CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK: PROBING THE PREFERENCES OF ESL LEARNERS

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Abstract: Corrective feedback is vital in improving ESL learners’ writing skills. This phenomenological study explored the Filipino ESL learners’ preferences, responses, and suggestions to their teachers’ written corrective feedback. There were three participants in the in-depth interview and seven participants in one focused group discussion as sources of data. The results reveal that students preferred that their teacher provides direct corrective feedback, both written and oral, like written comments, detailed corrections, peer editing or tutoring, immediate oral feedback, and individual conferencing. The data also show that ESL learners value peer feedback more because they believe students should be patient and understanding in dealing with students’ learning and in giving corrective feedback. Thus, teachers’ corrective feedback played an important role in the ESL students’ learning.

Keywords: Corrective feedback; ESL learners’ preferences; responses; suggestions

INTRODUCTION
In the L2 classroom, corrective feedback (CF) is considered to be a controversial issue. Leki (1991) pointed out that entirely accurate writing is an unrealistic goal because specific errors in writing may never disappear and, therefore, enormous expenditures of effort to eliminate them may be pointless. Truscott (1996) goes even farther to conclude that error correction should be abandoned in thesecond language writing classes since it could have dangerous effects. Other scholars have found it to be pointless and destructive (Mollestam & Hu, 2016; Polio, Fleck & Leder, 1998). The idea of corrective feedback is ambiguous as questioned by Hendrickson (1978) whether errors must be corrected, and if so, it should be known what particular errors have been made, why it becomes erroneous and how these errors should be corrected (Smith, 2010).

This unresolved issue about CF is addressed in this study. This study also intends to fill in the gap of researches in the national and local setting. Though there are many researchers conducted in the global setting, however, there are only a few studies conducted in the Philippines. This study explored the preferences, responses, and suggestions of Filipino ESL learners in their teachers’ written corrective feedback.

METHOD
This study adopted a qualitative study employing phenomenological approach because it seeks to explore the preferences of Filipino ESL learners in their teachers’ written corrective feedback. Using purposive sampling, participants were identified.

The participants of this study were those low-performing Filipino college students (who received plenty of corrective feedback in their written output and had a low score in every writing task in English writing class) in one of the academic institutions in Tagum City, Davao del Norte, Philippines who had taken up English writing class. The participants were referred by the English teachers of the said institution who handled English writing classes.

There were ten participants, three in the in-depth interview (IDI); seven in the focused-group discussion (FGD). The sample size of the participants satisfies the requirement in the qualitative study using phenomenology because there should be five to 25 (Creswell, 1998) or at least six participants in a qualitative study (Morse, 1994). FGD needs to have between six to twelve participants so that it would not be too populous nor too small of a group in order to give more avenue for sharing and expressing ideas and experiences (Lasch, Marquis, Vigneux, Abetz, Arnould, & Bayliss, 2010; Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010). The participants were requested to sign a consent form and agree to the condition stipulated that they are voluntarily participating and are willing to impart their knowledge as needed in the study. The participants also were given an orientation about the study and were asked to participate through FGD and IDI as means of data collection.

It is important to emphasize that the discussion is about personal views and experiences and therefore there are no right or wrong answers (Dornyei, 2007). Data from the participants were generated through a semi-structured interview using validated interview questions as an instrument. Transcripts of interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. The use of pseudonyms was employed to protect the identity of the participants in the data analysis and reporting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
This section presents the result and discussion of the study according to its objectives. The present study sought to explore and understand the preferences, responses, and suggestions of Filipino ESL Learners regarding written corrective feedback.
Five major themes emerged from the data collected on the preferences of Filipino ESL learners in their teachers’ written corrective feedback which are written comments, detailed corrections, red ink corrections, immediate oral feedback, introduction, and employment of proofreading symbols. Students’ preferences in their teachers’ written corrective feedback have played a significant role in students’ learning.

**Written comments** are an essential part of giving written corrective feedback for it allows students to engage in their teachers’ corrections. Many times, confusion is cleared up through comments that could help to improve students’ written output. The participants preferred written comments for the better understanding of their mistakes resulting in the improvement of their written outputs. In addition, written comments clarified their doubt because, for them, markings in the form of shapes are not enough for them to understand the written correction clearly and accurately. The result is similar to the study of Goldstein (2005) which stated that providing teacher-written comments enable students to reflect upon whether what they intended to write is what the reader understood. It is also permanently available for the writer to refer to when necessary, and it gives the teacher the opportunity to expand her/his comments with full explanations of suggestions. Moreover, in the study of Üstünbaş & Çimen (2016) revealed that the preferable type of feedback is the correction with comments.

