

Undergraduate Efl Students' Perceptions And Preferences For Written Corrective Feedback: A Study In English Classrooms In Vietnam

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Abstract : *Providing written corrective feedback (WCF) on students' assignments is a standard practice in writing classes within the context of English teaching and learning in Vietnam. Although numerous studies have confirmed the positive impact of WCF on Vietnamese students' performance, fewer studies have explored students' perceptions and preferences regarding WCF in an EFL setting, especially among students at different language proficiency levels. Understanding students' perspectives on this process is crucial for teachers, as it provides valuable insights that can enhance their teaching strategies in writing classes. This research gathered data through questionnaires and interviews from 100 first-year and 100 third-year English majors at the University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies to examine their views and preferences regarding WCF in writing courses. The results indicate that most students have a positive attitude towards WCF and desire to receive more feedback from their teachers. However, while first-year students prefer targeted and direct feedback, third-year students lean towards unfocused and indirect feedback. The study also highlights various activities that students engage in and the challenges they face after receiving WCF. In addition, suggestions are presented on how teachers can adapt their teaching strategies to better meet students' expectations for WCF.*

Keywords : *English as a foreign language, EFL writing, Perceptions and preferences, Undergraduate students, Written Corrective Feedback*

I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of providing WCF in English classrooms cannot be overstated. WCF plays a crucial role in the language learning process, offering students the necessary guidance to improve their writing skills. Numerous recent studies have demonstrated the positive effects of WCF on students' language acquisition. Shintani and Ellis [1] found that consistent written feedback significantly improved students' grammatical accuracy over time. Similarly, Kang and Han [2] highlighted that targeted feedback on specific error types led to substantial improvements in students' writing proficiency. Zhang and Hyland [3] also noted that WCF helps students internalize correct language forms, which enhances their overall language competence. These studies emphasize the value of WCF in enhancing students' writing capabilities and overall language competence. Furthermore, WCF not only helps in correcting errors but also motivates students to engage more deeply with their learning materials, thus fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the language.

At the University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies, the provision of WCF in English writing classes follows a well-established practice. After students complete a writing assignment in class and submit it to the teacher, the teacher meticulously reviews and provides feedback at home. In the following class, the teacher discusses the essays based on the prepared feedback, and the students then revise their writings accordingly. This cycle of WCF provision continues until students produce the final draft. This iterative process is designed to foster continuous improvement in students' writing skills. Typically, feedback addresses various aspects of writing, including grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and overall structure. Despite the systematic approach to WCF provision, little is known about students' attitudes towards the feedback they receive from their teachers. Understanding students' perceptions and preferences regarding WCF is crucial for optimizing teaching strategies and ensuring that feedback effectively supports students' learning. Teachers' awareness of students' views can lead to more personalized and effective feedback, ultimately enhancing the educational

experience and outcomes for students. Moreover, knowing students' attitudes can help teachers to identify potential areas of resistance or misunderstanding, and allow them to adjust their approaches to better meet their students' needs and expectations.

However, teachers in writing classes at UD-UFLS often struggle to grasp their students' attitudes towards the feedback on their written assignments. This disconnect can result in several drawbacks. For instance, students may feel demotivated or confused by feedback that seems irrelevant or overly critical, which can hinder their progress and engagement (Bitchener & Knoch, [4]). Moreover, without understanding students' perspectives, teachers might provide feedback that is not tailored to individual needs, reducing its effectiveness (Mahfoodh, [5]). This can lead to a sense of frustration and a lack of improvement in writing skills, as students may not fully understand how to apply the feedback they receive. Consequently, the lack of insight into students' reactions can impede the overall learning process, making it challenging for teachers to foster a supportive and productive learning environment. Furthermore, this gap can result in a one-size-fits-all approach to feedback, which does not consider the diverse linguistic and cognitive needs of students, thereby limiting the potential for personalized learning experiences (Zhan, [6]).

Given these challenges, it is necessary to investigate students' perspectives and preferences regarding WCF. Understanding what students find helpful or unhelpful can lead to more effective feedback practices, ultimately benefiting both teaching and learning (Ferris, [7]). Research indicates that when feedback aligns with students' preferences and learning styles, it significantly enhances their ability to internalize and apply corrections (Jonsson, [8]). By adapting feedback methods to meet students' specific needs, teachers can create a more engaging and responsive educational setting. This alignment supports not only student improvement but also encourages a collaborative learning atmosphere where feedback is seen as a constructive dialogue rather than a one-way communication (Xu & Carless, [9]). Moreover, exploring students' preferences can reveal insights into cultural and individual differences in feedback reception, which results in more culturally sensitive and effective teaching practices (Yang & Qian, [10]).

For the above-mentioned reasons, this study aims to investigate the perceptions and preferences of students regarding WCF in English writing classrooms at UD-UFLS. This study also presents and analyzes the differences in opinions between two groups of students: first-year and third-year students. The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

- a. What are students' perceptions of WCF in writing classrooms?
- b. What are students' preferences regarding WCF provided by teachers in writing classrooms?
- c. What activities do students engage in and what difficulties do they face after receiving WCF?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Academic writing and teaching academic writing in EFL tertiary settings

Academic writing in EFL tertiary settings presents unique challenges and opportunities for both teachers and students. Academic writing is defined as a formal style of writing used in universities and scholarly publications, characterized by a clear focus, evidence-based arguments, proper citation practices, and adherence to specific genre conventions (Swales & Feak, [11]). At the tertiary level, academic writing requires students to engage with complex ideas, present arguments coherently, and adhere to the conventions of academic discourse. In the context of EFL, these tasks are further complicated by language proficiency issues, making effective teaching strategies crucial. Research suggests that explicit instruction in the conventions of academic writing, such as structure, argumentation, and citation practices, can significantly enhance EFL students' writing abilities (Hyland, [12]).

One effective approach is process-oriented writing instruction, which emphasizes writing as a recursive process involving multiple drafts and revisions. This method allows students to develop their ideas and improve their language skills progressively (Ferris & Hedgcock, [13]). Besides, integrating technology in writing instruction, such as using online platforms for peer feedback and collaborative writing, has been shown to foster a more interactive and supportive learning environment (Sun & Chang, [14]). The adoption of genre-based approaches in teaching writing is also gaining attraction in EFL tertiary settings. This approach involves teaching students the specific features and language used in different types of academic writing, such as research papers, essays, and reports (Cheng, [15]). Understanding these genres helps students to write more effectively for their specific academic purposes and audiences.

