

Exploring Learners' and Teachers' Preferences Regarding Written Corrective Feedback Types in Improving Learners' Writing Skill

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Abstract :

The current research is significant. It aims to improve learners' writing and facilitate their academic achievement. This study examines learners' and teachers' preferences to written corrective feedback types in enhancing EFL learners writing. The main research question is to investigate the likes of teaches and learners regarding written corrective feedback types in enhancing learners' writing skills. The learners' questionnaire and the teachers' questionnaire were the instruments. The respondents responded to the questionnaires. The submission of the research instruments took place on November 2021 at Zaida Ben Aissa middle school. The findings have shown that learners prefer their writing to be corrected via unfocused, direct feedback while teachers like to use indirect, focused feedback on their learners' writings.

Keywords: direct and indirect written feedback, EFL learners, focused and unfocused written feedback, preferences, writing skill

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Introduction:

According to Klimova (2013), writing is a crucial productive skill. Factors impact the student's piece of writing while, pushing them to make errors. One of these factors is preferences that affect students' writing. What constitutes well-written feedback to learners and how they prefer their writing to be corrected can impact how well they do in writing (Greenberg, 1988).

Researchers believe that written feedback is an instructional tool that plays a role in helping learners to improve their writing (Ferris, 2004). Bitchener and Knoch (2008, 2009) concluded that learners whose papers are provided with written feedback improve in their writing in comparison with those who had no feedback. However, the provision of written feedback is complicated. Aridah, Atmowardoyo, & Salija (2017) explained the complexity of written corrective feedback by saying that writing covers various aspects (organization, content, style, grammar, vocabulary and, mechanics). They further assumed that teachers' correction of all the elements of writing requires time and energy. Teachers provide comments and corrections on their learners' writing, but still, learners do not benefit from them. We notice a gap or a mismatch between the types of written feedback teachers provide and the types of written corrective feedback learners prefer in their writing (Calvalcanti, 1990).

Since students' preferences of feedback may influence the effectiveness of feedback (Shulz, 1996), it is necessary to identify students' choices on their writing. The study of Lithuania (2015) showed that although research tackled written feedback from different perspectives, learners' preferences of feedback are not investigated. Research on learners' and teachers' preferences was not conducted, mainly in the Algerian context. This research explores learners' and teachers' preferences regarding written corrective feedback types.

Aboubakr (2016) believes that focusing on learners' preferences towards written feedback can foster their writing. That is to say, investigating what learners prefer can raise teachers' awareness of their learning styles. It is crucial to examine how learners wish to be corrected. Teachers of English also have preferences to remedy learners' writing; some want to correct all errors while others leave errors uncorrected (Noora, 2008).

This research explores teachers' and learners' preferences regarding written feedback types. Few studies, mainly in the Algerian context, have neglected to examine the preferences of both teachers and learners regarding what type of registered corrective feedback that teachers use and learners expect. Little research has dealt teachers' and learners' preferences (Katayama, 2008).

Investigating first pupils' preferences can tell a lot about how learners prefer to learn writing. Some learners like to be corrected, while others prefer to self-correct their errors. Preferences can have an effect as it shows what teachers believe how feedback can be effective for learners, including teachers' and learners' voices in written feedback research to address their preferences (Balachandran, 2017). Ferris (2003) suggested that a mutual benefit can occur if there is an attempt to establish a correlation between teachers' and learners' preferences regarding written feedback. Wang (2010) said that teachers should how their learners think about their learning preferences. Also, Leki (1991) asserted that being aware of students' preferences

and learning styles can help teachers' decision-making. That is to say, teachers can select written feedback types that facilitate the learning. The objective of this research is to explore what kind of written feedback teachers and learners prefer.

We formulated two research questions:

1. What type (or types) of written corrective feedback do **teachers** *prefer* to correct learners' writing?
2. What type (or types) of written corrective feedback do **learners** *prefer* being corrected?

This research attempts to trigger teachers' awareness towards learners' preferences. Exploring learners' likes in learning is a preliminary step that can help and contribute to fruitful learning.

