Exploring Secondary School Teachers' Feedback Practices in Written English as a Foreign Language in Tanzania

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Abstract: This study explored the feedback practices of secondary school teachers of English as a foreign language in Tanzania. It employed the mixed approach using a concurrent embedded design to collect data from 22 secondary schools in six districts of the Kilimanjaro region. From convenient sampling, 22 Form Three teachers filled in questionnaires; six of whom participated in semi-structured interviews. A documentary review collected information on teachers' feedback practices from 176 students' written texts using purposive random sampling. Cronbach's alpha was .800 and .766, indicating high and acceptable reliability of the questionnaire items. Besides, the reliability of qualitative data was established by interrater and member checks. Findings showed that the teachers marked students' written tasks using a holistic approach, focusing mainly on content errors. They paid little attention to form errors using indirect feedback strategies. The written comments were also controlling and judgmental. The teachers had a positive belief about feedback in writing lessons, but there was a mismatch between what the teachers perceived to do and their actual feedback practices. Such practices were influenced by inadequate training, a large number of students, a shortage of time and too many written errors for teachers to handle. Feedback practices that would help students develop writing skills in both form and content should be encouraged among teachers. Teachers also need professional development on feedback practices for effective writing lessons.

Keywords: Feedback; writing, Foreign Language; Second Language; Written Comments.

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Introduction

Learning writing skills and teachers' feedback in second language classes are inseparable. This is because learners of English commit errors as they write their essays. Hence, teachers communicate with them about their content and form errors through feedback. In so doing, teachers' feedback

has been noted to facilitate content learning writing in a second or foreign language (SL/FL) classes (Truscott, 1996). However, the debate on the effectiveness of teachers' feedback in developing accuracy in form (i.e., grammar, vocabulary and mechanics) in SL/FL writing lessons still continues following the influence of individual differences and environmental or social factors (Bitchener& Storch, 2016).

The debate can be traced back to the early studies on teachers' feedback practices. For example, Kepner (1991) and Semke (1984) indicated that teachers' feedback did not help students learn a second language. Conversely, Fathman and Whalley (1994) and Sheppard (1992) showed that teachers' corrective feedback addressed content and form errors in writing tasks. Moreover, Sommers (1982) reported that students received vague and meaningless comments from teachers. Thus, Truscott (1996; 2007) suggested that teachers should stop providing feedback because feedback does not improve grammatical accuracy and it de-motivates students.

In contrast to Truscott's (1996) argument, Li and Vuono (2019) report that recent studies on teachers' feedback in second or foreign language contexts have been prominent, focusing on how teachers' feedback can be given effectively and meaningfully from which positive results have been reported (cf. Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Bitchener, 2008; Cheng & Zhang, 2021; Khadawardi, 2021; Van Beuningen, De Jong & Kuiken, 2012). From such studies, Ellis (2009) and López (2021) classified teachers' feedback practices as direct, metalinguistic explanation and indirect feedback. For example, in direct feedback, students are provided with the correct form beside or above the error, including reformulating students' entire written compositions. Besides, direct feedback has been effective for students whose language proficiency is low, and it limits the chances of confusion among learners. However, direct feedback has been found to favor short-term learning over long-term learning.

In contrast, teachers provide indirect feedback by highlighting students' errors in their compositions by circling, underlining or crossing the error or placing a question mark near or on the error. Students are expected to use their acquired target language knowledge to address the errors independently because they are cognitively engaged. Such involvement helps them to retain knowledge in the long term. Nevertheless, low proficient students find it difficult and most are demotivated. Besides, metalinguistic explanation involves explicit information about the rules of the language that students are provided with about their form errors in writing tasks. Each error is usually numbered with its metalinguistic explanation at the end of the composition, as pointed out by Bitchener and Storch (2016).

Furthermore, EFL/ESL teachers' feedback practices either deal with students' errors selectively or comprehensively. Selective feedback focuses only on one or three errors (Bitchener& Storch, 2016) unlike comprehensive feedback which handles a wide range of students' written errors in their compositions (López, 2021). Besides, studies on the effectiveness of teachers' feedback have reported that selective feedback is more effective than comprehensive feedback. On the other hand, comprehensive feedback burdens students with overloaded cognitive information processing, especially low proficient students. Students may also be devastated seeing many marks in red pen on their errors. Nevertheless, comprehensive feedback encourages independent learning among second language learners in which long-term learning is embraced.

Moreover, Borg (2003, p .81) indicates that "teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically oriented, personalized and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs". Such beliefs, knowledge and thoughts result from teachers' school experience as a student, teacher trainees, teachers' classroom practice and contextual factors. As a result, feedback practices vary among EFL/SFL teachers and between times. For example, studies on teachers' feedback practices like that of Lee (2008) found that teachers provided feedback focusing on form (grammar and vocabulary) errors using direct corrective feedback mostly at (75.5%) with few indirect corrective feedback practices at (28.5%). The author also indicated that teachers' feedback practices were influenced by accountability, beliefs and values, exam culture and lack of teacher training. Besides, Wei and Cao (2020) found that teacher respondents in their study employed feedback strategies that need a high level of input, like interpreting the feedback, identifying and correcting mistakes, and including the strategies

associated with indicating the locations of the mistakes without giving students the correct answers. The authors also showed that teachers' feedback strategies were influenced by students' failure to interpret error codes, teachers' fear of demotivating students, perfectionism and self-expectations, cultural reasons, poor language learning experience and multiple errors in one sentence.

