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RESEARCH PAPER

Investigating Pakistani EFL Students' Beliefs and their Impact on Written Constructive Feedback

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ABSTRACT

Students' beliefs are significant factor which play vital role in the learning of foreign language. The present study investigated this important factor on undergraduate EFL students at Mir Chakar Khan Rind University Sibi-Balochistan, Pakistan. The study quasi-experimental and used questionnaire and interviews. Students were divided into two groups: experimental and control group. Writing accuracy for the pre and two post delayed tests was checked and statistically analyzed on SPSS. Different repeated measures ANOVA tests were used. Findings revealed that there were marginal differences in beliefs of the students from urban and rural areas. Results showed that types of the written CF which are the most effective were different according to their beliefs. Besides, beliefs about written CF were also found to have significant impact on students' writing accuracy. Students in the control group showed significant accuracy in writing as compared to the students in the control group. Finally, the findings have theoretical implication pertaining to the university students' cognitive development.

Keywords	Beliefs, EFL Students, Facilitate, Theoretical, Written CF

Introduction

This is one of the most instructional practices in L2 learning classrooms to provide WCF (Yang, Potts, & Shanks, 2017), which is viewed by the most EFL instructors as a part of their jobs and that is also what their students expect. Nevertheless, the role of WCF as an instructional instrument to facilitate foreign language (henceforth FL) learning has been unclear generally. Moreover, it also investigates the extent to which correction in grammatical comprehension could help EFL learners and notice their errors in writing whether or not that leads to more accuracy in subsequent producing drafts.

The opening theme of this current pedagogical debate regarding the significance of WCF stemmed from Truscott's (1996) claim that correction of grammatical comprehension was not only ineffective but harmful also, and therefore, might be abandoned. Responding to this argument, and defending the case of grammar correction, Rich et al. (2017) contended that claims made by Truscott were impulsive. Ferris (2015) put forth the fast emerging research evidence to support the effectiveness of WCF. Ferris also contended that EFL students require supplementary adjusted intrusion from their teachers in order to provide compensation for their

limitations. Students also need to learn some strategies to assist them in finding out corrections and preventing the errors in EFL writing.

In spite of the several research studies conducted over the last two decades, some important issues and criticism on the studies of the effects of WCF can be highlighted which are: (1) the incompetence to provide evidence in relation to language that EFL learners apply the information obtained from WCF on the earlier written prompts to new writing production (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Bruton, 2009 and (2) the deficiency of WCF research studies outlined within the SLA theory (Shabir, 2017).

Although, there is increasing indication of the significant relationship between WCF and development in EFL writing over the time, as Cahyono (2016) observed that the basis of research studies has been restricted so far to examine the effectiveness of WCF (i.e., students are provided WCF on one or two types of errors) with particular linguistic categories (e.g., the use of verbs or articles). Problem with this pedagogical method is that, as Chen, Nassaji and Liu (2016) illustrate, focusing on one or two grammar or linguistic categories might lead EFL learners to be consciously involved into monitoring the use of the targeted linguistic features, while overlooking the others. From this perspective, providing focused WCF received criticisms because it did not take into consideration the goals of EFL classroom instructions as well as the purpose of grammatical corrections which are intended to help language learners increase their accuracy as a whole, not in one or two features of grammars (e.g., Luan & Ishak, 2018; Aranha & Cavalari, 2015).

On the other hands, some research studies have probed the impacts of comprehensive WCF that is the most extensively applied in the teaching grammar comprehension in EFL classrooms in which EFL students are provided error corrections on several error types simultaneously. The research studies (e.g., Al-bakri, 2015; Nemati et al. 2017; Cahyono, 2016) have examined the usefulness of comprehensive WCF on new written drafts which have evaluated the outcomes of their various treatments by common measures of accuracy e.g., percentage/ratio of error-free words (kartchava, 2016), error-free sentences and clauses (Liskinasih, 2016), and error rate in the broader categories such as 'non-grammatical' and 'grammatical'(Han, 2017).

