

Challenges in Written Corrective Feedback: Young EFL Learners' Attitudes and Perceptions of the Boomerang WCF Strategy

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Abstract

EFL young learners' writing improvement hinges mostly on the educators' indirect, unfocused written corrective feedback (WCF) (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010, Ferris et al., 2013). Although a mounting body of research has examined the effectiveness of the educator's WCF for improving L2 learners' grammatical accuracy (Ferris et al., 2013; Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen, 2007), fewer studies have investigated learners' perceptions of types of corrective feedback, of active involvement in the correction process, and even less among young learners (Karim & Nassaji, 2015). Research also emphasizes the importance of peer collaboration in providing feedback, which in turn ensures engagement with WCF (Loewen & Sato, 2018); thus, learners who are actively involved through self or peer-correction seem to show significant improvement in EFL writing pushing educators to recognize learners' agency (Loewen & Sato, 2018; Mackey, 2020). The present research explores young EFL learners' perceptions and attitudes towards WCF conditioned by the type of corrective feedback they receive. The predominant purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of a novel WCF approach called "Boomerang Correction Strategy", which is a collaborative method developed by the researcher actively involving learners in the correction process. Ninety-six fifth grade EFL learners from three private schools in Lebanon were randomly assigned to a no-feedback control group and three experimental correction conditions: educator-only, educator+self+educator, and educator+peer+educator. The study measured the attitudes and perceptions of learners who participated in this proposed correction strategy (educator-self and educator-peer correction groups, N= 51) through a post intervention perception survey. The results indicated that overall, learners had a favourable attitude towards WCF and preferred intervening in the feedback process. They generally enjoyed taking more initiatives in the revision process of their writing with less interference from teachers. Highly positive attitudes emerged particularly in the self-correction group.

Keywords: Written corrective feedback; L2 writing; young EFL learners; learner perception; self-correction; peer-correction

1. INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of written corrective feedback (WCF) on second and foreign language (L2) writing development has been the focus of extensive research. L2 learners often face difficulties in written production, such as inappropriate grammar, ambiguous meanings, faulty sentence structure, and inaccurate spelling, and the usual role of the educator is to provide WCF in relation to language-related errors (Paris, Ngonkum, & Nazaruddin, 2017) in an effort to improve L2 accuracy (Nassaji & Kartchava, 2017; Karim & Nassaji, 2019).

Earlier L2 research considered the value of WCF in L2A and while some studies claimed that it had no impact on L2 improvement (Kepner, 1991; Sheppard, 1992), others praised its effectiveness (Ferris, 1995; Leki, 1991). The focus of most research studies has been the effectiveness of WCF types on writing accuracy ignoring learners' perceptions of teacher feedback. Only since the 1990s, when research studies on learners' perceptions and reactions to written feedback began to appear (Ferris, 1995; Hedgecock &

Lefkowitz, 1996; Leki, 1991), did the field focus more on how learners viewed WCF in general. Hyland and Hyland (2006) indeed stated that written feedback is influenced by personal beliefs and perceptions learners bring with them into the L2 classroom.

The current study contributes to this gap by looking into the attitudes and perceptions of WCF of fifth-grade EFL learners from three private schools in Beirut, Lebanon. Employing a mixed-methods approach that includes post-intervention perception surveys, this study aims to shed light on the significant role that active involvement in feedback provision as well as learners' individual preferences play in their reception and interpretation of WCF (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Mantle-Bromley, 1995). This study provides a new strategy in WCF provision named the “Boomerang Correction Strategy” in an attempt to better understand how young learners view the different WCF strategies and their possible consequences for teaching practices. This strategy encompasses different types of WCF such as direct, indirect and focused feedback in various feedback conditions including educator-only feedback, a combination of educator and self-feedback, and a blend of educator and peer feedback. It is intended that the results of this study underline the importance of learner agency and individual factors as moderators of the effectiveness of WCF, giving educators insights into how they can best tailor feedback to support the writing development of EFL learners.

We first review the literature on written corrective feedback, paying close attention to its effectiveness, learners' perceptions, and the roles of self and peer-correction. After this, we outline our methodological procedures before presenting our findings and discussion. Conclusions and implications for EFL writing practice are finally provided.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 L2 writing development and WCF

The development of writing has been perceived to be a complex and multidimensional skill because of its ever-changing nature affecting the learners' strategic behavior, knowledge, and motivation (Graham, Harris, & Mason, 2005). The writing task becomes even more complex and demanding when it comes to writing in a second and/or foreign language. The investigation of WCF in the context of L2 language learning, specifically writing in the L2, has been and remains a significant area of interest (Ferris, 2010; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Truscott, 2007; Ellis, 2008).

Written corrective feedback in second/foreign language acquisition has been acknowledged as a crucial component in addressing learners' errors, despite the ongoing inconclusive nature of research regarding its effectiveness. Written corrective feedback is a process in which a reader or instructor provides feedback to a writer to address and correct errors or areas of improvement in written texts. It involves comments, suggestions, or corrections aimed at enhancing the writer's language accuracy, clarity, organization, and overall effectiveness in written communication (Bitchener, & Ferris, 2012; Ellis, 2009; Ferris, 2010; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Sheen, 2007).

Some early L2 researchers argued that WCF may have a negative impact such as discouraging learners from acquiring the target language (Kepner, 1991; Sheppard, 1992). It was at this time when Truscott strongly argued that there is very little benefit from WCF, and educators should drop it altogether (Truscott, 1999). On the other hand, research data indicated that L2 teachers see the need for feedback provision, and L2 learners specifically expect their teachers to provide WCF (Chandler, 2003; Ellis, 2008; Ferris, 2002). Research conducted in more recent years, specifically in the 2000s, strongly supports the effectiveness of WCF, particularly on explicit linguistic features as compared to no feedback (e.g., Bitchner & Knotch, 2010; Ellis et al., 2008).

