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Examining secondary school learners' beliefs about different types of corrective feedback

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Abstract

Learners' beliefs about different aspects of second and foreign language learning and teaching are of crucial importance as they can determine the effectiveness of the instructional practices employed by teachers. This also applies to corrective feedback (CF) that teachers provide on learners' errors, both oral and written. While there is copious empirical evidence concerning learners' beliefs about oral CF, much less is known about students' perceptions of specific types of written CF. The present paper reports a study that sought to fill this gap. The investigation was part of a larger-scale research project that examined the efficacy of six different types of written CF among 119 Polish secondary school students. Data on beliefs were obtained by means of open-ended queries that participants responded to prior to the treatment and immediately after receiving their corrected assignments. The analysis showed that the students were convinced of the utility of written CF for L2 development. As regards specific types of CF, they showed a clear preference for direct rather than indirect feedback. The latter was viewed more favorably when it was combined with oral conferences. The perceptions of indirect CF accompanied by metalinguistic comments or correction codes hinged on participants' familiarity with relevant rules and terminology.

Keywords: learner beliefs; written corrective feedback; direct feedback; indirect feedback; writing conferences; metalinguistic explanations

1. Introduction

When learners embark on the adventure of studying a second or foreign language (L2) and especially as they move on along this path, they are bound to hold a variety of beliefs about different aspects of this process, concerning, for example, the nature of the target language (TL), the most effective ways of teaching and learning it, the importance of various skills and subsystems or the role of the teacher (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). As Kalaja et al. explain (2018, p. 10), "holding a belief (or believing) is an occasion when a learner . . . reflects on aspects of language learning or teaching, relates these to experiences of his or her own or those of others, and assigns these aspects his or her own personal meanings." These assumptions or "mini-theories" that can vary widely among learners are of crucial importance because they have the potential to influence perceptions and evaluations of instructional practices and may even determine the effectiveness of the tasks and activities employed by teachers (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Ellis, 2008; Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014; Hosenfeld, 1978; Pawlak & Kruk, 2022). It is thus not surprising that this individual differences (ID) variable has attracted considerable attention of second language acquisition (SLA) researchers since the construct first was introduced into the field by Horwitz (1985, 1988) and her *Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory* (BALLI) was developed. This having been said, the construct has been subject to reconceptualization over the years (e.g., Barcelos, 2015; Kramsch, 2003; Mori, 1999; Wenden, 1999) and they are no longer seen as relatively straightforward, consistent and stable. By contrast, in the words of Griffiths and Soruç (2020, p. 159), ". . . they are influenced by context (i.e., they are situated, and they may change in response to the ecological or sociocultural environment), they are complex (i.e., they interact with, and may be adapted according to multiple other variables), and they are dynamic (i.e., they are not set in stone, they can and do change over time – sometimes quite short periods of time)."

The changes in the way in which beliefs are perceived have not discouraged SLA researchers from conducting studies in this area and this line of inquiry remains robust. Particularly promising are empirical investigations that go beyond gauging their perceptions of the entirety of the L2 learning and teaching process by focusing on specific contexts or aspects of this process, such as, for example, content-based instruction (Briggs et al., 2018), the use of the native language (e.g., Wach & Monroy, 2019) or different TL skills and subsystems, such as grammar teaching (e.g., Pawlak, 2013) or writing (e.g., Majchrzak, 2018). Not surprisingly, studies have also been undertaken to tap into learners' but also teachers' beliefs about the corrective feedback (CF), which can be defined as ". . . any signal that that a learner's utterance may be erroneous in some way" (Nassaji

& Kartchava, 2021, p. 1), both in terms of utility and the most beneficial ways in which it should be offered. The bulk of such research, however, has focused on beliefs about oral CF and, as Kim and Mostafa (2021, p. 562) point out, ". . . relatively little is known about teachers' and students' beliefs about written CF and the extent to which their beliefs translate into practice and revision behavior." The study reported in this paper was undertaken with the aim of contributing to this line of inquiry by exploring learners' beliefs about six distinct types of CF that they received on their written production. To the best knowledge of the present authors, no prior empirical investigation has adopted such a fine-grained perspective on this issue.

