ESL Learners' Preferences for Written Corrective Feedback in Pakistani Context

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ABSTRACT

The present study is conducted in Pakistani ESL context to explore the preferences of ESL learners for the types of WCF and teachers' practices of WCF. Further, the researcher tries to investigate alignment of learners' preferences and teachers' practices of WCF. The researcher used mixed method approach including WCF questionnaire of learners for quantitative data and teachers' semi structured interviews for qualitative data. The participants were 200 learners of BS second semester from four social sciences departments of GCWUS and five ESL teachers from the same institute. The WCF questionnaire consisted of six categories in three pairs (focused/unfocused, direct/indirect, feedback on content and feedback on form) and it was analyzed by comparing the means of each category with the other by using SPSS version 26. The qualitative data was analyzed by using thematic analysis. The findings of the study elucidated that learners preferred focused, direct feedback and feedback on form from the three pairs of WCF categories. The independent t-test was used to highlight the significant differences in the preferences of learners based on age, medium of instruction and family status. The results indicated no significant differences based on age, medium and family status. One-way ANOVA was also used to explore the significant differences based on departments, grades in previous English exams and favorite subject throughout study career. The results indicated significant differences in the learners' preferences of WCF based on their departments, grades and favorite subject. The interview analysis indicated that teachers preferred unfocused, direct feedback and feedback on form. There was mismatch between the learners' preferences and teachers' practices on focused and unfocused feedback as three teachers valued unfocused feedback while learners preferred focused feedback. While in other two categories of WCF (direct feedback and feedback on form), there was alignment between learners' preferences and teachers' practices. The study implied that there is need to shift classroom into learner centered in which they can freely discuss their preferences for WCF. There should be workshops for training of teachers for WCF. The institutes should make policies under which teachers can freely practice the WCF by keeping in mind the needs and requirements of their students.

Keywords: Written corrective Feedback, ESL Learners, Pakistani ESL Context

INTRODUCTION

Dulay and Burt (1974) claimed that committing errors in study of language is unavoidable and a sign of learning the rules of target language. In language learning it is idealistic to suppose learning without committing errors (Ferris, 2002). Students

require a competent source to identify and correct their errors, as they are unable to find their own errors (Hendrickson, 1978). Corrective feedback in writing is the most common approach which teachers use in response to learners' errors (Leki, 2007). According to Ur (2006) feedback is the remarks given by the teachers on learners' performance for the purpose of improvement. He stated that remarks which teacher provides on the learners' organization, ideas and writing mechanics in written work is feedback on writing. Brown (2007) stated that teachers think that providing feedback to the learners is essential and requirement of the learners. To provide feedback on learners' performance is crucial part of instruction for all grades and required in teaching of all subjects (Gan, Nang & Mu, 2018). According to Hyland (2003) written corrective feedback is vital in learning process and particularly in writing as it provides information to enhance writing skills. WCF is crucial in developing the understanding of writing procedures and to enhance writing skills.

WCF is a controversial issue in ESL writing and different arguments are there in its favor and opposition to prove whether it is effective or ineffective in the language learning. The debate on the effectiveness of WCF rose between rivals of WCF drove by Truscott (1996), the defenders of feedback drove by Ferris (1999). Both the opponents, and the proponents of written corrective feedback try their best to justify their viewpoints. Truscott argued that learners do not have any favor from it instead they develop avoidance behavior and it is also tedious for teachers. Sheppard's (1992) study of the holistic correction and corrective feedback favors Truscott's view as he revealed that students who receive corrective feedback are regressed in comparison to those who receive holistic correction notes. According to Truscott and Hsu's (2008) research findings, error correction is harmful and ineffective. In opposition to Truscott' view; (Bitchener, 2008; Ferris, 2002; Hendrickson, 1978) argued that students need the intervention of their teachers in the development of writing skills. According to Carless (2006), learners who receive feedback during the process have clear idea about their performance and can alter their thinking and behaviour to increase their outcome in the writing. Williams (2005) stated that feedback enhances the explicit knowledge of the rules, which is crucial for learners as writers. Bitchener and Storch (2016) believed that feedback provided by teachers in written form could be more productive in the development of L2. Williams (2012) stated that writing facilitates and give better time for cognitive processing as it is slower than speaking and beneficial for L2 development. The input in written form is productive and proved a lasting source for learning which students can get any time at whatever point they need it.