Feedback plays an important role in teaching writing in EFL contexts. Both teacher feedback and peer feedback have been found to be beneficial, although they serve different purposes. Teacher feedback is often more authoritative and focused on linguistic accuracy, while peer feedback encourages collaborative learning

and critical thinking (Yu & Lee, [16]). Moreover, recent studies emphasize the importance of formative feedback, which is continuous and aimed at guiding students through their writing process, as opposed to summative feedback, which is evaluative and often provided at the end of the writing task (Carless, [17]).

In general, teaching academic writing in EFL tertiary settings requires a multifaceted approach that combines explicit instruction, process-oriented writing, technological integration, and effective feedback mechanisms. By addressing both linguistic and rhetorical aspects of writing, teachers can better support EFL students in developing the skills necessary for academic success.

2.2. Definition of WCF

WCF in EFL writing instruction refers to the process by which teachers provide comments, corrections, and suggestions on students' written work to help them improve their language accuracy and overall writing skills. According to Bitchener and Storch [18], WCF involves "the provision of feedback to learners on their written output in order to help them notice and correct their errors" (p. 5). This definition emphasizes the importance of WCF as a tool for error correction, aiming to draw students' attention to specific mistakes and guiding them towards more accurate language use. Hyland and Hyland [19] further emphasize the role of WCF in bridging the gap between current and desired performance, stating, "Written feedback is essential in helping students understand the gap between their current performance and the desired performance" (p. 47). This highlights WCF not only as a mechanism for immediate correction but also as a strategic approach to long-term improvement, which helps to foster greater awareness and understanding of linguistic norms and conventions. Thus, WCF serves as a critical component in the process of writing development, assisting learners as they navigate and master the complexities of EFL writing.

2.3. Types of WCF

WCF in EFL writing instruction can be categorized into several types, including focused and unfocused feedback, direct and indirect feedback, and electronic and handwritten feedback. Each type serves distinct purposes and has unique implications for language learning.

Focused and Unfocused Feedback: Focused feedback targets specific types of errors, such as verb tense or article usage, allowing students to concentrate on particular areas of improvement. This targeted approach can lead to more effective internalization of correct forms and long-term retention of accurate language use (Ellis, [20]; Sheen, [21]). For example, a teacher might focus solely on correcting past tense errors in a student's essay, which helps the student to systematically address and understand this particular grammatical point. In contrast, unfocused feedback addresses a broad range of errors in their writing. While this comprehensive approach can overwhelm some students, it provides a holistic view of their writing performance, highlighting various areas that need attention (Ellis, [22]). This type of feedback might be more suitable for advanced students who can handle multiple corrections simultaneously and benefit from a broader critique of their writing skills.

Direct and Indirect Feedback: Direct feedback involves the teacher providing the correct form of the error, which can be particularly beneficial for lower proficiency students who may not have the ability to self-correct (Bitchener & Ferris, [23]). This approach is immediate and explicit, reducing the likelihood of repeated errors. Following this approach, teachers may directly rewrite a sentence correctly and help students see the exact change needed. Indirect feedback, on the other hand, indicates the presence of an error without providing the correction, often through underlining, circling, or using codes. This method encourages students to engage in deeper cognitive processing by identifying and correcting their errors themselves, fostering greater autonomy and self-editing skills (Ferris, [24]). For instance, a teacher might underline a mistake and leave it to the student to determine the correct form, thus promoting active learning and problem-solving.

Electronic and Handwritten Feedback: The mode of delivering feedback can also influence its effectiveness. Electronic feedback, provided via digital platforms such as word processors or learning management systems, can enhance clarity and accessibility. It allows for the inclusion of multimedia elements, such as hyperlinks to additional resources or video explanations, which can be particularly beneficial in providing comprehensive and multimodal feedback (Hyland, [25]). For example, feedback given through a learning management system might include links to grammar tutorials or exemplars of high-quality writing, which offers students additional learning resources. Handwritten feedback, while more traditional, offers a personal touch that can create a sense of immediacy and directness. Some students may find handwritten comments more engaging and easier to relate to, so they can create a stronger connection with the teacher (El Ebyary & Windeatt, [26]). The tactile nature of handwritten feedback can sometimes make the critique feel more personal and thoughtful, which can be particularly motivating for students.

The integration of these various types of WCF in EFL writing instruction can significantly enhance its effectiveness. By tailoring feedback to the specific needs and proficiency levels of students, teachers can

provide more targeted and meaningful support. For instance, combining focused feedback with indirect methods can encourage learners to engage more deeply with their errors while avoiding overwhelming them with too much information. Similarly, using a blend of electronic and handwritten feedback can cater to diverse student preferences and contexts; therefore, the feedback's impact on their writing development will be optimized.

2.4. Theoretical framework of using WCF in teaching EFL writing

A contemporary theoretical framework for using WCF in teaching EFL writing integrates sociocultural theory and cognitive-interactionist approaches. Sociocultural theory, rooted in Vygotskian principles, considers WCF as a mediational tool that facilitates language internalization through social interaction and scaffolding provided by teachers (Mao & Lee, [27]). This perspective emphasizes dialogic feedback, where interactions between teachers and students support cognitive engagement and self-regulation in writing (Chong, [28]). Such dialogic exchanges allow learners to process feedback collaboratively, which helps to improve their understanding and application of correct language forms. Furthermore, cognitive-interactionist approaches highlight the role of attention and noticing in language acquisition. According to this approach, feedback that prompts learners to recognize discrepancies between their output and target language norms enhances error correction and language development (Crosthwaite et al., [29]). It also suggests that the cognitive effort involved in noticing and correcting errors leads to deeper processing and long-term retention of linguistic forms.

Recent studies advocate for focused WCF, which targets specific linguistic forms rather than providing comprehensive feedback. This strategy is argued to mitigate cognitive overload, allowing learners to concentrate on particular areas for improvement and thereby leading to more effective learning outcomes (Lee, [30]; Mao & Lee, [27]). For instance, by focusing on recurring grammatical errors, learners can gradually master specific aspects of the language, leading to cumulative improvements in overall writing proficiency. Moreover, the efficacy of WCF is influenced by factors such as learner proficiency levels, feedback types, and cultural considerations. Research indicates that learners at different proficiency levels may benefit from different types of feedback, and culturally responsive feedback can enhance learner engagement and receptivity (Li, [31]; Truscott, [32]).

