1 Introduction

Feedback is often defined as an instructional practice which allows learners and teachers to improve their performances and be better aligned with the learning targets. Chappuis, Stiggins, Chappuis, and Arter (2012) define feedback as the information provided to a learner in order to assess their performance in a certain learning task. Hattie and Timperley (2007) refer to feedback provision as an interactional process in which feedback is the information provided by an agent such as a teacher, peer, book, parent, self or experience as a response to an individual or a group performance or understanding. Winne and Butler (1994, cited in Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 82) emphasize the role of the learner in feedback provision. They define feedback as the information learners receive from a feedback provider and adapt to their own
needs. This information often relates to a ‘domain knowledge, metacognitive knowledge, beliefs about self and tasks, or cognitive tactics and strategies’.

Today, feedback can be considered as a well-established field in ELT thanks to the large amount of research conducted worldwide. The history of research in this field started in the middle of the previous century or even before. Hyland and Hyland (2006) state that research in feedback first started in L1 writing in the 1970s with the emergence of the ‘learner-centred approach’ in ELT. In the MENA region, however, research on feedback in EFL classes can be considered a novice field. A quick review of the research conducted in the region shows that almost all the works were published in the last decade. In addition, there seems to be a lack of research in the field. Ahmed (2020, p. 19), in a study conducted to review feedback research in L2 writing in the Arab world, concludes that ‘[t]he literature review demonstrates the paucity of research about feedback in EFL writing in some Arab countries’. This highlights the need for more research in the field and especially research studies which describe the state of art of research on feedback in EFL classes in the MENA region; a gap that this work purports to fill.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Feedback Effect on Instruction

Feedback plays a pivotal role in instruction. Several studies (e.g. Chan, Konrad, Gonzalez, Peters, & Ressa, 2014; Chappuis et al., 2012; Frear, 2010) consider feedback as a tool which has a significant impact on formative instructional practices. Most of these studies point to the existence of a positive correlation between feedback provision and the improvement of learner’s achievement. Qi and Lapkin (2001; cf., Kang & Han, 2015) state that feedback provision boosts students’ development in areas related to lexis, grammar and discourse. Sadler (1989) explains that feedback provision helps the learners bridge the existing gap between their own productions and the standards set by the curriculum. In the field of writing, Liu (2008) affirms that providing feedback helps
reduce students’ errors. Similarly, Bitchener and Storch (2016) assert that written feedback develops L2 writers’ accuracy as well as their overall L2 level of command. They maintain that feedback equips students with the strategies necessary for the objective evaluation of their own production in terms of observing and monitoring the quality of their work. As for oral performance, Swain (2000) highlights the importance of teacher’s feedback during speaking production through the use of empirical evidence.

In language learning, two views exist concerning the function of feedback provision: the cognitivist view and the constructivist view. According to Ellis (2009), the cognitivist view emphasizes the corrective nature of feedback. Feedback provision is perceived as a linear process in which information is transferred from the feedback provider, the expert, to a passive recipient, the learner. In the socio-constructivist view, however, feedback provision is an interactive process in which the feedback provider, the facilitator, provides information to help learners gain an understanding of their mistakes and make their own revisions (Evans, 2013). Despite these differences, these two views emphasize the importance of feedback in fostering language learning. Similarly, in the communicative approach, feedback is also viewed as a medium to boost motivation and develop linguistic accuracy (Ellis, 2009). Despite this wide agreement of the positive effect of feedback provision on the learning in general, and language learning, in particular; this process remains mostly constrained by the degree of knowledge teachers have about feedback in terms of available types and techniques.

2.2 Feedback Types

In relation to feedback types, the review of literature shows that different typologies exist. These typologies vary according to the feedback provider, mode of delivery and media of delivery (Wanchid, 2015). Feedback is often referred to as oral or written, implicit or explicit, positive or negative, direct or indirect, focused or unfocused and immediate or delayed.
Oral feedback refers to the information provided in an oral mode to the learner. This may include the comments directly provided during a classroom speaking activity or a discussion following a specific oral performance. Hadzic (2016, p. 6) affirms that ‘when discussing oral feedback in the classroom, any kind of dialogue that provides information that will help students improve their learning can be included’. Written feedback is the information provided in a written mode on the learner’s written performance. It may include written comments, correction of errors, or codes referring to specific types of mistakes. Sheen (2010) points to some differences between oral and written feedback. He explains that, compared to oral feedback, written feedback is more limited and individualized. While oral feedback is typically directed to individual learners and accessible for the rest of the learners as well; written feedback is individualized and only accessible to the recipient unless they wish to let others examine their corrections.

Feedback can also be classified as implicit or explicit. Sheen and Ellis (2011) explain that implicit feedback refers to the instances when the feedback provider requests clarifications from the learner about a specific error. Explicit feedback, on the other hand, consists in the direct correction of the error followed by an explanation. Oral feedback can be both implicit and explicit. Written feedback, however, is often described as explicit as there is little room for interaction between the feedback provider and the learner. Today, however, written feedback provision is becoming more interactive through the use of new technology, namely online feedback programs, social media and e-learning platforms. In a study conducted to compare the effects of implicit and explicit feedback on the learners’ grammar accuracy, Zohrabi and Ehsani (2014) noticed that their students’ grammar accuracy improved thanks to the provision of both implicit and explicit feedback. Explicit feedback, however, proved to be more effective as the groups who received explicit feedback outperformed the ones who received implicit feedback.

