

A Qualitative Research Synthesis of Learner Engagement with Teacher Written Corrective Feedback Cases of Integrated Language Courses

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筆記による学習者の訂正フィードバックエンゲージメントの質的研究 ——一般言語コースの場合——

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Abstract: Written corrective feedback (WCF) has garnered considerable scholarly attention, due to its perceived role in offering valuable learning opportunities. Given its significance, researchers have investigated how learners engage cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively with WCF. These studies have uncovered that learner engagement with WCF constitutes multifaceted, dynamic, fluid processes that mutually interact with individual and contextual factors. This qualitative research synthesis critically reviews and synthesizes studies on engagement with WCF by learners in an integrated language course, using Chong and Plonsky's (2021) framework of qualitative research synthesis. This study aims to discern patterns of learner engagement with WCF and provide a deeper understanding of the complex nature of engagement with WCF. Employing specific inclusion criteria, the literature search identified nine empirical studies. Relevant information to address the research question was extracted, coded, and thematized. The findings showed that learner engagement with WCF mutually interacts with other aspects of engagement, as well as individual and contextual factors. Drawing from these findings, implications for future research on learner engagement with WCF, qualitative synthesis research, and feedback practice are discussed.

Keywords: written corrective feedback, learner engagement, individual and contextual factors, qualitative research synthesis, integrated language course

1. Introduction

In the field of second language (L2) writing, L2 acquisition, and language pedagogy, written corrective feedback (WCF) has been extensively examined, as it is believed to provide valuable opportunities for language learners. WCF is commonly defined as comments provided by teachers or peers on learners' written work, particularly addressing language issues (Bitchener & Storch, 2016). Some scholars suggested that WCF can facilitate L2 development due to its permanence and slower nature in comparison to oral corrective feedback (Williams, 2012). These characteristics afford learners the opportunity to allocate their attentional resources, thereby facilitating input processes. Thus, WCF is expected to fill in learners' knowledge gaps and improve the accuracy of language use. However, despite its theoretical advantages, Truscott (1996, 2007) contested the efficacy of corrective feedback, suggesting it might not always be effective and could potentially be detrimental to some learners. Truscott identified flaws in earlier empirical studies that, according to him, failed to substantiate its efficacy. Subsequently, newer studies employing more rigorous research designs emerged, focusing primarily on various types of feedback (direct, indirect, and/or metalinguistic explanations), the scope of feedback (focused or unfocused), and types of errors (see Bitchener & Storch, 2016).

Despite the extensive research on WCF, findings across various studies present a mixed picture. Some studies emphasize the effectiveness of explicit forms of WCF, like direct correction, especially for long-term learning compared to implicit WCF. This aligns with the intuitive notion that direct correction provides learners with target-like input, directly facilitating input processing. Van Beuningen (2008; 2012) reported that both direct and indirect WCF positively affected short-term gains, yet direct error correction showed a more significant long-term impact. Bitchener and Knoch (2010) also found no difference among metalinguistic explanation, underline-only, written and oral metalinguistic explanation in immediate post-test, but found both metalinguistic groups outperformed the indirect group in the delayed post-test. Conversely, Lalande (1982) revealed that implicit forms of WCF are more effective, aiding problem-solving during the revision process. Bitchener and Storch (2016) noted the absence of consensus among researchers regarding the superiority of one feedback type over the other, emphasizing the need for more evidence.

While these quasi-experimental studies have significantly contributed to understanding WCF, researchers raised concerns regarding ecological validity of these quasi-experimental studies (Ferris, 2010; Liu & Brown, 2015). In other words, studies conducted outside the classroom fail to mirror real classroom environments and the actual methods teachers employ in delivering WCF. For example, in a real classroom setting, students' written work typically undergoes grading, a motivating factor for them, and students typically receive unfocused feedback. Additionally, if learners have built a sound relationship with their instructor, they might find it easier to consult with their instructor. As these examples demonstrated, the use of WCF and revision practices are influenced by individual and contextual factors. Therefore, as Bitchener and Storch (2016)

stated, in order to find more meaningful understanding of the role of different types of WCF on L2 development, studies should focus on other variables that influence learners' understanding and use of WCF. Consequently, researchers began shifting their focus from studying WCF itself to exploring how learners actively engage with WCF and roles of individual and contextual factors. This shift in focus has led to a surge in studies exploring learner engagement with WCF over the last decade, revealing the intricate and dynamic nature of interactions among learners and WCF.

