



The role of feedback in the writing competence of Foreign Language English students in Andalusia

El rol del feedback en la competencia escrita de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera en Andalucía

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Abstract

While a growing body of research has been carried out in the last decade to investigate how to develop students' feedback literacy in higher education, studies in English Language Teaching in secondary education are scanty. The main objective of this study, undertaken in the 3rd year of compulsory secondary education, is to investigate how pupils and the supervising teacher perceived feedback prior to a cycle of action-research interventions. Moreover, it aims at looking into the effects of the intervention on students' feedback literacy and writing competence in English. To this end, the study was conducted combining both quantitative and qualitative research instruments: two Likert-scale questionnaires, a semi-structure interview and a writing portfolio. Feedback literacy, understood as the dispositions, understandings, and commitment to applying feedback, was trained to boost students' writing through feedback workshops. Learners engaged in activities to discuss, decode, and act upon the feedback they received after submitting three writing tasks. The results suggest that students gained strategies to spot and correct their own mistakes, developed writing fluency, and came to appreciate the usefulness of feedback in taking an active role in their own learning.

Keywords: Feedback literacy, writing, secondary education, EFL

Resumen

En la última década, se ha podido ver un aumento de investigaciones con el fin de estudiar cómo implementar el feedback en la competencia escrita de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera en la Educación Superior; sin embargo, estos estudios en Educación Secundaria son escasos. El objetivo principal de este estudio, realizado en el tercer curso de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria, es investigar cómo el alumnado y el profesor supervisor perciben la retroalimentación antes de un ciclo de intervenciones de investigación-acción. Además, se pretende estudiar los efectos de la intervención en los alumnos en cuanto al feedback que reciben en la competencia escrita en inglés. Para ello, el estudio se llevó a cabo combinando instrumentos de investigación cuantitativos y cualitativos: dos cuestionarios de escala Likert, una entrevista semiestructurada y un portafolio de escritura. La estrategia de la alfabetización en el feedback, entendida como la disposición, la comprensión y el compromiso para aplicar la retroalimentación, se llevó a cabo en este estudio para potenciar la escritura de los estudiantes a través de talleres de retroalimentación o feedback. Los estudiantes participaron en actividades para discutir, decodificar y actuar sobre el feedback que recibieron después de presentar tres tareas de escritura. Los resultados sugieren que los estudiantes adquirieron estrategias para detectar y corregir sus

propios errores, desarrollaron la fluidez de la escritura y llegaron a apreciar la utilidad de la retroalimentación para asumir un papel activo en su propio aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: alfabetización en el feedback; escritura; Educación Secundaria; ILE

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Introduction

Research into how to give efficient feedback has shifted in the last two decades to developing students' capacity to deal with feedback so that they can become capable of judging and editing their work and adapting to new scenarios after finishing their studies. Experts in this area are interested in finding how to systematically incorporate feedback literacy in the curriculum in an era where the value and role of feedback are no longer questioned nor contested (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Carless & Boud, 2018; Malecka et al., 2020).

Although feedback literacy was initially defined as “the ability to read, interpret and use written feedback” (Sutton, 2012, p. 31), Carless and Boud (2018) later expanded this definition to “the understandings, capacities and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies” (p. 1316). However, studies on how to develop feedback literacy in secondary education are limited, as most research on the topic has been carried out in higher education. In this regard, Berggren (2015) argues, “the context and conditions of secondary-school instruction differ from those of university in a number of ways, such as scope, time available for a specific task, and the students' proficiency level” (p. 59). Berggren also claims that traditional assessment techniques are still overused in primary and secondary education.

For instance, Cindrić and Pavić (2017) conducted a survey into the frequency, characteristics, and teachers' competence regarding feedback practice among Croatian teachers of English. They found that teachers tend to give students oral feedback to ensure they remember the points covered in previous lessons. However, only half of the participants claimed to use delayed feedback frequently, while the other half stated that they use it occasionally or not at all. In Ketonen et al. (2020), student feedback literacy in secondary education was explored for the first-time paying attention to the different dimensions of feedback and using a reference framework. The results in Ketonen et al. (2020) yielded two important discoveries. On the one hand, they described stages of development for feedback literacy divided into three categories: understanding of the purpose of feedback, engagement, and interpretation of received feedback, and engagement in making revisions. On the other hand, the researchers tracked their development in these three categories showing that students make progress at different rates across the three dimensions.

