

# Errors and Corrections: Metalinguistic Corrective Feedback on Writing Proficiency

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**Abstract** – Feedback is an essential part of teaching and learning which enables students to identify their mistakes and improve on. Using metalinguistic corrective feedback which involves checking of written outputs using codes, this study sought to improve 45 college students' writing proficiency in content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. This study further identified the common writing errors committed by the students. It also determined whether significant differences exist between the students' pretest and post-test scores. The study used the one-group pretest-post-test design and involved situational composition writing in gathering data. The students' outputs were evaluated through the ESL Composition Profile, and their scores were analyzed and interpreted using mean and t-test. Results showed that subject-verb agreement is the most common error of students. Furthermore, pre-test results showed that students had "Poor" writing proficiency as manifested in the content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Their scores improved to "Very Good" in the post-test in terms of content, organization, language use, and mechanics, but received a rating of "Good" in vocabulary. Nevertheless, their overall writing proficiency became "Very Good" after exposure to metalinguistic corrective feedback. The results showed a significant difference between the students' writing proficiency levels before and after their exposure to MCF. Thus, MCF should be adopted and used in teaching writing. However, a similar study should be conducted with students of a different profile to look into the strategy's effectiveness. This study's findings should also be used as baseline data in formulating programs for the teachers who teach writing classes.

**Keywords:** feedback, writing proficiency, metalinguistic corrective feedback

## 1. Introduction

Writing is one of the dreaded and deemed uncomfortable activity for most students. Writing is the last preferred of the four skills among the five language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing. As Biggs, Lai, Tang, & Lavelle (1999) forward, writers need to produce their thoughts that need to be monitored, selected, and prioritized. Furthermore, they need to translate the ideas organized into language, use the correct rules of a lexicon, grammar, and genre, and review the text to explain the meaning and remove errors. Therefore, writing includes both the cognitive and linguistic abilities of students. This makes the extent of this task overwhelming and exhausting. Most students do not like the thought of exhausting effort to undertake this process and submit an output that does not meet the criteria. Ironically, it is the most used skill in a classroom, so with note-taking and a standard evaluation method such as writing reflections, answering test-

type tests, and formulating analysis. Despite the complexity of this skill, communicating effectively through writing is highly valued in society. Writing is often referred to as the window to the author's soul, but without mastering the skill, a person cannot fully express one's self.

Writing can be a skill or talent. It can be learned and enhanced in a formal instructional setting or environment. It can also be an innate gift, and one can develop the skill through reading and consistent writing practice. Ebadi (2014) cited that writing is considered one of the most significant language skills in second or foreign language teaching. However, mastering the art of writing is a tedious process. To be a good writer, one must have a good foundation as early as elementary. It entails the development of a higher form of thinking and expression, and the monitoring of such. Interventions such as guided practice and campus journalism help the students learn

different styles and acquire their voices, putting their audience into consideration. From kindergarten to college, this skill is needed to be continuously emphasized and evaluated. Hence, educators spend countless hours teaching students to write, expecting them to be competent writers when they graduate, and enter the workforce.

English is declared one of the Philippines' official languages, but many are still struggling to grasp proper formal writing. The importance of writing has always been emphasized in children's early education; however, written texts produced by the second language (L2) learners contain a wide array of grammatical and rhetorical errors. The need to fix this predicament only grows as writing is limited to language or literature subjects. Even though considered a secondary factor, the same problem is also observed in other subject areas, making it challenging to comprehend the written text, which can reach the point where the repercussion affects the output's grade.

While writing exercises are commonly given to students, it does not guarantee development. Usually, students submit pieces of writing to their instructors. These are eventually scored, and when the instructors return the outputs, they are usually put aside and forgotten as the students begin new writing activities without much reflection on the recent previous task.

In recent decades, researchers and teacher alike are drawn into studying the corrected students' writings using the second language (L2). In correcting the learners' writing, teachers write their feedbacks on the output. Feedback is vital in the teaching-learning process. In studying how learners write enables teachers to understand what still need to be taught. Muncie (2000) added that when teachers give feedback, they help learners see their mistakes and weaknesses, and encourages them to overcome these problems to produce a more proficient text next time. This process is believed to be effective in improving the learners' writing proficiency, making the teachers' feedback crucial in improving the learners' writing skill.

