

# **The Hong Kong Institute of Education**

## **ENG 4900**

### **HONOURS PROJECT**

**The Effects of Focused and Unfocused Written Corrective Feedback on  
the Accurate Use of Tenses in Hong Kong Primary ESL Context**

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**Abstract**

This paper reveals the findings from a study exploring (1) whether focused and unfocused corrective feedback (CF) can improve the accuracy in using the two functions of tenses (the use of “present tense” for describing things happen in the present and in dialogues and “past tense” for describing actions in the past) of average-proficient ESL learners, who have rooms for improvement on accuracy in English; and (2) whether the efficacy of the two different types of corrective feedback (focused and unfocused) can retain over time on the accurate use of tenses by these ESL learners. In this research, six average-proficient ESL learners formed two experimental groups and a control group and underwent a pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test. The two experimental groups received focused written CF and unfocused written CF respectively, while the control group did not receive any written corrective feedback. Findings of this study showed that both experimental groups outperformed the control group in both post-tests, and the focused group improved more than the unfocused one on the accuracy of using the two tenses. Since the effectiveness of focused written CF outperformed that of unfocused written CF, in improving accuracy of tense usage, teachers may ponder to adopt the former in writing tasks.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Rationale

It is believed that corrective feedback (CF) is one of the important elements in language learning, however second language (L2) teachers and researchers still could not make a conclusion about the effectiveness of different kinds of corrective feedback although there have been a good number of studies put forward for the past two decades. Generally in Hong Kong's English as a second language (ESL) classrooms, unfocused written corrective feedback are given to students in their writings, as many of them think that the more feedback they have given to students, the more students can improve in their next writing. Sadly, it is still not certain whether "the feedback given does have effect on learners' language development" (Kassim and Lee, 2013). As a result, I decided to study on the topic of focused and unfocused written corrective feedback in this research trying to find out the efficacy and retention of corrective feedback and also which type of corrective feedback will be better for improving the language learning of this sample group of ESL learners.

### 1.2 Literature review

This topic has been significant for L2 teachers and researchers to study due to the view put forward by Truscott (1996). He suggested to abandon the use of corrective feedback in language learning as the results of his research showed that "corrective feedback is ineffective in helping learners improve their language accuracy, and also pose harmful effects on the learning process". This statement has brought assaults for the scholars and educators as it gives an idea that the overwhelming feedback on grammatical errors given by teachers and corrected by students may only increase both sides of workload but make improvements on nothing. Debates about the effectiveness of corrective feedback between the two sides has then been carried out, a number of researchers stated that there is no positive effects on developing students' grammar accuracy when giving corrective feedback in writings (e.g., Kepner, 1991; Sheppard, 1992; Truscott, 2007). On the contrary, researchers such as Bitchener and Knoch (2008a), Chandler (2003), Ferris (2002) and Sheen (2007), they assured the positive effectiveness of corrective feedback on grammar accuracy. According to Farrokhi (2012), the debate has become more controversial as "It is not just a question of whether CF is effective but also which type is effective".

### 1.3 Direct and indirect corrective feedback

There have been more and more researchers making a comparison between the efficacies of certain types of corrective feedback, the most common types categorized in these studies are direct (explicit) and indirect (implicit) corrective feedback. Direct corrective feedback, the "provision of the correct linguistic form or structure by the teacher above or near the linguistic error" (Bitchner and Knoch, 2008), favored the research results in the earlier times (e.g. Schmidt, 1990). While the more recent ones (e.g. Ferris, 2002; Chandler, 2003) are more in favor with the indirect corrective feedback, indicating in some way an error has been made such as underlining or circling the errors and using

codes to show errors.

#### 1.4 Focused and unfocused corrective feedback

Focused and Unfocused written corrective feedback is another pair of feedback which is interesting for scholars and educators to study on and compare their efficacy and retention. Focused corrective feedback is to “indicate the location of errors by circling or underlining the errors of only one certain type of the targeted linguistic structures each time” (Xu, 2011). In contrast, unfocused corrective feedback is the type that teachers indicating (i.e. circling and underlining) all kinds of language errors committed by students ((Ellis et al., 2008; Ellis, 2009; Lee, 2009).