One of the main challenges in developing feedback literacy in the curriculum is identifying pertinent curricular proposals. Research also shows that learning to interpret feedback is a challenge for students, who need to change and adapt to new academic identities, gain self-confidence, and willingness to cope with criticism. However, as for teachers, this means not assuming that students are constantly anxious when receiving feedback. Carless and Boud (2018) shed light on defining general principles of what constitutes student feedback literacy. Their framework comprises four processes: appreciation of feedback, making judgments, managing affect, and taking action. These processes can serve as guidelines for establishing appropriate conditions, understanding feedback literacy descriptors, and expanding feedback practice horizons. Learning to make judgments can take different forms, e.g., by examining exemplars or engaging in peer assessment. When learners receive feedback, they need to manage affect, which might require adopting new attitudes, and for teachers, this would comprise finding the right feedback tone and establishing conditions when the source of feedback is a classmate.

Finally, the descriptors in the expanded framework of Molloy et al. (2020) also indicate that taking action in feedback literacy not only implies making plans but also identifying and documenting

relevant feedback for its use in the long-run and examining work in progress to determine at what point students need to seek feedback from other sources or other people (Burns, 2010).

The present study investigated techniques to prevent students in the 3rd year of compulsory secondary education from reading feedback about their texts written in the English class superficially or even plainly ignoring it. Therefore, the main and specific objectives of this research are the following:

O.1 To analyze how feedback is given and processed in a secondary English class

O.1.1. To explore what perceptions secondary school students, have about feedback.

O.1.2 To investigate the techniques that the supervising teacher (dis)favors when giving feedback, how frequently the teacher gives feedback, and how preconceived notions of feedback contribute to following up the enactment of feedback.

O.2 To evaluate the effects of backfeed techniques on students' writing skills and feedback literacy.

O.2.1 To assess the development of the feedback literacy after attending feedback workshops.

O.2.2 To observe the effects of feedback workshops on students' texts.

Method

Participants

The study was carried out in an English as a foreign language course of 26 students in the 3rd year of Secondary Education. They had four sixty-minute sessions a week. In addition, two of their subjects were taught in English (five hours a week in total for both courses), two more CLIL subjects offered instruction in French (also five hours a week in total), and students attended a French course (three hours a week). The students' age ranged from 14 to 15 years old. All of the students but one reported Spanish as their mother tongue (L1). The student who reported not being Spanish speaking was a Russian student who had recently moved to Spain and was learning Spanish. Most of the learners had been diagnosed at level A2 at the beginning of the school year and were working towards a level B1 and a few towards B2. Concerning the students' social and cultural backgrounds, it is worth mentioning that many of them attend extra-curricular programs in music, dance, and language courses. The parents' commitment was described as high in general according to a survey conducted by the secondary school, which contributes to low school failure rates. It is worth mentioning that the teacher that was interviewed is also part of the sample.

Study Design and Instruments

This study follows a mixed method approach to achieve the defined main objectives combining both quantitative and qualitative research instruments. Within the first main objective, to attain the first specific objective 'to explore the group's perception of feedback (O.1.1)', a questionnaire consisting of Likert-scale items was prepared. This instrument is in part based on Malecka's (2019) questionnaire on the enactment of feedback for writing. The aspects to explore were how often students receive feedback, how they implement the feedback they receive, what actions they undertake when their English teachers make comments or corrections to their texts, and how frequently they react with self-defense when they receive feedback. This instrument was implemented before the first intervention to explore attitudes towards feedback and define appropriate teaching techniques.

Moreover, the specific objective O.1.2 of this research was to inquire into the teachers' feedback attitudes and favored and disfavored techniques. To accomplish this objective, Hyland's and Hyland's (2001) semi-structured interview was chosen. The interview explores attitudes to teaching writing, approaches used for giving written feedback, expectations of students' actions once they have been provided with feedback, and reflections on his experiences giving feedback. The interview lasted about 40 minutes. The interview was first transcribed in its totality, reviewed for accuracy, and coded for thematic analysis (Braun, & Clarke, 2006).

