

# Typological Description of Written Formative Feedback on Student Writing in an EFL Context

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## Abstract

This study is a typological description of written formative feedback in an EFL context in Iran. Twenty M.A. students of TEFL participated in the study. They were required to summarize a scholarly article in each session on which the instructor would provide written corrective feedback (CF). Written formative comments were extracted, coded, and categorized into various types, such as asking for and giving information interrogatively or as a statement, making a request interrogatively, imperatively or as a statement, making positive comments or exclamation, and also making statements or comments on grammar and mechanics. Written formative comments were also analyzed with regard to the use of hedges and text-specific comments. Furthermore, we introduce a new category into the feedback types: *hidden or covert feedback*. Results are expected to raise the awareness of writing practitioners regarding their own practice in an EFL context.

**Keywords:** Written Corrective Feedback (CF); Feedback Typology; EFL Context; Writing Practitioners

## 1. Introduction

As is the case with many terms in specific fields of study, the heading of feedback encompasses a range of definitions and functions under itself, and the identification with each definition necessitates a differentiation of the position in which we situate ourselves. In second language acquisition (SLA), the definition of this term is channeled into a learning paradigm in which the problem of definition still lingers unless the position is narrowed down. Lyster and Ranta (1997) accentuated this multiple definitions problem by mentioning various meanings and understandings of the term *feedback* operationalized by specialists in different disciplines. According to them, linguists dub this term *negative evidence*, whereas from discourse analysts' point of view feedback is called *repair*; psychologists name it *negative feedback*, and yet SLA studies use the term *focus on form* to refer to feedback. Also, second language (L2) teachers call it *corrective feedback (CF)*.

These multiple definitions provided the impetus for the current and majority of studies conducted in the area of L2 writing to opt for CF and its derivatives, such as written CF and peer feedback. The corrective essence of feedback, implicit or explicit, reminds one of the feedback employed in

communication situations, with the difference that, here, we deal with written communication between the writer and reader. In a definition, Shute (2008) defined feedback as “information communicated to a learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behavior for the purpose of improving learning” (p. 154). In another situated definition of feedback in writing domain, Keh (1990, as cited in Muncie, 2000) referred to feedback as “what pushes the writer through the various drafts and on to the eventual end-product” (p. 47). In learning situations, feedback is aimed to enhance language learning in which it is employed to equip learners with the ability to approximate and reach the hoped-for performance (Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

A change in orientation toward L2 writing and feedback happened during the 1970s and 1980s from a product to a process-based orientation. The unremitting dissatisfaction voiced by both teachers and students about the product-based approach to L2 writing in which the focus was mostly directed at grammatical and organizational areas, and also the advent of communicative language teaching with a focus on meaning, paved the way for a more process-based approach to L2 writing wherein writing was considered as “nonlinear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate reason” (Zamel, 1983, as cited in Silva, 1990, p. 15). Consequently, the content and the development of ideas were granted higher priority (Silva, 1990). This change of orientation had some manifestations in writing instruction, the most researched of which was the development of EAP. In this kind of pedagogy, writing in L2 was the medium of instruction to help nurture ideas with primary focus on content and communication, driving L2 writing practitioners to intervene in the process, guide and scaffold students so as to critically materialize their potentiality.

The other manifestation of process-based approach to ESL writing was the introduction of peer review and revision in ESL writing classrooms (Kumari Dheram, 1995; Sengupta, 1998; Zhang, 1995). Kumari Dheram indicated that students, in their way to decentralizing the process of learning and moving away from too much dependence on the teacher as the sole source of knowledge, considered peer feedback on content beneficial, which would also make constantly bear the audience in their mind while composing a text. Sengupta’s (1998) research oriented toward the other side of the coin. In this study, the researcher trained the participants to review and respond to their peers’ writings. The researcher, then, interviewed them to highlight their reactions and opinions to this sort of feedback provision. The overwhelming majority of the participants gave a more significant role to the teacher feedback than to peer feedback and mentioned the teacher as the sole dependent point of reference when considering revision process.

In the study conducted by Zhang (1995), though the students preferred peer feedback and peer correction to self-correction, they still preferred a more traditional approach to feedback provision and considered the teacher as the only authority. Zhang stated that these results question the beneficial nature and affective advantage of peer revision because the students had a more robust inclination toward teacher feedback than to peer feedback.

