FACTORS INFLUENCING EFL STUDENTS' UTILISATION OF TEACHER WRITTEN FEEDBACK

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Abstract: This qualitative case study investigated factors affecting EFL university students' use of teacher written feedback. Ten Yemeni EFL university students participated in this study. Data included students' written essays, teacher written feedback, and semi-structured interviews. Students' use of teacher written feedback was analysed using an adapted rating scheme. Thematic analysis was used for analysing the interviews. The results revealed that the major factors affecting students' use of teacher written feedback are feedback-related factors (teachers' use of correction symbols, legibility of written feedback, explicitness of written feedback, and wording of written feedback) and student-related factors (students' emotional responses towards teacher written feedback and students' previous literacy experience). Understanding the impact of these factors on students' utilisation of teacher written feedback may help teachers to provide constructive and effective written feedback to their students. Training EFL students on how to utilise teacher written feedback successfully is important for improving the practice of teacher written feedback.

Keywords: EFL, factors, teacher written feedback, utilisation of feedback, writing

In Second Language (L2) writing, teacher written feedback is an important feature because it is a source for students to revise their writing, has positive effect on student learning outcomes, and can give students a sense of audience (Pearson, 2022; Zhang & Hyland, 2022). Despite the significant role of teacher written feedback for students in L2 writing contexts, the issue of factors affecting students' use of teacher written feedback is an important gap in previous studies (Goldstein, 2006; Harris et al., 2014; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Lee, 2014; Mahfoodh, 2017). In giving suggestions for future research on teacher written feedback, Goldstein (2016) points out that one of the questions that deserve

researchers' attention is "What are the range of factors that affect how students use their teacher's feedback and how successfully they do so" (p. 424). Furthermore, Harris et al. (2014) have argued that "[f]urther research is needed to understand better how students make use of feedback as part of a process of self-regulated learning" (p. 133). Students' learning and performance in any teaching setting are affected by a wide range factors (Lipnevich et al., 2021). In L2 writing contexts, Conrad and Goldstein (1999) have noted that understanding how students revise and use teacher written feedback should involve examining contextual factors that affect this practice. Goldstein (2006) has also identified that the majority of studies carried out on teacher written feedback have been "noncontextual and nonsocial" (p.185).

Researchers have noted that few studies have examined how contextual factors can affect L2 students' use of teacher written feedback, especially in EFL contexts. For example, Ferris (2003) has argued that factors affecting students' use of teacher written feedback can be included in the "agenda for future research on this topic" (p. 47). Furthermore, Goldstein (2004) has highlighted that when teacher commentary and student revision are investigated, we should be aware that this is "a complex process, with multiple contextual, teacher and student factors" (p. 67). In response to this argument, Hyland and Hyland (2006) have given a call for more studies that should analyse the complexities involved in the issue of written feedback by examining factors affecting the practice of teacher written feedback. In EFL contexts, Mahfoodh and Pandian (2011) point out that studies on teacher written feedback "have not focused on the crucial role of factors in context" (p. 15). This gap in previous studies on teacher written feedback has been pointed out by Lee (2014) who has stated that "[w]hile research on teacher feedback has largely been influenced by second language writing and second language acquisition perspectives, little attention has been paid to the contextual and sociocultural dimension of teachers' work" (p. 201).

Recent studies have also highlighted that teacher written feedback and students' use of it are influenced by a hierarchy of interrelating factors. For example, Dressler et al. (2019) have clearly stated that "it is important to consider other factors that may contribute to students' evaluation and use of the formative feedback" (p. 16). Additionally, Yu et al. (2021) have advocated that "learners' responses to feedback are complex and subject to various factors" (p. 12). Cheng and Zhang (2021) have indicated that the effects of teacher feedback on accuracy of students' writing "may be attributable to several potential factors" (p. 11). Recently, it has been argued that little is known about factors that can encourage students' engagement in the use of teacher written feedback (Zhang & Hyland,

2022). Although we are aware of the importance of various contextual factors in examining how L2 students react to and use teacher written feedback, how these factors can affect students' actual use of teacher written feedback in the revision of their writing has not been fully explored in EFL contexts. In other words, there is a dearth of research on the association between EFL students' utilisation of teacher written feedback and types of teacher written feedback.

