

A Qualitative Case Study of EFL Students' Affective Reactions to and Perceptions of Their Teachers' Written Feedback

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Abstract

The present paper reports a qualitative case study of investigating EFL students' affective reactions to and perceptions of their teachers' written feedback. In addition, the study reported here also focuses on contextual factors that may influence students' reactions to and perceptions of their teachers' written feedback. Data were collected using multiple methods that included semi-structured interviews, think-aloud protocols, teachers' written feedback, and students' written essays. Results of data analysis revealed that EFL students showed some variations in their affective reactions to their teachers' written feedback. The students perceived their teachers' written feedback as useful and very important for the development of their writing skills. The students wanted their teachers to focus on all aspects of written texts when they provide written feedback. Contextual factors such as students' past experience, teachers' wording of written feedback, students' acceptance of teachers' authority, and teachers' handwriting have their impact on EFL students' affective reactions to and perceptions of their teachers' written feedback.

Keywords: Teacher written feedback, Affective reactions, Perceptions, EFL students

1. Introduction

Written feedback is clearly crucial to students' growth as writers, and it is one of the most fundamental components of ESL/EFL writing-centred classrooms. Teachers and students agree that despite the time-consuming nature of providing written feedback, teacher written feedback is both helpful and desirable (Ferris, 2003; Goldstein, 2004; Lee & Schallert, 2008) because it is considered to be the best way for communication with each student on a one-to-one basis. In addition, teacher written feedback raises student writers' awareness of the reader's expectations (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994).

Despite the increase in the studies on teacher written feedback in L2 contexts, most of these studies were conducted in L1 and ESL contexts (Furneau, Paran, & Fairfax, 2007); studies on written feedback have been relatively few so far (Ferris et al., 1997; Goldstein, 2005). Moreover, in EFL context, few survey studies focused on investigating the EFL learners' preferences for feedback (Chiang, 2004; Diab, 2005a; Grami, 2005). According to Chiang (2004), "It is hoped that more research can be conducted in an EFL setting so as to provide EFL teachers with more insights into giving effective feedback" (p. 110). Straub (1997) argued that "Future studies might take up a number of questions, such as how students react to comments made on their own writing in actual classroom settings" (p. 113). In short, there is a need for more studies on "the various ways that students incorporate feedback into their language learning processes" because such studies can enhance our understanding of the feedback process and help us to give more useful feedback to students (K. Hyland, 2003, p. 229).

Survey studies of L2 students' reactions to teachers' feedback (e.g., A. Cohen, 1987; Radecki & Swales, 1988; A. Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Leki, 1991; Enginarlar, 1993; Saito, 1994; Ferris, 1995; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994, 1996) reported that L2 students value the feedback they receive on their errors in writing. In EFL Arab contexts, Diab (2005a) and Grami (2005) explored EFL university students' preferences for error correction and papers' marking

techniques and their beliefs about what constitutes effective feedback. Following both Ieki's (1991) and Hedgcock and Lefkowitz's (1994) surveys, Diab explored 156 EFL Lebanese students' attitudes towards teacher feedback regarding various features of their writing such as content, organization, grammar, vocabulary choice, and writing style as well as students' preferences for various teacher papers' marking techniques. Diab's findings support the general orientation that L2 students seem to expect surface-level error correction from their teachers and believe that such feedback is beneficial. Employing a questionnaire, Grami (2005) explored the reactions of English major Saudi students to teacher written feedback. Grami found that English major Saudi students desired and expected written feedback from their writing teachers.

Earlier studies, employing the approach of surveys, on L2 students' reactions to and perceptions of teachers' written feedback tended to focus on necessarily limited perspective of a particular group of informants, often without any effort to triangulate data by, for example, surveying teachers or examining comments (Ferris, 2003). Both teachers' comments and student's perceptions of those comments are slippery constructs which are difficult to define with any precision (Straub, 1997). Although his study enriched researchers' understanding of the complexity of written feedback, Straub maintained an underlying assumption of response as something that cannot be isolated from the classroom context.

