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The Practices of English Language Teachers' Error Treatment on Students' Writing: The Case of Secondary School Teachers in Benishangul Gumuz Regional State, Ethiopia

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Abstract:

This study was conducted in two secondary schools of grade 11 and 12 teachers in Benishangul Gumuz Regional State. The purpose of the study was to investigate EFL teachers' feedback provision practices in responding to students' written works. This study at finding out teacher's ways of giving written feedbacks, investigating how teachers treat errors in students' writing and identifying the factors affecting teachers' choice for different types of error correction. Methodologically, qualitative analysis was utilized on the data originated from primary sources. The participants of the study were 8 teachers who were selected using available sampling technique. Two data collection instruments, interview and document analysis were used to collect data from the participants. One-to-one in-depth interview was conducted with EFL teachers of the target schools. In order to provide supportive data, 48 students' produced texts to which teachers have provided feedback were analyzed using a checklist. The results of the study revealed that teachers had a tendency to provide mainly corrective feedback without commenting on strong and weak points. It was also found that the method teachers employed to give feedback on students' errors was the provision of direct/explicit corrections to erroneous parts mainly on grammar and mechanics. The study, moreover, indicated that teachers' feedback was influenced by two categories of factors which are related to students and teachers along with teaching contexts. Based on the findings, it was recommended that teachers should pursue various means for enhancing their feedback practices and incorporate both explicit and implicit correction techniques. Besides, teachers are urged to recognize the inevitability of devoting extra efforts when providing feedback to students' written works.

Keywords: Error correction, feedback, error correction strategies, comments, factors

1. Introduction

In the context of teaching writing, teacher feedback refers to the written reaction teachers give on students' written works. The available literature reveals the existence of different ways of responding to students' written works, error correction and commentary being the commonly practiced ones (Kepner, 1991; Saito, 1994). However, teaching writing poses difficult tasks for EFL teachers as it requires knowledge of how to use various corrective feedback techniques and devoting large amount of time and effort to review students' writing. Providing effective feedback is one of the most important tasks for writing teachers (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Yet the practice of feedback provision in the teaching and learning of writing seems to be under question in the context of Ethiopian secondary schools.

Besides, writing is one of major focus in teaching any English language course, yet it is relatively ignored or treated with less respect than it deserves. The writer of this article witnesses that students consider their teachers as vital way to improve grammar, clarify ideas and avoid future mistakes. In other words, students regard teacher feedback as crucial aspect of their writing skills development. However, due to teachers' less attention to writing it is less likely for students to sufficiently use feedback as an input to see their strength and weakness.

There are some local studies concerning teacher feedback in responding to students' writing. Getnet (1993) studied the responding behavior of EFL instructors to students' written works at Addis Ababa University and showed that instructors mainly focus on grammar, and mechanics. Another study by Taye (2005) which investigated the effect of feedback in promoting students' writing skills revealed the presence of gap between what is theoretically stated and what is practically done with regard to the effect of written feedback.

The present study differs from the previous researches in research objectives, settings and the specific aspects investigated. Getnet (1993) was conducted at university wherein writing courses are given as separate course that instructors concern only on writing activities. On the other hand, the objective of Taye (2005) was to investigate effects of written feedback. Besides, both studies did not consider how teachers provide feedback, how students' errors are treated and what situations affect teachers' feedback preferences. Therefore, this study was dealt with investigating EFL teachers' error correction practices at secondary schools.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to investigate EFL teacher's feedback provision practices in responding to students written works. To this end, the study attempted to:

- Analyze how EFL teachers provide written corrective feedback to students' written errors;
- Discover how EFL teachers treat errors in students' writing;
- Explore the reasons for teachers' choice of different types of corrective feedbacks.

The following research questions were formulated to achieve the desired study objectives.

- How do teachers provide corrective feedback to students' written works?
- How do teachers treat students' written errors?
- What factors affect teachers' choices for different corrective feedback approaches?

2. Review of Related Literature

A considerable amount of literature has been published on the issue of teacher written feedback. To this end, this chapter mainly reviews issues related to written error correction.

2.1. Corrective Feedback and Approaches to Teaching Writing

There are fundamentally two approaches to teaching writing: the product approach and process approach. This section briefly reviews the concern of feedback in the two approaches.

2.1.1. Feedback in Process Approach

Feedback is a fundamental element of a process approach to writing. It is viewed as important input of providing information to students for revision. In other words, it is regarded as a method to provide information, comments, questions, and suggestions about the strength or weakness of students at various writing stages or process, (Belinda, 2004).

The process approach emphasizes the stages of the writing process as well as the writer's independent production. Importantly, it examines how writers create ideas, compose them, and then revise them in order to generate a text, (Zamel, 1985). Accordingly, feedback in process approach emphasizes on content and leaves grammatical accuracy to a minimum.

Saito (1994) states that in process approach, feedback mainly looks at how to generate, organize, express and draft. Other feedback sources like peer review and teacher-student conference could be adopted with teacher feedback to support students, (Zhang, 1995).

The work of providing feedback to students becomes more demanding in the process approach. According to Zhang (1995) the teachers have two roles to play. as facilitators offering support and guidance and as an authority imposing critical judgment on writing products. Therefore, the patterns and responses given by the teacher depend on the teacher's conception of the composing process and his/her understanding of learner's errors.

2.1.2. Feedback in the Product Approach

The focus of feedback in product-oriented writing is on the final written product. According to Saito (1994), traditional feedback procedures in the product approach fail to adequately stress particular aspects of writing such as organizing and creating a cohesive text which are difficult for students to master. Hence Mi (2009) exposes that the primary goal of feedback in product writing is an error-free coherent text. As a result, the feedback gives much stress to errors that affect the final product.

