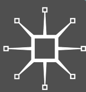

Feedback in L2 English Writing in the Arab World

Inside the Black Box

Edited by

Abdelhamid M. Ahmed · Salah Troudi
Susan Riley

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Foreword

Feedback in L2 Language Writing in the Arab World: Inside the Black Box is the first book of its type to address feedback practices in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing in the Arab world. To the best of the editors' knowledge, no previous book has tackled this under-researched topic. This volume comprises ten research-based chapters divided into two parts: Perceptions about Feedback in L2 English Writing and Feedback Practices in L2 English Writing. Sixteen EFL experts have contributed to writing the nine chapters that comprise this book. The contributors are affiliated with the following seven Arab countries: Egypt, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). However, research on feedback in EFL writing in the other eleven Arab countries is reviewed and reported in Chap. 1.

It has been acknowledged that research is lacking in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) context (Hidri, 2019). Accordingly, the lack of published research articles is a common feature that was found while reviewing the previous research about feedback in EFL writing. Most of the reviewed research rely on Arab researchers' unpublished theses, with a few published research articles in peer-reviewed journals. Hidri, Troudi, and Coombe (2018) confirmed the relatively few research studies in English language teaching and learning in the MENA region. The researchers believed that the interests and orientations of many Arab researchers have not been well-defined (ibid.).

There are several reasons for the lack of peer-reviewed research in general and lack of research on feedback in EFL writing by Arab researchers in particular. First, Arab researchers might be doing their MA or PhD theses as a requirement for obtaining a teaching position at a university. Second, many Arab universities do not tend to incentivise Arab researchers to do research after obtaining their postgraduate degrees. It has thus been recommended that researchers, and specifically those in the MENA region, publish their research (Melliti, 2019). Third, a lack of research funding has contributed to the dearth of research in MENA universities (Hidri, 2019). In addition, many public universities in the Arab world lack research resources and facilities such as subscriptions to peer-reviewed journals. The scarcity of both resources and funding demotivates researchers from conducting and publishing research. Finally, in seeking career promotion (e.g. to associate or full professor status), Arab researchers tend to rely on publishing their work in local journal imprints, which are inaccessible via the internet. For example, Abdel Latif (2018) highlighted that the local educational research culture, the inappropriate interdisciplinarity approach, reading sources and institutional regulations, and researchers' over-reliance on convenience sampling are some of the reasons for the current status quo of research in Egypt.

The nine chapters in this book critically examine how feedback in EFL writing is perceived and practised in some Arab world contexts. This volume is unique in addressing a variety of perspectives about feedback in EFL writing Arab contexts. With the exception of the introductory and concluding chapters, each chapter is based on empirical research that tackles a significant aspect of feedback in EFL writing in a different Arab country. All chapters are original in addressing various aspects such as feedback practices and perceptions in Egypt, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and UAE. They draw on both quantitative and qualitative research. We hope that this book will inform academics, practitioners and researchers interested in feedback in EFL writing and offer insightful views about how and why feedback is practised and perceived in these different contexts. The editors expect that this volume will appeal to an international readership as it portrays a comprehensive picture about feedback in EFL writing in some Arab world countries.

The first chapter critically reviews the literature and previous studies on feedback in foreign language writing in eighteen Arab world countries. It first introduces feedback issues, before moving on to critically review the literature that has emerged from Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, UAE, and Yemen. It then synthesises some key findings focusing on the following issues: lack of teachers' feedback, effective and ineffective types of feedback, peer feedback, students' reactions to feedback, and the technological tools/applications used to give feedback.

The second chapter examines students' opinions and perceptions about their teachers' feedback in a Moroccan higher education institution. It attempts to determine the extent to which teachers' feedback is likely to enhance the students' writing skills. To this end, the authors administered a questionnaire on the quality of teachers' comments and the students' perception of these comments to 261 fifth-semester English major students. The findings indicate that neither the students nor the teachers approached feedback in the ways we expected. It was revealed that students were unable to revise their EFL writing. The lack of follow-up activities shows that the writing process is not given the required attention.

The third chapter explores the impacts of 'languaging' and '4D feedback' on Omani students' EFL writing. The 4D feedback model proposed by the authors is underpinned by languaging and extended practice, and includes the four stages of (1) Dialogue (supervised-oral languaging), (2) Drill (extended practice), (3) Discovery, (4) Dialogue (group-oral languaging). To obtain data, group interviews were conducted and participants were given opportunities to reflect on the different stages of feedback and on their experience with languaging. Findings of the study suggest that 4D feedback assists noticing and boost students' engagement with feedback from the students' perspectives. This study supports Swain's (2009) belief that languaging is a key mediating tool in helping students to identify gaps in their linguistic knowledge.

The fourth chapter assesses faculty and student perceptions regarding the effectiveness of various feedback practices used in process-based writing classrooms with Emirati L2 students at the American University of Sharjah. In addition, it explores the challenges encountered by faculty

during the provision of feedback practices. The quantitative research findings are based on two concurrent electronically distributed anonymous surveys; one aimed at students who have just completed a process-based writing course, and the other at instructors who delivered these courses. The student sample is drawn from multiple sections of the Academic Writing I and II composition course cohorts, and the instructor survey was distributed among faculty of the Department of Writing Studies. Findings strongly suggest that all methods of feedback are deemed equally important by both students and faculty. Students, in particular, find process writing and its feedback practices to have significantly contributed to their writing proficiency.

The fifth chapter investigates the effects of three types of feedback (self-review, peer review and teacher feedback) on the narrative writing of Moroccan EFL students. It focuses particularly on the correction of content (story grammar) and form (grammar accuracy). Two lecturers and six students participated in the study. The students of different writing abilities—two high-level, two mid-level and two low-level—were tasked with writing timed narrative essays and then correcting their drafts based on the three types of feedback. They also expressed their views on these approaches through a think-aloud protocol. Findings show that the higher the level, the more self-corrections took place. Similarly, the benefits of peer-review feedback were determined by student ability level. Teacher feedback seemed to better address accuracy with salience being a determinant factor; the more salient the feedback, the more students corrected their drafts accordingly. The think-aloud technique revealed that unlike high-ability and medium-ability students, low-ability students tended to lack trust in their peers' feedback. Content was neglected by both students and lecturers, and therefore very little change was identified across students' drafts.

The sixth chapter explores how Tunisian university EFL teachers provide feedback on their students' writing assignments. More specifically, the study examines (a) the type of feedback provided by the teachers, (b) the writing features they focus on and (c) the theories and/or beliefs (if any) which inform their feedback practices. It collects data from semi-structured interviews with the teachers and a questionnaire to the students, as well as teachers' written feedback on samples of the students'

essays. Findings from the study reveal that teachers seemed to possess some theoretical knowledge about feedback provision. On some occasions, however, they failed to translate that knowledge into concrete instructional practices. The results also show that the teachers mainly focused on the provision of written corrective feedback, which suggests that they view feedback more as directive or corrective. The chapter concludes with a call for the improvement of feedback practices through the provision of training programmes to help teachers align their practices with best feedback practices recommended in the literature or internationally used in other higher education institutions.

The seventh chapter aims to report findings as part of a wider exploratory study that investigated the academic writing difficulties of Saudi postgraduate students. The study focuses on supervisors' written feedback to their students and their views on the academic challenges those students encountered. Nine supervisors across different disciplines at six universities in the UK provided samples of written feedback for this study. The data were analysed thematically to identify several themes and categories and the findings show that supervisors' written feedback focused mainly on content knowledge, criticality, coherence, clarity, structure, vocabulary appropriateness, and grammatical and spelling accuracy.

The eighth chapter investigates the effect of teachers' feedback on EFL students' dissertation writing in Moroccan higher education institutions. It focuses on teachers and students' perceptions and practices of feedback as a pedagogical tool. The purpose of this study is to probe the power of teachers' feedback on university students' dissertation writing skills and identify its type, nature and eventual repercussions on the quality of the dissertations. Questionnaires and interviews with both students and teachers were used to describe and explore the participants' beliefs and attitudes towards the effects of teachers' feedback on EFL writing. The findings of the study indicate much discordance between students' conceptions of feedback and teachers' understanding of what feedback comprises, offering some potential pedagogical implications as well as questions for further research.

The last chapter concludes the book. A healthy number of Arab countries are represented in this volume including countries with the same

first language (Arabic), religion, and educational systems characterised by major differences and yet many similarities. Some groups of countries, such as those in the Gulf region, also have similarities in the history of teaching English as a foreign language, and in teaching approaches in general. Given the continuous calls in the literature to improve Arab EFL students' writing proficiency at all levels (Al-Harbi, 2017), the editors believe that a volume on the topic of feedback in L2 English writing in the Arab world could contribute to a better understanding of what is happening in Arab educational institutions in the key area of writing feedback practices, including how students and teachers perceive these practices and challenges. The contributors to this book explore this issue in depth and propose several pedagogical steps to address the current challenges. We hope readers from different contexts and backgrounds will benefit from these contributions since they are intended to be relevant to practising teachers, researchers and academics.

In closing, the editors would like to thank colleagues who contributed to the success of this volume. First to the sixteen authors who devoted their time, effort and energy to making this book a success. Second to the anonymous reviewers who provided them with valuable feedback that enriched the quality of this collection. Finally, we would also like to thank the editorial team at Palgrave Macmillan, particularly Cathy Scott and Alice Green, for their unstinting support.

Doha, Qatar — Abdelhamid M. Ahmed

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1

Feedback in EFL Writing: Arab World Contexts, Issues, and Challenges

Abdelhamid M. Ahmed

Introduction

The English language has become the most widely used language in the world due to globalisation and internationalisation. More people are learning English worldwide, and it is expected that half the world will be using the English language proficiently by 2050 (Johnson, 2009). Proficiency in English writing is one of the most important skills needed for written communication nowadays. Written communication skills in English are twenty-first century skills required by employers worldwide as highlighted by the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) in its VALUE rubrics. In line with this, Leki (2011) justified the importance of written communication in English for the following five reasons. First, writing is a skill that achieves one's personal fulfilment. Second, it helps students to learn the content of different disciplines.

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Third, students need to write a lot in different courses at college and university levels. Fourth, good writing skills in English are required by employers worldwide. Finally, writing is considered a powerful tool for justice in a democratic world.

In the Arab world context, Rabab'ah (2005) assured that learning English for Arab students is a difficult process. Despite its importance, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing constitutes a challenge to most Arab students (Ahmed & Abouabdelkader, 2016). English writing is not only challenging for native speakers; it is even more challenging for non-native speakers whose first language is entirely different from English—such as Arabic (Muthanna, 2016). EFL writing entails a wide range of skills that Arab students, at different educational stages, need to master throughout their course of study. These skills include cohesion, coherence, style, clarity of writing, grammatical and lexical structures, and mechanics of writing (i.e. punctuation, spelling, handwriting, and revision). English writing and pedagogy need to be explored continuously in the Middle East and North Africa contexts (Arnold, Nebel, & Ronesi, 2017). In addition, research has highlighted that students' skills in EFL writing need to be assessed in more informative, accurate, and effective ways (Weigle, 2002).

The teacher plays an essential role in guiding the development of these skills through providing meaningful and constructive feedback. Feedback is a crucial aspect in the process of assessment as it fundamentally enables students to learn from assessment (Irons, 2008). Hyland and Hyland (2010) argued that teachers' feedback on students' writing is one of the ESL writing teacher's most important tasks through providing individualised attention to each student, something that is rare under usual classroom conditions. Feedback plays an essential role in educational practices and advancing students' learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). However, responding to students' writing seems to be an exhausting process for those teachers who invest their time and energy to give feedback to their students (Ferris, Brown, Liu, & Stine, 2011).

Teachers' feedback can take different forms: written commentary, error correction, teacher-student conferencing, or peer discussion (Hyland & Hyland, 2010). Similarly, Frodesen & Holten, 2011 referred to direct and indirect forms of grammatical feedback. Direct feedback can take

place through marking or correcting grammatical errors, or delivering instruction to the class as a whole on examples of students' error-filled sentences. On the other hand, indirect feedback can be delivered in three ways: (1) teachers asking students to discover the types of errors made and correct them independently; (2) teachers underlining or circling errors for the students; (3) teachers using a system of symbols to represent the categories of common grammatical errors.

Students expect feedback from teachers to help them understand their strengths in writing and identify areas for improvement (Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2010). In this regard, Ferris (2011) showed that teachers' error feedback on different language features has some significant functions. First, it helps students to become aware of where their writing fails to follow the conventions of Standard Written English. Second, it helps them to develop their editing skills by drawing their attention to patterned errors. Moreover, it helps students to write more accurately over time and value feedback. Finally, careful feedback sends a strong message emphasising that clear and appropriate language forms are important aspects of effective communication (Frodesen & Holten, 2011).

Aspects of feedback to which teachers attend are important. Irons (2008) referred to three aspects of feedback that enhance students' learning and lead to a good student-teacher relationship: feedback, quality of feedback, and timeliness of feedback. In addition, teachers respond in their feedback to aspects such as students' ideas, rhetorical organisation, grammatical and lexical choices, and mechanics of writing such as spelling and punctuation (Leki et al., 2010). Teachers' feedback on these aspects of EFL writing is crucial since it impacts students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Irons, 2008). Therefore, teachers' feedback must be constructive in order to help students identify their mistakes and encourage them to continue to develop their writing until they master it. Such constructive feedback has the potential to help teachers create a supportive teaching environment, convey and model ideas about good writing, and develop ways through which students can talk about their writing, mediate the relationship between their sociocultural worlds, and become familiar with their new literacy practices (Hyland & Hyland, 2010).

Previous research stresses the importance and need for feedback in English writing instruction in different Arab world contexts (Seliem &

Ahmed, 2009; Adas & Bakir, 2013; Ahmed & Abouabdelkader, 2016, 2018). Written feedback is an essential factor that is missing in some EFL writing classes (Ahmed, 2016; Ahmed & Abouabdelkader, 2018). For example, Seliem and Ahmed (2009) highlighted that teachers' electronic feedback on students' writing impacts upon students' revision and provides a positive learning experience. The lack of written feedback urged one author, in the Emirati context, to conduct an experiment measuring the effect of written corrective feedback (WCF) on developing Emirati students' academic writing (Solloway, 2016).

Feedback in EFL Writing Arab World

The present chapter reviews the issues, contexts, and challenges related to the provision of feedback practices in EFL writing instruction in the following eighteen Arab countries: Algeria, Kingdom of Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the Sultanate of Oman, Palestine, the State of Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Yemen.

Feedback Practices in Algeria

Based on the present author's review of the literature, a few studies have been conducted in the Algerian context to measure the effects of coded content feedback, peer feedback, and weblogs on developing students' EFL writing performance (Baghzou, 2011; Moussaoui, 2012; Mansouri, 2017). First, Baghzou (2011) conducted a quantitative study to measure the effect of coded content feedback on the written performance of sixty sophomore Algerian learners. A quasi-experimental design and pre-tests and post-tests were used. Results showed that the experimental group of students, instructed using coded feedback, differed statistically from the control group students who received no feedback. In addition, the content coded feedback had improved students' written performance.

Second, another quantitative research measured the effect of peer feedback on developing Algerian students' writing autonomy (Moussaoui,

2012). Using pre-surveys and post-surveys, class observations and peer-evaluation rubrics, the research results indicated that the experimental group of students socially interacted during the peer-evaluation process and exhibited positive attitudes towards peer feedback. Peer review was found to reduce students' writing apprehension and augment their writing self-efficacy. Moreover, when students got involved in reading, rethinking, and revising, they were able to try new writing tasks independently and develop their writing autonomy.

The third study integrated technology in the form of weblogs to understand their impact on developing Algerian students' English writing performance (Mansouri, 2017). Participants enumerated the many beneficial uses of the weblog. First, weblogs were marked by authenticity and interaction where students shared their reflections, experiences, and assessed their achievements. Second, weblogs motivated students to write for purposes other than examinations. Third, weblogs were a flexible tool whereby students received feedback from their instructor and peers, and in turn gave feedback to their peers.

Feedback Practices in the Kingdom of Bahrain

Little research has been done on feedback in EFL writing in the Bahraini context. The author found just two unpublished PhD theses and a recently published research article that addressed the issue of written feedback in Bahrain (Mubarak, 2013; Wali, 2017; Wali & Huijser, 2018). The first study was conducted by Mubarak (2013) at the University of Bahrain using classroom observation, with three aims: (1) investigating the feedback and teaching practices of English writing; (2) examining the effect of direct and indirect feedback on developing students' English writing; (3) exploring teachers' and students' beliefs about feedback. Findings of the study showed that several problems were observed in the teaching of English writing and methods of feedback used at the university. Neither the direct nor indirect type of feedback had significantly affected the accuracy or grammatical or lexical complexity of the students' English writing. Despite the value and benefit of feedback reported by both students and instructors, students tended to prefer direct to indirect

corrective feedback, especially where instructors provided corrections of errors.

The study by Wali (2017) was a case study that examined the impact of a process-oriented approach on developing Bahraini students' accuracy in English writing. This intervention study included peer review as well as individual and collective teacher feedback. Results showed that the process-oriented approach and peer-review method contributed to students' learning of writing and enabled them to identify L1 Arabic interference errors in their peers' writing. Results also revealed the dynamic relationship between students' ability to produce correct English forms in their writing and spot errors in their peers' writing.

In an attempt to improve Bahraini students' English writing, Wali and Huijser (2018) evaluated the usefulness of Write & Improve; an automatic feedback tool. Findings indicated that students' responses were interesting and occasionally contradictory. Participants revealed that Write and Improve was effective in providing immediate feedback on students' writing. However, it was not effective in some areas in which students struggled, especially when the provision of feedback needed to be non-judgemental, contextualised, and personal. The authors of the study suggested combining the automated feedback tool with teacher feedback to avoid impersonal, uncontextualised and judgemental feedback.

Feedback Practices in Egypt

More research has been published in the Egyptian context (Seliem & Ahmed, 2009; Ahmed, 2010, 2016; El Ebyary & Windeatt, 2010; Ali, 2016). One study reported that Egyptian university professors do not always provide written feedback due to the large class sizes, volume of teaching responsibilities, and lack of research and professional development opportunities both locally and internationally (Ahmed, 2016). Low levels of teacher written feedback and oral discussion of common writing mistakes and the infrequent use of peer review are some of the feedback practices reported in the Egyptian university context (ibid.).

Seliem and Ahmed (2009) carried out a study in which eighty student teachers and seven teachers exchanged e-mails to explore the effect of

electronic feedback (e-feedback) on developing students' EFL writing at the university level. Findings revealed that students perceived e-feedback as capable of improving their writing for the following reasons. First, it positively impacted upon their revision. Second, it provided a positive learning environment and them feel responsible for their writing. Third, it facilitated teacher-student collaboration and increased students' participation. Teachers, however, perceived e-feedback as a good but exhausting and time-consuming pedagogic practice.

El Ebyary and Windeatt (2010) investigated the impact of Criterion—a software tool that provides automatic feedback at the paragraph, sentence, and word levels. Thirty-one teachers and 549 EFL student teachers participated in questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. A total of twenty-four student teachers received feedback through Criterion on two drafts of their essays. The findings showed that Criterion had a positive effect on students' second drafts. In addition, participants showed a positive attitude towards the feedback generated by the Criterion software.

Similarly, Ali (2016) investigated the effect of Screencasting—a video feedback tool—on first-year students' writing skills in English. Using a quasi-experimental research design, students were divided into an experimental group which received Screencasting feedback on content, organisation, and structure, and a control group which only received written comments. Results revealed that in terms of improved EFL writing skills the experimental group outperformed the control group. Participants who received Screencasting feedback found it engaging, personal, constructive, supportive, clear, and multimodal. Despite its numerous benefits, however, participants also reported encountering two challenges: the slow loading time and the inability to download videos to computers.

Feedback Practices in Iraq

Surprisingly, only one published research paper was found on the impact of feedback practices on Iraqi students' EFL writing (Cinkara & Galaly, 2018). This study investigated Iraqi students and teachers' attitudes towards teachers' written feedback. A teacher's questionnaire was completed by 100 participants and a student one by 200. Results indicated

that teachers' written feedback helped improve students' writing skills, especially where the feedback was constructive and optimistic. Results also showed that Iraqi students preferred teachers' feedback when it was timely and when it corrected mistakes. Statistical analysis showed no statistical significance between male and female teachers and students towards this form of feedback.

Feedback Practices in Jordan

In Jordan three studies have been published in peer-reviewed journals about feedback practices in EFL writing (Al-Omari, 1998; AbuSeileek, 2013; Al-Sawalha, 2016). Al-Omari (1998) identified the focuses of EFL writing assessment among Jordanian university teachers in eight universities. He collected data from questionnaires, interviews, and an analysis of marked assessments of students' writing. Findings revealed that most teachers when assessing students' writing focused on grammatical accuracy and mechanics of writing (i.e. handwriting, spelling, and punctuation). Yet few teachers focused on organisation, content, and cohesion; and few teachers provide written feedback. No statistical differences were found among teachers by experience or specialisation.

In 2013 AbuSeileek measured the effect of computer-mediated corrective feedback on EFL writing. Participants were divided randomly into three experimental groups that gave and received computer-mediated corrective feedback while writing (track changes, word processor, and track changes and word processor) and a control group that neither gave nor received writing corrective feedback. Results showed that there was a significant effect for only the experimental group that combined track changes and word processor. In addition, the experimental groups that used the computer-mediated corrective feedback outperformed the control group in their English writing performance.

To examine Jordanian EFL students' reaction to their teachers' written feedback, Al-Sawalha (2016) investigated twenty junior undergraduate students. Findings revealed that participants varied in their attitude towards their teachers' written feedback; however, most participants reported that they found it useful to their writing in two ways: it improved their revision skills and enhanced their overall writing quality.

Feedback Practices in Kuwait

Only one published research paper was found addressing the Kuwaiti context: Alhumidi & Uba, 2016. In this study, the researchers examined the effect of indirect WCF on two assignments. No feedback was given on the first and only indirect feedback on the second. The results showed that indirect feedback was effective in improving the writing of Kuwaiti students at an intermediate level writing. However, a high number of spelling mistakes was noticed in students' written assignments. The authors recommended using indirect rather than direct feedback since it proved effective in developing students' writing skills.

Feedback Practices in Lebanon

The Lebanese context is unique in that feedback on students' L2 writing is paid more attention than most other Arab countries reviewed here (Diab, 2005, 2010, 2011, 2015; Ghosn-Chelala & Al-Chibani, 2018). For example, Diab (2005) investigated Lebanese EFL university students' preferences for paper-marking techniques and error correction. The study shows that students tended to expect surface error corrections from their teachers and believed that these corrections are useful. In another study, Diab (2010) investigated the effectiveness of peer feedback versus self-feedback in an attempt to reduce specific language errors in the writing of Lebanese university students. Findings indicated that students in the peer-feedback group performed better in their revised drafts than their self-feedback counterparts in rule-based errors (subject/verb agreement, pronoun agreement). Thus peer feedback proved effective in creating collaborative dialogue and negotiation of meaning that facilitated the learning of L2 writing. Similarly, Diab (2011) attributed the positive impact of peer feedback on students' writing to the interaction among peers, language peers' engagement with language during the peer-feedback process, and the use of learning strategies. Recently, another study examined the effect of Screencasting using Jing on developing the writing of EFL Lebanese students (Ghosn-Chelala & Al-Chibani, 2018). The remedial writing program used Screencasting videos that focused on indirect corrections, a rubric-guided oral commentary, and annotations. Students'

views about Screencasting were examined through a survey and an informal group discussion. The study showed that Lebanese students perceived screencast feedback as clearer and more useful than traditional written feedback on the one hand, and more engaging and supportive of learning preferences on the other.

Feedback Practices in Libya

Work on feedback practices in Libyan students' L2 writing has only emerged in recent years (Gashout, 2014; Omar, 2014; Ghgam, 2015; Amara, 2015; Sopin, 2015). The type of teachers' written feedback can be a helpful factor in motivating Libyan students to write and revise their written assignments (Gashout, 2014). Therefore, using facilitative feedback strategies combined with the process approach to writing can help students enhance their writing and revision skills and gain more self-confidence when composing text (ibid.). Similarly, Amara (2015) revealed that Libyan participants were highly interested in teachers' written comments; preferred complimentary feedback that praised good work; complained when feedback was not linked to specific errors; and sometimes misinterpreted teachers' comments. Besides, Sopin (2015) confirmed the value of teachers' corrective feedback and revealed that Libyan students felt offended or uncomfortable when the teacher provided them with feedback in front of their peers.

Concerning the type of feedback, Omar (2014) studied the effects of teachers' coded and uncoded feedback on EFL Libyan writing and found that the group that used coded feedback recorded more improvement in terms of error correction than the group that used uncoded feedback. Also, the participants had a positive perception of receiving and giving feedback. In addition, Ghgam (2015) examined the effect of face-to-face feedback on the L2 writing of 200 third-year Libyan university students. Students were assigned to an experimental group that received face-to-face feedback and a control group who received written feedback. The experimental group outperformed the control group in their L2 writing performance. The study findings showed that students preferred face-to-face feedback to written and perceived it as a useful experience in developing their writing.

Feedback Practices in Morocco

Unlike many other Arab contexts in which feedback is rarely given, Moroccan researchers have paid much attention to investigating feedback practices on Moroccan students' L2 writing (Bouziane, 1996; Haoucha, 2005, 2012; Bouziane & Zyad, 2018). In this regard, Bouziane (1996) urged teachers to use any of five different types of feedback: comments, error treatment, peer review, reformulation, and conferencing. In response to Bouziane's call (1996), Haoucha (2005) used a case-study approach to explore students' use of three types: self-monitored feedback using annotations; peer feedback; and teachers' written feedback and taped commentary. The study showed that first, annotated self-monitored feedback helped students identify their problems with their writing skills and that annotations revealed students' perceptions about good writing. Second, peer feedback did not only encouraged students' revision but also benefited them linguistically, cognitively, and affectively. Third, teacher-taped commentary proved effective in commenting on the content and organisation of students' writing.

In reference to the integration of technology-mediated feedback, Bouziane and Zyad (2018) investigated the effects of technology-mediated self-review and peer feedback on Moroccan students' university L2 writing. The researchers used a quasi-experimental design in which experimental and control groups were used. The study revealed that self-review and peer feedback led to an improvement in students' ability to spot problems in writing since unhelpful comments decreased and meaning-level comments increased.

Feedback Practices in the Sultanate of Oman

Research on feedback in L2 writing in the Omani context showed that different aspects of feedback have been well researched (Kasanga, 2004; Al-Badwawi, 2011; Denman & Al-Mahrooqi, 2014; Al Ajmi, 2015; Al-Bakri, 2016). For example, Kasanga (2004) combined the use of peer feedback along with teacher feedback using the process approach with a sample of Omani first-year students while revising their essays. The study

proved that participants preferred teacher over peer feedback. Nevertheless students were very willing to peer-review each other's work and incorporated peers' feedback in their revision. Moreover, the types of feedback received from peers and teacher differed notably and suggested a combination of both types in the revision stage. Surprisingly, a negotiated classroom practice thought to be unacceptable culturally turned out to be not only acceptable but favoured by the study participants. Similarly, Denman and Al-Mahrooqi (2014) investigated Omani university students' perceptions of peer feedback in their English writing classes. The students were shown to have constructive views of peer feedback, despite the limitations related to implementation.

Two other studies have explored the effect of teacher written feedback on different aspects of students' L2 writing. First, Al-Badwawi (2011) investigated Omani students, their EFL teachers, and disciplinary teachers on the subject of academic writing. The study revealed that teachers' written feedback improved students' writing and motivated them to exert more effort to produce better pieces of writing reflected in higher scores. Other students, however, were discouraged and depressed by their teachers' red ink in their assignments. In reference to students' reaction to their teachers' written feedback, students either accepted the feedback and revised the assignment accordingly; accepted the feedback and simply deleted the problematic sentences, not knowing how to revise them; or ignored the feedback and reproduced the same written essay without any revision. Second, Al Ajmi (2015) conducted a quasi-experimental study to measure the effectiveness of WCF to Omani students on their uses of prepositions in English. The experimental group received WCF on their writing whereas the control group only received general comments. The experimental group outperformed the control group and showed that WCF has the potential to develop students' use of prepositions in English.

Moreover, Al-Bakri (2016) examined teachers' beliefs about WCF and the reasons for their practices and challenges while providing students with WCF in a public college in Oman. Six writing instructors were interviewed, and feedback on eighteen written assignments was analysed. Findings revealed that teachers were responsible for the provision of WCF to students. In addition, the teaching context proved to influence teachers' beliefs. For example, teachers who believed that their students

had spelling mistakes in their writing, changed their practice to give WCF on students' spelling mistakes. Moreover, teachers were not able to give WCF congruent with their beliefs because of contextual factors such as workload and fatigue. Finally, all teachers were content with their WCF; however, they were not satisfied with their students' attitudes towards their teachers' feedback.

Feedback Practices in Palestine

Feedback practices in Palestine is well investigated (Hammad, 2014, 2016; Farrah, 2012; Abu Shawish & Abd Al-Raheem, 2015). For example, Hammad (2016) explored essay-writing problems as perceived by Palestinian EFL university students and their teachers. Results showed that the students' English essay-writing problems were attributed to many factors, the most important of which was that writing teachers did not provide students with the necessary feedback in order to improve. The lack of teachers' feedback was due to the lack of adequate time and teachers' suspicions about how effective feedback would be in developing their students' written performance.

In response, three published studies reviewed feedback practices in Palestine. Farrah (2012) examined Palestinian students' attitudes towards peer feedback and assessed its effectiveness. The study showed that students perceived peer feedback as a valuable experience that offered opportunities for social interaction and developed their writing skills. In a later study, Hammad (2014) explored the effect of direct teacher feedback on the writing of female Palestinian EFL university students. The study revealed that teacher direct WCF improved the writing performance of high achievers; however, it did not enhance the writing performance of middle and low achievers. Finally, Abu Shawish and Abd Al-Raheem (2015) identified the feedback practices of Palestinian university professors and assessed their awareness of audio feedback practices. The study also investigated students' reactions to their teachers' feedback. Results showed that Palestinian writing professors were aware of audio feedback practices since they provide oral discussion of feedback and WCF, suggest strategies for revision, and provide constructive feedback that does not

discourage students. Palestinian students reacted satisfactorily to most of their teachers' feedback practices.

Feedback Practices in Qatar

Feedback practices on students' English writing in Qatar are gaining attention. In 2011, Al-Buainain identified EFL writing difficulties among Qatari university students. The study recommended that teachers identify their students' writing problems and spend more time giving feedback. In response to this recommendation, Pessoa, Miller, and Kaufer (2014) examined challenges faced by multilingual students in reading and writing in their transition to college in Qatar. It is noteworthy that students were provided with substantial written and oral feedback on their multiple drafts in their ESL writing courses. The study showed that students' academic writing and reading levels developed as their understanding of the expectations of college writing increased. Additionally, Williams, Ahmed, and Bamigbade (2017) emphasised the importance of the support given to L2 writing in Qatar by comparing and contrasting the different services offered by the writing centres in ten different higher education institutions. These services included face-to-face writing support, teachers' corrective feedback, and online feedback, and were found to help Qatari university students develop and enhance their English writing skills based on their individual needs and levels. Finally, Weber (2018) explored how the First-Year Writing Seminar (FYWS) at the Cornell campus in Qatar helped develop Qatari university students' English writing. During their study in the FYWS, Qatari students write five to eight formal essays, using multiple drafting. The feedback practices used in this course include oral corrective feedback, written comments, individual conferencing with the teacher, and formal peer review.

Feedback Practices in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The Saudi context is another that is well researched. Grami (2010) investigated the effect of peer feedback on Saudi students' English writing at university. The study revealed that students were satisfied with teachers'

written feedback but were apprehensive of peer feedback since they lacked confidence in their classmates' linguistic level. Using a quasi-experimental design, the experimental group of students outperformed the control group of students in their writing development, demonstrating that peer feedback assisted students in gaining new skills and developing existing ones. Using a Saudi university as their setting, Alshahrani and Storch (2014) explored teachers' beliefs and practices of WCF and students' preferences. The study revealed that teachers provided students with indirect WCF that focused on the mechanics of writing. However, teachers were not aware that students preferred direct feedback that focused on grammar. A year later, Alkhatib (2015) explored Saudi writing teachers' beliefs and practices of the role of WCF in a Saudi university. The study showed that teachers' beliefs corresponded with their practices about the focus and amount of WCF. On the other hand, teachers' beliefs were not aligned with their practices about the use of positive feedback, the source, and explicitness of WCF. The university context, teachers' teaching experience, and students' proficiency levels were behind the incongruences between teachers' beliefs and practices. Finally, students reported finding it difficult to understand teachers' comments.

Feedback Practices in Sudan

Research on feedback practices on EFL writing in Sudan is limited. Indeed Ali (2014) recommended that additional research is needed in this area. In response, Zakaria and Mugaddam (2013) assessed the English written texts of 240 Sudanese university students and reviewed their teachers' views. The study showed that EFL students had some language problems, lacked organisational skills, produced disconnected and incoherent paragraphs, were unable to meet audience expectations, lacked awareness of cohesive ties, and did not use teacher or peer feedback. In addition, Ali (2014) investigated how teachers' written feedback can develop Sudanese Secondary students' writing performance. The study showed that despite its importance, teachers' feedback does not meet student expectations since this type of feedback does not take students' ability level and lesson objectives into consideration.

Feedback Practices in Syria

Similarly, there is limited peer-reviewed published research on feedback practices in Syria. Janoudi (2011) compared teachers' and students' perceptions and attitudes towards teacher written feedback in three secondary schools in Syria. This findings suggested that teacher feedback is the preference in the Syrian context due to four factors related to teachers, students, the educational system, and the social system. In addition, the study by Meygle (1997) aimed at developing the English writing of Syrian undergraduate students. The study showed that 66% of students preferred teachers' written feedback and 77% liked teachers' correction of their mistakes in writing. Some participants in the study also preferred oral feedback.

Feedback Practices in Tunisia

As is pointed out in this book, a select few studies have been conducted on the Tunisian context (Athimni, 2019). For example, Mhedhbi (2011) investigated the effect on the quality of students' revised writing of teachers' feedback using a specific marking scheme that highlighted errors constructively with positive and negative comments. The study indicated that teachers' error correction produced well-written final drafts in terms of grammar, spelling, and organisation of ideas. In addition, teacher's written feedback and peer reviews had motivated students to rewrite their work. In a recent study, Athimni (2018) researched how teachers communicated test results to their students. The study showed that teachers provided test scores accompanied by written feedback on the topic ideas, style of writing, and the organisation of writing. In addition, Tunisian teachers underlined or corrected students' language mistakes. Other teachers organised in-class oral group feedback sessions in which students' errors were discussed collectively. In the current edited volume, Athimni (2019) identifies how Tunisian teachers provide feedback and focuses on feedback type, the writing features they focus on, and the guiding theories and beliefs that inform their approach. The study shows that Tunisian teachers possessed some theoretical knowledge about feedback practices; however, translating this knowledge into practice was not

always a success. The results also disclosed that teachers viewed feedback more of a directive or corrective nature which justified their provision of WCF.

Feedback Practices in the UAE

In the context of the UAE, Shine (2008) investigated the type, timing, and mechanism of feedback from both a student and a teacher perspective. The study indicated that students did not strongly believe in peer feedback and preferred to use teachers' written feedback while revising their essays. Besides, teachers also focused on grammar more than content. Students did not understand the extent of revision expected from them and the aspects to which they should attend. The study suggests using classroom teaching and revision strategies to improve students' reaction to teachers' written feedback. Mohammedi (2016) explored the perceived and actual written feedback preferences between secondary EFL students and their teachers in the UAE. The study showed that teachers and students' preferences for feedback were similar. However, the following factors were taken into consideration while giving feedback to students: school requirements, orientations on feedback, students' proficiency levels, and the nature of tasks. Students regarded direct correction as a practical choice for them. Another study examined the impact of training students on how to provide effective peer feedback on students' motivation and engagement levels on peer review and self-feedback (Hojeij & Baroudi, 2018). The study reported that when peer feedback training was combined with face-to-face and mobile learning, it positively affected EFL students' revisions and overall writing.

Feedback Practices in Yemen

It has been shown to be the case that Yemeni teachers of English regard giving feedback to students on their English writing as a burden (Al-Hammadi & Sidek, 2015). Previous research in the Yemeni context has shed light on students' dissatisfaction with their English writing skills and indeed EFL provision in general due to specific challenges that

include the absence of EFL programme policy, admission policy, material development and evaluation, insufficient instructors and classrooms, and educational environment (Muthanna, 2016). These challenges have negatively influenced students' acquisition of EFL writing skills and made them helpless to pursue postgraduate degrees that require higher levels of writing skills (ibid.).

In an attempt to address students' concerns about their EFL writing development and teachers' provision of feedback on their writing, two researchers have investigated the impact of using portfolios as a mechanism to obtain feedback from the course instructor and classmates. Assaggaf & Bamahra's study (2016) found that portfolios assisted students in obtaining better feedback on their technical report writing from both the instructor and their classmates. More specifically, 64% of students believed that the instructor gave them more feedback and 82% received more feedback from their classmates due to the close relationships between them.

