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# THE ABC's OF STUDENT DISPOSITIONS TOWARDS WRITTEN FEEDBACK IN ESL CLASSROOMS IN ACCRA METROPOLIS, GHANA

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**Abstract:**
Educators and researchers interested in the development of second language learners' writing skills place premium on how feedback is provided and the crucial role student attitudes play in determining the efficacy of feedback in the execution of L2 writing instruction. In line with this standpoint, the current study investigates the affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions of student dispositions towards written feedback in English composition classrooms in senior high schools in the Accra Metropolis in Ghana. The study was based on Eagly and Chaiken's (1998) ABC model of attitude. Following a sequential explanatory design, 12 students each from the 5 major programs in each school were sampled from 2 each of Categories A, B, and C schools to respond to questionnaires. Afterward, 36 of these students were purposively sampled to take part in interviews. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used to analyze the quantitative data generating means and standard deviations. Also, the interview data were thematically analyzed. The findings show that students generally have positive cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes towards teacher direct and unfocused feedback but have negative attitudes towards peer feedback and teacher indirect and focused feedback. From these findings, it is suggested that English language teachers in Ghanaian ESL classrooms should carefully consider the attitudes of their students in determining the use of written feedback in order to optimize the impact of the feedback on the development of the writing proficiencies of the students.

**Keywords:** attitudes, cognition, affect, overt behavior, written feedback, error correction, second language writing

## 1. Introduction

Educators and researchers in the field of second language learning concerned with the development of learners' writing skills place premium on how feedback is provided in

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the composition classroom. This is because feedback is regarded as a central tool for revealing how successful second language learners have been in the language learning enterprise (Aridah et al., 2017; Yilmaz, 2013). It is also an avenue for communicating the gap between the performance of learners and expected educational outcomes (McDonnel, 2012). For instance, when students write essays, they demonstrate their linguistic, genre, audience, and topic knowledge about a given rhetorical problem (Hayes, 2012; Graham, 2018) and written feedback is crucial in indicating how successful or otherwise they have been in the attempt. Again, written feedback in the form of error correction has the potential to reduce students' errors in their writings to some substantial degree (Truscott & Hsu, 2008) and leads to improvements in subsequent writings. One of the participants in a study by Rummel and Bitchener (2015) was for instance reported expressing his frustration in an exit interview by saying: "*How can I improve if I just write and write and no one tells me my mistakes?*" Indeed, it takes an identification and/or correction of the mistakes of learners to provide the reinforcement necessary to scaffold their development of writing proficiency. The aforementioned reasons offer some bases for the continuous deployment of written feedback in the composition classroom particularly in second-language contexts.

In spite of the all-important place of written feedback in improving second language learners' writing proficiency, aspects of their attitudes such as their perceptions and preferences have been found to be crucial in determining the effectiveness of the feedback in second language learning circles. Regarding feedback preferences for example, it has been observed that where there are disparities between students' preferences for feedback and the kinds of feedback they receive, the feedback is unlikely to achieve the outcome for which it was provided (Aridah et al., 2017; Janqueira & Payant, 2015). Suggestions have therefore been made about the need to ensure congruence between the nature of feedback used in the classroom and the specific preferences of students for feedback (Diab, 2005; Ferris, 2003; Lee, 2008). More so, variations have been found in the perceptions and preferences of students about feedback. For instance, while some studies report that students prefer direct written feedback from their teachers (egs. Fithriani, 2017; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Rhamadhani et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021), others report that it is indirect written feedback students prefer (egs. Ferris 2003; Li & He, 2017). Similarly, divergent results have been found regarding students' preferences for focused (Nemati et al., 2017) and unfocused feedback (Diab, 2005; Jahbel et al., 2020; Zohra & Fatiha, 2022). Conflicting findings of this nature particularly hinder the drawing of firm conclusions (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009). There is therefore the need for further studies in the area. Again, it is important to study how written feedback is seen and reactive to in specific settings because the variations in students' preferences for feedback may be contextually dependent (de Luque & Sommer, 2000). It is therefore important to understand the nature of students' dispositions towards written feedback in the composition classroom in second language contexts like Ghana where researchers and educators continue to bemoan the poor performance of students in English language

generally and in writing specifically (see: Akampirige, 2017; Duut, 2020; Mensah, 2014; Owu-Ewie & Williams, 2017; Worny, 2016).

