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Students' Perceptions About Teachers' Written Feedback on Writing in a Moroccan University Context

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Introduction

There is no doubt that responding to students' writing is not an easy task. Writing feedback includes complex activities that range from pinpointing mistakes in punctuation, spelling, and grammar to commenting on the organisation, content, and relevance of what has been written. The complexity of such a task also stems from the variety of writing tasks that are both complex by nature and essential in the shaping of the language learning process. In a classroom writing context, providing feedback is one of the most frustrating and time-consuming tasks for any teacher because it requires providing feedback which leads to students recognising their next steps and how to take them.

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As a pedagogical tool, feedback, when provided effectively, should enhance the student's writing skill, trigger revision, and strengthen the student-teacher interaction (Lee, 2017). According to Ferris (2001), written feedback is a useful technique to interact with students writing assignments for it provides them with an individualised, contextualised and text-based response from the teacher. Teachers presume that feedback is an essential component of their workload. Likewise, students always seem to be eager to receive teachers' feedback on their writing, whether in the form of comments, suggestions, grades or codes (Leki, 1991). In academia, writing, in addition to its crucial role in the school curriculum, is liable for students' academic success. As a multi-faceted topic, in addition to its role in assessing the students' writing performance, feedback indicates their progress, provides solutions to problematic areas and engages them in future writing assignments.

Most studies on teachers' feedback have investigated its different critical facets, including its description, impact, and students' perception of and reaction to that feedback. The latter aspect determines whether students take their teachers' feedback seriously or not. Put differently, if the teacher's feedback conforms to the student's preferences, feedback can promote the student's writing skill and vice versa. Many scholars recommended that teachers should acknowledge and endorse their students' viewpoint about what effective feedback is (Ferris & Bitchener, 2012; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1996).

It seems that if students and teachers do not agree on the type of feedback to be provided, and if students do not equally engage in the feedback process, their expectations are not likely to be met, and they will be less likely to process the received feedback. Therefore, raising awareness of the importance of feedback and supporting and guiding learners in improving their writing skills are likely to create a positive teacher-learner interaction.

In this respect, this chapter aims at investigating the usefulness of teachers' feedback from learners' perspectives, with more heed given to the students' perceptions and preferences as far as this pedagogical tool is concerned. We will, in what follows, provide an overview of the relevant features of feedback and then discuss its main dimensions within the university context. This is meant to pave the way to explore how Moroccan

university students perceive their teachers' feedback on their writing assignments and how this perception affects their exploitation of the feedback received. Before concluding the chapter, we will examine the implications of this investigation in the classroom context.

Review of the Literature

Several studies have provided evidence on the role of quality feedback in promoting students' writing skills (e.g. Semke, 1984; Ferris, 1995; Lee, 2005; Seker & Dincer, 2014). They have highlighted the positive impact of quality feedback to improving writing, a complex activity that requires the use of critical thinking skills and cognitive abilities. There is also evidence that the teacher's formative feedback does influence the 'self-efficacy beliefs' of receivers (Duijnhouwer, Prins, & Stokking, 2010). Lee draws our attention to the role of the teacher:

teachers do not mainly correct errors and give scores to student writing, but they should provide mediated learning experience in the form of formative feedback to help students improve learning, to motivate them, and to make them autonomous writers in the long run. (Lee, 2017, p. 57)

When students feel they are on the right track towards progress, they will be endowed with a sense of fulfilment and will be looking ahead towards their targets. They will do their best to improve further towards their desired writing level in the future. This purpose is likely to be achieved once the teacher strives to provide quality feedback which will encourage the learners to cope not only with their writing difficulties but also to develop and reinforce their critical approach towards writing as a whole, as Lee (2017) and Walk (1996) have pointed out.

Feedback is now considered one of the critical elements in the process approach to teaching writing, and this has not always been the case. In the late sixties and early seventies, pedagogical interest was more invested in writing as a product than a process. This traditional approach focused on writing as a final product, and students were required to write accurately because of the belief that writing correct grammatical sentences was

a prerequisite to composing essays (Ashwell, 2000). In this traditional approach, or product approach, students would write assignments that teachers then correct, hoping that students would remember their errors and avoid them in subsequent tasks. Contrary to their teachers' expectations, students generally tended to forget about their teachers' comments. With the emergence of the process approach, writing is viewed as a cyclical and recursive process which includes planning, drafting, revising and editing. Lee explains the subsequent development:

Existing rules that require one-shot writing in a testing-oriented environment that emphasises scores should be changed so that new rules like multiple drafting and a greater emphasis on pre-writing instruction and post-writing reinforcement can be established. (Lee, 2017, p. 58)

Therefore, the teacher can interfere at different stages of the process via the use of a variety of techniques to respond to their students' writing—teacher-student conferences, peer feedback, oral and/or written feedback—with the aim of reducing the types of errors students frequently commit.

This shift to process writing occurred with recommendations to teachers to focus on content and organisation along with formal correctness, mainly grammar, style, and spelling. A balanced approach covering both form and discursive aspects of writing simultaneously was advocated by Krashen (1984), Ferris (1999), Hyland and Hyland (2001), Biber, Horn, and Nekrasova (2011) and many others. However, many researchers investigating feedback (Zamel, 1985; White & Arndt, 1991; Lee, 2005; Seker & Dincer, 2014) found that teachers focus more on formal aspects. Lee's study (2017), for example, shows that teachers are still predominantly preoccupied with grammatical errors. Others (Reid, 1998) argue, however, that teachers give priority to content. It seems that there are no conclusive results about what teachers focus on when correcting their students' writing. Teachers' preferences vary in relation to the curriculum, students' level and needs, and the teaching-learning context.