Recently, Lee (2008) has focused on investigating the reactions of Secondary Schools students in Hong Kong. Using multiple methods of data collection, both quantitative and qualitative, Lee found that Secondary School students in Hong Kong want their teachers to give more written comments. Lee also found that factors such as students' preferences for written comments and error feedback, students' uptake of feedback, and students' demand for more feedback are some of many factors in the context. It is necessary to note that Lee's study was conducted in a secondary school context in Hong Kong, a context in which the students are different than those in EFL college students in Arab countries.

Therefore, the current study attempted to investigate EFL students' perceptions of and reactions to their teachers' written feedback, and the factors that might have influenced this complex process (i.e. giving feedback by teachers and students' perceptions and reactions). Al-Khuwaileh (2001) indicates that there are several studies on error analysis, testing, EFL learners' needs, and evaluation of writing in EFL Arab contexts, but there is a need for studies on how to help EFL learners to correct their errors. He states that it is important and worth studying to investigate how to treat errors and help EFL students in Arab contexts to improve their English writing skills.

Unlike surveys and experimental designs which necessarily deal with limited and predetermined sets of variables (Ferris, 1995; Chiang, 2004; Diab, 2005a; Grami, 2005), the present study is a qualitative case study which presents an advantage to account, from a holistic perspective, for particular characteristics of research participants as well as for multiple aspects of the immediate context. The major value of the present study is that there is an opportunity to use various sources of data and employ both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. Therefore, the authors were specifically interested in examining English major EFL students' perceptions of the effectiveness of their teachers' written feedback on their essays.

The study reported in this paper is one of the first few studies that focus on teacher written feedback in EFL contexts in one of Arab countries. This study is also significant as it adds to our knowledge and understanding of EFL students' reactions to and perceptions of their teachers' written feedback. Moreover, this study is significant because it has some implications for EFL writing instruction especially for teaching English as a major of study in universities in Arab countries. Furthermore, previous studies on teachers' written feedback have not focused on the crucial role of factors in context. However, the present study attempted to reveal the possible factors in the context that might have influenced students' reactions to and perceptions of their teachers' written feedback.

Methodologically, this study employed qualitative case study design for studying teachers' written feedback. Therefore, the design of this study helped the researchers to study teachers' written feedback from the perspectives of eight English major EFL students. While previous studies on teachers' written feedback in EFL contexts (e.g. Enginarlar, 1993; Chiang, 2004; Diab, 2005a; Grami, 2005) employed survey design using questionnaires for data collection, the study reported in this paper employed some methods for data collection. Triangulation of time, triangulation of methods of data collection, and triangulation of techniques for analysis of data were employed in this study for enhancing reliability and validity in this research.

To sum up, our study has its contribution to the fields of research on teacher written feedback and writing instruction in EFL context. This study contributes to existing research on teacher written feedback by relating English major EFL students' affective reactions to and perceptions of actual teachers' written feedback, focusing particularly on the influence of contextual factors on students' responses to their teachers' written feedback.

2. Research questions

The study reported in this paper was designed to investigate the following research questions:

- (1) How do English Major EFL students react affectively to their teachers' written feedback?
- (2) How do English Major EFL students perceive their teachers' written feedback on their written texts?
- (3) What are the factors in the context that may influence EFL students' perceptions of and reactions to their teachers' written feedback?

3. Method

3.1 Design

The design of the current study is a case study in which data was collected through semi-structured interviews, think-aloud protocols, and students' written texts. The research context of the present study was the Department of English Language, Faculty of Education, Hodeidah University, Yemen. The courses were 'Writing Course 2' and 'Writing Course 4'. By the time data collection started, EFL students in Second Year had already finished three courses of EFL writing instruction; EFL students in the First Year have already finished one course of EFL writing instruction. Moreover, the EFL students in the selected courses were required to write essays of different types at the time of data collection for the current study.