Studies on teacher written feedback in L2 contexts have examined various issues. For example, some of these studies have focused on students' perceptions of and preferences for teacher written feedback (e.g., Chiang, 2004; Cohen, 1991; Enginarlar, 1993). Some studies have examined students' attitudes towards teacher feedback, teachers' practices of written feedback, and students' reactions to teacher written feedback (e.g., Lee, 2008a; Lee, 2008b; Zacharias, 2007). Although Zacharias (2007) did not examine students' written texts, she found that EFL students had strong beliefs regarding the usefulness of teacher feedback. She also showed that using correction codes did not facilitate students' use of teacher written feedback in the revision process. In Hong Kong, Lee (2008a, 2008b) found that students' reactions and attitudes towards teacher feedback are complex phenomena which are highly influenced by teacher factors, such as teachers' beliefs, writing instruction practices, and their interactions with students, as well as the instructional context. Specifically, Lee (2008b) pointed out that "the factors that appear to have influenced student reactions to teacher feedback include the instructional context, teacher factors, such as personality, pedagogical approach, and activities, and student factors, such as student expectations, proficiency, and motivation" (p. 157). In the Arab context, studies on teacher written feedback have examined students' perception of, preferences for, and reactions to teacher written feedback. For example, in Lebanon, Diab (2005) explored EFL university students' preferences for written feedback and their beliefs about what constituted effective written feedback. Diab's (2005) findings supported the general orientation that L2 students expect surface-level error correction from their teachers and believe that this type of written feedback is beneficial. In another study in the Arab EFL context, Mahfoodh and Pandian (2011) examined EFL university students' affective reactions to and perceptions of teacher written feedback and found that EFL university students paid great attention to written feedback because they needed such feedback to improve their texts. However, Mahfoodh and Pandian (2011) focused on factors that affected students' affective reactions to teacher written feedback rather than examining students' use of teacher written feedback.

Different contexts indeed contribute to different patterns of feedback practices and different patterns of learners' utilisation of teacher written feedback. Studies on teacher written feedback have reported that L2 students' revision after teacher written feedback varies in the degree of success, even in the case where the students in different groups are given similar comments (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999). In a US ESL university context, Ferris (1997) found that 15% of teachers' comments focused on grammar and mechanics and 85% dealt with ideas and rhetorical development of the ESL students' written texts. However, in a different context (viz., secondary schools in Hong Kong), Lee (2008a) found that the practice of teachers' written feedback took place in single-draft classrooms and was primarily error-focused. On examining the effect of teacher's comments on EFL students' revision, Sugita (2006) found that the students' utilisation of teachers' comments was high when written comments were in the imperative form. However, in an ESL context, Ferris (1997) found that ESL students revised more successfully when teachers' comments request specific information. Thus, "teachers' feedback practices are influenced by a myriad of contextual factors including teachers' beliefs, values, understandings, and knowledge" (Lee 2008a, p. 69). To sum up, various factors can influence the practice of teacher written feedback and students' utilisation of it. Taking these issues into account, this study was conducted to examine how both 'feedback factors' and 'student factors' can affect students' utilisation of teacher written feedback.

This study is supported by three theories: the cognitive process theory of writing, sociocultural theory of learning, and social constructivism theory. From the perspectives of the cognitive process theory of writing, reviewing (revision), which is a stage where students utilise teacher written feedback, is an essential part. Furthermore, the cognitive process theory of writing emphasises multiple drafts and written feedback from teachers. Additionally, this study is supported by the sociocultural theory of learning. Teacher written feedback supports and guides students to proceed through zones of proximal development until they come up with the outcomes (Thurlings et al., 2013). Teacher written feedback should be understood as a dialogue between teacher and students because this "draws on the Vygotoskian concept of scaffolding and how dialogic feedback between teacher and student can enable the student writer to develop both a text and writing abilities" (Hyland, 2013, p. 247). The third theory which is considered important for this current study is the social constructivism theory which emphasises ways of learners' active engagement in constructing their knowledge (Paris & Byrne, 1989; Thurlings et al., 2013). In the social

constructivism theory of learning, knowledge is viewed as a socially constructed meaning that is evolved through individuals' interactions with each other within their environment with its various factors (Gredler, 1997). Based on this theory, teacher written feedback is viewed as an interactive process of knowledge construction and an ongoing communication between student writers and their teacher.

This study was carried out to occupy these gaps in previous research on teacher written feedback. Specifically, the study reported in this paper addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent is the success of students' utilisation of teacher written feedback associated with the types of teacher written feedback?

2. How do factors in the context affect students' utilisation of teacher written feedback?

METHODS

Design and Context of the Study

This study is a qualitative case study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research is a combination of "a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible" (p. 3). In applied linguistics, a case study research has gained popularity and recognition because it has been proven to be methodologically effective and productive in providing a rich description of language learners and social and individual factors related to their language development and performance (Duff, 2008). Moreover, case studies have the power of providing in-depth analysis of a few cases. In the specific field of L2, ESL, and EFL writing contexts, employing case studies is identified as an important response to the socio-cultural turn in L2 writing research and a gradual extension of the focus of analysis from textual and procedural practices to the inclusion of the complex interactions of different contextual and social factors that shape L2 students' texts and their language development (Kubota, 2003).

