Learner Preferences for Teacher Corrective Feedback: A Survey Study of Arab Students from Qatar

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Abstract

Despite vast research into the effectiveness of teacher corrective feedback (TCF) in second language writing, little is known about its influence on students' motivation in different contexts and settings. Where teachers complain about their students not responding to their feedback, students do not always find teacher feedback helpful and motivating. This study explores Arab students' perceptions of TCF and the way it encourages them to continue working on their writing skills. In specific, this study uses survey methods to understand student views about the type, form and method of TCF that enhances their motivation. The findings reveal that Arab students expect their teachers to provide feedback that is corrective and self-explanatory in nature. In addition, students prefer handwritten feedback to oral and electronic, and are highly motivated after receiving their teacher's feedback on their writings. The results of this study can benefit SLW teachers around the world to make their feedback more appealing to their students in specific contexts and enhance their motivation to make the most out of TCF.

Keywords: *Teacher Corrective Feedback; Arab Students; Motivation; Second Language Writing*

Introduction

For English as Second Language/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) learners, a mastery of all language skills is always a long and tedious process, and a significant imbalance can often be seen in the acquisition and proficient use of the receptive versus productive skills. Writing, an important productive skill, is often considered the most difficult output ability for the learners to master. This is one of the reasons that the teaching and learning of second language writing (SLW) is one of the important areas of interest for ESL/EFL researchers.

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SLW teachers continue to learn about different strategies to help students master L2 writing, and providing feedback and keeping up student interest throughout the process of writing skills development are two of them.Despite the fact that teacher corrective feedback (TCF) plays an important role in the development of writing skills and the betterment of student work, the main concern in this regard is the scarcity of direct investigation of therelationship between TCF and student motivation and whether teacher feedback motivates students differently in different contexts and settings (Raza, 2018). An example of this setting is the Arab students learning writing skills at different institutions across the globe. There has been a lot of research on the types of errors Arab students make in writing in English and the ways to respond to these errors, but little research exists on the effects of TCF on Arab students' motivation level in SLW acquisition. Filling this research gap, this study aims to see whether teacher corrective feedback on their written work in English enhances their intrinsic motivation and urges them to respond to the error correction process in a positive way.

As the number of Arab students in ESL/EFL classrooms is increasing every year, this study is concerned that the role of the teacher in the classroom should be made more productive. The research is therefore, focused specifically on teacher feedback, motivation and second language writing. The study sees L2 writing as learners' capability to think and select ideas, develop and arrange them in order and then express them clearly and objectively in writing, while "Feedback" according to Hyland (2003) "emphasizes a process of writing and rewriting, where the text is not seen as self-contained but points forward to other texts the student will write" (p.177). In addition, intrinsic motivation is considered the learner's inner urge to do something for self-satisfaction and self-interest.

The study intends to investigate the effect and benefit of teacher feedback as a factor for intrinsic motivation for Arab students' acquisition of second language writing.The following research questions were raised and answered in this study:

1. How do Arab studentsfeel about different ways teachers can give feedback on their writing?
2. What type of teacher's feedback do Arab students prefer?
3. Which types of errors do Arab students want their teachers to correct in their writing?
4. How is the motivation of Arab students affected when their errors are corrected?

Literature Review

The ability to write clearly, objectively and effectively is one of the most challenging tasks for both L1 and L2 students. Hyland (2003) states that effective writing ability is dependent upon particularly designed and fitted instructions and teaching writing in L2 context has become central concern because of two factors. First, writing competence is seen as an important equipment for success in the 21ˢᵗ century as good writing skills are essential for the communication of ideas in today's digital world. The second reason is "the expanded knowledge base on the nature of written texts and writing processes that has been developed by scholars in such fields as composition studies, second language writing, genre theory, and contrastive

rhetoric" (p. xiii). This has given birth to different research questions concerning possible application of new teaching approaches in the second language writing contexts. Importance of teacher feedback in enhancing intrinsic motivation among Arab students to master second language writing is one of these questions.

