

INDIRECT FOCUSED WRITTEN CORRECTIVE
FEEDBACK ON ELEMENTARY ESL LEARNERS' WRITING

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**INDIRECT FOCUSED WRITTEN CORRECTIVE
FEEDBACK ON ELEMENTARY ESL LEARNERS'
WRITING**

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Indirect Focused Written Corrective Feedback on Elementary ESL Learners'

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the efficacy of indirect focused written corrective feedback (IFWCF) on simple past tense errors of two distinct groups of elementary ESL pupils (high and low proficiency level) through a 6-week intervention. Comparison between pretest and posttest was made within groups using paired sample t-test and between groups with Mann-Whitney U test. Based on the findings, the intended measure was effective for the high proficiency group but not the low proficiency group, yet no significant difference was observed between those two groups. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with ten selected participants with the most significant difference in their pretest and posttest scores to probe their perceptions towards the usefulness of the measure towards their use of simple past tense in their descriptive writing. From the thematic analysis conducted, four major themes were identified. It was revealed that the intended measure was effective in cultivating error identification ability, promoting critical thinking skills, regulating problem solving skills and improving implicit knowledge. Due to the limited sample size, generalization cannot be made upon the population outside the study.

Keywords: indirect focused written corrective feedback, grammatical accuracy, error correction, proficiency level

Indirect Focused Written Corrective Feedback atas Penulisan Murid ESL

Sekolah Rendah

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyiasat keberkesanan *indirect focused written corrective feedback* (IFWCF) untuk merawat kesilapan *simple past tense* terhadap dua kumpulan murid ESL yang berbeza (tahap kecekapan tinggi dan tahap kecekapan rendah) melalui intervensi 6 minggu. Perbandingan antara pretest dan posttest dibuat dalam kumpulan menggunakan ujian t sampel dan antara kumpulan dengan ujian Mann-Whitney U. Berdasarkan penemuan, *indirect focused written corrective feedback* adalah berkesan untuk kumpulan kecekapan tinggi tetapi bukan kumpulan kecekapan yang rendah, namun tidak terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan antara dua kumpulan tersebut. Temubual separa berstruktur juga dijalankan dengan sepuluh peserta terpilih dengan perbezaan yang paling ketara dalam skor pretest dan posttest mereka untuk meneliti persepsi mereka terhadap kegunaan *indirect focused written corrective feedback* ke arah penggunaan Penggunaan kata lepas oleh dalam penulisan deskriptif mereka. Berdasarkan analisis tematik, terdapat empat tema yang dikenalpasti. Adalah didapati bahawa *indirect focused written corrective feedback* adalah berkesan dalam memupuk keupayaan pengenalan kesilapan, menggalakkan kemahiran berfikir kritis, mengawal kemahiran menyelesaikan masalah dan meningkatkan pengetahuan tersirat. Oleh kerana saiz sampel yang terhad, generalisasi tidak boleh dibuat atas populasi di luar kajian.

Kata kunci: *indirect focused written corrective feedback*, ketepatan tatabahasa, pembetulan kesilapan, tahap kecekapan

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CF	:	Corrective Feedback
DF	:	Direct Feedback
ESL	:	English as Second Language
IF	:	Indirect Feedback
IFWCF	:	Indirect Focused Written Corrective Feedback
L2	:	Second Language
SLA	:	Second Language Acquisition
SPT	:	Simple Past Tense
WCF	:	Written Corrective Feedback

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the research by outlining the background in relation to the issues discussed, the research problems which drive the investigation as well as the significance of the study. It also addresses the research purposes and eventually informs the research design through the questions posed.

1.1 Background of the research

Writing is a complicated task as it does not only demand fluency but also the accuracy of language. Learners need to constantly engage themselves in planning, formulating, reading and revising in order to produce a good piece of writing. It is even more challenging for English as Second Language (ESL) learners who have yet to grasp the language which are not of their native language. Therefore, in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), making errors has been regarded as an important and natural process to foster Second Language (L2) development and the internalization of the targeted linguistic knowledge (Zhu, 2010). According to Hendrickson (1978), errors also help to develop a better insight among teachers and researchers to understand the fundamental language acquisition processes involved.

Feedback, which lies within the core of a writing process, has been one of the most commonly adopted instructions in developing foreign language and second language writing. Corrective Feedback (CF), which is defined by Lightbown and Spada (2006) as any form of indication to a learner's incorrect use of target language, is a way to help learners to recognize and rectify their errors so that they could improve and avoid the repetition of errors in the future. Skinner (1958), the father of behaviourism, imposed that feedback reinforces and motivates learners towards desired behaviour and responses in a gradual manner. The constructivists, nevertheless, stress that feedback scaffolds students to construct their own knowledge and interpret experiences. It also aids to create

awareness and guide in fulfilling gaps between students' current stage of knowledge, skills or understanding and their intended goals (Burke and Pieterick, 2010). The underlying assumption of CF is to help learners establish their error noticing ability and subsequently to produce target-like form of writing. Conversely, feedback plays a significant role in generating self-regulated learning.

However, Hyland and Hyland (2006) professed that the research literature, thus far, has not been unanimously positive about the effectiveness of CF in enhancing the learners' writing development. The amount of teachers' time and effort spent on feedback provision pose limited effect on the learners' attainment of language accuracy in writing and this predicament remains a constant debate between educators and researchers (Ferris, 2010; Lee, 2013). The same phenomena also applies in the Malaysian setting where the selection and administration of CF are one of the concerns in an ESL writing classroom as teachers are required to not only examine the aspects of writing but also to deal with their students' proficiency, causing the process to be more exhausting and time consuming (Mahmud, 2016).

1.2 Problem Statement

Over the years, numerous research have been conducted either globally or locally in the area of written corrective feedback (WCF). Researchers have examined the efficacy of different types of direct and indirect WCF (i.e. Chandler, 2003; Chieng, 2014; Ishak, 2017; Jusa, 2017), focused and unfocused WCF (i.e. Sheen, 2007; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Farrokhi & Sattarpour, 2012; Angus, 2017; Jusa, 2017) as well as their short-term and long-term effects (i.e. Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 2006; Foin and Lange, 2007; Ferris, 2010). Despite the abundance of research, it has yet to conclude on the efficacy of WCF due to a great variation in theoretical stands and methodological

designs (Ferris, 2004; Ortega, 2012). Hence, reliable generalisations could not be applied to conclude on the effectiveness of WCF.

According to Li's meta-analysis (2010), most of the CF research had been conducted on adult L2 learners with approximately two-thirds of them were low-level university students while child learners were only represented in three global studies (i.e. Mackey and Oliver, 2002; Mackey, Oliver and Leeman, 2003; Oliver and Mackey, 2003). Furthermore, past studies in the Malaysian contexts are mostly conducted at either secondary level (i.e. Angus, 2017; Chieng, 2014; Ishak, 2017; Maros, Tan and Khaizriyati, 2007) or tertiary level (i.e. Stapa and Izahar, 2010; Jusa, 2017). It was evident that scarce research have been performed on elementary learners in this area of research.

Furthermore, most research investigated the effects of WCF on homogenous experimental groups with the same proficiency level while its efficacy on different proficiency levels within a single study is still left unexplored. As the "streaming system", or in other words, class placement based on student's abilities and academic levels has been called to put on halt by the Education Ministry in 2017 for a more holistic education approach (Mohamed Radhi and Syed Nokman, 2017), it is inevitable that a Malaysian classroom would comprise students of different proficiency levels. Thus, it is crucial for a study to take into account the diversity of a real classroom situation when performing the treatment. In addition, Jusa (2017) also urged future researchers to look into the relationship between a type of CF and its benefits towards the different proficiency groups as well as to analyse the differences of effects within and between groups.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This research is conducted in the hope that it helps to contribute to the existing body of literature by providing evidences either in support or refute the use of WCF in teaching writing, especially in ESL classrooms which may be applicable in the Malaysian contexts as well as in other countries. Besides, the outcome of the study will also offer a great pedagogical contribution to teachers who “are unaware of the available and important approaches of WCF”, especially teachers whose method is very much confined to the marking codes and symbols provided by the examination boards (Mahmud, 2016, p.54). It may also act as a mean for the policy makers to take the different types of WCF into consideration in addressing errors in students’ writing catering to their proficiency level.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

To fill in the literature gap, the present study attempts to investigate the efficacy of Indirect Focused Written Corrective Feedback (IFWCF) in enhancing high and low level proficiency elementary ESL learners’ grammatical accuracy in writing, particularly in the use of simple past tense.

Based on the aforementioned general aim, the objective of the current study is two-fold:

1. To evaluate the potential variances in the effect of IFWCF on high and low proficiency learners’ use of simple past tense.
2. To probe the learners’ perspectives pertaining to the usefulness of IFWCF on their use of simple past tense in their descriptive writing.

1.5 Research Questions

It is conducted to address the research questions as follow:

1. Is there a significant difference in the effect of IFWCF on the two groups of language learners' use of simple past tense in their writing?
2. What are the learners' perspectives towards IFWCF in improving their simple past tense use in descriptive writing?

H₀: There is no significant difference between the high and low proficiency groups on the accurate use of simple past tense in the elementary ESL learners' descriptive writing.

1.6 Chapter Summary

In sum, this chapter highlights the ESL teachers' concerns in feedback provision as well as the on-going debate among educators and researchers on the efficacy of WCF on students' writing. It also presents the current situation in the Malaysian classrooms in which diversity in terms of proficiency, needs to be addressed when providing CF. Innovative strategies are also in demand due to the lack of awareness among Malaysian teachers on the subject of WCF types (Mahmud, 2016). Besides, the limited research at the elementary level also calls for the study to be conducted to fill in the gap of the literature. With the aim to compare the differential effects of IFWCF on two proficiency groups of elementary students on their use of simple past tense in their descriptive writing as well as to probe into students' perspectives towards the use of the intended measure, this chapter introduces the scope of the study which is the explanatory sequential design which will be detailed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter entails the fundamental concepts such as feedback in the view of SLA and discussions of definitions along with the issues which revolve around Direct and Indirect Feedback including its relative effectiveness, degree of explicitness, focus of WCF as well as the selection of linguistic form to be corrected. It also provides evaluation based on empirical studies and a few theories such as the Skills Acquisition Theory, Swain's Output Hypothesis and Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis which shape the conceptual framework for the present study.

2.1 Feedback in the View of SLA

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories such as how learners can learn, develop and acquire the language efficiently along with why certain learners differ from one another in terms of its effectiveness in the process of SLA are among the prevalent reasons that drive the researchers in the field to carry out studies in order to explore possible answers to these issues. In SLA, the means of dealing with errors among individuals are deemed to be important in the process of acquiring the target language.

Krashen (1982), however, saw no value for instruction and CF to take place in the learning as he believed in subconscious acquisition of grammar through natural settings. He ruled out several principles pertaining to second language learning in his Monitor Model.

The first is the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis in which he differentiated between learning and acquisition. Learning, in his point of view, refers to the knowledge learnt in a formal setting whereas acquisition is described as the language competence that is subconsciously developed in a natural and meaningful setting as how a child acquires his or her first language. Krashen (1982) viewed learning and acquisition as two separate

systems in which he did not see a role for CF in the conversion of explicit knowledge into implicit knowledge. Thus, he regarded CF as superfluous.

Besides, he also perceived language to be learnt in a natural predictable order. In his Natural Order Hypothesis, he proposed that learners may acquire certain language rules prior to another. According to him, the manner, however, is not determined by how rules are taught in class. Hence, he deemed classroom instruction to be invaluable as language acquisition differs across individuals. The Pienemann's Model (1998) agreed with Krashen on the predictable order of acquisition that the efficacy of grammar instruction lies within the readiness of the L2 learner.

Following the Natural Order Hypothesis, in his Input Hypothesis, he reckoned that L2 learners can develop accuracy when ample comprehensible input is provided. He implied that language is developed from a comprehensible input which is a little beyond the learner's current state of language competence (Krashen, 1982). This theory denotes that none other than input, from where the learner is immersed in, is solely responsible for one's language acquisition. Therefore, additional measure like formal grammar instruction, according to Krashen (1982), is not necessary when the input itself is sufficient and understood.

Yet, Krashen (1982) did not totally rule out error correction. In his Monitor Hypothesis, he professed that learners will be able to monitor or edit the target structure with enough time given and target like accuracy should be the focus. He also claimed that error correction will be only effective and valuable when learners have already acquired the relevant linguistic schemata of the target form or structure. It would pose no effect if the learners are still in the process of developing such knowledge.

Lastly, it is also possible for the level of acquisition to be reliant on the learners' motivation, self-confidence, anxiety and attitude towards the input that they received. It is believed that these affective factors may either facilitate or hinder the process of acquisition. Krashen (1982) implied that learners with a "lower filter" may be able to acquire language better than those with a "higher filter". Hence, the strength of filter is one of the contributing factors for successful language acquisition.

Fundamentally, Truscott (1996) initiated much of the dispute in the studies of CF. He demanded empirical evidence and theoretical justification on error correction in which he questioned its practicality and usefulness towards one's language development. Theoretically, he doubted the learner's readiness and capability to utilize the feedback effectively in acquiring the targeted linguistic form and structure with greater accuracy over time due to their distinctive individual developmental stages. Similar to Krashen (1982), he viewed "the acquisition of grammar structure as a gradual process, not a discovery as the intuitive view of correction would imply" (p.342). Pienemann (1984), in his Teachability Hypothesis, agreed that error correction can only assist language learning when students are ready to learn. Truscott (1996) further substantiated that it is impossible for acquisition of linguistic knowledge to be built upon mere transfer of knowledge because it requires comprehension of form as well as its semantic and pragmatic relation in the language system. Thus, he claimed that error correction might be counterproductive and detrimental to one's language development (Truscott, 2007). To him, corrective feedback should be employed in L2 writing classroom only if its efficacy has been verified by empirical research (Truscott, 2007).

Ferris (1999) was one of the researchers who opposed Truscott's arguments. Based on the evidences of burgeoning studies pointing towards the effectiveness of error correction, she believed that a clear, focused and consistent error correction will promote awareness

among learners and hence, facilitate language development. She also stated that it is unfeasible to completely disregard error correction. Ferris (1999, p.2) asserted that Truscott's convictions were "premature and overly strong" as she found heterogeneity in his participants and that imposed validity threat to his findings. Thus, she urged future researchers to provide evidences in different settings for generalisation.

2.2 Direct Feedback (DF) vs Indirect Feedback (IF)

Over the years, the attention to which some types of WCF are more effective than others has been driven in a more pedagogical manner. Teachers are concerned with the exact type of feedback that should be provided in assisting their students towards better writers.

Based on the empirical studies, direct feedback (DF) and indirect feedback (IF) are two of the most discussed types of feedback. DF involves providing the explicit and correct counterparts over the incorrect ones, either above or near the linguistic error. "Crossing out of an unnecessary word/phrase/ morpheme, the insertion of a missing word/phrase/morpheme, and/or the provision of the correct form or structure" are the generic ways DF is provided (Bitchener and Ferris, 2012, p.65, see Figure 2.1).

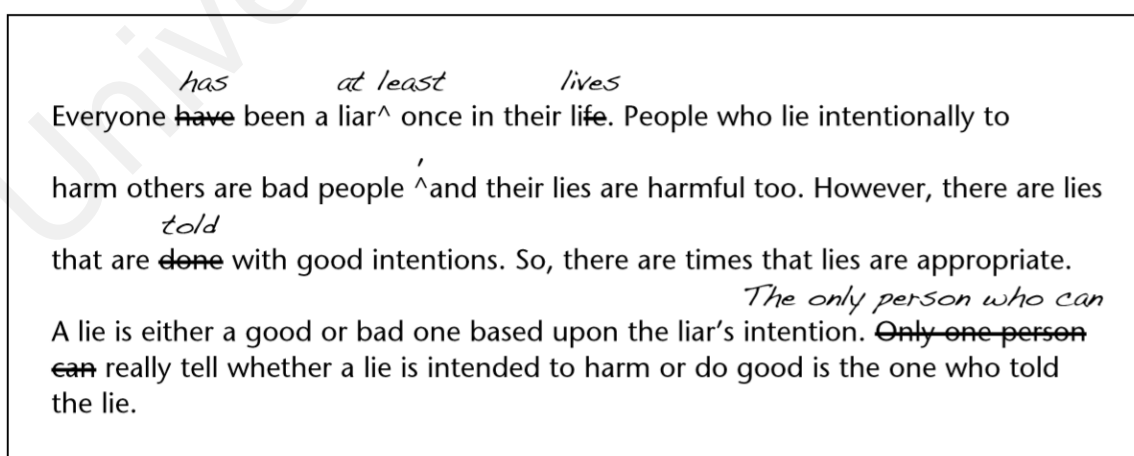


Figure 2.1: Example of DF on Student's Text Excerpt (Ferris, 2008a, in Bitchener and Ferris, 2012, p.148)

Bitchener and Ferris (2012) also noted that the recent DF is associated with the inclusion of written meta-linguistic explanation as well as oral form-focused instruction to further elucidate the written meta-linguistic explanation.