The impact of two types of written corrective feedback strategies have particularly been researched in the field of second/foreign language acquisition to examine the extent to which they facilitate accuracy in written output. The existing literature on WCF, as evidenced by studies conducted by Ashwell (2000), Chandler (2003), Ferris and Hedgcock (2005), and Polio, Fleck, & Leder (1998). "If I only had more time:" ESL learners' changes in linguistic accuracy on essay revisions. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 7(1), 43-68. (1998), indicates a prevailing preference among teachers for employing indirect feedback strategies. According to Bitchener (2008), indirect WCF compared to direct WCF can be more effective because it involves signaling the presence of errors and giving learners the responsibility of identifying and correcting the errors that have been indicated, rather than receiving direct, explicit corrections from the teacher. Consequently, rather than being provided with the correct forms outright, learners should be motivated to independently identify and address their own errors (Russell & Spada, 2006). On another vein, an increasing amount of evidence advocates that direct WCF can improve writing precision in limited contexts (Bitchener et al., 2005; Bitchener, 2008; Ellis et al., Ferris, 2006; Hartshorn et al., 2010; Russell & Spada, 2006; Sheen, 2007; 2008). In support of this stance, research indicates that, unlike educators, learners may prefer direct, explicit feedback rather than indirect implicit feedback (Ferris et al., 2000; Ferris & Roberts, 2001).

2.2 Learner perceptions of WCF

As emphasized by Hyland and Hyland (2019), research in L2 writing, especially WCF provision, has undergone yet another notable transformation over the last decade. This shift is evidenced by a broader range of experimental studies that explore learner perceptions on the effectiveness of different types of WCF. Moreover, there has been an increased focus on factors such as learner agency, active participation, and perceptions of types of WCF, autonomous learning such as self-correction, as well as collaborative work, such as peer feedback (Chen, 2016; Crosthwaite, Ningrum, & Lee, 2022; Han & Hyland, 2015; Han, 2017; Zhang, 1995; Hyland, 2018).

Understanding learners' perceptions becomes an asset to quality teaching (Lee, 2008). While research backed up the positive attitude of learners towards educator's WCF on writing (Hyland, 1998; Zhang, 1995), the effectiveness of WCF on L2 writing remained a grey area to be further explored. This generated the need to develop new approaches to WCF provision. In general, both educators and learners acknowledge that, regardless of its type, WCF provided by the educator is vital for teaching writing (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Ferris, 1995; Ferris, 2002). This fact is particularly true for L2 writing since its purpose is not only to teach about writing conventions but to reinforce learnt grammatical forms in the L2 as well (Paulus, 1999). Hartono et al. (2023) sought to examine the attitudes of EFL learners towards WCF provided by both their peers and their instructor within the context of EFL writing. A total of fifty-nine undergraduate students, ages 20 to 22 participated in the study, with data collected through a structured questionnaire. The findings revealed that learners generally held positive attitudes towards WCF from both teachers and peers, they reported feeling motivated and challenged to improve their writing when errors were consistently corrected by either their teacher or peers, and learners expressed a preference for direct WCF over indirect WCF, favoring focused feedback over unfocused feedback. Another study by Sato (2013) looked into the perceptions of L2 learners regarding peer interaction and peer corrective feedback (CF). The classroom intervention was designed to promote collaborative learning and to train learners to provide CF to each other. Participants were university-level learners in 4 required English classes in Japan (N = 167), each assigned to 1 of 4 treatment conditions. While all experimental classes were given peer interaction instruction, 2 classes were given CF training, while another class served as the control group. Data were collected through pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, and a subset of learners (n = 36) participated in follow-up interviews. The quantitative data, analyzed using factor analysis and matched-samples t-tests, and the qualitative data, examined using grounded theory methodology, indicated that learners held positive beliefs about peer interaction and CF.

Wiboolyasarini et al. (2022) addressed the principal questions of how EFL Thai learners perceived corrective feedback strategies. The quantitative study collected 418 Thai EFL learners' preferences for corrective

feedback via a closed-ended Likert scale questionnaire. The survey showed that learners desired to self-edit when their writing contained errors, particularly when the error was responded to with educator's indirect feedback regarding the error's nature. Statistical analysis found significant differences in students' preferences that less proficient learners would almost certainly experience embarrassment if they were corrected in front of their peers which was not the case for self-correction. In their paper, Rana and Perveen (2013) highlight how students can be encouraged to improve their written work by using self-correction and how they perceive this tool. The findings are based on students from a Business and Technical Writing of BSIS classroom at Punjab University College of Information Technology. These students were asked to correct their own mistakes on their writing. The study reveals that the use of self-correction enhanced the student's linguistic competence. In addition, students were able to identify specific problems with their written work and this in turn motivated them making way to positive perception of self-correction. Alternately, Levi & Doolittle (2022) investigated American students' perceptions of peer feedback in college foreign language courses. Quantitative results showed that students had overall high perceptions of the peer feedback provision experience.

2.3 Written corrective feedback and learner involvement: Self and Peer feedback

Previous empirical studies have also identified the connections between the efficacy of WCF and learner's active involvement through self and peer feedback provision strategies. For instance, peer feedback (Yu et al., 2020) and indirect feedback (Zhang, 2017) can increase student engagement and learning. The quality of the feedback notice (Qi & Lapkin, 2001) and the level of learner involvement can significantly impact writing outcomes. Research also shows that learners who are involved in the process of correction through self or peer-correction seem to show significant improvement in EFL writing (Loewen & Sato, 2018; Long, 1996; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2004; Zimmerman, 1989). It is also important to bear in mind that the notion of feedback as information transmitted from educator to learner as passive recipient has been recently critiqued, as corrective feedback on its own may no longer be enough for EFL learners to improve their language skills (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Learners must be able to make sense of feedback and use it to enhance the quality of their language as well as their learning strategies (Boud and Molloy 2013; Carless 2015). In this sense, there has been a shift to recognizing learners' agency, perceptions, and preferences when it comes to learning (Boud and Molloy 2013; Carless 2015). Learners are hence perceived as active participants in the feedback process, with their perceptions and preferences taken into consideration, rather than passive recipients of information.

As the 21st Century classrooms increasingly transition from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered approach, the significance of peer and self-correction in L2 writing is steadily and sternly gaining attention as a research topic. Research suggests that learners may learn best when they are actively involved in classroom activities (Dewey, 1966; Lev Vygotsky, 1978; Prince, 2004; Saunders, 2020). In this regard, peer and self-correction can have an impact of L2 acquisition and complement each other. It is important to note that the presence of teacher feedback does not always guarantee greater improvement either. Makino (1993) found that while learners who received more error cues from the teacher showed increased accuracy in morphology, learners who were given the chance to self-correct and who received no feedback at all were still able to independently identify and correct errors in their writing, achieving a similar level of improvement.

