Written Corrective Feedback in Second Language Writing: Does SEMI-Feedback Suffice?

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Abstract

Despite the multitude of studies on the effectiveness of written corrective feedback (WCF) in helping learners improve their grammatical accuracy, SLA research has scarcely explored whether there is a reliable alternative to typical WCF. In an attempt to investigate whether there are other options to address learners' written grammatical errors, the present study employed a pre-test-immediate posttest-delayed posttest design to compare the effects of indirect focused WCF with sample enhanced motivating input (SEMI) on the accuracy with which EFL learners used English articles to express first and second mention in narrative writing tests. Using three intact intermediate classes totaling 46 EFL students who ranged in age from 15 to 18, three groups were formed: (1) a WCF group (n = 17) who received indirect focused WCF along with written metalinguistic information, (2) a SEMI group (n = 15) who received SEMI-feedback (a writing sample the focused structures of which are enhanced) along with written metalinguistic information, and (3) a control group (n = 14) who received no corrective feedback. While no difference in effectiveness was found between WCF and SEMI, both of the experimental groups outperformed the control group on the immediate and delayed posttests. The results of the study suggest that, given its high practicality, SEMI-feedback can be considered a reliable alternative to focused WCF for addressing students' grammatical errors.

Key words: Error correction, Sample enhanced motivating input, Writing, Written corrective feedback.

Introduction

The main role of language instructors is to help students improve their language proficiency based on learner needs and course objectives. Since it guides, motivates, and encourages language learners in the process of language learning, providing corrective feedback (CF) is regarded as one of the most important parts of language pedagogy. As a result, there has been an escalating and ever-growing interest in the topic of error feedback in SLA research.

Review of Literature

Over the past three decades, there have been profound disagreements about the role of error correction in helping language learners acquire grammatical structures. On the one hand, some theorists emphasized the importance of CF as negative evidence which can make learners aware of their erroneous utterances (Gass, 1997; Long, 1996). On the other hand, some claimed error correction is a futile task and positive evidence alone is enough for successfully acquiring a language (Krashen, 1981, 1988), and even error correction can be harmful to learners' language developments (Truscott, 1996, 1999).

While less controversy has existed over the positive effects of oral CF on language acquisition, whether or not to provide learners' grammatical errors with written corrective feedback (WCF) has led to heated discussions in L2 writing research. In the area of error correction, provision of WCF was assumed an indispensable part of writing classes by both language instructors and researchers for a long time until Truscott (1996) expressed his opposition to the inadequacy of any hard evidence supporting the unquestioned belief that WCF is effective in improving learners' writing accuracy. As Truscott (1999) put it:

The literature was full of confident assertions and assumptions that grammar correction is beneficial and that it must be a part of second-language writing classes. Dissenting voices were almost non-existent. For teaching purposes, the result was an effective lack of choice. It was simply taken for granted that language teachers correct grammar errors. (p. 111)

Since Truscott (1996) made his claims that WCF is ineffective and even harmful, which were stigmatized as "overtly strong", "premature", and even dangerous to the field by Ferris (1999), in a series of debates and dialogues, many articles have attempted to argue for or against the effectiveness of WCF (Bitchener, 2009; Bruton, 2009, 2010; Chandler, 2004, 2009; Ferris, 2003, 2004; Nassaji & Fotos, 2004; Truscott, 1999, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Xu, 2009). The main concerns of these debates have revolved around the designs of the studies done on the effectiveness of WCF as well as the validity of the conclusions which were made based on their findings.

Aside from discussions on empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of WCF, researchers in the field also proposed theoretical arguments on the positive and negative effects of CF. On the one hand, drawing upon Long's (1996) interaction hypothesis, many believe positive evidence (about acceptable target linguistic features) alone does not lead to successful language acquisition, and argue negative evidence (about unacceptable target linguistic features), arising from negotiation for meaning, also plays a crucial role in helping learners improve their language proficiency. Another argument for the positive role of error feedback resides in Swain's (2005) output hypothesis. It is believed negative feedback can help students notice the gap between the linguistic forms in their inter-language and those in the target language. Besides, during hypothesis-testing, another function of learners' output, CF can enable students to make judgments about the acceptability of the linguistic forms they just produced. Finally, as conscious attention to linguistic features is considered facilitative to inter-language development (Schmidt, 2001), corrective feedback can have a positive impact on learners' language acquisition.

