

# ○ THE EFFECTIVENESS OF WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK AND THE IMPACT LAO LEARNERS' BELIEFS HAVE ON UPTAKE

---

*Stephanie Rummel & John Bitchener* Auckland University of Technology (AUT)  
[nygma44@hotmail.com](mailto:nygma44@hotmail.com)

---

This article presents the results of a study examining the effectiveness of written corrective feedback (CF) on the simple past tense and the impact beliefs may have on students' uptake of the feedback they receive. A seven-week study was carried out with 42 advanced EFL learners in Vientiane, Laos. Students' beliefs about written CF were first collected, after which they were assigned to either the control group or to groups that received written CF according to their feedback preferences. Students produced four pieces of writing (pre-test, post-test and two delayed post-tests) that responded to four different narrative prompts. The targeted grammatical feature was the simple past tense. The study found that the three feedback groups showed significant improvement in the use of the targeted feature while the control group did not. Furthermore, the results seemed to indicate that beliefs might have impacted on the extent to which the Lao students improved their linguistic accuracy because the students who received their preferred type of feedback were more successful at eliminating the targeted errors than the ones who did not.

**KEY WORDS:** written corrective feedback, errors, error correction, beliefs

## INTRODUCTION

The notion that second language writing teachers have a duty to correct student's grammar errors was questioned by Truscott (1996), who sparked a debate by calling for the abandonment of corrective feedback (CF) targeting grammatical errors. Those against the practice have argued that positive evidence is sufficient for learners to acquire a second language (Krashen, 1985; Schwartz, 1993) and that negative evidence in the form of CF has no role in L2 acquisition. On the other hand, Anderson (1983, 1985) claimed that more than just exposure to positive second language (L2) input is needed, and that CF plays an important role in leading learners to modify their output. Others in support of CF have pointed to Schmidt's (1990) 'noticing hypothesis', claiming negative evidence helps learners notice the gap between the language they are producing and the target structure, thus possibly enabling them to correct their language production.

Questions arising from the debate have led to studies investigating, amongst other issues, whether or not CF is effective, which type of feedback is the most effective, and what teachers and students believe regarding CF. Recent research has shown evidence to support

the effectiveness of CF (Bitchener, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008, 2010a, 2010b; Sheen, 2007; Van Beuningen, de Jong, & Kuiken, 2008, 2012). However, findings as to the relative effectiveness of different types of feedback remain inconclusive, possibly because many of the studies have different designs and therefore cannot be easily compared (Chandler, 2003; Kepner, 1991; Sheen, 2007; Semke, 1984; Truscott & Hsu, 2008). Furthermore, the effect of beliefs on the use of CF remains virtually unexplored although they have been found to influence other aspects of language learning such as strategy use and motivation (Dornyei, 2005; Yang, 1999). Storch and Wigglesworth (2010), Mahfoodh and Pandian (2011) and Swain and Lapkin (2002) found some support for beliefs impacting learners' use of written CF in several small-scale studies; however, further research is needed before any generalisations can be made.

This paper will first report the findings of a study that examined 1) whether one type of written CF was more effective than another and 2) whether beliefs impact students' use of the written CF they receive. In this research, the beliefs of Lao students were surveyed and written CF on the simple past tense was provided in order to investigate whether one type of feedback was superior. Furthermore, the effect of beliefs on the uptake of written CF was measured by the accuracy achieved on subsequent written texts.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **THEORIES SUPPORTING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF WRITTEN CF**

Despite the time and effort devoted to the provision of written CF, questions still remain as to whether, from a theoretical point of view, we should even expect written CF to have a positive impact on L2 learning and acquisition. Several cognitive perspectives have been cited as possibly predicting its effectiveness (Polio, 2012), the first of which focuses on implicit/explicit knowledge. Implicit knowledge is the knowledge that can be used automatically and unconsciously by learners while explicit knowledge consists of the knowledge that learners have that only becomes available through conscious and controlled processing (DeKeyser, 1994). Because of the pace, implicit knowledge is usually drawn upon in oral contexts while explicit knowledge is more easily drawn upon in written contexts because learners have more time.

DeKeyser (1995) claimed that explicit knowledge is utilised anytime a learner has been directed to pay attention to a specific grammatical form. For this reason, the information contained in all CF is explicit knowledge. According to Polio (2012) some researchers have argued that written CF promotes only explicit knowledge, and as such, cannot lead to real L2 acquisition (Lightbown, 1985; Truscott, 1996); however, N. Ellis (2009) claimed that a number of factors, including error correction, can focus learners' attention on certain features of language. This in turn impacts on learning, which could indicate that CF may help

acquisition. DeKeyser (2007) also argued the benefits of explicit knowledge, saying it allows the skill to be broken apart into smaller units, and also that it helps ensure that wrong information does not become proceduralised.