Previous research about students' opinions about their teachers' feedback can be categorised as follows: (a) students' preferences about the type of feedback they receive and (b) students' attitudes towards their

teachers' feedback. In the literature, although there are divergent findings concerning students' preferences about whether feedback should be content-based (Semke, 1984) or grammar-based (Ashwell, 2000; Lee, 2005), among other aspects, most studies (for instance, Hattie, 2009) call attention to the necessity for teachers and students to agree on common feedback purposes, types and strategies. In fact, both teachers and students need to work together in order to meet the needs and expectations of writing tasks.

In the second line of inquiry, Cohen (1987) found out that his respondents did not process their teachers' feedback adequately because of the lack of a wide range of strategies that could have allowed them to react actively towards their teachers' feedback. As a result, their teachers' feedback had little impact on them. McCurdy (1992) reported more positive findings when he claimed that his respondents considered the teacher's feedback useful and helpful though they had problems in understanding and dealing with it.

Scholars agree that "the student needs to be an active agent in the feedback process if successful learning is to take place" (Busse, 2014, p. 161). Both teachers and students need to have a clear conviction that they are on the right path to create a synchronous interaction. In this respect, Ferris and Bitchener (2012) remind us that "It is a well-established fact that most learners want and expect clear and regular feedback on their writing" (p. 141) but comment that "there is always the possibility that too much feedback at any one time might be de-motivating or too burdensome for cognitive processing" (ibid.). Thus, they conclude that "careful consideration needs to be given to the amount of feedback that learners are given" (ibid.).

Research Questions

Having established the importance of teachers' feedback in foreign-language writing and its subsequent effect on students' academic success, the main purpose of the present study is to contribute to this growing area of research by developing an understanding of the learner's views, attitudes and preferences towards their teacher's feedback.

Based on the stated aim, the study intends to address the following research questions:

- How do higher education students view their teachers' feedback on their writing assignments?
- What are the students' preferences about their teachers' feedback?
- To what extent do the students benefit from their teachers' feedback?

In addition to their research relevance, the answers to these questions can be insightful to teachers who can use the findings of this investigation to adjust their feedback practices to students' needs.

Significance of the Study

Research on feedback has been mostly restricted to investigating English in second-language contexts with a manageable class size environment, and little attention has been paid to academic practices in which English is learned as a foreign language. In conjunction with this gap in the previous research, writing in general and feedback in particular, has not been sufficiently investigated to reach conclusive findings, even though it is an essential component for academic success. In addition, to the best of our knowledge, there are very few publications in the literature about the issue of students' perceptions of teachers' feedback in Moroccan higher education institutions where the number of students in a class (ranging between 120–160) is huge.

Methodology

Since this investigation is exploratory and descriptive in nature, a quantitative approach has been employed. The questionnaire is considered the appropriate quantitative instrument used in this study. By relying on the quantitative mode of inquiry, we attempt to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions towards their teachers' feedback so as to determine the different factors behind their attitudes and to find

out the extent to which the teachers' feedback can be beneficial and motivating to students.

Questionnaire

Data were collected through a survey that aimed to measure students' perceptions of their teachers' feedback on their written work. Questionnaires with close-ended questions were considered the most appropriate data collection method for this study because they allow informants to offer accurate and measurable responses.

Keeping in mind the learning practices of the teachers in the English Department of the Sultan Moulay Slimane University Faculty of Arts and Humanities in Beni Mellal and the purpose of the study, a two-page questionnaire was constructed on the basis of hybrid surveys conducted by Amrhein and Nassaji's (2010) and Chen, Nassaji, and Liu's (2016) original designs. However, this preliminary version underwent considerable revision to simplify the items and make them accessible to the participants. The final version of the questionnaire (see Appendix), in addition to the demographic information of the participants (age, gender, etc.), consists of nine items: five on the subjects' own perception of their teachers' feedback and four on their preferences about the feedback they want to receive. The questionnaire items comprise multiple-choice questions and Likert-scale items.

Participants

The target population of the current study was English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities in Beni Mellal. The sample included 261 fifth-semester students aged between 19 and 35 in the English Department (mean age: 21.5). There were 183 (70%) female and 78 (30%) male students. All respondents have been studying EFL for more than five years. They are Moroccan Arabic or Berber native speakers.

During the first four semesters at the English Department, students study writing techniques and composition once a week, with each session lasting two hours. The syllabus lays stress on form and content and covers all aspects of writing composition, including shifts, sentence variety, punctuation, coherence, cohesion, paragraph structure, thesis statement, essay structure, the writing process, and types of essays, in addition to an introduction to research methodology. Therefore, the syllabus deals with writing at the level of the sentence first, then the paragraph, and subsequently the essay and research paper.

Data Collection

All the students' participating in the study were asked to fill in a questionnaire in class under the supervision of their teachers who had explained the instructions and goals of the study having distributed the questionnaires at the end of a composition class. Most students completed the questionnaire in about twenty minutes.

The compiled data by the questionnaire was analysed with SPSS 17.0 software, as the primary statistical tool to investigate the responses of the participating students and to answer the research question. Descriptive statistics were used for measuring percentages and graphical representations; the aim was to discern the students' perceptions about their teachers' feedback and to determine the extent to which it promotes their writing skill. These measures have allowed us to classify the findings of the study in a systematic way.

