

Omani EFL Students' and Their Teachers' Perceptions of Written Corrective Feedback

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Abstract—This study examines the EFL teachers' and students' perceptions of the effectiveness of written corrective feedback (WCF) in the EFL context. The data was collected from 104 male and female students and 11 professors at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. Two questionnaires, one for students and one for professors, were used to collect quantitative data and some qualitative data. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data, and thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. The participants agree on the provision of selective, mid-focused, rather than comprehensive WCF. They prefer a focus on a group of categories of errors rather than flooding the students with feedback on all types of errors. Unlike previous research, the EFL students and their teachers do not solely prioritize accuracy issues over content-focused feedback. The EFL students affirm that they are not seeking error-free writing but rather effective communication of their ideas. In addition, the students perceive the student-teacher engagement with feedback via discussion as an essential pedagogical practice to maximize their WCF uptake. The study confirms the ecological nature of WCF by calling attention to the methodological variable of oral feedback scaffolding strategies that might affect the effectiveness of WCF but go unnoticed in WCF studies.

Index Terms—written corrective feedback, error correction, teacher-learner engagement, L2 writing, Online teaching and learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Written corrective feedback (henceforth WCF) has been an integral part of language teaching and learning, particularly in writing classes. Research on the effectiveness of WCF has yielded mixed results, as some studies advocate the implementation of WCF in language teaching and learning classrooms while others argue against it. Some scholars consider WCF to help improve students' writing skills. For example, Bitchener (2008) examined the effectiveness of WCF on ESL students' use of English articles. The results revealed that those who received WCF outperformed students who did not receive any WCF in terms of accuracy when using English articles. Several other studies have yielded the same positive effects of WCF (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Ferris, 2010; Kang & Han, 2015; Lim & Renandya, 2020).

Other scholars, on the other hand, dispute the effectiveness of WCF. For example, Truscott (1996) calls for the abolition of the use of WCF, arguing that it is ineffective. He asserts that WCF is a waste of teachers' and students' time. Several studies have supported Truscott's claim (e.g., Polio et al., 1998), as no significant improvement in accuracy was recorded. Various studies were conducted to support or refute Truscott's claim. The result of this is a plethora of conflicting opinions on the effectiveness of WCF.

Ferris (2004), known for her rebuttal of Truscott's argument, stipulates that the reasons for this controversy might be due to inconsistencies and flaws in research designs. Similarly, researchers like Brown (2012) assert that the effectiveness of WCF is mediated by different variables, which could be the reason for the conflicting opinions over the effectiveness of WCF. One of the variables is the context of learning, i.e., EFL versus ESL. Several studies affirmed that the type of learning context contributes to the divergent results on the effectiveness of WCF practices.

To generate a context-specific understanding of the effectiveness of WCF, several studies were conducted in various EFL contexts, especially in Asian countries (e.g., Chen et al., 2016; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). However, little is known about the WCF dynamics in the Arab EFL context and only a handful of studies have been conducted over the past 20 years (e.g., Aseeri, 2019; Al Kharusi & Al-Mekhlafi, 2019; Trablesi, 2019).

Another influential variable that received much attention in recent years is the perception of students of the effectiveness of WCF (Atmaca, 2016; Chen et al., 2016). Studies on students' perceptions of WCF have indicated that generally, there is a positive attitude held by learners towards WCF (Karim & Nassaji, 2015). Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) argue that the opinions of the students about WCF affect their interaction with WCF. Other researchers confirmed that WCF feedback could be useless if there is a discrepancy between learners' preferences for feedback and teachers' practices (Zhang et al., 2021).

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Studies focusing on the role of perception commonly examine the perception of students or teachers of WCF but not both. Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) assert that investigating the similarities and differences in the views of students and teachers in the same study design could reveal the discontent with WCF that may result from the mismatch between the perceptions of the two groups.

