

Challenges Faced by EFL Teachers and Learners in Providing and Receiving Online Corrective Feedback on Writing Assignments

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted most sectors on a global scale. In most places around the world, education has transitioned to a fully online mode. During the pandemic, online learning was the most appropriate alternative for continuing education, particularly at the tertiary level, though this transition was not without inherited challenges. A mixed-methods study investigated English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' and students' attitudes towards and beliefs surrounding the use of online corrective feedback on Blackboard, with a qualitative component designed to explore the challenges. The aim of this part of the study was to determine the challenges faced by EFL teachers and learners when using Blackboard (LMS) to provide and receive online corrective feedback on writing assignments. Responses to an open-ended question in a survey-based questionnaire of 130 EFL teachers and 219 EFL learners in a Saudi university's Preparatory Year Program (PYP) were analyzed using thematic analysis, the data from which revealed that the main obstacles for EFL instructors and learners were related to language proficiency, technical and communication challenges, and the amount of time and effort required. This study also found that another challenge was the disparity between teachers and students regarding perceptions of Online Corrective Feedback (OCF), which must be taken into consideration in order to make online learning effective in improving EFL students' writing skills in an EFL context.

Keywords: Online Corrective Feedback, Blackboard, Saudi Arabia, E-learning, Higher Education, Covid-19, Writing Skills, Learning Management System (LMS)

1. Introduction

Continuously changing and challenging circumstances require new approaches to leading an effective educational institution. Furthermore, in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, there have been wide-scale changes on a global scale, and educational institutions around the world have been transformed into virtual hubs. Teaching and learning practices have taken a new turn by focusing on techniques that can be used for the benefit of teachers and learners online. As the internet has proven to be a blessing in these unprecedented conditions, its use in the educational arena has been the most effective one since its inception. As the internet has taken over the world, online and virtual platforms have given a completely new course to pedagogical practices. Similar to the rest of the world, schools, colleges, and universities in Saudi Arabia have adapted to the changing environment and adopted modern virtual techniques to facilitate teaching and learning and to contribute to the competence, knowledge, and skills of students to enable them to compete in international markets. Policy makers seem to be cognizant of the fact that, under these circumstances, virtual teaching and learning are the only options available. Therefore, a variety of teaching and learning tools have been introduced and employed both at school and university levels. Madrasati and Blackboard are the two most prominent tools that have been used in Saudi Arabia in the wake of the pandemic and social distancing rules. A number of local researchers have undertaken the task of investigating the effectiveness and appropriateness of these tools in different institutions in Saudi Arabia, the findings of which indicate that online tools such as Blackboard have contributed significantly to the success of online education in the kingdom (Alsowayegh et al., 2019; Ali, 2017; Alowedi, 2020; Bukhari & Basaffar, 2019; Gulnaz et al., 2020). Although many studies have looked into the concept of teaching and learning online, there seems to be a lack of empirical evidence on the challenges and difficulties that EFL students and teachers encounter during writing lessons with a special focus on online corrective feedback. Saudi educational institutions emphasize the development of language learners' writing skills as language curriculums and pedagogical practices are directed to work on EFL learners' academic writing skills. In this endeavor, teachers play a crucial role in reading students' drafts and giving them constructive feedback, though it is not an easy task for teachers to provide feedback and help students overcome their weaknesses in writing drafts online. The apparent challenge associated with giving corrective feedback has been widely investigated in EFL and ESL contexts, though it requires a more systematic approach to find challenges and solutions in order to enhance virtually delivered language lessons, particularly in terms of writing skills feedback. Therefore, this study takes into consideration the virtual EFL classroom setting in the Saudi context and explores EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions of the challenges, issues, and problems that they encounter while providing and receiving corrective feedback on learners' online writing drafts.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 The Advantages of Online and Blended Learning

A number of studies have examined the usefulness of using technology in online and blended learning in Saudi universities. These studies have found that online learning has been an

effective solution to continuing teaching and learning and has many advantages, including high level of accessibility, saving money, time, and effort, and class and lecture recording (Alsowayegh et al., 2019; Ali, 2017; Alowedi, 2020; Bukhari & Basaffar, 2019; Gulnaz et al., 2020). Ali (2017) found that using the Blackboard platform demotivated some language learners and motivated others, whereas Alfadda and Mahdi (2021) found a significant correlation between the use of Zoom by Saudi university students and their positive perception of technology's utility in EFL classrooms. Alowedi (2020) explored students' perceptions of the use of Blackboard at the Saudi Electronic University, finding that participants were positive, satisfied, and motivated to attend classes online using Blackboard. Moreover, a study conducted before the pandemic by Bukhari and Basaffar (2019) investigated students' perceptions of integrating technology into English language classrooms and their opinions of its influence on their motivation, interaction, and learning English in general. The results demonstrate students' motivation toward the use of Blackboard and the large number of students in favor of integrating the online tool in the learning process; however, they appeared to perceive blended learning positively regardless of their level of language and computer literacy.

