

WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK: INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PREFERENCES

Pariyanto

Program Studi Sastra Inggris
Fakultas Ilmu Budaya
Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya
pariyanto@untag-sby.ac.id

Dona Rahayu Sugiharti

Program Studi Sastra Inggris
Fakultas Ilmu Budaya
Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya
donarahayu@untag-sby.ac.id

Article History

Received
14-05-2022

Revised
26-05-2022

Accepted
31-05-2022

Abstract. This paper reports on an exploratory study that investigated learners' perceptions and preferences of written corrective feedback (WCF) in Indonesian EFL setting. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from 32 adult English learners studying academic writing. Employing written questionnaire, the study explored the learners' perceptions and preferences of WCF. The results indicated that the participants (1) mainly expressed a favorable attitude towards error correction or WCF; (2) preferred to revise errors on punctuation (40%), vocabulary (30%), spelling (15%), grammar (10%), and organization (5%); (3) considered commenting on content, grammar, organization, overall quality of writing equally important; (4) believed that WCF is effective when it is presented by underlining the error and then pointing to the correct source of information, showing the location of the error and indicating the type of error, underlining the error, and then telling the correct form, providing corrections for errors and then providing an explanation regarding the improvements; and (5) shared similar opinions about WCF, regardless of their proficiency level. Overall, the findings confirm the significance of WCF for Indonesian EFL learners learning to write.

Keywords: *Written corrective feedback, error correction, L2 writing, English as a foreign language*

INTRODUCTION

One of important aspects of teaching English as a foreign language is how to deal with learner errors. Correcting mistakes and commenting on learners' written assignment is one of the teacher's daily routines. Nevertheless, the efficacy of feedback provision is still questioned whether or not it improves second language learners' accuracy. In other words, studies in second language writing (L2 Writing) and second language acquisition (SLA) place the role of written corrective feedback (WCF) as a debatable topic. The role of WCF has been the topic of debate since Truscott (1996) argued that "substantial research has shown [grammar correction] to be ineffective and nothing has shown it to be useful in any interesting sense" (p. 327). His argument received criticism from other researchers (e.g. Guénette, 2007; Ferris, 2004; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Through some empirical research, Guénette (2007), Ferris (2004), and Hyland & Hyland, (2006) suggest that WCF such as grammar correction is important for SLA and continue to be essential component in L2 instruction.

There are a few focuses of dispute about WCF, such as whether it is explicit or implicit (see Ellis et al., 2009), or whether it is selective or comprehensive (see Sheen, 2007 and van Beuningen et al., 2012). Arguments concerning WCF are varied. However, many researchers agree that WCF is a subject that is complex and multivariate where more and more research is required (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Over the last ten years, fortunately, positive trends have been shown regarding the number of studies exploring WCF- ranging from descriptive analysis to experimental designs. Students and teachers' perception of the usefulness of WCF is one of the concerns the researchers popularly investigate (e.g., Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Brown, 2009; Diab, 2005; Karim & Nassaji, 2015; Lee, 2008; Montgomery & Baker, 2007; Simard et al., 2015).

The perception of learners is believed to affect the role of WCF (e.g. whether the learners have the same interpretation as the teacher expect in the feedback provided). Amrhein & Nassaji, (2010) contend that different understanding or interpretation on the WCF may lead to ineffectiveness of learning. Learners' positive attitudes toward WCF make effective instruction, as shown by research studies discussed above. This is very important that more and more evidence has been provided regarding the value of WCF in the existing debate in the field (Ferris, 2012; Saito, 1994; Schulz, 2001). Even though learners' perception has previously been explored in EFL context, for instance study by Chen et al., (2016), yet the context of EFL has various attributes as learners' characteristics and motivation. In Chen et al. (2016) study, the participants were Chinese students attending the university. The participants in the present research is Indonesia adult EFL learners. The present study is aimed at exploring Indonesian EFL learners' perception and preferences of WCF.

