

# Exploring EFL female teachers' and undergraduate students' perceptions regarding written corrective feedback

Anwar Alhumaid

*Department of English Language and Translation,  
College of Arabic Language and Social Studies, Qassim University,  
Buraidah, Saudi Arabia*

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of teachers' and undergraduate students concerning the provision of written corrective feedback (WCF) in Saudi EFL writing classrooms in the form of a case study.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The sample consisted of three teachers and five students, whose views on WCF were recorded via individual semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative data.

**Findings** – The results revealed some divergent viewpoints between students and teachers and among peers in both groups.

**Originality/value** – By offering the best WCF practice and considering students' interests, this research is important for improving the pedagogical approaches used by EFL instructors for teaching writing to university learners. It will, therefore, have more of an impact on EFL writing instruction.

**Keywords** Writing, Corrective feedback, Perceptions

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

It is broadly acknowledged that instructors' comments on students' compositions are a basic educational tool for improving learners' writing skills (Ferris, 2014). Most learners believe that their learning can be improved by receiving teacher written corrective feedback (WCF) (Hyland, 2004). Feedback can be described as "information that is given to the learner about his or her performance on a learning task, usually with the objective of improving the performance" (Ur, 1996, p. 242), while WCF means "any feedback provided to a learner, from any source, that contains evidence of learner error of language form" (Russell *et al.*, 2006, p. 134).

Sociocultural theory of second language (L2) learning encourages teacher feedback usage. The theory places a significant value on students working together with the instructor. According to Vygotsky (1978), human learning always occurs in a social setting in which individuals (i.e. students) develop their cognitive abilities through social interactions with a more knowledgeable person (i.e. an instructor). Such assistance, according to Vygotsky (1978), serves the purpose of scaffolding, enabling individuals to learn and internalize new ideas and thus reach their zone of proximal development, which he described as the gap between their actual performance and the potential progress that they can achieve in collaboration with more knowledgeable others.



While the issue of WCF is debatable among scholars (Ferris, 1997; Truscott, 1996), results of recent meta-analyses studies and systematic reviews demonstrated a great impact of WCF to improve students' writing fluency and accuracy (Crosthwaite *et al.*, 2022; Fu *et al.*, 2022; Mohsen, 2022). Majority of studies in the literature on WCF were carried out using quantitative methods and few studies used a qualitative approach to test the students' improvement in their L2 writing (Fu *et al.*, 2022). Attitudes of teachers and students are crucial that could affect processes and outcomes of learning (Cook, 2002).

More research is needed to compare instructors' and learners' views of WCF to gain a better understanding, and in the context of Saudi Arabia, there has been very little research on how EFL instructors and learners give voice to their perceptions of WCF. Therefore, to fill this gap, the current research seeks to explore students' and teachers' perceptions of WCF in Saudi EFL writing classes and attempts to answer the following questions:

- RQ1. How do EFL female teachers perceive the WCF that they provide to their students on their writing?
- RQ2. How do EFL female undergraduate students perceive the WCF that they receive from their teachers on their writing?

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Writing in a second language

Writing is a daunting task for foreign language learners due to their incompetence and low automaticity in mastering writing skills. Several studies have explored the problems and difficulties that Saudi EFL learners face in particular. Mohammad and Hazarika (2016) indicated that Saudi EFL students repeatedly made errors regarding capitalization, punctuation, grammar, word choice and spelling. They also found that Saudi EFL writers were unaware of the types of mistakes they make. Similarly, Nuruzzaman *et al.* (2018) noted that Saudi EFL students with different English proficiency levels frequently made grammatical, lexical, organizational and semantic errors.

### 2.2 Teacher WCF

Writing instructors can deliver WCF in a variety of forms with different focuses and strategies, and the choice of feedback type depends on the teacher's values. Teachers might rely on a single strategy when commenting on a student's writing or incorporate different strategies concurrently. These types are explained in the following section.