It has also been argued that the act of retrieving and using explicit knowledge may facilitate L2 development even if it does not have a direct effect (N. Ellis, 2011). The facilitative role of CF in the acquisition process is also supported by the interaction hypothesis, which posits that input, possibly in the form of written CF, will push students to modify their output in future productions. The origins of the interaction hypothesis are in oral interaction (Hatch, 1978; Long, 1981), though recently it has also been used to predict the usefulness of written CF in written CF studies as it focuses on the role of input, output and feedback during L2 interactions (Polio, 2012). Gass (1988) outlined apperceived (noticed) input, comprehended input, intake, integration and output as the stages of acquisition in her cognitive framework. Schmidt (1990) also argued that the potential for CF to be converted to intake, and therefore internalised, exists if the learner 'attends to' (or notices) the feedback. He added that the amount of attention a learner pays to feedback may be affected by mediating cognitive, motivational and affective factors, which could perhaps affect other stages of information processing.

Although these theories have been used to hypothesise that written CF can be effective, empirical studies are needed, and the results of these are presented in the following section.

### **STUDIES INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF WRITTEN CF**

Early studies investigating the effects of written CF on learners' accuracy produced conflicting results (Chandler, 2003; Kepner, 1991; Semke, 1984) with Chandler reporting an improvement in accuracy over time and the others reporting no improvement. However, these reported differences could stem from differences in the designs of the studies or flaws in the design and analysis of the studies (for reviews of the issues, see Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Van Beuningen et al., 2008). For example, studies by Fathman and Whalley (1990), Ferris and Roberts (2001) and Ashwell (2000) found positive evidence for the use of written CF; however, the post-test required only revision rather than the writing of a new text. Other studies that claimed written CF to be effective did not include a control group (Chandler, 2003; Lalande II, 1982), making it difficult to determine if improvements were due to the written CF provided or if they came from other factors such as classroom instruction. On the other hand, Polio, Fleck and Leder (1998) found written CF to be ineffective, but because different instruments were used in the pre- and post-tests, instrument variability may have affected the findings (Bitchener, 2012).

More recent studies have sought to overcome the problems of earlier studies by including a control group, having students write new texts for the post-test and using similar instruments for all stages of testing (e.g. Bitchener, 2008, 2009a; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010a; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008; Sheen, 2007; Sheen, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009; Van

Beuningen et al., 2008, 2012). In all of these studies there was an improved level of accuracy in the immediate post-tests, which can be taken as clear evidence of uptake. Participants noticed the difference between what they had produced and the written CF provided, and then accurately used the correct version when producing a new text.

### **THE LINGUISTIC FOCUS OF WRITTEN CF**

Not all linguistic errors are necessarily treatable with written CF. According to Pienemann's (1989) Processability Theory, there are set processing procedures that are activated during language generation and learners will only be able to acquire a certain structure or structures when they are developmentally ready to do so. When this is considered, it is easy to see why written CF may not be effective if the targeted linguistic structure is beyond a learner's stage of development. For this reason, many studies have looked at the effectiveness of written CF on either one or a small number of linguistic error categories. Bitchener (2008) and Bitchener & Knoch (2008, 2010a, 2010b), Sheen (2007) and Sheen et al. (2009) focused on one or two functional uses of definite and indefinite articles and all found significant gains for the treatment groups in the immediate post-tests and delayed post-tests. No such gains were found for the control groups.

In contrast, the effectiveness of written CF for several other linguistic error categories (lexical items and prepositions) has been tested and no benefits have been found (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Ferris, 2006; Frantzen, 1995; Lalande II, 1982). For lexical items, this could be due to the low frequency with which a particular word is used, providing few occasions for a learner to notice acceptable usage. With prepositions, their use is not so much rule-governed as idiosyncratic, making it more difficult for learners to choose the correct preposition. For this reason, feedback may need to be provided on numerous occasions, which is not usually the case in CF studies.

Due to mixed findings and limited investigation, further research is needed on other linguistic error categories. Furthermore, more research is needed to determine the extent to which specific error types respond to different forms of written CF.

### **TYPES OF WRITTEN CF**

Although the previously mentioned body of research seems to support the positive effects of written CF on some grammatical features in certain linguistic contexts, questions still remain as to which type of feedback is most effective. Feedback is generally considered either indirect or direct, and various forms of feedback fall into these two categories, but they vary in their degree of explicitness. In written CF, indirect feedback can be coded, uncoded or marginal. Coded feedback means that the location and type of error is indicated, while uncoded feedback means that only the location of the error is shown through marking, underlining or highlighting. Direct feedback, on the other hand, can take the form of

providing the corrected form and/or providing metalinguistic explanation. For written metalinguistic explanation, the error is marked and students are asked to refer to the end of the page or paper where a grammar explanation and an example are given. It is, therefore, less explicit than direct correction.

Some studies have found an advantage for indirect feedback (Ferris, 2006; Lalande II, 1982) while others have found an advantage for direct feedback (Van Beuningen et al., 2008, 2012; Chandler, 2003). Furthermore, in studies by Bitchener (2008, 2009a, 2009b) and Bitchener and Knoch (2010a, 2010b) investigating various direct feedback options, although all the feedback groups showed a significant increase in accuracy, no feedback type was more effective than another. Due to these conflicting results, more research is needed. Furthermore, investigations into the mediating effects of factors such as beliefs may show that the type of feedback that is most effective may vary from student to student. If a student believes that the type of feedback he/she is receiving is effective, he/she may be more willing to engage with the feedback than a student who does not hold that belief.

