The Effect of Timing Differences in Online Corrective Feedback on Adult Verbal English Learners' Learning Engagement: A Micro-genetic Study

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Abstract: This study examines the impact of different timing direct corrective feedback strategies utilized by instructors in online verbal English class on the learning engagement of EFL adult learners. The study randomly divided 8 participants with the same English proficiency into two groups, one receiving immediate direct corrective feedback and the other receiving delayed direct corrective feedback. Applying a micro-genetic method, the study observed the online learning of the 8 participants and implemented two types of direct corrective feedback through online learning. The study found that both feedback methods could improve learners' learning engagement, but immediate direct corrective feedback had a more positive effect on learners' learning engagement, and could improve it in a shorter amount of time. Additionally, learners' learning engagement showed dynamic changes during the learning process due to other influencing factors.

Keywords: Micro-genetic method, immediate corrective feedback, delayed corrective feedback, learning engagement, online learning

1. Introduction

With the rise of globalization and international communication, more and more adults are learning English as a foreign language (EFL). EFL adult learners worldwide, particularly in the area of speaking, face various challenges. These challenges include difficulties in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and cultural differences from their native language. Among this group of learners, feedback teaching strategies, including immediate and delayed corrective feedback, are widely used by teachers, and their effectiveness has been extensively studied. However, different scholars have reached varying conclusions regarding the impact of these two feedback strategies on students' learning. Some scholars believe that immediate corrective feedback is more helpful for learners' English language learning (Sakiroglu, 2020), while others argue that delayed corrective feedback is more effective (Nassaji & Kartchava, 2017). Similarly, some scholars have conflicting conclusions about the impact of different timing of corrective feedback strategies on learners' emotional states (Estaji & Farahanynia, 2019; Sarifah, 2019; Shabani & Safari, 2016a). These divergent research findings may stem from individual differences and the diversity of influencing factors, which further illustrates the complexity of the factors influencing learners' acceptance of feedback methods. In previous relevant research, the predominant traditional approach often centered on pretest-posttest methodologies, typically involving measurements before and after interventions. However, this approach didn't capture the changes in students' involvement during the learning process. Learning engagement is a complex process, and a new research method is needed to understand it better. The micro-

genetic method could be the solution to this gap in research. It's considered a good approach because it allows researchers to closely observe and analyze individual behaviors over time. It can help researchers gain a deeper understanding of the behavior and thought processes of EFL adult learners and provide more targeted learning support for them (Siegler & Crowley, 1991). On the other hand, learner engagement includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). It can help observe changes in learner engagement under different feedback strategies, which can comprehensively understand the effectiveness of learners' learning, providing more guidance for teachers' use of teaching strategies. The fact that there hasn't been much research using the micro-genetic method to study how different feedback approaches affect learners' engagement highlights a gap in our knowledge. Clearly, studying the impact of various corrective feedback methods on how engaged learners are using the micro-genetic approach is very important and valuable for research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Impact of Types of Direct Corrective Feedback on EFL Learners

Direct corrective feedback refers to the teacher directly pointing out learners' errors and providing correct expressions. It can help learners correct pronunciation and grammatical errors and improve their verbal expression ability (Harmer, 2007). In addition, there are two main types of direct corrective feedback. The first is focused corrective feedback, which usually only corrects learners' errors in specific language targets or language skills to avoid overloading learners with too much information and unnecessary interference (Mackey & Goo, 2007; Nassaji & Swain, 2000; Sheen, 2007). The second is comprehensive corrective feedback, which refers to correcting students' language errors so that they can discover and correct errors on their own, thereby promoting their autonomous learning and language proficiency (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Ellis, 2009; Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Studies have shown that comprehensive corrective feedback has a positive effect on the learning performance of L2 learners (Cahyono, 2016; Van Beuningen et al., 2012) and can also significantly improve their learning interest and motivation, while focused corrective feedback has no significant effect (Falhasiri, 2021; Hartshorn & Evans, 2015). Therefore, this study will use direct comprehensive corrective feedback as the main feedback teaching strategy to observe the changes in learning engagement of EFL verbal English adult learners.

