

Students' Beliefs Toward the Effectiveness of Receiving Written Corrective Feedback for Developing L2 Writing Skills

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Abstract

This study investigated students' beliefs and preferences regarding written corrective feedback (WCF) in an EFL environment. More specifically, it examined Saudi students' perceptions of the utility and effect of WCF in enhancing their language skills at KAU. The study used a mixed-method research paradigm: a qualitative part, where data were collected from semi-structured interviews, and a quantitative part, which involved a closed-ended questionnaire to investigate participants' beliefs regarding WCF and how it is used in EFL writing classes. The results can assist language teachers and curriculum designers in adapting feedback systems suitable to students' expectations and learning styles. Finally, the study aims to bridge the gap between the current instructional approaches and student preferences.

Keywords: EFL classroom, learner belief, written corrective feedback, error correction, L2 writing, accuracy development

1. Introduction

Writing is regarded as the most challenging skill for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL; Xin, 2007). It is considered difficult even for international classes in which students practice the language more frequently (Shapo, Walter, & Fajans, 1995). More specifically, previous studies have shown that writing is the most challenging language skill for Saudi learners (AbuSeileek, 2006). Moreover, of all the skills, writing has been found to be the most neglected (Coker & Ritchey, 2015). Some researchers have noted that learners' chances of success are shaped by their skills and the beliefs and objectives they carry into their studies (Elliot & Dweck, 2005). The literature suggests that beliefs influence learner behavior to a significant degree (Horwitz, 1988) and influence both the process and outcome of second-language (L2) learning (Ellis, 2008). Thus, understanding learner beliefs provides insights for instructional intervention approaches in the classroom to prevent the learning process from being hampered and negatively affecting student learning.

Students' beliefs about learning a second or foreign language may relate to the kind of language being studied, its difficulty, the significance of various teaching strategies, and how long it takes to learn a language. According to previous investigations, these beliefs can affect learners' motivation, experiences, and behavior in the classroom and their attitudes toward language and learning (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). Learners' beliefs have been found to significantly affect language learning, outcomes, and learner behavior (Ellis, 2008; Horwitz, 1988). Context, culture, past experiences, and other individual factors can all influence one's thinking and beliefs (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). Nevertheless, Richardson (1996) defines beliefs as "psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true" (p. 102). According to Arnold (1999), beliefs are strong reality filters. Researchers have long recognized that learner beliefs influence language acquisition, outcomes, and behavior, which has led to investigations into the context-specificity of these beliefs. Moreover, several researchers suggested investigating beliefs in various settings to determine the belief's context-specificity (Tanaka, 2000).

2. Research Problem

Existing research on student perspectives and preferences for using WCF to improve writing abilities has yielded useful insights into various areas. A void remains in the research landscape, however, concerning students' beliefs and preferences about using WCF to build L2 writing skills and their preferences for WCF strategies

practiced in class. This distinction is best described as a limitation in the qualitative examination of student-centered approaches. While previous studies have investigated student preferences, they have mostly been quantitative. Similarly, in regard to contextual variability, previous research has primarily focused on student perspectives and preferences within certain educational environments. Even though there is little evidence linking written corrective feedback (WCF) perception to context-specific variants, it is unclear whether EFL and ESL learners differs in how they perceive WCF. Furthermore, researchers recommend that beliefs be investigated in different contexts to determine context-specificity (Benson & Lor, 1999; Tanaka, 2000).