Global universities have also researched the usefulness of employing online tools to provide online corrective feedback. For example, Yoke, Rajendran, Sain, Kamaludin, Nawi, and Yusof (2013) investigated the effectiveness of using e-mails as an alternative online tool to provide corrective feedback for L1 Malay learners, the results of which show that using alternative online tools could be beneficial and an effective means of enhancing students' writing skills.

2.2 Education during the Pandemic in the Saudi Context

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the world's industries have been severely affected, and the need to close educational organizations called for an urgent solution to facilitate learning at any time and place. In most countries, education turned to technology to obey social distancing guidelines and prevent the spread of Covid-19 among students and teachers. In response to the pandemic, different countries shifted to remote learning using television channels or other online platforms such as Telegram, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, and Blackboard, among others. Although many Saudi learners and instructors were not prepared or lacked the needed devices or networks to connect to these online platforms, the Saudi Ministry of Education established a learning tool called Madrasati to provide a unified platform to over six million learners in public schools in Saudi Arabia with online instruction (Oraif & Elyas, 2021). Moreover, all universities in Saudi Arabia used Blackboard, a learning management system (LMS), to continue teaching and learning their courses online. Since the onset of the pandemic, Blackboard has officially become the main tool for teaching, learning, testing, giving feedback, assessing, and grading students' quizzes and assignments at a tertiary level. In the context of a global crisis, the shift to a new learning environment has meant that teachers' and academics' awareness of online learning and Blackboard features needed to be increased because this system was only partially used as a complementary tool prior to the pandemic. Furthermore, teachers may need to apply new strategies to improve their students' attention, satisfaction, cognitive and behavioral engagement, and motivational to learn online.

2.3 Readiness for Online Learning

The literature found that many students and teachers were not ready for the new task of online learning and teaching. For example, Alsobhi, Meccawy, and Meccawy (2021) argue that, in the event of a crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the significance of several dimensions of e-learning readiness in relation to learners, teachers, and infrastructure, such as acceptance of e-learning, technical proficiencies, and appropriate cultural mindset, is emphasized. Al-Nofaie (2020) investigated the Blackboard readiness of 25 students at Taif University studying English as a foreign language, the results of which reveal students' lack of technological preparation and competence as language instructors were not only teaching students, but also instructing them how to download, upload, and share their work using software in English, particularly lower-proficiency-level students (Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020). Previous studies have also found challenges faced by teachers and learners when teaching and learning English online (e.g., poor internet connectivity, network problems, lacking e-devices, and communication problems, assessment problems, technical problems, and other psychological problems such as decreased motivation, anxiety, and Covid-19 disease-related stress). In another study on teachers' readiness for online teaching and learning, Badiozaman (2021) explored 22 Malaysian teachers' perceptions of online teaching and learning readiness in different higher education settings, demonstrating teacher's agency as critical in shaping flexibility and adaptability during the transfer to online learning. In addition, based on participants' experiences during the pandemic, there are other significant competencies that contribute to the readiness of online teaching and learning, including course design, time management, and technological and communication competency. Furthermore, few studies have investigated the association of gender differences and education levels as factors affecting students' online readiness. Tang, Chen, Law, Wu, Lau, Guan, and Ho (2021) investigated students' online learning readiness in relation to gender differences and different academic levels, with the results reporting no significant differences regarding gender; however, higher-academic level students were more prepared for online learning than lower-level ones.

2.4 Challenges of Online Learning

With the sudden shift to online learning, existing language teaching and learning problems were exacerbated as many studies have found challenges and obstacles that had a negative impact on the quality and effectiveness of educational technology in general, online learning, or online English language learning specifically, with further studies providing guidelines for dealing with these challenges (Al-Nofaie, 2020; Mahyoob, 2020; Hossain et al., 2017; Dhawan, 2020; Pellegrini, et al., 2020; Byun, Sooyeon, & Slavin, 2020). Some studies have claimed that traditional face-to-face teaching may be more efficient and effective than online Blackboard teaching (Tichavsky, Hunt, Driscoll, and Jicha, 2015). Alturise (2020) evaluated learners' and teachers' satisfaction with online learning using the Blackboard platform at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia, finding that further steps needed to be taken to improve the overall online learning experience. In addition, Alanezi and AlAzwani (2020) conducted a small sample study of only 52 participants in Kuwait to investigate students' opinions on mobile learning after the current pandemic to find positive views on the use of mobile learning in higher education. Moreover, a study was conducted in the College of Medicine at Alfaisal University in Saudi

Arabia by Rajab, Gazal, and Alkattan (2020) to explore online learning challenges faced by 208 learners and faculty members in medical education during the pandemic. Furthermore, Mahyoob (2020) conducted a descriptive study of 184 learners by administering a questionnaire evaluating their experiences in online education, assessing the practicability of online learning, and identifying challenges and obstacles faced by English language students at Taibah University's Science and Arts College in Saudi Arabia. The results of these studies identify several technical, academic, and communication challenges that have influenced online language learning during the Covid-19 pandemic and obstructed the anticipated progress in language learning, thereby having a negative impact on students' satisfaction with continuing online learning.

