Interpersonal written corrective feedback: A case study of reading log feedback

Xiaomei Sun✉1

1English Department, China Foreign Affairs University, Beijing, China

Article Info

Abstract

Written corrective feedback (WCF) has been given considerable attention in the past few decades in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing. However, few studies have focused on students' written works and examined how their writing performance change in response to teachers' feedback and comments. This paucity of data from students' actual works is problematic. Accordingly, this study scrutinized eight secondary school students' reading log entries written in EFL and the feedback their teacher provided. Data were also collected from semi-structured interviews with the students and the teacher. Findings indicate that the combination of direct error correction in in-text feedback and mitigation strategies in end comments could lead to effective integration of interpersonality into WCF. Specifically, mitigation strategies such as using suggestions, expectation, and encouragement in lieu of criticism contributed to constructive and effective feedback. Demonstrated effects on students' writing include lengthened text, decreased grammar mistakes, enriched content, and increased exam marks for writing. Meanwhile, teacher-student relationship was reported to have improved due to the application of interpersonal WCF. Practical implications of the findings include specific strategies that EFL teachers could adopt to effect interpersonality in WCF and thus enhanced student written works.

INTRODUCTION

In second/foreign language (L2/FL) writing, feedback, especially written corrective feedback (WCF), has been given an increased emphasis among classroom teachers and language teaching researchers. Feedback is a 'constructive judgement of a text', essentially providing informational, pedagogical, and interpersonal responses to the text (Hyland & Hyland, 2006a, p. 1). Thus, feedback could be regarded as a type of communication between the writer and the reader regarding the content and form of language of the text, and this collaborative pedagogical activity could facilitate and enhance learning. WCF, as a most common form of feedback, makes responses to linguistic errors and content-related issues in the writing (Ashwell, 2000; Bitchener & Storch, 2016).

The effectiveness of WCF could be influenced by various factors. In a broad sense, learner differences, situational and methodological factors exert influence on the efficacy of WCF (Evans et al., 2010). Teachers, as part of the situational constitution and the pivot of methodological decisions, take varied stances in giving feedback shaped by their sociocultural and political backgrounds (Hyland & Hyland, 2006a). Despite differences in style and focus of attention, WCF provided by teacher, compared with that by peers, is usually given more weight by students and tested more effective in language improvement and teacher-student relationship enhancement (Ruegg, 2015b; van Ginkel et al., 2017).

In recent years, interpersonal aspect of written feedback, as well as the sociocultural perspective of feedback, has been gaining currency in research and classroom practice (Chong, 2018b; Storch, 2018). From this perspective, feedback interaction is deemed as a dynamic co-constructed process in which teacher and student negotiate meanings, alongside structural and linguistic issues (Anderson, 2021). However, previous research into this field mostly explored students' and teachers' perceptions, for example, the effect of feedback on student-teacher relationship or how this relationship affected students' response to teachers' feedback (Chong, 2018b; Crimmins et al., 2016; Skipper & Douglas, 2015).

There is a scarcity of research that examines students' written works with the intention of discovering changes in their works and whether/how these changes are related to teachers' WCF. In China where the educational system is comparatively exam-oriented (Rappleye & Komatsu, 2018), interpersonality in WCF and its effects on students' EFL writing is a poorly studied topic. The current study intends to fill the gap by scrutinizing a writing-after-reading program in a Chinese secondary school. Through analyzing eight students' reading log entries and the teacher's feedback including in-text feedback and end comments, and conducting semi-structured interviews with the students and the teacher, this study aims to answer the following two questions:

1. How could interpersonality be integrated into WCF on reading log entries?
2. What effects could interpersonal WCF have on EFL writing?

Literature Review

Written Corrective Feedback

Written corrective feedback (WCF) is defined by Bitchener and Storch (2016) as 'a written response to a linguistic error that has been made in the writing of a text by an L2 learner' (p. 1), which denotes that WCF takes the form of a written account. Different from this interpretation, Li and Vuono (2019) maintain that the definition of WCF should be based on the modality of L2 production rather than the form of feedback. That is to say, verbal (written and oral) feedback on students' written production is regarded as WCF. This article follows Bitchener and Storch's (2016) definition of WCF so as to differentiate the written and oral feedback the teacher participant gave students. More specifically, only the written form of feedback is regarded as WCF in the current study. Despite the disparity in defining WCF, commonality can be identified in the specification of WCF targets: both content and language (Ashwell, 2000). This being the case, the vast majority of research has focused on language-related errors rather than content issues (Li & Vuono, 2019). With regard to how teachers point out errors, feedback could be categorized into direct error correction (i.e., teacher makes the correction) and indirect error correction (i.e., teacher locates the error for students to make the correction). Alternatively, teachers may also provide meta-linguistic information, or codes as indication of linguistic rules, to help students correct errors (Ellis, 2009). Research and discussion regarding the efficacy of different types of WCF are still ongoing, and to date no clear-cut differences have been ascertained between various forms of WCF (Kang & Han, 2015). However, empirical findings evidence that compared with other types of feedback (e.g., peer feedback), teacher written feedback is

upheld as more helpful by students and tested more effective in promoting writing abilities in certain cases (Mulati et al., 2020; Ruegg, 2015a, 2015b, 2018; van Ginkel et al., 2017).

Regarding factors that may influence the effectiveness of WCF, Evans et al. (2010) highlighted three contextual factors: learner, situational, and methodological variables. Respectively, learners' individual differences (IDs), sociocultural elements (including teacher, physical environment, and wider contextual factors), and pedagogical design and activities are regarded as contributory factors for the efficacy of WCF. Partly overlapping the last two categories, Hyland and Hyland (2006b, p. 166) used the term 'recognized social purpose' to stress the influence of sociocultural and pedagogical elements on feedback formation and function. For instance, feedback might be recognized as a tool to evaluate or give feedforward to students' works. The perceived purpose of feedback comes into play when teachers make decisions on how to provide WCF. In an exam-oriented teaching environment, for example, where written accuracy is closely linked to academic performance therefore highly prized by various stakeholders, WCF concerning error correction may be given the most attention and emphasis by teachers, students, and parents as well (Lee, 2016). Shaped by socio-political factors and the dominant discourse of their backgrounds, teachers' personal, educational, and working experiences influence the stances they take when giving feedback, such as focus on content or form, praise or criticism, and positioning themselves as remote or involved in the pedagogical activity of giving feedback (Hyland & Hyland, 2006a).

