

Preferences of Saudi English-major students towards written corrective feedback: An exploratory study

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Abstract

This is an exploratory study investigating the perceptions and preferences of EFL learners who study English for academic purposes towards written corrective feedback. Qualitative data were collected from 64 Saudi English-major students by means of focus group interviews, a survey with one open-ended question, and semi-structured interviews. Findings revealed that all the participants had positive attitudes towards WCF and believed that teachers' comments could help them promote their writing accuracy. They looked at teacher response as a great guidance to soften writing anxiety and overcome multiple composing difficulties. The majority of students preferred direct feedback and found it beneficial to locate and correct errors successfully. Most students also preferred comprehensive feedback that responds to all types of errors in their texts. They found large amounts of different feedback comments helpful to make successful revisions and reduce the number of errors in the next drafts. Additionally, all students endorsed positive feedback and considered encouraging and praising comments a powerful motivation tool to enhance their achievements and make them work harder. As a result, EFL writing teachers are expected to become more sensitive to their students' needs, meet their preferences, and adjust their written corrective feedback to respond to certain writing aspects that students need the most.

Key words: L2 writing, student preferences, written corrective feedback

Introduction

There are around 6500 languages spoken in the world. For more than a century, English has been a dominant global language, very extensively used, and firmly established in all political, economic, and educational fields. English is the official language in 53 countries even though it is not the most spoken language in the world (Woolard, 2021). Learning English has been a challenging priority for many people because it has been the language that occupies a unique position among all other languages in the world. There are different methods of teaching English as a second language (ESL) or as a foreign language (EFL). Communicating properly in English became necessary especially in the world of

globalization where language-based skills influence everyday life and real opportunities for success. Consequently, there is a shift in pedagogical programs to focus on maximizing communicative competence and content, rather than concentrating on correctness and explicit knowledge of grammar (Cocchetta, 2018).

Successful communication in proper language plays a vital role in sharing ideas and feelings with other people as well as clearly conveying opinions, thoughts, reactions, and emotions. Writing in English has been considered one of the difficult skills for English language learners (ELLs) because of the multiple complexities

related to the morphological, syntactic and pragmatic structures that they have to produce in English as the target language. To produce well-written essays in English, ELLs need sufficient communicative language abilities that include linguistic, pragmatic, and discourse competencies. In addition, writing in the target language needs cognitive abilities that comprise lower skills such as remembering and processing and higher skills like creating, evaluating, and critical thinking. One of the important classroom methods that teachers implement in their efforts to develop their learners' writing skills is responding to students' writing and providing constructive feedback (Mao & Lee, 2020). This study explores the perceptions and preferences of English major students in a Saudi university about the written corrective feedback they receive on their writing.

Significance of the study

The significance of this study lies in providing new insights into how Saudi L2 college students value a prominent classroom treatment in the form of teacher written corrective feedback and how far they consider such feedback important and beneficial for them to improve as student writers. Moreover, this study is significant because it analyzes L2 students' perceptions and preferences in an educational environment where learners' reactions are not evaluated systematically and their attitudes are not usually taken into account in the process of higher education development. Understanding how students react to and make use of teacher response can offer better understanding of the problems why Saudi EFL students find writing in English highly tedious, which could also provide better support for teachers in order to meet the expectations of their students. The results of this research have the potential of guiding future studies in the field of EFL writing in Saudi Arabia and the recommendations of the study are expected to be beneficial for curricular development plans in the English departments in the Arabic-speaking contexts.

Literature review

Different composition studies explored multiple issues related to how teachers deal with students' errors and the effect of feedback on the improvement of students' writing. Written corrective feedback (WCF) has been found an essential component in writing classrooms through which teachers identify errors in students' writings and provide suggestions for corrections (Albelihi, & Al-Ahdal, 2021; Ferris, 2012). Responding to different errors was found crucial in providing a potential value to motivate students to be more active which in turn increases their self-sufficiency to be more engaged in the writing process and improves writing accuracy. Researchers considered feedback very helpful to provide students with constructive comments on their drafts for the purpose of enhancing the various skills they need to understand their mistakes, improve future writing, and produce texts with minimum errors and maximum clarity (Storch, 2018).