Feedback is also divided into positive and negative. Ellis (2009) states that while positive feedback refers to the instances when learners are rewarded for their correct use of the language; negative feedback relates to the provision of a correction of the error whether oral or written. The responses provided with the aim of correcting learners’ errors are labelled
‘corrective feedback’ (CF). Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam (2006) maintain that CF is often used to point to the occurrence of an error, provide a correction, or supply some metalinguistic information concerning the nature of the error committed. These types of responses could be combined or separately provided.

Feedback can also be direct or indirect. Sheen and Ellis (2011) argue that the difference between direct and indirect feedback lies in the focus of the process itself. While the former focuses on the input provided to the learners, the latter prompts the output produced by the learners. Direct feedback consists in the provision of the correct form of the utterance in question to the learner. Indirect feedback, however, aims at eliciting such correct form from the learners. In terms of effect, Liu (2008) affirms that providing direct feedback helps reduce students’ errors in their immediate drafts. In the same vein, Bitchener, Young, and Cameron (2005, p. 202) confirm that ‘direct oral feedback in combination with direct written feedback had a greater effect than direct written feedback alone on improved accuracy over time’.

Feedback is also referred to as focused or unfocused. Unfocused feedback relates to the instances when teachers opt for correcting all the learners’ errors, while focused feedback takes place when correcting only a few selected errors (Ellis, 2009). As far as focused feedback provision is concerned, several studies (e.g. Ferris, 1995; Ferris & Helt, 2000; Ferris, Chaney, Komura, Roberts, & McKee, 2000; Sheppard, 1992) highlight the need for a focused treatment of errors as different types of errors require different types interventions. In terms of effect, Farrokhi and Sattarpour (2011) argue that focused CF had more effect on their students’ grammatical accuracy. Karimi and Fotovatnia (2010, cited in Alimohammadi & Nejadansari, 2014), on the other hand, maintain that focused and unfocused CF equally contribute to the development of their students’ L2 writing grammatical accuracy.

Feedback can also be immediate or delayed. In oral feedback, teachers often have the choice between immediate/online and delayed/offline provision. In written feedback, however, the intervention is mostly ‘offline’ as teachers require time to correct the writing productions submitted by learners (Ellis, 2009; cf., Sheen & Ellis, 2011). Ellis (2009) refers to the disagreement between SLA researchers concerning
the timing of oral feedback provision. While studies such as Harmer (1983) claim that immediate provision of feedback disturbs the learning context and thus hinders L2 learning; Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (2001) contend that providing immediate feedback does not disrupt the communicative flow of the classroom activities.

2.3 Knowledge and Beliefs About Feedback Provision

The study of teachers’ classroom feedback practices often leads to the investigation of their beliefs and knowledge about feedback provision. Lee (2008a, p. 69) affirms that:

teachers’ feedback practices are influenced by a myriad of contextual factors including teachers’ beliefs, values, understandings, and knowledge, which are mediated by the cultural and institutional contexts, such as views about feedback and attitude to exams, and socio-political issues pertaining to power and teacher autonomy.

In a study conducted to explore feedback beliefs and practices among novice and experienced ESL teachers, Karaağaçzan and Yiğitoğlu (2018) conclude that teachers’ provision of written feedback was mainly shaped by their attitudes towards writing as well as their beliefs about the roles of the teacher and the learners in their writing classes. In addition, many other studies (e.g. Eraut, 2000; Lee, 2008b; Parr & Limbrick, 2010) point to the discrepancy between teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about feedback provision and their classroom practices. In most of these studies, teachers seemed to possess some theoretical knowledge about feedback provision, but they failed to translate that knowledge into concrete instructional practices.

The present study is undertaken to explore research activity about feedback in EFL classes in the MENA region. More specifically, it aims to describe the activity in terms of feedback areas investigated, findings and research gaps. The study is guided by the following questions:

RQ 1: What are the areas/aspects of feedback in EFL classes investigated by research studies conducted in the MENA region?
RQ 2: What are the main findings of these studies?
RQ 3: What are the gaps in the research activity about feedback in EFL classes in the MENA Region?

3 Methodology

To effectively review relevant studies about research on feedback practices in EFL classes in the MENA region, the study employed a scoping review. A scoping review is a study conducted to review available literature about a specific topic. More specifically it

aim[s] to map rapidly the key concepts underpinning a research area and the main sources and types of evidence available, and can be undertaken as stand-alone projects in their own right, especially where an area is complex or has not been reviewed comprehensively before. (Mays et al., 2001, p. 194; emphasis in original)

Arksey and O’Malley (2005) specify that this type of study is often conducted to (a) explore research activity in a specific field in terms of extent, range and nature, (b) decide about the usefulness of undertaking a systematic review of the literature, (c) disseminate research results, and (d) spot research gaps in the field. In terms of research procedures, Pham et al. (2014) state that scoping reviews generally include five distinct phases. Phase one consists in the definition of the research questions. Phase two includes the identification of relevant studies. Phase three relates to the selection of relevant studies. Phase four consists in the extraction of data. The fifth and last phase includes data summary and synthesis.

