The University Students' Beliefs towards Corrective Feedback in Learning English as Foreign Language in Pakistan

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*Abstract***:** *The present study is carried out in English as a foreign language (EFL) experimental classroom at Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering & Information Technology Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan to investigate the Pakistani EFL learners' beliefs towards written CF in L2 writing. Two types of Written CF: Direct and Indirect feedback, were provided during four weeks of study period in written tasks to the two groups (direct feedback and feedback group) and third was provided only metalinguistic information (Controlled group). The students were divided into two groups: experimental group provided with CF (Direct and Indirect), control group. The students in the experimental group were compared to a control group which was provided with no corrective feedback. BS level adult learners (n= 40) were randomly assigned to write short essay/Gap Fill/ Timed grammatical Task during four successive weeks. Afterwards, they were asked to fill in a questionnaire (k=21), at the post-test time. Correlation between participants' beliefs about written CF and the effectiveness of those beliefs was measured by an attitudinal questionnaire. The students' performance was also checked through written test battery. The results of this study revealed the learners' beliefs about errors' corrections, the writing activities, and various types of CF. The study also suggested the significant role of learners' beliefs in mediating language accuracy in writing tasks.*

*Keywords***:** *Beliefs, EFL learners, Corrective feedback, Effectiveness, Short essay*

I. INTRODUCTION

To comprehend the role of written corrective feedback in EFL classroom, it is important to investigate whether cognitive factors such as learners' beliefs and attitudes have impact on the effectiveness of d various types of corrective feedback. Learners' beliefs as sheen (2010) stated, might be affected by their areas they belong to and their previous knowledge about error corrections and treatment. These beliefs may also have impact on students' performance in learning a foreign language. Oxford and Shearin (1994) asserted that six possible factors are likely to impact on EFL learning: goals to learn English as a foreign language, student and teacher beliefs about self, participating in L2 learning, personal attitudes and supportive environment.

Gass and Selinker (2008) also suggested that neither all humans, in any L2 situation, can equally be motivated to learning nor they can be motivated equally to learn any of the specific languages (p.165).

Thus, EFL teachers are required to be sensitive towards their students' beliefs and attitudes, specifically towards error corrections. Although it may be argued that the EFL learners' preferences may not be what are actually considered suitable to their L2 acquisition (Truscott, 1996). Based on the university level experience (10 years of teaching) in Pakistan, the researcher finds that teaching approaches focus more on the teachers being the greatest source of transferring knowledge, therefore "EFL students in Pakistan perceive it to be an uphill task to accept the teachers who do not play a leading and guiding role" (Bhatti et al., 2016). The provisions of direct feedback with metalinguistic information are frequently used in the teacher-centered classrooms in Pakistan. EFL teachers most often keep repeating the rules and providing examples. They put a great attention on form rather than meaning and the focus of the current study is also on writing skill in the learning of English as a foreign language. Writing is not merely considered as a skill for learning a language but also a vehicle to learn sentence structures and uses of foreign language (Martin, 2014). Since, during the writing process, students actively manipulate the functions, forms and concepts, hence the learners are required to process a foreign language more attentively than processing their other skills such as reading and listening (Van Erde & Hajer, 2008). Moreover, William (2012) argued that writing calls for a much focus on form in a language which is absent in the speaking process of learning. Besides, writing in a foreign language is a slower process and in this process, the learners may have time to plan for producing correct form. Kuiken and Vedder (2011) also discussed that the foreign language learners during writing may take pause and recollect knowledge about structuring sentences stored in their memory. On a strand of writing to learn a foreign language, the present study is intended to find out how intervening in EFL students' linguistic processing by providing corrective feedback affects the accuracy of their writing. This type of study is labelled as a feedback study in foreign language learning which investigates how different feedbacks affect the learning of grammar and lexis (Manchon, 2011, p. 78). Some researchers and teachers do not agree that providing written corrective feedback is effective for students' accuracy in writing or has any role to play in the accuracy of L2 writing (Sheen, 2007; Ferris, 2010; Bitchener & Knoch, 2012).

