UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED

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**EXPLORING AND COMPARING MOROCCAN EFL WRITING INSTRUCTORS'
AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND REPORTED PRACTICES
OF WRITTEN FEEDBACK**

Summary of the PhD Dissertation

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INTRODUCTION

Feedback has been acknowledged as a highly influential factor in students' learning, as supported by Hattie (2009). Feedback is generally defined as "information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 81). Within the context of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing, the concept of written feedback (WF) has been perceived differently based on its effectiveness and usefulness in enhancing students' writing, both as a product and a process. Consequently, WF can be categorized as either product-oriented or process-oriented. Bowen et al. (2022) highlighted that process-oriented feedback is provided throughout the various stages of writing, including pre-writing, while writing, and post-writing. These stages involve specific writing activities such as goal-setting, planning, problem-solving, and revision. On the other hand, product-focused feedback is given on finalized drafts or completed written texts, with the aim of improving the content, organization, language usage, and linguistic structure of the text. Despite this distinction, the process approach to writing combines both product and process-oriented feedback through written or face-to-face comments, questions, and suggestions provided by teachers and/or peers on completed drafts (Bowen et al., 2022).

Numerous studies have explored WF in relation to students' perceptions (Bonilla López et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2016; Liu & Wu, 2019; Mahmood, 2021; Sinha & Nassaji, 2022; Tian & Li, 2018; Yenus, 2020). These studies have frequently identified students' perceptions as crucial indicators of language learning success, particularly in writing development. Perceptions, in essence, can influence teachers' judgments, decisions, and instructional practices (Aguirre & Speer, 1999; Burns, 1992; Borg, 2001). Within the teaching context, teacher practice is often investigated through students' perceptions, observations by researchers, and self-reports by teachers (Muijs, 2006). Therefore, reported practices can align meaningfully with perceptions (Brown, 2009) when teachers' perceptions shape their actual instructional practices (Aguirre & Speer, 1999; Cheng et al., 2021). Basturkmen (2012) and Borg (2006) have indicated that discrepancies between perceptions and practices may arise due to personal and contextual factors related to teachers, students, and the working environment. Consequently, it is essential to examine how teachers' perceptions influence their practices (Min, 2013) and how these teacher perceptions relate to those of students (Ma, 2018), despite the limited availability of such comparisons (Montgomery & Baker, 2007). Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020) argued that investigating teachers' opinions should be contrasted with the exploration of students' preferences regarding teachers' feedback. In WF research, Black and Nanni (2016) suggested that comparing students' and teachers' preferences can be an initial step towards reconciling the differing expectations between teachers as providers of feedback and students as feedback receivers. Considering all the aforementioned information, it is crucial to understand how students and instructors perceive the role of WF and the types of feedback practices employed by instructors, as reported by students. This investigation may identify the extent to which instructors' perceptions align with their self-reported practices of product- and process-directed WF and the extent to which students' reported instructor WF practices are in harmony with their WF perceptions in Moroccan EFL writing classrooms.

OBJECTIVES OF THE DISSERATION

The exploration of the aforementioned issues related to WF holds significance within the EFL writing context of higher education in Morocco. The challenges faced by university teachers and students during the teaching and learning process of writing, where the provision and receipt of WF play a crucial role in the assessment, have motivated the investigation and comparison of students' and instructors' perceptions and/or reported practices of WF. In Morocco, assessment primarily revolves around exams, and the responsibility of delivering exams to students lies with the teacher, with limited involvement of students in this assessment process. Students enrolled in Bachelor of Arts (BA) and Master of Arts (MA) programs undergo three types of exams (continuous assessment, end-of-semester exams, and retake exams) each semester (Bouziane, 2017). Consequently, there is a greater need for formative assessment that encourages the provision and receipt of product- and process-based feedback among Moroccan students and instructors. However, Moroccan EFL university instructors face various challenges in implementing formative and alternative assessment practices, such as time and resource constraints as well as insufficient training (Bouziane, 2017; Jebbour, 2021; Ouakrime, 2000). Additionally, the large class sizes hinder instructors' ability to provide effective feedback and employ continuous assessment (Khtou & Erguig, 2013). These difficulties may influence the feedback strategies chosen by instructors during the revision process (Ouahidi & Lamkhanter, 2020). Students at Moroccan universities have reported that their instructors rarely engage in teacher-student conferencing or dialogic feedback, and feedback is infrequently provided during the writing process. This led Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020) to conclude that instructors primarily provide feedback on the final product. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the issue of WF in the Moroccan higher education context from both instructors' and students' perspectives.

