

Use of L2 Appropriate Formal Written Words by EFL Learners: A Study of the Contribution of DCF and MCF

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Received: August 22, 2022

Accepted: October 18, 2022

Online Published: October 21, 2022

doi:10.5430/wjel.v12n7p85

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v12n7p85>

Abstract

Considering the significance of corrective feedback and its effect on L2 vocabulary building, this study aimed to investigate the extent to which direct corrective feedback (DCF) and metalinguistic corrective feedback (MCF) could contribute to the use of L2 appropriate formal written words among Arabic L2 learners of English. A writing test (IELTS writing Task 2) as a pre and post-test was administered to gauge the participants' (N= 96) L2 lexical resources. The sample was randomly divided into 3 groups according to the teaching feedback strategy applied: direct, metalinguistic, and control groups. The first two groups were given feedback based on their condition but the control group was given the conventional, unfocused feedback. Ten tutorial sessions on how to write formal words accurately were delivered to boost the appropriate use of L2 formal words in the writing tests. The target components of essay writing measured in the study were word choice, and the correct use of L2 formal words in writing. Findings showed the positive effects of both feedback types but metalinguistic groups outperformed the direct and control groups in the posttest. Additionally, the qualitative dimension of the study demonstrated that those who received metalinguistic feedback had more positive attitude than those who received direct feedback.

Keywords: direct corrective feedback, metalinguistic corrective, Saudi EFL learners, writing tests

1. Introduction

Research indicates that learning entails noticing (Richards, 2008) because it may occur consciously and converts input into intake. Written corrective feedback (WCF) plays a pivotal role in enhancing and improving L2 writing (Azizi, *et al.*, 2022). Although Truscott (1996) argued against the efficacy of WCF, other researchers proved its effectiveness (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Bitchener, *et al.*, 2005; Chandler, 2003; Ellis, *et al.*, 2008; Sheen, 2007). Cognitive theories differ regarding the support they provide to explicit corrective feedback (ECF) (Zhao & Ellis, 2020). The clear-cut rationale that the theory provides lies in the *Noticing Hypothesis* (Schmidt, 2001). Learning occurs when learners pay attention to the input; that's why, ECF, involving direct corrective feedback (DCF) as well as metalinguistic corrective feedback (MCF), is more efficient which more likely increases correction and noticing (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Lyster, 2002). Vocabulary acquisition theoreticians pointed out that words are on top priority for language use and development (Henriksen, 2008; Read, 2000) because L2 learners need to convey a message in different ways through words (Goossens, *et al.*, 2012). Vocabulary can build blocks of second language (L2) learning and a message cannot be delivered without enough words even with having a high command of grammar. According to Gass and Selinker (2008), once L2 language users resort to words equivalence to convey a message, misunderstanding occurs in the written medium (where the writer is absent) due to the use of wrong words. Since writing is an important skill for students to show their learning and knowledge (Bai, 2018), it is imperative that L2 learners learn how to use appropriate L2 words as word choice errors weaken L2 writing, especially when (in)formal words are used interchangeably (Carrio-Pastor & Tamarit, 2015). L2 learners' inappropriate use of (in) formal words can be improved through exploring the frequent words choice they make, raising the L2 learners' awareness on errors, and offering them suggestions how to rectify them. Even though researchers concur with the effectiveness of corrective feedback (CF) (Nassaji, 2015), there are discrepancies in the value that these rests on ECF and the sort of learning it yields. It is worth stating that lexical errors were largely subject of the previous studies (e.g., Dilans, 2010; Ko, 2019; Zarei & Rahnama, 2013) but formality of L2 words has

not been a focus to the best of the researcher's knowledge. Moreover, qualitative design does not suffice to be relied on; therefore, quantitative data was also measured to the current study to examine deeply the effect of the two types of CF on using correct formal words in L2 writing.

2. Literature Review

Direct and metalinguistic corrective feedback

Corrective feedback (CF) is referred to teacher's reactive move to the ill-formed utterances produced by learners and it can be encountered both in classroom and naturalistic settings. One of the earliest definitions of CF is provided in Chaudron (1977): "any reaction of the teacher which clearly transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands improvement of the learner utterance" (p. 31). According to Takimoto (2006) CF have so far been intended to improve ungrammatical sentences. Keshavarz (2017) stated that CF can be classified into oral and written corrective feedback (WCF). A more comprehensive definition of CF is provided by Ellis et. al., (2009) as follows: Corrective feedback takes the form of responses to learners' utterances that contain an error. The responses can consist of (a) an indication that an error has been committed, (b) provision of the correct target language form, or (c) metalinguistic information about the nature of the error, or any combination of these.

