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Students' Response to Teachers' Feedback on Writing
The Case of Third – Year L.M.D Students of English

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Studies

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to:

'Mami' and *'Papitou'*. I've casted on you all my fears and tears but instead, you've given me but an endless love, generously and continuously...

'Alaa', *'Selma'*, and *'Seif'*; I love you sincerely...

The sole of my dear grandpa. Though you were not here to see me achieve this,

I know you are proud of me. *'Jaddou'*, I'm missing you awfully...

The "*lounis(s)*" and "*loucif(s)*". Together, you are my family...

My friends *Besma*, *Hala*, *Meriem*, *Nassima*, *Amina*, *Ati*, *Soumeya*, *Rawiya*, *Jemy*,

and Noro. Thanks guys for representing friendship perfectly...

To *'Adel'* for whom i'm waiting impatiently...

And to you, *'Maha'*. Glad, you've made it finally.

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“Shall I compare you to a candle that

Kept on enlightening the path of knowledge for me...

You are more generous, you are much greater.

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Abstract

Teacher feedback is no doubt a vital component in developing adequate writing proficiency. However, feedback which the learners do not and /or cannot process is deemed purposeless. Therefore, through the use of two different research instruments, the ultimate goal of this study was to ensure the incorporation of the written feedback into the learners' written productions. Through the use of a teacher's questionnaire, are provided some insights into the instructors' real practices and their patterns of teaching writing at Mentoury University in Constantine (UMC). The results yielded by the second research instrument, a writing test, mirrored the effectiveness of the teacher comments suggested in this study: the participant students did not only incorporate a considerable proportion of their teacher's comments but they also committed fewer errors. Moreover, an overall improvement in subsequent drafts was also demonstrated. Findings of this research invite teachers of writing first to integrate the multiple draft technique into their teaching practices and second, and more importantly, to provide feedback on preliminary drafts not on final ones.

List of Abbreviations

EFL: English as a Foreign Language.

ESL: English as a Second Language.

L1: First Language.

L2: Second Language.

MA: Master of Arts.

PhD: Doctor of Philosophy.

Q: Question.

UMC: University Mentoury, Constanine.

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General Introduction

Background of the Study

Among the most important skills students of English as a Second Language (ESL) or a Foreign Language (EFL) need to develop is writing. For many years, as many historical accounts have shown, writing won little interest from the learners' side compared to other skills especially speaking. Learning to speak has been deemed a primary concern; learning to write has always been a secondary matter, a means of practicing, sustaining and reinforcing other skills. However, foreign language proficiency demands a balance in mastery between different language skills. Thus, ESL/EFL students have come to realize the importance of writing as an independent medium of communication they are in dire need of for a wide range of purposes in different contexts be it in or outside the classroom.

The Algerian learners of English at Mentoury University who follow a three year course in English are, by no means, an exception. The course program prepares the learners for a career across a wide range of employment sectors or to take up an academic/professional career. Over the first semester of the first year, the students are introduced to some basic concepts in Grammar (parts of speech and word function) , Syntax (phrases, clauses, and sentences) , and Mechanics (capitalization and punctuation) . It is until the second semester that students are introduced to basic writing, ranging from writing topic sentences and paragraphs to recognizing their unity and coherence. By the second year, the students' writing centers no longer around single isolated paragraphs but rather, larger pieces of discourse namely essays are introduced to the learners. The students are taught different patterns and techniques for essay writing including introductions, developmental paragraphs and conclusions. In addition, they are provided with insights into different patterns of essay

development (cause/effect, comparison/contrast, argumentation, etc.). The third year is by far an opportunity to practice writing essays with different patterns of development.

Teaching writing is no easy task. Planning what to teach within a particular curriculum is only a part of the task. The other part manifests itself in how to teach such a complex skill. In fact, it is the teacher's job to consider the different approaches that gleaned from theories and researches on teaching writing in ESL/EFL contexts. It is also the teacher's job to select the approach that best fits the learners' needs and, accordingly, choose or even improvise what s/he thinks would be effective teaching materials, techniques, etc. The teacher of writing is also deemed responsible for creating a motivating environment and being in charge of facilitating the learning-to-write activity. The teacher can do so by widening the area of interaction, and therefore reducing any potential gap, between him and his students. The best means for teacher-student interaction may therefore be insightful feedback which has, as a dual effect, both improving students' writing production and motivating them to write more and better.

Rationale of the Study

Statement of the Problem

The teacher's feedback to students' writing is undeniably a key component and a crucial part of the process of writing. It is supposedly the guide which students follow throughout the process of writing and the means which enables them to produce a readable end product. However, what may make teachers get increasingly worried is the fact that the students tend to overlook and ignore the instructor's feedback on their writing.

Teachers make considerable efforts and spend a long time circling, underlying, and correcting errors, rearranging ideas, trying to grasp what the student writer intends, and

making suggestions for improving the written piece. Yet surprisingly, the students do not take their feedback into account .

In fact, students only sometimes respond to the teachers' feedback. On many occasions, they merely glance at the red monster: the marks, lines, circles, symbols, etc, that their papers are spotted with. They, then, fold the papers, put them somewhere in their bags and never offer them a second look. Even worse, they sometimes crumple and throw the papers which the teachers had spent nights considering. For these learners, the feedback meant nothing but a criticism and an underestimation to their writing abilities. They never looked at its lighter side, the one of improving their writing. They were not presented with an appropriate or a motivating way that could make them use it given the fact that some teachers gave feedback on final drafts only, and sometimes, it took them a long period to return the papers so that students lost interest in whatever comment made. Consequently, many students overlooked, and are continuing to overlook, the feedback.

Teachers should continuously provide insightful, instructive, encouraging, and therefore effective feedback on different aspects of students' writing (form and content) .The way teachers respond to students' writing need not be thought of as a mere criticism to writing but as a means for improving it, rather. More importantly, teachers are deemed responsible for making learners understand it as such and motivate them to consider it instead of overlooking it. The process of writing can be thought of as a play in which:

- The classroom stands for the theatre.
- Both the teacher and students stand for performers.
- The different stages of writing stand for the different acts.
- The feedback stands for a transitional event and, therefore, there is no need to delay its appearance to the last scene; the students' final drafts.

This is supposed to mean that the researcher is aware of the existence of two differences between the writing process and a play: first, the audience which constitutes a crucial part in any play performance is absent in the process of writing due to undeniable pedagogical requirements. Second, while the acts of any play are performed following certain order, this cannot be the case with the stages of writing which are said to be recursive, rather. However, it is necessary to note that the idea emphasized here is that writing is worth thinking of as a joint effort between the student and the teacher and that the feedback is worth appearing while writing rather than after it.

As one reads current research on feedback matters as related to the writing skill, it becomes evident that more research about two crucial issues is certainly needed: first, the possible role the teacher's feedback (mainly the written one) has in improving the writing skill, and second, how to make students aware of its importance and respond to it.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the present dissertation is fourfold. The first aim is to examine teacher's practices in the writing class: their approaches to teaching writing, the type of instruction they give and their different conceptions of feedback, mainly the written one. The second aim of the present research is to find appropriate ways that may contribute to raising the learners' awareness of the role of feedback and may enhance their revision skills, trigger their repair mechanisms and boost the overall writing quality. The third aim is to investigate the effect(s) of teachers' written feedback on the evolvment of students' written end products. Finally, this study cannot be finished without providing inspiring guidelines for teaching. Hence, the last, but by no means the least, aim is to raise some implications for second language writing instruction as related to the effective use of feedback in the department of English at Mentoury University, Constantine (UMC henceforth).

Research Questions

This study tries to answer a number of related questions:

-Are the teachers of writing at the English Department aware of the importance of their written feedback?

- Do they continue to assess the students' writings using this technique?

- Are students aware of the importance of the teachers' feedback?

- Do teachers do anything to make students consider their feedback?

Hypothesis

In the light of what has been previously said, the hypothesis on which the present thesis is based runs as follows:

The feedback given prior to the final draft during the writing process as an input from the teacher to the students works best; it is taken into consideration by the students and it triggers the students' repair mechanisms which, in turn, increase their uptake.

Methodology

To meet the research aforementioned aims, two research instruments will be used: a teachers' questionnaire and a writing test for students. The questionnaire which is meant for teachers of writing at the Department of English at UMC enquires about their writing teaching practices and feedback-related matters such as their definition of feedback, the type of feedback they usually provide, and how they make students respond to it. The writing test is meant to examine the utility of providing written feedback before final drafts as a technique itself to make students respond to it.

Structure of the Study

The dissertation is composed basically of two chapters. The first chapter, a descriptive one, is made up of two parts devoted to the review of related literature. The second chapter, an empirical one, is also composed of two parts devoted to the description of the research methods and procedures used and the analysis of the results obtained from the teachers' questionnaire and the students' test. Added to these is a section for implications for teaching writing.

As far as the first chapter is concerned, part one provides insights into the writing skill in general. It includes definition(s) of the writing skill, the importance of writing, the purpose of writing, approaches to teaching writing, the process of writing, and the teacher's role in this process. The second part deals with issues about the notion of feedback. This includes different definitions of feedback, types of feedback, the purpose(s) of feedback in addition to its importance relative to the writing skill and the conditions that ensure its effectiveness.

Chapter two of this dissertation is designed to include a detailed description of the sample population, why and how they are chosen. A detailed analysis of the teachers' questionnaire and an examination of the students' written work will, then, follow. The data will be analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to see whether the obtained results confirm or refute the hypothesis.

One aim of this study is to obtain some inspiring pedagogical implications. Therefore, relying on the findings of this research a set of recommendation and suggestions on feedback is provided.

Chapter One: Written Feedback on Writing

Chapter one: Written Feedback on Writing

Introduction

Developing writing proficiency whether in ESL or EFL settings is widely acknowledged as an important skill. Teaching writing is therefore assuming an outstanding position in foreign language education. One major area of writing instruction which constitutes a key factor of students' rising control over the writing skill is teacher written feedback. Thus, to meet the parallel between writing and feedback on it, this chapter is divided into two parts. The first part starts with a definition of writing and attempts to report how it has been viewed and contextualized by different composition scholars. Then, an exploration of different approaches to teaching writing follows. The second part includes a definition of the term feedback, followed by definition of its different types. Then, the scope of this dissertation is narrowed down to review literature on teacher's written feedback and how it is perceived by students.

1. Writing

1.1. EFL/ESL Writing

Many years ago, the single definition people could provide for writing was the use of symbols and graphs to record speech. A skilful writer, then, was one who had a beautiful hand writing as described by Castairs (1816:12)

When writing is well performed, it gives a beautiful and pleasing effect to the eye and may not improbably be considered in two respects, as it proceeds from the eye and the hand; from the one we have size and proportions; from the other boldness and freedom.

However, although the definition of writing, in general terms, includes the use of graphic symbols, it is by no means limited to this narrow sense as it also refers to the process through which a piece of written language is produced. In other words, even if learning the

writing system of the second language is a basic requirement and may constitute a major impediment to some L2 writers whose language system is different (e.g. Arabic to English),there is much more that students bring to the writing task than the use of graphic codes to express meanings. The writing process is described by White and Arndt (1991:3) as a mental-effort demanding and thus, a time consuming one: “Writing is far from being a simple matter of transcribing language into written symbols: it is a thinking process in its own right. It demands conscious intellectual effort which usually has to be sustained over a considerable effort of time.”

Weigle (2002) claims that writing in an ESL/EFL context is also far from being a means for learning and reinforcing other skills especially the oral one since none of the skills is superior to the other. In her view, the writing and oral skills are equally important but differ in certain criteria such as, textual features, socio-cultural norms, and the cognitive processes involved in the production and understanding of a text. Thus, the long established view that writing functions mainly to support and reinforce patterns of spoken language “is being supplanted by the notion that writing in a second language is a worthwhile project in and of itself” (Weigle 2002:1). However, Harmer (2004) argues that while in some L2 teaching situations writing is treated on equal basis with other skills, it is still used in other contexts, if at all, for its “writing for learning” goal where students write with the ultimate goal of augmenting other language skills such as reading, grammar and vocabulary.

While Weigle’s view that writing is a project in itself is unquestionable, describing it as a project of itself draws the layout for a serious controversy. Writing can by no means be totally independent of other skills. It should be thought of as “a developmental task which can be conceived as a performance made up of a series of lesser skills, one built upon another”(Li WaiShing 2000:49). Knowing how to write entails as a prerequisite knowledge of and in other skills as Nation (2009:114) puts it, “writing is easier if learners write from a strong

knowledge.” Canal and Swain (quoted in Nation 2009:32)claim that the L2 writing activity requires the writer to have a set of competences summarized as follows:

- Grammatical competence: knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and the language system.
- Discourse competence: knowledge of genre and the rhetorical patterns that create them.
- Sociolinguistic competence: the ability to use language appropriately in different contexts, understanding readers, and adopting appropriate authorial attitudes.
- Strategic competence: the ability to use a variety of communicative strategies.

Describing these competences as the minimum knowledge that every writer should at least have, Canal and Swain’s suggestions go in line with what Coffin et al(2003) and Nation (2009) propose: that writing is a hybrid skill that can be prepared for effectively from other skills.

Grabe and Kaplan (1996) view writing as the process a writer goes through towards the production of a meaningful text. They approach writing from the rhetorical triangle: the writer, the audience, and the text itself. The writer is the text producer; the audience is the reader or the recipient of the written product of the writing process; the written text is the result of some cognitive activities the writer processes, and the meaning of any piece of writing, in their view, can be arrived at by considering these three aspects (the three angles of the rhetorical triangle) altogether. Li Waishing (2000: 53) supports Grabe and Kaplan’s claim that writing is meant to be meaningful and functional, “writers need to pay attention to writing as communication of meaning and treat writing as a goal-oriented activity.” Moreover, aside from being a process students go through to generate units of meaning with particular communicative purposes, the activity of writing is of an intrinsic value and one which writers go through for several goals. Following are some summarized possible writing purposes suggested by Grabe (2000):

- Writing to control the mechanical production aspect.