Furthermore, an important gap in the literature revolves around the ways in which students' reaction to written feedback in the classroom has been approached. Much of the attention towards written feedback has been examined either in terms of one or two of the following: perceptions, preferences, and overt behaviours. However, research works that combine all three constructs in one study appear to be rare. Meanwhile, within language learning circles, learners' reactions to written feedback necessarily manifests in a combination of affective (preferences), behavioural (overt behaviour) and cognitive (perceptions) dimensions. A comprehensive understanding of written feedback from all these dimensions promises to give a broader picture of students' reactions to written feedback and to foster the development of more effective pedagogical strategies in ensuring optimal impacts of written feedback on second language learning. From the foregoing backdrop, the current study examines the affective, behavioural, and cognitive attitudes of students in Ghanaian ESL classrooms in the Accra Metropolis.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The Concept of Feedback

In language acquisition contexts, feedback is conceptualized as responses to language learners' oral or written productions (Balenghizadeh & Razael 2010; Ellis, 2009; Li, 2014). These responses are provided in speech or writing by teachers, peers, and learners and could be positive or negative (Muhsin, 2016; Opitz et al., 2011; Pradhan & Ghimire, 2022). Positive feedback which aims at positive reinforcement is provided on productions that are consistent with the target language while negative feedback aiming at negative reinforcement is provided on learner outputs that are inconsistent with the target language.

Also, in the language learning classroom, feedback that is written could be considered in terms of its types. In this regard, mention can be made of direct written feedback in which errors are identified (through underlining, circling, and/or the use of error codes) and the correct forms provided (explicitly above or near the error) and indirect written feedback in which errors are identified without providing the correct forms (Alkhawaiah, 2016; Chong, 2017; Rummel & Bitchener, 2015). Written feedback may also be focused and unfocused which are collectively termed 'feedback mode' in the current study. Focused written feedback is one in which attention is paid to specific errors at a time while unfocused written feedback calls for attention to all forms of errors (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Chong, 2017).

When students receive written feedback, one of the ways in which they are expected to engage with the feedback is through revision. Feedback revision involves attempts made by learners to read over the feedback received, process it, and internalize the correct forms that may have been provided particularly in the case of direct feedback (Han, 2017).

It must be noted that both teachers and students have degrees of responsibilities regarding the roles they must play in engendering feedback revision or engagement generally. Teachers may hold one-on-one or whole-class discussions with students in a bid to provide avenues for the latter to engage with the feedback and to answer questions about certain worded or wordless feedback the learners do not understand. On their part, students need to make time for and engage with the feedback on their essays so as to ensure that the positive traits in their write-ups are maintained in subsequent attempts and the negative ones avoided (Nusrat et al., 2018).

### 2.1 The Concept of Attitude

Many definitions and conceptualization of *attitude* exist in the literature. In Kreitner and Kinicki's (2004) view attitude is a predisposition to respond to a given object either favorably or unfavorably. Conner and Armitage (1998) add that attitude is a function of an individual's salient behavioral beliefs and represents what is perceived to be the likely outcome or attribute of that individual's behavior. Beyond the language classroom, one popular perspective from which attitude is conceptualized (which the current study adopts) is Eagly and Chaiken's (1998) ABC model of attitude in which they illustrate that attitude is made up of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Each of these aspects of attitude is explained in the lines that follow.

#### 2.1.1 Cognitive Attitude

Eagly and Chaiken (1998) put forth that there is the cognitive aspect of attitude which encases the thoughts, understandings, and beliefs of a person towards an object. Bodur et al., (2000) further explain that a person's cognitive structure which comprises the person's salient beliefs is a major determinant of their attitudes. This cognitive structure is the storage section of a person's attitude. It is at this point that an individual organizes facts about a specific attitude object. People have a store of facts and thoughts about specific attitude objects as a result of which they associate those objects with specific beliefs. In the composition classroom, learners may associate specific instructional tasks with positive beliefs such as the fact that written feedback has the potential to improve upon their performance in writing (Karim, 2013; Rummel & Bitchener, 2015). On the other hand, a learner may perceive written feedback as a mere attempt by the teacher to magnify their weaknesses and therefore associate it with the negative belief that the practice is unhelpful. Whether learners have positive or negative cognitive dispositions towards written feedback is very important because it goes a long way to determine their engagement with the feedback. Also, learners may have perceptions about specific feedback agents which can influence how they react to feedback from such people. For instance, where a student believes that it is the instructor who must provide written feedback on their essays and not their peers, they are likely to pay more attention to teacher feedback than peer feedback.

