EFL Students' Voices: Preferences and Perceptions on Teacher-provided Written Corrective Feedback

Voces de estudiantes de inglés: preferencias y Percepciones sobre la retroalimentación correctiva escrita docente

Authors:

Jorge Villavicencio
Universidad Nacional de Educación (UNAE),
Ecuador

Correspondence:

Jorge Villavicencio
jorgevillavicencioreinoso@gmail.com

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Abstract

Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) is a common teachers' practice to develop EFL writing skills in students; however, research in this field remains scant within and beyond Latin America. This context-specific study analyzed B1 EFL students' perceptions on the targets, strategies, and scope of teacher WCF through a mixed-methods approach adopting a convergent design with a Likert-type questionnaire variant. The Perceptions of WCF Questionnaire ($\alpha = .67$) was administered to 189 Ecuadorian university students. Quantitative and qualitative analyses showed a preference for direct feedback and indirect feedback accompanied by corrective information as they guided error revision clearly and promoted autonomous learning. Furthermore, the participants valued WCF on linguistic and content elements and expressed interest in receiving comprehensive correction of their errors. Nevertheless, they showed limited understanding of idea-focused feedback. Pedagogical implications and study limitations are discussed.

Keywords: teacher-provided feedback, written corrective feedback, writing skills, EFL learners' perceptions and preferences, university level.

Resumen

La retroalimentación correctiva escrita (RCE) es una práctica docente esencial para desarrollar la escritura en inglés; sin embargo, la investigación en este ámbito sigue siendo limitada dentro y fuera de Latinoamérica. Este estudio, centrado en un contexto específico, analizó las percepciones de estudiantes de inglés B1 sobre los objetivos, estrategias y alcances de la RCE docente mediante un enfoque mixto con diseño convergente y de variante de cuestionario tipo Likert. El Cuestionario de Percepciones sobre la RCE ($\alpha = .67$) se aplicó a 189 estudiantes universitarios ecuatorianos. Los resultados evidenciaron preferencia por la retroalimentación directa y por la indirecta acompañada de información correctiva, percibidas como guías claras para la revisión de errores y el aprendizaje autónomo. Asimismo, los participantes valoraron la retroalimentación lingüística y de contenido, y manifestaron interés en recibir corrección integral de sus errores. No obstante, mostraron comprensión limitada de la retroalimentación centrada en ideas. Se discuten implicaciones pedagógicas y limitaciones del estudio.

Palabras clave: retroalimentación docente, retroalimentación correctiva escrita, destreza escrita, percepciones y preferencias de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, nivel universitario.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, education seeks to promote autonomy, reflection, and continuous improvement in learners through student-centered approaches (Ministerio de Educación, 2011). In this regard, Written Corrective Feedback (WCF)—a common practice among language teachers—supports these educational goals by enhancing writing skills in English. WCF refers to the written responses teachers provide to students' errors in writing (Nanni & Black, 2017). However, this practice is not only limited to the correction of errors but also involves praising students' performance. Accordingly, teacher-provided WCF functions as an appraisal of the extent to which learners have acquired language skills (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

This appraisal does not occur in a single form or focus, but it can vary in its strategies, targets, and scope. Two common feedback strategies are direct and indirect feedback. In direct feedback, errors are explicitly corrected, whereas in indirect feedback, error markings are provided without corrections (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Also, WCF can address both content-related (content/ ideas and organization) and linguistic (grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics) errors as targets (Al-Jarrah, 2016). Additionally, its provision may focus on all, most, or a specific number of errors. When all errors are corrected, feedback is considered comprehensive or unfocused, whereas correcting only some or a specific number of errors is considered selective or focused (Ellis et al., 2008). Overall, WCF can adopt various strategies, targets, and scopes.

Because of its versatility and role in writing, teacher-provided WCF has received significant research attention. Its influence on mastering linguistic and/or content-related aspects of writing has become an object of several studies reporting its positive impact and recommending its use in classrooms (Bagheri & Rassaei, 2022; Chingchit, 2024; Villavicencio & Argudo, 2021). Furthermore, teachers' opinions about its role have been examined. From their perspective,

WCF is valuable for learners to improve their writing skills, with direct and indirect strategies particularly favored (Mamad % Vígh, 2022; Yaseen et al., 2024). Hence, WCF in its various forms has been applied and researched widely in language learning environments.

