Correcting Students' Writing Errors: The Role of Communicative Feedback

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Abstract

Many EFL teachers spend a lot of time marking students' written assignments and correcting their spelling, grammatical, punctuation, organization and idea generation errors in detail. The more students make mistakes, the more meticulously they mark and correct mistakes. Despite meticulous error correction, students continue to make the same mistakes over and over again. Teachers' correction of written assignments does not seem to be effective in reducing students' errors and enhancing their ability to write correctly and effectively. The present study proposes a model for correcting students' errors effectively. In this model, students are encouraged to write for communication and not to worry about spelling, grammatical, punctuation or capitalization mistakes. Students do written assignments or part of them in class. While doing the written exercises and writing their paragraphs, the teacher monitors students' work and provides individual help. She gives communicative feedback that focuses on meaning and highlights only errors related to rules or skills under study in a particular chapter. Feedback is provided on the presence and location of errors, but no correct forms are given. Self-editing and peer-editing are encouraged. Extra credit is given for good paragraphs every time the students write a paragraph in class.

Keywords: *Writing errors, error correction, communicative feedback, EFL writing, L2 writing, writing process skills, writing product, college writing, instant feedback, teaching stages, writing instruction.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Both teachers and students consider error correction important in second language (L2) teaching and learning. In a study by Lee (2004), teachers and students preferred comprehensive error feedback and students, in particular, relied on error correction provided by their teachers. Similarly, ninth to twelfth grade students and teachers in Warsaw high schools supported the need for error correction in L2 teaching (Zawadzka, 1989). In another study, ESL freshman students enrolled in writing classes wanted their compositions to be error-free and wanted their teachers to correct all of their mistakes (Leki, 1991). Hendrickson (1980) also indicated that error correction benefits adults who learn L2 in the classroom.

Despite the importance of error correction, research in this area has mostly focused on whether teachers should correct errors in students' writing and how they should correct them. The issues of who corrects errors, which errors should be corrected, and how they should be corrected and the efficacy of students' error correcting in L2 writing classes has been the subject of much controversy and the existing research base is incomplete and inconsistent. There is also a great deal of discussion about the best way to approach issues of accuracy and error correction in ESL composition (Ferris, 1999; Ferris, 2004; Truscott, 1996). For example, results of two studies by Chandler (2003) showed that direct correction and simple underlining of errors were significantly superior in reducing long-term error than just describing the type of error, even when the errors are underlined. Direct correction produced accurate revisions and the students preferred it because it is faster and easier than writing

several drafts. However, students indicated that they learnt more from self-correction. Simple underlining of errors on the first draft took less teacher time. Self-correction and underlining of errors were found to be viable methods depending on the objectives of error correction. Chandler's studies were critiqued by Truscott (2004), who argued that their findings did not provide evidence that error correction is beneficial in L2 writing. Truscott added that Chandler's claims are simply speculations. In the absence of suitable students' comparison groups, it is reasonable to suppose that correction is not helpful across all groups in Chandler's study 1, where L2 writing students performed better with correction plus revision than with correction alone, and across writing assignments in Chandler's study 2, where students' writing practice should have produced larger gains over time in holistic ratings.

Such inconsistencies among findings in the error correction research, Wen (1999) pointed out, are attributed to variables of students' proficiency level, cognitive style, motivation, attitudes, clarity and how feedback is given.

A review of prior research studies showed that error correction in written assignments has several shortcomings. First, correcting writing errors by providing the correct forms and structures is time-consuming for the teacher and may hinder the writing skill development by the students (Hendrickson, 1980). Secondly, error correction in writing is complicated due to the number of papers and assignments teachers have to correct and the presence of multiple problems such as spelling and grammar that inhibit students' ability to express themselves (Taniguchi, 1990). Thirdly, EFL writing classes, especially large ones, often present bored, unappreciated teachers who are exhausted from endless corrections of writing errors, and from students who feel frustrated and unappreciated for their correction efforts. The students' need to write freely is suppressed by restrictions imposed on them such as overused, artificial writing topics and writing formulas that seem to be irrelevant to the students' personal needs and interests (Steed, 2000).