In the present study, a scoping review is used to identify the areas of feedback investigated by research studies in the MENA region, summarize the e-studies and spot the research gaps in the field, if any. The time span was not set since the researchers are interested in defining the history of the research activity in the region. The search included peer-reviewed journal articles, chapters, academic books, theses and
dissertations and conference papers. The selection of the relevant research works was guided by the following criteria:

a. the topic of the work is related to feedback, feedback provision, or feedback practices in the MENA region,
b. the study was conducted in the MENA region or about learners from the region, and
c. the work is published in English and available online.

Searches were performed in Google, Google-Scholar, Researchgate and Academia with a combination of the following search terms: 'feedback in the MENA region', 'feedback in the Arab world', 'feedback studies in the MENA region', 'feedback studies in the Arab world', 'feedback provision in the Arab world', 'feedback provision in the MENA region', 'feedback practices in the MENA region', and 'feedback practices in the Arab world'. The search of these terms identified 70 journal articles, book chapters, M.A. and Ph.D. dissertations and books. Titles and abstracts of these publications were scrutinized to select relevant studies to be included in the study. Finally, the research team agreed to base their scoping review upon 37 studies. These studies are indicated in the reference list with an asterisk (*).

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Research on Feedback in EFL Classes in the MENA Region

In terms of the geographical distribution of research activity on feedback in the MENA region (see Table 1), the analysis of the articles collected for the study reveals that 27% of the feedback studies were conducted in Saudi Arabia, followed by Morocco (16%) and Iran (13%), Oman, Egypt and Libya are with 8% each, followed by Jordan and Tunisia (5%); and Kuwait and the UAE with 3%. These figures also reflect the amount of interest in feedback research in these countries. In addition to the small number of studies conducted in these countries, a close analysis
of the dates of publication of the articles shows that this field of study does not have a long history in the region. Most of the articles selected for the study (32 out of 37) were published between 2015 and 2020, which indicates that the interest in this field started only in the recent years. In Saudi Arabia, for example, nine out of the ten articles included were published between 2018 and 2020, which shows that feedback is perhaps only just becoming established in the country.

In relation to the areas investigated by the feedback studies conducted in the region, the analysis revealed that these studies focused on different areas which include feedback types, feedback effect, interaction in feedback provision, teachers’ knowledge, beliefs and practices, and students’ attitudes towards feedback provision. Table 2 shows that these studies focused mainly on feedback effect (35% of the studies), followed by feedback types and students’ attitudes with 21.5% each, and feedback

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**Table 1** Distribution of feedback research articles in the MENA region

| Country   | Number of articles | Percentage (%) |
|-----------|--------------------|----------------|
| KSA       | 10                 | 27             |
| Morocco   | 6                  | 16             |
| Iran      | 5                  | 13             |
| Egypt     | 3                  | 8              |
| Oman      | 3                  | 8              |
| Libya     | 3                  | 8              |
| Tunisia   | 2                  | 5.5            |
| Jordan    | 2                  | 5.5            |
| Palestine | 1                  | 3              |
| Kuwait    | 1                  | 3              |
| UAE       | 1                  | 3              |
| Total     | 37                 | 100            |

**Table 2** Research focus

| Research focus                              | Number of articles | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Feedback types                              | 8                  | 21.5           |
| Feedback effect                             | 13                 | 35             |
| Interaction                                 | 2                  | 5.5            |
| Knowledge, beliefs and practices            | 6                  | 16             |
| Students’ attitudes                         | 8                  | 21.5           |
| Total                                       | 37                 | 100            |
knowledge, beliefs and practices with 16%. Little attention, however, was given to interaction which was the focus of only two out of 37 studies. These figures, however, provide a description of the articles based on their general research focus. In fact, most studies included more than one focus even though they claim, in their titles, that they focus on one aspect of feedback. For example, interaction during feedback provision, which was the focus of only two articles, was either mentioned or even investigated in many of the 24 other articles. In addition, some articles focus on different feedback aspects at the same time. Shaqaqi and Soleimani (2018), for instance, investigated the effects of two different types of feedback, namely the ‘asynchronous and conventional paper-and-en metalinguistic feedback’. This work has been categorized as focusing on ‘feedback effects’; however, it can also be categorized under ‘feedback types’ since it explores the effects of two feedback types.

4.2 Feedback Effect on Instruction

Out of the 37 studies, 19 investigated the effect of feedback on instruction. In terms feedback types, two studies focused on the effect of feedback in general, ten studies focused on written feedback, five studies on online feedback and two studies on oral feedback. All these studies concluded that feedback has a positive effect on the instructional process. No study referred to a negative or no effect. More specifically, these studies revealed that feedback has a positive impact on learners’ achievement and motivation.