According to Abraham and Vann (1987), learners' philosophy shapes their language-learning practice. Their philosophy is practiced "in observable (and unobservable) strategies" and "directly influence[s] the degree of successful [sic] learners to achieve" (p. 96). Additionally, learner beliefs can affect teaching practices (Borg, 2003), and unrealistic beliefs about language learning might obstruct the educational process (Sawir, 2002). Therefore, the current study was motivated based on the importance of this topic for the EFL classroom and the vast number of standpoints from researchers and theorists. This is in addition to the findings of previous studies (AbuSeileek, 2006; Ellis, 2008; Horwitz, 1988). Furthermore, current literature yields inconclusive results concerning students' perceptions, beliefs, and preferences about WCF. These disparities prompted the current investigation. The current study explores the often-overlooked beliefs regarding WCF in the Saudi EFL context. Focusing on students at KAU in Saudi Arabia, the study investigates the importance students assign to WCF and how learners' beliefs about WCF affect their academic achievement and development. In addition, it sets out to provide L2 writing teachers with a paradigm to help improve their instruction to better suit the needs of students through understanding students' beliefs.

3. Research Questions

- 1) What are the EFL students' beliefs regarding WCF as an instructional development method for writing skills?
- 2) What is the correlation, if any, between student beliefs regarding WCF and their language proficiency level?
- 3) How do Saudi students perceive and respond to written feedback?

4. Literature Review

WCF, or teachers' written comments on a variety of aspects of their students' writing, has been an important topic in L2 writing studies for decades (Ferris, 2006; Truscott, 1996; Abdelrahman, 2016; Zheng & Yu, 2018; Albogami, 2020; Alharbi, 2020). There has been a debate over the function of WCF (Ferris, 2010; Krashen, 1984; Truscott, 1996). Truscott argues against giving language learners WCF on theoretical, pedagogical, and empirical grounds. He maintains that teachers' belief in error correction as a straightforward process of information transfer overlooks the complexities of interlanguage development. He also questions the possibility of timing WCF according to learners' readiness, reflecting Krashen's third hypothesis. Moreover, he expresses concerns regarding the effectiveness of CF across different error categories, claiming that such learning could result in "pseudo-learning" and thereby casting doubt on its usefulness. His arguments have been criticized, however, with researchers such as Ferris (1999) pushing for more research before making definitive claims. WCF debates continue to encompass theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical aspects.

Given the diverse theories of second-language acquisition (SLA) that address the role of error correction in language learning (Ferris, 2010). The increasing theoretical and educational role of SLA research in the classroom has prompted WCF research to continue to expand. WCF research explores the theory of language acquisition. While theories derived from Chomsky's universal grammar (Schwartz, 1993) reject corrective feedback, cognitive interactionist theory claims that learners benefit from error correction. WCF research is guided by practical and pedagogical concerns, such as the role of WCF in classroom discourse and the effectiveness of L2 learning (Nassaji & Fotos, 2010). However, many researchers question WCF's ability to improve L2 writing (Ferris, 2010).

Truscott's work has questioned the role of error correction in L2 writing instruction, which has sparked discussions on WCF. Grammar correction, according to Truscott, is time-consuming and impractical, contradicts SLA theories, and has little potential benefit for writers. However, his remarks have received pushback from other researchers. Despite disagreeing that Truscott's criticism of WCF ignores numerous studies that demonstrate its efficacy, Ferris (2004) acknowledges that Truscott highlights the difficulties and practical features of WCF. Nevertheless, various studies have investigated WCF and demonstrated that effectively designing and implementing WCF can enhance learners' performance on particular grammar structures (e.g., Shintani, Ellis, & Suzuki, 2014). Recent research includes Shintani et al. (2014), who investigated the effect of direct and metalinguistic feedback and reported that the former had a more significant effect than the latter. On

the other hand, Bitchener (2008) found that direct corrective feedback (written and oral) improved performance, as students who received direct corrective feedback and written or oral metalinguistic feedback outperformed a control group that received no input. Abualsha'r and AbuSeileek (2014) found that students who received feedback delivered via computer on the types of errors they made while writing essays outperformed those who did not receive corrective feedback. Moreover, Mawlawi Diab (2015) found that direct error correction improved student performance over metalinguistic feedback. He reported that students who received both direct error correction and metalinguistic feedback outscored those who received only metalinguistic feedback. For instance, learners who received direct error correction produced fewer pronoun and lexical errors.