The efficacy of WCF is still uncharted despite the existing theoretical underpinnings lending support to CF in language classrooms. The question whether or not WCF can play a part in L2 acquisition is of great significance (Bitchener & Ferris, 2011). Although most researchers declared its efficacy (e.g., Azizi et. al., 2022, Hashemian & Farhang-Ju, 2018, Shintani & Ellis, 2013), an earlier study by Truscott (1996) pointed out that WCF is ineffective as CF may give rise to negative attitudes towards it and hence, cause lack of motivation. This argument was challenged by a number of researchers (Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 1999). Ferris underlined the effectiveness of WCF on L2 writing development.

Direct corrective feedback (DCF) and metalinguistic corrective feedback (MCF) form two different ways of exerting written error correction (Shintani & Ellis, 2013). MCF explicates the use of L2 linguistic forms (Ellis, 2009). This type of CF gives comments explicitly about the nature of error (Hashemian & Farhang-Ju, 2018) which takes two forms; (a) utilizing error codes as abbreviations placed on the error site or in the margin; (b) providing the L2 learners with metalinguistic explanation. Bitchener (2012) mentioned the impressionability of explicit knowledge through MCF and a number of scholars approved his claim by evidence (e.g., Rassaei et. al., 2012; Shintani & Ellis, 2013). In this sense, MCF is salient which gives L2 learners an opportunity to attend to their ill-formed sentences. Bitchener (2012) suggested that saliency can benefit L2 learners by strengthening the corrective function of MCF. Actually, MCF assists learners to pay attention to the gap between their knowledge and the MCF provided. Its advantage is that it would not be time-consuming since the teachers are not mandated to provide the correct form on each error. Moreover, MCF requires maximal processing by learners (Bitchener, 2012). On the other hand, in the terms of DCF, the teacher needs to assist the student with the correct form (Ellis, 2009). This type of CF takes a number of forms like crossing out the mistake, be it spelling, morpheme, or writing the missing form, and writing the correct form on or around the error site. Its adequacy lies in providing the learners with explicit correct form. According to Shintani and Ellis (2013), DCF can be advisable once the learners' proficiency level is low and they are unable to self-correct. It is also fruitful once it is congruent with learners' intended meaning because it provides clear information about the correct form that enables the learners to attend to the gap between the interlanguage system and the target forms (Ferris et al., 2013). On the contrary, as pointed out by Ellis (2009) DCF's shortcoming is that it does not require deep processing by learners. DCF also affects development of specific grammatical features (Sheen, 2007) because such type of CF is straightforward and uncoded which explicitly resolve the problems (Stefanou & R ́ev ́sz, 2015). However, WCF can also be implemented to reduce lexical errors to write appropriately (Diab & Awada, 2022). Thus, even though researchers concur with the effectiveness of corrective feedback (CF) (Nassaji, 2015), there are incongruities in the value that these two types of CF and the sort of learning it yields.

Lexical errors

Lexical errors are generally deviations of form and meaning of a word (Llach, 2011). Lexical errors pertain to academic achievement (Hawkey & Barker, 2004; Llach, 2011) since it seems beneficial showing the quality of learners written work, lexical achievement, and good command of lexical resources (Llach, 2007). Lexical errors are classified into orthographic, phonological, and syntactico-semantic types (Keshavarz, 2017). Furthermore, Hemchua and Schmitt (2006) divided lexical categories into (a) formal errors like misselection (suffix type, prefix type, vowel-based type, consonant-based type, and false cognates), misformation (borrowing, coinage, and calque), and distortion (omission, overinclusion, misselection, misordering, and blending) and (b) semantic errors including confusion of sense relations (general term for specific one, overly specific term, inappropriate co-hyponyms, and

near synonyms), (c) collocation errors (semantic word selection, statistically weighted preferences, arbitrary combinations, and preposition partners); and (d) connotation errors, and stylistic errors (volubility and underspecification).

Most research is conducted on grammatical errors but lexical errors are underexplored which less garnered a thick literature despite their significance being more than that of grammar (Llach, 2007). Ferris (2006) investigated the impacts of different types of CF on different L2 linguistic errors in essays subjected to revision and in those essays which were not given any CF. It showed that students succeeded in error correction in revised drafts. Additionally, Ferris (2006) compared the students' first and last semester's essay and observed that they significantly improved to correct 5 out of 15 categories and showed that some error types may affect accuracy and lexical errors could not be treated. Riazantseva (2012) traced the effect of three types of writing assignments viz., in-class essays, in-class summaries, and at-home essays on L2 learners' accurate lexical and grammatical errors. Learners were provided with DCF and coded CF on both types of errors, but they were not asked to revise their assignments accordingly. The researcher compared the pre-test to post-test performance, and the result indicated that those assignments performed at home had the least percentage of errors out of the two essays. Riazantseva (2012) further compared the three assignments, on pre-test as well as on post-test, and reported the decrease of lexical errors but grammatical error reduction occurred in in-class and at-home essays.

