

**The Effect of Considering Students' Attitudes Towards  
Methods of Error Correction on the Grammatical  
Accuracy of their English Writing**

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**Abstract**

An extremely important issue in any approach of teaching and learning second/foreign language is that students receive feedback on their activities in second/foreign language learning milieu. There are many strategies that teachers adopt to provide students with evidence that what they have just produced in their writing activities is incorrect. However, there has not been much attempt to investigate the effect of considering the students' attitudes in adopting these error correction strategies. The present study was an attempt to explore the effect of considering student's attitudes towards error correction on the grammatical accuracy of their English writing. For this purpose two groups, experimental and control, passing writing essay course as partial requirement of their study at university, were selected. The students in both groups took part in an original IELTS test as a pre-test. For the first half of the term (8 sessions) the students in both groups received similar writing instruction. They also received feedback on their writing activities. Then, a questionnaire was given to the teachers to find out how correlated their methods of error correction are. The results showed that the methods used by them were different. After that, an early version of a questionnaire developed by Icy Lee (2005), after some modifications, was given to both experimental and control groups to check the students' attitudes towards

writing error correction strategies. The data obtained from this questionnaire was analyzed to highlight those error correction strategies preferred by most students. Then, the teachers in both groups were informed about the result of the questionnaires. The teacher of the experimental group adjusted and modified his error correction methods according to those preferred by the students for the second half of the term. The teacher in the control group, on the other hand, ignored the students' preferences in writing error corrections. Finally, both groups took part in IELTS test as post-test. The result showed that the students in the experimental group outperformed the students in the control group on grammatical accuracy in English writing.

**Key words:** Error feedback, Attitudes, Correction strategies, grammatical accuracy

### 1. Introduction

Among the many controversial debates about the issue of error correction in L2 writing, the one which has received much attention is the effect of mismatch between the types of feedback that students prefer and the types of feedback that actually teachers provide. Although research shows a positive trend toward diminishing this mismatch (Enginarlar, 1993; Ferris, 1995; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994, 1996), none has investigated the efficacy of the application of what students prefer in L2 writing error correction.

A plethora of research can be found that have investigated different aspects in L2 writing error correction. The focal attention of all these studies can be summarized in one deceptively simple question whether, how, and when to respond to students' grammatical and lexical errors (Chandler, 2003).

It seems that the result of all controversial debates to answer the former question has been inconclusive (Ferris, 1999, 2004; Truscott,

1996, 1999). Reviewing the literature, Ferris (2004) concluded that findings of different studies were not similar. In the words of Ferris (2004), the studies compare apples and oranges! This may lead to a stronger position against the Truscott's (1999: 114) counter that "generalization is most reasonable when similar results are obtained under a variety of conditions". Perhaps the results of these suggestive and skeptical accounts about the effect of error correction have been the dilemma (i.e. whether, how and when to correct ) that teachers have faced.

This study tries not to add another dilemma but to help with the main concern of teachers in providing their learners with appropriate feedback. Here, much attention has been paid to find out the effect of the combination of students' preferred error correction methods on the accuracy of their writing.

## **2. The Importance of L2 Writing Error Correction**

The literature of L2 writing error correction is replete with controversial ideas as well as arguments about the importance of error correction. More than two decades ago Zamel (1985: 96) argued against error correction and warned teachers to "hold in abeyance their reflex-like reactions to surface level concerns and give priority to meaning".

Of all the recent debates, the ones between Truscott (1996) and Ferris (1999) received much attention. Taking a strong position, Truscott (1996) argued that error correction is harmful and should be abandoned. He, in fact, argued against error correction in several grounds such as practicality, second language acquisition, and lack of enough support for the efficacy of grammar correction (Truscott, 1999). Later in (1999) Ferris argued against Truscott's idea stipulating that what he said was premature, incomplete and not statistically proved!

From that time on, there have been many other studies which have argued in favor of L2 writing error correction ( Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ferris, 1995, 1997; Ferris & Helt, 2000; Lalande, 1982; Polio, Fleck & Leder, 1998). Among the most recent ones is the Lee's (2003) argument that indicates "while Truscott's idea of

correction-free instruction may be welcoming news for writing teachers, in reality, it is difficult for teachers to renounce the established practice of giving feedback on student errors in writing” (p. 217). She has also argued that “however unnecessary and out of vogue error correction is to some writing researchers, in the classroom, error correction is a real and urgent issue that commands teachers’ attention” (Lee, 2004: 286). Ferris (2004) in another attempt to reiterate the importance of error correction tried to consider it as a component of error treatment both of which are crucial for L2 writing instruction.

