



Analyzing Corrective Feedback Practices and Perceptions of ESL Teachers: A Qualitative Study in a Private Secondary School in Karachi, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Written corrective feedback (WCF) is a predominant but contentious practice in the ESL writing classroom because it is believed to be related to teachers' decisions and students' opportunity to notice, revise and regulate the language in use. This study examines the WCF practices and perceptions of ESL teachers in a private secondary school in Karachi, Pakistan focusing on the gap between what teachers perceive to be best practice in providing feedback and the actual feedback that is seen in marked student writing. A qualitative case study design was used in this research. The data sources were teacher questionnaire/interviews and document analysis of students' written assignments at the common genres in common schools including letter, essay, summary, character sketch and central-idea task across the grades VI-VIII. Four key themes of feedback form, feedback focus, genre sensitivity, and belief-practice congruence were examined using a process of thematic coding and writing-sample analysis. It is found that teachers appreciate WCF as a formative tool to enhance accuracy, confidence, self-correction, but class size, syllabus pressure, time constraints and varying degree of assessment literacy affect the implementation in the classroom. Both direct correction and indirect marking emerged, and feedback most often focused on grammar, punctuation, spelling, sentence structure and on the genre format. For written, while teachers reported that they were doing developmental feedback that was responsive to the genre, written samples indicated that the depth, specificity, and uniformity of feedback was somewhat inconsistent across grade levels and within tasks. The findings of this study highlight the need for a school-level WCF policy, consistent teacher feedback practices, common genre-specific rubrics, and an equitable emphasis on language accuracy, organization, content development, and learners' uptake of feedback.

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Introduction

Writing is an essential form of academic literacy with which learners' structure, present concepts and engage in institutional evaluation. Writing in an ESL context is particularly

challenging because of the higher order cognitive skills required for learners to coordinate their content, genre, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, cohesion, sensitivity to audience and accuracy in the use of the language, which may not be very functional outside the context of school. In this regard, feedback given to students on written work can foster the ability to be a writer or make writing evaluation a mere correction of surface grammar errors. At the secondary level, feedback is especially pertinent as learners are about to move from writing at sentence level to longer texts including essays, summaries, letters and interpretive responses. Corrective feedback is the feedback given to learners which informs them about linguistic or textual errors in their productions, such as explicit correction, underlining, symbols, comments in the margins, reformulations, and metalinguistic explanations. While WCF has been claimed to promote noticing, revision, and language development in second language writing, it has also been discussed in debate since its effect is contingent on classroom ecology, the type of writing task, individual L2 proficiency, focus of feedback, and opportunities for uptake (Brown et al., 2026; Ferris, 1999; Kang & Han, 2015; Lee, 2019; Truscott, 1996). The discussion has shifted from the issue of whether or not feedback is effective to the pedagogically more meaningful issues of type, recipient, conditions, and consequences of feedback in class.

This question revolves around teacher beliefs. While teachers have stated that they appreciate feedback as a pathway for more effective provision, it has also been noted that in practice teachers' own written responses to feedback does not always fully align with this appreciation as a teacher would be potentially constrained by the regulations of teaching in any institution and may not have been explicitly trained on the design of feedback. This interpersonal misalignment between belief and practice for L2 writing has been reported in other contexts: This is a problem in Pakistan, where English is high-stakes in education and writing instruction is exam-oriented and grammar oriented.

The study focuses on how ESL teachers in a private secondary school in Karachi offer WCF on student writing, their perceived role, and purpose of offering WCF, the perceived utility of WCF, and the extent to which the perceived role and utility of providing WCF and classroom evidence show a congruence. The study adds to the local discourse where it engages with both WCF practice and teacher feedback literacy while drawing attention to some of the practical challenges of secondary ESL setting and genre-specific writing assessment.

Literature Review

ESL Writing and Feedback as Formative Assessment

Second language writing is not one skill but multiple skills that involve language, rhetoric, cognitive and sociocultural components. Learners are required to brainstorm, plan the content, use appropriate vocabulary, and write correct clauses, paragraphs and edits for audience and purpose. Process approaches focus on the process of drafting and revising, genre approaches focus on the rhetorical and linguistic expectations and requirements of text types, and product-based traditions often emphasize the aim of being accurate at the end and/or achieving well in the exam (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014, Hyland, 2019, Hyland & Hyland, 2019). In school ESL classrooms, a combination of these may be utilized and occupy a continuum; as teachers scaffold students towards assessed written products, they are also attempting to do so through guided writing and feedback.