Corrective Feedback in Second Language Writing (SLW)
The significance of corrective feedback in L2 writing has been an important area of debate in ESL studies. Empirical evidence shows that ESL learners expect corrective feedback on their writing to fill what they often call 'lacks' in their writing samples (Chen, Liu & Nassaji, 2016; Hashemnezhad & Mohammadnejad, 2012; Nakamura, 2016; Sritrakarn, 2018). Hyland (2003) states "providing feedback is often seen as one of the ESL writing teacher's most important tasks, offering the kind of individualized attention that is otherwise rarely possible under normal classroom conditions" (p 177). However, there have been different opinions about the role of teacher corrective feedback in L2 writing development. Some researchers oppose this practice and consider it detrimental for learners. For instance, Truscott (1996) presented "*the case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes*" by considering it unfruitful and, even, harmful for the learning process of the students. He believes that teachers waste their time and energy when they provide feedback. He suggests abandoning it for the reasons he provided in his 1996 paper, the response to which was given by Ferris (1999). Ferris, while acknowledging Truscott's remarkable concerns regarding the nature of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and practical problems with providing corrective feedback, claimed that providing corrective feedback is not completely ineffective in language acquisition, rather it does help some students in their L2 acquisition, provided it is clear, professional and prioritized. He adds that teacher corrective feedback makes students aware of their grammatical problems. He stated Truscott's arguments as premature and incomplete.

There is a lot of support for Ferris' (1999) stance in the research on SLA and SLW. Hyland (2003) believes that students often expect feedback from their teacher. Besides students' expectations about teacher feedback, he believes that, teachers themselves feel unsatisfied if they do not comment on students' papers as they are intended to provide reasons for giving specific grades to students. Hashemnezhad and Mohammadnejad (2012) reported the positive effects of teacher corrective feedback in promoting accuracy and observed better use of past simple tense, relative pronoun and propositions after receiving corrections from the instructors. Similarly, Sritrakarn's (2018) findings also support the provision of WCF for the development of students' written work and suggest increasing teacher intervention in the correction process.

Motivation in SLW
Motivation provides the beginning force to start learning and continue the hard and lengthy process of education (Dornyei, 1998). It plays a significant role in teaching and learning process. Intrinsically and extrinsically motivated students help teachers handle the challenging situations

inside the class and out of it which; otherwise, make them exhausted and unsuccessful in their jobs.

Inner desire to learn, acquire knowledge and value, and perform better in mastering English language are always considered to be preferred educational goals of ESL/EFL learners. Intrinsically motivated students are in their own control, in contrast to extrinsic motivation where an external force, usually a teacher, controls how they behave. Furthermore, learners with extrinsic motivation are more likely to be inspired by external benefits (William & Burden, 1997) as compared to intrinsic motivation where learners "performing a behavior for its own sake in order to experience pleasure and satisfaction such as the joy of doing a particular activity or satisfying one's curiosity" (Dornyei, 2001, p.47).

A number of strategies are used to motivate students in a writing classroom to perform well in acquiring the writing skills. Ellis (1994) states that designing challenging tasks for the students that provide opportunities for communication and self-direction could be one way to motivate them to learn L2. The main concern in this regard is that a writing task has various components, which a teacher should consider before designing it for his students. According to Hyland (2003), 'input', 'goal', 'setting', 'roles', and 'activity' are the five important components which demand consideration in this regard.

Yuan-bing (2011) employs these components when he explains pre-writing, online writing, and post-writing processes. Audience-awareness, which he calls "pre-writing motivation", can be a good step in enhancing students' writings. Yuan-bing states that students usually ignore "intended readers" when they are assigned to write something in the class. A strong desire or necessity to do a task, like achieving some social purpose or targeting specific readers can be a strong factor in stimulating students to devote their efforts in producing something better which otherwise would not be possible.

