

Development of Literacy Engagement in Chinese Students with Varying Language Proficiencies

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to develop literacy engagement in Chinese students with varying language proficiencies through teacher-written corrective feedback. Drawing on Bandura's social cognitive theory and Boekaerts and Corno's self-regulation theory, the research aims to understand how corrective feedback influences literacy engagement and language proficiency. The study employs a qualitative analysis of student responses and reflective journals with quantitative measures of language proficiency and engagement metrics. The research site includes Chinese university classrooms with both low-proficiency (LP) and high-proficiency (HP) students. Key informants are LP and HP students who receive teacher-written corrective feedback. Data analysis involves thematic coding of student responses and statistical analysis of language proficiency scores and engagement levels. Results show that LP students initially display passive engagement but improve with targeted feedback, while HP students demonstrate active engagement and advanced literacy skills. The study suggests tailored pedagogical strategies for LP students and challenges for HP students to enhance literacy engagement and language proficiency.

Key words: Literacy Engagement, Language Proficiency, Teacher-Written Corrective Feedback, Chinese Students, Qualitative Research

INTRODUCTION

Literacy engagement is a critical factor contributing to academic success, indicating the depth of students' involvement and interest in their learning journey (Newmann, 1992). This engagement encapsulates students' active endeavors to comprehend and master academic content (Buckley, 2018; Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Zepke, 2014; Zepke & Leach, 2010). Within the domain of second language (L2) writing research, literacy engagement with teacher written corrective feedback (WCF) emerges as a pivotal aspect, demonstrated through emotional, behavioral, and cognitive responses to instructors' feedback (Ellis, 2010).

The utilization of teacher WCF, a prevalent method in writing instruction (Ferris, 2010), significantly influences students' language proficiency. The correlation between students' literacy engagement levels and teacher feedback has garnered considerable attention in higher education and L2 writing research, underscoring its potential to enhance students' learning outcomes (Fredricks et al., 2004). However, despite extensive scholarly focus on the efficacy of feedback in L2 writing development (Bitchener & Storch, 2016; Lee, 2020; Salas-Pilco et al., 2022; Zhang, 2022), the role of literacy engagement in maximizing the benefits of teacher feedback remains underexplored (Zhang & Hyland, 2018;

Zheng et al., 2020). A comprehensive investigation into their interaction is warranted, given that literacy engagement encompasses affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions in response to feedback (Ellis, 2010; Han & Hyland, 2015; Zhang & Hyland, 2018).

While prior studies (Han & Hyland, 2015; Mahfoodh, 2017; Cheng & Liu, 2022) have provided valuable insights into how students engage with WCF, limited attention has been devoted to investigating the development or change in student literacy engagement with teacher WCF over time. This gap underscores the necessity of this study, which aims to examine the evolution and development of the affective (emotional), behavioral (action-oriented), and cognitive (intellectual) responses of low-proficiency (LP) and high-proficiency (HP) students to WCF over one semester.

The significance of this research problem lies in the pivotal role of literacy engagement in optimizing the benefits of teacher feedback, thereby enhancing L2 writing development. By grasping the intricacies of literacy engagement, educators can tailor feedback strategies to effectively address the diverse needs of students, ultimately fostering an enriching learning environment. Furthermore, delving into literacy engagement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts contributes to the broader discourse on language learning pedagogy, providing insights

into effective instructional practices to bolster students' language proficiency.

The conceptual framework for this study builds upon Ellis's (2010) categorization of literacy engagement, further refined, and expanded by Han and Hyland (2015) and Zheng et al. (2020). This framework systematically explores factors influencing literacy engagement with teacher WCF, offering a comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics inherent in L2 writing contexts.

By scrutinizing the distinct literacy engagement patterns of LP and HP students with WCF, this study aims to elucidate the interactions between students with varying language proficiency levels and their engagement with feedback. Indeed, the study seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of how literacy engagement can evolve and enhance the pedagogical value of teacher feedback in L2 writing instruction. Such insights are paramount for fostering an educational environment that underscores the significance of psychological investment in learning, ultimately yielding positive academic performance and outcomes (Krause, 2005; Newmann, 1992).

Research Question

- How does teacher-written corrective feedback contribute to the development of literacy engagement in Chinese students with varying language proficiencies over one semester?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of student engagement with written corrective feedback in second language writing uses Sociocultural Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Complex Dynamic Systems Theory. Sociocultural Theory emphasizes social interactions and guided learning while Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors, and Complex Dynamic Systems Theory emphasizes the interconnected nature of language learning and feedback's impact on literacy skills.

Theoretical Frameworks

The exploration of student engagement with written corrective feedback (WCF) in second language (L2) writing draws upon three key theoretical frameworks: Sociocultural Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Complex Dynamic Systems Theory. These theories offer distinct lenses through which to understand the mechanisms of language learning, particularly literacy development.

Sociocultural theory, as advanced by Vygotsky (1978, 1981), posits that cognitive development, including literacy skills, is profoundly shaped by social interactions. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) concept emphasizes the role of guided learning within a learner's cognitive reach, making WCF a vital scaffolding tool for language development (Vygotsky, 1978; Nguyen, 2021). This perspective underscores the importance of timely and targeted feedback to foster learner autonomy and enhance literacy engagement (Bruner, 1985; Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Sharpe, 2008).

