Teachers' Practices and Students' Preferences: Grammar-Centered Written Corrective Feedback in Iran

Hooman Saeli*
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, USA
Email: hsaeli@utk.edu

Abstract

This study explored teachers' practices and students' preferences regarding grammar-centered written corrective feedback (WCF) in an Iranian EFL context. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from 14 teachers and 15 students, teaching and taking English at different proficiency levels. The data analysis identified three thematic categories in the interview responses: error correctors, amount of WCF, and WCF methods. The findings showed that the teachers mostly provided teacher-generated grammar feedback since they believed that their students preferred this type of correction. Additionally, the students preferred teacher-generated feedback. Also, the teachers mostly gave comprehensive feedback on the grammatical errors, because they thought comprehensive correction was perceived positively by their students. This, similarly, was preferred by the students. Moreover, the teachers stated that their students liked direct grammar feedback; the students also reported their preference for direct WCF. Overall, the teachers were aware of their students' preferences, so they provided the kind of feedback their students were most likely to effectively engage with.

Keywords: Learner engagement with feedback, Student perceptions, Teacher perceptions, Teacher practices, Written corrective feedback.

1. Introduction

Teachers and students have traditionally been the providers and recipients of corrective feedback (CF). The efficacy of feedback given by teachers and received by students has been the center of conceptual and empirical attention for a few decades. In particular, the existing literature includes abundant research, though partly inconclusive, on the effectiveness of correction methods (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Sheen, 2010). Also, supported by the tenets of sociocultural theory (e.g., Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994) and learner-centered teaching (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001), another body of research has explored the effectiveness of peer correction (e.g., Lee, 2015; Min, 2006; Yang, Badger, & Yu, 2006). Drawing the attention back to the two groups directly involved in the process of CF provision, several studies have examined students' perceptions and preferences with regard to CF (e.g., Ferris, 1995; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Poulos & Mahony, 2008; Radecki & Swales, 1988), as well as teachers' perceptions and practices of CF (e.g., Ferris, 2014; Ferris, Brown, Liu & Stine, 2011). The above studies stress the importance of teachers and students in the ultimate effectiveness of CF.

Exploring teacher and learner perceptions has received prior empirical attention. Brown (2009), in general, highlights the importance of investigating the perceptions held by teachers and students in language teaching and learning. Focusing on second language (L2) writing, Junqueira and Payant (2015) suggest that discrepancies between student preferences and teacher practices could negatively affect the efficacy of CF. Several studies have, therefore, aimed to explore the similarities/differences between students' preferences and teachers' perceptions with regard to CF (e.g., Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Diab, 2005; Mackey et al., 2007; Schulz, 1996). Nayar (1997), in addition, emphasizes the importance of sociocultural considerations in English language teaching (ELT) and underscores their roles in affecting teacher and student perceptions of various learning activities. Consequently, a smaller body of research has focused on the role of sociocultural/contextual differences in forming student and teacher perceptions of CF (e.g., Schulz, 2001). Drawing upon the results of the above works, the current study was an attempt to explore Iranian EFL teachers' and students' perceptions with regard to 1) CF providers (e.g., teachers and students), 2) CF amount (e.g., comprehensive and selective), and 3) CF methods (e.g., direct and indirect).

2. Literature Review

L2 learners' perceptions of CF, written corrective feedback (WCF), and grammatical accuracy have been studied before. For instance, Elwood and Bode (2014) concluded that Japanese EFL students prefer direct and comprehensive WCF on "all surface-level errors" (p. 340). Lee (2008) investigated how students in Hong Kong reacted to their teachers' CF practices. She concluded that these students' preferred teacher-generated, comprehensive CF on their grammatical errors, and that teacher practices had a significant impact on students' perceptions of feedback. Additionally, Leki (1991) reported that her ESL student participants strongly valued grammatical accuracy, teacher-generated, comprehensive WCF. She also highlighted the importance of students' and teachers' mutual understanding of WCF-related perceptions and practices. Loewen et al. (2009), on the other hand, reported that second and foreign language (SL and FL, respectively) held various perceptions of grammar correction, and some even viewed it negatively. Loewen et al. pointed to the importance of student expectations in teaching practices, claiming that teachers tended to gear the teaching of grammar/correction of grammatical errors toward their students' preferences. Overall, these reviewed works suggest that L2 learners value grammar feedback and grammatical accuracy.

A second body of research has investigated teacher beliefs, perceptions, preferences, and practices with regard to CF. For instance, Ferris, Brown, Liu, and Stine (2011) reported that composition teachers tended to provide more sentence-level feedback geared toward their ESL students. Other important findings of the study were the composition instructors' lack of awareness of their ESL students' needs and their provision of little grammatical feedback to ESL learners. The authors concluded that their teacher participants needed preparation to meet the needs of ESL students. In addition, Lee (2009) surveyed L2 teachers in Hong Kong and concluded that the participants held positive perceptions of peer-feedback, self-correction, selective CF, and the writing process (rather than writing products). In addition, Guénette and Lyster (2013) explored pre-service ESL teachers' practices and concluded that direct feedback was preferred over indirect correction. The researchers stated that teachers' language learning experiences and perceptions of grammatical accuracy were strong determinants of their CF practices. Guénette and Lyster argued for teacher autonomy, free from institutional constraints. Also, Ferris (2014) examined composition teachers' perceptions of CF and grammar correction. She concluded that her participants employed peer-feedback practices in class, that the participants used a

variety of tools (e.g., rubrics) to hold students accountable in the process of peer-correction, and that the teachers focused on various issues (e.g., content, organization, and grammar) when providing feedback. As shown above, the current literature yields mixed results on teacher practices and preferences regarding WCF in the L2 classroom.

