

Please cite this paper as follows:

Hardani Naeme Zade, Z., Gholami, J., & Sarkhosh, M. (2024). Iranian EFL Teachers' Perception of Formulaic-Oriented Witten Corrective Feedback Practices. *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 12 (48), 11-25. <http://doi.org/10.30495/IJFL.2023.707677>

## Research Paper

# Iranian EFL Teachers' Perception of Formulaic-Oriented Witten Corrective Feedback Practices

Zahra Hardani Naeme Zade<sup>1</sup>, Javad Gholami<sup>2\*</sup>, Mehdi Sarkhosh<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English Language and Literature, Urmia University, Urmia, Iran

[z.hardani2373@gmail.com](mailto:z.hardani2373@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Urmia University, Urmia, Iran

[j.gholami@urmia.ac.ir](mailto:j.gholami@urmia.ac.ir)

<sup>3</sup>Department of English Language and Literature, Urmia University, Urmia, Iran

[mdsarkhosh@gmail.com](mailto:mdsarkhosh@gmail.com)

Received: March 13, 2023

Accepted: September 30, 2023

## Abstract

Although there is an increasing amount of research examining the efficacy of Witten Corrective Feedback (WCF) in enhancing the grammatical accuracy of EFL learners, only a few studies have explored the perspectives of EFL teachers regarding Formulaic-oriented Witten Corrective Feedback (FWCF) in EFL settings. Using a mixed-method approach, this interpretive exploratory study sought to understand the attitudes of Iranian EFL teachers toward FWCF. The analyses were based on quantitative data from a 13-item anonymous bespoke online survey, qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, and an open-ended question at the end of the survey. EFL teachers ( $n = 137$ ) responded to the online survey, and 7 participants participated in semi-structured interviews. The findings indicated that female teachers' favorable opinions about the effectiveness of WCF for improving EFL learners' writing performance resulted from their belief that the learners' capacity to use more formal and courteous language in their writing assignments was positively impacted by using these formulaic sequences. Moreover, the findings demonstrated that EFL teachers preferred direct WCF methods over indirect tactics. The most essential component that affected teachers' practices in the classroom was training designed to change their perspective of the valuelessness of WCF. The teachers' lack of satisfactory understanding of formulaic sequences stemmed from their lack of information. In addition, teachers' hesitancy to use them in the lower proficiency levels emanated from their misconceptions of their uselessness in the language learners' writing tasks.

**Keywords:** *EFL Classes; Formulaic Witten Corrective Feedback; Perception; Teachers*

## درک معلمان زبان انگلیسی ایرانی از شیوه‌های بازخورد اصلاحی مبتنی بر عبارتها و اصطلاحات زبانی

اگرچه تحقیقات بسیاری در مورد بررسی کارایی بازخورد اصلاحی نوشتاری در افزایش دقت دستوری زبان آموزان زبان انگلیسی وجود دارد، تنها چند مطالعه دیدگاه معلمان زبان انگلیسی را در مورد بازخورد اصلاحی نوشتاری مبتنی بر عبارتها و اصطلاحات زبانی را مورد بررسی قرار داده است. این مطالعه تحقیقاتی و تفسیری با استفاده از رویکرد ترکیبی به دنبال درک نگرش معلمان ایرانی زبان انگلیسی نسبت به بازخورد اصلاحی نوشتاری مبتنی بر عبارتها و اصطلاحات زبانی بود. تجزیه و تحلیل‌ها بر اساس داده‌های کمی از یک نظرسنجی آنلاین و بر پایه‌ی داده‌های کیفی از مصاحبه‌های نیمه ساختاریافته صورت گرفت. صد و سی و هفت نفر معلم زبان انگلیسی به نظرسنجی آنلاین پاسخ دادند و هفت شرکت کننده در مصاحبه‌های نیمه ساختاریافته شرکت کردند. یافته‌ها نشان داد که نظرات مساعد معلمان زن در مورد اثربخشی برای بهبود عملکرد نوشتاری زبان آموزان زبان انگلیسی ناشی از این باور است که ظرفیت زبان آموزان برای استفاده از زبان رسمی‌تر و مودبانه‌تر در تکالیف نوشتاری با استفاده از بازخورد اصلاحی نوشتاری مبتنی بر عبارتها و اصطلاحات زبانی تأثیر مثبتی داشته است. علاوه بر این، یافته‌ها نشان داد که معلمان زبان انگلیسی روش‌های مستقیم را بر تاکتیک‌های غیرمستقیم ترجیح می‌دهند. اساسی‌ترین مؤلفه‌ای که بر عملکرد معلمان در کلاس درس تأثیر گذاشت، آموزش طراحی شده برای تغییر دیدگاه آنها از بی ارزش بودن بازخورد اصلاحی نوشتاری بود. عدم درک رضایت بخش معلمان از استفاده بیشتر از عبارتها و اصطلاحات زبانی ناشی از کمبود اطلاعات آنها بود. به علاوه، تردید معلمان برای استفاده از آنها در سطوح مهارت پایین‌تر ناشی از تصورات نادرست آنها از بی‌فایده بودن آنها در وظایف نوشتاری زبان آموزان بود.