Research Objectives

•   To investigate the ESL learners' preferences for the types of WCF

•   To highlight the WCF types practiced by teachers in ESL context in Pakistan

•   To indicate the in/consistencies between learners' preferences and teachers' practices

Literature Review

Ellis (1994) stated feedback as teachers' attempt to provide evidence to the students for the specific errors, which are committed by learners linguistically. In direct feedback, errors of the learners are highlighted and corrected by the teachers (Mohebbi, 2013). In indirect feedback, learners' errors are highlighted by the teachers without providing the correct version of the errors (Lee, 2004, p.286). In focused feedback only selective errors are corrected by the teacher (Sheen, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009, 567).   In

unfocused form of feedback all or most of the errors are corrected without considering their category by giving parallel amount of attention to all errors (Ellis, 2009; VanBeuniongen, 2010). Deptolla (2019) conducted action research to explore the learners' perspectives regarding frequency of corrective feedback, their satisfaction level with the provided feedback and the most useful language elements. The six-week study was conducted in a Level 5 English language course. The data collection instruments included students' entrance and exit questionnaires, traffic signal forms distributed to the learners and teachers' reflection journal. The results of the study indicated that learners were satisfied with the amount of feedback given to them in the classrooms and the most useful language elements range from grammatical elements to pronunciation.

Güntherová (2019) conducted a study to explore the advantages and disadvantages and effectiveness of three error correction methods; explicit, implicit and error-code on the grammatical and lexical accuracy of intermediate learners. For the completion of this study total number errors were examined in pre- and post- test writings of the learners. The results indicated that error-code is not suitable for learners at this level and insufficient for the language development. Then the explicit error correction did not show marked difference in students' performance. In opposition to the first two methods, implicit error correction proved effective in language development and accuracy of intermediate learners. Maamuujav (2020) argued that writing instructors should not play the role of an editor in language classrooms rather act as a facilitator to make students autonomous self-editors of their own writing. The researcher challenged the role of teacher's corrective feedback and proposed an alternative approach to make students more active to edit their own work. Through the strategy, training and scaffolding, instructors can develop the habit of self-editing in students and help them to become more critical reader and autonomous learners.

Shahzadi (2017) conducted a mixed method study in COMSATS institute of information and technology in Lahore to analyze the attitudes and beliefs of undergraduate students and ESL teachers towards corrective feedback on the language errors of ESL students. The quantitative data was collected by using questionnaire both from teachers and the students. While for qualitative data, interviews with teachers and students were conducted. The results indicated that both students and teachers have positive attitude towards the correction of students' errors by teachers and consider it essential for the effective learning. In L2 classroom a quantitative study conducted by Tanveer, Malghani, Khosa and Khosa (2018) with pre, post and delayed posttest on 30 low-intermediate learners proved the efficacy of WCF in reducing errors. The two types of WCF direct and indirect were provided on articles and past tense errors. The results indicated that learners who received feedback performed better than the learners in control group on the above-mentioned error categories. Therefore, the findings advocated the efficacy of WCF in L2 classrooms for error reduction.

In L2 classroom a quantitative study conducted by Tanveer, Malghani, Khosa and Khosa (2018) with pre, post and delayed posttest on 30 low-intermediate learners proved the efficacy of WCF in reducing errors. The two types of WCF direct and indirect were provided on articles and past tense errors. The results indicated that learners who received feedback performed better than the learners in control group on the above-mentioned error categories. The quasi-experimental study by Nustrat, Ashraf, Khan, Aziz and Jabeen (2019) was conducted among ESL learners in Pakistani university to investigate the impact of indirect feedback and to check learners written accuracy in articles, past simple tense and prepositions. The treatment group was

provided indirect feedback while the control group received no feedback at all. To highlight the effect of feedback learners' performance was recorded in three phases. Learners with feedback provision perform remarkably different from the control group but their performance was better in immediate posttest then in the delayed posttest as they were unable to retain things in mind for longer span. The new writings of the students indicated more use of simple past tense but no remarkable change in prepositions. But even after the feedback practice students failed to use articles properly might be the intervention of Urdu in which there is no definite article. The learners who received indirect feedback performed better in immediate post-test than delayed post-test (Nustrat et.al, 2019).