With the second main objective, this study evaluates the impact of backfeed techniques, i.e., techniques to engage students in the interpretation and uptake of feedback (Malecka, 2019), on the students' feedback literacy and writing skills. For the first specific objective (O.2.1), a questionnaire was prepared and implemented at the end of the teaching practicum to assess the degree of development of both areas. The questionnaire includes two open-ended and 11 Likert-type scale questions. The open-

ended items inquire into the change of perceptions of the role of feedback in enhancing their drafts and ask participants what improvements they would suggest for the writing project. The Likert-scale questions get students to assess the received feedback in terms of effectiveness, clarity, complexity, dialogic nature, amount of time, increased awareness of weaknesses, motivational drive to enact feedback, and affective impact.

The second specific objective (O.2.2.) was to track the influence of written feedback and the effect of feedback workshops on students' texts. In this case, the research tool was a learning material, a writing portfolio. The data collected with this instrument does not aim to measure how many of the mistakes identified were corrected quantitatively; instead, it was a tool for the teacher to track students' most frequent mistakes, individual strengths and weaknesses, and gains in their writing competence.

Teaching interventions

The teaching interventions were three-folded. Firstly, an initial training introduced students to an editing code consisting of eight symbols, provided them with guidance to correct mistakes using the editing code and promoted discussion as a group about the advantages of a correction code. Secondly, a series of procedures were followed to support students during the writing sessions. Writing was always preceded by work on other skills. Moreover, the approaches to student writing adopted in the lessons were: an approach on the process, through which stages of planning, drafting, editing, and re-drafting were followed; and a genre approach, which guided learners through typical discursive features, functions, layout, structuring, and register of the different text types presented in the interventions. Thirdly, feedback workshops took place. The concept of feedback workshops consciously articulates a design of activities for facilitating the four processes of Carless' and Boud's (2018) framework of feedback literacy. Thus, the feedback workshops strive to provide the conditions for appreciating feedback, learning to make judgments about their performance in the writing tasks, creating a safe space for students to manage affect, and giving students time and resources to take action. This proposal attempts to include Malecka et al.'s (2020) principles for incorporating feedback literacy in the curriculum as a central goal for foreign language learning.

The workshops of feedback had three main stages. First, students were elicited to share how they had felt during the previous writing task. At this stage, students told the teacher on several occasions where a task might have needed more time allocation and commented where they struggled. This stage was ideal for giving feedback at the level of the process and exchange ideas on how to redirect efforts during the prewriting stage. The class also discussed how to exploit the text models used in the writing sessions, paraphrase when their vocabulary was not rich enough.

Process of Analysis

After coding and tabulating the data, a descriptive analysis of the frequencies was carried out. Statistical analysis was performed with SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences, v. 20.0, for Windows; SPSS Inc, Chicago) and Nvivo-11 for the qualitative data.

Results and Discussion

The results are presented below according to each of the specific objectives set out:

O.1.1. To explore what perceptions secondary school students, have about feedback.

Before implementing the teaching interventions to enhance feedback, students were given a questionnaire to explore their perceptions regarding feedback. Students stated that they received little feedback, 13 students (54,14%) reported receiving it sometimes. However, a fourth of the student sample (25%) and the mean (2,87) indicate a tendency toward "sometimes" and "rarely". Combined, the options "often" or "always" amount to less than 17%, indicating that learners do not get feedback frequently.

The results obtained for questions 2 and 3 ('Do you incorporate the feedback you receive in your following tasks?' and 'What do you usually do when your English teacher makes comments or corrections to your texts?') are both compelling and contradictory. The mean in the students' answers to

the former question shows that students tend to incorporate the feedback with some frequency. Even though the standard deviation (1.18) shows variation among students' responses, the tendency tends to gravitate toward the frequent spectrum. Nevertheless, when students are asked what they usually do when their teacher gives them feedback, a significant majority stated that they do so by thinking about how to improve it. In their framework, Carless and Boud (2018) claim that taking action is one of the four processes in their framework that indicate feedback literacy. Hence, these results indicate low levels in the readiness to enact feedback.

