

Iranian Learners and Teachers on Written Corrective Feedback: How Much and What Kinds?

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Abstract

Different studies have shown the effectiveness of different kinds of written corrective feedback (WCF) on L2 writing. Now the question is whether there is a mismatch between the preferences and opinions of learners and teachers about the usefulness of different types and amounts of written corrective feedback. To answer this question, the present study tried to investigate and compare Iranian EFL learners and teachers' opinions regarding the amount of, the kinds of WCF, and different kinds of errors. 54 English learners and 24 English teachers took part in this study. Using written questionnaires, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. The results showed that though there are few significant differences in Iranian learners and teachers' opinions regarding the amount and kinds of WCF, they have almost similar ideas in how much and what types of WCF, and error correction to be given to learners, and why.

Keywords: written corrective feedback, WCF amount, WCF types, EFL learners and teachers, error correction

I. INTRODUCTION

Language teachers have all experienced tough hours reading, correcting and commenting on their students' written work. During these boring hours, teachers usually wonder whether they should correct all errors or some, whether it is necessary to correct errors or just show that something is wrong, how useful their feedback is for students, and many more questions. Language learners, on the other hand, have sometimes criticized their teachers of not giving them enough or suitable feedback on their written errors, or of discouraging and disappointing them by correcting lots of tiny mistakes. It seems some studies are needed in order to investigate the usefulness of different types and amounts of written corrective feedback based on both teachers and learners' opinions in order to be able to make better decisions to improve writing skill of language learners.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ellis (2009) presented a typology for correcting linguistic errors in a written work. According to him there are 6 types of corrective feedbacks (CF) on linguistic errors that teachers provide for students:

- 1) Direct CF: when teachers give the correct form.
- 2) Indirect CF: when teachers indicate that there is an error without correction. Teachers may either indicate and locate the errors, or only indicate errors without locating them.
- 3) Meta-linguistic CF: when teachers give some kind of meta-linguistic clues on the nature of errors via using an error code or describing the grammatical point briefly.
- 4) Focused vs. unfocused CF: whether teachers correct all or some selective types of errors.
- 5) Electronic feedback: when teachers indicate errors and provide a hyperlink to a file that gives examples of correct usage.
- 6) Reformulation: when a native speaker reworks the entire text to make it more native-like without changing the content.

Many researchers have investigated effects of various types of WCF. Sheen (2007) studied the differential effects of two types of WCF and the extent to which language analytic ability mediate the effects of WCF on the acquisition of articles by adult intermediate ESL learners of various L1 background. Three groups of participants took part in the study: a direct-only correction group, a direct meta-linguistic group, and a control group. Both treatment groups performed much better than the control group on the immediate post-tests. The direct meta-linguistic group performed better than direct-only group in the delayed post-test. Bitchener (2008) conducted a two-month study of the efficacy of written corrective feedback on low-intermediate ESL students. He assigned participants to 4 groups (direct corrective feedback, written and oral meta-linguistic explanation, direct corrective feedback only, and the control group without any corrective feedback). The participants wrote three pieces as pre-test, immediate post-test, and delayed post-test to describe a picture. Referential indefinite article “a” and referential definite article “the” were targeted in feedback. He found that the accuracy of students who received corrective feedback in the immediate post-test outperformed those in the control group. Participants retained this performance two months later. Ellis, Murakami and Takashima (2008) conducted a similar study and found that WCF is effective at least where English articles are concerned.

Different researchers have studied the effectiveness of different types of WCF on Iranian learners who learn English as a foreign language. Rahimi (2009) studied the impact of feedback on writing accuracy and the relevance of learners’ mother tongue to feedback. The results of his study showed a main effect for practice, and the interaction of practice and feedback. This interaction over the course of time resulted in writing accuracy in his treatment groups of participants. Farrokhi and Sattarpour (2012) conducted another research study which explored whether direct WCF can help advanced L2 learners improve in the accurate use of two English articles (namely indefinite article “a” and definite article “the”),

and whether there are any differential effects in providing two different types of WCF (i.e. focused vs. unfocused) on the accurate use of these grammatical forms by Iranian learners. They found that both focused and unfocused WCF improved the use of definite and indefinite articles while the group who received focused WCF outperformed the unfocused group. Their results suggest that focused WCF is more effective than unfocused one in improving grammatical accuracy of high proficient L2 learners. Ghandi and Maghsoudi (2014) investigated the effects of direct and indirect corrective feedback on Iranian EFL learners' spelling errors. The results of their study revealed that indirect feedback was more effective than direct feedback in rectifying students' spelling errors. Karbalae and Karimian (2014) conducted another study on advanced EFL learners and found that the most common types of teacher corrective feedback were *make a grammar/mechanics comments*, *give information, statement*, and *ask for information/questions*, respectively. Their findings showed that learners make most of their revisions to the writing at the surface rather than the meaning-preserving level. Ebadi (2014) explored the effect of focused meta-linguistic written corrective feedback on Iranian EFL learners' essay writing ability among intermediate learners. She found a significant progress among the subjects in the experimental group who were exposed to meta-linguistic feedback upon the submission of the drafts of their essays during a 12-session treatment.

No research study has been done to find preferences of Iranian learners and teachers for different types of corrective feedback and whether there are any significant differences between Iranian learners and teachers' opinions. Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) investigated how ESL students and teachers perceive the usefulness of different kinds and amounts of written corrective feedback, and the reasons for their preferences. Their findings showed there are some important discrepancies between students and teachers' opinions both regarding different types and amounts of WCF and their explanations for them. The present study tries to examine and compare Iranian EFL learners and teachers' preferences and ideas about usefulness of different types of WCF and the amount of WCF.