4.2.1 Effect on Learners’ Achievement

12 studies refer to improvements in the learners’ language skills thanks to the provision of different types of feedback. Some studies (e.g. AbuSeileek, 2013; Al Ajmi, 2015; Ali, 2016; Alhumidi & Uba, 2016; Al-Hazzani & Altalhab, 2018; Al-Saleh, 2018) rely on experimental designs to trace the effect of feedback on their learners. Their findings point to significant differences in the achievements of their experimental and control groups in written and oral tests. For example, in a study
conducted to trace the effect of online positive corrective feedback, Al-Saleh (2018, p. 1) refers to the existence of ‘statistically significant differences between the performance of the experimental group and the control group on the post-writing test that showed the effectiveness of providing positive, written corrective feedback via Showbie on the students’ English writing’. Other studies (e.g. Dehdary & Al-Saadi, 2020; Ouahidi & Lamkhanter, 2020; Sayed & Curabba, 2020; Shaqaqi & Soleimani, 2018) rely on the learners’ accounts to measure the effect of feedback provision on their performance. The results reveal that most learners noticed some improvement in their writing and speaking skills thanks to feedback. For instance, Al-Sawalha (2016, p. 17) concludes that ‘teachers’ written feedback have a twin effect: the first one was improving and orientating students’ revision skills and correcting their writing mechanisms, and the second was enhancing the Jordanian EFL students’ overall writing quality while doing a different draft of the same essay and composition’. In another study conducted to measure the impact of 4D feedback, Dehdary and Al-Saadi (2020, p. 80) conclude that ‘[t]he participants approved of their progression while receiving 4D feedback. They found the sequence smooth and helpful’.

4.2.2 Effect on Motivation

Some studies (e.g. Daweli, 2018; Seliem & Ahmed, 2009; Zouaidi & Hermessi, 2019) mentioned that feedback has some effects on learners’ motivation. Findings from these studies emphasize the role of some types of feedback, especially online feedback, in decreasing learners’ inhibition and increasing their involvement in the classroom. In a study conducted about the provision of electronic feedback in Egyptian writing classes, Seliem and Ahmed (2009, p. 2) maintain that:

E-feedback, as a new pedagogic practice, was generally effective in providing positive learning environment different from the physical rigid classroom environment, encouraging students’ responsibility for their own written work, facilitating peer and lecturer collaboration, increasing student participation, sharing learned outcomes between students, and
giving writing feedback to students electronically was a well-received and helpful pedagogic practice.

The role of online feedback in creating a new motivating context for the learners is also reiterated by Daweli (2018) who explains that using this type of feedback involves the learners in a virtual social environment in which they feel free of any kind of inhibition or embarrassment. Focusing effect of oral corrective feedback (OCT), Zouaidi and Hermessi (2019) add that teachers’ feedback practices do not only change the learner’ immediate behaviour in the classroom but also their behaviour in the whole course.

4.3 Feedback Types

The analysis of the articles collected for the study shows that this aspect is of major concern for feedback research in the region. Almost all the articles focused on feedback types in terms of effect, related teachers’ practices or students’ preferences. Table 3 shows the existence of some differences in terms of researchers’ interest in the types of feedback. Written feedback is by far the most commonly researched type (78.37%), followed by oral corrective feedback (29.72%), online feedback (27.02%) and peer feedback (11%).

4.3.1 Written Feedback

Among the articles included in the study, 29 focus on written feedback. Some articles (e.g. AbuSeileek, 2013; Al Ajmi, 2015; Al-Hazzani
& Altalhab, 2018; Alshahrani & Storch, 2014; Amara, 2017) highlight the advantages of written corrective feedback (WCF) provision and its effective role in the development of learners’ language skills. AbuSeileek (2013, p. 330) affirms that WCF positively impacts learners writing skills. He explains that, in his study, ‘participants who obtained written corrective feedback performed better on the writing post-test’. Al Ajmi (2015) adds that WCF provision helps improve students’ performance on preposition use grammatical and lexical accuracy (Al-Hazzani & Altalhab, 2018) and verb tense accuracy (Shaqaqi & Soleimani, 2018). Al-Sawalha (2016, p. 63) adds that WCF plays an effective role in ‘improving and orientating students’ revision skills’.

Some studies, however, mention that despite its positive effects, WCF can sometimes be problematic in instructional settings. Alkhatib (2015, p. ii) refers to the degree of clarity of teachers’ feedback. The author states that ‘although students valued teachers’ WCF and placed a great importance to it, they faced difficulties understanding some of their teachers’ comments’. In the same vein, Amara (2015) and Said and El Mouzrati (2018) report that students complained about their teachers’ feedback describing it as unclear and sometimes misplaced leading often to confusion and misinterpretation. Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020, p. 53) add that ‘teachers’ feedback, according to students, is more often than demotivating’.

4.3.2 Oral Feedback

10 studies out of 37 investigated oral feedback practices in the region. Some studies (Alahmadi, Alrahaili, & Alshraideh, 2019; Sakale, 2017; 2019; Zouaidi & Hermessi, 2019) refer to its positive effect on learning. Alahmadi et al. (2019) claim that oral feedback, when integrated as formative assessment tool, it improves the students’ performance skills and enables them to understand the subject contents properly. Zouaidi and Hermessi (2019) emphasize that the use of some oral feedback techniques such as ‘recast’ increases the learners’ motivation and involvement in the classroom activities. Sakale (2019) adds that helping students
make the necessary changes in their oral performance results in a density of negotiation leading to the improvement of student’s oral performance.