Taking into consideration the variables of the context of learning and perceptions of students and faculty, this exploratory study aims to examine the similarities and differences between the perceptions of the EFL university students and their teachers of WCF. It attempts to answer the question: How do students and teachers perceive WCF practices in terms of overall usefulness, focus, type, and amount of WCF? In the following sections, we synthesize the literature on WCF, teachers' and students' perceptions of WCF, and WCF in online teaching and learning. Then, we describe the methodology of the study. After that, we analyze the results and discuss the findings.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

From an ecological perspective, the effectiveness of WCF is contingent upon situational variables, learner variables, and methodological variables (Evans et al., 2010). All studies on WCF implicitly, if not explicitly, point out the complex interaction between these three variables that results in the different findings about the effectiveness of WCF. Some studies, for example, view the effectiveness of WCF in relation to situational variables. Situational variables include context-related variables such as the physical context of the learning environment, socioeconomic conditions, and the teacher's characteristics and attitude (Evans et al., 2010). In their meta-analysis, Kang and Han (2015) indicate that the learning context can influence the effectiveness of WCF, as the cited studies reported a difference between EFL and ESL in reaction to WCF. The studies showed that ESL learners benefit more from WCF than EFL learners. Later meta-analyses, such as Lim and Renandya (2020) and Brown et al. (2023), reveal counter findings that EFL learners benefited the most from feedback compared to ESL learners. Researchers affirm that while the context of learning is important, its influence on the effectiveness of WCF cannot be viewed in isolation from other variables.

Other studies measured the effectiveness of WCF by focusing on the learner variables, which consist of learner-related characteristics and individual differences such as first language, learning style, beliefs, and motivation (Evans et al., 2010). Some studies examined learners' attitudes or perceptions of WCF in different learning contexts (Atmaca, 2016; Chen et al., 2016; Ferris, 2004). Li (2017, p. 85) defines such perceptions as "the attitudes, views, opinions, or stances learners and teachers hold about the utility of corrective feedback in L2 learning and teaching and how it should be implemented in the classroom." Studies on students' perceptions of WCF have indicated that generally, there is a positive attitude held by students towards WCF (Karim & Nassaji, 2015). Chen et al. (2016), for example, examined the perceptions of 64 Chinese EFL learners of WCF to examine whether their proficiency levels in English influence their preferences for WCF strategies. The participants were of three English proficiency levels: intermediate, advanced-intermediate, and advanced. The findings revealed that Chinese EFL students had a positive attitude towards WCF and they particularly valued WCF on grammar as well as content and organization.

Some studies examined students' perceptions and methodological variables. Methodological variables consist of the instructional methodologies, including what is taught and how it is taught (Evans et al., 2010). For example, Karim and Nassaji (2015) examined the perception of 53 Canadian ESL learners of WCF and their preference for types of WCF. The results revealed that the majority of the participants found WCF to be useful. As for the type of WCF, the participants affirmed their preference for the underlying metalinguistic WCF technique. This technique made them aware of the type of errors they made and how to correct such errors. Karim and Nassaji assert that students may benefit more from the WCF if it matches their needs and preferences. They conclude that knowing students' perceptions helps teachers align their WCF strategies with students' expectations. This observation highlights the influence of methodological variables, such as the different types of WCF provision strategies, on the effectiveness of WCF.

Teachers' beliefs are one of the under-examined situational variables in WCF research (Shen & Chong, 2022). Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) conducted one of the early studies that compared and contrasted the teachers' beliefs and students' beliefs on feedback provision methodology. Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) compared and contrasted the views of 31 Canadian ESL teachers and 33 ESL students in terms of their preference for the amount and type of WCF. They collected quantitative and qualitative data using two questionnaires. Amrhein and Nassaji found more differences than similarities between teachers' and students' perceptions of WCF. In terms of the type of WCF, students preferred overt feedback with explanatory comments, unlike the teachers, who valued less explicit feedback, advocating learner autonomy. Concerning the amount of WCF, students found larger amounts of feedback to be more useful, while teachers were divided on this matter. To reduce the mismatch between students' expectations and needs of WCF and teachers' provision of WCF, and hence enabling teachers to provide a more effective WCF, researchers recommend juxtaposing the perception of students with those of their teachers within the same study design.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Context and Participants

This study took place at a university, which is a public higher education institution, during the Fall semester of 2022. The participants in the study are students and professors in the Department of English and Translation, where English is

taught as a foreign language. The participants of this study are 104 EFL students: 76 female students and 28 male students. All the students completed level six in the in-house English proficiency test, which highly correlates with level 5 in IELTS. As for the professors, 11 participated in the study.

