

# Written corrective feedback in secondary education: Learner's and teacher's preferences and perceptions

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## Abstract

This research focuses on preferences and perceptions towards written corrective feedback through the delivery of a questionnaire to 28 last year secondary learners and their two respective teachers. Results show that, according to learners, grammar and vocabulary take precedence over other aspects. Moreover, a clear preference over direct and metalinguistic correction was found. Regarding the teachers also taking part in the study, their perceptions and preferences as observed in the questionnaire were not reflected in their actual teaching practice and differ from that provided by their learners.

**Keywords:** written corrective feedback, second language acquisition, preferences, perceptions

**Título:** Feedback correctivo escrito en educación secundaria: preferencias y percepciones de alumnos y profesores.

## Resumen

Esta investigación se centra en las preferencias y percepciones hacia el feedback correctivo escrito en el aula de inglés. Gracias a un cuestionario dado al alumnado de último año de bachillerato y a dos de sus profesoras, se puede apreciar que, según los alumnos, la gramática y el vocabulario prevalecen frente a otros aspectos. Sumado a esto, el alumnado muestra una clara preferencia hacia el feedback directo y metalingüístico. Con respecto a las profesoras, sus percepciones y preferencias tal y como se observan en el cuestionario no se ven reflejadas en la práctica y difiere con la de sus alumnos.

**Palabras clave:** feedback correctivo escrito, adquisición de una segunda lengua, preferencias, percepciones.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The role of corrective feedback (CF, henceforth) in second language acquisition (SLA, henceforth), more specifically written corrective feedback (WCF, henceforth), has been highly studied in the last couple of decades (Truscott, 1996; 1999; Ferris, 1999; Ashwell, 2000; Chandler, 2003; Russell & Spada, 2006; Sheen, 2010; 2011; Ellis & Shintani, 2014 among others). In fact, in the past years there has been an increase in the number of studies addressing this issue (Storch, 2010). Even though the role of written correction in SLA was often shaded by the importance of oral CF, it has recently gained strength and is now an aspect of language learning worth of research. From the above mentioned studies, most of them discussed the importance of WCF in relation to the efficacy in learners' grammatical improvement and made a comparison of different WCF techniques. Even though much debate continues on these issues and further research is needed, another relevant aspect which could provide vital insight to this topic is learners' perceptions and preferences. Already stated by Olajedo (1993), learners' views are neglected but, in fact, they should be considered and compared with the opinions of teachers. Among the first studies to tackle this aspect, we can find Radecki and Swales (1988), Olajedo (1993) and Saito (1994). A more recent study conducted by Hamouda (2011), which paid attention to learners and teachers and the comparison between these two groups, has thrown interesting findings related to similarities and differences of perception within the same classroom. Following Olajedo's (1993) statement, the present study aims at observing learners' and teachers' views and perceptions on WCF. Taking Hamouda's (2011) research as the basis of this project, this study will analyse secondary learners' and teachers' perceptions and preferences for WCF in a real classroom.

## 1. 1 Literature review

### 1. 1. 1 Defining corrective feedback

One of the earliest definitions of CF found in the literature is the one provided by Chaudron (1977). In his work, the author developed a model for the description of error correction and corrective interactions. Chaudron (1977: 31) understood CF as «any reaction of the teacher which clearly transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands improvement of the learner utterance». From this perspective, the goal of CF is “correctness” that is, pushing the learner towards the appropriate structure. Lightbown and Spada (2006) explained CF as the teacher’s input which signals that the student’s use of the target language contains a grammatical inaccuracy or fails in the act of communication.

As can be seen, the initiator of the CF act is “failure” from the part of the learner in an attempt to communicate. This is so because, as conceived by Sheen (2011), CF is a type of feedback that emerges from an incorrect, that is, an ungrammatical response from the learner. Sheen (2011) continued her explanation of CF by referring to it as an umbrella term which covers *error correction*, *error treatment* and *negative feedback*. Therefore, CF is a type of feedback that «provides learners with evidence that something they have said or written is linguistically incorrect» (Sheen, 2011: 2). An interesting component in Sheen’s (2011) definition is the incorporation of the written medium as a possible channel for the provision of CF too.

After having provided several definitions of CF, we now turn to a specific type and of interest for the present study, that is, written corrective feedback.

### 1.1.2 Written corrective feedback

CF is generally associated with oral production of the language. This link is established through the use of the term *focus-on-form* (Long, 1991) which is a way of drawing learners’ attention to linguistic aspects of the language in a communicative environment. Oral CF is understood as a focus-on-form technique for highlighting the learner’s error when producing the language with a focus on meaning (Sheen, 2011).

However, CF can also take place in the written mode. Teachers spend a great deal of time correcting written assignments in order to provide learners with feedback regarding their written productions. From the previous section, one can extend the definition of CF to understand written corrective feedback as feedback from the part of the teacher to improve learners’ grammatical appropriateness when communicating through the written medium. From a second language acquisition (SLA) perspective, WCF is purely lexico-grammatical, making it different from written feedback which focuses on aspects dealing with content and organisation (Sheen, 2011). Throughout this paper, the main focus will be on WCF as a reaction to lexico-grammatical errors. Nonetheless, aspects regarding content and organisation will also be part of the study.

### 1.1.3 Types of written corrective feedback

Ellis (2009: 99–102) provided a typology of WCF based on research conducted in the field of SLA. The author distinguished six different types of WCF:

1. *Direct CF*: It is understood as the teacher’s provision of the correct form. In order to do so, the teacher can resort to a number of strategies such as crossing out an unnecessary word, phrase or morpheme, inserting a missing word or morpheme, and writing the correct form above or near the erroneous form.