The second stage Yuan-bing (2011) discusses is "online writing motivation". This is the stage when students are in the process of learning how to write. Hestates, "Besides motivating learners before the task, it is really essential to motivate students during the process of writing" (p. 239). The third step of motivation is "post-writing" stage. Here students assess their own writings and that of their peers. Yuan-bing claims that this activity can help students take more interest in the process of writing as they will learn more from working with their peers. Self-assessment and peer evaluation, on one hand, can create a sense of awareness among the students as they are in the class, which otherwise becomes difficult, while on the other hand, it reduce the burden of teachers.

Another way of motivating language learners could be the use of educational technology, significantly internet, in the classroom. Researchers use the term computer-assisted-language-learning (CALL) to explain it. This approach employs "technology-based pedagogies" (Hyland, 2003) for teaching English language. Yuan-bing (2011) cites Pinkmam (2005) who studied the use of blogs in ESL classroom and how they can be utilized for providing interesting, reliable, and socially interacting resources to ESL students. Since educational technologies have become a part of our daily life, with an increasing influence in the field of education, many teachers

prefer to use them in the classroom for many reasons, some of its' importance were discussed by Hyland (2003):

"- Most significantly, new technologies:
- Influence drafting, editing, proofreading, formatting, and publication processes
- Facilitate the combination of written texts with visual and audio media
- Encourage nonlinear writing and reading processes
- Alter the relationships between writers and readers
- Blur traditional oral and written channel distinctions (e.g., email, ICQ)
- Facilitate entry to new online discourse communities
- Increase the marginalization of writers and texts isolated from new writing Technologies" (p. 144).

Technologies can be employed to make independent writers out of dependent ones. Yuan-bing (2011) states that the use of technologies "helps arouse intrinsic motivation by providing writers authentic input, setting natural purpose, giving students real context and audience" (p. 238).

Methods
In this research, the researcher did not manipulate the independent variable and the event had already taken place. Following descriptive research design, data were collected using structured, close-ended questionnaire items with Likert scale formats. The collected data was analyzed using simple percentages, mean and standard deviation. This is to observe to what extent teacher feedback would motivate Arab students' mastering L2 writing.

Questionnaire Design
This study used survey methods to collect data from the participants thorough an online bilingual (English and Arabic) questionnaire that consisted of 23 questions related to participant demographics and perceptions about written corrective feedback provided by their teachers and its significance in enhancing their motivation in SLW acquisition. Amrhein and Nassaji's (2010) WCF survey mainly informed the survey items for this study; however, the researcher made slight changes to the wording and structure of the questions considering the program nature and course objectives of the institute where the study was conducted. When developing the questionnaire, following things were considered. First, the format of the questions and the options was kept very simple to help students easily understand them and make it easier to translate. Secondly, the number of questions was kept to 23 to allow students to finish the survey within 30 minutes (Chen et al, 2016). Lastly, considering the linguistic limitations of the students and limited time available during the classroom and the semester, the survey was translated into Arabic so that students could choose either the English or Arabic version.

Context of the Study

To collect data for this study, Foundation English Program students at a Gulf university were chosen. These students were enrolled in a writing workshop course that had two levels (elementary and intermediate) and aimed to prepare students for their majors. The classes met five times a week for a total of six hours over a 14-week period. The three types of writings students were supposed to learn about were descriptive, process and opinion essays. Each type of essay followed six stages of completion. Image 1 outlines these stages in brief.
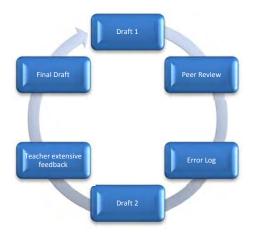

Figure1. Stages of writing portfolio completion

Students were required to produce level appropriate paragraphs and essays that followed instructed structures and genres. The course also aimed to promote critical thinking, collaborative/independent learning, and the use of ICT tools. In addition to learning about different genres of writing, students were also supposed to develop genre specific grammar and vocabulary. All of these elements were assessed using the rubrics that were developed by the faculty teaching the courses. Table 1and 2 provide further details about the participants.