### 2.3 Types of teacher WCF

Feedback can be provided in several forms based on the purpose of the feedback. According to Ferris (1997), teachers' comments on students' texts can be classified into three kinds: criticism, praise and requests. A similar categorization was proposed by Hyland and Hyland (2001), although they replaced the term "requests" with "suggestions."

Praise, which can also be referred to as positive feedback, consists of "an act which attributes credit to another for some characteristic, attribute, skill, etc., which is positively valued by the writer. It therefore suggests a more intense or detailed response than simple agreement" (Hyland, 2004, p. 44). Although positive feedback promotes L2 learners' motivation, writing teachers should be careful as to the amount of praise they give their students and its credibility (Hyland, 2003). In other words, too many positive comments may be unhelpful for students, especially if they are alert to their mistakes, whereas a lack of praise can negatively affect learners' attitudes toward writing (Hyland and Hyland, 2001).

In contrast, criticism can be described as an "expression of dissatisfaction or [a] negative comment" that teachers provide regarding students' compositions (Hyland, 2004, p. 44). It is

used interchangeably with the term “negative feedback” to indicate corrections that target fault in different aspects of a text (Ferris, 1997). However, this type of feedback can be problematic, as students may misunderstand the meaning of the criticism and thus fail to learn from it as a means to improve their subsequent writing (Hyland, 2003).

Suggestions and requests, which lie between the two extremes of praise and criticism, provide “a retrievable plan of action for improvement, a do-able revision of some kind” (Hyland, 2003, p. 189). In other words, they highlight students’ errors in a less critical way and offer explicit suggestions for revision.

#### *2.4 Approaches for teacher WCF*

Another way of categorizing teacher WCF is based on the strategies used to provide feedback, which can be direct, indirect or metalinguistic (Ellis, 2008). With direct feedback, the teacher highlights the student’s mistakes and explicitly offers the correct structures and forms. With indirect feedback, the instructor draws student’s attention to the presence of an error without offering a correction and instead leaves the student to figure it out (Ellis, 2008). The former is also referred to as explicit feedback and the latter as implicit feedback. Metalinguistic feedback entails the teacher marking each mistake with a code or abbreviation to indicate the error type, such as “Art” for article error (Ellis, 2008).

Feedback can also be classified into focused and unfocused feedback according to the number of errors corrected by the teacher. With unfocused feedback, which is also referred to as constructive feedback, the instructor targets all or most types of mistakes in a student’s compositions and corrects them (Liu and Brown, 2015). By contrast, focused feedback is when the teacher specifies in advance a few linguistic categories to be corrected instead of revising all of the student’s errors (Frear and Chiu, 2015). This selective feedback can focus on learners’ needs by revising one or two linguistic features that occur most frequently in a single composition, such as all spelling errors (Liu and Brown, 2015).

#### *2.5 Teachers’ perceptions of WCF*

EFL/ESL teachers’ preferences for delivering WCF have been the subject of a sizable amount of research, and the findings have revealed variations in how feedback is provided. Generally speaking, writing teachers agree on the value of their written comments as part of their teaching strategies for writing, leading students to better achievement of the syllabus objectives (Ganapathy *et al.*, 2020a). Similarly, Lee *et al.* (2017) argue that instructors believe that WCF can enhance learning writing and feel obliged to use it to justify the grades they assign. Some studies on teachers’ perceptions have focused on an explicit degree of WCF. For instance, in Halimi’s (2008) study, most teachers favored using direct feedback to correct students’ assignments by underlining the mistakes and providing the right one. By contrast, Damanik *et al.* (2017) found that many professors preferred implicit over explicit WCF when it relates to correcting students’ mistakes. In the Saudi EFL context, many studies were conducted to investigate teachers’ perceptions of the use of WCF. Alshahrani and Storch (2014) examined teachers’ perceptions about the use of WCF in light of the guidelines provided by teachers’ institutions they were affiliated to. Three teachers were interviewed and 15 students were surveyed. The results indicated that teachers focused more on correcting mechanic errors with little attention on improving the writing content. Alzahrani (2016) surveyed 10 instructors teaching at the university level about their beliefs toward uncoded unfocused corrective feedback and found positive attitudes in improving the students’ writing accuracy in their second draft of writing. Albelihi (2022) assessed the practices of Saudi EFL teachers in aiding their students with corrective feedback. Ninety-two writing scripts were evaluated by raters to find out types of WCF adopted by teachers and the students’ responses in addressing their teachers’ feedback. Direct method was found the most dominant feedback employed by teachers to correct mechanic errors such as grammar and lexis.