In general, the product-oriented feedback is mainly form-focused, neglecting other aspects such as the discovery and construction of meaning in the writing process. Obviously, there is a need to address concerns of accuracy and language in the feedback, but it is suggested to make minimal. Thus, the product approach can usefully be incorporated into the system of the process approach. Therefore, feedbacks which address the elements of both process and product approaches can be used harmoniously with regard to the given learning context.

2.2. Error Correction Strategies

There are two strategies of error correction; direct and indirect correction. Direct feedback is a technique of correcting students' error by giving explicit correction. Whereas, indirect feedback occurs when teachers alert students about the error using general comments or symbols, but gives students the opportunity to fix errors themselves.

2.2.1. Direct Error Correction

Direct error correction refers to the provision of explicit corrections to students' errors. Using this format teachers tend to give precise corrections or structured notes on students' mistakes, (Hyland, & Hyland, 2006). Direct feedback is provided when the correct form is written on student's paper. For students who are at a lower-level of proficiency, direct feedback would be more effective. Besides, direct feedback is more helpful for students when revising syntax and vocabulary.

A study by Ferris (2002) categorizes errors as treatable and untreatable. Accordingly, rule-governed errors, such as subject-verb agreement, run-on, comma splices, missing articles and verb form errors are treatable, whereas lexical errors, wrong sentence construction, missing words, unnecessary words, and wrong word order are categorized as untreatable errors. For errors that are not rule-governed, methods of explicit correction are recommended.

2.2.2. Indirect Error Correction

In indirect feedback, the teacher indicates that an error has been made but expects the student to self-correct in various forms like circling and questioning the erroneous parts. According to Ferris (2002) it is inadequate to provide implicit correction for untreatable errors.

To make indirect feedback more effective, Lee (2005) recommends symbols representing a specific kind of error. For the purpose of reducing student confusion, teachers can consistently use symbols to indicate place and type of error. Besides, teachers should familiarize students with the system so they will not be surprised when new symbols are occurred.

Kepner (1991) also remarks that providing indirect feedback is more useful for students' improvement than direct feedback. Students are able to express their ideas more clearly and to get clarification on any comments that teachers have made.

2.3. Problems of Teacher Written Feedback

Research reveals that despite the various positive aspects, many teachers make problems when providing written feedbacks. The following are some of the common problems.

2.3.1. Focusing Mainly on Grammar

EFL teachers are preoccupied with grammar when they correct students' writing. Zamel (1985) criticizes that teachers overwhelmingly view themselves as merely language teachers rather than teaching writing. Due to this, teachers concentrate primarily on grammatical and lexical errors. According to Wang (2010), students are led to thinking that good writing means correct grammar and may neglect or may not understand elements of good writing, such as clarity and organization of ideas.

2.3.2. Providing Only Corrections

Several teachers find it irresistible to give correction, but this feedback does not make students critical of their work. Studies recommend to provide feedback that help students to reflect on their writing and rewrite the problematic parts of the composition rather than corrections (Ferris 2002). Therefore, the feedback would be more important when it includes both what students have done and what should be done in the future.

2.3.3. Giving Vague Comments

According to Mi (2009) some teachers write a few word comments on the margins or a few marking symbols like "awk" or "frag". This may result in vagueness and confusion. Vague comments would rather lead students to frustration let alone improving students writing (Mi (2009). This indicates that the use of error codes should be easy and the students have to get experiences before the using the codes.

2.3.4. Overemphasizing the Negative Points

Some teachers tend to point out problems rather than telling students the good points in their composition. So, in many cases, students perceive teacher comments as critical and negative and feel frustrated as a result (Saito, 1994). This in turn affects students' motivation to learn from the teacher's feedbacks. Therefore, teachers' feedback beginning with positive comments and moving to the negative aspects will be of important means to encourage students.

3. Methodology of the Study

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive design with qualitative approach. The rationale behind selecting qualitative approach was that the data generating process entails use of different instruments such as, text analysis and semi-structured interviews which could not be expressed numerically. According to Kvale (1996), qualitative research design provides more favorable condition for interpreting interviews and document reviews to present detailed descriptions of characteristics, cases, and practices. For that reason, the current study utilized qualitative approach to analyze the data collected using document analysis and interview.

3.2. Study Area

Benishangul-Gumuz Region, which is one of the nine regional states of Ethiopia, is located in North Western Ethiopia. According to the 2007 population and housing census, the population of this region was 784,345 (385,690 female and 398,655 male). The study was conducted at two secondary schools found in two towns; namely, Assosa Secondary School and Bambasi Secondary School with particular reference to grade eleven and twelve teachers. The schools were intentionally selected for this study due to the authors' perceived problems in his experience both as a student and teacher of the target schools.

3.3. Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The subjects of the study were EFL teachers who taught English at grade 11 and 12 levels. This grade level was chosen purposively for the reason that the researcher's perceived problems when teaching this grade level. The total

number of EFL teachers was eight; four at Assosa and four at Bambasi Secondary Schools, and all the EFL teachers were taken as participants using comprehensive sampling technique.

3.4. Data Collection Instruments

3.4.1. Interview

Because of its interactive nature, interviewing has many advantages over other types of data collection strategies (Best & Kahn, 2006). Accordingly, semi-structured interview was conducted to obtain comprehensive data about teachers' error correction approaches when responding to students' writing. Two types of questions were asked in the interview: basic questions and clarification questions. Accordingly, the interview attempted to address all of the research questions.

