



Between Preaching and Practising – The Incongruities of Teachers’ Written Feedback Beliefs and Practices: A Case Study

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Article Info

Received:

26 January 2020

Accepted:

18 March 2020

Publish

6 April 2020

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e-ISSN 2682-759X

Abstract

Feedback provision is a platform for teachers to feed forward young writers to improve their second language writing skills. However little is known on how teachers’ personal beliefs of error correction impact their choices of feedback strategies in teaching writing and whether their beliefs of written corrective feedback are echoed into actual practices when assessing writing. This study thus investigated perceptions of two Malaysian English teachers on written corrective feedback in secondary school classrooms. Designed as a small-scale case study, the study examined the factors that affect teachers’ knowledge, beliefs and error correction strategies through Think-Aloud protocol sessions, semi-structured interviews and analysis of commented student texts. The findings revealed that there are evident incongruencies between teachers’ perceptions and actual practices in teaching to write and written feedback strategies adopted in classroom instruction. It was also found out that in cases where teachers are constrained with various contextual factors of time, class size and students’ motivation, teachers’ agency was exercised to accommodate the needs of the target writers and differing instructional demands. The paper also discusses relevant pedagogical implications for second language teacher education in order to support teachers as they develop written feedback practices.

Keyword: Written corrective feedback; Error correction; L2 writing; Teacher beliefs; Teacher cognition

Introduction

Writing remains as the most challenging skill to master for second language (L2) writers as learners are required to rely more on their cognitive capacity of working memory (Wrigle, 2002; Hyland, 2006; Fareed, Ashraf & Bilal, 2016). They are not only expected to learn new conventions of English writing with limited linguistic repertoire but are also burdened with learning the target language simultaneously (Hyland & Hyland as cited in Nguyen, 2019). In an attempt to provide writing instructors with guidance on how best to teach L2 writing, researches have examined the effects of written corrective feedback (henceforth WCF) in

myriad language learning settings. WCF is exploited by teachers and instructors to 'inform learners of the nature of the error' (Chaudron, 1988; p 150) with the purpose of improving learners' ability to write accurately (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Depending on the focus of error correction, it seeks to provide information about where the error has occurred, the cause of the error in writing and how it may be further corrected in new pieces of writing. In teaching L2 writing, WCF traditionally informs erroneous linguistic forms rather than content or organisational errors. However until more recently, teachers around the globe have gradually utilised the provision of WCF for wider purposes namely linguistic, content, organisation, discourse and pragmatic errors to hone students' writing acquisition (Black & Nanni, 2016; Esmaeili & Behnam, 2014; Lee, 2004; Nassaji, 2017). In Malaysia, studies on the differential effects of WCF has long been central to the development of teachers training curriculum however remains under-researched.

Literature Review

From second language acquisition (SLA) standpoint, theories have shown differing views with regards to significance of error correction in learning. At the outset, the argument whether error correction is harmful or beneficial for L2 learning relates closely with the notion of negative evidence in language acquisition. Long (as cited in Abolhasanpour & Jabbari, 2014) categorises two types of input in SLA: positive and negative evidence. The former is a kind of information that tells learners of what is possible in a given language. This type of evidence is received mainly through a naturalistic exposure to language input such as foreigner talk discourse or modified input which occurs in naturalistic conventions (Chaudron, 1988). In contrast, negative evidence refers to input that informs learners what is not possible in a given language and consists of 'information about the impossibility and ungrammaticality of a form or an utterance' (Abolhasanpour & Jabbari, 2014: p. 46). This includes explanation and explicit grammar teaching as well as error correction of incorrect sentences as guidance or prompts (Long, 1996). In other words, corrective feedback on learner errors serves as a source for negative evidence in L2 learning. Such feedback could be obtained by giving explicit WCF and implicit strategies of repetition, clarification requests and confirmation checks for oral error correction (Karim & Nassaji, 2015).

While considerable amount of researches in SLA field validate the effects of negative evidence in L2 learning, there are proponents who argue against it and that corrective feedback leads to little impact on the acquisition of L2 knowledge. One such position is the nativist proponent. Nativists posit that language acquisition is only made possible by Universal Grammar (UG), a biologically innate and unique linguistic system. From their standpoint, the role of negative evidence is downplayed and regarded less important as learners have access to UG principles, which are triggered by exposure to positive evidence or natural use of language (Cook, 1991; Schwartz, 1993). Krashen (1982, 1985) who shares similar view to that of UG proponents' argues that language acquisition is a subconscious process therefore negative evidence has little influence to it. He further termed the positive evidence as 'Comprehensible Input'. Most importantly, Krashen believes that negative evidence interrupts the flow of positive evidence discourse therefore rejects its usefulness for language learning. However, such claim was challenged by researches put forward by Harley (1989) and Swain (as cited in Schmidt, 1990) in that they argue that L2 learning cannot be altered by Comprehensible Input alone even if the feedback provision is made comprehensible for the learners.