Question 4 aimed at inquiring into how students manage to affect their emotions when receiving feedback. With a mean of 2.25, the results indicate that the class does not seem to experience negative emotions, i.e., frustration or discouragement, when reading their teachers' comments. As a matter of fact, adding both values "never" and "rarely" constitute more than 66.67%. Nevertheless, attention should still be given to the feedback tone since a class segment often or always reacts negatively to it.

Another interesting finding has to do with question 5, a multiple-choice item that provided students with a list of 10 techniques for teaching writing. Students were asked to choose three from the list that, in their view, are the most conducive to learning to write in English. Similar to the results found in Malecka's study (2019) with students in higher education, the most valuable technique rated by learners was getting all their mistakes corrected by the teacher. Malecka (2019) explains this preference as resulting from a combination of factors, including the "previous experiences where students were not given enough opportunities to receive feedback; feedback may be seen as a commentary on both the work and the person that work and interpreted as posing a threat" (p. 44). The following two most often selected techniques were preparing multiple drafts until arriving at final versions and analyzing models of sample texts, i.e., exemplars. This might be an indication that students recognize the potential of activities that require them to engage in the writing process while at the same time expecting mistakes to be corrected by an expert. Moreover, when asked to reflect on the most conducive scenario to improve writing, they stated that drafting and redrafting might play an important role.

Studies on how feedback is processed indicate that the perceptions teachers and students in higher education have play a detrimental role in how feedback is viewed, given, and used. For example, Mahfoodh (2007) studied that the emotional responses in students triggered by written comments, and Hyland and Hyland (2001) studied the effect of praise on students when they receive feedback. However, these studies have traditionally been carried out in higher education. Researchers in secondary schools have worked with students around the same age as the target group of this study in Sweden and Finland and offered reference points of how teenagers acquire feedback literacy (Berggren, 2015; Ketonen et al. 2020).

Berggren (2015) explored the effects of peer feedback on a group of 14- to 15-year-old teenagers in Year 8 in a secondary school in Sweden. As described by the researcher, through social networking and international exchanges, learners in Sweden have extensive exposure to English outside the classroom. The English proficiency level of the target group had been diagnosed at levels B1 and B2 before the intervention, and for the researcher, "due to their exposure to extramural English, these teenagers are in many ways in charge of their own language learning" (p. 58). Berggren prepared a teaching unit that trained two groups of correspondingly 15 and 11 students in peer feedback to prompt improvement in their writing skills. In a unit consisting of six one-hour sessions, students reviewed the genre of reply letters by analyzing sample texts, preparing a list of criteria to be taken into account, and writing the first draft of a reply letter. Then, they looked at what areas they could give feedback to, did a peer-review activity in consensus groups, and edited their reply letters using the feedback comments from their classmates. Her results suggest that the intervention triggered enhancements in their reply letters and allowed for improvements in two areas: adapting the content to address the audience and making changes according to the genre. While 57% of the corrections in these two areas can be attributed to peer feedback, the remaining 43% were made by the learners. Moreover, peer review did not significantly influence linguistic appropriacy, i.e., morpho-syntactical structures, punctuation, or spelling. Berggren attributes this lack of improvement in formal linguistic aspects to students' lack of metacognitive knowledge about grammar and spelling rules.

Berggren's work is insofar relevant as it is one of the few research projects in secondary education. Compared to students in secondary school in Andalusia, her focus groups have many

differences in student ratio per classroom, level of proficiency, and exposure to English. In addition, teenagers in Spain are much less likely to receive the same amount of input by listening and reading in English outside the classroom. Nevertheless, Berggren's study did not aim to explore how to improve feedback literacy over time, and its effects seem to be limited to some areas. Finally, it does not offer any insight into how students' understandings and dispositions to feedback changed during the study, i.e., its contributions to feedback literacy.