The research context of this study was the Department of English language in a public university in Yemen. The program was a four-year program that leads to the degree of Bachelor of Arts majoring in English and Education. The researcher was a lecturer in this context and this helped him to conduct the study and to get help from the academic and administrative staff in the context of the study.

Student Participants

The participants were ten EFL students taking English as their major. For the selection of the ten student participants, three techniques were employed (refer to Table 1). The first technique involved students' revision process. Based on Sommers' (1982) scheme of the revisers, the teachers of the two selected writing courses were requested to identify some students to participate in this study using this scheme. The second technique was students' willingness to participate in all sessions of data collection. The third technique was the need for variation as much as possible because any learning context includes many variables that interact with each other.

Table 1. Student participants

Students		Gender	Revising category
1	Salwa	Female	low-reviser
2	Ali	Male	low-reviser
3	Faten	Female	high-reviser
4	Majed	Male	low-reviser
5	Yumna	Female	low-reviser
6	Shada	Female	high-reviser
7	Safa'a	Female	high-reviser
8	Nabeelah	Female	low-reviser
9	Zainab	Female	high-reviser
10	Rashaad	Male	high-reviser

Data Collection

The data included students' written essays, teacher written feedback, and semi-structured interviews. Teacher written feedback given on students' essays was collected. Based on the suggestion from Hyland (1998), each written intervention that focuses on a different aspect of the text is considered as a separate written feedback point. All points of written feedback were tabulated and categorised using an adapted analytical scheme (see Table 2) which was constructed based on two important schemes in the field: Straub and Lunsford (1995) and Ferris (1997). The refinement of the final coding of written feedback was done by checking each point of written feedback with the adapted analytical scheme.

Data were also collected using semi-structured interviews. Immediately after the students produced their revised drafts, they were interviewed individually because the purpose of the interviews was to obtain information on students' utilisation of teacher written feedback and the factors that affected this process. The first and revised drafts of each essay were examined in the interviews. The total number of semi-structured interviews varied based on the number of drafts produced by each student.

Data Analysis

To analyse teacher written feedback, the analytical scheme developed by Straub and Lunsford (1995) was found to be the most appropriate because it accounts for types of teacher written feedback including the use of direct codes and symbols. Table 2 presents the components of this analytical scheme. However, it should be noted that written feedback points that did not require students to do any revision in the revised draft were excluded from the analysis. Most of these comments belonged to the category of 'Giving praise'.

To enhance the reliability of the adapted analytical scheme, two PhD holders were requested to code teacher written feedback points. Briefing and training on how to use the analytical scheme were provided to the two coders. The co-efficient inter-coding reliability was calculated in order to obtain the Kappa value which was 0.80, a Kappa value which is above the substantial result, 0.70 (refer to Krippendorff, 2012; Stemler, 2001). The value I obtained indicates significant reliability and consistency of the analytical scheme used for coding teaching written feedback points.

Table 2. Analytical scheme for analysing teacher written feedback

No.	Code	Description and examples
1	Direct coded	Using a code or a symbol such as '*SP*', '*VF*', '*TV*', and '*CS*'.
2	Grammar/editing	Indicating explicitly problems in grammar, structures, or editing.
3	Giving information	Providing factual information/sentences to be incorporated in the revised assignment.
4	Giving praise	Positive written comments on student's writing: a long sentence to one single word such as '*Good*' and '*OK*'.
5	Making a request	Requests for addition, deletion or modification. They might call for extensive change or minimal one.

No.	Code	Description and examples
6	Negative evaluation	Objective criticisms about any aspect of the assignment or general criticism.
7	Reflective statements	Reader-responses, personal notes, funny remarks, and any apology. Written comments that are not grouped under one of the categories listed here might be grouped under this category too.

Students' utilisation of teacher written feedback was analysed using an adapted rating scheme (see Table 3) based on Conrad and Goldstein (1999). This adapted rating scheme has three strengths. First, it identifies how much of students' revisions were related to each type of teacher written feedback. Second, it identifies the relation between teacher written feedback and students' revisions. Third, it considers the degree to which the students utilise teacher written feedback in their subsequent drafts (Ferris, 2003). It is worth mentioning that only written feedback points that were usable for revising were considered. To enhance reliability of the adapted rating scheme, two raters were requested to rate students' utilisation of teacher written feedback. Based on Stemler (2001), the co-efficient inter-rater reliability was 0.84, indicating significant reliability and consistency of the adapted rating scheme.