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However, some researchers favored direct feedback in teaching writing skills as direct feedback reduces the students' confusion and helps in understanding what the errors mean. Bitchener & Knoch (2008) also called in question the effectiveness of providing corrective feedback. They argued that direct feedback helps learners to cope with more complicated errors and resultantly they acquire immediate accuracy in their L2 production. In response to arguments put against providing corrective feedback, many researchers conducted researches in which control group was included with pre-test, post-test and delayed post-tests (Saeed, 2015; Betchener, 2009; Sheen, 2010). These studies produced a growing body of research which suggested that providing written corrective feedback is very effective for improving EFL learners' accuracy in writing; however, which type of feedback is suited more and which way corrective feedback is administered has been a contested issue till now. Moreover, contextual and individual factors which impact the language learners' engagement with written corrective feedback have received a limited amount of attention in EFL research. The research which investigates such factors is much required to explore why one thing which is very effective for one student is not effective for others.

Having discussed the different types of corrective feedback which are fixed firmly in the most EFL/ESL classroom writing tasks, the researcher had a brief review on quite a few of the researches that explored EFL learners' beliefs about accuracy in writing tasks and types of corrective feedback.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Various scholars have described and defined corrective feedback according to their perceptions. According to Chaudron (1998), and Tatawy (2002) also asserted that term 'corrective feedback' is applied in a number of of ways. Tatawy (2002) described that according to Chaudron, the term 'treatment of errors' is referred to teacher's react on error corrections which implies that the learners should be aware of the fact that their errors are being corrected. This treatment however, cannot be observed by the learners, or possibly, some treatments are provided very explicitly to stimulate a revised response from the students. Tatawy (2002) further elaborated Chaudron's view that the effective corrective feedback helps language learners to revise their inter language rules in such a way that the errors do not occur again in L2 production. Research reveals that psychological and social variables such as attitude, beliefs and motivation. They have very effective role in the learning of any foreign language. In this regard, Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model is the obvious example that is "AMBT (Attitude/Motivation Test Battery)" to examine the variables regarding the differences individually. Nevertheless, motivation for L2 learning embraces a desire to learning a second or foreign language, an effort towards learning L2, and students' beliefs towards learning a language (Gardner, 1990). The previous researches have affirmed that written corrective feedback is useful but this may also set obstacles in the language learning process that is dependent on the student as well as teacher beliefs about various types of CF provided by the teachers. Few researched found note-able discrepancies between the student and teachers' beliefs towards types of corrective feedback e.g., Schulz' (1996)

investigation showed that 90% of EFL students revealed highly positive attitudes about written corrective feedback and grammatical instructions as compared to their EFL teachers' attitudes. Likewise, Ancker (2000) administered a survey questionnaire with different group of students and their teachers in 15 developing countries to find out their perceptions. The main purpose of this study was whether EFL teachers should correct all the errors made by the EFL learners in producing correct form of writing. The findings in this survey revealed that 25% of the EFL students' positive response was calculated for their teachers and 76% students' positive response was obtained for the learners. The negative impact of written corrective feedback on the students' confidence was about the teachers' concerns, although the learners were willing to receive corrections on their written prompts.

A. Beliefs and their mediating role to the Effectiveness of CF in L2 writing

Barcelos (2003) discusses about distinct nature of beliefs. According to him, numerous definitions are referred to defining beliefs in accordance with the agenda various scholars have, such as to name few: representations of the learners (Holec, 1987), language learning Philosophy of learners (Abraham & Vann, 1987), learning theories in the folk linguistic (Miller & Ginsberg, 1995), Afterwards, she describes that one thing appears to be common in all these definitions in the SLA field is that they refer to language learning and nature of language. In the current study, beliefs are taken to be non-static ideas which students and the teachers develop in their minds on the basis of knowledge and past experiences which have impact on how they approach to act in a foreign language learning/teaching. Discussing either how beliefs have impacts on efficacy of written corrective feedback or not, has been a particular topic of probing which means that the current study provided deep insight into an existing space in field of SLA. Park (1995) describes that as beliefs influence many other areas of language acquisition and language learning e.g. proficiency level, hence, a link might be observed between effectiveness of written corrective feedback and language learning beliefs having countless pedagogical and theoretical implications. Since this study is intended to compare beliefs and uptake/retention of written corrective feedback in Pakistani EFL context, therefore, it is inevitable to define what actually a context stands for in the present study. Context is usually considered to be the context of any given region. It is also applied to a situation when focus is either on form or on the content. Regarding the current study, a context is meant specific program of English language being offered in Pakistani universities.