**کلمات کلیدی:** کلاس‌های زبان انگلیسی، بازخورد اصلاحی نوشتاری مبتنی بر عبارتها و اصطلاحات زبانی، ادراک، معلمان

## Introduction

One of the most crucial assignments that writing teachers can give to their students is written corrective feedback (WCF) (Ferris 2006). Over the past two decades, WCF research has drawn more attention. A simple definition of WCF is the "type of information, which is provided for the learners about his or her performance of a learning task, typically with the aim of improving this performance" (Ur 1996, p. 242). There are several overlapping terms and various WCF styles. Direct and indirect WCF are the two primary types of WCF tactics that L2 writing teachers often give to their students. Direct WCF is the practice of providing the proper form right next to (or close to) the error committed for error categories like "preposition" and "tense." However, indirect WCF does not give the learner the proper form; instead, it only highlights, underlines, or circles the area where the error or erroneous form occurred (Lee 2008). Focused WCF chooses some faults to fix while ignoring others. A specific error category, such as mistakes in using the past simple tense, will be the topic of a very concentrated WCF. A less-targeted WCF, on the other hand, will apply to several kinds of mistakes. However, it will still limit correction to a small number of types that have been preselected (such as the simple past tense, articles, or prepositions) (Wayne 2013). Unfocused WCF, on the other hand, describes what may be referred to be a standard practice in writing instruction (but may not exactly correlate to what L2 writing scholars suggest), when teachers mark and correct all (or at least a variety of) the faults in students' written work. This kind of WCF is said to be "extensive" since it handles a wide range of faults.

In the big picture, writing successfully is not a talent that comes readily to people (Myles, 2002). In reality, in linguistics, neurophysiology, and philosophy of language, the natural form of any language is processed unplanned and without conscious or purposeful planning (Lyons, 1991); in contrast, writing necessitates substantial preparation and thought. Only through persistent practice and ongoing learning experiences can writing talents be improved. Additionally, writing requires composition, which denotes combining knowledge into new works, such as in argumentative or expository writing, or conveying information as a narrative account or description.

Moreover, as early as the 1980s, several linguists argued against the Chomskyan approach, which hypothesizes that any natural language comprises infinite utterances generated based on syntactic rules (Pawley & Syder, 1983). To Barlow (2000), Liu and Huo (2011), and Wray (2000), language users tend to repeatedly employ utterances in their language production and disregard all other possible grammatical expressions that can be as useful to express the same concept.

This growing interest in what is known to be the formulaic of language production is linked to a burgeoning of new linguistic theories that focus on performance rather than competence *per se* and highlight the significant role of formulaic sequences in language production. Numerous researchers have noted formulaic sequences as requiring a significant component of instructional materials due to their importance in producing language fluently (Li & Schmitt, 2009; Nation & Newton, 1997; Nattinger & De Carrico, 1992; Sinclair, 1991).

Additionally, single words are frequently regarded as the fundamental lexical unit of sentences in the literature on second language (L2) research and pedagogy (Hatami, 2015; Schmitt, 2010; Siyanova Chanturia & Sidtis, 2019), not only because they are simple to identify but also because they are simple to teach (Schmitt, 2010). On the other hand, expanding psycholinguistics research has revealed that language users extend their processing of language beyond single words to include multi-word sequences (Conklin & Schmitt, 2012; Siyanova-Chanturia & Pellicer-Sanchez, 2019). These lexical elements or multi-word sequences are sometimes referred to as "formulaic sequences," and they typically have a single meaning.

Idioms, collocations, phrasal verbs, lexical bundles, lexical phrases, etc. are all included under the term "formulaic sequences" as a whole. (Schmitt, 2010). A further definition of formulaic sequences is provided on page 42 by Wood (2010a), who describes them as "multi-word or poly morphemic units of language, stored in memory as if they were single lexical units, and recalled and produced as wholes. "With reference to mental processing, the hypothesis that formulaic sequences are retained and processed holistically in long-term memory has been supported.

According to some researchers, formulaic sequences are processed more quickly and possibly in a different way than fully creative expressions, giving both native speakers and proficient L2 users a processing advantage (Conklin & Schmitt, 2008, 2012; Gibbs & Gonzales, 1985; Tabossi, Fanari, & Wolf, 2009). Such assertions have been examined from several perspectives. According to Conklin and Schmitt (2012), formulaic sequences are responsible for between 30 and 50 percent of all language created. This theory aligns with a number of well recognized studies. Recurrent sequences make up 21% of academic writing and 30% of speech, according to research by Biber et al. (1999).

Similar findings were reported by Howarth (1998), who found that 30 to 40 percent of academic language is formulaic. The most significant results were published by Altenburg (1998), who ascribed 80% of a sample of spoken English to frequent two-word combinations. Less than 4% of a corpus of spoken and written language was used by Moon (1997) to report the lowest findings. Recurring word patterns cover the entire English language. The outcomes heavily rely on the operational methods for definition and identification.

In general, speaking and writing are unquestionably different forms of communication that have developed their standards for proficiency (Allen, 1966; Chafe & Tannen, 1987; Pawley & Syder, 1983); nevertheless, the differences are not absolute (Biber, 1986). These distinctions, whether obvious or subtle, are significant for language learners who are focused on academics. The study would be conducted in an academic environment at some schools and foreign language English institutes. The main goal of this study is to determine how formulaic language affects the grades that ESL writing instructors assign for academic writing projects. Second, the study examines the quantity of formulaic sequences to see if the quantity can influence EFL teachers' evaluations. Ultimately, the study looks into any potential discrepancies in teacher views revealed by results on a grading instrument's writing skill-specific sub-scales.

The following main theme and sub-theme questions were raised to meet the objectives of this study:

**Main Theme Question:** What perceptions do male and female Iranian teachers hold on using WCF in general and formulaic WCF in particular in EFL classes?

**Sub-theme Questions:**

1. Does WCF positively affect the errors of EFL learners in EFL classrooms based on the EFL teachers' opinions?
2. Is there a difference between male and female EFL teachers' perspectives on the effects of WCF on the EFL learners' formulaic errors in EFL classrooms?
3. What are the EFL teachers' perceptions on WCF?
4. What are the EFL teachers' perceptions of direct and indirect WCF strategies?
5. What are EFL teachers' perceptions of using formulaic WCF to improve EFL learners' writing performance?

