

# MASSED TASK REPETITION, WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK AND INTERMEDIATE EFL LEARNERS' WRITING DEVELOPMENT

REPETICIÓN MASIVA DE TAREAS, RETROALIMENTACIÓN CORRECTIVA ESCRITA Y DESARROLLO ESCRITURAL EN APRENDICES DE INGLÉS LENGUA EXTRANJERA

RÉPÉTITION MASSIVE DE TÂCHES, FEEDBACK CORRECTIF ÉCRIT, ET DÉVELOPPEMENT DE COMPÉTENCES RÉDACTIONNELLES DANS DES APPRENANTS D'ANGLAIS LANGUE ÉTRANGÈRE

REPETIÇÃO MASSIVA DE TAREFAS, FEEDBACK CORRETIVO ESCRITO, E DESENVOLVIMENTO DA ESCRITA ENTRE ESTUDANTES DE INGLÊS COMO LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA

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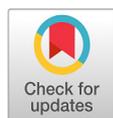
## ABSTRACT

Despite extensive research on task-based learning and corrective feedback in second language acquisition, little is known about how massed task repetition (MTR), both with and without written corrective feedback (WCF), affects the development of grammatical forms among Iranian EFL learners. This study aimed to investigate the effects of MTR, both independently and when mediated by written corrective feedback, on the writing development of EFL Iranian learners at a language school. In this quantitative study, 40 male intermediate learners, aged 15 to 17, in three intact classes, classified as B1 level, were randomly assigned to three groups: one experimental group that engaged in MTR, a second experimental group that received unfocused WCF on their MTR tasks, and a control group that neither performed MTR nor received WCF. Results from the pre- and post-tests revealed that only the group receiving WCF showed significant short-term improvement across the language components of content, organization, grammar, and mechanics. Vocabulary gains, however, were not significant in any of the groups. More importantly, content and organization exhibited a strong transfer-of-practice effect in the delayed post-test, indicating long-term learning resulting from engagement with indirect WCF. Mechanics, for which direct WCF had been provided, also showed evidence of transfer, though with a smaller effect size. Findings suggest that multiple task repetition can benefit EFL learners when accompanied by WCF, particularly indirect feedback, to promote their writing skills.

**Keywords:** massed task repetition, written corrective feedback, short-term learning, long-term learning, writing development, EFL learning

## RESUMEN

A pesar del amplio corpus de investigaciones sobre el aprendizaje basado en tareas y la retroalimentación correctiva en la adquisición de una segunda lengua, poco se



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sabe sobre cómo la repetición masiva de tareas (RMT), con o sin retroalimentación correctiva escrita (FCE), afecta al desarrollo de las formas gramaticales entre los estudiantes iraníes de inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE). El presente estudio buscó investigar los efectos de la RMT, tanto de forma independiente como mediada con FCE, en el desarrollo de formas gramaticales en estudiantes iraníes de ILE de un instituto de idiomas. En este estudio cuantitativo, 40 estudiantes varones de entre 15 y 17 años, en tres clases intactas identificadas como nivel B1, fueron repartidos aleatoriamente a tres grupos: un grupo experimental que participó en la RMT, un segundo grupo experimental que recibió FCE no específico en sus tareas de RMT y un grupo de control que no realizó RMT ni recibió FCE. Los resultados de las pruebas previas y posteriores revelaron que solo el grupo que recibió FCE mostró una mejora significativa a corto plazo en los componentes lingüísticos de contenido, organización, gramática y mecánica. Sin embargo, el vocabulario no mostró mejoras significativas en ninguno de los grupos. Más importante aún, el contenido y la organización mostraron un fuerte efecto de transferencia de la práctica en la prueba posterior diferida, lo que indica un aprendizaje a largo plazo como resultado de la participación en FCE indirecta. La mecánica, para la que se había proporcionado FCE directa, también mostró evidencia de transferencia, aunque con un efecto menor. Lo más destacado es que la repetición múltiple de tareas puede beneficiar a los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera cuando se acompaña de FCE, en particular de retroalimentación indirecta, para promover sus habilidades de escritura.

**Palabras clave:** repetición masiva de tareas, retroalimentación correctiva escrita, aprendizaje a corto plazo, aprendizaje a largo plazo, desarrollo de la escritura, aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera

## RÉSUMÉ

Malgré les nombreuses recherches menées sur l'apprentissage par tâches et le retour correctif dans l'acquisition d'une langue seconde, on sait peu sur la manière dont la répétition massive de tâches (RMT), avec ou sans *feedback* correctif écrit (FCE), affecte le développement des formes grammaticales chez des apprenants iraniens de l'anglais langue étrangère (ALE). Cette étude visait à examiner les effets de la RMT, tant de manière indépendante qu'accompagnée d'un retour correctif écrit, sur le développement des formes grammaticales chez des apprenants iraniens de l'ALE dans une école de langues. Dans cette étude quantitative, 40 apprenants masculins de niveau intermédiaire, âgés de 15 à 17 ans, identifiés comme étant de niveau B1, ont été répartis au hasard en trois groupes : un groupe expérimental qui a participé à la RMT, un deuxième groupe expérimental qui a reçu des FCE non ciblés sur leurs tâches de RMT, et un groupe témoin qui n'a ni participé à la RMT ni reçu de FCE. Les résultats des tests pré- et post-intervention ont révélé que seul le groupe ayant reçu un FCE a démontré un progrès significatif à court terme dans les composantes linguistiques du contenu, de l'organisation, de la grammaire et de la mécanique. Le vocabulaire, cependant, n'a montré aucune amélioration significative dans aucun des groupes. Plus important encore, le contenu et l'organisation ont montré un fort effet de transfert de pratique lors du post-test différé, indiquant un apprentissage à long terme résultant de l'engagement dans un FCE indirect. La mécanique, pour laquelle un FCE direct avait été fourni, a également montré des signes de transfert, mais avec un effet plus faible. Les résultats suggèrent que la répétition multiple des tâches peut être bénéfique pour les apprenants d'anglais langue étrangère si elle s'accompagne d'un *feedback* continu, en particulier un *feedback* indirect, afin de favoriser le développement de leurs compétences en écriture.

