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Keywords	EFL; teacher attitudes; learner attitudes; corrective feedback; error correction; writing accuracy
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Data will be made available on request

Attitudes of Teachers and Students of English as a Foreign Language towards Error

Correction and Corrective Feedback: A case study of Dabburiya Junior High School

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Abstract

This study investigates English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' and learners' attitudes towards error correction and corrective feedback in English writing. The study involved 10 EFL teachers with more than 10 years' teaching experience each, and 250 students between the seventh and ninth grades. The data were collected using a questionnaire, interviews, and writing tasks. The results indicate common positive agreement between teachers and students on the importance of error correction and corrective feedback for improving writing skills. All participants expressed strong opinions on the importance of error correction, but neither teachers nor students showed a clear preference for any one type of corrective feedback. Teachers also shared no consensus on the most effective kinds of corrective feedback. These results indicate that, despite their strongly positive attitudes towards the importance of error correction, both teachers and learners are uncertain about the most effective type of corrective feedback. The results also reveal a significant correlation between students' performance in writing tasks and their attitudes towards the most helpful kinds of corrective feedback. These results confirm the importance of error correction and strongly suggest a need for more research on this topic.

1.   Introduction

Learning to write in English is one of the basic components of acquiring the language, yet writing is an "intricate and complex task; it is the most difficult of the language abilities to acquire" (Corder, 1974, p. 177). This is particularly true for learners who have not yet internalized the multitude of rules that native speakers automatically know (Tahaineh, 2010, p. 80). Learners are more prone to making mistakes and committing errors (Allen & Corder, 1974).

It is essential to make a distinction between 'mistake' and 'error'. Corder (1974) argues that a mistake can be self-corrected, but an error cannot. Unlike mistakes, errors are systematic, likely to occur repeatedly, and often go unrecognized by the learner.

In the early twentieth century, language errors were considered undesirable, (George, 1972). However, in the early 'sixties, language experts began to view language errors more positively as indicative of progress. Corder (1974) points out that language errors are important for teachers, allowing them to modify their instruction accordingly. Hendrickson (1978) states that language errors are a natural part of learning and systematic error analysis can provide a better understanding of the language acquisition process.

There is some divergence on the effectiveness and desirability of corrective feedback. Krashen (1982) suggests that students do not need it, but Lightbown and Spada (1990), Long (1996), Lyster and Ranta (1997), Sheen (2004, 2006), and Ellis (2009) all suggest it plays a crucial role in language learning as it pushes learners to be more aware of and, therefore, more likely to correct their errors.

This study aims to assess perceptions and attitudes towards error correction and corrective feedback and help identify the most effective techniques for improving writing skills.

2.   Existing Literature

Acquiring writing skills is very challenging for EFL/ESL learners, who need it for employment and promotion (Graham & Perin, 2007). For learners to achieve their educational and professional goals, writing accuracy is essential (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Many educational institutions use examination-based assessments of writing skills focusing on the importance of accuracy (Talatifard, 2016).

Richards, Platt, Platt, and Candlin (1992) define writing accuracy as the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences. Foster and Skehan (1996) define it as freedom from error. Wolfe-Quintero, Inagaki, and Kim (1998) define it as error-free language usage in written communication. Seiffedin and El-Sakka (2017) give a more specific definition of it as the ability to write a paragraph without committing errors in punctuation, articles, subject-verb agreement, spelling, and conjunctions.

English language learners often perform adequately in routine class grammatical exercises, but fail to translate this into reality in writing tasks. Grammar

issues are often presented in textbooks out of context, with learners given isolated sentences they are expected to internalize through repetition, manipulation, and grammatical transformation exercises. These only provide learners with formal linguistic mastery (Nastaran, 2014). Nunan (1989) holds that language learners find it difficult to use language if they are not provided with opportunities to explore grammatical structures in context. Frodesen (2014) argues that teaching grammar through writing means "helping writers develop their knowledge of linguistic resources and grammatical systems to convey ideas meaningfully and appropriate to the intended readers" (p. 233). Frodesen also maintains that second language learners can discover and use discourse-level grammatical principles through writing practice. It is for the teacher to help learners see that effective communication involves coherently situating grammatical items in their discursive contexts.

Many studies have examined whether corrective feedback in general has any effect on written accuracy (such as Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Ferris, 2006; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010). The effects of corrective feedback in reducing the number of errors were evidenced in Ferris's 2006 study, where there was a significant reduction in them from the first to the last draft. Bitchener and Knoch (2010) emphasize the importance of corrective feedback on improving L2 advanced learners' language accuracy. Burstein, Chodorow, and Leacock (2004) hold that the best way for learners to improve accuracy is through a continual process of writing, receiving feedback, and revising using that feedback. Saadi and Saadat (2015) found that post tests showed direct and indirect corrective feedback had a significant effect on

writing accuracy. The kind of corrective feedback provided to EFL students is one of the important variables in developing accuracy in writing (Tafazoli, Nosratzadeh, & Hosseini, 2014). Sheen, Wright, and Moldawa (2009) found that direct corrective feedback is only effective for certain types of errors. Chen and Li (2009) found that direct corrective feedback was significantly better than indirect for enhancing accuracy. Almasi and Tabrizi's (2016) study on the effects of different types of corrective feedback on Iranian EFL students' writing accuracy revealed that the direct feedback group were significantly better. Other studies have found indirect corrective feedback more effective, however. Wang and Hu (2010) found support for indirect error correction in improving language accuracy, compared with the absence of teacher feedback. Khodareza and Delvand (2016) investigated the effect of direct versus indirect feedback on six types of errors and found that indirect feedback had a significant effect on overall accuracy.