Yemen seems to be the only Arab country in which students' affective reactions to their teachers' written feedback have been the subject of study. For example, Mahfoodh and Pandian (2011) explored Yemeni EFL students' affective reactions to and perceptions of their teachers' written feedback as well as the contextual factors that are believed to impact on those reactions. Using semi-structured interviews, think-aloud protocols, students' written essays, and teachers' written feedback, research findings have revealed that students viewed teachers' written feedback as useful and important to developing their writing skills; however, they wanted their teachers to pay attention to all aspects of their written essays when giving written feedback. Some of the contextual factors reported as having an impact on students' affective reactions to their teachers' written feedback include students' acceptance of their teachers' authority and handwriting, students' experience, and teachers' choice of wording in feedback. Similarly, Mahfoodh (2017) studied the relationship between EFL university students' emotional responses towards their teachers' written feedback and the success of their revisions. Findings showed that students' emotional response to their teachers' written feedback varied between acceptance, rejection, surprise, dissatisfaction,

happiness, disappointment, satisfaction, and frustration. These findings could be ascribed to teachers' harsh criticism, negative evaluations, and miscommunication with their students.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how feedback in EFL writing has been addressed in eighteen Arab countries. In concluding, I will pull together all the issues related to feedback by focusing on the following six issues: (1) lack of teachers' feedback; (2) effective types of feedback, (3) ineffective types of feedback, (4) peer feedback, (5) students' reactions to feedback, (6) technological tools/applications used to give feedback.

Lack of Teachers' Feedback

The literature review demonstrates the paucity of research about feedback in EFL writing in some Arab countries. For example, Zakaria and Mugaddam (2013) revealed that teacher or peer feedback is missing in Sudan. In addition, teacher feedback is reported by university students as lacking in Egypt due to the dearth of qualified writing teachers and heavy workload faced by Egyptian teachers (Ahmed, 2011). It is also absent from Palestinian EFL writing classes due to the lack of adequate time and teachers' doubts about how effective feedback would be to developing their students' writing (Hammad, 2016).

Effective Feedback

Previous research has, however, highlighted the following six types of feedback that proved effective and was preferred by participants in different Arab contexts: constructive feedback, face-to-face feedback, teachers' written feedback, direct correction of students' mistakes, indirect feedback, and coded feedback.

Constructive Feedback

Giving constructive feedback has been reported and preferred by students in Iraq, Tunisia, Libya, and Palestine. For example, in Iraq, participants preferred feedback that is timely, constructive, and optimistic (Cinkara & Galaly, 2018). Similarly, Tunisian students liked teachers' comments on their written assignments, whether positive and negative (Mhedhbi, 2011). Besides, Libyan participants preferred complimentary feedback that praised students' good work (Amara, 2015). Finally, writing teachers in Palestine provide feedback and comments on students' English writing that do not disappoint students (Abu Shawish & Abd Al-Raheem, 2015).

Face-to-Face Feedback

Provision of face-to-face feedback is another effective type of feedback as revealed in Libya, Syria, Palestine, and Qatar. For example, in Libya, students preferred face-to-face feedback to the written type and perceived it as a faster and more effective means of developing their English writing skills (Ghgam, 2015). Participants in Syria reported their preference for oral feedback (Meygle, 1997; Janoudi, 2011), and in Palestine, oral discussion of feedback and provision of written comments on students' writing were believed to be effective in developing students' English writing (Abu Shawish & Abd Al-Raheem, 2015). Similarly, in the Qatari context, oral corrective feedback was provided and used with Qatari students and helped them to develop their English writing (Weber, 2018).

Teachers' Written Feedback

Teachers' written feedback was preferred by students in Syria, Libya, Oman, UAE, Tunisia, and Palestine. It was favoured by Syrian students due to factors related to teachers, students, the educational system, and the social system (Janoudi, 2011). We also found that 66% of Syrian undergraduate students preferred teachers' written feedback (Meygle,

1997). Libyan students were highly interested in teachers' written comments (Amara, 2015), and in Omani, participants preferred teacher written feedback to peer feedback (Kasanga, 2004). Similarly, in the UAE, students preferred and used teachers' written feedback while revising their essays, since they did not strongly believe in peer feedback (Shine, 2008). On the other hand, both teachers' written feedback and peer feedback motivated Tunisian students to rewrite their work. In Palestine, the provision of teachers' written comments on students' writing was believed to be effective in developing students' English writing (Abu Shawish & Abd Al-Raheem, 2015).

Direct Corrections of Students' Mistakes

Provision of direct correction of students' mistakes in writing has been repeatedly used and favoured by students in ten Arab countries. First, Iraqi students preferred writing teachers who correct their mistakes (Cinkara & Galaly, 2018). Second, Syrian students liked teachers' correction of their mistakes in English writing (Meygle, 1997; Janoudi, 2011). Third, Emirati students regarded direct correction as a practical choice (Mohammedi, 2016). In Palestine, direct WCF enhanced high achievers' performance in a new piece of writing but did not improve the performance of middle and low achievers (Hammad, 2014). In Qatar, written comments and individual conferencing with the teacher proved effective in enhancing students' writing performance (Weber, 2018). Bahraini students tended to prefer direct to indirect corrective feedback, especially when instructors provided corrections on mistakes (Mubarak, 2013). In Lebanon, students tended to expect surface error corrections from their teachers and believed that these corrections are useful (Diab, 2005). Saudi teachers were not aware that students preferred direct feedback that focused on grammar rather than indirect WCF that focused on the mechanics of writing (Alshahrani & Storch, 2014). Emirati students regarded direct correction as a practical choice (Mohammedi, 2016). Finally, in Yemen, students wanted their teachers to pay attention to and correct all aspects of their written essays when giving written feedback (Mahfoodh & Pandian, 2011).

Indirect Feedback

Indirect feedback proved effective only in Kuwait. Research results showed that indirect feedback was effective in improving intermediate Kuwaiti students' English writing (Alhumidi & Uba, 2016).

Coded Feedback

Coded feedback—giving feedback using writing symbols that encourage learners to self-correct their writing errors—has only been researched in the Algerian context. Using a quasi-experimental design, Baghzou (2011) revealed that using coded feedback with Algerian students proved statistically significant and helped improve students' performance in English writing.

Ineffective Feedback

Some feedback provision practices proved ineffective in some Arab countries. For example, in Egypt, the correction of the most common mistakes in students' English writing was criticised by undergraduate university students (Ahmed, 2011). In Oman, marking and commenting on students' assignments in red ink proved to be a depressing experience for first-year students still learning to operate within a new academic context (Al-Badwawi, 2011). Finally, Libyan students complained about teachers' feedback that was not linked to specific errors, and misinterpreted some of their teachers' comments (Amara, 2015). In another study, Libyan students felt offended or uncomfortable when the teacher provided them with feedback in front of their peers (Sopin, 2015)

Peer Feedback

Results of the effectiveness of peer feedback in the Arab world varied. In Egypt peer feedback was infrequently used due to sociocultural reasons such as academic jealousy and competition (Ahmed, 2016; Ahmed &

Myhill, 2016), while in Sudan, it is missing altogether (Zakaria & Mugaddam, 2013). For is peer feedback favoured in Saudi Arabia or the UAE. Saudi students were apprehensive since they lacked confidence in their classmates' linguistic level (Grami, 2010), while Emirati students did not strongly believe in peer feedback and preferred instead to use their teachers' written feedback while revising their essays (Shine, 2008).

Despite this, the literature shows that peer feedback is frequently used and highly recommended in many other Arab world contexts. For instance, in Bahrain, the process-oriented approach and practice of peer review contributed to students' learning about writing and enabled them to identify the L1 Arabic interference errors in their peers' writing (Wali, 2017). In Algeria students interacted socially during the peer-evaluation process and exhibited positive attitudes towards peer feedback; moreover, peer feedback was found to reduce their apprehensions about writing and helped augment their writing self-efficacy (Moussaoui, 2012). Using peer feedback in process writing classes in Palestine, students viewed it as a worthwhile experience that offered them an opportunity to interact socially, improve their writing, and enhanced their critical thinking, confidence, creativity, and motivation (Farrah, 2012). Formalised peer review using peer-review sheets was used to help develop Qatari university students' English writing (Weber, 2018), and in the Lebanese context, Diab (2011) examined peer feedback and proved its effectiveness in creating collaborative dialogue and negotiation of meaning that facilitated the learning of L2 writing. Finally, in Omani English writing classrooms, university students demonstrated constructive views of peer feedback and were willing to peer-review each other's work and incorporated peer feedback in revisions (Kasanga, 2004).

Students' Reactions to Teachers' Feedback

The literature also demonstrated varied reactions from students to teacher feedback in eight different Arab world contexts. In Yemen, Mahfoodh (2017) showed that students' emotional response to their teachers' written feedback varied between acceptance, rejection, surprise, dissatisfaction, happiness, disappointment, satisfaction, and frustration. These

emotional responses could be ascribed to teachers' harsh criticism, negative evaluation, or miscommunication with their students. Jordanian students reacted positively to teachers' written feedback and reported that they found it useful to their writing process since it improved their revision skills and enhanced the overall quality of their writing (Al-Sawalha, 2016). University students in Saudi Arabia (Grami, 2010) and Palestine (Abu Shawish & Abd Al-Raheem, 2015) reacted satisfactorily to most of their teachers' constructive feedback practices as they believed that it developed their writing skills. Omani students either accepted the feedback from their teachers and revised their writing accordingly; accepted the teachers' feedback but did not know how to revise and thus simply deleted the problematic sentences and effectively ignored the feedback; or reproduced the same essay without any changes or revision (Al-Badwawi, 2011). Finally, students in the UAE did not understand the extent of revision expected of them nor the aspects to which they should attend (Shine, 2008). The study suggested using classroom teaching and revision strategies to improve students' reactions to teachers' written feedback (ibid.).

Technological Tools/Applications Used to Give Feedback

The literature suggests that integrating technology into feedback on EFL writing has been used and recommended in many universities in the Arab world. Weblogs proved authentic, interactive, flexible, and motivating to write among Algerian students (Mansouri, 2017). The automated feedback tool Write & Improve was found to be effective in providing immediate feedback on Bahraini students' writing (Wali & Huijser, 2018). The video feedback tool Screencasting was used with Egyptian university students and proved to be engaging, personal, constructive, supportive, clear, and multimodal (Ali, 2016). Screencasting was also used in a study conducted in Lebanon and proved to be clearer, useful, engaging, and supportive of students' learning preferences (Ghosn-Chelala & Al-Chibani, 2018). Electronic feedback was recommended by Seliem and Ahmed (2009) in Egypt due to its positive impact on students' revision and the fact it helped students feel responsible for their writing,

facilitated teacher-student collaboration, and increased student participation. The Criterion automated feedback tool was found to enhance Egyptian students' writing through the provision of feedback at word, sentence, paragraph, and text levels (El Ebyary & Windeatt, 2010). In Jordan, AbuSeileek (2013) used computer-assisted corrective feedback, in the form of track changes and word processor, with Jordanian students and found that it proved effective in developing students' EFL writing. Bouziane and Zyad (2018) investigated the effect of technology-mediated self-review and peer feedback on Moroccan students' university L2 writing. They found an improvement in students' ability to identify problems as unhelpful comments decreased and meaning-level comments increased. Finally, in the Qatari context, online feedback services are offered in some writing centres in higher education institutions (Williams et al., 2017).

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Part I

Perceptions of Feedback in L2 English Writing

2

Students' Perceptions About Teachers' Written Feedback on Writing in a Moroccan University Context

Meriem Ouahidi and Fouzia Lamkhanter

Introduction

There is no doubt that responding to students' writing is not an easy task. Writing feedback includes complex activities that range from pinpointing mistakes in punctuation, spelling, and grammar to commenting on the organisation, content, and relevance of what has been written. The complexity of such a task also stems from the variety of writing tasks that are both complex by nature and essential in the shaping of the language learning process. In a classroom writing context, providing feedback is one of the most frustrating and time-consuming tasks for any teacher because it requires providing feedback which leads to students recognising their next steps and how to take them.

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As a pedagogical tool, feedback, when provided effectively, should enhance the student's writing skill, trigger revision, and strengthen the student-teacher interaction (Lee, 2017). According to Ferris (2001), written feedback is a useful technique to interact with students writing assignments for it provides them with an individualised, contextualised and text-based response from the teacher. Teachers presume that feedback is an essential component of their workload. Likewise, students always seem to be eager to receive teachers' feedback on their writing, whether in the form of comments, suggestions, grades or codes (Leki, 1991). In academia, writing, in addition to its crucial role in the school curriculum, is liable for students' academic success. As a multi-faceted topic, in addition to its role in assessing the students' writing performance, feedback indicates their progress, provides solutions to problematic areas and engages them in future writing assignments.

Most studies on teachers' feedback have investigated its different critical facets, including its description, impact, and students' perception of and reaction to that feedback. The latter aspect determines whether students take their teachers' feedback seriously or not. Put differently, if the teacher's feedback conforms to the student's preferences, feedback can promote the student's writing skill and vice versa. Many scholars recommended that teachers should acknowledge and endorse their students' viewpoint about what effective feedback is (Ferris & Bitchener, 2012; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1996).

It seems that if students and teachers do not agree on the type of feedback to be provided, and if students do not equally engage in the feedback process, their expectations are not likely to be met, and they will be less likely to process the received feedback. Therefore, raising awareness of the importance of feedback and supporting and guiding learners in improving their writing skills are likely to create a positive teacher-learner interaction.

In this respect, this chapter aims at investigating the usefulness of teachers' feedback from learners' perspectives, with more heed given to the students' perceptions and preferences as far as this pedagogical tool is concerned. We will, in what follows, provide an overview of the relevant features of feedback and then discuss its main dimensions within the university context. This is meant to pave the way to explore how Moroccan

university students perceive their teachers' feedback on their writing assignments and how this perception affects their exploitation of the feedback received. Before concluding the chapter, we will examine the implications of this investigation in the classroom context.

Review of the Literature

Several studies have provided evidence on the role of quality feedback in promoting students' writing skills (e.g. Semke, 1984; Ferris, 1995; Lee, 2005; Seker & Dincer, 2014). They have highlighted the positive impact of quality feedback to improving writing, a complex activity that requires the use of critical thinking skills and cognitive abilities. There is also evidence that the teacher's formative feedback does influence the 'self-efficacy beliefs' of receivers (Duijnhouwer, Prins, & Stokking, 2010). Lee draws our attention to the role of the teacher:

> teachers do not mainly correct errors and give scores to student writing, but they should provide mediated learning experience in the form of formative feedback to help students improve learning, to motivate them, and to make them autonomous writers in the long run. (Lee, 2017, p. 57)

When students feel they are on the right track towards progress, they will be endowed with a sense of fulfilment and will be looking ahead towards their targets. They will do their best to improve further towards their desired writing level in the future. This purpose is likely to be achieved once the teacher strives to provide quality feedback which will encourage the learners to cope not only with their writing difficulties but also to develop and reinforce their critical approach towards writing as a whole, as Lee (2017) and Walk (1996) have pointed out.

Feedback is now considered one of the critical elements in the process approach to teaching writing, and this has not always been the case. In the late sixties and early seventies, pedagogical interest was more invested in writing as a product than a process. This traditional approach focused on writing as a final product, and students were required to write accurately because of the belief that writing correct grammatical sentences was

a prerequisite to composing essays (Ashwell, 2000). In this traditional approach, or product approach, students would write assignments that teachers then correct, hoping that students would remember their errors and avoid them in subsequent tasks. Contrary to their teachers' expectations, students generally tended to forget about their teachers' comments. With the emergence of the process approach, writing is viewed as a cyclical and recursive process which includes planning, drafting, revising and editing. Lee explains the subsequent development:

> Existing rules that require one-shot writing in a testing-oriented environment that emphasises scores should be changed so that new rules like multiple drafting and a greater emphasis on pre-writing instruction and post-writing reinforcement can be established. (Lee, 2017, p. 58)

Therefore, the teacher can interfere at different stages of the process via the use of a variety of techniques to respond to their students' writing—teacher-student conferences, peer feedback, oral and/or written feedback—with the aim of reducing the types of errors students frequently commit.

This shift to process writing occurred with recommendations to teachers to focus on content and organisation along with formal correctness, mainly grammar, style, and spelling. A balanced approach covering both form and discursive aspects of writing simultaneously was advocated by Krashen (1984), Ferris (1999), Hyland and Hyland (2001), Biber, Horn, and Nekrasova (2011) and many others. However, many researchers investigating feedback (Zamel, 1985; White & Arndt, 1991; Lee, 2005; Seker & Dincer, 2014) found that teachers focus more on formal aspects. Lee's study (2017), for example, shows that teachers are still predominantly preoccupied with grammatical errors. Others (Reid, 1998) argue, however, that teachers give priority to content. It seems that there are no conclusive results about what teachers focus on when correcting their students' writing. Teachers' preferences vary in relation to the curriculum, students' level and needs, and the teaching-learning context.

Previous research about students' opinions about their teachers' feedback can be categorised as follows: (a) students' preferences about the type of feedback they receive and (b) students' attitudes towards their

teachers' feedback. In the literature, although there are divergent findings concerning students' preferences about whether feedback should be content-based (Semke, 1984) or grammar-based (Ashwell, 2000; Lee, 2005), among other aspects, most studies (for instance, Hattie, 2009) call attention to the necessity for teachers and students to agree on common feedback purposes, types and strategies. In fact, both teachers and students need to work together in order to meet the needs and expectations of writing tasks.

In the second line of inquiry, Cohen (1987) found out that his respondents did not process their teachers' feedback adequately because of the lack of a wide range of strategies that could have allowed them to react actively towards their teachers' feedback. As a result, their teachers' feedback had little impact on them. McCurdy (1992) reported more positive findings when he claimed that his respondents considered the teacher's feedback useful and helpful though they had problems in understanding and dealing with it.

Scholars agree that "the student needs to be an active agent in the feedback process if successful learning is to take place" (Busse, 2014, p. 161). Both teachers and students need to have a clear conviction that they are on the right path to create a synchronous interaction. In this respect, Ferris and Bitchener (2012) remind us that "It is a well-established fact that most learners want and expect clear and regular feedback on their writing" (p. 141) but comment that "there is always the possibility that too much feedback at any one time might be de-motivating or too burdensome for cognitive processing" (ibid.). Thus, they conclude that "careful consideration needs to be given to the amount of feedback that learners are given" (ibid.).

Research Questions

Having established the importance of teachers' feedback in foreign-language writing and its subsequent effect on students' academic success, the main purpose of the present study is to contribute to this growing area of research by developing an understanding of the learner's views, attitudes and preferences towards their teacher's feedback.

Based on the stated aim, the study intends to address the following research questions:

- How do higher education students view their teachers' feedback on their writing assignments?
- What are the students' preferences about their teachers' feedback?
- To what extent do the students benefit from their teachers' feedback?

In addition to their research relevance, the answers to these questions can be insightful to teachers who can use the findings of this investigation to adjust their feedback practices to students' needs.

Significance of the Study

Research on feedback has been mostly restricted to investigating English in second-language contexts with a manageable class size environment, and little attention has been paid to academic practices in which English is learned as a foreign language. In conjunction with this gap in the previous research, writing in general and feedback in particular, has not been sufficiently investigated to reach conclusive findings, even though it is an essential component for academic success. In addition, to the best of our knowledge, there are very few publications in the literature about the issue of students' perceptions of teachers' feedback in Moroccan higher education institutions where the number of students in a class (ranging between 120–160) is huge.

Methodology

Since this investigation is exploratory and descriptive in nature, a quantitative approach has been employed. The questionnaire is considered the appropriate quantitative instrument used in this study. By relying on the quantitative mode of inquiry, we attempt to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions towards their teachers' feedback so as to determine the different factors behind their attitudes and to find

out the extent to which the teachers' feedback can be beneficial and motivating to students.

Questionnaire

Data were collected through a survey that aimed to measure students' perceptions of their teachers' feedback on their written work. Questionnaires with close-ended questions were considered the most appropriate data collection method for this study because they allow informants to offer accurate and measurable responses.

Keeping in mind the learning practices of the teachers in the English Department of the Sultan Moulay Slimane University Faculty of Arts and Humanities in Beni Mellal and the purpose of the study, a two-page questionnaire was constructed on the basis of hybrid surveys conducted by Amrhein and Nassaji's (2010) and Chen, Nassaji, and Liu's (2016) original designs. However, this preliminary version underwent considerable revision to simplify the items and make them accessible to the participants. The final version of the questionnaire (see Appendix), in addition to the demographic information of the participants (age, gender, etc.), consists of nine items: five on the subjects' own perception of their teachers' feedback and four on their preferences about the feedback they want to receive. The questionnaire items comprise multiple-choice questions and Likert-scale items.

Participants

The target population of the current study was English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities in Beni Mellal. The sample included 261 fifth-semester students aged between 19 and 35 in the English Department (mean age: 21.5). There were 183 (70%) female and 78 (30%) male students. All respondents have been studying EFL for more than five years. They are Moroccan Arabic or Berber native speakers.

During the first four semesters at the English Department, students study writing techniques and composition once a week, with each session lasting two hours. The syllabus lays stress on form and content and covers all aspects of writing composition, including shifts, sentence variety, punctuation, coherence, cohesion, paragraph structure, thesis statement, essay structure, the writing process, and types of essays, in addition to an introduction to research methodology. Therefore, the syllabus deals with writing at the level of the sentence first, then the paragraph, and subsequently the essay and research paper.

Data Collection

All the students' participating in the study were asked to fill in a questionnaire in class under the supervision of their teachers who had explained the instructions and goals of the study having distributed the questionnaires at the end of a composition class. Most students completed the questionnaire in about twenty minutes.

The compiled data by the questionnaire was analysed with SPSS 17.0 software, as the primary statistical tool to investigate the responses of the participating students and to answer the research question. Descriptive statistics were used for measuring percentages and graphical representations; the aim was to discern the students' perceptions about their teachers' feedback and to determine the extent to which it promotes their writing skill. These measures have allowed us to classify the findings of the study in a systematic way.

Results

In order to process the data, we investigated the frequencies and percentages of responses provided by the participants. Therefore, in answer to the first question of the questionnaire related to how the subject students view their teachers' feedback, the majority of respondents held a positive view regarding the usefulness of the feedback provided by their teachers. The results in Fig. 2.1 reveal that most students (62%) agreed that the

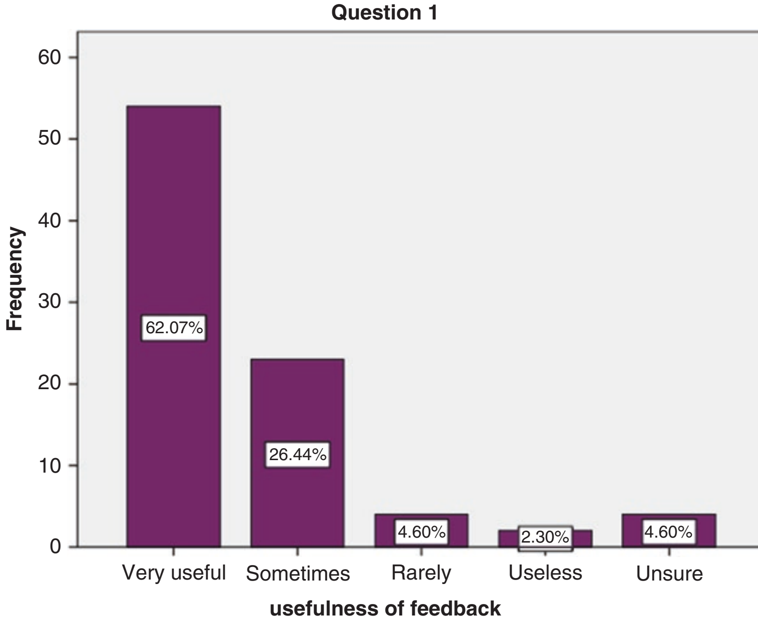

Fig. 2.1 Usefulness of the teachers' feedback

teachers' feedback is very beneficial and, consequently, has a positive impact on improving their writing skill. Few students considered it unrewarding because they find it useless (2%) or feel unsure (5%) of its benefits.

Item 2 of the questionnaire was designed to measure students' perceptions of their ability to understand the teachers' feedback. The statistical representation demonstrates that most students managed to get the significance of the comments provided by the teacher. It is apparent that there is an insignificant difference between the percentages, regarding the options 'Often' (31%), 'Usually' (29%) and 'Sometimes' (29%). About one-third of the respondents 'Sometimes' (29%) had difficulties in deciphering the teachers' feedback. The most striking remark to draw from Fig. 2.2 is that not one of the respondents selected the option 'never', hence its absence from the graph.

When the students were asked about their ability to revise their compositions in relation to the received feedback, their responses were remarkably revealing, as Fig. 2.3 illustrates. It is very obvious that the

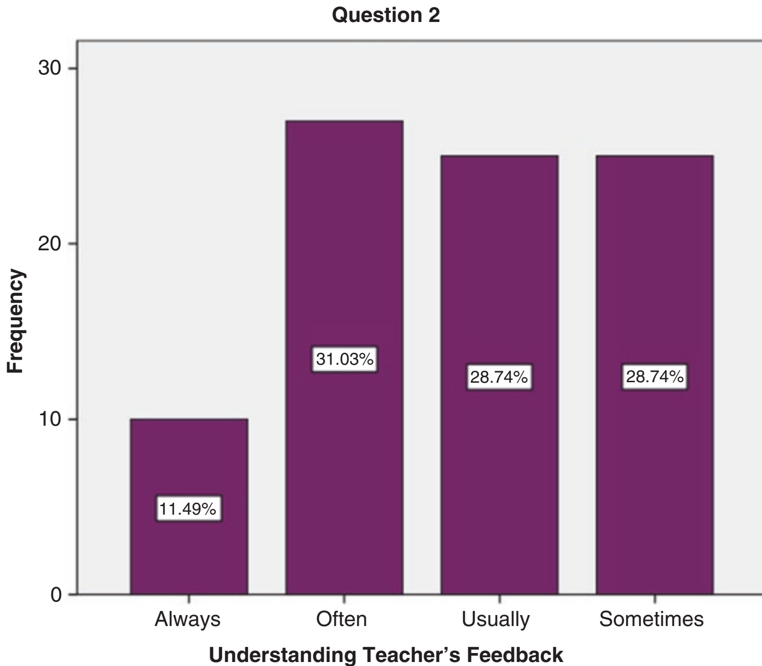

Fig. 2.2 Students' understanding of teachers' feedback

majority of students (55% + 17%) find it hard to revise their written assignments. The lowest percentage is associated with the option 'often'. A small number of students assumed that they are either 'Usually' (17%) or 'often' (11%) able to work on and correct their errors. Question 3 was set as a follow up to question 2. However, it seems striking that there turns out to be no correlation between the students' understanding of the teachers' feedback (item 2) and their ability to correct their errors (item 3).

With regard to follow-up activities that the teachers' design as remedial work to consolidate the learning experience after assessing the students' writing, Fig. 2.4 reveals that teachers tend to skip this stage of the writing process as mentioned by 63% of the respondents. It is very apparent that the highest percentage is attributed to the first option 'no follow-up activities (63%)'. This demonstrates that teachers provided feedback to the end product. Just 9% of respondents selected the third option 'tutoring with the teacher'. This percentage reflects the rare use of teacher-student

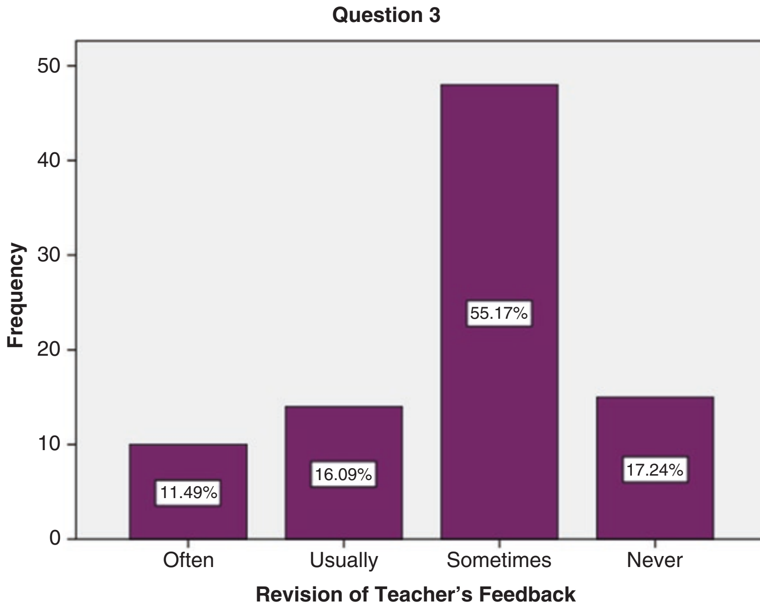

Fig. 2.3 Students' revision of their writing

conferencing. Only one-quarter of the students (25%) completed any revision to their compositions. Thus there is an absence of substantial revision that can attend to teachers' feedback. There seems to be a general tendency among teachers to skip the follow-up activities and to avoid conferencing with students. A few students (2%) selected 'other' but did not specify what they meant by the term, even though they were required to explain it in the questionnaire. The data in graph 4 provides a satisfactory explanation for the students' difficulty to revise their teachers' feedback.

Concerning Fig. 2.5, students were asked if they preferred oral more than written feedback. In response to question 5, dealing with the type of feedback, be it oral or written, more than two-thirds would rather have written feedback. That is why the option 'false' has received the highest percentage (77%), as Fig. 2.5 displays. One-third of the students preferred oral feedback. This finding goes hand in hand with what is revealed

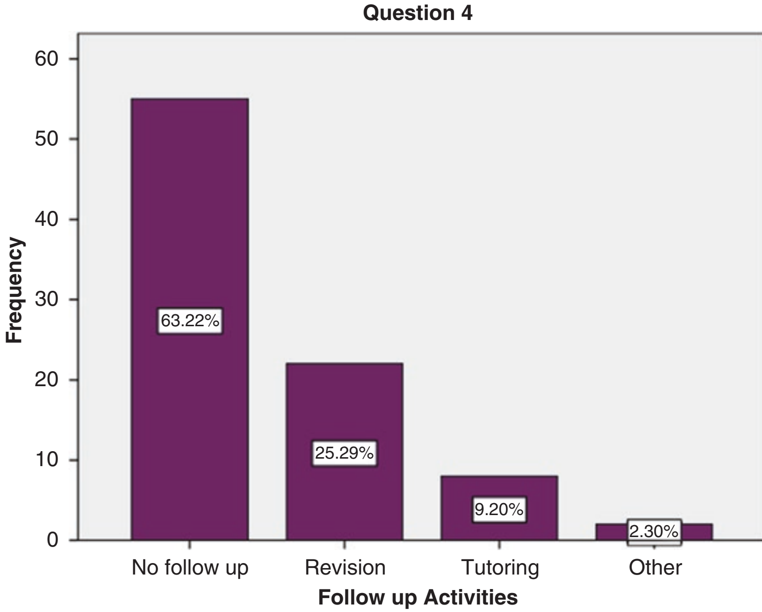

Fig. 2.4 Follow-up activities to writing tasks

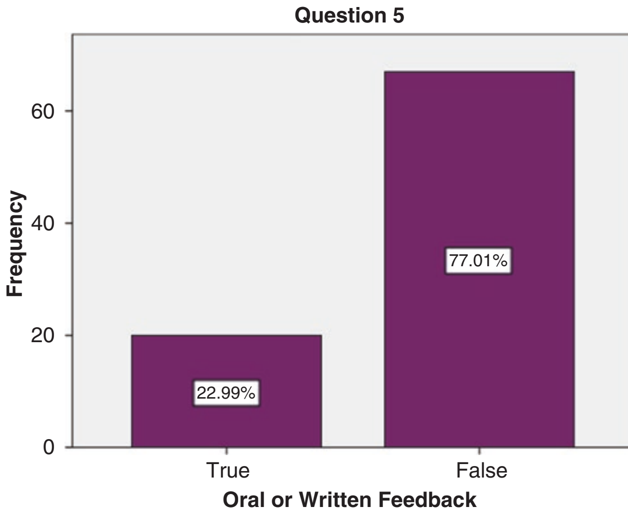

Fig. 2.5 Students' preference for oral feedback

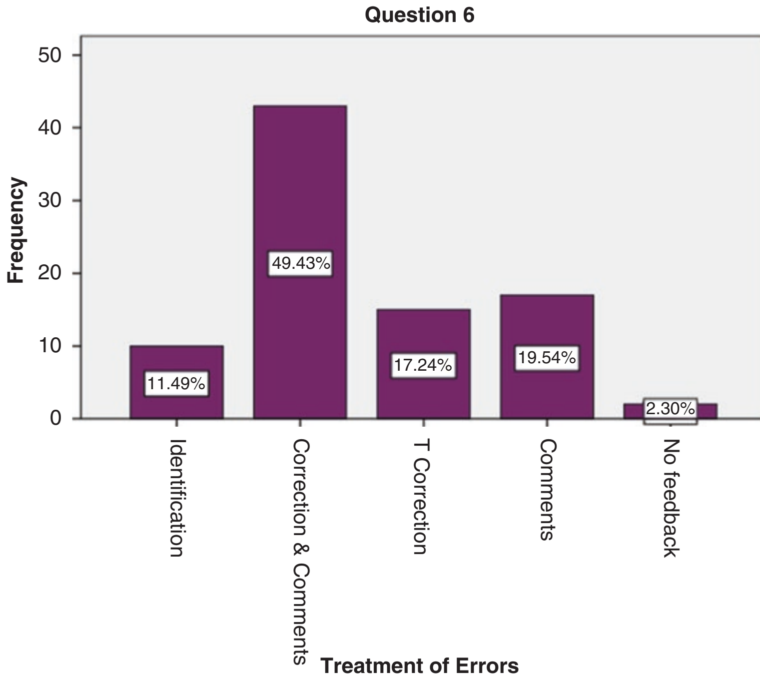

Fig. 2.6 Teachers' treatment of errors

in Fig. 2.6, that students clearly stated that they had better receive corrected written versions so as to improve their writing abilities.

Figure 2.6 depicts the students' responses to how they prefer their errors to be approached by their teachers. If we take a close look at the graph, we can observe the predominance of the second option 'correction and comment'. About half of students presumed that the instructor should correct the errors and at the same time provide comments. Opting for "direct error correction", students want their teachers to mark their writing comprehensively. The purpose is to know how to deal with different types of errors and to minimise them in future writing. Secondly, there is a slight difference between the options 'Teacher correction' and 'Comments': 17% of the respondents believed the teacher should correct the errors only, whereas 20% thought that his/her role should be limited to providing a comment or suggestion. These students want to play an

active role in the process of correction and to figure out the most appropriate way of fixing problematic issues. Only 11.49% and 19.54% received indirect feedback for they believe that the teachers' response to writing should be in the form of comments or codes. According to them, it is the role of the student to figure out the errors and revise them. Few students (2%) consider grades more important than feedback, which backs up their selection of the option: 'No feedback'.

When asked about feedback strategies that the teacher should adopt, the students seemed to favour direct error correction, as Fig. 2.7 demonstrates. There is a general agreement among the subjects of this study on how they would like the teacher to tackle their errors. There is, indeed, a very slight difference between the percentage of results obtained for the options 'all', 'major' and 'most'. Just under a third (30%) of respondents wanted the teacher to correct major errors. The other responses ranged from 'All' (29%) and 'Most' (21%). Unexpectedly, about 11% would like

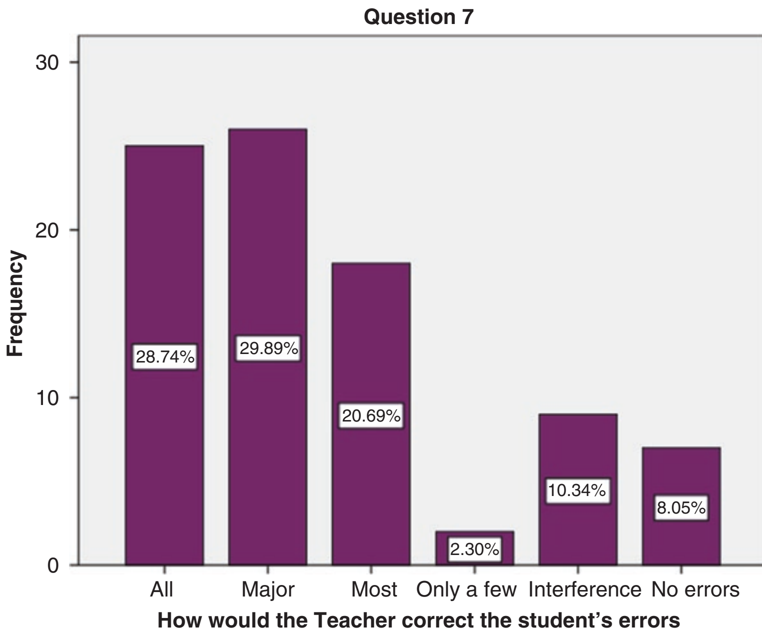

Fig. 2.7 Amount of errors the teacher should correct

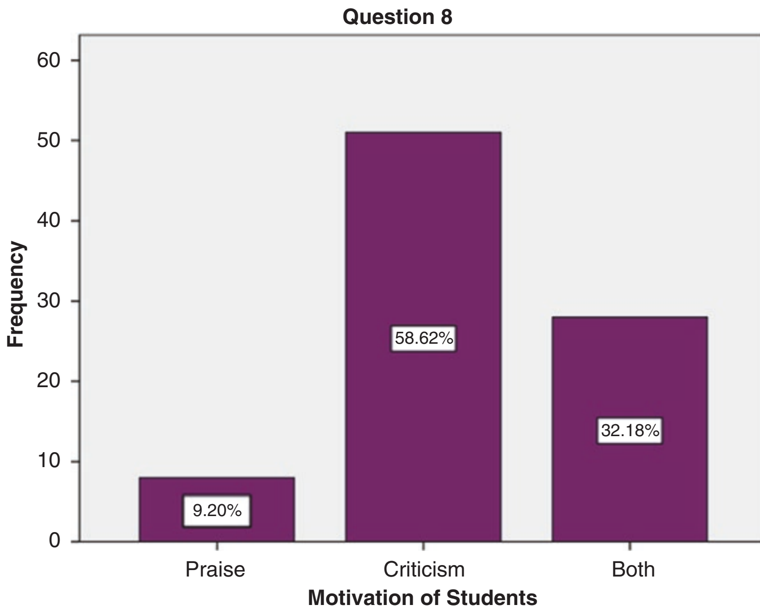

Fig. 2.8 The reaction of teachers towards repeated errors

their teachers to focus on errors that interfere with meaning and content, followed by a smaller percentage (8%) who opted for content only, believing thus that the teacher should respond to content and ideas.