Storch and Wigglesworth (2010) examined the impacts of DCF and ICF on graduate students' L2 writings which were revised cooperatively and individually. The target features of the study were lexicons, grammar, and mechanics. Findings showed that type of errors and editing gave mostly led to language error reduction. The research imputed its results to the CF with which the students engaged and led them to notice the linguistic features. Similarly, Sampson (2012) studied the effects of coded and uncoded CF on L2 error reduction of four assignments (productive tests). Having revised their errors after four days on their own, they were provided with the original writings, which have already been written and were required to rectify their errors (receptive test). The students corrected the fourth essays better than that of the first on the basis of a comparison. As for productive tests, coded CF led to more error reduction than the coded CF on the fourth essays. However, spelling and lexical errors were more difficult than other error types.

Van Beuningen et. al. (2012) investigated the effects of comprehensive, DCF, and ICF on L2 lexicons, grammar, and orthography in revised and new essays. The researchers reported that different types of CF treat different types of errors. Diab (2015) investigated the effects of DCF in conjunction with MCF, and MCF only on two groups of experimental and one control counterpart. Then target features of the study were pronoun agreement and lexicons in essays. Then, the three groups were administered in an immediate and a delayed post-test with no CF. Results demonstrated that the group which received DCF along with MCF significantly improved on immediate post-test, but no significant difference was appeared on lexical errors reduction among the three groups. However, a significant difference was observed in lexical errors in delayed post-test through giving DCF along with MCF. In a similar vein, Diab (2016) studied the effects of three CF agents (teacher, peer, self) on L2 pronoun agreement and lexical errors reduction in students' essays. A pre-test was conducted, then a specific treatment in terms of CF condition was delivered, and finally a post-test and a delayed post-test were given. Diab (2016) compared the three groups on immediate and delayed post-tests. Findings showed that L2 pronoun agreement error reduction on the latter test was not significant. Furthermore, the researcher compared the self-feedback to the peer-feedback group on lexical errors which were visible, even with a limited sample size. Hence, the outperformance of the self-feedback on immediate post-test and the same held true for the comparison of self-feedback to teacher feedback on delayed post-test. All such findings, therefore, showed the significance of written lexical errors, as it determines the quality of L2 learners written work and implementing the right CF may lead to L2 lexical error reduction.

Withing the framework of L2 language writing, one of the main roles of lexical errors reduction is to use appropriate vocabulary with the right level of formality. Formal and informal language are commonly used in written and spoken channels, respectively (Mitchell, 2019) whose "styles dictate different patterns of vocabulary usage" (Mitchell, 2019; p. 3). The interchangeable use of formal and informal words leads to formal errors in general and distortion e.g., misselection in particular. The use of formal words, hence, is important in the process of L2 writing; and L2 learners should be corrected if formal words are interchangeably employed with informal words.

The use of L2 (English) formal words

Formal and informal words are normally used in written and spoken language (Mitchell, 2019). The former is usually used in academic and business settings. It is unimportant whether formal or informal style is selected but what is of key importance is for the selected word to show the level of formality. For instance, what leads a speaker to select

“horrendous” instead of “awful” or “spectacular” over “good”? Gu (2003) enumerated four crucial points regarding vocabulary learning for L2 learners: person, task, context, and strategies. As Gu (2003) held the strategies a learner uses and the effectiveness of these strategies very carefully depend on the learner himself/herself (e.g., attitudes, motivation, prior knowledge), the learning task at hand (e.g., type, complexity, difficulty, and generality), and the learning environment (e.g., the learning culture, the richness of input and output opportunities). Therefore, four indispensable points interact together so that the learners may both recognize and understand that the words they employ are at the right level of formality. Having a wide range of vocabulary knowledge and using formal words corresponding to the informal ones and vice versa in spoken or written channel indicates a good command of L2 proficiency. Although the mere knowledge of vocabulary breadth does not completely guarantee L2 proficiency, this is one of the main criteria of scoring in L2 proficiency in international language proficiency tests such IELTS and TOEFL. Truscott (1996) pointed out that WCF cannot be implemented especially in terms of grammar correction but then extended to lexicons because lexicons comprised of form, meaning, and use of each word depends on its relationships to other words and “to other portions of the language system, as well as to nonlinguistic cognitive systems” (p. 344). Notwithstanding, according to Kamiya and Nakata’s study (2021) demonstrated that WCF gives rise to appropriate use of words.

Overview of the present study

Despite the above arguments, previous L2 learning research provided contradictory results with respect to the effects of WCF on lexical errors reduction but it is still unclear the extent to which the WCF can affect the use of L2 (in)formal words. Therefore, the present study aimed at investigating how DCF and MCF may enhance the use of L2 appropriate formal written words and the efficacy of the two feedbacks based on L2 learners’ perceptions.