- Writing to list, fill-in, repeat, and paraphrase.
- Writing to understand, remember, and summarize simply, and extend notes to oneself.
- Writing to learn, solve problem, summarize, and synthesize.
- Writing to critique, persuade, and interpret.
- Writing to create an aesthetic experience, to entertain.

Stating these purposes in this particular order neither suggest any order of importance nor does it implicate a continuum of difficulty but it does imply that behind the process of writing that writers plunge to toward a final product are three broad purposes. The first purpose is to reinforce and augment already acquired knowledge (some previously-learned language systems such as grammar.) The second one is writing to communicate with a focus on writing as a skill itself not as an adjunct to other skills. And a final purpose where writers set both their ideas and pens free to produce texts of artistic nature (creative writing). So, both human knowledge in language and mastery of communication are enriched by writing (Birsh 2002) which is neither necessarily inborn nor tacit since there is always a way to learn it through the use of effective strategies, practice (Oshima & Hogue 1999), and formal teaching and instruction as claimed by Carson (2001: 191) who also points out that, “writing is an ability that is typically developed in formal instructional settings, and a skill most closely related to educational practices.”

Carson (2001:191) goes further to argue that models of teaching and learning writing in EFL/ESL contexts can be contributed to and developed through a comprehension of theories in second language acquisition "because L2 competence underlies L2 writing in a fundamental way. " Hence, though there exist qualitative differences between the two, Carson identifies four areas of intersection between L2 acquisition and L2 writing theories whose understanding can contribute significantly to teaching non English speaking students how to write.

First, the L2 writer's language is characterized by being erroneous. Such errors are inevitable, essential features and evidence of the language the writer is about to acquire. This language, called inter-language, has been a major concern for many theories of L2 acquisition. Second, in the acquisition of a second language are involved some social and cognitive processes which the development of the writing skill also seems to entail. Third, both L2 learners and L2 writers exhibit different levels of achievement. What accounts for such differences seems to be the same for both parties (individual differences, sociopsychological factors, personality, cognitive style, hemisphere specialization, learning strategies, etc.) The last area where L2 acquisition and L2 writing overlap is the effectiveness of formal instruction in acquiring both of them. In short, "it is clear that second language acquisition theory is, and will continue to be, relevant to models of how we teach and how students learn to write in a second language"(Carson 2001:192).

According to Hedge (1998), writing is a very important, yet neglected, aspect of language and it was not until recently that findings of research in writing have started to offer insights into what good writers do. She further claims that in the ESL/EFL contexts, the teaching of such a skill is confounded by the fact that L2 writers often get confused because they, sooner or later, recognize the existence of differences between writing conventions in their L1 and L2. Hyland (2003:31), provides an inclusive, but not an exhaustive, list of such differences between L1 and L2 writing:

- Different linguistic proficiencies and intuition about language.
- Different learning experiences and classroom expectations.
- Different sense of audience and writer.
- Different preferences for ways of organizing texts.
- Different writing processes.
- Different understandings of text uses and the social value of different texts.

In a review of seventy two studies comparing L1 writing and L2 writing research, Silva (1993:669) notes that “L2 writing is strategically, rhetorically, and linguistically different in important ways from L1 writing.” Teachers, then, need to consider the implications offered by such differences for teaching L2 writing in order to meet the classroom expectations and make the teaching practices and assessment procedures as fair and effective as possible (Hyland 2003).

In sum, the idea that can be derived from this section is that writing is a means of communication per se. In ESL/EFL contexts, such a skill entails the acquisition of a set of competences that underlie knowledge in different language systems, and the use of graphic codes to transfer ideas into written texts. Writers go through such a complex process to achieve a number of purposes as to communicate thoughts, to convince and persuade, or to provoke feelings and emotions if aesthetic aspects of language are employed. Moreover, the idea that the ability to write well is a gift that one may or may not be innately born with is a mistaken one. Many good writers could develop this skill through practice and effective formal teaching. Therefore, ESL/EFL students need to be instructed and provided with practice activities to develop their writing skill in order to meet their needs and ensure their success in school life and other settings as well.

1.2. Approaches to Teaching Writing

Writing is a particularly highly-demanding and difficult skill for both native speakers and non-native speakers. Richards and Renandya (2002: 303) claim that “There is no doubt that writing is the most difficult skill for L2 students to master”, and Nunan(2000:271) thinks that it is an enormous challenge to produce “a coherent, fluent, extended piece of writing” in a second language. Thus, the fact that developing the writing skill is not an easy task imposes the idea that teaching such a skill is not easy, either. Therefore, many ESL/EFL theorists,

researchers, and teachers have been endeavouring to come up with the most effective theories, approaches, and models of teaching L2 writing.

According to Zamel(1985:32), “ESL writers who are ready to compose and express their ideas use strategies similar to those of native speakers of English.” This accounts to the fact that the teaching approaches in English dominant countries influenced to a large extent pedagogies and teaching approaches in non-English dominant ones (Li Waishing 2000) . Such approaches have developed from different theories and researches over time in different geographical settings. While some researchers (e.g. Raimes,1991) consider them as being successive with one emerging out of the other, and one replacing the other, other researchers (Hyland, 2003; Harmer, 2004), propose to view these approaches as “complementary and overlapping perspectives, representing potentially compatible means of understanding the complex reality of writing” (Hyland 2003:2). Inspired by the work of Berlin (1982, 1987, 1988), Johns(1990) argues that in any approach to teaching writing there must be consideration of four elements central to writing: the writer, the reader, reality and truth (i.e. argumentation), and the text itself. She further claims that any approach or theory that lacks consideration of any of these elements cannot be considered as such.

1. 2. 1. The Product-Oriented Approach

Following theories of Behaviorism, teaching writing within this approach entails the establishment of habit formation and imitation. Student writers are asked to imitate already prescribed texts, models, or exemplars that constitute good writings in their teachers’ views (Coffin et al 2003) in order to give them insights into how to correctly arrange words into clauses, clauses into sentences, and sentences into larger discourse units (Hyland, 2003). The focus then, as the name of the approach under discussion suggests, is on final products to ensure that students achieve language fluency. This approach emphasizes accuracy and correctness at the expense of the writer, his ideas and decisions, and the process through

which texts are produced. Thus, according to Li WaiShing(2000), it is often deemed a mere grammar exercise rather than composing. Silva (1999:3) points out that:

- The writer is simply a manipulator of previously learned language structures.
- The reader is the ESL teacher in the role of editor or proof reader, not especially interested in quality of ideas or expressions but primarily concerned with formal linguistic features.
- The text becomes a collection of sentence patterns and vocabulary items.

This approach (also called text-focused approach) neglects the role of the writer as the text producer, his ideas and intentions, and the various stages of the writing process. The teacher's role is limited to be the spotter of errors, the source of directives and rigid rules, the corrector of final drafts, but not a facilitator of the learning-to-write activity since he "often ends up the writing session abruptly without providing the feedback to help students revise their work." (Li Waishing 2000:51). The main pedagogical activities used in such an approach, as suggested by Hyland (2003) range from fill in the gaps, substitution, and reordering exercises to imitation of parallel texts and writing from tables and graphs.

1. 2. 2. The Genre-Oriented Approach

The genre approach to writing has taken place in different parts of the world. Some researchers (e.g. Silva,1990; Li Waishing,2000; Coffin et al,2003) consider it as a type of, an extension to the product-based approach, whereas other L2 researchers deem it a distinct paradigm in the teaching of writing (e.g.Johns,1990; Raimes,1991; Hyland,2003; Paltridge,2004).This approach focuses on "teaching particular genres that students need control of in order to succeed in particular settings"(Paltridge 2004:1). Attention in this approach is paid to formal discourse characteristics of texts and the particular contexts in which these texts are produced. Incorporating textual and contextual aspects of a particular

genre, the writer's aim becomes to achieve the same communicative purpose or function exhibited by other texts belonging to this particular genre. Hence, the idea that any piece of language is meant to be functional and that writers write in certain genres to fulfil certain functions are the focal points underlying this approach. In a more detailed way, Hyland (2003:18) says, "The writer is seen as having certain goals and intentions in certain relationships to his or her readers, and certain information to convey, and the forms of a text are resources used to accomplish these."

Hence, the writer is the producer of a text whose language and form adhere to the audience (the community) for which it is written; the reader is a member of this community- not necessarily the teacher- whose reaction to the text determines whether or not this text's function has been fulfilled. The teacher's role is more or less the same as in product-based approaches with his feedback occurring on the final text and limited to the correction of grammatical shortcomings.

1.2.3. The Process-Oriented Approach

The process-based approach to teaching writing has emerged from the coupling of two-parent theories: Cognitivism and Expressivism. In adopting the Cognitivists' view, attention is primarily paid to the cognitive and mental processes involved in writing, while in adopting the expressivists' view, the emphasis is on students' abilities, encouraging them "to take power over their own prose" (Johns 1990:25). So, the writer as the text generator and the process he goes through to generate this text are the two foci of this approach. The writer, the reader, and the text: the elements which constitute Grabe and Kaplan's rhetorical triangle (1996) are described by Silva (1990) as follows.

- The writer is the centre of attention- someone engaged in the discovery and expression of meaning.

- The reader, focusing on content, ideas and negotiation of meaning, is not preoccupied with form.
- The text is a product –a second derivative concern, whose form is a function of its content and purpose.

The text form is not neglected but it is not the primary concern. The lion's share in this approach goes to the different stages of the writing process along with which have emerged a number of concepts central to the process approach: multiple drafts, revisions, peer feedback, teacher as facilitator...,etc(Raimes 1991). The foci of this orientation are indicated by Hyland (2003:10) as follows, "The process approach to writing teaching emphasizes the writer as an independent producer of texts, but it goes further to address the issue of what teachers should do to help learners perform a writing task."

In other words, by adopting this approach in the writing class, teachers come to consider what their students can do (write), pay more attention to how these students approach the writing task moving through different stages of writing, and offer the writers opportunities to improve their writing through providing effective feedback and allowing time for revisions. The main pedagogical techniques employed in a process-oriented class, as suggested by Hyland (2003), include: brainstorming, planning, multiple drafts, peer collaboration..., etc.

1.3. Stages of Writing

The process approach is the one that emphasizes both cognitive and discursal aspects of writing to help students understand how to generate ideas and how to develop them in a written structure that adheres to both the writer's intentions and the reader's needs. Its concern is to make students aware of the way writers make decisions as they write going through the different stages of writing. The stage-divisions the writing process falls into and the terminology used to define them differ to some extent from one theorist to another (e.g.

Hedge, 1998; White&Arndt, 1999; James, 2003; Nation, 2009). But it is worth saying that whatever divisions are suggested and whatever names they are given, these stages seem to underlie the same cognitive and metacognitive processes involved in the production of written prose for L1 and L2 writers alike. Williams (2003:101) originated the idea that “these stages are hypothesized as universals which means that, at least to some degree, all writers are to engage assumingly in these stages.”

According to Nation (2009) who provides a seven part division for the process of writing, writing is not necessarily a linear act moving from one stage to the next following a certain strict order; the stages of writing are better thought of as recursive since writers can move freely from one stage to the other. Further, he claims that in any of these “sub-processes”, author students may receive help from their teacher who is assumed to locate sources of difficulty which potentially inhibit students’ writings especially that, “The main goal of a process approach is to help learners improve their skills at all stages of the process”(Nation, 2009:114). In this dissertation, the division provided for the writing process is a generic one including other sub-stages. It is the one taught at Mentoury University.

1.3.1. Prewriting

Prewriting is the stage in which writers spend a good amount of time generating ideas and organizing them into a particular plan before they write. Students need to be clear about the message they want to convey, they should be aware of their purpose (what they want to achieve through their writing,) and they should consider their audience/reader (their knowledge, background, expectations...), since the choice of ideas, organization and language depends on these factors. According to D’Aoust (1986:94) ,prewriting activities are the key to generating ideas and planning what to say :“Prewriting activities generate ideas; they encourage a free flow of thoughts and help students to say it on paper. In other words,

prewriting activities facilitate the planning for both the product and the process” (qtd in Oskourt 2008:94).

The possible ways of approaching the generation of ideas include: brainstorming, free writing, asking questions, listing, visualizing, etc. After writers have generated ideas about their topic, they focus their ideas on a main point and develop a plan, a framework, for the paragraph or the essay they are going to write.

1.3.2. Writing

Writing or drafting is the stage where real writing takes place. It is in this stage that writers flesh out the skeletal framework they have already put. It is the stage where writers move from the abstract (ideas) to the concrete (written text) and as White and Arndt (1991:99) suggest, is the stage where “the writer passes from the ‘writer based’ writing to the ‘reader based’ writing in which the concerns of the reader should now begin to assume more significance.” In other words, the audience analysis that writers have done in the prewriting stage prepares them to decide on what they should or should not include to meet their reader’s needs.

1.3.3. Post Writing

Post writing (the revising and editing stage) is the stage that allows the writers to critically examine the first draft, along with feedback from teacher or peers, and make the necessary changes since “no piece of writing is ever perfect the first time” (Oshima& Hogue 1999, 10).

White and Arndt (1991) state that the ultimate goal of this stage is to “enrich the repertoire of linguistic resources which are the essential tools for writing” (1991:137). The idea of recursiveness mentioned before is most reflected at this phase as, in some cases, students have to reconsider some prewriting decisions. So, it is in this stage that writers can make changes at both form and content levels of their first drafts: they may reformulate ideas

and structure; correct lexical, grammatical, and syntactic errors; incorporate new ideas; etc. Nation (2009) calls for the importance of different types of feedback in the overall improvement of students' writing especially if intervening at this stage saying, "Learners can be encouraged to edit through the feedback they get from their classmates, teacher, and other readers" (2009,120) .