Although research and teachers support WCF, class practices should not rely solely on teachers' or researchers' views. Class decisions should also incorporate students' perspectives, especially in student-centered settings. In Ecuador, institutions teach English through student-centered approaches (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2016), and as students are at the heart of the learning process, their opinions on classroom practices should be heard. However, their voices on WCF remain scarce both within and beyond Ecuador (Gedik Bal, 2022; Gonzalez-Torres & Sarango, 2023). Therefore, this study attempts to identify B1 EFL university students' perceptions and preferences regarding teacher-provided WCF in terms of strategies, targets, and scopes.

1.1. Literature Review

It seems that the current literature regarding students' perceptions of teacher-provided WCF revolves around three main themes of interest – i.e., strategies, targets, and scope – and emphasizes that, overall, students see feedback as beneficial for developing their writing skills. In terms of strategies, direct and indirect options stand out as preferred methods of feedback delivery; however, students' preferences differ regarding the form of the strategy.

1.2. Perceptions on WCF strategies

On the one hand, learners favor direct feedback because of its clarity of correction that facilitates understanding and avoids similar mistakes in subsequent tasks (Ganapathy et al., 2020a; Yaseen et al., 2024). Particularly, learners prefer direct corrections because indirect feedback does not explicitly explain or rectify errors,

leaving them uncertain about what needs to be changed (Kawashima, 2023; Rasool et al., 2023). Similarly, students expect direct feedback with metalinguistic explanations of why something is incorrect, enabling them to remember it easily and avoid repeating mistakes (Ene & Yao, 2021; Rashtchi and bin Abu Bakar, 2019). According to Hamid et al. (2021), metalinguistic comments are required since students often lack confidence in their language skills to correct errors independently.

On the other hand, indirect feedback is valued when it includes symbols, codes, or examples, as they are guiding and self-explanatory and foster comprehension (Cho and Park, 2019; Valentin-Rivera, 2023). Reynolds and Zhang (2022) suggest that this strategy encourages teacher-student interactions because students independently correct their errors, which can reflect the extent of their learning autonomy. However, learners' preferences for either direct or indirect strategies vary based on their correction targets. Whereas indirect feedback is generally preferred for content-related issues, direct feedback is valued for linguistic concerns.

Finally, Kim et al. (2020) and Mikulski et al. (2019) report no consistent trend in strategy preferences. Learners value both strategies regardless of codes or underlining (indirect) or explicit corrections (direct). In this vein, Mikulski et al. (2019) reason that when WCF is clear, learners can make corrections effectively. Lastly, Kim et al. (2020) recommend providing feedback during task completion rather than afterward to enhance error comprehension. In conclusion, there appears to be no agreement on which WCF strategy learners prefer because preferences vary depending on individual learning needs.

1.3. Perceptions on WCF targets

A second area of interest is targets. Studies show that students accept WCF on all aspects of writing—content/ideas and linguistics features—though they tend to prioritize feedback on certain areas. To illustrate, Gedik Bal (2022) and Nanni and Black (2017) highlight that learners favor feedback on grammar and vocabulary, and while teachers could express concerns about

concentrating on these aspects, students positively respond to such corrections, particularly in classrooms where writing accuracy is a central goal (Mikulski et al., 2019). Conversely, Nguyen et al. (2021) and Nurie (2020) communicate that learners prefer feedback on content/ideas and organization when their main interest is to clarify ideas (Reynolds & Zhang, 2022).

These varied results may stem from different factors. As Nguyen et al. (2021) observe, preferred targets naturally differ within and across classrooms since students are diverse. Furthermore, attention to content and linguistic aspects can reflect learners' awareness of their interdependence in conveying effective messages. Lastly, Reynolds and Zhang (2022) note that WCF is perceived as unnecessary for already-mastered targets, and certain errors might be more demanding than others due to their depth of reflection. In other words, linguistic correction entails less student reflection compared to content aspects.

