

A Systematic Review of ESL/EFL Learners' Communication Preferences for Written Corrective Feedback

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Abstract Fuelled by the advent of process-oriented approaches to writing instruction, written corrective feedback (WCF) has garnered popularity, as a written communication skill, in second and foreign language writing research. Despite the prior reviews on WCF so far, no attempt has been made to synthesize existing research evidence on students' communication preferences for it. Driven by the gap, the present study seeks to systematically review empirical research on learners' WCF preferences published between 2013 and 2023 to examine their trends and major findings. The review was conducted according to the PRISMA 2020 Statement Guidelines, and three electronic databases including Web of Science, ERIC, and Scopus were searched. Thirty studies were evaluated based on their relevance and quality. Content analysis indicated that the majority of these primary articles were mixed-method studies, using mostly questionnaires to gather data. Three major groups of research foci were identified. The publications mostly recruited adult, intermediate-level, EFL university students. Students expressed a strong preference for teacher-initiated, direct, comprehensive WCF, targeting grammar errors, and were provided with a red pen.

Keywords: *Written corrective feedback, Students' preferences, ESL/EFL settings, Communication, Systematic review*

1. Introduction

As with any form of human learning, language learning involves committing errors, and the emergence of student-centred process approaches to teaching writing highlighted the need to address these errors. If to err is human, then to correct them should be divine. However, the majority of novice student writers lack the ability to rectify their own errors, necessitating the provision of written corrective feedback (WCF) from a more qualified individual, namely, teachers (Hendrickson, 1978). Providing WCF involves treating errors related to grammar and vocabulary as well as "spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and typing conventions" to improve the accuracy of writing (Ferris, 2003, p. 42). Written error correction helps teachers strike a balance between communicative competence and ensuring grammatical accuracy (Savignon, 2018). This highlights that it is not the writing itself that is of primary importance but rather learners' processing

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and response to the WCF (Williams, 2012). Accordingly, this systematic review seeks to scrutinize prior research on learners' preferences for various dimensions of this ubiquitous practice. The rationale of this review is evident, given that there is an urgent need for instructors to recognize the nuanced expectations and preferences of learners regarding WCF for making informed decisions and maximizing the efficacy of their feedback strategies in second and foreign language (L2) writing classrooms to improve students' written communication skills. This systematic review is valuable since, to our best knowledge, it is the first attempt to comprehensively overview the past studies on students' expectations regarding WCF, offering an evidence-based understanding of these preferences, as well as identifying research gaps and guiding future studies. Since WCF is one of the most researched and controversial topics in L2 written communication research, a systematic review of students' preferences might provide implications about how WCF should be given to meet the needs of individual learners.

The ultimate aim of this review is to determine the patterns and outcomes of prior research on the WCF preferences of ESL/EFL learners in terms of feedback source, type, scope, focus, and colour. Feedback mode is deliberately left out of the inquiry since this review only addresses written feedback mode and does not include automated and oral feedback modes. To achieve these research goals, the current review is guided by the following research questions (RQs):

1. What are the trends in the research articles investigating ESL/EFL students' WCF preferences published between 2013 and 2023?
2. What are the major findings of these research articles regarding ESL/EFL students' WCF preferences?

2. Theoretical Framework

Communication skills are one of the essential abilities required for individuals in the 21st century, and written communication is fundamental for educational and professional success. Written CF is believed to be one of the crucial factors in the improvement of learners' written communication skills (Wirantaka, 2022). It can be planned and implemented across multiple dimensions. This review is guided by Nakamura's (2016) proposed framework (Table 1), which was prepared "by reviewing three meta-analyses on WCF (Biber et al., 2011; Kang & Han, 2015; Liu & Brown, 2015) and Ellis' (2009) review article" (p. 92). The researcher lists the various aspects of WCF, such as feedback source, mode, type, scope, and focus.

Table 1
Nakamura's (2016) WCF Framework

Feedback dimension	Description	Classification
<i>Feedback source</i>	The agent who provides WCF	- Teachers - Peers - Students
<i>Feedback mode</i>	The way WCF is delivered	- Written - Verbal - Electronic
<i>Feedback type</i>	The strategies used to correct students' writing errors	- Direct (involves the provision of explicit corrections) - Indirect (entails pinpointing an incorrect form without explaining how it can be fixed or rectified) - Metalinguistic (describes offering students some form of explicit feedback on the nature of the mistakes they have committed, either by using error codes or by giving explanations)

<i>Feedback scope</i>	The amount of WCF provided	- Focused (when one or a few error categories are targeted) - Unfocused (involves correcting all writing errors)
<i>Feedback focus</i>	The type of errors to address when providing WCF	- Organization and content - Vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and other mechanical aspects

Since different colours have varying effects on learners' writing quality, as stated by Brown (2012), it would be wise to examine an additional dimension of WCF, namely, *feedback colour*, which refers to the colour of the pen used in feedback provision. As Elwood and Bode (2014) posit, investigating this facet of WCF could unearth a potential mediating factor in the uptake and efficacy of feedback. Given that colours might have different connotations in different settings (Aslam, 2006), it would be beneficial to examine students' preferences for different colours of pen. Overall, this systematic review seeks to synthesize previous studies that explore learners' opinions about different aspects of feedback provided in the written mode in ESL and EFL contexts.

