The Relationship between Iranian Teachers' Experience and Education, and their Written Feedback on their Students' Papers

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Abstract

This cross-sectional study was designed to explore the written corrective feedback (WCF) strategies employed by Iranian university teachers and the focus of their feedback; we also aimed to determine the relationship between the use of the identified strategies and the teachers' teaching experience and educational level. To this end, 100 MA and PhD volunteer teachers with various years of experience in teaching English from different universities in Iran participated in this investigation. Each male or female participant was requested to provide the researchers with a batch of rated writing essays which contained at least 15 papers. Afterwards, the collected essays were analyzed in terms of feedback strategy types and focus of feedback. To

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analyze the relationship between feedback strategies and teacher characteristic variables, we used the chi-square test. The findings indicated that the teachers used all the feedback strategies under study including direct, indirect, comprehensive, and selective strategies with the predominance of direct and selective ones. Besides, form followed by organization received the teachers' attention in the current research more than other aspects of writing. The results of the chi-square test showed that education, rather than experience, had a significant relationship with the teachers' feedback strategies and was a better predictor of the feedback strategies given by the teachers. At the end, pedagogical implications are provided for researchers and teachers interested in this area of study.
Keywords: Written Corrective Feedback, Feedback Strategies, Focus of Feedback, Teaching Experience, Education

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1. Introduction

Second language learning is a complicated process which requires a lot of effort on behalf of the learners and a great deal of expertise on behalf of the teachers in EFL or ESL classroom contexts. In the process of language learning, the students make a lot of errors before they acquire the required proficiency. How to deal with these errors has been the focus of second language theorists and researchers from long ago. They hold different views about this subject. Some believe that the errors have to be corrected and some maintain that correcting errors is not efficient and may even have negative effects (Bitchener, 2008; Ferris, 2007; Sheen, 2007; Tootkaboni & Khatib, 2014; Truscott, 2007). However, in most second language classes, error correction is practiced, and a large body of research has been devoted to this issue.

Sheen (2011) expresses that corrective feedback is commonly defined as "a teacher's reactive move that invites learners to attend to the grammatical

accuracy of something they have said or written", which can take place in a traditional grammar class as well as in response to a student's writing in the context of a communicative activity (p. 1).

The study, which focused specifically on written corrective feedback (WCF), was an attempt to investigate the types of strategies preferred by Iranian university teachers while giving feedback to their students, find out whether they preferred direct or indirect feedback and also comprehensive or selective feedback, and determine the potential association between these strategies and the teachers' experience and education. According to Ellis (2009), in the case of direct corrective feedback, the teacher provides the student with the correct form by crossing out an unnecessary word, phrase, or morpheme, inserting a missing word or morpheme, and writing the correct form near or above the erroneous one. However, for indirect feedback, the teacher indicates that the student has made an error but does not actually correct it. This is done by underlining the errors or using cursers in the student's text to show omissions, or by placing a cross in the margin next to the line containing the error. On the other hand, comprehensive feedback involves correcting all the student's errors, while selective feedback involves correcting a number of specific errors in the student's text (Van Beuningen, 2010). The inconsistency in rating and giving feedback on the learners' writing texts has caused a great number of researchers to look for the factors which contribute to this variability. However, a definite answer to this problem has not been found yet, and this subject deserves more research to close the gap. The current study gains significance in that the existence of a significant relationship between the teachers' experience and education and the feedback they provide might help the researchers to consider these causative factors in rater training and rater monitoring activities. The findings of this research, then, can add to the knowledge of the researchers, teachers,

raters, and stakeholders in the field of teaching and testing foreign languages. Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions were posed:

1. What are the corrective strategies used by Iranian EFL university teachers as written feedback to their students (direct/indirect; comprehensive/selective)?
2. What is the focus of Iranian EFL university teachers' written feedback? (i.e. form, content, organization, or others)
3. Do Iranian EFL teachers' written feedback strategies have any relationship with their experience and educational level?
4. Which of the factors under study, is a better predictor of the types of written feedback given by teachers?

2. Literature Review

In second language acquisition research, there has been an ongoing debate over the nature of errors and role of corrective feedback in language learning. The dilemma of whether or not to correct errors and how explicit the corrections should be has been the major focus of this debate. As an instance, in the behaviorist approach, the dominant approach in the 1950s and 1960s, errors were seen too negatively and were mainly limited to grammatical ones. Accordingly, the behaviorists believed in the strict and systematic correction of errors on the part of the teacher (Nagode et al., 2014). According to the nativists such as Chomsky, however, negative evidence (corrective feedback) has hardly any impact on language acquisition. This is rooted in the idea that what makes language acquisition possible is the Universal Grammar, (i.e., certain characteristics and grammar shared by all human languages) as well as the innate human linguistic mechanism. Corrective feedback (CF), therefore, affects performance, but not the underlying competence (Alkhawajah, 2016; Rezaei et al., 2011; Tatawy, 2015). To investigate the role of written corrective feedback and written language in improving EFL learners' compositions, Moradian and Hossein-Nasab (2019) carried out a

study. They concluded that the indirect WCF participant students who had produced reasons behind their errors in response to WCF (written language group) improved more significantly than the mere indirect WCF group. Recently, Negahi, et al. (2022) conducted a research study to examine the effect of direct and indirect unfocused WCF on the increase of implicit and explicit grammatical knowledge. Based on the results, both types under study increased implicit and explicit grammatical knowledge, however, direct feedback could even better improve the learners' performance.