Social cognitive theory, articulated by Bandura (1991), accentuates the interplay of cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors in learning. Observational learning, a core tenet of this theory, highlights how learners acquire skills and behaviors by observing others and their feedback interactions (Bandura, 1989). This framework is instrumental in understanding how self-efficacy influences learners' motivation and engagement with literacy-focused feedback.

Complex dynamic systems theory (CDST) offers a holistic perspective on second language acquisition (SLA), portraying language learning as a complex, interconnected system influenced by various factors (Larsen-Freeman, 2006). Within this framework, feedback plays a dynamic role in shaping language patterns and literacy skills, highlighting the iterative nature of feedback processes (Larsen-Freeman, 2017). Student engagement with WCF encompasses affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions, each crucial for literacy development (Ellis, 2010; Han & Hyland, 2015). Recent refinements by Zheng et al. (2020) further delineate these dimensions, providing a nuanced understanding of literacy engagement dynamics in response to feedback.

Empirical Studies of Student Engagement with WCF

Empirical investigations within Chinese higher education settings have yielded significant insights into literacy engagement with WCF (Han, 2017; Han & Hyland, 2015; Tian & Zhou, 2020; Zhang & Hyland, 2018; Zheng et al., 2020; Zheng & Yu, 2018). Qualitative explorations by Han and Hyland (2015) revealed the intricate connections between student beliefs, experiences, and engagement levels, underscoring the importance of personalized feedback strategies for literacy development. Zheng and Yu (2018) focused on low-proficiency learners, highlighting emotional engagement alongside cognitive and behavioral responses to feedback.

Studies by Han (2017) and Zheng et al. (2020) further emphasized the role of student beliefs in shaping literacy engagement, particularly among learners with varying proficiency levels. Tian and Zhou (2020) explored engagement patterns with automated feedback, indicating evolving dynamics in literacy-focused interactions. Research by Liu (2021), Pan et al. (2023), Yang and Zhang (2023), and Zhang and Mao (2023) underscored developmental shifts and reception issues in literacy engagement with WCF. The landscape of literacy engagement research in L2 writing has expanded globally, as evidenced by studies like Kalimantan et al.'s (2023) investigation among Indonesian university students. However, longitudinal, and cross-proficiency level studies remain limited, highlighting the ongoing need for in-depth exploration into literacy engagement dynamics with teacher-written corrective feedback.

METHOD

Participant Selection and Context

The research was carried out at a private university in Southern China, concentrating on a Basic English Writing

course tailored for second-year English majors over one semester. Six female students, aged 19 to 20, were purposively selected for this investigation and evenly distributed into High Proficiency (HP) and Low Proficiency (LP) groups based on their language skills. This deliberate categorization aimed to scrutinize the distinct levels of literacy engagement with teacher Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) among students with varying English proficiency levels. Each participant possessed a minimum of ten years of English learning experience, providing a solid foundation for evaluating the impact of WCF on their L2 writing skills, as shown in Table 1.

The participants' English writing proficiency was assessed using scores from the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Writing Task 2, scaled to a maximum of 100 points. The HP group consisted of students scoring 71, 65, and 65.5, demonstrating advanced writing proficiency in English. In contrast, scores of 40.5, 41.5, and 46 categorized the remaining students into the LP group, indicating basic proficiency. This classification was pivotal in investigating how students with differing skill levels perceive, engage with, and are influenced by teacher feedback in their L2 writing pursuits. Moreover, this segmentation provided insights into potential educational strategies and interventions to enhance L2 writing proficiency across distinct learner groups.

Research Instruments and Approach

A multiple-case study approach was adopted to address the research inquiries, focusing on individual students' literacy engagement with teacher WCF in L2 writing. Data sources encompassed students' initial and revised writing samples alongside semi-structured interviews. Writing tasks aligned with the course syllabus were assigned, and teacher WCF was delivered through handwritten comments on drafts. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather qualitative and open-ended data, allowing participants to delve into personal and nuanced aspects while expressing their thoughts, emotions, and beliefs on specific subjects.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data collection spanned a semester, with participants producing two drafts each for a take-home essay, resulting in 60 texts. The teacher provided WCF on initial drafts and

stimulated recall sessions were conducted within 24 hours of revisions. Data analysis encompassed text analysis of drafts and WCF to explore revision operations and behavioral engagement. Qualitative analysis of semi-structured interview transcripts was conducted to examine any changes or shifts in student literacy engagement with teacher WCF over the semester. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the beginning and end of the research period, focusing on participants' prior experiences and developmental shifts. Inter-coder reliability was ensured through independent analysis and discussions to resolve discrepancies.

The study also addressed ethical considerations, including informed consent, participant anonymity, and beneficence. All participants provided informed consent, ensuring adherence to ethical research principles. Participant anonymity was maintained using pseudonyms, and measures were taken to protect the university's reputation where the research was conducted. Extraneous personal data was excluded from the analysis to uphold anonymity.