Ketonen et al. (2020) studied feedback literacy in secondary education for the first-time paying attention to the different dimensions of feedback and using a reference framework in two chemistry courses with 16 and 15 students developed feedback literacy in a peer feedback project. Before giving feedback, students received six training sessions on giving, receiving, appreciating feedback, peer assessment tasks, and revisions. Not only did the target grouped looked at assessment criteria to judge their classmates' work, but they also discussed how to be sensitive about making constructive comments and how to emotionally self-regulate when receiving input from other classmates. After this training, peer assessments took place seven times. Students worked in pairs during the sessions to write lab reports collaboratively, assess and comment on another team's work using stipulated evaluation criteria, and use the feedback provided by their classmates for a write-up of their lab reports. The results in Ketonen et al. (2020) yielded two important discoveries. On the one hand, they described stages of development for feedback literacy. On the other hand, the researchers tracked the development of students in the three categories. While their results shed light on how feedback literacy is acquired, they did not explore the role of teachers' views in developing students' feedback literacy.

O.1.2 To investigate the techniques that the supervising teacher (dis)favors when giving feedback, how frequently the teacher gives feedback, and how preconceived notions of feedback contribute to following up the enactment of feedback.

A semi-structured interview was conducted with the host teacher by resorting to a series of prompts developed and published in Hyland and Hyland (2001). The objective of this instrument was to study his attitudes regarding his experiences with feedback, knowledge about techniques, expectations for students, and attitudes toward teaching writing. The teacher's views on how writing is learned and should be taught heavily influence his conception of feedback, whereby the precept of appropriacy as the central goal of feedback was identified, a goal which the teacher currently aims at achieving with a pilot program.

Three main aspects constitute the teachers' views on teaching and learning to write. First, according to the instructor, reading is a requisite to writing ("In the first place, to write well, students should be good readers"). By extension, learners cannot be expected to learn this skill unless reading has become a habit. When students have not developed reading, they might rely on intuition to get their message across. However, the teacher thinks that resorting to intuition is a hindrance to learning to write, as students should instead learn and adapt the appropriate models they encounter in readings ("They trust more on their intuitive element even more so than on the formal and descriptive elements").

Second, the teacher claims that learning to write requires assuming traditional roles in the classroom ("The relationship that exists between teachers and students has deteriorated. It is not completely built on the principle that students are there to learn and teachers to teach. Thus, this relationship... this relationship, which we could say is about students' academic enlightenment is not there; students do not trust on it and do not see it"). In other words, the instructor is there to teach, while students should maintain a positive and open attitude to processing the input provided to them. In the teacher's view, strong students are those who acknowledge their role and apply themselves to learning the contents provided by their teachers. Third, learning to write is a crucial curricular objective because it facilitates critical thinking ("I take notice of whether the topic that students choose fulfils the idea of the English expression 'food for thought' [...]"). Nevertheless, despite the fact that the teacher tries to motivate students to use feedback, he thinks that they ignore it, greatly in part because students do not assume the role that they should.

The second theme identified, *conception of feedback*, is intrinsically linked with the teacher's views on learning and teaching to write. For instance, as described above, the teacher assumes that for

learning to write, teachers and students should assume a series of roles. Hence, one of the teacher's duties is using feedback as guidance: "I think that the feedback they [students] receive is important because somehow they are being reminded or guided to a writing strategy." Guidance should be provided during the whole course, and the technique of asking students to reflect was mentioned by the teacher, who often aims to stimulate reflection on the quality of their work by questioning them, for example, by asking: "Is this the best text you could write if it were a matter of life or death? Would you... would you be able to tell me 'Yes, sir, I've done it to the best of my ability'?". Furthermore, feedback is subject to differentiation, i.e., it should take into account the learners' level of competence ("Therefore, each student receives personalized feedback on the grounds of what they submit"). Finally, the teacher thinks that the effects of feedback can be seen in the long term.

Concerning the characteristics that feedback should have, the subthemes *appropriacy as the main goal* and *use of feedback in pilot program* were identified as being included in the previously described theme. The host teacher was unable to explain what approach he uses to give feedback. However, one of his techniques is providing indirect feedback to develop linguistic appropriacy by consulting their learning materials ("Normally, I circle [a phrase] to indicate that there is a mistake. I do not usually write the correction [...] because what I pretend is that they see it first because it might have been a slip [...] If they are not certain, they should consult the materials I provide them with"). This comment indicates that some of the responsibility should be transferred to teenagers, which is facilitated by providing learning materials. This is in line with the process of making judgments in current feedback literacy frameworks (Carless & Boud, 2018).