B. Data Collection Tools

This study aims to investigate the learner variable of students' perception and preference for WCF and the methodological variable of teachers' preference for WCF in the EFL context. This study adopted Amrhein and Nassaji's (2010) two parallel questionnaires to collect data about the teachers' and students' perceptions. However, the student questionnaire was expanded to include questions from Chen et al.'s (2016) questionnaire about the students' overall perception of WCF and the type of WCF. Considering that the data were collected in the semester immediately following the online teaching and learning (henceforth, OTL) of COVID-19 in Fall 2022, most of the WCF students received over the past two years was provided online. Their recent history of WCF online provision might have an impact on their perception of WCF immediately after the OTL of COVID-19. Therefore, a new theme about the overall perception of the effectiveness of WCF during COVID-19 OTL as a situational variable was added to both questionnaires. The two questionnaires for the teachers and the students contain the same themes: overall perception of the effectiveness of WCF, types of WCF, amount of WCF, focus of WCF, and online WCF.

In terms of overall structure, both questionnaires have the same themes with closed-ended questions followed by open-ended questions to collect more insightful data. Closed-ended questions like yes-no questions, Likert-scale items, and multiple-choice questions were used to collect the quantitative data as they can be easily quantified and analyzed. Open-ended questions following the closed-ended questions were used to collect qualitative data explaining the reasons for the choices of the participants. Each questionnaire contains about 21 statements.

C. Data Collection Procedures

Before the dissemination of the questionnaires, the questionnaires were reviewed by the Research Committee in the Department of English & Translation. The committee waived the requirement for approval because the data were collected using questionnaires that contained written informed consent outlining voluntary and anonymized participation. An invitation was sent via WhatsApp and email to students in the different courses in the department. The invitation contained a link to the electronic form of the questionnaires. The invitation clearly stated that participation in the questionnaire was voluntary, and the students were not required to provide any identifying information about themselves, such as their names, university identifying numbers, emails, or phone numbers.

D. Data Analysis

In order to evaluate the perceptions of the participants on WCF, the quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 29.0.0.0 to generate descriptive statistics. Given the small size of the dataset, descriptive statistics provide an appropriate and meaningful summary of the data without overextending its analytical power. To gain clear insights into the central tendencies and variability in the data set, measures such as frequency, mean, and standard deviation are used (Field, 2013).

The qualitative data collected as short open-ended responses in the questionnaire were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach: familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme development, theme review, definition, and final reporting. Despite the brevity of responses in the questionnaire, this method allows for the identification of recurring patterns and meaningful insights related to participants' experiences and beliefs.

The main codes were elicited from the themes under which the responses are required: overall perception, amount of WCF, and online WCF. Guided by these themes, sub-themes emerged for both groups: students and instructors, as in Table 1 below:

TABLE 1
EMERGING THEMES FROM THE QUANTITATIVE DATA

Theme	Student	Faculty
Overall perception	1. Positive	1. Positive
Amount of WCF	1. All errors	1. All errors
	2. Some errors	2. The correction amount correlates with proficiency
Online WCF	1. Unfamiliarity with WCF codes/concepts	5. Time-consuming
	2. Ambiguity of the WCF	
	3. Illegible handwritten WCF	
	4. Lack of teacher-student oral engagement on WCF	

The quantitative data (a total of 294 statements) were coded by the first and the second author separately. Coding results were compared and inter-coder reliability was calculated. The inter-coder reliability is calculated using the formula below (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 64). The number of agreements between the two coders, was divided by the number of agreements plus the number of disagreements. The inter-coder reliability is 98.9%, as shown in the formula below:

$$\frac{\text{number of agreements (29)}}{\text{number agreements (291) + number disagreements (3)}} \times 100$$

$$= [291 / (291 + 3)] \times 100 = 98.9\%$$

IV. RESULTS

This study is designed to investigate the EFL teachers' and students' perceptions of the effectiveness of WCF. Two questionnaires with open-ended and closed-ended questions were used to collect students' and teachers' perceptions. Table 2 below demonstrates students' background information regarding their sex, year of study, and major, as well as the instructors' background information regarding their sex and area of specialization. It shows that the majority of the participants are female students (73.1%) and female teachers (63.6%). However, only 26.9% of the students and 36.4% of the teachers are males. All the participants are enrolled in English-related majors such as English Language and Literature, English Education, and Translation (English/Arabic). The study also targeted students in their second year and above because they should have completed the foundation program before taking courses from their degree plan.