**Mots-clés :** répétition massive de tâches, commentaires correctifs écrits, apprentissage à court terme, apprentissage à long terme, développement de l'écriture, apprentissage de l'anglais langue étrangère

## RESUMO

Apesar da grande quantidade de pesquisas sobre aprendizagem baseada em tarefas e *feedback* corretivo na aquisição de uma segunda língua, pouco se sabe sobre como a repetição massiva de tarefas (RMT) com e sem *feedback* corretivo escrito (FCE) afeta o desenvolvimento de formas gramaticais entre alunos iranianos de inglês como língua estrangeira (ILE). Este estudo visou investigar os efeitos da RMT, tanto de forma independente quanto de forma mediada por *feedback* corretivo escrito, no desenvolvimento da escrita de alunos iranianos de ILE em uma escola de idiomas. Neste estudo quantitativo, 40 alunos do sexo masculino, com idades entre 15 e 17 anos, identificados como nível B1, foram aleatoriamente designados a três grupos: um grupo experimental que se envolveu na RMT, um segundo grupo experimental que recebeu FCE não focado em suas tarefas de RMT e um grupo de controle que não realizou RMT nem recebeu FCE. Os resultados dos pré e pós-testes revelaram que apenas o grupo que recebeu FCE demonstrou uma melhoria significativa a curto prazo em todos os componentes linguísticos de conteúdo, organização, gramática e mecânica. O vocabulário, no entanto, não apresentou ganhos significativos em nenhum dos grupos. Mais importante ainda, o conteúdo e a organização exibiram um forte efeito de transferência de prática no pós-teste retardado, indicando uma aprendizagem a longo prazo resultante do envolvimento com FCE indireto. A mecânica, para a qual foi fornecido FCE direto, também mostrou evidências de transferência, embora com um efeito menor. O estudo destaca que a repetição múltipla de tarefas pode beneficiar os alunos de ILE quando acompanhada por FCE, particularmente *feedback* indireto, para promover suas habilidades de escrita.

**Palavras-chave:** repetição massiva de tarefas, *feedback* corretivo escrito, aprendizagem de curto prazo, aprendizagem de longo prazo, desenvolvimento da escrita, aprendizagem de ILE

## Introduction

Since its inception, task-based language teaching has grabbed increasing attention amongst researchers and instructors. Following the reports of its success in the field of language pedagogy (Lyster, 2017), and considering that tracking writing development through one task is unreliable and needs multiple tasks (Graham et al., 2016; Schoonen, 2005; Wu et al., 2023), researchers and instructors have attempted to maximize task benefits accruing to learners through implementing task repetition (TR) in their course curricula (Bygate, 2018; Khezrlou, 2019, 2021; Kim et al., 2020).

There is evidence in the literature that shows the positive effect of TR on learners' language output (Ahmadian, 2011; Fukuta, 2016). However, this has mainly been investigated in the oral modality and there is insufficient research addressing the improvement of writing skills in the repeat task context (Sánchez, 2018). Besides, it is inconclusive whether gains via TR transfer to a new task. In addition, although written corrective feedback (WCF) has been suggested as motivating and facilitating L2 learners' writing skills in task-based research, its role has not been widely investigated in interaction with TR (Kim, et al., 2020), particularly in the context of MTR, the results of which emerge in the long run (Larsen-Freeman, 2009). Thus, the present study aims to examine the effect of MTR alone and when mediated by WCF on learners' writing skills and whether the supposed enhancement of the ability transfers to new tasks.

A careful scrutiny in the literature reveals that previous research has mostly investigated the effect of WCF on the micro linguistic features of learners' output, and to our knowledge, few studies (e.g., Papi et al., 2024) have investigated learners' output regarding macro linguistic structures, such as organization and content, in their investigations. Therefore, to promote learners' L2 writing skills, WCF as an influential factor should be explored further to determine its effectiveness on learners'

awareness of different text characteristics such as content and organization apart from vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics.

Another discovery regarding WCF, visible through a careful scrutiny of the literature, is that previous studies have mostly examined its effectiveness in revising the same texts, except for a few studies (Adams, 2003; Mehrang, 2016; Sippel & Martin, 2024). Therefore, further research is needed to explore the effect of WCF on the quality of text writing in a procedural type of writing TR in which various topics are introduced. With this objective, the current study explored students' writing MTR to analyze their writing skills improvement mediated by WCF. The following research questions oriented the current study's inquiry.

1. Does MTR contribute to learners' quality of writing?
2. Does MTR coupled with WCF contribute to learners' quality of writing?
3. Which group (MTR or MTRWCF) is likely to transfer their enhancement to a new task?

## Theoretical Framework

This section reviews TR and its cognitive and pedagogical underpinnings in SLA. It also discusses the role of WCF in L2 writing development, touching on its scopes and types.

### Task Repetition

Bygate and Samuda (2005) refer to TR as engaging learners in performing either the same or slightly different tasks at different points in time. From a cognitive point of view in SLA, TR scholars believe that repeating a task causes emancipation of learners' cognitive capacity, which allows them to pay more attention to linguistic aspects of language (Bygate, 2001; Bygate & Samuda, 2005; Ellis, 2008; Skehan, 2007). It also renders a trade-off between accuracy and meaning conveyance (Bygate, 2018). In fact, from a

pedagogical perspective, Bygate (2018) proposes that performing a task only once is unlikely to lead to considerable accomplishment in learning. Therefore, repeating a task is indispensable to benefit L2 learners, as it assists them in using their limited cognitive resources more freely while focusing on form and meaning (Skehan, 2009).

Bygate (2001) also makes the point that learners need MTR practice in order to experience acquisition. In this connection, building on the effective outcome of previous multi-session learning research, Walsh et al. (2023) investigated the effect of the distribution of item repetitions among multiple sessions on retention. They found that the retention of an item is strongly affected by the number of sessions covering it, and propose that to boost long-term retention, as many sessions as possible be devoted to item repetitions because when learners are engaged in writing tasks in a large number of sessions, their cognitive resources are less strained, making them more likely to attend to all aspects of composing a text.

