

WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN ONLINE WRITING CLASSROOMS: EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND PREFERENCES

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ABSTRACT: *This article contributes to the existing body of research on written corrective feedback (WCF) in foreign language (L2) writing classrooms by focusing on online learning environments. The study offers insight into the effective use of different WCF strategies in a Saudi context. This was achieved by investigating students' perceptions of WCF and exploring the WCF strategies that students preferred in online writing classrooms. Data was collected through an online survey modified and administered for this study. SPSS version 26 was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the students' responses. Results for the first research question indicate that Saudi students felt positive about using WCF in their EFL online writing classrooms as they found it a helpful tool to improve their writing. For the second research question, findings suggest that students found some WCF strategies to be more helpful than others. Electronic feedback was the strategy that students most preferred, while unfocused feedback was the second most favorable strategy. The study has pedagogical implications for EFL teachers regarding the integration of different WCF strategies to improve EFL online writing classrooms.*

KEYWORDS: written corrective feedback, Saudi EFL students, online writing, classroom

INTRODUCTION

Recently, writing is becoming the most important skill for success in a wide range of occupations and study disciplines. Writing skills are necessary for students in higher education because they are encouraged to actively write when conducting research and sharing information. Writing also helps students improve their communication, self-expression, and academic success (Graham, 2006). Moreover, it helps improve students' academic achievement and learning performance. While writing is a vitally important skill for students, it is regarded as the most difficult and complex skill to master due to the numerous elements of language involved such as spelling, sentence

structure, words choice, etc (Harmer, 2004). Therefore, students need support and help to improve their L2 writing. To achieve this, teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) are required to provide clear and effective feedback to their students. Providing students with written corrective feedback (WCF) can help them develop writing skills, such as in-text structure and language mechanics, that are important to effectively convey the desired message (Chandler, 2003; Jahin, 2012; Kamimura, 2006). WCF enables students to obtain and display mastery of specific linguistic forms and structures for their L2 writing. It encourages and facilitates their academic L2 writing by communicating how well they are performing and where they need to improve. Thus, considering students' perceptions of and preferences for receiving written feedback on their L2 writing is essential to ensure its effectiveness.

According to the literature, many studies have investigated students' perspectives on receiving WCF on their writing. Some have found that the students found it to be a helpful tool to avoid committing the same mistakes and to enhance their writing (Ashrafi & Fozunfar, 2018; Chen et al., 2016). On the other hand, Others have found that the students believe that receiving feedback is demotivating, illegible, and associated with negative emotions due to negative comments on writing performance (Zumbrunn et al., 2016; Higgins et al., 2002). According to Gamlem and Smith (2013), the main reason for the differences in students' perceptions is that the way students perceive feedback depends on how it is provided and employed in the learning process. The choice of feedback-giving strategies has an impact on the effectiveness of their implementation. Empirical studies have identified different strategies for providing corrective feedback (e.g., Robb et al., 1986; Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 2006), for example, direct feedback (providing the correct form to the learners), indirect feedback (indicating the errors without correction), focused feedback (providing feedback on a specific linguistic feature), and unfocused feedback (providing general feedback without focusing on a specific language feature). Students' preferences regarding these strategies should be considered because the students' experience receiving feedback can determine the feedback's effectiveness (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Moreover, it has a significant impact on their response to use feedback in learning (Schulz, 2001).

Although many WCF studies have focused on WCF, there are many unanswered questions and gaps in the literature that call for further investigation. For example, many previous studies were conducted in face-to-face environments (Hamouda, 2011; Ashrafi & Fozunfar, 2018; Chen et al., 2016; Zumbrunn et al., 2016; Higgins et al., 2002; Mustafa, 2012). Therefore, students' opinions of WCF and their preferences regarding the WCF strategies used in online writing classrooms also call for further investigation. Recently, and necessarily because of the COVID-19 pandemic, most universities, schools, and institutions transferred to online learning. Therefore, research in this area will help teachers gain a better grasp of how to persuade students to value feedback and be more willing to use it to improve themselves in this isolated environment. Moreover, disagreement in the previous studies in both students'

perceptions (Truscott, 1996 and Ferris,1999) and preferences (Saragih et al., 2021; Iswandari, 2016; Kassim and Ng, 2014; Lertcheva, 2014) requires further investigation to consider factors that may affect the results, such as the level of proficiency, age of the learners, and strategies used for feedback. This study fills these gaps by investigating students' perceptions of WCF in online writing classrooms. It also explores the WCF strategies that students prefer in online writing classrooms in a Saudi context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Corrective Feedback in L2 Writing

Writing is the act of putting words to paper to express one's thoughts or beliefs. Writing is a skill that students find challenging when learning a language. Some researchers have argued that most students of English as a foreign language (EFL) find it challenging to both formulate and arrange their ideas and translate their ideas into readable writing (Richards & Renandya, 2002). In other words, learners struggle to express themselves due to the differences in rules and structures between their native language and English. To address this, EFL teachers can give their students corrective feedback (CF) to help them improve their writing. CF was defined by Lightbown and Spada (1999) as "any indication to the learners that their use of the target language is inappropriate" (p. 171). There are two forms of providing corrective feedback which are written and oral feedback (Saragih et al.,2021). Since this study focuses on writing skills, it focuses on the written form which is written corrective feedback (WCF).