## **Method**

The research study's methodology is a "fixed" mixed-methods design (Creswell & Clark 2010), which employs parallel data collection and analysis for both qualitative and quantitative research

designs (Kemper, Stringfield, and Teddlie 2003). In order to better understand a research problem, a mixed-methods design is a methodology meant for gathering, analyzing, and "mixing" both quantitative and qualitative data at some point during the research process within a single study (Creswell 2002). The fixed mixed-method design was selected for this exploratory study in order to improve triangulation and increase the validity and trustworthiness of the quantitative survey results. Furthermore, a lot of Iranian EFL teachers feel more comfortable voicing their ideas in a formal situation like this interview or a faculty meeting. The survey was designed to comprise 13 items (12 close-ended questions and one open-ended section for additional information). The survey was followed by 10 semi-structured interviews with male and female EFL teachers in Iran.

## **Participants**

The study's target population was 137 EFL teachers in Iran in Khuzestan (71 females and 66 males). These participants were chosen at random (by simple random sampling) from 8 Secondary schools and 12 Language institutes. These educators were picked from a large pool of EFL instructors employed by several secondary schools and language institutes. Those teachers were chosen from a long list of EFL teachers at different secondary schools and language institutes in Iran, Khuzestan. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven EFL teachers (2 male and 5 female). No two teachers were chosen from the same school/ institute to randomly obtain as much data from various EFL teachers in Khuzestan as possible. 200 EFL instructors from language institutes received e-mails with a link to the [www.survey.porsline.ir](http://www.survey.porsline.ir). After receiving emails including the survey link, a handy sample of 20 intended participants was questioned about their interest in taking part in a brief, semi-structured interview that lasted between 15 and 20 minutes. 68% of the 137 people who took part in the survey and 35% of the people who took part in the semi-structured interviews responded. Participation in this research study was voluntary.

## **Instruments**

### **Teachers' questionnaire**

The purpose of the teachers' questionnaire (Appendix A) was to collect quantitative information about EFL teachers' perceptions of WCF from them in an anonymous manner. The purpose of the questionnaire's first section was to collect demographic data (such as gender, highest degree, course taught, etc.). The second section aimed to get EFL teachers' responses to the research questions. Closed-ended questions with binary yes/no responses and the option to check the appropriate box were included in the latter section (questions 7–12). One open-ended question made up the third section of the questionnaire, allowing EFL teachers to add remarks and statements pertinent to the current poll. The participants were free to add any remarks they desired to make in this optional final section.

### **Semi-structured interviews**

The researcher produced a list of questions pertaining to areas in WCF and FWCF for this study, which included semi-structured interviews in the second phase. The questions were purposefully chosen for their informality and openness, as shown in Appendix B. Since EFL teachers in Iran, Khuzestan generally have very busy schedules, semi-structured interviews were the only way to get them to agree to participate in an in-depth research study. Semi-structured interviews also allow EFL teachers to feel more at ease and free when speaking with a researcher.

**Table 1***Interview Participants' Profile*

| Participant               | Gender | Nationality | Interview    | Date     |
|---------------------------|--------|-------------|--------------|----------|
| EFL Teacher (High-school) | Male   | Iranian     | Face-to-Face | Nov 2023 |
| EFL Teacher (Institute)   | Female | Iranian     | Face-to-Face | Nov 2023 |
| EFL Teacher (Institute)   | Female | Iranian     | Face-to-Face | Nov 2023 |
| EFL Teacher (Institute)   | Male   | Iranian     | Face-to-Face | Nov 2023 |
| EFL Teacher (High-school) | Female | Iranian     | Face-to-Face | Nov 2023 |
| EFL Teacher (Institute)   | Female | Iranian     | Face-to-Face | Dec 2023 |
| EFL Teacher (Institute)   | Female | Iranian     | Face-to-Face | Dec 2023 |

**Procedure**

The survey aimed to reach out to as many EFL teachers in Khuzestan as possible by offering succinct responses and complete anonymity. As a follow-up to the survey, emails were sent to a randomly selected list of 7 EFL teachers (5 female and 2 males; Table 1) from different institutions and schools inviting them to participate in a face-to-face interview. The participants were informed that complete anonymity would be guaranteed. The goal of the semi-structured interviews was to collect as much specific information as possible. The interviews were not necessarily limited to a predetermined list of questions (Appendix B); each interviewee was given as much leeway as possible to voice their opinions within the broad parameters of WCF subjects. At each interview, the survey results were mentioned, and the participants were given a chance to ask questions and share their thoughts. Each of the seven interviewees stated that they wished to remain fully anonymous, meaning that neither their names nor their places of employment would be mentioned. Every interview was done one-on-one, and the majority of the conversations lasted between ten and fifteen minutes. Since the focus of this research study was EFL teachers' opinions of WCF in Iran setting, only English was used for the survey and interviews.

**Results****Quantitative Findings**

The first question of this study explored whether WCF have a positive effect on the EFL learners' errors in EFL classrooms based on the EFL teachers' opinions. Considering the objective of this question, the researcher examined the frequency and percentage of the EFL teachers' positive and negative responses to the relevant question item. Table 2 provides the frequency and percentage of the EFL teachers' answers to this item:

**Table 2***Frequencies and Percentages of EFL Teachers' Perspectives on the Effectiveness of WCF in Reducing Errors*

|               | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Effective     | 104       | 75.9    | 75.9          | 75.9               |
| Not Effective | 33        | 24.1    | 24.1          | 100.0              |
| Total         | 137       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

As shown in Table 2, 104 (75.9%) of 137 participants believed that WCF significantly improved the participants' writing performance. Consequently, it can be argued that the participants had favorable views on the utility of WCF in their classes.