2. Literature review

In light of the focus of the study reported in this paper, the present section provides a brief overview of empirical investigations that have examined learners' beliefs about written CF. However, several important caveats are in order at this juncture. First, studies that have targeted teachers' beliefs in this respect are not included in this overview unless such beliefs were tapped into alongside learners' perceptions in one study. Second, although interesting insights about CF can be derived from studies that have zoomed in on the perceptions of different aspects of form-focused instruction, of which the provision of CF is an integral part (cf. Pawlak, 2014), this line of inquiry in not included since error correction was often included as an appendage rather than an object of empirical investigation in its own right (e.g., Loewen et al., 2009; Pawlak, 2011). Third, studies that have examined CF in a general manner, without making a distinction between the oral and written mode (e.g., Chunhong & Griffiths, 2012), are omitted in this synthesis since the two contexts are distinct and some of the choices teachers face are entirely different (e.g., written CF is almost always delayed). Fourth, no attempt is made to synthesize studies that have sought to shed light on how learners' beliefs mediate their engagement with the CF provided and shaped its effectiveness (e.g., Han & Hyland, 2015; Sinha & Nassaji, 2022) because they are not directly pertinent to the focus of the present investigation. Fifth, the overview is mainly confined to studies that have been conducted in the last two decades or so, even though earlier investigations will also be mentioned in passing.

Almost two decades ago Hyland and Hyland (2006) remarked in their state-of-the-art paper that "research on student preferences has consistently found that students expect teachers to comment on their written errors and are frustrated if this does not happen" (p. 84). Even though this pronouncement was based on very early studies, such as those conducted by Leki (1991), Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1991) or Lee (2004), more recent empirical investigations have

largely corroborated such an evaluation, with the caveat that the questions they sought to answer were often much more specific. For example, Montgomery and Baker (2007) compared learners' perceptions of written CF and their teachers' self-assessment of their corrective practices. They found a considerable overlap between the two groups, even if the teachers focused primarily on local rather than global errors, which stood in contrast to what they believed. In another study, Armhein and Nassaji (2010) used parallel written questionnaires to elicit beliefs about written CF from 33 adult learners and 31 teachers of English as a foreign language in two private institutions in Canada. While there were similarities between the two groups in terms of the pedagogical value of error correction, the students expressed a clear preference for comprehensive feedback, with a particular focus on errors involving grammar, the teachers tended to be much more selective in this respect. In addition, while the former favored all types of correction, the latter preferred such that emphasized content as well as effective communication of ideas.

Particularly relevant to the focus of the empirical investigation reported below are studies that have provided insights into L2 learners' beliefs about specific types of written CF. Early research has produced somewhat conflicting findings in this respect, with some studies reporting a preference for large amounts of different types of CF targeting a wide variety of errors (e.g., Ferris, 1995; Lee, 2005), others indicating that learners are in favor of receiving feedback on content and ideas rather than grammar and structures (e.g., Woroniecka, 1998), and others yet indicating a predilection for CF targeting both content and surface-level errors (e.g., Ashwell, 2000). In a more recent investigation, Storch and Wigglesworth (2010) analyzed students' beliefs about CF in the form of editing symbols and reformulations that they received after collaboratively writing essays in pairs in response to a graphic prompt. They found that although the two corrective techniques may have served different functions, it was the attitudes and beliefs that the participants manifested that determined whether or not the negative evidence would be retained. Finally, Chen et al. (2016) explored the perceptions and preferences regarding written CF in the case of 62 university students in the English Department in a large university in Mainland China. The data were collected by means of a questionnaire which included both Likert-scale items and open-ended queries. On the whole, the analysis indicated that the participants held very positive views about the utility of CF in the L2 learning process, that they were in favor of detailed comments on errors related to both content and organization and accuracy in terms of grammar, but also that they wanted to receive follow-up activities that would allow them to better process the feedback.