The participants also agreed that they preferred that their teacher provides detailed correction of their errors for them to be aware of the exact errors committed, and also they believe that correcting errors in detail is vital for them to avoid repetition of errors and for them to have a clearer understanding of their mistakes. The finding is in line with the study of Armhein and Nassaji (2010) in which students have stated that they prefer to receive feedback for all of their errors. Besides, the result also is in line with the study of Lee (2005) of which students preferred comprehensive written corrective feedback (WCF) rather than selective WCF, students expressed that having their errors marked comprehensively helps them learn and remember them in the future better than if they are not marked.

**Red ink correction** is indeed an eye-catching color. If teachers will use this as their tool in writing corrections, students would find it easy to locate the written corrective feedback for it is noticeable. The participants agreed that they preferred that their teachers will use a red pen because they can read comments and corrections more easily for it is attention-getting and the corrections will retain in the mind of the students and somehow can be their motivation to do better in their written output. Also, also, they preferred their teachers to use a red pen because it is clear, they can easily notice or distinguish their errors. The result is congruent to the result of the study of Hamouda (2011) which revealed that using a red pen has got the highest agreement of students as compared to that of in using a pencil or other colors because with red-inked notes, it will be easier for them to see their errors. Further, red ink boosted performance on detail-oriented tasks such as memory retrieval and proofreading.

**Immediate oral feedback** is a powerful force for moving students on and will be the most regular and interactive form of feedback. It provides opportunities for students to ask for clarification. The participants agreed that they preferred immediate oral feedback to have an interaction with their teacher for a clearer understanding of the errors committed. And also, immediate oral feedback gives them an opportunity to interact with their teacher and clarify correction that they find confusing.

The preferences of the participants in immediate oral feedback is in line with the study of Baleghizadeh & Gordani (2012) which stated that the teachers’ oral feedback held every session helped clarify the students’ errors, rather than students were left with corrected errors. rather than students were left with corrected errors.
papers might not be able to make sense of the feedback provided. In addition, Gobert (2010) mentioned that the best way of providing feedback to students about their writing might well be through one-to-one and teacher-to-student writing conferences; however, these proved to be time-consuming and impractical when dealing with large class sizes.

**Introduction and employment of proofreading symbols** found to be beneficial to students. The more systematic method of proofreading, the fewer the errors that will escape being noticed. It is not required to have the same thorough knowledge about proofreading that full-time proof-readers have. But familiarity with common proofreading symbols and techniques can help the student to proofread their work effectively. The participants in this study preferred that their teachers will use proofreading symbols for a clearer understanding and will not end up confusion for as long as the proofreading symbols should be introduced before its utilization. And also, it will save their time in understanding the corrections. The clearer corrections, the lesser chance of miscommunication. The result is in line with the study of López Valero, Encabo Fernández & Clarkson (2008) that correction of all mistakes and errors by signs is a procedure requires the codes such as proofreading symbols to be clear for the students, by using codes or symbols, students become able to analyze their own mistakes and errors. This procedure causes students to become more aware of the kind of error they have made and thus they may self-correct.

There are also five major themes emerged from the data collected on the responses of Filipino ESL learners in their teachers’ written corrective feedback such as confusion, offensiveness, and disappointment, consultation with peers, open-mindedness, realization in improving writing skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
<th>Core Ideas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confusion understanding</td>
<td>• have difficulty in corrections</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• encounter incomprehensible corrections</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• misinterpret the corrections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offensiveness &amp; Disappointment</td>
<td>• ashamed of the written output with corrections</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• give too personal corrections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consultation with peers</td>
<td>• ask corrections classmates or peers to understand better the corrections given</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• clarify corrections with smarter peers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• feel comfortable with peers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open-mindedness</td>
<td>• follow corrections received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• accept some changes of corrections the second time around</td>
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<tr>
<td>Realization in Improving Writing skills</td>
<td>• realize that there are many areas of writing skills that need to be improved</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• recognize the need to make written output right to avoid repetition</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• need to perform better in the writing task to have a better score</td>
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*Table 2. Responses of Filipino ESL Learners to their Teachers’ Written Corrective Feedback*

Confusion will hinder the acquisition of learning. If students’ encounter confusion with their teachers' corrections, the written corrective feedback provided by their teacher will add students’ burden in learning. The participants in this study responded that they are confused with the written corrective feedback given by their teachers because they could hardly understand some of the written corrections of their teachers.

This result is supported with the study of Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) which showed that students had problems understanding the WCF provided to them and that often students’ use of feedback did not completely match the teacher’s intentions. The mismatch between the students’, attitude and understanding of feedback has been reported in many studies which found that most L2 students may face difficulties when responding to their teacher’s comments, to understand her use of terminology and symbols, and even to read her handwriting.