TABLE 2
PARTICIPANTS' BACKGROUND (N=104 STUDENTS, N=11 TEACHERS)

Students' sample				Teachers' sample			
Variable	Categories	n	%	Variable	Categories	n	%
Gender	Male	28	26.9	Gender	Male	4	36.4
	Female	76	73.1		Female	7	63.6
Major	English Language and Literature	37	35.6	Specialization	Linguistics	6	54.5
	English Education	62	59.6		Literature	4	36.4
	Translation	5	4.8		Translation	1	9.1
Year	2nd year	20	19.2				
	3rd year	8	7.7				
	4th year	45	43.3				
	5th year or more	31	29.8				

Note: SD = Standard Deviation, n = Number of Participants

A. Overall Perception

The data revealed (Table 3) that both students and faculty perceived WCF very positively. The majority of the students perceived WCF as either very important or important (Mean= 4.40%, SD= 0.757). The instructors' perception of WCF is aligned with that of students (Mean= 4.82%, SD= 0.405). Generally, students agreed that WCF helped them understand their mistakes and improve their writing. Students commented that WCF was "effective" and "important to improve" or "enhance" their "language" and their "writing" in English. Likewise, the teachers emphasized the importance of WCF in English language learning and that WCF is the right of the student. One instructor commented, "The students have the right to know about their language errors and get proper feedback from their instructors, whether it is during online or regular classroom periods." Another instructor confirmed that WCF helps students "develop their writing" and that "If errors go unchecked, they will persist and that may lead to fossilization".

TABLE 3
OVERALL PERCEPTION (N=104 STUDENTS, N=11 TEACHERS)

Measure	Categories	Students' sample		Teachers' sample	
		n	%	n	%
N(%)	Not very important	0	0	0	0
	Not important	2	1.9	0	0
	Neutral	11	10.6	0	0
	Important	34	32.7	2	18.2
	Very important	57	54.8	9	81.8
Mean		4.40		4.82	
SD		0.757		0.405	

B. Types of WCF

Table 4 below describes students' preferences for type of WCF their instructors using a Likert-scale. The data revealed that all seven different types of strategies are used by the instructors, with a mean ranging from 2.34 to 3.72. The most frequently used strategy is number four "Locating the error and indicating the type of error" (Mean= 3.72, SD= 1.250), followed by "Indicating the type of error without locating or correcting it" and "Highlighting/ underlining the error and then correcting it" with a mean of 2.88 and SD= 1.332 and SD= 1.396 consecutively.

TABLE 4
TYPES OF WCF PREFERRED BY STUDENTS (N=104 STUDENTS)

Statements	Students' sample	
	Mean	SD
1. Highlighting/ underlining the error without correcting it	2.75	1.364
2. Highlighting/ underlining the error and then directing the student to a source of information	2.71	1.363
3. Indicating the type of error without locating or correcting it	2.88	1.332
4. Locating the error and indicating the type of error	3.72	1.250
5. Highlighting/ underlining the error and then correcting it	2.88	1.396
6. Correcting the error then providing an explanation for the correction	2.74	1.637
7. Simply indicating that there is an error in the sentence by putting a cross next to it without locating/ correcting the error	2.34	1.355

Unlike the students, the instructors' responses in relation to type of feedback were collected using multiple choice questions. The data reveal that the teachers also selected "Locating the error and indicating the type of error" at 54.5% followed by "Indicating the type of error without locating or correcting it" at 45.5% in Table 5. These results confirm the students' perception of the type of strategy used by their instructors. Unlike the students, the instructors selected "Highlighting/ underlining the error without correcting it" at 36.4% as the third most used type of WCF, while students selected "Highlighting/ underlining the error and then correcting it" as their third most commonly used WCF strategy.

Overall, students and instructors agree that the most frequently used strategies focus on indicating, locating, or highlighting errors with no correction. However, when students were asked about the most useful type of feedback, they identified three types: locating/highlighting the error and indicating the type of error, locating/highlighting the error and providing an explanation for the error, and locating/highlighting the error and providing correction and explanation. Generally, it seems that faculty prefer the identification of errors with minimum or no correction, while students diverge in their preference, as they seem to prefer the identification of errors with the correction or the provision of an explanation for the correction or the identified error.