3.4.2. Document/Student's Writing Analysis

Merriam (1988) defines documents as any form of data not gathered through interviews or observations. Document based data inform research by enhancing the credibility of the interpretations and research findings. Hence, students' written assignments marked/corrected by teachers in the normal teaching and learning process were collected and analyzed to obtain the actual practices about ways of teachers' errors treatment.

3.5. Methods of Data Analysis

The data collected through text analysis and semi-structured interview were analyzed qualitatively. The recorded interview was first transcribed, and condensed. Subsequently, similar patterns and themes of responses were categorized, and the core meanings of the responses were discussed against each of the research questions. On the other hand, the sample assignments were collected and analyzed carefully against a follow-up checklist. The data emerged from the analysis was condensed and organized in order to identify similar themes. The meaning resulting from the analyses was then interpreted. Finally, integration was established between the interview themes and document analysis. Consequently, the core meanings were analyzed and interpreted against each of the research questions.

4. Results and Discussions

The main results drawn from semi-structured interviews and document analysis are presented and discussed in topics categorized under three main themes following the three research questions. Please note that TA, TB, ...Tth are used to mean 1st teacher interviewee, 2nd teacher interviewee ... 8th teacher interviewee.

4.1. Teachers' Preferred Correction Approaches

In general, this theme attempts to answer the first research question 'How do teachers provide corrective feedback on the students' written works?' Interview and document analysis were made to determine the strategies of feedback provision on students' written work and frequently used feedbacks strategies are identified and categorized as the follows:

4.1.1. Selective Versus Comprehensive Correction

The participants were asked about the extent to which their corrective feedback was comprehensive or selective and direct or indirect. The findings showed that teachers often struggle to decide to comment and how to correct errors in their students' writings. The excerpts from TA&TD below illustrates this effort.

...I prefer to be more general because if I go deeply line by line, I may get different kinds of errors, and if I correct each error, students will be ashamed of their works; so, they will not be motivated to write next time. So, I prefer to see some aspects... (TA).

... Because many students make a large number of errors, feedback can easily become irresistible. However, most of the time I focus on errors that are interfering with the understanding of a text and frequent as compared to other errors, (TD). As highlighted in the above quotes, teachers struggle to determine how to correct students' errors. The participants indicated that they need to comprehensively respond to errors in students' writings with concern about overwhelming the students. Nonetheless, the feedback strategy adopted by the teacher tended to be more comprehensive than selective emphasizing some aspects of the erroneous parts.

Similarly, the document analysis confirms that teachers were giving comprehensive the emphasis being grammatical, mechanics and vocabulary error correction (See Appendix Figure A, B, C, D). The teachers did not set specifications about what aspects of the students' works needed to be emphasized when the feedback was given. This shows that the approach teachers adopted to use tend to be more wide-ranging. In other words, the students were provided with corrective feedback encompassing various error types. Yet, some participants suggest more selective approach to enhance students' responsibility for their learning and be less dependent on the teacher.

... mostly I give feedback selectively because if the mistake that the student commit in the paragraph does not bring any meaning change, I will not consider it just; I put some signs and leave it for the students to self-correct it. If that mistake distorts the meaning, I automatically see it very seriously and correct it for the students, (TE).

Noticeably, selective marking is easier for the teacher and students. This also allows prioritization of most serious and frequent errors. This teacher seems to prefer to correct selectively errors that do not interfere with the meaning students wanted to disseminate. In other words, whatever error type it could be, the teacher would not be concerned with unless

the mistake brings meaning change. However, the analysis made on students' assignments to which teachers had provided feedback showed that teachers were concerned with correcting errors without consideration of whether a certain error brings meaning change or not; Teachers tried to give corrections to errors without setting any priority. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that teachers tended to follow comprehensive correction than selective feedback on students' written works.

This result appears to correspond with the argument of whether feedback should follow comprehensive or selective approaches. Different studies reported that many teachers provide comprehensive feedback on students' essays rather than engaging in selective feedback practices. Some researchers have supported utilizing more selective strategies in deciding which errors to provide feedback on. Wang (2010) cautions teachers who seek to correct every error because in doing so the teacher takes away the opportunity for the student to discover the errors and learn from the corrections that the teacher has made.

Contrary to the result of this study, Hyland & Hyland (2006) argue that teachers should not correct every error suggesting that teachers should comment on every aspect of writing. This shows that teachers should respond to all aspects of student texts including structure, organization, content, and presentation, but it is not necessary to cover every aspect at every stage of teaching. In line with this result, Lee (2003) reports that although selective feedback is recommended, the majority of teachers provide feedback comprehensively. Therefore, whether to adopt selective or comprehensive approaches of providing feedback seems to be controversial issue, yet researchers advocate selective feedback.

4.1.2. Direct Versus Indirect Feedback

The participants addressed that both direct and indirect approaches are important for correcting students' errors.

... I use different approaches based on the types of errors to be corrected and other areas to be considered. For example, if students commit errors such as spelling and punctuation, I use indications but for errors like wrong word choice and structural mistake, I will give directly the correct form, (TE). ... I employ both direct and indirect feedback (TF).

This revealed that both direct and indirect error correction strategies were used when teachers respond to students' writing. In other words, teachers' feedback included the provision of both commentary and corrections on the strength and weakness of students' texts through direct corrections and indirect indication. These claims concord with what has been suggested in researches regarding how teachers should respond to students' writings. Feedback should include indication that an error was committed, identification of the type of error, location of the error, selection of a remedy, provision of a correct model, the furnishing of an opportunity for a new attempt, indication of improvement, and the offering of praise, (Zhang, 1995). Therefore, it is possible to say that the EFL teachers are alert about the use of incorporating both direct and indirect correction to help students become beneficial of the feedback

However, the result of the document analysis contradicts with what the teachers stated in the interview. The sample-paper analysis indicated that direct correction was the principal strategy practiced by teachers (See Appendix Figure A, B, C, D). Regardless of their claims, teachers' feedback was concerned on correcting students' errors. Accordingly, it is possible to infer that students were not encouraged to exercise self-correction even for surface level errors that can be recognized by the students.

