

*Investigating the Effectiveness of Feedback Loop on Second Language Writing Accuracy  
Among Young Learners*

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**Abstract**

Feedback and its effectiveness on L2 writing performance has been studied by many scholars, and the debate about its effects has been a controversial topic for over two decades (Cao, 2021). Apart from the inconclusive results, most studies on this topic have been conducted with postsecondary students (75%) and adult learners (86%), which highlights the need to pay more attention to young learners (Liu & Brown, 2015). Driven by this gap, this study aims to clarify whether the feedback loop has an impact on young learners' second language writing. 40 EFL Second grade students were divided into two groups: the experimental group and the comparison group. During the treatment period, the experimental group received a continuous feedback loop for 5 weeks, while the comparison group received feedback only once. At the end of the treatment period, the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test showed that the experimental group performed better than the comparison group on the post-test. ( $H(1) = 17.094, p < .005$ ). Pedagogical implications are presented at the end of the article along with suggestions for future studies.

Keywords: Feedback, Feedback Loop, L2 Writing Accuracy, Young Learners

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## Introduction

Feedback has been a topic that educational researchers have been studying to determine its role, impact, and meaning. Shute (2008) defines feedback as “the information communicated to learners to change their thinking or behaviour to improve learning” (p.154). Studies on the subject have demonstrated that feedback improves students' performance on the given task (Hendry et al., 2016). Thus, it is argued that “giving feedback to students on their performance provides valuable information that facilitates learning” (Tricomi & DePasque, 2016, p.175). Therefore, providing feedback in the writing process is considered beneficial to L2 learners' writing performance (Wahyuni, 2017). Feedback, as a concept based on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, ensures that learning occurs through social interaction. According to this theory, “language development occurs when learners have sufficient and efficient scaffolding so that they can be supported by agents such as teachers and then become self-regulated learners who can use the L2 freely in their zone of proximal development” (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012, p.18). According to Hattie & Timperley (2007) the definition of feedback is “the information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) about aspects of one's performance or understanding, and this can help learners identify their strengths and weaknesses in writing” (p.81).

There are several types of feedback to provide information about L2 learners' writing performance: “Teacher feedback, peer feedback, self-feedback, and technology-based feedback” (Lee, 2020, p.5). Since the focus of this study is on teacher feedback, it should be mentioned that there are also different types of teacher feedback. These include: written corrective feedback (feedback on errors made by the writer), written commentary (written comments on other aspects of writing such as content and organisation), and oral feedback (given face-to-face rather than in written form) (Lee, 2020). Several studies have examined the effectiveness of feedback on L2 learners' writing skills. The study by Fathman and Whalley (1990) found that the group that received error feedback had fewer grammatical errors in their revised draft than the other groups that received only content feedback or no feedback at all. Another study by Bitchener (2008) examined the effectiveness of written corrective feedback with 75 ESL university students and found that the experimental group, who received corrective feedback outperformed the control group in terms of writing accuracy.

Although the effect of feedback on second language writing has been a topic of interest for the past two decades and studies state that young learners also benefit from feedback (Roothoof, Lázaro-Ibarrola & Bulté, 2022), the number of the studies that have investigated the effectiveness of feedback on young learners' writing performance is small (Liu & Brown, 2015). Therefore, further research on the effectiveness of feedback on young learners' writing performance is needed to provide helpful information on this topic. Besides, there are studies in the literature that have investigated the effectiveness of different types of feedback to compare them (Saed, AbuSa'aleek, RahmtAllah, 2022), but experimental studies that focus exclusively on oral feedback in the context of EFL are scarce (Alfalagg, 2020). And although studies have attempted to investigate the effectiveness of oral feedback on students' written performance, the results are uncertain and inconclusive (Erlam, Ellis, & Batstone, 2013).

Moreover, most of these studies in the literature examined the effects of feedback on revision accuracy, and few of them focused on the effectiveness of feedback on new written work (Ferris, 2010, 2012). As Ferris (2004) explains, revising an incorrect form may show improvement, but it does not guarantee that learners will use the correct forms when writing a

new text. Therefore, researchers (Sheen, 2007; Truscott, 1999) have pointed out that it is important to examine the effects of feedback not only on the accuracy of L2 revision but also on the newly written texts. This is referred to as the transfer of feedback (Karim & Nassaji, 2018) and has been explained in previous studies as a reduction in errors from one written work to another (Truscott & Hsu, 2008; Van Beuningen et al., 2012).