Integrating these theoretical perspectives creates a strong foundation for applying WCF in EFL writing instruction. The combination of sociocultural and cognitive-interactionist approaches highlights the importance of interactive and focused feedback mechanisms in promoting linguistic accuracy and learner autonomy. This dual approach fosters a supportive learning environment where learners are encouraged to actively engage with feedback, thus enhancing their writing skills through both social and cognitive processes. By aligning WCF practices with these theoretical insights, teachers can more effectively address the diverse needs of EFL learners, facilitating their journey towards greater language proficiency.

2.5. Previous studies on students' perceptions and preferences for WCF

As regards general evaluation of students about WCF, it is reported that students generally perceive WCF as an essential component of their language learning process. Studies have consistently shown that EFL students value feedback and see it as crucial for their writing development. Lee [33] found that students appreciate detailed and explicit feedback, which they believe helps them identify and correct their mistakes more effectively. Likewise, Mahfoodh [5] reported that students expect clear and direct corrections from their teachers, as this clarity boosts their confidence in understanding and applying the correct language forms.

Research on students' preferences of focused versus unfocused feedback reveals a nuanced perspective. Focused feedback, which targets specific types of errors, is generally preferred by students who feel that it allows them to concentrate on particular areas of improvement. This targeted approach is seen as less overwhelming and more manageable, leading to better internalization of correct forms (Ellis, [20]; Sheen, [21]). On the other hand, unfocused feedback, which addresses a wide range of errors, provides a comprehensive overview of the student's writing performance. While this can be overwhelming, it helps students understand their overall proficiency and identify multiple areas for improvement (Ellis, [22]).

Students' preferences for direct versus indirect feedback also vary. Direct feedback, where the teacher provides the correct form of the error, is often favored by students because it is immediate and explicit, reducing the likelihood of repeated errors (Bitchener & Ferris, [23]). For example, when a teacher directly rewrites a sentence correctly, students can see the precise changes needed. However, some studies, such as Ferris (2014), suggest that while students may prefer direct feedback for its clarity, they also recognize the benefits of indirect feedback in the long term. Indirect feedback, which indicates errors without providing corrections, encourages deeper cognitive engagement and fosters the development of self-correction skills, promoting learner autonomy.

The mode of feedback delivery, whether electronic or handwritten, significantly influences student perceptions. Electronic feedback, often delivered via digital platforms, is appreciated for its clarity, accessibility,

and potential for multimodal enhancement. Ene and Upton [34] found that students value the ability to access feedback through learning management systems, which can include links to additional resources and explanatory videos. This mode of feedback is particularly beneficial for providing comprehensive and detailed responses. However, handwritten feedback still holds value for many students. El Ebyary and Windeatt [26] noted that some learners prefer handwritten comments for their personal touch and immediacy, which can create a more direct and engaging connection with the instructor.

Recent research on students' preferences regarding types of errors commonly corrected by teachers in English writing has provided valuable insights. Ellis [22] highlighted that students often prefer feedback that focuses on global aspects of writing, such as organization and coherence, rather than solely on local errors like grammar and vocabulary. Bitchener and Ferris [23] expanded on this by emphasizing the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback on specific linguistic features that are crucial for communication. Moreover, Hyland and Hyland [19] noted that students appreciate feedback not only correcting errors but also providing explanations and suggestions for improvement, crucial for enhancing their understanding and skill development. Li [35] contributed by suggesting that students value feedback that corresponds to their individual learning goals and writing needs.

From the above analysis, it can be seen that previous studies highlight the complexity of students' perceptions and preferences of WCF in EFL writing. Students generally value WCF but have varied preferences depending on the type and mode of feedback. Understanding these preferences and tailoring feedback accordingly can significantly enhance its effectiveness in supporting student learning.

2.6. Prior research about activities students engage in and difficulties they have after receiving WCF

Prior research on the activities students engage in and the difficulties they face after receiving WCF highlights several key findings. Students often engage in reviewing and revising their work based on the feedback provided, aiming to understand and correct their errors. According to Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam [36], many students meticulously compare their initial submissions with the feedback to identify areas for improvement. Also, some students seek further clarification from teachers or peers to better understand the feedback, as noted by Hyland [37].

However, difficulties arise in several areas. One major challenge is interpreting the feedback correctly, especially when it is ambiguous or lacks specificity, as noted by Ferris [37], who emphasized the need for clear and actionable feedback. Applying corrections to future assignments rather than just the current one is another common issue, as highlighted by Bitchener and Storch [38], who found that students often fail to transfer learned corrections to new contexts. Moreover, dealing with the emotional impact of receiving criticism can affect students' motivation and self-efficacy, a concern raised by Rowe [39]. This emotional response can lead to anxiety and reduced confidence in writing abilities. Furthermore, students might struggle with understanding the linguistic or grammatical rules underlying the corrections, particularly if they lack a strong foundation in the language, as discussed by Lee [40]. This struggle is compounded by the cognitive load involved in processing complex feedback, as noted by Chandler [41], which can overwhelm students and hinder their ability to make effective revisions.

To address these challenges, students often engage in various strategies. Some may rewrite their drafts multiple times to internalize the corrections, as indicated by Ferris [24]. Others might use external resources, such as grammar guides or online writing labs, to enhance their understanding of the feedback, as noted by Goldstein [42]. Collaborative activities, such as peer review sessions, can also be beneficial, providing students with alternative perspectives and additional support in interpreting and applying feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, [43]). These findings suggest that while WCF is a valuable tool for learning, its effectiveness can be significantly enhanced with clear, detailed feedback and support mechanisms to help students process and apply the corrections. Providing examples, conducting follow-up discussions, and offering supplementary instructional materials can help mitigate these issues and improve the overall impact of WCF on student learning.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Setting

The current study was conducted at the Faculty of English, UD-UFLS, where one of the major academic offerings is the Bachelor Programme in the English Language. Within this programme, students are required to complete various modules, including the compulsory Integrated English Skills B1.1 and C1.1. These modules are designed with a specific focus on enhancing students' writing skills, particularly in composing various types of academic essays at the B1 and C1 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The primary aims of these modules are to develop students' abilities to structure their writing coherently, utilize appropriate academic vocabulary, and employ critical thinking in their arguments. The

modules also emphasize the importance of adhering to academic conventions and enhancing overall writing fluency. To support the development of these skills, the coursebooks "Pathways: Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking" (Second Edition, 2018) are employed, with Level 1 and Level 3 corresponding to the B1.1 and C1.1 modules respectively. These resources provide structured activities and exercises that guide students through the process of developing their academic writing proficiency.