This study also delved into finding out if there is a difference between the male and female EFL teachers' perspectives on the effects of WCF on the EFL learners' formulaic errors in EFL classrooms or not. Considering the objective of this study, the researcher examined the



frequencies and percentages of the male EFL teachers' perspectives on the utility of WCF for reducing the EFL learners' formulaic errors. Table 3 provides the male EFL teachers' results.

**Table 3**

*Frequencies and Percentages of Male EFL Teachers' Perspectives on the Effectiveness of WCF in Reducing Formulaic Errors*

|                      | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| <b>Effective</b>     | 28        | 20.4    | 42.4          | 42.4               |
| <b>Not Effective</b> | 38        | 27.7    | 57.6          | 100.0              |
| <b>Total</b>         | 66        | 48.2    | 100.0         |                    |

As shown in Table 3, 28 (42.4%) of 66 male EFL teachers had positive perspectives on the effectiveness of WCF for reducing the EFL learners' formulaic errors.

Furthermore, the researcher scrutinized the frequencies and percentages of the female EFL teachers' perspectives on the utility of WCF for reducing the EFL learners' formulaic errors. Table 4 shows the female EFL teachers' results:

**Table 4**

*Frequencies and Percentages of Female EFL Teachers' Perspectives on the Effectiveness of WCF in Reducing Formulaic Errors*

|                      | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| <b>Effective</b>     | 58        | 42.3    | 81.7          | 81.7               |
| <b>Not Effective</b> | 13        | 9.5     | 18.3          | 100.0              |
| <b>Total</b>         | 71        | 51.8    | 100.0         |                    |

As shown in Table 4, 58 (81.7%) of 71 female EFL teachers had positive perspectives on the effectiveness of WCF for reducing the EFL learners' formulaic errors. Considering the above-mentioned results, it can be argued that, in general, the female EFL teachers had more positive perspectives on the effectiveness of WCF for reducing the EFL learners' formulaic errors.

### Teachers' Perception and Attitudes on WCF and FWCF

This section expounds on the qualitative findings of the study by analyzing the EFL teachers' responses to the open-ended questionnaire items. Based on the aim of this question, the researcher analyzed the questionnaire data. The results of the thematic analysis highlighted the existence of two underlying themes in the EFL teachers' data including: *WCF-induced improvement in writing performance* and *WCF-related learning opportunities*. Table 5 shows these findings:

**Table 5**

*Codes and Themes in the EFL Teachers' Perceptions of WCF*

| Codes                                                                                         | Themes                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Increased opportunity to correct vocabulary and grammar errors                                | WCF-induced improvement in writing performance |
| Increased chances of noticing the gap between self-performance and native-speaker performance |                                                |
| Motivation to use the recently learned grammar rules and words in writing tasks               | WCF-related learning opportunities             |
| Perception of native-speaker language use instances by correcting the errors                  |                                                |

As shown in Table 5, the first theme in the data was *WCF-induced improvement in writing performance*. Based on the findings, 102 of the EFL teachers noted that WCF benefited the EFL learners' writing performance. In this regard, participant 37 stated that "I have been teaching English for 16 years. My experience has showed that the learners need to be provided with the corrective feedback that makes them cognizant of their errors in their writing tasks in an explicit way. That is, WCF which is not confusing can help them to deal with their language-learning difficulties appropriately".

Likewise, participant 89 accentuated the utility of WCF for teaching language forms and stated that "The teacher's WCF is necessary for providing the learners with a better understanding of the uses of language forms in formal writing tasks. In my opinion, implementing effective WCF strategies constitutes the line of demarcation between effective and maladaptive writing instruction".

Moreover, according to Table 5, the second major theme in the above-mentioned data was *WCF-related learning opportunities*. The findings showed that 112 of the EFL teachers noted that the provision of WCF encouraged the learners to take advantage of numerous learning opportunities in diverse settings. In this regard, participant 6 pointed out that "I have witnessed many cases of these WCF-related learning opportunities. In one case, I provided a learner with direct metalinguistic WCF on her uses of subject pronouns and explained their uses in the sentences. In the following session, the learner provided me with a list of subject and object pronouns and the example sentences which involved the relevant pronouns. My feedback prompted the learner to search for the term *pronoun* and to better understand the uses of these words in sentences".

Furthermore, participant 29 noted that "The teachers' WCF may motivate the language learners to use different sources, including the Internet and dictionaries to determine the natural uses of various words and grammar structures. For instance, the learners at pre-intermediate levels commit a common error and use the verb *learn* instead of the verb *teach*. The teachers' WCF on the uses of these verbs may help the learners to check the different dictionary sentences and to be able to use them accurately in their upcoming writing tasks".

In the interviews, we also elicited the teachers' perceptions on direct and indirect WCF strategies.

On the basis of the objective of this question, the researcher analyzed the data using thematic analysis. The analysis results accentuated the existence of two major themes in the EFL teachers' data: *Efficacy of direct WCF* and *confusing nature of indirect WCF*. Table 6 shows these findings:

**Table 6**

*Codes and Themes in the EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Direct and Indirect WCF Strategies*

| Codes                                                                                                               | Themes                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Effectiveness of direct WCF for directing the learners' attention to second language forms                          | Efficacy of direct WCF           |
| Utility of direct WCF for facilitating the learners' comparisons between their own output and target language forms |                                  |
| Ineffectiveness of indirect WCF in helping the learners to determine the cause of their errors                      | Confusing nature of indirect WCF |
| Learners' inability to deduce grammar rules using indirect WCF                                                      |                                  |

As shown in Table 6, the first theme in the EFL teachers' data was the *efficacy of direct WCF*. Based on the findings, 105 participants noted that direct WCF effectively reduced the learners' writing errors in their classes. In this regard, participant 16 pointed out that "The direct strategies of WCF are effective in teaching almost all of the formal aspects of the language. I have used these strategies in all of my classes and have noticed that they promote the learners' understanding of both the vocabulary items and grammatical aspects of the language in the learners' writing tasks".