In addition, many EFL teachers at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT), at King Saud University (KSU), in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia spend a lot of time marking students' written assignments and correcting students' spelling, grammatical, punctuation, organization and idea generation errors in detail. The more students make mistakes, the more meticulously they mark and correct those mistakes. Despite their meticulous error correction, students continue to make the same mistakes over and over again. Teachers' correction of written assignments does not seem to be effective in reducing students' errors and enhancing their ability to write correctly and effectively. Therefore, the present study proposes a model for correcting students' errors effectively. This model de-emphasizes error correction of writing assignments by the instructor out of class (at home). In this model, the students work on their writing assignments or part of them in class. While working on written exercises and writing their paragraphs, the instructor monitors their work and provides individual help. She does not correct each and every error in the students' compositions. Rather, she gives communicative feedback that focuses on meaning and highlights only errors related to rules or skills under study. Feedback is provided on the presence and location of errors, but no correct forms are given. Self-editing and peer-editing are encouraged and initiated by a series of instructor's prompt. In out-of-class practice, the students are encouraged to write for communication and not to worry about spelling, grammatical, punctuation or capitalization mistakes. The study also reports the factors that lead to EFL freshman students' improvement in writing skills using the proposed approach and will help instructors at COLT deliver pedagogically sound error-correction and feedback in writing classrooms.

2. GUIDELINES FOR CORRECTING WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Based on a review of the literature on the effective practices in error correction in writing assignments, the following guidelines can be followed:

- **Focus on communication:** Woods (1989) gave some alternatives to error correction as a means of improving students' language forms. These included focusing on real communicative situations as a context for correction, teaching students strategies for paying attention to form, and making them responsible for monitoring their own form.

- **Give content-related feedback:** Combining written error-corrections with explicit rule reminders does not help L2 student writers to avoid surface-level errors or facilitate higher-level writing production. Content-related feedback resulted in journal entries of superior quality. Verbal-ability distinctions were found to play a significant role in achievement, especially on learning tasks with higher-order cognitive processes (Kepner, 1991).

- **Focus on comprehensible input:** Wen (1999) recommended that writing instruction should focus on comprehensible input, form-focused activities, varied corrective feedback at the sentence and discourse levels, and the timing of corrections.

- **Give immediate practice and feedback:** Herron & Tomasello (1988) found that learning was better in the feedback condition, especially for the new structure. In the feedback condition, students answered questions requiring the use of the structure after only a brief introduction to it. Their mistakes were systematically corrected by the teacher using a sequential series of prompts. The teacher never provided the correct sentence for the students.

- **Highlight error location:** Allen (2001) examined the editing performance of 20 American and 20 Korean students as they detected and corrected errors in supplied standard essays. The analysis included misdetection, miscorrections, and stylistic changes. Allen (2001) found that highlighting the error location provided an effective scaffolding strategy especially for basic writers, and effectively minimized the differences between basic and advanced writers in error detection and error correction.

- **Do not supply correct forms:** Lyster & Ranta (1997) observed that four fourth-grade French immersion students in Montreal, Canada responded more successfully when the teacher did not supply but negotiated the form with them, i.e., responded to clarification requests, provided meta-linguistics feedback, elicitation, and/or error repetition.

- **Use an error taxonomy:** Li & Chan (1999) suggested that teachers use corrective feedback that consists of a set of pedagogically sound procedures to help student self-monitor their own written English output.

- **Error correction by students:** A study by Lee (1997) showed that undergraduate engineering students at Hong Kong Polytechnic University failed to detect errors, had limited understanding of grammatical terms in a correction code, and were able to correct surface errors better than meaning errors. Lee (1997) found that use of error

feedback was more effective than overt correction. To modify students' behaviors, the teacher must handle the error correction code with care and should vary the attention he/she pays to errors.

- **Follow an algorithmic approach** to error correction by: (i) Using pedagogically sound input requiring minimal cognitive effort; (ii) showing the procedures with illustrative examples; (iii) giving explicit rules that help the students conceptualize the correction procedure; and (iv) adding reinforcement exercises. Comments from both teachers and classmates indicated that the algorithmic approach was effective, flexible, and versatile in helping Hong Kong Chinese ESL students overcome persistent writing errors (Chan, Kwan & Li, 2002).

- **Follow a selective-discovery approach:** Before correcting written errors, teachers should consider the following: (i) the student's purpose and goals for communicating in writing; (ii) the student's current written proficiency level in L2; (iii) the teacher's awareness of the types and frequencies of written errors students produce and how the types and frequencies of errors relate to the students' writing goals; and (iv) the students' attitudes towards making errors and towards error correction itself (Hendrickson, 1980).

- **Teachers' attitude towards error correction:** Instructors should not be hostile or indifferent to errors, should distinguish between errors and mistakes, and should depend on their own teaching experience. They should also use communicative activities and tasks that are helpful in error remediation (Lee, 1989).