Other researchers under the cognitive or interactionist perspective also have argued that corrective feedback is not only available in the first language environment but is requisite for a successful L2 acquisition. Swain (ibid.) with her Output Hypothesis argues that for potential learning to occur, learners need to produce the language, and that comprehensible input (positive evidence) alone, however vital, is far from sufficient for L2 development. She

emphasises that the output opportunities in L2 learning is of key importance thus highlights that negative evidence should be made available for the learners in various L2 contexts. Similarly, Ellis (1991) and Schmidt (1990), proposed the Noticing Hypothesis which claims that noticing is fundamental to acquisition and learners need to consciously pay attention to input given in order to acquire the target language. The researchers recognise the value of negative evidence as it provides learners with ample noticing opportunities to reflect on their error correction.

Parallel to the evolution of SLA theories and teaching methodologies, current growth of literature in the field of L2 writing has resulted in significant shifts in teaching writing and more emphasis is given in favour of the inclusion of various feedback types in L2 writing instruction. As a result, more studies have been conducted to shed light on gains of incorporating process oriented formative feedback in L2 writing to supplement the commonly used product oriented summative error correction in ESL classroom. This shift, according to Hyland and Hyland (2006), has underlined the significance of feedback in L2 writing and various theories of language learning such as the dialogic nature of writing, socio-cultural theories of learning promoting peer and collaborative feedback. In particular, theories about process-oriented writing have highlighted the potentials of WCF in generating opportunities for learning and promoting students' motivation.

To date, researches in the area have sought to uncover how teachers' perceptions on differential types of error correction affect their approaches to teaching writing and how they expect learners to go about it in relation to the complexity of learners' engagement with regards to teachers' feedback. Literature investigating the latter found out that in most circumstances, teachers often grapple to bridge the discrepancy between their perceptions on error correction and students' expectation of teachers' written feedback. Radecki and Swales (1988 cited in Diab 2005) argue that ESL teachers might 'lose their credibility' (p. 31) if they do not correct all surface errors in students' writing even though they personally believe selective marking on content and other error types offers boundless advantages. Similarly, Leki (1991) who investigated on the perceptions of teachers and students on feedback also found out that ESL writers in the study equated effective feedback with error correction targeting at linguistic forms thus expecting teachers assessing them to only focus on accuracy of their written texts. The evidence thus suggest that L2 teachers are often caught up in a dilemma of deciding and mediating between their own beliefs and practice as language teachers and students' preference and expectations.

In a more recent study by Montgomery and Baker (2007), it was discovered that there were evident incongruities both in the actual feedback and in teachers' own beliefs about feedback. The findings suggested that whilst students perceived receiving more feedback than their teachers perceived giving, students are given different error correction amount with more feedback on local errors in comparison to global ones. Although teachers generally believe that fluency in writing (i.e. ideas, content, organisation, vocabulary) is of key importance, the findings of the researches have proven otherwise. Similar inconsistencies were presented by Lee (2009), who examined ten mismatches between teachers' beliefs and their written feedback practices. Firstly, she discovered that although teachers believe that good writing depends on both accuracy and fluency of ideas, they still tend to pay most attention to linguistic forms. Secondly, and perhaps the most apparent teacher-student perceptions' mismatch, is teachers perceive preferring focused feedback (selective marking) but end up marking errors comprehensively regardless of the error types. Moreover, it was discovered that their practices which include correcting and locating errors for students, using error codes, giving scores or grades, responded mainly judgmental and focused on a surface-level correction and that the teachers preferred giving one-shot writing over a series of writing, even though their beliefs about these issues seemed to be in contrast (Lee, 2009: p. 13-22). In similar cases, Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) and Black and Nanni (2015) who investigated the impacts of WCF

provision in Thai educational context found out that teachers' and students' preferences of feedback vary greatly, highlighting evident mismatches between teachers' way of assessing writing and students' expectation of the given feedback. Thai students, according to Amrhein and Nassaji (2010), found the direct WCF most relevant to their learning however found themselves often frustrated when their instructors preferred to opt for indirect WCF when assessing their written work. These studies thus validate the argument that discrepancy between teachers' personal beliefs about feedback and the feedback given to the learners may impact writing instruction as a whole (Jones, 2007).

