International Journal of English Studies

IJES

UNIVERSITY OF MURCIA www.um.es/ijes

Written Corrective Feedback: Practitioners' Perspectives

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Received: 19 July 2010 / Accepted: 21 October 2010

ABSTRACT
Considerable attention has been given to written corrective feedback (WCF) in second language writing (L2) over the past several decades. One of the central questions has focused on the appropriateness of its use in L2 writing. In these academic discussions, scholars frequently describe how WCF is utilized in the classroom. However, many of these claims of teacher practice have no research base, since few studies have actually asked teachers what place WCF has in their writing classroom (Ferris, et al., in press/2011a; Ferris, et al., in press/2011b; Hyland, 2003; Lee, 2004). This paucity of data from teachers about their WCF practices is problematic. Understanding teacher perspectives on corrective feedback is integral to our understanding the place of WCF in L2 writing pedagogy. Accordingly, this article reports on a study that asks two fundamental research questions: (a) To what extent do current L2 writing teachers provide WCF? and (b) What determines whether or not practitioners choose to provide WCF? These questions were answered by means of an international survey completed by 1,053 L2 writing practitioners in 69 different countries. Results suggest that WCF is commonly practiced in L2 pedagogy by experienced and well-educated L2 practitioners for sound pedagogical reasons.

KEY WORDS:
error correction, L2 writing, written corrective feedback,

RESUMEN
Durante las últimas décadas se ha prestado bastante atención a la pertinencia del empleo de feedback correctivo (FC) sobre los textos producidos por los alumnos en una segunda lengua. Aunque hay bastantes descripciones sobre cómo se emplea el FC en el aula, muchas de las afirmaciones sobre la práctica docente no tienen una base científica ya que son pocos los estudios en los que se ha preguntado directamente a los profesores el lugar que el FC ocupa en sus clases (Ferris, et al., in press/2011a; Ferris, et al., in press/2011b; Hyland, 2003; Lee, 2004). Esta escasez de datos es problemática ya que las percepciones de los profesores sobre el del FC son fundamentales a la hora de entender su puesta en práctica. Teniendo todo ello en cuenta, este artículo presenta un estudio que plantea dos preguntas de investigación fundamentales: (a) ¿En qué medida proporcionan FC los profesores de escritura en L2? y (b) ¿Cuáles son los factores que determinan ese uso o falta de uso? Por medio de una encuesta internacional, 1053 profesores de escritura en L2 en 69 países diferentes contestaron a estas preguntas. Los resultados indican que el FC es una práctica pedagógica común en L2 que se lleva a cabo por docentes experimentados y bien formados teniendo en cuenta sólidos motivos pedagógicos.

PALABRAS CLAVE:
Corrección de errores, escritura en segundas lenguas, feedback de corrección escrita

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ISSN: 1578-7044

1. INTRODUCTION

Corrective feedback is a long-standing educational practice that can arguably be linked to almost everything we learn (Evans, Hartshorn, McCollum, & Wolfersberger, 2010; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). According to Russell and Spada (2006), in language learning "the term *corrective feedback* [refers] to any feedback provided to a learner, from any source, that contains evidence of learner error of language form" (p. 134). The value of such feedback in second language (L2) writing has been debated in the literature for several decades. Theorists have attempted to answer many questions related to written corrective feedback (WCF) in L2 writing. For instance: Is it helpful or harmful to students? (Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 2007; Truscott, 1996, 2007; Zamel 1985); Should it be given to students at all proficiency levels, or only at beginning levels? (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009a; Kepner, 1991); Should WCF be given to students explicitly or implicitly? (Bitchener, Cameron, & Young, 2005; Hyland & Hyland, 2002; Lalande, 1984); Should it be given directly or indirectly? (Ferris, 1997, 2001, 2006; Ferris, & Roberts, 2001; Ellis, 1998; Lee, 2004; Sheen, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009); Should all written errors be marked or only select errors? (Bitchener et al., 2005; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008; Lee, 1997, 2004; Sheen, 2007); Should error correction be provided simply because students want or expect it? (Lee, 2004; Leki, 1991).

While the literature on the use of WCF in L2 writing is extensive (e.g. Bitchener, 2008, Ferris, 2003; Storch, 2010), one important question remains unanswered: What are the current WCF beliefs, theories, and practices espoused by writing teachers in the classroom? Unfortunately, practitioner perspectives have been fundamentally absent in the published literature.

Kumaravadivelu (1994) argued that in a "postmethod condition" it is impossible for any one theory or stance on language teaching –indeed, even theories on the pedagogical role of WCF– to account for everything language teachers encounter in their classrooms day to day (p. 30). They must be free to make autonomous choices and develop, in essence, their own approach to language teaching, or what Kumaravadivelu refers to as the development of their own "principled pragmatism" (p. 30). This pragmatism is informed by teachers' own learning experiences, the influences of their professional training, their own observations of what works and what does not work for their students, and even their own intuition.

Kumaravadivelu is not alone in his support of teacher autonomy. Richards (1998) notes that the development of teaching skills should not be seen as "the mastery of general principles and theories that have been determined by others," but rather as "the acquisition of teaching expertise [in a] process that involves the teacher in actively constructing a personal and workable theory of teaching (p. 65). Similarly, Nation and Macalister (2010) posit that what teachers do in their classrooms will "be determined by what they believe," and that "the old-fashioned notion that a teacher's role is to transmit knowledge from the curriculum to the

learners has been replaced by recognition that teachers have complex mental lives that determine what and how teachers teach" (p. 176). Even Truscott (1999), who has published extensively against the use of WCF[1] in the classroom, has acknowledged that "teachers must constantly make decisions about what to do –and what not to do– in their classes." He further notes that "these decisions are necessarily made under conditions of uncertainty: research never puts an end to doubt. But the choices still must be made, and made constantly" (p. 121). It is our position that writing teachers' practices must be included in the WCF discussion. While the study of student responses to feedback will and should influence what teachers do in their classrooms, teachers' personal choices based on experience and insight are important, indeed integral, to understanding the role of WCF in L2 writing.