While numerous studies have explored learner engagement with WCF, considering individual and contextual factors, it remains pivotal to synthesize these findings comprehensively. Shen and Chong (2022) conducted a qualitative research synthesis focusing on learner engagement with WCF in English writing classes. However, a comparable synthesis tailored specifically for learners in an integrated language course is notably absent. Given the distinct purposes and learning emphases between a writing course and an integrated language course, their practices concerning WCF differ significantly. Hence, this qualitative research synthesis endeavors to offer fresh insights into how learners in integrated language courses engage with WCF. This qualitative research synthesis is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do learners in integrated language courses engage cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively with WCF?

RQ2: How do individual and contextual factors contribute to learners' cognitive, behavioral, and affective engagement with WCF?

By addressing these research questions, this study aims to bridge the gap in understanding the nuanced dynamics of WCF engagement specifically within the context of integrated language courses.

2. Literature review

2.1 Quasi-experimental studies on WCF

As WCF continues to garner scholarly attention, a plethora of studies have emerged aiming to ascertain the types, scope, and error types upon which educators should focus their WCF for learners. Typically employing quasi-experimental designs, these studies utilize treatment and control groups, comparing pre-, immediate-, and delayed post-test scores to assess the efficacy of WCF. These investigations often narrow their scope to specific aspects of feedback types (e.g., direct or indirect), feedback scope (focused or unfocused), and error categories (e.g., article and preposition errors, among others).

To synthesize the body of quasi-experimental empirical studies on WCF, Kang and Han (2015) conducted a meta-analysis encompassing 22 empirical studies. Their findings revealed that while WCF contributes to enhancing accuracy in learners' written texts, its effectiveness is contingent upon learners' proficiency levels and learning contexts, such as second or foreign language settings. Notably, a more substantial effect size was observed among learners with higher

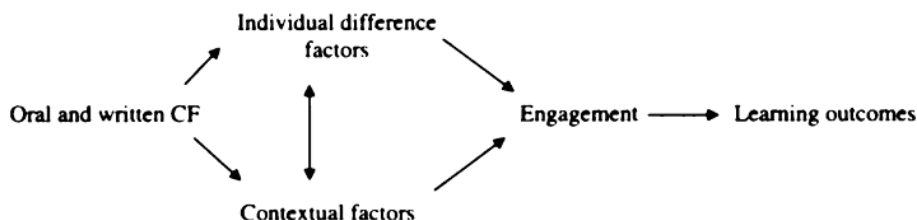
proficiency levels, whereas beginners showed a negative effect from WCF. Furthermore, they suggested that learners in a L2 setting tend to derive greater benefit from WCF compared to those in a foreign language context. Although these empirical studies have advanced understandings of WCF, criticisms from scholars like Ferris (2010) and Liu and Brown (2015) have highlighted concerns regarding low ecological validity in these studies. They argue that research studies that overly restrict variables fail to accurately reflect actual classroom practices.

2.2 Holistic approach to study learner engagement and analytical framework

In response to criticisms regarding the lack of ecological validity, researchers have shifted their focus to conducting studies on learner responses to WCF within naturalistic classroom environments. Acknowledging that learner responses to WCF shape and are shaped mutually by individual and contextual factors, these studies often adopt a case study approach, enabling researchers to delve into the intricate and dynamic relationships among these influential factors, albeit with smaller participant sizes. Typically, data collection involves diverse sources such as interviews, verbal reports (e.g., stimulated recall or think-aloud protocols), reflective accounts, classroom observations, examination of learners' initial and final drafts, and course-related documents such as assignment sheets and syllabi.

Ellis's (2010) analytical framework (Figure 1) has been utilized in studying learner engagement with WCF. Ellis defined engagement as "how learners respond to the feedback they received" (Ellis, 2010, p. 342). In the analytical framework, learner engagement with corrective feedback encompasses three key dimensions: cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement. Cognitive engagement pertains to how and if learners attend to the provided WCF, behavioral engagement refers to ways learners revise their written texts based on received WCF, and emotional engagement focuses on learners' attitudinal responses to WCF. Although this framework was initially developed for both oral and written corrective feedback, researchers exploring WCF have expanded its scope to capture the intricate nature of learner engagement. Han and Hyland (2015) extended this framework by incorporating cognitive and metacognitive operations into cognitive engagement, observable strategies (i.e., looking up online dictionaries, seeking help from a teacher, etc.) into behavioral engagement, and attitudes towards WCF into emotional engagement. This multi-faceted framework emphasizes the interplay of student engagement with WCF alongside other dimensions, mediated by individual and contextual factors.

