# ความท้าทายในการตอบกลับงานเขียนของผู้สอนในห้องเรียนที่มีผู้เรียนจำนวนมากในบริบทการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ
# Challenges Faced by EFL Writing Instructors with Overcrowded Classes in Providing Written Corrective Feedback

สุวิชชาน อุ่นอุดม[1], ณฐยา อุ่นอุดม[2]
Suwitchan Un-udom[1], Nathaya Un-udom[2]

## บทคัดย่อ

วัตถุประสงค์ของงานวิจัยครั้งนี้คือ 1) ศึกษาความท้าทายเชิงทฤษฎีในการตอบกลับงานเขียนของผู้สอนในห้องเรียนที่มีผู้เรียนจำนวนมากในบริบทการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศและ 2) ศึกษาความท้าทายเชิงปฏิบัติในการตอบกลับงานเขียนของผู้สอนในห้องเรียนที่มีผู้เรียนจำนวนมากในบริบทการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ ผู้ร่วมวิจัยซึ่งเป็นผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ ประกอบด้วย กลุ่มผู้สอนการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษในห้องเรียนที่มีผู้เรียนจำนวนมาก 30 คน ผู้สอนซึ่งถูกสัมภาษณ์ 3 คน และ ผู้สอนซึ่งถูกสังเกตการณ์ระหว่างการตอบกลับงานเขียน 1 คน ข้อมูลถูกเปรียบเทียบจากมุมมอง 3 มุมมอง (Triangulation) โดยใช้แบบสอบถามความท้าทายในการตอบกลับงานเขียนของผู้สอนในห้องเรียนที่มีผู้เรียนจำนวนมากในบริบทการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ แบบสัมภาษณ์แบบมีโครงสร้าง และ แบบสังเกตการณ์ วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงปริมาณจากแบบสอบถามโดยใช้ ร้อยละ ค่าเฉลี่ย และ ส่วนเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพจากแบบสัมภาษณ์โดยใช้การวิเคราะห์แบบกำหนดกรอบประเด็น (Thematic Analysis) และ วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลจากการสังเกตโดยใช้การวิเคราะห์แบบพรรณาวิเคราะห์ ผลการวิจัยชี้ให้เห็นศึกษาความท้าทายทั้งเชิงทฤษฎีและปฏิบัติในการตอบกลับงานเขียนของผู้สอนในห้องเรียนที่มีผู้เรียนจำนวนมากในบริบทการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศด้านให้โอกาสผู้เรียนทดลองเขียนภาษาอังกฤษ การให้การตอบกลับที่มีประสิทธิภาพ การจัดการเวลา และ การจัดการ

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[1]  อาจารย์หลักสูตรสาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ คณะมนุษยศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏมหาสารคาม,
    E-mail: suwitchan.un@rmu.ac.th

[2]  อาจารย์หลักสูตรสาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ คณะมนุษยศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏมหาสารคาม,
    E-mail: nathaya.un@rmu.ac.th

[1]  Lecturer, English department, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Rajabhat Maha Sarakham University,
    E-mail: suwitchan.un@rmu.ac.th

[2]  Lecturer, English department, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Rajabhat Maha Sarakham University,
    E-mail: nathaya.un@rmu.ac.th

ความเครียด ผลของงานวิจัยสามารถนำไปปรับใช้ในด้านการบริหารการศึกษา การพัฒนาการตอบกลับงานเขียน และการศึกษาการเขียนในภาษาที่สอง

**คำสำคัญ**: การตอบกลับงานเขียน, ความท้าทายในการตอบกลับงานเขียน, การจัดการการสอน

## Abstract

The purposes of the current study are. 1) to study the theoretical challenges in written corrective feedback (WCF) provision faced by EFL instructors of overcrowded classes and 2) to study procedural challenges in written corrective feedback provision faced by EFL instructors of overcrowded classes. The participants were divided into groups comprising a group of 30 EFL instructors of overcrowded writing classes, a group of 3 interviewees, and an EFL instructor in an observation group. The data were triangulated using a questionnaire for challenges in providing WCF of EFL writing instructors with overcrowded classes, a structured interview form, and an observation form. The quantitative data were analyzed using percentage, mean score, and standard deviation while thematic analysis was used to analyze the transcription of the participants' interview. Lastly, the data from the observations was analyzed using descriptive analysis. The results of the study indicated both theoretical and procedural challenges faced by EFL instructors of overcrowded classes including challenges in providing learners opportunities to write, providing effective written corrective feedback, time managing, and stress managing. The results could be used in educational management, the development of WCF, and studies in second language writing.