2.2 The Effects of Direct Corrective Feedback at Different Time Intervals on EFL Learners

The direct corrective feedback teaching strategy can be divided into two temporal dimensions: immediate direct corrective feedback and delayed direct corrective feedback. Immediate direct corrective feedback refers to correction given immediately after the learner produces an error, while the learner is still in the process of expressing themselves. Delayed direct corrective feedback, on the other hand, refers to correction given after the learner has completed the sentence or paragraph (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Some studies have found that immediate direct corrective feedback can improve L2 learners' learning performance (Li et al., 2016; Tesnim, 2019). However, other studies have found that delayed corrective feedback can be more effective in improving L2 learners' fluency and accuracy of oral production (Hunter, 2012; Rahimi & Dastjerdi, 2012).

In addition to learning outcomes, the effects of direct corrective feedback at different time intervals also have different impacts on learners' emotional and affective states. Some scholars have found that learners receiving delayed feedback experience more negative emotions during the learning process, such as anxiety, frustration, and embarrassment (Quinn, 2014). However, other researchers have found that delayed feedback can help learners regulate emotions, improve learning outcomes, and have a positive impact on their

self-worth and self-esteem (Estaji & Farahanynia, 2019). On the other hand, some studies have shown that immediate corrective feedback can help learners correct errors faster, and improve their affective state during the learning process, such as confidence and optimism (Yakisik, 2021). Interestingly, some scholars have drawn opposite conclusions. Immediate feedback may have negative effects on L2 learners' confidence and produce negative emotion although it can help L2 learners improve their language proficiency (Shabani & Safari, 2016).

In summary, the effects of immediate and delayed corrective feedback on learners' emotions and affective states are complex and depend on various factors, such as individual learners, different subject areas, and learning environments.

2.3 The Application of Micro-genetic Method in Studying Learning Engagement

Micro-genetic method is a real-time analysis method for studying learning, which decomposes the learning process into small time units and analyzes the interaction between learners and the learning environment during these units. This method allows researchers to identify patterns and micro-changes in learner behavior, understand the basic mechanisms of learning, and study real-time dynamic processes in the learning process (Siegler & Crowley, 1991). Learning engagement refers to the degree to which learners actively participate in the learning process, including behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). In recent years, micro-genetic methodology has been increasingly used to study the learning engagement of linguistic learners. Kaivanpanah and Miri (2018) used micro-genetic methodology to study changes in task-induced involvement of 24 Iranian EFL learners over an 18-month observation and recording period. The study found that cognitive engagement was influenced by multiple factors, such as task type, evaluation and teacher instructional style. In addition, emotional engagement predicted learners' learning engagement. Jiang(2019) explored the changes in learning engagement and influencing factors of 12 EFL learners over a 10-week task interaction period using micro-genetic methodology. The results showed that learners' learning engagement fluctuated multiple times during the task process and was influenced by task type, language input and output, and other factors. Furthermore, learners generated many questions during the learning process, which promoted their learning engagement.

Therefore, learners are influenced by various factors during the learning process, leading to dynamic changes in learning engagement. Observing the trajectory of changes in learners' engagement during the learning process can provide a comprehensive understanding of their learning situation, thereby facilitating the search for more effective teaching strategies.

3. Research Question

Based on the current research, most studies examining the effects of different timing for corrective feedback have primarily focused on the writing skills of EFL learners, while neglecting the exploration of oral proficiency development. Moreover, the application of micro-genetic methods to investigate changes in learner engagement among EFL learners remains largely unexplored. Therefore, this paper aims to use the micro-genetic method to observe changes in EFL adult learners' engagement in online learning environments and analyze differences in their engagement trajectories after receiving direct corrective feedback at different timing. The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic impact of these two types of feedback on learning engagement among adult EFL learners, and to compare the differences between them, so that more effective feedback approaches can be identified for instructional practices. To achieve this research objective, the following research questions are proposed:
1. Are there differences in the impact on EFL adult learners' learning engagement between immediate direct corrective feedback and delayed direct corrective feedback teaching strategies?

