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ESL Learners' Perceptions and Preferences of Written Corrective Feedback (WCF)

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing body of research examining the effectiveness of Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) in improving L2 learners' writing accuracy, there has been a notable lack of studies investigating learners' preferences and perceptions of WCF in the Sri Lankan context. This study aims to address this gap by investigating ESL learners' perceptions and preferences of WCF in a Sri Lankan ESL classroom. Specifically, the study seeks to investigate ESL learners' perceptions of WCF, their preferred types of WCF, and the causes underlying their preferences. This study applies a mixed-methods research approach, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data were collected from 60 ESL students by means of written questionnaires. The qualitative data were analyzed using the deductive content analysis method, whereas the quantitative data were processed using Microsoft Excel to generate descriptive statistics. The findings reveal that students tend to hold a positive view of WCF. In addition, the study concludes that students perceive teacher-provided WCF positively, viewing it as beneficial for improving their writing skills. Moreover, the study reveals that students prefer indirect WCF, where errors are highlighted or indicated by the teacher but not corrected, suggesting that they value guidance and support in their writing development over explicit correction. However, the generalizability of the findings is limited by the fact that the sample was drawn from a single public school and focused only on Grade 11 students, which may not fully represent the broader population of ESL learners. To address this limitation, future studies should expand their scope by including larger and more diverse samples from multiple schools and educational levels to offer a more comprehensive understanding of ESL learners' feedback preferences.

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1. Introduction

Feedback is a vital component of the teaching and learning process, providing learners with valuable information about their language development. Primarily, it refers to feedback on language production, although it can also encompass guidance on study skills, attitudes, effort, and other aspects. Providing effective feedback is a key responsibility of educators. According to Corder, errors play a crucial role in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and serve as an indication of the extent to which learners have grasped the target language, as well as the areas where they require further assistance. Therefore, it is essential that any given feedback is effective and relevant to the task at hand. Specifically, feedback plays a significant role in student learning, and its implementation has been shown to be constructive in improving students' writing skills.

One common form of feedback in language classes is error correction, or corrective feedback, which aims to improve learners' accuracy by providing information about their performance and guiding them towards error correction (Shirota, 2016). Error feedback or corrective feedback (CF) is also defined as, "any indication to the learners that their use of the target language is incorrect" (Lightbown & Spada, 1999). According to K. Hyland and F. Hyland (2019), error feedback is "a constructive judgment of a text: an evaluation that points forward to the student's future writing and the development of his or her writing processes" (p. 1). The significance of such feedback in second language (L2) writing has been a subject of debate in the literature for many decades. Nevertheless, numerous studies have shown that providing corrective feedback can significantly enhance learners' writing skills (Boggs, 2019; Hadiyanto, 2019; Polio, Fleck, & Leder, 1998). Moreover, much of the existing research on feedback has predominantly centered on teachers, examining their feedback strategies, their stances and perspectives, and the influence of their

feedback on students' writing (e.g., Tade, & Tinti, 1997; Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Stern & Solomon, 2006).

One effective way of providing feedback is through written feedback, which is specifically referred to as Written Corrective Feedback (WCF). This type of feedback involves written comments or notes on a student's writing instead of oral feedback. Bitchener and Storch (2016) state that "WCF is a written response to a linguistic error that has been made in the writing of a text by an L2 learner. It seeks to either correct the inaccurate usage or provide information about where the error has occurred and/or about the cause of the error and how it may be corrected." (p.6). Researchers highlight that WCF is an important instructional tool that helps learners enhance their writing skills (Ferris, 2004). Language instructors or teachers commonly utilize WCF as an approach to facilitate students' improvement in writing (Alshahrani & Storch, 2014; Jui-Jung et al., 2017).

Written Corrective Feedback encompasses various types, including direct, indirect, metalinguistic, unfocused, and focused. Ellis's (2009) classification of WCF comprises direct feedback (errors are corrected), indirect feedback (the presence of an error is identified but not corrected), and metalinguistic comment (errors are identified without correction and a general comment on the nature of the errors is given). Moreover, direct feedback typically involves the teacher correcting errors by crossing out an unnecessary word phrase/morpheme, inserting a missing word/phrase/morpheme, or providing the correct form or structure (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010a). On the contrary, indirect feedback occurs when the teacher signals the presence of an error without providing the correction. This type of feedback simply highlights the error without supplying the correct form. It may take the form of writing down a code, which stands for an error category, or highlighting the error

with no further explanation (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010). Teachers often use various common symbols and codes to provide indirect CF, such as (VT: verb tense, Sp. Spelling, WW: wrong word). This encourages students to identify and correct the errors themselves, promoting “guided learning and problem-solving” (Lalande, 1982), which can aid long-term language acquisition. In addition to these three main types, Ellis (2009) categorized feedback as either focused or unfocused. Focused feedback targets specific errors and provides corrective feedback to the learners’ writing task. Unfocused or comprehensive feedback, on the other hand, corrects all errors. Overall, these typologies; direct, indirect, metalinguistics, focused and unfocused serve different roles in helping learners develop their language skills and improve their error correction strategies.