III. METHODOLOGY

The present study investigates to answer the following questions:

1. What is the useful amount of WCF for Iranian EFL learners and teachers? Why?
2. What are the most useful kinds of WCF for Iranian EFL learners and teachers? Why?
3. What kinds of errors do Iranian EFL learners and teachers consider necessary to be corrected? Why?

A. Participants

A total number of 80 people participated in this study: 56 learners and 24 teachers. The learners (26 males, 30 females) studied English at a private language institute (55.4 percent at intermediate levels and 44.6 percent at upper-intermediate levels) in Shiraz, Fars with the average age of 17.47 years old. They were asked to fill the questionnaires in a period of time between May 17th and May 24th 2014. All the learners filled the questionnaires in the

presence of their teachers and at the free time they had after taking their midterm exams. They were all informed that this study had nothing to do with their regular class activities and marks. All the teachers (8 males and 16 females) worked as English teachers at different language institutes in Shiraz, holding at least a B.A in English with the average 7.66 years of experience in English teaching. The participants received instructions in their native language (i.e., Persian) and they were allowed to ask any questions they had, or to give their reasons in Persian.

B. Questionnaires

In order to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data, written questionnaires which were used earlier by Amrhein & Nassaji (2010) were adapted. The original teachers' version of the questionnaire was given to teachers (Appendix A), while to prevent any misunderstanding by learners, items in the students' version of the questionnaire were translated to Persian (learners' L1), and the translation of each item was provided next to English version (Appendix B). These questionnaires elicited Iranian EFL learners and teachers' opinions about the useful amounts and types of WCF and their reasons for choices. Close-ended items including yes/no questions, MC and Likert-scale items were used to get quantitative data. Open-ended questions tried to give reasons for preferring a particular amount and kind of feedback.

IV. RESULTS

A. WCF amount

On item one, Iranian learners and teachers were asked whether *all errors*, *all major errors*, *a few major errors*, *errors that interfere with communication* must be corrected or only *content and ideas* must be reacted to without correcting any errors. As shown in Table 1, the most popular choice for learners was *mark all errors* (64.3%), and the second most popular choice for learners was *mark all major errors but no minor errors* (25%), while among the teachers popularity of these two choices were the same (37.5%). Choices *mark most major errors, but not necessarily all of them*, and *mark only errors that interfere with communicating ideas* are the next choices for learners (19.6% and 16.1% respectively). The places of these choices were reversed in the list of popular options for teachers, i.e. *mark only errors that interfere with communicating ideas* was more popular (25%) than *mark most major errors, but not necessarily all of them* (12.5%). The last two choices for both learners and teachers were *mark only a few of major errors* (7.1% for learners, and 12.5% for teachers) and *mark no errors; respond only to ideas and content* (3.6% for learners, no teacher chose this option).

Table 1: Different amounts of WCF

options	Learners		Teachers	
	No.	%	No.	%
Mark all errors	36	64.3	9	37.5
Mark all major errors but no minor errors	14	25	9	37.5

Mark most major errors, but not necessarily all of them	9	16.1	6	25
Mark only a few of major errors	4	7.1	2	8.3
Mark only errors that interfere with communicating ideas	11	19.6	3	12.5
Mark no errors; respond only to ideas and content	2	3.6	0	0
*Total Response	76	135.7	29	120.8

*Participants were permitted to choose more than one option, so total responses are more than 100%.

The participants were also asked to give reasons for their choices. As Table 2 shows the majority of participants (55.5%) believe that it is necessary to mark all errors because learners must be informed of their errors so that they can correct them, otherwise learners may never understand they had some errors. Many participants claim the more teachers mark learners' errors, the better learners write the next time. Paying attention to learners' feelings some of the participants (16.4%) mentioned that marking all errors may discourage learners from writing because they may feel they are not able to write well. 14.9% of the participants think teachers have to mark only major errors and errors interfere with communication since minor errors are caused by factors not related learners' knowledge, such as ignorance, fatigue, hurry, distraction, etc. they asserted that if a text convey its message, it is perfect. Furthermore, minor errors peter out by time. While a few (4.4%) believe that marking all errors makes learners over-dependent on teachers, 8.9% of the participants disagree and claim that learners cannot identify minor errors if they are not marked by teachers. Moreover, not correcting minor errors results in fossilization of, and more major errors in future.

Table 2. Reasons for different amount of WCF

Reasons	Teachers		Learners		all %
	No.	%	No.	%	
Marking all errors prevents their recurrence	9	45	28	59.5	55.5
Minor errors are because of non-linguistic factors	4	20	6	12.7	14.9
Marking all errors makes learners over-dependent on teachers	2	10	1	2.1	4.4
Learners cannot identify minor errors themselves	1	5	5	10.6	8.9
Marking all errors may discourage or confuse learners	4	20	7	14.8	16.4
total	20		47		

In order to gain more data on the amount of useful WCF, item 4 asks the participants "If an error is repeated in an intermediate to advanced EFL student's writing more than once do you think it is useful to mark it each time it occurs?" The teachers (91.7%) and the learners (70.4%) marked "YES" more than "NO" (teachers= 8.3%, and learners= 29.6%). These show that the majority of both teachers and learners consider it useful to mark a repeated error anytime a learner makes the same error. A chi-square test for independence (with Yates continuity correction) indicated no significant difference between Iranian EFL learners and teachers' opinions for this item ($p=.07$, $\phi=-.23$).