1.4. Perceptions on WCF scope

Research on scopes has yielded varied results. First, studies conducted in English as either a second language (ESL) or a foreign language (EFL) report that learners tend to view unfocused feedback as essential for understanding, learning, and retaining lessons (Ganapathy et al., 2020b; Nouraey and Behjat, 2020; Yaseen et al., 2024). Nguyen et al. (2021) remark that a comprehensive approach is commonly favored to achieve accuracy, imitate good writing, and address students' inability to detect and correct errors independently. As a result, content and linguistic aspects are addressed.

Nonetheless, other works suggest that students advocate for a selective approach. This is because, unlike comprehensive feedback, focused feedback does not overwhelm learners with extensive and detailed revisions (Ene and Yao, 2021; Saliu-Abdulahi and Hellekjær, 2020). Moreover, selective feedback can encourage self-correction and prevent learners from feeling demotivated by excessive corrections (Nguyen et al., 2021). However, the selective scope has been mostly studied in linguistic corrections,

so insights into content-related aspects remain scarce.

1.5. Perceptions on WCF from Latin America

In Latin America, studies on WCF are limited and offer a partial understanding of students' perceptions. López (2023) exclusively addresses targets and strategies. The author notes that less proficient Colombian students prefer corrections on grammar, whereas advanced learners value feedback on organization and coherence. Interestingly, both groups, especially advanced learners, favor indirect feedback accompanied by metalinguistic comments. For her part, Westmacott (2017) examines six Chilean learners' opinions on direct and coded indirect feedback through action research. The participants prefer the latter strategy for reinforcing grammatical knowledge, encouraging active responses to feedback and fostering autonomous learning. Learners, however, note two drawbacks: initial confusion caused by the codes and uncertainty about the accuracy of their corrections. The author recognizes that insights are limited since the study has a small sample and focuses on two strategies only. Finally, Ecuadorian studies are primarily centered on whether students consider feedback valuable. In Narváez and Verdezoto (2021), students identify feedback as a regular practice in EFL courses and understand its role in developing their language skills. Furthermore, Gonzalez-Torres and Sarango (2023) report xthat learners emphasize WCF's contribution to refining their writing skills, particularly in grammar and vocabulary. Taken together, research on WCF practice and students' perceptions remains scant in Latin American settings (Villavicencio, 2023).

Although efforts to determine learners' perceptions of teacher-provided WCF in terms of strategies, targets, and scope exist, the available evidence remains limited. Current studies tend to focus on either targets (e.g., Rashtchi & bin Abu Bakar, 2019) or strategies and scope (e.g., Nanni and Black, 2017), neglecting their interrelation. Consequently, research simultaneously exploring all three areas is necessary. Furthermore, there is no consensus in students' opinions regarding targets, strategies, and scope, likely due to differences among student groups across research settings. This underscores the need for context-specific studies as generalizing results seems impractical. Moreover, evidence within and beyond Latin America is still scant, prompting calls for further investigation in this field. Most importantly, listening to students' opinions on class practices is relevant when discussing student-centered education.

Thus, this study aimed to identify EFL students' perceptions and preferences regarding teacher-provided WCF in writing tasks in terms of strategies, targets, and scope. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What teacher-provided WCF strategies do B1 EFL students prefer in writing? Why?
2. What are B1 EFL students' perceptions of teacher-provided WCF on content-related and linguistic aspects of writing? Why?
3. What type of scope of teacher-provided WCF do B1 EFL students prefer in writing? Why?

2.   Materials and methods

2.1. Research Approach and Design

This context-specific mixed-methods study employed a convergent design with a questionnaire variant. According to Creswell and Plano (2018), a convergent design integrates quantitative and qualitative data for a holistic understanding of an issue, and the questionnaire variant, through its open-ended questions, allows researchers to validate or confirm the closed-ended results. The questionnaire was administered cross-sectionally, as data were collected at a single point in time (Creswell, 2015).