Error analysis compares errors made in the target language with the target language itself. Corder is considered the 'father' of error analysis and his article "The Significance of Learner's Errors" (Corder, 1974b) was seminal. Beforehand, errors were seen as flaws to be eradicated, but Corder took the contrary view that such errors were "important in and of themselves" as indispensable learning tools. Gass and Selinker (1994) deem errors "red flags" providing evidence of the learner's second language knowledge. Errors provide valuable information on the strategies that people use to acquire a language. Richards and Sampson (1974) state: "At the level of pragmatic classroom experience, error analysis will continue to provide one means by which the teacher assesses learning and teaching and determines priorities

for future effort" (p. 15). For Corder (1974a), error analysis has two objectives: one theoretical and another applied. The theoretical objective serves to "elucidate what and how a learner learns when he studies a second language." The applied objective helps the learner "to learn more efficiently by exploiting our knowledge of his dialect for pedagogical purposes."

Many studies on EFL have addressed the root causes of student writing errors. In Rabehi's 2012 study of 25 EFL English teachers and 50 students, over 60% of the teacher respondents stated that, in addition to having poor writing skills, students were unaware of its importance. They agreed that the best measures for improvement were to encourage students to write more and to supply immediate feedback. Over 50% of the students linked their weakness in writing to a lack of concentration, and around 30% of them stated that they did not know the rules of English grammar. According to the students, their deficiencies in writing skills were due to poor background knowledge of the target language and a lack of practice, in addition to a low motivation to write in English.

Corrective feedback is another term for error correction (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012, p. viii). It can include a response indicating an error has been made, provision of the correct form, and metalinguistic information about the error (Ellis, 2007).

Error correction in L2 writing is important for teachers and students alike. For the student, it indicates areas needing improvement and offers opportunities to recognize and consciously analyze linguistic forms and increase declarative knowledge (Ferris, 2011). Feedback in the writing classroom is considered an essential element in guiding students' writing development (Ene & Kosobucki,

2016). Harmer (2001) states that "feedback encompasses not only correcting students, but also offering them an assessment of how well they have done, whether during a drill or after a longer language production exercise" (p. 99). Corrective feedback also helps students discover the target language's systematic structure (Papangkorna, 2015). For teachers, errors are important because they inform them about the students' accuracy and language learning process. Tsui (2003) points out that error correction in writing helps teachers become aware of the effectiveness of varying teaching techniques.

There are, however, opposing views on the importance of corrective feedback based on different views of language learning and acquisition. For naturalists, who describe acquisition as the unconscious absorption of a language in a natural environment and learning as the conscious studying of target language rules and structures, corrective feedback is unimportant for language acquisition. Naturalists believe that learning does not lead to acquisition but only helps learners to monitor or edit their language production. For cognitivists, who equate acquisition with implicit or procedural knowledge and learning with explicit or declarative knowledge and who believe that learning leads to acquisition, corrective feedback is a useful tool (Parreno, 2015). Supporters of corrective feedback believe that it aids L2 learning and acquisition as it helps learners recognize the difference between their own production and target structures, increasing their awareness (Schmidt, 1990; Schmidt & Frota, 1986).

Many researchers agreed that corrective feedback helped in improving EFL learners' writing accuracy (Sameera, Amin, & Siddiqui, 2016) until Truscott

published his 1996 report on its inefficacy. He found error correction an ineffective activity as students experience stress when they are told of their errors and this, in turn, deters them from writing. He backed up his claim with many studies, such as Hendrickson (1980), Kepner (1991), Robb, Ross, and Shortreed (1986). He also referenced Semke's (1984) and Sheppard's (1992) studies which showed that corrective feedback can be harmful because it impedes fluency. Building on that, he concluded that corrective feedback should be abandoned.

Ferris is a major opponent of Truscott's views and argues that Truscott ignored some evidence in favor of corrective feedback. Ferris (1997) acknowledges that more research is required to reach a conclusive answer as to whether different types of feedback had different results on students' writing. Lee (2004) notes that students become frustrated if their teachers do not give them feedback on their writing. Hyland and Hyland (2006) state that feedback helps students gain control over their writing skills. Sheen, Wright, and Moldowa (2009) state that corrective feedback helps learners notice their errors and control the accuracy of their writing.

Hartshorn, Evans, and Tuioti (2014) conducted a survey among 1,053 ESL and EFL writing instructors and found that 92% of the instructors provide some sort of error correction, because (a) it improves students' ability to correct and understand errors, (b) students expect feedback, and (c) students prefer it. Brookhart (2008) states that students become unmotivated in the absence of feedback and lose a sense of which aspects of their writing need improvement. Lee (2008) argues that learners may gain an inaccurate impression of their writing performance in the absence of feedback.

