Teacher Beliefs, Practices and Student Responses to Teacher Written Corrective Feedback in an EFL Writing Classroom in China

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Abstract: This explanatory sequential mixed methods study aimed to investigate (i) teachers' beliefs and practices of providing written corrective feedback (WCF) in an English as a foreign language (EFL) writing classroom, (ii) the EFL students' responses to teacher written corrective feedback (TWCF), and (iii) the mismatches between teachers' practices and students' responses to TWCF in an EFL writing classroom in China. Firstly, students' essays corrected by teachers were collected to obtain teachers' WCF. Secondly, a questionnaire was administered to 260 Junior Middle School students to understand their preferences toward TWCF. Finally, eight teachers and 12 students were interviewed to explore their beliefs and views of TWCF. The findings indicate that both teachers and students recognized the benefits of WCF. Teachers used a combination of direct, indirect, focused, and unfocused feedback and paid more attention to students' grammar. However, there were some mismatches between teachers' and students' expectations. The students preferred direct and focused feedback and wanted their teachers to provide feedback on content. Considering these findings, teachers should consider students' needs and adopt appropriate feedback strategies to make their WCF practices effective and beneficial.

Keywords: Teacher Beliefs, Teacher Practices, Students Responses, Written Corrective Feedback (WCF), feedback strategy

1. Introduction

In foreign language learning, writing takes an inseparable role (Hyland, 2016). It is a comprehensive reflection of learners' various English abilities (Alshahrani & Storch, 2014) and a way to communicate thoughts and feelings (Rosenblatt, 2018). In other words, writing is one of the most important skills that learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) must master (Yunus, 2020). Language learners need feedback from their teachers, especially in pointing out the mistakes in their essays (Agbayahoun, 2016). According to Ellis et al. (2006), corrective feedback means giving corrective responses to a learner when he or she makes an error. It can be verbal or written. Providing written corrective feedback (WCF) to students' writing is one of the techniques commonly employed to improve students' writing abilities. Teacher written corrective feedback (TWCF) facilitates students' EFL understanding and improves their language achievement (Cheng & Zhang, 2021; Ganapathy et al., 2020), which is important in improving their writing skills. TWCF helps students to identify and correct their errors, provides writing motivation (Karim & Nassaji, 2020), expands language knowledge, and guides them to produce proper language output (Shao, 2015).

WCF's success or failure relates to how teachers provide feedback (Ferris & Roberts, 2001). Previous studies have found that teachers' ways of providing feedback are influenced by many factors, such as their educational background, related knowledge, teaching experience (Wei & Cao, 2020, Lee & Mohebbi, 2021), as well as school policy, exam orientation and students' learning needs (Junqueira & Payant, 2015). Teachers' WCF beliefs influence their perceptions, which in turn influence their WCF practices (Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019). However, teachers are unable to implement their WCF beliefs fully and there are differences between teacher beliefs and teacher feedback practices in many cases (Ellis, 2009; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019). Therefore, it is essential to investigate teacher beliefs and their practices on WCF.

Most of the previous studies have put teachers at the center stage of the TWCF process, focusing on teachers' feedback methods and the impact of teacher feedback on students' output (Loan, 2019). However, these studies have ignored students' attitudes and preferences toward TWCF (Yu & Yang, 2021), hence students' responses toward TWCF deserve further attention (Karim

& Nassaji, 2015). Most feedback studies on student perceptions and preferences have been conducted in college or university settings (e.g., Sritrakarn, 2018; Irwin, 2017; Chen et al., 2016; Chong, 2019), and there is a lack of research conducted on Junior Middle School backgrounds in China. An investigation on Junior Middle School EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions towards TWCF can help understand how Junior Middle School teachers may provide their feedback, identify better ways to help students with their English writing, and bring about long-term beneficial effects on Junior Middle School students' EFL writing. For these reasons, there is a necessity to ascertain the needs of Junior Middle School teachers and students regarding EFL writing process.