1.4. The Teacher's Role in the Process

One of the most valuable issues central to the process approach is the role of teachers in improving the writing skill. That is to say, the teacher's main role shifts from being the source of authority to that of facilitating the learning task and to helping students produce well structured compositions by teaching them a step by step process approach. As argued by Ken Hyland (2003,10), "The process approach to teaching writing emphasizes the writer as an independent producer of texts, but it goes further to address the issue of what teachers should do to help learners perform a writing task." In his book '*How to Teach Writing*', Harmer (2004) identifies five roles for writing teachers: teacher as demonstrator, teacher as motivator, teacher as supporter, teacher as responder, and teacher as evaluator. The two last teacher tasks i.e. responder and evaluator are grouped under one category 'feedback provider' in another book by the same author (Harmer, 2000: 261) . It is his belief that,

Giving feedback on writing tasks demands special care. Teachers should respond positively and encouragingly to the content of what the students have written. When offering correction teachers should choose what and how much to focus on based on what students need at this particular stage of their studies, and on the tasks they have undertaken.

1.5. Written Feedback

1.5.1. Definition of Feedback

Drawing from theories of classroom psychology, Drown (2009) provides a generic definition of the term feedback. For him, feedback appears when "the output of a system

becomes an input to the same system causing the system to respond dynamically to its previous products” (2009:407). That is to say, feedback does not occur randomly, but it is rather part of a complex system of other subsystems which are interrelated and mutually influenced by each other. This system is made up of the feedback source or producer, the feedback itself and the feedback recipient. Feedback is inevitably influenced by its source, yet it is meant to influence its recipient making him change his prior products. In relation to the learning context, Drown (2009) views feedback both as a response to learners’ productions, be oral or written language, and an indicator of how successfully an objective of the teaching-learning activity has been accomplished. Feedback, then, has as effects both permitting learners to enhance their comprehension quality and promoting knowledge execution and skill.

Feedback is therefore deemed, as argued by Hyland (2003), an inseparable, integral and central element in language learning generally and in learning to write particularly. It is the input and means that provides writers with a set of information such as the reader’s needs and expectations and whether students’ writings have met such expectations (Harmer, 2004) and more importantly, it “offers an additional layer of scaffolding to extend writing skills, promote accuracy and clear ideas, and develop an understanding of written genres.” (Hyland, 2003:207)

Hyland and Hyland (2006) consider feedback as a social act since it embraces all the aspects (context, participants, medium, goal) that, together, give any communicative act its identity. For them, like other communicative acts, feedback occurs in a context of a particular kind (institutional, pedagogical) ; it appears between participants of particular identities (teacher/peer/learner) ; it is delivered by a particular medium (peer, conference, written comments) ; and it is designed to accomplish certain educational, pedagogical and social

purposes. A consideration of all these aspects would, therefore, contribute to an appropriate interpretation of feedback.

Many researchers advocate the importance of feedback in improving the writing skill (e.g. Leki(1990a); Hyland(2003); Ferris(2003); Harmer(2004); Hyland & Hyland(2006)). Leki (1990a) for instance, highlights the fact that producing a well written text in a second language often constitutes a hassle to students, consuming their time and intellectual efforts alike. She, therefore, claims that feedback on students' writings becomes the least of teacher's reactions these students need and should have in order to improve their skill of intent. Ferris (2003) represents another proponent of the crucial role plaid by feedback in improving writing. She argues that such a way of responding has not only a short term effect but also a long term one. The former occurs as immediate improvement in writers' texts in subsequent drafts (if any are required) ; the latter occurs as a progress in students' writings over time. Sommers (1982) states three main purposes for which teachers provide feedback on writing:

- To inform writers as to whether their written products have conveyed their intended meanings;
- To give the student writer a sense of audience (their interests and expectations) and make them ameliorate their writings accordingly.
- To offer students an impetus for revision, for without comments from a critical reader, writers will feel no need to revise thoroughly if they ever think about revision.

However, for feedback to be effective and meet the designed purposes, Li Waishing (2000) introduces four criteria he considers basic assumptions in feedback of any type:

- Feedback must be integrated within the process of writing.
- It must be presented as an input and impetus for revision of writing.
- It must be formative (detailing the writer's strengths and weaknesses as well) , not summative (taking the form of grades, marks, or global comments such as good, bad, etc.)

- It must be appropriate: corresponding to the student-writer's background knowledge, level of learning, abilities, and so forth.

1.5.2. Types of Feedback

There is no single way for providing feedback on writing, nor is the teacher the only source of it. Feedback, therefore, falls into different types according to who gives it and how. Conferencing, peer feedback, and teacher written comments constitute the most common feedback types cited in many researchers' works (e.g. Zamel(1985); Ferris(2003); Hyland(2003); Harmer(2004)). Throughout this dissertation reference is made to these three types with a focus on the last category since it represents the main concern of this research.

1.5.2.1. Conferencing

Conferencing (also referred to as oral or face-to-face feedback) is one way of responding to students' writings in which a two party conversation between students and teacher takes place in order to discuss and deal with written products. It is defined by Hyland & Hyland (2006,5) as "an approach lauded by L1 researchers as a dialogue in which meaning and interpretation are constantly being negotiated by participants and as a method that provides both teaching and learning benefits." Conferencing, as claimed by Hyland (2003), not only opens the door for teacher-student interaction but it goes further to offer teachers insights into their students' needs and give these students opportunities to negotiate meanings and clarify ambiguities. For a writing conference to be successful, writers need not play the role of passive recipients but they should be active participants in such a conversation as well. This can be achieved by giving them a chance to discuss, negotiate and ask questions about their writings' strengths and weaknesses (Hyland, 2003).

Advocates of oral conference on writing (Zamel(1985); Mahili (1994); Murray(2002)) acknowledge its usefulness since both teacher and students can benefit from the opportunities of "immediacy," "negotiation," and "clarification" that this way of responding to writing

offers (Ferris:2003). Teachers are advised to adopt conferencing in favour of written comments because the former provides students with more focused and useable comments than the latter (Zamel:1985) and, unlike oral response, written comments are often vague, confusing and are only one “way communication” leaving the writer with no chance for discussion(Mahili,1994).

However, by studying their pros and cons, Hyland & Hyland (2006) observe that writing conferences are not successful in every writing class due to some defined reasons which Ferris(2003) also agrees with. First, employing such a feedback technique may require the student to master both the aural and oral skills to be able to understand the teacher's feedback content and discuss it as well. Second, since some students may have some impediments in interacting with their teachers even in informal settings, a formal discussion on writing would be impossible causing these students to accept blindly their teachers' suggestions. The third reason is basically related to teachers who, in addition to the need of suitable interaction skills, find themselves in need of considerable amounts of time to deal with each student's writing individually. These are precisely the shortcomings which push Ferris(2003) to disagree with the “zealous” proponents, as she describes them, of exclusive conferencing, to call on them to consider real life situations and constraints, and to suggest that conferencing is a possible rather than a required technique of providing feedback.

1.5.2.2. Peer Feedback

Different researchers have referred to peer feedback using different terms of the type: peer evaluation, peer editing, peer responses ...etc. All of these names, however, refer to the same kind of activity which emphasizes peer students' role in the process of writing. This type of feedback involves a kind of cooperation between students with each reading his peer's paper and making responses to it as a reader (Li Waishing, 2000). According to Leki (1992:169), peer evaluation provides a means whereby both students' drafts and their

awareness of what leads to good writing develop: “It is a part of the process approach to teaching and is widely used in L1 and L2 contexts as a means to improve writers’ drafts and raise their awareness of readers’ needs” (qtd in Oskourt 2008:130).

Mahili (1994) believes that the idea of students receiving feedback from their mates is one that would contribute to writers’ recognition of different constituent features of good writing including grammatical and lexical accuracy, good content, ideas development, and clarity in writing. For her, this feedback delivering technique is of great use since it offers writers the opportunity to see their writing through the critics’ lens. Peer editing further initiates students to self-criticism and enables them to explore other writers’ products and become more aware of their own weaknesses. Li Waishing (2000: 55) sees that students “therefore learn more and become more confident as well.”

Leki (1990b) conducted a study investigating students’ beliefs about the usefulness of peer feedback. Twenty students who had been receiving feedback from their peers over a period of time were asked to answer two questions:

- 1) How useful was it to you to read other students’ papers?
- 2) How useful was it to you to read/hear other students’ comments on your papers?

Leki reported that in response to the first question, only seventeen students answered, with one negative and sixteen positive responses. The second question revealed more mixed answers with fifteen positive and five negative answers and two students were reported to give both positive and negative answers. Based on these findings and her own observation, Leki identified some problems with peer evaluation including unproductive responding behaviour and comments that are directive, dull or even unkind in nature. In another study at two U.S. colleges (by Zhang: 1995), eighty-one ESL students’ attitudes toward feedback from their peers were investigated. The researcher concluded that students preferred teacher feedback over peer feedback, but chose peer feedback over self evaluation. Comparing the

effectiveness of teacher feedback and peer feedback, Yang et al (2006) found that the former proved to be more effective and resulted in better improvement than the latter. They also found that the usefulness of peer feedback was acknowledged by students. Hyland (2003:199) therefore claims that despite its potential advantages, peer evaluation has been more welcomed by teachers than students who tend to prefer teacher feedback, and whose sense of security about their writing seems to derive solely from their teachers' comments: "Students themselves are rather ambivalent about the quality of their peer suggestions and many both mistrust them and fear ridicule due to their poor proficiency, generally preferring feedback from teachers."

It is suggested that when taking the role of editors, students may not be able to make comments of constructive nature (Urza, 1987) and are more likely to address surface errors than problems of meaning. Besides, inexperienced L2 students may find it hard to accept their peers' comments (Leki, 1990b); hence, there is a need for professional training of students as to enable them to cope with their peers' prose. Such training encourages a greater level of engagement within the writing task and offers a more helpful and concrete device for both student writer and student evaluator (Hyland & Hyland2006).

1.5.2.3. Teacher's Written Comments

Another way whereby teachers give feedback on students' written performances is written comments (written feedback, written commentary). These are considered by Li Waishing (2000) as the most common feedback delivering method for both teachers and students and which contribute to the overall improvement of student writing be it at form or content level. Not only are written comments the most common but they are also the most expected and welcomed feedback type by students. In this respect, Ferris (2003:41) notes that "this type of feedback may represent the single biggest investment of time by instructors, and it is certainly clear that students highly value and appreciate it." A similar idea is the one

introduced by Sommers (1982) who thinks that such comments constitute a challenge for teachers of writing since they have to address a number of issues such as, motivating students to revise and rewrite their work using the feedback, targeting areas of failure in students' learning, and making students understand and incorporate teachers' suggestions in their writings:

The challenge we face as teachers is to develop comments which will provide inherent reason for students to revise; it is a sense of revision as discovery, as a process of beginning again, as starting out new, that our students have not learned. We need to show our students how to seek, in the possibility of revision, the dissonances of discovery- to show them through our comments why new choices would positively change their texts, and thus, to show them the potential for development implicit in their writing.(Sommers 1982:156)

Assuming that the aspects of language actually taught in classroom are the ones teachers focus on when commenting on students' writing, Hyland (2003:3-18) introduces a list of the main foci of teacher written feedback. The six main foci of feedback adopted from him are: focus on language structures, focus on text functions, focus on creative expression, focus on writing process, focus on content, and focus on genre. However, Harmer (2004) distinguishes only two foci which provide the basis for a distinction between two types of written commentary: responding and correcting. Responding emphasizes the idea that the main concern of feedback is not primarily the accuracy of students' performance, but it is the content and design of their writing. Correcting, by contrast, is limited to an indication of what students fail to perform in different language aspects such as, grammar, syntax, concord, etc. For correcting to be effective, Ferris (2003) argues that teachers need to consider three factors: first, students should be made aware of the significance of correction in the process of writing; second, correction should be selective and focus on the most frequent errors rather than single ones; and third, feedback should be provided on preliminary drafts than final drafts. Hyland (2003) points out that for any feedback type to be effective, attention to what

individual students want from and the use they make of it must be paid. He, thus explains that, “Some students want praise, others see it as condescending; some want a response to ideas, others demand to have all their errors marked; some use teacher commentary effectively, others ignore it altogether.”(Hyland 2003:180)

Due to their high valued contribution to writing improvement, many researchers, (e.g. Ferris(2003); Ellis(2009); Irtis(2009)), acknowledge the importance of teacher’s written feedback; however for others, the usefulness of such comments has been and continues to be debatable, to the extent that some researchers,(for example, Sommers (1982); Zamel (1985); Truscott(1996)), suggest abandoning them altogether. Thus, because it constitutes the main emphasis of this study, a close look at what gleaned from previous researches about teacher written feedback is certainly needed.

1.6. Teacher Written Comments: The Gist of Research

Written feedback, its nature, form, effect, and usefulness have provoked a long-term controversy among many researchers over time. A key issue related to this type of feedback is the distinction between formative and summative feedback. The former takes the form of different comments, questions, suggestions, corrections, etc; and gives the teacher a chance to gather information on the progress of students over a period of time. The latter, in contrast, takes the form of grades, marks, letters, etc; and aims at determining student’s achievement at the end of an assignment (Leki, Cumming and Silva 2008). Many composition researchers (Sommers, 1982) advocate formative feedback over the summative one for grades are seen as an end in themselves and scarcely contribute to writing improvement (Mahili, 1994).