Comparatively, a smaller number of studies on the efficacy of the focused (targeted) and unfocused (untargeted) corrective feedback on grammar accuracy have been put forward and most of these studies had focused on a targeted grammar structure – definite and indefinite articles. The results of the research carried out by Ellis et al. (2008) indicate that there are no significant differences between the focused and unfocused corrective feedback in terms of improving students’ accuracy in using articles although there are signs that the focused group performed better than the unfocused group and control group in their post-tests. On the other hand, Sheen et al. (2009) and Farrokhi (2011) claimed that focused corrective feedback has a longer retention as the group had a higher accuracy than the unfocused group in the delayed post-test, also it is more effective than the unfocused one as the focused group outperformed the unfocused group and control group in both immediate and delayed post-tests in terms of accurate use of articles. However, Sheen (2009) pointed out that her findings cannot totally support the effectiveness of the focused written corrective feedback as her research only focused on one linguistic form (i.e. definite and indefinite articles).

#### 1.5 Research gap

Looking into the research over years studying on the efficacy of different types of written corrective feedback, there are some gaps which lead to the research results not comprehensive enough to represent the whole corrective feedback system, for instance the participants, the types of corrective feedback chosen and the linguistic structure focused. This present study is trying to begin addressing some of these gaps among the previous studies.

In a large number of the studies, researchers tended to choose university students and adult learners to participate in the tests (e.g. Ellis et al., 2008 & 2009, Bitchener, 2008; Storch, 2009), and only a few worked with college ESL learners (e.g. Van Beuningen et al., 2008; Sheen et al., 2009), even none of them have chosen primary ESL learners to participate in these research. Besides, the ratio between studies of direct and indirect corrective feedback to focused and unfocused corrective feedback is too distinct that the research on the later type of CF is much less than the former. Furthermore, in many

of the studies, researchers only focused on ESL learners with rather high or low English proficiency (e.g. Farrokhi & Sattarpour, 2011 & 2012, Kassim & Lee, 2013) instead of focusing on average-proficient ESL learners. As a result, the participants in this present study will be 6 senior primary ESL students with average English proficiency to help looking into the efficacy and retention of focused and unfocused corrective feedback. Nevertheless, most studies focusing on focused and unfocused written CF tested on the same kind of linguistic elements – definite and indefinite articles (e.g. Ellis et al., 2008; Ellis, 2009; Lee, 2009) and only a few worked on other linguistic structures such as preposition (e.g. Kassim and Lee, 2014). As researchers have made suggestions for further studies to focus on other linguistic forms when determining CF effectiveness (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; 2009; Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen et al., 2009), therefore, tenses (i.e. present tense and past tense) was selected as the targeted grammar structure of this present study.

## **2. Method**

This section shows the methodology of the present study including the research questions, context and participants, target linguistic structure, instruments, procedures and scoring and analysis.

### **2.1 Research questions and Hypothesis**

The aim of the project is to study the effectiveness of direct focused and unfocused written corrective feedback in improving the accurate use of tenses in writing in Hong Kong Primary ESL Context. The study is guided by the following two research foci:

1. Does the accuracy in the use of targeted language form vary according to types of written corrective feedback provided?
2. Does the accuracy in the use of targeted language form vary over time as a result of written corrective feedback?

Many of the researches by other professionals such as Kassim & Lee (2014); Chandler (2003); Ellis et al. (2008); Ferris (2002) revealed that the effectiveness of corrective feedback aid the uptake and retention of the accurate use of different grammatical structures. However, some of these researches suggested there is a small or even no significant difference between the use of focused written corrective feedback and unfocused written corrective feedback. With reference to the mentioned results of the researches, the present study hypothesizes that (1) the accuracy in the use of tenses does not vary much between focused written corrective feedback and unfocused written corrective feedback, and (2) the effectiveness of written corrective feedback can maintain over time.