3.2 Participants

Eight English major students were selected according to their revision process as rated by their teachers using an adapted scheme of Sommers (1982). Moreover, the students' willingness to participate and to attend all research sessions was also taken into account during the selection of the student participants. It should be noted that the selected English major student participants shared similar cultural and language background. Arabic is the mother tongue and the first language for all of them, and they started learning English officially as a Foreign Language at schools when they were in Grade 7.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

In the present study, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, think-aloud protocols, teachers' written feedback, and students' written texts. Table 1 provides a list of the students' participants and the data collected from them. A total of 1038 points of written feedback were collected from 45 drafts marked by the two teachers. To examine how EFL students reacted affectively to their teachers' written feedback and how they perceived written feedback given on their drafts, think-aloud protocols and retrospective interviews had their strengths in eliciting the subjects' responses, especially immediate responses after they received their commented-on drafts. For the think-aloud sessions, the student participants were trained and requested to read their commented drafts as they would be reading it in normal situations. Semi-structured interviews, adapted from F. Hyland (1998), were conducted with each student after he/she produced the second draft of an assignment. All think-aloud sessions and semi-structured interviews were tape-recorded.

Inductive data analysis, as suggested by Patton (1990, p. 390) was used in which patterns, themes, and categories of analysis "emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data a collection and analysis". The file sounds from the think-aloud protocols and semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim. After that, the transcripts were broken down into smaller units of segments. The process of segmentation was done according to the continuous episodes which were not defined as sentences or clauses but rather as units of concentration or focus (Grant-Davie 1992). Coding the segments of think-aloud protocols and interviews was carried out based fifteen codes/categories (see Table 2). This coding scheme was considerably based on the coding scheme used in Brice (2005) with some modifications to suit the research objectives. The data analysis was further completed through a triangulation of relevant data from other sources, in particular, students' written drafts, and written feedback provided by the teachers. After the segments of the think-aloud protocols and interviews had been coded, larger patterns were created to put these codes under them. These patterns were associated to the research questions.

3.4 Trustworthiness, validity and reliability

According to Riessman (1993), trustworthiness "moves the process into the social world" because it is based on understanding that "individuals construct very different narratives about the same event" and that "facts are products of an interpretative process" (p. 64-65). Trustworthiness is considered an essential element of conducting any type of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998), and it consists of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility addressed the questions of whether the reconstructions (i.e., the research findings and interpretations) arrived at through the study are acceptable to the research participants. Transferability addresses such questions as whether the researcher has provided a clear description of the research context to make it possible for others to replicate the study or make judgments about contextual similarity. Dependability asks the question whether either factors of instability and factors of phenomenal or design induced changes are taken into

consideration. Confirmability deals with the issue of whether the characteristics of the data, rather than those of the researcher, are confirmable (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

These four components of trustworthiness guided the researchers throughout the research processes of this study. To establish trustworthiness, the researchers took measures such as reviewing transcripts with colleagues, submitting findings for peer review, and approaching data collection and analysis in a particular manner to avoid developing and finding anticipated outcomes. Moreover, triangulation of data collection was employed because data were collected from different sources. In addition, member checking was also done to increase the credibility of the findings.

In qualitative research, transferability is used and understood as the possibility of applications of the findings to other contexts that share some characteristics with the context of the findings of a particular study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Erlandson et al., 1993). In this study, thick description of the research context and the participants was provided to enable other researchers interested in transferring the results to other contexts to make decisions about the degree of similarity between the contexts and therefore determine feasibility of transferability. Furthermore, two factors contributed to the dependability and confirmability of the findings of this study: the documentation of the research process and data collection procedures and requesting independent coders to code qualitative data.

3.4.1 Inter-coder reliability

For inter-coder reliability of coding think-aloud protocols and students' semi-structured interviews, recommended strategies in L2 writing research and analysis of qualitative data were followed. For coding qualitative data, three coders were requested for assistance. To determine consistency among coders, an inter-coder reliability (J. Cohen, 1960) analysis using the Kappa statistic was performed in SPSS version 15. This kind of inter-coder reliability measure was chosen because it is the most common measure and it also takes into account the agreement among coders. Moreover, it is significant to mention that most statisticians prefer for Kappa values to be at least 0.6 and most often higher than 0.7 before claiming a good level of agreement (J. Cohen, 1960; Landis & Koch, 1977; Krippendorff, 1980; Stemler, 2001). In coding qualitative data of this study, all Kappa values were higher than 0.70, substantial results that indicate significant reliability and consistency of all coding schemes used for coding qualitative data in this study (Stemler, 2001).

