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# Conclusion and Final Remarks

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A good number of Arab countries are represented in this volume—from Morocco in the western part of the Arab world to Saudi Arabia, Oman and the United Arab Emirates in the Gulf region. This is a vast geographical area that comprises countries with the same first language, Arabic, and educational systems characterised by major differences and yet many similarities. Some groups of countries, such as those in the Gulf region, also have similarities in the history of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), and in teaching approaches in general. Given the continuous calls in the literature to improve Arab EFL students' writing proficiency at all levels (Al-Harbi, 2017), the editors believe that a volume on the topic of feedback in L2 English writing in the Arab world could contribute to a better understanding of what is happening in Arab educational institutions in the key area of writing feedback practices, including how students and teachers perceive these practices and challenges. The contributors to this volume have explored this issue in depth

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and proposed a number of pedagogical steps to address current challenges in the area of writing. We hope readers from different contexts and backgrounds will benefit from the studies presented here as they are designed to be relevant to practising teachers, research students and academics.

We organised the book around the two main themes of feedback practice and perceptions of writing feedback. The topics covered ranged from correction practices in a Moroccan EFL context to students' perceptions of 4D feedback treatment on EFL writing in Oman. The books starts with Ahmed's review of current theories and practices of feedback in second language writing in the Arab world.

## Main Feedback Practices

One main feature shared by most of the chapters is that they are research-based. In his exploratory study of feedback practices at a Tunisian University, Athimni (Chap. 6) collected a mix of quantitative and qualitative data to investigate what students of English language and literature thought of the feedback they received from their lecturers. He also used semi-structured interviews to explore lecturers' views on the feedback they provide on their students' writing assignments, as well as analysing a sample of teachers' written feedback. This technique was also used in the study of Saudi students in the UK by Al-Harbi and Troudi (Chap. 7). The main findings about feedback practices in Tunisia, though limited in sample in Athimni's study, reveal that feedback is directive and corrective in nature, and was mainly provided through a written format. Oral and peer feedback did exist but were less common. In this study, as in the one by Hicham Zyad and Abdelmajid Bouziane on the Moroccan context (Chap. 5), students preferred teachers' feedback and had less trust in peer feedback, which they judged to be less detailed and informative. Students of both high and low abilities preferred explicit and directive feedback to implicit feedback. Their study also revealed that self-review is suitable as a learning strategy only for high-ability students. Those with lower abilities did not seem to benefit from this form of feedback.

An interesting finding in Althimni's study is the diversity in students and teachers' views about the focus of written feedback. The majority of the students (70%) reported that their teachers mainly focused on general aspects of writing such as organisation, style, development of ideas, coherence and unity; 60% mentioned language errors; and only 49% referred to overall writing performance as the major focus of the teachers' feedback. The teachers reported focusing on language errors, general aspects of the writing and overall writing performance. Some of the participating teachers were concerned about their students' accuracy so their feedback dealt mainly with correcting errors. This reflects the view that grammatical errors affect the overall quality of a piece of writing. In terms of feedback practice the sample analysis revealed that teachers underlined their students' errors and, in many cases, provided writing full corrections of these errors. Teachers' feedback did also focus on aspects other than grammar: Attention was paid to such elements as organisation, style, development of ideas, quality of ideas, coherence and unity. This reflects a well-balanced view of what makes a good piece of writing.

The practice of discussing feedback is another interesting finding from these studies. Both teachers and students reported that feedback was discussed, and the students were quite involved in interactive and conducive dialogues with their teachers. This practice allowed them to ask questions and seek clarifications from their teachers about the content of feedback and what needs to be done to improve their writing. An important point to raise is that teachers varied not only in their focus and practices but also in the amount of feedback they provided to their students. While some offered a lot of comments others provided very few points.

Most of the authors of the studies in this volume conclude that feedback practices need improvement. Many of the current practices seem to be incongruent with university students' needs and are not compatible with current feedback literature. The authors have called for the provision of training and professional development opportunities to provide university teachers with up-to-date theoretical and practical knowledge on types of feedback and appropriate pedagogies to facilitate more positive effects on students' writing.

## Perceptions of Feedback

There seems to be a high level of agreement among participants of the studies in this volume, both students and teachers, on the significance and importance of feedback. However, one major challenge for students is the inability to capitalise on this feedback to improve the quality of their writing. According to the findings of Ouahidi and Lamkhanter's quantitative study conducted in Morocco (Chap. 2) this is due mainly to two reasons. The first is that teachers provide feedback on final products, indicating that the approach to the teaching of writing is not process-based and students do not therefore benefit from follow-up activities which would provide them with opportunities to improve their writing. Feedback on final products in many educational institutions is summative in nature and is commonly used for evaluative purposes only. The second reason, according to students, is the lack of motivation resulting from negative feedback which focuses only on problematic areas. Students need positive comments and encouragement from their teachers to be able to work on improving their work. In an exploratory study by Sayed and Curabba, writing teachers and students at a University in the UAE were asked their views on the process approach to the teaching of writing and the kinds of feedback practised by teachers. The participants reported positive views about the effect of process writing and feedback on the overall quality of the students' writing.

Using the concept of languaging and being informed by sociocultural theory, Dehdary and Al-Saadi's small-scale qualitative study investigated Omani students' views of corrective feedback (Chap. 3). This study is a good reminder that written corrective feedback (WCF) still attracts considerable research and the issue of learners' reaction to and engagement with feedback is an important and current topic of investigation in different English language teaching contexts. In an exploratory study to improve L2 writing accuracy, Evans, Hartshorn, McCullum, and Wolfersberger (2010) suggested dynamic WCF as a pedagogical approach. They argue that to understand research on WCF we need to consider three contextual variables: "the learner, the situation and the instructional methodology" (p. 445). This suggestion is still valid today; Han (2019,

p. 298) reminds us that "a lingering concern is how to assist individual learners in perceiving and acting upon learning opportunities afforded by WCF and relate resources embedded in the context".

# References

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