B. Exploring Differences of Beliefs among students and teachers

Given that written corrective feedback can be provided in direct and indirect way, or together, it is pertinent to explore whether EFL learners and teachers have different attitudes and beliefs about written corrective feedback. Many researchers have also pursued "how EFL learners and teachers perceive corrective feedback and whether their beliefs have impact on students' later L2 learning accuracy"(Mackey et Al., 2000, p.471).

Sheen (2006) administered a (1-6) Likert scale questionnaire to examine ESL students' anxiety, perceptions and their attitudes towards different types of corrective feedback, and learning of grammatical features to explore whether the teacher's corrective feedback is helpful for the ESL students. As a result, it was revealed that the explicit group showed highly positive attitudes towards error correction on grammatical accuracy as compared to the implicit group that showed negative attitudes. Hence, the learners were benefitted more from metalinguistic corrective feedback as compared to the recasts. Sheen further argued that the learners' attitudes towards teacher's providing corrective feedback and grammatical accuracy may have no any mediating impact if the learners are not made aware of that they are being corrected. More preferences for explicit corrective feedback were also revealed by Amador (2008) who conducted a survey of twenty-three beginners of English learners in the school of modern languages from the University of Costa Rica. Twenty different corrective techniques were provided to the learners to correct their errors which were conducted in the interactional dialogues between teachers and students or within students. The language learners were asked to show their preferences with underlining the letters of their own choice. These findings of this study can be matched with Sheen's (2006) investigation which revealed learners' preferences about the explicit method of providing corrective feedback.

As opposed to the explicit method of correction, investigating the EFL learners' beliefs about the implicit method of correction, Philp (2003) revealed that to which extent the non-native speakers noticed corrections made by native speakers' through recasts in dyadic interaction on interlanguage grammar. The study had thirty three adult learners being engaged in oral communication tasks and received recasts in the forms of non-target questions. It was revealed that the learners did not have notice of the recasts, and if they did, they mostly did not have every detail. The study suggested that various of the learners' variables may be accounted for how students perceive their recasts, if they are noticed at all.

A study was also carried out to measure the relationship between the EFL students' perceptions by Egi (2010) about providing the recast on errors and their responses on recasts. 24 EFL Japanese EFL learners were engaged in the task-based interactional tasks and they were provided recasts by their teacher to correct their errors. Each of the learners was shown video clips of recast episodes to comment on them. Analysis in relation to learners' responses to the recasts: uptake, modified output and repair revealed that where students produced the uptake, it was found that they showed positive attitudes towards providing recasts by perceiving it to be more significant and frequent as compared to the cases wherein the uptake was not formed.

Exploring the relationship between students' verbal attitude, intelligibility and proficiency level about corrections and the success of corrective feedback, Havranek and Cesnik (2001) carried out a comprehensive study with two-hundred EFL native German students. The effects of repetition + recasts, elicitation and recasts were examined in the study to examine providing the successful way of corrective feedback on the performance of EFL students in the post-delayed tests. This study reported that providing corrective feedback is very useful to benefit the EFL learners who perceive error corrections positively to a great extent.

The nature of corrective feedback may have positive effects on the attitudes and their effectiveness on students' writing accuracy. In a similar vein to the previous studies, Mackey et al. (2000) analyzed the collected data from 10 EFL students and seven FL learners of Italian. Their findings revealed that the students were found showing more accuracy in their beliefs towards lexical corrective feedback more than in the beliefs regarding morphosyntactic CF. It was indicated by them that this might be because of the morphosyntax that often does not interfere with their understanding in the same way as wrong pronunciation or wrong lexical item does. Based on the findings of the study, Mackey et al. (2000) described that the nature of provided feedback might be effective on students' producing accurate form of writing. Even though there is a lack of a contextual based assistance or the vice versa, it might create a big difference in terms of handling the task-difficulty and attitudes about the tasks. Revesz (2009) administered a questionnaire with the students after the test was just over to obtain data regarding the perspectives about the test activities. Responding to the questions whether the absence or presence of visual images helped them more to describe the task, most of the research participants 20/32 showed that describing the photos was found less difficult to them after they had looked at them. The other participants (10.1%) reported that availability or lack of contextual assistance made no differences in terms of difficulty in the tasks. Nonetheless, most of participants of the study revealed that speaking by looking at images without having context was perceived rather much complicated because they forcibly focused on speaking as well as memorizing at the same time, which in turn, hindered to focus on completing their task.