2.2. Setting and Participants

The research context was the Language Institute of a public university in Ecuador. The Institute offers free English courses from A1 to B2 levels to undergraduates as part of their graduation requirements. The sample consisted of nine B1 courses selected through convenience sampling due to their accessibility to the researcher (Dörnyei & Dewaele, 2022). In total, 189 (48 male and 141 female) students aged between 18 and 25 years completed the questionnaire. The participants met the following inclusion criteria: being native Spanish speakers, majoring in fields other than English, and having prior experience receiving teacher-provided WCF at the Institute.

2.3. Instrument

The Perceptions of WCF Questionnaire was employed. This five-point Likert-type tool was adapted from Chen et al. (2016), Nanni and Black (2017), Nemati et al. (2017), and Rashtchi and Bin Abu Bakar (2019), and it consisted of four sections: demographic and second language (L2) information, preferences for feedback strategies, perceptions of feedback targets, and preferences for feedback scopes. The sections on preferences and perceptions included closed-ended items followed by open-ended questions eliciting the reasons behind students' choices.

The validity of the tool was ensured through multiple measures. First, content validity was supported by adapting items from published studies in high-quality journals (Hamid et al., 2021). Additionally, the tool was reviewed by an experienced EFL teacher colleague, who provided feedback on item clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study's scope. Finally, adjustments were made accordingly before assessing the instrument's reliability.

Also, the instrument was piloted with 24 respondents who shared similar characteristics with the actual participants. Completion of the instrument took approximately 15 minutes, indicating that it was time-appropriate (Dörnyei & Dewaele, 2022). Statistical analyses of the overall tool and its two constructs (preferences for strategies and perceptions of targets) yielded

Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .67, .62, and .76, respectively, indicating acceptable reliability since coefficients were above .60 (Dörnyei & Dewaele, 2022). Finally, no item modifications were suggested by the pilot participants.

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The instrument was administered one month before the participants completed their B1 English course. The administration involved debriefing the participants about the study's purpose, signing a consent form, and completing the paper-based questionnaire in Spanish. Nguyen et al. (2021) recommend using the participants' mother tongue to minimize potential language proficiency issues during completion. After collecting the responses, anonymity was ensured, and the papers were coded for subsequent analysis.

Quantitative data were processed and analyzed in SPSS version 25 to examine respondents' perceptions and preferences for WCF in developing writing skills. Following Boone and Boone (2012), medians, frequencies, and Chi-square tests were applied as they are suitable analytical procedures for Likert-type data. The median was suitable for analyses as Likert-type surveys treat items individually and provide ordinal data for responses (Boone & Boone, 2012), and it is not sensitive to outliers. Finally, the Chi-square goodness-of-fit test was performed for each item to identify the distribution of responses. A significance level of 5% (p<.05) was the criterion for accepting or rejecting the hypotheses. The following hypotheses were established:

H0: the distributions of the responses are the same.
H1: the distributions of the responses are different.

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify the participants' reasons behind their choices. Braun & Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data" (p. 7). Because the aim was to provide a detailed account of specific aspects of the data, deductive analysis was used for coding, and the analyses were theoretically driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Consequently, the items in sections two to four

served as initial codes to identify the participants' reasons for their perceptions and preferences.

Based on Braun and Clarke (2006), the reasons were first identified and classified under their corresponding questionnaire items during data familiarization. Then, recurrent patterns within the reasons were coded and later grouped into themes. Codes and themes occurred at a semantic level since they were extracted from the explicit meanings in the data. Next, themes were described in the results and subsequently discussed. Lastly, data interpretation was accomplished through the integration of quantitative and qualitative results (Creswell & Plano, 2018). The purpose of this integration was first to identify trends in students' preferences and perceptions regarding teacher-provided WCF and then to deepen understanding through the reasons underlying those preferences and perceptions. To protect confidentiality and comply with ethical research standards, participants are referred to as Respondents 01 through 189.

