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**ELT Teachers' Perceptions of Using Written Feedback as a
Technique to Improve Syntactical Errors in Grade 8 Students**



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Abstract

This research investigates the perceptions of ELT teachers on the use of written feedback to correct syntactical errors in Grade 8 students in Pakistani schools, specifically in urban Karachi. A qualitative approach was used to gather data through semi-structured interviews with six ELT teachers of private schools in Karachi. The study investigates the types of feedback provided by teachers and the challenges they face in improving students' syntactical accuracy. The findings suggest that teachers use a combination of direct and indirect feedback methods, focusing on specific syntactical issues such as word order and sentence structure. Teachers emphasized the importance of clear, actionable feedback but faced time constraints in large classrooms. The study highlights the need for focused written feedback to address common syntactical errors influenced by students' first language, Urdu. This research contributes to understanding effective feedback practices in ESL classrooms and how teachers can better support students' writing development.

Key terms: Written Feedback, Syntactical Errors, ELT Teachers, ESL Writing, Direct & Indirect Feedback

Introduction

In the English language, writing is one of the most challenging aspects of both teaching and learning. Among all the language skills, writing is often regarded as the most difficult skill (Huang & Zhang, 2020; Zhang, 2021). This is particularly true for learners of English as a second language (ESL), who struggle not only with studying the language itself but also with overcoming various syntactical and grammatical challenges that are most of the time very unique to their native languages. If we particularly consider the Pakistani context, where English is taught as a second or foreign language, students frequently face difficulties in understanding and applying the correct sentence structures, such as word order, verb tenses, and other syntax elements. Mostly these challenges are caused by the influence of the first language, such as Urdu, which follows a subject-object-verb (SOV) word order, unlike English, in which we use SVO (subject-verb-object) structure.

The importance of written feedback in addressing these issues is important for ELT teachers to understand. In written corrective feedback (WCF), teachers provide students with comments and corrections on their written work, and it has been recognized as an important

pedagogical tool in language learning. Feedback not only corrects and improves errors but also a crucial process for improving their proficiency in language. The present researches appear to have reached an agreement that the written corrective feedback (WCF) benefits writing accuracy in L2 learners' revised/new writing (Bitchener and Knoch, 2009, 2010; Shintani and Aubrey, 2016; Li and Roshan, 2019; Karim and Nassaji, 2020). Therefore especially for ESL learners, feedback is often considered a key aspect of writing instruction, and it plays an important role in developing students' syntactical accuracy and overall writing skills. Research discusses the importance of written feedback in helping students identify and address their syntactical mistakes which ultimately improves their writing performance (Zhang, 2013; Hyland & Hyland, 2019).

Considering the recent studies on teacher feedback, they have also particularly focused on the effectiveness of written corrective feedback in second language acquisition. After Truscott's (1996) critique of WCF, a significant debate arose in which he questioned its effectiveness in improving student writing. However, it is also suggested that WCF benefits writing accuracy, especially in terms of revision and error correction in new writing (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Shintani & Aubrey, 2016; Karim & Nassaji, 2020). While the overall consensus has shifted towards the effectiveness of WCF, the way feedback is provided and the students are engaged with it remains a critical factor in determining its success. Research has shown that students benefit most from feedback that is specific, clear, and actionable (Lee, 2017). However, the delivery of this feedback can vary widely depending on the teacher's approach and the student's proficiency level.

In Pakistan, Urdu is the dominant language, and most students struggle with transferring their first language's syntactical patterns to L2, which is English. For instance, the use of SOV structure in Urdu leads to common errors in word order when students write in English because English follows an SVO structure. Now due to this difficulty in transition, teachers must provide comprehensive written feedback on these specific issues of syntax. Moreover, feedback is not just about correcting mistakes but also about creating students' autonomy in language learning. Ferris (2006) emphasizes the role of feedback in promoting learner autonomy, stating that it encourages students to notice their errors and learn from them, which is extremely crucial at the middle school level when students are in the growing period of understanding and refining their language skills.