1.1. Background literature

The published research relative to the role of WCF in the L2 classroom is substantial and growing. It is, however, insufficient if used as the sole source to inform the practice of WCF in language learning. The literature on WCF demonstrates inconsistencies in findings and pedagogical advice. For instance, Zamel (1985) noted that as early as 1980, Hendrickson observed that "current research tells us very little about ESL teachers' responses to student writing. We know that teachers respond imprecisely and inconsistently to errors" (p. 84). Yet, little progress in this area is evidenced. As Ferris (2004) states, even after decades of research, publication, and debate on the matter, "we are virtually at Square One, as the existing research base is incomplete and inconsistent, and it would certainly be premature to formulate any conclusions about this topic" (p. 49).

1.2. Inconsistent and contradictory opinions about WCF

Despite over two decades of research and writing, inconsistencies in the research still make it unclear what role WCF should play in the language classroom. Some have stepped forward in strong support of WCF (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener et al., 2005; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009a, 2009b; Chandler, 2003; Ellis, Erlam, & Loewen, 2006; Evans et al., 2010; Ferris, 1997; Ferris & Roberts, 2001, 2004; Hartshorn et al., 2010; Lalande, 1984; Polio & Sachs, 2007; Sheen, 2007). Others have argued against it for various reasons (Kepner, 1991; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986; Semke, 1984; Truscott, 1996, 1999, 2007; Zamel, 1985). Some researchers have neither supported nor opposed WCF, but have demanded instead careful reanalysis of the published studies, arguing that the variations and inconsistencies in them negate the possibility of reaching any real conclusions on the matter (Bruton, 2009; Ferris, 2004; Guénette, 2007; Hyland & Hyland, 2002; Russell & Spada, 2006).

1.3. Cited references for the teachers' voice

When focusing specifically on the practices and beliefs of practitioners concerning WCF, the published findings are inconsistent and, in some cases, as contradictory as the findings about WCF generally. A review of L2-related literature (see Appendix A) shows that very few studies provide much insight into what teachers actually say about their WCF practices. Furthermore, the findings that are presented have vast discrepancies. For example, some studies indicate that teachers are overly concerned about grammar (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Hyland & Hyland, 2002; Robb et al., 1986; Zamel, 1985), while another study implies that they are not (Sheen, 2007). Some have proposed that teachers believe the WCF they give is effective (Bitchener, 2008; Kepner, 1991; Zamel, 1985), while another states that teachers are doubtful of such (Hyland, F., 1998). Some studies suggest that teachers are essentially unsure about the worth of their feedback (Guénette, 2007; Hyland & Hyland, 2002; Kepner, 1991; Lee, 2004; Truscott, 1996) and other studies have implied that teachers are inconsistent and arbitrary with their comments (Cohen & Robbins, 1976; Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Lee, 2004; Zamel,1985).

Furthermore, some studies suggest that teachers are not capable of giving correct grammatical feedback (Lee, 2004; Truscott, 1996), yet another found that they are extremely accurate (Ferris, 2006). Some theorists have argued that teachers take into account the needs and desires of their students when considering whether and how to give WCF (Ferris, 2006; Ferris, Pezone, Tade, & Tinti,1997; Goldstein & Conrad, 1990; Hyland, F., 1998; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Lee, 2004), while others have claimed that teachers are so insensitive to student needs that students are incapable of making sense of the feedback given them (Cohen & Robbins, 1976; Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Lee, 1997, 2004; Truscott, 1996). Two things that seem clear about the reports on the voice of practitioners in the WCF literature are that the accounts are conflicting and are certainly incomplete.

1.4. Methods used to report the practitioners' voices

In order to understand the conclusions reported regarding teacher practices, we must first understand how the underlying data were obtained. Most of the evidence cited in the literature about teachers comes from informal observations. Surprisingly few statements about the beliefs and practices of teachers come from actually asking the teachers themselves. Of the statements that do, even fewer are from studies published with the specific intent to learn about WCF by questioning teachers.

Within the articles analyzed, not all of the stated opinions of ESL teachers were documented with specific studies. Indeed, many of the articles contain broad, unsupported

statements about the practices of teachers, presumably based solely on the intuition of the authors. Truscott (1996) serves as an example of such claims. He notes that

In L2 writing courses, grammar correction is something of an institution. Nearly all L2 writing teachers do it in one form or another, nearly everyone who writes on the subject recommends it in one form or another. Teachers and researchers hold a widespread, deeply entrenched belief that grammar correction should, even must, be part of writing courses. (p. 327)

Many similar comments can be found in L2 writing literature; they are at best unsubstantiated assumptions of the theorists (e.g., Bitchener, 2008; Ferris, 2004; Guénette, 2007; Hyland & Hyland, 2002; Kepner, 1991; Sheen, 2007).

The few studies that include direct teacher input are listed in Table 1. Of these only five studies focused specifically on asking teachers about their practices and beliefs regarding WCF in L2 writing (Ferris, 2006; Ferris, et al., in press/2011a; Ferris, et al., in press/2011b; Hyland, 2003; Lee, 2004).

Author	**Year**	**Method of Study**
Horowitz, D.	1986	Essay on process writing
Roberts, M.	1995	Chapter in book intended for use in teacher training; does not principally consider the opinions of active teachers
James, C.	1998	Book intended for use in teacher training; does not principally consider the opinions of active teachers
Komura, K.	1999	Master's thesis with focus on assessing attitudes of students, not teachers
Rennie, C.	2000	Master's thesis with focus on assessing attitudes of students, not teachers
Ferris, D. R., Chaney, S. J., Komura, K., Roberts, B. J., & McKee, S.	2000	Unpublished colloquium presentation
Ferris, D. R., & Roberts, B.	2001	A study of students' ability to self-edit; study not focused on considering the voice of teachers
Ferris, D. R.	2002	Chapter in book intended for use in teacher training; does not principally consider the opinions of active teachers
Hyland, F.	2003	Analysis of teachers' beliefs and feedback using think-aloud protocols
Lee, I.	2004	A teacher survey with follow-up questionnaire administered to 206 teachers in Hong Kong
Ferris, D. R., & Hedgcock, J.	2005	Chapter in book intended for use in teacher training; does not principally consider the opinions of active teachers
Ferris, D. R.	2006	Interviews with teachers (3) to determine their strategies for providing feedback
Ferris, D. R.	2007	The voice of a teacher trainer on how to provide WCF
Ferris, D. R., Brown, J., & Liu, H., Arnaudo Stien, M. E.	In press /2011a	Survey (129) and interview (23) of college-level writing teachers. Focused on teachers' perspectives of written response practices
Ferris, D. R., Liu, H., & Rabie, B.	In press /2011b	Survey (129) and interview (23) of college-level writing teachers. Focused on teachers' perspectives of written response practices

Table 1. Studies which refer to analyses drawn from teachers

Of these five studies, two have limited sample sizes, but offer valuable insights nonetheless (Ferris, 2006; Hyland, 2003). In her investigation of the efficacy of error feedback, Ferris (2006) also considers the strategies teachers use to provide feedback. She does this by interviewing three L2 writing teachers. One of her conclusions from this research is the "significance of examining what teachers actually do when giving error feedback" (p. 98). Hyland (2003) also uses a case study approach by looking at the feedback given by two academic writing teachers to six students over a complete course. She found that, despite teachers' claims to be focused on genre issues and either process or whole writing, much of their feedback "focused on the formal aspects of the students' texts" (p. 222).

