Impact of Written Corrective Feedback on Malaysian ESL Secondary Students' Writing Performance

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ABSTRACT

The teacher plays a crucial role in providing good written corrective feedback (WCF), especially in Malaysia's education system. Numerous studies were conducted on its effectiveness and students' perceptions, but most were meant for tertiary education. This mixed method study identified the types of WCF provided by teachers during their English as a Second Language (ESL) writing pedagogical practices in five Malaysian secondary schools, and analysed the perceptions of 482 students and 15 teachers towards the provision of WCF. A questionnaire survey was administered to collect quantitative data from students, and focus group discussions were conducted among the teachers to collect qualitative data. Students highlighted that, teachers gave unfocused, metalinguistic WCF, and only held discussions much later. Students preferred teachers to mark all errors, and perceived WCF as important in improving their writing skills. Teachers reported, that they are in the habit of providing unfocused, indirect, and metalinguistic WCF, and held discussions with students only after marking the scripts. They perceived WCF as beneficial in enhancing students' writing skills and teachers' pedagogical practices. In this vein, it is construed, that the perceptions of teachers and students are mostly aligned. Teachers need to be aware of the existing types of WCF and incorporate the appropriate ones in their teaching practices. This study is significant in enriching ESL teachers' pedagogical practices of teaching writing to secondary school students by providing the best practices of WCF, taking into account students' interest, and ultimately create a more significant impact in the ESL writing classroom.

Keywords: Written corrective feedback; pedagogical practices; secondary schools; writing skills; writing performance

INTRODUCTION

This study is in line with the globalisation era which grows rapidly, especially in international communication where English is the language used for communication worldwide, and in Malaysia as well. 'English Rules' presents the language per se to the world as an uncomplicated scenario, suggesting language spread as universal and likely to continue (Crystal, 1997). The demand of English has greatly increased, but the fact is the English skill of people in Malaysia is still lacking. One of the factors that makes it occur is the lack of an effective English learning in school, especially for written form. To help students improve their writing skills, the teacher provides form-focused feedback on their linguistic errors (grammar and vocabulary) through written corrective feedback (WCF) by being a reader, writing guide, grammarian, and an evaluator (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Keh, 1990). Paulus (1999) viewed teacher written feedback as important where students are taught the grammatical forms of the second language (L2) together with the culture's writing norms.

Given that writing is a necessary skill in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom, it is a challenging yet possible skill to master with proper guidance through teachers' WCF (Al-Khaza'leh & Mohammed, 2020; Mastan and Maarof, 2014). Montgomery and Baker (2007) stated that the significance of teacher WCF is acquiesced by both teachers and students, and Hosseiny (2014) views WCF as helpful to students for improving their writing accuracy, and as a tool for teachers for providing adept feedback to students. ESL students consistently acknowledged and appraised WCF over peer and oral feedback (Zhang, 1995), and requested clarification and comments on grammar, eventually improving students' following texts (Ferris, 1997). However, such ideal conditions are hard to fulfil in Malaysian classrooms as teachers often face problems giving sufficient coaching to students on their writing skill, due to time constraints and a high student-to-teacher ratio of about 30 to one.

The teacher plays a crucial role in providing good WCF, especially in Malaysia's education system. In conjunction with the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, the Malaysian Minister of Education announced the initiative of passing English as compulsory for the Malaysian Certificate of Education or *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) candidates by 2016 (Phung, 2015), which points out that students are compelled to master the four basic English language skills (reading, speaking, listening, writing) in order to pass the English paper. As writing is a vital part of SPM English, the role of teachers giving WCF during their pedagogical practices is deemed vital in supporting the writing development of students, where feedback provided by teachers will enhance their writing skills. Learners will then be able to prepare themselves for SPM through the WCF in their written compositions. In a nutshell, what teachers do in giving good feedback, and what students need to do in order to excel in their writing (and other skills) is of equal importance. The implication of students needing a compulsory pass for SPM English is pertinent, which makes looking into the classroom to see what the teacher is doing is relevant, as they need to constantly decide on what needs to be done (and not) in the classroom (Truscott, 1999).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to:

1. Identify the types of WCF provided by teachers during their ESL writing pedagogical practices in selected Malaysian secondary schools.
2. Analyse ESL students' and teachers' perceptions towards the provision of WCF.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the types of WCF provided by teachers during their ESL writing pedagogical practices in selected Malaysian secondary schools?
2. What are the perceptions of ESL students and teachers towards the effectiveness and usefulness of WCF?