As stated, the existing of research on L2 lexical errors reduction is still scanty and given the mounting interest in use of formal words in lieu of informal ones, hence, further research merits conducting to better understand the efficacy of different forms of CF to reduce L2 lexical errors. Consequently, little attention has been paid to L2 learners’ perceptions towards the types of CF they receive. To this end, the following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. Is there a difference in the use of L2 appropriate formal words among Arabic L2 learners of English who received Metalinguistic Corrective Feedback and those who did not?
2. Is there a difference in the use of L2 appropriate formal words among Arabic L2 learners of English who received Direct Corrective Feedback and those who did not?
3. Is there a difference between the contribution of direct and metalinguistic corrective feedback on the use of appropriate L2 formal words?
4. What are Arabic L2 learners’ perceptions towards the efficacy of direct and metalinguistic corrective feedback for developing the use of L2 formal words?

3. Methodology

Participants

Ninety-six female adult Arabic L1 learners of English took part in this study and the average of the participants (mean age = 19.2). They were all enrolled in the Intensive Course Program in the English Language and Translation Department. The sample was isolated out of one hundred participants who took the Oxford Placement Test (OPT), with the researcher excluding four of them for not meeting the criterion of the level of concern (Upper intermediate level). The research aims were duly explained to the sample and consent to participate was obtained.

Instruments

Oxford Placement Test

The Oxford University Press and Cambridge ESOL, was administered to gain certitude about the participants’ level of proficiency. The administration of this test is a time-saving and an ideal way of placing EFL learners in a certain level (Azizi, et. al., 2022; Hill & Taylor, 2004). This test is a multiple-choice test that takes 30 minutes to administer and can be both quickly and directly corrected through the overlays procured. It measures English structures knowledge and is deemed as an overall measure of ability in a language or content areas. The OPT rubric classifies test scores as 1-17: Beginner, 18-27: Elementary, 28-36: Lower intermediate, 37-47: Intermediate, 48-55: Upper intermediate, 56-60: Very advanced. The 96 participants gained 48-55 were considered Upper intermediate EFL learners on the basis of the rubric provided by OPT. The test has high reliability ($\alpha=.91$) based on Cronbach's alpha (Berthold, 2011, p. 674) and also gets high construct validity due to the multiple administrations in

previous studies (Motallebzadeh & Nematizadeh, 2011; Wistner *et. al.*, 2009).

Writing task

IELTS writing Task 2 was administered in the present study to gauge the participants' lexical resources in relation to the use of L2 formal words. Four components of essay writing are measured in such type of writing such as task response, coherence and cohesion, L2 lexical resources, and grammatical accuracy. Task response is making a to-the-point response to the question in a way that the response should not sidetrack. Coherence is the connectivity of meaning along the paragraph. Cohesion is to use transitional words to make the sentences interwoven and keep solidarity as well as unity among them. Grammatical accuracy is simply to use error-free sentences. But L2 lexical resources refer to a range of words utilized accurately and appropriately. The examiners consider one major component of an essay in regard to L2 lexical resources: word choice. This one general category includes subsets e.g., the former contains range and flexibility, level, precision, style, and collocation. The latter comprises spelling, word choice, and word formation. What is of concern in the current study is word choice including use of formal words; for instance that is, it is highly preferred to employ "infant" or "offspring" instead of "kid".

The participants of each group were administered a pre-test on the topic *every year several languages die out. Some people think that this is not important because life will be easier if there are fewer languages in the world. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this opinion?* Which was the participants' favorite topic in terms of their major as English Language and Translation then they were administered the same writings each tutorial session. This test took 40 minutes as the same in IELTS venue. Afterwards, they were provided with topics to write in the class for 10 sessions and then a post-test was given to find out the contribution of DCF and MCF on L2 lexical errors reduction. Much more details about the sessions provided are discussed in the procedure section.

The use of formal words was the scoring target of the essays that was quantitatively gauged. The percentage of each inaccurate use for each specific word was delineated as a criterion of accuracy calculation. For example, an error rate of 1% would demonstrate one informal use of a specific word. The intra-rater and inter-rater reliability level of the scores were checked. In order to delineate intra-rater reliability, the essays were scored two times, one month after the first round of scoring was done. In order to check inter-rater reliability, two IELTS instructors marked the writings. The target feature of the current study, hence, was the correct use of formal words in writing. It can be challenging for L2 learners of English to use formal words correctly, as the synonyms of English words have different levels of formality and this may lead to some difficulties specially in reducing L2 lexical errors.

Semi-structured interview

To conduct a qualitative study, open-ended questions should be used to obtain deep insights into the perceptions on a certain topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, five participants from DCF and MCF groups were randomly selected to be interviewed for the purpose of finding out their perceptions towards the type of CF they were provided. The nature of interview and the availability issue led the researcher to include five participants from the two experimental groups in the qualitative dimension. The interview was administered individually in person and the following three questions were asked to seek out the effectiveness of DCF and MCF in terms of their contribution through perceptions.