The idea of corrective feedback has a strong foundation in major learning theories. Schmidt (1990) underlines the significant role of grammar and conscious attention. He states that, for language acquisition to take place, there must be some exclusive attention to form. Accordingly, error correction is important as it draws learners' attention to language structure issues (Ji, 2015). For behavioral theoreticians, feedback is a means of encouraging learner motivation and ensuring linguistic accuracy (Saadi & Saadat, 2015). Ellis (2009) shows that feedback may be either positive or negative. For Ellis, positive feedback occurs when a learner's response is correct and provides effective support and motivation to learners. According to cognitive load theory, working memory should have as light a load as possible to optimize learning: for learning to take place and have lasting effect, there should be a link between schematic structures of long-term memory and new data (Sweller, 1988). Thus corrective feedback helps learners focus on the areas they have difficulty with while freeing their minds to process language content (Maleki & Eslami, 2013).

Bates, Lane, and Lang (1993) advise instructors to mark only global errors in students' writing. Global errors are defined as those that impede the understanding of a text. This category includes incorrect use of verb tense, modals, conditionals, passive voice, sentence structure, connectors, along with unclear messaging and incorrect word usage. The authors classify the remaining error types into two groups: 'local' and 'other'. Local errors are less serious than global ones in that they do not usually impede understanding. This group includes incorrect subject-verb agreement, incorrect or missing articles, problems with singulars and

plurals, wrong word choice, wrong word form, and unidiomatic expressions. Those they classify as 'other' are, they say, typically made also by native speakers of English, and include errors in capitalization, punctuation, pronoun referencing or agreement, and spelling, along with a lack of coherence, comma splices, dangling modifiers, sentence fragments, and run-on sentences.

According to Doughty (2001), there are four logical possibilities for error correction:

a) implicit attention to form, meaning, and function at precisely the time of learner need (Doughty & Williams, 1998);

b) implicit or explicit attention to form shortly in advance of learner need (Dekeyser, 1998; Lightbown, 1998);

c) a brief, implicit or explicit shift of attention from meaning and function to form at precisely the time of learner need (Long & Robinson, 1998);

d) implicit attention to form shortly after learner need (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Long, Inagaki, & Ortega, 1998).

However, there is a lack of evidence to support these claims. Moreover, the extent to which explicit and implicit error correction can be effective in restructuring the learners' interlanguage is theoretically and pedagogically critical. It may provide a clear understanding of how the cognitive system operates when acquiring a second language and also provide practitioners with better strategies in choosing when to correct the learners explicitly and implicitly, depending on their goals. Teachers need not fear providing immediate correction when there is a need for it. However, if they want to focus on fluency in communicative activity, it might be better to

delay correction. If they are less concerned with fluency and wish instead to focus on accuracy, immediate correction may be best.

Guenette (2007) points out that teachers have difficulty in choosing the correct error treatment type. They afraid that not marking up an error will cause it to be repeated and make them appear lazy or incompetent. Ferris (2010) also questions the number of error types that should be treated and advocates marking only those that are global, frequent, and stigmatizing.

Much research (such as Bates, Lane, & Lange 1993; Ferris, 1995; Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Ellis, 2009) agrees on two main kinds of corrective feedback: direct and indirect. Direct (explicit) corrective feedback is a strategy that helps students correct their errors by providing the correct linguistic form (Ferris, 2006; Elashri, 2013). Direct feedback takes various forms: striking out an incorrect word; inserting a missing word, phrase, or morpheme; or providing the correct linguistic form, usually above the wrong form or in the margin (Ferris, 2006; Ellis, 2008). Bitchener and Knoch (2010) argue that direct feedback is more helpful because it shows learners what is wrong and how the error can be corrected, minimizing confusion. Therefore, this type is more appropriate to low-level students who do not have the ability to self-correct even when these errors are highlighted for them (Ellis, 2009). Ene and Kosobucki (2016) found that low-level students benefit more from direct than indirect error correction, and Sheen (2006) revealed a student preference for explicit corrective feedback.

However, many other researchers argue that direct teacher feedback is one of the least effective methods for students (Elashri, 2013). Clements (2010) and

Elashri (2013) believe it leaves no work for learners to do and little chance for them to think about their errors. Rewriting a teacher's corrections is passive in character and does not teach students how to recognize or correct errors on their own. Therefore, it does not lead to long-term learning because it requires minimal processing on the part of the learner (Khodareza & Delvand, 2016).

Indirect (implicit) corrective feedback is a strategy whereby the existence of an error is indicated without providing the correct form (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Lee, 2008). For example, teachers can provide general clues about the location and type of an error by leaving symbols and marks in the text body or margins (Talatifard, 2016). Teachers using indirect corrective feedback may simply underline or circle errors in students' compositions without giving the correct words and explanations (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005). Following an indirect strategy, teachers do not correct students' papers as such. Rather, they highlight the error without providing the correction themselves and perhaps provide cues so that students can correct their own papers (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

Studies of indirect feedback strategies have tended to make a further distinction between coded and uncoded feedback. With coded indirect feedback, the teacher underlines the error, writes a symbol or code above it indicating the kind of error it is and then has the student correct it. Uncoded indirect feedback is where the teacher points out the error but leaves the student to diagnose and correct it (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005). Students are challenged to correct errors based on their informed knowledge. This type of feedback increases student engagement and attention to forms and improves their problem-solving skills, which

is beneficial for fostering long-term acquisition (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008). That said, Srichanyachon (2012) argues that students with a low-level of writing proficiency may be unable to recognize and correct errors even when they are made aware of them.