LITERATURE REVIEW

FORMS OF WCF AND TEACHER WRITTEN FEEDBACK

Teachers use various WCF strategies to mark students' writing, in which the type is reported to be based on what students want, and what they need (Lee, 2004; Li & He, 2017; Saeli, 2019). Focusing on linguistic errors, the four main types of WCF are direct, indirect, unfocused, and focused (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Ellis (2009) also categorised other types of WCF – metalinguistic, electronic, and reformulation.

Even though Truscott (1996) viewed grammar correction as ineffective and should be discontinued, citing previous first language (L1) and L2 studies, form-focused feedback is still prevalent in the L2 classroom (Ng & Ishak, 2018; Nusrat, Ashraf & Narcy-Combes, 2019; Rahim, Jaganathan & Mahadi, 2019; Tanveer, Malghani, Khosa & Khosa, 2018). Liu and Jhaveri (2019) found that ESL teachers used WCF to correct grammatical errors, notably the use of articles, tenses and prepositions. It was also effective in improving students' grammar and writing accuracy (Rahim et al., 2019).

Advocates of Truscott (1996) are of view that teachers should focus on providing feedback on the content of the text, such as Alamis (2010) who found that students in the Philippines prefer feedback on content rather than vocabulary and grammar. Scholars also suggested a combination of both form (grammar correction) and content (meaning), which is integrated feedback, but the most effective method to conduct integrated feedback is still disputed. Zamel (1985) claimed that feedback on the following draft should be firstly form-focused, and then content-based, but Ashwell (2000) found that there was not much difference between students who received form before content as compared to the reverse, as well as for both done simultaneously.

Nonetheless, Ferris (1997) and Fathman and Whalley (1990) viewed integrated feedback as detrimental, and that more studies on the helpfulness of error feedback need to be carried out (Ferris, 2004). More research on WCF needs to be done, in which new insights will bound to be useful to teachers in seeking the best WCF pedagogical practice to be taken into consideration especially in the ESL context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of the study is based on Vygotsky's (1978) theory of sociocultural learning, whereby the process of language acquisition is shared between the teacher and student through the notion of scaffolding. The teacher facilitates the learning of writing skills by acknowledging students' pre-existing and tacit knowledge of writing, and further builds upon them by providing optimum feedback. Through the provision of WCF. the student creates new knowledge by integrating teacher feedback with their current schema or thought pattern, and adapts their writing styles accordingly.

STUDIES ON TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Experts have conducted past studies on teachers' perspective of WCF (Abdullah & Aziz, 2020; Köksal, Özdemir, Tercan, Gün & Bilgin, 2018; McMartin-Miller, 2014). Abdullah and Aziz (2020) conducted a case study on two Malaysian ESL teachers and found that their provision of WCF is often constrained by factors of time, class size and student motivation. Additional factors reported by Köksal et al. (2018) include workload, levels of burnout and self-efficacy. McMartin-Miller (2014) determined the error percentage in students' work marked by ESL teachers, its reasons, and students' dispositions towards the treatment of selective and comprehensive errors. It was found that teachers' comprehensive feedback was preferred.

Some studies were done on teachers' WCF beliefs and practices (Al Shahrani, 2013; Ferris, 2006; Lee, 2008). Lee (2008) carried out a study in Hong Kong by collecting two sets of data, in which the first set was on written feedback, and the second was on teachers' WCF beliefs and practices. Interestingly, several mismatches were found while comparing the beliefs and practices of teachers, showing that teachers can be unaware of their actual classroom practices or had their beliefs and practices misaligned. Consequent studies also found evident incongruencies between teachers' perceptions and their actual practices (Abdullah & Aziz, 2020; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019).

Focusing on accuracy and consistency of corrections, Ferris (2006) conducted a study among a group of teachers in an American university, who were expected to use the university's correction chart to correct their students' work. The teachers' strategies were noted and three teachers were interviewed. It was found that teachers mostly use direct feedback to mark students' work. A study by Al Shahrani (2013) on three university teachers and 41 students in Saudi Arabia concluded with mostly students' preferences matching their teachers' practices, with several mismatches as well. These studies show the misalignment of their beliefs and their actual practices.