Lee (2004) investigates the error correction practices of 206 writing teachers in secondary classrooms in Hong Kong by means of a teacher survey, a follow-up interview, and a teacher error correction task in order to determine teachers' accuracy in error correction. Among her findings, Lee notes that both teachers and students "preferred comprehensive error feedback" and that the "teachers used a limited range of error feedback strategies" (p. 285). The two strategies used most often were direct error feedback and indirect coded feedback.

In the most recent study, aspects of which are presented in two separate publications, Ferris et al. (in press/2011a, in press/2011b) investigates via survey (n = 129) and interviews (n = 23) the training backgrounds, philosophies, and practices of college-level writing teachers with regard to providing response to L2 student writing. In the justification for their study (Ferris et al., 2011b), the authors note that previous research on teacher response to writing "has relied too heavily on either student reports or researchers' descriptions and judgments without adequately consulting teachers themselves as informants about what they do with feedback and why" (p. 4). Findings from this study suggest that teachers sincerely want their students' writing to "improve to its fullest potential" and they want the time and effort they spend on providing feedback "for student writers to be well spent" (p. 19).

A review of the literature leads to at least one relevant conclusion: While much is assumed about what teachers do regarding WCF, the extant research offers a limited view of what teachers do in actual practice according to teachers themselves. In terms of prescribing the use or avoidance of WCF and in describing the beliefs and practices of writing teachers regarding the same, the research leads to no clear conclusions; the literature base is simply insufficient.

2. THE STUDY

The essential absence of the practitioner's voice in the WCF literature must be considered problematic because it makes it fundamentally impossible to draw any conclusions from the published findings on this matter. In addition, even when theories of teaching are unified, no one theory of teaching, or view on a pedagogical technique, is sufficient for all that teachers

face in their classrooms (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). Furthermore, due to the contradictory nature of WCF research and the lack of teacher input, the argument for including and clarifying the teacher's voice, as this study attempts to do, is compelling.

2.1. Aims of the study

The study was designed to answer two related questions: (a) To what extent do current L2 writing teachers provide WCF? And (b) What determines whether or not practitioners choose to provide WCF?

2.2. Instrument

In order to clarify what L2 writing teachers are doing with WCF in their classes and why, we determined to seek input from a broad range of English language teachers by means of an online survey that could be distributed globally to L2 writing teachers.

With our research questions as guides, we constructed a survey consisting of 24 questions using Qualtrics survey software. Each item on the survey was designed to probe the research questions from various perspectives. The final survey consisted of four sections under the following headings (see Appendix B for the full survey): "Background information" (8 questions), "Do you error correct?" (4 questions), "How do you error correct?" (6 questions), and "Why do you or don't you error correct?" (6 questions).

Designing and refining the survey led to several strategic choices. If we wanted many voices, the survey could not be inordinately time-consuming for the participants. Asking too many questions would diminish return rates, and asking too few questions would limit the depth of collected data. In addition, while open-ended questions provide rich insights, they can discourage survey completion. Consequently, we had to find the appropriate number and type of questions. This balance was determined through the process of piloting the survey with writing teachers in our intensive English program and with colleagues in other programs. The survey was piloted on three separate occasions with a select group of writing teachers. In the first iteration, participants were asked to take the survey and then provide feedback on (a) how long the survey took to complete, (b) any questions that they did not understand, and (c) any questions that they thought should have been included. This process led to assorted revisions. Of significance, the number of open-ended questions was reduced to shorten the time required to complete the survey. The second draft of the survey was then sent to an additional group of colleagues for further modifications. Changes on this second version were generally minor. After these changes were made, the survey was administered to two colleagues who did think-aloud protocols while taking the survey. This also resulted in minor suggested changes. With all revisions completed, the survey was ready to be distributed to the full mailing list.

2.3. Contact lists

Several additional strategic decisions had to be made when selecting recipients for the survey, the most important of which was more a question of representation than of quantity. Since our intent was to gather data from as many qualified respondents as possible, no attempt was made to randomize recipients or limit distribution to particular subpopulations. In order to capture a broad sample of WCF practices and philosophies, the survey's reach needed to extend beyond personally known colleagues. This resulted in a compilation of a master mailing list from four sources: (a) known L2 writing scholars for whom we had email contacts, (b) personal professional contacts, (c) teachers or researchers whose contact information had been published by scholarly associations, and (d) names extracted from ESL/EFL program websites. From these sources we generated a master list of approximately 4,300 individuals to whom the survey link was sent.

Two additional sources of input were used to contact L2 writing teachers. First, a brief description of the study including the survey link was posted on multiple list servers associated with professionals involved in L2 writing. Second, we programmed several features into the survey software to increase participation. The first was a pass-along feature whereby each participant who completed the survey received a "Thank You" email (see Appendix C) that note included a request to forward the survey link, which was included in the message, to other colleagues. In addition, the survey software was programmed to send one reminder to any email address on the original list of 4,300 individuals from which no reply had been received.

Because of the composition and nature of these lists, it was impossible to determine survey response rates with any degree of accuracy. For instance, once the survey was initially sent, we quickly discovered that some professional association lists were likely outdated. We received approximately 500 invalid address notices within minutes of launching the survey. Despite these limitations, after being posted for less than two weeks, the survey link generated a total of 1,080 surveys, of which 1,053 provided data that could be analyzed. It should be noted that not all survey questions were completed by each respondent. However, the independent nature of each question allowed us to analyze data submitted for each completed question.