1. Do you think direct corrective feedback played a key role to reduce your L2 lexical errors?
2. Do you think metalinguistic corrective feedback played a key role to reduce your L2 lexical errors?
3. Do you prefer direct/metalinguistic corrective feedback for regular instruction?

The interviews were recorded via a cellphone for transcription. Analysis of the interviews was carried out on the transcription of recorded interviews by concentrating on which type of feedback played a major part in reducing lexical errors and if they preferred such types of feedback.

Procedures

The participants' consent was required before getting being involved in the research through signing the consent form. The participants were given some information in general i.e., to write an essay, to receive intervention for 10 sessions of 35 days, and to write the last essay on final day. To control the data, they were not told the purpose of the study in details. The participants were randomly assigned to two experimental and one control groups. They were assigned to specific CF conditions with DCF and MCF and their control counterpart was subjected to the previous practice of unformatted feedback. The three groups were given an IELTS opinion writing Task 2 as pre-test with their opinions elicited on: *Every year several languages die out. Some people think that this is not important because life will be easier if there are fewer languages in the world. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this opinion?* It was the

participants' favorite topic in terms of their major as English Language and Translation. Different topics revolving around the same theme were applied for each CF condition as well as control group to neutralize John Henry Effect. The DCF and MCF groups, who were trained to utilize appropriate formal words developmentally before delivering writing assignments, were supplied with the same feedback on their writings for 10 sessions spanning 35 days.

Before the treatment sessions, participants were notified about the informal words as unacceptable words in academic writings (Diab & Awada, 2022). Besides, they were taught frequent errors they committed after review of the drafts by the instructor. The terms DCF and MCF have been adopted in the current study with the aim of helping L2 learners focus on formal word choice. As the participants were provided with a list of words around the same theme, based on the British National Corpus (BNC) data, in every session before writing the essays. A sample as one list of informal words along with their corresponding formal words was provided as follow:

Informal: ask, tell, but, get, bad, seem, also, buy, end, lack, live, lively, hurt, put in, check, sorry, help, chance, use, whole, job, call on.

Formal: enquire, inform, however, receive, negative, appear, moreover, purchase, finish, deficiency, reside, energetic, damage, insert, verify, apologize, assist, opportunity, utilize, entire, occupation, visit.

The two feedback condition groups were supposed to write formal words in their writings. DCF was given feedback in the form of crossing out and writing the accurate form on/under the error site but MCF was provided with feedback through underlining, glossing, and writing error code on the error site. Examples are followed for both types of CF:

DCF:

Student: Most people all over the world ~~ask for~~ free education by governments.

request

The teacher directly crossed out the informal word and wrote the formal one under the error site.

MCF:

Student: Most people all over the world ask for free education by governments.

FW

FW stands for formal words signifying that the L2 writer should write formal words.

Student: The parents should not let their children stay out till overnight.

Write a formal word.

The instructor underlined the error sites, provided error code, and glossed.

The same held true for the subsequent 9 sessions following which a post-test was administered after two weeks to check whether or not DCF and MCF affected on L2 lexical errors reduction. On the contrary, the control group received regular instruction and this group also took the post-test. Finally, five participants were given interview regarding their perceptions towards the effectiveness of DCF and MCF they received. The answers of the interview questions were transcribed by the researcher and themes emerged from the transcriptions were analyzed inductively.

4. Result Analysis

The current study aimed to investigate the contribution of DCF and MCF on L2 appropriate formal English words and secondly, the learners' perceptions towards the type of CF received. Before answering the research questions, the researcher employed normality tests on both pre-test and post-test in order to determine which tests, parametric or nonparametric, should be utilized to analyze the data.

Table 1 shows the P value of both Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk were found to be less than .05. In other words, the data were not normally distributed. Therefore, nonparametric tests were utilized to analyze the total results.

Table. 1 The normality test of lexical errors reduction pre-test and post-test of the three groups

Test Groups	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a		Shapiro-Wilk			
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Control	.499	32	.000	.464	32	.000
Pre-test MCF	.451	32	.000	.522	32	.000
DCF	.477	32	.000	.469	32	.000
Control	.486	32	.000	.488	32	.000
Post-test MCF	.430	32	.000	.602	32	.000
DCF	.429	32	.000	.628	32	.000

The first research question of the study intended to find out if there is a statistically significant difference in using L2 appropriate formal English words of Arabic L1 adult L2 learners of English who received MCF and those who did not. Table 2 shows that in the pre-test the students scored (control = 93.66, MCF= 104.78). The difference between them seemed not huge. However, Table 2 presents the results of both groups in the post-test (control = 49.51, MCF=143.49), MCF group gained higher score than the control one on the post-tests. To check whether the differences are significant, or not, Wilcoxon test was administered, Table 3.