As can be seen from the overview provided in the present section, research on L2 learners' beliefs about written CF has been scant in recent years,

somewhat as if the researchers were content with the conclusion that such feedback is welcome and that it can take any form as long as extensive comments are offered on both content, structure and TL accuracy. Few studies have set out to look into students' perceptions concerning specific corrective techniques, certainly not with the intention of comparing such perceptions with diverse CF options in one group of participants. The study reported in the following section was aimed to fill this lacuna.

3. The study

The present study is part of a larger-scale empirical investigation which sought to shed light on the effectiveness of different techniques used to provide written CF that have been investigated by SLA researchers (cf. e.g., Bitchener, 2021) in the context of Polish secondary school as well as learners' perceptions regarding the effectiveness and usefulness of these techniques. The present paper only reports the findings of the latter part of this research project, that is, the participants' beliefs about the CF options implemented as part of the pedagogic intervention after this intervention had been completed. Specifically, the following research question was addressed:

What are the participants' beliefs concerning the effectiveness and usefulness of different types of written CF?

3.1. Participants

The participants were 119 Polish secondary school students, 40 males and 79 females who attended Grade 1, Grade 2 and Grade 3 of a three-year program. Based on their assignment to a given class, the students were divided into seven groups: six experimental groups (EG) which received different types of CF (EG1 = 14 students, EG2 = 22 students, EG3 = 14 students, EG4 = 15 students, EG5 = 18 students, EG6 = 19 students), and a control group (CG) comprising 17 students. According to their responses to demographic items included in the questionnaire, their average experience in learning English as a foreign language amounted to 9.48, which might be viewed as considerable. As is often the case with educational institutions in foreign language settings, where access to the TL may still be often limited, the participants were not homogenous with respect to their command of English which varied a lot both among and within the groups. The overall proficiency level fell somewhere between lower pre-intermediate and lower-intermediate, or, to use the designations included in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, it oscillated around A2 and B1. The mean

semester grade in English for all the participants was 3.63 on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest), with the standard deviation equalling 0.98, which indicates considerable individual variation. The six groups differed to some extent in this respect. While EG1 had the highest mean grade of 4.28 and the lowest standard deviation value of 0.72, the reverse was the case in EG3, with the lowest mean grade amounting to 2.07 and the standard deviation value standing at 0.47. However, the remaining groups were similar in terms of proficiency level, operationalized as grades received in the English course. The number of English lessons attended by all of the groups ranged from 3 to 6 a week, with the average of 4 hours. Quite surprisingly given growing access to Internet resources, the majority of the learners declared to have limited exposure to English outside the classroom or no exposure at all. Only some participants reported having regular access to the TL which was possible thanks to the Internet (including English websites as well as chat rooms with foreign language speakers), television, music (the lyrics of English songs), computer games, as well as trips abroad to countries were English was used as a medium of communication.

3.2. Procedures, data collection and analysis

As mentioned above, the study of learners' beliefs about CF reported here was part of a larger-scale empirical investigation which aimed to shed light on the effectiveness of different types of CF options on the accuracy of students' writing. This main study was conducted over the period of 12 weeks and involved six regular English classes during which the students were supposed to write six pieces of writing on three different topics as well as their re-writings after the provision of CF. Unfocused CF was employed, where a wide range of errors were responded to in the participants' compositions (cf. van Beuningen, 2021). The topics in the six experimental groups and the control group were the same and they were as follows: (1) *Describe your nightmare journey,* (2) *Describe the person you admire and explain why,* (3) *Write about the event from your childhood that you remember very well*. The word limit was set in the range of 120-150 words. Importantly, none of the topics represented the genre that the students were taught at school in preparation for their final examinations. Before the first writing assignment got under way, students were asked to fill out a questionnaire about written CF which consisted of 29 Likert-scale items and two open-ended queries. Since this paper focuses only on qualitative data related to beliefs about written CF, only the two open-ended questions will be considered in further analyses. The questions were formulated in such a way that the students were asked to finish the following statements: "I believe written corrective feedback is important because . . .;" and "I believe written corrective feedback is not

important because . . . ." The participants wrote each piece in the classroom within two weeks to ensure that the students who were absent during the writing classes also handed in their assigned compositions. Once all the texts had been collected, the researcher used unfocused CF to address linguistic inaccuracies at different levels (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, spelling). Specifically, the following CF techniques were employed to respond to errors in the seven groups:

