

Written Corrective Feedback Practices of English Teachers: An Empirical Evidence of Secondary School

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Abstract

The quantitative survey study was designed to examine teachers' perceptions about their Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) practices at secondary level. The population consisted of all the teachers who are teaching English subject in public and private sector schools at secondary level in Lahore District. However, 160 (80 male and 80 female) teachers participated in this study that was randomly selected from 60 (30 public and 30 private) schools. Teachers' perceptions about WCF were measured by administering Teachers' Perceptions of Written Corrective Feedback Questionnaire (TWCFPQ) developed by the researchers. The validity was checked by taking expert opinion and the reliability was Cronbach's Alpha=0.849. Multiple statistical techniques i.e. mean, standard deviation, independent sample t-test, and ANOVA were applied. Analysis of teachers' perceptions of WCF demonstrated that teachers mainly use indirect WCF on students' writing. Results exhibited that private secondary school teachers give more direct WCF as compare to public school teachers. Results also demonstrate that male teachers give more direct corrective feedback (CF) in comparison with female teachers. It is recommended that professional development training programs may be arranged to train in-service teachers to use different WCF strategies to choose from according to the need and level of students. Furthermore, a guide may be provided on which teachers can base their choice of types of WCF and that guide may offer explanations of types of errors along the way's teachers can respond to each error in student writing.

Keywords: *Feedback, Written Corrective Feedback, Secondary School.*

Introduction

Learning and acquiring the English language is a challenging task with many difficulties and chances of mistakes. These mistakes are common because of having inadequate competence in English writing but still are a concerning matter for English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners (Jafari & Ansari, 2012). EFL learner is the person who is not native to English Language speaking or he/she does not live in a place or a country where English is native language but rather it is a foreign or second language. According to Hyland (2003), people who learn a foreign language carry two types of burdens which include the burden of learning the language and the burden of learning to write the concerned language as well. The ability to write English correctly is considered vital for language learning (Ahmadi, Maftoon, & Mehrdad, 2012). According to Zacharias (2007), writing English is regarded as the most challenging skill for many EFL learners because it needs to have background knowledge of that language. Moreover, the demand for writing English accurately is becoming prominently more and more important in the modern world and present-day academic setting of learner's life (Ghoorchaei, Tavakoli, & Nejad 2010).

One major way that actively plays an important role in helping students to improve their English writing skills is by providing feedback which can help a learner to learn from his/her mistakes (Alshahrani & Storch, 2014; McMillan, 2007). Corrective feedback (CF) is the process that endeavors to give information to the learner about the learner's performance and this process aims to enhance the learning skills through error correction. The type of feedback that is available in written form and specifically focuses on the language is called written corrective feedback (WCF). This form of feedback is important and the most widely used form of feedback students receive on their written work (Coffin et al., 2005; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Williams, 2003). WCF plays a significant role in helping students to improve their writing skills (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009a). Providing WCF to EFL learners like students in Pakistan becomes more important because they cannot correct their errors in English writing on their own. Thus, teachers' WCF is essential to guide and assist students in overcoming the difficulties they face while learning English (Goldstein, 2005).

In Pakistan, the education system is designed in a way that students although study the English language as a subject up to the age of graduation but still, most of them are unable to write the language correctly (Kalsoom, 2013). It is noted that in our country secondary school students have been studying English language for many years of elementary classes, but they still find difficulties in writing English. Therefore, the need for corrective feedback or communication about errors is more recognized in the EFL context (Nicol, 2010). Teachers' WCF can assist and guide students to write correctly in the approved manner (Srichanyachon, 2012). Most of the teachers in the EFL context spend a lot of time giving WCF to their students' written work. The query is whether that time and effort are productive or not productive. This question requires attentive consideration and making wise decisions which will help students as well as teachers. As a result, the researchers find that investigating teachers' perceptions about their WCF practices at the secondary level are crucial because it may offer insights into their perceptions which witness teachers' classroom practices. Although several studies have been conducted to investigate teachers' WCF practices in other EFL contexts, this area of research is very much neglected in our country. Therefore, it was needed to examine teachers' perceptions of written corrective feedback (WCF) practices at secondary schools and compare their perceptions based on demographical variables (i.e. Gender, sector, qualification, and teaching experience).