Other studies (e.g. Alkhammash & Gulnaz, 2019; Karimi & Asadnia, 2015) refer to some limitations regarding the use of oral feedback in the classroom. Alkhammash and Gulnaz (2019, p. 51) point to the difficulty of customizing oral feedback to the individual needs of the learners. They report that ‘[t]eachers often encounter difficulties when dealing with spoken errors as they requires the use of appropriate techniques that best address particular types of error and are suitable for the type of learning activities and the learner’ profile.’

In addition, oral feedback provision is mainly dependent on the student’s level. In a study conducted to investigate teachers’ use of feedback strategies, Karimi and Asadnia (2015) reveal that there was a significant difference in teachers’ use of corrective feedback strategies between elementary and intermediate levels, and that more explicit correction, elicitation, metalinguistic clues, clarification request, and repetition are with learners at the elementary level.

### 4.3.3 Peer Feedback

Out of the 37 studies, four focus on peer feedback and five treat it as a secondary topic. Some of these studies (AbuSeileek, 2013; Alkhatib, 2015; Alnasser, 2018; Daweli, 2018) highlight the importance of this type of feedback in instruction. Alkhatib (2015, pp. 137, 138) mentions that teachers are aware of the necessity to allow students to obtain feedback from their peers. ‘[P]eer feedback helps them [students] exchange ideas’ and to ‘not to be over dependent on teachers’. Similarly, Selieem and Ahmed (2009) and Daweli (2018) affirm that peer reviews and comments helped participants improve and adjust their writings accordingly. For Ahmed (2020, p. 11), ‘peer feedback did not only encourage students’ revision but also benefited them linguistically, cognitively, and affectively.’

Other studies (e.g. Alkhatib, 2015; Alnasser, 2018), however, raise certain concerns about the use of this type of feedback in the classroom. Alkhatib (2015, p. 138) warns about replacing teacher’s corrective
feedback with peer feedback. She declares that ‘although peer feedback is important and should be implemented according to teachers, it should however, neither replace nor compensate for teachers’ WCF, and it should be guided by the teacher’. In the same vein, Alnasser (2018, p. 345) believes that despite the reported positive experience related to the used peer and computer-based feedback in the classroom; ‘students are not yet ready to let go of teacher feedback’. Zyad and Bouziane (2020) point to the lack of trust in peer feedback. They argue that this type of feedback is questionable as the provider is perceived to be of ‘equal footing’ and capable of committing and overlooking mistakes.

### 4.3.4 Online Corrective Feedback

10 out of the 37 articles included in the study focus on online feedback. Results were varied but overall, online feedback is perceived as valuable and beneficial. Ali (2016) describes a study conducted to investigate the efficacy of incorporating ‘screencast’ feedback in a university EFL writing course. Students, in this study, demonstrated a positive attitude towards feedback and perceived it as clear and motivating, despite the problems related to internet connection. Seliem and Ahmed (2009, p. 20) affirm that

> E-feedback proved essential in the teaching and learning of essay writing for Egyptian student-teachers of English. Student-teachers revealed that it is instrumental in improving their essay writing skills. Besides, lecturers’ experiences of e-feedback proved successful as they managed to respond to students’ e-mails, but they found it exhausting.

### 4.3.5 Other Feedback Types

The articles included in the study also focus on other types of feedback. Direct and indirect feedback is investigated in 18 articles. Findings of these studies reveal the existence an agreement among students and teachers on the effectiveness of direct and indirect WCF. Alkhatib (2015, p. 135) contends that ‘while all teachers believe in the effectiveness of the direct WCF, some teachers still believe that indirect WCF might be
also used in three situations: when dealing with frequent errors, minor errors, and/or with stigmatizing errors’. Similarly, Ali (2016) stresses on the effectiveness of both types of feedback. In the same vein, Karimi and Asadnia (2015) propose a mixed approach in which both types of feedback are employed to maximize effectiveness. In terms of use, Al-Bakri (2016) claim that teachers mostly provide students with direct WCF. Zyad and Bouziane (2020) add that peer reviewers also provide direct feedback. In terms of preference, Alshahrani and Storch (2014) and Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020) assert that students prefer direct feedback as it is more accessible and can be easily implemented.

Focused and unfocused types of feedback are also investigated in the articles collected for the study. 9 out of 37 studies have mentions of focused (24.32%) and unfocused (21.62%) feedback types. In relation to students’ preferences, Al Ajmi (2015) affirms that 88% of their informants [students] preferred focused WCF and saw it as facilitative, organized, effective and motivating. Additionally, Amara (2017) sheds the light on the effectiveness of focused WCF mainly on the improvement of students’ writing and grammatical accuracy. In contrast, Alshahrani and Storch (2014) declare that teachers in their study were obligated by institutional guidelines to provide unfocused feedback to students.