2.5 Psychological Challenges

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown, learning may be exceedingly stressful due to anxiety over disease. Therefore, students may face psychological problems related to the disease itself (Elsalem, Al-Azzam, Jum'ah, Obeidat, Sindiani, and Kheirallah, 2020). Although both teachers and students have been able to continue the learning process, they have had to overcome psychological barriers and challenges. Though some studies have suggested that online learning is more pleasant and can increase learner motivation (Kim & Frick, 2011), it may negatively affect motivation to learn (Al-Hoorie, 2017; Elyas and Al-Grigri, 2014; Rahman, 2020; Wright, 2021). Wright (2021) administered a questionnaire to over 1,000 English teachers in 99 countries and found that students' motivational levels during the pandemic were among their most significant concerns. However, this lack of motivation is not necessarily associated with online learning as other factors may have contributed to the decline in students' motivation, such as social isolation, fear of halting academic progress, anxiety related to the disease, network problems, and home or family distractions. Additionally, through a literature review, Al-Samiri (2021) explored how the shift to online learning has both negatively and positively affected English language teaching and learning at the university level in Saudi Arabia and found that students' lack of motivation was one of the major obstacles observed and was associated with other contributing issues, such as technical problems, inappropriate learning settings, and students' mental health.

2.6 Technical Challenges

Technical problems such as repeated network disconnection due to slow internet connection, sound interruption, poor technical support, incompatible devices, or being logged out by the platform may also negatively influence learners' online learning experiences (Ali & Abdalgane, 2020; Al-Nofaie, 2020; Bin Dahmash, 2020; Hashim, 2018; Mabrook, 2020). Bin Dahmash (2020) conducted a qualitative study and interviewed 12 EFL university learners at King Saud University, the results of which show that students confronted numerous technical issues while joining online classes with increased internet traffic, which negatively affected their learning and exam experiences, thereby causing high levels of frustration and demotivation among learners.

2.7 Communication Challenges

Lack of instant interaction, visual cues, eye contact, non-verbal communication, and facial gestures online are significant challenges associated with online language learning. As a result of cultural constraints in the Saudi context, turning on cameras during the online classroom was not mandatory for teachers and students, particularly for female campuses. However, Gregersen and MacIntyre (2017) argue that these visual communication methods are crucial for communicating or conveying the complete meaning of an oral message, which may explain the results of pandemic-related online learning studies in which participants preferred in-person classes in the Saudi EFL context (Al-Jarf, 2020; Al-Nofaie, 2020). It may be argued that this problem is exacerbated in language courses in that the teacher needs to teach phonetics and morphemes (Mahyoob, 2020). Another challenge related to communication includes privacy and security issues related to other online applications used beside the main learning platform. For instance, Alabsi and Alghamdi (2019) found that WhatsApp was widely used by university EFL students to communicate with peers and instructors and enhance their reading, writing, and grammar skills. However, due to many privacy concerns related to the application, most universities instructed faculty members and staff to use other applications such as Signal, which higher level of data protection (Tashkandi, 2021). Moreover, due to other security problems such as uninvited individuals attending a Zoom session to cause disruption, the majority of Saudi colleges have warned teachers about using Zoom for teaching and have instructed them to replace it with Blackboard LMS.

2.8 Time Constraints

While a number of studies have found that online learning can save time and money, other studies have found that online learning and teaching are time-consuming. For example, according to a survey with English teachers, before the pandemic only 10% of teaching time was spent online; after the pandemic it increased to 55% (Wright, 2021). Instructors planned lessons, prepared lectures, created materials, sent and replied to student and administration emails, created and uploaded assignments, and given corrective feedback to students in addition to teaching online. Furthermore, other studies have found that teachers spend more time preparing for online lectures than for in-person ones, leading to problems such as social media addiction, academic procrastination and Zoom fatigue or general exhaustion (Hernandez and Florez, 2020; Mabrook, 2020; Shaibani, 2020; Wiederhold, 2020).

2.9 Assessment and Feedback-related Challenges

Assessment is a fundamental challenge in online teaching and learning, due to the high probability of cheating, using a number of dishonest methods, and submitting plagiarized work despite the availability of plagiarism-detecting software, assessing, evaluating students' learning progress and grading language learners can be challenging (Ali and Abdalgane, 2020; Mabrook, 2020). These issues in evaluating students can significantly hinder accurate assessment of students' development and corrective feedback on their work. A form of negative response to a learner's language production is known as corrective feedback (Ellis, 2009); existing studies have shown its significant impact on language learning development. For instance, some research has examined the efficacy of specific feedback types, such as error

coding and direct, indirect corrective feedback on surface-level content (Rajab et al., 2020; Hartshorn and Evans, 2015; Atmaca, 2016; Tang and Liu, 2018), while the effectiveness of corrective feedback on foreign language writing has caught the attention of many researchers (Bitchener, 2017; Yilmaz, 2013). However, Cohen-Sayag (2016) argues that the effectiveness of feedback is related to learners' preferences, feedback giver, type of instruction, and feedback receiver.

