

## **Feeding Written Corrective Feedback Forward: English Language Learners' Writing Improvement in a Portfolio-Keeping Atmosphere**

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### **Abstract**

Keeping portfolio opens a window on the way teachers try to assess students' writing improvement and learning capacity. Implementing this curricular innovation, the present study was an attempt to grow tutor-student dynamic involvement in giving/receiving written corrective feedback (WCF). To this end, two intact classes of EFL university students participated, each experiencing a distinct portfolio-keeping model (working vs. showcase) while receiving WCF from triadic sources (self, peer, & tutor) and varying tutor feedback types (indirect-unfocused vs. direct-focused). Students' performance on "TOEFL Test of Written English" and their grades in the previous writing course, namely "Advanced Grammar and Sentence Writing" were averaged out for both groups (Working Portfolio Group/WPG and Showcase Portfolio Group/ SPG) to assign them as low-, medium- and high-proficiency L2 writers. Written products kept in their portfolios were examined to see how differently the participants benefited from WCF sources/types. The findings revealed that WPG participants were more responsive to the working portfolio model than those in SPG who received delayed tutor evaluation in showcase portfolio approach. The article concludes with some pedagogical implications on how to use feedback to improve the quality of revised written texts and to support learning through writing.

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## **1. Introduction**

One of the challenges in English Language writing courses is the detachment of teaching writing from the way it is assessed. To establish the association between teaching and assessment of writing, and as a better alternative to one-shot timed essay testing, portfolio-based assessment has been considered as one subdivision of Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) which refers to teacher-assisted and context-sensitive assessment practices aiming to sustain student learning with effective and ongoing feedback (Davison & Leung, 2009).

Applying self-, peer- and teacher- commentary, L2 writers' strengths/weaknesses will be diagnosed and tips for productive text revisions can be provided (Fox & Hartwick, 2011).

Aydin (2010) points out that portfolio keeping involves how students manage their portfolio entries purposefully, professionally and reflectively. Lam (2018) uses "writing portfolio assessment" as "an all-embracing term to manifest its multiple purposes when applied in writing classrooms, namely a dossier for learners, an instructional approach for teachers and a formative/summative assessment tool for students, teachers, principals and administrators" (p. 3).

While there are studies about teacher implementation of various portfolio models for instructional and assessment purposes, examining the effect of portfolio assessment on EFL learners' composing capacity faces a paucity of quantitative research (Song & August, 2002), at not only surface levels but also text-based changes, and especially in cases where learners at different

proficiency levels are provided with written feedback from different sources and in varying types, hence should be scrutinized.

With respect to the aforementioned circumstance, the overriding thematic focus in this study was to discover in what ways portfolios are beneficial for the teaching, learning, and assessment of academic writing leading to text improvement in the light of giving/receiving feedback in heterogeneous settings. In so doing, this study investigated the possible effectiveness of two portfolio models (working vs. showcase portfolios) on low-, medium-, and high-proficiency EFL learners' writing performance and revision reaction to clarify the extent to which they benefited from self-regulated (internal self-feedback) vs. other-regulated (external peer/tutor feedback) learning and to decide which sources/types of WCF might have resulted in better gains on writing quality.

## **2. Literature Review**

Studies (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2013; Lam, 2016, 2018; Romova & Andrew, 2011; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012) indicate that portfolios have made considerable contributions to EFL writing. A multidraft portfolio, embedded in a process-oriented instructional methodology, is a powerful device in teaching, learning, and assessment not just on the grounds that cognitive operations of L2 learners will be supplied with a circular formative feedback, yet additionally in light of the fact that it improves their comprehension of composing as a socially-arranged procedure being involved in "language socialization" (Duff & Hornberger, 2008, p. 35).

Lam (2018) claims that "with an aim to support reflective composing processes in action, portfolio assessment provides a window for practitioners to understand students' writing development and learning trajectories as opposed to merely evaluating their written products summatively, namely one-shot impromptu essays" (p. 14). Requiring students to collect, reflect and

select works-in-progress in support of learning, portfolio assessment further nurtures students' self-regulated learning capacity to monitor their portfolio journeys (Lam, 2015). It ideally takes place in a collaborative workshop environment where learning writing is situated in a community of practice via getting scaffolded input from more capable others (Hyland, 2009, cited in Lam, 2018).

### **2.1 Written Corrective Feedback**

Written corrective feedback (WCF), as the main core of all portfolio studies, is a common strategy, considered requisite and unquestionable by many scholars (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010, 2015; Daneshvar & Rahimi, 2014; Ellis, 2008; Lee, 2013; Parr & Timperley, 2010). A considerable amount of time is allocated by the teachers supplying students with different types of modifications to varying ranges (correcting every single grammatical, spelling error, ..., or just a few selection of errors) to enhance L2 learners' writing efficacy carrying much conviction that such an indispensable feedback is to develop both accuracy and fluency (i.e., quality) of their students' writing and their learning to write successfully.

### **2.2 Feedback Scope**

As far as feedback scope is concerned, focused (selective) and unfocused (comprehensive) WCF are different in the sense that the former includes giving feedback on a limited number of predetermined structures, while the latter involves providing feedback on all or a variety of structures (Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008). The priority given to selective over comprehensible feedback by most L2 writing researchers results from the unmanageability of the latter to be provided by the teachers and to be processed by the learners (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Ferris, 2006; Sheen, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009).

It means that in giving feedback on every error learners do not receive tailored feedback and therefore may not know in what area they need more help. Too many corrections can also overwhelm the learner and thus may negatively affect the influence of the feedback (Karim & Nassaji, 2019). Focused feedback has been assumed to be more effective than unfocused feedback because the former draws learners' attention to form more effectively than the latter (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Ellis et al., 2008; Nassaji, 2015).

Furthermore, Ellis (2013) warns against over-correction and proposes that teachers should be selective in the errors they correct, while it is not highlighted which errors teachers should correct and which ones they should ignore (cited in Ng & Ishak, 2018).

Nevertheless, other scholars have enquired the ecological validity of focused feedback, where a more comprehensive approach may be needed (Bruton, 2009; Storch, 2010). Van Beuningen (2010) has argued that comprehensive WCF is more authentic for many classroom contexts and that "the learning potential of comprehensive WCF deserves more attention" (p. 19).

### **2.3 Feedback Type**

While indirect feedback merely shows the error location, direct feedback unequivocally rectifies it by indicating its spot, as well as supplying its correct equivalent (Kang & Han, 2015).