Results

In order to process the data, we investigated the frequencies and percentages of responses provided by the participants. Therefore, in answer to the first question of the questionnaire related to how the subject students view their teachers' feedback, the majority of respondents held a positive view regarding the usefulness of the feedback provided by their teachers. The results in Fig. 2.1 reveal that most students (62%) agreed that the

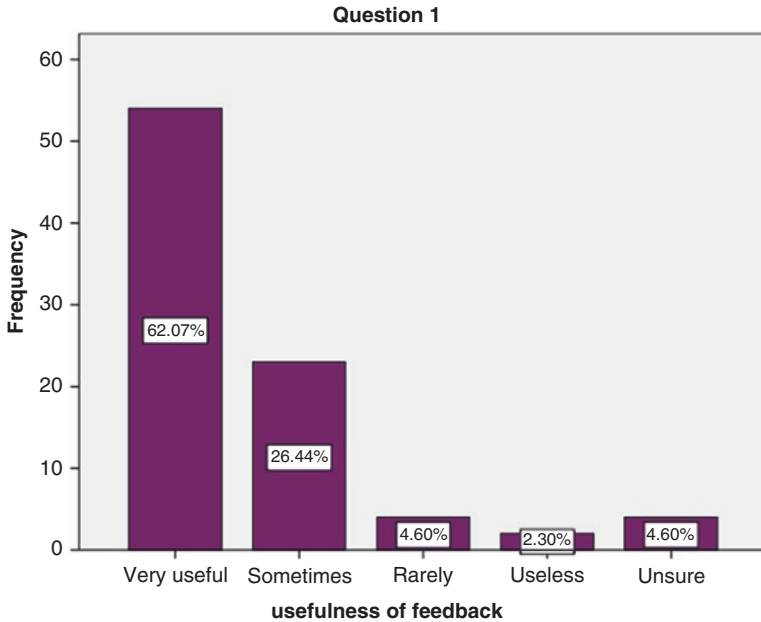


Fig. 2.1 Usefulness of the teachers' feedback

teachers' feedback is very beneficial and, consequently, has a positive impact on improving their writing skill. Few students considered it unrewarding because they find it useless (2%) or feel unsure (5%) of its benefits.

Item 2 of the questionnaire was designed to measure students' perceptions of their ability to understand the teachers' feedback. The statistical representation demonstrates that most students managed to get the significance of the comments provided by the teacher. It is apparent that there is an insignificant difference between the percentages, regarding the options 'Often' (31%), 'Usually' (29%) and 'Sometimes' (29%). About one-third of the respondents 'Sometimes' (29%) had difficulties in deciphering the teachers' feedback. The most striking remark to draw from Fig. 2.2 is that not one of the respondents selected the option 'never', hence its absence from the graph.

When the students were asked about their ability to revise their compositions in relation to the received feedback, their responses were remarkably revealing, as Fig. 2.3 illustrates. It is very obvious that the

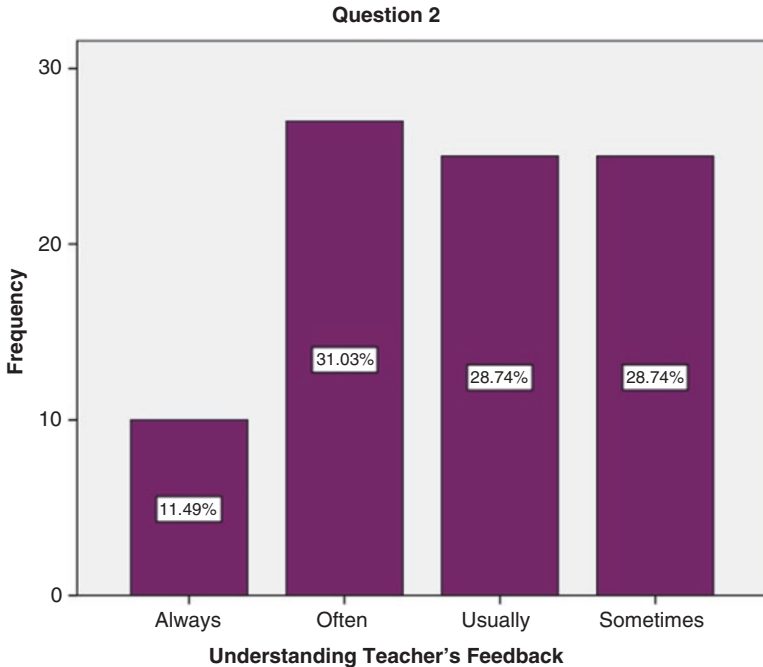


Fig. 2.2 Students' understanding of teachers' feedback

majority of students (55% + 17%) find it hard to revise their written assignments. The lowest percentage is associated with the option 'often'. A small number of students assumed that they are either 'Usually' (17%) or 'often' (11%) able to work on and correct their errors. Question 3 was set as a follow up to question 2. However, it seems striking that there turns out to be no correlation between the students' understanding of the teachers' feedback (item 2) and their ability to correct their errors (item 3).

With regard to follow-up activities that the teachers' design as remedial work to consolidate the learning experience after assessing the students' writing, Fig. 2.4 reveals that teachers tend to skip this stage of the writing process as mentioned by 63% of the respondents. It is very apparent that the highest percentage is attributed to the first option 'no follow-up activities (63%)'. This demonstrates that teachers provided feedback to the end product. Just 9% of respondents selected the third option 'tutoring with the teacher'. This percentage reflects the rare use of teacher-student