DF, in which its immediate effect is irrefutable, according to Bitchener and Ferris (2012) is able to help learners to resolve more complicated errors such as syntactical errors and idiomatic expressions. DF is also effective in reducing confusion among learners and to aid understanding of IF or their attempt in recalling the feedback given (Bitchener and Ferris, 2012). Ferris (2002) also confirmed that DF helps students to pay attention to the similar errors committed in their texts, especially in the editing stages and acts as a reference for them in the future tasks. Spivey (2014) stated that DF provides immediate solution to errors and aids the learners to understand the differences between their production and the correct targeted forms. Shintani & Ellis (2013) alleged that DF is more likely to facilitate learners with restricted or without explicit or implicit linguistic knowledge. In other words, DF is more useful to assist lower level language proficiency learners. However, as it requires minimal cognitive processing, it does not guarantee life-long autonomous learning.

Indirect Feedback (IF), in contrary, only indicates the position of an error typically through underlining, circling or marginalizing the incorrect forms without the explicit meta-linguistic explanation nor the correct forms (Bitchener and Ferris, 2012, see Figure 2.2). The learners are left to figure out and self-correct the incorrect counterparts based on the attention drawn to them (Ferris, 2006). From a theoretical perspective, IF is more advantageous because it regulates problem solving and learning (Lalande, 1982) and, as a result, abets learners to reflect on their existing knowledge and internalize such knowledge to achieve long-term acquisition and written accuracy.

Everyone have been a liar once in their life. People who lie intentionally to harm others are bad people and their lies are harmful too. However, there are lies that are done with good intention. So, there are times that lies are appropriate. A lie is either a good or bad one base upon the liar's intention. Only one person can really tell whether a lie is intended to harm or do good.

Figure 2.2: Example of IF on Student's Text Excerpt (Ferris, 2008a, in Bitchener and Ferris, 2012, p.150)

In sum, both feedback is divergent from one another in their functions in language learning. According to Ellis (1994), IF consolidates learners' existing or partially internalized linguistic repertoire while DF eases the process of internalization by supplying learners with the instant correct form. It is also proposed that certain level of metalinguistic competence is required for learners to self-correct their own errors with the provision of IF (Ferris, 2004; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Sheen, 2007). This shows that the efficacy of both WCFs is ascertained by the learners' current state of grammatical knowledge. Hence, it is important to look into the effectiveness based on proficiency level to determine the type of feedback catering to their needs instead of assumptions.

2.3 Issues in WCF

Other than highlighting the two types of CF which often receive the lion's share among the researchers, it is of great significance to emphasize on the several issues which revolve around the studies of WCF. Among them are the efficacy of different types of WCF, the degree of explicitness of WCF, focus of WCF and the selection of linguistic form to be corrected.

2.3.1 Relative Effectiveness of Direct and Indirect Feedback

With the assumption that WCF assists learners to improve the accuracy of their writing and facilitates the SLA process, a range of studies has been conducted comparing certain types of WCF or their combinations. As the primary focus of this study is to investigate the efficacy of IF, the following section will only stress on the different studies relevant to it, which is the comparison between the efficacies of DF and IF.

Among the studies conducted either in the global or local contexts, some researchers have found no significant differences between the two CF types (Frantzen, 1995; Robb, Ross and Shortreed, 1986; Hosseiny, 2014), others have testified gains for IF (Ferris, 2006; Lalande, 1982; Lee, 1997; Chieng, 2014; Ishak, 2017), and yet others have found DF to be more effective in their comparisons (Bitchener and Knoch, 2010; Chandler, 2003; Sheen, 2007; van Beuningen, De Jong and Kuiken, 2008).

Ellis, Sheen, Murakami and Takashima (2008) along with van Beuningen et al. (2008; 2012) reported that DF contributes to an amplified grammatical accuracy of both English as Foreign Language (EFL) and ESL learners' writing. In van Beuningen et al.'s study (2008), they thoughtfully suggested that DF might be more beneficial than IF. This is because the significant difference between DF and IF was too minimal but when compared to the participants in the control group, the DF group had revealed more elevated performance. Similarly, Bitchener, Young and Cameron (2005) and Sheen

(2007) also reported a positive effect for DF with meta-linguistic explanation. Chandler (2003) detected that DF surpasses IF from initial to subsequent writing while students in the IF group committed more errors at Test 3 than Test 1.

However, the results in Chieng's study (2014) showed otherwise. Participants in the IF group performed better than those in the DF for revised text. Although all participants were advanced students, only 3 participants improved in accuracy from pretest to posttest. Prediction for the remaining 17 was their incapability to comprehend the provided grammar rules and that the given time period was too short. An interesting result also emerged from Ishak's (2017) study. Ishak (2017), who investigated the impacts of DF and IF WCF on the use of past tense among Malaysian secondary ESL learners in Malaysia, had found that although the mean scores for the direct group increased from immediate posttest to delayed posttest, the reading was still lower than the experimental group who received IF. This showed that IF is more effective on learners' uptake and retention as it required more attention for them to comprehend the feedback they received. The higher consumption of cognitive effort, thus, lead to more retention in accuracy (Ishak, 2017). This is in proportion to Lalande's claim (1982) that IF engages students more than DF, sequentially, it promotes long term acquisition. It is also observable that indirect approach encourages self-discovery towards the correct form, thus, is more likely to have long-term positive effects in improving students' writing (James, 1998; Li, 2010).

Lalande's (1982) contention has also led us to another correlation that ties closely with DF or IF – the proficiency level of learners. In Kang and Han's meta-analysis (2015), results have shown the influential outcome of proficiency in the uptake of WCF: larger effect size was identified with higher level of proficiency and negative effect had been associated with beginning learners. This effect is true as Ellis (2009) also asserted that DF posits more benefits for beginners as they need explicit guidance to extend their

linguistic repertoire, while IF is sufficient for advanced learners since they possess higher proficiency and larger linguistic repertoire. Ferris and Helt (2000) and Ferris (2002) held a similar view that beginning learners, who do not possess sufficient linguistic knowledge to discern errors, benefit more from DF. It is contended that DF expedites revision due to its immediate comprehensibility (Ferris et. al, 2000). Brown (1994) also corroborated that lower level students, who possess limited understanding of discrete form, should have the opportunity to practise error correction by recopying the correct form given by the teacher.

Besides, there are also studies which found no significant difference between both types of WCF (i.e. Hosseiny, 2014; Lee, 1997). Although the result in Hosseiny's research (2014) favoured both types of CF, he reviewed that IF encourages learners to actively engage themselves in editing and information processing. This brings about their error noticing ability, comprehension skills and accuracy in applying knowledge. This claim is aligned with Ferris and Robert's (2001) who also stated that IF helps in guiding learning and problem solving. On the other hand, according to Hosseiny (2014), DF failed to compel learners to produce the "pushed output" as indicated by Swain (1985) as it does not allow learners to exhibit thinking but to depend on their teachers for error correction. Due to this phenomena, Ellis (2009) was concerned if learners' minimal processing of input would affect long term acquisition. Likewise, the students who received IF also performed better in editing in Lee's study (1997). These findings disclosed a mismatch between the prior claims that DF either displays an analogous effect with IF or even better than the latter.

Although most of the studies recount the benefits of DF for beginning writers while IF is more suitable for writers with higher proficiency, the discrepancy in research contexts as well as the difference in the proficiency level of the participants make it

difficult to assess the value of the claims that are made. It is still dubious if these two groups would benefit from the implicit measure taken by ESL teachers onto L2 learners' writing as postulations had been made without empirical evidence which looks into a single type of WCF across both high and low proficiency groups.

2.3.2 The Degree of Explicitness of WCF

Another issue much debated is the degree of explicitness of WCF in improving students' writing. Polio (2012), following DeKeyser's (1995) definition, connoted explicitness to the amount of rules or instruction given to learners on which specific form to be focused on. It is claimed that the degree of explicitness is fundamental in making feedback beneficial for learners as it helps to stimulate noticing by drawing learners' attention to form (Ellis, 1994; Robinson, 1995; Russell and Spada, 2006; Sheen, 2010). This is in line with Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1990) which advocated that noticing is obligatory in learning the grammatical features of a language. The disputes, however, juggle between whether noticing is a necessary condition for learning.

This argument is proven through the previous studies by Robb et. al (1986) and Ferris (2006). They observed that the level of saliency does not play a role as irrespective of the different means of WCF, the treatment groups were able to achieve accuracy throughout the experimentation. Results from Robb et. al (1986) revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in the accuracy gains among the four different treatment groups (three types of IF in varying degrees of explicitness – coded, non-coded and marginal and one DF) over an academic year. Similar result could also be found in recent study in the Malaysian context. Although the effect of metalinguistic feedback surpassed DF in Jusa's study (2017), its impact was not very significant for the delayed posttest when compared between groups. The metalinguistic feedback group also failed to retain its effect for the Timed Grammatical Judgement Test which is used to study the learners'

implicit knowledge. This is in line with Bitchener's claim (2012) that some might believe that metalinguistic feedback would be the most effective as it provides explicit explanation with examples which helps learners to develop deeper understanding on the feedback given. Yet, Bitchener (2012) also pointed out that the understanding of knowledge may also be dependent upon (1) how the information is provided (2) the frequency the information is received (3) the learner's proficiency level (4) the learner's ability to associate it with other linguistic knowledge which may also be processed and consolidated as well as (5) how complex the linguistic focus is. Henceforth, it was reckoned not worthwhile to implement full detailed feedback as saliency was not impactful towards the improvement of accuracy. Both DF and IF treatment group in Ferris' (2006) study, nevertheless, improved in their revision of errors. In spite of this, they exhibited different success rate in the short term and long term effectiveness. Ferris (2006) assumed that DF may posit an immediate effect in the grammar accuracy while IF may seem to be more beneficial in the long term accuracy gains. She also related this outcome to Lalande's (1982) assertion that through IF, learners need to actively engage themselves in revision as they reflect on their errors and test their hypothesis for the target linguistic form.

Nonetheless, it is worth to mention that learner differences clearly correspond with how much WCF is noticed and converted to intake by L2 writers. Whether the degree of explicitness of WCF affects the effectiveness of uptake and retention, theoretical explanations should consider these differences as empirical evidence in describing and predicting the manner L2 learners acquire second language. In the pedagogical aspect, this will help teachers to know if the explicitness of WCF could maximize learning.

2.3.3 Focused vs Unfocused WCF

Besides the types of WCF, another dichotomy in the WCF which is worth discussing is whether the scope of WCF should be focused or unfocused. Focused feedback refers to selective correction of predetermined error types (Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008), while unfocused feedback involves correcting all types of grammatical errors that occur in the learner's writing (Ellis, 2009; Kang and Han, 2015). Over the years, questions have been raised whether it is reasonable to implement unfocused WCF as heavy cognitive load might be placed on L2 learners especially on low proficiency learners. Sheen (2007) also supported this notion that cognitive overload that is caused by unfocused CF might impose an impact on the learners' attentional capacity.

van Beuningen et al. (2012), who investigated the effectiveness of unfocused WCF on the errors made in the use of Dutch among multilingual secondary school students in the Netherlands, found out that unfocused WCF can be effective in improving accuracy over a range of error categories as both DF and IF groups outperformed the control groups in the immediate post-test and the DF group outperformed the other groups in the delayed post-test. Yet, it was unknown if additional linguistic input had been administered during the interval between the intervention and immediate post-test. Another attention that should be drawn from this study was whether the learners in the self-correction group were aware of the focus of the study, which was accuracy, when doing self-correction. Older studies such as Kepner (1991), Semke (1984), Robb et al. (1986) and Sheppard (1992), on the other hand, showed no significant difference in terms of gains in accuracy among the treatment groups. Truscott (1996; 1999) regarded the inconsistency in these results as evidence showing that grammar correction is ineffectual and unfavourable. Ferris (2003) argued otherwise on the grounds of methodological shortcomings. Guenette (2007) also insisted that these findings should not be the reason for dismissal of CF in writing classes.

Ellis (2009), who supported Schmidt's (1994) view on the importance of "attention" and "understanding", reported that focused feedback allows learners to focus their attention on fewer grammatical features, enabling them to comprehend the gap between their own and the target-like form by examining the underlying factor as well as working out ways to correct them. Lee (2004; 2009) advocated Ellis's claim (2009) in employing focused feedback since it may enhance language learning through intensive and rich source of linguistic input. Similarly, most studies conducted by Bitchener and colleagues (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener and Knoch, 2008, 2009, 2010) as well as Sheen (2007) along with Farrokhi and Sattarpour (2012) yielded exceptional effects for focused feedback over unfocused feedback. Sheen, Wright and Moldawa (2009) conducted a study investigating the comparative effects between focused, unfocused and writing practice group in improving targeted linguistic features. It was found that only the focused group performed better than the control group. Focused feedback studies by Bitchener and colleagues also prevailed interesting insight for second language teaching and learning. Expanding focus on three linguistic forms (the two functional use of English articles, simple past tense and prepositions), Bitchener and Knoch (2005), for instance, who examined the relative effectiveness of different subtypes of DF, discovered that with the assistance of DF and conference, simple past tense and definite article were used accurately in writing prior to prepositions which showed significant improvement in the performance 12 weeks later. From the findings, they claimed that the stages of acquisition do not only differ from one learner to another but also from one linguistic form to another.

In line with Bitchener et al. (2005), Truscott (1996) and other researchers studying error correction (Chaney, 1999; Ferris, 1995; Ferris and Helt, 2000; Lalande, 1982; Sheppard, 1992) posited that error treatment should not be the equivalent between linguistic categories as they represent the distinctive domains of knowledge learnt through different stages and processes. Despite Truscott's (1996) strong notion on

abandoning grammar correction due to its incompetence in enhancing language learning, Ferris (1999) believed that the problem with regards to the issue of developmental sequence can be overcome if learners are given opportunities to self-edit their errors and IF to be provided for “treatable” errors while DF for “untreatable errors”. Ferris (1999) distinguished the term between “treatable” and “untreatable” errors, suggesting that the former are usually rule-governed (i.e. verb tense and form, subject-verb agreement, article usage, plural and possessive noun endings, and sentence fragments) in which learners can easily refer to and to resolve their error, whereas the latter (i.e. word choice errors, with the possible exception of some pronoun and preposition uses, and unidiomatic sentence structure, resulting from problems to do with word order and missing or unnecessary words) are usually idiosyncratic in which learners have to apply their acquired knowledge of the language in error correction. She also presumed that teacher’s inability and inconsistency to provide reliable accurate feedback can be solved by adopting selective correction strategy, targeting on only the grammar problems faced by learners.

In a more recent study conducted by Frear (i.e. Frear, 2012; Frear and Chiu, 2015), however, it was discovered that both focused and unfocused CF were equally effective in the writing accuracy experiment as it provided no significant difference between both groups. Frear and Chiu (2015) pointed out that although both feedback pushed learners towards accuracy in output, it does not guarantee metalinguistic understanding. Jusa (2017) stated that while both CF are useful, focused CF will help lower the affective filter which Krashen (1982) believed to be constructive for learning. It is also a good method to reduce confusion among learners when correcting errors (Jusa, 2017).

Since unfocused CF hardly promotes noticing and attentional capacity in language development, there is a need to understand how focused CF enables learners to foster such functions in different contexts. It is also crucial to explore and compare the extent

to which focused WCF is effectual for different proficiency levels targeting on a particular rule-based linguistic form.

2.3.4 Selection Linguistic Form

Despite the advantages of focused CF as mentioned above, the choice for a selective approach in treating students' error might also be a challenge among ESL teachers. It requires them to decide on the type(s) or the amount of errors which need to be addressed in their students' writing. Furthermore, as focused CF is not comprehensive and it contradicts with students' beliefs on how an error correction should be, this unfamiliar approach may not only spark misunderstanding between the instructor and the learners but also cause their grades to regress (Sarkhanlou, 2016). Thus, it is essential to take into account several proposals which have been advanced on the selection of target structure(s) to be corrected.