On the other hand, it is argued that error correction, especially in written form, is either ineffective or even harmful to learners' L2 development. Truscott (1996) claimed that since teachers fail to account for learners' developmental sequences proposed by Pienemann's (1989) learnability hypothesis, students usually receive WCF for which they are not developmentally ready. Thus, as teacher WCF usually addresses linguistic features which are beyond students' current developmental stage, it will be ineffective. Drawing upon Krashen's (1982) distinction between learning and acquisition, Truscott (1996) also argued transfer of information from teachers to learners by providing WCF is not sufficient for language acquisition and used the term *pseudolearning* to refer to the superficial knowledge formed as a result of teacher correction. Raising learners' affective filter and causing them to avoid using the targeted structures in the future writing tasks which can lead to less complex language use are among the other objections to WCF thought to be even harmful to learners' L2 development (Krashen, 1982; Sheppard, 1992).

Language learners expect their teachers to provide them with error correction (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Ancker, 2000; Jean & Simard, 2011; Lee, 2004), and research in SLA suggests that CF plays significant roles in helping learners' L2 development. As discussed above, there are a number of theoretical challenges to providing effective WCF which have not been yet practically

addressed by previous studies. Besides, given its low practicality, especially in large classes, language practitioners sometimes have mixed feelings as to providing WCF as typically done in writing classes is worth their while and effort (Lee, 2003, 2008). The present study aims to investigate whether SEMI-feedback can function as a viable alternative to WCF for addressing learners' written grammatical errors which is argued to enjoy the positive impacts of WCF without suffering from its potential harmful effects.

The present study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Does focused WCF help intermediate language learners become significantly more accurate in using indefinite and definite articles to express first and second mention?

2. Does SEMI-feedback help intermediate language learners become significantly more accurate in using indefinite and definite articles to express first and second mention?

3. Is there any significant difference between the effects of focused WCF and SEMI-feedback on the accuracy with which intermediate language learners use indefinite and definite articles to express first and second mention?

Methodology
Design

The present study employed a pre-test- immediate posttest-delayed posttest design using three intact EFL classrooms which served as a WCF group (N = 17), a SEMI group (N=15), and a control group (N=14). The three groups rewrote a narrative as the pre-test in the first week of the semester. The following week, they were required to revise their previously written drafts whether they received treatment or not. Finally, for the delayed posttest, they were asked to rewrite a new narrative after a two-month interval. The two narrative tasks required students to read and then rewrite narratives with the aim of eliciting article errors from them. The study intended to investigate whether and how focused WCF and SEMI-feedback affect learners' accuracy in using English articles on an immediate posttest (revision task) as well as on a delayed posttest.

Participants

Three intact intermediate classes, composed of 50 male students ranging from 15 to 18, participated in this study. They were high school students studying English for general purposes at a private institute in Iran. The three classes were randomly assigned to two experimental groups consisting of a WCF group and a SEMI group, as well as a control group. As the requirements of the institute, students either had been studying at a lower proficiency level and passed the institute's achievement tests, or took an Oxford Placement Test to enter the intermediate level. In order to make sure the three groups were not significantly different with respect to their accuracy in using the two functions of the English article system, their scores on the pre-test were analyzed. Since the accuracy of four students in using articles was above 90%, which is a criterion for the mastery of a grammatical feature (Brown, 1973), their scores were excluded from the data. Ultimately, the scores of 17 students in the focused WCF group, 15 students in the SEMI group, and 14 students in the control group were analyzed. The instructor for the three classes was an experienced non-native teacher who had a master's degree in TEFL.