The teacher emphasizes that appropriacy should be the most important goal in secondary education: "linguistic elements to synthesize and present ideas with great clarity because, of course, the determining factor for us at a secondary school is the writing format of the university entrance exam." In the previous statement, the teacher argues that appropriacy is essential for *Selectividad* (the entrance examination for university studies) and highlighted it several times during the interview as "guidance and insistence on the linguist resources used to word ideas."

Since the teacher sees appropriacy as the cornerstone of the writing competence, he considers that feedback on the content is less effective, so feedback should support learners in correcting their mistakes and sophisticating their writing style. The second subtheme, *use of feedback in pilot program*, shows an attempt of the host teacher to articulate his belief that grammatical correctness is at the heart of teaching writing. He described his project as consisting of getting learners to write an academic paper similar to the ones published in scientific journals: "I establish that the writing project for this article... it is carried out during the school year. It is a year for making a draft and making corrections, almost permanently, first to correct mistakes and then to give the text content and linguistic sophistication." Given that when students "go to university, they have no idea of how to carry out a research project," his rationale is that the project prepares students for the future. Notwithstanding, the teacher declares that the implementation of the project has been frustrating: "it has been impossible for me to engage them."

Students' lack of engagement might result from too strong focus on academic writing and a prescriptive view of grammar. As the approach might have a negative impact on their performance, this was a strong reason not to continue along the lines of the teacher's project and instead focus on topics and writing tasks that reflect students' interests and needs.

O.2.1 To assess the development of the feedback literacy workshops.

The feedback workshops were crucial for students not only for the cooperative interpretation of feedback but also to resort to the teacher's guidance and support whenever their linguistic knowledge was not enough. To accomplish this objective, a Likert-scale questionnaire was employed. Research in the last two decades has emphasized the need to avoid giving praise to mitigate criticism and instead provide positive feedback that recognizes students' strengths (Carless & Boud, 2018; Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Huong, 2018; Mahfoodh, 2017; Sutton 2012; O'Donovan, 2017). In the feedback provided in this study, a conscious effort was made to provide both positive feedback identifying students' strengths and practical suggestions for enhancements. The results show satisfaction with these two characteristics of

the feedback. When asked to assess whether the feedback recognized their strengths, the mean of the results (4.29) suggests high agreement with a standard deviation (0.75) showing a trend mostly between the scales “agree” and “strongly agree.”

Even a more positive tendency is observed when prompted to value the intelligibility of the indications explaining what to correct. In this case, 19 students (almost 80%) chose the option “strongly agree,” and the standard deviation was very low. This confirms that giving feedback is not enough (Corral-Robles & González-Gijón, 2018). Students seemed to have benefited from being given the space and time to read, discuss and discern a plausible plan of action in the feedback workshops. The topic selection might also have contributed to increasing participation and interest in the tasks. Similar to the questions items about praise and precision in indicating what is to be corrected, a majority strongly agrees that the teacher resolved doubts about the aspects of the feedback that remained obscure.

In the questionnaire, students perceived to have achieved a series of gains in several areas. For example, 7 students (29,2%) agree, and 11 students (45,8%) strongly agree that they improved their writing. While a quarter of the students remained neutral regarding this prompt, the standard deviation and the mean suggest agreement. In terms of being aware of their mistakes, an even more positive tendency is observed since students think that the interventions contributed to making headway in their writing competence (mean 4,5, standard deviation 0,78). However, these gains need to be examined closely in regard to the following two results where students express less consensus.

The statement “The feedback motivated me to improve my texts” was scored relatively high (mean 3,91); however, the standard deviation (1,28) shows a dispersion as regards the mean value. Moreover, the item “Sometimes the feedback made me experience frustration” has an even higher standard deviation showing that students’ opinion is even more split. This means that while learners tended to score feedback as helpful and identifying gains in writing in general, and being more aware of their mistakes, motivation and frustration deserve further work.

O.2.2 To observe the effects of feedback workshops on students’ texts.

As mentioned above, to answer this specific objective a writing portfolio was employed. The portfolios allowed for connecting the writing sessions with the feedback workshops (Heath & Malecka, 2016) and were used throughout the interventions to draft, edit, receive feedback, redraft their texts, and include a revision memo. The data collected with this instrument does not aim to measure how many of the mistakes identified were corrected quantitatively; instead, it was a tool for the teacher to track students’ most frequent mistakes, individual strengths and weaknesses, and gains in their writing competence.

