

Teacher-initiated vs. student-initiated written corrective feedback in EFL writing

Bakhtiar Naghdipour
(bakhtiar.naghdipour@nu.edu.kz)
Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan

Abstract

With the popularity of student-centered pedagogy in language education, research on alternative feedback strategies to supplement teacher written corrective feedback (WCF) has flourished in different contexts. Such research, however, has viewed alternative feedback strategies as initiated, deployed, and controlled by teachers, paying little attention to students' capability in identifying and correcting their linguistic errors on their own. The current study adopts a quasi-experimental design to investigate the impact of a student-initiated feedback intervention on undergraduate students' error identification and correction ability at a major university in Oman. To this end, two groups of first-year students ($n = 63$) from two different sections of an essay writing course were assigned to a control group, who received the traditional teacher feedback, and an experimental group, who consulted alternative sources of feedback on their own. Analysis of the data from pre-test and post-test tasks revealed that while both groups significantly improved their scores on different error correction attempts over a 16-week semester, the source of feedback did not lead to significant between-group differences in the scores. Furthermore, qualitative data indicated that, despite some challenges, students drew on a variety of sources and resources to reduce linguistic errors in their writing.

Share and cite

Naghdipour, B. (2023). Teacher-initiated vs. student-initiated written corrective feedback in EFL writing. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching [e-FLT]*, 20(1), 22–36.
<https://doi.org/10.56040/10.56040/bana2012>

1 Introduction

The effectiveness of corrective feedback, known as “any feedback provided to a learner from any source that contains evidence of learner error of language form” (Russell & Spada, 2006, p. 134), in reducing students' linguistic errors in writing has been a source of debate among L2 writing scholars and teachers. Despite the existence of accumulated evidence in favor of teacher WCF and its potential to help students write more accurate texts, this practice has been criticized for various practical reasons (Ekiert & di Gennaro, 2021; Lee, 2017; Truscott, 1996, 2007; Truscott & Hsu, 2008). More specifically, recent developments in language education, such as the advent of student-centered pedagogical approaches, the emergence of social learning theories, and the rapid growth of technological advancements, have rendered teacher feedback as one, rather than the only, source of knowledge or information for students. L2 writing teachers and researchers have therefore resorted

to alternative sources of feedback, such as peer correction and self-correction (Séror, 2011), to diversify the feedback students receive, make them more accountable for their learning, and enrich their learning experience (Ferris, 2007). However, these alternative strategies have been predominantly initiated and controlled by teachers as part of class activities, while neglecting the students' ability to seek feedback on their own without much teacher intervention. The potential benefit from such cannot be further ignored in an era when outside brick-and-mortar classrooms lies a range of possibilities and affordances including a wide network of language learners and users, technological applications, and other easily accessible resources (Han, 2019; Naghdipour, 2022; Trinder, 2017) that could provide scaffolding for students in producing more linguistically accurate texts.

To put this perspective into practice and to contribute to the ongoing debate on alternative sources of WCF in EFL writing where traditional instructional, assessment, and feedback practices are still prevalent (Lee, 2016; Naghdipour, 2016, 2021; Shen et al., 2020), this study investigates the impact of a WCF intervention on students' ability to deal with linguistic errors in writing. Student-initiated WCF is defined operationally as feedback sought by the student through active engagement in drawing on different sources of knowledge and learning resources to learn about their linguistic errors and invest effort into correcting them. It is believed that student-initiated feedback practices in L2 writing classes and programs could promote in students more accountability for their learning and channel the teacher's time and energy into other key areas of developing writing proficiency, such as organizational and rhetorical skills which generally demand more instruction and attention.

2 Review of literature

Hyland and Hyland (2006) believe that any form of feedback should ultimately aim "to move students to a more independent role where they can critically evaluate their own writing and intervene to change their own processes and products where necessary" (p. 92). Students' sole reliance on teacher feedback, however, seems to be a hurdle to achieving this goal or fostering in them the desired level of learning agency and autonomy. Other L2 writing researchers have also made a similar appeal for the recognition of a stronger role for student engagement in the feedback process. Ferris (2007, 2014), for example, suggests that teachers should look for alternative strategies to offer students ways to assume more responsibility for their writing improvement and enrich their learning experience by making use of different reactions and input from others. Similarly, Séror (2011) argues in favor of engaging students with various sources of feedback to "establish stronger connections between the learning that occurs in class and the learning that occurs outside of it" (p. 139).

A large proportion of research on alternative feedback strategies has thus far focused on peer and self-feedback or self-assessment (e.g., Lázaro Ibarrola, 2013; Lee, 2017; Makino, 1993; Mawlawi Diab, 2016; Miao et al., 2006; Wang, 2014; Yang et al., 2006; Zou et al., 2022). Incorporating these two strategies, in particular, increases feedback opportunities by involving a greater number of correctors or feedback providers and supports learner agency (Naghdipour, 2022; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yang et al., 2006) by giving students opportunities to be active "rather than passive recipients of feedback" (Makino, 1993, p. 340). Despite these benefits, teachers have complained about students' insufficient knowledge, experience and ability to give their peers quality feedback or to effectively revise their own work (Carless & Boud, 2018; Leki, 1991; Zhang, 1995). In addition, students may not trust their peers' feedback because they may find it insincere or inaccurate (Zhang, 1995). Still, time constraints could negatively affect students' negotiation of the exchanged feedback (Wang, 2014) when peer feedback activities are set up in the classroom context. Another drawback occurs when both peer feedback and self-feedback strategies are deployed in a top-down manner as part of class activities with teachers initiating and directing the entire process. This could deprive students of the opportunity to explore a range of possibilities to deal with linguistic errors outside the classroom.

