

Error-correcting Adult Learners' Writing: Quantitative Interpretations of their Preferences and Perceptions

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Abstract

Current knowledge on the efficacy of teacher error and grammar correction in second language writing classes is controversial and inconclusive, mostly because of the lack of quantitative studies. 'Bottom-up' studies researching the views on learners' preferences on if and how they prefer their written errors to be corrected are therefore clearly necessary. Perceptions and attitudes towards written error correction may substantially vary according to learners' previous schooling experiences, cultural values and other socio-educational factors. This quantitative study therefore specifically focuses on urban-based, middle-class Sudanese learners of English. This cohort of learners clearly favours the detailed correction of surface errors, particularly of grammar, lexis and spelling; they appreciate explicit written suggestions and corrections. Slightly more than half of the learners want their teacher to correct errors by writing the solution above, but only around a third said this technique is adopted. A significantly larger proportion of higher-level learners indicate this is not sufficiently done by their teachers; but lower-level learners' requests for this are not significantly different from what is delivered by teachers. Slightly more than a third of the learners want the teacher to underline the error with a code-indication written above, and half said their teachers use this correcting technique. Two thirds of the learners want all surface errors corrected, big and small, even if there are many. Most learners said they carefully read the teacher's corrections and comments on their written work. Almost two thirds of the learners choose underlining the error with correction written above as their preferred correction technique. However, a quarter of all learners prefer being referred to specific pages of the course book during written error correction; lower-level learners consider this to be more important than higher-level learners. Only around one learner in ten considers the teacher underlining the error only, or to only comment about content as a 'very good' correcting technique.

Keywords: written corrective feedback, adult learners, Arab cultural influence and perceptions, linguistic quantitative study, bottom-up research.

Introduction

Educators, albeit to a different degree, often feel the need to supply written corrective feedback (WCF) to assist learners' language learning (Brown 2007; Casanave, 2007; Goldstein, 2008). Recent studies are tending to favour the judicious use of WCF. For example, Polio (2012) argues that despite differences in various teaching approaches, written error correction could be effective in certain conditions. Other examples include its benefit during synthesis writing (Zhang, 2013), and collaborative writing and feedback (Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012). Collaborative writing, done mainly in pairs and with WCF on their writing, gives learners the opportunity to scaffold each other's contributions and knowledge (*Ibid*, 2012). Another ongoing trend is challenging the assumption that WCF is an exclusively posthumous task applied to the learner's final text. Using a multistage writing task, Hanaoka and Izumi (2012) examined if learners successfully 'noticed' their issues and corresponding solutions during written output, and if they incorporated them in subsequent revisions.

But enormous differences among views on the importance of WCF in the EFL class have been highly evident, with certain proponents still emphasizing that it is a negative practice to be abandoned. Some researchers have also taken into account the teachers' (e.g. Jordan & Kedrowicz, 2010; Montgomery, 2007) or learners' perspectives (e.g. Zhou, 2009; Oladejo, 1993; Leki, 1991) when discussing WCF, incorporating and contrasting their respective views with those proposed by academics in the field. This exploratory study takes a 'bottom up' approach, including learners' perspectives by directly collecting information from them about the writing process, and their ideas on the utility of WCF and how it should be conducted. Further to the pragmatic use of knowing and understanding learners' preferences and perceptions of WCF, this study may help in giving an additional and highly relevant perspective in the broader, debatable case for or against WCF.

The case against written corrective feedback (WCF)

The case against WCF continues to present times. Indeed, Truscott (2010, p.329) succinctly expresses "...the conclusion that correction is a failure and has no place in second language writing classes". Active debate on the benefits and damage attributed to WCF has raged on for several years, particularly since Truscott (1996, p.328) emphatically proposed his case against grammar correction in the L2 writing class as follows:

"(a) research evidence shows that grammar correction is ineffective; (b) this lack of effectiveness is exactly what should be expected, given the nature of the correction process and the nature of language learning; (c) grammar correction has significant harmful effects; and (d) the various arguments offered for continuing it all lack merit".