TABLE 5
TYPES OF WCF PREFERRED BY TEACHERS (N=11 TEACHERS)

Statements	n	%
1. Highlighting/ underlining the error without correcting it	4	36.4%
2. Highlighting/ underlining the error and then directing the student to a source of information	2	18.2%
3. Indicating the type of error without locating or correcting it	5	45.5%
4. Locating the error and indicating the type of error	6	54.5%
5. Highlighting/ underlining the error and then correcting it	3	27.3%
6. Correcting the error then providing an explanation for the correction	2	18.2%
7. Simply indicating that there is an error in the sentence by putting a cross next to it without locating/ correcting the error	2	18.2%

C. Amount of WCF

To measure the students' preference to the amount of feedback, the students were asked to evaluate the amount of feedback their teachers should have provided on their work. Table 6 below illustrates that 28.1% of the students preferred their teacher mark all errors, and 26% preferred the marking of all major errors but not minor errors. Some of them (16.7%) believe that the teacher should mark only the errors that interfere with communicating their ideas. On the other hand, 50% of teachers prefer marking all errors, and 21.4% of them prefer marking most of the major errors but not necessarily all of them. Both teachers and students agree on the necessity of marking both types of errors, minor and major. However, they disagree in terms of the amount of feedback, focusing on major errors. Some teachers preferred marking most of the major errors, while some students preferred marking all of them.

TABLE 6
AMOUNT OF WCF PREFERRED BY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS (N=104 STUDENTS, N=11 TEACHERS)

Statements	Students' sample		Teachers' sample	
	n	%	n	%
1. Teacher should mark all errors	54	28.1%	7	50.0%
2. Teacher should mark all major errors but not the minor ones	50	26.0%	2	14.3%
3. Teacher should mark most of the major errors, but not necessarily all of them	26	13.5%	3	21.4%
4. Teacher should mark only a few of the major errors	16	8.3%	0	0.0%
5. Teacher should mark only the errors that interfere with communicating your ideas.	32	16.7%	1	7.1%
6. Teacher should mark no errors and respond only to the ideas and content	14	7.3%	1	7.1%

As for students, they have two divergent views. Some students argue that marking all errors, including minor errors, is important to improve students' work, especially if they are language specialists. One student commented, "If the teacher ignores minor errors, students will continue making these mistakes without improvement." However, some students prefer instructors to focus only on the students' major errors on the grounds that minor errors do not always reflect the real level of the students, and focusing on such errors could lead to frustration. One student explained, "Because some simple mistakes are just happening, not because we do not know them, but because we were in a rush." Another student affirmed, "Although I believe that the students should know all their mistakes, some mistakes are [happening] just because of the

time limit of the test.” Some students argued against marking all minor errors on the grounds that “locating all the errors, especially at the first stages [of learning] will disappoint the students and can affect their confidence in writing.” An observation echoed by other students who argue against marking all minor errors “so that the student won’t feel frustrated by the number of errors.” Another student commented on a personal experience, “I get disappointed when I see many mistakes. I think it is better to focus on the major ones”.

On the other hand, the teachers commented that marking all errors helps students avoid them in the future, as some students may “not be able to see all of their mistakes.” For example, one instructor explained, “The students need to be aware of all their errors, whether they are minor or major, so they can avoid making them next time.” A similar assumption is held by another faculty member who argued that “students lack the ability to identify all their errors,” which justifies the faculty’s preference for correcting all errors. Another faculty commented that the amount of feedback depends on “the assignment, quality of the student’s language, how serious errors are” in terms of whether these errors “totally impede comprehension”.

D. Focus of WCF

Table 7 below demonstrates students’ and teachers’ responses to the usefulness of providing feedback on particular types of errors. There is an overall positive perception of the different foci of WCF as the mean response for each statement shows an overall positive rating. The students perceived WCF focusing on grammatical errors (Mean= 4.31) and content/idea errors (Mean= 4.02) as the most useful. On the other hand, teachers preferred to focus their WCF on organization (Mean= 4.55) and on grammatical errors (Mean= 4.45). A focus on content/idea errors came in third (Mean= 4.36).