In addition, the mismatches between teachers' practices and learners' beliefs may lead to learners' disengagement in learning activities and impede successful language teaching (Kaivanpanah et al., 2015). More importantly, students' views should not be treated individually, but should be combined with teachers' beliefs and practices (Li, 2016). Therefore, the mismatch between students' and teachers' perceptions of WCF should be avoided to ensure WCF validity (Nanni & Black, 2017) and facilitate the students' understanding (Irwin, 2017), which calls for further investigation into the mismatch between teachers' beliefs, practices, and students' responses.

The present study has three main aims (i) to contribute to a deeper understanding of teachers' beliefs and classroom practices about WCF (ii) to investigate students' responses to TWCF and (iii) to compare teachers' beliefs, their classroom practices and students' responses regarding WCF. The research questions that guided this study are:

1.   What are teachers' beliefs and practices of providing written corrective feedback in the EFL writing classroom in a Junior Middle School in China?

2.   How do the students respond to teachers' written corrective feedback in the EFL writing classroom in a Junior Middle School in China?

3.   What are the mismatches between teachers' beliefs, practices, and students' responses to TWCF in the EFL writing classroom in a Junior Middle School in China?

2. Literature Review

Previous studies on this topic have both supported and argued against the benefits of TWCF. Some early scholars (Cohen, 1987; Truscott, 1996) expressed a negative attitude towards error correction, believing that error correction is ineffective, not beneficial for language learners and even harmful to both students and teachers. Truscott (1996) believed that when the learner does not reach a certain level of language competency, error correction has no actual value and cannot promote the comprehensive development of language knowledge.

On the contrary, some studies have pointed out the usefulness of teachers' feedback (Ferris, 2012; Isnawati et al., 2019; Vögelin et al., 2021). Ashewell (2000) conducted a comparative study and found that the language accuracy of the experimental group which received TWCF has been drastically improved. Chandler (2003) compared two groups of students - those who received TWCF and revised accordingly and those who only accepted TWCF without any changes. The study found that students who received teacher feedback and modified the errors made more significant improvements and proved the importance of TWCF. The findings of Chen, Nassaji and Liu (2016) confirmed the value of WCF for EFL learners and the participants expressed a favorable attitude toward WCF. According to Isnawati et al. (2019), TWCF can facilitate students' revision, especially regarding linguistic accuracy. Vögelin et al. (2021) also found that WCF positively impacted on the quality of students' essays.

In the literature on WCF, several themes have interested researchers, namely feedback focus, feedback scope, and feedback strategies (e.g., Ellis, 2009; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019; Cheng & Zhang, 2021). Feedback focus refers to the aspects teachers focus on when they provide written corrective feedback (Yu and Lee, 2014). Teachers' feedback on students' written work is divided into form feedback and content feedback (Agbayahoun, 2016). Content feedback refers to the feedback which makes the learners pay attention to the essays' discourse level, including content and organizational structure, while form feedback is the feedback on the language features, including grammar, choice of words, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation (Ellis, 2009). Dehgani et al. (2017) recognized the positive impact on students' writing development

of form feedback. Rojab et al. 's (2017) study proved that content feedback may have a greater impact than form feedback. Hubais and Dumanig (2014) reported the positive effect of both form and content feedback on language learners' overall writing quality development. According to Ellis (2009), Nanni and Black (2017), WCF can be further categorized into five areas: organization, content, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics.

Feedback scope refers to how many errors the teacher corrected. If teachers choose to correct a wide range of students' language errors, the feedback is unfocused or comprehensive. On the contrary, if teachers concentrate on a particular aspect of language errors and leave others uncorrected, the corrective feedback is focused or selective (Ellis, 2009). Unfocused feedback is helpful for learners' language accuracy and lexical complexity in the long run (Fazilatfar et al., 2014) and leads to the development of long-term accuracy (Frear & Chiu, 2015). However, some studies have demonstrated the limited functions of unfocused feedback because too much error correction gives students a lot of linguistic input and easily makes them lose focus while writing (Lee et al., 2018). Unfocused feedback may also increase students' anxieties and add to their learning burdens (Wang & Jiang, 2015), leading to students' psychological frustration. Therefore, many scholars agreed on the important role of focused feedback because it only targets certain specific types of errors, which leads to students' better understanding and thus targets their corrections (Winstone & Boud, 2019). Focused feedback can improve students' grammatical accuracy (Fadilah, 2018) and linguistic fluency (Rahimi, 2021). Lee (2019) suggested that focused feedback is more helpful for learners to develop their English writing skills. Whether teachers should be selective in providing feedback on specific aspects or correcting all students' errors, students' language levels should be considered (Zhang & Hyland, 2018).