As argued by Chandler (2003), direct WCF allows learners to immediately internalise the correct form as it was provided by the teacher. Ferris (2002) acknowledged the benefits of direct feedback when (1) faced with beginner students (2) errors are “untreatable” and (3) when drawing learners’ attention to other error patterns which require learners’ correction.

2. *Indirect CF*: It indicates that an error has been produced but without correcting the actual error. Underlining such errors or using cursors as well as placing crosses next to the line containing the error are ways of drawing learners’ attention to the location of the ungrammatical aspect.
3. *Metalinguistic CF*: It consists of providing learners with comments and information about the nature of the error produced. Error codes are helpful when giving metalinguistic CF. These labels may appear in the error, in the text or even in the margin. This last option forces learners first to locate the error and later to correct

- it. Another technique to provide learners with metalinguistic comments on their errors is metalinguistic explanation.
4. *Focused vs. Unfocused CF*: This distinction is made when the teacher chooses whether to correct just some grammatical errors such as prepositions (focused) or all kind of errors (unfocused). Focused WCF is likely to lead to language acquisition as the focalisation of the errors help learners to (1) comprehend the nature of the error and to (2) acquire the appropriate form. On the contrary, unfocused WCF makes more difficult to learners the understanding of all errors produced as there are more grammatical aspects to pay attention to.
  5. *Electronic feedback*: Use of electronic corpora which may be helpful to provide WCF to learners' written assignments. These corpora can either be used when learners are in the process of writing or teachers providing feedback.
  6. *Reformulation*: This technique consists in rewriting the learners' piece of text, trying to be as faithful as the original text, with the corrections being made. This combination of "direct correction" and "revision" entails more cognitive effort as learners need to spot and understand the changes made.

Other types of classifications for WCF exist in the literature. The reasons for choosing the above mentioned are the following two: 1) the relatively recent publication of the taxonomy and 2) other authors adopting this taxonomy as trustworthy. Therefore, Ellis's (2009) classification of WCF will be used throughout the present study.

### **1.2 Students' preferences and perceptions of WCF**

In language learning, learners bring into the classrooms their own beliefs, perceptions and attitudes regarding not only the language itself but also the teaching practice. Teachers are not exempt from having their own perceptions and preferences. In this particular study, these two aspects with regards to WCF will be the focus of attention. Little research has been conducted in this field when compared to the bulk of studies focusing on the different WCF techniques and their effectiveness. Learners' perceptions of feedback and what it implies is also of importance when teachers are to decide what technique to employ when error correction is being made. As posited by Olajedo (1993: 74), it is relevant to «present the other side of the coin, the often neglected views and attitudes of learners to errors and error correction in language learning and to compare them with some widely accepted opinions of EFL/ESL teachers».

One of the first studies to tackle this issue was conducted by Radecki and Swales (1988). Their research consisted of delivering a questionnaire to 59 ESL students and interviewing some of them to observe their attitudes towards teacher's comment, correction and instruction together with their views on the usefulness on the types of comments. Results showed that 87% of participants were "receptors" of teacher's feedback and wanted all linguistic errors to be marked. The "resistors" (13%) focused more on the final grade, showed a preference for direct correction of the most relevant mistakes and were reluctant to revise and rewrite after the provision of feedback. The interviews conducted expanded on what was previously mentioned and used as a complement to the questionnaire. Olajedo (1993) attempted to shed light on some aspects regarding learner's attitudes towards error correction. In order to do so, secondary and university students were asked to complete a more or less similar questionnaire. Results showed that learners wanted their errors to be corrected, especially linguistic errors. The preferred WCF technique included comments and cues which foster self-correction followed by direct feedback. From Olajedo's (1993) study, some mismatches could be ascertained between teacher's general beliefs and learner's preferences, for example, teachers tended to provide direct feedback when learners would rather find cues for self-correction. Saito (1994) investigated the preferences and attitudes towards WCF of 39 students plus the techniques employed by three teachers. Regarding teachers' preference for the provision of WCF, two of them provided indirect feedback together with some comments regarding organisation and content. However, one of the teachers also resorted to direct WCF. As for the learners, most of them showed a preference for teacher's feedback, especially on grammar, (error identification, correction and feedback with prompts) rather than peer-correction. An interesting finding is related to what learners do with their feedback. Depending on the technique employed by the teacher, learners will either rewrite the assignment (when provided with indirect feedback) or make mental notes of their errors (when provided with direct feedback).

Over the years, the interest on this issue has largely grown. A well-known study conducted by Lee (2004) studied learners' and teachers' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards WCF. Through the implementation of questionnaires, phone interviews and tasks, Lee (2004) collected data from 206 teachers and 320 students. Regarding teachers, findings showed that most of them had a clear preference for marking all errors by using direct or indirect coded techniques. As for

the students, they expected all their errors to be marked with a clear tendency towards error codes techniques. Diab (2006) also compared teachers' and learners' preferences and beliefs regarding WCF provision. Among some of the teachers' responses, they placed emphasis on grammar, spelling and punctuation whereas learners either opted for grammar or the writing style. When marking, teachers believed that a red pen should be used while relying on a wide range of techniques (and not only those cited in the literature but also their own ones). However, learners expected direct correction and in all of their errors. The same year, Plonsky and Mills (2006) conducted a similar study but with learners of Spanish in the USA. One of the biggest gaps between teachers' and learners' perceptions addressed the correction of grammar. Montgomery and Baker (2007) observed that teachers tend to pay more attention to grammar but their provision may vary to no comments on grammar in one students' writing to only grammar marking to another student within the same classroom. When compared teachers' and learners' perceptions, learners believed they were being provided with more feedback, especially on grammar, than teachers actually thought they gave. Nonetheless, learners were satisfied with this last aspect.