Other studies have investigated EFL teachers' perceptions and shed light on those aspects of writing that feedback focused on. Some instructors were obsessed with providing feedback targeting surface-level errors such as grammar accuracy, mechanisms including spelling and punctuation and word choice, whereas others commented on global problems in content, clarity and fluency of ideas and text organization (Hyland and Hyland, 2006). For instance, in the study by Jodaie and Farrokhi (2012), all teachers strongly valued grammatical accuracy, and the findings revealed that instructors were divided in their opinions of WCF's comprehensiveness. Almost half of them preferred comprehensive feedback, claiming that all student's errors in a writing piece must be marked, as students expect teachers to correct all their mistakes. Similarly, Alshahrani and Storch (2014) found that Saudi EFL teachers tended to use "a comprehensive approach to prevent errors fossilization" (p. 113).

### 2.6 Students' perceptions of WCF

In general, learners view teacher WCF as crucial for allowing them to detect the strengths and weaknesses in their compositions (Tom *et al.*, 2013). The opinions of EFL/ESL learners regarding the types of teacher feedback delivered on their compositions have been the subject of numerous studies. Learners' perceptions differ significantly, and they desire different kinds of feedback for a variety of reasons (Zhan, 2016). The main categories of student preferences focus on writing form, handling local problems or/and writing content, handling global ones. Numerous studies have found that some learners favor feedback on the surface level of writing such as for grammar, vocabulary and mechanisms (e.g. Ganapathy *et al.*, 2020a). Students admit that this teacher feedback approach enables them to identify their mistakes, know what to improve and avoid repeating the same mistakes (Zhan, 2016). In addition, form-oriented feedback is desired by students who are more concerned with writing flawlessly than they are with expressing ideas that are clear and consistent (Ganapathy *et al.*, 2020a). However, other studies have displayed students' preference for global WCF targeting content, text organization and writing style (e.g. Fithriani, 2017). A great number of studies of EFL/ESL students' perceptions of type, amount and explicit degree of teacher WCF have shown a preference for a combination of comprehensive WCF that corrects all errors related to the linguistic form as well as the content. For example, Ganapathy *et al.* (2020b) found that direct feedback with an emphasis on grammar, content and ideas, and paragraph organization was preferable and useful for most students, who in turn claimed that it enabled them to understand their mistakes clearly and enhanced their writing abilities. It was also found that the majority of learners wanted teachers to mark all errors, believing such type of feedback to be significant for their comprehension while improving their ability to learn and memorize the subject. Likewise, Halim *et al.* (2021) found that Saudi female EFL learners (N = 60) perceived teacher's WCF as a motivating educational tool that improves their writing.

Other studies on students' perceptions have explored the influence of teacher WCF on students' emotions. For example, Marrs *et al.* (2016) pointed out that the majority of learners appreciated teacher WCF for the following reasons: it improved their writing skills, enabled them to see their mistakes and the positive aspects of their writing, provided them with feedback from a reader and motivated them. However, a small percentage of students preferred not to obtain teacher WCF because (1) they did not appreciate negative feedback on their writing; (2) they were not interested in receiving feedback; and (3) it engendered negative feelings such as sadness, timidity, fear and anxiety. In a more recent study by Maniam and Shah (2020), the majority of students reported that they felt improved, cared for, satisfied and assessed when they received written comments from their instructor. The remainder showed negative reactions toward teachers' WCF, such as feelings of humiliation, disappointment, frustration and dissatisfaction.