Specifically, feedback strategy refers to direct feedback and indirect feedback. Direct feedback refers to the instructor pointing out students' errors and providing them with the correct language form directly (Ellis, 2009). Indirect corrective feedback refers to the instructor pointing out the errors that the student has made without correcting them (Ellis, 2009). This involves teachers underlining errors, using symbols or codes to locate the errors, indicating with

linguistic cues, and drawing a mark near the errors (Chong, 2019). Direct feedback benefits students' writing accuracy and promotes their acquisition of grammar rules (Bitchener, 2018), and enhances the learning motivation of EFL students (Chong, 2019), which will produce quality written output (Akmal & Mahrup, 2019). Students expressed a positive attitude toward direct feedback (Chen et al., 2016). Some researchers found that direct feedback is helpful and well-accepted for beginners and low-level learners because they can immediately realize and correct their errors with the help of their teachers (Purnomo et al., 2021). Meanwhile, many language teachers and learners have realized the value of indirect feedback. Indirect feedback can save teachers' time, reduce their burden (Irwin, 2017), and enhance students' EFL learning. Indirect feedback does not directly provide the correct form of language. Instead, it guides students to find solutions and encourages students to correct their errors themselves (Bitchener, 2018; Westmacott, 2017) which prompts learners to self-reflect on their mistakes (Hosseiny, 2014). Ellis et al.'s (2006) study found that indirect corrective feedback is more applicable to higher-level EFL learners. Therefore, indirect feedback benefits learners to gain the target language more effectively and the long-term development of their EFL learning (Park et al., 2016). According to Park et al. (2016), providing direct WCF can help students deal with complex language errors, while indirect WCF is more suitable for more superficial language errors. Purnomo et al.'s (2021) study also indicated that teachers should provide indirect feedback for higher proficiency level students while direct feedback should be used on lower proficiency level students.

WCF is widely used in EFL writing classes (Zhang & Yu, 2018). EFL students and teachers recognize the vital role of feedback and its necessity for developing students' writing skills (Kahraman & Yalvaç, 2015; Zhang et al. 2021). Clear, accurate and proper WCF helps students improve their writing achievements and increase their writing skills.

3. Methodology

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed method, - a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. It aims to use quantitative research to collect and analyze data, and then use qualitative research to interpret the results of the quantitative phase (Creswell, 2013).

3.1 Setting

The study was conducted in a Junior Middle School located in the northern part of China. The school consists of three grades – Grade 7, Grade 8, and Grade 9. English is a compulsory and main course for Junior Middle School students and the students attend English courses every day.

3.2 Participants

The participants of this study are eight English teachers and 260 students in Grade 8. The teacher participants teach different classes of Grade 8. They are all female teachers from different age range and years of teaching experience, including novice and experienced teachers. The student participants came from 14 classes of Grade 8 and ranged from ages 14 to 16 years. All the students took part in the questionnaire survey, and 12 were chosen to participate in the semi-structured interview. Labels such as Teacher A to Teacher H were used to represent the teachers and student participants were labeled Student A to Student K to maintain anonymity.

3.3 Instruments

The instruments used in this study are student essays, student questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. To obtain the WCF points made by the teachers, 48 pieces of their students' essays were collected. To seek students' responses to TWCF, student questionnaires were employed. The close-ended questionnaire adapted from Leki (1991) comprised of 15 items. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain detailed information. The interview protocol was developed based on the quantitative results.