Mahfoodh (2011) centred the attention only to learners' perceptions, especially on the affective reaction aroused by WCF provision. Findings showed learners responded positively to teachers' feedback by rereading the marked essay or expressing happiness towards the correction. Moreover, they perceived the feedback as useful and beneficial for the future. However, a small percentage expressed surprised or disappointment in relation to the WCF techniques used. Hamouda (2011) focused on the beliefs and preferences of 200 Arabic native speakers in an EFL academic writing course and 20 instructors. A questionnaire adapted from relevant research in the field (Ferris, 2003; Hyland, 2003; Lee, 2005; Radecki and Swales, 1988) was used for the collection of data. Such research drew interesting results. Firstly, both, students and teachers, had a clear tendency towards the use of the red pen for correcting. Whereas learners expected their teachers to correct all errors, their instructors used selection techniques. As for whom should correct errors, learners and teachers agreed on teacher correction rather than peer- or self-correction. However, the vast majority of teachers considered peer-correction a useful technique to take into account. Both groups of participants agreed on specific error correction techniques: circling and underlining together with direct correction. Nonetheless, some teachers preferred the use of correction codes to encourage learner's reflection. Learners preferred corrections on aspects related to grammar, vocabulary and punctuation whereas teachers put emphasis on grammar and content. Finally, after the provision of feedback, learners liked to read each comment and review their writing. Furthermore, they felt that feedback was positive and encouraging.

A recent study conducted by Norouzian (2012) observed a mismatch between what teachers said they do and what learners perceived. While teachers stated that they corrected all the errors on an essay, most of the learners disagreed with it. What is more, teachers disregarded the use of error codes when providing feedback but more than 50% of learners claimed they did use them. When referring to awareness of error type, teachers said they notify their learners of the criteria being used (grammar, spelling and punctuation among others) but 90% of learners denied this. As can be seen, the mismatch observed is considerable and for sure, it denotes, firstly, a negative attitude towards teachers' WCF and, secondly, a lack of development of learners' writing skills as the marking is attributed as useless. Finally, other studies were also conducted with similar findings to the above-mentioned preference for linguistic error correction (Chiang, 2004), direct correction (Diab, 2005) and correcting all errors (Diab, 2005; Lee, 2005).

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Due to the fact that still much debate exists in relation to the effectiveness and use of WCF and that few studies tackle learners' perception of error correction, more specifically, their preferences and perceptions regarding WCF, the aim of this study is to shed more light on this topic by analysing the responses of secondary students and teachers to examine preferences and perception in relation to WCF. Moreover, learners' and teachers' responses will be compared so as to find similarities or differences. This study will be guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: What aspects of the language do learners and teachers believe the focus of written correction should be placed on?
- RQ2: What WCF techniques do learners and teachers prefer?
- RQ3: How do learners handle the feedback provided?

Drawing on previous research on the topic, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H1: Learners would expect a focus on form and on all errors of this type (Radecki & Swales, 1988; Olajedo, 1993; Saito, 1994; Chiang, 2004; Diab, 2005; 2006; Lee, 2004; 2005; Hamouda, 2011). As for the teachers, they would focus on form and content and not on all errors (Hamouda, 2011)
- H2: Learners would prefer direct correction rather than indirect correction or other types of techniques (Saito, 1994; Diab, 2005; 2006) and the use of the red pen (Diab, 2005; Hamouda, 2011) whereas teachers would opt for indirect techniques (Saito, 1994; Hamouda, 2011).
- H3: Most learners would go over the corrected written assignment and revise the corrections (Mahfoodh 2011; Hamouda, 2011) whereas a small proportion would ignore the corrections (Radecki & Swales, 1988). Furthermore, they would feel that such feedback is positive and encouraging (Lee, 2004; Mahfoodh, 2011; Hamouda, 2011).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Setting

The study was conducted in *Ágora Lledó International School*, a private school located in Castellón de La Plana, a bilingual community in the East of Spain. The educational centre is characterised by a strong multilingual program in which the two local languages, that is, Spanish and Catalan are taught together with English, German and French as foreign languages. Emphasis is placed upon the English language as learners attend to 4 hours of EFL classes per week. In order to ensure and motivate language acquisition, trips to foreign countries and exchange programs guarantee the use of the language in a real context.

An additional feature of *Ágora Lledó International School* is their International Baccalaureate (IB) program, an educational curriculum which differs from the one established by the general national secondary education. The main aim of such program is to promote and foster an intercultural knowledge of the world. In order to do so, emphasis is placed upon the learning of a foreign language as it is demanded by the process of globalisation. The distribution and organisation of the lessons differ from the standard Secondary Education in the sense that students are encouraged to do autonomous research and develop a critical attitude towards the information presented. Moreover, the type of oral and written assignments is different from those required from the national program. The IB diploma gives access to top universities without the need of validation when moving around different countries.

#### 3.2 Participants

Learners in their last year of secondary education took part in the research. Twenty-eight EFL learners, ranging between 17 and 18 years old, volunteered for the study together with two teachers. Broadly speaking, their current level of English was an upper-intermediate one (B2 according to the CEFR) and in some cases of even an advanced level (C1). Out of the 28 learners, 17 of the participants belonged to the national secondary education program and the rest (11) were part of the IB program. For the purpose of the study, from those EFL teachers who participated in the study, one teacher taught in the national secondary group (teacher A) and the other in the IB group (teacher B).

