

Original Paper

Can Formative Assessment and Corrective Feedback Improve L2 Learners' Performance on English "Comparative Forms"? The Case of Low-Proficiency Level EFL Learners

Alqahtani Mofareh A^{1*}

¹ King Khaled Military Academy, Civilian Studies, English Department, Riyadh Saudi

* Alqahtani Mofareh A, King Khaled Military Academy, Civilian Studies, English Department, Riyadh Saudi

Received: June 20, 2019

Accepted: July 1, 2019

Online Published: July 18, 2019

doi:10.22158/grhe.v2n3p104

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/grhe.v2n3p104>

Abstract

This study aims to examine the impact of formative assessment with corrective feedback as one of the effective tools that improve the performance of students who study English as a second language (L2 learners). More specifically, it contributes to research on the complex relationship between the attitudes and practices of English language teachers and students regarding the way they understand and practice the basics of formative assessment and corrective feedback when checking students' achievement. In order to achieve this goal, the study investigated this matter in light of the following guiding questions: What are the effects of corrective and formative feedback in improving students who are learning English as a second language level L2 learners? How might teachers provide effective assistance to their students during this stage?

To address these questions, A total of 58 subjects were divided into a control group (n=29) and an experimental group (n=29). All the subjects were second-year cadets at a military academy. Both groups were given a pre-test prior to the teaching of English "comparative forms". The purpose of the pre-test was to make sure that the two groups were homogenous. The pre-test was then followed by the teaching of English "comparative forms" in both groups. The experimental group was given a formative assessment where each subject also received one-on-one corrective feedback. Finally, a post-test (summative assessment) was given to both groups.

After collecting and analyzing the data, it was found that providing a formative assessment and corrective feedback has a positive impact on improving students' level of accurate understanding accurately and student writing as well as correct reading.

Definitions of Terms

▪ *Formative:*

Serving to form something, especially having a profound influence on a person's development.

▪ *Assessment:*

The action or an instance of making a judgment about something; the act of assessing something: APPRAISAL.

▪ *Corrective:*

Tending to correct or rectify generally used to refer to something that is intended to improve a situation.

▪ *Feedback:*

The transmission of evaluative or corrective information about an action, event, or process to the original or controlling source.

▪ *L2 learners*

The students learning a Second Language, non-native language, foreign language, it is a process of acquiring language capacity after another language (or languages) have already been learned natively.

▪ *EFL Learners*

EFL is an abbreviation for (English as a Foreign Language) This is mainly used to talk about students (whose first language is not English) learning English while living in their own country (For example, a Chinese person learning English in China).

Keywords

assessment, feedback, formative, summative, teaching English as a foreign language

1. Introduction

Formative assessments stand in contrast to summative assessments. On the one hand, summative assessments are used to evaluate the achievement of students at the end of a course, program, semester, or school year. That is, the final grade of students is determined based on their performance in summative assessments. Formative assessments, on the other hand, are used to help teachers identify whether students have any difficulties or learning needs during the course, program, semester, or school year. Thus, formative assessments ultimately aim at improving students' performance on summative assessments.

Formative assessment refers to a wide variety of methods that teachers use to conduct in-process evaluations of student comprehension, learning needs, and academic progress during a lesson, unit, or course. Formative assessments help teachers identify concepts that students are struggling to understand, skills they are having difficulty acquiring, or learning standards they have not yet achieved so that adjustments can be made to lessons, instructional techniques, and academic support.

The usual goal of formative assessment is therefore to collect detailed information that can be used to improve instruction and student learning while it is happening. What makes an assessment “formative” is not the design of a test, technique, or self-evaluation, per se, but the way it is used—i.e., to inform in-process teaching and learning modifications.