According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), teachers can use two types of indirect corrective feedback and four types of direct corrective feedback. The two types of indirect corrective feedback are:

a) recasting, where the teacher implicitly reformulates the student's incorrect pattern or provides the correction;

b) clarification requests, where the teacher indicates that the messaging has not been understood and requires the student to reformulate it.

The four types of direct corrective feedback are:

c) explicit correction, where the teacher indicates that the student has made an error and provides the correct form;

d) metalinguistic feedback, where the teacher asks questions or provides information or comments on the error without providing the correct form;

e) elicitation, where the teacher elicits the correct formation from the student by asking questions;

f) repetition, where the teacher repeats the students' error and changes intonation to draw attention to it.

Ferris (2011) argues that teachers should provide primarily direct correction for untreatable errors (like errors in word choice and sentence structure) and mainly

indirect correction for treatable errors (such as errors in the use of the simple past and spelling).

Regardless of its type, it is crucial to consider how students respond to corrective feedback (Khodareza & Delvand, 2016). When teachers provide feedback, they normally expect to receive a revised version that shows how the students have responded to their comments. In this way, feedback becomes a part of the language-learning process because students are able to diagnose and correct their mistakes. If students have made the required revisions, the process of feedback is complete. If students, as Harmer (2001) argues, refer to grammar books or dictionaries to correct their errors, the feedback creates a positive outcome (Khodareza & Delvand, 2016).

Over the last decade, electronic communication has inevitably begun to play a role in the language-learning process. Several types of technology have been investigated for the purpose of increasing feedback efficiency (Saadi & Saadat, 2015). Researchers suggest many benefits in electronic feedback, such as greater participation levels and motivation, providing a nonthreatening environment and reducing student anxiety. Students can communicate with their teachers easily and at any time, narrowing the distance between learners and teachers (Farshi & Safa, 2015). A study by Koolivand and Iravani (2013) indicated that students who received electronic corrective feedback showed greater improvement than learners who received traditional feedback. A study by Tafazoli, Nosratzadeh, and Hosseini (2014) revealed that electronic feedback had positive effect on Iranian ESL students' writing accuracy. Farshi and Safa's 2015 study showed that electronic feedback was

more effective than traditional feedback. Direct-indirect corrective e-feedback is a strategy combining both direct and indirect types of corrective feedback via email in three main phases (Seiffedin & El-Sakka, 2017).

Research shows that social and psychological variables—attitude and motivation—play a key role in language learning. Gardner (1985) developed his Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMBT) model to assess variables related to individual differences. Motivation in second and foreign language learning has three main elements: (a) a desire to learn the language, (b) effort expended towards learning the language, and (c) favorable attitudes towards learning the language. It has been argued that corrective feedback can either assist or hinder the language learning process depending on learner and teacher attitudes towards error correction and types of corrective feedback.

To understand the role of corrective feedback in ESL classrooms, it is essential to determine whether individual differences in apprehension and learner attitudes influence the effectiveness of different kinds of corrective feedback. Learner attitudes, which can be influenced by cultural and educational background, among other factors, may affect outcomes. Oxford and Shearin (1994) claim that six factors impinge on language learning: general attitudes, beliefs about self, goals for learning, involvement in the process of language learning, environmental support, and personal attitude. Gass and Selinker (1994) suggest that "in any learning situation, not all humans are equally motivated to learn languages, nor are they equally motivated to learn a specific language" (p. 165). Teachers must be sensitive

to this, particularly in error correction, although it might be argued that a learner's preference may not be what is actually best for acquisition (Truscott, 1996).

Many studies have been conducted on attitudes towards error correction. Bang (1999) revealed that ESL and EFL learners had strongly positive attitudes towards receiving error correction in their writing practice. Mackey, Gass, and McDonough (2000) argue that both the nature and target of the feedback may affect the accuracy of learners' perceptions. Several studies have suggested that L2 students need and expect different types of feedback for their various errors. In Ferris and Robertson's 2001 study, students preferred feedback with labels attached to errors rather than feedback that was simply marked but not explained. Havranek and Cesnik's (2001) comprehensive developmental study of 207 native German-speaking EFL students found that corrective feedback was likely to benefit learners who had a positive attitude towards error correction and high-language proficiency. Hyland's (2003) study revealed that students believe repeated feedback will eventually help them and that, without it, they will fail to identify errors and therefore not improve. Jang (2003) found that 77.6% of the participants had positive attitudes towards receiving error correction. Katayama (2007) reported that 82 % of 819 Korean EFL learners expressed positive attitudes towards error correction. Katayama (2006) found that most students said that they did not need all their errors to be corrected because they thought that correcting them would negatively affect their feelings. Forty percent of the students expressed agreement that teachers should correct only the errors that interfered with communication, while 32.7% disagreed, and 27.3% remained neutral. Katayama also found that 92.8% of the

participants in Japanese language classes in the USA expressed strong positive attitudes towards teacher correction. Sheen's (2006) questionnaire elicited strongly positive attitudes towards error correction and Sheen argued that attitudes towards error correction cannot be expected to have any effect if learners are unaware that they are being corrected.