An important learning theory supporting TR for SLA is skill acquisition theory (Dekeyser, 2007), which argues that learners initially rely on explicit processes and gradually move toward implicit processes. Explicit learning exposes learners to explicit rules and raises their awareness of them; through sufficient practice and exposure, their explicit knowledge evolves into implicit knowledge. Learners reach automaticity when they are able to produce and comprehend language with few non-native-like structures (VanPatten & Benati, 2010). Accordingly, as learners engage in massed task writing that provide ample practice, they are more likely to develop proficiency in their writing skills.

Drawing on Bygate (1996, 2001, 2018), L2 researchers have highlighted the cognitive benefits of TR content, exact, and procedural repetition. They have also investigated how tasks of various types can enhance learners' accuracy or help them attend to form and meaning simultaneously.

For example, inspired by the speech production model by Levelt (1989), recent studies on TR have focused on different characteristics of L2 oral output (Aaj et al., 2023; Bygate, 2001; Hawkes, 2012; Kakitani & Kormos, 2024; Kim & Tracy-Ventura, 2013; Muhammadpour et al. 2023), and argued that TR's different aspects can render differential influence on oral production quality, specifically in areas such as accuracy, complexity, and fluency.

Some other studies, on the other hand, investigated the effects of different types of TR on learners' language development. For instance, Patanasorn (2010) observed that learners enhanced simple past production through procedural repetition, while showing global fluency improvement through content repetition. However, the group undertaking exact TR made no significant changes. In another study, Kim and Tracy-Ventura (2013) studied the impact of collaborative tasks that included two simultaneous types of TR (same and procedural) on EFL learners' L2 performance in Korea. They found that learners' oral syntactic complexity was promoted in procedural TR through an information-exchange task, while their use of linguistic features, as induced by the task, benefited from both types of TR. These findings suggested that different types of TR have different benefits on speaking performance. In other words, TR benefits might rest on various issues, such as the type of intervention provided, task operationalization, and the linguistic focus across studies.

Indeed, previous research has mainly focused on oral interaction, oral production quality, and grammar learning. Recently, however, researchers have set out to consider the improvement of writing skills through the implementation of different TR types. For instance, Nitta and Baba (2014) explored Japanese tertiary level students' writing development over a year and compared the effect of both exact TR and procedural repetition on writing quality aspects such as fluency, syntax, and lexicon. The results revealed no significant writing quality differences between exact and procedural TR. However, procedural repetition did improve

learners' writing in terms of syntax and lexicon. The authors concluded that exact same TR leads to attrition in learners' motivation. To compensate for this shortcoming, Kim and Tracy-Ventura (2013) proposed procedural TR to better engage learners, as it confronts learners with different content.

In a subsequent study, Nitta and Baba (2018) investigated whether learners would improve their L2 writing by performing a MTR for 30 weeks over one year. Learners were required to expand on their ideas on a self-selected topic for 10 minutes. The following week, they wrote on the same topic as an exact repetition, and the week after that, they wrote about a new topic as a procedural repetition task. The researchers found that TR can exert a dynamic and constructive influence on learners' writing quality. For example, one participant attempted to write on the same topic with different purposes in mind. The researchers also emphasized that written and oral tasks should not be viewed as identical since distinct processes participate in completing writing and speaking tasks (Payant & Kim, 2019).

Finally, some other studies have examined how TR characteristics could affect learners' subsequent learning performance. Khezrlou (2019), for example, investigated the effects of timing and availability of form-focused instruction through TR on learners' accuracy and fluency in writing. She noticed that the performance of the experimental groups progressed in the repeat task phase but decayed in the new and delayed tasks.

In a follow-up study, Khezrlou (2021) examined the effect of explicit instruction in the context of TR on learners' development of oral explicit and implicit knowledge. She found that both types of knowledge showed improvement in the delayed post-test. Although previous studies contributed to our understanding regarding the role of TR in advancing learners' performance, they specifically focused on linguistic features and did not consider learners' improvement in producing the content and the linguistic macro structures.

To summarize, a look at the inconclusive findings of previous studies on TR indicates that its impact on learners' writing skills has not yet reached sufficient maturity and still needs more attention. Also, research on this topic has been limited to assigning a few writing tasks, overlooking the potential effect of MTR on learners' writing skills. What is more, research has not explored whether learners can transfer their gains to a new task with a different format, such as eliciting and translating into English the content from a Persian text with textual macro structures utterly differing from English (Pishghadam & Attaran, 2013). This study presents such an inquiry.

### Corrective Feedback

In recent decades, the effectiveness of WCF has been a hot topic among researchers in the field. For instance, Ellis (2009) argues that task rehearsal does not necessarily assist acquisition unless it is accompanied by some kind of feedback. Arroyo and Yilmaz (2018), on the other hand, claim corrective feedback is given to L2 learners by more knowledgeable individuals to indicate that their language production does not match the target language, or in Li's (2018) terms, to provide "responses to learner errors." Thus, the learners utilize the feedback to cut back on their errors and move towards target-likeness. Following Truscott (1996), a few decades ago a surge of research emerged on WCF efficacy, indicating an effective role for it in promoting L2 writing accuracy (Ghane & Mazdayasna, 2022; Kao, 2023; Karim & Nassaji, 2020; Papi et al., 2024; Sippel & Martin, 2024; Zabihi & Erfanitabar, 2024).

Currently, research has shifted attention towards exploring what scope and type of WCF can trigger more facilitation of L2 writing development. In terms of scope, WCF can be classified as either focused or unfocused, depending on the level of comprehensiveness of the provided correction. Unfocused WCF addresses a broad range of errors, while focused WCF targets specific errors. The two types of feedback have been scrutinized in

previous research. For instance, Ellis et al. (2008) and Frear and Chiu (2015) discovered that both types of WCF can be equally effective in improving learners' L2 writing accuracy. Kang and Han's (2015) meta-analysis, on the other hand, found focused WCF to be more effective than unfocused WCF, even though the difference was statistically insignificant. Notably, the discrepancy between focused and unfocused WCF concerns corrections of all types.