66 participants (21 teachers, and 45 learners) provided reasons for their choice. Those who were against marking a repeated error more than once believe that first time marking

suffices and learners can identify the same error elsewhere (14.2% of the teachers, 26.6% of the learners, and 22.7% of all). They explained that marking the same error several times makes no difference in improving learners' writing skill, rather makes a text seem full of errors, and therefore, discourage learners from writing (4.7% teachers, 6.6% of learners, and 6.0% of all). On the contrary, supporters of marking a repeated error claim that if an error is not marked, learners may consider it to be correct in other contexts (9.5% of teachers, 13.3% of learners, and 12.1% of all). They say that marking errors every time they occur may help learners understand their problems better and eventually leads to a better writing skill (19.0% of teachers, 22.2% of learners, and 21.2% of all). Some think several marking of the same error helps the point to stick in learners' minds and go to long-term memory (9.5% of teachers, 13.3% of learners, 12.2% of all). Many assert that marking repeated errors makes learners conscious and less ignorant when they see how frequently they make the same errors, thus they pay more attention the next time they want to write something (33.3% of teachers, 15.5% of learners, and 21.2% of all). Of course a few mentioned that marking an error several times reduces the chance for their recurrence (4.7% of teachers, 2.2% of learners, and 3.0% of all), and that it is teachers' job to mark all errors (only 4.7% of teachers, 1.5% of all). Table 3 presents the reasons given by participants for their choices on item 4.

Table 3. Reasons for correction of a repeated error

Reasons	Teachers		Learners		all %
	No.	%	No.	%	
First time correction is enough, learners identify the error in other sentences.	3	14.2	12	26.6	22.7
Marking repeated errors makes learners conscious so that they pay more attention.	7	33.3	7	15.5	21.2
Marking an error many times helps learners understand their problems better, and eventually improves writing.	4	19.0	10	22.2	21.2
Several marking the same errors help the point stick in mind.	2	9.5	6	13.3	12.1
If an error is not corrected learners don't understand they have made a mistake.	2	9.5	6	13.3	12.1
Marking errors every time they occur makes the writing full of errors and disappoint learners.	1	4.7	3	6.6	6.0
Marking repeated errors reduces the chance for their recurrence.	1	4.7	1	2.2	3.0
It's teachers' duty to mark all errors	1	4.7	0	0	1.5
total	21		45		

B. WCF Type

The second item of the questionnaires asks participants what kind of WCF they think is the most useful. An example for each type of WCF was provided (see appendices), and the participants were asked to rate each type (1= not useful at all, 2= not useful, 3= doesn't

matter, 4= quite useful, and 5= very useful). Since the data obtained in this study was skewed, the researchers had to use Mann-Whitney U as the most appropriate statistical test.

For the first type, *Clues or directions on how to fix an error*, 33.3% of the learners found it quite useful, and 25.9% of them said it does not matter. On the other hand, 29.2% of the teachers said it does not matter, 20.8% of them believed it is not useful, and the same percentage thought it is not useful at all. A Mann-Whitney U test showed no significant difference between the learners (Md= 4.0, n=54) and the teachers (Md= 3.0, n=24), $U=474.0$, $Z= -1.935$, $p= .05$, $r = 0.2$.

The second type of WCF was *Error identification*. The majority of learners were against it since 30.2% said it is not useful, and 26.4 % considered it as not useful at all. Although 37.5% of the teachers believed this type of error correction is quite useful, 33.3% of thought that it is not useful. Mann-Whitney U test revealed no significant difference between the learners (Md= 2.0, n=53) and the teachers (Md= 3.0, n=24), $U=552.0$, $Z= -.952$, $p= .34$, $r = 1.08$.

No significant difference was observed for *Error correction with comment* between the Iranian EFL learners (Md= 4.0, n=56) and teachers (Md= 5, n=24), $U=630.0$, $Z= -.467$, $p= .6$, $r = 0.05$. 39.3% of the learners found it very useful, and the same percentage believed it is quite useful. Having the same ideas, 54.2% of teachers said this type of WCF is very useful.

Overt correction by teachers was considered quite useful and very useful by 36.4% of the teachers and 23.6% of the Iranian learners, respectively. 45.8% of the teachers agreed that it is quite useful. There was no significant difference between the learners (Md= 4, n=55) and the teachers (Md= 4.0, n=24) for *Overt correction by teachers*, $U=633.5$, $Z= -.294$, $p= .7$, $r = 0.03$.

Comments without correction, however, was a type of WCF for which there was a significant difference between the learners (Md= 2.5, n=54) and the teachers (Md= 3.5, n=24), $U=465.0$, $Z= -2.032$, $p= .04$, $r = 0.23$. For the learners this type was not useful at all (25.9%) and not useful (24.1%), while 37.5% of the teachers believed that this type is quite useful.

The next type is *No feedback*. Both teachers and learners assert that it is not useful (75% and 79.2%, respectively). Mann-Whitney U revealed no significant difference between the Iranian learners (Md= 1.0, n=53) and the teachers (Md= 1.0, n=24), $U=611.5$, $Z= -.372$, $p= .7$, $r = 0.04$.

Finally, *Personal comment on content*, was the last type of WCF for which Mann-Whitney U test was done to show no significant difference between the learners (Md= 1.0, n=55) and the teachers (Md= 1.0, n=24), $U=579.0$, $Z= -.954$, $p= .3$, $r = 0.1$.

The participants were also asked to give their reasons for their choices. The participants' explanations for each choice are categorized as helpful or not helpful, and are going to be examined separately for each choice below.

Table 4 shows explanations which the participants provided for choice a: *Clues for direction on how to fix errors*. 40.62% of the participants consider it helpful because it

makes learners refer to a reference (book); therefore, they can analyze and review the point themselves. On the other hand, 59.36% of all participants, the majority of them, do not think so. 31.25% of the Iranian EFL learners and teachers believe that learners will never refer to the reference due to laziness, lack of interest or time, etc. 23.43% of them stated that even if learners refer to the reference, it is very likely that they may not get the point since this choice is only suitable for very clever or advanced learners. In addition 4.68% of the participants worry that this choice may imply that the errors are unimportant.

Table 4. Participants' reasons for *Clues or directions on how to fix an error*.