### **BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING AND WRITTEN CF**

A number of SLA studies have focused on the role learner beliefs play in the second language acquisition process. Wenden (1999) defined learner beliefs as what learners think they know about learning. Dornyei (2005) and Barcelos (2003) claim that there is some evidence that the beliefs language learners hold may considerably impact L2 learning. Most studies looking at learner beliefs about CF have found that students want teachers to correct their errors for them (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Leki, 1991) and also revealed several possible issues, such as preference for certain types of feedback, that could affect learners' uptake of written CF.

No studies have been identified that specifically investigated the effect of beliefs on the uptake and retention on written CF, but several have indirectly found support for the idea that beliefs can affect students' use of written CF (Mahfoodh & Pandian, 2011; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010; Swain & Lapkin, 2002). When examining the way four pairs of students interacted with the feedback they received and then examining uptake on immediate revisions and a new delayed writing, Storch and Wigglesworth (2010) found that if learners received feedback they felt contradicted their beliefs, they were more likely to resist it. It could be that beliefs influence affective factors such as motivations and feelings and thus have an impact on the way learners use written CF. Furthermore, in Swain and Lapkin's (2002) study of two students studying in a French immersion program in Canada, students worked together to create a text in a jigsaw activity. The students were then provided with reformulations as CF and their interaction when working through the CF was audio-recorded. After that, the students separately rewrote their original text. The researchers found that one of the students rejected a reformulation because it was in contrast to an existing rule they

knew and already believed to be correct. Mahfoodh and Pandian (2011) reported a similar finding when one of the students in their written CF study rejected a teachers' reformulation because she believed that it changed the meaning she had intended to convey.

All three of these studies were small-scale and all either had students rewrite a text they had already written or used the same prompt on both occasions, so more research is needed in order to determine if individual factors such as beliefs affect students' use and uptake of written CF on new texts. The lack of research into the connection between beliefs and uptake of written CF was the motivation for the current study.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **AIM**

The study was designed to answer two research questions:

1. Does the type of written CF given affect the accuracy of students' use of the simple past tense?
2. Does a match between students' beliefs about CF and the type of CF they receive impact on the extent to which their accuracy levels improve?

### **CONTEXT**

The study was conducted at an English language center for adults in Vientiane, Laos. The program was English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and focused on reading, writing, listening and speaking. Grammar was also explicitly taught.

### **PARTICIPANTS**

This study's participants consisted of three intact classes of students at an English language school in Lao P.D.R. Students had received scholarships and were preparing to study at universities overseas in Australia and New Zealand in an Intensive English Program that required them to study English six hours a day. The students (22 male and 20 female) were between the ages of 23 and 27. The majority claimed to have been studying English for over eight years.

### **INSTRUMENTS**

Data for this study were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and writing prompts.

#### *Questionnaires and interviews*

Beliefs were collected using a questionnaire that included a section on feedback type preferences so that they could be placed into either one of the feedback groups or the control group. The questionnaire was followed up by a semi-structured interview in English during

which students elaborated on their answers from the survey. An exit survey and interview were also conducted to find out students' views about the feedback that they received during the study. During this time any responses that were overly critical or positive towards the feedback were noted.

### *Four writing prompts*

Each of the four pieces of writing was a narrative about an aspect of the students' past.

Prompt 1: Write about an important event in your life. What happened and why was it important.

Prompt 2: Write about a friend who has been important in your life. Write about when you met, what you did, and how your friendship grew.

Prompt 3: Write about the best holiday you have ever had. Describe where you went, who you went with, what you did, and why it was so enjoyable.

Prompt 4: Write about a special day spent with family or friends. Describe who you were with, what you did, and why it was special.

Narratives were chosen in the hope that students would be motivated to write about themselves and thus perhaps focus on conveying a message to an audience without a clear focus on accuracy. In other words, it was hoped that a communicative writing task would allow students to write quite naturally. Narratives were also chosen because such prompts create the best opportunities for students to use the past simple tense.

## FEEDBACK TYPES

Students were divided into three feedback groups and a control group. Three types of feedback were provided, with students being placed into a specific group and receiving the same type of feedback on two occasions. The types of feedback provided were as follows:

*Direct CF*: Both an indication of the errors as well as the corresponding target forms is provided.

*Indirect coded CF*: Errors are underlined and the error code VT is inserted.

*Meta-linguistic feedback*: Learners are supplied with meta-linguistic descriptions of their errors but no corrections are made.

## PROCEDURE

Three days prior to the pre-test students were given information sheets about the study at which time they could ask any questions before signing the participant consent form.

On the first day of the study the questionnaire was given and interviews were set up with students in order to find out about their written CF beliefs. The questions focussed on beliefs about grammar correction only as that was the focus of the study. Students were then placed

into treatment groups according to whether they stated they preferred direct, indirect or metalinguistic feedback, with some students receiving their preferred feedback type and others receiving a feedback option other than the one they said they preferred. This was done in order to try to determine if beliefs and preferences affect uptake.