2.10 The Knowledge Gap

The literature review reveals that many researchers consider Blackboard a reliable platform for providing corrective feedback to EFL learners (Ali, 2017; Sauro, 2009). Furthermore, researchers have found that learners preferred to use electronic devices to receive corrective feedback (Qutob and Madini, 2020), though few studies have investigated the challenges related to assessment and feedback given by language teachers through Blackboard. Therefore, the current study attempts to fill the research gap by focusing on feedback-related challenges faced by language learners and teachers when providing and receiving corrective feedback on writing assignments using Blackboard as a tool in the Saudi EFL context. The current qualitative study is a part of a larger mixed-methods study, which focuses on the relationship between the attitudes and beliefs of English teachers and learners toward corrective feedback using Blackboard, while the qualitative part explored the challenges and obstacles encountered by teachers and learners during the pandemic. The results of the present study may lead to a more comprehensive understanding of online English language teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia. This study attempts to answer the following question: What challenges do EFL learners and teachers face when using Blackboard to give and receive online corrective feedback on writing assignments during the Covid-19 pandemic?

3. Methodology and Research Design

A mixed-method design was adopted to investigate EFL teachers' and students' attitudes towards and beliefs surrounding the use of Blackboard for providing and receiving online corrective feedback. However, the current study represents only the qualitative section of the study, exploring the challenges faced by EFL teachers and learners while providing and receiving online corrective feedback. The study was designed as a quantitative survey with an embedded qualitative component, making it a survey with one open-ended question about these challenges. The open-ended question given to both teachers and students was as follows:

What are the challenges or difficulties that you faced while giving or receiving online corrective feedback via Blackboard?

3.1 Context

The study was conducted at an English Language Institute at a university in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, at which the ELI program consists of four modules that must be completed within the first Preparatory Year, for which are two main tracks, namely Arts and Science (at the time of conducting this research). Each semester, there are two modules that students must pass in

order to be accepted into the university making it is an intensive, which is fast-track course of seven to eight weeks per module.

3.2 Participants

This study used a convenient sampling approach, in which 219 female EFL students and 130 female EFL teachers at the ELI participated. Students were from across the four different levels and studying on the two main tracks, whereas teachers varied in age, nationality, qualification, and ranking at the university.

3.3 Instrument and Data Analysis

An online questionnaire was used to collect data from both participant groups. The students' survey was translated into Arabic to ensure that they understood the survey items, whereas the teachers' survey was in English. Validity and reliability tests were conducted after the surveys were piloted to two smaller groups of participants and appropriate revisions were made. To examine the reliability coefficients for the multi-item scales in both questionnaires, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability coefficients were computed using SPSS version 22.0. For the majority of the scales for teachers and students' questionnaires, the reliability is over or close to 0.70, with the lowest reliability being 0.64. This figure suggests that there was a display of homogeneity among the items of the composite variables. On the students' questionnaire, the beliefs multi-item scale attained an unexpectedly low Cronbach's alpha coefficient, though this score was increased by the deletion of one item. Two items from the attitudes scale were also deleted to increase the Cronbach alpha coefficient. As a result, three items in total were deleted from the student questionnaire to ensure the consistency among the items of the composite variables. Table 1 presents the questionnaires' four multi-item scales and their Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient, as well as a sample item from each scale.

Table 1. Internal consistency reliability test results for survey

Variable	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha	Sample items
Student beliefs	5	.78	I believe that Blackboard corrective feedback is important in improving my writing.
Student attitudes	7	.89	I feel excited every time I read my teachers' Blackboard corrective feedback on my writing assignments.
Teacher beliefs	6	.64	I believe Blackboard is an effective tool for providing corrective feedback on students' writings.
Teacher attitudes	6	.87	I enjoy providing corrective feedback on my students' writing on Blackboard.

Based on the results of the tests and participants' comments and feedback during the piloting phase, the survey was sent via WhatsApp to both teachers and students. Both questionnaires consisted of one open-ended question, to which participants responded electronically, and irrelevant or empty responses were excluded using Microsoft Excel. Consequently, 65 responses out of 218 students and 43 teachers were considered for the purpose of the qualitative data analysis. Students' responses were translated into English as the students' survey was in Arabic, after which all responses were coded manually by assigning a number to responses sharing the same theme; each of the responses were categorized under one of those themes. The codes were handled only by one coder but reviewed by an external reviewer to ensure face validity. Analyzing the qualitative data from the open-ended question in both surveys yielded two major themes, one related to students and another related to teachers, as shown in detail in Figure 1.