- EG1 (*N* = 14) – direct treatment (e.g., *Last holiday I go* WENT *there with my parents.*);
- EG2 (*N* = 22) – direct treatment with metalinguistic information in the margin of the students' texts or next to their errors (e.g., *Last holiday I go* WENT [You need Past Simple here] *there with my parents.*);
- EG3 (*N* = 14) – indirect treatment in the form of underlining or circling errors (e.g., *Last holiday I go there with my parents.*);
- EG4 (*N* = 15) – indirect treatment with an oral writing conference during which the students had an opportunity to clarify doubts concerning the underlined errors (e.g., *Last holiday I go there with my parents.* (T: Look, you talk about the past, so what tense do you need?));
- EG5 (*N* = 18) – indirect treatment with the use of a coding system (e.g., *Last holiday I go there with my parents.* GR);
- EG6 (*N* = 19) – indirect treatment with metalinguistic information in the margin of the students' texts or next to their errors (e.g., *Last holiday I go there with my parents* [You need Past Simple here]);
- CG (*N* = 17) – no CF but only comments concerning the organization and content (e.g., *Last holiday I go there with my parents*).

After the provision of CF, the students in each group were given back their pieces of writing so that they could examine the feedback received. Subsequently, they were requested to write a new piece of writing on the same topic without access to the corrected version and they were instructed that the new version should be as similar to the original as possible. Although there were differences in the amount of time the students spent analyzing their errors and the CF provided, the researcher recommended that this should not exceed 15 minutes to make sure the students had adequate time to compose a new piece of writing. Having finished the re-writing, the students in the experimental groups were asked to fill out a short questionnaire containing yes/no and open-ended questions concerning their perceptions of the CF that was employed in the respective groups. The queries were as follows:

- Do you think the marked/corrected errors in your piece of writing were clear? YES/NO Why?

- Do you think the marked/corrected errors were helpful in re-writing? YES/NO To what extent?
- Did you use the marked/corrected errors in re-writing? YES/NO In what way?
- Is there anything else that helped you in re-writing?
- Do you think the marked/corrected errors will help you to avoid errors when writing a new piece of writing?

Polish was used to supply instructions and word the items in the questionnaires, and the participants could use Polish or English when providing their responses. Such a decision was made in view of the relatively low level of TL proficiency and the danger that the students might in some cases misunderstand or fail to understand questions written in English, let alone be able to express their views and opinions adequately and precisely. Importantly, all the participants agreed voluntarily to take part in the study and they were informed that they could withdraw from it at any time. Table 1 provides a diagrammatical representation of the design of the study.

Table 1 Design of the study

Week	EGs	CG
1 & 2	Writing 1 + questionnaire about WCF (pretest)	Writing 1 + questionnaire about WCF (pretest)
3 & 4	Re-writing 1 + questionnaire (immediate posttest 1)	Rewriting 1 (Immediate posttest 1)
5 & 6	Writing 2 (delayed posttest 1)	Writing 2 (delayed posttest 1)
7 & 8	Rewriting 2 + questionnaire (immediate posttest 2)	Rewriting 2 (immediate posttest 2)
9 & 10	Writing 3 (delayed posttest 2)	Writing 3 (delayed posttest 2)
11 & 12	Rewriting 3 (immediate posttest 3)	Rewriting 3 (immediate posttest 3)

The data collected by means of the open-ended queries were subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analysis that were undertaken separately for the six experimental groups. The former was applied to the yes/no questions that were included in the questionnaires completed in order to elicit the students' perceptions of the different types of written CF provided by the researchers and it involved calculating raw numbers and percentages. This kind of analysis was also applied in the case of the statements concerning the importance of written CF that they were asked to complete. The latter was employed in the case of the open-ended queries that were intended to shed light on the perceived effectiveness and utility of the different ways of responding to errors, allowing the participants to

describe their reactions in their own words and to explain why they believed a particular CF technique worked or not. Specifically, thematic analysis was used, where recurring patterns in the participants' responses were examined in the six-stage procedure suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarizing oneself with the data, coming up with initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and, describing the results.

