# A Case Study on Students' Self Correction Ability in English Writing

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## Abstract

**This paper investigates the methods to improve senior high school students' English writing ability from two dimensions: English writing self correction ability and English writing self correction attitude. The results show that: 1) there are significant differences in error recognition rate and error correction rate among the three different level groups. 2) Low level students also have basic error correction ability. 3) When asked if students are required to make self correction, the middle and high-level groups think they can try, but the low-level group firmly opposes it. This paper briefly analyzes the reasons for the use of self correction, and the research conclusion has certain guiding significance for the teaching of second language pragmatic competence.**

## Keywords

**Self Correction; English Writing; Language Ability.**

## 1. Introduction

As a language output skill activity, the position of writing in senior high school English teaching is obvious. However, in the actual teaching, the English writing ability of senior high school students is far from the requirements of the English curriculum standard for senior high schools. According to the analysis of Wu Juan (2009:86), the main problems of senior high school students' English writing are difficulty in writing, unclear expression meaning, unclear sentences, idiomatic language, low level of language and vocabulary and poor readability. Some grammar mistakes have been pointed out by teachers many times when correcting their homework, but they still appear repeatedly in their compositions, such as tense, singular and plural, subject predicate inconsistency and so on. Although every time teachers correct seriously and correct every mistake, they have little effect. I happened to see an experiment of self correction in a literature, saying that the effect of students' self correction of common errors is much higher than that of teachers. Based on this background, this paper will deeply explore the better methods of students' English writing error correction.

## 2. Related Research

### 2.1. Types of Writing Errors

On the basis of summarizing the previous error classification principles, Mao Binbin (2009:15) summarized the errors in English writing into global errors, local errors and other errors. Global errors involve errors in the layout of the full text and the relationship between sentences, such as incoherent or illogical context; Local errors refer to errors in sentences, such as misuse or omission of vocabulary, tense and voice; Other errors mainly refer to spelling, case errors, punctuation and so on. Among them, overall errors are a headache for teachers in English writing. Some high school students get the writing topic and are not used to reviewing the topic or conceiving the framework structure of the whole composition. Instead, they start writing directly and write what they think. In this way, English compositions are easy to write, often have little connection with the context, and the logic of the full text is relatively poor. In order

to meet the requirements of writing words, some high school students will piece up some sentences unrelated to the theme, which will also affect the logic of the full text. In addition, the poor logic of English writing may also be caused by the influence of Chinese writing habits of senior high school students. English writing emphasizes contextual cohesion, while Chinese writing is more free. Local errors mainly involve grammatical errors, which is inseparable from the language knowledge base of senior high school students; Other mistakes may be caused by the carelessness of high school students themselves.

On the basis of James (2001) classification, Xu Youyan (2005) will write

Errors can be summarized as errors belonging to ontology level, text level and text level. Ontology level errors generally refer to spelling, punctuation, case and other errors. Stylistic errors can be analyzed from two aspects: grammar and vocabulary. Among them, the common mistakes in grammar include unclear pronoun reference, inconsistent tense, inconsistent subject predicate, inconsistent singular and plural, misuse of articles, ambiguous tense, improper choice of conjunctions, excessive generalization of verbs, etc; Common errors in vocabulary include modifier position, collocation and wording. Common errors at the discourse level include incoherence, loose cohesion between paragraphs, Chinglish, inappropriate sentence breaks, semantic and pragmatic errors, incomplete and cumbersome sentences and so on. No matter what kind of classification, teachers should understand them so that they can accurately grasp the common errors in senior high school students' English writing and choose the corresponding error correction strategies.

## 2.2. The Necessity of Self Correction in Students' English Writing

Some scholars (fathman & Whalley, 1990; Leki, 1991) agreed that teachers should correct the grammatical errors in students' compositions. The reasons they put forward are: 1) research shows that correcting mistakes can improve the grammar of composition; 2) Students think it is useful to correct mistakes and hope the teacher can correct them; 3) Due to the limitation of their level, students do not recognize their language mistakes and need someone with a higher level to point out; 4) If you don't change your mistakes, they will become rigid; 5) Correcting mistakes can make students pay attention to their language problems, so as to promote language learning, because noticing is a necessary condition for learning (Schmidt, 1990).

Other scholars (zamel, 1985) oppose teachers to correct grammatical errors in students' compositions. Their main reason is that language learning is a gradual development process, and learners' language is a self-contained interlanguage. Teachers do not understand students' current language acquisition stage, but uniformly correct students' compositions according to the standards of the target language. In this way, teachers do not know what to change and what not to change, and sometimes even misunderstand students' writing intention; Similarly, due to the limited level, students usually can not understand or even misunderstand the teacher's correction intention. Therefore, it is difficult to achieve the expected correction effect. Even for good students, it is common to make similar mistakes repeatedly.