Several studies leading up to Truscott's (1996) explicit stand against WCF had also suggested that this practice, administered to second language writing students, actually discouraged them, and was even harmful for the development of their writing abilities. Some examples of this research include: Knoblauch & Brannon, 1981; Krashen, 1984; Semke, 1984; Hillocks 1986; Robb *et al.* 1986; Kepner, 1991; Sheppard 1992. The dilemma on WCF continues to the present day among researchers (e.g. Polio *et al.*, 1998; Gray, 2004; Truscott, 2010) and

practitioners alike. For example, with university ESL students, Liu (2008, p.65) showed that "Overall results imply that providing corrective feedback on students' writing is not a sufficient way to improve students' accuracy in writing". Truscott and Yi-Ping Hsu (2008) also showed that WCF did not make any sustained difference with the amount of written errors produced by learners.

The case for written corrective feedback (WCF)

A large number of researchers and educators have consistently reiterated the benefits of WCF. Many researchers feel that WCF is central, indeed essential for writing tasks. For example, Williams (2003) considers written feedback to be an essential aspect of any English language writing course, especially true now with the predominance of the process approach to writing that requires some kind of second party feedback, usually the instructor, on student drafts. Kroll (2001) takes an equally strong stance when he says that current writing instruction is quintessentially dependant on instructor feedback, it being one of the two components most central to any writing course (with the other being the assignments the students are given). Williams (2003) also adds that the purpose of WCF is to teach skills that help students improve their writing proficiency to the point where they are cognizant of what is expected of them as writers, and are able to produce it with minimal errors and maximum clarity. WCF has also been said to be important for helping learners notice the gaps between the learners' interlanguage and target language, facilitating L2 development (Abadikhah & Ashoori, 2012). Further to the correction of surface errors, aspects of written discourse such as coherence and cohesion, critical to synthesis writing, have also been seen to benefit from WCF (Zhang, 2013). Other recent studies favouring the use of WCF were referred to in the introduction, e.g. Hanaoka & Izumi (2012); Polio (2012); Wigglesworth & Storch (2012).

Ferris (1999) has been a leading proponent, and indeed spearheaded the counterproposal, 'The case for grammar correction in L2 writing classes: A response to Truscott', towards Truscott's (1996) stand against WCF. Among the many ideas and arguments raised by Ferris is that Truscott's ideas positively serve to highlight the complexity of error correction in language learning, yet that his theory (essentially that WCF is of no use and even damaging to learners) should be supported by further research. This is of particular relevance as Ferris points out that Truscott actually offers an improper and ineffective review of error correction by relying on flawed research studies, and that Truscott's stand is not overly helpful to language learners. In contrast, Ferris distinguishes between effective error correction and ineffective error correction, whereby effective error correction can positively impact language learners' writing. There is mounting research evidence that effective error correction which is selective, prioritized and clear can, and does help at least some student writers.

Pawlak (2004) also agrees in the need for further research that, however, is quantitative (empirical), and that the role of grammar instruction in foreign language pedagogy has been subject to considerable controversy. A positive result of this has been the creation of a need for answers which has generated a number of empirical investigations. Indeed, a growing body of empirical research is now investigating the agenda proposed by Ferris (1999), with evidence in favour of WCF. For example, in a 10-month study on 52 low-intermediate ESL students in New Zealand showed the treatment groups (with WCF) outperformed the control group on all post-tests (Bitchener & Knock, 2009). Another study on 53 adult migrant students investigated three

types of error (prepositions, the past simple tense, and the definite article); this resulted in improved accuracy in new pieces of writing over a 12-week period for those receiving WCF (Bitchener & Young, 2005). Another example is a study on 144 international and migrant ESL students which investigated the extent to which different WCF options help students improve their accuracy in the use of two functional uses of the English article system (referential indefinite 'a' and referential definite 'the'). This study found that students who received all three WCF options outperformed those who did not receive WCF, and that their level of accuracy was retained over seven weeks ((Bitchener & Knock, 2008).

Written corrective feedback (WCF): where do we stand?

In pragmatic terms, the outcome of these divergent ideas is that language advisors and teachers of English worldwide continue to receive conflicting information as to how to proceed with WCF. Indeed, "...many teachers continue to be confused about the practical steps they should utilize to help their students improve their writing" (Hartshorn et al., 2010, p. 84). Therefore nested within this controversy on WCF in the academic world are also educators and learners, namely the actual protagonists of this scenario.