- **Discuss errors in draft:** In French immersion classrooms, Froc (1995) found that writing conference in which students spoke freely, wrote a draft of what they spoke about, and then discussed the errors in the draft and why they committed the errors were effective**.

- **Maintain students' confidence:** A balance must be drawn between handling significant errors and maintaining students' confidence so that they feel encouraged to continue writing. To do this, the teacher can include conferences, mini-lessons, and use checklists of common errors (Taniguchi, 1990).

3. CONTEXT

The translation program at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT), King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia is 10 semesters (5 years) long. In the first 4 semesters the students take 22 English language courses covering the listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary grammar, and dictionary skills. In particular, the program offers four writing courses: Writing I (4 hours), Writing II (4 hours), Writing III (3 hours) and Writing IV (3 hours) ranging between pre-intermediate and advanced levels to students in semester 1-4 of the translation program. In addition to the writing 1 course, freshman students in semester I concurrently take Listening I (4 hours), Speaking I (4 hours), Reading I (4 hours), Vocabulary Building I (3 hours) and Grammar I (2 hours) courses. The subjects are all Saudi, and they are all Arabic native speakers. Their median age was 18 years, and the range is 17-19. They all studied 6 years of EFL instruction in grades 6-12 () junior and senior high school) prior to their admission to COLT.

4. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A qualitative analysis of a writing pretest given to several groups of EFL freshman students at COLT over four semesters revealed many writing problems: EFL freshman students make several spelling errors per line, do not use punctuation marks at all, cannot capitalize words, have difficulty expressing, generating and organizing ideas and have many difficulties with English grammar and sentence structure.

Questionnaire-surveys also show that many EFL freshman students at COLT have negative attitudes towards English writing. They feel that writing assignments are a chore even in L1. When asked to write an essay about a topic at home, some come to class without having written their assignments, some copy their paragraphs from the Internet or some other source, and others seek the help of a tutor or a relative who is proficient in English or copy it from a classmate.

5. THE WRITING CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS

Freshman students at COLT study Pavlik, Cheryl and Segal, Margaret Keenan's (2007) book *Interactions One: Writing* (Sliver Edition), McGraw-Hill Higher Education. This textbook was assigned by COLT. The aim of the book is to develop EFL freshman students' ability to write a cohesive paragraph that has a topic sentence and supporting details with minimal grammatical, spelling, punctuation, and indentation errors. The book consists of 10 chapters, each of which has a theme and is divided into the following parts: (i) Exploring ideas, (ii) building vocabulary, (iii) organizing ideas, (iv) developing cohesion and style, (v) some grammatical points, (vi) writing the first draft, (vii) editing practice, (viii) writing the second draft, and (ix) journal writing. In each chapter, the writing tasks and skills are practiced one at a time, before the students put them all together in their paragraph. The chapter themes and the writing process skills to be practiced in each chapter are shown in Table (1) below.

Each chapter is completed in 5-6 class sessions (1.5 weeks), and the book is covered over 12-14 weeks (whole semester). Each week or so, the students complete all the skills, exercises and writing tasks in the chapter and write two one-paragraph essays and a journal.

Table 1: EFL Freshman Writing Process Skills in the Textbook

Chapter	Writing Product	Idea Development /Organizing Skills	Grammar	Editing Skills
Academic Life Around The World	A descriptive paragraph about a classmate	• Interviewing a classmate • Ordering information in a paragraph • Using a graphic organizer • Writing topic sentences	• Using connectors: *and, but*, & *so* • Using prepositions of location, direction, & distance • Using *there, it* & *they*	• Revising for content: topic sentence, focus, & grouping of related ideas • Editing for form: paragraph format, third person singular,

				negative verb forms, & capitalization
Experiencing Nature	A descriptive paragraph about a painting	• Discussing a painting • Ordering information from general to specific • Grouping details in spatial order	• Using descriptive adjectives • Using prepositional phrases • Unifying a paragraph with pronouns • Using the present continuous • Using *a, an* & *the*	• Revising for content: inclusion of important detains, order of information, use of adjectives • Editing for form: use of articles, paragraph & sentence form
Living to Eat or Eating to Live	A descriptive paragraph about holiday foods	• Free writing • Ordering information from general to specific • Using a graphic organizer to determine levels of detail • Writing topic sentences	• Using count & non-count nouns • Giving examples with *such as* • Using appositives • Punctuating lists • Spelling third-person singular verb	• Revising for content: adding appositives & *such as* • Editing for form: use of commas in lists, plural nouns, & third person singular
In the Community	An informative letter to a friend	• Organizing paragraphs in a letter • Using a paragraph organizer to write directions	• Suing the present tense & be going to for future • Using prepositions of location, direction & distance • Using *there, it, & they*	• Revising for content: paragraph division • Editing for form: letter format
Home	A personal narrative	• Using a time line to organize information • Choosing a topic • Limiting information	• Using the past tense • Combining sentences with because • Using *before, after, when*, & *as soon as*	• Revising for content: combining ideas with *but, so* & *and* • Editing for form: punctuating dependent