Figure 1

Ellis's (2010) analytical framework of engagement

Within this framework, learner engagement with corrective feedback is believed to be influenced by both individual difference factors and contextual factors. Storch and Wigglesworth (2010) delved into learners' beliefs, revealing that when learners perceive minimal value in the WCF provided, their engagement in effectively revising their drafts tends to diminish. Additionally, Han and Hyland (2015) stated that metalinguistic knowledge stands out as another influential individual factor. Furthermore, Goldstein (2006) highlighted the significant role of motivation in utilizing WCF effectively. Contextual factors, on the other hand, encompass macro and micro levels. The macro level encompasses sociocultural factors, institution policy, and instructional practices. According to Lee (2008), in classroom cultures that lean towards being more teacher-centered, such as in Hong Kong, learners are often more receptive to receiving extensive and explicit WCF, as learners expect their teacher to tell them what to do. Furthermore, Lee highlighted that the administration of WCF by teachers is influenced by institutional and curriculum goals. At the micro level, one prominent area of research revolves around the characteristics of WCF (e.g., explicitness and scope) and their impact on various facets of learner engagement (see Bitchener & Storch, 2016, for review). Additionally, Lee and Schallert (2008) indicated that the teacher-student relationship significantly influences how learners revise their essays.

While studies have synthesized learner engagement with WCF in English writing courses (e.g., Shen & Chong, 2022), there exists a notable gap in the synthesis of studies focusing on learner engagement within an integrated language course. Recognizing the significance of context as a pivotal influencing factor, this study aims to address this gap, seeking to offer a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of learner engagement with WCF, specifically in the context of an integrated language learning environment.

3. Methods

3.1 Framework of qualitative synthesis

This study employed the qualitative research synthesis framework proposed by Chong and Plonsky (2021) to systematically synthesize existing qualitative studies and mixed methods studies primarily featuring qualitative data related to WCF in integrated language courses.

Following the guidelines set forth by Chong and Plonsky (2021), the data collection process involved several key steps:

1. Designing research questions to guide the synthesis process.
2. Identifying keywords pertinent to the research area for conducting a literature search.
3. Conducting a thorough literature search to gather relevant studies.
4. Evaluating the identified literature based on predetermined inclusion criteria.
5. Extracting qualitative data from the selected studies.
6. Synthesizing the qualitative data through systematic analysis and interpretation.
7. Composing a comprehensive report outlining the findings and insights derived from the synthesis process.

Adopting this systematic approach allowed for a structured and rigorous synthesis of qualitative findings regarding WCF within the specific context of integrated language courses.

3.2 Keywords development and conduct relevant literature

Once the research questions were established, keywords were developed to search relevant literature to address the research questions. With some articles already identified due to prior familiarity with the subject, key terms were extracted, including “written feedback,” “engagement,” “student engagement,” “responses,” “cognitive engagement,” “behavioral engagement,” and “affective engagement.” To effectively locate relevant articles, specific search terms were formulated: “(L2 AND) written corrective feedback AND teacher AND qualitative AND (engagement OR response OR motivation OR proficiency OR emotions OR strategies OR context).” The search was conducted across 16 digital databases (Table 1), primarily focusing on leading academic journals based on their impact factors. Additionally, two dedicated journals, “Feedback Research in Second Language” and “Journal of Response to Writing,” specializing in feedback and student responses to WCF, were included. To refine results in education journal databases such as “Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education” and “Teaching in Higher Education” the term “L2” was appended to the search terms. Limiting the publication years from 2015 to 2023 ensured a focus on recent publications, capturing the most up-to-date research. The collective search across databases yielded a pool of 1216 articles. Furthermore, the search extended to ProQuest to include relevant Ph.D. dissertations and encompassed Google Scholar to ensure a comprehensive review of available literature.

Table 1

Identified academic journals

Journal	# of studies by initial search
1 Applied Linguistics	2
2 Assessing Writing	40
3 Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education	20
4 ELT Journal	11
5 Journal of English for Academic Purpose	16
6 Foreign Language Annals	130
7 *Feedback Research in Second Language	12
8 Language Teaching Research	190
9 Language Learning	43
10 The Modern Language Journal	102
11 Journal of Response to Writing	119
12 Journal of Second Language Writing	55
13 Studies in Second Language Studies	251
14 System	88
15 Teaching in Higher Education	14
16 TESOL Quarterly	123

Note: The search engine on the “Feedback Research in Second Language” database website was unavailable, resulting in the inclusion of all articles from the journal.