In this regard, peer and self-correction can have an impact on L2 acquisition and complement each other. Compared to the conventional teacher-provided method, peer and self-correction offer viable alternatives. Both approaches can be implemented within the classroom setting and promote learner autonomy as well as collaborative learning as they do not rely on direct teacher involvement (Chaudron, 1984; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Additionally, it has been proposed that when novice learners work in pairs, they can assist each other in their writing and acquire knowledge from one another (De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000). On the other hand, self-correction is equally valuable as it promotes autonomy and independent learning. If students are able to correct their own errors and the errors of others accurately, this supports the notion that learners

can benefit from each other's input (Berg, 1999). Maftoon, Shirazi, & Daftarifard (2010) compared the effectiveness of recast and self-correction through measuring elementary students' accuracy on a writing task. The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of the two types of feedback on the accuracy of writing in terms of using past tense. Students' writing sample was selected as the instrument as for both pretest and posttest. Man Whitney, along with Wilcoxon, was run as the main statistical techniques to examine the effectiveness of methods of error correction on students' writing accuracy. The result of this study showed that self-correction outperformed recast and recast did not improve students' accuracy in posttest. Then again, limited research has been conducted regarding self-correction and its effectiveness in enhancing a text from one draft to another. Furthermore, studies indicate that peer interaction plays a significant role in enhancing a writer's awareness of their strengths and weaknesses (Tsui & Ng, 2000). When learners seek clarification from their peers, this draws their attention to discrepancies between their existing knowledge and their actual language proficiency (Gass, 2003). Other studies indicate that L2 students do incorporate peer comments into their revised texts (Hu & Lam, 2010; Rollinson, 2005), and that peer feedback pushes for improvements to revised texts in the L2 (Diab, 2011; Hu & Lam, 2010).

However, it is important to note that learners do not always accept the knowledge offered by peers unquestionably. In addition, research results have not consistently supported this positive outlook. For instance, Nelson and Murphy (1993) and Mendonça and Johnson (1994) found that writers inconsistently incorporate their peer's comments during the revision process, often preferring to include a peer's suggestion after engaging in collaborative discussions rather than accepting it without any interaction. Other examples are Nelson and Carson (1998) as well as Tsui and Ng (2000), who discovered that students placed less trust in peer comments compared to feedback from teachers. Furthermore, Zhang (1985) found feedback provided by the educator to be more effective in enhancing grammatical errors compared to peer or self-feedback.

All in all, previous research confirms that WCF is a key component of teaching and learning L2 writing. In the process of acquiring new competencies in the L2, it is inevitable that learners make errors and encounter missteps. The approach which educators utilize to correct these errors is of paramount significance in the process of learning to write in the L2. In this sense, WCF emerges as a powerful instrument for addressing errors. Despite the fact that previous studies have established a positive impact of WCF on writing performance (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Ferris et al., 2013), there remains a scarcity of research exploring how young learners perceive and react to the different types of WCF (Karim & Nassaji, 2015).

3. Aims of the study and research questions

The present research explores young EFL learners' perceptions of WCF in written production conditioned by the type of corrective feedback they receive. The predominant purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of focused-indirect written corrective feedback together with the "Boomerang Correction Strategy" and how the two versions of the Boomerang strategy, educator-self and educator-peer correction, may impact learners' perceptions of focused, indirect, direct, and the Boomerang feedback strategies employed. We asked the following research questions:

Q 1: What are the perceptions of EFL primary learners of the usefulness of the types of corrective feedback and the Boomerang Strategy?

Q 2: What are the perceptions of EFL primary learners of the impact of the types of corrective feedback and the Boomerang Strategy on the improvement of their L2 writing?

Q3: What are the perceptions of EFL primary learners of the helpfulness of different types of corrective feedback and the Boomerang Strategy in understanding their errors?

Q4: What are EFL primary learners' preferences regarding peer-correction, self-correction and the Boomerang strategy in relation to L2 writing?

Based on previous research, young EFL learners who are subjected to the “Boomerang Correction Strategy” in corrective feedback (both with self- and peer-correction) are predicted to have positive perceptions towards getting involved in the correction process leading to L2 acquisition and improved perceived accuracy in written production. Moreover, these learners are predicted to better understand their errors and learn from the corrections consequently improving their writing in the L2 (Zimmerman, 1989; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2012; Long, 1996; Lowen & Sato, 2018; Mackey, 2020).

4. Methodology

This study investigates low-proficiency English L2 learners' perceptions of educator, peer, and self-corrective feedback strategies within the proposed Boomerang feedback strategy. The selection of the research methodology was founded on previous studies to ensure quality and reliability as to how instructors do not provide corrections but rather merely flag L2 students' errors, the focused nature of feedback, and engaging learners in the feedback process (e.g., van Beuningen et al., 2008, 2012; Ferris, 2006, 2010; Hyland, 2003; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Participant perceptions were collected through a survey including Likert-scale and open-ended questions, to gain in-depth insights into their experiences with corrective feedback.

4.1 Participants

The study utilized convenience sampling to select a cohort of 96 primary-level L2 learners from three private schools in Beirut, Lebanon. Participants, who were Grade 5 students aged 11 to 12, were randomly assigned to a control group (N= 22) and three experimental groups, educator-only (N= 23), educator-self-correction (N=25) and educator-peer-correction (N=26). The whole sample consisted of 49% male and 51% female students. English language proficiency was assessed using a standardized test provided by the British Council (Online English Level Test, British Council¹), with 24% participants (N=23) scoring at the A1 level and 76% (N=73) at the A2 level. Additionally, participants' first language (L1) was considered. A majority, 85%, spoke Armenian at home, reflecting the Armenian heritage of the institutions, where most students were of Armenian descent, with at least one Armenian parent. The remaining 14.5% of participants spoke Arabic as their L1, typically coming from Lebanese families with one or both parents of Lebanese origin. For the purpose of the present study, only the experimental groups involving the use of educator-self-correction and educator-peer-correction were investigated.

