Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching, 13(2), October 2018, pp. 85-114

CAF: A Collaborative Approach to Providing Feedback

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Abstract

This paper reports findings from a small-scale study on a collaborative technique for providing feedback to student writing, English languages teachers spend a significant amount of their time and effort on providing feedback to students on their writing performances. However, their corrective feedback does not produce desired outcomes. The students either do not pay attention to the comments or they do not learn as much as expected. Research suggests that they generally regard feedback as punitive. and demoralising. One reason for this is that students are not made a part of the feedback process, rather, only its recipients. Based on these premises, a small-scale action research project was conducted in a reputed Australian university. The study employed a collaborative approach, termed here as Collaborative Approach to Feedback (CAF), in which students, rather than their teachers, in small communities, worked together on their writings to provide feedback to each other. CAF, as an educational practice framework, was adopted in this project to involve students actively and collaboratively to provide feedback to other members of their community. Preliminary findings indicate that students felt engaged in and empowered by the process, and that, CAF as a feedback technique exerted positively on the correction of errors in writing. In the pretext of feedback and error correction theory, this paper offers a collaborative feedback framework and a rationale for CAF to be further explored, developed, and adapted.

Keywords: error correction, peer feedback, collaborative feedback, self-correction, teacher feedback, corrective feedback, CAF

Introduction

Feedback to student performance is one of the most researched and published English language teaching (ELT) issues, yet, it remains a much-misunderstood issue in teaching English as a second/foreign language. Feedback in ELT refers to the response or information provided in the form of observation, concerns, and suggestions to improve students' language performances. The response often includes an evaluation of erroneous

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parts/items (what errors/mistakes there are, and why they are erroneous) and corrective measures (how these may be improved or corrected). Whether and to what extent teacher feedback makes a positive impact on improving students' performance is fiercely debated. The debate, however, is largely inconclusive in that while some studies have reported positive outcomes of teacher feedback, many others have claimed that it is ineffective, a waste of time, and therefore, should be abandoned. One reason for the negative impact may be the fact that recipients of the feedback, i.e. students, remain detached from feedback processes. On the other hand, studies show that students learn more from feedback when they are engaged or made part of the feedback process. Based on this premises, the present action research project trialed a collaborative approach to feedback in which students in small communities work together to provide feedback to each other.

Collaborative Approach to Feedback (CAF) as an educational practice is widely practised to provide a collaborative and supportive learning environment in which the participants collaborate to learn from each other on matters relating to their learning. In this model, learning is regarded as an active and constructive process in which participants work together to create new knowledge (Dewey 1916), and support each other in small groups to achieve a shared goal (Slavin, 2011).

CAF as a technique for providing feedback on academic writing has four tenets: peer learning, tribes, constructivism, and student engagement and blended learning. Firstly, peer learning is an interactive learning process for anyone by anyone for about almost everything (Slavin, 2011). As a reciprocal learning activity, it involves sharing of knowledge, and therefore, is mutually beneficial (Boud, 1988, Boud, Kogan &Simpson, 2006). Similarly, tribes are small cooperative learning communities in which participants of a tribe work in a self-managed team to achieve a shared objective. Studies on tribes reveal higher achievement and retention in contrast to the traditional, competitive and individualistic learning (Gibbs & Ushijima, 2008).

Collaboration within ‘tribes' helps improve self-organisation and in(ter)dependence in learning. It enables participants to develop group skills, critical skills (Abercronbie, 1969) and to be better motivated and committed to their own learning (Yu, 1993). A widely-used learning model in English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL), collaborative tribes provide opportunities to develop social and interpersonal skills. One other premise of this theory is that knowledge is accessed and constructed through connections, interactions, and assembly of prior knowledge with the new ones. The members of CAF community interact with each other as well as with the presented material, and by sharing what they already know about the problem, they develop new knowledge to resolve it. Two important

things take place during the knowledge construction process. First, the members of CAF connect with each other, which helps remove anxiety and stress of working in isolation. And second, the control of the teaching and learning process shifts from the teacher to increasingly more autonomous/independent learner (Kep & Hill, 2008).

Finally, the approach embraces and emphasises blended learning. Technology is combined with classroom learning at all levels. Flipped teaching and independent study are vigorously encouraged. The CAF technique incorporates and facilitates blended learning by encouraging students to use their communication devices for learning. Students, for example, use their devices to connect and interact with each other during CAF sessions, which may take place in class or at home.

The present qualitative study attempts to highlight some pertinent features and usefulness of CAF as a collaborative feedback technique. It focuses on three areas: firstly, it explores what corrective feedback techniques are prevalent in the current ESL/EFL writing practices; second, it examines how features of such techniques can be used to develop a collaborative feedback technique in which students themselves become the providers of feedback; and finally, it finds out student perceptions and motivations for using such a technique.

Theoretical perspectives

Interest in feedback and its importance in language teaching and learning can be traced back to 1920s when the term' feedback' appeared as a distinct word to mean "the signal from the output to input" (Bennett, 1974, p. 50). Feedback in this sense was used in a different context then, but as it can be deciphered, the message has been as relevant in the field of language teaching. In language teaching, especially, teaching English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL), the term 'feedback' made its debut in the 1950s when the behaviourist teaching models took the center stage. These models of teaching considered errors as "sins to be avoided, and its influence overcome" (Brooks, 1960, p. 56) and they focused on error prevention rather than on error treatment.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the "hands-off approach" led by Terrell (1977) and Krashen (1982; 1987) who asserted that affective factors contribute most to the effectiveness of learning; correction of errors exerts a negative effect in regards to motivation, anxiety, and attitude, which raise their affective filter impeding learning. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasised communicative competence, development of fluency and acceptable language use, also ruled out the importance of error correction (Richards and Rodgers, 1986).