The screening process involved a thorough examination of the title, keywords, abstracts, and, most importantly, the methods section of each study. Studies meeting the following criteria were considered for inclusion:

1. Primary studies were included, excluding theoretical pieces, commentary, review articles, and any articles without data.
2. Studies conducted within an integrated language classroom were included, while those conducted solely in L2 writing classes or lacking clear descriptions of the setting were excluded.
3. Articles addressing at least one aspect of learner engagement with WCF, as delineated in Ellis (2010), were included.
4. Studies employing qualitative or mixed-methods approaches were included.

Following this screening, employing the snowballing technique, as advocated by Shen and Chong (2022), further literature searches were conducted within each identified study, resulting in the discovery of nine delete studies in total meeting the specified criteria (Table 2).

Table 2

Articles included in this qualitative research synthesis

	Author (s)	Context	Target language	Proficiency
1	Cheng et al. (2023)	College in China	English	College English Test Band 4
2	Han (2017)	College in China	English	N/A
3	Han (2019)	College in China	English	N/A
4	Han & Hyland (2015)	College in China	English	College English Test Band 4
5	Han & Xu (2021)	College in China	English	N/A
6	Lira-Gonzales & Valeo (2023)	Adult learners in Quebec, Canada	French	Beginners
7	Saeli & Cheng (2019)	College in Iran	English	TOEFL writing 6-30
8	Takahashi (2022)	College in the US	Japanese	ACTFL Novice
9	Zhang & Hyland (2018)	College in China	English	IELTS 5.5-7.5

3.3 *Synthesizing identified studies*

The extraction and synthesis of qualitative data involved multiple steps. Initial codes were assigned to the extracted data from the identified studies using an in-vivo coding method. During this phase, qualitative notes were taken to capture the researcher's immediate thoughts and reflections. Subsequently, focused coding was employed, necessitating iterative readings and reiterations of initial codes to categorize and cluster related codes together. The final phase, axial coding, aimed to discern relationships among the coded data. This involved a thorough examination to establish connections and patterns between the various codes, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the synthesized qualitative data.

4. Findings and discussions

This systematic synthesis review analyzed nine empirical qualitative studies on learners' engagement with WCF within an integrated language course. The subsequent section will illustrate the results and discussions in response to each research question.

RQ1: How do learners in integrated language courses engage cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively with WCF?

4.1 Cognitive engagement

In this study, cognitive engagement encompasses learners' attention to errors and WCF, alongside cognitive and metacognitive operations. The studies reported varying levels of learner understanding of WCF, spanning from "full understanding" to "partial understanding," "identified but not understood," "misunderstood," and "ignored," manifested in provided explanations. Notably, while learners showed different levels of understanding, instances emerged where learners misinterpreted the intentions behind received WCF, even though writing is believed

to facilitate processing WCF due to its permanence and slower pace (Williams, 2012). For example, Dai in Han and Hyland's study (2015) misread feedback aimed at a language issue as addressing vagueness. Similarly, Liu in Han (2019) mistook a lexical error for a logical problem. Conversely, their understanding of their errors and WCF were facilitated by multiple factors, including metalinguistic knowledge (Han & Hyland, 2015), experiences with WCF (Han, 2019), and behavioral engagement such as individual student-teacher conferences (Han & Hyland, 2015). However, these factors interplay with others, making it challenging to attribute deep cognitive engagement solely to one factor.