2.4. Participants

Demographic data generated in the survey gave us valuable insight into the characteristics and qualifications of those writing teachers who responded to the survey. The average respondent speaks English as a first language and has earned a master's degree in TESOL. In addition, the average respondent is currently teaching ESL in the United States to university

matriculated students, has been teaching ESL for nearly 17 years, and has been teaching L2 writing for almost 13 years. In total, responses to this survey represent many years of English language teaching experience in 69 different countries. In sum, the WCF philosophies reflected in the responses to the online survey come from educators who are well informed by both formal training and extensive experience in L2 writing (see Table 2).

Teacher attributes	**N**	**% of total**
Years Teaching ESL/EFL		
1-2	23	2
3-10	294	28
More than 10	719	70
Years teaching L2 writing		
1-2	75	7
3-10	423	42
More than 10	522	51
Education		
BA (or in progress)	68	7
MA (or in progress)	574	55
Doctorate (or in progress)	399	38
Native Language		
English	809	77
Other	244	23
Teaching Context		
In the U.S	642	63
Outside the U.S.	375	37
L2 Writing students*		
Primary school age	66	6
Secondary school age	125	12
Adult education	273	26
Intensive English program	406	39
Matriculated university students	508	48

Table 2. Participant profile selected attributes**.**

* Multiple responses possible

2.5. Analysis

Responses to all but 3 of the 24 survey questions were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS software. The results are primarily descriptive. The three open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively to identify patterns and common themes among the participants' responses. This qualitative analysis examined data according to participants' years of experience teaching L2 writing.

In order to make the analysis of the qualitative data as trustworthy as possible, the process of referential adequacy was employed (Eisner, 1975; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 1997; Tierney, 1992). This process involves identifying a portion of data to be archived but not analyzed. The researcher then conducts a data analysis on the remaining data to develop preliminary findings. Once the data are analyzed, the archived data are used to verify the findings (Eisner, 1975).

In this study, the process involved three steps. First, a researcher (R1) read responses to the question "I do/do not error correct because . . ." from all participants with 1–2, 11–14, and 25 or more years of teaching L2 writing experience (n = 429). These responses constituted 42% of the total data set[2]. In this process, R1 created categories for the responses, such as "Students need it," "It helps improve writing." or "Students expect it." In the second step, all three researchers reviewed and refined the categories. This was done by comparing the category descriptors to sample responses taken from the 429 responses. Finally, a second researcher (R2) read all 1,031 responses and assigned each response to a category. R2 found that the categories created in steps 1 and 2 adequately described the majority of all responses. An "other" category was included to account for the few (10%) responses that did not fall within the main categories. It should also be noted that often a response from a participant was assigned to multiple categories. For instance, one participant said, "[it] doesn't work, takes lots of time, is unpleasant, can be harmful." In this case 4 responses were recorded for one participant.

3. RESULTS

Given the extensive data collected in this study, only the most pervasive patterns in participant responses are presented. As noted, every effort has been made to accurately describe patterns reflected in the survey results.

3.1. Research question 1: Do L2 writing teachers correct errors?

In a word, yes; current teachers do correct errors. However, the purpose of our first research question was not only to identify how pervasive the practice of WCF is among current ESL/EFL writing teachers, but also to address the intricacies of the matter as well. In order to accomplish this, we asked five related questions: (1) "Typically, do you provide your writing students with at least some error correction?" (2) "Typically, I (do/do not) provide error correction to my students because . . . ," (3) "Considering all the writing your students submit, what percentage gets error corrected?" (4) "What percentage of your time is spent on feedback on the linguistic accuracy of your student writing?" and (5) "What percentage of your time is spent on feedback on the rhetorical features of your student writing?" The results of each question are discussed below. It should be again noted that because not all 1,053 participants answered all survey questions, each question has a different number of respondents.

At first glance, questions (1) and (2) may appear to be asking the same thing; they do not. Question one asked teachers if they typically provide "at least some" error correction,

whereas the second question asked if teachers "typically provide" error correction. The responses to both questions were overwhelmingly positive in favor of WCF. On the first question, 99% of all respondents (1,053) indicated that they do provide at least some error correction on student writing. Only 1% (10) said that they never provide any error correction.

Responses to question two were also predominantly positive in favor of WCF, with 92% of the respondents (945) indicating that error correction is typically part of what they do as L2 writing teachers. Only 8% of the respondents (86) indicated that they typically do not include error correction as part of their writing instruction.

Responses to the third question confirmed and illuminated the positive response given in the first two questions. On average, the 982 teachers who responded to question 3 reported providing some form of error correction on over 66% of the writing they receive from students. The 903 teachers who completed questions 4 and 5 indicated that, on average, over 44% of their time is spent providing feedback on linguistic accuracy, and 61% of their time[3] is spent providing feedback on content and rhetorical features of their students' writing.

3.2. Research question 2: What determines whether or not practitioners choose to provide WCF?

Understanding that current L2 writing teachers overwhelmingly do include written corrective feedback as part of their teaching is informative and important to know, especially in light of the dearth of data described earlier. However, an even more interesting question to ask is why they provide this feedback. In an effort to understand the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of this practice, five additional questions were asked in three different formats: (1) an open-ended sentence completion question: "I typically do/do not error correct because..."; (2) two Likert scale questions: "My writing students effectively apply the error correction I provide"; and "Generally, how effective is the practice of error correction on improving the overall accuracy of student writing?", and (3) two item-ranking questions: "What factors influence your error correction practices most?" and "What do your writing students struggle with the most?"

The open-ended question asking teachers to complete the sentence "I typically do/do not error correct because…" was extremely informative, and provided rich, qualitative data supporting teachers' reasons for their WCF practices. Because much of the debate on WCF in the literature focuses on the appropriateness of providing WCF, the results to this question are presented from contrasting perspectives. We do this by comparing the reasons why some few teachers (8%) choose not to provide WCF with the reasons that most teachers (92%) give for including WCF as part of their L2 writing teaching.