Written Corrective Feedback has been a highly debated and controversial topic in the field of SLA and among teachers in the last four decades. The past two decades have seen a substantial body of research on WCF, sparked by the debate over its efficacy between Truscott (1996) and Ferris (1999). Yet, the usefulness of WCF cannot be entirely dismissed or definitively confirmed. In this regard, researchers are divided into two groups: those in favor of WCF and those who oppose its provision. For instance, the findings of Bitchener and Knoch’s (2010) study demonstrate that WCF plays a crucial role in enhancing learners’ writing accuracy. Ferris (1999) provided evidence that learners valued their teachers’ feedback and perceived WCF as helpful in improving their writing skills. Research by Mackey et al. (2007) supports the view that WCF is seen as beneficial for improving lexical and grammatical accuracy. Furthermore, since 2000, popular interest in WCF research has primarily focused on quasi-experimental studies investigating its efficacy. Notably, research has consistently shown that learners place great importance on teachers’

WCF and find it to be the most useful among other types of feedback, such as oral or electronic conferencing (Ekholm et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2006; Zumbunn et al., 2016). These studies provided empirical evidence of the significant benefits of WCF. However, critics of WCF argue that it may be detrimental rather than beneficial. Truscott (1996) famously argued that “grammar correction has no place in writing courses and should be abandoned,” arguing that it does not lead to significant improvements in writing accuracy and may even discourage learners. Further supporting this perspective, some researchers (e.g., Liu, 2008; Semke, 1984; Truscott & Hsu, 2008) have argued that WCF can be more harmful than helpful, potentially leading to negative effects on learners’ confidence and writing development. They suggest that focusing too much on grammatical errors may detract from other aspects of writing, such as content and organization. Additionally, Mustafa (2012) found that Saudi students sometimes feel dissatisfied with the feedback they received, indicating a mismatch between their expectations and the actual feedback.

In light of this ongoing debate, a crucial area of focus has emerged: understanding how students perceive the usefulness of WCF. Recent research has emphasized that learner perception is a key factor in determining the effectiveness of WCF (e.g., Diab, 2005; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Hyland, 2003; Leki, 1991; Schulz, 1996, 2001). Studies such as Saidon et al. (2011) and Hamouda (2011) highlight that students, including those in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, generally view WCF positively and believe it aids their writing improvement. Yang and Liao (2011) further support the idea that students who view WCF as constructive and relevant are more likely to engage with it effectively and use it to enhance their writing skills. Their study emphasizes that when students find feedback useful and applicable to their writing, they are generally more motivated to apply it, resulting in improved writing performance.

Additionally, research highlights the variability in students' preferred types of WCF. While some students prefer detailed comments on content and structure (Ashwell, 2000; Leki, 1991), others value direct feedback or metalinguistic explanations (Nemati et al., 2017; Saeli, 2019). This variability emphasizes the necessity for teachers to understand students' perceptions and preferences to provide effective, tailored feedback. This is also because if students construe instructional techniques in ways not intended by the teacher, this disconnect can hinder the effectiveness of learning (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010). Moreover, the mismatch between students' and teachers' perceptions of WCF can lead to pedagogical challenges. For instance, teachers may provide a particular type of WCF, but students may have different preferences or expectations. If students do not perceive a certain type of WCF as necessary, they are less likely to engage with or utilize it. They may undervalue corrective feedback if they find the teacher's comments unhelpful or disagree with the grades they receive (Marrs, 2016; Weaver, 2006). Teachers often complain that students pay only minimal attention to even meticulously composed corrective feedback. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for both teachers and students to clearly define what works for them and how. Without a clear understanding of how students perceive teacher feedback, teachers may risk relying on strategies that are counterproductive.

Furthermore, learners' preferences and perceptions of WCF may be partly shaped by the nature of feedback on their writing. Believing that the feedback provided is helpful, the learner will consequently become more motivated to use their preferred WCF to identify and correct their errors. This, in turn, leads to learners being more attentive to their mistakes, whereas those who disagree with the feedback may be less motivated (McCargar, 1993; Schulz, 2001). This disconnect can lead to students repeating mistakes and making only superficial changes

to their writing. However, despite receiving written feedback, students often continue to repeat mistakes. They tend to make minor adjustments to their grammar and sentence structure errors based on teachers' remarks but rarely revise the overall ideas and content of their compositions. This lack of engagement may stem from a disconnection between the type of feedback given and the student's emotional and motivational responses. Therefore, it is essential for educators to understand students' perceptions and preferences regarding WCF. By aligning feedback with these factors, educators can foster a more effective feedback process that encourages student involvement and prompts a more concerted effort to correct errors and enhance writing skills.

