Students' and Teachers' Beliefs about Written Corrective Feedback: Perspectives on Amount, Type, and Focus of Feedback in an EFL Setting

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Article information	Abstract
	Many writing teachers believe that giving written corrective feedback (WCF) is an important part of learning to write. Equally, students like to receive it. However, most previous research on WCF has looked at its overall effectiveness, with less attention paid to the differences of opinion between students and their teachers, and the implications of these differences. Accordingly, our aim was to investigate further these differences by carrying out a partial replication of Amrhein and Nassaji (2010). Using a combination of multiple-choice questions, Likert scale items, and open-ended questions, we sampled the beliefs of 469 undergraduates and 40 of their teachers at two public Thai universities. Our findings revealed significant differences of opinion between both groups when it came to the ideal amount of WCF, preferred type of WCF for grammatical errors, and the most useful WCF for specific error types. Qualitative comments also highlighted the affective side of WCF, the realities of the task-at-hand for teachers, and a misalignment between theory and practice. Based on our findings, we make recommendations for teacher development, cross-cultural awareness in teaching writing, increased communication between students, teachers, and theorists, and the importance of assessment rubrics in the feedback process.

INTRODUCTION

Written corrective feedback (WCF) has been defined as "a written response to a linguistic error that has been made in the writing of a text by a learner" (Bitchener & Storch, 2016, p. 1). Until the mid-1990s, its effectiveness was more or less taken for granted. In a now infamous article, Truscott (1996) argued that WCF was not just worthless, but possibly even harmful to learners. In response, Ferris (1999) admitted that teachers had been "rely[ing] on inadequate evidence to make important pedagogical decisions" (p. 10). Subsequently, researchers began exploring the efficacy of WCF and, in recent years, the field has moved toward something of a consensus. Gurzynski-Weiss and Baralt (2014) write, "the issue of whether or not corrective feedback plays a causal role in L2 [second language] acquisition is no longer a contentious one" (p. 3).

Aside from the efficacy of WCF, research has shown that students and teachers often hold very different views on what constitutes the ideal amount and type of WCF, as well as what WCF should focus on (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019; Sayyar & Zamanian, 2015). This is an important issue, because such differences can have significant effects on learning outcomes (Plonsky & Mills, 2006). Furthermore, if a learner believes that one type of WCF is superior to another, then they may be more likely to pay attention to it (Shen & Chong, 2022). Hence, differences of opinion between students and teachers on WCF-and the fact that these differences can influence learning outcomes-make understanding them, and learning how to overcome them, a matter of central importance.

Accordingly, the current study investigates English as a foreign language (EFL) students' and teachers' beliefs about the ideal amount of WCF, the most effective type of WCF, and what types of errors should be targeted with WCF. It explores if students and teachers differ in their beliefs about these issues, and to what extent. It also considers the reasons behind any differences, and ways to address them in light of situational constraints and current theory. Consequently, we add to the knowledge base of students' and teachers' beliefs on WCF by focusing on a somewhat underrepresented context-Southeast Asia (cf. Black & Nanni, 2016)- and the beliefs of native *and* non-native English speaking teachers' beliefs, which has been a somewhat neglected area until late (Cheng & Zhang, 2021). We also contribute to the field of WCF by further developing the means by which to collect data on teacher and student beliefs. To achieve these outcomes, we present a partial replication of Amrhein and Nassaji (2010), incorporating and building upon their research design, and utilizing their research questions. Through our modified survey, we set out to answer the following questions:

1. What amount of WCF do students and teachers think is most useful, and why?
2. What kind of WCF do students and teachers think is most useful, and why?
3. What types of errors do students and teachers think should be corrected by WCF?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Efficacy and perceptions of written corrective feedback

Written corrective feedback can be focused or unfocused (*feedback scope*). Focused WCF targets specific error types or patterns (Ferris, 2011), or corrects specific errors and ignores others (Ellis et al., 2008). By contrast, unfocused WCF or "comprehensive WCF" can involve the correction of all (or most) learner errors, or just the errors that a study focuses on (e.g., Ellis et al. [2008]). WCF can also be direct or indirect (*feedback strategy*). Direct WCF provides the correct linguistic form, whereas indirect WCF either highlights an error or gives the learner some hint about the error (Ellis, 2009). This latter strategy is often referred to as Metalinguistic WCF (Ferris, 2011).

Efficacy of WCF

Many early WCF studies focused on the provision of comprehensive, unfocused feedback, and in studies indicating no positive effects, it was speculated that learners were overwhelmed by too much feedback. This led to studies focusing on a specific error type, the most prominent of which targeted definite and indefinite articles in English. Studies such as those by Sheen (2007) and Ellis et al. (2008) found that groups receiving WCF did better than groups receiving no WCF. However, as Xu (2009) argues, in such narrowly focused studies, students' improved performance likely comes at the cost of mastering more complicated grammatical forms. Similarly, Ferris (2011) claims that focusing on a single error type is not realistic, and as Lee (2020) remarks, it is often the researcher and not the teacher making decisions about what errors should be corrected. Nevertheless, such research has tended to show that focused WCF is more beneficial than unfocused/comprehensive WCF (Bitchener, 2021).

With regard to type of WCF (feedback strategy), some researchers contend that direct WCF is more effective than indirect WCF due to its greater clarity and immediacy (Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen, 2007), and this has been borne out in several studies (Bitchener, 2021). However, arguments have also been advanced in support of indirect WCF based on the kind of cognitive engagement it engenders (Ferris, 2006). Overall though, as Lee (2020) states, "the efficacy of various WCF strategies (direct, indirect, and metalinguistic) for focused/comprehensive WCF is inconclusive" (p. 1). This lack of consensus may be because the field of WCF research has predominantly drawn on a positivist epistemology, wherein "knowledge of language" is framed as activities or states residing within the learner. In other words, many earlier studies overlooked the complex and multifaceted ecology of WCF.

However, studies are increasingly considering the sociocultural and dynamic nature of WCF. For instance, in terms of students' attitudes toward WCF, Westmacott's (2017) small study suggests that indirect WCF is more popular than direct WCF with students once they get used to it. Similarly, Moser (2021) found that learners engaged with metalinguistic WCF in the form of written statements more than other types. By contrast, indirect WCF was the least engaging. Moreover, the tone of comments, quantity of corrections, and use of red ink also have a role to play in the uptake of WCF (Bitchener & Storch, 2016), as do student and teacher relationships (Shen & Chong, 2022). Recent years have seen increasing moves into these areas, particularly investigations of students' and teachers' beliefs.

Students' and teachers' beliefs about WCF

In early studies looking at WCF, most learners indicated a desire for comprehensive (or unfocused) error correction. This belief still holds true today, as highlighted in the second to fifth column from the right in Table 1, which summarizes the findings from comparable studies looking at beliefs on WCF.