Besides, using direct correction as a principal strategy shows that students were provided with direct versions of their errors. Hence, the feedback seems to contribute less for facilitating learners' ability to correct their errors independently. Also, the strength of the students' works was neglected. Moreover, this could show that before employing direct correction, teachers did not judge whether students could manage the error themselves or not. Hence, the notion that teacher feedback should focus on what the student did correctly, and what needs to be done to improve future performance seems to be neglected.

4.2. Error Treatment

4.2.1. Teachers' Views about the Purpose of Feedback on Errors

The view teachers hold regarding the purpose of feedback on students' written errors is likely to influence the selection of correction techniques when they deal with the students' errors.

... the goal of feedback on students' works is to initiate them have interest for writing, to help them avoid similar mistake again, to correct errors, and improve writing skills. (TG)

.... feedback on errors should aim at correcting and showing students' mistakes. If the mistake is chronic, error correction helps to teach students the mistake. On the other hand, if the error is silly, the teacher can show students where and the error is... (TB)

The interviewees stated that the main purpose of feedback on students' errors is to help them avoid similar mistakes in the future and to develop students' writing interests and skills. Apart from this, some of the teachers view feedback as means to prompt students' reading skills for the reason that reading and writing are interrelated so that teachers deal with students' reading problems as they go through written errors.

...when I teach writing, students are expected to read and write simultaneously. So, checking students' writing gives me chance to address reading problems. (TF)

The above discussions reveal that teachers hold similar views about purpose of feedback. It shows that teachers are of the opinion that feedback on students' errors has contribution for students' improvements. The teachers also acknowledged that giving feedback on errors has positive effect on avoiding future mistakes and instigating interests in

future writing engagements. Therefore, it is possible to say that teachers value the role of feedback as a means to foster students learning in addition to the provision of immediate errors corrections.

4.2.2. Teachers' Error Correction Strategies

4.2.2.1. Explicit Error Correction

When implementing error correction, teachers decide what strategy to use across the various types of errors. The most significant division of error correction strategies is between direct/explicit correction, which is the provision of correction to the error, and implicit/indirect correction where the teacher indicates the error by highlighting, underlining or coding and leaves the error for students for self-correction. The interviewees stated that they often provide explicit/direct corrections for students' errors.

...most of the times I prefer to provide direct correction. If I use other method such as error codes, it is difficult for the students what does that mean... Therefore, I usually write the correct form and sometimes circle/underline the mistakes, (TA).

...directly correcting may not foster independent learning, but leaving errors without corrections also frustrates students. So, I mostly use direct error correction, (TH).

... most often I provide the correct forms of the errors, and sometimes I use underlining or circling. Therefore, I use different error correction techniques on students' writing, (TC).

The above statements indicate that teachers frequently employ explicit error correction as principal error correction strategy. This shows that teachers were concentrated on correcting as many errors as possible in students' writing. Thus, the opportunity given for students to seek corrections for their mistakes was not enough. As a result, the learners are likely to depend merely on what teachers provide concerning their errors. Similarly, the analysis of teacher feedback strategy on student-produced papers confirmed that direct error correction was the widely used strategy for dealing with students' errors (See Appendix Figures A, B, C, D). Besides, the sample paper analyses clearly indicated that teachers did not tolerate even surface level errors. Thus, it is fair to say that students are provided with inadequate opportunities to think about and learn from their mistakes.

Obviously, direct error correction could probably be better than the indirect one with students of low levels of proficiency. In other words, explicit correction could be desirable if learners are not capable of correcting the error. However, the disadvantage is that it requires minimal processing on the part of the learner; although explicit correction might help learners produce correct forms when they revise, it may not contribute to long-term learning, (Ellis, 2008). In general, as teachers tended to give explicit error correction, it is possible to conclude that the feedback is likely to concentrate on surface mistakes. Therefore, learners would have slim opportunity to consider other types of errors.

4.2.2.2. Implicit Error Correction

When indirect error correction is employed, the feedback indicates that an error exists but no correction is provided. Indirect error correction takes forms of either indication only or indicating and locating the error. Indicating and locating students' errors takes the form of underlining and use of cursors to show omissions in the student's text. Instead, indication only takes the form of an indication in the margin that errors have taken place in a line of text. In view of that, the data from the interview indicate that some of the teachers used the indirect error correction strategies on students' faults. Inter alia, teachers use strategies of circling and underlining the erroneous parts to show errors.

...I usually prefer to directly correct the errors committed by the student, but sometimes I underline students' errors (TD).

... if the errors are easy to be corrected by the students, I will use implicit correction. But most of the time I prefer explicit correction strategy... (TG).

The reaction from the interviewees reveals that teachers incorporate implicit correction as secondary strategy. This shows that teachers were attempting to encourage students to practice self-correction so as to encourage students to seek for their error by themselves. Yet, the results from the interview also indicated that implicit error correction was occasionally practiced by the teachers. Besides, results obtained from the analysis of teacher-marked student papers also confirmed that teachers combined both forms of feedback, direct and indirect error correction, but error indication was infrequently used strategy with students' errors. (See Appendix Figure A, B, C, D). The teachers occasionally used circling, asking questions, and underlining as a means of indicating the erroneous parts. This shows that teachers have mainly adopted explicit correction strategy.