Another group of studies has examined teachers' and students' WCF-related perceptions in comparison with one another. Such studies argue that discrepancies between the two perception groups might lead to undesirable learning outcomes. For instance, Schulz (1996) investigated teacher and student perceptions of grammar instruction and grammatical accuracy, among others. The results revealed that students tended to value grammatical accuracy more than their teacher counterparts, that both students and teachers viewed the study of grammar as essential to learning an L2, and that students strongly preferred to be corrected by their teachers. The results of Schulz's study suggested that L2 students more strongly valued grammatical accuracy and grammar feedback as opposed to the teachers. In light of the importance of learner-centeredness, Ferris (2014) emphasizes three variables in CF provision: Error correctors, CF amount, and correction methods. These three variables, as explained later, are essential components of the present study. Also, the research conducted by Han and Hyland (2015) is central to the current study. Han and Hyland investigated the extent to which students engaged with teacher feedback. In particular, they claimed that if students like/see benefits in the feedback they receive, they affectively engage with it positively. This positive engagement, as Han and Hyland assert, can help determine the extent to which students can attain learning goals. Here, we can hypothesize that, in the case of grammar feedback, the chief learning goal is increasing students' grammatical accuracy. Therefore, if students receive the kind of grammar feedback they consider useful, such feedback more likely leads to increases in their grammatical accuracy.

The current study aimed to contribute to the existing literature in several ways. First, previous studies (e.g., Lee 2008) have shown that discrepancies between teachers' WCF practices and students' WCF perceptions might negatively affect the efficacy of WCF. Second, as Han and Hyland (2015) show, discrepant teacher practices and student perceptions can result in students' negative affective engagement with feedback, thereby making WCF less effective. Finally, although some research exists on teacher and student preferences regarding WCF in the Iranian EFL contexts (e.g., Kaivanpanah, Alavi, & Sepehrinia, 2015; Rahimi, 2010), the effects of any discrepant perceptions/practices on

learners' affective engagement with feedback have yet to be explored. Thus, the current study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of grammar-centered WCF?
2. What are the Iranian EFL students' perceptions of grammar-centered WCF?
3. Do discrepant teacher practices and student perceptions affect students' affective engagement with grammar-centered WCF?

It should be noted that the findings of the study focus only on grammar-centered corrective feedback, not feedback on other areas in student writing, such as content and organization.

3. Methods

3.1. Design and Context of the Study

This study was a qualitative inquiry into teachers' and students' perceptions of WCF. Semi-structured interviews were, therefore, utilized to identify the patterns of learners' affective engagement with several aspects of WCF. Since this study was centered around participants' perceptions, qualitative interviews were deemed appropriate. Notably, interviews have been extensively used in the L2 literature when studies aim to uncover the underpinning components of participants' perceptions and practices (e.g., Harwood, Austin, & Macaulay, 2009; Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Zhu, 2004). The data for the current study were collected from two English schools in Tehran, Iran, where various general-English classes were offered. In these classes, textbooks were utilized and, according to the schools' curricula, all the major skills of English were covered. Because the present study was focused on grammar-centered WCF, care was taken to recruit participants with prior experience in teaching/taking classes which involved L2 writing.

3.2. Participants

14 teachers and 15 students were invited to take part in the study and were provided with the consent forms. The sampling method of the current study was a combination of purposive and snowball. As mentioned above, the students/teachers who had experience in taking/teaching writing were invited to participate in the study. Additionally, the teachers were asked to invite any of their colleagues who met the study's recruitment criteria. The students were willingly enrolled in classes of various proficiencies, and the teachers were

teaching general-English classes of various proficiencies. Table 1 provides some demographic information on the participants:

Table 1

The Participants' Background Information

Teachers		Learners	
No. of Teachers	14	No. of Students	15
Age	20s-30s	Age	20s-30s
Gender	6 women and 8 men	Gender	10 women and 5 men
Native Language	Farsi	Native Language	Farsi
Major	TEFL, Linguistics, And Literature, humanities	Major	Engineering, sciences, and
Teaching experience	2-15 years	experience	2.5-26 years
Proficiencies taught	Beginner to advanced	Proficiencies	Lower-intermediate to advanced

Note that all of the student participants were enrolled in the classes taught by the teachers.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

A semi-structured interview was employed to collect the data, in which the participants provided their perceptions of 1) the source of grammar feedback (e.g., teachers and peers), 2) amount of grammar feedback (e.g., comprehensive and selective), and 3) method of grammar feedback (e.g., direct and indirect), to name a few (see Appendices A and B). The interview questions were adopted and adapted from previous research on WCF (Ferris, 1995, 2014). In particular, the teacher participants were asked to provide responses about their own WCF-related perceptions and practices, along with their students' preferences; also, the students were encouraged to report on their own perceptions/preferences with regard to grammar-centered WCF, along with those of their teachers.

The data were collected in two specific settings: The language institutes or a coffee shop. The participants were given the freedom to choose their desired time and location for the interviews. After a short ice-breaker, the respondents were provided with the consent forms, introduced to the objectives of the study, informed of the use of a recording device (i.e., a personal digital device), and told that their responses had no bearing on their teaching

career and term grades, for the teachers and students, respectively. The mean length of the teacher interviews was approximately an hour, whereas the student interviews tended to be shorter. After the interviews were over, the recordings were examined to assure their clarity.

3.4. Data Analysis and Operationalization of Variables

The interviews were conducted and transcribed in Farsi. After that, the responses were analyzed individually using the three main interview questions (i.e., perceptions of error correctors, the amount of correction, and correction methods). The analysis of the individual responses was coupled with a grounded-theory approach. That is, the teacher and student responses were compared with each other, and as a result, a coding scheme was developed in which the instances of divergence/convergence between the teachers' and students' reported perceptions were identified.