		• Writing topic sentences		clauses
Cultures of the World	The conclusion of a folktale narrative	• Reading & discussing a folk tale • Using a lot diagram • Understanding the elements of a story	• Using *when* & *while* • Varying time words: *when, while, before, after, then* & *as soon as*	• Revising for content: clarity, relevance & sequence • Editing for form: using editing symbols
Health	An informative paragraph about health treatments	• Using an idea map • Writing topic sentences	• Using restrictive relative clauses • Using *in addition, however, for example* • Giving reasons with because & infinitives of purpose	• Revising for content: relevance & transitions • Editing for form: editing symbols & punctuation with *&* and *but*
Entertainment and the Media	A one-paragraph movie review & analysis	• Using a story web • Identifying the elements of a story	• Using the historical present • Using appositives, • using adjectives to describe character & setting	• Revising for content: appositives & relevance • Editing for form: spelling of present & past participles, capitalization
Social Life	A narrative paragraph about a classmate	• Interviewing a classmate • Choosing a method of organizing information • Writing topic & concluding sentences	• Choosing the correct verb tense • Using transitional words & phrases: *also, in addition, in fact* & *however* • Expressing cause & effect with *so…that*	• Revising for content: combining ideas • Editing for form: connecting words & comparatives
Sports	A paragraph comparing 2 sports	• Using a Venn diagram • Using a comparison table • Writing topic	• Using comparative adjectives & adverbs • Using both to write about	• Revising for content: topic sentence & combining sentences • Editing for

	& concluding sentences	similarities • Using *but* & *however* to write about differences	form: connecting words & comparative structure

6. THE INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL

In this proposed model, EFL in-class writing instruction goes through the following stages: Orientation, presentation and modeling, guided practice, independent practice, extension activities, and assessment. Each stage is explained in detail below.

6.1 Orientation

In the first week of classes, the students are shown the writing textbook parts, i.e., title, author, publisher, publication year, table of content, and index. They are also shown the chapter design, i.e., parts and what each part is about. At the beginning of each class session, the instructor tells the students what they have studied in the previous class and what they are going to study in this particular class and at the end of the class session, she tells them what they have studied.

6.2 Presentation and Modeling

The students brainstorm the new chapter theme that they are going to write about. The instructor asks questions to help the students generate ideas. She introduces new vocabulary items related to the chapter theme under study while brainstorming the new theme. She divided the class session into several small parts (skills or tasks). She goes through the subskills in each chapter in sequence one at a time. She explains the new item, task, subskill or structure, illustrates it with examples, the students practice the new item once it is presented, and the instructor gives immediate feedback (see details below). At first, the instructor speaks slowly and does not use the first language (mother tongue). She moves from one task to the next fast.

6.3 Guided Practice

With the help of the instructor, the students do the exercises that follow each skill or task in the textbook in class. They practice one task or one skill at a time right after it has been introduced. She sets a time limit for finishing each task or exercise (2-5 minutes). The students do all of the exercises and at least write part of their paragraph in class under the instructor's supervision. They complete or rewrite their paragraphs when necessary at home. No grading is done at home and no correct forms are provided by the teacher. For example, while writing a topic sentence, supporting details, doing an exercise or writing a paragraph, the instructor goes around, checks what the students are doing or writing and provides individual help in the form of short conference with individual students. If she has large classes, she randomly checks a number of students each class session and makes sure she checks on the students each week. If the student writes a faulty topic sentence that does not suit the type of paragraph to be written, i.e. descriptive or informative, she is asked to re-read

the definition in the textbook, look at the example and/or rule given in the textbook, compare her topic with the example and fix it accordingly. While focusing on the topic sentence, grammatical and spelling mistakes are temporarily ignored. While writing the whole paragraph, the instructor gives communicative feedback that focuses on meaning. Students are asked *"What do you mean?", "Explain?", "Give more examples", "Give more reasons".*