On day three, the pre-test was administered. Students were given 30 minutes to write at least 200 words. Samples were collected under identical writing conditions (all were given during class time in the students' respective classrooms) as any differences could have an effect on performance. Feedback (written CF) on the erroneous use of the simple past tense was provided one week later (in week two). Other tenses and grammatical errors were left uncorrected. Students were given ten minutes to look at the written CF on their first writing and try to understand the mistakes they had made. Students then wrote the immediate post-test text. In the case of the control group, they were also given the same amount of time to look over their previous writing even though no feedback had been provided, in case they would be able to see, without the help of written CF, errors they had made.

The immediate post-test for all groups was returned one week after it had been written (week three). Corrective feedback was again provided in order to see if students would show more improvement with multiple treatments. The first delayed post-test was given one week later (week four). It was returned to the students, without any type of further feedback, one week later. The second delayed post-test was administered three weeks later in week seven. A survey was given and a short exit interview was also conducted at the end of the study to evaluate how students felt about the feedback they had received. See Table 1 for an overview of the research design.



Table 1. Research design

Treatment Group	Pre-test Week 1	Treatment Week 2	Post-Test Week 2	Treatment Week 3	Delayed Post-Test Week 4	2 <sup>nd</sup> Delayed Post-Test Week 7
Direct WCF		Direct WCF with 10 minutes to review before writing		Direct WCF with 10 minutes to review before writing		
Indirect WCF	All Groups: Day 1: Questionnaire Day 1-3: Interview Day 3: Pre-test	Indirect WCF with 10 minutes to review before writing	Post-test	Indirect WCF with 10 minutes to review before writing	All Groups: Delayed Post-Test 1	All Groups: Delayed Post-Test 2 Exit Survey and Interview
Metalinguistic Explanation		Metalinguistic Explanation with 10 minutes to review before writing		Metalinguistic Explanation with 10 minutes to review before writing		
Control Group		No WCF with 10 minutes to review before writing		No WCF with 10 minutes to review before writing		

ANALYSIS

For the analysis of the writing samples, incorrect uses of the simple past tense were identified and corrected for each text on the four writing samples. Photocopies of the texts for the control group were used so that those students did not receive the targeted feedback. The same process occurred for all groups with each of the delayed post-tests. For all writing tasks, accuracy was calculated as the percentage of correct uses of the simple past tense. In other words, seven correct uses out of ten obligatory occasions would give an accuracy rate of 70%. Group means and standard deviations were then calculated for each feedback group over each testing occasion and tests of statistical significance were carried out using two-way repeated measures ANOVAs. In order to determine if beliefs impacted on learners’ uptake of written CF, Fisher’s Exact Test for Count Data was carried out.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### RQ1: DOES THE TYPE OF WRITTEN CF GIVEN AFFECT THE ACCURACY OF STUDENTS' USE OF THE SIMPLE PAST TENSE?

To answer this question, incorrect uses of the simple past tense were first identified and corrected on the writing samples. Feedback was given to those in the three treatment groups. It was not given to those in the control group. Descriptive statistics for the pre-test and three post-tests were calculated separately for each of the four groups and are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for mean test scores by group and testing period

Group	Number	Pre-test		Post-test		Delayed Post-test 1		Delayed Post-test 2	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Direct	10	85.19	9.22	84.00	12.99	94.47	8.89	91.23	8.21
Indirect	10	83.31	14.24	93.65	6.86	95.77	5.12	91.52	10.35
Metalinguistic	11	84.77	9.12	87.68	13.15	96.22	6.30	92.38	8.19
Control	11	90.49	8.94	92.96	6.09	90.73	5.62	90.91	7.11

Figure 1 is a visual representation of the mean percentages over the four testing periods. As can be seen, although the control group started out stronger (but not significantly so) than the other three groups and improved slightly on the immediate post-test, it did not show any improvement on the two delayed post-tests. Of the three written CF groups, both the metalinguistic and indirect feedback groups showed an observed improvement on their immediate post-test, and all three groups showed an observed improvement on their first delayed post-test. Although there was a decline on their second delayed post-test, all three groups had still shown an observed improvement from their pre-test.