The amount of literature provided on types of corrective feedback used in language learning is largely beyond the scope of the current research that is mainly based on the impact of EFL students' beliefs about two types of corrective feedback and their possible effect on language accuracy. It is a fact that both EFL teachers and researchers have long expressed their interest in the error corrections and corrective feedback research. Hence, there is more need to determine which corrective feedback techniques, the student and teacher believe to be more useful and successful to deal with students' written errors.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research is aimed to provide answers to the following research questions:

a) What are Pakistani EFL students' attitudes about the different type feedback techniques used by teachers in Pakistani Universities?
b) Is there any correlation between students' beliefs about corrective feedback and accuracy in writing tasks?

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IV. METHODS

A. *Instruments and data collection*

The questionnaire used in the current study is adapted from the one already used by Rummel (2014), however, some modifications were made in the areas of the content and format of the response. Rummel (2014) applied 3-Likert scale response format to measure only language anxiety and attitudes towards corrective feedback and grammar accuracy.

But in the current study, five Likert scale response format was used consisting of 21 items including from strongly agree, Agree and Neutral to strongly disagree and disagree which covered all three constructs in the questionnaire: Students Preferred way of Receiving corrective feedback, Students' Attitude towards Receiving Corrective Feedback and writing accuracy, and Students' Attitude toward L1 and L2 as shown in Table.1. Questionnaire was piloted to measure its validity first, on student participants from the same group of population. The questionnaire was designed in English because the current study was to measure students' accuracy of writing in English in Pakistan and it was conducted in EFL classroom. In case of difficulties in English lexical structures, the question statements were translated in Urdu by the researcher. Besides, some questions were also included to describe biographical data (not mentioned in Table 1 below) on gender, Location, prior exposure to English, goal of studying English and time to spend on studying English outside the class.

Table 1 shows Questionnaire items used in the current study

Dimension	Question Items
Students Preferred way of Receiving corrective feedback	**Q1.** Which way is the easier to correct errors in your writing? **Q2.** Which way is the easier to see the errors you made? 1) **Q3.** Which way do you learn from the most? **Q4.** Which way will help the most in your future time? **Q5.** Which way would you like your teacher to use in future?
Students' Attitude towards Receiving Corrective Feedback	**Q1.** It is very important for teachers to provide feedback on students' writing. **Q2.** Teachers should correct all errors of the students **Q3.** It is teachers' job to locate errors and provide corrections **Q4.** Both teachers and students are responsible for correcting errors **Q5.** Teachers should vary feedback techniques according to the type of errors **Q6.** Students should learn to locate their own errors **Q7.** When I make errors in writing, I like my teacher to correct them. **Q8.** Students usually keep error correction in mind when they revise essays. **Q9.** Students usually keep error correction in mind, when write new essays
Students' Attitude toward L1 and L2	**Q1.** Students are responsible for their own learning. **Q2.** I enjoy writing in English **Q3.** I enjoy writing in my own language. **Q4.** My L1 helps learning English when teachers use it in English teaching. **Q5.** Learning to write in English language is very interesting without using L1 **Q6.** I have been encouraged by teachers in to write in English without thinking

B. *Coding and Scoring*

Each group was given a numerical code according to their preferred feedback e.g., Direct feedback group was given1, Indirect group was coded with 2 and control group was coded with 3. Besides, student participants were also given numerical codes, e.g., S1, S2, S3 etc. Regarding questions, all questions were also given identification numbers from1-20. Each response in the questionnaire was given code starting from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). To score, more questions were added to enhance the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. To get the scores for the three constructs in the questionnaire, following procedure was adopted: 1) Responses for each survey were added to see their Mean scores, then total sum were divided by the total number of questions. 2) Some questions were calculated having reverse points. These were to be marked with five instead of one and so on. By doing this, questions No.3, 11, 15, and 20 were revised and reversed.