In the editing stage, only errors related to rules or skills under study are edited. Self-editing skills are developed by giving a series of prompts, as many students are incapable of detecting their own errors. The first series of prompts target the content of the paragraph and the next series target the paragraph form. The students are asked to check their paragraph title, then topic sentence, then examine supporting details to see if they are enough, specific and clear. Then they are asked to check whether their paragraph is indented or not. After they do that, they are asked to check for capitalization. When they do that, they are asked to underline all the verbs in their paragraph and check to see if the correct tense and verb form are used. The instructor proceeds this way depending on the grammatical structure emphasized in a particular chapter to make sure that most content and form issues have been checked. When the student misses a verb, or fails to identify her own weakness, the instructor provides feedback on the presence and location of errors, but no correct forms are provided. Extra credit is given for those students who write an acceptable paragraph within the time limit set by the instructor.

After few weeks, the students check their paragraph title, indentation, capitalization and punctuation on their own without the instructor's prompts. Independence in self-editing is developed gradually. As the students move along the semester, the more chapters, writing strategies and structures they cover, the more the build their repertoire of writing skills. Correcting errors related to a limited number of tasks in each chapter will help the students focus and develop accuracy as they have less cognitive burden. This way, the instructor will maintain students' self-confidence. The students will also learn to self-monitor their own writing.

6.4 Independent Practice

The students write about extra topics of their choice and write the journal topic in each chapter on their own at home (out of class). Here, they are encouraged to write and not to worry about mistakes. The instructor only makes sure that the students have written those, but she does not mark mistakes in them. The students will improve gradually as they practice more and more strategies for formulating topic sentences, idea development and organization, grammatical structures and editing issues.

6.5 Extension Activities

Developing students' writing ability in EFL requires continual practice and the support and integration of other language skills. For those reasons, the students are encouraged to practice out of class reading, listening, and writing. They locate material related to the theme of each chapter off the Internet and in magazines, read it and keep it in a portfolio. They watch T.V. shows or documentaries related to themes covered in class and write a short summary. They can also write paragraphs about special occasions and personal experience such as Ramadan, the feast, the National Day, birthdays, marriage, death of a relative…etc. They type their paragraphs and post them in class so that the students have a chance to read each other's paragraphs, compare and evaluate their own performance. The instructor just reads those and encourages the students to write. Marking errors in those paragraphs will discourage the students and they will quit writing, whereas telling the students that the

instructor enjoys reading what they write will encourage them to write more. They will also feel good about their writing ability.

In addition, an online course, a blog, a wiki, Facebook, or an online discussion forum can be used as supplement to in-class instruction where students write paragraphs on any topic of their choice. They may post stories and poems. They can have a personal homepage. They respond to their classmates' posts, locate information from internet, e-mail classmates and instructor and word-process and spell-check paragraphs.

Here again the students are encouraged to write and not to worry about spelling, grammatical, punctuation or capitalization mistakes. Positive comments should be given no matter how poor their writing is. Online writing activities give the students a chance to see how good student writers express themselves. The instructor can also post paragraph of her own on topics posted to keep them interested. Marking students' errors in detail will discourage them and make them feel inadequate. It is difficult for them to conceptualize the corrections of all kinds of errors in their writing. Instead, the instructor can ask a student to clarify a certain point or to add more details or give examples. She should also encourage the students to respond to and comment on each other's posts.

Once in a while, the students may practice online peer-editing (the students mark the errors in each other's paragraph) following a series of prompts posted by the instructor. Each prompt should ask the students to focus on one aspect of the writing process such as checking capital letters, underlining verbs and checking their tenses and forms, checking subject verb-agreement of each verb, use of articles, prepositions and conjunctions, making sure each paragraph has a topic sentence, that the paragraph has sufficient details, making details specific and so on. They check each aspect one at a time. Student editors can also give suggestions for improving a classmate's paragraph.

6.6 Skill Enhancement

The instructor should help the students organize their notebooks by dividing them into sections: One for the new words, one for spelling rules, one for first drafts, one for final drafts and so on. She can provide them with internet website with supplementary exercises that target their weaknesses. She should teach them time management and study skills and general learning strategies such as how to make an outline of a topic sentence and supporting details, a summary table, using graphic organizers, making a list of words related to a phonic rule and so on.