According to Lightbown and Spada (1999) WCF is "a variety of ways a reader can respond to a second language writer by suggesting that some usage in the writing does not comply to the target language's norms." Thus, teachers can review students' writing by focusing on the major issues such as grammar, vocabulary, and organization. Despite the importance of WCF in L2 writing classrooms, whether WCF should be used is still disputed, as it can have both beneficial and detrimental effects. According to Armhein and Nassaji (2010), if input is deemed meaningless by students, it will be ignored. Meanwhile, if students find input beneficial, they will accept it, work on it, and learn from it. On the one hand, Pajares (2003), Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), and Shirota (2016) have asserted that providing feedback on writing improves students' motivation and self-regulation when writing. On the other hand, Robinson et al. (2013) have claimed that it contributes to negative emotional responses and discourages writing drive. This result aligns with Truscott's (1999) argument that providing corrective feedback has only a detrimental impact on pupils' learning. It could be assumed that individual and contextual factors are the main reasons behind this debate over the effectiveness of WCF.

Students' Perception of WCF

Exploring how students perceive feedback practice is important for the present research because it will help determine whether utilizing WCF in an L2 writing classroom is

effective (Bitchner, 2008; Bitchner & Knoch, 2010; Sheen, 2009) or harmful (Robinson et al., 2013; Truscott, 2004). Many studies have been carried out, all of which have shown that students are enthusiastic about WCF being used in their L2 writing classes (Hamouda, 2011; Ashrafi & Fozunfar, 2018; Chen et al., 2016; Zumbrunn et al., 2016; Higgins et al., 2002; Mustafa, 2012). Hamouda (2011) used a questionnaire to assess the views of Saudi EFL students and teachers. The findings showed that both students and instructors had a favorable opinion of WCF. Similarly, Ashrafi and Fozunfar (2018) used a questionnaire and then interviewed three groups of students. Oral feedback was given to the first group, written feedback was given to the second group, and both oral and written feedback were given to the third group. According to the findings, students showed a positive attitude toward all three types of feedback (Ashrafi & Fozunfar, 2018). In a mixed-method study conducted among Chinese students by Chen et al. (2016), the authors discovered that students like error repairs because they help improve their writing.

Nevertheless, students loathe receiving criticism because it is negative and demotivating in terms of developing their writing (Zumbrunn et al., 2016). Moreover, students perceived feedback to be too impersonal, unhelpful, ambiguous, and illegible (Higgins et al., 2002). Mustafa (2012) conducted a qualitative study in the Saudi context. He questioned five Saudi students to get their thoughts on the feedback they receive and their perceptions of what constitutes helpful feedback. The data imply that Saudi students are dissatisfied with the feedback they receive, and that the input they desire differs significantly from what they receive.

Previous researchers found that these disparities is due to students' different levels of language proficiency and their different usage of feedback. This means that the level of language proficiency impacts the way that students interpret feedback such as direct correction, indirect corrections, focused correction, and unfocused correction. All these factors should be considered while providing feedback. For example, several researchers have proposed that learner characteristics, such as learners' level of proficiency, should be considered when WCF is provided (Schulz, 1996; Ferris, 1999; Lee et al., 2016). Furthermore, a Chinese study valued student characteristics that may contribute to the efficacy of WCF including learners' usage and interpretation of teacher feedback (Zhao, 2010). Therefore, it is important to take into account students' preferences as well as the factors that might affect them while receiving feedback in order to provide highly effective feedback.

Students' Preferences Regarding WFC Types

Preference, as defined by Aydin and Ayranci (2018), is when a person selects one thing over another because they favor it. EFL teachers need to be aware of the differences between their learners' preferences regarding the different ways of providing feedback and take them into consideration (Chung, 2015; Diab, 2015; Han, 2015). There are many types of WCF, as well as diverse strategies for providing corrections. Direct and indirect WCF are two types that researchers have explored (Aseeri, 2019; Beuningen,

2010; Eslami, 2014; Ganapathy et al., 2020; Iswandari, 2016; Li and He, 2017; Morphology, 2015; Saragih et al., 2021; and Winda and Sanny, 2018). The distinction between these two strategies, according to Beuningen (2010), is the extent to which students are active in the correction. On the one hand, with direct feedback, teachers identify students' errors and deliver the correct target forms directly. On the other hand, teachers using indirect WCF indicate where errors have occurred by providing error codes, such as underlining or circling the errors. In this strategy, it is the responsibility of the student to fix their own mistakes.