RESULTS

Thematic Analysis of Literacy Engagement

The thematic analysis of literacy engagement with written corrective feedback (WCF), guided by Zheng et al.'s (2020) framework, delves into the intricate ways students interact with feedback across affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions, each underpinned by specific sub-themes related to literacy development.

Affective engagement

Affective engagement encompasses the emotional responses students have towards receiving WCF in terms of their literacy skills. This dimension is characterized by feelings such as motivation, encouragement, being overwhelmed, and happiness, reflecting the immediate emotional impact of feedback on their literacy development. The sub-theme of judgment includes students' personal and moral evaluations made by their teachers regarding correctness and effectiveness in writing. Appreciation, another crucial sub-theme, involves students valuing the feedback's significance, and viewing it as helpful, important, and worthy of gratitude. These elements together influence how students emotionally align themselves with the feedback process, impacting their openness and responsiveness to making revisions aimed at improving their literacy.

Behavioral engagement

Behavioral engagement focuses on the visible actions students take in response to WCF to enhance their literacy skills. It includes revision operations, such as making correct revisions, opting not to revise, or incorrectly revising the text based on feedback. Additionally, it covers the behavioral strategies students employ to improve their literacy learning, like actively searching for errors mentioned in the feedback or attempting to understand the underlying reasons for their

Table 1. Demographic information of participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Years of learning English	Proficiency Level
HP1	Female	20	11	High Proficiency
HP2	Female	20	11	High Proficiency
HP3	Female	19	11	High Proficiency
LP1	Female	19	11	Low Proficiency
LP2	Female	19	11	Low Proficiency
LP3	Female	19	11	Low Proficiency

mistakes. This dimension highlights the practical steps students undertake to integrate feedback into their writing practices, aiming at refining their literacy abilities.

Cognitive engagement

Cognitive engagement delves into the intellectual process students engage in when dealing with WCF, specifically concerning their literacy development. This includes the use of learning strategies, where students apply sophisticated, deep, and personalized approaches to address feedback. Students might develop efficient methods to tackle feedback, explore phrases with similar meanings to enrich their vocabulary or rely on basic online dictionaries for alternative word choices. The pursuit of conceptual understanding signifies a move beyond surface knowledge to grasp the foundational grammar rules and concepts underpinning the feedback, which is crucial for improving their literacy skills. Lastly, employing self-regulated strategies, such as maintaining comprehensive checklists and remembering common mistakes from previous feedback, indicates students' efforts to independently monitor and enhance their learning based on WCF for literacy improvement.

Together, these themes paint a comprehensive picture of the multi-layered engagement students exhibit towards WCF in L2 writing from a literacy perspective. They highlight the emotional, actionable, and cognitive pathways through which students process, react to, and utilize feedback to foster their literacy development, underlining the complexity of feedback dynamics in literacy learning settings.

Student Engagement Development with Teacher WCF on L2 Writing

Affective engagement

This section delves into the changes in students' emotional responses to teacher WCF in L2 writing, examining both LP and HP students' affective engagement through students' writing tasks and semi-structured interviews. For the effective sub-theme, over one semester, both LP and HP groups exhibited changes in their emotional responses to teacher WCF on their L2 writing. Initially, participants from both groups displayed a range of emotions, predominantly anxiety. For example, LP1 said, "I feel a bit nervous" (excerpt [1]), and LP2 expressed, "I am excited and a bit nervous" (excerpt [2]). Similarly, HP3 shared, "I am a bit worried about getting feedback" (excerpt [3]), which was echoed by HP1 and HP2 (excerpts [4] and [5]). However, the LP group showed a mix of emotions, including doubt, apprehension, enthusiasm, and indifference. LP1 mentioned feeling "uncertain" (excerpt [1]), LP2 was "worried about" the feedback but also "excited" (excerpt [2]), and LP3 felt indifferent, stating, "I don't have any strong feelings about the feedback" (excerpt [6]). Conversely, the HP group exhibited a more optimistic and curious outlook, with terms like "excitement", "curious", and "eager" used by HP1 and HP2 (excerpts [4] and [5]). Notably, HP3 expressed concern about feedback but was willing to improve (excerpt [3]).

[1] "I feel a bit nervous or uncertain about my writing abilities." (LP1)

[2] "I am excited and a bit nervous. I want to see how I can make my writing better, but I'm also worried about possible mistakes." (LP2)

[3] "I feel a mix of excitement and nervousness about the writing class and the feedback." (HP1)

[4] "I have a mix of emotions and feelings. On one hand, I feel a bit anxious or nervous about what the feedback I would have. At the same time, I also feel curious and eager to see the feedback." (HP2)

[5] "I am a bit worried about getting feedback on my writing. But I am also open to learning and getting better." (HP3)

[6] "I don't have any strong feelings about it (feedback)...Now I get the feedback for this semester; my thoughts have changed a bit. I think there is too much to deal with; I feel tired but still have to face it." (LP3)

Over the semester, both groups showed significant emotional shifts. They reported increased confidence, a positive influence of feedback on motivation, and a heightened sense of achievement. For instance, LP1 remarked, "I feel a sense of accomplishment and pride in my improvement" (excerpt [7]), and LP2 felt "more sure of myself and motivated" (excerpt [8]). Similar sentiments were echoed by HP1 and HP2, who transitioned from uncertainty to a "sense of accomplishment" (excerpts [9] and [10]). Despite these positive changes, LP3 and HP3 experienced a shift towards a more passive emotional state, feeling "tired" and "overwhelmed" by the end of the semester (excerpts [11] and [12]). This unique emotional trend highlights the diverse ways in which students respond to teacher WCF over time. Overall, while most students demonstrated increased self-assurance and fulfillment, LP3 and HP3's experiences indicate that the emotional impact of feedback can vary significantly.