<i>a. Clues or directions on how to fix an error</i>		Teachers		Learners		all %
		No.	%	No.	%	
helpful	It makes learner find, analyze and review the point in the reference (books).	8	32	18	46.15	40.62
Not helpful	Learners will not refer to the reference due to laziness, lack of time or interest, etc.	12	48	8	20.51	31.25
	Learners may consider errors as unimportant	1	4	2	5.1	4.68
	Learners may refer to the reference but might not get the point.	4	16	11	28.20	23.43
total		25		39		64

When asked to give their reasons for their choice on b: *Error identification*, those participants who consider this type as helpful (24.63%), just mentioned that giving a hint to learners in order to understand that there is an error but not providing the correct form, will makes error correction a challenge for learners; learners will try to correct their errors themselves, therefore, they may become autonomous in long term. On the contrary, the rest of the participants (75.37%) did not believe that this type of WCF is so helpful. Many of the Iranian EFL learners and teachers (39.13%) explained that because learners are not able to correct their errors themselves, they will get confused, and errors will recur. Some of the participants (13.04%) say that not providing the correct form is not informative and beneficial and has no advantage. A group of them (10.14%) admit that learners may never try to find the correct form and pay no attention to this type of WCF. A few (8.69%) consider it only helpful for very clever and advanced learners. Finally 4.34% of the participants (only learners and none of the teachers) state that it is teachers' responsibility to correct learners' errors. The participants explanations are given in table 5.

Table 5. Participants' reasons for *Error identification*.

<i>b: Error identification</i>		Teachers		Learners		all %
		No.	%	No.	%	
helpful	Giving a hint to learners to understand their errors makes the process of learning a challenge for them.	9	39.13	8	17.39	24.63
	Learners cannot correct their errors themselves and get confused.	8	34.78	19	41.30	39.13

Not helpful	Not providing the corrective form is not informative. It is only a waste of time.	0	0	9	19.56	13.24
	Learners will never try to find out the correct form.	2	8.69	5	10.86	10.14
	It is only useful for very clever and advanced learners.	7	17.39	2	4.34	8.69
	Teachers must tell the correct forms.	0	0	3	6.52	4.34
total		23		46		

Error correction with comment was the next choice for which the participants provided their explanation. These explanations are shown in table 6. The majority of the Iranian EFL learners and teachers (67.79%) believe that giving correction with comments will help learners understand their errors exactly and thoroughly, and therefore, they pay more attention to the point in order to prevent recurrence of these errors. Some say (10.16%) the more information is provided, the better learners learn. Opponents of this choice, however, believe that this is only spoon-feeding learners which has a bad effect on them and will be forgotten soon (8.47). A few (5.08%) warn that this type is very time-consuming for teachers. A couple of the participants (3.38%) say that learners will learn only one point this way and nothing more.

Table 6. Participants' reasons for *Error correction with comment*.

<i>c: Error correction with comment</i>		Teachers		Learners		all %
		No.	%	No.	%	
helpful	Learners will understand what their problem is exactly and will pay more attention.	12	54.54	28	76.67	67.79
	The more information is provided, the better learners will learn.	1	4.54	5	13.51	10.16
Not helpful	It has bad effects because learners will not meditate on their errors.	5	22.72	0	0	8.47
	It is very time-consuming for teachers.	2	9.09	1	2.70	5.08
	Students will just learn one point.	1	4.54	1	2.70	3.38
total		22		37		

Although the majority of the participants (nearly 60% of all) say that *Overt correction by teachers* is helpful, and that this choice is their second-best choice after *Correction with comments*, it seems that EFL learners and teachers' explanations are somewhat different. 30.30% of the learners who consider this choice to be helpful believe that providing overt correction helps learners to remember the point, and therefore, prevent the recurrence of errors in long-term. 27.27% of them mentioned it is helpful because learners will understand their problems and then they will search themselves to find the reasons. Some (9.09%) also claim that it is not necessary for teachers to comment on all errors. On the other hand, 15.15% of the learners think giving overt correction by teachers is not helpful without

specifying the reasons confuses the learners because they do not understand the problem. Some learners (12.12%) stated that learners must undertake correcting errors themselves in order to learn the point, and teachers' direct correction is not helpful. Finally, a few (6.06%) said it does not make any differences since learners do not know the reasons so they do not pay attention to correction. Teachers provided the same set of explanations but with different ratings. Most teachers who gave their reasons (27.27%) asserted that this kind of correction will only baffle learners because of not providing the reasons. 13.63% of them said that learners need to analyze and meditate on their errors themselves, and a few (9.09%) believe that it does not make any differences. Teachers who were for the choice explained that it works because learners understand their errors and will search the reasons themselves (18.18%); teachers do not have to comment on all errors (18.18%), and learners will remember the point and avoid repeating it in future (13.63%). See table7.

Table 7. Participants' reasons for *Overt correction by teachers*.

<i>d: Overt correction by teachers</i>		Teachers		Learners		all %
		No.	%	No.	%	
helpful	Learners understand their errors and will search for reasons.	4	18.18	9	27.27	23.63
	Learners will remember the point and won't repeat the errors in future, so it's good in long-term.	3	13.63	10	30.30	23.63
	It is not necessary for teachers to comment on all errors.	4	18.18	3	9.09	12.72
Not helpful	It confuses learners because they do not understand why something is wrong.	6	27.27	5	15.15	20
	Teachers' direct correction is not helpful; learners must undertake correcting their errors in order to remember them forever.	3	13.63	4	12.12	12.72
	It does not make any difference; learners do not know the reason so they do not pay attention.	2	9.09	2	6.06	7.27
total		22		33		

Overall it seems that the participants do not agree that *Comments without correction* may be helpful. Supporters of this choice claim that it may lead to self-correction stage because learners analyze the errors themselves so the point sticks in their minds (20.83% of teachers and 7.69% of learners); it enhances learners' curiosity to find the correct form (16.60% of teachers, 5.12% of learners). The majority of the participants, however, gave their reasons against this choice. The most frequently mentioned reason by both teachers and learners is that everything must be explained in a clear way so that learners can understand their errors otherwise they get confused (25% of teachers, 46.15% of learners). 20.85% of teachers believe that teachers must not neglect learners' errors; only 5.12% of learners have the same idea. 16.66% of teachers and 7.69% of learners worry that not all learners are competent enough to correct their errors, and some may replace a wrong form with another

wrong form. Two other reasons provided by learners are as follows: it makes no difference for learners since they cannot identify their errors (15.38%), and learners will not pay any attention and forget errors quickly (12.82%)

Table 8. Participants' reasons for *Comments without correction*.