We begin with the reasons some practitioners give for *not* providing WCF. To put this in perspective, it may be useful first to remember that these responses represent only 8% of all the survey respondents. Also, we should note that there were no meaningful differences

between the background and experience of those indicating that they do correct errors and those indicating that they do not correct errors. For example, analysis of variance showed that no significant differences emerged based on level of education (p = .702, η^2 < .001), years of experience as an L2 writing teacher (p = .682, η^2 < .001), whether or not the teacher was a native speaker of English (p = .369, η^2 < .001), or the specific nature of the teacher's training (e.g., TESOL, p = .708, η^2 < .001; Applied Linguistics, p = .308, η^2 = .001; Education, p = .930, η^2 < .001; Writing Specialization, p = .093, η^2 = .002). The difference in teaching contexts, however (i.e., ESL or EFL), proved to be statistically significant (p = .010), although the negligible effect size (η^2 = .006) renders this difference inconsequential.

3.2.1. Why teachers do not correct errors

With over 1,000 respondents, many reasons were given in support of and opposition to WCF. It should also be noted that some respondents provided multiple reasons. Those who do not typically provide WCF identified 13 different reasons, 7 of which predominate. The 7 most common reasons for not correcting errors are listed below in order of frequency and are based on the survey item: "Typically, I do not provide error correction because . . . ." The quotations listed below these reasons exemplify common responses cited exactly (unedited) as the participant wrote it, and each quotation is cited by listing the respondent's level of education, country in which he or she typically teaches, and the number of years teaching ESL/EFL. Numbers in brackets and parentheses following the category title indicate the total number of responses given in a category and the percentage of total non-correctors who gave this response.

1. Content, organization, and rhetoric are more important than linguistic accuracy. [n = 23 (26%)]

I want to focus on organization and content development primarily, and error correction (I'm assuming this means grammar) is ancillary.

MA, U.S., 3 years

2. Students should take care of grammar errors by themselves. [n = 20 (23%)]

I want students at a higher level of proficiency to take responsibility for their errors, many of which they are aware of, but don't take enough time to think about.

MA, U.S., 31 years

3. Error correction is not effective. [n = 10 (11%)]

Ferris has as of yet been unable to prove her point . . . go Truscott!

Doctorate, U.S., 3 years

. . . students only look at red ink but don't actually read it.

MA, Mauritania, 7 years

I think students will self-correct when they become aware of the difference in their writing and what they are reading.

MA, U.S., 21 years

4. **Context is not appropriate for error correction.** [n = 9 (10%)]

In the area I teach –adult/survival– content is more important.

IBA, U.S., 31 years

5. **Don't want to overwhelm, threaten, or discourage students.** [*n* = 8 (9%)]

I want sts to write, and not shy away from writing if they see a number of corrections.

MA, U.S., 13 years

. . . When they are bombarded with lots of comments, they tend to shut down.

Doctorate, Lebanon, 21 years

6. **Others should help students with grammar errors.** [n = 5 (6%)]

. . .that's what a tutor's for.

MA (in progress), U.S., 3 years

. . . I expect students to receive this from friends, tutors, or others who don't have the rhetorical background that I can provide.

MA, U.S., 5 years

7. **Process writing suggests that grammar errors come last.** [*n* = 4 (5%)]

I want to spend class time to teach other features of writing such as rhetorical issues; grammar comes later.

MA, U.S., 8 years

8. **Other** [*n* = 9 (10%)

Errors are too complicated (2)
Not the focus of my classes (2)
Students don't care (1)
Students are not developmentally ready for WCF (1)
Takes too much time (1)
Requires little effort on the students' part (1)
Not pleasant (1)

The two most common reasons for not providing WCF (content, rhetoric and organization are more important, and students need to take care of errors themselves) account for nearly 50% of all the reasons given for not correcting errors. The remaining five reasons had 36 responses combined.

3.2.2. Why teachers do correct errors

Reasons for correcting errors are presented below in order of frequency. Responses are based on the survey item: "Typically, I do provide error correction because . . . ." Numbers in brackets and parentheses following the category title indicate the total number of responses given in a category and the percentage of total correctors who gave this response.

1. **It helps students.** [*n* = 448 (45%)]

- notice/be aware of language
- build self-editing skills
- understand errors

I believe when it is done in the way I do it (consistently, in a planned way beginning on day one using the same exact symbols throughout the semester etc. . . .), the students do learn from it, and most of them expect it of the only native speaker in the room.

Doctorate, U.S., 21 years

SLA research makes clear that learners need to notice the gap between their production and more proficient production, and teacher feedback is one way of assisting them in that noticing.

Doctorate (in progress) UK, 21 years

. . . it is the purpose of the language classroom to improve. Error correction is one way I help my students improve.

MA (in progress), Venezuela, 8 years

2. **Students expect it.** [*n* = 223 (22%)]

. . . students expect it; other university faculty will "ding" them for grammar errors; raising their consciousness about error patterns.

Doctorate , U.S., 6 years

. . . students want it, and I'd want it if I were a student.

Doctorate (in progress) Japan, 16 years

3. **Students need it.** [*n* =193 (17%)]

- to be understood
- to be respected
- in contexts after ESL instruction
- to see errors
- as a model of good writing

My students' writing needs improvement. Also, as a second language speaker, I am anxious to be as good as possible in my second language and I am not willing to settle for "cute" German!

MA, U.S., 10 years

Students need guidance. If the teacher's not correcting common errors, who will?

Doctorate (in progress), Russia, 11 years

How are students supposed to learn how to write correctly? It doesn't always happen by osmosis.

Doctorate, U.S., 26 years

4. **Language matters.** [*n* = 72 (7%)]

. . . after all of the work on organization and content, I need to remind them that language form matters too.

MA, US, 15 years

5. **Feedback is a teacher's responsibility.** [*n* = 51 (5%)]

. . . like Frank Smith (in "Understanding Reading,") I consider timely feedback one of the most important roles of a teacher.

Doctorate, U.S., 21 years

6. **Program requires it.** [*n* = 35 (3%)]

I find that students want it, and our program demands it in the curriculum.

MA, US, 16 years

7. **Other** [*n* = 34 (3%)]

- Reinforces what is taught in class (10)
- Helps teachers who are in training (6)
- It is a natural habit that cannot be avoided (5)
- I wanted it when I was learning a language (4)
- Motivates students (4)
- Also shows where errors are in speaking (2)
- Better than not correcting (1)
- Part of the learning process (1)
- Provides a record of error patterns (1)

The first three reasons for using WCF account for over 80% of all reasons given. While most of these are self-explanatory, the first and third most common responses, which appear to be saying the same thing, require some explanation. When participants noted "It [WCF] helps students," they almost always added further details suggesting that it helps students linguistically. They presented such ideas as it helps students "notice and be aware of

language," "build self-editing skills," or "understand errors." The third most common reason given, "Students need it," was typically followed by such ideas as students need to be "understood," "respected by others in the university," "prepared for contexts outside of the ESL classroom," or "exposed to good models of accurate writing."