Although findings of such studies are of values and set a further direction to the current growth of WCF literature, researches concerning teachers' beliefs and practices of WCF provision in ESL context is far from replete. There are limited numbers of studies available which exclusively focus on teachers' cognition and the relationship of teachers' beliefs and their practices in teaching writing with regards to WCF types in Malaysia (Vengadasamy, 2002). Furthermore, the existing researches conducted in the area are mainly focused on higher education setting and some suffer methodological flaws which make it rather difficult to generalise the findings for other ESL settings (Lee 2004 & 2009a; Leki 1991; Nguyen 2017 & 2019; Tsui 1996). The findings of these past literature thus underrepresent the whole picture of error correction studies in Malaysia thereby the results could not be generalised to other secondary level learning context. The present study thus aims to bridge this gap and hopes to shed more light on how Malaysian teachers' conceptions of WCF provision impacts their teaching approaches to write. Two research questions that guide the study are thus developed: (1) What are teachers' stated beliefs and practices about written corrective feedback?; (2) What are the contextual factors that determine teachers' knowledge, beliefs and practices when employing WCF?

Methodology

Participants

As the purpose of the small-scale case study is to explore an in-depth relationship between teachers' perceptions of WCF and their actual feedback practices in classroom instruction, the participants were pragmatically and purposively selected. The participants, Linie and Dee (pseudonyms) represented two differing groups of English teachers in secondary school context in Malaysia. Linie, with eighteen years of teaching experience, is currently the Head of English Panel at her school and has been involved with various workshops and courses at both district and state level. She holds a bachelor degree with honours in Business Administration and previously worked in a German-US company before becoming an English teacher through the *Kursus Perguruan Lepas Ijazah* (KPLI) course. Linie is also an experienced Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) 1119/1 English examiner. The second participant, Dee, is on her fifth year of teaching and is an overseas TESL graduate. Similar to Linie, Dee is also an active English teacher in her district and has been much involved in the English Teaching Assistant (ETA) programmes at both district and state level. Despite the different level in terms of years of academic qualifications and teaching experience, both Linie and Dee had undergone teacher training courses which include pedagogical studies and are qualified English teachers. This case study focuses on the WCF practices of the teachers in teaching English in their classrooms.

INSTRUMENT

Data Collection

Participants of the study were asked to conduct one-hour writing lesson in their respective classes. A writing task from a previous trial assessment standardised by the state board of examination was used for this purpose for authenticity and the task was to write a speech

detailing benefits of joining co-curricular activities at school. The teachers were requested to prep the students prior to the writing task as they usually do, and the students carry out the task as an in-class essay during the lesson. The essays were then collected, and two texts were selected randomly for each participant to assess as part of the TAP sessions at a suitable time and place. The interviews were scheduled three days after the respective TAP sessions. Both the TAP and the interview were carried out entirely in English. The consent form, which was adapted from Balachandran's (2018) study on WCF, was administered before the evaluation took place (Appendix 1) and information on the TAP procedures was briefed. A pilot evaluation was carried out before the actual TAP sessions were recorded to ensure that rich data could be collected from the participants.

Think-aloud Protocol Procedures

The TAP sessions commenced with greetings followed by an informal briefing of the procedure as mentioned above. The information in the consent form was orally repeated and participants' permission was sought prior to recording the sessions. The participants were asked if they have any further questions before they began the evaluation. Once they started the TAP session, field notes and observations were made to observe their facial expressions and body language while completing the task. The researcher remained silent throughout the sessions and did not interfere other than gesturing them to speak whenever necessary and to indicate the end of the TAP. The pilot session of the TAP was reviewed with both participants before the actual task took place. Important details such as time, date, venue and the name of the participants were noted in the field notes. The TAPs of both teachers were audio-recorded using a mobile phone and placed next to the participants to avoid filtering out of information (ibid., 2018).

Semi-structured Interview Procedures

The follow-up interviews, which were conducted approximately for 30 minutes, were carried out three days after the TAP sessions. The interview questions (Appendix 2) which were adapted from Balachandran's case study of teachers' error correction strategies (2018) were selected after listening to the Think-Aloud recordings and the questions were mainly open-ended. Following the interview, the participants were asked to respond to a single preference survey question (Question 15) in which they were required to assess how important it is for them to address different error types, such as mechanical errors, lexical errors, grammatical errors, analysing organisational problems and content problems in students' essays (Appendix 2). The interviews were audiotaped using a mobile phone voice recorder application to ensure clarity and quality. Field notes were also taken to supplement any missing data. Finally, the marked student essays were collected from teachers as a support material to analyse the TAP sessions and the interviews. Most importantly, the marked student essays have written comments from the teachers which serve as a significant source of data for the study.

DATA ANALYSIS

A thematic content analysis of the collected data was conducted after the transcription of the audio-recorded interviews and TAP sessions was completed. This content analysis is a requisite stage of the study as it helps the researcher to find recurring patterns in participants' responses through systematic coding procedures which later developed into themes. The data obtained was further categorised into: (1) feedback types (i.e. WCF/Oral/Peer/Automated); (2) Ellis's (2009) WCF typology (i.e. Direct/Explicit or Indirect/Implicit and Focused or Unfocused); and (3) challenges faced by the teachers when providing WCF. The analysed results were then developed and further refined to identify contextual factors that influence teachers' selection of WCF types.