Table 1
Main findings of studies on students' and teachers' beliefs on WCF

| | Amount of WCF (%) | | | | Type of WCF (*M*) | | | |
| | Unfocused | | Focused | | Direct | | Indirect[1] | |
Study; sample size	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	T
Amrhein and Nassaji (2010); *S* = 33, *T* = 31	93.9	45.2	6.1	45.1	4.1	3.1	2.6	3.9
Sayyar and Zamanian (2015); *S* = 54, *T* = 24	64.3	37.5	32.1	62.5	4.0	4.0	2.0	3.0
Black and Nanni (2016); *S* = 262, *T* = 21	-	-	-	-	3.87	2.68	2.41	3.47

Note: S = Students, T = Teachers.

From the research listed in Table 1, we see disparities regarding the type of WCF (feedback strategy) preferred by teachers and students. In Amrhein and Nassaji (2010), for example, the most popular choice for students was direct WCF, but this was the fourth most popular choice for teachers. Black and Nanni's (2016) partial replication of Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) had similar results. In Sayyar and Zamanian (2015), on the other hand, students *and* teachers believed direct WCF to be most useful. However, as highlighted by Mao and Crosthwaite (2019) what teachers say they do and what they actually do in relation to WCF are often at odds. Hence, such findings need to be carefully interpreted in light of contextual constraints and affordances.

Regarding what *kind* of errors WCF is most useful for (feedback focus), the top answer for teachers and students in Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) was WCF on grammatical errors. The biggest difference between teachers and students was on WCF for content and ideas. In the other half of their replication of Amrhein and Nassaji (2010), Nanni and Black's (2017) students also showed a preference for WCF on grammatical errors, yet teachers saw organization as most useful. In Sayyar and Zamanian (2015), students and teachers broadly agreed about what kind of errors they believed WCF to be most useful for, with grammar once again topping the list. This focus-on-form among EFL writers has long been documented in the literature (Schultz, 1996), and even when revising work with no WCF given, advanced EFL students predominantly focus on tense, determination (articles), and other grammatical items (Bowen & Thomas, 2020).

However, while the above studies provide valuable insights into students' and teachers' beliefs, there are a number of fundamental flaws in their designs and/or presentations. First, Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) surveyed only 33 students and 31 teachers from two language schools, where the stakes were arguably low for the learners. Moreover, many of their survey items seemed unnecessarily complex and convoluted (as outlined in the Instrument section below). Moreover, there seemed to be a pre-established mismatch between student and teacher backgrounds, as most teachers they sampled were presumably Canadian, while the students had only been in Canada for two to eight months. A similar mismatch between sociocultural

backgrounds may be present in Black and Nanni (2016) and Nanni and Black (2017), who only surveyed first language English teachers working in Thailand. This sociocultural mismatch between respondent groups could have important ramifications for such studies' findings, because, as Cheng and Zhang (2021) note, WCF "is a teaching behavior influenced by cultural norms and expectations within which teachers operate, rather than a practice in a vacuum" (p. 13). Furthermore, Black and Nanni's (2016) study did not present any results relating to amount of WCF, despite using the same instrument as Amrhein and Nassaji (2010), and, somewhat confusingly, presented their findings for error type preferences in a separate paper (Nanni & Black, 2017). Third, Sayyar and Zamanian (2015), who used the intact version of Amrhein and Nassaji (2010), had relatively small sample sizes, and simply presented results with little interpretation in light of their research context or any detailed consideration of the implications of their findings.

METHODS

In the following sections, we present the details of our research methodology, covering the research setting, participant demographics, survey procedure, the instrument used, and the data analysis techniques applied.

Research setting

Surveys were administered at two public universities in Bangkok. At the time of the study, University A had approximately 1200 students and 46 teachers at the faculty we sampled, and University B had approximately 3,800 enrolled students (female–male ratio = 1.27:1) and 135 teachers at the sampled faculty.

Participants

After removing incomplete surveys, our sample consisted of 469 EFL undergraduates and 40 of their teachers. The majority of undergraduates were Thai ($n = 437$), and their ages ranged from 18–22. The other 32 students were of the same age range and from East Asia. All student respondents were learning English as a foreign language. Teacher participants taught various courses in English, from EFL skill-based classes to more advanced Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) classes. Eighteen teachers were Thai, while the rest were American (6), British (6), and other nationalities (10).

Procedure

After securing ethical approval, we administered our online surveys at the beginning of semester 2, 2021. This ensured that all participants had taken at least one writing course at undergraduate level. We invited teachers to participate through targeted emails and requested that they pass the survey link on to students in their writing classes. The survey remained active until the end of May 2021.

Upon clicking the survey link, participants were presented with information about the study, followed by a question asking if they would like to continue. After filling in some basic demographic information, participants were then presented with three multiple-choice questions. Two of these questions were followed by open-ended questions, which asked them to give reasons for their previous multiple-choice selection. Participants were then presented with six Likert items, which asked them to rate the usefulness of WCF for grammatical errors, punctuation errors, spelling errors, organization errors, ideas/content errors, and vocabulary errors. The average time to complete the survey was 5 min 19 s (*SD* = 3.08).[1]

Instrument

Our instrument is a modification of Amrhein and Nassaji's (2010) original. Our modifications were based on over twenty years of combined knowledge and experience of the issues surrounding WCF and through an inductive content analysis of existing research. We also piloted the teacher survey on one Thai and one non-Thai colleague who were experts in teaching writing to EFL students. Their feedback helped us improve the layout and language. We piloted the student questionnaire with a class of fourth-year English Majors (*n* = 18) at University A and in consultation with a focus group of six student volunteers from this class. Their feedback helped us improve the layout, and language used. Student and teacher questions differed only in how they were worded (e.g., 'If you make a mistake in your writing, what do you think the teacher should do' vs. 'If a student makes a mistake in their writing, what do you think the teacher should do').

The first difference between our instrument and Amrhein and Nassaji's (2010) was the number of items it contained. Their study had 10 open-ended questions, 13 Likert-scale items, and 2 multiple-choice items, which resulted in their survey taking up to 25 minutes to complete. To mitigate this, we included just two open-ended items, seven Likert-scale items and two multiple-choice items. Second, our survey was professionally translated into the first language of the majority of student participants. We believe the presentation in English only to students was a weakness in the original study and in the replications by Black and Nanni (2016) and Nanni and Black (2017). Third, Amrhein and Nassaji's survey (2010) began with a question that prompted a choice of six options. After the focus group session with the six fourth-year English language majors, all agreed that options 2, 3, and 4 on the original item were confusingly similar. Therefore, we combined all three into one option: *mark all major errors and ignore minor ones*. Fourth, we changed the item, "Since I arrived in Victoria, I am very lonely" (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010, p. 125) to "Last night I go to the cinema". Hence, we simplified the language and changed the error type. Fifth, one of the original items included directions to an answer in a textbook and another option with a personal comment unrelated to the error. Drawing on the findings from the focus group, we removed these two options and used Ellis's (2009) classification of (a) direct, (b) indirect, (c) metalinguistic, and (d) no WCF. Finally, we presented an additional question asking teachers how often they followed best practice beliefs on WCF.