In general, it is possible to conclude from the discussion that implicit error correction was used as a minor strategy to correct students' errors next to direct correction. In contrast to this result, some researchers suggest that implicit forms of correction methods are more effective than those of explicit types. Ferris (2002) recommends that students learn more when they find their own errors and make their own corrections. Hence, for errors that are rule-governed implicit correction methods are suggested, where as providing explicit correction is recommended for untreatable errors for the reason that these errors have no rules to consult. Therefore, to deal with errors such as spelling, punctuations and wrong tense implicit correction methods can be sufficient. Conversely in the case of certain types of errors, such as wrong word order or wrong word usage, inappropriate structures or finding the right word are relatively difficult for learners so that explicit types of correction methods are considered to be more helpful and effective.

4.2.3. Types of Frequently Corrected Errors

The teachers were asked to explain what kinds of errors they primarily consider in the feedback. Besides the actual feedback provided to students' written works were analyzed to substantiate the extent to which teachers' claims

were practical. The results from the interview revealed that teachers were concerned with errors related to various components.

...mostly students make spelling punctuation and grammar errors, so I focus on these issues TB ... I usually correct errors related to tense, pronouns and spelling, (TG).

...I check all aspects of the student's works such as vocabulary, grammar, mechanics and the content because if the mistake is very chronic it will kill the meaning of the paragraph. As a result, the paragraph will be meaningless, (TE).

The teachers revealed that mainly problems related to mechanics and grammar capture their attentions. Accordingly, spelling, punctuation and capitalization were the areas that most of the teachers are concerned with when correcting students' errors. Moreover, the rest of the interviewees indicated that the areas they treat as errors were more or less similar.

On the other hand, only a single interviewee (TH) responded that he considers problems related to different parts of students' works as an error.

The kinds of error that I consider as an error include; sentence fragments, subject verb disagreements, etc. punctuation, capitalization, spelling and problems related to connectors, linking words and the like. Generally, I look for these kinds of errors.

The teacher stated that the areas considered as error include both content and grammatical problems. The feedback provided to the students' errors is likely to include comments on the contents and organization of the students' works treating all aspects of available errors. Even so, majority of the participants appear to neglect errors related to contents and organization.

Noticeably, without feedback most of the students would not be able to identify their own errors, which may cause frustration. However, as teachers tend to employ more explicit error correction approach the advantages of involving students to try remedies for their own errors seems to be neglected. Besides, the feedback tends to frequently emphasize grammatical errors. In other words, the feedback was less likely to include errors related to the content of the work. Therefore, it is possible to say that students are confined to concentrate on aspects like grammar and mechanics deemphasizing other aspects of the work.

On the other hand, the analysis of teachers' feedbacks on students' written works showed that the four most commonly corrected errors were punctuation, article use, word choice, and subject-verb agreements (See Appendix Figure A, B, C, D). Consequently, the claim teachers made regarding the provision of all rounded error correction was not confirmed by the result of feedback analysis. This may show that teachers were mainly dealing with surface level errors which could be easily dealt with the learners themselves. The question of what and how to correct student's written errors has provoked some debate in the literature. Consequently, the essential question appears to be whether written feedback should concentrate on form or content in accordance with the specific needs of the students and the nature of the writing task. Yet, for grammatical and spelling errors, learners should be informed of the location and features of mistakes so as to require the students to correct their own errors, (Keh, 1990). On the other hand, errors related to content organization of text and amount of detail require teachers to provide correction.

The results so far, in general, indicated that teachers considered various aspects of the students' written works as an error. Many of the interviewees treat errors related to grammar, mechanics and vocabulary. Although some teachers claimed to treat errors related to both linguistic and content, the document analysis designated that grammatical and vocabulary errors were the most commonly corrected type of errors. From this it is possible to say that teachers' error correction mainly emphasized accuracy rather than improving their fluency.

4.2.4. Teachers' Criteria for Selecting Errors to Be Corrected

In order to identify the criteria employed for correcting errors, teachers were asked about how they decide to correct one error over another. Accordingly, teachers revealed that they some issues as criteria to correct errors on students' writing. Regarding this, TH and TC stated that:

... I give priority for errors that hamper the flow of ideas. Next to this, I look into severe grammatical errors. ... (TH).

... It is difficult to see and check over each type of errors, as a result I decide to correct errors which are easily observable and interfere with the meaning, (TC).

... if the error interferes with the meanings of the text, I will be concerned with correcting that error ... Therefore, I will focus on every aspects of the language, (TG).

The data obtained in the interview revealed that these teachers have similar stance in respect of the criteria to use when they decide to provide correction on students' errors. The teachers mainly elaborate the need for correction of errors that affect the overall meanings of students' work. This may show that next to the meaning related errors, rigorous grammatical problems are used as criteria for choosing which error to give priority in the feedback. The teachers mainly look for errors which are easily visible and hampering the meaning of the work.

However, a point that should be underlined is that the analysis of the teacher feedback on the students' works clearly manifested the corrections of errors that are less likely to interfere with the overall meaning on the students' works. The document analysis demonstrated that teachers tended to the provision of corrections to any error that appears on students' works including articles, punctuations and prepositions. This shows that teachers were mainly providing corrections for surface level errors which could have been easily dealt with by the students rather than affecting the idea students intended to communicate. Moreover, the disparity between what teachers claimed and what they practically did shows that though teachers understood what errors to correct, yet, not practically implemented. As a result, students were

provided with corrections without discriminating whether a certain error interferes with the meaning and that mistake could be dealt with the learners themselves.