WCF can, furthermore, be classified into two common types: direct and indirect. Direct feedback involves explicit correction of erroneous linguistic features (Bitchener, 2018). It exposes learners to explicit correct forms for language components such as individual words, structures, and mechanics, and therefore, reduces confusion for learners, as they can easily copy the correct forms (Bitchener, 2008). In contrast, indirect feedback, only points out the error without providing a correction (Bitchener, 2018), which means it guides learners into problem-solving through reflection upon their learning activities.

Scholars remain divided in their preference for direct versus indirect types of WCF. While some advocate for the benefits of direct WCF (Almasi & Tabrizi, 2016; Chandler, 2003; Van Beuningen et al., 2012; Zabihi & Erfanitabar, 2024), others emphasize the advantages of indirect WCF (Ferris, 2002; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Tang & Liu, 2018).

Chandler (2003), for example, found that learners achieved greater accuracy after receiving direct WCF, whereas they made more errors when receiving indirect WCF. Similarly, Van Beuningen et al. (2012) reported that direct WCF was more effective in promoting both short- and long-term accuracy gains during text revision. Finally, Zabihi and Erfanitabar (2024) argued that direct WCF supplemented with metalinguistic explanation resulted in greater improvement in writing skills than either direct WCF alone or indirect WCF with metalinguistic support.

In contrast, Ferris (2002) and Ferris and Roberts (2001) argue that indirect WCF has a greater long-term impact on students' writing by encouraging learners' reflection on language use, which enhances retention. Supporting this view, Tang and Liu (2018) claim that learners who receive indirect WCF outperform those who receive direct feedback.

Other scholars, however, have both recognized and denied the value of both types of feedback. Among the first group are Kang and Han (2015) and Karim and Nassaji (2020) who reported that both direct and indirect WCF can positively contribute to writing development, depending on factors such as task type, learner proficiency, and instructional context. Among the second group are Alharrasi (2019) and Ghoorchaie et al. (2022) who found no significant improvement in EFL learners' writing performance by either type of direct or indirect feedback in a quasi-experimental study.

It appears as though context-specific intervening variables affected learners' availing themselves of either type of feedback provision. For instance, in his study among 36 college students in Taiwan, Kao (2023) found that the perception of subject-verb agreement as the targeted error type influenced the effectiveness of WCF, leading to retention of their learning benefits in the delayed post-test. Similarly, Mehrang (2016) emphasized that in an Iranian context, explicit attention should be directed to problematic linguistic features, as Iranian learners are typically accustomed to direct feedback.

An important SLA theory underpinning WCF is *noticing*, which has attracted notable attention among researchers (Schmidt, 2001; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). According to this theory, noticing is the purported result of WCF, making learners conscious of the disparities between their developing inter-language and the accurate target language. Therefore, learners should be provided with efficient WCF to arouse their "substantive noticing", and promote their analytical and deep

engagement with details while learning. They should not be equipped with mere “perfunctory noticing” (Qi & Lapkin, 2001, p. 291), which lacks in attention to underlying reasons and connections.

## Method

This section describes the participants, instruments, and data collection procedures. Additionally, it includes the statistical analyses used to evaluate the effects of the interventions on learners’ writing performance.

### Participants

A total of forty intermediate-level male students of English from 3 intact classes at an all-boys language school in Iran, aged 15 to 17, participated in this study. All the participants spoke Farsi as their L1, began learning English in junior high school, and had never been to an English-speaking country and reported not having any prior rigorous writing experience. Their socioeconomic status was also comparable. They all expressed their willingness orally to participate in this study and in the pre-test administered at the onset of the study. Following research ethical standards in the collection and treatment of data, all participants were asked to obtain their parent’s signature on a consent form to authorize their participation in the study. Based on the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) results, their proficiency level was determined to be B1. Two classes were considered as the experimental groups. One experimental group (N = 13) undertook the TR for 11 times, without WCF. The other experimental group repeated the task fourteen times (N = 14) and received WCF. The third class was considered the control group (N = 13). They undertook the repetition task 3 times without receiving any WCF.

### Instruments

For data collection and analysis, 3 instruments were utilized in this research. At the study onset,

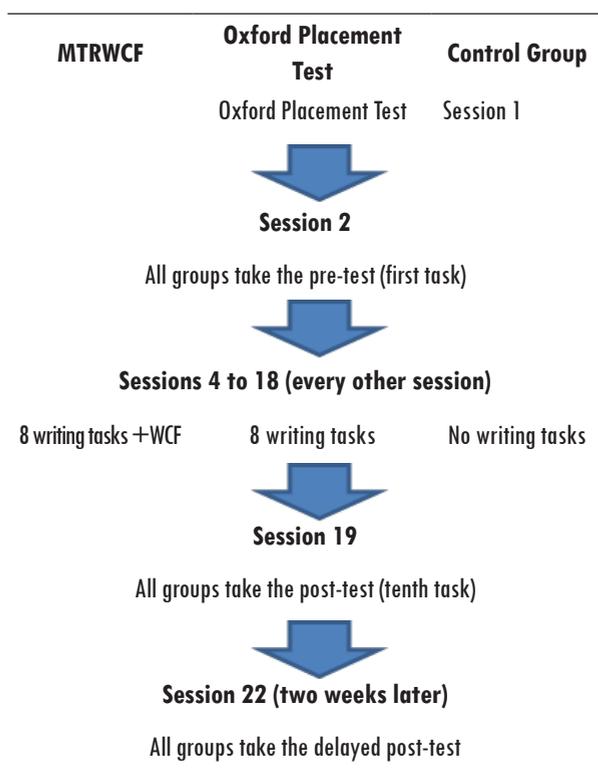
the OPT was administered among the participants of the 3 classes to ensure the similarity of the learners’ language proficiency level. The participants’ scores ranged from 42 to 53, which was indicative of their B1 language proficiency level. After that, a topic was assigned to them to write on, which served both as a pre-test and the first writing task of the whole research process. Given that external conditions such as task topic can cause score variance (Wu et al., 2023), this and the other topics of the experimental group had to write about were selected based on the opinions of teenagers with demographics and proficiency level similar to those of the participants of this study. To this end, the teenagers were given a list of topics from which they could select their favorite ones. The third instrument, used as the delayed post-test, was a type of writing task that differed from the previous tasks in that the learners had to read a text in Persian and translate and expand it into English.

