

Written Corrective Feedback: The Perception of Korean EFL Learners

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This paper reports on the perception of Korean EFL learners toward feedback types on their written errors. The survey was administered using an adopted questionnaire from previous studies (Ishii 2011; Leki, 1991). This further allows a comparison of Korean EFL learners' attitudes with the responses to an identical questionnaire by Japanese EFL learners and ESL students in North America. The collected data were analyzed based on the response frequencies and a one-way ANOVA test was performed. The results indicated that Korean EFL learners react in favor of direct feedback to their written work, and yet they show little tolerance for simply marking the error without explanation or no feedback. In addition, these preferences are found to be different from Japanese EFL learners and ESL students. Possible explanations for the results were given with reference to the theoretical constructs of SLA.

Key Words: written corrective feedback, feedback types, perception of learners, EFL learners

1 Introduction

The writing skill is one of the important skills like any other (reading, listening, and speaking) that people use on a daily basis. In the field of SLA (Second Language Acquisition), it is acknowledged that learning a writing skill in foreign language is challenging and time demanding for learners to master. The students' primary motivation for taking writing courses, according to Leki (1991), was found to avoid producing errors and to be able to use "perfect" English. In support of the needs of students, written corrective feedback (CF) has been employed by teachers in writing instruction. Defined as 'responses to learner utterances containing an error (Ellis, 2008)', CF has also been a topic in the area of writing instruction that has drawn much attention from researchers. Conflicting findings on its effectiveness, however, have been reported (Cho & Lee, 2015; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Ji, 2015; Liu, 2008; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986; Sampson, 2012; Truscott, 2007). On one hand, a group of researchers (Cho & Lee 2015;

Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Ji, 2015; Liu, 2008; Sampson, 2012) argued that CF may enhance writing skills as they become aware of non-native like features, thereby raising the possibility of improving accuracy over time. On the other hand, Robb, Ross, and Shortreed (1986) pointed out that overt correction may lead learners to be unnecessarily sensitive to surface/grammar features. They continued that it is not a specific type of CF that enhances students' writing skills, but rather it is constant practice that results in improvement over time. Truscott (2007) further reached the conclusion that CF on linguistic errors should not be overly used. Meanwhile, a meta-analysis (Li, 2010) showed greater student improvement by the teacher's CF in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context than in a second language context.

Along with the potential efficacy of CF in EFL, students' attitudes toward error correction has been explored in a number of studies (Chin, 2008; Ishii, 2011; Ji, 2015; Kim, 2005; Leki, 1991; Liu, 2008). Some generalizations are possible: (a) students are likely to prefer teacher's feedback over peer-editing or self-correction (Kim, 2005) and (2) an explicit method of error treatment was favored by the students in an EFL context (Ishii, 2011; Leki, 1991; Liu, 2008).

The present study investigates the viewpoint of Korean EFL learners on their general preference and attitude toward CF in tertiary-level English composition classes. Another focus of this study is to compare the viewpoints among three groups, ESL learners in the U.S. and EFL learners in Korea and Japan. Therefore, this study is expected to help provide suggestions for teachers on (1) which type of CF Korean EFL students prefer and (2) how the perceptions of Korean EFL learners are different from those of other countries.

In the following section, the relevant literature will be reviewed focusing on the efficiency of certain types of feedback and the viewpoints in different educational contexts.

2 Literature review

2.1 Feedback efficacy

Within the context of feedback in writing, Ellis (2008) provided a useful description of CF types. It has also allowed researchers to carry out rigorous analyses of teachers' CF based on his typology. According to Ellis (2008), the CF types basically fall into two categories: corrective feedback provided by teachers and students' revision followed by the feedback. Table 1 below illustrates the CF types provided by teachers along with descriptions.

Table 1. Strategies for Providing CF (Ellis, 2008)

Type	Description
1. Direct CF	The teacher provides the student with the correct form.
2. Indirect CF	The teacher indicates that an error exists but does not provide the correction.
2-a. Indicating + locating the error	This takes the form of underlining and use of cursors to show omissions in the student's text.
2-b. Indication only	This takes the form of an indication in the margin that an error or errors have taken place in a line of text.
3. Metalinguistic CF	The teacher provides some kind of metalinguistic clue as to the nature of the error.
3-a. Use of error code	The teacher writes codes in the margin (e.g. ww = wrong word; art = article).
3-b. Brief grammatical descriptions	The teacher numbers errors in the text and writes a grammatical description for each numbered error at the bottom of the text.
4. The focus of the feedback	This concerns whether the teacher attempts to correct all (or most) of the students' errors or selects one or two specific types of errors to correct. This distinction can be applied to each of the above options.
4-a. Unfocused CF	Unfocused CF is extensive.
4-b. Focused CF	Focused CF is intensive.
5. Electronic feedback	The teacher indicates an error and provides a hyperlink to a concordance file that provides examples of correct usage.
6. Reformulation	This consists of a native speaker's reworking of the students' entire text to make the language seem as native-like as possible while keeping the content of the original intact.