STUDIES ON WCF IN MALAYSIA

Numerous studies were conducted on its effectiveness and student perceptions, but most were for tertiary education (e.g. Fhaeizdhyall, 2020; Gharehbagh, Stapa & Darus, 2019; Lee & Sim, 2019), with some studies focussing on lower levels (Ahmad, 2019; Chieng, 2014; Mahmud, 2016; Nilaasini, 2015). Ahmad (2019) conducted a longitudinal study on 30 primary school students, employing a double posttest design to determine the effectiveness of direct and indirect WCF on students' use of past tense. It was found that students exposed to direct WCF had better writing accuracy, contributed by their cognitive effort in understanding errors.

Mahmud (2016) investigated teachers' WCF practices in 14 high-performing national secondary schools, which included 54 ESL teachers. It was found that they "were unaware of the available WCF types to provide in the teaching of ESL writing" (Mahmud, 2016, p. 48), in which their feedback method was mostly influenced by marking codes and symbols set by the Malaysian Examinations Board. Up to 83% of them, who have taught ESL for at least ten years, used indirect, unfocused WCF on their students' writing, and "the fact that they were unaware of the available and important approaches of WCF really is a serious consideration" (Mahmud, 2016, p. 54), adding that ESL teachers in Malaysia should be made aware of various types and forms of WCF that they can use to help further improve the quality of students' writing.

Nilaasini (2015) conducted a case study of an ESL teacher in a private primary school, focusing on WCF practices and beliefs. It was found that the teacher mostly used direct, unfocused, and metalinguistic WCF on students' writing, which was similar to Mahmud's (2016) findings. In dealing with students' written work, the teacher was not fully aware of her WCF habits, despite matching most beliefs and practices. The effectiveness of any form of WCF is dependent on the learner's perception of its usefulness, as any "incongruity between students' and teachers' perceptions regarding WCF" (Armhein & Nassaji, 2010, p. 98) may be problematic. As such, researchers need to not only improve the effectiveness of WCF, but to also investigate whether both teachers and students perceive the usefulness of WCF similarly, and rectify if necessary.

Chieng (2014) investigated the differential effects of direct and indirect WCF in improving the accuracy of tenses on 20 students from a Chinese-independent (vernacular) secondary school students, using a pretest-treatment-posttest design. It was found that the direct WCF group out-performed the indirect WCF group in the posttest stage in new pieces of writing, in which the latter only showed an improvement in revised texts. Through follow-up

interviews with selected students, the effectiveness of WCF can be influenced by student motivation and teacher scaffolding. They recommended teachers to "apply mix [sic] strategies of corrective feedback in their writings depending on the severity of the mistakes or errors" (Chieng, 2014, p. 59), and to also adjust the feedback according to the students' proficiency.

These studies indicate that more research needs to be done on the effectiveness of WCF, considering there is much variation among different Malaysian ESL teachers, and the findings can potentially provide teachers insight on the best types of WCF to enhance students' writing. As not much research has focused on teachers providing direct, focused WCF in Malaysian secondary schools, studies that do so could guide teachers in choosing an effective WCF approach which may further improve students' written grammatical accuracy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a mixed method convergence parallel design which combines qualitative and quantitative data to support each other, supplying a more complete understanding of the research problems (Creswell, 2002). Students' data were collected through a questionnaire survey whereas focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with the teachers.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

This research uses two instruments, (1) a survey questionnaire and (2) a list of FGD questions. The questionnaire contains two sections: Section A for demographic information and Section B for items related to the study. Section A comprises 3 items, whereas Section B has 44 items. The questionnaire was adapted from previous research (Ferris, 1995; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Lee, 2004), and then checked and verified by two experts from the university to establish content validity. Next, the instrument was pilot tested on 68 Form 4 students and 2 teachers from a secondary school in Penang, Malaysia. A reading of 0.82 was imported by using Cronbach's alpha, which is an acceptable internal consistency.