Feedback is a significant way of doing formative assessment of writing. Hattie and Timperley (2007) described effective feedback as information which can tell the learner where they are, where they need to go and their next steps. With regard to L2 writing, this entails that learners' feedback should not simply be limited to identifying errors, but need to help them understand the nature of the errors, prioritize their importance for revision, and transfer the information into further writing exercises. In recent years, scholars have stressed the process of feedback instead of one-way exchange of information, as students' interpretation and emotions and their subsequent revision activities are the bridges between teacher feedback and the influence of feedback (Liu & Yu, 2022; Yu et al., 2022; Zhang, 2022).

Types and Purposes of Written Corrective Feedback

WCF can manifest itself in several different ways. There are four different types of feedback: direct feedback which shows an error or gives the right answer, indirect feedback which indicates the presence of an error but not the answer, metalinguistic feedback which displays codes or grammatical explanations, feedback that is focused on selected error types or feedback that is comprehensive and indicates many or all visible errors. Global comments can also be given by the teachers on content, organization, genre, coherence and task fulfillment (Ellis, 2009; Ferris, 2006; Lee, 2013). The distinction between WCF and feedback for writing more widely is frequently blurred in school writing as teachers are acknowledging simultaneously what has occurred in grammar, punctuation, form, relevance of content, and level of presentation.

The use of direct versus indirect feedback needs to be pedagogically motivated. For lower proficiency students and errors that cannot be corrected by the learner, providing direct feedback may be more efficient, whereas for those errors that can be corrected by the lower with existing knowledge, it would be beneficial to provide indirect feedback which can encourage noticing and by-product learning of language. (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Ferris, 2010; Lee, 2019). However, while extensive feedback might be expected in an examination culture where students and parents believe that full marking means that teachers are working hard, focused feedback is more likely to decrease cognitive load and clarify learning targets (Lee, 2020; Lee et al., 2021). The challenge is the practical one of balancing accuracy, autonomy for students, the aims of the genre and the amount of available teaching time.

Effectiveness of Written Corrective Feedback

For decades WCF has been subject to debate on effectiveness. Feedback might not be effective or beneficial to the student (Truscott, 1996), but Ferris (1999) stated that when it is clear, selective and associated with revision, it might be beneficial to the student. Subsequent research and meta-analyses have found that WCF generally has a positive effect on L2 written accuracy, but its effect size and sustainability are subject to fluctuations according to learner proficiency, feedback type, and the duration of the treatment as well as whether participants revised or applied the feedback to their subsequent writing (Brown et al., 2026; Kang & Han, 2015; Lim & Renandya, 2020). The general view is now that not all correction is necessarily beneficial, but in a learning context, well-designed feedback can be a facilitator of learning.

New research expands what's meant by the term feedback impact. Liu and Yu (2022) maintain that feedback has impact on the written products as well as on the writing processes and writer identity. Learners' responses to feedback are behavioral, cognitive and affective, for example,

when correcting an error, they may do it mechanically without knowing how, or when facing detailed feedback, they may feel that it is overwhelming, discouraging, and irrelevant (Han & Hyland, 2015, 2019; Shen & Chong, 2023). This attitude comes in handy in secondary classrooms since pupils' confidence in writing is not yet well developed. Feedback focused on the error can decrease students' motivation; feedback that includes positive comments and error cases, and provides guidelines to revise the error may increase students' self-regulation.

Teacher Beliefs, Feedback Literacy, and Belief-Practice Alignment

According to teacher cognition studies, teacher decisions made in the classroom are influenced by beliefs, past experiences, teacher preparation, institutional standards, the assessment and classroom conditions (Borg, 2015; Karaca & Uysal, 2023). In WCF, teachers might think that they are giving feedback which is detailed, direct or genre sensitive but marked scripts may demonstrate inconsistencies in selecting errors, specificity of comments and responding to content. Mao and Crosthwaite (2019) reported that teachers' self-reported beliefs matched only in some aspects, and at other times professors' beliefs about how direct and how comprehensive feedback was, were misrepresented. The same alignment has been seen in activity theory research, for example, feedback practices were influenced by tensions between the teacher, institution, tools and community expectations (Soleimani & Rahimi, 2021).