Nonetheless, Li and Vuono (2019) reported that few studies have recently focused on how EFL/ESL teachers provide feedback on content errors in students' compositions. As a result, few studies (e.g. Treglia, 2009) have studied how teachers write comments in students' compositions. For example, the author indicated that teachers wrote comments at the margin and end of the composition, which appeared as a request, information, suggestion, clarification and praise. Accordingly, responding effectively and meaningfully to students' errors in content and form differs among teachers. This study thus sought to explore the feedback practices that Form Three secondary school teachers in Tanzania employed in responding to content and form errors in students' written texts and the factors that influenced their feedback practices. The following questions were used as a guide:

1. How do EFL teachers respond to the learners' errors in writing tasks?
2. What factors influence the EFL teachers' responses to the learners' errors in writing tasks?

Literature Review
This section reviews literature related to teachers' feedback practices. Lee (2003) used questionnaires and interviews to investigate second-language teachers' perspectives, practices and problems regarding error feedback. Lee's teacher respondents indicated that they provided feedback to students to help students overcome their errors. The majority responded to students' errors comprehensively. However, the Form One teachers perceived to use direct feedback, but the Form Four teachers perceived to use indirect coded feedback mostly. Nevertheless, most teachers showed that they located errors directly for students. Moreover, teachers indicated that their feedback practices were determined by student requests and the amount of time available against their heavy workload. Teachers also provided feedback on students' errors because they perceived that students needed the feedback.

Leng (2014) explored the types of feedback beneficial to students by investigating in-text feedback and overall feedback written by the lecturer on the student's written assignments. The study collected data from a documentary review of students' written drafts. The findings revealed that students received directive and expressive feedback. The directive feedback category appeared at (77%) in which students were told exactly how to improve their writing, while expressive feedback was (23%). The directive feedback also appeared as directive-instruction feedback (52%) where students were instructed to make changes necessary for the text. Directive clarification feedback (24%) asked for a clearer explanation of ideas mentioned in the paper. The author thus concluded that written feedback was helpful and useful in students' essays revision, and students favored detailed feedback with specific praise from their lecturers.

Lira-Gonzales, Tejeda and Vasquez (2018) explored the EFL teachers' written corrective feedback and the ability of EFL students to integrate the corrective feedback in their text revisions. Using interviews and students written texts, the authors indicated that two teachers frequently used error identification with error codes in the pre-intermediated groups. The other teachers in the upper intermediate group mainly used direct corrections without comments in responding to students' errors in writing tasks. Yunus (2020) studied teachers' practices in marking students' English compositions, students' expectations of the teachers' written corrective feedback and whether teachers' feedback practices correspond to students' expectations. From the questionnaires given to teachers and students, the study found that teachers used direct unfocused corrective feedback by underlining, correcting and explaining the errors made by the students in their compositions. They also explained the errors to students in groups and in front of the class, including encouraging peer feedback but few of these teachers preferred face-to-face interaction with individual students. Moreover, teachers and students favored written corrective feedback as they believed students learn from it. Nevertheless, there was a mismatch between teachers' feedback practices and students' expectations.

IIonga (2019) investigated university students' English language errors and correction methods applied by tutors at Dar es Salaam University College of Education in Tanzania. Data was collected from students' written assignment papers. Findings revealed that the common English language written errors made by students were related to syntax, morphology and mechanics. Moreover, tutors responded to these errors by underlining the error, striking through the error, circling the error, punctuating sentences, filling in the missing words, and putting a question mark on or around the errors.

Sebonde and Biseko (2013) assessed the corrective feedback techniques that secondary school teachers in Dodoma, Region in Tanzania used to respond to their students' morphosyntactic errors in written and spoken contexts. They used documentary review, observation and questionnaire to gather their data. They reported that respondents used focused corrective feedback, direct and indirect corrective feedback and metalinguistic feedback. In addition, teachers preferred indirect feedback responding to students' written errors while explicit and recast were used mostly for students' oral errors.

Although a range of teachers' feedback practices studies has been done, as evidenced by the studies mentioned above, very few studies have been conducted in the Tanzanian EFL context. To the researchers' best knowledge, IIonga's study (2019) focused on university students' English language errors and correction methods; Sebonde and Biseko (2013) focused on the corrective feedback techniques that teachers use to handle their students' morphosyntactic errors both written and spoken errors. However, both studies focused on only error corrective feedback teachers used and overlooked teachers' feedback practices that include content and form, as well as the comments that teachers write responding to students' written errors. Therefore, considering teachers' cognition can vary feedback practices of one teacher to another, a study that explores the teachers' feedback practices that focused on form and content is worth conducting.

Methodology
The section describes the research methodology used in this study. It specifically focuses on the research design, context, population and sampling

as well as data collection methods and procedures. These are described in more detail below.

Resign Design
The study employed a concurrent embedded design of the mixed-methods approach (see Creswell, 2014 & Dörnyei, 2011). It collected both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data was obtained from textual data in students' written tasks, open-ended items in teachers' questionnaires, and the interview guide. The qualitative data obtained from students' written tasks were quantified to provide numeric data that showed the weight of the problem, similar to quantitative data from closed-ended items in teachers' questionnaires. In addition, the mixed methods improved the validity by triangulating the data from these research methods. Using the concurrent embedded design, the researchers collected the data concurrently but analysed separately. Such data were then integrated during their interpretation to complement the results of one of the approaches in a larger approach, where necessary.

Research Context
The study was conducted in government secondary schools in six districts of Kilimanjaro Region in the north-eastern part of Tanzania. These were day schools that received students from multilingual contexts. Most students enrolled in these schools were from public primary schools where Kiswahili is the language of instruction. English is taught as a subject and is a language of instruction in community government secondary schools. Form One and Form Two students attend seven English language periods per week while Form Three and Form Four students attend six periods a week. Writing is also one of the language skills that students are required to develop in the English syllabus. Furthermore, the regulations require English to be taught by teachers who have passed the English subject in their ordinary secondary schools and majored in English in their advanced secondary schools. These teachers are also required to be professional teachers who have either attended courses in Diploma in Education or earned a Bachelor's Degree in Education majoring in English.