To achieve such high quality results, teachers are encouraged to provide students with feedback in the form of complete sentences and clear guidelines that address their weak points, avoid abstract instructions, technical language, and confusing abbreviations. Teachers should always take into consideration that the main objective for corrective feedback is to improve student achievement so they can write with less errors which boosts their writing proficiency (Lee, 2017). Teachers' corrective feedback gained increasing importance as one of the components of the process approach in which teachers are supposed to introduce instructional materials in several steps that promotes a cycle of teacher written feedback and student revision. This pedagogical approach accentuates the value of teacher feedback to provide help and guidance to students to correct errors, restructure ideas, revise content, or develop the writing style (Irwin, 2017).

Constructive feedback has played a vital role in improving ESL/EFL students' writing skills because written feedback contains *heavy informational load* that introduces tips and suggestions to increase the adequacy of the form and content of written texts which in turn inspire students to develop the quality of their writing and

consolidate their learning (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). From an educational psychology perspective, teachers' corrective feedback represents a sophisticated form of assistance coming from an expert which gives students the opportunity to see how others, who are more experienced in the field, respond to their work. Subsequently, students learn from these responses that have the potential to guide their learning through the 'zone of proximal development' (Mao & Lee, 2020). Corrective comments can facilitate the optimization of multiple learning outcomes and contribute to strengthening the learner's short-term and long-term memory. Teacher response is a good strategy to motivate the learner to make use of deep cognitive processing for the purpose of facilitating the target language proceduralization and writing development (Li & Vuono, 2019).

Moreover, the cycle of comments and revisions promotes the dialogic interaction between the teacher and students, highlights the need that students should communicate their ideas more clearly, and provides them with increased awareness of audience so they do the best to meet the expectations of the communities they are writing for. Students find teachers' corrective feedback more helpful if it is clear, focused, applicable, and encouraging which helps them to understand the nature of their errors and to be more capable of writing better in future writing tasks. Accordingly, teachers can provide valuable support by inspiring students to become more responsive to WCF and make use of the corrective comments to enhance their writing proficiency. Positive student attitudes to corrective feedback help students think critically, improve their writing abilities, self-regulate their own learning through controlling significant aspects such as self-monitoring, self-instruction, and self-reinforcement (Mason & Brady, 2021).

Similarly, many studies revealed that writing teachers attach a great value on teachers' responses when discussing the common errors that appear in their student writing. They consider their corrective comments a major source for constructive feedback that is helpful to students and necessary for their progress (Alqurashi, 2022). Teachers were also found to respond to students' writing differently in different contexts. Based on

the communicative capacity of language, teachers' corrective feedback is a form of human interaction through which teachers communicate with students in specific social settings. Teachers use corrective feedback in a certain social context to establish relationships in a learning community, convey meaningful messages, and construct different aspects of social identity through the use of language. Providing students with clear and immediate feedback is considered a form of explicit guidance on how to handle complex errors of different types which in turn mitigates writing anxiety and promotes L2 proficiency (Jang, 2020).

Exploring students' preferences to corrective feedback is important to understand their reactions and attitudes towards WCF on different errors. Learners' positive attitudes and acceptance to their teachers' response enhances the effectiveness of WCF and reflects their desire for improvement in writing performance (Ainscow & Messiou, 2018). The framework of educational psychology maintains that individuals' behavior can be deeply affected by their attitudes, beliefs, and preferences which can shape the way they build and organize knowledge. Therefore, the learners' ability to understand and make use of WCF effectively is based on appreciating teacher response and developing positive perceptions and sufficient awareness that corrective feedback can improve their writing accuracy. Teachers are also recommended to pay more attention to student WCF preferences and try to facilitate creating more student positive attitudes and awareness related to how they perceive and utilize the effectiveness of error correction (Zhang et al., 2021). This study aims at investigating the preferences of EFL learners who study English for academic purposes towards written corrective feedback.