### 2.1.2 Affective Attitude

Apart from cognitive attitudes, there is the affective component of attitudes. Bodur et al., (2000) point out that several researchers have shown multiple affect categories as largely related to attitudes notwithstanding the important role a person's cognitive structure plays in their attitude formation. Affective attitude comprises one's feelings and emotions towards an attitude object. As explained by Akurugu (2010), affective factors bother on learners' emotional states. Individuals have emotional responses towards specific attitude objects; emotions which are usually expressed in their likes or dislikes. In relation to written feedback, students may either like or dislike written feedback in general, especially because of their positive or negative beliefs about it. Besides, as already indicated, while some students may have preferences for direct and/or focused written feedback, others may opt for indirect and or unfocused written feedback. These likings and preferences which constitute the affective attitudes of learners determine the extent to which the learners consider revising the feedback.

### 2.1.3 Behavioral Attitude

The third and final component of attitude Eagly and Chaiken (1998) identify is behavioral attitude. Behavioral attitude refers to a person's overt behavior or behavior that is noticeable. People have ways in which they physically react or have the tendency to react to particular attitude objects and these make up their behavioral attitudes towards the objects. Jain (2014, p. 6) states that the behavioral component of attitude "*may either be actions or observable responses and may also involve the favorable or unfavorable responses to 'do something regarding an attitude object*." Generally, the cognitive and affective attitudes a person has influence how they act or behave toward an attitude object. Therefore, people with positive cognitive and affective attitudes towards specific attitude objects are more likely to behave positively towards these objects whereas those with negative cognitive and affective attitudes are more likely to behave negatively towards the objects. Similarly, students' cognitive and affective attitudes towards written feedback are expected to influence their behaviour towards the feedback. For example, where students do not regard indirect written feedback as important, it is expected that they will dislike and consequently fail to revise it. On the contrary, when students are given direct written feedback which they find important, there is a high probability that they will like and consequently revise it.

## 2.2 Student Attitudes towards Written Feedback

As hinted in the preceding lines, discussions on the concept of attitudes towards feedback essentially view it from one spectrum of the ABC model or at best two spectra. Most discussions at students' attitudes in terms of students' perceptions (cognitive attitudes); some others look at the attitudes in terms of students' preferences and expectations (affective attitudes) while others look at the concept as a combination of cognitive and affective attitudes. Diab (2005), Ferris (2003), and Lee (2008) for instance, consider students' attitudes in terms of their feelings (affective attitude). They note that teachers

need to delve into the feelings of their students about the written feedback they (the teachers) give to them (the students) so as to avoid the risk of using feedback strategies that do not yield any good learning outcomes.

The feelings of students express towards written feedback come in the form of preferences for specific types of feedback such as direct or indirect written feedback. While some students may want their teachers to indicate their errors and also provide the correct forms, others may want their teachers to indicate the errors only. At the secondary level of education, where the feedback preferences of teachers' conflict with students' feedback preferences, students are unlikely to favorably engage with the feedback (Janqueira & Payant). It is for this reason that Lee (2008) advocates for awareness of secondary L2 learners' affective reactions to teacher feedback to adjust the feedback practices to suit students' preferences in order to ensure lasting effects of the feedback on students' writing.

Also, Hyland and Hyland (2006) and Yang et al., (2006) regard students' attitudes as their perceptions. These researchers have shown that students demonstrate positive cognitive attitudes in terms of perceptions toward teacher-written feedback. Yang et al (2006) for instance put forth that students hold teacher feedback in high esteem and see it to be more important than other forms of feedback such as peer and self-evaluation. These cognitive attitudes have reciprocal effects on students' affective attitudes. For instance, Hyland and Hyland (2006) report that when teacher feedback is provided to meet the affective needs of students, the students are more likely to express positive cognitive attitudes towards the feedback and the more students express positive cognitive attitudes towards the feedback, the more their affective attitudes in terms of their liking for the feedback grows.