Therefore, as previous literature shows the importance of focusing on new texts when studying the effects of feedback, this study addresses L2 accuracy in learners' new texts. And given the lack of studies on the effectiveness of feedback on young learners' writing performance and the inconclusive findings on the impact of oral feedback, further studies are needed to investigate the effects of oral feedback in the context of young learners.

Feedback and its effectiveness on L2 writing performance has been studied by many scholars, and the debate about its effectiveness has been a controversial topic for over two decades (Cao, 2021). The debate began with Truscott's (1996, 1999) claim that written corrective feedback was ineffective and also damaging to the accuracy of L2 writing. He therefore suggested that teachers should refrain from it. Ferris (1999, 2004, 2006), on the other hand, held that feedback can significantly improve the accuracy of L2 writing if it is used carefully and continuously. Due to these conflicting statements and suggestions, Hyland & Hyland (2006) stated that the impact of feedback is still unclear.

As the number of studies on the impact of feedback has increased, the debate on this topic has also expanded. As mentioned earlier, most of these studies have demonstrated a positive effect of feedback on L2 writing performance. For example, the study by Karim & Nassaji (2018) showed that the group, which received feedback performed better on revision tasks than the group, which did not receive feedback. The study by Stefanou & Revesz (2015) also showed that the experimental group, which received direct feedback performed better than the comparison group that did not receive feedback when their article usage for specific and generic plural references was assessed through a text summary and truth value judgement test.

However, there are also studies that show feedback has no positive effect on writing in the L2. For example, Truscott and Hsu's (2008) study showed that the group that received feedback performed better on the posttest than the control group did. However, in the delayed posttest, which was administered one week later than the posttest, both groups performed equally well. Therefore, the study concluded that feedback had no lasting effect on writing in the L2. Similarly, in Gorman & Ellis' (2019) study, the results showed no difference between the groups that received corrective feedback and those that did not. All three groups had similar results and showed no significant difference. Liu & Brown (2015) pointed out that most studies on this topic have been conducted with postsecondary students (75%) and adult learners (86%), highlighting the need to pay more attention to young learners. Therefore, there is a need in the literature to fill this gap and conduct studies that shed light on the literature on the effectiveness of feedback in second language writing by clarifying it in the context of young learners.

### **The Present Study**

Within this frame, the purpose of this study is to fill this gap in the literature and clarify whether the feedback loop has an impact on second language writing among young learners. Thus, it aims to answer the following research question:

1. Does providing feedback loop have an effect on second grade EFL students' writing performance?

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The design of the study is quasi-experimental because the participants are not randomly divided into experimental and comparison groups. Instead, they are selected as a whole class as either the experimental or comparison group (Best et al., 2017). The number of participants in both groups is the same, 20 in the experimental group and 20 in the comparison group (total  $N = 40$ ).

### **Participants**

Participants in both groups were 8-year-old second grade EFL students of the same school. The genders in both groups were mixed, i.e., male and female, and their English proficiency was in the same range (A2 on the CEFR). They could understand frequently used expressions and communicate in everyday situations. All participants were monolingual and native Turkish speakers.

### **Instruments & Data Collection**

Participants took a pre-test and a post-test to collect data. The English exam, which all second graders in the school take twice in a term served as the pre-test and post-test. Their performance on the writing section of this exam provided the data to compare the two groups. Since the participants were young learners and their language proficiency was low, they only had to write one paragraph on a given topic in the writing part of the exam. The reliability of the exams measured using Cronbach's alpha was .677 and .856 for the pre-test and post-test respectively.