2.1. Previous Research Syntheses on WCF

The last several decades have witnessed mounting interest in WCF practice, research, and theory. However, contemporary debates over this contentious but ubiquitous practice were ignited by Truscott (1996), whose assertion opposing WCF sparked debates rather than ending them. Due to the proliferation of primary studies on WCF, research syntheses have gained attention as a separate area (Liu & Brown, 2015). So far, the majority of review studies on WCF have concentrated on its effectiveness in improving writing quality (Kang & Han, 2015), which is in line with the empirical research in this area of investigation (Park, 2018). These review articles provided useful insights into the CF domain; however, none of them has conducted a systematic examination of methodological and reporting procedures in this field. To address this caveat, Storch (2010) reviewed primary WCF studies published between 2005 and 2010 and urged for a more relevant and ecologically valid WCF research agenda. This call was reciprocated by several studies (Kang & Han, 2015; Liu & Brown, 2015), which are of great value since they were conducted by prominent researchers in the field who have given other researchers access to the unique and empirical viewpoints of authorities on WCF. However, as Pae (2015) highlighted, these studies lack objectivity and rigour in their methodology since they failed to make judgments regarding the relevance and quality of the papers they reviewed. They also overlooked learner-related variables such as learner engagement or expectations, and there appears to be a dearth of review publications on feedback research that use a variety of methodologies. Only a few review studies have attempted to investigate WCF from students' perspectives (Paterson et al., 2020; Shen & Chong, 2022; Yu & Yang, 2021). These three systematic reviews offer insight into WCF from the eyes of students by focusing on learner responses to feedback; however, they still do not provide comprehensive data on learners' preferences. The review conducted by Paterson et al. (2020) was only limited to learners' academic feedback perceptions in higher education. Shen and Chong's (2022) review was a qualitative research synthesis with only 14 articles. Yu and Yang's (2021) systematic review focused on learners' responses to feedback, not specifically on their preferences for various aspects of WCF. Few other research syntheses had a secondary or indirect aim to delve into learners' preferences regarding teachers' paper-marking strategies. Two review articles (Mao & Lee, 2020; Thi & Nikolov, 2021) concentrated solely on feedback scope and reported that the majority of the reviewed studies found that students went for unfocused WCF. Li and Vuono's (2019) review was limited to the System journal and covered both oral and written CF. Data gathered from the included studies revealed that students favoured direct, comprehensive, and teacher-initiated WCF. A meta-analysis conducted by Nakamura (2016) provided data on learners' error treatment expectations in terms of focus and amount and indicated that students favoured unfocused CF targeting grammar errors, according to the outcomes of the examined studies. A narrative review that was conducted by Hyland and Hyland (2006) found that the teacher was the most trusted feedback source; however, in terms of the preferred WCF type, their reviewed papers reached contrasting findings with those in the other reviews and indicated that the participants in their sample studies wanted to receive indirect feedback most. Although these

review articles and meta-analyses bring us one step closer to hearing students' voices, the data they presented is limited since their main goal was not to explore student preferences.

In light of this gap and the advent of automated tools and software to assist researchers in conducting reviews, more robust systematic review studies are warranted to examine the regular patterns of WCF studies in order to guide feedback research and practice. To our best knowledge, no research synthesis has examined students' WCF preferences in a comprehensive and systematic way so far. Filling this void might enhance existing WCF research and practice in L2 writing classes. Insights gleaned from this review might help instructors make wiser decisions related to the amount and focus of feedback they provide and employ various WCF strategies that may fit different learners with diverse preferences.

3. Methodology

In line with the aforementioned research goal and to address the RQs, this study employed a systematic review approach. As Dixon-Woods (2011) defines, a systematic review refers to "a scientific process governed by a set of explicit and demanding rules oriented towards demonstrating comprehensiveness, immunity from bias, and transparency and accountability of technique and execution" (p. 332).

3.1. Data Collection

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) statement (Page et al., 2021) guidelines were strictly followed to collect pertinent data and guarantee systematicity. Given that the rigour and reliability of systematic reviews are largely determined by how well the methodological approach is planned and documented in advance, a protocol was generated beforehand to document the planned methodological and analytical approach for the current review. Following a predetermined protocol guarantees that all crucial decisions have been made before, which is a major strategy for preventing selection bias. A scholar who holds a PhD degree in English language teaching examined the protocol, data collection process, and all datasets and offered feedback about it since external audit is vital in such qualitative studies.

3.1.1. Search Strategy

Prior to searching for relevant articles for this review, a list of databases, keywords to be used in the database search, and eligibility criteria were created. Three electronic databases, namely, Web of Science, The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Scopus, were searched to identify the empirical studies whose primary or secondary goal was to reveal students' WCF preferences. These three databases, which were searched on February 25, 2023, were selected based on their high number of education-related studies. A considerable number of key terms, as well as spelling variations and truncation, were used in the search since it was crucial to expand the search to optimize the retrieval of relevant results and avoid missing articles inadvertently. The following search string was generated by utilizing Boolean operators:

(written corrective feedback OR corrective feedback OR teacher feedback OR error correction OR written correction OR feedback) AND (student OR learner) AND (prefer* OR view OR opinion OR think OR perception OR belief OR expect OR want OR perspective OR attitude OR favo?r) AND writ* NOT (oral)

As a next step, a series of criteria to determine whether studies were to be included or excluded in this review were applied to all the identified records (Table 2) since explicit eligibility criteria are essential for transparent, consistent, and replicable data selection.

Excluding studies using writing tasks other than compositions (essays) is based on the idea that the type of writing task can impact learners' feedback responses and preferences. This decision forms a rationale for not including studies sampling post-graduate learners since this group of learners usually engage in more specialized writing tasks, namely thesis, dissertations, or research papers. The timeframe between 2013 and 2023 was determined to examine the most recent works in the field.

Table 2*The Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

A study is included in the review if it	A study is excluded if it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is a primary study (i.e., a research article). • focuses on students' WCF preferences. • is published in the English language. • samples ESL/EFL learners. • is published between January 2013 and January 2023. • is with the full text available. • is published in peer-reviewed SSCI- or ESCI-indexed academic journals. • focuses on feedback provided in the written mode. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not use compositions (essays) as a writing task. • has post-graduate learners as participants. • has an unclear methodology description. • is unpublished. • is a systematic review, meta-analysis, synthesis, or any other kind of review of research. • is an example of grey literature (e.g., conference proceedings, dissertations, reports or book chapters) • focuses on WCF provided in oral or computer-mediated/digital/electronic mode.

Including studies published in the last decade ensured that the results are based on current educational practices and provide a timely understanding of learners' preferences. Journals indexed only in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) or the Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) were included in the review to generate the most unbiased, credible, and valid results.