In terms of teacher's CF, it is narrowed down into six types of CF: (1) Direct CF, (2) Indirect CF, (3) Metalinguistic CF, (4) The focus of CF, (5) Electronic feedback, and (6) Reformulation. The following provides explanations of the types of CF by the teacher. (1) Direct CF directs not only where the errors occurred but how they should be corrected. (2) Indirect CF is distinguished into two sub-types: (2-a) Indicating + locating the error and (2-b) Indication only. Neither type provides correct forms clearly, but (2-a) marks exactly where the error took place, and (2-b) informs in the margin that an error or errors were found in the line. (3) Metalinguistic CF is also divided into two sub-types: (3-a) Use of error code, where the teacher uses codes indicating errors, and (3-b) Brief grammatical descriptions, where the teacher numbers the errors and writes a description for each number. (4) The focus of the feedback also has two separate sub-types: (4-a) Unfocused CF and (4-b) Focused CF. This is related to whether the teacher corrects all or

selectively. (5) Electronic feedback concerns the feedback with a hyperlink set up by teachers to access web-based examples to correct. Finally, (6) Reformulation indicates complete modification by a target language native speaker.

As for the second category of the CF typology by Ellis (2008), students' revision followed by the feedback is relatively simple. It is dichotomized in terms of whether the revision is necessary or not, after students receive CF.

The division of the types of CF enables classification of the effective feedback types in past research. Despite some conflicting results, much research focusing on teachers' CF shows consistent evidence of a significant effect of CF (Cho & Lee, 2015; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Ji, 2015; Liu, 2008; Sampson, 2012).

A positive impact of CF has been demonstrated by Cho and Lee (2015), Ferris and Roberts (2001), Ji (2015), and Sampson (2012). These studies presented the effects of indirect methods of CF, which may fall into Ellis's (2008) division as (2) Indirect feedback and (3-a) Use of error code. Findings from these studies showed that indirect types of feedback resulted in meaningful improvement of the surface errors (grammatical errors). In addition, coded feedback (Sampson, 2012), which may correspond to (3-a) use of error code, maintained better performance in terms of accuracy.

Liu (2008) also confirmed affirmative effects, but made a comparison between direct and indirect types of feedback. Findings from an experiment using both feedback types indicated that they helped in reducing errors. However, the improvement with direct feedback was likely to appear in immediate draft and less likely in a delayed draft.

In general, the following finding has been emphasized. Among the six types of the teacher's CF (Ellis, 2008), (2) indirect CF, especially (2-a) indicating + locating the error, has been recognized to have a greater positive impact over all the rest. In other words, indirect feedback in writing has been found to outperform other feedback types.

2.2 Learners' perception toward feedback in writing

With a growing number of studies focusing on the effects of the teacher's feedback, research on the learners' perception (learners' attitude or preference) has received much attention at the same time. It apparently commands attention because the general learners' perception is in opposition to the prevailing effective CF type.

In an EFL context, Chin (2008), Ishii (2011), and Kim (2005) explored the learners' perception of CF. Chin (2008) collected responses from 82 college students after students were given feedback on their writing from two English native speakers. The study showed that students' primary

concern was surface/grammatical errors rather than other skills such as vocabulary, organization, content, or mechanics.

Kim (2005) explored the learners' viewpoints comparing teacher and non-teacher (either classmates or themselves) as being an agent of feedback. It revealed that students preferred feedback received from their teacher over feedback coming from peers or themselves. Also, the study presented the most valued feedback type from the teacher. The feedback types in this study were distinguished in terms of the forms of the feedback, varying from an open discussion to typical written feedback. Among the feedback types, the teacher-student sessions were found to be appreciated the most by the students. The teacher-student sessions possibly raised students' interest, in that students can expect benefits from an interactive discussion with the teacher on their work. The remaining four teacher-oriented feedback types were rated in the following order: teacher correction with comments, teacher correction, comment, and error identification.

