THE IMPACT OF FOCUSED CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK AND META-LINGUISTIC EXPLANATION ON L2 COMPOSITION WRITING

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THE IMPACT OF FOCUSED CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK AND META-LINGUISTIC EXPLANATION ON L2 COMPOSITION WRITING

ABSTRACT

This mixed-method study investigated the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation on the accuracy of subject-verb-agreement among learners of second language. For the quantitative inquiry, 28 learners were recruited and pre-test and post-test were administered over a 10 week period. For the qualitative inquiry, this study attempted to explore learners' perceptions towards the provision of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation by conducting semi-structured interviews with selected participants. From the quantitative inquiry, learners managed to retain their accuracy performance because significant improvement was shown in the delayed post-test compared to the score means in the pre-test and immediate post-test. Findings from the qualitative inquiry revealed that learners found the feedback and meta-linguistic explanation effective and helpful in enhancing their new piece of writing. One of the prevalent limitations was this study did not include a control group. In order to explore the efficacy of corrective feedback, there should be a control group to compare the results.

Keywords: focused corrective feedback, meta-linguistic explanation, subject-verb agreement

KESAN MAKLUM BALAS PEMBETULAN BERFOKUS DAN PENJELASAN META-LINGUISTIK DALAM PENULISAN BAHASA KEDUA

ABSTRAK

Kajian kaedah campuran ini menyiasat keberkesanan maklum balas pembetulan berfokus dan penjelasan meta-linguistik mengenai ketepatan '*subject-verb agreement*' di kalangan pelajar bahasa kedua. Bagi siasatan kuantitatif, 27 orang pelajar telah direkrut dan ujian pra dan ujian pasca ditadbir selama tempoh 10 minggu. Bagi penyelidikan kualitatif pula, kajian ini cuba untuk meneroka persepsi pelajar terhadap penyediaan maklum balas pembetulan berfokus dan penjelasan meta-linguistik dengan melakukan wawancara separa berstruktur dengan peserta terpilih. Daripada pertanyaan kuantitatif, pelajar dapat mengekalkan prestasi ketepatan mereka kerana peningkatan yang ketara ditunjukkan dalam ujian pasca tertunda berbanding skor bermakna dalam pra-ujian dan ujian pasca segera. Hasil daripada penyelidikan kualitatif mendedahkan bahawa pelajar mendapati maklum balas dan meta-linguistik penjelasan berkesan dan membantu dalam meningkatkan penulisan baru mereka. Salah satu batasan adalah kajian ini tidak termasuk '*control group*'. Bagi menilai keberkesanan maklum balas pembetulan, harus ada '*control group*' untuk membandingkan hasilnya.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

In many ESL writing classrooms, there are learners who face issues not only with the coherency of content but with grammatical accuracy as well. Since writing is seen to be a challenging task for learners, teachers play an imperative role in guiding their learners to write more effectively and produce linguistically accurate texts (Ferris, 2010, p. 182).

The effort and attention devoted by teachers to provide corrective feedback to students has always been a strenuous work, mainly when correcting learners' grammar errors. It is even more challenging when the feedback does not seem to benefit the learners. However, Ferris (2004) believes that identifying an effective feedback is highly crucial in order to influence learners' linguistic accuracy.

In line with what is stated by Ferris, this study is carried out to investigate the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation on the accuracy of subject-verb-agreement among learners of second language.

1.1 Background

The provision of focused corrective feedback is one of the pertinent issues discussed in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). The most common feedbacks used in ESL classrooms is either in written or oral form. According to Hyland and Hyland (2006), "while feedback is a central aspect of L2 writing programmes across the world, the research literature has not been unequivocally positive about its role in writing development, and teachers often have a sense that they are not making

use of its full potential (p.83)". This is because the provision of corrective feedback on learners' writing has been one of the challenging tasks for teachers as the teachers may not be sure that the feedback given has any impact on learners' writing development (Asiah Kassim and Ng Lee Luan, 2013). Researchers like Truscott (1996) and Truscott and Hsu (2008) have stated that the corrective feedback is harmful and ineffective and therefore, it should be abandoned in language classrooms. Truscott also states that corrective feedback does not help learners improve their writing accuracy. The time and effort devoted to correcting learners' errors could be rather spent on creating additional writing practices.

Many studies were conducted by researchers like (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener and Knoch, 2010; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami and Takashima, 2008; Sheen, 2010) to dismiss Truscott's claim by investigating the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback and meta- linguistic explanation. Findings revealed that focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation were effective in improving learners' written accuracy. Bitchener and Knoch (2010) and Ellis et al. (2008) have further asserted that the learners' accuracy have retained over time.

In addition, studies conducted by Sheen (2007) and Ellis and Shintani (2013) prove that focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation yielded positive impact towards learners' long term acquisition in certain grammatical features such as English articles and prepositions.

However, in previous years many corrective feedback studies were conducted using different types of feedback involving different grammar structures (Lalande, 1982; Robb et. al, 1986) but these studies yielded inconsistent results. This is because according to Ferris (2004), "the studies in the research base are fundamentally

incomparable because of inconsistencies in design (p.52)." This phenomenon has resulted in Truscott's claim that corrective feedback is ineffective and harmful. Subsequently, many studies were conducted to refute Truscott's claim using a focused approach of corrective feedback and one grammatical structure (Bitchener, 2008; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami and Takashima, 2008; Shintani and Ellis, 2013). These studies have shown consistent positive effects of corrective feedback in improving learners' accuracy in grammar in the writing of new texts. According to Nilaasini (2015), in an ESL classroom, when teachers provide corrective feedback to their learners, the role of the teacher is pivotal in becoming a grammarian. The role of the teachers is to assist their learners in improving their writing skills.

Not only that, according to researchers like Bitchener and Knoch (2009) and Sheen et al. (2009), they argued that little attention has been devoted to investigate the extent to which focused corrective feedback is effective in facilitating improvements in the accuracy of learners' writing of new texts. Therefore, this present study seeks to investigate the effectiveness of focused CF and meta-linguistic explanation. In this study, focused CF and meta-linguistic explanation will be used as a means to investigate its impact on ESL learners' demonstration in the accuracy of subject-verb agreement in their compositions.

1.2   Statement of Problem

Researchers like Tafida and Okunade (2016) have stated that ESL learners are facing difficulties in grasping the rules of subject-verb agreement. This worrying phenomenon has extended beyond school level to advanced learners of ESL. There were many studies conducted by researchers in order to explore the reasons that may impede ESL learners' difficulty in subject-verb agreement. For instance, findings from these studies carried out by Noorizah and Mustapha (1998) and Maros et al. (2007) revealed that ESL learners face difficulties with subject-verb agreement. Other studies (Law, 2005; Stapa and Izaha, 2010; Moses et al., 2007) have further asserted that ESL learners have problems with subject verb agreement especially in their writing. Simultaneously, the findings of a study conducted by Darus and Subramaniam (2009) in examining errors in 72 essays in a secondary school in Malaysia revealed that subject-verb agreement was among the common types of errors committed by L2 learners. Not only that, Stapa and Izaha (2010) assert that Malaysian ESL learners face problems in adhering to the rules of subject-verb agreement was mainly because of their L1 which is Bahasa Malaysia. This is because there is no such rule regarding subject-verb agreement in Bahasa Malaysia. According to Ferris (1999), subject-verb agreement errors are deemed as treatable errors as they are rule-governed, which unlike untreatable errors – which are not rule governed (e.g. use of prepositions, adjectives, adverbs, etc).

In the context of the present study, based on discussion with instructors, the problem with subject-verb-agreement in writing among ESL learners in Sri KDU Secondary School is becoming a major issue. Students starting from Secondary One to Five tend to face problems with subject-verb-agreement in their writing tasks. This is because learners do not adhere to the rules of subject-verb agreement. Even teachers in

Sri KDU Secondary School with eight to 10 years of working experience have raised their concern over this issue. Furthermore, teachers in Sri KDU Secondary School also revealed that learners lack the knowledge in adhering to the rules of subject-verb-agreement especially in writing (like factual writing). Therefore, in order to facilitate improvement in learners mastery of grammatical accuracy especially in subject-verb agreement, research that looks into focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation is needed. Thus, this present study intends to investigate the effectiveness of focused CF and meta-linguistic explanation on learners' subject-verb-agreement usage in their compositions.

1.3   Purpose of Study

This research aims to investigate the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation among 27 ESL secondary school learners in their usage of subject-verb-agreement in their compositions. This study also seeks to investigate how students perceive the role of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in terms of subject-verb-agreement performance in their compositions.

Based on the objectives mentioned, this study addresses to answer two research questions:

1. What are the effects of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation on subject-verb agreement towards L2 writers' compositions over a 10 week period?

2. How do students perceive focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in terms of their impact on subject-verb agreement performance in their compositions?

1.4   Significance of Study

As this study chooses to focus on one type of corrective feedback and one linguistic feature in correcting learners' mistakes, this may provide ESL teachers insight on which types of feedback is useful to help their learners to improve their written work.

Besides that, this study may also benefit ESL learners. With this, ESL learners may be able to identify the targeted errors (in this case, the errors relate to subject- verb agreement which is present tense) and ways to correct the errors. Since errors are related to subject-verb agreement which is present tense that is considered as treatable errors because they are rule-based, the findings from this study may shed light on ways to address issue related to treatable errors such as the use of incorrect tenses found in students' compositions.

Additionally, future researches on focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in the Malaysian secondary school context can use this study. This study may serve as a starting point to investigate the impact of other grammatical structures or categories.

In the past, studies conducted on focused CF and meta-linguistic explanation have shown that there are long term effectiveness on learners' written accuracy. For instance, the findings from Sheen's study (2007) have shown that focused CF and meta-linguistic explanation has helped learners improve and retain their accuracy in definite and indefinite articles in their writings. Therefore, the findings of this study is expected

to shed light to teachers and syllabus planners on the importance of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in improving learners' writing performance over time.

1.5   Definition of Key Terms

Because this study is a simplified adaptation of Bitchener and Knoch's research (2010b) on focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation, their operationalization of key terms are employed.

a) Written Corrective Feedback

Written corrective feedback refers to written feedback from teachers on a learners' composition with the aim of improving learners' grammatical accuracy. Written corrective feedback also includes feedback based on the content and organisation. However, this study is only focusing on correcting learners' usage in subject-verb agreement which is present tense in their factual essays.

b) Focused Corrective Feedback

This type of correction is an intensive type in which it only focuses on one error category or type. In other words, focused corrective feedback approach involves providing correct form for specific linguistic forms, leaving errors outside the focus domain uncorrected. For example, Bitchener and Knoch (2010b) conducted a study that focused on articles as one error type in their study. This study intends to focus only on learners' usage in subject- verb agreement which is present tense in factual essays.

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b) Written Meta-Linguistic Explanation

Written meta-linguistic explanation involves providing learners with some form of explicit comments about their nature of errors they have committed Ellis (2009). In other words, in this type of feedback, the teacher provides some form of metalinguistic clue as to the nature of error.

1.6   Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the focus of this study by outlining the background of the study, statement of problem, research questions that this study intends to answer. The definition of key terms are also operationalized. Subsequently, in the coming chapters, Chapter 2 will outline the literature which is relevant to this study. Chapter 3 explains the methods employed in this study and how the data is being analysed. Chapter 4 discusses the research findings. Finally, Chapter 5 introduces the summary of the findings of this study, limitations of this study and the implications.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Giving feedback is broadly believed to be a vital part of the teaching profession. Researcher like Nunan (1998) asserted that as how providing instructions is seen as a pivotal part, the provision of feedback is also considered as one of the important responsibilities of a language teacher. The provision of corrective feedback is considered as a teacher's "traditional right" (Ellis, 2000). With such beliefs, teachers are expected to provide their learners with feedback on their answers or written work to enable learners improve their learning. Teachers have been painstakingly assessing learners' work, particularly writing teachers whereby significant amount of time and attention have been devoted in providing feedback towards learners' writing. Leki (1990) noted that language use was one of the most common written feedback given by most writing teachers. Writing teachers felt that it was their responsibility to give feedback focusing on how ideas are presented or the structures of sentences in writing are written.

Second language theorists like Schmidt and Frota (1986) have theorized that the provision of corrective feedback assists in language learning and acquisition whereby learners are guided to notice the difference between their own production and the target structure as well as raising their awareness about the rules and structures of second language. Therefore, providing feedback on learners' writing has become a universal practice among writing instructors.