The most familiar means of doing this is to recast or to reformulate parts of the student's writing, minus the error. The only task of the learner then is to rewrite the recast version of his/her paper. It is the same as how the teachers

would require the students to compose a formal theme, leave their remarks on it, and then let them apply the corrections. Nevertheless, feedback is not enough to improve one's writing skills, as Ellis (2009) believed that it only demands minimal processing on the part of the learners. Although it might help them produce the correct form when they revise their writing, it may not contribute to long-term learning.

It is important not to stay anchored on the present but instead look into the future if one wants to meet this fast-paced society's unending demands. Since the goal of education is long-term learning, the researcher focused on another form of correction called metalinguistic corrective feedback (MCF), which is believed to satisfy such a goal. Unlike the recast method, MCF does not simply reformulate the student's writing. It uses codes or labels to identify errors. Thus, it encourages learners to deduce some rules about the particular grammatical feature. Then they use this rule, which can lead to longer-term effects on the learners' ability to avoid committing errors.

Although there is an increase of literature devoted to the different corrective feedback types; the metalinguistic types have limitedly been addressed. However, due to their potential effect on writing development, they are the subject of this study. The present study intends to implement a process approach in writing to investigate MCF's effectiveness. This is deemed significant to the teaching of writing, especially that writing is a life-long skill needed in the real world. Furthermore, this study is deemed significant not only to the teachers but also to the school administrators and students. The school administration may use the findings as a basis for new school programs that may encourage students to practice and appreciate writing more than before. If proven effective and used in teaching writing, MCF will motivate the students to write, help them develop critical thinking, and internalize the rules they learn during the process. The abovementioned significance will, in turn, improve writing in other fields, and professional writing outside the school.

### 1.1. Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to improve the writing proficiency of the college students of the University of Northern Philippines.

Specifically, it sought to determine the following: (1) students' common writing errors in the tests administered, (2) level of the writing proficiency of the students in content, organization, language use, and mechanics before and after their exposure to MCF, and (3) significant difference between the writing proficiency levels of the students before and after their exposure to MCF.

### 1.2. Theoretical Framework

**Error Analysis.** In recent years, second language acquisition studies have focused on learners' errors since they allow predicting the difficulties involved in acquiring a second language. In this way, teachers can be aware of their students' difficult areas and devote particular care and emphasis on these.

Since writing is a complex skill, students who are asked to make a composition face difficulty and are most likely to commit errors. While it is challenging in L1, it is more difficult in L2. The graveness of difficulty increases as it demands the students to consider the grammar and the target language's writing system. Therefore, grammar is a significant part of the language that a learner has to develop mastery of all other language aspects (Karim, Fathema, & Hakim, 2015). Without its mastery, the students' tendency to commit errors in their writings is high and can cause frustrations to language teachers.

However, Khansir (2012) views learner's errors as an integral part of language learning. They serve as the basis of the teachers and syllabus makers in devising strategies and techniques to improve the students' competency. Thus, they must be taken from a more positive viewpoint.

Stephen Pit Corder, as cited by Saville –Troike (2006), is credited with reviving the interest in error analysis in publishing several articles and providing a basis for research. Corder created five procedures to analyzing errors:

1. *Collect samples of learner language.* Data is gathered over a given time and compared.
2. *Identification of errors.* A difference is made between an error and a mistake. An error means that the learner does not possess the knowledge of the correct usage. A mistake means the learner possesses the knowledge but has a lapse in memory. An example of a mistake is when a learner, who knows the distinction between men and women and pronouns, uses the pronoun 'she' when referring to a man.
3. *Description of errors.* Once the mistakes are eliminated from the errors, they are classified into language level (structural- phonology, and others), general linguistic (passive sentences, active sentences, and other), or specific linguistic elements (nouns, articles, and others).
4. *Explanation of errors.* A possible reason for the error is given.
  - Inter-lingual (between two languages): the error could be interference from the first language to the second language; or
  - Intra-lingual (within the language): the error could be developmental, which shows a gap in knowledge of the rule.
5. *Evaluation of errors.* Since errors are some of the significant constraints that teachers encounter in language teaching, researchers have tried to trace the root of these errors. First language interference, overgeneralizing rules, responding to complex communication demands, and carelessness could be possible reasons.