Bitchener and Ferris's (2012) study results claimed that although direct written feedback helps students with lower language proficiency, indirect feedback is more beneficial for the more proficient ones because they are often capable of correcting their careless mistakes themselves. Their study results were also implemented and supported by Gharehbagh, Stapa, and Darus's (2019) study whose participants were preintermediate to intermediate

students preparing for their IELTS examination and therefore did not need direct corrective feedback. Findings from another study reported that direct and indirect WCF had equal short-term effect in developing learners' accuracy; however direct WCF showed a more significant long-term effect as compared to indirect WCF (Salimi & Ahmadpour, 2015, cited in Ng & Ishak, 2018).

#### **2.4 Learner Variable**

The inconsistency in the results of *when* and *how* WCF works and what type of feedback strategy is effective may be due to a range of confounding variables, that is, learner and situational/methodological variables that were not well controlled (Evans, Hartshorn, McCollum, & Wolfersberger, 2010). Among other important learner variables, the proficiency of the learner could potentially have a substantial impact on how well he or she can process and apply feedback. Bitchener and Ferris (2012) have pointed out that lower-proficiency learners may become overwhelmed more readily than higher-proficiency ones and that the higher-proficiency learners may have greater metalinguistic knowledge to better process certain types of feedback.

Nonetheless, wherein students are considered to be conventionally error feedback advocators, preference will be given to receiving their instructors' content-related and organization-sensitive feedback on their written product by some (Lee, 2007). Despite of the fact that L2 learners are inclined to attend to the teacher's WCF in the portfolio process, self- and peer-feedback do play a crucial role in captivating L2 learners' linguistic consciousness and boosting active involvement in making revision changes. (Birjandi & Hadidi Tamjid, 2012; Ghoorchaei, Tavakoli, & Ansari, 2010).

To underline the student writers' vital role in keeping portfolios, and how their dynamic cooperation in the assessment procedure may pave the way for their learning to compose, Hamp-Lyons and Condon's (2000) theoretical framework of portfolio assessment consisting of the following procedures,

namely *collection* (students' being required to compose multiple drafts for the assigned text types), *selection* (student-selected written products showcasing their optimal aptitude while collecting the portfolio), *reflection* (growth of self-monitoring capability in reconsidering their learning improvement), and *delayed evaluation* (teacher' s scores given merely to the students' final written products) was adopted. Their framework lets teachers take specific contextual factors (e.g., incompatibility with product-based instruction) into account (cited in Lam, 2013) and prevents them from being one-size-fits-all model executors.

While feedback is beneficial for learning writing, there is still very little knowledge about when, how and why students apply and utilize particular types of written corrective feedback for revisions (cf. Han & Hyland, 2015; Lee, 2017).

Besides, how and whether feedback-oriented nature of portfolio-keeping models, as assessment tools, might bring about fruitful revisions and improve writing still remains questionable. Owing to this, there are inconsistencies in the effectiveness of WCF, the results of which is highly dependent upon L2 learners' proficiency level and has been neglected so far.

In order to address the research gap identified above, this study focused on two groups of Iranian EFL university students' revision practices, aiming to examine how individual differences (in terms of mastery of language), teacher factors (selective/comprehensive WCF), interaction between the effectiveness of the corrective feedback sources/types and the learners' proficiency level as well as contextual factors (implementation of different portfolio models) would feed feedback practices forward to enhance the students' writing quality. This investigation was guided by the following research questions:

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1. To what extent are different aspects of writing improved for the Working Portfolio Group (WPG) and Showcase Portfolio Group (SPG) after making revisions?
2. Which sources of triadic feedback (self, peer, & tutor) do the EFL learners of different proficiency levels in each group take the most advantage of?
3. Which tutor feedback types (i.e., indirect-unfocused vs. direct-focused) are considered to be (more) influential in enhancing the EFL learners' writing quality?

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Participants**

The participants consisted of 62 Iranian sophomore and junior EFL learners (majoring in English translation, and TEFL) studying at two Islamic Azad Universities enrolled in the "*Advanced Writing Course*", on the verge of being able to write one-paragraph essays and as a preparatory course to enable them to further their knowledge on how to write accurately and fluently. The first intact class (i.e., Working Portfolio Group/WPG) consisted of 30 students with 7 high-proficiency (HP), 11 medium-proficiency (MP), and 12 low-proficiency (LP) learners, whereas the 32 students in the second intact class (i.e., Showcase Portfolio Group/SPG) were 5 HP, 12 MP and 15 LP learners.

#### **3.2 Materials**

##### **3.2.1 TOEFL test of written English**

Students' performance on TOEFL Test of Written English (TWE) and their grades in the previous writing course, namely *Advanced Grammar and Sentence Writing* were averaged out for both groups to assign them as low-, medium-, and high-proficiency L2 writers (i.e., LP, MP and HP student writers). The participants were required to produce an essay within 30 min in response to the teacher-assigned topic.

##### **3.2.2 Written genres**

Inspired by Lam's (2013) research, this study was carried out on the basis of two portfolio models called working and showcase portfolios, requiring the



participants in both groups to go on a genre-based course. The student writers were necessitated to write one-paragraph essays with teacher-selected topics on four written genres: comparison/contrast, cause/effect, for/against argumentation, and description, all of which were assigned in a 16-week semester.

### **3.3 Procedure**

Being preceded by an introduction to the aims of the study in the first session of the semester, the training of peer review and self-assessment was arranged and conducted by the same researcher in class (for both groups). In this study there were not equal numbers of students at each proficiency level and a deliberate mixed-proficiency pairing or homogeneous grouping was not the focus of the present study. So, the participants freely self-selected their partners for peer-review activities, regardless of their fellows' proficiency level.

Concerning the quantitative phase of the study and for collecting the required data, the learners were assigned 18-contact hour sessions in total (for the first two text types prior to the midterm [Week 8] and for the last two after the midterm). The even sessions consisted of an introductory 15-minute tutor speech (to teach each text type) followed by a supplementary 75-minute student practice. Next, the odd sessions (allocated for 12-week assignments) were held to make portfolio compilation be completed for learning and assessment purposes (the collection phase lasted out every two continuous sessions for each written genre). The writing cycle in the collection phase was treated differently in the two groups (Figures 1 & 2; adopted with some modifications from Lam, 2013; Min, 2006).

