



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



Autonomy in acquisition: Exploring the transformative effects of self-error correction on ESL learners' proficiency and motivation

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Abstract

This study explores the transformative effects of self-error correction on language proficiency and motivation among ESL college students. The research investigates how self-directed error handling influences ESL learners' linguistic development and engagement in learning activities through a mixed-methods approach involving surveys and interviews. Preliminary findings indicate significant enhancements in language skills and motivational levels, substantiating the role of self-correction in promoting educational outcomes and learner independence.

Keywords: Self-Error Correction; ESL Learners; Language Proficiency; Learner Autonomy; Motivation; Language Pedagogy.

1. Introduction

Self-error correction plays a pivotal role in fostering learner autonomy and linguistic development, aligning with the interlanguage theory proposed by Selinker (1972), which emphasizes learners' evolving linguistic systems influenced by their native languages. This strategy promotes deeper engagement with language structures and facilitates the internalization of grammatical rules, as discussed by Watanabe (2015).

Error correction is fundamental to language acquisition, impacting learners' ability to refine and utilize linguistic structures effectively. Traditionally, error correction has been the purview of language instructors, who provide feedback to help students recognize and correct their mistakes (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). However, recent pedagogical shifts emphasize the importance of learner autonomy in error correction (Little, 2007). Self-error correction, where learners independently identify and amend their mistakes, enhances cognitive engagement with linguistic rules and promotes deeper learning (Swain, 2005).

Research highlights that self-directed approaches, such as those outlined by Swain's (2005) output hypothesis, contribute to metacognitive skill development, which is crucial for autonomous learning (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Moreover, Corder (1981) identifies errors as learning opportunities, supported by findings that self-correction enhances accuracy and motivation (Dörnyei, 2001). These findings are further substantiated by Adam (2024), who emphasized the role of reflective practices in enhancing ESL learners' autonomy and confidence.

1.1. Self-Error Correction and Its Importance

Self-error correction allows learners to engage with their mistakes, fostering a deeper understanding of language structures and rules. According to Corder (1981), errors are not merely failures but opportunities for learning that provide valuable insights into a learner's progress. This perspective is supported by Selinker's (1972) interlanguage theory, which posits that language learners develop an interim linguistic system influenced by their native language. As

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students engage in self-correction, they refine their understanding of the target language, enhancing accuracy and fluency (Benson, 2011). Furthermore, research has shown that self-correction can increase metalinguistic awareness, enabling learners to internalize grammatical rules more effectively (Watanabe, 2015).

2. Methodology

Studies by Benson (2011) underline the importance of integrating self-correction into curricula, fostering reflective practices essential for ESL learners. Furthermore, applying thematic analysis, as per Braun and Clarke (2006), provides a robust framework for understanding learners' perceptions, revealing increased confidence and ownership in the learning process (Balderas & Cuamatzi, 2018).

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively assess the impacts of self-error correction among college-level ESL students. Participants were 26 ESL learners enrolled in advanced writing courses at a college. A stratified random sampling method was used to ensure a diverse representation of linguistic backgrounds and proficiency levels. Data collection consisted of quantitative surveys, which measured changes in error rates before and after implementing self-correction practices, and qualitative interviews designed to capture students' perceptions and experiences with self-correction. The surveys included Likert-scale questions assessing confidence, motivation, and proficiency, while semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of individual experiences. Data analysis involved statistical methods for the quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative responses, following the guidelines set forth by Braun and Clarke (2006).

These insights are crucial for educators aiming to implement strategies that align with sociocultural language acquisition theories (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), ultimately contributing to intrinsic motivation as conceptualized by Ryan and Deci (2000). This is consistent with the broader implications for language pedagogy highlighted by Adam (2024), who advocated for a structured yet flexible approach to learner-centered error correction.

3. Findings

The analysis revealed that students who regularly engaged in self-correction demonstrated a significant improvement in writing accuracy, with a reduced grammatical error by approximately 30% over the semester. Qualitative data from interviews highlighted increased motivation and engagement, with students reporting a greater sense of ownership over their learning process. Participants expressed that self-error correction helped them identify their mistakes and empowered them to take control of their language-learning journey (Dörnyei, 2001).

4. Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that self-error correction is an effective pedagogical strategy that enhances language proficiency and positively influences learners' motivation. The alignment of self-correction with constructivist principles provides a robust framework for understanding its effectiveness. As students engage more deeply with their learning processes, they develop essential metacognitive skills that contribute to their overall success in language acquisition (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). These skills are crucial for fostering independent learning and resilience in the face of challenges, which are vital traits for language learners in higher education.

4.1. Implications for TESOL

The implications of this research are significant for TESOL professionals. Integrating self-correction strategies into ESL curricula can improve linguistic outcomes and enhance learner motivation. Educators are encouraged to incorporate structured self-correction activities within their lesson plans, facilitating opportunities for students to reflect on their errors and take ownership of their learning processes (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Furthermore, training teachers to support students in developing self-correction techniques is essential to ensure effective implementation in the classroom.

5. Conclusion

This study underscores the importance of self-error correction in ESL education, demonstrating its effectiveness in enhancing language skills and learner motivation. As educators strive to create more engaging and effective learning environments, integrating self-directed learning strategies such as self-error correction can lead to more successful and

motivated learners. Future research should continue to explore the various dimensions of self-correction in language learning contexts, investigating its long-term effects on learner autonomy and success.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest related to this research.

Statement of Ethical Approval

This study did not require formal ethical approval as it did not involve interventions or sensitive data. The research adhered to ethical standards for conducting educational research with adult learners.

Statement of Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were assured that their participation was voluntary, their responses would remain confidential, and all data were anonymized for analysis and reporting.

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