Thus, this chapter outlines the various aspects and the relevant empirical studies that involved corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation. This research also draws on Swain's Output Hypothesis as the theoretical framework alongside two

central claims which are 'noticing' hypothesis and hypothesis testing function in order to explain the provision of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in improving learners' language production. The next subsection discusses the factors influencing second language learning and teaching.

2.1   Factors influencing Second Language Teaching and Learning

2.1.1   Factors influencing second language learning

Two of the most common factors influencing the second language learning are motivation and attitudes. (Ellis, 1985). Firstly, motivation is said to be one of the most pertinent factors in second language learning (Richards, 1985, p. 185). Motivation determines a person's interest to do something. It is prevalent that learners who are motivated to learn more are likely to achieve more than learners who are not motivated to learn. SLA theorists like Gardner and Lambert (1972) define motivation as "the learner's overall goal or orientation" and "attitude as the persistence shown by the learner in striving for a goal". Motivation can be distinguished into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Learners who are intrinsically motivated are those behaviours are focused on achieving internal rewarding consequences like competence and self-determination. On the other hand, learners who are extrinsically motivated are those behaviours are focused on expecting a reward, for example, money, a praise or a positive feedback.

Secondly, attitude is defined as "sets of beliefs about factors as the target language culture, their own culture and, in case of classroom learning, of their teachers, and the learning task they are given" (Ellis, 1985 p. 292). Attitude is referred as L2 learners' attitudes in learning a different language apart from their first language.

Learners who express positive or negative attitudes toward learning their second language may reflect upon their ease or difficulty in learning a language, degree of importance and social status (Richards, 1985, p. 155). It is pivotal on how learners feel about learning a second language because learners who express positive attitudes towards their L2 learning are likely to learn more.

These motivation and attitudes factors indicate or influence the way learners encounter their second language that may obstruct or support them in their efforts to master their L2. Moreover, these factors also seem to be a crucial part in L2 learning process, which can contribute to the success or failure of a second language learner. The next subsection discusses the second language teaching strategies that influence second language learning.

2.1.2 Second language teaching strategies that influence second language learning

In order to effectively teach a second language, every teacher should be aware how the L2 is being acquired by the learners. The most prevalent strategies used by teachers in teaching second language are scaffolding and providing feedback. Scaffolding acts as a teaching strategy initiated by Lev Vygotsky's (1896) sociocultural theory and his concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is defined as "the distance between what children can do by themselves and the next learning that they can be helped to achieve with competent assistance" (Raymond, 2000, p.176). On the other hand, Vygotsky defined scaffolding instructions as the role of teachers or more competent peers in supporting learners' development and giving adequate support in order for the learner to achieve the next level independently.

In the educational setting, scaffolding includes four ways as suggested by Ellis and Larkin (1998). Firstly, is "*the teacher does it*". In this method, the teacher models how to perform a new or difficult task. Second way is through "*the class does it*". In this way, the teacher and learners work together to perform the task. Thirdly, "*the group does it*" is a way used when learners work together with their peers or small groups of peers to perform the task. Finally, the fourth way is "*the individual does it*". In this stage, the individual will demonstrate their task mastery independently and receive practice to help them perform the task automatically and quickly.

Scaffolding in an instructional setting that promotes learning through discussion, dialogue, feedback and learning autonomy. Through a supported and challenging L2 learning process, teachers can help L2 learners become independent, self-regulated learners and problem solvers (Hartman, 2002). As the learner's knowledge and learning competency in L2 increases, the teacher will gradually reduce the supports provided.

Moreover, through scaffolding, providing corrective feedback is seen to be one of the most common instructional strategies that focuses on grammatical, lexical and mechanical errors that aim to improve second language learning particularly in writing skill for those L2 learners demand a high level of linguistic accuracy (Evans, Hartshorn, McCollum and Wolfersberger, 2010; Hartshorn et al., 2010). Through scaffolding, the provision of corrective feedback is usually given by the teacher or more capable peers until the learners can achieve or accomplish a task independently. According to Ellis (2009), in both behaviourist and cognitive theorists of SLA, feedback is seen as an effective instructional tool to foster language learning. Feedback can be classified in two ways; positive and negative. Positive feedback confirms that a learner's response to a task has been correct or the learner has successfully fulfilled the L2 target rules and

structures. In other words, it signals the accuracy of the content from the learner's utterance, written work of the linguistic accuracy. This positive feedback is said to be important in an instructional setting because it provides affective support to the learner.

In SLA, however positive feedback is opposed with negative feedback which is seen as a practice amongst language teachers in modifying or correcting learners' incorrect production in their L2 (Ellis, 2009). Negative feedback indicates that the learner's utterance or written work lacks veracity. Therefore, it demands the learner to self-correct or revise their work immediately.

Corrective feedback regardless oral or written; it is seen as an integral part of language teaching. It is a common instructional method used in most language classrooms as it plays a significant role in the L2 teaching and learning process in enhancing both oral and written linguistic accuracy. The next section discusses the role of corrective feedback in second language teaching and learning.

2.2 The Role of Corrective Feedback in Second Language Teaching and Learning

The role of corrective feedback has been a topic that has been studied in the field of SLA. It has always been an argument on whether or not corrective feedback can possibly help learners acquire their L2. Second language writing teachers and many researchers have been exploring the role of feedback and its effectiveness in learners' L2. The provision of feedback for learners' written work has been one of the most challenging tasks for teachers as they are not certain if the feedback given does have a significant impact on the learners' language development. Language teachers have been

meticulously correcting and providing learners' written work with feedback particularly on grammar errors, yet this may not have benefited the learners in any way.

This brings to the discussion that was put forth by Truscott (1996) that states not only error correction is ineffective in aiding learners improve their accuracy in language but error correction is also harmful and it should be abandoned. On the other hand, researchers like Bitchener, Young and Cameron (2005), Chandler, (2003), Ellis, Sheen, Murakami and Takashima (2008), Ferris (2006), Sheen, Wright, and Moldawa (2009) have dismissed Truscott's claim by arguing that error correction helps students improve their accuracy in writing. There are mounting evidence from these studies refuting Truscott's claim by stating that corrective feedback has long-term effectiveness over learners' written accuracy when they were asked to revise their new texts.

Ferris (2006) states that in order for the feedback given to be effective, the types of feedback given should be taken into careful consideration in SLA classrooms. Therefore, F.Hyland and K.Hyland (2006) state that by employing different approaches of corrective feedback, it will ensure the impact and effectiveness as the different types of feedback may provide opportunities for learners to revise their written work often. The next section discusses the different types of feedback and efficacies in SLA.

2.3   Types of Feedback

Corrective feedback is defined as responses to learners' written work that contain an error. There are many different approaches in corrective feedback on L2 learners' writing. These approaches may be carried out based on their explicitness, focus and the person who is providing the feedback. There are different types of feedback and they presumably have different impact towards learners' acquisition in

their L2. These feedback are focused, unfocused, direct written corrective feedback, indirect written corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation. The next subsection discusses the types of feedback used in correcting learners' writing.

1. **Focused feedback**: Involves providing correct form for only a specific linguistic form, leaving errors outside the focus domain uncorrected.

2. **Unfocused feedback**: Concerns teachers' correction on all students' errors, regardless of the error category.

3. **Direct WCF**: the provision of the correct linguistic form or structure by the teacher to the student above or near the linguistic error. It may include the crossing out of an unnecessary word / phrase / morpheme, the insertion of a missing word / phrase / morpheme, or the provision of the correct form or structure.

4. **Indirect WCF**: indication can be in a form of underlining the errors or writing error codes on top of the errors using certain correction symbols. Therefore, students are required to resolve and correct the error which has been indicated instead of having the teacher provide the correction for the learners.

5. **Metalinguistic explanation**: involves providing learners with some form of explicit comments about their nature of errors they have committed Ellis (2009). In other words, in this type of feedback, the teacher provides some form of metalinguistic clue as to the nature of error.

There have been extensive research carried out by researchers in the past decades that relates to the efficacy on the types of feedback in improving the accuracy of students' writing. However, the studies have yielded different findings. In line with that, the present study aims to investigate the potential benefits of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in enhancing learners' language learning. The subsection below describes studies that incorporated direct and indirect corrective feedback.

2.3.1   Direct vs Indirect Approach

Bitchener and Knoch (2008) define direct corrective feedback as the provision of the correct linguistic form or structure by the teacher to the student above or near the linguistic error committed by the learner. The correction may entail crossing out of an unnecessary word / phrase / morpheme, the addition of a missing word / phrase / morpheme, or the provision of the correct form or structure by using correction symbols. According to researchers like Bitchener and Ferris (2012), direct feedback approach may include written meta-linguistic explanation which means the provision of grammar rules and examples of correct usage that also may be carried out in oral-form. Findings from a study carried out by Chandler (2003) with 31 ESL learners concluded that direct corrective feedback is more effective than indirect corrective feedback. The findings in this study also concluded that learners benefited accuracy in improving their revised drafts and subsequent writing. Additionally, the findings also concluded that students preferred direct corrective feedback because it is the easiest and fastest way for them to revise their drafts. Ferris and Roberts (2001)'s study showed

that direct feedback is more effective than indirect feedback especially for learners with low levels of proficiency of English. The provision of direct feedback may help the weak learners to produce the correct form when they revise their work.

Indirect feedback, on the other hand, is an error correction that involves the indication that an error has been made in writing. The provision of indirect feedback is carried out by underlining the errors or writing error codes above the errors using certain types of correction symbols. Therefore, this type of feedback requires learners to resolve and correct the error which has been identified or indicated instead of providing the correction. Researchers like Ferris and Roberts (2001) suggest that indirect feedback is helpful and effective as it requires learners to engage in guided learning and problem solving. Ferris (1995) also stated that indirect feedback is beneficial because learners get to process the language by editing their output independently. The error codes given by their teachers pushes students to engage in hypothesis testing. A number of research studies carried out by Lyster (2004) and Ferris (2006) acknowledge that indirect feedback prompts the learners to independently correct their errors that promotes acquisition. However, there are still a number of problems learners face when they self-correct their errors. Firstly, learners are more comfortable when teachers correct the errors for them. Secondly, and most importantly, learners can only self-correct their errors if they possess the adequate linguistic knowledge. This is closely referred to Corder's (1967) terms, that learners can correct their mistakes but not their errors. Lastly, other correction will be necessary to allow learners to identify or notice linguistic forms which are not part of their interlanguage. Therefore, considering the difficulties of indirect feedback, this study chooses not to focus on indirect feedback. The next subsection discusses the correction symbols used for direct and indirect corrective feedback.

2.3.1.1 Correction Symbols for Direct and Indirect Corrective Feedback

According to Bryne (1988) the application of correction symbols is usually carried out by underlining the mistakes by using some kind of symbol to focus the attention of learners on the kind of mistakes they have made. It is a convenient way of providing learners with information on where they have gone wrong (Bright & McGregor, 1970). These correction symbols help learners to know what they are looking for and make their corrections accordingly. Additionally, according to Mantello (1997) and Makino (1993), it is believed that the usage of correction symbols is an effective method in guiding learners to correct their errors. This is because they need to be guided in discovering the nature of their errors, otherwise, correcting their own errors without their teacher's guidance would become a task that needs extraordinary effort and may lead to frustration. According to Hyland (2003, p.181), "this technique makes correction neater and less threatening than masses of red ink and helps students to find and identify their mistakes".

Therefore it is highly crucial for teachers to inform learners about the correction symbols at the beginning of corrective feedback in order to avoid confusion. This is because confusion of correction symbols will affect their improvement in writing as well as their attitude in revising their drafts. The **Table 1** (Appendix C) below outlines the correction symbols which are commonly used in language classrooms as suggested by Oshima and Hogue (1997).
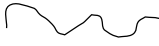
Symbol	Meaning	Incorrect	Correct
P.	Punctuation	I live, and go to school here Where do you work.	I live and go to school here. Where do you work?
◯	Word missing	I working in a restaurant.	I am working in a restaurant.
SVA	Subject-verb agreement	The manager work hard. There is five employees	The manager works hard. There are five employees.
Sp	Spelling	The stunden is excellent.	The student is excellent.
∿	Wrong word form	Her voice is irritated.	Her voice is irritating
Frag.	Fragment (incomplete sentence)	She was fired. Because she was always late	She was fired because she was always late.