Another issue of contention that has captured the attention of theorists, researchers, and even teachers of writing is the focus of written feedback. In L2 contexts, the effectiveness of written comments that focus on error correction is deemed dubious, and the question of whether such feedback is beneficial to writing development is a controversial one. Sommers

(1982), for instance, was among the earliest opponents of error correction in response to students' writing. She claimed that by correcting errors, the teacher's purpose becomes an attempt to appropriate the student's text to a rigidly standardized pattern derived from the teacher's own beliefs; hence, the task of writing is hindered. Zammel (1985) argues that teachers of L2 writing tend to think of themselves as language teachers not as composition instructors. Thus, they tend to focus on surface level errors rather than on the writing content. Implicit in Zammel's claim is a suggestion for teachers to rein their focus on grammar; however, Truscott (1996) goes further to express his scepticism about grammar correction and suggests its abandonment altogether.

As for dealing with language errors spotted in writers' performance, Nation (2009) suggests adopting Zammel's idea (1985) of establishing priorities in responding to students' productions. That is to say, teachers should address content issues on early drafts and delay grammar based feedback to later ones. A twofold arguments of this idea of prioritizing feedback can be found in Sommers (1982) and Zammel (1985) who both think that there is no need to waste time correcting language errors in first drafts because in the course of rewriting their first drafts, students may add, delete, and rearrange ideas so that surface level errors are likely to disappear any way. More importantly, focusing on micro level errors may impede the students' focus on "macro level meaning".

The usefulness of such a "multistage" feedback lacks empirical evidence, yet surprisingly, many teachers have taken it as a must that they should not attend to language errors in first drafts (Ferris 2003). The most frequently cited study as a counter claim to feedback prioritisation is the one conducted by Fathman and Whally (1990) on seventy-two students. The researchers found that there was almost no difference in students' performances when only content feedback was given as opposed to when grammar and content feedback

were given at the same time. This is supposed to mean that grammar and content feedback can be provided separately or simultaneously with approximately the same effect(s).

While some researchers emphasize that writing should be uninhibited by language correction, others argue in favour of the need for correction since such errors often constitute a major impediment to L2 writers making it necessary for teachers to intervene (Hyland & Hyland 2006). Moreover, L2 students whose language is still developing need and expect grammar feedback on errors as a key to improving writing (Leki 1991; Ferris 2003).

Language errors should not be viewed as a sin but rather as an indicator of a lack of exposure to the target language (Leki 1991) and as nonstandard forms that need to be standardized through formal instruction (Eliis 2009). However, if such deviations from L2 norms are not corrected, they may be fossilized and may obscure meaning for readers (Ferris, 2003; Hyland, 2003). Thus, as claimed by Yates & Kenkel(2002); Ferris(2003) and Hyland (2003), because writing is meant to be primarily meaningful, any attempt to separate language forms from their meanings is deemed a false one as asserted by (Hyland, 2003:184-5) “Language is a resource for making meanings, not something we return to when we have worked out what we are going to say, and the two cannot be realistically separated when responding to writing.” Therefore, instead of abandoning error correction altogether or delaying it to later drafts, many composition researchers (e.g. Mahili(1994); Yates & Kenkel (2002); Clark et al (2003); Ferris(2003); Hyland(2003); Harmer(2004)) suggest that feedback should be selective, building on what is presently significant to students and giving attention to what has been taught in the classroom. Phrased differently, Yates and Kenkel (2002:45) make the point that “Teachers must approach commenting from the student perspective. This means remembering the grammatical and pragmatic knowledge which underlies the interlanguage constructions that occur in L2 learner texts.”

Another area of investigation related to written feedback is the form it takes. Ferris (2003) stresses the fact that the “substance” of written commentary is more important than its form; however, the ways in which feedback is given seem to affect both writer’s reactions to it and its effect on short and long term improvement in student writing. Considering the forms it takes, teacher written feedback falls within two categories:

-Direct feedback: when the correct forms are provided by teachers for students.

-Indirect feedback: when errors are merely indicated leaving the writers to solve the problem themselves.

Abu Qubeitha (2009) conducted a study which involved a total number of 102 participants divided into one control group and two experimental ones. The control group comprised twenty five participants and received no feedback; the first experimental group comprised forty four participants and received direct feedback; and the second experimental group comprised thirty three participants who received indirect feedback. The results of the study showed that students who received indirect feedback did better than both the control group and the direct feedback group. Similar findings were achieved in a similar study by Liu (2008:65) who states that “indirect correction enabled students to make fewer morphological errors with greater accuracy in new pieces of writing than did direct correction.” Comparing the effects of both direct and indirect feedback on some students’ writing, Iris (2009) ended up with a threefold conclusion: a) providing feedback on students’ writing is extremely important; b) direct feedback is time consuming for both teacher and student; c) feedback, then, need not be extensive to be effective.

Another issue central to studies about written feedback and L2 writing is whether to accompany negative feedback/correction with positive feedback/praise or not. Ellis (2009) highlights the importance of positive feedback in pedagogical settings due to the purposes it serves: on the one hand, it supports the learner; on the other, it fosters motivation to write

more and better. However, it seems that such type of commenting on writing has received little attention from writing researchers and teachers alike as explained by Raimes (2002:283), “We are so attuned to errors and so involved in ferreting them out that we attend to neglect to praise our students when they take a risk and try but get it wrong.” Some studies of L2 students’ attitudes to teacher commentary (Ferris 2003; Hyland & Hyland, 2006) show that students appreciate praising remarks but prefer constructive criticism over them. Students’ preferences, attitudes, and expectations of teacher written feedback are, therefore, extremely important and need to be considered; otherwise, the effectiveness of teacher feedback would lend itself to doubt since, as Leki (1991) notes, neglect of what student writers want from their teacher’s feedback would be “counterproductive” and discouraging.

1.6.1. Students’ Views on Teacher Comments

Written comments on written productions constitute one step forward on the way towards ‘writing competence’. However, the effectiveness of such feedback type turns to be dubious if not taken into account by text generators. Hyland (2003:179) determines a three way reaction to teachers’ responding behaviour in which students may either:

- Follow a comment closely in their revision (usually grammar correction).
- Use the feedback as an initial stimulus which triggers a number of revisions (such as comment on content or style).
- Avoid the issue raised by the feedback by deleting the problematic text.

The first and second aforementioned types of responding to teacher’s feedback are probably the reactions exclusively sought by teachers and the ones that indicate the effectiveness and success of their feedback. In order for feedback to be effective, however, many composition scholars call for the idea that attention should be paid to students’ views and preferences about the form and type of written feedback they believe help them to improve writing skills. Thus, though students’ beliefs and attitudes to feedback are still an

unexplored area of investigation, at least in Mentoury University, in this dissertation are reported some empirical studies concerning this issue.

One example study is the one conducted by Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) who investigated nine EFL Brazilian students' responses to their teacher's commentary. The students reported that the comments they usually received were mainly form-based focusing on grammar and mechanics, but that they would prefer feedback on other aspects of writing such as content and organization of ideas. Hence, it was these researchers' belief that there should be a student-teacher agreement about the focus/foci of feedback. Different results, conversely, were arrived to by Leki (1986 qtd in Leki 1991). Studying 100 students concerning their attitudes toward their teacher's error correction, Leki (1986; 1991) reports that these students wanted to receive correction on every error they made, and that they preferred indirect feedback to direct one. Parallel to these findings are the results Ferris(2003) reached by summarizing eleven studies conducted by different researchers on EFL students from different backgrounds at different points of time (Cohen,1987; Rade & Swales,1988; Cohen & Cavalcanti,1990; Mcurdy,1992; Arndt,1993; Enginarlar,1993; Hedgock & Lefkowitz,1994; Saito,1994; Brice,1995; Ferris,1995; Hedgock & Lefkowitz,1996). Consequently, Ferris (2003:103-4) concludes that:

- Students value and appreciate teacher feedback in any form (with a minority exception).
- Students in nearly all the studies expressed strong preferences for teacher feedback on language issues.
- In some of the studies, student writers also expressed appreciation for feedback on their ideas and composing strategies.
- When asked about specific types of error feedback, students seemed open to the idea of indirect correction rather than insisting that only the teacher could correct errors, and they felt that they would learn more if they collaborated with the teacher revision and correction processes...

In a related study at Mentoury University, 160 students were the subjects of a research investigating whether or not these students have a negative attitude towards the form-based feedback provided by their teacher in writing (Selman 2006). One main result obtained from this research is that students favoured error based feedback: “they [students] expressed their favourable attitudes towards correcting all their errors in use and usage.” (2006:125). Based on the findings of this study, the researcher concluded that teachers should find a way to determine properly their students’ attitudes and preferences, and adopt a feedback approach accordingly to guarantee that any feedback given is clear, understandable and thus, constructive. Considering these example findings, one can come to conclude that the way students view feedback differs from one situation to another, and even from one student to the next; however, the idea of student-teacher agreement about the feedback type introduced by Cohen and Cavalcanti(1990) seems best working if teachers want to see something else than fading light in students’ eyes.

Conclusion

The conclusion that can be drawn from this literature review is that neither developing nor teaching the writing skill are easy tasks. On the one hand, learning to write involves the development of a hybrid competence derived from knowledge in different language aspects. On the other hand, teaching to write involves the provision of prompt, insightful, and useful feedback that contributes to learners’ development of composition skills. However, the teacher’s job is not limited to providing feedback as such but it extends to ensure that the feedback provided has been taken into account. The next chapter will, thus, be devoted to an investigation of the practices of teachers of writing at Mentoury University, their perceptions of feedback, and how they ensure incorporating it in students’ writings.

Chapter Two: Data Collection and Analysis

Chapter Two: Data Collection and Analysis

Introduction

Chapter one of the present research was devoted to a review of literature about feedback on writing with a specific focus on teacher's written comments. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part is concerned with a detailed description of the research methodology, instruments, and procedures. The second part analyses the data yielded by the research instruments and presents their interpretation in the light of the research questions and hypothesis. This part also includes a section for pedagogical recommendations and further research.

2.1. Data Collection

2.1.1. Research Instruments

In order to answer the research questions and meet the aims of the present research, two research instruments were used: A questionnaire and an in-class writing test.

2.1.1.1. The Questionnaire: Participants, Description, and Administration

The questionnaire was designed in accordance with the literature reviewed in the first chapter of the present dissertation. It was addressed to teachers who taught or are currently teaching writing at UMC.

In order to elicit information about teachers' background, opinions, and attitudes concerning issues highlighted in the theoretical part, this questionnaire includes twenty four questions (see Appendix p 73). These questions are, in turn, grouped into four broad sections. The first five questions constitute the first section and are meant to gather information about

teachers' age, gender, degree held, work experience, and the subjects they teach. The second section includes question items seven, eight, nine, and ten which investigate the teachers approach to teaching the writing skill, the focus of their writing instruction, and some of their general practices in relation to feedback provision. The focus of the third section (question item ten through twenty) is narrowed down to an inquiry into teachers' written feedback on students' written performance: feedback importance, its effects, its application, its form, its focus and its types. The last section contains four questions related to students' attitudes and reactions to teachers' written commentary from the teachers' perspective.

The questionnaire was given directly to 20 teachers of writing at the Department of English at UMC; then, an agreement with the researcher and each teacher was made concerning the setting in which the questionnaires would be returned after completion. After collecting all the questionnaires, the answers of the respondents were coded and stored on a computer. The data were, then, converted into excel spread sheet form and analyzed.

2.1.1.2. The In-class Writing Test: Participants, Description, and Administration

This writing test is meant to investigate the use of a 'between-drafts' feedback as a technique to make the students respond appropriately to the written commentary given by instructors. Feedback given as such clearly implies that the draft, on which the feedback was given, is no longer the final one.

On the 22nd of April 2010 at 8:00, all the participants (30 students), who were third year students, were asked to write an in-class composition in 90 minute time. The topic they wrote about was "Is college education necessary?" and was chosen at random by their teacher. After the students had completed their first drafts, these were collected and then corrected by the teacher. Then, they were handed to the researcher who classified and analyzed both students' errors and teacher's feedback. One week later, the students got back their first drafts with the written comments on.

The teacher was requested by the researcher to ask her students to try to improve their essays. Then, the compositions that were rewritten (the final drafts), were collected and corrected. After that, the researcher chose but 15 papers to receive a detailed analysis of the changes made by the students, in order to check any progress in students' final drafts as a result of the rewriting activity. In order to achieve randomization in the choice of the sample papers, all the participants' names were written on small sheets of paper; then, a colleague master student was asked to choose 15 papers; the rest were thrown out.

2.2 Data Analysis

2.2.1. Questionnaire analysis

Question items one through five: Teachers' background

The return rate of the questionnaire was 100%. 40% of them were males and 60% females. They all held BA (Licence) and MA (Magister/ Master) degrees but only 20% held a PhD (doctorate) degree. All the teachers reported that they taught at least two modules or more. Many teachers (55%) had from ten to twenty years of work experience.

Question item six

-What type of approach do you follow in teaching the writing skill?

This is a close ended question that was designed firstly to meet the first aim set for this dissertation: to examine teachers' practices in the writing class. Secondly, as indicated in the literature review, each approach to teaching writing conveys a distinct understanding of the teacher's role in developing such a skill; hence, not only are teachers' overall practices affected by the approach chosen but also their feedback, its nature, form, and focus.

In response to this question, none of the respondents chose the Process Approach (option a) in which teacher's feedback is paid lip service. Only 10% of them chose the Genre Approach (option c) in which each piece of writing is viewed as an end-product allowing no

time for feedback processing. The highest percentage was 45% and was scored by both option (b) and (d). The process approach to teaching writing (option b) unquestionably allows time for the provision of contrastive feedback and its implementation. An eclectic approach to teaching writing (d) hopefully, offers the potential for such activities. These results are shown in figure1 below.

