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Unified Approach in Correction of Errors among Students' Written Work

Florhaida V. Pamatmat
Laguna State Polytechnic University, Santa Cruz Main Campus, Laguna, Philippines
heidipamatmat@gmail.com

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Abstract

Philippines is one among the Asian countries where people utilize English as L2 or second language. Despite this phenomenon, mistakes among students' written work are undoubtedly inevitable. This is a natural phenomenon occurring when learning a second language. Hence feedback to students' written work alerts them to discover their writing strengths, weaknesses, and work improvement. As Riddel disclosed, it is feedback that allows students to discover inner intellectual energies in the most productive way. Needless to say that one of the most fundamental responsibilities and demanding tasks among teachers is giving feedback through marking and commenting on students written outputs accurately and reliably. This paper explored the use of unified approach in error correction of students' written work to practically help the student teachers face the problem of "which" error to check and "how" to check errors utilizing unified coded correction of errors by Johanna Klassen. Two kinds of correction methods were introduced to BSED student teachers, major in English at LSPU such as using unified codes and the other one is using their own technique of correction. The effectiveness of the coded correction system was measured and it was found out that coded correction system as a unified approach was a meaningful and strategic means of error correction in students' written work.

Keywords: Unified approach, Error correction, Students' written work, Feedback, Student teachers.

Introduction

Unified Approach in Error Correction of Students' Written Work: Philippines is one among the Asian countries where people utilize English as L2 or second language. Despite this phenomenon, mistakes among students' written work are undoubtedly inevitable. This is because of the first language (L1) interference during the students' period of learning the target language particularly in the early stage, which is a natural phenomenon occurring when learning a second language. This phenomenon has been observed with the Filipino students' learning of a second language.

Hence, it is a belief that feedback to students' written work alerts them to discover their writing strengths, weaknesses, and work improvement. It is feedback that allows them to discover their inner intellectual energies in the most productive way[1].

Needless to say that one of the most fundamental responsibilities and demanding tasks among teachers is marking and commenting on students written outputs accurately and reliably. According to Johanna Klassen[2] teachers of English invest many hours in correcting students' writing, yet it is one of the areas that most teachers hesitate to discuss because of lack of uniformity and differing systems and approaches in the marking of errors.

This paper explored the use of unified approach in error correction of students' written work to help out teachers face the problem of "which" error to check and "how" to check errors in students' written work.

Background of the Study

According to Sawalmah[3] one of the most common unavoidable things in education is getting errors. On the other hand, the more the students get errors or mistakes, more specifically, in written works, the better they become because of the feedback given by their mentors. Hence, the more they try successive attempts; they come close to their desired objectives

For teachers to correct all the mistakes of the students' written work or spoon feed them with accurate answers would be completely difficult. In this situation, they should devise some new methods.

Two specific methods in correcting errors are presented by Yugandhar[4] in his study such as the explicit and implicit error correction. He refers explicit correction to be direct or overt error correction, where all correct forms or structures are provided to students, to allow them to mark their errors in terms of linguistic structure. The other type of giving feedback is implicit error correction where the teacher simply supply the students with various means like giving feedback such as correction codes to reflect the error made by the student.

In this case, students' mistakes can be utilized as a teacher's teaching tool with the aid of using correction codes on students'

work to improve their writing capability in a short span of time. Relative to this, Riddel[1] pointed out that correction symbols or correction codes can be utilized by teachers to provide feedback to students written work in the same way that teachers could also underline errors to emphasize mistakes and write the symbol or code within the margin of the paper.

However, despite various studies conducted to examine the issue on error correction in students' written work and despite diverse strategies already introduced in the field of learning, many teachers still go back with their traditional way of giving error feedback to students.

The researcher being a mentor in the College of Teacher Education at Laguna State Polytechnic University is mindful of helping Practice Teachers discover some methods in error correction of students' written work. Some correction codes could be modified from the work of Hedge[5] which suggests learner independence and develops sense of responsibility for learning.

In this research though, two kinds of correction methods were introduced to the practice teachers such as using codes and the other one was the traditional way of using their own system of correction. The underlying rationale was to determine the effectiveness of the coded correction system on the part of the students and to find out if the coded correction system as a unified approach will be a meaningful and strategic means of error correction in students' written work among the student teachers.