The participants also responded with mixed emotions or reactions, such as offensiveness & disappointment, towards their teachers’ corrective feedback. One participant said that she felt ashamed as she received her written output with corrections. The other informant said that she was offended with the written correction given by her teacher. Other said that he finds written corrections of his teacher helpful but, he...
felt offended because some corrections are too personal. Others also responded that it hurts to see that her written output was filled with many corrections, but somehow she was motivated with those corrections to do better next time. This result is supported by the study of Mollenstam and Hu (2016) which stated that providing constructive feedback risks hurting the students’ self-esteem, motivation, and joy, but at the same time, sometimes for some students, CF is what makes them motivated.

Consultation with peers or opening-up clarification to peers is one way to help students develop their writing and the internal self-talk they must undertake. Students might find peer feedback useful but, teachers’, beliefs maybe about the inappropriateness of peer feedback might hinder or stop them to never implement it. The participants in this study responded that they made a clarification with their classmates or peers for them to know what to do with the corrections given by their teachers. And also they made a clarification with their classmates whom they considered intelligent for they find comfortable with their peers. The result is supported by Falchikov (2011) which stated that supplemental instruction, or what is more commonly called simply peer tutoring, typically focuses on a more advanced student helping lower-level students with course content. Peer mentoring focuses on a more experienced student helping a less experienced student improve overall academic performance, encourages mentors’ personal growth and provides advice, support, and knowledge to the students.

Corrections are made to correct errors. Teachers give corrective feedback to help students eliminate their errors to improve their writing skills. Students being open-minded to corrections and following those feedbacks made their teacher is a good thing to notice for it is one of the indicators of students’ willingness to learn. The participants in this study responded that they follow the correction given by their teachers. Lee (2013) mentioned that it is imperative to differentiate constructive judgment from sheer condescension, needling or domineering correction.

Realizing the need to improve one’s writing skills is a wonderful realization for it is one of the indicators of willingness to embrace and to continue learning. The participants in this study responded that they realize that there are many areas of their writing skills that need to improve such as grammar, punctuation and sentence construction. And also, one of the participants said that there was a realization that came across in her mind of improving her written output for her to get a better score.

The result is supported with the study of Amrhein, & Nassaji (2010) which revealed that student believes the kind of WCF is beneficial, then a student is more likely to pay a lot of attention to the correction and utilize it for learning.

Table 3. Suggestions of Filipino ESL Learners to their Teachers in Giving Written Corrective Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
<th>Core Ideas</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification of Weak Points</td>
<td>• indicate marks in the errors</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• point out specifically the errors</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• distinguish weaknesses (like grammar, spelling)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>to know what exactly to improve</td>
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<td>Interesting Activities for Writing</td>
<td>• give fun writing activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>with Peer tutoring</td>
<td>• organize challenging writing task yet enjoyable</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• create a separate group for advanced and average students where advanced students will help the average students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constructive Feedback</td>
<td>• be patient towards student learning in writing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• be objective in handling students</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• understand students’ capacity in acquiring knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open-mindedness</td>
<td>• consider students’ feeling in giving feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• accept students’ imperfections be gentle in dealing with them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• proficient in providing positive and negative comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Conference</td>
<td>• explain errors</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• help to organize written output better</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• understand corrections clearly</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Five significant themes also emerged from the data collected on the suggestions of Filipino ESL learners in their teachers’ written corrective feedback such as identification of weak points, interesting activities for writing with peer tutoring, patience and understanding of teachers, constructive feedbacking, and individual conferencing. At some point, students’ voices need to be heard by their teachers to achieve lasting learning.

Students, especially those who are not good in terms of writing using English tend to prefer explicit
corrections for them to have an idea of the scope of their error. Identification of weak points is necessary for learning error correction. The participants suggested that their teacher should indicate marks in their errors. They suggested that their teachers should point out their mistakes for them to know what to improve and for them to distinguish their weaknesses in writing. And also they suggested that their teacher should tell them on what to improve their writing skills.

The result is supported by Lee’s (2008) investigation, which showed that direct prompting of error location is more helpful than indirect prompting since students can correct more errors when errors are directly located for them.

Interesting activities for writing with peer tutoring help students to find fun in writing because it is more important for the students to learn to love writing themselves. One of the informants suggested challenging and fun activities that could develop students’ writing skills. This will also help students to become better writers and collaborators for as long as peer review must be planned and guided carefully. The result is supported by Gardner, Roth, Brooks-Gunn (2008) who mentioned that theory and research on positive youth development emphasizes the transition of human development, and suggest that cultivating positive, supportive relationships with people and social institutions encourages healthy development. Considering this perspective, organized activities can encourage healthy development because of the support and opportunities that are present. Students who participate in structured activities are more likely to respect diversity, play by the rules, and know their role as part of a team. Students may have benefited from the small group connection and potential for success that the activities would provide. Further, students can also have a superior performance by the student-to-student activities because these activities are often more detailed than teachers' feedback (Keikhaee, 2014).

