# Students' Perceptions and Preferences about Teachers' Written Corrective Feedback at Secondary Level

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## Abstract

This research was aimed to study students' perceptions of written corrective feedback (WCF) and their preferences about WCF at secondary level. Descriptive research design of quantitative approach was used. 1000 (500 boys and 500 girls) students of grade IX were participated in the study and selected from 60 schools (30 public and 30 private) by using two stage cluster stratified random sampling technique. A self-developed questionnaire was used to collect data. The validity of the questionnaire was checked by taking opinion of three experts and the reliability of the instrument was Cronbach's Alpha=0.763. Data was analyzed by using mean, standard deviation and independent samples t-test. The results of students' perceptions showed that students find their teachers' WCF helpful in noticing their errors in writing and help them to improve their performance in English. Moreover, majority of students prefer that their teachers should give a clue about errors and do not correct them. It is suggested that teachers may keep students' views and preferences in mind while giving WCF to students on their writing to make it useful for them.

**Keywords:** Feedback, Written Corrective Feedback, Secondary Level

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## Introduction

The role of WCF in English writing has been a topic of interest over the past many decades. Feedback plays a significant role in student learning and its implementation is constructive for the improvement of students' writing (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Saragih, Madya, Siregar, & Saragih, 2021; Shute, 2008; Srichanyachon, 2012; Taylor, Mather, & Rowe, 2011; Trabelsi, 2019). Corrective feedback (CF) strives to give information to the learner about the learner's performance and aims to increase learning through error correction (Shirota, 2016). The comments which purposely address the use of English language are known as written corrective feedback (WCF), and are frequently used by English as foreign language (EFL) teachers (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). It is also the most widely used feedback form given to students on their written work (Park, Song, & Shin, 2015). Teachers guide their students in writing by correcting their errors and giving comments on errors. Many research studies have revealed a positive role of feedback on students' writing (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Chandler, 2003; Ene & Kosobucki, 2016; Hashemnezhad & Mohammadnejad, 2012; Shirota, 2016; Sritrakarn, 2018).

Provision of WCF is an approach generally utilized by language instructors to facilitate students to improve their writing (Alshahrani & Storch, 2014; Jui-Jung, Wen-Ta, & Chaochang, 2017). Lizzio and Wilson (2008) advocate that WCF plays a fundamental function in supporting students to minimize their errors. WCF is a significant area of teachers' work and researches sho that students value their teachers' WCF and find it helpful to improve the process of writing (Chen, Nassaji, & Liu, 2016; Karim & Nassaji 2015; Nakamura, 2016; Raza, 2019; Sritrakarn, 2018). Research constantly shows that learners give importance to teachers' WCF and find it most useful among other types (e.g. oral and electronic conferencing) feedback (Ekholm, Zumbrunn, & Conklin, 2015; Yang, Badger, & Yu, 2006; Zumbrunn, Marrs, & Mewborn, 2016).

However, there is no universal agreement on the relevance of corrective feedback to student learning for the reason that although feedback is considered vital, it is also believed that students show disengagement from teachers' WCF (Robinson, Pope, & Holyoak, 2013). Some students do not value corrective feedback if they do not like the comments given by their teachers and the marks they get as a result of that (Marrs, 2016; Weaver, 2006). Teachers complain that students give superficial attention to even a fastidiously composed corrective feedback (Carless, 2007; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004). Teachers grumble that they spend a lot of time for correcting errors in students' drafts but it appears wastage of time and energies (Crisp, 2007). The views regarding lack of concern of students towards WCF are intriguing. Research shows differing views of learners and teachers about WCF in terms of its function in improving students' writing.

Here is another issue of difference between teachers' purpose of giving WCF and learners' views about that (Robinson et al., 2013). A lot of students are not even able to understand their teachers' WCF and act accordingly (Chanock, 2000; Ganapathy, Tan, & Phan, 2020; Orsmond, Merry, & Reiling, 2005). They do not understand the comments and cannot interpret them properly. Students' ability to understand teachers' WCF to improve their learning in English is another area which needs attention (Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2010).

Student perception is an important factor which actually influences the function of WCF in their learning. To make WCF useful for the students, the teachers must be aware of their students' perceptions and preferences for the following reasons: firstly, a disconnect between students' understanding of different teaching strategies and teachers' expectations from their students can lead to an impairment in learning process (Amrhein & Nassaji 2010). Conversely, students' approving views evidenced by already conducted research studies for WCF help the teachers to choose the best practices of instruction. This situation can offer a stronger supportive confirmation of the role of WCF in a continuing academic debate of the effectiveness of WCF (Ferris 2012; Saragih et al., 2021; Schulz, 2001; Srichanyachon, 2012; Taylor et al., 2011; Trabelsi, 2019).