Table 2.1   Correction symbols suggested by Oshima and Hogue (1997)

Table 2.1 explains the correction symbols suggested by Oshima and Hogue (1997). The usage of correction codes should be handled with care otherwise it may lead to confusion when learners correct their errors. As proposed by Ferris and Roberts (2001), learners will be able to develop accuracy if the system of marking codes is used and reinforced consistently through lessons. The next section discusses the focused and unfocused feedback approach.

2.3.2 Focused vs Unfocused Approach

Researchers like van Beuningen (2010) stated that the contrast between focused and unfocused approach refers to the clarity or comprehensiveness of corrective feedback provided by teachers on learners' written work. The focused corrective feedback involves correcting errors on specific linguistic form or domain whereas errors outside the focused linguistic form or domain will be left uncorrected. Alternatively, the unfocused approach involves teachers correcting all linguistic forms regardless of the error category. Additionally, van Beuningen (2010) stated that by using the focused corrective feedback approach, it may promote more noticing function among learners thus giving a positive impact on learners' accuracy development. This is because learners tend to notice and comprehend corrections when an error domain is highlighted.

According to Sheen (2007) and Bitchener (2008), they believe that the unfocused approach seem not to benefit the learners compared to the focused approach. The reason being L2 learners have limited processing capacity and may experience cognitive overload when coping with unfocused approach that covers various linguistic domains. There are also evidence from researchers like Murakami and Takashima (2007) stating that focused corrective feedback is more reliable and effective than unfocused corrective feedback. This is because this type of feedback promotes clearer understanding of the nature of the error and the correction needed. L2 acquisition researchers like Schmidt (1994) and Ellis (2006) suggested that if attention and understanding are important for L2 acquisition then, focused corrective feedback is deemed effective in producing positive results. Similarly, other SLA researchers see value in focused corrective feedback (Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005; Ellis et al., 2008) in their studies that have shown focused corrective feedback is effective in

promoting accuracy in L2. The next subsection discusses the issues related to focused corrective feedback in second language learning.

2.4 Issues Related to Focused Corrective Feedback in Second Language Learning

Researchers like Truscott and Hsu (1996; 2008) stated that corrective feedback is not effective and the provision of corrective feedback was detrimental to learners' language development. Truscott and Hsu (2008) refer to a number of studies to prove their viewpoint. These researchers stated that studies carried out in the past had methodological issues and failed to provide sound evidence on the efficacy of feedback in learners' language development (Chandler, 2003; Fazio, 2001; Robb, Ross & Shortreed, 1986). One of the methodological issues is highlighted in studies like Ashwell, 2000; Fathman and Whalley, 1990; Ferris and Roberts, 2001. These studies explore "learners" success in revising an essay upon receiving different types of feedback and they are only short-term in nature and they also do not offer measure of changes in students' ability to write correctly, i.e their learning" (Truscott, 2007). Furthermore, a writing task which students write with teacher's support or guidance (the revised essay) is not comparable to the one they write on their own (the original essay).

Also, by citing these studies, Truscott claims that these studies cannot be considered to answer the question of whether grammar correction is effective or not. Therefore, there have been continuous debates about the role and efficacy of corrective feedback and meta-linguistic feedback.

While, researchers like Bitchener and Knoch (2008; 2010), Ellis et al (2008) and Sheen (2007) argue that corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation is proven to be effective in language accuracy development. The findings from these studies reveal that corrective feedback is significant because it is helpful in developing and improving students' accuracy in writing. The findings from studies conducted by researchers are inconclusive because different types of feedback give different impacts. Therefore, next section discusses the differential effects of studies on the use of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in second language learning.

2.5   Differential Effects of Studies on Focused Corrective Feedback and Meta-Linguistic Explanation

Researchers such as Truscott and Hsu (1996; 2008) state that corrective feedback is ineffective and therefore it should be abandoned. Therefore, there are a number of studies that investigated the role of corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in language learning that revealed results that supported Trsucott's viewpoint (Sheen, Wright & Moldawa, 2009; Sheppard, 1992; Polio, Fleck, Leder, 1998) that corrective feedback is ineffective. For instance, in Sheen's (2007) study that involved a group of learners using the writing treatment with no feedback provided. The other two groups received error feedback for their written work. Results from Sheen's study showed that the group who did not receive any error corrections in their writing were able to improve their accuracy using the English articles.

Alternatively, past studies conducted by Ferris (1999, 2002, 2004; 2006) revealed that the use of corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in language classrooms are effective in providing assistance to learners' linguistic accuracy.

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Additionally, extensive studies were carried out to investigate the efficacy of meta-linguistic explanation to improve learners' accuracy. (Bitchener et al., 2005; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008a; 2008b; 2009a; 2009b; 2010; Sheen, 2007). Findings from these studies conclude that the provision of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation have an encouraging long-term effect on learners' accuracy in language in their new pieces of writing in their delayed posttests. These studies also suggested that learners with different language proficiency were able to retain their accuracy on the use of English articles over a long period of time. The next section discusses the theoretical framework of this study.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

2.6.1 The Output Hypothesis

Based on the aim of this study, Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis forms the basis of the theoretical framework. Swain defines Output Hypothesis as "through producing language, either spoken or written, language acquisition or learning may occur". Swain also asserts that learners must be pushed in order to produce output in their L2 in order to enhance grammatical accuracy.

To be precise, "output may stimulate learners to move from the semantic, open-ended, strategic processing prevalent in comprehension to the complete grammatical processing needed for accurate production" (Swain, 2000, p. 99). Swain also asserted that comprehensible input is not the sole reason for SLA, yet, under certain conditions, it might help second language learners to facilitate their L2 learning because of the mental processes which are related to the language production. Most importantly,

students need opportunities to produce "comprehensible output" to promote accuracy in the second language.

Alternatively, it is also important to recognize that when learners experience difficulties while communicating, the role of output plays an important role in encouraging or it "pushes" the learners to enhance their second language learning. Thus, production will aid acquisition only when the learner is pushed. Hence, Output Hypothesis gives an impact towards corrective feedback. The provision of CF will help learners to overcome their difficulties in communicating their intended message either in spoken or written form. This is because the input or feedback given by their teachers encourages learners to process the language with "focused attention" and subsequently push the learners to provide output. Learners who are engaged actively in the process of producing second language is seen to be the key concept of Output Hypothesis. Additionally, the advantage of Output Hypothesis is they allow learners to be actively involved in the process of learning a second language.

Subsequently, this study focuses to outline two identified functions of output: (1) the noticing/ triggering function, (2) the hypothesis-testing function. Firstly, the noticing/ triggering function in which from the learners 'production that serves as 'triggering function' for learners to notice or to be more aware of their interlanguage and second language. Secondly, hypothesis-testing, is linked to learners' output, whereby, learners are given the opportunity to be actively involved in the process of acquiring L2 by themselves via hypothesis testing based on linguistic forms. The next subsection discusses the 'noticing function' in focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in second language learning.

2.6.2 The 'noticing function' in focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation

The noticing function is activated when the learners notice the gap between their interlanguage and target language for acquisition to occur (Schmidt & Frota, 1986). When learners make an attempt to produce output either spoken or written, in their second language, the learners might not be aware of the grammar rules and structures that are needed for communication. At the moment of production, the L2 learners will then notice a 'hole' or gap in their interlanguage knowledge. Therefore, when learners attempt to produce an output, they are forced to notice what they might not know fully or partially. Besides, Swain (1995, 2000) also asserted that when learners notice holes or 'gaps' in their interlanguage, it allows learners to pay close attention in order to enhance their accuracy for the future production. Swain also added that when learners notice their grammar deficiencies, they will make an effort to fill in the holes or gaps in their interlanguage by referring to a dictionary, grammar book or by asking their peers or teachers.

Furthermore, Ellis (1994) pointed out that learners acquire their second language only when they notice certain linguistic form deficiency in their language production, both oral and written. A notion was put forward by Schmidt (1990; 1994; 2001) that noticing is a prominent phase towards the acquisition of a language. Schmidt defines noticing as a stage where learners devote more attention to the gap in their production of language. For instance, learners become more aware of certain words that have been misspelled. The next subsection discusses the hypothesis-testing in focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation.

2.6.3 The hypothesis-testing function in focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation

Researchers like Nobuyoshi and Ellis (1993) have pointed out that hypothesis function is also important because when learners are in the process of producing output, they have the opportunity to confirm or disconfirm their hypotheses regarding their second language when they receive feedback from their teachers. In other words, Swain (2005) claims the "output may sometimes be, from the learner's perspective, a "trial run" reflecting their hypothesis of how to say (or write) their intent" (p.476). There is an opportunity for learners to make changes to the output as a response to the feedback provided. This hypothesis-testing encourages learners to explore and try out new linguistic forms. Therefore, Swain further argues that it is vital for learners to produce targeted linguistic form accurately. This is because it is seen as an indication that "learners were actively seeking feedback through hypothesis testing" (Swain, 2005, p.477). In line with that, the present study focuses on focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation that the participants have received. With this, learners are given the opportunity to do hypothesis-testing in producing output of their L2.

2.7 Studies related to the efficacy of Focused Corrective Feedback and Meta-linguistic explanation

A number of studies were carried out by researchers in the SLA field to examine the impact of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation on English article system. Bitchener et al. (2005) conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of different subtypes of direct feedback. The first treatment group received written direct feedback with a 5 minute oral teacher-student conference. The second treatment

group received written direct feedback only. On the other hand, the control group received no feedback. Findings showed that written direct corrective feedback and the teacher – student conference seemed to assist the learners the most in enhancing their accuracy consistently over a period of time.

In another study conducted by Bitchener (2008) to investigate the effectiveness of focused CF and meta-linguistic explanation with 75 low intermediate ESL learners on the article system. The 75 participants were grouped into three treatment groups and one control group. Group one received direct CF with written and oral meta-linguistic explanation. Group two received direct CF with written meta-linguistic explanation. Group three received only CF and lastly the control group did not receive any feedback. The findings concluded that the groups who received CF outperformed the control group in their immediate post-test and their accuracy level was retained two months later. Another surprising finding of this study was group three who only received CF outperformed group two that received CF and written meta-linguistic explanation. The finding clearly shows that written or oral meta-linguistic explanation promotes the accuracy of learners' writing was inconclusive. Therefore, it is evidently clear that further study is required to explore the effectiveness of meta-linguistic explanation in improving learners' grammatical accuracy.

Bitchener and Knoch (2010b) extended their research in examining the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback on the two functional uses of the English article system with 63 advanced learners. The participants were divided into three treatment groups (group one received CF with written meta-linguistic explanation; group two received indirect CF; group three received direct CF with written and oral meta-linguistic explanation). The control group did not receive any CF on their texts. The findings revealed that all three treatment groups outperformed the control group in

the immediate post-test. Not only that, the researchers also concluded that learners who received written meta-linguistic explanation only and both written and oral meta-linguistic explanation were able to retain their accuracy in writing across the 10 week period (delayed post-test). On the other hand, learners who only received indirect feedback were unable to retain their written accuracy in the immediate post-test itself.

Additionally, Ellis et al. (2008), Sheen (2007, 2010) and Sheen et al. (2009) have conducted their studies investigating the effectiveness of focused CF and meta-linguistic explanation on two particular usage of English article systems (definite and indefinite article). Another aim of Ellis's study (2008) is to determine if there is any differential effects in feedback between focused and unfocused corrective feedback to improve accuracy in English articles. The findings revealed that focused CF and meta-linguistic explanation have helped learners improve their accuracy in the two functional uses of the English article system in their writings. These findings were evident in the immediate post-test and delayed post-test. Additionally, Lee (2004; 2009) and Ellis (2008) assert that there are encouraging findings from studies employing focused corrective feedback because it may be able to assist learners with "intensive and rich source of linguistic input". In Sheen's study (2007) that examined the effects of focused CF on the development of 91 adult ESL learners' accuracy in the use of two types of articles ("the" and "a"). One group received direct feedback only. The second group received direct feedback with meta-linguistic explanations and a control group that received no feedback at all. The efficacy of corrective feedback was measured on prestests, posttests and delayed posttests. Sheen discovered that the both treatment groups outperformed the control group by asserting that the feedback given to students with the correct form was limited to only two linguistic forms (articles 'the' and 'a'). The students managed to process the feedback and explanation given to them. Sheen

also noted that focused corrective feedback approach "runs the risk of overloading students' attentional capacity". On the other hand, the findings in another study conducted by Sheen et al. (2009) revealed that the focused corrective feedback group outperformed not only the control group but also the unfocused group in immediate post-test. The focused corrective feedback focused on indefinite and definite articles resulted in significant accuracy than unfocused CF which focused on a range of grammatical errors. These findings suggest that focused corrective feedback is more valuable than unfocused corrective feedback as it has positive effect on the learning.