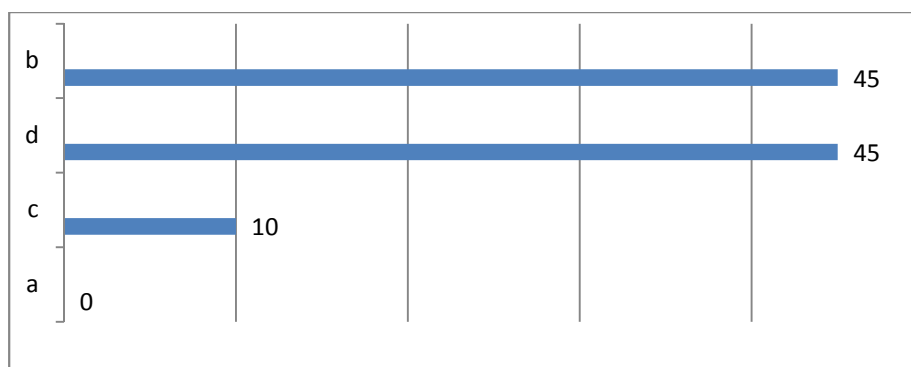


Figure 01: Question Item 6

Question item seven

This question asks the teachers about the most common problems noticed in students' writings and requires them to choose one the following options:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| a-Grammar mistakes | b-Interference of the mother tongue |
| c- Poor content/ideas | d-Poor vocabulary |
| e- Poor organization of ideas | f-Mechanics |

In response to this question item, all teachers opted for more than one answer. This clearly indicates that teaching writing is a difficult and highly-demanding task since it requires teachers to deal with too many problems in order to help learners develop adequate composition skills. Such problems are influential factors in teachers' feedback since the latter is designed and oriented according to the former.

As shown in figure 2 on the next page, grammar mistakes (option a) were reported by 95% of the teachers to be among the most common problems they often encountered;

followed by interference of the mother tongue (b) and mechanics (f) which were chosen by 75% and 70% of the teachers respectively. Though poor content/ ideas was the least detected problem opted for by only 45% of the teachers, their organization (option e) was deemed a major troublesome issue for more than half of them along with vocabulary, which scored the same rate(65 %).

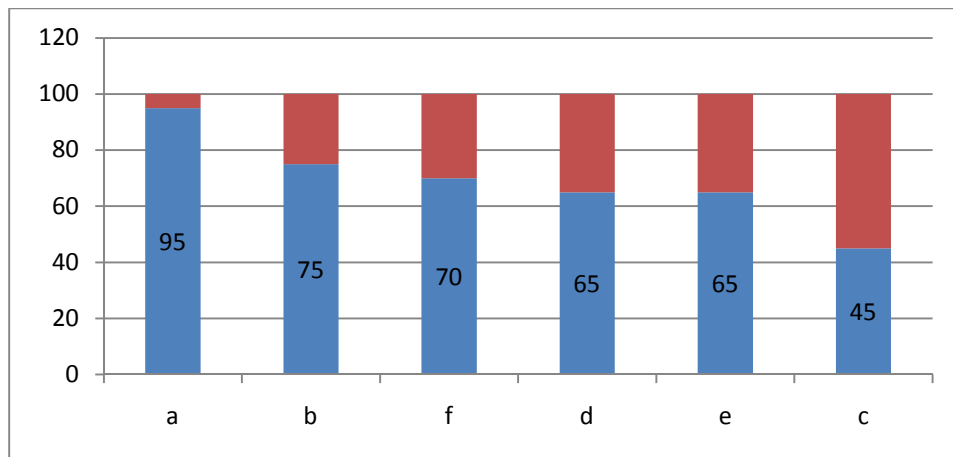


Figure 2: Question Item 7

Question item eight

The question runs as follows: To which of the following aspects do you attach a great importance in your writing instruction? (Rank them in order of importance)

a-Grammar

b-Vocabulary

c-Content

d-Mechanics

As the way it was phrased indicates, this question investigates the importance attached to major aspects of writing skills which also constitute the foci of instruction for teachers of writing. It, thus, requires the informants to rank the options provided (a, b, c, d) according to their order of importance from one to four.

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
a- grammar	25 %	45 %	25 %	5 %
b- vocabulary	5 %	35 %	35 %	25 %
c-content	55 %	10 %	15 %	20 %
d- mechanics	10 %	10 %	20 %	60 %

Figure 3: Question Item 8

As can be grasped from figure 3 above, the most important aspect of writing that constitutes the focus of instruction is content (option c). It was the most frequently classified first by the respondents with a rate of 55%, followed by Grammar with 45% and vocabulary with 35%. In the last position comes option (d), Mechanics, with 60%.

However, though it is assumed that the foci of writing instruction are determined by the instructor who designs his class based on learners' inadequacies, the situation these statistics revealed is enough a paradox. Interestingly, what was considered the most important writing aspect by the teachers (content) was the least cited as a problem in students' writing (Q 7). Moreover, though option (d), Mechanics, was among the top writing problems in question 7, it, surprisingly, occupies the last position among the foci of instruction.

Question item nine

This is a two-part question. The first part asks the teachers whether or not they require their students to write multiple drafts. This is a technique that emerged along with the Process Approach to teaching writing and whose proponents (Ferris2003) acknowledge its contribution to writing improvement. The second part of the question requires the teachers to justify their choices (Why/ Why not?). The responses showed that 55% of the teachers said "Yes" to multiple drafts whereas 45% of them chose "No".

Following further analysis of the answers the respondents provided, it was found that 55% of the teachers who do not apply the multi-draft technique traced that to the lack of time experienced at UMC. Fewer rates were provided by teachers who preferred not to justify their answers or to say that each piece of writing was deemed a final product that they had to correct any way. On the other hand, the teachers who opted for “Yes” and constituted the majority of teachers provided a wider range of the reasons behind their choice. Their answers could be grouped into the following categories:

-Multiple drafts are a basic component of the writing process; a view supported by teachers who follow the Process Approach.

-Multiple drafts are very useful in the sense that they provide learners with ample opportunities to review, revise, and polish up their compositions. In other words, they are twofold use: to manipulate and refine the writing skill.

-Not only are multiple drafts beneficial for students but they also help teachers analyze the way students make revisions; thus, they enable the instructors to monitor their students’ progress.

The statistics revealed by the present question allow for the conclusion that the majority of teachers at UMC are aware of the usefulness of multiple drafts as asserted by one of them, *“Yes, to experience the process; to make them [students] know how papers can be improved with each new draft; to make them focus on different aspects of language, each in the appropriate step.”* However, though, unfortunately, some teachers were deprived from the use of the multi-draft technique, this was primarily traced to a lack of time not to a lack of awareness of its importance. For these teachers, their comments on written prose appeared inexorably but on final drafts.

Question item ten

Question ten is a follow-up to the previous one; it requires the participants who answered “Yes” in response to question nine to specify the draft they provide feedback on

- a- First
- b- Intermediate
- c- Final
- d- All of them

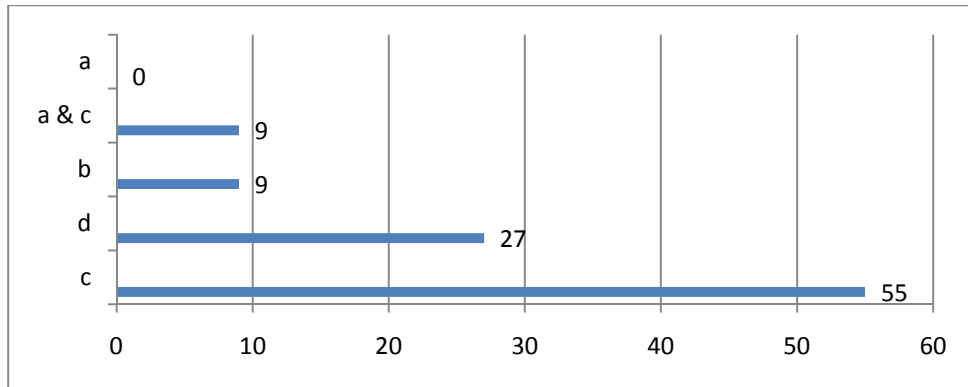


Figure 4: Question Item 10

As figure 4 exhibits, option (c), in which feedback occurs on final drafts, got the highest percentage with 55%, followed by option (d) with 27%; then, comes the lowest rate, 9%, which was scored by both option (b) and an eclectic answer (a & c). So, the results obtained from responses to this particular question and the previous one go in line with what the writer of this dissertation expected: that the overwhelming majority of teachers of writing delay feedback provision to final drafts. This, however, raises the question about whether such a feedback is beneficial or not; whether it can be processed by students or not.

Question item eleven

The reason behind putting this question was to find out teachers’ opinions about how important is feedback provision in teaching writing. They had, then, to opt for one of the following options:

- a- Very important
- b- Important

- c- Moderately important
- d- Of little importance
- e- Unimportant

There was a complete accord among the respondents in answering this question. They all agreed that feedback provision is important in teaching writing. Their answers ranged from Important (option b) with a rate of 20% to Very important (option a) with a rate of 80%. These findings which obviously emphasize the teachers' strong belief in the strong relation between their feedback and the development of composition proficiency are displayed in figure 5 below.

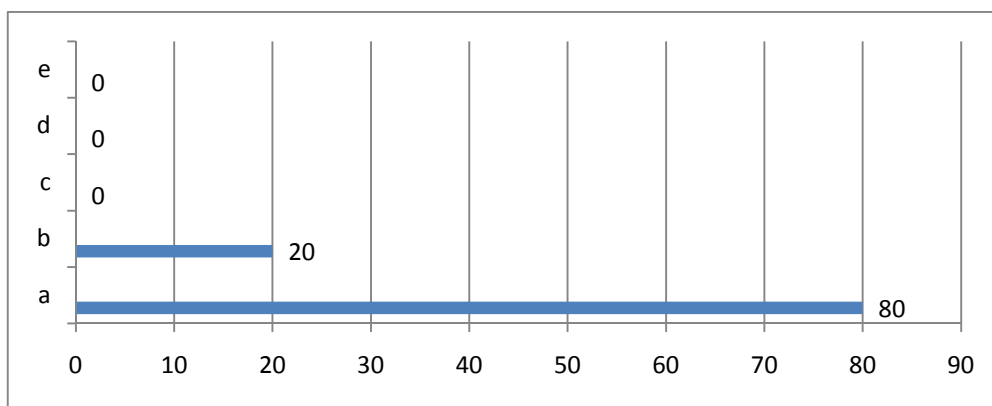


Figure 5 Question Item 11

Question item twelve and thirteen

Because questions twelve and thirteen are closely related, the researcher chose to discuss them under the same item. To start with, question 12 was set as a further inquiry about teachers' beliefs concerning feedback in general, and its effects in particular. The two effects suggested here (revision and writing improvement) were adopted from Ferris (2003) who, as mentioned in the previous chapter, referred to them using a different terminology (the short-term and long-term effect, respectively). Question 13, on the other hand, was a follow-up to question 12 and was phrased as follows: How often do you ask your students to redraft their first drafts using your feedback?

The respondents, thus, had to choose one of these answers: (a) Always, (b) Very often, (c) Sometimes, (d) Rarely, and (e) Never.

So, question 13 was designed to ask the teachers about how frequently their students practised redrafting activities using the received feedback. Redrafting was considered by Ferris (2003) as a technique teachers can use to achieve the short term effect for which feedback was designed. However, though 100% of the teachers agreed on the two effects suggested for feedback in response to question 12, question 13 revealed more distributed statistics. The highest percentage (40%) was scored by option (c), followed by 35% for option (b), 20% for option (d) and only 5% for option (a). These results, therefore, clearly reflect diversity in teachers’ opinions and even their uncertainty about the usefulness of redrafting and its implementation as a way to revise and process feedback. More details can be obtained from figure 6.

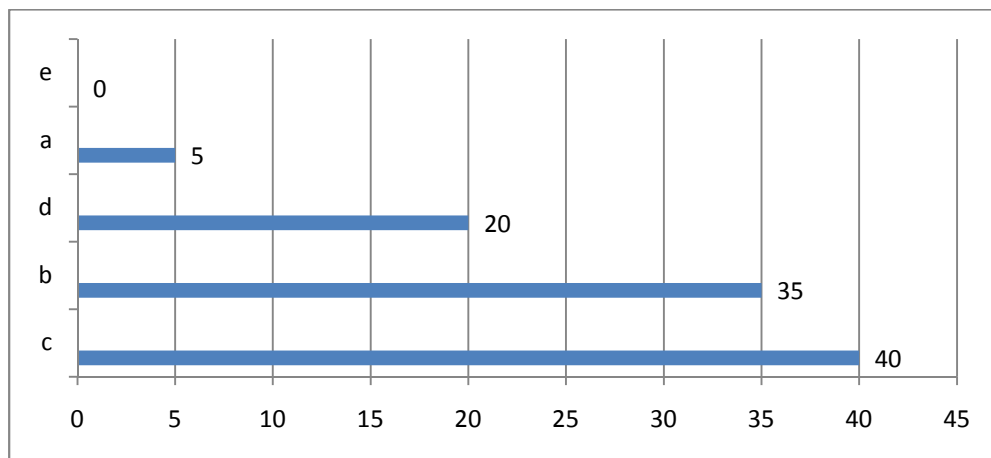


Figure 6: Question Item 13

Question item fourteen

Question item fourteen was an open-ended one: What form does your feedback take?

- a- Written comments
- b-Conferencing/Oral comments
- c- Marking
- d-Others.....

In answering this question, the respondents would provide insights into the techniques they used in their feedback delivery; whether they used one of the suggested techniques exclusively or not; and whether there were other techniques used for such an activity.

As shown in figure 7 below, the majority of teachers opted for more than one answer; 95% of them said that they used written comments (option a), 75% said that they used conferencing (option b), and 30% used marking (option c). As far as option (d) is concerned, only two teachers opted for it; the first suggested “whole class discussion”; the second suggested the use of symbols which was considered as a form of written comments in the previous chapter.