First, it is essential to understand the distinction between error and mistake. The disparity between errors and mistakes can be distinguished by its instigation. Corder (1967) differentiated them by asserting that an error reflects a gap in competence whereas a mistakes represents processing failure due to competing plans, memory limitations and lack of implicit knowledge. Another common distinction on error correction is between global and local errors. Global error refers to major errors that affect overall sentence organization or meaning such as word order, confusing words or syntactic overgeneralizations while local error deals with minor errors that do not obstruct the lucidity of the text such as morphological errors or grammatical functions (Burt, 1975; Ferris, 2003).

Other criteria for selecting errors to mark might also include the frequency of the error relative to other errors observed, the ratio of correct/incorrect usages in obligatory contexts and the length of the text or stigmatizing errors that can label student according

to their proficiency level (Bitchener and Ferris, 2012). Teachers might also choose to look at treatable errors (Ferris, 2003). Besides, they might also avoid marking errors which could be self-edited via proofreading (Haswell, 1983) and/or errors that could be checked via grammar or spelling checker on a computer over errors that needs more expert assistance (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

In the studies of WCF, four major categories of errors had been established based on the previous taxonomies instituted by Corder (1974) and Ferris (2002). Among them are lexical errors which comprise of word choice, idioms and informal usage; grammatical errors such as articles, tenses, prepositions, articles, singular/plural and adjectives; syntactic errors which include word order and sentence structure and last but not least, mechanical errors such as spelling, punctuation and capitalization (O'Sullivan and Chambers, 2006).

One of the concerns addressed by Truscott (1996) is the probability of considering learners' readiness in acquiring a specific language structure when providing WCF as the acquisition of some linguistic forms has been proven to adhere to a natural order (Clahsen, Meisel and Pienemann, 1983). Bitchener and Knoch (2009) suggested that teachers should focus on one or two targeted forms that are frequently deemed as problematic. In Focus on Form studies, a set of criteria has also been laid out in selecting forms, particularly arguments based on linguistic theory (i.e. White, 1991), learnability (i.e. Lightbown and Spada, 1993), and possible-either-L1-or-L2-induced error (Herron, 1991; Herron and Tomasello, 1989). As disparity has been yielded in results of the same kind of instruction on a variety of linguistic forms, Herron and Tomasello (1992) and Zhou (1992) claimed that the same treatment is not applicable for all forms as learners will not respond equally to them. It has also been proven that WCF may not necessarily be effective for all types of linguistic error.

Harley (1993) mentioned that the measures which are likely to be effective are those focusing on forms that portrays divergent in nonobvious ways from the learners' first language, or those which are not salient due to their irregularity and infrequent input, or are insignificant for successful communication, and forms which are likely to be misinterpreted or misanalysed by learners. Ferris (2002) stated that teachers need to distinguish the disparity between their learners' errors and their stylistic differences to the target language because teachers are more sensitive towards the communicative intention of their learners in terms of morphological, lexical syntactic, mechanical errors as well as wording or phrasing that their learners produced. With regards to that, she proposed three stages of understanding in error selection. The first is to identify the types of errors that are most recurrently committed by ESL writers. The second would be to understand that those errors are distinct across individuals followed by the need to prioritise error feedback catering for individual writers. Once identified, Ferris (2002) believed that teachers will be able to decide on which errors to mark.

To date, WCF has been deemed to be effective in targeting some discrete, rule-governed form such as the functional use of the English article system and the use of simple past tense (mostly in Bitchener's and Sheen's studies). Bitchener et al. (2005), for example, conducted a research studying the types of WCF which is most effective in enhancing accuracy in new pieces of writing on three most committed errors – simple past tense, definite articles and prepositions. In this study, it was discovered that in terms of verb tense, simple past tense was the most effective "treatable" error using direct WCF with conference. Ferris and Roberts (2001) also reported a reduction in verb and noun ending errors as well as an increased precision in the use of articles.

As this present study is to be conducted in the Malaysian classroom, findings from local WCF studies were also taken into consideration for the choice of the focused

linguistic features to be corrected. Based on the error analysis conducted on Malaysian ESL secondary school students' writing, past tense was found to be the most commonly committed errors. Darus and Subramaniam (2009), for instance, discovered that verb tense, preposition and subject-verb-agreement were the factors affecting the accuracy of structure in the participants' written work. They also obtained that students in their study often generalised the rules of past tense as irregular instead of both regular and irregular. However, due to the variation in methodology, these findings cannot be generalized in all teaching and learning contexts. Hence, it demands for more exploration on the extent to which WCF is effective in different settings.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Before the conduct of a study, it is crucial to lay out the nexus of ideas from several theories that are relevant to the present study. Output Hypothesis and Noticing Hypothesis as well as Skill Acquisition Theory (SAT) explained the different cognitive processes involved in SLA. However, these three theories complement one another as the proposed cognitive processes involved are similar in nature. The subsections below explain the fundamental concepts which illustrate the relationship among these three theories.

2.4.1 Skill Acquisition Theory (SAT)

In SLA, making errors and learning from errors are important in the process of acquiring the target language. McLaughlin (1987) accommodated the view that instruction and CF are essential in the controlled phase where intentional learning occurs as they can promote automatized learning through "practice" and "repeated activation". In other words, McLaughlin (1987) believed that in order for explicit knowledge to be converted into implicit knowledge, instruction and CF are necessary in the drilling of the learning process. Anderson (1993) extends McLaughlin's model by stating that information can shift from declarative (explicit) to procedural (implicit) if provided

opportunity to make associations in contexts. Drawing from both perspectives, McLaughlin and Anderson emphasized on the prominence of explicit instruction and CF inclusion in facilitating knowledge and competence development.

DeKeyser (1998), in the later years, related Anderson's theory to SLA. Apart from accentuating on the magnitude of declarative knowledge, he also perceived that practice is crucial in the proceduralization process once declarative knowledge has been developed. Ellis (2011) also supported that the process of retrieving and applying explicit knowledge may facilitate SLA even if the effect is indirect. It is assumed that in the initial stage, CF plays a significant role in promoting the acquisition of declarative knowledge. During proceduralization, CF does not only allow the learners to utilize the knowledge gained but also to modify them. DeKeyser (2001) also stressed that learners need to be given ample opportunities to put the internalized linguistic knowledge into practice, especially in learning grammar. According to Polio (2012), timely CF is important in the process of automatization to prevent fossilization of uncorrected errors.

Production practice, a term introduced by DeKeyser (1998), indicated that repetition in language structure production enables the linguistic repertoire to be gradually activated until it is automatized (Ellis, 1992). Besides, DeKeyser (2007) also implied that WCF and opportunities for practice in applying the feedback should be timely, constant and manageable to attain a meaningful level of automatization towards achieving accuracy in the production of L2 writing. In other words, feedback should be received immediately after writing and offered regularly over a period of time. Teachers should also be provided ample time to deliver feedback while learners should be given enough time to process and apply the feedback they received (Sarkhanlou, 2016).

In sum, the central assumption of Skill Acquisition Theory (SAT) is that explicit knowledge is accumulated through various stages and the automatization into implicit

knowledge depends on the speed as well as the ample opportunities given for it to be applied. To simplify, the amount of target knowledge attained and its language use can be progressively bridged by timely and constant output practice (DeKeyser, 2003).

2.4.2 Swain's Output Hypothesis

Similar to the production practice termed by DeKeyser (1998), Swain (1985) also believed in the contribution of output towards SLA. First, it enables learners to apply their linguistic repertoire meaningfully through practice, thereby promotes automatization of knowledge. In this process, due to the increased usage of the language, fluency is achieved rather than accuracy. However, Swain (1993) reckoned that fluency is not enough for successful language acquisition. Output also extends learners' linguistic repertoire via hypothesis testing, henceforth, pushes learners towards deeper understanding. Krashen (1982) stated that learners are likely to comprehend a language in a non-syntactical way. Language production, thus, forces learners to move from semantic to syntactic use of language by allowing them to pay attention to the target structure. Lastly, feedback in the process of language output reroute the language learning process to a clarified one. In this case, learners are provided with clear and concise input via feedback as well as chances to negotiate meaning and opportunities to produce the modified output.

In addition, Swain (2005) suggested that language output should not be viewed merely as practice or to be put as an end to the input and acquisition process. In contrast, she believed that comprehension input is the extension of the whole language learning process and active engagement in learning leads to acquisition. Swain (2005) described three functions that are crucial in second language development.

The first is noticing or triggering function which directs learners' attention towards the existing gap between their current linguistic knowledge and their intended goals towards target-like language production. Output Hypothesis disseminates this concept of noticing

by providing opportunities to learners to use the language and become aware of their limitations and the current linguistic gap that exists in their interlanguage system. In this context, the provision of negative evidence in the form of CF is believed to inform them on the grammaticality of the language produced to the targeted form when the “exposure to comprehensible input” is insufficient (Panova and Lyster, 2002; Rutherford and Sharwood Smith, 1988; White, 1987). Qi and Lapkins (2001) distinguished two types of noticing that enhance second language learning: perfunctory and substantive. The former indicates that the learners are competent to notice their language production as non-target like yet impotent to provide reasoning while the latter is on the contrary. They also proposed that the latter yields more accurate subsequent written work as they are able to reason on top of being more aware of their errors. This shows that the saliency of WCF is essential in enhancing the learners’ noticing ability.

Secondly, learners should also be given chances to reflect on their intent and to test their language hypothesis via trial-and-error in order to modify their subsequent language output for better communication. Conceptually, indirect focused feedback tallies with this feature as sufficient clues such as underlining of errors are made salient for learners to notice yet leaving them adequate space to reflect and test their hypothesis on the accurate use of linguistic forms without the provision of any metalinguistic explanation.

Lastly, real acquisition occurs when learners play an active role in discovering and developing metalinguistic knowledge through exploration of language, especially in the form of collaborative tasks. However, this function is not significant in this study as the participants involved might not be able to justify the concept of simple past tense with just two years of grammar instruction.

2.4.3 Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis

Schmidt (1990), in his Noticing Hypothesis, also emphasized on the importance of noticing in language learning where input must be consciously attended to in order for learning to take place. For successful learning, Schmidt (2010) stated that learners must be made conscious to compare their own language output with the targeted input in overcoming errors. He predicted that there are relations between implicit and explicit learning. To him, unconsciously learnt information requires conscious processing to develop awareness (Schmidt, 2001).

According to Schmidt (1990), there are three types of consciousness. The first is intention. Schmidt (2010) noted that incidental learning is effective for learning vocabulary through reading but might not be effective for error correction. He highlighted that focused attention is necessary and that intentional learning is essential for facilitative effect especially for stimulus detection. The second type of consciousness is attention. According to Schmidt (2001, in Robinson, 2001, p.3), attention includes the various functions of controlling information processing and behaviour such as “alertness, orientation, detection within selective attention, facilitation and inhibition”. These functions are important when the existing knowledge and practices are insufficient. Attention may bring about learning, modifying and establishment of new knowledge. One of the empirical studies that support this theory is the study on whether feedback facilitates students’ noticing of L2 forms in a classroom context by MacKey (2006). When feedback was provided, the students, who were able to exhibit more noticing, developed more than those who did not. Baars (1997), however, questioned whether more attention leads to more learning. Izumi (2002), who evaluated the comparative effects between output and enhanced input on noticing and development, proved that enhanced input does not necessarily bring about more learning. This shows that the types of WCF also play a significant role to determine the amount of input in maximizing learning. It is

suggested that the attention must be highly focused and not just global (Schmidt, 2010). The last type of consciousness which ties closely with attention is awareness as awareness develops with the presence of attention. According to Schmidt (1990), insights and understanding are gained when we notice, analyse, reflect and compare it to other instances that we have experienced.

In spite of this, Schmidt (2010) stressed that the awareness of abstract grammar rules cannot be a precondition for learning as it involves intuitive form of knowledge that is beyond verbalization. Reber (1993) defined implicit knowledge as knowledge that is acquired intuitively without prerequisite metalinguistic awareness nor the ability to explain certain rules. Implicit knowledge entails a different level of understanding and it differs from awareness developed from noticing. Schmidt (2001) distinguished noticing as registration of certain language features as a result of attention whereas understanding requires a higher cognition which includes the ability to make generalizations across instances. This implies that explicit and implicit learning are possible although they belong to two different ends of cognitive processes as they are highly reliant on the level of understanding of the learner.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

From the theories discussed above, it is conclusive that there are many who perceived that conscious understanding of the target language system is essential for accuracy in language use. This process is also believed to be made possible with the presence of ample output practice and the facilitation of CF. Hence, Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis and Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis as well as Skill Acquisition Theory will be the core to serve as the conceptual framework of the study (see Figure 2.3).

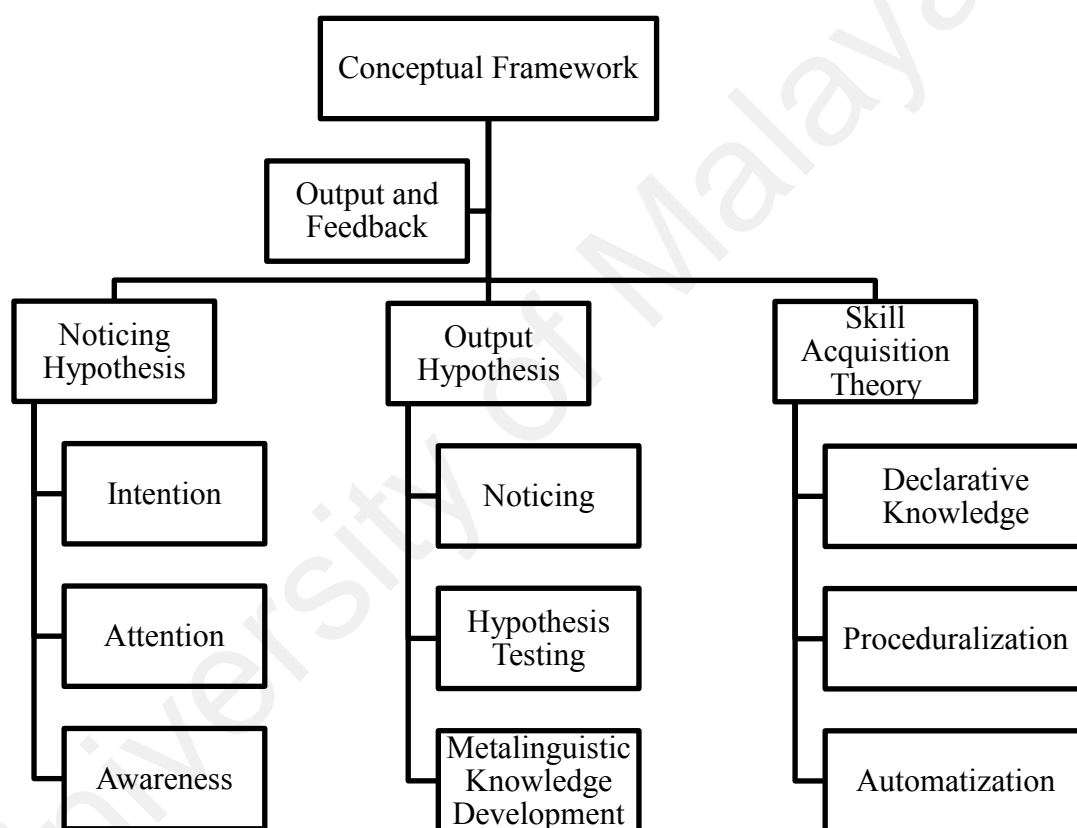


Figure 2.3: Conceptual Framework of the Study

First, Schmidt (1990) stated that errors occur due to the lack of knowledge on the rules of the target language, the inability to retrieve information from memory as well as the lack of attention on the target linguistic structure. Swain (1995) further corroborated that other than input, output is also necessary for noticing and attention as learners need to be guided for accuracy in their language use. By this means, the amount of output practice

bridged by the timely, constant and manageable feedback may facilitate automatization of proceduralized knowledge and hence lead to competence among learners (DeKeyser, 2003).