Results and Discussion

Results

Three themes emerged from the thematic content data analysis and the findings and participants' interpretation are presented as follows:

Theme One: Approaches to WCF

When asked about participants' approach to error correction in writing, Linie reported that she provides feedback, mostly written feedback, rather consistently to her students. She mentioned that she makes her students write at least two essays (guided or continuous) on a weekly basis which she would assess and grade according to the SPM writing assessment rubrics. For classroom writing tasks, she opts for oral feedback and indirect WCF using codes for her students. Elaborated written feedback is usually given for summative essays, and in most cases Linie combines the provision of individual oral feedback and implicit WCF to help justify the band she gives to her students before providing suggestions for their next pieces of writing.

I try to discuss with my students when I return their essays back... And when I give their essays back, I try to talk to them I will justify why you got this grade, and this is why...look at this...maybe you could improve this...think about this next time...

(Extract 16: Interview, Linie)

Linie also reported that she prefers oral feedback combined with written ones rather than WCF alone when dealing with more complex errors as she believes that it is crucial to inform learners on how to go about their errors to further improve their written accuracy. She would try to talk to the students and instead of making students rewrite their essays like they usually do, she would use errors as a source for class discussion and collaborative peer-writing activities in her classroom learning. According to her, teachers should welcome mistakes from learners as it is a part of their learning and they should adopt appropriate and specific strategies to maximise learning in writing including students' errors. Moreover, collaborative feedback provision such as teacher-student conferences and peer feedback activities (with guidance), in her opinion, do not only improve students' accuracy but also prepare them to be an independent writer.

Usually I use collaborative learning in writing classes so my pupils can interact...discuss and work with peers. They can learn from one another and help each other improve their writing...sometimes we don't have a lot of time to check all essays so peer writing works for me. But before I assign them task, I'll demonstrate...show them how to give good comment.

(Extract 14: Interview, Linie)

Dee, on the other hand, despite her agreement that peer feedback in writing offers promising gains for L2 learners, reported that she rarely uses the strategy in her classroom as it is heavily depends on the linguistic repertoire of the target students. She prefers indirect written feedback and oral feedback with her students particularly when dealing with the weaker ones. She admitted that although one-to-one feedback approach takes much time in comparison to peer feedback, she personally feels that comments with imperatives tone at the end of students' written essays are more effective as they are more direct for her remedial students.

Peer feedback? Hmm...sometimes or perhaps occasionally. Usually the more knowledgeable students would assist the weaker ones. I don't really use teacher-student writing conferences as well...what works the best, for now...to be direct with the students. I mean, clearly address the errors... In my case, I think one-to-one approach works a lot...but it needs a lot of time.

Theme Two: Feedback types

Linie and Dee believe that the most important aspect of a written text is the fluency of the subject matter discussed besides the accuracy of the writing. By fluency, Linie refers to the flow of ideas, cohesion and whether the choice of words used convey the meaning intended in the writing. She justifies this by quoting the criteria of SPM writing assessment when she was grading her students' work. According to Linie, students must be able to understand the rubric and requirement of the task when writing.

Not fulfilled (task requirement) too bad...the major errors are evident throughout and this affects the writing. She (the student) did not fulfil the task requirement so this is definitely not in C band.

(TAP 1, Linie)

Similarly, Dee strongly believes that WCF should not only focus on the errors that interfere with comprehensibility of a text – global errors – but also on local errors. According to her, local errors such as spelling for low frequency words and grammatical errors may largely affect fluency of writing therefore a concern in L2 writing.

Hm...I think I'd go with spelling errors first, especially the simple ones. Students must know simple spelling...they should be aware of the correct spelling of the common words...they have been using them...for example "ourselves" and "themselves". Priority is given more on the plural-singular nouns...SVA. I think common grammar rules should be given attention... but I believe it takes time...

(Extract 18: Interview,

Dee)

Dee was aware of her own practice that she tends to correct all errors in her student texts and if she finds a linguistic error in her student writing, she usually will use error codes to indicate the type of errors or sometimes she adopts indirect WCF approach, underlining the erroneous phrase or words when dealing with more proficient writers. Dee admitted that although correcting all of her students' errors might likely to demotivate them from improving, she insisted that accuracy in writing will be improved when writers are aware of particular grammar rules in writing. For complex local errors or whenever there are too many errors throughout the essay, Dee would select a few errors of the same types to be corrected (focused WCF).