A lens to address these gaps is feedback literacy. Writing teacher feedback literacy involves writing teacher feedback knowledge, values for writing teacher feedback that are conducive to learner development and writing teacher feedback abilities associated with designing and running feedback processes in real classrooms (Lee, 2021; Lee & Mao, 2024). Student feedback literacy is also important because students must value feedback, be able to make judgements, respond emotionally and act upon the feedback (Yu et al., 2022). Teachers and students have a better chance of applying WCF as a learning process instead of a marking ritual when they communicate with each other about the feedback symbols, revision requirements, the priorities of errors, and rubrics.

Pakistani ESL Context and Research Gap

English is used in Pakistan as a course content in schools, language of assessment and a language of access in academia and jobs. But writing teaching is still trapped in some examination forms, some of the rote memorization forms, correct grammar, teacher-directed evaluation. There has been some locally conducted research on the practice of WCF in ESL settings in Pakistan. Similarly, Nawaz et al., (2022) focused on perceptions and practices in Cambridge-system schools, from Karachi, and found that comprehensive, focused and metalinguistic feedback was visible in classrooms and students expected their teachers to give them comprehensive and focused feedback. Further research on revision in Pakistan has also indicated that students appreciate teacher feedback however, they do not always get clear direction on revision.

Despite this literature, in the lower secondary level more classroom based qualitative research is warranted, especially in the private schools in middle and lower middle-class communities. Less attention has been paid to either younger students, or to the use of smaller samples of surveys of students' views, and very few studies relate teachers' written beliefs to written learners' work, within genres and across grades. In order to bridge this gap, the present study examines teachers

WCF practices and perceptions in Grades VI-VIII, and finds zones of proximities and compromises between teachers' beliefs and practices.

Conceptual Framework

It is based on an integrated conceptual framework that sutures teacher cognition, institutional context, feedback practices, student engagement, and writing development. Teacher cognition encompasses beliefs in language learning in general, beliefs in writing instruction, beliefs in assessment and beliefs in error correction. Institutional context refers to workload, class sizes, pacing of the syllabus, school assessment policy and examination expectations. They are two dimensions that mold the form and the focus of WCF practices, which can be direct or indirect, focused or comprehensive, product-oriented or process-oriented, and grammar-centered or genre-responsible. Feedback is only effective when students notice, revise, self-correct, and transfer their learning to future acts of writing. For this reason, editing development isn't just a matter of less grammatical mistakes; it involves organization development, control over the genre, choice of vocabulary, confidence as a writer, and development of content.

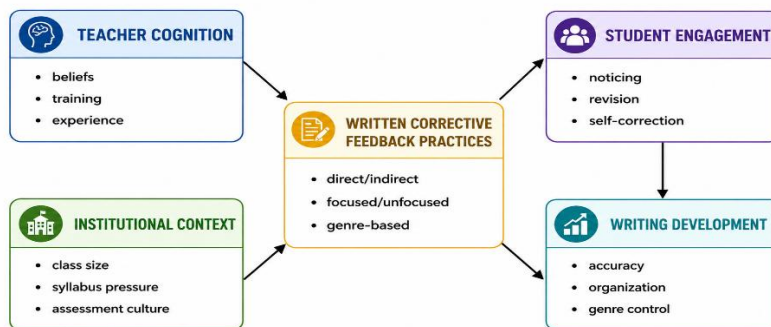


Figure 1: Conceptual framework linking teacher cognition, context, WCF practice, engagement, and writing development.

As seen in Figure 1, WCF is not distinct from marking behaviors. The extent to which feedback evokes revision and writing development depends on teachers' beliefs and institutional conditions as well as the students' engagement.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative case study approach that allowed the analysis of WCF practices and perceptions in their natural habitat, the school. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' meanings, classroom routines, and teacher-produced documents. Accordingly, a qualitative research design was adopted, as the study sought to understand these phenomena rather than measure the effect of an intervention or treatment. Case-study logic also permitted for close consideration of the relationship between reported perceptions and actual writing in one readily accessible private-school setting (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study was conducted in a private school in Karachi, Pakistan. This included both secondary teachers and students of ESL in the population. Four ESL teachers (females) in Grades VI-VIII were part of the group of participants. Documentary data comprised students' written texts