Method and procedures

Setting

The present study took place in an English department in a university in Saudi Arabia where students earn a Bachelor degree in a four-year program. According to the study plan, when students are enrolled at the English language program they take in the first two years four levels

of each of the basic components: listening and speaking, writing, reading, and structure. Upon the completion of those four levels, students proceed to study content courses in the third and fourth year. The purpose of this study is to answer the following two research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What are the L2 writing students' perceptions about receiving WCF on their writing?

RQ2: What are the L2 writing students' preferences about receiving WCF on their writing?

Participants

The participants in this study were 64 male students enrolled in three sections of course *Advanced Writing* which is offered in level 4 of the program. All students in this course have finished three levels of writing in the first 3 semesters of their enrollment in the BA program. This means they have been exposed to different writing texts, studied with different teachers, wrote about various genres, and received different types of written corrective feedback. Therefore, they are expected to have enough experience in receiving and implementing WCF than other students at earlier stages which makes them more capable of talking about their perceptions and preferences about receiving teacher corrective comments.

Instruments

The study employed multiple qualitative methods including focus group interviews, a survey of a single open-ended question, and semi-structured interviews with the participants to elicit their beliefs and preferences about the use of WCF. Interviews in general are flexible tools to explore perceptions, attitudes, feelings, behaviors, and different situations that may occur at some points of time. In particular, focus group interviews were utilized as they represent a guided discussion method where a small group of respondents, who usually have similar backgrounds, interests, and experiences, are brought together to answer questions in a moderated setting to obtain

unconstrained information and spontaneous comments. Focus groups have been found a great tool to provide more nuanced and natural responses to explore in greater depth the opinions, attitudes, and experiences of a subset or cross-section of a larger group about a specific issue. In academic settings, focus groups represent a reliable and effective method for collecting information about students' perspectives about a course or program and their reactions towards certain practices (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

Also, surveys are important tools to collect data by providing a set of questions to a certain population about a specific topic. Surveys are very beneficial in extracting data that are near to the exact qualities of that population. There are two categories of questions in surveys: open-ended questions to gather qualitative data and closed-ended questions to obtain quantitative data. Surveys with open-ended questions give respondents more freedom to express their needs, opinions, and attitudes towards any given topic that researchers could utilize to reach more accurate, profound, and meaningful responses (Braun et al., 2021). Moreover, semi-structured interviews were employed because they are great exploratory tools that give the opportunity to expand on certain issues where researchers can probe for further questions and digress for various directions during discussion. Semi-structured interviews are a form of verbal interchange held in a conversational manner that is interactive in nature and widely utilized to elicit additional information to supplement initial data that might be unclear, imprecise, and/or off-topic (Dörnyei, 2007).

Procedures

Students participating in this study attended focus group sessions with the researcher at the end of regular classes in week 10. The class teachers introduced the researcher to their students at the end of the class before leaving along with students who were not willing to participate in discussion. Teachers assured students that their participation in discussion is confidential and will not affect their grades in any way possible. Then the researcher gave a brief idea about the nature and

goals of the study, encouraged students to discuss any issues they believed to be relevant, and took the students' consent to audio record the discussions using his own cell phone.

Focus groups discussions lasted between 20 to 30 minutes each time. Students answered general questions about how they perceive their teachers' corrective feedback on their writings, how clear, useful, and manageable the comments are, and how far they employed teacher response to improve their writing accuracy. Also, the participants were encouraged to raise points, and voice out concerns about what they think of their teachers' corrective feedback, how helpful that feedback was to improve their writing, what preferences they had regarding the extent, focus, and type of their teachers' comments, and what difficulties they experienced in understanding and implementing those comments.