4.2 Instruments and materials

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected through a survey designed to assess the perceptions of learners in the two experimental conditions under study of the usefulness of various types of Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) and the Boomerang Correction Strategy and their views on whether WCF contributed to their improvement in L2 writing and their understanding of errors. The survey contained six statements for each of the three key categories: Usefulness, Improvement, and Error Understanding. For each of the three categories, participants were asked to consider the teacher's WCF (statements 1, 7 and 13), the use of indirect feedback (statements 2, 8 and 14), the use of direct feedback (statements 3, 9 and 15), the use of focused feedback (statements 4, 10 and 16), the use of peer or self-correction (statements 5, 11 and 17) and the use of the Boomerang Correction Strategy (statements 6, 12 and 18). Participants

¹ <https://englishonline.britishcouncil.org/free-english-level-test-cefr-2/>

selected a response on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Not at all" to "Extremely". The survey also included three open-ended questions, which explored the learners' views on whether the Boomerang Strategy allowed them to learn better, whether they would have preferred the alternative strategy (peer in the case of self-correction and self-correction in the case of peer) and whether the WCF strategy they followed helped them improve their writing. All questions were followed by a "why" question to allow learners to justify their answers (see Appendix).

4.2 Procedures

An eleven-session intervention began with explicit instruction of selected L2 grammatical and written discourse elements in accord with the schools' curriculum: 3rd person singular, articles, prepositions, subject drop and verb-drop. Four of the sessions were dedicated to writing and corrective feedback activities during which learners took part in guided and semi-guided writing activities designed by the researcher (continuing sentences, filling the gaps, writing for a picture, answering questions, sequencing, and descriptive writing) to target the specific L2 structures selected. After each writing session, learners received WCF provided by the educator. While the control group did not receive any feedback, one experimental group (i.e. educator-only) received indirect, focused correction provided by the educator and was asked to go over the corrections without attempting to correct the errors. The two experimental groups involved in the present study (i.e. educator-self-correction and educator-peer-correction) received indirect, focused feedback and followed the Boomerang self-correction or Boomerang peer-correction strategy (see Figure 1 below). Then, the educators looked at the corrections done by the learners, provided direct, focused feedback where necessary, and returned the papers to the learners for them to go over the errors.

Finally, participant perceptions were collected through the survey. The survey was administered to the self and peer groups separately after the intervention was completed. Each Likert-scale statement was read and explained in Armenian. Participants were given the freedom to answer in English or the Armenian language. Each open question was presented orally to the learners as well as in written form, subsequently translated into Armenian, and further elaborated upon as necessary. Participants were granted sufficient time to produce written responses and seek clarification as needed.

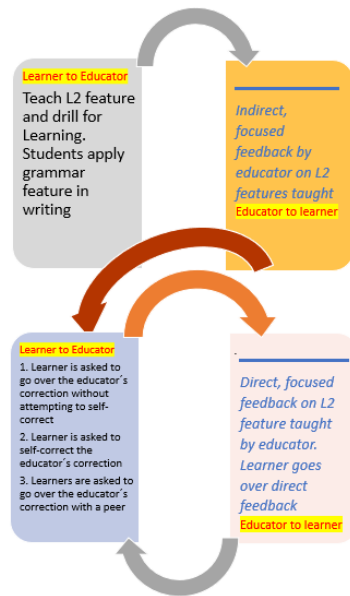


Figure 1. Boomerag Strategy Intervention

4.3 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data from the Likert-scale statements was conducted by running non-parametric U Mann-Whitney tests between the two groups who engaged in the Boomerang Correction Strategy for the three main categories of analysis (i.e. Usefulness, Improvement and Understanding of errors), which contained 6 statements each. As for the three open questions, the analysis aimed to identify patterns and themes that emerged from the data in order to gain insights into the experiences of students who engaged in self and peer correction as part of the implementation of the Boomerang Correction Strategy.

The data derived from responses were analyzed using both deductive and reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) and Hayes' (2000) guidelines. This double approach allows for a flexible and nuanced analysis that is sensitive to the complexity and richness of the data. Deductive thematic analysis (DTA) was essential for the reason that some codes were pre-determined guided by the questions asked which were directly linked to the research questions, and which in turn necessitated the deductive approach it being theory-driven (e.g. Boyatzis, 1988). As a supplementary step, Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was utilized because of its iterative and recursive nature that involves examining the data in a reflexive manner, meaning that the researcher continually reflected on their own assumptions and biases throughout the analysis. The RTA method was employed to ensure full engagement with the data, move above surface level and create themes that do not pre-exist in the set questions. As a final step, data was analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines for thematic analysis, whereby the researchers familiarized themselves with the data. The first step involved reading through the data multiple times to become familiar with the content and identify initial observations and patterns. Next, initial codes were generated based on the research question and question wording. In this step, significant features, patterns, and phrases from the data were identified and labeled, which might be relevant to the research question. These initial codes were question-demarcated and involved identifying and labelling different aspects of the data that relate to the research question or objective. Some initial codes included "self-correction," "Boomerang Strategy," "accuracy," "writing improvement," and "peer feedback." Next, the researchers engaged in an open coding process, where they labelled segments of the data with codes that reflected the content of each question.

The codes then were grouped into two themes, namely “self-evaluation and autonomy” and “peer correction and collaborative learning”, upon which, two learner profiles were created: “Preference for self-evaluation and autonomy” and “Preference for peer correction and collaborative learning”. The identified themes encompass both learning styles and the type of corrective feedback provided. Participants from both experimental groups were placed under either one of the profiles based on their answers to the open questions.

5. Results and Findings

5.1 Quantitative analysis

The quantitative data from the perception survey was analyzed based on the analysis of the three categories under investigation, as specified in section 4.2: Usefulness, Improvement, and Error Understanding. The average scores of the six statements belonging to each category were calculated and are presented in Table 1. The SE group showed higher positive perceptions than the PE group and a stronger belief that self-correction as part of the Boomerang Strategy was useful and led to writing improvement and understanding of errors.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

	Group	N	Mean	SD
Usefulness	Self	25	3.43	0.35
	Peer	26	3.35	0.54
Improvement	Self	25	3.54	0.37
	Peer	26	3.25	0.43
Error Understanding	Self	25	3.56	0.43
	Peer	26	3.28	0.42

Shapiro-Wilk normality tests were run and since the data were normally distributed ($p > .05$), independent t-tests were performed to compare the scores between the educator+self-correction (SE) and the educator+peer-correction (PE) groups in each category. Table 2 indicates that the SE group showed significantly higher scores in perceived writing Improvement and perceived Error Understanding than the PE group. In terms of usefulness, the SE group also obtained higher results but they did not reach significance.