collected from different grade levels and writing genres, including letter writing, essay writing, summary writing, central idea writing, and character sketch writing. In total, five writing pieces were collected from each of the four teachers across these five genres, yielding twenty writing samples for document analysis, alongside the teacher questionnaire/interview data. Convenience and criterion-based sampling were adopted as the school was readily accessible and the teachers had an immediate responsibility for marking written work. The study is therefore not intended to be statistically generalizable but rather provides an insight into the practices of WCF in a particular context of ESL schools. There were three sources of data. First, teacher questionnaire/interview results indicated teachers' beliefs on the Purpose, Usefulness, and Preferred method of WCF. Secondly, there was evidence in the students' writing pieces that showed the real marking practices. Third, feedback forms, feedback targets and genre-specific feedback were coded through the use of document-analysis notes. Multiple data sources enhanced this analysis as teacher reports were supplemented with written evidence of classroom artefacts. The analysis of the data comprised two stages. Teacher responses to the first phase of the questionnaire were analyzed thematically and coded for beliefs about the purpose of feedback, perceived usefulness, preferred forms of feedback, perceived constraints, and genre-specific assessment criteria. In the second stage, the writing samples were analyzed with regard to feedback form – direct and indirect marking, metalinguistic clues, praise, margin comments, end comments and grammar correction, punctuation, spelling and syntax, vocabulary, format, organization and feedback focus – development, content relevance. This was followed by analyzing both data sets with the interest of revealing data on the alignment and misalignment between perception and practice. Figure 2 shows how the analytical procedure has been summarized.



Figure 2. Research process and analytical procedure.

Figure 2 illustrates the sequence of analysis starting at the point of problem identification through to the interpretation of the belief-practice. Here it shows that assessment results have been based on comparing teachers' reports and documentary evidence in marked writing. Ethical considerations comprised voluntary participation, consent of participants, confidentiality of teachers and learners, anonymization of the school and learner names, avoiding psychological harm and responsible reporting of the findings. All identifiable details from the data have been removed due to the presence of student written work and only feedback patterns of importance to the research questions have been analyzed.

Results and Interpretation

Participant and Data Profile

The participant and data profile presents a small but rich in information qualitative sample. ESL writing instruction was distributed among the teachers in lower secondary levels. When

considering the student writing pieces these covered common school genres, allowing for the analysis of genre shifts in feedback relative to expectations of the task and grade level.

Table 1. Participant and data profile

Component	Description	Analytical purpose
Research site	Private secondary school in Karachi, Pakistan	Provides the institutional context for ESL writing feedback practices
Teacher participants	Four female ESL teachers teaching Grades VI-VIII	Captures teacher perceptions and reported WCF routines
Documentary data	Student writing pieces from multiple grades and genres	Allows comparison between reported beliefs and actual marking practices
Genres represented	Letter, essay, summary, central idea, and character sketch	Enables analysis of genre-sensitive feedback
Sampling strategy	Convenience and criterion-based sampling	Appropriate for a qualitative case study but limits statistical generalization

As can be seen in Table 1, the study is purposefully small and qualitative. The power of its strength is in the close comparisons of teacher perceptions and marked classroom artefacts not in the statistical representation of ALL teachers of ESL.

Existing WCF Practices Across Grades VI-VIII

Direct and indirect feedbacks were utilized by teachers in the study – from the VI to VIII grade levels. Direct correction came when a teacher provided him/her with the correct spelling, punctuation, grammatical structure or sentence form. The indirect feedback happened when teachers didn't make any marking on an error, underlined or circled it, marked it with a symbol, or told learners that they needed to find the correct answer by themselves. There was some evidence of peer feedback, rubric-based, positive reinforcement and self-correction. However, there was evidence of differences in the amount and nature of the written feedback provided between teachers, indicating a lack of a consistent school policy for written feedback.

It seemed that, within levels, lower ability students were provided with more explicit guidance and higher ability students were being guided more independently with information or comments in the margins or ends. This is an educationally sound practice provided that the students have been taught how to use feedback codes and make revisions on their texts. But in the absence of a shared system, indirect marks can be confusing. Hence, it has been indicated that the feedback scaffolding should be grade responsive and at the same time it must be standardized to ensure the understanding of the learners.