The 1990s, however, experienced a turn around so far as error correction is concerned. Many studies in this decade, notably, Ellis (1993b), Fotos (1994), Schmidt (1995) and Long (1996) are tentative though they are in their conclusion, reported that error correction and ‘selective attention' to linguistic forms promote second language learning. Studies conducted in the last 15 years, (e. g., Tran 2013; Bitchener, 2012; Brown, 2012; Polio, 2012, Ellis, 2009; Guennette, 2007; Hyland and Hyland, 2006; Ferris, 2003 & 2006; Chandler, 2003) are also inconclusive in claiming the effects of corrective feedback. As a result, though providing corrective feedback on second/foreign language writing is extensively researched and widely published, it is least understood, highly controversial, and above all, most challenging (Polio, 2012; Brown, 2012). This section looks into some of the issues of providing corrective feedback to EFL/ESL student writing. In particular, this section provides a critique of why corrective feedback is misunderstood. More specifically, it attempts to address some of the questions that make feedback and its influence on student writing challenging. With a view to assisting the ensuing discussion, the section begins with an analysis of some of the dichotomy followed by some of a discussion of the approaches used in providing corrective feedback.

The dichotomy of errors

The most common dichotomy of errors is that of the **treatable/non-treatable** errors. Authors have defined a treatable error as an error which is a breach of a linguistic rule that governs a language system (Ferris, 2011). It is termed as treatable because novice writers can correct it when the rule is brought to their attention or when they have a grasp over it. Untreatable errors, on the other hand, are idiosyncrasies for which students need to have a good control of not just one but most language systems. Ferris (2002) recommends that while dealing with treatable errors, teachers should look patterns of error and treat the pattern as a whole, instead of responding to each error individually.

> This selective error-correction strategy helps students learn to make focused passes through their texts to find particular types of errors to which they may be most prone and to master grammatical terms and rules related to those specific errors (p. 50).

Another dichotomy made in dealing with errors in student writing is **global/local** errors. According to Ferris (2002), global errors are "errors that interfere with the comprehensibility of a text" (p. 22). These errors relate to content, ideas, and organization of the writer's argument. Local errors refer to minor errors such as grammar, spelling, or punctuation "that do not

impede understanding" of a text (of. cit). Many authors are of the opinion that global errors are better treated at the initial stages of the writing process, that is when the planning-drafting begin. Feedback on local errors may be provided when the draft is produced and revision of drafts commences (Dodge, 2016).

Similarly, **surface error** is errors of mechanics, grammar, and sentence structure. They are sometimes described as superficial errors the consequences of which may not be superficial. In other words, they are language level discrepancies which might distract and prevent from grasping the writer's meaning. **Discourse level errors,** on the other hand, refer to errors which require the context of the discourse/text to be identified and corrected. Such errors put a strain on readers and may impede processing meaning of the text (Suri & McCoy, 2008)

Other authors (Ferris, 2003; Stanley, 1992; Leki 1990) have suggested yet another dichotomy of **micro-macro** errors. Micro-errors are those errors which are surface-level or grammar errors and are similar to what has been discussed above as local errors. Macro-level errors are similar to global errors and relate to discourse or organisation level errors. Modified forms of these approaches have also been in practice which different authors have used different terms to refer to. They are too many of them to discuss here. However, the table in the following section provides some details.

Approaches to providing Feedback

As it has been indicated above, there is a sharp controversy regarding the effectiveness of corrective feedback. Several studies (e.g., Baker and Bricker, 2010; Bitchener 2008; Gascoigne, 2004; Chandler, 2003; Ferris and Roberts, 2001; Lizotte, 2001; Ashwell, 2000; Lee, 1997; Ferris, 1997; Fathman & Walley, 1990; Sheppard, 1992) have claimed that corrective written feedback had positive effect on students writing and that it helped students achieve accuracy in writing. Many others (Hartshorn et al, 2010; Truscott and Hsu, 2008; Liu, 2008; Fazio, 2001; Kepner, 1991; Polio, Fleck & Leder, 1998; Semke, 1984), on the other hand, did not find any positive evidence of its effectiveness. Many of these writers, in fact, claim that corrective feedback might influence negatively on students' performance as this raises their anxiety level, and consequently, demotivates them. Most of these studies, however, did not have a control group in their research, and as a result, their claims are questionable. For example, without comparing the results of the experimental groups with those of the control groups, it would be difficult to make any definitive claims on the impact of the corrective feedback approaches they employed. Notwithstanding, the notable achievement of these studies are the approaches to the feedback they have proposed.

The approaches to providing corrective feedback are many. A detailed discussion of these approaches is available elsewhere (See, for example, Ellis 2009: Ferris, 2008). For the purpose of this article, a survey of related literature is summarised under the headings of: (a) what type of errors to provide feedback to; (b) when to provide feedback; (c) who should provide feedback; and (d) how should feedback be provided. As far as the type of errors are concerned, literature seems to suggest that feedback should be provided for both local (surface level) as well as global (discourse or rhetorical level) error (Zamel, 1985, Tran, 2013). Feedback on local level errors may appear to be less effective depending on who provides the feedback and how and when it is provided. Discourse or rhetorical feedback helps students with the organisation and content when provided in the process stage of the writing.