Research Questions

- 1) What are the teachers' perceptions of written corrective feedback (WCF) practices at secondary schools?
- 2) Is there any significant difference in teachers' perceptions about WCF on the basis of demographical variables (i.e. Gender, sector, qualification, and teaching experience)?

Literature Review

The area of written corrective feedback (WCF) is a significant and important area of English language teaching (Lee, 2009) and research shows that WCF is valued and found helpful in the improvement of their writing (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Chen, Nassaji, & Liu, 2016; Hamouda, 2011; Karim & Nassaji, 2015). WCF is a teacher's response to student's errors in English writing which is provided to correct student's inaccurate use of language form (Bitchener and Storch, 2016). Teachers of English language are specifically concerned with the writing skills of their students and by providing WCF they ensure the improvement and clarity in their writing skills and understanding of English writing composition.

There are different types of WCF used by teachers for students' error correction (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ellis, 2009a; Ting & Lin, 2015). Among those, two strategies are commonly used by teachers for giving WCF to students: direct and indirect. In direct WCF, the error is highlighted or indicated along with the provision of the correct word/form of the target language next to the error in student writing. In indirect WCF, incorrect form or error in student's writing is indicated or highlighted by encircling or underlining

the errors but the correct form is not provided (Ellis, 2009a; Lee, 2008). Indirect WCF further comprised of different techniques which include underlining mistakes, encircling the errors, and recording the number of errors in the margin given beside the written piece of writing in the form of codes (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010a; Mohebbi, 2013). The act of indicating, highlighting the errors and mistakes without actually correcting them and leaving it up to students is a process of calling students' attention towards the mistakes and helping them to consciously correct them. These errors can be highlighted through underlining, putting the cursor of the highlighted mistake, or by putting a little cross sign in the margin of the line which contains the error.

Different research studies in the area of WCF have addressed a variety of aspects and can take many forms (Ting & Lin, 2015). Researchers like Bitchener & Knoch, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008; Guenette & Lyster, 2013; Sheen, 2007 have worked on the effectiveness of corrective feedback provided by teachers. In other researches, the researchers studied methods of giving WCF (like direct, indirect, etc.) which teachers use to respond to a student's written work (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010a; Ellis, 2009b; Ellis et al., 2008; Eslami, 2014; Ferris, 2003; Ferris & Robbert, 2001; Guenette & Lyster, 2013; Kazemipour, 2014; Sheen, 2010). Some studies conducted by Al-Jarrah & Al-Ahmed, 2013; Ashwell, 2000; Ferris, 2006 have examined the feedback based on form and content and the way it is perceived by teachers in terms of effectiveness. One more area that is attracting researchers' attention is the way teachers and students perceive WCF (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Karim & Nassaji, 2015; Simard, Guenette, & Bergeron, 2015).

The phenomenon of error correction requires highlighting the mistakes and correcting them or by guiding learners to correct it for themselves, but the question always had been that how teachers should provide WCF which help students to improve their writing skill (Lee, 2003, 2004). Several studies have been conducted to investigate which types of WCF help the learners to improve their accuracy in writing. Research reveals that two very much discussed types are direct and indirect WCF (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010a; Chandler, 2003; Ellis, 2009a; Eslami, 2014; Ferris, 2003; Ferris & Robbert, 2001; Guenette & Lyster, 2013; Kazemipour, 2014; Park, Song, and Shin, 2015). However, the findings of research studies conducted on the effectiveness of these two WCF types are mixed. A study conducted by Eslami, (2014) revealed that there was no difference between these two types, some other studies (Abualshar & AbuSeileek, 2014; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010b; Chandler, 2003; Diab, 2005; Farrokhi & Sattarpour, 2012; Hosseiny, 2014; Sheen, 2007; Shintani, Ellis, and Suzuki, 2014) suggest that direct WCF is more effective, whereas some revealed that indirect WCF is more effective for correcting students' errors (Eslami, 2014; Ferris, 2002, 2003; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Kazemipour, 2014; Park, Song, & Shin, 2015; Zhang, 2017).