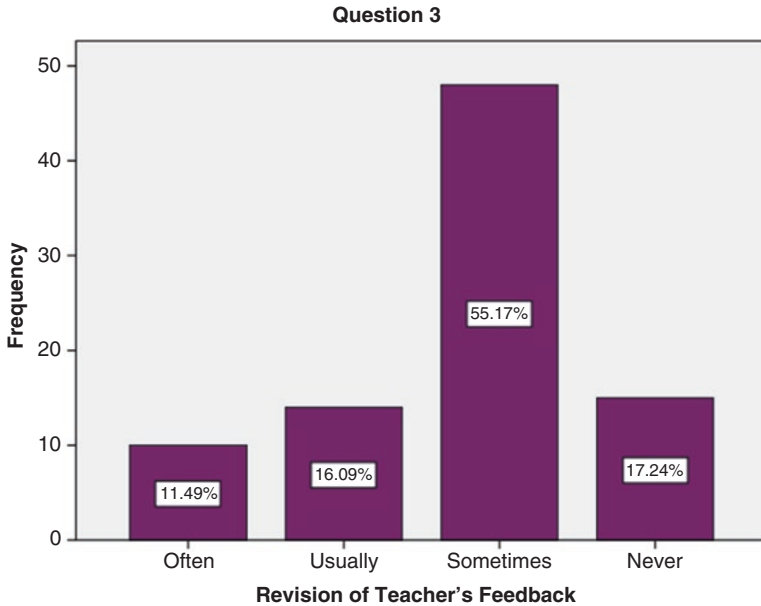


Fig. 2.3 Students' revision of their writing

conferencing. Only one-quarter of the students (25%) completed any revision to their compositions. Thus there is an absence of substantial revision that can attend to teachers' feedback. There seems to be a general tendency among teachers to skip the follow-up activities and to avoid conferencing with students. A few students (2%) selected 'other' but did not specify what they meant by the term, even though they were required to explain it in the questionnaire. The data in graph 4 provides a satisfactory explanation for the students' difficulty to revise their teachers' feedback.

Concerning Fig. 2.5, students were asked if they preferred oral more than written feedback. In response to question 5, dealing with the type of feedback, be it oral or written, more than two-thirds would rather have written feedback. That is why the option 'false' has received the highest percentage (77%), as Fig. 2.5 displays. One-third of the students preferred oral feedback. This finding goes hand in hand with what is revealed

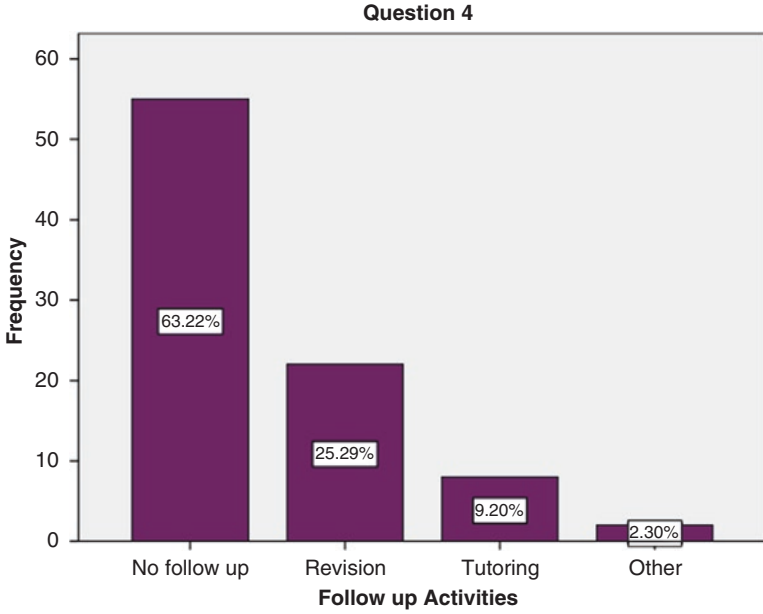


Fig. 2.4 Follow-up activities to writing tasks

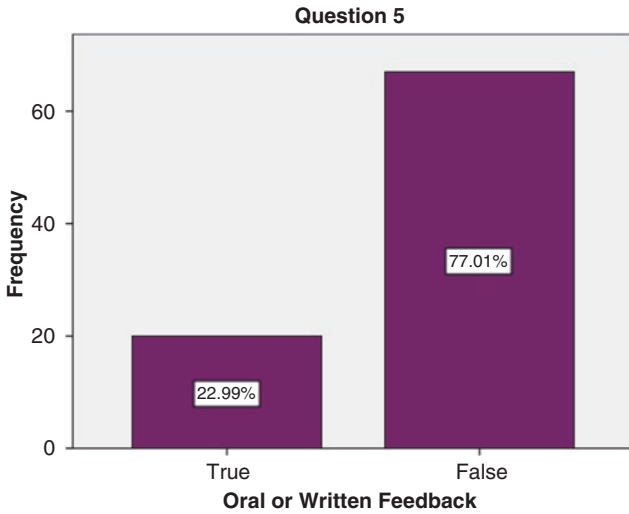


Fig. 2.5 Students' preference for oral feedback

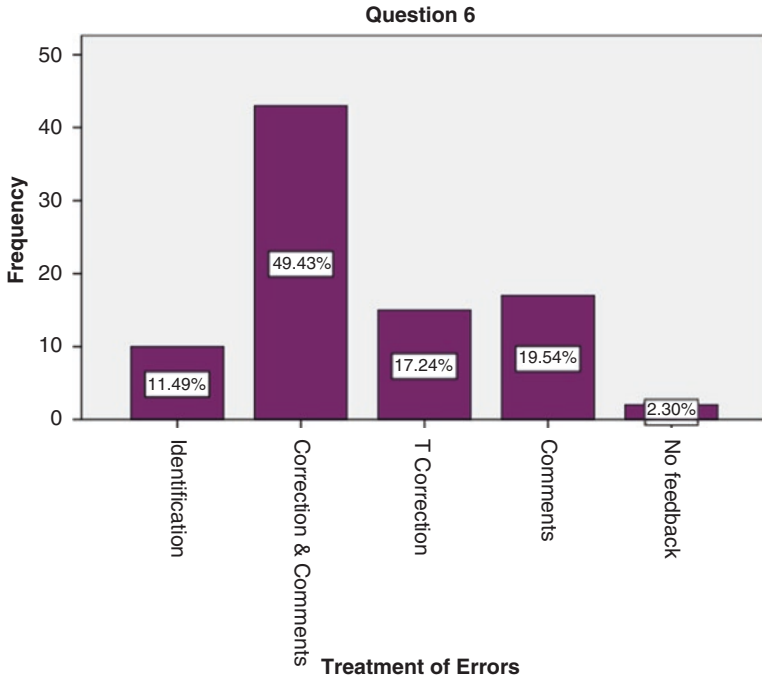


Fig. 2.6 Teachers' treatment of errors

in Fig. 2.6, that students clearly stated that they had better receive corrected written versions so as to improve their writing abilities.