The results about teachers' error treatment, in general, imply that teachers are theoretically aware of the different error correction methods. This was evident from results drawn in the interview analysis regarding what error correction strategies, errors types to focus and what criteria to use when correcting students' errors. However, the actual analysis made on the teachers' feedback given to students' written works illustrated that teachers were not practicing what they claimed to use. In most cases, the results drawn from the interview do not match with the results of the document analysis emerging out of the sample papers. Thus, it could be possible to conclude that the teachers do not practice most of claims about what they actually address when providing feedback to students' errors.

4.3. Factors Affecting Teachers' Choice for Different Types of Corrective Feedback

The response obtained from the interview showed that the teachers take different factors into account when providing feedback on students' writing. Thus, the frequently stated factors are identified and discussed with in three sub-themes as follows.

4.3.1. Student Related Factors

Some of the issues claimed as factors were linked to students' limitations and desires. In view of that, the subsequent discussion presents the factors related to students.

4.3.1.1. Students' Level of Proficiency

The interview with the teachers demonstrates that students' proficiency level has an influence on teachers' feedback.

... Student's written works are full of numerous errors. It is difficult to go through and deal with such mistakes. I mostly focus on correcting only some errors, (TC).

... When I give assignments, students produce simply a collection of words which has no meaning. So, it is even difficult where to give feedback. To be frank, I roughly see some surface level grammar errors, (TD).

The interviewees stated that students' low level of proficiency has influenced the type of feedback provided on students' works. Due to students' low level of proficiency, the teachers could not adopt various feedback techniques when responding to students' works. In other words, because students are poor at writing, they commit various errors, and teachers were required to concentrate on sentence level feedback emphasizing on grammar. Therefore, teachers appear mainly to focus on correcting surface errors when providing feedback.

4.3.1.2. The Amount and Type of Errors Students Make

The amount and type of errors students commit was one of the issues stated to have an effect on teachers' feedback provision. The teachers reflected about how the types and amount of errors students commit affect teachers' feedback.

The students make different types of errors. If the types of mistakes are few you will have the chance to be selective, but mostly I find several types of errors on a single paper. So, the simplest option will be to look for grammar and mechanics, (TE).

...from my experience, I have realized that students commit several kinds of errors. Since the errors are too many, I prefer to provide corrections than comments, (TB)

As can be seen from these descriptions, providing feedback for students' written works was in some way guided by the types and numbers of errors students made. On the one hand, the teachers understand the importance of incorporating both comments and corrections in their feedback, yet they depend on the types and amount of errors to decide what kind of feedback to provide. This may indicate that as the feedback provision process is directed by the types and number of errors on students' written works, teachers seem to mainly provide corrections to the errors committed by the learners de-emphasizing other aspects of the work. From this it is possible to say that students' errors, in terms of types and quantity, are one of the determinant factors for deciding about what types of feedback to provide on students' errors.

4.3.1.3. Students' Motivation for Writing

With the assumption that students' motivation toward learning writing could stimulate teachers' considerations in relation to how feedback provided to students' written works, the participants were asked to express their views and their lived experiences about students' motivation in learning writing.

Even if teachers want to emphasize writing, students are not interested to writing activities because they know that no writing question appears in the university entrance examination. Thus, it is more important for teachers to deal with other language areas than writing so as to help students join university or colleges, (TH).

Similarly, other teachers also expressed related concerns as:

...after students join a preparatory school, they worry about the university entrance examination. Because of this, they are not interested to deal with writing lessons, (TF)

... Most of the students view writing as a difficult skill so that they do not want to engage in writing activities. They rather prefer to concentrate on other areas such as grammar, vocabulary and reading tasks, (TD).

...I think, at preparatory levels students are expected to read different materials in order to be successful in their entrance examination that could lead them to university education. So, since writing will not be part of the entrance exam, it is better to emphasize on other areas such as reading and vocabulary, (TG).

The participants believed that students were not motivated to learn writing. Teachers' perception on the necessity of writing instruction was also reflected in their beliefs whether students were motivated to learn writing. Moreover, teachers believe that students of the preparatory level prefer to learn reading, grammar and vocabulary compared to other skill areas. That means learners are interested in learning other language areas than writing. The teachers were asked to explain the reasons why students were not interested in learning writing. The reasons stated by the teachers appear to incline to two reasons; students' view of writing as difficult and students' exam-oriented learning. In light of this, the participants question the need for providing feedback if students do not consider it.

...if students don't refer to the feedback, what is the need to bother about giving feedback? I do not bother about what to consider when I mark students' writing, (TE).

According to the participants, students concerns on future national exam made students unmotivated to involve in writing activities. In other words, the teachers think that learners perform the writing lessons without curiosity. For that reason, teachers believe that the feedback given to students' works would make no difference on students' writing skill development. In teachers' words, students' lower level of motivation toward learning writing, had affected their feedback practices. Due to this, teachers believed that learners would not thoughtfully look upon the feedbacks provided to their written errors. Moreover, because students are exam orientated, teachers would tend to deal with mainly on grammar and vocabulary targeted feedback. Accordingly, teachers' feedback would abandon other types of errors other than grammar and vocabulary.

This finding proposes that teachers were deficient of their efforts exerted in raising student awareness about benefits writing. The views teachers held about students' motivation towards learning writing lessons suggests that teachers themselves need to convince and enhance learners' understandings about the role of writing in future engagements. More understanding of students can lead to appropriate instruction and good performance of students in writing.

4.3.2. Teacher Related and Contextual Factors

4.3.2.1. The Type of Writing Students Is Asked to Develop

The teachers stated how the type of writing students develop affects their feedback as follows:

There are mainly two types of writing in the text book; guided and free writing. So, in guided writing, my feedback mainly emphasizes the extent to which students have applied lessons learned before. But, in the case of free writing, I consider many different aspects of the work in my feedback. Therefore, I give feedback in accordance with the type of writing produced by the students, (TG).