Although there are a lot of similarities between the characteristics of error correction and feedback in oral and written work, the apparent differences in establishing standards for correcting the written work merit specific consideration; this prompted the researchers to carry out the present study in this area. In this part, the studies related to the subject of the present research are reviewed under two categories.

2.1 Studies on different strategies for written corrective feedback

Kaivanpanah et al. (2014) analyzed and compared Iranian teachers' perception of written feedback and their actual practice in the TOEFL/IELTS writing classes. To this end, 10 TOEFL/IELTS essays with written feedback from 30 experienced teachers were collected. The feedback on the 300 essays was analyzed in terms of local errors (e.g., spelling, grammar, punctuation) and global errors (e.g., content and organization). Also, a questionnaire was given to the teachers to find out their perception of giving written feedback on the students' essays. After comparing the perceptions and the actual performance of teachers, the researchers concluded that there was a mismatch between these two. Contrary to their perceptions, most of the teachers' feedback was on the language rather than the organization and content of the essays. Besides, the majority of the feedback was direct rather than indirect,

which was not in the same line with the results obtained from the questionnaires.

Alshahrani and Storch (2014) conducted a study in a Saudi university to investigate the teachers' written corrective feedback practices and their correspondence with the teachers' beliefs, university guidelines, and students' preferences. The participants of the study were three volunteer teachers as well as 45 volunteer students. The teachers at the university were supposed to follow strict guidelines on WCF and provide their students with indirect and comprehensive feedback. The data for the study came from the students' essays with their teachers' feedback, the interviews with the three teachers, and the questionnaires completed by the students. The analyses of the data revealed some discrepancies between the teachers' self-reports and their actual feedback as well as the university's guidelines. Also, the findings showed that there was a discrepancy between the students' preferences and the teachers' real practice.

To investigate Truscott's claim who asserts that WCF is useless, Modirkhamene et al. (2017) carried out a study to examine the long- and short-term effects of three types of written corrective feedback, namely selective, comprehensive, and no correction. 66 Iranian elementary EFL learners who were homogenous in terms of their general English proficiency and writing accuracy comprised the subjects of this study. The subjects were assigned into three groups of the same number, each receiving one of the three types of feedback in this study. During the study which lasted for six weeks, the subjects were asked to write six compositions, one each week. For the first group, all the errors were underlined and corrected. For the second group, on the other hand, only selected errors, namely, simple past tense, countable/uncountable, and comparative adjectives, were underlined and corrected. And the third group received comments such as good, great, ok,

etc., but no corrections. At the end of the sixth week, the immediate writing post-test was administered, and after an interval of one month, the learners took the delayed post-test. The results of the ANOVA tests showed that the second group, who received selected corrections, significantly outperformed the other two groups both in the short and long term.

Nemati et al. (2019) conducted a research study in Iran to investigate the potential effects of focused direct feedback and focused indirect feedback on beginner second language learners' acquisition of explicit and implicit knowledge of simple past tense. They also intended to know if there were any differences between these two types of feedback in improving the learners' ability of accurate use of simple past tense. According to the aim of the study, the volunteer participants were randomly assigned to three groups: one to receive focused direct WCF, one to receive focused indirect WCF, and a control group. In the first stage, the pretest untimed grammaticality judgment test and the pretest metalinguistic knowledge test were used to measure the students' explicit knowledge of the target structures. To measure their implicit knowledge of the target structures, the researchers used a pretest timed grammaticality judgment test. After that, the students did four text summary tasks. In the next stages, they also took the immediate posttest text summary task, the delayed posttest text summary task, the delayed posttest untimed grammaticality judgment test, the delayed posttest metalinguistic knowledge test, and the delayed posttest timed grammaticality judgment test. The statistical results of the study showed the positive effects of focused direct and focused indirect WCF on the explicit and implicit knowledge of the students as the participants in both groups outperformed the ones in the control group in the posttests. Concerning the differences between the effect of the two types of feedback in the study, the results indicated that the

students in the focused direct group performed significantly better than those in the focused indirect group in the posttests.

To investigate the role of written corrective feedback and written language in improving EFL learners' compositions, Moradian and Hossein-Nasab (2019) carried out a study. They concluded that the indirect WCF participant students who had produced reasons behind their errors in response to WCF (written language group) improved more significantly than the mere indirect WCF group.   Recently, Negahi et al. (2022) conducted a research study to examine the effect of direct and indirect unfocused WCF on the increase of implicit and explicit grammatical knowledge. Based on the results, both types under study increased implicit and explicit grammatical knowledge, however, direct feedback could even better improve the learners' performance.