## **2. Literature Review**

There is a bulk of research investigating various aspects of feedback in different educational contexts such as research conducted in academic literacy domains (Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Horowitz, 1986; Johns, 1986; Santos, 1988; Vann, Meyer & Lorenz, 1984) and research on teachers and students' preferences and reactions to feedback (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1994; Enginarlar, 1993; Ferris, 1995; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Hyland, 1998; Lee, 2008; Montgomery & Baker, 2007; Radecki & Swales, 1988; Zamel, 1985).

Caffarella and Barnett (2000) implemented the scholarly writing project with the aim of exploring the perceptions of doctoral students about different processes of the project. They collected data from 45 doctoral students who had enrolled in the project. Employing interview and constant comparative data analysis before, during, and after the implementation of the project significantly brought forth the emotional state of the participants as the common theme regarding receiving and providing feedback. Although the emotionally loaded words of the participants dissipated over time, they stated that this emotional reactions, which were overwhelmingly negative, still lingered as a result of lack of confidence and credibility that the participants observed in themselves.

Santo (1988) investigated the reactions and perceptions of 178 professors to students' writings. From among these instructors, 96 professors were in the humanities and 82 were in the physical sciences. The researcher concluded that two factors of age and academic discipline were determining in the instructors' reactions to students' errors in their writing in academic settings. In the study, older professors were less irritated than younger professors by students' errors. Regarding principle-specific reactions, professors in the humanities were less strict in their judgment than instructors in the physical sciences.

In the same vein, Cohen and Cavalcanti (1994) made an effort to dig deep into the students' and teachers' perceptions and preferences regarding feedback. The researchers selected three groups of Brazilian students enrolled in three writing courses. The focus of one group was L1 writing process and the other two groups on L2 writing. The analysis of the results indicated that there was a misfit between the kind of feedback the teachers claimed they provided to the students and the actual

feedback received by the students. Also, the teachers expressed that there were situations in which they had to provide some specific feedback but they did not deliver it due to the proficiency level of the students. Similarly, Montgomery and Baker (2007), trying to delve into the teachers and students' perceptions regarding written CF, indicated that there was a mismatch between the kinds of feedback the teacher believed he was providing and the actual provision of feedback. In this study, the teacher provided feedback more on formal aspects of writing than on content and organization, in an attempt to meet the needs and expectations of the students who considered the former to be critical to their writing improvement.

Lee (2008) investigated students' perceptions about written CF. The researcher indicated that both weak and competent students considered written CF as desirable, with more competent students favoring more feedback types on grammar than less competent students. Lee highlighted the vague nature of some of the written comments in which the students allocated more time to understand or, when not fully understood, skipped them completely. The role of individual differences in perceiving feedback was also emphasized in the study conducted by Hyland (1998). The research highlighted several issues, the most important of which is the individual differences and preferences that the students showed while receiving feedback. Each student tended to be more open to one type of feedback than another. Some students considered the feedback on language and formal features more helpful, whereas some chose to receive feedback mostly on content. Some of the students deemed praise and not negative feedback more conclusive to their writing development. The results highlighted the need for a more teacher-student dialogue in writing classes to communicate mutual preferences for providing and receiving feedback. Also, Hyland stated that if feedback was provided incorrectly, it could lead to avoidance on the part of students in that they would not only ignore the feedback, but they would also steer clear of the parts on which feedback was given in their subsequent writings.

In spite of the studies investigating teachers' and students' belief in the (in)effectiveness of written CF (Ashwell, 2000; Chandler, 2003; Ferris & Roberts, 2001), some researchers have voiced their concern with regard to these findings (Ferris, 1999; Truscott, 1996, 2007; Truscott & Hsu, 2008). This caveat was given a robust influence by the study conducted by Truscott (1996). Truscott strongly rejected the effectiveness of all forms of CF provided on grammar and considered them harmful to the process of L2 writing development. He indicated that students who were not corrected in their writing developed a more positive attitudes toward writing and naturally tended to write more. He also mentioned some research (Fazio, 2001; Polio, Fleck, & Leder, 1998; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986) in which there was evidence of ineffective nature of CF. In the study conducted by Fazio (2001),

three types of feedback were provided on both L1 and L2 students during four months. The researcher concluded that after these four months there was not a meaningful difference in the writing ability of students receiving the three types of feedback. Likewise, Polio et al. (1998) concluded that in their study the experiment group receiving CF performed no better than the control group that received no feedback. Truscott (1996) also criticized other research supporting CF by highlighting their lack of a control group or flawed methodology and research design.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