### Procedure

The researcher conducted this study as a part of his regular teaching program at a language school in Yazd, Iran. After the English intermediate-level learners in the three intact classes agreed to participate in the writing task research and had their parents fill in consent forms, they were given the OPT to ensure they all had a B1 level of English. The classes were held twice a week for twenty-two sessions. The researcher considered one of the classes as the MTR group, another as the repetition group provided with WCF, and the third as the control group (see Figure 1). He briefly explained to all groups how to write a text in terms of content, organization, and mechanics.

In the MTR class, participants received a writing assignment on a given topic every other session over the course of ten sessions and were instructed to produce a 150–200-word text within approximately thirty minutes (Appendix 1). The topic for the first and tenth tasks was the same and served as the pre- and post-tests. In the WCF group, the

Figure 1 Data Collection Procedure



same procedure was conducted with the only difference being that learners were provided with WCF. In the control group, the writing tasks were assigned only 2 times as pre- and post-tests and learners received no WCF. The WCF that learners were provided was direct for vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics; and indirect for content and organization. For the latter, the researcher highlighted the errors or missing parts trying to make clear reference to the parts that needed revision so that the learners would not feel frustrated (Fukuta et al., 2019). He also directed learners to their shortcomings and asked them to rework their tasks so that they would not present those weak points in their subsequent writing tasks.

The shortcomings referred to issues such as lack of coherence, unrelated ideas, lack of supporting ideas, and illogical sequencing. For example, a writing task would suffer from an organizational error if it lacked a clear beginning, body, or end or if each part did not build on the previous one. The researcher explained to participants

that to address the indirect WCF, they would have to resort to their own knowledge and problem-solving skills and promised them that this would foster their long-term learning. He returned the papers to all groups the next session and allowed the participants 10 minutes to go over their writing tasks and to ask questions, if they had any. The reason for having the writing tasks every other session was that the researcher needed enough time to supply learners with WCF. Finally, the participants in all groups were assigned an additional topic with a different format two weeks later as the delayed post-test (Appendix 2).

The purpose of the delayed post-test was to evaluate whether the benefits of MTR, WCF, or both were transferable to new tasks. Therefore, this used a different format from the previous tests. The assignment was a short text (52 words) in Persian, a language which does not typically follow the same structure as English (Pishghadam & Attaran, 2013). Learners had to find the theme or topic implicitly embedded in it (Amini, 2010), translate the excerpt into English, and expand it to 150 words. If they were able to transfer their writing enhancement to this new task, particularly organizational patterns employed in English expository texts, such as topic sentence and conclusion, they were considered to have been influenced by the writing activities course (Zaini & Ollerhead, 2019). The researcher scored the pre, post, and delayed post-tests according to Jacobs et al.'s (1981) framework. The constructs in this framework include both micro and macro skills, as this helps them reflect on and improve their performance (Huisman et al., 2018).

### Data Analysis

The researcher scored learners' pre, post, and delayed writing tasks for each group separately using the framework suggested by Jacobs et al. (1981), according to which the constructs of content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics were scored out of 30, 20, 20, 25, and 5, respectively. Also, another expert in the field of TEFL was enlisted to rate 20 percent of the tasks

**Table 1** Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Test Scores for the Control, MTR, and WCF Groups

	Control			MTR			WCF		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Content	13	19.15	2.51	13	19.46	2.75	14	19.14	3.08
Organization	13	12.15	3.33	13	11.92	3.47	14	12.07	3.14
Vocabulary	13	12.84	2.30	13	12.84	2.60	14	12.92	2.05
Grammar	13	12.23	3.58	13	12.30	3.52	14	12.07	3.52
Mechanics	13	2.30	0.85	13	2.15	0.89	14	2.22	0.86

**Table 2** Descriptive Statistics of Post-Test Scores for the Control, MTR, and WCF Groups

	Control			MTR			WCF		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Content	13	19.46	2.69	13	20.92	2.84	14	24.07	2.46
Organization	13	12.00	3.05	13	12.69	2.98	14	16.92	2.30
Vocabulary	13	12.69	2.28	13	13.61	1.60	14	13.71	2.16
Grammar	13	12.23	3.58	13	13.30	3.47	14	15.78	3.76
Mechanics	13	2.07	0.75	13	2.30	1.03	14	4.14	0.94

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in each group to ensure rater reliability. Cohen’s kappa results for inter-rater reliability was found to be high for pretest ( $K=0.83$  for content,  $0.94$  for organization,  $0.87$  for vocabulary,  $0.95$  for language use, and  $0.97$  for mechanics), post-test ( $K=0.81$  for content,  $0.96$  for organization,  $0.85$  for vocabulary,  $0.91$  for language use, and  $0.96$  for mechanics), and delayed post-test ( $K=0.87$  for content,  $0.97$  for organization,  $0.92$  for vocabulary,  $0.95$  for language use, and  $0.95$  for mechanics), revealing an acceptable to a high level of agreement between the raters.

To answer the questions of the study, which asked whether the experimental groups who went through two different interventions outperformed the control group across three time periods, a series of one-way ANOVAs were run through SPSS version 16. The preliminary analyses showed no violation of normality of distribution ( $p > 0.05$ ) and equality of variance ( $p > 0.001$ ) for any of the constructs.

### Results

Findings suggest that MTR mediated by WCF had a substantially greater impact on learners’

writing quality compared with MTR alone, while the control group showed minimal improvement. Descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA results are reported for the pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test across the control, MTR, and WCF groups to address the three research questions (see Table 1).