### **2.2 Context and Participant**

The study was conducted at a primary school in Hong Kong with 6 average-proficient senior primary ESL learners with age range of 9 – 11 including 3 males and 3 females. On average, the

selected participants had the experience of learning English for 7 years in their kindergarten and junior primary phases. In order to ensure the participants' English proficiency levels are similar, their performance on the English tests, examinations and writing tasks in the previous semester were checked and confirmed with their English teachers. After that, the 6 learners were divided randomly into three groups, two experimental groups and one control group, each group contained 2 learners. The two experimental groups were categorized as (1) a focused written corrective feedback group (n=2), and (2) an unfocused written corrective feedback group (n=2). The first experimental group was provided with focused written corrective feedback in their writing task and the second group was provided with unfocused written corrective feedback, while the control group (n=2) received no written corrective feedback

In the briefing session before undergoing the research, the six participants were briefed about the procedures and requirements of data collection. Also, the participants were given the opportunity to ask questions before they agreed to take part in the research.

### 2.3 Target linguistic structure

The present study focused on tenses (the use of "present tense" for describing things happen in the present and in dialogues and "past tense" for describing actions in the past) as the target linguistic form used in the writings of the three experimental groups to measure the effectiveness of the two types of written corrective feedback (focused and unfocused). It was chosen to be the target linguistic structure of this present study for some reasons. First, tenses is one of the frequently observed grammatical errors in ESL learners' writings. Also, tenses is one of the main components being taught in the semester so that it is already acquired by the participants (i.e. used but not always correctly). Moreover, in some types of text types such as narratives, there are obligatory occasions for the use of tensed verbs, therefore a basis for reliable analysis of the accurate usage of tenses is provided. With reference to Shima's (2014) research, tenses was one of the ten kinds of structure target in the study and it was the grammatical structure that received the highest degree of positive influence among all target structures and thus was selected in the present study as the target linguistic structure.

### 2.4 Writing task instruments

The participants were asked to complete three writing tasks in the whole research (pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test), they were required to write at least 100 words for each of the narrative writing. The writing task in pre-test provided a brief situation of the topic about making wishes, while pictures were provided for the participants in the immediate post-test task to create their own narrative stories. In the delayed post-test writing task, participants were asked to create their own fable with the same moral based on the one they read together in class. In these three writing instruments, students were required to include dialogues among the characters in their stories. The participants could ask questions to clarify the situations or the content of the pictures if

necessary during the 60-minute writing time in each test. As the participants were also given 60 minutes to complete writing tasks in their usual writing lessons, it was proven that 60-minute allocation was sufficient for the participants to complete the task.

One of the reasons for selecting narrative writing as the text type of all the tests in the present research was that it was the text type that the participants were learning in the semester which the present research underwent. Moreover, the writing instruments were created by the English Department of the participants' school which were related to the topics they were learning. Therefore, the participants would have sufficient knowledge on the choice of words and structure of the text type. Another rationale of adopting narrative writing as the writing task instruments was that the narrative part and the dialogues in this kind of writing provided rooms for the participants of the usage of present tense and past tense to a similar extent.

## 2.5 Procedures

After selecting 6 participants in the class with similar English language proficiency (average proficiency) by reviewing their exam and test results, they were divided into three groups, two experimental groups and one control group. The case-study research of the present study were consisted of three stages: pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test over a period of 16-week in a primary school hoping to measure the accurate use of tenses.

In the beginning of the whole experiment, the participants will be given a narrative writing test (pre-test) to ensure the homogeneity of the six participants in terms of their proficiency level in use of tenses and examine their proficiency levels on using the targeted linguistic structure, present tense and past tense. In the experiment session, the participants were asked to write a 100-word narrative writing on an assigned topic (making wishes). Three weeks later, one of the experimental group received focused written corrective feedback, another condition group received unfocused written corrective feedback including linguistic features such as prepositions, English articles and spelling mistakes, etc., while the control group received no feedback. An immediate post-test was carried out after the focused CF group and the unfocused CF group have received the written feedback. The participants were then required to write another piece of writing (picture composition) as the immediate post-test after reviewing the feedback given in the first writing. Five weeks after the feedback of the second writing was given to the focused and unfocused CF group, a delayed post-test (writing fable) was carried out to test the effectiveness of the two kinds of corrective feedback over time, students will be asked to write the last piece of writing in this session.