3.4 Data collection

Teacher feedback was investigated through content analysis of TWCF on students' essays. Each teacher chose 6 of their students' essays for further analysis and altogether 48 students' essays were investigated. The feedback analysis mainly covered two parts - the feedback aspects and the nature of feedback. In addition, 260 copies of the student questionnaires were collected to investigate students' responses. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain in-depth information on teachers' and their students' attitudes toward WCF. The

participants of the teacher interview consisted of all eight English teachers of Grade Eight and the student interview involved 12 student participants. The 12 samples are representative because they involved students of different English proficiency levels and came from different classes. They were selected through random sampling. Because of COVID-19, the interview was conducted face-to-face and online. The interviews were conducted in the participants' native language – Chinese, because speaking in the native language makes them more relaxed and they would provide more substantial information.

3.5 Data analysis

Descriptive and thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Students' essays with TWCF were analyzed through descriptive analysis. Student questionnaires were collected and put into the SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solutions) 21.0 for further analysis. In addition, teacher and student interviews were transcribed and translated into English. Thematic analysis was used to examine the teacher and student interviews.

4. Findings and Discussion

This study investigated teachers' beliefs, practices, and students' responses toward TWCF. This part reports the results and findings of the study.

4.1 RQ1: Teachers' beliefs and practices of providing written corrective feedback in the EFL writing classroom in China

Teachers' beliefs and practices are discussed according to the aspects of teachers focused on, direct and indirect feedback, focused and unfocused feedback, as well as the functions of feedback.

4.1.1 WCF aspects focused on by teachers

To analyze teachers' WCF on student essays, frequency and percentage were counted and calculated to identify teachers' WCF points. Table 1 shows the distribution of the WCF aspects focused on by the teachers. Teacher D provided the most WCF points (N=73) of the eight teachers, while Teacher B provided the least (N=34). Teacher' different feedback points may be due to teachers' feedback habits and the number of errors students made. Most of them covered

the aspects of grammar, mechanics, vocabulary, and content. The eight teachers paid more attention to the aspects of grammar, which took the most significant percentage of their feedback points (51.7%). The aspect of grammar took up more than fifty percent of the feedback points of Teachers A, B, C and E. The next aspect with which the teachers were concerned was mechanics. (27.8%) However, they seemed to pay less attention to the aspects of the organization (0.9%). Only Teacher A and Teacher G covered organizations in their WCF. This is similar to Kao and Reynolds (2022), who have confirmed the importance of grammar in TWCF. Students can gain knowledge from teachers' WCF on their grammatical errors (Irwin, 2017) and grammar correction is necessary and effective (Mahfoodh, 2017). For example, Teacher D mentioned: *"Students lacked grammar knowledge. As a result, grammar mistakes were the ones that students made the most in their writing process. Therefore, I paid much attention to grammar."* Teacher A also explained why she seldom focused on content: *If I criticize students too much in terms of content, I'm afraid that it will inhibit their interest and motivation to write in English."* Previous studies also reported that teachers prefer to pay attention to form feedback, such as grammar and spelling, rather than content feedback (Glenn & Goldthwaite, 2014). As stated by Dehgani et al. (2017), teachers believed that form feedback could improve learners' linguistic accuracy and language fluency, which benefits EFL learners' writing development.

Table 1

Distribution of the Aspects Focused on by the Teachers

Teacher	Content	Grammar	Organization	Vocabulary	Mechanics	Sum
A	0(0%)	43(78.2%)	2(3.6%)	4(7.3%)	6(10.9%)	55
B	2(5.9%)	24(70.6%)	0(0%)	2(5.9%)	6(17.6%)	34
C	10(18.5%)	28(51.9%)	0(0%)	12(22.2%)	4(7.4%)	54
D	8(11.0%)	30(41.1%)	0(0%)	7(9.6%)	28(38.3%)	73
E	4(6.1%)	34(51.5%)	0(0%)	6(9.1%)	22(33.3%)	66
F	4(11.4%)	17(48.6%)	0(0%)	1(2.9%)	13(37.1%)	35
G	9(14.8%)	24(39.3%)	2(3.3%)	7(11.5%)	19(31.1%)	61
H	6(9.8%)	27(44.3%)	0(0%)	4(6.6%)	24(39.3%)	61
Total	43(9.8%)	227(51.7%)	4(0.9%)	43(9.8%)	122(27.8%)	439

4.1.2 Direct and indirect feedback

The teachers in this study provided both direct feedback and indirect feedback. Table 2 shows direct and indirect feedback provided by the teachers. Most teachers (N=6) tended to provide more direct feedback, while Teacher B and F chose to provide more indirect feedback. They expressed their reasons in the interview.