2. In the teaching strategies of immediate direct corrective feedback and delayed direct corrective feedback, what are the specific trajectories of the impact on EFL adult learners' individual learning engagement?

4. Research Design

4.1 Participants

This study recruited eight participants whose English proficiency level was at the international A2 elementary level, as defined by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2001). All participants had graduated from university several years ago and were engaged in different professions but had a personal need to improve their verbal English skills. Among the participants, there were two male and six female participants, ranging in age from 25 to 45 years old. The participants were randomly assigned to two experimental groups: one group received immediate direct corrective feedback instruction, and the other group received delayed direct corrective feedback instruction.

4.2 Instruments

4.2.1 Learning Engagement Scale

The Online Student Engagement Scale (OSE) (Cronbach's alpha = .95, p<.01) (Dixson, 2015) will be used in this study to measure students' learning engagement. This scale consists of four dimensions: skill engagement, emotion engagement, participation engagement, and performance engagement. Skill engagement refers to students' cognitive engagement in the learning process. Emotion engagement relates to students' emotional experiences and attitudes towards learning. Participation engagement pertains to the extent of students' involvement in online courses and tasks. Performance engagement reflects students' performance and grades in learning tasks. The scale comprises 19 questions and uses a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." As the experimental instruction in this study is one-on-one, the questions related to peer interaction in the participation dimension were modified to focus on interaction with the teacher.

4.2.2 Verbal English Task

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) speaking exam is a comprehensive test that assesses test-takers' verbal proficiency. Studies have shown that IELTS speaking scores demonstrate high validity in predicting English language ability and actual performance (Li & Zhang, 2018). This study employed the first section of the Cambridge IELTS Speaking test for one-on-one online oral instruction. Each session lasted for 30 minutes, encompassing three distinct topics. Each topic consisted of four questions, with the primary instructional emphasis on grammar structures and oral expressions pertinent to the IELTS Speaking test.

4.2.3 Procedure

In this study, 8 participants were randomly divided into two groups: the immediate direct corrective feedback group and the delayed direct corrective feedback group. Four participants were assigned to each group. The study consisted of four one-on-one online oral English training sessions, which were conducted via Tencent Meeting. Prior to the experimental training, all participants received training in English sentence structure and related experimental instructions for the first part of the IELTS speaking test. During the experimental training, the examiner asked the participants English questions and they responded verbally. For the immediate direct corrective feedback group, the examiner immediately interrupted and corrected the participants when they made expression errors,

and then required them to repeat the corrected sentence before continuing with their response until the end of the question. For the delayed direct corrective feedback group, the examiner noted down the errors made by the participants during the oral response process and provided comprehensive corrective feedback after the completion of the entire topic. In addition, the examiner asked the participants to re-answer the questions. Written homework assigned by the teacher was completed before the start of the next class. At the end of each session, the participants completed a survey on their learning engagement and recorded a video of their responses to specific questions. The experimental training consisted of one session per week for four weeks.

4.3 Data Analysis

The online verbal English task in this study was conducted through Tencent Meeting software, allowing video recording. Participants' learning engagement scores were collected through questionnaire responses, and further data collection on the reasons for changes in learning engagement was carried out using observational methods and self-reporting by the participants. Subsequently, the micro-genetic method was applied to encode and categorize the overall changes in learning engagement of the participants over time, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of trends in engagement growth and decline. This method enabled an in-depth investigation into the impact of direct corrective feedback teaching strategies on participants' learning engagement performance at different time intervals. The data analysis in this study was mainly conducted using the Excel 2021 version and the SPSS 27.0 version software. The learning engagement scores of the participants in the two experimental groups are presented and analyzed as below.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Learning Engagement Scores by Feedback Type*

Feedback Type	M	MD
Immediate Direct Correct	73.5	8.12
Delayed Direct Correct	70.25	6.23