Apart from all the benefits of providing relevant written feedback, the challenges ELT

teachers face cannot be denied. Teachers struggle with providing clear, focused, and actionable feedback that students can easily understand and apply. Especially when it comes to large classrooms, it gets even more challenging due to time constraints. Also, providing students individual attention is almost close to impossible in this situation. The effectiveness of written feedback also depends on how students respond to it, like some actively engage with the feedback, making corrections and applying suggestions, while others may overlook or misunderstand the feedback, resulting in minimal improvement in their writing (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009). In some cases, students may feel overwhelmed by the number of corrections, and it makes it harder for them to focus on the most critical errors such as syntactical ones.

If we talk about private schools in urban areas like Karachi, English is taught as a second language, and so the demand for strong writing skills in English is high. Even the academic and professional success in Pakistan is often judged by students' ability to write clearly and accurately in English. Although the reality cannot be denied that there is a lack of research that explores how middle school teachers perceive and implement written feedback to improve syntactical accuracy.

This research aims to look into how middle school English language teachers' perceive written feedback and its role in improving the syntactical accuracy of Grade 8 students' writing. The study will portray the challenges and opportunities associated with the use of written feedback in ESL writing instruction. In Pakistan, students face multiple linguistic challenges, so this study will also be particularly useful for the ELT teachers here, as it will discuss how to better support students in overcoming syntactical difficulties and improving their writing proficiency.

Objectives

The primary objectives for this study are:

- Understanding ELT teachers' perceptions of the role of written feedback in correcting syntactical errors.
- Identifying strategies used by ELT teachers when providing written feedback to grade 8 students.
- Identifying the challenges ELT teachers face in providing effective written feedback.
- Evaluating the impact of written feedback on students' syntactical error reduction from teachers' perspectives.

Research Questions

This study aims to investigate the following research questions:

1. What challenges do ELT teachers face while implementing written feedback to improve syntactical accuracy in grade 8 students?
2. How do ELT teachers perceive the effectiveness of written feedback as a technique for addressing syntactical errors in grade 8 students' writing?
3. What are ELT teachers' perceptions of the long-term impact of written feedback on grade 8 students' syntactical proficiency?

Literature Review

In English language teaching (ELT), the role of written feedback in improving syntactical accuracy is extremely important. This literature review highlights the studies that address this strategy of written feedback. Also it maintains a focus on key themes, including feedback types, teacher beliefs, and the effectiveness of various strategies, with a focus on their relevance to the research of Grade 8 students.

Written feedback is often categorized into local issues which deal with language syntax and grammar, and the other one is global issues which focuses on content and organization (Ellis, 2009). Focused feedback is particularly beneficial for second language (L2) learners because it reduces cognitive overload by narrowing the scope of feedback (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Empirical studies such as those by Sheen (2007), explained that focused feedback significantly enhances accuracy in areas, like article usage. Apart from this, some researchers questioned the ecological validity of this approach in real-world L2 contexts, arguing that its controlled nature may not translate effectively to typical classroom settings.

There are generally two categories of feedback strategies, direct or indirect. In direct feedback the teacher provides corrections explicitly, meanwhile, we talk about indirect feedback, where the teacher points out errors without providing corrections, encouraging students to self-correct. Studies remain uncertain and inconclusive regarding the superiority of one over the other. For example, Chandler (2003) concludes that direct feedback led to immediate improvements, particularly among low-proficiency learners, while indirect feedback has deeper cognitive engagement and long-term retention.

Moreover, feedback plays a significant role in students' motivation, whether it is positive or negative. When students are provided with positive feedback, it boosts their confidence.