The first benefit of the teaching interventions was the positive effect on mistakes, especially in terms of content (informing the reader), text conventions, omission of commas or periods, tenses, prepositions, false cognates, the spelling of common words, among others. The outcomes observed were that the mistakes made in the first or second text did not recur in the following ones. This eventually permitted students to concentrate on different mistakes and weaknesses in the following texts (Bardine, & Fulton, 2008; Lee & Lyster, 2016).

A few mistakes, such as the omission of determiners and infinitive constructions, proved to be resistant to feedback. This demonstrates that while learners developed awareness of their weaknesses in their performance, some mistakes might remain longer. Moreover, genre analysis, an approach implemented for teaching writing, proved helpful and relevant for students, but applying the text conventions of a formal email turned out to be more challenging than expected. Even though guidance was provided before drafting the email, avoiding contractions, using openings and closings, and other formal features seemed to have placed a cognitive burden on students. Given that this was the first-time students wrote a formal text, they might need further practice to master the features of a formal email.

The second effect of the intervention on students’ writing was an increasing number of corrections in relation to the feedback. By comparing the number of corrections made between the first and the third text, it is evident that students, especially those with a lower English level, increased their student feedback literacy and gradually enhanced their texts by paying closer attention to the teachers’ comments. This increase in the number of corrections indicates that familiarity with the editing code

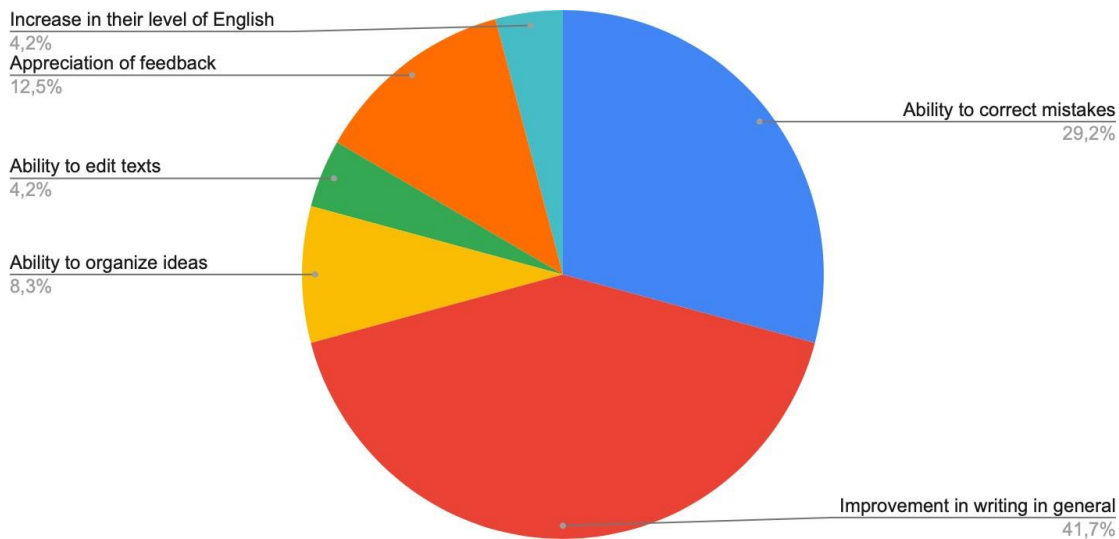
and the techniques for backfeed used in the feedback workshops allowed students to spot their mistakes more easily, diagnose the kinds of enhancements required and deliver them accordingly.

Finally, the third gain made in regard to the writing skill has to do with the writing fluency. One significant challenge at the beginning of the teaching intervention was the time required to compose their texts. Some students even expressed frustration in class and objected that they always write their tasks at home where they can use Google Translate or a dictionary. Nonetheless, by the third writing task, all students managed to finish within the time frame, and many of them developed habits such as preparing lists of useful expressions for the different functions used in the text genres or bringing their dictionaries to the class.