The significance of this exploratory and comparative research lies not only in contributing to the ongoing debate on the effectiveness of written corrective feedback (WCF) (Truscott, 1996, 1999; Ferris, 1999), which is conceptualized as product-based WF, but also in exploring the new conceptualization of feedback as a process. The latter encourages teachers to view feedback as a means of improvement rather than a mere input message. It also encourages students to not only act upon the feedback received but also actively participate in the feedback process. This research focus can also shed light on the state and practice of EFL writing assessment through WF in the Moroccan context, as well as the extent to which teachers and researchers are able to support process-based writing and feedback implementation in higher education. Additionally, this research may increase EFL writing teachers' awareness of the WF techniques integrated into EFL writing classrooms. Abouabdelkader and Bouziane (2016) argued that the lack of awareness regarding research-based studies aimed at enhancing the teaching of EFL writing is one of the factors contributing to writing difficulties. Furthermore, this research focus is relevant due to the limited research available on teachers' perceptions regarding their use of WF (Ma, 2018). Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020) noted the scarcity of literature exploring students' perceptions of teachers' feedback in Moroccan higher education institutions, especially considering the large class sizes. Moreover, there is a lack of comparison between students' and teachers' perceptions (Ma, 2018). Therefore, extensive research is necessary to examine the perceived usability of teacher-written feedback from the perspectives of both students and teachers, as well as the relationship between the two (Ma, 2018). The main objective of this dissertation is to explore and compare the perceptions and reported practices pertaining to WF among Moroccan university students and instructors within the domain of EFL writing. This examination aims to ascertain the extent of alignment and misalignment that exists between these perceptions and practices.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

I. The primary aim of conducting a narrative literature review was to identify different approaches to writing and WF, as well as explore the fundamental concepts of perceptions and reported practices. The key focal points focused on
(1) describing the product and process approaches to writing;
(2) clarifying the distinction between product- and process-based WF; and
(3) defining the terms of perceptions and reported practices and their relationships.

II. The systematic review aim at synthesizing and interpreting the findings related to students' and instructors' perceptions and reported practices of WF. This review sought to address the following questions:
(4) What are teachers' perceptions and self-reported practices of WF?
(5) What are students' perceptions and reported practices of WF?
(6) What are the relationships between teachers' or students' perceptions and their reported practices of WF?
(7) What are the differences between students' and teachers' perceptions and/or reported practices of WF?

These questions were investigated by following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol (Page et al., 2021) to select empirical studies, describe their characteristics, summarize their findings, and make recommendations for future research. The synthesis of the studies involved the utilization of two distinct approaches. First, a summary was provided concerning the research methodology employed, the data collection methods utilized, and the characteristics of the participants involved in the selected studies. For this purpose, the research methodology codes proposed by Riazi et al. (2018), encompassing qualitative, quantitative, mixed, and eclectic approaches, were adopted. Additionally, the methodology designs were categorized according to the classifications outlined by Hyland (2016), which include auto-ethnography, experimentation, case studies, quasi-experiments, and other methodologies. Second, a thematic analysis was conducted on the included studies to identify and summarize common themes.

III. The first empirical study aimed to explore 468 Moroccan EFL university students' preferences and reported instructor practices of product- and process-based WF. The following research questions were investigated in this study:
(8) What are their perceived preferences regarding product- and process-based WF?
(9) What are their reported instructor practices of product- and process-based WF?
(10) The extent to which their perceived preferences align or match with their reported instructor practices regarding the product- and process-based WF?