Most scholars who believe that error correction contributes to improved accuracy in writing recommend instructors take a selective approach when marking papers (Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Lee, 2008). Instructors should not mark every grammatical, vocabulary, or technical error that occurs, but identify a limited number. This strategy not only saves the instructor time but also allows students to recognize error patterns, avoid being overwhelmed by feedback, and develop independent editing skills. Despite its advantages, however, a selective approach to error treatment may be challenging in requiring teachers to make decisions regarding which and how many error types to address, perhaps based only on intuition. Misunderstandings between an instructor using a selective approach and a student may also occur if the student believes that all errors are being marked up.

Another issue with selective error treatment is students' perceptions of it. Leki's 1991 survey of 100 ESL students found that 70% wanted all errors, major or minor, to be marked. Summarizing students' attitudes, Leki stated that it was the "English teacher's job, it would seem, to mark errors" (p. 208). Lee (2004) found that 82.9% of the student participants preferred comprehensive error markup.

Examining teachers' beliefs can provide a better understanding of their relation to practice (Burns, 1992). Teachers' beliefs can influence their feedback on students' writing, which, in turn, is likely to shape their students' self-perceived writing efficacy (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994), revision, and writing quality (Tsui & Ng, 2000). Teachers' beliefs may be a result of prior learning experiences (Lortie, 1975), and can influence their classroom practice (Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver, & Thwaite, 2001; Borg, 2001). Teachers have a chance, in their feedback, to put their beliefs into practice, increasing teacher sensitivity to deal more effectively with student error correction. This contributes to the quantity, quality, and tone of teachers' written comments (Ferris, 1997).

Hui-Tzu (2013) found that, with experience, teachers' beliefs changed and their written comments improve. Studies have found that teachers of L2 writing mostly support the use of written corrective feedback (Hartshorn, Evans, & Tuioti, 2014). However, despite the positive perception of written corrective feedback and the pervasiveness of the practice, academics have not come to a consensus on the effectiveness of the different kinds of written corrective feedback, or even its general utility (Ebsworth, 2014; Ellis, 2009).

Nunan (1989) states: "One of the most serious blocks to learning is the mismatch between teacher and learner expectations about what should happen in the classroom" (p. 177). Many studies, such as Cathcart and Olsen (1976) and Schulz (2001), show mismatches between teacher practice and student learning preferences. This mismatch can produce unsatisfactory learning outcomes (Nunan, 1989; Schulz, 2001).

A few studies have found discrepancies between teachers' and students' attitudes to corrective feedback. Schulz's 2001 study revealed that 90% of the learners had a more positive attitude towards error correction and grammar instruction than their teachers. Ancker (2000) surveyed teachers' and students' perceptions in 15 countries, focusing on whether teachers should correct every error students make when using English and found a 25% positive response from teachers and 76% positive response from students.

Researchers comparing ESL/EFL writing teachers' beliefs with students' beliefs and perceptions have shown that teachers and students share similar ones about feedback (Schulz, 2001; Montgomery & Baker, 2007). Schulz (2001) found that most Columbian EFL teacher and student participants (93% and 98% respectively) concurred that students wanted their teachers to provide written feedback when they made writing errors. Montgomery and Baker (2007) found that students' perceptions of the quantities of written corrective feedback received were consistent with their ESL writing teachers' self-assessment. Others have reported disparities in teachers' and students' beliefs about the amount and types of written feedback that teachers should give. Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) found that almost 94% of ESL student participants wanted their teachers to correct all of their errors, but only 45% of the teachers did.

3.   Methodology

The study focuses on the following questions:

a) What are learners' attitudes towards error correction in writing in general?

b) What are learners' feelings about getting corrective feedback in general?

c) What are learners' perceptions towards the contribution of error correction in improving their writing skills?

d) What type of corrective feedback is the most helpful for correcting errors and is the most effective for improvement in writing?

e) What are teachers' attitudes towards error correction and corrective feedback in English writing?

f) What is the most common type of students' errors that teachers focus on when they give corrective feedback in their daily work?

g) Is there any correlation between learners' attitudes and their language accuracy and performance?

The study population consists of teachers and students. The sample consists of 10 Arab EFL teachers and 250 Arab EFL students between the seventh and ninth grades in Dabburiya Junior High School, Israel. Demographic details are shown below:

Table 1

Demographic Details of the Participants

Grade	Number	Male	Female
Seventh grade	85	30	55
Eighth grade	55	20	35

| Ninth grade | 110 | 45 | 65 |
| Total | 250 | 95 | 155 |

The data were collected over three months using questionnaires, interviews, and writings tasks.