3.1.2. Data Extraction

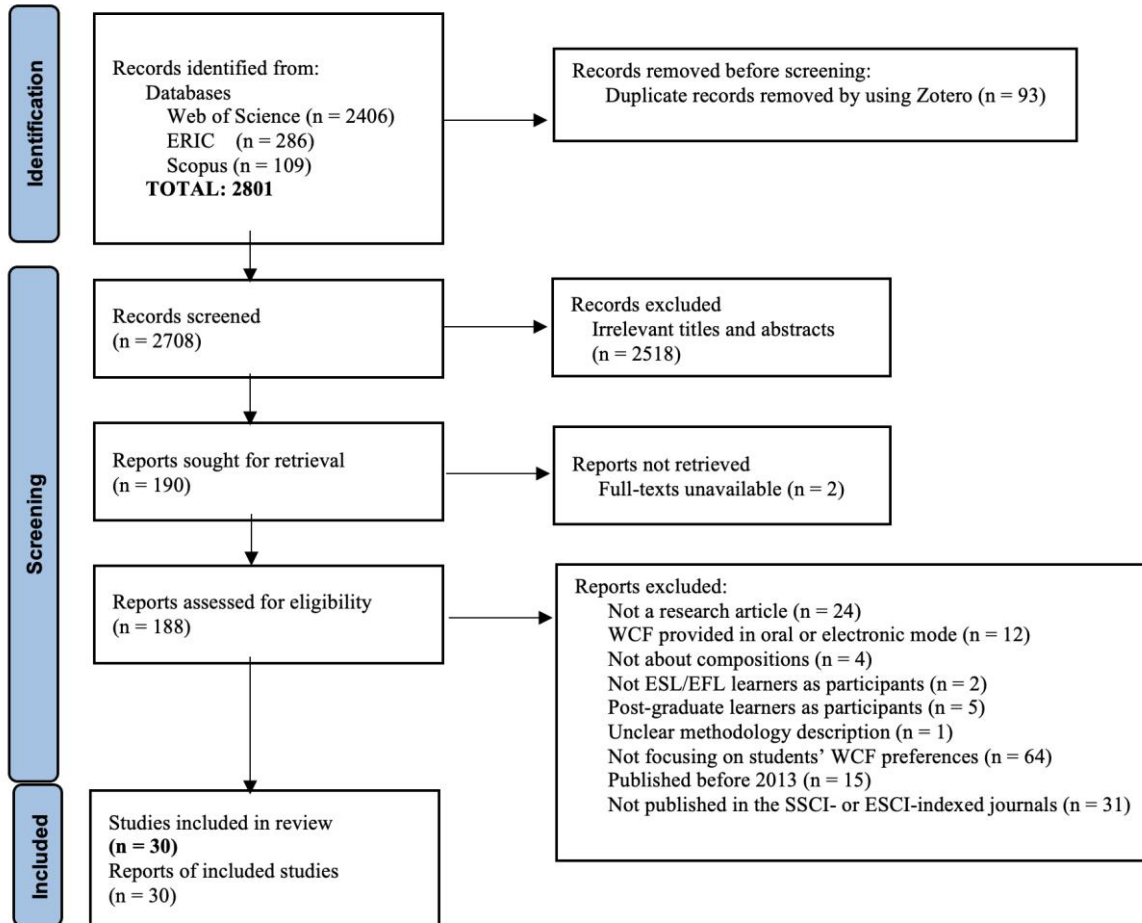
Once the search string was formulated, databases were selected, and eligibility criteria were set, the search in each database was carried out, and 2801 records were identified. The results were downloaded to Zotero, a reference management software, to remove the duplicates. The results were then exported to a semi-automated online screening program, Abstrackr. This free web-based tool, which serves as a second reviewer and helps minimize selection bias, uses text mining to recognize patterns in relevant and irrelevant records that have been labeled by the user (Rathbone et al., 2015). During the screening process of the titles and abstracts of the studies, I followed an inclusive strategy in order not to miss any data. After excluding the irrelevant records, 188 articles were selected for full-text screening as the full texts of two studies were unavailable (Salehfard & Bagheri, 2014; Salipande, 2017). The next step was to apply inclusion/exclusion criteria and perform a quality check on the reports retrieved. Of the 188 reports, 158 were excluded for several reasons, such as for not being a research article (Zhou et al., 2022), not using compositions as a writing task (Sanu, 2016), or not sampling ESL/EFL learners (Abd Hamid et al., 2021). Studies with post-graduate learners were also excluded (Can & Walker, 2011). A great majority of the excluded studies (Weng et al., 2022) were investigating learners' responses to WCF or the impact of feedback on writing accuracy. Twelve articles were not included as they focused on WCF provided in oral or electronic mode (Colpitts & Past, 2019). Thirty-one were excluded since they were not published in the SSCI- or ESCI-indexed journals (Wan Mohd Yunus, 2020). Studies with an unclear methodology description (Omar, 2014) and published before 2013 were excluded, as well (Radecki & Swales, 1988). At the end of this phase, 30 publications were left to be evaluated on their quality and relevance. Figure 1 presents the PRISMA 2020 flowchart for the whole data-gathering process.

3.1.3. Quality and Relevance Appraisal

The quality of a review is closely associated with the quality and relevance of the studies it covers. Assessing the quality and relevance of reports involves "evaluating the extent that each piece of the evidence contributes to answering the review question" (Gough, 2007, p.7). While evaluating the *weight of evidence* (WoE), Gough's (2007) framework was followed, and four criteria were taken into account: methodological quality, methodological relevance, topic relevance, and overall contribution of the study to the review (Davies et al., 2013). I filled out a grid (Appendix A) to evaluate individual studies

considering these four criteria. Table 3 demonstrates the appraisal of the 30 studies included in the review in terms of the WoE.

Figure 1
PRISMA Flowchart of the Search Strategy and Article Selection



Note. Source: Page et al. (2021).

What stands out in Table 3 is the high rate of methodological quality that the selected papers have, which makes them trustworthy. Seventeen studies were judged as having high (e.g., Alshahrani & Storch, 2014) quality of the execution of the research method adopted. Regarding methodological relevance, 15 studies were rated as highly appropriate (e.g., Kim & Bowles, 2019).

Table 3
The Appraisal of the Studies Included in the Review

Weight of evidence	Methodological quality (N)	Methodological relevance (N)	Topic relevance (N)	Overall contribution to the review (N)
High	17	15	25	19
Medium	11	11	4	10
Low	2	4	1	1
TOTAL	30	30	30	30

In terms of the topic relevance of the selected papers, 25 were evaluated to have foci that were highly aligned with the review questions (e.g., Zhang et al., 2021). Overall, 19 studies were able to significantly contribute to our review question (e.g., Rummel & Bitchener, 2015), which was remarkable.

3.2. Data Analysis

To ensure coding reliability, all 30 primary research articles were coded manually multiple times until saturation was achieved for a wide range of features in an MS Excel spreadsheet (Appendix B). The coding scheme used for this review comprises eleven categories, which were informed by extant review articles of WCF (Kang & Han, 2015). I was able to steer clear of subjective biases and provide data from the examined studies in an objective manner thanks to this bottom-up coding technique. I was constantly conscious of my professional background, as well as my experience with researching and teaching written communication skills as I worked on this review, which helped me to minimise any potential bias. My intention is that this awareness of and reflection on my position, with the thorough explanation of each and every step of the review, has contributed to the credibility of the results. Each research article was carefully examined by using the content analysis method (Bengtsson, 2016).