Moreover, it is worth highlighting that the results of one open-ended question whose answers were coded for statistical analysis gravitate towards three perceptions in terms of gains. 41,67% of the students (ten of them) stated that they improved in writing in general, 29,17% (7 students) mentioned the development in the ability to correct mistakes, and 12,5% (3 students) mentioned that they got to appreciate the feedback (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Perception of the role of feedback after the implementation of the feedback workshops



Conclusions

This action research set out to study the effects of teaching implementations to increase the writing competence and feedback literacy in students in secondary education. It aimed at adapting feedback techniques (Malecka 2019) for this education level to foster the interpretation and enactment of feedback by providing a space for collaboration and redrafting texts.

In the first part of the results, the perceptions of the teacher and students were discussed. It was stated that students claim to receive little feedback. While they claimed to take advantage of it, what they meant by applying feedback was thinking about how to improve. This passive approach to feedback is also reflected in how they rate feedback techniques, as many students think their teacher should correct all their mistakes. Nevertheless, when asked to reflect on the most conducive scenario to improve writing, they stated that drafting and redrafting might play an important role. Given that action research consists of bringing up innovative changes informed in current practice, exploring students' views was considered as important as the teachers' ones to gain a deeper understanding of the role of feedback in the writing competence. As to the views explored in the thematic analysis of the teacher's interview,

two main themes were identified. The teacher highlights the importance of developing reading before writing, the relevance of assuming traditional roles as a teacher or as learners, and focusing feedback on accuracy, i.e., on linguistic structures. While the teacher offers some indirect feedback, no systematic approach to feedback was described.

The second part of the results explored the development of student feedback literacy and the writing competence. The students' perceptions about the effects of the intervention show that they developed a disposition for feedback, the ability to spot and correct their mistakes, and they appreciated the space provided for discussing and acting upon it. In addition, students think that they improved their writing in general and can judge their performance better after the teaching interventions. Nevertheless, some information obtained with the questionnaire is not conclusive enough. For example, even though there was a low level of frustration with the feedback provided and high motivation to redraft their texts, some students stated to have experienced some frustration. Therefore, future research studies should pay more attention to students' emotions, especially when students who constantly feel stressed have been identified.

The study identified three main benefits on the students' writing competence. First, the mistakes students committed in their previous texts tended not to occur again in the following texts. Second, as the teaching interventions progressed, students were able to correct more mistakes with more autonomy. That is, students' ability to make judgments was developed. Students interpreted the feedback more reliably with continuous practice and implemented more corrections accurately when backfeed techniques were used. The third benefit observed was writing fluency. Especially in the third intervention, students were able to plan their texts, write their drafts and prepare their final versions in the given time frame.

The limitations faced in this study included the impossibility of implementing the teaching interventions in more groups. This would yield comparable results in controlled and experimental groups and allow to compare differences in the development of feedback literacy under different conditions. A second limitation is that the favorable response shown by the group might not be successfully replicated. As a result, future research should investigate how to implement the proposed teaching interventions in groups with different characteristics. Another future research line, more specific to the topic of the study, needs to examine recurring mistakes to determine whether the lack of benefit of feedback is due to fossilization. If so, feedback might need to be adjusted to address areas where learners need further support. One idea would be to discuss the most common mistakes in the feedback workshops and offer controlled exercises to practice correcting these types of mistakes.

The insight gained from this study suggests that giving feedback is not merely enough to support students in developing feedback literacy and the writing competence. Not only do teachers need to integrate feedback in the curriculum by taking into account models of effective feedback practice, but they should also ensure that the benefits and challenges of feedback are reflected upon throughout the course. Previous studies have shown the pertinence in initiating secondary school learners into the role of feedback (e.g., Ketonen et al. 2020). Yet, it is also detrimental to ensure that the disposition and appreciation of feedback are fostered with various techniques. In the EFL class, this might require deciding whether to use an editing code, revision memos, writing portfolios, keeping a diary, giving peer feedback, keeping track of progress, and debriefing as a group on frequent mistakes or the challenges of each task. In this sense, holding feedback workshops proved to be a successful teaching intervention, as it allowed the researchers to shift students' attention to specific areas where further work was needed, address frustration when feedback was beyond students' grasp and promote collaborative work in the classroom.

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