Several studies have been conducted in this regard and they have revealed contradictory results. For example, many studies have investigated students' preferences regarding different feedback strategies such as direct and indirect feedback. According to Saragih et al. (2021), Morphology (2015), Winda and Sanny (2018), Ganapathy et al. (2020), and Aseeri (2019), direct feedback is the most favored type because it improves students' writing skills. Conversely, Iswandari (2016), Eslami (2014), and Li and He (2017) found that the majority of students prefer indirect WCF. In addition, in one study, the indirect feedback group proved to be significantly better than "the red pen" feedback group on the delayed posttest (Eslami, 2014). The reason for this discrepancy may be that indirect corrective feedback is ineffective for low-proficiency foreign-language learners, who may lack the linguistic skills to self-correct their errors.

Focused feedback refers to feedback that is given only on a specific and pre-selected error type, for example feedback provided only on errors displaying incorrect use of English articles (Sheen, 2009). Unfocused feedback refers to feedback that is given on all or a range of error types. For unfocused feedback, the teacher corrects errors in tenses, articles, spelling, pronouns, vocabulary usage, and prepositions (Lertcheva, 2014). Instructors can offer focused or unfocused feedback to students. The correction of all or a set of errors in learners' written work is referred to as unfocused feedback. Language instructors frequently employ this method of comprehensive correcting. Focused feedback, on the other hand, is used to identify a few specific problems in students' written work that need to be fixed (Ellis et al., 2008). Many studies have been conducted to compare focused and unfocused feedback based on students' views. Kassim and Ng (2014) investigated focused and unfocused feedback efficacy regarding the accurate use of prepositions by ESL learners in written work over a period of 12 weeks using the experimental method. Both treatment groups outperformed the control group in the posttests; however, there was no significant difference between the unfocused and focused corrective feedback groups. Conversely, in another experimental study by Lertcheva (2014), the delayed posttest results showed that, compared to the focused feedback group, the unfocused feedback group yielded better long-term acquisition effects. Although many earlier studies employed unfocused corrective feedback to improve language accuracy in writing (e.g., Chandler, 2003; Robb et al., 1986), Ellis (2009) believed that focused corrective feedback provides "rich evidence" for the learners to be aware of the errors they commit, and that more focused attention paid to particular errors may lead to enhanced learning. However, students

with a higher level of language proficiency are more competent at self-correcting (Park et al., 2015). Thus, using indirect and unfocused strategies could be effective for upper-intermediate to advanced L2 learners but not for beginner learners.

Since teaching EFL, particularly writing skills, in online classrooms is a big challenge for English teachers, students are required to be self-regulated, autonomous, and motivated to achieve their academic goals. Using technology effectively may be the key to helping EFL teachers create an active online learning environment. However, students' interests, abilities, and technological literacy should be considered. Reichelt (2001) classified the field of computer technology used for developing foreign language writing skills as "computer-assisted language learning" (CALL). For example, to practice language structures through writing, interactive digital tools like email services and word processing applications should be used. Using these interactive tools can facilitate the improvement of L2 writing skills (Reichelt, 2001). In a study conducted by Yoke et al. (2013) that investigated alternative methods of providing WCF, such as through email, the results indicated that students prefer receiving feedback via e-mail over the conventional pen and paper. Therefore, using technology in providing WCF may be an effective way to improve the writing skills for EFL learners. Recently, Iksan & Halim (2018) conducted an experimental study to compare students' anxiety levels when receiving WCF on their L2 writing either traditionally or electronically by using a wiki. The results indicate that using web-based tools such as wikis for providing e-feedback is effective at lowering students' anxiety levels compared with face-to-face (pen and paper) feedback corrections (Iksan & Halim, 2018). Shintani & Aubrey (2016) investigated the effectiveness of using online tools to provide written corrective feedback in the L2 writing classroom. In this study, Moodle forums and Word documents were the main media platforms used to provide WCF. The findings indicate that students prefer using electronic tools to provide WCF as it makes them enjoy revising their mistakes and improving their writing in a short time. Another study that supports using computer-mediated corrective feedback in L2 writing classrooms, conducted by Abuseileek (2013), investigated the effectiveness of computer-mediated WCF by utilizing three techniques: (track changes), (word processor), and (track changes and word processor). The results of this experimental study found a significant difference between the control and treatment groups. The computer-mediated groups had fewer errors compared with the control group. Moreover, feedback type had a significant effect in favor of the group that used a combination of track changes and word processors. Despite using e-feedback to provide WCF having a positive impact on the students' writing abilities, there is a lack of studies investigating this type of feedback in L2 writing online classrooms.

In brief, in this modern age, using e-feedback is cost-effective, efficient, and easy to do. Thus, EFL teachers must integrate technology when providing WCF. Especially in the isolated environment of an online classroom, students need to receive regular and clear feedback on their writing.