At the end of each focus group, the researcher asked the participants to volunteer to attend interviews and to respond to a single open-ended question survey to write in their own words any additional comments or concerns about their teachers' written corrective feedback. The researcher asked the participants not to write their names on the survey sheet in order to make their views completely anonymous. The participants were allowed to write either in English or in Arabic, their native language, to make it easier for them to voice out their opinions. Even though 61 students attended the three focus group sessions, only 23 students responded to the survey.

In week 12 only 9 students were willing to attend face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Again, the researcher confirmed to the participants that absolute anonymity of their opinions would be guaranteed and informed them that the interviews would be audio recorded. The researcher asked the participants questions in English but students were allowed to answer in Arabic if they wish to make them more comfortable in explaining their perspectives. Questions were about their beliefs and preferences regarding their teacher response and also they were asked to talk freely about any other important aspects from their perspectives.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was the analytic strategy implemented to interpret the data collected via the three instruments. Thematic analysis is an interactive process that involves the identification of recurring patterns followed by categorizing and coding those patterns into certain themes in a clear, careful, and accurate manner for the sake of interpreting a set of data with some thematic structure as the standard outcome. In particular, audio-recorded data obtained from focus groups discussions and interviews were transcribed verbatim and the resulting transcripts were reviewed in full to derive codes from students' participations. In addition, student responses to the open-ended question were reviewed also and patterns were grouped. For purposes of maintaining consistency and validity and also exploring the connections between the three datasets, the same categories were used to generate predominant codes and themes that represent the participants' perceptions and preferences regarding written corrective feedback. Two independent raters worked with the researcher during the process of reviewing student participations and grouping the responses into codes and themes.

The three raters had a 92% agreement rate on the set of codes and themes extracted from the participants' responses which indicates that inter-rater reliability was ensured. This also indicates that investigator triangulation was achieved and the study did not have researcher bias that could affect the findings. Moreover, data triangulation was achieved as well when the participants' perceptions and preferences were obtained from three different sources of evidence. Data triangulation in research is a methodological strategy for cross examination where multiple datasets are involved to address the research questions and verify the findings. In particular, collecting data via multiple sources helps researchers achieve deeper and more complete understanding of the explored research problem. Furthermore, triangulation is effective for enhancing the credibility and validity when data from multiple sources line up and yield the same results (Mackey & Bryfonski, 2018).

Findings & discussion

Data collected from the participants' responses to focus groups discussions, open-ended question survey, and semi-structured interviews were analyzed to explore their experiences, values, attitudes, and preferences regarding how they perceive written corrective feedback. The main points and principal issues (themes) that the participants highlighted were related to their standpoints towards the importance of teacher response as well as its method of provision, explicitness, amount, focus, and manner. These themes are introduced as follows:

Source & purpose of WCF

All student participants confirmed that the idea of receiving feedback from their teachers is a great and important aspect. One of the participants said, *"Students always make mistakes. Teachers know more about writing and about the topics we take."* Another student mentioned, *"We did not write a lot in high school. This a separate class for writing. I think corrections are good."* Most of the justifications for this positive attitude towards WCF focused on the potential of teachers' comments to improve students' writing. According to the broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions towards the learning situation represent an essential element that can facilitate the process of second language acquisition. Positive emotions, if properly cultivated and channeled, represent a stimulating factor for human cognition towards promoting more sustainable learning efforts that could broaden students' thought-action repertoires. Moreover, positive emotions maximize learners' resilience and self-assurance and create longer-term consequences to help students in inevitable moments of struggle (Fredrickson, 2013).

Many student responses highlighted the significance of teacher corrective feedback to improve their subsequent writing. For example, a student confirmed, *"My teacher gave me advice how to distribute the supporting ideas in the paragraph. He is a good teacher. Now I do not mix up the ideas. I learned also how to create sub-ideas to make the paragraph stronger."* This view suggests that a number of students pay more

attention to the long-term target of WCF which is improving their writing ability in the future than to the immediate purpose of helping them avoid the same errors. Promoting writing accuracy development and facilitating long-term acquisition of the key linguistic features were found among the major benefits of teacher corrective feedback. Providing effective and meaningful corrective feedback to student writing is undeniably essential to help L2 learners overcome multiple composing difficulties to enhance their knowledge in the target language (Lee, 2017).