Nusrat, Ashraf and Narcy-Combes (2019) carried out a quasi-experimental study among undergraduate students in Pakistan to explore the impact of direct and indirect teacher feedback on English writing accuracy. The 90 participants were divided into three groups, one group with oral meta-linguistic, also called direct feedback, second with indirect written feedback and third with no feedback. To highlight the effect of feedback pretest, posttest and delayed posttest were designed. The results demonstrated that students who received oral meta-linguistic teacher feedback outperformed in comparison with the other two groups.

Different research studies were conducted on the effectiveness of WCF, comparison of different types, teachers' actual beliefs and practices, and learners' perceptions of WCF but these studies were limited to other contexts. In Pakistani context there is need to explore more on the WCF. In Pakistani ESL context, many studies were conducted on the effectiveness of WCF, comparison of feedback types, ESL teachers' perceptions and practices and students' attitude towards oral and written feedback. But there is limited work on learners' preferences for the different types of WCF. The present study is conducted in GCWU Sialkot in Pakistan to explore the ESL learners' perspectives regarding the type and amount of teachers' feedback on their writing. This study has focused on learners' choices for comprehensive or selective feedback, direct or indirect feedback and feedback on grammar or content and teachers' practices of WCF. Then the study also shed light on the consistencies between learners' preferences and their teachers' practices of WCF. In Pakistan English is taught as a compulsory subject from grade one to 14 and even after 14 years of learning it, mostly students are unable to write correct English. So, there is need to improve this learning condition in which teachers' written corrective feedback can be vital as different research studies discussed above prove the essential place of WCF in teaching writing. Now there is a shift from teachers' centered to learners' centered classroom and students are the focus of learning process. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate learners' perceptions and requirements regarding the provision of teachers' feedback.

Research Questions

- What are the ESL learners' preferences for written corrective feedback in Pakistani Context?
- What are teachers' WCF practices in Pakistani ESL context?
- To what extent do learners' preferences align with their teachers' practices of WCF in Pakistani ESL context?

Methodology

The researcher adopted a mixed method approach for the present study. The selection of mixed method approach is based on the research questions. Cresswell (2008) argued that the mixed method approach has become the most desired approach because of advantages of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The design of the study is concurrent embedded as both the quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analyzed separately to answer the research questions.

Population and Sample

The population of this study comprised of ESL students and teachers in a public sector university in Sialkot. The sample of the study was selected by using convenience sampling technique. Dornyei (2007) stated that though convenience sampling is least desirable yet most common approach of sampling as it focuses more on practicality. For quantitative data the participants were 200 students of B.S 2nd semester from four departments of social sciences: English, Urdu, Political Science and Sociology. The qualitative data was collected from 5 ESL teachers from the same institute.

Research Tools

For quantitative data a four-point Likert scale questionnaire adopted from Al Muhammadi's (2016) is used. The questionnaire is authentic and originally adapted from Lee's (2004) with some modifications and applicable in present context. It had two sections one with demographic part and other section consisted of 24 items which are related to WCF. The qualitative data had been gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews of five ESL teachers from the same institute. The interview guide was comprised of two parts, first part about background information and second about their practices and beliefs of WCF. The interview questions were selected from Lee's (2004) with some changes.

Results and Discussion

Internal consistency of Scales of WCF

In the survey research, the selection of items and categories is of crucial importance to get good results. The selected items in a category should be relevant and addressing the one main theme of that category. The relevance of the items in a category is usually measured by using internal consistency of scales. The validity and reliability are two important factors in psychometric research. Gay et al, (2011) stated that reliability is the extent of consistency of items in a single test with the test as a whole and among themselves. The researcher addressed the reliability of the students' WCF questionnaire by using Cronbach's alpha coefficients by employing the SPSS software. In social sciences, the Cronbach's alpha is frequently used as coefficients of reliability to measure the internal consistency of scales.