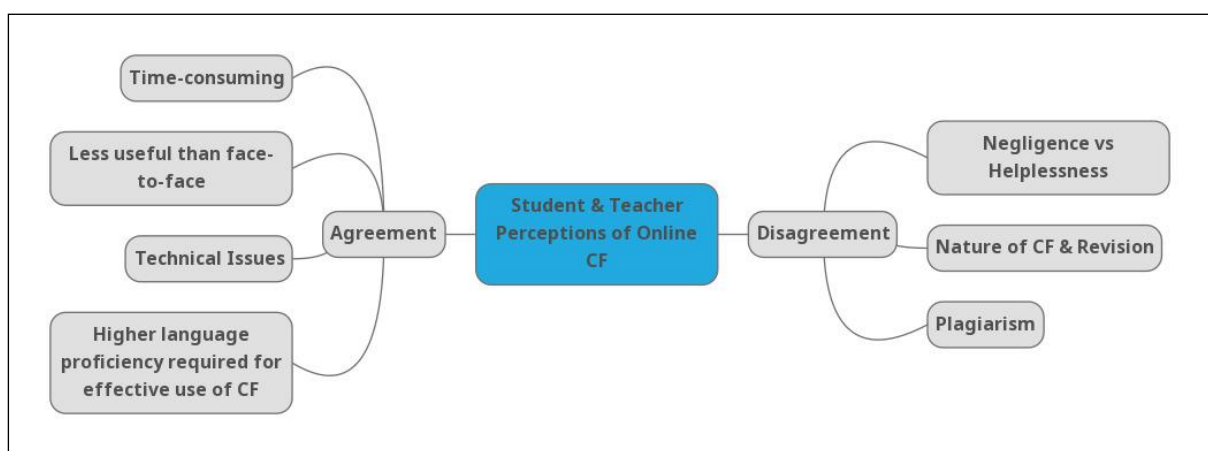


Figure 1. Challenges faced while providing and receiving online corrective feedback via Blackboard

(1) Student-related themes

Students' responses were categorized under seven sub-themes, as illustrated in Figure 1. These include the nature of online CF, rewriting, lack of instant communication, technical issues, language barrier, and dealing with criticism.

Nature of OCF

Most students agreed that the ambiguity of corrective feedback was the hardest issue that they faced on Blackboard as one participant said the following:

Sometimes, I don't understand the point that the teacher is talking about.

Another commented the following:

The teacher does not write about the areas that I need to improve, so I can achieve better marks on the next assignments.

Similarly, another respondent said the following:

I can't understand the teachers' feedback. Sometimes, I cannot understand the symbols that

the teacher uses in correcting.

Another respondent stated that her main problem was the following:

Unclear; the teacher does not make it clear what to fix or where exactly the mistake is. The feedback is often ambiguous as I often don't know my errors. I barely come up with sentences and the teacher does not like them. Sometimes, the teacher says that there is a mistake in my writing without telling me exactly where it is. Sometimes, the feedback is vague and does not have a meaning, and I cannot understand it. At the beginning, I did not know where to find the teacher's feedback; however, sometimes, I cannot understand the teacher's feedback.

Very few students stated that the absence of corrective feedback was an issue that they faced during the pandemic when learning online as one participant responded the following:

The teacher does not write any feedback on my assignments that I submit via Blackboard.

Similarly, another respondent stated the following:

There is often no feedback.

Another student clearly aware of the importance of corrective feedback indicated that her teacher provided no feedback on her writing assignments:

Some teachers do not write feedback even if it is positive; but in both cases, we need feedback to be motivated and to improve our writing.

Reviewing Drafts

Students complained about having to rewrite their assignments after receiving corrective feedback from teachers, which might be difficult due to the large amount of coursework that they have to do and the time they are obliged to submit their assignments. One student stated that the most difficult aspect of online corrective feedback was the following:

The most difficult aspect is rewriting the whole assignment without the teacher identifying the exact mistakes that I should fix.

Another respondent highlighted the following:

It is challenging that I have to rewrite my assignments.

Another agreed with this statement:

One difficulty is rewriting my assignments.

It proved difficult for students to rewrite their assignments, especially in the absence of online corrective feedback or when they did not understand said feedback given by their teachers.

Lack of Instant Communication

Students also highlighted the need for instant communication and the time that they would wait to receive feedback from their teachers:

I cannot ask for more explanations. I don't understand some of the feedback. When I cannot communicate quickly with the teacher before the due date, it becomes so frustrating.

Technical Issues Related to the Internet

A number of students faced technical issues that may have prevented them from benefiting from the online corrective feedback that they received on Blackboard. One of the major issues was internet connectivity as one participant said the following:

The internet is too slow.

Similarly, another respondent commented on Blackboard itself:

The internet and Blackboard often shut down during the session.

This issue seems to have hindered students from taking full advantage of online corrective feedback when provided by their teachers, making it difficult to complete tasks on time.

Low Language Proficiency

Some students considered the language barrier to be a challenge that they faced when receiving corrective feedback from teachers on Blackboard. For example, one student responded the following:

Sometimes, I cannot understand what the teachers wants.

Furthermore, not being able to understand instructions in English due to their low level of language proficiency was a problem:

I do not understand the language. I wish the teacher [would] translate some of the words.

Another explained the following:

Language differences make it difficult to understand.

This low level of language proficiency stands in the way of students' understanding and, therefore, use of the provided feedback.

Dealing with Criticism

One student's response was that she did not like to be criticized, mentioning 'criticism' as a challenge faced while receiving feedback from her teachers on Blackboard, which may reflect a misunderstanding of the purpose of corrective feedback.

Plagiarism

One student argued sometimes teachers deducted marks based on the SafeAssign report provided on Blackboard, which shows a high percentage of plagiarism (over the allowed 25%) when in reality the student feels they did not plagiarize:

Whenever I write my assignments, it appears that I copied them, and I did not.