Population and Sampling
English language teachers with their Form Three students from 331 O-Level secondary schools in Kilimanjaro Region were the target population for this study. These schools included 218 (65.9%)

government-owned and 113 (34.1%) non-governmental secondary schools. This study adopted 10% as a sample size for the schools selected as advocated by Creswell (2014) and Dörnyei (2011) argue that 1% to 10% works for a survey study. Thus, concurrent mixed methods sampling was adopted; both the purposive and probability sampling techniques were selected. Purposive sampling was used to engage 22 community government secondary schools in six districts. However, probability sampling through systematic random sampling was used to select 10% of community secondary schools based on their numbers in each district. From the schools, 23 teachers of English in Form Three filled in the questionnaire using convenient sampling. Among them, six were selected for interviews following Dörnyei (2011) comment that a sample of six to ten can suffice for an interview. The teachers were selected because they had been entrusted with teaching English and provided corrective feedback on students' writing tasks.

Furthermore, purposive random sampling was used to select 176 Form Three students from the 22 community secondary schools. Each school provided eight students; two boys and two girls with a B score and two boys and two girls with a D score in their Form Two English national Examination results for inclusive data. The Form Three students were selected because they did not have national examinations. In addition, the Form Three students had already spent two years learning English as a subject at the secondary level, where English is also the language of instruction.

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

The study collected data using the documentary review, questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. After the authors had been granted the research permission by the authorities and received the respondents' consent, they collected 176 English exercise books from the Form Three students thanks to teachers of English from the 22 secondary schools. They then read, selected and photocopied or snapshot some written texts from students' exercise books, specifically those marked by the teacher respondents. Afterwards, the exercise books were returned to the students. The researchers also administered the questionnaire to the teacher respondents to fill in. The questionnaires were returned to the researchers in 15 to 20 minutes. In addition, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with six

teachers involved in filling in the questionnaire. The interview was a face-to-face type, and they were held in place with privacy and free from distraction. The interviews were held for about 10 to 13 minutes. Each interview was recorded in a voice recorder and field notebook.

Validity and Reliability

Piloting of the questionnaire and the interview guide was conducted in four community secondary schools with similar features to those involved in the present study. Adjustments were made both in the questionnaire and interview guide. The internal consistency of items in the questionnaire using Cronbach Alpha was .800 and the Cronbach Alpha based on standardized items was .766, which indicated that the reliability of the questionnaire was high and acceptable. The reliability of the interview data was obtained by involving another rater. The voice recorder was replayed to adjust what was missing, including adding new information. The researchers also had member checks where the interviewees were asked to confirm the recorded data.

Treatment of Data

Content analysis was used to condense data obtained from students' written texts and open-ended items in the questionnaire. The major feedback strategies used by the teacher respondents were coded and then clustered into sub-categories. Descriptive statistics were then computed to obtain the frequencies and percentages of teachers' feedback strategies identified in students' written texts and those obtained from closed-ended and open-ended items from the questionnaire. Next, the researchers divided the teachers' feedback strategies by the total number of the identified teachers' feedback strategies obtained in students' written texts and then multiplied them by one hundred, similar to those obtained from the closed-ended item in the questionnaire. Data obtained from the semi-structured interview was analysed following content analysis but inductively. Codes were assigned to themes established from the transcription until no new pattern could be identified.

Results and Discussion

This section presents findings of this study. It describes the findings about feedback practices used by the teachers on students' writings, including the factors that influence teachers' feedback

practices. The sub-sections below provide more detail.

Research Question 1: How do EFL teachers respond to the learners' errors in writing tasks?

The first question regarding *how EFL teachers responded to the learners' errors in writing texts* sought to identify the feedback practices that teachers used on students' written texts. Teachers' feedback practices on students' errors were identified following Ellis's (2009) and López (2021) typology and the related aspects as suggested by Ferris (2014). The researchers then computed the frequencies and percentages of each feedback strategy, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Feedback Strategies Used by Teachers on Students' Written Tasks

Teachers' Written Feedback Strategies	f	%
Put a correct tick	208	53
Total	208	53
Indirect Feedback		
Circle the error only	35	8.8
Underlying the errors only	31	7.8
Put a cross on an error	27	6.8
Use a question mark only	7	1.7
Use a symbol like λ for deletion or *sp* for spelling only	3	0.7
Total	103	25.8
Direct Feedback		
Provide a correct form near an error only	24	6.0
Total	24	6
Both Direct and Indirect Feedback		
Underline and provide a correct answer	12	3.0
Circle the error and provide the answer	17	4.2
Use a symbol λ or *sp* to mark an error and provide the answer	16	4.0
Cross the error and provide the answer	14	3.5
Put a question mark and correct answer	2	0.5
Total	61	15.2
Grand total	396	100
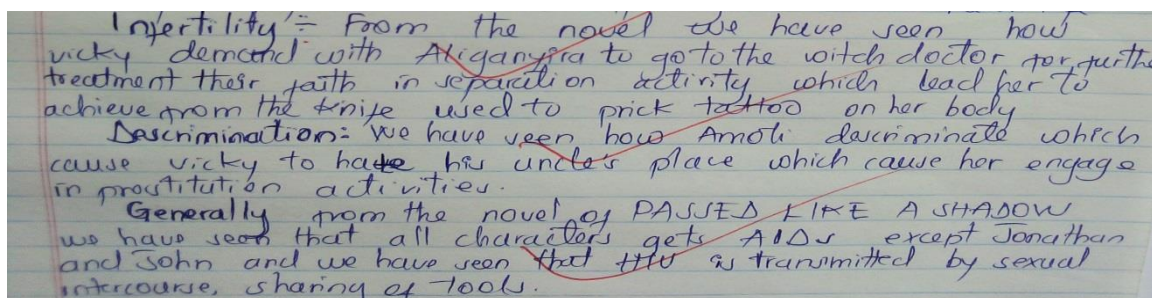
Excerpt 1: A tick as a Feedback Provision Strategy in an Essay

Putting a Correct Tick

Table 1 indicates the most prominent feedback strategy was putting a tick for the correct answer with a frequency of 208 (52%) out of 396 occurrences of all feedback strategies. Excerpt 1 exemplifies such practice.