### **3. Research Evidence on the Effect of Different Feedback Strategies**

Apart from the importance given to error correction, the literature has underscored the importance of error correction strategies used by teachers (Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 2002; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Ferris & Helt, 2000; Lee, 2005; Lee, 2003; Lee, 1997; Lee, 2004). Lee (2005), for example, surveyed the students’ preferences regarding the existing error correction methods. She observed that what the teachers did (i.e. correcting all errors) is just congruent with what their students want (i.e. comprehensive feedback). She cautioned that students’ preferences might be influenced by their prior instructional experiences; for example, they have had all their writings corrected comprehensively by their previous teachers and they may believe that this is the best method. She also argues that “one result of teachers’ comprehensive error feedback might be developing a false idea on the part of students that writing must be entirely error-free” (Lee, 2005: 11) and a premise on the part of teachers that error-free writing is a desirable goal (Lee, 2003). She suggests that teachers should be familiarized with systematic selective marking of the errors (Lee, 2004).

Some studies have investigated the effect of direct and indirect error correction. Ferris and Roberts (2001), investigated 72 university ESL students and came to an important conclusion that indirect error correction is useful even for idiosyncratic errors such as word choice and sentence structure. They also found that indirect

feedback helps students in self-editing. Lee (1997), on the other hand, had previously shown that students were able to correct more errors if they were provided with direct error correction. While research evidence suggests that indirect error feedback brings more benefits to students long term writing development than direct error feedback (Frantzen, 1995; Lalande, 1982). Ferris (2002, 2003) believes that direct and indirect error correction may play their own roles differently in different cases. For example, direct feedback may be appropriate for beginners and also when the errors are not meant to be corrected by students themselves (i.e., untreatable errors).

Identifying error types by means of codes is known as coded error feedback. It is opposed to uncoded through which teachers just underline or circle the errors. Ferris (2002: 67) argues that identifying errors can be “cumbersome for the teacher and confusing for the student”. Lee’s (2003) survey of the students’ beliefs in Hong Kong schools about methods of error correction revealed that “despite the popularity of marking codes among teachers, it may not be as effective as some teachers think” (p. 231). Ferris and Roberts (2001) didn’t find any improvement in students’ self-editing between the group that received coded feedback and the group that simply had errors underlined.

How effective different error feedback strategies are, has been another question which has gravitated the bulk of research in recent years. Lee (2005) in her survey in the Honk Kong secondary writing classroom found out that only 9% of teachers believe that their error correction would result in good progress and 61% believed that it would result in some progress on the part of students. She advises teachers to make use of a wider range of error correction strategies not just one or two, consider the student factor and also spell out the aim of error feedback explicitly at the beginning of writing class. Lee’s (2003) study also suggests that teachers should treat error feedback as a long term task, accompany it with strategy training and grammar instruction to make students independent. Bitchener, Young and Cameron (2005: 201), studied 53 post intermediate

ESOL adult migrant from China and found that “different types of feedback provided had a significant effect on the accuracy with which the participants used the separate linguistic categories in new pieces of writing”. They specifically found that the more “treatable” categories (e.g., past simple tense and definite article) were amenable to the combination of written and oral (conference) feedback.

#### **4. Research Evidence on the Effect of Teachers' and Students' Attitudes toward Error Feedback Strategies**

There have also been many attempts to investigate the error correction issue from the students' and teachers' point of view. The majority of these studies have targeted the accuracy in writing. In fact, written accuracy is important in many contexts that students themselves want and expect feedback in their written errors from their teachers. They value their teachers' practice in error correction very much (Ferris, Chaney, Komuras, Roberts & Mckee, 2000; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Ieki, 1991; Truscott, 1996).

Considering the students' overall attitude in respecting their teachers' attempt, Ferris (1999) sees a need for students' consciousness raising about the rules governing the frequent errors, if the teachers' feedback is going to be effective. Ferris and Roberts (2001: 166) warn, “Students' attitudes and preferences have unfortunately been a neglected piece of information in previous error correction studies”. It seems that both teachers and students should be in close contact with each other and respect their attitudes.

