

Online versus face-to-face written corrective feedback: EFL students' perception and preference

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, there are many Internet applications (e.g. *Instagram* and *Tumblr*) that can be used in the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL). The emergence of Internet applications enables EFL teachers to provide online written corrective feedback (WCF) in addition to face-to-face WCF. Being applied in the blended-learning mode of instruction, this study aimed to describe EFL students' perception and preference for the use of online and face-to-face WCF. It involved 36 students of the English Department who took an Advanced Writing course. In the course, the students learned two kinds of essays: opinion essays and argumentative essays. In the first half of the semester, the students were engaged in online WCF provided through *Instagram* for the opinion essay and through *Tumblr* for the argumentative essay. In the second half of the semester, the students were provided with face-to-face WCF for the argumentative essay. The result showed that while the students agreed with the use of Internet platforms in the teaching of EFL writing, they stated their preference for face-to-face WCF over online WCF. Accordingly, when teaching is likely to be conducted in online mode, WCF must be given in ways that can engage the students enthusiastically.

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INTRODUCTION

A proliferating area in the study of writing in English as a foreign language (EFL) deals with the provision of written corrective feedback (WCF). Early studies on WCF began more than twenty years ago. In the process of writing, students frequently get WCF on what they have written, be it in the form of peer feedback or teacher feedback. Peer feedback is feedback given by peers or fellow students. A noted study was the one conducted by Villamil and Guerrero (1998). They investigated the impact of individual peer feedback on students' drafts. It was found that the students included feedback in the final product of their writing. Porto (2001) examined feedback given to students working in groups. The study showed that feedback given by members of the group helped improve students' awareness of the writing process and their strengths in writing.

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On the other hand, teacher feedback refers to feedback given by the teacher. An early study on the effect of teacher feedback was conducted by Hyland (1998). The result of Hyland's study showed that the students valued the teacher's feedback and used most of the feedback for the revision.

Some perspectives on the employment of WCF have been debated. Corrective feedback is a prominent element in teaching and learning English since it was beneficial to improve the accuracy in composition writing (Ferris et al., 2013; Diab, 2015), specifically to correct the students' language errors (Sermsook et al., 2017). In opposition, some argued that WCF consumed teachers' time (Rajab et al., 2016), yet it failed to boost the students' motivation (Brown, 2012) since it reflected teacher-centered learning, causing the students to retain passive action during the feedback process. Corrective feedback was also considered to make students feel unconfident in their writing (Irwin, 2017). Hence, it is recommended that while applying WCF, the teacher consider a balance between pattern and content (Chen et al., 2016), cover other different aspects of writing such as content and organization (Lee, 2019) as well as create motivating responses toward the students' writing progress (Ahmed et al., 2020).

Traditionally, WCF on the student draft is given by peers or the teacher in the face-to-face session in the classroom. With the development of technology, especially the Internet nowadays, written corrective feedback may be given through various online platforms. There have been a lot of research studies that reported the use of online platforms as a means to provide written corrective feedback to EFL students' writing. Some of the online platforms which have been used to provide feedback include Blog, Edmodo, Facebook, Instagram, Schoology, and Quipper School.

Recent studies on the efficacy of online WCF have been performed (Bitchener et al., 2010; Yoke et al., 2013; Tai et al., 2015; Aridah et al, 2017; Daweli, 2018; Widyaningsih, 2018; Sarré et al., 2019). The results of the research studies on the effect of online written corrective feedback vary. For example, a study on the effect of online written corrective feedback conducted by Bitchener et al. (2010) showed that Blogs could be used effectively to reduce targeted errors (singular/plural nouns and subject-verb agreement) in the students' writing.

Yoke et al. (2013) reported the result of their study comparing two groups of Malay students, one group was given WCF through email and the other was given conventional WCF. The result showed that the students who were given WCF through email outperformed those who were given conventional WCF. Besides, it implied that the students were more interested in online corrective feedback due to the absence of submitting printed works. Similarly, the students also revealed some positive attitudes toward the employment of online WCF using google docs (Daweli, 2018), Learning Management System via K-12 Digital School (Tai et al., 2015), email (Widyaningsih, 2018) and moodle (Sarre et al., 2019). Despite the various online platform used, the research showed the same successful outcome.