Few studies have tried to propose a typological descriptions of written CF (Ellis, 2009; Ferris, 1997; Ferris, Pezone, Tade, & Tinti, 1997; Kobayashi, 1991; Robb et al., 1986). Ellis (2009), in a typological description of written CF, delineated six types of written CF with several subcategories: direct CF, indirect CF, metalinguistic CF, the focus of the feedback, electronic feedback, and reformulation. The first one is direct CF, in which students are provided the correct forms. The second type of feedback is indirect CF, categorized into indication of error accompanied by the location of the error, and indication of error in the margin with no specified place of the committed error. The third type of feedback is metalinguistic CF, in which the teacher provides some explanation pertinent to the source of the error; this type of feedback is also categorized into the use of error code alone, and error code with grammatical explanation. The fourth type of feedback is divided into unfocused and focused CF, in which focused CF is intensive and unfocused CF is extensive. In the fifth type of feedback, electronic CF, the teacher indicates errors and provides a database containing correct usages of identified errors. The last type of feedback is reformulation, in which the words of students is rewritten by a native speaker without changing the content of the text, in order to make it as native-like as possible.

In another typological descriptions of written CF, Kobayashi (1991) classified teachers' written CF into evaluative and corrective. In evaluative feedback, teachers' subjective reactions to students' writing are characterized, whereas CF deals with how the teacher corrects the writing of students. In his study, Kobayashi tried to compare and contrast these two types of written CF provided by both native and nonnative teachers. He indicated that the native teachers were more positive with regard to the content of writing and also more concerned with the students' grammaticality, hence correcting more errors than did their nonnative counterparts.

Another study which was an attempt to provide a typological descriptions of written CF is that conducted by Robb et al. (1986). In this study, written CF was categorized into correction, coded, uncoded, and marginal, each with different

location and content of error; that is, their focus was on feedback on content vs. feedback on form. In this study, the students were required to write five narrative test compositions at equal intervals during the academic year. These five compositions were analyzed and graded by means of 1 subjective and 18 objective measures of ability. The researchers concluded that “highly detailed feedback on sentence-level mechanics may not be worth the instructors’ time and effort” (p. 91).

Another typological description of written CF, which was adopted in the present study as the theoretical framework, was conducted by Ferris et al. (1997). In this study, the researchers aimed at the specification of pragmatic goals and linguistic forms of written CF provided on students’ writings. Regarding the pragmatic and intent of written CF, they categorized feedback into asking for information, making suggestion or request, and giving information. However, in a later work, Ferris (1997) extended the model to include other types of written CF such as making positive comments and providing grammar and mechanics comments. In this model, linguistic features consist of syntactic form, presence or absence of hedges, and text-specific and generic comments.

These typological descriptions indicate different orientations on the part of writing practitioners in the use of various types of written CF. As mentioned before, native teachers that participated in Kobayashi’s (1991) study gave more importance to mechanics and grammar in writing and reacted more positively to content. Likewise, Ferris (1997) reported that end comments on grammar and marginal comments requesting information led to more substantive changes in revision drafts. In the study by Robb et al. (1986), the effectiveness of this focus was called under question, stating that the time and effort exerted by teachers to direct students’ attention to grammar and mechanics may not always be beneficial. The differential treatment of written CF by writing practitioners and the accompanying taxonomies put forward in distinctive contexts provided us with the motive to conduct present research as part of a larger project on written CF. Given the few studies conducted in the area, the need for more research to analytically describe and characterize written CF provided on students’ writings in a foreign context such as Iran is warranted.

## **4. Methodology**

### ***4.1 Participants***

The participants were 20 M.A. students of TEFL (males = 3, females = 17). They were attending two regular courses of advance writing held weekly in the Faculty of Humanities at a university located in western Iran. The participants were in their third and second semesters, and they were all teaching at private language institutes. They consented informally to take part in the study. The instructors of the courses were two associate professors with more than 11 years of experience in teaching various linguistics and applied linguistics courses.

### ***4.2 Procedure***

The participants were required to summarize a scholarly paper in each session. They provided their summaries to the instructors who would comment on their summaries and deliver them back to the participants in the subsequent session. The participants were not required to revise the same texts; instead, they were expected to incorporate the received written CF into new texts in their subsequent writings. This cyclic process of writing and receiving written CF lasted about fourteen weeks, and the researchers, in each session, would request the participants to provide them with the copies of their summaries on which they had received written CF. From among the 20 participants, the researchers were able to collect the copies of 16 students because some had decided not to give out their received comments in later stages of the research and some had left the university after finishing their required modules. At the end of the course, the researchers managed to collect 140 summaries of minimum 1 and maximum 3 pages on which the instructors had provided written CF.