Another reason for students' errors that have been identified is fossilization. Han (2004) claims that second language acquisition research over the past three decades has produced a broad spectrum of different interpretations of 'fossilization' – a construct introduced by Selinker (1972) for characterizing the lack of grammatical development in second language learning. Han views these conceptual differences as increasingly clear, creating confusion rather than offering clarification, thereby hindering a coherent understanding of the theoretical notion and empirical research findings. As Selinker (1972) further defines, fossilization means that there is no further learning that appears to be possible, with

the student's performance impervious to both exposure to English and explicit error correction (i.e.: 'set in stone')."

Hasbun (2007) conducted a cross-sectional study on 159 English Foreign Language college students' most frequent grammar errors. The data was composed of eight sets of writing samples produced either in class or out of class as part of the regular class requirement. The students were evaluated, and the errors were classified according to an error taxonomy. The study found that although the frequency of specific errors increased and decreased unpredictably across levels, errors on the subject omission, subject-verb agreement, and negative forms were found to be more common in beginners. Hasbun concluded that errors related to articles and prepositions and incorrect verb forms were the most frequent categories across levels.

Hasbun (2007) added that some errors are so frequent, and some are not corrected after the pedagogic intervention, even when provided over an extended period. In his study, he found out that some errors are caused by first language interference, and some errors committed by students are so frequent. Some are not corrected after the pedagogic intervention, even when provided over an extended period. He likewise found out that the knowledge the students gained in the classroom remains inactive or inept when put into service (in communication within and) outside the classroom. Students recall the rules when they are asked but fail to use them spontaneously in their communication. They know the form and probably the meaning, but the function is still beyond their reach.

In his study, Han (2004) discovered that most errors resulted from using uncorrected, and incorrect grammatical forms. He also added that the major causes of fossilization for adult learners are maturational constraints and the influence of their first language. However, the degree in lack of success may differ from learner to learner since other variables intervene. Moreover, when learners are exposed to incorrect English language forms, they might begin to accept the incorrect form. These incorrect forms might be inherited from their peers' forms, which are commonly used by their peers in the classroom, in the same grade, or across all grade levels.

Lunsford and Lunsford (2008) conducted a study to identify college students' common errors and which of those patterns were marked most consistently by teachers. They identified the following top ten errors: wrong word, no comma after introductory element, possessive apostrophe error, vague pronoun reference, wrong/missing inflected endings, comma splice, no comma in a compound sentence, wrong or missing preposition, fragment, and no comma in the non-restrictive element. They concluded that these could be caused by the teachers' wide variety of thinking about what constitutes a *markable* error; teachers do not mark as many errors as the popular stereotype, perhaps due to the difficulty of explaining the error. It can also be because the teacher is focusing on a few errors at a time.

Errors are inevitable in writing, especially in L2. Thus, committing these should not be a cause of frustration but a springboard in making new strategies and, preparing lessons in language teaching.

**Writing.** One can easily define writing as forming visible letters or characters—just as Merriam-Webster (2016) cited—that serve as visible signs of words, symbols, or ideas. However, writing for academic or professional purposes is not merely scribbling symbols to form words, phrases, sentences, and composition. It has to be done painstakingly with several rhetorical rules that must be followed to communicate ideas in the best way possible.

In the Philippine context, English is a medium of instruction and communication in national transactions. It is considered a second language (L2) to learners; thus, they are expected to use it when writing. Compared to students writing in their mother tongue (L1), L2 deliberately requires proficiency in using the language writing strategies, techniques, and skills (Azizi et al., 2014).

In the history of language teaching, there have been several approaches to writing instruction. Traditionally, most writing teachers influenced by structural linguistics and behaviorists treated writing as a product that focused on linguistic knowledge, vocabulary choices, and syntactic patterns essential for forming written texts (Hyland, 2003). On the other hand, instructors

following the process approach can intervene in the students' writing process at any stage. This approach urges the students to pay more attention to their topic, supplement more information, and develop deeper insights with more time allotted for their writing. Effective intervention then results in better products (Trupe, 2001).

For the past years, students have taken reading and writing independently and were taught separately by language teachers. However, the prominent English/Language Arts professional organizations recommended that reading instruction is better taught when intertwined with writing and vice versa. Previous studies have found that when learners read extensively, they become better writers. Reading a wide variety of materials helps them learn text structures and language to transfer to their own writing (Smith, 2016).