### **Treatment Procedure**

In order to investigate the effect of feedback loop on young L2 learners' writing performance, two groups were formed in this study. One group served as the comparison group and the other as the experimental group. Before the start of the treatment, both the control and experimental groups took a pre-test to ensure that the groups did not differ. After data collection on the students' writing scores from this pre-test was completed, the experimental group received the treatment. As part of the treatment, the experimental group received feedforward from the teacher on their writing performance as well as feedback. This cycle of feedback and feedforward engaged the experimental group in a feedback loop. During the feedback process, students were asked to pay attention to their grammatical errors. The teacher provided indirect feedback to the students, i.e., the errors were not directly shown to the students, but they were guided to find and correct them themselves (Karim & Nassaji, 2020). The feedback loop was provided to the experimental group in every writing session for 5 weeks until the post-test. To avoid bias, the control group received a placebo, i.e., they received feedback only once. The experimental group received the treatment until they took the second English exam at school. And this second English exam served as a post-test. Based on the data collected from both groups in the pre-test and post-test, their writing

performance was graded and compared. The results of the two tests from both groups were used to determine if the treatment group would perform better than the control group.

### Scoring Procedure

Students' writing performance was graded according to the school's grading policy, thus the teacher graded students' written work only on their grammatical errors. Therefore, the focus was on the accuracy of the texts by evaluating the grammatical errors. Following the study of Van Beuningen (2011), the grammatical errors that were considered included errors in the syntax and morphology of a sentence. To ensure the reliability of the scores, interrater reliability was calculated. Another EFL teacher, who is a native speaker of English scored the participants' writings individually and the Pearson correlation coefficients for the two scores in the pre-test and post-test were calculated. Pearson correlation coefficients in pre-test and post-test were: 0.99, 0.99 respectively, which refers to 98% positive association. The results indicated that there was a strong positive agreement between the raters.

### Data Analysis

The results of the two groups were subjected to descriptive and inferential analysis using SPSS 26.0 software to obtain sufficient information on the significance of the results. Since the data did not meet the normality assumption of the parametric tests, the non-parametric tests were used to analyse the data. Therefore, to examine the effect of feedback, Kruskal-Wallis and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were used to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental and comparison groups.

### Results

#### Normality Testing

In this study, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to measure the normality of the data distribution. The data distribution was normal if the significance level was higher than .05. The results of the normality test are shown in Table 1.

Groups	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Experimental	.200	.000
Control	.061	.200

Table 1: The Summary of the Result of the Normality Testing

As Table 1 shows, not all values obtained exceeded the .05 significance level. Therefore, the results showed that the data deviated from the normal distribution and the non-parametric tests had to be used for further analysis to answer the research question.

***RQ: Does providing feedback loop have an effect on second grade EFL students' writing performance?***

Groups	Tests	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental	Pre-Test	3.00	10.00	7.10	2.17
	Post-Test	6.00	10.00	8.65	1.46
Comparison	Pre-Test	2.00	10.00	6.60	2.99
	Post-Test	1.00	9.00	4.90	2.82

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Results of Experimental & Comparison Groups in Pre & Post Tests

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the results of the experimental and comparison groups in the pre- and post-test. It shows the minimum and maximum scores obtained and the mean of each test with its standard deviation. To answer the research question, the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental and comparison groups were compared to determine if there was a difference between the groups. For this purpose, the Kruskal-Wallis test was used.

Tests	Kruskal-Wallis H	df	Asymp. Sig
Pre-Test	.136	1	.712
Post-Test	17.094	1	.000

Table 3: Kruskal-Wallis Test Statistics

As shown in Table 3, the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test indicate that there was no difference between the groups at the pre-test  $H(1) = .136, p = 0.712$ . However, there was a significant difference between the groups at the post-test  $H(1) = 17.094, p < .005$ .

To determine the differences within groups, the Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used to compare the scores of each group on the pre-test and post-test.

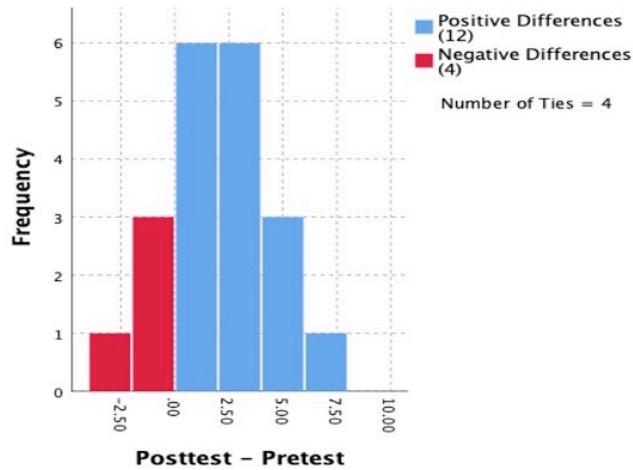
Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
The median of differences between Pretest and Posttest equals 0.	Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.021	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .050.