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[1] Thirty-eight participants took over 24 hours to complete the survey. We assume they simply began the survey and then went back to finish it the next day, thus we removed their times from this calculation.

Data analysis

Data analysis followed that of Amrhein and Nassaji (2010). We employed Chi-square tests to investigate potential differences between teacher and student beliefs on amount of WCF (scope) and type of WCF (strategy). For all Likert scale items, we used coefficients of kurtosis and skewness to check for any abnormally distributed items before analysis. For the usefulness of WCF on error types (focus), we calculated means and standard deviations within groups and compared mean scores for each item between groups using independent *t*-tests (two-tailed). We coded and categorized the open-ended responses for each group using thematic analysis.

RESULTS

How much WCF is most useful, and why?

For our first survey item, which asked how much WCF is most useful, a chi-square test revealed a significant difference of opinion between teachers and students, X^2 (3) = 228.35, p < .001. Figure 1 shows the distribution of teacher and student responses as percentage ratios:
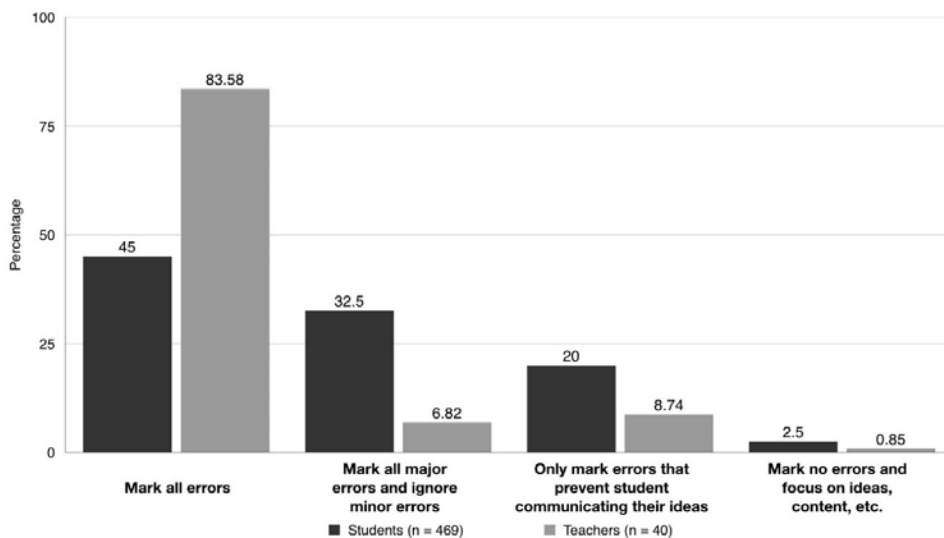

Figure 1 Students' and teachers' beliefs on how much WCF should be provided

As shown in Figure 1, "mark all errors" was the most frequent choice for both students (*n* = 392, 83.58%) and teachers (*n* = 18, 45%). The least popular answer among students (*n* = 4, 0.85%) and teachers (*n* = 1, 0.85%) was "mark no errors and focus only on ideas, content, structure, etc." Thai and non-Thai teachers held similar beliefs on this item.

Following this item, respondents were invited to give reasons for the choice they had just made. A number of themes emerged, as shown in Table 2:

Table 2
Reoccurring comments (themes) relating to beliefs about WCF

Belief	*Students	*Teachers
Marking errors increases understanding / prevents recurrence	234	14
Just "good" for them to be marked / it is the teacher's duty	70	6
Learners cannot identify errors themselves	38	2
Students appreciate errors being marked	16	2
Marking everything discourages learners	14	4
Focusing on errors that prevent communication is important	10	8
Shows dedication of teacher	10	
Comprehensive WCF is unfair/unrealistic for the teacher	4	
Other/unclear	66	2
Total	462	38

Note: Some participants gave multiple comments; others gave none.

The most frequently occurring belief for both groups was that WCF increases understanding of the target form and prevents errors recurring-although this view was more prevalent among students (49.89%) than teachers (35%). Of the 392 students who selected "mark all errors" (unfocused WCF), 234 were confident that such feedback axiomatically leads to improvement. One student wrote, "Seeing every error helps lower the amount of errors made, especially the ones that are normally made". Notably, these students showed little awareness that too much WCF might cause cognitive overload, and seemed confident that every error marked would facilitate learning. For example, one student wrote that mistakes should be described "in full detail to increase student awareness". "The more feedback the better", wrote another. A teacher who chose unfocused WCF commented, "Showing all errors is necessary for students to recognize what they should correct".

The second most frequent comment among students was quite simply that it is "good" for errors to be marked, and that it is something that teachers "should do". Eighty of the student's comments focused on what the teacher should do without explaining why-comments like the following were common: "The teacher should mark every single error"; "The teacher should tell about [*sic*] every mistake in the essay like spelling or grammar". Teachers with similar beliefs (*n* = 6) referenced ethical aspects of WCF. One wrote, "I think it's the responsibility and duty of the teacher to indicate all grammatical, organizational, and content-related errors to students". Such comments do not necessarily demonstrate a conviction that WCF works, rather that providing it is "the right thing to do".

Continuing this thread of ethical duty, ten students remarked that highlighting all mistakes shows diligence: "Even though some students might not care about it [= comprehensive WCF], it is still good to see that the teacher really takes it seriously". Another student highlighted a

possible link between WCF and student-teacher relationships: "My teacher gives extremely detailed feedback … my teacher is really dedicated and cares". However, such an approach can have the opposite effect on motivation: One teacher observed, "Marking all the errors can discourage learners", while one student wrote, "If every little error is marked, students will end up disheartened and eventually give up". Another student noted the effects that comprehensive feedback can have on individual voice/style: "Sometimes, labelling something as a mistake may take the characteristic and unique tone of writing away from a student's work". Another said, "Every student has a different writing style, so that isn't something I think should be 'fixed', as it isn't wrong per se".

The second most frequent option among teachers-and third most frequent among students-was "mark all major errors and ignore minor ones" (focused WCF). Several teachers asserted that marking all errors is simply not a constructive endeavor. One teacher commented that they do not pay attention to trivial errors because students are "incapable of learning everything at once", while another wrote, "this technique [= unfocused WCF] would keep students from becoming overwhelmed by corrections".