More recent evidence from a study by Angus (2017) in examining the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback on the usage of English articles ('the' and 'a') in the written narratives among ESL learners has yielded positive findings. This study utilized a pretest - treatment – posttest – delayed posttest on three groups: two experimental groups one group received focused CF (direct only) and the other group received focused CF (direct with metalinguistic comments) for the duration of nine weeks and a control group. The findings showed the two experimental groups found that focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic comments were effective in improving lower-intermediate ESL learners' accuracy in using two functions of English articles. It is also found that receiving focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic comments do have a significant impact in improving linguistic accuracy among lower-intermediate ESL learners even in delayed post-test.

Elahe Ebadi (2014), on the other hand, conducted a study among Iranian intermediate EFL learners focusing on the impact of focused CF and meta-linguistic explanation on grammatical accuracy in learners' writing. The findings concluded that the learners who received focused CF and meta-linguistic explanation outperformed the learners who did not receive any CF. The researcher also concluded that the learners in

delayed post-test also made progress in writing skill. Therefore, employing focused CF and meta-linguistic explanation led to significantly lesser mistakes in learners' writing. The researcher stated that learners were also encouraged to become more aware of their own errors.

Lastly, Lee Chieng Shea (2014) conducted a study in exploring the effectiveness of direct and indirect written corrective feedback on ESL learners' essays by focusing on present tense target structure. The findings concluded that learners showed improvement from pre-test up to post-test when direct feedback was given. However, learners who received indirect feedback did not show improvement in accuracy in post-test.

Taking all these empirical findings mentioned above into consideration, it is clear that further studies is required to explore the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation. It is also clear that these studies used different research designs that yielded varying results. Therefore, studies focusing on corrective feedback should be continuously carried out by researchers and educators, nevertheless the different findings. In the context of this present study, this study aims to examine whether focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation influence learners' use of present tense in their factual writing.

2.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed about the issues of feedback roles as well as its efficacy. This chapter also reviewed related empirical studies on focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation. The theoretical framework presented places a foundation for this study of which research questions presented in Chapter One. The Output Hypothesis identified two functions for this study; which are the noticing or triggering function and the hypothesis-testing function. The following chapter will present the research methods which addresses the research questions formulated for this current study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.0   Introduction

There have been numerous debates on the efficacy of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic feedback in a second language writing classroom setting. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation towards subject-verb agreement using simple present tense among L2 writers in their compositions over a 10-week period. This study focused on the learners' usage of subject-verb agreement using simple present tense in their factual writing.

In this chapter, the research design and procedures will be explained. It is then followed by the description of data analysis and instrumentation. This chapter also describes the methods used for data collection and interpretation of data collection for semi-structured interviews.

3.1   Research Design

According to Creswell (2014) mixed method research is a methodology for conducting research that involves collecting, analysing and combining both quantitative and qualitative methods in a study to understand a phenomenon better. Therefore, this present study attempts to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative methods. Both types of methods offer a better understanding of the research problem rather than employing one method only. Using a quantitative method, data was gathered from a pre-test (immediate) and two post-tests (immediate and delayed). Subsequently, using a qualitative method, data was gathered from semi structured interviews allowed the researcher to gauge into various perspectives of the study.

Therefore, a mixed method study was employed because this study's research design is constructed on the vigour of both quantitative and qualitative data. This mixed method was employed in order to examine the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation on the accuracy of subject-verb agreement in learners' written work over a 10-week period. Additionally, the methods employed in this study are used to provide a deeper understanding to the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation on the accurate use of subject-verb agreement in learners' written work.

In choosing to adapt Bitchener and Knoch's study (2010b) that examined the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation on the accuracy of English articles in ESL learners' compositions, this study chooses to employ only one group of pre-test and post-test, with no control group. This study is followed by semi structured interviews with the participants. Due to insufficient number of students to participate in this study, this study did not employ a control group. In a study conducted by Siti Nor Aishyak (2017) in investigating the effects of direct and indirect written corrective feedback on ESL students' use of past tenses without employing a control group have yielded promising results that students managed to retain their accuracy performance since significant results were achieved in delayed post-test.

This study involved an ESL class with 27 learners to form a group in order to receive focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in their factual writing tasks. While Bitchener's and Knoch's study (2010) only provided the focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation once, this study incorporated three cycles of the feedback provision using similar factual writing tasks. The provision of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation sessions were conducted

once a week and took a total of four weeks to be carried out. Each session was carried out around 45 minutes which is a complete teaching period. In each session, participants were asked to write a short factual writing based on factual topics. Subsequently, the factual written tasks would be corrected using focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic feedback by the teacher. The corrective feedback would entail with the indication of the error that focuses only on subject-verb agreement along with the correct form. Additionally, for meta-linguistic explanation, it would include the some comments on the nature of errors learners have committed.

Subsequently, in Week 4, an immediate post-test was conducted after the participants had received three sessions of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation. After that, a delayed post-test was employed six weeks later which was in Week 10.