### *2.7 Teachers' and students' perceptions of WCF*

A few studies in the field of EFL were conducted to find out the perceptions of teachers and learners toward WCF. In one of these, [Baz et al. \(2016\)](#) explored the attitudes of teachers and learners in Turkey and found that they shared almost similar views. Both valued WCF and believed that students' learning was enhanced when teachers corrected all their errors. Furthermore, both agreed that when teachers did not provide WCF on students' assignments, the students felt neglected.

Some studies, however, have revealed a mismatch between teachers' and learners' perceptions. For instance, [Zhan \(2016\)](#) examined the preferences of Chinese instructors and learners in terms of the focus and types of teacher WCF. The respective perceptions were revealed to be slightly different from each other, and the learners' preferences were not expected by the teachers. More specifically, the students and teachers held different views from their colleagues. In a recent study, [Ganapathy et al. \(2020a\)](#) examined the attitudes of instructors and learners regarding WCF usage in Malaysia. The perceptions mostly aligned in terms of the importance and effectiveness of WCF and diverged in terms of the amount of feedback. [Albelihi \(2022\)](#) found that direct WCF was the highest strategy used by Saudi EFL instructors to correct the students' writing assignments, followed by metalinguistics and clarification types. Learners also preferred to receive direct feedback from their teachers on Polish mechanic errors. [Alshahrani and Storch \(2014\)](#), however, found that teachers preferred to use indirect methods to correct students' grammatical and lexical errors.

To conclude, there seems to be a dearth of studies that qualitatively examined the students and teachers' perception toward using written corrective feedback in Saudi EFL context. Therefore, this study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the issue of WCF in the Saudi Arabian EFL context.

## **3. Methodology**

### *3.1 Subjects*

The participants in this research consisted of three female teachers and five female undergraduates at a Saudi public university. The instructors had experience of teaching writing for at least a year and a half. All students were freshmen (at level two) who majored in English and were enrolled in a three-hour weekly writing class. This level was selected because students in it are considered to have intermediate writing proficiency; they have already completed two writing courses but still have another course beyond the current one. They have received WCF for almost two courses from their instructors, and at the time of doing the experiment, they were studying Writing III. Thus, they may be in a position in which they still require feedback, and they can have their own discussions about learning.

### *3.2 Instrument*

To obtain teachers' and students' views on WCF, an interview protocol with semi-structured questions was employed as the tool. Most of the questions were adopted from [Ferguson's \(2011\)](#) study, although one question designed by the researcher based on previous studies was added.

### *3.3 Procedure*

The study was carried out in the second semester of the academic year 2018–2019. Three writing teachers were asked to participate, and they immediately agreed. For the undergraduate students, five students from two different classes volunteered to take part in the investigation. Face-to-face interviews were conducted by the researcher inside the university campus. Each participant was interviewed individually after being informed that their name would be kept anonymous. The instructors were interviewed in English,

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while learners were interviewed in their first language (Arabic) to offer them the opportunity to express their opinions clearly.

## 4. Findings

*RQ1.* How do EFL teachers perceive the WCF that they provide to their students on their writing?

Based on the instructors' responses, six themes were noticed, as follows.

### 4.1 Teachers' perceptions

*4.1.1 Importance of WCF.* All teachers emphasized that WCF is essential for learning all language skills and that it is an inseparable part of the writing pedagogy in particular. They believed that the provision of WCF for students' compositions is part of their duty as teachers. Such importance was for a variety of reasons and basically to reflect student's needs.

If you do not provide [corrective feedback], students will not be able to notice small mistakes in their writing. (Teacher B)

If students don't know what mistakes they are making, they will keep on making mistakes, and their errors will be fossilized. (Teacher A)

Thus, the participants thought that learners could not identify and correct their errors by themselves, and if students did not receive feedback, their errors would become a habit. In other words, drawing students' attention to their mistakes during the learning stage is critical, while any correction after that period will not be effective.

*4.1.2 Focus of WCF.* Most of the teachers agreed to provide WCF on all aspects of writing, including the language structure, content and organization of the text.

There are two internationally accepted criteria in English language writing, which are from Cambridge University . . . The first one is language focus, and the second one is content style . . . so I'm going to check over everything at the micro and macro level. (Teacher A)

However, one instructor had a different opinion regarding the writing aspects that require feedback.