Table 1: Internal consistency of Scales used in WCF

Scale	alpha
Direct feedback ((4)	.746
Focused feedback (4)	.693
Feedback on form (4)	.687
Feedback on content (4)	.648
Unfocused feedback (4)	.644
Indirect feedback (4)	.638

Descriptive analysis of Scales of WCF

The mean and standard deviation of all the six categories of feedback were given below in the table 4.2. The table indicated that two categories focused feedback and feedback on form displayed higher values of mean and standard deviation which were 3.4 and .482 respectively.

Scale	Mean	SD
Focused feedback	3.42	.483
Feedback on Form	3.42	.483
Direct feedback	3.29	.541
Unfocused feedback	3.26	.463
Indirect feedback	3.19	.503
Feedback on Content	3.05	.541

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of WCF Scales

Comparison of WCF Scales by using Mean and SD

As the six feedback categories are in pair and one is opposite to the other category as focused feedback verses unfocused feedback By calculating the mean and standard deviation the researcher compared the each two categories of feedback such as focused and unfocused, indirect and direct and feedback on content and feedback on form to explore which category students preferred over other. In the table4.3 the difference between means and standard deviations of focused and unfocused feedback indicated that the students preferred focused feedback (*M*= 3.4) over unfocused feedback (M= 3.2).

Table 3: Comparison of Focused and Unfocused feedback

	Mean	Std. Dev.
Focused	3.42	.483
Unfocused	3.26	.463

The difference in the mean of two categories indicated that students want only limited correction of errors in the form of focused feedback. They don't value unfocused feedback which means correction of all their errors in a single assignment which might be discouraging for them.

The comparison between indirect and direct feedback is given below in table 4.4.

Table 4: Comparison of Indirect and Direct feedback

	Mean	Std. Dev.
Indirect	3.19	.530
Direct	3.29	.541

The difference between the means of two feedback categories (direct and Indirect) showed that the students want to get direct feedback in comparison of indirect feedback

on their errors. The comparison between feedback on content and feedback on form indicated that the students desired to get feedback on form. The table4.5 indicated that the mean of feedback on form (M=3.4) was higher than that of feedback on content (M=3.05).

Table 5:   Comparison of feedback on content and form

	Mean	Std. Dev.
Content	3.05	.541
Form	3.42	.483

The higher mean of feedback on form reveled that students want more correction on errors of language structures.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the ESL learners' preferences and teachers' practices of WCF and the consistencies and inconsistencies between the preferences of students and practices of the teachers. The data was collected from both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interview) methods and analyzed. The quantitative data highlighted the learners' preferences for the types, focus and amount of WCF. The learners were asked about the six categories of feedback, focused, unfocused, direct, indirect, feedback on form and feedback on content. There were four statements relevant to every category. The researcher found the means and standard deviation of all the six categories by using SPSS version 26. Then the mean of each category given in pair (focused/unfocused, indirect/direct and content/form) was compared. The comparison of means of focused (M=3.4) and unfocused feedback (3.2) elaborated that the learners want to receive selective feedback as the mean was greater for the focused feedback. The greater value of focused feedback showed that students preferred selective error correction on their assignments from their teachers. The students' preferences for focused feedback aligned with the findings of the studies of Ellis et al, (2006) and Farrokhi & Sattarpour (2011). In these two studies, the students preferred focused feedback. While the results indicated inconsistencies with the findings of Amrhein & Nassaji (2010) and that of Al Muhammadi (2016). These two studies revealed the preferences of the students for unfocused feedback. The greater mean of direct feedback (3.2) in comparison to indirect feedback (3.1) illustrated learners' bending towards direct feedback.

