



Students' Voices: Navigating Written Corrective Feedback in English Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) remains a widely practiced instructional strategy in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, particularly for improving students' writing accuracy, yet debates continue regarding its pedagogical value and the ways learners actually respond to it. While existing studies have examined the technical aspects of WCF, fewer have investigated how students perceive its usefulness and how their emotional reactions shape engagement with feedback. This study seeks to explore these dimensions by analyzing students' preferences for different feedback types, their evaluations of WCF's effectiveness, and the affective responses that accompany the process. Adopting a qualitative design, data were collected through surveys and semi-structured interviews with EFL learners from diverse academic backgrounds. The results suggest that although students generally recognize WCF as an essential tool for language development, their preferences vary: some favor direct feedback for its clarity, others prefer indirect or metalinguistic feedback for encouraging self-correction. Emotional responses were equally diverse, ranging from motivation, reassurance, and appreciation to frustration, anxiety, and even discouragement when feedback was perceived as overly critical. These emotional factors proved influential in determining the extent to which learners engaged with and acted upon the corrections provided. The study concludes that effective feedback practices require a balance between corrective and supportive elements, enabling learners to benefit cognitively while also maintaining confidence and resilience in the face of error correction. The findings hold significant implications for language teachers, emphasizing the importance of adopting feedback strategies that attend simultaneously to students' linguistic needs and their affective well-being in order to cultivate sustainable writing development.

Keywords: *Written Corrective Feedback; Students' Perceptions; Emotional Responses; English Language Learning; Feedback Types*

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INTRODUCTION

Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) is one of the most widely employed pedagogical tools in English language learning, intended to address learners' linguistic errors and enhance the accuracy of their writing. Feedback can take multiple forms, ranging from direct corrections to indirect prompts or metalinguistic explanations, and has long been

acknowledged as a central element in the process of second language development (Ellis, 2009; Ferris, 2010). While previous research has extensively examined the efficacy of different types of feedback in facilitating linguistic improvement, considerably less attention has been paid to how learners themselves perceive, emotionally respond to, and ultimately engage with WCF in practice.

This gap is particularly important in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where students' motivation, confidence, and willingness to revise are closely shaped by their experiences with feedback. As Hyland and Hyland (2006) note, feedback does not operate in a vacuum but is deeply tied to learners' identities, expectations, and affective responses. Understanding students' voices, therefore, is essential for optimizing feedback practices—not only to improve linguistic outcomes but also to create a more constructive and supportive learning environment.

To address this issue, the present study explores students' perspectives on WCF by examining three interrelated aspects: (1) their perceptions of its usefulness and relevance in improving writing skills, (2) their preferences for particular types of feedback, and (3) their emotional responses to receiving feedback in English writing assignments. Accordingly, the research is guided by the following questions:

1. How do students perceive the effectiveness of WCF in improving their writing skills?
2. What types of WCF do students find most and least helpful?
3. How do students respond emotionally to WCF, and how do these emotions affect their learning?

By centering on students' voices, this study contributes to a learner-centered perspective on feedback in second language writing. It builds upon the growing body of scholarship that highlights the interplay between cognitive and affective dimensions of feedback (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010). The findings are expected to provide valuable pedagogical implications for language educators, particularly in EFL contexts, by offering practical insights into how feedback strategies can be adjusted to balance error correction with the need to maintain students' confidence and motivation. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: the next section reviews relevant literature on WCF, followed by the methodology, presentation of results, discussion of findings, and finally the conclusion and implications for teaching practice.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach to capture students' voices regarding Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) in English language learning. A qualitative design was considered appropriate as it allows for an in-depth exploration of learners' perceptions, preferences, and emotional responses that are not easily quantifiable.

2.1 Research Design

The research adopted a descriptive qualitative design, combining survey questionnaires with semi-structured interviews. The survey was used to collect broad patterns of students' perceptions and preferences, while the interviews provided richer, more nuanced insights into learners' experiences and emotional reactions to WCF.