While cognitive and metacognitive operations received less emphasis compared to other aspects of engagement in the identified studies, certain high-achieving learners, such as Jia in Han and Xu's study (2021) and Nick in Takahashi's study (2022), displayed a remarkable ability to associate errors with past instructional moments when they were analyzing errors. For instance, upon encountering a marked fragment error with an "F" indicating the error on his draft, Jia promptly recalled a previous in-class grammar instruction covering the same grammar. Similarly, when Nick noticed a conjugation error marked with coded feedback, he immediately recognized the same error he had made in a previous homework assignment. Conversely, some struggling learners tended to rely on unreliable intuition rather than strategic recall, manifested in their explanation of underlying grammar rules such as "it sounds smooth" or "that sounds right." (Han & Hyland, 2015; Takahashi, 2022). Regarding metacognitive strategies, these can be classified into two types: strategies for revising essays and strategies to prevent recurring mistakes. In the former category, some learners exhibited a preference for addressing specific issues over others. For instance, Ying in Han and Hyland (2015) prioritized addressing major concerns before focusing on local ones, while Claire in Takahashi's study (2022) rectified treatable errors initially before tackling more intricate ones. Learners in Cheng et al. (2023) reflected on their writing processes after they received WCF to improve the revision performance. In the latter category, Liu in Han (2017) read aloud coded WCF and target structures to memorize so that she will not make the same errors in the future.

4.2 Behavioral engagement

Behavioral engagement primarily encompassed two facets: revision types and observable actions facilitating comprehension. Across all identified studies, learners' essay revision operations in response to received WCF were illustrated, ranging from "successful revision," "unsuccessful revision," "deletion," "substitution," and "no revision." Their successful revision operations were mainly supported by deep cognitive engagement (Han & Hyland, 2015; Takahashi, 2022). While learners showed many instances where they understood the errors and WCF fully and thus they successfully corrected them, an observed common revision tactic among these studies was the adoption of an avoidance strategy (Han, 2019; Takahashi, 2022; Zhang & Hyland, 2018).

When learners encountered challenges in revising sentences even after receiving WCF, they often opted to delete or substitute these sentences with simpler alternatives. The perception of difficulty varied, influenced by factors such as students' proficiency levels, the nature of feedback received, and the complexity of the original sentences. For instance, as reported by Liu in Han's study (2019), extensive revisions involving deletions and substitutions were driven by a desire to make alternative errors and to receive a better grade. Similarly, studies reported some instances where WCF facilitated error correction but not understanding. In other words, learners were able to correct errors successfully when they received direct WCF without understanding them (Takahashi, 2022) or their peers told them how to correct the errors (Han & Hyland; 2015). Thus, successful correction did not always reflect learners' deep understanding of errors.

In an integrated language course, learners demonstrated various revision strategies to facilitate their understanding the errors and WCF. These strategies encompass seeking assistance from instructors, peers, tutors, or friends, utilizing online dictionaries, employing spelling checks in word processing software, referencing course textbooks, and engaging in online discussion forums. Interestingly, while some learners proactively sought one-on-one conferences with their teachers and benefitted from such interactions (Han & Hyland, 2015), many others hesitated to consult their native-speaking teachers, perceiving them as authoritative figures and feeling apprehensive about potential communication hurdles (Han, 2019), even though learners think that the instructor is caring and approachable (Takahashi, 2022). In addition, learners were concerned that they appear to be competitive and be under-prepared by asking simple questions (Han, 2017; Han & Xu, 2021). Moreover, when struggling learners accessed external resources such as online dictionaries, they occasionally failed to fully engage with these materials (Han & Hyland, 2015; Takahashi, 2022). For instance, Lin in Han and Hyland (2015) used an online dictionary but utilized the discovered word without reviewing carefully its definition or example sentences. Hence, actions taken to enhance their comprehension do not always result in a deeper understanding of the errors and WCF.

4.3 Affective engagement

Affective engagement in this study encompasses learners' attitudes toward WCF and their emotional responses to the feedback they receive. Regarding attitudes toward WCF, learners viewed it as a valuable tool to enhance their learning and writing in the target language. While generally positive about WCF, they showed a preference for specific types of feedback from their teacher. The most favored feedback types were those that helped learners understand their errors and provided a clear pathway for enhancing their writing. In particular, struggling learners strongly favored explicit forms of WCF, as implicit WCF can be difficult to understand. Interestingly, some advanced learners preferred implicit forms of WCF, finding it more engaging in the learning process (Takahashi, 2022). Furthermore, beginner learners expressed a preference

for WCF delivered in a language they could comprehend (Lira-Gonzales & Valeo, 2023).