A semi-structured interview with the teachers, which took place at the school, was conducted in order to answer Research Questions 5 and 6. Interviews and questionnaires were used to answer Research Question 4, with data analysis of the responses. Writing tasks were given to all students to answer Research Question 7, which five EFL teachers who work at the school, each with over 10 years' experience, corrected. Qualitative and quantitative analysis were used to interpret results from these writing tasks. Errors were noted and classified and the most common categories determined (spelling, grammar, and language accuracy). Qualitative analysis using SPSS (particularly the Pearson T-Test) assessed any correlation between students' attitudes and their language accuracy and performance. The questionnaire tool adopted to examine learners' perceptions and attitudes was as used by Sheen (2006) and modified by Faqeih (2012). Sheen focused on measuring language anxiety and attitudes towards corrective feedback and grammatical accuracy. The questionnaire in Faqeih's study focused on measuring attitudes towards the content of the activities, learners' opinions on error correction and accuracy, and learners' opinions on corrective feedback techniques. In order to raise the validity of Faqeih's questionnaire, it was first piloted on students who were native speakers, and then on students from Saudi Arabia. Varying

Faqeih's strategy, the questionnaire used in this study examined only two areas: student perceptions of error correction and opinions of the corrective feedback techniques. The questionnaire consisted of questions eliciting personal data, along with 14 five-point Likert scale ('strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree') statements. Three other statements were also included for elicitation on the type of corrective feedback, based on the results of research by Jang (2003), Ferris and Hedgcock (2005), Ellis, Sheen, Murakami and Takashima (2008), and Lee (2008). To test the reliability of the questionnaire, Faqeih (2012) conducted an internal consistency reliability test and found that Cronbach's alpha=.95. To improve the validity of the questionnaire, it was also referred to subject specialists.

For this study, a factor analysis was conducted on the 14 questionnaire items, which, as a result, were divided into four categories. The first consisted of Statements 1, 3, 4, and 5 and related to general attitudes towards error correction. A reliability test showed statistically high results (Alpha Cronbach's=.913). The second category included Statements 2, 6, and 7 on feelings about corrective feedback in general. The third category comprised Statements 8, 9, 10, 13, and 14 on the contribution of error correction to improving writing skills. The fourth category consisted of Statements 11 and 12 and related to the type of corrective feedback they prefer to receive: direct or indirect.

A semi-structured interview was used in order to collect data about teachers' perceptions of and views on error correction practices. A qualitative method based on discourse analysis was used on the resultant data, with findings grouped and summarized according to major themes.

The writing tasks were given to learners in order to verify whether there was any correlation between students' attitudes and their language accuracy and performance.

4.   Results

The results summarized in Table 2 reveal the students' perspectives on the four categories on the questionnaire. All four statements received high ranking by the participants (mean=4.5 out of 5).

Table 2

General Attitudes Towards Error Correction

Statement	Mean	Standard (std.) Deviation
I feel it is the teacher's duty to correct students' errors all the time.	4.54	.574
I think the most helpful way is correcting all of my errors all time.	4.45	.633
I think the most helpful way is correcting selectively just the important errors.	4.46	.621
I feel more comfortable when the teacher doesn't correct all my errors.	4.50	.603

Table 3 presents students' feelings about getting corrective feedback in general. The results indicate low scores for these three statements. The mean score for these statements is ~=2 with SD~=.94.

Table 3

Feeling About Getting Corrective Feedback in General

Statement	Mean	Std. deviation
I feel frustrated when the teacher corrects me.	1.98	.907
I feel discouraged when the teacher corrects my repeated errors.	1.99	.978
I feel nervous after the teacher corrects my errors.	1.98	.912

The results of the five statements that tapped learners' perceptions towards the contribution of error correction in improving writing skills are summarized in Table 4. All five statements in this third category were ranked over 4.4, a high level of agreement among students for this category.

Table 4

Learners' Perceptions Towards the Contribution of Error Correction in Improving Writing Skills

Statement	Mean	Std. deviation

I think it is better for me to know the corrections of my errors.	4.51	.772
I benefit from error correction.	4.47	.772
Having my errors corrected is the best way to learn English.	4.66	1.953
The corrections the teacher provides improve my English.	4.55	.776

For the fourth category, regarding the two statements on the type of corrective feedback, learners prefer to have on their writing (see Table 5), the participants were uncertain as to what type of corrective feedback is the most helpful in correcting their writing errors (mean=3, SD=1.28).

Table 5

Attitudes Towards the Most Helpful Type of Corrective Feedback in Writing

Statement	Mean	Std. deviation
I think the most helpful way is correcting my errors directly.	3.06	1.277
I think the most helpful way is correcting my errors indirectly.	3.07	1.287

A t-test was used to analyze the data, and significant differences were found between males and females on the three statements of the second category. Males had a slightly negative feeling towards receiving corrective feedback (mean=2.3 for the three statements), against mean=1.8 for females with t~=4.5 and p<0.01).

Significant differences were found between male and female adolescents for the third category: in the five statements, the study found mean~=4.25 for males, against mean=4.71 for females, with t~=4.7 and p<0.01. An ANOVA test was conducted to reveal any differences between participant's grades and their attitudes towards the four categories (see Table 6). Results indicate significant differences associated to categories 2, 3 and 4.