For the FGD, six questions were derived from the questionnaire (Q1-Q6), with 11 sub-questions linked to them. Q1 elicits responses if the teachers mark all the errors in their students' essays. Q2 reflects on the manner in which teachers mark students' errors, the sub-questions are based on codes/symbols, written feedback, and details respectively. Q3 looks at the teachers' expectations of their students after receiving the feedback, with 2 sub-questions on whether they hold post-discussion sessions, and mark their corrections respectively. Q4 aims to seek the general corrective feedback teachers usually provide to the students, and Q5 relates to the teachers' comments on WCF, with 6 sub-questions on introduction, thesis statement and topic sentence, topic sentence in paragraphs, transition words, logical arguments, and conclusion respectively. Lastly, Q6 reflects on the teachers' opinion of WCF.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION AND SAMPLE SIZE

Systematic sampling was used to select students, and purposive sampling was used to select the teachers and participating schools. Form 4 students were chosen for the study as they have spent the most time in secondary school classes and activities, excluding Form 5 students. The latter group was excluded as they were preparing for the national exam (SPM), and therefore unable to participate in the study. This sampling was used as it was more cost-effective, less time-consuming, and it did not disrupt the teaching and learning process in the classrooms.

Students from all Form 4 classes in each school, were selected according to a random starting point and fixed periodic interval based on the class register. The sampling interval was

calculated by dividing the class size by the desired sample size from each class until the desired number of 100 students per school was reached. Using this method, 500 students were randomly selected for the questionnaire, but only 96.4% of questionnaires were completed and returned, hence the sample size consisted of 482 student participants.

Teachers from participating secondary schools who taught English as a subject were chosen for the study, regardless of their experiences. Purposive sampling was used due to a limited number of eligible teachers. However, 15 teacher participants were selected for the FGD, with an average of three teachers from each school. The same sampling method was also used to select five participating schools from Malaysia which is deemed to represent the general secondary school students' population of the country and its national characteristics.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Both students and teachers were briefed on the research aims and objectives, and were invited to participate in the study upon completing the consent form. Questionnaires were distributed to the students, whereas teachers were grouped together for the FGDs. After data collection, the completed questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics via the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (SPSS), and tabulated according to items, frequency (*f*), percentages (%), and mean (x̄) scores.

Recordings from teachers' FGDs were transcribed and coded according to recurring themes via NVivo 12. The coding process was conducted by familiarising with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and ending with producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The qualitative data from teachers were triangulated with the quantitative data from students, by supporting information, and through corroborating evidences from different individuals, methods or types of data (Creswell, 2002). The combined data were then used to describe the participants of the study, address research questions, and discuss the findings in relation to past studies.

FINDINGS

SURVEY

Section A contains the demographic information of student participants involved in this study, whereas Section B contains close-ended questions (Part I) and 4-point Likert scaled questions (Part II–V). Schools are labelled A, B, C, D, and E respectively.

SECTION A – DEMOGRAPHY OF THE STUDENTS

TABLE 1. Demographic Information

School	Participation (%)	Gender			Age		
		Male	Female	15	16	17
A	30.1	11.2	18.9	0.0	30.1	0.0
B	18.0	18.0	0.0	0.4	16.0	1.7
C	20.7	0.0	20.7	0.0	21.7	0.0
D	18.5	8.7	9.8	0.2	15.6	2.7
E	12.7	12.7	0.0	0.2	12.2	0.2
Total	100.0	50.6	49.4	0.8	94.6	4.6
Mean (x̄)	96.4	48.8	47.6	0.8	91.6	4.4

Based on demographic information tabulated in Table 1, most students were from School A (30.1%) followed by School C (20.7%), School D (18.5%), School B (18.0%), and School E (12.7%). Each school had an average of 96.4 students, totalling 482 from all five schools. For gender, the majority was male students (50.6%) followed by females (49.4%). Most students were aged 16 (94.60%), followed by age 17 (4.57%), and age 15 (0.83%). A vast majority of the respondents were Malay (42.5%), followed by Chinese (29.7%), Indian (21.2%), and Others (6.6%).

SECTION B – PART I

TABLE 2. How the Teacher Marks Students' Errors

Item		Yes		No	
		f	%	f	%
1	Marks all errors.	367	76.1	115	23.9
2	Marks all major errors but ignores minor errors.	107	22.2	375	77.8
3	Marks most of the errors but not all.	198	41.3	282	58.7
4	Marks only specific errors.	127	26.3	355	73.7
5	Marks only the errors which alters the meaning of ideas.	181	37.6	301	62.4
6	Does not mark any errors.	22	4.6	460	95.4

Based on Table 2, students generally agreed that their teachers mark all errors (76.1%), disagreeing to Items 2-6. Most students disagreed to Item 6 (95.4%), followed by Item 2 (77.8%), Item 4 (73.7%), Item 5 (62.4%), and Item 3 (58.7%).