3.3. Findings

The analysis of the responses to the open-ended queries where participants were requested to explain why written CF was important or not demonstrated overwhelming support for this kind of pedagogic intervention. More precisely, as many as 111 students (93.28%) expressed the opinion that feedback of this kind was essential in L2 learning. When offering justifications for this evaluation, the students most often mentioned greater awareness of the errors they make and the ability to learn from them, greater possibility of repeating similar mistakes in the future or enhanced motivation to study more. The excerpts below illustrate some of these points:[1]

> *I can see my mistakes, which might help me in the future in written assignments.*
>
> *It motivates me to work more on the material that is not covered.*
>
> *I learn from my mistakes and when I see some marked errors in my piece of writing, I know what I need to revise.*
>
> *I know what I did wrong. A person learns from mistakes, so if I do something wrong and a teacher marks it as a mistake, I will remember the right form of a sentence or words which I wrote.*

When it comes to the ten respondents (6.72%) who believed that the provision of written CF did not play an important role in their attempts to improve their mastery of English, they primarily mentioned the demotivating aspect of seeing so many errors and correction made in red ink in their compositions. Some of them also raised the important point that not all errors are equally egregious and some of them, especially such that do not negatively affect the attainment of the communicative goals, do not have to be corrected or even indicated. Such opinions are exemplified in the following responses:

> *Written corrective feedback is important but if I see too many errors in my work, I feel discouraged and it doesn't motivate me so much.*

[1] All the excerpts were originally written in Polish and then they were translated into English by the present authors.

A teacher should remember that not every mistake is equally important. Some of them can be left uncorrected, especially if the meaning has been conveyed.

When it comes to the types of written CF used in the study, students' perceptions were gauged by means of the questionnaires that they were requested to fill out on receiving their compositions in which errors were treated. For the sake of clarity and in order to facilitate comparisons, such data are presented separately for each of the six experimental groups.

In EG1, where direct treatment was employed, all the students found the markings and corrections useful and were convinced that they helped them rewrite the original texts. On the whole, they highlighted that this type of CF allowed them to immediately identify the errors and, as a result, they were aware from the get-go which areas they needed to work on. It can thus be assumed that the students actually employed the correct versions of TL forms, which improved the quality of the rewritings. The following representative experts illustrate the participants' perceptions of direct CF:

Having analyzed the mistakes in my work, I knew how to write the sentences and words correctly during the re-writing.

I tried to avoid making the same mistakes. I tried to memorize what I had done wrong in my previous work.

I believe that they [corrected forms] *would help me to a large extent if I could write the most common mistakes in my notebook. I would memorize them much better and for a longer time.*

The students in EG2 also benefitted from direct CF but, in this case, it was accompanied by metalinguistic information included next to the committed errors or in the margins with an eye to encouraging reflection on the reasons why the specific forms were erroneous and required negative feedback. What needs to be noted at this juncture is the fact that, since some of the pieces of writing contained numerous errors and because unfocused CF was employed, it was quite demanding as well as simply problematic to provide rules or extensive explanations next to every single inaccurate form in the texts, with the result that some of the comments were more elaborate than others. Almost all the students in this group (21 out of 22 or 95.45%) found the corrections useful while almost three fourths (17 out of 22 or 77.27%) indicted that all the markings and the metalinguistic tips were clear for them, thus helping them to analyze their essays in more detail and to pay special attention to the errors that were the most recurrent. The most noticeable advantage of this way of supplying CF was related to the fact that it fostered students' awareness with respect to the errors

they made, offered them the opportunity to revise some of the grammar structures and vocabulary items, and, in the long run, could thus contribute to reducing the number of errors in future writing assignments. The following responses exemplify some of these arguments:

> *I could see what tenses, vocabulary, grammatical aspects I have problems with and I realized I need to work on them more.*
>
> *All the markings and information were useful because I realized what gaps I have in my knowledge of English and what I have to work on more to become a better student. I used from the corrected versions a lot.*

However, quite surprisingly, five students did not appreciate this form of written CF, claiming that they still did not understand why the TL forms they had originally used were judged as incorrect. They explained that they did see the metalinguistic explanations but, it could be surmised, they may have lacked the requisite proficiency to appreciate them and they did not have the opportunity to turn to the teacher for assistance.

