

# **Grammar Correction in ESL Writing Classrooms**

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In this paper, the case for and against the use of an error correction code to indicate ESL learners' errors in writing will be discussed. Then, an action research project scaffolding students into self-editing and self-evaluation via group and peer-reviewing will describe an alternative to indicating students' written errors using an error correction code when providing feedback. Finally, two groups of students' writing will be compared on a pre-action research writing task and a post-action research writing task.

## Literature Review

Seldom has the field of Applied Linguistics been so shaken as when Truscott (1996) published his review article on the case against grammar correction in the ESL writing classroom (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Lee, 2009; Shin, 2008). Truscott (1996) gave three major reasons not to correct grammar in ESL students' writing compositions: (a) research shows that grammar correction is ineffective, (b) this ineffectiveness is to be expected because students are in the process of acquiring language and what we are correcting is their interlanguage, which will continue to develop and change anyway as it becomes closer to the target language, (c) grammar correction has harmful effects. In addition, the reasons for continuing grammar correction all lack merit, according to Truscott. Truscott's article provoked an unprecedented outcry from teachers (Lee, 2009; Shin, 2008) including Ferris (1999), who subsequently oversaw many dissertations attempting to prove that indirect, or coded, error correction is beneficial. Ferris (2002) even published a book on the subject of error treatment.

Truscott (1996) had indeed succeeded in shaking the foundation of a fundamental belief about language learning and teaching, the belief that indicating students' written grammatical errors using an error correction code improves their writing. In a typical teaching environment, ESL teachers use an error correction code to identify students' writing errors. Teachers then return the writing papers, now covered with editing symbols such as SV, for subject-verb agreement, VT, for verb tense error, WO, for word-order error, etc., to the students. The students are expected to re-write the paper, correcting the errors, despite evidence showing that successful error correction during revision does not improve students' writing ability (Truscott & Hsu, 2008). The identification of errors by the teacher using the error correction code and the students' subsequent correction of their errors is the accepted methodology for teaching ESL writing. This is the methodology for providing writing feedback to students found in textbooks and teacher-training programs. It remains unquestioned and is still in use by many teachers.

Just how successful is the use of an error correction code in improving students' writing? Do students make fewer grammatical errors when this methodology is employed? According to the research review done by Truscott (1996), the answer was a resounding "No!" According to a more recent review by Ferris (2004) on the state of the art in writing error correction studies, the answer is still "no," and according to two current studies by Aliakbari and Toni (2009) and Ellis, Sheen, Murakmi, and Takashima (2008), the answer is again, "no." Unless, that is, the indirect coded error correction is narrow enough (such as the use of *a* and *the* in first and second mention article usage), and the data is collected from a discrete item post-test, rather than from students' actual writing. In the study done by Aliakbari and Toni, a 40-discrete item grammar post-test that came with the students' course book was adapted to use as the post treatment (coded error correction feedback) test, not student essays written under test conditions. In the Ellis et al. study, a discrete item error correction test was used as well as a new piece of writing; however, only one condition of article usage was targeted in the study. Therefore, we may conclude from the Aliakbari and Toni study that coded written error correction on students' writing is effective in improving their test scores on a discrete item grammar test, but we have no new knowledge of whether it is effective in improving students' grammar on writing tasks or improving their writing. We may also conclude that indefinite and definite article usage on first and second mention of a noun for Japanese students is improved by coded written error correction from the Ellis

et al. study under the condition that only this error is targeted in the students' writing across a semester. A subsequent study by Bitchener and Knoch (2009) showed no difference in effect upon accuracy for this particular indefinite/definite English article usage whether the students had direct corrective feedback with written and oral metalinguistic explanation, direct corrective feedback with a written metalinguistic explanation, or direct corrective feedback only.

One of Truscott's (1996) practical problems with error correction is that a teacher must recognize that a mistake has been made which is not always as straightforward as it may seem with native speaking teachers' proofreading abilities and non-native speaking teachers with varying levels of grammatical expertise in the target language themselves. Ferris (1999, 2002) is in whole-hearted agreement with Truscott on this issue and her solution is to train teachers better in the recognition and correction of grammatical errors. The problem of teachers completely and correctly identifying errors is illustrated in Figure 1.