Anderson, Briggs, and Lily (2011) and Olness (2005) believe that reading can help students become writers since they are exposed to good writers' language. They acquire the vocabulary, sentence patterns, and genre features typically used in written discourse. Similarly, MacArthur, Graham, and Fitzgerald (2006) attested that writing is affected by reading and should be taught in unison. Kirin (2010) added that a reader would instinctively acquire vocabulary and language structures while reading and use them in their writing work. Consequently, the National Reading Panel of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000) supports the claim that students exposed to various strategies that combine reading and writing reach the goal of becoming a skillful reader and a capable writer.

Moreover, Berninger (2000) appealed that the different macro skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) all develop simultaneously.

With these things in mind, one can say that writing is a very laborious task. It entails the mind's energy and power, which can cause learners to undergo difficulties in fulfilling this task.

**Teacher Corrective Feedback.** Usually, teachers act four functions: a. as a reader and respondent to the writing content; b. as a guide that may print points for improvement; c. as a

grammarian and comments on the grammatical mistakes in the writing; and d. as an evaluator of the paper's overall quality.

All these roles give the students feedback, and this feedback matter to the students, especially the positive ones, since it is considered a reinforcement rather than punishment (Brookhart, 2010). According to Azizi, Behjat, and Sorahi (2014), students prefer written responses from teachers among the various forms of input because they have a high value in developing their writing skills. There are usually two kinds of instructor response, written feedback, and oral feedback. Both offer writers opportunities for the quality of potential drafts to be produced.

The kind of teacher input will impact the writing process, feedback, and changes to the students. Thus, when deciding whether and how to offer written corrective input, teachers should consider their students' needs and expectations to provide meaningful written feedback (Ferris, 2006).

Teachers have various kinds of feedback to help students go through various writing processes (Hyland, 2010). Including direct vs. indirect, explicit and implied, concentrated vs. unfocused, form-focused vs. content-focused and metalinguistic, the methods and types of corrective input they use are known. Research indicates that it is more common to provide input on the type of language that improves the accuracy of students' writing (Ferris, 2006; Lee, 2008; Rahimi, 2009) than to provide content-based feedback (Magno & Amarles, 2011 cited from Oregon, 2015).

**Metalinguistic Corrective Feedback.** Error correction goes hand-in-hand with feedback. Feedback lets the learner know the result of his/her performance, gives information about how one is doing and prompts motivation to continue or change style or method.

Glover and Law (2002) affirmed the idea that a student is more likely to learn effectively or behave appropriately if the feedback is used in connection with praise. They gave a sequence where feedback is sandwiched between praise, and that is praise-constructive feedback-praise. Giving

feedbacks also enlivens the interaction of teachers and students in the classroom.

Ellis (2009) has identified six corrective feedback types, and one is the metalinguistic corrective feedback (MCF). It is described by Lyster and Ranta (1997) as comments, information, or questions related to the "well-formedness" of the learners' utterance. Also, Lyster (2007) argued that self-repair following metalinguistic feedback also requires a deeper processing level. Therefore, self-repair is more likely to destabilize interlanguage forms as learners are pushed to reanalyze interlanguage representations and attend to the retrieval of alternative forms.

Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, and Takashima (2008) elaborated further on MCF, defining it as explanations of the learners' repeated errors and followed by metalinguistic information about the target language form not provided. Ellis (2009) also explained that MCF involves providing learners with some form of explicit comment about the nature of errors they have made. Explicit comments can take two forms. The most common is the use of error codes, consisting of abbreviated symbols for different error types. The labels can be placed over the location of the error (1) in the text, wherein the student has to work out the correction needed from the clue provided, or (2) in the margin, wherein the exact location of the error may or may not be shown, and student needs to decipher the error first before proceeding working out the correction. He also added that MCF is concerned with the syntax of the written material, particularly the provision of grammar rules and the examples at the end of the student's script concerning parts in the text where the error has been made. It also refers to the act of providing learners with explicit comments about the nature of errors. When the instructor puts his comments as predefined abbreviated labels for different kinds of errors, the learners gradually grasp the most frequent error type and internalize the proper solution for this lack of knowledge. This strategy puts the burden of accuracy on the learners to avoid mistakes by awareness of competency.