3.2. Participants

The participants in this study consist of 200 students from the Faculty of English, UD-UFLS, divided into two groups: 100 first-year students and 100 third-year students specializing in English language studies. These students were selected randomly from writing classes during the first term of the academic year 2023-2024. Currently, the first-year students are enrolled in the Integrated Skills B1.1 module, while the third-year students are undertaking the Integrated Skills C1.1 module.

The rationale for selecting these groups lies in investigating differences in attitudes towards WCF between students at different stages of their English language learning journey. Freshmen, as first-year students, are typically new to academic writing and may have limited exposure to WCF in formal educational settings. Their interactions with WCF are likely to be more novel, potentially influencing their initial perceptions and attitudes towards its utility and effectiveness in improving their writing skills. In contrast, juniors, who have progressed through several years of English language education, including previous exposure to WCF, are expected to have more nuanced perspectives. They may have developed specific preferences regarding the types of feedback they find most helpful or the frequency of its application in their writing classes.

Besides, by comparing attitudes between freshmen and juniors, the study aims to capture developmental differences in how students perceive and engage with WCF over time. Freshmen may view WCF as a critical tool for learning and improvement, whereas juniors might approach it with a more refined understanding of its role in their writing development. Understanding these developmental shifts can inform teachers about the evolving needs and preferences of students as they progress through their academic journey in English language studies.

Another reason for this selection of participants is that insights gained from this study can have practical implications for curriculum design and teaching practices within the Faculty of English, UD-UFLS. Teachers can tailor their approaches to WCF based on the evolving attitudes and preferences identified in different student cohorts. In essence, the selection of freshmen and juniors for this study allows for a comprehensive exploration of how attitudes towards WCF develop and change across different stages of English language education, which hopes to offer valuable insights into enhancing the effectiveness of feedback practices in academic settings.

3.3. Research design

The current study employs a sequential explanatory design, a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative and qualitative methodologies in a sequential manner. Initially, quantitative data is collected through surveys to quantitatively measure factors related to students' perceptions and expectations of WCF. This phase allows for statistical analysis to identify patterns, trends, and correlations within the data (Johnson et al., [44]). Following the quantitative phase, qualitative data is then collected through interviews to provide deeper insights into the quantitative findings. Qualitative methods enable researchers to explore the reasons behind quantitative results, uncovering students' perceptions, experiences, and suggestions regarding WCF in more detail (Creswell & Clark, [45]). The sequential explanatory design offers several benefits, including complementarity of data sources, enhanced validity through triangulation, and a comprehensive understanding of the research problem by addressing both breadth and depth of inquiry (Teddlie & Tashakkori, [46]). This approach not only enriches the interpretation of findings but also strengthens the applicability of research outcomes to educational practices and policies in English language education.

3.4. Data collection

Data collection for the current study involved administering a questionnaire and conducting interviews. The questionnaire was adapted from Amrhein and Nassaji [47] and Chen, Nassaji, and Liu [48] to ensure its relevance and reliability in assessing students' perceptions and preferences regarding WCF. These sources were chosen because they offer validated instruments specifically designed to explore WCF in language learning contexts, thus providing a solid foundation for the study's objectives. The questionnaire comprises 15 closed-ended questions with the use of multiple choice and Likert scale formats to facilitate quantitative analysis. These types of questions were chosen for their efficiency in capturing a wide range of data and their ability to produce statistically analyzable results. The questionnaire is divided into three sections: Section 1 (Personal Information) collects demographic data; Section 2 (Students' Perceptions) explores students' views on the frequency, amount,

and importance of WCF; and Section 3 (Students' Preferences) examines their preferences for different forms of WCF and error corrections. Complementing the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 students (10 freshmen and 10 juniors). These interviews provided deeper insights into the reasons behind the students' survey responses and gave the researcher a richer understanding of their attitudes and experiences with WCF.

3.5. Data analysis

The data analysis for the current study involved both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS version 29, with results displayed in various charts to visualize patterns and trends. The qualitative data from the interviews was transcribed and analyzed using Thematic Analysis, which identified key themes and patterns in students' responses. This combination of data analysis methods is effective because SPSS allows for thorough statistical analysis and provides clear, objective insights into the quantitative aspects of the data. Likewise, Thematic Analysis offers a deeper, more detailed understanding of the qualitative data. Together, these methods offer a comprehensive view of the research findings, ensuring both breadth and depth in understanding students' perceptions and preferences for WCF in writing classes.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Findings

4.1.1. Students' perceptions of WCF in writing classrooms

a. Importance of WCF

The research findings reveal significant insights into the perceptions of two groups of students regarding the importance of WCF. According to the data, 91% of first-year students rate the importance of WCF highly. This indicates that even at the beginning of their academic journey, most students recognize the value of feedback in improving their writing skills. Similarly, 96% of third-year students believe that WCF plays an important or very important role in their writing skill development. The data implies that this group of students, having more experience and a deeper understanding of academic writing, recognize the essential role that consistent and detailed feedback plays in refining and perfecting their writing abilities. This slight increase suggests that as students advance in their studies, their appreciation for WCF grows stronger. However, the high percentages in both groups demonstrate that a vast majority of students, regardless of their academic year, are aware of the crucial role WCF plays in their learning process. This result emphasizes the widespread acknowledgment among students of the importance of WCF in enhancing their writing abilities.

b. Benefits of WCF

Based on the survey results regarding the benefits of WCF from the perspectives of first-year and third-year students, there are notable differences and similarities in their opinions. For first-year students, the majority (72%) selected "Improved accuracy" as the primary benefit of WCF. This was followed by 65% who chose "Confidence building", 43% who believed WCF improves the overall quality of their writing, 40% who felt that WCF encourages self-editing skills, and 35% who selected "Increased awareness of language". In contrast, third-year students prioritized different benefits. A significant 81% stated that WCF enhances their English writing skills, 69% chose "Encouragement of self-editing skills", 60% believed WCF increases their awareness of language, 54% affirmed that WCF improves the accuracy of their future writings, and 45% felt that WCF builds their confidence.