This study was designed to examine Indonesian adult EFL learners' perceptions and preferences about WCF. Using a written questionnaire, this study surveyed 32 EFL learners studying academic writing as the teacher professional development program. We focus on this particular category of learners since the previous research on learners' perceptions of WCF has been carried out mainly in ESL classrooms in English speaking countries where language teaching where language teaching tends to focus on meaning and form and also takes place in contexts where learners use English in a variety of ways outside of their classroom. This differs from the EFL context in Indonesia where form-focused teaching is the main mode of teaching and learners also have few opportunities to use English outside of the classroom context. A better understanding of their perceptions of WCF has important pedagogical implications for language teaching in countries where English is taught as a foreign language.

Overall, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do Indonesian EFL learners view the role of grammar instruction and written corrective feedback in their writing class?; (2) What amount and types of WCF do learners prefer and why?; (3) What types of WCF do learners find effective and why?; (4) Does this learner's level of language proficiency affect their WCF preferences, and if so, how?

METHOD

To obtain information regarding participants' preferences and opinions of WCF, a written questionnaire was used. Close-ended questionnaire in Likert scale formats was employed to collect quantitative data and open-ended one was to collect qualitative data. The quantitative data were used to provide information on general patterns of the participants' preferences for WCF activities and grammar instruction. The qualitative data were used to provide information on the participants' opinions concerning their preferences. The questionnaires were distributed to Indonesian adult EFL learners.

Participants

This study involved 32 Indonesian secondary school teachers learning written academic English. The teachers taught various subjects at school. The school requires teachers to develop their English to improve their professionalism. Previously, they took English for general communication and were at intermediate level of proficiency. Thus, the participants scored around 450 of a paper-based TOEFL (test of English as a foreign language) test.

Questionnaire design

Adapted from Amrhein & Nassaji (2010) questionnaire design, the questionnaire in the present study was aimed at eliciting the participants' preferences and perceptions of WCF as well as the explanation of their opinions. There were seven close-ended questions, and three open-ended questions. Such considerations were taken in designing the questionnaire as minimizing the use of technical jargon to make it easy to understand, providing not too many questions where it can be answered in 15 minutes, using open-ended questions to obtain a deeper understanding of the participants' opinions regarding WCF, emphasizing on learning practices instead of theoretical issues dealing with L2 context. The questionnaire was translated into Indonesian to get better responses from the participants.

Data analysis

The questionnaire responses were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and then exported into SPSS 22.0 for statistical analysis. For the quantitative data, both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (the chi-square test for nominal variables and the one-way ANOVA test for the mean scores of ordinal variables) were conducted to explore statistically significant differences across the three proficiency levels. For the qualitative data, the participants' explanatory responses were coded by the first and third authors, based upon their common themes. Different coding results between the two coders were then negotiated and, in the end, common responses by the participants were recorded. The following section will describe the questionnaire's major findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Indonesian EFL learners view on the role of grammar instruction in writing classes

Table 1. EFL Learners' responses to questionnaire

No	Questions	Average response
1	Grammar instruction is essential for mastering the writing of English.	4,38
2	Study of grammar improves my writing skill of English	4,36
3	I believe that my English writing will improve quickly if I study and practice English grammar	4,38
4	I like studying English grammar	3,68
5	I need more grammar instruction in my English writing classes	4,4
6	I keep the English grammar rules in mind when I am writing in English	3,77
7	I think that language practice in real contexts is more important than grammar instruction in the classroom.	4,11
		4,15

As can be seen from Table 1, the average response to the questions related to the usefulness of grammar instruction in writing classes is high (4,15). The majority of learners agree that grammar instruction is important in writing class. They believe that grammar can help improve their writing. Studying grammar and keeping the grammar rules in when writing is considered essential by the learners.

Further explanation is given by the learners regarding the usefulness of grammar instruction and written corrective feedback in an open-ended question. The learners claim that written corrective feedback is important since it (1) can improve the quality of their writing; (2) raises learners' awareness of the well- and ill-formed sentences; (3) makes learners' writing to be more structured and systematic; (4) allows the learners to pay attention to their language when writing; and (5) minimizes errors to occur in the learners' subsequent drafts.

The present study indicates that Indonesian EFL learners regard grammar instruction as important in writing classes. This is because the learners believe that knowledge in English grammar influences their writing skill. In line with studies by Chen et al. (2016) and Suerni et al. (2020), EFL learners expressed a positive attitude toward error corrections and comments. As reported in (Chen et al., (2016) study, EFL learners in Mainland China recognized the significance of grammar instruction in their writing classes. Situated in a similar context to this study, Suerni et al. (2020) study found that Indonesian EFL learners were in favor of corrective feedback provided by their teacher. In general, EFL learners perceive grammar instruction or focusing on form such as providing corrective feedback to learners' errors as vital when learning to write in English.