SECTION B – PART II

TABLE 3. Teachers' Marking of Essays

Item		Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	My teacher uses certain codes and symbols to mark my essay.	132	27.4	270	56.0	61	12.7	19	3.9
2	My teacher uses certain codes and symbols as well as written feedback to mark my essay.	94	19.5	292	60.6	86	17.9	10	2.0
3	I understand the codes and symbols used by my teacher to mark my essay.	90	18.7	267	55.4	106	22.0	19	3.9
4	I want my teacher to use such codes and symbols when marking my essay.	164	34.0	205	42.5	75	15.6	38	7.9
5	My teacher always provides written feedback to mark my essay.	160	33.2	225	46.7	77	16.0	20	4.1
6	My teacher's written feedback is detailed.	106	22.0	232	48.1	121	25.1	23	4.8

Based on Table 3, the majority showed their consent to all statements. Most students strongly agreed that they want their teacher to use such codes and symbols when marking their essays – Item 4 (34.0%), followed by Item 5 (33.2%), Item 1 (27.4%), Item 6 (22.0%), Item 2 (19.5%), and Item 3 (18.7%).

SECTION B – PART III

TABLE 4. Teachers' Expectations After Marking of Essays

	Item	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	After marking my essay, my teacher does not do anything.	20	4.2	67	13.9	255	52.9	140	29.0
2	After marking my essay, my teacher holds a discussion with the class.	165	34.3	238	49.3	62	12.9	17	3.5
3	After marking my essay, my teacher holds a discussion with individual students.	92	19.1	198	41.0	164	34.1	28	5.8
4	After marking my essay, my teacher ensures I correct my errors.	155	32.2	242	50.2	72	14.9	13	2.7
5	After marking my essay, my teacher asks me to record my errors in a notebook.	38	7.9	181	37.5	196	40.7	67	13.9

Based on Table 4, the majority of the students agreed to all statements except Items 1 and 5. Most students strongly agreed their teacher holds a discussion with the class after marking their essay – Item 2 (34.3%), followed by Item 4 (32.2%), and Item 3 (19.1%). However, many students strongly disagreed that their teacher does not do anything at all – Item 1 (29.0%), and that their teacher asks them to record their errors in a notebook – Item 5 (13.9%).

SECTION B – PART IV

TABLE 5. Types of Written Feedback by Teachers

	Item	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	The introduction must grab the reader's attention.	194	40.2	230	47.7	51	10.6	7	1.5
2	The Thesis Statement and Topic Sentence must be clearly stated.	130	27.0	273	56.6	70	14.5	9	1.9
3	Each paragraph must have a Topic Sentence.	126	26.2	220	45.6	124	25.7	12	2.5
4	Transition words (e.g. firstly, in addition to, likewise, moreover, etc.) should be used to move from one idea to another.	186	38.6	223	46.3	56	11.6	17	3.5
5	Logical argument must be provided to support the Thesis Statement.	119	24.7	280	58.1	71	14.7	12	2.5
6	The conclusion must sum up thoughts/ideas /arguments.	162	33.6	266	55.2	43	8.9	11	2.3
7	The writing should stay on topic throughout the essay.	233	48.3	197	40.8	40	8.4	12	2.5
8	Quality is more important than quantity of essay.	177	36.7	218	45.2	72	15.0	15	3.1
9	All ideas must be relevant to the Thesis Statement/essay topic.	175	36.3	259	53.7	39	8.1	9	1.9
10	The writing should be comprehensible.	155	32.1	271	56.2	47	9.8	9	1.9
11	Out of topic ideas should be avoided in the writing.	170	35.2	232	48.1	70	14.6	10	2.1
12	Specific facts and details should be added to support opinions	160	33.2	272	56.4	42	8.8	8	1.6
13	The beginning of each sentence must be different.	124	25.7	225	46.7	121	25.1	12	2.5
14	Each sentence builds on the previous sentence.	67	13.9	269	55.8	137	28.4	9	1.9
15	Each sentence must have clear meaning.	190	39.4	257	53.3	28	5.8	7	1.5
16	Sentence must flow from one to another.	140	29.1	261	54.1	67	13.9	14	2.9
17	Every word must be used accurately.	160	33.2	259	53.7	57	11.9	6	1.2
18	Any unfamiliar terms must be explained and defined.	126	26.1	221	45.9	118	24.5	17	3.5
19	Spelling of words in the writing must be accurate.	240	49.8	201	41.7	30	6.2	11	2.3
20	Punctuation used throughout the writing must be accurate.	199	41.3	236	48.9	37	7.7	10	2.1
21	Appropriate words must be capitalised correctly.	216	44.8	219	45.5	41	8.5	6	1.2