4. Results

4.1. Research Trends on ESL/EFL Students' WCF Preferences

The primary goal of this review was to explore the current landscape of research related to ESL/EFL learners' preferences for the feedback provided for their L2 writing. To this end and to address the first RQ, the surface-related features of each article were examined in detail. Thick descriptions of each category are provided in the following section. Because some studies fit into more than one category, the sum of values in several tables exceeds the total number of studies evaluated ($n = 30$).

4.1.1. Source Journals for Articles on Learners' WCF Preferences

The papers that were selected were published in a variety of journals. The distribution of research articles in relation to the journals where they were published is shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Source Journals for the Selected Articles

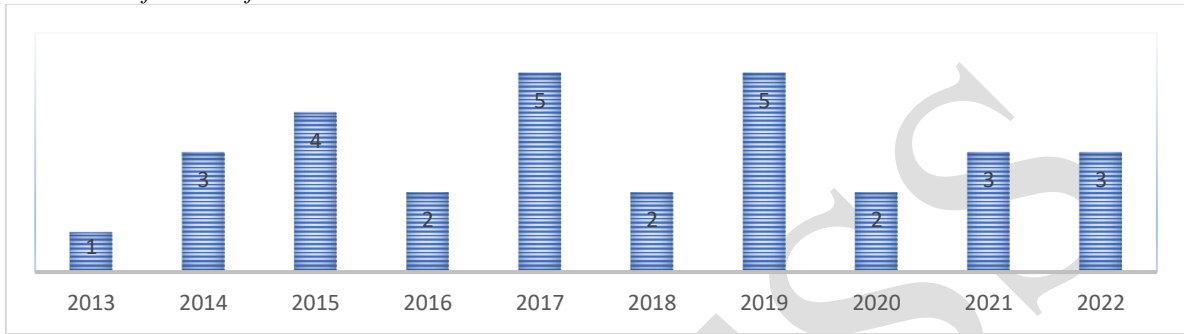
Journal	N
The Journal of Asia TEFL	5
GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies	2
Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences	2
System	2
Australian Review of Applied Linguistics	2
Arab World English Journal	1
Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language	1
Assessing Writing	1
Australian Journal of Teacher Education	1
Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics	1
Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics	1
Frontiers in Psychology	1
Hacettepe University Journal of Education	1
HOW-A Colombian Journal for Teachers of English	1
International Journal of Applied Linguistics	1
International Journal of English Linguistics	1
Issues in Educational Research	1
Journal of Language and Education	1
Journal of Second Language Writing	1
Journal of Writing Research	1
Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction	1
TESOL Quarterly	1

The Journal of Asia TEFL (n = 5) ranked first among all other journals for having the most studies on students' WCF preferences.

4.1.2. Distribution of Articles by Year

The scanning of the empirical studies was limited to the years 2013 to 2023. Figure 2 displays the yearly frequencies of the publications analysed for this review.

Figure 2
Distribution of Articles from 2013 to 2023



The number of studies on learners' expectations related to WCF reached a peak in 2017 and 2019. However, there is a fluctuating trend.

4.1.3. The Location of the Studies

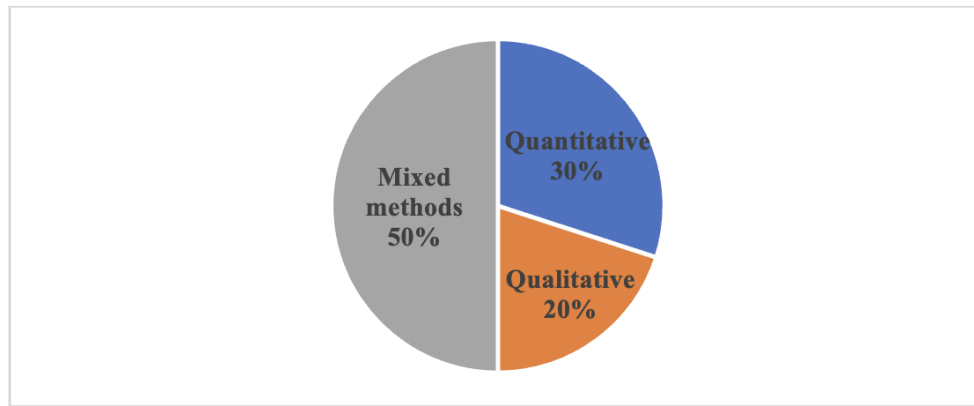
Table 5 shows how the studies were distributed based on the countries in which they were carried out. The results indicated that Iran (n = 8) had the largest number of empirical research in this domain (e.g., Nemati et al., 2017).

Table 5
The Location of the Studies

Country	N
Iran	8
Thailand	4
The U.S.	4
China	3
Japan	2
Algeria	1
Canada	1
Hong Kong	1
Indonesia	1
Laos	1
Malaysia	1
Saudi Arabia	1
South Korea	1
Turkey	1

4.1.4. Research Methods Used in the Studies

Figure 3 indicates that the analysed studies adopted different methodological approaches.

Figure 3*Distribution of Articles by the Research Methodology*

As revealed in Figure 3, while half of the selected research (50%) were mixed methods studies ($n = 15$; Park, 2018), only six studies adopted qualitative methodology (McMartin-Miller, 2014).

4.1.5. Data Collection Instruments in the Studies

Table 6 displays the descriptive results related to the data collection tools that were utilized in the studies within the framework of this review.

Table 6*Data Collection Tools*

Data collection tools	N	Sample Study
Questionnaire	24	Nemati et al. (2017)
Semi-structured interviews with students	10	Saeli and Cheng (2019)
Students' writing tasks	9	Kim and Bowles (2019)
Semi-structured interviews with teachers	3	Alshahrani and Storch (2014)
Focus-group interviews	2	Nguyen (2019)
Verbal reports (e.g., think-aloud protocols)	2	Ahmadian et al. (2019)
Classroom observation (including field notes)	1	Ferris et al. (2013)

By far, the most commonly used instrument in the data-gathering process of the analysed studies was questionnaires ($n = 24$). Among the 30 studies, nine used semi-structured interviews with students, whereas nine studies made use of students' writing tasks. Only the researchers in one study made classroom observations.

4.1.6. Sampling Features of Research Articles

This section reports the descriptive findings about the sampling characteristics of the studies. Participants ranged in number from 10 to 730 for the analysed studies, adding up to 3563 in total, 3407 of whom were students and 156 were teachers. Since teachers' opinions are beyond the scope of this review, only findings about students will be provided, and the term *participants* will refer to students in the following parts. Table 7 demonstrates the frequencies and percentages of the variables related to the participants in the empirical studies.