Target Structures

After Ferris (2004) argued that WCF is more effective when it targets one or a limited number of error categories at a time, several studies attempted to investigate the efficacy of focused WCF. The structures targeted by most of these studies were two functional uses of the English article system (e.g., Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008a, 2008b, 2010a, 2010b; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima 2008; Sheen, 2007; Sheen, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009). There are some reasons for targeting articles in most focused studies. First, the use of articles to express first and

anaphoric mention is a well-defined aspect of grammar which can be easily addressed by WCF. Second, obligatory uses of these structures can be hardly avoided by students which makes it easy to analyze learners' accuracy. Finally, since intermediate and more advanced students have already begun to learn how to use articles to express first and second mention, and given most of them experience difficulty in doing so, the English article system can be considered one of the aspects of grammar which have been partially acquired rather than being completely new (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010b; Ellis, *et al.* 2008). The mean scores of the three groups in the pre-test (WCF group: 51.82; SEMI group: 55.26; Control group: 57.21) also indicated that students had a partial mastery of the two functions in the beginning of the study.

For similar reasons and in order to render the results of this study comparable to those of previous research, the present study also chose the two functional uses of the English article as the target structures. The following error types were targeted by the researcher for the purposes of error correction and scoring:

1. Using definite article instead of indefinite article or vice versa.
2. Failure to use any article when it was obligatory by linguistic context.
3. Using article when it was not required by the linguistic context.

Treatment

The provided treatment was WCF/SEMI on errors which had been made in using the English article system to express first and second mention. Whereas the control group did not receive any feedback for the revision task, one of the experimental groups received indirect focused WCF and the other was given SEMI-feedback. Both groups also received a written metalinguistic explanation of the two functional uses of the indefinite and definite articles followed by examples of their use:

1. Use ''a/an'' for the first mention of a singular noun.
➢ Use "a" before a singular noun which starts with a consonant (e.g., a banana)
➢ Use "an" before a singular noun which starts with a vowel (e.g., an apple)
2. Use ''the'' for a singular/plural noun which has been already mentioned.
❖ *Example:*

A boy and a girl were friends. The boy was taller than the girl.

As the treatment of their errors, WCF group received indirect focused WCF in the form of underlining, which was accompanied by the above-mentioned metalinguistic explanation at the end of their texts. Thus, all of the students' errors on the two functional uses of English articles were underlined but no direct correction was provided, and students had to self-correct based on the metalinguistic explanation. The SEMI group, on the other hand, was provided with an enhanced example essay the indefinite and definite articles of which were underlined. Sample enhanced motivating input was operationalized as the enhanced reformulation of a piece of writing produced by one of the WCF group's students. Thus, contrary to the students in the WCF group who received their own drafts which were provided with indirect focused feedback along with metalinguistic explanation, all the students in the SEMI group received the same enhanced sample essay along with the metalinguistic explanation to complete the revision task. An example of a treated text given to one of the students in WCF group, and its reformulated version which was employed as the sample essay for SEMI group is provided in Appendix B.

Sample enhanced motivating input is a writing sample the focused structures of which are enhanced through underlining or bolding in order to attract learners' attention to those targeted linguistic features. SEMI has been adapted from Krashen's (1982) comprehensible input and Smith's (1991) input enhancement, and is consonant with the view that "SLA is largely driven by what learners pay attention to and notice in target language input and what they understand the significance of noticed input to be" (Schmidt, 2001, p. 2). SEMI-feedback can be considered a type

of feedback because it is provided to help learners improve the grammatical accuracy of their previously written drafts. It is different from feedback, however, since it does not directly target the addressees' grammatical errors, rather it highlights one or a limited number of focused grammatical structures in a writing sample to draw the addressees' attention to those linguistic features.

As it is argued that providing some students with WCF giving a control group no CF whatsoever leads to practical and ethical problems (Ferris, 2004), the control group's written narratives on the pre-test and immediate posttest were given overall scores based on ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, & Hughey, 1981). Aside from an overall score, the students in the control group also received a general comment on the content of their written narratives for the revision task. All the treatments were provided by the researcher himself**.**

Instruments

In order to investigate the students' accuracy in using the targeted structures, two narratives were used. The first narrative was based on Aesop's fable, "The Fox and the Crow", and the second one was the story of "The Thief" (See Appendix A). These stories were chosen for the tasks because they could oblige the students to use English articles for the first and second mention.