Interpersonal Feedback
In recent years, a shift from the dominance of WCF research to a socio-constructivist or sociocultural perspective of feedback has been discernible (Storch, 2018). From this perspective, feedback could be defined as 'an interactive process in which students engage in assessment dialogues with the teacher' (Chong, 2018a, p. 186). During this dynamic co-constructed process, both the feedback provider and the receiver are involved in meaning-making mediated by implicit and explicit messages within and beyond the feedback (Anderson, 2021). Moreover, this two-way communication provides students with a sense of audience who expresses the expectations of the communities students are writing for (Hyland & Hyland, 2006b). In the short term, the audience awareness may spur students to carry out linguistic revision of the writing; in the long run, it could promote their self-monitoring, evaluation, and regulation of learning (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017; Merkel, 2018). Furthermore, the dialogic interaction draws on teacher-student relationship and in turn nurtures and develops this relationship (Chong, 2018b).

Hyland and Hyland (2006a) put forward the concept interpersonality in feedback, referring to 'the relationship that participants construct, confront, and deal with as they engage in the situated processes of giving feedback' (p. 14). This concept highly stresses the notion of responding to 'a person rather than a script' when giving feedback; otherwise, the feedback cannot be effectively taken by students (Hyland & Hyland, 2006b, p. 165, emphasis in original). In actuality, it is often the case that student emotional response is not given adequate attention when teachers provide WCF (Mahfoodh, 2017). To draw teachers' attention to such aspects, Xu and Carless (2017) introduced the concept – enabling construct of teacher feedback literacy which refers to teachers' awareness and skills of developing students' cognitive, affective and relational capabilities to bring about effective feedback practice. While the three dimensions are essential for feedback exchange and effect, it is worth noting that the two-way communication, in which teachers and students are equally important, and their awareness and capabilities in these aspects are both conducive to positive change through the activity of giving/taking feedback. Aligned with this perception, it is legitimate to investigate both teachers' and students' attitudes and opinions regarding interpersonal WCF. Thus far, research into students' perspectives of WCF is scant, even less with L2 learners (Chong, 2018b). This study adds to the existing body of literature by exploring both teacher's and students' perspectives of interpersonal written corrective feedback on reading log entries.

Relevant Research
Skipper and Douglas (2015) conducted a study that investigated the effects of praise and criticism in reading feedback on students' perceptions of student-teacher relationship. Student participants were British children of 9-11 (n=45) and 7-11 (n=98) years old, respectively participating in two stages of the experiment: Experient 1 – experience of praise; Experient 2 – experience of criticism. Each experiment involved person feedback (i.e., attributing success or failure to stable factors or personal features), progress feedback (i.e., attributing success or failure to unstable factors such as efforts made

in the task), and no feedback at all. Findings indicated that praise and experiences of success positively affected students' perception of student-teacher relationship while types of feedback did not significantly impact the perception. In a tertiary institution in Australia, Crimmins et al. (2016) explored students' and teachers' perceptions of the effect of written, reflective and dialogic feedback (WRDF) on the relationship between the two groups. This study collected data with the tools of pre student survey(n=414), post student survey (n=342), student focus group (n=8), and post teacher survey (n=12). Results showed that WRDF helped address issues caused by dissatisfaction with assessment feedback, therefore valued by students and teachers as constructive for academic achievement and teacher-student relationship building. From the perspective of community college students as L2 learners in Hong Kong, Chong's (2018b) study focused on the interpersonal aspect of written feedback. A combination of open-ended questionnaires (n=93) and interviews (n=12) collected data that indicated the importance of sociocultural factors (specifically in this study, students' impression on teachers and student-teacher relationship) for students' response to teacher feedback. Meanwhile, two mediating factors, that is, students' trust in teachers' professionalism and students' responsibilities, were brought into the limelight as potential compensation for relational factors stated above. Building on the existing literature, the present study utilizes student reading log entries and teacher feedback, coupled with interviews with students and teacher, to provide further insight into interpersonal WCF.

METHODOLOGY
This study is one of the ten cases that my doctoral research investigated. The teacher participant, Fang (pseudonym), had been teaching EFL for 25 years in a county in Jiangxi province which used to be a poverty-stricken area. Fang was the only teacher among the ten of my doctoral research participants that provided students with reading-log feedback and comments, thus fulfilling the research aim of this study. During the data collection period, Fang was teaching two Senior One classes (students aged 15-16), one of which was an experimental class. Considering that students of the experimental class were more academically competent than the other class Fang was teaching, Fang decided to incorporate reading newspapers and keeping reading logs into her EFL teaching in this class. Fang chose 21st Century (Teens version) as the reading material for the following reasons: to expand students' vocabulary; to enrich and increase their language input; to motivate students with interesting topics in the newspaper. For most of the students, this was the first time to read English materials other than textbooks. Fang's writing-after-reading program lasted for eight weeks following these procedures: students read the weekly newspaper and chose one article (approximately 300 words) to comment on in their reading logs. The reading log included four sections: Basic Information (including Source of reading, Reading time, Theme, and Topic), Language Accumulation, Summary, and My Opinions. At the beginning of each week, Fang collected the reading logs and gave feedback. In order to gain a relatively multi-layered view of students' feedback and evaluation of this writing-after-reading program, eight students of different English competence from the experimental class (with code names S1-S8; 2 girls and 6 boys) participated in the study on a voluntary basis.