3. Results

3.1. What teacher-provided WCF strategies do B1 EFL students prefer in writing? Why?

Table 1 reports that, according to the Chi-square test results (p<.05), responses were not evenly distributed but clustered on one side of the scale. Most students agreed that either direct (E and F) or indirect (B and D) feedback was useful. Particularly, indirect strategies were preferred when they included some guiding reference such as a source for information or the location of an error accompanied by codes (B and D).

Conversely, the majority deemed reporting errors without correcting or indicating them (A and C) ineffective.

According to the participants, top choices B, D, E, and F served as clear guides by providing corrections and explanations for errors. As respondent 17 stated, "these corrections are very detailed, showing us exactly where we went wrong" (January 12, 2023). Respondent 42 echoed this sentiment, explaining, "I chose these options because I believe feedback is essential for clarifying doubts and misconceptions" (January 12, 2023).

Table 1. Students' Perceptions on the Usefulness of Teacher-provided WCF Strategies
Own source (2025)

Strategy[a]	Frequency (%)					Median	$\chi2$[b]
	Very useless	Useless	Neither useful nor useless	Useful	Very useful		
A	28.57	33.33	23.81	7.41	6.88	2	106.51
B	6.88	17.99	22.75	28.04	24.34	4	14.65
C	29.63	28.57	25.4	9.52	6.88	2	94.67
D	0.53	3.17	8.99	33.86	53.44	5	100.98
E	0.53	1.06	5.29	29.63	63.49	5	131.65
F	1.06	2.12	3.7	4.23	88.89	5	130.16
G	70.74	14.89	9.04	1.6	3.72	1	228.05

a A = Underlining the error without correcting it. B = Underlining the error and then directing you to a source for information. C = Indicating the type of error without locating or correcting it. D = Locating the error (e.g., by underlying it) and also indicating the type of error. E = Underlining the error and then correcting it. F = Correcting the error and then providing an explanation for the correction. G = Simply indicating that you have an error in the sentence by putting a cross next to it without locating or correcting the error.
b df = 2, p < .05
Own source (2025)

The strategies were also favored as they help prevent similar errors in future tasks. It seems that past tasks can serve as a source of error information or a reference for subsequent work. Respondent 58 acknowledged, "to me, the most effective approach is to identify the mistake, explain why it's incorrect, and categorize the error. This will help prevent similar mistakes from happening again" (January 19, 2023). Likewise, respondent 61 noted, "having our mistakes highlighted and explained helps us learn from them. If we're unsure about something in the future, we can look at our previous work with the corrections to guide us" (January 19, 2023).

Moreover, indirect strategies B and D were supported because they can promote autonomous learning. According to respondent 35, "teacher feedback is valuable, but it's essential that we do our own work too; that's why option B is useful" (January 12, 2023). A similar opinion was shared by respondent 100, "it's necessary to indicate sources of information in books to encourage self-learning, and it's very useful for the teacher to collaborate by explaining the error" (January 19, 2023).

In the case of direct feedback, participants advocated for strategies E and F since they facilitate the revision of feedback. Students preferred having their errors explicitly corrected rather than deciphering them based on the teacher's indications (indirect feedback). Respondent 91 explained, "the strategies are more direct, so I don't have to spend time figuring out what the teacher meant or tried to say" (January 19, 2023). Respondent 130 added, "the teacher should show me what the answer should have been because sometimes we don't review the errors, and we're left wondering what the mistake was" (July 13, 2023).

Opposition to strategies A, C, and G arose because they are not considered genuine feedback because of their lack of corrective information. Respondent 29 highlighted, "they are not feedback because they only indicate that

something is wrong without explaining why" (January 12, 2023). Respondent 33 further added, "they are very ambiguous strategies that do not really provide meaningful feedback, considering that this is a language we are still learning" (January 12, 2023).

Additionally, the participants did not perceive those strategies as catalysts for learning because they might create confusion and doubt. Respondent 07 commented, "highlighting an error doesn't show me what I did wrong; instead, it makes me question things I thought I got right" (January 12, 2023). Furthermore, respondent 88 stated, "no explanation or correction of the error can lead to a lot of confusion, so students will continue making the same error" (January 19, 2023).