1.1 Review of the Relevant Literature

In this regard, a number of previous studies concerning with the subject matter of the current research were examined or addressed, the most important of which are:

- Maddalena Taras (2008) found that there was a general consensus among practitioners on the understanding of the term “formative assessment”. Eighty per cent (40/48) of lecturers mentioned it to be “developmental” and/or “for learning” (2 did not reply). The definition of formative assessment also reflected the etymological meaning of assessment, however: only 28 per cent (14/48) mentioned “feedback”. Formative assessment is argued, however, to be properly understood as summative assessment plus feedback, such as some form of correction.
- Ehsan Rassaei, Ahmad Moinzadeh, Manijeh Youhanaee (2012) carried out a study in which the impacts of two types of feedback-related evidence which are believed to be crucial in second language (L2) development were compared. Positive evidence provides learners with the correct and target-like structures or what is acceptable in L2 while negative evidence indicates learners clearly what is unacceptable. One framework for investigating the roles of positive and negative evidence is based on research on their role in corrective feedback in L2 acquisition. Corrective feedback is defined as a teacher’s reactive move that invites a learner to attend to the grammatical accuracy of the utterance which is produced by the learner (Sheen, 2007), and Rassaei et al. (2012) found that corrective feedback giving explicit negative evidence was superior to other types. Carroll and Swain (1993), studied the effects of four different types of feedback: explicit hypothesis rejection, explicit utterance rejection, modeling/implicit negative feedback, and indirect metalinguistic feedback. Findings showed that the group receiving explicit hypothesis rejection outperformed all the other groups, providing evidence again that explicit correction played more a important role in learning correct grammatical generalizations than implicit correction.
- Lyster and Ranta (1997) categorized corrective feedback into six different types when investigating four immersion classrooms at the primary level: explicit correction, recast, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition. They found that teachers used recast (55%) the most out of the six different types of feedback, followed by elicitation, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback explicit correction, and repetition of errors (5%). However, recast, which is often positive and implicit, was the least likely to lead to uptake in student responses to feedback, whereas elicitation led to student responses the most successfully.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

I aim to demonstrate the effectiveness in EFL teaching of formative assessment with corrective feedback in improving the performance of L2 learners learning comparative forms. Objectives are therefore:

- 1) To determine the effect of using formative assessment on later summative assessment of the attainment of students at the end of a course that has been instructed in a systematic way.
- 2) To study the effectiveness of the formative assessment in helping teachers to assess the students' status and whether they need extra help in the classroom.
- 3) To verify the existence of effective corrective feedback methods to help students improve their performance through formative assessment.

1.3 Importance of the Study

Formative assessment is an important process that used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students' achievement of intended instructional outcomes therefore formative assessment takes place during instruction. Meanwhile feedback also focused on the conditions and principles of effective feedback that will have most effect on student learning where it explain how the use of written feedback from lecturers can improve student outcomes and grades from one assessment task to the next one therefore it has been determined by many experts as a very important and vital tool that much helpful for the students to improve their skills and minimize the related errors.

1.4 Research Hypothesis

Based upon the above-mentioned arguments, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

- 1) Corrective feedback as a part of formative assessment plays an important role in the final summative performance of EFL learners.

2. Method

A total of 58 subjects were divided into a control group ($n=29$) and an experimental group ($n=29$). All the subjects were second-year cadets at a military academy. Both groups were given a pre-test prior to the teaching of English "comparative forms". The purpose of the pre-test was to make sure that the two groups were homogenous. The pre-test was then followed by the teaching of English "comparative forms" in both groups. The experimental group was given a formative assessment where each subject received one-on-one corrective feedback. Finally, a post-test (summative assessment) was given to both groups.

3. Result

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Groups' Performances in Pre- and Post-Tests

Group	Pre-test		Post-test	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Control	1.69	1.92	6.59	4.19
Experimental	2.62	2.87	9.17	.97

Note. Participants in each group (n=29); Maximum score on each test is 10.

Table 1 above shows that the subjects in the two groups performed slightly differently in the pre-test. However, the high standard deviations clearly indicate the wide variation among the subjects in prior ability. Furthermore, the difference between the groups on the pre-test was not significant ($t(56)=-1.4504, p=.153$). Results of the post-test however show a clearly better performance in favor of the experimental group. The t-test result indicates a highly significant difference between the groups ($t(56)=3.324, p=.002$), supporting the efficacy of formative assessment and feedback on the learning of English comparative forms. Figure 1 below illustrates the post-test's mean difference in both groups.