Procedure

Before the semester started, the head of the institute as well as the participants were informed of the purpose of the study and signed a consent form. The instructor was briefed on how to manage the classrooms and how to collect data in the three groups. The specific procedures for data collection were as follows:

1. In the first week, the pre-test was administered. First, the teacher handed out the story of "The Fox and the Crow" and asked students to read it silently. Then he explained the key words and discussed the message of the story with them. Once students were given the chance to ask questions about the narrative, the teacher collected the stories. Before asking learners to rewrite the story, the teacher read it aloud once more to refresh their memory. Finally, students were given twenty minutes to rewrite the story as closely as possible.

2. One week later, students were given back their first drafts to revise which served as the immediate posttest of the study. For the revision task, although WCF group received indirect focused WCF and SEMI group received SEMI-feedback both of which were accompanied by written metalinguistic explanation, the control group did not receive any CF on their grammatical errors. Whereas the control group was simply given 10 minutes to revise their previously written drafts, the experimental groups were given an extra 10 minutes to go through the provided feedback prior to the revision task. In the meanwhile, students were not allowed to ask the teacher or their peers any question as the study intended to investigate the effects of error correction only in written form.

3. After a two-month interval, the delayed posttest was administered. Its procedures were the same as the pre-test except there was no revision task. The teacher was asked not to provide any instruction on the targeted forms during this interval and he did not give students any advance notice as to when this test was going to be administered.

Scoring and Analysis

The researcher calculated the scores of the three groups on the pre-test, immediate posttest, and delayed posttest by means of obligatory occasion analysis (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). All obligatory uses of indefinite and definite articles to express first and second mention were identified for each of the texts produced by students. Then the total number of correct uses of the target structures was divided by the total number of obligatory occasions multiplied by 100 to obtain the percentage of accuracy rate of each individual in that particular writing task. For instance, five out of ten correct uses of the target structures was calculated as 50% accuracy rate. In order to make

sure the scoring of the writing tasks was reliable, the researcher rescored 20 texts from the pre-test after a one-month interval. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) for the two sets of scores was .93.

In order to examine the effects of the two treatments on students' accuracy in using indefinite article (for first mention) and definite article (for subsequent references), descriptive statistics for the scores on the narrative writing tests (pre-test, immediate posttest, and delayed posttest) obtained by the three groups were calculated. Since, the results of one-way ANOVA showed no significant difference between the scores of the three groups on the pretest (F (2, 43) = .43, p = .65), tests of statistical significance were carried out by means of a mixed between-within subjects ANOVA to see whether there are main effects for each of the between-subjects independent variable (WCF, SEMI, and control groups) and within-subjects independent variable (pre-test, immediate posttest, and delayed posttest), and whether the interaction between them is significant.

Results and Discussion

The descriptive statistics for the scores of the two experimental groups and the control group in pre-test, immediate posttest, and delayed posttest are presented in Table 1 below. In order to make sure the three intact classes were not significantly different with respect to their accuracy in using articles to express first and second mention at the outset of the study, the scores obtained in the pre-test were subjected to a one-way ANOVA test. The result showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups before the study began (F (2, 43) = .43, p = .65).

Table 1 . Descriptive statistics for the narrative writing tests

Groups	n	Pre-test		Immediate Posttest		Delayed Posttest	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
WCF	17	51.82	16.65	76.17	11.46	72	9.06
SEMI	15	55.26	15.45	77.86	11.26	76.2	12.42
Control	14	57.21	17.14	60.14	17.31	62.35	17.56

Figure 1 visualizes the mean scores of each group in the three narrative tests. As can be seen, whereas the three groups' mean scores were very close in the pre-test, the experimental groups noticeably outperformed the control group in immediate and delayed posttests. As demonstrated, while the control group made a slight improvement in terms of accuracy from the pre-test to the immediate posttest and from the immediate posttest to the delayed posttest, the treatment groups made a noticeable improvement from the pre-test to the immediate posttest which was followed by a small decrease in accuracy on the delayed posttest.