Based on Table 5, the majority showed their consent to all statements. Most students strongly agreed that spelling of words in writing must be accurate – Item 19 (49.8%), followed

by Item 7 (48.3%), Item 21 (44.8%), Item 20 (41.3%), Item 1 (40.2%), Item 15 (39.4%), and so on. The rest of the items have *Strongly Agree* percentages ranging from 13.9% to 38.6%.

SECTION B – PART V

TABLE 6. Students' Perception About Teacher's Written Feedback

Item		Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
1	I prefer teachers to provide feedback on the grammar of my writing.	271	56.2	178	36.9	26	5.4	7	1.5
2	I prefer teachers to provide feedback on the vocabulary of my writing.	233	48.3	211	43.8	32	6.7	6	1.2
3	I prefer teachers to provide feedback on the content of my writing.	239	49.6	197	40.8	36	7.5	10	2.1
4	I prefer teachers to provide feedback on the structure and organization of my writing.	204	42.3	217	45.0	48	10.0	13	2.7
5	I prefer teachers to provide feedback on all the errors in my writing.	247	51.4	180	37.3	48	10.0	6	1.3
6	It is important for teachers to provide written feedback on their student's errors in writing.	292	60.5	155	32.2	26	5.4	9	1.9

Based on Table 6, the majority showed their consent to all statements. Most students strongly agreed it is important for teachers to provide written feedback on their students' errors in writing – Item 6 (60.5%), followed by Item 1 (56.2%), Item 5 (51.4%), Item 3 (49.6%), Item 2 (48.3%), and Item 4 (42.3%).

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION FINDINGS

FGDs were conducted with selected teacher participants from all five schools. Five teachers whose quotes were used in the findings are labelled as Teacher A, B, C, D, and E respectively to retain anonymity.

STUDENTS' ERRORS MARKING

Regarding students' errors marking, the first question asked teachers whether they marked all the errors in their students' essays. Most teachers claimed that they marked all errors. Only a few teachers pointed out that they marked all major errors but ignored minor errors. Teacher A pointed out that they marked most errors but not all. No teachers claimed that they avoided marking any errors.

TEACHERS' MARKING OF ESSAYS

Regarding teachers' marking of essays, the second question asked teachers how they marked students' errors, with sub-questions on codes/symbols, providing written feedback, and detail respectively. The findings indicated that different teachers used significant techniques to mark errors, such as Teacher B who pointed out that they marked errors by *"underlining or by using wavy line omissions"*. Almost all teachers used codes and symbols to mark the errors of the students, in which they used it for their own references. In addition, most teachers said that they provided proper written feedback to students during marking because they believed it helps them to know their weak areas. Many pointed out that their written feedback was often *"very detailed"*, and included encouraging words to motivate students whenever possible. They also wrote statements such as *"Please see me"*, *"Good"*, *"Keep it up"* and *"Keep the good work"*.

TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS AFTER MARKING OF ESSAYS

Regarding teachers' expectations after marking of essays, the third question asked their expectations on their students after receiving the feedback, with 2 sub-questions on whether they held post-discussion sessions and marked their corrections respectively. Most teachers claimed that they held discussions with the class to ensure students' errors were corrected. After marking essays, teachers also instructed students to record errors in their notebook. Many teachers claimed that they held discussions with individual students. Teachers C and D mentioned that they ensured that they *"corrected the errors of their students"* and *"made sure that students correct their errors"* respectively. As far as the post-discussion sessions are concerned, most teachers claimed that they only conduct rigorous post-discussions sessions after major exams so that students can get proper feedback.