Therefore, the only corrective feedback that this student would receive is that her work was

copied and no instructions on how to improve it. Finally, despite all these challenges of online corrective feedback from the students' perspectives, around 22 students responded that they did not have any difficulties understating this kind of feedback from their teachers, as one of them stated the following:

I don't have any difficulty; on the other hand, I really enjoy writing my assignments online on Blackboard. [Using] the teacher's online feedback, I can recognize my mistakes so I would be more careful in the final writing exam.

(2) Teacher-related themes

Teachers' responses were categorized under five sub-themes as illustrated in Figure 1, including students' difficulty understanding corrective feedback, students' low proficiency, technical issues, cheating and plagiarism, time-related pressures, and the impact of Blackboard on students' performance.

Student Negligence and Lack of Seriousness Toward Online Corrective Feedback

In responses to the open-ended question, some teachers believed that students usually do not understand or often ignored the online corrective feedback provided:

I don't use it, [because] I believe that students don't see the correction.

Similarly, other teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with students' attitudes towards online corrective feedback:

I have noticed that most of the students ignore the feedback provided to them on Blackboard.

Another teacher stated that,

I am afraid that students might not understand my remarks.

One teacher argued the following:

They don't understand English feedback and/ they ignore it.

Another teacher agreed:

It is not difficult, but students don't pay attention.

Also, teachers felt that their online corrective feedback was ignored:

Some students don't bother to check the feedback I provide, which is very disappointing.

Teachers' responses also illustrated that students' lack of seriousness is a major reason for their inability to benefit from online corrective feedback and improve their writing skills, as the following response suggests:

The fact [is] that some students might not be listening during the session [and] keep repeating the same mistakes in their writings. Students don't pay attention.

Teachers' responses also indicated that students repeating their mistakes after receiving online corrective feedback shows that they are not taking it seriously:

Most students need further detailed explanations and instructions to help them understand and tackle their various error types. From my experience, online corrective feedback via Blackboard is not taken seriously by some learners, and mistakes are repeated.

Another teacher demonstrates how students would neglect OCF:

We can have the same writing samples from the students with no correction. Although I've already discussed the same errors through corrective feedback and Blackboard discussion, but it has no impact on the learners' writing.

Students' Low Language Proficiency

Students' low proficiency may be an issue that teachers face when providing corrective feedback on BB, which can affect their understanding of their teacher's feedback. For example, one teacher commented the following:

Although I use very simple English to give my feedback and to explain the mistakes yet, most of the weak students can't even read [or] make use of the correction tips!

Another teacher commented the following:

Sometimes, [this method] is not effective for low level students.

Similarly, another teacher stated that,

The weak student needs face-to-face feedback.

Another teacher argued as follows:

Most of the students don't read the feedback on Blackboard. Some may read and still not fully understand what the mistakes are.

Students can't sometimes grasp the idea of writing.

From a teacher's point of view, one teacher believed that students' low level of language proficiency contributed significantly to benefiting from online corrective feedback provided by their teachers:

It is challenging to provide feedback on all student's mistakes. Especially, if the students' language level is extremely below the level.

Technical Issues Related to Blackboard

In their responses, teachers expressed that they had to tackle technical issues mostly related to Blackboard as an online learning and teaching platform during the process of providing online corrective feedback to their students:

It is not easy to correct assignments on the Blackboard. I had to download the file sometimes to correct it and upload it back on the Blackboard.

Another pointed out the following:

Some of the corrective feedback cannot be accessed or seen by students.

The participants also noticed that, at times, it is not possible to save the feedback on Blackboard due to some of its features:

The Blackboard tool doesn't work efficiently, and I need to copy the students' writings and correct them on the Word document.

Other teachers referred to the fact that some students were accessing Blackboard and consequently the online corrective feedback provided by the teacher through their mobile phones, which brings its own set of problems:

They cannot identify the corrected writing as they might be using [an] old mobile phone, or it is not supported with some features on the Blackboard.

It is difficult to use mobile phones to understand the teacher's feedback.

In addition, some of the issues raised by teachers illustrated this challenge from different perspectives, as one teacher commented on the tools not being fully interactive:

The blackboard writing feedback tools are not fully interactive. They allow some type of annotation, but it is not enough to give full-fledged feedback to the students. On the other hand, the general comments in the feedback box do not allow [users] to point out the major areas [that] a teacher wants to point out.

Regarding providing corrective feedback online, some teachers created their own rubrics to help speed up the process and make it more accessible to students:

The ELI doesn't provide an electronic rubric, so I created an online rubric to make the corrections easier for my students.

Interestingly, some teachers felt that online corrective feedback would be beneficial if provided to older or more mature students, while younger learners needed the face-to-face interaction when receiving corrective feedback:

The corrective feedback on Blackboard could be useful for old[er] students more than younger ones. I think it is interesting, but it is not useful like face-to-face when you explain and let the students write again in front of you.