In order to compare the accuracy of the WCF, SEMI, and control groups in using two functions of English articles across the pre-test, immediate and delayed posttests, a mixed between-within subjects analysis of variance was conducted. As can be seen in Table 2, while the differences between the groups averaged across time were not significant (F (2, 43) = 1.91, p = .16), tests of within subject effects showed that learners' accuracy in using two functions of the English article system significantly changed over time across the whole sample (F (1.38, 59.46) = 161.11, p < .001). It was also found that there was a significant interaction between time and group (F (2.76, 59.46) = 23.19, p < .001), indicating that the three groups performed differently from one another over time.
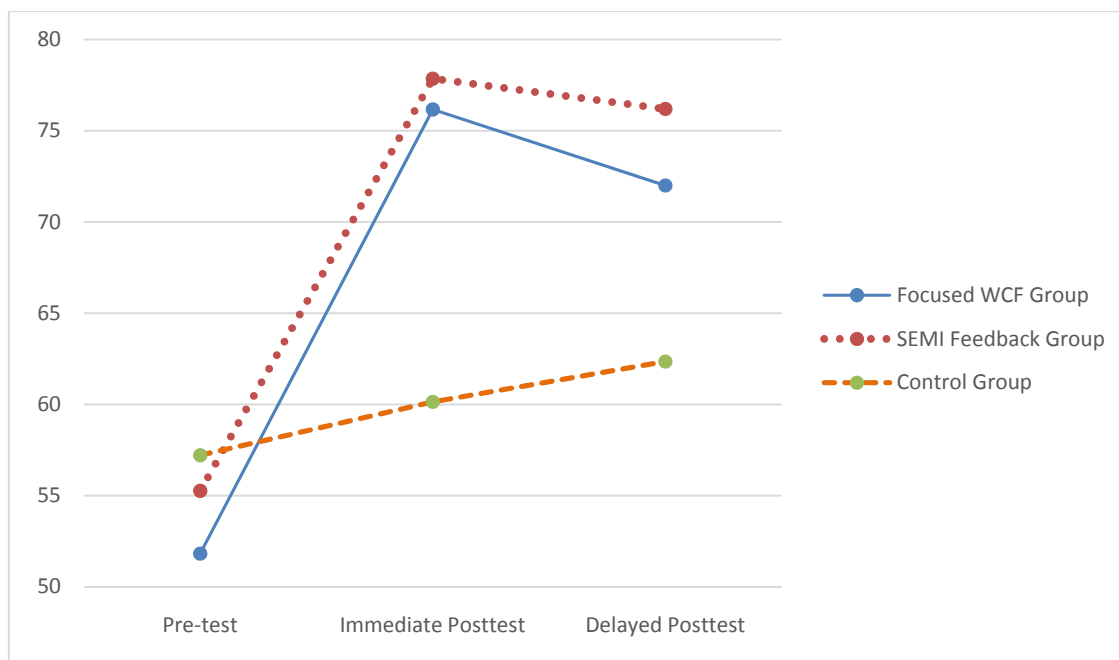
Figure 1. Three groups' mean scores on the written narratives

Table 2. Repeated measures ANOVA of the scores across the three groups and the three testing points

Source	df	F	p
Between-Subjects Effects			
Group	2	1.91	.16
Error	43		
Within-Subjects Effects			
Time	1.38	161.11	.00
Time × Group	2.76	23.19	.00
Error	59.46		

In order to follow up mean differences between the three groups in the three written narrative tests, the results of pairwise comparisons are presented in Table 3. As can be seen, none of the groups were significantly different from others in the pre-test. Nonetheless, having received treatment, WCF group on the immediate posttest ($p = .006$) and SEMI group on both immediate and delayed posttests (respectively $p = .003$, $p = .022$) were significantly more accurate than the control group in using English articles to express first and second mention. Although the difference between WCF and control groups on the delayed posttest was not statistically significant ($p = .14$), while the mean score of WCF group was 5.39 below that of control group on the pre-test, their mean score went 9.64 above that of control group on the delayed posttest. The data also indicate that the experimental groups' accuracy change in using English articles was not statistically significant in any of the written narrative tests.

