Error-correcting Adult Learners' Writing: Quantitative Interpretations of their Preferences and Perceptions

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Abstract

Current knowledge on the efficacy of teacher error and grammar correction in second language writing classes is controversial and inconclusive, mostly because of the lack of quantitative studies. 'Bottom-up' studies researching the views on learners' preferences on if and how they prefer their written errors to be corrected are therefore clearly necessary. Perceptions and attitudes towards written error correction may substantially vary according to learners' previous schooling experiences, cultural values and other socio-educational factors. This quantitative study therefore specifically focuses on urban-based, middle-class Sudanese learners of English. This cohort of learners clearly favours the detailed correction of surface errors, particularly of grammar, lexis and spelling; they appreciate explicit written suggestions and corrections. Slightly more than half of the learners want their teacher to correct errors by writing the solution above, but only around a third said this technique is adopted. A significantly larger proportion of higher-level learners indicate this is not sufficiently done by their teachers; but lower-level learners' requests for this are not significantly different from what is delivered by teachers. Slightly more than a third of the learners want the teacher to underline the error with a code-indication written above, and half said their teachers use this correcting technique. Two thirds of the learners want all surface errors corrected, big and small, even if there are many. Most learners said they carefully read the teacher's corrections and comments on their written work. Almost two thirds of the learners choose underlining the error with correction written above as their preferred correction technique. However, a quarter of all learners prefer being referred to specific pages of the course book during written error correction; lower-level learners consider this to be more important than higher-level learners. Only around one learner in ten considers the teacher underlining the error only, or to only comment about content as a 'very good' correcting technique.

Keywords: written corrective feedback, adult learners, Arab cultural influence and perceptions, linguistic quantitative study, bottom-up research.