Table 7*Sampling Features of Research Articles*

Variable	Level	N	%
Context	EFL	24	80
	ESL	6	20
L2 Proficiency	Advanced	4	13.3
	Upper-intermediate	10	33.3

	Intermediate	13	43.3
	Pre-intermediate	5	16.6
	Elementary	1	3.3
	Not reported	13	43.3
Education Level	University	22	73.3
	High School	1	3.3
	Secondary School	3	10
	Elementary	0	0
	Not reported	4	13.3
Age	Adult	22	73.3
	Teen	3	20
	Children	0	0
	Not reported	6	20

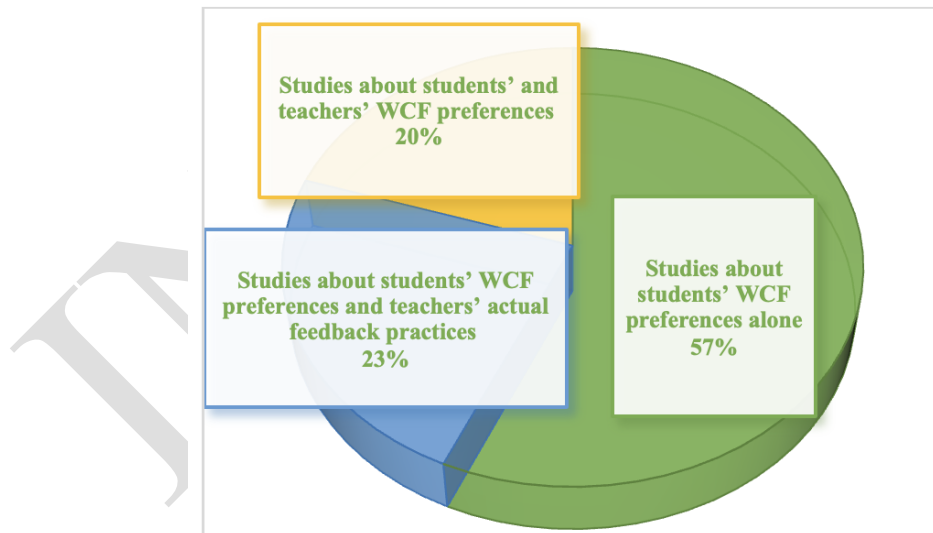
Table 7 discloses a number of notable trends. To illustrate, 77% of the studies ($n = 23$) were conducted with EFL learners (Ji, 2015). Another salient result is about the recruited learners' age and proficiency levels. The findings indicated that this line of investigation gave intermediate (73.3%; Gedik-Bal, 2021) and adult learners (73.3%; Kim & Bowles, 2019) priority. The lack of information on student proficiency levels ($n = 12$) is also remarkable. An overwhelming majority of the studies (73.3%) were conducted with undergraduate students (Park, 2018), including both English and non-English majors; very few were conducted at the secondary ($n = 3$; Lee, 2015) or high school level ($n = 1$; Vaghei et al., 2020).

4.1.7. Distribution of Articles by Research Foci

Upon reviewing the empirical articles, three groups of studies delving into students' WCF preferences were identified (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Distribution of Studies by Research Foci



The most prevalent group of studies ($n = 17$) examined learners' WCF preferences alone (Aridah et al., 2017). The second group of research ($n = 7$) investigated how learners' preferences and teachers' feedback practices are related (Nemati et al., 2017). The last set of empirical research ($n = 6$) compared instructors and learners in terms of their WCF preferences (Liu & Wu, 2019).

4.2. Major Findings of the Reviewed Studies

The second RQ aimed to reveal the major findings of recent research articles regarding ESL/EFL students' preferences for WCF. The results are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8*Number of Studies by Preferred WCF Dimension*

Feedback dimension		N
Type	Direct	13
	Indirect	5
	Metalinguistic	6
Scope	Focused	3
	Unfocused	14
Focus	Grammar	8
	Content	1
	Organization	1
	Mechanics	1
	Vocabulary	0
Source	Teacher	8
	Peer	0
	Self	0
Colour	Red pen	2
	Green pen	0
	Pencil	0
	Other	0

In all the reviewed studies, it was highlighted that students had a positive approach toward error correction, irrespective of their age, education, or L2 proficiency level. By and large, among the various facets of feedback preferences, the analysed studies mostly investigated learners' preferences regarding the type of WCF that is provided ($n = 24$; Zhang et al., 2021). Only two studies inspected learners' preferences regarding the colour of the pen used in feedback provision (Elwood & Bode, 2014; Maghsoud & Karim, 2015).

With regard to the feedback type, the majority ($n = 13$) of the 24 studies which investigated students' favourite WCF strategy found that the participants opted for direct feedback (Aridah et al., 2017). Indirect feedback was the least favoured CF strategy, according to the findings 8/5/2024 4:02:00 PM.

The majority of the studies that asked students about their thoughts on the scope or amount of feedback ($n = 14$) revealed that they expected their teacher to address all the errors in their written work, be it global or local (Nguyen, 2019), while only three studies reported that learners wished their teachers to adopt a focused approach and only rectify the errors that hinder the comprehensibility of the text (Chen et al., 2016).

Regarding the focus of WCF, there is substantial evidence ($n = 11$) indicating that students wanted their grammatical errors to be rectified most (Alshahrani & Storch, 2014). Surprisingly, no study reported that student respondents cared for vocabulary errors the most.

Data from the analysed publications revealed that, when it comes to feedback sources, the greatest demand was for teachers. Of the eight studies that questioned participants about their favourite feedback-providing agent, subjects all preferred their instructors to correct their errors (Kazemi et al., 2018).

Of all the domains of written error correction, feedback colour was the least investigated variable, with only two studies (Elwood & Bode, 2014; Maghsoud & Karim, 2015). Red was the favourite colour of the participants when receiving feedback in both studies. These results will be discussed and interpreted in the forthcoming section in relation to the RQs that guide the current review.