The study revealed that learners exhibited a wide range of emotions upon initially receiving and reviewing the WCF provided to them. These emotions varied significantly and encompassed feelings of happiness, a sense of being cared for, disappointment, guilt, sadness, embarrassment, curiosity (in finding better ways to express ideas), surprise, among others. The diverse array of emotions experienced by many learners was attributed to the multifaceted nature of emotional constructs within learners (Han & Hyland, 2019). Initial emotional responses seemed predominantly rooted in achievement emotions—those linked to expected and actual outcomes of the revision process—and social emotions connected to interpersonal interactions. Positive emotions, such as happiness and relief, often stemmed from learners' overall positive attitude towards WCF, perceiving it as an opportunity for learning and improvement, especially when learners received a satisfactory grade. Simultaneously, many learners also experienced negative emotions because they anticipated better results and believed they could have performed better than the actual outcomes. For example, Flora in Zhang and Hyland (2019) and Nick in Takahashi (2022) felt embarrassed upon discovering errors they deemed to have resulted from their carelessness. Furthermore, social emotions played a role in shaping these positive feelings, too. For instance, learners felt cared for as they recognized their teachers' dedication to enhancing their writing skills by providing WCF (Lira-Gonzales and Valeo, 2023; Takahashi, 2022; Zhang & Hyland, 2018).

However, understanding the intricate relationship between learners' emotions and their engagement with WCF goes beyond the simplistic categorization of positive and negative emotions. For instance, certain learners anticipated and welcomed WCF from their teachers, recognizing their ongoing language development (Han, 2017; Han & Xu, 2021). Conversely, some learners who struggled academically found contentment in the grades received on their drafts, leading to reduced engagement with WCF (Han & Hyland, 2015; Takahashi, 2022). Interestingly, high-achieving learners also grappled with emotions like anxiety, embarrassment, or guilt. However, they adeptly regulated these negative emotions into motivation, leveraging them as driving forces to enhance their writing skills and master the target language. This complexity showcases how learners' reactions to WCF are shaped by diverse factors beyond mere positive or negative emotions.

4.4 Individual and contextual factors

RQ2: How do individual and contextual factors contribute to learner cognitive, behavioral, and affective engagement with WCF?

Certainly, the depth of learner engagement appears to strongly correlate with their level of feedback literacy, as indicated in previous studies (Shen & Chong, 2022). Feedback literacy encompasses both the capacity and willingness to comprehend WCF (Han & Xu, 2021). While

individual factors like metalinguistic knowledge have been identified as influential in learner engagement, it is evident that these factors do not act alone. Instead, they interact with various other individual and contextual elements to mold learner (dis) engagement with WCF. For instance, consider the case outlined in Han and Hyland (2015) where Ying, despite not being the most proficient participant in terms of grades and initial error frequency, exhibited extensive behavioral engagement with WCF. Her fervent aspiration to enhance her English skills drove her to initiate a one-on-one teacher-student conference, showcasing her commitment to improvement. This led to her deep understanding of WCF, facilitated by her metalinguistic knowledge. In contrast, Song, who demonstrated better proficiency based on initial writing scores, did not engage as actively as Ying. Consequently, Song struggled to grasp the underlying grammar and word usage rules, indicating a lack of thorough engagement. While metalinguistic knowledge unquestionably contributes to learner engagement, it is clear that other multifaceted factors play significant roles in shaping how learners engage with WCF. Therefore, taking a holistic approach to understanding engagement with WCF becomes imperative to capture the complexity of this interaction.

Learners demonstrated significant engagement with WCF when both individual and contextual factors were aligned. This study contributes to previous research by reinforcing the notion that engagement is fostered through such alignment. Alignment operates on various levels: firstly, in learners' preferences for specific types and quantities of WCF, which is in line with previous studies (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010). To be more specific, deeper engagement occurs when learners receive their preferred types and amounts of feedback. For example, participants in Saeli and Cheng's study (2019) expressed disinterest when receiving WCF types they did not prefer. Liu in Han (2019) was willing to work on errors that received coded WCF because she believed that coded WCF was more important than other types of WCF. Secondly, alignment between teachers' and learners' understanding of writing assignment goals and expectations. For instance, when learners perceive an assignment's goal solely as error eradication, while instructors aim for error-based learning, expected engagement might not transpire. Thirdly, learner engagement correlates with learners' comprehension of WCF; deeper engagement is observed when learners grasp the meaning behind WCF. In Takahashi's study (2022), some learners remained unaware of the meaning behind coded WCF, despite receiving instructions and illustrative handouts from their instructors. Similarly, Feng in Han's study (2019) faced difficulty deciphering codes due to limited listening comprehension, which hindered understanding classroom instructions related to the codes.