Although considerable research has been conducted on WCF, studies exploring students' perceptions, their preferences for various types of WCF, and the reasons behind these preferences remain limited in the Sri Lankan context. In other words, although WCF has been investigated through different lenses, the relation between learner perspective, preference for the explicitness of WCF, and their performance in writing is scarce in the literature. This gap is especially pronounced in the context of Sri Lankan ESL learners, where such research is notably scarce. In addition, comprehensive analyses of existing research in this area (e.g. Hyland & Hyland, 2006) highlight the lack of conclusive evidence supporting WCF or determining whether one type of feedback is more effective than another. Therefore, exploring students' perceptions and preferences regarding WCF is crucial for enhancing second language learning and teaching. Thus, this study aims to explore ESL learners' preferences and perceptions related to WCF within a Sri Lankan ESL classroom. It also seeks to examine ESL learners' views on WCF, identify the types of WCF they prefer, and understand the reasons behind their preferences. By focusing on these aspects, the

study aims to offer insights that can aid L2 specialists and teachers in tailoring their feedback approaches, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of current ESL programs and the overall learning experience.

1.1 Research Questions

The present study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do ESL learners perceive WCF provided by teachers on their writing tasks?
2. What types of WCF do learners prefer and why?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Methodology and Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. To meet the objectives of the study, a self-developed written questionnaire was administered to collect data. The questionnaires were distributed to 60 ESL learners (Grade 11) studying in a public school in the Southern Province and the data was based on WCF received by students in their current grade. A random sampling method was used to select the participants, comprising 40 female and 20 male students with varying levels of proficiency in English. A descriptive method was employed in this study, with graphical and numerical techniques used to summarize and describe the data, as well as to illustrate and interpret phenomena. Furthermore, the study emphasizes descriptive statistics by utilizing frequency and percentage calculations.

1.1 Instruments

To achieve the goals of the study, as outlined earlier, a self-developed written questionnaire was employed as the primary data collection instrument. The draft of the questionnaire was developed based on the

researcher's readings, existing studies, professional literature, published and unpublished theses relevant to the study. The use of a written questionnaire allowed for anonymous responses, which was considered crucial for achieving the study's goals. Quantitative data were collected using close-ended questionnaire items with yes-no questions, multiple-choice options, or Likert scale formats to measure the central tendencies of the participants, while qualitative data were gathered through open-ended questions to explore the reasons and rationales behind their opinions and preferences. The questionnaire consisted of 10 statements and was designed with the following considerations: (1) a minimal usage of technical jargon to ensure clarity; (2) an adequate number of questions to be completed in under 30 minutes; (3) a strong emphasis on open-ended questions to gain deeper insights into the reasons behind participants' perceptions of WCF, particularly in the context of ESL and (4) a focus on learning practices rather than theoretical issues pertaining to L2.

1.2 Data collection procedure

To begin the data collection process, the permission was initially obtained from the principal of the selected government school by explaining the purpose and potential benefits of the current research. Prior to the data collection process, a preparatory discussion was conducted to familiarize students with the concept of WCF and the various types of WCF commonly utilized by their teachers. This discussion, which took place in the presence of the class teacher, provided an opportunity for the researcher to ascertain that the students were already familiar with the error-coding table, as it was regularly applied by their teacher during the correction of their writing tasks. The questionnaire was given to the students at the end of one of the sessions conducted by their English teacher. All necessary instructions were provided to the students in both English

and Sinhala to ensure comprehensive understanding. Students were also assured that they could skip any questions they found uncomfortable and that their responses would be based solely on their personal opinions, with no right or wrong answers. They were allowed sufficient time to read and complete the questionnaire carefully, ensuring the collection of reliable and valid data.

1.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were processed using Microsoft Excel to determine frequencies and percentages, facilitating descriptive statistical analysis of the responses. This method provided an overview of the numerical data and helped identify trends and patterns in the participants' responses.

Qualitative data were analyzed using the deductive content analysis method where participants' responses to open-ended questions were summarized and categorized based on common themes. Each participant's responses were systematically reviewed and assigned to relevant codes representing the identified themes, such as feedback preferences, perceived effectiveness, and the

desire for specific feedback. To enhance the accuracy of the coding process, multiple coders were involved in categorizing the data, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus. Examples of participants' responses were then used to illustrate each coded theme. For example, participants who preferred direct feedback often stated that "direct feedback helps me know exactly where I went wrong," reflecting their desire for immediate and clear corrections. Conversely, those who favored indirect feedback expressed that "indirect feedback pushes me to think about my mistakes and find the correct answer myself," highlighting the self-reflection aspect.

This approach ensured a comprehensive analysis of both the numerical and explanatory data, and the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods provided a well-rounded understanding of students' perceptions of WCF.

