Language Learning Potential of Writing
in an Additional Language

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Thanks to the increased attention on the role of writing in language development, many empirical studies in L2 writing have confirmed at least some degree of facilitative roles of writing in enhancing second language acquisition. The main hypotheses of these studies are that L2 writing offers opportunities for learners to test their language hypotheses through written output, to reflect on their use of language through collaboration during writing, and to analyze language use during feedback process, while using the target language in communicative ways. The purpose of the present study is to review and synthesize findings from empirical studies on the roles of writing in an additional language in facilitating language learning. For this purpose, this paper connects relevant issues in recent L2 writing research to see how L2 writing provides contexts for language learning and reviews findings from recent empirical studies in terms of how collaborative L2 writing facilitates language learning process and what type of written corrective feedback provides better environment for L2 learning, based on the writing-to-learn a language (WTL) framework, in the later part of the paper.

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, the attention to L2 writing has increased dramatically for L2 writing as a goal of learning and, more recently, as a means of language learning. Since Krashen (1982)’s Input Hypothesis, the role of input as an only source of language development has been questioned and the concept of Hypothesis Testing whereby learners use their production to test out the hypothesis about language have put more emphasis on
productive skills. Recently, Manchon (2011a) applied the notion of Hypothesis Testing to writing, arguing the advantage of writing over speaking in testing learners’ hypotheses because some features of writing provide ideal demands for improving language proficiency. Manchon (2011a) also suggested the two general dimension of L2 writing: the learning-to-write dimension (LTW) in which second and foreign language learners learn to express their ideas through writing, and the writing-to-learn dimension (WTL) in which L2 writing activities can facilitate the development of L2 language knowledge and skills. Simply, in the writing-to-learn perspectives, writing is viewed as a vehicle for learning rather than a goal of learning (Harklau, 2002).

Unlike the LTW approach where educators and researchers focus mostly on “writing to learn about writing itself,” WTL dimension puts more emphasis on what Manchon (2011b) called the language learning potential (LLP) of writing. Evidently, an increasing number of studies are exploring the role of L2 writing as a means of second language development and this interest is clearly highlighted in the following statement of Williams (2008):

> It is increasingly apparent that the act of writing may also promote general proficiency in ways that have not always been acknowledged. (p. 483)

Considering the widespread perception that the goal of foreign language writing is to learn and practice L2, how L2 writers develop their target language through writing in a foreign language can provide meaningful implications on why L2 educator include writing even when learners feel no need to learn writing skills, in comparison to oral output (Ortega, 2009).

The purpose of this paper is to highlight some key concepts related to language learning potential (LLP) of L2 writing and synthesize findings from existing empirical studies on the LLP of L2 writing in L2 development so that educators and researchers interested in foreign language learning can have further insights about the practices in their language classes and the direction of future research in L2 writing.

II. Issues and Research Gap in Language Learning Potential of L2 Writing

Since Krashen (1982) introduced his theory of second language acquisition,
including the Input Hypothesis, it posed a huge impact on the field of second language acquisition and the practical implementation of language classes. However, the role of input as an only source of language development, proposed in Input Hypothesis development, has also been questioned. Today, we know input alone is not sufficient for language learning to occur. Swain (1985), in her study of an immersion French program, found that the lack of target language production resulted in the lack of proficiency even in an immersion setting. She suggested the crucial role of output in second language acquisition called "comprehensible output" or "pushed output," arguing that “production may force the learner to move from semantic processing to syntactic processing” (p. 249). More recently, attention on the role of output in language learning has enhanced since Swain (1998) posited new functions of output, suggesting the relation between learners’ linguistic production and their hypothesis testing about the linguistic knowledge.

1. Role of Writing in Language Learning

Currently, one of the most widely recognized functions of output is that of "Hypothesis Testing" (Swain, 1995, 1998), whereby learners use their production to test out the hypothesis about language. Swain argued that output can be the indication that a learner is testing the comprehensibility and well-formedness of a target language form formulated based on a linguistic hypothesis. Therefore, from the point of Hypothesis Testing, errors in a learner’s output can provide a critical point where a language learner can take advantages in order to develop more target-like forms.