The second most frequent choice for students, and third for teachers, was "(3) only mark errors that prevent the student communicating their ideas". One student explained, "Errors that prevent us from communicating ideas are the most important". Another said that they do not pay attention to "small corrections like grammar mistakes" and instead "value comments about logical fallacies", which seems to relate to a specific type of writing they have encountered (probably argumentative writing).

The next multiple-choice question also related to quantity of WCF. It asked whether teachers should mark errors every time they occur or just the first time. An overwhelming 81.66% of students and 62.5% of teachers believed that errors should be marked every time.

Because dispensing WCF can be time-consuming work, we also asked teachers how often they followed best practice beliefs when it comes to the amount of WCF they provide. Twenty-five percent said that they always follow best practice beliefs, 67.5% said they did "most of the time", while 7.5% selected "about half the time".

What kind of WCF is most useful, and why?

In the next survey item, teachers and students were presented with four sentences containing the same error, but with different WCF strategies given, as shown in Figure 2:

1. Last night I go to the cinema.
2. Last night I go to the cinema.
3. Last night I go to the cinema.
4. Last night I go to the cinema.

Figure 2 Survey item showing four types of WCF for a grammatical error

In option 1 (above), "go" is circled, but the WCF does not explicitly indicate what the problem is (indirect WCF). Option 2 provides the learner with the correct linguistic form (direct WCF). Option 3 offers a hint about what the error is (metalinguistic feedback). Option 4 has no WCF. Participants were asked to choose which type they believed was most useful in this instance. Figure 3 shows the distribution of their responses.
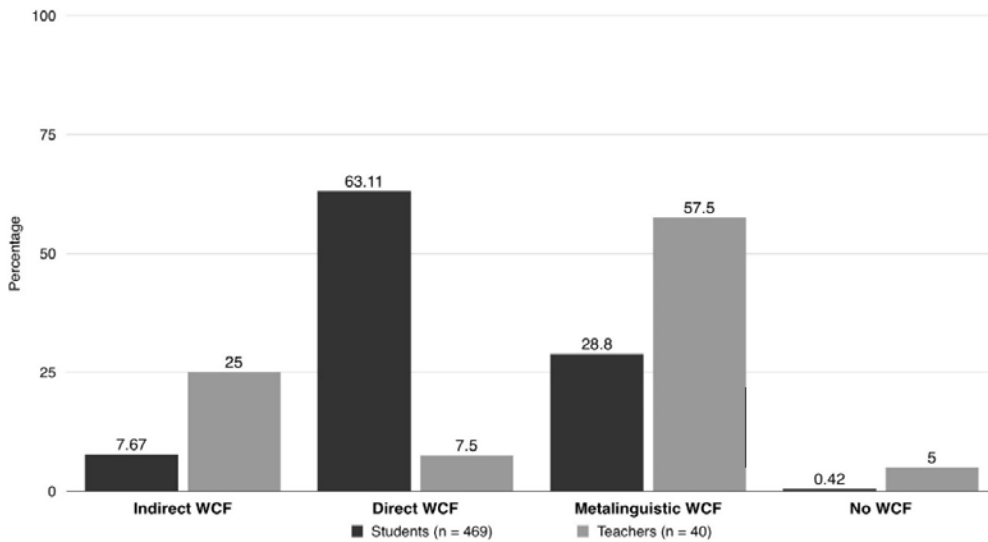

Figure 3 Respondents' beliefs on which type of WCF is most useful for a grammatical mistake

Figure 3 highlights how student beliefs differed significantly from that of teachers, which was confirmed with a chi-square test, X^2 (3) = 144.15, p < .001. While most teachers preferred a learner-centered approach for this kind of grammatical correction, one in which students figure things out for themselves (metalinguistic feedback [57.5%] + indirect feedback [25%] = 82.5%), a significant majority of students preferred direct WCF (63.11%) followed by metalinguistic WCF (28.8%). Such findings mirror those of previous studies (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Black & Nanni, 2016; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019; Sayyar & Zamanian, 2015). Once again, Thai and non-Thai teachers held similar beliefs on this item.

In the open-ended question following this multiple-choice item, several teachers stated that metalinguistic WCF encourages students to be proactive in their learning. They gave comments such as "Students need to find out by themselves and with this process they should learn better", and metalinguistic corrections "require the writer to think" and therefore "reinforce their learning". A common sentiment was that providing any kind of non-metalinguistic feedback infantilizes the learner. Two teachers even referred to direct WCF as "spoon-feeding" and "hand-holding", respectively.

In the open-ended responses from students, the majority stated that they wanted teachers to supply the correct form because they believe it facilitates learning. One student captured the tenor of these comments when they remarked, "just circling it or underlining it makes it hard to understand what needs to be changed". However, among the students who preferred metalinguistic WCF, the general feeling was that learner autonomy plays an important role.

One observed, "Writing the word tense instead of correcting it allows the student to … go find out what's wrong with it". Another made a connection between type of WCF and memory: "If the answer is always given, we will not remember our mistakes".

What types of errors should be corrected?

Teachers and students were asked to rate the usefulness of WCF for six types of errors: organization, grammatical, ideas and content, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary. Table 3 displays the mean scores for their responses, standard deviations, and confidence intervals. We also ran independent samples t-tests (two-tailed) between the respondent groups to test for significant differences in mean scores.

Table 3
Student and teacher beliefs on the usefulness of WCF for specific error types

Type of error	Students (n = 469)				Teachers (n = 40)			
			95% CI				95% CI	
	M	*SD*	Lower	Upper	*M*	*SD*	Lower	Upper
Organization	4.3	0.76	4.23	4.37	4.42	0.67	4.21	4.63
Grammatical	4.49	0.67	4.43	4.55	3.90***	0.87	3.63	4.17
Ideas and content	4.36	0.82	4.29	4.43	4.40	0.67	4.19	4.61
Punctuation	4.05	0.89	3.97	4.13	3.50**	1.01	3.19	3.81
Spelling	4.29	0.87	4.21	4.37	3.35***	1.00	3.04	3.66
Vocabulary	4.64	0.61	4.58	4.70	4.0***	0.85	3.74	4.26

Note: Responses were indicated on a scale from extremely useful (5) to not useful at all (1).
**p < .01, ***p < .001