Table 1
Gender Distribution of the Participants

Gender	Percentage (%)	Response Count
Male	57.0	69
Female	43.0	52
Total	100.0	121

Table 2
Age Distribution of the Participants

Age	Percentage (%)	Response Count
Below 18	24.0	29
18 – 24	66.9	81
25-30	7.4	09
31 or older	1.7	12
Total	100.0	121

Results

Table 3 shows that the Arab students strongly agreed that they wanted their teachers to provide feedback on their written work (mean = 3.58); they also strongly agreed that teachers should underline their mistakes, write the correct forms of their mistakes (mean = 3.51), and explain all the errors in their writing (mean = 3.50) clearly. It is also revealed in the table that the Arab students agreed that teachers' feedback helps them to improve their writing skills when it is explained to them and they understand it (mean = 3.47). Similarly, teachers should pay great attention to their grammatical errors (mean = 3.38), provide feedback on grammatical errors that make meaning unclear (mean = 3.38), and provide feedback on all the mistakes in their written work (mean = 3.32). For each mistake they make, they want their teachers to give example of the correct form (mean = 3.31). They prefer written feedback to oral (mean = 3.07) and computer feedback to handwritten (mean = 2.80).Teachers' feedback affects their attitude towards developing their English writing skills regardless of grades and marks (mean = 3.00).They prefer their teachers to focus comments more on the meanings than grammar and vocabulary forms (mean = 2.61).

Table 3

Research Question 1: How do Arab studentsfeel about different ways teachers can give feedback on writing?

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std.D
1.	I want my teacher to provide feedback on my written work.	59.1% (52)	39.8% (35)	1.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	3.58	0.52
2.	I prefer written feedback to oral feedback.	28.4% (25)	52.3% (46)	17.0% (15)	2.3% (2)	3.07	0.74
3.	Teacher should pay great attention to my grammatical errors.	46.6% (41)	44.3% (39)	9.1% (8)	0.0% (0)	3.38	0.65
4.	My teacher should provide feedback on grammatical errors that make meaning unclear.	44.3% (39)	48.9% (43)	6.8% (6)	0.0% (0)	3.38	0.61
5.	I want my teacher to provide feedback on all the mistakes in my written work.	42.0% (37)	47.7% (42)	10.2% (9)	0.0% (0)	3.32	0.65
6.	The teacher should only underline mistakes and not correct them.	18.2% (16)	28.4% (25)	36.4% (32)	17.0% (15)	2.52	0.98
7.	The teacher should underline the mistakes and also write the correct form.	56.8% (50)	37.5% (33)	5.7% (5)	0.0% (0)	3.51	0.61
8.	I want my teacher to explain all the errors in my writing.	52.3% (46)	42.0% (37)	4.5% (4)	1.1% (1)	3.50	0.64
9.	For each mistake I make, I want my teacher to give examples of the correct form.	44.3% (39)	43.2% (38)	11.4% (10)	1.1% (1)	3.31	0.72
10.	My teacher should not correct my grammatical errors.	8.0% (7)	18.2% (16)	30.7% (27)	43.2% (38)	3.09	0.97
11.	I prefer computer feedback to handwritten feedback.	29.5% (26)	30.7% (27)	29.5% (26)	10.2% (9)	2.80	0.98
12.	I want my teacher to correct none of the mistakes on my written work.	9.1% (8)	13.6% (12)	22.7% (20)	54.5% (48)	3.23	1.00
13.	Teacher feedback affects my attitude towards developing my English writing skills regardless of grades and marks.	28.4% (25)	47.7% (42)	14.8% (13)	9.1% (8)	3.00	0.90
14.	Teacher feedback helps me improve my writing skills when it is explained to me and I understand it.	52.3% (46)	43.2% (38)	3.4% (3)	1.1% (1)	3.47	0.62
15.	I prefer my teacher to focus his or her comments more on the meanings than grammar and vocabulary forms.	14.8% (13)	39.8% (35)	37.5% (33)	8.0% (7)	2.61	0.84