4. Results

4.1 Students' affective reactions to teachers' written feedback

The eight English major students in this study showed different types of affective reactions toward written feedback they received from their teachers of EFL writing courses during one full semester. The results of the students' affective reactions to their teachers' written feedback showed a reasonable range of responses varying from positive affective reactions to negative ones. The results obtained from data analysis showed that the students responded affectively to their teachers' written feedback. The student participants expressed that they thought carefully about their teachers' written feedback. They also indicated that they read their drafts after getting written feedback from their teachers which meant that they paid attention to the written feedback they received.

Another positive affective reaction was that English major EFL students liked written feedback provided on their written texts. In the first interview with Moneer, he expressed that he liked written feedback:

Researcher: So you like the teacher's written comments?

Moneer: Yes I do. (Moneer, Interview 1)

In another interview with Zahra'a, a student participant in the Second Level, she indicated that she liked written feedback given on her essays:

Researcher: You like all comments given by the teacher and you agree with them?

Zahra'a: Yes I like the comments from my teacher. (Zahara'a, Interview 1)

A third positive affective reaction to teachers' written feedback the students showed was being happy. The students expressed their happiness when their teachers praised their written texts, ideas, or their drafts. In one of her think-aloud protocols Fatima stated, "*but at the end of all these comments I am very very happy to see these comments*" (Fatima, Think-aloud 3). In one of his think-aloud protocols, Moneer declared, "*I am happy because the teacher praised my conclusion*" (Moneer, Think-aloud 2). These positive reactions shown by the students were in reaction to written feedback such as "*Good conclusion*". In one of the interviews with Abdu, he was asked about his feeling when he read his teacher's written comments, such as "*your organization seems good*"; he replied, "*good words for encouraging me write more to develop my writing skills and I feel happy*" (Abdu, Interview 2). In one of the two interviews with Zahra'a, she was asked about her feelings toward the written feedback "*Good idea*":

Researcher: Yeah for this idea you got a comment "Good idea".

Zahra'a: I am happy. (Zahara', Interview 2)

To sum up, the students showed their happiness after getting positive confirmation on their performances. In other words, positively evaluative written feedback inspired positive feelings in most student participants. In Nadiah's first draft of the assignment 'Dropout of Schools', Dr. Ahmed's written comment was "this is a nice and good introduction" and Nadiah's affective reaction was "I liked this comment very much. I love it so much because this comment encouraged me to do the best" (Nadia, Think-aloud 2). When Zahara'a asked whether she liked written feedback or not, her answer was as follows:

Zahra'a: ... after these problems I have done something good. Yes I am happy encouraged... Yeah I feel happy because there is something good in my essay. (Za, IN 1)

Studying students' affective reactions to teachers' written feedback in this study also included both students' acceptance and rejection of their teachers' written feedback. The eight students in this study showed their acceptance to a good number of teachers' written feedback. In one of her think-aloud protocols, Suaad stated "In fact I agree with all comments given by my teacher because they helped and I will get use of them" (Suaad, Think-aloud 2). Shadiah, in her first think-aloud protocols said, "there are some grammatical mistakes I agree with that" (Shadia, Think-aloud 1). Samiah, in one of her think-aloud protocols, reacted to "where is the introduction" saying, "I agree with the teacher's comment because I did not use to write introduction for my essay" (Samiah, Think-aloud 1). When Samiah was asked about her agreement to the written feedback "try to cover the topic of the essay", she showed her acceptance of that written feedback and declared, "Yeah" (Samiah, Interview 1).

Therefore, most of the student participants mentioned that they liked their teachers' written comments that praised their drafts and what they did well. Although, teachers' written comments that praised the student written texts were not useful for their revisions, the students liked to be complimented and praised. This finding should not be interpreted in a way that the students liked plenty of written feedback because some of the student participants revealed that there should have been a balance between praise and criticism. To quote one example for this, Abdu, in one of the interviews put it "not exactly but praising and giving constructive feedback that help me to improve not only blaming" (Abdu, Interview 1). Thus, the balance between criticism and praise is the factor that teachers should take into consideration when providing written feedback on their students' written texts.