Truscott's skepticism persists, however, despite growing evidence supporting WCF. Most research that supports WCF has typically involved small samples and has primarily concentrated on basic English grammar principles, such as the past tense and articles. Furthermore, there are many contrasts in WCF research. To illustrate, whereas some studies have shown a significant benefit of indirect WCF that is concerned only with grammatical errors (e.g., Ferris, 2006), others have noted equivalent or even more positive outcomes in detecting and correcting errors provided by direct WCF (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2008). Likewise, multiple studies have indicated that WCF focusing on a single linguistic feature is highly effectual (e.g., Yang & Lyster, 2010). On the other hand, several studies (e.g., Evans et al., 2010) have encouraged the use of WCF for various language-related issues. Recent research has focused on the efficacy of WCF, with greater focus on contextual analysis (Ferris, 2010). Contextual variables are rarely highlighted in experimental studies due to their tendency to produce generic outcomes. Goldstein (2001) asserts that "the (WCF) research has been largely non-contextual and non-social" (p. 77).

The three types of contextual variables in WCF are learner variables, methodological variables, and situational variables (Evans, Hartshorn, McCollum, & Wolfersberger, 2010). Learner variables include individual characteristics such as L1 background, perspectives on WCF, and learning style. Seedhouse (2004) distinguishes "form-and-accuracy contexts" from "meaning-and-fluency contexts" (p. 142). According to his research, error correction will likely ensue from form-and-accuracy contexts. The situational variables may be the most significant but least investigated variables. Although previous work has shown that WCF benefits foreign language, L2, and immersion settings, researchers are still unsure to what extent situational circumstances can moderate the effectiveness of WCF in different contexts. Moreover, little is known about the relationship between situational, methodological, and learner variables or how these variables, collectively or individually, affect the usefulness of feedback. For instance, curriculum design and the number of students may limit how WCF activities are carried out. However, their effects may be closely tied to learner variables. Motivation and other learner variables, such as anxiety, self-esteem, learning styles, and cultural sensitivity, are dynamic and influenced by personal emotions and instructional situations. Han and Hyland (2015) discovered that individual and contextual factors influence how EFL learners from Mainland China perceive WCF. These results suggest that students and teachers should come to a shared understanding of the objective of WCF and adopt a collaborative approach to feedback to guarantee successful communication and alignment of students' preferences, eventually helping the learning process. Although previous studies have highlighted learners' positive attitudes toward WCF, they have also shown that students hold preferences and opinions regarding different types of WCF. For instance, a number of studies have demonstrated that learners favor a grammar-based approach, which calls for accuracy-focused WCF (e.g., Radecki & Swales, 1988). Other research indicates that learners favor content-based correction, where the focus is on the writing content alongside grammar errors (e.g., Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010).

Given the findings discussed above, the current study investigated students' beliefs and preferences regarding WCF in an EFL environment. Previous research on students' perceptions of WCF has primarily focused on ESL classrooms in English-speaking nations, where language learning tends to be both meaning- and form-focused, as it takes place in environments in which students use English beyond the classroom setting. This stands in contrast to the EFL context in Saudi Arabia, where students have relatively little chance to use English outside the classroom. Moreover, in light of Saudi Vision 2030, which places emphasis on the development of education as a whole including, the curriculum, teacher, and instruction methods, this study provides a better understanding of Saudi students' perceptions of WCF, which has important pedagogical implications for language instruction. With this program, the Ministry of Education began teaching English according to new study plans aimed at improving educational outcomes, developing the capabilities of male and female students early, and preparing them to achieve the goals of the Kingdom's Vision 2030. With these changing circumstances in English-language learning in Saudi Arabia, a more in-depth evaluation of learner beliefs regarding L2 development strategies such as WCF is required to establish interventions more tailored, engaging, and relevant

to learners' needs.