Finally, the absence of specific corrections was deemed demotivating, leading students to lose interest in learning and reflecting a perceived lack of the teacher's interest in their progress. Respondent 79 explained, "if they don't tell me why the error is there or where it's wrong, or if they just put an X, it would make me feel bad without knowing what I'm doing wrong, which would make me lose interest in English or stop learning English" (January 19, 2023). Similarly, respondent 111 added, "the strategies indicate a lack of interest in the students" (July 13, 2023).

3.2. What are B1 EFL students' perceptions of teacher-provided WCF on content-related and linguistic aspects of writing? Why?

Table 2 shows that, according to the Chi-square test results ($p<.05$), responses were not evenly distributed but clustered to one side of the scale. Most participants favored teacher-provided WCF on content-related and linguistic aspects, particularly grammar, vocabulary, and organization. Conversely, 16,4% of students regarded feedback on content/ideas as not valuable.

Table 2. Students' Perceptions on the Usefulness of Teacher-provided WCF on Content-related and Linguistic Errors
Own source (2025)

Error category[a]	Frequency (%)					Median	χ2b
	Very useless	Useless	Neither useful nor useless	Useful	Very useful		
Content/ideas	1.06	5.29	10.05	34.92	48.68	4	11.28
Organization	0.53	2.12	4.76	25.4	67.2	5	0.82
Grammar	0	0.53	3.7	15.34	80.42	5	6.74
Vocabulary	0	1.06	4.23	27.51	67.2	5	4.36
Mechanics	1.59	5.29	6.35	28.57	58.2	5	6.61

[a] Content-related aspects: Content/ideas = Relevance, development, and clarity of ideas. Organization = Coherence and cohesion, genre, and paragraph structure. Linguistic aspects: Grammar = Rules and structures that govern how words are combined to form meaningful sentences. Vocabulary = Word choice. Mechanics = Punctuation, spelling, capitals, and paragraphing.
b df = 2, $p < .05$

Because of text clarity concerns, the participants favored corrections on both content-related and linguistic aspects of writing. Respondent 53 argued, "corrections are key to improving the writing and comprehension of a text" (January 12, 2023). Further, respondent 136 commented, "the goal is to write clearly and to the point, so any correction helps us improve our writing" (July 13, 2023).

Another reason for this preference was the desire to achieve thorough mastery of the writing skill. Respondent 11 reflected, "it's very useful when teachers give feedback on all our errors, big or small, to master the language and gain more specific knowledge that helps us in writing" (January 12, 2023). Likewise, respondent 20 noted, "corrections on these aspects help us have a correct command of English since, by knowing the mistakes we make, we can improve" (January 12, 2023).

Finally, the participants opposed idea-level feedback because ideas reflect personal opinions; therefore, they should not be corrected. Respondent 162 affirmed, "I don't really agree with being corrected about my ideas because everyone has their own ideology and thinks differently" (July 20, 2023). Respondent 08 assented by saying, "marking errors on our ideas will make us not want to participate with our judgement or opinion on a topic" (January 12, 2023).

3.3. What type of scope of teacher-provided WCF do B1 EFL students prefer in writing? Why?

Table 3 indicates that most respondents preferred all their errors to be corrected, whereas none wanted feedback on only a few major errors. The participants preferred feedback on all errors because it allows for personalized learning. Respondent 182 declared, "if I get feedback on all my mistakes, I'll know exactly which topic I should review. But if only some errors are pointed out, I will continue to do a poor job" (July 20, 2023). Similarly, respondent 02 conceded, "teachers should point out all the students' mistakes so that they receive feedback, can correct them, and see where they are making the most mistakes, so they don't make them again" (January 12, 2023).

Furthermore, participants opted for comprehensive feedback because achieving thorough mastery of writing was important to them. Respondent 39 stated, "teachers should select all the errors because in writing, both the structure, selection of ideas, as well as punctuation and grammar are essential for a good text" (January 12, 2023). Additionally, respondent 20 highlighted, "[comprehensive feedback] helps ensure that there are no gaps or blind spots in the acquisition of knowledge" (January 12, 2023).