5. Discussion

Based on the empirical articles that have been published in prestigious journals over the past ten years, this study attempted to provide an overview of the status quo and the development of research on learners' WCF preferences, as a written communication skill. The first RQ was related to the surface-related features of the studies included in the review. The analysis revealed that the number of papers

exploring students' preferences for WCF followed a fluctuating pattern, which might be due to the changes in research priorities. Although Iran ($n = 8$) had the highest number of empirical research, the publications had international representation from various countries, making this review quite inclusive and enhancing the generalizability of its findings. As for the research methodology, mixed-method studies took the lion's share. Such a commitment suggests that the reviewed studies sought to offer a holistic understanding of students' feedback expectations. Qualitative research was the least adopted methodology in the selected studies. Given that this method provides a more in-depth appreciation of the construct under investigation and unearths nuanced perspectives of learners, future studies could utilize it more. The reviewed studies mostly administered questionnaires; this trend could be explained by the notion that questionnaires are popular tools since they provide quick and affordable ways to collect large quantities of data from huge sample sizes. The reviewed studies triangulated data via follow-up interviews. This might be due to the researchers' desire to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the subject. Nevertheless, they seldom used classroom observations, which could increase ecological validity, offer contextual insights, and reveal more information about teachers' actual feedback practices. Relying solely on students' self-report data might lead to bias. This finding reveals a noteworthy gap in the research methodology in this domain.

As for the participants, the predominance of undergraduate, adult, and EFL learners with an intermediate level of proficiency was evident in the dataset, which corresponds to the outcomes of Liu and Brown's (2015) meta-analysis. Non-adult learners' exclusion restricts the generalizability of findings, downplays the diversity in elicited learner data, and makes it challenging for teachers to respond to learners of various age groups and education levels, such as secondary school students, who are underrepresented. A vast bulk of these studies were conducted in the EFL context; ESL classes in nations whose cultural norms and classroom dynamics differ significantly from those in EFL settings are a missing piece in the picture.

Three main categories emerged in terms of research foci after analysing the selected studies. The majority of research focused solely on learners' preferences for this pervasive practice. Student preferences are likely to be influenced by contextual factors; however, this group of studies focused on these preferences in isolation. Exploring learner perspectives in relation to other factors, such as teachers' actual feedback procedures, may help us gain a better grasp of the subject. To bridge this gap and determine if students' expectations match teachers' paper marking practices, a second set of studies focused on investigating students' perspectives in connection to their instructors' actual feedback practices. The synthesised data demonstrated that students' expectations and teachers' WCF practices are usually out of sync. To investigate these misalignments, it is crucial to conduct more robust research on learners' beliefs regarding teachers' error treatment strategies. Few studies set out to compare students' and instructors' preferences for WCF. Conducted with diverse contexts, most of these studies indicated that learners' and teachers' WCF preferences do not always align. On the whole, most teachers favoured indirect, focused, content-related feedback, while the vast majority of learners valued direct, unfocused, and grammar-based WCF. For CF in L2 writing classes to be more efficient, further research comparing instructors' and students' perspectives in various settings is required, as suggested by Saeli and Cheng (2019).

Data that address the second RQ fall into five main categories: students' preferences for WCF in terms of type, scope, focus, source, and colour. Feedback type was the most investigated variable in terms of learner preferences. Among the several studies that scrutinized L2 learners' views on WCF type, Ganapathy et al.'s (2020) research stands out for having the highest number of subjects ($n = 720$). Their study, conducted with secondary school students, revealed that participants gave high credit to direct CF. Students' strong preferences for this explicit feedback strategy are not limited to secondary education level; undergraduate students were found to value direct WCF most, as well. In terms of the settings where the relevant research was conducted, not only EFL learners (Nemati et al., 2017) but also ESL students (Sinha & Nassaji, 2022) favoured direct feedback. There seems to be a consensus among learners in terms of direct error correction irrespective of their age or education level. This outcome is consistent with the findings of numerous earlier reviews (Li & Vuono, 2019; Paterson et al., 2020). Direct, overt correction is favoured more than other feedback strategies, probably for being less demanding and time-consuming for students. Surprisingly, a narrative review conducted by Hyland and

Hyland (2006) found that students in the analysed studies valued indirect feedback most. Such an incongruence in the findings may result from the differences between the sample demographics, contextual variables, or methodological approaches of the current review and their study.

The second most analysed aspect of WCF was feedback scope. Several studies have provided solid evidence that students expected their teachers to fix all of their errors in a comprehensive manner (Aridah et al., 2017). Student's preference for unfocused CF was an expected finding that aligns with past research results (Li & Vuono, 2019; Mao & Lee, 2020). However, Yu and Yang (2021) reported inconsistent results, which discovered no definite trend in terms of learners' expectations related to the feedback scope. This may result from the individual and contextual differences between the samples of the two studies, along with their methodological variations.

Another anticipated finding was about learners' opinions regarding the error types that should be rectified. Multiple studies in the dataset have shown strong evidence that students desired their grammatical errors to be fixed the most, a finding that corroborates the outcomes of several prior reviews (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Such an inclination might have resulted from the influence of students' previous educational experiences.

Consistent with the literature (Li & Vuono, 2019), instructors were found to be the most trusted source of feedback. This is not an unexpected finding, considering that most students may feel they cannot receive adequate feedback if it is provided by themselves or their peers. Peers may not be a trustworthy source of feedback for them since, depending on their relationship, students may either overly appreciate or harshly criticise one other's written text. Peer evaluation may not also be preferred because it is not very commonly employed in L2 writing classrooms. On the other hand, students may not have valued self-correction because of their lack of self-confidence (Liu & Wu, 2019).

The feedback colour domain received the least amount of research (Maghsoud & Karim, 2015). The findings of these studies show that most participants responded favourably to red ink while having their errors corrected. Such a preference seems logical given that red is a noticeable colour, and students can easily spot their mistakes when they are marked in red ink as opposed to other colours. However, reaching a conclusion based on two studies would also be premature, warranting further research.

Despite the transparent and rigorous methodology used in the current review, this study is not free from limitations. One major constraint is the small sample size, which might prevent the generalizability of the findings. Exclusion of studies recruiting post-graduate learners makes the results less representative of the population, as well. Data reliability might be another concern, given that only one coder was engaged in data gathering and analysis. Such a limitation was tried to be eliminated by careful quality appraisal procedures, external audits, and thick descriptions of all the steps taken in the review. Since relevant papers outside of the searched databases and examples of grey literature are not included, publication bias cannot be completely avoided. However, data from high-impact articles can offer a snapshot of the current research on students' WCF expectations, from which insightful conclusions can be made for both instructors and researchers. Despite these flaws, this study offers trustworthy and systematic information that covers a part of WCF that has previously gotten little interest.