Cheating and Plagiarism

Despite having SafeAssign as a feature on Blackboard, many teachers agreed that using an online platform for students to submit their writing assignments made it easy for them to cheat or exert less effort when writing their assignments, which, in turn, would affect their overall performance. For example, one teacher believed the following:

With online teaching, most students don't write the writing tasks themselves and use direct translations from Google.

Similarly, a few teachers commented on the survey question regarding the challenges that they face when giving online corrective feedback, with the “plagiarism” referring to what another teacher explained as a possible reason why students do not pay attention to feedback:

Most students don't write the assignments themselves, so they're not interested in the feedback.

Furthermore, using translation applications are one of the ways in which students circumvent plagiarism detection tools online.

Online Corrective Feedback is Time-consuming

Some teachers find that providing online corrective feedback via Blackboard is a time-consuming activity:

It takes a long time. It is not an easy tool [to use]. Correcting online is exhausting and time consuming.

Another teacher commented with disappointment that,

It takes time and, sometimes, I feel demotivated when I don't see improvements [in the students' writing].

Another teacher agreed:

Sometimes, it can be time consuming.

Another teacher suggested holistic feedback as a solution:

It's time consuming. You can't look at each mistake, but you[']d rather give holistic feedback.

Another teacher suggested that online corrective feedback should not be done during class time as it will affect the lesson objectives and recommended a dedicated online session for corrective feedback:

It should be done in a separate meeting.

Another teacher also pointed out the time that it takes to provide feedback and proposed it is more effective to carry it out during online office hours:

Providing corrective feedback on Blackboard is quite challenging. It takes so much time and doesn't help students to improve their writing skills! I spend so much time correcting students' assignments' 'first drafts', hoping that they'd check their mistakes and correct them in the final draft, but I find out every time [that] they do not change much! However, I do some corrective feedback during my office hours [online,] and it's much better.

Finally, the data shows that only two of the teachers did not find it difficult or challenging in any way to give corrective feedback to their students online. For example, teachers identified several advantages of online corrective feedback to highlight its importance in language learners' development, and the following response is representative of this idea:

Providing feedback online has many advantages, such as the ability to copy and paste feedback with recurrent error patterns. However, I often wonder if the student checks the feedback and learn from it. I am inclined to think that most students would simply check their grades and dismiss the feedback. Undoubtedly, there will always be a percentage of responsible students who care about improving their performance and having a better outcome next time [that] they attempt a writing task.

4. Major Findings

Examining the data, it is apparent both teachers and students agreed on some aspects of online corrective feedback and disagreed on others as illustrated in Figure 2.

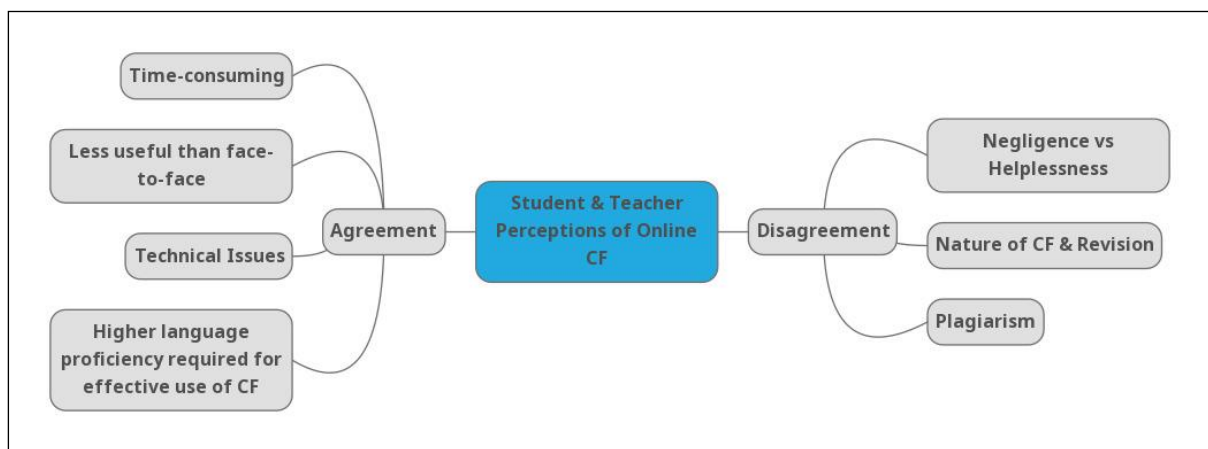


Figure 2. Agreement and disagreement between students and teachers in perceptions of online corrective feedback

Both groups agreed that language can be a barrier. Therefore, higher language proficiency is required for the effective use of online corrective feedback. Teachers and students also agreed that online corrective feedback's effectiveness may be hindered by technical issues and the online platform used. One challenging aspect of the use of online corrective feedback that both groups of participants agreed on is that it requires a lot of effort and is time consuming as teachers must provide online corrective feedback to approximately 40 students on average four times each module; students must rewrite their assignments several times in addition to other academic tasks that they are required to complete within a limited time. Most importantly, students and teachers agreed that providing and receiving online corrective feedback is less useful than face-to-face feedback received in class because of the lack of instant communication.