The rationale behind the selection of participants lays on the idea that all of the participants were about to sit for the university entrance exam, a compulsory examination required for accessing to university studies (*Selectividad*). Among the different aspects assessed, the English language is one of them, specifically, learners are asked to write a composition about a given topic. This is the reason why participants were chosen to be part of the study. Throughout the whole academic year, learners have been practising the structure of the writing and feedback has been provided. Therefore, when data were gathered, learners were asked to have such composition in mind.

### 3.3 Instruments

The instrument for data collection was an adapted version of the questionnaire used by Hamouda (2011). Such adaptation was made to fit the needs and purposes of the study. The questionnaire (see appendix A) consisted of 7 different closed-questions plus number 8, which was an open-question. Item 1 asked about the preference of instruments to provide correction, either pencil or red pen. Item 2 dealt with the focus of errors (all, some or none). Item 3 focused on learners' preference for WCF techniques whereas item 4 asked about what aspect of the language the teacher should correct (grammar, vocabulary, content and others). Item 5 elicited learners' preference for a certain type of teacher comment. As for items 6 and 7, they evaluated how learners handle their feedback and what their feelings were towards it, respectively. The last item (number 8) made learners think about the type of difficulties they encounter when revising the corrections. Such question was an open one so as to provide a more qualitative approach to the study.

A different questionnaire was administered to the two teachers taking part in the study. The nature of the questions was exactly the same to the learners' questionnaire, though it focused on the perspective of the provider of WCF (see appendix B). To add more reliability to the teachers' responses, they were asked to hand in some samples of their written corrections so as to compare if what they have completed in the questionnaire matched what they did in their everyday life. Random sample were selected by the researcher.

### 3.4 Data collection and analysis

The questionnaire was administered between the first and second week of April, 2016. All participants completed the instrument for data collection during their scheduled English lessons. They were asked not to speak with each other so as not to influence their responses. As for the teachers, they took longer to complete the questionnaire due to their duties. Once the questionnaires were completed, it was counted the total number of instances in which participants either agreed or did not agree which each of the statements proposed for the different questions. For the purpose of this study, some items of the questionnaire were left out when analysing the results. The same was done for the teachers' questionnaire but with the difference that their questionnaires were simultaneously compared with their actual error corrections made on a written assignment.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to present the findings extracted from the data analysis, this section will be organised taking into account the three research questions previously posited. Each subsection will display the percentages obtained from the questionnaire and interpretations together with a comparison between learners' and teachers' responses.

### 4.1 Results and discussion regarding research question one

Results to the issue concerning the focus of WCF provision can be seen in Table 1. This aspect was evaluated in item number two from the questionnaire employed. All learners (96%), except for one (4%), wanted all their errors to be corrected in their written assignments. When asked about the possibility of selecting a few errors for correction, only 18% agreed on this while the rest did not (82%).

**Table 1.** Focus of errors as preferred by learners.

<i>It would be better if my teacher:</i>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Corrects all the errors	27	1
Selects some errors	5	23
Doesn't correct any error	1	27

Also focusing on errors, item number four assessed which aspects of learners' written assignments teachers should correct. Regarding grammar, a vast majority of learners (86%) expected this type of correction whereas only 14% disregarded a focus on form. Equal percentages were observed when asked about vocabulary choice, with 86% in favour. Lower numbers were obtained with regards to mechanisms of the language, with 68% of learners wanting this correction and only 32% against it. Surprisingly, despite the preference for focus on form by learners, they also desired feedback on content (79%) and organisation and paragraph construction (71%), as Table 2 illustrates.

**Table 2.** Preferred aspects in writing for correction by learners.

<i>Which aspect(s) in writing would you prefer teacher comments to focus on?</i>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Grammar	24	4
Mechanism (e.g. punctuation, spelling)	19	9
Vocabulary choice	24	4
Content	22	6
Organisation and paragraph construction	20	8

With regards to whether focus on all, some or none of the errors, hypothesis number one predicted a preference for correcting all errors which appear in learner's written assignments. Results indicate that this is the case and findings are in line with Radecki and Swales's (1986) study in which receptors and semi-receptors wanted all their errors to be marked. Lee (2004; 2005) and Diab (2006) also noted that more than half of the participants favoured the correction of all errors rather than the selection of some of them. Another example is Hamouda's (2011) study in which 70% of participants expected all errors to be marked. A possible interpretation for this tendency is learners' desire not to reproduce errors again, that is, the more errors corrected, the less they will appear in the future. Even though marking all errors will not prevent learners from committing them in the future, learners expect this to be done.

It was also expected that learners would indicate a clear tendency towards the correction of grammatical errors as well as vocabulary choice. Findings show that this is the case, followed by content and organisation and, in the last place, punctuation and other mechanisms of the language. Saito (1994) and Chiang (2004), as in the present study, found learners' preference for feedback on form. However, other studies such as Olajedo (1993) and Diab (2005) observed the opposite, that is, an emphasis on content and organisation over grammar. An aspect that does match Olajedo's (1993) and Diab's (2005) studies is the lack of attention to punctuation and other mechanisms of the language, which are considered the least relevant. One possible reason for learners' preference towards grammar and vocabulary may be textbooks themselves. Nowadays, most of the course books employed base their organisation on a focus on form perspective in which grammar and vocabulary exercises predominate. Moreover, in most cases, exams and test mainly assess the use of grammar and vocabulary. Because of all this, it seems logical to think that learners perceive these aspects of the language as the most important.