Two Likert scale items were also used to determine why teachers do or do not provide WCF. The first was based on a six-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (6). This item presented teachers with the statement, "My students effectively apply the error correction I provide." Teachers who typically error correct (n = 952) produced a mean of 4.4, indicating that they "somewhat agree" with this statement. Teachers who typically do not error correct (n = 86) generated a mean of 3.6, designating that they "somewhat disagree" with this statement. The results of a simple t-test comparing the means of these two groups produced a statistically significant difference with a large effect size ($p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .155$).

The second Likert scale item was also based on a six-point scale ranging from "very ineffective" (1) to "very effective" (6). Teachers were presented with the statement, "Generally, how effective is the practice of error correction on improving the overall accuracy of student writing?" Answers to this question were similar to the first Likert scale question. Teachers who correct errors produced a mean of 4.3, indicating that they felt it is "somewhat effective," and the non-correctors generated a mean of 3.4 suggesting that they find it "somewhat ineffective." The results of a t-test show a statistically significant difference between group means along with a large effect size ($p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .228$).

The final two questions asked participants to rank a list of given factors according to what most influenced their error correction practices and what elements of writing their students struggle with the most. The aim of the first question was to determine which of seven factors in a teacher's training and experience –research and conferences, colleagues, academic training, institutional expectations, personal language learning experience, personal teaching experience, and student expectations– most influence their WCF practices. Responses were ranked on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 represented the greatest influence. According to 1,023 participants, personal teaching experience (m = 2.51) was the most influential, followed by professional training (m = 3.48), and research and conferences (m = 3.91). Student expectations (m = 3.95) was ranked in the middle of the seven reasons followed by personal language learning experience (m = 4.09) and ideas from colleagues (m = 4.47), with institutional expectations (m = 5.59) being ranked as the least influential.

The purpose of the second question was to determine teachers' perceptions of their students' greatest challenges in writing. This question asked respondents to rank five aspects of writing (mechanical errors, lexical errors, grammatical errors, organizational problems, content problems) in terms of what seemed the most difficult for their students. Responses were ranked on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represented the greatest struggle for the students.

Responses to this question indicate that 1,021 participants ranked grammatical errors (*m* = 2.25) as the most challenging aspect of writing for their L2 students. This was followed closely by organization (*m* = 2.85) and lexical errors (*m* = 3.02). mechanical problems (*m* = 3.41) and content problems (*m* = 3.46) were ranked as the least problematic for L2 writing students.

4. DISCUSSION

This study was undertaken to determine to what extent current L2 writing teachers provide written corrective feedback, and what determines whether or not practitioners choose to provide WCF. Knowing what practitioners have to say about their WCF practices seems to be central to our understanding of WCF and its place in L2 pedagogy.

Response to the on-line survey was extraordinary, with 1,053 respondents providing a wide range of insights from their professional training and years of teaching experience. Furthermore, responses came from participants in 69 different countries. In fact, responses from participants outside the United States represented 37% of all respondents. This strong and wide response to the survey suggests at least two preliminary conclusions. First, WCF is a topic of keen interest to practitioners. Responses flooded in almost immediately after the survey was launched, and a number of participants sent emails to the researchers expressing interest in the topic. In addition, one question on the survey asked participants if they would be interested in receiving a summary of the survey results; over 85% of the respondents requested this summary. The second insight that can be gained from this strong response is that these results are likely indicative of the general L2 writing practitioner population. While no effort was taken to target specific populations, the generally consistent responses from this sampling of L2 practitioners suggests some clear patterns of WCF practice.

The most obvious pattern observed in this research is that WCF is indeed used extensively in L2 writing by extremely experienced teachers. The average years of ESL/EFL teaching experience was slightly more than 16 years, with a median of 16 and a mode of 21 years of teaching ESL/EFL. Approximately 99% of the L2 practitioners surveyed use some form of WCF to a degree. Those who typically use WCF as part of their teaching represented 92% of the respondents. This response should not be surprising given the fact that respondents identified "grammatical errors" as their students' greatest single struggle. The 86 participants (8%) who said that they do not use WCF in any form were conspicuous by their limited numbers. In this regard, Truscott's (1996) assumption seems accurate, "In L2 writing courses, grammar correction is something of an institution. Nearly all L2 writing teachers do it in one form or another" (p. 327).

An additional point that must not be overlooked, however, is how informed this practice is. Over 70% of the respondents have more than 10 years experience teaching

ESL/EFL, and over 50% have had in excess of 10 years experience teaching L2 writing. Additionally, an extremely high percentage (87%) of the participants have a master's degree or higher in a discipline related to language teaching. It is safe to say that participants who provide WCF comprise a highly educated and experienced group of teachers. This is supported by the factors that respondents identified as being the most influential to their WCF practices. The top three factors were personal teaching experience, academic training, and research and conferences. We have no way of discerning participants' level and frequency of conference attendance or how current they are with research. We can say, however, that these respondents are speaking from a level of expertise that cannot be taken lightly or considered misguided or uninformed.

Attempts to define patterns showing why practitioners do or do not provide WCF were addressed from various perspectives. The use of the open-ended sentence completion question, "I typically error-correct my students' writing because . . .", proved to be invaluable. A comparison of the responses to this question by those who do and those who do not use WCF offers a mirror image of each other. Non-correctors say they do not use WCF because "content, rhetoric and organization matter most." On this point, those who do use WCF counter with the argument that "language matters too." When non-correctors say that "students should be responsible to correct their own errors," those who use WCF are adamant that it is a teachers' responsibility to provide corrective feedback. "How," they ask, "are students supposed to know what is erroneous or not?" The non-correctors' position that "WCF is not effective" is countered with a resounding "WCF helps students." A particularly important point here is that the many practitioners who said that WCF helps students offered reasons that are based in second language acquisition (SLA) research. For instance, WCF helps students notice or be aware of language patterns, teaches them how to self correct, and provides them with good language models.