Literature Review:

Written Corrective Feedback Types in Writing

Investigating the efficacy of written corrective feedback in meliorating learners' writing has been a controversial topic in research. This has led to the rise of two opposing views towards error correction. Research showed that written feedback on students' writing is harmful, and teachers' written comments make learners stigmatized (Horowitz, 1986; Johns, 1995; James, 1998). Several studies were undertaken on the efficacy of written feedback on improving writing and changing the earlier views towards written feedback (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami & Takashima, 2008; Farrokhi & Sattapour, 2011; Hanakour & Izumi, 2012; Hyland, 2011; Shintani, Ellis & Suzuki, 2014; Van Beuningen, De Jong & Kuken, 2012). All these studies agreed that teacher correction has a positive effect on learners' writing. Ellis (2008) explained written corrective feedback types or dichotomies.

Direct Written Corrective Feedback

This type of feedback requires teachers to highlight the error and provide its correction. Teachers can correct through direct feedback by: crossing out unnecessary words, inserting a missing word, writing the correct format above or near the error. Immediate feedback has many advantages: it can help learners to reduce the number of mistakes in their writing, it provides explicit guidance to them on how to correct their mistakes, it also promotes the acquisition of specific grammatical features, it provides detailed, immediate information about the correct version, and enables learners to notice the gap between their current level and the proper format (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010).

Indirect Written Corrective Feedback

Indirect feedback indicates students' errors in their writing without giving the correction. Giving indirect feedback involves underlying or circling, or showing the omissions of the mistakes (Ferris et. al. 2010). Indirect feedback is beneficial in many ways: it leads to guided learning and problem-solving (Lalande, 1982), it contributes to reflection about the linguistic forms, it leads to life-long learning, and it engages learners in solving and correcting their mistakes. A study conducted by Ellis (2009) and Ferris (2004) indicated that students who received indirect feedback reflect on teachers' comments on their writing than those who received direct feedback.

Focused and Unfocused Written Corrective Feedback

Teachers can correct all learners' errors in writing, and that's called unfocused feedback. Teachers repair all types of errors found in learners' writing. For instance, teachers do not only

fix preposition errors or definite/indefinite article errors; they correct all errors. Unfocused feedback is difficult for teachers because it takes both time and energy. It is also challenging for learners because they cannot process all the fixed errors at once. Focused feedback, on the other hand, can be fruitful as learners may process and learn from teachers' selective corrections on specific errors, most fundamental errors. It is also practical because it enables learners to reflect on their writing (Ellis, 2008).

Meta-linguistic Written Corrective Feedback

It consists of providing learners with explicit comments. The comments may take the form of error codes or abbreviations under the error in the text or the margin. For example, article --- art/preposition ---prep / wrong word --- WW. Another form is the provision of meta-linguistic explanations of learners' mistakes in writing. That is explaining to learners the mistakes they have committed. Meta-linguistic feedback is time-consuming. It requires teachers to possess sufficient meta-linguistic knowledge to write clear, accurate explanations.

Studies on Learners' Preferences Regarding Written Corrective Feedback Types

Several studies explored learners' and teachers' preferences towards the different types of feedback. The studies have shown differing findings and discrepancies. Radecki and Swales (1988) concluded that learners expect their teachers' written feedback on all their errors. Similarly, Leki (1991) reported that they preferred their teachers to correct all their mistakes. Enginarlar's study (1993) also indicated that learners prefer unfocused feedback and want all their errors to be fixed. The survey of Hedgcock and Leftkowitz (1994) concluded that learners favored teachers' corrections and comments.

Schulz (1996) investigated teachers' and learners' beliefs to written corrective feedback. The findings indicated that learners preferred direct, explicit corrections on their errors in writing rather than any other type of feedback. Diab (2005) conducted a study investigating 156 EFL university learners' preferences on their teacher's written feedback. Findings showed that most students preferred the teacher to cross out the error and report its correction as "the best teacher feedback technique" (p. 38). Also, findings revealed that learners want all their mistakes to be corrected.

Some recent studies showed that learners prefer direct written corrective feedback on their writing. For instance, Chen, Nassaji and, Liu (2016) investigated what types of written feedback, learners favor. The results showed that learners favored direct corrections on their writing. The study of Zhang, Chen, Hu, and Ketwan (2021) indicated that learners want to be correct through direct feedback.

Some discrepancies appeared in terms of findings. Lee (2008) showed that learners favored direct feedback whereas Ferris (2003) revealed that learners preferred indirect feedback, on their writing. Bitchener (2012) explained that factors could intervene in the way learners prefer their errors to be corrected. One of these factors is the proficiency level of the learners. Direct feedback is suitable for learners with lower proficiency levels and with limited linguistic knowledge because it is more effective for their writing. Sheen (2007) agreed that proficiency

level could be an indicator of learners' preferences towards teachers' feedback in the sense that he believes that indirect feedback is more suitable for learners with better analytic ability.