Based on the average scores presented in Table 1, the immediate direct corrective feedback group had higher scores in learning engagement, while the delayed direct corrective feedback group had lower scores. Preliminary analysis suggests that immediate direct corrective feedback may have a more positive impact on participants' learning engagement than delayed direct corrective feedback. Additionally, there were differences in the standard deviation and standard error between the two groups, indicating that the learning engagement scores in the immediate direct corrective feedback group were more stable, while those in the delayed direct corrective feedback group were more variable. Further analysis using the micro-genetic approach will be conducted to validate these findings.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Comparison of Mean Score Changes in Learning Engagement for Two Direct Corrective Feedback Methods

As shown in Figure 1, the micro-analysis method was used to compare the average scores of learning engagement between the immediate and delayed direct corrective feedback groups in each class. The immediate direct corrective feedback group (3.25, 2.33, 2.67, 2.75) had slightly higher score changes throughout the process than the delayed direct corrective feedback group (1.25, -0.25, 4, 3), and the change trend was relatively stable. However, the score changes in the delayed direct corrective feedback group fluctuated in the first two classes, but increased significantly in the third and fourth classes, with average score changes higher than the immediate direct corrective feedback group throughout the

process. This indicates that the learning engagement of the immediate direct corrective feedback group is more stable than that of the delayed direct corrective feedback group in the learning process, while the delayed direct corrective feedback group's learning engagement improves significantly in the later stages of learning.

It can be seen that the immediate and delayed direct corrective feedback groups showed completely different trends in the average score changes of learning engagement in each class. The learning engagement of the immediate direct corrective feedback group steadily increased as the course progressed, while that of the delayed direct corrective feedback group fluctuated and was unstable. These data results may be related to the characteristics of the feedback modes of the immediate and delayed corrective feedback groups. The immediate direct corrective feedback group corrected students' errors in a timely manner and provided corresponding suggestions, which may help students make more correct responses in subsequent learning. However, the delayed direct corrective feedback group may not make students perceive their errors in a timely manner, leading to longer-lasting responses to errors and adverse effects on learning engagement.
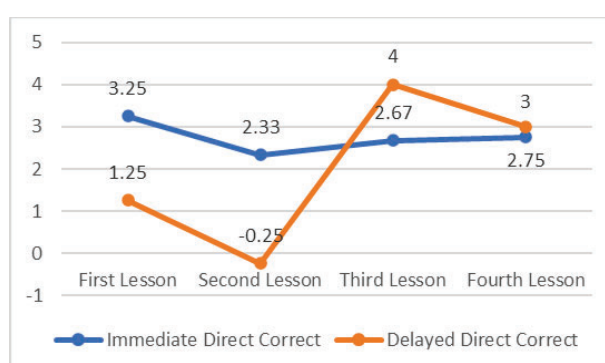

Figure 1. Average score changes in learning engagement between two different corrective feedback groups.

5.2 Comparison of Rate Changes in Learning Engagement for Two Direct Corrective Feedback Methods

As shown in Figure 2, a microscopic analysis of the change rate reveals that the immediate direct corrective feedback group exhibited a higher change rate in the first two sessions, particularly with a change rate of 0.14 between the first and second session, while the delayed direct corrective feedback group showed a more stable change rate throughout the process with minimal fluctuations.

From this, it can be inferred that the immediate direct corrective feedback group demonstrated a gradually increasing trend in learning engagement scores throughout the course, with a higher change rate in the first two sessions. In contrast, the delayed direct corrective feedback group also showed improvement in learning engagement throughout the course, but with a more stable change rate. These findings suggest that immediate direct corrective feedback is more effective in producing positive effects on students' learning engagement in a shorter amount of time, while delayed direct corrective feedback may require a longer learning process to achieve significant improvement.
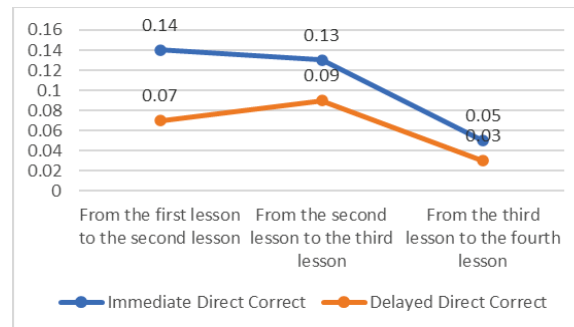
Figure 2 Rate of changes in learning engagement between two different corrective feedback groups.