While those who use WCF are part of a strong majority, an important insight from the two scaled questions must be carefully considered. When asked to scale how effective WCF was for students, participants who said that they typically use WCF were fairly reserved in their responses. On average, they indicated that they think WCF is only "somewhat" effective in helping students improve their linguistic accuracy. They do not seem to think that WCF is an overwhelming solution to improving limited linguistic accuracy. Their response to a similar question asking how effectively students apply the error correction that teachers provide was similar to the first. They indicated that students "somewhat effectively" apply the WCF provided. While both responses were well positioned on the positive side of the scale, there clearly is some reservation. This may be an indication that these practitioners understand the potential of WCF, but they recognize that it may be ineffective if the students are not motivated enough to take adequate advantage of the WCF they receive. This observation

seems to be confirmed by open-ended question responses. Many respondents said such things as "it is one way to help," "it helps to some degree," and "if students are motivated, it helps."

Finally, an observation cited earlier by Ferris et al. (in press/2011b) seems applicable here. They note that the teachers in their study "sincerely want their students' writing to improve to its fullest potential" and they want the time and effort they spend on providing feedback "for student writers to be well spent" (p. 19). The patterns observed in the written responses in this study seem to confirm these same sentiments. The overwhelming majority of teachers' comments on open-ended questions indicated that they provided feedback because they think students need it, and that WCF is an effective pedagogical practice.

4.1. Limitations and Further Research

Despite the useful findings generated by this study, we should be aware of its limitations and of the additional questions raised that should be explored in further research. First, we should recall that many of the measures examined in this study were based on self-reporting by the respondents. While we believe that this approach yielded results that were both valid and insightful for the study's specific context and purpose, we would encourage additional researchers to also use external measures to examine teacher WCF practices.

In addition, though data analyzed in this study included both ESL and EFL contexts, it may be useful to examine more closely how such contexts may or may not shape WCF practices. Similarly, comparing the WCF practices from EFL teachers of various regions or nations may also be of interest. Finally, further study may also help us to identify additional differences between those more inclined to provide WCF and those less inclined to provide it.

4.2. Conclusion

We began this discussion by referencing Kumarivadivelu's (1994) postmethod condition in which teachers "theorize from practice and practice what they theorize" as an alternative to traditional methods –what he calls "principled pragmatism" (p. 27). He notes that one way teachers can practice principled pragmatism is to rely on what Prabhu (1990) calls a "sense of plausibility" (p. 31). By this, Prabhu means teachers rely on their "subjective understanding of the teaching that they do. Teachers need to operate with some personal conceptualization of how their teaching leads to desired learning with a notion of causation that has a measure of credibility for them" (p. 172). It is our assertion that the very experienced 1,053 L2 practitioners who participated in this survey are operating on their developed principled pragmatism and sense of plausibility when it comes to WCF. Findings from this study are helpful in several ways. First they have considerably augmented the limited, extant research on teachers' WCF practices. In addition, this study shows that current L2 writing teachers'

pragmatism suggests that corrective feedback has an impact on what their learners achieve –that there is causation between WCF and greater linguistic accuracy.

NOTES

[1] This opposition is based on the assumption that WCF wastes time and may be harmful to students.

[2] Only 1,031 of the total 1,053 participants indicated years of L2 writing experience. Therefore, only responses from those who indicated years of experience were analyzed.

[3] Because these were presented as two separate questions, the combined totals exceed 100%.

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APPENDIX A

References made to previous finding OF and from teachers in 22 L2 articles analyzed

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APPENDIX B
Online Survey

INTRODUCTION
This survey is for those who teach ESL/EFL writing, those who have taught ESL/EFL writing, and those who train ESL/EFL writing teachers. The purpose is to identify how teachers respond to student errors. The survey includes some background information and 18 questions. It should only take about 10 to 15 minutes. This survey focuses on "error correction," which we define as feedback targeting grammatical or lexical errors. Please click "Finished with this page" in the lower right corner to begin the survey and to indicate your willingness to be a research subject.

RISKS/BENEFITS
Though there are no known risks, answering these questions will provide valuable insights about what teachers think are the best ways to provide error correction. You may also benefit personally as you think about your own approach to error correction.

PARTICIPATION
Involvement in this research is completely voluntary.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The survey is completely anonymous with no identifying information unless you choose to provide it.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH
If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Dr. Norman Evans at (801) 422-8472, norman_evans@byu.edu.

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AS RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in research projects, you may contact the IRB Administrator, A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602, 801-422-1461, irb@byu.edu.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

1. Level of education (select one in each row).

	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctoral Degree	Other ☐	N/A
What is your highest level of education completed?	○	○	○	○	○
If currently a student, which degree are you working on now?	○	○	○	○	○

2. Academic training (select all that apply).
   ☐ TESOL
   ☐ Education
   ☐ Applied Linguistics
   ☐ Writing specialty
   ☐ Other

3. Is English your native language?
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

4. On average, how often do you teach writing?
   ○ Every quarter, semester, or session
   ○ Most quarters, semesters, or sessions
   ○ At least one class per year
   ○ Less than once per year
   ○ Never
   ○ Other

5. Which best describes your current responsibilities (check all that apply).
   ☐ ESL/EFL Program Administrator
   ☐ ESL/EFL Teacher Training
   ☐ Currently Teach ESL/EFL writing
   ☐ Student Teacher/Practicum
   ☐ Not currently teaching ESL/EFL writing but have taught in the past

6. Total years of ESL/EFL language teaching (round to nearest year).

7. Total years of teaching ESL/EFL writing (round to nearest year).

8. Second language teachers often teach in a variety of contexts at any given time. Please base your responses to the remaining questions in this survey on the context in which you most often teach.

a. Typically, in what context do you teach most often?
   ○ ESL
   ○ EFL

b. The majority of my ESL/EFL teaching has been in which country?

c. Typically, what do you teach most often?
- ○ Survival English
- ○ General English
- ○ English for Specific Purposes
- ○ English for Academic Purposes
- ○ Other

d. Typically, what level do you teach most often?
- ○ Novice
- ○ Intermediate
- ○ Advanced
- ○ Superior
- ○ All ESL/EFL levels
- ○ Native English Speakers

e. Who are your second language writing students? (select all that apply)
- ☐ Primary school age
- ☐ Secondary school age
- ☐ Adult Ed
- ☐ Intensive English Program
- ☐ Matriculated University students

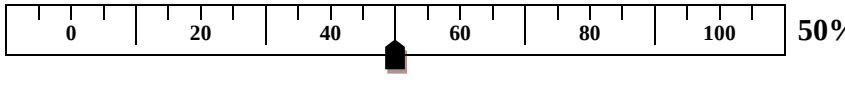
PART 1: Do You Error Correct?
If you are not currently teaching writing, please respond as if you *were*:

For this survey, we define "error correction" as feedback targeting grammatical or lexical errors.