Conceptual Framework

This study utilized the unified coded error correction by Johanna Klassen[2] as a technique in correcting students' written work. These unified coded error correction afforded the student teachers with useful guide in marking essays. This study also investigated on the implications of using unified approach in error correction to the Student Teachers, major in English with respect to three schemes: flexibility in marking; interesting exercises; and saving of time.

Paradigm of the Study:

IV

The use of Unified Approach in Error Correction

Common errors found in students' written output

Frame-1

DV

- Level of Improvement on students' written work
- Teaching Implications:
  - *Flexibility in Marking*
  - *Interesting Exercises*
  - *Saving of Time*

Frame-2

Statement of the Problem: i. What are the common errors found in students' written output?. ii. What is the level of improvement on the Group A's written output without the unified coded error correction?. iii. What is the level of improvement on Group B's written output with the unified coded correction?. iv. What is the level of implication to practice teachers who did not use the unified coded error correction with respect to: Flexibility in marking, Interesting exercises, Saving of time. v. What is the level of implication of the use of unified coded error correction to practice teachers with respect to: Flexibility in marking, Interesting exercises, Saving of time. vi. Does significant difference on the perception of practice teachers who used and who did not use the unified coded error correction occurred?

Hypothesis: No significant difference on the perceived implications occurred between those Practice Teachers who used the unified coded error and those who did not.

Review of Related Literature and Studies

One of the variables found to be significant in this study is common errors which refer to the frequent mistakes that students commit specifically in writing. Relatively, error analysis, which is mainly focused to the investigation of the errors committed by L2 learners, is one of the most significant theories in investigating problems along second language acquisition. The field of error analysis (EA) was instituted by Corder[6] and his contemporaries and was focused on the errors learners make. According to Corder[6], EA has two objects, which include the understanding of what and how the learner learns a second language; and the applied object which enables the learner to learn more effectively by using the concept of his dialect for academic purposes.

In 2001, there was another interpretation of EA as disclosed by James cited by Sawalmeh[3]. According to him "error analysis embodies the study of linguistic ignorance in determining what people do not know and how they strive to cope with their ignorance". In this case, correction plays a crucial role in advancing students' ability to speak and write with accuracy.

Error analysis (EA) has been very advantageous for both learners and teachers as observed by a number of researchers, because EA obviously provided teachers the relevant information on students' errors. Also according to Al- haysoni cited by Hossein[7], errors helped teachers in three ways, they can correct students errors, improve teaching, and they can focus on the areas that need reinforcement.

Since writing is commonly considered to be one of the dynamic or productive skills of language usage, this is very significant in students' academic course of study, in taking notes, writing essays, answering written questions developing compositions, and the conduct of research, among others. According to Al-Buainain[8] writing develops students' cognitive skills in obtaining necessary research strategies such as evaluating results out of research rudimentary task, and deducing significant differences observed in comparing means, and frequencies among others.

In 1991, Johanna Klassen[2] from City Polytechnic, Hongkong wrote an article on using student errors for teaching and presented correction symbols that could be an operational guide for marking students written output. She believes that by giving students an organized list of error types with examples of errors in sentences, teachers can motivate students to internalize grammatical rules. She was able to present teaching implications like familiarity with error code, flexibility in marking, interesting exercises, revision, and saving of time.

The valuable information relative to the common errors committed by students that were taken from the work of prestigious authors are found relevant in this study and are considered significant in this research undertaking.

Another significant variable considered in this study is the use of coded feedback in the written output of students.

Ester D. Gimena[9] conducted an empirical investigation on how coded feedback, as opposed to the direct correction method, helped students at the Institute for English Language Education at Assumption University of Thailand improve their accuracy in grammar, vocabulary, and spelling in in-class writing assignments. Based on the results, coded feedback helped students improve their writing accuracy in terms of grammar. However, in terms of vocabulary and spelling, students still need guidance.

In the study conducted by Farhana Ferdouse[10] in 2013, she said that utilizing correction code to advance students' writing skill in English composition was significant among Bangladesh students and found out in the analysis that students made various mistakes in writing, hence, feedback using correction symbols dramatically enhanced their written paragraphs which was evidenced by the improved results on their written work, thus, the effectiveness of correction symbols.