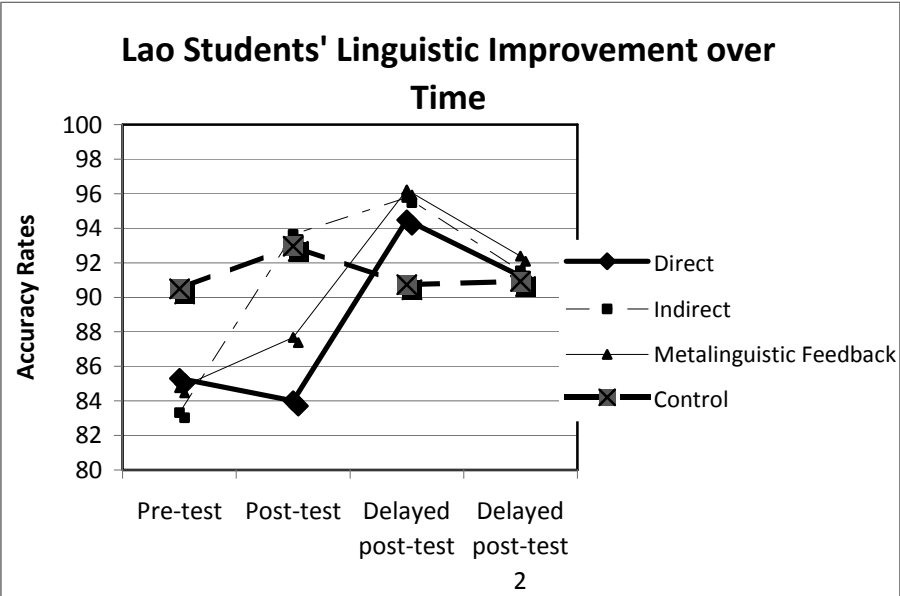


Figure 1. Lao Students' Linguistic Improvement over Time

To compare the treatment and control groups' scores across all four tests, a series of ANOVAs were computed. Using a two-way repeated measures ANOVA, the test scores were entered as the dependent variable of Time and the written CF types as independent variables. Table 3 shows the results of this analysis.

Table 3: Results of two-way repeated measures ANOVA			
Source	Df	F	p
<b>Between Subjects</b>			
WCF type	3	.425	.736
<b>Within Subjects</b>			
Time	3	15.14	.000
Time x WCF Type	9	1.918	.143

As can be seen from the results, there was no significant interaction between time and the type of written CF given; however, there was a significant difference found in regard to time when within-subjects effects were examined. One-way ANOVAs were then performed and the results showed that all three feedback groups showed statistically significant improvements (direct feedback  $p$ -value= .00, indirect feedback  $p$ -value= .00, metalinguistic

feedback  $p$ -value= .00) over time but the control group did not ( $p$ -value= .93). Figure 1 shows that although the students receiving direct feedback first showed a decrease in accuracy that was not significant at time two (post-test), they significantly improved their accuracy at time three (first delayed post-test). The indirect feedback group showed a significant increase in accuracy at time two and continued to improve significantly at time three. The metalinguistic feedback group experienced an increase in accuracy that was not significant at time 2, then a significant improvement regarding accuracy at time 3. Although all three feedback groups saw a decrease in accuracy that was not significant from time 3 to time 4, they retained a significantly higher rate of accuracy than they had at the beginning of the study. The control group, which started out with a higher level of accuracy, showed no significant change over the course of the study.

#### *Discussion of Research Question 1 findings*

The results of Research Question 1 showed no statistically significant difference between the three feedback groups, and also no significant difference between the control group and the feedback groups. It could be that, because students were advanced learners and made a limited number of errors to begin with (Mean 85.19, 83.31, 84.77, 90.49), finding a difference between the groups was difficult. However, a study of advanced learners by Bitchener and Knoch (2010b) which targeted the two functional uses of the of English article system found a significant difference between the three treatment groups and the control group, even though there was no difference found between the three feedback groups. Although no significant difference was found between the four groups in this study, all three feedback groups were able to statistically significantly improve their accuracy in using the past simple tense over the course of the study. This supports the findings of Bitchener and Knoch (2010b) and provides further indications that advanced level students are able to improve their accuracy with regard to certain rule-based linguistic features.

The results pertaining to the first research question lend support to the value of explicit knowledge in writing, which has been a topic of contention. The findings of the current study and a number of other recent written CF studies (for example Bitchener, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Sheen, 2007) show that written CF, even if it only promotes explicit knowledge, does lead to improved accuracy regarding certain linguistic features, at least during timed writings. In this study, improvement was seen on the post-test, and significant improvement was seen on the first delayed post-test (refer to Figure 1). This seems to indicate that students who received written CF were able to draw on the explicit knowledge that had been provided by the feedback, even several weeks after the feedback had been provided. The absence of improvement in the case of the control group indicates that the improvement of the feedback groups was not just the result of practice or exposure to the language from other sources.

Besides support for the benefits of explicit knowledge, the findings of the current study also support the idea of positive evidence leading to more accurate output that was proposed in a number of information processing models (Gass, 1988; Long, 1981). These models stress the role of input (of which written CF is one type) in helping learners to pay attention to certain targeted forms. If the input is salient, it may then cause students to focus on the correct form in revisions or future writings, which are considered output. When considered within such a framework, learners in this study were able to use the input, if it was salient to them, to improve their written accuracy on output in the form of new pieces of writing. In the current study, all three feedback groups (direct, indirect and metalinguistic) were able to significantly improve their linguistic accuracy regarding the past tense.

The findings from this research question also add to a growing body of research that disproves Truscott's (2001, p. 94) theory that the only value to second language acquisition (SLA) written CF could have would be for 'errors that involve simple problems in relatively discreet items' such as spelling, but not for errors in grammar. Although no significant difference in overall performance was found between the feedback groups and the control group, the fact that only the three feedback groups showed significant decreases in errors supports the idea that written CF can improve the linguistic accuracy of certain targeted grammatical features, in this case the simple past tense.