Studies in the Saudi Arabian context have addressed various themes, including instructors' feedback approaches, pedagogical practices and beliefs alignment, student preferences, and the potential effect of WCF on students' language acquisition. While some studies have used larger samples, they frequently lack a thorough examination of student preferences, particularly among females. Furthermore, it appears that in some cases, learners were confined to responding to a limited number of survey items (11 items), limiting their ability to adequately express their ideas regarding their specific needs and beliefs of WCF. The present study seeks to fill a void in the literature by more deeply exploring student preferences, particularly female students. It takes a mixed-method approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to fully examine the topic, adding to a more holistic understanding of student beliefs and preferences regarding WCF.

5. Methods

This descriptive study focused on investigating EFL students' beliefs regarding WCF in writing courses. According to Williams (2007), descriptive research is a study intended to describe, explain, and interpret the data collected. This study employed qualitative methods to describe students' beliefs on feedback in EFL writing classes. The qualitative data were needed to understand better learners' beliefs about using teachers' feedback in the classroom setting. The qualitative approach was also used to obtain an in-depth understanding of the participants' perspectives (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2017).

5.1 Participants

The study was conducted in an English Language Institute (ELI) at King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. ELI offers an intensive preparatory year English language program for newly enrolled KAU students. The program is divided into tracks, such as science, arts, and general tracks, with varying exit competence levels and a curriculum to meet the English-language needs of each track. Two sampling procedures, convenience and purposive, were selected as the most appropriate strategies for recruiting participants. Convenience sampling is a useful and favored method in L2 research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Cohen et al., 2017). Ten female students who were enrolled in the same program at KAU completed the interview consent form to participate in an online interview.

5.2 Research Tool

The interview questions were adopted from Alkhatib's (2015) semi-structured interview for students. Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain an in-depth understanding of the research phenomena. All interviews lasted 20 to 30 min and were audio-recorded. Subsequently, the sample for the qualitative phase was identified using saturation, characterized as "data adequacy," which is vital to produce ideal qualitative results (Morse, 1995). As a result of theoretical saturation, the decision was made to discontinue interviewing participants, because no new information emerged. The interview procedure was divided into two domains:

- 1) The preparatory sections provided background information about the participants, the objective, and the aim of the research.
- 2) The participants were asked about their beliefs regarding WCF, including attitudes toward WCF, the purpose of WCF, and the amount of WCF to be provided.

5.3 Data Analysis Methods

The interview transcription was coded using the NVivo14 software, and a thematic analysis using both inductive and deductive methods was carried out to reveal underlying themes and subthemes.

6. Results

6.1 Theme 1: Beliefs of EFL Students Regarding Written Corrective Feedback as an Instructional Development Method for Writing Skills

This theme is one of the primary themes of the study questions and addresses the first RQ. The study findings regarding WCF beliefs formed by student WCF preferences, skill improvement, strategies to improve, usefulness, and preferences for feedback explicitness were clustered together to construct an understanding of student beliefs regarding using WCF as an instructional development method for writing skills.

6.1.1 Feedback Preferences Related to Focus

In general, most (six) students' answers suggest that their teacher should focus on the major mistakes and structure of the text. For example, S1 expressed a desire for error discussion and feedback that targets the major errors in the text:

I'd prefer that she focused on the major mistakes and write feedback on them and the other things minor mistakes. I'd prefer that she discussed them with me so I can pay attention to those things. (S1)

Moreover, the students revealed a shared belief regarding what errors should be corrected. The errors students consider most important for teachers to address are primarily grammar and spelling errors:

Mostly grammar and spelling. (S1)

Other preferences include punctuation, paragraph structure, and word frequency:

First of all, spelling; second, punctuation, titles for the paragraph—I see these things as being important. (S8)