Mahfoodh and Pandian (2011), in their discussion of students' attitudes toward written feedback, combined cognitive and affective attitudes. They analyzed students' attitudes to comprise students' perceptions and preferences. They showed that students may express both positive and negative cognitive and affective attitudes toward teacher-written feedback. They tagged students' expressions of liking for specific teacher feedback types as positive and expressions of dislike for the feedback as negative.

In spite of these efforts made at providing conceptual and empirical evidence on the interrelation between aspects of students' attitudes and the feedback they receive in the second language classroom, the author believes that an examination of learners' attitudes by considering all of the cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions will be a more complete approach to studying the phenomenon. In effect, the current study is expected to reveal a more complete picture of the affordances and constraints written feedback experiences in the second language classroom in the face of the attitudes students express towards it.

## 3. Material and Methods

### 3.1 Research Design

The study used the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. It involved the collection and analysis of quantitative data first and a subsequent collection and analysis of qualitative data in an attempt to provide explanations for the quantitative results (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018).

### 3.1 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample for the study was three hundred and sixty (360) students from six (6) schools in the Accra Metropolis. The selection of the schools was based on categories. In Ghana, senior high schools are generally classified under categories based on their infrastructure and academic performance. A school classified as Category B for instance has better infrastructure and superior academic performance at the West African Senior School Certificate Examination than a Category C school. In order to ensure representativeness, two (2) schools each were selected from Categories A, B, and C. From each of these schools, sixty (60) students were selected, twelve (12) each from the five major programs on offer, namely General Arts, Science, Business, Visual Arts, and Agricultural Science/Home Economics. These participants were involved in the quantitative phase of the study. In the qualitative phase, a total of thirty-six (36) of the participants were purposively selected based on the responses they gave in the quantitative phase.

### 3.2 Instruments and Administration

Questionnaire and interview were the instruments employed in the current study. The questionnaire was a typed and printed document with statements aimed at obtaining the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, values and perspectives of participants in accordance with the research objectives (MacMillan, 2004). The statements used in the questionnaire were adapted from Samuel and Athmer (2021) and Seker and Dincer (2014). The responses were on a Likert-scale of 1 to 5 in the following ways: 1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neutral, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree. On the other hand, the interview was semi-structured in nature with questions aimed mainly at seeking the reasons for which the respondents selected the kinds of responses they did. These interview responses were audio recorded and stored for analysis.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Data from the quantitative phase were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25. The responses were coded and keyed into the SPSS software and followed by a rigorous data-cleaning process. A descriptive statistical test of mean and standard deviation was then run and the results were classified in terms of the general themes of cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes. In interpreting the distribution of the findings, the least value on the Likert scale (1) was deducted from the greatest value (5) and the outcome was divided by the greatest value, thus (5-1)/5. The

result which was 0.8 was used as the length of each of the scales. Therefore, 1 – 1.80 was interpreted as strongly disagree, 1.81 – 2.60 was interpreted as disagree, 2.61 to 3.40 was interpreted as neutral, 3.41 – 4.20 was interpreted as agree, and 4.21 – 5.00 was interpreted as strongly agree. An agreement and a strong agreement to a positive statement were interpreted as a positive attitude while the same responses to negative statements were interpreted as a negative attitude. On the other hand, a (strong) disagreement with a positive statement was interpreted as a negative attitude while the same responses to negative statements were interpreted as a positive attitude. Apart from these, data obtained from the interview were transcribed verbatim and analyzed according to the themes and the specific questions they sought to clarify.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The results of the study indicate that students had defined cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes toward written feedback in the composition classroom in the schools. These results from both questionnaire and interview responses are iteratively presented and discussed in the lines that follow. Under each aspect of attitude, quantitative results are presented as values in terms of the number of responses (N), mean and standard deviation (SD) while qualitative interview responses are sandwiched into the presentation and discussion of the quantitative values.

### 4.1 Students' Cognitive Attitudes

Students' cognitive attitudes were measured in terms of their knowledge of the value of written feedback, the kinds of agents responsible for feedback, the type and mode of feedback, and the need for revision. Table 1 below shows participants' responses to the questionnaire items.