MCF can also activate the awareness of learners in writing. Ovegno (2015) explained that systematic written corrective feedback helps them focus on specific aspects of the language and

provide the tools to edit and self-correct their work. It helps in developing the students' internal monitor. Students need to draw on their pre-existing language knowledge (given-to-new principle), compare their internal monitor, find discrepancies, and adjust the form to match the intended meaning by engaging in such metalinguistic tasks. This type of activity reflects the awareness principle as characterized by Batstone and Ellis (2009) characterized.

Various studies on MCF have been conducted. Hyland & Hyland (2006) reported that error codes helped students improve their accuracy over time in only two of the four categories of error investigated. Longitudinal comparisons between the number of errors in the students' first and fourth compositions showed improved total and verb errors but not in noun, article, lexical, or sentence errors.

Ferris & Roberts (2001) observed that error codes helped the students self-edit their writing but no more than indirect feedback.

Nonetheless, Rassaei & Moinsadeh (2010) examined the immediate and delayed effects of three types of corrective feedback, namely recasts, metalinguistic feedback, and clarification requests, on the acquisition of English wh-question forms by Iranian EFL learners. The data analysis revealed metalinguistic feedback effectiveness and recast in both immediate and delayed post-tests, with MCF establishing superiority over recasts. MCF's effectiveness can be explained by the role and importance of attention in L2 acquisition. MCF prompted the learners to pay more attention to the errors they commit and the metalinguistic information provided by interlocutors.

Earlier studies regarding the effectiveness of MCF have similar findings. The study of Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam (2006) demonstrated that those learners who received metalinguistic corrective feedback outperformed those who received recasts in a delayed post-test, while no difference was observed between the groups in the immediate post-test. The study of Ellis (2009) also indicated a distinct advantage for the group that received metalinguistic corrective feedback.

Amoli (2020) used MCF in improving the pronoun accuracy of her students. The results of the study revealed that metalinguistic corrective

feedback has an effect on the learners' performance. The findings further elaborate that learners learned effectively from teacher corrective feedback by utilizing the correct form of previous errors in each session. Thus, EFL learners decreased their grammatical errors. The findings also illustrate the empirical document about reducing errors in learners' pronoun accuracy during the treatment period.

On the other hand, Khodi and Sardari (2015) studied the effects of focused and unfocused MCF on students' performances in EFL writing classes. The statistical analysis results (ANOVA) showed significant differences among the three groups in favor of focused metalinguistic and unfocused metalinguistic groups.

Consequently, Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima (2008) claimed that this kind of feedback helps the language acquisition process through the increase in control of a linguistic form that has already been partially internalized. Evidently, this tool alone is not solely responsible for students' grammatical development but has been proven to be a highly effective way to promote uptake.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Research Design**

This study used the One –Group Pretest-Posttest Design to determine the effect of metalinguistic corrective feedback on students' writing proficiency.

### **2.2. Subjects of the Study**

This study was conducted in the Philippine educational context. The 45 participants were enrolled at the University of Northern Philippines taking the Bachelor of Elementary Education program. In their first year in college, they finished a communication course that involved numerous exercises on professional and academic writing. All of the participants were native Ilokano speakers and used English as their second language.

### **2.3. Data Gathering Instrument**

The writing test used in the pretest and post-test was a situational composition that required the respondents to write an answer to a letter within 30 minutes.

The ESL Composition Profile was adopted from the book of Hughey, Jacobs, Zingraf, & Hartfield (1981) was used for the evaluation of the students' written works.

### **2.4. Data Gathering Procedure**

A pretest was administered, which is the equivalent version of the post-test. A week after administering the pretest, the treatment started, and the study group received instructions. Participants were provided with explicit instructions about the target form. Next, students practiced the use of target form in a free written task. Each written output of the students was treated with metalinguistic corrective feedback for five months. After the experiment, the participants were given the post-test to assess and compare the metalinguistic corrective feedback's effectiveness on students' writing proficiency.

### **2.5. Ethical Considerations**

The researcher observed research ethics in the conduct of the study. The researcher sought permission from proper authorities. Before the test administration, the researcher informed the respondents about the nature and purpose of the study and the protocols to be observed to protect their anonymity. The researcher conducted the study for the improvement of writing proficiency. Privacy and confidentiality were also observed in the study. Data gathered were all kept confidential, especially in reporting their level of writing proficiency. There were no risks associated with the conduct of the study.