The proponents of direct WCF favor this type by giving a reason that it assists learners to recognize their errors in the language which further leads to clarity and accuracy in the use of grammar (Moradian, Miri, & Nasab, 2016). According to Sarvestani and Pishkar (2016), learners required direct CF on the errors to fix those errors in comparison to working on their own on the errors only highlighted by the teacher. Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) favor direct WCF because it appears simply as well as easier to understand for the students. Whereas, indirect WCF is more supported by giving a reason that it assists learners to improve accuracy in writing over time (Ferris & Roberts, 2001) and contributes to making students independent writers for the future (Ferris, 2007). EFL teachers prefer this type of feedback because of its polite and less frightening form of direct feedback (Thonus, 2002).

Materials and Methods

The descriptive survey research design of the quantitative approach was adopted to explore the perceptions of secondary school teachers about their WCF practices. The population consisted of all the teachers who are teaching English subject to grade 9 (the academic year 2018) in the public sector and private sector schools at secondary level in Lahore District. In total, there are 334 public schools (155 were for boys and 179 for girls) at secondary level (School Education Department, 2018). There are 1002 (465 male teachers

and 537 female teachers) teaching English subject in public sector schools whereas approximately 2269 teachers (921 male and 1348 female) who were teaching English subject in private sector schools at secondary level. A two-stage sampling method was used to select 180 teachers (90 male and 90 female). At the first stage, 30 public sector (15 male and 15 female), as well as 30 private (15 male and 15 female) sector schools at secondary level, were selected by using a dis/non-proportionate stratified cluster random sampling technique. For stage two, 180 teachers of English (three English teachers on average from each selected school) were selected randomly.

Researchers developed a Teachers’ Perceptions of Written Corrective Feedback Questionnaire (TWCFPQ) to collect data about teachers’ perceptions. The TWCFPQ was validated by giving the questionnaire and seeking guidance from three experts in the assessment and evaluation area. The questionnaire was revised based on the valuable comments provided by experts. For pilot testing, the questionnaire was given to a sample of 100 teachers. The reliability of the questionnaire was checked by using Cronbach's alpha and the reliability was $\alpha = 0.849$.

Data were collected personally by the researchers. Researchers provided the consent letter and discussed all the ethical considerations (i.e. demographical information was kept confidential, etc.) before data collection. For the study, 180 secondary school teachers were requested for participation. However, 20 teachers refused to participate in the study. So, the overall response rate was 88%. Data were analyzed by applying multiple statistical techniques comprising descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics i.e. mean and the standard deviation was used to calculate teachers’ perceptions. Likewise, inferential statistics were used for making comparisons. Independent samples t-test was used to compare the difference between two groups whereas, one-way ANOVA was used to examine the difference in three or more groups. SPSS -23 software was used to apply t-tests, and ANOVA test.

Results

Table 1: Teachers’ Perceptions of Direct WCF

Type (Direct)	Public		Private	
	M	SD	M	SD
I point out all types of errors as well as correct them.	4.10	1.038	4.29	.860
I point out errors and specify them (with the help of an error code).	1.83	1.412	2.43	1.448
I point out errors, correct them, and specify them (with the help of a marking code).	1.85	1.202	2.12	1.267
I use error code for error and correct the error in students’ writing.	2.77	1.136	3.04	.947
I locate and correct my students’ errors.	3.76	1.389	3.96	1.354
I cross out unnecessary words and write the correct form in students’ writing.	2.51	1.423	2.69	1.580
I write the correct form by inserting a missing word near the error in students’ writing.	2.85	1.294	3.18	1.491
I correct the incorrect form near or above the error.	3.24	1.334	3.50	1.369
I cross out unnecessary phrases and write the correct form of the phrase in students’ writing.	3.66	1.312	4.16	1.037

Note: N=160

Table 1 reveals the comparison of mean scores of teachers’ perceptions of direct WCF practices in public and private secondary schools. The results show that the mean score of the statement “I point out all types of errors and also correct them” was highest among all other mean values in public and private sector teachers in secondary schools as $M = 4.10$ with $SD = 1.038$ and $M = 4.29$ with $SD = .860$ respectively. This shows that teachers in both public and private sectors perceive that they give direct WCF to their students.