The participants in EG3 were provided with indirect written CF, which took the form of circling or underlining. Even though 10 out of 14 of the students (71.43%) found the markings in their works to be clear and they knew that they were used to indicate places where errors had been committed, 60% of them (6 out of 10) reported not being able to take advantage of this type of correction. Quite predictably, this was related to the fact that they simply did not have the necessary TL proficiency to self-correct the inaccuracies in their essays. Thus, despite the popular belief that indirect CF allows students to analyze their mistakes, thus setting in motion deeper processing, this form of treatment was believed to be of little value in writing follow-up assignments. Still, most of the students did make efforts to analyze their errors and made whole-hearted attempts to use alternative versions of the TL form in question in the hope of getting it right. Some representative excerpts from the questionnaires follow:

> *I saw the errors but I didn't understand why the words were wrong. I thought they were OK.*
>
> *I tried to analyze the underlined words and correct them but I don't know if I did it right.*
>
> *Not all of the errors were clear because there were no corrected versions written. I didn't know how to do it myself.*
>
> *I tried to correct them, but if I don't see the correct words, I don't know what kind of mistake I have made. I don't know if it was tense or something else – I can't recognize it.*

Although they were in the minority, some of the participants valued indirect written CF since it made them cognizant of the need to pay greater attention to the TL

forms they used in their writing, which could have a positive effect on their attempts in this area in the future. Such sentiments are illustrated in the following excerpts:

> *I hope that error correction in my works will help me because with every piece of writing I pay more attention to what I write, I just try to make sure it will be correct, I pay attention to grammar and vocabulary.*
>
> *I am not sure if I am able to stop making mistakes, however, at least I see that I make quite a lot of them and I have to work harder to reduce their number.*

In EG4, indirect CF was used as well but it was followed by an oral writing conference, where the students had the opportunity to ask for additional clarifications concerning the parts of the text that were underlined or circled and could thus resolve any doubts they might have. Yet, a time limit was set in this case as well in order to ensure that all the participants would manage to rewrite their essays and fill out the questionnaire. As a consequence, it was simply not feasible to explain every error in detail and many of them may not have even been brought up in the first place. Similarly to students in EG3 who had only benefitted from underlining and circling, most participants in this group (8 out f 15 or 53.33%) did not fully understand the nature of the errors indicated in this way and they also faced considerable challenges with self-correcting the erroneous forms on their own. The difference was that in this case the participants could turn to the teacher for assistance when interpreting indirect CF. Somewhat unsurprisingly, most of the students in EG4 (13 out of 15 or 86.67%) stated that the corrective technique employed was useful because it not only enabled them to pinpoint the exact locations of errors but, much more importantly, also gave them a chance to ask the teacher for additional explanations during the oral writing conferences. In their view, this was crucial since they were able to test their hypotheses concerning the TL forms and were thus more likely to use them accurately in their texts. In other words, face-to-face consultations of this kind helped them rewrite their essays, which indicated that the role of the teacher was simply invaluable in providing written CF. Such views are exemplified in the following responses:

> *I could use the marked errors in my re-writing, but only after the teacher explained to me what I had done wrong, because I could not understand them at first.*
>
> *The marked errors were not as helpful as the explanations given by the teacher. Without them, I wouldn't be able to correct most of my mistakes.*
>
> *No, none of the underlined words helped me because I didn't know what kind of a mistake I had made. If only I had some kind of notes giving hints about that, I could at least try to correct my mistakes. I had to ask the teacher to explain the errors that I had no idea how to correct in my composition.*