Ishii (2011) investigated the perception of EFL learners on the favored feedback types. The findings were compared with those of a study by Leki (1991) in which an identical questionnaire was used in an ESL setting. The results indicating the students' preferences in the EFL context were inconsistent with those in the ESL context. The EFL students were recognized to favor direct feedback, whereas indirect type feedback was valued in the ESL context.

Leki (1991) and Liu (2008) presented the perception of learners in the ESL setting. Both indicated that the ESL learners preferred indirect feedback. In particular, Liu (2008) indicates a strong preference for underlining and description.

Hence, for learners in the EFL context, direct feedback, particularly received from the teacher rather than peers or students themselves, appears to take precedence, or at least compete with the indirect feedback method.

2.3 Research questions

Given the efficacy of the feedback types and the general perception of the feedback types illustrated in the previous literature, the present study aims to provide a basis for understanding Korean EFL learners' perception of the feedback types, focusing on the following research questions:

1. What do Korean EFL learners think is the best and worst corrective feedback for their written English errors?
2. How different are the perspectives of Korean EFL learners from those of Japanese and US ESL students?

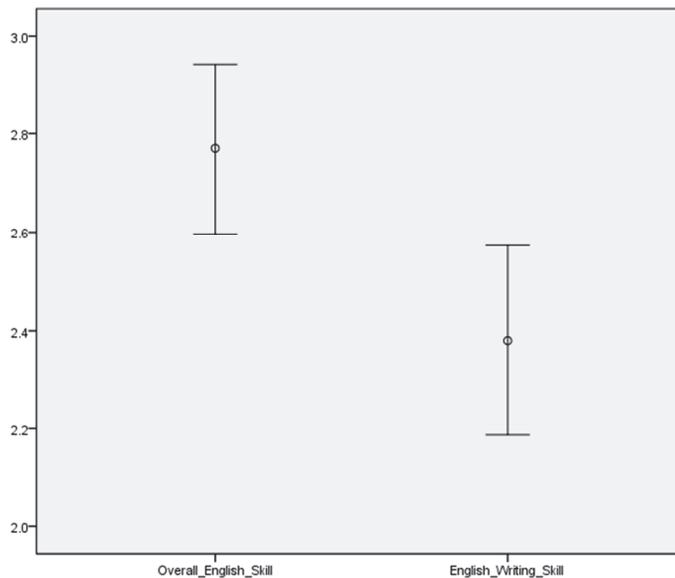
3 Method

3.1 Participants

The total number of 105 undergraduate university students in different departments took part in the survey. However questionnaires showing no responses or incomplete responses were omitted (< 0.5 %). In the analysis, a total of 100 responses were used. All participants share the same nationality, South Korea, and hence the viewpoints examined in this study were most likely based on learning experiences in South Korea. There were 69 female participants and 31 males, all older than 18, with an average age of 21 (range from 18 to 25). Among them all, 15 female students had experiences studying abroad, and no more than 2 years' in all cases (5 in North America, 3 in the Philippines, 1 in U.K., 1 in Singapore, 1 in Australia, 1 in New Zealand, 1 in China, 1 in France, 1 in Senegal).

A total of 100 participants were asked to self-evaluate their overall English skills and writing skill. The average was 2.77 out of 5 and 2.39 out of 5 respectively, which appear to be slightly less than the midpoint. From the plot, it should be noted that the distributions of the two are relatively symmetric and the variances appear to be fairly similar. As the averages both in overall and English writing skills are less the median (3), it can be stated that the students are likely to have a lack of confidence in their general English and English writing ability.

Figure 1. Mean and variance of the two self-evaluated items



In addition, participants show variance in terms of the majors (37 in social science related majors, 39 in engineering department, 5 in education department, and 19 in English language and literature). In a previous study, Ishii (2011) pointed out the limitation of their study of only involving the participants from an English language department. By inviting students from different departments, the current study is expected to build evidence on the general perception of feedback for English writing.

3.2 Instrument

Data were collected using a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was adopted based on Leki (1991) and Ishii's (2011) questionnaires. English language learners in the ESL context were involved in Leki's (1991) study, whereas students were in the Japanese EFL context in Ishii's (2011). Adopting the previously-used survey questionnaire allows the results in the current study to be compared to determine if there are differences in learners' preferences among instructional settings.