I give different kinds of writing assignments. For instance, if I give letter writing, my feedback will be much concerned with how the students dealt with each parts of the letter. Whereas, if the assignment is given to practice some previously learned language items like for example, how to use conditional sentences, my feedback will be mainly concerned with how far students used correct tense forms of the three types of conditionals, (TB).

The teachers share the idea that the type of writing students is asked to produce has an influence on the type of feedback to be provided. As shown from teacher's responses, some teachers consider specific elements such as items or lessons which are learned in previous sections of the text book. Others stated that their feedback emphasize on particular areas which are expected to be addressed by the topic of the writing students are asked to develop. The reason claimed by the teachers is that in most cases the writing section deals with consolidating other skills learned in different parts of the textbook. The topics and issues provided for in the writing parts of the text book are very much concerned with enhancing students' ability to practice and consolidate previously learned lessons. Hence, teachers provide context specific feedback because the text book directs them to do so.

4.3.2.2. Time

Work load was one of the issues raised as time constraints for choosing the type of feedback.

In the case of our school English language teachers are expected to works in two shifts and cover 22-24 classes per a week. In addition to this, we also participate in different duties such as being member and leader of clubs, committees, and homeroom teacher. In such circumstances it is difficult to deal with teaching writing let alone giving feedbacks to students writing assignments, (TD).

... we are required to take part in various co-curricular activities. In such occasions it is difficult to manage the time we have and the large number of students' papers. So, I simply try to correct errors that are easily observable at the time of marking (T).

The teachers show that they are working in two shifts and are weighing overload so that they have little time available for dealing with students' written activities. Moreover, the participants stated that they are forced to take part in many different co-curricular activities which are in school time and out of school time. Hence, teachers are preoccupied with different co-curricular activities so that they have constraints of time to provide in depth and inclusive feedback on students' writing. Accordingly, the types of feedback provided on students written works would be chosen in accordance with the time teachers have. TB states:

...under such context it is even difficult to think about giving written activities. But as a teacher I understand that students

have to develop their writing skills, but I do not give feedback appropriately because the time I have does not allow me to do so.

This teacher underlines the necessity of providing writing tasks, yet due to time constraints he does not provide inclusive feedback for the students' works. The above discussions indicate that the issue of what and how to give feedback to students' writing depend on the availability of time. The participants reported time constraints due to various reasons including work load, large class size and various co-curricular engagements. According to the teachers, the overall effects of these reasons consume much of their time. This shows that the magnitude of the feedback provided to students' writing depends on availability of time.

4.3.2.3. Efforts Needed to Review Students' Works

The participants stated the efforts needed to reviewing students' works claiming large number of students in a class require large amount efforts to deal with students' written works.

I teach five sections containing 65-75 students. You can imagine the number of ours and efforts required to deal with such a large class size, (TA).

In addition, other teachers also expressed concerns about the efforts required as:

... writing is the most difficult skill both to teach and give feedback. Teaching writing needs a lot of time, efforts, and practices. Because of this I prefer to give one or two group assignments to students, (TH).

The statements reveal that teachers appear to acknowledge the fact that providing feedback requires devotion of efforts and time. However, the context in which they are teaching seem to restrict the magnitude of the areas touched by the feedback. Some of the reasons which are mounting the efforts needed to review the work include; large class size, boredom, and scarcity of time. The sums of these reasons escalate the weight of the efforts needed to be devoted when responding to students' works. As a result, teachers tend to explore only errors concentrating on limited areas of the work. From this it is possible to say that the efforts required to review students works are likely to affect how and what aspects to consider.

In summary, the foregoing discussion shows that the factors stated to have influence on teacher's feedback practices were of two categories; student related and to teacher. Thus, student motivation and low level of proficiency, teachers' views regarding writing instruction as well as efforts required for dealing with students writing and contextual factors such as time constraints were found to be most crucial to the teachers' choice over the types of feedback provided on students' writing. The cumulative effects of these factors may have influenced the way teachers' feedback views and practices. Consequently, it is possible to say that the actual feedback provided on students' writing could be the reflection of these factors.

5. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1. Summary/Major Findings

The major findings of this study were:

- The study revealed that teachers mainly inclined to provide direct correction-oriented feedback on students' written works.
- Regarding the types of errors corrected, the study made clear that majority of the teachers do not tolerate surface level errors which could be treated by students themselves. Accordingly, the learners were not encouraged to exercise self-correction on their errors.
- Though the results of the interview reveal that most of the participants seem theoretically aware about how provide feedback and its uses, results emerging out of the interview, the results of document analysis illustrate that teachers fail to implement what they claimed to know about error correction.
- The study further revealed that teachers' adoption of different types of feedback was influenced by mainly two categories: student related and teacher related factors.

5.2. Conclusion

The following conclusions are drawn based on findings of the study.

- The study revealed that teachers tended to emphasize the provision of correction to students' errors. Accordingly, it was found that the way teachers treat written errors merely focused on providing corrective feedback rather than addressing the general aspects of errors.
- Teachers adopted direct/explicit error correction as principal strategy to provide corrective feedback. Moreover, the study indicated that most of the errors corrected by the teachers were confined to grammar, spelling and punctuation. As a result, the students were given feedback mainly on surface level errors which the students could deal with themselves.
- The study revealed that the participants seem theoretically aware about how to provide feedback and its uses. Contrarily, results emerging out of the document analysis illustrate that teachers fail to implement most of their claims. As a result, there was disparity between what the teachers stated to incorporate in the feedback and what they put into practice.
- Teachers' option for adopting different types of feedback was influenced by mainly two categories of factors. According to the responses obtained from teachers, these factors were related to teachers, and students. Students level of proficiency, motivation and number of errors students commit were the main

issues raised against students. Likewise, the factors mentioned in relation to the teachers and contexts include; teachers view regarding importance of writing, time, and workload, efforts needed to review students' works and the type of writing students are asked to develop. Therefore, it was indicated that teachers were affected by the collective effects of these factors when correcting students' written papers.