In addition to the aforementioned types, some articles investigate implicit and explicit feedback. 12 out of 37 articles focus on this type of feedback. Al-Hazzani and Altalhab (2018) mention that explicit WCF has a significant positive effect on the development of students’ grammatical and lexical accuracy. This is also reiterated by Farrokhi (2011), who admits that despite the low percentages of occurrence in actual teachers’ practices, explicit correction has one of the highest percentages of effectiveness. Still with the frequency of occurrence, Khorshidi and Rassaei (2013) add that explicit feedback was the least frequent among the various feedback types included in their study. As for implicit feedback, studies show that it is not commonly used by teachers. Karimi and Asadnia (2015, p. 58) claim that ‘[a]lthough the teachers stated that they use both explicit and implicit CF according to error type, situation, and task, the teachers mostly relied on explicit feedbacks than implicit ones at both levels regardless of the error types and situation-based functions of the tasks’.
4.4 Interaction in Feedback Provision

The analysis of the feedback articles selected for the study revealed that interaction during feedback provision was of primary research concern in two articles and secondary research concern in 24 other articles. 25 articles dealt with teacher–students interaction, while only eight focused on peer interaction. In relation to teacher–students interaction in written feedback, Al-Harbi and Troudi (2020, p. 192) explain that the success of teacher–student interaction is based on the type of relationship established between the students and their supervisors. They argue that ‘a good relationship between students and their supervisor will contribute to the successful completion of the students’ research project and an improvement in their writing skills, in conjunction with effective and continual communication with their supervisors’.

Other studies (e.g. Al-Bakri, 2016; Al-Harbi & Troudi, 2020; Amara, 2015; Shawish & Al-Raheem, 2015) pointed to some challenges at the level of teacher–student written interaction, which mainly relate to the lack of communication, feedback misinterpretation and unrealistic expectations. Abu Shawish and Abd Al-Raheem (2015) point to the lack of communication between teachers and students regarding written corrective feedback provision. They explain that, due to the large number of learners, teachers were unable to appropriately communicate their feedback to all their students. For example, they were unable to have individual conferences with students who needed more care and guidance. Also some studies mention that marking and commenting on students’ papers was problematic. Amara (2015) explains that students often misinterpreted their teachers’ comments and perceived them as severe criticism or even accusations of plagiarism. Another problem with teacher–student written interaction relates to the unrealistic expectations of teachers and students. In a study conducted to explore Saudi postgraduate students’ problems with academic English writing, Al-Harbi and Troudi (2020) found that many Saudi postgraduate students expect their supervisors to play the role of schoolteachers. For them, supervisors should provide close assistance and guidance to supervisees. Supervisees, on the other hand, should not give their own opinions or views or question those of their supervisors.
At the level of oral interaction, Sakale (2017, p. 276) focuses on the timing of teacher’s intervention and more specifically on the wait-time necessary before feedback provision and its role in the development of the students’ speaking skills. She states that ‘[a]ccording to research findings wait–time instruction might be determinant in letting learners more time to prepare their speaking and modify or add on new things which may lead to improvements in their oral production’. Alkhammash and Gulnaz (2019) point to some difficulties relating to the management of verbal interaction in the classroom. They maintain that successful provision of feedback requires the mastery of certain classroom management techniques that many teachers do not possess due to the absence of appropriate teacher training programs.

Some studies (e.g. AbuSeileek, 2013; Ahmed, 2020; Alnasser, 2018; Daweli, 2018; Reinders & Mohebbi, 2018) praised the use of peer interaction in the classroom as it enhances students’ involvement and enables them to check their errors and correct them. Other studies (e.g. Alnasser, 2018; Athimni, 2020; Seliem & Ahmed, 2009; Zyaad & Bouziane, 2020), however, mention some problems related to peer interaction. Athimni (2020, p. 149) mentions that this type of feedback is not preferred by students. He states that ‘peer feedback did not seem to be preferred by many students. Only respondent 7 referred to this type of feedback. She explained that some of her students did not actively participate in peer feedback sessions as they are not willing to hear the evaluation of their peers’. In addition, Zyaad and Bouziane (2020) and Seliem and Ahmed (2009) point to the lack of trust in peer correction. Most students question the value of this practice and consider it artificial and not valuable as all students nearly have the same language proficiency level.

4.5 Feedback Knowledge and Beliefs About Feedback Provision

Out of the 37 studies, nine focus teachers’ feedback knowledge, beliefs about feedback provision. Most of the articles investigate the degree of congruence between the teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about feedback
and their feedback practices in the classroom. In terms of possession of theoretical knowledge about feedback, several studies (e.g. Al-Bakri, 2016; Alkhatib, 2015; Athimni, 2020) affirm that teachers seem to possess the theoretical knowledge necessary for good feedback practices in the classroom. Athimni (2020, p. 157) states that ‘teachers’ feedback practices were governed to an extent by theoretical knowledge and beliefs about feedback provision in writing classes’. In a study conducted to investigate EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices about oral corrective feedback techniques, Alkhammash and Gulnaz (2019) claim that their findings are congruent with what is agreed upon in the literature concerning the most commonly used types of OCF techniques that are proved to help improve learners’ spoken proficiency presenting. Teachers seem to possess the necessary knowledge about those techniques and properly use in their classrooms. Similar findings about congruence between teachers’ beliefs and practices are also reported in studies (e.g. Alkhatib, 2015; Shawish & Al-Raheem, 2015) conducted, respectively, in Saudi Arabia and Palestine.