Table 3. Rating scheme for students' utilisation of teacher written feedback

Scale	Ratings	Descriptions
0	Not revised	No recognisable change made by the student in response to teacher written feedback.
1	Unsuccessful revision	The student addressed the written feedback. Unsuccessful revision appeared in the student's draft.
2	Mixed effect	Substantive change(s) made by the student in response to comment, effect generally mixed.
3	Successful revisions	The student addressed the written feedback. Successful revision appeared in the student's draft.

For better understanding of students' utilisation of teacher written feedback, I grouped 'not revised', 'unsuccessful revision' and 'mixed effect' categories under a higher category which is 'unsuccessful incorporation of feedback' (refer to Tables 4 and 5). When a student made no change in response to feedback, it was considered as 'not revised'. Further, cases of avoidance of using teacher

written feedback in the revised drafts were considered as 'not revised'. When a student made a wrong change, it was considered as 'unsuccessful revision'. In case of changes that led to success but created another problem in the text, they were regarded as 'mixed effect'. The last category in the rating scheme is 'successful revision' in which a student made successful changes in accordance with written feedback.

Semi-structured interviews were transcribed first. As suggested by Hayes (2000), each transcript of the interviews was read several times to identify content topics which are similar threads interwoven throughout all transcripts. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse data collected from interviews. I started with initial themes and refined them through the analysis. The refined themes are (1) understanding correction symbols; (2) students' previous literacy experience; (3) students' emotional responses towards written feedback; (4) understanding teacher's handwriting used in written feedback; (5) explicitness of written feedback; and (6) wording of written feedback.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Written Feedback: Types and Students' Utilisation

The analysis revealed that the most recurring instances of successful utilisation of feedback were in three types of feedback: 'Giving information' (83.99%), 'Grammar/editing' (82.53%), and 'Making request' (71.34%) (refer to Tables 4 and 5). These tables show that 251 written feedback points were not successfully incorporated in the students' revised drafts. This raised questions regarding the factors that affected students' utilisation of teacher written feedback. Thus, I examined the drafts and conducted interviews with the students to explore and uncover factors that affected their utilisation of teacher written feedback.

Table 4. Students' utilisation of teacher written feedback

No.	Types of TWF	Total	Successful utilisation	Unsuccessful incorporation of feedback	Percentage of Successful utilisation
1	Direct coded	286	191	95	66.78%
2	Giving information	281	236	45	83.99%

No.	Types of TWF	Total	Successful utilisation	Unsuccessful incorporation of feedback	Percentage of Successful utilisation
3	Grammar/ editing	269	222	47	82.53%
4	Making request	164	117	47	71.34%
5	Negative evaluation	35	23	12	65.71%
6	Reflective statements	21	16	5	76.19%
	Total	1056	805	251	

Table 5. Students' unsuccessful incorporation of teacher written feedback

No.	Types of TWF	Unsuccessful incorporation of written feedback			Total	Percentage of unsuccessful incorporation of feedback
		Not revised	Unsuccessful revision	Mixed effect		
1.	Direct coded	27	44	24	95	37.85%
2.	Giving information	27	5	13	45	17.93%
3.	Grammar/ editing	27	16	4	47	18.73%
4.	Making a request	31	6	10	47	18.73%
5.	Negative evaluation	4	3	5	12	4.78%
6.	Reflective statements	0	3	2	5	1.99%
	Total	116	77	58	251	

Factors Affecting Students' Utilisation of Teacher Written Feedback

The data analysis revealed that various factors affected students' utilisation of teacher written feedback. These factors are teachers' use of correction symbols, students' previous literacy experience, students' emotional responses towards teacher written feedback, legibility of written feedback, explicitness of written feedback, and wording of written feedback.

Use of Correction Symbols

The analysis of students' utilisation of teacher written feedback and interviews with them showed that several codes and correction symbols were used to convey feedback to the students. Examples of these codes and correction symbols are '*PL*', '*VF*', '*SP*', '*Sing*', and '*V+ed*'. When I interviewed the students and asked them about their understanding of such codes and correction symbols, they pointed out that they did not utilise some of these written feedback points because they could not interpret the meanings of such codes and correction symbols. This is clearly shown in interview Excerpts 1-3 below.