In the present study, the following variables were operationalized as following:

1. Grammar correction providers: the agent responsible for providing corrections on students' grammatical errors in writing: For instance, teachers, students (i.e., peer-feedback), self-correction, or outside sources (e.g., grammar books);

2. Grammar correction amount: a continuum with the following two ends:

   a. Comprehensive grammar feedback: the correction of every single grammatical error in student writing, irrespective of type (e.g., verb tense errors) and frequency;

   b. Selective grammar feedback: the correction of a fraction of grammatical errors in student writing, irrespective of type (e.g., verb tense errors) and frequency;

3. Grammar correction methods: the methods by which students' grammatical errors in writing are corrected: a continuum composed of the following two ends:

   a. Direct grammar feedback: direct notification of students' grammatical errors and direct provision of corrections;

   b. Indirect grammar feedback: notification of students' grammatical errors without providing direct correction (e.g., leaving a question mark; or coded feedback: SV for subject-verb agreement);

4. Students' affective engagement with feedback: as Ellis (2010) posits, if students like a certain type of feedback/perceive it as useful, they are more likely to

incorporate that feedback and attend to it in their future writing endeavors, so learning (i.e., increases in students' grammatical accuracy) is more likely to occur.

4. Findings

This section is divided into three subsections. The findings on the participants' perceptions of CF providers (e.g., teacher and peer), CF amount (e.g., selective and comprehensive), and CF methods (e.g., direct and coded) are presented. In particular, teacher responses are provided first, followed by student responses, supplemented with a number of excerpts which are used to further substantiate the coding scheme.

4.1. Participants' Perceptions of Grammar Correction Providers

The data analysis showed that all of the teacher respondents ($N = 14$) reported the frequent use of teacher-generated WCF in student writing. When asked about their students' perceptions of the source of WCF (i.e., error correctors), almost all of the teachers ($n = 13$) showed their awareness of their students' preferences for teacher-generated grammar feedback. In Excerpt 1, a teacher brought up the provision of teacher-generated CF on students' grammatical errors, adding that students preferred this source of WCF:

Excerpt 1: "They [students] like to receive feedback from me. They don't like being corrected by friends [peers]… They [students] might think I'm avoiding my responsibilities if I don't correct [grammatical] errors. Because I thought they [students] have such a mindset, I never tried to peer-feedback."

Similar to Excerpt 1, Excerpt 2 clarifies that students might even perceive the teachers as irresponsible if they do not provide grammar feedback on errors:

Excerpt 2: "In giving feedback, if we do peer-correction, students think I don't like to do my job [to provide WCF]. For example, I told one student to go correct something on her/his own; s/he came back to me and said if s/he knew how to, s/he wouldn't need to come to class."

In Excerpt 3, another teacher mentioned that students prefer teacher-generated feedback, which is why this type of feedback was provided in correcting students' grammatical errors:

Excerpt 3: "Kids [students] expect me to provide feedback. If not, [they think] their errors might be fossilized. If I don't correct errors, students might get offended. They expect me to correct errors."

As the above excerpts show, these teachers' students might think that their teachers are not doing their job if they do not provide teacher-generated WCF. In addition, in Excerpts 4 and 5, the teachers referred to the psychological state of their classes and clarified that their students trust teachers as a reliable source of grammatical knowledge:

Excerpt 4: "If there is an error which has been repeated a lot, I ask the whole class to see if someone can help. If an error is made by one student, I ask that student only, but I make sure to give them the correct form myself. [Why?] They [students] trust me more than themselves."

Excerpt 5: I make sure to correct all errors myself in class. [Why not peer-feedback?] Because I am the teacher of the class!"

Based on the above excerpts, we can conclude that the teachers were aware of their students' preferences in receiving WCF in writing, so they provided teacher-generated feedback which was also preferred by their students, thereby promoting students' affective engagement with feedback. The teachers not only did strive to promote students' positive engagement with teacher-generated feedback, but they also reported a number of practical constraints in incorporating peer-feedback in their WCF practices (e.g., students' heterogeneous proficiencies and lack of time). See Excerpts 6 and 7:

Excerpt 6: "I tried it [peer-feedback] once or twice. We swapped writings in class. I don't do it that much. In the courses that I teach, students' proficiencies vary, so it's not possible for them to correct each other's errors. One might be able to correct a lot of errors, but another one might not, even though the writing is full of errors. I nevertheless give the final OK. My students, themselves, like to receive feedback from me."

Excerpt 7: "Only I correct errors. [Why not peer-feedback?] We don't have much time. If we do, I ask one student to read their essay and ask others to give comments give peer-feedback."

Similar to their teacher counterparts, the student participants ($n = 13$) believed that, in practice, their teachers were the major providers of grammar feedback. In addition, the

majority of the students (*n* = 12) preferred to receive grammar feedback from their teachers, and also believed that their teachers wanted to remain the principal grammatical errors correctors. In Excerpt 8, a student clarified that they perceive teachers as reliable sources of grammatical knowledge:

Excerpt 8: "Usually, teachers correct grammatical errors in writing. [Why?] Because teachers have mastery over grammar rules. If students knew about grammar, they wouldn't go to class. [How about peer-feedback?] It's not good to swap writings, because they [peers] don't know enough about grammar. Errors might go uncorrected. You might think that you have used erroneous forms accurately and keep using them."

In Excerpts 9 and 10, two students stated that their and their peers' weak background in grammar was another factor behind the students' stronger "faith" in their teachers when it came to grammar feedback:

Excerpt 9: "Always teachers correct errors. Peers [peer-feedback], very little. [Why?] Because in Iran, students have always had weak grammar. Teachers know much more about grammar, and they can easily correct errors."

Excerpt 10: "[Do you like peer-feedback?] No, because a student who doesn't know enough about grammar might give you corrections [which might not be accurate]. I prefer teachers to correct [grammatical errors] because I don't have high enough self-confidence to find out whether I have used [grammatical structures] accurately or not."