Methods:

This study investigates pupils' and teachers' preferences regarding written corrective feedback types.

Participants: Teachers and Learners

The participants were middle school learners. They have been learning English as a foreign language since their first year at middle school and teachers of English at middle school in Zaida Ben Aissa Middle School, Hadjout, Tipaza in November 2021. Teachers from the same middle school and other teachers from the other middle schools took part in the study. The participants were selected via a random probability sampling. All participants had equal chances to take part in this study.

Research Instruments

We selected "Teacher questionnaire of written corrective feedback types preferences" and "Learner Questionnaire." "Learners' questionnaire" aims to explore what type of written feedback they prefer their writing to be corrected. Teachers' questionnaire on written corrective feedback types preferences aims to investigate teachers' practices regarding written feedback and which type they practice and believe is more effective in improving learners' writing. Learners' questionnaire was translated from English to Arabic by a professional translator; this is because learners at middle school do not possess the required linguistic ability to understand the items of the questionnaire and respond to them. Teachers' questionnaire is about what type or types of written feedback they use in correcting learners' writing.

The research tool selected was a questionnaire of "*Written Corrective Feedback Scale*" of (Aridah, Atmowardoyo, & Salija, 2017). The instrument was the same for both teachers and students. The differences lay in the wording and to whom it was addressed. This tool is a multiple choice item questionnaire in which learners choose ONLY one option by crossing (X). The option they select means their preference (what type of feedback they prefer) and how they like their writing to be corrected (direct, indirect, focused or, unfocused feedback). The questionnaire contained ten items; each item was about one type of feedback (Direct Feedback, Indirect Feedback, Focused Feedback and, Unfocused Feedback). Each allowed learners and teachers to choose one of the four options that represent their preference; what they use when correcting their learners' papers.

Research Procedures

The current study took place at a middle school. We administered pupils' questionnaires that were translated into Arabic. Learners put a cross on their preferred answer. When they finish, the researcher collects them. Some of the teachers took a hard copy of the questionnaire, while others received an electronic copy via emails to facilitate the data collection process. The respondents also put a cross on their preferred answer.

Results:

This section aims to present the primary data gathered about teachers' and learners' preferences in figures, tables and, percentages (%).

Data Gathered from Learners' Questionnaire

Item 1: when giving feedback on my written work, I like my teacher to:

Table 1. *Students' preferences on direct written corrective types*

Options	Number of participants	Percentages (%)
To provide the correct linguistic form or structure on my errors. (Direct feedback)	24	60%
To implicitly signal the errors and let me do the correction myself (Indirect feedback)	6	15%
To select specific errors to be corrected and ignore others. (Focused feedback)	2	5%
To comment on and correct all the committed errors. Unfocused feedback	8	20%
Total	40	100%

Item one attempts to investigate which type of written corrective feedback learners want their writing to be corrected. Table one showed that 60% of learners choose direct written corrective feedback.

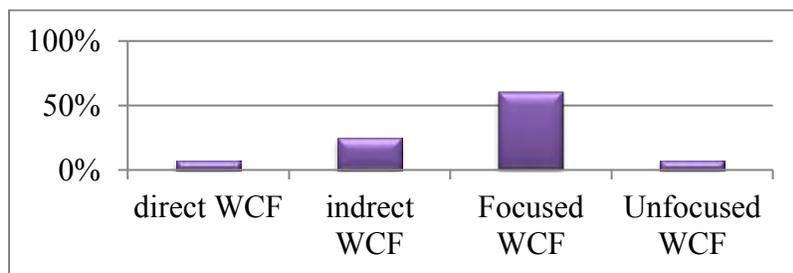


Figure 1. Students' preferences on direct written corrective feedback

Item 2: when I make errors in my writing, I want my teacher:

Table 2. *Students' preferences on unfocused written corrective feedback*

Options	Number of participants	Percentages (%)
To cross out the errors and provide the correct form (Direct feedback)	8	20%
to identify the mistakes without giving the proper form (Indirect feedback)	2	5%
to correct some errors, not all of them (Focused feedback)	2	5%

to randomly comment on and fix all my writing problems Unfocused feedback	28	70%
Total	40	100%

Item two aims at exploring which other types of written corrective feedback learners prefer. Table 2 shows that 70% of learners selected unfocused feedback.