Following the taxonomy suggested by Ferris et al. (1997), we tried to codify and categorize the collected written comments from the participants' summaries. Although the instructors had indicated and corrected the errors, we did not take account of them, except in situations when the indicated errors were accompanied by written comments. The taxonomy functioned deductively (Cohen et al., 2007) in the codification process. However, in order to accommodate any new category, the taxonomy would be revised in an inductive manner (Cohen et al., 2007). Following this typology, we determined and divided the length of the comments into short (1-5 words), average (6-15 words), long (16-25 words), and very long (26 or more words) comments. Then, we divided the type of the comments into the suggested categories: asking for information/question, making a request/question, making a request/statement, making a request/imperative, giving information/question, giving information/statement, making a positive comment/statement or exclamation, making a grammar/mechanics comment/question, statement, or imperative. We also specified and classified

comments consisting of hedging into three types: lexical, syntactic, and positive softeners. In the last categorization, the written comments were specified as text-specific and general comments, with the latter having the potential to be written on any paper (Ferris, 1997), such as the written CF *nice introduction*. In order to ensure interrater reliability, another experienced rater codified 20% of the extracted comments. The point of difference was almost in 10% of the comments which were removed from the final categorization.

## 5. Results

In this section, we first dwell upon the frequencies and percentages of categories of written CF, as shown in Table 1. Having done this, we will try to expound upon the interesting practice of covert feedback:

Table 1. *Characteristics of Teacher Commentary*

Characteristics	Marginal Comments		End Comments	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
<b>Length</b>				
Short	213	81	70	47
Average	41	16	52	35
Long	5	2	15	10
Very long	3	1	12	8
<b>Type</b>				
Ask for information/question	75	29	20	13
Make a request/question	2	1	2	1
Make a request/statement	24	9	3	2
Make a request/imperative	48	18	15	11
Give information/question	3	1	2	1
Give information/statement	19	7	25	17
Make a positive comment /statement or exclamation	13	5	74	50
Make a grammar/mechanics comment/question, statement, or imperative	78	30	8	5
<b>Use of Hedges</b>				
No	240	92	97	65
Yes	22	8	52	35
<b>Text-Specific Comments</b>				
No	86	33	24	16
Yes	176	67	125	84
Total Comments	262		149	

### 5.1 Length of Comments

In the present study, the overwhelming majority of the written comments were short. From among the marginal comments, 81% were short, 16% average, and



5% and 3% were rated long and very long, respectively. Also, the end written comments were rated as average, long, and very long. From among these comments, 47% were short, 35% average, and 10% and 8% long and very long, respectively.

Note some examples of end comments:

- C # 1: *I didn't read this summary to the end because it seems you have copied whole sentences or part of them. This could be considered as plagiarism.*
- C # 2: *You need to learn where to use the right punctuation mark. Also when you're reporting previous research, use the simple past tense.*
- C # 3: *Good improvement.*
- C # 4: *Good summary.*

Also, note some examples of marginal short comments which were formulated interrogatively and imperatively:

- C # 5: *Explain with examples.*
- C # 6: *Do you mean 17 is not enough? Why?*
- C # 7: *Unpack the terminology.*

## **5.2 Type of Comments**

### **5.2.1 Asking for information/question**

Directive comments, mainly used to ask for information in a question form, consisted of 29% of the marginal comments and 13% of the end comments. According to Ferris et al. (1997), asking for information can be formulated in three types. The first one is when the teacher asks for information that is unknown to him or her such as:

- C # 8: *How were data collected and analyzed?*
- C # 9: *How? Is it your own belief or you are citing from the paper?*

The second one is when the teacher asks the student to provide information that is known to the teacher. Particularly, asking for information that has been previously explained in class and that students are required to remember and learn them such as:

- C # 10: *Can you link actions, settings, and meanings?*
- C # 11: *Is there any theoretical framework for the study?*

The third one is a rhetorical question which is supposed to instigate more thought in students. Such questions could be both known and unknown to the teacher, for example:

- C # 12: *Are you writing about the context of our country?*

### **5.2.2 Making a request-question, statement, imperative**

The second type of written CF is to make a request or suggestion which could be a question (C # 13), statement (C # 14), or could be formulated imperatively (C # 5). For example:

- C # 13: *How can this work be extended to literary works?*
- C # 14: *You need to explain your criteria for labeling these categories.*
- C # 15: *Don't start your paragraph with direct quotation-italicize book titles.*

In the present study, making a request interrogatively accounted for less than 1% of the marginal and end comment. With regard to the statement requests, 9% of the marginal and 2% of the end comments contained this type of feedback. Also, 18% of the marginal and 11% of the end comments were formulated imperatively.