Figure 2.6 depicts the students' responses to how they prefer their errors to be approached by their teachers. If we take a close look at the graph, we can observe the predominance of the second option 'correction and comment'. About half of students presumed that the instructor should correct the errors and at the same time provide comments. Opting for "direct error correction", students want their teachers to mark their writing comprehensively. The purpose is to know how to deal with different types of errors and to minimise them in future writing. Secondly, there is a slight difference between the options 'Teacher correction' and 'Comments': 17% of the respondents believed the teacher should correct the errors only, whereas 20% thought that his/her role should be limited to providing a comment or suggestion. These students want to play an

active role in the process of correction and to figure out the most appropriate way of fixing problematic issues. Only 11.49% and 19.54% received indirect feedback for they believe that the teachers' response to writing should be in the form of comments or codes. According to them, it is the role of the student to figure out the errors and revise them. Few students (2%) consider grades more important than feedback, which backs up their selection of the option: 'No feedback'.

When asked about feedback strategies that the teacher should adopt, the students seemed to favour direct error correction, as Fig. 2.7 demonstrates. There is a general agreement among the subjects of this study on how they would like the teacher to tackle their errors. There is, indeed, a very slight difference between the percentage of results obtained for the options 'all', 'major' and 'most'. Just under a third (30%) of respondents wanted the teacher to correct major errors. The other responses ranged from 'All' (29%) and 'Most' (21%). Unexpectedly, about 11% would like

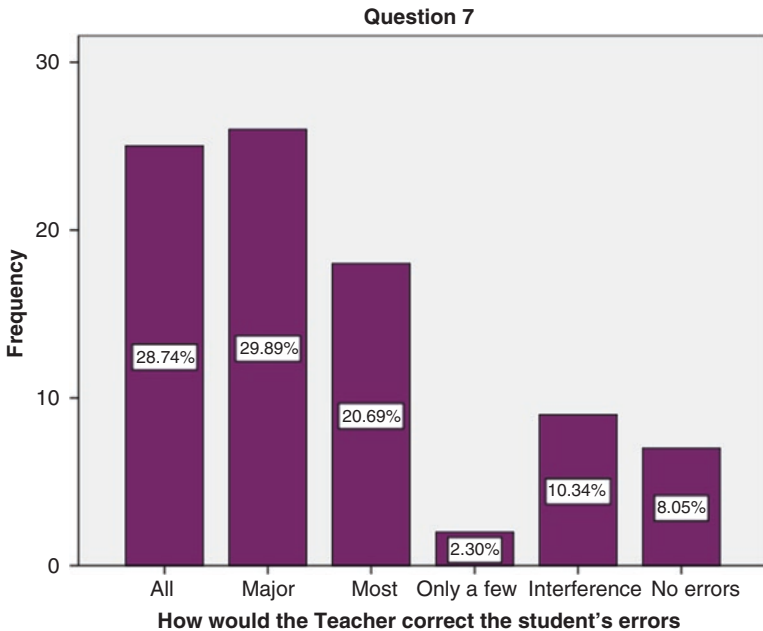


Fig. 2.7 Amount of errors the teacher should correct

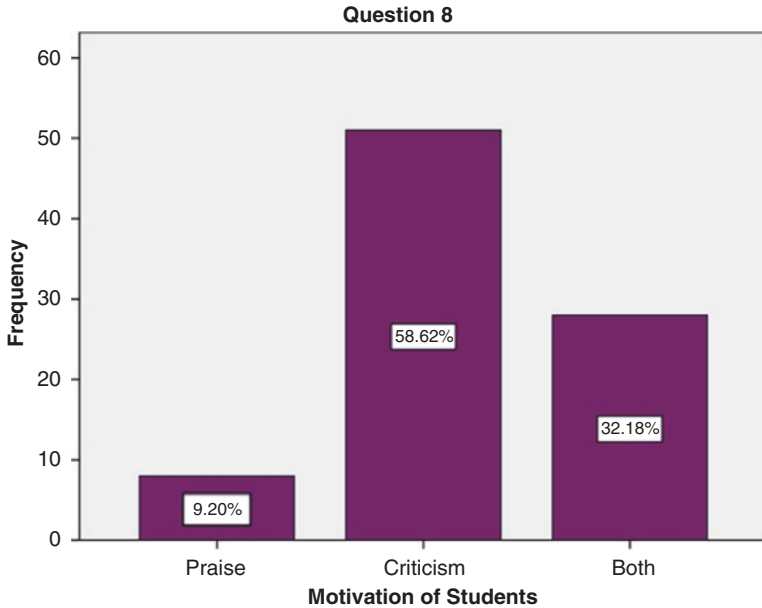


Fig. 2.8 The reaction of teachers towards repeated errors

their teachers to focus on errors that interfere with meaning and content, followed by a smaller percentage (8%) who opted for content only, believing thus that the teacher should respond to content and ideas.

Figure 2.8 indicates that 'criticism' is highly scored by participants. That is, 59% of respondents maintained that the teacher should focus on the negative aspects of the writing assignment. Only 32% believed that the teacher should outline both positive and negative remarks.