B. Error types frequently revised by Indonesian EFL learners

Table 2. Error types that EFL learners revised

Error types	Percent (%)
Punctuation errors	40%
Vocabulary errors	30%
Spelling errors	15%
Grammatical errors	10 %
Organization errors	5 %

Table 2 shows error types that EFL learners normally revised. The most preferred errors the students revised are punctuation errors (40%), vocabulary errors (30%), spelling errors (15%), grammatical errors (10%), and organization errors (5%). An open-ended question asking the reasons for such revision indicates that the learners find them easier and requires less time to revise. This is especially relevant to punctuation error, where the majority of learners (40%) preferred revising it to the other error types.

The types of errors that Indonesian EFL learners revise when receiving feedback from the teacher include punctuation errors, vocabulary errors, spelling errors, grammatical errors, and organization errors. Punctuation and vocabulary errors are the most frequent errors the learners revise since they are considered easy and take less time to revise. Studies (e.g. Hanaoka, 2007; García & Labandibar, 2017; Simard et al., 2015; and Zhang, 2018) shared similar findings to this study. Hanaoka (2007), García and Labandibar (2017), and Simard et al. (2015) noted that Japanese and Spanish EFL learners focused more on revising lexical errors than other types of errors when written corrective feedback (WCF) was provided. Learners, as Simard et al. (2015) reported, sometimes misinterpreted word choice errors as spelling errors - unlike the teacher's intention when correcting word choice errors. However, Zhang (2018) suggests that orthographic errors are easier for EFL learners to revise than lexical errors.

C. Types of WCF perceived to be effective by Indonesian EFL learners

Below are types of written corrective feedback perceived to be effective by EFL learners

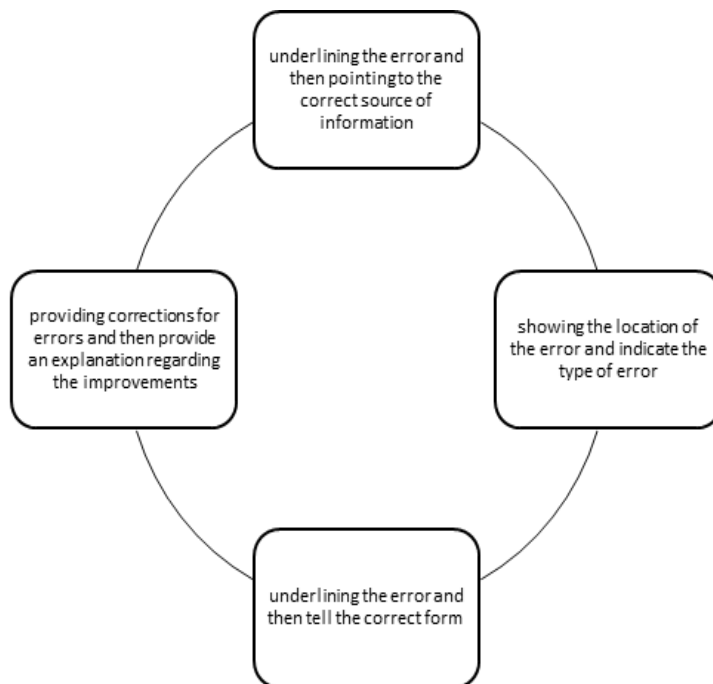


Figure 1. WCF types perceived to be effective by Indonesian EFL learners

As shown in Figure 1, WCF types that are considered effective by Indonesian EFL learners include underlining the error and then pointing to the correct source of information, showing the location of the error and indicating the type of error, underlining the error and then telling the correct form, and providing corrections for errors and then providing an explanation regarding the improvements.