Studies Looking at WCF in a Saudi Context

In a Saudi context, many studies have investigated Saudi students' perceptions of different types of WCF (Aseeri, 2019; Hamouda, 2011; Mustafa, 2012; Qutob & Madini, 2020). A quantitative study was conducted by Aseeri (2019) to investigate Saudi teachers' and students' attitudes toward the most common techniques used in receiving feedback in L2 writing classrooms such as direct and indirect feedback. This study found that direct feedback is the strategy that instructors most often use. Moreover, these findings indicate that both instructors and students have positive attitudes toward WCF. Similarly, Hamouda (2011) investigated Saudi EFL students' and teachers' preferences and attitudes towards written error corrections. Hamouda's findings revealed that teachers and students prefer to give feedback (e.g., questions, assertions, imperatives, exclamations, underlining or circling faults, and issuing correction codes) in different ways. Circling and underlining errors were the most favored strategies among students. A recent mixed-method study conducted by Qutob & Madini (2020) found that Saudi students felt positively about, and preferred to use, electronic tools for WCF. However, the study did not focus on specific types of electronic tools or students' preferences among them.

Based on this literature review and to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is a lack of studies investigating the effectiveness of using WCF in online classrooms, especially in a Saudi context. In addition, the lack of investigation into e.feedback is evident. Moreover, conflicting findings in the literature regarding the perceptions of and preferences for WCF in L2 writing classrooms prompted the current study. Thus, this study intends to fill in the gap and answer the following research questions to gain a deeper understanding of Saudi students' impressions of WCF in online classrooms and the techniques that they favor the most:

Research Questions

RQ1. What are the students' perceptions of written corrective feedback in an online writing classroom?

RQ2. What are the WCF strategies preferred by the students in an online writing classroom?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This study seeks to measure EFL students' attitudes toward using WCF as a means to improve their writing skills. Moreover, it aims to explore students' preferences for different types of WCF. A quantitative research method was used. It is applied to describe behaviors and gather people's perceptions, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs about a current issue in education (Creswell, 2008; Lodico et al.,2010).

Study Instrument

The instrument used in this study was adapted from Marrs (2016) and Rowe & Wood (2008). In the present study, the instrument was modified to be administered to EFL students who study L2 writing in an online classroom. It consists of two scales: The first consists of sixteen statements to determine the students' perceptions of the effectiveness of using WCF to improve their writing skills., and the second consists of nineteen items that examine the students' preferences toward direct, indirect, focused, unfocused, and electronic corrective feedback (e-feedback) in online EFL classrooms. Each scale is designed on a five-point Likert Scale (1-Agree, 2-Strongly Agree, 3-Slightly Agree, 4-Disagree, 5-Strongly Disagree). Students should rate the statement based on the degree to what they think that the WCF and its strategies are helpful. Experts reviewed the questionnaire to ensure that the items were comprehensive and easy to comprehend before distributing it to participants. Before administering the questionnaire, a pilot stage was conducted with ten students to ensure whether the items were clear or not. The pilot group reported that the wording of the instructions on the two subscales was unclear, thus some amendments were made to the instructions before distribution.

Participants

This study's participants comprised 50 EFL students studying online courses because of the COVID-19 pandemic in the academic years 2021. The participants were aged from 18 to 25 years. They were intermediate students. Their level of language proficiency was determined by the placement test provided by an English-language institution at a Saudi university.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical issues regarding data collection were taken into consideration. Approval was requested and approved by the English language institution at a Saudi university. All students participated voluntarily. There were assured that their identities and responses would remain anonymous, and that the data would only be used for the research paper.

Procedure and Data Analysis

Upon approval from the English language institution in the university, snowball sampling was used to collect the data. The participants selected based on their level of language proficiency. Web surveys were administrated to collect data about the participants' perceptions of the benefits of using written corrective feedback to improve L2 writing.

Through snowball sampling, a Google forum link of the survey was sent via WhatsApp, emails, and Telegram to reach the selected participants. The online survey took 15–20 minutes to complete. 50 students answered the survey completely. The participants' responses were analyzed using SPSS software version 26. While descriptive statistics were collected to describe the students' responses to the items, the reliability of the instrument was calculated to check the internal consistency of students' responses to

the survey. According to Dörnyei (2007), Cronbach's alpha must be above (.70). The analysis provided an excellent average (see Table 1).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Before analyzing the data, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to check the internal consistency of students' responses to the survey. Table 1 below shows that the Cronbach's alpha for students' perceptions of WCF was ($\alpha = .75$) and WCF strategies preferred by the students were ($\alpha = .80$). Total reliability for the entire questionnaire was $\alpha = .89$.