The data were collected through three main sources: interviews with the teacher and eight student participants, the eight students' reading-log entries, and teacher's written feedback on the writing. The interview protocols were developed based on the two research questions (RQ). Specifically, RQ1 (i.e., How could interpersonality be integrated into WCF on reading log entries?) shaped the teacher interview questions, while RQ2 (i.e., What effects could interpersonal WCF have on EFL writing?) guided the design of student interview questions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, teacher and students alike. The interview with Fang lasted for approximately one hour, while interviews with each student lasted 20 minutes or so. To enable participants (particularly students whose spoken English was limiting) to fully and freely express their opinions, all the interviews were conducted in Chinese, L1 for participants and the researcher, then transcribed and translated into English by the researcher. In addition, eight students' reading logs (eight entries in total from each student) with Fang's feedback on each entry were analyzed as another source of data. Each reading log entry was named with student's code name and the ordinal number of the entry. For instance, the entry labelled as S4-4 refers to the fourth reading log entry of student participant 4.

The data from interviews were analyzed with the approach of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial codes (e.g., encouragement, interaction, and communication) were developed into emergent themes including teacher-student relationship building, mitigation strategies, effects of feedback, students' expectations, interpersonal aspects etc. Based on the emergent themes, final themes were identified and framed the subheadings of the Findings chapter. To answer RQ1 (i.e., How could interpersonality be integrated into WCF on reading log entries?), teacher's feedback, including in-text feedback and end comments, was analyzed following frameworks used in related research. First, in-text feedback was analyzed drawing on the four categories adopted in a study of similar nature: organization, vocabulary, content, and grammar (Ruegg, 2015b). Second, Fang's end comments were analyzed following the three categories used in Hyland and Hyland's (2001) seminal study (i.e., praise, criticism and suggestions). To answer RQ2 (i.e., What effects could interpersonal WCF have on EFL writing?), data from student interviews and reading log entries were analyzed to identify changes in terms of vocabulary, grammar, content, and structuring in the writing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Findings
Fang's Feedback and the Rationale Behind Her Decisions
Fang's in-text feedback was mainly composed of error corrections. Subsumed under the category of 'error correction', four aspects were identified: organization, content, vocabulary, and grammar (see proportions in Table 1). Among these four subcategories, corrections of grammar mistakes took up the largest percentage—more than 50 percent of all the error corrections, followed by vocabulary—approximately one third of the total. Organization and content corrections respectively accounted for 8% and 5% of error corrections.

Table 1. Components of in-text feedback on students' reading log entries

	Organization (%)	Content (%)	Vocabulary (%)	Grammar (%)
S1	2 (6)	2 (6)	12 (36)	17 (52)
S2	2 (8)	2 (8)	12 (50)	8 (33)
S3	3 (15)	1 (5)	7 (35)	9 (45)
S4	2 (11)	0 (0)	9 (50)	7 (39)
S5	2 (6)	2 (6)	4 (12)	27 (77)
S6	1 (8)	1 (8)	3 (25)	7 (58)
S7	3 (14)	2 (10)	5 (24)	11 (52)
S8	0 (0)	0 (0)	6 (50)	6 (50)
Average	2 (8)	1 (5)	7 (32)	12 (55)

In end comments, however, Fang exercised great caution when expressing criticism compared with giving praise and suggestions (see Table 2). This result mirrored her concern about giving negative feedback: 'If I point out too many mistakes, it may affect their enthusiasm for learning. Some students are particularly sensitive…I try to find their merits and encourage them instead.' (Fang, interview) In comparison, Fang was much more generous when giving praise and encouragement, which was not only reflected in the data (see Table 2) but also demonstrated in what she said: "When we give students feedback, we need to understand them and think from their standpoint… to dig out their strengths, and encourage them over and over again' (Fang, interview).

Table 2. Feedback acts in end comments on students' reading log entries

	Praise (%)	Criticism (%)	Suggestion (%)
S1	3 (50)	0 (0)	3 (50)
S2	6 (75)	1 (13)	1 (13)
S3	2 (40)	0 (0)	3 (60)
S4	4 (57)	0 (0)	3 (43)
S5	7 (78)	0 (0)	2 (22)

S6	3 (75)	0 (0)	1(25)
S7	6 (86)	0 (0)	1 (14)
S8	4 (80)	1 (20)	0 (0)
Average	4 (63)	0.3 (5)	2 (32)

Another feature of the WCF Fang gave students was that she provided individualized feedback in accordance with students' personalities and used different types of feedback based on students' varied language competence. Fang elaborated on this: 'According to students' English level, I make the decision whether to correct the mistakes, simply underline them, or talk with students about the mistakes face to face in private.' (Fang, interview) It was indicated that Fang complemented WCF with oral feedback, and she used both direct and indirect error corrections in her feedback. In rare cases of making criticism, Fang adopted mitigation strategies. For instance, following a criticism-like comment 'It seems that this passage comes from last issue, doesn't it?', she praised the student with 'You did a good job with this article!' (Fang, S2-2) In a longer feedback, Feng made a harsher criticism:

> It seems that you are doing this job carelessly! Because in my eyes you are able to write this much better if you make enough efforts! Remember: success equals hard work, right approaches of working and less empty talk! I expect to meet a new different Alex! (Fang, S8-1)

In this 47-word comment, every sentence ended with an exclamation mark, which indicated Fang's disappointment with the written work. However, it is easy to note that this comment culminated with an expectation, and importantly, the name of the student was added to create an effect of personalized comment and dialogic communication.