To simplify, these three theories emphasized on the significance of error noticing ability among learners in order to develop awareness to identify and assess their interlanguage gap. By doing so, they can modify their knowledge based on the feedback they receive. Once the declarative knowledge is established, the process of retrieving and applying explicit knowledge will help them to achieve metalinguistic understanding and eventually automatize as proceduralized knowledge.

The conceptual framework of this study also corresponds to Batstone's (1995) proposal of sequence for grammar learning. He propositioned that grammar learning should adhere to the patterns of structures as follow:

(re)noticing → (re)structuring → proceduralizing

The first element in grammar learning is initiated with the process of noticing. Noticing is an active process which allows learners to notice the connections between form and meaning as well as develop awareness on the structures of the target language. Structuring, on the other hand, refers to the process of reforming internalized grammar knowledge through the process of accommodation and assimilation. This process is usually controlled around form and meaning while learners participate actively in attempt to convey messages across in a precise manner. This form of practice, thus, gradually stimulates further noticing for more accurate output. Proceduralisation is the final stage where newly internalized grammar knowledge is put into practice. In this process, grammar and form are attended to as they are essential for effective communication. It is also suggested that teachers can scaffold the proceduralisation process by progressively

adjusting the level of task requirement and shortening the task time limit when the grammar forms are gradually automatized.

All in all, these three theories are intricately related and are attached to one another. Therefore, it is important to take them collectively into account according to their contribution towards SLA.

2.6 Chapter Summary

Apart from the discussion on how feedback is viewed from the SLA perspectives, this chapter also highlights how IF is distinguished from DF. In addition, this chapter also summarises several important issues related to the studies of WCF.

The first is with regards to the never ending arguments on the relative effectiveness of DF and IF. Some believed that DF benefits the learners by providing immediate solution to the errors without bringing about any confusion to the feedback given yet some believed that it does not foster long term acquisition. IF, on the other hand, posits more advantages as it helps to retain the effect in the long run by encouraging self-discovery and problem solving. However, it is perceived to be more effectual for those with higher linguistic repertoire.

Besides, the decision on whether WCF should be explicit is also one of the most discussed topics among the researchers. Some postulated that WCF should be explicit for students to notice their errors while some questioned whether saliency plays a role to stimulate more learning.

The above discussion is also linked to the next issue which is the focus of WCF. Although focused WCF is proven in the recent years to be effective in improving students' accuracy in writing, this issue has often remained a dilemma among the educators as focused WCF is not a commonly adopted approach and is against the norms

of marking. In Malaysia, especially, the awareness of other forms of marking is low among teachers, hence, causing them to conform to only the marking scheme provided by the Examination Board. The confidence of switching to the new way of marking is also hindered when it cannot meet up to the students' expectation who are habituated with the old convention of feedback provision. Hence, the manner of linguistic form to be selected in error correction was also highlighted in this chapter.

Last but not least, this chapter also deliberates three fundamental theories – the Skills Acquisition Theory, Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1990) and Swain's Output Hypothesis in forming the conceptual framework of the study. These three theories emphasize on the importance of conscious understanding with the assistance of CF, ample practice in knowledge application and automatization of knowledge. Since IF and focused feedback posit more benefits in relative to DF and unfocused feedback, this study aims to investigate the potential efficacy of Indirect Focused Written Corrective Feedback (IFWCF) in enhancing high and low level proficiency elementary ESL learners' grammatical accuracy in writing, particularly in the use of simple past tense.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter elaborates on the research design, the participants involved and the instruments employed, followed by the data collection and data analysis procedures for both phases in the study.

3.1 Research Design

As this study intends to examine the effects of Indirect Focused WCF (IFWCF) on the accurate use of simple past tense in writing across different proficiency levels in an elementary ESL context, to fit the purpose of the study, this investigation adopted the explanatory sequential design. According to Creswell (2014), an explanatory sequential design begins with collecting quantitative data followed by an in-depth qualitative exploration of data in the second phase to consolidate findings in the first phase. Grounded on Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1990), Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985) and Skill Acquisition Theory, this mixed method design was conducted in two phases (see Figure 3.1).

First, in order to explore the disparities in the effect of IFWCF within and between two proficiency groups, a quasi-experiment was conducted. The experimental phase was then followed by a structured interview in the second phase. A thematic analysis was also performed on the structured interview to probe into the efficacy of the intended measure from the students' point of view for triangulation of data.

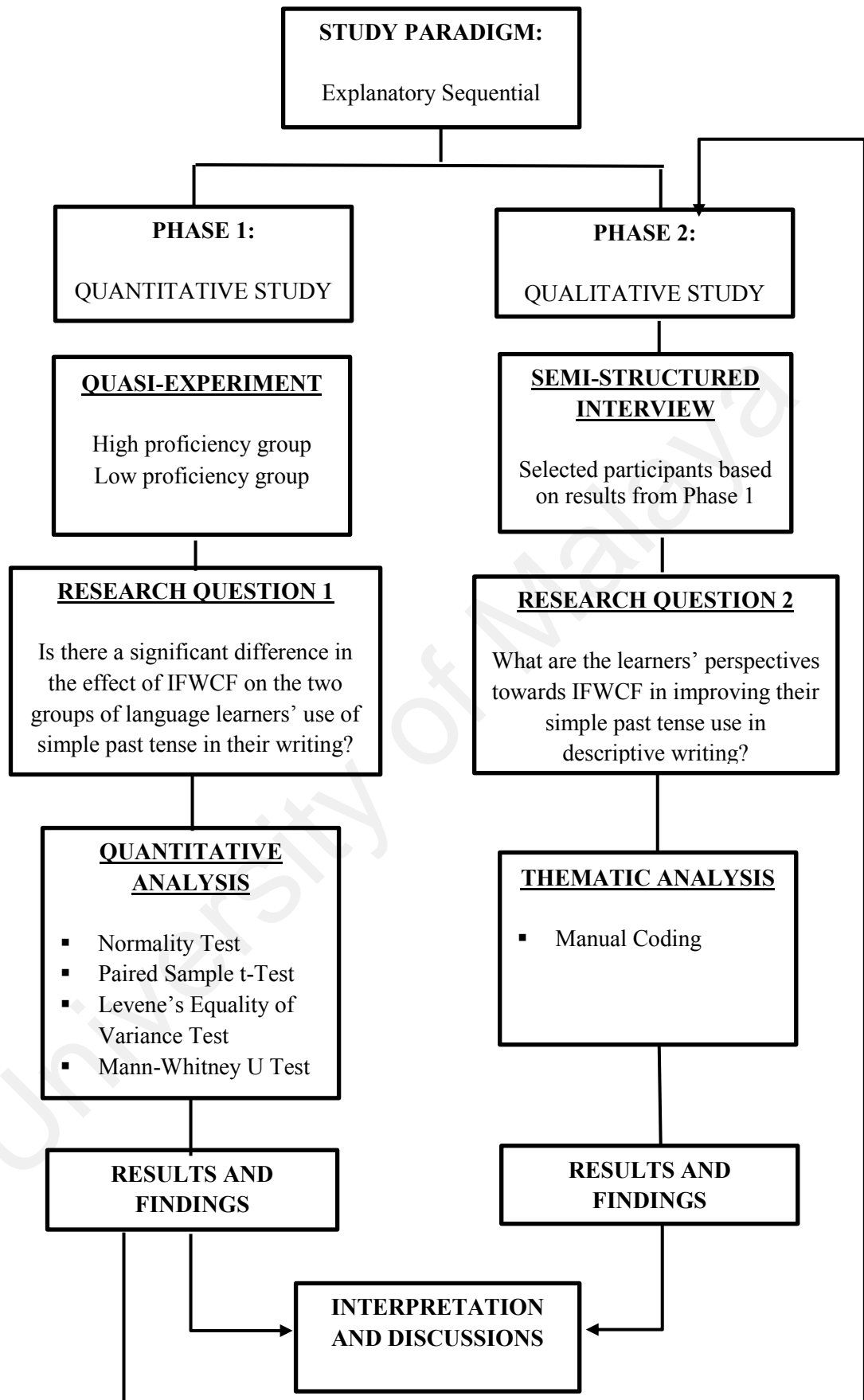


Figure 3.1: Study Paradigm

3.2 Ethical Consideration

Before the commencement of a study, it is important to consider the ethical issues which may arise to avoid any violation of conduct when conducting a research. Bryman and Bell (2007) further substantiated that results of the study may be questioned if the researcher is found with any violation of rules.

Prior to the study, access was attained from the headmistress of the school for permission to conduct the study (see Appendix A). A meeting was then arranged with two respective English class teachers to ask for their consent to conduct the research during their English lessons for two days a week with the duration of 6 weeks for the experimentation phase and a day for semi-structured interview which was conducted two weeks after the first phase. Upon meeting them, they were informed about the nature and duration of the study. Assistance to distribute the consent form to the participants' parents or guardian (see Appendix B) was also obtained to avoid any coercion. It also provides the learners permission to withdraw from the study as well as to protect their identity. Apart from that, both the teachers and students were also notified that this research would be treated as a writing practice each week with the aim to improve students' grammatical accuracy and it does not have any impact on their academic performance.

3.3 Quantitative Phase

In education, many experimental settings prohibit the formation of groups, hence, researchers are required to adopt intact groups as assignment to avoid disrupting classroom learning (Creswell, 2014). Predominantly, the studies of CF have vastly involved participants formed in natural groups wherein the participants are readily available for the assignment of groups (McGraw-Hill, 2017). Additionally, a quasi-experiment involves the administration of intervention, by implementing a pre-test and posttest or only the posttest in the design (Creswell, 2014). This approach clearly

corresponds to one of the objectives of the study which is to compare the results from pretest to posttest in accuracy performance between the two proficiency groups of learners.

In this phase, in order to evaluate the potential variances in the effect of IFWCF on high and low proficiency learners' use of simple past tense in their writing, a 6-week quasi-experiment was conducted.

3.3.1 Participants

In this study, besides the availability of students in intact classrooms, another reason for using the convenient sampling method is due to an easy access to the research site as the researcher has a background of working as a teacher and was a former subordinate to the headmistress of the school where the research was conducted.

As larger sample is significant to make generalization for the entire population in a quantitative study, to minimize sampling error in an experimental study, Creswell (2014, P.164) suggested that for an experimental study, it is best for researchers to use "approximately 15 participants in each group". Hence, it is crucial for the researcher to determine the initial population size and number of experimental groups before conducting the study. In the present study, a total of 56 ESL learners from two Year 5 classes (Class A: 30; Class B: 26), aged 11, studying in an urban vernacular primary school in Kampar, were chosen to be part of the study.

Since the researcher is a teacher in a primary school, the reason for selecting the Year 5 pupils was based on the assumption that they have acquired the knowledge on simple sentence and text construction as well as the use of basic grammar, particularly simple past tense. This is important as the comprehension of IF, based on the empirical studies by Ferris (2004), Hyland and Hyland (2006) and Sheen (2007), is dependent on the

students' current level of metalinguistic competence. Krashen (1982) also stated that CF would pose no effect if the learners are still in progress of developing such knowledge.

It was also confirmed by the English teachers of the school that the participants have been exposed to two years of basic grammar instructions, including the function of simple past tense and their usage in contexts (see Appendix C). This is in line with the fulfilment required in their learning standards which they need to achieve by the end of Year 3 and Year 4 English lessons. The relevant learning standards are as follow:

5.1.3 Able to use verbs correctly and appropriately

- (a) regular verbs
- (c) simple past tense

(Extracted from Year 3 Standard-based English Language Curriculum Document, n.d.)

5.1.3 Able to use verbs correctly and appropriately

- (a) irregular verbs
- (b) verbs that do not change form

(Extracted from Year 4 Standard-based English Language Curriculum Document, n.d.)

In addition, the Standard-based English Language Curriculum Document (n.d.) also confirmed that the participants have been given exposure in expressing their ideas clearly in writing with teacher's guidance since Year 4.

3.3.1 Able to create simple texts using a variety of media with guidance:

- (b) linear

(Extracted from Year 4 Standard-based English Language Curriculum Document, n.d.)

Furthermore, as this research was conducted in the beginning of the year, it would serve as an introduction for students to learn the process of writing such as planning, drafting, revising and editing which is also part of their learning standards to be fulfilled by the end of the year. As stated in their Year 5 Standard-based English Language Curriculum Document (n.d.), in this process, the mechanics of writing such as spelling, punctuation and grammar checking should also be emphasized. Thus, this research could act as a stepping stone for students to learn the means of grammar checking which would help to facilitate their writing process in the future.

Besides, these pupils are the most suitable candidates as they have yet to sit for the primary school centralised examination. Therefore, this study would not disturb the teaching and learning process.

3.3.1.1 Criteria for Proficiency Level Grouping

With regards to the previous studies, some researchers failed to clearly specify the rigorous measure to arrive at the conclusion to which criteria their participants' proficiency level was referred to. In the research of Bitchener and Knoch (2010), for instance, the participants were advanced L2 writers who were enrolled in the courses where the experiments took place. However, they did not explain the criteria which were used to label the L2 writers as advanced writers. It is evident what was absent, was the careful consideration and assessment of initial language proficiency of the participants. For example, although the term "advanced" was used, Bitchener and Knoch (2010) failed to justify as to which criteria was referred to, to arrive at this conclusion.

As students' proficiency level is a prominent independent variable of this study, it is important to clarify the criteria for the two groupings used in the study. Although the participants were selected from two intact classes, due to the abolishment of the

“streaming system” in the Malaysian classrooms, it is significant to regroup them accordingly to their proficiency level before conducting the study.

This study employed the previous test scores as the benchmark for proficiency. Besides, as the test scores were set 3 months prior to the study, it was possible for maturation in linguistic knowledge to take place within this period. As a result, a similar measure ensuing Shintani and Ellis’ (2013) approach to conduct a pretest writing tasks in the first week of the actual study to reveal the participants’ ability in writing was also administered to account for the participants’ criterion and the process of group allocation.

After the marking of written work in the pretest, it was found that 8 participants were unable to construct a simple sentence, they were thus excluded from the study for more valid results. To be more specific, the initial number of students in the population (N=56) was reduced to 48 samples for the actual study (n=48). The exclusion of participation from the study was made based on the inter-rater agreement between the researcher and an experienced marker after the implementation of pretest writing on the first week. Creswell (2014) further substantiated that differences in outcomes could be negotiated and reconciled among interrater and researcher to help negate and dispute over any biasness that arises in the study.

Based on the interrater results, participants were then divided into two proficiency groups, which were the high (H) and low (L) proficiency group. The high proficiency group consisted of 25 pupils while the lower proficiency group comprised of 23 pupils (H=25; L=23). Since there were two participants who obtained similar test scores in the high proficiency group, to ensure equal distribution of participants in each group, their school-based assessment scores were also taken into consideration. It was revealed that one of them scored lower band in their writing, thus, that particular participant was automatically assigned to the low proficiency group (H=24; L=24). Throughout the study,

the exact nature of the study was not disclosed to the participants to ensure the validity of the findings.

3.3.2 Instrument

According to Creswell (2014), the treatments are the key indicators that will either elevate or deteriorate a study's external and internal validity. This includes the instruments used and the execution of the study.

3.3.2.1 Writing Tasks

According to Bitchener and Knoch (2010), it is deemed that descriptive writing is the most suitable measure as minimal knowledge and less processing capability are required for such writing tasks. Grounded on their claim, the present study utilized guided descriptive writing tasks restricted under the theme on socially relatable incidents (i.e. burglary and robbery, see Appendix D).

Due to the inability to provide any verb in SPT form, to ensure the validity of the task, other potential to elicit SPT use was also taken into account. For instance, time frame (i.e. yesterday, one day) was given in every beginning of the story. Besides, the participants were familiar with the task requirement of a descriptive writing as similar measure has been implemented for their monthly test following the UPSR format. Mackey and Gass (2005) assert that the reliability of testing instrument is important in yielding consistent and accurate results. In this context, six testing instruments (1 for pretest, 4 for treatments, 1 for posttest) were carefully chosen to ensure the consistency of difficulty level and familiarity across the interventions.

Moreover, the administration of writing testing instrument also adhered to Swain's Output Hypothesis. In this context, the writing instruments did not only provide sufficient opportunity for the participants to self-correct their errors towards the accurate use of SPT

after they were endowed with IFWCF, but this discovery process was also assumed to help to develop linguistic awareness which might eventually lead to acquisition through noticing. This allows the learners to use the language as well as be conscious of their linguistic limitations in their interlanguage system.