Figure 2.8 indicates that 'criticism' is highly scored by participants. That is, 59% of respondents maintained that the teacher should focus on the negative aspects of the writing assignment. Only 32% believed that the teacher should outline both positive and negative remarks.

In the final item of the questionnaire, the students were required to rank the different aspects of language they want the teacher to emphasise, as shown in Fig. 2.9. The highest rate is associated with grammar. Revealing their inclination to receive feedback on the formal aspects of language, the majority of students (43%) selected grammar, followed by organisation (24%). The most surprising result to emerge from the data in Fig. 2.9 is related to the option 'Content' which was selected by only a small proportion of students (15%). The least chosen option is vocabulary (2%).

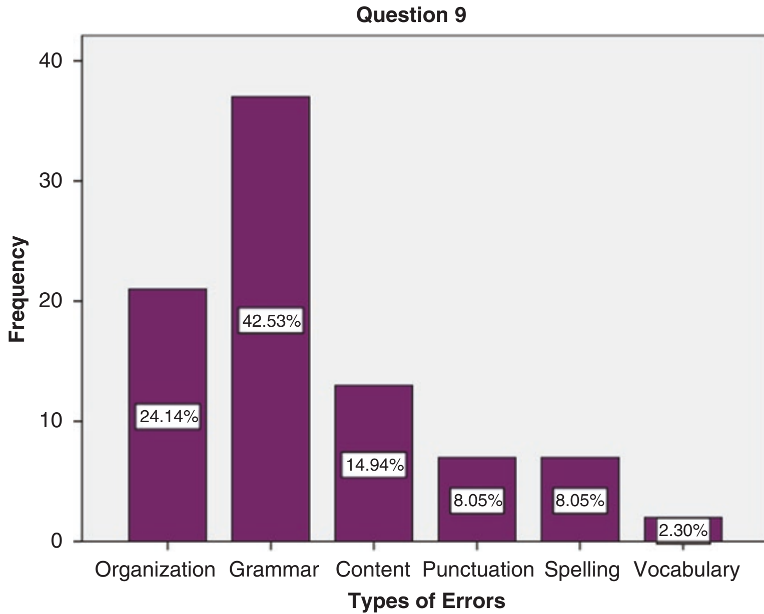

Fig. 2.9 Type(s) of errors teachers should focus on

Overall, the survey data indicates that although the vast majority of students value the teachers' responses to their writing, they encountered difficulties revising their work appropriately due to a lack of follow-up activities, teacher tutoring and teacher-student conferencing. This finding is consistent with the students' wish to receive direct correction. The possible reasons behind these results are discussed in the following section.

Discussion

It is obvious from the findings of the current study that there is a discrepancy between students' perceptions of feedback and their teachers' practices. Hence, contrary to our expectations, feedback does not help students much in promoting their writing skill for several reasons. In fact, teachers correct their students' writing and provide them with feedback so that they can correct their errors and hopefully avoid making the same

ones in future tasks; however, the students are not always successful in their endeavour. Their inability to engage actively with learning and interact positively with their teachers' feedback is proof that there is a gap in the process that should be bridged so that students/teachers can profit fully from the teaching-learning interaction.

Undergraduate students' perceptions of their teachers' feedback are influenced by a multi-faceted range of educational and contextual factors. First, teachers' responses on the final draft have little effect on students' development as they may not read it when there is no need to revise the draft. It is believed that in each draft, the teacher can address some intentional aspects, closely related to their goals. Multiple drafting can facilitate students' understanding of the information in the feedback given so that they can actively interact with the teacher. In this connection, Lee (2017) states:

> These feedback strategies have to be applied to interim rather than single drafts in a process-oriented classroom so that students use feedback to revise and improve their own writing and learn to play an active role in their learning. (p. 57)

Second, there is not enough practice of writing at the university level to allow students to go over their writing problems. The lack of writing activities and remedial work, as the results have indicated, deprive students from the opportunity to interact with their teachers' feedback. Another possible reason may lie in the teachers' view of students as autonomous learners, who should be in charge of their own learning in general and writing process in particular. They may have forgotten that those students have not been trained before to behave autonomously, to set targets by themselves or feel responsible for reaching them. All these factors affect not only the teachers' feedback but also how students perceive it. In other words, students' perceptions of their teachers' feedback are strongly mediated by the educational and contextual variables that directly influence their reaction to it.

Feedback is thus a two-way communication through which learners and teachers interact positively to enhance the learning process in general and the students' writing skill in particular. Students may become passive

agents in the feedback process. If there is no collaboration between the parties, no improvement of writing skill will take place. This does not mean that teachers should switch to direct feedback to match students' preferences (as students' response to questions six and seven indicates). On the contrary, the teachers' role should not be limited to detecting errors since this is likely to turn teachers into 'marking machines'. At the same time, the correcting strategies of teachers should meet students' preferences so that effective communication can take place. In this respect, as stated earlier, students' expectations are directly determined by their teachers' practices; see Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990).

As expected, the majority of students appreciate their teachers giving detailed, comprehensive feedback in which all errors are corrected. Students want their teachers to be primarily responsible for the correction of errors perhaps due to their inability to handle indirect feedback. It seems that they have a strong desire to eradicate errors and to produce error-free writing, which is regarded as a near-impossible mission. This strategy can fall short of being beneficial to students' writing development since achieving perfection by being provided with all the corrections is not the main objective of the writing task and will not, as a result, improve their writing skill. Students' preference for direct feedback on their errors may equally be attributed to their reluctance to make an effort and react to teachers' feedback.

The research findings suggest that error correction should also be accompanied by a commentary (Fig. 2.6) that explains the nature of the error and how it can be avoided in future assignments. This result substantiates students' wishes to be involved in the feedback process and to avoid confusion and misunderstanding. Following this line of thought, Mahfoodh (2011) supported the need for marginal comments since Arab learners of English tend to reject teachers' feedback that does not explain the reasons behind the occurrence of such errors. Previous research (Ferris, 1995; Lee, 2005) has also corroborated this view by emphasising that the overuse of codes and symbols to mark errors as a feedback strategy has been questioned because of the inability of students to interpret these codes. The provision of codes and a grade are not enough to guide students to better ways of improving their writing skill. In fact, students

would like to know what needs to be corrected and how to correct it effectively to avoid confusion.

Teachers' feedback practices can inhibit students' ability to revise their writing and in fact demotivate them. Arbitrary feedback is usually perceived as a demotivating judgement that can negatively affect students' attitudes towards writing and inhibit future improvement. Feedback can be beneficial if students are offered positive grounds of improvement and if they are able to celebrate their accomplishments. Seow (2002) suggested that the post-writing stage, for example, may be used as a stimulus for writing as well as hedging against students finding excuses for not writing. Likewise, Dragga (1988) recommended the necessity to associate praise comments with a specific place in the essay. Therefore, to consolidate their learning, gain confidence, and enhance their self-esteem, students should be, hopefully, made aware of their strengths as well as their weaknesses. Hyland and Hyland (2001) supported this point by arguing:

> We know that writing is very personal and that students' motivation and self-confidence as writers may be damaged if they receive too much criticism. We may also believe that praising what a student does well is important, particularly for less able writers, and we may use praise to help reinforce appropriate language behaviors and foster students' self-esteem. (p. 186)

This study has clearly demonstrated that teachers' feedback, according to students, is more often than not demotivating. Unlike Cardelle and Corno (1981) who stated that the vast majority of their respondents reported that praise motivated them to make more efforts to revise better. Generally, as an interactive process between teachers and learners, feedback can be encouraging or disheartening. While responding to students' writing, the teacher can lower or boost their motivation. The choice of vocabulary and style used in feedback should convey that there is a way to move forward. Thus, teachers should be cautious of the inherent risk of using the red pen to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation of their negative comments and suggestions. Otherwise, students will exhibit negative attitudes towards the writing task.

Another significant finding of this study supports previous studies that confirm students' preference for written rather than oral feedback. Previous studies (Dragga, 1988; Lee, 2017) are insightful about the immense significance of written feedback, but they do not deny that oral feedback can also play a substantial role in promoting writing skill. According to Lee:

> teacher written feedback is best followed up by oral feedback in face-to-face conferences, during which teachers can respond to individual student needs by clarifying the meaning, explaining ambiguities, and allowing students to ask questions. (Lee, 2017, p. 71)

It is almost impossible to use face-to-face conferences in the Moroccan higher educational system, as is evidenced by the vast majority of students who responded to our questionnaire. This may be due to the constraints of time (two hours per week) and class size, which can obstruct the provision of adequate personal feedback. Oral feedback provided to the whole class together with some remedial work, in this context, can prove to be very helpful if the teacher verbally explains the most common errors, using examples from the students' compositions, and showing and discussing how to address them. Remedial work may be one of the follow-up activities that can foster learning as it works on areas that students, especially in large size classes, have not mastered yet and that are likely to improve their performance later and, as a result, motivate them to engage in other writing tasks.

Students should become actively involved in the feedback process by promoting peer interaction. In this respect, peer editing should not be considered an alternative to teacher feedback but rather a way to lighten the teachers' workload. Besides, it is a strategy to involve students in the learning process and to build collaborative learning as they learn how to negotiate meaning and develop a clear understanding of academic writing techniques.

The primary concern of more than 50% of the respondents to our survey is accuracy since they have a more favourable view of feedback pertaining to grammar and organisation rather than content. This find-

ing appears to corroborate the studies of Leki (1991), Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1996) and Ene and Upton (2014). Higher education teachers, according to Zamel (1985), are often "so distracted by language-related local problems that they often correct these without realizing that a much larger meaning-related problem has totally escaped their notice" (p. 86). However, this result is in contradiction with the balanced feedback approach proposed by Lee (2017) which should incorporate grammar, organisation, content, vocabulary, and other aspects. In the same line of thought, previous studies (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Ferris, Pezone, Tade, & Tinti, 1997) on feedback endorse a balanced approach in which both form and content are emphasised.

According to Huang (2016), EFL classes are pedagogically accuracy-oriented since they focus more on grammatical accuracy than fluency. Teachers' over-concentration on linguistic form can result in neglecting the discursive level of writing. This preference can be attributed to the curriculum, which gives less significance to the communicative aspect of writing. Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1996) suggest that teachers' practices can be reflected in their students' productions. Thus, it will not be surprising to come across students who are less inclined to work on feedback directed towards content or organisation if their teacher has placed a strong emphasis on form and error correction.

It is significant to note that students have a positive attitude towards the value of their teachers' feedback although they have difficulty in revising and editing their writing tasks. This finding corroborates with Ferris (1995) who reported that overall respondents believe that the feedback they receive is helpful and allows them to improve their writing.

In a nutshell, this investigation of higher education students' opinions about their teachers' feedback reveals that neither teachers nor students exploit feedback as they should. A conscientious reading of the students' responses displays their reluctance to correct their errors or revise their writing because the role of their teacher ends as soon as they have handed the writing assignments back to the students. There are a number of recommendations and implications that higher education teachers should consider in order to profit from teacher-student interaction via feedback.

Pedagogical Implications

Even though several researchers (Zamel, 1985; Truscott, 1996) have questioned the usefulness of feedback to promote students' writing, we believe that well-designed and targeted feedback can draw the students' attention to problems in their writing so that learning can take place. Through this process, they can become more aware of their needs and challenges at both the linguistic and discursive levels. Feedback, when handled properly, can almost certainly be effective. In this framework, and in the light of the findings drawn from the data analysis, the following implications have been formulated to provide some guidelines for higher education teachers when responding to their students' writing:

1. Given the objective of improving students' writing skill through teacher feedback, there should be a match between what the students prefer and what the teacher expects so that feedback can become a bidirectional pedagogical tool that contributes to more productive writing and creates a cooperative teaching-learning atmosphere. More than this, teachers can help learners improve their writing skills when the students are fully aware of the teachers' goals, procedures and strategies at the beginning of the semester in order to familiarise them with the teachers' practices and to avoid misunderstandings.
2. It seems quite obvious that the lack of follow-up activities may reflect teachers' concerns with the final product instead of the writing process as a whole. Teachers, therefore, should be encouraged to follow a process approach to writing whereby feedback plays a crucial role in the different steps of the task as previous research (Ferris, 1999; Lee, 2017) has indicated.
3. Teachers are advised to readjust their current feedback practices and adopt ones that will create autonomous learners who can take charge of their writing. Students should be fully aware that error correction is their responsibility if they want to develop their writing skill. Indirect feedback should be advocated since it promotes long-term acquisition and increases learner autonomy.

4. Feedback should be constructive and purposeful, revolving around a well-determined purpose, directly related to the teachers' instructions, students' needs and/or writing genre.
5. Teachers can just raise the most significant points, using constructive and supportive language. Though time-consuming, writing some informative comments at the end of students writing is crucial.
6. More importantly, providing motivating feedback in which the teacher outlines the students' strengths (praise) and weaknesses (constructive criticism) is key to a favourable reception of that feedback.
7. In the context of process writing, it is highly recommended that teachers should focus on content, structure and organisation in the initial drafts, and grammar in the final draft. This order, however, is not fixed; teachers should be flexible in deciding what should be given prominence, depending on the goals of the writing task. Importantly, it is critical that teachers do not correct all these aspects in the same draft for fear that students get disappointed and frustrated if the amount of received feedback is significant.
8. Eventually, bearing in mind the large size of classes, we believe that both oral and peer feedback can substitute for individualised feedback in this institutional context.

Limitations

It is plausible that a number of limitations may have influenced the results obtained in our study. To begin with, our data are insufficient since they were collected only from students; teachers' practices were not investigated but were only reported by the students. The findings of the current study, therefore, cannot be generalised. To balance the investigation of students' perceptions, attitudes and preferences about teachers' feedback, we need to examine the other side of the coin; the opinion of teachers. Therefore, further study is required to determine exactly how teachers' feedback can affect the students' progress in writing. Another source of unreliability can be attributed to the method used in the analysis. The use of interviews and qualitative analysis would have allowed students to explain and clarify their choices.

Conclusion

Drawing upon our findings, this paper has presented the salient problematic aspects of teachers' feedback in the English Department of a Moroccan university that may hinder the improvement of students' writing skills. Working on students' perceptions and attitudes towards their teachers' feedback, this chapter has presented some recommendations that can be successfully applied in the classroom to improve the students' writing ability. We have also clearly outlined the mismatch between the students' expectations, teachers' current practices and previous research.

It is important to note that students do not all have the same reaction to their teachers' feedback. Regardless of the time taken by teaching writing, especially when it comes to giving feedback, the present paper has presented several arguments in favour of providing useful feedback that takes into consideration the academic needs of students. Equally, the need to follow up with students on the feedback they receive is crucial. Finally, there should be an implicit agreement between teachers and students that feedback, be it grades, coding or comments, is intended to help students develop and improve their writing, and never to judge or impede their progress.

Appendix

Questionnaire for Students

We would like to ask you to help us by answering the following questions concerning foreign language learning. This survey is conducted to better understand how students perceive their teachers' feedback. This is not a test so there are no "right" or "wrong" answers and you do not even have to write your name on it. We are interested in your personal opinion. Please give your answers sincerely, as only this will guarantee the success of the investigation. Thank you very much for your help.

Section 1:

1. How old are you? ……………
2. Are you Male □ Female □
3. Semester: ……
4. 2. How long have you been learning English? ………………….

Section: 2

1- **How useful is the written feedback that you receive from your teacher on your composition**? (Circle the appropriate number)

1: Very useful, 2:sometimes useful, 3:rarely useful, 4: useless, 5:unsure

1 2 3 4 5

2- **How often are you able to understand your teachers' comments**? *Mark only one answer.*

- Always
- Often
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Never

3- How often are you able to use your teacher's comments to revise your essay? *Mark only one answer.*

- Always
- Often
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Never

4- What follow-up activities does your teacher offer you after returning your writing tasks?

- Usually no follow-up activities
- Revision and rewriting
- Individual tutoring with the teacher
- Other, please specify____

5- Mark the following sentence as being true or false. (Circle 'T' for true of 'F' for false)

a- I prefer my teacher to give me oral rather than written feedback. T/F

6**. How would you like your errors to be treated by your instructor?** *Tick only one answer.*

- Error identification (T circles or underlines errors, no errors are corrected)
- Correction with comments (T corrects errors and makes comments)
- Teacher correction (T corrects errors)
- Commentary (errors are not corrected; T makes comments on errors only)
- No feedback (only the grade)

7-When Correcting your writing, what do you think your teacher should do? Tick only one.

- T should mark all errors
- T should mark all major errors
- T should mark most of the major errors, but not necessarily all of them
- T should mark only a few of the major errors.
- T should mark only the errors that interfere with communicating your ideas
- T should mark no errors and respond only to the ideas and content.

8- In response to an error, should your teacher

- Praise
- Criticise
- Both

9- If there are many different errors in your written work, which type(s) of errors do you want your teacher to point out most? Tick only one answer.

- Organization errors
- Grammatical errors
- content/ideas errors
- punctuation
- spelling
- vocabulary

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Students' Perceptions of 4D Feedback Treatment on EFL Writing in Oman

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Introduction

To date, research on writing pedagogy and written corrective feedback (WCF) has produced disparate and contradictory results as to whether or not feedback on language use leads to improved linguistic accuracy. Truscott's (1996, 2007) vehement remarks on the inefficacy of corrective feedback initiated a heated argument and then a series of studies that testified to the opposite conclusion (Bitchener, 2008; Sheen, 2007; Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2012). Studies both supporting and opposing the efficacy of WCF have been criticised by a number of scholars who ascribe their paradoxical results to poor research design, comparability issues, and cognitively overwhelming feedback (Ferris, 2004; Storch, 2010). Despite inconclusive results, WCF is widely practised in writing classes, and teachers see it as an effective tool in treating students' errors (Brown, 2007; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). In addition, students

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expect to receive corrective feedback to improve their writing accuracy (Ferris, 2004). The present chapter does not intend to question the effectiveness of WCF but assumes that WCF can be a worthwhile practice. In fact, it intends to shed light on one of the most neglected aspects of this widespread practice in writing classes.

In her *Critical Feedback on Written Corrective Feedback Research*, Storch (2010) notes that "the pendulum has swung too far towards experimental studies" (p. 29). Such studies fall short of looking into affective factors such as learners' attitudes to feedback which influence their responses to feedback and uptake of the correction. There are, however, a number of studies which have explored the impact of affective factors in students' decision to act upon feedback, and their findings reveal that both affective factors and students' uptake of the feedback are inextricably intertwined (Hyland, 2003; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010a, 2010b). Regarding the importance of considering learners as the main stakeholders of the feedback process, Hyland and Hyland (2006) state that learners are "historically and sociologically situated active agents who respond to what they see as valuable and useful" (p. 220). Thus, the present chapter is an effort to draw attention to the students in the process of corrective feedback and augment our understanding of their perceptions of a WCF type underpinned by "languaging" that we refer to as *4D feedback*.

Contextual Background

The language unit where this chapter was conducted is in a well-known public university which enjoys a high level of popularity not only in Oman but the wider Gulf region. For the university students, the foundation programme is a prerequisite of their degree courses. The primary responsibility of the foundation programme is to equip students with the linguistic skills they need for success in their English-medium courses in their respective colleges. After passing the foundation programme, students take credit courses in English which are mainly of the English for Specific Academic Purposes type.

The foundation programme operates a six-level system ranging from beginner to intermediate (equivalent to B1 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) and follows a skills-based curriculum which covers the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) along with study and research skills. Writing, however, constitutes the major proportion of the course at all six levels and enjoys a significant role in the foundation programme. Each level lasts eight weeks and consists of 18 to 20 weekly contact hours.

The curriculum is based on a set of learning goals which learners are expected to acquire gradually during the six levels. The foundation curriculum reflects what students need to learn in order to succeed in their college studies. Success in the foundation programme is determined by a combination of continuous assessment throughout the semester, a mid-semester exam, and a final exam at the end of the semester. A sample of four male students enrolled in level 6 of the foundation programme represents the study sample of this research.

Review of Literature

This section begins with the theoretical framework underpinning the study and reviews the literature pertinent to languaging, languaging as a self-scaffolding tool, and languaging as an auxiliary tool in WCF.

Sociocultural Theory

The theoretical paradigm underpinning the present study is sociocultural theory. This paradigm, which has its origins in the writings of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1978), is built upon the belief that humans are mediated beings whose mental functions are guided by activities, concepts, and artefacts throughout history (Lantolf, 2006). Unlike cognitive theorists who define learning as a mediated process between stimulus and response, sociocultural theorists' main focus is the individual's surroundings. To them, learning is not confined to one's cognition but is the by-product of learners' collaboration. Vygotsky (1981) mentioned that any

mental function first "appears between people as an inter-psychological category, and then within the child as an intra-psychological category" (p. 163). In other words, a highly interactive and supportive learning environment is a prerequisite to cognitive development. Hawkins (2004) considered meaning to be dynamic rather than a commodity residing in the heads of individuals. Put differently, meaning is co-constructed between humans through social interaction in an ongoing process.

The core construct of sociocultural theory is *mediation* in the learners' zone of proximal development (ZPD) which is defined as "the process through which humans deploy culturally constructed artefacts, concepts, and activities to regulate (i.e., gain voluntary control over and transform) the material world or their own and each other's social and mental activities" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 79). To Vygotsky, mediation is categorised into three types as mediation by others, mediation by self through private speech, and mediation by artefact (Lantolf, 2000). Learning, in a Vygotskyan approach, is the result of these mediations within the social context. In fact, Vygotsky (1978, 1981) stated that all higher mental functions are mediated processes and the role of language as a mediating tool of cognition is of paramount importance. The relationship between the mediating role of language and cognitive development serves as the basis of this study.

Languaging

When proposing the term *languaging*, Swain (2009) stated, "it is too simplistic to think of language as being only a conveyer of meaning. Rather, we need to think of language as also being an agent in the making of meaning" (p. 96). She views language as a mediating tool in the development of cognition which shapes thought, solves problems, and constitutes learning. To her, new insights can be constructed, and learning can take place through the use of language with self or with others. Languaging is an integral part of mental functions and a foundation for higher order thinking (Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2015). We believe that languaging facilitates meaning discovery and deeper understanding of concepts and notions through filtering information and regulating mental

functions. In other words, languaging is a sine qua non of developing consciousness.

Vygotsky considers foreign language acquisition a *non-spontaneous concept* for which conscious attention is required (Britton, 1987). Language learners are involved in a problem-solving process as new knowledge needs to find embodiment in the learners' body of knowledge and experiences (Britton, 1987). The problem-solving process requires conscious attention and researchers in second language learning are of the opinion that collaborative dialogue or languaging in L2 writing helps create consciousness, mediates second language learning, and assists in solving linguistic problems (Dobao, 2012; Storch, 2005; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012). On the importance of languaging in language learning, Swain (2009) points out that

> Languaging about language is one of the ways we learn language. This means that the language (the dialogue or private speech) about language that learners engage in takes on new significance. In it, we can observe learners operating on linguistic data and coming to an understanding of previously less well understood material. In languaging, we see learning taking place. (p. 98)

Since consciousness is an integral component of languaging, having dialogues with self or others makes learners attend to issues they have in writing and leads to language learning in the long run (Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012). Furthermore, it is believed that in second language acquisition (SLA), languaging "mediates second language learners' development of grammatical concepts" (Brooks, Swain, Lapkin, & Knouzi, 2010, p. 90).

The type of scaffolding to which languaging contributes does not fit in the original definition of scaffolding provided by early sociocultural theorists in their introduction of ZPD. Scaffolding is usually interpreted as assistance provided by a more knowledgeable other. Languaging, however, assists the novice in constructing new knowledge or skills without the assistance of an expert (Knouzi, Swain, Lapkin, & Brooks, 2010). In fact, it kindles self-scaffolding in learners. Holton and Clarke (2006) stated that self-scaffolding is "a form of internalised conversation in

which the student interrogates their epistemic self" (p. 128). They believe that it is equivalent to metacognition as self-scaffolders gain awareness of their own learning styles and both conceptual and heuristic knowledge.

Related to scaffolding is the concept of agency. In self-scaffolding, agency is relocated to the learner with the purpose of empowering learners and equipping them with what they need to take control of their own learning to help them move towards learner autonomy. The locus of authority in self-scaffolders is no longer external but is placed within the learners themselves (Holton & Clarke, 2006). Self-scaffolding emerges "as a form of internalised conversation in which the student interrogates their epistemic self" (Holton & Clarke, 2006, p. 128). In other words, languaging is a self-scaffolding tool through which learners make sense of new knowledge (Knouzi et al., 2010). We are also of the opinion that learners take control of knowledge construction and exercise agency via languaging. Once languaging is exercised, agency settles within learners (Swain, 2009). Sociocultural theorists hold that learner agency is an integral component of language learning (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Van Lier, 2008; Zheng, 2013) and studies suggest that languaging not only facilitates development of higher order thinking skills and helps students to discover meanings and connections, but also contributes to greater learner agency (Knouzi et al., 2010).

Even though there are voices both for and against WCF, recent studies in the field have suggested positive results, and their findings evidence the effectiveness of WCF under certain conditions (Bitchener, 2012). There is a widely held belief that feedback cannot lead to uptake unless it is attended to and acted upon (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010b). Qi and Lapkin (2001) have pointed out that WCF may have no impact unless the right condition for processing the feedback is provided. They also hold that noticing alone does not necessarily lead to learning as it is the calibre of the noticing process that counts. Studies suggest that languaging facilitates noticing (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010b) and enhances knowledge of second language grammar and lexis (Brooks et al., 2010; Negueruela, 2008; Swain, Lapkin, Knouzi, Suzuki, & Brooks, 2009). Cognitively, languaging involves learners in processing the feedback through perception and reasoning (Moradian, Miri, & Hosseinnasab, 2017). The same source points to extensive studies suggesting that

intentional engagement in either collaborative dialogue or private speech enables learners to gain a better awareness of the gaps in their knowledge and helps them bridge those gaps.

In one of the early studies on the effect of languaging on students' understanding of grammatical knowledge, Swain et al. (2009) selected nine intermediate learners of French and evaluated their languaging on the concept of voice in French through pre/post-test design. The findings revealed that not only did languaging help the learners to make better sense of the concept, but it also enabled them to apply the passive voice in other sentences. Their findings also suggested that there was a positive correlation between both quantity and quality of their languaging and their accurate understanding of this grammar concept. In other words, high languagers showed greater linguistic improvement. In order to determine why some learners gain more from languaging than others, Knouzi et al. (2010) conducted another study using a microgenetic analysis of two French learners' languaging behaviour. They found that the high languager in their study was better at solving linguistic problems and constructing meaning than the low languager who struggled and left the grammatical problems unresolved. They concluded that self-scaffolding mediated by languaging plays a crucial role in solving cognitive conflicts. They also maintained that education should call for new practices that give more space to learner agency through languaging.

This argument was also supported by Suzuki (2012) who explored the impact of written languaging on the writing skills of 24 Japanese learners of English. Students were asked to write out their understanding of lexis-based and grammar-based direct feedback in Japanese. The effect of written languaging treatment was then examined in the immediate revision and it was noticed that there was a significant decrease in the students' errors. The findings of this study indicated that written languaging had a positive impact on the learners' treatment of their own errors. In another study, Moradian et al. (2017) looked into the influence of written languaging on the grammatical accuracy of two groups of Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. For the pre-test, both groups were required to write a composition on the same prompt. As for the treatment, the control group (n = 19) received direct corrective feedback, whereas the experimental group (n = 19) received direct corrective

feedback followed by written languaging. For the post-test, both groups were asked to revise their original compositions. A comparative analysis of the students' performances revealed that the additional of written languaging had a more positive impact on students' writing than direct corrective feedback on its own.

Suzuki (2017) further explored this area by looking into the quality of written languaging and its impact on the students' immediate revision of their drafts. Twenty-four Japanese EFL learners participated in a three-stage study. First, the students were asked to write an essay using a prompt. Direct corrective feedback was then provided on every error in their first drafts. Second, they were asked to do a written languaging task in Japanese on all their errors based on the direct corrective feedback written on their original drafts. Third, they then received a clean copy of their original essays and were asked to produce a revised draft. The researcher then identified three different levels of awareness in the students' written languaging task: *noticing*, *noticing with reason*, and *uncertainty*. Exploring the revised feedback along with the written languaging task revealed that the first two levels of awareness, *noticing* and *noticing with reason*, led to accuracy improvement. The findings of this study confirmed the importance of languaging as an essential mediating tool in second language learning.

The introduction of languaging as a crucial self-scaffolding tool has brought about new pedagogical practices in writing and initiated research on its influence on students' processing and accurate production of the language. Even though research on WCF is vast, research on students' engagement with feedback and their preferences and attitudes towards corrective feedback is rather scarce. Yet teachers' understanding of students' attitudes towards feedback is essential in acquiring a broader understanding of the feedback type teachers plan to provide. As there is very little research concerning learners' perceptions and attitudes towards languaging-based corrective feedback, the present study is an endeavour to explore the students' perceptions and attitudes towards 4D feedback. This study is significant since it addresses the dearth of research on students' feedback preferences in the Arab world in general and in the Omani context in particular.

Research Design

This study seeks to explore students' perceptions of the proposed 4D feedback. The following are the questions this study aims to address:

1. What are the foundation students' perceptions of 4D feedback?
2. What are the foundation students' attitudes towards languaging in 4D feedback?

4D Feedback

The rationale behind 4D feedback is to create a kind of treatment which functions by noticing, supervised and group-oral languaging, practice, and self-editing. The first stage of the treatment follows teachers' indication of selective errors based on their importance for the level and frequency. Arguments in favour of selective feedback suggest that the selective approach is more manageable since it is less overwhelming for learners to process and more feasible for teachers to apply (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Errors are indicated indirectly by underlining the sentences or phrases containing errors. The reason for indicating errors indirectly is that extensive studies provide evidence that indirect feedback enhances leaners' self-editing strategy as it makes them "reflective and analytical about their errors" (Alkhatib, 2015, p. 46). Another advantage of indirect feedback is that the level of student engagement is higher when processing it (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010b). 4D feedback which has been devised to improve learners' grammatical accuracy includes the four stages of Dialogue, Drill, Discovery, and Dialogue. Figure 3.1 shows the four stages of the 4D feedback method.

D1. Dialogue (supervised-oral languaging): The teacher projects the selected errors in some sample sentences, clauses, or phrases. After that, the teacher and the students discuss the errors and how each can be corrected.

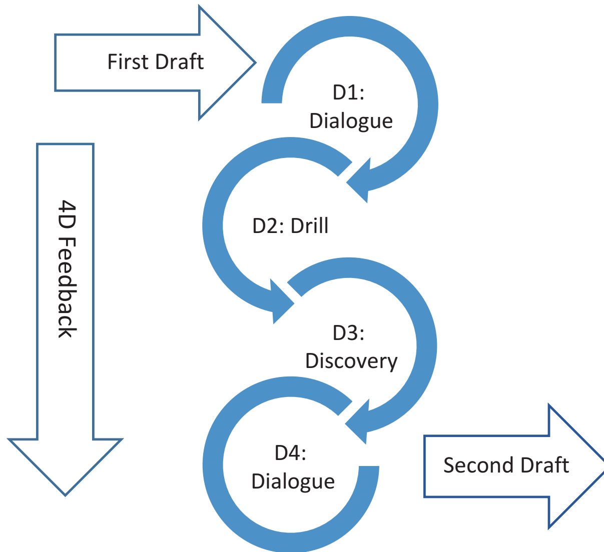

Fig. 3.1 4D feedback: the process

D2. Drill: Students are given copies of a number of sentences, clauses, or phrases containing the most frequent grammar and lexis-based errors discussed in the previous stage. *Drill* used in the 4D method is different from mere mechanical drill; it refers to the purposeful practice requiring students to detect the same errors in a variety of contexts and correct them. At this stage, error detection and correction are done repeatedly, hence the use of the term drill.

D3. Discovery: The first drafts are distributed and students begin discovering their own errors. The selected errors are underlined, and students need to specify the problems and suggest how they can be treated.

D4. Dialogue (group-oral languaging): In pairs and/or groups, students discuss how their errors should be fixed. Each student talks about their errors, how they should be corrected, and what they need to focus on in their next writing task. This stage is followed by revising the first draft and producing a second.

Research Method

The present research is a qualitative study informed by the interpretive paradigm since its main focus is to gain a deeper understanding of corrective feedback grounded in sociocultural theory and the languaging aspect of it from the perspectives of the participants. Before deciding to use corrective feedback in writing classes, it is essential to understand what students think of it. The findings can help tailor future feedback to make it better suited to the needs of the students. The study focused on a group of Omani EFL learners receiving 4D corrective feedback.

To elicit the responses and opinions of participants, we opted for a focus group interview rather than one-on-one interviews. Although both methods use open-ended questions, they vary in the way they are structured (Guest, Namey, Taylor, Eley, & McKenna, 2017). Krueger & Casey (as cited in Cheng, 2014) have pointed out that the focus group interview is conducted with a group of individuals sharing certain features or experiences who help shed light on certain issues in the presence of a moderator and via group discussion.

Qualitative researchers posit that the dynamic and interactive nature of focus groups produce data that may not be elicited through individual interviews (Guest et al., 2017) as the quality of responses and data produced in focus groups vary in both depth and breadth. Data elicited from group interviews are known to be deeper and richer (Thomas, as cited in Rabiee, 2004) and can also be of a wide range (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). The quality of responses obtained from focus group interviews can be attributed to the synergic nature of groups (Krueger & Casey, 2014). For these reasons, we favoured focus group interviews in order to obtain rich and deep data.

Participants

This study was conducted in the spring of 2018 at a public university in Oman. The participants in this study were four male students aged 19 who volunteered and expressed their willingness to partake in the study.

Table 3.1 Characteristics of the participants

	Name	Gender	First language	Nationality	Age	Linguistic ability
Student 1	Ahmed	Male	Arabic	Omani	19	Intermediate
Student 2	Ali	Male	Arabic	Omani	19	Intermediate
Student 3	Aymen	Male	Arabic	Omani	19	High intermediate
Student 4	Ibrahim	Male	Arabic	Omani	19	Intermediate

They came from the same class and were studying English at a high intermediate level as part of the foundation programme. The class in which the 4D feedback model was implemented was an all-male class and since the method was implemented three times, the participants were able to give their insights into the topic because they all acquired familiarity with the method and the process during the sessions it was practised. The participants represented students of slightly different linguistic levels within their class and their almost similar schedule allowed the interview to take place with almost no interruptions. Thus, the sample selected for the group interview was based on both purposiveness and convenience. Table 3.1 summarises the main characteristics of the participants:

Procedure

The interview questions (see Appendix) were prepared in accordance with the objective of the study and were written ahead of time. The questions were open-ended questions which allowed development of the responses via follow-up questions. The questions were reviewed a number of times and examined in terms of how they can help expand the topic and help the interviewer to delve into the heart of the matter. In the process, a couple of questions were deleted, some were added, and the list was finalised after we made sure there were no guiding, prejudicial, double-barrelled, or vague questions. Apart from examining each interview question in isolation, we made sure that the ordering of questions facilitated a smooth transition.

The homogeneity of the participants in terms of gender and familiarity with each other and the interviewer helped to build rapport at a very early stage. The participants were also briefed on ethical considerations and the importance of sharing their true feelings from the very beginning. All of these measures created a non-judgemental atmosphere which was essential in eliciting the participants' views and attitudes towards 4D feedback. In fact, the participants' disagreements in some of the cases indicate that they felt safe and were willing to share their honest opinion. This open atmosphere enhanced the accuracy and reliability of the qualitative data, which is the foundation of this study.

The interview began with a short briefing clarifying the aim of the study, the purpose of the interview, and the ethics the authors of the study are bound by. The participants were given opportunities to ask questions both before and during the interview. To refresh their minds, the four stages of 4D feedback were reviewed at the beginning of the interview. As the four stages had been introduced and reviewed in class during all the feedback sessions, the students were already familiar with them. For reliability purposes, some of the questions were asked twice using different wording. Also, the interviewer restated and rephrased the participants' responses to ensure an accurate understanding of their viewpoints. Efforts were made to keep the questions short and to give the participants sufficient time to express their opinions, ask questions, react to and build on each other's responses. The interview took 1 hour and 20 minutes and was conducted in Arabic, the participants' mother tongue. The reason for selecting Arabic was to help the participants to articulate their feelings with ease and to make sure that nothing hindered the process of both comprehending the questions and expressing their feelings. The interview was audio recorded, transcribed, and colour-coded in terms of the emerging themes and sub-themes. Based on the research questions, the two major areas which were 4D feedback and languaging were identified. In analysing the feedback process, the data was analysed based on each stage of the 4D feedback process. Students' challenges in writing also emerged during data analysis. Wolcott's (1994) suggestions of data descriptions, data analysis, and data interpretation were followed. Attempts were also made to avoid biased interpretations of the data and to be faithful to the students' viewpoints.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations described in this section are built upon the principles established by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011).

Voluntary informed consent was granted by the participants after we made sure they were aware of the process they were involved in and agreed to participate. The participants were fully informed of the purpose of the study and the interview, assured of their anonymity, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any time during the research both in a face-to-face session and through written consent forms. Consent forms that provided information about their rights in both English and Arabic were distributed prior to the interview. Participants were invited to read the forms and were given sufficient time to ask questions. The interview did not convene until after the forms had been signed. Furthermore, the university's permission was granted after the proposal, purpose, and details of the study had been reviewed by the committee in charge of research. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms have been used in this study.