The outcomes of the current review have several pedagogical implications for enhancing feedback procedures in L2 writing classrooms. A large proportion of the participants in the synthesized research articles favoured teacher-generated feedback; however, students who receive error correction using a teacher-centred approach are likely to be more prone to become reliant and passive. Devoting some class time to training students about self and peer editing can foster autonomy and collaboration. Data indicated that students wanted all of their errors to be fixed; however, several studies have shown that selective feedback is more effective in increasing written accuracy (Ellis et al., 2008). According to Brookhart (2008), when deciding on the right amount of CF, Goldilocks' "not too much, not too little, but just right" approach could be followed (p. 13). As suggested by Lee (2018), "Depending on their own teaching context and the learners' needs, teachers can go for WCF that is mid-focused, perhaps varying the number of target error types at different stages/times of the writing class" (p. 12). The same dilemma is valid for the WCF type. While learners opted for overt correction, the literature is filled with studies suggesting indirect WCF minimizing errors (Ferris & Roberts, 2001). Employing both

strategies based on the intended error types or learners' proficiency levels may be the most optimal strategy for teachers. Although most students prioritized form-focused feedback, instructors are recommended to maintain a balance between accurate written communication and content-related issues. The results of this review may also be used by other stakeholders to guarantee that students receive a personalised learning experience based on their WCF preferences. Since some instructors might not have sufficient training or expertise, administrators could arrange seminars and workshops regarding writing instruction and error treatment. Overall, it is expected that the data obtained from the current research will offer practical advice for teachers as they choose the most effective WCF techniques by taking particular educational settings and individual differences into account since a one-size-fits-all strategy is unhelpful.

This review may potentially encourage future research, leading to the generation of additional data and the possibility of a meta-analysis. Prospective review studies are advised to extend the scope of the dataset (e.g., including studies sampling post-graduate learners) or the review's timeline to allow for a more thorough investigation of the construct under investigation. Including studies that focus on the issues that were not examined in this study, namely, automated WCF, would be worthwhile. Along with further systematic reviews, future empirical research could also benefit from the suggestions that this review will offer. More research could be conducted on students' favourite feedback colour and its effects on writing quality. Underrepresented samples such as K-12 students or ESL learners could be recruited to increase generalizability. Making use of classroom observations could make it possible to examine the classroom dynamics and contextual factors that might impact learners' WCF preferences. Hearing the voices of teachers might be interesting in terms of gaining insight into the potential (mis)alignments between students' and instructors' beliefs and their feedback practices, as well. Further research and review studies are required to identify whether several individual difference variables are the mitigating factors that might affect learners' WCF preferences. This line of inquiry might enhance the effectiveness of teachers' feedback procedures and promote written communication skills.

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Appendices

Appendix A

The Appraisal of the Selected Studies in terms of Their Weight of Evidence

- 1. Methodological quality** : The trustworthiness of the results judged by the quality of the study within the accepted norms for undertaking the particular type of research design used in the study
- 2. Methodological relevance** : The appropriateness of the use of that study design for addressing their particular RQ
- 3. Topic relevance** : The appropriateness of focus of the research for answering the review question
- 4. Overall contribution to the review** : Judgement of overall weight of evidence

Study	Methodological quality	Methodological relevance	Topic relevance	Overall contribution to the review
Ahmadian et al. (2019)	Medium	High	Low	Medium
Alshahrani and Storch (2014)	High	High	High	High
Aridah et al. (2017)	Medium	Low	High	Medium
Black and Nanni (2016)	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
Chen et al. (2016)	Medium	Medium	High	High
Elwood and Bode (2014)	High	High	High	High
Fatima Zohra and Hamitouche (2022)	Low	Low	High	Medium
Ferris et al. (2013)	High	High	High	High
Ganapathy et al. (2020)	High	Medium	High	High
Gedik-Bal (2021)	High	Medium	High	High
Ji (2015)	Low	Low	Medium	Low

Kazemi et al. (2018)	Medium	Medium	High	High
Kim and Bowles (2019)	Medium	High	High	Medium
Lee (2015)	Medium	High	High	Medium
Liu and Wu (2019)	Medium	Medium	High	High
Maghsoud and Karim (2015)	High	High	High	High
McMartin-Miller (2014)	High	Medium	High	Medium
Moslemi and Dastgoshadeh (2017)	High	Medium	High	High
Nanni and Black (2017)	Medium	Medium	High	Medium
Nemati et al. (2017)	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium
Nguyen (2019)	High	Medium	High	High
Park (2018)	High	High	Medium	High
Perks et al. (2021)	High	High	High	High
Rummel and Bitchener (2015)	High	High	High	High
Saadat et al. (2017)	Medium	Medium	High	Medium
Saeli and Cheng (2019)	High	High	High	High
Sinha and Nassaji (2022)	High	High	High	High
Vaghei et al. (2020)	High	Medium	High	High
Wang and Wu (2012)	High	High	High	High
Zhang et al. (2021)	High	High	High	High

Appendix B

Dataset

Article	Foci	Context	Location	Sample Description	L2 Proficiency	Education level	Age	Research Method	Data Collection Tools	Students' WCF preferences. The majority of the participants preferred
Ahmadian et al. (2019)	Focused on students' WCF preferences alone	EFL	Iran	87 students	Pre-intermediate	University	Not reported	Mixed methods	A questionnaire, verbal reports (think-aloud protocols)	indirect feedback.
Alshahrani and Storch (2014)	Focused on students' and teachers' WCF preferences	EFL	Saudi Arabia	45 students and 3 teachers	Not reported	University	18 to 21	Mixed methods	Students' essays, student questionnaire, semi-structured interviews with teachers	direct, unfocused feedback and mainly on grammar errors.
Aridah et al. (2017)	Focused on students' WCF preferences and teachers' actual feedback practices	EFL	Indonesia	54 students and 22 teachers from the English Education Department of a university	Not reported	University	18 to 22	Quantitative	Student questionnaire, Teacher questionnaire	direct, unfocused feedback.
Black and Nanni (2016)	Focused on students' and teachers' WCF preferences	EFL	Thailand	262 students and 21 teachers	Intermediate	University	17 to 20	Mixed methods	Student and teacher questionnaires with closed ended and open-ended questions	direct feedback.