The findings and deductions of these experimental research studies revealed that the learners in the experimental groups acquired (or did not acquire) knowledge obtained from WCF that was provided on the previous writing tasks (i.e., pre-tests) to a second writing tasks (i.e., posttests). Hence, if there is no significant difference in the average errors' rates between two groups (i.e., experimental group and control group) in the learners' second texts; it is then presumed that the learners of the experimental group used no knowledge gained from the WCF. Nonetheless, as Gries & Deshors (2015) argue that there are several illustrations in which errors in the subsequent written drafts stand in no relation with the previously corrected errors. So, application of such metrics provides little evidence on the effects of WCF in subsequent writings. Likewise, the researcher himself contends that global methods of providing accuracy may also run the risk of complicating the cases in which learning has occurred.

This question is vital as finding the evidence of how WCF can affect the specific linguistic features may provide more insight into assessing the effectiveness and pedagogical significance of a certain WCF treatment by addressing Truscott's claims (1996) that no WCF is useful to help the learners acquiring lexical and syntactic

knowledge. In doing so, WCF research study requires to be guided by the SLA theory because Rizwan and Akhtar (2016) elucidate that some theories can be invoked to address the efficacy or lack regarding errors' correction (p. 376). Similarly, within the perspective of learning EFL writing, wherein writing is perceived as a tool for EFL learning, SLA-based research studies on grammar correction in writing are significant to obtain better understandings of the role of writing skill and learning grammar for L2 efficacy.

Literature Review

In comparison to what happens in WCF studies, the relationship between theory and research studies has been a common practice in any oral corrective feedback investigation for several years (e.g., Ahiatrogah, Madjoub & Bervell, 2013; Ellis, 2008). Only a few studies conducted on longitudinal design (Waller & Papi, 2017; Holec, 2010; Rummel, 2014; García-Mayo & Labandibar, 2017) were designed to investigate the efficacy of comprehensive WCF within SLA approach. These studies were carried out by using principles of SAT (Skill Acquisition Theory) to frame for providing WCF in EFL classrooms. According to the finding of these studies as mentioned before, WCF should give reflection of "what is the most needed by an individual learner" and "what the learner shows in producing writing" and both the writing activities and the WCF should be "timely, meaningful, constant and easy to be managed" (Cephe & Yalcin, 2015).

Likewise, in the area of WCF and oral CF, earlier studies within both the sociocultural and interactionist perspectives, have established a series of constructs and involved in productive discussions. They allowed to conduct more forceful, empirically-based investigations (Fu & Nassaji, 2016; Ellis, 2012). Predominantly, the concepts of uptake and noticing have attracted much attention in the area of oral CF research (Lyster & Ranta, 2017) as they could develop L2 learners' abilities to reform their current knowledge and subsequent acquisition. 'Noticing' refers to denote "the conscious awareness of surface-level linguistic phenomena (Belaid & Murray, 2015). 'Uptake' is learners' response to the teacher's feedback provided on a linguistic feature, and is considered effective when the learners use those features correctly or understand them (Belaid & Murray, 2015; Hassan, 2020a; Hassan, 2021b). Though, the correct use and understanding of L2 forms as Panova and lyster (2012) denote, do not specify that the features have been acquired; instead, they claim that it is essential to examine whether the learners are able to yield the correct forms on their subsequent writings. But, the research studies on WCF that have to examine these constructs to some extent, are still very limited. These investigations (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2012; Rummel, 2014; Saeed, 2015; Kerz et al., 2017), as discussed in literature, particularly probed the processing of the WCF on learners' uptake and noticing during text revisions by focusing certain linguistic features without taking into consideration the students' beliefs towards WCF. This provided a gap for the current study. Therefore, the present research first explored EFL students' beliefs towards comprehensive WCF and then investigated the impacts of comprehensive WCF on the subsequent revisions in writing to help them obtaining accuracy in large number of writings. This allowed the researcher to observe the students' accuracy in writing over the different period of time.