As shown in Table 3, students believe that the two most useful error types to receive WCF on are vocabulary (M = 4.64) and grammar (M = 4.49), which is similar to the results of Nanni and Black (2017), where students saw grammar (M = 4.46) and then vocabulary (M = 4.33) as most important. For our teachers, WCF was seen as most useful for organization (M = 4.42) and ideas and content (M = 4.40), which again mirrored the results of Nanni and Black (2017), where organization (M = 4.8) ranked first, followed by content (M = 4.55). Students and teachers had similar beliefs as to the importance of WCF for organization errors, with 84.42% of students and 90% of teachers finding it either "extremely useful" or "very useful", respectively.
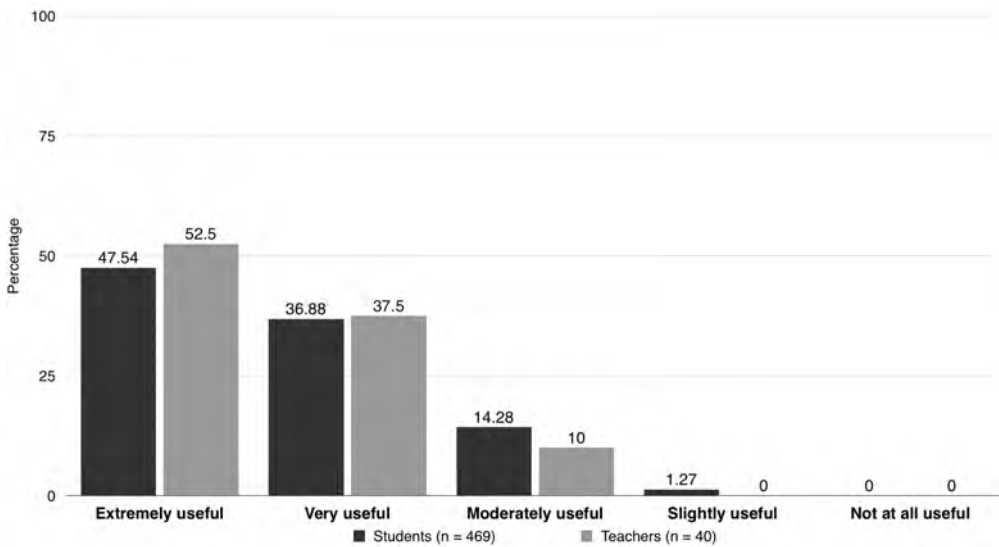
Figure 4 Respondents' beliefs on how useful WCF is for organization errors

In terms of WCF on grammatical errors, there was a significant difference between teachers' (M = 3.90) and students' (M = 4.49) responses, $t(507)$ = 5.20, p <. 001. Figure 5 below shows that the most popular belief among teachers was that it was "very useful" (52.5%), followed by "extremely useful" (22.5%). Contrastingly, 57.7% of student respondents believed that WCF on grammatical errors was "extremely useful".
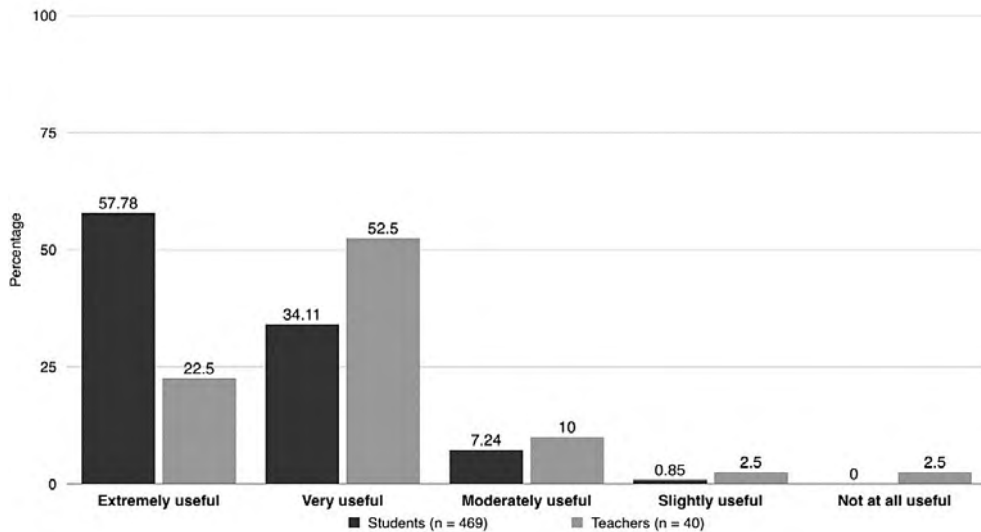

Figure 5 Respondents' beliefs on how useful WCF is for grammatical errors

Interestingly, despite the decades-long claim by Truscott on WCF's lack of efficacy for grammatical errors, no such doubts seem to exist among our sample. Specifically, none of our student respondents (and just one teacher) believed WCF on grammatical errors to be "not at all useful", with just one teacher finding the practice "slightly useful" and four students (0.85%) feeling the same way.

Regarding the usefulness of WCF for punctuation errors, students (M = 4.05) and teachers (M = 3.50) held significantly different views, with students regarding this form of WCF more useful than the teachers, $t(507)$ = 3.72, $p < .001$. This is reflected in Figure 6, where students believe that WCF for punctuation errors is "very useful" (37.1%) or "extremely useful" (36.9%), whereas for teachers it was predominantly "moderately useful" (42.5%).
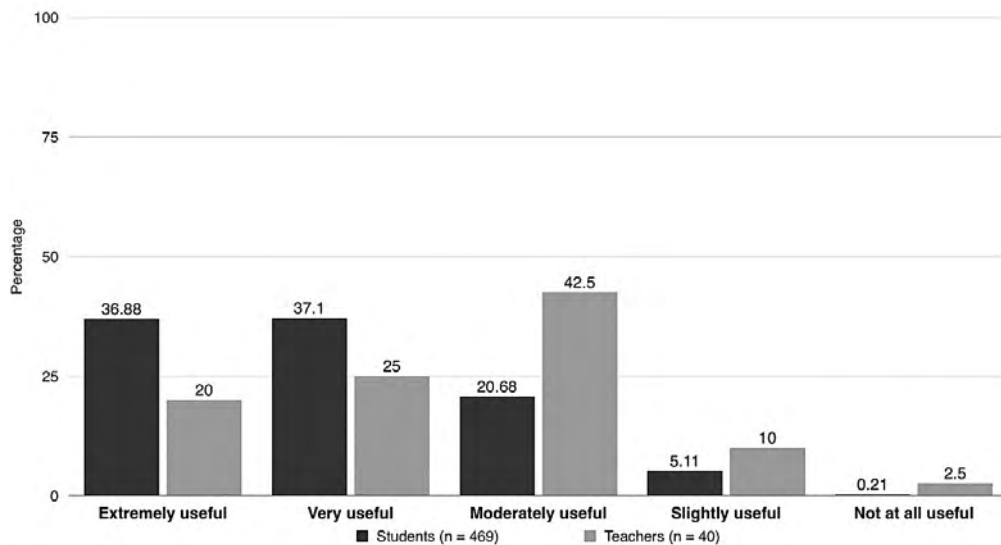