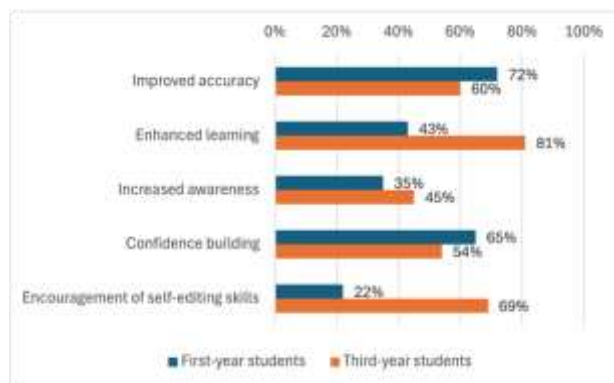


Figure 1: Benefits of WCF

This comparison reveals a shift in perceived benefits as students advance in their studies. First-year students emphasize immediate accuracy and confidence building, which reflects their need for foundational support through direct and comprehensive feedback. In contrast, third-year students prioritize long-term benefits such as improved writing skills and self-editing abilities, indicating their development into more independent writers who appreciate feedback that fosters autonomy and higher-order writing skills. This progression suggests that as students grow more proficient, they shift from relying on detailed corrective feedback to valuing guidance that helps them refine their writing and develop self-sufficiency.

In addition to the five main benefits identified in the survey, interview data reveals several other advantages that WCF brings to students. According to students, WCF enhances their understanding of writing conventions and standards, so they can produce more academically acceptable work. Also, some students shared that WCF serves as a motivational tool which encourages them to engage more deeply with the writing process and strive for continuous improvement. Moreover, it is believed that WCF offers personalized learning opportunities in which feedback can be tailored to address individual weaknesses and helps students progress at their own pace. Finally, responses from students confirm that WCF equips them with the critical thinking and self-evaluation skills necessary for success beyond the classroom. These additional benefits highlight the multifaceted impact of WCF on students' academic growth and personal development.

c. Frequency and focus of WCF

The research findings from the questionnaire on the frequency and focus of WCF provided by teachers in writing classes reveal distinct perceptions between first-year and third-year students. As shown in the results, all first-year students confirmed that their teachers always provided WCF in writing classes. Within this group, 78% stated that teachers corrected all errors in their writing, while 12% reported that teachers focused only on the major errors. Similarly, all third-year students also affirmed that their teachers consistently provided WCF. However, only 53% of them indicated that teachers corrected all errors, whereas 21% mentioned that teachers focused solely on significant errors.

It is evident from the findings that WCF consistently plays a crucial role in writing lessons. Regarding the focus of WCF, the results indicate that as students progress in their academic journey, there appears to be a shift in the approach teachers take towards WCF. For first-year students, a thorough correction of all errors is more prevalent, possibly to help them build a strong foundation in writing. For third-year students, the focus shifts towards correcting major errors, which may reflect an expectation that these students have developed better self-editing skills and can manage minor errors independently. This shift could be aimed at encouraging more advanced critical thinking and self-reliance in writing.

4.1.2. Students' preferences of teachers' WCF

a. Amount of WCF

Examining the amount of WCF that students expect from teachers during writing lessons highlights significant differences between the two student groups. A majority of first-year students express a strong desire for abundant WCF to help them avoid making mistakes in future writing assignments and to enhance their language knowledge, particularly in vocabulary and English grammar. Responses from interviews show that students view extensive corrective feedback as essential for their language development and academic success. Meanwhile, almost all third-year students, while still appreciating substantial feedback from teachers, prefer that their writing is not overloaded with corrections. Instead, they desire feedback in the form of comments, advice, and personalized study guides. Students in the interviews believe that such personalized feedback fosters a closer, more supportive relationship with their teachers and serves as a valuable source of motivation and encouragement. In general, the findings above reveal a shift in students' feedback preferences as they progress in their studies. While extensive error correction is crucial for beginners, more advanced students increasingly value personalized and supportive feedback. It is, therefore, important for teachers to adapt their feedback strategies to meet the evolving needs of their students, with a balance between corrective feedback and personalized guidance.

b. Types of WCF

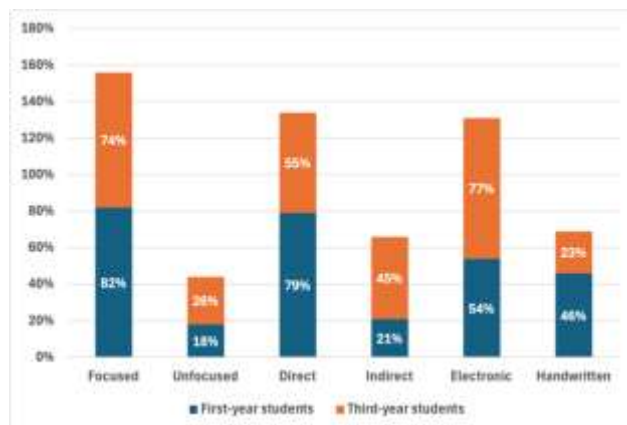


Figure 2: Students' preferences for types of WCF

In the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, students are asked to answer the question about their preferences for different types of WCF, together with the reasons for their choices. The results are presented in Figure 2, with data categorized into three groups: focused and unfocused feedback, direct and indirect feedback, electronic and handwritten feedback.

For focused feedback, 82% of freshmen and 74% of juniors value this targeted approach, which aims at specific language elements like vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. This indicates a consistent preference across both groups for detailed feedback that enhances their understanding of English language components. Meanwhile, when it comes to unfocused feedback addressing broader aspects such as organization, ideas, or writing styles/registers, there is a disparity. Only 18% of freshmen compared to 26% of juniors expressed interest in such feedback. This suggests that while both groups show higher interest in focused WCF, juniors demonstrate a slightly higher inclination towards broader feedback areas than freshmen.

Explaining the reasons why unfocused WCF is more favored, some juniors shared that they appreciate how it helps them develop their overall writing skills and adapt their style to different contexts. They feel that at their stage, having a broader perspective on their writing is beneficial for advanced academic work and professional communication. Freshmen, on the other hand, replied that they find detailed, focused feedback more immediately helpful as they are still building their foundational language skills. They believe that mastering specific language elements first is essential before moving on to more complex aspects of writing. Freshmen also mentioned that they sometimes feel overwhelmed by broader feedback, as they are still trying to grasp the basics.