Table 2

Direct and indirect feedback provided by the Teachers

Teacher	Direct feedback	Indirect feedback	Sum
A	31(56.4%)	24(43.6%)	55
B	4(11.8%)	30(88.2%)	34
C	49(90.7%)	5(9.3%)	54
D	45(61.6%)	28(38.4%)	73
E	45(68.2%)	21(31.8%)	66
F	14(40%)	21(60%)	35
G	52(85.2%)	9(14.8%)	61
H	38(62.3%)	23(37.7%)	61
Total	278	161	439

In teachers' opinions, direct feedback points out students' mistakes as well as provides the correct language forms, significantly contributing to students' writing accuracy and clarity. As stated by Ganapathy et al. (2020), direct feedback is easy for students to understand and correct. This is because direct feedback provides correct usage and clear direction. The teachers stated that when correcting the essays of low proficiency level students or dealing with complex errors, direct feedback is a good choice. For example, Teacher D said, "*Using direct feedback allows the students to be aware of their mistakes and quickly correct them. Most students may be unable to understand what their problems are due to time constraints or attitude when dealing with indirect feedback, and there won't be much improvement.*" This view was supported by Teacher H, who had this to say: "*For complex errors or errors related to the knowledge which the students haven't been exposed to, indirect feedback can lead to confusion. Direct feedback*

is clearer and easier to understand."

Moreover, the teachers believed indirect feedback saved time and contributed to students' critical thinking. Indirect feedback directs students to understand the errors and make efforts to find the correct form, which encourages students' engagement in correcting their essays. Karim and Nassaji (2018) agreed and stated that indirect feedback allows learners to make an effort to think about the correct usage of language, which benefits both learners and teachers. Teachers in this study provided indirect feedback in different ways, such as using pictures to provide feedback, guiding students to refer to the grammar part of the textbook, pointing out the errors with a hint written in the margin, error codes as well as pointing out the errors without correction. *"I think this method allows the students to be aware of the problem and makes them think about what the correct form should be. So, I have to use pictures to help students and make the feedback more understandable,"* said Teacher E. On the other hand, Teacher F said, *"As a new teacher, I often feel that I don't have enough time. Thus, I have to choose the quickest form of feedback - pointing out mistakes directly sometimes."* Teacher G would *"ask students to look up the grammar points in the Appendix of the textbook and tell them which page and which part they should refer to so that they could consciously learn to look up the grammar rules by themselves"*. All these indicate that both direct and indirect feedbacks are valuable. These two strategies have advantages and strengths, and work well for EFL students. As stated by Alqurashi (2022), indirect feedback can be used for errors that students can recognize and correct themselves, whereas direct feedback is more often used for complex errors which are beyond students' ability to self-correct.

4.1.3 Focused and unfocused feedback

The teachers in this study expressed their preferences towards focused and unfocused feedback. A few teachers preferred focused feedback. They felt that selective error correction would help students focus on the type of errors chosen and improve their attention and understanding of these errors, which would impress students a lot and result in fewer errors in the future. In addition, it may have a positive effect because focused feedback can protect students' self-esteem and reduce their frustration if they see fewer marked errors in their essays. According

to Lee (2019), focused feedback is helpful and practical.