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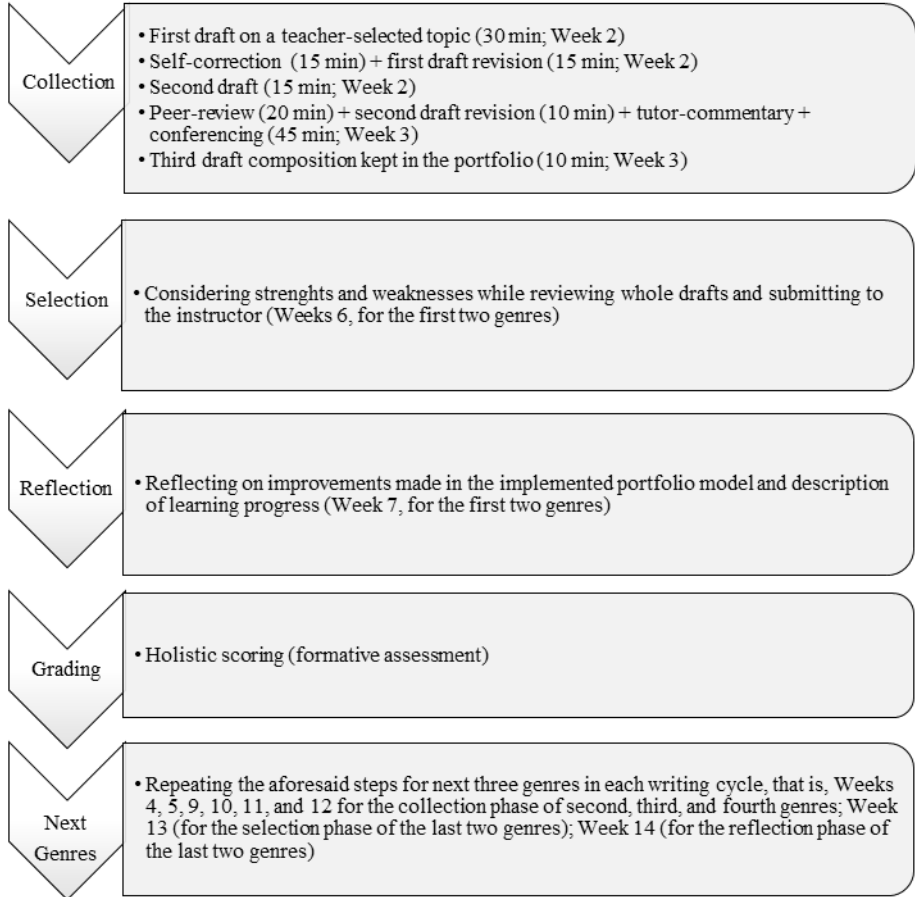


Figure 1. WPG's writing cycle

The aforementioned procedures in each writing phase were replicated for the whole written genres.

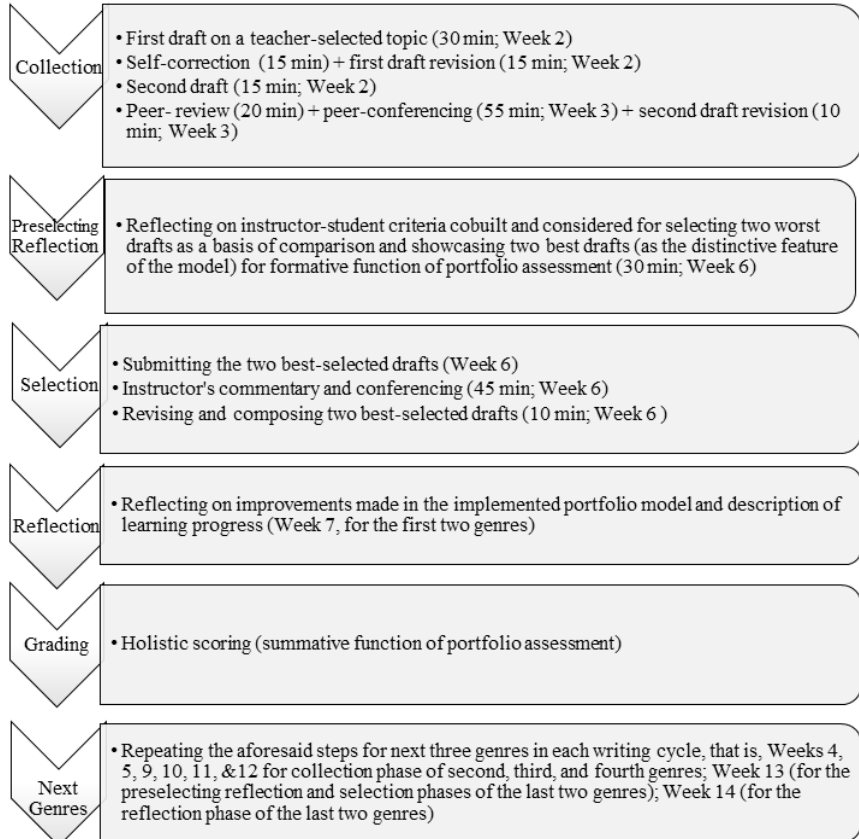


Figure 2. SPG's writing cycle

Students' compiled written products (three drafts for each text type) were accompanied by two journals (reflection phase, during Weeks 7 and 14). The reflection phase had no concern with the quantitative nature of the present study, so it was ignored.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The instructor researcher was responsible for coding all the essays, and the entire process was blind. Nearly one-third of the participants' written texts were coded for error identification and categorization, WCF points, and

revision changes by a trained research colleague, as an assistant, to enhance the validity of the data analysis. Whole classified changes were read and reread, at least, twice by the researchers. Using Kappa statistic, the inter-coder reliability was 0.92, indicating that they the instructor researcher and her assistant highly converged in their codification. In cases of discrepancies, ongoing discussions and negotiations were conducted to attain a high level of consensus.

The revisions were analyzed and categorized adopting Faigley and Witte's (1981) taxonomy of revision operations in writing as quantitative changes (type, size, and function of revisions) as well as using an analytical scheme based on Conrad and Goldstein (1999) to address how (in)effective the changes were in terms of qualitative changes (being successful/unsuccessful).

The revision *types* were coded using Faigley and Witte's (1981) taxonomy, as either *surface* (formal, including changes to mechanics and meaning-preserving) or *text-based* changes. *Addition*, *deletion*, *substitution*, *permutation* (rephrasing information), *distribution* (rewriting the same information in larger chunks), *consolidation* (condensing information in one unit), and *reordering* (rearranging information) are subdivisions of the surface change. The *text-based* changes were divided into *microstructure* and *macrostructure* changes, each of which contained same subcategories comparable to the ones in the surface change category. What makes surface, microstructure, and macrostructure changes different is that the overall meaning of the original sentence will not be altered when surface changes are made, though a group of sentences, paragraphs, or the entire text will be modified by microstructure changes yet not the summary of a text. On the other hand, macrostructure changes affect the whole summary of the text, altering the direction or the gist of the idea presented (cf. Min, 2006).