Based on the ANOVA results for the pre-tests (see Table 1), the  $p$ -values for content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics were  $0.947$ ,  $0.984$ ,  $0.994$ ,  $0.985$ , and  $0.905$ , respectively. Therefore, at the outset the groups showed no significant differences. In order to answer the first and second research questions concerning whether MTR and MTR mediated by WCF contribute to learners’ writing skills improvement, a series of one-way ANOVAs were run on the post-test scores of the three groups. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics.

As the descriptive statistics in Table 2 demonstrate, both instrumental groups obtained higher mean scores than the control group in all the constructs. Regarding content, the WCF group performed significantly better than the other two

( $F_{2,37} = 10.606, p = .000, \eta p^2 = 0.36$ ), while the MTR group's performance showed a non-significant difference from that of the control,  $p = 0.512$ . Concerning organization, the WCF's performance stood significantly higher than that of the MTR and control groups ( $F_{2,37} = 12.488, p = .000, \eta p^2 = 0.40$ ), while the MTR group's improvement was not statistically better than the control group ( $p = 1$ ).

As for vocabulary, no group's scores revealed a significant improvement ( $F_{2,37} = 1.004, p = 0.376, \eta p^2 = 0.05$ ), although the mean scores of the experimental groups (MTR = 13.61 and WCF = 13.71) were higher than that of the control group (12.69). Thus, neither the MTR nor the WCF strategies were able to enhance the learners' writing skills in terms of vocabulary.

In terms of grammar, although the MTR group had a higher mean score, it showed no significant difference from the control group ( $p = 1$ ). The WCF's mean score was significantly higher than that of the control group only ( $F_{2,37} = 3.786, p = .032, \eta p^2 = 0.16$ ) but showed no significant difference from the MTR group. Thus, only the WCF group rendered a positive influence on the learners' writing ability concerning grammar.

With respect to mechanics, the MTR group's mean score increase was insignificant compared with the control group ( $p = 1$ ), while the WCF group significantly outperformed both the MTR and control groups ( $F_{2,37} = 20.598, p = .000, \eta p^2 = 0.52$ ). As a result, only the MTR mediated by WCF strategy was effective.

The above indicates that for question 1, which asked whether MTR contributes to learners' quality of writing, the statistics revealed that although this strategy triggered a rise in the MTR group's mean scores in all the aspects, their enhancement was insignificant. In regards to question 2, which asked whether MTR coupled with WCF contributes to learners' quality of writing, the results showed that except for vocabulary, where learners' progress was not statistically significant, the other aspects significantly improved with large effect sizes. This enhancement was seen particularly for content and organization, where learners were exposed to an indirect type of WCF.

In order to answer the third research question regarding whether learners' improvement transfers to a delayed post-test, another series of one-way ANOVAs were run. Table 3 shows the descriptive results.

As shown in Table 3, both experimental groups demonstrated higher mean scores than the control group on the delayed post-test. Also, similar to the post-test results, WCF obtained higher mean scores than the MTR group, except for vocabulary, on the delayed post-test.

As for content, the WCF significantly outperformed the MTR and control groups ( $F_{2,37} = 12.027, p = .000, \eta p^2 = 0.39$ ). However, the MTR group's improvement proved insignificant ( $p = 0.546$ ) compared to the control group. Therefore, only the MTR mediated by the WCF led to learners' content enhancement.

**Table 3** Descriptive statistics of delayed post-test scores for the Control, MTR, and WCF groups

	Control			MTR			WCF		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Content	13	19.23	2.94	13	20.53	2.06	14	23.71	2.26
Organization	13	12.30	3.42	13	12.84	3.28	14	15.42	2.40
Vocabulary	13	12.92	2.46	13	13.53	2.06	14	13.21	1.76
Grammar	13	12.46	3.01	13	13.07	3.68	14	15.14	2.62
Mechanics	13	1.92	0.64	13	2.23	1.01	14	2.85	0.66

Concerning organization, WCF group performed significantly better than the control group,  $F(2,37) = 4.059, p = 0.035, \eta^2 = 0.17$ . However, statistics comparing WCF and MTR groups were insignificant,  $p = 0.104$ ; as WCF group's mean score declined in the delayed post-test ( $M = 15.42$ ) compared to the post-test ( $M = 16.92$ ). Similarly, results comparing MTR and the control groups showed statistical insignificance,  $p = 1$ . Thus, WCF together with MTR helped learners write well-organized texts.

Regarding vocabulary, as with the post-test, statistics revealed that neither MTR nor WCF facilitated learners' vocabulary enhancement ( $F(2,37) = 0.277, p = 0.760$ ).

Similarly, concerning grammar, statistics revealed that neither the MTR nor the WCF facilitated learners' grammar enhancement ( $F(2,37) = 2.747, p = 0.077$ ). In contrast to the post-test, on which the WCF group had significantly improved, their mean score declined abruptly on the delayed post-test from 15.78 to 15.14, leading to a non-significant difference from the other two groups.

Finally, concerning mechanics, the WCF group significantly outperformed the other groups ( $F(2,37) = 4.963, p = 0.012, \eta^2 = 0.21$ ). The mean scores of the MTR and the control groups, however, showed statistical insignificance ( $p = 1$ ).

Therefore, in response to research question 3, the results revealed that only the WCF group reached enhancement in the delayed post-test, although in merely the three aspects of content, organization, and mechanics. In contrast, the other two groups made no progress in any aspect.

## Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the effects of MTR, both in isolation and in combination with WCF, on the writing quality of EFL learners. The analysis focused on macro-linguistic features, such as content and organization, and

micro-linguistic features, such as vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics, which were evaluated through pre-tests, post-tests, and delayed post-tests. The short-term and long-term effects of these two instructional approaches on EFL learners' writing development are discussed below.

### Short-Term Effect of MTR and WCF on EFL Learners' Writing Development

In response to the first research question concerning the impact of MTR on learners' writing quality, findings indicate that MTR alone did not lead to significant improvement. Although the MTR group showed an increase in mean scores on the post-test, the difference was not statistically significant compared to the control group. In other words, mere exposure to multiple writing tasks was insufficient to foster meaningful development in learners' writing performance.