Indeed, if error correction is to be effective, the opinions of linguists and teachers alone is not sufficient, but must be flexible enough to incorporate the preferences and needs of the language learners (Oladejo, 1993). Yet Truscott (1996) observed that although students want grammar correction, teachers need not necessarily give it to them, a position criticized by Ferris (1999), who felt that learners' needs and perceptions could not be brushed aside so lightly. This is the key rationale on which this study has been based.

Several studies have successfully targeted specific groups of learners, enquiring on their specific preferences and perceptions. For example, a study in Costa Rica on 23 college students showed their clear preference explicit oral error correction in class (Amador, 2008). In China, 15 learners in a pre-university intensive English for Academic Purposes programme said they lacked the knowledge and resources to take effective action and improve grammar and vocabulary in their writing (Zhou, 2009), suggesting that the teacher has role in being more proactive in WCF.

It is essential for researchers and educators alike to understand the preferences and perceptions of learners. Learners may come to the classroom with very different notions from those of their teachers about what sort of 'responses' in WCF will be of most help to them for improving their writing (Leki, 1991). It is therefore essential that (at least some) studies focus on the views and perceptions of the learners themselves, and this has been the fundamental strategy adopted in this paper.

Furthermore, research must also take into account research design and methodology, and variables such as age, language level, culture, past educational experiences and learning motivation; these factors may influence results and interpretations. For example, Ferris (1999) specifically indicates that there is, in fact too much diversity between environments and students in Truscott's (1996) referenced studies, and the results are over generalized outside the context in which they were conducted. These variables often cannot be fully accounted for (statistically) or interpreted quantitatively and at times qualitatively. Therefore focussing research on targeted, homogenous groups (e.g. adult vs. young learners, urban vs. rural learners, nationality etc.) may help generate accurate, target-group focussed results on the question of WCF, rather than fuel generalized controversy.

Research objectives

This study specifically focused on urban-based, middle-class Sudanese learners of English. Being a bottom-up study, it directly enquired about their personal preferences and perceptions of writing and WCF. More specifically, learners were asked about their views on:

(i) the importance of accuracy in writing as a skill for the learners themselves as learners of English (i.e. having as few errors as possible in their written work);

(ii) their perceptions of teachers' views on the importance of accuracy in writing as a skill (i.e. having as few errors as possible in their students' written work);

(iii) what the teacher should focus on when correcting homework; for example, if surface errors important, such as grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and punctuation errors etc. Other requested areas to focus on could be errors based on the content, register and style, and general organization (e.g. paragraphing) of the written work.

(iv) the utility of using a set of correction or proof-reading symbols, and the use of a red marker for showing corrections;

(v) how they want their teachers to show the mistakes in their written work, for example: showing where the error is only; writing the correct word or grammar structure above the error; underline where the error is, with suggestions how to correct it (for example, with correction symbols); underline where the error is and indicate where to find the correction (example page indications in the textbook); focus on ideas with no error corrections in grammar, spelling, punctuation...etc.;

(vi) how do their teachers actually show the mistakes in their written work from the choices listed in (v);

(vii) how they want English teachers to correct their written work if there are many errors, for example: correct: all errors, big and small; all big errors but not the small errors; most of the big errors if there are many of them; a few of the big errors even if there are not many; all repeated errors whether major or minor; only errors that might give you problems with communicating your ideas; no error correction and only discuss ideas;

(viii) how carefully they look at the teacher's marks and comments on their written work, for example: do they: read all carefully; look at some marks and comments more carefully than at others, or focus mostly on ideas.