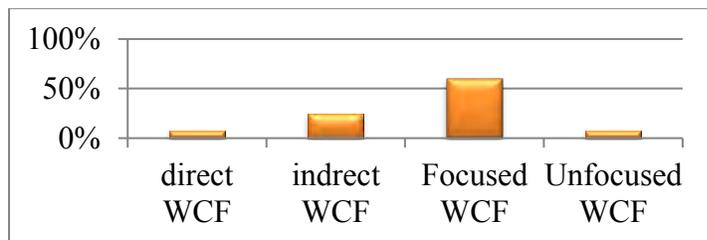


Figure 2. Students' preferences on unfocused written corrective feedback

Data Gathered from Teacher's Questionnaire

Item 01: When I give feedback on my learners' written work, I like:

Table 1. Teachers' Preferences on Indirect Written Corrective Feedback

Options	Number of participants	Percentages (%)
To provide the correct linguistic form or the structure above or near the linguistic error my learners made. (Direct feedback)	3	7.5%
To implicitly signal the errors and let my learners do the correction by themselves (Indirect feedback)	27	67.5%
To select specific errors to be corrected and ignores other errors. (Focused feedback)	8	20%
To randomly comment on and correct all my learners' writing problems Unfocused feedback	2	5%
Total	40	100%

Item one attempted to explore which type of written corrective feedback they prefer when correcting learners' written works. Table 1 showed that most teachers (67.5%) liked to practice indirect written corrective feedback on learners' written errors.

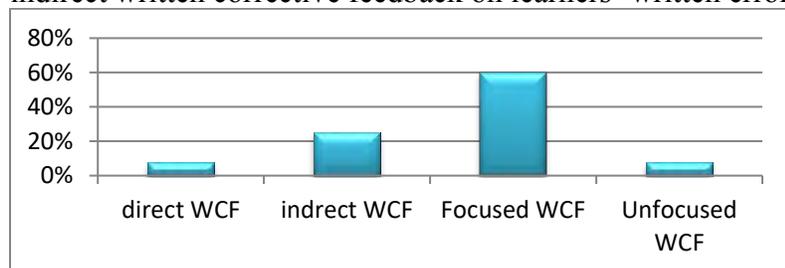


Figure 1. Teachers' preferences on indirect written corrective feedback

Item 2: When my learners make errors in their writing, I prefer:

Table 2. Teachers' preferences on focused written corrective feedback

Options	Number of participants	Percentages (%)
To provide the correct linguistic form or structure on my learners' errors. (Direct feedback)	3	7.5%
To implicitly signal the errors and let my learners do the correction themselves (Indirect feedback)	10	25%
To select specific errors to be corrected and ignore others. (Focused feedback)	24	60%
To comment on and correct all my learners' committed errors. Unfocused feedback	3	7.5%
Total	40	100%

Item 2. Teachers' preferences on focused written corrective feedback

Item two explored how teachers prefer to correct their learners' writing. Table 2 shows that most of them (60%) like to practice focused feedback