Table 2. Mean rank of the MCF and control groups on pre-test and post-test

Group	N	<i>pre-test</i>		<i>post-test</i>		
		Mean Rank	Sum of ranks	N	Mean Rank	Sum of ranks
Control	32	93.66	8991.00	32	49.51	4753.00
MCF	32	104.78	10059.00	32	143.49	13775.00

Table 3 indicates that there was no statistically significant difference (P = .232) between MCF and control groups in the pre-tests. MCF’s gain score on post-test was higher than that of control group. The difference between them was significant (P= 0.000).

Table 3. Comparison of the MCF and control groups on pre-test and post-test

	Pre-test	Post-test
Mann Whitney U	4335.000	1.000
Wilcoxon W	8991.000	4657.000
Z	-1.195	-12.944
Asymp.Sig (2-tailed)	.232	.000

The second research question of this study examined if there is a statistically significant difference in using L2 appropriate formal words of Arabic L1 adult L2 learners of English who received DCF and those who did not. Table 4 shows that both groups scored (control= 93.66, Experimental = 99.34). On the contrary, the two groups scored in the post-test (control = 49.51, Experimental = 143.49). This reveals that DCF group had higher scores on the post-test compared to its control counterpart. To check the differences between the participants’ scores in both groups, Wilcoxon test was administrated in Table 5.

Table 4. Mean rank of the DCF and control groups on pre-test and post-test

Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of ranks	N	Mean Rank	Sum of ranks
Control	32	93.66	8991.00	32	49.51	4753.00
DCF	32	99.34	9537.00	32	143.49	13775.00

Table 5 shows that as per the Wilcoxon test revealed, no statistically significant difference was noticed (P= .232) between DCF and control groups in the pre-test. On the contrary, significant difference was found between DCF and control group in the post-test, (Sig= .000) indicating that DCF outperformed the control group on post-test.

Table 5. Comparison of the DCF and control groups on pre-test and post-test

	Pre-test	Post-test
Mann Whitney U	4335.000	97.000
Wilcoxon W	8991.000	4753.000
Z	-1.195	-12.682
Asymp.Sig (2-tailed)	.232	.000

For the third research question, the three groups were compared at once through Kruskal-Wallis to find out which one outperformed the others. Table 6 shows that MCF had the highest scores both on pre-test and post-test, with the DCF group reporting the lowest on the same tests before the control group.

Table 6. Mean rank of the experimental and control groups on pre-test and post-test

Group	N	Mean Rank	N	Mean Rank
Control	32	133.38	32	49.52
MCF	32	158.34	32	232.04
DCF	32	141.78	32	151.94

As shown in Table 7, the Kruskal-Wallis Test indicates that there was a statistically significant difference (P > 0.05) across the three groups on both pre-test and post-test.

Table 7. Comparison of the three groups on pre-test and post-test

	Pre-test	Post-test
Kruskal-Wallis	12.386	251.102
df	2	2
Asymp.Sig	.002	.000

The Fourth research question was about the efficacy of DCF and MCF in reducing L2 lexical errors. The garnered data were analyzed inductively (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and then generalized on the basis of the themes. Based on the analysis of the participants' answers to the interview questions, MCF was found to be more effective than DCF in reducing L2 lexical errors. For instance, the respondents reported that DCF is much less laborious, saves more energy and time on the part of the learners as demonstrated in the responses whose excerpts are reproduced here.

- Excerpts 1, student 1:

DCF is not time-consuming because it directly leads the learners to write the target words which are suitable in the specific context.

- Excerpts 2, student 1:

It totally assisted to use more formal words but the contribution DCF made was not significant because it is the most convenient type of feedback which does not require much time and energy to consume.

- Excerpts 3, student 2:

DCF did not improve the breadth of my formal words drastically because it did not get me involved in searching for more synonyms and directly led me to the word of concern.

- Excerpts 4, student 3:

The effect of DCF could not be disregarded but it had not maximal effect on use of formal words. Since it provided the correct words choice, it made me lazy to find more formal words to learn more. Therefore, I counted on the teacher's given words which did not require spend time and energy performing a search.

Besides, MCF is mentioned to be a laborious task and requires higher mental processing by the learners because this type of CF requires learners to perform additional task on their own in addition to the teacher's guidance and also, they should think deeply to find an appropriate formal word fitting into a specific context.

- Excerpt 5, student 7:

Having received MCF on my assignment, it obligated me to intentionally search for more words appropriate for the context.

- Excerpt 6, student 8:

MCF led me to carry out self-analyses and to reflect on the formal words in lieu of the informal ones supplied once glosses were provided.

- Excerpt 7, student 9:

MCF made me think more about the informal words I had written and scan corresponding formal words in my mind. Thus, it was difficult to some extent but effective to a large extent.

- Excerpt 8, student 9:

MCF raised my consciousness on errors I committed through having me to find appropriate formal words.

Basically, the interview questions sought to delve into the participants' opinions about DCF and MCF in terms of their efficacy and the interviewees preferred MCF (90%). The participants' perceptions towards MCF were congruent with the quantitative analysis which indicated a significant difference between MCF and DCF. They also addressed the engagement factor and freedom of word choice in favor of MCF.