Furthermore, the mean value of the statement “I point out errors, correct them and specify them (with the help of a marking code), was $M = 2.12$ with $SD = 1.267$ which was lowest among other mean values for private sector teachers.

Table 2: Teachers’ Perceptions of Indirect WCF

Type (Indirect)	Public		Private	
	M	SD	M	SD
I highlight students’ errors in English writing with the help of underlining.	4.39	0.893	4.56	0.691
I point out students’ errors selectively in writing.	4.42	1.003	4.39	0.864
I point out only a specific type of error for correction.	4.33	0.868	4.19	0.943
I point out errors of all types in students’ English writing by underlining them.	4.16	1.107	4.09	1.105
I don’t provide the correct substitute for students’ errors in written form.	3.94	1.060	3.90	1.038
I point out all errors in writing but do not correct errors in written form, e.g., has <u>gone</u> .	2.54	1.449	2.74	1.385
I provide a clue regarding errors’ location to indicate an error in the relevant line.	2.84	1.061	3.06	1.060
I provide a clue regarding errors’ location and specify them (by using an error code), e.g., ‘Prep’ in the margin of the relevant line to indicate a preposition error.	3.06	0.862	3.09	0.957
I ask my students to locate their errors.	2.03	1.201	2.40	1.165
I ask my students to analyze their errors.	3.48	1.302	3.79	1.027

Note: N=160

Table 2 gives a comprehensive view of the mean and standard deviations of the statements about teachers’ perceptions of indirect WCF in public and private schools. The comparison of mean scores of teachers’ perceptions in public schools shows that the statement ‘I point out students’ errors selectively in writing’ had the highest mean $M = 4.42$ with $SD = 1.003$ among all other statements. On the other hand, the results depict that the mean value of the statement ‘I highlight students’ errors in English writing with the help of underlining.’ was highest for teachers’ perceptions in private secondary school with $M = 4.56$ with $SD = 0.691$. This shows that teachers in public as well as in private schools perceive that they also give indirect WCF to their students. Whereas, the comparison demonstrates that the mean score of the statement ‘I ask my students to locate their errors’ was lowest in public as well as in private sector teachers among all other mean values as $M = 2.03$ with $SD = 1.201$ for public and $M = 2.40$ with $SD = 1.165$ for private school teachers.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-test between Teachers’ WCF based on Gender

	Male (80)		Female (80)		df	t	p	Cohen’s d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Direct WCF	3.11	0.580	2.90	0.626	158	2.209	0.029*	0.348
Indirect WCF	3.63	0.519	3.50	0.498	158	1.585	0.115	0.255

Note: WCF= Written Corrective Feedback; and*= $p < 0.05$.

The result of the t-test used to compare male and female teachers’ perceptions of direct and indirect WCF are given in table 3. The table shows that the mean values of male respondents (Mean=3.11, SD=0.580;

Mean=3.63, SD=.519) for direct WCF and indirect WCF respectively were higher than female respondents (Mean=2.90, SD=.626; Mean=3.50, SD=.498). The above-given table also indicates that there was a significant difference in male and female teachers' perceptions of direct WCF as $t(158) = 2.209, p=0.029 < 0.05$. Moreover, the results depict that male teachers perceive that they give more direct WCF as compare to female teachers. Whereas, results display an insignificant difference in male and female teachers' perceptions of indirect WCF, as $t(158) = 1.585, p = 0.115 > 0.05$. Hence, the findings revealed that gender influences teachers' perceptions of WCF. Furthermore, the values of Cohen's d show a small effect size as $d = 0.348$, and 0.255 for direct and indirect WCF respectively.