Materials & research methods

Participants

Adult Sudanese Learners attending English classes at the British Council in Khartoum, Sudan, have formed the basis of the study population for this study, which is still ongoing. A sample of classes was taken ensuring that a varied and representative selection of different language levels was taken, ranging from beginners through to advanced classes. No sampling was taken among the learners in any of the classes chosen: all learners were included in the study, compiling the questionnaire as part of the 'routine' feedback collected from students at the teaching centre. This ensured that not only those learners who were positive about WCF and wanted to give their views were included in the study, as this would have generated bias by

presenting a picture that was positively skewed. Moreover, the learners had the added option of remaining anonymous, further to being guaranteed confidentiality. The sample size included for this paper was of 168 learners and the entire study was conducted inside the learners' own habitual classrooms, and during regular class hours. This eliminated any possible bias that could have been caused due to the stress of changing the educational environment or time when conducting the study.

Data collection

The research tool used was a written questionnaire (*Appendix 1*), with eight questions that covered the research objectives described in the previous section. Answer options varied: for example, many questions required an answer where the learners had to choose from a selection of answer options, circling the single most appropriate choice given (closed-ended questions). They were usually also given the option for choosing 'other', allowing the learners to describe an option that was not listed but possibly the most important for them (this gave a more open-ended aspect to these questions). In other questions, learners were asked to choose all the options that were relevant and important to them, while in other cases they were asked to allocate numbers to choices (1-5), these representing a 5-point scale in order of importance: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neither agree or disagree, (4) disagree, and (5) strongly disagree (Likert, 1932).

Although this was a written questionnaire to be compiled by the learners, the researcher was always present to help orally administer the questionnaire. This ensured the complete understanding of the questions, and in particular the sometimes subtle differences among the possible answer choices. The learners were in a better position to answer accurately after having a full understanding of the questionnaire, rather than having to second-guess some of the finer differences in answer choices. This therefore increased the internal validity of the study. On average the questionnaire took between 20-30 minutes to conduct. Learners often asked the researcher for explanations of the options, including the 'advanced' learners. As the questionnaire was conducted by the same person for all learners, the possibility of introducing bias via the use of different questionnaire administrators was eliminated. Furthermore, the researcher, also being a British Council teacher and familiar face among the learners, also lessened the possibility of bias being introduced by having a new face in the classroom: the learners therefore felt confident about being able to freely express their choices. Learners compiled the questionnaire independently so as not to influence each other in their choices.

Data analysis

Responses, expressed as percentages were calculated for the entire sample (*Appendix 1, Q.1-7*) For analytical purposes, the sample was also divided into lower-level learners, namely elementary and pre-intermediate, or A1, A2, B1 ALTE levels, and higher-level-learners, intermediate to advanced, or B2, C1 and C2 ALTE levels (Harmer, 2007). For certain questions (*Q.4-5*), the difference in response proportions between higher and lower-level learners were calculated using a two-tailed z-test, and the significance level (α) was set at 0.05.

Learners' views on written error-correction (*Q.8*) were examined after allowing the participants to rank each technique according to their perception of its utility, using a 5-point scale. Rankings between higher and lower-level learners were then examined using a Wilcoxon rank-sum test.

Results and Conclusions

Learners' views on WCF importance and their perceptions of teachers' views

The results and conclusions addressed in this section are those stemming from questions in the questionnaire used (*Appendix 1, Q.1-8*). The salient summary statistics of learners' preferences on WCF are summarized in *Table 1*.

Learners' perceptions of teachers' views on the importance of accuracy (*Q.2*) in writing as a skill showed some important discrepancies when compared with their own: 39.29% and 30.95% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed, respectively, that thorough WCF, and that learners make as few errors as possible in their written work was seen as important for their teacher. Indeed, 53.57% of the learners strongly agree and 32.74% agree that to focus on accuracy when writing and having as few surface errors as possible, such as grammar, spelling and vocabulary errors is important (*Q.1*). Local learners therefore feel that foreign, native-speaker teachers tend to give less importance on written work to be totally error-free and are more tolerant of some surface errors that local learners would be content with. Such teachers possibly divide their time when giving WCF between correcting surface errors, and other aspects of writing, such coherence, cohesion, paragraphing and subject development.

Learners' preferences for specific WCF techniques were compared to their perceptions of teachers' preferences for written error correction (*Table 2*). The proportion of learners wanting the underlining of errors with and error- type indication written above, e.g. through the use of symbols, was the same as what the learners said teachers actually adopted. Likewise, there was no difference between the proportion of learners wanting WCF via underlining error only, and the proportion of teachers that used this technique. There was a significantly higher proportion between teachers and both high-level learners ($p=0.01$), and low-level learners ($p=0.05$) for the WCF through underling the error and the corrected version written above.