These patterns were also visible in individual teacher accounts. One teacher described relying mainly on a detailed feedback strategy that concentrated on punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure, while another indicated that she preferred to underline an error and leave the correction to the student rather than supplying it directly. A third teacher reported drawing on a reward-

based approach to keep students engaged with feedback, particularly in the lower grades. These differences point again to individual teacher judgment rather than a shared, school-wide standard of practice.

Table 2. Coding framework for WCF analysis

Code	Operational meaning	Example in classroom marking	Analytical relevance
Direct feedback	Teacher supplies the correct form	Incorrect spelling or tense is replaced by the teacher	Shows explicit correction and reduced learner search burden
Indirect feedback	Teacher signals an error without giving the answer	Underline, circle, question mark, or margin symbol	Shows attempt to prompt noticing and self-correction
Metalinguistic feedback	Teacher uses a code or grammatical clue	T for tense, P for punctuation, WW for wrong word	Requires shared feedback-code literacy
Global feedback	Teacher comments on content, organization, or genre	Improve paragraph unity; follow letter format	Connects WCF with broader writing quality
Affective feedback	Teacher uses praise or encouragement	Good idea; well tried; improve this point	Supports motivation and confidence

Table 2 defines the categories that have been used to interpret writing samples. The coding system acknowledges that informative feedback may address local accuracy and global writing characteristics.

Feedback Practices across Genres

Feedback priorities differed for genres. The format, structure and conventional layout of a letter were highlighted in letter writing by teachers, and language errors were sometimes considered as substandard. Organization, relevance, word limit, grammar, and paragraphing were emphasized in the writing of essays. Teachers aligned to understanding of plot, characterization, and evidence in text during character sketches. Content relevance, compression, and clarity were factors in summaries and central-idea tasks. This sensitivity to genre is a strength – for some genres, grammatical correctness is important; for others, the result of the process is more important than the grammar itself; some require both.

Simultaneously, the evidence pointed to a failure under genre criteria to be used consistently across teachers. Some teachers made specific comments on structure and organization; others made mostly grammar, punctuation and spelling error comments. Teachers could benefit from having a common genre rubric so they have a consistent voice when giving feedback and the student understands the feedback in relation to the task.

Table 3. Genre-sensitive feedback priorities identified in the study

Writing genre	Dominant feedback focus	Observed/expected teacher response	Pedagogical interpretation
Letter writing	Format, structure, salutation, closing, sentence accuracy	Comments on layout and conventions; selected language correction	Feedback must protect genre conventions while still addressing clarity
Essay writing	Organization, relevance, grammar, paragraphing, word limit	Corrections on language and comments on flow or relevance	Essays require balance between accuracy and idea development
Summary writing	Compression, main idea, clarity, avoidance of unnecessary details	Comments on relevance and conciseness	Feedback should guide students to distinguish essential and nonessential information
Central idea	Understanding of text, concise expression, accuracy	Correction of expression and content focus	Teachers need to respond to both interpretation and language form
Character sketch	Textual understanding, traits, evidence, organization	Comments on plot understanding and character actions	Feedback should connect literary understanding with writing quality

From the data displayed in Table 3, it is observed that teachers did not handle all writing tasks the same. Importantly, too, the table shows that common rubrics will be necessary for ensuring that genre-specific criteria are applied to all teaching and grading, across teachers and across grades.

Feedback Targets: Language, Mechanics, and Global Writing Features

Misspellings, punctuation, grammar and sentence construction were the most common feedback targets. The other items of format, organization, coherence, vocabulary, and content development were also commented on by teachers, although global issues were not systematically addressed as much as local language errors. This is frequently the case in ESL writing classrooms where teachers feel like it is their job to clean up errors or where the marking of examinations depends on the presence of these errors. Nevertheless, the research on feedback acknowledges that overfocusing on lower-order errors may be mistaken in terms of highlighting upper-order concerns in writing, including argument, organization, audience and genre control (Lee, 2019; Liu & Yu, 2022).