**Keywords**: Written corrective feedback, challenges in providing written corrective feedback, Instructional management

## Introduction

Gaining its status as one of the main skills of a language in the late 60s, writing has drawn the attention of scholars as one of the most difficult skills to master in learning a second language (Silva & Matsuda, 2002). To clarify, the demand for grammatical correctness, specific organizational structures, and unique rhetorical moves in each genre put learners in a difficult situation dealing with a writing task (Hyland, 2003). Especially for EFL learners who are unlikely to encounter the language outside classrooms, the problems seem to be more crucial. Considering L1 interference, lack of experience in writing practice, and ineffective teaching methods, it is not a surprise that EFL learners have been found to have problems in learning all aspects writing (Dueraman, 2012).

The situation of teaching writing in the EFL context forces scholars to frame attempts and techniques to soften the problems and develop students' writing ability, and one of the wildly used methods is providing written

corrective feedback (WCF). The method could be clarified by giving corrective comments on learners' writing mistakes, and it has been approved by scholars in the area (e.g., Ferris, 2006; Ellis, 2009, Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Shoja, & Narjes, 2017). In detail, written corrective feedback would notify learners of their mistakes, encourage the restructuring processes, and eventually lead to the development of writing. As a result, providing written corrective feedback was established as a core activity in writing classrooms (Seloni & Lee, 2019).

However, the process of providing WCF might not always lead to success in writing development. Theoretically, awareness of feedback is needed as learners need to comprehend the given WCF to restructure their output (Schmidt, 2001). Moreover, the processes of the output modification after receiving feedback are also an indicator of learning processes (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). In this case, direct feedback where learners are informed about their mistakes and given the correction might not support the learning processes as they would only rewrite their text following the given feedback without learning. Similarly, learners who are not aware of the characteristics of errors in their text might not gain benefit from indirect feedback which does not provide suggestions for fixing the errors.

In terms of class management, WCF might put a burden on instructors as the processes of feedback providing require physical and mental effort to complete (Moa

& Crosthwaite, 2019). To clarify, instructors of writing courses need to carefully read the text and put some effort into providing comments that could develop their students' writing. In an overcrowded EFL classroom where 30 students or more enroll in a writing class, an instructor might take days providing WCF to their students, which affects their career and personal lives. With this concern, the current study aims to investigate challenges in written corrective feedback provision among EFL instructors of overcrowded classes. The results of the study could provide initial information to improve the processes of written corrective feedback providing in overcrowded EFL writing classrooms in terms of both theoretical and procedural aspects. The purposes of the current study are.-1) to study the theoretical challenges in written corrective feedback providing faced by EFL instructors of overcrowded classes and 2) to study procedural challenges in written corrective feedback providing faced by EFL instructors of overcrowded classes.

## Literature Review

Written corrective feedback could be defined as processes in providing corrective comments to learners' writing errors to improve the quality of the text in both grammatical and organizational aspects (Ellis, 2009). This process has been accepted as an important methodological component of writing instruction (Seloni & Lee, 2019). The current study discusses WCF in the theoretical and procedural aspects below.

**The theoretical framework of WCF**

Ellis (2009) provided a theoretical point of view of how successful WCF is beneficial in the processes of L2 learners' writing development. In writing, learners are allowed to test their hypothesis of the language structure. In the early stage of learning, learners might not use the correct structures in creating output, and feedback is needed to let learners compare their performances to the correct structure. Moreover, the modification of output is also an important process as learners need to study the feedback and restructure the output. In detail, the opportunity in output production is crucial for language learning (Swain, 1995). Moreover, Schmidt (2001) indicated that learners need to notice the differences between the errors in the texts and corrective feedback in order to gain benefit from feedback. Modification of output is also an indicator that learners comprehend the feedback at a level that they could restructure the errors (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). It could be concluded that the opportunity to write, notification of errors, comprehension of feedback, and the opportunity to rewrite the text are key components making WCF effective in developing learners' writing.

**The procedural framework of WCF**

According to Biggs and Tang (2011), feasibility is an important factor to indicate the effectiveness of a teaching method. Even though a method seems to be effective by the theory, the difficulty in executing the method might make it questionable for skill development.

In this case, providing WCF requires three important processes, namely input processing, analysis of feedback, and expression of feedback (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). In detail, an instructor needs to process learners' written output to identify errors committed in the text. He/she also needs to analyze the correction of the errors. Lastly, feedbacks are provided considering learners' uptakes and the possibility that they could learn from the feedback. These processes put a cognitive load on instructors and are time-consuming. Therefore, it might not be feasible to give effective WCF for classes under certain conditions. In practice, it might take hours of stressfulness to finish giving written corrective feedback to fix the grammatically and organizationally erroneous essays of 30 students in an EFL class. Stressful and time-consuming behaviors of giving WCF in overcrowded EFL classes issue is a dubious aspect to the method in terms of its effectiveness from a practical point of view.