The findings show that in more than half of the feedback strategies used, teachers put a tick sign to communicate to students that their answers were correct based on the written task. These findings echo the findings from the questionnaire that 70.8%

of teachers marked students' writing using a tick with a grade or a score. In comparison, 83.4% indicated marking using a tick while giving comments like very good, good and fair. However, a few of them, 45.6%, indicated that they did not use a tick with a grade or a score or comments marking students' errors. Such findings imply that teachers preferred holistic marking by using ticks to signal that the answers given by students were correct. The findings are consistent with Hattie and Timperley (2007) who argued that the response on how well a task is being accomplished or performed

in terms of correctness or incorrectness is a common feedback strategy among teachers.
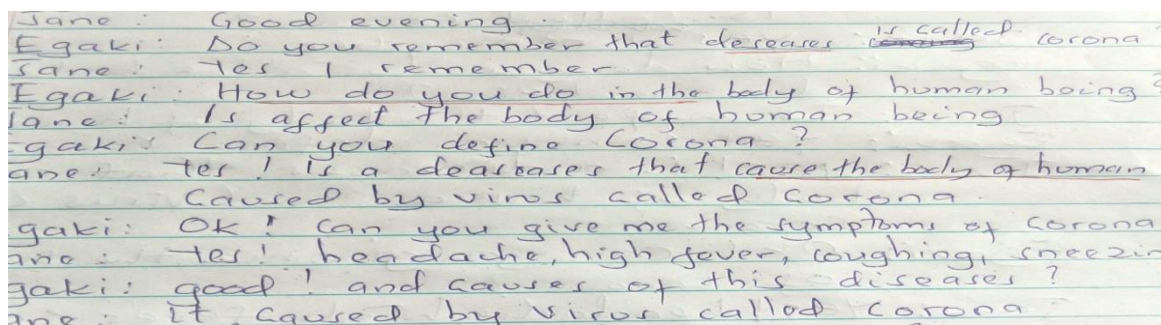
Indirect Feedback Strategies

Indirect feedback strategies appeared at a frequency of 103 (25.8%) out of 396 (100%) written corrective teachers' feedback strategies. Some indirect feedback strategies had high frequencies; these included circling only 33 (8.8%), underlining the errors only 31 (7.8%) and putting a cross on an error without an answer 27 (6.8%). The least used indirect strategies were a question mark of only 3 (1.7%); symbols like λ for deleted errors or *sp* for spelling or // for lack of clarity or global error had a frequency of 2 (0.5%). Excerpts 2 and 3 present examples of different forms of indirect feedback strategies.

The analysis of students' written texts shows teachers preferred to use circling and underlining as indirect feedback strategies to question marks and symbols. These results were in comparison with what the teachers indicated in the questionnaire. All teachers indicated underlining students' errors while 95.8% pointed to circle students' errors.
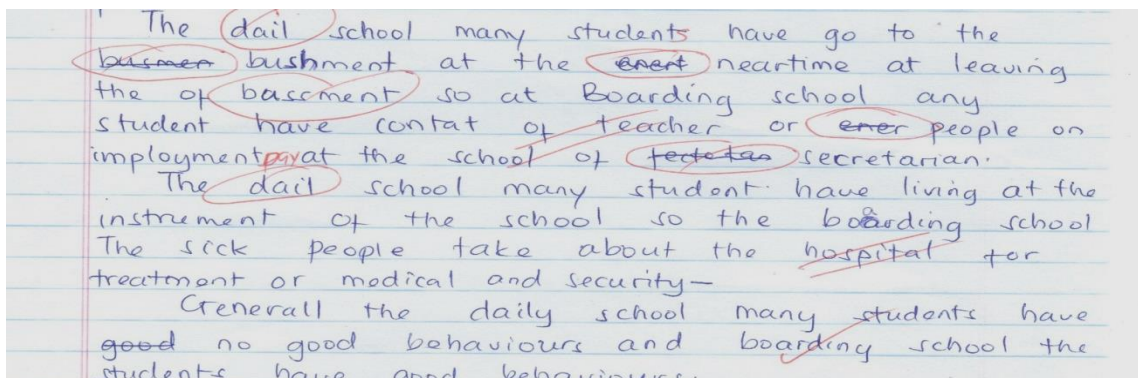
Excerpt 2: An Example of the Indirect Feedback Strategy Using Circling

Excerpt3: An Example of the Indirect Feedback Strategy Using Underlining
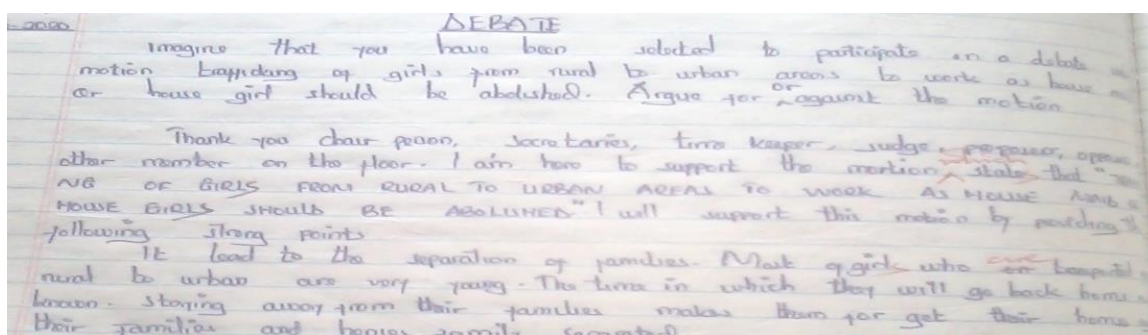
Excerpt 4: The Use of Direct Feedback