There seems to be a disagreement among authors as to when feedback should be provided. Truscott (1996), for example, advocates that feedback should be provided at every stage of the writing process, which includes collecting relevant materials, planning (creating an outline), composing/drafting, revising and editing. Providing feedback at the revision stage was less effective than when it was provided at the drafting stage (Ferris and Roberts, 2001). Similarly, authors have different opinions about who should provide feedback, students themselves, their peers or their teachers. Raimes (1983) found that feedback is effective and engaging when students are given time and opportunity to find their own errors and correct them before their teachers review them. Self-feedback, thus, requires students to find their own errors and think of the ways or measures to correct them. Spratt et al (2005), on the other hand, believes that peer-feedback is more meaningful and has positive effects on classroom composition dynamics (Kavaliauskiene & Ausiene, 2012; Gascoigne, 2004). According to some researchers, student writers have shown a great deal of interest in peer feedback affirming that it strengthens their learner autonomy in engaging with each other to review their writing, and in writing practices (Eksi, 2012). It also helps to develop their language learning, particularly, vocabulary building and sentence structure ((Eksi, 2012; Sato 2013). In addition, the interaction with other members of the peer group is instrumental in developing their speaking skills (Yu & Lee, 2014; Zhao, 2014). Ferris et al (2001), however, found that students who received feedback from their teacher had greater self-correction abilities than those who did not.

As for ways of providing feedback, authors agree that there is not one recipe for this (Ellis 2009; Guenette, 2007). Every setting is unique and every group of students is different. What works in one context and with one group of students may not work in another context and/or another group of

students (Hyland and Hyland, 2007). Accordingly, ways of providing feedback vary. Ferris (2011), for example, suggests that providing direct and indirect feedback is the most popular method of providing feedback. Indirect feedback is provided in different ways, and as a result, it affects students differently. Indirect corrective feedback, for example, provides an indication of an error and/or its diagnosis (i.e. by underlining the error, highlighting erroneous linguistic form using colour coding or by giving a numerical value, e.g., 1 = I like this point; 2 = This is a good example, and so on). It may also be provided by indicating the sentences in which erroneous forms exist or by giving a brief note of how many errors there are in a text (see appendices). Indirect corrective feedback, therefore, adopts a problem-solving approach in that students are expected to find and correct errors and take responsibility for their learning (Zaman & Azad, 2012). Direct corrective feedback, on the other hand, not only identifies errors (their location, their types and their diagnosis or providing an error code, see Appendix A for example) but provides their target or correct forms as well (Van Beuningen, 2008). The direct and indirect feedback strategies have been summarised in table 1.

Table 1
Feedback providing strategies*

Direct Feedback	***Indirect Feedback***			
	Indicating location of errors only	***Identifying error-types only***	***Indicating location and error-types***	***Indication of error only***
Teacher locates, identifies and corrects learner errors.	Teacher indicates erroneous forms by underlining or color-highlighting parts of text	Teacher identifies types of errors in the margin by using number-codes or error-codes (see appendices for examples)	Teacher identifies the location and error-types by highlighting and by using codes.	Teacher indicates that there are erroneous forms in a particular line/part of the text but does not indicate their locations or types.

*based on ideas from Ferris, 2004; 2008; 2011 & 2014; Bitchener, 2008; Ellis 2009a; Zaman and Azad, 2012; Van Beuningen, 2008

Table 2
Types of Feedback (Ellis, 2009a, p. 98)

	Types of Corrective Feedback	Description	Studies
1.	Direct Corrective Feedback	The teacher provides the student with the correct form.	e.g. Lalande (1982) and Robb et al. (1986)
2.	Indirect Corrective Feedback	The teacher indicates that an error Exists but does not provide the correction.	Various studies have employed indirect correction of this kind (e.g. Ferris and Roberts 2001; Chandler 2003). Fewer studies have employed this method (e.g. Robb et al. 1986).
	A: Indicating + Locating the error	This takes the form of underlining and use of cursors to show omissions in the student´s text.	
	B: Indication only	This takes the form of an indication in the margin that an error or errors have taken place in a line of text.	
3.	Metalinguistic Corrective Feedback	The teacher provides some kind of metalinguistic clue to the nature of the error	Various studies have examined the effects of using error codes (e.g. Lalande 1982; Ferris and Roberts 2001; Chandler 2003) Sheen (2007) compared the effects of direct CF and direct CF + metalinguistic CF.
	A: Use of error code	Teacher writes codes in the margin (e.g. ww = wrong word; art = article).	
	B: Brief Grammatical Description	Teacher numbers error in text and writes a grammatical description for each numbered error at the bottom of the text.	
4.	The focus of the feedback	This concerns whether the teacher attempts to correct all (or most) of the students´ errors or selects one or two specific types of errors to correct. This distinction can be applied to each of the above options.	Most studies have investigated unfocused CF (e.g. Chandler 2003; Ferris 2006). Sheen (2007), drawing on traditions in SLA studies of CF, investigated focused CF.
	A: Unfocused Corrective Feedback	Unfocused Corrective Feedback is extensive.	
	B: Focused Corrective Feedback	Focused Corrective Feedback is intensive	
5.	Electronic feedback	The teacher indicates an error and provides a hyperlink to a concordance file that provides examples of correct usage.	Milton (2006).
6.	Reformulation	This consists of a native speaker´s reworking of the students´ entire text to make the language seem as native-like as possible while keeping the content of the original intact.	Sachs and Polio (2007) compared the effects of direct correction and reformulation on students' revisions of their text.