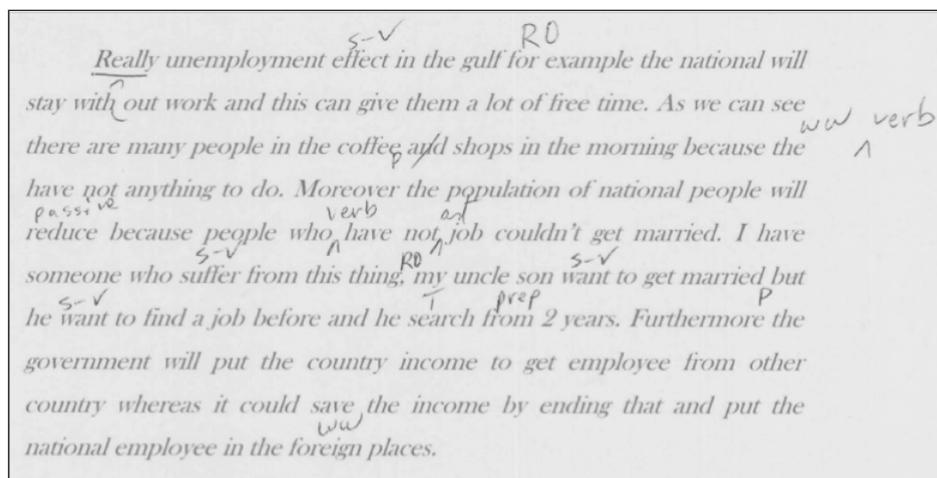


Figure 1: Using coded error feedback

In Figure 1, the deletion of the word *and* in Line 3 might not be the error at all. Perhaps the student meant to say *cafes and shops* rather than *coffee shops*. The student has been asked to add a verb after *who* in Line 5, the auxiliary verb *do* presumably, with no mention of correcting the word order, and finally, Line 10 does not have any errors indicated although surely it should be *country's income* and *employees* rather than *employee*. Furthermore, this is only one paragraph of one student's 250-word essay. Most teachers have many more students and going through a class of twenty students' essays of 250-words is a time-consuming enterprise. This brings us to one of the supporting reasons that Truscott (1996) gave to abandon error correction in the ESL writing classroom, the time that it involves in relation to its general ineffectiveness. Teacher recognition and identification of errors in students' writing is not a trivial matter. Mistakes are bound to be made. Even reducing the workload of the error correction code system of providing feedback on writing by focusing on only a certain type of error per assignment would not entirely alleviate the problem of correct and complete error recognition by the ESL instructor.

Another problem with using coded error correction is that it demotivates students. The more essays handed back to students for rewriting, the more demotivated they become and the less rewriting they do. This is true whether the teacher uses a neutral color (not red) for hand marking as advised by White and Arndt (1991) or whether the teacher uses electronic feedback such as the track changes feature of Microsoft® Word or a coded error correction software such as Markin© by Creative Technology. A catch-22 evolves. According to Ferris (1999, 2002, 2004),

one of her primary reasons for giving students error correction feedback is because they expect it. She argues that since they expect it, this will motivate them to rewrite their essays correcting their mistakes. In my experience, just the opposite is true. When a second language learner is asked to produce a piece of written work, they write what they think is correct. No student would intentionally hand a piece of written work to a teacher that they purposefully wrote full of mistakes. This is because their interlanguage is developing and they write what they believe to be correct at that time in their internal system of rule-making and generalization. This is Truscott's (1996) second main reason for not wasting time on error correction in the writing class. Even if a teacher could zero in on a particular student's internal rule-making system level for an aspect of grammar, there are so many different categories of written language grammatical error ranging from article usage to word usage to word order to verb tense to verb form and so on, that it would be impossible to do it for one particular student, much less twenty students or sixty students because they would all be at different stages in their language acquisition for every aspect of language. It would be impossible for teachers to pinpoint exactly which error correction would be taken up by the student to improve her/his writing. It would be much more efficacious to abandon error correction in ESL writing classes. Truscott's (1999) response to Ferris's (1999) stance on students wanting and expecting error correction, ergo it is a good thing, is to say that a correction free-approach does not lead to frustration, or a lack of motivation or confidence, as Ferris argued, but rather to happier students who are happier with the course according to his course evaluations after he abandoned error correction in his writing classes. According to Truscott (1999), the reason that students believe that they should have their written errors corrected is because teachers have taught them that they should have their written errors corrected.