Limitations of the Study

Owing to the qualitative nature and design of this small-scale study, the authors do not claim generalisability of the findings. However, they can be transferrable to similar contexts in the Arab world. Another limitation is that the interview was conducted by the class teacher who is also one of the researchers of this study. This may have biased some of the students' responses. However, every attempt was made to clarify the purpose of the research and help students to be truthful throughout the interview.

Findings and Discussion

This section aims to interpret and discuss the findings in light of the literature on EFL written feedback. The findings are categorised based on the interview questions into the main themes of usefulness of the 4D feedback,

practice stage, discovery, and students' perceptions of languaging. An emerging theme in the analysis was grammar and writing enhancement and for that reason it is here presented first. What follows is a discussion of each theme.

Grammar and Writing Enhancement

The data analysis revealed that students considered grammar to be one of the biggest challenges hindering their writing skill. Ahmed said, "Grammar is the biggest challenge. Besides grammar, it is having information about the topic". Corroborating this point, Ali mentioned that "My main challenge is grammar". In addition to grammar, participants called attention to their inability to express feelings, topic novelty, and their insufficient knowledge of the topic as their other concerns. However, grammar was mentioned three times by three of the participants. Azar (2007) has stated that poor grammar is the root cause of problems in academic writing. In her study, she showed that students with poor grammar knowledge have difficulty understanding sentence formation and the connections among sentences in a paragraph. In another study on students' perceptions of grammar, Pazaver and Wang (2009) reported that participants considered grammar to be a key factor in communication and a tool for augmenting their writing skill.

Myhill and Watson (2014) examined the literature pertinent to the role of grammar in writing and stated that there is a growing consensus on the implementation of grammar into the writing curriculum as it increases the number of writing options which can, in turn, enhance student writing. The findings of our study confirm that grammar, which might be considered obsolete in some contexts, needs to be revived and paid attention to as students see it as one of the biggest impediments to progress in writing. If sentence structure is flawed, the flow of information will be affected and meaning cannot be communicated. Students themselves have identified this issue as well as the close connection between form and meaning.

4D Feedback: Was it Helpful?

The participants unanimously approved of their progression while receiving 4D feedback. They found the sequence smooth and helpful. Ahmed

said, "We liked how we moved from D1 to D4". They all noted that this method was very different from what they had experienced before. One of the participants called the previous method "very limited" and explained that errors were just identified with correction symbols on the first draft and students had to write the second draft based on the teacher's comments and correction symbols. In some classes, they explained, redrafting was not required. In contrast, they found the 4D method of treatment between the first and second drafts facilitative. Ali mentioned, "If we'd had it [4D] earlier, it would have helped us a lot in higher levels". When they were asked whether they recommend that this method be implemented, the answer was a resounding yes.

Findings revealed that for feedback to be effective, teachers should realise students' needs in grammar and act upon them. The first draft can provide an invaluable source of information as it can reveal the gaps in students' knowledge. Studies suggest that feedback on the first draft helps and has a positive impact. However, in the opinion of our participants, for the same errors not to be repeated, using correction symbols and getting the students to write a second draft is not effective. Instead they thought that there should be a discussion and practice between the first and second drafts. They stated that 4D feedback was effective because of both the integration and chronological sequence of the four main elements of the feedback. In their view, the individual steps used in isolation were not as effective, and it was the combination of all the elements that added to its strength. They also stated that another positive point of the method was that it entailed noticing and student engagement. In short, we found that languaging can strengthen and sharpen noticing, and students perceived it as a facilitative tool that contributed to their learning.

Practice Stage

The participants asserted that the practice stage assisted them in locating and identifying their errors at the Discovery stage. Aymen confirmed this by saying,

> *The whole drill part was useful because I kept asking myself what errors I had made and was trying to find my own errors among the example sentences.*

One participant, however, did not approve of the last part of the practice stage in which students were required to fix a number of erroneous sentences. He said that it was challenging. Ahmed, who disagreed and was in favour of the practice stage, stated,

> *It helped us to recall the grammar points and refresh our memories. The errors were not new. It gave us a chance to recall and do further practice.*

To Ali, one of the plus points of this treatment was the amount of practice it afforded them. He said, "After doing it several times, some of the rules stick in mind".

Regarding the modes of presenting and practising the errors, two of the participants maintained that for the presentation stage to be effective, the common errors should be classified based on their grammatical category and be presented systematically. One of the participants said,

> *I think the teacher should focus on the same type of error so that students learn one error and then move to the next one, and so on. Yes, this may take a long time, but it makes the information stick in mind.*

The participant quotes presented in this section confirm the importance of practice in writing accuracy and can be supported by skill acquisition theory which states that explicit rules and extensive practice are both required for procedural knowledge and automatisation (DeKeyser, 2001, 2007). Hartshorn, Evans, Merrill, Sudweeks, Strong-Krause, and Anderson, (2010) call attention to skill acquisition theory and state that accurate writing is the result of frequent and authentic practice. Storch (2010) also points out that according to theories of SLA, "Learning requires extensive and sustained meaningful exposure and practice" (p. 42).

Discovery

On several occasions, the study participants mentioned that discovery was the stage they liked most. Ahmed said,

> *I enjoyed the discovery part. You find the errors on your own, and you won't repeat them.*

Ibrahim, however, had a different idea. He mentioned that although the discovery stage was useful, it was not always straightforward. To Aymen, this stage was thought-provoking, and he continued that learners need to ponder about the cause of the error and how each error can be fixed. Ali confirmed that discovering errors after the practice stage was done with ease.

Based on these findings, one can connect the positive feelings discovery evoked in learners towards the practice stage. Numerous examples and extensive practice can equip students with the knowledge required for self-editing. On the other hand, discovery naturally contributes to high levels of student engagement with language. Svalberg (2009) argued that engagement is the point where learning takes place. Together, the chemistry created by practice and discovery can positively impact learners' uptake of feedback and lead to a strong sense of achievement. Put simply, the practice stage is a discovery facilitator which enables learners to discover flawed sentences and which promotes critical thinking. This could explain why the participants collectively agreed that the discovery stage was both enjoyable and productive.

Students' Perceptions of Languaging

Drawing attention to the most frequent errors through languaging is the main purpose of the first and final stages. Interestingly, the importance of getting to know other learners' errors and its effect on broadening one's own knowledge of grammar was mentioned several times. Participants compared the treatments they had received in previous semesters with the new approach and stated that one of the drawbacks of the previous methods was their limited scope. They continued that 4D, however, could provide a more comprehensive picture. One participant said,

> *The previous method was limited to the individual's errors. Students did not know other students' errors.*

Another confirmed this point by saying,

> *It is helpful to get to know others' errors because you won't make the same errors again.*

As previously mentioned, the 4D treatment covers a broader scope as it does not restrict itself to individual student errors but covers the most frequent errors. Getting to know the most common errors assists students in broadening their knowledge of grammar points and offers a better coverage of the gaps in their knowledge.

Numerous quotes confirmed the positive attitude of the students towards languaging. The participants clearly stated that discussing grammar points with peers could greatly enhance their understanding of those points. Ahmed mentioned, "I feel that I sometimes learn better if the rule is explained to me by my friend than by the teacher". Aymen compared teacher-student interaction with the interaction taking place among students and said,

> *In my case, when my partner explains the rules to me, I use this rule when I write in the exam. However, when the teacher explains things I may not understand why I made that mistake, but when I ask my partner I understand better.*

The participants also explained that using their mother tongue and discussing points in their local language helped them a lot. Languaging exercised in this type of feedback could be considered a tool which raises students' consciousness of their errors through discussions across the class between the teacher and the students (D1) and the discussions in groups (D4).

The participants' opinions illuminate the importance of noticing and how languaging can contribute to it. Countless studies suggest the positive impact of noticing on students' writing (Uscinski, 2015). It has also been stated that collaboration stimulates noticing and engages students in a dialogue which can contribute to uptake (Swain & Lapkin, 2002). Swain (as cited in Uscinski, 2015) asserts that the scaffold created by peers of similar knowledge and problem-solving skill can broaden the interlanguage phase.

Summary and Future Directions

This study explored students' perceptions and attitudes towards 4D feedback underpinned by languaging. Four male Omani EFL learners were interviewed and the findings revealed that 4D feedback was embraced

since participants showed a positive attitude towards the stages they were engaged in. Analysis of the data revealed that to students, feedback is not always facilitative. In fact, students in this study preferred feedback accompanied by extensive practice. They were of the opinion that feedback deficient in practice was restrictive and did not reinforce learning. In addition, they had a positive attitude towards languaging and found it helpful in boosting their uptake of linguistic points. Thus, it can be argued that this study opens another window to languaging as it looks into learners' attitudes towards it and supports Swain's (2009) belief that languaging is a mediating tool that helps students identify gaps in their linguistic knowledge.

This study was exploratory in nature in its attempts to explore the perspectives of students on 4D feedback. However, experimental studies need to be conducted to further investigate 4D feedback and examine whether this kind of feedback can foster accuracy. Future studies that focus on students' writing using this feedback model can help us to gain a better understanding into the efficacy of 4D feedback in second language writing.

Appendix

Interview Questions

Warm-up Questions

1. How do you like writing?
2. What is the biggest challenge for you in writing?

Interview Questions

1. How do you compare the 4D feedback to other feedbacks you have received?
2. Which part of it did you find the most useful? Why?
3. Which part of it did you find the most challenging? Why?
4. How did you like the sample sentences showing the common errors? Did you find your own errors in the practice phase?

5. How did you find the practice phase? What were the advantages/ challenges?
6. Did you manage to discover your errors easily in the "Discovery" phase?
7. How did you like speaking about your errors?
8. Did you like speaking with your friends about your errors? Why? Why not?
9. How did you find the relationship between speaking about errors and your understanding of your writing errors?
10. What can you finally tell us about this particular method?

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4

Harnessing the Power of Feedback to Assist Progress: A Process-based Approach of Providing Feedback to L2 Composition Students in the United Arab Emirates

Sana Sayed and Brad Curabba

Introduction

Anyone who has attended an English writing course is all too familiar with the following phrases: “critical thinking,” “critical reading,” and “critical writing.” The syllabus almost certainly includes a list of readings that the professor thinks are academic yet appealing to a wide variety of students, quizzes/exams based on departmental requirements, and maybe even graded homework assignments that all culminate in what is really important and at stake: the summative essay assignments. These formal essays are high-stake submissions that students at the American University of Sharjah (AUS), in the context of this chapter, usually have a little less or a little more than a month to complete and constitute the majority of

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students' final grades. However, once the essay prompt or assignment sheet is distributed and the rhetorical mode for that particular essay assignment has been defined, students are given very limited direction on how to proceed. In a traditional composition course that existed prior to the turn of the century, probably not much else related to the process of writing happened in the classroom.

In the past, most composition courses focused on fostering critical thinking through reading and analysing a series of texts. These texts, based on politics, sociology, current events, or mostly literature, were the basis of class discussions and in-class activities. Past research encourages this practice. Literature, for example, encourages students to think beyond the discipline so that they benefit well after graduation (Tate, 1993, p. 321). Briggs (2004) defended literature by explaining how it enhances the composition classroom and makes learning more interesting and exciting for students (p. 3). However, composition trends have shifted away from reading and responding to thematic or literary texts. When composition courses focus predominantly on having conservations about readings, they fail to teach students the skill of becoming better writers. This is because most texts, especially those that are based on literature, are not examples of the types of writing they are expected to produce in a composition classroom. A composition classroom should foster understandings of structure, argument, logical reasoning, and concise prose rather than literary content (Teller, 2016). As faculty who teach composition, our primary purpose is to teach students *how* to write based on their understandings of concepts such as the audience, style, organisation, Aristotelian logic, deductive and inductive reasoning, and elements of argument. In essence, we want our students to learn how to become better writers by having them write as much and as frequently as possible both inside and outside the classroom.

A process-based approach to writing focuses on students and their individual progression as writers. Feedback plays a key role to gauge students' understanding of the task at hand. The goal is to integrate low-stake activities, tasks that do not carry a lot of weight, so students feel comfortable sharing and developing their ideas through writing. As they become more comfortable and open to feedback, they can perform better on their high-stake assignments, those that have a direct impact on the

course grade and are intended specifically to assess learning. It is important to have a series of low-stake activities before the final high-stake, summative submission because it helps students identify and improve their writing with the help of their instructor. Since low-stake tasks do not have a dramatic effect on student grades and usually take place in an informal setting, students are open to feedback and have a vested interest in wanting to integrate the suggestions offered to them. While process-based writing is an approach that both of us regularly use in the composition classroom, our real interest lies in investigating how well this works for other faculty and, more importantly, our students. The purposes of this research are (1) to assess faculty and student perceptions regarding the effectiveness of various feedback practices used in process-based writing classrooms with L2 students at AUS; (2) to explore the challenges encountered by faculty during the provision of feedback practices; and (3) to understand how process writing and its feedback practices benefit writing proficiency. Recommendations on how the process can be improved will also be discussed. The research questions for this chapter are: What are faculty and student perceptions towards feedback practices used in process-based writing classrooms? What are the challenges? How does process writing and its feedback practices improve student writing?

Literature Review

Feedback in the Writing Classroom and Benefits to the Learning Process

Over the past three decades, the field of L2 writing has continually sought to examine the pedagogical practices of process writing and its relationship to formative feedback. As a field, there is now a vast collection of data from research on the effects of feedback on L2 students' writing. Beginning in the mid-1980s, feedback practices and issues were increasingly influenced by interactionist theories of education, which emphasised the significance of the individual reader and the dialogic nature of writing (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Probst (1985) proposed that "without the reader, there is only potential for meaning but no meaning itself"

(p. 69). This perspective stressed the importance of the reader (teacher, peers) and multiple instances and forms of feedback in order to provide a real audience to the writer.

Feedback has also been widely cited as an important facilitator of learning and performance (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979; Bandura & Cervone, 1983; Bandura, 1991; Fedor, 1991). Additionally, Cohen (1985) described the importance of feedback in writing courses as a powerful and essential instructional tool, yet somehow the least implemented when designing course curriculum (p. 33). Further, according to Freedman (1985), teacher feedback on students' work has powerful potential to shape students' learning, with the possibility of re-evaluating the cognitive process of how learning happens (p. xi).

In a writing classroom context, feedback has a vital role serving a multidimensional function. In addition to assessment purposes, it has a larger pedagogical role by helping students understand future assignments, recognising the potential of their current writing, and comprehending the contexts in which written work is produced with audience awareness in mind (Hyland & Hyland, 2006, p. 206). When used effectively, it can also act as a medium of interaction between student-teacher and student-student and trigger revisions, which subsequently foster language improvement (Ferris, 1997; Hyland, 1998) and contribute to the process of learning when the nature of it is well chosen (Balzer, Doherty, & O'Connor, 1989; Kluger & DeNisi, 1998). Finally, the widely cited article by Bangert-Drowns, Kulik, Kulik, and Morgan (1991) demonstrates the benefits to learning that feedback can provide as long as there is an appropriate amount of reflection and purpose to the feedback.

Faculty and Students' Perceptions of Feedback

The practice of providing written feedback is widely seen by writing faculty as an essential component of any writing course (e.g. Lee, 2007; Gielen, Peeters, Dochy, Onghena, & Struyyen, 2010; Parr & Timperley, 2010; Strijbos, Narciss, & Dünnebier, 2010; Li & Barnard, 2011). Much of the research has also focused on the type and quality of feedback provided. Some researchers argue that quality feedback should focus on

form (e.g. Zamel, 1985; White & Arndt, 1991; Polio, Fleck, & Leder, 1998; Ferris & Helt, 2000; Ferris, 2002; F. Hyland & K. Hyland, 2006), while others argue that feedback should focus on content (e.g. Frantzen, 1995; Truscott, 1996; Reid, 1998).

Some studies on students' perceptions of feedback indicate that students prefer comments on content and ideas rather than on grammatical errors (e.g. Semke, 1984; Zamel, 1985). Yet, other studies show that students value and expect feedback on their grammatical errors (Leki, 1991; Ashwell, 2000; Lee, 2005). Still, there are also results indicating that students expect various types of feedback including content-related, grammatical, and organisational aspects (e.g. Radecki & Swales, 1988; Ferris, 1995; Lee, 2005).

Challenges Encountered by Faculty to Providing Feedback

The main challenge faced by faculty in terms of feedback is the excessive workload and time commitment required to provide quality feedback to students' writing. As this chapter highlights, process-writing pedagogy places an even greater emphasis on feedback, with faculty often providing feedback multiple times and in different settings per assignment. Many studies focusing on teacher workload in relation to feedback (e.g. Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Litherland-Baker, 2014; Ritter, 2012) have sought to highlight the problem and provide evidence that it is a growing concern among writing faculty. Other studies have focused on providing solutions to the problem (e.g. Golub, 2005; White, 2007). However, as Litherland-Baker (2014) points out, researched analyses and findings do not always align with experiential understandings of how students learn and respond to feedback. Oftentimes, published articles within the discipline do not take into account the struggles of balancing a full workload, instructor development and training workshops, and service opportunities (p. 37). Past research indicates that irrespective of the type of feedback provided, feedback is essential to students. However, there are many external factors such as time, resources, and how the feedback is provided that do not always make it a feasible and effective endeavour.

Method

The process-based approach to writing that the Department of Writing Studies at AUS uses focuses on three types of feedback: in class, online, and during office hours. Teachers also provide feedback through electronic grading rubrics, but this is used as a summative assessment measure. The process-based feedback focuses on low-stake tasks where students are producing and receiving guidance on small components of the final, high-stake essay submission.

Data Collection

Our research is based on two surveys; one that was administered to our colleagues in the Department of Writing Studies, and another to AUS students enrolled in Writing Studies 101: Academic Writing I (WRI 101) and Writing Studies 102: Academic Writing II (WRI 102).

Courses and Participants

WRI 101 and WRI 102 are both sequential composition courses at AUS. They are the first and second of four required general education writing courses for all students pursuing an undergraduate degree at AUS (the latter courses are offered by the Department of English). We specifically chose WRI 102 students because they were already acquainted with process-based learning techniques from their previous course, WRI 101, since incoming AUS first-year undergraduate students cannot be directly placed into WRI 102. We also administered the survey to WRI 101 students for two reasons: to understand how their responses would differ from WRI 102 students who were more familiar with process-based writing, and to increase the sample size in case there were not enough respondents.

Data Collection Tools

The faculty survey consisted of seven questions; six multiple-choice questions and one optional, follow-up open-ended question (see Appendix 1).

When applicable and appropriate, the multiple-choice responses utilised a five-point Likert scale. The purpose of the faculty survey was to gauge educators' overall perceptions of teaching writing as a process. The multiple-choice questions asked the level at which process writing encouraged students to work harder; the extent to which students' overall writing improved because of process writing; how challenging it was to give feedback during class time; how challenging it was to provide further feedback to work submitted online after class; to rate which type of feedback (in class, online, during office hours) was the most challenging to provide; and whether electronic or traditional paper-based feedback was easier to provide. If faculty felt providing students with feedback on work submitted online after class was 'challenging' or 'very challenging', then they were asked to explain why in an optional, open-ended response question.

The student survey comprised of ten multiple-choice questions that yielded purely quantitative results (see Appendix 2). Similar to the faculty survey, a five-point Likert scale, which measures perceptions and provides a range of answer options including a neutral answer choice at the midpoint, was used where appropriate. Otherwise, students were asked one yes/no question and one informational question about the specific writing course they were taking in Spring 2016. The multiple-choice questions asked students how much process writing (the systematic feedback on small components of the essay) encouraged them to work harder on their writing; the extent to which their writing improved because of process writing; how important was the feedback that they received during class, online, and office hours; to rate which type of feedback (in class, online, during office hours) was the most important; whether the feedback they rated as the least important could be eliminated altogether (yes/no question); whether electronic feedback is more effective than traditional paper-based feedback; how useful they found the process model of writing; and which writing course they were enrolled in.

Procedure

Data for this research project was collected in Spring 2016. This was the second consecutive academic year that our department was implementing process-based writing techniques, so both faculty and students were

familiar with the process. Both surveys were electronically distributed through the AUS e-learning management system, Blackboard. Both faculty and student participation were voluntary, to be completed on their own time, and participants were assured anonymity. Neither survey took more than ten to fifteen minutes to complete. We had a total of 21 faculty responses, which is high for a department that consists of up to 25 faculty during any given academic year. We received 142 student responses across eight sections of WRI 101 and WRI 102, and selected a random 100 surveys as a sufficient, workable sample size.

Research Findings

Faculty and Student Perceptions Regarding the Effectiveness of Various Feedback Practices

Overwhelmingly, faculty perceptions of process writing were seen as either 'greatly encouraging' or 'encouraging' to both students' motivation (see Table 4.1), and improvement of their writing (see Table 4.2). As instructors provide and students receive constructive feedback on individual parts of their writing, they learn how to become better writers. Faculty and students are given an opportunity to work one-to-one in an informal environment to improve. Be it through clarity in writing, understanding and forming an argument, using logical evidence, or integrating

Table 4.1 Faculty perceptions on how 'process writing' encouraged students to work harder on their writing

Greatly encouraged	Encouraged	Moderately encouraged	Slightly encouraged	Did not encourage
47.62%	33.33%	14.29%	0%	4.76%

Table 4.2 Faculty perceptions on the effect that 'process writing' may have had in improving students' writing ($n = 21$)

Greatly improved	Improved	Moderately improved	Slightly improved	Did not improve
38.10%	47.62%	9.52%	0%	4.76%

scholarly source support based on students' level of writing, faculty provide the necessary tools for student success.

Additionally, students' perceptions of the benefit of process writing and multiple forms of feedback were also overwhelmingly positive. A majority (91%) of the students felt that the feedback helped them to work harder on their writing (see Table 4.3), and 89% of students felt that process writing and feedback helped them improve their writing proficiency (see Table 4.4). Students also seemed to value all types of feedback and did not differentiate between the value of feedback given in class, during office hours, or on electronically submitted writing through Blackboard (see Table 4.5). As the researchers have observed, students genuinely desire help, and feedback provides them with the informal environment to comfortably ask questions irrespective of the type of feedback they are receiving. Their progress is validated, which gives them the

Table 4.3 Students' perceptions on how feedback helped them to work harder on their writing (n = 100)

Greatly encouraged	Encouraged	Moderately encouraged	Slightly encouraged	Did not encourage
43%	48%	5%	3%	0%

Table 4.4 Student's perceptions of the benefit of process writing and its feedback practices on writing proficiency

Greatly improved	Improved	Moderately improved	Slightly improved	Did not improve
37%	52%	9%	2%	0%

Table 4.5 Students' perceptions of various types of feedback

	Feedback in class (%)	Feedback during office hours (%)	Feedback electronically (%)
Very important	66.67	62.24	66.67
Important	26.26	24.49	26.26
Moderately important	5.05	9.18	5.05
Of little importance	2.02	2.04	2.02
Unimportant	0	2.04	0

confidence to progress forward with their writing. Moreover, using different feedback methods appeals to students with varying learning needs. Some students prefer asking questions in a large classroom environment, others prefer office hours where they willingly come to ask questions, and some prefer written feedback with no face-to-face communication. In general, using the strategies in combination optimises student learning.

Students did, however, seem to slightly prefer electronic feedback to traditional (paper-based) feedback with 52% either agreeing or strongly agreeing that electronic feedback was more effective. Surprisingly, 35% of the students were 'undecided' on this question, while only 13% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. A majority of students prefer electronic feedback because technology facilitates ease of communication. Our students use Blackboard as their course management system and they also have access to the Blackboard mobile application on their mobile phones which means accessing feedback electronically is much easier than paper-based feedback since the latter occurs in subsequent class meetings and is not immediate. Since faculty utilise the various integrated applications of Blackboard differently, this is one explanation of why 35% of students were undecided about which method they prefer. Students are better equipped to choose between electronic and traditional feedback only if they have been exposed to both, which is not always the case. Student experiences differ depending on how they are taught and by whom.

Conversely, when students were asked to rate whether feedback in class, online, or during office hours was the most important, feedback during office hours ranked the lowest. However, this response is based on two underlying assumptions: (1) all students surveyed are available during their instructor's office hours to make a valid judgement for this survey question, and (2) all students surveyed visited office hours at least once. Research findings indicated that the majority (89%) of respondents did not think the feedback they rated the lowest (in this case, feedback during office hours) should be eliminated altogether. It follows that students do value feedback during office hours; however, they ranked it as the lowest because time restrictions and/or availability do not always make this type of feedback the most feasible option. This echoes the concerns made by Litherland-Baker (2014) in the literature review section that feedback has to be with purpose in a practical and achievable time frame.

Another point of discussion is how AUS students interpret feedback practices. This is evident in how they sometimes verbally respond after receiving a final letter grade for a formal, high-stake writing assignment for which they have received multiple types of feedback. Often, the more feedback a student receives (whether in class, online, during office hours), the higher the grade she or he thinks is automatically deserved. When an instructor provides feedback, they are seeing a fragmented part of a larger assignment. As mentioned in the literature review, the focus of the teacher's feedback in a composition classroom can be on content, form, or grammar (Reid, 1998; Lee 2005; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). If an instructor thinks that a student's thesis statement, for example, is very well-structured and concisely phrased, this does not mean that subsequent topic sentences or content for the remainder of the essay will necessarily also be the same. In reverse, if an instructor reads a topic sentence or body paragraph, it does not mean that this well-written paragraph relates back to the thesis statement or is organised according to the student's stated thesis. When looking at bits and parts of what will eventually be a cohesive submission, neither the instructor nor the student writer can assume the quality of the collective whole. Moreover, many students assume that the more time they have spent working on an assignment, the higher grade they should automatically receive. This is a faulty cause fallacy that students often make. In reality, the time spent completing an assignment is not a measurable marker of assessment, which is why it never appears on a grading rubric. If a person were to push a giant rock, for example, should that person be rewarded if the rock, after being pushed for five hours, did not move anywhere? The same could be said for the time a student spends on writing an essay.

Challenges Encountered by Faculty During the Provision of Feedback Practices

Most faculty members agreed that giving feedback to students in class was more challenging overall than giving feedback electronically on student work after class. Twelve (57%) faculty members felt that giving feedback during class was 'moderately challenging', 'challenging', or 'very

Table 4.6 Perceptions of faculty on the challenges to providing feedback during class-time and online

	In class (%)	Online (%)
Very challenging	4.76	14.29
Challenging	23.81	19.05
Moderately challenging	28.57	14.29
Slightly challenging	28.57	28.57
Not challenging	14.29	4.76

challenging', while three (14%) thought that it was 'not challenging' at all. Giving feedback to student work electronically after class was seen as slightly less challenging for most faculty; however, seven (33%) faculty felt that it was still either 'challenging' or 'very challenging' (see Table 4.6).

Providing feedback in a composition classroom is challenging depending on the faculty-to-student class ratio; the more students in each class section, the harder it becomes to provide thoughtful feedback to each individual student in class. Instructor feedback, both in class and electronically on student work after class, is also dependent on external factors that cannot be controlled such as enrolment, predetermined class caps, and assigned overloads. This is one explanation why a significant portion of faculty still found electronic feedback after class to be 'challenging' or 'very challenging'; they simply have too many students or too many sections of the same course, which is why electronic feedback becomes a daunting endeavour.

The faculty who believed that providing feedback outside of class was challenging all mentioned similar concerns; mainly time and workload constraints. As mentioned by Litherland-Baker (2014), faculty usually balance teaching with research and service, since year-end evaluations are based on their achievement in all three areas. One faculty member mentioned that in order to provide electronic feedback that is thorough, it would take anywhere from 1.5 to 3 hours for two sections (approximately 40 students). The same professor mentioned: "However, it is a necessary step that students both appreciate and benefit from." Most faculty acknowledge the advantages of feedback, but also acknowledge the difficulty of providing quality feedback when course loads and class sizes are high.

Future Direction

As the research has demonstrated, formative feedback and process writing are seen as beneficial to student motivation and improvement of their writing. While a vast majority of students felt that all types of feedback were worthwhile, the research discussed their general impression rather than specific reasons why they believe it was beneficial or specific examples of how their writing improved. Incorporating other types of research data such as student interviews or case studies in addition to conducting a detailed analysis of both written feedback and the subsequent effect on students' writing may provide further insight into exactly how their writing improved based on the feedback they received.

An additional line of inquiry could be the types of feedback itself. Much research has been conducted on the effects of different types of feedback in writing within the context of the language classroom, but in the context of the AUS composition classroom, where students' language proficiency is usually high, examining the types of feedback given may provide some insight into both common errors that students make and common types of feedback instructors provide. A further detailed analysis and coding of types of feedback, similar to Ferris (2006), may help to provide suggestions to future faculty on what type of feedback is most effective or beneficial to students' writing improvement.

Recommendations

To produce more comprehensive results, this research should be conducted with multiple instructors, over multiple semesters, and throughout the various courses our department offers. While this would make data collection tedious, the benefit is that results could then be compared/contrasted with what we currently have. An ideal situation would be to begin with Writing Studies 001: Basic Academic Writing (WRI 001), our department's fundamental composition course, and then chart students' attitudes toward various feedback practices as they progress through the writing sequence (students enrolled in WRI 001 must take

WRI 101 and then WRI 102). However, this is a difficult endeavour because students take semester gaps between writing courses. They also enrol with different faculty, and this is for two reasons: they do not wish to take a subsequent writing course with the same instructor, or the specific writing course that students need is not being offered by their previous professor.

Another recommendation, based on the qualitative faculty survey responses, is that there should be a healthy balance between the various types of feedback used so that constant feedback does not become cumbersome for faculty. On average, instructors in our department teach anywhere between 72 to 90 students every semester. It is impossible to provide thoughtful feedback in class, online, and during office hours multiple times on every major assignment for each student considering that we already provide extensive feedback on students' final draft submissions. A department-wide discussion of the experience of faculty who have integrated various feedback practices over multiple semesters would yield information on what is best practice. Otherwise, such decisions are at the discretion of the individual faculty member.

Conclusions

For students, too much feedback can create false or unrealistic expectations of what their final summative grade will be. For faculty, too much feedback can lead to higher class averages. However, the benefits of multiple feedback practices for students in a composition classroom are undeniable. Our research findings indicate that process writing and its related feedback practices help students improve their writing because they are more receptive, motivated, and subsequently work harder. Students value all types of feedback (in class, online, during office hours) and find the process model of writing useful. These findings align with faculty perceptions towards process writing.

Teaching composition is no longer simply about reading and responding to texts, but understanding broader concerns of how both a professional writer and a student writer construct an argument, make

valid assumptions, and convey meaning through word choice, style, and choices in syntax. As a student progresses through his/her writing assignments, it is the instructor's objective to offer constructive criticism, positive reinforcement, and encouragement to enhance confidence in writing. Composition instructors facilitate the process through the various feedback practices we use in the classroom, online, and during office hours. Using various types of feedback practices appeals to varying styles of learning and helps students become better writers. Through feedback, students learn how to improve their critical thinking and writing skills because they are not just writing, but learning *how* to write better.

The benefits of multiple feedback practices for student learners is that they learn how to become better writers through revising their own work. When they utilise class time to revise work with their professor's help and guidance, the subsequent revisions are thoughtfully integrated in an intelligent and effective manner. The positive, constructive criticisms we offer our students through various feedback practices is what ultimately helps them progress as writers. This is because the feedback they receive is focused and directed with purpose. Moreover, they are more likely to listen and integrate feedback offered to them during process writing because this is when the instructor is facilitating writing versus taking on the role of a summative evaluator.

The majority of the students we teach are not aspiring English or Composition and Rhetoric majors, and they need not be. In a composition classroom, students work with topics that require them to write for a specific audience. They submit and receive feedback for multiple drafts, they receive feedback through peer comments, and they also receive feedback through the final summative assessment. When they go through this sequence repeatedly for every writing assignment in a composition class and then again over the progression of multiple composition courses that they are required to take as part of their general education requirements, differentiated feedback practices help students become better writers. More importantly, feedback helps students find purpose and meaning in their writing submissions that extend beyond the classroom.

Appendix 1: Faculty Survey

1. To what degree do you think 'process writing' encouraged students to work harder on their writing?

o Greatly Encouraged

o Encouraged

o Moderately Encouraged

o Slightly Encouraged

o Did Not Encourage

2. To what extent do you think students' writing improved this semester as a result of the 'process writing'?

o Greatly Improved

o Improved

o Moderately Improved

o Slightly Improved

o Did Not Improve

3. How challenging was it to give feedback during class time?

o Very Challenging

o Challenging

o Moderately Challenging

o Slightly Challenging

o Not Challenging

4. How challenging was it to give further feedback to the work submitted online after class?

o Very Challenging

o Challenging

o Moderately Challenging

o Slightly Challenging

o Not Challenging

5. If you answered ‘Very Challenging’ or ‘Challenging’ in the previous question, please briefly explain why.

6. Which of the following types of feedback is the most challenging for you to provide? Rate from 1 to 3, where 1 is the most challenging.

o In-class feedback

o Draft feedback

o Office hours feedback

7. Electronic feedback is easier to provide than traditional (paper-based) feedback.

o Strongly Agree

o Agree

o Undecided

o Disagree

o Strongly Disagree

Appendix 2: Student Survey

1. How much did the process writing (systematic feedback on small components of the essay) encourage you to work harder on your writing?

o Greatly Encouraged

o Encouraged

o Moderately Encouraged

o Slightly Encouraged

o Did Not Encourage

2. To what extent do you think your writing improved this semester as a result of the 'process writing'?

o Greatly Improved

o Improved

o Moderately Improved

o Slightly Improved

o Did Not Improve

3. How important was the feedback given in class?

o Very Important

o Important

o Moderately Important

o Of Little Importance

o Unimportant

4. How important was feedback given to the work submitted online?

o Very Important

o Important

o Moderately Important

o Of Little Importance

o Unimportant

5. How important is feedback given individually in office hours?

o Very Important

o Important

o Moderately Important

o Of Little Importance

o Unimportant

6. Rate in order of importance the feedback type given to you this semester, where 1 is the most important and 3 is the least important.

o In-class feedback

o Draft feedback

o Office hours feedback

7. Do you think that the feedback you rated of lowest importance in the previous question, could be eliminated completely?

o Yes

o No

8. Electronic feedback is more effective than traditional (paper based) feedback.

o Strongly Agree

o Agree

o Undecided

o Disagree

o Strongly Disagree

9. Overall, how useful did you find the 'process model' of writing this semester?

o Very Useful

o Useful

o Moderately Useful

o Not Useful

10. Which writing course have you just completed?

o WRI 101

o WRI 102

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Part II

Feedback Practices in L2 English Writing

5

The Effect of EFL Correction Practices on Developing Moroccan Students' English Writing Skills

Hicham Zyad and Abdelmajid Bouziane

Introduction

Since Truscott's (1996) controversial and provocative article, an intensive research agenda has been launched to investigate the effects of feedback (correction of grammar errors) on students' writing skills development. Truscott's argument was built on theoretical, empirical and practical grounds. Theoretically, his position was informed by Krashen's Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis and Natural Order Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982, 1984, 1985). The former hypothesis distinguishes between the acquisition of language as a process very much akin to child language acquisition, which subconsciously occurs in a natural setting without formal intervention, and the learning of language under guided

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instruction conditions taking place in a classroom-based, formal setting. According to this hypothesis, language learning can never turn into language acquisition through teacher-led instruction. The latter hypothesis claims that the learning of language structures consistently occurs in a given sequence that cannot be broken by formal instruction. Empirically, Krashen points out that evidence in favour of error correction is at a premium. Given the practical considerations, he posits that grammar correction is a waste of time and resources in the absence of solid evidence that suggests otherwise. It can even be a cause for frustration and apprehension for students due to the repetitive markings and corrections on their written assignments.

Several researchers have responded to Truscott's position, notably Ferris (1999), arguing that the field is still in its embryonic stages and that more research is needed to advance the understanding of how feedback can really enhance students' burgeoning writing skills. Instead of definitively closing the door on the argument for the effectiveness of feedback, special efforts need to be deployed to continue the research agenda that seeks to probe how feedback can play a role in writing development. Triangulation of evidence stemming from studies tackling the effectiveness of feedback in terms of timing, amount, type of feedback, sources of feedback and students' differing language abilities can be considered a line of research that can help foster effective writing instruction practices (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

The current chapter aims to contribute to this scholarly dialogue by investigating the effects of different sources of feedback on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' second drafts based on their language ability. An attendant objective is to explore students' thought processes and views on feedback provided by their peers and teachers. To achieve these research objectives, this chapter poses the following research questions:

1. To what extent do students of different language abilities respond to feedback based on self-review, peer review and lecturer review?
2. How do students of different language abilities perceive feedback provided by different sources?

Literature Review

Alternative forms of assessment which believe in the capacity of the learner to take an active role in the learning process have been found to be conducive to deep and strategic learning (Paulus, 1999). This type of learning is tightly associated with learners who possess the qualities of autonomy, self-regulation and the life-long pursuit of knowledge. In fact, successful students own their learning and tailor it in consonance with their needs and wants. They also identify their strengths and translate their weaknesses into remedial action for improvement. In this connection, interest in self-assessment and peer assessment has been gathering momentum in recent years. In ELT writing learning environments, these two forms of assessment have been employed by researchers and practitioners as motivators that actively engage the learner and empower him/her with strategies assumed to generate life-long, self-regulated individuals as explained in the subsequent sections.