Table 2. Independent t-tests between the SE and PE groups

	t	df	p
Usefulness	.622	49	.537
Improvement	2.56	49	.013
Error Understanding	2.25	49	.028

Further t-tests were performed for each of the statements in each of the categories where significant differences between the two groups were observed (i.e. Improvement and Error Understanding) to explore which specific statements yielded significant differences. In the case of Improvement, only the statement on the effects of indirect feedback on improvement displayed significant differences between the groups

($t(49) = 2.67, p = .010$) with the SE obtaining higher scores ($M = 3.64, SD = 0.95$) than the PE group ($M = 2.76, SD = 1.33$). As for Error Understanding, significant differences emerged in favour of the SE group in the statements on the perceived benefits of indirect feedback ($t(49) = 1.96, p = .055$), self-correction ($t(49) = 2.35, p = .022$) and the Boomerang Strategy ($t(49) = 3.25, p = .002$), with the SE group obtaining significantly higher scores ($M = 3.68, SD = 0.98; M = 4.32, SD = 0.69; M = 4.56, SD = 0.58$) than the PE group ($M = 3.15, SD = 0.92; M = 3.80, SD = 0.84; M = 3.96, SD = 0.72$).

5.2 Qualitative Analysis of learner perceptions of the Boomerang Strategy (open question 1)

For the first question (“Do you think with the Boomerang Strategy you *learned better* than when you were not involved in the correction process? Why?”), results will be described according to the learner profiles from both intervention groups described in section 4.3: “Preference for self-evaluation and autonomy” and “Preference for peer correction and collaborative learning”.

Participants from both the SE and PE groups who were within the self-evaluation and autonomy profile, indicated that they learned better with the Boomerang strategy because they were able to identify and learn from their mistakes. Responses for the preference for the Boomerang strategy and whether they learned better with Boomerang include: “Yes, it help me to learn better” (56), “Yes, I did because I got to find out and really explore my mistakes so I would not make them again.” (57), “Yes, it helped me so much because, some of the things I didn't know but know I can correct.” (76), “Yes, it helped me better because I improved in my English tests.” (72). Participants from both the SE and PE groups also indicated that they learned better by seeing and correcting their mistakes using the Boomerang strategy: “Yes because I learned my mistakes and I corrected it.” (59), “Yes, when I correct them I can see my mistakes. I feel better when I do it.” (58), “Yes, it helped me so much because now I can correct.” (78). Participants expressed their content by saying “Yes, because I learned my mistakes and stopped doing them.” (97), “Yes, because I learned some mistakes that I have not learned” (66). Participants also stated that this approach helped them to avoid making the same errors again in the future: “Yes, because it helped me too learn better. Because when the first paper I had something wrong and the second paper I can make it correct.” (68), “Yes, because I can tell them their mistakes and I can learn from them.” (85), “Yes, I did because I got to find out and really explore my mistakes so I would not make them again.” (57). Participants from both the SE and PE Groups who indicated preference for self-evaluation and autonomy also described how they were given the opportunity to self-correct their work using the Boomerang strategy. They expressed that this helped them to take ownership of their learning and be more responsible for their work: “Yes, because the teacher gave me the paper and I corrected.” (62), Yes, because the teacher told me to correct myself.” (67), “I can correct the mistakes alone.” (69), “Yes, because I learned to check mistakes every time.” (64).

Similar to the first profile, participants within peer correction and collaborative learning profile also indicated that they learned better with the Boomerang strategy. They expressed that this is true because they were able to identify and learn from their mistakes. Responses for the preference for the Boomerang strategy within this profile include: “Yes, because I love seeing my own mistakes and correct them.” (61), “Yes, because the teacher gave the paper I self-correct. (64), “Yes, I did because I benefit a lot from that practice.” (91), “Yes, the Boomerang strategy helped me learn better.” (74), “Yes, because I learned to not write any mistakes.” (92), “Yes, I learned better because I understood English a lot better. (101). These participants also indicated that they learned better by seeing and correcting their mistakes using the Boomerang strategy: “Yes, it help me to learn better, because I saw my wrong in an English test and helped me.” (70), “Yes, it did help me get better because I saw my mistakes and got better.” (86), “Yes, I learned better because it helped me a lot and I understand my mistak.” (103). To sum up, the young learners under study, both in the SE and the PE groups and from both learner profiles, generally described how the Boomerang strategy encouraged them to reflect on their mistakes and take responsibility for correcting them. These learners expressed that the Boomerang strategy helped them to understand the importance of mistakes in the learning process. The participants. They appreciated the personalized nature of the

Boomerang strategy. They felt that it allowed them to focus on their own individual mistakes and learn from them in a way that was tailored to their specific needs.

It is important to note that while the majority of participants reported positive experiences with the Boomerang strategy, there were a few from the SE group ([two out of the 25 participants (8%) in the self-group]) who indicated that they did not benefit much from the Boomerang strategy, did not find it helpful, and would prefer the teacher's feedback: "I feel ok with the Boomerang, but when the teacher corrects I know the correct grammar and so on." (55), "No it didn't help me because not all my answers were wrong." (71). These few participants expressed that self-correction did not significantly improve their writing. For example, one participant said, "No, not really. It helped a little. Because the teacher is much smarter than me." (55). Furthermore, only one participant from the peer-correction group ([one out of the 26 participants (3.86 %) in the self-group]) indicated not benefitting much from the Boomerang strategy: "I don't think I learned better by correcting other papers" (98). Overall, the reflexive thematic analysis of the data suggests that the Boomerang strategy is an effective way to help students learn from their mistakes and improve their writing in the L2.

5.3 Qualitative analysis of learner perceptions of self vs peer correction (open question 2)

Results from question two ("Would you like to do this correction activity by yourself/with a peer instead of working with a peer/by yourself? Why?") will first be presented for each profile (preference for autonomy vs preference for collaboration) and also according to each group's (SE vs PE) preferences.