I mark them depending on what I have taught them. (Teacher C)

Thus, Teacher C preferred the feedback provision to be based on the syllabus course.

*4.1.3 Ways to Provide WCF.* Some instructors preferred to provide both general feedback (i.e. addressing the common errors of all students) and individual feedback (i.e. addressed to each student alone based on their compositions).

I provide general feedback for all the students . . . about the things that all students have as an issue . . . Without giving students specific feedback, they may not take the criticism as their own . . . but when you show them this on their paper, they notice. (Teacher B)

Teacher B argued that students may not take general feedback into consideration unless the feedback is addressed to them directly. However, another opinion was to rely on general feedback more than on individual feedback.

I conduct error analysis collectively on the board, unless it is so bad that I need to address it individually. If you are going to pinpoint mistakes individually in a harsh way, [learners] won't be motivated to write down anything else. (Teacher A)

Thus, Teacher A thought that in-person WCF may harm students' motivation. She was not against individual feedback, but she thought it would be better left for difficult cases.

*4.1.4 Positive and Negative Written Feedback.* The instructors showed similar perceptions regarding whether to provide positive and negative feedback.

I do provide them [with positive feedback]; I encourage them. Sometimes I give them stars for their writing . . . and I see them get really motivated . . . You need to give them some initiative. (Teacher A)

Teacher A perceived positive feedback as providing impetus to push students to write and claimed that it is essential for motivation and encouragement. However, Teacher B believed that positive and negative feedback were both equally important; that is, praising students' compositions motivated them to write while correcting their errors contributed to their improvement.

It is better to combine them . . . Positive feedback is very important [for] students at lower levels . . . If you always give them negative feedback, it will kill their motivation . . . [but] giving them negative feedback for every aspect of the text helps the students to improve. (Teacher B)

*4.1.5 Efficacy of WCF.* The participants agreed that WCF is not always beneficial for students and reported a number of factors that might negatively influence its effectiveness. Time can be crucial for students to process feedback.

If you don't give them immediate written feedback . . . [and] if you prolong the feedback, it of course loses its efficacy. (Teacher A)

In other words, the more there is a delay between the task and the feedback provision, the less effective the feedback will be. The other factor is related to students' attention and interests.

I noticed that they didn't take it into consideration most of time . . . for a lot of students, you will see the same errors again and over again. (Teacher B)

Some students who pay attention to me, who make some effort—I see how they improve. (Teacher C).

Thus, students are sometimes not interested in or do not pay attention to teachers' comments, which results in errors being repeated. However, being interested is not always a good sign.

Not every student is interested in getting feedback; mostly they are interested in knowing their marks. (Teacher A)

According to Teacher A, students' interest in receiving feedback is not always for the purpose of improving their writing. Sometimes, they are interested in knowing their grades rather than correcting their errors, rendering the written feedback useless.

*4.1.6 Difficulties of WCF.* The teachers highlighted the different obstacles that faced them when providing students with WCF. The time it takes to provide WCF was first among these difficulties, followed by the number of students in the class.

There is a big number of students . . . [and] I really have a problem with managing the time. (Teacher A)

Thus, the instructor explained that she struggled with delivering WCF to a large class size within a limited amount of class time.

The lecture lasts almost three hours. If I provide feedback throughout those three hours, I would be standing up and going back and forth with the students, which would be exhausting . . . When I collect the samples and do it at home, it's just tiring. (Teacher C)

Teacher C's comments showed that feedback provision is not an easy job. It requires considerable physical effort, whether it is provided in class or at home.

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RQ2. How do EFL undergraduate students perceive the WCF that they receive from their teachers on their writing?

Based on the students' responses, five themes were noticed, as follows.

#### 4.2 Students' perceptions

4.2.1 *Importance of WCF.* All students perceived WCF to be significant for writing development, since it highlights errors, corrects them and prevents their repetition.

This will help me to know what writing aspects I have problems with and to revise them later . . . I think this way will improve my writing. (Student B)

4.2.2 *Focus of WCF.* The students had different perceptions regarding the writing aspect(s) that teachers should focus their comments on. Some students favored receiving content-oriented feedback.