Excerpt 1

Researcher : Your teacher underlined 'left' here and wrote VF, but I can see that in the revised draft you did not use this feedback.
Yumna : because I did not know the meaning of this 'VF'. (3rd interview)

Excerpt 2

Researcher : What about these corrections [researcher points at some of the written comments]. You also did not understand this?
Ali : Which comments?
Researcher : I mean these 'VF' and others … here on these pages.
Ali : I did not understand them because I have no idea about their meanings. (1st interview)

Excerpt 3

Researcher : Here your teacher gave you this coding correction 'WW'.
Majed : I did not know the meaning but I asked a classmate he said means wrong. (2nd interview)

Students' Previous Literacy Experience

The data analysis revealed that one of the factors that affected students' utilisation of feedback was their past literacy experience. Most students in this study did not have the experience of dealing with teacher written feedback in their previous education. To understand how EFL students' past experience affected their utilisation of written feedback, data obtained from the interviews with Faten were good sources. Faten had some experience of receiving written feedback before she joined the university. In the interviews, she expressed that she did not have any difficulties in understanding 'Direct coded' feedback because she had previous experiences in dealing with this type of feedback (refer to Excerpts 4 and 5 below).

Excerpt 4

Faten : No. actually I have a book on composition and I found all the codes and abbreviations used by my teacher. I read the book and found it useful. So, I can know what these codes or abbreviation mean. (1st interview)

Excerpt 5

Researcher : You told me that you have experience in receiving codes as corrections.
Faten : Yeah. I dealt with these correction symbols before I join this program. (2nd interview)

Although Faten had the experience of dealing with 'Direct coded' feedback before she joined the university, other students did not have this experience. Therefore, these students expressed that they faced difficulties in understanding written feedback which included codes and correction symbols. Consequently, this lack of understanding of such codes led to unsuccessful incorporation of some written feedback because the practice of using codes and corrections symbols in teacher written feedback was new for the majority of the students.

Students' Emotional Responses

Students' emotional responses to teacher written feedback affected their use of some written feedback because their attitudes played a significant role in their revising tasks, which influenced their engagement with feedback. The analysis of data revealed that both harsh criticism and too much written feedback in one single draft evoked students' negative emotional responses towards teacher written feedback. Subsequently, this resulted in unsuccessful incorporation of teacher written feedback. Some participants showed that they intentionally avoided using some written feedback because they felt disappointed when they found their drafts full of written comments. Evidence of the effect of emotional responses on the students' use of written feedback can be recognised in the following representative quotations (Excerpts 6-9) from the semi-structured interviews.

Excerpt 6

Salwa : But frankly sometimes, this lot of corrections and comments make me disappointed and frustrated to write another draft. Using these comments is difficult. (1st interview)

Excerpt 7

Nabeelah : These written comments make me frustrated because he [the teacher] gave many comments. How can I use all of them in my revised draft? How? (2nd interview)

Excerpt 8

Researcher : If you got your draft and found that you have a lot of problems and mistakes with corrections and comments here and there, what is the adjective you can use to describe your reaction?
Salwa : Frustrated. (1st interview)

Excerpt 9

Researcher : Here you got a big circle and the comment is "Irrelevant". Do you feel frustrated when you got this big circle?
Safa'a : Yes. Yes. I felt frustrated and I don't know why.
Researcher : So, you spent days to come up with these paragraphs and the teacher easily gave this big circle in a minute [Researcher refers to the comment 'Irrelevant']. So, you feel …
Safa'a : (student interrupted) Disappointed. (1st interview)

Legibility of Written Feedback

For teacher written feedback to be useful, it should easily read. The participants reported that they had difficulties in utilising some written feedback because of teachers' unclear handwriting. Excerpt 10 below from an interview with Salwa illustrates why she did not utilise some written feedback points.

Excerpt 10

Researcher : What are the reasons for not understanding these written comments and corrections?
Salwa : Not able to read my lecturer's handwriting ... Sometimes I don't understand feedback in which codes were used for corrections given by the lecturer. (2nd interview)

Though Salwa listed some reasons for not understanding her teacher's written feedback, she included handwriting as one of the difficulties she faced in utilising teacher written feedback. When Ali was asked about the reasons for not understanding a particular written feedback point, his answer was related to the legibility of his teacher's handwriting, as shown in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 11

Researcher : Did you understand this written feedback point? I do not find an effort of using it in your revised draft.

Ali : Yes. In many cases it is difficult for me to understand his handwriting. (1st interview)

Explicitness of Teacher Written Feedback

In this study, explicitness of teacher written feedback was found to be an important factor affecting students' use of teacher written feedback. With reference to the results provided in Tables 5 and 6, it can be found that students' successful utilisation of teacher written feedback was high in 'Giving information' and 'Grammar/editing' types of teacher written feedback in which teachers' intentions in their feedback were explicitly embedded. On the other hand, the percentages of successful utilisation of 'Direct coded' feedback and 'Making a request' were 66.78% and 71.34%, respectively, which were considered the lowest percentages.