### **5.2.3 Giving information-question, statement**

This type of feedback can be either a question or a statement. For instance:

- C # 16: *How does this relate? Is this a paragraph?*

This question type of feedback accounted for about 1% of the marginal and end comments. However, in the present study, comments giving information were mostly formulated as statement. Seven per cent of the marginal comments and 17% of the end comments were rated as giving information in statement form, such as:

- C # 17: *You write topic sentences, but you fail to develop them by supporting sentences.*

### **5.2.4 Making positive comment-statement, exclamation**

In the current research, 5% of the marginal comments and 50% of the end comments were categorized as being positive. For example:

- C # 18: *This was a good summary.*
- C # 19: *Good analogy.*
- C # 20: *Very good, but you need to cite your sources.*

### **5.2.5 Making a grammar/mechanics comment-question, statement, imperative**

The frequencies of these comments are 30% and 5% for the marginal and end comments, respectively. Following are some examples of grammar and mechanics comments:

- C # 21: *Use APA style to cite your sources.*
- C # 22: *Page number is required for direct quotation.*

### **5.3 Use of Hedges**

In the current study, 8% of the instructors' marginal comments and 35% of their end comments contained different kinds of hedges, which were more placed on the end of papers. Followings are some examples:

- C # 23 (lexical): *Please use APA style.*
- C # 24 (syntactic): *Could you elaborate on differences and similarities between home and school literacies?*
- C # 25 (positive softener): *Good writing, but it does not have an ending or conclusion.*

### **5.4 Text-Specific Comments**

With regard to these comments, 67% of the marginal and 84% of the end comments were text-specific. Followings are some examples of text-specific and generic comments. According to Ferris (1997), generic comments could be written on any paper:

- C # 26 (generic): *Good structure.*
- C # 27 (text-specific): *It seems that your experience of home literacy was more tuned into your needs and expectations*

### **5.5 Covert Feedback**

Our constant interactions with the written formative comments provided on the participants' summaries revealed an interesting point. Some of the summaries did not have any written CF. We decided to contact the related participants to interview them so as to dig into the issue. It was revealed that the instructors had considered the summaries as plagiarism and decided not to provide any comments on them. This practice of providing no feedback, as highlighted by the participants, had several consequences: reflection, demotivation, and fossilization.

### 5.5.1 Reflection

The first function of the covert feedback, which is characterized by providing no feedback at all in specific situations, is reflection. In this function, students are covertly required to reflect upon receiving no feedback in order to determine the reasons behind such practice. In this study, the only situation in which the instructors provided no written comments on the participants' writings was related to plagiarism. That is, the instructors had considered some of the participants' summaries to be plagiarized and someone else's words. This no-feedback practice would make one student not only to reflect upon and uncover the reasons for receiving no feedback, but also to look for ways to address such hidden feedback:

- *I noticed that . . . his [the instructor's] no feedback practice was actually a feedback telling me indirectly that you have done plagiarism . . . he thought I had committed plagiarism . . . He asked me whether they are my own words . . . I said no . . . it was my own fault . . . I didn't know it at first . . . because it was for my proposal . . . and I didn't have enough time, too.*

### 5.5.2 Demotivation

The second impact of providing no written comments on students' summaries or covert feedback was demotivation. The participants in the interviews stated that receiving no feedback would demotivate them in undertaking subsequent writings. Following excerpts show this issue:

- *[Receiving no feedback] made me very upset . . . and I recall that in that session a classmate of mine had a lecture and I didn't understand a word of his lecture . . . because I had received no feedback . . . although I knew the reason.*
- *Receiving no feedback means that students' work is worthless . . . but when you receive feedback . . . it means the instructor has valued your job . . . and you try to do better in your later writing.*
- *When you write something . . . you aim at improving your writing [by receiving feedback] . . . to improve . . . to progress in your subsequent writings.*