Another strategy that Fang employed was expressing immediate recognition of students' progress. Two weeks after Fang gave the critical feedback above, Fang made such a comment on the student's writing: 'I am very pleased that a new and different Alex is now in front of me :)Thank you for your efforts you put into reading and writing, which makes your article better worth reading :)' (Fang, S8-3). This strategy could also be identified in a comment on another student's writing (see Fig. 1). In the first entry of the student, Fang's suggestion for writing down 'more phrases or sentences' in the Language Accumulation section was responded to in the other entry with sentences copied from the reading and application of the sentence patterns in My Opinions section. Fang praised the student with quite long comments and four smileys scattered in different sections.
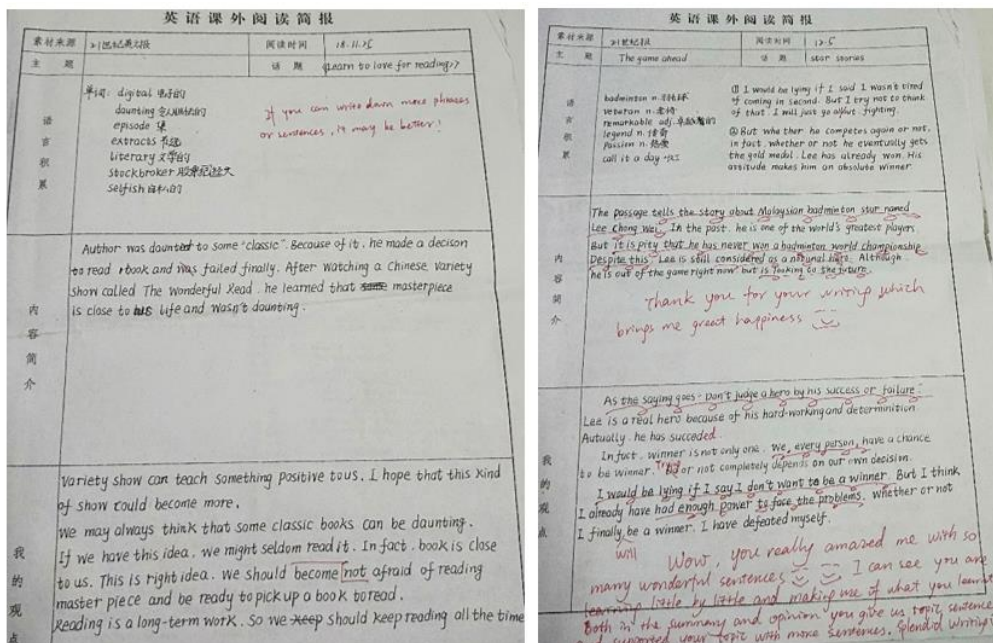

Figure 1. An example of Fang's immediate recognition of student's progress

Fang's immediate recognition of students' progress was prominently displayed in her sensitivity to students' use of newly learnt linguistic items. For instance, she gave the comment 'I especially appreciate the proper use of some newly-learnt sentence structures, like, "not to mention", "we can't ignore", "your chances of survival are small", "given that". Well done :) :)' (Fang, S5-6). In great detail, Fang listed all the items that the student had recently learnt and used in the writing, ending with two smileys, which did not commonly occur in her feedback.

Another mitigation strategy that Fang applied was using suggestions or expectations rather than criticism to point out aspects that students could improve on. In such cases, Fang might also praise students first. For example: 'I find you're good at language learning actually. Maybe if you put more efforts into reading and writing English, you can present a perfect paragraph, making it a bit longer and more profound!' (Fang, S3-1) The beginning remark was a general praise, or Fang's evaluation of the student's capability to learn English as a foreign language. Following that, Fang indicated that the writer had not exerted her full potential yet; therefore made the suggestion she should read and write more, followed by detailed instructions. This praise-suggestion pattern was extended in another comment:

> Reading your writing is a pleasure as usual. Nothing can hold the progress of exploring new technology; however, experiment on human beings should be forbidden. That's it! I suggest that you should make your expressions various about language, for example, "think". (Fang, S3-6)

This comment started with an emotion response expressing praise, followed by a content response related to cloning, after which Fang gave a precise suggestion about variety of expressions.

Expectation, as an alternative or complement to suggestion, was also commonly used in Fang's feedback. For instance:

> Good summary! As for opinions, I am attracted by it as usual. However, maybe a little more attention should be paid to grammar, which I believe you are able to show me in your article next time :) By the way I can understand the charm of Single's Day when people just can't help with all the flash sale, pre-sale, group-buying, red envelopes and coupons. However, we really should shop rationally so that less waste may be caused :) (Fang, S5-4)

This comment combined praise ('Good summary!') which was supported by emotion response ('I am attracted by it as usual') and content response ('I can understand the charm of Single's Day…'), suggestion ('maybe a little more attention should be paid to grammar'), and expectation ('which I believe you are able to show me in your article next time'). It is important to add that the student presented a 73-word summary of the newspaper article, while Fang responded with a 76-word comment which was rich in vocabulary associated with online shopping fever. It is arguable that this comment per se could be regarded as a source of language input. However, this is not the longest comment Fang gave students. In the following feedback, Fang used 119 words to express her feelings and opinions based on a student's writing:

> You leave me the good impression that you're a very diligent and intellectual girl. However, what flatters me today is your really profound and unique share of your opinions about different kinds of prejudice in our real life. Both racial prejudice and sexual prejudice make the world not so perfect, as we all know. To change this situation, people have a long way to go. What's more, a different prejudice happens more and more. I guess maybe only when everyone in the world helps can we create a world where all people are equal. So, work hard enough to be an influential woman so that your voice can be heard in the world and you can change the world :) (Fang, S5-5)

This comment covers aspects such as gender discrimination and racial prejudice. In addition to the richness of content, this feedback is also spiritually uplifting: Fang encouraged the student to become an 'influential woman' to effect change in the world. Such encouragement was mingled with emotion response, which Fang perceived as having a reciprocal effect and she as a teacher benefited from it as well: 'I think it (giving feedback on students' works) is an emotional harvest, which makes

a teacher persist' (Fang, interview). This 'emotional harvest' was fully embodied in the following emotion response Fang gave to another student's writing: 'Your genuine and sincere feelings are expressed in those fluent sentences, which really touched me. I can see a gentle and emotional girl by reading the lines. So this piece of writing is a success :)' (S3-5). Such emotional exchange was regarded as a source of happiness by Fang: 'the greatest happiness, or worthwhile thing, is to see the changes of students as a result of the communication between them and myself… the mutual trust built between us is the happiest thing' (Fang, interview).