As for the two teachers who completed the questionnaire, both agreed on the fact that all errors should be corrected and that omitting error correction was a not a choice. However, they disagreed on error selection, while teacher A did select some errors to focus on, teacher B did not. This discrepancy was also observed in Hamouda (2011), in which error selection came first and correcting all errors in second place with 10% of difference between these two options. Regarding the preferred aspects to be corrected, both teachers completely agree on all of them (grammar, vocabulary choice, mechanisms of the language, content and organisation and structure) are as equally important for correction.

When observing teachers' correction samples, some mismatches were noticed. For example, Teacher A's corrections showed some contradictions. First of all, all the corrections were made to grammatical and syntactical aspects of the language, omitting other aspects equally important according to this teacher. The space between paragraphs is irregular, finding big gaps between them that were not commented on by the teacher. This type of error is linked to organisation and paragraph construction, an issue that Teacher A expressed as important and that learners expect to be corrected. As the composition was a "for and against" type, it demanded a more formal use of the language. Nonetheless, errors such as the combination of the use of contractions and no contractions in auxiliary verbs were not marked.

In the case of Teacher B's correction sample, one aspect worth of correction concerns paragraphs (organization and paragraph construction). Even though Teacher B selected this aspect as to be corrected, it did not appear in the sample under analysis. Three out of the four paragraphs of the essay consisted of one unique long sentence and no feedback on this aspect was provided. Another issue to be mentioned is the marking system. Teacher B chose to provide a numerical final mark as the result of 1) language (10 points), 2) message (10 points) and 3) format (5 points). It is interesting to see that even though all aspects of the composition were important, some worth less than others when marking, in this case format (organization and paragraph).

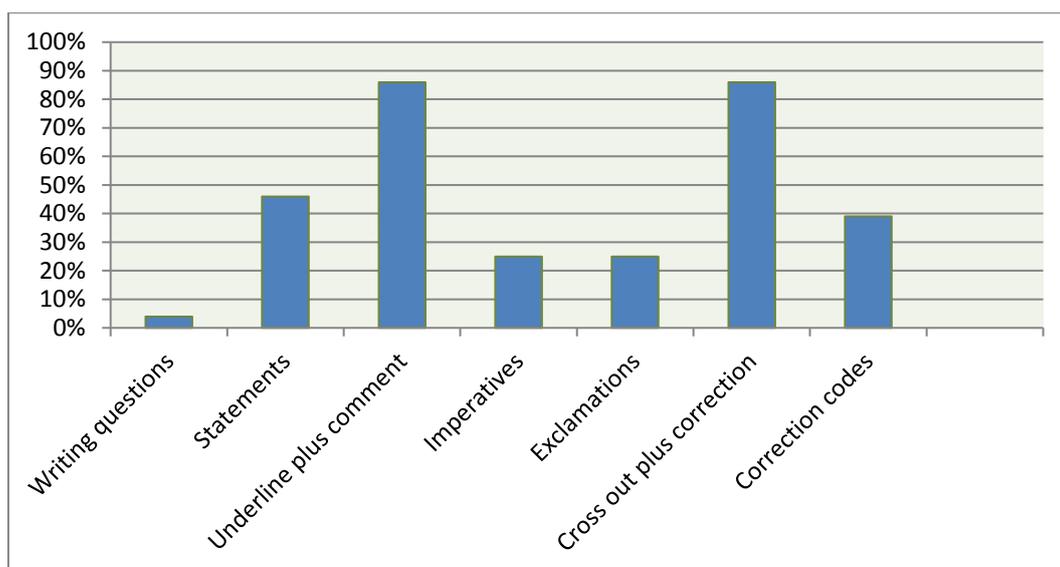
When comparing learners' and teachers' responses, the first group showed a clear tendency to having correct all rather than select some of the errors as well as teachers. Error selection exhibits discrepancies, with one teacher counting it as an option and only 18% of learners wanting this technique. Moreover, learners and teachers agreed on a focus on form and content but students disregard attention to mechanisms of the language.

#### 4.2 Results and discussion regarding research question two

Learners showed a clear tendency towards direct correction, with more than three quarters of participants (86%) choosing this technique as well as metalinguistic comments about their errors (86%). On the contrary, the use of indirect WCF such as writing questions to reflect on the nature of the errors is the least preferred option, with only 4% of participants in favour. Discrepancies can be observed with the use statements with 46% of participants opting for this option while 54% disagreed. A similar trend is also observed in the use of correction codes (metalinguistic WCF) in which only 39% of learners consider it useful. Finally, the use of imperatives and exclamations were seen as negative with three quarters of learners (75%) disliking this technique. A comparison of learners' preference for these techniques can be seen in Figure 1.

In addition, in implementing these techniques fifty percent of learners expect the use exclusively of the red pen whereas 11% expect the use of pencil. The rest (39%) showed no clear position by choosing both tools.