Most recently, Manchon (2011a) applied this notion to writing, arguing that learners probably test new L2 structures through writing. Manchon suggests the advantage of writing over speaking in testing learners’ hypotheses because some features of written production give ideal demands for improving language proficiency. Particularly, the permanence of written record enables learners to be more aware of language forms and the extended time needed to write gives opportunities to try out new and more complex forms (Williams, 2012). This permanence of written output helps learners to try out their L2 hypotheses, monitor what they write and
compare it with the texts produced by others or themselves (Schoonen, Snellings, Stevenson, & van Gelderen, 2009).

Another key insight that has contributed to the increased attention to the role of L2 writing is related to Schmidt’s (1990, 2001) Noticing Hypothesis. Schmidt highlighted the role of production as a spring board for comparing and noticing the gap between the interlanguage and target forms of the input. In fact, the concept of noticing has gained an increasing amount of attention from both applied linguists and researchers in L2 writing. Swain (1995, 1998) hypothesized that output promotes noticing and suggested that a language learner noticing the gap between what he wants to say and what he can say, through the production of the target language, recognizes some linguistic problems that brings his attention to learn, correct, or discover the target language.

Due to that writing usually is less time-constraint and results in more permanent records, it gives more opportunities for noticing holes (Swain, 1998), to reflect and negotiate the meaning, and to interact with external sources including experts and reference materials (Williams, 2012). Researchers documented the noticing role of L2 writing during reformulation process in empirical studies. Adams (2003) found the benefit of noticing the gap between L2 learners’ writing and native speakers’ forms and incorporating more accurate forms in L2 output (Adams, 2003). Yang and Zhang (2010) also found that learners noticed many communicative problems during their composition and interacted with reformulated version of their texts to solve problems. Hanaoka and Izumi (2012) examined the interaction between internal factors and external factors, and suggested that writing provides an interface where learners’ internal factors required to process input and output and external input, including feedback and revision, interact to result in learners’ noticing. Williams (2012) viewed this interaction as knowledge internalization through noticing and shaping of intake.

The relative advantage of written output over spoken output in facilitating learners’ noticing was also found. Niu (2009) examined learners’ Language Related Episodes (LREs) in collaborative output tasks and found that writing drew learners’ attention to language forms quantitatively more than speaking did. More empirical findings that suggest the connection between noticing and
the effect of writing tasks are discussed in the later part of this paper.

The fact that learners may deepen their knowledge about L2 through the act of expressing their cognitive process both in writing and speaking provides researchers and educators of L2 writing with meaningful insights in which more empirical studies can be designed to see the LLP of L2 writing.

2. Focus on Form and L2 Writing

It is widely accepted that, unlike L1, most learners of L2 feel that certain degree of knowledge of rules in target language is necessary to develop their L2 proficiency. Ur (2009) suggested that providing opportunities in which learners understand and create meanings using the target grammar point is generally viewed as important base in today’s language teaching and communicative activities because some reactive grammar teaching—e.g. error correction—can take place in enhancing grammar learning during these communicative activities.

With regard to the relation between L2 writing and L2 grammar, it has been found that language output facilitates learners’ L2 grammar accuracy because output can lead learners to notice language forms. This process involves the interaction between learners and other writers, as well as between learners and the text improved with the help from more capable writers, often as a form of feedback. This constitutes a crucial condition of language learning based on the Interaction Hypothesis (Long & Robinson, 1998). Interaction for language learning, in this hypothesis, means the negotiation for meaning, which elicits forms of negative feedback on vocabulary and grammar that would have not been learned only with positive evidence or input. Therefore, at the core of language learning potential of L2 writing is the premise that learners’ attention to mismatches between input and output through interactive feedback on written texts enables learners to elaborate linguistic forms without losing their attention on intended meanings.