While constructive or negative feedback highlights areas of weakness and directs improvement (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). So, it is a critical responsibility of the teacher to balance these approaches to help students with their writing because their beliefs play a pivotal role in shaping classroom practices, particularly in providing written feedback. According to Borg (2003), teachers' beliefs develop gradually and are influenced by formal education, teaching experience, and contextual factors. Previous schooling experiences significantly shape teachers' beliefs about effective teaching strategies, including feedback methods. In Pakistani classrooms, teachers face practical constraints in implementing ideal feedback strategies, especially with larger class sizes or limited resources.

It is even recommended that non-native English-speaking (NNES) teachers prefer focused and direct feedback. They believe that those approaches offer greater clarity and structure to learners (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). In Pakistan, teachers struggle with balancing the need for feedback with the realities of large crowded classrooms and limited time duration. Therefore, it is important to understand their perceptions of how feedback strategies can be adapted to these constraints that might improve syntactical accuracy in Grade 8 learners.

Ellis (2009) conducted a case study under the qualitative research paradigm and investigated how written corrective feedback helps second or foreign-language learners develop grammatical accuracy. Data were gathered through observations of the classrooms and semi-structured interviews with teachers and students. The findings of this study showed that when direct feedback is provided consistently, it improves students' ability to understand and apply grammatical rules. The study also highlighted challenges such as the time-intensive nature of giving detailed feedback making it challenging to implement, particularly in large classes.

In another study, Bitchener and Ferris (2012) used a mixed-methods approach to study the short-term and long-term effects of direct and indirect feedback. The study combined pre-test and post-test to measure immediate syntactical improvements and interviews to understand learner and teacher perspectives. The findings suggested that direct feedback led to immediate improvements, while indirect feedback supported long-term retention. A limitation of this study was the short intervention period that limited the ability to study sustained improvements over time, but this study is still relevant to our research as it highlights the dual benefits of direct and indirect feedback.

Moreover, to study the impact of written feedback, Hyland and Hyland (2019) conducted a longitudinal qualitative study that analyzed feedback dialogues between teachers and students over a semester. The data included written feedback samples and follow-up interviews to assess students' understanding and application of the feedback. The study found the importance of specificity and clarity in feedback, revealing that vague comments or overly general feedback often led to student confusion and misinterpretation. The study focused on advanced learners which may not fully apply to younger or less proficient students. Nonetheless, the emphasis on clear and detailed feedback aligns closely with the needs of Grade 8 students. And, this makes it highly relevant to the current research.

In another study of feedback, Sheen (2007) conducted an experimental design to examine the effectiveness of metalinguistic feedback compared to simple error correction. Participants were divided into experimental and control groups, with the former receiving explicit grammatical explanations alongside error correction. The study found that metalinguistic feedback significantly improved students' syntactical accuracy, especially for complex structures. However, the study's controlled settings and focus on adult learners limited the generalizability of its findings to younger learners in natural classroom settings.

Research by Chandler (2003) examined the role of revisions in maximizing the benefits of feedback. His quasi-experimental study found that students who revised their work based on feedback showed greater improvement. The study found that students who actively revised their drafts showed marked improvements in grammatical accuracy, suggesting that feedback alone is insufficient without opportunities for revision. A limitation of this study was its focus on university-level learners, which might differ from the context of Grade 8 students. Still the findings highlight the importance of integrating revision opportunities into feedback practices that is particularly relevant to the current study.

There are also two main types of feedback: focused and unfocused. Focused feedback looks at one specific type of mistake, like subject-verb agreement. Ferris (2002) said, "Focused feedback enables students to process corrections more effectively, as they can concentrate on one aspect of writing at a time." (p. 5). This is easier for students with limited skills. Unfocused feedback, however, covers many mistakes at once. Fazilatfar et al. (2014) explained, "Unfocused feedback helps learners gain mastery over multiple aspects of language use, ultimately enhancing their writing proficiency." (p.7). This works better for students who are already good at writing.