Likewise, participant 6 stated that "The learners want direct guidance on grammar rules. They are not interested in solving puzzles in their writing tasks. When I provide them with feedback in the form of clues, they disregard the feedback and ask me the same questions. This issue has made me aware of the fact that while the learners appreciate direct WCF, the indirect clues are ignored as insignificant guidance".

Furthermore, the second major theme in the relevant questionnaire data was *confusing nature of indirect WCF*. On the basis of the results, 116 of the participants noted that indirect WCF perplexed them. For instance, participant 98 noted that "I underlined the problematic sections of the participants' writing tasks in order to attract their attention to their erroneous uses of the target language. Nonetheless, my learners looked puzzled and pretended to understand what I meant.

These issues made me aware of the futility of the indirect strategies of WCF". Likewise, participant 66 pointed out that "None of the indirect WCF strategies were useful in my classes. We use WCF in order to provide the learners with guidance on task performance. Notwithstanding, indirect WCF strategies seem to bewilder the learners instead of helping them to deal with their weaknesses in their tasks".

Furthermore, we also asked the teachers to comment on using formulaic WCF to improve the EFL learners' writing performance.

Based on the aim of this question, the researcher analyzed the EFL teachers' data on the utility of formulaic WCF. The results of the thematic data analysis highlighted the fact that there were three main themes in the relevant data, including *lack of a satisfactory understanding of formulaic WCF*, *hesitancy about using formulaic WCF*, and *utility of formulaic WCF at higher proficiency levels*. Table 7 shows these results:

**Table 7**

*Codes and Themes in the EFL Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of FWCF*

| Codes                                                                    | Themes                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| EFL teachers' confusion about phrasal vocabulary                         | Lack of a satisfactory understanding of FWCF |
| EFL teachers' lack of attention to formulaic sequences                   |                                              |
| EFL teachers' disbelief in the effectiveness of FWCF                     | Hesitancy about using FWCF                   |
| EFL teachers' interest in non-formulaic second language vocabulary       |                                              |
| The lower number of formulaic sequences at lower proficiency levels      | Utility of FWCF at higher proficiency levels |
| The lower-level EFL learners' lack of ability to use formulaic sequences |                                              |

As shown in Table 7., the first theme in the relevant questionnaire data was the *lack of a satisfactory understanding of formulaic WCF*. Based on the results, 74 of the participants did not have a satisfactory understanding of phrasal vocabulary, including formulaic sequences. In this



regard, participant 26 noted that: "I do not know exactly what a formulaic sequence means. Does it mean an expression or an idiom? I might have used formulaic WCF without being aware of it".

Similarly, participant 108 noted that "I believe that formulaic sequences include the chunks of words which are called lexical bundles. If this is the meaning of a formulaic sequence, I can provide more information on my uses of the formulaic WCF strategies".

Moreover, the second major theme in the relevant data was *hesitancy about using formulaic WCF*. Based on the results, 81 participants were not completely certain about the usefulness of these WCF strategies. In this regard, participant 51 stated that: "Does directing the learners' attention to these strings of words enable them to use them satisfactorily in their writing tasks? As you know, they are less frequently used in writing in comparison with the other words. Therefore, I do not think highlighting them can improve the learners' writing performance".

Likewise, participant 37 noted that: "We need to make the learners aware of the uses of main second language words. The feedback on these words can enable them to perform their tasks satisfactorily. They can learn the phrasal sequences over the course of time by themselves".

Lastly, the third underlying theme in the data was *utility of formulaic WCF at higher proficiency levels*. Based on the findings, 89 of the participants stated that formulaic WCF could be used at higher levels of proficiency. In this regard, participant 95 stated that: "I believe that the formulaic sequences are rarely used in the materials of the lower proficiency levels. The learners are not exposed to them and do not use them in their written output. Therefore, formulaic WCF is not frequently used in these levels and is mostly useful at higher proficiency levels".

Moreover, participant 30 noted that "The learners at the lower proficiency levels are mainly focused on the simple words and grammatical structures. They rarely use formulaic sequences such as expressions and lexical bundles due mainly to the fact that they cannot process them satisfactorily. This issue highlights that the teachers can use formulaic sequences at higher proficiency levels in their classes".

## Discussion

The present study's first research question tried to examine the EFL teachers' perspectives on the utility of WCF in their classes. Based on the results, most of the participants had favorable perspectives on the usefulness of WCF in their classes. In general, these results support the results of the studies which were conducted by Wray and Namba (2003), Zhao and Bitchener (2007), Yang and Lyster (2010), Yeldham (2015), and Gholami et al. (2017), which showed that teachers regarded WCF strategies as effective strategies for improving the EFL learners' writing performance.

Wood (2010) pointed out that, in the communicative language classrooms, teachers have become aware of the significance of focus on form techniques, including WCF in the process of language learning. He explained that teachers have realized the fact that the lack of WCF in writing classes has a negative effect on the learners' performance since it deprives them of useful guidance on the native-like uses of the second language forms.