Table 4: Independent Samples t-test between Teachers' WCF based on Sector

	Public (80)		Private (80)		df	t	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Direct WCF	2.85	0.556	3.17	0.623	158	-3.461	0.001*	0.541
Indirect WCF	3.51	0.523	3.62	0.496	158	-1.270	0.206	0.215

Note: WCF= Written Corrective Feedback; and *= $p < 0.05$.

Table 4 reveals the results of the mean values of teachers' perceptions in the private sector (Mean=3.17, SD=0.623; Mean=3.62, SD=.496) for direct WCF and indirect WCF respectively were higher than the respondents of the public sector (Mean=2.85, SD=0.556; Mean=3.51, SD=0.523). The above-given table also indicates that there was a significant difference in public and private sector teachers' perceptions of direct WCF as $t(158) = -3.461, p=0.001 < 0.05$. Furthermore, the results reveal that teachers in the private sector perceive that they give more direct WCF as compare to teachers in the public sector. Whereas, results given in the table displays an insignificant difference in public and private sector teachers' perceptions of indirect WCF, as the p-value is more than 0.05 $t(158) = -1.270, p = 0.206$. Hence, the findings revealed that the sector influences teachers' perceptions of WCF. Moreover, there is variation in Cohen's d values which vary from small to medium (0.2 to 0.5) effect size as $d = 0.541$ and 0.215 for direct and indirect WCF correspondingly.

Table 5: One-way ANOVA between Teachers' WCF based on Age

	20-25 years (40)		26-30 years (62)		31-35 years (19)		36 years & above (39)		F (3,156)	P	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Direct WCF	2.97	0.547	2.97	0.629	3.29	0.715	2.97	0.575	1.555	0.203	0.029
Indirect WCF	3.53	0.586	3.59	0.459	3.61	0.511	3.53	0.523	0.195	0.900	0.004

Note: WCF= Written Corrective Feedback.

To examine the impact of age on teachers' WCF practices at the secondary level, ANOVA was applied. Teachers were divided into the four following age groups (1= 20-25 years; 2= 26-30 years; 3= 31-35 years and 4= 36 years & above). There was no statistical difference (variation) at the $p < 0.05$ level in overall WCF values of all four age groups. To calculate the effect size eta squared was applied and the result of the effect size was 0.02.

Results demonstrate that an insignificant difference was found in perceptions of teachers about direct and indirect WCF among all four age groups as $F(3,156) = 1.55, p(0.203)$ and $F(3,156) = .195, p(0.900) > 0.05$ level respectively. To calculate the effect size eta squared was applied and the result of effect size was ($\eta^2 = 0.02$) which shows no effect on teachers' perceptions about WCF practices among four groups on the basis of age.

Table 6: One-way ANOVA between Teachers' WCF based on Academic Qualification

	BA/B.Sc. (35)		MA/M.Sc. (95)		M.Phil. /Ph.D. (30)		F (2,157)	p	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Direct WCF	3.07	0.591	3.00	0.635	2.96	0.566	0.285	0.752	0.004
Indirect WCF	3.52	0.566	3.56	0.509	3.62	0.459	0.293	0.747	0.003

Note: WCF= Written Corrective Feedback.

To investigate the impact of teachers' qualifications on their perceptions about WCF practices one-way ANOVA was applied. On the qualification basis, teachers were divided into three groups (1= BA/B.Sc.; 2= MA/M.Sc.; 3= MPhil. /Ph.D.). Results of one-way ANOVA given in table 6 show that an insignificant difference was found in teachers' perceptions of direct and indirect WCF among three groups on the basis of qualification as the values are $F(2,157) = .285, p(0.752)$ and $F(2,157) = .293, p(0.747) > 0.05$ level respectively. Eta square's value ($\eta^2=0.004-0.003$) shows a small effect on teachers' perceptions about WCF practices because of three groups on the basis of qualification.