Direct Feedback Strategies

Teachers also used direct feedback strategies as well as combinations of both direct and indirect feedback strategies. These strategies were observed when teachers provided the correct forms next to the errors, which occurred at a frequency of 24 (6%). Combining direct and indirect feedback strategies had a frequency of 61 (15.2%). Such feedback strategies appeared in the form of underlining and providing a correct answer 12 (3%), circling the error and providing the answer as well as using symbols like λ for deleted errors and *sp* for misspelt errors had a frequency of 16 (4%) and 17 (4.2%), respectively. Furthermore, most teachers

crossed the error and provided the correct answers at the frequency of 14 (3.5%), and only 2 (0.5%) put question marks and correct answers altogether. Excerpt 4 is illustrative.

The findings show that the direct feedback strategy was not much employed by the teachers in responding to students' written errors. However, such findings were in contrast with those that teachers indicated in the questionnaires, as 87.5% of the teacher respondents indicated using the direct feedback strategy and 16.5% indicated otherwise. Besides, teachers showed to prefer combining direct and indirect feedback strategies to only direct feedback strategy.

Generally, the findings about direct and indirect feedback strategies indicate that teachers use the indirect feedback strategy more than the direct feedback strategy. These findings are partly concurrent with Wei and Cao (2020) who reported that university English teachers employed an indirect feedback strategy than a direct feedback strategy. Nonetheless, the little practice of providing feedback using indirect feedback strategies in the present study was ineffective, given the student respondents' level of language development. Students with such performance may fail to self-correct the errors. Ferris (2014) pointed out that students with low proficiency lack enough linguistics knowledge for self-correction because they involve complex grammatical systems.

Evaluation and Affective Feedback in Written Feedback

Teachers indicated that they enhanced their feedback strategies with evaluation and affective feedback. For example, evaluation feedback appeared in written comments with an assigned numerical score and/or a grade while affective feedback was reflected by written comments that praised or criticized or gave suggestions or directives, including those which criticized and gave suggestions altogether as well as those which suggested for face-to-face interactions between a teacher and a student. Table 3 shows the frequencies and percentages of teachers' modes of grading their students' written texts.

Table 3: Teachers' Modes of Marking and Grading

	f	%
Marked but without any comment and score	94	38
Marked and awarded a score	76	31
Marked and wrote a comment that praises the student	25	10
Not marked but wrote comments on suggestions	22	9
Marked and wrote comments on suggestions	11	4.4
Marked but with a written comment, *seen*	6	2.4
Not marked but has a written comment, *seen*	5	2
Not marked but has a comment, *see me*	4	1.6
Not marked but has criticism given	4	1.6
Grand total	**247**	**100**
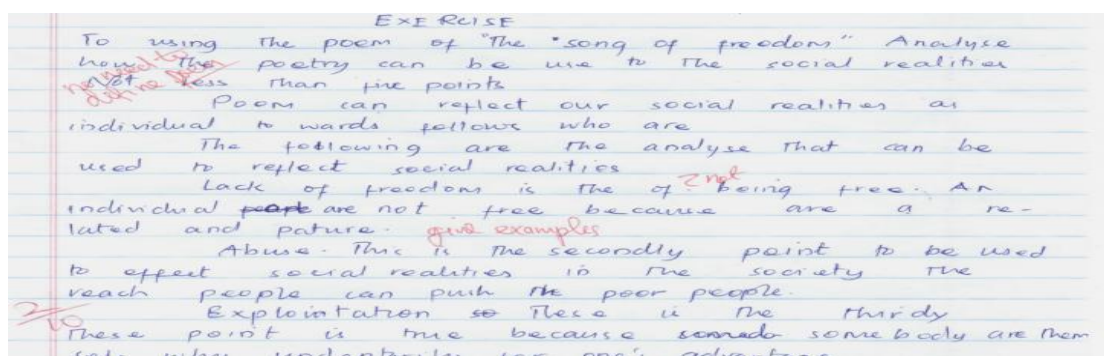
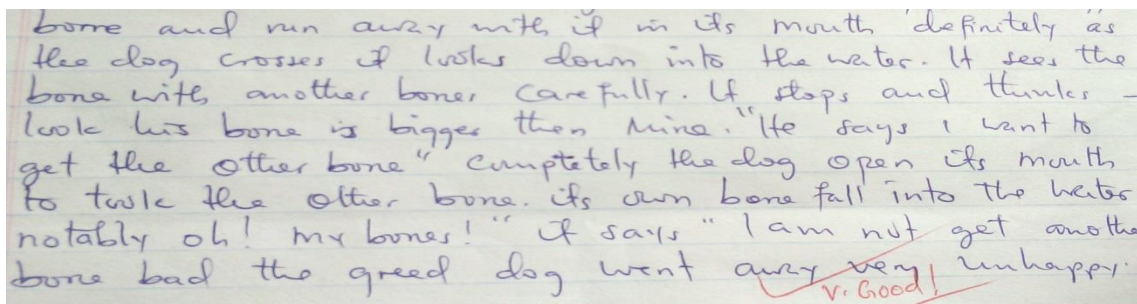**Excerpt 5: An Example of Written Feedback that was accompanied by a Score**

Table 3 shows 94(38%) of teachers marked students' written texts but did not write any comments or award a score. However, some teachers integrated holistic marking (i.e., a tick for the correct answer) with direct and indirect feedback strategies; some of which had high frequencies. For example, 76(31%) of students' written texts were marked and awarded a score,

25(10%) were marked with a written comment that praised the student, 11(4.4%) marked with written comments on suggestions while those which were marked and written seen had a frequency of 6(2.4%). Some teachers did not use direct and indirect feedback strategies; instead, they wrote comments on suggestions with a frequency of 22(9%). Few with 5(2%) and 4(1.6) frequencies

wrote comments like seen and see me. Excerpt 5 above exemplifies some written tasks that were marked and assigned a score with written comments.