Consequently, teachers have advocated feedback practices that could help students take greater responsibility for identifying, reporting, or even correcting their own errors. As one of the earlier

attempts in this area, Storch and Tapper (1996) used an annotation scheme to give students a chance to identify their own writing problems assuming that having students self-monitor their writing progress would minimize their over-reliance on teacher feedback. The results revealed that students' marginal or endnotes targeted the main concerns they had about writing, particularly those related to syntax and lexis. Although students' annotations were initiated by the teacher, this study clearly indicates that L2 writing teachers have for a long time been working towards more student-initiated feedback processes. In another study, Suzuki (2008) divided a sample of Japanese university students into a peer-revision group and a self-revision group and required them to revise their own written work, within an interval of one week. Whereas students in the peer revision group focused more on the content of their writing, students who implemented self-revisions addressed more language-related issues in their texts. Séror (2011) also investigated university students' perceptions of alternative sources of feedback and their implications as a source of pedagogic support. The results revealed that students viewed these resources as valuable as instructor-based feedback. In particular, students mentioned friends, roommates, and tutors at the writing center as the main sources of feedback or advice. Séror (2011) concluded that due attention should be paid to the contribution of alternative sources of feedback to shaping students' literacy development and to their potential as a bridge between the formal and informal learning contexts. More recently, Naghdipour (2022) has explored undergraduate students' reliance on online informal tools and artifacts to mediate their formal writing development. The results indicated that students consulted various informal digital editing and proofreading applications to detect and correct linguistic errors in their written assignments and projects.

However, alternative sources of feedback are not necessarily limited to the context of the classroom, nor are all merely controlled by teachers. Students can also initiate the feedback process themselves, inside or outside of the classroom, through actively exploring different sources and resources to seek advice or gather information on their errors. This type of feedback that could be materialized in various forms, provided by classmates and "invisible partners" or individuals and contexts that contribute to student learning outside of class (Séror, 2011, p. 118), is supported by the sociocultural learning theory that recognizes language learning as a social activity facilitated by interaction and scaffolding between human agents or mediated by non-human tools and resources (Vygotsky, 1978). Student-initiated feedback also shares common grounds with constructivist learning theory as writers move from a reliance on objects to more competent others and ultimately to self-regulation (Schunk & Greene, 2018) and sustainable feedback strategies that aim to help students become autonomous learners who have developed self-reflection, self-regulation and self-assessment capacities (Carless et al., 2010). In addition to acting as "instructional resources" (Black & Wiliam, 2009, p. 8) for each other, students these days do have access to different learning resources and sources of knowledge – thanks to the emergence of new means of communication, sharing and networking – and are increasingly exposed to the target language input to improve their writing accuracy. While there exists extensive research on classroom-based WCF feedback practices, reports on incorporating student-initiated WCF in L2 writing classes, specifically in EFL contexts, remain scarce. To contribute to this line of inquiry, the present study aims to investigate the impact of a student-initiated WCF policy on students' ability to detect and correct linguistic errors in writing, alternative sources of feedback they draw on to deal with errors, and challenges they may encounter while exercising their agency to produce more error-free texts.

3 Research questions

This study is informed by the following three research questions:

1. How does a student-initiated WCF policy differ from teacher-initiated feedback in terms of its impact on students' ability to identify and correct linguistic errors in writing?
2. What sources and resources do students consult to identify and correct their linguistic errors in the absence of teacher feedback?

3. What are the likely challenges of advocating a student-initiated WCF policy in EFL writing?

4 Method

4.1 Participants

The participants were 63 first-semester undergraduate students (54 female and 9 male) from different degree programs who enrolled in a compulsory essay writing course during the Fall Semester 2019 at a university in Oman. The course aimed to provide students with the opportunity to develop the necessary writing skills with special emphasis on descriptive, narrative, cause and effect, compare/contrast, and persuasive rhetorical patterns. Given that the medium of instruction at this institution is English, students who fail to submit evidence of English proficiency are required to attend a General Foundation Program (GFP) where they take courses in mathematics, IT, and English to meet the requirements of studying at degree programs such as English, Economics, and IT. The English courses are intensive multi-skill and students move through three different proficiency levels for up to three semesters until they reach the upper-intermediate level and are prepared to pass the exit exam, which is an equivalent of an IELTS score of 5 (see Naghdipour, 2022, for a review). Although the main focus of the GFP writing classes is on paragraph development, students who make it through level three are taught to write short essays of between 150 and 200 words. Two intact classes taught by the teacher-researcher were assigned to a control group ($N = 31$) and an experimental group ($N = 32$). Students in both groups met for one hour three times a week over a course of a 16-week semester and received the same instruction throughout. All participating students were native speakers of Arabic, with an average age of 19.65 ($SD = 1.11$).