Figure 6 Respondents' beliefs on how useful WCF is for punctuation errors

When it came to WCF on spelling errors, there was again a significant difference in beliefs between students (M = 4.29) and teachers (M = 3.35), $t(507)$ = 6.44, $p < .001$. This is in stark contrast to the findings of Nanni and Black (2017); their students and teachers showed near perfect agreement on this item with M = 3.95 and 3.94, respectively. As shown in Figure 7, the majority of our students believed that this type of WCF was "extremely useful" (52.68%), followed by "very useful" (27.9%). Contrastingly, the most popular choice among teachers was that it is a "moderately useful" practice (31.2%).
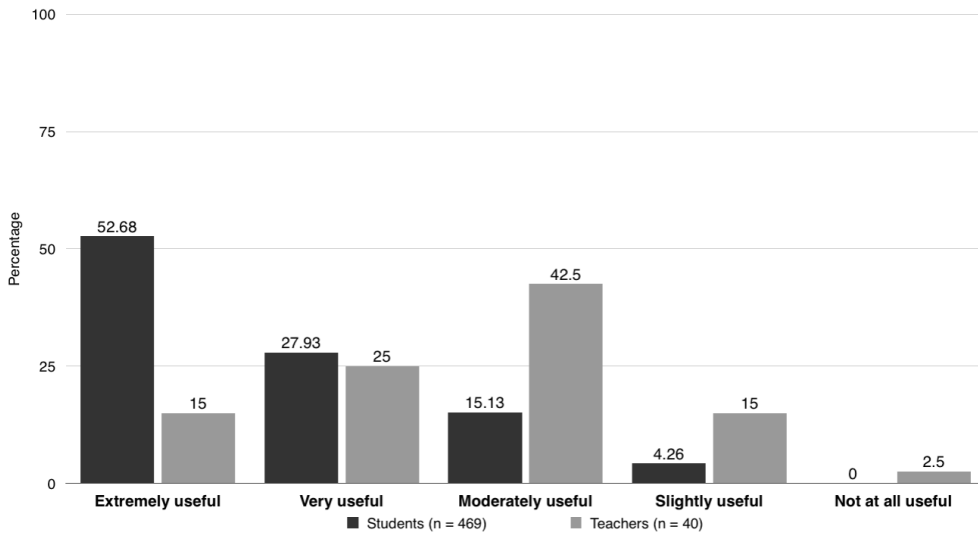
Figure 7 Respondents' beliefs on how useful WCF is for spelling errors

Moving on to the usefulness of WCF for idea and content errors, teachers' (*M* = 4.4) and students' (*M* = 4.36) beliefs were remarkably well aligned, *p* = .75, with 50% of teachers and 53% of students finding it "extremely useful", and 40% of teachers and 33% of students considering it "very useful". This finding contrasts with Nanni and Black's (2017), where teacher (*M* = 4.55) and student beliefs were not aligned as tightly as ours were (*M* = 4.15).
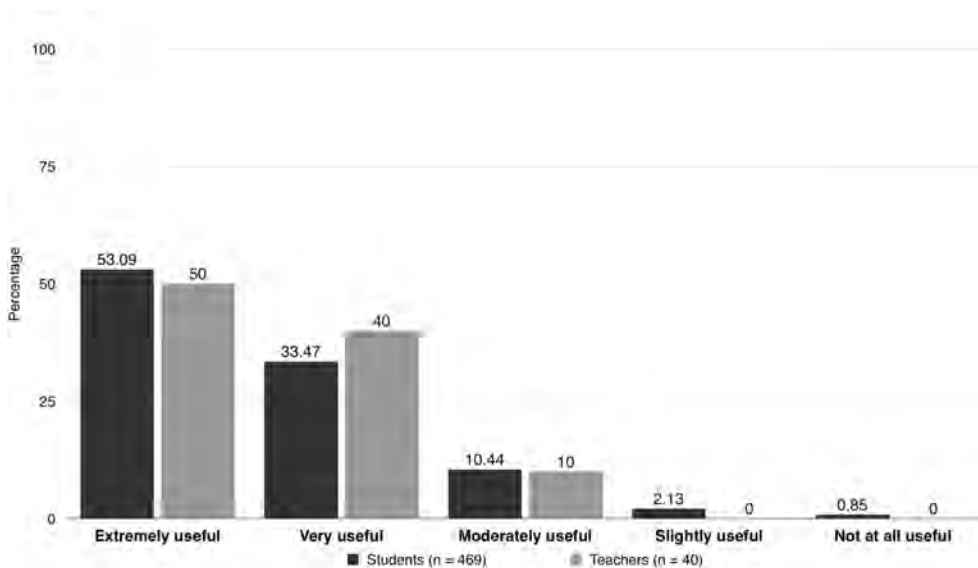

Figure 8 Respondents' beliefs on how useful WCF is for idea and content errors

For the last error type, teachers (*M* = 4.0) and students (*M* = 4.64) showed significantly different beliefs on the usefulness of WCF for vocabulary errors, *t*(507) = 6.14, *p* < .001. This finding also contrasts with Nanni and Black's (2017), where student (*M* = 4.33) and teacher beliefs

(*M* = 4.25) were relatively well aligned. Our teachers were split between considering it "extremely useful" (32.5%), "very useful" (37.5%) and "moderately useful" (27.5%), whereas 69.5% of students believed it to be "extremely useful", and 26.65% considered it "very useful".
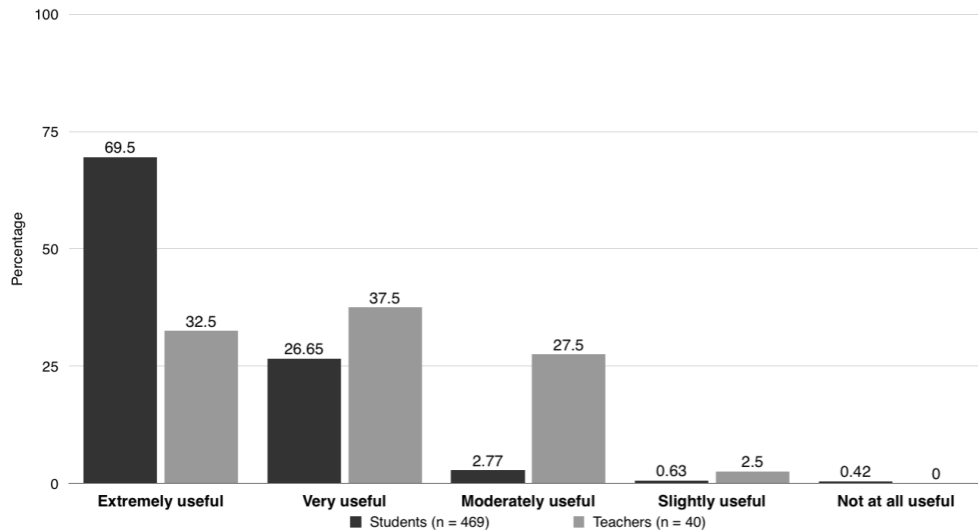