<i>e: Comments without correction</i>		Teachers		Learners		all %
		No.	%	No.	%	
helpful	It leads to a kind of self-correction stage.	5	20.83	3	7.69	12.69
	It enhances learners' curiosity to find out the correct forms.	4	16.66	2	5.12	9.52
Not helpful	Everything must be explained clearly.	6	25	16	46.15	30.09
	Teachers should not neglect learners' errors.	5	20.83	2	5.12	11.11
	Learners cannot correct their errors; they may replace them with other wrong forms.	4	16.66	3	7.69	11.11
	It makes no difference because learners cannot identify their errors.	0	0	6	15.38	9.52
	Learners pay no attention and forget the point soon.	0	0	5	12.82	7.93
total		24		39		

All participants who provided their explanations on choice *No feedback* unanimously agree that this choice is not helpful. The majority of them (60.86% of teachers, 56.25% of learners, 58.18% of all) said that not providing feedback may mislead learners to think that there is no error. The second frequently mentioned reason by learners is that it results in fossilization because learners will repeat the same errors again (34.37% of the learners, only 4.34% of the teachers). While the second popular reason for teacher is that learners cannot learn anything because they are not able to touch their problems (26.08% of the teachers, 6.25% of the learners). 8.69% of the teachers also mentioned that teachers must not neglect learners' mistakes. Finally, 3.12% of learners said that when they see no feedback on their writing paper, they feel their teachers have not read the text. See table 9.

Table 9. Participants' reasons for *No feedback*.

<i>f: No Feedback</i>		Teachers		Learners		all %
		No.	%	No.	%	
Not helpful	Learners may not realize that something is wrong and consider it to be correct.	14	60.86	18	56.25	58.18
	Learners will repeat that error again.	1	4.34	11	34.37	21.81
	Learners cannot learn anything because they are not able to touch their problems.	6	26.08	2	6.25	14.54
	It is teachers' duty to correct errors; teachers must not neglect learners' errors.	2	8.69	0	0	3.63
	Learners may feel the teacher has not read the text.	0	0	1	3.12	1.18
total		23		32		

The last choice given is *a personal comment on the content*. Once again all participants unanimously consider it not to be helpful. Table 10 shows the participants' explanations on this choice. 30.43% of the learners believe that this kind of feedback has no advantage because it does not lead to correction; only 12.5% of the teachers think so. The most frequently mentioned reason by teachers, which is the second ranked reason for learners, is that it may discourage learners by affecting them emotionally, humiliating them, or causing them to lose their confidence or motivation (29.1% of the teachers, 17.39% of the learners). Some also claim that grammatical and discourse accuracy is more important than content for learners to improve their writing skill (25% of the teachers, 17.39% of the learners). A number of teachers believe that learners will not realize that they have some errors unless they are very intelligent (20.83% of the teachers, 8.69% of the learners). 17.39% of the learners worry that learners will repeat their mistakes again, though only 4.16% of the teachers agree with them. A few think that learners pay no attention to this type of feedback since teachers' personal comments has little value for some learners (4.16% of the teachers, 8.69% of the learners). Finally 4.16% of the teachers say that giving personal comments makes teachers' job quite subjective.

Table 10. Participants' reasons for *A personal comment on content*.

<i>g: A personal comment on content</i>		Teachers		Learners		all %
		No.	%	No.	%	
Not helpful	It is useless because it does not lead to correction.	3	12.5	7	30.43	21.27
	Learners will repeat their mistakes.	1	4.16	4	17.39	10.63
	Learners will not realize they have problems.	5	20.83	2	8.69	14.89
	It may discourage learners.	7	29.1	4	17.39	23.40
	Grammatical and discourse accuracy is of utmost importance.	6	25	4	17.39	21.27
	Learners pay no attention to it because they do not care about teachers' personal views.	1	4.16	2	8.69	6.38
	Giving personal views makes teachers' job subjective.	1	4.16	0	0	2.12
total	24		23			

Item five asks the participants what type of errors they think teachers should point out in a writing work. They were given six types of errors (*organization, grammatical, content/ideas, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary errors*), and were asked to circle a number that best describes each statement (1= not useful at all, 2= not useful, 3= doesn't matter, 4= quite useful, and 5= very useful).

Correcting *organization errors* was the first item which the participants consider to be very useful (47.1% of the learners and 45.8% of the teachers), and quite useful (41.2% of teachers, and 41.7% of learners). Mann-Whitney U test was done and showed no significant difference between the learners (Md=4, n=51) and the teachers (Md=4, n=24), $U=604.0$, $Z=-.10$, $p=.92$, $r=.01$.

Grammatical errors was the second item, the participants said it is very useful (73.1% of the learners, and 54.2% of the teachers), and quite useful (15.4% of learners, and 33.3% of teachers) to point out this type of errors. Mann-Whitney U test revealed no significant difference between the learners (Md=5, n=52) and the teachers (Md=5, n=24), U= 519.0, Z=-1.41, p=0.15, r=.16.