4.2 Instruction and feedback procedure

After introducing each type of essay, analyzing samples, and completing the relevant tasks, students were assigned a topic to practice writing in the class or at home. Students in the control group drafted and submitted their papers, and the teacher-researcher corrected and returned them for their information or further revision. Although the literature is evenly divided between arguments on the effectiveness of direct versus indirect and focused versus comprehensive feedback, students received explicit direct mid-focused feedback. Direct mid-focused feedback, as a type of WCF that focuses on correcting a manageable number of errors each time (Liu & Brown, 2015), is more compatible with students' learning needs in this context. Emphasizing direct feedback could also discourage students in the control group to draw on alternative sources of feedback, as this was the main focus of the intervention in this study. At least one linguistic error from each different area (e.g., spelling, tenses, plurals, capitalization, style etc.) was corrected, focusing mainly on the first two paragraphs of students' essays, as they tended to repeat the same types of errors throughout their writing. Liu and Brown (2015) suggest targeting 2-6 structures for mid-focused feedback, yet there seems to be no one-size-fits-all definition for such a feedback strategy, and it is usually left to the teachers' discretion to decide based on their familiarity with students' educational and linguistic background and their writing proficiency or the ability to manage the received feedback. Thus, more or less 10-15 errors of all types, rather than errors of structures, depending on the severity of the error type and its treatability (Ferris, 2006), were targeted each time.

Students in the experimental group were subjected to the same instruction their counterparts received, but they were held responsible to take initiative and seek feedback on their work themselves. To enable them to do so, they were exposed to a number of strategies such as peer correction and self-correction, and were introduced to technological tools such as the Spelling and Grammar Checker in Microsoft Word, bilingual and monolingual dictionaries, translating and editing applications and other text-sharing tools and platforms, as reported in the literature (e.g., van Zundert et al., 2010), to help them identify and correct their linguistic errors or exchange their work with others.

To train as well as raise their awareness of the types of issues they should attend to while writing, revising, or reviewing their own or others' work, they were given a list of error types adopted from Ferris (2014) with examples and model responses for each error type. Students in both groups were also encouraged to read and gather sufficient ideas or content on the given topics to enhance their topical knowledge. Occasionally, however, the relevant texts were selected, simplified, and handed out to ensure their knowledge of the given topics. Thus, the difference between students in the experimental group and the control group was in the type of feedback and the way they received it. Table 1 highlights some of the key differences between these two WCF practices experienced by the experimental group and the control group.

Table 1. Key differences between teacher-oriented and student-oriented WCF

Attribute	Teacher-initiated WCF	Student-initiated WCF
Role	<i>Teacher as feedback provider</i>	<i>Student as feedback seeker</i>
Mediation	<i>Teacher-mediated</i>	<i>Agent- or artifact-mediated</i>
Source	<i>Single source of learning</i>	<i>Multiple sources of learning</i>
Emphasis	<i>Error correction</i>	<i>Error detection and correction</i>
Mode	<i>Passive learning</i>	<i>Active learning</i>
Direction	<i>Prescriptive learning</i>	<i>Collaborative learning</i>
Structure	<i>Structured</i>	<i>Flexible</i>
Skill development	<i>Lower-order thinking skills</i>	<i>Higher-order thinking skills</i>

4.2 Data collection and analysis

Background survey: Students were asked to fill a survey in the first session of the semester. The first part comprised of several questions on students' demographic information such as age, gender and the length of time studying at the GFP. The second part consisted of four questions addressing their opinions on their writing ability and different aspects of writing development. A descriptive analysis of the responses to the survey questions was carried out to provide background information on the participants.

Pre-test and post-test: Students in both groups were given an editing task in the first week and last week of the semester. This was a typed essay written by a student who took the same course two years back. It included 40 errors of different types (see Ferris et al., 2013 for a taxonomy of linguistic errors). Students in both groups completed the task under the same conditions: they were asked to edit the same text on both pre-test and post-test, were given 30 minutes to complete the task in their regular class time, and were not allowed to use any resources, such as dictionaries, or refer to their peers. While they received instructions on how to complete the task, the pre-test was not given back to students, and therefore they didn't have any chance to work on the text between the two tests. Also, similar activities were not discussed in the class to reduce the risk of practice effect. An editing task was used to have students engage in the same activity (in terms of length, degree of challenge, number of errors, etc.) to control such confounding variables. To measure and compare their scores in error identification and correction, students' pre-tests and post-tests were collected and assessed for the number of errors identified and fixed, the number of errors identified but not fixed, and the number of wrong attempts made or those misidentified as errors (see Table 2). An experienced colleague (non-native speaker) with a Ph.D. in linguistics, who was also involved in teaching the same course, re-assessed 20% of students' papers, producing a correlation of .96. The students' scores were then subjected to two paired-samples t-test and a one-way ANOVA to investigate the in-group and between-group changes in their error identification and correction ability over time.

Table 2. Extracts from students' pre-test and post-tests

Identified & fixed	Original: They didn't anything know about technology. Edited: They didn't know anything about technology.
Identified but not fixed	Original: ... a better place to live for three different reazons. Edited: ... a better place to live for three different reasons.
Wrong attempt	Original: Technology has changed the way people live. Edited: Technology has changed the way people life.