Other studies (e.g. Athimni, 2020; Farrokhi, 2011; Karimi & Asadnia, 2015; Said & El Mouzrati, 2018; Shawish & Al-Raheem, 2015), however, point to some discrepancies between teachers’ knowledge and their actual classroom practices. Athimni (2020, p. 159) states that ‘on some occasions and in relation to some aspects of feedback, teachers seemed to possess the theoretical knowledge, yet they failed to translate that knowledge into concrete instructional practices’. Equally, Abu Shawish and Abd Al-Raheem (2015) mention that, in their study, teachers opted for using unsound practices as well as sound ones despite their knowledge and awareness of sound feedback practices. More specifically and regarding OCF, Karimi and Asadnia (2015, p. 61) point to ‘some areas of belief-practice mismatch in teachers’ sensitivity to students’ errors, their employment of different CF strategies, use of explicit and implicit CF, application of immediate and delayed CF, correction of global and local errors, focus on different linguistic targets, and reliance on self, peer, and teacher correction’.

Some studies (e.g. Al-Bakri, 2016; Alkhatib, 2015; Alshahrani & Storch, 2014) investigate the reasons behind this mismatch. Al-Bakri
(2016) explains that students’ attitudes towards feedback could negatively impact teachers’ emotional state, hindering their feedback practices. In the same vein, Alshahrani and Storch (2014) and Alkhatib (2015) consider the disagreement that may occur among teachers’ beliefs, institutional guidelines and the teaching overall context among the factors that prevent teachers from enacting their beliefs into practices. Alshahrani and Storch (2014) add that, most often, there is a mismatch between the type of feedback recommended through institutional guidelines and that preferred by students. Alkhatib (2015) considers the issue from a wider perspective. She explains that teachers’ feedback practices are influenced by a number of external factors including teachers’ beliefs, understandings, theoretical knowledge, learning and teaching experience, students’ behaviour and educational policy.

4.6 Students’ Attitudes Towards Feedback

Out of the 37 studies, 8 studies investigated students’ attitudes towards feedback. Some studies (Al Ajmi, 2015; Al-Sawalha, 2016; Ouahidi & Lamkhanter 2020; Shawish & Al-Raheem, 2015) mention that students have a positive perception of feedback. Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020, p. 42) report that ‘(62%) agreed that the teachers’ feedback is very beneficial and, consequently, has a positive impact on improving their writing skill’. Sayed and Curabba (2020) also report similar results. They state that a vast majority of students perceived all types of feedback as worthwhile. In some studies, these attitudes seem to positively correlate with the use technology-assisted feedback. Ali (2016, p. 106) mentioned that when asked to evaluate ‘Screencast’ feedback, students’ responses included adjectives like ‘clear, personal, specific, supportive, multimodal, constructive, and engaging’. Similar results were also reported in other studies (e.g. Basabrin, 2019; Daweli, 2018; Seliem & Ahmed, 2009) about the use of other online programs such as Showbie, Google Docs, or e-feedback. Other studies (Alkhatib, 2015; Alnasser, 2018; Al-Saleh, 2018), however, report students’ expressed preferences for teachers’ WCF and highlight the role of the teacher as key feedback provider. Sakale
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(2019, p. 350) praises ‘the pivotal teachers’ role’ during speaking activities. She emphasizes ‘the pertinence of teachers’ feedback in the classroom particularly when pushing students to make modifications in their responses’.

In other studies (e.g. Amara, 2015; Ouahidi & Lamkhanter, 2020) students expressed a negative attitude towards the feedback provided by their teachers. They reported they faced difficulties in understanding some of their teachers’ comments. Dehdary and Al-Saadi (2020) mentioned that students do not always find feedback to be facilitative; it is often described as ‘restrictive’ or even deficient. For Said and El Mouzrati (2018, p. 237), ‘it seems that students rarely turn to teachers to discuss the content of the feedback with their teachers and prefer, instead, to discuss it with their peers. The majority of the respondents continue to complain that teachers’ feedback is too vague and too general’.

### 4.7 Gaps in Feedback Research in the MENA Region

The present study provides an overview of research on feedback in EFL classes in the MENA region. It describes the areas investigated by researchers in the region. Some areas received extensive attention such as ‘feedback effects’ and ‘feedback types’. Other areas received little or no attention; they constitute the ‘gaps’ of feedback research in the MENA region.

The analysis of the articles selected for the study shows that compared to other feedback areas; interaction received little attention from researchers. Only two articles focused on the interactional aspects of feedback, which represents a major gap in feedback research in the region. Investigating how teachers and students interact during the provision of written or oral feedback helps researchers spot the deficiencies that may occur in feedback communication. This involves the identification of teachers’ and students’ moves and roles attributed to each party during feedback provision. It also includes the description of the techniques and strategies used during the interaction. Furthermore, feedback interaction
should be understood within the cultural context in which teachers and students operate, as it helps researchers identify the major cultural factors which affect the feedback interactional act. In broader terms, investigating how interactions are managed and how roles are attributed to teachers and students in a specific culture should be of prime concern to researchers as it helps them devise appropriate solutions to breakdowns in feedback communication which are properly adapted to the cultural contexts in which teachers and students operate.