The limited progress observed in the MTR group can be interpreted through the lens of skill acquisition theory (DeKeyser, 2007), which posits that learning occurs through sustained exposure to explicit instruction, allowing learners to proceduralize declarative knowledge and ultimately achieve automatization. Although the MTR participants in this study received some initial instruction in writing, they were not cognitively engaged throughout the intervention, as they did not receive any feedback on their performance. This finding aligns with Ellis's (2009, 2016) argument that task rehearsal alone is insufficient for language acquisition and that learners require feedback to support their development. The finding is also consistent with Lázaro-Ibarrola and Hidalgo's (2021) finding that procedural TR is ineffective in enhancing writing performance.

The lack of effectiveness of mere MTR in enhancing learners' writing skills stands in contrast to Larsen-Freeman's (2009) claim that the benefits of TR may emerge over time, particularly at later stages of learning. The current findings also contrast with those of Manchón (2011, 2020), who

argued that writing alone, without the inclusion of WCF, can serve as a powerful tool for language development. Furthermore, this result contradicts Khezrlou (2021), who reported improvement in writing performance through a TR program, although that study did not involve multiple procedural repetitions.

This finding also diverges sharply from previous research on TR in the oral modality (e.g., Ahmadian, 2011; Bygate, 2001), which demonstrated substantial gains in L2 performance through repeated speaking tasks. One possible explanation for this lies in the fundamental differences between speaking and writing (Payant & Kim, 2019). Unlike oral tasks, writing allows learners ample time to allocate their attentional resources, which may explain why the control group in this study achieved post-test scores comparable to those of the MTR group (see Table 2).

While it may seem counterintuitive that MTR alone does not lead to significant gains in writing proficiency, it is important to consider the potential influence of learner-related psychological variables such as interest, motivation, and self-efficacy, etc., which may have limited the participants' progress in this context. According to Hawkes (2009) TR may become tedious for learners, leading to boredom and a decline in performance quality as tasks are approached in a perfunctory manner. As a result, teachers should consider adopting context-specific strategies to mitigate monotony and sustain learner motivation.

Regarding the effect of MTR combined with WCF (Research Question 2), the WCF group outperformed both the control and the MTR groups on the post-test across all aspects of writing, except vocabulary, where no statistically significant difference was observed. The greater writing development observed in the WCF group appears to be attributable to the combined effects of MTR and WCF. First, the MTR strategy enabled learners to engage in sustained writing practice over ten sessions, offering many opportunities for textual

production. More importantly, the provision of WCF throughout these sessions facilitated easier access to relevant linguistic knowledge and guided learners in restructuring their output in subsequent writing. In other words, the observed improvement was not merely a result of repeated writing practice; rather, it was the result of the integration of this with a treatment strategy, namely the WCF, which allowed learners to compare their own output with the correct forms, thereby promoting the consolidation of their linguistic knowledge.

This finding can be explained by Schmidt's (2001) noticing hypothesis, which suggests that WCF draws learners' attention to the discrepancies between their developing interlanguage and the accurate target language. This positive effect of WCF on learners' writing quality aligns with findings from previous studies (Chandler, 2003; Ellis, 2016; Ghane & Mazdayasna, 2022; Karim & Nassaji, 2020). The observed improvement among the WCF recipients was particularly evident in content and organization for which the learners received indirect feedback. This type of WCF appears to have encouraged them to both draw on both linguistic and non-linguistic resources and engage in problem-solving and reflection. Such cognitive engagement probably enabled them to outperform in these areas compared to those aspects addressed through direct WCF.

This important finding supports the arguments of Ferris (2002), Ferris and Roberts (2001), and Tang and Liu (2018), who advocate for the effectiveness of indirect over direct WCF. Overall, the learners' progress in this group challenges Truscott's (1996, 2007) claims that WCF is entirely ineffective or even detrimental, and that class time would be better spent on alternative activities such as increased writing practice.

Concerning vocabulary enhancement, although the WCF group exhibited a greater increase in mean score, the difference was not statistically significant compared to the other groups. This may be attributed to the fact that all groups received

the same instructional content, and participants across groups were likely to utilize the vocabulary encountered during lessons. This was particularly evident in the case of the MTR group, whose mean score in the vocabulary component also increased, albeit to a lesser extent than that of the WCF group. Another possible explanation is that learners were consistently engaged in writing tasks throughout the program, as well as in the delayed post-test, all of which involved topics that differed from those on the pre-test and required distinct vocabulary. As a result, their performance on the post-test and consequently on the delayed post-test did not show substantial improvement. Furthermore, although the pre-test and post-test addressed the same topic, they were administered ten weeks apart, which may have also influenced the learners' retention and performance.

This finding is consistent with the results reported by Sánchez et al. (2020), who found that neither oral nor written tasks led to significant improvements in lexical complexity or accuracy. However, it contrasts with findings by Coyle and Cánovas-Guirao (2019) and Luquin and García Mayo (2020), who argued that learners tend to notice lexical features highlighted in feedback and subsequently incorporate them into their later writing tasks.

#### Long-Term effect of MTR and WCF on EFL learners' writing development

The answer to the third research question is particularly significant for the present study, as it provides insight into learners' long-term retention. The findings revealed that the MTR group did not exhibit effective performance on the delayed post-test, whereas the WCF group was able to sustain its superior performance on the new task. This suggests that the WCF group had processed linguistic input more deeply, leading to the establishment of durable learning traces in long-term memory (Bygate, 2001). Despite a moderate decline, the positive effects of WCF extended to the new task, particularly in the areas of content

and organization, and to a lesser extent in the area of mechanics. Vocabulary performance remained consistent with the post-test results, showing no significant gains, while grammar scores declined in the delayed test, rendering the effect statistically insignificant.