In short, most of the student participants indicated that they felt satisfied with their teachers' written feedback and they liked teachers' written feedback. However, in some cases or with some types of written feedback, the results revealed that the students expressed some negative affective reactions toward their teachers' written feedback. The students' negative reactions included 'dislike', 'disappointed' and 'surprised'. Such negative affective reactions were identified with some particular types of teachers' written feedback. For example, in the first interview with Abdu, he stated, "codes I don't liked coz I didn't understand them" (Abdu, Interview 2). For Abdu, he did not like the written feedback he did not understand. Therefore, students' inability to understand written feedback resulted in their negative affective reactions. In some situations, the student participants revealed their rejection of a particular written feedback because their teachers did not understand what they conveyed in the text. For example, when Shadiah was asked about her reaction to the written feedback, "your essay is good but you need to look again at the organization putting each group of reasons in one paragraph", she replied:

I don't agree with this comment because I put reasons under different groups...I put 'academic reason' in one paragraph 'economical reason in one paragraph. (Shadia, Interview 2)

Another example is shown in the following quotation from the first interview with Suaad. In the following quotation, Suaad showed that she did not accept her teacher's written feedback because her teacher could not understand what she wanted to say in the text.

Omer: Here the teacher replaced 'to' by "past"

Suaad: yeah he did not understand what I mean

Omer: so you accept this kind of correction.

Suaad: no. I insist on using the word 'to' because it is true but he did not understand me. (Suaad, Interviews 1)

It is shown in the quotation given in the previous paragraph that the communication between the teacher and his student over a written text was not successful because the student insisted that her teacher did not understand what she wanted to convey in a particular part of her text.

Other negative reactions the student participants showed were being surprised, frustrated, or disappointed. The student participants offered some situations in which they felt frustrated when they read or saw written feedback in

red colour on their drafts. In one of the interviews, Suaad declared, *“but frankly sometimes this lot of corrections and comments make me disappointed and frustrated to write another draft”* (Su, Interview 1). In her first think-aloud protocol, Shadiah mentioned *“when I see this big circle and this comment I feel I don't like even to read this comment”* (Shadiah, Think-aloud 1). Shadiah's negative affective reaction could be attributed to the way in which her teacher put his written feedback (i.e., using a big circle on one of the paragraphs of the first draft of her first assignment). In the same think-aloud protocol, Shadiah declared, *“I want to say that all these comments made me feel upset and frustrated to write another essay”* (Shadiah, Think-aloud 1). In general, the students felt frustrated when they found that their drafts were full of comments, corrections, circles, and marks in red colour.

The EFL students in this study also showed their rejection of teachers' written feedback, which is another negative affective reaction. The students rejected some written feedback given by their teachers and for that kind of negative reactions, they gave one or some reasons. In one of the interviews with Suaad, she showed her rejection of a particular piece of written feedback. The following lines are quoted from the interview with her:

Omer: Here the teacher replaced 'to' by "past"

Suaad: yeah he did not understand what I mean

Omer: so you accept this kind of correction.

Suaad: No. I insist on using the word 'to' because it is true but he did not understand me. (Su, Interview 1).

It can be found that Suaad showed her rejection toward a particular written feedback because she thought that her teacher did not understand what she meant in that particular use of the word 'to'. Moreover, one of the written comments on Fatima's first draft of the essay entitled *Tourism* was *“You can make it at the beginning”*. In her think-aloud session, Fatima showed her initial reaction to this comment and declared:

But I actually I have disagreement against with this comment because I think when I write or when I beginning this with this tags I read in some books to give the reader attraction to this topic I use question tag. (Fatima, Think-aloud 3)

With her rejection of this written comment, Fatima identified the reasons for her negative affective reaction. However, in some cases the students revealed their rejection of teacher written feedback without the inclusion of any reason. This kind of negative affective reaction can be attributed to the students' attitudes toward their teacher or the course, or to their low proficiency in explaining the reasons of their rejection.

4.2 Students' perceptions of their teachers' written feedback

In this study, EFL students reported that they found their teachers' written feedback important, helpful, and useful. Moreover, the students considered their teachers' written feedback helpful and useful not only for revisions but also for their future essays. In the first interview with Abdu, he put it as, *“Using teacher's corrections and comments have improved my essay and my writing”*.