CORRECTIVE WRITTEN FEEDBACK

Regarding corrective written feedback, the fourth question asked the general corrective feedback teachers provided to the students. All teachers view WCF as beneficial for English teaching and learning as it enhances the skills of both students and teachers. For students, some teachers perceived that WCF can help students to correct and minimise their own errors as well as increasing their motivation and knowledge skill. For teachers themselves, some believed that WCF eased them to measure their students' achievement and progress. Many teachers believed both sides benefit from the use of WCF in classroom evaluation and teaching quality. Regarding the learning experience, a majority indicated that WCF would have provided students with the information about the errors that contribute to the students' language proficiency and learning achievement. Teacher E said that it *"could be an indicator of student's achievement in the classroom"*. Taken from the interview dataset, some teachers clarified that WCF may affect both teachers' teaching quality and students' learning motivation.

TYPES OF WRITTEN FEEDBACK BY TEACHERS

Regarding the types of written feedback by teachers, the fifth question asked for their comments on WCF, with 6 sub-questions on introduction, thesis statement and topic sentence, topic sentence in paragraphs, transition words, logical arguments, and conclusion respectively. The findings indicated that different teachers adopted various strategies in giving their feedback on the aforementioned aspects. Many teachers believed that the *Thesis Statement* and *Topic Sentence* must be clearly stated. Some teachers were of the view that they gave feedback such as *"wrong connotations"*. Teacher B pointed out that they provided feedback by *"writing it down on each student's paper"* and invited all students to *"discuss it together focussing only on the repeated errors"*.

FINAL OPINION ON THE CORRECTIVE WRITTEN FEEDBACK

The sixth question asked the teachers' overall opinion on WCF. All teachers agreed that their provision of WCF has really helped students to improve their writing skillset. Teacher D pointed out that WCF *"gives the students of their achievements in doing the task"*, and Teacher E said that the feedback *"motivates students if the comments are encouraging"*.

DISCUSSION

Teachers reported providing unfocused, indirect, and metalinguistic WCF, leaving encouraging comments which are comprehensive. From the teachers' perspective, most teachers marked all their errors of the students, a few focusing on major errors, but one teacher marked only some errors and not all. Different teachers used significant techniques to mark errors. Most teachers used codes and symbols, but one teacher underlined or used wavy line omissions. Teachers also used WCF for their references. This finding is in line with Mahmud (2016) for indirect and unfocused WCF, in which indirect feedback can elicit students' ''deeper cognitive processing and learning'' (Westmacott, 2017, p. 17). It is also comparable to Nilaasini's (2015) view that teachers used unfocused and metalinguistic WCF during their pedagogical practices, but not direct as teachers in this study were found to have used codes and symbols to mark their students' essays, considering that indirect WCF can be useful for long-term students' learning (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Poorebrahim, 2017).

Most teachers held discussions with students after marking, whether individually, or as a whole class. Some teachers corrected their students' errors, and ensured that students correct the errors themselves. Most teachers only conducted rigorous post-discussion sessions after major exams. This finding concurs with Rezazadeh, Ashrafi and Foozunfar (2018) as students are provided the chance to negotiate and interact with their teachers regarding their error corrections. Teachers could explain and justify their WCF, while students could enquire and check their mistakes, while strengthening their relationship, which influences students writing (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Considering the lack of contact time and a large student-to-teacher ratio in Malaysian secondary schools, this practice has proven useful.

Different teachers have also pointed out various strategies in giving their feedback on all aspects of an essay (e.g. Introduction, Conclusion). Many believe that the thesis statement and topic sentence must be clearly stated. Some gave general feedback such as *wrong connotations*. Even Chieng (2014) recommended teachers to "mix [sic] strategies of corrective feedback in (students') writings depending on the severity of the mistakes or errors", as language acquisition is ensured through WCF (Ferris, 1999).

Most teachers have a similar perception that WCF for English teaching and learning is effective, as it enhances students' writing skills and teachers' pedagogical practices. Five teachers perceived WCF as a platform to help students correct and minimise their own errors, and increase their motivation and knowledge skills. A majority also indicated that WCF enhances students' learning experiences by providing students with information on errors. Most teachers claimed that they provide WCF as they believe it helps students become aware of their weaknesses. They believed that by including encouraging words to the students, it helps motivate them. These findings have shown how a variety of factors can contribute to teachers' beliefs, including learning experience, pedagogical practices, and also the context/situation (Pajares, 1992; Pennington, 1996). These findings concur with Rahimi's and Gheitasi's (2010) view that teachers can promote teaching and learning of writing using WCF as an impactful pedagogical tool.