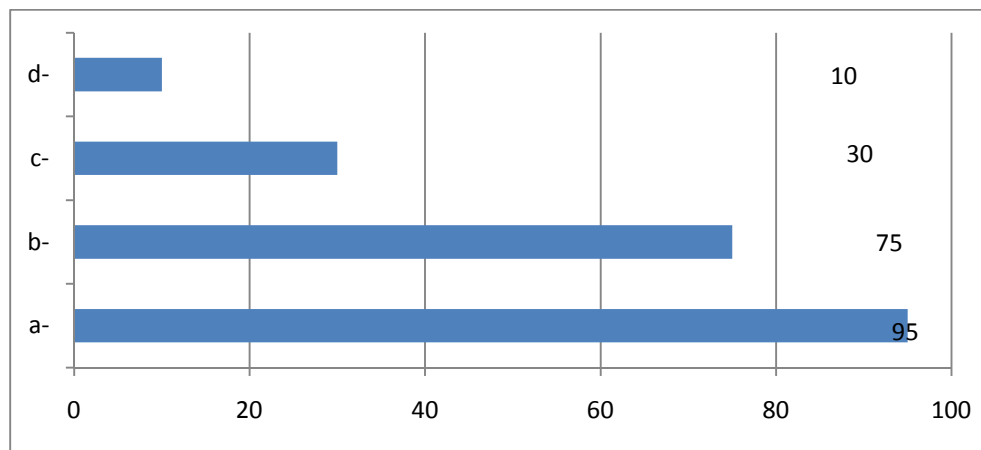


Figure 7: Question Item 14

The statistics displayed in the previous figure (7) indicate that teachers seldom use one particular technique exclusively. However, although written comments have been and continue to be debatable (as indicated in the literature review), they are the most often used, the most prevailing type of teachers’ feedback.

Question item fifteen

Question 15 explores the substance, the components and the foci of teachers’ written comments. It attempts to find out whether the teachers focus on surface-level aspects of writing suggested by option (a) (Grammar and mechanics), or on meaning-level aspects

suggested by option (b) (content). Moreover, it also provides the respondents with a third option (c) to suggest any other component/focus of their feedback.

Similar to previous questions, the responses for this question were transferred into statistical terms: 75% was the highest rate and was scored by the informants who preferred to choose both answer (a) and answer (b) together. Much lesser rates went for option (a) with 15%, option (b) with 5%, and option (c) with 5% as well.

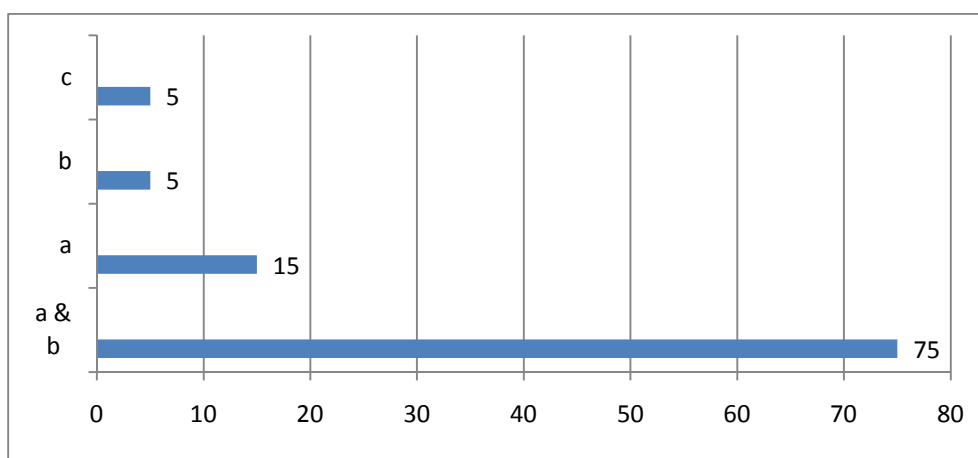


Figure 8: Question Item 15

Both figure 8 above and the statistical results obtained from answers to this question clash with Zammel's claim (1985) referred to in the first chapter. She takes for granted that L2 teachers tend to think of themselves as language teachers not as composition teachers because they tend to focus on surface-level errors at the cost of the writing content. Teachers of writing at UMC, however, extend their perception, and therefore, their orientation and implementation of feedback to include different components be it at surface or at meaning level. In short, the fact that writing is a hybrid skill imposes the need for feedback that is hybrid in nature.

Question item sixteen

When you give feedback, you usually focus on:

- a.** the students' background knowledge (only what they have been taught in the classroom)

b. all aspects of the writing skill?

This question item further investigates the foci of teachers' feedback and provides insights into their actual practices as far as feedback provision is concerned. Investigated here is the use of 'selective feedback', suggested by some researchers (Hyland(2003), Harmer (2004), and which was made explicit by option (a).

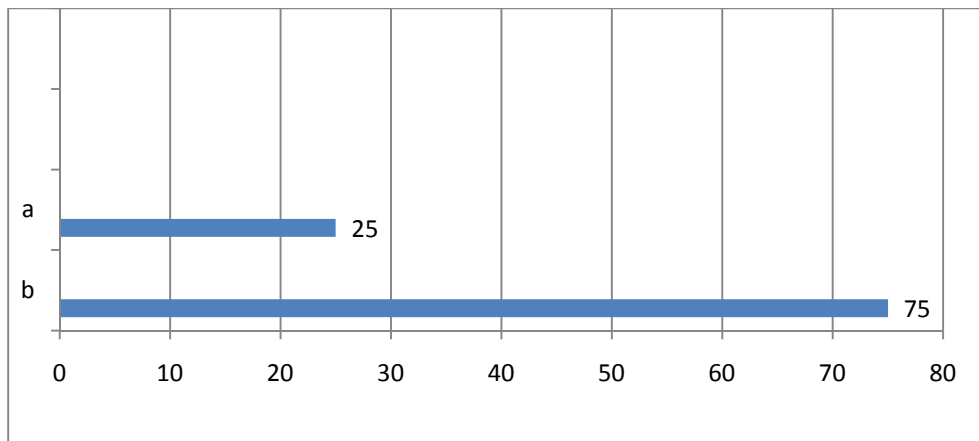


Figure 9: Question Item 16

As displayed by figure 9, only 25% of the respondents opted for selective feedback. The rest of them (75%) said that they focused on all aspects of the writing skill when they gave feedback. Such results allow for one-way interpretation: though teachers consider the students' background knowledge, their feedback on written prose usually focuses on all aspects of the writing skill (examples are discussed in the following question item). In other words, teachers' comments include but are not limited to composition aspects taught in class. Selective feedback, therefore, was not much welcomed by teachers of writing at UMC.

Question item seventeen

This question was designed as a follow-up to the previous one. It requires the respondents who opted for answer (b) in question (16) to give some examples of any other aspects they consider while providing feedback.

Consequently, all the teachers who were asked to provided some examples which, interestingly, revealed a significant unanimity. Thus, the respondents' suggestions for types of feedback based on its focus could be grouped into four broad categories. These categories were arranged from the most general to the most specific as follows:

-Feedback determined by students' areas of weaknesses.

-Feedback on common mistakes among students, and on mistakes that may constitute a major impediment to the understanding of written products.

-Feedback on critical thinking, adequate content, adequate organization of ideas, and adequate rhetorical organization.

-Feedback on vocabulary, word choice, diction, and register.

Regarding the writing aspects included in the curriculum designed at UMC which were detailed in the introductory part of this dissertation, it becomes reasonable that the teachers tended to consider others. This is never to criticize the syllabus but it is because some basic components of writing (e.g. word choice, critical thinking) cannot possibly be planned to be taught.

Question item eighteen

After investigating the focal points of their feedback (Q 15 & 16), the informants were asked the following question: Which of the previously mentioned types of feedback (Q15) do you think benefit your students most? Why?

So, although findings of question 15 assured the use of 'hybrid' feedback focusing on grammar and mechanics as well as content, the teachers were further asked about their opinions concerning the most useful type of feedback. They were also required to justify their choices.

The teachers' responses revealed that 45% of them opted for feedback on grammar and mechanics (option a); an equal rate (45%) opted for grammar and mechanics (option a) along with content (option b); 5% opted for content only; and 5% chose option (d), others.

The statistics clearly indicate that there is a little harmony in the teachers' opinions concerning the most useful type of feedback. On the one hand, the respondents who supported the first type (option a) justified their answer saying that such surface-level elements are the key to shape and structure meanings; thus, if they are affected, the meaning of any written piece will be lost. This argument seems reasonable considering the findings of question 7 which indicated that students had problems with surface-level skills most.

On the other hand, the other view that scored an equal percentage was justified as well. For these teachers, writing is worth thinking of as a dichotomous notion built upon both micro-level and macro-level aspects. That is to say, surface-level and meaning-level elements are complementary and cannot be separated as asserted by one of the teachers supporting this view, *"All of them are equally important because writing is (a-) form and (b-) content; one cannot go without the other."*

Question item nineteen

How do you usually comment on errors you spot in your students' writings?

- a. Indicate where the error is and correct it for the students.
- b. Indicate where the error is, what type it is, and let the student himself correct it
- c. Indicate where the error is using symbols and let the student discover its type and correct it
- d. Others: please, specify.....

This question aims to elicit information about the teachers' recurrent practices concerning written comments provision. More specifically, it inquires the teachers about the form/shape their written comments usually take. This is, actually, an issue that has constituted

an area of contest for many composition researchers mentioned previously in the present research (Chapter One).

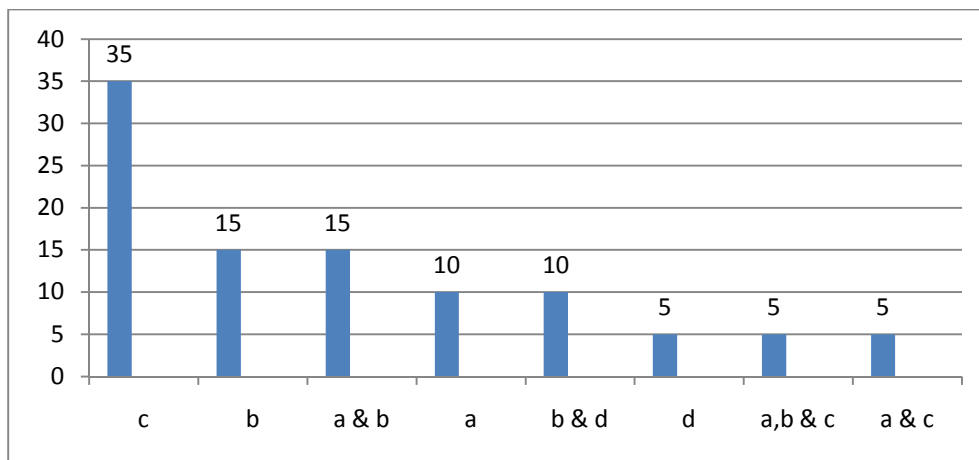


Figure 10: Question Item 19

As can be interpreted from the accompanying figure, the highest rate (35%) goes to option (c), followed by 15% to option (b). Smaller rates were scattered across options (a), (d), and some miscellaneous answers.

The widely distributed responses to this question lead to one conclusion. There is little agreement among the teachers concerning the way they comment on errors spotted in students' written work. Nevertheless, still the most widely used form is the one indicated by option (c); a form of written comments whose convenience in improving writing fluency has been the concern of many researchers as illustrated in the first chapter.

Question item twenty

Is your feedback definition expanded to include positive feedback (praise) or is it restricted to include only comments on writing deficiencies?

The way this question was phrased suggests that this question requires a Yes/No answer. Yet, it was implicitly made open-ended leaving the respondents a space to comment appropriately in order to elicit information about their perceptions and use of positive feedback.

In answering this question, only 5% of the respondents said that their feedback included but comments on writing deficiencies; 95% of the respondents expressed their approval about expanding their feedback definition to include positive comments. Most of them went on to discuss the possible psychological effects assumed for praising words and their role in increasing motivation to write. The best timing for praise was another point of discussion issued by some teachers who suggested that students would better receive praise prior to “destructive” criticism. Another issue that some teachers discussed was the quantity of positive feedback which was preferred not to be “much”. One of the teachers suggested a way to praise students’ good prose: *“Reading students’ good papers in the classroom is a form of positive feedback; I practiced it.”*

Question twenty one

How often do your students respond to your feedback?

- a-Always
- b-Very often
- c-Sometimes
- d-Rarely
- e-Never

This question was so phrased to ask teachers about the frequency to which their students take into account the feedback; one of the teachers’ biggest investments in a writing class.

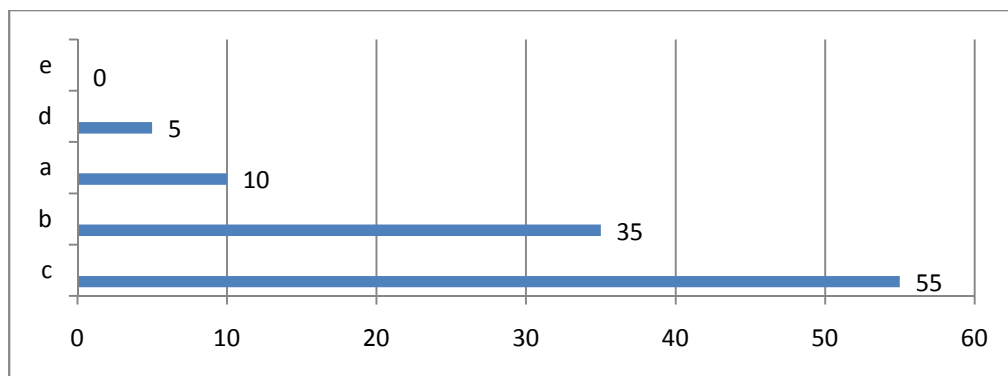


Figure 11: Question Item 21

The responses to this question item were transferred into figure 11 on the previous page. In a bit more details, the highest percentage was 55% and was rated by the teachers who said that their students take their feedback into account only occasionally by opting for option (c). This was followed by a rate of 35% for option (b), 10% for option (a), and only 5% for option (d). None of the respondents opted for option (e) which is an indication that students at UMC have inevitably experienced responding to teachers' commentaries on their written performance even for just once. However, still these results are not much promising. To know that it is only sometimes that students take into account the feedback for which the teachers devote most -if not all- of their time, is merely inauspicious. Sommers (1982:156) makes it clear that feedback provision is not easy nor is it purposeless:

The challenge, teachers face, is to develop comments which may provide inherent reason for students to revise; it is a sense of revision as discovery, as a process of beginning again, as starting out new, that students have not learned. Teachers need to show students how to seek, in the possibility of revision, the dissonances of discovery- to show them through our comments why new choices would positively change their texts, and thus, to show them the potential for development implicit in their writing.