3. Results and Discussion

The results of the written questionnaire addressed the research questions posed in this study.

Table 1. Participants' (ESL learners) perceptions of teacher's error corrections

Response Option	Count	Percentage
They are not important at all.	0	0
They are not important.	0	0
I have a neutral opinion on it	4	6.7%
They are important.	18	30%
They are very important.	38	63.3%

Table 2. The frequency of WCF provided by teachers

Question	Frequency of WCF	Count	Percentage
How often does your English teacher provide WCF on your writing tasks?	Always	45	75%
	Sometimes	10	16.7%
	Rarely	03	5%
	Never	02	3.3%

The opening question of the questionnaire explored the participants' perceptions of teacher-provided error correction in learners' writing tasks. According to Table 1, the students generally expressed a highly positive view of this aspect of writing instruction. Specifically, 38 out of 60 respondents, representing 63.3% of the total, selected the fifth option ("They are very important"), indicating strong support for the value of error correction in their learning process. The qualitative responses also reinforce this finding, with many students emphasizing the importance of feedback as a key element in their learning process. Conversely, a small number of participants with a neutral opinion suggests that while most find error correction beneficial, there may be individual differences in how feedback is perceived or its effectiveness. The absence of responses indicating that error correction is unimportant underscores a general agreement on its positive impact. Overall, the findings imply that teachers' error correction practices are highly valued by students, reinforcing the need for continued and effective feedback mechanisms in writing instruction. Additionally, addressing the perspectives of the small number of students who are neutral could provide insights into how feedback can be further tailored to meet diverse needs.

Table 2, which illustrates the frequency of WCF provided by teachers, reveals a predominant trend towards frequent feedback, with many students reporting that

they receive WCF regularly. A significant majority (75%) of students reported that their teacher provides WCF "always." This high percentage indicates that for most students, feedback on writing tasks is a consistent and integral part of their learning experience. It also suggests that teachers are actively involved in supporting students' writing development by providing regular feedback. About 16.7% of students indicated that they receive WCF "sometimes." This implies that while feedback is provided periodically, it may not be as frequent or consistent as for those who reported receiving it "always." Only 5% of students stated that they receive WCF "rarely." This small percentage suggests that a minority of students get feedback infrequently.

This could imply limited opportunities for these students to receive corrective guidance, which may affect their writing development. A very small percentage of students (3.3%) mentioned that they "never" receive WCF, suggesting a potential lack of support in this aspect of their writing instruction. Overall, the high frequency of WCF among most students highlights the significance of regular feedback in developing writing skills. However, the small percentage of students who receive WCF less frequently or not at all suggests that there may be inconsistencies in feedback delivery. Addressing these disparities could involve refining feedback strategies to ensure all students receive timely and constructive support.

Table 3. Participants' perceptions of WCF

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
WCF helps improve my writing in English.	00	00	8 13.3%	15 25%	37 61.6%
WCF helps improve my performance.	00	00	12 20%	18 30%	30 50%
WCF helps in my understanding of English grammar.	00	00	04 6.6%	25 41.6%	31 51.6%

WCF helps to clarify my misconceptions about the use of verbs, and tenses.	00	01 1.6%	15 25%	20 33.3%	24 40%
WCF helps to reduce my errors in spelling.	00	00	12 20%	20 33.3%	28 46.6%
WCF helps me reduce my capitalization errors.	00	00	08 13.3%	19 31.6%	23 38.3%
WCF increases my awareness of errors in my writing.	00	00	05 8.33%	20 33.3%	35 58.3%
I understand what I must do to improve my writing when I read my teacher's WCF.	00	01 1.6%	09 15%	23 38.3%	27 45%
WCF equips me for more advanced levels of academic writing.	00	03 5%	16 26.6%	13 21.6%	28 46.6%
WCF on my writing is unhelpful.	35 58.3%	12 20%	03 5%	00	00
WCF in my writing is frustrating.	35 58.3%	20 33.3%	05 8.33%	00	00
WCF in my writing makes me feel happy and confident.	01 1.6%	03 5%	15 25%	18 30%	23 38.3%
WCF, I receive on my writing motivates me to become a better writer.	00	01 1.6%	10 16.6%	20 33.3%	29 48.3%
WCF in my writing encourages me to do better next time.	00	00	12 20%	16 26.6%	22 36.6%
WCF in my writing makes me feel hopeless.	27 45%	18 30%	12 20%	03 5%	00

Based on the data presented in Table 3, a significant majority of students (61.6%) strongly agree that WCF contributes to their writing improvement. A smaller proportion (13.3%) remains neutral, while no students strongly disagree or disagree. This indicates a strong positive perception of WCF's effectiveness in writing improvement among the students. Half of the students (50%) strongly agree that WCF helps improve their performance, with 30% agreeing. A neutral stance is observed among 20% of the students, while none disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting a consensus that WCF has a positive impact on writing performance. Most students (51.6%) strongly agree that WCF aids in understanding English grammar, with 41.6% agreeing. Only 6.6% of students are neutral, reflecting a strong perception of