Within the self-evaluation and autonomy profile, 20 learners (84%) from the SE group expressed that they would rather work alone indicating that they prefer self-correction. They reported that they enjoyed working alone and correcting their own mistakes because it was "peaceful and quiet", it gave them "better focus with little distraction", they preferred "correcting and learning from their own mistakes, or they were "not interested in other's mistakes". One learner said: "I personally prefer to work alone for peace and quiet." (55). Another learner expressed that "I would like to do mine by myself, because I can think about my answer instead of people telling me mine." (57). Others put forth similar answers for example: "With myself so I can see my mistakes and correct them." (58), by myself because I like to focus and its better for me." (63), "I like to do by myself, because it was peace (77), "I would like to do the correction alone, because I trust myself correcting my mistakes." (74). To conclude, participants in the preference for autonomy profile appreciated the opportunity to self-correct their work and learn from their errors. These participants also reported that receiving final, direct feedback from their teacher was an important part of the Boomerang Strategy. As for participants from the PE group who were within the preference for autonomous learning profile, a good number responded that they would prefer working alone (8/26-30.8%). Participants in this group who preferred self-correction indicated that correcting one's own mistakes is easier. For example, one learner said, "I prefer by myself because it can be easier to do it alone and it will be calmer." (85).

As for participants within the peer correction and collaborative learning profile who mostly indicated that they prefer peer-correction, and (18/26-69.2%) of learners from the PE group emphasized the preference for peer-correction, with participants valuing the opportunity to work with a friend and learn from each other's mistakes. Participants also mentioned the fun factor associated with working with a friend. One idea that emerged was the importance of understanding corrections and how working with a peer could provide a better understanding of mistakes. Additionally, participants viewed peer-correction as a way to learn from both personal and others' mistakes. One learner said: "With my friend because they help me and I help them." (86), while another learner stated that "I prefer with a friend because it is fun." (88). Other learners had similar answers for example: "I like to correct with a friend because we learn from each other's mistakes." (90), "I prefer peer because I love helping my team." (91), (93), (96), "I would rather work with a peer because I would understand better if the peer Im working with knows the answer." (98), "I prefer

peer because I do it with my best friend and its fun.” (102), “I prefer peer because if I don't understand something I can ask them to help me.” (106), “I prefer to work in peer because I saw our both mistakes.” (109). Coming to participants from the SE group who were within the peer correction and collaborative learning profile, out of 25 learners, only four (16%) preferred the collaborative learning profile. These learners expressed that they would prefer working with a peer, while the other 20 learners (84%) expressed that they would rather work alone. Participants in the SE Group who preferred peer-correction stressed the social aspect of collaborative learning. For example, one learner said, “I like to correct my answer with my friend, because I and my friend we correct together” (60) while another learner expressed that “With my friend, because I like spending time with my friends and correct each other.” (64).

5.4 Qualitative analysis of learner perceptions of their writing improvement in relation to self vs peer correction (open question 3)

As for question three, (“Do you consider that peer-correction/self-correction helped improve your writing? Why?”), twenty-two (88%) of the participants from the SE Group were within the preference for self-evaluation and autonomy learner profile. These learners believed that their writing improved. Participants from the SE Group mostly indicated that they think they improved their writing by attempting to self-correct. These learners indicated that correcting their own errors helped them understand their mistakes, which in turn prevented them from repeating the same errors again. One learner said, “Yes, because I can find out mistakes by ourselves.” (4). Another participant expressed that “Yes it helped a lot because I corrected my own mistakes and I see them.” (5). Other young learners uttered the following: “Yes, because I will never do that mistake again.” (10), “Yes, because when I write my mistakes it made me write better.” (12), “Yes, because I learned all my mistakes.” (15), “Yes, because at first I was doing mistakes but on the last test I didn't do any mistakes.” (16), “yes I consider that self-correction helped improve my writing because it helps me understand my mistakes.” (26). Learners in the SE group also expressed that they felt more confident in their abilities after using this approach. For example, one participant stated, “Yes, because It boosted me better writing.” (9). Furthermore, participants expressed that doing self-correction activities was very effective in that they would now use it to always to check their mistakes, check the teachers' feedback, and self-correct. For example, one participant said “Yes, because I learned to check mistakes every time.” (11). Another learner indicated that “yes it helped and I can correct my mistakes always even for math test.” (7). Participants under this profile also indicated that the indirect feedback helped them understand their mistakes and correct them. Yet another learner said, “Yes, because when the teacher gave us the wrong answers I would understand better.” (13). Coming to participants from the PE Group, within the preference for self-evaluation and autonomy learner profile, only three (11.5%) preferred autonomous learning expressing a negative view of the peer correction efforts. These learners stated that they did not improve their writing. These participants said, “No because I like by myself and I don't like to correct other people.” (44), “No, because I am not better.” (49), and “No, because I can still see that my writing is the same.” (50).

As for participants within the PE Group, 23 (88.5%) were within the peer correction and collaborative learning profile. These learners mostly indicated that they learned and improved their writing by doing collaborative peer-correction attempts. They also thought that correcting together was fun, and they enjoyed helping each other. One learner said, “Yes because I solve each others mistake” (33). Another participant expressed that “yes I can see if I did it correctly and tell their mistakes.” (34). Other participants also had similar opinions as follows: “Yes, because I saw their mistakes and they saw my mistakes and we corrected it all.” (35), 41), “Yes, because we learn more while having fun.” (45), “Yes, because we were correcting our answers we learned from each other.” (52), “Yes, because my friend and I learnt more things and help each other.” (57), “Yes, because I saw our both mistakes.” (58). Finally, three participants (12%) from the SE group were within the preference for collaborative learning, and they wrote that they do not believe that

doing self-corrections improved their writing, while the other learners (88%) in the SE Group expressed that they believe that their writing improved. Those who had perceived self-correction as ineffective and preferred peer correction had difficulty correcting their own errors and consequently said, “No not really. It helped a little. Because the teacher is much much smarter than me.” (1), “No because if I wrote my mistake wrong I will learn it wrong.” (21). Others who felt that they did not have a significant number of corrections to do also indicated that self-correction did not actually impact their writing positively expressing, “No, because I know English well.” (18).