Regarding direct and indirect feedback, the data reveals interesting results. A substantial majority (79%) of first-year students anticipate more direct feedback. In other words, they showed a preference for teachers directly correcting errors by crossing out incorrect words and substituting them with the accurate ones. While still a majority, a smaller proportion (55%) of third-year students prefer direct feedback. This could indicate a slight shift in preference, possibly towards a more balanced approach or a greater appreciation for other forms of feedback as they advance in their studies. According to the data on indirect feedback, a minority (21%) of first-year students are keen on indirect feedback. This result shows a lower preference for feedback that is more general or implicit in nature, possibly due to a perceived need for clarity and direct guidance in their learning process. At the same time, a notable minority (45%) of third-year students expect to receive more indirect feedback from teachers. This higher proportion compared to first-year students might suggest a developing preference for feedback that allows for more independent reflection or interpretation as students gain experience and confidence in their academic abilities.

According to the data from interviews, first-year students prefer direct feedback where teachers correct errors because they are still developing their foundational language skills and need clear, specific guidance to understand and learn from their mistakes. This type of feedback helps them quickly identify and correct their errors, building their confidence and aiding their learning process. In contrast, indirect feedback, where teachers provide comments, suggestions, or instructions on how to correct errors, is more favored by third-year students because they have a stronger grasp of the language and are ready to engage more deeply with the feedback. Indirect feedback encourages them to think critically, reflect on their mistakes, and develop problem-solving skills, which are crucial for more advanced learning and application of language skills.

As for method of feedback delivery, in the first-year group, there is a relatively balanced division between e-feedback (54%) and handwritten feedback (46%), with a slight preference towards e-feedback.

Interviewees from the first-year group shared that they may not strongly favor one mode over the other because they are still exploring different methods and are comfortable with both formats as long as the feedback is clear and helpful. Among third-year students, there is a significant preference for e-feedback, with a large majority (77%) choosing this method over handwritten feedback (23%). According to these students, feedback on digital platforms is their favorite because it is more convenient, easier to access, and allows for quicker revisions. They also appreciate the ability to store and organize feedback digitally for future reference.

c. Types of errors

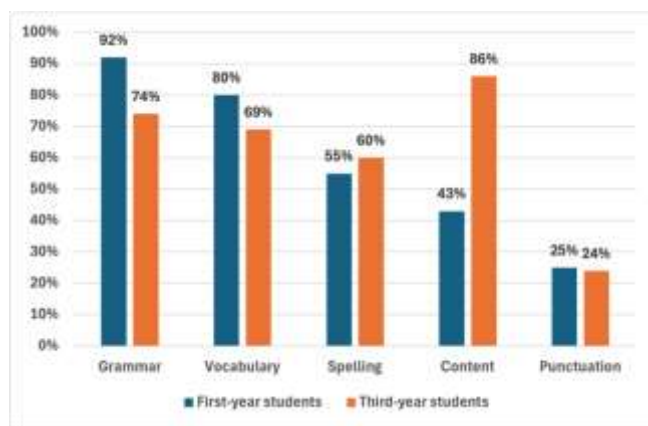


Figure 3: Students' preferences for types of errors

Figure 3 illustrates the preferences for different types of errors when receiving WCF among first-year and third-year students. For grammar errors, a significant 92% of first-year students prefer feedback on this type of error, compared to 74% of third-year students. It is suggested from the result that first-year students prioritize foundational language skills. Similarly, 80% of first-year students value feedback on vocabulary errors, while only 69% of third-year students do, indicating a stronger emphasis on vocabulary development in the earlier stages of learning.

In contrast, third-year students show a higher preference for feedback on content errors, with 86% favoring this type of feedback compared to 43% of first-year students. This highlights that as students progress, they place greater importance on the substance and organization of their writing. Furthermore, feedback on spelling errors is more popular among third-year students (60%) than first-year students (55%), which suggests that accuracy in spelling becomes more critical as their writing skills develop. It is noted that both groups show relatively low and similar preferences for feedback on punctuation errors, with 25% of first-year students and 24% of third-year students favoring this type. This indicates that punctuation is not a primary concern for either group.

In the interviews with first-year students, it is reported that they prefer feedback on grammar and vocabulary errors because they are new and inexperienced in learning the language. They need corrections on these elements to construct correct and meaningful sentences. On the other hand, third-year students admitted that they favor feedback on content errors because they have already developed a solid foundation in grammar and vocabulary. At this stage of their learning, they prefer feedback on content, which helps them improve the overall quality of their essays and arguments. This type of feedback allows them to handle more complex aspects of writing and enhances the depth and clarity of their ideas.

4.1.3. Students' activities and challenges after receiving WCF

a. Students' post-WCF activities

Post-WCF activities	First-year students	Third-year students
Review feedback, correct errors, rewrite texts	85%	76%
Take notes of the teacher's WCF	51%	60%
Consult materials	45%	58%
Ask the teacher for clarification	35%	44%
View the grade and do nothing else	19%	16%

Table 1: Students' post-WCF activities

As can be seen in Table 1, first-year students predominantly engage in reviewing feedback, correcting errors, and rewriting their texts, with 85% of them reporting this activity. This high percentage indicates that first-year students focus heavily on understanding their mistakes and working to correct them in their drafts. They also take notes of teachers' WCF (51%) and consult additional materials (45%) to better comprehend the feedback and improve their work. This suggests that they are developing a structured approach to learning from their errors. In addition, 35% of first-year students seek further clarification from their teachers, demonstrating a reliance on direct guidance. However, 19% of first-year students view their grade and do nothing else, possibly due to a lack of understanding or motivation.

In contrast, third-year students display slightly different patterns in their post-WCF activities. While 76% of them engage in reviewing feedback, correcting errors, and rewriting texts - a slightly lower percentage than first-year students - this still represents a significant majority. Third-year students are more likely to take notes of teachers' WCF (60%) and consult additional materials (58%), indicating a higher tendency to seek independent learning tools compared to first-year students. Moreover, 44% of third-year students ask for clarification, which shows a proactive approach in addressing uncertainties. Only 16% of third-year students view their grade and do nothing else, which is slightly lower than first-year students, suggesting that they are generally more engaged in the feedback process.