Retrospective interviews: At the end of the study, 18 students agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews conducted to investigate their opinions and evaluations of the student-initiated WCF intervention and the sources and resources they relied on to elicit feedback on their work or to identify and fix errors in their writing. The interview protocol included five core questions, along with follow-up inquiries posed for clarification or further information (see Appendix A). The teacher-researcher conducted the interviews in English. Each interview lasted between 12 to 15 minutes and were digitally recorded with the students' consent. The teacher-researcher transcribed and categorized the collected data related to each different interview question. Then the database for each interview question was read several times to determine the initial codes and recurrent patterns in students' responses and comments. An attempt was made to detect several codes for each interview question (Appendix B). These codes were then categorized and reviewed to identify the most common themes. Once the major themes were figured out, students' comments were edited to ensure clarity and reported in support of the emerging themes to answer the second and third research questions.

5 Results

5.1 Effect of student-initiated WCF on students' error identification and correction ability

The first research question sought to investigate the impact of a student-initiated WCF policy on students' error identification and correction ability. Two paired-samples t-test were conducted to compare the students' scores on the pre-test and post-test tasks for each group separately. Then, a one-way ANOVA between subjects was run to examine the effect of each type of feedback or corrector on students' error correction ability. As illustrated in Tables 3 and 4, students in the experimental group improved their scores significantly at the $p < .05$ level on the three error-correction attempts defined in this study. This means that there was a significant difference in students' gain scores from the pre-test to post-test in identifying and fixing ($M = 1.87$, $SD = 4.54$); $t(31) = 2.33$, $p = .026$ and identifying but not fixing ($M = .84$, $SD = 2.01$); $t(31) = 2.36$, $p = .024$ errors. At the same time, students managed to significantly reduce the number of wrong attempts made in identifying errors or those cases they thought were the incorrect usage of language ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 5.01$); $t(31) = 3.06$, $p = .004$.

Table 3. Descriptive analysis of data for both experimental group and control group

Error correction attempts Phase		Group	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Identified & fixed	Pre-test	Experimental	5.62	5.21
	Post-test		7.50	4.05
	Pre-test	Control	5.80	3.32
	Post-test		7.93	3.75
Identified but not fixed	Pre-test	Experimental	1.96	1.35
	Post-test		2.81	1.82
	Pre-test	Control	1.77	1.08
	Post-test		2.67	1.79
Wrong attempt	Pre-test	Experimental	7.62	4.00
	Post-test		4.90	2.44
	Pre-test	Control	7.12	2.43
	Post-test		4.03	2.50

The results of data analysis for students in the control group also indicate that, like their counterparts in the experimental group, they significantly improved different components of their error correction ability at the $p < .05$ level (Tables 3 and 4). In other words, there was a significant rise in students' scores in identifying and fixing ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 4.03$); $t(30) = 2.93$, $p = .006$ and identifying but not fixing ($M = .90$, $SD = 1.88$); $t(30) = 2.66$, $p = .012$ errors from the pre-test to the post-test. They also managed to significantly reduce the number of wrong attempts made in error detection between the two administrations ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 3.00$); $t(30) = 5.74$, $p = .000$.

Table 4. Paired-samples *t*-tests for both experimental group and control group

Error correction attempts	Phase	Group	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>
Identified & fixed	Pre-test–post-test	Experimental	-1.87	4.54	-2.33	31	.026
		Control	-2.12	4.03	-2.93	30	.006
Identified but not fixed	Pre-test–post-test	Experimental	-.84	2.01	-2.36	31	.024
		Control	-.90	1.88	-2.66	30	.012
Wrong attempt	Pre-test–post-test	Experimental	2.71	5.01	3.06	31	.004
		Control	3.09	3.00	5.74	30	.000

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the impact of feedback source on students' error correction ability. The results in Table 5 indicate that there was no significant between-group difference in students' scores on the post-test at the $p < .05$ level for the three tested categories of 'identified & fixed' [$F(1, 61) = .195$, $p = .660$], 'identified but not fixed' [$F(1, 61) = .088$, $p = .768$], and 'wrong attempt' [$F(1, 61) = 1.963$, $p = .166$]. A post hoc test with Bonferroni correction also indicated that the differences between the means of these tested categories of 'identified & fixed' ($p = .220$), 'identified but not fixed' ($p = .256$), and 'wrong attempt' ($p = .055$) were not statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. The results suggest that students in both groups developed a capability to identify and correct errors in writing approximately at the same level and thus the source of feedback or who provided or initiated the feedback did not result in a significant

between-group difference. Overall, out of 40 errors in the editing task, students in the experimental group identified 25.77% of the errors and fixed 18.75% correctly, compared with the teacher-feedback group, who identified 25.15% and fixed 19.82% correctly. Both groups also misidentified approximately the same number of errors or made the same number of wrong attempts, 12.25% and 10.75 for students in the experimental group and control group respectively.