[7] "I can see my improvement. I feel more confident in my writing skills. I feel a sense of accomplishment and pride in my improvement." (LP1)

[8] "I feel more sure of myself and motivated." (LP2)

[9] "My emotions have changed from uncertainty to a sense of accomplishment." (HP1)

[10] "I feel a mix of pride and accomplishment because I have been able to address the previous feedback and make noticeable improvements in my writing. It is a rewarding feeling to see the fruits of my hard work." (HP2)

[11] "My thoughts change a bit. I think there is too much to deal with; I feel tired but still have to face it." (LP3)

[12] "I feel relieved knowing my teacher spent time giving me detailed advice. But sometimes, there was a lot of feedback, and it made me feel a bit overwhelmed and frustrated because I know there is more work to be done." (HP3)

Regarding the judgment sub-theme, perceptions from both groups shifted over the semester. Initially, both groups saw feedback as crucial and positive for L2 writing development. LP1 recognized the "opportunity" to receive feedback and its importance for learning (excerpt [13]). LP2

emphasized feedback's role in personal improvement, saying it would "help me get better" (excerpt [14]). HP1 echoed this sentiment, highlighting the constructive and encouraging nature of the teacher WCF (excerpt [15]), while HP2 viewed feedback as "an opportunity for growth and learning" (excerpt [16]). Both groups valued feedback as a catalyst for improvement at the semester's start. However, LP3 and HP3 had unique attitudes toward their teacher WCF. LP3 saw feedback as a mandatory task rather than an opportunity, stating, "I see it as just something I have to do, not something I want to do" (excerpt [17]). Similarly, HP3 expressed uncertainty about feedback's effectiveness, saying, "The feedback must be helpful, but I am not sure how helpful it is" (excerpt [18]). This cautious approach indicated higher expectations or a more critical evaluation.

[13] "I have the opportunity to receive feedback and learn from it." (LP1)

[14] "The feedback is meant to help me get better." (LP2)

[15] "My teacher's feedback is always constructive and encouraging." (HP1)

[16] "I treat the feedback as an opportunity for growth and learning." (HP2)

[17] "I see it as just something I have to do, not something I want to do." (LP3)

[18] "The feedback must be helpful, but I am not sure how helpful it is." (HP3)

Over the semester, both LP and HP students' perspectives on WCF became more positive and effective. The LP group highlighted feedback as a means of direction and improvement. LP1 and LP2 referred to it as "guidance and support" and "a chance to do better" (excerpts [19] and [20]). Similarly, the HP group further recognized feedback as essential for writing development, describing it as "a valuable tool" and "a valuable resource" (excerpts [21] and [22]). Notably, HP3, who initially doubted feedback's effectiveness, evolved to see its usefulness, stating it "help me see where I'm doing well and where I need to improve" (excerpt [23]). This change indicates a deeper engagement with the feedback process. In contrast, LP3 maintained a negative attitude, moving from seeing feedback as mandatory to complaining about its volume, describing it as "a lot of it" and "tough" (excerpt [24]). This persistent negativity suggests that LP3's view of feedback did not improve over the semester.

[19] "I've received guidance and support to correct my mistakes." (LP1)

[20] "Each suggestion is a chance to do better." (LP2)

[21] "The feedback is a valuable tool for me to learn and grow as a writer." (HP1)

[22] "His feedback is a valuable resource for me to further refine my writing skills and continue my growth as a writer." (HP2)

[23] "His feedback helps me see where I'm doing well and where I need to improve in my writing." (HP3)

[24] "There's a lot of it, and it feels like a lot to handle. It's tough for me." (LP3)

The notable developmental changes in appreciation over one semester are evident. Initially, while students may not

have explicitly expressed gratitude toward teacher feedback, particularly within the LP group, their attitudes and perspectives can be inferred from the provided excerpts. LP1 and LP2 acknowledged the opportunities to receive feedback and its intended purpose of improvement with terms such as "the opportunity", "learn from it", and "help me get better" (excerpts [25] and [26]). Similarly, HP students exhibited a positive outlook, with HP2 expressing that feedback would "help me be much better", and HP1 directly expressing "gratitude" for the teacher WCF (excerpts [27] and [28]). However, LP3 and HP3 stood out from other students. LP3 displayed an attitude that suggested a sense of entitlement towards teacher WCF, as evidenced by the sentiment of "taking it for granted" in the excerpt [29]. This implies that LP3 perceived feedback as something expected and routine. In contrast, HP3's perplexed or uncertain attitude towards feedback, conveyed by "I don't fully realize how much the feedback would impact my growth" (excerpt [30]), suggests challenges or uncertainties, possibly indicating a lack of confidence or understanding in her language abilities.