5.3. Recommendations

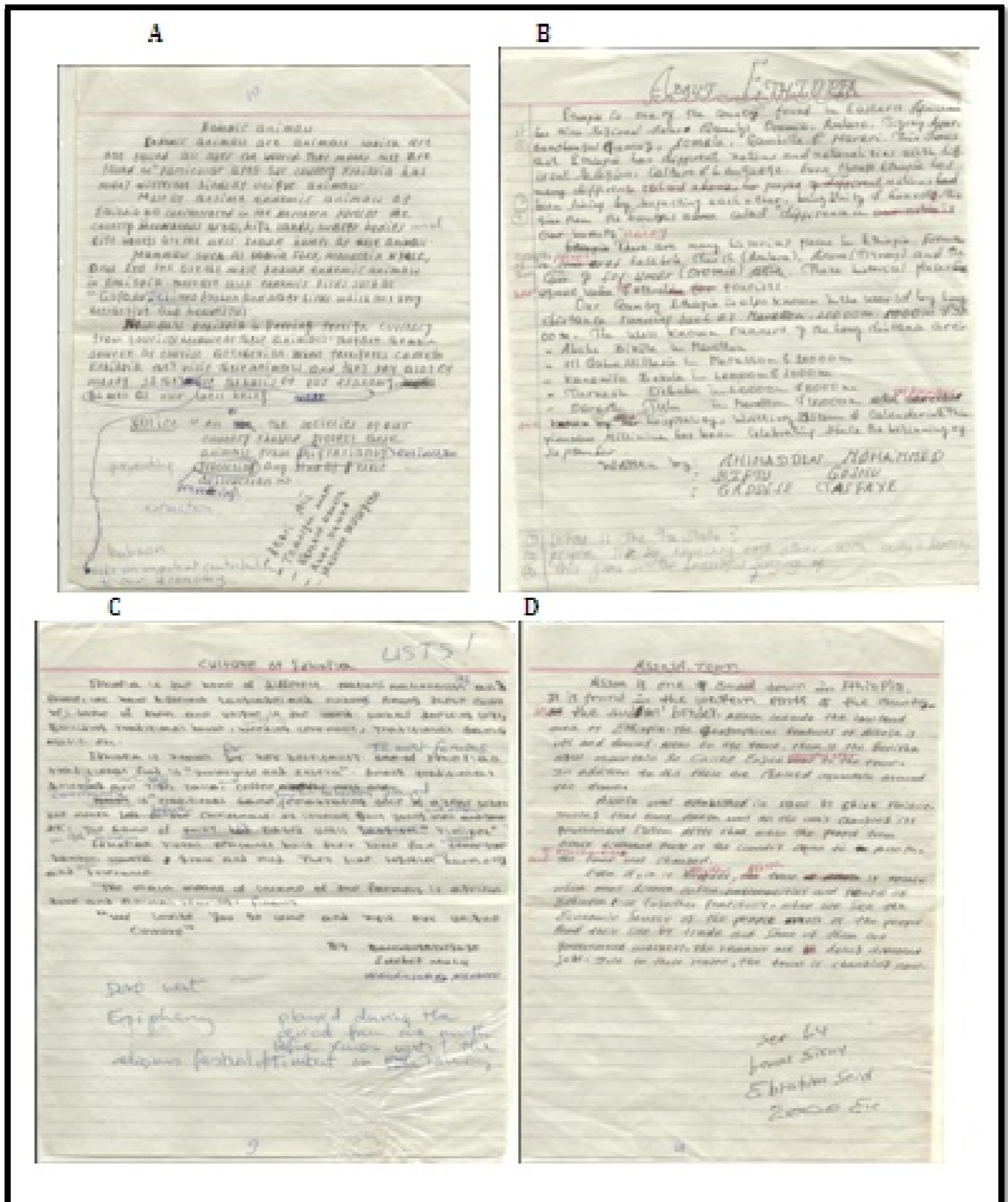
On the basis of the conclusions, the following recommendations are made to address the specified problems.

- With regard to how to respond to students' written works, teachers should incorporate different kinds of feedback so as to improve students' writing skills. Both comments and corrections should be used in accordance with the specific situations of the students' works. Besides, the feedback should be insightful about how to develop and sustain ideas in their writing. In general, teachers' feedback must address strengths and weaknesses both on what students have done and what they need to do in the future.
- As far as error treatment is concerned, students must receive both direct and indirect correction forms of feedback. Consequently, teachers are urged to use indirect correction techniques with errors that learners can easily deal with by themselves. On the other hand, teachers would be concerned with correcting errors which are difficult for students to correct. As a result, students could be encouraged to manage their errors and learn from teachers' feedback. Moreover, teachers should consider reviewing the various aspects of the students' writing and correct various errors types in the feedback.
- In order to assist students writing skills development, teachers have to pursue various means for enhancing their feedback practices. Inter alia, experience sharing, personal reading and rethinking the importance of writing, encouraging and convincing students about the significance of writing skills in their current, forthcoming education as well as other engagements. Likewise, teachers should recognize that reviewing students' writing requires more effort and time so that the importance of feedback to students should be measured from both current as well as future benefits so that it needs to exert utmost efforts to minimize the effects said to have influenced their feedback provision practices.

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Appendix



Figures 1: Sample Teacher-Corrected Papers Used for Document Analysis