## 2.6 Scoring and analysis

Accuracy in the present study was defined as using tenses (present and past tense) correctly (present tense and past tense) in the appropriate language contexts. Adopting the calculation method

of the participants' written work used in the study of Sheen et al. (2009), each occurrence of tensed verb was counted and each correct use of tensed verb was marked at "1", while the incorrect ones were marked as "0". Then, the marks were converted to percentage showing the accuracy of the use of tenses in the work, using the number of correct uses divided by the number of total uses. The mean of the pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test of the two experimental group and the control group were calculated for further analysis of the efficacy and retention of focused and unfocused written corrective feedback.

### 3. Results

The first and the second research questions of the present research were addressed by the following statistical results.

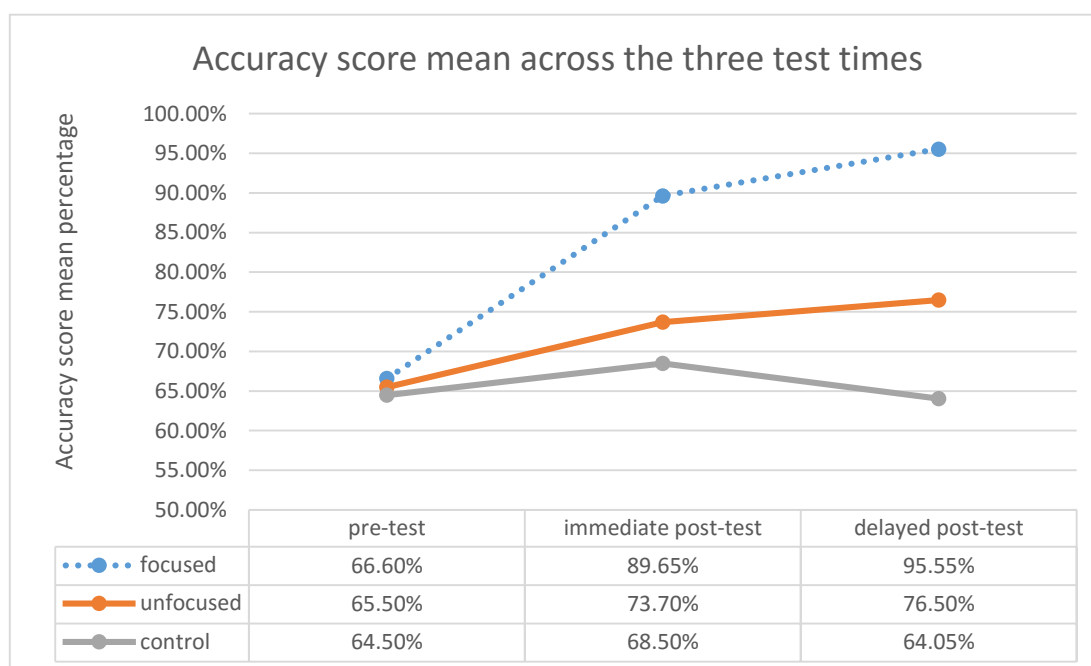
#### 3.1 Efficacy of Focused and Unfocused CF in Increasing the Accurate use of Tenses

Table 1 presented the percentages of accurate use of tenses for the pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test of the three groups of participants, average-proficient ESL learners, while Figure 1 showed the mean of the percentage of accuracy in the use of tenses of the two conditional groups and the control group. Also the line chart in Figure 1 showed the changes of the accuracy score mean across the three tests.

Types of Corrective Feedback	Student	Pre-test	Immediate post-test	Delayed post-test
Focused	1	68%	92.3%	96.1%
	2	65.2%	87%	95%
Unfocused	3	67%	78.4%	80%
	4	64%	69%	73%
Control	5	65%	70%	63.1%
	6	64%	67%	65%

**Table 1.** Accuracy scores of the three condition groups across the three test times





**Figure 1.** Accuracy score mean of the three condition groups across the three test times

Addressing the first research question, the results of Table 1 and Figure 1 illustrated that both groups of average-proficient ESL learners who received corrective feedback (focused group and unfocused group) outperformed the group who received no feedback (control group). However, the group receiving focused written corrective feedback (mean = 89.65%) showed a greater improvement on the uptake of the accuracy in tense usage comparing to the unfocused written CF group (mean = 73.7%), with reference to the higher accuracy score mean of the focused group in the immediate post-test. The results in the present study contended the hypothesis made before based on the findings suggested by the research done by Kassim & Lee (2014), which claimed that both focused and unfocused written corrective feedback have similar effectiveness on the uptake of the accurate use of grammatical features of ESL learners in writing.