In the final item of the questionnaire, the students were required to rank the different aspects of language they want the teacher to emphasise, as shown in Fig. 2.9. The highest rate is associated with grammar. Revealing their inclination to receive feedback on the formal aspects of language, the majority of students (43%) selected grammar, followed by organisation (24%). The most surprising result to emerge from the data in Fig. 2.9 is related to the option 'Content' which was selected by only a small proportion of students (15%). The least chosen option is vocabulary (2%).

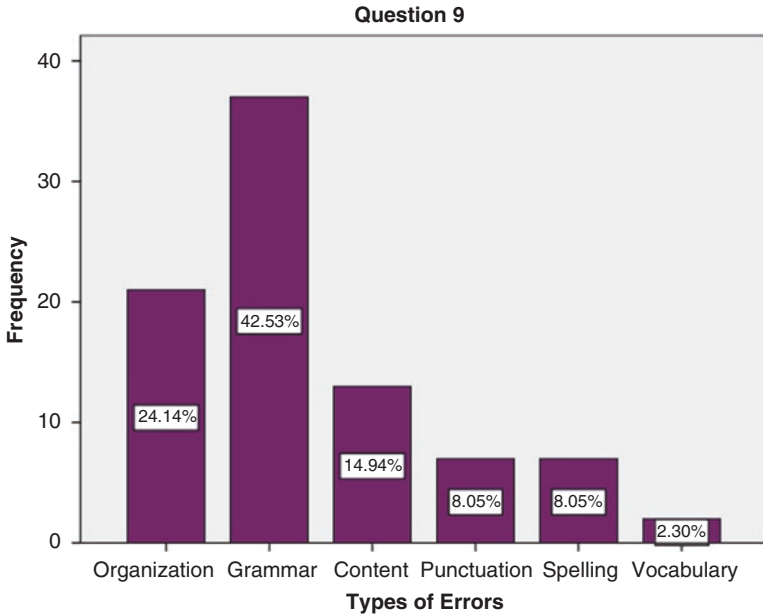


Fig. 2.9 Type(s) of errors teachers should focus on

Overall, the survey data indicates that although the vast majority of students value the teachers' responses to their writing, they encountered difficulties revising their work appropriately due to a lack of follow-up activities, teacher tutoring and teacher-student conferencing. This finding is consistent with the students' wish to receive direct correction. The possible reasons behind these results are discussed in the following section.

Discussion

It is obvious from the findings of the current study that there is a discrepancy between students' perceptions of feedback and their teachers' practices. Hence, contrary to our expectations, feedback does not help students much in promoting their writing skill for several reasons. In fact, teachers correct their students' writing and provide them with feedback so that they can correct their errors and hopefully avoid making the same

ones in future tasks; however, the students are not always successful in their endeavour. Their inability to engage actively with learning and interact positively with their teachers' feedback is proof that there is a gap in the process that should be bridged so that students/teachers can profit fully from the teaching-learning interaction.

Undergraduate students' perceptions of their teachers' feedback are influenced by a multi-faceted range of educational and contextual factors. First, teachers' responses on the final draft have little effect on students' development as they may not read it when there is no need to revise the draft. It is believed that in each draft, the teacher can address some intentional aspects, closely related to their goals. Multiple drafting can facilitate students' understanding of the information in the feedback given so that they can actively interact with the teacher. In this connection, Lee (2017) states:

These feedback strategies have to be applied to interim rather than single drafts in a process-oriented classroom so that students use feedback to revise and improve their own writing and learn to play an active role in their learning. (p. 57)

Second, there is not enough practice of writing at the university level to allow students to go over their writing problems. The lack of writing activities and remedial work, as the results have indicated, deprive students from the opportunity to interact with their teachers' feedback. Another possible reason may lie in the teachers' view of students as autonomous learners, who should be in charge of their own learning in general and writing process in particular. They may have forgotten that those students have not been trained before to behave autonomously, to set targets by themselves or feel responsible for reaching them. All these factors affect not only the teachers' feedback but also how students perceive it. In other words, students' perceptions of their teachers' feedback are strongly mediated by the educational and contextual variables that directly influence their reaction to it.

Feedback is thus a two-way communication through which learners and teachers interact positively to enhance the learning process in general and the students' writing skill in particular. Students may become passive

agents in the feedback process. If there is no collaboration between the parties, no improvement of writing skill will take place. This does not mean that teachers should switch to direct feedback to match students' preferences (as students' response to questions six and seven indicates). On the contrary, the teachers' role should not be limited to detecting errors since this is likely to turn teachers into 'marking machines'. At the same time, the correcting strategies of teachers should meet students' preferences so that effective communication can take place. In this respect, as stated earlier, students' expectations are directly determined by their teachers' practices; see Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990).

As expected, the majority of students appreciate their teachers giving detailed, comprehensive feedback in which all errors are corrected. Students want their teachers to be primarily responsible for the correction of errors perhaps due to their inability to handle indirect feedback. It seems that they have a strong desire to eradicate errors and to produce error-free writing, which is regarded as a near-impossible mission. This strategy can fall short of being beneficial to students' writing development since achieving perfection by being provided with all the corrections is not the main objective of the writing task and will not, as a result, improve their writing skill. Students' preference for direct feedback on their errors may equally be attributed to their reluctance to make an effort and react to teachers' feedback.