### **2.6. Data Analysis**

The data were collated, organized, and subjected to statistical analysis to answer the problems of the study. Frequency and rank were used to determine the common errors the students

committed in the tests administered. Mean was used to describe the level of writing proficiency of the students. The t-test was used to significantly differentiate students' writing proficiency during the pretest and post-test.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Students' Common Writing Errors

The students committed most errors in subject-verb agreement, erroneous use of prepositions, and word usage in the pretest. The same type of errors were committed the most in the post-test but was in a different order. Erroneous use of prepositions came first, followed by word usage, then subject-verb agreement. It can be seen that there is consistency in the type of errors committed in the pretest and post-test.

In the overall result, subject-verb agreement ranks first. Some of the specific subject-verb agreement-related errors of the students were "*your mind and your parents' mind is different*"; "*you deserves to be happy*"; "*she don't have any communication and she don't love her ex-boyfriend anymore*"; "*follow what your heart want*"; and "*it take years to build up trust*," among others.

Second in rank, is the erroneous use of prepositions. For instance, one student wrote, "*choose what your heart says to you...*", and another wrote, "*If you're really meant to each other...*" the First case shows that the student does not know the optionality of prepositions in certain constructions. The second case illustrates the student's lapse in using to, instead of for.

The wrong usage of words ranked third. For example, one student wrote "*give yourself time to wine up*" instead of "*give yourself time to wind up*"; another wrote, "*Its up to you...*" instead of "*It's up to you...*"; and "*I wish I where on your side...*" instead of "*I wish I were by your side...*".

The error committed the least is on the mood of the verb, both in the pretest and post-test.

Andrea and Connors (1992) and Hasbun (2007) identified the same kind of errors committed by students in their studies.

The students' errors can be attributed to different factors. One could be the kind of English language they are exposed to. As Lumbus, Smit,

and Hamunyela (2015) pointed out, a learner might inherit incorrect English forms commonly used by peers in the classroom, in the same grade, or across different grades. The same kind of English will be transferred in their writings.

Another reason is the first language interference. Students apply the rules of their native language to their second language, which will lead to errors. According to Hasbun (2007), these errors are frequently committed by the students, and some are not corrected after the pedagogic intervention, even when provided over an extended period. He also added that errors could also be caused by the students' inability to apply their knowledge in the classroom. He said that the classroom's knowledge gained in (formal lessons in) remains inactive or inept when put into service (in communication within and) outside the classroom. Students recall the rules when they are asked but fail to use them spontaneously in communication.

The above results prove that there are various and numerous errors still committed by the students despite their long-term exposure to English as their second language.

#### 3.2. Level of Writing Proficiency of the Students

Table 1 presents the level of the writing proficiency of the students before and after exposure to MCF.

**Table 1.** Writing Proficiency Level of the Students Before and After Exposure to Metalinguistic Corrective Feedback

Criteria	Pretest		Posttest	
	Mean	DR	Mean	DR
Content	2.35	P	3.44	VG
Organization	2.14	P	3.33	VG
Vocabulary	1.93	P	3.07	G
Language Use	2.09	P	3.30	VG
Mechanics	2.05	P	3.32	VG
Range Scores	Descriptive Rating			
3.26 -4.00	Very Good (VG)			
2.51 -3.25	Good (G)			
1.76 -2.50	Poor (P)			
1.00 -1.75	Very Poor (VP)			



As the table shows, the students' overall writing proficiency level before their exposure to MCF is "Poor" as supported by the mean of 2.11. The students are also "Poor" in terms of content (2.35), organization (2.14), vocabulary (1.93), language use (2.09), and mechanics (2.05).

However, after their exposure to MCF, their overall writing proficiency level became "Very Good," with a mean of 3.29. Furthermore, they also obtained the rating "Very good" in content (3.44), organization (3.33), language use (3.30), mechanics (3.32), and "Good" in vocabulary (3.07).