I prefer to receive feedback on the content in general, rather than on the grammar . . . because I have already learned grammar, spelling, and punctuation from the previous two writing courses. (Student A)

In her opinion, the focus of feedback should depend on a student's writing proficiency. She believed that commenting on the writing content would be suitable for those at an intermediate writing level like her, while correcting the writing structure would be more suitable for beginners. In contrast, other students preferred to receive feedback about the language structure of their writing.

I prefer the focus of the feedback to be on the grammar, spelling, etc., since that is what will improve my skills . . . Taking a writing course means learning how to write in a correct structure instead of how to present your ideas. (Student C)

Student C perceived writing only as a matter of writing correct sentences, regardless of the ideas being presented. Teachers' comments on the content, in her opinion, did not contribute to students' development at all. Student E's views were in line with this.

I don't like receiving feedback on ideas, as the ideas are mine and I write them based on my point of view . . . I don't want my teacher's opinion. (Student E)

Thus, Student E stood strongly against content-based feedback and perceived such comments to be opinions rather than feedback. Thus, criticizing one's opinion based on someone's else perspective would be like violating intellectual property. However, another group of students preferred to receive form-based as well as content-based feedback.

To balance them . . . of course grammar and spelling are necessary, but at the same time, ideas are important . . . Receiving feedback on ideas helps me avoid writing about boring ideas, and I write about new things in order to draw the attention of the reader. (Student B)

Student B called for a feedback provision targeting micro and macro issues. She argued that teachers' comments on her ideas would help her to take into consideration what the reader wants and expects from her as a writer.

4.2.3 *Positive and Negative Written Feedback.* The participants showed different perceptions of praise and criticism. The majority of students favored positive feedback due its role in writing development, enjoyment and motivation.

I like to be provided with positive feedback on what I did well in writing because it will motivate me to keep writing . . . When my teacher focuses only on correcting my mistakes without commenting on the good things, I hate it. (Student A)

Student A perceived compliments on her writing as a form of motivation because it sheds light on her strengths. She also argued that focusing feedback only on error correction, in



spite of its importance, affected her emotions negatively. However, some students perceived both positive and negative feedback as motivations for writing.

Positive feedback motivates me to write more and to be creative . . . [while] corrective feedback motivates me even more to correct myself, to learn, and to acquire new skills. (Student B)

Thus, Student B argued that positive comments lead to creativeness, while negative ones lead to writing development. Surprisingly, a minority of students did not experience positive feedback at all.

I have never thought of receiving positive feedback, and I have never received it once. (Student D)

Student D declared that she had never encountered positive comments on her writing, and thus she had no specific perceptions regarding positive feedback.

*4.2.4 Grades and WCF.* Some students perceived teacher WCF to be linked to marks.

Once, I took full marks, but that was without comments . . . because the mark is the feedback itself. (Student C)

The student perceived the assignment mark to be an indicator of teacher feedback. In other words, the lower the mark one obtains, the more written feedback one will receive from the instructor.

I want overall feedback and criticism for everything, even my handwriting, but marks only for what we are learning now. (Student D)

Thus, Student D claimed that feedback provision and writing assessment were totally different things. She argued that teacher feedback should be based on the student's needs rather than grades, and such a link could negatively affect her willingness to accept that feedback. The student also explained that if the instructor had to link marks to feedback, at least it should target the writing skills mentioned in the curriculum rather than all the errors.

*4.2.5 Students' Emotions and WCF.* The majority of participants reported that they did not take receiving a great deal of WCF personally. However, some students claimed that a large amount of feedback did affect their affection.

It bothers me because it makes me feel like I did not do my best. (Student E)

The student explained that receiving many corrections would lead to disappointment, regardless of the effort that she had put into writing the piece. Moreover, some learners perceived teacher WCF to be a sign that reflected teachers' concerns.