From the learners' perspective, when correcting homework teachers should strongly focus on surface errors. Learners agree or strongly agree on the importance of grammar (86.31%), spelling (73.81%) and vocabulary errors (95.98%), and also to punctuation errors (67.85%), paragraphing (73.815%) etc. Learners also agree or strongly agree on the importance of the teachers' comments on the ideas of what was written (75.59%). Learners also agree or strongly agree that register and paragraph organization to be important (76.79%). While most learners had not experienced the use of correction symbols in their WCF they were mostly enthusiastic about their possible use: 62.51% agreed or strongly agreed on their use. Many were also not against the use of red markers to highlight and correct written errors; indeed, slightly more than half of the learners (52.97%) were strongly in favour of their usage (*Q 3a-i*).

Learners stating that the teacher should not correct written errors at all, and focus on ideas only, i.e. with no surface error corrections in grammar, spelling, punctuation, were only 1.79%. This in sharp contrast to research that dismisses the importance of WCF. More than half (51.19%) of the learners were favoured their teacher directly writing the correct word or grammar structure above the error. Other learners (39.88%) said that underlining the error and giving an idea about correcting it was their first choice (*Q.4*). Only 5.95% said the teacher should only underline errors. In contrast, when asked how their teachers actually show the mistakes in their written work, 50.00% said they underline the error and give an idea about the correction,

36.31% said teachers write the correct word or structure above error, 8.33% only underlined errors, and 1.19% focussed on development of ideas only and did no WCF (Q.5).

When comparing what learners want to what they reported teachers delivered, no significant differences were reported. However, after splitting the sample into lower-level and higher-level learners, differences between the two levels were observed. A significantly larger proportion of higher-level learners wanted teachers to correct errors by writing the solution above, than was done by their teachers. This indicated an area of disconnect between the degree to which learners wanted this technique and how widely it was done by their teachers. However, there was no difference in the proportion of lower-level learners' requests and what they reported was delivered by teachers, indicating that learner perceptions of 'good techniques' corresponded to how teachers were conducting WCF (Q.4-5).

After division of the learner sample into two levels, when asked to rank various WCF techniques, lower-level learners considered being referred to specific pages of the course book during written error correction to be more important than did higher-level learners (Table 4). The proportion of low-level learners who considered only underlining the error as a 'very good' technique was also significantly higher ($p=0.04$) than higher-level learners (Table 3). There were no other significant differences between the two learner levels for the other WCF techniques (Q.8).

When learners were asked about how detailed teachers' correction of their written work should be if there are many errors, 65.45% answered that they hoped to see the correction of all errors, big and small. Only 17.86% wanted only all big errors corrected, but not the smaller errors; fewer still wanted only most (4.17%), or a few (1.19%) of the big errors to be corrected. Few learners felt that a correction focus on repeat-errors alone was satisfactory for them (4.76%), or that focussing only on errors that impeded communication (4.76%). A mere 1.19% of the learners said WCF was irrelevant and that the focus should be on ideas only (Q. 6).

Learners were also asked as to how carefully they looked at the teacher's marks and comments on their written work (Q.7), with 81.55% stating they read all errors corrections and suggestions about errors carefully. Only 1.19% said they looked at some comments and corrections more carefully than others, and 4.76% suggested that feedback on ideas was more important than error correction.

While this cohort of learners is still under study, these preliminary empirical results suggest they clearly favour the detailed correction of their errors, large and small, particularly of grammar, lexis and spelling, and appreciated explicit written suggestions and corrections. The study seems to positively favour WCF, strongly dismissing ideas that it is pointless and possibly damaging for learners of this age group and socio-cultural background. The cohort of learners appears to see strong advantages in detailed WCF of surface errors, and also other linguistic components such as register, paragraphing and layout. Perhaps rather surprising was the importance given to feedback on the ideas expressed in the learners' writing: such comments were valued by them almost on par with WCF.