Budianto (2021) and his colleagues explored the impact of direct and indirect corrective feedback strategies on the writing proficiency of high and low level EFL university students. They found that regardless of the students' language proficiency, direct corrective feedback was more effective in improving the students' writing.

In a more recent study, Salami and Khadawardi (2022) investigated Saudi EFL students' perception of WCF as well as the WCF strategies they preferred in online writing classrooms. The findings of the study indicated that the students had a positive view about using written corrective feedback in their online writing classrooms. Besides, electronic and unfocused feedback were the strategies most favored by the students.

2.2 Studies on the factors associated with the teachers' written corrective feedback

Erdosy (2004) conducted a case study in North America to find the answer to the following question: Is there any relationship between the

scoring procedures and scoring criteria which the writing teachers follow while assessing their students' writing performance and the teachers' personal background and professional experience? With this aim, the four participant teachers in the study were selected in a way to have a wide range of variability in terms of cultural background, mother tongue, and professional experience. To collect the data on the teachers' scoring criteria, the researcher used the scores which the teachers had given to 60 randomly selected TOEFL essays, concurrent verbal protocols (produced by the raters while rating the essays), and the comments which they had provided. After that, interviews and a questionnaire determined the influence of background factors on the participants' judgments and strategies. The quantitative and qualitative analyses of the collected data revealed that several factors were effective in the participants' use of specific criteria and strategies and could account for the differences found in their behavior; they included the raters' experience in teaching, their experience in learning ESL (in the case of nonnative speaker participants), their perception of language proficiency as well as language acquisition, and their ethnicity, culture and mother tongue. In contrast, the effects of academic background and assessment experience were limited.

In a mixed-method, cross-sectional study, Barkaoui (2010) explored the potential changes which occurred with experience in the raters' evaluation criteria of ESL essays. The study included 60 participants from different universities in Canada who were assigned to experienced and novice groups based on the results of a background questionnaire. To collect data, the researcher distributed 180 essays which had been randomly grouped into batches of 24 essays among the raters. Each rater was asked to rate the same batch of 24 essays both holistically and analytically, with an interval of at least two weeks between the two methods. Half of the raters were asked to rate the essays holistically first, and the other half were asked to rate them

analytically first. The results of score and qualitative data analyses showed that in both experienced and novice groups, the communicative quality of the essays was weighted more than other features. Although a wide range of variance was found across the raters in terms of using this feature, it was not associated with their experience. Generally speaking, only argumentation and linguistic accuracy were found to be influenced by the participants' rating experience to a small extent. The differences across the two groups might be explained by other rater factors such as L1, age, and writing experience.

Norouzian (2015) investigated the role of teaching experience in Iranian EFL teachers' perception towards the types (direct/indirect) and amount (comprehensive/selective) of written corrective feedback and also their precision and accuracy of corrective feedback provided. To do this, first the researcher asked 23 EFL teachers to complete a demographic questionnaire. Later, 15 teachers were selected out of this sample so that they could be equally distributed in three experience groups: 0-5, 5-10, and 10+. At the beginning of the semester, the selected participants filled out a teacher questionnaire to provide some information about their teaching experience, their educational backgrounds, the types and amount of their error correction provision, and their principles for the selection of errors. To examine the teachers' real practice, at the end of the semester, the researcher asked the participants to correct a 5-paragraph sample composition. Besides, they were asked some questions about their perceptions regarding their feedback practices in an oral interview session. The statistical results of the study showed that the years of teaching experience had no significant effect on the teachers' perception of the amount of error correction provision. However, the three groups differed significantly in terms of direct feedback provision. The more experienced teachers were more in favor of providing direct feedback and also more precise in correcting the errors.

To examine the effect of experience and expertise on the raters' rating process and to compare the novice and experienced raters' practices, Mostofee et al (2016) conducted a study in Boushehr, Iran. In their study, the researchers compared the behaviors of four novice and four experienced raters as they were rating the essays. Each participant was asked to rate two essays on two tasks written by two TEFL students holding BA degree under exam conditions. The raters' tape-recorded verbal think-aloud protocols and their comments in the margins constituted the main data for the study. The data analysis used in the mentioned study was mainly qualitative. The findings indicated that no consistent pattern existed between the novice and experienced raters regarding the number of times they referred to the rating scale. However, a consistent trend was found among the raters in each group as to the total scores they assigned to the essays. Furthermore, it was shown that the novice raters generally tended to refer to the rating scale more often than the experienced ones did. In addition, it was seen that the experienced raters showed higher justifications for the scores they assigned to the higher-level essays. The findings also indicated that the overall time allocated by the experienced raters to reading and assessing the essays was more than that allocated by the novice raters. Finally, the number of pauses longer than five seconds was seen much higher among the novice raters than the experienced ones.