This view was supported by Teacher C who said, "*If a student sees that his teacher has marked his essay with many errors, he will first feel frustrated and feel that his efforts have not been rewarded. With so many mistakes, he does not know where to start to correct them and will put them aside, which will not help the student.*" Teacher E added, *"When students have several grammatical errors in their essays, it is more beneficial to focus on one of them."*

In contrast, some teachers were in favor of unfocused feedback. These teachers believed that students need to be aware of where their mistakes are and that it is their responsibility to correct or point out all or most of their errors. According to Fazilatfar et al. (2014), unfocused WCF improves students' syntactic and lexical knowledge. Furthermore, teachers felt that if some errors are not corrected, students may be confused and believe what they wrote was right and repeat them in their future writing. As Teacher D pointed out, *"Only if students understood where their mistakes were, could they understand what they were and not repeat them in their future writing."* She further said, *"If students' errors were not pointed out, they would default to the usage as correct and continue to use the incorrect usage in the future."* Teacher E shared a similar view on this matter. She said, *"I have also used selective corrective feedback before, but found that it may confuse some students. If I do not offer any feedback, the students may think what they wrote was correct."*

The teacher participants in this study could not agree on whether to provide focused or unfocused feedback. Compared to focused feedback, more teachers chose to provide unfocused feedback to those errors students made. Focused feedback would not result in students losing focus and feeling frustrated when teachers point out some of their errors (Lee et al., 2018). On the other hand, unfocused feedback help students recognize their errors and avoid the same errors in the future, which would benefit them in the long run (Rahimi, 2021). Similar to the study of Elhawwa et al. (2019), the teachers in this study also revealed that both focused and unfocused feedback benefited students' writing improvements.

4.1.4 The Function of WCF

The teachers in this study thought highly of WCF and confirmed the function of WCF. They acknowledged that feedback was helpful, resourceful, and vital. They believed that WCF is an evaluation of students' essays and can reflect their overall writing level. In their opinion, WCF can help students to identify and understand their errors. Students can correct their errors, avoid similar errors in their future writing and improve their essay qualities and writing abilities. Teacher A pointed out: "*WCF helps students understand the errors in their essays.*" Teacher F had a similar viewpoint: "*TWCF encourages student engagement or promotes their writing ability in the long run.*" Moreover, WCF is a communication bridge between teachers and students, further enhancing the relationship between teachers and students. As Teacher E stated, "*TWCF is a written form of communication where I can write my expectations and encouragement to the students to improve a teacher-student relationship.*"

As Chong (2019) stated, TWCF is a summary of a student's writing performance. Feedback can not only guide students to reduce their errors and improve their writing skills (Yunus, 2020), but also build a new interaction bridge between teachers and students (Liu et al., 2022), which would help to build a close, harmonious and trusting teacher-student relationship.

4.2 RQ2: Students' responses to teachers' written corrective feedback in the EFL writing classroom

The students' responses to TWCF were answered through student questionnaires and interviews, from the aspects of the feedback, direct and indirect feedback, focused and unfocused feedback, as well as the functions of feedback.

4.2.1 Aspects of feedback teachers should focus

When teachers return students' essays with WCF, students will look carefully at some aspects, namely grammar, mechanics, vocabulary, organization, and content. This specific part investigated the aspects students focused on. The student questionnaire used to collect data is a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being Strongly disagree and 5 Strongly Agree. The results are shown in Table 3.

After receiving TWCF, which includes grammar, mechanics, vocabulary, organization and content, the students reported that they would look carefully at the content part (M=3.91). The next concerning part is feedback on grammar (M=3.65), followed by mechanics (M=3.55) and vocabulary (M=3.46). According to the results, the least concerning aspect the students reported is organization (M=3.43). Students reported that they wanted all kinds of feedback. Student L mentioned, "*I want to receive feedback on all aspects and get a full mastery of my overall level*." However, the students in this study paid more attention to the content of their essays than other aspects. For example, Student I said, "*Sometimes when I see a topic, I do not know where to start or what to write about, so I look forward to more feedback on content.*" Student B had confusion about content feedback and explained: "*I was often confused about what was appropriate content. Several times my teacher commented that my essay was a bit off-topic.*" These findings contrast with Ganapathy et al. (2020), whose study found that learners tend to focus more on language forms such as grammar. The results of this study indicated that students needed feedback on all aspects but preferred content feedback more than language form.