Some feedback types received little attention by researchers, and this represents another gap in feedback research in the region. Compared to written feedback, which was the focus of 78% of the articles included in the study, the other types, namely oral, peer and online feedback were by far under-researched. This, to a certain extent, reflects a traditional view of language and language teaching. Language teaching, today, is learner-centred, communication-oriented and technology-assisted. The small number of studies conducted on oral, peer and online feedback report that these types are deemed to have positive effects on instruction. As such, further understanding is needed of how they should be effectively incorporated in the classroom in terms techniques and strategies appropriate to each type and teachers’ and students’ attitudes. More attention should also be provided to online feedback as more investigation is required to better understand the implications of incorporating this technology-assisted feedback in the twenty-first century’s classroom, its limitations and any possible challenges as well as the ways to overcome them. This is becoming of prime concern today, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another gap in feedback research relates to the rift between teachers’ feedback knowledge and their classroom practices. Among the 37 articles reviewed in the study, no attempt was made to investigate feedback provision in teacher-education programs and how they relate to real-life educational settings. Researchers need to examine the contents of these programs and find whether they equip teacher-trainees with the necessary knowledge on feedback provision, and more importantly provide them with the techniques that help them translate that knowledge
into their daily classroom practices. Investigating this area may provide an answer to the everlasting incongruence between teachers’ feedback knowledge and classroom practices reported in several studies conducted across the region.

5 Implications for the Context and Conclusion

The present study set out to review the available literature on research on feedback in EFL classes in the MENA Region. The review of 37 articles selected for the study revealed that interest in feedback research is a novice field in the region. The majority of the research works were conducted between 2015 and 2020 in Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Iran. These studies focused on different areas which include feedback types, feedback effect, interaction in feedback provision, teachers’ knowledge, beliefs and practices and students’ attitudes towards feedback provision. ‘Feedback effect’ and ‘feedback types’ were the main areas investigated by researchers in the region.

The findings of the feedback research studies provide information on the aforementioned areas. All the studies investigating the effect of feedback on instruction conclude that feedback has a positive effect on the learners’ achievement and motivation. Empirical studies provide statistical evidence of improvement in learners’ performance thanks to feedback provision. Other studies emphasized the role of some types of feedback, especially technology-assisted feedback, in decreasing learners’ inhibition and increasing their involvement in the classroom.

Findings about feedback types reveal the existence of some differences in terms of researchers’ interest in the different types of feedback. Written feedback is the most commonly researched type, followed by oral corrective feedback, online feedback and peer feedback. Written feedback is described as effective in developing learners’ language skills. Some concerns, however, were raised about quality of teachers’ comments in terms of clarity and responsiveness to learners’ needs. Oral feedback is also perceived as effective in improving learners’ oral performance and increasing their motivation, but some references are made relating to the
ability of the teachers to customize their feedback to needs of individual learners and learners’ willingness and degree of involvement. Peer feedback is also rated as important in feedback provision as it fosters learners’ independence and boosts their motivation. Some criticisms, however, were levelled in relation to the frequency of its use in the classroom and the trust students have in their peers’ comments. As for online feedback, it is described as valuable and beneficial, especially in motivating learners and providing alternative solutions for teachers. Some studies though, referred to some unacceptable practices students often resort to when they are under time constraints. Some studies also investigated other types of feedback such as direct and indirect feedback, focused and unfocused feedback, and explicit and implicit feedback. The findings point to the effectiveness of these types and the differences between them in terms teachers use.

Findings about interaction during feedback provision mainly refer to teacher–student interaction and peer interaction. In teacher–student interaction, the relationship established between the teacher and the students is perceived as a prerequisite for the success of written interaction. Some studies report failure in this process related to lack of communication, feedback misinterpretation and unrealistic expectations. In oral interaction, the focus is on the timing of teachers’ intervention and the difficulties of the management of oral interaction in the classroom. As for peer interaction, some studies focus on the role of motivation in increasing students’ participation, while others refer to the lack of trust students have in this process.

In terms knowledge and beliefs about feedback, several studies report that most teachers possess the theoretical knowledge necessary for good feedback practices. They point, however, to the large discrepancies between teachers’ feedback knowledge and their classroom practices. Some studies investigate the reasons behind this rift. They refer to factors including time constraints, number of students in each class, students’ level and attitudes, as well as their motivation and commitment.

Students’ attitudes to feedback provision are also investigated in the research works included in the study. Some of them refer to the students’ positive perception of feedback, especially technology-assisted one. Other studies refer to the students’ negative attitudes towards the feedback
provided, which mainly relate to difficulties in understanding some of their teachers’ comments and lack of trust in the quality of their peers’ feedback.

The study also provides an overview of the gaps of research on feedback in EFL classes in the MENA region. These include the feedback areas which received little or no attention from researchers, namely feedback interaction, oral, peer and online feedback, and feedback contents in teacher education. These areas require more investigation in order to improve feedback practices in the region.

Finally, the present study does not claim itself exhaustive as it does not include all the research works undertaken about feedback in EFL classes in the MENA region. Some studies were conducted as part of M.A. or Ph.D. programs but not published online, and other studies were published but not detected by the search filter. However, the added value of this study resides in the opportunity it provides for researchers inside and outside the region. Though not totally accurate, the study provides a general overview on feedback research activity in the region in terms of geographical distribution, history and feedback areas investigated. The description of the feedback areas investigated by research works provides guidance on the areas that should receive ample attention in future research studies. The summary of the findings of previous studies can be used in future comparative studies conducted in L1, L2 or EFL contexts. Early-career researchers can also benefit from the study, as it helps them easily locate the research gaps in the field and later compare their findings with the results of previous studies.

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