Finally, the importance of discriminating among different learner language levels has been highlighted as differences in perceptions on WCF have emerged when statistical analyses were conducted on learners according to different language ability. Learner perceptions on WCF vary according to previous schooling experiences, cultural values, and other socio-educational

factors. However, perceptions and needs may also change as learners improve their writing skills, increasing their autonomy and altering their needs and expectations.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics for learners' preferences and perceptions of written error-correction

<i>Learners perceptions & views on written corrective feedback (WCF) focus/techniques with which they 'agree' or 'strongly agree'(n=168)</i>	%
Important to have as few errors as possible	86.31
Teachers think it's important to have as few errors as possible	73.81
WCF focuses on grammar	95.24
WCF focuses on spelling	89.88
WCF focuses on vocabulary	91.67
WCF focuses on punctuation	67.85
WCF focuses on paragraphing	73.81
WCF focuses on writing style & register	76.79
WCF focuses on ideas	75.59
WCF with use of correction symbols	62.51
WCF with use of a red pen	52.97
<i>Learners' ideal WCF should have a focus on:</i>	%
all big & small errors	65.45
all big errors	17.86

most big errors	4.17
some big errors	1.19
all repeated errors	4.76
errors impeding communication	4.76
discussion of ideas only	1.19

Table 2. Learners' preference, and perceptions of their teachers' preference, on written error correction

<i>Written error-correcting technique usage</i>	<i>Learners' level: High*</i>		<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Z-score: High* Low#</i>		<i>P-value: High* Low#</i>	
	<i>Low#</i>						
Underlining error, correction above	0.53	0.49	0.36	2.67	1.98	0.01 Sig.	0.05 Sig.
Underlining error, error- type indication above	0.42	0.38	0.51	-1.32	-1.75	0.19 Not sig.	0.08 Not sig.
Underlining error only	0.11	0.14	0.08	0.59	1.28	0.55 Not sig.	0.20 Not sig.
Comments on ideas only	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

^ 5-point scale in order of learner's perception of importance: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neither agree or disagree, (4) disagree, and (5) strongly disagree about the use of this error-correcting technique [i.e. values towards '1' reflect a positive preference, and increasingly negative as they approach '5']

* Proportion of higher-level learners [intermediate to advanced (B2, C1, C2); n = 95] favouring a specific technique, compared to learners' perception of teachers' preference; corresponding z-score and p-value: Sig./Not sig = significant/not significant (2-tailed z-test, $\alpha = 0.05$)

Proportion of lower-level learners [elementary to pre-intermediate (A1, A2, B1); n = 73] compared to learners' perception of teachers' preferences; corresponding z-score and p-value: Sig./Not sig = significant/not significant (2-tailed z-test, $\alpha = 0.05$)

Table 3. Difference in the proportion of higher- and lower-level learners when referring to different written error-correction techniques as 'very good'

<i>Written error-correcting technique usage</i>	<i>Lower-level learners *</i>	<i>Higher-level learners **</i>	<i>Z-score</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Significant difference#</i>
Learners referred to page(s) in course book	0.32	0.20	1.80	0.07	No
Underlining error only	0.18	0.07	2.11	0.04	Yes
Underlining error, correction above	0.54	0.65	-1.45	0.15	No
Comments on ideas only	0.07	0.11	-0.80	0.42	No
Underlining error, error-type indication above	0.35	0.32	0.43	0.67	No
No correction or comments	-	-	-	-	-

^ 5-point scale in order of learner's perception of importance: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neither agree or disagree, (4) disagree, and (5) strongly disagree about the use of this error-correcting technique [i.e. values towards '1' reflect a positive preference, and increasingly negative as they approach '5']

* Proportion of lower-level learners [elementary to pre-intermediate (A1, A2, B1); n = 73]

** Proportion of higher-level learners: [intermediate to advanced (B2, C1, C2); n = 95]

2-tailed z-test, $\alpha = 0.05$

Table 4. Differences in ranking of written error-correction technique preferences between higher- and lower-level learners