Item C was *content/idea errors*. It seems the participants were not sure about the usefulness of correcting this type of errors since 30% of the learners and 43.5% of the teachers said it does not matter; of course 43.5% of teachers and 22% of learners consider it to be quite useful, and very useful to point out this type of errors. Once more Mann-Whitney U was done and showed no significant difference between the Iranian EFL learners (Md=3, n=50) and the teachers' (Md=4, n=23) opinions on this item, U=455.0, Z= -1.47, p=.13, r=.17.

Punctuation errors are the only errors about which Iranian learners and teachers have different ideas. While 33.3% of learners, the majority of them, believe that it does not matter if teachers point out *punctuation errors*, only 8.3% of teachers think so. On the other hand, 54.2% of teachers believe that it is quite useful, and 25% of them think it is very useful to point out *punctuation errors* (only 17.6%, and 23.5% of learners, respectively). Furthermore, Mann-Whitney U test showed a significant difference between learners (Md=4, n=24) and teachers (Md=4, n=24) in this regard, U=431.0, Z=-2.1, p=.03, r=.24.

Item E deals with *spelling errors* which is found quite useful (29.2% of teachers, 47.1% of learners), and very useful (29.2% of teachers, and 23.5% of learners). Mann-Whitney U test showed no significant difference between learners (Md=4, n=51) and teachers (Md=4, n=24), U=576.0, Z=-.43, p=.66, r=.049.

Finally the last type of errors was *vocabulary errors*. The teachers agree unanimously agree that it is quite useful (45.8%), and very useful (54.2%), no other option was selected by the teachers. The learners have nearly similar ideas, 32.7% of them found it quite useful, and 44.1 of them said it is very useful to point out this type of errors. Mann-Whitney U test revealed no significant difference between the Iranian EFL learners (Md=4, n=52), and the teachers (Md=5, n=24), U=502.5, Z=-1.47, p=.14, r=.169.

The participants were also asked to provide their reasons for their choices. Their reasons can be seen in table 11. The most frequent reason given by the teachers (58.82%) is that all aspects of writing are important and attention must be paid to them, while 23.07% of the learners gave the same reason, 26.92% of them believe that only grammar and vocabulary are important. 11.76% of the teachers had the same idea. The same percentage of learners believed that content is as important as vocabulary and grammar.

Table 11. Participants' reasons for their choice for pointing out different types of errors.

	Teachers		Learners		all %
	No.	%	No.	%	
All aspects of writing are important and attention must be paid to them.	10	58.82	6	23.07	37.20

Content, vocabulary, and grammar are important. If learners master them, they learn other aspects, too.	1	5.88	4	15.38	11.62
Only grammar and vocabulary are important.	2	11.76	7	26.92	25.58
Letting learners know what areas of language they are weak in, helps them improve their writing.	1	5.88	4	15.38	11.62
Even tiny mistakes may cause misunderstanding for readers.	0	0	2	7.69	4.65
The more feedback is given, the better learners learn.	1	5.88	0	0	2.32
If spelling mistakes do not change meaning, teachers may ignore them, otherwise they must correct them.	1	5.88	1	3.84	4.63
Even a single error must be corrected in order to prevent fossilization	1	5.88	2	7.69	6.97
total	17		26		

V. DISCUSSION

In this part, results of this study are discussed with respect to the research questions. The first research question is what the useful amount of WCF is for Iranian EFL learners and teachers, and why. The majority of both learners and teachers declared that teachers should mark all errors (64.3% of the learners, 37.5% of the teachers) or at least mark all major errors (25% of the learners, and 37.5% of the teachers). It seems that Iranian EFL learners and teachers believe it is useful for students to know their errors. The most frequent reason for their choice is that marking errors prevents reoccurrence of them in future.

When the participants of this study were asked what teachers must do if there are some repeated errors, the majority of them (91.7% of the teachers, and 70.4% of the learners) consider it useful to mark errors any time learners make the same errors. A chi-square test for independence (with Yates continuity correction) revealed no significant difference between Iranian learners and teachers on this item ($p=.07$, $\phi=-.23$). Making learners conscious about their repeated errors to make them pay more attention (33.3% of the teachers, 15.5% of the learners), helping learners to understand their problems (19.6% of the teachers, 22.2% of learners), making the points stick in learners mind (9.5% of the teachers, 13.3% of the learners) are some reasons given to support marking repeated errors by teachers. Of course, some participants disagreed and said marking errors the first time is enough and learners can identify the same errors in other sentences (14.2% of the teachers, 26.6% of the learners). They also worry that marking errors many times may disappoint learners (4.7% of the teachers, 6.6% of the learners).

The second research question is what the most useful kinds of written corrective feedback for EFL Iranian learners and teachers. *Clues or direction on how to fix an error* was considered useful by the majority of the learners (51.8%). They believe that this type of WCF is quite useful (33.3%) or very useful (18.5%). Only 29.2% of the teachers think so and many of them think it is not useful at all (20.8%), not useful (20.8) or it does not matter (29.3%). No significant difference, however, was revealed between the learners and the teachers. *Error identification* is the next type which is believed to not to be useful by 56.6% of learners. While 45.8% of the teachers agree that this type is not useful at all (12.5%) or not

useful (33.3%), 37.5% of the teachers consider it to be quite useful. *Error correction with comment* is the most popular type for both Iranian learners and teachers. 78.6% of the learners think it is quite useful (39.3%), and very useful (39.3%). 66.7% of the teachers have similar ideas; 54.2% of them said this type is very useful, and 12.5% of them consider it quite useful. *Overt correction by teachers* appears to be the second most popular type for both learners (60%) and teachers (58.3%). 36.4% of learners said it is quite useful, and 23.6% of them believed that it is very useful. 45.8% of the teachers consider it quite useful, 12.5% of them said it is very useful. *Comment with no correction* was the only type of WCF which showed significant difference between the learners and the teachers. Although 37.5% of the teachers thought it may be useful, only 22.2% of the learners think so and more than 70.4% of learners consider this type not to be useful at all (25.9%), not useful (24.1%) or it does not matter (24.1). *No feedback* and *Personal comment on content* are two types of WCF which are considered not to be useful by both learners and teachers. Many of the participants believe that *No feedback* is not useful (88.6% of the learners, and 87.5% of the teachers). Finally the last type is *Personal comment on content* which is not popular neither for learners nor teachers. 52.7% of the learners consider it not useful at all, and 10.9% said it is not useful. Having similar point of view, 62.5% of the teachers consider it not useful at all, and 10.9% believe that it is not useful. Overall it can be said that *Error correction with comment* and *Overt correction by teachers* are the most useful types of WCF for both Iranian teachers and learners.