6. Discussion

The preliminary results of the current study indicated that overall, learners had a favorable perception towards WCF and preferred taking active part in the process of correction, with highly positive attitudes emerging in both the peer and self-correction groups. Overall, the findings confirm the value of WCF for young EFL learners and highlight the significance of individual and contextual factors in the ongoing debate over the effectiveness of WCF.

With respect to the first research question, “What are the perceptions of EFL primary learners of the *Usefulness* of the types of corrective feedback and the Boomerang Strategy?”, the findings of this study show a clear alignment with much of the literature on corrective feedback (CF), self-correction, and peer-correction. The results underscore the varying degrees to which students perceive the usefulness of these strategies, particularly when employed through the Boomerang strategy. Similar to previous studies, participants expressed a strong preference for feedback, whether self-corrected, peer-corrected, or provided by the teacher. This is consistent with the view that learners value the usefulness of written corrective feedback (WCF) as a critical tool for improving their writing skills (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). Both the Self-Correction (SE) and Peer-Correction (PE) groups found the Boomerang Strategy useful with respect to involvement in the WCF process indicating a desire for more involvement in the correction process, aligning with findings on learners’ preferences for active participation (Chen, Nassaji, & Liu, 2016).

In accord with previous studies, the SE Group thought that correcting their own mistakes was useful (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Hendrickson, 1980; Makino, 1993) mentioning that they could see, understand, and correct their own mistakes, and they also didn’t want to correct other’s errors. They preferred to work alone rather than with a peer, unlike in Levi & Doolittle (2022), where peer corrections were reported to be the preferred method and in Raza (2019), where students preferred the teacher’s direct WCF to being left to self-correct.

The quantitative results also indicate that the SE Group leaned towards more positive perceptions of the usefulness of the Boomerang Strategy as part of self-correction compared to the PE Group. This echoes Suzuki’s (2020) argument that self-correction fosters learner autonomy by encouraging students to reflect on their mistakes and internalize language rules. However, some SE Group participants (8%) did not find self-correction helpful, which mirrors Hyland & Hyland’s (2006) suggestion that not all students are equally equipped to self-correct effectively. On the other hand, the PE Group valued the Boomerang Strategy as part of the direct, focused feedback, which aligns with Hartono et al. (2023) who found that low-proficiency learners often struggle with peer corrections and require more support from educators.

As for the second research question “What are the perceptions of EFL primary learners of the impact of the types of corrective feedback and the Boomerang Strategy on the *Improvement* of their L2 writing?”, the SE Group perceived indirect feedback having very positive impact on improvement in L2 writing scoring significantly higher than the PE Group, a result consistent with Sheen’s (2011) argument that indirect CF,

when learners are required to identify and correct their own mistakes, leads to deeper learning. Participants in the SE Group highlighted that self-correction helped them "see their own mistakes" and "learn not to repeat them," which parallels similar conclusions from Bitchener & Knoch (2010). They found that indirect CF promotes long-term retention of language structures because it forces students to engage in the problem-solving process. Conversely, the PE Group's (slightly) lower scores in perceived improvement through indirect feedback suggest that peer-correction may not have been as effective in this context, possibly due to students' limited proficiency or lack of confidence in correcting their peers' mistakes. This resonates with Lee's (2008) critique that peer feedback, while beneficial in some collaborative environments, may not always provide accurate corrections, thereby limiting its effectiveness and improvement in certain settings.

As for research question three, "What are the perceptions of EFL primary learners of the helpfulness of different types of corrective feedback and the Boomerang Strategy in *Understanding* their errors?", the SE Group again displayed more positive results reporting higher levels of understanding through self-correction. These findings align with Maftoon, Shirazi, & Daftarifard (2010) research, which shows that self-correction promotes cognitive engagement and helps learners internalize grammatical structures more effectively. SE Group also reported significantly higher results on the helpfulness of indirect feedback in relation to understanding of errors and the Boomerang strategy and appreciated the personalized nature of self-correction, noting that it allowed them to focus on their own mistakes and learn from them, a process consistent with Zimmerman's (2002) concept of self-regulated learning. However, when asking about focused feedback, the PE Group reported higher levels of understanding unlike in Raza (2019), where students disapproved when the teacher marked only a few errors. A possible explanation could be that because the proficiency level of the participants was low, they faced difficulty understanding peer errors. When the feedback was focused, they also needed to correct fewer of their peer's errors making the process less ambiguous. This finding contrasts somewhat with Chandler's (2003) assertion that self-correction leads to a better understanding of grammatical rules. Instead, the present study suggests that collaborative efforts in peer-correction, particularly when direct and focused feedback is involved, may have led to deeper exploration of mistakes and collective resolution, as seen in Sato (2013) research on peer-assisted learning. Participants from the PE Group reported that collaborative learning helped them gain a deeper understanding of their mistakes through social interaction and teamwork (Hartono et al., 2023).

In relation to research question four, "What are EFL primary learners' preferences regarding *peer*, *self*-correction, and the *Boomerang* strategy in relation to L2 writing?", the study provides further insight into the learners' preferences for self-correction and peer-correction, shedding light on the tensions between autonomy and collaborative learning. The majority of students in the SE Group expressed a preference for working independently, emphasizing the value of "peace and quiet" and "better focus." This preference aligns with Han & Hyland (2015), Chen (2016), Han (2017), and Zhang Hyland's (2018) views on learner autonomy, where students take ownership of their learning process, thereby fostering deeper engagement and responsibility. In contrast, participants from the PE Group leaned towards collaborative learning, with many noting that working with a friend was "fun" and allowed them to "learn from each other's mistakes." This preference aligns well with Vygotsky's (1978) theories on the role of social interaction in cognitive development and reinforces the idea that collaboration can enhance learning outcomes for students who may not thrive in more autonomous settings. While the SE Group exhibited a strong preference for independence, a smaller subset of participants (16%) from this group did express a desire to work with peers. Similarly, while the majority of the PE Group preferred collaboration, 30.8% of participants expressed that they would prefer to work alone, suggesting that even within these groups, preferences are not homogeneous. These findings echo research by Wiboolyasarin et al. (2022), which showed that students' preferences for feedback modalities vary widely and are influenced by individual learning styles. While some learners preferred to self-edit when their writing contained errors, particularly when educator

provided indirect feedback regarding the error's nature, less proficient learners almost certainly perceived peer feedback as an embarrassment experience when they were corrected in front of their peers.