Table 5. One-way ANOVA for students' error correction attempts

Error correction attempts		df	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Identified & fixed	Between Groups	1	2.98	.195	.660
	Within Groups	61	15.30		
	Total	62			
Identified but not fixed	Between Groups	1	.287	.088	.768
	Within Groups	61	3.27		
	Total	62			
Wrong attempt	Between Groups	1	12.02	1.963	.166
	Within Groups	61	6.12		
	Total	62			

5.2 Enhanced learner engagement and autonomy

Students' responses to the interview questions were analyzed to find out what sources and resources they drew on the most to deal with linguistic errors in their essays. The results revealed that students received feedback on their errors from various mediating agents and artifacts (Table 6). Their choice of these sources and resources, however, depended, among others, on the type of errors they produced and the availability of resources. For example, while students could easily use a dictionary to detect and correct misspelled words, they relied on support from more proficient others or sophisticated tools to correct erroneous grammar problems.

Table 6. Sources and resources students consulted to address their errors

	Learning sources & resources	Frequency
1	Classmates	All
2	Dictionary (electronic & paper-based)	All
3	Spelling & Grammar checker (typing)	All
4	Internet (online material & applications)	All
5	Concurrent courses	13
6	Friends & hostel roommates	11
7	Family members & relatives	7
8	Writing center tutors/teachers	5
9	Reference books	2

Consulting classmates was the most frequent strategy students reported using to tackle linguistic errors in their writing. In addition, all interviewed students reported using dictionaries, mainly electronic bilingual ones installed on their smartphones or available online, to check the spelling or usage of a certain vocabulary item. Students reported using the Spelling and Grammar Checker as another effective strategy to notice and fix surface-level errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. They were, however, required to first hand-write their essays in their notebooks and then type the revised version. If they first typed their essays, Microsoft Word would correct some of the errors automatically, and this could hamper their ability to ‘notice’ errors. The next most frequent resource used was the internet and students accessed it predominantly to read and gather background knowledge or content on the given topics, use bilingual translation applications, such as Google Translate, to translate from Arabic into English, and join social networking sites and similar platforms to receive feedback or exchange ideas with others. One of these students said:

After reading about the topics, I used a dictionary to translate words and phrases I didn't know from Arabic into English. I made the sentences and then tried to get around them and fix my errors.

More than half of the interviewed students also benefited from engaging with other courses they took during the semester to deal with language-related issues in their essays. One student, for example, noted:

Reading material from 'Introduction to Psychology' helped me a lot to improve my writing. For example, I was curious to know how to write correct sentences.

Students reported approaching their friends, as another reliable source of knowledge and feedback, to get their work edited. As the following excerpt highlights, some of these friends were quite proficient in English:

I have a friend who teaches English at an international school. Sometimes I send him my writing over the phone and he reads it and gives me feedback.

In addition, students reported consulting family members and relatives such as siblings, parents, cousins, and uncles to help them correct their errors. One student, for example, commented:

My father read my essay and gave me feedback because his English is much better than mine. He studied in the UK as a navy officer.

A few students also received feedback from English club tutors. Despite encouraging them to visit the learning support centers, some less proficient students tended to avoid visiting such places for the fear of, as one of them indicated, being exposed to others as ‘weak’. As the last reported strategy, two students reviewed reference books such as grammar textbooks and chapters on style and punctuation to write more accurately in English. One of these students said:

My brother is at the middle school and I took his books and the activities his teacher assigned to improve my vocabulary and grammar. I did this twice a week.

5.3 Challenges of a student-initiated WCF intervention

Despite offering students opportunities to learn from each other and exploit various mediating learning resources and tools to correct errors in their writing, implementing this student-initiated WCF policy was not without challenges. Consulting students' responses to interview questions revealed several key concerns. First, it was noted that weaning students from the teacher feedback was difficult in the beginning. While students received feedback on the rhetorical aspects of their work – for accountability purposes – they still expected to receive teacher feedback on their linguistic errors. This is best echoed in the following extract:

The night before the exam, I was a little bit nervous; I wished I had the teacher's feedback to review my errors. I think sometimes we need to get teacher feedback because we have other courses to study and we don't have time to correct our errors ourselves. But I also know that teachers are busy. In the end, I am happy that I learned how to be responsible for my learning.

These feelings of uncertainty and anxiety, however, subsided toward the end of the semester once students fostered the ability to deal with errors in their writing. One student, for example, said:

In the beginning, I was very upset. I saw only some comments on my paper without feedback. But it took me time to get used to working on my own errors. I think teacher feedback makes us lazy. I used to get feedback from my teachers and I only revised my writing based on what they corrected; I never went beyond what they corrected, but now I use many different resources and I go and get feedback myself.

In addition, while it is true that students may not be in a position to provide flawless feedback on their peers' work, the element of trust was another factor pushing them to look for teacher feedback. As one student noted:

I think even if others or even we correct our own papers, we still need teacher feedback because we trust it the most and we also want to know what teachers want from us in the exam.

However, students believed that teachers should leave their feedback channel open. At the same time, they mentioned certain conditions under which they believed this feedback should be provided. As an example, some students believed that teacher feedback should be given only when it is voluntarily asked for, as illustrated in the following quote:

This is true we expect teacher feedback, but I think teachers should give their feedback only when students ask for it.

Some other students believed that teachers should not correct each and every submitted paper. Rather, they indicated that it would be better for teachers to address some errors and leave the rest to the students themselves. As one student suggested:

I believe that teachers should do 25% of the job and students should do the rest themselves. This is about learning another language and students should decide whether they want to improve their language first. For example, I know some students didn't understand the teacher's feedback but they were shy and never asked the teacher for clarification.