Table 1

Reliability analysis

Variables	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
Students' perceptions of WCF	16	.75
WCF strategies preferred by the students	19	.80

Students' Perceptions of WCF in Online Writing Classroom

In general, the majority of students had a positive perception toward using written corrective feedback in an online writing classroom. 90% of surveyed students agreed that receiving feedback makes them feel proud, confident, and like a better writer. Most students used feedback to help them improve their writing on future assignments (89%). In addition, many students found feedback to be a helpful way to inform them of their errors (85%) and gauge their performance (84%). On the other hand, the data indicated that approximately half the students found receiving feedback made them feel "hopeless" (45%) and frustrated (66%). However, most of the students disagreed to say that WCF is unhelpful (78%). Students' responses to WCF implementation in the online writing classroom are elaborated in Table 2 below.

Table 2*Students' perceptions of written corrective feedback in the online writing classroom*

N	Types of feedback	Agreement	Disagreement	Mean (St. Deviation)
1	Feedback on my writing sometimes is frustrating	66%	34%	3.10(1.23)
2	Feedback on my writing makes me feel proud	90%	10%	3.80(1.04)
3	Feedback on my writing makes me feel happy	86%	14%	3.84(1.12)
4	Feedback on my writing makes me give up	33%	64%	2.31(1.04)
5	The feedback I get on writing makes me want to become a better writer	88%	12%	3.82(1.09)
6	Feedback on my writing makes me feel like I am a bad writer	42%	58%	2.51(1.30)
7	Feedback makes me feel like I am a good writer	79%	21%	3.53(1.13)
8	Feedback on my writing makes me feel confident	90%	10%	3.86(1.11)
9	Feedback on my writing makes me feel hopeless	45%	55%	2.49(1.17)
10	Feedback on my writing is unhelpful	22%	78%	2.04(1.01)
11	Feedback helps me write better next time	84%	16%	4.00(1.01)
12	Feedback tells me what I did well in my writing	84%	16%	3.88(1.19)
13	Feedback explains what I did wrong in my writing	85%	15%	3.94(1.24)
14	Feedback makes me a better writer	90%	10%	4.00(1.00)

15	I use feedback to help me write better next time	89%	11%	4.06(1.02)
16	Feedback tells me how to make my writing better	88%	12%	4.08(1.14)

Students' Preferred WFC Strategies in Online Writing Classrooms

The questionnaire in this study covered all WCF strategies developed by Ellis (2009). It provided a more detailed overview of the types of feedback and strategies that could be used in an educational setting, and students had the opportunity to explore what types of WCF they preferred. Even though the students held positive perceptions of all the strategies, some strategies rated higher than others. Table 3 depicts the development of the WCF strategies.

Many of the students found that using electronic feedback facilitated the reviewing process (M=4.10). Most of the students were pleased with using Blackboard to provide feedback (M=4.24). Finally, students stated that using electronic feedback was better (M=3.24) and more enjoyable (M=3.45) than pen and paper. As a result, it can be deduced that students preferred electronic corrective feedback strategy in which their writing errors/mistakes have been revised using electronic devices and platforms (see Table 3).

Table 3

Electronic strategies preferred by the students in online writing classrooms

Types of feedback	Items	Mean (St. Deviation)
Electronic feedback	I think providing corrections electronically allows me to better review the correction	4.10(1.10)
	I believe using email is better for providing feedback than pen and paper	3.24(1.33)
	I believe using Blackboard is better for providing feedback than pen and paper	4.24(1.46)
	I think using technology to provide feedback makes me enjoy reviewing corrections more than pen and paper	3.45(1.34)

Unfocused feedback was the second most preferred type of WCF strategy. Students reported that using “unfocused feedback” encouraged them to be more aware of their writing (M=4.08). Students’ responses showed that correcting errors helped them gain more knowledge (M=96). On the other hand, some students reported that correcting mistakes should be specific (M=3.59). Also, respondents indicated that focusing on crucial errors could motivate them to learn more (M=3.88) (see Table 4).

Table 4*Focused and unfocused strategies preferred by students in online writing classrooms*

Types of feedback	Items	Mean (St. Deviation)
Focused feedback	I think the corrections should be specific	3.59(1.28)
	I think that feedback should focus only on certain crucial errors	3.10(1.33)
	I think focusing on crucial errors motivates me to learn more	3.71(1.18)
Unfocused feedback	I believe correcting all errors encourages me to be more aware of my writing	4.08(1.18)
	I believe that correcting any errors motivates me to gain more knowledge	3.96(1.14)
	I believe correcting any errors, in general, is helpful for me	3.96(1.23)

Students preferred indirect feedback without codes over direct strategies. “Circling and underlining the mistakes” was the most favorable method for students (M=4.00). Students found that being able to immediately locate their mistakes could help them learn more by using their critical thinking skills to analyze their mistakes (M=3.96) (See Table 5).