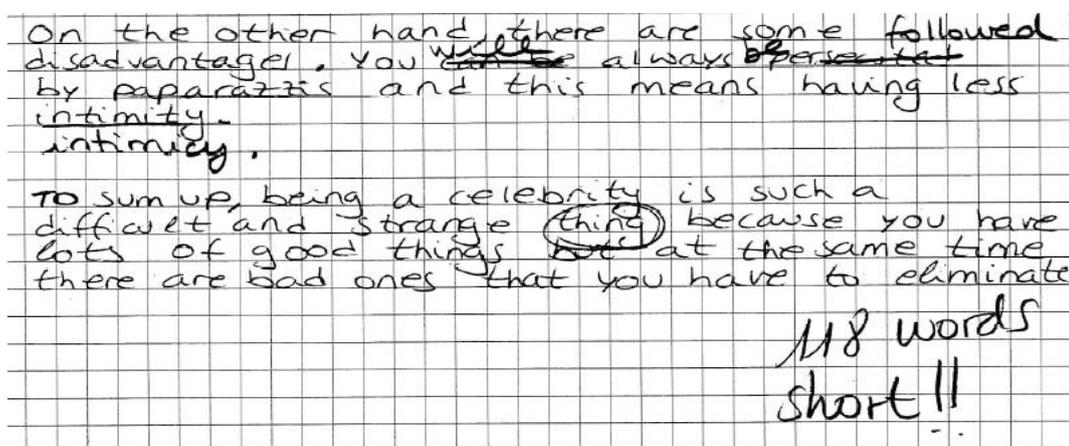
In line with previous research, learners would prefer direct correction over indirect correction or other types of techniques (Saito, 1994; Diab, 2005; 2006). However, metalinguistic comments were indeed welcome and expected as argued in Hamouda (2011). Diab (2005) showed that more than half of the participants preferred crossing out errors and provide the correct form rather than indirect correction with 20% only in favour. Disliking the use of imperatives and exclamation was also observed in Hamouda's (2011) participants. Regarding the use of the red pen, results are similar to Diab (2005) in which half of the students preferred this option.



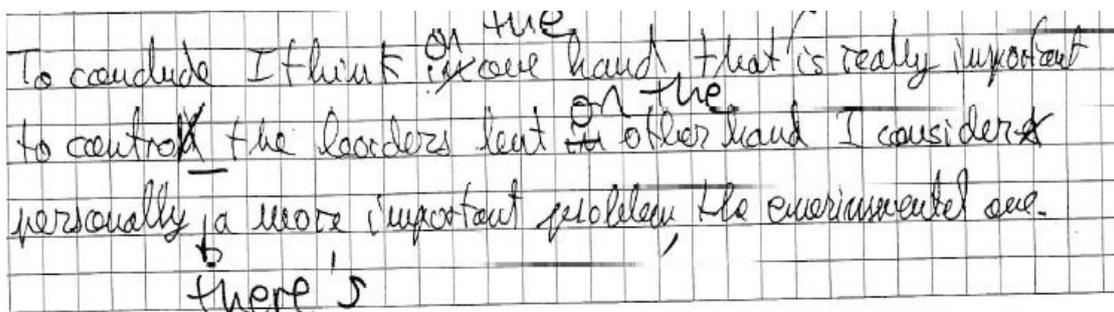
**Figure 1.** Learners' preferences for WCF techniques.

Both teachers' responses coincided completely by disliking only statements and the use of correction codes. This more or less is in line with learners' tendencies that did not show a preference for the use of these techniques. Both groups agreed on direct correction and metalinguistic feedback (not including error codes) as welcome in their feedback. Nonetheless, while teachers conceived using exclamations and imperatives as part of their WCF, learners disliked these options with only a quarter of them in favour. Finally, both teachers opted for the use of both the red pen and pencil while half of the learners prefer only the red pen. In Hamouda's (2011) research, most teachers used the red pen and the vast majority of learners expected it. However, this is not the case as teachers interchangeably use both tools.

Examples 1 and 2 illustrate written corrections provided by teacher A and B, respectively. As can be seen, both teachers make use of, mainly, direct correction with no presence of other forms of WCF such as metalinguistic comments preferred by learners. In the case of teacher A, the use of exclamations is present as stated by the questionnaire. Once again, this technique is not something desired by learners. Even though teachers exposed their preferences for a wide range of WCF techniques, these two samples show that direct correction is the main one.



Example 1. Example of written correction by teacher A.



Example 2. Example of written correction by teacher B.

### 2.3.3 Results and discussion regarding research question three

Once the written assignment was corrected, it is important to analyse how learners react in order to make the best of it. When examining answers to item six, most of the participants (71%) selected they 'like to read every mark/comment wrote on the piece of work carefully' and 61% decided to make corrections. On the contrary, 21% disliked revising the composition after marked. Not surprisingly, 54% of learners were concerned and motivated about the final mark of the assignment. When asked about learners' exploratory nature, 36% opted for asking their classmates for help while 32% seek the teacher for clarification of feedback. While 21% went online and search for references which could help them to understand their errors, a low percentage asked other teachers or went to the library (7%). Finally, only one student (4%) decided to ignore the feedback as he or she was not able to comprehend it.

To complement the previous findings, an open-question (number eight) asked learners to mention the difficulties they may find in revising WCF. Broadly speaking, learners stated having no difficulties. However, participants mentioned some problems which are directly linked to pedagogical implications. A high number of learners stated that they do not understand the comments provided or the nature of the error. Furthermore, they asked for more time to discuss the feedback in class and explanations on how to avoid making such errors. Finally, a few learners expected more positive and motivating comments and a clearer teacher spelling when marking.