I tend to correct all...mistakes in the text. Somehow the technique might not be the appropriate one for students to improve...writing because there would be a lot of underlined words...complicate them. I advise myself to reduce the errors...by focussing on specific errors.

(Extract 24: Interview, Dee)

During the TAP, it was evident that Dee corrected most on grammatical errors and errors related to the structure of the essay (speech writing) thus validating her belief that both fluency and accuracy aspects of writing is fundamental. She corrected both types of errors rather equally in numbers; twelve comments on content, structure, variation, organisation and fluency (Global), and sixteen comments on articles, subject-verb agreement, prepositions, modals, gerunds and spelling mistakes (Local). However, her personal belief of WCF that

selective marking is better than the unfocused one was poorly reflected in her actual practice in the TAP session. Instead of focusing on a specific grammatical forms or errors made by her students, Dee corrected all of the local errors she found throughout the text. It was also noted that most of the comments given were on the local issues in the written text. Most importantly, she mostly gave direct WCF by underlining the erroneous words and providing explicit correction on top of the words. This is therefore in contrast with her belief of written feedback in which she acknowledged her preference of indirect WCF provision when assessing writing (Theme One: Approaches to WCF). She also expressed frustration when the student made repeated grammatical errors of the same error type (modal verbs). For instance,

Hmm... another modals error...also...will...seems like she doesn't remember the basic rule we learned in class... frustrating.

(TAP 2, Dee)

In total, the written work assessed by Dee received 28 correction therefore suggesting that there is an evident of discrepancy of her practice in assessing writing in comparison to her belief of feedback strategies in that she adopted unfocused WCF feedback type instead of selective marking during the TAP session.

Meanwhile, when data obtained from Linie's TAP was colour coded, it was observed that Linie focused mainly on fluency of the text and made explicit comments on the development of content of the essay, as shown in Table 1. She commented also on the clarity of expression in the introductory paragraph and made remarks on the student's choice of words which according to her were well adapted to the topic.

...short but straight to the point...hmm... well-written introduction... he has the greetings...purpose of speech and it makes...hmm... the subject pretty clear...

(TAP 1, Linie)

Type of issues	Linie	Dee
Content	3	4
Organisation	4	3
Repetition	2	0
Style	3	1
Grammar	6	11
Mechanics	0	5
Vocabulary	2	4

Table 1: An overview of the type of issues targeted by the teachers during TAP

Throughout the TAP session, it was noted that organisation, content and form were given equal importance in Linie's comments and she made altogether six comments on the organisation of the essay with special attention to ideas development and writing cohesion. Linie also commented six on local errors on grammar, such as modal verbs, to-infinitive problems, subject-verb agreement and spelling during the evaluation. In the interview, the teacher mentioned that she often provides metalinguistic clues to the nature of the error by using error codes. She reported that she provides elaborate comments on repeated errors and prefers selective error correction than correcting every error in the text.

...article error...and another error here. Oh this is a gross error, also can versus can also...modals must sit in front, also comes second...I gonna underline...

When marked student texts are closely examined, it become evident that Linie did not provide any kind of metalinguistic clues to some errors corrected. She also left a few punctuation and spelling errors evidently untreated. When asked about this, Linie justified that she preferred oral feedback to WCF for less important errors (i.e. mechanical errors) and hence the errors were located for her only as a reference which she would later discuss with the student. Although she insisted that she would opt for oral feedback for further discussion with the students, her practice in the TAP session does not reflect her preference over the indirect WCF with metalinguistic cues about the nature of the errors made. This suggests that there is a discontinuity in between her beliefs and real approaches to assesing writing.

Theme Three: Challenges to WCF Practice

When interviewed, Linie and Dee strongly agreed that time-constraint is the most prominent issue in teaching writing for Malaysian schools. They argued that although the idea of having students to write multiple drafts is enticing as it helps students to improve fluency and accuracy in writing, it is rather impossible for any teachers to provide written feedback for every writing tasks assigned due to limited time available and large class size. Both teachers pointed out that on average, they have 25-33 students in their classrooms thereby keeping up with the marking and providing them with personalised feedback is highly time-consuming.

I wish that... I did that every time... I try to... have them write something and I will collect it and... give them comments and give it back and... keep doing that...because it takes forever and... I have 35 students in my classes.

(Extract 20: Interview, Linie)

To mitigate this challenge, Linie employs peer feedback activities to overcome her constraints although it is initially challenging for her to familiarise the students on how to go about assessing their friends' written work. According to her, teaching students how to assess fluency is the most challenging part in teaching writing as the students may not always understand the concept.

I stress the importance of that because it helps them... First, it's like a.... bit challenging, like they don't understand what is it and... what's the point...?

(Extract 12: Interview, Linie)

Besides, Linie also finds setting a clear rubric or success criteria of what a good writing looks like prior to the peer assessment activity tremendously helps the students to give quality peer feedback comments.