Material and Methods

The study was quasi-experimental which used instruments: questionnaire and interviews to collect data from EFL students. Population was 163 undergraduate EFL students at Mir Chakar Khan Rind University Sibi. Sample population was

selected by applying purposive sampling technique. Students were divided into two groups: experimental and control group. Duration of the study was whole semester. Therefore, data were collected over different period of time to see accuracy of writing in the pre and two post delayed tests.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Students' feedback preferences and beliefs (N=50, Rural)

Items	Direct CF	Indirect CF	Metalinguistic CF
Which type of written CF you believe will help you the most in future?	49	01	0
Which type of written CF will you prefer to receive in future?	49	01	0

During the interviews when it was asked form the students what they would feel if they were not given any written CF, they responded that they could not improve their writing; however, two of the students said that they would request their teacher and tell, she would have perhaps forgotten to provide feedback on their writing (RS2 & RS20). Bio-data of the rural students revealed that 38 out of 50 students were studied at government higher secondary schools before they joined university as students while other students got education form private higher secondary institutions except one who was made to receive education in well reputed private institution. Furthermore, in the interview one student only agreed on indirect CF. Teachers in private college used indirect feedback. He added that students from English medium school systems got better learning environment that is he preferred to receive indirect CF. The other students said that in government higher secondary institutions, EFL teachers used mixed types of written CF due to which they could not obtain accuracy in their writing in pre-education. However, in the research process, they preferred to receive direct CF because it seemed to them effective.

Table 2
Comparison of Urban and Rural Students' feedback preferences and beliefs

Items	Direct CF		Indirect CF		Metalinguistic CF	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Which type of written CF you believe will help you the most in future?	24(29.26%)	49(98%)	52(63.41%)	01(2%)	7.31 (%)	0
Which type of written CF will you prefer to receive in future?	24(29.26%)	49(98%)	52(63.41%)	01(2%)	7.31 (%)	0

Table 3
Descriptive statistical results for Mean scores of Urban students' tests

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-Test		Delayed Post-test 1		Delayed Post-test 2	
		Mean	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*
Direct	25	83.20	9.40	86.10	13.90	95.43	9.23	96.44	9.23
Indirect	35	82.27	13.30	89.63	5.83	93.77	6.14	96.20	12.33
Metaling.	35	79.39	10.89	81.41	4.13	89.17	4.91	87.31	9.27
Control	22	91.73	93.56	90.37	7.80	93.33	6.60	91.89	9.13

The table 3 shows the mean % for the four tests conducted over different periods of time. Mean scores reveals that although students in the control group appeared to be stronger at the very out set as compared to other three groups but

with not so much significance difference and they showed their improvement slightly on the immediate post-test and this group also did not reveal any significant development in writing accuracy on the other two delayed post-tests. Whereas, three written CF groups (direct, indirect CF & metalinguistic) showed an observable accuracy rate in writing on their immediate post-tests and more significant improvement on their first delayed post-test. Although, there was a slight decline improvement observed in the indirect CF group on their 2nd delayed post-test yet three of the groups still revealed notable consistency in their improvement right from their pre-test.

To further compare the experimental group and control groups' scores in one pre-test, post-test and two delayed post-tests, a series ANOVAs were calculated. As one-way ANOVA revealed no significance difference between three groups F (3, 58.20) =.427, *p*=.76. a two-way repeated measures ANOVA was run. Scores of the test were inserted as the dependent variable of time and two written CF as independent variables.

Table 4
Two-way ANOVA results for urban students

Source	Df	F	*p*
Between subjects			
Written CF	2	.427	.835
Within subject			
Time	3	16.13	.000
Time x Written CF	9	1.819	.141

The above table 4 shows that there is no significant relationship between time and the types of written CF provided to the students. However, a significant difference has been noted regarding time and within the subjects, impacts are observed. Upon this, one-way ANOVAs were run which revealed that three of the written CF groups showed significant development in writing accuracy (direct written CF, p value= .00, indirect written CF, p value = .05 and metalinguistic, p value= .03) over different period of time. Contrary to this, control group did not show such consistency on improvement in writing accuracy (p value= .74). although the students who received direct written CF, they first showed a decline in writing accuracy in the immediate post-test which was insignificant at time 2 (post-test), yet they were able to show improvement in their writing accuracy at test 3 (first delayed post-test). Whereas, indirect CF group and metalinguistic CF depicted consistency in showing significant increase in the accuracy at time 2 and they kept up improving significantly at time 3.