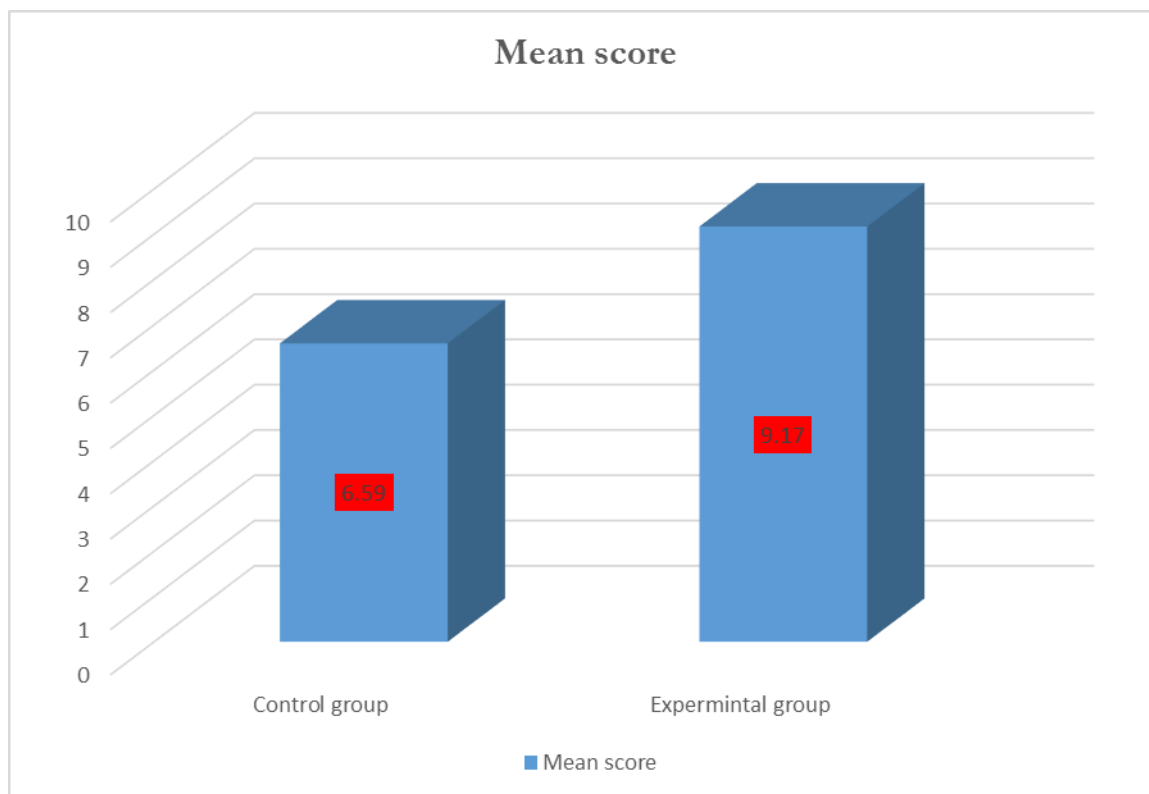


Figure 1. Post-Test Difference between Control and Experimental Groups

Cohen's d effect size was also computed to quantify the effect of formative assessment and feedback on the students' learning of English comparative forms. Cohen's d is operationalized by calculating the mean difference between two scores and then dividing the result by the pooled standard deviation. The results show a large effect size of formative assessment and feedback on the learning of L2 comparative forms (Cohen's $d=0.85$). According to Cohen (1992), a value of 0.8 or greater is a very large effect.