**Table 3.** How learners handle the WCF provided.

<i>What do you usually do after you read your teacher's comments and corrections?</i>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
I like to read every mark/comments my teacher wrote on my piece of work carefully.	20	8
I am mostly concerned and motivated about the grade.	15	13
I ask my teacher for help.	9	19
I ask some other teacher for help.	2	26
I use Internet to find more references.	6	22
I go to the library to consult reference materials (e.g. grammar book, dictionary)	2	26
I ask my classmates for help.	10	18
I make correction myself.	17	11
I ignore them because I do not know how to make the corrections	1	27
I don't like to read the entire composition again after my teacher has marked it.	6	22

Item seven explored the feelings emerging after the provision of feedback. In general, learners seem to be quite pleased with the corrections provided. Eighty-two percent (82%) of participants have highlighted the usefulness of marking for understanding and not committing the same error next time. The overall satisfaction with the feedback provided by the teacher was of 79%, a high percentage when compared with the 14% who stated that the comments were too negative and discouraging. Continuing with the positive impact of the feedback provided, 57% stated that corrections pushed them to improve next time and 54% enjoyed the comments and saw a progression on their writing skill. On the other hand, only a 39% felt good about themselves after revising the corrected assignment and 18% considered teacher's comments too general.

**Table 4.** Learners' feelings after the provision of WCF.

<i>How do you feel about your teacher comments?</i>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
My teacher's comments are too negative and discouraging.	4	24
My teacher's comments are too general.	5	23
I enjoy the teacher's comments on my composition.	15	12
My teacher's comments and corrections help me to know what to avoid/improve next time.	23	5
My teacher's comments and corrections help me to know where my mistakes are and correct them.	23	5
The feedback given makes me want to try harder to improve my writing.	16	12
The feedback given makes me feel good about myself.	11	16
I feel that my writing has improved because of the feedback given on my paper.	15	13
Generally, I like the way my composition is marked.	22	6

These results show that there is a general tendency to perceive teacher's WCF as a positive issue. More than half of the learners took profit of the WCF provided to progress in their learning process. By rereading and making correction themselves, it is shown that learners take the written assignment seriously. These findings were also observed in Saito's (1994) study in which learners would reread and even, in some cases, rewrite the composition after the provision of feedback. Unfortunately, few learners resorted to teachers, dictionaries and other resources for a better comprehension of their errors and mistakes. The small percentage of learners ignoring the comments was also found in Radecki and Swales' research (1988). Regarding learners' feelings, a considerably high percentage of participants felt feedback is useful and encouraging as Lee (2004) and Mahfoodh (2011) observed. Hamouda (2011) reported between 75% and 90% of positive feelings towards the WCF provided. When complementing these numbers with the qualitative data provided by item number eight, again a general tendency to find no major problems; nonetheless, other issues such as incomprehensibility and lack of metalinguistic comments emerged in the study.

Comparing these results with teachers' responses, some important discrepancies were observed. In general, Teacher A's expectations matched learners' answers. Regarding the handling of the feedback, Teacher A agreed on all the options except for asking other teachers, going to the library and making corrections themselves. The previous options showed low percentages in learners' responses except for making corrections, with 61% of learners choosing this. As for the feelings aroused by the WCF, Teacher A felt that her students had a positive image of her feedback which is indeed true. However, Teacher A believed that learners, as a general picture, disliked her marking, contradicting learners' responses. Unfortunately, teacher A did not provide useful insights in question number eight to complement these qualitative data.

A stronger mismatch is perceived in Teacher B's selection of options. This teacher believed that learners only care about the mark disagreeing with the rest of the options such as making corrections or rereading. Regarding feelings, Teacher B felt that her corrections were useful for improvement and disregarded options such as 'makes me feel good' or 'try harder next time'. Curiously, the general picture of Teacher B is that learners like the WCF provided. Answers to item number eight showed that Teacher B would appreciate more time for correction. In this way, she would implement correction codes (metalinguistic feedback) and invite learners to rewrite their compositions for later correcting final mistakes.

Clearly, learners and teachers do not entirely agree on these issues, having learners a more positive view toward the WCF than teachers would expect. This was not observed in Hamouda (2011), in which teachers put their trust on learners and exhibited much higher positive percentages.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The present piece of research is to be understood as an exploratory study and the previous step for more significant research on learners and teachers' perception on written correction. Several aspects were analysed during the study and many conclusions can be drawn. First of all, taking into account learners' views on WCF, it can provide fruitful insights of a practice that, to my understanding, is often neglected. The provision of feedback in all their modes (oral or written) may lead the learner through a process of self-discovery and acquisition. On the other hand, feedback can also prevent learners from learning and internalizing the target language. Therefore, it is a vital issue the treatment of such practice with the delicacy and relevance it deserves. Aspects such as individual differences, preferences, beliefs and perceptions come into play and are worth of future research. Currently, most of the studies conducted on WCF focused on its effectiveness regarding language learning. Moreover, control and experimental groups were used, creating non-naturalistic settings for research. It is our belief that the authentic WCF employed in real classrooms is worth of study as it is in such environment where actual language teaching and learning takes place. Future research should take into consideration aspects such as anxiety aroused by the provision of WCF or beliefs and attitudes that may prevent learners from functioning at their full potential.

The main aim of this research was observing learners' preferences regarding WCF in aspects related to techniques employed, handling feedback and feelings. Furthermore, this study set out to explore the link existing between learners and teachers when it comes to provision of WCF. As it was explained throughout the study, teachers' perception about their learners does not coincide with what learners expect from their teachers. In most cases, teachers take for granted techniques and desires. This lack of coordination may affect the learning process and WCF may not work at its best. In our view, teachers must assess learners' expectations regarding WCF as knowing preferences can be beneficial for both parties.