The results revealed that although, three written CF groups were witnessed to have decline in the accuracy rate which was not, in fact, significant from time 3 to time 4, yet they continued to significantly acquire a higher rate of writing accuracy than they showed at the very outset of the study. The control group which at the beginning, started with showing a higher rate of writing accuracy, did not show significant variation in writing accuracy over the total course of the research.

Table 5
Descriptive statistical results for Mean scores of Rural students' tests

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-Test		Delayed Post-test 1		Delayed Post-test 2	
		Mean	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*
Direct	**25**	87.19	11.40	90.11	10.89	99.41	0.53	99.54	9.33
Indirect	**10**	87.17	8.30	84.53	7.73	91.67	8.14	94.19	8.13

Control	**15**	88.03	8.80	86.17	8.60	87.13	8.60	89.29	8.17

The table 5 shows the mean % for the four tests conducted over different periods of time. Mean scores reveals that although students in the control group showed steady development at all the four tests and they showed a slight decline on the immediate post-test and this group also did not reveal any significant difference or development in obtaining writing accuracy on the other two delayed post-tests. Whereas, both written CF groups (direct and indirect CF) showed accuracy development differently. The indirect CF group revealed an observable decline in their immediate post-test and contrastively sudden increase in their 1st delayed post-test. At the end, another decrease in the delayed post-test was noted. However, direct CF group revealed an observable accuracy rate in writing between the pre-test and immediate post-test. In addition to this, rural students in the direct CF group also showed significant results in obtaining writing accuracy between the immediate post-test and 1st delayed post-test which remained constant on the 2nd delayed post-test. Although, there was a slight decline observed in the indirect CF group on their 2nd delayed post-test yet both groups still revealed notable differences in their improvement right from their pre-test.

To further compare the experimental group and control groups' scores in one pre-test, post-test and two delayed post-tests, a series of ANOVAs were calculated. As one-way ANOVA revealed no significant difference between two groups $F (3, 22.59) =.730$, $p=.73$; hence, a two-way repeated measures ANOVA was applied. The Score of the test were inserted as the dependent variable of time and two written CF as independent variables.

Findings of rural university students

For the rural student-participants too, same process was adopted as was applied for the urban students. Data collected from students' surveys and interview questions were used putting them into groups according to their preferred type of written CF. Out of 50 rural students, 49 students preferred to receive direct written CF, only one student preferred to receive indirect CF and no student preferred to receive metalinguistic CF. Whereas, students were given no written CF in the control group.

Table 6
Students able to eliminate errors on both delayed post-tests (rural)

	Experimental group	Control group
Eliminated the targeted errors.	34 (68%)	10 (32%)
Did not eliminate the targeted errors.	16(32%)	21 (68%)

Out of 50 rural students who got written CF according to their preferences, 34 students were able to eliminate their all targeted errors on their 2nd delayed post-test as the above table shows. Moreover, of the 16 students were unable to eradicate all their targeted errors on their last delayed post-test. These are similar findings to the urban students which is an evidence that students' beliefs have impact on the uptake and retention of the written CF for improving in the targeted linguistic features. However, in contrast to the urban students, less number of rural students in the control group were able to eliminate their targeted errors.