3.2   Research Procedure

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│              Week 1                  │
│                                      │
│              Pretest                 │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ▽
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│             Week 2 - 4               │
│                                      │
│   Three Sessions for Focused         │
│   Corrective Feedback and            │
│   Meta-Linguistic Explanation        │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ▽
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│              Week 4                  │
│                                      │
│          Immediate posttest          │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ▽
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│              Week 10                 │
│                                      │
│   Delayed Post-test (six weeks       │
│   after the immediate post-test)     │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ▽
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│              Interview               │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
```
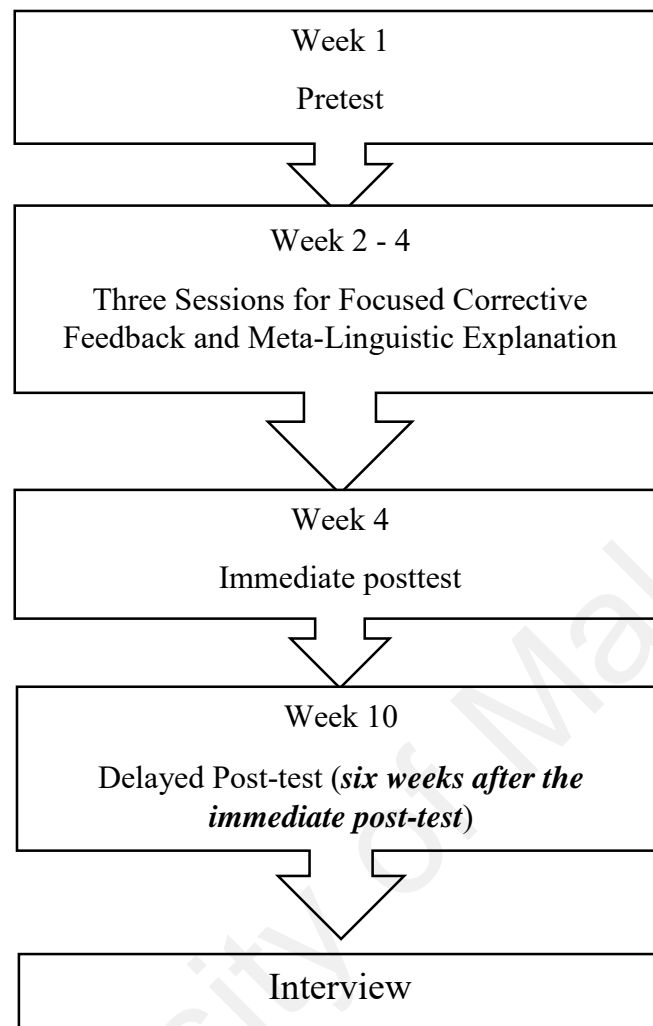
Figure 3.1   Overview of Research Procedure

Figure 3.1 explains the research procedure of this study. A pretest-posttest and semi structured interviews with 27 learners were carried out for this study. The pre-test took place in the first week of the 10 week period. Students received three sessions of this entire feedback provision. Learners were provided with focused CF and meta-linguistic explanation focusing only on subject verb agreement which is in simple present tense. This is because in factual essays, simple present tense is used to present facts or general truths. Once the students received their essays with focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation, each student had a 10 minutes discussion

with the teacher. Based on the researcher's teaching experience, the 10 minutes discussion was deemed sufficient to provide learners with explanation on the errors they have committed. The discussion also entailed with the correct form and a brief comment of the correct form. The 10 minutes discussion was carried out for the three sessions. The explanation given by the teacher was based on learners' nature of errors and clues of the correct forms of simple present tense in subject-verb-agreement. Subsequently, an immediate post-test was employed after the third session. At the end of the 10 week period which is six weeks after the immediate post-test, a delayed post-test took place. During the delayed post-test, students were asked to write a new topic of the factual genre. After the delayed post-test, the students' compositions were marked and one-to-one interview was conducted with selected participants.

3.3   Participants

This study involved 27 ESL students from a secondary school based in a Malaysian context. All participants were ESL learners who had completed nine years of formal English language lessons in both primary and secondary schools. All the participants for this study were Form 3 students from a private national school, Sri KDU Secondary School. Permission was obtained from the school principal to conduct this study. Since all the participants were 15 years old, a consent letter was sent to the participants' parents to gain permission. All participants were briefed orally about the objectives and purpose of this study and consent forms were given to the participants to sign. The participants consist of seven Malay, 20 Chinese. Male participants slightly outnumbered female participants at 15 and 12 respectively. Since the participants belong to the same class, the cycle and interviews were very efficiently conducted.

3.4 Ethical Consideration

For this study, ethical considerations were taken into account. In order to conduct the pre-test, post-test and interviews with the participants from Sri KDU Secondary School, a consent letter (Appendix A) was sent to gain permission from the school administration. Also, consent letter was given to the participants' parents to gain permission since the participants were below 18 years old (Appendix B). Upon approval, participants were informed about the research objectives of this study. Participants were also given the freedom to withdraw from this study. Participants' names were not mentioned instead pseudonyms were used for data analysis.

3.5 Instrumentation

This study used six factual writing task topics during the pre-test and post-tests. Thirty minutes was given for the participants to complete the factual writing task. The scores obtained from pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test were keyed in Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Using Microsoft Excel as a tool, the accuracy scores for the three tests were calculated separately to obtain the mean and standard deviation scores to measure the performance of subject-verb agreement among the 27 participants. In Week 10, after the delayed post-test, semi structured interviews took place.

3.5.1   Factual writing task instruments

There were three sessions for the provision of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic feedback that involved a short factual writing task. For all six factual writing genre topics, the participants were asked to write their factual written tasks in about 100- 150 words. The six factual writing task topics can be found in Appendix D.

3.5.2   Provision of Focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic Explanation

The factual writing task for every session was carried out once a week for a period of 10 weeks following these three steps as shown in Figure 3.2 below.
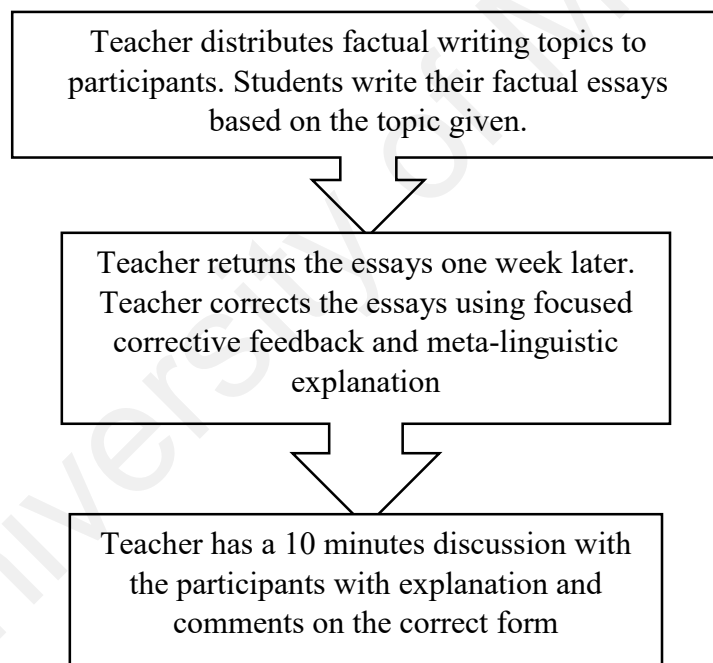
Figure 3.2: Corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation

In Figure 3.2, it explains the procedures involved when providing focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation. The teacher corrects the factual written compositions only on subject-verb agreement. The researcher indicates the subject-verb agreement error and provides the correct form above it. An example of participant's factual written composition with focused corrective feedback focusing on subject-verb agreement and meta-linguistic explanation is appended in Appendix F. The following examples illustrate how the corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation are executed (Figure 3.3).

a) The graph show the number of internet users in 2009

It should be "***The graph shows****….*"

Metalinguistic explanation: The graph is a singular noun phrase, thus, it should agree with a singular verb, which is 'shows'

b) "Many students to class by car."

It should be "***Many students go to class by car***"

Metalinguistic explanation: If the subject is plural, the verb has to be in plural as well which is 'go'

Figure 3.3: Examples of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation from Asiah (2014).

Subsequently, the written factual compositions were returned to the participants after one week. Participants were given a few minutes to look over their errors indicated by their teacher using the focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation. Subsequently, the teacher will conduct a 10 minutes discussion with the participants. The discussion would entail the indication of errors learners committed in their written

work, the correct form of the errors committed and explanation of the correct form and with a few examples of the targeted linguistic domain which is simple present tense in subject-verb-agreement.

3.6   Data Analysis Procedures

3.6.1   Scoring Procedure for Factual Written Tasks

The data for all tests (pre-test, immediate and delayed post-test) were keyed in Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to tabulate the accuracy score in order to obtain the mean and standard deviation scores to measure the performance of subject-verb agreement among the 27 participants. Using Lee Chieng Shea's (2014) guidelines in obtaining the accuracy score, the guidelines state if the number of errors made in the tests decreases, it indicates that learners have shown improvement. In the current study, if the accuracy score increases, it indicates that the number of correct uses made in present tense is gradually improving in all three tests.

In this study, sentences that consist the usage of present tense were identified in every factual writing compositions. The participants' written work was assessed based on the method of calculation used in the study conducted by Sheen et al. (2009). Every occurrence of the present tense was taken into account. For the correct usage of the present tense, the learners' work was rewarded as "1" and "0" for the incorrect usage of present tense. Subsequently, the marks were converted into percentage by dividing the overall number of correct usage with the number of total uses. Below is the formula of the calculation:

$$\text{Accuracy score} = \frac{\text{Total number of correct present tenses uses}}{\text{Total number of correct and incorrect uses of present tenses}} \times 100$$

A score of "1" was awarded for the accuracy of the usage of present tense. For example, if the student wrote "*In the current generation where technology is flourishing, social networking becomes a big part in our lives*", the correct uses tenses of the present tenses, which are "*technology is flourishing...*", "*social networking becomes...*" were identified, underlined and a score of "1" was remarked beside the words. Below is an example of the scoring procedure:

"*In the current generation where technology <u>is</u> (1) flourishing, social networking <u>becomes</u> (1) a big part in our lives*".

Alternatively, the score of "0" was given for the incorrect uses of present tense. An example is shown below:

In current generation where technology <u>was</u> (0) flourishing, social networking <u>had</u> (0) become a big part in our lives".

Based on the example given above, if the overall number of the present tense occurrence was 10 for instance and the learner had been awarded "1" for his or her correct uses of the present tense, hence, the calculation would be as follows:

$$\text{Accuracy score} = \frac{1}{10} \times 100 = 10\%$$

Therefore, the percentage of 10% attained for the correct usage of present tense would then be keyed in Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to obtain the mean and standard deviation scores.

3.6.2 Interviews

The interview sessions were conducted in Week 10. The present study employed a semi structured interview with selected participants. Semi-structured interviews were employed in this study because researcher has the freedom to probe for more information if the interviewees' responses are not specific enough. Additionally, the selection of participants to be interviewed was made based on their performance on the immediate and delayed post-test. Subsequently, the 27 participants were grouped into most improved, slight improvement and no improvement. The participants who had performed well were considered to be an important indication of the uptake of feedback being used and were selected for the interview. At the same time, participants who showed no improvement were also selected for the interview. This is to deduce the reasons that may impede the uptake and retention of the accurate use of the targeted linguistic forms. Therefore, based on the selection procedures for the interview, 12 participants were selected.

Each interview session lasted for about more than 25 minutes. Upon the participants' consent, the interview sessions were recorded using a digital voice recorder. The interview questions are appended in Appendix E. The responses gathered from the interview sessions were then transcribed. Subsequently, the researcher organised and coded the interviewed data using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). By using this approach, data would be organized minimally and the data set was

described in detail. The researcher also identified and interpreted the coding to obtain

emergent themes. Lastly, the researcher coded the data and presented the interpretation.

3.7   Steps of Data Analysis

The present study involved analysis on the quantitative and qualitative components of the investigation. **Table 3.1** explains the planning of data analysis for the data collected according to the research questions outlined for this study.

Research Questions (RQ)	Data involved	Procedure in analysing data
RQ1. What are the effects of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation on subject-verb agreement towards L2 writers' compositions over a 10 week period?	- Students' written essays were collected from the pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test	- Each occurrence of the present tense was counted - For the correct use of the tense, the learners were awarded as "1" and "0" for the incorrect uses - Results from the immediate post-test and delayed post-test were compared
RQ2. How do students perceive focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in terms of their impact on subject-verb agreement performance in their compositions?	- 12 students out of 27 students were selected for the interview.	- Face to face interview was involved. - Interview responses were analysed using the thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

Table 3.1:   Planning of data analysis of the study.

Research Question 1

What are the effects of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation on subject-verb agreement towards L2 writers' compositions over a 10 week period?

To answer this research question, learners' compositions from the pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test was calculated and the accuracy scores were compared. These tests were evaluated using the calculation method explained in the previous section (**refer 3.6.1**). For the correct use of words, it was marked as "1" and "0" for the incorrect uses. The marks were converted into percentage by dividing the overall number of correct uses with the number of total uses. Subsequently, the percentages were keyed in Microsoft Excel spreadsheet in order to tabulate the mean and standard deviation scores.

Since the first research question attempted to determine the effectiveness or impact of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation on subject-verb agreement towards L2 writers' compositions over a 10 week period, an Excel spreadsheet was used to compute the accuracy scores for the pre-test, immediate and delayed post-tests that were administered.

Research Question 2

How do students perceive focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in terms of their impact on subject-verb agreement performance in their compositions?

The second research question attempted to find out learners' perceptions towards focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in terms of their impact on subject-verb agreement performance in their compositions. For this reason, this present study employed a semi-structured interview with selected participants only. Researchers like Mackey and Grass (2005), semi-structured interview means it "*uses a set of questions as a guide and is less rigid because the researcher has the freedom to digress and probe for more information if initial answers are vague, incomplete, off-topic, or not specific enough*" (p. 173). In other words, semi-structured interviews are interactive and meaningful because it allows the researcher to explore phenomena which things can go uneasily unnoticeable, like participants' perceptions and attitudes.

For the participants involved in the interview, participants were selected according to their performance in the immediate and delayed post-test. The selection was made based on those who performed well, who demonstrated slight progress and those who showed a decline in the performance of both post-tests. With regards to this selection criteria, 12 participants were chosen to explore learners' perceptions towards focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in terms of their impact on subject-verb agreement performance in their compositions.

In order to analyse the data for the interview, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested a six phase model. Additionally, Braun and Clarke (2006) further stated that thematic analysis is used to analyse different types of data to transcribe transcripts of interviews. Figure 3.3 below explains the six phases of thematic analysis.
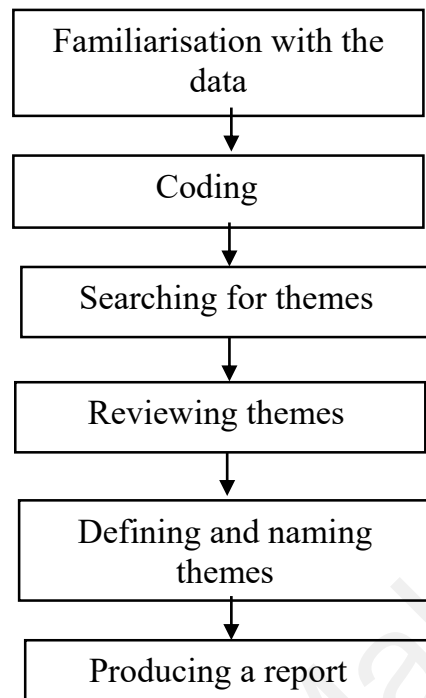
Figure 3.4   The six phases of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

Figure 3.4 shown above is an outline of the six phases of thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2005). The first phase, the familiarisation with the data, is significant for the researcher to engage and get familiarised with the data. The semi-structured interview conducted was a verbal data, hence, the data of the interview needed to be transcribed into written form in order to conduct the thematic analysis. To be familiarised with the data, the researcher was required to reread the transcribed data. Although this process was time-consuming, Braun & Clarke (2006) suggested that this step is important that it should not be skipped.

The second phase is coding. This phase involved the researcher to come up with a list of preliminary ideas about the content of the data and what was fascinating about them. Coding is an analytic process where it involved the researcher to code the data manually by writing notes and highlighting them to indicate potential patterns. With

regards to inter-coder reliability, the researcher asked an experienced teacher to code the responses from the semi-structured interviews in order to check the reliability of the coding. The index of the inter-rater coding was at 0.89, which means that the similarity of codes between the two coders is at 89%, which is deemed acceptable.

The third phase is searching for themes. This phase needed the researcher to sort different codes into potential themes. In order to search for themes, the researcher prepared visual representations to explore the relationship between codes, themes and different levels of themes.

The fourth phase is reviewing the themes. There are two levels involved in this phase. Level one required the researcher to read all the collected extracts from each theme and to ensure whether these extracts form a coherent pattern. If these extracts are coherent, the researcher will proceed to level two. If the extracts appeared to be incoherent, the researcher will consider the themes itself to be problematic and inappropriate. Level two, includes the similar process but it is related to the whole data set. The researcher also needed to consider the validity of the individual themes.