Serving humanity is a prime concern of being and becoming a teacher. The very heart of the teaching-learning process is the patience and understanding of teachers. A good teacher is a good friend. Thus, good teaching is empathizing with students. Students are at different levels in terms of acquisition of learning or information, so a teacher needs to be extra patient, flexible, and strategic in delivering lessons to address diverse students’ needs. And also teachers should possess a passion for the subjects that they taught and genuine care for the students. The participants in this interview suggested that their teachers should be patient towards students learning in writing because not all students have the capacity in terms of writing.

This result is supported by Mollestam & Hu (2016) which stated that when providing corrective feedback it is important that the individual needs and personality be taken into consideration...the relationship between the teacher and student is built on trust and respect.

Moreover, an ideal teacher is somebody who has qualities of being very knowledgeable on the subject the subject matter, can manage his classroom proficiently, truly enjoys teaching and dealing with students, has high expectations for his students, good communication skills, and an engaging teaching style. Some other qualities are patience, resourcefulness, adaptability, resilience and a good sense of humor to excel in their school work (Tucker & Stonge, 2005).

The teachers, being the focal figure in education, must not only be competent and knowledgeable but also gentle and possess a good behavior to be an effective educator. Constructive feedback is one of the CF’s that students want to hear. The participants in this study suggested that their teachers should make use of constructive feedbacking. One participant suggested that their teachers should be conscious with their feedback and consider the students’ feelings in giving feedback. Another informant suggested that the teachers should be gentle with their students and accept the students’ imperfections. Other participants also suggested that the teachers should be gentle, should possess an ethical manner and also proficient in giving positive comments.

This finding is in agreement with Hyland & Hyland (2006) who suggested that students are most likely to find their teacher’s feedback effective only when it motivates them and when it gives great consideration to their individual needs. Moreover, working from a social psychological perspective, MacDonald (1991) suggested that students—especially low-achieving ones, when their writing receives adverse comments, they usually get frustrated and disappointed, and to reduce this tension, they tend to discredit their teacher’s comments.

Educators have a vital role in the lives of the students. Teachers are bombarded with multi-faceted tasks starting from simple to most challenging responsibilities to provide holistic development to the students. Every day we encounter them as part of the work or mission that we are in, and that includes doing an individual conference with students to attain lasting learning. The participants suggested that the teachers should do an individual conferencing in correcting students’ errors. Like, making the students understand what’s wrong with their written output, what makes it wrong and the teachers should give the students an idea of how to correct those mistakes. And also, the teachers should explain well to the students of the errors that the students’ committed in their paper.

This agrees with the findings of Balehizadeh, & Gordani (2012) which showed the effectiveness of feedback in the form of conferences would prepare students themselves in doing academic writings in the future, and also students will be well aware of the importance of structural accuracy of their writings. In fact, feedback on the structure of their writings is usually what they expect the teacher to provide.

Moreover, students benefit from conferencing because it encourages the development of autonomy and it allows them to construct their revision plan independently. This one-on-one dialogue allows the writer to reflect and change the main idea of the composition. Nevertheless, some researchers believe
face-to-face conferencing may have certain reservations (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

CONCLUSION

The findings implied that ESL learners preferred direct corrective feedback, both written (e.g., written comments, detailed corrections) and oral (e.g., immediate oral feedback, individual conferencing) feedback than implicit corrections. It was noteworthy to say that though ESL learners were quite offended and disappointed to see corrections, they were still open-minded and willing to learn from their peers and teachers to improve their writing skills. This study suggested steps for effective written corrective feedback. First, students' weak points must be identified, and then teachers provide activities that would eliminate those weaknesses such as poor spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and the like. Along with this is the use of constructive feedback and peer tutoring. In the last phase, individual conference showing the progress of students' writing skills would be done for follow-up and evaluation purposes.

Moreover, the results of this study could be a tool for teachers' awareness and understanding students' preferences, responses, and suggestions in CF that would lead to a meaningful discussion among teachers in formulating concepts in improving their strategies in responding the students' errors in writing. The findings also could be utilized by an institution as their basis in formulating seminars and workshops for teachers about teaching writing in general and responding to students' written output in particular. This is an important contribution to the study of CF because it fills a gap in the literature, especially that the studies about CF, in particular, are lacking in the Philippines. Moreover, in this study, the present study has not only focused on the preferences of ESL learners but also the response of the students towards their teachers' corrective feedback and their suggestions for teachers in giving corrections.

Future research may examine the teacher's beliefs, and practices with regard to all kinds of feedback (oral and written feedback) given on all aspects of writing (e.g., during conferencing) since CF investigation in this study was restricted to only one type of feedback (i.e., written). Research designs to investigate CF further can include mixed-method approaches of surveys, interviews, analyses of student texts with teacher corrections, and the classroom observations of teachers inside the classroom. Further research may employ more participants to enhance the generalizability of the result being studied.

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