Furthermore, the students expressed mixed attitudes about the error focus of WCF in terms of the positive and negative aspects of their writing composition. Some (five) expressed their preference for the teacher to only focus on the negative aspects of the writing when giving them WCF. Arguing in favor of such an approach, they viewed it as a way of learning and improving. In addition, others said that they benefited from feedback that was focused on the negative aspect of the writing; however, they did not seem to find justification for feedback on the positive aspect of their writing:

Yes, of course, focus on it, and possibly it might be useful, especially if there's something that one doesn't know, because the mistake is the thing that I'm going to benefit from—as well as the positive things! The mistake is the original problem, and I want to fix it. (S2)

Some students said that while they do not mind receiving feedback focused on the negative aspect of the writing in their first draft, in the second draft they want to receive feedback on both negative and positive aspects.

6.1.2 Effects of Written Corrective Feedback

Some of the students reported a strong negative emotional reaction to feedback that focuses only on the negative aspect of the writing composition, explaining that such feedback affects their interest in the course and motivation. They argued in favor of receiving feedback on the writing composition's negative and positive aspects:

For sure, it's important that she also tells me the positive aspects of my writing, because it motivates me. (S1)

Moreover, the students described the effect of receiving WCF on motivation and learning enthusiasm. They revealed a shared positive belief regarding the effect of receiving WCF.

6.1.3 Skill Improvement

The interviewees highlighted specific changes and improvements in their writing skills. The aspects of their writing that the students believed had improved included writing speed, structure, grammar, sentence construction, vocabulary, and spelling:

In terms of grammar, constructing sentences. (S5)

6.1.4. Strategy to Improve Writing Skill

The different coping strategies adopted by the students to enhance their writing skills were evident from the interview data, including suggestions to the teacher to help the students improve their writing skills and self-practice strategies. A number of students expressed different recommendations for teachers that they believe may help them improve their writing skills, such as providing examples and ideas to assist in understanding and preparing for the task ahead of time, a revision process, and a focus on writing more than grammar. This assistance was considered valuable, especially for students who require further instruction and practice to improve their writing skills. Moreover, the students reported that writing-focused activities and dialogues were seen as ways to enhance writing skills. Nevertheless, the students expressed that the course activities should be increased:

She can help us with revision and focus more on writing rather than on grammar. This is something I feel I'm missing. I want the focus of teaching to be on writing rather than grammar, , increase the course activities, such as good dialogues. (S2)

In addition, the students favor using books instead of iPads and being given more homework, tasks regarding writing, and even basic activities such as repetitions and questions, whether the students understand or not. Furthermore, while some students favor collaborative writing with the teacher and found it to be a helpful learning method, other students expressed a need for more independent writing activities, arguing that

collaborative writing exercises in which the teacher writes with student input may not be as beneficial. Furthermore, the students voiced their need for opportunities to write in class, for receiving immediate feedback, and for a more balanced approach to language study throughout the term, with more focus on writing in the course material:

The most important thing is that they dedicate some time to writing in the lecture. (S7)

Nonetheless, the students stated a desire for immediate feedback via pop-up tests and corrective meetings, as this learning method assists them in efficiently storing and learning from their mistakes:

She gives us three days a week to do a pop-up test that she corrects in the same class ... or a meeting in Zoom. Honestly, this is the best way—to write and she corrects for us at the same time. This helps a lot, however, telling us to write something then, later, memorize it and write it no. (S10)

Another suggestion was to organize one or two writing classes per week and to break away from the standard, sometimes repetitive, study methods by incorporating games into language learning:

Organize one or two lectures per week and take a topic that's related to the units and write about it. (S7)

The students reported several self-practices strategies to improve their writing skills, including using a word puzzle or word game app to enhance spelling and writing skills:

Maybe ... yes, I used an app on my phone. I forgot the name, but it was green. But basically, you connect the letters in the word. It was very useful for me, especially in levels one and two. It was helpful in writing and very entertaining; it improved my spelling. (S10)