Although the results of previous researches have revealed that students hold positive views about WCF, but these researches have also explored students' differing viewpoints regarding various methods of giving WCF and having their own preferences. Students might have different perception about the effectiveness of WCF (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Faqeih, 2015). Some research studies (Aseeri, 2019; Chandler, 2003; Ellis, Leowen, & Erlam, 2006; Ganapathy et al., 2020; Lee, 2004; Li, 2013; Liu, 2008; Nassaji & Swain, 2000; Saeli, 2019) have established that students' preference is direct WCF in which teacher provides correct form on student errors. Whereas, other research studies (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Chandler, 2003; Eslami, 2014; Ferris, 2003; Hosseiny, 2014; Iswandari, 2016Trabelsi, 2019) have suggested that student prefer receiving indirect WCF in which errors are indicated by giving clues instead of correcting them.

Despite recognizing the role of feedback as a vital component of learning process, this area has not been extensively addressed in educational research. Mutch (2003) demands more research into students' views and responses to teacher feedback. There is a paradigm shift also in last decade towards fully student-centered approach of education which is not possible until the understanding of the views and responses of students.

Although there is an increase in the area of research regarding student perception and preferences for WCF, but still there are many areas relating to this topic which are unknown.

One major area is whether students in ESL and EFL contexts have different perceptions and preferences about WCF. Role of contextual factors have been an area of interest in research on other types of feedback like oral feedback, but they are mostly ignored by the researchers working on WCF (Goldstein, 2001). Particularly, previously conducted studies on students' perceptions and preferences were largely conducted in ESL learning context in English speaking countries. An obviously missed and neglected area is EFL learning context in developing countries like Pakistan because its culture as well as classroom dynamics differ considerably from the learning context of English speaking countries.

As far as the literature abroad and at home indicates, only a few scholars in Pakistan have so far targeted WCF from the perspective of students. But there is deficiency of research about students' perspective regarding the usefulness of WCF based on gender and sector (public and private schools which are two different systems of education in Pakistan). In order to fill the research gap on students' perceptions of WCF in Pakistan and an EFL context, the current study is going to examine students' perspective about WCF. The aim of research was to explore students' perceptions about the usefulness of their teachers' WCF and their preferences for WCF.

**Research Objectives**

The study's objectives were to:

1. Examine students' perceptions of their teachers' WCF at secondary level in Lahore district.
2. Explore students' preferences about teachers' WCF at secondary level.
3. Identify the difference in students' perceptions and their preferences about teachers' WCF based on gender and sector.

**Research Questions**

Our research intends to respond to these questions:

1. What are the perceptions of students about their teachers' WCF in secondary schools of Lahore district?
2. What are the preferences of students' for their teachers' WCF in secondary schools?
3.1 What is the difference in students' perceptions regarding their teachers' WCF based on gender and sector?
3.2 What is the difference in students' preferences about teachers' WCF based on gender and sector?

## Research Methodology

Present study was based on positivism (i.e. quantitative) in nature. The study aimed to explore students' perceptions and their preferences for their teachers' WCF at secondary level. Therefore, cross-sectional survey method was used.

## Participants of the Study

There are 155 boys and 179 girls (in total 334) public secondary (i.e. high) schools and 1175 private high schools in District Lahore (Government of The Punjab, 2018). There are 46338 students of grade IX enrolled in public schools whereas, 67080 students of grade IX are in private schools. Two stage cluster random sampling technique was used to select the sample of the study. At stage one, non-proportionate stratified cluster random sampling technique was used to select 60 schools (30 public and 30 private) from Lahore city. The number of IX grade students enrolled in these schools was 15363 that was accessible population of the study. From each selected school, average 20 students were selected randomly at stage two. In total, 1200 students (600 boys and 600 girls) were comprised of the sample of the study. However, 1000 students participated in the study.

## Research Instrumentation

To study students' perceptions and preferences for their teachers' WCF at secondary level, a self-developed questionnaire, with closed ended items based on five-point Likert scale was developed for data collection. The questionnaire comprised of 20 statements i.e. students' perceptions of WCF (16), students' preferences for WCF (4). Validity of the instrument was made sure from educational experts. For pilot study, students (150) were conveniently selected from the target population. In analysis of items reliability was determined through the reliability coefficient test. The value of Cronbach Alpha was 0.763.

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data was analyzed through mean, standard deviation, and independent samples t-test to summarize data and calculate the variations between students' perceptions and preferences about their teachers' WCF.

## Part 1: Descriptive Statistics

This part describes the analysis of statements about the perceptions and preferences of students for written corrective feedback (WCF) which was done by applying mean and standard deviation.