The third research question asked what kinds of errors Iranian EFL learners and teachers consider necessary to be corrected and why. Pointing organization errors, grammatical errors, spelling errors, and vocabulary errors are considered necessary by both the teachers and learners. On the other hand, the participants were not so sure about content/idea errors. The only kind of errors about which there was significant difference between the Iranian learners and teachers was punctuation errors. 54.2% of the teachers consider it quite useful, and 25% of them say it is very useful to mark punctuation errors while only 17.6% and 23% of the learners have similar views, respectively. It seems Iranian learners are not so aware of the importance of punctuation in writing.

VI. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

The participants of this study, Iranian learners and teachers, showed very similar opinions regarding the amount of WCF, kinds of WCF, and kinds of errors to be corrected in writing. Overall they all prefer overt and clear error identification and correction; they believe the more information is given about an error, the more useful it is for learners. They want all and any type of linguistic errors to be corrected by teachers, and seem to think that problems in content are not important or necessary to be corrected. These attitudes put a lot of burden on teachers to correct and improve writing skill in learners. It is suggested that teachers do their best to correct and mark as many errors as possible at early levels, but they must attempt to gradually make learners independent so that they self-correct their writing tasks themselves. Learners must become aware that if something is not marked, they cannot take it for granted that it is absolutely accurate. Learners must be told that punctuation marks are as important as other aspects of writing.

Although this study attempted to investigate opinions of Iranian learners and teachers on the useful amount, and different kinds of WCF and different types of errors, there are some limitations. First, only a small number of learners (56) and teachers (24) participated in this study. Furthermore, all learners in this study are English learners at intermediate and advanced levels at one language institute in Shiraz. Teachers are employed at language institutes as well. May be conducting the same study on a larger population, participants learning or teaching English in other settings (for example, universities, or schools) gives a better, different, or more accurate view about preferences of Iranian learners and teachers. The only instrument to collect data is self-reported questionnaire, it seems necessary to have similar studies using other data-collecting instruments.

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Appendix A

Teacher's Questionnaire:

Age: ----- Gender: male female

Education: ----- Years of teaching: -----

(1) If there are many errors in an intermediate to advanced EFL student's writing, what do you think is most useful to do? Please check all that apply!

- mark all errors
- mark all major errors but not minor ones
- mark most of the major errors, but not necessarily all of them
- mark only a few of the major errors
- mark only the errors that interfere with communicating your ideas
- mark no errors and respond only to the ideas and content

Please explain the reason for your choice(s).

(2) The following sentences all have the same error and the teacher has given a different type of feedback for each. For each sentence circle the number that best describes the usefulness of the feedback for an intermediate to advanced EFL student.

1= not useful at all 2= not useful 3= doesn't matter

4= quite useful 5= very useful

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|------------------|
| a) Since I arrived in Victoria, I am very lonely. | Look at unit 3 in your book | <u>1</u> 2 3 4 5 |
| b) Since I arrived in Victoria, I am very lonely. | | <u>1</u> 2 3 4 5 |
| c) Since I arrived in Victoria, I am very lonely. | have been (wrong tense) | <u>1</u> 2 3 4 5 |
| d) Since I arrived in Victoria, I am very lonely. | have been | <u>1</u> 2 3 4 5 |
| e) Since I arrived in Victoria, I am very lonely. | wrong tense | <u>1</u> 2 3 4 5 |
| f) Since I arrived in Victoria, I am very lonely. | | <u>1</u> 2 3 4 5 |
| g) Since I arrived in Victoria, I am very lonely. | I'm sorry to hear that | <u>1</u> 2 3 4 5 |

(3) Please explain the reasons for your choices for each type of feedback in item 2.

a- Clues or directions on how to fix an error (the teacher gives clues or directions on how a student can correct his/her work)

Please explain the reason for your choice.

b- **Error identification** (the teacher points out where the errors occur, but no errors are corrected)

Please explain the reason for your choice.

c- **Correction with comments** (the teacher corrects errors and makes comments)

Please explain the reason for your choice.

d- **Teacher correction** (the teacher corrects errors)

Please explain the reason for your choice.

e- **Commentary** (the teacher gives feedback by making comments about errors, but no errors are corrected) Please explain the reason for your choice.

f- **No feedback on an error**

Please explain the reason for your choice.

g- **A personal comment on the content** (the teacher gives feedback by making comments on the ideas or content, but no errors are corrected)

Please explain the reason for your choice.

(4) If an error is repeated in an intermediate to advanced EFL student's writing more than once do you think it is useful to mark it each time it occurs?

Yes

No

Please explain the reason for your choice.

(5) For each of the following questions. Circle one number that best describes its usefulness for an intermediate to advanced EFL student.