In addition, less responses highlighted the importance of WCF to help students get better grades and pass the exams. More particularly, some students were not satisfied with limited feedback given on their writing. A student argued, *"I got poor grades in Writing I because my teacher put the mark on the paper without saying anything. I do not know why my grade was very bad."* This reflects a situation of frustration where students expect help from teachers but teachers provide inadequate or sometimes no corrective feedback. Another student commented, *"Last year I failed and had to take the same course again because the teacher did not show me my mistakes or explain how I should write better."* This comment indicates that students hold high expectations to get help from teachers to facilitate the writing process. Previous studies in L2 settings accentuated the importance of students' affective perceptions in motivating them to improve their study abilities which in turn enhances their academic achievement (Mercer, 2019).

Studies that surveyed college-level Saudi students' perspectives in relation to WCF found that Saudi EFL student writers value teacher WCF, prefer to receive feedback on their writing regularly, accept their teachers' comments, and subsequently believe that those comments could help them overcome many challenges when they write in English (Grami, 2010). Other studies in the Saudi educational context reported that Saudi students attached great importance to WCF, expressed their willingness to attend to their teachers' comments which they found effective in helping them produce better writing with less errors on both surface-level and meaning-level.

Saudi students attached high expectations on their teacher's intervention to soften the anxiety that many of them face during writing tasks especially those who get low scores on exams or feel unable to improve their writing quality. Students in such situation found WCF informative and helpful when provided in a friendly learning-supportive environment (Alshahrani, 2020).

Explicitness of WCF

The majority of students expressed their preference for direct feedback (overt correction). Direct WCF refers to locating errors in student writing and providing correct forms. Students gave several reasons to justify this attitude such as, *"I need the teacher to show me the mistakes clearly. Sometimes the teacher underlines the whole sentence but I still do not know what is wrong. This is not very comfortable."* Direct corrective feedback has been found a very helpful tool for immediate intervention that provides students with the necessary support to predict and prevent future errors. Studies that surveyed preferences in relation to WCF reported that EFL students have a general feeling that direct feedback is more constructive to them as it reduces the chance of bewilderment that students normally experience in case they are left without the clear feedback they expect from their teachers (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

Even though most students considered direct feedback helpful to improve their learning, a few students preferred indirect feedback (covert correction) as it allowed them to work out their errors and find mistakes by themselves. Here is an example: *"Of course corrections help me very much to revise, but in fact I want to learn more from my mistakes. I want the teacher to give me a chance to think about why he underlined this sentence so I can look for the correct answer myself."* This attitude indicates a preference for metalinguistic feedback which basically is underlining or circling errors without providing the explicit correct form. Students adopt such an attitude maybe because this type of feedback encourages them to think deeply about the nature of error and reflect on their background

knowledge to generate thinking in order to discover how to correct that error (Jang, 2020).

Researcher in the field of L2 writing studies did not agree on what type of corrective feedback is more beneficial. Many studies revealed that direct WCF is more helpful and effective in improving L2 students writing. Researchers who investigated the relationship between teacher corrective feedback and second language acquisition argue for the superiority of direct feedback because it provides students with the immediate feedback that they need. Also, direct WCF offers more explicit guidance on how to handle complex errors related to syntactic structures and idiomatic usage which provides learners with enough support to reduce their confusion and make them feel confident about their learning. Saudi student writers preferred to receive more direct corrective feedback and justified this preference by maintaining direct WCF is more effective for the immediate identification of the correct form and also more helpful in getting to the correct answer positively (Alqurashi, 2015; Alshahrani & Storch, 2014).