According to Riazi (1997), one of the salient elements in producing writing tasks by non-native graduate students in a natural setting is the composing strategies they use. Through one of these strategies participants reported that they usually asked their professors to clarify their comments on the writing tasks. The kinds of feedback on language, rhetorical organization and content, as reported by participants, were considered as sources of improving their language learning and writing as well as a way of improving their performance on academic tasks.

In a similar study Caffarella and Barnett (2000) obtained doctoral students' perceptions of a specific teaching process namely the Scholarly Writing Project (SWP). Probably the most significant result of this study was that "the students perceived critiquing as one of the most influential elements of the scholarly writing process in terms of both learning about the process and improving their final product" (Caffarella and Barnett, 2000: 50). Hyland (2003: 228) states, "Teachers may need to open channels with students to discuss the potential benefits of feedback on different aspects of writing and possible strategies for using this feedback". He warns teachers of their students' beliefs and taking them in to consideration when giving feed back.

Ferris(2004: 55) speculates that from an affective standpoint students' strongly held opinions about this issue may influence their success or lack thereof in the L2 writing class". Diab (2005: 31) warns us "the difference between students' and teachers' expectations and views about feedback may obviously be a cause of miscommunication and unsuccessful teaching and learning; therefore, it may be especially important to explore further this relatively unexamined area of research in L2 writing". The result of his case study also revealed that "teachers should make an effort to explore their students' beliefs about writing, feedback, and error correction and try to bridge any gap between their own and their students' expectations" (Diab, 2005: 40)

### **5. Research Evidence on Grammar Correction**

Several researches have investigated the question of whether grammar can help students produce more accurate text than those who receive no error feedback? About a decade ago, Truscott (1996) argued that grammar correction is ineffective and he (1999) reiterated the idea that there is no clear evidence to prove against this claim. Other studies, on the other hand, came to the conclusion that grammar correction can help improve the accuracy of the text written by students (Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005; Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Kepner, 1991;). Enginarlar (1993) and Diab (2005) concluded that students were

concerned with accuracy and perceived attention to linguistic errors as effective feedback from teachers. Some studies (Sheppard, 1992; Truscott 1996), however, have argued against grammatical accuracy as a result of error correction. Sheppard (1992) found that responding to content resulted in improvement in grammatical accuracy, whereas responding to form did not seem to have any effect on students' writing.

Chandler (2003: 292) concluded that if error correction is accompanied by students' revisions, the students' subsequent new writing will be more accurate. She also did not reject the probability of the effect of students' attitudes on accuracy of subsequent writing, for example, "marginal description of type of error had the most negative effect on accuracy of subsequent writing of any feedback methods used in either study, perhaps because of students' attitudes toward it".

Truscott's (2004) continuous rebuttal arguments regarding the efficacy of error correction can be traced in recent response to Chandler. In this response, Truscott tries to show that Chandler's (2003) claims are not more than conjectures. He argues that no previous research findings support the effectiveness of correction plus revision.

Last but not the least issue which has attracted the attention of researchers is the different error treatments by teachers. Hyland and Anan (2006: 517) surveyed different groups of teachers (i.e., Japanese teachers, native English speaker non- teachers, and native English speakers as teachers from UK) and concluded that "although the teachers viewed error correction as a positive pedagogic strategy, they performed the task in different ways". In fact, Japanese teachers as non-natives were less lenient while native English speaking teachers identified fewer errors and judged errors considering their appropriacy. The source of this contrast can be traced back in teachers' prior experience, in addition to their background and teaching contexts.



## **6. Method**

### **6.1 Subjects**

The participants were all Iranian students studying English as a Foreign Language to receive their BA degree in TEFL. The majority of them were female and in their early twenties. They comprised two groups. There were 33 students in class A and 30 students in class B, all studying essay writing course held at Azad University of Torbat-e Heidarieh as partial requirements of receiving their degree. To be included in this study they all sat for an original IELTS test (2003). Those who gained between 3- 4.5 on this test were included in the study.

### **6.2 Research Questions**

This study was conducted to answer the following questions:

To what extent does considering the students' attitudes toward the error correction methods affect the grammatical accuracy of their English writing?