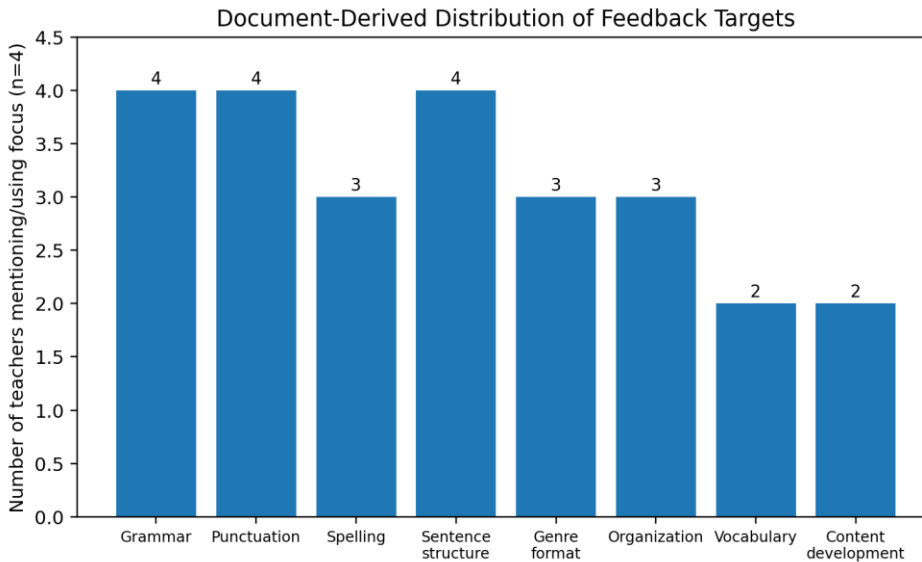


Figure 3. Document-derived distribution of feedback targets across teacher responses and marked writing evidence.

Figure 3 shows that feedback was most prominent in grammar, punctuation, spelling and sentence structure. Global issues of organization, vocabulary and content development were less dominant and present, contributing towards an accuracy-obsessed feedback culture.

Table 4. Local and global feedback emphasis

Feedback domain	Examples of focus	Strength in the data	Interpretive comment
Local language accuracy	Grammar, tense, articles, syntax, spelling	High	Teachers strongly associated feedback with error correction and linguistic accuracy
Writing mechanics	Punctuation, capitalization, sentence boundaries	High	Mechanics were treated as visible indicators of writing quality
Genre format	Letter format, essay structure, task conventions	Moderate	Genre awareness existed but required more standardization
Organization and coherence	Paragraph unity, sequence, flow of ideas	Moderate	Some teachers valued coherence but comments were less systematic
Content development	Relevance, supporting detail, depth of response	Low to moderate	Content feedback needs strengthening to support communicative writing

Table 4 reveals the teachers' feedback ecology indeed focused on local accuracy. More detailed local feedback and global feedback would be beneficial to achieve full writing development.

Teachers' Perceptions of WCF

Teachers perceived WCF as an instrument to enhance writing precision, to be able to determine gaps and also to assist themselves for rectifying the gaps of having less level of confidence. Some teachers wanted “paths of encouragement” (like the sandwich) as this minimized discouragement and made criticism easier for the student to accept. Teachers also found that they were thinking that feedback should be differentiated for grade level, genre and learning objective. The goal, for instance, in the area of vocabulary development would be to focus the feedback on the vocabulary, not all the possible errors.

The main perceived barriers were: time constraints, syllabus pressure, class strengths, workload and the challenge of providing detailed feedback to all the scripts. These limitations are possible reasons for why teachers think they practice developmental feedback but don't or only practice it partially. Thus, the results suggest that WCF is not just an issue for individual teachers but it is also an institutional issue of workload and the design of assessments.

Belief-Practice Alignment and Fissures

Perceptions and the writing samples showed a partial correspondence. Teachers appreciated the feedback and they mentioned that they used both direct and indirect feedbacks which is evidence for them saying WCF was a part of their writing pedagogy. They also had an insight into genre differences and some genre specific criteria were found in the marked work. However, there were areas where it was lacking. Not all feedback was communicated in a clear way to guide revision; some aspects of writing were marked, others left ignored; and no code and rubric for revision varied consistently across grade levels and genres. The outcome of this is a gap between how teachers would like feedback to be and the discrepancy in practice that is revealed through texts marked by teachers.

This crack should not be considered to be the teacher's fault. Instead, it displays the amount of complexity involved in WCF in actual classroom scenarios. Teachers have to face the competing expectations while performing their negotiation task, they have to correct and mark much work, to finish the course, to make students motivated and fulfill the expectation of parents. Hence, professional development should not only emphasize types of WCF but also routine plans that are feasible for selecting, following up with feedback, and marking by genre.