The survey was structured into three parts, with 24 questions in total. The first part of the questionnaire, Part I, had nine questions asking about general information of the respondent. In part II, other nine questions inquired about their perceptions on the writing feedback. In the last part, Part III, six different types of teacher's feedback were given and the participants were asked to rate on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good). The reliability of the adapted questionnaire was assessed and the Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire was .675. Thus, the Cronbach's alpha result met the minimum reliability level of .60 for the present study. The following table shows each type of feedback with an example in the Part III questionnaire.

Table 2. Feedback Types in the Questionnaire

Item	Feedback Type	Example
1	Direct feedback	(ex) He go to the cinema. => He goes to the cinema.
2	Pointing out the error item of grammar	(ex) He go to the cinema. => <i>Third person singular</i>
3	Directing students to a grammar handbook for an explanation.	(ex) He go to the cinema. => <i>See page 121 in grammar handbook.</i>
4	Teacher's error code	(ex) He go to the cinema. => <i>E-12</i>
5	Simply marking (circle, underline, or any kind) the error	(ex) He <i>GO</i> to the cinema.
6	No feedback	(ex) He go to the cinema.

When comparisons are made following Ellis's (2008) CF typology for items in Part III, '*Direct feedback*' is (1) Direct CF, '*Pointing out the error item of grammar*' is (3-b) Brief grammatical descriptions, '*Directing students to a grammar handbook for an explanation*' is (2) Indirect CF, '*Teacher's error code*' is (3-a) Use of error code, and '*Simply marking the error*' is (2-b) Indication only (See Table 1 above for entire contents of the typology). As such, the questionnaire items in Part III can be subsumed under the Direct, Indirect, and Metalinguistic CF according to the typology of Ellis (2008).

3.3 Data collection

The survey questionnaire was administered using Google Forms and distributed through text messages within regular class hours. The questionnaire explored the preferences among Korean undergraduates in terms of certain types of written feedback. The survey was conducted within two weeks of the spring semester in June 2015. The data were drawn from three English classes, taken by students in different departments, at three universities in Chungnam Province. After being informed of the purpose of the study, the participants were asked to complete the questionnaire. The survey did not take more than 15 minutes.

3.4 Data analysis

The collected data from the questionnaire were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 21. For the purpose of the current analysis, only questions in Part III of the questionnaire (items regarding six feedback types rated from very bad to very good) have been included. Based on the participants' responses to the questionnaire, the average frequency of responses for each of the six feedback types was calculated in order to find out the most and least preferred feedback types among Korean EFL learners.

A comparison was then made among the average frequencies, using the results from previous studies (Ishii, 2011; Leki, 1991), for each feedback types. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to this end. The results shed light on the similarities and differences of perspectives towards feedback type preference reflected by the students both in ESL and EFL contexts.

4. Results

4.1 The preference of Korean English learners

This section provides descriptive statistics of the data collected through the questionnaire and reports findings regarding the feedback. For the purpose of the current analysis, only questions in Part III of the questionnaire have been

included. For each of the six feedback types, the percentage of response frequencies derived from all 100 responses was measured. The descriptive statistics for each item are summarized in Table 3.

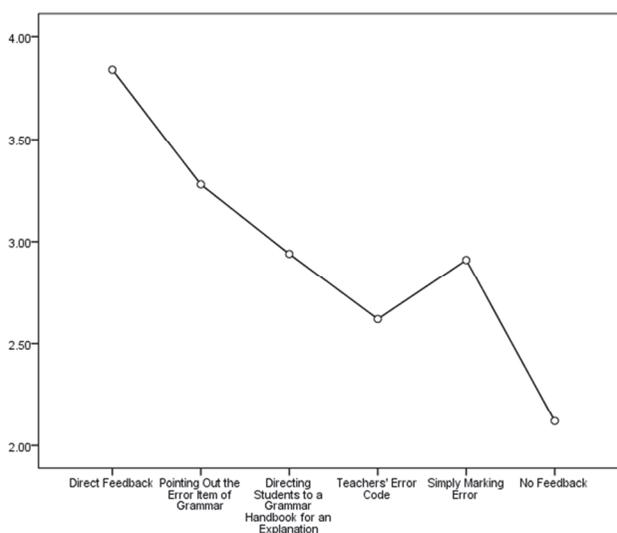
Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Each Feedback Type

Total N = 100						
Item	Very bad (1)	Bad (2)	Neither bad nor good (3)	Good (4)	Very good (5)	Average Rating
1	1%	4%	31%	38%	26%	3.84
2	1%	13%	53%	23%	10%	3.28
3	6%	22%	48%	20%	4%	2.94
4	11%	34%	41%	10%	4%	2.62
5	8%	21%	48%	18%	5%	2.91
6	41%	19%	30%	7%	3%	2.12

Item 1 = Direct feedback; 2 = Pointing out the error item of grammar; 3 = Directing students to a grammar handbook for an explanation; 4 = Teachers' error code; 5 = Simply marking the error; 6 = No feedback; Likert scale point is given in the parenthesis.