TABLE 7
FOCUS OF WCF PREFERRED BY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS (N=104 STUDENTS, N=11 TEACHERS)

Statements	Students		Teachers	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. WCF on <u>organization</u> errors	3.79	1.138	4.55	.688
2. WCF on <u>grammatical</u> errors	4.31	.946	4.45	.688
3. WCF on <u>content/idea</u> errors	4.02	1.199	4.36	.674
4. WCF on <u>punctuation</u> errors	3.88	.932	4.09	.701
5. WCF on <u>spelling</u> errors	3.87	1.158	4.18	.751
6. WCF on <u>vocabulary</u> errors	3.87	1.199	4.27	.647

E. Online WCF

Table 8 below illustrates students’ and teachers’ responses to whether they faced challenges pertaining to WCF during OTL. The percentage of students who faced challenges with WCF (55.8%) is higher than those who did not (44.7%). The majority of teachers (63.3%), on the other hand, had no difficulty in providing WCF.

The students reported that the difficulties in understanding WCF during OTL were caused by the ambiguity of the WCF, bad handwriting, unfamiliarity with some codes and concepts of WCF, and lack of physical interaction. For instance, one student said, “Teachers write ambiguous feedback without explaining it,” while another student commented, “Some teachers only tell us that we have grammatical mistakes, but not where and what the grammatical mistakes are.” Some students also emphasized the lack of explanation for the error. One student commented, “Especially with content or ideas, you don’t know what is wrong exactly since such areas depend on how an individual sees things.” On the problematic handwriting, a student commented, “Some of them have bad handwriting that I couldn’t read.” All of these issues were aggravated by the lack of physical interaction with the teachers. One student said that “Sometimes he or she explains my mistakes, but I don’t understand him or her correctly due to the lack of physical interaction of the traditional way of learning”.

As for the teachers, one of the challenges in providing WCF during OTL was that it was time-consuming due to the lack of physical interaction and the need to convert the marking into a soft copy. For example, on the difficulties in providing WCF during OTL, one professor said, “It was extremely time-consuming compared to written corrective feedback during face-to-face teaching and learning. The physical classroom made it easier to explain the written feedback and discuss it with the students.” Also, one of the professors stated that, “Marking and typing on soft copies took a long time,” while another professor reported that the difficulty was “mainly [in] correcting students’ errors on paper then scanning and emailing the corrections”.

TABLE 8
PERCEIVED CHALLENGES IN ONLINE WCF PROVISION (N=104 STUDENTS, N=11 TEACHERS)

Measure	Categories	Students’ sample		Teachers’ sample	
		n	%	n	%
	Yes	58	55.8	4	36.4
	No	46	44.2	7	63.6

V. DISCUSSION

This study sought to examine how the EFL students and university instructors perceived the effectiveness of WCF. In relation to the overall perception of WCF, this study found that both students and instructors perceived the WCF positively as the majority of them reported that it was very important for the development of writing skills. The students and the professors agreed that the students must know their mistakes to avoid them. This positive stance of the EFL learners and their teachers towards WCF aligns well with the previous research findings in that no difference was found between the teachers and the students regarding their perception of the importance of WCF provision (Mao et al., 2024; Shen & Chong, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021).

The findings of this study revealed that the most commonly used strategy by the teachers was the WCF of locating/highlighting the error and indicating its type, i.e., indirect feedback. The teachers' preference for less explicit WCF confirms the findings of previous studies (Al Kharusi & Al-Mekhlafi, 2019; Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010), and it could be motivated by the teachers' desire to build learner autonomy (e.g., Ferris & Roberts, 2001).

While some students also favored this strategy, the majority of students' preferences for the type of feedback extend beyond locating/highlighting the error and indicating its type to include the provision of correction and/or explanation for the correction or error. These two techniques are not commonly used by their teachers. This finding confirms the observations in other studies that students prefer direct WCF with metalinguistic comments because indirect feedback alone is insufficient (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Atmaca, 2016).

This finding also partially confirmed Amrhein and Nassaji's (2010) remark on the lack of alignment between students' and teachers' preferences for the type of WCF. The teachers seem to prefer indirect feedback, while the students prefer indirect and direct feedback with metalinguistic explanation. These observations aligned with the previous findings that direct feedback with metalinguistic comments could benefit lower proficiency students (Al-Rubai'ey & Nassaji, 2013) as it provides them with the necessary scaffolding for feedback uptake. By comparison, students with advanced language proficiency might benefit from indirect feedback as they "can probably cope with a high cognitive load required for processing feedback targeted at a wide range of error categories" (Mao & Lee, 2020, p. 8). The differences in the level of proficiency could explain the divergence in students' preference for direct and indirect WCF.