Clarifying the problem, the researcher found it inevitable to answer the following questions too:

- a. What are the students' main preferences regarding methods of error correction?
- b. What are the teachers' existing error correction methods?
- c. Does the teachers' methods match with those students prefer?

(The teachers and students' questionnaires answered these questions.)

### **6.3 Instrumentation and Procedure**

Two questionnaires were used in this study in an attempt to :

- a. Find out the students' attitudes and preferences regarding error correction methods used by their teachers.
- b. Elicit the existing error correction methods used by teachers.

The first questionnaire was a version developed and used by Lee (2000). This questionnaire was piloted with the participants of this study and they were asked to include any other techniques and recommendations they felt necessary along with comments about possible ambiguous items. Altogether 80 students were surveyed using this questionnaire. Twenty students randomly took part in an

individual follow up interview to confirm their comments and elaborate on the logic behind them. The result was a final totally revised version.

The second questionnaire was taken from Lee 2005 and was used to elicit the teachers' existing error correction methods. Both teachers were interviewed after filling the questionnaire out to find out the rationale behind their error correction methods.

An original version of IELTS was used to ascertain the participants' level of proficiency. This test was used as a pre-test in the first session and as a post-test after the 8<sup>th</sup> session just before starting the research. The IELTS writing tasks (essay section) were used to both practice writing out side of the classroom and judging the students progress. The topics were general and interesting for the participants.

Two groups of students studying Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) after taking the IELTS as a pre-test to determine their level of proficiency were selected. They received similar writing instruction by teachers, the teachers were asked to teach writing and give feedback exactly as they would have if the researcher had not been present. After 8 sessions during 8 weeks, they sat for the same proficiency test to check any possible change in their language proficiency.

Both sets of students were surveyed using the revised questionnaire to explore their attitudes and preferences for error correction techniques used by their teachers.

Another questionnaire was given to both teachers to explore their existing error correction techniques in their classes. The results were summarized and analyzed.

Both teachers were informed about the result of the students' questionnaire. The teacher in class A was asked to provide the students in his class with special error correction treatment as his students preferred. The teacher in class B, on the other hand, was asked to continue his traditional procedure in error correction.

Two essay-writing tasks of IELTS were given to both teachers to give as a pre-test to their students. Three non-native English

teachers including both teachers in class A and B and the researcher corrected the tasks. They counted the errors and normalized them<sup>1</sup> in this way the most recurrent error types were detected. Four error types were selected in-group A. A combination of the students' most favorite methods was used to treat these errors. Tables 1 and 2 below delineate the frequency of elicited errors.

**Table 1:** error frequency (Class A)  
Writing section of IELTS

Types of errors	Frequency (8 <sup>th</sup> session)	Frequency(16 <sup>th</sup> session)
Tense/ Verb	*125	38
Article	*121	52
Preposition	*192	79
Subject/Verb agreement	*101	80
Relative pronoun	27	22
Word order	40	35
Number	30	29
Passive/Active	18	15
Modals	12	11
Infinitive/Gerund	20	22
Participles	22	18
Pronouns	14	14
Conjunctions	8	9

\*The most frequent grammatical errors (Targeted errors)

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<sup>1</sup> The average number of words per text was 365 error counts have been normalized by dividing number of errors by number of words and multiplying by a standard which was set at 350.

**Table 2:** error frequency (Class B)  
Writing section of IELTS

Types of errors	Frequency	Frequency (16 <sup>th</sup> session)
Tense/ Verb	*103	82
Article	*176	125
Preposition	*134	98
Subject/Verb agreement	*63	53
Relative pronoun	37	29
Word order	28	23
Number	25	23
Passive/Active	20	14
Modals	14	16
Infinitive/Gerund	18	13
Participles	15	13
Pronouns	22	18
Conjunctions	12	10

Four grammatical errors were selected as the most frequent ones and the teacher in class A was asked to apply a combination of the students' most favorite error correction techniques in correcting their outside classroom writing activities. The teacher in class B; however, was asked to continue his previous method of error correction ignoring the result of the questionnaire. Students wrote at least 8 essays outside the classroom to be corrected by their teacher. At the end of the course (i.e., 16<sup>th</sup> session) students sat for an in-class essay as a post-test. Raters corrected the essays, counted, and normalized the errors.