The research findings suggest that error correction should also be accompanied by a commentary (Fig. 2.6) that explains the nature of the error and how it can be avoided in future assignments. This result substantiates students' wishes to be involved in the feedback process and to avoid confusion and misunderstanding. Following this line of thought, Mahfoodh (2011) supported the need for marginal comments since Arab learners of English tend to reject teachers' feedback that does not explain the reasons behind the occurrence of such errors. Previous research (Ferris, 1995; Lee, 2005) has also corroborated this view by emphasising that the overuse of codes and symbols to mark errors as a feedback strategy has been questioned because of the inability of students to interpret these codes. The provision of codes and a grade are not enough to guide students to better ways of improving their writing skill. In fact, students

would like to know what needs to be corrected and how to correct it effectively to avoid confusion.

Teachers' feedback practices can inhibit students' ability to revise their writing and in fact demotivate them. Arbitrary feedback is usually perceived as a demotivating judgement that can negatively affect students' attitudes towards writing and inhibit future improvement. Feedback can be beneficial if students are offered positive grounds of improvement and if they are able to celebrate their accomplishments. Seow (2002) suggested that the post-writing stage, for example, may be used as a stimulus for writing as well as hedging against students finding excuses for not writing. Likewise, Dragga (1988) recommended the necessity to associate praise comments with a specific place in the essay. Therefore, to consolidate their learning, gain confidence, and enhance their self-esteem, students should be, hopefully, made aware of their strengths as well as their weaknesses. Hyland and Hyland (2001) supported this point by arguing:

We know that writing is very personal and that students' motivation and self-confidence as writers may be damaged if they receive too much criticism. We may also believe that praising what a student does well is important, particularly for less able writers, and we may use praise to help reinforce appropriate language behaviors and foster students' self-esteem. (p. 186)

This study has clearly demonstrated that teachers' feedback, according to students, is more often than not demotivating. Unlike Cardelle and Corno (1981) who stated that the vast majority of their respondents reported that praise motivated them to make more efforts to revise better. Generally, as an interactive process between teachers and learners, feedback can be encouraging or disheartening. While responding to students' writing, the teacher can lower or boost their motivation. The choice of vocabulary and style used in feedback should convey that there is a way to move forward. Thus, teachers should be cautious of the inherent risk of using the red pen to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation of their negative comments and suggestions. Otherwise, students will exhibit negative attitudes towards the writing task.

Another significant finding of this study supports previous studies that confirm students' preference for written rather than oral feedback. Previous studies (Dragga, 1988; Lee, 2017) are insightful about the immense significance of written feedback, but they do not deny that oral feedback can also play a substantial role in promoting writing skill. According to Lee:

teacher written feedback is best followed up by oral feedback in face-to-face conferences, during which teachers can respond to individual student needs by clarifying the meaning, explaining ambiguities, and allowing students to ask questions. (Lee, 2017, p. 71)

It is almost impossible to use face-to-face conferences in the Moroccan higher educational system, as is evidenced by the vast majority of students who responded to our questionnaire. This may be due to the constraints of time (two hours per week) and class size, which can obstruct the provision of adequate personal feedback. Oral feedback provided to the whole class together with some remedial work, in this context, can prove to be very helpful if the teacher verbally explains the most common errors, using examples from the students' compositions, and showing and discussing how to address them. Remedial work may be one of the follow-up activities that can foster learning as it works on areas that students, especially in large size classes, have not mastered yet and that are likely to improve their performance later and, as a result, motivate them to engage in other writing tasks.

Students should become actively involved in the feedback process by promoting peer interaction. In this respect, peer editing should not be considered an alternative to teacher feedback but rather a way to lighten the teachers' workload. Besides, it is a strategy to involve students in the learning process and to build collaborative learning as they learn how to negotiate meaning and develop a clear understanding of academic writing techniques.

The primary concern of more than 50% of the respondents to our survey is accuracy since they have a more favourable view of feedback pertaining to grammar and organisation rather than content. This find-

ing appears to corroborate the studies of Leki (1991), Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1996) and Ene and Upton (2014). Higher education teachers, according to Zamel (1985), are often “so distracted by language-related local problems that they often correct these without realizing that a much larger meaning-related problem has totally escaped their notice” (p. 86). However, this result is in contradiction with the balanced feedback approach proposed by Lee (2017) which should incorporate grammar, organisation, content, vocabulary, and other aspects. In the same line of thought, previous studies (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Ferris, Pezone, Tade, & Tinti, 1997) on feedback endorse a balanced approach in which both form and content are emphasised.

According to Huang (2016), EFL classes are pedagogically accuracy-oriented since they focus more on grammatical accuracy than fluency. Teachers' over-concentration on linguistic form can result in neglecting the discursive level of writing. This preference can be attributed to the curriculum, which gives less significance to the communicative aspect of writing. Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1996) suggest that teachers' practices can be reflected in their students' productions. Thus, it will not be surprising to come across students who are less inclined to work on feedback directed towards content or organisation if their teacher has placed a strong emphasis on form and error correction.

It is significant to note that students have a positive attitude towards the value of their teachers' feedback although they have difficulty in revising and editing their writing tasks. This finding corroborates with Ferris (1995) who reported that overall respondents believe that the feedback they receive is helpful and allows them to improve their writing.

In a nutshell, this investigation of higher education students' opinions about their teachers' feedback reveals that neither teachers nor students exploit feedback as they should. A conscientious reading of the students' responses displays their reluctance to correct their errors or revise their writing because the role of their teacher ends as soon as they have handed the writing assignments back to the students. There are a number of recommendations and implications that higher education teachers should consider in order to profit from teacher-student interaction via feedback.