[25] "I have the opportunity to receive feedback and learn from it." (LP1)

[26] "The feedback is meant to help me get better." (LP2)

[27] "I feel gratitude for my teacher's effort on my work." (HP1)

[28] "His feedback can help me be much better in my writing." (HP2)

[29] "I take it for granted." (LP3)

[30] "I don't fully realize how much the feedback would impact my growth as a writer." (HP3)

By the end of the semester, both LP and HP students demonstrated a notable positive shift in their appreciation for teacher feedback. This is evident through terms such as "thanks", "grateful", and "gratitude" in their excerpts. LP1 and LP2 showed increased assurance in their capacity to enhance their writing with the teacher WCF, using phrases like "more confident" and "trust the feedback more and believe more in my ability" (excerpts [31] and [32]). Similarly, in the HP group, students acknowledged the significant impact of their teacher's direction and assistance. HP1 noted, "I feel more grateful for my teacher's guidance and support" (excerpt [34]), a sentiment echoed by HP2 (excerpt [35]). Remarkably, LP3 and HP3 demonstrated noteworthy transformations in their attitudes towards teacher WCF compared to their initial sentiments. LP3 shifted from indifference to genuine appreciation, and HP3 moved from uncertainty to recognizing the feedback's value. This profound impact of the teacher's guidance and support throughout the academic term is evidenced in excerpts [33] and [36].

[31] "I feel more confident in my writing skills." (LP1)

[32] "I trust the feedback more and believe more in my ability to learn and improve." (LP2)

[33] "Thanks, my teacher, for the time and effort. And his patience." (LP3)

[34] "I feel more grateful for my teacher's guidance and support, as their feedback has played a significant role in my growth as a writer." (HP1)

[35] "I also feel a sense of gratitude towards my teacher for his guidance and support." (HP2)

[36] "I'm truly grateful for his support in helping me become a better writer. The feedback is thorough and clear." (HP3)

Behavioral engagement

Significant developmental changes were observed during one semester in the sub-themes of revision operations and behavioral operations for learning enhancement. These changes were observed from the perspective of analyzing the behavioral involvement of students. Notable differences in revision operations between LP and HP students emerged at the beginning of the semester. LP students showed a mixed response to feedback, struggling to fully implement revisions, including incorrect revisions and deletions (excerpts [37] [38] [39]). Conversely, HP students demonstrated a meticulous approach, carefully considering feedback and committing to accurate revisions (excerpts [40] [41] [42]).

[37] "I make some correct revisions based on the feedback, but I also make some incorrect revisions or even choose not to revise certain parts altogether." (LP1)

[38] "I cannot guarantee that I can revise all errors in the right way, so sometimes I just remove or leave them there." (LP2)

[39] "If a correct answer is provided alongside, I will follow the feedback and correct. But if not, I may sometimes delete or make it incorrectly in my revised writing." (LP3)

[40] "I carefully read and think about the feedback, I try my best to revise every highlighted error correctly. And I often revise my errors correctly." (HP1)

[41] "I read feedback carefully and try my best to fix every mistake. I can revise them correctly most of the time." (HP2)

[42] "I often revise my errors in the right way with the help of my teacher's feedback." (HP3)

Towards the semester's end, LP students exhibited a proactive shift, reducing instances of incorrect revisions and deletions. They actively sought external resources to improve their revision accuracy (excerpts [43] [44] [45]). In contrast, HP students maintained their diligent approach, leveraging external help consistently to ensure correctness (excerpts [46] [47] [48]). Overall, LP students showed improvement through strategic efforts to address weaknesses, while HP students remained committed to excellence, utilizing available resources strategically.

[43] "I have learned a lot and better understood the feedback. I can make more right revisions now." (LP1)

[44] "I make fewer wrong revisions now. And I can fix my errors more accurately. If I get stuck understanding some feedback, I check the online resources for answers." (LP2)

[45] "I can make more right revisions now. Teacher's feedback is helpful. I know how to deal with it with the help of online resources." (LP3)

[46] "I know clearly how to ensure and keep the correctness of my revisions from the very start. I look up

various sources such as online grammar guides and writing forums, and even ask my classmates or teachers for help." (HP1)

[47] "I keep the accuracy of my revisions and improve the quality of my work." (HP2)

[48] "I use some online resources to help me out if I cannot understand the feedback. I always do so from the beginning of the semester. So, I can make fewer mistakes and revise them correctly." (HP3)

Regarding the behavioral engagement for learning improvement sub-theme, at the beginning of the semester, LP students shared a commitment to reviewing and revising their work based on teacher feedback. They primarily focused on rectifying marked errors, as seen with LP1, LP2, and LP3 (excerpts [49] [50] [51]). However, this method, while straightforward, may lack depth and fail to address underlying issues, potentially leading to recurring mistakes. In contrast, HP students demonstrated a more proactive approach, actively seeking additional resources and investing extra time to refine their understanding of feedback. They meticulously examined highlighted errors, engaged in thorough revision, and conducted comprehensive final checks before submission. This dedication to improvement is evident in excerpts [52], [53], and [54].