Furthermore, the teachers also agreed that students' current level of English proficiency and their motivation towards English are two fundamental aspects of WCF provision. In particular, Dee highlighted that making students understand the complexity of genre writing and how to resolve issues relating to it is an equally demanding process. She expressed her disappointment when she pointed out that WCF may not always worth the time invested because her students are too young and some are lacking motivation to process it in an effective, responsible and positive manner.

Hmm..I always get annoyed when my kids ignore my comments I gave them...especially if my comments are very detailed. Like a waste of time, they don't bother to read it. A few students would improve from...feedback I give,

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*butt most are unaware of the errors stated...some didn't even bother reading
the feedback. In the end, they repeat the same mistakes...again and again*

(Extract 28: Interview, Dee)

Dee reported that in cases where she needs to leave for courses or any English programmes outside the school, she makes her students share their writings on Telegram and Whatsapp applications so that she can provide immediate comments and suggest improvements instantaneously. She also shares her students' written works in her Instagram stories whenever they show exemplary written work. This practice, according to Dee, motivates some reluctant writers in her classes and surprisingly, they become more attentive to the error correction given. The data from TAP and the evaluated student texts were in confirmation with her claims.

*I do give them feedback... in writing...through ...chats...mostly they have
WhatsApp in their phones. I think all teachers do it these days...to have Whatsapp
groups with the students. I encourage them to snap, upload their essay or
sentences they want to ask...they can also comment or disagree with me, in
writing...like some would ask, 'Why must I write this way, not that way', 'Can I
write like this?' or 'Is this OK, teacher?' Sometimes we have a discussion on our
written homework there (WhatsApp and Telegram) when I have to leave school
for courses or programmes... It's easier too...I can track their progress.*

(Extract 22: Interview, Dee)

One of the advantages of responding to student texts digitally, according to Dee, is that the whole process becomes a timely and convenient activity, providing the teacher and the students with an opportunity to respond in real time. She strongly believes that written feedback provision is significantly effective and practical, if utilised with digital technology to maximise its efficacy. Moreover, it helps her track the students' progress for assigned written tasks particularly when she has to be away attending courses and workshops outside school.

Discussion

The first research question of the study sought to identify teachers' philosophies and practices about WCF: what are teachers' stated beliefs and practices about written corrective feedback? The findings from the qualitative analyses of the two teachers feedback practices revealed that the teachers dominantly employ direct written feedback for lower proficient learners and indirect written feedback for more proficient writers despite their stated belief that all learners should be given extensive indirect feedback in writing regardless of their learning years and levels. This evident mismatch however is not primarily sourced by teachers' lack of cognisance of WCF strategies available for classroom instruction rather, it stems from teachers' personal choice as 'sole decision makers' in classroom setting (Borg, 2003) in which they feel that putting learners' needs into context when administering feedback is vital. For example, Dee resorted to providing direct WCF for her students although she personally agrees that indirect WCF promises greater benefits to their learning in a long run. Her concern of her students 'not being able to process the feedback given' led to her choice of such feedback type thereby the evident discontinuity of practice in teaching writing. Dee's preference of feedback could be further corroborated with findings from that of Ferris's (2006) and Sheen's (2007) in which they found out that L2 writer with lower proficiency benefits best from direct WCF in comparison to other feedback types. Although in general mismatches in between philosophies and practices are often frowned upon in teaching practices, in Dee's situation nonetheless, contextual factors of learners' proficiency level and age play a bigger part in determining her choice of feedback provision for the students. Her decision to employ a feedback type

conflicting to her beliefs proves that teachers are active thinkers “who construct their own personal and workable theories of teaching” and are therefore an indispensable part of any classroom practice (Lee, 2008, p. 2). Dee’s conundrum of whether her teaching practices should mirror her philosophies about writing instruction or vice versa corroborates that teaching learning is complicated and often context-bound (Borg, 2005).