Table 5*Direct and indirect strategies preferred by the students in online writing classrooms*

N	Types of feedback	Items	Mean (St. Deviation)
1	Direct feedback	I like seeing the corrected forms of my errors	3.98(1.02)
		I believe providing the right forms is encouraging	3.76(1.14)
		I believe knowing the right forms helps me reflect on my errors	4.00(1.05)
2	Indirect feedback with using codes	I prefer receiving codes and cues to identify errors	3.67(1.17)
		I believe providing only codes is helpful for better understanding	3.31(1.22)
		I believe providing codes increases motivation to learn	3.78(1.11)
3	Indirect feedback without using codes	I think underlining or circling errors without any codes or revisions is better for learning	4.00(1.05)
		I think locating errors without codes trains me to analyze and think critically	3.96(1.17)
		I believe locating errors without codes can improve learning	3.88(1.03)

Overall, electronic feedback was the most favored type of WCF (89%). Unfocused WCF was students’ second preferred type (87%). The most interesting findings were that focused feedback ranked last for participants (73%). All the three types of WCF including direct, indirect with codes, and indirect without codes were rated closely together (76%), (78%), and (79%) respectively (see Figure 1).

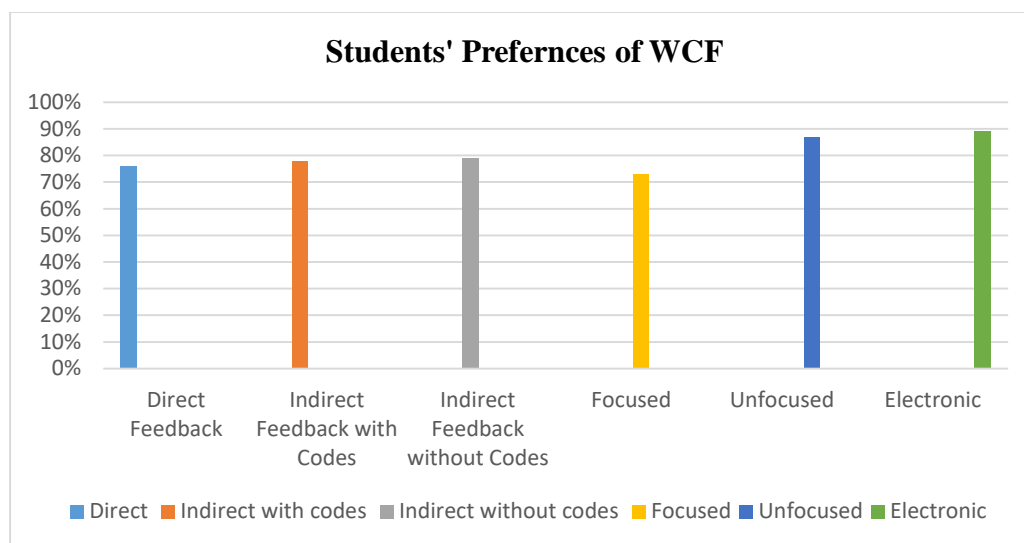


Figure 1 : Students' Presences of WCF

DISCUSSION

Students' Perceptions of Written Corrective Feedback in Online Writing Classroom

The research findings indicate that students have a positive perception of using WCF in their EFL writing classroom. These findings align with those of several previous studies (Hamouda, 2011; Ashrafi & Foozunfar, 2018; Chen et al., 2016; Zumbrunn et al., 2016; Higgins et al., 2002; Mustafa, 2012). Many students like WCF because it helps them improve their writing and makes them better writers. These findings are similar to those of Chen et al. (2016) who highlight that error corrections are preferred by students since they aid in the improvement of their writing. However, Mustafa (2012) claims that Saudi students are unsatisfied with the feedback they get. This researcher argues that one reason for these results is that the study focused on general feedback while the current study focused on WCF.

Another important finding of the current study is that receiving feedback was associated with positive emotions. Students felt proud, happy, and confident when they received their feedback. The current study is not the first to discover that some students link positive emotions with good feedback. Similarly, Zumbrunn et al. (2016) support that students frequently associate joy and happiness with written feedback for their writing. Similarly, to the Saudi context, it has been found that students hold positive perceptions of WCF (Aseeri, 2019; Hamouda, 2011; Mustafa, 2012; Qutob & Madini, 2020). Even though Saudi students have positive attitudes toward WCF, it has been found that receiving feedback can also be hopeless, frustrating, and unhelpful for the students. These findings align with previous studies as they highlight that WCF could demotivate students to improve their writing (Zumbrunn et al., 2016). Also, students may find it

unhelpful and impersonal (Higgins et al., 2002). Since students can hold these negative emotions toward feedback, it could be assumed that these feelings result from the techniques used to deliver it. Thus, considering the way that the students prefer to receive their feedback is essential to make it effective and acceptable for students.