In her research, Cao (2017) aimed at examining ESL teachers' knowledge of, experience with, training in, and practice of written corrective feedback at a university in Mainland China. For this purpose, she administered a questionnaire with several close-ended and two open-ended questions to 55 ESL teachers who agreed to participate in the study. The questionnaire served as the means to gather the participants' demographic information, as well as the required data about their knowledge of and experience with WCF. Then,

two volunteer teachers were interviewed to give more information about their perception of WCF and its use in their classes. After that, the two interviewees' written feedback on their students' assignments was checked to gather the data on the real practice of the teachers regarding WCF. Having analyzed the data, the researcher found that the teachers did not show a high knowledge level of corrective feedback types. Second, it was indicated that the teachers received different amounts of feedback and different types of corrective feedback during their own studies. Third, regarding their training, the majority of the teachers believed that they had not received any training or proper training pertaining to providing corrective feedback. But the few who had been trained were more self-confident with correcting their students' assignments compared to their colleagues. It was also revealed that the teachers used different numbers of feedback types and differed in their perception and practice of WCF. Furthermore, it was found that the participants were familiar with a greater variety of WCF types than those they actually provided their students with.

3. Method

The main objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between the two characteristics of EFL teachers, namely years of teaching experience as well as education level, and the variability of their written feedback. To this end, in the first step, over 1500 writing samples of students with various proficiency levels which had been corrected or rated by 100 writing teachers were collected from universities in different parts of Iran including *Fars*, *Boushehr, Ahvaz, Tehran, Bandar Abbas, and Yasouj*. The male and female teachers with different degrees (MA or PhD) and years of experience (low and high experienced teachers) were encouraged to cooperate in the study. The researchers asked the teachers to give them a batch of rated writing assignments of their students. Since the number of

female students was higher in most cases, the writing samples were separated based on the gender of the students. Then, the assignments were randomly selected from the two groups in a way that the number of students from both groups was almost equal. At last, 15 assignments from each teacher were included in the study. In the next step, the collected papers were analyzed in terms of their dominant written feedback strategies and focus. The relationship between feedback strategies and the teachers' characteristics (gender and education) was also investigated. Accordingly, the researchers did not interfere with the teachers' performance and obtained the results based on their observations. To fulfill the purpose of the study, the researchers collected the written assignments that had been rated or corrected by the teachers at one point of time since the change of the teachers' treatment pattern over a course of time was not a matter of concern in this research. All of this prompted the researchers to conduct an analytical cross-sectional study.

3.1 Participants

One hundred Iranian university teachers constituted the participants. The researchers used convenience sampling to select the male and female participants who were full-time and part-time EFL teachers in English departments at different universities in Fars province, Boushehr, Ahvaz, Tehran, Bandar Abbas, and Yasouj (Shiraz University of Medical Sciences: 8, State University of Shiraz: 3, Azad University of Shiraz: 4, Payame Noor University of Shiraz: 4, Zand Institute of Higher Education, Shiraz: 4, Hafez Institute of Higher Education, Shiraz: 3, Pishtazan Institute of Higher Education: 1, University of Applied Science and Technology, Shiraz: 3,Azad Universities of Kazeroun, Darab, Lamerd, Jahrom: 8 (two from each),University of Applied Science and Technology, Marvdasht: 2, Azad University of Marvdasht: 3, Payame Noor University of Jahrom: 2,Payame

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Noor Universities of Kharameh, Darab, Fasa, Kazeroun, Zar ghan, Safashahr, Sarvestan, and Marvdasht: 8, Azad Universities of Abadeh and Sepidan: 2, State University of Tehran: 3, Shahid Beheshti University of Tehran: 2, Allameh Tabatabaei University of Tehran: 4, Alzahra University of Tehran: 2, Azad Universities of North Tehran Branch and Central Tehran Branch): 4, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz: 2, Payame Noor University of Ahvaz: 3, Azad University of Ahvaz: 4Azad University of Bandar Abbas: 4, Hormozgan University of Bandar Abbas: 3, Payame Noor University of Bandar Abbas: 3, University of Yasouj: 2, State University of Yasouj: , Noor University of Yasouj: 1, and Azad University of Boushehr: 2)

Availability and familiarity were the most important criteria for the researchers to choose the universities in these parts of Iran. All the participants were selected from among the teachers who were willing to participate, and the researchers assured them of their own and their students' anonymity. The researchers also assured them that they would maintain their data confidential. As to the purpose of this study, we needed a large number of samples from different universities, so we did not consider the proficiency level of the students who were majoring in medicine and dentistry (who had enrolled in a writing course as a compulsory subject in Shiraz University of Medical Sciences), and different fields of the English language and literature for a BA degree (TEFL, translation, English literature, linguistics)