### 7. Analysis

A version of Lee's (2005) questionnaire was piloted with a group of students (about 80 students). It was revised, finalized, and given to both groups. This questionnaire aimed at finding the most favorite error feedback strategies by students.

Only the significant responses are tabulated below.

**Table 3:** Class A (33 students)  
Questionnaire Results Regarding Students' Error Correction Preferences

Students most preferred items	Number of students	Percent %
They preferred their teachers to .....		
Underline all types of errors	25	75.75%
Correct one single error type at a time	25	75.75%
Write a comment, and not the correct form, to be discussed in groups	23	69.69%
Make a list of common errors and photocopy it and give it to groups of four to be discussed	30	90.90
Use common errors to make an exercise, quiz or game	29	87.87

As it can be observed from table 3, of 33 students who were surveyed, more than half of the students (0.75%) preferred their teachers to mark (underline) all their errors but at the same time and about the same proportion (0.75%) preferred to have just one error type corrected by their teacher. Since it seemed a little bit odd to prefer both comprehensive (i.e., underlining all errors) and selective (i.e., correcting one single error type), an interview was run to reveal the reason. The interview data shed light on why the same proportion of the class preferred two different types of error feedbacks. The result revealed that students didn't like their papers to be dirty and overwhelmed by teacher's corrections; however they would like to have all errors marked (underlined) but just one type be corrected at a given time. One student remarked "not to miss my errors, I like my teacher to mark all errors but comment on just one type (e.g., tense/verb) at a given time because I don't like a dirty paper." This shows that students like their teachers to correct their errors indirectly at the same time. The third item of table 1 shows that over half of the class (0.69%) preferred indirect error correction. Those who were interviewed all attributed their preferred methods to their learning. Another student remarked, "I can learn better in this way."

The third item shows that over 90% of the class preferred an immediate revision in groups. This item also shows that students think the error correction is the teachers' responsibility. The last item exactly prove the idea that students (over 87%) prefer their teacher to develop another exercise (e.g., quiz, game) to treat their errors.

In general, it can be construed that the students in class A prefer more comprehensive but a special selective type of error correction, which is rare in previous studies. Also students preferred quite indirect error feedback. The results also suggest that students in this class are more reliant on their teacher and feel it is the teacher's responsibility to correct their errors. It is also obvious that an immediate group revision is what students like to have.

**Table 4:** Questionnaires Result Regarding Teachers' Existing Error Correction Methods

The Teacher in class A ....

a	Uses more selective error feedback
b	Marks about 2/3 of errors
c	Select the errors on ad hoc basis
d	Uses codes for error feedback
e	Designs the codes by himself
f	Makes students correct errors out of the class
g	Writes the correct forms above each error
h	Goes through students' common errors inside the class
i	Believes that his error feedback method is to some extent effective

The contents of the table above are the result of a questionnaire that mainly asked teachers about:

1. Their existing error feedback practice
2. their perspectives on error feedback
3. Their perceived problem

Although this paper was just after the first item, teachers were asked to answer the whole questions.

As the items of the table suggest, contrary to what students in class A preferred, their teacher was more selective and direct in error feedback. When he was asked about the significance of his methods, he speculated, "I feel my students prefer to have their errors corrected selectively and directly but not systematically." When he

was asked about the revision of the errors he stated that it should be done by students individually and out of the class.

As it can be observed, there is a mismatch between what students desire and what their teacher prefers.

**Table 5:** Class B (30 students)

Questionnaire Results Regarding Students' Error Correction Preferences.

Students most preferred items They preferred their teachers to .....	Number of students	Per cent %
Underline some of the errors at a time	28	93.3 %
Give the right form not just a comment	27	90 %
Write a comment to be discussed individually	24	80 %
Make a list of common errors and write on the board to be discussed by the class	26	86 %

The questionnaire results for class B suggests that almost all (93.3%) of the students wished their teacher to correct some of their errors, which is a selective approach to error feedback. A student remarked in the following interview " I don't like to have all my errors corrected, it doesn't look good to me to have a dirty paper." The results also suggest that majority of students (90%) prefer direct error feedback. They were mostly reliant on their teachers and they preferred an individual revision accompanied by teacher contact.