When a teacher hands back a paper to a student that is covered with the error correction code for rewriting, students become less and less motivated, not only to rewrite, but to write in general. They perceive themselves as failures: they will never master the English writing system; they will never become good at English spelling. Teachers who use coded error correction seldom respond to their students' ideas in the content of their writing. In Lee's (2009) study of 5,353 feedback points 94% addressed form and only 3.8% addressed content. The fifth principle of White and Arndt's (1991) process writing model, editing, has overtaken every other aspect of process writing including responding to content. White and Arndt give a touching example of a Japanese student writing about his bicycle being stolen in England shortly after his arrival and how a teacher could respond to the content by asking for clarification and further information to encourage the student to write rather than identifying all of his errors with the error correction code. In all the students' papers passing through teachers' hands, there is seldom even one positive comment about the grammar or content. Writing teachers need to begin emphasizing the positive to encourage students to write and to write more. It is only thus that students' writing has a chance of improving; the more they write, the better their writing will become as they acquire English. The use of coded error correction has the impact of making students hate writing. In this regard, Truscott (1996) is absolutely correct in his estimation that error correction is not only ineffective, but harmful.

## Research Method

This action research study began in an attempt to find a better way to respond to student's writing rather than using coded error correction. After witnessing students become increasingly demotivated about writing in general and rewriting in particular, I decided to scaffold my students into self-editing and self-assessment without using any error correction to see if that would improve their writing. The goals I hope to accomplish with this action research study were the same assessment-driven improvements described by Andrade et al. (Andrade, Buff, Terry, Erano, & Paolino, 2009) to improve middle-school students' writing. First of all, I wanted to make assessment processes and criteria transparent to the students, thus the use and simplification of the banding descriptors used to assess their writing. Secondly, I wanted to provide better feedback from peers and the teacher, and develop students' ability to assess their own work. Third, I wanted to be able to analyze the strengths and weaknesses in students' writing and use

it to guide instruction. The students who participated in this action research project were a group of 22-year-old Emirati male students from elementary to pre-intermediate level.

First of all, I resurrected a feedback scale made of simplified writing band descriptors that I had used in the past to give students feedback on their writing. Bloxam and West's (2007) study on the induction of non-English speaking students into the UK academic writing community, not just as writers, but as participants in all stages of assessment and writing, showed the importance of developing students' understanding of the formal guidance provided in rubrics, or descriptors, which constitute the criteria used to mark the students, to assist in the successful completion of assessments. Figure 2 is an example of the simplified writing bands from Band 3 to Band 5 as a Writing Evaluation Feedback Scale.

<b>Name: _____ Writing Evaluation Feedback Scale Section: _____</b>					
<b>Communicative Quality and Coherence</b>					
Complex communication not always clear	Meaning clear in basic communication		Meaning clear in very simple communications		
Organization helps make it clear	Meaning comes through a little in complex communication		Meaning is unclear in complex communications		
Attempts wider range of joining words	Simple joining words used correctly		Little or no use of joining words		
<b>5</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3.5</b>		<b>3</b>
<b>Structural Range and Accuracy</b>					
Simple sentences correct	Can write simple sentences		Tries to write simple sentences		
Subject-Verb errors may happen	Mistakes happen in word order and subject verb agreement		Lots of mistakes in sentence structure		
	Uses basic verb tenses correctly		Lots of mistakes in word order		
<b>5</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3.5</b>		<b>3</b>
<b>Lexical Range and Fluency</b>					
Vocabulary limited to familiar contexts	Wider choice of vocabulary words		Vocabulary limited to simplest personal topics		
Correct word choice, idioms, register	Text is stilted (short sentences, simple words)		Vocabulary limited to simplest work topics		
<b>5</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3.5</b>		<b>3</b>
<b>Mechanics</b>					
Spelling errors intrude	Spelling mistakes happen but the teacher can guess the word		Cannot spell unknown words		
Uses capital letters, full stops, commas, and apostrophes with occasional errors	Uses capital letters and full stops almost without mistakes		Correct spelling of known words		