In Pakistan, students often make mistakes in English writing because of the first language interference. For example, they follow Urdu's sentence order (subject-object-verb) instead of English's (subject-verb-object). Bitchener and Ferris (2012) said, "Effective WCF should address learners' unique needs, focusing on their specific areas of difficulty." (p. 2). Similarly, Aseeri (2019) observed, "Instructors who employ targeted feedback strategies see significant improvements in students' writing accuracy." (p. 3). These studies reveal that the strategies such as direct and indirect methods, and clear feedback practices tend to improve accuracy. But, challenges such as limited resources, time constraints, and large class sizes remain struggling factors, especially in the setting of urban Karachi classrooms.

Methodology

This section explains how ELT teachers perceive written feedback as a tool to improve syntactical errors in Grade 8 students' writing. Through a qualitative approach, we are able to understand teachers' beliefs, strategies, and challenges related to written feedback. This method captured the subjective and contextual experiences of participants as suggested by Creswell (2013).

Research Design

A qualitative exploratory design was used under a phenomenological approach which studied the perception and interpretation of ELT experiences with written feedback. This research design has given an in-depth exploration and understanding of teachers' perspectives on the role of feedback in improving students' syntactical accuracy and errors.

Research Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to include ELT teachers with firsthand experience in providing written feedback to Grade 8 students. A total of six teachers who are designated as ELTs in private schools in urban Karachi participated in the study. They provided informed consent before participating and their anonymity was maintained throughout the study.

Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured interviews allowed the teachers (participants) to share their experiences, strategies, and challenges in their own words. The data collection method provides flexibility to find the key themes while allowing participants to elaborate on their thoughts (Kvale, 1996). The interviews were conducted in English and lasted approximately 30–45 minutes each. These were then audio-recorded with participants' consent. An interview guide with

open-ended questions ensured consistency across sessions while allowing room for follow-up questions based on participants' responses.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach. Transcripts were read multiple times to gain familiarity, and initial codes were generated to understand key ideas. These codes were then organised into themes that addressed the research objectives, such as teachers' perceptions of written feedback, strategies used, and challenges faced. Later the analysis was done manually to ensure a thorough understanding of the data.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines to protect participants' rights and privacy. Ethical approval was obtained from all participants. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was voluntary. They had the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. All identifying information was kept anonymous, and data were securely stored to maintain confidentiality.

Findings

The Role of Written Feedback in Student Learning

All participants agreed that written feedback plays a significant role in helping students improve their writing skills, particularly when we talk about addressing syntactical errors. Teachers highlighted that written feedback provides a clear record of corrections, which students can review to understand their mistakes and improve. As Respondent 1 explained, "Written feedback allows students to go back, look at their mistakes, and see exactly where they need to improve."

Respondent 2 also emphasized its importance stating, "Written feedback is essential for students to understand their strengths and weaknesses and make targeted improvements." Unlike verbal feedback which can easily be forgotten, written feedback is beneficial as it serves as a long-term reference. Respondent 3 also agreed by saying, "The written feedback really, really helps the students because, you know, they can always go back and look into that paragraph or any piece of writing and then they can see what falls."

However, while most teachers agreed on the importance of written feedback, Respondent 6 expressed a contrasting view, stating that "this generation does not work well with written feedback, and it is time-consuming for teachers as well." This shows

that while written feedback is generally valued, its effectiveness may vary depending on student engagement and the practicality of implementation.

Strategies for Providing Written Feedback

Various strategies were used by teachers to ensure their feedback is effective and helpful. A common approach is to start with positive comments to encourage students before pointing out their mistakes, this way they won't be discouraged. Respondent 3 described, "My strategy is to start with the positive. When they start feeling good about themselves... then I go with the negative thing." Another key strategy is providing specific and actionable feedback, such as identifying particular errors like subject-verb agreement issues or sentence structure problems. Respondent 1 shared, "Instead of saying, 'Improve your grammar,' I can be more specific and say, 'Change subject-verb agreement in the sentences.'"