In addition to the WCF types mentioned above, commenting on content, grammar, organization, overall quality of writing is considered equally important by Indonesian EFL students. Indonesian EFL learners, irrespective of their proficiency level, consider WCF effective when it is presented by underlining the error and then pointing to the correct source of information, showing the location of the error and indicating the type of error, underlining the error, and then telling the correct form, providing corrections for errors and then providing an explanation regarding the improvements. These types of WCF are closely associated with direct and explicit corrective feedback. Indonesian EFL learners' preferences for the corrective feedback types are in line with that of Chinese EFL learners in Zhang et al. (2021) study. Zhang et al. (2021) reported that Chinese EFL learners, regardless of their proficiency levels, prefer the explicit WCF. Some experts in second language writing and second language acquisition (e.g. Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ellis et al., 2009) suggest that explicit WCF type is favorable to lower proficiency learners and is beneficial since it provides overt correction to learners' written errors. However, explicit WCF is not regarded to contribute to learners' long-term learning due to learners' cognitive process being limited when correct forms are provided in the feedback.

Ellis and Erlam (2009) point out that long-term learning can take place when learners spend more time thinking and figuring out the solution to their problems. Explicit feedback provides direct and instant solution to learner errors so that the learners take less time to think and find the solution. This results in the learners to easily forget what they have learned from the direct and explicit feedback the teachers have provided. Unlike the direct and explicit feedback, the implicit and indirect feedback are considered useful for learners' long-term learning. Through thinking and finding out the solution on learners' own, this sort of feedback contributes to learners' long-term learning. However, for lower proficiency learners, this is very difficult to figure out the solution on

their own in that the basic knowledge they have may not be sufficient to solve their own problems. In this sense, Ellis and Erlam (2009) suggest direct and explicit feedback are more relevant to lower proficiency learners of English.

D. Indonesian EFL Learners' level of proficiency and WCF preferences

Indonesian EFL learner's level of English proficiency in the present study shows similar preference on WCF. In other words, English proficiency level of learners does not affect WCF choices. What is important that learners mentioned in the open-ended questionnaire is that they do not like feedback that is over-emphasis on teaching grammar and target heavily on accuracy. Indonesian EFL learners do acknowledge the significance of WCF on improvement of their writing accuracy, yet focusing too much on grammar feedback is seen to be ineffective for overall quality of learners' writing.

Overall, the present study shares similar finding to the study by Chen et al., (2016). In Chen et al., (2016) research, the learners with different level of proficiency were in favour of direct and explicit WCF. Explanations on the errors committed by the learners were expected. This indicates that EFL learners most likely prefer feedback that is direct, explicit, and corrective. The findings of the present study are crucial for writing teachers since they influence teachers' decision in designing classroom activities. Without information available on the learners' perceptions and preferences as the findings of this study, the writing teachers might lie their decision of classroom practice upon assumption they have. This assumption leads to disconnection of learners' and teachers' expectation. As a result, classroom learning is most likely ineffective.

The findings of this study support the value of WCF. Indonesian adult EFL learners see the significance of WCF to improve the quality of their writing. In the context of EFL, focusing on forms (grammatical features) is still relevant because the learners have insufficient input of authentic English, unlike those living in the ESL context where such input is abundant. As the purpose of learning English is to be able to communicate, either verbally or in written form, feedback is more relevant when it is provided in communicative activities. Learning certain functions of language accompanied with feedback provision is more important since EFL learners of any proficiency levels do not like the feedback when it focuses too much on grammar.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the perceptions and preferences of adult Indonesian EFL learners. The findings show that learners tend to have a positive view on WCF. Learners' views, however, exclude the feedback that is over-emphasis on grammar explicitly. Hence, a balance between grammar and content-oriented feedback should be taken into account when using WCF. The findings of the present study could not be generalized to other context since the samples used in the study was limited to 32 participants.

Further research with bigger number of participants or with different context and design may be needed to confirm the previous findings. More research is required to examine how different learners from different backgrounds or different instructional contexts perceive the importance of error correction and also what factors may also mediate their perception. Such studies are essential to advance our understanding of the role of corrective feedback in such contexts.