3.3.3 Qualitative Data Collection Procedures

Two weeks prior to the actual study, permission of research site was gained from the headmistress of the school and a briefing was carried out with the class English teachers. Teachers were briefed to refrain from SPT instruction throughout the intervention period. They were also required to complete a background questionnaire on each of their student's demographic information as well as their educational and language background. A consent form was also distributed to the participant's parents or guardian prior to the study to avoid coercion, provide them allowance for withdrawal from the study as well as to protect their identity. These forms were collected during the first week of the actual study.

During the actual study, as this study intends to examine the effectiveness of IFWCF towards L2 young learners' SPT accuracy, participants were required to write a description between 80 and 100 words within 30 minutes. This process conformed to a criterion to measure implicit knowledge stated by Ellis (2005) that the time limit will harness considerable pressure on the learners' language processing capacity to communicate their ideas as well as exploiting the linguistic knowledge explicitly in their writing. Prior to writing, difficult words were explained and the content of the story was also discussed in their mother tongue. Any anticipated vocabulary was also provided to lessen the processing load on the participants when writing while verbs were provided in base form to lend to the validity of the findings.

The participants' work was collected each week and photocopied prior to marking. The photocopy version would be given during revision to avoid the over-reliance on WCF for self-correction as well as to ensure the internalization of knowledge from the revised piece to their existing knowledge. Their pieces of writing were then marked and endowed with IF whereby the incorrect counterparts (wrong usage of simple past tense – omission of verbs, past tense copula verbs, irregular verbs and regular verbs in the active voice), were underlined. Four days later, the participants were given 15 minutes to study the marked writing with error indication. The original piece of writing with WCF was thenceforth collected followed by a 30-minute revision on the photocopied piece without any provision of WCF. The same convention during the experimentation phase was repeated for the following four weeks with the provision of IF.

As for posttest in week 6, although the similar procedure as the experiment phase was administered, the participants were only required to produce a piece of descriptive writing under the same theme. Their piece of writing was lastly collected and analysed. A brief data collection procedures during the actual study were as shown in Figure 3.2.

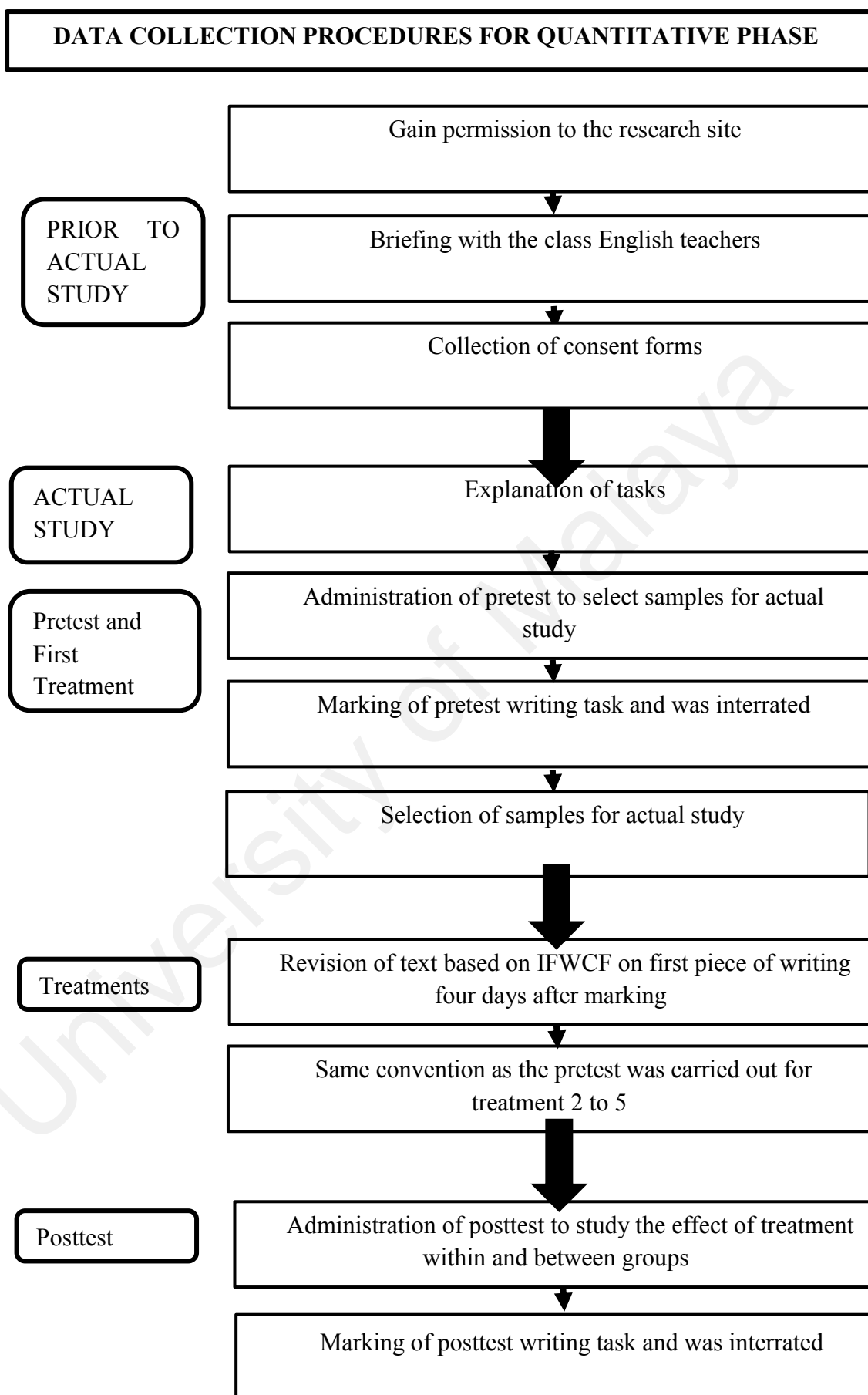


Figure 3.2: Data Collection Procedures for Quantitative Phase

3.3.4 Target Linguistic Feature

Based on the error analysis in the empirical studies either in local or global contexts as outlined in Chapter Two, simple past tense (SPT), which was one of the commonly committed errors in students' writing, was selected as the target linguistic form investigated in this present study.

According to Ferris and Roberts (2001), despite possessing only one function which is used to represent a completed action or state in the past, the numerous forms of simple past tense make it worth discussing. They further explain that its function can be expressed through the use of the past tense copula (was or were), regular verbs (e.g., walked and talked) and irregular verbs (e.g. went and did) or even in the active or the passive voice. In addition, the error correction in this study also selected several other forms proposed by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982, in Ishak, 2017, p.62-64). They stated that the inappropriate uses of the past tenses can take into the form of (i) regular past tense (ii) irregular past tense (iii) past participle incorrect (iv) omission of verb (v) use of progressive tense (vi) subject-verb-agreement. The details are as follow:

a) Regular past tense

(i) Omission of –ed

i.e. “We play a lot of games yesterday.” instead of “We played a lot of games yesterday.”

(ii) Adding –ed to past already form

i.e. “Last night, he calleded her.” instead of “Last night, he called her.”

- b) Irregular past tense
 - (i) Regularization by adding –ed

i.e. “He putted the cookie on that table a while ago.” instead of “He put the cookie on that table a while ago.”
 - (ii) Substitution of simple non-past

i.e. “He fall into the well.” instead of “He fell into the well.”
 - (iii) Substitution of past participle

i.e. “I been near to him.” instead of “I had been near to him.”
- c) Incorrect past participle
 - (i) Omission of –ed

i.e. “He was call.” instead of “He was called.”
- d) Omission of verb
 - (i) Omission of main verb

i.e. “He into the well.” instead of “He fell into the well.”
 - (ii) Omission of to be

i.e. “She here last night.” instead of “She was here last night.”
- e) Use of progressive tense
 - (i) Omission of be

i.e. “He washing the dishes while his brother cleaning the table.” instead of “He was washing the dishes while his brother was cleaning the table.”

- (ii) Replacement of –ing by the simple verb form

i.e. “My mother was cook dinner.” instead of “My mother was cooking dinner.”

- (iii) Substitution of the progressive for the simple past

i.e. “Then the man shooting the bird with a gun.” instead of “Then the man shot the bird with a gun.”

- f) Agreement of subject and verb

- (iv) Disagreement of subject and verb person

i.e. “You be friends.” instead of “You were friends.”

- (v) Disagreement of subject and number

i.e. “The cats was chasing the mouse.” instead of “The cats were chasing the mouse.”

- (vi) Disagreement of subject and tense

i.e. “I didn’t know what it is.” instead of “I didn’t know what it was.”

As Ferris and Roberts (2001) suggested that feedback should not be provided on the passive voice because it represents a potentially untreatable sentence structure error, incorrect past participle was not taken into consideration. Besides, as the use of progressive tense and subject verb agreement represent another linguistic domain in past tense, they were also discarded from the focus of the target structure in this study. Hence, the simple past tense correction for this study only constituted the past tense copula verbs, regular and irregular verbs in the active voice as well as the omission of verb.

3.3.5 Quantitative Data Analysis Procedures

To answer the first research question, a 6-week IFWCF intervention was carried out to study the influence of WCF on the participants' grammatical accuracy. A comparison was made within and between groups to find out whether proficiency level mediates the effects of WCF in error treatment.

The term accuracy in the present study is operationalized as the correct usage of the SPT in the appropriate language contexts. Both correct suppliance of SPT in obligatory contexts and incidences of overuse in every piece of descriptive writing in the pretest and posttest was counted and calculated using Pica's target-like use (TLU) scoring procedures (1994).

$$\frac{\text{number of simple past tense supplied correctly}}{\text{number of obligatory contexts} + \text{number of overused forms}} \times 100\%$$

The percentages acquired from these data were then tabulated and analysed using descriptive statistics in the SPSS. This is to obtain the mean scores for each proficiency group in the pretest and posttest. To enhance the reliability of the scoring, all of the scripts from the pretest and posttest were rated by the second rater to refute any biasness that the researcher might bring to scoring. After the descriptive statistics were generated, a normality test was administered to check the normal distribution of the groups to determine the appropriate statistical test for analysis of effects within and between groups. Levene's Equality of Variance Test was also conducted to check the assumption of homogeneity. The data analysis procedures can be briefly illustrated in Figure 3.3.

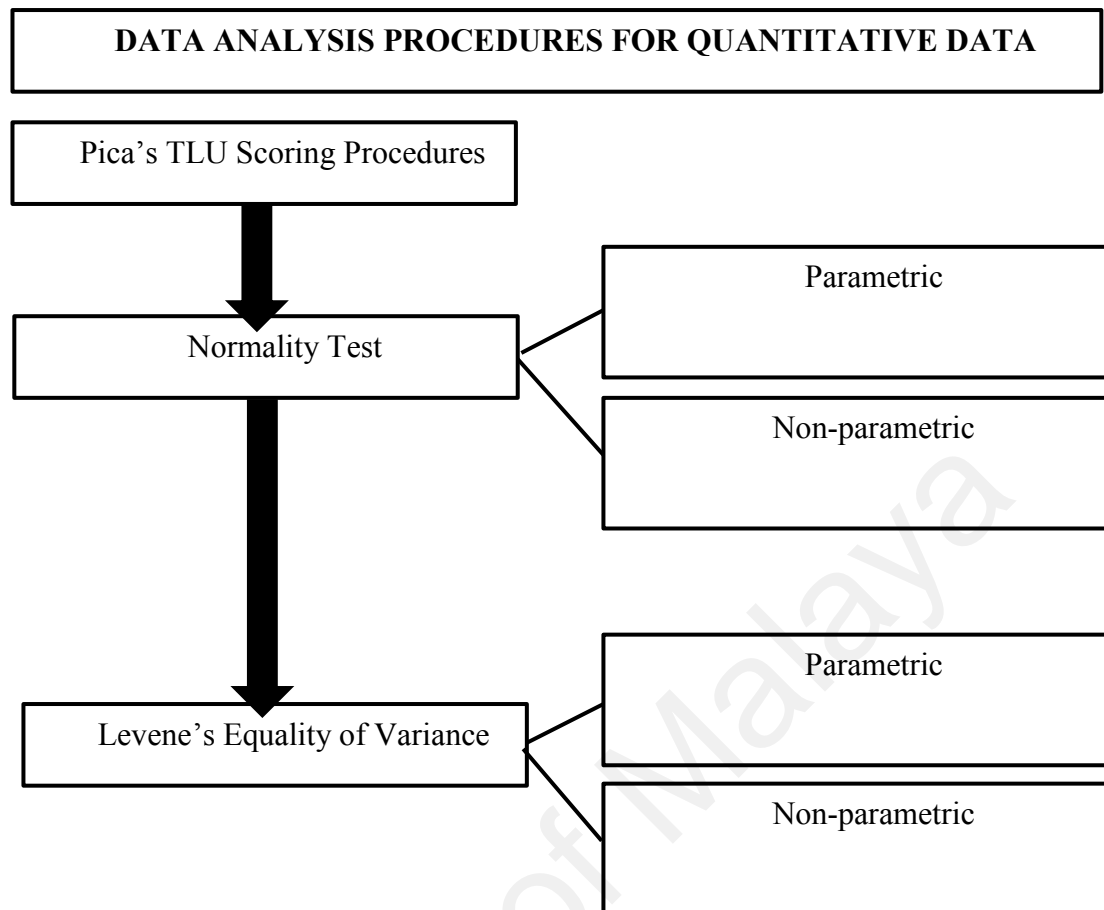


Figure 3.3: Data Analysis Procedures for Quantitative Data

3.4 Qualitative Phase

According to Schulz (2001, p.256), the role of grammar and CF is highly dependent on students' beliefs or it might pose negative effects if their expectations are not met. Thus, it is important to look into the learners' perspectives on the usefulness of the intended measure. Besides, a semi-structured interview with predetermined flexible questions will provide more tentative answers to the research questions and help to generate insights and reflections of the themes being investigated (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006; Newton, 2010). Semi-structured interviews also encourage the interviewees to express themselves openly and freely from their own perspectives, not solely from perspectives of the researcher.

3.4.1 Participants

As opposed to the previous phase where a larger number of participants were involved, only 10 participants were picked for the semi-structured interview. These participants were carefully chosen based on the most significant difference in their scores for accuracy from the pretest to posttest writing. To note, the differences could be both positive and negative. As a result, 5 candidates from each proficiency group were selected respectively to be part of the interview. According to Creswell (2014), purposeful sampling allows the researcher to identify the central phenomenon within the population.

3.4.2 Interview Instrument

In this process, a list of predetermined flexible questions and a sample writing from one of the participants were utilized. Besides consolidating the findings from the quantitative analysis, the chosen sample writing helped to reveal the participant's developed noticing ability. This process is also essential especially when the lack of language capacity to express ideas is concerned. Instead of implementing a delayed posttest, via this process, the researcher was able to study the retention effects of IFWCF on the students' uptake of the targeted linguistic feature through the indirect oral test during the semi-structured interview. This approach was rather similar to the Timed Grammatical Judgement Test in Jusa's study in 2017 in which the test was employed to test the learners' grammatical uptake after the treatments.

In conjunction to the function of this semi-structured interview, the predetermined questions posed for the semi-structured interview are demonstrated as follow:

1. If I give you a story (see Student's Sample Story in Appendix E), can you tell me what the errors that have been underlined are? What do you call them?
2. Why are they underlined?
3. For example, the sentence, how can you change the error? Can you spell it for me?
4. What about the sentence ... (choose another two sentences from the story)
5. How do you know that is the answer?
6. Do you think underlining of errors help you to use simple past tense more correctly in your writing?
7. (If yes) How does it help you?
8. (If no) Why do you think underlining of errors does not help you to use simple past tense more correctly in your writing?
9. How do you think feedback can be written to help you to write better in the future?

3.4.3 Qualitative Data Collection Procedures

In the present phase, a 150-minute semi-structured interview with the approximate time of 15 minutes for each candidate was conducted two weeks after the experimentation. The two-week interval between the quantitative phase and the qualitative phase was to allow the researcher to analyse and select the participants with the most significantly different result from their pretest and posttest writing for the interview. With the aid of interview, it provided an in-depth explanation to the efficacy of IFWCF towards the accurate use of SPT in writing. Apart from note-taking, audio was also recorded on a mobile phone as a means of data collection to record the interviews.