The role of learners' prior experiences with WCF was pivotal in shaping their engagement with this feedback mechanism. In various studies, learners occasionally interpreted received WCF based on their prior encounters with it. For example, Takahashi (2022) highlighted that nearly all participants found revising the second essay easier than the first essay. This ease stemmed from their familiarity with expectations, feedback provision methods, and external resources after

undergoing a writing-feedback-revision cycle. Those drawing from previous experiences managed their emotional responses better and identified effective revision strategies. Similarly, Liu in Han (2019) comprehended coded feedback due to prior exposure during high school, provided by an English teacher. However, prior experiences did not always ensure profound understanding; for some learners, it proved perplexing. John, as mentioned in Takahashi's study (2022), found caret feedback confusing as its application in his Japanese course differed from its usage in his English class. Hence, personal histories of engaging with WCF served both as a facilitator and an inhibitor of learner engagement with this feedback mechanism.

5. Conclusion

This qualitative research synthesis explored nine empirical studies concerning learner engagement with WCF within an integrated language course. The findings highlighted a spectrum of engagement levels among participants, influenced either positively or negatively by individual and contextual factors. These influential elements intricately interacted, molding each learner's distinct engagement pattern with WCF.

5.1 Pedagogical implications

An important finding from this study underscores that deeper learner engagement with WCF occurs when individual and contextual factors align. Several researchers, such as Saeli & Cheng (2019), have stressed the significance of educators customizing feedback strategies to accommodate learner diversity. While tailoring feedback to meet learner needs remains pivotal, equally crucial is the explicit communication of the assignment's purpose, grading criteria, expectations, available external resources, and the rationale behind the feedback methodology employed by instructors. Transparent communication provides students with clarity regarding the purpose behind received feedback, guidelines for effective revision, and avenues for seeking clarification when WCF is unclear. Furthermore, beyond transparency, offering practice opportunities with WCF before actual writing tasks prove beneficial in preparing learners for effective engagement, as prior experiences of using WCF is expected to facilitate learner engagement with WCF.

5.2 Implication for future synthesis studies on WCF

Future synthesis studies on WCF could significantly enhance their comprehensiveness by expanding the criteria for relevant research. This expansion might involve encompassing a broader range of publication years and datasets, such as master's theses, book chapters, and conference proceedings. A more extensive search strategy would enable the inclusion of diverse publications, enriching the understanding of the intricate nature of learner engagement with WCF. Moreover, future synthesis studies could delve deeper by comparing learner engagement across different

proficiency levels (e.g., novice vs. advanced learners), varied learning contexts (e.g., second language vs. foreign language contexts), diverse learning purposes (e.g., writing-to-learn vs. learning-to-write contexts (Manchón, 2011)), and various feedback sources (e.g., teacher vs. peer vs. automated written evaluation). Such comparative analyses would offer valuable insights into the nuanced roles of individual and contextual factors in shaping WCF engagement. To achieve this, a call for more empirical qualitative studies is essential, particularly studies conducted within non-English classrooms. This broader scope of research will contribute significantly to the comprehensive understanding of learner engagement with WCF across diverse educational settings.

5.3 Implications for future studies on WCF

Future primary studies exploring WCF within the context of integrated language classrooms can significantly contribute by diversifying learning contexts beyond those predominantly observed in this study, often situated in English classrooms. Expanding research contexts to other foreign language learning environments would offer valuable insights into the impact of varied learning contexts on shaping learner engagement with WCF. Furthermore, to broaden the scope, future studies should focus on diverse learner groups, such as high school students, heritage learners, and immigrants. This approach would offer a comprehensive understanding of how different learner profiles engage with WCF. Additionally, addressing the impact of language proficiency on WCF engagement is crucial. Most reviewed studies concentrated on English learners in China, typically having prior compulsory English education before college. This focus demands exploration, especially given findings that proficiency levels influence engagement with WCF (Kang & Han, 2015). However, only a few studies, like Lira-Gonzales and Valeo (2023) and Takahashi (2022), have delved into engagement among beginner learners. Ensuring consistency in the terminology used, such as “proficiency,” is paramount. Some studies define “proficiency” based on scores from national entrance exams (Cheng & Liu, 2022), third-party tests like IELTS (Zhang & Hyland, 2018), or ACTFL standards (Takahashi, 2022). Regardless of the assessments utilized by researchers, it remains crucial to offer clear explanations regarding the proficiency scale employed and the meaning of each level. This practice enables readers to gain a precise understanding of the research context.

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