Some teachers used affective feedback by writing comments like, *'Excellent', 'Very good, 'Good', or 'Good try'*, as evidenced in Excerpt 6.

Excerpt 6: An Example of Written Feedback that was Accompanied by Praise
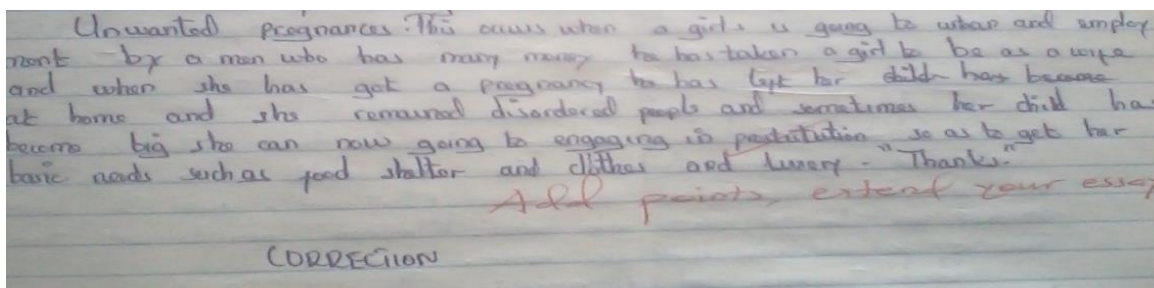
Excerpt 7: An Example of Written Feedback that Gave Directives

Table 4: Holistic Marking

Holistic Marking	D		A	
	f	%	f	%
Providing a tick with a grade/score	7	29.2	17	70.8
Providing a cross with a grade/score	17	70.8	7	29.2
Providing a tick with comments like very good, good and fair	4	16.6	20	83.4
Providing a cross with comments like poor, seen, see me	10	43.5	13	56.5
Putting a question mark where you failed to understand	6	25	18	75
Providing a grade/score without any marking on the student's essay/text	17	77.3	5	22.7
Returning student's an essay/text without any marks and providing them with a new task to write	21	87.5	3	12.5

In addition, some wrote comments that provided suggestions or directives or both criticized and offered suggestions or directives like *'Start with the book then the author', 'Write in an essay form', 'Your sentences are too long,' 'Add points, extend your essay'* and *'This is descriptive, make a correction.'* Excerpt 7 provides an example.

Moreover, some written comments informed students that the teacher simply noted their tasks with an overall evaluative remark like 'Seen'. Some were not marked but had the same evaluative remark, *'Seen '*and *'See me'*. Other written

comments like; *'Be serious', 'Follow instructions', 'Avoid copying',* and *'Too short,'* to mention but a few, were also observed. Besides, some teachers marked students with correct ticks but were not accompanied by any comment, score, or grade.

From items in the questionnaire that sought to determine how teachers mark, grade, write comments, and score in students' written tasks, teachers indicate to do the same as displayed in Table 4. According to Table 4, teachers indicated agreeing or disagreeing with some holistic marking strategies. Providing a tick with comments like very

good, good and fair and a tick with a grade or score received high frequencies of agreeing at 17(70.8%) and 20 (83.4%) respectively. Teachers indicated that they moderately provided a cross with comments like poor, seen, and see me with the frequency of 13(56.5%). Besides, teachers indicated disagreeing with returning students' essays without any marking while providing them with new tasks to write at a frequency of 17(70.8%). Similarly, a frequency of 17(77.3%) indicated that they did not provide a grade/score without any mark on the students' essays while 17(70.8%) did not provide a tick with a grade/score. Whereas teachers with frequencies of 13(56.5%) indicated agreeing, 10(43.5%) indicated disagreeing by providing a cross with comments like poor, seen and see me.

The findings show that teachers evaluated students' written tasks and provided affective feedback. Most teachers wrote comments that gave directives or suggestions and praised students, similar to what Hyland and Hyland (2001) and Leng (2014) reported. However, the quality of some written comments was hardly effective because some written comments were in contrast with some of the effective attributes related to feedback as explained by Agbayahoun (2016), Hattie and Timperley (2007) and Hyland and Hyland (2001). Students prefer specific comments to comments referring to general observations. They also like specific positive comments that relate to basic text features rather than general praises.

Additionally, students have been noted to prefer comments that explain why something is good or bad and they dislike those which are too controlling and judgmental. Studies showed that written comments need to accommodate students' feelings and facilitate the writing progress through which students are motivated rather than demotivated. Sommers (1982) added that written comments of one word or two words might not give students enough information about the quality of their written tasks. Treglia (2009) mentioned that some written comments' tone or wording boost or damage students' learning and self-confidence. Most of the written comments observed in the present study lacked the positive attributes mentioned above as some of them were too general and too controlling and judgmental, as witnessed in some comments like *seen, see me, repeat or Are you serious?* Thus, the written comments were ineffective as they could demotivate students and they did not give students enough information about the quality of their writing.

Placement of Written Comments in Students' Written Texts

Teacher respondents positioned written comments within the text, at the margin and at the end of written texts. Table 5 shows that 92(80%) of written comments were positioned at the end of an essay, 16(14%) were within the text and 7(6%) were written at the margin. Thus, the findings suggest that written comments at the end of an essay had higher frequencies than others.