Self-assessment

Self-assessment has been revitalised due to the increasingly expanding body of literature suggesting that it can successfully enhance students' performance in ELT writing. For example, in an experimental study, Andrade, Du, and Mycek (2010) showed that students who participated in generating a rubric produced significantly better written assignments than the control group that did not know about the rubric. This finding supports the hypothesis that involving students in the co-construction of a rubric and ultimately using it for self-assessment can yield improved quality of written products. However, the potential improvement resulting from co-construction of rubrics needs further testing over time. Employing quite a similar research design, Honsa (2013) studied the effects of a self-assessment programme on the writing performance of a cohort of intermediate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in a Thai university. The study showed that self-assessment in the form of checklists and guidance sheets enabled the trained students to produce better quality essays than the control group that did not receive such

training. Again, the holistic assessment procedure used to score students' essays in the study needs further scrutiny to identify the areas of progress as writing is a multi-componential skill.

Similarly, Zheng, Huang, and Chen (2012) explored the effects of training students in self-assessment of written assignments on their ability to efficiently self-evaluate their own work as well as improve the quality of their writing. It was found that the training had a positive impact on the overall accuracy of their written compositions. It should nonetheless be said that a longer period than eight weeks might reveal more accurate differences between the two groups. Pursuing a similar line of research, Fahimi and Rahimi (2015) examined the impact of self-assessment on EFL college-level students' writing performance and its influence on their attitudes towards writing as a language skill. The students expressed a positive attitude towards self-assessment, unanimously agreeing that it was a useful strategy to enhance their writing skills. Over four weeks of instruction, the researchers discerned an upward linear curve, suggesting that the students gradually started to improve. Much akin to Zheng et al. (2012), more time is needed to validate any conclusions on students' progress.

From a different perspective, several researchers have claimed that self-assessment lacks reliability and validity and is therefore of little use in classroom-based practices. In an extensive review of the literature, Ross (2006) attempted to probe this issue by exploring the findings reported in previous research. This review identified a host of important learning benefits associated with the practice of self-assessment. First, it was found that self-assessment was reliable across items, tasks and short periods. However, validity defined as the correspondence between teacher or peer evaluations and self-assessments was found to be inconsistent across studies. Interestingly, there is a widespread consensus that self-assessment can improve students writing ability. The most salient finding, according to Ross, is the prominence of training students in how to self-assess their own work. However, if weaknesses associated with self-assessment persist, they can be handled by teacher intervention.

Peer Assessment

The multifaceted and expanding body of literature associated with peer assessment reflects the great interest that has been expressed within the writing research community with regard to its potential as a valuable learning strategy. A line of research focuses on the prerequisite characteristics of the peer review process itself. For instance, Baker (2016) investigated the conditions under which peer assessment can yield significant outcomes for learning. First, the time interval prior to paper submission should be enough to enable learners to write a complete product. Second, the findings of the study reveal that the students generally exchanged formative feedback. Third, it was reported that the students' revision focused on meaning-level aspects. Additionally, the changes brought about in response to peer feedback were in the form of new material rather than the existing text.

Other researchers shifted attention to the learning gains of actively involving students in the generation of a rubric to be used subsequently for peer assessment purposes. An example is Becker's (2016) empirical study which examined the effects of involving learners in the co-construction and/or use of a rubric in an intensive English programme. The class that actively participated in the co-construction of a rubric significantly outperformed the one that used a rubric during peer assessment. For a better understanding of how participation in the co-construction of a rubric can improve students' writing ability, future research needs to apply the same strategy on text types other than summary writing.

Another strand of research aimed to identify the recipient of greater learning gains from the peer assessment process. In this regard, Lundstrom and Baker (2009) compared the writing performance of two cohorts of learners belonging to two proficiency levels in an intensive English institute. Over a semester, it was found that feedback-givers scored significantly higher than feedback-receivers. However, the study should mention the extent to which the participants were similar at the outset of the experiment in order not to attribute the feedback-givers' better performance to their higher level of language proficiency. In this same vein,

some researchers have explored students' perceptions of the peer assessment activity based on the belief that perceptions mediate behavioural engagement. Mulder, Pearce, and Baik (2014) reported that students had high expectations of the potential of this form of assessment to improve their writing ability. However, a downward trend in students' positive attitudes towards peer assessment was recorded at the completion of the intervention because of students' failure to provide effective feedback. Once again, this calls to mind the necessity of training students on how to give useful feedback through criterion-based rubrics.

It must nevertheless be recalled that peer assessment has not invariably been found to affect learning in positive ways. Covill (2010) investigated three forms of assessment on college-level students' revision behaviour and writing performance. Such procedures of assessment were (1) formal peer review in which students had to outline and critique their peers' works, (2) formal self-review where they had to outline and critique their own works, and (3) no formal review where they had to revise their works for better clarity and completeness. The three forms showed no significant differences as a function of the effects of any procedure on writing performance.

Teacher Assessment

The utility of corrective feedback (CF) in writing courses has attracted the attention of several researchers over the years (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Guenette, 2012; Sheen, 2007). However, some researchers have been vociferous in their criticism of CF as a useful strategy to improve students' writing accuracy. Prominent among them is Truscott (1996), who claims that grammar correction does not have any place in writing courses and hence should be abandoned. By CF, Truscott does not mean feedback on global issues of content, organisation and development, which he seems to endorse. He specifically dismisses the correction of grammar errors in writing courses not only as ineffective but also as potentially harmful. In response to Truscott's position over the usefulness of CF in writing instruction, Ferris (1999) carefully scrutinised his evidence and eventually came to the

conclusion that claiming that "grammar correction has no place in writing courses and should be abandoned" (Truscott, 1996, p. 328) is "premature and overly strong" (Ferris, 1999, p. 2). Ferris was able to identify two major limitations in Truscott's argument against error correction, namely the problems of definition and empirical support.

The debate on the usefulness of CF has sparked off intense scholarly activity aimed to determine which type of CF can potentially improve ELT students' writing. For instance, Ferris and Roberts (2001) contributed to the ongoing debate on the efficacy of error feedback by examining how explicit it should be to help students to self-edit their compositions. The groups that received feedback, irrespective of the presence of labels, significantly outperformed the no-feedback group. However, no significant differences emerged between the two modes of feedback. This implies, according to Ferris and Roberts, that the degree of explicitness of error correction does not affect students' writing accuracy significantly. In the same area, similar results were reported by Bitchener and Knoch (2009) who examined the effects of four different treatment conditions on two functional uses of the article system in English. The types of feedback were (1) direct CF with written and oral metalinguistic explanations, (2) direct CF with written metalinguistic explanations, (3) direct CF, and (4) no feedback. The 52 low-intermediate ELT students participating in this study developed over the intervention period across their five written products, namely pre-test, post-test, and three delayed post-tests. However, the three groups who received feedback performed significantly higher than the control group in terms of accuracy. The results of the delayed post-tests provided evidence for the effectiveness of written CF.

More evidence is provided in a study by Benson (2016) who investigated the extent to which direct feedback and metalinguistic explanations can affect the writing accuracy of a sample of 151 ELT learners particularly on the simple past tense, the present perfect tense, dropped pronouns, and pronominal duplication. The treatment students performed better than the control group. It was observed, however, that the direct feedback had a more durable effect on the use of the simple past tense than the metalinguistic explanations. Another related line of research has examined the efficacy of focused versus unfocused feedback. For example,

Bitchener, Young, and Cameron (2005) investigated the effects of different modes of feedback provision on the accuracy of 53 adult student migrants. The study found that written CF with conferencing had a significant impact on the students' overall accuracy as to the past tense and the definite article. Combining the three error categories yielded no effect on accuracy improvement in the three types of feedback.

Furthermore, other researchers have turned to investigate differences of uptake between peer review and teacher feedback. Tsui and Ng (2000), for instance, found that students reacted more frequently to teacher feedback than peer feedback. They viewed the teacher as an authority and thus his/her feedback as worthy of attention. Similarly, Hamer, Purchase, Luxton-Reilly, and Denny (2015) reported a greater uptake of feedback from the teacher due to the great amounts of detail it involves in addition to the higher regard for the teacher.

In the aforementioned studies, the students' writing levels have not been controlled to attend to assessment effectiveness. It is the intent of this chapter to address this issue by considering student proficiency level as a variable that may determine the effectiveness of assessment exerted by self or others.

Methods and Materials

Context of the Study

Two lecturers were approached to participate in the current study. They have been working in English departments for an average of 14 years. Because college-level instructors may teach different courses each year, the lecturers made it clear that they taught writing on several occasions and dealt with students belonging to different proficiency levels. They reported that their research interests were literacy and second/foreign language teaching. Their long experience implies that they do not need training in feedback provisions. The students, who are first-year university students in a university department of English studies in Morocco,

Table 5.1 Students' demographic and proficiency level

Name	Age	Gender	Proficiency level
Brahim	19	Male	Low
Khalid	20	Male	Low
Khawla	19	Female	Mid
Lobna	19	Female	Mid
Asmaa	18	Female	High
Othman	20	Male	High

were selected according to their proficiency level to explore the effects of feedback obtained from different sources on students belonging to different ability levels. The proficiency level of the students was determined based on the results of a midterm exam in a composition course. Table 5.1 shows the students' demographics and proficiency level.

The selection of the students for this study was meticulously made.[1] Based on their teacher's initial selection as having the targeted levels, they were selected from a pool of 12 students whose written products were scored by three independent scorers using holistic assessment. Their scores were averaged to yield a single score which was taken to be a good approximation to the student's true level of writing proficiency. The scores were turned into percentages: low-ability students were those who scored below 40%, medium-ability those who scored 40% to 59%, and high-ability those who had a score above 60%.

Procedure

The procedure adopted included two consecutive major phases; the second phase was further divided into three steps. In the first phase, the students were asked to write a timed narrative essay on one of the following three suggested prompts:

1. We usually learn from past experiences. Write a narrative essay on how you managed to deal with a difficult situation.

[1] To protect the confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms have been used.

2. Kids are not easy to take care of. Write a narrative essay on how you managed to look after your brother or sister while your parents were out.
3. Friendship is such a precious social value. Write a narrative essay on how one of your friends made you feel the truest sense of friendship.

The first step in the second phase consisted of students revising their essays referring to a checklist provided by the researchers (see the Appendix). The checklist addressed both local and global areas of written composition within the framework of story grammar. The revision task was untimed because we wanted to explore how long it took each student to complete the process. A week later, in the second step, the essays were swapped for feedback and the students were assigned to revise their essays based on their peers' feedback. Afterwards, the essays were given to two lecturers for feedback. The researchers made it clear to the two recruited assessors that they needed to vary their feedback so that it would incorporate local and global aspects of writing as well as comments on story grammar. In a third session, the students were asked to revise their essays in accordance with the feedback provided by the lecturers.

Data Collection

Data collection was carried out based on two main instruments: students' essays and think-aloud protocol during the revision process. The students were asked to choose from three different prompts to write a narrative essay with a clear purpose and target audience. The purpose was to participate in a contest of best narrative essay organised by the English department. The audience for the narrative essay was designated as a jury of university professors as well as a cohort of peers who would also offer their ratings of the quality of the essays. The one-hour test was administered by their teacher to make sure the students performed in exam-like conditions. To address ethical considerations, the students were unambiguously informed that their data would serve research purposes and remain confidential. Besides, they were informed that participation in the test was voluntary and withdrawal would not incur any harm. Later, a think-aloud protocol was employed to elicit data on students' underlying

thinking processes during the completion of the task of revising their narrative essays based on different types of feedback. This technique of data elicitation is defined as an introspective process whereby participants verbalise their inner thoughts while engaging in the accomplishment of a given activity (Ericsson, 2003). To make sure that the participants externalised their thoughts during the revision process, a notice was stuck on the board urging them to keep talking.

Data Analysis

In view of the limitations of quantitative research, this chapter sought to uncover salient issues pertinent to the effectiveness of feedback adopting a qualitative approach. By nature, qualitative research does not usually depart from predetermined criteria and categories; rather, it attempts to identify emerging patterns of students' errors and suggests ways in which these patterns relate to one another. With this in mind, a detailed analysis of the initial student essays revealed that errors made formed a pattern including lexical and morpho-syntactic deviations. Lexical errors were mainly of three different types: word choice, confusing same-stem lexical items and false cognates. Morpho-syntactic errors included faulty word order, addition or omission of certain elements, misused determiners, lack of subject-verb agreement, and erroneous inflexion. Considering students' second drafts across the three modes of feedback provision, the researchers deployed special efforts to track these errors to explore how students responded to them in their revisions and whether differences existed in such revisions as a function of the mode of feedback.

Furthermore, to track improvements in students' narrative writing performance, Stein and Glenn's (1979) model of story grammar was utilised. The two major components of this model are the setting and the episode. The function of the setting stems from the fact that each story needs to be rooted in a particular spatial-temporal and social context. Although the setting is not considered to be part of the episode as it does not directly influence the unfolding of the sequence of events in the story, it is nonetheless essential as it provides a framework for the interpretation

of such a sequence of events. Moreover, being the central unit of analysis, the episode is further subdivided into a sequence of five interconnected categories, namely the initiating event, an internal response, an attempt, a consequence and a reaction. Each category incorporates a distinct strand of information and plays a different role in the fabric of story schema.

Findings and Discussion

Accuracy

Prior to subjecting students' drafts to the first round of review, the analysis associated with the accuracy of the students' essays revealed that students' errors fell into two broad categories, namely morpho-syntactic and lexical. Table 5.2 summarises the errors committed in the first drafts and the improvements detected in them as a result of self-review.

As Table 5.2 shows, it is striking to note that the students did not detect all the language problems in their essays, irrespective of their writing proficiency. The table suggests that the essays had very few grammatical and lexical errors although a closer examination reveals that the

Table 5.2 Developments in essay accuracy in response to self-review

	Before peer review						After peer review					
	L_1	L_2	M_1	M_2	H_1	H_2	L_1	L_2	M_1	M_2	H_1	H_2
Morpho-syntactic errors												
Faulty word order	1	2	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	1	0
Addition or omission of certain elements	2	2	3	3	1	1	2	2	1	2	0	1
Misused determiner	1	1	3	2	1	1	1	0	2	0	1	0
Misused article	2	2	1	2	2	0	1	1	1	1	0	0
Lack of subject-verb agreement	1	2	2	3	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Erroneous inflection	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	0
Lexical errors												
Word choice	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Confusion of same-stem lexical items	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Confusion of false cognates	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

students overlooked many errors (see Table 5.4). The checklist was supposed to help them spot as many errors as possible in their essays. This finding can be attributed to two different factors. First, the students' level of English, estimated between intermediate and upper-intermediate, is not high enough to enable them to notice the grammatical and lexical errors they made in their essays. This was particularly conspicuous in the essays produced by low-ability students who were able to discern only a small number of the errors they had committed. The second factor could be students' sense of ownership of the essays and their attempt to maintain a good self-image. As they knew that someone would examine their work, they overlooked some errors. This finding is interesting since it shows that, unlike previous research (Andrade et al., 2010) which reported a positive correlation between self-review and quality of writing performance, there is variation in the extent to which high-ability and low-ability students managed to spot errors in their essays.

Another related finding was that although some errors were identified, they were not rectified in the revision phase. Low-ability students corrected between 34% and 50% of the errors they had identified, medium-ability students amended 50% to 73%, and high-ability students revised 75%.[2] It is hardly difficult to notice that this pattern constitutes a continuum with high-ability students more prone to apply the necessary modifications, followed by medium-ability students less inclined to do so, and low-ability students least predisposed to revise. This pattern could be construed as a manifestation of students' varying levels of certainty and confidence in the credibility of the errors they had spotted. It appears that because high-ability students had a more developed interlanguage system, they did not hesitate to make the necessary changes. By contrast, their low-ability and medium-ability counterparts failed to revise as required most errors probably owing to their lack of confidence in the validity of their self-assessment outcomes.

It is worth recalling that the second phase in the study consisted of students' receiving feedback from their peers and applying it to their essays. The findings gleaned from this phase are tabulated as follows in Table 5.3.

[2] This quantification was conducted by turning the number of errors that were actually corrected by each category of student in the self-assessment phase into a percentage.

Table 5.3 Developments in essay accuracy in response to peer feedback

	Before peer review						After peer review					
	L_1	L_2	M_1	M_2	H_1	H_2	L_1	L_2	M_1	M_2	H_1	H_2
Morpho-syntactic												
Faulty word order	3	2	1	0	2	0	2	1	1	0	1	0
Addition or omission of certain elements	4	4	4	3	1	1	4	2	1	2	0	1
Misused determiner	2	3	3	2	1	1	1	2	2	0	1	1
Misused article	3	4	2	2	2	0	2	2	1	1	2	0
Lack of subject-verb agreement	1	4	1	3	1	1	0	3	0	0	1	1
Erroneous inflection	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	0	1	0	1	0
Lexical errors												
Word choice	1	3	0	1	1	0	1	2	0	1	1	0
Confusion of same-stem lexical items	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Confusion of false cognates	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0

In much the same way, regardless of language ability, the table demonstrates that the peer reviewers did not manage to detect all the morpho-syntactic and lexical errors which occurred in their peers' work. This corroborates the finding in Table 5.2 which indicates that students' noticing ability is not so mature as to enable them to uncover deviant language structures. Moreover, the findings once again suggest that the likelihood of making alterations based on feedback seems to be contingent on the student's language ability. The low-ability pair were the most reluctant to apply the suggested modifications provided by their peers. It is interesting to note that medium-ability students reflected two disparate trends regarding their readiness to accept peers' suggestions for revision; while Khawla seems closer to low-ability students, Lobna is closer to high-ability ones. This explains why the high-ability pair corrected 75% of the errors they identified whereas they made only 25% of revisions based on peer feedback. Most probably, the high-ability students were more willing to revise their essays based on self-review because they did not feel any inhibition to correcting what they had uncovered. However, the situation was different when they received feedback from their peers. It seems as if they did not consider a large portion of the language issues identified by their peers. This may be ascribed to two interconnected factors. First, it might be the case that high-ability students did not view their peers as a

trustworthy source of feedback and hence they were reluctant to revise their essays accordingly. Second, the students in question might be operating in an educational culture that privileges competition over collaboration. In such a culture, high-ability students might consider peer feedback to be intrusion rather than teamwork designed to achieve a common goal. This is similar to the findings of a study in the Egyptian context where university students competed to obtain higher scores (Ahmed & Myhill, 2016).

As was mentioned earlier, the feedback offered by the teachers uncovered more errors than did the feedback generated from self-review and peer review. In comparison to Tables 5.2 and 5.3, the students in all language proficiency levels were able to recognise only a limited number of lexical errors, as Table 5.4 shows.

This finding suggested that students' knowledge of vocabulary was not broad enough to enable them to avoid making lexical errors or to notice them in their essays during self-review and peer review sessions (Paulus, 1999). Additionally, data analysis revealed that the students managed to respond to most errors identified by their teachers. A plausible interpretation for this revision behaviour could be that the students hold their teachers in high esteem and regard their feedback as unquestionable,

Table 5.4 Developments in essay accuracy in response to teacher feedback

	Before lecturer review						After lecturer review					
	L_1	L_2	M_1	M_2	H_1	H_2	L_1	L_2	M_1	M_2	H_1	H_2
Morpho-syntactic												
Faulty word order	8	6	6	4	0	1	3	1	1	0	0	0
Addition or omission of certain elements	15	10	6	7	3	2	4	2	3	2	0	0
Misused determiner	6	9	5	4	2	0	4	3	2	2	1	0
Misused article	12	8	8	5	3	0	7	2	3	1	2	0
Lack of subject-verb agreement	9	5	4	2	2	1	5	0	0	0	0	1
Erroneous inflection	6	8	5	2	2	2	5	1	2	0	1	0
Lexical errors												
Word choice	6	7	4	3	3	1	4	2	2	1	2	1
Confusion of same-stem lexical items	3	4	4	2	2	1	3	1	1	0	1	1
Confusion of false cognates	4	2	2	3	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0

in contrast to their own feedback or that of their peers. Interestingly, a closer inspection of the feedback supplied by the teachers and the students' response to it showed that the errors that were not explicitly annotated had little chance of being corrected (Benson, 2016). Examples of such feedback were when the teachers contented themselves only with specifying the number of erroneous structures in the margin of the paper or underlining an error without giving metalinguistic explanations.

Story Grammar

The second level of analysis aimed to gauge improvements in the students' narrative structure due to their response to feedback. It should be recalled that the only source of feedback on story grammar was teacher assessors. In regard to the two low-ability students, their essays typically were devoid of any reference to the setting where the events of the story were supposed to unfold. This could be pinned down to these students being unaware of the importance of the setting in story structure. Equally, it could be attributed to their limited vocabulary repertoire which prevented them from providing satisfactory descriptions of the location of the narrative. For instance, Brahim began his story with, "One time, I broke a beautiful vase that my father likes so much. I know he will punish me".[3] By contrast, the two high-ability students, in addition to one of the medium-ability students, devoted the first paragraph of their narratives to delineating the setting of the story. Asmaa began her story thus:

> *One day, I was walking back home with my friends at night. We had had an extra tuition course of physics because the Baccalaureate exams were coming soon. Two blocks away from my home, I separated with my friends because we did not live in the same neighbourhood. So, I was left by myself. It was too dark and the rain was falling slightly.*[4]

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[3] No effort was made to correct the students' errors as the erroneous tense shift in this example illustrates.

[4] Most of the data collected from the think-aloud protocol was in Moroccan Arabic or French, since we encouraged participants to speak in the language they felt most comfortable with. As such, some of the student quotes in this paper have been transcribed into English by the authors.

The high-ability students exhibited an advanced command of language, which allowed them to free up their working memory for global issues of writing such as a fully developed description of the setting.

With reference to how the students dealt with the five constituent elements of the episode, it was found that there were inter-individual variations among the participants. Table 5.5 illustrates their performance.

As shown in Table 5.5, the only student who adequately included all five components was Asmaa. The other students glossed over one or more elements. The performances of the low-ability students were identical in that they included an initiating event, an attempt and a consequence. Although these three elements were considered, neither student included background events. Khalid went about developing his story as follows:

> *I stoled my father's key car… I started the car…*[5] *I hitted our neighbour's car … when my father came down, I ran away … I spent the night in my aunt's house.*

Conversely, the narratives of the high-ability students contained more than three components and were rich in background events. Consider Othman's episode:

> *My parents trusted me so much as to let my little brother stay with me while they went to visit my uncle who had a surgical operation … After some time together with my brother, I started to get bored … Noticing that my brother was busy with his toys, I tiptoed outside to have a chat with my friend and left the door open … All of a sudden, I heard a loud bang upstairs and realized that the door was closed by the wind … I was shocked because my brother was inside crying and I did not have the key to open the door … I talked to my brother from outside to calm him down and ask him to reach the door handle to open it …*

This discrepancy in performance between high-ability and low-ability implies a trade-off relationship. The two excerpts revealed that high-ability students' language proficiency level enabled them to free their working memory to handle global issues of text construction while lower ability students may have been grappling with more basic linguistic

[5] Due to space constraints, some content from the excerpt has been removed.

Table 5.5 Students' use of story grammar components

	Setting	Initiating event	Internal response	Attempt	Consequence	Reaction	Background events
Brahim	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes[a]
Khalid	Incomplete	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Khawla	Incomplete	Yes	Yes	Incomplete	Yes	No	Yes[b]
Lobna	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Incomplete	No	Yes[a]
Asmaa	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Incomplete	Yes[c]
Othman	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes[c]

[a]Limited
[b]Moderate
[c]Extensive

aspects of written composition to pay much heed for macro-level components.

It is interesting to note that the analysis of the students' responses to teacher feedback on story grammar revealed that they hardly made any global changes in their essays. Unlike their response to feedback on local issues which yielded 50% of the suggested alterations, the structure of their narratives remained almost unchanged. This means that the participants gave more importance to correcting morpho-syntactic and lexical problems identified by their teachers than to concerns about meaning. This situation can perhaps be better understood through an exploration of students' thought processes during revision tasks and their views on their teacher's feedback, a topic to which we now turn for discussion.

Students' Views on Peer and Teacher Feedback

Lack of Trust in Peer Feedback

It should be recalled that the two rounds of feedback that were carried out are associated with peer review and teacher assessment. Taking peer review first, it was found that almost all comments fell within the category of direct feedback. For example, a peer reviewer commented, "with subjects like it, he and she, you need to add an –s in the present simple". Another pointed out, "information does not get an –s. It is not like French". Never did the case arise for a peer reviewer to provide indirect feedback. It is worth mentioning that low-ability students were less prone to apply the feedback given by their peers. During the think-aloud protocol, it became evident that this was a matter of a lack of trust and confidence. For instance, Khalid who was trying to respond to the subject-verb agreement issue mentioned above said, "I don't know … this is correct! … well, see … maybe I will just leave this as is …". On another occasion he stated that, "This can't be right … I read it somewhere in the same way". Brahim uttered similar comments when he was about to react to an incorrect article. He stated, "well, I can't see what this means but I feel a definite article is the correct form".

In this context, Brahim thought that the word “life” should take a definite article as it does in Standard Arabic. Support for this finding comes from Tsui and Ng (2000) who also found that a greater percentage of student revisions resulted from feedback supplied by the teacher. These authors also reported that peer feedback was perceived as not useful, especially by students who did not react to it.

The lack of trust seems to result from the awareness that the feedback came from a peer who was perceived to be on an equal footing. Given such a perception, the student believed that their peer was just as likely to make errors as they were and thus their feedback must be questionable. What feeds this perception is the lack of confidence that springs from struggling students’ low proficiency level. Because language proficiency constrained the faulty language structures students made, they tended to approach peer feedback with uncertainty. This was not the case with medium-ability and high-ability students who attended to most of the feedback offered by their peers. The positive reaction to such feedback can be interpreted not so much as a consequence of trust in their peers but rather as an outcome of their relatively advanced language proficiency. While most of the low-ability students’ errors were due to competence deficiencies, it appears that high-ability students’ mistakes resulted from performance constraints. This is testified by one student’s verbalised inner thought as she was on the verge of correcting a lexical error: “Oops, I do not know how I did this … sure, the word ‘terrific’ has a positive meaning … I should have said ‘terrible’ instead”. Another student said, “That is obvious! We do not say ‘knifes’ but we say ‘knives’. Sure maybe I was getting tired!”.

Trustworthiness of Teacher Feedback

In contrast to this attitude to peer review, we observed that feedback uptake was highest when the teacher was the source, irrespective of proficiency level. A closer look at how the students approached teacher feedback through the think-aloud protocol shows that medium-ability and high-ability students showed greater readiness to apply the suggested modifications. This runs in consonance with previous research about

positive student responses to teacher feedback based on authority (Tsui & Ng, 2000) and quantity of detail (Hamer et al., 2015).

However, students in this chapter handled feedback differently depending on its degree of salience. When it was inadequately annotated in the form of underlining or coding the targeted item, they felt confused and thus failed to revise accordingly. Othman, for instance, tried to understand an underlined verb and said: "it is not clear to me what I am supposed to do here … I think it is right to use the present perfect … I used the word 'since'!". In this case, the error was a misspelt irregular verb, but the student's attention focused wrongly on tense use. The literature abounds with studies that provided empirical evidence of the effectiveness of explicit over implicit feedback (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

Although medium-ability and high-ability students demonstrated a readiness to revise their essays based on teacher feedback, it is interesting to note that they behaved differently in relation to lexical errors. Despite salient feedback indicating that a word needed to be replaced by another, the students were adamant that theirs was a more appropriate lexical choice to make. For example, a teacher underlined the word "sleepy" and put above it "asleep" indicating that it is the correct alternative. Asmaa disregarded this feedback, saying: "Why should I change this word? I think they have the same meaning!". Likewise, when a teacher crossed the verb "raised" and wrote "rose", Lobna ignored the correction, stating, "Well, why should it be wrong? We can say the sun raised high in the sky". The behaviour of Asmaa and Lobna here can be explained as a manifestation of a less sophisticated knowledge of the English lexicon. Perhaps, they felt that the teachers' suggested words were stylistic subtleties of diction rather than incorrectly used lexical items.

Conclusion and Implications

This chapter came to the following conclusions. First, high-ability students were found to be more inclined to successfully react to self-review feedback than their low-ability peers, who were able to identify

only a small number of the errors they had made. Second, teacher feedback was more detailed and informative than peer feedback. Put differently, teachers identified the location of the error, explained why it was erroneous and suggested alternatives. Third, both high-ability and low-ability students showed a greater willingness to respond to teacher feedback than to their peers' feedback. Unlike low-ability students, those with higher language proficiency included a richer description of the settings of their stories together with more than three of the essential constituents of the episode. In contrast to feedback on local aspects, the students did not attend to story grammar in their revisions. Moreover, the think-aloud protocol revealed that students did not hold peer feedback in high esteem. It also indicated that implicit teacher feedback went unrecognised by students irrespective of their proficiency level. Interestingly, high-ability students were reluctant to respond to all the feedback on word choice, even though it was supplied by the teacher.

In view of these conclusions, some implications for writing pedagogy and research are in order. Pedagogically, it appears that self-review is suitable as a learning strategy only with high-ability students. Low-ability learners are limited by deficiencies related to their language proficiency. Such deficiencies prevent them from spotting errors in their own work and hence their inability to respond to all the language problems in their essays. Although this chapter cannot claim that teacher feedback is effective on learning, the findings suggest that it is superior to peer review and self-assessment in two important respects. On the one hand, it is highly valued by students, a fact that was reflected by their reactions to it. On the other hand, it is richer and more informative than student feedback. Moreover, the lack of response to teacher feedback on story grammar suggests that students' main concern was sentence-internal issues. This implies that more attention needs to be paid to raising students' awareness of macro-level aspects of written composition through direct instruction. Empirically, the findings give evidence in support of explicit feedback. The think-aloud protocol demonstrated that students experienced confusion when they had to deal with implicit feedback. This shows that teachers need to make sure that their feedback is presented with enough detail to allow their students to handle it effectively.

Appendix

Checklist for Essay Revision

Instructions: This checklist will help you revise your narrative essay. Read it carefully before starting revision.

Marco-level Components

My story starts with a setting that includes the following details:

a. Time
b. Place
c. Characters

My story has an episode which contains the following constituents:

a. Initiating event (what happened?)
b. Internal response (how did you feel?)
c. Attempt (what did you do about it?)
d. Consequence (did you attain your goal?)

Micro-level Components

Read your essay and make sure that it meets the following criteria:

a. It does not have any run-ons, fragments or comma splices.
b. Articles and demonstratives are correctly used.
c. Verbs and their subjects agree in every sentence.
d. No tense shift (make sure you are using past tenses correctly).
e. Every pronoun has a clear referent which can be identified in the text.
f. Words are used appropriately.
g. Every sentence begins with a capital and ends with a full stop.
h. Commas, colons, semi-colons, apostrophes and other punctuation marks are used correctly.
i. Word spelling is accurate.
j. Paragraphs are indented.

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6

Feedback Practices in University English Writing Classes in Tunisia: An Exploratory Study

Moez Athimni

Introduction

The provision of feedback is a very common practice in education. It is generally referred to as an instructional act which comes at the end of the teaching process. This process often starts with a teacher providing specific input to a group of learners, continues with the learners assimilating, manipulating and using that input, and ends with the teacher providing feedback on the learner's performance. Feedback is often defined as the practice that allows learners to improve their performances to meet certain learning targets. Chan, Konrad, Gonzalez, Peters, and Ressa (2014, p. 97) define it as "the information provided to the student or teacher about his or her performance that is intended to lead to improved performance." Hattie and Timperley (2007), focusing on the interactional aspect in the provision of feedback, defined feedback as the information provided as a response to a specific performance or understanding. This

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information could be provided by a teacher, a classmate, a parent or a book, and is often meant to correct a mistake, clarify an idea, provide a different strategy, or give encouragement. The task of feedback provision, however, is widely thought to be restricted to teachers. Baker, Perreault, Reid, and Blanchard (2013) explained that it is generally believed that feedback provision is the responsibility of the teacher, especially in cultures where teachers are considered responsible for the whole learning process and perceived to have an unquestionable authority over all that happens in the classroom.

The role of feedback in instruction is well established and widely acknowledged. In the literature, the provision of feedback has been reported to positively correlate with improvement in learners' performance and achievement. Chappuis, Stiggins, Chappuis, and Arter (2012, p. 44) contended that "[p]roviding students with descriptive feedback is a crucial part of increasing achievement. Feedback helps the students answer the question, 'Where am I now?' with respect to 'Where I need to be?'" Chan et al. (2014, p. 96) highlighted the role of feedback in formative instruction. They explained that feedback could be considered as a means to integrate all components of formative instruction which include the setting of clear learning goals, collection of learning evidence and promotion of the students' ownership of the process. Qi and Lapkin (2001) referred to the role of feedback in drawing the attention of learners to the types of errors they make. They argued that feedback provision does not only allow learners to identify their errors, it also helps them focus on areas such as lexis, grammar and discourse, which has a positive impact on their learning process.

Different views exist about the function of feedback in learning. Evans (2013, p. 71) referred to the distinction between the cognitivist and socio-constructivist view of feedback. He explained that

> [t]he cognitivist perspective is closely associated with a directive telling approach where feedback is seen as corrective, with an expert providing information to the passive recipient. Alternatively, within the socio-constructivist paradigm, feedback is seen as facilitative in that it involves provision of comments and suggestions to enable students to make their own revisions and through dialogue, help students to gain new understandings without dictating what those understandings will be.

Within the field of language learning, feedback seems to play a more significant role especially in relation to the learning of certain language skills which require the learner to use the language for communicative purposes. The teaching of the skill of writing, for example, does not only require the learner to construct the language from the input received but also necessitates continuous improvement of the learner's performance through the regular provision of feedback.

In relation to the types of feedback provided by teachers, the literature shows the existence of different typologies. Wanchid (2015) explained that these typologies vary according to the feedback provider or responder, mode of delivery and media of delivery. With reference to feedback provider, feedback is classified into self-feedback, teachers' feedback and peer feedback. In relation to the mode of delivery, feedback can be oral or written. With reference to the media of delivery, feedback can be paper and pencil or electronic. Some classifications were made based on the effect of feedback on the learning process, so feedback which enhances learning is often referred to as positive while feedback which provides critical comments is often referred to as negative.

Some typologies are only limited to written feedback. Based on its degree of explicitness, teachers' feedback can be direct, indirect or metalinguistic. Ellis (2009) explained that direct corrective feedback includes the writing of the correct form to be used by the student; indirect corrective feedback involves a reference to the error without correcting it; and metalinguistic corrective feedback includes some information about the nature of the error in the form of an 'error code'. Written feedback can also be focused or unfocused. While focused feedback involves the correction of specific types of errors, unfocused feedback refers to the teachers' correction of all of the students' errors (Ellis, 2009).

Feedback provision in education in general and in writing classrooms in particular has been the concern of a considerable body of research. Hyland and Hyland (2006) stated that the interest in feedback first started in L1 writing in the 1970s with the emergence of the 'learner-centred approach' to language teaching and the 'process approach' to writing instruction. Research on feedback in L2 writing began in the 1990s with a debate on the type of feedback to be provided to learners. Evans, Hartshorn, McCollum, and Wolfersberger (2010) mentioned that

in the last two decades several studies (e.g. Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Ferris, 2006; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008; Hartshorn et al., 2010; Russell & Spada, 2006; Truscott, 2007) have been conducted to investigate the value of written corrective feedback in L2 writing classes. These last decades have also witnessed a movement from 'traditional' to 'modern' feedback practices. Hyland and Hyland (2006, p. 1) explained that there has been a change from "summative feedback, designed to evaluate writing as a product" to "formative feedback that points forward to the student's future writing and the development of his or her writing processes." Such developments have been the result of extensive research (e.g. Chandler, 2003; Ferris & Helt, 2000; Lee, 2007) on the effects of different types of feedback on writing accuracy conducted in some L2/foreign language teaching contexts worldwide.

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, research has also focused on other issues such as teachers' feedback practices in L2 classrooms. Several studies (e.g. Carless, Salter, Yang, & Lam, 2011; Lee, 2008; Nicol, 2007) were more concerned with the way teachers provide feedback to their students in their local contexts. More specifically, they were interested in the teachers' performance in terms of types and focus of feedback and knowledge and beliefs about feedback provision. Such studies are important as they focus on feedback provision from the teachers' perspective. Lee (2003, p. 218) explained that understanding how teachers provide feedback in their local contexts can help improve the quality of the feedback provided in the writing classrooms. He maintained that

> In order to come up with a sound pedagogy of error feedback in the writing classroom, it is important to understand the issues teachers face while giving error feedback, their beliefs and their concerns. It is hoped that through obtaining such information, effective measures to cope with such a painstaking task can be designed.

The Study

The present study was conducted to explore how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers at the Institut Supérieur des Langues de Tunis (ISLT) provide feedback on their students' writing assignments. More

specifically, the study aimed to identify type of feedback used, what that feedback focuses on and the beliefs informing the feedback practices of Tunisian EFL writing teachers. The research thus poses the following three questions:

1. What is the type of feedback provided by EFL writing teachers?
2. What are the feedback focuses of EFL writing teachers?
3. What beliefs inform the feedback practices of these EFL writing teachers?

Method

The study relied on a mixed-method design to collect the data needed to answer the research questions (see Table 6.1). A questionnaire and a structured interview were employed to gather information about the feedback practices of the sample of Tunisian EFL writing teachers. These practices were also explored through the analysis of written feedback provided by some of these teachers on a sample of students' essays.