In view of the above objections, zamel (1985) believes that the task of revising the composition should be left to the students themselves. She believes that students' writing errors reflect their deep language system, and teachers should adopt strategies to cultivate students to correct their compositions by themselves. Indeed, the best way to deal with mistakes is for students to correct themselves. As Prabhu (1987) said, attention in foreign language learning should be spontaneous, not planned or arranged by teachers. For example, raimes (1988) found in a study of second language learners' multi draft compositions that students' errors in their second draft compositions were 20% less than those in the first draft when the teacher did not correct them. James (1998) proposed that the most ideal way to deal with errors is students' self correction, which is the most harmless way to correct errors. Hu Zhuanglin, Liu Runqing and Li Yanfu (1987) also believe that the effective way of writing error correction is for teachers to let students

correct themselves rather than give answers directly. The research of Wang Xiufen (2006) shows that in College English writing teaching, teachers can completely adopt the way of students' self correction. But do junior middle school students have the ability of self correction? What is the effect of self correction of students with different English levels? The author did an experimental study in class to analyze students' self correction ability in writing, so as to improve the effect of writing teaching.

## 3. Research Object and Method

### 3.1. Research Questions

The main problems to be solved in this study are:

1. What is the situation of students' self correction in English writing（ For example, what is their error recognition rate? What is the correct rate of each error correction?)

2. What mistakes can be corrected after the teacher prompts?

3. What is the students' attitude towards self correction? Why?

### 3.2. Research Object

2020-2021Six students participated in this study. They come from three different level groups: high, medium and low, one male and one female. Their grades are in the middle of all levels.

**Table 1.** Grades of Different Level Groups

| Name | Gender | Age | Grade | Group |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Liu Jun | Male | 17 | 91 | High level |
| Wang Min | Female | 17 | 92 | High level |
| Li Qiang | Male | 17 | 80 | Intermediate level |
| Fang Mei | Female | 17 | 81 | Intermediate level |
| Yang Yan | Male | 17 | 69 | Low level |
| Zhang Hua | Female | 17 | 68 | Low level |

### 3.3. Data Collection

This case uses two tools: writing error correction task and interview to collect data. Students' self correction is in the front, and the interview is in the back. Six students were divided into three groups and came to a recorded classroom to correct their newly handed in English compositions for unlimited time. The actual completion time of each group of students is within half an hour.

The next day, the teacher interviewed the six students one by one. The interview was recorded. The interview has two parts: the first part focuses on the composition to correct mistakes. The teacher asked the students to read the corrected composition again, check whether there are omissions, and then give tips on the areas that have not been corrected or have not been corrected well. The second part focuses on students' attitude towards error correction.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The first stage of data analysis is to answer the first and second research questions. Firstly, it analyzes the statistical error recognition rate and error correction accuracy rate, the number of uncorrected errors and improper error correction, and the places where both error recognition and error correction are improper. Then, according to the interview data the next day, further analyze the reasons why some errors were not found the previous day. Combined with the video data, observe and analyze the process, attitude and speed of students' error correction. The second stage of data analysis is mainly to provide answers to the third question.

According to the interview data, analyze the students' attitude towards error correction and explore the reasons.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Students' Self Correction Ability

The overall situation of students' error correction in this case is ideal. For common grammatical errors, students in the high-level group can correct 90% at a time, with a correct rate of 85%, students in the middle level group can correct 75% at a time, with a correct rate of 68%, and students in the low-level group can correct 60% at a time, with a correct rate of 51%. When reading again the next day, the high-level group found another 1% error, and the accuracy rate increased by 3%; The students in the middle level group found 4% errors, and the correct rate increased by 6%; The students in the low-level group found another 10% errors, and the accuracy rate increased by 9%. The above results show that there are significant differences in error recognition rate and error correction accuracy among the three different level groups. Even so, the low-level group students also have basic error correction ability.

### 4.2. Students' Attitude Towards Self Correction

The six students have the same attitude towards error correction. They all hope that the teacher is responsible for correcting mistakes and think that the teacher is the most reliable. When asked if students are required to make self correction, the middle and high-level groups think they can try, but the low-level group firmly opposes it. They think they lack the ability to complete the task. There is no significant difference in error correction ability and attitude between male and female students at the same level.

According to the above research results, it can be seen that students' self correction is effective. However, before the trial, we must help students correct relevant wrong ideas, explain the necessity and importance of self error correction, and provide necessary training for error correction. Of course, students' self correction can not completely replace teachers' correction, and teachers should regularly check students' self correction.

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