Table 5: Placement of written comments in students' written texts

Written Comments Placement	f	%
At the end of an essay or composition	92	80
Within the text	16	14
At the margin	07	6
Grand total	**115**	**100**

Table 6: Written Comments

Written Comments	D		A	
	f	%	f	%
Writing comments in the margin close to the line or paragraph where the error(s) occurred	2	8.2	22	91.7
Writing comments at the end of the composition about the errors committed	3	13.6	19	86.4
Numbering the errors in the texts and writing a grammatical explanation for each numbered error at the end of the composition	10	47.6	11	52.3

Teachers were also given a questionnaire to fill in where they placed written comments. Table 6 indicates that most teachers agreed with placing written comments in different parts of students' essays. With a frequency of 22(91.7%), teachers

indicated writing comments at the margin close to the line or paragraph while 19(86.4%) indicated placing written comments at the end of students' essays. Some with 11(53.3%) frequencies indicated numbering errors in the text while writing a

grammatical explanation for each numbered error at the end of the composition.

Findings in Tables 5 and 6 indicate that teachers preferred to place their comments at the end of compositions. These findings indicate a mismatch between what teachers perceived to do and their actual practices of placing written comments at the margin. Similarly, teachers indicated to number the errors in the text and write grammatical explanations for each numbered error at the end of the composition, but there was only one occasion of written comments on mechanics, which was at the end of the written formal letter observed under study. No written comments either placed at the margin or the end of the essays addressed errors in grammar and vocabulary.

Feedback on Content and Form Errors
The study also observed that teachers gave feedback to students about content errors and somehow on forms errors in written tasks. From the 162 marked written texts, teachers provided feedback on errors related to the content at a frequency of 127 (78%) and on form at 35 (22%). Besides, the findings of text analysis did not align with those indicated in the questionnaire by the teachers. Of 23 teachers, two showed that they provided feedback on content only, 14 indicated on form only, while eight indicated to give feedback on both form and content.

Such findings showed a mismatch between what teachers perceived to do and their actual feedback practices. In text analysis, teachers paid less attention to form errors compared to content errors. However, in the questionnaire, teachers indicated marking form errors with high frequency. The teachers also believed that they marked students' written errors comprehensively but their actual practices in written text analyses did not reflect comprehensive feedback. Most teachers marked students' tasks holistically and did not focus on form errors. The findings suggest teachers' feedback practices focused on content errors rather than grammar and vocabulary errors. Thus, students were not given chances to develop their grammar and vocabulary. Considering teachers' feedback on form errors has proved to be effective and useful in developing grammatical accuracy in writing, the findings suggest that the studied students may not become good writers if their writings are full of grammar and vocabulary errors and may also end in

fossilization as Ferris (2014) and Selinker (1972) pointed out.

Teachers' Oral Feedback
From the closed-ended item in the questionnaire, 66.7% of teachers indicated that they provided oral feedback to students by having a general explanation with all students about their errors observed in written tasks, but 33.4% indicated that they did not provide oral feedback. Furthermore, 87.5% of teachers showed that they provided oral feedback to individual students, unlike 12.5% who indicated to disagree. Such findings were supported by results obtained from the interviews as one teacher said,

I communicate with them orally in class when I give them feedback about the errors, especially the common ones, and I also give time to those individual students who either need more help on how to write a good composition or have good writing skills. (T.1).

Peer Feedback
In closed-ended items in the questionnaire, teachers showed to encourage peer feedback. For example, all teachers indicated that they tended to ask students to peer review their errors in class, but 82.6% indicated to be asking students to peer review their errors outside the classes. These findings were also supported by findings in the open-ended item in the questionnaire, as evidenced in the following extracts: "I use to provide them with correction in the class through discussion when they can identify their own errors and how to correct them" (TD5). Another respondent reported that "I exchange their work from one group to another and present their work on the blackboard" (TE2).

The use of oral feedback and peer feedback echoes the findings of Bayraktar (2012), Küçükali (2017) and Yunus (2020). Oral feedback implies teachers strengthened their written comments on students' written texts with oral feedback because a teacher and a student could negotiate meaning by asking for clarification. Thus, students were more likely to understand what they had failed in written feedback; as mentioned in the interview, teachers used oral feedback to talk with students about their written errors, specifically the weak ones. Moreover, teachers could gain more insights into areas that challenge students and build good relationships with students, a context that would

reduce the effects of affective factors. On the other hand, peer feedback helped students improve their writing and encouraged critical thinking skills through which writing autonomy was developed.

The findings about teachers' feedback practices showed that teachers mostly marked students' written tasks using the holistic approach by putting a tick to signal the correctness of facts. Additionally, some teachers' responses basically focused on content errors through which they wrote comments at the end of students' written tasks, praising, giving directives or suggestions, and awarding students' written tasks with a score and/or a grade. Besides, some teachers' feedback practices showed that they responded to form errors preferring indirect feedback, to direct feedback or combined direct and indirect feedback strategies. However, the findings suggest that very little attention was given to form errors in students' written tasks, and there was a mismatch between what teachers indicated to do in their questionnaires and their actual feedback practices in written tasks. Moreover, teachers indicated that they provided oral feedback to students about their written errors and encouraged students to have peer feedback.

Research Question 2: What Factors Influence the EFL Teachers' Responses to Learners' Errors in Writing Tasks?

The second research question sought to explore factors influencing teachers' feedback practices. The following themes were identified from the teachers' interviews and questionnaires:

Teachers' Beliefs about Feedback in Writing Tasks

All the 23 teacher respondents involved in the questionnaire and those six who participated in interviews indicated that marking students' writing tasks is important. In addition, teachers believed that students learned from the feedback they gave even without substantial evidence, as exemplified in the following extract from the interview:

Yes.., it is very important because it helps students to correct themselves on different errors, for example, they will know how to arrange their work in paragraphs, and they will know how to write words correctly without having errors in spelling. Also, it will help students to use punctuation marks like full stops, capital letters, and small letters (T.F.)