**Table 1:** Students' responses on cognitive attitudes

| Concept | Statement | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Value | Written feedback **improves my accuracy in writing.** | 354 | 4.31 | .82 |
| | Written feedback helps me to **notice my errors.** | 355 | 4.21 | .78 |
| | Written feedback **helps me to learn grammatical rules.** | 355 | 3.93 | .78 |
| Agency | **My teacher is responsible** for providing feedback on my essays | 355 | 4.71 | .67 |
| | **I am responsible** for providing feedback on my essays | 351 | 2.78 | 1.12 |
| | **My friends can** be tasked to provide feedback on my essays | 357 | 2.39 | .83 |
| Type | In providing feedback, errors need to be **identified and the correct forms provided**. | 355 | 4.85 | .79 |
| | In providing feedback, errors can only be **identified without the correct forms provided**. | 355 | 2.68 | .99 |
| Mode | Written feedback should be provided **all forms of errors** anytime. | 355 | 4.74 | .81 |
| | Written feedback should focus **only on concepts students are supposed to know** at the time of writing. | 355 | 3.32 | .92 |
| Revision | Revising written feedback is **tedious**. | 355 | 2.72 | .82 |
| | Revising written feedback is **time-wasting**. | 353 | 1.34 | .66 |

As shown in Table 1, the participants had positive perceptual dispositions about the value of written feedback (Aqeela & Mumtaz, 2021). All their responses about the value of written feedback were within the agree and strongly agree ranges of the scale indicating that they held feedback in high esteem in terms of its influence on their second language writing development. They saw written feedback as having the potential to improve the accuracy of their writing, aid them to notice the errors in their essays, and equip them to learn the grammatical rules of the language. These are in line with Karim's (2013) finding that non-native writers appreciate the value of written feedback in terms of how it helps correct their grammatical and non-grammatical errors. Similarly, one respondent said during the interview:

> *"It [written feedback] is important to help the student. Usually, you are not sure of what you write, so when the teacher gives you the feedback, you will be like okay, so this is what I was supposed to write, not the other way round."*

Indeed, written feedback creates a platform for students to notice the gaps between their second language written products and the target language standards (McDonnel, 2012). As students in a non-native setting, their levels of proficiency in the language are mostly limited necessitating diverse instances of hypothesis testing during the writing process. Feedback, therefore, serves as a way of confirming or disconfirming the correctness of the hypotheses they have formed about the language. When written feedback, particularly that which is accompanied by metalinguistic comments is provided, therefore, it offers additional avenues for explaining or emphasizing the principles that govern appropriate language use (Golizade, 2013).

The students also demonstrated their belief about feedback agency. They saw the provision of written feedback as the responsibility of only the teacher. To this end, while they strongly agreed to the teacher as feedback agent, they were neutral about the use of self-feedback and negative about peer feedback. Indeed, Ketonen et al., (2022) observe that feedback is traditionally conceptualized as a responsibility of the teacher and therefore the students' stance is not surprising. In giving reasons why they did not expect peer feedback to be used in the classroom, one respondent said:

> "*The student cannot be good to that extent [the extent of providing written feedback on the essay of his mate], like, the student cannot be good to do that [provide written feedback]."*

This accentuates the lack of confidence students have about the proficiency of their mates. Others indicated that they were not sure if the student they sat in the same class with when concepts were explained could be given the mandate of a teacher to determine the appropriateness of their writing. On the other hand, a few students indicated that where the teacher takes time to train some high-performing students on how to provide feedback, the possibility of using peer feedback could be attempted. They however saw

no need for the use of self-feedback because they believed providing feedback on one's own essay could hardly be done with objectivity.

Moreso, the respondents indicated strong agreement with the need for the provision of direct written feedback while rejecting indirect feedback. This confirms the findings of Najmaddin (2010) that most students perceive direct feedback as that which should be used in the classroom. They expected that written feedback in the ESL classroom will go beyond the identification of the errors in essays to an indication of what the correct form of the error is. It is this form of feedback that speeds up noticing, correction, and improvement of accuracy as indicated under *feedback value*.

Regarding the mode of feedback, they showed strong agreement for unfocused feedback and neutrality towards focused feedback. They were of the view that teachers should not pay attention to the accuracy of some features of the writing while delaying others for the future. They thought that even when they had not yet been introduced to the concept, the feedback was a way of drawing their attention to the existence of the concept. For example, during the interview, one responded advised:

> *"The moment he sees the mistake, he should just correct and teach the class so that when we get to that topic it will be easy for us to understand."*

To this end, unfocused feedback was to be used to do prior teaching of concepts in an incidental manner so that student understanding of these concepts in subsequent times will become easy since the concept would have been introduced to them earlier via the feedback.