Pedagogical Implications

Even though several researchers (Zamel, 1985; Truscott, 1996) have questioned the usefulness of feedback to promote students' writing, we believe that well-designed and targeted feedback can draw the students' attention to problems in their writing so that learning can take place. Through this process, they can become more aware of their needs and challenges at both the linguistic and discursive levels. Feedback, when handled properly, can almost certainly be effective. In this framework, and in the light of the findings drawn from the data analysis, the following implications have been formulated to provide some guidelines for higher education teachers when responding to their students' writing:

1. Given the objective of improving students' writing skill through teacher feedback, there should be a match between what the students prefer and what the teacher expects so that feedback can become a bidirectional pedagogical tool that contributes to more productive writing and creates a cooperative teaching-learning atmosphere. More than this, teachers can help learners improve their writing skills when the students are fully aware of the teachers' goals, procedures and strategies at the beginning of the semester in order to familiarise them with the teachers' practices and to avoid misunderstandings.
2. It seems quite obvious that the lack of follow-up activities may reflect teachers' concerns with the final product instead of the writing process as a whole. Teachers, therefore, should be encouraged to follow a process approach to writing whereby feedback plays a crucial role in the different steps of the task as previous research (Ferris, 1999; Lee, 2017) has indicated.
3. Teachers are advised to readjust their current feedback practices and adopt ones that will create autonomous learners who can take charge of their writing. Students should be fully aware that error correction is their responsibility if they want to develop their writing skill. Indirect feedback should be advocated since it promotes long-term acquisition and increases learner autonomy.

4. Feedback should be constructive and purposeful, revolving around a well-determined purpose, directly related to the teachers' instructions, students' needs and/or writing genre.
5. Teachers can just raise the most significant points, using constructive and supportive language. Though time-consuming, writing some informative comments at the end of students writing is crucial.
6. More importantly, providing motivating feedback in which the teacher outlines the students' strengths (praise) and weaknesses (constructive criticism) is key to a favourable reception of that feedback.
7. In the context of process writing, it is highly recommended that teachers should focus on content, structure and organisation in the initial drafts, and grammar in the final draft. This order, however, is not fixed; teachers should be flexible in deciding what should be given prominence, depending on the goals of the writing task. Importantly, it is critical that teachers do not correct all these aspects in the same draft for fear that students get disappointed and frustrated if the amount of received feedback is significant.
8. Eventually, bearing in mind the large size of classes, we believe that both oral and peer feedback can substitute for individualised feedback in this institutional context.

Limitations

It is plausible that a number of limitations may have influenced the results obtained in our study. To begin with, our data are insufficient since they were collected only from students; teachers' practices were not investigated but were only reported by the students. The findings of the current study, therefore, cannot be generalised. To balance the investigation of students' perceptions, attitudes and preferences about teachers' feedback, we need to examine the other side of the coin; the opinion of teachers. Therefore, further study is required to determine exactly how teachers' feedback can affect the students' progress in writing. Another source of unreliability can be attributed to the method used in the analysis. The use of interviews and qualitative analysis would have allowed students to explain and clarify their choices.

Conclusion

Drawing upon our findings, this paper has presented the salient problematic aspects of teachers' feedback in the English Department of a Moroccan university that may hinder the improvement of students' writing skills. Working on students' perceptions and attitudes towards their teachers' feedback, this chapter has presented some recommendations that can be successfully applied in the classroom to improve the students' writing ability. We have also clearly outlined the mismatch between the students' expectations, teachers' current practices and previous research.

It is important to note that students do not all have the same reaction to their teachers' feedback. Regardless of the time taken by teaching writing, especially when it comes to giving feedback, the present paper has presented several arguments in favour of providing useful feedback that takes into consideration the academic needs of students. Equally, the need to follow up with students on the feedback they receive is crucial. Finally, there should be an implicit agreement between teachers and students that feedback, be it grades, coding or comments, is intended to help students develop and improve their writing, and never to judge or impede their progress.

Appendix

Questionnaire for Students

We would like to ask you to help us by answering the following questions concerning foreign language learning. This survey is conducted to better understand how students perceive their teachers' feedback. This is not a test so there are no "right" or "wrong" answers and you do not even have to write your name on it. We are interested in your personal opinion. Please give your answers sincerely, as only this will guarantee the success of the investigation. Thank you very much for your help.

Section 1:

1. How old are you?
2. Are you Male Female
3. Semester:
4. How long have you been learning English?

Section 2:

1- How useful is the written feedback that you receive from your teacher on your composition? (Circle the appropriate number)

1: Very useful, 2:sometimes useful, 3:rarely useful, 4: useless, 5:unsure

1 2 3 4 5

2- How often are you able to understand your teachers' comments? *Mark only one answer.*

- Always
- Often
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Never

3- How often are you able to use your teacher's comments to revise your essay? *Mark only one answer.*

- Always
- Often
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Never

4- What follow-up activities does your teacher offer you after returning your writing tasks?

- Usually no follow-up activities
- Revision and rewriting
- Individual tutoring with the teacher
- Other, please specify _____

5- Mark the following sentence as being true or false. (Circle 'T' for true of 'F' for false)

- a- I prefer my teacher to give me oral rather than written feedback. T/F

6. How would you like your errors to be treated by your instructor? Tick only one answer.

- Error identification (T circles or underlines errors, no errors are corrected)
- Correction with comments (T corrects errors and makes comments)
- Teacher correction (T corrects errors)
- Commentary (errors are not corrected; T makes comments on errors only)
- No feedback (only the grade)

7-When Correcting your writing, what do you think your teacher should do? Tick only one.

- T should mark all errors
- T should mark all major errors
- T should mark most of the major errors, but not necessarily all of them
- T should mark only a few of the major errors.
- T should mark only the errors that interfere with communicating your ideas
- T should mark no errors and respond only to the ideas and content.

8- In response to an error, should your teacher

- Praise
- Criticise
- Both

9- If there are many different errors in your written work, which type(s) of errors do you want your teacher to point out most? Tick only one answer.

- Organization errors
- Grammatical errors
- content/ideas errors
- punctuation
- spelling
- vocabulary

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