2.2 Participants

Participants were English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners enrolled in an undergraduate English education program at a university in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select students who had consistent exposure to WCF in their writing courses. In total, 28 students completed the survey, and 10 of them were invited for follow-up interviews. This combination ensured a balance between representativeness and depth of data.

2.3 Instruments and Data Collection

Two instruments were employed: (1) a structured survey with both closed- and open-ended items to identify students' preferences for types of WCF and their perceptions of its usefulness, and (2) semi-structured interview protocols designed to elicit detailed accounts of emotional responses and personal reflections on feedback. Surveys were administered during class sessions, while interviews were conducted individually and recorded with participants' consent.

2.4 Data Analysis

Survey responses were analyzed descriptively to identify common trends in students' preferences and perceptions. The interview data were transcribed verbatim and subjected to thematic analysis. Coding was conducted inductively to allow categories to emerge from the data, which were then grouped into broader themes representing patterns of perception, preference, and emotional response. To ensure trustworthiness, data triangulation was applied by comparing survey and interview findings, and member checking was used to confirm the accuracy of interpretations.

FINDINGS

A. Perceptions of Feedback Usefulness

The study revealed that the majority of students considered Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) to be an indispensable part of their English language learning process. Most participants reported that feedback helped them identify errors they had previously overlooked and provided guidance for improving subsequent writing tasks. One student reflected, *"The feedback from my teacher helps me realize the mistakes I didn't notice before. It really helps me improve."* This perception supports the view that WCF promotes self-awareness and reflection in language use, as emphasized by Bitchener and Knoch (2010).

However, students also voiced concerns about the frequency and density of feedback. While acknowledging its importance, several participants admitted feeling overwhelmed when faced with too many corrections at once. One student noted, *"Sometimes I feel lost because there are so many corrections. I don't know which one to focus on first."* Such responses resonate with Lee's (2014) observation that excessive feedback may lead to cognitive overload, reducing learners' ability to prioritize revisions effectively.

B. Preferred Types of Feedback

Students expressed diverse preferences regarding the form of feedback they received. A significant proportion favored direct feedback, in which the teacher provides explicit corrections. This group argued that direct feedback offered clarity, saved time, and minimized confusion. As one participant explained, *"I prefer when my teacher tells me the correct way to write something. It saves me time and helps me understand faster."* This preference is consistent with Sheen (2011), who found that direct feedback is particularly beneficial for learners with lower proficiency levels.

Conversely, another group preferred indirect feedback, where the teacher highlights errors but leaves the correction process to the student. Learners in this group believed that indirect feedback encouraged critical thinking and deeper engagement. As one participant remarked, *"When I have to figure out the mistake myself, it helps me remember better for next time."* This finding aligns with Ferris (2006), who argued that indirect feedback fosters long-term retention by stimulating cognitive involvement.

Interestingly, several students expressed appreciation for metalinguistic feedback, where teachers not only point out errors but also provide explanations or codes related to grammatical rules. A participant explained, *"It's helpful when the teacher gives a reason for the"*

correction. I can understand the rule better.” This echoes Ellis (2009), who highlighted that metalinguistic feedback enhances learners’ grammatical awareness and promotes self-editing.

C. Emotional Responses to Feedback

Students’ emotional reactions to WCF ranged from highly positive to deeply negative. On the positive side, many participants reported feelings of motivation, encouragement, and confidence when feedback was constructive and balanced. One student shared, *“When I get feedback that points out both the good and bad parts of my writing, I feel encouraged to keep improving.”* Such responses affirm Hyland and Hyland’s (2006) argument that feedback is not only corrective but also relational, influencing learners’ affective engagement.

At the same time, negative emotions such as frustration, anxiety, and discouragement were commonly reported, particularly when students received an overwhelming number of corrections or when the tone of feedback was perceived as harsh. A participant admitted, *“Sometimes, when there are too many red marks, I feel like I’m not good enough.”* This finding underscores the affective risks of feedback practices and the importance of teacher sensitivity to learners’ psychological well-being.