		Commas or apostrophes missing or wrongly used		Uses capital letters and full stops most of the time
<b>5</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Comments:</b>				
<b>Overall Band:</b> _____				

Figure 2: Writing evaluation feedback scale based on writing band descriptors

I originally developed the Writing Evaluation Feedback Scale so that students could understand the reason why they got a certain writing band on an assessed piece of writing and how that translated into a percentage using band conversion tables. I tried to simplify the wording of the banding descriptors so that they were accessible to students. In this respect, I hoped to make the assessment practice for evaluating students' writing more transparent. For example, a banding descriptor written for an instructor or writing rater that said, "Simple cohesive devices used appropriately" became "Simple joining words used correctly." I had previously used the Writing Evaluation Feedback Scale with a generic self-editing checklist for advanced intermediate students that included such items as "Do you use different joining words? Highlight them in yellow."

The simplified writing bands alone were not enough to help students learn how to self-edit or self-assess their work. The students needed to be scaffolded into self-editing and self-assessment through peer-reviewing. Therefore, I developed peer-review checklists to assist the students in evaluating each other's work as a precursor to evaluating their own work. Peer assessment has been shown to encourage students to pay more attention to assessment criteria (Bloxham & West, 2007). The benefits of students self-editing and self-assessing their work are manifold: (a) ease of administration, (b) involve students in the assessment process, (c) enhance independent learning, and (d) increase student's motivation (Suzuki, 2009).

The first time I read through a writing assignment from my students, I thought about the main features that were lacking in their written language, such as paragraphing and organization, and how to make students aware that, if they wanted to improve their writing from a Band 3 to a Band 4, or from a Band 4 to a Band 5, they should be focusing on those features when they write. I then developed a peer-review checklist that focused on the main things that I thought their writing was lacking in that particular assignment. As I developed the peer-review checklist for the first assignment, I was careful to focus on the positive.

The first peer-reviewing experience for the students was a narrative writing assignment done in groups of 3-4 students. I read through the assignments from the different groups, looking for common features that were weak across the different texts, but would improve the students' writing bands according to the simplified band descriptors in the Writing Evaluation Feedback Scale. This is the peer-reviewing checklist that was used in the first assignment:

**Peer-reviewing Checklist**      **Students:** \_\_\_\_\_

- |    |  |     |    |
|----|--|-----|----|
| 1. | Is there a title?                                    | Yes | No |
| 2. | Are there margins around the page on all four sides? | Yes | No |

- |     |   |     |    |
|-----|---|-----|----|
| 3.  | Is the paper nice and neat, not torn from a notebook?   | Yes | No |
| 4.  | Is there an introductory sentence?  | Yes | No |
| 5.  | Are there at least 3 sentences in each paragraph?   | Yes | No |
| 6.  | Do all the sentences have a verb?<br>(Highlight all the verbs in pink.)   | Yes | No |
| 7.  | Are there more than 5 different joining words?<br>(Highlight all the joining words in yellow.)<br>( <i>and, but, because, so, first, next, also, after that, etc.</i> ) | Yes | No |
| 8.  | Are there more than 5 different adjectives?<br>(Highlight all the adjectives ( <i>sifar</i> ) in blue.)   | Yes | No |
| 9.  | Is there a concluding sentence?   | Yes | No |
| 10. | Are there more than 150 words? (Count them.)  | Yes | No |

The students were also given the instructions to award 10 points for every question they answered "Yes" which would be their mark on the assignment.