5.3 Variations in Individual Learning Engagement for Two Direct Corrective Feedback Methods

5.3.1 Individual Learning Engagement Changes in Immediate Direct Corrective Feedback

As illustrated in Figure 3, it demonstrates a general trend of improvement in the learning engagement of the four research participants over the course of the four sessions. Specifically, the first participant exhibited a score increase from 83 to 88, with relatively consistent change patterns. In the interview, the participant reported that the immediate direct corrective feedback facilitated a more profound understanding of incorrect language points in their verbal expression, thereby enhancing their motivation to learn, as evidenced by the reduced frequency of errors and a sense of achievement. Participant 2 demonstrated significant changes in scores between the first and second sessions, but subsequently displayed relatively stable changes, ultimately achieving a score of 68. During the interview, this participant indicated that the experiment had a positive impact on their English verbal skills. However, due to the establishment of a new company, they lacked the energy to devote to English learning and experienced interruptions from work during class. Participant 3's score continued to rise steadily throughout the four sessions, increasing from 69 to 81. The participant reported that their work frequently involved the use of English and that the immediate direct corrective feedback helped them to deepen their understanding of language points, thus increasing their motivation to learn by reducing errors in verbal expression. Participant 4 demonstrated relatively stable score changes during the first three sessions but exhibited significant improvement during the fourth session, with a score increase from 77 to 84. During the interview, the participant stated that they initially felt pressure and lacked confidence when receiving instant direct corrective feedback, which resulted in hesitancy to express themselves. However, after adapting to this feedback method, their perspective changed, and they recognized it as an integral part of the learning process. They gained more confidence as they encountered and addressed challenges, ultimately becoming more willing to invest additional effort into learning.
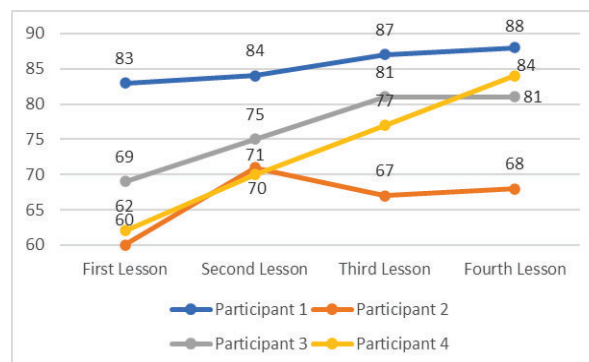

Figure 3 Individual changes in learning engagement for immediate direct corrective feedback group.