### 5.5.3 Fossilization

In the same vein, receiving no feedback had another consequence: fossilization. Fossilization is defined as "the relatively permanent incorporation of incorrect linguistic forms into a person's second language competence" (Brown, 2007, p. 270). Receiving no feedback, besides demotivating students, cajoles them

into believing that there is nothing wrong in their writings and, consequently, the errors will go unnoticed. The following excerpts highlight this issue:

- *When there is no feedback, you never know your errors . . . you never know which part of your writing is good to repeat it for the next time.*
- *The more feedback you receive, the more you'll become aware of your weaknesses, hence more progress.*
- *Feedback highlights our strong and weak points . . . we know what's wrong with our writing and try to handle it, and as a result to improve it.*

## **6. Discussion and Conclusion**

In the present study, we employed the typological description of written CF suggested by Ferris et al. (1997), in an inductive manner, to describe and codify written CF provided on the participants' writings. This taxonomy could sufficiently inform and classify the collected comments due to its deemed relative thoroughness by the researchers, in which written comments were linguistically and pragmatically accounted for to distinctively appreciate instructors' written CF.

The results of the study indicated the significance of end comments as being holistic and summative in nature because the instructors had more space in which they could summarize and give holistically oriented feedback with regard to content and organization of the papers. However, the number of short comments at the end of papers could be attributed to the point that the majority of the short end comments were the instructors' positive statements or exclamations. The instructors provided more positive comments on the participants' writings than did the teacher in the study by Ferris (1997). Considering the general motivating impact of positive statements, we can say such comments could neutralize the possible negative effects of imperative comments.

With regard to marginal comments, we can argue that their precedence over end comments could be related to the specificity of error correction and indication to direct the attention of the students to the pattern of errors, which were syntactically more in question and imperative forms. The difference between the percentages of the end and marginal comments underscore the specificity of the marginal comments, which the instructors mainly utilized to "get the hearer to do something," as it is the case with the function of directive speech acts based on Searle's (1976, as cited in Ferris et al., 1997) taxonomy of speech acts. On the other hand, the written comments formulated interrogatively is bound to inspire students to ponder more over various options and ideas (Stern & Solomon, 2006).

We can argue that the imperative formulation of 29% of all the marginal and end comments implied the more dominant and omniscient role devolved upon

instructors, who are expected to shoulder the burden of transferring the required body of knowledge to the students in the context of Iran. However, as explained in the Results section, some of the written comments provided by the instructors were less direct and imperative. According to Ferris et al. (1997), teachers who provide written CF in which they give information, they normally do not tell directly and explicitly to the students what to undertake, rather they imply that students should act upon the information provided in the feedback, that is “the illocution (intended effect) is still directive” (p. 165). In such indirect written comments, “the teacher can be seen as an interested and informed reader, responding actively to the writer and the text” (p. 165).

Compared to the study by Ferris (1997), our instructors provided more comments on grammar and mechanics, 35% altogether, than did the teacher in the study by Ferris, overall 18%. This could highlight several issues. For instance, the precedence of grammar and mechanics over content, the importance attached to the role of the students’ L1 in an L2 context, and that because the students should write in an L2, they need to develop proficiency in grammar and mechanics as the medium of communicating content.

According to Ferris et al. (1997), teachers should “provide text-specific commentary rather than vague generalizations which demonstrate little teacher involvement with the individual student or his or her paper” (p. 167). Lack of text-specific or even providing no feedback at all demotivates students, and impacts negatively on their subsequent writings. We argue that CF should be considered as a reassuring impetus for students to help them maintain the process of writing over time and invest more time and effort into the writing skill because it is argued that feedback, particularly written formative CF, can function as a tool for learning informally (Mirzaee & Hasrati, 2014).

Lack of any systematic and specific typological description of written CF, particularly in Iran as an EFL context, warranted the present study as part of a larger scale project on written CF. The results of this study indicated how writing practitioners in an EFL context formulate their written comments on the students’ writings in terms of the length and types of comments. Such understanding, we hope, could raise writing practitioners’ awareness with regard to their own practice of CF provision. Writing practitioners can employ CF as a hidden syllabus in which they would familiarize students with “disciplinary epistemological orientations and world views” (Mirzaee & Hasrati, 2014, p. 555). However, the results are limited and limiting in the sense that it would be more illuminating if they were accompanied with an analysis of the effects of each CF type on subsequent revision of the same text or a different text. Likewise, an investigation into instructors’

beliefs regarding factors influencing the way they would provide written CF will expand our understanding of the issue.

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