On the same note, two other incongruities were found from the study: (1) teachers gave less elaborated feedback than they perceived giving; and, (2) teachers marked errors unfocusedly despite their preference of selective error correction strategy in writing. Linie reported that she mostly provides indirect WCF with metalinguistic cues to feed forward her students’ writing acquisition however her belief was poorly reflected in her actual practice. Not only she administered less metalinguistic cues for indirect feedback given but it was also noted that some of the mechanical errors in her student’s text were left untreated. Dee, on a similar note, also showed some inconsistencies in her feedback practices as she did not practice selective marking (focused WCF) as stated. These mismatches thus validate Lee’s (2009) findings who found out that on average, most language teachers administer one error correction per seven words in students’ written text (p. 15) thus suggesting that written instructors often provide comprehensive, yet unselective error correction for learners despite their claim of practising focused written feedback in classroom instruction. In ESL countries where teachers are predominantly regarded as the assessor than a mentor in writing discourses, teachers have long been practising extensive error correction with little information given to the learners on how to go about improving their written work. Traditions and mainstay practices, in the study, no doubt plays a role in determining teachers’ choice of feedback types. Despite their technical knowledge on writing process and exposure on gains of what focused WCF could offer to their young writers, the teachers resorted to the traditional way of correcting all errors. Although from the interviews the teachers may appear updated with the current advances in teaching pedagogies, when faced with actual classroom practices, they unconsciously fall back to their accustomed practices about language learning (Qingmei, Wenhuan & Yang, 2011). The finding is thus parallel to that of Phipps and Borg’s (2009) who found out that in cases where teachers are comfortable with the internalised way of teaching, there is a natural, subconscious resistance to challenge their practices therefore reluctance to abandoning the practice. Pennington, Brock and Yue (1996), echoing the same vein, also found out that there is a tendency for ESL teachers to develop feedback in a product-oriented teaching culture in which error correction is constrained to grammatical forms and errors are extensively marked (Lee, Mak, & Burns, 2016).

The second research question addressed the role of contextual factors in shaping the cognitions of participants in this study. Here, a number of factors influencing the teachers’ decision-making process in providing WCF in the study were identified: (1) learners’ proficiency/age; (2) learners’ motivation; (3) time; and (4) classroom size. Both teachers made explicit comments on these factors particularly Linie who reported that time constraint and the size of her classes makes the process writing practice impossible to be implemented in her classes. Acknowledging the recurring challenges that they have to face in the classrooms daily, both Linie and Dee resourcefully innovated their WCF strategies to further accommodate to the needs of the students and differing instructional demands in schools. In particular, Dee was able to integrate technology into her feedback approach to mitigate the constraints of time and class size to provide effective feedback to her students despite the fact that most secondary institutions in Malaysia value written feedback from the language teachers. Such adaptation to teaching practices, as supported by Borg (2005), is an embodiment of active decision-making that reflects teachers as ‘thinking beings’. In other words, the constraints that undermine the participants from proceduralising their philosophies into actual teaching practices have, inevitably, molded them to become versatile and resourceful in their classroom teaching practices as it encourages the teachers to become problem-solvers. On another noteworthy note, the finding also suggests that where classroom practices fail to work

accordingly due to the instructional hindrances, teachers take liberty to exercise their own agency over the teaching process to modify the prescribed way of teaching in order to overcome challenges they face in everyday classroom situation. Taken together as a whole, contextual constraints that operate within the instructional spectrum in relation to feedback practices in the study serve as a stepping point for the teachers to delve deeper into new WCF junctures and this process enables them to 'cognitively deveoping'. From the study, both teachers had evidently showed progression from being 'developing teachers' (i.e. teachers who solely focus on making their beliefs about learning explicit) to 'experienced teachers' as they were able to prioritise students' cues and were confident at adapting their WCF practices although those new practices did not necessarily reflect their philosophies about writing instruction (Clark & Peterson as cited in Lee, 2014: p. 18). This proves that contextual factors, as supported by previous researches (Borg, 2005; Lee, 2009a), develop teacher's cognition in WCF classroom practices.

Conclusion

To summarise, the study confirms that teachers' beliefs, knowledge and practices are influenced by contextual factors as recognised by previous WCF and teacher cognition literature. Among other factors, proficiency level or age, time and class size determined their feedback practice in classroom contexts. The study reported that there are discrepancies in the beliefs and actual practices of teachers in teaching writing and providing WCF due to the contextual demands. Most importantly, the study argues, along with Mori (2011), that the WCF studies and other teacher cognition literature must always be perceived in context – never in isolation – as both stated beliefs, cognition and actual practices are inextricably intertwined. It is also worth noting that the study sets forth with a different tone from that of Lee's (2009b), and concludes that not all incongruencies between preaching and practising reflect poor WCF practices in classroom learning. The findings are thus paramount to the recent WCF and teacher cognition literature as they offer a different perspective at understanding how teachers employ WCF practices in relation to their philosophies about writing instruction. Owing to the improvements of future teacher training, the findings in this study also address the challenges and frustrations experienced by teachers as language practitioners and emphasise the need for teachers to evaluate and adapt their own practices to utilise the complete potential of WCF in language teaching.