Addressing the second research question of the present study, when comparing the data of the delayed post-test of the three condition groups in Table 1 and Figure 1, both groups receiving written corrective feedback endured the accurate use of targeted grammatical feature, tenses, that the participants gained after the pre-test and immediate post-test. Both the focused and unfocused groups increased their accuracy of tense usage in the delayed post-test by 3 to 6 percentage points (mean = 95.55% and mean = 76.5% respectively). Similar to the hypothesis made earlier in the present study, the statistical results revealed the efficacy of the retention of the accurate use of tenses when ESL learners received either focused or unfocused written corrective feedback, which contended the claim made by Truscott (1996) suggesting the ineffectiveness of corrective feedback.

#### 4. Discussion

The first research question of the present study looked into the differential effects of the adoption of focused written corrective feedback and unfocused written corrective feedback towards the accurate use of targeted functional use of tenses (present tense and past tense) by average-proficient ESL learners. The results illustrated that both condition groups receiving focused or unfocused written CF outperformed the control group receiving no feedback which corroborated with the findings suggesting the effectiveness of written corrective feedback (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008a, 2008b, 2010a; Sheen et al., 2009). However, when comparing the difference in efficacy of the two types of written corrective feedback, the findings from the present study contended with those of Ellis et al. (2008) and Kassim & Lee (2014). In line with the research results of Farrokhi and Sattarpour (2011), the present study's results indicated that the effectiveness of focused written corrective feedback displayed a clear distinction between that of unfocused written corrective feedback in the uptake of accurate use of tenses in writing practice.

The second research question of the research concerned whether the efficacy of both types of written corrective feedback (focused and unfocused) can enable average-proficient ESL learners, who had few problems in grammar accuracy, to improve and maintain the accurate usage of tenses by in their writing five weeks after the immediate post-test session. The findings of the present study indicated that both groups receiving focused and unfocused written CF outperformed the control group in the delayed post-test. The current results corroborated with that of Bitchener and Knoch (2008) suggesting that the adoption of written corrective feedback in writing enables ESL learners in improving the grammatical accuracy in their writing, also "the benefits accrued from this input are not only retained over time but also evident in new pieces of writing". Furthermore, the results of the current study even showed that the power of the focused written corrective feedback in retaining the accurate use of tenses by average-proficient ESL learners is higher than that of the unfocused written corrective feedback, as the improvement made by the group receiving focused written corrective feedback was greater than the group who received unfocused written corrective feedback. In short, according to the findings on the two research questions in the present study, it is an effective way to provide written corrective feedback to average-proficient ESL learners in order to improve and retain the written performance, at least in terms of the accuracy in the usage of present tense and past tense. Moreover, focused written corrective feedback shows a higher effectiveness in doing so, comparing to unfocused written corrective feedback.

##### 4.1 Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of Focused and Unfocused Written CF

In line with several earlier studies (Ashwell, 2000; Bitchener, 2008; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Sheen, 2007; Farrokhi & Sattarpour, 2011), the results of the present study indicated that intermediate proficient ESL learners who received written corrective feedback significantly improved their accuracy in using past tense and present tense, also the level of accuracy even retained five weeks after the

immediate post-test. However, the effectiveness of them differs. Therefore, the following part would state some possible factors attributing to the research results that focused written corrective feedback outperformed unfocused written corrective feedback in helping ESL learners improve the accuracy in tense usage in writing.