Not all teachers provide us with feedback—only the ones who care about your improvement . . . The majority will just correct and give grades. (Student C)

Thus, Student C claimed that she was used to receiving feedback in the form of corrections and marks, and a small number of teachers who were concerned about her improvement would provide holistic feedback that targeted her needs.

## 5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how undergraduate students and teachers felt about the use of WCF in Saudi Arabian EFL writing classrooms. The results revealed some divergent viewpoints between students and teachers. More precisely, the teachers' and students' perceptions were divergent from those of their peers. This mismatch is consistent with prior research (e.g. [Ganapathy et al., 2020a](#); [Zhan, 2016](#)). Since the participants had a similar language learning experience in EFL settings, the differences could be attributed to

their different needs. In general, all the interviewees (instructors and students) demonstrated positive attitudes regarding WCF provision.

Regarding the importance of WCF, both instructors and learners agreed that feedback played a crucial role in writing pedagogy. This is in line with [Alzahrani \(2016\)](#), [Ganapathy et al. \(2020a\)](#) and [Lee et al. \(2017\)](#), who found that teachers believed feedback provision to be part of their job and that it enhances learners' awareness of their weaknesses. Students also mentioned different reasons for valuing WCF, including locating errors, correcting them, minimizing error repetition and thus developing writing skills, which agrees with [Albelihi \(2022\)](#), [Alzahrani \(2016\)](#), [Maniam and Shah \(2020\)](#) and [Tom et al. \(2013\)](#).

The participants also discussed the amount of WCF and the writing aspect(s) it should focus on, although they showed contrasting views. Most teachers and students preferred unfocused feedback that corrected all local and global writing problems and claimed that such a combination would ultimately lead to the development of writing performance. This is in line with [Albelihi \(2022\)](#) and [Alzahrani \(2016\)](#) that teachers and students preferred a direct approach to correct mechanical errors. This view contradicts [Alshahrani and Storch \(2014\)](#), [Saidon et al. \(2018\)](#) and [Ganapathy et al. \(2020b\)](#), in whose studies *instructors* showed preferences for specific aspects, but it is consistent with the studies of [Ganapathy et al. \(2020b\)](#) and [Marrs et al. \(2016\)](#), in which *students* showed an equal preference for global and local feedback. It also contrasts with [Ganapathy et al. \(2020a\)](#) and [Fithriani \(2017\)](#), in which students revealed that they prioritized either macro issues or micro issues over each other. However, one teacher argued for a different view, namely, that WCF should be based on the syllabus objectives, regardless of any other mistakes a student might make. She might think that since WCF is linked to grades, it is unfair to bring all errors to the book. This could be justified from another corner that believes feedback should address students' needs and that a syllabus is built based on the same goal of students' needs. This is in line with [Zhan \(2016\)](#) in which learners dislike it when their ideas are controlled and possessed by teachers.

In terms of providing positive and negative feedback, both instructors and learners valued a combination of praise and criticism, claiming that the former enhanced motivation and encouragement while the latter led to writing improvement. This is in agreement with [Marrs et al. \(2016\)](#), in which students appreciated criticism so that their errors would be corrected and their writing skills would be developed. They also appreciated praise so that they would be motivated and their strengths would be identified. Regardless of the perceptions, one student reported never having experienced receiving positive comments on their writings. This may be attributed to teachers' unawareness of their actual educational practices inside the classroom ([Ganapathy et al., 2020a](#)).

All teachers had the same opinion about providing both general and individual feedback for the following reasons:

- (1) General feedback is better for correcting common errors and saving the teacher time and effort than addressing each learner in person.
- (2) General feedback is suitable for classes with a large number of learners.
- (3) Individual feedback enables students to take WCF into consideration.
- (4) Receiving a large amount of individual feedback may harm students' emotions.

This perspective of individual feedback is in line with most of the studies on WCF (e.g. [Saidon et al., 2018](#)). Additionally, the findings regarding general feedback support [Alshahrani and Storch \(2014\)](#), who found that most instructors offered feedback in a whole class situation, but contrast with the study of [Jodaie and Farrokhi \(2012\)](#), in which only two teachers discussed and corrected common mistakes made by learners during the lecture.