Besides, other studies argued that indirect WCF, in the form of underlining, circling, or providing codes and letting students come up with the correct answers, could provide L2 learners with more beneficial results than direct WCF. In particular, indirect WCF has been considered a good method to promote a more profound form of guided learning and problem-solving which enhances intense language processing, self-reflection, attention, and noticing that have the potential to foster long-term second language acquisition (Wang & Jiang, 2015). To reach a common ground in this long-lasting debate, some researchers maintained that the magnitude of the error is a main point to consider in choosing what type of WCF to provide; direct or indirect. Both types have different impacts and can be positive or negative depending on the situation and how far effectively and appropriately they are employed (Ellis, 2008).

Amount of WCF

There was a general tendency among the surveyed students to prefer comprehensive (unfocused)

feedback in which their writing teachers comment on all types of errors in their texts. A student stated, *“Correcting mistakes is good. It makes my essay better. My teacher corrects all the mistakes. That is good.”* Another student connected marking all errors to the teachers’ work responsibilities claiming, *“We are students and they are teachers. We always do homework and teachers must correct everything and tell students everything.”* Marking all errors is a widespread pedagogical practice in L2 writing settings that has a strong effect on the successful revisions on the students’ essays which helped students reduce the number of errors in the next drafts (Lee, 2018). This method of responding to student writing was found more effective for advanced students who prefer to receive large amounts of different feedback comments regardless of the types of errors (Irwin, 2017).

However, studies on teacher written feedback presented mixed results and reported different L2 learners’ opinions and preferences favoring to receive selective (focused) corrections for specific error types. Selective feedback has been found more effective to enrich students’ understanding of the nature of error and the correction and guide them to focus on one small error at a time which in turn can help them avoid making the same error in the future. Also, this method of teacher response is more likely to promote students’ level of writing accuracy whereas highly unfocused WCF is assumed to be less effective because it can easily result in a situation of excessive information processing (Li & Vuono, 2019). Nevertheless, since L2 learners expect WCF to help them in accuracy improvement by responding to all errors, some studies concluded that highly focused feedback is less appropriate in L2 contexts as it lacks ecological validity which makes it pedagogically insignificant for real classrooms (Storch, 2018),

Interestingly, there were a few voices against comprehensive feedback that preferred to self-correct some errors such as, *“I do not think I need all these corrections. Some mistakes are really easy. I do not know how I made those mistakes. My teacher should not correct everything. I can do that myself.”* This an indication that teachers should consider learners’ affective aspects when

providing WCF and try to minimize learners’ negative emotions. Teachers, in many situations, are concerned that responding to a limited number of errors each time could intimidate students or negatively touch their affective engagement with teacher corrective feedback (Ellis, 2008). To solve this dilemma of contradicting research findings and theoretical assumptions, writing teachers have been recommended to adopt a mid-focused approach to corrective feedback. The way learners perceive WCF could shape their attitudes to the corrective comments and affect how they respond to teacher intervention. Therefore, teachers should examine how students perceive the usefulness of focused and unfocused for the sake of justifying the amount of WCF provided to student writing (Lee, 2018).

Focus of WCF

Focus of WCF refers to providing comments to students related to various aspects of their writing. In particular, teachers provide comments to address local issues such as grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation or global issues that include content, organization, and ideas. The data collected from student participations revealed diverse preferences with respect to what areas of writing on which they prefer to receive comments. Many students expressed preferences to receive corrective feedback on their writing related to local issues. For example, a student preferred more comments on grammar confirmed, *“Grammar is very important. The meaning cannot be clear if grammar is bad. You cannot understand anything I want to say if it is not grammatical.”* Another student expressed similar concerns stating, *“If I have a lot of mistakes that means my grammar is broken. I am afraid my teacher cannot read my essay, so he gives me bad marks.”*