**Overcrowded EFL classroom management**

Benhow *et al.* (2007) suggested that classes with 30 or more students could result in the ineffective academic performance of members. In addition, Küçükler and Kodal (2019) indicated that for language teaching, classes bigger than 25 are considered overcrowded as they affect the opportunity to practice language skills which need active learning activities to accomplish. This is especially the case in productive skills where

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learners need opportunities to produce output, receive feedback, and improve the quality of output production. It is a challenge to manage an effective teaching method for 40 students without putting a burden on instructors (Moa & Crosthwaite, 2019). In terms of provision of WCF, an instructor needs to analyze 40 texts of students and consider the best way to carry out the feedback that could improve their writing. The stress and tiredness of the processes might affect the quality of the instruction and lead to failure in students' writing development.

To provide suggestions for the improvement of written corrective feedback provision, studies have been conducted to investigate challenges regarding the processes (e.g., Lee, 2003; Ferris *et al.*, 2011; Alkhatib, 2015; Wei & Coa, 2020; Purnomo *et al.*, 2021). The results of the previous studies suggest both theoretical and procedural difficulties in providing written corrective feedback. For example, Bitchener and Ferris (2012) pointed out the importance of instructors' English writing knowledge which plays a great part in the success of written corrective feedback processes. Teachers of writing classes need to have a certain knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and writing structure to analyze students' texts and provide proper feedback. Moreover, students' English proficiency is also a key factor (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). As they need to notice the mistakes and learn from the feedback, students also need to be at a certain level of English proficiency to decode

the feedback and restructure their output. From a procedural point of view, Hyland and Hyland (2001) suggested that WCF might not be a practical method for writing classes because it put excessive stress on teachers, especially those who have an overcrowded class with low proficiency students. The studies below illustrate challenges in providing written corrective feedback in different contexts.

Wei and Coa (2020) studied the uses of written corrective feedback strategies used by EFL university instructors in Thailand, China, and Vietnam. The result of the study suggested that WCF is a complicated process, and instructors need to consider components such as grammar correctness, lexical and syntactic complexity, content, and organization. Therefore, the instructors needed to combine strategies to lower the burden of providing written corrective feedback.

Alkhatib (2015) studied teachers' beliefs, students' preferences, and teachers' practices regarding written corrective feedback. The data were collected from English writing instructors and students in a university in Saudi Arabia. The result of the study indicated that although instructors' beliefs and students' preferences went in line with each other in the way that they both want most possible detailed feedback to support the processes of writing development. However, instructors reported that they needed to practically provide feedback as there were difficulties in both principle and procedure in providing WCF. The effects of these difficulties decreased the

capability of giving feedback in real practice.

Purnomo *et al.* (2021) studied Indonesian teachers' perspectives in giving written corrective feedback. The results of the study indicated that the participants precepted WCF as an important process of a writing class. Even though the process places a burden on their job, they had to provide feedback in the most effective way. Moreover, the participants also reported that the actual feedback provision was correlated with their perspectives.

It could be seen that providing WCF is a challenging process for EFL instructors of overcrowded writing classes. The current study was conducted to investigate the difficulties in providing WCF in such a condition. The research questions are. 1) what are the theoretical challenges in providing written corrective feedback provision faced by EFL instructors of overcrowded classes? and 2) what are the procedural challenges in written corrective feedback providing faced by EFL instructors of overcrowded classes?

## Research Methodology

The study was conducted in a mixed-methods approach. Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The details of the data collection can be seen below.

### Participants

The participants were categorized into 3 groups. The first group consisted of 30 Thai instructors teaching writing courses selected by a convenient sampling method. They were asked to complete a questionnaire related to challenges in providing written corrective feedback in their classes. The second group of participants consisted of 3 Thai writing instructors purposively selected from the first group. They took part in the interview session. The last group of the participants comprised a single writing instructor who was also selected from the first group. He/she took part in an observation session. All participants were treated anonymously throughout the process of the study.