D. Discussion and Linking to Previous Research

Taken together, the findings illustrate both the cognitive and affective dimensions of WCF. Students valued feedback as a tool for improvement, consistent with previous studies that emphasize its role in language development (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ferris, 2006). Preferences for direct feedback mirror Sheen (2011) and Bitchener & Knoch (2010), who found that learners often appreciate explicit corrections for their clarity and efficiency. At the same time, support for indirect and metalinguistic feedback aligns with Ferris (2006) and Ellis (2009), highlighting that learner engagement and rule awareness are critical for long-term retention.

What sets this study apart, however, is its focus on emotional complexity. Students’ affective responses—ranging from motivation to discouragement—demonstrate that feedback cannot be treated as a purely cognitive process. As Lee (2014) and Hyland & Hyland (2006) argue, feedback also functions as a form of communication that impacts learner identity, self-esteem, and motivation. Therefore, the findings call for a balanced

approach in which teachers combine corrective accuracy with supportive comments to sustain learners' confidence.

In sum, the results highlight that effective WCF practices must integrate clarity, adaptability, and affective sensitivity. Teachers who acknowledge students' diverse preferences and emotions are better positioned to foster both linguistic accuracy and positive engagement, thereby maximizing the pedagogical potential of WCF in EFL contexts.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reinforce the central role of written corrective feedback (WCF) in second language (L2) writing, while also revealing the nuanced ways in which students perceive and respond to it. The generally positive perceptions of WCF confirm its usefulness as highlighted by Bitchener and Knoch (2010) and Ferris (2006), who argue that corrective feedback supports error noticing and self-regulation. However, the concerns expressed by students regarding excessive or overwhelming feedback shed light on a tension also observed in Lee (2014): while feedback enhances accuracy, its density may hinder processing and motivation. This suggests that the effectiveness of WCF is not absolute but contingent upon its quality, focus, and delivery.

The students' divided preferences for direct versus indirect feedback echo the ongoing debate in feedback research. The preference for direct feedback resonates with Sheen (2011), who emphasized its clarity for less proficient learners, while the appreciation for indirect feedback aligns with Ferris (2006) and Ellis (2009), who stressed the role of cognitive engagement in fostering long-term retention. The desire for metalinguistic explanations in this study further expands the literature, indicating that students not only seek corrections but also a deeper understanding of linguistic rules.

Equally important are the affective dimensions of WCF. Students' mixed emotional responses—from motivation to frustration—highlight feedback's dual role as both a cognitive and emotional intervention. This supports Hyland and Hyland (2006), who emphasized that teachers must consider how tone, volume, and framing of feedback influence learners' affective states. Thus, this study extends prior research by foregrounding the interplay between cognition and emotion, suggesting that sustainable feedback practices must balance clarity, autonomy, and encouragement.

CONCLUSION

This study explored students' perceptions, preferences, and emotional responses toward written corrective feedback in an Indonesian EFL writing classroom. The findings reveal that while students overwhelmingly view WCF as beneficial for identifying and correcting errors, the perceived effectiveness is shaped by its type, frequency, and emotional impact. Direct feedback was valued for its clarity, while indirect and metalinguistic feedback were appreciated for fostering critical engagement and deeper learning. However, excessive feedback was found to cause confusion and negative emotions, underscoring the importance of balance and sensitivity in feedback practices.

The study concludes that WCF should not be approached as a one-size-fits-all tool but rather adapted to learners' proficiency levels, learning preferences, and affective needs. Teachers are encouraged to adopt a selective, supportive, and dialogic approach to feedback, integrating both cognitive and emotional dimensions.

Limitations of this study include its relatively small sample size and focus on a single institutional context, which may limit generalizability. Future research could explore longitudinal effects of different feedback types, investigate teacher perspectives, and examine how digital platforms mediate feedback practices.

Practically, the study implies that teacher training should emphasize not only strategies for effective error correction but also the importance of balancing rigor with encouragement. Creating an emotionally supportive feedback environment can foster both accuracy and confidence, making WCF a more sustainable pedagogical tool in EFL writing classrooms.

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