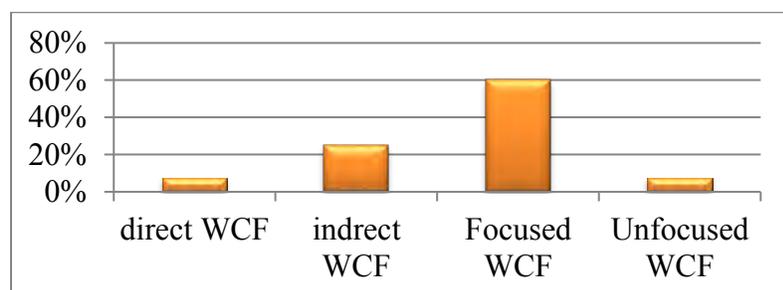


Figure 2: Teachers' preferences on focused written corrective feedback

The study showed a tendency towards direct written corrective feedback and unfocused written feedback. Learners (60%) prefer their teacher to give direct written corrective feedback on their writing. They like their teachers to highlight the grammar error by underlining, circling as well as providing the suitable form above or near the error. Learners also prefer teachers' direct corrections. The findings showed that 70% of learners prefer unfocused written feedback. They desire all the significant mistakes and all types of mistakes to be corrected. They also want their teacher to write in the margin next to every mistake they make. Few learners (10%) favor the focused feedback. Few learners (15% and 5%) preferred indirect feedback. They do not like when their teacher implicitly signals the errors and let them self-correct. They also do not choose their errors in writing to be identified without providing the correct form. The results indicated that teachers provide two types of feedback: focused feedback and indirect feedback. Teachers favor and practice the indirect feedback on their learners' writing. Teachers (67.5%) like to indicate that an error has been made by underlining, circling, crossing out, or using codes without correcting. This study showed that the other type of feedback that teachers prefer to use is focused feedback. Teachers (60%) prefer focused feedback on their learners' writing because they do not like to correct all errors but rather select the most significant aspects in writing to be updated. Teachers (5% and 7.5%) favored the unfocused written corrective feedback. Those teachers do not like to repair all types of errors. Few teachers (7.5% and 7.5%) provide direct

feedback on their learners' writing. They do not prefer to correct all errors for improved accuracy; they practice the immediate feedback by stating that a mistake has been made by underlying, crossing out the-mistake, or by circling the error and providing its correct form or in the margin.

Discussion

In this section, we will answer the main research questions. As far as learners' preferences are concerned, they favor direct feedback because it helps them learn new grammatical forms in a faster, more straightforward way. Through providing the proper format, learners avoid formulating wrong hypotheses that may affect their writing accuracy. Direct feedback can be effective in improving writing. It excludes any ambiguity on the part of learners. Learners will have no anxiety or confusion in finding out the right correct form. The finding is correlated with (Schulz, 1996; Diab, 2005; Lee, 2008; Hedgcock & Leftkowitz, 1994; Chen, Nassaji & Liu, 2016; Zhang, Chen, Hu, & Ketwan, 2021).

We explored that learners also like when their teacher corrects all their errors; they expect unfocused feedback on their writing. The findings correspond with the research of (Radecki & Swales, 1988; Enginarlar, 1993; Jahbel, Latief, Cahyono, & Abdalla, 2020). The findings of this study showed that learners favored the unfocused feedback i.e., they like when all the errors corrected, for unfocused feedback contributes to learning. This finding is similar to (Leki, 1991; Cohen, 1987; Cumming, 1995; Ferris, 1995; Hyland, 1998; Lee, 2004; Jahbel, et al., 2020). There is no correlation in this study between teachers' and learners' preferences regarding written feedback types. The finding corresponds with the investigation of (Cohen & Calvalcanti, 1990). The results of this study indicate that learners prefer both direct and unfocused written corrective feedback, whereas teachers favor indirect and focused written corrective feedback. Learners' expectations do not match with teachers' preferences. Hamer (2000, 2004) assured that this mismatch is because some factors may affect teachers' written corrective feedback provision. The factors can correlate with time, place, topic and, goal. Students believe that direct feedback is effective. It helps them to reduce ~~or~~ anxiety in finding the suitable form. Pupils favor the unfocused feedback because it leaves "no questioning" or "hypothesizing" (Ellis, 2005, 2008).

On the other hand, teachers (according to the current findings of this study) prefer to provide indirect feedback as it challenges learners to self-correct their errors. Teachers believe that indirect feedback students to find the proper format. It motivates them to be responsible for their learning (Lalande, 1982; Ellis, 2008). Teachers favor focused feedback because it focuses only on the significant errors; teachers select specific errors; most important ones because it helps the learners to reflect on what they have written (Ellis, 2008).

The mismatch in this study is because the provision of types of feedback on learners' writing can be challenging for the teacher. Giving focused feedback is difficult; it takes time and energy for learners who can't process all the corrected errors at once (Ellis, 2008). Giving direct feedback can also be demanding for teachers. It is necessary not always to spoon-feed learners and give them the proper corrections; it is crucial to let learners be responsible to self-correct their errors. Sheen (2007) argues that providing feedback types is relevant to learners' proficiency level. It

can tell what learners prefer. Sheen (2007) added that indirect feedback is more suitable for learners with better analytic ability.

Conclusion:

This research explores learners' and teachers' preferences regarding written corrective feedback types. The research tools used were: the "Learner Questionnaire" and the "Teachers' Questionnaire". Findings indicated a mismatch between teachers' and learners' preferences regarding written feedback types. Teachers favor indirect feedback and focused feedback, whereas learners prefer direct input and unfocused feedback. Factors can interfere with teachers' preferences.

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