These comments from students indicate that student overestimate the role grammatical accuracy in the writing. Previous studies found a general tendency among EFL students, regardless of their proficiency level, to prefer comments on grammatical errors than on lexical or mechanical errors (Zhang et al., 2021). Even though grammar is taught in a separate parallel course, it is very

important to remember that teaching grammar has to take place within context and communicative settings in order to enhance its authentic use. Moreover, only very few students called for more corrective feedback on spelling. As a matter of fact, there are students who were against this kind of comments. A student mentioned, *“Everybody has a dictionary. Why should we make mistakes then? When you type your essay the computer takes care of your spelling. We should not lose any marks for spelling.”*

Preferences related to corrective feedback on global matters focused on the importance of giving clear instructions how to improve those two aspects. A student stated, *“I usually do not make many many mistakes in spelling or grammar. My teacher last semester asked me to focus on ideas. He gave me the same comment several times. I don’t know what he means.”* Another student complained against ignoring global issues saying, *“Most of the corrections I got in course Writing II were on spelling and a few corrections on grammar. The teacher underlined my mistakes and wrote ‘look at the dictionary’ and did not say anything how I can make my essay better. I don’t think this very good.”* This is an indication that there are a few students, mainly higher achievers, who considered grammar and mechanics minor issues and attached much more importance to global issues. However, it has been reported in the literature that most feedback in EFL contexts address local issues as they seem easier for teachers to locate and comment on (Dressler et al., 2019).

In addition, there are students who preferred to receive feedback on all aspects of writing. A student elaborated on this tendency stating, *“We always make mistakes. Teachers should correct all those mistakes in spelling and grammar and everything else.”* This preference to receive teacher response on all aspects of writing is parallel to the students’ preference for comprehensive feedback. Some L2 writing experts contended that teachers should provide more corrective feedback on treatable errors that appear in student writing in a patterned way because students are usually capable of successfully managing to edit their texts and correct such errors on their own (Budianto et al.,

2017). Some other researchers emphasized that teachers should maximize their corrective feedback efficacy if it is directly related to error types and student proficiency level. Also, teachers should take student preferences and individual variation into considerations to ensure the learners’ understanding of the corrective comments and amplify their engagement in the revision processes (Rummel & Bitchener, 2015).

Manner of WCF

All students stressed the significance of positive teacher feedback where they are encouraged to meet the teacher expectations and praised to when they show any improvement. A student expressed this preference saying, *“Encouraging is very important. We should feel that teachers care about us and give us the push we need so next time we improve more and more.”* This reference to the significance of encouragement reflects a serious need for sincere praise and powerful motivation to students on their achievements. Another student mentioned, *“We make mistakes all the time. We also want the teacher to correct the mistakes but also we want the teacher to praise us when we improve. Any comments with nice words can make us work harder to avoid mistakes and write better.”* This comment shows that students all levels of proficiency are eager to be praised and encouraged which is the basic requirement to make them work harder.

Such clear student preferences to receive positive comments to their writing put some pressures on writing teachers to meet their students’ expectations. A few students expressed dissatisfaction with their teachers’ feedback that does not praise their writing or encourage them for better achievement. A student, who seems a proficient writer, talked about his experience with the writing teachers when he first joined the English department saying, *“In the first semester here I was working very very hard but the teacher was tough and never encouraged me. He never looked at me with a smiley face or gave me any praise, even though I got good marks better than many other students.”* Praising points to student writing indicates that students conform to teacher expectations and adhere to academic standards.

Positive comments on student writing have the potential to strengthen the relationship between students and their teacher which could also lead them to show more engagement in the learning process and become more disciplined in class (Ainscow & Messiou, 2018).

Moreover, positive teacher feedback has the power to change student behavior fruitfully if it is implemented to inform students about the ideal learning practices and the precise academic performance. Conversely, negative comments and harsh responses to student writing could make students feel frustrated and unmotivated to work harder. A student, who seems to be a low-achiever, complained about negative and harsh feedback stating, *“If we do not do very well the teacher should talk to us and advise us about the difficulties we face. The teacher should not blame us all the time. I began to hate writing. I think I have to go to another department.”* These points reveal deep disappointment towards undesirable teacher comments that students try always to avoid. Therefore, writing teachers should do their best to identify students with learning difficulties in order to provide them with type of support they need to help them become more engaged with classwork and more likely to improve their performance (Mercer, 2019).