Wording of Written Feedback

The analysis of the data revealed that the wording of written feedback affected students' utilisation of teacher written feedback. The students reported that they had difficulties in interpreting some feedback points because the wording of these feedback points hindered them from comprehending the intended meanings in the feedback they received. In the following Excerpts, i.e., 12-15, taken from the interviews, most students explained how they had some difficulties in understanding the intended meanings in some written feedback.

Excerpt 12

Researcher : Why didn't you utilise this written comment?
Ali : I didn't know what he means by this feedback. (1st Interview)

Excerpt 13

Researcher : If we look at the second draft, we can find that you did not attempt any change for this verb. Why?

Salwa : This is because I did not understand the mistake and maybe not knowing the change. (1st Interview)

Excerpt 14

Researcher	: Yeah. But in your second draft you have not done or added anything relating to this comment.
Ali	: Yeah.
Researcher	: I mean the same sentence in the last paragraph in the first draft appeared in the second draft.
Ali	: The same sentence?
Researcher	: Why? You could not use this feedback point. Do you have a reason for this?
Ali	: What does the teacher want here? What should I do? (1st Interview)

Excerpt 15

Researcher	: The written comment in this draft is 'subject needed'. What did you understand?
Majed	: …. (Student silent)
Researcher	: So, here there is a problem.
Majed	: Yeah. I did not know what he wanted me to do. (1st Interview)

Factors Affecting Unsuccessful Utilisation of Teacher Feedback

As shown in Table 6, the major four factors that are associated with students' unsuccessful incorporation of teacher written feedback are (1) teachers' use of correction symbols; (2) students' previous literacy experience; (3) students' emotional responses towards teacher written feedback; and (4) legibility of written feedback. The factor of teachers' use of correction symbols resulted in 71 unsuccessful incorporated written feedback (28.29%). This shows that the students in this study faced difficulties in using teacher written feedback in which correction codes such as '*VF*', '*SP*', '*PL*', etc. were used. Regarding the factor of students' previous literacy experience in L1 and L2 writing, Table 6 reveals that 58 written feedback points were not successfully incorporated in students' revised drafts (23.11%). This was because the students lacked sufficient experience on how to utilise teacher written feedback. This study revealed that students' emotional responses towards teacher written feedback have contributed to students' unsuccessful incorporation of 48 written feedback points (19.12%). The fourth major factor that has resulted in unsuccessful incorporation of 39 written feedback points (15.54%) was legibility of teacher written feedback. This reveals that EFL students in this study faced difficulties in understanding and using some written feedback due to unclear teachers' handwriting.

Table 6. Factors affecting unsuccessful incorporation of teacher written feedback

Factors		Total of written feedback points	%
Student factors	Students' previous literacy experience	58	23.11%
	Students' emotional responses towards written feedback	48	19.12%
Feedback factors	Teachers' use of correction symbols	71	28.29%
	Legibility of written feedback	39	15.54%
	Explicitness of written feedback	25	9.96%
	Wording of written feedback	10	3.98%
	Total	251	100%

Discussion

This study has revealed that factors affecting EFL students' utilisation of teacher written feedback can be grouped into six major factors: (1) teachers' use of correction symbols in written feedback; (2) students' previous literacy experience; (3) students' emotional responses to teacher written feedback; (4) legibility of written feedback; (5) explicitness of written feedback; and (6) wording of written feedback. Figure 1 displays my conceptualisation of these factors and the complexities of the interaction between teacher written feedback and students' utilisation of this feedback. It also indicates two major important aspects of the interaction between students' production of written texts and teacher written feedback: (1) the complex phases of producing a single draft of an essay; and (2) the various factors that affect students' utilisation of teacher written feedback. As shown in Figure 1, the heart of this complex interactive process is students' utilisation of teacher written feedback. The human participants in this interactive process are the teacher and student. While the student brings his/her texts to this complex process, the teacher gives written feedback on students' written texts for helping them to improve their texts. The interactive process of text production involves four main phases.

The starting point 'phase 1' indicates the point where a student starts the task of writing the first draft of an essay. After the first draft of the essay is produced, the student submits it to the teacher (phase 2). This is followed by phase 3 where the teacher reads student's written text and provides his/her