Direct corrective feedback expects learners to remember the provided correct forms and apply in revising the writing. Authors have pointed out positives and negatives of both of these approaches. Ellis (2009a), for example, suggests that while indirect corrective feedback facilitates the acquisition of specific language structure, direct feedback is more effective and efficient in focused feedback (Bitchener, 2017; Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Other researchers like Bitchener, Young, and Cameron, (2005); and Lalande (1982) have also reported advantages of indirect feedback, whereas Chandler (2003) reported positive evidence for both direct and indirect feedback. Similarly, Hattie (1999) states that focused feedback, that is focusing on one specific area of language and/or writing is the most influential feedback in promoting learning, especially with the beginner writers. Unfocused feedback is more relevant to more advanced students in term of their language proficiency. The discussion above implies that while providing feedback, writing teachers consider different categories of errors as equal and treat them in the same way (Bitchener, 2010) though they are actually supposed to be treated differently since the processes of their acquisition are different. Agreeing with this, Ferris and Roberts, (2001) affirm that different types of errors should not be treated in the same manner.

More recently, some authors have advocated for the use of internet and technology to provide corrective feedback. Ellis (2009) summarises these in table 2 as a typology of options for correcting linguistic errors.

To sum up this section, providing feedback to student writing and its effectiveness for the writers is widely researched and extensively documented. The literature on corrective feedback, extensive though it may be, is far from being conclusive. A significant number of studies seem to have centred around the contested issue of its effectiveness (see for example Bitchener, 2008). However, one thing that they all agree with is the fact that feedback has potentially a significant bearing on the development of the overall language of the students in general and their writing in particular (see also Lee, 2008; 1997). The literature also suggests that teachers employ a product approach to providing feedback. In other words, students receive feedback and/or are involved in the feedback process when the draft has already been produced. It is also implied that while providing corrective feedback to writing adds a considerable amount of work to teacher workload its impact is uncertain. There is, therefore, a need of a feedback technique which reduces teacher workload but at the same time makes a substantial impact of student writing development.

The present study attempts to build on this perspective and argues that feedback on different types of errors should be provided differently and at different stages. In particular, the study addresses the basic questions of

who should provide feedback and how it should be provided in order for it to make a substantial contribution to the student writing development process.

Research Methodology

The main aim of the research is to explore how effective CAF is as a technique of providing feedback on students writing. In order to achieve this aim, the following questions were addressed:

1. What feedback do the students provide to the members of their community at the feed-in stage?
2. At the feedback stage, what types of errors are they able to identify, diagnose and provide corrective measures?
3. What feedback do they take or intend to take to the future writing activities?
4. What are students' attitudes towards feedback provided by other members of their community?
5. In what ways is CAF as a feedback technique effective and/or ineffective?

As discussed in the previous sections, most of the previous studies investigating corrective feedback, including peer feedback, have taken the product approach treating students as recipients of feedback. There is, therefore, a dearth of knowledge on its effectiveness when student-writers themselves become a part of every stage of the feedback process. The present study builds on the existing body of knowledge by addressing the gap. More specifically, the study attempts to incorporate student-writers at the three levels of the feedback process – the feed-in, feedback and feedforward levels to find out their effectiveness.

The study was conducted with two groups/classes of 18 each with a total of 36 international students. The classes and the students were selected following the purposeful, convenient sampling. A convenient sampling is defined as a non-probability sampling method designed to select participants who are easy to reach for a particular research purpose (Johnson, 1992; Denzin, 1989). In the case of the present research, the study was carried out in the classes that were assigned to the researcher and his co-teacher. The same sampling technique was applied to select 10 students for an interview which allowed the researcher to select students who could contribute to the semi-structured, obligation-free interview. The students, aged 19-22, were enrolled in a pre-university, academic English course. The course emphasises improving their reading and writing along with their listening and speaking skills to enable them to follow their destination courses at the

university upon the completion of the 20-week intensive language program divided into four terms. They were placed in the high-intermediate level of their English language proficiency with an average IELTS score of 5.5.

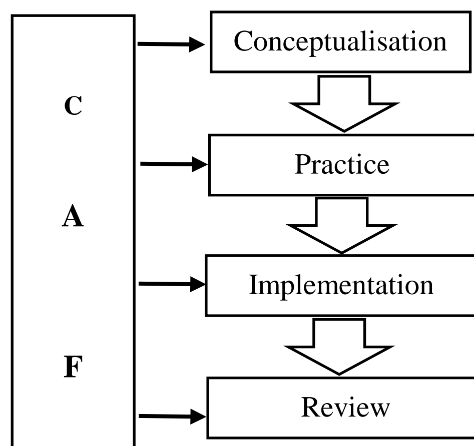
The Research Design

Students of a class were divided into groups of four or five. These groups are called CAF communities as they are treated as small communities to practice the collaborative technique to providing feedback. The members of a community remain in the same community for a term, after which the teacher may regroup them into new communities for the next term.

Phases of the CAF Process

The CAF feedback process has the following four phases as shown in the following figure 1.