The Interaction Hypothesis motivated a new approach called Focus-on-Form (Long, 1991). Because classroom second language acquisition (SLA) is different from first language acquisition, researchers in SLA have investigated how pedagogical interventions can help second
language learners to overcome the limitation of classroom context without compromising communicative goals of language teaching and this debate includes how teachers’ or learners’ attention should be directed to linguistic features (Doughty & Williams, 1998). The notion of focus on form was first introduced when Long (1991) suggested the distinction between focus on formS (FonFs) and focus on form (FonF). The former refers to synthetic approaches to language teaching designed to teach language forms while the latter refers to drawing learners’ attention to linguistic features while they engage in meaning-based communicative tasks. The most distinctive appeal of FonF is its prerequisite engagement in the communicative function of language. Later, Long and Robinson (1998) defined the concept of focus on form as “an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production.”

The idea that FonF can be promoted by output was elaborated particularly with the role of written output as in the suggestion that the act of writing offers more need and opportunity for FonF (Ortega 2009). As stated earlier, Niu (2009), who investigated how collaborative writing tasks are different from collaborative oral tasks in drawing learners’ attention to language forms, found that the learners performing the written output task showed extensive engagement with language forms.

Due to the attention to focus-on-form approach, instructional strategies that draw learners’ attention to specific language forms, including dictogloss, collaborative writing tasks, or reformulation as a written recast, have been explored to confirm the language learning potential of writing. Empirical studies on these writing tasks are described in the later part of this paper.

3. Bias in L2 Writing Research

(1) Writing in Second Language (SL) vs. Writing in Foreign Language (FL)

Although research in second language writing has grown dramatically since 1990s, as Manchon and de Haan (2008) rightly pointed, researchers have not put balanced emphasis on second language (SL) and foreign language (FL) writing, resulting in heavily-ESL oriented tradition in L2 writing. This is not
viewed as ideal because the role of L2 writing in non-English settings or in foreign language contexts has not been examined sufficiently, due to the bias of SL studies. As Ortega (2009) rightly suggested, knowledge in L2 writing research across diverse settings, not just ESL settings, should be investigated more systematically.

Since Silva, Leki, and Carson (1997) argued that as composition studies had neglected second language writing, resulting in monolingual bias in writing scholarship more than a decade ago, another bias has come up in the field of L2 writing study: SL (Second Language)–bias of L2 writing over FL (foreign language) writing. In fact, Ortega (2009), in her analysis of second language writing research in Journal of Second Language Writing (JSLW) and TESOL Quarterly (TQ) between 1992 and 2007, reported that only 72 out of 202 empirical studies were conducted in EFL contexts; that is, 36% of empirical studies in JSLW and 33% of TQ were focused on EFL writing. She expected an increasing amount of knowledge and more insights of research in FL writing, from various geographical and institutional context of FL, will be incorporated into our knowledge in L2 writing, considering the ever increasing demand of challenges that FL writers and educators face all over the world.

One rationale for more research on writing in foreign language can be drawn from the perspective that L2 writing in foreign language contexts (FL) can be distinctively different from that of second language contexts (SL). As indicated by Ortega (2009), FL writing can be different from SL writing in terms of motivation to write, purpose of writing, language proficiency, availability of L1 writing capacity. In fact, many FL learners, unlike SL learners, might see writing as a language learning vehicle, and their central aim of writing in a foreign language may be using writing to develop language proficiency (Manchon, 2011b).

However, since this difference has not been recognized sufficiently, knowledge of SL writing overwhelm that of FL writing. In the work of Journal of Second Language Writing published between 1992 and 2007, only 56 out of 154 are conducted in EFL context and most of them have been done since 1999. In L2 writing studies, scholars seem to have concerned more about the comparison between L1 and L2 writing instead of SL and FL.
writing. Fortunately, there has been a steady growth of FL research recently. For example, in 2006, an almost equal number of SL and FL presentations were given in AAAL annual conference (Manchon & de Haan, 2008).

An important study that shows how dynamic FL and SL writers’ motivation can be was recently conducted by Sasaki (2009, Retrieved from Manchon, 2011a, p. 192). Sasaki, after analyzing 22 EFL writers, found that there was a distinct difference in forming motivation to write in FL contexts between students with learning experience in L2 countries and those who have not. The motivation was related to whether learners form “L2–related imagined communities.” Considering the fact that most of young FL writers have never been exposed to the target language community, this implies that the difference between SL writing and FL writing can be far more important than researchers have recognized.