Another feature reported by instructors was the existence of external factors that might reduce WCF effectiveness. The teachers perceived different factors, including (1) the time between the writing task and WCF provision, (2) student's interest in grades and (3) the amount of attention students paid to WCF. According to [Damanik et al. \(2017\)](#), paying attention to mistakes and corrections will gain students' awareness and thus increase their responsibility for correcting their errors. Regarding the timing of the WCF provision, there were two distinctions: immediate versus delayed, referring to whether mistakes should be corrected right away after students are instructed on a particular rule or sometime after the instruction. This perspective on immediate feedback can be illustrated by student's interest, that is, students are enthusiastic to receive their teacher's comments when submitting assignments, and with the more time pass they lose their interest. Another explanation is that learners may struggle with comprehending delayed feedback because they could not remember why they made this mistake. However, according to [Li \(2017\)](#), no studies examining how time affects WCF effectiveness have so far been published.

In terms of grades, some learners perceived that marks and teacher feedback mirrored each other, and teacher WCF should cover all students' needs, while grades should evaluate the skills mentioned in the syllabus. Linking feedback and marks together may affect learners' willingness to accept teacher WCF. This may be due to different expectations the students have about the teacher's feedback. This is in line with [Marrs et al.'s \(2016\)](#) research, in which a minority of students were not interested in receiving feedback and rejected negative feedback on their writing. Such a link may also engender negative feelings, such as disappointment, frustration and dissatisfaction ([Maniam and Shah, 2020](#)).

Another feature mentioned by learners was the effect of WCF on their affection. Most of them reported that teachers' comments were not taken personally. This is in line with [Maniam and Shah \(2020\)](#), in whose study most learners reported positive feelings when reading teachers' comments. However, this perception is opposed to that of [Saidon et al. \(2018\)](#), who found that WCF made students feel unmotivated and unsatisfied with themselves. However, one student argued for teachers' positive comments are sign of their concern. This may refer to the reason that many writing teachers do provide correction only. The perspective agrees with [Maniam and Shah \(2020\)](#) study, in which feeling cared for is one of the emotions that teacher WCF engenders.

## 6. Conclusion

The current study sought to find out how teachers and undergraduates in Saudi Arabia perceived teacher WCF on writing. It can be concluded from the preceding section that instructors and learners view WCF differently. They perceive WCF to be important for students through its focus on language level and/or content level of writing, providing it collectively and individually and combining both positive and negative feedback. The current study's findings demonstrate that learners' views on WCF should be taken into consideration in EFL writing classes.

Further, the findings may offer suggestions for writing tutors. To maximize the efficiency of WCF, it appears crucial for teachers to be aware of students' expectations and to have a common comprehension of the provision of WCF. To boost students' involvement in the learning process, instructors are recommended to encourage them to raise their voices and express their thoughts. Lastly, standardization of WCF practices is important among colleges.

### 6.1 Limitations and further studies

The current study is limited in a few ways, the first being that it only relied on a low number of participants. Therefore, the findings on how Saudi EFL teachers and undergraduates view

WCF cannot be generalized to a broader context. The participants' responses, however, reflected several points made by earlier studies. Second, this research was based primarily on one method of data collection, namely, interviewing. Using different quantitative methods, such as a questionnaire, would add more findings. Moreover, all the undergraduates in this research were at the same university level. The outcomes might change if there were more participants from multiple levels. Therefore, additional research is required to overcome these constraints. One limitation of this study's finding is that the results obtained from the interviews were analyzed manually. Future projects are advised to use software such as Nvivo or MAXQDA to provide visualization for the themes generated from the interview.

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#### About the author

Anwar Alhumaid is currently a master degree student at applied linguistics in Qassim University. She obtained a bachelor degree with an honor from Qassim University in English Language and Translation in 2016, and had a general diploma in education from Qassim University in 2017. Anwar Alhumaid can be contacted at: [391200381@qu.edu.sa](mailto:391200381@qu.edu.sa), [anwaralhumaid0@gmail.com](mailto:anwaralhumaid0@gmail.com)