Table 3. Pairwise comparisons between the three groups across the three testing points

Time	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	*p*
	WCF	SEMI	-3.44	5.81	1
Pre-test	WCF	Control	-5.39	5.92	1
	SEMI	Control	-1.94	6.10	1
	WCF	SEMI	-1.69	4.76	1
Immediate Posttest	WCF	Control	16.03	4.85	.006
	SEMI	Control	17.72	4.99	.003
	WCF	SEMI	-4.20	4.67	1
Delayed Posttest	WCF	Control	9.64	4.76	.14
	SEMI	Control	13.84	4.90	.022

To answer the first and second research questions, pairwise comparisons for each group's mean scores within testing points were analyzed (see Table 4). Whereas no significant difference was found between the control group's mean scores on the written narrative tests, both experimental groups became significantly more accurate in using English articles on the immediate and delayed posttests ($p <.001$). That is, both indirect focused WCF and SEMI-feedback had a significant impact on the accuracy with which EFL language learners used English articles to express first and second mention.

Although both of the experimental groups significantly became more accurate from pre-test to immediate and delayed posttests, their mean scores decreased from the immediate to delayed posttest. Whereas SEMI group's accuracy loss was not statistically significant, WCF group's mean score decreased significantly ($p <.001$). By comparing the mean differences of WCF and SEMI groups from pre-test to immediate posttest and from immediate to delayed posttest, it was revealed that, compared with SEMI group, WCF group gained more accuracy during revision process which was followed by more accuracy loss in the delayed posttest. These results are not surprising as in WCF the errors are located for students while in SEMI-feedback it is the students' responsibility to locate their errors. It can be concluded even if WCF may lead to more accuracy gain during revision process, it is more likely that students lose this accuracy gain on a new writing task.

Table 4. Pairwise comparisons within three testing points for each group

Group	(I) Time	(J) Time	Mean Difference (J-I)	Std. Error	*p*
	Pre-test	Posttest 1	24.35	2.00	.00
WCF	Pre-test	Posttest 2	20.17	1.90	.00
	Posttest 1	Posttest 2	-4.17	.98	.00
	Pre-test	Posttest 1	22.60	2.13	.00
SEMI	Pre-test	Posttest 2	20.93	2.02	.00
	Posttest 1	Posttest 2	-1.66	1.04	.35
	Pre-test	Posttest 1	2.92	2.20	.57
Control	Pre-test	Posttest 2	5.14	2.09	.055
	Posttest 1	Posttest 2	2.21	1.08	.14

Concerning the third research question, the mean scores of the WCF and SEMI groups on immediate and delayed posttests were compared (see Table 3). The results suggest that there is no significant difference between the effects of focused WCF and SEMI-feedback on the accuracy with which intermediate language learners use indefinite and definite articles in the immediate and delayed posttests ($p = 1$).

The present study compared the accuracy of a WCF group, a SEMI-feedback group, and a control group in using English articles to express first and second mention on an immediate posttest as well as a delayed posttest. Although the three groups' accuracy differences were not significantly different in the pre-test, the experimental groups noticeably outperformed the control group in the immediate and delayed posttests. The patterning of scores for WCF and SEMI groups was consistent. While the control group showed gains from the pre-test to the immediate posttest and from the immediate posttest to the delayed posttest neither of which were statistically significant, the treatment groups made a significant improvement from the pre-test to the immediate posttest which was followed by a slight decrease in accuracy on the delayed posttest.

The first research question investigated whether indirect focused WCF enables Iranian intermediate students to use English articles to express first and second mention more accurately. As with the findings of previous studies examining the effect of focused WCF on language learners' accuracy in using two functions of English articles (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008a, 2008b, 2010a, 2010b; Ellis *et al.*, 2008; Sheen, 2007; Sheen *et al.*, 2009), the results of the present study suggest that indirect focused WCF is significantly effective in helping language learners improve their grammatical accuracy both in an immediate posttest during revision process and in a delayed posttest after a two-month interval. Although WCF group experienced a slight decrease in its accuracy from the immediate posttest to the delayed posttest, comparing learners' scores from pre-test to immediate posttest and from pre-test to delayed posttest revealed that WCF group became significantly more accurate as a result of receiving indirect focused WCF.