WCF's role in grammar comprehension. Regarding specific grammatical issues, 40% of students strongly agree that WCF clarifies misconceptions about verbs and tenses, while 33.3% agree. A quarter of the students (25%) are neutral, and a minimal 1.6% disagree. This reflects a positive perception of WCF in addressing verb tense issues. Nearly half (46.6%) of students strongly agree that WCF helps reduce spelling errors, with 33.3% agreeing. A neutral view is held by 20%, while no students disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting WCF is seen as effective in addressing spelling mistakes. Additionally, 38.3% strongly agree and 31.6% agree that WCF aids in reducing capitalization errors, with 13.3% expressing neutrality. This further suggests that WCF is seen positively in addressing issues of capitalization. A

substantial 58.3% strongly agree that WCF increases their awareness of writing errors, with 33.3% agreeing. A small proportion (8.3%) of respondents are neutral, reflecting a strong belief in WCF's role in enhancing error awareness. Furthermore, 45% strongly agree and 38.3% agree that they understand how to improve their writing from WCF. Neutral responses account for 15%, and 1.6% disagree, showing that WCF is generally effective in providing clear improvement guidance. In terms of long-term academic preparation, nearly half (46.6%) strongly agree and 21.6% agree that WCF helps prepare them for advanced academic writing. Neutral responses were given by 26.6%, with 5% disagreeing, indicating that WCF is valued for its role in academic preparation. A majority (58.3%) strongly disagree and 20% disagree with the statement that WCF is unhelpful, while 5% remain neutral. No students agree or strongly agree, suggesting that most find WCF helpful. Similarly, 58.3% strongly disagree and 33.3% disagree with the statement that WCF is frustrating, while 8.3% are neutral. No students agree or strongly agree, indicating minimal frustration with WCF. On the other hand, 38.3% strongly agree and 30% agree that WCF makes them feel happy and confident. Neutral responses were observed among 25%, and 6.6% disagree, suggesting that WCF generally has a positive emotional impact. Most students 48.3% strongly agree and 33.3% agree that WCF motivates them to improve their writing. Neutral responses account for 16.6%, and 1.6% disagree, indicating that WCF is seen as motivating. Additionally, 36.6% strongly agree and 26.6% agree that WCF encourages them to improve in the future, with 20% expressing neutrality. Lastly, 45% strongly disagree and 30% disagree that WCF makes them feel hopeless with 20% neutral and 5% agreeing, suggesting that WCF rarely leads to feelings of hopelessness.

Overall, the responses reflect a positive perception of WCF. Students generally

perceive WCF as beneficial for enhancing their writing skills, understanding grammar, and preparing for advanced academic writing. The emotional impact of WCF is also largely positive, with minimal frustration or feelings of hopelessness reported. To further explore these perceptions, qualitative data was analyzed to uncover the reasons behind students' attitudes toward WCF and their views on its role in their learning process. The following section presents a thematic grid summarizing students' responses, followed by an in-depth discussion of the key findings.

The qualitative analysis reveals several key insights into how ESL learners perceive WCF provided by teachers on their writing tasks. As shown in Table 4, the responses were grouped into recurring themes that highlight the multifaceted role of WCF in students' writing development. These insights align with the quantitative findings, which indicated a strong positive perception of WCF. One prominent theme that emerged is the perception of WCF as more than just immediate error correction. Many students value WCF as a tool they can revisit to reinforce their learning over time. As one student noted, "WCF can remind me and be learned at another time easily." This highlights students' appreciation for WCF as a resource that aids in long-term retention and skill development rather than serving as a one-time correction. Another significant theme is that WCF helps students identify and avoid repeating mistakes in the future. As one respondent stated, "We like feedback because it helps us to know and avoid our mistakes, and we learn from them. Thus, we will not repeat them." This reflects a proactive learning approach, where students view WCF as a resource that supports not only the correction of current errors but also the prevention of future ones. Students also perceive WCF as beneficial for both immediate error correction and long-term writing development. The qualitative data suggests that they value feedback for its dual role: addressing current writing problems

while contributing to sustained improvement over time. This indicates that students see WCF as an integral part of their writing progression, reinforcing both short-term accuracy and long-term growth. Furthermore, many responses highlight that WCF enhances students' awareness of their mistakes, ultimately aiding in their writing development. A recurring sentiment expressed was, "We will not repeat them," emphasizing how students appreciate feedback for helping them recognize errors and improve over time. This awareness not only supports their current learning but also contributes to their overall growth as writers. The final theme that emerged is the perception of WCF as an essential educational tool. Students view WCF as more than just a

means of correcting errors; they see it as a valuable resource for understanding common mistakes and developing writing proficiency. This reinforces the broader role of WCF in the learning process, positioning it as a key component of effective writing instruction. The qualitative analysis supports the view that WCF is a vital component of students' learning experiences. Its effectiveness lies in addressing immediate errors, fostering long-term learning, increasing awareness of mistakes, and enhancing students' confidence and skills. These findings, as presented in Table 4, complement the quantitative data, reinforcing the conclusion that well-implemented WCF can significantly improve students' academic writing abilities and overall learning outcomes.