written feedback. In this phase the teacher points out aspects of strengths and weaknesses in the text and requires the student to produce the next draft of the same essay. The final phase refers to the stage where the teacher returns the essay to the student to work on written feedback and revise his/her essay. The second major aspect in Figure 1 is the factors that affect students' utilisation of teacher written feedback. These factors, which were obtained through the analysis of semi-structured interviews and students' utilisation of teacher written feedback, influence students' use of teacher written feedback.
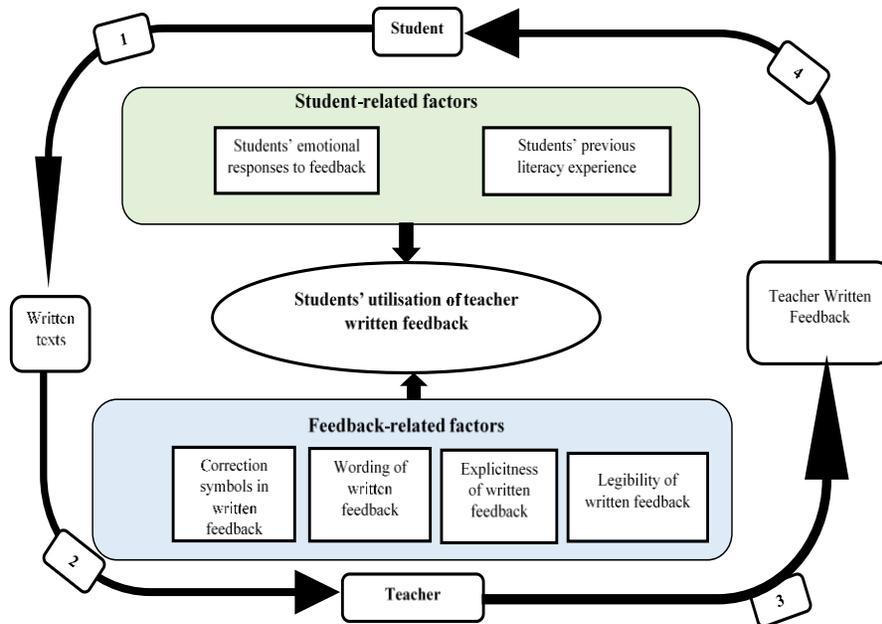
Figure 1. Factors affecting students' successful use of teacher written feedback

This study has shown that EFL students' utilisation of 'Giving information' feedback was high because the students had to take the information provided by their teachers and add them to their written texts without much effort. Similarly, the students could utilise successfully a high percentage of feedback which was classified under 'Grammar/editing' type. In this type of feedback, students are given either the correct forms or the required grammatical structures, and the

students' task is only to add the correct form or the structure to their revised drafts.

The study has also revealed that some students were not able to utilise written feedback that included codes and correction symbols because they did not understand the meanings of such symbols and correction codes. When the teacher used codes such as '*VF*', '*SP*', and '*PL*' to give feedback, the students with no prior knowledge on the meanings of these codes were unable to use this type of feedback effectively. Although Enginarlar (1993) and Sampson (2012) found that coded feedback helps EFL students to produce correct forms in subsequent pieces of writing, my findings support the findings of Chiang (2004) and Zacharias (2007) who found that EFL students could not utilise some written feedback because coded feedback was difficult for them to understand and interpret.

Another significant factor that played an important role in the process of students' utilisation of teacher written feedback is students' previous literacy experience in L2 writing. In other words, students' lack of experience in interpreting feedback can lead to misinterpretation of written feedback and an unfamiliarity with the implicit assumptions made by teachers about their students, which may result in ineffective use of teacher written feedback (Lea & Street, 2000; Ramsden 1992). Therefore, students with past experience of receiving teacher written feedback can have some knowledge to interpret and understand their teachers' intentions embedded in written feedback. Furthermore, Robinson et al. (2011) have argued that one of the reasons students in higher education struggle to use feedback is because it can be very different to feedback which they have previously experienced within their education system.

As revealed by this study, EFL students' emotional responses to teacher written feedback have affected their utilisation of it. When the students felt harshly criticised by teacher feedback, they might not have attempted to utilise such written feedback in their revised drafts. Rather, the students might have deleted the whole commented-on parts in their texts. Harsh criticism in teacher written feedback includes feedback in which negative evaluation such as 'bad', 'not good', 'your introduction is bad', and 'the conclusion paragraph is not good at all' were used. In this study both harsh criticism and too much written feedback evoked students' negative emotional responses because the students felt that they were humiliated, and they were not good writers/learners. In previous studies, Boud and Falchikov (2007) and Robinson et al. (2011) have pointed out that negative feedback can make students feel humiliated, which can

have its impact on their willingness to use written feedback in their learning process. This has also been highlighted by Hyland (1998) who showed that negative feedback may make students delay or ignore responding to written feedback.