### **RQ2: DOES A MATCH BETWEEN STUDENTS' BELIEFS ABOUT CF AND THE TYPE OF CF THEY RECEIVE IMPACT THE EXTENT TO WHICH THEIR ACCURACY LEVELS IMPROVE?**

In order to answer Research Question 2, the relationship between students' beliefs about written CF and their performance after receiving written CF that either matched or didn't match their beliefs needed to be investigated. At the beginning of the study, students had been asked questions regarding which type of feedback they preferred and which type of feedback they would like to receive in the future. Ten students responded they preferred direct feedback, 20 stated they preferred indirect feedback, and 12 said they preferred metalinguistic feedback. Using their answers to these questions, students were either placed into the group they said they preferred and would like to receive or another group (either another feedback group or the control group). Of the 42 students who participated in this study, eight received the type of feedback they said they preferred (direct, indirect, or metalinguistic) while 34 did not.

It was noticed upon data entry that many students were able to eliminate all errors pertaining to the past simple in their two delayed post-tests. In order to investigate if there was a correlation between preferences and the elimination of errors data was analysed by Fisher's Exact Test for Count Data. This test is used to calculate the probability of the results happening naturally (without factoring in beliefs). Of the eight students who received the type of feedback they said they preferred, seven were able to eliminate all their targeted

errors on their second delayed post-test. In contrast, of the 34 students who did not receive the type of feedback they said they wanted, only four were able to eliminate all targeted errors on their final post-test (refer to Table 4). The  $p$ -value=.00 (.0087%<.01%) shows that there is a strong reason to believe that these results could not have been reached if beliefs had not had some effect on learners uptake of the written CF they received.

Students were also asked how they felt about the feedback they had received in an exit survey and interview. Although the majority of students were either positive or neutral regarding the feedback they have received, three of the students expressed some negative opinions about the feedback. These three students remarked that they were not satisfied with the feedback on the survey and two of them simply mentioned in the interview that they felt a different type of feedback would have been more useful. However, one student, LS1, expressed anger during the interview at having received direct feedback. She said:

This feedback, I have to do nothing. Just look and see, oh, there’s an error. It didn’t help me become independent learner...not at all. I like the feedback my teacher gives much better. I can learn a lot. This type of feedback just wastes my time. I write, but I get nothing....so I don’t want to write anymore.

While looking at her set of texts, I noticed that her last two texts were considerably shorter than the first two and she had also been unable to reduce the number of targeted errors she made, which suggests that her feelings about the feedback she had received may have impacted negatively on her use and uptake of it. This student, however, was the most extreme case as no other students expressed such strong feelings.

Table 4. Students Able to Eliminate Errors on Writing 4

	Received the type of feedback they believed to be most helpful	Did not receive the type of feedback they believed to be most helpful
Eliminated targeted errors	7	4
Did not eliminate targeted errors	1	30

Also interesting is that of the 11 students in the control group, none were able to eliminate all their simple past tense errors. Furthermore, several students in the control group expressed their frustration in the exit interview. One student stated: ‘How can I improve if I just write and write and no one ever tells me my mistakes?’ This type of comment and the inability of students in the control group to eliminate the targeted errors would seem to support the use of written CF, while the stronger performance of the students who received their preferred type of feedback would seem to indicate that beliefs may impact the effectiveness of written CF.

### *Discussion of Research Question 2 findings*

In regard to RQ2 examining the effect of beliefs on written CF, this study showed that beliefs regarding the type of feedback that is most effective and helpful for the future influenced the Lao participants' uptake of the written CF they received. Most of the students who received the type of feedback that they believed to be most effective were able to eliminate the targeted error category from their writing while the other students were not. Such results support the findings of Storch and Wigglesworth (2010) who showed learners who did not believe the feedback they received to be effective were reluctant to use it in their revisions and future writing. However, their study looked at learners' ability to write a second time on the same topic whereas the current study had students write new texts. Writing new texts could be more of an indication that learning has occurred because it shows students did not simply memorise what they wrote before with regard to the feedback previously given.

The findings of this research question also have implications because a negative reaction may cause students to refuse to even engage with the feedback and notice the information it contains, which is a necessary first step to start the processes involved in information processing (Gass, 1988). Support for this idea can be found in the negative comments of LS1 regarding the direct feedback she had received and her lack of engagement with the feedback and with future writing tasks. Such findings indicate that understanding and working with student beliefs about written CF could translate into increased uptake of the written CF provided.

Another interesting result of this study is that when only treatment groups were looked at, no statistically significant differences were found between any of the feedback groups; however, when the students who had eliminated their errors were examined in relation to whether or not they had received the type of feedback they believed would help, the differences were statistically significant. This may be one reason some studies have found written CF does not improve learners' linguistic accuracy. Simply looking at feedback groups without investigating factors that could cause individual differences could affect the results. For example, if written CF worked for half the group but not the other half, the positive effects may not be revealed.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study was designed to investigate (1) whether the type of written CF provided impacted on students' ability to improve linguistic accuracy on the past simple tense and (2) whether beliefs impacted the extent to which students improved their linguistic accuracy after receiving written CF. In doing so this study endeavoured to overcome several issues that have impeded researchers from obtaining clear answers regarding the efficacy of written CF. The study found that the three types of feedback were effective in improving students linguistic accuracy but added to existing knowledge by investigating the simple past tense.