1- not very useful at all (useless) 2- not useful 3- doesn't matter

4- quite useful 5- very useful

- a) How useful is it to point out *organization* errors in an intermediate to advanced EFL student's written work? 1 2 3 4 5
- b) How useful is it to point out *grammatical* errors in an intermediate to advanced EFL student's written work? 1 2 3 4 5
- c) How useful is it to point out *content/idea* errors in an intermediate to advanced EFL student's written work? 1 2 3 4 5
- d) How useful is it to point out *punctuation* errors in an intermediate to advanced EFL student's written work? 1 2 3 4 5
- e) How useful is it to point out *spelling* errors in an intermediate to advanced EFL student's written work? 1 2 3 4 5
- f) How useful is it to point out *vocabulary* errors in an intermediate to advanced EFL student's written work? 1 2 3 4 5

Please explain the reason for your choice(s).

Thanks a lot.

Appendix B

Student's Questionnaire:

Age: ----- Gender: male female

Level: -----

(1) If there are many errors in your writing, what do you think your English teacher should do? You can check more than one!

اگر در نوشته شما اشتباهات زیادی وجود داشته باشد، فکر می کنید معلم زبان شما بهتر است چه کاری انجام دهد؟ می توانید بیش از یک پاسخ را انتخاب کنید.

Teacher should mark all errors

معلم باید تمام اشتباهها را علامت بزند

Teacher should mark all major errors but not minor ones

معلم باید تمام اشتباههای اصلی و مهم را علامت بزند ولی اشتباههای جزئی را نه

Teacher should mark most of the major errors, but not necessarily all of them

معلم باید اکثر اشتباههای اصلی و مهم را علامت بزند اما نه لزوما همه آنها را

Teacher should mark only a few of the major errors

معلم باید تنها تعداد اندکی از اشتباههای اصلی و مهم را علامت بزند

Teacher should mark only the errors that interfere with communicating your ideas

معلم تنها باید اشتباههایی را علامت بزند که مانع از انتقال منظور شما میشوند.

Teacher should mark no errors and respond only to the ideas and content

معلم نباید هیچ اشتباهی را علامت بزند و تنها به افکار و محتوای متن واکنش نشان دهد.

Please explain the reason for your choice(s).

لطفا دلیل خود را برای گزینه های فوق بنویسید

(2) The following sentences all have the same error and the teacher has given a different type of feedback for each. For each sentence circle the number that best describes the usefulness of the feedback for an intermediate to advanced EFL student.

جملات زیر همگی اشتباه یکسانی دارند و معلم از انواع متفاوت برخورد با خطا استفاده کرده است. برای هر جمله دور عددی که به نظر تان به بهترین شکل کارایی برخورد را توصیف می کند را دایره بکشید.

1= not useful at all 2= not useful 3= doesn't matter 4= quite useful 5= very useful

۱- اصلا مفید نیست ۲- مفید نیست ۳- فرقی نمی کند ۴- مفید است ۵- خیلی مفید است

- Look at unit 3 in your book
- a) Since I arrived in Victoria, I am very lonely. 1 2 3 4 5
- b) Since I arrived in Victoria, I am very lonely. 1 2 3 4 5
- c) Since I arrived in Victoria, I ~~am~~ ^{have been (wrong tense)} very lonely. 1 2 3 4 5
- d) Since I arrived in Victoria, I ~~am~~ ^{have been} very lonely. 1 2 3 4 5
- e) Since I arrived in Victoria, I ~~am~~ ^{wrong tense} very lonely. 1 2 3 4 5
- f) Since I arrived in Victoria, I am very lonely. 1 2 3 4 5
- g) Since I arrived in Victoria, I ~~am~~ ^{I'm sorry to hear that} very lonely. 1 2 3 4 5

(3) Please explain the reasons for your choices for each type of feedback in item 2.

لطفا دلایل خود را برای انتخاب هر یک از انواع برخورد با اشتباه در سؤال قبل را توضیح دهید

a- Clues or directions on how to fix an error (the teacher gives clues or directions on how a student can correct his/her work)

سرنخ یا آدرسهایی در مورد چگونگی تصحیح اشتباه (معلم به شاگرد آدرس را برای تصحیح اشتباه می گوید)

Please explain the reason for your choice.

لطفا دلیل خود را بنویسید

b- Error identification (the teacher points out where the errors occur, but no errors are corrected)

شناسایی اشتباه (معلم نشان میدهد اشتباه کجاست اما آن را تصحیح نمی کند)

Please explain the reason for your choice.

لطفا دلیل خود را بنویسید

c- Correction with comments (the teacher corrects errors and makes comments)

تصحیح همراه با توضیح (معلم خطا را تصحیح کرده و روی آن نظر می دهد)

Please explain the reason for your choice.

لطفا دلیل خود را بنویسید

d- Teacher correction (the teacher corrects errors)

تصحیح معلم (معلم اشتباه را تصحیح می کند)

Please explain the reason for your choice.

لطفا دلیل خود را بنویسید

e- **Commentary** (the teacher gives feedback by making comments about errors, but no errors are corrected)

توضیح (معلم تنها درباره اشتباه توضیح می دهد اما آن را تصحیح نمی کند)

Please explain the reason for your choice.

لطفا دلیل خود را بنویسید

f- No feedback on an error

هیچ برخوردی با اشتباه نمی شود

Please explain the reason for your choice.

لطفا دلیل خود را بنویسید

g- A personal comment on the content (the teacher gives feedback by making comments on the ideas or content, but no errors are corrected)

نظر شخصی در خصوص محتوا (معلم نظر خود را در خصوص ایده و محتوا میدهد اما هیچ اشتباهی تصحیح نمی شود)

Please explain the reason for your choice.

لطفا دلیل خود را بنویسید

(4) If you repeat an error in a writing more than once do you think it is useful for your teacher to mark it every time it occurs?

اگر اشتباهی را بیش از یک بار در نوشته خود تکرار کنید ، فکر می کنید مفید است معلم شما هر دفعه آن را علامت بزند.

Yes

No

Please explain the reason for your choice.

لطفا دلیل خود را بنویسید