Figure 1
Phases of the CAF Process



1. Conceptualisation

In the CAF process, students are a part of the process from the start. They detect erroneous linguistic forms, they diagnose them and they suggest corrective measures. As they are new to the system, they need to be adequately prepared with correction codes and the terminologies to be used during CAF sessions, Correction codes are codes or symbols used to diagnose and indicate types of errors committed (Giri & Awasthi, 1998). Learning how to diagnose errors takes place in the first week of a term.

2. Practice

This phase is basically practicing the CAF technique using error correction codes. A name and a Google Folder is assigned to each CAF community which is shared by its members. Using the File Upload in the Google Drive page, the members of a CAF community upload their first writings (or first drafts. Henceforth "initial submission") to their assigned folder. The initial submissions may be a simple outline/plan for writing at the feed-in phase, a fully developed draft at the feedback phase or a reflective writing on the whole feedback experience at the feed forward phase. This folder is accessible to the members of the respective CAF community only.

Practice on the CAF process takes place in three steps. In the first step, the members of a CAF community identify errors, diagnose them and suggest their corrections. In the second step, they only diagnose errors (indicate their types) in the margin but do not identify their locations or provide suggestions for corrections. In the third step, they only indicate which lines of the writing in question have errors, but they do not diagnose or identify their location and types.

Upon the completion of a session, a community member receives feedback from three or four fellow members. Individual students then work on their writings revise, improve and rewrite, which they submit to their teacher for their considerations (hereafter termed as "final submission").

This phase runs simultaneously with phase 1. The teacher provides the required assistance to facilitate the CAF process.

3. Implementation

During the implementation phase, CAF communities work together to provide feedback to each other with decreasing assistance from the teacher. The communities conduct three CAF session per week, two sessions in class and one session at home. The purpose of the home session is to encourage students to work as a community without the teacher being physically present in the process. For each submission, there are three feedback sessions – feed-in, feedback, and feedforward.

The phase runs for seven weeks. Students, having received feedback from fellow community members revise and improve their writing. The improved versions of their writing are then submitted to the teacher for their general comments. The teacher compares their initial submissions with their improved versions, or the final submissions, to keep track of the changes and improvements.

4. Review

In the final week of the CAF process, a review session is conducted. The review takes place in CAF communities as well as in the class as a whole. The students are given a questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview is conducted with selected students with a view to finding out their experience as well as their attitude toward the process.

Data Collection

The tasks for the writing submissions were the weekly tasks assigned to students during the course. These ranged from paragraph writing, descriptive writing, comparison writing, analytical writing to reflective writing. A topic and its context for the tasks were normally provided. Expected length of a paragraph was 150-200 words whereas essays were supposed to be 350 word-long. The writing tasks were conducted during class usually after a number of scaffolding activities. At times, the students were asked to complete the task as homework.

Three techniques were used to collect data for the study. Students' submissions, a questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. Students' initial and final submissions serve as the main source of data. These submissions were analysed to check a number of weaknesses or errors they made, what types of errors (macro or micro level errors) the CAF communities were able to identify, diagnose and correct. These were then compared with their final submissions. Next, a questionnaire consisting of five to seven (closed and open-ended) questions were given to the students to share their experiences. They were asked to share their opinion anonymously on questions like – in what ways has the process been helpful/useful or not useful. Finally, based on the outcome of the first two data collection instruments, a small-scale, semi-structured interview was conducted. The purpose of the interview was to seek further explanation/clarification raised in the data of the first two instruments.

Data Analysis

The main goal of using the CAF was to help students improve their writing. Therefore, with a view to finding out what improvements the participants made, data were collected from their initial submissions (drafts) as well as from their final submissions. To analyse the data, first, the average scores of errors-counts both of first submissions and final submissions were established on the weekly basis. Second, a qualitative and theme-based approach to analysis was applied. Themes, in line with the research questions, were developed and followed through the analysis process: (a) categories of errors identified were established and searched

through the students' submissions. Errors and categories of errors were then further analysed to establish their patterns; (b) an analysis of suggested corrective measure was carried out. And (c) a similar theme-based analysis was conducted on the data collected through questionnaire and interview.

Findings and discussion

Error counts were conducted at two stages, first, of the errors on the first submissions as identified by the students themselves, and second, on their final submissions, i.e., the submissions students made after revising/improving their initial drafts. The following table 3 shows the number of identified errors at various stages of the course.

Table 3
Average number of errors identified per 200 words in the initial and final submissions (no. of submissions = 36)

Stage into the term	Beginning	Mid	End
Average no. of errors identified in the first submissions.	14	9	5
Average no. of errors in the final submissions	6	4	2

Table 4
Error types and their percentages at the three stages of the term

Error types/ Stage into the term	Beginning	Mid	End
Grammar	43	25	25
Vocabulary	36	22	20
Mechanics	14	22	20
Organisation	0	11	15
Coherence	7	20	20

Table 1 presents simplified, average scores of the number of errors identified by the CAF communities. It shows that they were able to identify, diagnose and suggest measures for 14 errors per 200 words in the first submissions at the beginning stage of the course. Similarly, 9 and 5 errors were identified at the mid-term and end-of-term stages which is a decrease of 35 percent in the mid-term and by 65 percent at the end of the term. The table also shows that 6 (out of 14, i.e., 43 %) and 4 (out of 9, i.e., 44 %, and 2 (out of 5, i.e., 40%) errors remained in their final submissions at the beginning, mid and end of the course respectively. One explanation for the decreasing trend could be the fact that students committed increasingly fewer errors as they progressed through the course. These remaining errors

were generally the discourse level errors. Table 4 shows what types of errors the students could identify, diagnose and suggest remedial measures.