The fifth phase is defining and naming themes. During this phase, the researcher identified each theme and determined the aspect which the theme evolved because they will be presented for analysis.

The last phase is producing a report. At this final phase, the researcher provided a clear, logical and coherent report.

3.8   Chapter Summary

This chapter described the methods employed for this study, its participants, research instruments, research procedures and how the data has been analysed. In the following chapter, the findings of these analyses will be discussed further. The next chapter will describe and discuss the results obtain from the data collected.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.0   Introduction

This study investigated the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation on the accuracy of subject-verb agreement among L2 writers. This chapter outlined the results of the study which is reported according to the research questions. This chapter consists of two parts. Firstly, this chapter discusses the data analysis of the quantitative method which involves the first research question. While, the second part, discusses the qualitative data analysis which is related to the second research question. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation on subject-verb agreement towards L2 writers' compositions over a 10 week period?

2. How do students perceive focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in terms of their impact on subject-verb agreement performance in their compositions?

4.1   Data Analysis for Quantitative Study

In order to answer the first research question, there were a total of three sets of test scores gathered which are from pre-test (before the provision of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation), an immediate post-test (immediately after the provision of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation) and a delayed post-test (six weeks after the immediate post-test). Along with these three tests conducted, learners' written work test scores were gathered. During these three stages, the learners received focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation from the teacher. These corrections provided by the teacher entailed the indication of the errors committed by the learners. Additionally, this feedback approach also gives the correct form of the errors by the teacher.

To answer the first research question which is "*What are the effects of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation on subject-verb agreement towards L2 writers' compositions over a 10 week period*?" the accuracy scores were tabulated in Excel to measure the acquisition or accuracy performance of subject-verb agreement among the 27 participants. The accuracy scores for the three tests were calculated separately.

In order to compare the accuracy of subject-verb agreement in writing on the corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation provided, Table 4.1 was tabulated to provide the mean and standard deviation percentages of correct uses made across the three writing tests (pre-test, immediate and delayed post-tests).

Pre-test		Immediate post-test		Delayed post-test	
Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
38.55	23.85	38.52	23.43	39.62	24.00

Table 4.1: Mean and standard deviation percentage for the three tests.

As shown in Table 4.1, the mean percentage of correct uses of subject-verb agreement with the provision of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation is higher in the delayed post-test (M= 39.62). Learners who received this type of feedback made a mean percentage of correct uses of 38.55% in pre-test while the mean percentage in immediate post-test is 38.52%. The mean difference was only 0.03%. Although there was a slight decrease of mean percentage in immediate post-test (M= 38.52), the difference of the mean scores between immediate and delayed post-test is 1.1%. This showed that learners have showed improvement in their delayed post-test on the accuracy use of present tense in subject-verb agreement. Additionally, the results showed that the mean score continued to rise reaching significance difference in the delayed post-test (1.1%). Learners managed to retain their accuracy performance since significant changes or improvement is shown in the delayed post-test compared to the score means in the pre-test and immediate post-test.

Similar results were found in other studies that proved the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation. For example, in Bitchener and Knoch's (2010) study, by using a pre-test immediate post-test-delayed post-test design, the researchers stated that there was a consistent improvement in the accurate use of English articles in participants' writing task from pre-test to the immediate and delayed post-tests. The researchers also concluded that the group that received focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation had more opportunities to revise their written work compared to other groups. Not only that, similar findings were

yielded in Sheen's study (2009) which clearly indicated that the group who received the focused corrective feedback outperformed not only the control group but also unfocused group in the immediate post-test.

Meanwhile, the descriptive statistics of this study is presented in Table 4.2. The percentage of the number of correct uses made by all 27 learners forms the basis of comparison in this study. Subsequently, the marks were converted into percentage by dividing the overall number of correct usage with the number of total uses of present tense in factual compositions.

Test Students	Pre (Week 1)	Immediate Post (Week 4)	Delayed Post (Week 11)
Student 1#	31.00	31.5	32.44
Student 2	13.52	19.13	19.02
Student 3	9.00	7.12	8.18
Student 4*	52.00	57.13	59.37
Student 5#	87.13	88.12	88.15
Student 6$	76.13	74.21	71.19
Student 7	58.91	43.21	59.08
Student 8$	76.45	77.32	72.45
Student 9#	33.45	34.56	39.39
Student 10#	39.54	43.59	44.63
Student 11#	27.65	29.21	29.73
Student 12#	18.86	19.26	21.06
Student 13$	43.04	41.26	34.00
Student 14*	76.54	77.64	79.20

Student 15$	19.54	21.34	12.37
Student 16*	32.43	33.47	43.21
Student 17*	54.32	67.54	72.34
Student 18$	14.09	13.21	10.21
Student 19*	32.17	21.57	43.3
Student 20	21.21	16.3	18.86
Student 21$	66.12	65.12	63.09
Student 22#	10.98	11.23	12.0
Student 23#	11.34	23.9	24.5
Student 24*	21.37	22.54	26.67
Student 25#	15.19	18.27	19.0
Student 26$	65.43	53.21	54.32
Student 27	33.42	29.10	12.0

Table 4.2: Percentage of number of correct uses made in three tests.

* = showed significant improvement

 # = showed slight improvement

$ = showed no improvement

4.2   Results for Research Question 1

From Table 4.2, six students (student 4, 14, 16, 17, 19 and 24) showed significant improvement in accuracy from pre-test up to immediate and delayed post-tests. For student 4, the percentage of correct use in pre-test was 52%. In immediate post-test, the percentage of correct use was 57.13% and she made a significant improvement in her delayed post-test which was 59.37%. For student 14, he achieved 76.54% of correct uses. In immediate post-test, he showed a significant improvement

by increasing his accuracy by 77.64% in his revised written work and in his delayed post-test, he showed improvement of 79.20%, which is an increase of 1.56%. For students 16 and 17, they showed improvement in their delayed post-test by showing a drastic improvement of 43.21% and 72.34% respectively. Student 19, on the other hand, showed a massive improvement in her delayed post-test by achieving 43.3% of correct uses of subject-verb agreement whereby in her immediate post-test, she attained 21.57% of correct uses. For student 24, he showed a difference by 5.1% of improvement in his delayed post-test.

The results of these six students were partially supported by (Bitchener et. al, 2005; Bitchener and Knoch, 2008; Bitchener and Knoch, 2010; Sheen et.al, 2009; Sheen, 2007) argument that the provision of corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation is effective. This means that these six learners who showed significant improvement analysed the focused corrective feedback given to them attentively, understood their teacher's comments, noticed the accurate forms of the linguistic domain and produced a new piece of writing. Learners were able to use the knowledge they gained through the discussion whereby their teacher discussed about the errors, the correct form and other examples of the linguistic domain. Additionally, based on the responses from the semi-structured interviews, learners have responded that focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation given were effective. They also added that focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation is effective in improving their new piece of writing and encourages them to learn about the rules of present tense in subject-verb agreement.

However, focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation was only effective for these six learners since they have showed significant improvement. On the other hand, students 1, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 20, 22, 23 and 25 have showed only slight

improvement because they did not show a significant improvement in their delayed post-tests. Also, responses from semi-structured interviews revealed that learners felt very anxious and confused when they received their corrected drafts from their teacher. These learners felt confused and anxious because they were not too clear with the about the rules of the targeted linguistic feature which means that they did not know how to differentiate between present tense and past tense.

However, students 6, 8, 13, 18 and 26 did not benefit from the corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation provided because they did not show improvement in their accuracy in their delayed post-test. This might be due to their incompetency to understand the rules of subject-verb agreement or the inability to master the knowledge in a period of 10 weeks. This may be due to the learners' first language which is Mandarin that does not have structures of tenses like the English language. This finding is similar to Truscott and Hsu (2008) study which showed that corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation did not benefit the learners during their delayed post-test. Truscott (1996) also claimed that successful revisions do not ensure that students can become better writers because the knowledge learners gain from corrective feedback can be treated as short-term knowledge. Learners might not grasp the rules of the targeted linguistics and they are unable to use the correct form of subject-verb agreement in writing over time. The next subsection discusses the data analysis for the qualitative study.

4.3   Data Analysis for Quanlitative Study

In order to answer the second research question, students' interview transcriptions were analysed. There were a total number of 27 participants in this study. The selection of participants to be interviewed was made based on their performance on the immediate and delayed post-test. Hence, only 12 participants were selected for the interview based on their performance on the immediate and delayed post-test. In which the 27 participants were grouped into most improved, slight improvement and no improvement. The participants who had performed well were considered to be an important indication of the uptake of feedback being used and were selected for the interview. At the same time, participants who showed no improvement were also selected for the interview. This is to deduce the reasons that may impede the uptake and retention of the accurate use of the targeted linguistic forms. To answer the second research question, the interview transcriptions were coded.

Through the interview, learners' attitudes towards focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation, the problems faced by the learners during correction and suggestions on the provision of corrective feedback to improve learners' accuracy in subject-verb agreement were collected. Upon data analysis, three themes were emerged from the learners' responses; learners' attitudes towards focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation, motivation and scaffolding. The next section outlines each theme that emerged as well as providing examples of excerpts from the learners' responses during the semi- structured interview.

4.4   Results for Research Question 2

"How do students perceive focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in terms of their impact on subject-verb agreement performance in their compositions?"

In order to explore learners' perceptions towards focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in terms of their impact on subject-verb agreement performance in their compositions, face to face interview was conducted with 12 students. Before the interview, the participants were informed that they could respond in any language they were comfortable with. In this case, participants had the freedom to speak in Bahasa Malaysia or English or mixed languages with the researcher. This was carried out so that learners are comfortable to express their ideas. The next subsection discusses the three themes with examples of excerpts from participants' transcribed interview sessions.

4.4.1   Learners' attitude towards Corrective Feedback

Learners' attitudes towards corrective feedback provided is the most significant factor that influences the learners' performance in the usage of subject-verb agreement which is present tense in relation to focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation. From the interview data, students 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 out of 12 students expressed that focused corrective feedback was helpful. Meanwhile, two students expressed that they found focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation demotivating. This is because whenever they noticed their compositions were being corrected with red pen, they felt very anxious about it hence the learners were demotivated to revise their drafts. The excerpts for the five students are outlined below. (Note: excerpts have not been corrected for grammatical errors).

Researcher: What is your opinion about feedback that is given and the discussion? What is the impact on your writing?

Student 1: Well, I personally think that corrections are really useful especially when teacher corrects every single error that I make. Also, I feel that discussion we usually have about the corrections and other examples, they have really helped me like a lot rather than only the marked errors on my papers!

Student 2: Yeah, not just the feedback but also the discussion held during lessons were effective to help me write better.

Student 3: Yes, I think my writing has improved through the help of corrections my teacher gives for the mistakes I did.

Student 4: At first, I was not comfortable with the corrections I see on my writing. Eventually, I think it has helped me a lot especially through the explanations given during the discussion.

Student 5: Yes teacher, the corrections or feedback given by you was very helpful.

Figure 4.1: Students' responses towards their attitude of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation

As a general presupposition, Students 1 to 5 seemed to find corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation very useful. Additionally, learners also agreed that focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation given were effective in enhancing their new piece of writing. For example, students 1 and 3 favoured focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation because the teacher provided the corrected answers on top of the sentences. Similarly, findings from the quantitative approach showed that students 16, 17 and 19 showed significant improvement in their delayed post-tests. The findings clearly indicate that students 16, 17 and 19 have displayed positive attitude and have favoured the provision of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation.

Additionally, Student 2 mentioned that the discussion carried out in class was very helpful because it entailed the correct form of the mistakes committed and other examples of the similar linguistic category were provided. Student 2 also expressed that the discussions carried out in class have improved her writing skills. Student 4, however, mentioned that he initially felt very anxious about the corrections given by the teacher but after revising his new drafts, it helped him learn about the rules of present tense in subject-verb agreement better and has gradually improved his writing skills.

Additionally, students 1, 2 and 4 suggested that by only providing corrective feedback, it is totally insufficient to fully comprehend the rules of the targeted linguistic domain, instead, the discussion held by their teacher seemed to be effective in explaining the learners about the mistakes they have committed. In other words, a one to one individual conference (writing conference) between the teacher and the student is essentially needed. Hyland (2006) defined writing as "a two way interaction between teacher and student(s) where interpretation are constantly being negotiated by

participants and which provides both teaching and learning benefits". Additionally, researchers like Amrhein and Nassaji (2010), Tootkaboni and Khatib (2014) stated that learners who receive feedback in the form of conference between the learner and the teacher is considered to be a very good ground for interaction with the teacher. In relation to this, a study carried out by Savestani and Pishker (2015) indicated that the interaction between teachers and students help create better understanding of the targeted linguistic domain and will reinforce long-term memory.

Conversely, Student 6 and 7, expressed their concerns about the focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistics explanation given in class. When they received their corrected drafts, they felt very anxious and confused. Figure 4.2 below outlines the excerpt.

Researcher: What is your opinion about feedback that is given and the discussion? What is the impact on your writing?