Table 4: Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results for Experimental Group's Scores

Table 4 shows that the results of the related-samples Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated that post-test ranks were statistically significantly higher than pre-test ranks in the experimental group  $Z = 112, p < .05$ .

Graph 1 visually represents the differences between the pre-test and post-test results of the experimental group in a bar graph. It shows that the results were higher in the post-test than in the pre-test.



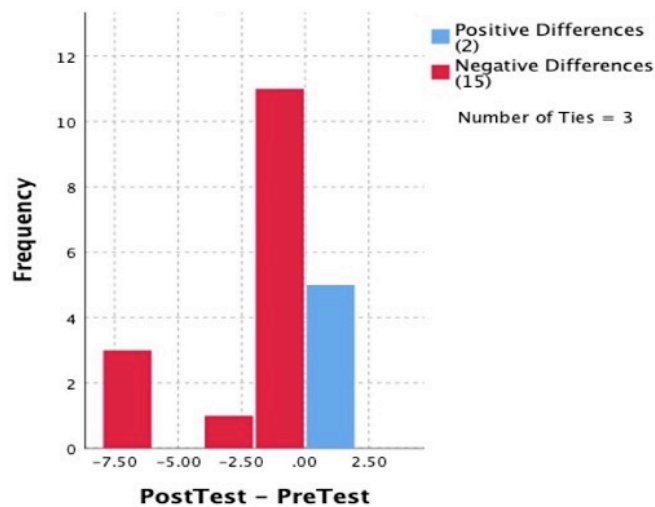
Graph 1: Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results for Experimental Group's Scores on a Graph

Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
The median of differences between Pretest and Posttest equals 0.	Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.002	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .050

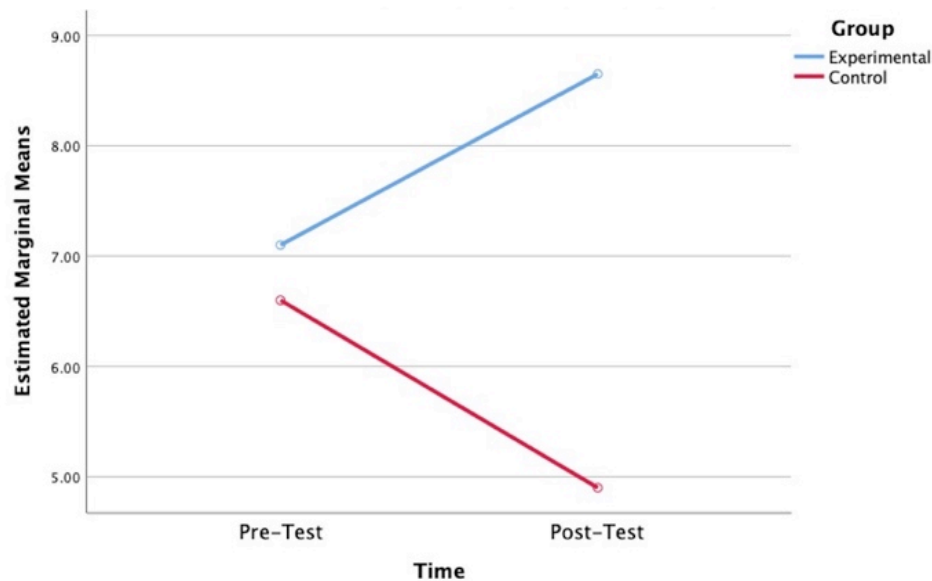
Table 6: Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results for Comparison Group's Scores

Table 6 shows that the related-samples Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated that post-test ranks were statistically significantly lower than pre-test ranks in the comparison group  $Z = 14, p < .05$ .



Graph 2: Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results for Comparison Group's Scores on a Graph

Graph 2 visually represents the differences between the pre-test and post-test results of the comparison group in a bar graph. It shows that the results in the post-test were lower than in the pre-test.