As it is illustrated in Table 3, at the beginning of the term, students identified errors that are known as surface level (or local level or micro-level) errors. Micro-level errors included errors in grammar (25%), vocabulary (20%) and mechanics (20%). Grammar errors generally included errors in subject-verb agreement, verb form, tense, articles, and prepositions. Vocabulary errors were errors of word-choice, word form, and appropriateness in their use. Similarly, mechanics errors consisted of punctuation errors, and errors in capitalisation and spelling. At this stage, students were not able to identify errors related to paragraph and/or essay organisation and coherence (use of discourse markers and/or linking words). One explanation for their inability to identify organisation and coherence errors may be that they knew little about how paragraphs or essays are organised and how unity within a paragraph is achieved. However, students could increasingly identify more such errors in the subsequent stages of the course. This could be the result of the course intervention in that the teachers introduced these concepts as the course progressed.

Students' attitude towards the CAF collaborative feedback technique

As mentioned in the section above, students were given a questionnaire and selected students were interviewed in order to find out what they thought of the CAF. This section looks into some issues students raised during the project. The discussion below summarises the findings from the questionnaire and incorporates comments from the interview wherever appropriate. The interviewees here are termed as IN and a number has been assigned to them in order to maintain their anonymity.

It is fun, engaging and empowering

The use of technology in the CAF provided novelty. Students, in their communities, used the *google doc* software to view their submissions and work on them to provide feedback. Through the software, the members of a community could connect with each other and all of them could work on a draft and see what others were doing on it at the same time. As they detected errors, diagnosed them and suggested their remedial measures, they were fully engaged as they had to explain why certain linguistic forms were erroneous, what type of errors they were and what corrective measures may be applied to correct them.

> *It was fun to find and correct our own errors. I wasn't sure if I could do this because my grammar is not that good, but by working in a community, I felt happy. I think I developed some confidence (IN 4).*

The comment that the student was not sure at the initial stage is significant. Conceptual clarity and the understanding of what was expected of them was an important step in the feedback process. It could be expected of students to be uncertain, confused and unable to see the relevance of the process initially. However, as the process proceeded, students seemed to have overcome their anxiety and confusion.

Students also shared their feelings when their community/team members telling them about their errors and in what ways it was good to learn from their classmates. The followings are the statement from student IN6 and IN10:

> *I did not feel bad learning from my classmates. In fact, it was good as the teachers did not see all the errors that I made. (IN 6)*

> *The team members were supportive and nobody makes other people feel uncomfortable. (IN10)*

One other interviewee, IN9, implied that the community members were very cooperative and that provided her motivation to work better as a team. The fact that measures to improve from their peers came as advice, not as a correction. “We enjoyed finding errors for each other and their solutions,” said IN1.

CAF develops transactional English

The CAF processes generated a great deal of interaction among the community members. As they discussed errors, their types, and their corrective measures, they not only had to explain what errors they found, but they also had to negotiate why the errors might have occurred and what could be done to remedy them. This facilitated communication among them. ‘We are talking most of the time trying to convince others about what I think', suggested IN4 when she was trying to answer what she liked about it. Face-to-face interaction, as Long (1996) suggests, promotes target language proficiency, especially the language of transaction because language is best acquired through negotiated interaction (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996).

CAF facilitates critical thinking

Reading each other's writings and evaluating them provided a new perspective. For most of the participants, to make a critical evaluation of their classmates' writing was a novel experience. They experienced some inhibitions in doing so in the first few sessions. Relatively less vocal or shy students needed a considerable amount of scaffolding to get started. Nevertheless, after a few teacher-assisted sessions, they started to participate in the process. The students shared their experiences as follows:

We learned new ideas and new ways of saying, but at the same time, we analysed their language and their ideas. (IN8)

Talking about each other's writing and giving suggestions made me feel important. (IN2)

I liked what they said about my draft. (IN5)

As pointed out at the beginning of the article, there are discrepancies in the previous corrective feedback research, and its effect on students' attitude and their writing is fiercely debated. While some studies seem to have focused on local, lexica-syntax level errors, many others have taken a product approach to providing feedback in which students are treated as recipients of feedback. Some other studies have also suggested that ineffectiveness of corrective feedback is mainly because it is generally vague, prescriptive and non-qualitative, and as a result, students develop an unfavourable attitude towards it. None of the studies reviewed in this article appears to have taken a process approach to feedback. Notwithstanding, Radeeki, and Swale (1988, Leki (1991), and Chandler (2001; 2003) reported that students had a favourable attitude when they had the opportunity to correct their own errors. Based on this premise, the present study adopted a process approach and integrated the recipients of feedback, students, into the feedback process.

In the CAF process, students themselves are creators of their feedback. As a part of the feedback process, students, in small communities, collaborate at every stage of the writing process and then work on each other’s draft to generate corrective feedback. The CAF process, however, raised positive as well as negative issues. This section elucidates some of these issues.