3.4.4 Qualitative Data Analysis Procedures

In this process, all the audio recordings from the interviews were transcribed. Transcriptions and any translation done within were then inter-rated by an experienced English teacher. The entire interview extracts relating to the usefulness of the IFWCF were manually analysed thematically to answer the second research question. However, in this coding process, inter-rater reliability was not taken into account as according to Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis is a flexible method which can be conducted in a variety of ways and is rather interpretive in nature. Hence, if interrater, different opinions might incur when developing themes.

Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as the process that identifies the patterns related to the objectives of the study followed by an analysis and report of the emergent themes generated from the interview data. Figure 3.4 explains the six phases of thematic analysis as recommended by Braun & Clarke (2006).

Braun and Clarke (2006) advocated that a thematic analysis should begin with familiarisation where the researcher read and rereading the transcript several times to engage with the data. The process is then ensued by coding which is the analytical process where the researcher searches for the semantic and conceptual ideas from the data. The third phase involved a deeper interpretation in which the researcher unearths the potential patterns and collate them with the pertinent data extracts from collected interview data. The fourth phase is reviewing and refining the themes to ensure the accurate representation of the themes and the coherence between the identified codes and their relevant extracts. This process is significant as it affects the validity of the results. Once the themes have been accurately defined, the next approach is to name them accordingly. Finally, the thematic analysis ends with an analytical report of the carefully chosen themes substantiated with sufficient evidence from the data in order to demonstrate their

prevalence within and across each theme. An example of thematic analysis process from this study can be represented in Figure 3.4 as follow:

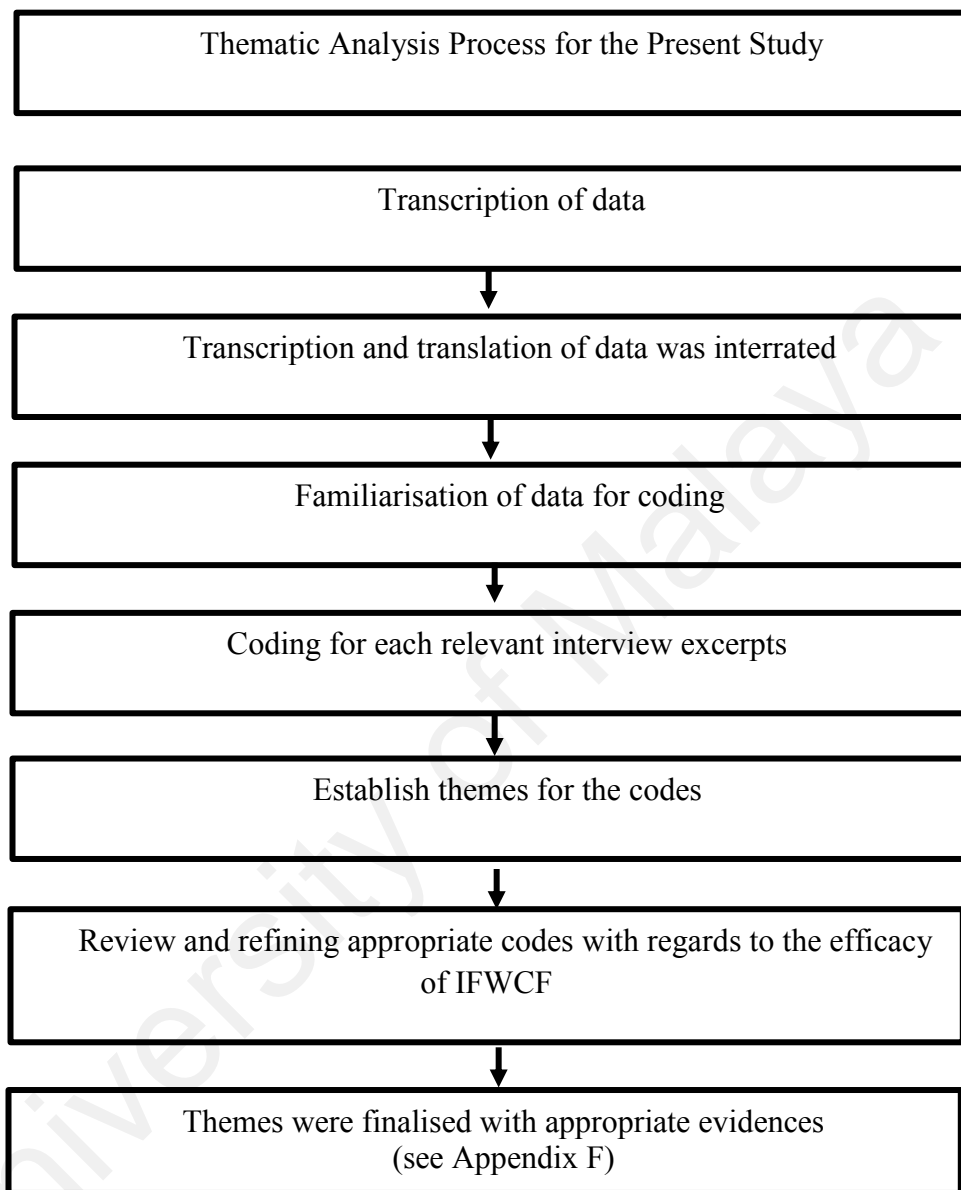


Figure 3.4: Thematic Analysis Process

3.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter particularises the necessary information on the participants of the research comprising their age and their educational background. It also specifies the prominent variables of the study which are the proficiency level and the targeted linguistic features. Additionally, it elaborates on the instruments used in the study. Lastly, it provides an extensive description of how the data was collected as well as the steps involved in interpreting the data.

University of Malaya

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Grounded on the explanatory sequential design, to reiterate, a 6-week IFWCF intervention followed by a semi-structured interview were carried out to study the usefulness of WCF in improving the high and low proficiency groups' accurate use of simple past tense in descriptive writing. To answer the first research question on whether proficiency level mediates the effects of IFWCF in error treatment, a comparison was made within and between both groups by calculating and analysing the percentage of errors committed by the learners in the pretest and posttest. The second research question, on the other hand, was answered through a semi-structured interview conducted to consolidate the findings in the quantitative phase on the efficacy of IFWCF based on the students' perspectives.

The assumption of this inquiry was that WCF facilitates young ESL learners to increase accuracy of linguistic forms in written work regardless of proficiency. It was also hypothesized that both high and low proficiency groups would significantly differ in their uptake of WCF reflected on the accurate use of these forms. The subsections below presents the results of the study in the quantitative phase and qualitative phase followed by an interpretation of the findings substantiated with relevant evidence from the study.

4.2 Analysis of Quantitative Data

In this phase, calculation of percentages of students' errors in writing and several statistical analyses in the SPSS such as normality test, paired sample t-test, Levene's Test for Equality of Variances and Mann-Whitney U test were conducted to evaluate the results within and between proficiency groups on the efficacy of the treatment on the elementary ESL students' accuracy of SPT use in writing across different proficiency groups. This was carried out to address the first research question as follow:

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in the effect of IFWCF on the two groups of language learners' use of simple past tense in their writing?

4.2.1 Pica's Target-Like Use (TLU) Scoring Procedures

In comparing the performance of learners in the high and low proficiency group on the accuracy of SPT use, the correct usage of the SPT in the appropriate language contexts was first calculated using Pica's target-like use (TLU) scoring procedures (1994).

$$\frac{\text{number of simple past tense supplied correctly}}{\text{number of obligatory contexts} + \text{number of overused forms}} \times 100\%$$

In this context, both correct suppliance of SPT in obligatory contexts and incidences of overuse in every piece of descriptive writing in the pretest and posttest was counted, interrater and tabulated in Table 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 as follow:

Table 4.1: Pretest Result for High Proficiency Group

PRETEST RESULT FOR HIGH PROFICIENCY GROUP					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	1	4.2	4.2	4.2
	14.29	2	8.3	8.3	12.5
	16.67	1	4.2	4.2	16.7
	20.00	1	4.2	4.2	20.8
	25.00	2	8.3	8.3	29.2
	26.67	1	4.2	4.2	33.3
	31.25	1	4.2	4.2	37.5
	33.33	1	4.2	4.2	41.7
	35.71	1	4.2	4.2	45.8
	36.36	2	8.3	8.3	54.2
	37.50	1	4.2	4.2	58.3
	40.00	1	4.2	4.2	62.5
	46.15	1	4.2	4.2	66.7
	53.85	1	4.2	4.2	70.8
	54.55	2	8.3	8.3	79.2
	61.54	1	4.2	4.2	83.3
	70.59	1	4.2	4.2	87.5
	85.70	1	4.2	4.2	91.7
	92.31	1	4.2	4.2	95.8
	94.18	1	4.2	4.2	100.0
Total	24	100.0	100.0		

Table 4.2: Pretest Result for Low Proficiency Group

PRETEST RESULT FOR LOW PROFICIENCY GROUP					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	7	29.2	29.2	29.2
	7.11	1	4.2	4.2	33.3
	7.14	1	4.2	4.2	37.5
	7.69	1	4.2	4.2	41.7
	8.33	2	8.3	8.3	50.0
	11.11	1	4.2	4.2	54.2
	12.50	1	4.2	4.2	58.3
	16.67	1	4.2	4.2	62.5
	18.18	1	4.2	4.2	66.7
	20.00	1	4.2	4.2	70.8
	23.08	1	4.2	4.2	75.0
	30.74	1	4.2	4.2	79.2
	33.33	1	4.2	4.2	83.3
	36.36	1	4.2	4.2	87.5
	41.67	1	4.2	4.2	91.7
	50.00	1	4.2	4.2	95.8
	61.54	1	4.2	4.2	100.0
Total	24	100.0	100.0		

Table 4.3: Posttest Result for High Proficiency Group

POSTTEST RESULT FOR HIGH PROFICIENCY GROUP						
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	.00	3	12.5	12.5	12.5	
	8.33	1	4.2	4.2	16.7	
	14.29	2	8.3	8.3	25.0	
	16.67	1	4.2	4.2	29.2	
	23.08	1	4.2	4.2	33.3	
	25.00	1	4.2	4.2	37.5	
	36.36	1	4.2	4.2	41.7	
	38.46	1	4.2	4.2	45.8	
	42.86	1	4.2	4.2	50.0	
	46.15	1	4.2	4.2	54.2	
	50.00	1	4.2	4.2	58.3	
	58.33	1	4.2	4.2	62.5	
	66.67	1	4.2	4.2	66.7	
	69.23	1	4.2	4.2	70.8	
	72.72	1	4.2	4.2	75.0	
	75.00	1	4.2	4.2	79.2	
	83.33	1	4.2	4.2	83.3	
	84.62	1	4.2	4.2	87.5	
	91.67	1	4.2	4.2	91.7	
	92.86	1	4.2	4.2	95.8	
	100.00	1	4.2	4.2	100.0	
	Total		24	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.4: Posttest Result for Low Proficiency Group

POSTTEST RESULT FOR LOW PROFICIENCY GROUP					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	8	33.3	33.3	33.3
	7.69	5	20.8	20.8	54.2
	8.33	3	12.5	12.5	66.7
	11.11	1	4.2	4.2	70.8
	14.29	1	4.2	4.2	75.0
	15.38	1	4.2	4.2	79.2
	16.67	2	8.3	8.3	87.5
	18.18	2	8.3	8.3	95.8
	80.00	1	4.2	4.2	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

These results were then assessed using paired sample t-test for within group comparison and independent sample t-test for between groups comparison.

4.2.2 Normality Test

Before evaluating the potential effects of IFWCF for both proficiency groups, a normality test must be initially conducted to test the homogeneity of both groups and to check the groups' normal distribution. A normality test is important as it determines the type of statistical test, either a parametric or a non-parametric one, to be administered in a study. In this particular context, as the participants were sorted based on their previous test scores, the test scores for the chosen samples were tested for normality.

Table 4.5: Descriptive Statistics for Normality Test

Case Processing Summary						
	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
previous test scores	48	100.0%	0	0.0%	48	100.0%

Descriptives						
				Statistic	Std. Error	
previous test scores	Mean			55.08	2.727	
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound		49.60		
		Upper Bound		60.57		
	5% Trimmed Mean			55.47		
	Median			59.75		
	Variance			356.876		
	Std. Deviation			18.891		
	Minimum			16		
	Maximum			85		
	Range			69		
	Interquartile Range			34		
	Skewness			-.271	.343	
Kurtosis			-.967	.674		

Based on the descriptive statistics generated in SPSS (see Table 4.5), the mean of the previous test scores for the 48 subjects is 55.08 with the standard deviation of 18.9 (55.08 ± 18.9). The maximum and minimum test scores values are 85 and 16 respectively with the range of 69. The median test scores is 59.75 and the interquartile range is 34 ($59.75(34)$). The median value indicates that at least 50% of the participants score more than 59.75. Although the median value is larger than the mean value by 4.67, the skewness value shown in the statistics, -0.271 ± 0.343 , however, still fell within ± 1 , thus, it could

still be considered as symmetrical. Besides, according to Chua (2012), to ensure a data to be normally distributed, the skewness and kurtosis values should be in the range of -1.96 to +1.96. In this case, given that the skewness value is -0.271 ± 0.343 and the kurtosis value is -0.967 ± 0.674 (see Table 4.5), which conform within the range of the proposed value by Chua (2012), the data could be assumed to be symmetrical (see Figure 4.1).

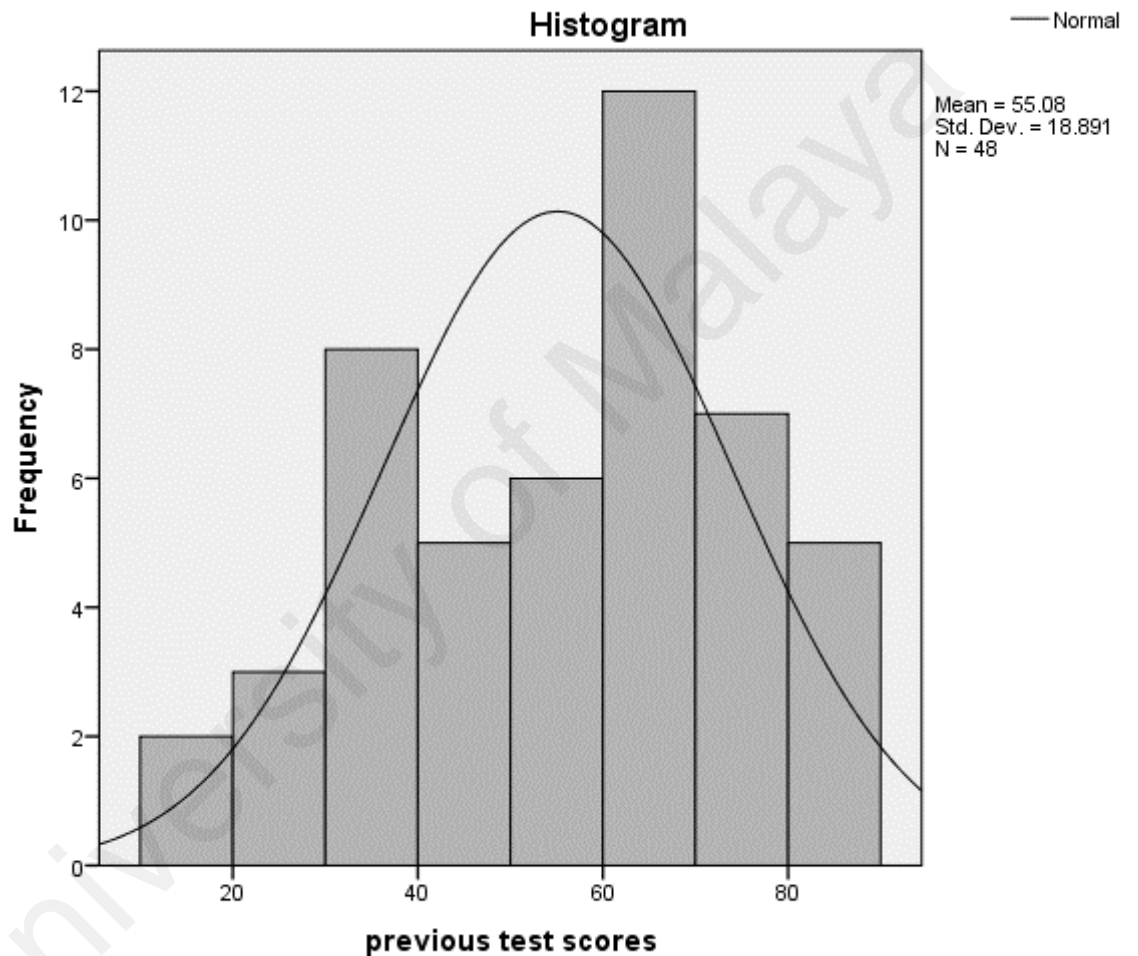


Figure 4.1: Histogram with Distribution Curve

Table 4.6: Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test Result

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
test scores	.113	48	.161	.959	48	.095

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Furthermore, since the sample size was small with only 48 subjects, the Shapiro-Wilk test was also used to determine its normality. The p-value shown in the test is 0.095 (see Table 4.6), which is more than 0.05, hence, the data can be assumed to be normally distributed.