On feedback revision, the respondent neither saw the act as tedious nor time-wasting. They were of the view that the time dedicated to revising feedback was a worthwhile investment because of the many benefits they stood to gain from it.

From these responses, it can be said that the students associated the provision of written feedback with positive values, knowing that it is the teacher, not they nor their friends who have the responsibility of providing written feedback, that the feedback should be direct and unfocused and that its revision is neither tedious nor time-wasting.

### 4.2 Students' Affective Attitudes

The affective attitudes of students involved those responses that bothered on their likes/preferences or dislikes/dispreferences for aspects of written feedback in the composition classroom. Findings on this aspect of attitudes show that students had a positive affect towards written feedback agency, type, and mode in ways that were almost consistent with their cognitive attitudes. Quantitative findings on these aspects of affective attitudes including post-feedback activities are shown in Table 2 below:

**Table 2:** Students' responses on affective attitudes

| Concept | Statement | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Agency | After writing an essay, I prefer **my teacher** provides feedback on it. | 355 | 4.52 | .87 |
| | I prefer my teacher gives my essay to **my friends** to provide feedback on it. | 354 | 2.12 | 1.23 |
| | I prefer to provide feedback on my essay **myself**. | 355 | 1.68 | 1.14 |
| Type | I like it when my errors are identified **and the correct forms provided**. | 355 | 4.01 | .73 |
| | I like it when my errors are identified **without the provision of the correct forms.** | 355 | 3.80 | 1.29 |
| Mode | I prefer **all forms of errors** in my essay are addressed all the time whether I am supposed to know the concept or not. | 355 | 4.58 | .88 |
| | I prefer **only errors on concepts I am supposed** to know are corrected at any given time. | 356 | 4.13 | .91 |
| Post-feedback activities | I like it when my feedback provider **discusses** the feedback on my essays with me **privately**. | 355 | 3.72 | 1.06 |
| | I like it when my feedback provider **discusses** the feedback on my essays while with other friends/the whole class. | 355 | 3.22 | 1.24 |

From Table 2, it is evident that the students strongly preferred teacher feedback but strongly dispreferred peer and self-feedback. As already indicated, these preferences were generally consistent with their perceptions. For instance, the strong preference for teacher feedback must have stemmed from the already existing belief that it is the teacher who has the knowledge and skills to guide them in their development of writing proficiency in the English language (Nugrahenny, 2017). A respondent affirmed this standpoint when she indicated in the interview "*I want only my teacher to do that [provide feedback on my essays] because he is the one who can teach me the right thing*." These confirm Badger and Yu's (2006) finding that students perceive teacher feedback as the most important of all feedback types making them prefer it the most.

Similarly, their dispreference for peer and self-feedback may be due to the lack of confidence they had in their friends and the challenge of objective evaluation of the essays by self. The surprising finding however lies in the students' near expression of strong dispreference for self-feedback (in spite of their neutral stance in under *perception*s). While this could be interpreted as a limitation to the validity of the responses provided, the actual explanation may lie in the fact that although the students do not disagree that they have the responsibility towards the general concept of feedback, they dislike the idea in principle. In the interview, one learner said "*My teacher has been telling us he needs to make sure the mistakes we've been making reduce by the time we will be writing our WASSCE so that we don't get zero in mechanical accuracy*". This goes a long way to authenticate the fact that in second language circles, perceptions about classroom events may be built as a result of what students may have been taught and may therefore not always correspond with students' preferences. It could also be interpreted to mean that since the students were aware of the extent to which preferences committed them to performance, they were shying away from their responsibilities.

Again, the students showed a liking for both direct and indirect written feedback although they liked direct more than indirect feedback. These indicate that in as much as students would generally want their teachers to include the correct forms of wrong productions, they also want their teachers to leave out the correct forms in some instances. These findings generally confirm the available literature on the disparities in student preferences for direct and indirect feedback. For instance, it validates the finding of Fithriani (2017) that students prefer their teachers to give direct written feedback on their essays, while giving some credence to the finding of Li and He (2017) and Nemati et al (2017) about Chinese and Iranian elementary, intermediate, upper-intermediate and advanced level students generally preferring indirect written feedback to other types. In explaining his preference for direct feedback, a respondent said:

> "*I prefer adding the correct form because when I refuse to ask my colleagues or search for the correct form, I continue to use the wrong spelling of it and in the future, I may speak a bad [sic] English*."