The results of unfocused studies which addressed more than one aspect of grammar also indicated that WCF is significantly effective during revision process (e.g. Ashwell, 2000; Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ferris & Roberts, 2001). Nonetheless, it was found that this accuracy gain does not extend to a new writing task performed after an interval (Truscott & Hsu, 2008). Although it seems that the results of focused and unfocused studies regarding the long-term effects of WCF are contradictory, since each of the designs addresses different questions, it is not logical to compare their findings. What can be concluded, however, is that when WCF is selective (i.e. addresses one or a limited number of error categories), it is usually found effective, whereas when WCF is comprehensive (i.e. addresses most or all of the learners' errors), it often fails to have a significant impact on their L2 development.

Concerning the second research question which investigated the effect of SEMI-feedback on learners' accuracy in using two functions of English articles, the results were similar to those of focused WCF. The students who received SEMI-feedback also significantly improved their accuracy from pre-test to immediate and delayed posttests. In order to investigate whether there was any significant difference between the effects of indirect focused WCF and SEMI-feedback on the accuracy of language learners, which was the concern of the third research question, the mean scores of the two groups on the immediate and delayed posttests were compared. The results revealed that, as with the pre-test, WCF and SEMI groups were not significantly different regarding their accuracy in using English articles on the immediate and delayed posttests. Although the data suggested that indirect focused WCF and SEMI-feedback had similar positive short-term as well as long-term effects on learners' grammatical accuracy, close class observation was required to compare the two groups' psychological and emotional reactions to the treatment they received. A cursory observation

of learners' behaviors during revision process, however, revealed that compared with WCF group, SEMI group needed more time for the revision task. Although both of the experimental groups were given 20 minutes to revise their first drafts, most of the learners in the SEMI group had difficulty doing the revision within the given time limit. This might be because SEMI-feedback required more learner engagement in the process of error correction as unlike indirect focused WCF, SEMI-feedback did not locate learners' errors.

Conclusion

The present study was undertaken with the aim of investigating whether SEMI-feedback can function as a viable alternative to WCF for addressing learners' written grammatical errors without suffering from its potential harmful effects. To this end, the effectiveness of indirect focused WCF and SEMI-feedback in helping EFL students improve their grammatical accuracy in using English articles was examined in an immediate posttest during revision process as well as in a delayed posttest on a new writing task. Whereas no difference in effectiveness was found between WCF and SEMI-feedback, both of the treatment groups outperformed the control group on the immediate and delayed posttests. Given its theoretical advantages over WCF and its high practicality, it is concluded that SEMI-feedback can be a reliable alternative to typical written error correction in writing classes. The present authors argue that SEMI-feedback has a number of theoretical as well as practical advantages over typical WCF. First, rather than imposing the use of certain linguistic structures as is the case for direct CF (Ferris, 2002), it helps learners follow their own developmental sequences of language acquisition by providing comprehensible input from which learners can focus on whatever they are psycholinguistically ready for (see Pienemann, 1984, 1989; Pienemann, Johnston & Brindley, 1988). Second, it promotes learner autonomy by motivating students to become responsible for locating and correcting their own errors. Third, it is student-friendly and does not result in learners' frustration and high level of affective filter which are usually resulted from too much WCF (Krashen, 1982). Finally, it allows teachers to draw learners' attention to the focused grammatical structures with high degree of practicality irrespective of the number of students. The findings of the present study implicate that language teachers, when found appropriate, can provide their students with SEMI-feedback as an alternative to WCF. Not only can SEMI-feedback play the positive roles in learners' L2 development attributed to focused WCF, but it is also less likely to suffer from the theoretical problems of typical WCF, let alone practical ones.