In contrast, although the students experienced the advantages of WCF through online platforms, they voiced a strong stance for interacting with their teachers face-to-face to get immediate feedback. Face-to-face WCF was able to develop students' writing accuracy (Akmal & Mahrup, 2019) since it enabled detailed feedback and inaccuracy form sharing (Evans et al., 2015). Indeed, students preferred face-to-face WCF since it alleviated recognizing errors quickly (Westmacott, 2016). Meanwhile, Ene and Upton (2018) confirmed that although the students got assistance from peer feedback through online chats and email, face-to-face WCF offered many opportunities for discussion and clear explanation as well as convenience bond obtained from their teacher.

In Indonesia, a study conducted by Wihastyanang and Latief (2017) compared the effectiveness of WCF given through online platforms, Schoology, and in a face-to-face session. The result of the study showed that there were no significant differences in the writing scores of the students from the group given WCF through online platforms and those from the group given

face-to-face WCF. As the Internet platforms provide an alternative way of WCF provision, besides being given WCF which was provided conventionally in face-to-face mode, EFL students may be given online WCF.

While many previous studies compared two groups of students each of which was given a different type of feedback provision separately, this study investigated the perception of online and face-to-face WCF of one group of students who were given two types of WCF provision subsequently. Three research questions were formulated as follows:

- (1) How do the EFL students perceive online written corrective feedback?
- (2) How do the EFL students perceive face-to-face written corrective feedback?
- (3) Which of the two types of written corrective feedback do the EFL students prefer: online or face-to-face?

METHOD

This study aimed to describe the EFL students' perception of the use of WCF provided by the teacher through online platforms and WCF provided in the conventional mode in the form of face-to-face teacher feedback. It involved 36 EFL students who took the Advanced Writing course at the English Department of Universitas Negeri Malang, a state university that is also a center of innovation in education in Indonesia. The students learned to write two types of essays in the course: opinion essays and argumentative essays. The material for the teaching of opinion essays was based on a coursebook written by Oshima and Hogue (2007, pp. 168-180). While the material for the teaching of argumentative essays was based on two coursebooks, one was written by Oshima and Hogue (2006, pp. 142-160) and the other was written by Smalley et al. (2001, pp. 275-298).

In the English Department, three levels of writing courses are taught: *Paragraph Writing* (focusing on writing paragraphs of different types), *Essay Writing* (which trains the students to write expository essays of five types: exemplification, comparison/contrast, classification, process analysis, and cause/effect), and *Argumentative Writing* (Catalog of the English Department, 2019). The Argumentative Writing or Advanced Writing course aimed to help students write two types of essays: opinion and argumentative essays. An opinion essay is written to "express opinions about everything" (Oshima & Hogue, 2007, p. 169). The opinions expressed in the essay should contain some reasons which are based on the writer's personal points of view. An example of a thesis statement for an opinion essay taken from a student's work is as follows: "Although it is good for children to know about technology, I think they should not be allowed to play with a smartphone for three reasons." Based on the thesis statement, it can be predicted that the next (body) paragraphs deal with the three reasons for the opinions which are explained one after another.

Unlike an opinion essay, an argumentative essay is written "to convince the reader to agree with the point of view or opinion of the writer" Smalley et al. (2001, p. 282). The arguments expressed in the essay take a side of an issue and refute the opposing view. An example of a thesis statement for an argumentative essay taken from a student's work is as follows: "Although school zoning system in new student school enrollment may not satisfy some parties, I believe it has more benefits than the old (non-zoning) system." In the development of the essay, the writer would state the arguments by some parties and then refute the arguments by giving more convincing arguments. Thus, the body paragraphs contain the arguments of the two opposing sides (the arguments of some parties versus those of the writer).