Comparing the average ratings for each feedback type, the following plot in Figure 2 displays the average ratings for each feedback type.

Figure 2. Average rating for each feedback type among Korean EFL learners



Of the 100 responses, more than half of the respondents (64%) felt Direct feedback was either 'very good' or 'good'. Somewhat fewer felt as strongly about *Pointing out the error item of grammar* (33%), *Directing students to a grammar handbook for an explanation* (24%), *Teachers' error code* (14%), *Simply marking the error* (23%), and *No feedback* (10%).

Despite the support for the Indirect and Metalinguistic CF in the previous literature, Korean EFL students presented a strong preference for *Direct feedback* ($M = 3.84$). The least favored type was *No feedback* ($M = 2.12$). Students particularly thought poorly of the idea that the teacher would not leave any comment whatsoever.

4.2 Comparison of perceptions with previous studies

A one-way ANOVA was employed to compare each feedback type between instructional settings (Korean EFL, Japan EFL, ESL in US). Levene's test for homogeneity of variances showed that variances of data were not equal ($p < .05$). Due to significant heterogeneity of variance, a Brown-Forsythe test was performed to calculate the F-statistic for ANOVA. Table 4 summarizes the ANOVA results.

Table 4. ANOVA Results for Feedback Types among Countries

Item	KEFL	JEFL	ESL	F	Games-Howell
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)		
1	3.84 (0.90)	3.75 (0.90)	3.39 (1.34)	4.834**	ESL < JEFL = KEFL
2	3.28 (0.85)	2.94 (1.03)	3.50 (1.08)	7.921***	JEFL < KEFL = ESL
3	2.94 (0.91)	2.70 (1.17)	4.22 (1.05)	58.650***	JEFL = KEFL < ESL
4	2.62 (0.95)	1.91 (0.85)	3.23 (1.35)	36.240***	JEFL < KEFL < ESL
5	2.91 (0.95)	2.84 (1.19)	2.22 (1.19)	11.012***	ESL < JEFL = KEFL
6	2.12 (1.12)	1.48 (0.93)	1.01 (0.10)	42.763***	ESL < JEFL < KEFL

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$

Note. Item 1 = Direct feedback; 2 = Pointing out the error item of grammar; 3 = Directing students to a grammar handbook for an explanation; 4 = Teachers' error code; 5 = Simply marking the error; 6 = No feedback.

This test revealed statistical significant differences among language learning settings for all feedback types: *Direct feedback* ($F(2, 238) = 4.83, p < .01$); *Pointing out the error item of grammar* ($F(2, 279) = 7.92, p < .001$); *Directing students to a grammar handbook for an explanation* ($F(2, 281) = 58.65, p < .001$); *Teachers' error code* ($F(2, 236) = 36.24, p < .001$); *Simply marking the error* ($F(2, 276) = 11.01, p < .001$); and *No feedback* ($F(2, 194) = 42.76, p < .001$). That is, significantly different distributions of each CF type prevalent in instructional settings were identified ($p < .05$).

Once the differences among students from different cultural backgrounds were found to be statistically significant, post-hoc comparisons were executed. Comparisons between groups were made with Games-Howell's test due to the unequal variance.

The results showed that Korean and Japanese EFL learners had an equally more positive attitude toward *Direct feedback* (Item 1) than those in the ESL context. A similar pattern was observed for the fifth feedback type, *Simply marking the error* (Item 5). For *Pointing out the error items of grammar* (Item 2), Korean EFL learners along with ESL learners indicated a more favorable attitude than Japanese EFL learners. In addition, Korean EFL learners tended to show lower approval of *Directing students to a grammar handbook for an explanation* (Item 3) than ESL students. For *Simply marking the error* (Item 4), Korean EFL learners were found to have greater preference than Japanese EFL learners, yet they were less in favor than ESL students. Also, no other groups seemed to be tolerant of receiving *No feedback* (Item 6) except Korean EFL students.