Limitations and Need for Further Research

Although the findings of this study have some implications to consider, it is important to outline its limitations and delimitations. The main limitation of the study can be attributed to its population. Due to the small sample size and the inclusion of only male students, one may treat the results of this study with some skepticism. As learners' gender, age, and level of proficiency can influence how much focused WCF and SEMI-feedback affect their grammatical accuracy, further research is needed to investigate the effects of focused and SEMI-feedback on students with different learner characteristics.

Concerning the delimitations of the study, one is the exclusion of any teacher or peer feedback during the revision process. Although this may not be typical of a writing task in a classroom, it will solve the problem discussed by Bitchener and Knoch (2010a) that when error correction is followed by class discussion or one-on-one conferences, it becomes impossible to attribute the results of the study to only one variable. Therefore, with the design of this study, the researchers are more confident in attributing the improvement of experimental groups to the effects of treatment alone. Another delimitation is the selection of two functions of the English article

system as the focused grammatical features. Although this has made the focus of this study very narrow, these linguistic features were chosen to make the comparison to the recent focused studies possible. Therefore, further investigation is due to examine the impacts of focused WCF and SEMI-feedback on learners' accuracy in using other aspects of English grammar

The present author argues that SEMI-feedback has a number of theoretical advantages over focused WCF; however, this study does not provide any evidence as to whether these claims can be actually observed in the classroom context. Considering SEMI-feedback was found to be as effective as focused WCF, and given its high practicality, investigating its psychological and affective impacts on language learners can be an interesting area for further research. Future studies, therefore, can analyze whether and how SEMI-feedback affect the complexity of students' written texts, explore whether and how SEMI-feedback can promote learner autonomy by engaging students in the process of error correction, and investigate language learners' and teachers' affective reactions to using SEMI-feedback as a complement or alternative to WCF.

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APPENDICES
Appendix A. Written Narratives
A-1. Narrative 1: The Fox and the Crow
There was once a crow who stole a piece of cheese from a kitchen window. She flew off with the cheese to a nearby tree. A fox saw what the crow had done, and he walked over to the tree. ''Oh, Mistress Crow, you have such lovely black feathers, such little feet, such a beautiful yellow beak, and such fine black eyes! You must have a beautiful voice. Would you please sing for me?" The crow felt very proud. She opened her beak and sang CAW-CAW-CAW-CAW. Of course the cheese fell down, and the fox ate the piece of cheese.

A-2. Narrative 2: The Thief
An old lady went out shopping last Tuesday. She came to a bank and saw a car near its door. A man got out of it and went into the bank. She looked into the car. The car keys were left in the car. The old lady took the keys and followed the man into the bank. The man took a gun out of his pocket and said to the clerk, "Give me all the money." But the old lady did not see this. She went to the man, put the keys in his hand and said, "Young man, you're stupid! Never leave your keys in your car: someone's going to steal it!" The man looked at the old woman for a few seconds. Then he looked at the clerk—and then he took his keys, ran out of the bank, got into his car and drove away quickly, without any money

Appendix B. Treatment
B-1. Focused WCF given to one of the students in WCF group for the revision task

Use ''a/an'' for the first mention of a singular noun.
Use "a" before a singular noun which starts with a consonant (e.g., a banana)
Use "an" before a singular noun which starts with a vowel (e.g., an apple)
Use ''the'' for a singular/plural noun which has been already mentioned.
Example:
A boy and a girl were friends. The boy was taller than the girl.

B-2. The sample enhanced essay given to the students in SEMI group for the revision task

A crow found a piece of cheese in a kitchen. The crow took the cheese and flew off with it. A fox saw the crow with the cheese and decided to steal it from her. The fox told the crow "you have black eyes, large wings, and a beautiful beak. You should be a good singer. Would you please sing for me?" The crow opened her beak to sing and the cheese fell down. Then, the fox ate it.
Use ''a/an'' for the first mention of a singular noun.
Use "a" before a singular noun which starts with a consonant (e.g., a banana)
Use "an" before a singular noun which starts with a vowel (e.g., an apple)
Use ''the'' for a singular/plural noun which has been already mentioned.
Example:
A boy and a girl were friends. The boy was taller than the girl.