On the other hand, a few students (*n* = 3) welcomed the idea of receiving peer-feedback and self-correction, even though such sources of grammar correction were, reportedly, rarely utilized in their classes. However, while, in Excerpt 11, a student voiced some concerns about the proficiency level of their peers, Excerpt 12 presents a perception in which peer-feedback was viewed rather positively under teachers' supervision:

Excerpt 11: "Usually, teachers [have corrected errors]. Not so much peer-correction. Peer-feedback is good if I know her/his writing grammatical knowledge in writing is better than me. If someone [peers] knows as much as me, I don't think it's useful."

Excerpt 12: "[Have you used peer-feedback?] No, but it's a good idea. You might actually learn something, so you won't repeat the same errors. But I want my teachers to give the final OK."

We can conclude that the students in Excerpts 11 and 12 were less likely to affectively engage with teacher-generated grammar feedback because they perceived it rather negatively. The following points summarize the reported teacher and student perceptions:

- 13 teachers believed that their students' preferred teacher-generated grammar feedback;

- 13 students believed that they mostly received teacher-generated grammar feedback, and 12 of them preferred this source of feedback;

- Because the teachers' practices and students' perceptions regarding the WCF source were in line, it is assumed that the students affectively engaged with feedback positively.

4.2. Participants' Perceptions of Grammar Correction Amount

The data analysis revealed that, whereas many teachers ($n = 10$) primarily used comprehensive grammar correction, a smaller group ($n = 4$) incorporated selective grammar feedback. In Excerpts 13 and 14, two teachers stressed the use of comprehensive and selective WCF, and stated that selective grammar correction could hold students accountable and helped them become more independent of teachers:

Excerpt 13: "If there are 5 -ed (past tense) errors, I correct one and underline the rest because students should be able to do it and become autonomous."

Excerpt 14: "One student might not know how to use the third-person -s. I explain it [how to use it accurately] once. The second time, I tell them to fix the error, because they probably can [correct the remaining errors]. But I only underline the third error [of this type]. I won't correct the rest of them. But for errors of different types, I correct all of them."

In Excerpt 15, a teacher stressed the role of selective grammar correction in further motivating students, because, reportedly, comprehensive feedback might leave students disillusioned. This teacher showed that students would affectively engage with selective feedback more positively:

Excerpt 15: "For example, if a student has written a 250-word essay, and you have turned the whole thing red using a red pen to correct errors, this might not be good. We should take into account the factor of motivation to not make students feel disillusioned, not make them lose hope."

In addition, all of the teachers (*N* = 14) claimed that their student writers strongly preferred comprehensive WCF on grammatical errors. In fact, these teachers stated that their students welcomed the correction of every grammatical error in writing, as shown in Excerpts 16 and 17:

Excerpt 16: "Most of my comments go to grammar, to be honest. I look at feedback like my personal assignment. I like it when students learn correct grammatical rules. I think it's normal for them [students] to pay more attention to grammar. So, I provide as much feedback as I can."

Excerpt 17: I correct all of them [grammatical errors] one-by-one and write correct forms. [How about coded WCF?] I used it once but didn't work that well… Students like to receive direct feedback [on grammatical errors]. They don't want to be personally involved in correction. They learn if they receive feedback on all of their errors. [Why do you give comprehensive WCF?] See, using this method, I can teach a lot in a small amount of time… Students see good writing in not having grammatical errors. So, I do this [provide comprehensive WCF] to meet their needs. This might even motivate them to focus more on content [if they do not have grammatical errors]."

The above excerpts suggest that the teachers were aware of their students' high attached value to grammatical accuracy and error-free writing. Specifically, some teachers drew a direct link between their students' preferences for comprehensive grammar correction and their actual feedback practices, as shown in Excerpts 18 and 19:

Excerpt 18: "Unfortunately, students expect comprehensive feedback on local errors, like grammar and spelling. They don't know what judgment criteria are [for evaluating writing]."

Excerpt 19: "They [students] think it's a teacher's job to correct every grammatical error. So, I sometimes correct errors so students think I can find something wrong with their grammar."

In Excerpt 20, a teacher explained why the employed approach in grammar feedback involved the correction of every grammatical error of different types, and why the feedback on grammar issues and the teaching of grammar was an integral part of such feedback approaches:

Excerpt 20: "It's like this I correct all grammatical errors. At least, the first ones [of a certain type] that I see have to be corrected. There is this popular belief among students that learning a language is only about earning grammar. Correcting other errors [e.g.,

content and organization] isn't that important [to students]. In my writing classes, for example, out of 10 sessions, I teach grammar for nine, and teach writing for one session."

Excerpt 21 presents a direct link between the teachers' WCF practices and students' satisfaction rates. In fact, the teacher viewed comprehensive WCF as a means of keeping their students happy:

Excerpt 21: "It's important for me to keep students happy. Some students expect you to make everything ready for them [correct all errors]. So, I prefer to correct all errors, though this is only good for a shorter term."

In addition, many students ($n = 10$) believed that comprehensive correction on all of their grammatical errors in writing would be more beneficial to increasing their grammatical accuracy; however, some students ($n = 5$) thought that selective feedback could improve their grammatical accuracy through rigorous self-correction, which could lead to long-term learning. Nonetheless, the students who preferred to receive comprehensive feedback stated that they did not tend to rely on their own grammatical knowledge to locate and correct their grammatical errors. Excerpts 22 and 23 corroborate the above findings:

Excerpt 22: "It's good to correct them [grammatical errors] all because I wanna know the errors and correct them. If a teacher doesn't correct all of them, I will repeat them [errors] because I think they have been used accurately."