Table 7: One-way ANOVA between Teachers' WCF based on Teaching Experience

	1-5 years (41)		6-10 years (66)		11-15 years (21)		16 & above years' experience (39)		F (3,156)	p	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Direct WCF	2.89	0.544	3.07	0.659	3.01	0.675	3.05	0.554	0.712	0.546	0.013
Indirect WCF	3.46	0.510	3.66	0.457	3.43	0.670	3.59	0.481	2.007	0.115	0.038

Table 7 reveals the results of one-way ANOVA applied to compare teachers' perceptions based on teaching experience between groups (i.e. 1= 1-5 years; 2= 6-10 years; 3= 11-15 years; and 4= 16 & above years). Results depict that all groups' means were not very different from each other because the real difference in means among all groups was small.

An insignificant difference in teachers' perceptions regarding direct WCF; and indirect WCF was found among four groups of qualification as $F(3,156) = 0.712, p(0.546)$ and $F(3,156) = 2.007, p(0.115) > 0.05$ level. The small effect size was observed as the value of eta square ($\eta^2=0.01$ to 0.05) shows a small effect of four teaching experience groups on teachers' perceptions about WCF practices.

Discussion

This research aimed to study the perceptions of teachers about their written corrective feedback (WCF) practices. The findings of teachers' perceptions of WCF show that they mainly give indirect WCF in comparison with direct feedback. This finding is aligned with the findings of the study conducted by Eslami, 2014; Ferris, 2003; Ferris & Robert, 2001; McDonough & Shaw, 2012 which revealed that indirect WCF is more frequently used than direct WCF. A study conducted by Ferris (2002) also favors that indirect feedback is generally more appropriate and frequently used WCF strategy than direct feedback. A study conducted by Ferris (2002) also favors that indirect feedback is generally more appropriate and frequently used WCF strategy than direct feedback. The results show that male teachers provide more WCF as compare to female teachers. However, in a previous study conducted by Rajab, Khan, and Elyas (2016) there was no significant difference found between male and female teachers' perceptions of WCF. The findings also revealed that teachers in public and private institutions differed in their perceptions. Teachers working in private schools give more WCF than teachers of public schools. This finding is aligned with

Jodaie and Farrokhi (2012) who explored the perceptions of written feedback given by teachers working at a private institution. This finding also corresponds with the results of Lee (2008) who said that there were multifold factors that influence teachers' practices. These factors can be contextual which deal with beliefs and knowledge system; institutional which deal with policies and ways of administration and socio-political which deals with autonomy. The findings also revealed that there was no significant difference between teachers' perceptions of WCF in terms of years of teaching experience and age. This is following the findings of Junqueira and Kim (2013). The results revealed that there was no difference in teachers' perceptions in terms of qualification. This finding is in contrast with the study of Lee (2008). The future research study may be conducted on a larger number of teachers in different regional contexts, to explore teachers' perceptions about other types of WCF and to identify which one is the most frequently practiced type among EFL teachers.

Conclusion

The results obtained from English teachers' perceptions about their written corrective feedback (WCF) practices lead us to conclude that teachers mainly give indirect WCF to their students. In addition, it was also identified that there was a significant difference in male and female teachers' perceptions of direct WCF. Male teachers give more direct WCF than female. Similarly, there was a significant difference in public and private sector teachers' perceptions of direct WCF. Private sector teachers give more direct WCF than public sector teachers. Furthermore, it was found that teachers' age, qualification, and teaching experience have no significant influence on their perceptions about WCF. Based on the results, it is recommended that different professional development training programs may be arranged to train in-service teachers (especially female teachers) to improve their WCF practices in their classes.

Implications of the Study

This study provided a comparison of teachers' perceptions of their WCF practices. Correspondingly, teachers may get insight from the results and improve their WCF practices. The results may also provide teachers with an analytic perspective about different types of written corrective feedback (WCF) that influence their students' writing. This research study may also helpful for educational decision-makers as it may lead and direct them to make appropriate decisions for students' interests.

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