Implicit in her claim is that in addition to its utility, the activity of feedback provision is both an effort-consuming and a time-consuming one. Hence it becomes unreasonable that students respond to it only sometimes.

The responses to this question were, additionally, compared to and re-analyzed along with the answers revealed by question item thirteen (whether teachers required their students to redraft using the feedback provided). All the teachers who said that students always responded to their feedback (10%) said in answer to question thirteen that their students were sometimes asked to redraft. Similar findings were arrived to concerning the teachers who said that their students rarely responded to their comments (5%)! The two highest percentages scored in the present question (corresponding for option c and b) revealed more interesting

results after being compared to results from question thirteen. The majority of the respondents who opted for option (*b- very often*) (66.66%) said in their thirteenth answer that they often required their students to redrafting activities and to take in consideration their comments. The majority (45.45 %) of the teachers who opted for option “c-sometimes” in the present question reported that their students were asked to redraft sometimes as well (Q13). These statistical findings generate an assumed correlation between redrafting and students’ response to teachers’ comments. However, it is worth mentioning that is also this dissertation’s concern to investigate this assumption.

Question twenty two

This question was put to investigate students’ attitudes towards teachers’ written feedback from the teachers’ perspectives. It, thus, aims to raise teachers’ awareness about what their students expect from the feedback they receive. It, furthermore, seeks to increase the potential of taking such expectations into account by teachers and making them channel their feedback accordingly.

As was requested by the researcher, the respondents chose up to four statements they thought their students would agree on. The top four statements most agreed on among the teachers were: (option d), *the teacher’s written feedback should be direct (detailed)*; (option c), *it should focus on grammar, mechanics, and content*, (option f), *it should include praise as well as criticism* and (option h), *it should be in the form of grades*.

In statistical terms, these statements scored the highest percentages with 80 %, 75%, 75%, and 60% of the respondents opting for them respectively. The least agreed on statement was that “*teacher’s written comments should be in the form of grades*” with only 25%. None of the teachers believed that their students would look forward for written feedback which focuses on content only (b), feedback which is indirect (codes/symbols)(e), and feedback which includes criticism only (g). More details are provided by figure12.

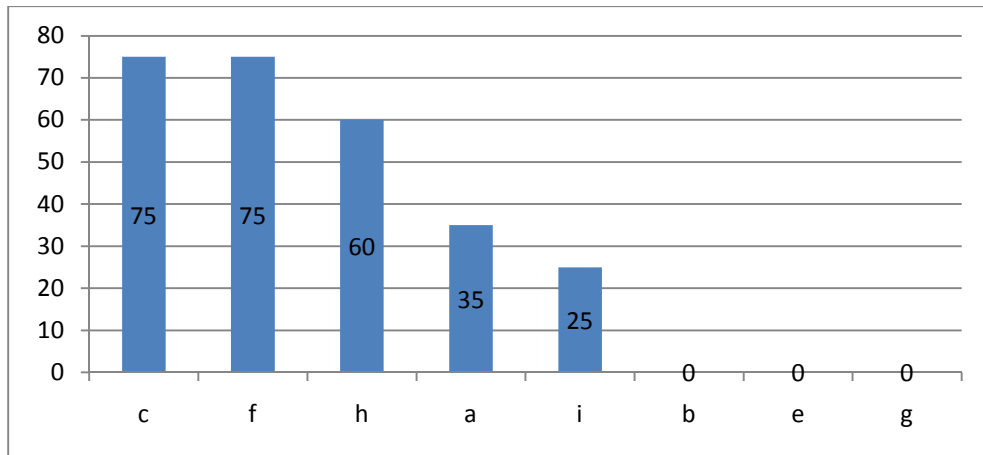


Figure 12: Question Item 22

Question item twenty three

Which of the following may constitute a possible reason for students' disregard for your feedback?

a-the use of red ink

b-the ambiguity of feedback (they do not understand what it is about)

c-they are not given a chance to use it (if the teacher does not enter the scene until the final draft without asking them for a retrial)

d-Others: please, specify.....

The purpose behind putting this question was to find out the possible reason(s) that teachers think would lead students to overlook their comments. This is because it is assumed that to know the reason is half the way towards solving the problem.

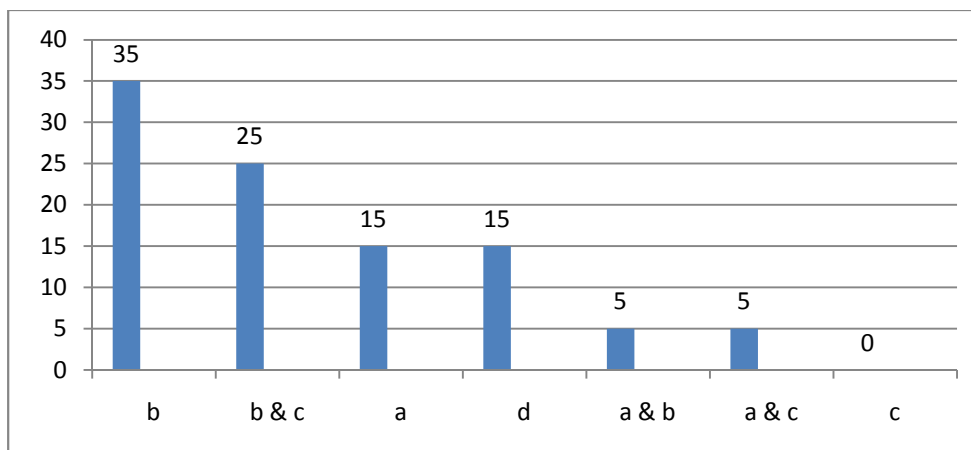


Figure 13: Question Item 23

Figure 13 shows that responses to this question were highly distributed across the options provided. As expected by the researcher, none of the respondents traced the students' disregard for their feedback to delaying it until final drafts (option c) unless combined with other reasons (b & c with 25%; a & c with 5%). 15% of them opted for option (a). An equal rate opted for option (d) tracing this problem either to students' lack of motivation, lack of awareness about feedback utility, or their interest in grades. The highest rate goes to option (b) with 35%.

Such a wide variance in the responses reflects a parallel variance in teachers' opinions, and thus, suggests little agreement among them concerning the problem under discussion. Hence, it also imposes the idea that the way such a problem (students' disregard for feedback) is tackled receives little accord among the teachers either.

Question item twenty four

The last question was an open-ended one inviting the teachers to suggest any technique, strategy, or idea that would make students take teachers' written comments into account.

The respondents' answers (suggestions) were analyzed and categorized as follows.

- The incorporation of peer feedback along with teachers' written comments to provide the writer with a wider audience.
- The use of conferencing or class discussion either as an adjunct or as an alternative to written comments.
- The implementation of a rewriting activity as a follow-up to class discussion.
- The use of grades along with written comments.
- The use of a list of symbols designed and agreed on by both the teacher and students.
- The integration of praising expressions within teachers' commentary.
- Drawing students' attention to the progress accomplished after following such comments as one of the teachers asserted, "*When a student observes a substantial improvement thanks to the practice of feedback, he'll adhere to it.*"

One of the respondents suggested, "*Ask one of them to write their writing sample on the board and give the necessary feedback; the whole class will then, try to rewrite it taking into consideration the written feedback.*"

These responses illustrated the way teachers can make their students incorporate and process the feedback they receive. Because the teachers held a strong belief in the importance of the way they responded to writing, they all attempted to answer this question whereby they proposed solutions to the problem under discussion.

The results generated via this thorough analysis of the questionnaire demonstrate that the teachers of writing at UMC attach great importance to feedback, and that they are definitely aware of its potential for excelling the composition skills of students. They all use it continuously to assess students' writing in more or less the same fashion. For example, their written commentaries take often the form of hints or symbols rather than explicit corrections, and are often postponed to final drafts. Yet, although there was a firm accord among teachers with regard to feedback significance, the students seemed not to be that much aware. So, not

only did the data generated by the questionnaire analysis answer the research questions mentioned in the general introduction, but they also yielded a more solid scaffolding ground to our hypothesis. Hence, it becomes a need to investigate the use of intermediate feedback which occurs prior to final drafts and whether it is incorporated by students or not.

2.2.2. Analysis of The Writing Test

The purpose of this test is to see whether the written comments that appeared before final drafts were taken into account by the students or not. Here, the written feedback is said to be taken into consideration and processed rather than overlooked by the participants if they produce actual changes and progress in their final drafts compared to first ones. Hence, students' consideration of such feedback is determined in this study, by the number of times the comments occur in final drafts (after receiving them) as opposed to first drafts (the ones commented on).

The written comments that the respondents received on their first drafts addressed both surface and meaning-level aspects of writing. Under the first category are included the teachers' comments on students' errors in grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. Feedback in the other category stressed meaning-level issues such as good/poor content, organization of ideas, cohesion, coherence..., etc. It is worth mentioning, however, that the comments analyzed in this research are limited to comments on writing shortcomings. Both surface-level and content-level comments are further detailed in the following figure.

Written comments categories	Sub categories	Description of the category
Surface-level comments	Grammar mistakes	-Verb tense; subject-verb agreement; use of articles; plural formation; adjective/ adverb formation. -Sentence structure: word order, run-on sentences, fragments, very long sentences.
	Vocabulary	-Word choice, missing words, unnecessary words, spelling.
	Mechanics	-Punctuation and capitalization.
Meaning-level comments	Content	-Poor argumentation, lack of supporting details and examples, contradictory ideas, overall treatment of text...etc.

Figure 14: Categorization of Teacher’s Written Comments

Concerning the way the teacher commented on students’ performance, her feedback provision practice went in line with the findings revealed by the analysis of the previous questionnaire (Q 19). She did not rely on one feedback form but rather, her comments took one of the different forms exemplified as follows:

a- Correction: When the teacher indicates where the error is and provides the correct form for the student.

e.g. *I—» Subject*

me—» Object “...me, for example, I love English...”

b- Hint/ Indication

When the teacher indicates where the error is and provides a hint to its type but lets the task of correcting it to the student.

E.g. "...; education have no benefit."

S/V Con.

c- Correction symbol

When the teacher merely indicates where the error is using symbols, putting abbreviations...etc. and lets the student discover its type and correct it.

E.g. "...experts can decide weather a country is a developed one or not."

d- Suggestion/ directive

When the teacher suggests or orders the student to make a change especially, concerning ideas. e.g. *Your essay lacks arguments.*

2.2.2.1. Incorporation of Written Comments: First Drafts through Final Drafts

As was previously mentioned, feedback incorporation in this study is determined by the proportion of comments on final drafts compared to first ones. However, the comparison of the participants' first and subsequent compositions revealed some interesting observations that are worth mentioning.

As far as the first drafts are concerned, all of the participants proved to go through the same thorny path towards the production of their first essays. They all had major problems in vocabulary (especially, word choice and spelling); mechanics (a lot of mistakes in punctuation) and grammar (with subject-verb agreement, verb tense, and article use). Content, however was not a major impediment for writing with much lesser errors identified, i.e. with less comments made. Consequently, the written comments the participants received on their first attempts of writing were primarily surface-level ones.

However, when writing the second drafts that is, after the teacher identified and commented on what went wrong in the first drafts, things noticeably changed to the better. In

the second drafts, fewer errors were identified; hence, less written comments were provided compared to first drafts.

On the whole, there was a significant improvement and a noticeable incorporation of the teachers' comments as a result of the opportunity of re-attempting writing the participants got. Almost all of them showed progress in final drafts as they showed better control of punctuation and capitalization though there remained some instances of feedback disregard which the researcher traces to students' lack of care. It was also observed that the students responded to the feedback they got on grammar mistakes since they used more English-like structures and committed fewer errors on agreement, verb tense, and article use. Moreover, in writing the final drafts, the students tended to incorporate their teachers' suggestions concerning word choice and spelling.

The observation made as far as comments on content are concerned was that they were not integrated as noticeably as was the case with the surface-level comments. It is the researcher's belief that this can be accounted for by the fact that the comments which stressed the form of the written products took often the form of explicit correction (type a) or a hint (type b) to help students make the necessary changes. In contrast, the comments which addressed the macro-level aspect of writing took often the form of a suggestion or a directive for change leaving the task of correction to the students themselves.

The aforementioned observations are illustrated using extracts from the participants' first and subsequent drafts in the following figure.