Consequently, it can be argued that, in this study the EFL teachers' favorable views on the WCF strategies stemmed from their realization of the effectiveness of these strategies for providing the language learners with guidance on the natural uses of the diverse language forms, including singular and phrasal vocabulary items of the target language.

The study's second research question focused on the differences between the male and female EFL teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of WCF strategies for reducing the EFL learners' formulaic errors. The results indicated that, in general, female EFL teachers had more favorable views on the effectiveness of these WCF strategies in comparison with the male EFL teachers. These results corroborate the results of the studies conducted by Williams (2001), Karim and Nassaji (2020), and Ekiert and Di Gennaro (2021).



Simpson-Vlach and Ellis (2010) pointed out that, in general, female EFL teachers are more concerned with language learners' use of natural formulaic sequences because they consider the use of these sequences to be a reflection of more formal and polite language use. Consequently, they believe in the utility of formulaic WCF and endeavor to provide their learners with it in their writing classes.

Therefore, it can be noted that, in the present study, the female EFL teachers' positive perspectives on the utility of WCF for ameliorating the EFL learners' writing performance stemmed from their perception of the positive effect of the use of these formulaic sequences on the learners' ability to use more formal and polite language in their writing tasks.

The third research question endeavored to examine the EFL teachers' perceptions of WCF. The findings showed that, based on the teachers' opinions, WCF provided the language learners with more language learning opportunities and improved their writing performance. These findings support the findings of the studies that were carried out by Meunier (2012), Rahimi (2019), and Gharanjik and Ghoorchaei (2020).

Jiang and Nekrasova (2007) pointed out that the language learners' recurring errors over different writing tasks have made the EFL teachers cognizant of the fact that optimal attention to language forms, including the vocabulary items, can help the learners to use the relevant forms more naturally and accurately in their writing output.

On the basis of this discussion, it can be pointed out that, in the present study, the EFL teachers had favorable perspectives on the use of WCF strategies since they were aware of the fact that they empowered the EFL learners to use the singular and phrasal vocabulary of the target language including its formulaic sequences in a more natural and native-like way.

The study's fourth research question tried to determine the EFL teachers' perceptions of direct and indirect WCF strategies. The results of the study highlighted that the EFL teachers believed in the efficacy of the direct WCF strategies and considered the indirect WCF strategies to be confusing in the context of the classroom. These findings are in line with the results of the studies which were carried out by Bitchener, Young, and Cameron (2005), Santos, López Serrano, and Manchón (2010), Saadi, and Saadat (2015), and Rizkiani, Bhuana, and San Rizqiya (2019).

Sarré, Grosbois, and Brudermann (2019) pointed out that the results of numerous studies have highlighted the fact that direct WCF strategies are more beneficial for ameliorating the learners' writing performance since they attract the learners' attention to the erroneous aspects of their output and facilitate their cognitive comparison between their output and native-like language use. They noted that indirect WCF strategies can be effective when they are used along with the direct strategies.

Based on this issue, it can be noted that, in this study, the EFL teachers preferred to use more direct WCF strategies since they were cognizant of their effectiveness in expediting the learners' cognitive comparisons. Moreover, they were aware that these strategies enabled the learners to use the formal aspects of the language, including formulaic sequences, in a more native-like way.

Lastly, the fifth research question made an effort to determine the EFL teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of formulaic WCF in their classes. Based on the results, the participants were unaware of the categories of formulaic sequences and were hesitant to use formulaic WCF in their classes. Moreover, they believed that formulaic WCF could be beneficial in higher proficiency levels. These results support the results of the studies that were carried out by Wood (2002, 2006, 2010) and Tabossi, Fanari, and Wolf (2009).

Simpson-Vlach and Ellis (2010) pointed out that formulaic sequences are rarely addressed in the materials which are taught in academic settings both in foreign and second language contexts. Therefore, the teachers and learners are not satisfactorily informed about them and are less likely

to use them in their language uses. As they explained, these sequences are included in the learners' materials at the higher-intermediate or advanced levels.

Considering this issue, it can be stated that, in the present study, the teachers' lack of satisfactory understanding of formulaic sequences stemmed from their lack of information about them. Moreover, it can be noted that the teachers' hesitancy to use them in the lower proficiency levels emanated from their misconceptions of their uselessness in the language learners' writing tasks.

Moreover, considering the findings of the fourth research question, although the educators were aware of how well these more direct WCF tactics accelerated the learners' cognitive comparisons, the EFL teachers in this study favored using them. Furthermore, they understood that by using these tactics, the learners could use the language's formal features, such as formulaic sequences, in a fashion that was more akin to that of a native speaker. Ultimately, the study attempted to ascertain how EFL teachers felt about formulaic WCF's efficacy in their lessons. According to the results, the participants were reluctant to employ formulaic WCF in their classes and were not fully aware of the categories of formulaic sequences. Furthermore, they thought that formulaic WCF would be advantageous at higher competence levels. Additionally, the study has provided insights into curriculum design and teaching style in academic environments and empirically shown that focused instruction of formulaic sequences may improve EFL learners' results.

### **Conclusion**

This study's primary goal was to investigate how instructors view the use of FWCF. The first research question has been answered based on the first research findings. As a result, it may be claimed that the EFL teachers' positive opinions of the FWCF strategies in this study were influenced by their recognition of how well these strategies guided language learners in the natural applications of a variety of language forms, including singular and phrasal vocabulary items in the target language. The study's findings also put pressure on educators to identify formulaic language that might be used in the instruction of English, particularly writing. It can be concluded, then, that in the current study, the positive views of the female EFL teachers regarding the effectiveness of WCF in improving the writing performance of the EFL learners resulted from their perception of the beneficial impact of using these formulaic sequences on the learners' capacity to use more formal and polite language in their writing tasks. Based on the discussion part, it can be concluded that the EFL teachers in this study had positive views about the use of WCF strategies because they knew that these strategies enabled the EFL learners to use the target language's singular and phrasal vocabulary, including its formulaic sequences, in a way that was more natural and native-like.