Students' Questionnaire

The questionnaire is divided into two sections (see Appendix 1). The first section consists of three questions about the respondent's gender, affiliation and level of study. The second contains twelve structured questions

Table 6.1 Research design

Instruments	Subjects/ documents	Data type	Analysis procedures
Questionnaire	121 ISLT EFL students	Quantitative + qualitative	Descriptive statistics
Structured interview	7 ISLT writing teachers	Qualitative + quantitative	Coding + categorisation
Document analysis	60 essays	Qualitative	Coding + categorisation

and aims to collect data about the students' perception of the feedback practices at the ISLT. Some of the questions (e.g. 1, 10, 11 and 12) include some open-ended items in which respondents are instructed to explain their answers to the structured items.

The questionnaire was piloted on a group of fifteen students with the same profile as the students who participated in the study (see section 'Participants'). The students were instructed to answer the questionnaire and underline the words or expressions they might find difficult or unclear. Based on their feedback, the decision was made to explain the terms 'peer feedback', 'oral feedback' and 'online feedback' used in question 2 as they seemed unfamiliar to some respondents.

Teachers' Interview

The interview is divided into two sections and is very similar to the students' questionnaire (see Appendix 2). The main difference relates to the nature of the questions used in each instrument. The interview includes open-ended questions as it was designed for a deeper exploration of the teachers' feedback practices at the ISLT. Some of the questions, however, include some structured items in which participants are instructed to choose from a list of options. The first section consists of five demographic questions about the respondents' gender, affiliation, position, teaching experience and training in teaching writing. The second comprises twelve questions about (a) the type of feedback provided by the teachers, (b) the type of feedback preferred by the students, (c) the teachers' feedback focuses, and (d) feedback explicitness on error correction.

Document Analysis

Document analysis was used to collect information on the type of written feedback provided by these EFL writing teachers. Samples of students' essays were scrutinised in terms of type and quality of the written feedback provided by the teachers. Sixty essays were collected from three groups taught by three different teachers (see Table 6.2).

Table 6.2 The students' essays analysed for the study

	Number of essays	Level	Topic
Teacher 1	20	1st year	Media
Teacher 2	20	3rd year	Education
Teacher 3	20	3rd year	Values

Table 6.3 General profile of the questionnaire respondents

	Gender		Level	
	Male	Female	1st year	3rd year
Number of participants	15	106	65	56

Participants

The study included 121 EFL students enrolled in the first and third year of the Bachelor's degree in English Language, Literature and Civilisation at the ISLT. Only first-year and third-year students participated in the study. Second-year students were not included due to the unavailability of a writing course in the second-year syllabus. As can be seen in Table 6.3, the majority of participants were females, and this could be considered representative of the target population since female students in the Tunisian higher education institutions far outnumber their male counterparts.

The study also included seven writing teachers. Table 6.4 shows that all teachers had varying degrees of teaching experience. Five teachers had more than fifteen years of teaching experience; only two had less than five years. At the level of teaching position, the sample included three secondary school teachers working in higher education institutions, two *professeurs agrégés* and one lecturer. In terms of training in EFL writing, four teachers reported that they had received training sessions in EFL writing. When reporting the study results, the seven teachers who responded to the interview were attributed the pseudonyms of respondent 1 to respondent 7. The three teachers who corrected the students' sample essays were referred to as teacher 1, teacher 2 and teacher 3.

The current study abided by British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines. All the participants in the study were informed that their responses would only be used for research purposes. They were

Table 6.4 General profile of the interview respondents

	Gender		Teaching experience				Position				
	Male	Female	<5	5–9	110–15	>15	PES[a]	Agrégé[b]	Lecturer	Assistant professor	Training in EFL writing
Number of participants	–	7	2	–	3	2	3	2	2	–	4

[a]PES: Stands for 'Professeur *d'Enseignement Secondaire*' which means English secondary school teacher. These teachers are generally trained as high school teachers, but they are recruited by the Ministry of Higher Education for a specific period of time

[b]Professeur agrégé: Refers to high school teachers who are recruited by the ministry of higher education after passing a national exam called 'agrégation'

also informed that the findings of the study would be published in an academic article of which they would be able to obtain a copy. They were also told that each participant could withdraw at any time and that his/her rights to confidentiality and anonymity would be respected as no reference to his/her name or identity would be made when reporting the study results.

Data Analysis

The present study relied on quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data consisted of the students' answers to the structured items of the questionnaire. They were statistically analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (SPSS, version 22). The qualitative data included (a) the teacher's responses to the interview, (b) the students' responses to the open-ended items in the questionnaire and (c) the student's essays. The teachers and students' responses were grouped, examined and coded according to certain categories. The analysis of the students' essays followed the same procedure. The teachers' written comments on the students' performance were examined, coded and grouped into a set of predetermined categories and then used to answer certain parts of the research questions.

Findings

Background in Teaching EFL Writing

The analysis of the teachers' responses to the demographic items in the questionnaire revealed that no respondent had any training in teaching EFL writing to university students. Even though four teachers reported that they had training in EFL writing, the analysis of the information provided about these training sessions showed that they were in fact targeted to secondary school teachers and were not specifically focused on writing since they included other skills such as reading, listening and speaking. The apparent lack of the teachers' formal training in teaching

EFL writing to university students raises questions about their practices in writing classes in general and their chosen feedback practices in particular.

Feedback Practices

The provision of feedback seems to be a regular practice for ISLT writing teachers. When asked about feedback provision in writing classes, 95% of the students mentioned that their teachers had provided them with feedback on the paragraphs or essays they had written for the writing course. The teachers interviewed confirmed this finding; all of them reported that they provided feedback to their students on a regular basis.

Feedback Types

Table 6.5 summarises the students' responses to the question about the types of feedback they had received by the writing teachers at the ISLT. As can be seen in the table, written feedback is by far the most common type of feedback, selected by 84% of the respondents, followed by oral feedback (40%) and peer feedback (19%). Online feedback was the least used with only 12% of the students indicating that their teachers used this type in their writing classes.

Teachers' responses seem to be in line with these findings. In response to a question about the type of feedback they provided to their students, all respondents reported that they mainly relied on written comments

Table 6.5 Types of feedback provided by ISLT teachers

Type of feedback	Number of students[a]	Percentage[b]
Written feedback	99	84
Peer feedback	22	19
Oral feedback	47	40
Online feedback	14	12

[a]Refers to the number of students who reported that their teachers used the type of feedback in their writing courses
[b]Each percentage is calculated out of a total of 121 respondents

Table 6.6 Types of feedback preferred by ISLT students

Type of feedback	Number of students	Percentage[a]
Written feedback	91	75
Peer feedback	26	21
Oral feedback	64	53
Online feedback	33	27

[a]Each percentage is calculated out of a total of 121 respondents

and to a lesser degree on oral feedback. Three respondents mentioned that, in addition to written and oral feedback, they also used peer feedback and two other respondents reported that they used online feedback, especially with third-year and Master's students. Respondent 3 mentioned that she always uses a combination of written and oral feedback in which "*written comments are accompanied by oral feedback for more clarification*."

In relation to the types of feedback preferred by the students, the analysis of the students' responses revealed results which are similar to the ones about the types of feedback provided by the teachers. Table 6.6 shows that written feedback was the most preferred as it was selected by 75% of the students, followed by oral feedback (53%) and online feedback (27%). Peer feedback was the least preferred as it was selected only by 21% of the respondents.

In response to the question about the type of feedback preferred by their students, all teachers said that their students mainly preferred written comments and oral feedback. Some of them explained that their students often asked for oral feedback to obtain more information about their performances. Respondent 4 explained that "*most students prefer written comments. They, however, ask for oral feedback if they are not convinced with the written comments or when they ask for clarification.*" Peer feedback did not seem to be preferred by many students. Only respondent 7 referred to this type of feedback. She explained that some of her students did not actively participate in peer feedback sessions as "*they are not willing to hear the evaluation of their peers*." As for online feedback, respondent 6 reported that only Master's students asked for this type of feedback.

Table 6.7 Teachers' feedback focuses

Aspects	Number of students	Percentage[a]
Language errors	72	60
General aspects (organisation, ideas, style, etc.)	85	70
Overall writing performance	59	49

[a]Each percentage is calculated out of a total of 121 respondents

Feedback Focus

When asked about teachers' feedback focuses in the questionnaire, students provided a variety of responses (see Table 6.7). 70% of them indicated that their teachers mainly focused on general aspects of writing such as organisation, style, development of ideas, coherence and unity, 60% mentioned language errors and 49% referred to overall writing performance as the major focus of the teachers' feedback.

Teachers provided different responses concerning the aspects they focused on in their feedback. Four respondents reported that they focused on language errors, general aspects of the writing and overall writing performance. They explained that the focus on these aspects stems from their concern about providing students with complete information about their performance. Respondents 1 and 5 said that they mainly focused on language errors in their feedback because they were primarily concerned with the accuracy of the students' performance. Respondent 5 commented that "*the errors in grammar or vocab affect the quality of the academic writing*." Respondent 3, on the other hand, mentioned that she only focused on the general aspects of the writing because "*organisation, structure or quality of ideas are the most important aspects in essay writing*."

The analysis of the teachers' feedback on the students' essays revealed that the teachers mainly focused on language errors in their comments. Table 6.8 shows that 82% of the comments were about the language errors in the essays, 16% about the general aspects of the essays and only 3% about the overall writing performance. The table also shows considerable differences between the three teachers in terms of the amount and focus of feedback. In terms of the amount of feedback, teacher 2 provided about half (48%) of all the comments made by the three teachers.

Table 6.8 Teachers' feedback focuses (students' essays)

	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Total
Aspects	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)
Comments about language errors	75 (16)	269 (64)	120 (26)	464 (82)
Comments about general aspects (organisation, ideas, style, etc.)	30 (31)	10 (10)	55 (58)	95 (16)
Comments about overall writing performance	7 (63)	0 (0)	4 (36)	11 (3)
Total (%)	112 (20)	279 (64)	179 (31)	570 (100)

Teachers 3 provided 31%, and teacher 1 provided only 20% of the comments. At the level of feedback focus, while teacher 2 provided 64% of all the comments made about language errors, she only provided 10% of all the comments made about the general aspects and no comments at all about the overall writing performance. The other two teachers, however, provided a balanced amount of comments across the three types of feedback.

Feedback on Error Correction

When reporting the teachers' practices when dealing with language errors, the students mentioned 'underlining errors' and to a lesser extent 'writing a code referring to the error type' as the most common practices. Table 6.9 shows that 77% of the students reported that their teachers mainly underlined their errors, 41% said that their teacher wrote a code referring to the error type and only 22% mentioned that their teacher included the full correction of the error in their feedback.

The analysis of the teachers' responses indicated that underlining errors and writing full correction were the most common teachers' feedback practices when dealing with language errors. Four respondents reported that they mainly underlined errors which are 'too evident', but when the errors were more complex, they wrote the full correction to help the students learn the correct use of the language. Respondents 2 and 4 mentioned that they wrote a code referring to the error type to push the students "*reflect on their mistakes*." Respondent 6 said that she relied on

Table 6.9 Error correction practices

Practice	Number of students	Percentage[a]
Underline errors	92	77
Write a code referring to the error type	49	41
Write full correction of error	27	22

[a]Each percentage is calculated out of a total of 121 respondents

Table 6.10 Error correction practices (students' essays)

	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Total
Aspects	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)
Underline language errors	23 (10)	129 (55)	82 (35)	234 (50)
Write a code	5 (50)	3 (30)	2 (20)	10 (3)
Write full correction	47 (21)	137 (62)	36 (16)	220 (47)
Total (%)	75 (16)	269 (58)	120 (26)	464 (100)

the three practices in her feedback. She explained that "*my choice of which practice to use usually depends on seriousness of the error and the level of the students I am teaching*."

The results of the analysis of the teachers' feedback on the students' essays seem to confirm these findings. Table 6.10 shows that 50% of the teacher's comments about language errors consisted in underlining the errors, 47% consisted in writing full correction of the errors, and only 3% of the comments included writing a code which referred to the error type. The table also reveals significant differences between the teachers in terms the amount of comments provided about language errors. While teacher 2 provided 58% of all the comments made about language errors, teacher 1 provided only 16% of the comments.

Feedback on General Aspects of Writing

The general aspects that teachers focus on in their feedback relate to aspects of writing which include organisation, style, development of ideas, quality of ideas, coherence and unity. Table 6.11 provides a summary of the students' responses to the item about these aspects in the questionnaire. The students reported that their teachers' general comments focused mainly on coherence (79%), development of ideas (72%)

Table 6.11 Feedback on general aspects

Aspects	Number of students	Percentage[a]
Organisation	79	66
Style	37	31
Development of ideas	86	72
Quality of ideas	34	28
Coherence	95	79
Unity	51	42

[a]Each percentage is calculated out of a total of 121 respondents

and organisation (66%). Smaller numbers of students mentioned other aspects which include unity (42%) and, to a lesser extent, style (31%) and quality of ideas (28%).

When asked about the general aspects they focus on when providing feedback on the students' writings, all teachers mentioned that they focus on organisation, style, development of ideas, quality of ideas, coherence and unity. Most of them explained that all these general aspects are important as they help them make their students better writers. In their comments about the importance they attributed to these aspects, most respondents considered organisation, development of ideas and coherence as the most important. Less importance, however, was given to unity and style.

The analysis of the teachers' comments on the students' essays revealed that the main aspects teachers focused on included organisation (39% of the comments), style (29%) and development of ideas (18%). Very little focus was placed on unity and coherence. Table 6.12 shows significant differences between the teachers' amount of focus on general aspects of their feedback. While teacher 3 provided more than 58% of all the comments about the general aspects of the essays, teacher 2 provided only 10% of those comments.

Feedback on Overall Writing Performance

The feedback on overall writing performance generally included encouraging remarks meant to motivate the students or critical remarks meant to push the students to reflect on their performance. Table 6.13 provides

Table 6.12 Feedback on general aspects (students' essays)

Aspects	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Total No. (%)
Organisation	18	6	13	37 (39)
Style	4	2	22	28 (29)
Development of ideas	2	–	15	17 (18)
Quality of ideas	5	2	4	11 (11)
Coherence	–	–	–	– (–)
Unity	1	–	1	2 (0.5)
Total No. (%)	30 (31)	10 (10.5)	55 (58.5)	95 (100)

Table 6.13 Nature of teachers' comments

Comment type	Number of students[a]	Percentage[a]
Encouraging remarks	8	7
Critical comments	58	50
Both	51	43

[a]Each percentage is calculated out of a total of 121 respondents

a summary of the responses to an item about the nature of teacher's feedback in the questionnaire. About 50% of the students mentioned that their teachers' comments were mainly critical, 43% reported that the comments were both encouraging and critical and only 7% described their teachers' comments as encouraging.

All teachers reported that they used both encouraging and critical comments. In their responses, they emphasised the importance of the provision of positive reinforcement to build the students' self-confidence and critical comments to help them focus on their errors. Respondent 3 mentioned that she provided here students with both encouraging and critical comments. She explained that "*by giving them encouraging remarks, I motivate them to write more. Critical comments make the students aware of the errors that they have made while writing*."

Table 6.14 summarises the main findings about the nature of the feedback provided by the teachers on the students' essays. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the teachers' feedback about the overall writing performance consisted of critical comments which focused on the students' errors and included remarks such as "*serious problems of the organisation*," "*poor*

Table 6.14 Nature of teachers' comments (students' essays)

Aspects	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Total No. (%)
Encouraging remarks	6	–	6	12 (35)
Critical comments	11	–	11	22 (64)
Total No. (%)	17 (50)	–	17 (50)	34 (100)

development of ideas" or even offending comments such as "*is this English?*" Encouraging remarks represented only 35% of the teachers' general feedback and included comments meant to motivate the students such as "*you can do much better*," "*interesting ideas and clear outline*" or "*excellent work*." Significant differences also exist between the teachers' use of these types of general comments. While teachers 1 and 3 provided an equal percentage of critical and encouraging remarks (50% each), teacher 2 provided none of these types of remarks about the students' overall writing performance.

Feedback Responsiveness to Learners' Needs

This point relates to the degree of sensitivity of the teachers' feedback to the student's needs. As can be seen in Table 6.15, 57% of the students reported that their teachers customised their feedback based on what they knew about the students' background, needs and performances, while 43% indicated that their teachers provided the same feedback to all students.

When asked about the responsiveness of the feedback they provided to their students, all teachers reported that they customised the feedback they provided based on what they knew about the profiles of their students. In their responses, they provided general statements about the importance of taking into account the students' background, needs and performances. Respondent 2 commented that "*every single student should feel that the teacher is caring for his/her writing and taking into consideration his/her individuality*."

The close examination of the teachers' comments on the students' essays seemed to indicate that those comments were not often customised

Table 6.15 Responsiveness of feedback to learners' needs

Type of feedback	Number of students	Percentage[a]
Same feedback to all students	50	43
Customised feedback	58	57

[a]Each percentage is calculated out of a total of 108 respondents

to the students' needs. The feedback provided by teacher 1 and teacher 2 was mainly centred on the correction of the student's language errors. Little efforts were made to provide information about each student's specific problems. Teacher 3, however, provided more comments about the students' overall writing performance. Some of these comments included reference to the students' specific problems and the ways to deal with those problems.

Discussion of Feedback with Students

A majority (87%) of the students reported that their teachers allowed them to react and respond to the feedback they provided. Only 13% mentioned that their teachers did not discuss the feedback they provided with them. When asked whether they allow their students to react to their feedback, all teachers mentioned that they regularly discussed their feedback with their students. Most of them explained that this practice not only increases the students' awareness of the mistakes they might make in the future but also increases their readiness to learn from the feedback as they become more convinced by the teachers' comments. Respondent 6 explained that "*by discussing the feedback, students become more involved in the writing process and they become more aware of the possible errors that they may make in their future writing performance*."

Effects of Feedback

In their responses to the question about the effects of feedback, the students seemed to be aware of the positive effects of feedback on their future performance. Over two-thirds (70%) said that it has considerable effects, 26% mentioned that it has some effects and only 3% thought

that feedback has little or no effects. Teachers' responses seemed to be in line with the students' opinions about the effect of feedback. All of them highlighted the positive effects of feedback on the students' future performance. Three respondents focused on the immediate effects of teachers' comments as they would help learners identify and correct the mistakes they make in their writings. Respondent 1 and 4 were mainly concerned with the intermediate effects of feedback. Respondent 4 emphasised that teachers' comments "*help students improve their future performance as they raise their awareness to their errors and encourage them to avoid them in the future*."

Beliefs Informing Feedback Practices

The data collected about feedback practices at the ISLT did not only provide insights about how teachers provide feedback, but it also served as a source of information about the theories and beliefs which informed those practices. The analysis of the data collected for the study revealed that teachers' feedback practices were governed to an extent by theoretical knowledge and beliefs about feedback provision in writing classes. This knowledge and beliefs were probably acquired during the teachers' university studies, from their experiences as writing teachers and/or from the readings they had done for the course.

In terms of theoretical knowledge, the study showed that the teachers were familiar with all the different types of feedback. In addition, most of them were also knowledgeable about the characteristics of each type and the context in which it should be used. For instance, while some teachers mentioned that online feedback is more effective with students who are at advanced levels, other teachers reported that they often used a combination of written and oral feedback to maximise the effect on the students' writing performance. Teachers also seemed to possess some knowledge about the different aspects on which they should focus in their feedback. Most of their feedback consisted of comments on different aspects of writing which focused on language errors, general aspects of writing such as organisation, style, ideas, coherence and unity, and the students' overall writing performance. In relation to error correction, the

study also revealed that the teachers were, to a certain extent, knowledgeable about the different techniques used in error correction. When dealing with the students' errors, they used techniques which included underlining errors, writing a code referring to the error type or writing the full correction of the errors. Some teachers even mentioned that their choice of the error correction technique was often based on the type and the seriousness of the students' error.

Regarding beliefs about feedback provision, the study revealed that ISLT writing teachers' practices were informed by some beliefs about the role of feedback in writing instruction and the nature of the feedback to be provided. Most teachers seemed to be aware of the importance of regular feedback provision in writing instruction. All of them mentioned that they provided feedback to their students on a regular basis. They also seemed to be aware of the types of feedback preferred by their students and most of their practices seemed to be in line with those preferences. The data collected also showed that teachers appeared to be fully aware of the role of positive feedback in building students' self-confidence. In their responses to the interview, all of them reported that they regularly motivated their students with encouraging feedback. Teachers also seemed to be aware of the importance of taking into account students' differences in feedback provision. Most of them reported that they customised their feedback according to their students' individual needs.

The teachers' knowledge and beliefs about feedback practices seem to have their roots in two major approaches to language learning and writing instruction. Teachers' beliefs about the importance of regular feedback provision and the role of feedback in improving the learners' writing performance could be traced back to the 'process approach' to writing in which writing is perceived as a formative process in which the writing skill is improved through the regular provision of information on the learner's actual performance. Teachers' assumptions about the learners' differences and their effects on feedback provision seemed to root in the 'learner-centred approach' to language teaching in which each learner is treated as a separate individual who has specific needs and learning styles. These specific needs have to be taken into consideration when designing classroom tasks or selecting the teaching method to be used in the classroom.

Conclusions and Discussion

The present study explored the feedback practices of Tunisian EFL writing teachers at the ISLT. Analysis of the data collected from the students' questionnaires, teachers' interviews and students' essays leads to two major conclusions about how ISLT teachers delivered feedback in their writing classes. First, teachers seemed to possess some theoretical knowledge about feedback provision (see section "Beliefs Informing Feedback Practices"). This knowledge was often translated into some classroom practices. Second, on some occasions and in relation to some aspects of feedback, teachers possessed the theoretical knowledge but failed to translate that knowledge into concrete instructional practices. Some of their practices were informed by certain traditional beliefs which confine the provision of feedback to the correction of students' errors. For instance, all teachers appeared to possess some knowledge about the different types of feedback and the context in which each type is used. The data showed, however, that the feedback they provided to their students was mainly confined to two types, namely written feedback and, to a lesser extent, oral feedback. In relation to the focuses of their feedback, all teachers mentioned that they focused on all the aspects of writing which include language errors, general aspects of writing and overall writing performance. However, the analysis of the teachers' comments on the students' essays showed that almost all these comments were centred on error correction.

The present study also highlighted some significant differences between the teachers' feedback practices in terms of the amount and focus of feedback provided. Some teachers were highly productive regarding feedback provision. Others, however, only provided a small number of comments on their students' essays. Some teachers focused their feedback on all the aspects of writing. They provided comments on the students' language errors, the general writing aspects and the overall writing performance. Other teachers, however, showed more concern with the accuracy of the students' performance. They only limited their comments to the correction of language errors.

These conclusions seem to indicate that most of the teachers who participated in the study adhere to the constructivist feedback paradigm (Knight & Yorke, 2003; Poulos & Mahony, 2008). Though not explicitly stated, the teachers' focus on the provision of written corrective feedback suggests that they adopt a view which considers feedback provision as a unidirectional process in which an expert, the teacher, supplies a passive recipient, the learner, with the correct forms of the language. In fact, teachers' accounts on the way they provided feedback together with the types of feedback they wrote on their students' essays included little reference to or examples of 'facilitative' feedback (Evans, 2013) that is built on interaction and meant to help students gain a new understanding of language use.

These conclusions would gain more importance if related to the issues and challenges of feedback provision in the higher education context, a context in which learners are considered as active participants in the learning process who need to be supplied with the necessary strategies to enhance their independence in the future. Ferguson (2011) stated that in higher education, feedback is perceived as a means to facilitate the development of students as independent learners who are able assess and regulate their own learning process and prepare them for the tasks they will perform after graduation. In the same line of thought, Black and McCormick (2010) contended that, in the higher education context, oral feedback is appropriate to the needs of the students as it ensures greater independence in learning. The present study, however, showed that feedback practices in this particular Tunisian higher education institution seem to be incongruent with the needs of university students and the challenges of feedback provision in the context of higher education. This points to an urgent need for improvement of feedback practices at the ISLT in particular and in other Tunisian higher education institutions in general. This improvement can be achieved through the provision of training programmes in EFL writing to help writing teachers consolidate their theoretical knowledge about feedback provision and align their practices with best feedback practices recommended in the literature or used in other international higher education institutions.

Appendix 1

Students' Questionnaire About Feedback Practices in EFL Writing Courses in Tunisia

This questionnaire aims to collect background information about the way your teacher provides feedback on the essays or paragraphs you write for the writing courses at the ISLT. Your answers are very important and will be strictly confidential.

Please fill in the information requested.

This questionnaire includes three pages and may take about 10 minutes if you answer all the questions. Please return it to the person who gave it to you.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Section A: Biodata

1- Gender: Female [...] Male [...]

2- Institution (where you study): ---

3- Level : 1st year [...] 2nd year [...] 3rd year [...]

Section B: feedback practices

1- Does your writing teacher provide feedback on the paragraphs/essays you write?

Yes [...] No [...]

a) If yes, please move to questions 2- 11 below.

b) If no, please explain the reason(s) in the space provided.

2- Tick the option(s) which refer(s) to the **type of feedback** provided by your teacher.

● When you teacher provides feedback on your paragraphs/essays, does s/he	√
- **write comments** on your paragraphs/essays?	
- organise **peer feedback** sessions in which you comment on your classmates' paragraphs/essays?	
- organise **oral feedback** sessions in which s/he discusses the written feedback provided to you?	
- provide **online feedback** to you through computer-mediated communication such as emails, forums or social media?	

3- Tick the option(s) which refer(s) to the **type(s) of feedback** you **prefer**

● Which type(s) of **feedback** do you **prefer**?	√
- Written feedback	
- Peer feedback (commenting on your classmates' paragraphs/essays)	
- Oral group discussion of written feedback	
- Online feedback (through emails, forums or social media)	

4- Tick the option(s) which refer(s) to the **aspect(s)** that your teacher **focuses on** in his/her feedback.

● When your teacher writes feedback on your paragraphs/essays, does s/he focus on:	√
- language errors?	
- general aspects of the writing such as organisation, quality of ideas and style?	
- the overall writing performance?	

5- Tick the option(s) which best describe(s) the **degree of explicitness** of your teacher's feedback.

● When you teacher provides feedback on your language errors, does s/he	√
- underline the errors?	
- write a code which refers to the error type (example: **gr**. for grammar, **voc**. for vocabulary)?	
- write the full correction of the error?	

6- Tick the option(s) which refer(s) to the **general aspect(s)** that you teacher **focuses on** in his/her feedback.

● When you teacher provides feedback on the general aspects of your paragraphs/essays, does s/he focus on	√
- organization?	
- style?	
- development of ideas?	
- quality of ideas?	
- coherence?	
- unity?	

7- Tick the **option** which refers to the **type of comments** your teacher provides in his/her feedback.

● When your teacher comments on your overall writing performance, does s/he provide	√
- encouraging remarks?	
- critical comments?	
- both?	

8- Tick the option which refers to the **type of feedback** provided by your teacher.

● When your teacher provides feedback on your paragraphs/essays, does s/he	√
- provide the same feedback to all students?	
- customise his/her feedback based on what s/he knows about your background, needs and performance?	

9- How often does your teacher use **peer feedback** (letting you comment on your classmates' paragraphs/essays)?

Never ... Almost never ... Sometimes ... Often ... Always ...

10- Does your teacher allow you to **react and provide your responses** to his/her feedback?

Yes ... No ...

If no, please explain why?

11- Does your writing teacher provide **online feedback** on the paragraphs/essays you write?

Yes ... No ...

a) If yes, please explain how?

----

b) If no, please explain why?

12- Do you think that the provision of feedback may have a **positive effect** on your future writing performance?

	√
No effect	
Very little effect	
Some effect	
Considerable effect	

Thank you for your cooperation

Appendix 2

Teachers' Structured Interview About Feedback Practices in EFL Writing Courses in Tunisia

This interview aims to collect background information about the way you provide feedback on your students' writings. Your answers are very important and will be strictly confidential. Please fill in the information requested.

This questionnaire includes three pages and may take about 10 minutes if you answer all the questions. Please return it to the person who gave it to you.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Section A: Biodata

1- Institution (where you work): ---

2- Position : PES Détaché [...] Assistant [...] Maître assistant [...] Maître de conférences [...]

3- Total number of years of experience as an EFL writing teacher: ------------------------.

4- Gender: Female [...] Male [...]

As a teacher, have you ever had a training course in EFL writing?

Yes [...] No [...]

If yes, please specify the place, focus, and length--

Section B: Feedback Practices

1- Do you provide feedback on the paragraphs/essays that your students write for the writing course? Yes [...] No [...]

c) If yes, please answer questions 2- 11 below.

d) If no, please explain the reason(s) in the space provided.

2- What type of feedback do you provide to your students (e.g., written comments, peer feedback, oral feedback or online feedback)?

3- Which type(s) of feedback is (are) preferred by your students?

4- When you write your feedback on your students' paragraphs/essays, which aspects do you focus on?

	√
- language errors?	
- general aspects of the writing such as organisation, quality of ideas and style?	
- the overall writing performance?	

- Please specify why you focus on such aspects.

5- When you provide feedback on your students' language errors, do you

(You can tick more than one option)	√
- underline the errors?	
- write a code which refers to the error type (e.g., gr., voc., sp., str.)?	
- write the full correction of the error?	

- Please justify your choice.

6- When you provide feedback on the general aspects of the paragraphs/essays, do you focus on

(You can tick more than one option)	√
- organization?	
- style?	
- development of ideas?	
- quality of ideas?	
- coherence?	
- unity?	

- Please explain why you focus on such aspects.

7- When you comment on the overall writing performance of your students, do you provide

(Please tick only one option)	√
- encouraging remarks?	
- critical comments?	
- both?	

- Please justify your choice.

8- When you provide your feedback on your students' writings, do you

(Please tick only one option)	√
- provide the same feedback to all students?	
- customise your feedback based on what you know about the student's background, needs and performances?	

- Please justify your choice.

9- How often do you rely on **peer feedback** in your writing classes?

Never [...] Almost never [...] Sometimes [...] Often [...] Always [...]

10- Do you allow your students to **react and respond** to your feedback?

Yes [...] No [...]

If yes, please explain how?

If no, please explain why?

11- Do you provide **online feedback** on the paragraphs/essays your students write on the writing course?

Yes [...] No [...]

If yes, please explain how?

If no, please explain why?

12- Do you think that the provision of feedback may have a **positive effect** on your students' future writing performance?

Thank you for your cooperation

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7

Supervisors' Written Feedback on Saudi Postgraduate Students' Problems with Academic English Writing in Selected UK Universities

Noof Al-Harbi and Salah Troudi

Introduction

Academic writing is both challenging and complex for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. This is particularly true for students conducting research or studying in EFL contexts where English is the language of instruction (Al-Badwawi, 2011; Muslim, 2014). There is already a significant amount of literature regarding the challenges Arab students, including Saudi students, face when dealing with academic writing in a second language (Al-Khawaldeh, 2011; Al-Mansour, 2015; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Tsai, 2006; Zamel, 1992). The main problem is because academic writing involves systematically presenting thoughts and experiences based on logic and reason. Thus, academic writing differs from other forms of writing (Al-Mansour, 2015).

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As Al Fadda (2012) highlighted, students working at higher levels of academic writing in English and wanting to develop their academic voice need to analyse and evaluate the views of other researchers and synthesise their ideas. Writing in a foreign language involves several elements. The first is the cognitive element, which refers to the linguistic competence of composing. Second is the meta-cognitive element, which involves being aware of the aim, audience, and style of the writing. The third is the social element, which comprises communicating and interacting with peers and with the target reader, and fourth is the affective element, which involves expressing feelings and ideas (Xiao-xia, 2007). However, it is difficult to acquire such writing skills, particularly when compared to other language skills, and thus the writing process for such students is complex.

Hyland (2007) commented that at university level, writing skills are crucial, as this is mostly how students are assessed. Therefore, EFL students may find that poor academic writing hinders their success; they might be unable to meet their institution's expectations regarding the level of their writing, and so they should develop and improve their writing skills so they are able to cope with university coursework in a range of disciplines (Bacha, 2002).

Feedback is a crucial factor in student achievement in L2 writing; it aids learners in finding appropriate methods to convey their ideas, express meaning, and explore a wide range of linguistic apparatus (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Liu & Hansen, 2002).

Many researchers have noted the significant impact that supervisory feedback has on improvements in students' writing (Bitchener, Basturkmen, & East, 2010; Catterall, Ross, Aitchison, & Burgin, 2011; Idris, 2011; Kumar & Stracke, 2007). However, these studies have used international students as the sample, and there is little or no research exploring the effects of supervisor written feedback on the writing skills of Saudi postgraduate students in particular. Thus, since Saudi students form an increasingly large group in tertiary and especially postgraduate education in the UK, it is important to explore the written feedback supervisors give to their postgraduate students regarding the drafts of their theses. This chapter sheds light on the nature of the written feedback Saudi postgraduate students receive from their supervisors. In particular, the focus is on the types of difficulties supervisors identify in the written

products of their Saudi students and the feedback they provide to address these difficulties. Thus this research proposes to answer the following question:

How do supervisors view Saudi postgraduate students' difficulties with their academic English writing and what feedback do they provide?

Review of the Literature

Several studies have examined the effects supervisory feedback can have on the development of students' writing (Bitchener et al., 2010; Catterall et al., 2011; Idris, 2011). The findings of these studies show that supervisor feedback influences various aspects of the quality of student writing, such as cohesion and coherence in constructing an argument, knowledge of genre, knowledge of content, rhetorical organisation, accuracy of linguistic elements, and structure.

When supervisors add written feedback to students' work, they act as mentors with the aim of increasing students' independence in their writing by giving them advice and techniques regarding their writing skills; in this way, students are able to become more proficient in their academic writing and will subsequently be better able to write independently (Bitchener et al., 2010). Catterall et al.'s (2011) research demonstrated how positive supervisory practices such as providing students with feedback on their writing can contribute to students making a significant improvement in their ability to write and acts as a pedagogical tool not only for teaching but also for learning to write for research purposes (Catterall et al., 2011). Similarly, effective supervision has been recognised as making a crucial contribution to the success of doctoral research (Frischer & Larsson, 2000).

For postgraduate students, feedback serves to enable them to understand the academic standards expected of them. This is a major challenge for many students especially at the initial stages of their postgraduate experience. Feedback will also help them improve their academic skills in a number of areas, such as methodological issues and the writing and presentation of data and findings. Feedback also serves to orient students

towards a deeper understanding of their topic and the multiple perspectives in the literature that relate to their research areas. This should add breadth and depth to the quality of their work. Feedback can also give students a sense of achievement (Brown & Atkins, 1988) by identifying elements of good quality work. In fact, receiving positive recognition from their supervisors, for whom they have significant respect, regarding what they have managed to achieve can play a crucial role in motivating candidates. This is particularly the case early on in an academic project (Taylor & Beasley, 2005). In addition, Taylor and Beasley (2005) argued that for supervisors' feedback to be effective, it has to be not only purposive and timely but delivered in the most appropriate form. In addition, it should be carried out correctly with the necessary care taken with regard the candidate's feelings.

However, the quality of supervision for international students can be affected by a wide range of challenges, particularly with regard to international students' academic cultural adjustment in western countries (Handa & Fallon, 2006; Robinson-Pant, 2009) and their linguistic competence (Andrade, 2006; Park & Son, 2011; Walsh, 2010). In view of the complex nature of the writing difficulties experienced by students writing in a foreign language, supervisor's feedback is likely to play a major role in shaping a student's academic journey and progress.

A considerable amount of literature exists that identifies the difficulties L2 postgraduate students face with regard to their academic writing while producing assignments or theses. These include thinking critically, constructing a logical argument, and providing links between ideas, as well as the need for a broad and suitable vocabulary. Regarding the latter, a few studies have demonstrated how an insufficient academic vocabulary is problematic for English as a Second Language (ESL) and EFL students' writing (Hinkel, 2004; Paynter, Bodrove, & Doty, 2006; Song, 2002), and several studies have been conducted to explore the difficulties with vocabulary faced by Arab students in their L2 writing. Research by Hisham (2008) and Al-Khasawneh (2011) clearly showed that Arab learners encounter a range of problems while completing their writing tasks, including referencing and grammar, but vocabulary is identified as a major issue. Other researchers have found that, for Arab

students, constructing an argument represents a significant challenge (Al-Abed Al-Haq & Ahmed, 1994; Kamel, 2000); indeed, researchers in a wide range of EFL studies (Groom, 2000; Hirose, 2003; Wingate, 2012; Zhu, 2001) have supported this finding. Thus, the claim that students struggle when asked to produce written academic arguments is supported by a significant body of literature. Studies have revealed that Saudi university students' writing is generally weak regarding sentence fragments and link sentences (Alkubaidi, 2014; Al Fadda, 2012), and research carried out in Arab nations has demonstrated that Arab students also encounter problems at the sentence and paragraph levels, for example, the concept of paragraph unity, establishing a logical link between ideas, and moving from one idea to another (Ahmed, 2010; Ezza, 2010; Khuwaileh & Shoumali, 2000). A number of studies have also highlighted the challenges Arab students face when required to demonstrate critical thinking in their academic writing (Abdulkareem, 2013; Ahmed, 2011; Al-Wehaibi, 2012; Al-Zubaidi, 2012; Barnawi, 2009; Saba, 2013).

This overview of the existing literature demonstrate how students' writing development is affected by supervisory feedback and identifies the importance of investigating the challenges faced by L2 postgraduate students regarding their academic writing to help them achieve greater academic success.

Methodology

The decision to apply an exploratory methodology in the current study was based on the type of research questions. Creswell (2009) claimed that an exploratory methodology can help a researcher explore a specific phenomenon. Similarly, according to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), an exploratory methodology allows the researcher to investigate participants' values, cultures, and perceptions while revealing the true meaning of participants' behaviours and words, so an exploratory methodology would provide a better understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Research Methods

Semi-structured Interview

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), an interview is more than the informal exchange of quotidian conversations, as it has more structure and a specific purpose. Thus, it involves careful questioning and careful listening in order to acquire thoroughly tested knowledge. In addition, Kvale (1996) stated that the aim of the interview in qualitative research is to gain an understanding of the world as seen from the subjects' perspective, to unpack the hidden meaning of the experiences people go through, and to reveal their world. Thus, researchers use interviews to help them understand interviewees' meaning (Kvale, 2009).