In the view of the fact that both the proficiency groups were normally distributed according to their previous test scores, a parametric approach, the paired sample t-test was used to compare the differences between the pretest and the posttest to examine the effect of IFWCF within the two proficiency groups. According to Pallant (2007), a parametric test can help to make generalisations about the population from which the sample has been drawn.

4.2.3 Within Group Comparison

Table 4.7: Paired Sample t-test for Low Proficiency Group

Paired Samples Statistics (Low Proficiency Group)					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Low	POSTTEST	10.5800	24	16.14925	3.29645
	PRETEST	16.4075	24	17.52106	3.57647

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence				
					Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Low	POSTTEST – PRETEST	-5.82750	13.38308	2.73181	-11.47868	-1.17632	-2.133	23	.044

According to the results from the paired sample t-test (see Table 4.7), the mean scores for the accurate use of SPT in the pretest for the low proficiency group is 16.41 ± 17.52 while the mean scores for their posttest is 10.58 ± 16.15 . The mean difference is -5.83 ± 13.38 with the standardized difference $t = -2.133$ and $df = 23$. The p-value of the test is 0.044. It is less than 0.05. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a marginally significant change in the percentages of the correct usage of SPT. Since the mean scores for the posttest is lower than the pretest, this decrement in scores indicates that the change is negative. In other words, the learners did not produce more accurate simple past tense in their writing as compared to their pretest, thus the treatment is ineffective for the low proficiency group and appears to be detrimental to them.

Table 4.8: Paired Sample t-test for High Proficiency Group

Paired Samples Statistics (High Proficiency Group)					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
High	POSTTEST	46.2467	24	32.66122	6.66694
	PRETEST	41.9104	24	25.01449	5.10606

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
High POSTTEST – PRETEST	4.33625	24.09651	4.91868	-5.83881	14.51131	.882	23	.387	

The mean scores of accuracy for pretest in the high proficiency group, in contrary, is 41.91 ± 25.01 while the mean scores for the posttest is 46.25 ± 32.66 . The mean difference is 4.34 ± 24.1 with the standardized difference, $t = 0.882$, $df = 23$. It was observed that the p -value of the test showed 0.39, which is more than 0.05, thus, it can be assumed that there is no significant difference in the efficacy of IFWCF towards the accuracy of SPT usage after the intervention. Although the effect was not large to indicate a significant difference, the growth in scores for the accurate use of SPT in the posttest (46.25 ± 32.66) as compared to the pretest (41.91 ± 25.01), however, proposes that IFWCF was assumed to be more successful in treating errors for the high proficiency group than the low proficiency group.

4.2.4 Between Group Comparison

Table 4.9: Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

Group Statistics					
	proficiency	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Difference between pretest and posttest	low	24	-5.8275	13.38308	2.73181
	high	24	4.3363	24.09651	4.91868

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Difference between pretest and posttest	Equal variances assumed	4.286	.044	-1.806	46	.077	-10.16375	5.62638	-21.48907	1.16157
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.806	35.957	.079	-10.16375	5.62638	-21.57507	1.24757

As for the comparison between groups, before the evaluation on the effects of IFWCF, Pallant (2007) emphasized on the necessity to check if there is any violation in the assumption of homogeneity. Homogeneity is assumed when the variances in both groups are similar. In other words, the p -value must be larger than 0.05 for the assumption to be non-significant. To check if the assumption was met, Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances was first performed.

Based on the test (refer to Table 4.9), the sample mean for the low proficiency group is 5.83 ± 13.38 and the sample mean for the high proficiency group is 4.34 ± 24.1 . Since the p -value is 0.044 which is less than 0.05, the equality of variance is not assumed, hence,

this study resorted to a non-parametric approach, the Mann-Whitney U test, to compare the significant difference in the effects of IFWCF between both proficiency groups.

Table 4.10: Mann-Whitney U test for between Groups Comparison

Ranks				
	proficiency	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
difference between posttest and pretest	low	24	21.58	518.00
	high	24	27.42	658.00
	Total	48		

Test Statistics ^a	
	diffpostpre
Mann-Whitney U	218.000
Wilcoxon W	518.000
Z	-1.446
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.148

a. Grouping Variable: proficiency

According to the Mann-Whitney U test (refer to Table 4.10), the mean rank for the low proficiency group is 21.58 while the mean rank for the high proficiency group is 27.42. The p-value is 0.148 which is more than 0.05, hence, there is no significant difference in the effects of IFWCF between the low and high proficiency groups on the accurate use of SPT in their writing.

4.2.5 Summary of Findings for Quantitative Phase

In sum, to answer the first question on the potential variances of IFWCF effects in enhancing the accurate use of SPT among the high and low proficiency groups, the results revealed a slightly negative significant difference among the low proficiency students in which they regressed in the mean scores from the pretest to the posttest while the high proficiency group did not show any significant difference in the accuracy of SPT use in their writing. Nonetheless, the high proficiency group improved from the treatment. This shows that the intervention was effective for the high proficiency group but it posed negative impact on the low proficiency group. Still, when comparison was made, there was no significant difference between both groups. Thus, this study failed to reject the null hypothesis that there will not be a statistically proven significant difference in the uptake of WCF reflected on the accurate use of SPT between the high and low proficiency group.

4.3 Analysis of Qualitative Data

Although the quantitative data provided strong evidences of successful and unsuccessful use of SPT yielded by the two proficiency groups, individual variability was also expected to be reflected across the students' decision of responses on how the imposed IFWCF measure facilitates them to produce more accurate SPT in their writing. These variations can be further explained through their patterns of responses when they evaluate the underlined grammatical errors and justify their decision. Hence, it was carried out to answer the second research question as follow:

RQ2: What are the learners' perspectives towards IFWCF in improving their simple past tense use in descriptive writing?

4.3.1 Students' Perceptions on the Efficacy of IFWCF

According to the patterns of responses generated, four major themes concerning the efficacy of the intended measure had been identified.

(i) Efficacy in identifying errors

First, IFWCF leads to error identification efficacy. IFWCF is effective in assisting the learners to detect and locate errors. IFWCF engages the learners to be conscious through intentional learning. In this context, in order to successfully overcome errors, it provokes the thoughts of the learners to first identify the error type based on the induction from the context where the underlined counterparts were in. Schmidt (1990), in his Noticing Hypothesis, stated that intentional learning is crucial for stimulating detection. The ability to detect the error type from the underlined stimulus enables the learners to be aware of their interlanguage gap towards target-like output. It also supported Schmidt's argument (1994) on the prevalence of "attention" and "understanding". Schmidt (2010) stated that learners must be made conscious to judge their own language output against the targeted input in overcoming errors. The participants in the study, S2, S7 and S9 from the high proficiency group were aware of the use of SPT in context. Examples can be illustrated as follow:

Interviewer : ... So, these are the underlined, uhm, errors, so what do you call them? What are you supposed to use?

S2 (H) : Past tense.

S7 (H) : Past tense.

S9 (H) : Past tense.

The ability to identify the error type, hence, contributes to these three participants' capability to self-correct all the errors (as discussed in the later part of the report).

However, IFWCF also caused misperceptions among one of the high proficient learners. For instance, S3 acknowledged all the underlined counterparts as verbs without a specific domain.

Interviewer : ... can you tell me what the errors that have been underlined are so what do you call them? ...

S3(H) : Present tense.

Interviewer : The errors you call them present tense? (S3 shook head).
So, what do you call them?

S3(H) : (long pause) Can I speak Mandarin?

Interviewer : Ya.

S3(H) : 动词 [verb]

Due to her incompetence in error identification, all her self-correction were incorrect except “was” for “is” in the sentence “*Ben is a good neighbour.*” The possible reason for this phenomenon to occur might be due to the inadequate explanation on the underlined counterparts, thus, led to the inability to notice the exact error type and thus brought about ambiguity and confusion in self-correction. Similar justification was also professed by another participant, S8 that IFWCF is futile as it does not inform the correct form.

Interviewer : 为什么我如果我只是这样子画线罢了, 你认为为什么不会帮助到你呢? [Why I, if I only underlined like this for you, why do you think it doesn't help you?]

S8 (L) : (long pause) 因为没有讲它是错什么 [because it didn't state what is wrong]

(ii) Efficacy in promoting critical thinking

Another theme that emerged was the effectiveness of IFWCF in promoting critical thinking. In this context, time frame, the only fundamental factor which helps determine the use of SPT in the writing instrument, played an important role in stimulating the learners' critical thinking for the choice of SPT use. In other words, the competence to justify the reason behind the SPT use is crucial to help inform the efficacy of the intended measure. Based on the interview, it was found that most of the participants could detect the time frame (last night) given as a guideline to determine the correct tense to be used regardless of proficiency. This case can be illustrated based on the following examples where the participants used his or her linguistic knowledge of SPT to justify their decision.

Interviewer : ... So, ... How do you know "is" must change to "was", and then "praise" must change to... "praise" must add d?

S1 (L) : Because "last night" is past tense.

S2 (H) : Erm... 因为他这里讲了昨天, 所以这个已经是past tense 了的事情。 [because it's stated here "last night", so it indicates something that happened in the past.]

S4 (L) : Last night.

S5 (L) : Because this write last night.

S6 (H) : Err, here last night.

S7 (H) : Last night.

S8 (L) : because err...(long pause) 可以讲有last night吗? [Can I say there's the word last night?] past tense

S9 (H) : Because in front say last night. Is past already.

These examples show that even after two weeks from when the treatment ended, IF was able to retain its effects in the students' uptake of the target linguistic feature. According to Ishak (2017), IF is more effective in retention as it requires higher cognitive effort to comprehend the feedback given.

However, misinterpretation could also occur due to a participant's ineptitude in utilizing such knowledge for justification. For instance, when further enquiry was made on how S3 derived the answer "was" in her correction to the sentence "*Ben is a good neighbour.*", she mentioned "-ed" while pointing to the adjective "shocked". Her wrong interpretation of SPT connotation is illustrated as follow:

Interviewer : *Ok, so, how do you know it is, uhm, "was"?*

S3(H) : *Because I see this is past tense.*

Interviewer : *Which one is past tense?*

S3(H) : *-ed.*

Interviewer : *-ed. The "shocked" -ed. (S3 nodded).*

It can be presumed that the ability of the participant to self-correct the error "is" to "was" might either be due to familiarity or pure luck. This supposition is deduced when the participant established a confusion in justifying her SPT connotation to the adjective ending with -ed suffix.

(iii) Efficacy in regulating problem solving skills

Besides, IFWCF also regulates problem solving skills among the learners. Although IFWCF takes the form of just underlining in locating the errors, it does not totally impede the students' ability to contemplate their hypothesis. Successful error correction can still take place through the provision of salient clues which is underlining. This adheres to Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985) that a learner should be given ample

opportunity to reflect and modify their subsequent language for more accurate language acquisition. Thus, successful problem solving skills can be demonstrated through the learners' successful attempts in error correction. To give an illustration, most of the participants regardless of proficiency level except S10 (L) could evaluate their errors and correct them independently, although no explanation was provided to understand the errors made.

Respondent 1

Interviewer : ... "He immediately calling the police." "Calling", here is wrong, so how do you change?

S1 (L) : c- (pause) c-a-l-l-e-d?

Interviewer : Ok, c-a-l-l-e-d. ... "The neighbour of Ben praise him because Ben is a good neighbour." "Praise", here is wrong, so how do you change, "praise"?

S1 (L) : P-r-a-i-s-e-d.

Interviewer : Ok, then what about "is"?

S1 (L) : Was.

Respondent 2

Interviewer : ... "He glance out of the window." Then, "he, something is missing here, shocked". So, "glance" is wrong, how do you change "glance"? Can you spell it for me?

S2 (H) : G-l-a-n-c-e-d

Interviewer : Ok, then what about the missing word here?

S2 (H) : Hmmm...felt.

Interviewer : Spell?

S2 (H) : F-e-l-t

Interviewer : ∴ ... “The neighbour of Ben praise him because Ben is a good neighbour.” “Praise” is wrong, so how do you change?

S2 (H) : P-r-a-i-s-e-d.

Interviewer : Ok, “is” change to?

S2 (H) : Was.

Respondent 3

Interviewer : ... “He glance out of the window then he, something was missing here, shocked.” So, glance is wrong, so how do you change?

S4 (L) : (pause) past tense.

Interviewer : Uhm, spell? Can you please spell for me?

S4 (L) : g-l-a-n-c-e-d

Interviewer : Ok, then this one, the missing word, what should you put?

S4 (L) : was

Interviewer : ... “The neighbour of Ben praise him because Ben is a good neighbour.” “Praise” here is wrong so how do you change?

S4 (L) : (long pause) past tense

Interviewer : Spell?

S4 (L) : p-r-a-i-s-e-d

Interviewer : P-r-a-i-s-e-d? Then, uhm, “is” how to change?

S4 (L) : was

Respondent 4

Interviewer : ... "He glance out of the window, then he, something is missing here, shocked." So, "glance" here is wrong, so how do you change? Can you spell it?

S6 (H) : g-l-a-n-c-e-d

Interviewer : Ok, so, something is missing here. What should you put? He what shocked?

S6 (H) : (pause) were.

Interviewer : "because Ben is a good neighbour." "is" how do you change?

S6 (H) : was a

Respondent 5

Interviewer : ... "He glance out of the window, then he, something was missing here, shocked." "He glance", "glance" here is wrong, so how do you change? Can you spell, spell it for me?

S7 (H) : g-l-a-n-c-e-d

Interviewer : ... "The burglar leaving the house." "Leaving" here is wrong so what must you change?

S7 (H) : leave

Interviewer : Can you spell?

S7 (H) : l-e-f-t

Interviewer : L-e-f-t, alright, so, last one "The neighbour of Ben praise him because Ben is a good neighbour." "Praise" here is wrong so how do you change it?

S7 (H) : *praised*

Interviewer : *Spell?*

S7 (H) : *p-r-a-i-s-e-d*

Interviewer : *Ok, then what about “is”?*

S7 (H) : *was*

Respondent 6

Interviewer : ... “He glance out of the window, then he, something was missing here, shocked.” “He glance”, how do you change this one, “glance”?

S8 (L) : *Past tense.*

Interviewer : *Ha, how do you spell? Spell the word for me please?*

S8 (L) : *g-l-a-n-c-e-d ah*

Interviewer : *g-l-a-n-c-e-d. And then what about this one, the word that is missing. What should you fill in? He, what, shocked.*

S8 (L) : *(pause) was*

Interviewer : ... “The burglar leaving the house.” “Leaving” was wrong so how do you change?

S8 (L) : *left*

Interviewer : *Spell?*

S8 (L) : *l-e-f-t ah*

Interviewer : ... “The neighbour of Ben praise him because Ben is a good neighbour.” “Praise” is wrong so how do you change?

S8 (L) : *p-r-a-i-s-e-d ah*

Interviewer : *Ok, is change to?*

S8 (L) : *was*

Respondent 7

- Interviewer* : ... "He glance out of the window, then he, something is missing here, shocked." "He glance", "glance" is wrong, so how do you change the error?
- S9 (H)* : g-l-a-n-c-e-d
- Interviewer* : Ok, and then what about the missing word? He, what, shocked?
- S9 (H)* : (pause) Then, he was shocked.
- Interviewer* : ... "The burglar leaving the house." "Leaving"?
- S9 (H)* : l-e-f-t left
- Interviewer* : ... "The neighbour of Ben praise him because Ben is a good neighbour." "Praise"?
- S9 (H)* : p-r-a-i-s-e-d
- Interviewer* : Ok, is?
- S9 (H)* : was

These findings also suggest in general that there is a linkage between successful error correction and one's effective use of his or her existing knowledge. Nevertheless, it was apparent that those who were familiar with their SPT were able to self-correct all or most of the errors confidently while participants who either did not have the linguistic knowledge or have limited knowledge about it were either able to self-correct partially or those which were only common to them. It is also possible that the participants realized the needs to use SPT yet were incompetent to provide the precise answers in contexts. The instances established by S5 are good examples to illustrate this assumption.