In addition to the activities mentioned above, students in the interviews shared that other activities are also beneficial. According to some first-year students, after receiving feedback, they often engage in writing exercises to strengthen the highlighted skills. These exercises help them apply feedback practically and improve their overall writing ability. Besides, third-year students assess their own writing against the feedback criteria, identifying areas for improvement. This self-reflection encourages them to take ownership of their learning and strive for better writing. Moreover, these students frequently discuss feedback with peers in collaborative settings. These discussions allow them to share insights and strategies for addressing similar feedback and enhancing their writing skills accordingly.

b. Students' difficulties

Difficulties after receiving WCF	First-year students	Third-year students
Sometimes I find it difficult to ask teachers for clarification	77%	76%
Sometimes I cannot understand the symbols teachers use to indicate my errors	67%	62%
Sometimes I cannot understand teachers comments because they are too general	58%	51%
Sometimes I cannot understand teachers' handwriting	33%	19%
Sometimes I disagree with teachers' corrections or comments	13%	11%

Table 2: Students' difficulties after receiving WCF

Research findings from Table 2 reveal that first-year students face several difficulties after receiving WCF. A significant 77% of them find it challenging to ask teachers for clarification, which may hinder their understanding and improvement. According to students in the interviews, this difficulty is due to a lack of confidence or fear of seeming incompetent. Besides, 67% of first-year students struggle with understanding the symbols used by teachers. Interviewees responded that this challenge often result in some misinterpretations of the feedback, which they do not expect to occur. The general nature of the comments is another issue, with 58% of students finding the feedback too vague to make specific improvements. In the interviews, students expressed frustration over the lack of detailed guidance, noting that comments such as "improve your grammar" or "rephrase this sentence" are not helpful without further explanation.

Furthermore, 33% of first-year students have trouble reading the teacher's handwriting, which directly affects their ability to understand the feedback. In their comments, students highlighted the difficulty of deciphering handwritten notes, particularly when the handwriting is small or cursive. Finally, 13% of first-year students disagree with the teacher's corrections or comments, which could create a barrier to accepting and applying the feedback. Students who disagree with the feedback often feel that their perspective or writing style is not being valued. Comments from these students indicate a desire for more dialogue with teachers to discuss the feedback and understand the rationale behind the corrections.

Third-year students, while also facing difficulties, report slightly different experiences. Like first-year students, a high percentage (76%) find it difficult to ask teachers for clarification. Comments from students often mention a reluctance to approach teachers due to fear of being perceived as incompetent or bothersome. Some students also expressed that they are unsure how to formulate their questions in a way that would elicit helpful responses. Meanwhile, 62% struggle with understanding the symbols. Giving comments on this

challenge, students mentioned the usefulness of reference sheets or guides provided by teachers that explain common symbols and their meanings.

The issue of general comments remains significant, with 51% of third-year students finding them too vague. Responses from interviewees reflect a desire for more detailed feedback that includes specific examples and suggestions for improvement. Interestingly, only 19% of third-year students report having trouble with teachers' handwriting. Many third-year students commented that they have become accustomed to their teachers' handwriting over time, making it easier to read. Finally, 11% of third-year students disagree with the teacher's corrections or comments. They expressed a desire for more opportunities to discuss feedback with teachers. This dialogue is seen as a way to resolve disagreements and enhance their learning experience.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Students' positive attitudes towards WCF

It is clear from the research findings that both first-year and third-year students highly value WCF, aligning with Lee [33] and Mahfoodh [5] who highlight the necessity of detailed and explicit feedback for writing development. As for the benefits of WCF, first-year students prioritize immediate benefits such as improved accuracy and confidence building, which reflects their need for foundational support through detailed feedback. This supports Mahfoodh's [5] view that beginners benefit from clear corrections. In contrast, third-year students value long-term benefits like enhanced writing skills and self-editing abilities, indicating their development into more independent writers, in line with Ferris [49]. Besides, the move in teachers' feedback focus from correcting all errors for first-year students to emphasizing major errors for third-year students promotes self-reliance and critical thinking, consistent with the findings of Ferris [49] and Bitchener & Ferris [23]. This progression reflects the expectation that advanced students have developed self-editing skills and can handle minor errors independently. It is also noted that WCF's role in enhancing understanding of writing conventions, serving as a motivational tool, offering personalized learning opportunities, and developing critical thinking skills highlights its diverse impact on students' academic growth. These benefits support the notion that tailored feedback significantly enhances learning outcomes, as noted by Hyland & Hyland [50] and Brookhart [51].

In general, the consistent high value placed on WCF by both first-year and third-year students confirms its universal importance across different stages of language learning. The prioritization of immediate benefits by first-year students and long-term benefits by third-year students suggests a developmental trajectory in students' perceptions of feedback. This indicates that as students progress, their needs change from requiring foundational support to seeking feedback that fosters independence and higher-order skills. More importantly, the transition in feedback strategies from comprehensive error correction to focusing on major errors demonstrates an adaptive teaching approach that corresponds with students' increasing proficiency. This adjustment not only helps students become more self-reliant but also encourages critical thinking, which is essential for advanced academic writing.

4.2.2. Variations in students' preferences based on their proficiency level

Research findings show the evolution of feedback preferences from focused to unfocused as students advance in their studies. The similarity in both previous studies and current findings is that focused feedback is favored for its clarity and manageability, particularly by beginners. However, the difference lies in the growing preference among advanced students for unfocused feedback, which suggests a transition towards a more holistic view of writing improvement as students progress in their studies. This trend is supported by Ellis [22] who emphasizes the importance of addressing multiple areas of writing for comprehensive skill development. The finding also supports Sheen's [21] conclusion that focused feedback is particularly effective in the initial stages of language learning, while advanced learners benefit more from broader, unfocused feedback that encourages independent learning and adaptability in various writing contexts. As students' proficiency level increases, they tend to seek feedback that not only addresses surface-level errors but also improves the overall quality of their arguments and organization in writing, as pinpointed by Ferris [52].

In terms of direct and indirect feedback, results of this study highlight the initial preference for direct feedback among beginners. However, as students become more advanced, they begin to appreciate indirect feedback, which promotes higher-order thinking skills. These skills are shown to be developed from long-term exposure to indirect feedback in Ferris [7] and Lyster and Ranta [53]. As for reasons why students at different language levels favor a particular type of WCF over the others, first-year students prioritize direct feedback to quickly grasp foundational concepts and improve basic skills, whereas third-year students, having developed more advanced skills, appreciate a blend of direct feedback for immediate improvement and indirect feedback for boosting deeper reflection and critical thinking. These findings are in line with other studies, such as

Bitchener and Ferris [23], who confirmed that while direct feedback is crucial for immediate error correction among beginners, indirect feedback plays a significant role in fostering deeper cognitive processing and long-term language acquisition among more proficient learners.