While enjoying students' progress and the 'emotional harvest', Fang encountered challenges as well. She introduced some difficulties she met with when giving feedback on students' reading log entries:

> Sometimes I have to think about what to say…occasionally I do find it hard to find proper and new language in my feedback…I cannot do it (giving feedback) at school…I need a quiet place at home…I usually do it in the evening…basically I need three and a half hours to finish it for the whole class. (Fang, interview)

Fang seemed to be indicating that giving feedback was not an easy task; rather, it could be time-consuming, environment-demanding, and language-challenging.

Students' Expectations and Responses to Fang's Feedback
According to the interview data, all student participants regarded error correction as an essential component of feedback (see Table 3). S1 plainly expressed that if the teacher could point out his mistakes, he would be 'happy'. In more detail, S2 revealed his attitude towards error correction: 'If I make some mistakes and the teacher points them out for me, I won't make the same mistakes again.' (S2, interview) In terms of how they expected teacher to respond to their mistakes, five out of eight students showed preference for direct comment while one said she hoped teachers could be 'euphemistic' because she did not have a 'strong psychological endurance' (S4, interview). Corroborating this notion, S1 held that teachers needed to be euphemistic only if they intended to say 'something really harsh'. Similarly, S6 believed that feedback should be person-specific: he personally preferred direct comment but he advised that teachers should be euphemistic when interacting with sensitive students. Among those who showed strong preference for direct comment, S7 gave the reason that he wanted to understand teachers' points quickly and correctly. Students' expectations of directness in teacher's feedback were slightly different from Fang's intentions: 'I only give full-blown criticism to those who are exceptionally good in English but don't take the writing seriously' (Fang, interview), by which she seemed to be indicating that mitigation strategies were necessary for students whose English was not quite good even though they made many mistakes in the writing.

Table 3. Elements of feedback that students expected for their reading log writing

	Error correction	Suggestion	Direct comment	Extended comment
S1	√	√	√	√
S2	√			√
S3	√	√		√
S4	√	√	X	√
S5	√		√	
S6	√		√	
S7	√	√	√	
S8	√	√	√	√

Surprisingly, five out of eight student participants explicitly expressed their expectations of extended comment. S1 said he would be delighted if the teacher wrote 'a lot' in the feedback. S3 valued longer comment even more: 'I would have a sense of being recognized or achievement when I got long feedback.' (S3, interview) If the feedback was short, some students might ask themselves questions such as 'Why is it so short?' (S2, interview) or 'Does it mean my writing is not good enough?' (S4, interview) Fang seemed to have conjectured students' expectations in this respect: 'If I

write a short comment, I would have the worry that I might disappoint the student…if I could write longer, we might have better communication' (Fang, interview).

When asked to make a choice between praise, criticism, and suggestion in teacher's feedback, five students selected 'suggestion' against the other two options. S3 provided an explanation that rather than purely criticizing or praising students, teachers could more helpfully provide students with specific instructions or suggestions as to how to improve. While S1 selected 'suggestion', he added that criticism and suggestion could be combined to achieve better effects. Interestingly, S8 revealed that he liked suggestions which he thought might lead to further discussion between him and the teacher and he liked this type of communication of ideas.

Regarding how feedback is related to teacher-student relationship, three students in different ways expressed that constructive feedback could enhance the relationship. One student thoroughly expressed her understanding of the effect of feedback on teacher-student relationship building:

> In fact, there are two advantages. One is to increase students' enthusiasm for learning English; the other is to deepen the relationship between teacher and students, and students may feel that teachers pay close attention to them. My English is not good compared with others in my class, but if I know the teacher cares about me, I will feel touched and work harder in my studies. (S3, interview)

Similarly, S5 expressed that teachers' feedback was a 'a type of encouragement' for him, while for S7 feedback was a channel to get a touch of teachers' feelings. The importance that students attached to the emotional and psychological aspects of teacher's feedback mirrored Fang's understanding:

> It is also a type of interaction between students and the teacher. I think we need this interaction to get closer and students will be more motivated to continue reading and writing…it is a kind of communication to help us get emotionally closer. (Fang, interview)

Changes in Students' Writing

According to Fang, 'obvious changes' took place in students' reading log writing, and she provided such details:

> There used to be seven or eight students whose written English was too poor for me to understand. Now there is one or two such students. When they are given a composition title, they can express properly, even though they can't use complex sentence patterns yet. (Fang, interview)

For students of higher English competence, improvement in writing was also evident. Fang presented one example: 'It's quite obvious in his article because he basically didn't use such complicated sentences before. Now he uses a variety of sentence patterns, and he can use them quite naturally.' (Fang, interview)

Analysis of students' reading logs showed that the most conspicuous change in students' works was the length of writing. As shown in Fig. 2, the first and fifth reading log entries of S8 demonstrated stark difference in length, from 35 words to 197 words in the section of My Opinions.
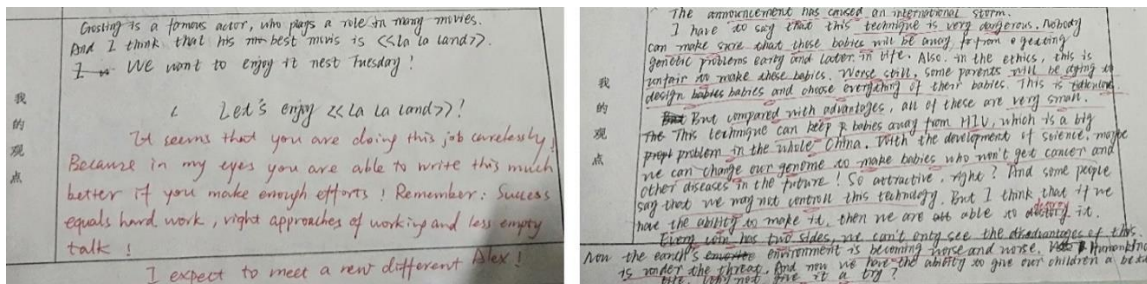

Figure 2. Change in the length of writing (S8-1 & 5)

Meanwhile, changes in the complexity of sentences were manifest. For example, in S2's first entry, he wrote the following in the section of My Opinions (Fang made the corrections shown in square brackets):