The teaching of Advanced Writing by using Internet applications was conducted by two female teachers, Teacher 1 taught the class by using Instagram, and Teacher 2 taught the class by using Tumblr. In the first half of the semester, the students were engaged in the use of *Instagram* in writing activities and they were provided with online WCF in the process of writing

opinion essays. There were eight sessions for the teaching to write an opinion essay. The first session was used for pre-test administration and the eight sessions for post-test administration. Thus, the teaching of opinion essays using Instagram ran from Session 2 to Session 7. In the second session, the students were introduced to the nature of opinion essays and the use of Instagram as an instructional medium. In sessions 3 to 5, the students were involved in the teaching and learning activities to write an opinion essay. Instagram was used to show video materials for classroom discussion, to show the list of topics that the students should choose for their first essay, to provide tips for writing an opinion essay, and to upload students' revisions based on feedback from peers. Sessions 6 and 7 were used to repeat the major teaching and learning activities for the second opinion essay that the students had to write.

Then, the students were taught to write argumentative essays by using *Tumblr* and they were also provided with online WCF through this Internet application. There were nine meetings for the teaching of argumentative essays by using *Tumblr*. The teaching and learning activities proceeded from Session 2 to Session 8. In Session 2, the students were introduced to *Tumblr* and asked to create a *Tumblr* account. They were also required to become followers of the teacher's *Tumblr* account. In Sessions 3 to 5, the teacher posted a number of exercises on *Tumblr* and guided the students in writing the introductory, developmental, and concluding paragraphs of the first argumentative essay. The teacher also asked the students to post their works and give peer feedback to each other's work on *Tumblr*. The same procedures were repeated in Sessions 6 to 8 so that the students can write the second argumentative essay. In the ninth session, the post-test was administered to the students.

It is important to note that the teaching and learning activities which took a number of sessions by using each of the two Internet applications (Instagram and *Tumblr*), were preceded by pre-test administration and followed by post-test administration. The scores resulting from the pre-test and post-test were compared to know whether there was an improvement in the students' ability in writing each of the two types of essays. The results of the analysis of each of the two tests showed the use of Instagram (Handayani et al, 2018) and the use of *Tumblr* (Rahmanita & Cahyono, 2018). effectively improved the EFL students' writing ability.

In the second half of the semester, the students were taught by a male teacher (Teacher 3) to learn to write argumentative essays in two patterns (Smalley et al., 2001, pp. 290-298). In the first pattern, after the introduction that contains the thesis statement, the reasons supporting the writer's stand are explained one after another in two subsequent body paragraphs. Then, the writer refutes the arguments of the opposing sides in the third body paragraph before ending the essay with a concluding paragraph. In contrast, in the second pattern, the writer presents each of the reasons supporting the stand and at the same time refutes each of the arguments of the opposing side subsequently in the body paragraphs.

In addition, the students were provided with face-to-face WCF when asked to write argumentative essays. The WCF dealt with the aspects of language use which include vocabulary, grammar and mechanics, and the aspect of the organization. More specifically, the students were given direct feedback when they made mistakes in word choice, grammar use (e.g. plural/singular nouns and verb agreement), and punctuation. In addition, they were reminded of the relation between the thesis statement which is located in the introduction, topic sentences in the developmental paragraphs, and the conclusion. Based on the written corrective feedback, the students revised their essays before finally submitting the essays to Teacher 3. The aspects of written corrective feedback provision are summarized in Table 1. At the end of the semester, the students were asked to respond to a questionnaire which was used to elicit their perception on the use of online WCF (which was given in the first half of the semester) and the use of face-to-face WCF (which was given in the second half of the semester).

Table 1

Aspects of WCF provision

No	Types of Essay	Mode	Applications	Teacher	Gender
1.	Opinion	Online	Instagram	Teacher 1	Female
2.	Argumentative	Online	Tumblr	Teacher 2	Female
		Face-to-face	None	Teacher 3	Male

The questionnaire consisted of 10 items: 4 for online WCF and 4 for face-to-face WCF, and 2 for the preference regarding the two types of feedback provision. The items on online WCF were divided into three parts, the first one was based on the use of Instagram and the use of Tumblr. The items for online WCF asked the students' agreement on whether Instagram can be used to give feedback effectively by the teacher (Item 1) and by the students (Item 2) and whether Tumblr can be used to give feedback effectively by the teacher (Item 3) and by the students (Item 4).

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of items dealing with face to face WCF. The students were asked about their agreement on the provision of face-to-face WCF (Item 5), how the WCF benefited the students in understanding language errors (Item 6), content errors (Item 7), errors in organization (Item 8). The last part of the questionnaire consisted of two items asking about the students' preference regarding online versus face to face WCF (Item 9) and their evaluation on the effectiveness of online WCF compared to face-to-face WCF (Item 10) (see Appendix 1).