The difference in the characteristics of focused written corrective feedback and unfocused written corrective feedback is thought to be one of the reasons that pull apart the effectiveness of the two types of written corrective feedback. Corrective feedback is “an indication to the learners that his or her use of the target language is incorrect” (Lightbown and Spada, 1999 p. 172) and they may get indication in various ways such as focused and unfocused written CF. When adopting unfocused written corrective feedback in writing, all kinds of errors learners made, such as grammatical errors, spelling mistakes and wrong word choice, etc., will be marked. With reference to Sheen et al. (2009), this kind of written corrective feedback is not effective as learners “are unable to process the feedback effectively, and even if they attend to the corrections, they are unable to work out why they have been corrected” when addressing a wide range of errors. In addition, unfocused written corrective feedback has risk in giving corrective feedback in a “confusing, inconsistent and unsystematic way” which may overburden learners, and thus becomes a less effective approach of written corrective feedback (p. 567). Contrary to unfocused written corrective feedback, focused written corrective feedback only focuses on certain type of errors learners made which allows learners to focus on one type of error they made. Han (2002) and Bitchener and Knoch (2010b) suggested that “a consistent focus on one aspect of L2 use” is one of the important approach for recasts to allow learners to acquire the correct form of certain types of errors made effectively. According to Sheen et al. (2009), focused written corrective feedback has higher effectiveness of language acquisition than unfocused written corrective feedback as it helps learners “notice their errors in their written work”, “engage in hypothesis testing in a systematic way” and “monitor the accuracy of their writing by tapping into their existing explicit grammatical knowledge”.

The results of the present study does not only indicate the differential effectiveness of focused and unfocused written corrective feedback to uptake accurate use of tenses but also the retention of both written corrective feedback. Both types of written corrective feedback showed their efficacy in retaining the accuracy in the use of tenses in the present research. One of the possible reasons attributing to this result may due to the attention of ESL learners to the mistakes and feedback provided. Noticing is believed to be one of the factors “that may have influenced the uptake and retention of the CF by the learners in written work over a period of time” (Kassim and Lee, 2014). When focused or unfocused written corrective feedback is provided to learners in their writing, they can notice the errors they made easily and thus become more aware of the same types of error which lower the chance of making mistake again. As focused written corrective feedback provides more centralized feedback on certain type of error, the opportunity of ESL learners to notice on the specific

type of grammatical feature will be higher. Therefore, in the present study, the effectiveness of retaining the accuracy in the use of tenses by the ESL learners who received focused written corrective feedback in the delayed post-test was higher than that who received unfocused written corrective feedback.

In most research done previously, such as Farrokhi & Sattarpour (2011) and Kassim and Lee (2014), researchers investigated the differential efficacy of different types of written corrective feedback targeting on ESL learners with high English proficiency and some with low English proficiency. For instance, the data of the study by Farrokhi & Sattarpour (2011), which targeted on the differential effects of different written corrective feedback on English learners with high proficiency and low proficiency respectively, suggested that both focused and unfocused corrective feedback were effective to learners with both English proficiency levels. In addition, the low-proficient participants who received focused written corrective feedback showed higher accuracy level than those with high proficiency. Instead of targeting on learners with high or low proficiency, the present study would like to find out whether, to what extent, different types of written corrective feedback, especially focused and unfocused ones, would affect the uptake and retention of accurate use of tenses by intermediate proficient ESL learners. Similar to the study done by Sheen, Wright and Moldawa's (2009), which was targeting on intermediate proficiency learners, the present study revealed that focused written corrective feedback has higher effectiveness in aiding average ESL learners in their accuracy in using tenses than unfocused written corrective feedback. The possible reason for intermediate proficient ESL learners to show improvement in accuracy of tense usage after receiving focused written corrective feedback is that learners are exposed to specific type of error in the feedback, therefore they can notice the errors they made more easily. After noticing a specific type of error in their writing, learners are able to correct the same type of mistakes in their next writing.

#### 4.2 Suggestions to Teachers on the Use of Written Corrective Feedback

As the results of the present study suggested that the effectiveness of focused written corrective feedback on improving the accurate use of tenses in writing outperformed that of unfocused written corrective feedback, there are some suggestions for ESL teachers to ponder in order to assist ESL learners to improve their accuracy in using different grammar items in writing.