Finally, students referred to the severity of errors as another condition that would determine whether teachers should intervene or not. One student, for example, suggested:

I think teachers should focus on those errors that are very serious and let students take care of those less serious errors.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to investigate the extent to which a student-initiated WCF intervention can help EFL students deal with linguistic errors in their writing. The results provided evidence that such an initiative was as effective as teacher feedback, as there were no significant differences in scores on different error identification and correction attempts between students who received feedback from the teacher and those who relied on alternative sources of feedback. There are several reasons why the type of feedback did not make a big difference in students' scores. Firstly, most of these students can correct simple grammatical errors in their own or their peers' work, because they tend to compose short sentences expressing simple ideas, mostly in the simple present, past and future tenses. Secondly, students now do have access to a wide range of sources of knowledge and learning resources (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Han, 2019; Naghdipour, 2022; Séror, 2011) and the traditional types of feedback channels might not be the only source of knowledge, particularly at the tertiary level of education where they are more motivated to assume responsibility for their learning. Thirdly, as also suggested by Hyland (2007), exposure and engagement in the target language input and academic discourse embedded in their coursework could have helped them notice the contextualized use of grammar.

The results of students' use of various sources and resources of feedback were also promising. Consistent with findings of previous research (e.g., Berg, 1999; Suzuki, 2008; Zou et al., 2022), in-class peer feedback proved to be an effective strategy encouraging students to act as "instructional resources" (Black & Wiliam, 2009, p. 8) for each other. This is important across EFL contexts where students share the same linguistic and cultural background and display a strong sense of camaraderie (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). The use of alternative sources of feedback, however, was not limited to the formal context of the classroom. Outside the classroom, students consulted many more competent individuals such as friends, hostel roommates, family members, and relatives to scaffold their development of linguistic accuracy in writing. Séror (2011) observed that contrary to the teacher feedback – which is constrained by time and space, offered in a summative manner through monologic interaction, and focused on problems rather than solutions – alternative sources of feedback are offered in less power-governed relationships through multiple modes of communication with more opportunities for students to discuss the recommendations and reflect on changes. Some of these attributes are best reflected in the feedback students received in digital forms through the use of technological applications (Trinder, 2017; Zou et al., 2022) which seem to better serve the preferences of this generation who are more wired than their predecessors to technology in their personal as well as academic life.

Despite these potentials, some students found it challenging to be deprived of teacher feedback. Previous research (e.g., Ferris, 2007; Leki, 1991; Storch & Tapper, 1996) also reported that students expect teacher corrective feedback, more specifically if they have been exposed to grammar instruction for many years in their prior education, or, as Berg (1999) noted, have developed a dependency on it. Students' resistance could be nevertheless alleviated by incorporating an element of talk and providing the rationale for introducing such pedagogical practices. Sharing pedagogical policies and decisions with students is aligned with the principles of formative feedback (e.g., Black & Wiliam, 2009; Naghdipour, 2022) which advocate affective support to help overcome students' reluctance to participate in student-led activities and those that foster their agency in learning. In addition, some students wished to have received teacher feedback because they trust it the most, mainly for its potential to inform them of the dynamics of exams and to provide them with a valuable model of language use. Yet, teachers can mitigate this feeling of distrust by diversifying assessment methods, offering corrective feedback from time to time in addition to asking students to seek feedback from other avenues (Ferris, 2007, 2014). Thus, given that students perceived feedback as a cognitive as well as an affective phenomenon (Carless & Boud, 2018), diversifying feedback practices would not only meet students' needs in literacy development and self-regulation, (Schunk & Greene, 2018) but would also satisfy their expectations of an accountable teacher and a worthwhile writing class. As students in this study indicated, however, teacher feedback would be more effective if it is offered

sporadically, preferably when sought voluntarily and offered in a formative fashion, just so that students do not become lazy. Such feedback should focus on serious errors or those that may go unchecked or unnoticed by students themselves or other feedback providers.

The findings of the current study offer several pedagogical implications for L2 writing teachers in this and similar contexts. Most importantly, the findings indicate that student-initiated feedback could be deployed as an alternative source of feedback or a supplementary pedagogical option in EFL contexts where the class size is increasing and teachers are required to assume more administrative responsibilities and are wrestling with the time-consuming task of correcting a large number of writing papers teeming with numerous linguistic errors (Miao et al., 2006). Thus, it stands to reason that teachers might consider holding students responsible for correcting a portion of their errors themselves so that they can allocate sufficient time to address meaning-based areas of writing development because it is meaning that is “the source of the energy required for learning” (Wenger, 1998, p. 266). Similar to their counterparts in other EFL contexts (e.g., Lee, 2016; Naghdipour, 2016, 2021; Shen et al., 2020), Omani students are also accustomed to an exam-based and teacher-centered pedagogy, and as a result possess a poor repertoire of learning strategies and are relatively unfamiliar with self-study techniques. Such unpreparedness for the academic challenges at university, where written assignments and projects have become the building blocks of assessment, may result in negative effects on their learning and put pressure on teachers if they wish to implement more student-centered instructional practices. Therefore, although catering to the real learning needs of students should be given priority, writing teachers should acculturate students to more academic student-controlled learning practices to help them play a more active role in their own learning. In addition, L2 writing teachers need to recognize the potential of technological advancements for writing development and provide students with the proper tools and training to help them better harness the power of technology for producing more error-free texts (Min, 2006; Zundert et al., 2010). That said, L2 writing teachers should also be cautious of students’ use of technological applications and software. While translating individual words, for example, is a totally acceptable practice, translating an entire sentence or more would constitute plagiarism. Likewise, more effort should be put into ensuring that students’ writing is not revised or corrected substantially by others because it could be also seen as a form of academic dishonesty.