It was further revealed in her study that students provided by correction symbols became more confident and active in their writing. They started writing matured and correct sentences using new vocabularies as they practiced a lot to correct their mistakes.

Muhad Hassan Mohammed Sawalmeh[3] attempted to investigate the errors in the essays written by Arabic-speaking Saudi learners of English. The results show that the native Arabic speakers commit ten common errors and it can be inferred that most of students' errors were due to L1 transfer; hence language teachers need to pinpoint on the transfer interference and persuade learners to carefully analyze and correct their own errors.

Very recently, Dr. K. Yugandhar[4] of Dilla University, Ethiopia carried out a study in using correction marks to uphold learners' abilities to correct their mistakes and observed how the use of symbols as a strategy could correct their mistakes. The study reflected on the result that student's desire coded feed backing to have the opportunity of knowing more of their mistakes and to eventually correct their mistakes. It can also be deduced from the study that students become more engrossed to develop their writing proficiency and correct their own mistakes.

The use of error codes was found to be a meaningful device of helping students checks their own errors in written works. Andrew Cohen[11] pointed out the significance of not giving cues to students so that they can correct mistakes or thinks about the right answers as much as possible; hence, give them time to check mistakes and further stimulate their linguistic competence. In the same way, Lalande[12] found out that American students who used error codes to correct errors in German language had greater improvement in writing than those students who had their errors corrected by their teachers.

On the other hand, Makino[13] showed that Japanese learners of English were helped to correct errors better when cues were given to them and Kubota[14] reported that her Japanese learners found coding errors to be useful in helping them check errors in written works.

Some practicalities in practicing error codes were also discovered by Yugandhar[4] in 2014. She realized that this strategy of correcting mistakes will help provide new opportunities in promoting the whole learning process like facilitating in-class peer correction work, supporting top-down and inducting learning styles, cutting down correcting time, and supporting structural and sentence level approaches to grammar teaching, among others.

By interviewing selected students, Ferdouse[10] found that promoting correction process of written works with the correction symbols helped the students not only to improve their writing skills but also generate autonomy towards

increasing students' self motivation. Relatively, Ferdouse[10] said that students' enthusiasm to act independently depends on the level of their motivation and confidence.

Consequently Klassen[2] provided at least five teaching implications of using student errors for teaching. She identified that familiarity with error code means that when students' essays are marked with symbols they are becoming familiar with them. Another implication is flexibility in marking, which means that as the students improve, the teacher will no longer need to give such explicit clues since students will be able to correct their errors from an underlined word or a symbol in the margin.

Further, Klassen[2] exemplified that correcting essay provides an interesting exercise for students while they are having fun. Doing revisions is even fun, because rewriting of essays does help students to internalize grammar rules. And most of all, symbols can save teachers time in marking and will unify the marking system, yet does not take away the need for comments at the end, especially regarding content.

The relevant information contributed by authors along the significance of coded feedback to students is very appropriate and contributory for deeper understanding of this study, hence found very practically helpful for future student teachers and researchers.

Theoretical Framework

Feedback processes depend on the learning theory adhered to. This study is anchored on the work of the behaviorist theorist like B.F. Skinner (1938-1953) in the form of positive and negative reinforces for learner behaviors with the objective of encouraging desired behavior and discouraging undesired behavior[15].

In this study, giving feedback to students' written work was still the main concern, supposing that positive motivation obtains positive response. This means that if the teacher provides meaningful, motivating, and encouraging feedback to the students' written work, it will trigger them in return to internalize learning with the teacher pointing out on the suggestion for correction rather than emphasizing on the error.

Another theory this study was adhered is the Interlanguage theory by Selinker[16] which dominantly manipulated the second language acquisition. The theory specifies the language system that each student constructs at any given point in their second language development asserts that language they produced is a system in its own right and follows its own rules; it is a dynamic system that evolves overtime.

The theory focus on the innate mental ability of the students in acquiring a target language[6]; hence it can be concluded that an L2 student, is using a language system that is entirely diverse from his L1.