However, perhaps the most important contribution to research regarding beliefs is that it investigates the extent to which the differences in beliefs affect students' improvement of linguistic accuracy after receiving written CF. It is hoped that this will influence future research designs and that researchers will be more inclined to consider social, individual and contextual factors that may influence students' feedback preferences, along with their retention and uptake of the feedback. Investigating mediating factors such as beliefs can provide added insight into the true effectiveness of feedback, and help explain why feedback works in some instances but not in others. Furthermore, these findings may help to explain why some studies have found written CF improves linguistic accuracy while others have found it does not.

While the results of this study seem to support that beliefs can have an impact on the way students respond to and use written CF, there are several limitations. First of all, it is important to note that the participants of this study all came from the same language school which means that this study cannot be generalised to learners in other institutions in Lao PDR and other countries. Further research in other contexts is needed in order to see if students with different language proficiencies and in different schools show a similar correlation between beliefs and uptake. Furthermore, participants were all upper level adult English language learners so once again the results cannot be generalised. Other levels and age groups need to be investigated in order to determine if those factors impact on beliefs and the use of written CF, and also look at if they influence changes in students' beliefs over time. For example, are younger, lower level students more likely to change their beliefs to match those of their teacher than older, higher level students. In addition, only eight students received the type of feedback they preferred. This is because none of the students in the control group could be used as they didn't receive any feedback. A larger sample would have provided more convincing results.

The present study also investigated the effect of beliefs on the acquisition of only one grammatical feature, the past simple. In future studies other grammatical structures need to be looked at, particularly features which are not rule based (Ellis, 2008), in order to see whether different grammatical features respond differently to written CF. Furthermore, perhaps focusing on a cluster of structures and providing a number of treatment sessions over time could provide results that more closely mirror the results achieved through actual CF practices in the classroom.

The findings of the current study indicate that we should take a more personalised approach to providing feedback, taking students' beliefs about feedback and other individual differences into account when developing feedback strategies. Furthermore, perhaps there should be more communication between teachers and students about the type of feedback they believe is useful and why they believe it is useful. By knowing what students expect in regard to feedback, and explaining reasons why feedback is provided a certain way, students



may become more receptive to different types of feedback, thus reducing the impact of beliefs on uptake of written CF.

---

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the Doctoral Completion Grant from AUT under Grant PBRF/01.

---

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, J. (1983). *The architecture of cognition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Anderson, J. (1985). *Cognitive psychology and its implications* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Freeman.
- Ashwell, T. (2000). Patterns of teacher response to student writing in a multiple-draft composition classroom: Is content feedback followed by form feedback the best method? *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 9, 227-258.
- Barcelos, A. M. F. (2003). Researching beliefs about SLA: A critical review. In A. Barcelos and P. Kalaja (Eds). *Beliefs about SLA: New research approaches* (pp 7-33). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Bitchener, J. (2008). Evidence in support of written corrective feedback. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 17, 102-118.
- Bitchener, J. (2009a). Measuring the effectiveness of written corrective feedback: A response to "Overgeneralization from a narrow focus: A response to Bitchener (2008)". *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 18(4), 276-279.
- Bitchener, J. (2009b). The relative effectiveness of different types of direct written corrective feedback. *System*, 37, 322-329.
- Bitchener, J. (2012). The language learning potential of written corrective feedback. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 21, 348-363.
- Bitchener, J., & Ferris, D. R. (2012). *Written corrective feedback in second language acquisition and writing*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bitchener, J., & Knoch, U. (2008). The value of written corrective feedback for migrant and international students. *Language Teaching Research*, 12, 409-431.
- Bitchener, J., & Knoch, U. (2010a). The contribution of written corrective feedback to language development: A ten month investigation. *Applied Linguistics*, 31, 193-214.
- Bitchener, J., & Knoch, U. (2010b). Raising the linguistic accuracy level of advanced L2 writers with written corrective feedback. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 19, 207-217.
- Bitchener, J., Young, S., & Cameron, D. (2005). The effective of different types of corrective feedback on ESL student writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 14, 191-205.
- Chandler, J. (2003). The efficacy of various kinds of error feedback for improvement in the accuracy and fluency of L2 student writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 12, 267-296.
- DeKeyser, R. (1994). How implicit can adult second language learning be? *Consciousness & Second Language Learning: Perspectives on Form-Focused Instruction*. *AILA Review*, 11.