The subjects who consented to cooperate with the researchers were EFL writing teachers with various years of experience in teaching English. It is worth mentioning that in the present study, the total years of the subjects' language teaching experience was taken into account. Based on their experience, the researchers divided the teachers into three groups: experience of less than 5 years, 5-10 years, more than 10 years. In addition, since the participants were selected from university teachers, they had either M.A. or

Ph.D. degrees. The overall number of the participants included 67 female and 33 male teachers, from among them 17 had 5-10 years, and 83 had more than 10 years of teaching experience. Unfortunately, no teacher was found with the experience of less than 5 years. Additionally, there were 40 teachers with MA and 60 with PhD degrees. Moreover, the factor of the teachers' being trained for teaching and rating the writing skill was not controlled in this study since it was not among the objectives of the study, like many other studies in this field (Alkharusi, 2018; Erdosy, 2004; Lee, 2004; Norouzian, 2015).

3.2 Instruments

Lee (2008) modified framework and a questionnaire on the teachers' demographic features were the instruments used in the present study. Lee's framework was selected as its taxonomy seemed proper for the purpose of the study. Also, a few aspects which were not in line with the objectives of the present research were modified. The following Table shows the lee's framework and its components:

Table 1.

Lee's Categorization of Written Feedback

Focus of written feedback	Error feedback	Written commentary
Form	Direct error feedback	Positive comments
Content	Coded feedback (indirect)	Negative comments
Organization	Uncoded feedback (indirect)	Others
Others		

At the time of data collection, each teacher who had provided the feedback on the writing assignments was asked to complete a form containing several items about his/her characteristics. These forms elicited the following pieces of information about the teachers:

1. Gender: male/female

2. Teaching experience: …….. years

3. Educational level: M.A. /Ph.D.

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4. Academic rank (instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, full professor, none).

In her paper, Lee (2008) discusses the aspects of writing which might be the focus of teachers while providing feedback, the strategies of error correction used by writing teachers, and the nature of written feedback considered by many researchers in the process of analyzing the teachers' feedback. She also presents her devised framework to analyze the teachers' written feedback in her own study. The categories and aspects of writing considered in Lee's framework include: 1) Focus of written feedback which includes "form (i.e., language use), content (i.e., ideas), organization (i.e., development of ideas, paragraphing, and overall organization), or others (e.g., handwriting)"; 2) Error feedback which comprises direct error feedback, coded feedback (indirect), and uncoded feedback (indirect); and 3) Written commentary which includes positive comments, negative comments, and others.

The researchers adopted Lee's (2008) framework for the current study, but they slightly modified it to make it suitable for the purpose of the study. First, since in Lee's work, all the collected writing papers had been corrected comprehensively, the category of *error feedback* did not include comprehensive/selective feedback. In the present study, however, the researchers considered comprehensive and selective feedback in addition to other aspects under the category of *error feedback* in Lee's analysis. Second, Lee analyzed coded and uncoded feedback separately, but in the present study both types were considered as one subcategory, i.e., indirect feedback. Third, the current study is part of a larger one; therefore, the focus for this part of the study was mainly on negative comments which indicated only the weaknesses of the pieces of writing.

3.3 Procedure

To obtain the data for the study, the researchers selected 1500 corrected writing samples from 100 teachers for analysis. As the researchers needed a large number of samples from different universities, there was no limitation on the proficiency level of the texts written by the students majoring in medicine and dentistry (who had enrolled in a writing course as a compulsory subject in Shiraz University of Medical Sciences), and different fields of the English language and literature for a BA degree (TEFL, translation, English literature, linguistics). Neither was a limitation on the method by which the essays had been corrected. The researchers personally attended the universities mentioned before to gather the required data and invited the writing teachers to take part in the study; there was an attempt to convince them to do so by ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected from them. It was explained to the volunteer teachers that the researchers needed a batch of their students' writing assignments that had been corrected based on their own criteria and not on the basis of particular rubrics provided by the authorities in the universities they worked. Since the corrected assignments needed to be returned to the students so that they would recognize their problems, the researchers made copies of the writing samples and turned back the original ones to their teachers. Besides, the researchers asked the teachers to choose the classes in which there were at least 15 students, preferably of both genders. Therefore, one piece of writing from each student in each class was to be delivered to the researchers. As is obvious, since the university students have different commands of the English language, the gathered data were expected to be collected from various language proficiency levels. When collecting the essays, the researchers requested the teachers to fill out a short demographic questionnaire. The anonymous questionnaires were attached to the relevant writing assignments gathered. For the teachers who had provided the

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researchers with more than 15 papers, the researchers selected randomly 15 papers out of the whole batch. Ultimately, 1500 rated writing assignments with the students' names on them were selected out of the gathered papers and prepared for analysis. It is necessary to note that the names of the students were only used to determine their gender, and their teachers were informed about this point.