### Research Instruments

Three research instruments were employed in the study. The first instrument was a questionnaire to investigate challenges in providing WCF of EFL writing instructors with overcrowded classes. The questionnaire consisted of three parts including 6 questions in background information, 20 question items concerning challenges related to provision of WCF, and an open-ended question asking for further recommendations. The Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) of 5 experts for each question item was found at 0.6-1.0. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. Moreover, a structured interview form was developed with 0.6-1.0 of IOC. The questions in the interview focused on the theoretical and procedural challenges in providing WCF. Lastly, an observation form was employed to provide detail of the difficulties faced by a teacher in providing feedback. The form consisted of 4 key components, namely

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analyzing students' text, correction, time, and stress, and each component was found to have 0.8-1 of IOC.

### Data collection and data analysis

Three sets of data were collected separately. The questionnaire was sent out online from June to July 2021. The data were analyzed using percentage, mean score, and standard deviation. The interviews took place in the same months, and were then transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. Lastly, an instructor was asked to participate in an observation session. He/she rated 30 pieces of paragraph writing and provided written corrective feedback. We observed his/her behaviors and analyzed them using descriptive analysis.

## Results

According to the figure, the participants reported having a range of 1-9 years of EFL writing teaching experience. Essays (100%), paragraphs (80%), and academic papers (70%) were reported to be the level of writing at which they had instructed. The instructors gave 3-6 pieces of writing assignment per semester. The average size of the class was 30-40 students (60%), 40-50 students (20%), and more than 50 students (20%). All of the participants (100%) reported that they provided written corrective feedback in their instruction.
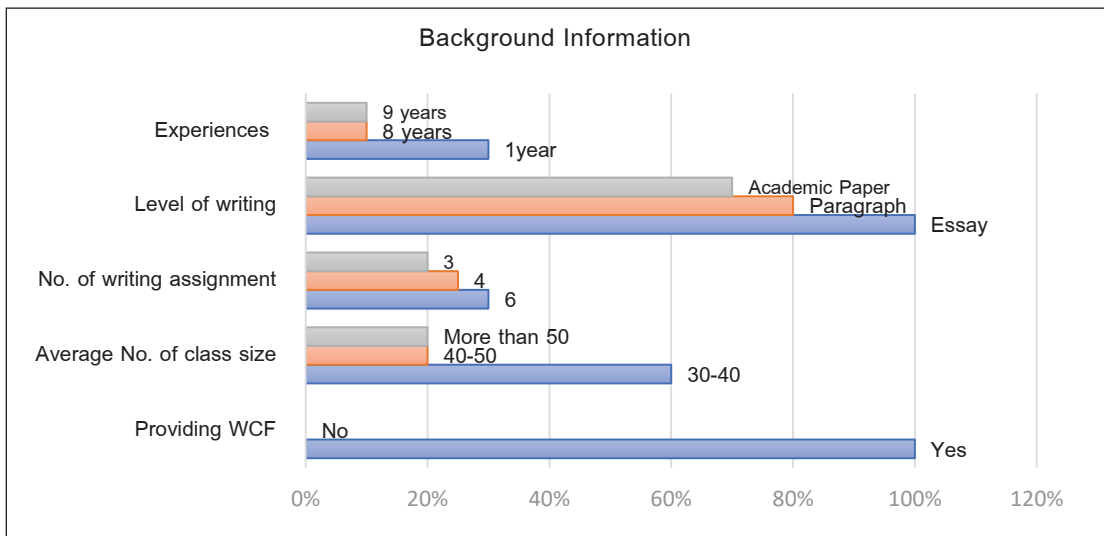


**Figure 1**. Background Information

According to Table1, the challenges rated at a high level by the EFL writing instructors with overcrowded classes were challenges in time management ($\overline{X}$=3.67, S.D=1.13), challenges in providing effective feedback ($\overline{X}$=3.67, S.D=0.92), and challenges in stress management ($\overline{X}$=3.51, S.D=0.88). Meanwhile, the challenges in giving learners an opportunity to write ($\overline{X}$=3.45, S.D=1.08) and challenges in analyzing learners' texts ($\overline{X}$=3.00, S.D=1.18) were rated by the participants at an average level.

**Table 1**.  Challenges in providing written corrective feedback

| Theoretical Challenges in providing written corrective feedback | $\overline{x}$ | S.D. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Challenges in giving learners an opportunity to write | 3.45 | 1.08 |
| Challenges in analyzing learners' texts | 3.00 | 1.18 |
| Challenges in providing effective feedback | 3.62 | 0.92 |
| **Procedural Challenges in providing written corrective feedback** | $\overline{x}$ | S.D. |
| Challenges in time management | 3.67 | 1.13 |
| Challenges in stress management | 3.51 | 0.88 |

In terms of recommendations, it is suggested that teachers should let students correct each other's work sometimes. Students can learn from their mistakes with the support of teachers and friends. Moreover, it might save time if teachers provide corrective feedback as a big picture of students' errors for individual works and explain in detail later to the whole class. From qualitative points of view, the participants' interviews were analyzed and categorized into themes. Challenges in providing written corrective feedback could be grouped into the themes below.