Table 3

Students' responses to the aspects of WCF

Aspects	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Rank
Grammar	7	23	97	71	62	3.61	2
	2.7%	8.8%	37.3%	27.3%	23.8%		
Mechanics	13	20	96	73	58	3.55	3
	5.0%	7.7%	36.9%	28.1%	22.3%		
Vocabulary	6	42	85	73	54	3.49	4
	2.3%	16.2%	32.7%	28.1%	20.8%		
Organization	11	30	105	72	42	3.40	5
	4.2%	11.5%	40.4%	27.7%	16.2%		
Content	7	26	56	74	97	3.88	1
	2.7%	10.0%	21.5%	28.5%	37.3%		

4.2.2 Direct and indirect feedback

Students' responses to different strategies of WCF are shown in Table 4. For all these teachers' WCF strategies, more students preferred direct feedback and it got the highest mean (M=4.24). Pointing out the error item of grammar was also supported by a more significant number of students, whose mean ranked the second position (M=4.12). The way of directing students to the grammar part of the textbook for an explanation was also recognized as a good way by some students (M=3.61), and was in the third position. Moreover, in most students' opinions, the ways the teacher giving error codes (M=3.33) and simply underlining the errors (M=3.01) were not their preferred strategies but also seemed acceptable. In contrast, most students did not want no feedback at all and the mean was shallow (M=1.73); only a tiny number of students stood by no feedback.

Table 4

Students' responses to the strategies of WCF

Strategies	Very Bad	Bad	Neutral	Good	Very Good	Mean	Rank
Direct feedback	0	4	3	26	227	4.83	1
	0%	1.5%	1.2%	10.0%	87.3%		
Pointing out the error item	1	4	35	90	130	4.32	2
	0.4%	1.5%	13.5%	34.6%	50.0%		
Directing students to the grammar part	1	11	92	89	67	3.81	3
	0.4%	4.2%	35.4%	34.2%	25.8%		
Error codes	2	22	112	70	54	3.58	4
	0.8%	8.5%	43.1%	26.9%	20.8%		
Underlining the error	19	36	103	70	32	3.23	5
	7.3%	13.8%	39.6%	26.9%	12.3%		
No feedback	145	33	37	36	9	1.97	6
	55.8%	12.7%	14.2%	13.8%	3.5%		

Students also expressed their preference for different types of WCF. As stated by Irwin (2017), direct feedback is easy to understand and follow. Students thought it could save time and produce more accurate language output. Student A stated, "*I am sometimes not able to correct*

those errors by myself, and direct feedback guides how to correct errors directly." Student K added, "*Direct feedback is straightforward, easy to understand and saves much time.*" Previous studies (Liu & Jhaveri, 2019; Niu et al., 2021) also found more learners confirmed and preferred direct feedback.

In contrast, indirect feedback does not provide corrections directly but guides the student to make efforts to obtain the proper form by themselves. Student D explained the benefit of indirect feedback: "*It can deepen my impressions of my mistakes when I try to fix the problems and prevent me from making the same mistakes in the future*." As in the previous studies, it leaves students a place to think and leads to self-learning (Westmacott, 2017).

4.2.3 Focused and unfocused feedback

There was disagreement in students' opinions on whether to provide focused and unfocused feedback. A few students preferred to receive unfocused feedback. They wanted their errors to be marked and identified. If not, they thought they would misuse them the next time. Just as Student B said: "*It is only when I know where the mistakes are that I know how to improve them.*" These opinions were supported by previous studies such as Aseeri (2019), who found that more students were in favor of their teachers' correcting all the errors in their writing.

However, more students in this study were in favor of focused feedback. They maintained that too many error corrections might make them nervous and annoyed and even lose confidence. For example, Student K said: "*I am aware that my English writing is not very good. But it still makes me sad when I see a lot of red annotations on my essays and have various problems pointed out by my teachers. This has affected my self-confidence.*" Therefore, focused feedback makes students more relaxed. This is in line with Lee's (2019) suggestion that focused feedback benefits learners in improving their English writing skills and reducing learning anxiety.