REFERENCES

- Amrhein, H. R., & Nassaji, H. (2010). Written corrective feedback : What do students and teachers prefer and why ? *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 13(2).
- Bitchener, J., & Ferris, D. R. (2012). Written corrective feedback in second language acquisition and writing. In *Written Corrective Feedback in Second Language Acquisition and Writing*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203832400>
- Brown, A. v. (2009). Students' and teachers' perceptions of effective foreign language teaching: A comparison of ideals. *Modern Language Journal*, 93(1). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2009.00827.x>
- Chen, S., Nassaji, H., & Liu, Q. (2016). EFL learners' perceptions and preferences of written corrective feedback: a case study of university students from Mainland China. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-016-0010-y>
- Diab, R. L. (2005). Teachers' and Students' Beliefs About Responding to ESL Writing: A Case Study. *TESL Canada Journal*, 23(1). <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v23i1.76>
- Ellis, R., Loewen, S., & Erlam, R. (2009). Implicit and explicit corrective feedback and the acquisition of L2 grammar. In *Implicit and Explicit Knowledge in Second Language Learning, Testing and Teaching*. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691767-015>
- Ferris, D. R. (2004). The "Grammar Correction" Debate in L2 Writing: Where are we, and where do we go from here? (and what do we do in the meantime ...?). *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2004.04.005>
- Ferris, D. R. (2012). Written corrective feedback in second language acquisition and writing studies. *Language Teaching*, 45(4). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000250>
- García Mayo, M. D. P., & Labandibar, U. L. (2017). The Use of Models as Written Corrective Feedback in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Writing. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 37. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190517000071>
- Guénette, D. (2007). Is feedback pedagogically correct?. Research design issues in studies of feedback on writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2007.01.001>
- Hanaoka, O. (2007). Output, noticing, and learning: An investigation into the role of spontaneous attention to form in a four-stage writing task. *Language Teaching Research*, 11(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168807080963>
- Hyland, K., & Hyland, F. (2006). Feedback on second language students' writing. *Language Teaching*, 39(2). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444806003399>
- Karim, K., & Nassaji, H. (2015). *ESL Students' Perceptions of Written Corrective Feedback: What Type of Feedback do they Prefer and Why?* 4, 5–25.
- Lee, I. (2008). Understanding teachers' written feedback practices in Hong Kong secondary classrooms. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 17(2). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2007.10.001>
- Montgomery, J. L., & Baker, W. (2007). Teacher-written feedback: Student perceptions, teacher self-assessment, and actual teacher performance. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 16(2). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2007.04.002>

- Saito, H. (1994). Teachers' Practices and Students' Preferences for Feedback on Second Language Writing: A Case Study of Adult ESL Learners. *TESL Canada Journal*, 11(2).
<https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v11i2.633>
- Schulz, R. A. (2001). Cultural differences in student and teacher perceptions concerning the role of grammar instruction and corrective feedback: USA-Colombia. *Modern Language Journal*, 85(2).
<https://doi.org/10.1111/0026-7902.00107>
- Sheen, Y. (2007). The effect of focused written corrective feedback and language aptitude on ESL learners' acquisition of articles. *TESOL Quarterly*, 41(2). <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2007.tb00059.x>
- Simard, D., Gu nette, D., & Bergeron, A. (2015). L2 learners' interpretation and understanding of written corrective feedback: insights from their metalinguistic reflections. *Language Awareness*, 24(3). <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2015.1076432>
- Suerni, Fani, S., Asnawi, & Wariyati. (2020). EFL Learners Perception of Written Corrective Feedback. *Proceedings of the 5th Annual International Seminar on Transformative Education and Educational Leadership (AISTEEL 2020)*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.201124.012>
- Truscott, J. (1996). The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes. In *Language Learning* (Vol. 46, Issue 2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1996.tb01238.x>
- van Beuningen, C. G., de Jong, N. H., & Kuiken, F. (2012). Evidence on the Effectiveness of Comprehensive Error Correction in Second Language Writing. *Language Learning*, 62(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2011.00674.x>
- Zhang, T. (2018). *The Effect of Focused Versus Unfocused Written Corrective Feedback on the Development of University-Level Learners' Explicit and Implicit Knowledge in an EFL Context* [The University of Sydney]. <http://hdl.handle.net/2123/19217>
- Zhang, T., Chen, X., Hu, J., & Ketwan, P. (2021). EFL Students' Preferences for Written Corrective Feedback: Do Error Types, Language Proficiency, and Foreign Language Enjoyment Matter? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.660564>