Table 3. Students' Preferences for WCF Scope
Own source (2025)

Scope	N	%
Teacher should mark all errors	141	74.6
Teacher should mark all major errors but not the minor ones	14	7.41
Teacher should mark most of the major errors, but not necessarily all of them	9	4.76
Teacher should mark only a few of the major errors	0	0
Teacher should mark only the errors that interfere with communicating your ideas	21	11.11
Teacher should mark no errors and respond only to the ideas and content	4	2.12

4. Discussion

Overall, this context-specific study revealed clear trends in preferred feedback strategies, which contrast with Kim et al. (2020) and Mikulski et al. (2019). This difference may derive from their inclusion of different participants and a narrower study scope. The authors examined Korean and Spanish learners and focused only on direct and indirect strategies with comments or indications. In contrast, this work exclusively involved EFL participants and addressed a wider range of strategies. Thus, the research context may have influenced the results (Villavicencio, 2023).

More specifically, the participants in this study favored direct feedback strategies, consistent with Yaseen et al. (2024), and indirect feedback accompanied by codes and error location, in line with Valentin-Rivera (2023) and Westmacott (2017). The participants regarded the strategies as clear correction guides and explained that only reporting error occurrences without further indications was useless. These findings may stem from the nature of the preferred strategies, which provide details on what needs to be corrected and thus avoid confusion or uncertainty for students (Kawashima, 2023).

Regarding direct feedback, the participants perceived it as a guide facilitating feedback revision unlike merely marking errors, which they considered neither genuine feedback nor motivating for learning. In this respect, Schultz (2001) emphasizes that students view teachers as sources of feedback provision and explanation;

consequently, students expect instructors to provide corrections that clearly show what they did wrong. Moreover, consistent with Westmacott (2017), the respondents indicated that indirect WCF through error indications encourages autonomous learning. Since the strategy does not provide correct forms, students engage in reflection processes to amend inaccuracies independently (Ellis, 2008). Nonetheless, the strategy should include clear error indications (Mikulski et al., 2019) rather than just marking errors, since a lack of corrective information can cause confusion according to the study participants.

In terms of targets, the participants deemed both linguistic and content-related WCF valuable, similar to Gedik Bal (2022) and Nurie (2020). This suggests that learners are aware of the importance of both aspects to become proficient writers (Nguyen et al., 2021) and recognize their interdependence in creating effective texts. In this sense, the study respondents expressed their preference for feedback on both targets, as they aspired to produce clear texts and achieve thorough writing mastery.

Particularly, the participants favored feedback on grammar, vocabulary, and organization, in contrast to Gonzalez-Torres (2023), who identified grammar and vocabulary as students' primary focus. This emphasis on one target over the other might reflect classroom goals; thus, teachers can have learners focus on either

linguistic accuracy or idea clarity (Mikulski et al., 2019; Reynolds & Zhang, 2022). Consequently, these study results may have been influenced by the classroom evaluation practices at the Institute, which encompassed content and linguistic parameters.

A notable finding of this study is that 16,4% of participants opposed content/ideas feedback. They argued that ideas belong to personal opinions, so WCF should not address them. The respondents seem to be confused about what content feedback refers to. It is not about judging their views but appraising them regarding their clarity, relevance, and development (Brown, 2004; Ruegg, 2015). This confusion might have led respondents to express, "[feedback on content] is the least useful as it's not related to English grammar," and "it doesn't feel like I get feedback when [teachers] comment on my ideas. I think my ideas have nothing to do with grammar". The misunderstanding might stem from insufficient teacher explanations of what content feedback involves (Lee, 2019) and scarce attention to it during correction (Lee, 2017). In fact, WCF has been traditionally focused on linguistic aspects (Cárcamo, 2020).