Table 1

*Students' Perceptions of Teachers' WCF*

| Statements | M | SD |
|---|---|---|
| WCF is helpful in improvement of my writing in English. | 4.83 | .557 |
| WCF is helpful in improving my performance. | 4.60 | .842 |
| WCF helps in my understanding of English grammar. | 4.34 | .966 |
| WCF helps to clarify my misconceptions about the use of verb tense. | 4.42 | .694 |
| WCF helps to reduce my errors in spellings. | 4.59 | .693 |
| WCF helps to reduce my errors in punctuation. | 4.49 | .605 |
| WCF helps to reduce my errors in capitalization. | 4.26 | .802 |
| WCF helps in noticing my errors in English writing. | 4.41 | .690 |
| WCF makes me more conscious of my errors in writing. | 4.74 | .549 |
| I understand what I have to do to improve my writing when I read my teacher's WCF. | 4.71 | .592 |
| WCF prepares me for higher levels of academic writing. | 2.76 | .867 |
| WCF has helped me to learn grammatical rules. | 4.35 | .987 |
| WCF has helped me to learn spelling. | 4.25 | .729 |
| WCF has helped me to learn punctuation. | 4.27 | .961 |
| WCF has helped me to learn capitalization. | 4.33 | .968 |
| WCF has helped me to improve my academic achievement in English. | 4.73 | .569 |

Table 1 gives a comprehensive view of the means and standard deviations for the statements about students' perceptions regarding their teachers' WCF at secondary level. The table describes that students find their teachers WCF helpful. As the mean score of the statement "Teacher's written corrective feedback (WCF) is helpful in improving my writing in English" is 4.83 which is highest among all other statements' mean. However, the mean value (2.76) of the statement "My teacher's WCF prepares me for higher levels of academic writing" is lowest among other statements' mean values. This shows that teachers' WCF is least contributor in students' academic writing for higher levels. Overall, the table highlights various perceptions of secondary school students like: WCF helps to improve performance; makes conscious about errors in English writing; and gives directions for improvement in writings etc.

Table 2

*Students' Preferences for Teachers' WCF*

| Statements | M | SD |
|---|---|---|
| I like when my teacher only gives a clue about errors and does not correct them. | 4.59 | .698 |
| I like my teacher to just encircle all my errors and give me a chance to correct my errors on my own. | 4.48 | .602 |
| I like when my teacher points out all my errors and provide correction. | 3.26 | .781 |
| I like my teacher points out (underlines/circles) errors, correct them and clearly describe them by using an error code. | 3.22 | .673 |

Table 2 discloses the preferences of students for WCF. The responses of students show that most preferred method of giving WCF is 'to give a clue about errors but not providing the correction' i.e. indirect method of giving WCF. As the statement "I like when my teacher only gives a clue about errors and does not correct them" has *M*=4.59, which shows the highest mean among all statements. On the other hand, students least preferred method of giving WCF is to point out (underlines/circles) errors, correct them and clearly describes them by using an error code as *M*=3.22 which is direct method of giving WCF.

**Part 2: Inferential Statistics**

This part gives the results of independent samples t-test (inferential statistics) for comparison between students' perceptions and preferences regarding WCF based on gender and sector.

Table 3
*Comparison between Students' Perceptions and Preferences about their Teachers' WCF based on Sector*

| WCF | Public (500) | | Private (500) | | *f* | *T* | *p* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | | | |
| Perceptions | 4.43 | 0.326 | 4.48 | 0.324 | 998 | 2.737 | 0.006 |
| Preferences | 4.34 | 0.597 | 4.43 | 0.561 | 998 | 2.413 | 0.016 |

Independent samples t-test was applied for comparison of public and private school students' perceptions and preferences of about teachers' WCF at secondary level. The result given in table 3 describes that there was a significant difference in public sector students' perception (*M*=4.43, *SD*=0.326) and private sector students' perception (*M*=4.48, *SD*=0.324) as $t(998) = 2.737$, *p*=0.006. Moreover, the table shows that students of private sector perceive that their teachers give more useful WCF in comparison to the students of public sector. Therefore, it can be inferred from the results that students enrolled in private schools perceive their teachers' WCF given to them is more useful for their writing as compare to the students of public schools.

Similarly, it is revealed from the table 3 that private sector students prefer teachers' WCF more as compare to public sector students as $t(998) = 2.413$, *p*=0.016. Correspondingly, the mean score of students' preferences in public sector (4.34) is less than the mean score of private sector students' preferences (4.43). Thus it can be inferred that students enrolled in private schools prefer WCF of their teachers more as they find it useful in comparison to the students of public schools.