The students' preferences for direct form of feedback are aligned with the findings of Ellis, et al., (2006) and with that of Al Muhammadi (2016). The results of these two studies also revealed the preference for direct feedback. However, the findings of this study contradicted with the study conducted by Ferris (2002) which supported indirect feedback. In the comparison of content (M=3.0) and form feedback (M=3.4) learners preferred form feedback as the comparison indicated the greater value of form feedback. The results outlined that students' valued grammar more than content are consistent with the results of Kahraman & Yalvac (2015), Chen, Nassaji and Liu, (2016) and Al Muhammadi (2016). The results of all these three studies also indicated students' preferences for feedback on form over content. However, the results are inconsistent with the results of Ferris (1997) and Long's studies (1991). These two studies advocated content feedback over form.

The researcher compared the means of WCF categories based on age, department, medium and family status. There were minor differences in the means of WCF categories based on age and medium. While there were differences in the means of WCF categories based on learners' departments and geographical settings. The quantitative data of questionnaire was analyzed by using independent samples t-test to find out the differences among students' preferences based on age, medium of instruction and family status. The results indicated no significant difference between the preferences of students based on age, medium and family status. Then one-way ANOVA was used to find significant differences in the preferences of the learners based on their departments, grades in previous English exams and favorite subject throughout the study career. There were significant differences in the learners' preferences based on their departments, grades and favorite subjects.

The qualitative data included teachers' interviews to explore their practices of WCF. From focused and unfocused feedback mostly teachers preferred unfocused feedback. The preference of teachers for unfocused feedback is consistent with the Lee's (2004) in which teachers valued unfocused feedback. While the other two teachers argued that correction of all students' errors by teachers is discouraging. They preferred focused or selective feedback on their learners' documents and considered it positive and constructive form of feedback. Their view is aligned with that of Ferris (2002) who also supported focused feedback.

While from direct and indirect WCF categories, teachers' practices aligned with the learners' preferences for direct feedback. The teachers' preference of direct feedback is aligned with the study of Ellis et al., (2006) and Al Muhammadi (2016). Both these studies indicated teachers' preference of direct feedback. However, the results are inconsistent with the study of Hammerly (1991) who advocated indirect feedback as a useful technique. When teachers were asked about the focus of feedback, they preferred form over content which was again consistent with learners' perspectives. Here the preferences of teachers for feedback on form are consistent with the studies of Ellis (2005) and Al Muhammadi (2016) and inconsistent with the study of Long (1991) that indicated teachers' preferences for feedback on content over form.

There was difference in the practices of the teachers and preferences of the learners regarding comprehensive and selective feedback. This mismatch between learners' preferences and teachers' practices is aligned with the study of Alkhatib (2015) which also represented inconsistencies between learners' preferences and teachers' practices of WCF. In comparison of direct and indirect feedback there is coordination between the learners' preferences and teachers' practices, which is consistent with the results of Al Muhammadi (2016) who reported the consistency between learners' preferences and teachers' practices of direct feedback. In the focus of WCF, the questionnaire results indicated that the students valued feedback on grammar more than feedback on content. The interview results also highlighted teachers' support towards grammar as focus of feedback. So here again the students' preferences align with their teachers' practices. This alignment of students' preferences and teachers' practices is consistent with the study of Al Muhammadi (2016) which also revealed a strong alignment of teachers' practices and learners' preferences.

Recommendations

By exploring, the preferences of learners and teachers' practices of WCF in ESL context in Pakistan there are many suggestions, which are given below:

- There is need to shift the classroom environment into students' friendly so they can freely discuss their choices with their teachers.

- There should be workshops or seminars for ESL teachers where they can share their ideas regarding the WCF

- The teachers should be given training for the practices of WCF so that they can get awareness about the uses and types of WCF

- Teachers should try to know their learners' preferences by arranging more interactive sessions with their students.

- There should be relaxation in institutes' policies for teachers so that they can freely practice the types of WCF that they considered more productive for their learners.

Future directions

This research study has many future directions which need to explore in the future and they are following:

- The present study was conducted on university level there is need to explore the learners' preferences and teachers' practices of WCF on school level.

- This study was conducted only in one public sector university there is need to explore the preferences of learners from the private sector.

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