**Table 6:** Questionnaires Result Regarding Teachers' Existing Error Correction Methods. The Teacher in class B ....

a	Corrects all students' errors
b	Gives hints at the locations of error but not correct them
c	Relies on his perception of students' needs
d	Doesn't do anything after error feedback
e	Thinks that students will have good progress in his writing class
f	Believes that students should be able to locate their errors and correct them
g	Overally believes that overt correction will be of no help
h	Thinks that teachers are responsible for error feedback

The results of the questionnaire for the teacher in class B show that contrary to what students wished, this teacher provided comprehensive and indirect error feedback. There was no revision after feedback. Although he believed that it is the teacher's responsibility to give feedback, he did not perform as his students preferred.

In general, it is obvious that there is a clear mismatch between what teachers perform in these classes and what their students want them to do.

These results helped a lot in the following treatments of the study.

**Table 7:** T-Test (Group A)

	Paired differences		t	df	Sig
	Mean	Std. Deviation			
pair 1 tense/verb	2.4990	1.33343	10.766	32	.000
Pair 2 article/article	2.0050	1.44560	7.967	32	.000
Pair 3 preposition/preposition	2.8477	1.70332	9.604	32	.000
Pair 4 word choice/word choice	.6102	1.49359	2.347	32	.025
Pair 5 others/others	.4649	1.44078	1.854	32	.073

To determine the difference between the students' performances before and after error feedback treatment, a paired sample T-test was run. The results in table 7 indicate a significant difference between the performance of the group A in the 8<sup>th</sup> session and 16<sup>th</sup> session. The P value for all types of targeted grammatical errors is less than 0.05 and significant. It shows that the result of considering student's attitudes in using methods of error correction has had a strong effect on their performance. i.e., the frequency of errors made by students has decreased dramatically.



**Table 8:** T-test (Group B)

	Paired differences		t	df	Sig
	Mean	Std. Deviation			
pair 1 tense/verb	.5434	1.75704	1.7	29	.101
Pair 2 article/article	.1918	1.38844	.757	29	.455
Pair 3 preposition/preposition	.5753	1.68174	1.9	29	.071
Pair 4 subject verb/ subject verb	.3196	1.21641	1.4	29	.161
Pair 5 others/others	1.0228	1.81474	3.1	29	.004

Another paired T-test was run to determine the difference between the students' performance in class B in the 8<sup>th</sup> session and 16<sup>th</sup> session. The results show that for all types of errors the P value is greater than 0.05 which not significant. It means that ignoring the students' attitudes towards methods of error correction would result in increasing the frequency of grammatical errors made by them.

**Table 9:** Independent T-test Between Mean Differences in Both Groups

	t-test for equality of means				
	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. error Difference
Verb/tense					
1	5.004	61	.000	1.9556	.39048
2	4.939	53.922	.000	1.9556	.39596
Article					
1	5.066	61	.000	1.8132	.35789
2	5.076	60.805	.000	1.8132	.35719
Preposition					
1	5.320	61	.000	2.2723	.42710
2	5.324	60.571	.000	2.2723	.42684
Others					
1	-1.357	61	.180	-.5579	.41101
2	-1.343	55.301	.185	-.5579	.41555

An independent T-test between the mean differences of group A and B was run. Since two groups were different in one error type

(i.e., subject/verb agreement in group B but word order in group A) the T-test was run only between the four similar parts. The results show that there is a significant difference between two groups. The difference for other types of errors that received no treatment is not significant.

### **8. Discussion**

The findings from the students' questionnaires as well as the follow-up interviews revealed that they prefer different methods of error correction. The students in class A preferred selective and at the same time comprehensive types of error correction. More than half of the class attributed indirect error correction to their better learning. An immediate revision was another thing that almost all students in this class were interested in.

Looking at the results gained from the teacher questionnaire for class A, one can perceive the difference between what the teacher did in this class, i.e., more selective and direct error correction, and what students preferred. The teacher also believed that the students should do the revision as an outside class activity.

The results of the assigning the same questionnaire to students in group B suggest that students preferred selective and direct approaches to error correction, while the teacher of this class provided them with a more comprehensive and indirect error correction approach.