Teachers also showed a strong belief in comprehensive feedback as 65% of teachers indicated to mark students' errors comprehensively from the questionnaire which was also pointed out in the interviews as witnessed by this teacher's response.

...I mark all of them so that they cannot make mistakes. I mark all of them, and if there are mistakes I tell them to make corrections...Then I give them another composition to write so that they cannot make the same mistakes (T.A.).

Inadequate Training
Findings indicated that most teachers were not trained to provide feedback on writing tasks. Out of the six teachers involved in the interview, only one teacher admitted during interviews having received training on how to provide feedback, as demonstrated in the extract given:

When I was at University, I didn't see anyone come to me or in the lecturing room and taught us how to mark the essays. I was not taught but when I started working it was the time when I came to know by myself [How did you come to know by yourself?] When I came to the work, I found that normally when we are marking some of the examinations we were provided with marking schemes, the marking schemes are very common and have guidelines for marking essays (T.G.)

A Large Number of Students
The interview data also indicated that many students in English language classes influence the type of feedback given. The following extracts provide some examples.

No, not all the errors. I select a few [Why do you do so?] Because you cannot correct all the errors in classes with 70 or 75 students, you take a lot of time and you might find yourself losing some periods (T.B.)

Another respondent added that "because of the number of students, I normally use the group. I arrange them in groups so I can talk to them at least three learners in each group [Why do you do so?] It is too practical" (T.F.).

Shortage of Time and Many Errors in Students' Written Texts
Some teacher respondents reported that they did not have time to mark all errors because students made many errors in their written tasks. The response showed that the respondents were afraid of the tedious task they would be involved in comparison to their time. The following excerpts

demonstrate a few responses that time and many errors in students' written tasks influenced teachers' feedback practices: "Yeah! Aah, in marking, sometimes, you may mark all; sometimes, you may mark a few, depending on time" (T.C.). Another one indicated that "Also sometimes I can call one by one if time allows so, I can correct them for the mistakes they have done" (T.F).

Difficulties in Identifying all Errors

Some teachers pointed out that they did not mark all errors in students' written tasks because it was challenging to identify all errors, as witnessed in the following responses from the interviews: "It is not easy. [Why do you mark so?] There are a few you can identify and others you may not identify" (T.E.). "Yes, but sometimes it is very difficult to see all the errors. [Why?] As a human being, marking each and everything or seeing all the errors found in learners' compositions, will be very difficult sometimes. That work is tiresome" (T.F.).

Non-response to Errors as Motivation for Students

Motivation is one of the factors that affected feedback provision among the teacher respondents. Some teachers said they did not mark all errors in students' written tasks to avoid demotivating students. The following extract provides an example.

No, not all errors [Why] Aaahh! I don't mark all errors in their writing composition, the big reason is to encourage them because if you mark everything then you end up seeing that they have not done anything [So you mark few of them] I mark few of them to avoid demotivating students (T.B.).

More Explanation for Students with Low Proficiency

Students in English language classes have different language abilities. Thus, teachers used different feedback strategies to meet the need of each student in a class. As pointed out by some teachers, they provide oral feedback to assist students who performed poorly. The following extract presents a few responses on how weak students influence their feedback.

Yeah, I communicate with them orally [How and why?] I communicate with them orally in class when I give them feedback about the errors especially the common ones and I also give time to those individual students who need more help on how to

write a good composition and have good writing skills (T.B.).

Reflective Teaching and Self-Evaluation

Feedback is a classroom practice that is interactive and evaluative in language classes. Whereas students receive information about their writing performance and achievements, teachers reflect on and evaluate the success and unsuccessfulness of feedback given to students writing tasks. Eleven of 23 teacher respondents involved in the questionnaire indicated that they provided feedback to establish what students understood from their written tasks, including students' progress. Likewise, from the interview, the teacher respondents showed that together with their beliefs and knowledge about feedback in language learning, the teacher respondents gave feedback on errors made by students for self-reflection and evaluation about their teaching, as presented in the following extract when responding to why marking is important: "It is easy to establish whether students have understood or they have not understood........ Failure to do that means that you are just teaching, and you are not responding to your students to see what you are teaching" (TE).

The findings for the second research question indicated that all teachers marked students' writing tasks because they believed it was an important practice in writing lessons, and students learned from it. However, their feedback practices were influenced by inadequate training, many students in classrooms, shortage of time and students committing many errors. Factors like difficulty in identifying all errors, fear of demotivating students, and students with low proficiency need more explanations, including using feedback as a tool for reflection and self-evaluation which were also noted to influence teachers' feedback practices. Such findings partly correspond to Lee (2008) who indicated that teachers' feedback practices were influenced by teachers' beliefs, values, exam culture, lack of training and school culture about feedback practices. Veloo, Aziz and Yaacob (2018), on the other hand, reported that teachers preferred holistic marking to analytical marking because little time is consumed and holistic marking is unsuitable for a class with many students. Moreover, the findings confirm Ferris' (2014) argument that most teachers locate students' errors than provide the correct ones because they lack enough knowledge of the target language, which could interfere with their ability to notice the error and give the correct

form. This is indicated from the interview that teachers had difficulties in identifying all errors and most did not have training in error correction. On the other hand, the present study's findings somewhat contrast with Lee (2003; 2008), who found that L2 teachers tremendously employed a direct feedback strategy.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that holistic marking that focused on content errors was the prominent feedback practice provided by EFL teachers in secondary schools under investigation. Teachers paid very little attention to form errors using the indirect feedback strategy. Written comments were placed at the end of an essay and were too controlling and judgmental for effective feedback. Teacher respondents were positive about feedback provision. However, teachers' feedback practices were influenced by self-experiences as teachers, inadequate training and contextual factors.

To develop holistic writing skills among students, teachers ought to respond to students' written errors in both form and content. Also, teachers need professional development in feedback practices.

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