Graph 3: Estimated Marginal Means of Groups in Pre-Test and Post-Test

Graph 3 shows the estimated marginal means of the groups at two different time points, the pre-test and the post-test. It graphically demonstrates that the experimental group's post-test scores increased while those of the comparison group decreased.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to answer the question of whether providing a feedback loop to young EFL learners would have an impact on their writing performance. The results of the study showed that both the experimental and comparison groups had similar pre-test scores at the beginning of the 5-week period, as there was no statistically significant difference between them. At the end of the 5-week treatment period, both groups were subjected to a post-test to determine whether they were significantly different from each other. And the results of Kruskal-Wallis test showed that the groups were significantly different from each other.

To compare the results of each group in the pre-test and post-test, the Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used. The results showed that the experimental group's scores significantly increased in the post-test, while the comparison group's scores significantly decreased. Thus, the treatment was effective for the experimental group and the feedback loop had an impact. Therefore, the answer to the research question of this study is that providing a feedback loop has an effect on the writing performance of second grade EFL students.

However, the findings showed that the results of the comparison group did not even stay the same, but actually worsened. Since they did not receive a feedback loop, they may not have had the opportunity to identify their errors and understand where they needed to make changes to correct their errors and how to do so. Consequently, it is possible that the post-test



challenged them more and they performed worse because there was no correction and scaffolding from a superior agent.

The results of this study support the theories that there is an effect of feedback on learners' writing. Therefore, the results seem to be consistent with some previous studies that also found that feedback has a positive effect on students' written work (Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ashwell, 2000; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener and Ferris, 2012). Thus, the results are in contrast to the studies that say feedback is ineffective (Kepner, 1991; Polio et al., 1998) and teachers should not use it (Truscott, 1996; 1999; 2004).

Another important point is that the results also show that feedback is effective on new written work, not just revision, which supports Bitchener's (2008) study. This is important because many researchers (Truscott, 1999; 2004; Ferris, 2004) have stated that accuracy must be measured on new written work and only then can the effectiveness of feedback be measured (Bitchener, 2008). Thus, the results of this study provide evidence that oral feedback has an impact on students' new written work, which supports previous research (Ellis et al., 2006).

Moreover, these findings can help shed light on the effectiveness of feedback on young learners' writing, as there are few studies that have examined this issue in the context of young learners (Liu & Brown, 2015). And, they support the earlier findings of Roothoof et al.'s (2022) study by showing that feedback is effective and young learners can also benefit from it.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether providing a feedback loop to second grade EFL students has an effect on their writing performance. The results were discussed in detail in the section above. There are also some noteworthy implications, applications, limitations, delimitations, and suggestions for further research to mention.

## **Implications and Applications**

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study. Providing feedback with feedforward that engages students in a feedback loop has an impact on second language learners' writing performance. And young learners can also benefit from this feedback loop, which enables them to improve the accuracy of their new writing. Therefore, a feedback loop is an important application for young learners that teachers can provide in their sessions. In particular, teachers who teach young EFL learners to write in their second language can provide their students with as much feedback and feedforward as possible to increase the intensity and impact of the feedback loop they offer. In this way, young learners can hopefully improve their writing performance and acquire better writing skills with the help of the persistent feedback loop.

## **Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

There are several limitations and delimitations of this study. Groups were selected from pre-formed classrooms to conduct this study. Therefore, two classrooms were selected for each of the experimental and control groups. This results in a lack of randomization of participants and may affect the validity of the study. In addition, the number of participants is small, which in turn affects the generalizability of the results. In addition, the researcher has only 5

weeks to study the effect of the treatment. Thus, the time limitation may pose a problem in determining the effect of the intervention. It is not known what would happen if the treatment lasted longer. In addition, there is no delayed post-test in this study. Therefore, we do not know whether the experimental group would still perform better than the comparison group after a certain period of time and whether the feedback effect would last. In addition, this study does not consider different types of feedback and only examines oral teacher feedback. Therefore, the results of this study do not provide information about the effectiveness of other types of feedback on the writing performance of young EFL learners, but only about the effect of oral feedback.

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