- DeKeyser, R. M. (1995). Learning second language grammar rules. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 17(03), 379-410.
- DeKeyser, R. (Ed.). (2007). *Practice in a second language: Perspectives from applied linguistics and cognitive psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dornyei, Z. (2005). *The Psychology of the Language Learner*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum Associates.
- Ellis, N. C. (2009). Optimizing the input: Frequency and sampling in usage-based and formfocused learning. *The handbook of language teaching*, 139.
- Ellis, N.C. (2011). Implicit and explicit SLA and their interface. In C. Sanz & R. Leow (Eds.), *Implicit and explicit language learning* (pp.35-47). Washington, DC: Georgetown University press.
- Ellis, R. (2008). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R., Sheen, Y., Murakami, M., & Takashima, H. (2008). The effects of focused and unfocused written corrective feedback in an English as a foreign language context. *System*, 36, 353-371.
- Fathman, A., & Whalley, E. (1990). Teacher response to student writing: Focus on form versus content. In B. Kroll (Ed.), *Second language writing: Research insights for the classroom* (pp. 178-190). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ferris, D. R. (2004). The "Grammar Correction" Debate in L2 Writing: Where are we, and where do we go from here? (and what do we do in the meantime). *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 13(1), 49-62.
- Ferris, D. R. (2006). Does error feedback help student writers? New evidence on the short- and long-term effects of written error correction. In K. Hyland & F. Hyland (Eds.), *Feedback in second language writing: Contexts and issues* (pp. 81-104). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ferris, D. R., & Roberts, B. J. (2001). Error feedback in L2 writing classes: How explicit does it need to be? *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 10, 161-184.
- Frantzen, D. (1995). The effects of grammar supplementation on written accuracy in an intermediate Spanish content course. *The Modern Language Journal*, 79(3), 329-344.
- Gass, S. M. (1988). Integrating research areas: A framework for second language studies. *Applied linguistics*, 9(2), 198-217.
- Hatch, E. (1978). *Second language acquisition: A book of readings*. New York, NY: Newbury House Publishers.
- Hedgcock, J., & Lefkowitz, N. (1994). Feedback on feedback: Assessing learner receptivity in second language writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 3, 141-163.
- Kepner, C. G. (1991). An experiment in the relationship of types of written feedback to the development of second-language writing skills. *Modern Language Journal*, 75, 305-313.
- Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. London: Longman.
- Lalande II, J. F. (1982). Reducing composition errors: An experiment. *Modern Language Journal*, 66, 140-149.
- Leki, I. (1991). The preferences of ESL students for error correction in college-level writing classes. *Foreign Language Annals*, 24, 203-218.
- Lightbown, P. M. (1985). Input and acquisition for second-language learners in and out of classrooms. *Applied Linguistics*, 6(3), 263-273.

- Long, M. H. (1981). Input, interaction, and second-language acquisition. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 379(1), 259-278.
- Mahfoodh, O., & Pandian, A. (2011). A qualitative case study of EFL students' affective reactions to and perceptions of their teachers' written feedback. *English Language Teaching*, 4(3), 14-25.
- Pienemann, M. (1989). Is language teachable? Psycholinguistic experiments and hypotheses. *Applied Linguistics*, 10, 52-79.
- Polio, C. (2012). The relevance of second language acquisition theory to written error correction debate. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 21, 375-389.
- Polio, C., Fleck, C., & Leder, N. (1998). 'If only I had more time': ESL learners' changes in linguistic accuracy on essay revisions. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 7, 43-68.
- Schmidt, R. W. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 11(2), 129-158.
- Schwartz, B. (1993). On explicit and negative data effecting and affecting competence and linguistic behavior. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 15, 147-163.
- Semke, H. (1984). The effects of the red pen. *Foreign Language Annals*, 17, 195-202.
- Sheen, Y. (2007). The effect of focused written corrective feedback and language aptitude on ESL learners' acquisition of articles. *TESOL Quarterly*, 41, 255-83.
- Sheen, Y., Wright, D., & Moldawa, A. (2009). Differential effects of focused and unfocused written correction on the accurate use of grammatical forms by adult ESL learners. *System*, 37(4), 556-569.
- Storch, N., & Wigglesworth, G. (2010). Learners' processing, uptake, and retention of corrective feedback on writing: Case studies. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 32(2), 303-334.
- Swain, M., & Lapkin, S. (2002). Talking It through: Two French Immersion Learners' Response to Reformulation. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 37, 285-4), p.285-304.
- Truscott, J. (1996). The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes. *Language Learning*, 46, 327-369.
- Truscott, J. (2001). Selecting errors for selective error correction. *Concentric: Studies in English Literature and Linguistics*, 27, 93-108.
- Truscott, J., & Hsu, A. Y-P. (2008). Error correction, revision, and learning. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 17, 292-305.
- Van Beuningen, C., de Jong, N. H., & Kuiken, F. (2008). The effect of direct and indirect corrective feedback on L2 learners' written accuracy. *ITL International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 156, 279-296.
- Van Beuningen, C., de Jong, N. H., & Kuiken, F. (2012). Evidence on the effectiveness of comprehensive error correction in Dutch multilingual classrooms. *Language Learning*, 62, 1-41.
- Wenden, A. (1999). An introduction to metacognitive knowledge and beliefs in language learning: Beyond the basics. *System*, 27, 435-441.
- Yang, N. (1999). The relationship between EFL learners' beliefs and learning strategy use. *System*, 27, 515-535.