From Table 3 it can also bee seen that the Arab students disagree that: they want their teachers to correct none of the mistakes on their written work (mean = 3.23); their teachers should not correct their grammatical errors (mean = 3.09); their teachers should only underline their mistakes and not correct them.

Table 4
Research Question 2: What type of teacher's feedback do Arab students prefer?

S/N	Type of feedback	Most Preferred	Preferred	Least Preferred	Rating Average
1.	Oral Feedback	36.6% (34)	39.8% (35)	21.6% (19)	1.83
2.	Handwritten Feedback	38.6% (34)	30.7% (27)	30.7% (27)	1.92
3	Computer Feedback	22.7% (20)	29.5% (26)	47.7% (42)	2.25

Table 4 shows that the participants' most preferred feedback type was oral feedback (mean = 1.83) followed by handwritten feedback (mean = 1.92) to be preferred and computer assisted feedback (mean = 2.25) to be the least preferred.

Table 5
Research Question 3: Which type of error do Arab students want their teachers to correct in their writing?

S/N	Type of error	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Rank
1.	Grammar	59.1% (52)	5.7% (5)	8.0% (7)	4.5% (4)	8.0% (7)	6.8% (6)	8.0% (7)	1
2.	Vocabulary	14.8% (13)	50.0% (44)	12.5% (11)	11.4% (10)	3.4% (3)	4.5% (4)	3.4% (3)	2
3.	Spelling	5.7% (5)	19.3% (17)	44.3% (39)	9.1% (8)	4.5% (4)	9.1% (8)	8.0% (7)	3
4.	Content (Meaning)	6.8% (6)	12.5% (11)	19.3% (17)	40.9% (36)	10.2% (9)	5.7% (5)	4.5% (4)	4
5.	Punctuation	0.0% (0)	6.8% (6)	8.0% (7)	13.6% (12)	47.7% (42)	12.5% (11)	11.4% (10)	5
6.	Organization	1.1% (1)	5.7% (5)	6.8 % (6)	14.8% (13)	17.0% (15)	53.4% (47)	1.1% (1)	6
7.	Format	12.5% (11)	0.0% (0)	1.1% (1)	5.7% (5)	9.1% (8)	8.0% (7)	63.6% (56)	7

Table 5 shows that the first thing the students want their teachers to correct in their writings is grammatical errors. Followed by this, 50% of the students wanted their vocabulary errors to be corrected second while 44.3% of the students wanted their spelling errors to be corrected third. The correction of content was ranked fifthwhich was followed punctuation, organization and format errors respectively to be corrected.

Table 6
Research Question 4: How is the motivation of the Arab students affected when every error is corrected?

I feel very happy	Skipped Questions	I feel very disappointed	Rating Average
56.8% (50)	42.1% (37)	1.1% (1)	1.61

Table 6 shows that 56.8% of the participants feel very happy when their mistakes are corrected. Only 1.1% of the participants feel very disappointed when their mistakes are corrected. 42.1% of the participants skipped the question. Therefore it can be inferred that the Arab students feel highly motivated whenever their mistakes are identified and corrected by their teachers.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of Arab students about the provision of teacher corrective feedback, its type and, role in enhancing their motivation to learn SLW. In specific, the study aimed to see if Arab students expected their teachers to provide corrective feedback on their written work in English, what type of error should be corrected and the expected strategies to correct student errors. Another objective was to understand if the practice of error correction and feedback provision motivated students to master SLW or not.