Based on the recent researches, there is no doubt that it is necessary for teachers to provide written corrective feedback allowing ESL learners to notice on the mistakes they made in their writings, so that the learners will be mindful of what mistakes they have made and thus remind themselves to correct the mistakes on their future writings. With reference to the research results of Han (2002), Bitchener and Knoch (2010b) and the present study, teachers recommended to adopt the approach of focused written corrective feedback when commenting on ESL learners' writings, comparing to unfocused written corrective feedback. As this kind of written corrective feedback

allows learners to focus on specific types of mistakes they have made, it would be manageable for them to notice the pattern of their mistakes made. When reviewing their own mistakes, learners will be able to process, learn from and accurately apply the relevant concepts in subsequent writing. In addition, it helps learners communicate confidently through tolerating some errors they made.

Another suggestion for ESL teachers is that corrections of the piece of writing should be done after ESL learners have received the written feedback from teachers. As mentioned above, it is important for ESL learners to notice their mistakes which can enhance the effectiveness of focused written corrective feedback, doing corrections can increase learners' notification of written corrective feedback given by teachers. Chandler (2003) proposed that "learners must make corrections for the errors committed to ensure uptake of the CF in subsequent written tasks". Teachers can focus on one type of grammatical structure such as tenses, prepositions or English articles when marking students' writing and ask students to correct that specific type of mistakes only. After seeing the improvement on the accuracy in using that grammatical structure, teachers can then switch the focus to another type of mistakes students made. This consistent and systematic way does not only help ESL learners notice their mistakes easily, but also will not overburden them.

#### 4.3 Limitations of the present study

Even though the results of the present study corroborated with other researches done by professionals, such as Sheen et al. (2009), Ellis et al. (2008) and Farrokhi and Sattarpour (2011), etc., that focused written corrective feedback is more effective in improving and retaining the accurate use in grammatical features by ESL learners comparing to unfocused written corrective feedback, there were some limitations on the design of the study which the future studies on the relevant topic can take note of.

##### 4.3.1 Participants

Small sample size is one of the limitations of the current study. The participants of the present study was six ESL learners with average English proficiency that the sample size of each condition group was too small. Low statistical power of this study "reduced chance of detecting a true effect" and the likelihood of getting statistically significant results (Button et al., 2013).

Moreover, as the present study would like to investigate the differential effect of focused and unfocused written corrective feedback on intermediate-proficient ESL learners, a group with low English proficiency and one with high English proficiency should be included in order to compare whether the results of the intermediate-proficient learners are more significant.

#### 4.3.2 Range of targeted grammar structures

Another limitation of the present study is the narrow range of targeted grammar structures. The targeted linguistic structure of this research was the use of present tense and past tense, which was not done by other researchers investigating the effectiveness of focused and unfocused written CF. The research would be more comprehensible if a wider range of linguistic structures were covered, such as article system, preposition or even subject-verb agreement, a structure that fewer researches have covered.

#### 4.3.3 Length of the feedback treatment

The retention of both written corrective feedback may not be able to see clearly with only one delayed post-test. In order to find out the power of focused and unfocused written corrective feedback in retaining the accuracy of tense usage, a delayed post-test was designed. Nevertheless, suggested by Bitchener and Knoch (2008), one delayed post-test is not enough to determine whether learners can maintain the same level of accuracy over a more extensive period. The results would be more accurate if one more delayed post-test is added after the first delayed post-test to ensure the retention power of written corrective feedback.

#### 4.3.4 Method of analysis

The method of analyzing data in the present study was to calculate the accuracy score mean of each condition group, the method adopted may not be significant enough. Due to the small sample size of the current research, statistical software like SPSS or ANOVA, which were adopted in most relevant researches for data analysis, was not used. Therefore, statistically significant differences among the three condition groups were not shown in the present study.

### **Conclusion and implications of the study**

Considering the most effective type of written corrective feedback to students in writing has always been a confusing task for many language teachers. The findings of the present study aims to expand on the relevant studies done previously in order to investigate whether the differential effects of focused and unfocused written corrective feedback can apply on intermediate-proficient ESL learners in Hong Kong. The results of this study revealed that providing focused written corrective feedback to intermediate-proficient ESL learners can improve the accurate use of linguistic structures (i.e. present and past tenses) in their written texts, in both short term and long term. As a result, language teachers are recommended to provide focused written CF to let students notice on specific type of grammatical error they have made in each piece of writing. However, further studies with a larger sample size done in the same way would be needed as confirmation to ensure the efficacy of focused written corrective feedback.