The study employed a self-designed questionnaire comprising 80 items that covered perceptions and reported practices and included nine subscales regarding product- and process-based WF. The reliability values of the subscales ($.51 \leq$ Cronbach's alpha $\leq .87$) were adequate, and the data were acceptable for factorization ($.75 \leq$ KMO $\leq .94$), which confirmed the validity of the questionnaire. In order to address the research questions, the data were analyzed in three phases. Initially, composite scores were generated based on the outcomes of Principal Component Analyses (PCAs). Subsequently, descriptive statistical analyses were conducted on these composite scores to examine students' preferences and their reported instructor practices. This analysis was performed on the entire sample and within different subgroups to assess the uniformity of students' responses and determine whether significant differences exist in preferences and reported practices across educational levels (BA and MA) and study years. To accomplish these objectives, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and subsequent post-hoc analyses were employed to identify differences between subgroups for each subscale. Additionally, a series of paired-samples t-tests were

conducted to investigate statistical disparities within the two dimensions (product and process scales) across the various subscales. Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed to assess the internal relationships among the subscales. Finally, a series of paired-samples t-tests were utilized to analyze the variations between students' preferences and reported instructor practices across the subscales.

IV. The second empirical study aimed to investigate the perceptions and self-reported practices of Moroccan EFL writing instructors in public universities. In this study, the following research questions were addressed:

(11) What are their perceptions of product- and process-based WF?

(12) What are their self-reported practices of product- and process-based WF?

(13) What is the degree of alignment and/or misalignment in their perceptions and self-reported practices regarding the product- and process-based WF?

The reliability values of the subscales used in the questionnaire were acceptable ($.50 \leq$ Cronbach's alpha $\leq .89$), and the data were suitable for factorization ($.72 \leq KMO \leq .82$). The data were analyzed in three steps to address the three research questions. In the initial step, composite scores were derived from the PCAs. These scores indicated the importance of perceptions of the items within the specified subscales and, in the case of self-reported practice, revealed the frequency with which respondents reported using the specified WF modes in their own practice. On the basis of these composite scores, descriptive statistical analyses were conducted to identify instructors' perceptions and investigate their self-reported use of WF. Using a series of paired-samples t-tests, the differences between the two were analyzed. By calculating the correlation coefficients, the internal relationships between subscales were revealed. Finally, the subscale differences between perceptions and self-reported practices were analyzed.

V. The third empirical study aimed to compare Moroccan EFL students' and their instructors' WF preferences and their reported practices at a specific university located in the city of Meknes. The targeted questions were:

(14) To what extent are instructors' perceptions of product- and process-based WF in alignment with their students' preferences?

(15) To what extent do instructors' self-reported practices of product- and process-based WF match their students' reported practices?

Participants in this study were selected from the whole surveys used in the first and second studies, involving the largest number of EFL writing instructors ($n = 13$) and their students ($n = 210$) at the chosen university. To answer the research questions, independent samples-t tests were utilized. To examine the consistency of the results, the responses of the instructor and student samples were compared across the entire sample, and subsamples were created based on the enrollment year of the students.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A narrative review on the approaches to writing and WF and definitions of perceptions and reported practices

(1) The approaches to teaching writing can be categorized into two main perspectives: the product-based approach and the process-based approach. The product-based approach prioritizes grammar and form, but it tends to overlook important aspects such as idea development and topic relevance, leading to limitations in the quality of student writing. Critics argue that this approach may neglect crucial elements like writing skills, genre, context, audience, learning strategies, and cognitive processes. In response, the process-based approach emerged, emphasizing cognitive processes and teacher-student interaction.

However, this approach has also faced criticism for its disregard of cognitive development, language proficiency, individual differences, and the final product. To address these concerns, models of Flower and Hayes (1980) and Hayes (2012) were developed, considering various factors and emphasizing revision, transcription, and creating communicative texts for the intended audience.

(2) To foster students' writing abilities, two distinct perspectives on WF have been used. The product-oriented WF seeks to ameliorate the accuracy of students' written texts. This WF type is often provided by instructors and other relevant sources (e.g., peers), encompassing both explicit and implicit WF, metalinguistic explanations, grades, praises, and criticisms. The process-oriented WF can be applied in the stages of pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing by actively engaging students in various sub-processes, including planning, prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Process-oriented WF also focuses on cognitive processes, social factors, and development, and it aims to engage learners in self-regulation and self-editing processes. This feedback is given in supportive, specific, personalized, and detailed ways, followed by explanations and suggestions for future writing improvement.