4.2.4 The impact of TWCF

Students in this study generally found the teachers' WCF valuable and essential. WCF guided students to identify and correct errors in their essays. Student F mentioned, *"It helps me to*

locate errors in my essay". Student G added, "*The teacher's feedback can directly reflect the strengths and weaknesses of my essay*."

In addition, TWCF pointed out students' weaknesses and strengths, which will promote their writing skills and benefit them in the future. Student C added: *"From the WCF, I will be able to know where I am lacking. It will strengthen my knowledge in this area in the future.*" Their views are consistent with previous research that students always have positive attitudes toward teacher feedback (Yu & Yang, 2021). Feedback is also a source of input, providing students with new language knowledge and teaching them some writing skills that will benefit their future English writing. Therefore, as Yunus (2020) reported, students always found TWCF beneficial to their writing improvement.

4.3 RQ3: Mismatches between teachers' beliefs, practices and students' responses to teachers' written corrective feedback in the EFL writing classroom in China

There will always be gaps between the feedback provided by teachers and the feedback students expect (Nanni & Black, 2017). These mismatches may affect the actual effectiveness of WCF and influence the students' writing output. Therefore, examining the mismatches between teachers' feedback and how students respond to them is important.

Firstly, there were some mismatches between teachers and students in feedback aspect. Teachers in this study paid more attention to the grammar part of students' essays and corrected most of their grammar errors. However, students would first look carefully at teachers' corrections on content, which indicated that students gave great importance to the aspects of content.

In addition, there were also some mismatches between teachers and students on whether to provide direct or indirect feedback. Teachers thought both direct and indirect feedback was important. They chose to use more direct feedback when correcting students' essays, and at the same time, they also recognized the role of indirect feedback. However, most students were in favor of direct feedback, and this strategy had the highest mean.

Moreover, there were other mismatches between teachers and students on whether to provide focused or unfocused feedback. More teachers tended to provide unfocused feedback to make students aware of their errors. They thought highly of focused feedback, while some valued the functions of unfocused feedback. They believed that focused feedback might confuse students. However, more students preferred their teachers to provide focused feedback. Focused feedback could point out students' significant problems in their writing, and do not demotivate or discourage them.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study investigated teacher WCF and student responses in Junior Middle School EFL writing classrooms. The findings confirm that clear and understandable WCF is crucial for improving EFL learners' writing and language proficiency.

Teachers generally recognized the value of WCF and confirmed the benefits WCF brings to students' writing output. They use a combination of direct, indirect, focused, and unfocused feedback to cover aspects of grammar, vocabulary, content, and mechanics in their practice of providing WCF to their students. As stated by Purnomo et al. (2021), teachers should combine different WCF methods and try to use a variety of strategies to provide feedback to students, such as direct and indirect feedback as well as focused and unfocused feedback to help them improve their writing.

Students tended to appreciate receiving feedback from their teachers. They recognized that teachers' WCF helped them to identify and correct their language errors, strengthen their weaknesses, and improve their English writing in the long run. Students gave great importance to content in all aspects of WCF and wanted teachers to inform them on how to develop the content of an essay. Parallel to the findings of Yunus (2020), students preferred direct feedback, because some students could not correct the errors themselves if they did not have relevant language knowledge (Ellis, 2009). The findings also indicated that more students were in favor of focused feedback, which is easy to follow and gives them confidence (Rizqiyyah & Prianty,

2020).

The mismatches manifested in the aspects teachers should focus on and whether to provide focused, unfocused, direct, or indirect feedback. The findings also revealed that some teachers did not have sufficient knowledge about students' needs, which may impact the effectiveness of teachers' WCF. This calls for teachers to take into consideration students' needs and expectations when providing WCF (Li and He, 2017).

Pedagogically, this study recommends that teachers value and fully use TWCF. Since TWCF plays an inseparable role in students' English writing, teachers should ensure that students understand and effectively use the feedback. In addition, teachers should communicate with students to understand their needs and preferences to adopt appropriate feedback -providing strategies to meet the needs of students with different levels of English language proficiency.

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