While the findings provide new insights into some of the day-to-day challenges L2 writing teachers encounter in their classes, the results should be treated with caution because of some limitations. First, the data for this study came from a small sample size living and studying in a particular context where spoken, informal English plays a strong role due to the presence of a large number of international employees whose language students tend to use when they write (Naghdipour, 2021). Second, students edited an artificial text on the pre-test and post-test that was not their own production. Requiring students to write and edit their own texts would be more likely to enhance their engagement and motivation in completing the task and thus lead to a higher validity. Third, while students were encouraged to attend to other aspects of their writing such as content and organization of their ideas and paragraphs, these areas were not examined in this study. Further studies need to consider fluency, complexity, and quality of students’ writing to examine the effect of each type of feedback on these constructs. As another limitation, although it is difficult to figure out how ‘controlled’ a control group is, in terms of using the sources and resources all students have access to these days, it is worth noting that having students rather than encouraging them, draw on these resources are two different scenarios. Indeed, it was observed that some students in the control group also worked together outside the classroom, engaged in self-study strategies, and drew on a number of resources to identify and correct errors in their writing. Future research should address this limitation by investigating what sources and resources students in both experimental group and control group would consult to reduce their errors. Finally, student-initiated feedback was only compared with one particular type of teacher-initiated feedback (direct corrective feedback). If other types of feedback (such as indirect feedback) were used, different results may be found.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the journal editors and reviewers for their constructive and valuable feedback.

References

- Berg, B. C. (1999). The effects of trained peer response on ESL students' revision types and writing quality. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 8(3), 215–241.
- Black, P. J., & Wiliam, D. (2009). Developing the theory of formative assessment. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 21, 5–31.
- Carless, D., & Boud, D. (2018). The development of student feedback literacy: enabling uptake of feedback. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 43(8), 1315–1325.
- Carless, D., Salter, D., Yang, M., & Lam, J. (2010). Developing sustainable feedback practices. *Studies in Higher Education*, 30(5), 1–13.
- Ekiert M., di Gennaro K. (2021). Focused written corrective feedback and linguistic target mastery: Conceptual replication of Bitchener and Knoch (2010). *Language Teaching*, 54, 71–89.
- Ferris, D. R. (2006). Does error feedback help student writers? New evidence on the short- and long-term effects of written error correction. In K. Hyland & F. Hyland (Eds.), *Feedback in second language writing: Contexts and issues* (pp. 81–104). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Ferris, D. R. (2007). Preparing teachers to respond to student writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 16, 165–193.
- Ferris, D. R. (2014). Responding to student writing: Teachers' philosophies and practices. *Assessing Writing*, 19(1), 6–23.
- Ferris, D. R., Liu, H., Sinha, A., & Senna, M. (2013). Written corrective feedback for individual L2 writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 22(3), 307–329.
- Han, Y. (2019). Written corrective feedback from an ecological perspective: The interaction between the context and individual learners. *System*, 80, 288–303.
- Hyland, K. (2007). Genre pedagogy: Language, literacy and L2 writing instruction. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 16, 148–164.
- Hyland, K., & Hyland, F. (2006). Feedback on second language students' writing. *Language Teaching*, 39(2), 83–101.
- Lázaro Ibarrola, A. (2013). Reformulation and Self-correction: Insights into correction strategies for EFL writing in a school context. *Vigo International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 10, 29–49.
- Lee, I. (2016). Teacher Education on Feedback in EFL Writing: Issues, Challenges, and Future Directions. *TESOL Quarterly*, 50(2), 518–527.
- Lee, I. (2017). *Classroom Writing Assessment and Feedback in L2 School Contexts*. Springer eBooks.
- Leki, I. (1991). The preferences of ESL students for error correction in college-level writing classes. *Foreign Language Annals*, 24, 203–221.
- Liu, Q., & Brown, D. (2015). Methodological synthesis of research on the effectiveness of corrective feedback in L2 writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 30, 66–81.
- Makino, T. Y. (1993). Learner self-correction in EFL written compositions. *ELT Journal*, 47(4), 337–341.
- Mawlawi Diab, N. (2016). A comparison of peer, teacher and self-feedback on the reduction of language errors in student essays. *System*, 57, 55–65.
- Miao, Y., Badger, R., & Zhen, Y. (2006). A comparative study of peer and teacher feedback in a Chinese EFL writing class. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 15, 179–200.
- Min, H. (2006). The effects of trained peer review on EFL students' revision types and writing quality. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 15(2), 118–141.
- Naghdipour, B. (2016). English writing instruction in Iran: Implications for second language writing curriculum and pedagogy. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 32, 81–87.
- Naghdipour, B. (2021). English writing pedagogy at the crossroads: The case of Oman. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 52, 100815.
- Naghdipour, B. (2022). ICT-enabled informal learning in EFL writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 56, 100893.
- Russell, J., & Spada, N. (2006). The effectiveness of corrective feedback for the acquisition of L2 grammar. In J. Norris (Ed.), *Synthesizing Research on Language Learning and Teaching* (pp. 133–163). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Séror, J. (2011). Alternative sources of feedback and second language writing development in university content courses. *The Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 14(1), 118–143.