Excerpt 23: "They correct them [grammatical errors] all… I personally don't pay a lot of attention to correct all my errors. If they [teachers] correct all errors, that'd be better. If not, I wouldn't think I had any errors."

On the other hand, the students who welcomed the use of selective error correction mentioned that this type of feedback would engage them more deeply in the process of increasing their grammatical accuracy. Excerpts 24 and 25, for instance, showcase two students' positive perceptions of receiving selective grammar correction, because they wanted to have an active role in correcting some of their own grammatical errors:

Excerpt 24: "My teachers correct them [errors] all. But if they are similar, correcting only one would be better; I want to try to find the rest on my own. But if they [errors] are not the same, correcting them all would be better."

Excerpt 25: "I prefer to be asked and be held responsible to go search [for correct forms]. First, it [correct forms] will stick in my mind. Second, I learn better. They

correct my entire [grammatical] one by one. [Why is it bad?] Like I said because you need to go do research [on locating and correcting grammatical forms]."

Additionally, the majority of the students ($n = 11$) believed that their teachers preferred to provide comprehensive grammar feedback; however, a smaller group ($n = 4$) stated that they received selective WCF from their teachers, as shown in Excerpt 26:

Excerpt 26: "They [teachers] have been selective. They don't correct all errors. Or they simply don't see them [errors]. [Why do they not correct all errors?] Maybe they want to encourage us to correct grammatical errors. Or not disappoint us because of having too many errors. Some errors are less important and let you communicate your thoughts. Teachers might not correct those errors."

The above students' perceptions suggest that some students might not prefer to receive comprehensive grammar correction; therefore, their affective engagement with comprehensive WCF might be negative. Nonetheless, because the majority of the students believed that comprehensive feedback was useful in increasing their grammatical accuracy, these students were likely to positively engage with such feedback practices. The following points summarize the findings in this section:

- While 10 teachers provided comprehensive grammar feedback, 4 preferred to correct grammar errors selectively;
- All of the 14 teachers believed that their students preferred comprehensive grammar feedback;
- Whereas 10 students preferred comprehensive grammar feedback, 5 welcomed selective grammar correction;
- 11 students reported that they received comprehensive WCF, but 4 thought that their teachers corrected grammar errors selectively;
- The findings suggested that the students might have affectively engaged with feedback negatively, if they sought selective feedback, but received comprehensive WCF.

4.3. Participants' Perceptions of Grammar Correction Methods

The analysis of the data showed that the teachers ($n = 12$) chiefly adopted direct methods of grammar correction. As noted earlier, this method of correction involved the

notification of grammatical errors and provision of correct forms. Excerpts 27 and 28 showed how direct methods of grammar correction were utilized by two of the teachers:

Excerpt 27: "I highlight each and every error. I give students feedback, but they don't fully understand, so I give some more feedback at the end of the essay. I also give feedback on coherence and stuff. I correct all the errors."

Excerpt 28: "I usually underline the erroneous structures and explain [provide correct form and, probably, meta-feedback] above it. I change them [erroneous structures]. If it's totally wrong, I simply tell them [students] faulty structure."

In addition, a number of the teachers stressed the role of error type and frequency in their employed methods of grammar correction. For instance, in Excerpt 29, the role of error frequency was highlighted in the provision of indirect WCF:

Excerpt 29: "If an error is made several times, I might circle and correct it, but I'll leave the rest errors of the same type to students… Indirect WCF helps to hold students accountable in correcting their errors."

Moreover, a few teachers highlighted a connection between students' proficiency level and the utilized grammar correction methods. For example, Excerpts 30 and 31 revealed how the teachers provided direct WCF to lower-level students, but utilized indirect WCF to students with higher levels of proficiency:

Excerpt 30: "For example, if it's an intermediate student, I underline it, if it's capitalization. I know we've covered this recently. But I explain if it's a new thing grammatical structure. As the level goes up, things would be more like this. For some, I provide the correct form; for some, just underlining. For grammatical errors, I mostly write the correct form. It depends… I give them the correct forms if I know they don't know! I know many students know about capitalization. They can fix it on their own."

Excerpt 31: "In higher proficiency levels, for example, I say SV. I code my feedback I introduce them to these codes in the first session. But I usually underline erroneous forms and correct them. Students also want to see their errors and correct forms. They [students] think learning grammar is equivalent to learning a language. They think this is the correct way of learning a language."

Furthermore, 2 teachers stated that they predominantly used indirect grammar feedback, because they aimed to make their students more responsible and motivated in the

process of increasing their grammatical accuracy in writing. Excerpt 32 showcases this perception:

Excerpt 32: "Usually, it's like I don't give direct feedback myself. I draw a circle and tell them to think. The first thing to do is to highlight the positive aspects. I take into consideration people's emotions. I don't scrutinize them; I act leniently so that students come to me to ask questions. Especially for tenses, so they go check things out themselves regarding the things I have done. If I see they're not asking any questions, I ask them if they've looked at the paper, why they don't say anything. I have a number of codes and work based on those."

When asked about their awareness of students' preferences, all of the teachers ($N = 14$) claimed that their students strongly preferred direct correction of grammatical errors. Excerpts 33, 34, and 35 show how Iranian EFL students, as reported by three of the teachers, perceived different methods of grammar correction:

Excerpt 33: "If I see an error, I write down the correct form, along with some explanation… students, on the other hand, prefer to receive direct CF. Mostly, they don't wanna bother to find correct forms on their own."

Excerpt 34: "I usually give direct feedback… When I give the indirect feedback [circling the erroneous forms], students get shocked. They expect me to explicitly correct their errors. Sometimes, after I explain the benefits of indirect CF, they get it. They still think it's high school, and all of their errors need to be underlined."

Excerpt 35: "In general, it's like that. These methods of self-discovery learning don't work for many students. In the end, students want you [teachers] to correct their errors… Writing accurately is very important for students."