Due to the imbalance of knowledge about between FL writers and SL writers and the association of language proficiency and L2 writing, there seems to be an increasing need for further research about why and how FL learners write in a foreign language, and how their effort in L2 writing can facilitate their language development.

(2) L2 Writing in Non–College Contexts

Another evident research gap in second language writing is that even the studies on L2 writing have predominantly focused on the L2 writers in higher education institutes and there have not been much attention on young learners, particularly non–college school contexts. The studies of L2 writing in two flagship journal of second language writing shows this discrepancy (Ortega, 2009). Among the empirical studies on EFL writing from 1992 to 2007, only 18% of studies in JSLW and 13% in TQ were conducted in elementary and secondary school contexts; while 75% of studies in JSLW and 69% of studies in TQ focused on college–level writers.

One of the major differences in L2 writing between pre–college and college context is the motivation to write. Due to the inherent nature of FL context, many learners in elementary and secondary schools find no clear reason why they should write well in the foreign language outside their
classroom. In addition, in many EFL countries, learning at least one foreign language, typically English, is mandatory in primary and secondary schools. This means that most EFL learners in writing classes are required to attend whether they need to write in English and whatever their motivation of language learning is.

Because their education is mandatory and English plays deciding roles in their career choice as well as academic advancement, the goal of English writing can be different from their counterparts in ESL contexts or in college. In fact, Yang et al. (2006, as cited in Reichelt, 2009) documented that EFL writers tend to focus on the product of writing, unlike ESL writers, rather than the process because of the bigger class sizes in EFL contexts and their focus of writing on the examinations, which only requires their final draft to be evaluated.

Lee (2013) also stated that school curricular are “primarily examination–driven” in many Asian EFL contexts. In Korea, for example, English is a required subject in primary and secondary schools but, according to Lee (2011), most Korean students rarely get chances to speak or write in English in the secondary school level because of the washback effect of college entrance standardized test in Korea. Choi (2008) stated English instructions in Korea is highly affected by the English section of university entrance exam, which is considered as the most important high–stake test in Korean students’ life, and English section in the exam plays very deciding role in assessing students’ academic performance. The problem is that the test does not assess English speaking and writing directly, so few students feel need to improve their writing skills in English and usually disregard writing proficiency, while learning English in secondary schools.

In order to maximize the LLP of L2 writing, the relationship between current examination system in language curricula in many FL contexts and their impact on learners’ motivation as well as language learning process should be explored. In the meantime, reviewing how recent empirical studies has explored language learning potential of writing in L2 classrooms can provide researchers and educators with opportunities to acknowledge the role of writing in second language acquisition.
III. RESEARCH EVIDENCE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING POTENTIAL OF L2 WRITING

1. The Effects of Collaborative Writing

The cognitive process of collaborative writing has been an area of interest in WTL research mainly because of the role of writing in encouraging the reflection of language collaboratively because writing offers more time for planning and revising. (Adams & Ross-Feldman, 2008; Williams, 2008).

According to Storch (2011), collaborative writing can be defined as "the joint production or the coauthoring of a text by two or more writers (p. 275)" and it is distinguished from group planning, peer feedback or peer revision. Although collaboration in second language classroom have been more common in oral tasks, the rationale for using collaborative writing tasks have been explored recently, particularly since Swain (1985, 1995) suggested the importance of output.