Table 4
*Comparison between Students' Perceptions and Preferences about their Teachers' WCF based on Gender*

| WCF | Boys (500) | | Girls (500) | | *df* | *T* | *p* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | | | |
| Perceptions | 4.44 | 0.343 | 4.47 | 0.307 | 998 | -1.455 | 0.146 |
| Preferences | 4.36 | 0.591 | 4.40 | 0.570 | 998 | -1.020 | 0.308 |

It is revealed from the table 4 that there was insignificant difference between students' perceptions and preferences about their teachers' WCF based on gender. As the mean score of boy students' perception ($M$=4.44, $SD$=0.343) is same as mean score of girl students' perceptions ($M$=4.47, $SD$=0.307) with $t$ (998) = -1.455 and $p$=0.146. Similarly, the mean score of boy students' preferences ($M$=4.36, $SD$=0.591) is almost same for the mean score of girl students' preferences ($M$=4.40, $SD$=0.570) with $t$ (998) = -1.020 and $p$=0.308. Therefore, it can be inferred from the findings that both boy and girl students perceive that their teachers' WCF is useful for their writing. Similarly, both boy and girl students equally prefer teachers' WCF for the reason that it is useful for their writing.

## Discussion

This study examined the perceptions and preferences of secondary school students for written corrective feedback (WCF) in English. The findings revealed that students expressed favorable views by claiming that their teachers' WCF is very helpful in improving their writing. The previous studies (Ashwell, 2000; Chandler, 2003; Diab, 2005a, 2005b; Gamlem & Smith, 2013; Hamouda, 2011; Listiani, 2017; Montgomery & Baker, 2007; Nakamura, 2016; Raza, 2019; Seker & Dincer, 2014; Sritrakarn, 2018; Trabelsi, 2019) showed that the students found WCF useful to improve their writing. Moreover, they value teachers' WCF as it makes them more conscious about their errors in writing. The findings were also supported by the findings of previous researches (Brown, 2009; Karim & Nassaji, 2015). Similarly, the outcome shows that students had a view that WCF is useful for them in minimizing errors in their writing. This finding was aligned with the results of studies that found that WCF is useful to minimize students' errors in writing (Chen et al., 2016; Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Ekholm et al., 2015; Ferris, 1995; Hedgecock & Lefkowitz, 1996; Karim & Nassaji, 2015; Yang et al., 2006; Zumbrunn et al., 2016).

It is also revealed from the findings that students preferred indirect WCF over direct WCF. Students like when their teachers only give a clue about errors and do not correct them. They like when teachers give students a chance to make corrections of their errors on their own. This result is consistent with the finding of the studies conducted by Amrhein and Nassaji (2010); Bahrouni and Tuzlukova (2019); Chandler (2003); Eslami (2014); Ferris (2003); Hosseiny (2014); Iswandari (2016); Trabelsi (2019). They explored students' preferences and their results revealed that students prefer indirect WCF in which the error is highlighted or indicated by the teacher but correction is not provided. This result is also aligned with the findings of Hyland (2001) and Li and He (2017) which showed that students like their teachers to give them clues as compare to providing correct forms since this practice encourages students to become more active towards WCF. However, students' preference of indirect WCF over direct did not match with studies such as (Aseeri, 2019; Ellis et al., 2006; Nassaji & Swain, 2000; Saeli, 2019) which showed the opposite results.

## Conclusion

Written corrective feedback (WCF) is an essential and significant area of teachers' work. Students find their teachers' WCF useful to improve their writing and they value teachers' WCF (Chen et al., 2016; Hamouda, 2011; Karim & Nassaji, 2015; Lee, 2009; Nakamura, 2016; Raza, 2019; Sritrakarn, 2018). This study examined the students' views regarding the usefulness of their teachers' WCF in English. Additionally, the study also explored the preferences of students for WCF. The results concluded that students have a positive view on WCF as majority of students' value teachers' feedback and find it very useful for their composition skills. They understand teachers' WCF and put it in practice. The study also identified that students prefer indirect feedback over direct feedback. Moreover, students' perceptions about the usefulness of WCF and their preferences for WCF in public schools are different from private school students. The students of private schools perceive their teachers' WCF more useful in comparison with students of public schools. Likewise, their preferences for WCF also vary. Whereas, the study also concluded that boy students' and girl students' perceptions towards usefulness of WCF and their preferences about WCF are not different.

## Recommendations

Based on results several recommendations are drawn. Firstly, teachers should provide written corrective feedback (WCF) to students on their writing because they find it helpful for their writing skills. Secondly, teachers should keep students' preferences in mind while giving WCF to fulfill their learning needs and making it useful for them otherwise giving WCF is of no use for students. Thirdly, public school heads should develop a policy to check the usefulness of WCF provided by English teachers in public schools. In-service training of teachers may be arranged to train teachers and make them more aware of various methods of WCF and their usefulness to improve their classroom practices. Moreover, the present study was conducted on students' views about WCF at secondary level, so it is suggested for future researchers to conduct studies at elementary level. Furthermore, this study was based on students' views obtained through questionnaire, so future study with students' interviews may be conducted to explore the reasons of their perceptions and preferences for WCF.

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