As mentioned before, the corrections or feedback on the essays given by the teachers were analyzed, using modified Lee's (2008) framework. The 15 essays in each batch were analyzed in terms of the error correction types, strategies, and the focus of feedback. In other words, the corrections were examined to see whether they were direct or indirect, comprehensive or selective, and also to determine the aspects of writing given attention by the teachers, namely, form, content, organization, etc. In the next step, the obtained data related to each teacher (on the basis of the analysis of the papers and the questionnaires) were tabulated separately to prepare the data for statistical analysis. The researchers allocated a number from 1 to 100 to each teacher to differentiate one from another. Each table pertaining to each teacher contained the number of male and female students, the teacher's gender, teacher's experience, teacher's education level, strategy-1 (direct/indirect), strategy-2 (comprehensive/selective), and focus (form, content, organization, others). It is necessary to mention that since no teacher with less than five years of teaching experience was found among the teachers from whom the data were gathered, the comparison, in terms of experience, was confined to the teachers with the experience of 5-10 and more than 10 years. Besides, after the questionnaires returned by the teachers were reviewed, the researchers decided to exclude the teachers' academic rank from the points of comparison as there was no sufficient variety in this matter to be categorized. Moreover, by *others*, under the category of "focus",

the researchers meant the focus of the teachers on subjects such as handwriting, general comments like words of praise or encouragement.

As can be noted, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were needed for data analysis in the present study. The teachers' feedback in terms of their focus and strategies was distinguished in the texts qualitatively. However, to find the answers to the third and fourth research questions which pertained to the relationship between the teachers' characteristics and their feedback practices, the researchers needed to perform statistical procedures. For quantitative analysis, after codifying the subcategories of the required variables, the data were entered into the computer. First, the frequency of the subcategories of the variables was calculated. Then, the chi-square test was run to find the relationship between the characteristic variables and the teachers' feedback variables. This was followed by the comparison of the results of the chi-square tests with one another. Furthermore, to find better predictors of the feedback strategies given by the teachers, which was the purpose of the fourth research question, we used the logistic regression to assess the predictive ability of the teachers' experience and education.

4. Results

As mentioned before, the collected essays were analyzed in terms of the types of feedback (direct/indirect and comprehensive/selective) provided by the teachers. Tables 2 and 3 display the frequency of corrective feedback strategies utilized by the teachers. Direct and indirect types are put under the title of strategy-1 and comprehensive and selective types under the title of strategy-2.

Table 2
The Frequency of Strategy-1 Types

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Direct	1065	71.0	71.0	71.0
	Indirect	435	29.0	29.0	100.0
	Total	1500	100.0	100.0	

Table 3

The Frequency of Strategy-2 Types

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Comprehensive	240	16.0	16.0	16.0
	Selective	1260	84.0	84.0	100.0
	Total	1500	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above Tables, all the four strategies in Lee's framework were employed by the Iranian EFL teachers; however, the majority of the teachers favored direct and selective strategies rather than indirect and comprehensive ones while providing corrective feedback to their students.

To answer the second research question of this study, i.e. the focus of the participant teachers' written feedback, we analyzed the feedback on the essays to determine whether the teachers focused on the form, organization, content, or other aspects of writing. This analysis revealed that most of the teachers emphasized form and organization in their feedback. All the teachers, except for four of them, paid more attention to the form of sentences in their feedback. Among these, 28 teachers focused only on form in their students' performance. On the other hand, 70 teachers overall paid attention to the organization. However, just four out of them focused only on this aspect. Furthermore, 60 percent of the teachers considered both form and organization in their written feedback. However, the teachers who participated in this study paid less attention to the content and other aspects of writing. None of them focused only on content or other aspects of their students' writings. Besides, after analyzing the teachers' written feedback, the researchers found that merely five teachers had paid attention to the

content of their students' writings, and just three teachers had focused on other aspects of writing, which were handwriting in one case and being neat in the other two cases. In addition, form, organization, and content together were the focus of three out of all the teachers.

The third research question sought to discover the potential relationship between the teachers' experience and level of education, and the written feedback strategies employed by them. As mentioned before, the chi-square test was run to find the correlation between the teachers' characteristics and feedback variables. Table 4 demonstrates the relationship between the teachers' experience and strategy-1.

Table 4
Chi-Square Tests Output for the Relationship between Experience and Strategy-1

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.025[a]	1	.874		
Continuity Correction[b]	.007	1	.934		
Likelihood Ratio	.025	1	.874		
Fisher's Exact Test				.880	.464
Linear-by-Linear Association	.025	1	.874		
N of Valid Cases	1500				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 73.95.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

The results obtained from the chi-square test, as shown in Table 3, revealed that experience did not determine the frequency of the use of direct or indirect strategies by the teachers in the present study. The significance level for the corrected value was .934 which is larger than .05. This suggests that highly experienced teachers did not use direct and indirect strategies in a significantly different way from those with 5 to 10 years of experience.

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The following Table shows the results of the chi-square test for the relationship between strategy-2 (comprehensive and selective) and the teachers' experience.