Engaging students in the feedback process and making it more meaningful for them has been an important consideration of the study. The study finds that students are likely to take the responsibility in detecting errors, seeking an explanation in trying to understand them and in improving their drafts if they become a part of the feedback generating process. What the study also finds is that when a student enjoys the process, the feedback becomes more meaningful, they have a favourable attitude towards feedback (see also Sheen, 2007; Simpson, 2006), and they are more motivated towards their work.

The study finds that the CAF process is increasingly student-directed and student-centred. Despite the fact that students are reliant on teachers as to how to proceed and what to do in the initial stage of the process, they become autonomous and independent in the later stages. The teacher’s role

is to create and facilitate the process rather than to control or monitor it, thus promoting independence in learning. This is important because independent learning is one skill that they will need throughout their academic life. While detecting and examining drafts of fellow community members, students take a critical and evaluative approach to it. They not only have to be critical of what they see but also have to explain what errors there are why they are errors and what can be done in order to correct them. This, in turn, promotes their critical thinking.

The CAF process is embedded into technology. Students must have their own devices and *Google* software installed in them in order to actively engage with the materials and interact with each other. Therefore, the process incorporates blended learning. Getting used to using the shared *Google doc* and setting it up before every CAF session may appear to be time-consuming. The initial sessions may seem to progress at a slow pace, and some students, who are fast learners, may get impatient as others catch up with the system. Some of them are likely to consider the approach a waste of time, especially, in the beginning. 'I understand what we are doing, but don't you think the lesson is slow going', said IN3. Furthermore, some shy, introvert and 'weak' students may need a considerable amount of encouragement and scaffolding to get involved. Some students, for example, simply do not like to offend their peers by criticising their works while others may fear to offend them. This is in line with Chen, 2013; Lu & Bol, 2007 who found that some students were not as critical as expected simply because they did not want to take the risk of potential disapproval from their peers.

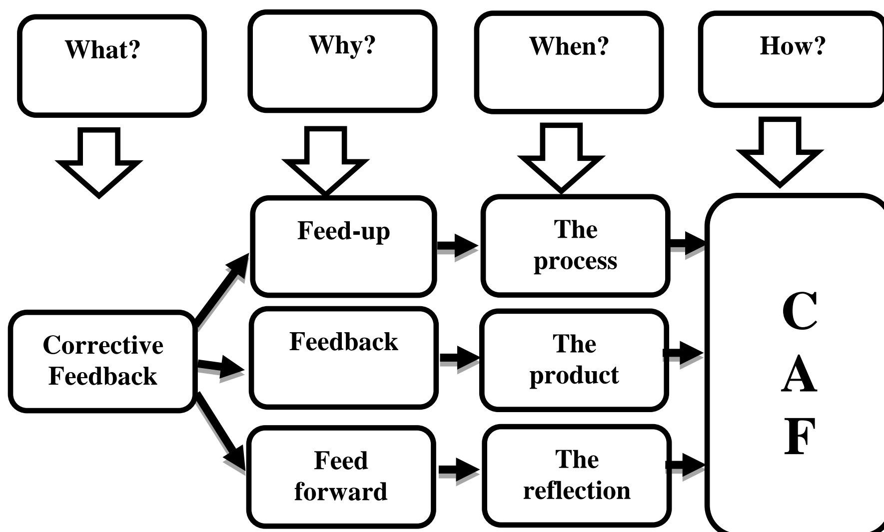
Another important issue raised by this study is that students were unable to detect some errors. These were some cases of article use, use of discourse markers, and somewhat is known as global errors. As discussed in this article, global errors are content, discourse, and organisation related errors and may interfere with the comprehensibility of a text (Ferris, 2002). This may be considered as an inherent weakness of the CAF framework and should be treated differently in different contexts.

Closing remarks

There are a number of implications for the teachers of academic writing. The article proposes the following framework to discuss these implications. As figure 2 illustrates, there are four questions which a teacher of writing needs to be aware of. They are, (a) what feedback to provide; (b) why to provide feedback; (c) when to provide feedback; and finally, (d) how to provide feedback.

The first point in the theoretical framework in Figure 2 is what (types of) feedback should be provided. Leki (1991) and Chandler (2003) reported that students prefer comprehensive error-correction, rather than a focused or selective correction in which only errors of a particular type or category are marked and feedback provided on. Contrary to this, Tran (2013) and Bitchener (2012) suggest that focused feedback is more effective than unfocused feedback, especially at the beginning stage as learners can process the feedback more easily. The present study found that the CAF generated more and qualitative feedback when they were asked to focus on a particular type of errors (e.g., verb-related, tense related, mechanical and so on). Similarly, Ferris (2002) recommends that treatable errors should be dealt with first, and untreatable errors could be treated later because selective treatable error-correction strategy helps students find errors with which they are prone. As discussed earlier, global errors require a greater degree of mastery over the language systems, local errors, therefore, should be treated before the global errors. This is reasonable because students with a lower level of proficiency are more likely to work on such errors at the initial stage of the course.