Results on manner of feedback provision show a consistency between previous studies and current findings which highlight the growing interest in electronic feedback as students progress in their learning path. The overwhelming preference for e-feedback among higher-level students reflects the increasing integration of digital tools in education and the need for feedback methods that align with students' technological proficiency and organizational needs. Findings show that e-feedback platforms often provide tools for comprehensive and detailed responses that enhance the feedback experience, as confirmed by Ene and Upton [34]. Likewise, students favor e-feedback for its convenience and fast speed, which helps to foster a more interactive and engaging learning environment (Warschauer and Grimes, [54]). Although other research supports handwritten feedback for its personal and immediate nature (El Ebyary and Wendeatt, [26]), results from the current study show that it is not preferred by skilled students. One possible explanation is that advanced students often have more demanding schedules and responsibilities. This increased workload can make time management a critical issue. Consequently, these students might prefer digital feedback tools, which allow for quicker access and easier integration into their existing workflows, enabling students to receive, review, and act on feedback without the delays associated with handwritten comments.

Regarding students' favorite types of errors corrected, findings reveal that first-year students exhibit a strong preference for feedback on grammar and vocabulary errors. This preference can be attributed to their focus on mastering basic language skills necessary for constructing correct and meaningful sentences. Feedback targeting grammar and vocabulary helps beginners establish a solid linguistic foundation, supporting their early language acquisition efforts (Ellis, [22]; Bitchener & Ferris, [23]). In contrast, third-year students show a higher inclination towards feedback on content and organization in their writing. This preference indicates a developmental progression where advanced students prioritize enhancing the overall quality and coherence of their essays. The finding aligns with earlier research which confirms that as students advance to higher academic levels, their writing goals expand beyond mere language accuracy to encompass deeper aspects of content development and argumentation (Hyland & Hyland, [19]; Li, [35]).

4.2.3. Students' engagement with WCF and associated challenges

The comparison between first-year and third-year students reveals both similarities and differences in their post-WCF activities. Both groups primarily focus on reviewing feedback, correcting errors, and rewriting texts, although first-year students do this slightly more than third-year students. Third-year students are more proactive in taking notes and consulting materials, indicating a greater independence in their learning process. This difference could be attributed to the increased experience and maturity of third-year students, who have more time to develop effective study habits and strategies. The emphasis on review and revision as a primary activity post-WCF is well-documented in the literature. Ferris [52] highlights the importance of detailed feedback in promoting student revisions. This process helps students internalize corrections and apply them to future work, fostering long-term improvement in writing skills. Furthermore, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick [43] argue that self-assessment and reflection are critical components of effective learning, supporting the finding that meticulous review is beneficial.

In terms of difficulties, results show that both groups find it challenging to ask for clarification, but first-year students struggle more with understanding symbols and teachers' handwriting. This suggests that as students move to higher level of their studies, they become more accustomed to the feedback methods used by their teachers. The general nature of comments remains a significant issue for both groups, which triggers a need for teachers to provide more specific and actionable feedback. The need for clear feedback is also echoed in various studies. According to Bitchener and Ferris [23], specific and detailed feedback is crucial for students to effectively correct their errors and understand underlying language rules. Lee [40] found that students benefit from feedback that is not only clear but also accompanied by examples and explanations, which help demystify complex corrections.

Besides, the slight decrease in disagreement with teacher corrections among third-year students, as shown in research results, may reflect a growing trust in the teacher's expertise and a better understanding of the feedback process over time. This finding reflects the significance of the emotional and cognitive challenges associated with WCF, which are supported in prior studies. According to Hyland and Hyland [50], the affective dimension of feedback plays a crucial role in how students perceive and respond to corrections. Teachers' ability to provide feedback in a supportive and constructive manner can mitigate negative emotional responses and enhance students' willingness to engage with the feedback.

Overall, the research findings indicate that while both first-year and third-year students engage actively with WCF, there are clear areas where additional support and guidance can improve their ability to benefit from

the feedback. Teachers can play a crucial role by providing clearer, more specific feedback and encouraging an open dialogue to help students overcome their difficulties. By addressing these challenges, teachers can enhance the effectiveness of WCF and support students in their academic development.

4.2.4. Suggestions for effective feedback strategies across different academic levels

It is learned from the findings of this study that WCF strategies must be adapted to the academic levels of students to maximize their learning outcomes. Across different academic levels, the needs and capacities of students require differentiated approaches to WCF. For beginners, feedback should be more detailed and specific. Lee [55] stated that novice learners benefit from explicit feedback that clearly identifies errors and provides concrete examples of correct usage. This approach helps build a strong foundation in language skills, as these students are still developing their understanding of basic grammar and writing conventions. Furthermore, Alshahrani and Storch [56] suggested incorporating metalinguistic explanations, which help students understand the rules governing language use, thereby promoting long-term retention and application of feedback.

In contrast, more advanced students can handle more sophisticated feedback strategies. At this stage, students have typically developed a higher level of language proficiency and can engage in self-assessment and reflection. Evans, Hartshorn, and Strong-Krause [57] highlighted the importance of indirect feedback, which encourages students to identify and correct their own errors. This strategy not only fosters independence but also enhances critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Also, Ferris [58] argues that peer feedback should be integrated at this level, as it promotes collaborative learning and allows students to gain diverse perspectives on their writing.

For all academic levels, timely and formative feedback is essential. Wiliam [59] emphasized that feedback should be given promptly to allow students to act on it while the task is still fresh in their minds. Formative feedback, which provides ongoing insights into students' progress, helps create a continuous learning loop where students can iteratively improve their skills. Moreover, the affective aspect of feedback cannot be overlooked. Hyland and Hyland [60] asserted that feedback should be delivered in a supportive and constructive manner to mitigate any negative emotional responses. This is particularly important for lower-level students who might feel discouraged by extensive corrections. Creating a positive feedback environment encourages students to view feedback as a tool for growth rather than criticism.

V. CONCLUSION

The research results indicate that WCF consistently plays an important role and is favored by students to improve their English writing skills. Students' preferences for WCF vary according to their English proficiency levels. Lower-level students tend to prefer feedback focused on grammatical and vocabulary errors, with direct corrections from teachers. In contrast, higher-level students prefer feedback on aspects such as essay structure, ideas, expression, and indirect feedback in the form of comments, evaluations, suggestions for corrections, or advice to improve their writing. These findings require teachers to adopt different feedback methods tailored to the diverse needs and preferences of students with varying proficiency levels. However, the research has limitations, such as a short implementation period, and calls for further surveys to gather teachers' opinions and examine their feedback strategies for more specific and in-depth evaluations. The potential for expanding this research includes conducting studies on the effectiveness of feedback strategies that better meet students' needs, or exploring the use of information technology or AI to optimize the efficiency of providing WCF.

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