Table 6

ANOVA-Differences in Attitudes Between Participants

Category	Mean by grade			Tot. mean	df	F	Sig.
	7th	8th	9th				
General attitudes towards error correction	4.54	4.41	4.49	4.49	249	.912	.403
Feelings about getting corrective feedback in general	2.38	1.39	1.97	1.98	249	23.60	.000
Learners' perceptions towards the contribution of error correction in improving writing skills	4.33	4.83	4.57	4.54	249	7.666	.001
Attitudes towards the most helpful type of corrective feedback in writing	2.44	3.15	3.50	3.07	249	19.47	.000

Qualitative analysis of the data from the interviews with teachers was conducted, with a coding system established based on common responses. Frequent themes and major points were identified as basic categories for further analysis: (a) opinions on error correction, (b) types of error correction and corrective feedback, (c) useful types of error correction, (d) comprehensive correction of writing errors, (e) selective correction, (f) comprehensive correction of errors, and (g) methods of giving corrective feedback. Based on analysis of these themes, these categories were established:

a) General attitudes towards error correction in writing.

b) The use of error correction and corrective feedback at the classroom.

c) Common types of students' errors that teachers focus on when they give corrective feedback in their daily work.

d) Beliefs about the most useful method of providing corrective feedback.

In general, teachers expressed positive attitudes towards error correction. Typical comments included: "Correcting errors in writing is important for students' writing progress"; "Students can learn from their mistakes"; "It's important to correct mistakes, as it's a basis for expressing themselves correctly".

Teachers had different methods for and attitudes to providing correction and feedback. Typical comments included: "Teachers should not correct errors all the time; it depends on the level of writing, importance, and relevance of the topic"; "Teachers should not correct all types of errors because it seems frustrating for some students"; "I choose the most common errors to correct, especially the essential and

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important ones"; "I believe that if the teacher focuses on certain types of errors to correct, given suitable feedback the amount of these errors will be reduced"; "Sometimes teachers should ignore things to give students the feeling that they are improving"; "Teachers should correct all types of students' errors because students are used to having their mistakes corrected all the time"; "Teachers should correct all the errors, not selectively. It's a second language, and so students find it difficult to write."

Analysis of the interviews revealed that teachers focused on three main areas when it came to the error correction they provided: grammar (primarily sentence forms, tenses, subject-verb agreement, and sentence structure), punctuation, and language accuracy.

Teachers used both direct and indirect corrective feedback, believing that both are useful. Typical comments included: "It depends, sometimes it should be directly in order to give them red light for what they are doing, although the indirect way could be useful, so we will not hurt and frustrate them"; "I believe in two ways: Indirectly in terms of motivating them to guess why it is wrong and figure out the correction. I use also direct corrective feedback"; "Indirectly, because some students may feel ashamed and they don't like to have many comments". Analysis of the writing tasks results revealed that teachers used both direct and indirect corrective feedback.

Qualitative analysis of the tasks conducted to verify the common types of writing errors among students revealed three common types related to spelling, grammar, and language accuracy. SPSS quantitative analysis produced the following results:

Table 7

Participants' Errors in the Three Categories of the Writing Task
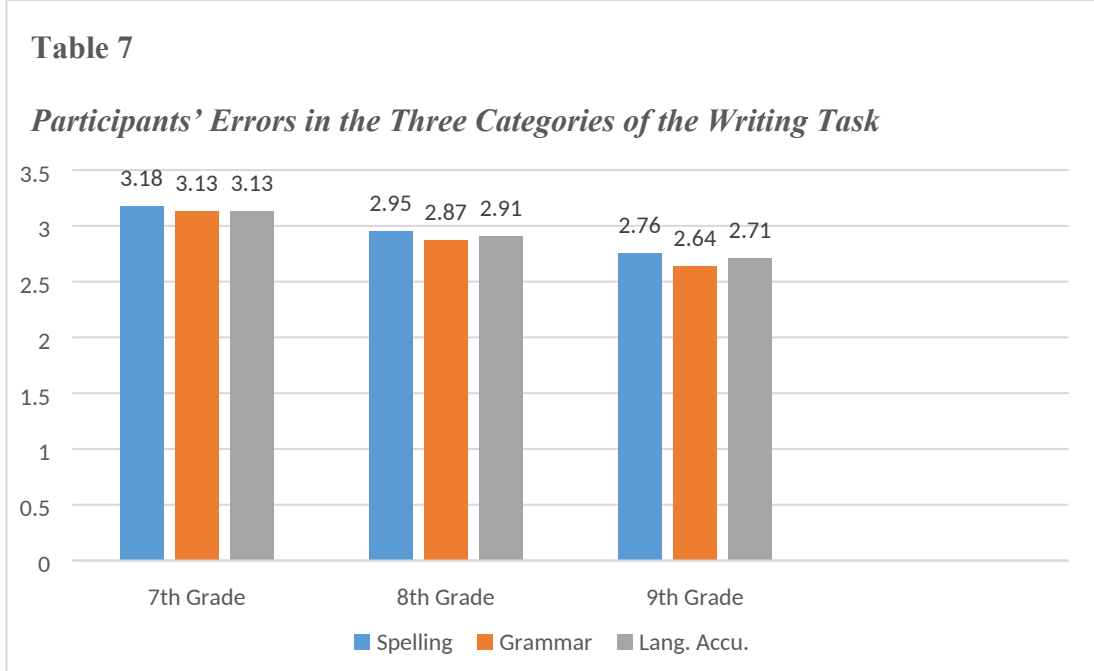
A t-test found no significant differences between male and female students involving the three types of errors, nor among males and females compared to all students, nor among males and females across grade. An ANOVA test indicated significant differences in the number of errors across the different grades.