This study opens the door for future research to examine this role empirically on a larger sample in order to produce results that can be generalized and offer insights into teaching academic writing in a variety of contexts. It does so by emphasizing the effectiveness of focused instruction of formulaic sequences in enhancing the academic writing skills of EFL learners. Furthermore, this study's findings illuminated a significant topic that warrants further investigation. Further empirical research is required to investigate any potential tendency on the part of EFL learners to transfer acquired formulaic sequences from one genre to another, since concentrated instruction of formulaic sequences appears to increase the holistic and creative use of formulaic sequences in a specific genre. Regarding the connection between formulaic sequences and improved language correctness, this particular theory needs to be approached cautiously as it hasn't been experimentally supported while being a common theme in research. Empirical research may now be able to determine whether formulaic sequences by themselves improve the language accuracy of EFL learners or if they also require corrective feedback.



Therefore, it is possible to determine whether any increased accuracy among EFL learners is attributable to corrective feedback in particular or to mastering formulaic sequences, which have syntactic and semantic functions in discourse (Pawley & Syder, 1983). These can be found through conducting empirical, controlled studies in which different groups receive focused instruction on formulaic sequences with one controlled factor, corrective feedback.

## References

- Allen, R. (1966). Written English is a 'second language'. *Communication Studies*, 18(2), 81-85.
- Altenburg, B. (1998). On the phraseology of spoken English: The evidence of recurrent word combinations. In A.P. Cowie (Ed.), *Phraseology* (pp.101-122). Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- Barlow, M. (2000). Usage, blends and grammar. In M. Barlow & S. Kemmer (Eds.), *Usage based models of language* (pp. 315-346). Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Biber, D., & Conrad, S. (1999). Lexical bundles in conversation and academic prose. In H. Hasselgard & S. Oskserjell (Eds.), *Out of Corpora: Studies in honour of Stig Johansson* (pp. 181-190). Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Bitchener, J., Young, S., & Cameron, D. (2005). The effect of different types of corrective feedback on ESL student writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 14(3), 191–205.
- Bybee, J. (2006). From usage to grammar: The mind's response to repetition. *Language*, 82, 711–733.
- Chafe, W. & Tannen, D. (1987). The relation between written and spoken language. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 16, 383-407.
- Conklin, K., & Schmitt, N. (2008). Formulaic sequences: Are they processed more quickly than nonformulaic language by native and nonnative speakers? *Applied Linguistics*, 29(1), 72-89.
- Conklin, K., & Schmitt, N. (2012). The processing of formulaic language. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 32, 45-61. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0267190512000074>
- Cowie, A.P. (1994). Phraseology. In Asher, R.E. (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of language and linguistics* (pp. 3168–3171). Oxford: Pergamon.
- Creswell, J. W. (2002). Educational research: planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall.
- Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2010). Designing and conducting mixed methods research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ekiert, M., & Di Gennaro, K. (2021). Focused written corrective feedback and linguistic target mastery: Conceptual replication of Bitchener and Knoch (2010). *Language Teaching*, 54(1), 71–89.
- Ferris, D. (2006). Feedback in second language writing. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press. 49–62.
- Gharanjik, N., & Ghoorchaie, B. (2020). The impact of metalinguistic corrective feedback on Iranian EFL learners' acquisition of the hypothetical conditional. *AJELP: Journal of English Language and Pedagogy*, 8(2), 27–38.
- Gholami, L., Nabi Karimi, M., & Atai, M. (2017). Formulaic focus-on-form episodes in adult EFL communicative interactions. *System*, 4, 1-15.
- Gibbs, R. W., & Gonzales, G. P. (1985). Syntactic frozenness in processing and remembering idioms. *Cognition*, 20(3), 243-259.
- Hatami, S. (2015). Teaching formulaic sequences in the ESL classroom. *TESOL Journal*, 6(1), 112-129.
- Howarth, P. (1998). Phraseology and second language proficiency. *Applied linguistics*, 19(1), 24-44.