It is noticeable that the students improved the least in their vocabulary. This could be attributed to MCF being focused on syntax (Ellis, 2009), and concerned with the grammatical arrangement of words in sentences. Another reason for this could be the reading habits of the students. As Shawna (2000) mentioned, adequate vocabulary in writing is dependent on the reading habits of learners. Kirin (2010) also stated that students would instinctively pick up vocabulary and language structures while reading and use them in their writing work. This claim is also supported by the National Reading Panel of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's (2000) report, which states that most vocabulary is learned by reading or listening to others. In addition, Olness (2005) said that exposure to rich literature could enhance students' vocabulary, which they can transfer in their writings. Therefore, this study concludes that MCF's effect on vocabulary competence is minimal. There is need to explore better interventions to improve the vocabulary of students.

The students improved most in their use of content. This could be attributed as students become more confident in expressing their ideas when given feedback and praise, which this study did. Glover and Law (2002) claimed that students are more likely to learn effectively if the feedback is used in connection with praise.

As students are continued to be exposed to this strategy, this shall in turn equip them with the skills to do self-repair. Lyster (2007) argued that self-repair following metalinguistic feedback requires a deeper level of processing, which is likely to destabilize interlanguage forms as

learners are pushed to reanalyze interlanguage representations and to attend to the retrieval of alternative forms, thus leading to decreased frequency of errors over time as observed in the study.

In other words, as Ovegno (2015) pointed out, systematic written corrective feedback helps learners focus on specific aspects of the language and provides tools for them to edit and self-correct their work. This helps in developing students to have an internal monitor. Students need to draw on their pre-existing language knowledge (given-to-new principle) and compare their internal monitor, find discrepancies, and adjust the form to match the intended meaning by engaging in such metalinguistic tasks. This activity tries to reflect on what Batstone and Ellis (2009) defined as the awareness principle. The study attempted to effectuate this in the experiment, thus getting good results.

This means that the writing proficiency level of the students improved after their exposure to metalinguistic corrective feedback. This implies that the strategy is effective for the students because it led to significantly fewer writing errors. Ellis (2009) stated that since the strategy is grounded on metacognition, it provides a condition in which learners could test their grammatical knowledge in light of the feedback provided, leading to significant gains in their writing proficiency. This result affirms Hyland and Hyland's (2006) findings, who reported that metalinguistic corrective feedback improves grammatical accuracy over time. Rassaei & Moinzadeh (2010) learned that MCF is the most effective among other corrective feedback types.

### **3.3. Significant Change in the Writing Proficiency of the Students after Exposure to MCF**

Table 2 shows the significant difference in students' writing proficiency level before and after exposure to metalinguistic corrective feedback. The table indicates that the post-test mean scores are significantly higher than the pretest mean for content, 13.007 for the organization, 15.868 for vocabulary, 11.928 for language use, 14.300 for mechanics, and 15.418 as a whole.

**Table 2.** Significant Difference in the Writing Proficiency Level of Students Before and After Using the Metalinguistic Corrective Feedback

Criteria	t-value	p-value	Decision
Content	11.098**	p<.01	Reject Ho
Organization	13.007**	p<.01	Reject Ho
Vocabulary	11.928**	p<.01	Reject Ho
Language Use	15.868**	p<.01	Reject Ho
Mechanics	14.300**	p<.01	Reject Ho
Overall	15.418**	p<.01	Reject Ho

\*\*  $\alpha$ . at .01 probability level

This implies that metalinguistic corrective feedback was effective in improving the writing proficiency of the students. This result supports Khodi and Sardari's (2013) claim that students exposed to MCF improved their writing proficiency. The result could be because MCF can lead learners to reanalyze their work and do self-repair, which requires a deeper level of processing and leads to a long-term effect on their ability, thus improving their writing proficiency in the long run.

#### 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The extensiveness of the errors committed by the students reflects the need for strategies to address their language deficit. The writing proficiency of the students in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics improved from "poor" to "very good" after exposure to metalinguistic corrective feedback (MCF); and (3) Metalinguistic corrective feedback is effective in improving the writing proficiency of students but in a gradual rate.

There is, therefore, a need to create strategies to address the students' language deficit because of the extensiveness of the errors they committed. MCF should be adopted and used since it is found effective in improving the writing proficiency of the students. Similar studies should be conducted involving students from other courses as respondents in order to look into the effectiveness of the strategy. Findings of this study should be used as a baseline data in formulating a program for the teachers who are teaching writing.

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