4. Discussion

As was mentioned above, the current study was designed to determine the effect of formative assessment with corrective feedback on improving the performance of L2 learners learning English comparative forms. After collecting and analyzing the data, it was noted that providing formative assessment and corrective feedback in addition to instruction had a positive impact on improving students' level of accurate understanding and use of comparative forms. This is therefore consistent with the literature which we reviewed in 1.1 above, and for example with Bitchener (2008) who revealed that using various kinds of formative assessment and corrective feedback in student groups can also lead to improvement in writing.

Students who received formative assessment and corrective feedback in the present study performed better in the post-test than the control group, which implies that greater emphasis should be placed on formative assessment and corrective feedback in the education and training process. On the other hand, however, Bitchener and Knoch (2009) reported that error correction alone, without additional feedback was just as beneficial as more elaborate forms of feedback (such as explicit explanation). Hence the question as to what precise form of feedback is the most beneficial remains to be answered. Moreover, we do not know what form of formative assessment and corrective feedback would have the greatest impact on improving the level of students at all levels of learner ability, nor which different types are likely to produce the best improvement in learning over the long term.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the results of the present study show that the subjects in the experimental group significantly outperformed the subjects in the control group. This is due to the fact that the subjects in the experimental group received corrective feedback in a formative assessment which ultimately aimed at improving their performance in the later summative assessment. Furthermore, the result of Cohen's *d* revealed a large effect size for formative assessment with systematic corrective feedback on the learning of L2 comparative forms. The pedagogical implication that the findings suggest is that formative assessment and corrective feedback are useful strategies for promoting learning in an EFL context, at least with low-proficiency level second language learners.

The researcher finally presents a number of recommendations, with the aim of contributing to and strengthening the understanding and use of formative assessment and corrective feedback to improve students' performance, especially L2 learners, by offering suggestions based on the current study.

- 1) There should be collaboration between students and teachers to extend the use of formative assessment with feedback to enhance all parts of the EFL syllabus, including reading and writing.
- 2) Students have to be given more formative assessment with corrective feedback, either as groups or individually, because effective formative assessment and corrective feedback provide the learner with two types of information: verification and elaboration.
- 3) L2 learners and teachers must consider formative assessment and corrective feedback as Scaffolding: it provides support which enables English learners to do more advanced activities and to engage in more advanced thinking and problem solving than they could without such help.
- 4) There is an additional effective cognitive mechanism by which formative assessment and corrective feedback may benefit learners. It can signal a gap between their current level of performance and some desired level of performance or goal. Resolving this gap can motivate the learner to engage higher levels of effort.

References

- Becker, L. J., & Seligman, C. (1981). Welcome to the energy crisis. *Journal of Social Issues*, 37(2), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1981.tb02623.x>
- Bitchener, J. (2008). Evidence in support of written corrective feedback. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 17(2), 102-118. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2007.11.004>
- Bitchener, J., & Knoch, U. (2009). The relative effectiveness of different types of direct written corrective feedback. *System*, 37(2), 322-329. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2008.12.006>
- Bitchener, J., Young, S., & Cameron, D. (2016). The effect of different types of corrective feedback on ESL student writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 14(3), 191-205. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2005.08.001>
- Boud, D., & Molloy, E. (2013). Rethinking models of feedback for learning: The challenge of design. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 38(6), 698-712. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2012.691462>
- Brookhart, S. M. (2014). *Formative assessment strategies for every classroom* (2nd ed). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).
- Brookhart, S. M. (2015). Feedback That Fits. *Educational Leadership*, 65(4), 54-59.
- Brookhart, S. M. S. (20016). *How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students*. Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).
- Butler, R. (2011). Enhancing and Undermining Intrinsic Motivation: The Effects of Task-Involving and Ego-Involving Evaluation on Interest and Performance. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 58(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8279.1988.tb00874.x>
- Carey, T., & Carifio, J. (2012). The minimum grading controversy: Results of a quantitative study of seven years of grading data. *Educational Researcher*, 41(6), 201-208. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X12453309>
- Carless, D. (2014). Differing perceptions in the feedback process. *Studies in Higher education*, 31(2), 219-233. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070600572132>
- Carless, D., Salter, D., Yang, M., & Lam, J. (2016). Developing sustainable feedback practices. *Studies in Higher Education*, 36(4), 395-407. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075071003642449>
- Carroll, S., & Swain, M. (1993). Explicit and implicit negative feedback: An empirical study of the learning of linguistic generalization. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 15, 357-386.
- Chandler, J. (2011). The efficacy of various kinds of error feedback for improvement in the accuracy and fluency of L2 student writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 12(3), 267-296. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743\(03\)00038-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743(03)00038-9)
- Cochrane, T. (2015). Enhancing oral presentation skills of engineering students: Technology to the rescue with the Virtual-I Presenter (VIP). *Computers in Education Journal*, 19(4), 43-52.
- Cohen, J. (1992). Statistical power analysis. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 1(3), 98-101.
- Connolly, M. (2016). *Skills-based health education*. Sudbury, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning.

- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Danforth, S., & Smith, T. J. (2014). *Engaging Troubling Students: A Constructivist Approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Dekker, H., Schönrock-Adema, J., Snoek, J. W., van der Molen, T., & Cohen-Schotanus, J. (2013). Which characteristics of written feedback are perceived as stimulating students' reflective competence: An exploratory study. *BMC Medical Education*, 13(2011), 94. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6920-13-94>
- Doan, L. (2013). Is Feedback a Waste of Time? The Students' Perspective. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 1(2), 3. <https://doi.org/10.14297/jpaap.v1i2.69>
- Dweck, C. (2006). Mindset: The new psychology of success. In *Head Neck*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Ehsan Rassaei, A. M., & Manijeh, Y. (2012). The Effect of Corrective Feedback on the Acquisition of Implicit and Explicit L2 Knowledge. *The Journal of Language Teaching and Learning*, 2(1), 59-75.
- Ellis, R. (2008). A typology of written corrective feedback types. *ELT Journal*, 63(2), 97-107. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccn023>
- Ellis, R., Loewen, S., & Erlam, R. (2006). Implicit and explicit corrective feedback and the acquisition of L2 grammar. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 28(2), 339-368. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263106060141>
- Ellis, R., Sheen, Y., Murakami, M., & Takashima, H. (2008). The effects of focused and unfocused written corrective feedback in English as a foreign language context. *System*, 26(3), 353-371. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2008.02.001>
- Evans, C. (2013). Making Sense of Assessment Feedback in Higher education. *Review of Educational Research*, 83(1), 70-120. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654312474350>
- Ferris, D. R. (2010). The case for grammar correction in L2 writing classes: A response to Truscott (1996). *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 8(1), 1-11. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743\(99\)80110-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743(99)80110-6)
- Ferris, D. R. (2011). The Influence of Teacher Commentary on Student Revision. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(2), 315-339. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3588049>
- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2007). *Checking for Understanding: Formative Assessment Techniques for Your Classroom* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).
- Gaonkar, V., & Patil, P. B. (2015). Slow Learners: Problems and Remedial Measures. In *Applied and Community Psychology: Trends and Directions* (1st ed., p. 854). New Delhi: Sarup & Sons.
- Gardner, J. (2012). *Assessment and Learning* (2nd ed.). London: SAGE Publications.