Student 6: Ummm, I personally think that the corrections given are quite demotivating. Because I find them very confusing and I do not know how to use present tense and past tense in my writing

Student 7: It's not too bad. But, I get very disappointed when I see my writing is being corrected, especially with a red pen. But, I also feel it's useful and I don't have the need to revise my work because the corrections have been corrected because my grammar is bad.

Figure 4.2: Students' responses towards their attitude of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation

Student 6 stated the focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation she received was not feasible because she perceived that the focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation caused confusion hence she was not comfortable. She also expressed that she was confused because she did not know how to differentiate between present tense and past tense in her writing. Meanwhile, Student 7 has expressed his disappointment when he sees his mistakes being corrected with red pen on his essays. He also mentioned that the provision of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation have made him feel unnecessary to revise his written drafts. This phenomena may be linked to what Swain and Lapkin (2002) stated that, "*learners may reject the provision of feedback given by their teacher because they may perceive it violating their own beliefs about language conventions or altering their intended meaning*" (p. 299). Therefore, although Student 7 had mentioned the problems he faced with the feedback given initially, later on, he noted that the provision of

feedback was beneficial or helpful because he felt his grammar was weak and he needed help.

Therefore, the learners have expressed that from corrective feedback, their writing and sentence structures have improved. They also found that feedback and meta-linguistic explanation is useful because it enabled them to do their corrections. When learners are positively inclined with the provision of feedback and meta-linguistic explanation, they will feel comfortable to accept the feedback provided by their teacher.

It can be concluded that learners' attitudes have an impact on the strategies they use when they deal with the feedback. According to Hyland (2003), teachers need to be receptive towards learners' attitude when feedback is given. Not only that, most learners want their errors to be corrected so that they can write better. They perceive that a good piece of essay consists of error-free writing. The next subsection discusses the theme that emerged as well as providing examples of excerpts from the learners' responses during the semi- structured interview.

4.4.2 Motivation

Based on the responses collected from the learners, motivation is seen as an important factor that influences the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation in enhancing learners' accuracy in writing. For example, from the semi interview conducted with the 12 participants, two learners agreed that focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation motivated them tremendously in improving their new piece of writing. The excerpt is outlined in Figure 4.3.

Interviewer: What thoughts came onto your mind when you made the corrections after your pre-test?

Student 8: Erm, I wasn't taking the feedback and the session quite well during the first few weeks. But, later on, when I started revising my drafts and giving a new piece of writing, I was very motivated because I was able to realise my errors and feedback of the correct form given by the teacher. Also, I also feel that my writing has improved and I feel better to write now because I know my teacher is there for me if I'm unsure of anything.

Student 9: I am more interested to write now after the feedback session. I think my grammar has improved a lot. I am now able to notice my errors much earlier before submitting, thus avoids errors in my essays for the second time. I feel motivated to write or revise my writing when my errors have been corrected for me rather than just indicating them and also a discussion is being held to improve on my work.

Figure 4.3: Students' motivation towards teacher's corrective feedback.

Based on Figure 4.3, from the responses of students 8 and 9, student 8 has expressed that she was not motivated when she received the focused corrective feedback given by their teacher at the beginning stage. Later on, she was motivated to revise her drafts because she realised that her grammar has improved. Additionally, it is important to recognize that Student 8 was motivated to write because the presence of the teacher has indirectly motivated her to improve her grammar and revise her drafts. The findings from the quantitative approach revealed that students 6, 8, 13, 18 and 26 did not benefit from the focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation given because they did not show improvement in their delayed post-tests. This clearly specifies that learners were not motivated to receive their written tasks being corrected and they were weak in grammar. Thus, their accuracy in writing did not improve.

Student 9, on the other hand, mentioned that the focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation given by the teacher is useful to avoid repeating the same mistakes in her new piece of writing. Simultaneously, the student mentioned that she felt motivated to write more because the errors have been identified for her. Also, she mentioned that the 10 minutes discussion about the nature of the errors committed in her writing made her write better. She was not only motivated upon being provided with focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation, but she was also motivated to write more because she has shown improvement in her grammar.

Therefore, with focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation, it helps to enhance learners' writing. When learners are motivated to learn from the errors they have committed, they would not repeat the same errors for the second time in their new piece of writing. Thus, this improves their overall writing skills. The next subsection discusses the next theme emerged in research question 2.

4.4.3 Usage of Correction Codes

The usage of correction codes in helping learners with their writing has been proven to be an effective method to facilitate error correction (Ferdous, 2013). Based on the responses collected from the learners in semi-structured interviews, it has been noted that Student 5 favoured the usage of correction codes in revising her drafts. However, Student 9 responded that she did not favour the usage of correction codes. The excerpt is outlined in Figure 4.4.

Interviewer: Have you faced any difficulties in revising your drafts after the errors have been corrected for you and also the correction codes have been indicated?

Student 5: Since you have explained what these codes meant in class, I find it easier to rewrite my essay. On top of that, corrections were given. I think its useful teacher.

Student 9: I don't know how to analyse the correction codes. I didn't understand them either. But, since you corrected my errors, I didn't find it difficult to revise my writing.

Figure 4.4: Students' responses towards the usage of correction symbols

Based on Figure 4.4, from the responses of Student 5 and 9, Student 5 has expressed that correction codes have helped her to notice the mistakes she has committed and thus have helped her to correct them accordingly. Student 5 also stated that she became more confident and active in her writing because she knew how to distinguish the error types. Alternatively, Student 9 expressed that rather than just indicating the errors using the correction codes, she felt comfortable to write when the teacher corrected all the errors for her. On the other hand, student 9 preferred having the old-fashioned way whereby the teachers provided the corrections for her. Student 9 has also mentioned that she faced confusion trying to distinguish all correction codes introduced by her teacher in class because she was weak in grammar. Therefore, she did not prefer to see the correction symbols on their writing.

Therefore, it is noted that the usage of correction symbols is effective in helping the learners to correct their new piece of writing and it proven to be an effective method in facilitating error correction (Farhana Ferdous, 2012). At the same time, it is important for teachers to know whether students have grasped the function of each correction symbol before they are being practised in class. If the learner is unable to distinguish

the correction symbols, confusion will take place and will affect their language accuracy particularly in writing. Overall, learners have expressed that their writing has improved through the provision of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation. The next subsection discusses the next theme emerged in research question 2.

4.4.4   Scaffolding

Scaffolding can be defined as a process in which learners are given guidance or support until they can apply new skills and strategies independently (Rosenshine and Meister, 1992, as cited in Larkin, 2002). Additionally, Bitchener and Ferris (2012) stated that when learners get the sufficient amount of scaffolding from teachers or their more advanced peers, they can eventually be independent (i.e. able to use the L2 autonomously).

There are several ways how scaffolding can be carried out in language learning. Scaffolding can be done in four ways suggested by Ellis and Larkin (1998). Firstly, is "*the teacher does it*". In this method, the teacher models how to perform a new or difficult task by using the thinking loud method. Second way is through "*the class does it*". In this way, the teacher and learners work together to perform the task. Thirdly, "*the group does it*" is a way used when learners work together with their peers or small groups of peers to perform the task. Finally, the fourth way is "*the individual does it*". In this stage, the individual will demonstrate their task mastery independently and receive practice to help them perform the task automatically and quickly.

In this study, scaffolding was carried out through what is defined by Ellis and Larkin (1998), '*the teacher does it', 'the group does it'*, and '*the individual does it'*.

'*The teacher does it*' was used when the teacher worked together with the students when the students could not get answers after a few attempts. The situation is illustrated in the excerpt below.

4.4.4.1 First type of scaffolding – "*The teacher does it*"

Interviewer: What do you usually do when you see your work is being corrected?

Student 10: At first, I was so confused to see my essays being corrected. After you told me how my errors are being corrected with examples, then only I understood. After I understood, I felt better doing the corrections.

Figure 4.5: Student's response towards the first type of scaffolding

In Figure 4.5, Student 10 expressed that she was a little confused about how her errors were being corrected. She also mentioned that when the teacher gave her some examples during the discussion and she could understand the approach of this feedback. Besides that, the help from the teacher via examples also facilitated her corrections. This indicated that through the 10 minutes discussion, the student was able to understand the errors she had committed and how to avoid these errors in her new piece of writing. As mentioned by Ellis and Larkin (1998), in the initial *Teacher* stage of this scaffolding process, the teacher will introduce and model the tasks for learners. In other words, in "*the teacher does it*" method, the teacher models how to perform a new or difficult task by using the thinking aloud method. In this case, the teacher introduced the errors via the provision of correct from and examples.

Additionally, the "*group does it*" process of the scaffolding occurs when learners seek help from their peers for answers and clarification. The situation is elucidated below.

4.4.4.2 Second type of scaffolding – "*The group does it*"

Interviewer: What do you usually do when you see your work is being corrected?

Student 11: I was very confused. I didn't like to see my see my words and essays were corrected. I know I am weak in grammar. But I couldn't understand what the corrections and examples meant. So, I asked few of my classmates who are good in grammar and English and yeah, I got them right and I finally understood what all these corrections meant.

Figure 4.6: Student's response towards the second type of scaffolding.

In Figure 4.6, Student 11 mentioned that he did not understand the way his errors were being corrected. So, he worked together with his peers who are good in grammar and English language to correct his writing task. Hence, the second type of scaffolding is "*the group does it*". In this, the teacher and learners work together to perform the task. Working cooperatively together with his friend facilitated him to do his corrections. Additionally, through cooperative learning, learners get a chance to verbally communicate with their peers and learn about grammar at the same time. These discussions allowed them to process the errors they have committed and notice or learn how their errors are being corrected. Therefore, according to Ellis and Larkin (1998), this stage involves guided practice and peer-mediated practice. This is highly important because learners may learn a lot from their peers as they do from teachers. Also, this stage is seen to be effective because learners are given the opportunity to interact among their peers.

Lastly, "*the individual does it*" was used when learners independently tried to solve the problems without the help of their teacher and peers. The example is shown below.

4.4.4.3 Third type of scaffolding – "*The individual does it*"

Interviewer: What do you usually do when you see your work is being corrected?

Student 12: Once I saw my errors are being corrected, I was able to understand and do my corrections because the feedback given was clear enough for me to comprehend.

Figure 4.7: Student's response towards the third type of scaffolding.

In Figure 4.7, Student 12 stated that with the provision of corrective feedback on her essays, she was able to do the corrections without the assistance of her teacher and peers. She did not find the feedback confusing because it was clear and easy to comprehend. At this stage, Student 12 can independently demonstrate mastery in her writing task and becomes less dependent. According to Ellis and Larkin (1998), when learners are at their "*individual stage*", it gives them the opportunity to practise the task to build fluency. In other words, when learners have the knowledge based on the task given, they become independent. For Student 12, she was independent with the feedback she received and was capable to solve the problem on her own.

In line with the findings of the present study, a study conducted by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994), their study had similar findings related to scaffolding in written corrective feedback. Both researchers conducted a longitudinal study with adult L2 learners who received one-to-one written feedback on their writing assignments that

took place on a weekly basis. Their study focused on Vygotsky's notion of ZPD and the findings of their study revealed that effective error correction and language learning solely depend on the support learners receive from their teacher or more advanced peers. Learners are more engaged when they work with other individuals in the form of constructive feedback are able construct a ZPD because this type of feedback serves as a scaffold guidance.

Researchers like Olson and Pratt (2000) have mentioned that language teachers must scaffold learners with instructors that are slightly beyond their proficiency level. With this, learners might comprehend certain linguistic rules that the teacher has taught them in class but learners may not be able to correct the errors by themselves. This is due to insufficient reading and practising to converse in their L2. Therefore, scaffolding becomes important for learners because learning a language is not something an individual does it alone, but through the aid of other individuals.

4.5   Chapter Summary

This chapter outlines the findings of this study. The findings were discussed with reference to the two research questions outlined for this study. In relation to the effectiveness of written corrective feedback, the findings of this study did not support Truscott's claim (1996); "*Corrective feedback is ineffective because it is detrimental to students' language learning development".* The findings of this study revealed that focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation contributed to the accuracy gain of the usage of present tense in subject-verb agreement within the period of 10 weeks.

Additionally, semi structured interviews were conducted to find out insights from learners. Three main themes were identified namely learners' attitudes towards corrective feedback, motivation and three types of scaffolding *("the teacher does it, "the group does it" and "the individual does it").*

The next chapter will summarize the key findings and present the theoretical, research and pedagogical implications. The last part of the chapter will also discuss the limitations and provide suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5: OVERVIEWS OF FINDINGS

5.0   Introduction

This chapter presents the overviews of findings for this study. This chapter consists of four subsections. Firstly, the key findings is presented. Secondly, the research and pedagogical implication of the research are outlined. Thirdly, suggestions and limitations are provided and identified. Finally, conclusion is given in the last section of this chapter.

5.1   Summary of the key findings

Figure 5.1 below shows the summary of the findings of this study.

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                        ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                        │  The Effect of Focused Corrective │
                        │  Feedback and Meta-linguistic     │
                        │  Explanation                      │
                        └─────────────────────────────────┘
                            ↙                        ↘
        ┌─────────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────────┐
        │   Research Question 1    │      │   Research Question 2    │
        └─────────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────────┘
```