- Interviewer* : ... ok, this one, "He immediately calling the police." So, how do you change the word, "calling"?
- S5 (L)* : (pause)
- Interviewer* : Can you spell? Spell for me. If you want to change the word, "calling", can you spell? How do you spell the word?
- S5 (L)* : (pause) past tense.
- Interviewer* : Don't know how to change? (S shook head). Don't know? (S shook head again)
- Interviewer* : Then what about this one? "The neighbour of Ben praise him because Ben is a good neighbour." "Praise", how do you change "praise"?
- S5 (L)* : (long pause)
- Interviewer* : Also don't know how to change "praise"? (S shook head) Then "is", how to change "is"?
- S5 (L)* : was
- Interviewer* : was. Spell?
- S5 (L)* : w-a-s

It is apparent that S5 was unable to state the correct answer to the errors underlined. She was only capable of revising the common copula verb from "is" to "was" which was familiar to her.

Furthermore, in contrary to the earlier pattern of responses in which some of the participants regardless of proficiency level could accurately correct the errors, S2 from the high proficiency group, however, was only able to self-correct regular verbs but not irregular one (i.e. leave).

Interviewer : ... *"The burglar leaving the house". "leaving" here is wrong, so what must you change?*

S2 (H) : *L-e-a-v-e*

Similarly, S6, who was also from the high proficiency group, faced the same difficulty with irregular verb. As opposed to the result in the study by Darus and Subramaniam (2009) where students tend to overgeneralise the rules of simple past tense to irregular verbs, S6 performed otherwise. The example is demonstrated as below:

Interviewer : ... *Ok, then what about this one? Err... "The burglar leaving the house." "Leaving" is wrong.*

S6 (H) : *l-e-a-v-e-d*

On the other hand, there are also a few instances portrayed in unsuccessful problem solving. The most obvious example would be by S10 from the low proficiency group where she simply reiterated or simplified the underlined errors into her responses. For instance,

Interviewer : ... *Ok, for example, the sentence, ok this one, "He immediately calling the police." So, "calling", how do you change the error?*

S10 : *Call*

Interviewer : *Can you spell for me?*

S10 : *c-a-l-l*

Interviewer : *c-a-l-l. Ok, what about this one, "The burglar leaving the house." "leaving"?*

S10 : *l-e-a-v*

- Interviewer* : l-e-a-v. Ok, what about, erm, ok, this one, “The neighbour of Ben praise him because Ben is a good neighbour.” So, “praise” how can you change?”
- S10* : (pause)
- Interviewer* “The neighbour of Ben praise him because Ben is a good neighbour.” How do you change the word “praise?” p...
- S10* : (pause)
- Interviewer* : “praise?” “praise?” How do you change this one?
- S10* : (pause)
- Interviewer* : Spell, spell
- S10* : p-r-a-i-----s
- Interviewer* : p-r-a-i-s. Then what about is. How can you change is?
- S10* : are

These results provide confirmatory evidence that the effects of IFWCF varies across individuals and its effectiveness relies heavily on one’s current state of grammatical knowledge and competence. Failure in providing the accurate tense happened due to the students’ incompetence in utilizing such knowledge Proficiency, however, did not pose much impact in mediating IFWCF towards their error reduction. It is evident that in order for IFWCF to be impactful, certain level of metalinguistic competence is essential in order for successful self-correction (Ferris, 2004; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Sheen, 2007).

(iv) Efficacy in improving implicit knowledge

Furthermore, IFWCF could also be effectual in improving the implicit knowledge of SPT. According to the learners’ perspectives, IFWCF helps them to recall internalized linguistic knowledge, create awareness and produce more correct sentences by using correct tenses. These claims can be inferred from the interview excerpts as follow:

Interviewer : ... do you think it ... helps you to use past tense more correctly in your writing? ... How does it help you?

S1 (L) : 老师教过我, 有e..有last night, was的话, 就全部那些应该放原...原...以前字。[My teacher taught me before, when I see “e”, see “last night”, all of those should be written in base...base...words that show the past.]

Interviewer : 就要放past tense, 对吗? [meaning you must use past tense, right?] (*S1 nodded*)

In short, S1 pointed out that IFWCF triggered his ability to elicit his implicit knowledge on the usage of SPT. When the same inquiry on the usefulness of IFWCF was enquired to the other respondents, S5 (L) also stated that IFWCF aids her to recall her memory on the required linguistic knowledge when writing her essay.

S5 (L) : (pause) 写作文的时候可以记得一点点 [can remember a bit when I write my essay]

S4 (L), when asked about his preference of feedback, his preference for IFWCF, nonetheless, implied that although explanation was not provided, IFWCF is able to help learners to create awareness by providing cues on the correct tense to use.

Interviewer : Underline no answer, or underline, there is an answer for you, or you want teacher to write the whole correct sentence for you?

S4 (L) : Underline.

Interviewer : Underline? No answer? (*S nodded*). Don't want the teacher to give you answer? (*S nodded*) Ok, why why?

S4(L) : (pause) 因为老师画线给我, 我就知道哪里错 [because if teacher underlines for me, I know what went wrong.]

S7 (H), on the other hand, highlighted that grammar can be improved through the implementation of IFWCF. S2 (H), S6 (H) and S9 (H) also implied that IFWCF helps them to achieve more marks in writing by producing more correct sentences.

S2 (H) : *Erm... 可以写到比较多分数这样。 [I can get more marks.]*

S6 (H) : *Err, can help me in the writing exam, err, got err, 可以, err, 写到, 可以使我的分数加多一点咯, 而不会用错 tenses. [can, err, write, can make me get higher marks and not make mistakes in tenses]*

S9 (H) : *Because it can help me to improve my writing skill in erm... exam.*

4.3.2 Summary of Findings for Qualitative Phase

Fundamentally, the analysis of the qualitative data suggest both positive and negative effects of IFWCF across proficiency groups. IFWCF, to a certain extent, supports the importance of WCF in cultivating noticing ability and allow the learners to utilize the knowledge gained to modify their subsequent language for more accurate language. Although IFWCF only indicates the position of errors through underlining without any provision of the correct form nor with any metalinguistic explanation, based on the findings, it can be effective to invoke various functions such as error identification ability, problem solving skills and improving implicit knowledge. However, it is also important to note that all these functions can only be activated with the sufficient amount of necessary linguistic repertoire.

4.4 Discussion

Over the years, an abundance of research has been conducted in order to prove the effectiveness of WCF in enhancing the learners' grammatical accuracy in writing. The disparity in theoretical stands and methodological designs has yet to make it a unanimously positive verdict. In this particular study, the combination of two WCF types, the indirect and focused WCF has, nevertheless, yielded both positive and negative efficacy towards elementary ESL learners' accuracy on SPT use. However, considering its positive effects, it is still impracticable to completely abandon grammar correction as proposed by Truscott (1996). Therefore, there are several issues that need to be addressed for more effective pedagogical measure.

- (i) The efficacy of IFWCF is reliant on students' current state of linguistic repertoire.

Although IFWCF is effectual in improving implicit knowledge by encouraging the learners in self-discovery towards the correct form, its effect might be detrimental to learning as well if input was not imparted correctly. This is true as proven in the interview data that although S3 was a participant in the high proficiency group who was assumed to possess larger linguistic repertoire, confused herself with SPT usage in context with the -ed suffix adjective. Conversely, S8, who was in the low proficiency group, was able to self-correct all the errors include the copula, regular and irregular verbs. This infers that proficiency level does not play a significant role in regulating problem solving. Instead, it was the learners' linguistic repertoire which helps to expedite the process.

Furthermore, in the study, the learners who were confident and capable of accurate self-correction were those who were familiar with the targeted form. These evidences also proved that sufficient linguistic competence enables to learners test their hypothesis more accurately than those who didn't. It also verified Krashen's (1982) viewpoint that error

correction will only be effectual for learners who have acquired the relevant linguistic schemata rather than those who are in the process of developing such knowledge. This finding also agrees with Truscott (1996) and Pienemann (1984) that error correction is highly dependent on the learner's readiness and distinctive individual developmental stage.

- (ii) The success of IFWCF is dependent on the complexity of linguistic focus.

Other than the learner's proficiency level, Bitchener (2012) accentuated that the comprehension of linguistic knowledge is also reliant on the complexity of the linguistic focus. Although Ferris (1999) deemed that errors which are rule-governed are treatable, SPT is still a rather complex linguistic feature as it takes numerous forms. Thus, learners should not just only understand when and how to use SPT but also to internalize its various forms such as copula verbs in the form of Subject-Verb Agreement, regular verbs as well as its irregular forms for more accurate use in writing. It should be noted that a learner's acquisition of linguistic knowledge should not be built upon mere transfer of knowledge but also the comprehension of form as well as its semantic and pragmatic relation in the language system as suggested by Truscott (1996).

- (iii) The effectiveness of IFWCF is determined by time factor.

From the quantitative analysis, the findings revealed that IFWCF failed to impose a significant effect on the high proficiency group although an increment of means scores for accuracy was found. This could be due to the lack of practice time for learners to establish form noticing ability to compare the errors with their interlanguage and to test their hypothesis with the targeted form. According to Skills Acquisition Theory by McLaughlin (1987), Anderson (1993) and DeKeyser (1998), ample practice is crucial for proceduralization of knowledge. It is deemed that repetition of language structure production or production practice by DeKeyser (1998) is essential to help activate the

linguistic repertoire and thereby promote the automatization of knowledge (Ellis, 1992; Swain, 1993).

4.5 Chapter Summary

Conclusively, the research finding reflected a strong relationship between a learners' current state of linguistic repertoire and the efficacy of IFWCF on their accurate use of SPT in writing. It needs to be noted that every individual develops at a distinctive pace in terms of linguistic knowledge regardless of proficiency. This conclusion however cannot be interpreted as saying that IFWCF is detrimental to all learners as it helps to establish error noticing ability, cultivate critical thinking, regulate problem solving skill and improve learners' implicit knowledge.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter synthesizes the key findings of the study and is followed by a discussion of implications. It also highlights the strengths and limitations of the study as well as recommendations for future research.

5.1 Summary of the Findings

This research was conducted on the foundation of underrepresented elementary context and inconclusive findings from the past studies due to inconsistencies in design and multiple theoretical stands. It aimed to contribute to the existing body of literature by providing evidences on either to support or refute the implementation of WCF in an ESL classroom, particularly on writing. It also aspired to provide a pedagogical contribution to the teachers and the policy makers on the other options for feedback provision catering to the different proficiency levels. Hence, this study investigated the effectiveness of Indirect Focused Written Corrective Feedback (IFWCF) in enhancing high and low level proficiency elementary ESL learners' use of simple past tense in writing by looking into its potential variances between both proficiency groups. It also probed into the learners' perception with regards to its efficacy of the treatment administered on their written work.

Based on the findings of the research, IFWCF was found to be marginally negative for low proficiency students as they regressed in the mean scores from the pretest to the posttest while no significant difference was demonstrated by the high proficiency group in the accuracy of SPT use in their writing. Although IFWCF failed to impose a significant effect on the high proficiency group, they, however, improved in the mean scores after the treatment. Hence, it can be concluded that the intervention was effective for the high proficiency group but it is detrimental to the low proficiency group. Yet, this study failed to reject the null hypothesis as there was no significant difference between the effects for both groups.

Moreover, an interesting discovery was also prevailed in this study. It was found that proficiency level was not the underlying factor which mediated the effectiveness of IFWCF. It was instead the learners' linguistic repertoire which contributes to the improvement of accuracy in writing. This implies that regardless of proficiency, each individual ESL learner develops their linguistic knowledge in a different pace and it should be taken into consideration in a language classroom to achieve a more successful language acquisition. Besides, it is also important to note that comprehensible input on the various forms of simple past tense should also be integrated during a grammar lesson and internalization of the correct knowledge needs to be ensured to avoid fossilization of false knowledge before the implementation of IFWCF. This is probably true as one of the participants from the high proficiency group portrayed failure in justifying the reason for simple past tense use by confusing herself to the –ed suffix adjective as the indicator.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

Based on the findings and discussions, there is, therefore, a definite need for teachers to equip ESL learners with the necessary linguistic repertoire in order to promote noticing ability in revision of text. Besides the function of simple past tense, pupils also ought to be aware of the various forms of simple past tense which might facilitate them to derive the precise form to be used in their writing. This is to avoid misinterpretation due to inaccurate application of knowledge base.

Another important pedagogical implication is with regards to the teacher's grammar instruction consistent with students' proficiency level. Truscott (1996) and Pienemann (1984) emphasized that a successful attempt of error correction is highly dependent on the learner's readiness and distinctive individual developmental stage. Teachers should be aware that each child develops differently especially in the development of linguistic knowledge regardless of their proficiency level. Thus, individual differences and the

students' readiness should be taken into consideration before the implementation of any WCF type.

5.3 Strengths of the Study

One of the most important points to address as the strength of this study is placing elementary ESL learners as the sample of testing for noticing ability. Based on the empirical studies conducted in this research domain, there is a prominent discrepancy in the elementary context. This discrepancy exists probably because noticing and writing ability is regarded as an age-specific strategy that should be gradually progressing with maturation. Hence, most research investigated descriptive writing and noticing ability as skills more pertinent to young adults and adults. A change in direction by using young learners as the samples of the research helps the researcher to add the discoveries into the existing body of literature.

The next evident strength that this study exhibits is its rigorous methods used. It utilized a variety of data collection through multiple sources related to the phenomenon investigated including the analysis of students' written work and the semi-structured interview with several selected pupils. Besides, the conduct of interview in the second phase could help to consolidate the findings from the analysis carried out in the experimental phase. This triangulation of data from multiple sources is deemed to be pivotal by Creswell (2014) to provide verification and affirmation to the claims made from the findings.

Furthermore, the reliability of the study was assured as it utilized the Pica's TLU scoring procedures in both pretest and posttest which had been applied in various previous studies (i.e. Shintani and Ellis, 2013; Rif'ah, 2012; Rezazadeh, Tavakoli and Rasekh, 2015). On top of that, the written work from both pretest and posttest were also interrater

by an experienced marker. Besides, as translation was required for the transcription of interview data, an experienced teacher who was well-versed with both English and Mandarin was also employed to repudiate or challenge over any biasness which the researcher might imply.

5.4 Limitations and Future Recommendations

As of any other research, limitations are inevitable aspects of a research. It is with this recognition that improvements can be made for future research. Primarily, the first shortcoming evident in the research is the small number of participants involved in the study. Due to the limited sample size, generalization cannot be made upon the population outside the study. Creswell (2014) asserted that the sample size for a research, matters, in the sense where precision and tolerance for risk are concerned. In this study, although the data can be assumed to be normally distributed conforming to the range within ± 1 as well as the skewness and kurtosis value proposed by Chua (2012), the larger reading of median than the mean value, however, cause the spread to be slightly skewed to the left. This might pose a potential threat to the study with regards to its results. Therefore, it is pivotal to ensure that the sample is representative of the larger population to increase the generalizability of the findings in this study.

Another problem of the study is with regards to the criterion set for the group allocation. Although the sampling was carried out conveniently, a rigorous selection method such as the previous test scores, ability to write a simple sentence based on pretest writing result as well as the participants' school based assessment scores was exploited to assign the participants into their respective experimental group. Although the explanation of content was controlled through their mother tongue, the gap in the ability to write a number of sentences between the two proficiency groups, however, made it difficult for the researcher to determine the number of errors in the obligatory context,

especially with the low proficiency group since they hardly write more than one structurally correct sentence. Thus, it is vital for future researchers to consider a better solution to control this phenomena for more valid results.

Lastly the administration of the writing instrument in the current study, to a certain degree could also be problematic. Although the instrument was restricted under the similar theme, the ability for the writing instrument to elicit the same number of obligatory verbs for the pretest and posttest was rather difficult to be managed. Hence, it was recommended in the future that researcher might want to utilize similar writing task for pretest and posttest while writing tasks during the treatment could differ throughout the intervention.

With the outline of several limitations and some future recommendations, it is hoped that a better insights could be gained in the future in this area of research.

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