This study is subject to some limitations: the first one refers to the lack of time to conduct the research. This study was carried out during my internship in a private school and time constraints were present. Even though the study was cross-sectional, it might have benefited more of a longitudinal study observing the evolution of such preferences along time. Another limitation concerns the sample, as a larger number of students would have helped for the provision of more support to the findings, especially in the case of teachers, as only two took part in the research. Despite the limitations, we believe that the research conducted has contributed to the body of literature on WCF and learners' and teachers' preferences, demonstrating, in some case, the mismatch between perceptions in the provision of corrective feedback.

**Appendix A: Students' questionnaire (adapted from Hamouda, 2011)**

I would appreciate if you could answer the following questions for a university project I am conducting. Remember this is not a test and there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. Take your time and try to give SINCERE answers.

Please say whether you agree or disagree with these statements. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be as honest as possible. Make a cross in one of the following:

Yes: **Y**

No: **N**

1) <i>In giving feedback, I like my teacher to use</i>	Y	N
1. The red pen		
2. The pencil		

2) <i>It would be better if my teacher:</i>	Y	N
3. Corrects all the errors		
4. Selects some errors		
5. Doesn't correct any error		

3) <i>How would you like your teacher to correct your errors in writing?</i>	Y	N
6. Writing questions		
7. Statements		
8. Underlining the error and write comments at the end of the essay		
9. Using imperatives		
10. Using exclamations		
11. Crossing out the error and writing in the correct word or structure		
12. Using correction codes		

4) <i>Which aspect(s) in writing would you prefer teacher comments to focus on?</i>	Y	N
13. Grammar		
14. Mechanism (e.g. punctuation, spelling)		
15. Vocabulary choice		
16. Content		
17. Organisation and paragraph construction		

5) <i>Which type of teacher comments do you prefer?</i>	Y	N
18. General comments		
19. Detailed and specific comments		
20. Positive comments		
21. Negative comments		

6) <i>What do you usually do after you read your professor's comments and corrections?</i>	Y	N
22. I like to read every mark/comments my teacher wrote on my piece of work carefully.		
23. I am mostly concerned and motivated about the grade.		
24. I ask my teacher for help.		
25. I ask some other teacher for help.		
26. I use Internet to find more references.		
27. I go to the library to consult reference materials (e.g. grammar book, dictionary)		
28. I ask my classmates for help.		
29. I make correction myself.		
30. I ignore them because I do not know how to make the corrections		
31. I don't like to read the entire composition again after my teacher has marked it.		

7) <i>How do you feel about your teacher comments?</i>	Y	N
32. My teacher's comments are too negative and discouraging.		
33. My teacher's comments are too general.		
34. I enjoy the teacher's comments on my composition.		
35. My teacher's comments and corrections help me to know what to avoid/improve next time.		
36. My teacher's comments and corrections help me to know where my mistakes are and correct them.		
37. The feedback given makes me want to try harder to improve my writing.		
38. The feedback given makes me feel good about myself.		
39. I feel that my writing has improved because of the feedback given on my paper.		
40. Generally, I like the way my composition is marked.		

8) *What kind of difficulties do you find in revising the writing after receiving feedback?*

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**Appendix B: Teachers' questionnaire (adapted from Hamouda, 2011)**

I would appreciate if you could answer the following questions for a university project I am conducting. Remember this is not a test and there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. Take your time and try to give SINCERE answers.

Please say whether you agree or disagree with these statements. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be as honest as possible. Make a cross in one of the following:

Yes: **Y**

No: **N**

1) <i>In giving feedback, I like to use</i>	Y	N
1. The red pen		
2. The pencil		

2) <i>I usually:</i>	Y	N
3. Correct all the errors		
4. Select some errors		
5. Do not correct any error		

3) <i>How do you usually correct errors in writing?</i>	Y	N
6. Writing questions		
7. Statements		
8. Underlining the error and write comments at the end of the essay		
9. Using imperatives		
10. Using exclamations		
11. Crossing out the error and writing in the correct word or structure		
12. Using correction codes		

4) <i>Which aspect(s) in writing do you usually focus on?</i>	Y	N
13. Grammar		
14. Mechanism (e.g. punctuation, spelling)		
15. Vocabulary choice		
16. Content		
17. Organisation and paragraph construction		

5) <i>Which type of teacher comments do you write?</i>	Y	N
18. General comments		
19. Detailed and specific comments		
20. Positive comments		
21. Negative comments		

6) <i>What do you think students would choose when asked about what they do after reading comments and corrections?</i>	Y	N
22. I like to read every mark/comments my teacher wrote on my piece of work carefully.		
23. I am mostly concerned and motivated about the grade.		
24. I ask my teacher for help.		
25. I ask some other teacher for help.		
26. I use Internet to find more references.		
27. I go to the library to consult reference materials (e.g. grammar book, dictionary)		
28. I ask my classmates for help.		
29. I make correction myself.		
30. I ignore them because I do not know how to make the corrections		
31. I don't like to read the entire composition again after my teacher has marked it.		

7) <i>How do you think students feel about your teacher comments?</i>	Y	N
32. My teacher's comments are too negative and discouraging.		
33. My teacher's comments are too general.		
34. I enjoy the teacher's comments on my composition.		
35. My teacher's comments and corrections help me to know what to avoid/improve next time.		
36. My teacher's comments and corrections help me to know where my mistakes are and correct them.		
37. The feedback given makes me want to try harder to improve my writing.		
38. The feedback given makes me feel good about myself.		
39. I feel that my writing has improved because of the feedback given on my paper.		
40. Generally, I like the way my composition is marked.		

8) *What kind of problems could you mention when providing feedback?*

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