1. Typically, do you provide your writing students with at least some error correction?
   - ○ Yes
   - ○ No

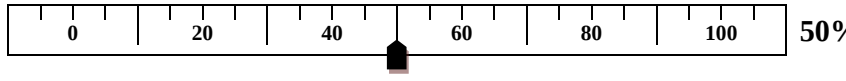
PART 1: Do You Error Correct?

2. Considering all the writing your students submit, how much gets error corrected? Slide the bar to indicate a percentage.



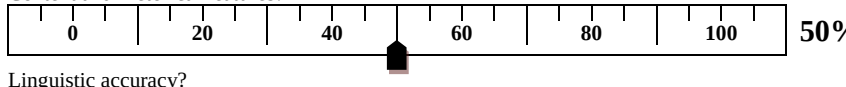
3. Error correction can range from "focused" (one or two error types) to "extensive" (many or all error types). Which of the following best describes your typical approach to error correction?
   - ○ Focused
   - ○ Mostly Focused
   - ○ 50% Focused-50% Extensive
   - ○ Mostly Extensive
   - ○ Extensive

4. On average, what percent of the time you have allocated as a writing teacher is devoted to error correction? Slide the bar to indicate a percentage.

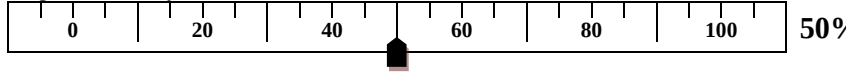


5. By the time a student submits a final draft of a writing assignment, what percentage of your time was spent on . . .

Content and rhetorical features?



Linguistic accuracy?



PART 2: How Do You Error Correct?

1. What kind of error correction do you provide for your writing students? (select all that apply)
   - ☐ Direct Feedback (you provide the correction)
   - ☐ Indirect Feedback (you indicate the presence of an error but expect the student to make the correction)
   - ☐ Global (errors that interfere with comprehensibility)
   - ☐ Local (errors that do not interfere with comprehension)
   - ☐ Other

2. For which drafts do you provide error correction? (select all that apply).
   - ☐ First Drafts
   - ☐ Intermediate drafts
   - ☐ Final drafts

3. Briefly list the types of assignments that typically receive error correction.

4. What determines the nature of the error correction you provide?
   - ☐ Student proficiency level
   - ☐ Student expectations
   - ☐ Administrative expectations
   - ☐ Purpose of learning
   - ☐ The particular draft (first, final etc)
   - ☐ Other

5. My writing students effectively apply the error correction I provide.
   - ○ Strongly Agree
   - ○ Agree
   - ○ Somewhat Agree
   - ○ Somewhat Disagree
   - ○ Disagree
   - ○ Strongly Disagree

6. Select one category for each of the following statements

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
How often do you spend writing class time discussing linguistic errors encountered in student writing?	○	○	○	○	○
For student writing for which you provide error correction, how often do you expect students to submit revisions?	○	○	○	○	○

PART : Why Do You Or Don't You Error Correct?

1. Please complete ONE of the following sentences.
   ○ Typically I DO provide error correction because . . .
   ○ Typically I DO NOT provide error correction because . . .

2. Generally, how effective is the practice of error correction on improving the overall accuracy of student writing?
   ○ Very Ineffective
   ○ Ineffective
   ○ Somewhat Ineffective
   ○ Somewhat Effective
   ○ Effective
   ○ Very Effective

3. Rank order each of the following in terms of how much they influence your error correction practices (click and drag text to adjust the order).

   1 Ideas from research or conferences
   2 Ideas from your colleagues
   3 Academic/Educational training
   4 Institutional expectations
   5 Personal language learning experiences
   6 Personal teaching experiences
   7 Student expectations

4. My views about error correction have changed over time.
   ○ Strongly Disagree
   ○ Disagree
   ○ Somewhat Disagree
   ○ Somewhat agree
   ○ Agree
   ○ Strongly Agree

5. Rank order each of the following in terms of what your writing students struggle with most (click and drag text to change the order).

   1 Mechanical errors (spelling, capitalization, punctuation etc.)
   2 Lexical errors
   3 Grammatical errors
   4 Organizational problems (sequencing, transitions)
   5 Content problems

6. Desribe why you hold the views you do about the efficacy of error correction.

Are you interested in receiving a summary of our survey findings?

- ○ Yes. Please include email.
- ○ No.

Would you be willing to participate in some follow-up questions via email or telephone?

- ○ Yes. Please include email.
- ○ No.

Thank you for completing this survey. Please click the button labeled "finished with this page" in the lower right corner to submit.

Finished with this page

APPENDIX C

Email Correspondence with Participants

Initial contact email message
Subject: Second Language Writing / Error Correction in Second Language Writing

Dear Colleague,
We are attempting to identify the error correction practices and perspectives of ESL/EFL writing teachers. If you have taught writing as a second or foreign language, we would be grateful if you would complete the survey linked to this email. The survey is completely anonymous. Your candid responses to these questions will help us bring the much-needed teachers' voice to error correction research. Most participants who piloted the survey took 15 minutes or less to answer all 24 questions.

Follow this link to the Survey: Take the Survey

Thank you for your important contribution.

Second Request to take the Survey follow up email

Dear Colleague,

We are sending this email to request your help with our survey on ESL/EFL writing teachers' error correction practices and philosophies. It should only take 15 minutes or less to answer the questions We value your input and deeply appreciate you participation.

Follow this link to the Survey: Take the Survey

Thank you for your important contribution.

Pass-along request

Colleague,

Thank you for taking the survey on error correction in second language writing. One of our goals is to get a broad perspective from many teachers. If you know of colleagues who teach or have taught ESL writing, we would be most appreciative if you forwarded this message and the survey link on to them.