5 Discussion

The present study examined the viewpoints of Korean EFL learners on six distinct feedback types to yield insightful results that in turn may (1) provide empirical evidence in support of the preferred CF types in the EFL context, and (2) make it possible to scrutinize the viewpoints further by comparing the different attitudes between three contexts: Korean and Japanese EFL and ESL in the US.

Research Question 1: What do Korean EFL learners think is the best and worst corrective feedback for their written English errors?

The preferred CF type order among Korean EFL learners is formed as [*Direct feedback*] - [*Pointing out the error item of grammar*] - [*Directing students to a grammar handbook for an explanation*] - [*Simply marking the error*] - [*Teachers' error code*] - [*No feedback*]. The students in this study showed the most positive attitude toward *Direct feedback*, like the students in Ishii (2011)'s survey. It appears that Korean EFL learners have no disapproval of being corrected by the teacher, and rather show a desire for receiving CF. Yet,

both *Teachers' error code* and *No feedback* were found to be the most disfavored types.

It is interesting in light of that the findings in the study do not tend to be commensurate with the efficient feedback types pointed out by previous research. Though much research focusing on teachers' CF has created controversial debate over the effectiveness of CF, *Direct feedback*, which was the most favored CF type among Korean EFL learners, is considered a less beneficial form of CF. Cho and Lee (2015), Ferris and Roberts (2001), Ji (2015), Liu (2008), and Sampson (2012) pointed out that students that received indirect CF generally outperformed those that received direct CF. In addition, the findings showed that Korean EFL learners clearly do not incline particularly toward *Teachers' error code*. However, Ferris and Roberts (2001) and Sampson (2012) indicated coded error aids learners both in recognizing and correcting their written errors. It can be concluded that an efficient type of CF and learners' preference are in conflict. Therefore, the English teachers' responsibility, it would seem, is to usefully combine the two complementary feedback types to provide proper comments, thereby aiding learners in developing English writing skills.

Research Question 2: How different are the perspectives of Korean EFL learners from those of Japanese and US ESL students?

The findings in the current study were compared with the results from two studies, Leki (1991) and Ishii (2011), in which an identical questionnaire to that in the current study was administered. This provides insight into how different the perceptions of Korean EFL learners are from those of Japanese EFL and ESL learners.

First, the order of preference was presented as follows. In comparison with Korean EFL learners' viewpoints, the results illustrated that the preferred type of CF among Japanese EFL learners are in parallel with Korean EFL learners. Japanese EFL learners showed exactly the same order of preference regarding the CF types. The Japanese EFL students tended to be most favored the *Direct* way of CF, whereas the *Teachers' error code* and *No feedback* were least favored. On the other hand, ESL students in the US showed a different distribution. For ESL students, *Directing students to a grammar handbook for an explanation* received the highest rating. This was followed by *Pointing out the error item of grammar*, *Direct feedback*, and *Teachers' error code*. The least favored approaches for ESL students were identical to those of Korean and Japanese EFL learners, *Simply marking the error* and *No feedback*.

The statistical differences were robust. It is likely that all students were generally reluctant to receive feedback in the forms of *Simply marking the error* or *No feedback*. Nevertheless, the difference between the groups was observed in the preferred type of CF. Both Korean and Japanese EFL

learners reacted favorably to receiving *Direct feedback* although ESL learners favored *Directing students to a grammar handbook for an explanation*. It is considered that EFL students showed a clear preference for receiving direct CF, although a somewhat indirect way was more preferred by ESL students.

6 Conclusion

The current study attempted to report the preferences of the six CF types of Korean EFL learners and whether they are different from those of Japanese EFL and ESL students. The results of this study show that Korean EFL learners react in favor of direct approaches of CF in their written work, and yet they show little tolerance for no feedback or simply marking the error without an explanation. Moreover, these preferences are found to be similar to those in the Japanese EFL context, whereas they were in different from those of ESL students in North America. Sheen (2004) discussed the results of an experiment revealing that there has been a tendency to use a certain type of CF in communicative classroom settings more frequently across four different cultural backgrounds — French immersion classes in Canada, Canada ESL, New Zealand ESL, and Korea EFL. Consistent with Sheen (2004), it is evident in the present study that preferences of a certain type of CF for written work also varied depending on instructional settings. Hence, considering the useful types of feedback for writing, it may be worthwhile to accommodate students' preferences. Even if they have clear preference for providing a typical type of CF, language teachers may want to consider questioning how they can balance the effective CF type with the preferred type of CF so that they can encourage students' drive to improve their writing skills.

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