From the different types of interviews available to a researcher, the semi-structured interview offers advantages since most researchers will have already prepared a list of relevant questions they wish to ask. It also allows them sufficient flexibility to explore issues that might arise during the interview but that might not be part of the interview protocol (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006). The researcher thereby gains a more in-depth understanding of an individual or subject, while keeping elements of control over the topic areas under exploration. In this research, such an interview type was employed because it could potentially lead to rich data being obtained, thus helping to provide a more in-depth interpretation not only of the topic but also of the interviewees' views concerning the nature of feedback they provide. See Appendix 1 for the list of questions asked to participants in the present study.

Document Analysis

Wellington (2000) defined document analysis as the procedures and strategy used to analyse and interpret any kind of documents that might be considered important when researching a specific area. A wide range of documents can be analysed, whether public documents, for example, newspapers, television scripts, or the minutes of meetings, or private documents, for example, personal journals, diaries, memoirs, school records,

and letters (Creswell, 2009). In addition, as Merriam (1988) stated, a wide range of documents can assist the researcher in revealing meaning, developing an understanding, and discovering new insights that are pertinent to the research problem.

In the current study, document analysis was applied to the feedback students received from their supervisors (see Appendix 2 for a sample of this feedback). This analysis supplemented and supported the data derived from the semi-structured interviews; the combination of methods facilitated comprehension of the nature of feedback provided to address the difficulties Saudi postgraduate students in the UK experience when writing their assignments and theses. Both methods also helped to formulate a deeper understanding of the various areas of academic writing, including those areas that students are considered to find the most challenging.

Sampling

The current research used a non-probability strategy or convenience sampling to potentially select 15 postgraduate Saudi students and nine of their available supervisors to be interviewed. This sampling strategy has the benefit of being relatively uncomplicated, and it avoids problems concerning gaining access to the participants (Wellington, 2000). The selection criteria for the nine supervisor interviewees were as follows: they had experience of supervising students from Saudi Arabia, Gulf countries, or Arab countries at a postgraduate level, and they were willing to be interviewed. The sample of supervisors included both males and females, and they were from six universities across the UK. Three supervisors were paired with three of the participant postgraduate students whose subjects were Islamic studies, education, biology, computer science, and business.

Regarding the sample of students, 15 Saudi postgraduate students in the UK were asked to provide samples of feedback on their English academic writing from their supervisors. There were both male and female students in the sample; they were from a range of universities across the UK, as well as many universities in Saudi Arabia, and were studying to

gain an MA, PhD, or EdD degree in a variety of specialisations; thus, it was felt that this would provide a representative sample of Saudi postgraduate students. The students shared a number of characteristics: Saudi national, Arabic speaker, postgraduate student in the UK, similar sociocultural background, and religious belief in Islam.

Of the 15 students, ten were willing to provide samples of feedback on their writing; the other five students said they preferred not to participate. It is important for researchers to obtain participants' consent during data collection (Creswell, 2009). Each of the ten students provided a single sample of feedback they had received from their supervisors; while each piece of writing was in the same genre, the length of feedback varied. In addition, the samples demonstrated the supervisors' perception of the students' writing difficulties.

Data Analysis

Data from the samples of written feedback and from the semi-structured interviews were analysed qualitatively in accordance with Creswell's (2007) procedures for qualitative data analysis, which state that such analysis comprises the preparation and organisation of the data, for example, text data from transcripts or image data from photographs, to make it possible to perform an analysis. The next step was to categorise the data into different themes; this involved first applying codes and then condensing them. The final step was to present the data in a graphic format, such as figures or tables, or in the form of a discussion. Qualitative data analysis is a non-linear process; the researcher has to become involved in all stages of the research, alternating between the original data and the coding process to test existing codes and devise new ones against the original data.

We carried out an inductive analysis of the qualitative data by building categories and themes from the bottom up (Creswell, 2013). The coding involved choosing from the data certain words, sentences, paragraphs, or sections that seemed to capture the participants' key concepts or thoughts (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Next, the coding and labelling processes were used to break the data down into smaller pieces and assign units of

meaning to each piece of data (Radnor, 2002). Various themes emerged when the coding was undertaken inductively. Subsequently, a thematic chart was created to display the data; the chart was modified by combining categories that were similar and creating other categories where necessary. In this way, the data were better organised and more easily accessed.

Ethical Considerations

To protect the participants' identities and maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used to refer to all the interviewed participants. Indeed, the confidentiality of the research is closely related to the research participants' anonymity. Moreover, we were careful to assure the participants that only the researchers would have access to their data and that it would be stored securely.

Findings

Difficulties with Developing an Argument

Five supervisors highlighted that one area which their students found difficult was developing an argument. This is a skill which is particularly important at postgraduate level as students need to present arguments which are clearly stated, well substantiated, and with full respect for the conventions of academic writing relevant to particular subjects or disciplines. Dr John gave the following example of this issue:

> Students have problems with constructing arguments, or they use language that just does not quite fit. There is often awkwardness about the written style, which is an indication of the problems the students have when trying to convey a message. Therefore, the combination of the technical language and the difficulty with constructing sentences clearly and concisely just makes it harder for the supervisors to help and to unpack the arguments that they are trying to present. This means we spend a lot of time helping the students to say what they want to say. Often they can articulate in a conversation a whole lot better than they can do in a written form.

Dr Helen gave another example, emphasising the difficulty not only of writing in English but also of establishing an argument:

> I find a lot of students struggle while writing. They think they are struggling with the language, but they are actually struggling with the logical sequence of arguments they are trying to create. I do not think this is necessarily just an academic problem, but it is particularly important for academics, and I think it entails a lot of very difficult thinking to make the argument clear and points that are logical.

Additionally, Dr Andrew commented that due to students' basic method of writing, they find it difficult to incorporate well-argued essays in their research:

> Some students struggle with the complexity of the arguments within English texts, because it is difficult to understand, to penetrate, and to engage with such writing, because if students are writing in a very simple way, and not an academic way, that can cause an argument to get lost in what they are saying. I think this is challenging, especially for the students from Gulf countries.

As these extracts show, the supervisors were aware that students struggled significantly with formulating their own arguments and subsequently arranging them into logical and coherent sequences in English. The supervisors also highlighted that students needed to read a greater number and variety of English texts as their lack of reading combined with the lack of proper training in conducting research is a significant hindrance to their attempts to construct an argument.

Difficulties with Coherence

Four supervisors emphasised that students show significant difficulties in writing coherently. Many students are unable to write a paragraph that has a main idea supported by the other sentences in the paragraph, as described by Dr John:

> I think paragraph construction and coherence is one of the most problematic areas. I think writing a paragraph is very difficult, but if you read good academic writing, you can see how important paragraphs are in that they indicate the topic at the beginning, develop it throughout the paragraph, and have a clear progression of ideas and coherence between ideas within the paragraph. I think Saudi students have problems with paragraph writing… these are not linked coherently—they are not synthesised; they do not follow each other.

Similarly, Dr Sarah indicated the importance of being able to write coherent paragraphs:

> Paragraph construction is different, I believe, in Arabic. I think in Arabic; you lead into the main points. The main point comes towards the end rather than at the beginning. Therefore, you have those different structural issues, which really have to be learnt because, if you have chosen to do a doctoral degree here, you have to agree to the requirements of the doctoral writing in this country.

The analysis of samples of written feedback students received from their supervisors showed that four supervisors commented on a difficulty with writing coherently, as in this example:

> You need to add a new subsection, or at least paragraph, and link it to the others to improve the coherence. Also, you need to indicate its relevance, because it just seems that you are jumping to a new topic.

Similarly:

> I feel this point is out of place with the rest of the paragraph. It seems some of your paragraphs take the form of text dumps rather than reasoned arguments because this sentence is out of place with what follows.

A close examination of such feedback shows that the supervisors highlight the issue of cohesion and coherence, as students have usually written sentences that are unrelated to the main topic of the paragraph, or they have not been clear about where they should put the introductory and supporting sentences.

Difficulties with the Depth of Explanation

The written feedback samples demonstrated that students found the amount of information and detail they need to produce and the depth of the explanations to be difficult. Four supervisors identified this area, as in this example: "You need to have had some explanation or discussion of this beforehand. This will help to enrich why you adopt the position you seek to take". On occasions, the feedback showed that some students tended simply to refer to the results of the data without giving any indication or evaluation of their importance, as seen in this supervisor's comments: "You need to expand this discussion chapter to bring out the significance of all your findings", and again, "You need much more depth in your analysis and interpretation here. This is very important. You did not actually provide an analysis in this section". Indeed, feedback from other supervisors related to this problem of linking the implications of the research to the findings in greater depth:

> You need to get to a point where you examine the implications of adopting this view to the objectives of what you are seeking to achieve. To an extent, this follows later, but you need to ground it in the work in more depth to have a clear appreciation of its implication for methods, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and theory.

Another supervisor mentioned the need for greater depth: "You need to investigate what the underpinning premise is to this—why is it important? Generally, though, I feel your points throughout need more depth".

For students to succeed in higher education, they need to be able to write effectively in an academic discipline at the doctoral level. One of the major requirements of English academic writing is providing sufficient and in-depth explanations. The above extracts demonstrate that the supervisors acknowledged that students find it difficult to provide a greater degree of depth when writing. This is because there are significant differences in the style of writing between Arabic and English regarding explicitness; Arab students have a tendency to be less explicit in their writing, as they make the assumption that their readers should take the responsibility for understanding what they wish to convey (Abu Rass,

2015). Another factor is the amount of reading done by these students; they demonstrated a general lack of interest in academic reading at both L1 and L2. This is almost certain to have an impact on their ability to write in-depth explanations, since acquiring knowledge and background information is closely related to reading. This close relationship between reading and writing is well documented in the literature, as a large number of studies have confirmed that these skills have a mutual impact (Al-khawaldeh, 2011; Al-Mansour & Al-Shorman, 2011; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Tsai, 2006; Zamel, 1992).

Difficulties with Academic Vocabulary

Three supervisors commented that their students encountered difficulties with academic vocabulary. Dr John revealed that students have problems selecting a precise word to suit the research language: "They really have an issue with using specific English vocabulary. One of their difficulties, I think, is finding the proper and exact words that express their intended views when writing". Similarly, Dr Sarah recognised students' limited ability when it comes to using academic vocabulary:

> Other students have a problem with using word collocations and idiomatic expressions. I think this is related to their insufficient knowledge of academic words, which prevents them from writing according to academic standards.

The idea of students having difficulty with using academic vocabulary is also supported by the analysis of supervisors' feedback on written assignments: "I do not like the word 'opinion'. 'Informed', perhaps, but still dangerous; you should consider 'subjective interpretation' and 'reasoned judgement' instead". Another example is in the following piece of feedback: "Be careful of such a term. Can anything really be 'fully' treated?" Finally, another stated: "It would be beneficial to be somewhat more assertive here—e.g., 'is most suitable".

While students' difficulties with academic vocabulary stem from a range of issues, in general, such difficulties are due to insufficient strategies for learning vocabulary in the education system of their native country. Additionally, insufficient experience in reading texts in English leads to

students having a restricted vocabulary. Thus, while writing, students find it difficult both to select the necessary vocabulary that is appropriate for the context and to find the exact word that expresses their meaning with accuracy and concision. This lack of lexical knowledge can be remedied, but "it is necessary for students to have a thorough knowledge of words that occur frequently in different academic texts in order to read and understand the advanced, authentic, and academic texts in English or to use the academic words when writing in their own fields" (Song, 2002, p. 3). Therefore, it is essential that students read intensively to satisfy the demands of academic writing.

Difficulties with Clarity

The majority of the supervisors commented on the students' difficulty in achieving sufficient clarity in their writing, as demonstrated in the following extracts from the supervisors' feedback: "The ambiguity here is problematic—you need to be confident that you show evidence of it; incomplete paragraph or details; This paragraph is unclear. This is really vague, explain the figure; You need to explicitly provide these definitions here" and finally, "Where does this inclination come from?"

The students' difficulty in attempting to write with clarity may be caused by a range of factors. Firstly, their lack of familiarity with writing in academic English means that they make errors in their own writing style when writing in English as their L2. Secondly, insufficient reading of academic resources in L2 means that students have rarely practised their writing skills before arriving in the UK. Thirdly, students' poor proficiency in the English language hinders them from formulating complex thoughts and expressing them in a clear structure and using the most appropriate language.

Difficulties of Criticality

Most of the supervisors commented on the students' difficulty in understanding what it means to be critical in the academic sense. For instance, Dr Sandy stated:

> I think the students who come from a different education system are unable, or unaware of the fact that you can critically engage in academic discourse, and I believe that critical engagement is absolutely crucial to academic writing. I mean, I think many postgraduate students, not particularly Saudi students, do not understand what it means to be critical in an academic sense. It means to disagree with other people, their theories or other ways of thinking, but in fact, all it means is to get an understanding of a much wider range of ideas than we had before. In this way, we can form a different opinion about it and decide how to proceed when people who are equally authoritative disagree.

In addition, Dr Ann commented that a significant number of students restrict their analysis to describing the views and ideas of other authors but lack any ability to analyse their writings or explain why they agree, or disagree, as can be seen by this excerpt from her interview:

> With all PhD students, there is a tendency to look at the box and look at the research material and start just writing, and then you find it to be very descriptive, but it has to be analytic because the PhD in this country and in America is awarded for an original and substantial contribution in knowledge; it's got to be original in some form.

Dr Mike gave another example when he referred to different educational systems being the reason for students having so many difficulties with writing in terms of criticality:

> Even if the language skills are high enough, I think the levels of criticality in thinking and writing still remain a challenge for students, because there are differences in educational systems in the world… I treat my students very strictly in terms of developing their research skills and asking critical questions.

In the Middle East, the tendency is for some supervisors to respect the author's view without offering any critique; indeed, this is a feature of their culture. However, it is crucial that students are willing and able to criticise the views and ideas of other authors respectfully and with the necessary evidence to support their own views. For example, Dr Ann

emphasised that PhD students should have the ability to provide a critique of what they read, rather than simply accept ideas just because they appear in a book or a journal. She stated:

> I can see that students have difficulties with the ability to make a critical view of what they read and what they write. Sometimes it seems to me that the international students, including some Saudi students, will read something, and just because it is written in a book or a journal, they think it must be correct whereas the best thing to do would be to think whether it is correct! You need to be critical about this; you need to look at the context in which the research and the ideas are being expressed and whether they are transferable, say, to different concepts. Therefore, there has to be a degree of criticality that some students perhaps do not have. However, when they start working on their PhD, developing that criticality is an essential part of the PhD process.

Similarly, Dr John highlighted the importance of students supporting their critique with the relevant evidence and facts:

> Students must feel free to criticise any scholar at all if they provide evidence. Give evidence for what you think, and if your thesis leads you to overturn the theories of an established scholar that is not a problem; so they must not be shy, and their criticality should be evidence.

Moreover, three of the supervisors revealed that students found it particularly difficult to write the discussion chapter in their thesis, and that this is due to their lack of critical reasoning skills. Dr Mike explained this as follows:

> The big challenge that the discussion chapter involves is to link the findings of your study back to the literature and to demonstrate their significance. So it is very much about argumentation and, again, you do need critical thinking and confidence. So, many Saudi students, in my experience, find the discussion chapter is challenging for them. Students have to think critically in order to write critically. On the other hand, the methodology chapter is more clearly described, as much clearer guidelines are often provided.

Dr Sarah mentioned that Saudi students studying at a master's level do not show any level of thinking critically, and thus their work is inadequate for this level. She commented:

> I do not think their master's degree is adequate, because, as I say, I suspect this does not reflect their critical thinking ability. They do not have the ability to critically analyse the literature and form their own complex argument, as that probably was not a part of their degree. If they achieve a master's degree, it should mean that they have critics-related skills, but this is often untrue. Obviously, they have the knowledge, but I suppose master's degrees in Saudi are more about the knowledge rather than the ability to think critically.

Dr Andrew had a similar viewpoint, and commented that the students' lack of critical thinking skills is due to the system of education in their own country:

> I think the education system in many countries focuses perhaps too much on memorisation, involves too many inputs from teachers and materials that students think they have to learn and reproduce. I do not say this is not enough, but it is insufficient for the western culture, because here they study in a different culture, and it requires critical thinking. It may not always be required—it certainly was not in the past—but it is now, and I think that this is something that many different cultures have no experience with, and therefore, developing habits of this kind is hard.

The analysis of the written feedback students received from their supervisors reveals that a significant number of them included comments about how the students find it difficult to write critically, as can be seen in the following feedback excerpt:

> You need to add your voice to your analysis of the findings and in the discussion as well. The data in this table needs to be explained in more depth than what you have done above. You cannot just repeat the results. The analysis requires a more in-depth explanation and interpretation.

Saudi students' difficulties with writing critically seem to stem from the uncritical culture of Saudi Arabia, which "doesn't encourage discussion, even in the home between parents and their children" (Allamnakhrah, 2013, p. 205). Indeed, Saudi society views it as an unacceptable mark of disrespect for students or young people to query or argue with older people and with their teachers (Barnawi, 2009). Additional reasons for the students' problems with thinking critically could be linked to how writing is taught in Saudi, as it is based on the product approach, that is, the focus is mostly on grammar and spelling. This is further confirmed by AlKhoudary (2015) who stated that: "The problem with the traditional writing class is that it leads to a view of writing as a set of isolated skills unconnected to an authentic desire to converse with interested readers about their ideas" (p. 214). Therefore, curriculum designers of courses for teaching writing should include critical thinking. Doing so would require a student-centred approach to be adopted, as students would need to engage in the learning process and would have opportunities to discuss, analyse, and evaluate issues and ideas and express their opinions.

Content Knowledge Difficulties

Supervisors indicated that students had difficulty with this area of their writing, as can be seen in the following two feedback extracts which focus on knowledge of philosophies and the need to demonstrate extensive understanding. Lack of extensive reading in academic areas related to their fields of specialism has also affected the quality of students' work:

> Please develop this more (here and below). To justify the position, you go on to take, you need to be able to grasp why it is that you are selecting it over something else. It is important to address this now because you might well get asked to justify your position in your Viva and part of that justification comes from appreciating how it differs over other philosophies and why other positions might be inferior to the subject/problem that serves as the objective of your study.

Additionally,

> Be absolutely specific. You cannot 'pick and choose' a part of a philosophy to discuss here because every aspect of it has an implication for your work. In turn, you must be as thorough and exhaustive as you need to be to map out its implications for your work.

There are several underlying reasons for Saudi postgraduate students' difficulties when it comes to obtaining background knowledge of the subject. Firstly, many students start their postgraduate studies in UK universities with a clear lack of sufficient reading in their subjects; secondly, their work is frequently rendered ineffective due to the lack of an effective planning strategy. Furthermore, the nature of many research topics demonstrates clearly the differences between Arabic and English, and these differences might restrict students' vocabularies and lead them to further challenges in their attempts to gain sufficient information about their subjects.

Structural Difficulties

Analysis of the feedback students received from their supervisors also demonstrated that the students encountered problems with grammar and structure in their English writing. Many comments were of general nature as in: "This does not make grammatical sense; the translation is not right here; this needs to be rewritten in a clearer structure; edit this sentence for structure and grammar." Others provided more focused and potentially more useful critique: "Please be careful with subject verb agreements"; "watch out for the wrong use of the definite article".

These extracts show clearly that some of students' difficulties with the language are related to the important differences between Arabic and English, differences that are related not only to a different alphabet but also to differences in writing structures and styles. As stated earlier, in Saudi Arabia the teaching of English writing is based on the product approach; that is, the emphasis is on elements such as linguistic accuracy, use of proper grammar, and correct spelling, with the focus being on the final product of the text. Despite this focus on grammatical accuracy, a good number of postgraduate students still demonstrate major challenges

with grammaticality, style, and general writing abilities. This issue can also be explained by the lack of writing opportunities students experienced in their first and second languages during their school and university education. In fact, the method of teaching writing in L1 is the same as that for L2 and, and students lacked the “ability to write in their own language, Arabic” (Al-Seghayer, 2014, p. 94). Prior to starting postgraduate studies in the UK most Saudi students had engaged in very little academic waiting in either Arabic or English.

Discussion and Conclusion

Analysis of the examples of the written feedback that supervisors provided shows that the feedback covers a wide range of areas, including content knowledge, structure, criticality, clarity, coherence, vocabulary appropriateness, and grammatical and spelling accuracy. Consequently, understanding the difficulties students face in their English academic writing will facilitate the formulation of suggestions to improve students’ academic writing.

Some supervisors feel it is inappropriate for them to interfere heavily with doctoral theses, as they are intended to be the student’s original work, and, furthermore, they consider that students are able to improve by practising independently. These supervisors fulfil their role by adding question marks and notes in the margins rather than making corrections in the text, and by asking the student to revise their work to provide further clarification of the meaning (Gurel, 2010). Other supervisors might prefer to provide more detailed feedback on language and structure and would make suggestions on how to develop one’s academic writing.

The findings of this study also indicated that, in the UK, a supervisor of a Saudi or overseas postgraduate student expects to help the student clarify their argument, their criticism, and their discussion. However, due to their educational culture, many Saudi postgraduate students expect the supervisor to have a role similar to that of a schoolteacher, in that they will tell the student exactly what they should do and that the student will not be expected to give their own opinion or views or question those of their supervisors (Al-Harbi, 2017). This is because in the academic

culture in Arab countries learners seem not to have received sufficient training in the three most important elements in becoming independent researchers and writers, namely, applying critical thinking, finding their own voice, and developing their own point of view (Azman, Nor, & Aghwela, 2014). Accordingly, this can exacerbate the students' inability to communicate effectively with their supervisors in English (Aldoukalee, 2013). During the research process, students encounter a high level of difficulty due to their lack of familiarity with the research topic and lack of knowledge relevant to research methodologies (Affero Ismail et al., 2015). Therefore, as emphasised by Moses (1992), it is important for students to process a variety of forms of guidance when structuring and writing their thesis. From the supervisees' perspective, Saudi students frequently feel unsatisfied with the feedback their supervisors give them when writing their dissertation, as they require more in-depth advice (Al-Harbi, 2017).

Thus, a systematic pedagogical approach to supervision is required so that these international students can be socialised into academic genres through supervisory feedback (Azman et al., 2014). Similarly, Wang and Li (2008) were of the opinion that supervisors should use a systematic approach to emphasise the problems in research writing, particularly with international students, who face a range of difficulties when writing their thesis in English. Kumar and Stracke (2007) suggested a taxonomy for good practices of feedback in postgraduate supervision practice in higher education based on three functions of feedback. Feedback should include comments that focus on a range of issues including content, organisational, and editorial matters. Feedback is further divided into three types, namely, suggestions, questions, and instructions, to offer praise or criticism or simply to express an opinion (Kumar & Stracke, 2007). They added that the expressive function of feedback is most beneficial for students as it resulted in more modification and further improvement of their thesis. This is particularly important given the diversity of doctoral students who differ in terms of academic ability and other features such as personality attributes, motivation, and attitude (Ismail, Abiddin, & Ahmad, 2010, p. 14). In Al-Harbi's study (2017), all of the participating Saudi postgraduate students had a background different to that of their supervisor in the UK, and thus it is possible that the

interaction between the students and their supervisors may be problematic and subsequently less productive.

The general conclusion from such studies would seem to indicate that learners require more assistance with regular writing experiences and benefit from structured feedback, in conjunction with effective and continual communication with their supervisors (Azman et al., 2014). Thus, establishing a good relationship between students and their supervisor will contribute to the successful completion of the students' research project and an improvement in their writing skills.

Appendix 1: Supervisors Semi-structured Interview

1. Are you currently supervising any Saudi students at master or doctoral levels?
2. What do you think are the main difficulties that Saudi students face in writing their theses or assignments?
3. Can you tell me if you are aware of any specific areas of difficulty among Saudi students compared to other non-native students in their postgraduate studies? Can you provide any examples?
4. Is there anything you want to add?

Appendix 2: A Sample of Written Feedback from Supervisors

Research Philosophy

Sayer (2000, p. 2) argues that critical realism is not what many people think in which they suppose it is the 'truth' and thus involves a kind of 'foundationalism' where this is inconsistent with realism. He points out that critical realism is

> *the belief that there is a world existing independently of our knowledge of it.*

Thus, this independence of objects from knowledge weakens any content assumptions about the relation between them and renders it problematic (Sayer, 2000). What makes critical realism 'critical' is that the identification of generative mechanisms (which Bhaskar refers to) offers the prospect of introducing changes that can transform the status quo (i.e. stable things) (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p. 18).

There are fundamental characteristics of critical realism shared by widely regarded critical realists such as Margaret Archer, Roy Bhaskar, Andrew Collier, Tony Lawson and Alan Norrie who together edited *Critical Realism: Essential Readings* (1998). Some critical characteristics will be discussed as follow:

Reed (2005a, p. 1637) reflects on the relevance, nature and consequences of adopting a critical realism approach as an investigative orientation in organisation and management studies. He points out that critical realism can offer a 'coherent ontological' grounds and 'causal-explanatory' method for determining fundamental structures and mechanisms which create 'observable events' and outcomes that may or may not be 'actualised' in particular historical contexts and social settings. Contu and Willmott (2005, p. 1646) indicate that 'critical realism can assist in opening-up deep-seated issues in the philosophical standing of social and organizational analysis'. Pratt (2011) observes that the critical realism approach seeks a depth investigation of natural and social phenomena in which it attempts to identify the mechanisms operating in a context. He also indicates that critical realism attempts to go beyond the boundary of experience by suggesting the reality behind it. Moreover, a social phenomenon can often be 'understood' but not often 'meaningfully measured', hence its preference for qualitative methods (Fleetwood & Ackroyd, 2004). Looking at the world from this angle is best for exploratory and descriptive studies that seek to understand, investigate, and explain a phenomenon in depth as perceived by social actors.

For the aforementioned reasons, this research study will look at the research problem from a critical realism perspective, which prioritises ontology over epistemology and focuses on the mechanisms that produce events rather than the events themselves, more specifically as 'structured' and 'differentiated' (Bhaskar, 2008, p. xi), along with a qualitative method. The stratified reality offers insights in a series of 'staggered layers',

each of which provides a foundation for the level above (Pratt, 2011, p. 15). This stratification with underlying generative mechanisms and causal structures provide a means to answer the research questions. Thus, critical realism can be seen as 'a philosophy of science that provides a theory and model of social scientific explanation, based on a systematic form of … methodology, which combines historical, structural and processual analysis in a coherent and integrated framework' (Reed, 2005b, p. 1664).

Both critical realism and institutional theory highlight the importance of social context and take a multi-level view of reality. Wry adopts Bhaskar's domains of reality and argues that 'structures' which operate in the 'domain of real' is parallel to 'institutional logics', the 'domain of actual' is equivalent to 'institutions', and the'domain of empirical' is similar to 'practice'. In the 'domain of real', structures/logics have the potential, as frameworks, to generate phenomena and make them meaningful (Bhaskar, 1978; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). These structures/logics play an important role in shaping patterns of behaviour in a context.

Research Methodology

Research methods represent the way data is collected. There are two main types of research methods in social science: quantitative methods and qualitative methods.

Thus, it allows for flexibility and variety of interpretive techniques that are essential for understanding a phenomenon in social science studies. Creswell (1996, p. 24) points out that:

> *[a] research problem needs to be explored [when] little information exists on the topic. The variables are largely unknown and the researcher wants to focus on the context that may shape the understanding of the phenomenon being studied.*

Thus, a qualitative approach is best for investigating a little-known or poorly-understood phenomenon. It is also best for areas that mistreated, non-treated, or received very little attention in the literature. Whereas these areas, which have unknown variables, needs to be fully treated and covered sufficiently to open doors for future research which, in turn, are necessary to broaden the views and provide insights that contribute to the literature.

Qualitative research concerns the process rather than the outcomes or products (Merriam, 1988). It also concerns the meaning—the way people make sense of their lives, experiences, and structures of the world (Merriam, 1988). Within a qualitative approach, the researcher is inclined to be subjective. More to the point, when the research inquiry is on the basis of the participant's perception and opinion, then the collected data is subjective data as the researcher's knowledge can influence the research to some extent (Herndl & Nahrwold, 2000). Qualitative research is used to gain insights and better understanding about an individual's experience and to have a sense of reality (Herndl & Nahrwold, 2000). It is also used in research that explores where and why knowledge and practices are at odds (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Qualitative research often generates credible data for analysis by means of describing, exploring, or expanding existing knowledge and theories (Herndl & Nahrwold, 2000). Qualitative approach is often used for gathering an in-depth understanding of the research topic through various instruments (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). These instruments include interviews, observation, case studies, and focus groups (Creswell, 1996).

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8

Teachers' Feedback on EFL Students' Dissertation Writing in Morocco

Mohammed Larouz and Soufiane Abouabdelkader

Introduction

Dissertation supervision feedback is a pedagogical practice that strongly affects quality assurance in higher education. It reflects the kind of relationship that exists between two of the major stakeholders of academic research in higher education. Researching this dimension of teacher and student practices is surely an important aspect of the learning and teaching pedagogy. As Donnelly, Dallat, and Fitzmaurice (2013, p. 157) reported in a study on research supervision: "Understanding student and staff perceptions of the intricacies associated with dissertation supervision is crucial" in the development of an effective research culture among

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university students. Bearing this objective in mind, many scholars have observed that more scholarly attention is required in dissertation supervision research (Armstrong et al., 2004; Buckley, 2013; Puckett & McClam, 1991).

In Moroccan universities, the state of dissertation supervision still needs further improvement. In many instances, supervision still remains an administrative authorisation given to some students to carry out research and 'join the club', an honour that only a few students are lucky enough to enjoy on the basis of merit, as it paves the way for them to carry out their own research project. A healthy condition of student-teacher interaction, in such conditions, is that in which both parties learn from and understand each other and work in ways that are appropriate to the international norms of dissertation supervision. In fact, most of the dissatisfaction and worries experienced by academic supervisors relate to the roadblocks encountered during the process of dissertation supervision as a result of factors relating to student and teacher expectations of one another and to understanding each other's roles and responsibilities.

Choosing or being allotted a supervisor is usually a matter of a student providing an attractive research proposal and appealing to a supervisor. What makes this task so hazardous, in terms of intellectual and creative outcomes, is that dissertation writing is a process which involves more than being assigned a supervisor; it is a matter of having the appropriate one. This double-edged challenge requires collaborative predispositions and different levels of work management skills from both sides, understanding of which is crucial to the whole issue of dissertation supervision. Consensus on these varied aspects of supervision feedback is of paramount importance in higher education institutions, and particularly in those universities where a research tradition is not yet adequately structured. As Armstrong, Allinson, and Hayes (2004) report, a good understanding of the student-supervisor relationship affects the student's academic work, in as much as it affects the university climate. It is, therefore, necessary to raise these issues among academia in order to contribute to more effective research.

Statement of the Problem

The study reported in this chapter focuses on students' and teachers' perceptions and practices of the issue of supervisory feedback on doctoral students' dissertations. It seeks to probe teachers' conception and identify

its nature and repercussions on the quality of students' dissertations, as perceived by a sample of doctoral students in the English departments of various Moroccan universities.

By attempting to investigate the supervisory styles of feedback adopted by Moroccan university teachers, this study seeks to isolate the practices and activities that reflect the conceptions and principles underpinning the act of supervisory feedback at the doctoral level. The questions raised to this end address the types of feedback made by teachers orally, in writing or through information technology, its nature, and its impact on students' performance outcomes. As explained in the methodology section, focus on this category of students is made for internal validity of the data.

The Objective of the Study

Based on the state of the art of supervisory feedback in the Moroccan university context, this study seeks to probe two main research questions related to how supervisory feedback is conceived of in some Moroccan universities. These questions are:

RQ1: What are students' conceptions of their supervisors' feedback?
RQ2: What are teachers' conceptions of supervisory feedback?

The first question (RQ1) seeks to isolate doctoral students' views of what supervisors should provide them with during the completion of their dissertations in terms of the three types described above. These views are checked against the various models introduced in the review of the literature. Based on the fact that supervisory feedback is not an overtly debated issue among teachers and students, it is assumed in the present study that students' conceptions would give us indications of what teachers' feedback on students' dissertations is concerned with and how it is structured (Youssef, 2017).

It is also expected that the findings of the second research question (RQ2) would be informative on what teachers provide in their feedback and how they view it. The findings of this research question are also expected to display significant variation and mismatch between teachers' conceptions of feedback and those of their supervisees.

Three factors were at the core of the questionnaires and interviews—a set of 26 questions in the Students' questionnaire (see Appendix 1) and 30 questions in the Supervisors' questionnaire (see Appendix 2)—used to describe and explore the participants' understanding and perception of supervision feedback in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) doctoral dissertation writing. The three factors are as follows:

1. Students/teachers' perceptions of supervisory feedback.
   (a) Aspects of feedback received from/given by supervisors.
   (b) Types of feedback expected.
   (c) Amount of feedback received or given.
2. Frequency of supervisors' feedback practices.
   (a) Occurrence of feedback.
   (b) Punctuality and respect of deadlines.
3. Attitudes of teachers and students towards doctoral supervision.
   (a) Satisfaction with supervision relationships?
   (b) Satisfaction with supervisees' reactions to feedback?
   (c) Ethical issues.

All these features of supervisory feedback were explored through a constructivist grounded approach that seeks to understand the conceptions underlying doctoral students' handling of supervisors' behaviour and feedback Ellison & Dedrick (2008).

The Context of the Study

In the Moroccan university context, the task of dissertation supervision is part of the paid duties of teachers in higher education. As stipulated in the official documents (Bulletin Officiel, 2008), a portion of teachers' workload is to be devoted to research supervision, as an integral part of their involvement in academic research. Within this frame, dissertation completion in Moroccan universities witnesses three distinct models of supervision feedback with different supervisory styles and performance

outcomes. As a compulsory component of the LMD system (Licence/Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate), dissertation completion is a requirement for the award of any of these three degrees. Thus, the supervision scheme used with doctoral students is not the same as the ones adopted for Bachelor's or Master's dissertation supervision.

The award of the doctorate is mainly based on the fulfilment of dissertation research. At this stage of higher education, dissertation fulfilment is considered as the candidate's achievement of academic research skills and scholarship through a written dissertation. This achievement goes through a series of consultations and checks between the student and the supervisor. One of the issues that bear critical importance during this process is the quality of supervisory feedback provided by teachers. The organisation of supervisory feedback described in the Charte des Thèses (Moulay Ismail University, 2012) stipulates in Article 10 that harmony and regulated doctoral studies must be dealt with appropriately. Drawing from the official guidelines (Bulletin Officiel, 2008), the charter makes supervision meetings and forums a component of doctoral students' development. However, the existing Doctoral Centres (CDOCS) are not structured in ways that would offer what they claim to serve. What is important is that the issue of dissertation supervisors' feedback has received little attention.

This scarce concern for supervision feedback is even ignored by many academics who consider it much more a teacher's favour than a work duty. Understanding the roles of supervisors is usually considered an implicit responsibility of both the teacher and the student, and its practice is a consequence of that understanding.

Such diversity of attitudes and practices is context-bound by culture and reflects students and teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards their respective roles. It is, therefore, normal to observe several types of reactions from both sides. This study seeks to investigate both students and supervisors' perceptions and attitudes towards dissertation supervision.

Here are two fundamental issues that need addressing:

(a) What is the responsibility of the doctoral student?
(b) What are the responsibilities of the supervisor vis-à-vis the student?

The factors investigated in this study relate to the following issues:

(a) Content that is supposed to be included in the dissertation.
(b) Dissertation structure and organisation.
(c) Proofreading and making sure the work is well written.
(d) Ensuring that research ethics are above reproach.
(e) Keeping to timetables.
(f) Fulfilling milestones, along with motivation sustainment.

In the absence of local research that explores these issues of supervisory feedback, this study focuses on the ways these traits, attributes and practices are manifested in students and teachers' conceptions of what they consider the best supervisory feedback practices.

Review of the Literature

Most of the existing research on supervision feedback contends that producing a successful dissertation largely depends on understanding what and how feedback can contribute in the construction of a piece of work, in as much as giving feedback is a matter of understanding what supervision entails. Without such understanding from both parties, the whole enterprise is doomed to an undesirable interaction between student and supervisor. According to Wright, Murray, and Geale (2007):

> A supervisor's understanding of what goal they are supervising shapes, and is shaped by, their understanding of what the role of a supervisor is. This is a substantive conclusion. It signifies that while supervisors can and do adapt their supervisory tasks and activities to suit the needs of individual students or the changing requirements of the university context, this adaptation occurs within the boundaries of the supervisor's holistic understanding of what dissertation supervision is. (p. 471)

As reported in a meta-analysis on the strategy of feedback by Avraham Kluger and DeNisi (1996), involving 607 studies, the analyses revealed that "the average effect of providing feedback to students is a

16-percentile-point gain" and that "more than one-third of the studies indicated that feedback has a *negative* effect on student achievement" (p. 258). In other words, using a teacher's feedback does not guarantee positive results unless it is accompanied by measures that take into consideration several other variables. For example, these measures include how a teacher reacts to students' work and how students use supervisors' feedback. Both of these elements are essential factors that determine how great or mediocre the results of feedback are on students' work.

From a socio-cultural perspective, supervisory feedback is a mediated activity that may have indirect impact on the students' dissertations, and may serve as motivational drives. Lee (2017, p. 20), for instance, agreed that: "Through de-emphasizing scores in classroom writing assessment, teachers are likely to build a supportive learning atmosphere where the focus is put on the quality of learning rather than scores."