Moreover, all of the students ($N = 15$) thought that direct grammar correction was the dominant method of error treatment in their classes. Excerpt 36, for instance, shows how a student perceived the WCF provided on grammatical errors in writing:

Excerpt 36: "Yes, they correct [grammatical errors] in writing. They usually write the correct forms above them."

Unlike their teacher counterparts, the students were split over their preferences for methods of grammar correction; that is, while a larger majority ($n = 9$) viewed direct feedback more beneficial to increasing their grammatical accuracy in writing, indirect methods of grammar correction were welcomed by several other students ($n = 6$). Excerpts

37 and 38, for example, show why the majority of the students preferred direct feedback, and why these students tended not to rely on their own knowledge in correcting their grammatical errors in writing.

> **Excerpt 37**: "They [teachers] always underlined and corrected them [grammatical errors]. [Why do they do it?] Because it becomes more obvious, we pay more attention to them [errors and correct forms], we learn them better. [Is it better this way?] Yes. [You do not want anything left to you?] No. this way [receiving direct feedback from teacher] is better because I don't trust my own knowledge."

> **Excerpt 38**: "If they [teachers] take our essays home, they underline errors and correct them. [Do you prefer indirect methods of correction?] No! If I knew [how to write grammatically accurate], I wouldn't go to this class!"

In addition, a few students (*n* = 3) preferred the incorporation of direct WCF, in conjunction with meta-feedback. Excerpt 39 reveals how a student viewed meta-feedback as beneficial to long-term learning:

> **Excerpt 39**: "They [teachers] have crossed out my errors and corrected them. They tell me the correct forms. [Is it good?] Yes, but what they do is good in the short term. If they also explain why something is wrong, it [the correct forms] sticks to my mind."

As stated earlier, a smaller group of the students (*n* = 6) regarded indirect feedback as more positively, compared with direct WCF. For instance, Excerpts 40 and 41 show why some students preferred to take a more active role in increasing their grammatical accuracy in writing:

> **Excerpt 40**: "Teachers underline it and give the correct form, then give us some time to ask questions [regarding the feedback]. It has happened that we were given a short time to self-correct the errors. But mostly you'd need to go home and check [the feedback and your errors]. Self-correction is good; I like to be challenged. I like teachers telling us about an error and then we go ahead and find [and correct] it."

> **Excerpt 41**: "They [teachers] underline them [errors]. If it's an easy error, nothing, but if it's a difficult one [difficult structure to use], they provide correct forms and some explanation. [How about indirect CF?] No, never. It's good, though… We get more involved in the process of learning [correct grammatical structures]."

The above findings suggest that some of the teachers might be relatively misinformed about their students' preferences in error correction. Specifically, while all of the teachers

thought that students preferred direct WCF, the students' preferences were far from unanimous. That is, several students preferred to receive the kind of feedback which was less direct. The following points summarize the findings in this section:

- 12 teachers reportedly provided direct grammar feedback, and all of the 14 teachers stated that their students preferred direct WCF;

- All of the 15 students claimed that they mostly received direct grammar feedback;

- 6 students believed that indirect grammar feedback was more beneficial than direct feedback;

- The data analysis showed that some of the learners might have affectively engaged with feedback negatively, if they were provided with direct WCF, but preferred indirect grammar feedback.

5. Discussion

Here, the findings are discussed in light of the existing literature and a number of sociocultural/contextual considerations about EFL teaching in the Iranian contexts. The following paragraphs discuss the findings on 1) WCF providers/sources, 2) WCF amount, and 3) WCF methods.

First, the findings suggest that the teachers exhibited their awareness of students' preferences in grammar correction. Therefore, we can hypothesize that the teachers consciously aimed to maximize their students' affective engagement with grammar feedback by providing teacher-generated grammar feedback. Additionally, we can assume that the use of peer-feedback was relatively limited because the teachers might have thought that peer-feedback could be viewed by students as less useful, thus negatively influencing learners' affective engagement with feedback. Here, the teachers seemed to deviate from their perceptions (e.g., benefits of peer-feedback) to satisfy their students' needs (e.g., the need for teacher-generated WCF). Therefore, the teachers' use of teacher-feedback, seemingly, aimed to promote students' positive engagement with feedback, which could, as Ellis (2010) notes, improve students' grammatical accuracy gains.

Moreover, the students reported that their teachers preferred to provide teacher-generated grammar feedback, and also these students preferred feedback from their teachers. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of the students affectively engaged

with teacher-feedback. Additionally, the fact that the students were unwilling to engage in peer-correction shows their strong dependency on teachers, a finding also reported by Zohrabi, Torabi, and Baybourdiani (2012) in the Iranian EFL contexts. The popularity of teacher-generated WCF has also been reported by Elwood and Bode (2014) and Lee (2008) in the EFL contexts: Japan and Hong Kong, respectively. The findings of the present study further the existing literature on L2 learners' preferences for teacher-generated WCF in another EFL context: Iran.

Secondly, while the majority of the teacher participants were aware of the benefits of selective WCF (e.g., due to promoting student autonomy), they frequently utilized comprehensive grammar correction. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the teachers mostly aimed to maximize their students' affective engagement with feedback. This finding is similar to the use of teacher-generated WCF, despite the reported benefits of peer-feedback. However, because a few teachers brought up the use of selective WCF, we can assume that some of their students' engagement with feedback might be negatively affected. Again, these findings provide further evidence for the teachers' divergence from their own perceptions, but convergence with students' preferences. In addition, the students' stronger preference for comprehensive WCF, as opposed to selective grammar feedback, was caused probably because the students did not trust their own grammatical competence, as also noted by Elwood and Bode (2014) and Leki (1991) in ESL contexts. Similar to the findings reported in Section 4.1., the students showed strong dependence on their teachers and doubted their own ability to locate and correct grammatical errors. These findings are in line with those of Rahimi (2010) who concluded that Iranian EFL students valued comprehensive WCF and viewed teachers as reliable sources of grammar knowledge.