- Hyland, K. (2007). Genre pedagogy: Language, literacy and L2 writing instruction. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 16(3), 148-164.
- Jiang, N., & Nekrasova, T. M. (2007). The processing of formulaic sequences by second language speakers. *The Modern Language Journal*, 91, 433-445.
- Karim, K., & Nassaji, H. (2020). The revision and transfer effects of direct and indirect comprehensive corrective feedback on ESL students' writing. *Language Teaching Research*, 24(4), 519-539.
- Kemper, E., Stringfield, S., & Teddlie, C. (2003). Mixed methods sampling strategies in social science research. In Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (Eds.), *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioural Research* (pp. 273-278). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lee, I. (2008). Ten mismatches between teachers' beliefs and written corrective feedback practice. *ELT Journal*, 63(1), 13-22.
- Li, J., & Schmitt, N. (2009). The acquisition of lexical phrases in academic writing: A longitudinal case study. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 18(2), 85-102.
- Liu, W., & Huo, Y. (2011). On the role of formulaic sequences in second language acquisition. *US-China Foreign Language*, 9(11), 31-36.
- Lyons, John (1991). *Natural Language and Universal Grammar*. New York: Cambridge University Press. pp. 68-70. ISBN 978-0521246965.
- Meunier, F. (2012). Formulaic language and language teaching. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 32, 111-129.
- Myles, J. (2002). Second language writing and research: The writing process and error analysis in student texts. *Tesl-EJ*, 6(2), 1-20.
- Moon, R. (1997). Vocabulary connection: multi-word items in English. In N. Schmitt & M. McCarthy (Eds.), *Vocabulary: Description, acquisition, and pedagogy* (pp. 40-63). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nassaji, H. (2009). The effects of recasts and elicitations in dyadic interaction and the role of feedback explicitness. *Language Learning*, 59(2), 411-452. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2009.00511.x>
- Nassaji, H. (2016). *The interactional feedback dimension in instructed second language learning: Linking theory, research, and practice*. Bloomsbury.
- Nation, I. S. P., & Newton, J. (1997). Teaching vocabulary. In J. Coady & T. Huckin (Eds.), *Second language vocabulary acquisition: A rationale for pedagogy* (pp. 238-254). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nattinger, J. R., & De Carrico, J. S. (1992). *Lexical phrases and language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pawley, A., & Syder, F. H. (1983). Two puzzles for linguistic theory: Nativelike selection and nativelike fluency. In J. C. Richards & R. W. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and communication* (pp. 191-226). New York, NY: Longman.
- Rahimi, M. (2019). A comparative study of the impact of focused vs. comprehensive corrective feedback and revision on ESL learners' writing accuracy and quality. *Language Teaching Research*, 4, 12-22.
- Rizkiani, S., Bhuana, G. P., & San Rizqiya, R. (2019). Coded and uncoded corrective feedback in teaching writing description texts. *ELTIN Journal, Journal of English Language Teaching in Indonesia*, 8(1), 55-66.
- Saadi, Z., & Saadat, M. (2015). EFL learners' writing accuracy: Effects of direct and metalinguistic electronic feedback. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 5(10), 2053-2063.



- Santos, M., López Serrano, S., & Manchón, R. M. (2010). The differential effect of two types of direct written corrective feedback on noticing and uptake: Reformulation vs. error correction. *International Journal of English Studies*, 10(1), 131–154.
- Sarré, C., Grosbois, M., & Brudermann, C. (2019). Fostering accuracy in L2 writing: Impact of different types of corrective feedback in an experimental blended learning EFL course. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 6, 1–23.
- Simpson-Vlach, R., & Ellis, C. N. (2010). An academic formulas list: new methods in phraseology research. *Applied Linguistics*, 31, 487-512.
- Schmitt, N. (2010). *Researching vocabulary: A vocabulary research manual*. Springer.
- Shintani, N., & Ellis, R. (2015). Does language analytical ability mediate the effect of written feedback on grammatical accuracy in second language writing? *System*, 49, 110-119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2015.01.006>
- Shintani, N., Ellis, R., & Suzuki, W. (2014). Effects of written feedback and revision on learners' accuracy in using two English grammatical structures. *Language Learning*, 64(1), 103-131. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12029>
- Sinclair, J. (1991) *Corpus, concordance, collocation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Siyanova - Chanturia, A., & Pellicer-Sanchez, A. (Eds.). (2019). *Understanding formulaic language: A second language acquisition perspective*. Routledge.
- Siyanova-Chanturia, A., & Sidsis, D. V. L. (2019). What online processing tells us about formulaic language in Siyanova-Chanturia, A., & Pellicer-Sanchez, A. (Eds.), *Understanding Formulaic Language: A Second Language Acquisition Perspective* (pp. 38-61). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Tabossi, P., Fanari, R., & Wolf, K. (2009). Why are idioms recognized fast? *Memory & Cognition*, 37(4), 529-540.
- Ur, P. (1996). *A course in language teaching: Practice and theory*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, UK.
- Wayne, E.A. (2013). Written corrective feedback: the parameters and the opinions.
- Williams, J. (2001). The effectiveness of spontaneous attention to form. *System*, 29(3), 325-340.
- Wood, D. (2002). Formulaic language in acquisition and production: Implications for teaching. *TESL Canada Journal*, 20(1), 76-89.
- Wood, D. (2009a). Effects of focused instruction of formulaic sequences on fluent expression in second language narratives: A case study. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 12(1), 39-57.
- Wood, D. (2010). *Formulaic language and second language speech fluency: Background, evidence and classroom applications*. London: Continuum.
- Wood, D. (2006). Uses and functions of formulaic sequences in second language speech: An exploration of the foundations of fluency. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 63(1), 13-33.
- Wray, A. (2000). Formulaic sequences in second language teaching: Principle and practice. *Applied Linguistics*, 21(4), 463-489.
- Yeldham, M. (2015). The influence of formulaic language on L2 listener decoding in extended discourse. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 8, 91-102.
- Zhao, S., & Bitchener, J. (2007). Incidental focus on form in teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions. *System*, 35(4), 431-447.

### Biodata

**Zahra Hardani Naeeme Zade** is a Ph.D. candidate in TEFL at Urmia University, Iran. She received his B.A. degree in ELT from Azad University in 2006 and her MA in TEFL from Iran

University of Science and Research in 2014. Since then, she has taught English at different companies' educational departments and Science and Applied University. Her research interest in teaching English includes oral and written corrective feedback types.

Email: *z.hardani2373@gmail.com*

**Javad Gholami** is a Professor of Applied Linguistics in the Department of English Language and Literature at Urmia University, Iran. His main publications have been on incidental focus on form, task-based language teaching, teacher education, and convenience editing.

E-mail: *j.gholami@urmia.ac.ir*

**Mehdi Sarkhosh** is an Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics at Urmia University, Iran. His research interests include pragmatics and society, language teaching research, and discourse.

E-mail: *mdsarkhosh@urmia.ac.ir*



© 2024 by the authors. Licensee International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Research, Najafabad Iran, Iran. This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY NC 4.0 license). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).