Another respondent said in relation to indirect feedback:

> "*I like it because it lets me know that my teacher knows I can find the right thing from the dictionary and like, yes, I will learn the correct thing by myself so that I can learn more. When it is direct, it is like spoonfeeding*."

These interview responses point to variations in the preferences of the students for direct and indirect feedback. While some preferred because of its greater potential to improve their subsequent writings, others dispreferred it because it promotes laziness among students. On the other hand, indirect feedback is preferred because it makes students more responsible for their own learning but dispreferred because it hinders engagement and reduces the tendency for the feedback to engender improved writing. These responses are reflections of the ways the respondents viewed the two contrastive forms of feedback. Written feedback is preferred by some for the same reason for which it is dispreferred by others. While the additional engagement responsibilities placed on students by indirect feedback are seen to have the potential of engendering fossilization of errors, others see it as capable of promoting independent learning and learner confidence.

Moreover, the responses on feedback mode showed that the students preferred unfocused feedback but dispreferred focused feedback. From the interview responses, they explained that they wanted their teachers to use written feedback to draw their attention to concepts that had been taught as a form of reinforcement and to concepts they are yet to be taught for the purposes of awareness creation. Some even emphasized that the creation of awareness could even ease the difficulties that might come with understanding the concepts when the time to teach them was due. These findings disconfirm the finding of Nemati et al. (2017) that students prefer focused written

feedback. While Nemati et al.'s participants wanted their teachers to address the use of specific forms at a time, the participants in the current study wanted all forms of issues to be addressed at any given time.

Regarding post-feedback activities, the students preferred both whole class and one-on-one discussions of written feedback. Some explained that the whole class meetings could improve their understanding of the feedback since they would know how their errors and their corresponding feedback compare with others. On the other hand, other respondents explained that their teachers were usually not specific in dealing with common errors in whole-class meetings and that affected their ability to properly access and engage with the feedback.

### 4.3 Students' Behavioral Attitudes

Results on the behavioral dimensions of attitudes involved responses concerning the overt behavior of students towards written feedback. They measured the tendency of students to behave in certain ways towards written feedback as an attitude object. These responses generally showed that students' behavior towards written feedback varied with respect to aspects of revision, agency, type, and mode. Table 3 below is a presentation of students' responses to questionnaire items on behavioral attitudes.

**Table 3:** Students' responses on behavioral attitudes

| Concept | Statement | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Revision | After feedback has been provided on my essay, I revise it. | 357 | 3.46 | 1.04 |
| | I find it easy going through the feedback provided on my essay. | 355 | 2.62 | 1.22 |
| | It is not difficult for me to make time to revise feedback on my essay | 355 | 2.45 | 1.13 |
| Agency | I pay more attention to written feedback when it is provided by my teacher | 354 | 2.14 | 0.77 |
| | I pay more attention to written feedback when it is provided by my friend. | 355 | 4.08 | 1.14 |
| | I pay more attention to written feedback when I provide it myself | 356 | 2.92 | 1.32 |
| Type | I revise feedback more when my errors are identified and the correct forms provided. | 355 | 4.12 | 0.99 |
| | I revise feedback more when my errors are only circled without provision of the correct forms. | 355 | 2.70 | 1.33 |
| Mode | I pay more attention to feedback that focuses only on errors on concepts I am supposed to know. | 356 | 2.92 | 1.10 |
| | I pay more attention to feedback that focuses on all errors whether they are concepts I am supposed to know or not. | 356 | 4.08 | 0.82 |

As shown in Table 3 above, the respondents expressed positive behavioral dispositions towards the revision of written feedback. However, their response shows that the revision process is fraught with difficulties and that making time for revision does not also come with ease. The generally positive nature of their response towards revision is therefore reduced by the neutrality expressed in relation to easiness and negativity in relation to the ease of finding time. These point to the level of constraints the students

encounter in the process of engaging in the all-important task of revision. This can be interpreted to mean that although students revise written feedback, they seldom do so. This to some extent confirms the findings of Irwin (2017) that less than 50% of students always read the feedback they receive on their essays. Again, from the interview, one respondent said "*The days she does not add the correct ones to the circles and lines, I find it difficult going through. Sometimes, I have to go back to her to explain to me before I can understand*". This response provides some explanations about the effects of the provision of indirect feedback on the frequency and ease of students' revision. The more direct the feedback is, therefore, the easier it is for students to revise it. This confirms Kim's (2013) finding that students' explicit understanding of written feedback is crucial to determining the extent to which they revise it.