1(1) The Outcome of Collaborative Writing

If collaboration during writing process has a language learning potential, the effect of collaboration should be measurable in the form of either incorporated texts or improved knowledge co-constructed during the collaboration. The most typical way to measure the effect of collaboration is the analysis of texts in terms of how the written output produced as a result of collaborative task is different from the output produced individually. In one such study, Storch (2005) compared the texts produced in pairs with the texts written individually in order to investigate the nature of collaboration in writing process in a college level ESL writing class and found that the text of pairs showed better task fulfillment, more accurate grammar, and more complexity than that of individual writers. The analysis of dialogues in the study also showed that collaboration provided the learners the opportunity to deal with different aspects of writing, including generating ideas. Similar findings about the outcome of collaborative writing tasks were reported by Wigglesworth and Storch (2009), who suggested that collaborative writing has a potential as an effective formative assessment.
The effect of collaborative writing on learners’ linguistic knowledge has also been examined. Watanabe and Swain (2007) analyzed the dialogue of pairs of ESL learners (the LREs in pairs and the patterns of pair interaction) in relation to posttest performance in individual writing. The analysis indicated that the pattern of interaction affected both the frequency of LREs and the performance in the post test: that is, when the patterns of participants were expert/novice, the higher posttest scores were attained than that of expert/passive pattern.

The number of LREs in collaborative writing was not the only data that researchers have focused on. The effect of collaborative writing on L2 vocabulary acquisition (Kim, 2008) was also investigated. In Kim (2008)’s study, how the writing of a group of learners of Korean as a second language, participated in a pretest, a dictogloss task, and two posttests in pairs or individually, affects their vocabulary acquisition. The analysis of their collaborative dialogues indicated that the learners who participated in pairs attained significantly higher score on the vocabulary tests, even though the number of LREs in both groups were similar. The findings of recent empirical studies on the effect of collaborative writing has been consistent in suggesting the positive relationship between collaboration in writing and improved accuracy in terms of posttest performance.

(2) Patterns of Collaboration in Writing Processes

Clearly, not all pairs or groups work collaboratively when assigned the same writing task. Research indicated that the pattern of interaction during collaborative writing seems to affect the level of support that learners can get from collaboration. Storch (2002a), in her case study of collaborative patterns of pairs in a writing task, found two distinctive dyadic pattern of interaction: collaborative and dominant/dominant pattern. These two patterns were identified based on the way the participants approached the task, dealt with language issues, as well as a number of salient features that were produced. In another study, Storch (2002b) found that the scaffolding in pairs was more likely to occur in either collaborative or expert/novice pattern among the four distinctive patterns of pair interaction based on their mutuality and equality (Figure 1).
Watanabe and Swain (2007) also investigated the effect of L2 proficiency and the patterns of interaction during collaborative writing on language learning. Their quantitative and qualitative data analysis showed that when the role of the core participant in pairs were either collaborative or expert (in the expert/novice pattern), the participants in these groups were more likely to score higher than those in groups with core participants with dominant, novice, or expert (in the expert/passive pattern) roles. When the non-core participants’ roles were collaborative or expert (in the expert/novice pattern), they showed higher scores. In short, what the analysis suggests is that both core and non-core participants in collaborative pairs achieved highest posttest scores. Learners, both core and non-core participants, in dominant/passive or expert/passive pairs scored lower than experts in the expert/novice pairs.

In addition to the pattern of interaction, L2 writers’ attitudes toward collaborative writing was also examined (Shehadeh, 2011). Shehadeh examined 38 EFL learners’ perception during writing tasks over 16 weeks. This study indicated that collaborative writing had an effect on the participants’ writing improvement and the participants displayed generally very positive perception toward collaborative writing. Considering that collaborative writing was new to them and their initial perception was not so...
supportive of collaboration, the fact that they felt the collaboration enhanced their self-confidence and their writing ability implies meaningful insights for L2 educators.

The number of participants in collaborative writing also seems to matter in co-construction of language knowledge. Fernandez Dobao (2012) compared pair and group collaboration of 111 learners of Spanish as a foreign language. The researcher’s analysis of accuracy, fluency, and text complexity indicated that both pairs and groups produced more accurate texts than individual writers and the greater number of LREs and more accurate texts were produced in groups than in pairs. The result also showed that small group interaction and pair interaction are qualitatively and quantitatively different in offering opportunities for co-constructing language knowledge.