Arguably, the use of indirect WCF for content and organization contributed significantly to learners' interlanguage restructuring and the successful transfer of acquired features to a new task. This contrasts with the direct WCF provided for vocabulary and grammar, which was less effective. In the case of content and organization, learners were encouraged to engage in cognitive and reflective processes, which facilitated deeper learning and knowledge internalization. In contrast, the provision of correct forms for vocabulary and grammar in a ready-made manner limited learners' active engagement, thereby impeding their ability to fully internalize and control these forms. This distinction can be understood through Qi and Lapkin's (2001) differentiation between *substantive* noticing, applicable to content and organization, and *perfunctory* noticing, associated with vocabulary and grammar. Consequently, the findings suggest that indirect WCF, when combined with MTR, is more conducive to learners' development of writing skills than mtr alone (Ellis, 2009).

The fact that learners showed improved scores from the pre-test onward but were unable to sustain those gains uniformly across all aspects, suggests difficulties in attending to multiple dimensions of writing simultaneously (Skehan, 2009). Notably, in the long term, learners in this study exhibited stronger performance in the meaning-related aspect (content) than in the form-related aspect (grammar). This finding stands in contrast to prior research (e.g., Khezrlou, 2019; Nitta & Baba, 2014), which reported that, following TR, learners tend to prioritize form over meaning. Several factors may account for this divergence. First, previous studies mostly employed exact TR with opportunities for revising linguistic features, whereas the present study implemented

procedural TR, requiring learners to address different topics and focus on various aspects of writing quality, without revision. Second, earlier research often involved a limited number of tasks, while this study incorporated MTR, providing more sustained writing practice. Third, prior studies generally applied either direct or indirect WCF exclusively, whereas this study utilized a combination of both. Finally, as the direct WCF could not engage learners in profound linguistic processing, learners showed more inclination towards focusing on expression of content, the macro structure of English texts, and mechanics.

Overall, the findings of this study challenge Bygate's (2001) claim that mere TR is sufficient to transfer its positive effects to a new task. Instead, they support Ellis's (2009, 2016) argument that additional instructional support, such as the provision of indirect WCF is necessary to enhance learning outcomes across tasks. In line with this, the following paragraphs outline some recommendations to enhance learners' writing quality:

1. Teachers should assign a variety of writing topics that align with learners' interests and language competence. This can encourage the use of broader background knowledge, foster sustained engagement, and promote the use of a wider range of linguistic features in meaningful contexts.
2. Teachers should carefully make a trade-off between direct and indirect WCF provision to maintain learner motivation while promoting autonomy, reflection, and problem-solving skills since engaging learners in writing tasks through direct WCF provision only may cause overreliance on teacher guidance.
3. Learners should be given opportunities for follow-up interactions with the teacher to better understand their writing weaknesses and receive clarification, which can support deeper learning and targeted improvement.

In this quest, several caveats should be made. First, MTR in writing is likely to cause boredom among

learners. In order to mitigate boredom while preserving the benefits of learning, teachers should manage the situation creatively by, for instance, resorting to gamification and peer review. Second, teachers are likely to encounter mixed-proficiency classrooms, in which case they should try to employ direct and indirect WCF in a balanced manner. To strike this balance, teachers are required to use direct WCF for lower proficiency levels and indirect WCF for higher proficiency levels, which is, indeed, a nuanced task. Third, although the study advocates for indirect feedback, potential challenges might appear; for instance, even strong learners may incur in incorrect self-corrections or may feel frustrated at times, as they may not recognize what is wrong or how to fix it. As a result, it is essential for teachers to provide learners with metacognitive training which helps them become more aware of how to think and learn.

## Conclusion

The current study casts light on two constructs in L2 writing pedagogy, namely, MTR and MTR coupled with WCF. Based on the results of the study, mere MTR cannot be heavily relied on for learners' writing development; however, when it is accompanied by WCF, it can lead to learners' notable accomplishments. In this study, for language components of content and organization, indirect WCF was provided, while for vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics, direct WCF was provided. Although both types of WCF were effective in learners' improvement, indirect WCF appeared more appropriate, as learners' enhancement was more notable in the aspects provided with indirect WCF. This finding is supported by the gains in content and organization as they carried over to the delayed post task characterized by a different format. Therefore, it is suggested that instructors utilize learner centered approaches such as indirect WCF in their pedagogy so that learners can raise their problem-solving abilities and take responsibility in their learning trajectory. As teachers tend to recycle their teaching activities in their pedagogy

to create opportunities for learning (Kim, 2013), this study emphasizes the use of MTR along with WCF, which necessitates noticing the gap and restructuring on the part of learners.

This study's results should be regarded together with its limitations. First, the sample size was small, which detracts from the study's reliability. As research comprising a larger number of participants would provide more insight into any context, replication of the results with larger samples is recommended. Additionally, the participants in this study were characterized by having only one level of proficiency and by being only males, making the findings non-generalizable to other levels and females. Therefore, further research on other proficiency levels and genders is required to investigate the issue more profoundly. Second, this study considered all the aspects of writing, namely, content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics simultaneously, which hindered deepening on any of them; future studies can investigate the role of focused feedback to unpack the detailed effects of TR on each of the mentioned writing aspects. For future work, it may also be of interest to consider individual variability among students, i.e., the role of motivation and perception of the WCF received.

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**Appendix 1. Writing Topics Given to the Class**

1. Why may students feel distressed at school?
2. Why are we required to learn English?
3. Why should we do physical exercise?
4. What is the role of computers in our lives?

5. Is telling a white lie reasonable?
6. What effects can smoking have on our body?
7. How can you improve your memory?
8. What are the causes of air pollution?
9. How can we reach success in life?
10. Why may students feel distressed at school?

**Appendix 2. Assignment for the Delayed Post-Test Persian-English: Social Relationships**

تنهایی برای انسان ها احساس ناخوشایندی است. همه ما نیاز داریم که دوستانی داشته باشیم تا هم به آنها محبت کنیم و هم مورد توجه و مهربانی قرار بگیریم. خداوند در سرشت ما انسان ها میل به محبت کردن و محبت دیدن و نیاز به برقراری ارتباط با دیگران قرار داده است.

Loneliness is an unpleasant feeling for humans. We all need friends to love them and be loved by them. God has put in our nature the desire to love and the need to communicate with others.