The theory explains that during the development of another language, L2 student has another language system that projects its own rules towards acquiring the target language. Therefore, Interlanguage theory infers that in order for L2 students to successfully learn the target language, effective language instruction is thus significant.

It can be inferred further that there is a vital need to explore some factors like age, motivation, cultural background, language aptitude, memory and learner's belief as emphasized by Selinker[16], that could affect the learner's language development[17]. From the cited phenomenon, Pienemann[18] formalized the idea of the Teachability Hypothesis.

Teachability hypothesis predicts that L2 students could be fully benefitted by language instruction when their current level of language development is ready for it, hence the influence of teaching is restricted by the process readiness of L2 students.

The coded correction, in this regard, is an option for teachers to practice particularly in written error correction of students as this strategy will push students to learn independently, to read more, to generate awareness, and improve proofreading skill.

Discussion

This part of the study presents and discusses the tabulated data including the salient findings with the corresponding analysis and interpretation. The presentation of the findings is based on the sequence of the problems on hand.

The Table-1 reveals that there are twenty six (26) unified coded errors found in the Grade 9 students written output. The table further presents that the students reduced the total number of errors in written works by 67.69 % from 229 to 74 using the first and second drafts of their written output. The 26 common errors are categorized as general items, punctuation, nouns, verbs, modifiers, prepositions, syntax, lexical items, connectors, and style adopted from the error correction symbols by Johanna Klassen[2].

The results highlight the importance of using unified approach in error correction, which may help students improve their writing accuracy in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and spelling, among others. In the process, the students will also become more responsible for their own progress in attaining writing accuracy. The results correspond with the previous research of Ester D. Gimena[9], and Farhana Ferdouse[10] which supported that coded feedback or using unified approach is effective in reducing errors in students' written outputs.

Table-1
Frequency of common errors identified in the written output of 11 Grade Nine students in LSPU identified as Group A considering the adopted unified error correction.

Error Correction Symbol	Type of Error	Frequency of Error	
		(1st draft)	(2nd draft)
General Items:			
1. //	New paragraph	6	3
2. ?	Meaning unclear	14	2
3. ^	Add omitted words	14	14
4. WR	Wrong	3	1
Punctuation:			
5. CAP	Capitalize	6	2
6. P	Incorrect punctuation	19	4
Nouns:			
7. ART	Article problem	6	6
8. PER	Shift in person	10	2
9. PR	Use pronoun	10	
Verbs:			
10. AG/S/V	Agreement subject/verb	15	
11. PST/P	Use past participle	1	
12. VB/F	Incorrect verb form	2	1
13. VB/T	Wrong verb tense	15	10
Modifiers:			
14. ADJ	Use adjective	1	1
Prepositions:			
15. PREP	add preposition	3	1
Syntax:			
16. FRAG	Sentence fragment	11	
17. R-O	Run-on sentence	9	1
18. SUBJ/VB	Subject or verb needed	4	
19. WO	Wrong word order	2	
Lexical Items:			
20. O	Omit/redundant	39	6
21. SP	Incorrect spelling	8	6
22. WD/CH	Word choice	15	6
Connectors:			
23. L	Link/combine	3	
Style:			
24. PAR	Faulty parallelism	7	3
25. INFORML	Too informal	2	
26. PAR/UN	Lacks paragraph unity	4	5
Total		229	74

The unified approach in error correction noticeably reduced errors in the following: general items such as unclear meaning and word omission; incorrect punctuation; nouns such as shift in person and pronoun use; verbs such as subject verb agreement and wrong verb tense; syntax such as sentence fragment and run-on sentence; lexical items such as redundancy and word choice; and style such as faulty parallelism. As the students get used to coded correction, they would be able to check which problems they should be careful of, and the students could be involved in their own improvement.

Table-2 presents the fifteen (15) common errors found in the students' written output specifying that there is lacking of uniformity in the teachers' correction and marking of papers. But, obviously noticeable also is the huge improvement from the first draft to the second draft of students written output since the teachers put marginal comments, used abbreviations and symbols, along with arrows, circles and lines, spoon feed the students by giving the exact correction to the errors made. There is a differing system of approaches to marking which according to Johanna Klassen[2] may be described as over correction (writing every correct word or expression on the students' paper), The table indicates a recorded 50.96% progress on the students' written output, yet does not provide opportunity to the students to critically think about the mistakes they committed.