As for the amount of WCF, the EFL learners and their teachers seem to agree that marking "all errors" is the most preferred strategy. Nevertheless, the data indicated a discrepancy in the expectations between students and instructors pertaining to what "all errors" entail. The students prioritize the marking of all major errors but teachers prefer marking most of the major errors. However, both agree that minor errors should not receive too much attention. The concept of major errors is understood by the students as any error that could hinder the effective communication of their ideas, while minor errors are errors that do not hinder the overall intended meaning such as typos. Therefore, both teachers and students do not favor comprehensive or unfocused feedback in the sense of providing WCF on all types of errors, unlike the EFL learners in Trabelsi's (2019) study. It is important to note that the EFL learners in Trabelsi's study have low proficiency levels because they were in the foundation program at the time of the study. However, the EFL learners in the current study already finished the foundation program and completed one year of intensive English language courses. Again variation in level of proficiency could explain their different attitudes towards the type of WCF.

The EFL learners in this study prefer mid-focused feedback in the sense of providing feedback on a group of categories of errors (Lee, 2017). However, the motivation of both groups of participants is different. The teachers are motivated by concerns for workload while students are motivated by affective factors such as feeling demotivated by the amount of WCF. This finding supports previous observations on the detrimental effect of comprehensive feedback provision on the motivation of EFL learners and their teachers (Yu et al., 2021a, 2021b).

The EFL learners' interpretation of major errors is not only form-focused, such as grammar and punctuation, but also content-focused. Other form-focused errors are also closely rated, such as spelling errors. Chen et al. (2016) reported a similar finding among a group of Chinese EFL learners who preferred a combination of grammar and content-related WCF. For teachers, major errors include content errors, such as errors related to the structural aspect of the content, as they place the highest emphasis on organization errors. Nonetheless, they also value form-focused feedback on grammatical errors. Teachers and students agree that major errors are not only form-focused but also content-related.

Comparable to the outcomes of Chen et al. (2016), the current study showed that EFL learners and their teachers agree on the usefulness of WCF on grammatical errors. A similar tendency is documented by Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) who noted that the ESL "students are anxious to perfect their English" (p. 115). However, unlike their participants, the EFL learners confirmed that they are not seeking error-free writing and are more concerned with the effective communication of their ideas.

The slight variation between teachers' and students' preferences for WCF categories indicates that overall, EFL learners and their teachers consider these categories of WCF of the utmost importance to the intelligibility of the students' writing. The evidence, however, is insufficient to prove that there is a significant discrepancy between the perceptions of teachers and students of WCF, considering that some variation in students' views is also documented. This slight variation among the EFL learners' perception of feedback type and amount could point to the possible influence exerted by individual variables of English language proficiency. The students are enrolled in different years of study, from years two to four, which indicates variation in their level of English language proficiency, and hence, their needs and preferences for WCF

might vary. Accordingly, the teachers' preference for both types of feedback could be a response to the students' learning needs at different levels of proficiency.

The findings of this study run counter to the assumption in some studies that EFL teachers would only focus on accuracy issues and hence, form-focused feedback. The findings emphasize that the realistic evaluation of WCF is contingent upon individual variables such as student level of proficiency and preference for WCF (Han, 2019). Accordingly, teachers should seek to maximize the students' uptake of the WCF by choosing different WCF techniques that respond to the needs of the different groups of learners (Moe et al., 2024).

In this study, students and teachers were also asked to evaluate the provision of WCF in online teaching and learning (i.e., OTL) versus face-to-face teaching and learning. The students reported challenges in understanding the WCF during OLT. The main causes of these challenges were the ambiguity of feedback, the lack of elaborate details in teachers' WCF in OTL, and the unclear handwriting of scanned documents, contacting the teachers' WCF. The issue of ambiguity or lack of clarity resulting from the technicality of handwriting should be addressed by typing the feedback. The provision of typed WCF in OTL makes responding to the WCF more convenient, as the students do not need to rewrite their whole work to correct their mistakes (Yoke et al., 2013).

The ambiguity or lack of clarity resulting from the insufficiency of feedback could be attributed to two reasons. First, it seems that the use of indirect feedback is insufficient for the students' uptake of the feedback. This is further supported by some students' demand for correction or more explanation on the nature of the error and/or the provided correction. Second, the students agreed that the insufficiency of online WCF resulted from the lack of physical interaction with the teachers during OTL. This implies that students sought further clarification on their received WCF in face-to-face teaching and learning. However, the shift to OTL made it difficult to seek further clarification from their teachers.