C. *Analysis and results*

To score all three constructs in the questionnaire were analyzed to find out the differences in both the groups: experimental and control group by applying a one-way ANOVA-Test. Besides, Pearson correlation coefficients (r), was also used to find out correlation between students' beliefs and the post-test and Mean scores about students' attitudes and Post-test on the written Battery of Tests for both the groups were measured. For the purpose of description, the tests are: gap fill and Timed Grammatical Judgment Test. The tests were constructed to measure the students' accuracy in writing skill. The validity and reliability of all three measures was also pilot-tested on same group participants. Tests were conducted in three different times, pre-test, post-test and delayed post-test. Similar design of the test and implementing the test materials were used by Faqeih (2012).

V. Results

A. *Students' preference toward written corrective feedback*

The descriptive statistical scores about students' preference toward written corrective feedback (k=5) indicated that the average scores for the students' preference for receiving indirect corrective feedback ranged from 3.31 to 3.51 obtaining the lowest scores (indicating the less positive opinions) and for receiving direct feedback obtained the highest (indicating more positive attitudes). Despite, a one-way ANOVA test did not indicate significant differences between for both types of corrective feedback $F_{(2, 33)} = 0.65$, $p = 0.56$.

B. *Students' Attitudes towards receiving Corrective feedback*

Descriptive statistics for the scores of students' attitudes on obtaining written CF normally (k=8), the average scores about students' attitudes normally calculated 3.38 to 3.39 for the control group that was calculated the lowest scores which means that they showed less positive attitudes. The corrective feedback groups attained the highest scores showing more positive attitudes. Nonetheless, a one-way ANOVA test did not show any significant difference between two groups, $F_{(2, 50)} = 0.22$, $p = 0.87$.

C. Students' Attitudes towards L1 and L2

The descriptive statistics for the scores of students' attitudes towards L1 and L2 to receive corrective feedback (k=8), showed the average scores of their' opinions about L1 and L2 ranged from 3.59 to 3.71 with the indirect CF group attained the lowest scores (showing less positive attitudes) while the direct CF group attained the highest (indicating more positive attitudes).

A one- way ANOVA test, however, did not revealed significant difference between two groups, $F(2, 38) = 0.47$, $p = 0.68$.

D. *Correlation between Students' Beliefs and Scores in the post-tests*

The correlational analysis of data between the post-test Mean scores on the battery of tests taken on different occasions and descriptive statistics on the attitudinal questions for both groups are mentioned in Table 2.

The results for the experimental groups: experimental and control group, however, showed having not significant relationship between the Mean scores of the post-tests obtained for TGJT tests and all the questionnaire constructs towards written CF interventions. Whereas, task only group indicated a significant correlation between the Mean of the post-test scores of the Gap Fill tests.

Table 2 Shows correlation between Constructs and Scores of Post Tests

Group	N	Tests	Task (K=5)	Error Correction (K=8)	Written CF (K=8)
Direct CF	13		0.42	0.34-	0.20-
Indirect CF	13	Essay writing	0.36	0.20	0.32
Control	14		0.14	0.72	0.05-
Direct CF	13		0.13	0.25-	0.57-
Indirect CF	13	Gap Fill	0.33-	0.26-	0.5-
Control	14		0.25-	0.73	0.27
Direct CF	13		0.08	0.19	0.05-
Indirect CF	13	TGJT	0.36-	0.33-	0.03-
Control	14		0.28	0.48	0.34-

VI. Discussion

Considering interpretation of the statistical data, the descriptive results obtained about the three constructs of the questionnaire showed EFL students' preferences in all three groups (Direct, Indirect and Control groups) to writing tasks, error treatment, and the various CF techniques used by the teachers in Pakistani universities. The Mean Scores on all the content areas of the questionnaire indicated that EFL learners in the direct group obtained the highest score as compared to other two groups (indirect and control). It revealed that the students who were provided direct CF to their errors showed highly positive attitudes towards writing essays, Gap fill and timed grammatical Task activities. However, their preferences towards their error corrections were found closer to the other two groups. This might be considered correct as most of the students were intended to get their errors corrected. All the students perceived that receiving corrective feedback is the best and effective way to improve their accuracy in producing short essays.