Chen et al. (2016)	Focused on students' WCF preferences alone	EFL	China	64 learners from the English department of a public university	Intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced	University	Not reported	Mixed methods	A questionnaire with closed-ended and open-ended questions	indirect, focused feedback on organization errors.
Elwood and Bode (2014)	Focused on students' WCF preferences alone	EFL	Japan	410 first-year students	Upper-Intermediate	University	19	Mixed Methods	A quantitative questionnaire and an open-ended followup questionnaire	direct feedback on mechanical errors, with red ink.
Fatima Zohra and Hamitouche (2022)	Focused on students' and teachers' WCF preferences	EFL	Algeria	40 students and 40 teachers	Not reported	Secondary school	Not reported	Quantitative	Student questionnaire, Teacher questionnaire	direct, unfocused feedback.
Ferris et al. (2013)	Focused on students' WCF preferences and teachers' actual feedback practices	ESL	The U.S.	10 first-year university students	Not reported	University	Not reported	Qualitative	Student background questionnaires, student texts, student interviews, field notes	indirect, teacher-initiated, focused feedback.
Ganapathy et al. (2020)	Focused on students' WCF preferences and teachers' actual feedback practices	EFL	Malaysia	720 students from 10 secondary schools	Not reported	Secondary school	16	Quantitative	Student questionnaire	direct, unfocused feedback on content errors.
Gedik-Bal (2021)	Focused on students' WCF preferences alone	EFL	Turkey	84 students	Intermediate	University	18 to 20	Mixed Methods	A questionnaire with closed-ended and open-ended questions	metalinguistic feedback with explanations, unfocused feedback on grammar errors.
Ji (2015)	Focused on students' WCF preferences alone	EFL	China	31 students	Not reported	University	Not reported	Quantitative	A questionnaire and student texts	indirect feedback.
Kazemi et al. (2018)	Focused on students' WCF preferences alone	EFL	Iran	21 year-four university students	Not reported	University	20 to 22	Mixed Methods	A questionnaire and semi-structured interviews	teacher-initiated feedback on organization errors.
Kim and Bowles (2019)	Focused on students' WCF preferences alone	ESL	The U.S.	22 adult learners	High-intermediate	University	18 to 22	Mixed Methods	Student writing tasks, think-aloud protocols and a questionnaire	direct feedback.
Lee (2015)	Focused on students' WCF preferences alone	ESL	Hong Kong	30 Chinese junior secondary students	Not reported	Secondary school	15	Mixed Methods	A questionnaire and semi-structured interviews	teacher feedback.
Liu and Wu (2019)	Focused on students' and teachers' WCF preferences	ESL	The U.S.	70 students and 16 teachers	Pre-intermediate to advanced	University	18 to 48	Quantitative	Student questionnaire, Teacher questionnaire	teacher-initiated, direct, unfocused feedback.
Maghsoud and Karim (2015)	Focused on students' and teachers' WCF preferences	EFL	Iran	100 English-major students and 30 teachers	Pre-intermediate to intermediate	University	18 to 51	Mixed Methods	Student questionnaire, Teacher questionnaire, follow-up interviews with the teachers	unfocused, metalinguistic feedback with explanations, feedback on grammar errors with red ink.
McMartin-Miller (2014)	Focused on students' WCF preferences and teachers' actual feedback practices	ESL	The U.S.	3 teachers and 19 students	Not reported	University	18 to 23	Qualitative	Student and teacher interviews	unfocused feedback.

Moslemi and Dastgoshadeh (2017)	Focused on students' WCF preferences alone	EFL	Iran	60 young adult learners	Intermediate to upper-intermediate	Not reported	20	Quantitative	The Ehrman and Leaver Learning Styles Questionnaire and corrective feedback preference questionnaire	metalinguistic feedback with explanations, unfocused feedback on grammar errors.
Nanni and Black (2017)	Focused on students' and teachers' WCF preferences	EFL	Thailand	262 students and 21 teachers in an intensive EAP program	Intermediate to upper-intermediate	University	17 to 20	Quantitative	Student questionnaire, Teacher questionnaire	feedback on grammar errors.
Nemati et al. (2017)	Focused on students' WCF preferences and teachers' actual feedback practices	EFL	Iran	311 students from various language institutions	Elementary, intermediate, and upper-intermediate	Not reported	18 to 19	Qualitative	Student questionnaire	direct, unfocused feedback on grammar errors.
Nguyen (2019)	Focused on students' WCF preferences and teachers' actual feedback practices	EFL	Thailand	65 fourth-year English-major students	Intermediate to upper-intermediate	University	Not reported	Qualitative	Text analysis, survey with the whole class, semi-structured focus-group interview with 20 students	unfocused, metalinguistic feedback with explanations.
Park (2018)	Focused on students' WCF preferences alone	EFL	South Korea	20 students majoring in English language and literature department	Not reported	University	24	Mixed Methods	A background survey, a survey on teacher and peer reviews, student essays, and interviews	teacher feedback.
Perks et al. (2021)	Focused on students' WCF preferences alone	EFL	Japan	101 students at a private university	Not reported	University	18 to 21	Mixed Methods	A questionnaire and semi-structured interviews	direct feedback.
Rummel and Bitchener (2015)	Focused on students' WCF preferences alone	EFL	Laos	42 students at a language center	Advanced	Not reported	23 to 27	Mixed Methods	Questionnaires, interviews, and writing prompts	indirect feedback.
Saadat et al. (2017)	Focused on students' WCF preferences alone	EFL	Iran	10 students from a state university	Not reported	University	19 to 36	Qualitative	Focus-group interviews	focused, teacher feedback.
Saeli and Cheng (2019)	Focused on students' WCF preferences alone	EFL	Iran	15 students from two language centres	Pre-intermediate to advanced	Not reported	20 to 30	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews	direct, teacher-initiated feedback on grammar errors.
Sinha and Nassaji (2022)	Focused on students' WCF preferences and teachers' actual feedback practices	ESL	Canada	56 students at an English language center	Intermediate	University	19 to 27	Mixed Methods	Student writing tasks, a feedback perception questionnaire and a personal profile questionnaire	direct, unfocused feedback.
Vaghei et al. (2020)	Focused on students' WCF preferences alone	EFL	Iran	150 learners from several private language institutes	Intermediate	High school and university	14 to 22	Quantitative	A proficiency test, the Language Mindsets Questionnaire and the Feedback Preferences Scale	metalinguistic feedback with explanations.
Wang and Wu (2012)	Focused on students' WCF preferences and	EFL	China	55 Chinese EFL teachers and 96 non-English	Not reported	University	17 to 24	Mixed Methods	Student Questionnaire and Teacher Questionnaire, semi-structured	direct, teacher-initiated, unfocused feedback.

teachers' actual feedback practices		major students from three universities				student interviews and student writings				
Zhang et al. (2021)	Focused on students' WCF preferences alone	EFL	Thailand	117 freshman students	Pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate	University	18 to 23	Mixed Methods	A written corrective feedback preference questionnaire, The Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale and follow-up semi-structured interviews	metalinguistic feedback with explanations, unfocused feedback on grammar errors.

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