Results from Research Question 1 show a positive attitude towards all four statements in this category (mean=4.5 out of 5). These results align with other studies in the field (such as Hyland, 2003 and Sheen, 2006). Students agreed that it was a teacher's duty to correct all errors all of the time. A t-test found no significant differences between males and females (t=.311 and p>0.05).

Responses to Research Question 2 elicited positive feelings. A t-test found significant differences between males' and females' feelings. Females presented stronger feelings towards receiving corrective feedback than males. The authors have not found any support for this interesting result in the existing literature and,

as such, this may stimulate further studies on this topic.

Data analysis of responses to Research Question 3 indicate that all students strongly agreed on positive contribution of error correction to improving their writing skills, with the mean of all five statements over 4.47 (see Table 4). These results align with many studies in this field (such as Jang, 2003, and Katayama, 2007) and confirm the importance of error correction in learning English writing skills. A t-test found significant differences between male and female attitudes (t=4.7 and p<0.01). Females expressed a more positive view on error correction. Significant differences between males and females were found regarding all five statements in this category (mean~=4.25 for males, against mean=4.71 for females, with t~=4.7 and p<0.01). This interesting result should also stimulate further research.

Data analysis of the fourth category on the questionnaire, regarding the types of corrective feedback that are most helpful for correcting errors, showed no clear preference. Direct and indirect corrective feedback both had the same score (mean=3, SD=1.28). This indicates that, despite their strongly positive attitude towards error correction, students are uncertain as to what type of corrective feedback is most helpful. This accords with existing research.

An ANOVA test was undertaken in order to assess any differences according to grade. The results in Table 6 indicate significant differences by grade. Positive feelings were stronger among eighth-grade students (mean=1.4) than seventh and ninth grade students. This requires further study, but may be related to other variables such as the transition from elementary to junior high school (in the case of

seventh grade) and the transition from junior high to high school (in the case of ninth grade). Ninth grade students were more certain about the most helpful type of corrective feedback than seventh and eighth grade students, perhaps reflecting their greater maturity and experience.

In response to the fourth question on the most helpful type of corrective feedback, students did not give a clear answer. Similar results emerged from the teacher interviews. Teachers believed that both direct and indirect feedback were useful, with some teachers favoring the direct method and others the indirect, but with no clear response. These results indicate the practical need for more research.

The fifth question of the study on teacher attitudes towards error correction revealed clear positive results. Teachers expressed strong agreement on the positive role and importance of error correction and corrective feedback. Based on both the questionnaire and interview results, this indicates common positive agreement between teachers and students on the importance of error correction and corrective feedback.

Responses to the sixth research question showed that teachers tended to focus on grammar, punctuation, and language accuracy in their corrective feedback. This may also correlate with the weakness of students in these areas.

Qualitative analysis of the writing tasks revealed three common types of writing errors among students: spelling errors, grammar errors, and errors in language accuracy. Quantitative analysis using SPSS was conducted in order to assess any differences among students associated with these three variables, and no significant results were found ($P>.5$).

For the final research question assessing any correlation between students' performance in English writing and their attitudes toward error correction and corrective feedback, a Pearson Correlation Test was conducted. The results shown in Table 8 generally indicate no significant correlations between the first three categories of the questionnaire and students' performance in writing (P>.5). This result indicates that students' attitudes about the process of error correction and corrective feedback in general had no effect on their writing ability. However, a significant correlation was found between their attitudes in the fourth category (towards the most helpful type of corrective feedback in writing) and the three kinds of errors in writing tasks (P>.5). Thus, it may be that the type of corrective feedback a teacher provides can affect students' writing ability.

Table 8

Correlations between Attitudes toward Error Correction or Corrective Feedback and Performance in Writing Tasks

Section		Spelling	Grammar	Language Accuracy
General attitudes towards error correction	Sig.	.691	.913	.975
Feelings about getting corrective feedback in general	Sig.	.925	.670	.960
Learners' perceptions towards the contribution of error correction in improving writing skills	Sig.	.145	.344	.246

Attitudes towards the most helpful type of corrective feedback in writing	Sig.	.003	.001	.002

5. Summary

This study indicates common positive agreement between teachers and students on the important role of error correction and corrective feedback in improving English writing skills. However, no clear preference for any type of corrective feedback was noted.

Teachers expressed strong agreement on the positive role of error correction and corrective feedback in the process of learning, but expressed different opinions on and no clear preference for particular methods of doing so. Teachers believed that both direct and indirect feedback were useful methods, with some favoring one method over another. This indicates the need for more research to be conducted on this subject for the practical benefit of both teachers and students.

The most common corrective feedback areas teachers habitually targeted were spelling, grammar, and language accuracy. These same issues were prominent in analysis of student writing tasks, allowing us to conclude that these are common areas of weakness that teachers indeed should focus on.

The study reveals significant correlation between student performance in the writing task and attitudes towards the most helpful type of corrective feedback. This indicates that the type of corrective feedback can affect the students' writing ability. Therefore, teachers must identify the most suitable corrective feedback type for each individual or group.

Certain practical limitations to the study – such as small sample size – should be considered when assessing the findings and also guide further research. Sampling, for example, should be expanded to other elementary, junior, and high schools in the Arab community in Israel.

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