Views:
A family should be [∧in] harmony. We shouldn't just do as ourselves [→we like] instead of taking care of others. No matter how busy we are, it's important to spare some time to talk with family, then we will be closer.
Lesson:
It's important to use a good way to get closer with [→to] our family. (S8-1)

This 54-word writing is comprised of four sentences, with the average length of eight words in each sentence. One clause (i.e., 'no matter how busy we are') was used, and three errors were identified and corrected by Fang. Seven weeks later in the same section of the entry, however, this student wrote the following:

Although it may be a good idea to give out gifts in Christmas, the receivers can't regard this good act as something that others owe to them and the donors shouldn't do this thing in the hope that others must do something turn [→to give] back. All those actions are bonded [→based] on kindness and love. What's more, a little gift doesn't help. After Christmas, the children become poor and unhappy again, so it may be a better idea to care about their regular life and mentle [→mental] health. (S8-8)

This piece of writing contains 85 words with four clauses. The first sentence is complicated in that the 45-word sentence, with three clauses led by 'although', 'that', and 'in the hope that', was effectively used to elucidate the relationship between the doner and the receiver of Christmas gifts.

Changes in paragraphing and structuring were also evident in some students' writing. Take S3 as an example. In her first entry, she wrote the following in My Opinions section: 'Hayao Miyazaki is a master of animation. His film like *Spirited Away*, *Howl's Moving Castle* and so on have a great influence on me and thousands of children and teenagers. I really want to be him.' (S3-1) Fang commented on this 36-word writing in this way: 'Work towards this goal! I find you're good at language learning actually. Maybe if you put more efforts into reading and writing English, you can present a perfect paragraph, making it a bit longer and more profound.' (Fang, S3-1) Two weeks later, this student wrote a much longer passage in this section:

I really really really disagree with this method which is in order [which is in order] to let our pets come back. Nobody can guarantee the cloned dogs can be identical as the lost ones, both shape and personality. My family used to have lots of dogs. However, most of them were died [→dead], sold or lost. Only two dogs are still in my home. I have to say that it's very painful and sad to see them leave away. But, all of them still live in my heart. I won't forget them forever. And no one could replace their positions even though their clones. Thank these dogs for staying with me in a period of time. Maybe learn how to let it go is the best way to remember them. (S3-3)

This is a 125-word writing, presented in three paragraphs. It seems that the first paragraph is the author's general attitude toward animal cloning; the second paragraph states the main reason for the writer's position; the third paragraph introduces the writer's personal stories and reflections on this issue. Compared with the 36-word passage she wrote in Week One, this piece of writing is much longer and 'more profound' as Fang expected. In addition, it is legitimate to conclude that compared with the 36-word writing, the 125-word one is much more persuasive and livelier.

For students of higher English proficiency, changes in their writing were also significant. Take S5 as an example. In his fourth entry (see the left picture in Fig. 3), the student's overall English competence was well demonstrated with complexity and variety of linguistic constructs; meanwhile, various grammatical mistakes dispersed in almost all sentences. By contrast, four weeks later, in this student's eighth entry (see the right picture in Fig. 3), Fang only pointed out one vocabulary mistake (i.e., see→read). Although if we examine the writing more closely, another one or two inaccurate

expressions could be identified, it is fair to say that grammar mistakes significantly decreased compared with the one written four weeks before.
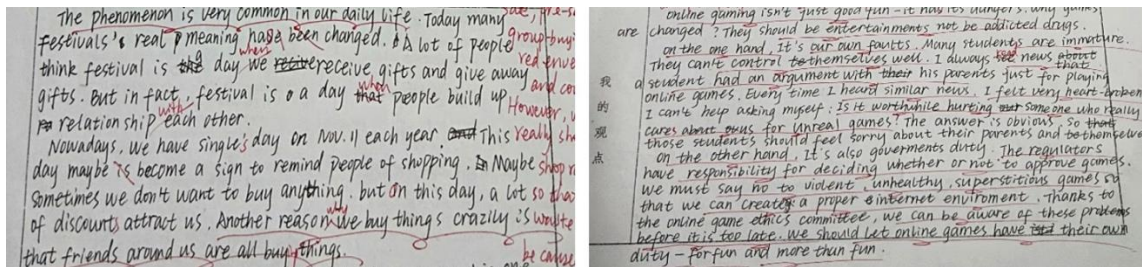

Figure 3. Change in grammar mistakes in the writing (S5-4 & 8)

Discussion

Integration of Interpersonality into WCF

Interview data of this study evidenced that student participants exhibited strong preference for error correction in teacher's feedback on their reading log entries, which is reflective of the exam-oriented teaching environment (Lee, 2016). In addition, five out of eight students explicitly expressed their expectations of extended comments from the teacher. These findings corroborate the results of another study carried out in mainland China among tertiary EFL learners (Chen et al., 2016) rather than secondary students as is the case in the current study. Students' preference for extended comments once again foregrounds the importance that students attach to WCF and the emotional factors that they value in teachers' feedback. Findings of the present study also indicate that while students valued encouragement in feedback, they attached greater importance to directness and straightforwardness in teachers' feedback, particularly in error correction. Most of the student participants regarded mitigation strategies in feedback as unnecessary, with only one exception (S4) who expressed her fear of receiving harsh comments from teachers due to her sensitive personality. Mirroring findings of another two case studies that explored university EFL teachers' and students' attitudes and perceptions of written feedback respectively in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia (Alshahrani, 2014; Mahfoodh, 2017), the current study collected evidence from secondary EFL learners who shared similar perceptions: direct error correction was preferred compared with other forms of written feedback.