Figure 2
A framework for providing feedback



The second point in the framework is why to provide feedback. There are two approaches to addressing this question, first of which is the product approach, which is a conventional approach in which feedback activity takes place when the draft is already produced and students are in the revising stage. They are given comments and strategies or correction to

improve their drafts. It has already been pointed out in this article that the effectiveness of such an approach is contested. The second approach is the process approach in which the feedback activity starts as soon as the writing process starts. The CAF advocates that the process approach to feedback has three steps. First, communities commence **feeding-up** activities as soon as students sit to set their goals and begin gathering and organising ideas together to form an outline for their writing. This is in agreement with Hattie and Timperley (2011) suggest that "a critical aspect of feedback is the information given to students about the attainment of learning goals related to the task" (p. 88). The feed-up activities, thus, may include a discussion of the task at hand, its goals and contexts along with the rubrics and descriptors used in the assessment process. Modeling or providing a model or sample of standard performance is effective at this stage. Second, **feedback** is provided on a task or a product, it may be aimed at the activities taken to complete a task to create a product, or, it can be an encouragement or praise to engage further on the task. And third, **feedforward** is an activity in which students are encouraged to take the learning forward or to the next level, i.e., in more challenging activities. Feedforward, thus, include "enhanced challenges, more strategies and processes to work on the tasks, deeper understanding and more information about what is and what is not understood" (Hattie and Timperley, 2011, p. 90). The three processes of feed-up, feedback and feedforward roughly addresses the third point of the framework (i.e., when to provide feedback) and correspond to three separate stages; the **process stage**, the **production stage,** and the **reflection stage**. In other words, feed-up takes place during the process of drafting, feedback is provided when the draft is produced and feedforward is reflecting on what learners do to avoid making similar errors in the later writing tasks.

The final point the article addresses is how to provide feedback. As it is evident now, feedback is best provided to students by students themselves in their small communities. The CAF ensures that students have an opportunity to present their drafts and explain their ideas. It also makes feedback more meaningful. By allowing participants to interact with the feedback and to negotiate their meanings with the fellow community members, CAF helps students construct their own knowledge, which are useful for them. The CAF as a process, thus is, motivating and inspiring as students can see what other members of the community do. Finally, CAF is engaging as everyone in class remains engaged in the activity throughout the feedback sessions.

In conclusion, then, the value of student interaction and student collaboration in providing feedback, cannot be exaggerated. The present study reaffirms that collaborative approaches to feedback have proven

benefits. The study, for example, shows that when students work in small communities, they can detect and identify a number of errors and their corrective measures which are more meaningful to them than when their teachers find and correct errors for them. Similarly, the approach strengthens student autonomy in learning, writing and in revision practices. It also facilitates student engagement which helps develop their language, especially, their sentence construction and vocabulary building. This is in line with Sato (2013) and Zhao (2014) who reported that such feedback techniques strengthen language acquisition. As the CAF is interactive and encourages interaction among community members, it facilitates the development of speaking skills (Zhao, 2014; Yu & Lee, 2014). Considering the benefits discussed in this section, it may safely be said that community interaction is more effective than student-teacher interaction and it makes substantial contribution to the overall language development of the participants.

Finally, it must be pointed out here that considering the fact that this was a small scale study with some obvious weaknesses, its findings may have limited applicability. Furthermore, in contexts where technology is yet to be integrated into education and where teachers have less flexibility in terms of curriculum delivery and material choice, practicality of the approach may need to be further studied before it is adapted.

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Appendix 1
Sample of feedback

Eva

In figure 1, during 1950 and 2025, the number of persons over 65 years people per 100 children in the least developed regions will remain stable about 10 until 2025 After that, it will increase a little. Likewise, the number of the less developed regions nearly keep the level as same as the least developed regions, but from 2000, it gradually rose and will reach to 100 in the future,and this tendency is similar with the whole world's trend, and there were followed by a rapid increase to approximately 250 in the more developed regions. Seemingly, from figure 1, we can suspect that there are 2 reasons improving the number of persons 65+ per 100 children. It is possible that medical innovation for new drugs and treatments help lots of people surviving from incurable diseases. Also, a research suggests there are more money for health care in richer regions. That's why the number of the more developed regions is much more than less and least developed regions.

Otherwise, in figure 2, between 1950 and 2010, the proportion of labour force (over 65 years old people) in the more developed regions and the less developed regions fell steadily, from 40% to 30% and 25% to 10% respectively. What caused this occasion maybe was the pension in every region was improved People had enough money and didn't need to work anymore. After 1990, the advance of welfare may be linked to the downward percentage of 2 regions.

Appendix 2
Error Correction Key

ww	=	wrong word chosen
wo	=	word order
wf	=	wrong word form (including verbs)
frag	=	Fragment
sv	=	subject verb agreement
Λ	=	word missing
art	=	wrong or missing article
t	=	wrong verb tense has been used
p	=	wrong punctuation used/punctuation needed
pl/sing/#	=	plural or singular confusion
sp	=	spelling mistake
	=	new paragraph needed
exp	=	expression / you need to reword this
?	=	meaning is not clear
/	=	not needed
sr	=	too similar or repetitive
bw	=	better word (this word is okay, but there is a better word)
wif	=	write in full

Appendix 2
Using numbers to make comments on student's writing

Numbers as codes may be inserted in the text to refer to values such as the following:

1. I like this point.
2. This is a good example
3. Provide another example.
4. Provide another example.
5. Provide more details
6. Make this text clearer.
7. Rephrase the text to improve clarity.
8. Provide a supporting reason for this point.
9. This is repeat. Can you use another expression/word?
10. Do you have a topic sentence? Is it clear? Does it say what you want to say in this paragraph?
11. Is your paragraph complete?
12. What is thesis statement? Is it clear? Does it say what you paragraph says?
13. This text is unclear.
14. What does your supporting details suggest? Do they agree with your thesis?
15. You need a discourse marker or a linking word here.