*Size* of revision refers to the linguistic unit of change in increasing size, that is, *punctuation* (symbol), *word*, *phrase*, *clause*, *sentence*, and *paragraph*. Revision *Function* includes *grammatical* (text grammatical accuracy), *cosmetic* (text better-look and reader-friendliness), *texture* (text coherence and cohesion), *unnecessary expression* (redundancy deletion) and *expliciture* (text explicitness).

To the researchers' point of view, positive (successful) and negative (unsuccessful) macrostructure changes were classified as qualitative changes in the sense that in positive macrostructure revision, the writers predict the things futuristically and make recommendations to improve/change things more drastically to leave some space for the readers to think about the issue more provocatively and deeply without being confused or misled. According to Goldstein and Conrad (1990), these are successful revisions defined "..... as those solving a problem or improving upon a problem area discussed in the feedback, while being consistent with the writer's purpose, main points and audience to strengthen the text" (p.154). On the other hand, negative macrostructure revision provides the audience with some false justifications, wrong predictions, and just with an introduction to open a misleading track to follow/conclude and as a distraction to the logical flow of the thoughts, as well. Being considered as unsuccessful revisions, these revisions are defined "..... as the ones that did not improve the text or that actually further weakened the text" (p. 154).

In each group, the revision changes were performed on four written genres across 744 texts (120 original and 240 revised texts for WPG; 128 original and 256 revised texts for SPG, as the second and third drafts), including a total number of 933 counts of revision changes made by WPG, and 1,282 counts of revision changes for SPG were analyzed. The revision changes in the participants' drafts triggered by self-, peer- and instructor-

feedback were also analyzed to enlighten the way various feedback sources might have been a contributory factor in the all-inclusive quality of the written text. The SPSS Pack 20.0 for Windows Software was used to conduct the statistical analysis.

#### **4. Results**

For ease of comparison, the results of this study are orderly organized by the research questions, that is, aspects of writing improved after revision changes (RQ#1), the use frequency of various sources of feedback (self, peer, and tutor; RQ#2), and WCF types (indirect-unfocused vs. direct-focused) given by the tutor (RQ#3).

##### **4.1 Aspects of Writing Improved after Revision Changes**

Frequency count of feedback points in revisions derived from three-operation revisions (type, size, and function of revision) adopted from Faigley & Witte's (1981) taxonomy of revision changes in writing was mainly the basis for quantitative text analysis of the written drafts of all participants ( $n = 62$ ) in both Groups, to assess the manner the writing quality was affected through making revision changes.

###### **4.1.1 Taxonomy of revision changes**

**4.1.1.1 Revision types.** The types of revision changes made by the participants in both Groups are illustrated in Table 1.

A cursory look at the total frequencies in Table 1 reveals that the revision types exploited by the HP participants outnumbered those utilized by the MP and LP participants in WPG, indicating statistically significant differences among the three proficiency levels with regard to each revision type, as the Chi-square test results showed ( $p=.00<.05$ ):

Table 1  
*Revision Types in WPG & SPG*

Group / Level	Revision Types							Total
	Add.	Del.	Sub.	Per.	Dis.	Con.	Reo.	
<b>WPG</b>								
HP	75	5	47	61	103	23	85	399 42.8%
MP	112	9	70	41	67	15	56	370 39.6%
LP	36	14	23	20	35	8	28	164 17.6%
<b>Total</b>	223 23.9%	28 3.0%	140 15.0%	122 13.1%	205 21.9%	46 5.0%	169 18.1%	933 100%
<b>SPG</b>								
HP	69	79	63	47	21	13	32	324 25.3%
MP	103	153	188	35	14	11	23	527 41.1%
LP	34	232	125	22	6	3	9	431 33.6%
<b>Total</b>	206 16.1%	464 36.2%	376 29.3%	104 8.1%	41 3.2%	27 2.1%	64 5.0%	1282 100%

*Note.* Add.=Addition; Del.=Deletion; Sub.=Substitution; Per.=Permutation; Dis.=Distribution; Con.=Consolidation; Reo.=Reordering

A tally of the revision types revealed that addition (23.9%), distribution (21.9%), and reordering (18.1%), at both microstructure and meaning-preserving changes, ranked as the most common revision types that WPG participants of the three proficiency levels adopted in their drafts. The arrangement of the occurrences at macrostructure changes was distribution ( $\frac{40}{205}=4.3\%$ ), addition ( $\frac{37}{223}=4.0\%$ ) and reordering ( $\frac{28}{169}=3.0\%$ ). The two least common revision types were consolidation ( $\frac{26}{46}=2.8\%$ ) and deletion ( $\frac{15}{28}=1.6\%$ ), which mostly happened at the microstructure level

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with no significant differences among the different revision types of surface and text-based changes ( $p = 1.00 > .05$ ; Figure 3).

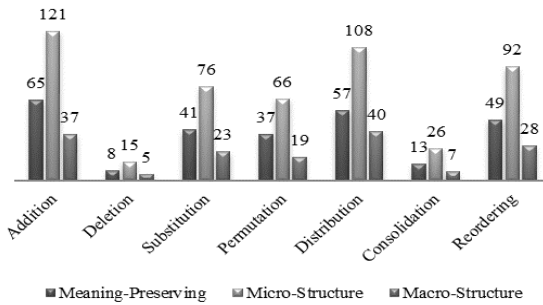


Figure 3. Different changes for revision types in WPG

These findings partially corroborated previous studies that have investigated revision (e.g., Lam, 2013). Lam's Hong Kong school-leavers of Grade 13 students also used addition and distribution most frequently at the microstructure level. As Table 1 reveals, the revision types incorporated by the MP participants in SPG outnumbered those utilized by the LP and HP participants. In the same vein, there were statistically significant differences among the three proficiency levels with regard to each revision type, as the chi-square test results showed ( $p = .00 < .05$ ).

On the other way around, the participants in SPG primarily employed deletion (36.2%), substitution (29.3%), and addition (16.1%), especially at the surface-level. Distribution (3.2%) and consolidation (2.1%) were the two least common revision types. The macrostructure changes ranked the third, allocating  $\frac{3}{41} = 0.2\%$  of the whole changes to distribution and  $\frac{2}{27} = 0.17\%$  to consolidation (Figure 4). The obtained results are in the same line with the ones reported in Lam's (2013) study, but the changes reported in his study were reversely at the microstructure level.