On the teacher's part, direct error corrections were provided in most parts of the in-text feedback she gave students, which means mistakes were not only pointed out but also corrected by the teacher. In this sense, teacher's perception and students' expectation of direct error correction converged. However, when giving end comments, Fang largely employed mitigation strategies which demonstrated a range of formats. First, in lieu of making blunt criticism, Fang exhibited a preference for giving suggestions or expressing expectations. Common patterns identified in Fang's end comments include praise-suggestion, praise-criticism, and praise-suggestion-expectation. This finding replicates Hyland and Hyland's (2001) research in which various types of feedback patterns were applied to teacher feedback often in the form of paired act patterns (e.g., praise–criticism and criticism–suggestion) or act triad (e.g., praise–criticism-suggestion). Another similarity between Hyland and Hyland's (2001) study and the present one is the finding of students' choice for suggestions which provide students with 'explicit recommendation for remediation' in preference to other feedback acts (p. 186). Adding to the existing literature, this study identified another commonly used feedback act – expectation. Compared with suggestion which is more content-oriented, expectation entails interpersonal communication. Even more emotionally provocative than expectation, encouragement in a general sense was commonly used in Fang's feedback, sometimes expressed with empowering remarks, for example, 'Work hard enough to be an influential woman so that your voice can be heard in the world and you can change the world!' (S5-5) Moreover, Fang quite often made emotion response in her feedback with expressions such as 'touched', 'glad', 'really like', and 'amazed me'. The emotion response was commonly blended with content response which either deepened or broadened the discussion of the student's writing, signaled by expressions like 'I truly agree with you that…', 'you're absolutely right in believing that…', and 'I side with you about…'. Analysis of

students' artefacts also indicated that the persistent written communication between teacher and students had brought about effect on students' increasingly longer and profounder writing.

In sum, Fang integrated interpersonality into WCF by means of using direct error correction in in-text feedback and a blend of content and emotion response with mitigation strategies in end comment. Resonating with the 'enabling construct' of teacher feedback literacy put forward by Xu and Carless (2017), that is, fostering students' cognitive, affective and relational capabilities conducive to effective feedback uptake, the current study highlights the interpersonal strategies that teachers could adopt in WCF, which in Fang's case took the forms of suggestion, expectation and encouragement in the feedback.

Effects of Interpersonal WCF

Due to Fang's persistent and consistent feedback, students' reading log entries demonstrated evident changes in a range of aspects. First, in almost all the students' reading logs, the length of writing manifested an increase (see an example in Fig. 2). A direct factor for the improvement could be the expectation Fang expressed in her feedback (e.g., 'Can I expect a little longer summary and opinion from you?'). Such interpersonal communication was responded to by students with lengthened and content-enriched writing as previously presented. Second, some students' writing demonstrated a decrease in grammar mistakes (see an example in Fig. 3), which might result from Fang's close attention to error correction in her in-text feedback. Third, some students' writing displayed a wider range of vocabulary in their later reading log entries. A contributory factor to this change could be Fang's immediate recognition of students' use of newly learnt vocabulary from the reading. Conceivably, Fang's recognition and timely praise spurred students on to further and broader application of newly learnt linguistic items. This result echoes Skipper and Douglas' (2015) finding in that immediate praise for students' progress could effect positive changes in their academic performance. Fourth, both students and the teacher reported progress in the 'naturalness' of reading log writing, as one student (S4) said: 'It (teacher's feedback) makes my English more natural and fluent.' Fifth, content of students' writing was broadened in a more packed structure, partly due to the extensiveness of Fang's feedback in terms of content coverage. One student revealed the mechanism of the student-teacher written communication like this: 'The teacher recognized my views expressed in the reading log, and then she sometimes put forward her own views.' (S3, interview) Sixth, the continuous reading and writing raised some students' English scores. One said with pride: 'The obvious effect is my writing scores: previously, I only got 10 plus; now it's 20 plus.' (S5, interview) Adding to the finding of a previous study which evidenced that students' perception of teachers' feedback was a significant factor in their academic enhancement (Crimmins et al., 2016), the present study demonstrated specific aspects of improvement in L2 writing in part due to students' persistent reading and writing, alongside teacher's WCF integrated with interpersonal elements.

Regarding the construction of teacher-student relationship, this study also showed positive effects. Three students explicitly mentioned that teacher's written feedback was able to enhance their relationship, which was what Fang had expected through providing interpersonal WCF on students' reading log entries. This finding corresponds to the result of Chong's (2018b) study (i.e., student-teacher relationship influenced feedback effect) in a converse manner by providing evidence indicating that interpersonal feedback could in turn impact the relationship between teacher and students. The enhanced relationship was reified in deeper communication between the two sides which covered various aspects including cultural, socio-political, and technological topics. Moreover, the strengthened bond consequently increased students' motivation for L2 learning, reflected in their improvement in various aspects of reading log writing as noted above. Hyland and Hyland (2001) stated that suggestions could turn 'a blunt criticism into a proposal for improvement, thus adding a more effective pedagogic and interactional dimension' (p. 195). Findings from Fang's situation confirmed and broadened this notion with evidence that in addition to suggestion, other forms of interpersonal communication in feedback (e.g., expectation and encouragement) could also bring about positive pedagogical and relational changes.

CONCLUSION

By examining eight secondary EFL learners' reading log entries and the teacher's written feedback on the writing, in tandem with interviewing these students and the teacher, this case study addresses the questions of how to integrate interpersonality into WCF and what effects the interpersonal WCF could have. Findings from the study answer these two questions with specific strategies the teacher adopted

and the influence on students' reading log writing. The implemented strategies could be summarized as follows. First, in-text feedback mainly took the form of direct error correction, covering content, lexical, grammatical, and structural aspects. Second, mitigation strategies were vastly used in end comments in the form of combined feedback acts. One typical example was using possible combinations of suggestion, expectation, and encouragement, rather than criticism, to provide guidance or specific directions for the writer to make improvement. Third, content response and emotion response were commonly integrated in a way that not only enriched and deepened the written communication between teacher and students but also enhanced their relationship. The effects of interpersonal WCF were observable in the following aspects in students' reading log entries: increased length of writing; wider range of vocabulary; fewer grammar mistakes; more natural expressions of English; richer content; increased marks in English exams; closer student-teacher relationship. It is important to note that these effects were concluded from changes in the eight student participants' writing, which does not mean all effects were reflected in each student's works.