Finally, the teachers' responses showed that the majority of them provided direct grammar feedback because they thought that their students valued direct correction of grammatical errors: a perception which was partly inaccurate, as the reported student perceptions showed. Nevertheless, the actual provision of direct grammar feedback can be hypothesized to promote learners' engagement with this kind of feedback, to a certain extent. However, in the case of students who preferred indirect feedback, the predominantly employed direct feedback might lead to undesired gains in students' grammatical accuracy. Overall, the teachers seemed to be aware of their students' WCF-related preferences, thereby providing more direct WCF in correcting grammatical errors. The employment of direct

WCF by teachers has also been reported by a number of previous studies (e.g., Guénette & Lyster, 2013). Nevertheless, the findings of the present study suggest that teachers provide direct feedback not because they perceive this method as effective, but because they can satisfy their students' needs by such feedback. Additionally, although a number of studies have attested to Iranian EFL students' tendency to produce error-free writing (e.g., Kaivanpanah, Alavi, & Sepehrinia, 2015; Rahimi, 2010), the current study suggests that these students might value indirect grammar feedback more than direct feedback. In fact, the data analysis indicates that students might perceive indirect feedback as a means of longer-term learning, engagement, and learner autonomy.

As the above findings suggest, the teachers' WCF practices tended to diverge from their perceptions, thereby deviating from what Ferris (2014) calls best feedback practices. There is one major explanation for this diversion. According to Han and Hyland (2015), students are likely to incorporate the type of feedback which they perceive to be useful. Therefore, based on this hypothesis, we can explain why the teachers of the present study provided the types of WCF not supported by the existing literature (e.g., Ferris, 2014). Particularly, as these teachers reported, their students strongly preferred to produce error-free writing, to be dependent on teachers, and remain doubtful of their own linguistic competency in correcting grammatical errors (e.g., Kaivanpanah, Alavi, & Sepehrinia, 2015; Rahimi, 2010; Zohrabi, Torabi, & Baybourdiani, 2012). Therefore, since the teachers showed their awareness of such student needs (e.g., Loewen et al., 2009), they provided the type of feedback which their students were more likely to affectively engage with.

Additionally, we can assume that L2 learners' feedback-related preferences and teachers' feedback-related practices might not be in line with the recommendations from the ESL contexts. In fact, in the Iranian EFL contexts, students and teachers might hold more positive perceptions of teacher-generated, direct feedback on grammatical errors. The present study, therefore, provides further evidence for the context-specific nature of student perceptions and teacher practices with regard to WCF (see Horwitz, 1999; Schulz, 2001).

6. Conclusion

The present study explored Iranian EFL teachers' WCF-related practices and perceptions, along with their students' perceptions and preferences. In particular, a number of feedback-related areas, namely, WCF correctors (e.g., teacher and peer), amount (e.g.,

comprehensive and selective), and methods (e.g., direct and indirect), were investigated. The data analysis revealed that the teachers' feedback practices were not in line with the "best practices," as suggested by Ferris (2014), who calls for the incorporation of peer-feedback, selective WCF, and indirect WCF. In practice, the teachers reportedly provided teacher-generated feedback, comprehensive correction, and selective WCF.

The current study should be regarded as exploratory. As mentioned earlier, it is the first qualitative attempt at uncovering Iranian EFL teachers' WCF practices, students' WCF preferences, and students' affective engagement with WCF. The findings can hopefully increase our understanding of teachers and students as the main providers and users of WCF. The findings of the current study might, therefore, provide a clearer picture of how and why teachers provide different types of feedback in their classes. That is, because of the teachers' awareness of their students' preferences/needs, they might end up providing WCF which might not be in line with the recommendations of the existing literature (see Ferris, 2014, for a list of effective practices) and their own WCF-related perceptions.

The findings of the study suggest that many students might be unaware of the positive role of the peer-feedback, self-correction, selective WCF, learner autonomy, and indirect WCF. As Ferris (2014) suggests, such WCF-related practices have been shown to be beneficial in increasing grammatical accuracy and promoting learners' active involvement in the process of WCF provision and use. Therefore, teachers need to increase their students' awareness of different WCF practices and their benefits to long-term learning. As shown by Ellis (2010), students' higher awareness of the efficacy of student-centered WCF practices (e.g., peer-feedback) can, in turn, positively affect their engagement with WCF. The findings also draw our attention to the potential lack of communication between teachers and students. As the current study's findings showed, teachers and students were relatively misinformed about each other's WCF-related perceptions and practices. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to clearly communicate their feedback practices with students, since such cases of miscommunication might be detrimental to the attainment of learning outcomes, which, in the case of WCF, might be increasing students' grammatical accuracy.

References

Aljaafreh, A., & Lantolf, J. (1994). Negative feedback as regulation and second language learning in the zone of proximal development. *The Modern Language Journal*, *78*, 465-   483.

Amrhein, H. R., & Nassaji, H. (2010). Written corrective feedback: What do students and teachers think is right and why? *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *13*(2), 95-127.

Bitchener, J., & Knoch, U. (2009). The relative effectiveness of different types of direct written   corrective feedback. *System*, *37*(2), 322-329.

Brown, A. V. (2009). Students' and teachers' perceptions of effective foreign language teaching: a comparison of ideals. *The Modern Language Journal, 93*(1), 46-60.

Diab, R. L. (2005). Teachers' and students' beliefs about responding to ESL writing: A case study. *TESL Canada Journal*, *23*(1), 28-43.

Ellis, R. (2010). A framework for investigating oral and written corrective feedback. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *32*(2), 335-349.