EFL student participants perceived that their teachers should provide written feedback on all aspects of their essays: content, organization, vocabulary and mechanics. However, as students in EFL contexts, the students sometimes believed that their teachers should focus on mechanic problems and vocabulary usage more than other aspects. To give an example of this, the following is an excerpt from an interview with Fatima:

Interviewer: so you think that the most useful feedback is the feedback that is related to the structures of the sentences that is grammatical corrections

Fatima: yes because knowing how to put the sentence will help me to know how to put the paragraph

For Fatima, getting feedback on grammatical problems was desirable and needed because, as she has expressed, written feedback on grammar would help her to form well-structured sentences in her essays.

One of the significant results related to EFL students' perceptions of their teachers' written feedback was that they accepted their teachers' authority over their written texts. In this study, EFL students perceived that their teachers had the greatest authority to provide written comments and corrections on their drafts. They also have shown that they could accept written feedback only from the teachers because they had the knowledge about grammar, writing essays and teaching in general. Although the students have, sometimes and in some instances, shown that they rejected the comments or corrections provided by their teachers, they still admitted they would follow the comments and corrections given by their teachers strictly. Abdu, in an interview with him, said a very significant sentence: *“I believe completely that the teacher is fully right in his comments and corrections so I will follow his comments”*.

The students also regarded and rated written feedback in which the teacher used symbols or codes for correction, such as 'SP' (Spelling mistake), 'VF' (Verb Form) and 'WW' (Wrong word), not useful. In the present study, EFL

students have shown that their teachers' written comments which praised their work were useful. EFL students in the present study hold this perception because 'useful' written feedback tried to build their confidence and encouraged them to write more. Therefore, they perceived written comments which praised what they did in their drafts as useful.

The student participants in this study reported that their teachers' written feedback were useful because they helped them to identify and correct their errors. Another reason was that their teachers' written feedback helped them to avoid the mistakes they did in their earlier drafts. The last reason the students gave on the usefulness of their teachers' written feedback was that their teachers' written feedback helped them to develop their writing skills in general so that they can produce good future essays.

For the student participants, they perceived getting written feedback from their teachers was the only and the best source of feedback. Answers of all student participants in the interviews revealed that the main preferred source of getting feedback was their teachers. It was seldom that the students referred to their friends or family members at home for getting written feedback on their essays. Abdu, one of the cases in the present study, mentioned that sometimes he used to refer to his brother for help. Even for him, this was seldom and not on the selected essays Abdu produced for the present study. Samiah, a student in Second Year, has mentioned that she did not refer even to her brother who was a member of academic staff at English Department she was enrolled in. However, for all other cases, the main source was their teachers of the writing courses. In the first interview with Fatima, she was asked whether she consulted any one at home for understanding and using her teacher's written feedback, she replied that she used to depend on herself only. Her answer was:

Interviewer: Self study?

Fatima: Yeah! I didn't ask anybody at home ... I don't trust anybody.

Fatima also mentioned that she trusted her teacher only, nobody else. This shows how an EFL student highly perceived the authority of her teacher. In the same interview, Fatima added, "even if I ask any student they will not give me the best answer that I need". For Fatima, she did not believe in receiving written feedback from her classmates because they were not able to provide her with the best and useful written feedback she needed. When Zahra'a was asked whether she prefer getting feedback from her classmates or from her teacher, she answered that she preferred to have feedback from her teacher. She added also saying, "His knowledge is better than the students".

EFL students' reactions to and perceptions of their teachers' written feedback are considered a complex process that is embedded in a larger context in which there are different factors that may affect this complex process. Therefore, the third research question focused on the factors that could be identified in the context which might have influenced the students' reactions to and perceptions of their teachers' written feedback. However, it is very important to note that due to restriction of time and number of student participants in this study, it was very difficult to reveal all factors in the context.

4.3 Factors in the context

This study reveals that there were different factors in the context that might have influenced the students' affective reactions to and perceptions of their teachers' written feedback. It should be noted that some of these factors are different than those in ESL and L1 contexts. It is necessary to indicate that this study does not attempt to find the effect of one factor on the whole process of students' reactions to teacher written feedback. Nevertheless, the present study, which is a case study in EFL college context, has attempted to reveal factors that exist in the context.