<i>Written error-correcting technique usage</i>	<i>Lower-level learners^{^*}</i>	<i>Higher-level learners^{^**}</i>	<i>Z-score</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Significant difference#</i>
Learners referred to page(s) in course book	2.47	2.79	-1.57	0.05	Yes
Underlining error only	3.26	3.45	-0.61	0.27	No
Underlining error, correction above	1.84	1.57	1.23	0.21	No
Comments on ideas only	3.38	3.55	-0.97	0.33	No
Underlining error, error-type indication above	2.18	2.21	-0.08	0.93	No
No correction or comments	4.56	4.65	-0.21	0.84	No

Wilcoxon rank sum test

[^] 5-point scale in order of learner's perception of importance: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neither agree or disagree, (4) disagree, and (5) strongly disagree about the use of this error-correcting technique [i.e. values towards '1' reflect a positive preference, and increasingly negative as they approach '5']

* Mean value from 5-point scale, lower-level learners [elementary to pre-intermediate (A1, A2, B1), n = 73]

** Mean value from 5-point scale, higher-level learners: intermediate to advanced [B2, C1, C2), n = 95]

Appendix 1. Questionnaire for 'Error correction for writing skills – the students' perspective'

- Read each statement, and then you can decide if you: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) disagree, or (5) strongly disagree.

Please write the number of your response in all the spaces provided.

1. It is important to me as a student to have as few mistakes as possible in my written work. ____

2. It is important to my English teacher for me to have as few mistakes as possible in my written work. ____

3. When correcting your homework the teacher should always focus on:

a. *grammar* errors (verb tenses, subject/verb agreement, article use...etc.) ____

b. *spelling* errors ____

c. *vocabulary* errors ____

d. *punctuation* errors ____

e. poor *organization of paragraphs in the homework* ____

f. incorrect *writing style* (the way you write – too formal, too informal etc) ____

g. make comments on the *ideas* expressed in the paper ____

h. use a set of correction or proof-reading symbols ____

i. use a red marker to correct ____

➤ Answer the following questions (4-7) by circling the best response (ONE choice).

4. How do you want your English teacher to show the mistakes in your written work?

a. Writing the correct word or grammar structure above the error;

b. Underline error is and giving an idea about correcting it;

c. Showing where the error is;

d. Focus on ideas with no error corrections in grammar, spelling, punctuation...etc.;

e. Other (please tell us): _____

5. How does your English teacher show you the mistakes in your written work?

a. Writes the correct word or structure above error;

b. Underlines the error and give an idea about the correction;

c. Underlines the error;

d. Focuses on ideas and not error correction of grammar, spelling, punctuation...etc.

e. Other (please tell us): _____

6. If there are many errors in your work, do you want your English teacher to correct:

a. all errors, big and small;

b. all big errors but not the small errors;

- c. most of the big errors if there are many of them;
- d. a few of the big errors even if there are not many;
- e. all *repeated* errors whether major or minor;
- f. only errors that might give you problems with communicating your ideas;
- g. no errors and discuss only your ideas;
- h. Other (please tell us): _____

7. How carefully do you look at the teacher's marks/comments on your written work? You.....

- a. read all carefully;
- b. look at some marks/comments more carefully than at others;
- c. focus mostly on ideas;
- d. Other (please tell us): _____

➤ Answer question 8 by circling ALL answers that you think are good.

8. Look at the different ways of sentence error correction.

➤ *For each one, circle #1 if you think it is very good, circle #5 if very bad, and a number between #1 and #5 if in between.*

	Very Good			Very Bad	
See section 'X' in grammar handbook					
a. Since I started lessons, I <u>am improving</u> my English. _____	1	2	3	4	5
b. Since I started lessons, I <u>am improving</u> my English. _____	1	2	3	4	5
have been					
c. Since I started lessons, I <u>am improving</u> my English. _____	1	2	3	4	5

I'm so pleased about this!

d. Since I started lessons, I am improving my English 1 2 3 4 5

tense

e. Since I started lessons, I am improving my English. 1 2 3 4 5

f. Since I started lessons, I am improving my English. 1 2 3 4 5

Your details:

Full name: _____

Number of years of English completed at school _____

Number of years of English completed at university _____

Number of years when you learnt university subject(s) through English _____

Your current English level: _____