Table 4. Qualitative data analysis: Participants' perceptions of WCF

Theme	Supporting student responses
WCF as a reminder and long-term learning tool	"WCF can remind me and be learned at another time easily."
Proactive learning and error prevention	"We like feedback because this helps us to know and avoid our mistakes and we learn from our mistakes. Thus, we will not repeat them."
Immediate and long-term improvement	"WCF helps me fix my errors now and also improves my writing in the long run."
Awareness of mistakes and growth	"We will not repeat them because we learn from the corrections."
WCF as an educational resource	"WCF is not only about fixing mistakes, but it helps us improve our writing skills over time."

Table 5. Participants' preferences for error correction types

The error type students most prefer to be corrected	Number of Participants	Percentage
Grammatical errors	41	68.33%
Vocabulary errors	06	10%
Spelling errors	05	8.33%
Organization errors	03	5%
Punctuation errors	05	8.33%

Table 6. Participants’ opinions on teacher’s error correction priority

If there are many errors in your writing, what do you prefer your teacher to do?	Number of Participants	Percentage
My teacher should correct all errors.	36	60%
My teacher should correct major errors but not minor ones.	12	20%
My teacher should only correct errors that interfere with communicating ideas.	10	16%
My teacher should not correct grammatical errors and should focus on the content only.	02	3.33%

Table 5 illustrates the distribution of students’ preferences for different types of error correction. Many students (68.33%) prefer grammatical errors to be corrected. This indicates a strong preference for receiving feedback on grammatical issues, reflecting that students view these errors as the most critical to address for improving their writing skills. This preference highlights the need for focused grammatical instruction and correction. Only 10% of students prioritize vocabulary corrections, indicating that while vocabulary is important, it is not their main concern. However, there is still a need for vocabulary support, though it may not require as much focus as grammar. Spelling errors receive preference from 8.33% of students. This indicates that while spelling issues are a concern, they are less significant compared to grammatical errors. Similarly, punctuation errors are preferred for correction by 8.33% of students, showing that punctuation is valued but not as highly as grammar. A smaller portion of students (5%) prioritize corrections for organization errors, making it the least preferred category. Nevertheless, improving organizational skills can enhance overall writing quality and should not be neglected. The data underscores the overwhelming preference for grammatical feedback, with 68.33% of students identifying it as their top priority.

While other areas such as vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, and organization are considered less critical, they still hold value for supporting well-rounded writing improvement.

Table 6 outlines students’ preferences for error correction types, based on their responses to the sixth item in the questionnaire, which explores their preferences regarding teachers’ error correction priorities when multiple errors appear in their writing. The data shows that a majority of students, representing 60%, indicate a strong desire for their teacher to correct all errors in their writing. This finding highlights their preference for comprehensive feedback, suggesting that students value thorough correction to improve their overall writing quality. They likely believe that addressing every error provides the most complete learning experience and helps them understand their mistakes better. Approximately 20% of students prefer that only major errors be corrected, leaving minor errors unaddressed. This approach reflects a more selective method of feedback, focusing on critical issues that affect clarity and communication while allowing less significant errors to remain. Students who prefer this method may feel it helps them focus on more impactful

areas of their writing without being overwhelmed by too many corrections. In addition, 16% of students prefer that teachers address only errors affecting the clarity of communication be corrected. Students who choose this option may be interested in ensuring that their main ideas are clearly communicated, focusing on the effectiveness of their writing rather than correcting all errors. A small minority (3.33%) prefers that teachers focus exclusively on the content of their writing, while ignoring grammatical errors. This preference reflects that these students place greater importance on feedback related to content development and organization than on grammatical accuracy.

As presented in Table 7, over half of the participants (53.33%) prefer indirect feedback, in which the teacher indicates the presence of an error without providing the correction. This preference suggests that much students value feedback that fosters

self-correction and active learning. In contrast, 16.66% of participants prefer direct feedback, where the teacher explicitly corrects errors by crossing out mistakes or providing the correct form. This finding indicates that some students benefit from immediate and clear guidance, as direct corrections enable them quickly to grasp and correct their errors. Moreover, the students who received minimal markings on their writing often felt confused by underlines, circles, and other symbols. Therefore, they still need clear explanations of the codes or markings provided in their work. Their explanation was that explicit types of WCF allow them to remember their errors and understand how to fix them. Most students stated that a clue with no correction is not useful, as they require more specific guidance. This highlights a preference for explicit feedback that provides clear guidance and explanations, rather than leaving students to self-correct without sufficient support.