Ferris, D. R. (1995). Student reactions to teacher response in multiple-draft composition classrooms. *TESOL Quarterly*, *29*(1), 33-53.

Ferris, D. R. (2014). Responding to student writing: Teachers' philosophies and practices. *Assessing Writing*, *19*, 6-23.

Ferris, D. R., Brown, J., Liu, H., & Stine, M. E. A. (2011). Responding to L2 students in college   writing classes: What teachers say and what they do. *TESOL Quarterly*, *45*, 207-234.

Ferris, D. R., Liu, H., Sinha, A., & Senna, M. (2013). Written corrective feedback for individual   L2 writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *22*, 307-329.

Guénette, D., & Lyster, R. (2013). Written corrective feedback and its challenges for pre-service   ESL teachers. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, *69*(2), 129-153.

Harwood, N., Austin, L., & Macaulay, R. (2009). Proofreading in a UK university: Proofreaders' beliefs, practices, and experiences. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *18*(3), 166-190.

Hedgcock, J., & Lefkowitz, N. (1994). Feedback on feedback: Assessing learner receptivity to teacher response in L2 composing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *3*(2), 141-163.

Horwitz, E. K. (1999). Cultural and situational influences on foreign language learners' beliefs about language learning: A review of BALLI studies. *System*, *27*(4), 557-576.

Junqueira, L., & Payant, C. (2015). "I just want to do it right, but it's so hard'': A novice teacher's written feedback beliefs and practices. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *27*, 19-36.

Kaivanpanah, S., Alavi, S. M., & Sepehrinia, S. (2015). Preferences for interactional feedback: Differences between learners and teachers. *The Language Learning Journal*, *43*(1), 74- 93.

Lantolf, J., & Pavlenko, A. (2001). Second Language Activity Theory: Understanding second language learners as people. In M. Breen (Ed.), *Learner contributions to language learning* (pp. 172-182). London: Longman.

Lee, I. (2008). Student reactions to teacher feedback in two Hong Kong secondary classrooms. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *17*(3), 144-164.

Lee, I. (2009). Feedback revolution: What gets in the way? *ELT Journal*, *65*(1), 1-12.

Lee, M. K. (2015). Peer feedback in second language writing: Investigating junior secondary students' perspectives on inter-feedback and intra-feedback. *System*, *55*, 1-10.

Leki, I. (1991). The preferences of ESL students for error correction in college-level writing classes. *Foreign Language Annals*, *24*(3), 203-218.

Loewen, S., Li, S., Fei, F., Thompson, A., Nakatsukasa, K., Ahn, S., & Chen, X. (2009). Second language learners' beliefs about grammar instruction and error correction. *The Modern Language Journal*, *93*(1), 91-104.

Mackey, A., Al-Khalil, M., Atanassova, G., Hama, M., Logan-Terry, A., & Nakatsukasa, K. (2007). Teachers' intentions and learners' perceptions about corrective feedback in the L2 classroom. *International Journal of Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, *1*, 129-152.

Min, H. T. (2006). The effects of trained peer review on EFL students' revision types and writing quality. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *15*(2), 118-141.

Nayar, P. B. (1997). ESL/EFL dichotomy today: Language politics or pragmatics? *TESOL Quarterly*, *31*(1), 9-37.

Poulos, A., & Mahony, M. J. (2008). Effectiveness of feedback: The students' perspective. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *33*(2), 143-154.

Radecki, P., & Swales, J. (1988). ESL student reaction to written comments on their written work. *System*, *16*(3), 355-365.

Rahimi, M. (2010). Iranian EFL students' perceptions and preferences for teachers' written feedback: Do students' ideas reflect teachers' practice? *The Journal of Teaching Language Skills*, *2*(2), 75-98.

Schulz, R. A. (1996). Focus on form in the foreign language classroom: Students' and teachers' views on error correction and the role of grammar. *Foreign Language Annals*, *29*(3), 343-364.

Schulz, R. A. (2001). Cultural differences in student and teacher perceptions concerning the role of grammar instruction and corrective feedback: USA: Colombia. *The Modern Language Journal*, *85*(2), 244-258.

Sheen, Y. (2010). Differential effects of oral and written corrective feedback in the ESL classroom. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *32*(2), 203-234.

Yang, M., Badger, R., & Yu, Z. (2006). A comparative study of peer and teacher feedback in a Chinese EFL writing class. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *15*(3), 179-200.

Zhu, W. (2004). Faculty views on the importance of writing, the nature of academic writing, and teaching and responding to writing in the disciplines. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *13*(1), 29-48.

Zohrabi, M., Torabi, M. A., & Baybourdiani, P. (2012). Teacher-centered and/or student-centered learning: English language in Iran. *English Language and Literature Studies*, *2*(3), 18-30.

Appendix A

Teachers' perceptions/perceived practices:

Age? Educational background? Professional training?

Do you correct students' grammatical errors in writing? How do you treat them? Direct? Coded? One-on-one conferences? Which methods do your students prefer? Why? Scenarios, please!

How much correction do you provide? Every error? Selective? Which do your students prefer? Why? Scenarios, please!

Who does provide correction on students' errors in writing? You? Peers? Self-correction? Outside sources? Examples? Why? Which sources do students prefer? Why? Scenarios, please!

Appendix B

Students' perceptions/preferences/expectations:

Age? Academic degree? English courses taken before?

Do your teachers correct your grammatical errors in writing? How do they treat them? Direct? Coded? One-on-one conferences? Which methods do you prefer? Why? Scenarios, please!

How much correction do you receive on grammatical errors in writing? Every error? Selective? Which do you prefer? Why? Scenarios, please!

Who does provide correction on your grammatical errors in writing? Teachers? Peers? Self-correction? Outside sources? Examples? Why? Which sources do you prefer? Why? Scenarios, please!