6.1.5 Usefulness

The students revealed a shared belief regarding the usefulness of WCF. All 10 students consider WCF to be a useful tool for enhancing writing skills, avoiding error repetition, and maintaining consistency of information:

Because the information will stick with me more, I won't make the same mistake again ... My level will change. (S2)

It is worth noting that in several cases the students' appreciation for the usefulness of WCF was linked to clear and comprehensive feedback:

If she wrote me a full note for feedback, yes, it would benefit me and improve my writing, so later on, I don't repeat the same mistake. (S1)

6.1.6 Explicitness of Written Corrective Feedback

As reported previously, most (six) students prefer the feedback to focus on the major mistakes. Nevertheless, the data highlight a need for explicit feedback, as some students (four) favor comprehensive WCF, "preferring all error in the text to be corrected," because it enables them to learn more:

To mark all types of errors, because this will be better for me—I'll learn more like this. (S4)

Others favor comprehensive corrections but indicated that it may be challenging for the teacher to correct all the flaws in the writing if there are numerous errors. Interestingly, the data indicated a nuanced approach to feedback, implying that different errors may necessitate varying levels of depth in the feedback offered. For example, S7 expressed a preference for detailed explicit feedback on errors related to structure and suggested that spelling mistakes should be addressed generally:

She doesn't have to mark all the mistakes; for example, if I have spelling mistakes, she'll just tell me in general that I have spelling mistakes, and I'll go back to the text and see my mistakes ... but if I have an error in my structure ... she has to explain it to me. (S7)

On the other hand, some students expressed a desire for feedback that encourages autonomy and self-guided error correction, resulting in a more self-reliant and empowered learning experience. In such feedback, the teacher merely draws a line to highlight an error, allowing the student to refer to it and address it themselves:

I prefer that she draws a line [to highlight the error] for me, and then I'll check it myself. (S3)

6.2 Theme 2: Perception and Response of Written Feedback by Saudi Students

This theme reflects the second primary theme of the study questions and addresses the third RQ. The study revealed that Saudi students have diverse perceptions and responses to written comments. Accessibility, feedback type, purpose of WCF, student practices, teacher practices, and comprehension of WCF were all combined to develop an understanding of Saudi students' perceptions and responses to written feedback.

6.2.1 Students' accessibility to WCF

Most (eight) of the students indicated that they have access to WCF. Moreover, the students reported that teachers were highly cooperative in offering feedback, demonstrating the teachers' readiness to satisfy the students' preferences and demands for feedback delivery:

They were very cooperative with us—they even told us that if you don't want the correction to be on paper, just send it via email. Our teachers used to write in the paper—some of them would take them and correct them, others would tell us to write them in Word and send them to them, and they would correct them and put the feedback on the side. (S4)

In addition, the students reported that their teachers allowed them to raise questions or seek clarification and encourage two-way communication. Furthermore, the interview data highlight that teacher feedback depends on the teacher (i.e., it differs from teacher to teacher) and offers insights into the variation in feedback techniques among teachers.

6.2.2 Comprehension of Written Corrective Feedback

Almost all of the students (nine) reported that they understood their teachers' WCF. Nevertheless, the interview findings indicate that the learning environment influences how efficiently feedback is received and processed, emphasizing the significance of considering individual preferences and sensitivities while offering feedback in a group context. Privacy concerns include feeling uneasy about corrections being made in front of peers due to shyness and the stress of being corrected in a social setting. Furthermore, public corrections can influence students' emotions, perhaps leading to emotions of embarrassment or anxiety as well as difficulty understanding corrections when given in front of others. The students highlighted these kinds of concerns during the interviews:

No, honestly, because sometimes she corrects me in front of my classmates, and I don't like to be corrected in front of others. I get shy and stressed about it and don't understand the corrections. (S3)

While some feedback is clear and understandable, the students sometimes struggle to comprehend the meaning of the feedback. This highlights the necessity for feedback to be clear and easily understandable by the student. In addition, open communication between the learner and the teacher can help clarify any uncertainty and ensure that feedback is a positive learning tool:

Yes, and if I did not [understand the teacher feedback], it's okay. I can go and ask her. (S9)

6.2.3 Feedback Type

According to the data, the students had different perspectives on different forms of feedback. While most of the students (six) favored uncoded WCF, the remaining students (four) preferred coded WCF, and only a few students (two) selected both:

(C) [By showing where the error is and providing codes/symbols] Because I'm already used to coding with my teacher, she will use a red pen and (A) [By showing where the error is and providing the correct] uncoded. (S8)

Furthermore, some students indicated a preference for obtaining comments directly on their written work, whether in physical form or online on the same document. One student explained that this method allows for greater clarity and connection between the comments and the precise areas of the text that require fixing. It assists learners in comprehending the context of the feedback. Furthermore, comments given directly on the paper or document are more likely to stay in her mind, making it easier to remember and learn from her mistakes. Having comments on the same paper or document allows her to refer to it easily:

Yes, no external note, so I can go back to it and understand my mistakes ... The best way is for the feedback to be written on the paper ... If the comments weren't on my paper, I wouldn't be able to connect the dots between them and my writing ... because it isn't clear to me—like, if she draws the line and shows me this is the mistake ... it will stick in my mind: "I did this before. It was a mistake, so now I will do something different." (S7)

S7's viewpoint emphasizes the benefits of integrating feedback on the same page or paper, since it improves clarity, connection, and the student's memory of the feedback. Nonetheless, some of the students want to receive feedback in the form of written remarks and oral conversations, indicating a need for complete feedback on all parts of the learning process.

6.2.4 Purpose of Written Corrective Feedback

WCF serves several functions in the context of language learning and writing education. It is used to achieve

various essential educational goals and to improve students' learning experience. The students revealed a shared belief regarding the purpose of WCF. All 10 students believed that their teachers' feedback was intended to enhance students' language skills and competency:

Why do they give me feedback? Because it will help me to develop my language. (S3)

Furthermore, the students expressed that recognizing and correcting errors helps them identify and understand mistakes so that they can avoid repeating them:

So we know what mistake we've made, and so we don't repeat the same mistake. (S4)

The interview data emphasizes the value of written feedback for reference, as a learning tool, and for information retention, preventing mistakes from being repeated and improving writing skills. The importance of feedback for students seeking explanations and confirmation of their comprehension is reflected in S8's statement:

I need to know that the thing that I'm not sure of is right or not, and I need to go back to it and revise it a lot and focus on it a lot and put more effort into it like any other subject. (S8)

6.2.5 Student Practice After Receiving Feedback

The interview data indicates that the students review their teachers' comments and feedback to ensure that they do not repeat the same errors. They put the feedback into their notes before writing the next task:

Because even if she just wrote the correction, I'll go back to the grammar book and check my mistakes. (S1)

Nevertheless, S4 said that she routinely goes back over her writing, sees the errors, and works to correct them:

Sometimes ... often I go to my old writing, and I write a new piece, and I look at the mistakes that I've made and see where the errors are and try to correct them and never do them again. (S4)

6.2.6 Teacher Practice

According to the students' interview data, how the feedback is given to the students in class varies based on how they submit the assignment. For example, if the task was submitted electronically on Blackboard, the teacher would have access and review the assignment digitally:

If it's online, she'll correct it, then sometimes she'll post notes for us or send us a message about it on the Blackboard, and we'll see it, and we can discuss it with her in class. We say to her, "Why is this wrong?" She explains to us, and we greatly benefit from this. (S6)

Other students reported that the teacher takes one student's paper, shows it to the whole class, and then highlights the common mistakes students make so that everybody can benefit from them and avoid making them again. Furthermore, the students reported receiving guided writing practice, as the teacher provides students with writing topics related to their course content, and then the students write independently in class and receive feedback in class:

First, she gave us examples and explained them to us, then she told us to write in our own way in English, meaning on our own level, and then we showed the teacher, and she corrected our writing and told us what the mistakes were so that we could learn. (S5)

The data indicate variation in teacher approaches when giving feedback, as some teachers are flexible with students' preferences, while others have limited opportunities for in-depth discussion and feedback. Overall, however, the teachers aim to improve students' writing skills using independent writing practice and immediate feedback and discussion. The focus of the WCF covers a variety of writing-related aspects, including vocabulary, structure, grammar, and punctuation. The data show that the teachers pay close attention to spelling and punctuation problems in students' writing. They identify and correct everything. Moreover, the teachers' focus in giving WCF is on the form and structure of written assignments. They offer comments on the paragraph structure, concept transitions, and general coherence:

She focuses on spelling, the way you write the story, punctuation. (S10)

Conversely, S6 and S9 stated:

She focuses on the major things, and if I want to talk in class with her, she'll tell me, "This point is wrong, and this point is wrong." (S6)

Moreover, the data indicate that teachers' feedback focuses on the use of vocabulary and grammar. Six students noted that the focus of WCF is grammar. Teachers help students improve their sentence structure and general grammar by correcting grammar mistakes, explaining, and providing feedback:

The main focus is on grammar and vocabulary. (S2)

The students reported receiving oral feedback during lectures. In some cases, this is the only type of feedback students receive:

Yes, during the lecture only ... orally. (S2)

However, others reported receiving written feedback in many forms, such as notes on student papers, red or green ink corrections, or written comments on tasks:

The mistake will be in red, and the good things will be in green color, and then she'll ask us later why we have these spelling mistakes.(S8)

Some students, however, complained that writing tasks were skipped or were not the primary emphasis of the course, since reading and listening were the daily activities during classes. Conversely, some students reported other practices in class related to writing activities: for example, the teacher practice assignment preparation where she notifies the student of future writing assignments via messaging systems such as WhatsApp, allowing the student to prepare.

The natural way things go is, a day or two before, the teacher will tell us in WhatsApp ... that we have such and such—oh, memorize it or read or try to practice the story you're going to write tomorrow, something like this. (S10)

7. Conclusion

This study investigated the beliefs held by EFL students regarding the use of WCF at the ELI, KAU, Jeddah. The findings revealed that Saudi ELI students have a favorable view of WCF in their EFL writing. These findings are consistent with earlier research (Abdelrahman, 2016). In the present study, student interviews revealed that if the student did not comprehend the WCF, they requested clarification from the teacher. The data also revealed students' favorable attitudes toward learning and skill development, implying their readiness for learning. This finding is in accord with Shaughnessy (1977), that learners can only learn all the components of writing when they are developmentally ready. When students are not prepared to improve, teachers' feedback may be ineffective. Moreover, Hyland (2010) points out that WCF is most effective when students are willing and motivated to interact with it and genuinely want to improve their performance. The present study data shows that students were responsive and interactive to WCF they received. In addition, considered WCF as a means of improving their writing skills and believed that feedback would help them identify errors and prevent them in the future. They said that receiving feedback was their right and part of the teacher's obligation.

This cross-sectional study collected beliefs at a single point in time, perhaps missing changes over time. A longitudinal approach may reveal whether beliefs remain constant or change. Future research could implement a longitudinal approach to observe beliefs that shift over time. This method would provide insights into the changing nature of people's beliefs about WCF. Furthermore, the study was envisioned as including both male and female subjects. Challenges in recruiting male volunteers prevented this, however. Comparative research between genders or different situations might help researchers better understand and gain knowledge of the aspects that influence WCF beliefs. This might include investigating possible differences in beliefs among male and female participants.

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Authors' contributions

Dr. Hanadi A. Khadawardi and Mrs. Shaymaa A. Al-Ahmadi were responsible for study design, data collecting, writing, and revising.

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Obtained.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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No additional data are available.

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