5.3.2 Individual Learning Engagement Changes in Delayed Direct Corrective Feedback

As shown in Figure 4, the learning engagement scores of the fifth participant decreased from 74 to 65 between the first and fourth lessons. During the interview, Participant 5 reported having to work on a project that required a report to be submitted at the end of the experiment, resulting in overtime work and interruptions during the lessons due to work-related phone calls. This left the participant with insufficient energy to focus on learning. The participant had enough time for English language learning in the early stages of the experiment and perceived an improvement in language proficiency. However, the participant recognized the need to dedicate more time to learning. Participant 6 showed an increase in learning engagement scores for the first three lessons and a decrease to 63 in the fourth lesson. During the interview, Participant 6 reported feeling that their English verbal proficiency had improved with delayed and immediate corrective feedback. However, during the final week, the participant was occupied with end-of-quarter preparations for annual summaries and meetings, leaving little energy for language learning. Participant 7 showed a slight decrease in learning engagement scores for the fourth lesson, with a change from 64 in the first lesson to 70 in the fourth lesson. The participant reported being less confident during the first lesson, which led to reluctance to speak, but as the course progressed, the participant gained more confidence and willingness to learn. However, the participant's workload increased during the final week, leading to a reduction in English language learning time. Participant 8 showed a continuous increase in learning engagement scores across all four lessons, with a change from 69 in the first lesson to 79 in the fourth lesson. During the first lesson, Participant 8 expressed doubts about the effectiveness of delayed and immediate corrective feedback and believed that learning English grammar systematically would be more meaningful. However, in the subsequent lessons, the participant found that their English verbal expression and language proficiency had gradually improved, resulting in greater learning motivation and willingness to dedicate more time to learning.
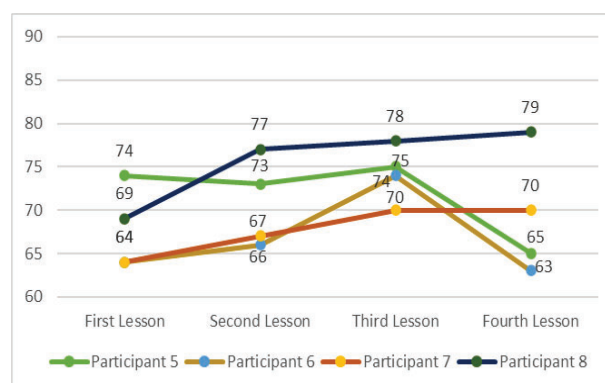

Figure 4 Individual changes in learning engagement for delayed direct corrective feedback group.

5.3.3 Comparison of Changes in Learning Engagement of Individuals for Two Corrective Feedback Methods

Overall, there was a positive trend in the learning engagement of all participants, indicating that both types of direct corrective feedback had a positive impact on their learning engagement. However, immediate direct corrective feedback had a more significant positive effect. Notably, the significant decrease in learning engagement in the final week observed in participants 5 and 6 was attributed to work-related factors, whereas the continuous increase in learning engagement in participants 1, 3, and 4, and 8 was influenced by their learning motivation and sense of achievement. These findings suggest that learners' learning engagement can be influenced by various factors, such as learning motivation, work, and cognitive awareness, etc., resulting in fluctuating changes in their learning

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engagement. However, given the limited sample size of this study, further research and validation are necessary to generalize these conclusions.

6. Conclusion

This study compared the effects of immediate corrective feedback and delayed corrective feedback on learners' learning engagement and found that both types of feedback significantly increased learning engagement. However, the immediate corrective feedback group had higher scores in learning engagement than the delayed corrective feedback group. The changes in learning engagement also differed between the two groups, with the immediate corrective feedback group showing more significant changes than the delayed corrective feedback group, which is consistent with previous research findings. Masià and Ramon's study (2013) found that immediate feedback can improve learning engagement and learning outcomes. Meanwhile, Winstone et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of timely feedback for student learning. The results of this study suggest that immediate corrective feedback can improve the average score of learning engagement and can change learning engagement in a relatively short period. However, delayed corrective feedback is also effective in improving learning engagement, especially for students who need more time to understand and digest information. Additionally, in the process of learners' learning, learning engagement can be influenced by other factors, especially for working EFL adult learners who are affected by work-related factors. Learners should reflect on their learning situation in a timely manner and plan for frequent learning in their free time to improve their learning engagement and learning outcomes. Teachers should also consider other influencing factors in the teaching process and provide timely feedback to students so that they can understand their learning situation and make corresponding adjustments.

  Future research can increase the sample size to further verify the generalizability of the conclusions. Additionally, it is possible to further explore the micro-level effects of different types of feedback on various sub-dimensions of learners' learning engagement. On the other hand, it is also possible to investigate how different types of feedback affect learners' learning engagement in different scenarios, such as small or large classes. Furthermore, it is possible to further investigate the effects of different types of feedback on the learning outcomes and learning engagement of learners with different personalities. These studies will help to better understand the role of feedback in student learning and provide better support for improving student learning outcomes.

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