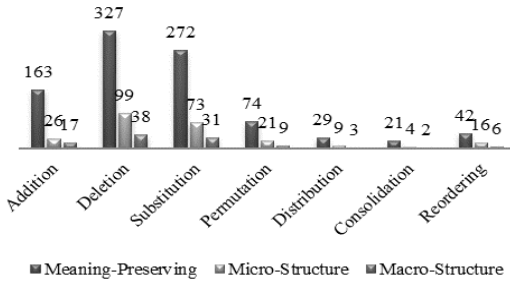


Figure 4. Different changes for revision types in SPG

The Chi-square results ( $p=.65>.05$ ) revealed that there were no significant differences among the different revision types of the surface and text-based changes.

A count of the revision changes revealed that across all the changes (surface and text-based changes) performed by the participants in WPG, more revisions were allocated to text-based changes (71.0%) than surface changes (28.9%), mostly at the microstructure level (54.0%), within which the HP and MP participants were placed at the top of the list (Table 2) with significant differences ( $p=.00<.05$ ), as the chi-square analysis showed. The LP participants' changes were more meaning-preserving-oriented than other kinds of changes:

Table 2  
*Types of Textual Changes in WPG and SPG*

Group / Level	Surface Changes		Subtotal 1	Text-Based Changes		Subtotal 2	Total
	Formal	Meaning-Preserving		Micro-structure	Macro-structure		
<b>WPG</b>							
HP	16	37	53	270	76	346	399
MP	31	98	129	187	54	241	370
LP	31	57	88	47	29	76	164
<b>Total</b>	78	192	270	504	<b>159</b>	663	933
	8.3%	20.6%	28.9%	54.0%	<b>17.0%</b>	71.0%	100%

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<b>SPG</b>							
HP	59	108	167	128	29	157	324
							25.3%
MP	128	232	360	112	55	167	527
							41.1%
LP	122	279	401	8	22	30	431
							33.6%
<b>Total</b>	309	619	928	248	<b>106</b>	354	1282
	24.1%	48.3%	72.4%	19.3%	<b>8.3%</b>	27.6%	100%

In SPG, conversely, more revisions were made with a higher rank for surface changes (72.4%), nearly three times more than text-based ones (27.6%), mostly meaning-preserving (48.3%) in practice. The MP and LP participants, who made three-thirds of the whole changes, outperformed their HP fellows in this regard, showing significant differences ( $p=.00<.05$ ) as a result of the chi-square test.

To trace the participants' success of revisions, Conrad and Goldstein's (1999) analytical scheme including not revised, unsuccessful/negative, and successful/positive revision was adopted. Because the present study was revision-oriented by nature, the unrevised parts or those revisions not clearly classifiable according to the last two above categories were excluded.

Considering Tables 2 and 3, it is noteworthy to mention that some positive (successful/illuminating) and negative (unsuccessful/misleading) revision changes were made in WPG and SPG at the macrostructure level:

Table 3

*Positive and Negative Macrostructure Changes by WPG and SPG*

Group / Level	Macrostructure Changes		Total
	Positive	Negative	
<b>WPG</b>			
HP	59	17	76
MP	38	16	54
LP	19	10	29
<b>Total</b>	116	43	<b>159</b>
<b>SPG</b>			
HP	21	8	29
MP	12	43	55
LP	4	18	22
<b>Total</b>	37	69	<b>106</b>

As shown in Table 3, 73.0% ( $\frac{116}{159}$ ) of the total macrostructure changes were positive. Although the HP and MP participants made positive successful revisions more frequently- about two times larger in proportion to the LP participants' revisions- none behaved statistically differently ( $p=.39>.05$ ).

In SPG, conversely, more revisions were made with a higher rank for surface changes (72.4%), nearly three times more than text-based ones (27.6%), mostly meaning-preserving (48.3%) in practice. The MP and LP participants, who made three-thirds of the whole changes, outperformed their HP fellows in this regard (see Table 2), showing significant differences ( $p=.00<.05$ ) as a result of the chi-square test.

Based on Table 3, 65.1% ( $\frac{69}{106}$ ) of the macrostructure changes made by SPG participants were mainly negative and obscured the intended meaning. The MP participants revised the texts most frequently, but in a negative/unsuccessful manner. The LP participants made the least frequent revision changes, mostly negative ones. The HP participants were ranked the highest in terms of making positive changes. The whole group did perform statistically different ( $p=.00<.05$ ).

**4.1.1.2 Revision sizes.** With regard to revision sizes, the most frequent changes occurred at the sentence-level ( $\frac{340}{933}=36.4\%$ ), for the HP participants ranked as the highest users, followed by word ( $\frac{168}{933}=18.1\%$ ), with a higher frequency for the MP participants, and phrase ( $\frac{128}{933}=13.7\%$ ), mostly used by participants MP and HP participants, respectively. The least revised part was at the symbol-level ( $\frac{75}{933}=8.0\%$ ), especially for the LP participants. The results obtained

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from the analysis of revision sizes in WPG participants' texts were in accord with Sengupta's (1998), Min's (2006), and Lam's (2013) studies where changes were made at the sentence-level many a time, nearly followed by lexical-level, respectively by senior secondary, university sophomore, and EFL pre-university students in Hong Kong (Figure 5).

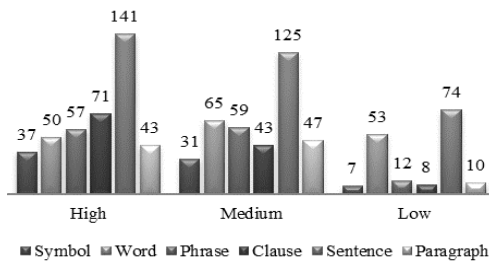


Figure 5. Revision sizes in WPG

There were significant differences ( $p=.00<.05$ ) among all the proficiency learners of WPG, in that the HP participants outperformed the MP and LP participants at the sentence- and clause-levels.

In SPG, the most frequently-used size of changes was word ( $\frac{830}{1282}=64.7\%$ ), particularly for the MP participants, followed by phrase ( $\frac{182}{1282}=14.2\%$ ), mostly used by the LP participants constituting about half of the class, and symbol ( $\frac{106}{1282}=8.3\%$ ), especially by the MP participants as the top users (Figure 6).