**Making learners understand comments**

The first theme is the difficulty in making learners understand teachers' comments. The interviewees commented that they use mixed strategies in providing feedback. For minor mistakes such as uses of articles, the plurality of word form, and verb form, the indirect WCF was used. However, it was reported that learners could not comprehend the feedback and reregulate their output. In contrast, when feedback was given in a direct manner, it was not quite sure that learners comprehended it, or they just rewrote the sentence copying the feedback. As a

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result, it is a challenge for instructors to provide feedback that could lead to the development of learners' knowledge and performance.

### Time management

It was reported that the processes of WCF are time-consuming. The participants taking part in the interview session reported that they normally spent 3-4 hours commenting on their students' writing. In essay classes with a size of 40 students or more, it could take 6 hours to complete giving feedback. The amount of time equaled working hours in Thailand and affected both instructors' work and personal life.

### Emotion

Unwilling emotions were also reported as a challenge in providing WCF. The interviewees suggested that they sometimes experienced stress and disappointment in giving feedback to students. The complication and time consumption of the method made it stressful for instructors. They also felt disappointed when hours were spent to provide feedback for students, and the same errors still occurred in the next students' writing. However, they reported that they understood the nature of writing development that takes time and patience.

Lastly, an instructor took part in the observation session. He/she rated a paragraph writing assignment of 30 students. During the observation, the instructor used both direct and indirect strategies in giving feedback. The average length of the paragraph was 110.65 words. He/she analyzed a sentence

and paused for 5-10 seconds before giving feedback. The instructor had to pause their processes a couple of times to relax from the feedback processes. In the end, the processes of providing WCF were finished in 2.5 hours. It was observed that the instructor felt 'stressed' out and tired.

## Discussion

Discussion of the results is arranged as follows.

### Theoretical challenges in providing WCF among EFL instructors of overcrowded classes

The results of the study indicated that giving effective WCF was found to be a most challenging process. The participants reported that it is not simply notifying students to understand their errors and how to fix them. Moreover, they realized that comments on students' errors could indicate the effectiveness of the WCF processes. Only clear and relevant comments bring about the development of students' writing. The results of the study are consistent with (Ferris, 2006) who also suggested that providing feedback is not an easy job. Feedback givers need to understand the nature of the receivers to apply the most appropriate method that could lead to improvement of students' writing ability.

In contrast, analyzing learners' texts was considered a less challenging issue by the participants. The participants believed that the ability to analyze students' texts is a qualification of write instructors. It was not as

challenging as providing effective feedback to resolve the students' mistakes. The results of the study relate to (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012) who suggested that instructors' ability is essential in such a complicated process as writing development.

**Procedural challenges in providing WCF among EFL instructors of overcrowded classes**

In terms of procedural difficulties in applying WCF in overcrowded writing classes, both time management and stress management were found to be at a high level of challenges. The participants reported that it takes almost all working hours to rate and provide WCF in an overcrowded writing class. Interviewees also reported that they have three essay classes in a semester, and course descriptions demand 4 pieces of composition in a class. The time-consuming nature of providing WCF brings about unwilling emotions such as stress and disappointment, especially when there was no improvement found in students' writing. The result of the study accords with Hyland and Hyland (2001) who also found that the managerial aspect of WFC might make it a dubious method in managing overcrowded EFL writing classes.

**Conclusion and suggestions**

In conclusion, the research questions of the current study were answered by the finding that instructors of overcrowded EFL writing classes face challenges in both theoretical and procedural aspects. In detail, providing feedback that could effectively improve learners' writing quality was the most challenging process. In addition, time and emotional issues were found to be challenging in managing overcrowded EFL writing classes. The results of the studies are consistent with the previous studies connecting difficulties in giving written feedback and EFL writing teachers of overcrowded classes (e.g., Lee, 2003; Ferris *et al*., 2011; Alkhatib, 2015; Wei & Coa, 2020; Purnomo *et al*., 2021). The results of the study could be implicated in both pedagogical and academic aspects. For classroom management, writing should be considered a tiresome course for teachers. Therefore, department heads should consider this issue so as to effectively manage a balanced workload for teachers. Further studies could use the data to compare difficulties in providing WTF in other contexts. Moreover, the results of the study could provide supportive data for scholars who seek to develop the processes of providing WCF. Further studies could also consider the development of a written corrective feedback-providing process that is effective in developing learners' writing without putting an excessive burden on instructors both emotionally and procedurally.

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