Comments categories	First drafts	Second drafts
a-Grammar	<p>-Learning is an important aspect that can be <i>deeled</i> with.”</p> <p>-...education <i>have</i> no benefit.</p> <p>-It is considered as <i>the most great</i>, powerful country.</p> <p>-When any person <i>study</i> at the university <i>surely after he gets</i> a job.</p>	<p>- Learning is an important aspect that can be dealt with...</p> <p>-...education has no benefits.</p> <p>- USA is considered as the greatest country...</p> <p>-Any person who studies at the university will surely get a job after graduation.”</p>
b- Vocabulary	<p>-“I <i>advise</i> them to...”</p> <p>-So we must give <i>careness firstable</i> to them...”</p> <p>- “Scientific development is <i>unexpectably</i> to happen unless with college education...”</p>	<p>- “I advise them to...</p> <p>-So, we must first of all pay attention to these factors.</p> <p>-Scientific development is unlikely to happen without college education.</p>
c- Mechanics	<p>-...help them? <i>high school</i> is enough for the majority <i>But</i> according to the new data college education is necessary</p>	<p>-...help them? High school seems enough for most people but according to the new data, college education is necessary.</p>
d- Content	<p>-Poor argumentation</p> <p>-Poor paragraph linking</p>	<p>- Better content.</p> <p>- More connected prose.</p>

Figure 15: Students’ Response to Feedback

Statistically speaking, in the total of first drafts (15 essays), there was a total of 306 comments. On average, there were 20.4 comments per essay. The lowest number of comments scored was 6; the highest was 38. The proportion of the comments in the students' first attempt compositions is shown in figure 16.

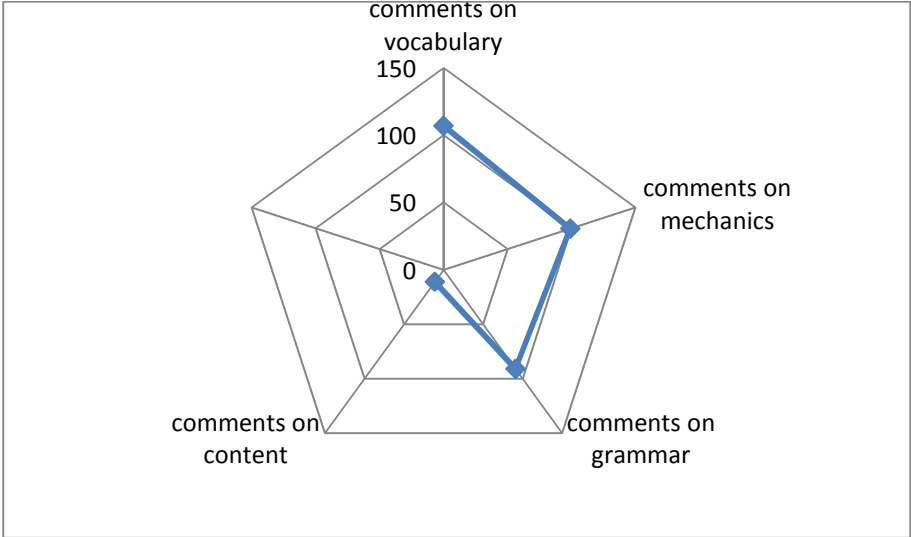


Figure 16: Proportion of Written Feedback in First Drafts.

However, after the teacher pointed out the problems, offered suggestions for improving the pieces of writing, and gave the students a chance to process the feedback they had received, the previous statistics changed significantly. The total number of comments in the final drafts decreased to 108. On average, there were 7.2 comments per essay. The lowest number was 2; the highest was 12. That is to say, as was hypothesised by the researcher, a considerable proportion of the written comments that had been received on first drafts were taken into account by the students. Only about 35% of the written comments were overlooked and 65% were responded to and processed by the participants resulting in overall essay improvement in the subsequent drafts. Figure 17 on the following page clearly charts the situation.

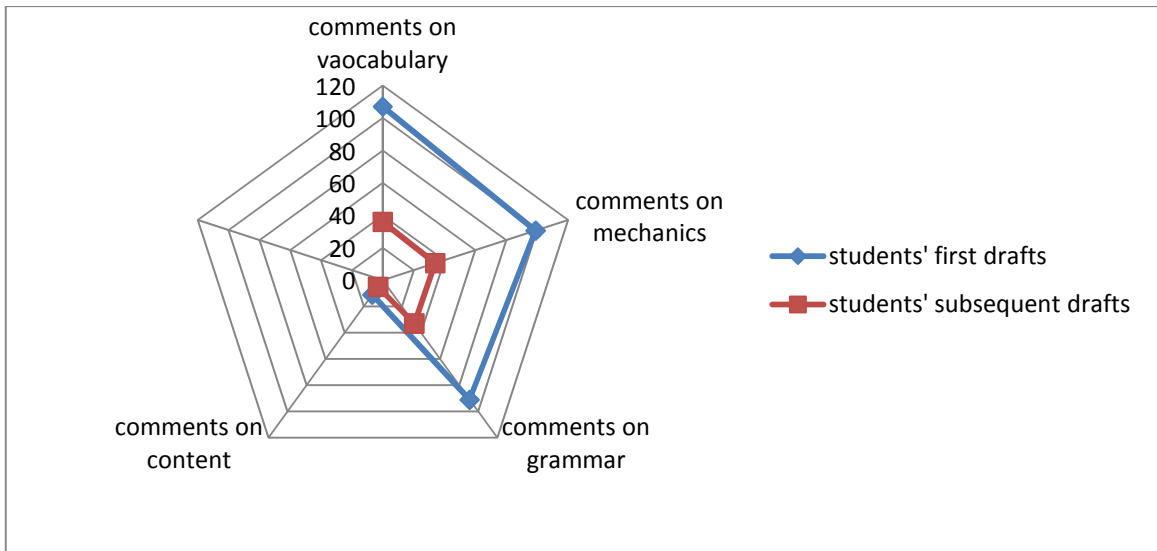


Figure 17: Proportion of Written Feedback across Drafts.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the results yielded by the two research instruments used in the current study. Throughout it, light has been shed on the teachers' general practices, their writing instruction patterns, and their implementation of feedback in the writing classes. There has also been an examination of the students' response to a feedback that occurs before the final draft. The results proved a strong connection between the variables of this research hypothesis, namely, the feedback provided prior to final drafts and the students' response to it. This type of feedback was a twofold effect: the first one was improving students' revision skills and repair mechanisms and the second was enhancing the learners' overall writing quality while doing a different draft of the same composition. Therefore, feedback that occurs between drafts should be incorporated into the writing classes at the Department of English at UMC given its plausible effect in making the students respond to it and improve their writing performance thereby.

Recommendations

The purpose of this section is to help teachers of writing at UMC to develop and modify their feedback provision techniques so that they help students reach the set pedagogical objectives. Discussed in this research is one of many teaching dilemmas teachers can encounter, namely, how to avoid students' disregard of written comments. As a solution to such a problem, the findings of the present research call for the implementation of a 'between-draft' feedback; one which appears prior to final drafts offering learners an opportunity to execute the commentary.

However, as yielded by the analysis of the questionnaire, the teachers are frustrated by the amount of time such a feedback may take. To remedy this situation, the teachers may adopt any of the strategies suggested by the teachers themselves mentioned in the questionnaire analysis. They are also advised to consider all or some of the following suggestions adopted from Ferris (2003) and which address the nature of the comments.

-Teachers need not tackle every problem noticed in students' writings. They need, rather, to establish priorities and address only major and/ or common troublesome issues in students' performances.

-Teachers need to provide feedback which is as clear as possible for learners, logically, take a lot of time to process the feedback they feel difficult to understand. Hence, because the use of coded feedback is deemed not too much time-consuming, composition teachers need to agree with students upon the list of codes to be used in responding to writing. This is asserted by Ferris (2003 118) as follows, "you [teachers] must explain your feedback philosophies and strategies to your students and be consistent."

- Teachers need to have a general idea about what their students expect from their feedback.
- They need construct encouraging comments which trigger the learner to utilize the feedback given.

Another way through which feedback provision may be less time demanding has to do with the practice of written feedback rather than its nature. Regarding the increasingly growing number of students who have computer skills and the fact that there exist some computer rooms at the Department of English at UMC, electronic comments may be very useful for and easily incorporated by the students. Harmer (2004: 114) suggests that:

Text editing packages, such as the 'Track Change' tool that comes with Microsoft Word Application, allow teachers or other respondents to make amendments and corrections, and also to leave notes and questions on a word-processed document which the student can react to at the same time as they edit that document on the screen.

If the teacher could not, however, find place for feedback prior to final drafts using any of the afore-suggested techniques, a home redrafting activity would be a possible alternative. Once again, regarding the fact that people are getting more and more acquainted with the use of computers and the internet at their homes, an 'e-feedback' seems worth trying.

Suggestions for Further Research

Actually, at the very beginning of this study, the aim was to monitor students' incorporation of the teachers' written comments as a result of providing them appropriately both in the short term and in the long term. What was meant to be done was to find out the extent to which the students' disregard of written commentary decreased in subsequent drafts (short term) as well as in other future writings (long term). However, due to some reason, reaching such an aim was not feasible so that only the short term effect could be investigated.

Therefore, it is hoped that a further research about the incorporation of the 'between-draft' written comments suggested here in the long term, say over a semester, will be conducted. It would be a good idea to conduct such a research on both an experimental and a controlling group to end up with sophisticating results.

Other possible areas of research may be a comparison of the effects of coded vs no coded comments on students' response to teacher's feedback; the incorporation of conferencing as an adjunct to written comments; and the use of computer mediated commentary.

General Conclusion

In language acquisition theories, the teaching-learning dichotomy has always been related to the notion of feedback. Feedback is the means through which information and output from the teacher is mediated to the learner in order to enrich his stock of knowledge, his input and thereby his performance. In the writing context, the overlap between the three is clearly charted by the fact that EFL/ESL students find themselves in dire need for developing both linguistic and non linguistic repertoires toward the production of well written end-products. Hence, to meet their students' needs, teachers of writing need to provide effective feedback and hybridize it to enrich learners' linguistic as well as non linguistic repertoires and enable them to produce good prose thereby.

However, awareness of the importance of feedback provision does not necessarily mean that teachers provide it appropriately. Appropriate feedback is one which offers the learners information, suggestions, and cues to improve their performances but before all, it is one which the learners can respond to, process, and use. To be appropriately executed, the teacher's feedback on writing need not be postponed to final drafts otherwise, its significance would be underestimated and the purposes for which it has been designed would be lost.

If writing can be compared to a play in which both the teacher and students stand for performers in such a fine theatre as the classroom, the teacher's feedback should not be delayed to the last scene for it stands for a transitional event upon which is based the whole plot of the play.

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Appendix

The Teacher's Questionnaire

Students' Response to Teachers' Written Feedback

I will be very grateful if you take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire whose aim is to gather information about teachers' practices in the writing class, their conceptions of feedback, and the way they incorporate written feedback in their writing instruction. Thank you very much for taking the time to share your ideas and experiences. Your input is very important and greatly appreciated.

Guidelines: For each item, please tick the right box or write in the space provided.

1. Age:
2. Gender: Male Female
3. Degree(s) held: BA (Licence) MA (Master / Magister) PhD (Doctorate)
4. Work Experience: (Number of years):
5. Subjects taught:.....
6. What type of approach do you follow in teaching the writing skill?
 - a- Product Approach
 - b- Process Approach
 - c- Genre Approach
 - d- Eclectic Approach
7. What are the most common writing problems you noticed in your students' writings?
 - a- grammar mistakes
 - b- interference of the mother tongue
 - c- poor content/ideas
 - d- poor vocabulary

e- poor organization of ideas

f- mechanics

8. To which of the following aspects do you attach great importance to in your writing instruction?(rank them in order of importance)

a- Grammar

b- vocabulary

c-content

d- mechanics

9.In writing about a particular topic, do you require your students to write multiple drafts?

Yes

No

Why/why not?

10.If your answer to the previous question is ‘Yes’, on which of the drafts do you usually provide feedback?

a- First

b- intermediate

c- Final

d- All of them

11. How is feedback provision important in teaching of writing?

a- Very important

b- Important

c- Moderately important

d- Of little importance

e- Not important

12. Do you believe your feedback affects revision and improves your students’ writing?

Yes

No

13. How often do you ask your students to redraft their early drafts using your feedback?

- a- Always
- b- Very often
- c- Sometimes
- d- Rarely
- e- Never

14. What form does your feedback take?

- a- Written comments
- b- Conference /oral comments
- c- Grade
- d- Others.....

15. What is your feedback usually about?

- a- Feedback on grammar and mechanics
- b- Feedback on content
- c- Others

16. When you give feedback, you usually focus on

- a- the students' background knowledge (only what they have been taught in the classroom)
- b- all aspects of the writing skill?

17. If your answer to the previous question is (b), give some examples.

.....

.....

.....

18. Which of the previously mentioned types of feedback (Q15) do you think benefit your students most? Why?

.....
.....
.....

19. How do you usually comment on errors you spot in your students' writings?

- a- Indicate where the error is and correct it for the students
- b- Indicate where the error is, what type it is and let the student himself correct it
- c- Indicate where the error is using symbols and let the student discover its type and correct it
- d- Others: please, specify.....

20. Is your definition of feedback expanded to include positive feedback (praise) or is it restricted to include only comments on writing deficiencies?

.....
.....

21. How often do your students respond to your feedback?

- a- Always
- b- Very often
- c- Sometimes
- d- Rarely
- e- Never

22. Which of the following statements you think your students would agree on?(you may choose up to 4 answers)

- a - Teachers’ written feedback should focus on grammar and mechanics.
- b- Teacher’s written feedback should focus on content.
- c-Teacher’s written feedback should focus on grammar, mechanics, and content.
- d-Teacher’s written feedback should be direct (detailed).
- e- Teacher’s written feedback should be indirect (codes/symbols).
- f-Teacher’s written feedback should include praise as well as critic.
- g-Teacher’s written feedback should include critics(indicating errors) only.
- h-Teacher’s written feedback should include grades.
- i- Teacher’s written feedback should not include grades.

23.Which of the following may constitute a possible reason for students’ disregard for your feedback?

- a-the use of red ink
- b-the ambiguity of the feedback (they do not understand what it is about)
- c-They are not given a chance to use it (if the teacher does not enter the scene until the final draft without asking them for a retrial)

d-others:please,specify
.....
.....

24. If your students overlooked your feedback, what would you do to make them take it into consideration?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....