Teachers also use tools like color coding, underlining, and detailed comments to make feedback clearer. Respondent 1 mentioned, "Highlighting with codes helps them to know that okay where they have made the error and it's related to which aspect—is it punctuation, is it capitalization, is it their grammatical error, or is it vocabulary." Although the feedback methods vary depending on the students' level, with younger students receiving direct corrections and older students being encouraged to self-correct. Respondent 2 explained, "Sometimes direct feedback is necessary, while at other times, indirect feedback with a lot of students works better."

However, Respondent 5 stated that "if it's a very weak student, they're not going to go through the effort of checking the spelling or whatever. So, I write the spelling." This indicates that while some teachers prefer indirect feedback (highlighting errors and letting students correct them), others opt for direct feedback (providing corrections) depending on the student's level and motivation.

Challenges Faced in Feedback Provision

Providing effective written feedback is not always easy. One major challenge is the lack of time, especially when teachers handle large classes. Respondent 2 stated, "In larger classes, time becomes a limitation. I provide individual feedback to students struggling the most, but general errors are addressed with the whole class." Teachers also struggle to balance syllabus completion with providing detailed feedback, as classroom time is often limited. Similarly, Respondent 6 noted that "my checking time is usually insufficient," which leads to the use of rubrics and correction symbols instead of detailed comments.

On the other hand, Respondent 4 emphasized that "time constraints do affect the quality of feedback," but added that "if managed properly, we can do everything." This contrast shows different perspectives on whether time constraints are actually a challenge or something that can be managed with effective strategies.

Another challenge is student resistance. Some students, particularly older ones, are defensive about their work and unwilling to accept feedback. Respondent 3 observed, "Grade 8 students often believe their work is correct and resist making changes. They are just like, okay, whatever we have written is correct and we are not going to correct it." This resistance can make it difficult to engage students in the feedback process.

Influence of Native Language (L1) on Writing

Students' native language, particularly Urdu, strongly affects their English writing. Teachers noted that differences in sentence structure between Urdu and English lead to errors. Respondent 1 explained, "Students might write, 'I the book read,' instead of 'I read the book,' this is all due to the syntactic structure of Urdu. Similarly, pronunciation, vocabulary choice also matters and how can we forget about the code-switching maybe in their own language they are saying a sentence in a different context but when they are writing instead of saying, 'I am going to the market,' they might write, 'I am going to the bazaar.'" This kind of influence is witnessed in both writing and speaking.

This issue is especially common when students directly translate from Urdu to English. Respondent 2 noted, "Many students translate directly from Urdu to English, which affects syntax." Teachers believe this influence can be reduced with consistent practice and focused feedback on sentence construction.

Apart from this, Respondent 4 stated a slightly contrasting perspective, noting that "the influence of native language has been significantly subdued because of the kind of exposure they have through social media, videos, and movies." This suggests that while L1 influence is still present, it may be less pronounced among students these days, especially of this age, with greater exposure to English.

Impact of Feedback on Student Development

Written feedback always have a positive impact on their writing skills when they engage with it since it boosts their confidence, and classroom participation. Teachers view feedback as it encourages students to take responsibility for their learning and develop a growth mindset. Respondent 1 emphasized, "This written feedback provides students with autonomy by

encouraging them to be accountable and to take responsibility for their learning.” Respondent 2 observed, “Students who engage with feedback show improvements not just in their writing but also in their classroom participation and confidence.” Whereas, Respondent 3 said that “no, not all of them [engage with feedback]. Of course, like no two students are the same. So, some of them do, and some of them don’t.”

However, the impact of feedback varies depending on student motivation. Some students are eager to apply feedback and improve, while others focus only on grades. Respondent 3 remarked, “No, not all of them. Of course, like no two students are the same. So, some of them do [engage with feedback], and some of them don’t.”