Positive corrective feedback has been found a powerful motivating tool that teachers could utilize for the sake of encouraging different aspects of student writing. Praising comments are an essential component in useful guidance that teachers are expected to provide to students to help them grow and excel throughout their studies. Praising comments could be used to single out a student's work product and highlight how closely the actual product matches the goals of the lesson. Teachers could also employ certain encouraging terms for the purpose of augmenting the performance of under-achieving student so they make more efforts to turn in writing assignments with better speed and accuracy. More particularly, under-achieving students should be treated with a combination of gradually challenging tasks and scaffolding support as well as positive feedback to appreciate their efforts and motivate them to work hard. In some cases, effective corrective feedback may take place in the form of constructive

criticism to reinforce student abilities to improve their academic or behavioral performance (Pearson, 2018).

Conclusion

This study explored the perceptions and preferences of 64 Saudi college students towards teacher written corrective feedback (WCF) that they receive on their writing. The collected data revealed that all student participants had positive attitudes towards WCF and believed in the potential benefit of teachers' comments to improve their subsequent writing, promote writing accuracy development, and soften writing anxiety. With regard to question 1 in particular, the participants expressed their trust in teacher response as a type of accurate judgment that could help them overcome multiple composing difficulties and enhance their knowledge in the target language. This finding indicates that the participants have already developed awareness of the benefit of corrective feedback and implemented teacher comments as an effective tool to improve their writing and consequently enhance second language learning. Such awareness, according to Noticing Hypothesis, is important for learners to enhance understanding and which is necessary to foster the ability to analyze, compare, and selectively attend to the relevant information in order to facilitate the creation of new knowledge and the modification of existing knowledge (Schmidt, 2010).

Student responses in the three datasets showed they preferred constructive guidance in the form of clear and useful feedback to help them write better and motivate them for more engagement in the learning process in general. These preferences suggest that the participants consider WCF a form of declarative knowledge that they implement, according to the framework of Skill Acquisition Theory (SAT), through actual performance in order to construct procedural knowledge of different aspects related to the writing skill. Therefore, corrective feedback should be provided in a format that is easy to understand, employ, and proceduralize. Utilizing teacher comments in subsequent drafts helps learners to grasp procedural knowledge which subsequently,

through extensive practice, can be internalized successfully and implemented effectively (McDonough & Sato, 2019). Therefore, teachers should be sensitive to students' needs and adjust their corrective feedback to respond to certain writing aspects that students need the most. Student preferences should be taken seriously because they shape their reactions to WCF and affect how they respond to teacher intervention.

Limitations and recommendations

This study is limited to the perspectives of Saudi male English major students about the potential usefulness of teacher response. The study did not include female participants because education in Saudi Arabia is gender segregated. As such, it would be valuable to investigate the perspectives of female English major students as well. Also, The population of the study was only 64 participants and the findings could have been more indicative if the sample was larger. There is a need also to assess the preferences of college students in other Saudi universities in order to obtain a better and more comprehensive picture of student perceptions and attitudes towards teacher WCF. Future studies in the field of teaching EFL writing in Saudi Arabia should also take teacher beliefs and practices into consideration and how far they align with student preferences. Because the process of providing and implementing corrective feedback context-driven and culturally mediated there should be further studies to investigate the specific elements of the leaning situation responsible for producing desirable/undesirable learning outcomes.

Bio:

Dr. Fahad Alqurashi is an Associate Professor at the English Department, Umm Al-Qura University, Saudi Arabia. He earned a BA in English from King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia in 1992, an MA in Linguistics from Indiana State University in 1999, and a PhD in Linguistics from Ball State University, 2005.

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