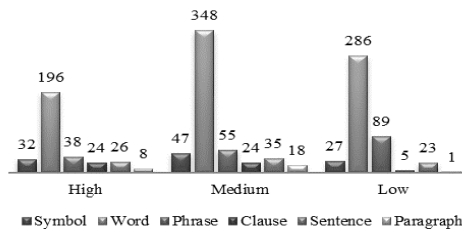


Figure 6. Revision sizes in SPG

Clause ( $\frac{53}{1282}=4.2\%$ ) and paragraph ( $\frac{27}{1282}=2.1\%$ ) received the least importance for SPG participants. The results are in the same line with Sato's (1991) and Lam's (2013) studies, regarding the learners' text revision changes, most frequently at the lexical level. There were significant differences ( $p=.00<.05$ ) among all the proficiency learners in SPG.

**4.1.1.3 Revision functions.** Figure 7 shows that the most common revision functions for WPG was cosmetic ( $\frac{373}{933}=40.0\%$ ), followed by texture ( $\frac{183}{933}=19.5\%$ ) and explicature ( $\frac{163}{933}=17.5\%$ ). Unnecessary expression was the least common revision function ( $\frac{61}{933}=6.5\%$ ) among the participants. The chi-square results showed a significant difference ( $p=.00<.05$ ).

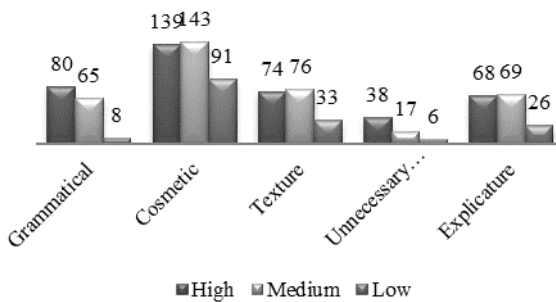


Figure 7. Revision functions in WPG

The MP participants outperformed the other two proficiency levels in terms of both rendering the text to make it more intelligible and reader-friendly (cosmetic function, as described by Lam, 2013), as

well as being more cohesive and coherent. The cosmetic revision changes were likely to enhance the participants' awareness of the overall quality of text, especially when revisiting the "appropriateness of information" (Sengupta, 1998, p. 113) they composed in the early drafts (cf. Lam, 2013, p. 143). The participants' making their revisions grammatically correct (16.5%, as the fourth rank), especially for the HP participants, should not obscure the very fact that the intended meaning, understanding the content, making the text more understandable, and expressing the ideas in a comprehensible fashion are more crucial than just be grammatical. Likewise, the participants' low percentage of grammatical revisions in Sengupta's (1998a) study was afforded by their restricted linguistic capabilities as an alternative contributing factor, while the participants in this study were second-year English majors at tertiary level (unlike those secondary school students in Sengupta's study), and low language proficiency was less likely a cause of low grammatical revisions, at least for the HP and MP participants and just true for the LP participants.

The most common function of the revision changes in SPG was grammatical accuracy ( $\frac{495}{1282}=38.6\%$ ), followed by unnecessary expression ( $\frac{256}{1282}=19.9\%$ ) and backed-up with a half-proportional value for focusing on explicature ( $\frac{230}{1282}=18.0\%$ ) as one of the content-related aspects in writing (Figure 8). There was a significant difference between the whole participants in SPG ( $p=.01<.05$ ).

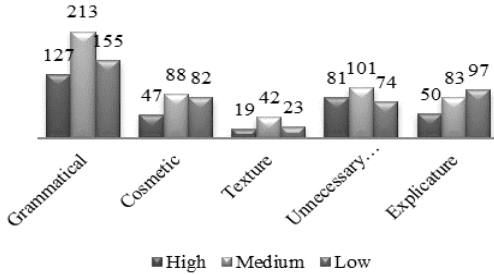


Figure 8. Revision functions in SPG

The MP participants outnumbered the other two proficiency levels, mostly for being grammatically accurate and reader-friendly, as well as writing cohesively and coherently. The LP participants had the greatest tendency to make the texts more explicit when compared with the HP and MP participants.

#### 4.2 Various Sources of Feedback: Tutor WCF Types in Focus

All the revised intervening and final drafts (496) throughout the four written text types from the 62 participants in both didactic groups were textually analyzed to examine student favorably-chosen feedback sources (self, peer, and tutor), with special emphasis on the different types of tutor-feedback (indirect-unfocused for WPG and direct-focused for SPG) (Table 4).

Table 4  
*Revisions Triggered by First and Second Self-Feedback*

Proficiency Level	WPG		SPG	
	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>
HP	55	32	113	40
MP	54	29	183	66
LP	32	18	151	52
<b>Total</b>	141	79	447	158
	15.1%	8.5%	34.9%	12.3%

## Feeding Corrective ...

The participants in SPG incorporated more self-feedback (34.9% and 12.3%) than those in WPG (15.1% and 8.5%), as the first and second self-feedback in their second and third drafts. This difference was significant ( $p=.003<.05$ ) between the participants in both Groups for the first self-feedback and ( $p=.04<.05$ ) for the second self-feedback.

Table 5  
*Revisions Triggered by Peer-Feedback*

Proficiency Level	WPG	SPG
HP	123	62
MP	175	107
LP	36	86
<b>Total</b>	334 35.8%	255 19.9%

The data in Table 5 shows the preference for incorporating more peer-feedback by the participants in WPG (35.8%) to write their second drafts than the ones in SPG (19.9%), with a significant difference ( $p=.00<.05$ ) after conducting the chi-square test.

Table 6  
*Revisions Triggered by Tutor-Feedback*

Proficiency Level	WPG	SPG
HP	189	109
MP	112	171
LP	78	142
<b>Total</b>	379 40.60%	422 32.90%

Although the participants in SPG outnumbered their counterparts in WPG while writing the third drafts, Table 6 reveals that 40.6% of the revision changes made by WPG participants (four-tenths of 933) were triggered by tutor-feedback, whereas their counterparts in SPG made 32.9% of the revision changes (three-tenths of 1,282). It can be concluded that WPG



participants outperformed those in SPG in terms of percentage out of the entire revision changes they made. Conducting the chi-square test resulted in a significant difference ( $p=.00<.05$ ).

Taken from Table 4 (as first and second self-feedback in total), compared with the other two sources of feedback (Tables 5 & 6), the participants in both classes preferred tutor-commentary more. There was a shift from a tendency to incorporate more peer-feedback (35.8%) in the second drafts to the adoption of much more tutor-feedback (40.6%) than the second self-feedback for revisions in the third drafts (8.5%) made by WPG participants (Table 7).