One of the factors in the context is the students' past experience. In this study, most of the EFL students did not have the experience of dealing with teachers' written feedback prior to this study. To understand how students' past experience has influenced their reactions to their teachers' written feedback, we analyzed data obtained from both Shadiah and Fatima. While Shadiah had experience of writing essays but not receiving written feedback, Fatima has the experience of writing essays and receiving written feedback. In one of the interviews with Shadiah, she declared, "I have a course in English proficiency for six months before joining English Department". So, Shadiah's experience of writing essays but not receiving written feedback made her to express, in her think-aloud protocols, her surprise and disappointment immediately after she received her commented-on drafts from her teacher. In one of the interviews with her, Shadiah declared, "But ... I don't like these big marks and circles on my essay". On the other hand, when asked about 'coded feedback', Fatima put it as,

Interviewer: You told me that you have experience in receiving codes as corrections

Fatima: Yeah

Because of her past experience of receiving 'coded feedback' Fatima did not show any feeling of being surprised or disappointed. Moreover, she has asserted that she did not face any difficulties in interpreting her teacher's 'coded feedback'.

As it was reported earlier, EFL students in this study considered the authority of their teachers extremely high, a factor in the context which made the student participants show few instances of negative affective reactions toward their teachers' written feedback. In other words, EFL students' acceptance of their teachers' authority influenced their affective reactions.

Another factor was reported by the students in their think-aloud sessions and in semi-structured interviews with them was their teachers' handwriting. In some situations, due to teachers' unclear handwriting, the students did not understand their teachers' written feedback, which in turn led them to showing negative affective reactions such as 'rejection of the feedback' or being unhappy. In one of the interviews with Suaad, she was asked about the reasons of not understanding teacher written feedback, she states:

Interviewer: What are the reasons for not understanding of the teacher written comments and corrections?

Suaad: Not able to read the teacher's handwriting

Sometimes I don't understand feedback

Using codes but this was at the beginning

The teachers' way of putting their written feedback had its influence on the students' perception of and affective reactions to their teachers' written feedback. Using codes for providing written feedback was used a lot by the teacher of 'Writing course 2' without prior teaching of the meanings of those codes to the students. Therefore, at the beginning of the "Writing course 2", the students in the First Level found it difficult to understand the meanings of those codes and corrections symbols. The difficulty EFL students faced when trying to understand their teachers' written feedback had influenced their affective reactions and perceptions of their teachers' written feedback. In the first think-aloud session done by Abdu, he was given "VF" as one of the "Direct coded" written feedback. His reaction to that was

"I don't know what he means by this symbol "VF"."

Sometimes the teacher did not state the written comments clearly, which lead to students' negative reactions. Teachers' wording of their written feedback was found to be one of the most important factors that influenced the students' affective reactions and perceptions of their teachers' written feedback.

5. Conclusion and implications

The first research question in this study focused on EFL students' affective reactions to their teachers' written feedback, which were of various types. The present study shows that students in EFL Arab context like the written comments and corrections given by their teachers of writing courses. EFL students reject written feedback points that are vague for them. In some cases the students revealed their rejection of their teachers' written feedback without the inclusion of any reason. This kind of negative affective reaction can be attributed to the students' attitudes towards the teacher or towards the course.

EFL students in this study also indicated that they pay great attention to their teachers' written feedback because they needed such comments and correction to develop their writing skills and to improve their current and future written texts. Similar to Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990), EFL students feel happy with the feedback they receive from their teachers. In additions, students like their teachers to praise their written drafts because EFL students believe that such written feedback helps them build their confidence and encourage them to write more. This result is consistent with the findings of Ferris (1995). EFL students' agreement with most of their teachers' written feedback stems from their acceptance of their teachers' authority; they consider their teachers as knowledgeable. In general, the students feel frustrated when they find their drafts full of comments, corrections, and circling.

The student participants' negative reactions, such as surprised, dislike, rejection of their teachers' written feedback and being frustrated, towards some types of their teachers' written feedback occur as a result of the students' lack of understanding their teachers' written feedback, students' essays which were full of red marks, and teachers' failure to understand the students' intentions in their texts.

The second research question focused on investigating the EFL students' perceptions of, and preferences of their teachers' written feedback. Similar to the findings of studies on ESL student writers (Radecki & Swales, 1988; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Ferris, 1995; Ferris & Roberts, 2001), this study shows that EFL student writers consider their teachers' feedback useful suggesting authoritative power of teacher. They seem to expect teachers to focus on all aspects of their written texts with more focus on grammatical corrections (Leki, 1991; Radecki & Swales, 1988).