When it comes to EG5, indirect CF in the form of underlining and circling was complemented with special codes indicating the kind of error that was committed. The coding system was adapted from similar systems described in Bartram and Walton (1991), and Harmer (2004, 2007). The symbols used were as follows: Gr – grammar, T – wrong tense, Prep – preposition, Pron – pronoun, A – article, Sp – spelling, WO – word order, Voc – vocabulary, ? – unclear meaning, \?/ – something left out or missing, and (–) something unnecessary. Before the teacher distributed the texts including CF among the students, the coding system was carefully explained to them to avoid unnecessary questions and save time that the participants could devote to decoding the symbols. The analysis clearly indicated that all the participants from this group found the provision of corrective feedback useful and only three students out of 18 (16.67%) stated that they did not understand some of the codes and did not know how to correct some of the errors. This said, even those students reported spending some time analyzing the inaccuracies in their compositions and trying to correct them in order to avoid them in their future writing. Obviously, not every student in EG5 appreciated the code added to his or her error and would rather have the right versions inserted in the text. Such perceptions are illustrated in the following excerpts from the questionnaire responses:

> *My mistakes were marked clearly, I got to know the meanings of the symbols next to them. I knew what to correct.*
>
> *I think that marking an error is not enough, I would prefer to have the correct version of my mistake, instead of the code.*
>
> *After the code marked next to my mistakes, I could analyze them and try to correct them myself. I could revise something. I also got to know something new – the symbols which are, for example, the abbreviated forms of the parts of speech.*

In EG6, the errors in the writing assignments were responded to by means of indirect CF but, in this case, it was accompanied by additional metalinguistic tips and explanations to induce reflection on the knowledge of the TL, thereby activating the processing of the erroneous forms as well as the feedback that was provided. 14 out of the 19 participants in this group (73.68%) found such CF to be useful and quite a few students (eight out of 19 or 44.11%) reported experiencing difficulty in fixing the errors they had committed. Also in this case many participants expressed a clear-cut preference for being provided with the correct forms rather than being encouraged to self-correct. As indicated when presenting the results for EG2, the metalinguistic hints once again turned out to be of little use for students whose explicit knowledge of relevant rules and generalizations was limited because they were not able to tell the difference between

parts of speech or sentences, they were not familiar with the names of tenses, and they did not know some of the terminology used in the comments. As a result, they could not really verify their hypotheses about how specific TL forms should be used. The following excerpts illustrate some of these points:

> *I saw that I had made some mistakes, but I prefer having the correct versions next to them, not only markings or some notes.*
>
> *The marks and notes were helpful, because I paid attention to my mistakes, I tried to correct them later.*
>
> *I didn't understand my mistakes, I did not find such tips as „You need a verb not a noun" etc. useful.*
>
> *I didn't know how to correct mistakes. It was too difficult to analyse them on my own. I asked my colleagues but they didn't know either.*

Adopting a holistic view of participants' responses, it can be stated that their beliefs about the effectiveness and utility of the different types of written CF varied, with some of them expressing doubts as to whether this type of pedagogical intervention could aid them in the long run and others being quite confident that they could remember their errors and this would help them improve their writing in the future. The most common view expressed by all the participants was that they hoped that they would be more careful and would try to pay more attention to TL accuracy when working on writing assignments in the future.

4. Discussion

The main research question that the present study addressed concerned secondary school students' beliefs about the effectiveness of six different ways of providing CF on their written errors. Before this issue is discussed in more detail, it should be pointed out that the vast majority of the participants were evidently in favor of having such errors responded to in some way by teachers and wished for such correction to be as comprehensive as possible, which by and large corroborates the findings of previous empirical investigations in this area that were summarized in the literature review (e.g., Armhein & Nassaji, 2010; Chen et al., 2016; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1991; Lee, 2004; Leki, 1991; Montgomery & Baker, 2007). This clearly shows that the preference for unfocused CF can be regarded as somewhat universal, although some of the responses of the participants of this study indicated that, actually seeing all the corrections in pieces of writing may have had a demotivating effect, making students realize the extent of the improvement that needed to be made.