For the first time, I saw students carefully reading over their written work in groups because they had specific tasks to accomplish, highlighting all the verbs in pink, counting the total number of words, and so on. I took up the papers again for feedback and using the Writing Evaluation Feedback Scale, I highlighted the band descriptor categories in the color that matched the editing checklist. For example, "Structural Range and Accuracy" (Highlight all the verbs in pink) was highlighted in pink, "Communicative Quality and Coherence" (Are there more than 5 different joining words?) was highlighted in yellow, and so on. I circled the appropriate number for each band category descriptor and averaged this to determine the overall band of each piece of writing. I did not indicate any errors on the students' papers. They asked me about this when I returned their papers the next day, but I explained that making errors was a natural part of learning a language (Li-Dong, 2008) and that I wanted to focus on how they could improve their writing rather than on what was wrong with it.

I wanted to follow the group peer-review session with several partner peer-review sessions to scaffold the students into self-editing and self-assessment of their writing. Peer-review can play a useful role in writing classes because peer reviewers have been shown to be internally consistent and their rating patterns are independent of their writing ability (Matsuno, 2009). In the next writing assignment, students interviewed each other about their partner's daily routine. After reading the assignments, I developed the following peer-review checklist for the assignment, again emphasizing the features that were lacking in their writing.

### Peer-Review Checklist

**Your Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Your Partner's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### Daily Routine

- |    |  |     |    |
|----|--|-----|----|
| 1. | Is there a correct title?                            | Yes | No |
| 2. | Are there margins around the page on all four sides? | Yes | No |

3.	Is the paper nice and neat, not torn from a notebook?	Yes	No
4.	Is there an introductory sentence?	Yes	No
5.	Are there at least 3 sentences in each paragraph?	Yes	No
6.	Are all the main verbs in the present tense? Highlight all the verbs in pink.	Yes	No
7.	Are there more than 5 different basic joining words? Highlight all the basic joining words in yellow ( <i>and, but, because, so, first, next, after that, etc.</i> ).	Yes	No
8.	Are there more than 3 different complex joining words? Highlight all the complex joining words in orange ( <i>before, after, while, etc.</i> ).	Yes	No
9.	Is there a concluding sentence?	Yes	No
10.	Are there more than 150 words? (Count them.)	Yes	No

The following day, the students read what their partner had written about their daily routine and used the peer-review checklist to assess their partner's work. They were again given the instructions to award 10 points to their partner for every question answered "Yes." I again took up the papers and used the Writing Evaluation Feedback Scale to give feedback in the same manner as before without indicating any written errors. The students continued peer-reviewing each other's writing in a similar vein for the next 3-4 assignments while I adjusted the peer-review checklists to address positive writing features that were lacking on a particular assignment. When every assignment had a title, when all assignments were done on A4 notebook paper or typed, when all assignments had margins, etc., I removed those categories from the peer-editing checklists.

Eventually, I had the students edit their own writing by giving them the self-editing checklist below. I explained that when they had to write Task 2 on their IELTS exam, they needed to be able to self-edit their work as they were writing the task during the exam, that they needed to be checking for certain things regarding their writing at the same time as they were writing their essays in English on the exam, which is not an easy task.

### Self-Editing Checklist

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1.	Are there at least four paragraphs?	Yes	No
2.	Is there an introductory paragraph?	Yes	No
3.	Are there at least 3 sentences in each paragraph?	Yes	No
4.	Are there more than 5 different basic joining words? Highlight all the basic joining words in yellow ( <i>and, but, because, so, etc.</i> ).	Yes	No
5.	Are there more than 3 different complex joining words? Highlight all the complex joining words in orange ( <i>that, although, however, when, before, after, who, etc.</i> ).	Yes	No
6.	Is there a verb in every sentence? Highlight all the verbs in pink.	Yes	No

- |     |  |     |    |
|-----|--|-----|----|
| 7.  | Are there more than 5 different interesting and unusual words?<br>Highlight all the interesting and unusual words in blue. | Yes | No |
| 8.  | Are all the capital letters correct?<br>Highlight all the capital letters in green.  | Yes | No |
| 9.  | Is there a concluding paragraph?   | Yes | No |
| 10. | Are there more than 200 words? (Count them.)   | Yes | No |

During this period of the action research study, I continued to take up the students assignments after they had checked their own work using a self-editing checklist and used the Writing Evaluation Feedback Scale to give the students feedback on their writing. After the students had practiced self-editing their work 3-4 times using a self-editing checklist, I gave the students both a self-editing checklist and the Writing Evaluation Feedback Scale and told them that on this occasion (and subsequently), they would use the Writing Evaluation Feedback Scale to band their own work. They applied themselves diligently to this task. Their self-evaluation on the Writing Evaluation Feedback Scale reflected the self-editing checklists for the assignments. All of my students' writing improved by approximately one writing band during the course of the action research study.