To help the students improve their spelling, the instructor provides phonics instruction at the beginning of each class sessions for 10 minutes or so. A single phonics rule is taught per day with examples in the form of a table as in Tables 2 and 3 below to help the students generalize phoneme-grapheme correspondences and see similarities and differences among them. When the students take a few rules, the instructor can give a summary table that shows those similarities and differences in phoneme-grapheme correspondences as in Table 4. She draws the students' attention to words they come across in subsequent chapters that follow the same rule and encourage them to make their own list of words that share a particular spelling rule (Al-Jarf, 2008).

Table 2: Single vowels with examples

a	e	i	o	u
fast	set	sit	top	tub
cat	led	lid	shock	cut
can	less	hit	lot	hut

am	tell	lid	shop	shut
fast	men	miss	doll	mud
back	get	kill	drop	must

Table 3: Vowels before final r having the same pronunciation

ir	er	ur	or	ear
bird	term	hurt	work	earn
birth	perm	burn	word	learn
shirt	pert	turn	world	earth
first	herb	curb	worst	search
thirst	stern	fur	worth	

Table 4: Different pronunciations of vowel digraph ou

1	2	3	4	5	6
gr**ou**p	c**ou**nt	f**ou**r	c**ou**ld	h**ou**r	d**ou**ble
s**ou**p	f**ou**nd	c**ou**rt	sh**ou**ld	fl**ou**r	tr**ou**ble

Asking the students to word-process their paragraphs will also teach them to correct their spelling, grammatical and punctuation mistakes. The instructor can guide them in this process and explain how MS WORD does that.

6.7 Writing Assessment

As for assessment, the instructor tests the students every other week. One week they write a paragraph, the following week, they complete tasks similar to those covered in class. These short quizzes help the students master specific tasks. Application questions should be given. The question formats should be varied from quiz to quiz. The students are asked to write about concrete topics related to their experiences. The test instruction should clearly specify what the students are required to do. The students should not use a dictionary during the test sessions. Quizzes must be always graded and returned to the students with comments on strengths and weaknesses. Words of encouragement should be given. The slightest improvement should be noted and commended. Answers should be discussed in class.

6.8 Instructor's Attitude and Beliefs

The instructor should have a positive attitude towards the students, the writing class and should like what she is doing. She should be enthusiastic, go to class well-prepared and be business-like in class. She should encourage the students to talk about their writing problems, and respond to their e-mails. It is important for the instructor to believe that the students can/will improve, to give them moral support and hope all the time, and to give the feeling that there is always an opportunity to improve. She can give examples of successful student writers from groups taught previously. She should give attention to all the students (call on every student; check every student's work) and have a good sense of humor. It is advisable that the class atmosphere be informal and friendly by sending and having students send letters of condolences, thank you notes, birthday cards and season's greetings to each other and to the instructor.

7. REFLECTIONS

Results of the statistical analyses of the writing pre and posttest scores showed significant improvements in the students' performance as a result of the writing instructional strategies described above. Qualitative analysis of the posttest essays showed that students who received writing instruction as described above exhibited a great improvement in their writing ability. They became more competent, could write fluently, and communicate easily. They could write long essays, paragraphs, and sentences, and compound and complex structures instead of short, simple and incomprehensible sentences at the beginning of the semester. There was a significant improvement in spelling, punctuation and capitalization errors (Al-Jarf, 2004, Al-Jarf, 2005; Al-Jarf, 2010).

Analysis of the students' responses to and comments on the post-treatment questionnaires revealed positive attitudes towards the instructional writing strategies outlined above. They found the online activities useful and fun and considered them a new way of improving their writing skills in English and a new way of doing homework. They heightened their motivation and raised their self-esteem. They found the exercises useful as they provided extra practice, gave instant feedback and provided an opportunity to improve their ability to write.

8. CONCLUSION

The present study presents a model for correcting errors in EFL freshman students' writing assignments. The model de-emphasizes grading of writing assignments at home and focuses on dividing the writing skill into small tasks and teaching them one at a time. After a brief introduction of a particular subskill, the students practice it right away and the instructor provides immediate feedback. The instructor does not correct the errors herself but encourages self-editing and peer-editing on the basis of a series of instructor prompts. Feedback focuses on content and form issues under study in a particular chapter. All other errors are ignored. In-class instruction is supported by out of class activities, time-management and study skills that provide the students with more real-life opportunities to practice the writing skill. The error correction model outlined in this paper was tried out with freshman students over four semesters and proved to be very effective in enhancing the students' ability to express themselves clearly, accurately and with ease.

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