- Shen, B., Bai, B. & Xue, W. (2020). The effects of peer assessment on learner autonomy: An empirical study in a Chinese college English writing class. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 64, 1-10.
- Sheen, Y. (2007). The effect of focused written corrective feedback and language aptitude on ESL learners' acquisition of articles. *TESOL Quarterly*, 41, 255–283.
- Schunk, D. H., & Greene, J. A. (2018). *Handbook of self-regulation of learning and performance* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Storch, N., & Tapper, J. (1996). Patterns of NNS student annotations when identifying areas of concern in their writing. *System*, 24(3), 323–336.
- Suzuki, M. (2008). Japanese learners' self revisions and peer revisions of their written compositions in English. *TESOL Quarterly*, 42(2), 209–233.
- Trinder, R. (2017). Informal and deliberate learning with new technologies. *ELT Journal*, 71(4), 401–412.
- Truscott, J. (1996). The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes. *Language Learning*, 46, 327–369.
- Truscott, J. (2007). The effect of error correction on learners' ability to write accurately. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 16, 255–272.
- Truscott, J., & Hsu, A. Y. (2008). Error correction, revision, and learning. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 17, 292–305.
- Tsui, A.B.M., & Ng, M. (2000). Do secondary L2 writers benefit from peer comments? *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 9(2), 147-170.
- van Zundert, M., Sluijsmans, D. M. A., & van Merriënboer, J. J. G. (2010). Effective peer assessment processes: Research findings and future directions. *Learning and Instruction*, 20(4), 270–279.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Interaction between learning and development (M. Lopez-Morillas, Trans.). In M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman (Eds.). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (pp. 79–91). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wang, W. (2014). Students' perceptions of rubric-referenced peer feedback on EFL writing: A longitudinal inquiry. *Assessing Writing*, 19, 80–96.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 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*, 8(3), 265–289.
- Zou, D., Xie, H., & Wang, F. L. (2022). Effects of technology enhanced peer, teacher and self-feedback on students' collaborative writing, critical thinking tendency and engagement in learning. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 35(1), 166–185.
- Zhang, S. (1995). Re-examining the affective advantage of peer feedback in the ESL writing class. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 4(3), 209–222.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. What is your evaluation of the feedback activities you experienced during the semester? Which activity/strategy helped you the most?
2. What sources or resources did you use to correct your errors (grammar, vocabulary and punctuation)?
3. Who did you ask to give you feedback on your writing? Who helped the most?
4. What challenges did you have with this type of feedback?
5. Do you think it is good to ask students to correct their own errors? Do you see any advantages or disadvantages?

Appendix B: Sample Coding Scheme for Interview Data

Themes	Codes	Excerpts
Useful learning strategies	Self-editing	<i>I think that teachers should focus on those errors that are very serious and let students take care of those less serious errors.</i>
	Peer-feedback	<i>As for peer feedback, my classmates corrected many of my grammar and spelling mistakes.</i>
Useful learning	Mediating tools	<i>I used a dictionary to translate words and phrases I didn't know from Arabic into English.</i>

sources or resources	Mediating artifacts	<i>Reading material from 'Introduction to Psychology' helped me a lot to improve my writing. For example, I was curious to know how to write correct sentences.</i>
Human feedback providers	Fellow students	<i>I have a friend who is studying here as a senior student. We came to university together and when she is driving I read my work for her and she tells me what is wrong in my essay.</i>
	Competent others	<i>My father read my essay and gave me feedback because his English is much better than mine. He studied in the UK as a navy officer.</i>
Challenges of student-centered feedback	Accountability	<i>These days, people are very busy. My uncle checked my writing several times, but he did it very quickly and I felt there were still mistakes.</i>
	Trust	<i>I think even if others or even we correct our own papers, we still need teacher feedback because we trust it the most and we also want to know what teachers want from us in the exam.</i>
Evaluation of student-centered feedback	Benefits	<i>In the beginning, I had bad feelings. Now it is okay. We know what we are doing and we got used to it. We know that at the end of the day we should learn and be responsible for our learning.</i>
	Drawbacks	<i>I have always felt that there are still mistakes in my writing when I receive peer feedback or I correct my errors. I think nobody can correct my mistakes like the teacher.</i>

About the Author(s)

Bakhtiar Naghdipour (<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4091-9815>) holds a Ph.D. in English Language Teaching (ELT) with a focus on Second Language Writing currently teaching undergraduate and graduate writing, rhetoric, and communication courses at the Writing Center Program at Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan. His research interests focus on second and foreign language writing pedagogy and curriculum, literacy practices, and blended learning. Some of his publications have appeared in *The Journal of Second Language Writing*, *The Curriculum Journal*, and *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*.