The results of the first phase of the study clearly point to the case that there is a mismatch between the types of error correction strategies preferred by students and those provided by teachers.

Following the idea coming out of the findings by Diab (2005) suggesting that "teachers are responsible to be aware of their students' perceptions of what helps them progress and somehow to incorporate these perceptions into their teaching", the teacher in class A was made conscious about the methods preferred by students and he was asked to consider the students' performance in correcting their writing papers. The result of this showed significant differences between the before and after treatment.

From the results, it seems possible to make some claims about the belief that we cannot easily dismiss the strongly held beliefs by majority of students. An interesting aspect of this study is that the result of ignoring students' attitudes in applying different error correction methods would be the deterioration of their grammatical accuracy.

This study, on the other hand, found that the frequency of errors in the experimental groups (where teachers respected the students' preferences and applied them) is less than the control group. It, in fact, indicates an improvement in the grammatical accuracy of the students in the experimental group.

The results also are in line with what Hyland (2003) claims that "teachers may need to open channels with students to discuss the potential benefits of feedback on different aspects of writing and possible strategy for using this feedback". Actually, it can be argued that the crux of the issue is not who should correct the errors, but rather why and how teachers should correct them. Looking into the student factor in this realm should be the policy of all teachers who would like to observe improvement on the part of students.

## **9. Conclusion**

Before coming to any conclusion, it is important to note the limitations of this study. First, the sample is not large enough to generalize the results with confidence. Second, the data gathered about the frequency of grammatical errors was from a single task. Third, the raters were all non-native speaker teachers. Forth, there was no attempt to control the effect of each error feedback method. Fifth, the research is a short term experimental one.

Nonetheless, this study has tried to shed light on the following issues ignored by previous studies. First, this study as Lee (2003) suggested, is looking for more open and reflective attitudes to error feedback. No point of restrictive error correction dictated by instructional system or the teachers themselves is accepted as the only one. Administrators, teachers, and students may play their own role in this field. This study shed light on the efficacy of the students' role in this regard. It seems very important for teachers to

identify their students, desire regarding error correction strategies and add it to their experiences. In fact, as Ferris (2004) suggests, teachers may not wait for researchers in the meantime and can help their students in this way. Second, ignoring the students' wishes and attitudes or any possible mismatch between what students desire and what teachers perceive as the most effective method will have negative effect on the students' writing accuracy. Third, there is a positive relationship between students' preferences for various types of feedback and the accuracy of their performance in writing. This part is in fact an answer to the demand for more research put forward by Diab (2005).

Therefore, in line with recommendations made in previous studies, this study suggests that teachers should make an effort to explore their students' attitudes and preferences about error correction methods. They are responsible to consider and apply their students' desires in this regard. A word of caution needs to be added here that students' attitudes may not be always productive. It is also the teachers' responsibility to change these unproductive attitudes into useful ones (Lee, 2003).

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**Appendix (Student's questionnaire)**

*Dear students we would like to know your views about how your writings in English should be corrected in your classrooms. Please answer the questions with reference to how your present teacher corrects your writing activities. All information you provide here will be treated in the strictest confidence. Thank you for your valuable time.*

1) Which one of the followings is true?

- A. My English teacher underlines / circles all my errors.
- B. My English teacher underlines / circle some of my errors.
- C. My English teacher does not underline / circle any of my errors.
- D. I have no idea about the above.

***If your answer to question 1 is 'b', answer question 2. If your answer is 'a' 'c' or 'd', go to question 3.***

2) Before / after marking your compositions, does your teacher tell you what error types (e.g. verbs, prepositions, spelling ) he/ she has selected to mark?

- A. Yes
- B. No

3) which one of the followings do you like the best?

- A. My English teacher underlines / circles all my errors.
- B. My English teacher underlines / circle some of my errors.
- C. My English teacher does not underline / circle any of my errors.

4) Which one of the followings is true?

- A. My teacher corrects one single error type (e.g. punctuation ) at a time.