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Appendix 1\_Marked pre-test (Focused group Student 1)

# Focused 1 (Pre-test)

## Two wishes

One day, my master, Ben, went into bankruptcy. I am a dog. I need a job to help support the family. Then, I could see a smart fairy had come to the rescue. The fairy said "I will give you two wishes. However, you couldn't wish for wealth or treasure. You have to work hard."

I want to be a brave fire fighter to help support the family. Then, I made the second wish. I wish to be a smart bus driver. I talked to the fairy what were the two wishes. Then, I finded a job already. I tried to put out the fire with water. I could use my nose to help people because I could smell if someone was trapped. My boss gave me some money and said good job.

Then, I will be a bus driver. First, I needed to learn how to drive because I wanted to be a bus driver. I had my bus. Then I will clean my bus. I will helped some people to go to some far places. Everyone was happy. My boss said he will gave me one millions everyday.

I help the family. The family is rich now. Ben say thankyou to me. I am happy.

Total: 34

1 mark: 23

0 mark: 11

$$\text{Accuracy \%} = \frac{23}{34} \times 100\% = 68\%$$

## Appendix 2\_Marked immediate post-test (Focused group Student 1)

**Focused 1**  
**(Immediate post-test)**

**Title:** Sam's Birthday Party

On 10<sup>th</sup> June, Sam's birthday was coming! He wanted to invite his family, his classmates and his friends. So, he wrote some invitation cards and gave one to them. He wanted to have an Angry Bird themed party. He prepared some Angry Bird shaped balloons, some Angry Bird shaped hats, some food and drinks.

On 18<sup>th</sup> June, it was Sam's birthday. Sam said, "Welcome to my party. Everyone was delighted. Then someone said, 'I have a present for you.' Sam was happy and said, 'Thank you, let's play Musical Chairs.' They all sang and Sam won the game. Sam's classmate said, 'congratulations!' Sam was glad and he said, 'It's time to eat birthday cake!'

Then, Sam got the birthday cake. He opened the box and said, "Where is the birthday cake?" Everyone was very sad because they could not eat birthday cake. Sam asked his parents, "Where is the cake? Why it is disappear?" Sam's parents didn't know. Sam knew who ate the cake, it was Sam's cat. His cat liked to eat cakes. Sam asked his parents to buy a new cake. He went to a cake shop and bought an angry bird cake. Everyone was happy now. Sam blowed the candles and make a wish. He cutted the cake into ten pieces. It was tasty. Sam took some cake and said "Goodbye Sam's friend, said, 'Thank you for inviting us.' Everyone said goodbye to Sam and go home.

**Total: 52**  
**0 mark: 4**  
**1 mark: 48**  
**237 words**  
**Accuracy: 48/52 = 92.31%**

Appendix 3\_Marked delayed post-test (Focused group Student 1)



Focused 1 (Delayed post-test)

### Candylocks and the Three Dogs

Once upon a time, there was a pretty girl named Candylocks. She lived in the city. One day, she was lost in the city. She found a big house and went inside.

First, Candylocks was thirsty, so she tried to drink the soup. Candylocks shouted, "this soup is too hot and that soup is too cold!" then, she drank the baby dog's soup and said, "this soup is just right. I like it very much." She drank all the soup of the baby.

Next, Candylocks was tired. She sat on the mat. "that mat is too thick," she said. So, she can't sit on that mat. She tried to sit on another mat and said, "this mat is too thin." She tried another mat, "this mat is just right." She sat on it and said. But the mat was broken because the mat is only for the baby dog.

Candylocks was still very tired. She wanted to sleep. So, she slept on the sofa. "this sofa is too big. I can't sleep on it and that sofa is too soft!" she yelled. She tried the baby dog's sofa. "this sofa is just right," she said.

The three dogs came home. They were sad because Candylocks drank their soup, sat their mat and slept on their sofa. The baby dog cried. They barked to Candylocks. She was scared and ran away.

The story teaches us that we should think before we act. Otherwise, we may hurt others' feelings.

Total: 51

0 mark: 2

1 mark: 49

Accuracy % =  $\frac{49}{51} \times 100\%$   
= 96.1%