- Excerpt 9, student 5:

MCF has engaged me with looking for words on my own and also, provided me with autonomy on how to learn independently but DCF provides a ready-made correction.

- Excerpt 10, student 1:

I think MCF engages the learners more than DCF because it puts the responsibility of learning on the learners' shoulder and it leads them to exploratory learning.

- Excerpt 11, student 2:

Given that I have been provided with MCF, it reminded me of Benjamin Franklin's quote noting that tell me I forget, teach me I remember, involve me I learn. In my opinion, such type of feedback foments cognitive engagement reminds the third part of the quotation but DCF lies in both the first two part of the quotation which would not be of help to a large extent.

- Excerpt 12, student 3:

DCF provides limited words on the part of the teacher but MCF was widely different to the point that it afforded me opportunities to encounter a large number of formal words alternative to the informal ones I had written.

- Excerpt 13, student 1:

Unlike DCF, I was not obligated to write the same formal word provided by the teacher. It connotes that I had a chance to seek other words to replace and this enterprise gave rise to learn more synonyms.

- Excerpt 15, student 3:

MCF gives opportunity to employ any word we would like to but the intended word might not be context-appropriate; however, it causes to learn more words.

Regarding the engagement aspect of DCF and MCF, the counted themes revealed that 90% believed that MCF made them more engaged with internalizing formal words compared to 30% believing in DCF. This percentage is obtained by counting the themes in data. Students in MCF groups are found to have positive attitude towards such type of CF because it led them to write better containing academic formal words. 85% of the students made positive comments on MCF and 25% of them made so on DCF. With respect to freedom of word choice, students in MCF condition (90%) highly preferred to MCF in comparison to those in DCF (15%) preferring DCF. Additionally, 90% of students voted to receive MCF instead of regular instruction.

5. Discussion

The present study examined the contribution of DCF and MCF on L2 lexical errors reduction and the participants' perceptions towards the efficacy of one of these two types of feedbacks. The results indicated that in general, both DCF and MCF are effective in reducing L2 lexical errors of utilizing L2 formal words in essay writing. Furthermore, the results provided evidence that MCF is more effective than DCF for promoting the use of formal words in L2 writing.

Thus, the first research question inquired if MCF had positive impact on reducing L2 informal words, the answer is affirmative. This result can be consistent with a number of research confirming the efficacy MCF (e.g., Hashemian & Farhang-Ju, 2018; Rassaie et. al., 2012). Rassaie et. al., (2012) who examined the effects of recasts and MCF on eighty-six EFL learners' L2 language enhancement in two experimental and one control groups argued that the efficiency of MCF is the explicit nature which leads to noticing, showing that the performance of MCF was superior to that of recasts and control. The L2 learners of this study in MCF condition gained high scores, which indicated the efficiency of the MCF in contributing to the use of L2 formal words in writing. A question requiring elucidation is why MCF was more effective than DCF in this study. Bitchener (2012) held MCF requires maximal mental processing. It can be argued that the participants of this study involved in mental processing through self-correction opportunities compared to DCF. Hashemian and Farhang-Ju (2018) made a remark concerning in saliency of MCF because it affords the opportunity to identify errors. It can be claimed, hence, that the saliency of cues hinged to MCF may lead the participants to seek appropriate L2 formal English words and use them correctly in the right context. Another suggested reason is that this could be due to the L2 learners' good command of English as they were upper intermediate learners. They might be declaratively and procedurally aware of the underlying rules of language and this eventuated in gaining high scores on the pre-test. It can be also argued that the enhancement of the use of L2 appropriate formal English words in this study can be a result of providing the L2 learners with a list of words around the same theme in every session before getting them to writing the essays. When L2 learners are aware of the correct formal words, they may learn these words deeply and then may use them successfully.

With respect to the second research question that investigated if DCF positively affected reduced use of informal words, the answer is affirmative. This can be consistent with a number of research corroborating the effectiveness of DCF on L2 lexical errors reduction (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch; 2009; Stefanou & Révész, 2015). Bitchener and Knoch (2009) examined the effectiveness of DCF as well as other types of CF on thirty-nine low intermediate ESL learners in New Zealand and found the efficacy of DCF, it can be claimed that because the participants were from

expanding circle of English user countries and had already received formal instruction and DCF is akin to a dictatorial mode of instruction as formal instruction, it resulted in their enhancement. As discussed before, the reason behind using L2 appropriate formal English words can be a result of providing the participants with a list of words around the same theme in each session, or because the participants' level of language proficiency was upper intermediate level which may aid them to learn or use those L2 formal words easily in writing essays. Due to the transparency of DCF, it can be claimed that the students experienced little difficulty in reducing the use of L2 English informal words. This clearly indicates the pivotal role of the instructor as they may respond differently according to the CF provider. Another reason of the effectiveness of DCF might be due to the short treatment sessions provided in the current study which is in accordance with some earlier studies (e.g., Van Beuningen et. al., 2012) that did not wear them out but a reverse result of DCF could be yielded if treatment sessions would be longer.