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- B. My teacher corrects all types of errors (e.g. punctuation, grammar all types, spelling etc )
  - C. My teacher categorize the errors and gives priority and inferiority to them.
- 5) Which one of the followings (mentioned in 4) do you like the best?
- A. My teacher corrects one single error type (e.g. punctuation ) at a time.
  - B. My teacher corrects all types of errors (e.g. punctuation, grammar all types, spelling etc )
  - C. My teacher categorize the errors and gives priority and inferiority to them.
- 6) Which one of the followings is true?
- A. My English teacher corrects all errors for me.
  - B. My English teacher corrects some errors for me.
  - C. My English teacher does not correct any errors for me.
  - D. I have no idea about the above.
- 7) Which one of the followings do you like the best?
- A. My English teacher corrects all errors for me.
  - B. My English teacher corrects some errors for me.
  - C. My English teacher does not correct any errors for me.
- 8) Which one of the followings is true?
- A. My teacher writes nothing on the paper and discusses the errors with students individually.
  - B. My teacher writes nothing on the paper and makes groups of four students to discuss the errors with each other.
  - C. My teacher writes a comment on each error to be discussed individually.
  - D. My teacher writes a comment on each error to be discussed in groups.
- 9) Which one of the followings (mentioned in 8) seems more useful to you not to make the same mistake again?
- A. My teacher writes nothing on the paper and discusses the errors with students individually.



- B. My teacher writes nothing on the paper and makes groups of four students to discuss the errors with each other.
  - C. My teacher writes a comment on each error to be discussed individually.
  - D. My teacher writes a comment on each error to be discussed in groups.
- 10) Which one of the followings is true?
- A. My teacher makes a list of common errors of all students and put them on the board each session to be discussed by the class.
  - B. My teacher makes a list of common errors of all students and write them on a paper and photocopy it and give to students individually to comment on these as homework.
  - C. My teacher makes a list of common errors of all students and write them on a paper and photocopy it and give to groups of four to be discussed.
  - D. None of the above is done.
- 11) Which one of the followings do you like the best?
- A. My teacher makes a list of common errors of all students and put them on the board each session to be discussed by the class.
  - B. My teacher makes a list of common errors of all students and write them on a paper and photocopy it and give to students individually to comment on these as homework.
  - C. My teacher makes a list of common errors of all students and write them on a paper and photocopy it and give to groups of four to be discussed.
  - D. None of the above is done.
- 12) Which one of the followings is true?
- A. My teacher uses errors from a number of different students writing to make an exercise, quiz, game, etc.
  - B. My teacher does not use errors from a number of different students writing to make an exercise, quiz, game, etc.
  - C. My teacher gets the students to make an exercise, quiz, game, etc using errors from a number of students
  - D. None of the above is done
- 13) Which one of the followings do you like the best?

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- A. My teacher uses errors from a number of different students writing to make an exercise quiz, game, etc.
  - B. My teacher does not use errors from a number of different students writing to make an exercise, quiz, game, etc.
  - C. My teacher gets the students to make an exercise, quiz, game, etc using errors from a number of students
  - D. None of the above is done
- 14) Does your English Teacher use a correction code in marking your compositions (i.e. using symbols like V, Adj, Voc, Sp, etc)?
- A. Yes
  - B. No

***If your answer to question 14 is “yes”, answer question 15 and 16  
If you’re answer is “no” go to question 17***

- 15) What percentage of your English teacher’s marking symbols (e.g. V, Adj, Voc, Sp) are you able to follow and understand when you are correcting errors in your compositions?
- A.            76-100%
  - B.            51-75%
  - C.            26-50%
- 16) What percentage of errors are you able to correct with the help of your English teacher’s marking symbols? (e.g. V, Adj, Voc, Sp)
- A.            76-100%
  - B.            51-75%
  - C.            26-50%
  - D.            0-25%
- 17) After your teacher has corrected the errors in your composition, do you think you will make the same errors again?
- A. Yes
  - B. No
- 18) Do you want your English teacher to use a correction code (i.e. using symbols like V, Adj, Voc, Sp, etc) in marking your compositions?
- A. Yes
  - B. No

19) Which one of the followings is true?

A. In this academic year, I am making good progress in grammatical accuracy in writing.

B. In this academic year, I am making some progress in grammatical accuracy in writing.

C. In this academic year, I am making little progress in grammatical accuracy in writing.

D. In this academic year, I am making no progress in grammatical accuracy in writing.

20) Which one of the followings do you agree with?

A. It is mainly the teacher's job to locate and correct errors for students.

B. It is mainly the students' job to locate and correct their own error