## Results

To determine if the use of peer-review, self-editing, and a writing evaluation feedback scale had an impact on students' writing, I was fortunate to be able to compare this group of students' writing (Group 1, n=16) with a similar group's writing who were studying in the same program, but who were in a different class and had a different writing teacher (Group 2, n=13). I was able to analyze the students' writing papers on the previous semester's final exam writing task (Writing 1) and the current semester's final exam writing task (Writing 2) and compare Group 1 students' writing performance in several writing and error categories with Group 2's using an independent samples t-test although the results are limited by the size of the sample and generalizability of the study. Group 2's writing teacher used the error correction code and direct error correction to give students feedback on their writing. The categories that were used to analyze students' writing were: total number of cohesive devices used, total number of different cohesive devices used, paragraphing, omitted verbs, verb form errors (\*I'm work), verb tense errors, subject-verb agreement errors, omitted articles, article errors, spelling errors, total number of words, and paragraphing. Table 1 compares the first writing task done by the two groups.

**Table 1 Differences between Group 1 and Group 2 on Writing Task 1**

	Group 1		Group 2		Significance
	M	SD	M	SD	
Total cohesive devices W1	13.7	4.80	14.6	4.15	$t(29)=.55, p=.59$ (ns)
Total different cohesive dev W1	6.00	1.97	4.69	2.17	$t(29)=-1.7, p=.10$ (ns)
Verb form errors W1	1.56	1.26	2.53	1.85	$t(29)=1.7, p=.10$ (ns)
Verb tense errors W1	.623	.885	.846	.689	$t(29)=.74, p=.47$ (ns)
Subject-verb agreement errors Wr1	1.13	1.86	1.92	1.71	$t(29)=1.2, p=.24$ (ns)
Missing verb error W1	.750	1.18	2.61	1.76	$t(29)=3.4, p=.00^*$

Missing subject error W1	.438	.629	1.54	1.27	$t(29)=3.1, p=.00^*$
Missing article error W1	1.19	1.05	1.77	1.01	$t(29)=1.5, p=.14$ (ns)
Article error W1	.875	1.15	1.38	1.56	$t(29)=1.0, p=.32$ (ns)
Spelling error W1	13.4	8.69	14.2	7.34	$t(29)=.28, p=.78$ (ns)
Total number of words W1	185	38.3	167	40.0	$t(29)=-1.3, p=.21$ (ns)

(\*p is significant at <.05)

Group 2 had significantly more missing verb errors ( $M=2.61, SD=1.76; t(29)=3.4, p=.00^*$ ) than Group 1 ( $M=.750, SD=1.18$ ) and significantly more missing subject errors ( $M=1.54, SD=1.27; t(29)=3.1, p=.00^*$ ) than Group 1 ( $M=.438, SD=.629$ ). The missing verb and missing subject errors from Group 2 on Writing Task 1 could be an indication that their English writing proficiency level was less than the English writing proficiency level of Group 1 on Writing Task 1.

Table 2 compares the second writing task done by Group 1 and Group 2.