(3) Perceptions and reported practices were used to compare these two WF approaches to teachers and students. Perceptions include knowledge, beliefs, views, and thoughts. Reported practices, on the other hand, focus on lesson techniques, and methods as perceived by students, observed by researchers, or reported by teachers.

A systematic review on instructors' and students' perceptions and reported practices of WF

(4) Out of the 11 studies included, eight explored the preferences of teachers when it comes to WF, while three specifically examined its perceived effectiveness or intended purpose. In terms of teachers' self-reported practices, nine studies delved into aspects such as the amount, form, type, scope, and extent of WF.

(5) Out of the 22 studies that concentrated on students' perceptions of WF, 13 explored their preferences for feedback, eight investigated its perceived usefulness, and one study examined both preferences and usefulness together. In relation to reported practices, three studies examined how students interpreted the feedback practices of their instructors, specifically in terms of the amount, focus, and type of the feedback.

(6) The reviewed studies have a gap in exploring the connection between students' perceptions and their reported practices. Nonetheless, six studies were found that specifically examined the relationship between teachers' perceptions and their reported WF practices. These studies were classified according to the scope, focus, strategies, and purpose of the feedback.

(7) Regarding the differences in WF perceptions between students and teachers, three studies were identified. Two of them exhibited that instructors' views contradicted students' preferences in WF types such as direct vs. indirect feedback. The other study showed alignment because both teachers and students favored mechanics-related feedback. Regarding differences between students' and teachers' reported WF practices, three additional studies were discovered. In two of them, discrepancy was found between teachers and students, mainly in relation to feedback focus and error treatment or marking. The other study discovered both alignment in the provision of comprehensive feedback and misalignment in feedback type (direct vs. indirect) and focus (e.g., grammar and mechanics).

Moroccan EFL university students' preferences and reported instructor practices of WF

(8) The findings concerning product-oriented WF showed that students had higher preferences for the practices of *WCF*. As part of process-based WF, most of them highly preferred receiving *effective WF modes in the writing process* containing specific, personalized, detailed WF that supports identifying next steps in the writing process and content-based WF related to macroaspects.

(9) Regarding students' self-reported practices of product-based WF, they reported that their instructors frequently used WCF. Within the process-based WF, they stated their instructors used of content-based WF related to macroaspects more often than other WF techniques.

(10) There were discrepancies between the two constructs of perceptions and reported practices in all subscales measuring different WF techniques. Thus, students perceived that product- and process-based WF techniques have great importance in EFL writing classes, but they also reported that, in comparison to their preferences, their instructors applied them less frequently.

Moroccan EFL writing instructors' perceptions and self-reported practices of WF

(11) The findings concerning product-oriented WF showed that instructors perceived applying the practices of *WCF* and *WF modes on the written text* as important techniques. As part of process-based WF, most of them highly valued *effective WF modes in the writing process*.

(12) Regarding their self-reported practices of product-based WF, instructors stated that they often employed *WF modes on the written text*. Within the process-based WF, they reported using *judgmental WF* and *effective WF modes* as their most frequent practices.

(13) The comparisons between perceptions and self-reported practices showed mismatches in the practices of *WCF*, *content-based WF related to macroaspects of writing*, *developing evaluative judgment*, and *effective WF modes in the writing process*. Thus, instructors admitted the importance of WF in these areas, although they acknowledged applying their practices less frequently.

Comparison between students' and their instructors' WF preferences and reported practices

(14) Instructors' preferences matched those of their students on the importance of focusing on the practices of *judgmental WF on the written text* and all process-based WF subscales, but instructors' and students' preferences mismatched regarding the importance of focusing on *WF modes on the written text*, which is a product-oriented subscale.