The study found that Arab students expected their teachers to provide corrective feedback on their writings. The most preferred type of feedback was handwritten, and students expected their teachers to correct their grammar errors first followed by vocabulary, spellings, content (meaning), punctuation, organization and format. This study also reports that student felt motivated when their errors were identified and corrected by their teachers.

The findings regarding students' expectations of corrective feedback provision and the enhancement of their motivation to develop writing skills are consistent with those of Chen et al (2016) where students reported that WCF helped them identify repeated errors, provided opportunities for making their writing better and helped improve form and precision. Since students in this study completed their essays in stages and teachers had to use rubrics to assess their second and final drafts, this can be the reason that students expected their teachers to identify the areas for improvement and suggest changes. These findings suggest that error correction and teacher feedback should be considered integral part of the writing courses, as they are expected by the students as well as play an important role in the acquisition of writing skills.

In terms of preference for grammar correction over other error types, there can be multiple reasons. For instance, the study by Chen et al (2016) found that students considered grammar instruction necessary for the development of writing skills in English. This means that better grammar is considered to be an essential element of better writing. Another reason can be previous experience (at school or in other writing classes) and the final draft rubric. Since students in Writing Workshops were mostly fresh intakes who recently graduated from schools, their school experience where an English teacher could have given more preference to grammar correction than content and format could have led to their preference for grammar. Similarly, the presence of 'grammar' as one of the criteria for assessment in final draft and final exam rubrics and the focus of lessons on grammatical accuracy can also push students to pay more attention to grammatical competence and thus expect teacher assistance. This calls for looking into specific reasons why students prefer grammar accuracy in writing classes and the factors that make grammar more important than other elements of good writing.

Another significant finding of this study is the students' preference for handwritten teacher corrective feedback over oral and computer assisted. Despite the continuous use of technology in ELT and SLW, students still consider handwritten feedback more convenient than the other two types investigated in this study. One reason for this preference can be the practice of teachers at the institute where the study took place. If teachers provide a certain type of feedback (e.g. computer assisted or handwritten), students become used to and familiar with this method, and feel more comfortable understanding and responding to it. For instance, in a study by Richter and Smith (2018) where online tool was used for writing assignment submission and peer review, students reported the use of electronic peer feedback to be 'highly useful' because it allowed online editing and revisions, was easy to understand, and was not restricted by time, place or amount. Since these students got used to online feedback provision and use throughout the course, their experience and preference for this type of feedback were positive.

Research on the effectiveness of teacher corrective feedback in enhancing intrinsic motivation could continue in numerous directions. First, the participants in this study showed their support for teacher corrective feedback and expected certain type and form of feedback from their writing teachers. Future research should explore if students' writings would become better after the provision of the type of feedback reported in this study. Secondly, students preferred handwritten feedback over oral and electronic feedback. Since I believe that the main reason behind this preference is the teacher feedback technique and style, teachers should also try the other two types of feedback techniques. This also needs to be investigated in future studies to see how students respond to other types of feedbacks. Lastly, the student population mainly consisted of fresh school graduates who were new to university setting. Do students' preferences and expectations change with their experience and exposure to different types and amounts of teacher corrective feedback at university? This also needs to be studied to see if teachers should modify their feedback types and techniques to accommodate students with differing university experience.

Conclusion

The results of this study provide some captivating insights into students' perceptions of teacher corrective feedback and its effectiveness in increasing their motivation to develop second language writing skills. Since students are the main recipients of teachers' feedback and they are the ones that have to respond to the comments provided by their teachers, it is important that their voices are also heard and considered when deciding what, where and how to provide corrective feedback. This study and other studies to follow will increase information about students' view on WCF and will help teachers make informed decision when choosing a specific type of feedback strategy or tool. The findings of this study suggest that students feel highly elated when their teachers correct their mistakes as they feel motivated to engage in tasks that would help them learn the target language. This study has therefore shown that feedback plays a very significant role in enhancing the motivation of students learning English as second and foreign language.

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