One empirical implication of the study is that L2 teachers may selectively use the strategies presented and tested effective in this study in their teaching contexts. Admittedly, the variation of teaching environments and teacher personalities impose limitation to the transferability of these strategies. However, the essence of interpersonal feedback, as Hyland and Hyland (2006b) stressed, making response to 'a person rather than a script' (p. 165, emphasis in original), was beneficially adopted in the given context and worth further experimentation in wider communities. There are some limitations to this study. First, the teacher participant implemented this writing-after-reading program in an experimental class consisting of 27 students, a size much smaller than the average class size in Chinese secondary schools. The small class size made it possible for the teacher to give extended comment which was highly recognized and valued by some student participants. Therefore, the practicality of giving interpersonal WCF for teachers of bigger class sizes is worth research and investigation. Future study may also extend the discussion in the direction of testing the possibility of involving peer feedback in interpersonal WCF.

FUNDING STATEMENT

REFERENCES

Ajjawi, R., & Boud, D. (2017). Researching feedback dialogue: An interactional analysis approach. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 42(2), 252-265. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2015.1102863

Alshahrani, A., & Storch, N. (2014). Investigating teachers' written corrective feedback practices in a Saudi EFL context: How do they align with their beliefs, institutional guidelines, and students' preferences? Australian Review of Applied Linguistics, 37(2), 101–122. https://doi.org/10.1075/aral.37.2.02als

Anderson, T. (2021). The socialization of L2 doctoral students through written feedback. Journal of Language, Identity & Education, 20(2), 134-149. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2020.1726758

Ashwell, T. (2000). Patterns of teacher response to student writing in a multiple-draft composition classroom: Is content feedback followed by form feedback the best method? Journal of Second Language Writing, 9(3), 227-257. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743(00)00027-8

Bitchener, J., & Storch, N. (2016). Written Corrective Feedback for L2 Development. Multilingual Matters.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77-101. http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Chen, S., Nassaji, H., & Liu, Q. (2016). EFL learners' perceptions and preferences of written corrective feedback: A case study of university students from Mainland China. Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education, 1(1), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-016-0010-y

Chong, I. (2018a). Interplay among technical, socio-emotional and personal factors in written feedback research. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 43(2), 185–196. doi:10.1080/02602938.2017.1317712

Chong, S. W. (2018b). Interpersonal aspect of written feedback: A community college students' perspective. Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 23(4), 499-519. https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2018.1526906

Crimmins, G., Nash, G., Oprescu, F., Liebergreen, M., Turley, J., Bond, R., & Dayton, J. (2016). A written, reflective and dialogic strategy for assessment feedback that can enhance student/teacher relationships. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 41(1), 141-153. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2014.986644

Ellis, R. (2009). A typology of written corrective feedback types. ELT Journal, 63(2), 97-107. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccn023

Evans, N., Hartshorn, J., McCollum, R., & Wolfersberger, M. (2010). Contextualizing corrective feedback in second language writing pedagogy. Language Teaching Research, 14, 445–464. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168810375367

Hyland, F., & Hyland, K. (2001). Sugaring the pill; Praise and criticism in written feedback. Journal of Second Language Writing, 10(3), 185-212. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743(01)00038-8

Hyland, K., & Hyland, F. (2006a). Contexts and issues in feedback on L2 writing: An introduction. In K. Hyland, & F. Hyland (Eds.), Feedback in second language writing contexts and issues (pp. 1-20). Cambridge University Press.

Hyland, K., & Hyland, F. (2006b). Interpersonality and teacher-written feedback. In K. Hyland, & F. Hyland (Eds.), Feedback in second language writing contexts and issues (pp. 165-183). Cambridge University Press.

Kang, E., & Han, Z. (2015). The efficacy of written corrective feedback in improving L2 written accuracy: A meta-analysis. The Modern Language Journal, 99(1), 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12189

Lee, I. (2016). Teacher education on feedback in EFL writing: Issues, challenges, and future directions. TESOL Quarterly, 50(2), 518-527. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.303

Li, S., & Vuono, A. (2019). Twenty-five years of research on oral and written corrective feedback in System. System, 84, 93-109. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2019.05.006

Mahfoodh, O. H. A. (2017). "I feel disappointed": EFL university students' emotional responses towards teacher written feedback. Assessing Writing, 31, 53-72. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2016.07.001

Merkel, W. (2018). Role reversals: A case study of dialogic interactions and feedback on L2 writing. Journal of Second Language Writing, 39, 16-28. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2017.11.007

Mulati, D. F., Nurkamto, J., & Drajati, N. A. (2020). The teachers' beliefs in teacher written corrective feedback on the students' writing. JOALL (Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literature), 5(1), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.33369/joall.v5i1.7644

Rappleye, J., & Komatsu, H. (2018). Stereotypes as Anglo-American exam ritual? Comparisons of students' exam anxiety in East Asia, America, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Oxford Review of Education, 44 (6), 730-754. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2018.1444598

Ruegg, R. (2015a). Differences in the uptake of peer and teacher feedback. RELC Journal, 46(2), 131-145. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688214562799

Ruegg, R. (2015b). The relative effects of peer and teacher feedback on improvement in EFL students' writing ability. Linguistics and Education, 29, 73-82. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2014.12.001

Ruegg, R. (2018). The effect of peer and teacher feedback on changes in EFL students' writing self-efficacy. The Language Learning Journal, 46(2), 87-102. https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2014.958190

Skipper, Y., & Douglas, K. (2015). The influence of teacher feedback on children's perceptions of student–teacher relationships. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 85(3), 276-288. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12070

Storch, N. (2018). Written corrective feedback from sociocultural theoretical perspectives: A research agenda. Language Teaching, 51(2), 262–277. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444818000034

Van Ginkel, S., Gulikers, J., Biemans, H., & Mulder, M. (2017). Fostering oral presentation performance: Does the quality of feedback differ when provided by the teacher, peers or peers guided by tutor?. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 42(6), 953-966. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2016.1212984

Xu, Y., & Carless, D. (2017). 'Only true friends could be cruelly honest': Cognitive scaffolding and social-affective support in teacher feedback literacy. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 42(7), 1082-1094. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2016.1226759