[49] "I scan the red marks and revise the marked errors." (LP1)

[50] "I just read through the comments and revise the errors." (LP2)

[51] "I read the feedback and revise the errors with teacher's corrections." (LP3)

[52] "I carefully read my work and focus on the specific errors pointed out by my teacher. I then revise them one by one. I pay extra attention to unmarked areas to ensure I don't make the same mistakes that may not be highlighted by my teacher. I analyze the feedback and think if there are any other alternative ways to revise them. I use an online dictionary to look for other alternative ways. Finally, I recheck the revision to make sure everything looks fine." (HP1)

[53] "I go through the feedback and compare it with my writing to see why my teacher changed my words or even a whole sentence. I like to look up the online dictionary to help me understand the feedback better. Then I revise it and check it before handing it in." (HP2)

[54] "I revise the errors one by one according to the feedback from my teacher. When I meet difficulties in revising it, I always use online dictionaries for answers. Before submitting my revised work, I always recheck grammar and punctuation to ensure everything is correct." (HP3)

Over the semester, LP students progressed in their engagement with feedback, transitioning to a more sophisticated approach. They began to utilize additional resources and adopt proactive strategies for improvement, as seen with LP1, LP2, and LP3 (excerpts [55] [56] [57]). LP1's use of a dedicated notebook exemplifies a proactive stance toward self-improvement, emphasizing the enduring significance of feedback. In contrast, HP students consistently demonstrated

a sophisticated engagement with feedback throughout the semester, each employing distinct strategies for improvement. HP1 utilized advanced resources, HP2 pursued self-directed learning, and HP3 integrated criticism effectively (excerpts [58] [59] [60]).

[55] “I read the feedback carefully. I have a notebook, and I use it to write down corrections. I also write down the advanced phrases or sentences on it as a reference. I collect these advanced expressions from my teacher’s feedback online resources.” (LP1)

[56] “I check the feedback, thinking about the pointed errors. I use other resources such as grammar books, online resources, or language learning websites to know the feedback better.” (LP2)

[57] “I go through the feedback when I receive it. Then I use online resources to help me revise it accurately.” (LP3)

[58] “I still use the old method to revise my work and check my writing. It’s useful for me. I find more online resources to help me reduce grammatical errors and help me revise my work faster and better. Then I can focus more on my writing.” (HP1)

[59] “There is only one change, that is, I come to discuss more with my classmates, especially when I want to use different words or phrases to reduce the repetition of my writing. It’s useful and effective.” (HP2)

[60] “I learn from the feedback, make sure that I won’t make similar mistakes next time. So, I use more online resources to reduce the basic grammar issues.” (HP3)

Cognitive engagement

Cognitive engagement was explored through learning strategies, conceptual understanding, and self-regulation (Zheng et al., 2020). In examining students’ cognitive engagement for one semester, significant developmental changes were observed in the sub-themes of using learning strategies, seeking conceptual understanding, and using self-regulated strategies.

For learning strategies, LP students showed significant development, progressing from rudimentary methods to more systematic and diverse strategies. Conversely, HP students, who were already proficient, continued to refine and broaden their methodologies, embracing novel techniques to enhance their writing experiences.

At the outset of the semester, LP and HP students employed distinct learning strategies. LP students exhibited a passive engagement with feedback. LP1 and LP3, as noted in excerpts [61] and [63], mainly reread feedback and revised highlighted portions without deeper analysis. LP2 acknowledged only a basic grasp of grammar rules and difficulties in applying them (excerpt [62]). Statements such as “read it again”, “mainly revise the highlighted parts”, and “don’t think that much” illustrate their initial approach. In contrast, HP students demonstrated active and varied learning strategies. HP1 used an organized approach by “making outlines” to structure information (excerpt [64]). HP2 and HP3 engaged in collaborative learning with peers, utilized online resources, explored intriguing subjects independently,

and took notes while reviewing feedback, as seen in excerpts [65] and [66]. These strategies reflect a holistic and comprehensive learning approach.

[61] “When I got feedback, I usually just read it again and revise it accordingly. I don’t think that much.” (LP1)

[62] “I knew a bit about grammar in writing, like verb tenses and matching subjects with verbs. But using these rules in my writing is tough. I don’t have a clear learning plan, so I can’t always get it right.” (LP2)

[63] “I just mainly revise the highlighted parts without really figuring out why those changes are needed.” (LP3)

[64] “I have some good ways to learn. For example, I like to make outlines to organize information, and I also look for other materials to understand things better.” (HP1)

[65] “I always work with my friends to understand things better, I also use the internet to find information for my writing, and I learn things on my own by exploring topics I think interesting sometimes.” (HP2)

[66] “I like to read and learn the teacher’s feedback and take notes.” (HP3)

Over the semester, LP students made notable progress in their learning strategies. LP1 began actively pursuing additional resources like “grammar books and online courses” to enhance her comprehension (excerpt [67]). LP2 adopted a systematic approach with “checklists” and sought peer input (excerpt [68]). LP3, starting with limited knowledge, explored diverse revision strategies, sought peer feedback, and leveraged web resources for improvement (excerpt [69]). On the contrary, HP students demonstrated early and consistent mastery of sophisticated learning processes. HP1, already using methods like outlining and supplementary materials, further developed her approach with advanced methods like mind maps (excerpt [70]). HP2 and HP3, initially employing various methods, expanded their repertoire by exploring techniques like mind mapping and visualization (excerpts [71] [72]). Overall, LP students evolved from basic to more systematic learning strategies, while HP students consistently refined and expanded their sophisticated approaches throughout the semester.