(15) When comparing instructors' and students' reported practices, WF strategies covering text quality (*judgmental WF on the written text*, *content-based WF related to the standards of textuality* and *macroaspects of writing*) were aligned. However, there were significant differences in other subscales (*WCF*, *WF modes on the written text*, *developing evaluative judgment*, *supportive WF*, *effective WF modes,* and *judgmental WF in the writing process*), indicating that instructors stated employing a variety of these WF strategies, while students reported their lesser frequency. This demonstrated that the instructors' use of WF strategies was inconsistent with the information provided by the students.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The systematic review found that student WF perceptions were studied more than teacher perceptions, and fewer studies from both perspectives focused on reported WF practices in EFL/ESL/academic writing in tertiary education. Six studies examined teachers' perceptions and reported practices, but none examined this relationship from the student perspective. Three studies compared teachers' and students' WF perceptions, and three compared their practices. Studies investigating the relationships between different levels of proficiency and feedback, the benefits of peer dialogic feedback, and the different aspects of WF dualities (e.g., implicit vs. explicit, face-to-face vs. anonymous, written vs. spoken, teacher vs. peer, and asynchronous vs. synchronous) tended to focus more on students' perceptions than on their practices. More emphasis was also placed on teacher perception research than practice research. The present review revealed gaps in feedback research, particularly in terms of the examination of the relationship between students' perceptions and reported practices and the comparison of teachers' and students' perspectives. Addressing the identified gaps in future research could provide a better understanding of the degree of alignment in WF perceived efficacy and its instructional practices, as well as the nature of the collaborative roles between students and teachers in the teaching and learning process of EFL/ESL/academic writing.

In the first study, Moroccan EFL students valued WCF more than judgmental WF practices and the different WF modes that could be provided on their written text. They also valued effective WF modes in the writing process and content-based WF related to macroaspects of writing, and they reported that WCF was used more frequently by their instructors than other WF modes and judgmental WF practices. Students also perceived that their instructors used content-based WF for macroaspects of writing more often than process-oriented WF. The study also found discrepancies between the WF practices students value in EFL writing courses and their reported instructor application of WF. Thus, these mismatches must be addressed by encouraging instructors to become familiar with student WF needs. Student preferences and reported instructor WF techniques differed slightly between student groups. Thus, future research on BA and MA students may reveal their WF perceptions and expectations.

In the second study, Moroccan EFL writing instructors' perceptions revealed that they highly valued WCF and recognized its assistance in resolving language accuracy-related problems for students. Regarding the process-oriented WF, the majority of instructors placed a high priority on applying effective WF modes. Concerning self-reported practices, instructors reported using feedback modes that address the linguistic structure of student drafts frequently. Judgmental feedback and effective WF modes were also often utilized when providing process-oriented WF. The research exposed disparities between perceptions and self-reported WF practices; therefore, it is suggested that future researchers investigate the underlying causes of these disparities in order to assist Moroccan instructors in acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills. This can ultimately assist them in bridging the gap between their beliefs and the practices that should be utilized when responding to student writing.

The third study revealed that instructors and students perceived the value of WCF, judgmental WF on written texts, and the other five process-based WF techniques similarly, but their preferences regarding WF modes on written texts differed. Instructors' and students' reported practices appeared to match regarding WF strategies, including judgmental WF on the written text and content-based WF related to textuality and macroaspects of writing. However, there were mismatches in providing WCF, using different WF modes on the written text, developing evaluative judgment, as well as applying judgmental, supportive, and

effective WF modes in the writing process. Thus, these findings implicate that teachers and students should discuss ways to resolve the disparities found regarding these WF strategies.

In conclusion, the overall empirical studies can contribute in two significant ways to educational research. First, they can propose new scales and subscales that highlight distinct differences between product- and process-oriented WF. Second, they can support multiple-perspective investigations into the effectiveness of WF approaches. It is possible to improve educational practices by combining the studies' self-invented questionnaires with other instruments. Understanding students' preferences and comparing them to the teacher's perspective can facilitate reflective teaching practices, allowing WF practices in the classroom to closely align with students' preferences and perceived teacher practices. This alignment has the potential to significantly boost the writing development of students.

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