*Table 2 Differences between Group 1 and Group 2 on Writing Task 2*

	Group 1		Group 2		Significance
	M	SD	M	SD	
Total cohesive devices W2	24.4	6.14	15.3	4.23	$t(29)=-4.5, p=.00^*$
Total different cohesive dev W2	10.7	2.86	5.54	1.85	$t(29)=-5.7, p=.00^*$
Verb form errors W2	3.43	2.73	2.07	2.06	$t(29)=-1.5, p=.15$ (ns)
Verb tense errors W2	1.94	1.91	.692	.855	$t(29)=-2.2, p=.04^*$
Subject-verb agreement errors W2	2.69	3.30	2.31	1.97	$t(29)=-.37, p=.72$ (ns)
Missing verb error W2	1.19	.911	2.31	1.70	$t(29)=2.3, p=.03^*$
Missing subject error W2	.500	.817	1.54	1.39	$t(29)=2.5, p=.02^*$
Missing article error W2	1.06	.928	1.46	.967	$t(29)=1.1, p=.27$ (ns)
Article error W2	.563	.629	1.23	1.69	$t(29)=1.5, p=.15$ (ns)
Spelling error W2	12.7	6.94	13.8	7.49	$t(29)=.43, p=.67$ (ns)
Total number of words W2	270	46.7	186	40.7	$t(29)=-5.1, p=.00^*$

(\*p is significant at <.05)

Table 2 shows that the students who used peer-review, self-editing, and the Writing Evaluation Feedback Scale (Group 1) used significantly more cohesive devices ( $M=24.4, SD=6.14; t(29)=-4.5, p=.00^*$ ), significantly more varied cohesive devices ( $M=10.7, SD=2.86; t(29)=-5.7, p=.00^*$ ), and wrote significantly more words on Writing Task 2 ( $M=270, SD=46.7, t(29)=-5.1, p=.00^*$ ) than the students in Group 2 ( $M=15.3, SD=4.23; M=5.54, SD=1.85; M=186, SD=40.7$ ). Group 1 also had significantly more verb tense errors ( $M=1.94, SD=1.91; t(29)=-2.2, p=.04^*$ ) than Group 2 ( $M=.692, SD=.855$ ), but this could be because they were attempting to use more verb tenses than Group 1 which would be an indicator of language development. Group 2 also had significantly more missing verb and missing subject errors ( $M=2.31, SD=1.70; t(29)=2.3, p=.03^*; M=1.54, SD=1.39; t(29)=2.5, p=.02^*$ ) than Group 1 ( $M=1.19, SD=.911; M=.500, SD=.817$ ) on Writing Task 2 (as on Writing Task 1) which would seem to indicate a lack of language development. In this respect, Truscott's (1996) contention that error correction is harmful has been borne out because it seems that the students from Group 2 are taking fewer chances than the students

in Group 1 and writing less. Students in Group 2 produced only an average increase of 19 words per essay while the students in Group 1 produced an average increase of 85 words. (The minimum word length requirement for Writing Task 2 was 200 words.) Group 1 wrote 56% more words than Group 2 on Writing Task 2 and used 41% more different (varied) cohesive devices. Each student in Group 1 also had clearly identifiable 3, 4, or 5 paragraph essays on Writing 2, while almost all students from Group 1 (except two students who had 2-paragraph essays) had single paragraph essays, or Arabic-style paragraphs.

To sum up, the benefits of feedback on students' writing regarding content, organization, or clarity Truscott (1996) are fully accepted. The peer review/self-editing/writing evaluation feedback scale action research study described in this paper is one way to help students develop their writing and the internal self-talk they must undertake as they produce a 250-word IELTS essay under stress. Whilst the best way of providing feedback to students about their writing may well be through one-to-one teacher-to-student writing conferences, these prove to be time-consuming and impractical when dealing with large class sizes (Bloxham & West, 2007; Davidson, 2008-2009). The issue is whether the identification of students' grammatical errors in writing using an editing symbol error correction code contributes to the improvement of students' writing. In this study, the comparison between the writing of the two groups of students, Group 1, who used the peer-review/self-editing/writing evaluation feedback scale and Group 2, whose teacher used error correction code symbols and direct error correction to provide writing feedback, it is clear that error indication/correction did not improve the students' writing ability in Group 2 when compared with the writing ability of Group 1 in the error categories of verb form, verb tense, subject verb agreement, omitted verb, omitted subject, omitted article, article error, or spelling. However, Group 1 students, who created a rich language writing environment through peer review and self review that did not involve either direct or indirect error correction, wrote significantly more words and used significantly more and varied cohesive devices, which are indicators of language development and higher levels of language proficiency.

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