However, there appears to be an incongruity between teachers and students regarding their perceptions of online correct feedback, in that teachers think that students neglect their corrective feedback and do not take it seriously, whereas students feel helpless because they do not understand the language or find it difficult to understand the nature of the feedback and the purpose of it. Furthermore, both groups disagreed on the nature of online corrective feedback, where teachers would provide it expecting revisions to be made based on it, and students felt

that they did not know how to deal with the feedback when rewriting assignments online. Furthermore, both groups disagreed on the concept of plagiarism, what it entails, and how it is calculated and graded online. Although only one student raised this point, it is an important consideration as it shows two things, namely that some students might not fully comprehend the definition of plagiarism and what it entails or that some teachers depend entirely on technology without using personal judgement when looking at online plagiarism reports.

5. Discussion

In line with other studies that have found that online teaching and learning are time-consuming and contribute to other problems (Hernandez and Florez, 2020; Mabrook, 2020; Shaibani, 2020; Wiederhold, 2020; Wright, 2021), this study obtained further evidence that teachers consider giving online corrective feedback time-consuming. Furthermore, students' rewriting of assignments after receiving feedback and looking at the new revised version of the written assignment is a time-consuming activity for them and for students due to time restraints and other academic tasks that must be carried out online.

Another important finding of this study is that both students and teachers believed that online corrective feedback on written assignments was less useful because it lacked instant communication. Students' minimizing the importance of online corrective feedback supports the findings of previous studies, demonstrating that some students preferred face-to-face or in-person classes in the Saudi EFL context (Al-Jarf, 2020; Al-Nofaie, 2020). These findings support the claim that a lack of instant communication during online learning can be a crucial challenge in online language learning, particularly writing skills development.

Moreover, the current study also supports previous studies, which have found technical problems as a challenge in online learning (Ali and Abdalgane, 2020; Al-Nofaie, 2020; Bin Dahmash, 2020; Hashim, 2018; Mabrook, 2020). Both teachers and students agreed that online corrective feedback on written assignments can be hindered by technical issues. For instance, receiving blank submissions, internet-related problems, and lacking the required skills to manage the Blackboard platform were the main technical challenges cited by both groups. Furthermore, high levels of disappointment, frustration, and demotivation caused by technical problems were reported by the participants from both groups.

Interestingly, the results of the present study reveal new challenges not previously discussed in existing literature. Firstly, students' level of language proficiency emerged as a crucial challenge since language can be a significant barrier that can hinder the effectiveness of online corrective feedback. Lower-proficiency language learners are, expectedly, less likely to understand teachers' corrective feedback written in English. Due to their limited vocabulary size, many students found it difficult to understand teachers' instructions, direct or indirect advice, and corrective error coding, especially online. The qualitative results suggest that intermediate and above level of language proficiency is an essential component for the effective use of online corrective feedback. Secondly, the qualitative findings show that some teachers did not provide any type of online feedback on written assignments because they were not

aware of the language barrier that hindered students from revising and editing their assignments. Unfortunately, while students reported the language barrier as a significant challenge, the teachers reported that students ignored the feedback given and/or did not take it seriously. There appears to be a major gap between teachers and learners regarding handling teachers' feedback, resulting in different explanations of the students' negligence and hindering the effectiveness of online corrective feedback.

Intriguingly, the disagreement on issues of plagiarism raises several points. For students, this issue reflects the need for more training and awareness of what constitutes plagiarism. For teachers, the issue means that they might base their decision of awarding the student '0' on the work on the percentage shown on the side without consulting the originality report provided on Blackboard, which, if checked, might show, in many cases, that the title and thesis statement (required by the homework instructions) is calculated in this percentage. Once the teacher examines this report and sees this issue, they can dismiss the match, thereby reducing the percentage shown and allowing them to base their judgement on this new one. Training teachers to examine the originality report on Blackboard and dismissing matches might help improve scores given based on the technology used.

Finally, none of the participants reported psychological challenges related to online corrective feedback as frustration and demotivation were not reported and were always associated with technical and network problems. This lack of mention may be due to many reasons including the small size of the sample or the nature of the data collection instrument and formulation of the qualitative question. Therefore, further studies should be conducted using different tools to collect more comprehensive data (e.g., interviews, diaries, and emails) and explore deeply the challenges faced by students and teachers regarding online corrective feedback on writing assignments. Furthermore, the qualitative questions can be reformulated and expanded to ask more specific questions about the challenges.

6. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

The qualitative findings from this study have important pedagogical implications as teachers' awareness of challenges reported should be raised, and more creative strategies and corrective feedback types should be used to facilitate students' understanding and management of feedback given online. Moreover, students should be encouraged to discuss the difficulties and obstacles that they face handling online feedback with their teachers and then taught how to overcome these obstacles. In addition, it is suggested that the number of students in each class should be reduced so that teachers are able to provide proper online corrective feedback to students and have more time discussing it during office hours, for example. Finally, decision makers should ensure that technical support is readily available and accessible to both students and teachers in order to help them overcome reported technical issues, thereby reducing their frustration and improving the overall online language learning experience.

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