Moreover, while some students prioritize understanding their errors, others focus primarily on grades. Respondent 4 observed, “They focus on their grades. They want their grades to improve. They only engage with feedback when they realize that their grades are affected by language issues.” These kind of student’s priorities become a major challenge of motivating students to engage with feedback for learning rather than just for grades.

Importance of Training and Tools in Feedback Delivery

Teachers highlighted the value of training and digital tools in improving feedback practices. Respondent 2 shared, “I have been attending workshops... and I have also taken the examiner for O Level Paper 1123 workshops as well, so yes, that helps a lot.” Training sessions help teachers learn new strategies for delivering effective feedback. Similarly, Respondent 5 also mentioned receiving training at the school on how to give feedback which influenced their strategies.

In contrast to this, not all teachers have access to such training. Respondent 3 stated, “*No, unfortunately, I have not gotten any training for this thing.*” this indicates that not all teachers have access to formal training. This also shows the uneven distribution of professional development opportunities among teachers. Some teachers are left to rely on their own experiences and trial-and-error methods, which can make feedback less structured and effective. This imbalance suggests that not all teachers are equally prepared to provide meaningful and constructive feedback to their students.

Digital tools like WhatsApp voice notes and PowerPoint presentations were also mentioned as time-saving and engaging methods for providing feedback. Respondent 2 explained, “I often use WhatsApp to send voice messages with feedback, which saves time and builds a good rapport with students.” These tools make it easier for teachers to deliver

detailed feedback without being constrained by class time. While digital tools can be useful, they also come with limitations. Some teachers still prefer traditional written feedback, as they feel it gives students a more detailed and structured understanding of their mistakes. Others believe that without proper training on digital tools, their potential is not fully realized.

Student Engagement with Feedback

The level of student engagement with feedback varies widely. Some students actively seek feedback and use it to improve their writing, while others ignore it entirely. According to Respondent 5, "Some students come to me and ask, 'Why did you write this? What does this mean?' But there are always some students who probably don't acknowledge it." Similarly, Respondent 6 said that some students do not take feedback seriously, "they don't make amends and somehow repeat the mistakes." This shows how different kind of students are resistant to applying feedback. Respondent 4 stated, "They focus on their grades. They want their grades to improve. They only engage with feedback when they realize that their grades are affected by language issues." This represents that not all students use feedback as a tool for learning. Many are more concerned with scoring higher marks than actually improving their writing skills. So better student awareness is much needed by institutes about the purpose of feedback and its role in their academic growth.

Balancing Positive and Constructive Feedback

Teachers emphasized the importance of balancing positive feedback with constructive criticism. According to most of the teachers, if students only receive criticism, they may feel discouraged and demotivated, whereas, if the feedback is always positive, they will still may not take the mistakes seriously, so a balanced approach has to be there. Respondent 5 shared, "They tell us to sandwich up feedback—give something positive, tell their mistakes, and then end it on a positive note." This "sandwich approach" helps students stay motivated while still acknowledging areas for improvement. However, in practice, teachers found that it was not always easy to maintain this balance. Respondent 3 noted that "most of the time the negatives are more than the positives," indicating that while the sandwich approach is ideal, it can be challenging to maintain a perfect balance in practice.

The major challenge is finding a middle ground—giving enough positive feedback to keep students motivated, while also providing clear corrections so they can improve. Some teachers try to personalize feedback based on the student's confidence level. They offer more encouragement to struggling students while being more direct with advanced learners.

Influence of Class Size and Time Constraints

Large class sizes and time constraints significantly impact the quality and frequency of feedback. With large classrooms, it becomes difficult to give individualized attention to every student's writing. Respondent 6 noted, "I usually use rubrics and correction symbols to mark students' errors because I mostly have a large class, so my checking time is usually insufficient."