Five teachers also perceived the potential of WCF as having the ability to facilitate an opportunity for teachers to gauge students' achievement and progress. It can also be an indicator of their achievement in the classroom. Eight teachers believed WCF was effective in terms of benefitting teachers and students by enhancing classroom evaluation and pedagogical quality. They testified that WCF may impact both teachers' teaching quality and students' learning motivation.

Overall, students were generally receptive towards teachers' WCF. In asking what teachers do in response to essay errors, students highlighted, that their teachers marked all errors using certain codes, symbols, with comprehensive written feedback. They preferred

teachers to use codes and symbols as they understood them. After marking their essays, they expected teachers to hold individual or whole classroom discussions. Students also reported that teachers ensured their errors were corrected. This finding is in line with Liu and Jhaveri (2019) and Rahim et al. (2019) in which students' writing can be improved through written feedback, considering that WCF can have a positive effect on their writing performance (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Mahfoodh & Pandian, 2011; Srichanyachon, 2012).

For the types of written feedback provided by the teachers, students are expected to include several aspects of writing, such as an attention-grabbing introduction, a clear thesis statement, and a clear topic sentence in every paragraph. They were also in the view that the teacher emphasised quality of writing over quantity. However, it is proven that students in this study prefer corrections on (1) *all errors*, followed by (2) *grammar*, (3) *content*, (4) *vocabulary*, and lastly (5) *structure and organisation*, which contradicts with Alamis' (2010) finding that students preferred content/organisation feedback over vocabulary and language use/grammar ones. This particular finding is in line with Zamel (1985) where content-focused marking comes after form-focused (grammar).

It is evident that the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the use of WCF in the ESL classroom were generally aligned. Students perceived WCF as useful, and teachers revealed that their WCF was effective as part of their writing pedagogical practices, hence leading to better achievement of students learning outcomes. They also perceived the teacher's role of providing WCF to students as important, being the audience to their writing, and exposing students the sociocultural context of the work done (Mack, 2009). The importance of the teacher to the students also shows that providing WCF and responding to their writing is a significant area of the teacher's job scope (Rahimi & Gheitasi, 2010), besides helping them to realise their potential, and recognising their weaknesses and strengths in writing (Srichanyachon, 2012). Teachers, on the other hand, view WCF as beneficial for students, teachers, and both, and that WCF may affect both teachers' pedagogical quality and students' learning motivation. This is true as both student motivation and teacher scaffolding can influence WCF's effectiveness (Chieng, 2014).

However, there were two misalignments of teacher and student perceptions on WCF, where although most teachers claimed that they mark all the errors of the students, a considerable proportion of 23.9% students reported, that teachers not doing so. Another finding was that after marking the essays, the teachers claimed that they asked the students to record errors in their notebook, but a majority of students (54.6%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that their teachers actually practise it. This finding concurs with Abdullah and Aziz (2020) and Mao and Crosthwaite (2019), as teachers may be unaware of their actual pedagogical practices in the classroom, causing mismatches that can be problematic due to "incongruity between students' and teachers' perceptions regarding WCF" (Armhein & Nassaji, 2010, p. 98).

CONCLUSION

This study advocates the need for teachers and educators to be aware of the existing types of WCF, and incorporate the appropriate ones in their teaching practices. Although teachers were already giving suitable WCF as preferred by their students, they need to be mindful of alternative pedagogical practices that can have a better impact on their writing processes, improve their skills and their writing quality. Standardisation of feedback practices among schools is important, but the ESL student population in Malaysia encompasses different cultural and language backgrounds. The findings from this study aims to benefit ESL teachers who are involved in secondary education, whether public or private secondary schools, as they

can equip themselves with impactful pedagogical practices related to WCF in the given context. Considering that students are expected to pass English language in order to successfully graduate from secondary schools, teachers need to work even harder to create an impact in the classroom. The implication of the study highlights the pressing need to improve the writing pedagogical practices of teaching English to secondary school students, and in this study's perspective, enable teachers to adapt their WCF to students' needs. This study advocates the need for lesson plans of secondary school ESL writing to entail the various types of WCF with detailed explanation of pedagogical practices in the classroom, and take into account their respective pros and cons. Future studies should consider comparing WCF of teachers and students from the urban and rural schools, and analyse students' corpus of writing.

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