Research Question 1

- Learners have showed improvement in their delayed post-test on the accurate use of present tense in subject-verb agreement.
- Learners managed to retain their accuracy performance since significant changes or improvement is shown in the delayed post-test compared to the score means in the pre-test and immediate post-test.

Research Question 2

a. Learners' attitudes towards corrective feedback

- Five out of 12 learners expressed that focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation are effective in enhancing learners' new piece of writing when teacher corrected their answers.

b. Motivation

- Learners are motivated to improve their writing when errors are being corrected.
- They would not repeat the same errors in their new piece of writing.

c. Scaffolding

Types of scaffolding that influence performance of the students in the use of present tense

a. The teacher does it

- The teacher helps by introducing the error codes, explaining and using the guideline paper as well as examples.

b. The group does it

- Students involve in a guided practice and together discover their interpretations of errors.

c. The individual does it

- Students involve in a student-mediated practice and independently solve the problem.

d. Usage of Marking Codes

- Learners have expressed that correction codes have helped them notice their mistakes committed and thus have helped them correct the errors accordingly.
- Learners mentioned that the usage of marking codes encouraged them to be more confident and active in their writing. Thus, it facilitated error correction.
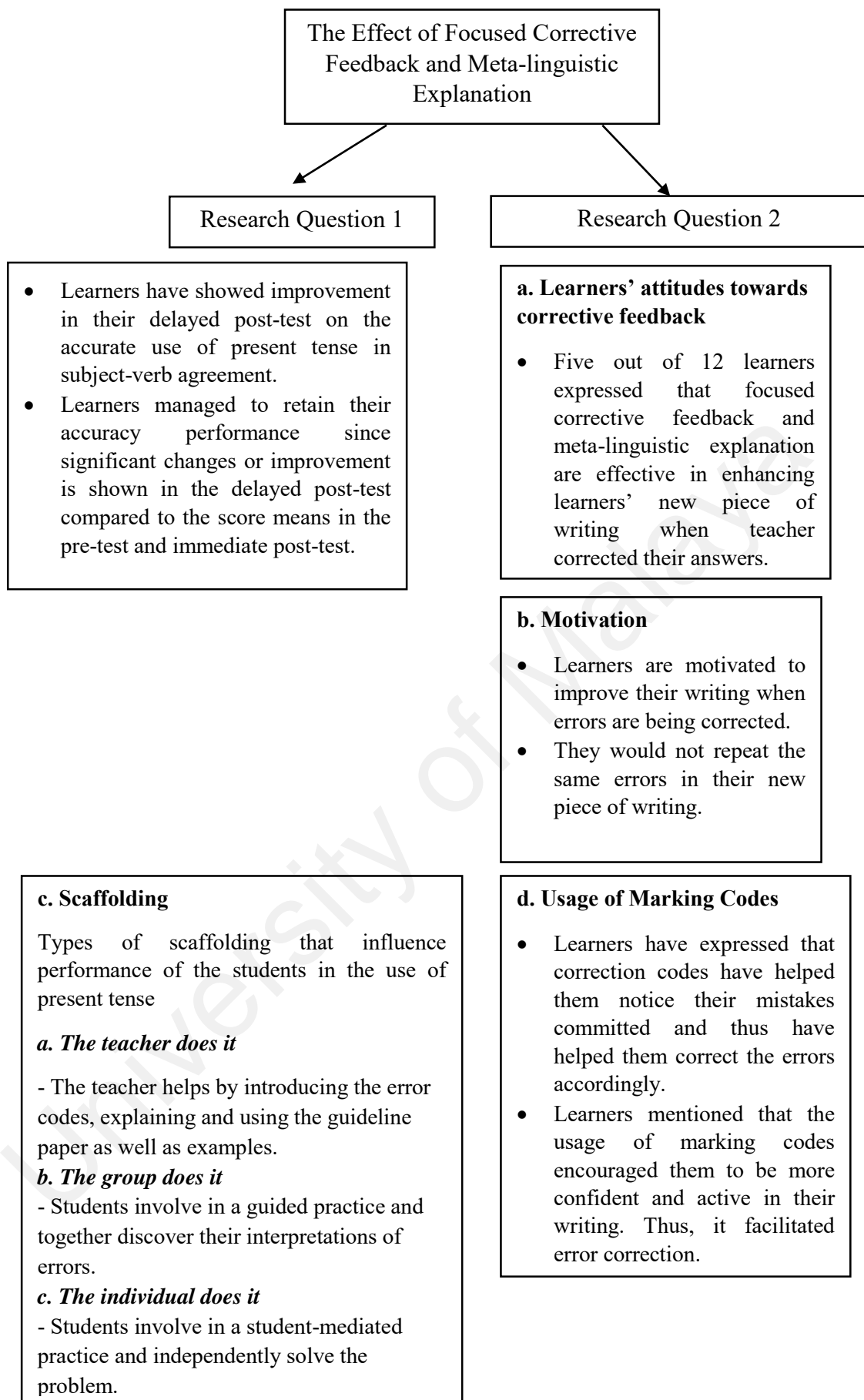
Figure 5.1   Summary of findings

Figure 5.1 explains the results from the research questions which are outlined for this study. The findings from the first research question revealed that learners have shown improvement in their delayed post-test on the accuracy use of present tense in subject-verb agreement. Additionally, the results showed that the score means continued to increase in reaching significance difference in the delayed post-test (1.1%) which clearly indicates that learners managed to retain their accuracy. Learners were able to use the knowledge they gained through the discussion whereby their teacher discussed about the errors, the correct form and other examples of the linguistic domain.

On the other hand, findings from the second research question revealed three emergent themes from the responses of semi-structured interviews. Firstly, learners' attitudes towards feedback provided. Five out of 12 participants who were interviewed by the researcher did not reject the provision of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation given as it helped them to write better. Also, learners favoured focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation because the teacher provided the correct answers on top of the sentences.

Secondly, motivation. Learners expressed that errors have been identified and corrected for them. Therefore, they were tremendously motivated to learn from the errors they have committed as they would not repeat the same errors in their new piece of writing.

Finally, the findings revealed that different types of scaffolding also serves as one of the factors that influences students' performance in the use of present tenses. There are three types of scaffolding involved in this study. Firstly, is "*the teacher does*

it". The teacher works together with the students by introducing the error codes, explaining and using the guideline paper as well as examples when the students could not get answers after a few attempts. The second type of scaffolding is "*the group does it*" is when learners seek help from their peers for answers and clarification. Finally, is "*the individual does it*", when learners independently attempt to solve the problems without the help of their teacher and peers. The next section discusses the implications of the study.

5.2 Implications of the Study

This section consists of three parts, which are theoretical implications, research implications and pedagogical implications. The theoretical implications will be discussed in the next section.

5.2.1 Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications of this study are related to theoretical understanding of the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985), which are the noticing function and hypothesis-testing function. The Output Hypothesis emphasized that learners must be pushed in order to produce output in their L2 to enhance their grammatical accuracy. In other words, when learners are actively engaged in using their L2, it provides them the opportunity to produce the output. In this study, when the focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation are given by their teacher, the learners are being allowed to notice the errors being indicated for them and to revise their drafts. Furthermore, learners avoid repeating the same error in their new piece of writing hence improving their grammatical accuracy over a period of time. Thus, it would be seen that meta-linguistic explanation also allows learners to be more attentive towards their own

errors by noticing the correct form and examples given by their teacher and pushes them to be more cautious when producing their output in writing. Not only that, the meta-linguistic explanation also stimulates learners to engage in two ways. Firstly, in guided learning, the teacher guides the learners with some brief comments on the nature of errors on their written work. Secondly, for problem solving, the learners notice the feedback given their teacher and rewrite their new piece of writing without repeating the errors. In conclusion, it promotes greater effects on learners' uptake and retention. The following subsection discusses the research implications of this study.

5.2.2   Research Implications

The sample size in this study is rather small (n=27) hence the findings of this study may not represent all ESL learners in Malaysia. A larger sample of learners can be used in the future in order to investigate more conclusively whether focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation is effective in improving learners' accuracy in writing.

Besides the sample size, timing of the study is also regarded as an important factor when a study is carried out. In this study, one of the reasons why the number of correct uses made in the pre-test was lower than the post-tests may be due to the timing when the pre-test was conducted. The pre-test of this study was conducted when the learners were preparing for their examination. Learners were assumed to not regard the test seriously as they did during the post-test because they were busy getting prepared for their school examination. Hence, it is highly crucial that the timing of a study is well-planned so that learners' performance does not vary significantly, especially if the

researcher wishes to carry out a longitudinal study. The following subsection discusses the pedagogical implications of this study.

5.2.3 Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study revealed that focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation is an effective method to be used in L2 classes in enhancing learners' accuracy in writing. When teachers provide learners with a particular linguistic domain (present tense) on learners' written texts, it enables learners to focus only on one linguistic domain and improve their revised drafts as well as their writing overtime.

It is recommended that teachers should provide corrective feedback according to learners' proficiency level. For instance, for beginner level or intermediate learners, teachers should start off by providing focused or direct corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation. This encourages them to notice the errors they have committed and gives them the ability to notice the correct form. Similarly, meta-linguistic explanation helps students to clear their confusion related to the errors identified by their teacher. Additionally, for advanced ESL learners, teacher can provide indirect feedback instead of direct corrective feedback because indirect feedback encourages learners to think. Also, advanced ESL learners have the competency to self-correct their own errors. All students from this study are intermediate learners of English and they have expressed that focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation is an effective tool because it helps them to produce lesser number of errors in their revised drafts. The recommendations for future research are discussed in the next section.

5.3   Recommendations for Future Research

The total number of participants who took part in this study was 27 intermediate ESL learners. The findings of this study revealed that ESL intermediate learners have the ability of enhance their accuracy in present tense if they are exposed to focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation. Therefore, further research is recommended if the findings also apply to L2 learners from other proficiency levels.

Secondly, the time spent before the immediate and delayed post-test interval was rather short, which was only six weeks (Week 4 to Week 10). The findings of this study yielded that the learners performed better in the delayed post-test and they improved in the usage of present tense. However, in order to observe a more consistent pattern in improvement of the target structure, it is suggested that further research is conducted to investigate the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback and meta-linguistic explanation more longitudinally.

Thirdly, further studies should be carried out to investigate the effectiveness of both focused corrective feedback and unfocused corrective feedback. In this study, only focused corrective feedback was used. By focusing on both focused and unfocused corrective feedback, the researcher can compare the effectiveness of both feedback types and hence find out the efficacy of each type of corrective feedback.

Fourthly, the targeted linguistic form in this study was focused solely on present tense. Present tense errors are treatable errors because they are governed by a set of rules. Therefore, more studies delving in different grammatical errors (articles, prepositions and past tense) are needed. According to Siti Nor Aisyah (2018), different

types of grammatical errors require different types of corrections which might require a combination of strategy training and direct correction.

Fifthly, it is highly crucial that the timing for future studies is well-planned so that learners' performance does not vary significantly, especially if the researcher wishes to carry out a longitudinal study. In this study, the learners were assumed to not regard the test seriously as they did during the post-test because they were busy getting prepared for their school examination.

Next, it is suggested that future researchers should handle the responses gathered in semi- structured interviews from learners with care. This is because the participants' responses may vary according to the learners' attitude, motivation and their needs or preference.

Finally, this present study did not include a control group. In order to explore the efficacy of corrective feedback, there should be a control group to compare the results. Therefore, in this study, the findings from Research Question 1 should be treated cautiously because this study did not include a control group the compare the effectiveness of the treatment. It is suggested that future researcher to use a control group in order to compare the performance of learners and to explore the uptake of corrective feedback in improving learners' accuracy use of present tense in their writing.

5.4   Conclusion

Undertaking this research study has been an invaluable learning experience for the researcher. The researcher has gained knowledge and understanding of the nature of research process. For example, the researcher has learnt that the data collection process can be tedious, time consuming and messy. Additionally, the findings of this study has provided some key ideas which have guided the researcher in examining professional values as a language practitioner especially in relation to future practice that is linked to how to provide focused corrective feedback catering learners' needs such as; attitudes, motivation, desires to learn, and learners' first language. The findings provided some guidance to the researcher in dealing with learners' attitudes towards second language learning, particularly corrective feedback in writing. For example, the researcher gives focus on whether learners have shown favourable attitudes towards the provision the corrective feedback given in class. Also, consideration is given by teachers on learners' attitudes which are influenced by their cultural background or interference of first language towards corrective feedback that may affect their accuracy in L2. This research process has also given the researcher an opportunity to view whether corrective feedback is effective in order to give students a chance to get the language right in the Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) context. Lastly, this study has furnished the researcher with a myriad of reliable resources from past studies by which second language practitioners can learn in order to lead an effective teaching practice.

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