It is, therefore, important to see it as a crucial activity in education that might affect the value of research in academia at several levels. To this end, it is crucial to overview some of the most influential trends in the field of supervisory feedback at the doctoral level.

Styles and Models of Supervisory Feedback

Among the three models of supervision reported in the literature, one of the most commonly agreed upon by both supervisors and students is the technical rationality model which gives priority to assisting students in the technical features of their dissertations. In the Moroccan context, this model is the only one that is implemented officially (Charte des Thèse, 2012). This technical rationality model attempts to cater for the urgent needs of the student. Within this model of supervision, students are supposed to be responsible for the ideas and content of their dissertations and the role of the supervisor is limited to providing guidance as to how to structure their work.

From a constructivist perspective, the negotiated order model posits that supervision is considered as a process open to mutual understanding between the teacher and the student in terms of interpretation and expectations (Lee, 2010; Woods, 1990). A supervisor's role, according to this

model, is to negotiate meaning with the student and agree on the prospective outcomes of the dissertation, making it a shared product that reflects the intellectual bias of both parties. This trend seems to be the one adopted in the Moroccan context. In a study carried out on supervision feedback direction and the type of relations existing between doctoral students and their supervisors, Acker, Hill, & Black (1994) suggested that: "although the technical rationality model has much to recommend it, a negotiated order model is a better description of what happens in practice" (p. 483).

In this era of change and technological progress, supervision feedback models in the social sciences take into consideration the possibilities of information search as being part of the students' responsibility to appropriately enrich and structure their work. This approach to supervision can be traced to availability of a huge amount of information on any topic on the web. In addition to that, many doctoral students still construct their conceptions of supervision feedback based on their previous experience at Bachelor and Master's levels in which teachers are assigned a huge number of supervisees whose satisfaction is difficult to achieve. The notion of good supervision, in such cases, depends very much on what previous experiences were like, and the student's history and experience of supervision feedback becomes a determinant factor in the construction and development of their feedback use and strategies. The plausibility of this view in the Moroccan context is checked and analysed in the present study.

Another model, which originates from management education and was proposed by Armstrong et al. (2004), is referred to as the cognitive style supervision model. This model considers the supervisory style as consisting of relations between student and supervisor. It also serves as a potential intellectual guide for students towards the achievement of successful dissertations by stimulating their creativity, researching skills and confidence. According to Armstrong et al. (2004, p. 41):

> analytic supervisors were perceived to be significantly more nurturing and less dominant than their more intuitive counterparts, indicating a higher degree of closeness in their relationships. This constructivist approach to supervision feedback contends that the achievement and completion of a

successful dissertation is a matter of establishing good relations between student and teacher.

The views advocated by Armstrong et al. bear some relevance to the Moroccan university context since it remains an essential condition of energising doctoral supervision practices. While there are several testimonies of supervision's vital role in the process of dissertation writing, there are also several reports of its difficulty as an influential feature of dissertation quality (Acker, Hill, & Black, 1994). In fact, it has been described by some researchers as "probably the most responsible task undertaken by an academic" (Moses, 1984), by others as "the most complex and subtle form of teaching in which we engage" (Atkins & Brown, 2002), and by some others as "the most advanced level of teaching in our education system" (Connell, 1985, p. 39). These claims are evidence that supervision feedback deserves significant attention among researchers.

From a general perspective, research studies on teachers' conceptions of dissertation supervision feedback seem to support the view that it is "the most complex and subtle form of teaching" (Brown & Atkins, 2002, p. 115) and that it is exceptionally difficult (Acker et al., 1994). The state of the art of dissertation supervision feedback reported in the existing literature fully portrays the diverse habits and styles spread among supervisors in the Moroccan context, providing instances that are common in drives, principles and behaviours.

One of the models considered in the literature as the 'dependency factor' posits that the quality of a students' work depends on how much mutual understanding exists between the two parties and how much assistance students receive from their supervisors. Kam (1997, p. 81) stated that "a student's reliance on her or his supervisor for guidance and motivation on work organisation and problem solving, research preparation, and communication exerts a significant effect on the relationship between style and quality of research supervision".

This model suggests that students' constant queries about what they are researching helps bring their relationship with their supervisors to higher levels of mutual understanding. It suggests that students' and teachers' relationships and outcomes may be affected by a mutual understanding of what supervision itself entails.

The argument made in the present research is that the way in which dissertation supervision feedback is enacted largely depends on the supervisors' personal history and personality traits. There are some supervisors who leave unforgettable memories with their students, in as much as there are some supervisees who leave a big imprint in the mind of their supervisors. This factor is assumed to be a major determinant of the shape of feedback provided to supervisees and the shape of feedback conception in the mind of students. Wright et al. (2007, p. 477) argued that "the supervisors and their lived experience of supervision cannot be separated. The supervisor and the work of supervision are intrinsically linked by the supervisor's understanding of that work". Positive feedback, however, may comprise issues that are praised and encouraged as well as issues that are problematic and need reconsideration by the student researcher. It does not matter whether the feedback is positive or negative; what really matters in the present study is whether it takes place and in which form it occurs. As referred to in several studies on feedback on writing, negative feedback that tracks failures and defects is more useful than praise (Huisman, Saab, Van Driel, & Van Den Broek, 2018). In dissertation supervision, however, this attitude to feedback seems to apply in some cases more than others.

Closely related to this view is the claim that the cognitive style model (Armstrong et al., 2004) of supervision, is sometimes biased, static and unproductive, as it simply reflects a tiny aspect of students' work and leads supervisors to evaluate and produce feedback on the basis of their personal views and thoughts (Messick, 1984). These studies contend that relying on such perceptions encourages the teacher to adopt a leader-subordinate relationship with their supervisees, which may hamper their creativity and productivity and may produce feedback that might affect the student-teacher relationship. In light of this, it is a key issue for the present research to explore some of the factors that constitute both students' and teachers' conception of what supervision feedback needs to address.

A third model which considers that the role of supervision is simply to coach the students' progress, providing them with guidelines and timelines that is helpful for the completion of the dissertation. Such a management-based model of supervision, however, can slide into an

authoritarian activity that encompasses the roles of instructor, mentor and director rather than a facilitator and coach. This is evidence that the way supervisors enact their roles and the way students conceive of these roles is not always easy to determine. Supervisors conceive of feedback differently, ranging from those who take into consideration students' worries and needs (Denicolo, 2004; Kam, 1997) in the belief that feedback needs to be a kind of support and collaboration with students along their journey, to those who play an authoritative role in which the supervisee is made responsible for his supervisee's dissertation. According to this latter model, supervision consists of making sure that it is the student that is applying the norms of ethics and quality (Vilkinas, 2002). Unfortunately, none of the above models is self-sufficient and each of them seems to have some features to offer.

In order to serve the objectives of the present study as well as the specificities of the context under investigation, features from each of these models have been taken into consideration in the construction of adequate analytical instruments and methodological procedures.

Methodology

Given the scope and perspective of the study and the complexity of the variables under investigation, a phenomenographical approach to research was adopted to gain more depth and insight into the problem under investigation. To this end, a qualitative method using different sets of data was employed to get results. The argument is that a phenomenological approach to methodology is an appropriate type of approach for investigating issues which involve different perspectives. As Armstrong et al. (2004, p. 460) contend, "the value of phenomenography as a methodology lies in the generation of 'useful insights' … in a range of contexts, including learning and teaching in higher education".

This approach is appropriate for studies in the social sciences in which the participants come from different contexts and experiences (Marton 1986, 1988), and serves the purpose of collecting unbiased data. The major concerns of the present study were probed through questionnaires and interviews administered to teachers and students. This approach was favoured for its usefulness in the analysis and interpretation

of the data gathered in educational contexts with varying features. According to Reed (2006, p.1):

> Phenomenography is a research approach that takes a non-dualist, second-order perspective describing the key aspects of the variation of individuals' experience of a phenomenon.

In compliance with the requirements of this approach, not all the participants display the same knowledge and experience of doctoral studies; some academics and students were involved irrespective of their degree of insight and experience in the field of doctoral studies (Barnard, McCosker, & Gerber, 1999).

The Research Context

The participants in the study included 25 doctoral students and 15 teachers four Moroccan universities (Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdallah University in Fez, Moulay Ismail University in Meknes, IbnTofail University in Kenitra, and Ben Msik University in Casablanca). The students were in the process of completing their dissertations. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the whole sample are female. All participants agreed to take part in the study and filled in the questionnaires willingly. Of all the student sample, 11 were involved in applied linguistics issues, seven in projects related to cultural studies, five were carrying out gender-oriented studies research and two in theoretical linguistics. All of them are novice researchers with little background in research practice. All 15 teachers are experienced and have practised doctoral supervision for many years.

Through a constructivist grounded theory approach, the questionnaires and interviews undertaken with the two groups were analysed to determine the current state of supervision in these Moroccan universities. Research supervisory feedback practices in private or semi-private universities, such as Al Akhawayne University were excluded from the study, as they have a different attitude towards the issue under investigation.

Whatever the outcome of the study, the researcher anticipated that it would serve the exploration of both positive and practices of doctoral supervisory feedback as conceived of by both students and teachers.

Findings

The data analysis provided different varieties of results. The findings highlighted the differences of conceptions and attitudes of supervisory feedback for each type and field of research, indicating that supervisory research feedback largely depends on students' and teachers' understanding of what this activity involves.

The findings reveal the existence of different conceptions of feedback among teachers and doctoral candidates: no unified model of supervisory feedback conception was isolated for both groups. Not only that but conceptions of feedback vary from one teacher to another and from one student to another. This variation reveals the absence of a clear model of supervisory feedback among participants and a lack of university guidelines on the matter. These results illustrate a mismatch between students' expectations and teachers' attitudes towards doctoral supervision.

On the one hand, the results showed that some students prefer to work on their own without any guidance or hindrance from their supervisors and others enjoyed working with their supervisors and praise their feedback. On the other hand, teachers' conceptions of supervisory styles and behaviours were equally varied and heterogeneous.

Most views collected from both students and teachers revealed a mixed set of the features reported in the literature. In particular, the results obtained by the different analytical instruments used in the study show that both the conceptions of both students and teachers tend to favour a general attitude towards supervisory feedback that supports both understanding and assistance with both the cognitive and the technical aspects of dissertation writing, as well as psychological support and encouragement.

In general, the findings indicate that teachers' feedback is viewed as a representation of all the factors involved in the teacher-student relationship, and a reflection of the quality of the students' work. This interaction is represented in Table 8.1.

The findings do not show a clear-cut relation between these categories of supervisory feedback. There have been few indications about what kind of technical and cognitive support needs to be provided. The results also indicate that the participants' conceptions have not been limited to

Table 8.1 Supervisor-supervisee interaction

Teacher-supervisor	Technical support Cognitive support Understanding and encouragement	Doctoral student

any particular aspects of students' work; they relate to most of the features of doctoral dissertation writing. Issues involved in this process concern content and form as well as the organisational features of the dissertation. The results for each group of participants are presented in more detail the two sections that follow.

Teachers' Conceptions of Supervisory Feedback

The findings indicate that the field of research carried out by the supervisee is the best determinant factor of teacher supervisory feedback style, as it indicates the kind of supervisory feedback approach to be adopted by the teacher and the degree to which student and teacher need to collaborate on a continuous basis. In other words, teachers do not follow any specific model of supervision; they simply interact with their supervisees according to what they think is appropriate for each student. The descriptive statistics used in the study that demonstrate this result are presented in Tables 8.2 and 8.3.

Instead, almost all supervisors conceive of feedback as being inclusive of all aspects of the dissertation. One supervisor reported that:

> I do not think that there is a model of supervision that is adopted or in Moroccan Universities. Each supervisor would choose his or her perspective of supervision. Given the different background of supervisors, there are as many models as there are many disciples. Supervisors issued from Literature streams would definitely differ from supervisors issued from linguistics or cultural streams.

This difference of supervision style among academics is borne out by other observations made by the teacher population under investigation. For instance, one teacher of language and culture argued that "dissertation feedback needs to be on methodological issues which have a big

Table 8.2 Frequency of using a particular model of supervision

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Never	14	93.3	93.3	93.3
	Seldom	1	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

Table 8.3 Do you focus in your feedback to your supervisees on all aspects of the work?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Sometimes	1	6.7	6.7	6.7
	Often	8	53.3	53.3	60.0
	Almost always	6	40.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

Table 8.4 Frequency of supervisors feedback from both form and content

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Sometimes	2	13.3	13.3	13.3
	Often	6	40.0	40.0	53.3
	Almost always	7	46.7	46.7	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

impact of the validity of the research". Another, a teacher of literature, said that such feedback needs to be on "the pertinence of the content and its relevance to the topic of the dissertation". As shown in Table 8.4, supervisors believe that feedback needs to look at both the form and content of the dissertation.

This approach towards supervisory feedback is indicative of the attitude that whatever the teacher does is simply a favour, not a duty. Though the statement does not pinpoint any aspect of the dissertation, it shows that the teachers' involvement in students' work differs from the traditional top-down practices of dissertation supervision they experienced themselves. At the far end of the continuum, an extreme position was reflected in one of the teachers' reactions. He believed that:

> students should feel happy; we do many things for them. We discuss their work and provide them with our views of the ideas they produce. When I was carrying research for the doctorate, I never got any feedback from my supervisor. I was doing it on my own.

This statement implies that the achievement of a doctoral dissertation is the responsibility of the student and teacher's duties are limited to assessing the relevance and appropriateness of its different features. Within the plethora of attitudes towards supervision feedback among teachers, it is worth mentioning that some perceptions persist over others.

Some teachers preferred to provide feedback orally (93%). A minority (6.7%) considered feedback as a written evaluation that needs to be a record of corrective information about students' writing. This category of teachers considered their feedback as an evaluation of far students' work is consistent and harmonious with the requirements of research at all levels. They maintained that feedback to doctoral students' work is usually oriented towards the satisfaction of students' needs and the improvement of the quality of their work. These findings are consonant with those reported in the literature that the role of supervisors depends on the needs of the student (Kam, 1997) on the one hand, and on the supervisor's own intellectual, functional, and subjective motivations on the other. However, the views of teachers reported in the present study indicate that these conceptions are not oriented towards the specific needs of the students; instead, they are merely reflections of their views of what feedback needs to address.

One important finding of the study is that none of the teachers interviewed uses a specific model of feedback; all of them seem to base their views of supervisory feedback on their own previous experience and cognitive styles.

Some of the teachers indicated that there is no strategy in the university departments with regard to supervision feedback since research studies differ in scope and objectives. Others maintained that supervisory feedback cannot be prescribed. One argued: "My feedback depends on what is expected from the student to achieve". Several other teachers supported this view and prefer a personalised approach to supervision rather than a unified style.

Taken as a whole, the study's findings indicate that teachers' conceptions of doctoral supervision feedback are based on their general knowledge and experience of supervision rather than on a systematic approach that addresses the components of research and the role of the supervisor. Importantly, none of the teachers in this study demonstrated knowledge of any structured model of supervision. All of them looked at it from a

general perspective. These findings are indicative that research supervision is left in the hands of teachers without any clear benchmarks and standards.

Students' Conceptions of Supervisory Feedback

The results emerging from the data on students' conceptions of supervisory feedback indicate that there is little consensus between students' expectations of teachers' feedback on their work and their teachers' conceptions of how to solve the challenges encountered during the research process. Like teachers, students do not have a systematic view of what supervision consists of. Their attitude towards supervision feedback was largely affected by factors that relate to their own background knowledge and other personal factors. Hence, students dealing with theoretical research in the fields of cultural studies and media studies, for instance, display less reliance on their supervisors and seek only occasional technical support from them. Most of these students seem to gain encouragement and understanding from their supervisors' feedback to their work.

As shown in Table 8.5, the findings reveal that not all students felt happy about meeting with their supervisors.

This feeling of unhappiness was expressive of their desire to receive more guidance on their work and more encouragement for what they had achieved. These instances indicate several aspects of concordance where cooperation between the teacher and the student and the way teachers assist students is on track with regard to all aspects of the research. This appears to be borne out by the fact that those students who reported

Table 8.5 Frequency of supervisees enjoying meetings with supervisors to discuss work

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Seldom	1	4.0	4.0	4.0
	Sometimes	10	40.0	40.0	44.0
	Often	10	40.0	40.0	84.0
	Almost always	4	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

needing more help from their supervisors were those writing dissertations in experiment-based studies, such as applied linguistics and gender studies (seven students), that require rigorous methods of data analysis.

The findings also revealed a similarity in students' conception of how feedback is delivered to that which emerged from the teachers in this study. That is, they conceive of teacher feedback as not being based on any principled approach as such, but rather as responding to their need to consult their teacher at any time during the dissertation research and writing process.

Altogether, the results obtained from the analyses of the questionnaires and interviews carried out with doctoral students on their conceptions of supervisors' feedback revealed three categories.

1. Students who conceive of supervision feedback to be encouraging and supportive of their work. What can be gleaned from the 13 students who were interviewed and a number of the 25 students who filled in the questionnaires used in the study is that 19 of them considered that supervisor feedback that contains encouragement and praise of the work, and which is returned to the student within one month of submission, is effective feedback. Such feedback, these students report, facilitates the establishment of positive relations and helps them progress in their work. This is probably due to the fact that supervisory feedback is not accompanied with a grade that might affect the student. It must be noted, however, that this is just one side of the coin, and that other features are also involved in this process.
2. Students who rely on their supervisors for feedback on most aspects of their dissertation. These students believe that supervisors' assistance, guidance and intellectual support are determinant in the completion and progress achieved in their work. They claim that their teachers' feedback needs to focus on the content and substance of their dissertation. This view is cognitivist in essence, and it considers the dissertation as an intellectual piece of work and teacher feedback as corrective information to that work.
3. Students who feel more responsible for their dissertations and take ownership of the writing process. These students seek only technical feedback related to the structure and organisation of their work but do also welcome encouragement.

Table 8.6 How often do You have formal meetings with other teachers and students?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Never	8	32.0	32.0	32.0
	Seldom	5	20.0	20.0	52.0
	Sometimes	9	36.0	36.0	88.0
	Often	3	12.0	12.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

This classification of conceptions may vary according to the previous experiences of the students and their environment. What is important for this research study is that, while these categories of students' conception of feedback exist in the context under investigation, they are also reported in several research studies on supervision styles (Kam, 1997; Leonard & Becker, 2009).

As shown in Table 8.6, the question of how often students meet their supervisors yielded positive results. In response to the question: "How often do you have formal meetings with your supervisor?" students' responses are disruptive; they are not indicative of any trend.

The rate of those who reported a few meetings with their supervisors is small; only four students reported having less than one meeting per month with their supervisors. In the data collected from the interviews, however, some students said that they regularly talk to their teachers, either personally, on the phone, or through email.

However, formal meetings involving a large number of doctoral students was rare. The findings reveal that within three years of research for doctoral studies, only three seminars were organised by supervisors and students in order to strengthen communication between and among students and teachers.

The results provide ample evidence that most students rely on themselves in the completion of their work. To the question: "How often do you get feedback from your supervisor?" several answers were given by the students. The most recurring was that they receive feedback from their supervisors only when they have a query or have completed a section of their dissertation. One student said:

> I get a query or feedback from my supervisor only when I give him a piece of work. My supervisor is always busy.

In the same vein, another student mentioned that supervisor feedback was not exactly timely or fulsome:

> It takes me much time before I sent my supervisor the first chapter of my work, but I never receive written feedback. I wait for a long time until I meet him one day and he told me that it was OK and that I had to pay attention to language…. He did not talk to me about the content.

Though very few (only two) of the students involved in the study said that they hardly ever receive any written feedback on their work, the data reported in the interviews display two types of response. As suggested by one of the students, the absence or scarcity of feedback from supervisors is a challenge to which students have to handle on their own:

> When I don't get a feedback, I feel frustrated. I don't know if my ideas are true or false, and I keep doing things according to my plan.

This demonstrates that delaying feedback or not giving it at all sometimes urged the students to develop their own research strategies and techniques. Other students, however, considered this type of conduct as a negative reaction towards their work, and that it simply meant for them that their supervisors were not satisfied with their work. This attitude towards dissertation supervision feedback, as expressed by one the students, concerns a small number of students, as most of them express their curiosity about their teachers' disinterest in their achievement. One student said:

> I sometimes submit what I have written to my supervisor, but do not get any feedback at all. For me, it's OK. I try to keep with my plan so as I can provide him with more work as planned in my agenda.

What can be gleaned from the data is that the issue of meetings between supervisors and students had a significant impact on students' attitudes

towards the supervision styles adopted by their teachers. The findings reveal that there were several cases where teachers and students did not see each other enough and did not communicate about the dissertation work on a regular basis. In many of these cases, the students are employed at the same time as doing their doctoral study (eight students). In such situations, major problems were reported in the teacher-student relationship.

The data reported problems arising from dissatisfaction on both sides with the work or behaviour of the other, which usually resulted in delays to the date of submission or viva examination.

> I wish I had more feedback from my supervisor. I keep writing my thesis, but I had problems finding my supervisor; He is very busy, and when I give him my work I get no feedback.

Most of the complaints made by these students were not provided with sufficient detail, perhaps because many students do not themselves know what the process of supervision involves or because they simply do not want to criticise their supervisors.

The analyses reported in Table 8.7 also indicate that the university does not organise sufficient seminars for the benefit of doctoral students. In response to the question of how often they discuss their work through other channels, 84% of the students indicated that they almost never do. To fill this gap, some of the students said that they had to attend events organised by other universities, usually in the form of 'Study Days' for doctoral students. Unfortunately, these formal gatherings are reported to take place only rarely. The students also said that these seminars constituted the main opportunity in which to receive feedback on their work

Table 8.7 Frequency of discussing supervisees' work through other channels

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Never	21	84.0	84.0	84.0
	Seldom	1	4.0	4.0	88.0
	Sometimes	2	8.0	8.0	96.0
	Often	1	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

and developed a clearer assessment of their efforts through comments and questions from peers and other teachers. Such meetings are mandated by the Charte des Thèses produced by the university, as they are supposed to help doctoral candidates feel upgraded to the status of researcher through communicating their thoughts and participating in the discussion of other students' work and raising their worries and concerns. The importance of such events is reported by four of the students who were interviewed to create positive attitudes and an appreciation of the supervision relationship. There is enough evidence in the current literature to suggest that these academic events are also likely to raise the curiosity of both teachers and students and leads to a better mutual understanding and clearer view of what supervision feedback needs to include.

With regards to face-to-face meetings, however, the results obtained in the three questions addressed in the questionnaire reveal that supervisors are not easy to reach for feedback and that they do not meet with students sufficiently (Table 8.8). There were, however, cases in which some supervisors were described as unavailable for oral feedback and consultation.

Results regarding appreciation and satisfaction with supervisors' feedback reveal that most of the students involved in the study were satisfied with their teachers' reaction to their work (with a cumulative percentage of 84%, see Table 8.9), but that they wish they had more feedback. Strikingly, the major cause of dissatisfaction was related to the length of teachers' feedback delays. A majority (88%) of the students reported that it often takes more than a month to get feedback from the supervisor (Table 8.10). This problem has been reported to affect the progress and quality of their dissertations.

As regards the type of feedback provided by supervisors, some students revealed that the nature of feedback provided by their teachers has a

Table 8.8 Frequency of meetings with supervisors

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Never	7	28.0	28.0	28.0
	Seldom	15	60.0	60.0	88.0
	Sometimes	3	12.0	12.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

Table 8.9 Is your supervisor's feedback limited and short?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Seldom	4	16.0	16.0	16.0
	Sometimes	9	36.0	36.0	52.0
	Often	8	32.0	32.0	84.0
	Almost always	4	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

Table 8.10 Frequency of reaching supervisors

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Seldom	2	8.0	8.0	8.0
	Sometimes	15	60.0	60.0	68.0
	Often	5	20.0	20.0	88.0
	Almost always	3	12.0	12.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

Table 8.11 Frequency of how substantive and detailed supervisor's feedback is

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Never	3	12.0	12.0	12.0
	Seldom	20	80.0	80.0	92.0
	Sometimes	1	4.0	4.0	96.0
	Almost always	1	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

significant impact on their work. As shown in Table 8.11, 84% of the students believed that their supervisors' feedback is limited and short, and 92% thought that their supervisors' feedback is seldom substantive and detailed. These findings are significant and suggest that supervisors' feedback needs to be reconsidered by the faculty.

That most students were not satisfied with their teachers' supervisory techniques and feedback is reflected in the following statement made by one of the participants:

> In general, there is much understanding between my supervisor and myself, but we sometimes have many disagreements about my approach to use in my dissertation. He sometimes asks me to omit big sections of my work without asking me about them. This makes me confused, and sometimes I have to reconsider all my work.

Table 8.12 Frequency of asking feedback on the form of your work (spelling, organisation, etc.)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	10	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Seldom	4	16.0	16.0	56.0
	Sometimes	1	4.0	4.0	60.0
	Often	7	28.0	28.0	88.0
	Almost always	3	12.0	12.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

Table 8.13 Frequency of asking feedback on the content of the work (relevance)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Seldom	1	4.0	4.0	4.0
	Sometimes	6	24.0	24.0	28.0
	Often	7	28.0	28.0	56.0
	Almost always	11	44.0	44.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

A lack of substantive feedback was a significant concerns among students. The above statement also reveals that teachers' feedback on students' work needs to include their opinions on both the content and form of their work and that it should address both the negative and positive points. The features that are most favoured by students relate to methodology aspects in general and the technical features of data analysis in particular. As shown in Table 8.12, the findings also indicate that students expected teachers to provide them with feedback on the organisation and structure of the dissertation.

While students believed that feedback is less required on aspects of form, they did emphasise the importance of feedback on content and felt that it falls within the teacher's responsibilities to check meaning in their writing (see Table 8.13).

Nearly half (44%) were in favour of content-oriented feedback. As one student reported: "It is important to get my ideas checked by my supervisors on a continuous basis". Though the distribution was not even, the overall picture obtained from the study's results is that students believed that feedback should be mainly focused on content.

Conclusions

These findings are significant in highlighting some key aspects of the conception of supervisory feedback among students and teachers. They reveal that teachers usually display different conceptions of supervision feedback from those of their doctoral students, and that very few of them are aware of what model of supervisory feedback they produce.

Two types of teacher approach to feedback emerge; one that is constructivist and based on interaction and collaboration with students, and another that is mostly top-down and authoritative which considers students as subordinate supervisees who should follow the teacher's instructions and respect their supervisory style.

The data also reveal that most of the students involved in the study feel happy to meet their supervisors but wish they had more feedback on their work in terms of both content and form. One of the major causes of students' dissatisfaction is related to the length of teachers' feedback delays and the nebulousness of their feedback. This problem was reported to affect the progress and quality of their dissertations. On the other end, teachers' views appear largely to be a reflection of their own experience with supervisory feedback rather than based on a systematic approach or academic knowledge of appropriate supervision models.

Finally, it is worth noting that the students' conception of what needs to be provided in teacher's feedback is not based on any principled approach to research practice, which suggests that further research is needed in the field that isolates the relationship between feedback and students' needs.

Pedagogical Implications

These findings call for both students and teachers to be fully involved in understanding what and how creating a research environment between the two sides can be achieved. Due to a lack of evidence that deals with the specific issue of doctoral dissertation supervision in the Moroccan context, it is important to encourage researchers to explore this rich and tricky area in order to find answers to questions that bear relevance to the improvement of quality and accountability of the university curricula and research practices.

The findings also reveal that both students and supervisors need to gain more insight into research practice in general, and the process of supervision and how supervision feedback can best be tackled, understood and catered for, in particular. To fill in this gap and promote harmony among students and supervisors and encourage research students to progress, this study makes the following recommendations:

1. Provide guidelines on doctoral dissertation supervision in the form of a booklet or handout that contains the readings and tools required for the completion of dissertations.
2. Ensure that research methodology modules delivered to postgraduate students fosters their knowledge and awareness of research skills.

With respect to teaching and training, the findings of the study indicate that CDOCs need to organise regular meetings with doctoral students of the same field on a regular basis by arranging opportunities for students to communicate their ideas through seminars, conferences and symposia.

Thus the issue of supervision needs to be considered from a global perspective that offers students international scope and insight, supports their morale and offers forums in which to engage in scholarly discussion and debate. Such enrichment can also be achieved through the implementation of a structured approach involving more than one supervisor to each doctoral student in order to cover the fields of research involved in the study. Though this approach exists in some universities, its implementation is not currently regulated by explicit guidelines and practices.

Finally, it is worth noting that research on supervision feedback is still in its embryonic state, and that its inclusion in university syllabi could be very beneficial to both students and teachers at the university level.

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Appendix 1: Students' Questionnaire

Appendix1: Students' questionnaire

Dear Student,

This questionnaire is part of a research project. It aims at investigating supervisors' feedback on doctoral students' theses. Your answers will remain confidential and anonymous. Your contribution is highly appreciated.

Please place an X in the appropriate box to indicate your response

Students' Conceptions and attitudes of feedback:

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
Do you need feedback on your product?					
Do you think your supervisor needs to help you with the review of the literature and references?					
Do you think your supervisor needs to help you with the methodology?					
Do you think your supervisor needs to help you with the data analysis?					
Do you think your supervisor needs to help you with the organization of your work?					

Frequency

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
Do you meet with your supervisor regularly?					
Do you meet your supervisor only when needed?					
Is your supervisor always available to respond to your queries?					
Is it difficult to reach your supervisor?					
Does it take less than a month to get feedback?					
Does it take more than a month to get feedback?					
How often do You have formal meetings with other teachers and students?					
How often do you discuss your work through other channels?					

Appreciation

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
Do you like meeting with your supervisor to discuss your work?					
Do you hate meeting with your supervisor?					
Do you get the right feedback from your supervisor?					
Do you get positive feedback from your supervisor?					
Is your supervisor's feedback limited and short?					
Is your supervisor's feedback substantive and detailed?					

Type of feedback requested

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
Do you ask for feedback on the content of your work? (Relevance)					
Do you ask for feedback on the form of your work? (Spelling, organization etc)					
Do you ask for feedback on both form and content?					
Do you send your work to your supervisor in a printed copy?					
Do you send your work for feedback through email?					
Do you ask for feedback from other sources?					
Do you ask for feedback from your peers?					

Appendix 2: Questionnaire for Teachers

Appendix2: questionnaire for teachers

Dear professors,

This questionnaire is part of a research project. It aims at investigating supervisors' feedback on doctoral students' theses. Your answers will remain confidential and anonymous. Your contribution is highly appreciated.

Please place an X in the appropriate box to indicate your response

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
1. Do you think dissertation feedback is important for doctoral students?					
2. Do you use a particular model of supervision?					
3. Do you focus in your feedback to your supervisees on all aspects of the work?					
4. On the content of your work? (Relevance)					
5. On the form of your work? (Spelling, organization)					
6. On both form and content?					
7. On the review of the literature and references?					
8. On the methodology?					
9. On the language, correcting their mistakes?					
10. On the data analysis?					
11. On the organization of your work?					
12. Do you provide your supervisees with oral feedback?					
13. Do you provide your supervisees with written feedback?					
14. Do you like meeting with your doctoral students?					
15. Do you think meeting your students is a waste of time?					
16. Do you enjoy discussing and reacting to yourstudents' work?					
	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always

17. Do you think doctoral supervision is a good practice for teachers?					
18. Do you think doctoral supervision is hard and demanding?					
19. Do youorganise forums for your students?					
20. Do you ask them to see your colleagues?					
21. Do you provide your supervisees with feedback in a printed copy?					
22. Do you meet with them on a regular basis?					
23. Do you meet your supervisees only when requested?					
24. Do you set timelines for work submission?					
25. Is it difficult for your supervisees to reach you?					
26. How long does it take before you send your student feedback?					
27. Does it take less than a month to send feedback?					
28. Does it take more than a month to send feedback?					
29. Do you have organized doctoral meetings with other students?					
30. Do you provide your supervisees with feedback through email?					

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9

Conclusion and Final Remarks

Salah Troudi and Susan Riley

A good number of Arab countries are represented in this volume—from Morocco in the western part of the Arab world to Saudi Arabia, Oman and the United Arab Emirates in the Gulf region. This is a vast geographical area that comprises countries with the same first language, Arabic, and educational systems characterised by major differences and yet many similarities. Some groups of countries, such as those in the Gulf region, also have similarities in the history of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), and in teaching approaches in general. Given the continuous calls in the literature to improve Arab EFL students' writing proficiency at all levels (Al-Harbi, 2017), the editors believe that a volume on the topic of feedback in L2 English writing in the Arab world could contribute to a better understanding of what is happening in Arab educational institutions in the key area of writing feedback practices, including how students and teachers perceive these practices and challenges. The contributors to this volume have explored this issue in depth

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and proposed a number of pedagogical steps to address current challenges in the area of writing. We hope readers from different contexts and backgrounds will benefit from the studies presented here as they are designed to be relevant to practising teachers, research students and academics.

We organised the book around the two main themes of feedback practice and perceptions of writing feedback. The topics covered ranged from correction practices in a Moroccan EFL context to students' perceptions of 4D feedback treatment on EFL writing in Oman. The books starts with Ahmed's review of current theories and practices of feedback in second language writing in the Arab world.

Main Feedback Practices

One main feature shared by most of the chapters is that they are research-based. In his exploratory study of feedback practices at a Tunisian University, Athimni (Chap. 6) collected a mix of quantitative and qualitative data to investigate what students of English language and literature thought of the feedback they received from their lecturers. He also used semi-structured interviews to explore lecturers' views on the feedback they provide on their students' writing assignments, as well as analysing a sample of teachers' written feedback. This technique was also used in the study of Saudi students in the UK by Al-Harbi and Troudi (Chap. 7). The main findings about feedback practices in Tunisia, though limited in sample in Athimni's study, reveal that feedback is directive and corrective in nature, and was mainly provided through a written format. Oral and peer feedback did exist but were less common. In this study, as in the one by Hicham Zyad and Abdelmajid Bouziane on the Moroccan context (Chap. 5), students preferred teachers' feedback and had less trust in peer feedback, which they judged to be less detailed and informative. Students of both high and low abilities preferred explicit and directive feedback to implicit feedback. Their study also revealed that self-review is suitable as a learning strategy only for high-ability students. Those with lower abilities did not seem to benefit from this form of feedback.

An interesting finding in Althimni's study is the diversity in students and teachers' views about the focus of written feedback. The majority of the students (70%) reported that their teachers mainly focused on general aspects of writing such as organisation, style, development of ideas, coherence and unity; 60% mentioned language errors; and only 49% referred to overall writing performance as the major focus of the teachers' feedback. The teachers reported focusing on language errors, general aspects of the writing and overall writing performance. Some of the participating teachers were concerned about their students' accuracy so their feedback dealt mainly with correcting errors. This reflects the view that grammatical errors affect the overall quality of a piece of writing. In terms of feedback practice the sample analysis revealed that teachers underlined their students' errors and, in many cases, provided writing full corrections of these errors. Teachers' feedback did also focus on aspects other than grammar: Attention was paid to such elements as organisation, style, development of ideas, quality of ideas, coherence and unity. This reflects a well-balanced view of what makes a good piece of writing.

The practice of discussing feedback is another interesting finding from these studies. Both teachers and students reported that feedback was discussed, and the students were quite involved in interactive and conducive dialogues with their teachers. This practice allowed them to ask questions and seek clarifications from their teachers about the content of feedback and what needs to be done to improve their writing. An important point to raise is that teachers varied not only in their focus and practices but also in the amount of feedback they provided to their students. While some offered a lot of comments others provided very few points.

Most of the authors of the studies in this volume conclude that feedback practices need improvement. Many of the current practices seem to be incongruent with university students' needs and are not compatible with current feedback literature. The authors have called for the provision of training and professional development opportunities to provide university teachers with up-to-date theoretical and practical knowledge on types of feedback and appropriate pedagogies to facilitate more positive effects on students' writing.

Perceptions of Feedback

There seems to be a high level of agreement among participants of the studies in this volume, both students and teachers, on the significance and importance of feedback. However, one major challenge for students is the inability to capitalise on this feedback to improve the quality of their writing. According to the findings of Ouahidi and Lamkhanter's quantitative study conducted in Morocco (Chap. 2) this is due mainly to two reasons. The first is that teachers provide feedback on final products, indicating that the approach to the teaching of writing is not process-based and students do not therefore benefit from follow-up activities which would provide them with opportunities to improve their writing. Feedback on final products in many educational institutions is summative in nature and is commonly used for evaluative purposes only. The second reason, according to students, is the lack of motivation resulting from negative feedback which focuses only on problematic areas. Students need positive comments and encouragement from their teachers to be able to work on improving their work. In an exploratory study by Sayed and Curabba, writing teachers and students at a University in the UAE were asked their views on the process approach to the teaching of writing and the kinds of feedback practised by teachers. The participants reported positive views about the effect of process writing and feedback on the overall quality of the students' writing.

Using the concept of languaging and being informed by sociocultural theory, Dehdary and Al-Saadi's small-scale qualitative study investigated Omani students' views of corrective feedback (Chap. 3). This study is a good reminder that written corrective feedback (WCF) still attracts considerable research and the issue of learners' reaction to and engagement with feedback is an important and current topic of investigation in different English language teaching contexts. In an exploratory study to improve L2 writing accuracy, Evans, Hartshorn, McCullum, and Wolfersberger (2010) suggested dynamic WCF as a pedagogical approach. They argue that to understand research on WCF we need to consider three contextual variables: "the learner, the situation and the instructional methodology" (p. 445). This suggestion is still valid today; Han (2019,

p. 298) reminds us that "a lingering concern is how to assist individual learners in perceiving and acting upon learning opportunities afforded by WCF and relate resources embedded in the context".

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