Table 7

*Revision Changes Triggered by Self-, Peer-, and Tutor-Feedback in WPG and SPG*

Group	First/Second Self-Feedback	Peer-Feedback	Tutor-Feedback	Total
WPG	220 23.6%	334 35.8%	379 40.6%	933 100%
SPG	605 47.2%	255 19.9%	422 32.9%	1282 100%

In SPG, far too many changes were made triggered by their self-corrections. They seemed to incorporate considerably more self-feedback (for the first self-feedback; Table 4) than peer feedback (Table 5) in the second draft for revisions, whereas the number of revisions was inclined to decrease in the incorporation of self-feedback (as the second time to give self-correction) and to increase in the use of tutor-feedback by no less than 20.6% (equal to 32.9% tutor-feedback minus 12.3% second self-feedback) in the third drafts for revisions. The chi-square results indicated a significant difference ( $p=.00<.05$ ) within each group, except for the changes triggered by

tutor-feedback between the two groups, whereby their differences were not of statistical significance ( $p=.12>.05$ ).

## 5. Discussion

The overarching aim of this study was to examine how portfolio implementation might affect L2 learners' text improvement. In other words, its purpose was to inspect the impact of different sources of feedback (self, peer and tutor) and variant tutor comment types (indirect-unfocused vs. direct-focused WCF) on L2 learners' revisions and their improvement in writing.

Being in line with previous research results (Chandler, 2009; Ferris, 2010; van Beuningen, 2010), the findings of the present study suggest that WCF, regardless of the sources/types involved, is an effective technique to enhance EFL learners' writing performance. In other words, student's text improvement in both surface and text-based changes (somehow successfully/positively) seems to be achieved through fostering manifold-drafting/editing in the portfolio-keeping process in general, leading WPG participants to be more successful revisers at the discourse-related levels and SPG participants to make more lexical-related changes, in particular. The results from WPG participants are in corroboration of some scholars' findings, indicating that substantial improvement in the writing of local senior secondary-level students (Sengupta, 1998) and postsecondary EFL writers (Lam, 2013) at the discourse level was largely due to receiving extra assistance given by the tutor, earlier than the revising procedure. Li and Lin (2007) also reported the EFL learners' effective text improvement with the use of written and verbal instructor feedback.

The participants' limited span of revisions at the text-based level made in SPG and their getting mainly involved in accuracy other than fluency are possibly the consequence of the tutor's absence in the early stages of the

writing process and the participants' being highly dependent revisers (especially the MP and LP levels), not knowledgeable enough to use their initiative in reflecting and editing the drafts to keep their portfolios autonomously. Their corrections were highly based on surface changes, mostly language-related (classified by Allen & Katayama, 2016) and not content-related changes, exactly reflecting the results of the study conducted by Radecki and Swales (1988) who concluded that the students preferred to have all surface-level errors corrected to the largest extent possible. As forerunners in making negative macrostructure changes, SPG participants' success in revision behaviors was far less than expectation at the macrostructure level (approximately one-third of WPG). Advancing either cooperative writing or peer assessment, as reported in Shehadeh's (2011) and Yang's (2011) studies, and fully confirmed by Lam's (2013) findings, is guaranteed by the inevitable heading part the tutor takes in the EFL writing classroom.

The lower-proficiency student writers of both groups tended to incorporate fewer of the meaning-related suggestions made by their peers than those made by their tutor in comparison with the other two proficiencies, in general, and just as making more meaning-preserving changes for SPG, which supports research that has shown that lower-proficiency learners make fewer meaning-related revisions in terms of micro/macrostructure changes (Berg, 1999).

Generally speaking, SPG participants made 47.2% (nearly half) of the total revisions on their own, two times more than those in WPG (23.6%). These changes were almost three times more in their second drafts (triggered by their first self-feedback) when compared with those generated in their third drafts (resulted from second self-

feedback). The MP and LP participants of SPG incorporated more revisions when they were assisted by their tutor than the HP fellows in their class as well as their counterparts of the same proficiency levels in WPG.

SPG participants did not incorporate peer feedback that much in their redrafted entries (approximately one-fifth of the total changes), especially the LP participants, constituting about half of the class. They waited for the proper time to receive and apply the tutor-feedback with certainty. It appears that the findings correspond to some studies reporting that low-achiever writers' concerns about making revisions and writing modifications results from their being disappointed to do the job autonomously (Porte, 1996) . It might be a reason why they disclaim all learning on their own, are disinclined to be dynamically involved in the portfolio-keeping process, and are dubious about the peer-feedback quality with no incentive to self-track their learning (Lam, 2013) which finally might burden inexperienced writers with cognitive overload and lead to disappointment (van Steendam, Rijlaarsdam, Sercu, & van den Berg, 2010, cited in Hanjani & Li, 2014).

Additionally, other studies emphasize that L2 learners either misunderstand the received comments while making changes in their drafts (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Goldstein, 2006; Lee & Schallert, 2008) or neglect to reexamine their writings, although they know what errors they have made (Lee, 2013). Participants' lack of reliance on their peers is also in the same line with what was previously found (Goldstein, 2006; Lam, 2013; Zhao, 2010) in that notwithstanding the merits of peer-feedback, the EFL learners were willing to include feedback triggered by the tutor rather than peer-feedback into their following revisions.

In comparison with the changes triggered by self-feedback, the participants in the current study incorporated approximately five times more tutor-feedback (WPG) and almost three times more tutor-feedback (SPG)

than self-feedback in their third drafts. In both groups, tutor-feedback (regardless of its type and time of delivery) gained top priority over self- and peer-feedback, corroborated by Zhang's (1995) study wherein the participants typically preferred instructor-feedback if they were asked to choose among self-, peer- and instructor-feedback for revisions.

Narrowing down the tutor-feedback to its specific type, indirect-unfocused tutor's comments were paid more attention by WPG participants than the advantage SPG participants took of direct-focused tutor-feedback. The obtained results are highly consistent with some other scholars (Aghajanloo, Mobini, & Khosravi, 2016; Hartshorn & Evans, 2012). The relative effectiveness of direct/indirect corrective feedback (CF) methodologies might be determined by intervening factors, such as a learner's L2 proficiency level or metalinguistic awareness (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

WPG (particularly the MP and HP participants) who received indirect-unfocused tutor-feedback in due course outperformed their counterparts in SPG whose access to the tutor's direct-focused feedback was postponed to later sessions (Weeks 6 & 13), and they made revision changes at the discourse-related level (in terms of fluency, (i.e., rhetoric and organization) in the text. Besides, as Chandler (2003) believes, indirect CF provided the L2 learners (especially for the LP participants in WPG) with insufficient information to resolve complex syntactic errors. Similarly, advocates of indirect WCF (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Hosseiny, 2014) have proposed that indirect WCF, as being seemingly for L2 learners' more benefit, requires their full involvement in an in-depth language processing while self-editing, hence cultivating reflection upon their existing or not fully-internalized knowledge (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012), which more predictably result in enhanced accuracy in the long term. It may also work better to advanced L2 writers' advantage for their possessing fairly higher linguistic knowledge.