Table 5
Chi-Square Tests Output for the Relationship between Experience and Strategy-2

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.100[a]	1	.043		
Continuity Correction[b]	3.730	1	.053		
Likelihood Ratio	4.374	1	.036		
Fisher's Exact Test				.049	.024
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.098	1	.043		
N of Valid Cases	1500				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 40.80.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 4 provides evidence for the difference between the two groups of teachers with different years of experience regarding the use of strategy-2. If we consider the significance level for Pearson Chi-Square, the difference is significant. However, to be more precise, and since we have a 2 by 2 table, we checked the significance level for Continuity Correction which was .053, a little bit larger than .05 and not significant.

The relationship between the teachers' education level and strategy-1 is displayed in Table 6.

Table 6

Chi-Square Tests Output for the Relationship between Education and Strategy-1

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	35.090[a]	1	.000		
Continuity Correction[b]	34.405	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	34.688	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	35.066	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	1500				

As shown in the above Table, the corrected value is 34.405 with the significance level of .000 ($p<.05$). This shows that the teachers' education level did have a relationship with their use of direct and indirect strategies.

In the next section, the results of the chi-square test for the relationship between strategy-2 and the teachers' education are discussed. (Table 7)

Table 7

Chi-Square Tests Output for the Relationship between Education and Strategy-2

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.115[a]	1	.003		
Continuity Correction[b]	8.686	1	.003		
Likelihood Ratio	9.347	1	.002		
Fisher's Exact Test				.003	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.109	1	.003		
N of Valid Cases	1500				

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The result of the chi-square test indicated that the teachers' education also had a relationship with their use of comprehensive and selective strategies. As shown above, the significance value was .003 which is less than .05. (Table 7)

With regard to the fourth research question, we were supposed to run logistic regression to find whether experience or education was a better predictor of the teachers' feedback strategies. However, since the results of the chi-square tests revealed that only education had a significant relationship with the teachers' feedback strategies, there was no need to use logistic regression. According to the statistical results, education was obviously a better predictor of the use of the feedback strategies used by the teachers in the current study.

5. Discussion

The body of literature on the written corrective feedback research suggests that teachers' characteristics and background have a relationship with their performance. The majority of the studies in this area, however, have focused on the correlation of one factor with the teachers' corrective feedback. This provoked the researchers of the current study to investigate the strategies applied by Iranian university teachers in their written corrective feedback as well as the relationship of several factors with their use of these strategies. The findings of the present investigation indicated that Iranian university teachers used all the strategies under study: direct, indirect, comprehensive, and selective. However, the teachers preferred direct strategies to indirect ones and selective strategies to comprehensive ones. The previous studies in the related literature show contrastive results regarding the use of the dominant written feedback types and strategies by the teachers in practice.

The findings of the present study are in line with Kaivanpanah et al. (2014) results; they found that although the teachers in their study believed that indirect types of feedback were more effective, practically, they tended to use more direct types in their feedback. Norouzian and Khomeijani Farahani (2012) also reached similar results as those in the present study. The results of their study indicated that contrary to the participant teachers' perception, the participant students in their study believed that their teachers provided them mainly with selective feedback (focus on only specific structures or tenses) than comprehensive one (correcting all the mistakes, as explained in the methods section).

Nevertheless, there are some studies with different results from those of the present research. Mao and Crosthwaite (2019), for instance, who compared the teachers' beliefs about their WCF practice with their real practice, found some misalignments between these two factors, including the participant teachers' misconception about their more frequent use of direct strategies compared to indirect ones. In practice, the teachers used more indirect strategies in their research. Also, Lee (2004) found that the teachers in her study both preferred and used comprehensive feedback more frequently than selective one. Probably the reason for these discrepancies between the results is the different types of students investigated in these studies. Lee did the study on students in secondary schools in Hong Kong, a completely different context compared to ours.

Concerning the focus of feedback, just like the majority of other studies in this field, the results of the present study showed that the teachers placed emphasis on the form of the language more than any other factors in their students' writings (Alshahrani & Storch, 2014; Kaivanpanah et al., 2014; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019). As Lee (2008) mentions, this can be explained by the fact that most teachers view themselves as language teachers

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rather than writing instructors and treat writing as a product. Of course, Lee (2008) believes that this was the case primarily in the past and the focus of writing teachers has recently shifted to issues such as content and organization. Having reviewed the related literature, however, the researchers found out that although this claim is to some extent true, the results of most of the studies in this field reveal that teachers' focus is still on the form of the language (Alshahrani & Storch, 2014; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019). Even so, unlike most of the studies, the present research demonstrated that after form, organization was also the focus of most of the teachers participating in the study even though content and other aspects of writing were not focused much by them. The reason behind noticing organization by the teachers in this study can be the fact that the participants were the university teachers who taught writing courses specifically and not as one of the skills focused at English classes.