Table-2
Frequency of common errors identified in the written output of 10 Grade Nine students in LSPU identified as Group B without the adopted unified error correction.

	Marginal comments given by student teachers without the unified error correction	Frequency of Error (1^{st} draft)	(2^{nd} draft))
1.	Use better words	3	1
2.	Avoid redundant use of words	1	1
3.	Observe subject-verb agreement	5	2
4.	Improve	4	1
5.	Give the purpose	1	1
6.	What else?	1	1
7.	Encircling or errors	48	16
8.	Incorrect spelling	1	
9.	Capitalize	4	4
10.	First/third person problem	1	3
11.	Underlining the error	29	11
12.	Put comma	1	
13.	Incorrect use of punctuation	3	5
14.	Use proper margin	1	
15.	Observe unity in paragraph	1	5
	Total	104	51

Students' reliance on the teachers as sole providers of correct forms of the language may also be observed in Table-2. During the method of receiving direct correction, students get rid from a lot of errors. This is due to the fact that accurate forms are provided, hence easier for modification purposes. Since the method does not provide students the chance to self-correct, it spoon feeds the students as they mainly copy out teachers' correction without difficulty[9]. The explicit error correction may not be able to develop independent learning among students.

The Table-2 shows the level of implication of checking students written output without using the unified coded error correction as perceived by the practice teachers. The result which is averagely interpreted as high level of implication may mean that in terms of flexibility in marking, practice teachers who are not using unified coded correction believe that there is also the presence of flexibility in their marking with providing the accurate forms or structures to explicitly show the error within the students' written text.

In terms of interesting exercises practice teachers who did not utilize unified coded error correction highly perceive that their own way of correction also serve as a motivating activity to work on for teachers and students. Obviously, practice teachers believe at a very high extent that their own way of correction is time saving since explicit error correction provide correct answers and is effective in attaining writing accuracy.

Further, the result may mean that as perceived by practice teachers, students benefit from receiving feedback whether implicitly or explicitly, and perceived that providing students the according feedback is an important part of ESL writing instruction[19].

According to Ferris[20] providing feedback as error correction is the most extensively used method to respond to students' writing by directly providing the correct forms or structures to overtly show the error of the students written text. Nevertheless, as disclosed by Lee[21] students want, look forward to, and value

teacher's feedback on their written work, and prefer to receive written corrective feedback.

Table-3
Level of implication to practice teachers who did not use the unified coded error correction with respect to: flexibility in marking, interesting exercises, and saving of time

Item	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Implication
Flexibility in Marking	3.83	1.15	High
Interesting Exercises	4.27	.646	High
Saving of Time	4.33	1.64	Very High

Table-4
Level of implication to practice teachers who used the unified coded error correction with respect to: flexibility in marking, interesting exercises, and saving of time

Item	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Implication
Flexibility in Marking	4.70		Very High
Interesting Exercises	4.67		Very High
Saving of Time	4.90		Very High

The table shows the level of implication of checking students written output using the unified coded error correction as perceived by the practice teachers. The result which is averagely interpreted as very high level of implication means that in terms of flexibility in marking, practice teachers who used the unified coded correction believe that there is presence of flexibility in their marking because they gradually and eventually progress to a less explicit form of giving students the error clues, in the same way that the students will become familiar with the correction technique and be able to correct their own errors by and by.

The table further indicates that teachers highly perceive that using unified approach in error correction could provide interesting exercises for students especially when they are correcting another's written work as if they are doing crossword puzzle. Likewise, it can be seen from the table that using the unified error correction is very highly perceived to be saving teacher's time of marking by unifying the marking system.

This findings support the study of Ferris[20] which disclosed that students preferred that their teachers provide corrective feedback to advance their L2 writing proficiency and the most preferred type was implicit or the use of codes or marks to label errors in their writing. Ferris findings pointed out that implicit written error correction was found effective than explicit written error correction in improving students' writing proficiency.