Due to limited time, teachers often have to prioritize certain mistakes rather than providing comprehensive feedback on every aspect of writing. In some cases, teachers address common errors with the entire class rather than giving individual comments. Respondent 2 shared, *"If I notice a common issue among most of the students, I address it with the entire class. But then there are a few students—let's call them the strugglers—so I try my best to give the written feedback individually."*

On the other hand, some teachers believe that time constraints can be managed with proper organization. Respondent 4 stated, *"If managed properly, we can do everything,"* suggesting that efficient time management strategies could help teachers provide better feedback despite large class sizes.

Role of Rubrics and Self-Assessment

Rubrics were frequently mentioned as a valuable tool for assessing student progress and providing structured feedback. Instead of writing individual comments for every student, rubrics help teachers to evaluate writing based on specific criteria such as grammar, sentence structure, and coherence. Respondent 4 explained, "Rubrics basically help you to keep a track of students' performance, not only in classroom-based tasks but in assessment-based tasks as well."

However, rubrics also have limitations. Respondent 6 pointed out that "it is not practically possible for me to give comments," highlighting the challenges of using rubrics in large classes that when rubrics are used, there may not be enough time for detailed, personalized feedback. Teachers also encouraged students to engage in self-assessment, which promotes learner autonomy and helps students take ownership of their learning. According to Respondent 4, "the learner autonomy does increase because the learners now are not dependent on the presence of their teacher, but rather than accumulation of written feedbacks. The person exactly knows to score more or write better. So written feedback

becomes documented in a certain way for that learner to improve and do show that skills in the language that needs to be implied. So that's autonomy for that learner."

Influence of Digital Tools and AI

Several teachers expressed interest in using digital tools and AI to enhance feedback practices. Respondent 5 mentioned, "I'm sure AI will have some tool for this soon. I'm waiting for it." Tools like Grammarly and online writing platforms were suggested as ways to provide more efficient and effective feedback, especially in large classes.

However, there were concerns about how effective AI-generated feedback would be compared to human feedback. Respondent 4 raised this issue, questioning "how humanized it could be?" and whether AI feedback would hold the same value as feedback from a teacher. Teachers generally agreed that technology should be used as a supporting tool rather than a replacement for teacher feedback. AI tools can help save time, but critical thinking and writing style analysis still require a teacher's expertise and judgment.

Discussion

The results of this study on ELT teachers' perception on using written feedback as a technique to improve syntactical error in students of grade 8 show that ELT teachers view written corrective feedback (WCF) as a most important tool for improving students' writing skills especially when it comes to addressing their syntactical errors. Teachers believe that WCF helps students understand their mistakes and provides them with a reference to review and improve their writing. Just like Respondent 1 explained, "Written feedback allows students to go back, look at their mistakes, and see exactly where they need to improve." Teachers also emphasized on the importance of using strategies that encourage and motivate students. The most important strategy was starting with positive feedback before pointing out students' weaknesses. Respondent 3 shared, "My strategy is to start with the positive. When they start feeling good about themselves... then I go with the negative thing." This way students not only improve their writing skills but also it helps majorly in building their confidence and autonomy in learning.

This study also highlights significant challenges faced by teachers when providing written feedback. Time constraints especially in large classrooms, make it very difficult for teachers to provide detailed and individualized feedback. According to Respondent 2, "In larger classes, time becomes a limitation. I provide individual feedback to students struggling the most, but general errors are addressed with the whole class." Similarly, Respondent 6

shared that *“my checking time is usually insufficient,”* which forces teachers to rely on rubrics and correction symbols instead of detailed comments. However, Respondent 4 presented a contrasting view, stating, *“If managed properly, we can do everything”* believing that effective classroom management and structured feedback strategies could help mitigate this issue.

Another challenge which cannot be ignored is the influence of students’ first language which is the L1, Urdu, which often leads to syntactical errors due to differences in sentence structure. Teachers reported that students commonly translate directly from Urdu to English, resulting in errors such as incorrect word order. Respondent 2 observed, *“Many students translate directly from Urdu to English, which affects syntax.”* However, some teachers believe that this influence is becoming less significant due to increased exposure to English through media. Respondent 4 stated, *“The influence of native language has been significantly subdued because of the kind of exposure they have through social media, videos, and movies.”* These findings show the strategies as well as the major challenges faced by ELT teachers in Pakistani classrooms.