Again, the participants showed that the type of feedback they revised most was teacher feedback, that they almost did not revise peer feedback and that self-feedback did not even call for revision. The regard and preference for teacher feedback reflect in their positivity about engaging with it. Other forms of feedback do not, therefore, have possible significant manifest roles in yielding returns in terms of second language learning. In the interview, one participant said "*There was a day our teacher told us to share our essays among ourselves and mark but me I didn't take what my friend did [his feedback] serious [sic] because his own mistakes were more than my own*." Another respondent said, "*I don't think I have to go over my own feedback because whatever I know is what I have done. Does it even work?*" These show that students almost did not revise other forms of feedback apart from teacher feedback. It should be noted also that in most of the instances, other forms of feedback were not used by teachers and hence students were not aware of their effectiveness.

In terms of feedback types, the students indicated paying more attention to feedback when the correct forms of errors are included. They explained in the interviews that they had greater motivation to revise direct feedback because of the extent to which it reduces the difficulty that comes with interpreting the feedback, clears ambiguities, and saves time.

More so, the participants revise feedback when all forms of errors are addressed. This result is almost confusing because it was expected that the focus on particular errors would reduce the difficulties that come with revising feedback as well as the amount of time involved in providing clarifications. Some of the respondents indicated in the interviews that some concepts help to explain other concepts and so when the former concepts are left out in the feedback process, it makes it difficult to understand the latter.

## 5. Conclusion

It is evident from the findings of the current study that students in the Ghanaian ESL classroom generally have positive cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes towards teacher direct and unfocused feedback but have negative attitudes towards peer feedback and teacher indirect and focused feedback. The findings have also revealed that although

students have positive attitudes towards written feedback, the manifestations of these attitudes towards feedback value, agent, type, mode, revision and post-feedback activities are varied. Finally, the results have shown that the positive nature of students' cognitive and affective attitudes does not necessarily reflect in their behavioral attitudes towards the feedback.

One implication of the findings is that it is important for teachers to reduce the amount of self- and peer-feedback used in the composition classroom in Ghana while increasing the amount of teacher feedback. This is because of the extent to which the students have regard for teacher feedback. On the other hand, teacher use of self- and peer-feedback could be increased if teachers can conscientize their students to understand and appreciate the all-important roles of those feedback types in the language classroom. This is particularly essential because in recent times, feedback has been observed to be shifting from being a teacher-only practice to a teacher and student one (Dawson et al., 2019). Again, peer feedback is seen to enhance the feedback literacy of learners (Carless & Boud, 2018). It must be added that before teachers use peer feedback, it is important for them to train their students on the rubrics for providing the feedback and also rely on students who are above average so as to increase the chances of having quality feedback.

Another recommendation is that teachers should provide more direct than indirect feedback and also ensure that their feedback is unfocused in nature. It is acknowledged that challenges such as large class sizes and teacher workload leading to cases of burnouts will hinder the extent to which indirect unfocused written feedback could be used by the teachers. It is therefore recommended that policy makers and all stakeholder work at ensuring a reduction in class sizes as well as teacher workload in Ghanaian senior high schools in order to provide the enabling environment not only for the provision of feedback that resonates with students' perceptions, preferences and overt behaviors but which generally fosters the effective teaching and learning of English language.

The following suggestions are made for further research. Firstly, it is proposed that future research into students' attitudes towards feedback in the second language classroom in Ghana will focus on oral feedback so as to expand understanding of the phenomenon in the classroom in Ghana. Secondly, future researchers could explore the ways in which different school categories and the language learning settings they create could impact on the way written feedback is provided and how students behave towards it. Although the current study sampled respondents from these school categories, the examination of students' attitudes towards feedback did not factor the possible diversities in the settings into account. Finally, future research works can consider examining the ways in which diverse individual learner characteristics such as sex, age, introversion and extroversion, language aptitude, learning style and personality may influence students' attitudes towards written feedback.

**Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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