Similar findings are to be found in a research carried out by Loewen et al. (2009) who also found Chinese and Arabic learners having more positive attitudes towards the instruction of grammar and corrective feedback as compared to the learners of other languages. The results of the current study also lend more support in a way to Schulz' (1996) study which proved that 90% of the students showed positive attitudes towards receiving corrective feedback on their drafts and in other way, the current study is different from Sheen (2006) who found stronger positive attitudes towards implicit CF as compared to the explicit corrective feedback group. The evident attitudes of explicit CF group on writing activities and error corrections might be due to the familiarity of the task, in which correction is embedded after the teacher had provided corrective feedback on students' written prompt, particularly in the EFL classroom. However, the lower Mean scores for the indirect group in students' attitudes about providing corrective feedback lends a support to Philp's (2003) study suggesting that the learners do not every time notice feedback, and if they do, they generally ignore the details. Contrary to this, the highest Mean Score on the attitudes toward providing indirect corrective feedback in metalinguistic (direct) group can be attributed to the students' awareness about this type of CF.Findings on second question in the present study about the relationship between L2 writing accuracy and the learners' beliefs in all three content areas of the questionnaire, the attitudes of the direct CF group on providing the CF was correlated negatively according to the Mean Scores obtained in the Gap fill activity as mentioned in Table2. This negative correlation is due to the fact that the provided implicit information might have developed awareness among students during the tasks about wrong forms and therefore, might have helped them in the tests; or learners might be felt fatigue for taking tests. As a result, their answers in the questionnaire were likely to show negative correlation since the questionnaires were administered after the tests. Moreover, negative significant relationship between explicit type of corrective feedback and the explicit feedback indicated that Pakistani EFL learners' prefer direct corrective information to correct their errors since they are taught by their teachers mostly with traditional teaching style. Regarding insignificant relationship between Mean scores of the tests and the provided corrective feedback for the tasks about the control group is due to the fact that this group was not provided any corrective feedback on their written prompts. The significant positive relationship between the Mean scores on Gap fill and the Mean scores on students' attitudes about error corrections in the control group indicated that the awareness of task and the creative activities might have diverted the students' focus on the test-tasks, or it must be due to the students' intensive willingness to get corrections. These finding supported by Rummel's (2014) study who carried out a survey of the students and found that 76% positive response of the students revealed that the students were strongly desirous of error corrections as they wanted to improve their writing accuracy.

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The insignificant relationship between students' scores on time out grammar judgment test and the attitudinal constructs does not imply that the learners did benefit from the writing activities the types of feedback they received but the time pressure affected their L2 writing improvement as revealed in the exit questionnaire survey. The contradiction of the statistical results shown in the Figure 1 and Table2 suggested that providing corrective feedback could be effective to the learners for both experimental groups. It also suggested that the learners who showed positive attitudes toward error corrections and writing tasks might also be benefited from picture describing tasks in improving their writing accuracy in L2 learning.

VII. CONCLUSION

On the whole, this study indicated that majority of the participants showed preference to get corrective feedback for their errors, however, findings revealed that the learners' attitude toward writing tasks was not observed highly positive. This was because learning English in the non-native environment made the tasks a bit difficult to them. Besides, presence of the written interactive activities also emaciated the learners' willingness to write freely and but the learners perceived the experimental tasks more useful owing to their innovations. The study also proved that student and teachers' beliefs about corrective feedback is one of the important factors in the selection of effective corrective feedback which had positive impact on students' writing skill. This study also emphasized the mediating role of learners' beliefs towards written corrective feedback types to endorse their L2 writing accuracy. This study has recommendations for EFL teachers that they must find out their learners' preferences towards types of feedback so that the classroom activities could be designed accordingly to focus the academic target. Finally this study could be useful contribution to foreign language learning to investigate more on the impact of various contexts, cultural and educational backgrounds to error corrections and effectiveness of corrective feedback. Particularly, increase in the sample size of the study is likely to produce different implications and findings.

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