2. Language Learning Potential of Written Corrective Feedback (WCF)

For more than a decade, a great deal of research interest has been on the topic of written corrective feedback (WCF), also known as error correction, in both SLA and L2 writing fields. There has been a robust of controversies over the role of errors correction since Truscott (1996) argued that error correction is not only ineffective but also harmful and, therefore, should be abandoned. Ferris (2010) pointed out the conflict in research findings and disputable implications regarding error correction may be due to the difference in goal of investigation between scholars in SLA and those in L2 writing field. For researchers, this conflicting results can provide motivation for further research with different research questions and methods. For teachers in language classroom, however, understanding the effective ways of implementing written corrective feedback, rather than the reasons for abandoning error correction, can be the most productive focus (Ferries et al., 2013), at least until more conclusive evidence is found. Since many writing teachers spend huge amount of time correcting students’ writing and mistakes (Schmitt & Christianson, 1998), and most second language learners expect their errors to be corrected (Leki, 1991), it is important to examine the role of corrective feedback in second language development.
(1) Direct vs. Indirect Feedback

Depending on how explicit feedback is provided, corrective feedback can be direct or indirect. While direct feedback explicitly corrects learners’ error, indirect feedback only draws learners’ attention to the errors they made and help them to correct their errors. Many studies compared the relative effect of direct and indirect feedback.

Table 1 below shows that the studies focused on a few target features found the effectiveness of written corrective feedback and the superiority of direct feedback at least for accuracy, particularly if a research goal was to trace evidence for acquisition of a specific feature. In fact, all the feedback studies in the table not only compare the effectiveness of different types of error corrections and metalinguistic explanation (ME) but also compare the groups that received CF treatment with non–CF control groups, making the comparisons more informative by controlling the proficiency level, writing conditions, and instructional context. This is probably because researchers criticized that some studies did not include control groups, yet made claims about the effectiveness of CF (Truscott, 1996, Guenette, 2007).

(2) Focused vs. Unfocused Feedback

Despite the rigorous methodologies of the studies proving evidence of language learning potential of corrective feedback, most of the studies have only focused on a few L2 features. Because the effect of corrective feedback is closely related to the current state of learners’ interlanguage and, practically, teachers cannot accommodate each individual learners’ interlanguage, pedagogically more significant distinction concerns whether teachers should give focused or unfocused feedback (Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008). When CF treats a range of errors in written text, it is considered as unfocused feedback, while error correction on one or a limited number of features can be regarded as focused feedback. It makes sense to believe that focused CF brings more productive results than unfocused CF because the former is more likely to draw learners’ direct attention to and provide clearer understanding of the target language form, which is being measured as evidence of learning.
### Table 1. Studies on Effectiveness of Corrective Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Type of CF</th>
<th>Language Features</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sachs and Polio (2007)</td>
<td>(1) Error correction (DCF)</td>
<td>unfocused</td>
<td>Both CF group outperformed the control group. / DCF produced more accurate text than ICF.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(2) Reformulation (ICF)</td>
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<td>(3) Control group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sheen (2007)</td>
<td>(1) Error correction only (DCF)</td>
<td>English articles</td>
<td>Both DCF groups outperformed control group. / ME group outperformed correction only group.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(2) Error correction and written ME (DCF)</td>
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<td>(3) Control group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bitchener (2008)</td>
<td>(1) Error correction with oral and written ME (DCF)</td>
<td>English articles</td>
<td>All DCF groups outperformed the control group. / DCF groups retained the improved accuracy in the delayed test.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(2) Error correction with written ME (DCF)</td>
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<td>(4) Control group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bitchener and Knoch (2008)</td>
<td>(1) Error correction with oral and written ME (DCF)</td>
<td>English articles</td>
<td>All three DCF groups outperformed the control group. / DCF group retained the level of accuracy.</td>
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<td>(2) Error correction with written ME (DCF)</td>
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<td>(4) Control group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Van Beuningan, de Jong, and Kuiken (2008)</td>
<td>(1) DCF (direct)</td>
<td>Unfocused comprehensive feedback</td>
<td>Only Group 1 and group 2 showed significantly accurate revision of their texts. / Long-term effect of feedback on new texts was only found in DCF group.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(2) ICF (indirect)</td>
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<td>(3) Control 1 (practicing writing)</td>
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<td>(4) Control 2 (no feedback)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bitchener and Knoch (2009)</td>
<td>(1) DCF + written ME + oral ME</td>
<td>English articles</td>
<td>All the treatment groups outperformed the control group on posttests and there was no difference in effectiveness among the types of CF.</td>
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<td>(2) DCF + written ME</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bitchen er and Knoch</td>
<td>(1) Written ME (DCF)</td>
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<td>All three treatment groups showed more accuracy in the immediate posttest. /</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(3) Written Me and oral instruction (DCF)</td>
<td>English articles</td>
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<td>(4) Control group</td>
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To see whether there is a difference in the effectiveness of focused and unfocused feedback, Ellis et al. (2008) examined three groups of Japanese EFL students. The first group received focused CF on use of English articles and the second group received unfocused CF while the third group was the control group which received no feedback. The analysis of revealed that all three groups showed some short–term improvement on posttest 1. While the both experimental groups produced significantly more accurate texts in the delayed posttest, which was conducted four weeks after the posttest 1, the accuracy of the control group declined. No significant differences were found between focused and unfocused CF groups’ writing. It was also found that the both forms of CF were effective with focused CF being slightly more effective in the long run.