Regarding the third research question, the results of Kruskal-Wallis comparing the three groups on pre-test and post-test scores showed that students both in direct and metalinguistic conditions significantly outperformed the control group but the effect of MCF was more than that of its DCF counterpart. The results of the current study are consistent with some prior studies to a large extent (e.g., Van Beuningen, et. al., 2012 & Mawlawi Diab, 2016) which pointed out that WCF results in lexical errors reduction as they were adults and were equipped with metalinguistic capacities. Zarei and Rahnam (2013) stated that WCF group significantly outperformed control group in lexical accuracy.

While many research are there substantiating the positive impact of CF on L2 lexical errors reduction (e.g., Mawlawi Diab, 2016; Mawlawi Diab & Awada, 2021), some other studies run counter results (e.g., Shalaby, et. al., 2009), as they analyzed the effectiveness of CF on a group of Arab EFL learners' L2 lexical errors through essays and showed the ineffectiveness of CF. It can be argued that since the students were not heavily trained the distinction between formal and informal words, the CF provision was futile. However, the present study revealed further results for the beneficial contribution of DCF and MCF on the improvement of using L2 appropriate formal words. Meanwhile, the mixed results of the prior studies offer that more research is required to be conducted to understand the value of CF for L2 lexical errors reduction.

Given the superiority of MCF over DCF, this study shows the contribution of both types of feedbacks. Since MCF does not directly provide the participants with correct target forms, it led them to seek the formal words and explore on their own and this may have long-term effects on their learning and retention. This study needs further investigation which did not gave delayed post-test to examine the long-term effects of the two feedbacks. Additionally, it can be claimed that MCF which is an output-triggering CF (Rassaie, 2015) results in motivation since the participants of this study were upper intermediate EFL learners who felt short of vocabulary breadth once they were provided with MCF by which they sought to know and learn more formal words on their own. Another factor accounting for the more positive results of MCF than DCF could be age. It can be argued that adults benefit from MCF more than those of children specifically once they are in limited contact with L2 classroom.

The fourth question pertained to qualitative part of the study that probed into finding out the participants' perceptions towards the efficacy of the two CF types that revealed their inclination more to MCF. This part of the study is in favor of MCF replicating the quantitative data because the participants advocated engagement as a leading factor (90%). The rationale behind the favorability of MCF more than that of DCF is more likely due to its nature and deepening function which engages cognitive processes. This finding is compatible with some previous studies (e.g., Ellis, 2009; Rassaie et. al., 2012; Zarei & Rahnam, 2013). Another significance of MCF in this study might be that it provides learners with explicit and metalanguage knowledge once they seek the formal words alternative to the informal ones and the reason could be their level of proficiency. Furthermore, the participants were also in favor of freedom of word choice (90%). It should be noted that the participants had freedom of word choice and could check out their dictionary providing a wide range of words but the point is that they did not know which formal word is suitable in a specific context and this was a challenge; however, it could be dispelled through having a fastidious look on the definitions. In general, it is recommended to implement DCF and MCF in writing classroom settings to rectify learners' errors. In essence, the goal of such practicing in lexicon issues is to employ appropriate words in appropriate contexts.

6. Conclusion, Implications, and Limitations

To conclude, the present study aimed at investigating the enhancement of DCF and MCF on using L2 appropriate formal written words, and L2 learners' perceptions towards the efficacy of the two feedbacks. The results of the study demonstrated that both DCF and MCF contributed to L2 lexical errors reduction, and also showed the superiority of MCF over DCF. This can be as a result of being involved in mental processing through self-correction opportunities compared to DCF. It can be claimed, hence, that cues hinged to MCF in the ten sessions provided may led the L2 participants to seek appropriate L2 formal English written words and then use them correctly in the right

context. Furthermore, the participants of the study were more inclined to MCF than DCF because of the engagement and freedom of word choice.

Some issues may be acknowledged as limitations in this study. Initially, delayed post-test was not administered to find out the long-term effects on learners' L2 lexical errors reduction because of logistical constraints. Secondly, the researcher included three intact classes of experimental and control conditions rather than assigning them to three groups randomly. Therefore, further research can be undertaken to include delayed post-test to explore the long-term effects. Besides, future researchers can replicate this study in another context to control other factors that may not be controlled in the current study. Pedagogical implications are suggested to teachers and materials developers through the results of the study. Teachers should provide advanced learners with MCF more so that they themselves may consult vocabulary resources to find the required words. That is, DCF, if it is needed in some cases, should be delivered less since they may get accustomed to it, and then exploratory learning may be overlooked. Course instructors should also supply the teachers with guidelines and strategies for better employment of both DCF and MCF.

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