EFL students seem to have a highly positive perception of their teachers' written feedback. They put a great value on their teachers' written feedback. Students in the EFL context accept written feedback only from their teachers

because their teachers, as they think, have the knowledge about grammar, about writing rules and conventions. In the context of EFL students hold high estimation of the knowledge of their teachers. Therefore, the students in the EFL context of the current study consider their teachers as the main and the sole source for providing written feedback on their essays. On the basis of this, teachers of writing courses should consider the needs of their EFL students (i.e. English major students) for developing writing skills for their current academic and future academic career.

The third research question had the focus on the factors in the context that might have contributed to the students' perceptions of and affective reactions to their teachers' written feedback. EFL students' affective reactions to their teachers' written feedback are influenced by students' past experience, teachers' handwriting, teachers' wording of their written feedback, and students' acceptance of their teacher to control their written texts. The topic of the essay EFL students are asked to write on is one of the factors that may have some influence on EFL students' perceptions of and affective reactions to their teachers' written feedback. In addition, the quality of the written feedback is another factor that should not be neglected when investigating factors in the context influencing students' reactions to and perceptions of their teacher's written feedback.

This study has some pedagogical implications for writing instructions and responding to EFL students' writing. First, teachers of EFL writing courses are encouraged to understand the positive and negative aspects of their written feedback when responding to their students' written texts. This is because harmful effects of written feedback may lead the students to ignore teachers' written feedback. Second, teachers of EFL writing should try to find ways through which their students can get motivated to read and spend some effort to use written feedback in revising their drafts. Third, students need their teachers of EFL writing to provide both praise and constructive criticism. This is because EFL students perceive these written feedback points as helpful and encouraging. It is an implication that was also suggested by Ferris (1995), a study that focused on ESL students' reactions to teacher written comments.

For future research on teacher written feedback in EFL Arab context, there are some issues to be considered. In fact, due to time and research design constraints, it was very difficult for the study reported in this paper to reveal all the factors in the context which might have affected the students' reactions to and perceptions of their teachers' written feedback. Therefore, another study that explores the factors in the context over one full academic year is recommended.

This study looked at all aspects of teachers' written feedback, whatever the teachers of EFL writing provided on their students' texts. Studies with experimental research designs which investigate the effects of different types of corrective written feedback are recommended. Although the issue of manipulating corrective feedback has been investigated in different studies in ESL context (e.g. Truscott, 1996; Ferris and Roberts, 2001; F. Hyland, 2003; Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005; Diab, 2005b; Rahimi, 2009), in EFL Arab context such issue has not been addressed adequately.

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Table 1. Student Participants and Data collected from them

	Name	Think-aloud	Semi-structured interviews	Drafts
1	Abdu	3	3	6
2	Fatima	3	2	6
3	Moneer	5	2	8
4	Suaad	3	2	7
5	Shadiah	3	2	5
6	Samiah	3	2	5
7	Nahed	2	2	4
8	Zahra'a	2	2	4
	Total	24	17	45

Table 2. Coding scheme for students' interviews and think-aloud protocols

	Code	Description
1.	Acceptance of TWF	Expressing acceptance or agreement to written feedback.
2.	Comprehension	Showing understanding of TWF.
3.	Difficulties in TWF	Difficulties in understanding a particular written feedback.
4.	Evaluation of draft/ class/self	Expresses his/her evaluation of himself/herself, writing or class in general.
5.	Evaluation of Written feedback	Giving evaluative expression or sentences of a written feedback he/she received.
6.	Feeling	Expressing his/her feeling to written feedback
7.	Lack of understanding of TWF	Expressing his/her lack of understanding of written feedback he/she received.
8.	Past experience	Past experience of writing instruction.
9.	Rejection of TWF	Expressing his/her disagreement/rejection of teacher written comments or correction.
10.	Suggestion for TWF	Giving suggestions or a piece of advice for the improvement of written feedback.
11.	Usefulness of TWF	Identifying a particular feedback as useful.
12.	Wants	Expressing his needs/wants/ preferences.