This study also highlights significant challenges faced by teachers when providing written feedback. Time constraints, especially in large classrooms, make it very difficult for teachers to provide detailed and individualized feedback. According to Respondent 2, *“In larger classes, time becomes a limitation. I provide individual feedback to students struggling the most, but general errors are addressed with the whole class.”* Similarly, Respondent 6 shared that *“my checking time is usually insufficient,”* which forces teachers to rely on rubrics and correction symbols instead of detailed comments. However, Respondent 4 offered a contrasting view, stating, *“If managed properly, we can do everything.”* This indicates that while time is a limitation, effective classroom management and structured feedback strategies could help mitigate this issue.

However, the findings also reveal that not all students engage with feedback in the same way. While some actively seek clarification and apply feedback to improve their writing, others ignore it entirely or prioritize grades over learning. Respondent 4 noted, *“They focus on their grades. They want their grades to improve. They only engage with feedback when they realize that their grades are affected by language issues.”* This shows that student motivation plays a significant role in the effectiveness of feedback so the eachers must find

ways to help students see feedback as a learning tool rather than just a means to improve grades.

The results also align with existing research on WCF. Studies by Bitchener and Ferris (2009, 2010) support the idea that WCF significantly improves students' writing accuracy when the feedback is clear and specific. Similarly, Ferris (2006) emphasized that feedback promotes student's autonomy, a point reflected in this study where teachers noted that students who engage with feedback become more responsible for their learning. The study's findings also support Ellis's (2009) distinction between direct and indirect feedback, as teachers reported using direct feedback for less proficient students and indirect feedback to encourage advanced learners to self-correct. There were also a few challenges identified in this study, such as time constraints and student resistance to feedback, which aligns with Hyland and Hyland's (2019) findings that practical limitations often reduce the effectiveness of feedback in ESL classrooms. Also, the impact of Urdu's syntactical structure on Pakistani students' writing reflects linguistic transfer issues noted by researchers such as Zhang (2013) and Aseeri (2019).

These findings have important implications for teaching practices. Teachers would benefit from more training and professional development opportunities that focus mainly on effective feedback strategies, as Respondent 2 said that workshops had helped refine their methods and strategies. Moreover, the use of technology, such as WhatsApp voice notes and PowerPoint presentations, could also address time constraints and make feedback more accessible and engaging for students according to the respondents. Teachers should consider providing focused feedback that targets specific syntactical errors to avoid overwhelming students. Feedback should address common errors caused by Urdu-to-English translation, helping students understand the structural differences between the two languages.

Apart from the strategies and perception, this study has several limitations. The small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, as the participants may not represent all ELT teachers in similar contexts. Furthermore, the study primarily focuses on private schools in urban areas which may not reflect the challenges faced in public or rural schools. The study also lacks achieving students' perspectives and classroom observations. Thus, future research could address these gaps by including a wide range of participants including student perspectives. Classroom observations could also be incorporated in the methodology.

Conclusion

This study shows that ELT teachers believe written feedback is important for helping Grade 8 students fix syntactical mistakes in their writing. Teachers agreed that feedback helps students understand their errors and improve their work. They also said it's important to give clear and specific feedback and to start with positive comments to encourage students. However, teachers faced challenges like lack of time, large class sizes, and the effects of students' first language L1 (Urdu) on their writing. The study also points out problems in Pakistani classrooms and suggests ways to improve feedback. This research gives ideas for improving feedback methods, especially in cases where students struggle with grammar because of their native language.

Future studies could also study how students feel about feedback and how they use it. Expanding the study by including more schools, such as public and rural ones, could give a bigger picture of how feedback works. Observing how teachers provide feedback in real classrooms could also show how it is used during lessons.

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