WCF Strategies Do Students Prefer in Online Writing Classrooms

According to the results of the study, most participants prefer to receive electronic feedback. Integrating different platforms and devices to provide WCF in an online environment would be more effective for them than using traditional methods (e.g., pen and paper corrections). It has been found that students are in favor of using emails to provide WCF. This finding is supported by Yoke et al. (2013) who find that students prefer using alternative methods such as email to provide feedback rather than traditional methods. Moreover, results indicate that students enjoy reviewing their mistakes when teachers use electronic platforms or devices. Similar to Shintani & Aubrey (2016), this study highlights that students enjoy revising their mistakes to improve their L2 writing when teachers use electronic means of feedback such as Moodle and Word documents.

The second-best strategy of WCF for the students was unfocused feedback. Students agreed that using an unfocused strategy helped them become aware of their mistakes and motivated them to learn more about their mistakes. Many previous studies find that using unfocused feedback is a very effective way to improve language accuracy in L2 writing (e.g., Chandler, 2003; Robb et al., 1986). However, Ellis (2009) claims that using focused feedback is better for providing rich information and evidence to help learners become aware of their mistakes. Park et al. (2015) mention that the level of proficiency is the main reason behind this differentiation. This means that students with a high level of proficiency might have the ability to engage with unfocused strategies while beginner learners need clear and detailed feedback. Even though the preference between focus and unfocused feedback was very close in our study, the students preferred unfocused feedback more as they were intermediate language learners.

The results indicate that students preferred an indirect feedback strategy without codes over a direct strategy. Many previous studies align with this as they also find that students prefer indirect methods of providing WCF (Iswandari, 2016; Eslami, 2014; and Li and He, 2017). Since this study focused on intermediate students, it should be noted that the means are very close to each other. Students at this level, which is between beginner and advanced, may have the ability to manage and correct errors using indirect strategies but they may lack the language skill that facilitates the correction process. Lower proficiency levels may struggle with these strategies.

Implications to Research and Practice

The findings of the current study reveal that Saudi EFL students have a positive perception of WCF, and they have different preferences for different WCF strategies. Therefore, in this section, some suggestions and implications should be mentioned to

help EFL teachers in this area. To provide useful feedback, teachers should consider students' preferences and perspectives on WCF. As a result, the findings of this study can help teachers gain a clear picture of their students' areas of deficiency and weakness while students can comprehend the hurdles or difficulties that impede their mastery of writing skills. Moreover, according to this study, students prefer using electronic feedback in their online L2 writing classrooms. Thus, providing both teachers and students with specific training programs and workshops in this area would be especially helpful in this modern age.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FURTHER RECOMMENDATION

Written corrective feedback is one of the most important tools that instructors can use to improve their students' writing in EFL classrooms. Therefore, this study investigated students' perceptions of WCF and their preferences for different types of WCF in online writing classrooms in a Saudi context. The study comprised a quantitative questionnaire that was administered among Saudi EFL students. For the first research question, it can be said that Saudi students had positive perceptions toward using WCF in their EFL online writing classrooms as they found it a helpful tool to improve their writing. For the second research question, findings indicate that students found some WCF strategies to be helpful than others. Electronic feedback was the most preferred strategy among students, while unfocused feedback was the second most favorable strategy.

This study has limitations that should be mentioned. First, only one method was used to collect the data due to time constraints. It would have been beneficial to use more methods to investigate students' perceptions, including both using surveys and conducting an experimental study, to obtain more accurate findings. Second, the demographic characteristics of the survey participants selected were limited. This could be improved in the future by including students with various levels of language proficiency, from beginner to advanced. Third, students who might have not experienced some WCF strategies or have limited exposure to them may rate these strategies as less preferred or effective.

Based on the results of this study, we recommend examining and comparing the perceptions of students and instructors to explore the differences and similarities between the groups. Further research could also focus more on how the instructors' personality, gender, and experience with different strategies of providing feedback may affect the students' attitudes toward WCF. We also recommend further research to investigate the use of electronic WCF by focusing on different online tools such as Blackboard, class wikis, and email.

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Appendices

Appendix A (Ethical Approval Form)



Ethics Approval Form 2021

This application form is to be used by faculty members and postgraduate students seeking ethical approval for an individual research project where primary research focus is in the English Language Institute at King Abdulaziz University.

Research must NOT begin until approval has been received from the ELI Ethics Committee.

1. Applicant Details

1.1 Primary applicant	Faten Ahmed Ali Salami
1.2 Affiliation	MA in TESOL
1.3 KAU ID (if applicable)	2100128
1.4 KAU Email (if applicable)	falisalami@stu.kau.edu.sa
1.5 Applicant Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Faculty member <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ELI Postgraduate student <input type="checkbox"/> KAU postgraduate student <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify:.....
1.6 List the names and affiliation of others involved in the research group	Faten Ahmed Salami Dr. Hanadi Khadawardi

2. Research Study Details

2.1 Title	Written Corrective Feedback in Online L2 writing classrooms: EFL Students' Perceptions and Preferences
2.2 Proposed start and end date of data collection	Start Date: 24/ 10/ 2021 End Date: 4 / 11/ 2021
2.3 Main supervisor (postgraduate students only)	Name: Dr. Hanadi Khadawardi Email: falisalami@stu.kau.edu.sa
2.4 Project type: Please choose the predominant data collection research instrument(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Questionnaire/ Survey <input type="checkbox"/> Interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Focus groups <input type="checkbox"/> Experiment <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom Observation <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify:.....
2.5 Briefly describe the aims of this research study. Any technical terms or discipline-specific phrases should be explained. Please use no more than 300 words.	