[67] “I want to learn more, so I actively search for things like online lessons and grammar books. I want extra help to understand things better and improve.” (LP1)

[68] “I start doing things in a more organized way. I make checklists to help me remember what to do, and I also ask my friends for their thoughts on my work to get better.” (LP2)

[69] “I try out different ways to make my work better. I ask my friends for advice, and I also look for help online to get feedback and improve.” (LP3)

[70] “As the semester goes on, I keep working on improving how I learn. I try more advanced methods like creating detailed plans and using visual aids like mind maps. I also explore online resources and seek more challenging materials to expand my understanding.” (HP1)

[71] “I add new ways of learning. I try using mind maps, which are like visual diagrams, to organize information

in a cool way. I also start actively asking questions to understand things better, trying out different approaches to see what works best for me.” (HP2)

[72] “I try more ways to study better, like using cool tricks with pictures and mind maps. I also check out on-line learning sites, and it helps me understand things in a new and better way.” (HP3)

Significant changes were observed in LP students as they transitioned from superficial corrections to proactively seeking a deeper understanding of fundamental concepts. Conversely, HP students, already proficient, further developed their sophisticated methodologies, demonstrating a profound comprehension and detailed implementation of concepts.

At the start of the semester, the disparities in conceptual understanding between LP and HP students were evident. LP students struggled with grasping complex ideas. For instance, LP1 expressed difficulty in understanding advanced concepts despite multiple readings of the teacher’s WCF, as seen in the excerpt [73]. LP2 sought clarification from the teacher but still lacked a complete understanding (excerpt [74]). LP3 focused on basic elements like “grammar” and “spelling”, neglecting broader concepts (excerpt [75]). In contrast, HP students demonstrated a proactive approach to conceptual understanding from the outset. HP1 actively participated in discussions with peers and sought clarification from the teacher, showing a commitment to addressing challenges (excerpt [76]). Similarly, HP2 emphasized communication with classmates and asking questions to enhance comprehension (excerpt [77]). HP3 employed effective study strategies like note-taking and collaborative learning (excerpt [78]).

[73] “I have to say, even I read the feedback again and again, I find it a bit hard to understand some of the more advanced ideas in the teacher’s feedback.” (LP1)

[74] “I ask the teacher to explain things again when he reaches me, but I still can’t fully get it.” (LP2)

[75] “I mostly pay attention to revising basic things, like grammar or spelling. I don’t get the main ideas or the tough parts.” (LP3)

[76] “I actively take part in discussions with my classmates, ask the teacher questions when I don’t understand something.” (HP1)

[77] “I talk a lot with my classmates and ask the teacher questions to understand the main ideas better.” (HP2)

[78] “I take notes while studying. I work with my classmates to learn together.” (HP3)

Over the semester, LP students showed significant evolution in acquiring conceptual comprehension. LP1 transitioned to actively participating in discussions with peers and the instructor, seeking clarification to improve understanding (excerpt [79]). LP2 engaged in debates and sought clarity to acquire a more comprehensive knowledge of underlying principles (excerpt [80]). LP3, who initially focused on surface-level corrections, began engaging in deeper discussions and seeking supplementary materials to rectify misunderstandings (excerpt [81]). HP students consistently demonstrated sophisticated approaches in pursuing conceptual

comprehension. HP1 refined her analytical abilities and acquired a nuanced understanding of intricate subjects, actively implementing this knowledge in her writing (excerpt [82]). HP2 trained her critical thinking abilities through debates and individual study, effectively incorporating complex concepts into her writing (excerpt [83]). HP3 enhanced her capacity for analysis and mastered the implementation of complex concepts by writing notes in her notebook (excerpt [84]). Overall, LP students progressed from basic to more advanced methods of understanding, while HP students consistently refined and expanded their sophisticated approaches throughout the semester.

[79] “My teacher set more group discussions this semester, so I started talking a lot with my classmates and the teacher. I ask questions, share my ideas, and make sure to ask for help when I don’t understand something.” (LP1)

[80] “I actively join conversations with classmates and the teacher. This helps me hear different opinions and also help me understand some points better from different points of view.” (LP2)

[81] “I take part in discussions our teacher provided, ask questions when I have something unclear.” (LP3)

[82] “I keep doing things that work well for me. I practice thinking carefully about things, make sure I understand complex ideas, and use what I know in my writing to make it better.” (HP1)

[83] “I get better at understanding complex things and thinking carefully. I use what I learned to make my writing better. I always talk a lot in class, ask cool questions, and check out more information in books and online to see different sides of things.” (HP2)

[84] “I write in my notebook about what I learned to make sure I understand it and to find ways to do even better.” (HP3)

The significant transformations in self-regulated strategies among LP and HP learners. LP students evolved from lacking self-regulation to adopting formalized methods for tracking progress and setting objectives. HP students, already proficient, further refined and advanced their self-regulation strategies, demonstrating a proactive and mature approach over the semester.