More recent studies investigated whether direct focused CF, in relation with effect of writing practice, has a different effects from direct unfocused CF. Sheen, Wright, and Moldawa (2009) compared the effects of focused and unfocused CF on the accurate use of grammatical forms found both focused CF group and unfocused CF group improved grammatical accuracy. The focused CF group showed higher gain on accurate use of English articles than unfocused group, suggesting that unfocused CF itself had limited effect, compared to focused CF and even to practice alone.

(3) Feedback for Acquisition

A more fundamental question regarding the effect of feedback on language learning might be how form–focused feedback results in language acquisition. Is outcome from processing corrective feedback an indication of ‘acquisition’ or ‘learning’? To answer this question, a clearer definition of learning and
acquisition is required. Bitchener (2012) uses ‘learning’, interchangeably with ‘development’ to refer to “the process involved in the acquisition of L2 forms or structures” while acquisition is “the ultimate goal of the learning (p. 349),”

If we accept this definition, the key question in relation to the role of corrective feedback in facilitating language acquisition is whether a learner can produce accurate texts after feedback and how consistently the level of accuracy can be retained. Although many studies reviewed earlier focused on a few language features and their accurate use in posttests, the findings gained particularly from the delayed posttests might provide clear evidence of uptake through processing corrective feedback and learners’ engagement in improving their language use, aroused from noticing the gaps between their erroneous output and target-like output (Bitchener, 2012).

Table 2 below summarizes the studies that provide evidence that CF can help improvement of accurate use of second language. Our special attention should be paid to the longitudinal study of Bitchener and Knoch (2009) who investigated the effect of direct corrective feedback and found positive effects in learners’ new piece of writing produced over ten-month period. In an SLA perspective, long-term increase in accuracy can be viewed as evidence of acquisition (Polio, 2012).

Although it is inconclusive whether certain types of corrective feedback have more beneficial effect over other types, empirical studies listed above provide clear evidence of language learning potential of written corrective feedback, at least on some grammatical features are concerned (i.e. English articles).

It is premature to conclude whether corrective feedback is helpful or harmful for language development. However, as Williams (2012) suggested, the possibility of explicit knowledge becoming implicit knowledge can increase the language learning potential of L2 writing. Since evidence in support of the effectiveness of corrective feedback exists, future studies should examine CF in more various context, with different language features, and through different types of tasks. Although there have been many corrective feedback studies, many of the results seem to be contradictory because of their different methodologies. Polio (2012) highlighted how the definitions and the
views of some key issues in L2 writing can vary according to the differences of approach in language development.