Teachers' handwriting was found to be one of the factors that affected EFL students' utilisation of teacher written feedback. This is because when the students faced problems in reading teachers' handwriting, they were unable to understand the messages that were conveyed in written feedback. Subsequently, the students could not get the message conveyed in such unreadable written feedback. These results are in agreement with the results of Robinson et al. (2011) who found that 30% in their sample indicated that some written feedback was not legible due to teachers' handwriting and lack of readability. My findings here also support the findings of Lee (2008b) who showed that "... when students cannot read some of the teacher's handwriting, teacher feedback is rendered less effective" (p. 157).

Explicitness of written feedback is found to be one of the factors affecting students' successful utilisation of teacher written feedback. Pointing out that there is a problem somewhere in students' texts may not be helpful for the students. Rather, the students need to know what is wrong in their texts as this can enable them to learn about their mistakes and definitely assists them to take into account such problems in their future texts. In other words, EFL students in this study would be motivated to successfully incorporate teacher written feedback in their revised drafts if they were provided with explanations of their problems and perhaps with suggestions on how to use written feedback effectively.

As revealed by this study, wording and phrasing feedback have affected EFL students' utilisation of teacher written feedback because the students struggled too much to interpret feedback which was vague, ambiguous, and unclear. Written feedback is perceived as unhelpful by the students when it appears to be vague and difficult to use (Cumming, 1985, Ferris, 2003; Zamel, 1985). Teachers of writing in EFL contexts need to know that any form of communication carries the potential to be misunderstood based on the careful wording of written feedback.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has demonstrated that students' utilisation of teacher written feedback is a complex process which is greatly affected by various factors in the context. Based on the preceding discussion of the results, several conclusions

can be drawn from this study. When taken together, the findings of this study provide support for the view that factors affecting L2 students' utilisation of teacher written feedback are many and can include teachers' use of correction symbols, students' previous literacy experience, students' emotional response to teacher written feedback, legibility of written feedback, explicitness of written feedback, and wording of written feedback.

It is difficult for EFL university students to utilise teacher written feedback which includes symbols and correction codes without prior briefing on the meanings of such codes and on how to use them. Thus, the use of correction codes in written feedback may not result in successful incorporation of this feedback in students' revised drafts. It should be noted that there is no harm in using codes and symbols in written feedback. Yet, some teachers prefer to use such codes to save their time and to apply a systematic approach. Thus, specific instructions at the beginning of the writing course on the meanings and interpretations of such correction codes and symbols can be useful for students to utilise teacher written feedback successfully. In relation to this, Ferris (2003) argued that if teachers of writing like to use codes, there should be a consistent system of codes which should be used judiciously and incorporated in systematic grammar instruction.

Understanding EFL university students' previous L2 literacy experiences can help teachers to have ideas and insights on how they should tailor their written feedback for their students. In this way, teachers can ensure that their feedback is effective and useful. It is recommended that training EFL university students on how to use teacher written feedback successfully can yield remarkable improvement in the process of students' utilisation of written feedback. Thus, teachers may specify some modules or workshops to demonstrate to their students the way they should handle and utilise written feedback effectively in the revised drafts.

There are some important contributions of this current study. The first one is related to the classification of the factors affecting teacher written feedback. Although there is no comprehensive classification of factors affecting the use of teacher written feedback, this study highlights that there is a need for considering a new type of factors, which is feedback-related factors. Goldstein (2006) argued that there are three types of factors that affect the practice of teacher written feedback. She proposed that these types of factors can be related to the context, teacher, and students. However, there is another type of factor that must be considered when there is an intention to examine how factors in the context can affect students' use of teacher written feedback. This type of factor is 'feedback

factors' which includes a group of factors that are related to the textual features of the written feedback itself. Among the six factors that were reported by the current study, four factors can be grouped under 'feedback factors' (i.e., (1) teachers' use of correction symbols; (2) legibility of written feedback; (3) explicitness of written feedback; and (4) wording of written feedback), while only two can be grouped under student factors: (1) students' previous literacy experience; and (2) students' emotional response to teacher written feedback. Thus, this current study built on Goldstein' (2006) classification of factors affecting the practice of using teacher written feedback and proposed a fourth factor which is feedback factors.

To conclude, this study has uncovered only few factors which may affect EFL university students' utilisation of teacher written feedback. Further studies can focus on other factors, such as self-efficacy and motivation. Additionally, future research may need to survey EFL university students across disciplines regarding the difficulties they face when utilising teacher written feedback. Moreover, the usefulness of teacher written feedback for writing in other courses is one of the issues that deserve researchers' attention because writing contributes to learning in areas other than writing itself (Hyland, 2013). Future research can employ experimental studies and focus on a specific number of feedback factors to examine their effects on the development of writing quality. Furthermore, future researchers might be interested in understanding the impact of negative feedback and 'Giving praise' comments on students' texts and on how they approach negative feedback.

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