Moving on to the participants' perceptions of the specific types of written CF employed in the six experimental groups, it is evident that direct forms of correction, where accurate forms were provided proved to be the most favorable (EG1 and EG2). By contrast, indirect CF was perceived as highly problematic because the participants were often at a loss when confronted with the challenge of self-correcting their errors but simply did not know how to do it. The problem was the most acute when the inaccurate forms were simply underlined or circled (EG3) and was alleviated the most when the students were given the opportunity to seek the teacher's' help during oral writing conferences, with the caveat that even in this case the limited time made it simply impossible to clarify all of the issues. Even though the process of self-correction was also facilitated to some extent when errors were indicated by means of symbols (EG5) or when metalinguistic comments were provided, this by no means applied to all of the students. This is because correction codes or explanations based on metalanguage can only be beneficial when L2 learners are aware of relevant rules and acquainted with pertinent terminology, something that can by no means be taken for granted. Such results stand somewhat in contrast to the opinions of some researchers that indirect CF is more beneficial because it fosters reflection on learners' TL knowledge, ensures deeper levels and processing and may lead to the development of self-editing skills, thus impacting long-term acquisition of TL forms (cf. Hyland & & Hyland, 2006). Evidently, the participants of the present investigation did not seem to notice such advantages and in fact indirect CF proved to be the least favored of all the types of feedback applied. One cannot help but wonder whether such preferences are not fully justified in view of the fact that many empirical studies have shown greater effectiveness of direct CF (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; van Beuningen et al., 2010). This said, the results of research comparing the contribution of different variants of CF are in general inconclusive and the effectiveness of correction is mediated by other factors, such as the type of TL form targeted, the short- and long-term effects or individual learner differences (cf. Bitchener, 2011; Pawlak, 2014).

The present study is not without its share of limitations. First, it would have been instructive to include other data collection instruments such as interviews with selected students as this could have enhanced our understanding of why some of the CF options employed turned out to be favored more than others. Second, the findings could be a function of the proficiency level of the participants which prevented many of them from taking full advantage of the additional corrective information supplied (i.e., metalinguistic explanations, codes or even indications of errors). Had the English level been higher, less direct ways of responding to errors could have been viewed more favorably. Third, it would have been instructive to find out how the participants' perceptions of corrective

techniques interacted with the actual effectiveness of such a technique. In fact, this issue was investigated in the larger-scale study but the results fall outside the scope of this particular paper.

5. Conclusions and implications

The study reported in the present paper contributes to the body of research into the role of written CF in L2 learning and teaching. In addition to corroborating previous empirical findings indicating that students want their written errors to be reacted to in a comprehensive manner, it also sheds light on the beliefs concerning the effectiveness and utility of six different corrective techniques, an aim that, to the best knowledge of the present authors, has not been pursued in previous research. The most important outcome in this respect was that direct CF was viewed as more useful than indirect CF and that the value of additional information in the form of metalinguistic comments or correction codes hinges of L2 learners' TL proficiency.

While the findings are insightful, it needs to be remembered that students' perceptions and expectations concerning various CF options may not be indicative of the actual effectiveness of these techniques. Moreover, some students may hold unrealistic beliefs about writing and error correction, which are based on limited experience or inability to reflect on their own process of L2 learning. Thus, it is the role of the teacher to evaluate such perceptions and expectations in each context and perhaps try to modify them to some extent if need be. In particular, teachers should strive to help their students understand why feedback is provided on their written errors, how it can aid them in improving their writing, and how it can ultimately affect their TL attainment. Otherwise, students may not be able to interpret the teacher's feedback in the right way and act on it in the manner that is intended by the teacher. It is also of crucial importance that teachers make an effort to explore their students' beliefs about writing and CF, and, if necessary, try to bridge any gap between their own and their students' expectations. Obviously, this can work both ways because, on the one hand, teachers may choose to modify their CF practices to better match students' preferences, but they can also attempt to change such preferences to some extent if this can benefit the learning process. This said, if teachers are expected to make optimal choices concerning the provision of written CF, more research is needed in this area, both such that seeks to determine the effectiveness of different corrective techniques and factors impacting this effectiveness, but also such that attempts to provide a fine-grained picture of L2 learners' preferences in this respect in a variety of instructional settings.

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