The teachers have also reported some difficulties in the provision of WCF during OTL. The main difficulty they had was the time constraint. This finding is similar to that of Jiang and Yu (2021) and AlBakri (2015), that the lack of face-to-face interaction with the students made WCF provision more time-consuming because of the increased feedback workload. During OTL, the indirect feedback was not enough, and the teachers were perhaps pressured to give more detailed WCF compared to what they were used to in face-to-face teaching and learning. The increased workload of WCF provision implies that while teachers preferred indirect WCF, they might have provided explanation and oral corrective feedback in face-to-face teaching and learning to scaffold their students' uptake of the WCF.

This implication confirms recent findings on the role of learner engagement as a prerequisite in facilitating the desired WCF uptake and sustained writing development (e.g., Zhang & Hyland, 2018; Zheng & Yu, 2018). When learners engage in dialogic interactions with peers or instructors regarding the feedback provided, they demonstrate an enhanced capacity to effectively address not only grammatical accuracy issues but also content-based issues (Zaccaron & Xhafaj, 2020). Similarly, Fitriyah et al. (2024) found that both teachers and students valued personalized and dialogic feedback, emphasizing that individual interactions and open dialogue in the feedback process promote active engagement and mutual understanding between teachers and students. Feedback discussion and oral feedback as learner engagement pedagogical practices affirm Han's (2019) conclusion that the effectiveness of WCF is contingent upon not only individual variables but also methodological variables, such as pedagogical practices.

The findings also emphasize that teacher training programs should move beyond traditional, one-way feedback to a dialogic feedback approach where learning emerges through students' active engagement with feedback (Myers & Buchanan, 2025). Instead of passively receiving comments, students interpret, evaluate, discuss, and act on feedback to support their ongoing learning (Akponah et al., 2024; Jwa, 2025). Engaging the learners in an interactive dialogue about feedback could create a two-way feedback loop that facilitates students' uptake of the feedback while at the same time gives the teachers immediate insights about their students' metacognitive processing of the feedback in terms of type, amount, and focus of feedback needed.

Overall, examining the online WCF in the OTL context reveals that student-teacher engagement with WCF is practiced to enhance the EFL learners' uptake of WCF. Consequently, to evaluate the effectiveness of WCF or a particular type of it, researchers should ensure that no oral feedback is provided for the students individually or in groups during any studies on the effectiveness of WCF. Otherwise, the research findings about the effectiveness of WCF alone could be misleading. Alternatively, the researcher should account for any side feedback practices outside the WCF that could be used by the teachers and go unnoticed, to develop a more comprehensive and realistic understanding of the effectiveness of WCF.

VI. CONCLUSION

Overall, this study contributes to enhancing our understanding of the EFL students' and teachers' perceptions of WCF. The findings confirm that WCF is an integral practice of English teaching and learning in the EFL context. The EFL learners and their teachers agree on the provision of selective, mid-focused, rather than comprehensive WCF. They preferred a focus on a group of categories of errors rather than flooding the students with feedback on all types of errors.

The study, however, has indicated a partial disagreement between teachers' practices of WCF and the students' preferences or the level of directness and type of error category. This partial disagreement is also documented among the participants themselves. Overall, teachers and some students prefer indirect WCF, while the majority of the students prefer either mid-focused direct or indirect with metalinguistic comments. Also, teachers prioritize organization-related feedback followed by grammar and content-related WCF. The EFL learners prioritize grammar-related WCF followed

by WCF on content and punctuation. These observed variations could be attributed to individual variables such as language proficiency, which confirms previous research findings on WCF that a realistic evaluation of WCF is contingent upon the individual variables.

An important contribution of this study is revealing that WCF during OTL, and by implication in face-to-face teaching and learning, alone might be insufficient. Feedback discussion and oral feedback as scaffolding strategies are needed to maximize the students' uptake of WCF feedback. Such practice calls attention to the importance of addressing the methodological variable of learner-teacher engagement that might affect the students' uptake of WCF. Future research directions suggest further research in the area of WCF and reiterate previous calls for centralizing the individual, contextual, and methodological variables such as, but not limited to, teachers' and students' preferences, levels of proficiency, and level of feedback directness, and WCF categories and other forms of student-teacher engagement practices used to support the students' uptake of the WCF.

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