Figure 9 Respondents' beliefs on how useful WCF is for vocabulary errors

Overall, the students and teachers we sampled showed significantly different views on how much WCF is most useful (feedback scope) and what type of WCF is most useful (feedback strategy). They also showed significantly different views on the usefulness of WCF for four of the six error types: grammar, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary. However, they did hold similar beliefs on the usefulness of WCF for organization errors and ideas and content errors. The implications of each of these results are discussed next.

DISCUSSION

How much WCF is most useful and why?

The students we sampled overwhelmingly believed that comprehensive WCF was most useful (83.58%). Moreover, they predominantly believed that every single error should be marked, even repeated ones. A large proportion of our teacher sample (45%) also believed that it was better to give comprehensive WCF. Although these findings mirror those of previous studies (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Cheng & Zhang, 2021; Sayyar & Zamanian, 2015), we find it surprising that comprehensive WCF enjoys such broad support from our teachers, despite it facing sustained criticism over the last few decades and in the face of increasing workloads for teachers.

There are a number of possible reasons for this disparity between theory and beliefs. First, many of our respondents may be unaware that contemporary research leans toward the

effectiveness of focused WCF. Second, teachers may feel obliged to mark comprehensively-something borne out in their comments-and which signals a kind of circular logic of providing comprehensive feedback simply because it is expected. Third, there may be a definitional issue as to what "mark all errors" meant to our respondents. Fundamentally, the word "mark" implies a quick stroke of the pen or, if using software such as Turnitin, a click of the mouse accompanied by a QuickMark[2] or one-word comment. Hence, there is a presupposition that "mark" leans toward identifying micro-level mistakes. Indeed, previous research into teachers' practices regarding WCF has shown that most teachers predominantly provide WCF on localized errors, such as incorrect spellings and punctuation despite claims to the contrary (Ferris, 2006; Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019).

Moreover, even though many teachers favored comprehensive WCF, the majority preferred a more selective approach, wherein their comments conveyed an awareness that comprehensive WCF can overwhelm students. Such beliefs about focused feedback could also reflect the realities of the job: Just a quarter of the teachers stated that they followed their own best practice beliefs, meaning time and energy at teachers' disposal is clearly an issue. Moreover, several students mentioned the importance of teachers being patient and kind when giving feedback, suggesting that some students may have received short, direct comments, rather than detailed and sympathetic ones.

Convincing more teachers to switch to focused WCF has several benefits. First, the provision of comprehensive WCF is regarded as "exhausting and psychologically and emotionally draining" (Lee, 2019, p. 2), which clearly does not bode well for teachers seeking emotional rewards from their work (Bowen et al., 2021). Second, in contexts where teachers face large classes and strict deadlines, comprehensive feedback can result in hastily written comments that end up confusing or misleading students (Lee, 2019). Third, in contexts like ours, most teachers are locally sourced, thus there is the added challenge of giving comprehensive feedback in a second language. Fourth, to get the best out of students, teachers should not waste time on ineffective practices. Getting all this information to teachers, however, is a challenge.

One possible solution is to highlight these issues and incorporate current theory within continuing professional development (CPD) programs (Koh, 2011). However, CPD programs are often expensive, and the peripatetic nature of many English language teachers (ELTs) may make schools reluctant to fund their professional development. Another way to disseminate contemporary knowledge on WCF is to include it in classroom inquiry. Knowledge about effective WCF may then trickle-down into the classroom, and thus teachers, rather than experiences, become the moderators of students' expectations regarding WCF. However, this is not without its challenges, as we discuss in the next section.

What kind of WCF is most useful and why?

The students we sampled predominantly believed that direct WCF is most useful for grammatical errors, while teachers believed that indirect, metalinguistic WCF is most useful. Students

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[2] QuickMarks are ready made comments that can be inserted into a student's submission

commented that being given the correct form leads to improvement, and that without it many struggle to understand the nature of errors. Teachers, on the other hand, commented that metalinguistic WCF engages students in their own learning and-as one teacher put it-helps them to "develop patterns of self-correction".

Moreover, although many students saw the benefit in metalinguistic WCF, there was a significant difference of opinion between students and teachers about the usefulness of it. For instance, 38 students stated that they have trouble identifying errors and need their teacher's help to do so. In other words, the provision of metalinguistic markers such as "tense" or "article" do not always lead to learning of grammatical forms. Indeed, studies have shown that teachers often combine direct and indirect WCF where appropriate (Cheng & Zhang, 2021; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019), which accords with the principles laid out by Bitchener and Storch (2016). Nevertheless, the fact that most of the student sample desired direct WCF bodes well for locally sourced teachers in Thailand because such a view complements traditional Thai views on teacher-centered learning and a focus on grammatical accuracy in English classrooms (Bowen et al., 2023). Interestingly, the three teachers who chose direct feedback as the most useful were all Thai, thus in this instance there was agreement between the students and the local teachers. It is therefore unclear if Thai students' desire for direct WCF is what they truly believe to be most effective, or if it is just a manifestation of teacher-centrality and a focus-on-form in our context.

What types of errors should be corrected?

In previous studies (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Nanni & Black, 2017; Sayyar & Zamanian, 2015), students believed that WCF for grammatical errors was the most useful type of WCF to receive. This was not the case in our study. Students viewed WCF for vocabulary and then grammar as most important. Conversely, teachers considered WCF for grammar fourth in importance after organization, ideas and content, and vocabulary. Such results demonstrate a concern among teachers for "bigger picture" issues.

There are number of possible reasons why our findings diverge from those of previous studies with regard to what types of errors should be corrected. First, many of the students-being enrolled in two "elite" Thai universities[3]-have possibly achieved a level a level of English wherein they no longer make some of the errors we discuss. Consequently, some teachers may feel they can (and should) focus on macro- rather than micro-level concerns. Second, as experienced university lecturers-many of whom hold an MA and/or PhD in linguistics-these teachers may be more comfortable moving away from localized (concrete) errors, such as grammar and spelling, and toward commentary on global errors, which is often not the case among lesser-experienced or lesser-qualified teachers (Bowen et al., 2023; Junqueira & Payant, 2015). Third, which ties into the previous two reasons, teachers in contexts like ours often position themselves as *not* ELTs, and are thus by default more concerned with content and critical writing skills (Bowen et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2023). This may explain many of the

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[3] Both universities are consistently ranked in the top ten of Thai universities and are amongst the few Thai universities included in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings

differences between our study and that of Nanni and Black (2017), who sampled teachers on an intensive English program (i.e., *true* ELTs).