- Ghazal, L., Gul, R., Hanzala, M., Jessop, T., & Tharani, A. (2014). Graduate Students' Perceptions of Written Feedback at a Private University in Pakistan. *International Journal of Higher education*, 3(2), 13-27. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v3n2p13>
- Goldstein, L. M. (2010). Questions and answers about teacher written commentary and student revision: Teachers and students working together. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 13(1), 63-80. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2004.04.006>
- Hamner, H. A. (in press). *Research in cognitive development*. New York: Springer.
- Hamp-Lyons, L. (2006). The impact of testing practices on teaching: Ideologies and alternatives. In *International handbook of English language teaching* (pp. 487-504). Norwell, MA: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-46301-8_35
- Happenstance, S., Holden, G., Irwin, B., Parkin, H., & Thorpe, L. P. (2017). Using technology to encourage student engagement with feedback: A literature review. *Research in Learning Technology*, 19(2), 117-127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21567069.2011.586677>
- Hargreaves, E. (2005). Assessment for learning? Thinking outside the (black) box. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 35(2), 213-224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640500146880>
- Harris, A. (2006). *Improving schools in exceptionally challenging circumstances: Tales from the frontline*. London: Continuum.
- Harris, K. L., Krause, K., Gleeson, D., Peat, M., Taylor, C., & Garnett, R. (2007). *Enhancing Assessment in the Biological Sciences: Ideas and resources for university educators*.
- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning-Synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement-John*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203887332>
- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2015). The Power of Feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 81-112. <https://doi.org/10.3102/003465430298487>
- Heritage, M. (2016). Formative Assessment: What Do Teachers Need to Know and Do? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 89(2), 140-145. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172170708900210>
- Hilts, P. J. (1999, February 16). In forecasting their emotions, most people flunk out. In *New York Times*. Retrieved November 21, 2000, from <http://www.nytimes.com>
- Irons, A. (2011). Enhancing learning through formative assessment and feedback. In *Key guides for effective teaching in higher education series* (Vol. 39). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Jolly, B., & Boud, D. (2013). Written feedback: What is it good for and how can we do it well? In *Feedback in Higher and Professional Education* (pp. 104-124). London: Routledge. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10453/27681>
- Juwah, C., Macfarlane-dick, D., Matthew, B., Nicol, D., Ross, D., & Smith, B. (2015). Enhancing student learning through effective formative feedback. *The Higher education Academy Generic Centre Enhancing*, 68, 1-41.

- Karim, B. H. H. (2015). The Impact of Teachers' Beliefs and Perceptions about Formative Assessment in the University ESL Class. *International Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education*, 2(3), 108-115.
- Kihlstrom, J. F. (2013). *How Students Learn—And How We Can Help Them Principles of Memory*.
- Kingston, N., & Nash, B. (2011). Formative assessment: A meta-analysis and a call for research. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 30, 28-37. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-3992.2011.00220.x>
- Laplace, P. S. (1951). A philosophical essay on probabilities (F. W. Truscott, & F. L. Emory, Trans.). *New York: Dover. (Original work published 1814) Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Lyster, R., & Ranta, L. (1997). Corrective feedback and learner uptake: Negotiation of form in communicative classrooms. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 19(1), 37-66.
- Maddalena, T. (2008). *Summative and Formative Assessment Perceptions and Realities University of Sunderland, UK, Post print/Zeitschriftenartikel/journal article*. SAGE Publications.
- Rassaei, E., Moinzadeh, A., & Youhanaee, M. (2012). The effect of corrective feedback on the acquisition of implicit and explicit L2 knowledge. *The Journal of Language Teaching and Learning*, 2(1), 59-75.
- Rocklin, T. R. (1989). *Individual differences in item selection in computerized self-adapted testing*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Research Association, San Francisco, CA.
- Ryerson, J. F. (1983). *Effective management training: Two models* (Unpublished master's thesis). College of Technology, Potsdam, New York.
- Schwartz, J. (1993, September 30). Obesity affects economic, social status. In *The Washington Post* (pp. A1, A4).
- Sheen, Y. (2007). The effects of corrective feedback, language aptitude, and learner attitudes on the acquisition of English articles. In A. Mackey (Ed.), *Conversational interaction in second language acquisition: A collection of empirical studies* (pp. 301-322). Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Shintani, N., Ellis, R., & Suzuki, W. (2014). Effects of written feedback and revision on learners' accuracy in using two English grammatical structures. *Language Learning*, 64(1), 103-131. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12029>
- Stefanou, C., & Revesz, A. (2015). Direct written corrective feedback, learner differences, and the acquisition of second language article use for generic and specific plural reference. *The Modern Language Journal*, 99(2), 263-282. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12212>
- Taras, M. (2008). Summative and formative assessment: Perceptions and realities. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 9(2), 172-192.