In the meantime, teachers should not stop providing corrective feedback and must be aware of the fact that feedback is only one of the many factors that affect slow and gradual process of language acquisition (Guenette, 2007). In order to examine the effect of feedback and the role of writing in language development, researchers and educators in L2 writing should also examine factors that have not been considered sufficiently in previous research, including learner differences in engaging with the feedback process, language proficiency, attitude, and perception.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Immediate posttest</th>
<th>Delayed posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheen (2007)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Both treatment groups showed more accuracy than the control group.</td>
<td>(three to four weeks later) The direct ME group performed better than the direct-only correction group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bitchener (2008)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>The students who received all type of written corrective feedback outperformed the control group.</td>
<td>(two months later) The improved accuracy in DCF groups was retained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bitchener and Knoch (2008)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>All three groups of direct CF treatment showed significant improvement between the pretest and the posttest, while the control group did not.</td>
<td>(seven weeks later) The three direct CF group also retained the level of accuracy they showed in the immediate posttest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Beuningen (2008)</td>
<td>Yes (two control group)</td>
<td>Both DCF and ICF had effect on learners’ accurate revision of texts. No control groups</td>
<td>(three weeks later) Only DCF, not ICF nor control, group showed positive effect of CF on accuracy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>Immediate posttest</td>
<td>Delayed posttest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bitchener &amp; Knoch (2009)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>All WCF groups outperformed the control group.</td>
<td>(ten month later) All CF groups outperformed the control group in all three delayed posttest no difference in effectiveness was found between the three treatment groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bitchener &amp; Knoch (2010)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Both direct and indirect feedback can help learners to improve linguistic accuracy.</td>
<td>(ten weeks later) Only DCF groups (ME) retained the improved level of accuracy, but ICF (error-circling) group.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### III. CONCLUSION

Numerous studies in L2 writing have confirmed facilitative roles of writing in enhancing second language acquisition mainly because L2 writing provides opportunities for hypothesis testing through output, reflection on the use of target language during involving collaborative writing and processing written corrective feedback. It is also confirmed that writing helps learners to be more aware of certain target forms, and, more importantly, to use the target language they learn in communicative ways.

It is true that there have been concerns and controversies over the language learning potential of L2 writing, requiring careful considerations of the insights and findings of recent L2 writing research. Even if the facilitative role of reflecting language during writing is conclusive, the time and energy spent in reflecting language forms and rules during collaborative writing may give learners a wrong impression that forms or rules, rather than meaning and uses, are the goal of language learning (Thornburry, 1999).

With regard to the effect of corrective feedback, learners may test multiple hypotheses through writing and this testing function of writing may vary according to leaners’ current linguistic, psychological, and affective readiness. Even through a specific form of corrective feedback may be proved to be more effective than another form through many empirical studies, it is hard to conclude that one type of feedback is superior to others with certain
groups, or individuals, of learners.

The major evidence that L2 writing teachers and researchers are looking for is not to decide one type of feedback over other types. More research in which various writing tasks and ways of providing feedback are investigated will offer better options for L2 writing teachers so that they can help learners’ language development. For this reason, there are many research issues that should be addressed in wider variety of learning contexts. One of the issue might be the consideration of learners’ individual difference. Learners’ individual difference is increasingly becoming an important consideration in research but considering it in actual classroom environment can require heavy demands on teachers. Therefore, in the studies focusing on individual variables, practical implication on classroom contexts should be always taken into account.

I have highlighted some key research trends in L2 writing from the perspective of writing-to-learn a language. Because the purpose of this paper was to synthesize the findings from recent L2 writing research, focusing on language learning potential of writing, one critical factor that affects classroom practices significantly has not been addressed: language assessment. Issues related to language assessment in writing-to-learn a language dimension deserve more research. Especially, in EFL writing where L2 learning has been highly exam-oriented and assessment of writing has been viewed as a judgment rather than a diagnose to improve learning (Lee & Coniam, 2013), failure to consider assessment of L2 writing might yield limited and impractical contribution to writing teachers. The very concept of Assessment For Learning (AFL), with comparison of Assessment Of Learning (AOL) in L2 writing, can draw more interest from researchers who expect to confirm the language learning potential of writing that can suggest practical implications for FL teachers and learners.

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Examples in: English

Applicable Languages: English

Applicable Levels: Secondary

Key words: L2 writing, Writing-to-Learn a language, collaborative writing, corrective feedback

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