Finally, consistent with Yaseen et al. (2024), the participants preferred WCF to cover all errors. They aim to master writing skills comprehensively and, therefore, value corrections on content-related and linguistic errors. This preference may derive from the nature of the unfocused scope, which addresses overall accuracy, good writing, and detection of flaws learners cannot identify (Nguyen et al., 2021). Furthermore, the respondents favored unfocused feedback for its personalized learning potential. Personalized learning deals with customizing teaching to learners' needs and strengths (Bishop et al., 2019), and comprehensive feedback can target each learner's actual errors in contrast to focused feedback which addresses specific ones (Ellis et al., 2008), overlooking individual learners' needs.

5.   Conclusions

This context-specific study explored B1 EFL students' perceptions and preferences regarding teacher-provided WCF in terms of strategies, targets, and scope at one university language institute in Ecuador; consequently, the results of this investigation pertain to this particular case.

The results reveal that the participants value direct feedback and indirect strategies that include either a source of information or coded indications of error locations to develop writing skills. When feedback does not have sufficient corrective information, the participants deem it confusing and unhelpful. Thus, teacher-provided WCF should be as clear and guiding as possible so that the participants recognize their errors and understand correct forms. Teachers may start providing direct feedback when learners do not have the confidence or knowledge to make independent corrections. Then, when they become more proficient, indirect feedback could be applied to foster reflection and problem-solving skills in error correction. Ultimately, teaching-learning processes should strive for autonomous learning.

Second, the participants value WCF on linguistic and content errors. Although they prefer all errors to be addressed, teachers can decide whether this is feasible or prioritize certain error types based on class needs. In either choice, instructors should communicate what targets feedback will cover. Further, while WCF can focus on either linguistic or content aspects, it should not concentrate on one throughout an entire course, as the other aspect may be perceived as irrelevant in writing. Learners should comprehend that mastering writing involves not only linguistic but also content precision, as they are interdependent and influence the effectiveness of texts.

Similarly, teachers should distinctly explain what each feedback criterion involves. The participants should understand that feedback on content is not about judging their personal opinions but appraising the relevance, clarity, and development of their ideas. Ultimately, they should know that the goal of feedback is to polish writing skills and not to judge personal opinions.

Finally, the respondents favor unfocused feedback for its personalized learning feature to achieve thorough writing mastery. As the classroom goal is to address students' language needs, comprehensive feedback can serve this purpose, as it corrects learners' actual errors and not those that seem common in class from the teacher's perspective. Consequently, content and linguistic inaccuracies are targeted, fostering a holistic development of writing skills. Nonetheless, assessing writing through an unfocused scope can be time-consuming due to its nature, so it is recommended that teachers alternate between an unfocused and focused scope.

6. Limitations and Recommendations

Similar to other works, this study acknowledges its limitations and provides recommendations. First, this context-specific research was conducted at a language institute of a public university, so the generalization of the results is not appropriate. Therefore, it would be useful to hear the voices of students on WCF from other contexts such as EFL majors, high schools, elementary schools, universities, and even from those learning L2s other than English.

Moreover, this study provides opinions from the study participants only. Hence, understanding teachers' perceptions and examining WCF practices are still needed to have a wider picture of the status of WCF in writing lessons. Subsequent studies can involve either a comparison between students' and teachers' perceptions and actual WCF classroom practices or investigate teachers' perceptions and classroom practices only.

Also, the discussion on WCF seems far from being settled in the current literature. Additional research is suggested because the evidence remains scarce, particularly in Latin America. Likewise, teacher WCF requires further investigation in Ecuador. The existing studies are limited in number and approach feedback broadly. Studies should have a more specific focus regarding settings and extent rather than being open to perceptions of feedback on learning languages, as in Narváez and Verdezoto (2021). Works should address specific language skills, participants, and types, targets, strategies, and scope of feedback.

Finally, it is noted that most studies concentrate on either feedback targets or strategies and scope, neglecting the interrelation among them. Therefore, future research should examine all three elements simultaneously as this study. They should not be treated separately because teachers can make WCF decisions regarding how, what, and how much to correct based on students' preferences and perceptions. Ultimately, student-centered teaching requires students' voices in class decisions.

7.   Acknowledgments

8.   Bibliographical references

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