Table 7. Participants' preferences for different types of WCF

Participants' preferences for different types of WCF	Number of Participants	Percentage
<u>Indirect Feedback</u> I like when the teacher signals the presence of an error without directly providing the correction.	32	53.33%
<u>Direct Feedback</u> I like when the teacher crosses out an unnecessary word phrase/morpheme, inserts a missing word/phrase/morpheme, or provides the correct form or structure.	10	16.66%
<u>Focused Feedback</u> I like that the teacher targets specific errors and provides corrective feedback to learners.	02	3.33%
<u>Unfocused Feedback</u> I like it when my teacher points out all my errors and provides corrections.	12	20%
<u>Metalinguistic Feedback</u> I like it when the teacher does not provide the correct form but instead offers "comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of our utterance.	04	6.66%

A small percentage (3.33%) of students prefer focused feedback, where the teacher addresses only selected types of errors. This method of feedback is less popular, which may imply that while some students find targeted feedback helpful, it is not the most favored approach among the majority. A total of 20% of participants prefer unfocused feedback, where the teacher points out all errors and provides corrections. This feedback style is preferred by students who feel that comprehensive correction helps them better understand all aspects of their mistakes, despite the potential for overwhelming amounts of feedback. A small percentage (6.66%) of participants prefer metalinguistic feedback, where the teacher gives comments, information, or questions about writing accuracy without offering direct corrections. This feedback style is appreciated by a smaller group, indicating an interest in understanding the underlying rules and concepts behind their errors. Despite the utility of overt correction, the student expresses a preference for

metalinguistic explanations. This preference reflects a desire for a more in-depth understanding of the errors. It emphasizes the benefit of being able to think through the corrections independently when provided with explanations.

While Table 7 illustrates the general preferences for various types of WCF, understanding why students favor these types is essential for gaining insights into their learning processes. Table 8 provides the qualitative data that reveals the reasons behind these preferences, highlighting the cognitive benefits and practical considerations students weigh when choosing their ideal feedback type. It presents a thematic grid summarizing the responses, followed by an in-depth analysis of the findings. This data directly strengthens research question 2, which explores why students prefer particular types of WCF, offering valuable insight into the factors that influence their feedback preferences.

Table 8. Reasons for participants' preferences for different types of WCF

Main theme	Supporting student responses
Encourages self- correction and active learning (Indirect Feedback)	"I feel more engaged when I have to find and correct my own mistakes." "It helps me remember my errors because I have to think about them."
Provides immediate clarity and saves time (Direct feedback)	"I need the correct form so I can understand my mistake quickly." "It helps me fix my errors without wasting time guessing."
Comprehensive learning and full error awareness (Unfocused feedback)	"I prefer all my errors to be pointed out because I want to improve everything at once." "I need to see all my mistakes, so I do not repeat them."
Focuses on specific weaknesses and avoids overload (Focused feedback)	"If I focus on one type of error at a time, I improve better." "Too much correction at once is confusing, so I like targeted feedback."
Promotes understanding of grammar rules (Metalinguistic Feedback)	"When the cause is explained, I have a chance to think about the correct answer on my own."

	"I want to know why my answer is wrong, not just the correction."
Need for clearer markings and explanations (Challenges with Indirect Feedback)	"I feel confused when I get an underline because I do not know what it means." "Some symbols are unclear, so I do not always understand what I need to fix."

A significant number of students (53.33%) favor indirect feedback, where the teacher highlights the presence of an error without directly providing the correction. This feedback type encourages self-correction, which students value because it allows them to actively engage with their mistakes. By identifying and addressing errors on their own, students report greater retention and deeper learning of language rules. As one student explained, "I feel more engaged when I have to find and correct my own mistakes" (Participant 1). However, some students also expressed difficulty interpreting feedback symbols like underlines, which highlights the need for clear explanations of markings used in this feedback method. A smaller segment of students (16.66%) preferred direct feedback, where the teacher explicitly corrects the errors in their writing. These students value the immediate clarity provided by direct corrections, as it allows them to quickly understand their mistakes and correct them efficiently. Direct feedback is especially beneficial for students who may struggle with self-correction or are looking for more immediate guidance. One student shared, "I need the correct form so I can understand my mistake quickly" (Participant 2). This highlights the time-saving nature of direct feedback for some learners, making it a favored choice for students seeking quick solutions to their errors. Some students (20%) prefer unfocused feedback, where all errors in their writing are pointed out by the teacher, irrespective of the type. This feedback style is appreciated because it provides a comprehensive view of their writing, helping students identify all areas where improvement is needed. These students feel that addressing multiple errors