This article contributes to the existing body of research on written corrective feedback in L2 writing classrooms, by focusing on online learning environment in the technological age. The study offers an insight into the effective use of different strategies of written corrective feedback in a Saudi context. This was achieved by investigating the students' perceptions of written corrective feedback in the online writing classroom. Also, by exploring the WCF strategies preferred by the students in the online writing classrooms.

2.6 Please provide an outline of the proposed research methods and procedure. Please use no more than 300 words.

To collect the data, online survey will be adopted and modified based on the purposes of the present research study. Spss Version 23 will be applied to analyze the data.

3. Participant Information

3.1 Who are the participants?	Preparatory year students at KAU will participate in this study. The participants aged from 18 to 25 years.
3.2 Number of participants required with justification.	About 100 students
3.3 How will they be recruited?	Online survey will be sent to the students via emails, telegrams and WhatsApp.
3.4 What is the inclusion/exclusion criteria?	Under- intermediate students and art-track students will be excluded. While upper-intermediate students and science-track students will be included
3.5 Are there any possible risks that participants may experience while participating in the research?	No
3.6 Explain whether participants will be provided with any financial incentive or other "reward" that will be used during the research	The participant will be voluntary . No reward will be given to them.

4. Publication and Dissemination of Results

4.1 Please briefly describe how:

- How the research results will be reported/ published;
- How will the participants' and the institution's confidentiality be maintained in your reports and/or publications.



Declaration

I certify that the information contained in this application is accurate. I have attempted to identify the risks that may arise in conducting this research and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants. I confirm that the research will be conducted in line with KAU ethical code, will avoid conflict of interest, and will preserve the confidentiality and dignity of the participants.

Name of primary applicant: Faten Ahmed Salami

Signature:.....

Date: 18/10/2021

Approval

The ELI Ethics Committee has considered the ethical aspects of this application. The committee recommends that the project be:

Approved deferred (for reasons attached) not approved

.....
.....
.....

Dr Badiah Hakeem
ELI Vice-Dean women's campus

..... 3./11/2021

Dr Nashwa Saaty
Head of the Graduate Studies and
Academic Academic Research Unit

..... 31/10/2021

Dr Hana Jan
Head of the Affairs Unit

..... 2./11/2021

Appendix B (The Questionnaire)

Students rated their perceptions and preferences based on five-point Likert scale (Agree- Strongly agree- slightly agree-disagree-strongly disagree).

Part One: Students' Perceptions of WCF

1. Feedback on my writing is frustrating

2. Feedback on my writing makes me feel proud
3. Feedback on my writing makes me feel happy
4. Feedback on my writing makes me give up
5. The feedback I get on writing makes me want to become a better writer
6. Feedback on my writing makes me feel like I am a bad writer
7. Feedback makes me feel like I am a good writer
8. Feedback on my writing makes me feel confident
9. Feedback on my writing makes me feel hopeless
10. Feedback on my writing is unhelpful
11. Feedback helps me write better next time
12. Feedback tells me what I did well in my writing
13. Feedback explains what I did wrong in my writing
14. Feedback makes me a better writer
15. I use feedback to help me write better next time
16. Feedback tells me how to make my writing better

Part Two: Students' Preferences of WCF Strategy

1. I like providing the right forms of the errors
2. I believe providing the right forms is encouraging
3. I believe Knowing the right forms assists in reflecting on the errors
4. I prefer giving codes and cues through the errors Providing
5. I prefer providing only codes is helpful for a better understanding
6. I believe Providing codes encourages the learning motivation
7. I think underlining or circling the errors without any codes or revisions is better for learning
8. I think locating the errors only trains to analyze and think critically
9. I believe locating the errors only is highly suggested for learning improvement
10. I think the corrections should be specific

11. I think that feedback should focus only on certain crucial errors
12. I think focusing on crucial errors motivates me to learn more
13. I believe correcting all errors encourages me to be more aware of my writing

14. I believe that correcting any errors motivates me to gain more knowledge
15. I believe correcting any errors, in general, is helpful for me
16. I think providing corrections electronically allows me to better review the correction
17. I believe using email is better for providing feedback than pen and paper
18. I believe using Blackboard is better for providing feedback than pen and paper
19. I think using technology to provide feedback makes me enjoy reviewing corrections more than pen and paper.