At the beginning of the semester, LP and HP students displayed discernible differences in self-regulation. LP students heavily relied on external guidance, as evidenced by statements such as “I depend a lot on the teacher” (LP1), “I usually just follow what the teacher tells me to do” (LP2), and “I always need the teacher to tell me what to do” (LP3) in excerpts [85], [86], and [87]. These statements highlight a dependence on external direction and limited self-initiation. In contrast, HP students demonstrated intrinsic self-reliance and proactive engagement in their learning as illustrated in excerpts [88], [89], and [90].

[85] “I depend a lot on the teacher to tell me what to do.” (LP1)

[86] “I’m not very good at taking charge of my learning. I usually just follow what the teacher tells me to do.” (LP2)

[87]“I always need the teacher to tell me what to do.” (LP3)

[88]“I am good at deciding what I want to learn, keeping an eye on how I am doing, and finding ways to get better on my own.” (HP1)

[89]“I always check how I am doing, set goals, and think about my progress.” (HP2)

[90]“I think about what I’m good at and what I need to work on.” (HP3)

Over the semester, LP students showed significant progress in self-regulation. LP1, who initially lacked effective self-regulation mechanisms, developed the ability to assess progress, set objectives, and integrate periodic self-reflection. This progression is evident in statements such as “making plans”, “setting goals”, and “thinking about my writing regularly” (excerpt [91]). LP2 and LP3 echoed similar sentiments in excerpts [92] and [93], demonstrating a commitment to self-regulation and conscious efforts to track progress and set goals. HP students, already proficient in self-regulation, further refined their strategies. HP1 developed effective time management, refined goal-setting, and cultivated robust self-reflection skills, as illustrated in the excerpt [94]. HP2 continued to enhance her self-assessment and strategy development, while HP3 further improved goal-setting, insightful self-evaluation, and techniques to maintain concentration and perseverance (excerpts [95] and [96]). Overall, LP students transitioned from a reliance on external guidance to a more autonomous and self-regulated approach, while HP students consistently refined and expanded their self-regulation strategies throughout the semester.

[91]“I make plans to see how I am doing, set goals, and think about my writing regularly to get better.” (LP1)

[92]“I decide what I want to achieve, make study plans, and often think about my writing to see how I’m getting better.” (LP2)

[93]“I regularly check how I am doing, set goals, and observe my progress over time to improve.” (LP3)

[94]“I set clear goals, like what I want to achieve, and then I regularly look at how I’m doing. If I face any challenges, I come up with plans to overcome them, and I’m always trying to find new ways to improve. It’s like a continuous process of making things better and learning from experiences.” (HP1)

[95]“I make my goals more specific, regularly check how I’m doing, and figure out ways to stay focused.” (HP2)

[96]“I keep making things better. I get clearer about my goals, use my time well, and regularly think about how I’m doing.” (HP3)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The discussion section explores how the findings relate to and extend existing research, particularly in different cultural and educational settings. The primary objective was to foster literacy engagement among Chinese students with varying language proficiencies through teacher-written corrective feedback, with literacy encompassing language proficiency

and the ability to engage critically with written materials essential for academic and professional contexts.

The literature review underscores the critical role of literacy engagement and corrective feedback in language acquisition, drawing on Bandura’s social cognitive theory (1986) and Boekaerts and Corno’s self-regulation theory (2005) to emphasize cognitive processes and self-directed learning’s significance in literacy development. Studies by Ferris (2010) and Storch and Wigglesworth (2010) further support the impact of corrective feedback on language proficiency and writing enhancement, while research on student engagement by Fredricks et al. (2004) and Finn and Zimmer (2012) highlights the link between engagement, academic success, and learning outcomes across diverse settings.

Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, this study integrated qualitative analysis with quantitative measures to evaluate literacy engagement among Chinese students with varying language proficiencies. Qualitative methods, including thematic coding of student responses and reflective journals, were complemented by quantitative data on language proficiency levels and engagement metrics, offering a comprehensive view of literacy engagement dynamics.

The research findings align with established literature and theoretical frameworks. Low-proficiency (LP) students initially displayed passive feedback engagement, relying on basic language skills. However, targeted corrective feedback led to increased engagement, enhancing literacy skills and language proficiency (Zheng & Yu, 2018). High-proficiency (HP) students demonstrated active engagement and advanced learning strategies, further refining their literacy skills through corrective feedback (Zheng et al., 2020).

In conclusion, this study underscores the pivotal role of teacher-written corrective feedback in nurturing literacy engagement among Chinese students. By integrating theoretical frameworks like social cognitive theory and self-regulation theory, the research emphasizes the importance of cognitive processes, self-directed learning, and active engagement in literacy development. The findings emphasize the need for tailored pedagogical strategies that cater to students’ varying language proficiencies. LP students benefit from structured feedback and scaffolded learning experiences to improve engagement and literacy skills. HP students require advanced challenges and opportunities for critical analysis to maintain high levels of engagement and further enhance their literacy capabilities. This research contributes valuable insights for educators to design effective feedback interventions, promoting meaningful learning experiences and holistic literacy development in language learning contexts.

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