This very point was closely touched for WPG participants (as having made about 73% of the macrostructure changes positively), hence, as a plausible elaboration on their being as almost four times more successful student writers than their counterparts in SPG in terms of both text-based and content-related changes.

Being deprived of the instructor's all-in-good-time guidance and skeptical about the quality of peer feedback (suggested by Lam, 2013) along with not having ever been left behind as autonomous L2 learners in the natural learning environment caused SPG participants (especially those at the MP and LP levels) to benefit more from the way their errors were treated directly (and selectively) by the tutor than those of the HP level. Examining the efficacy of direct feedback, some researchers (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Hyland & Hyland, 2006) have debated on lower-proficiency L2 learners' possible inability to do self-correction, even if the rectified errors are explicitly within their reach.

Accordingly, the findings of this study are partially consistent with those whose studies have confirmed direct WCF as an effective technique to improve intermediate EFL learners' writing performance (Ducken, 2014; Hartshorn & Evans, 2012). Likewise, Diab (2015) emphasized how receivers of direct error correction and metalinguistic feedback achieved better results than those exposed to just metalinguistic feedback. Again, there is a good match in this regard with the results obtained from SPG.

Viewing the scope of tutor feedback, the results of this study resonate with Bruton's (2009) findings showing that focused CF, as a type of explicit grammar instruction than focus-on-form mediation, might make it more difficult for L2 learners to transfer their feedback-incorporated learning to new-situated writing. Besides, focused CF cannot meet "the need to individualize feedback according to students' different strengths and

weaknesses" (Ferris, 2010, p. 192). The outcome is clear from the participants' writing in WPG, which is of higher quality in terms of enhancing linguistic (fluency) and metacognitive (self-reflection) aspects of writing, similar to the studies conducted by Hung (2006), Chang and Tseng (2011), and Li (2010). The findings for the revision changes correspond with other researchers' studies (Ferris, 2010; Hartshorn & Evans, 2012; Storch, 2010) who have discovered that unfocused CF has more striking capacity to affect L2 students' composition improvement. L2 learners' receiving fruitful comments on their erroneous written products comprehensively rather than being corrected selectively, contribute to the extermination of errors in later occasions for writing news pieces (Fazilatfar, Fallah, Hamavandi, & Rostamian, 2014).

SPG participants focused their attention on grammatical accuracy three times more than WPG participants, and the obtained results correspond with the findings of some scholars (Ellis, et al., 2008; Ferris, 2006) who assert that the theoretical rationale behind expected predominance of focused approach over unfocused CF for improving accuracy originates in L2 Learners' noticing and comprehending corrections in the course of aiming at particular kinds of errors. Moreover, van Beuningen (2010) notified that some recent studies (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen, 2010) discovered constructive outcomes for focused WCF, leading to long-lasting achievements in writing accurately.

Although WPG participants demonstrated a preference for more content-based correction, the same as the results of some other studies (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Lee, 2008) and SPG participants preferred a grammar-based approach in practice and as a result of a large amount of accuracy-oriented rule-based (focused) WCF, in the same line with some other studies (Lee, 2005; Radecki & Swales, 1988), L2 writing instructors should pay attention

to writing content as well as grammatical errors (Chen, Nassaji, & Liu, 2016).

## **6. Conclusion**

The participants' reactions in both groups were significantly different because they were exposed to totally different portfolio approaches. The nature of the showcase portfolio model (conducted in SPG) was not fully-formative (for its feedback implementation) and its learners were more grade-oriented for prioritizing with the submission of their best last compositions (as having summative function).

As one important issue noteworthy to mention here is the fact that L2 learners, at least in the L2 writing context of Iran, still have a great willingness to integrate tutor-feedback in their redrafts more than other alternatives, largely due to overreliance on the tutor as the most knowledgeable feedback-provider in the class, even if they do not understand its necessity (Goldstein, 2006). The higher proportion of the participants' revisions triggered by the tutor-feedback verifies this fact, as well.

The results of this study may contribute to L2 pedagogy because of its practical applications for EFL classrooms. The L2 teacher's being cognizant of different contexts, varying levels of need, ability, and other individual differences inherent in each learner (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Park, 2009) is strongly recommended to avoid relying only on his or her intuition to decide which error(s) is/are important to correct (acting selectively/comprehensively in a(n) direct/indirect manner), and to prevent each learner from being left on his or her own to process the teacher's correction.

Avoiding L2 learners being just receptive and teachers playing the role of error seekers or error hunters (suggested by Hairston, 1986, as cited in Lee, 2009; Lee, Mak, & Burns, 2016), a middle ground, including blended



strategies, when needed and to whom may be applied, can be one possible alternative in the writing class. L2 teachers should be considerate towards their learners' proficiency levels, use, and understanding of feedback, each of which may lead to different patterns of feedback.

By implementing a *No Student Left Behind* approach to design a class being run within a peer-to-peer collaboration, to avoid being grade-oriented, and to balance the dual functions of summative as well as formative writing assessment of L2 learners' learning-to-write/writing-to-learn through keeping portfolios, the teachers' concern appears to be that they adapt and innovate some new techniques (e.g., portfolio assessment) to foster the spirit of scaffolding through a good deal of sustainable triadic feedback practices (i.e., self, peer and tutor). This way, the students' writing will not only be assessed, but also be taught by adopting not-one-draft-one-reader approach to writing, whose design is really formative in nature and not dressed just in its clothing. Thus, this atmosphere will result in reciprocation of feedback fine-tuned to the learners' ZPDs to consequently feed feedback forward from other-regulated learning (tutor/peer-assisted) to self-regulated learning, to promote learner autonomy, and to develop accurate and fluent writing ability at the tertiary-level assessment context.

Like other studies, this study is not devoid of shortcomings and limitations. The absence of a true control group was due mainly to the ethical reason of not providing feedback to some students, following Bitchener and Knoch's (2009) study in that the limitations were seen in the small number of objects but not involving a non-feedback group and its not being longitudinal (Ferris, 2010, p. 188) to measure other facets such as time (immediate vs. delayed posttests) on new pieces of writing produced later on, hence the obtained results in this study cannot be generalized.

To break with precedent in the area of teacher training and teacher

evaluation, teachers' professional development in implementing innovative feedback practices in writing courses might be addressed to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of their approaches to teaching writing.

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