In addition to the strategies and focus of written feedback, this research investigated the relationship between two personal factors, namely, the teachers' experience and education, and the strategies they used. Regarding the teachers' experience, the researchers did not find a statistically significant relationship between this variable and the teachers' written feedback strategies. We finally could compare and contrast the teachers with less than 10 years of experience and those with over 10 years of experience and reached the conclusion that their experience was not a determining factor in the way they corrected the assignments. It is necessary to mention that descriptive analysis showed that the use of strategy-2 (comprehensive and selective strategies) was affected by the teachers' experience. In the statistical analysis, however, the difference between the two groups of teachers with different years of experience was not significant although the significance value was very close to the level considered to be significant. With respect to

strategy-1, the teachers' performance in the two groups was very similar to each other. In the same line, Erdosy (2004) found limited effect of teachers' assessment experience on their written feedback practices. Barkaoui (2010) also associated the differences seen among the raters' performance to factors other than their experience. Also, in her study, Al-Kharusi (2018) concluded that neither gender nor experience could affect the teachers' perception of WCF. She found that in-service training was the only effective factor in this regard.

On the other hand, many studies on the relationship between the teachers' experience and their practice of written corrective feedback showed results not in the same line with those of the current study. For example, the results of Norouzian's (2015) study revealed that the teachers' experience affected their provision of direct feedback. Comparing the experienced writing teachers' performance with the novice teachers', Mostofee et al (2016) found that experience influenced several issues, including the total scores the teachers assigned to the writings, the number of times they referred to the rating scale, and the overall time the teachers allocated to assessing the essays. An important point worth mentioning here is that in the present study, the data were collected from the teachers with more than five years of teaching experience. Although the researchers had planned to divide the teachers into three groups in terms of experience, this aim could not be fulfilled since none of the teachers had an experience of less than five years. The study, inevitably, was carried out with two groups of teachers, namely, those with 5-10 years of teaching experience and those with more than 10 years of experience. This can be one of the reasons why experience was not an effective factor in this research. Obviously, those with more than 10 years of experience should have given better feedback than the novice ones, but it was not the case in the present as well as other studies.

The impact of the teachers' educational level on their preferred feedback types was proved by the results of the statistical analysis in the present study. Furthermore, it was found that the teachers' educational level was a better predictor of their performance regarding their use of feedback strategies. As to the participants of this study, we did not search about whether they have attended courses on writing correction since in this case we would have a small sample. However, in other studies, although educational level has not been the focus of other researchers' attention in other contexts, teachers' training has been studied and considered to be a determining factor of teachers' written feedback practices (Cao, 2017; Al Kharusi, 2018).

Several implications of the above findings can be identified which are discussed here. Considering the fact that few studies have focused on the teachers' real practice of WCF, the findings of the present research can add to the existing knowledge in the literature on the topic of corrective feedback in general and written corrective feedback in particular. From the theoretical point of view, these findings will increase researchers and theoreticians' understanding of WCF and the effective factors influencing the raters' practical performance. However, the pedagogical implications of the present study are also important. According to the results of the current study, education was found to be effective in the teachers' written feedback strategies. Education, then, can make a difference in the teachers' attitudes and actual practices. In all, these results highlight the significance of teacher training in the field of written corrective feedback.

6. Conclusion

The findings of the study demonstrated that Iranian EFL university teachers employed a variety of written corrective feedback strategies, including direct, indirect, selective, and comprehensive strategies which were

examined in the current research. Nevertheless, direct and selective types were favored by both male and female teachers. Regarding the focus of teachers' written feedback, the researchers reached the same conclusion as the one in the studies conducted before, i.e. the form of language was the main concern of most of the writing teachers. Considering this aspect of the study, the present investigation is different from most of the previous research in that the findings indicated that after form, organization was the focus of Iranian teachers. This can be explained by the fact that all the participants in this study worked at university and compared with other teachers, university teachers might put more emphasis on the correct structuring of paragraphs and development of ideas. Besides, the statistical results of the study showed that education had a significant relationship with the strategies seen in the feedback provided by the teachers. Despite that, there was no significant link between experience and the teachers' feedback strategies.

The current research, like other research, had some limitations. First, we examined the performance of teachers with more than five years of experience since none of the teachers who cooperated with the researchers was really a beginner. This could be considered as one of the limitations of this study. Also, we needed a large batch of corrections, so we, like many other studies in the literature, considered teaching experience rather than experience in teaching writing. Also, whether the participating teachers had already passed courses on how to correct the writing assignments was not controlled in the study. To fully investigate the influence of experience on teachers' written corrective feedback, the future studies are recommended to include these variables in their analysis. Considering the teachers' experience years of rating or teaching writing courses would also yield more precise results about this issue. Another limitation might be that the participant

teachers were mostly chosen from the universities in the south of Iran. Involving teachers in universities of different regions of the country would certainly provide a more real sample of Iranian teachers.
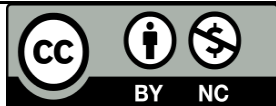
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