There was also a significant difference between groups regarding their beliefs on WCF for punctuation. Notably, written Thai does not use punctuation to indicate clause boundaries. Indeed, punctuation mistakes are some of most common errors made by Thai learners of English (Khumpee & Yodkumlue, 2017). Interestingly, WCF on punctuation mistakes ranked last among students and second last among teachers, which suggests that perhaps both groups do not fully realize its central role in written English, or more likely, the students are focused on other things.

Overall, in the case of WCF for error types, there is an argument to be made that teachers should pay attention to what their students need (and want). If students are being graded on spelling, for instance, then WCF should target spelling; if students are being graded on vocabulary, then WCF should focus on vocabulary. Black and Nanni (2016) allude to this when they link student needs to scored items on writing rubrics. In other words, while some teachers may value organization, ideas and content over grammar and vocabulary, students may just be orienting to points awarded on a scoring rubric. For example, in many Thai EFL classes, teachers use a point-deduction system, which focuses on localized (easy to spot) "mistakes" concerning language form and usage. This type of approach favors grammar, vocabulary, and spelling, and thus may well be why the sampled students want feedback on these items-it simply reflects what they are being scored on.

However, in a university setting such as ours, other elements of writing-rhetorical organization, clarity of ideas, content, etc.-become equally, if not more, important than localized errors. Consequently, perhaps a better way to align student and teacher beliefs at this level is to give more credence to combining analytic and multiple trait-scoring rubrics, which feed-back and feed-forward to learner autonomy, rather than purely feeding back to performance evaluations. Such an approach could draw students' attention away from localized point deductions and toward banded descriptors of text-specific features. This could also help teachers apply consistent and understandable descriptors when marking essays.

CONCLUSION

Overall, by exploring the beliefs of students and teacher at two Thai universities through a relatively large sample, we hope to have contributed to the field of WCF and the contextually dependent nature of teaching L2 writing.

First, by exploring WCF in a Southeast Asian context, we have attempted to address the scarcity of large-scale studies that examine student and teacher beliefs in this setting, especially in light of both native and non-native English-speaking teachers. Subsequently, we found significant differences between student and teacher beliefs about the ideal amount of WCF, the most effective type of WCF, and the most useful error domains for WCF. Yet, there was no significant difference in beliefs between Thai and non-Thai teachers. Such findings add more evidence

to the current consensus of research into beliefs on WCF, namely that students', teachers', and researchers' views on WCF are, for the most part, misaligned. This has important implications for teaching writing, because misalignments between students' beliefs, teachers' practices, and informed choices on WCF can lead to negative evaluations of teachers' performances and, more importantly, affective barriers to students' development.

Second, despite research highlighting the increased cognitive load that comprehensive WCF places upon students, and the emotional toll it takes on teachers, our student respondents overwhelmingly desired it. The implication of this finding is that for students' and teachers' beliefs on the amount of WCF to be better aligned with each other and current theory, then in-service training on the contextualized nature of WCF needs to be provided to teachers. Teachers can then explain to students why they are giving a certain amount of WCF. Moreover, students should be made aware of the impracticalities of providing comprehensive WCF in light of increasing class sizes and teacher workloads. Overall, while we acknowledge that many top-down constraints are present in contexts like ours (see Bowen & Nanni, 2021), we believe that more communication between teachers and students is crucial to narrowing any gaps in beliefs.

Third, when it came to grammatical errors, our student sample overwhelmingly preferred direct WCF, yet—in line with the majority of prior studies-many of the teachers preferred metalinguistic WCF. We agree with Bitchener and Storch (2016) that both are needed, depending on the context and students' needs/abilities. Consequently, the beneficial nature of indirect WCF should be made clearer to students in contexts such as ours, which may mean that educators have to deal with existing legacies first: In our context, these are a teacher-centered education system, a focus-on-form, and the assessment of learning over the assessment for learning.

Fourth, we have highlighted the importance of students' needs when giving WCF, especially as they relate to assessment. Fundamentally, our findings showed significant differences between teacher and student beliefs on which types of error the teacher should focus on. Moreover, respondents' comments illustrated how judgments about whether spelling is more important than vocabulary, or organization is more important than punctuation, seem quite subjective. Therefore, we recommend that teachers tailor their WCF toward students' assessment rubrics or, better still, (re)design rubrics to reflect what is important for students' development in a specific context. In this light, we have contributed to calls for assessment in EFL writing classrooms to move toward assessment *for* learning rather than assessment of learning (Wang et al., 2020).

Limitations and future research

First, we rely primarily on self-reported data, thus our study suffers from the usual limitations of such an approach. Second, respondents represent just two institutions at the "upper" level of Thai education, and while one may reasonably assume that they would present the same beliefs about WCF, we did not make any comparisons between the institutions. Third, WCF is a context-dependent phenomenon yet our two-open ended-questions were by necessity

somewhat decontextualized. For example, in response to "If a student makes mistakes in their writing … what do you think the teacher should do?" Many teachers simply said: "it depends". Nevertheless, some respondents gave helpful responses, such as they give comprehensive WCF to elementary learners and focused WCF to advanced learners. Fifth, in hindsight, we could have given respondents the option to rank types of WCF, rather than giving them multiple-choice options. Nevertheless, we feel that this may have resulted in them engaging less with the open-ended questions that followed.

In addition to addressing the above limitations, future research could investigate what teachers *actually* do rather than what they *say* they do, and what roles are played by the positions they take up (identities), their workload, and institutional constraints when making choices about WCF. This could include, among other things, the impact of class sizes, levels of agency, and policy documents (e.g., assessment rubrics) on WCF. Moreover, computer-mediated feedback is a growing area of research (see Bowen et al., 2022), and the use of tracking software could be used to explore how much time (if any) learners spend studying their feedback and what kind of revisions they make (Bowen, 2019). It can also be used to study how much time teachers give to WCF and what aspects of WCF they perhaps focus on the most. This could lead to fruitful investigations into relationships between WCF, revising, text quality, and even individual writing development.

Overall, despite our limitations, we hope to have provided a more thorough glimpse into beliefs surrounding WCF in our context and those like it, and that our results will help shape future pre-service training programs, in-class practices, and general understandings of WCF in contexts like ours.

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