This was also apparent in how individual teachers ordered their priorities. One teacher's stated criteria began with grammar, sentence structure, and punctuation, another placed fluency and coherence of ideas ahead of organization and content development, and a third began with grammar, syntax, and vocabulary before anything else. None of these hierarchies is wrong on its own, but their coexistence within the same department, without a shared point of reference, is itself evidence of the belief-practice fissure this study set out to examine.

Overall, the main point was that teachers appreciate feedback but classroom artifacts varied in implementation, as indicated in Table 5. The greatest want was in the presence of correction and the primary fissure was in consistency, specificity, and revision support to the learner.

Table 5. Belief-practice alignment matrix

Teacher perception	Evidence in practice	Alignment status	Implication
WCF improves writing accuracy and quality	Teachers corrected grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence form	Aligned	Teachers' basic commitment to WCF was visible in marked scripts
Feedback should vary by genre and task	Genre-related comments appeared, especially for letters and essays	Partially aligned	Shared genre rubrics are needed for consistency
Students should learn to self-correct	Indirect marking was used, but codes were not always standardized	Partially aligned	Students need explicit training in feedback-code interpretation
Feedback should be detailed and developmental	Some comments were brief, selective, or uneven across samples	Misaligned	Workload and time constraints limit depth of feedback
Positive comments motivate learners	Praise and encouragement were reported and occasionally visible	Partially aligned	Affective feedback should be integrated with actionable revision advice

Discussion

The results are in line with international research conducted by the WCF that indicates that teachers' beliefs and practice do not always match. The study found that the teachers used in the study thought that feedback contributes to improving writing and students self-correcting, however, documentary evidence showed that there was an inconsistency in terms of the depth and focus of the provision of feedback (Ahmad, Noorani, & Sewani, 2025). This is similar to the results reported by Mao and Crosthwaite (2019) that teachers could not be aware of the form and extent of feedback that they have provided. It also aligns with Lee (2019, 2020) in that more feedback is not better feedback should be selective, comprehensible, and to relate to learning goals (Dool, Imran & Ahmad, 2026; Oad et al., 2024).

The high weight given to grammar, punctuation, spelling, and clausal structure suggests that WCF in this context is mostly accuracy based. Local errors are important in the accuracy of ESL writing as they may diminish clarity and examination performance if they occur continually. A dynamic view of errors might, however, not be sufficient to prepare learners for writing tasks in which the emphasis is on coherence, content development, and genre sensitivity. The study thus suggests a balanced model where high-priority errors as well as writing features noticed globally, like organization, relevance, unity and development of the content need to be corrected by the teacher (Ahmad, Noorani, & Channa, 2025). The equilibrium between these is particularly significant in Grades VI-VIII when learners are still developing their skills in planning, drafting and revising through the effective professional development of teachers (Ahmad, Sewani, & Channa, 2025).

The findings on the genre are encouraging as teachers saw that there were different expectations to each task. There is not one generic checklist for letter writing, essay writing, summary writing, central-idea writing and character sketch (Shah, Ali & Ahmad, 2024). However, because of the lack of uniformity in the rubric, students might end up getting contradictory messages from different teachers. Teacher judgment, along with more transparent feedback, could be maintained by using a common school-level rubric. Local considerations like grammar and punctuation should be part of the rubric, as should global considerations like relevance of content, organization, genre form, and appropriateness of vocabulary (Kolachi et al., 2024; Imran et al., 2023).

The most concrete explanation for improvement is literacy of the teacher's feedback. Work-based learning should go beyond having teachers reminded to be more accurate during marking; it should help teachers determine a type of feedback, when to provide it, how to code it, how to write comments to prompt revision, and train students to respond to feedback. Teachers can feel uncertain about their ability to implement feedback skills, despite appreciating feedback (Lee & Mao, 2024; Jabeen, Ali, & Ahmad, 2023). This is helpful in the context of this study; although the teachers appreciated WCF, many were unable to apply it consistently due to time and workload limitations and limited standardization and mental health issues (Faheem, Gulab, & Ahmad, 2025).

Another missing link is student uptake. The study produced marginal results, concluding students benefitted in later drafts when good feedback was given, but this was not measured systematically in the original study. Research is needed to investigate whether students adjust consistently when they are provided with feedback from their teachers, if they can adjust accurately, and if adjusted versions are used in further compositions. If revision cycles are not included, WCF can become a document of mistakes and not a learning experience.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that ESL teachers in the investigated private secondary school perceived written corrective feedback (WCF) as an important component of writing instruction. They employed a combination of feedback practices, including direct, indirect, oral, written, peer, and rubric-based feedback. Teachers reported that WCF enhanced students' linguistic accuracy, self-correction, confidence, and overall writing quality.