Despite its conclusive objectives the study attempts to achieve, the study is however flawed in several ways. First, generalisations of the findings were made based on the availability of data obtained from this research. A larger context of study (i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary school settings and high performing versus low performing schools) are needed to support and validate the findings in myriad settings. Second, the study has not specifically addressed aspects such as teachers' previous learning experience and educational and/or professional training. Research in teacher cognition emphasises that teachers' experience as learners is very significant in understanding their beliefs and practices (Borg, 2015). Therefore, this study only analyses a limited number of factors shaping teacher's philosophies and WCF practices and more researches with wider scopes are needed to supplement the findings. From methodological viewpoint the case study suffers from a severe lack of respondents. Although it is designed as a small-scale research, the study could have benefited more from bigger sample size of different school settings to enhance data validity. A diversity in terms of participants and location, considering the multicultural classroom settings across Malaysia, can provide valuable insights into teacher identity and feedback practice. In particular, the study employs a data triangulation of semi-structured interviews, TAP and students' written texts however excludes the use of classroom observation and narrative inquiries as supplementary research instruments. There is a need for more researches that utilise real life, moment-to-moment writing instruction to explore the relationship between teachers'

philosophies and actual WCF practices. Having said this, the follow up of this study therefore should pursue a closer examination of the WCF practices using a broader sample by overcoming the aforementioned constraints. Future research might also extend the study over a longer period of time and observe the effectiveness of WCF practices in improving student writing as investigating how and to what extent the students benefit from WCF provision is central to their language learning.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Think-Aloud Protocol Consent Form

(Adapted from Balachandran, 2018)

I hereby acknowledge my free and willing participation in the Think-Aloud protocol session and the interview designed in connection with this research project.

I understand that _____ will take notes and record my interview and my speech as I “think aloud” while reading through the written texts I have agreed to evaluate, and that she/he will use these recordings only for research purpose.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study or decline to answer any question if I feel uncomfortable in any way during the TAP session or the interview.

I also understand (1) that no one except _____ will listen to my recording,

(2) that the disguised extracts from the TAP- session and the interview may be quoted in the thesis and

(3) that any use of the information contained in the recording will not reveal my name or other information that could identify me.

Name of Participant: _____

Participant’s Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name, contact information and signature of recorder:

Date _____

Appendix 2

Interview Questions

(Adapted from Balachandran, 2018)

1. Briefly introduce yourself and describe your experience being a teacher
2. Describe your approach to teaching writing in your classroom (Do you provide writing prompts? How do you prepare students before writing tasks? Do you make students write multiple drafts? Do you use peer feedback?)
3. In your opinion, what types of errors in a written text should be given immediate attention?
4. Describe your approach to providing feedback to your students' written work.
5. Explain your strategies responding to students writing?
6. Do you usually provide the students with the correct linguistic form?
Yes – Why?
No – Then what do you usually do? Do you underline/circle/locate the error in the text? Or Do you comment on the margin that there is an error?
7. Do you use error codes? Or Do you use numbers in the text to draw attention to the grammatical description provided in the margin?
8. Do you attempt to correct all the mistakes in the text?
Yes – Why?
No – Do you select specific errors? How and why?
9. Do you use automated or electronic feedback? (writing apps/Google Document)
10. How do you respond to multiple drafts of student texts? To which draft do you usually provide error correction?
11. To what extent do you rely on the “can do” statements and writing rubric/knowledge requirement by the Common European Reference of Framework for Languages (CEFR)? Do you find it difficult to interpret?
12. What is the most challenging aspect in providing written corrective feedback to your students?
13. In your opinion, how effective is error correction in improving student writing?
14. What are challenges you face with regards to providing effective feedback to students?

15. How important it is for you to address the following issues in student texts?

Tick the boxes to indicate your answers.

Type of errors	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important
Mechanical errors				
Lexical errors				
Grammatical errors				
Organisational issues				
Content issues				

Appendix 3

Think-Aloud Protocol: Instructions

(Adapted from Balachandran, 2018)

Background of the study

This is a research designed in connection with the partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Teaching English as a Second Language programme at The National University of Malaysia (UKM). I am interested in understanding the stated beliefs and attitudes of teachers in Malaysian schools and this study is designed to analyse how teachers think when they give feedback to their students. This project aims at analysing teachers' stated beliefs and practices regarding WCF in the Malaysian context by observing and recording the written corrective feedback (WCF) practices of teachers in English and their knowledge and beliefs on WCF using TAP and interviews.

Instructions

You will be asked to correct two randomly selected student texts and 'think aloud' while performing the task by trying to verbalise what you think when you do the correction which will be recorded with an audio recorder.

I want you to say out loud everything you think while you correct the student texts. But you don't have to explain or justify your thoughts.

You will be provided with a warm-up task as a trial. I will record that as well. You may ask for clarifications before we start the actual task.

You can stop the task at any time if you become uncomfortable.

You may ask questions at any point in the process, but I may not answer them.

I will not tell you when you have completed the task; you must determine this on your own.

I am testing the process, not the participant. So, any difficulties are my fault, not yours.

There is no limit to the session, feel free to ask for any clarifications before the recording starts.