The students' responses to the questionnaire were used to examine the research questions. For each item in the questionnaire, the students were asked to respond to one of the four options: strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD). The middle option "undecided" or "neither agree nor disagree" was not included in order to avoid unclear tendency in the perception of the students. In the interpretation of the data collected from the students' responses, the option "strongly agree" was given a value of 4, while the other options were given values of 3, 2 and 1, respectively for "agree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." In order to determine the students' perception on a particular item, the average score of the responses were computed by considering the number (frequency) of the students who choose each of the four options. Then, the frequency was multiplied by the value given to the option. The average score was gained from the sum of the scores for the four options divided by the total number of students who responded to the questionnaire item.

The average score which is close to 4 (from 3.50 to 4.00) is considered the most favourable, meaning that the students "strongly agree," while the average score which is close to 1 is considered as the least favourable, indicating that the students "strongly disagree" to the message in the item. Meanwhile, the average score which is close to 3 (from 2.51 to 3.49) is considered "agree," and one which is close to 2 (from 1.51 to 2.50) is considered "disagree."

RESULTS

The results of the study are based on the issues raised in the three research questions: the EFL students' perception on online WCF, their perception on face-to-face WCF, and their preference in the two types of WCF.

EFL Students' Perception on Online Written Corrective Feedback

The students' responses to four statements regarding their perception on online WCF are shown in Table 2.

Table 2*EFL Students' Perception on Online WCF*

No.	Items	Score	Meaning
1.	Instagram can be used by the teacher to give feedback in writing effectively.	2.41	Disagree
2.	Instagram can be used by my classmates to give peer feedback in writing effectively.	2.56	Agree
3.	Tumblr can be used by the teacher to give feedback in writing effectively.	2.74	Agree
4.	Tumblr can be used by my classmates to give peer feedback in writing effectively.	2.68	Agree

Table 2 shows that at average the students disagree that Instagram can be used by the teacher (Teacher 1) to give feedback in writing effectively. (Item 1). However, they agree that Instagram can be used by their classmates to give feedback in writing effectively (Item 2). Unlike Instagram which we thought to have not been used effectively, the students agree that Tumblr can be used by the teacher (Teacher 2) to give feedback effectively (Item 3). Interestingly, like their agreement to the use of Instagram for peer feedback, they considered that Tumblr can be used by their classmates to give peer feedback effectively (Item 4).

EFL Students' Perception on Face-to-face Written Corrective Feedback

The students' perceptions on face-to-face WCF are shown in Table 3. More particularly it deals written corrective feedback on language error, content, and organization.

Table 3*EFL Students' Perception on Face-to-Face WCF*

No	Items	Score	Meaning
5.	The teacher gave feedback to my writing in face-to-face session.	3.41	Agree
6.	Through feedback given directly by the teacher in face-to-face session, I could understand any language error.	3.41	Agree
7.	Through feedback given directly by the teacher in face-to-face session, I could understand any error in content.	3.65	Strongly agree
8.	Through feedback given directly by the teacher in face-to-face session, I could understand any error in organization.	3.62	Strongly agree

As Table 3 indicates, the students agree that the teacher (Teacher 3) gave corrective feedback to their writing in the face-to-face session (Item 5). The students also agree that through feedback given directly by the teacher in face-to-face session, they could understand any language error (Item 6) that they have made. Interestingly, the students stated their strong agreement that the feedback given by the teacher in the face-to-face session helped them understand error in content (Item 7) and error in organization (Item 8).

EFL students' preference in the two types of written corrective feedback

The students' preference of the two types of WCF is displayed in Table 4. As Table 4 shows, when asked about their preference on online WCF over face-to-face WCF, they stated their disagreement (Item 9). They also expressed their disagreement when they were asked to state that online WCF is more effective than face-to-face WCF.