7. Conclusion

This study sought to explore the impact of strategy training using the Boomerang feedback strategy on the perceptions of WCF and the Boomerang Strategy of low-proficiency English L2 learners in Lebanon. Overall, the findings suggest that the Boomerang strategy was perceived positively by both groups, especially for promoting reflective and independent learning, though SE Group showed a stronger preference for it and had more positive perceptions as regards perceived improvement and error understanding as a result of the teaching intervention and the type of WCF used. The strategy encouraged self-reflection and critical learning, which participants found beneficial for focusing on their individual mistakes. Nevertheless, the study also revealed some nuances in learner preferences.

The data suggests that both self-correction and peer-correction are perceived as helpful tools for improving writing skills. It allows individuals to identify their own mistakes, learn from them, and gain confidence in their writing abilities. Participants indicated that they learned better by seeing and correcting their mistakes using the Boomerang strategy, and they expressed that this helped them to take ownership of their learning and be more responsible for their work. They expressed that this is true because they were able to identify and learn from their mistakes.

7.1 Limitations

Despite the positive findings, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small, consisting of only 51 participants from three private schools in Beirut. This limited sample size and specific demographic context may not fully represent the broader population of L2 learners, particularly those in different geographical regions or educational settings. Second, the focus was on low-proficiency learners, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to higher-proficiency learners. Additionally, the intervention was limited to an eleven-session period, which may not be sufficient to fully capture the long-term effects of the Boomerang strategy on L2 writing skills.

Another limitation concerns the potential bias introduced by convenience sampling and the reliance on self-reported data through the survey. While it provided valuable insights into learner perceptions, it may not fully reflect the actual learning outcomes or be entirely free from response biases. Also, there was the special limitation whereby all the experimental groups were studied in the same classroom and at the same time. They were exposed to all the intervention methods but worked with only one. This could explain why some learners expressed their preference to work alone and not with a peer. Finally, the study did not account for the possible influence of other factors such as learners' prior exposure to corrective feedback, their intrinsic motivation, or the role of teacher-student relationships, which could have impacted the results.

7.2 Implications for Classroom Use

The results of this study have significant implications for classroom practices, particularly in the teaching of L2 writing. The positive impact of the Boomerang feedback strategy suggests that educators should consider integrating peer and self-correction activities into their instructional methods. These strategies not only promote learner autonomy and collaborative learning but also help students internalize correct language usage through active engagement in the feedback process.

Teachers should be mindful of the balance between direct and indirect feedback, as both have distinct benefits. Indirect feedback encourages learners to actively identify and correct their errors, fostering deeper learning and retention. Meanwhile, direct feedback can be particularly beneficial in providing clarity and guidance for learners who may struggle with complex linguistic structures. Moreover, the findings underscore the importance of adapting feedback strategies to the specific needs and preferences of learners. Educators should be prepared to offer differentiated feedback approaches, perhaps incorporating both peer and self-correction in tandem with traditional teacher feedback, to cater to diverse learning styles and preferences within the classroom.

This study underscores the importance of considering learner preferences in the provision of WCF in L2 writing. The findings suggest that while the Boomerang strategy is generally effective in perceived writing improvement, learners' preferences for self or peer correction should be taken into account to maximize the effectiveness of feedback. Future research should explore how these preferences may vary across different contexts and how educators can tailor their feedback strategies to meet the diverse needs of their learners.

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1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Not very	A little	Very	Extremely

Appendix
Perception Survey

Peer/Self

For each of the three categories, participants were asked to consider and rate (1 to 5) the teacher's WCF (statements 1, 7 and 13), the use of indirect feedback (statements 2, 8 and 14), direct feedback (statements 3, 9 and 15), focused feedback (statements 4, 10 and 16), peer or self-correction (statements 5, 11 and 17) and the use of the Boomerang strategy (statements 6, 12 and 18).

1. It is **useful** when the teacher **underlines** the error, **gives its correct form** and asks me to go over the corrections at home. _____
 2. It is **useful** when the teacher **just underlines** my error without correcting: _____
 3. It is **useful** when the **teacher provides the correct answer after I do peer correction.** _____
 4. Correcting **only some of the errors** (focused) was **useful.** _____
1. It is **useful** when **I correct with my peers/on my own.** _____
 2. The *Boomerang Strategy* of corrective feedback where the teacher corrected, then I cooperated with my peers, after which the teacher gave more feedback is **useful.** _____
 3. The **teacher underlining the error**, giving its **correct form** and asking me to go over the corrections at home helped me **improve** my writing. _____
 4. The teacher **just underlining my error** without correcting them helped me **improve** my writing. _____
 5. The **teacher** providing the **correct answer after I did peer correction** helped me **improve** my writing. _____
 6. Correcting only **some of the errors** (focused) helped me **improve** my writing. _____
 7. Doing **peer-correction/Correcting on my own** helped me **improve** my writing. _____
 8. The *Boomerang Strategy* of corrective feedback where the teacher provided correction, then I cooperated with my peers, after which the teacher gave more feedback helped me **improve** my writing. _____
 9. The **teacher** underlining the error, **giving the correct** form and asking me to go over the corrections at home helped me **understand** my errors. _____
 10. The **teacher just underlining** my error without correcting helped me **understand** my errors. _____
 11. The **teacher** providing the **correct answers** helped me **understand** my errors. _____
 12. Correcting only **some of the errors** (focused) helped me **understand** my errors. _____
 13. Doing **peer-correction/Correcting on my own** helped me **understand** my errors. _____

14. The *Boomerang Strategy* of corrective feedback where the teacher provided corrections, then I cooperated with my peers, after which the teacher gave more feedback helped me **understand** my errors. _____

Short questions:

Q1: Do you think with the Boomerang Strategy you *learned better* than when you were not involved in the correction process? Why?

Q2: Would you like to do this correction activity *by yourself/with a peer* instead of working *with a peer/by yourself*? Why?

Q3: Do you consider that peer-correction/self-correction helped *improve your writing*? Why?