The findings of the present study have significant theoretical implication pertaining to the university students' developmental levels. How these levels may have impact on the effectiveness of written CF provided by their teachers. When selecting linguistic and grammatical features to provide written feedback, teachers usually select the ones which may hinder the students' ability to communicate (Baker & Burri, 2016). Admissions such as these can support to Truscott's (1996) assertion that the ways, a teacher provides corrective feedback on L2 learners' writing is not useful. It is because teachers often do not keep in mind the students' developmental levels in the selection of grammatical features. Belaid and Murray (2015) presented their argument that in order to make grammar instruction effective, it should happen when a student is at the stage where he could catch grammatical point quite naturally. In the information processing models, the salience of the written CF is significant. It means that student's current grammatical knowledge could impact his ability to pay attention to the provided feedback (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2014). Moreover, Krashen' i+1 (1985) and Vygotsky's ZPD (1978) assert that students' developmental levels should be considered when providing any type of corrective feedback. As these theories say something about the significance of taking into account the students' levels, therefore, it looks quite relevant issue. However, if the teacher merely provides feedback on the issues that cause problems, he cannot provide salient CF to his students. Although ability to convey ideas effectively is very significant to students'' L2 writing. After consideration of the theory, it becomes clear that simply targeting students' issues which interfere with the effective communication of ideas cannot be the better strategy for providing any feedback. The current study provides theoretical implication here that a teacher must take into account students' contextual factors in order to understand his/her development level so that effective commutation may be occurred for providing preferred CF. According to Plonsky and Mills (2016), even if CF is tailored towards students' errors, if it is not up to their developmental levels, it may not be useful and effective.

The findings of the present study also support the current empirical research about written CF and students' language learning beliefs. in this respect, this research corroborates prior studies which investigated that focused written CF cannot improve the longer lasting acquisition of salient grammatical and linguistic features (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Cahyono, 2016; Cohen, 2015). Besides, this study added to current flow of research by focusing on comprehensive written CF including local and global errors which have received limited attention. This study also confirms to the findings of the Bitchener and Rummel (2015) study by revealing that written CF on local and global errors may help students acquire linguistic accuracy in some students. The study also endeavored to throw light on which type of written CF is most useful and effective. Regarding this question, no difference in the efficacy of three types of CF (direct, indirect & metalinguistic) was found among the treatment groups in urbans; however, direct written CF was proved to be the most effective and useful for the students' linguistic accuracy among rural students.

With regard to beliefs, this study lends great support to the earlier research which investigated differences in the beliefs among the students belonging to two different contexts. It adds to existing knowledge by investigating similarities and differences between university students coming from urban and rural areas in Pakistan. By employing multiple methods of data collection and cases, a complete picture of how university students' previous learning environment and educational experiences may affect their existing beliefs, is presented. The most significant research contribution of this study regarding language learning beliefs, is that it probes the extent to which differences of beliefs may impact students' development

of writing accuracy after they received written CF. As no earlier studies could investigate this issue; hence, this study has attempted to fill an important research gap. The current study has methodological contribution toward selecting data collection methods to investigate the written CF. Previous studies have mostly looked at this issue of providing written CF to improve writing accuracy of EFL students by collecting writing samples; however, the current study used questionnaires and semi-structured interviews along with collecting writing samples to present the holistic picture of the ways by which beliefs can have impact on Pakistani EFL students' uptake and retention of written CF (Hasan & Qureshi, 2020; Hasan, 2020a).

Conclusion

Douglas (2018) contended that language learning and its use are integrated into a world which is socially intervened; hence, those social aspects are required to be examined as a part of the similar cognitive process which underlies L2 learning and development. The present study has revealed that how previous social, contextual and educational experiences may be effective together for constructing students' existing beliefs about written CF and practices with respect to learning English as a foreign language. By taking this into consideration, future researchers may continue to investigate the environmental factors (present classroom environment, educational backgrounds, etc.) and social factors (cultural expectations, identity, etc.). This may also affect the extent to which provided CF is effective. Moreover, individual factors like personality, age, mental health, etc. should also be probed to examine if they have any impact on students' uptake and retention of written CF.

Recommendations

The current study has highlighted several issues that require further investigations. First of all, EFL students from other universities in Pakistan need to be further investigated to determine the extent to which findings of this research could be generalized. Besides, gender is another possible variable which if investigated, may explore further differences of foreign language learning beliefs which may also impact written CF. The current study was carried out on EFL students' beliefs towards written CF but future researcher may also add EFL teachers of universities in Pakistan to investigate what impact teachers' beliefs may have on students' choice toward written CF. In addition to this, similarities and differences of belief between teachers and students can also be important factor to explore.

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