at once gives them a more thorough understanding of their weaknesses. One participant explained, "I prefer all my errors to be pointed out because I want to improve everything at once" (Participant 3). However, while this method is comprehensive, it may also be overwhelming for some students due to the large volume of corrections. A smaller group (3.33%) of students favored focused feedback, where the teacher only addresses specific types of errors, such as grammar or vocabulary. This method appeals to students who prefer a more targeted approach to their learning, as it allows them to concentrate on one aspect of their writing at a time. Focused feedback is beneficial for students who may feel overwhelmed by many corrections. As one student shared, "If I focus on one type of error at a time, I improve better" (Participant 4). This suggests that gradual learning is more effective for certain students, allowing them to concentrate on particular weaknesses rather than attempting to address everything at once. A minority of students (6.66%) expressed a preference for metalinguistic feedback, where the teacher gives comments, information, or questions on the correctness of their writing without directly offering corrections. Students who prefer this type tend to focus on understanding the underlying rules behind their errors rather than just correcting them. This type of feedback encourages critical thinking and a deeper understanding of language concepts. One student stated, "When the cause is explained, I have a chance to think about the correct answer on my own" (Participant 5). This reveals that metalinguistic feedback helps students reflect on their mistakes and fosters

independent learning by guiding them to discover the correct solution themselves.

In summary, students' preferences for types of WCF are influenced by various factors, including their need for clarity, engagement, and a deeper understanding of their errors. While indirect feedback is most popular for fostering self-correction, students who prefer direct feedback seek more immediate clarity. Some students prefer unfocused feedback for a comprehensive understanding of their mistakes, while others appreciate focused feedback for its more manageable approach. Additionally, metalinguistic feedback helps students understand the underlying rules of their errors, encouraging independent problem-solving. Ultimately, the findings emphasize the importance of clear communication and flexibility in feedback methods, enabling teachers to address students' diverse needs and support their language development effectively.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Effective feedback plays a critical role in the educational process, especially in enhancing the writing skills of ESL learners. This study explored the perceptions and preferences of students in a Sri Lankan ESL classroom regarding WCF, offering insights into how feedback practices can be improved to better align with learners' needs. The findings suggest that students generally hold a positive view of WCF and recognize its important contribution to improving their writing skills. WCF is valued by students as an essential element in their learning process, highlighting its importance in writing development. The overwhelmingly positive perceptions demonstrate students' appreciation for WCF's role in reinforcing learning and guiding them toward improved writing practices.

A key finding from the study is that most students prefer indirect feedback, which provides clues rather than direct corrections.

This preference indicates that learners appreciate the opportunity to engage in self-correction, which fosters active learning and a deeper understanding of their errors. Students who favor indirect feedback report that this method encourages critical thinking and helps them retain language rules better by actively involving them in the correction process. In contrast, some students prefer explicit feedback because it provides immediate clarity, allowing them to quickly identify their mistakes and understand the correct form. These students value the direct nature of explicit feedback for its efficiency, which saves time and helps them correct errors quickly. In addition, the study revealed that some students prefer unfocused feedback, which addresses all errors in their writing, feeling that it offers a comprehensive view of their mistakes. This feedback style is appreciated for its thoroughness, allowing students to address all areas in need of improvement. On the other hand, focused feedback, which targets specific types of errors, is preferred by those who prefer a more structured approach, allowing them to concentrate on particular aspects of their writing at a time. Finally, metalinguistic feedback, where teachers provide explanations or questions about the correctness of students' writing, is favored by a few students. These students appreciate the chance to grasp the underlying rules and concepts behind their errors, fostering critical thinking and independent learning.

The implications for language teaching are clear: to enhance the effectiveness of WCF, teachers should tailor feedback strategies to align with students' preferences. Given that most students favor indirect feedback, educators should prioritize methods that promote self-correction and critical thinking. However, integrating explicit feedback, when necessary, can provide the clarity required for students who benefit from more direct corrections. Additionally, using a combination of unfocused and focused feedback can cater to different student needs,

ensuring that both comprehensive and targeted correction methods are available. Finally, incorporating metalinguistic feedback can encourage students to reflect more deeply on their errors and gain a better understanding of the language.

While these insights are valuable, the study has several limitations. First, the limited sample size restricts the extent to which the findings can be generalized. To extend the applicability of these results, future research should engage larger and more diverse samples to explore whether these preferences and perceptions remain consistent across different contexts and educational settings. Additionally, this study focused exclusively on the perspectives of ESL learners, leaving a gap in understanding teachers' viewpoints and practices regarding WCF. Including teacher perspectives in future studies would provide a more well-rounded view of feedback practices and their alignment with students' preferences. Furthermore, this study was limited to WCF and did not explore other feedback techniques. Future research could benefit from investigating a broader spectrum of feedback methods to compare their effectiveness and impact on students' writing development.

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