Table 4

EFL Students' Preference on Types of WCF

No	Items	Score	Meaning
9.	I prefer feedback given online to feedback given face-to-face.	1.79	Disagree
10.	I think feedback given online is more effective than feedback given face-to-face.	1.85	Disagree

DISCUSSION

In reference to the research findings on the students' perceptions toward online versus face-to-face WCF, it was found that there was a positive attitude toward the implementation of both online and face to face written corrective feedback. The results of data analysis have been presented by referring to the three research questions.

The effectiveness of applying Tumblr for getting teacher and peer-feedback in the students' writing supported with the result of previous studies (Bitchener et al., 2010; Yoke et al., 2013; Widyaningsih, 2018; Sarré et al., 2019). Apart from the difference platform used, the current study enriched the literature that online WCF was considerably able to develop the students' writing skill effectively. The students believed that online WCF offered flexibility of prompt responses and gave chance of having peer discussion to solve the same problem. Additionally, the students' positive attitude toward the use Instagram and Tumblr was also in line with the research conducted by Tai et al. (2015) and Daweli (2018). The online platform used in WCF was also efficient due to several reasons: promoting self-confidence, reducing the paper waste and saving recorded writing file.

With regards to the students' perception on face-to-face WCF, the current research strengthened the two preceding studies (Evans et al., 2015; Westmacott, 2016). The comprehensive feedback and swift error recognition given to the students writing through face-to-face conversation can successfully enhance the grammar (Akmal & Mahrup, 2019), content and organization aspects of writing (Lee, 2019). This result encouraged the statement of Chen et al. (2016) who stated that WCF should fulfill the balance between form and meaning. Accordingly, the present study also reinforced the findings of Ene and Upton (2018) indicating that clear explanation and students' comfortable feeling during the discussion augmented the students' motivation in writing.

Regarding to the third research question about the students voice on the choice between online or face-to-face WCF, it revealed that face-to-face WCF still the best option. The students' expression on the disagreement toward the statement uttering that online WCF is more effective than face-to-face WCF, supported the study conducted by Westmacott (2016) and Ene and Upton (2018). Conversely, the analysis from the students' preference in the present study was somewhat different from the prior research (Yoke et al., 2013).

CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined EFL students' perception and preference on online versus face-to-face written corrective feedback. It was revealed that the students' agreement (or disagreement) on the effectiveness of teacher online WCF seemed to be influenced by teacher and/or application factor(s). This is evident from the different teachers who used the Internet applications and the different types of Internet applications used in the WCF provision. Whereas, regardless of the types of Internet applications used in the process of WCF provision, the EFL students thought that online WCF could be used effectively whenever they got (peer) feedback from their classmates. Future studies could investigate the effectiveness of different Internet applications which are used

to give WCF by the same teacher. This study also found that the EFL students disagreed to the statements that they preferred online teacher WCF to face-to-face WCF and that online teacher WCF was more effective than face-to-face WCF. This implies that EFL teachers should not disregard the use of face-to-face WCF whenever they use an Internet application to provide WCF to EFL students. Thus, teachers still have an important role in helping EFL students to improve their writing skill through the WCF provided in the conventional (face-to-face) session. In addition, when teaching is likely to be conducted in online mode, WCF must be given in ways that can be accepted by the students and can engage them in the teaching and learning process enthusiastically.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire on Online and Face-to-face Written Corrective Feedback

Instruction: Please give responses to the items in this questionnaire according to what you have experienced in the writing course.

Part 1: Written Corrective Feedback through Instagram					
No.	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Instagram can be used by the teacher to give feedback in writing effectively.				
2.	Instagram can be used by my classmates to give peer feedback in writing effectively.				
Part 2: Written Corrective Feedback through Tumblr					
3	Tumblr can be used by the teacher to give feedback in writing effectively.				
4.	Tumblr can be used by my classmates to give peer feedback in effectively.				
Part 3: Written Corrective Feedback in Face-to-face Session					
5	The teacher gave feedback to my writing in face-to-face session.				
6.	Through feedback given directly by the teacher in face-to-face session, I could understand any language error.				
7.	Through feedback given directly by the teacher in face-to-face session, I could understand any error in content.				
8.	Through feedback given directly by the teacher in face-to-face session, I could understand any error in organization.				
9.	I prefer feedback given online to feedback given face-to-face.				
10	I think feedback given online is more effective than feedback given face-to-face.				