Table-5
Significant difference on the practice teachers perceived implications regarding the use of unified error correction with respect to: flexibility in marking, interesting exercises, saving of time

Item	Weighted Mean A	Weighted Mean B	t-value	Analysis
Flexibility in Marking	4.70	3.83	-6.117*	Significant
Interesting Exercises	4.67	4.27	-3.525*	Significant
Saving of Time	4.90	4.33	-4.572*	Significant

Significant: $t \geq 2.045$, $p \leq .05$

It can be inferred from Table-5 that a significant difference is established from the perception of Group A and Group B student or practice teachers regarding the use of unified error correction in the three items presented such as flexibility in marking, interesting exercises, and saving of time. These results confirm that the use of unified approach in error correction provide practicalities and new opportunities promoting the whole learning process as noted in the study of Yugandhar such as: facilitating in-class peer correction work, supporting top-down and inducting learning styles, cutting down correcting time, and supporting structural and sentence level approaches to grammar teaching, among others.

Ferdouse[10] said that utilizing correction code to advance students' writing skill in English composition was significant among Bangladesh students and found out in the analysis that students made various mistakes in writing, hence, feedback using correction symbols dramatically enhanced their written paragraphs which was evidenced by the improved results on their written work, thus, the effectiveness of correction symbols. It was further revealed in her study that students provided by correction symbols became more confident and active in their writing. They started writing matured and correct sentences using new vocabularies as they practiced a lot to correct their mistakes.

The results likewise support the study of Ferdouse[10] which confirmed that utilizing correction codes is useful in error correction, while Makino[13] states that using error codes is a successful strategy in helping students activate students' linguistic competence and correct their own errors supported by helpful guidelines. Further, Ferdouse[10] contends that if marking codes will be utilized, teachers need to make sure that students are clear about the grammar rules, hence, teachers should come

up with a list of coded symbols that students can understand and can use confidently. The marked compositions can help them learn more Therefore teachers need to teach students explicitly and provide them with ample practice until they can master meta-linguistic terms and knowledge to understand the corrections.

Conclusion

Summary of findings: There are 26 common errors found in the written output of Grade 9 students. The 26 common errors were categorized as general items, punctuation, nouns, verbs, modifiers, prepositions, syntax, lexical items, connectors, and style adopted from the error correction symbols by Johanna Klassen[2]. There was a recorded 67.69 % reduction of errors from 229 to 74 using the first and second drafts of Group A's written output which could be categorically interpreted that coded feedback or using unified approach is an effective correction strategy in reducing errors in students' written outputs.

There are fifteen (15) common errors found in the Group B's written output specifying that there is lacking of uniformity in the teachers' correction and marking of papers. Hence, obviously there is also a huge improvement from the first draft to the second draft of the output since the teachers put marginal comments, used abbreviations and symbols, along with arrows, circles and lines, in other words, spoon feeding the students by giving the exact correction to the errors made.

Based on the data there is a high level of implication in terms of flexibility in marking, even the students were not provided with the unified coded correction. In terms of interesting exercises practice teachers who did not utilize unified coded error correction highly perceive that their own way of correction also serve as a motivating activity to work on for teachers and students. Obviously, practice teachers believe at a high extent that their own way of correction is time saving since explicit error correction provide correct answers and is effective in attaining writing accuracy.

Based on the result, there was a very high level of implication in terms of flexibility in marking. The teachers also highly perceive that using unified approach in error correction provide interesting exercises for students especially when they are correcting another's written work. Using the unified error correction saves teachers time of marking by unifying the marking system.

A significant difference is established from the perception of Group A and Group B teachers regarding the use of unified error correction in the three items presented such as flexibility in marking, interesting exercises, and saving of time. The hypothesis is rejected.

Recommendations: The use of unified approach in error correction for Practice Teachers is recommended to avoid differing systems and approaches in marking papers. This will eventually reduce teachers' over-correction, use of unwanted abbreviations and symbols, and hurting marginal comments or the combination of approaches.

Teacher-student conferences should be undertaken to help clear the students on grammar rules. Giving appropriate feedback to written work should be practiced by teachers to encourage learners to be responsible of their own learning to a certain extent.

More studies along the area of coded feedback to students' written work should be undertaken to familiarize teachers in a more practical approach of correcting errors; hence, reduce the problem of "which" error to correct and "how" to correct errors.

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