However, an analysis of marked writing samples revealed discrepancies between teachers' reported perceptions and their actual classroom practices. Although feedback was consistently provided, its application varied across teachers, grade levels, and writing genres. Teachers primarily focused on correcting language errors, whereas broader aspects of writing, such as organization, content development, and genre-specific features, received comparatively less systematic attention.

The study further demonstrates that institutional factors, including time constraints, large class sizes, syllabus requirements, and heavy workloads, significantly influence teachers' feedback practices. These findings suggest that improving WCF requires more than simply encouraging teachers to provide additional corrections. Rather, it necessitates the development of a common school-level feedback policy, practical teacher training, enhanced teacher feedback literacy, structured opportunities for revision, and feasible marking procedures.

Implementing these measures can facilitate a shift from viewing feedback as a summative error-correction exercise to adopting it as a formative process that supports students' development as writers. Such a shift is particularly important in the Pakistani ESL context, where writing plays a central role in students' academic success.

Recommendations

First, schools should develop a common written corrective feedback (WCF) policy for ESL writing across Grades VI–VIII. The policy should clearly define expectations regarding genre-specific feedback, the minimum level of feedback to be provided, revision requirements, and correction practices. A shared policy would promote consistency among teachers, reduce discrepancies in feedback practices, and help students better understand and use the feedback they receive.

Second, each common writing task, such as a letter, essay, summary, character sketch, or central-idea response, should be accompanied by a shared genre-specific rubric. The rubric should assess not only language accuracy, mechanics, and format but also organization, content development, vocabulary, coherence, and unity. Providing students with the rubric before they begin writing can make expectations transparent and position feedback as an integral part of the learning process rather than merely a post-assessment activity.

Third, written corrective feedback should be purposeful and focused. Rather than attempting to correct every error in every script, teachers can prioritize specific learning objectives. For example, one assignment may focus on punctuation and sentence boundaries, another on paragraph organization and unity, and another on genre conventions. Such targeted feedback is more manageable for teachers and enables students to concentrate on achievable learning goals.

Fourth, teachers should adopt a balanced approach by combining direct and indirect feedback according to students' proficiency and learning needs. Direct feedback is particularly beneficial for lower-proficiency learners and complex errors, whereas indirect feedback and metalinguistic codes can encourage more proficient learners to reflect and self-correct. To maximize the effectiveness of this approach, students should be explicitly taught how to interpret commonly used feedback codes, such as those related to punctuation, tense, articles, word choice, sentence fragments, and paragraph unity.

Fifth, feedback should always be linked to opportunities for revision. Students should be encouraged to revise their work after receiving feedback by submitting a revised draft, maintaining an error log, or completing a brief reflection on the feedback received. These activities help students understand teachers' comments, monitor their own progress, and apply what they have learned to future writing tasks.

Sixth, professional development programmes should strengthen teachers' feedback literacy. Training should include effective marking practices, moderation sessions, rubric development, the use of feedback codes, genre-specific feedback strategies, balancing encouragement with correction, and managing feedback efficiently within existing time constraints.

Finally, school leaders should recognize that effective feedback requires sufficient time and institutional support. Reasonable marking loads, shared marking schemes, peer-review activities,

and self-editing checklists can help make feedback practices both sustainable for teachers and meaningful for students.

Limitations and Future Research

This study was conducted in a single private secondary school in Karachi and involved a small qualitative sample of four ESL teachers and selected writing samples from Grades VI–VIII. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to all schools in Pakistan. Furthermore, the study did not include classroom observations, students' perspectives, or pre- and post-intervention measures to examine changes in writing performance over time.

Future research could include a larger and more diverse sample of schools, teachers, and students from both public and private sectors, as well as English- and Urdu-medium institutions. Studies incorporating classroom observations, students' interviews, and pre- and post-feedback writing samples would provide a deeper understanding of how written corrective feedback influences writing development. In addition, future research may compare the effectiveness of digital and handwritten feedback and explore how different feedback approaches contribute to students' long-term writing improvement in the Pakistani ESL context.

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