Teacher Feedback to Writing of Secondary School Learners of English in the Polish Classroom Context

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Abstract Since 1960s, process-oriented methodology in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) writing has been thoroughly studied, researched, and successfully incorporated into pedagogy due to its repeatedly proven effectiveness. One of the procedures associated with this methodology is the provision of teacher feedback that goes beyond the form and grammatical aspects of written work. Nevertheless, while several decades of research conducted on writing instruction and teacher feedback situated within the tenets of process theories emphasize its positive influence on the development of EFL students' writing skills, it appears that in Polish secondary school education EFL writing is largely marginalized and the quality of teacher feedback does not reflect process-influenced strategies. Using questionnaire and interview data, the authors provide an insight into the current situation regarding feedback practices utilized by EFL teachers in Polish secondary schools and scrutinize these practices on the basis of the existing EFL feedback research. They also examine possible implications of this trend and underline the need for enhancing writing skill development among secondary school learners, focusing on alternative approaches to teaching writing.

Keywords EFL writing · Process approach · Product approach · Teacher feedback · Secondary education · Polish education

1 Introduction

Ever since the process approach to writing became favored over the product approach throughout the 1960s and 1970s, when the extensive research done on this complex skill from a brand-new perspective gained further momentum (see, e.g.,

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Emig, 1971; Flower, 1979; Perl, 1979; Stallard, 1974), both first language (L1) and second language (L2) writing instruction have undergone substantial changes in terms of recommended methodologies and the roles of learners and teachers in the educational setting. The ever-growing body of evidence clearly pointing to the benefits of switching to more process-oriented teaching strategies has resulted in the global emergence of writing curricula based upon the premise that teachers provide learners with procedural support on their path to developing solid writing skills (see, e.g., Hyland & Hyland, 2006b). One method of providing such support is written feedback, the importance of which had not become emphasized until the emergence of the process approach (Matsuda, 2003).

The product approach constitutes a model of writing instruction concentrated on text as an object rather than discourse and its overall form (Hyland, 2008; Raimes, 1991). This particular paradigm pays little attention, if at all, to the process of composing itself, focusing mainly on concerns related to the structure, style, genre, and proper language use (Young, 1978). Another assumption in product-oriented pedagogy is that "writers know what they are going to say before they begin to write; thus, their most important task when they are preparing to write is finding a form into which to organize their content" (Hairston, 1982, p. 78). Consequently, teaching writing based on the product approach revolves around helping learners master written genres primarily through the analysis of literary texts serving as prototypes for their compositions (Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; Straub, 2000), as well as providing them with a linear outline and rigidly established rules to follow for the purpose of carrying out error-free writing. Language correctness is especially prominent in an L2 writing setting, where particular emphasis is put on the reinforcement of the accurate application of grammatical rules through exercises requiring learners to manipulate linguistic structures (Raimes, 1991). In general, product-centered writing instruction does not offer learners many opportunities to receive content-based feedback, revise, find their individual style by being able to express themselves, or choose their own topic (Matsuda, 2003).

As opposed to the product approach, the process approach is based on the premise that writing does not simply consist in a transcription of the writers' pre-planned ideas, but can be considered a learning process in and of itself, during which learners organize their knowledge and engage in constant revision (Flower & Hayes, 1981). In this paradigm, the learner is depicted as the creator of original compositions, and the procedures and strategies involved in the writing and revising stages gain prominence (Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; Langer & Applebee, 1987). With the notion of writing as a complex thinking process, product-oriented and teacher-centered pedagogy is replaced with a process-oriented and student-centered one (Matsuda, 2003). Consequently, process-oriented writing instruction not only recognizes the active role of novice writers in organizing, reshaping, and refining their thoughts, but also encourages them to perceive their development as an ongoing process and the occurrence of errors in their writing as expected (Langer & Applebee, 1987). With this approach comes the decrease in the teacher's control over learners' texts, which allows the latter to explore the process of writing

independently (Murray, 1990/1972). An interesting feature of the process approach is the introduction of peer feedback and encouragement of peer tutoring (see Chang, 2016, for a research review of this notion; Wakabayashi, 2013).

In spite of the widespread popularity of the process-oriented pedagogies and the role that written teacher response plays in shaping learners' writing skills, English as a foreign language (EFL) writing instruction in Poland appears to be centered mostly around product-based methodologies (cf. Majchrzak & Salski, 2016), especially in the context of secondary school EFL instruction in which learners' proficiency in all four language skills is eventually tested during the Matura exam (i.e. the secondary school exit exam). Therefore, EFL language classes in this setting may resemble preparatory courses, where language correctness, also in writing, constitutes the primary focus of teacher commentaries, and summative rather than formative feedback dominates (Baran-Łucarz, 2019). The aim of this chapter is to discuss tendencies regarding teacher feedback to the writing of secondary school EFL learners in the Polish classroom context. Using a questionnaire and an interview, the authors asked a group of English teachers to comment on their way of teaching writing in English and their way of offering feedback in order to identify potential traces of the leading approach.

2 The Role and Benefits of Teacher Feedback

In the most general understanding, feedback can be defined as "input from a reader to a writer with the effect of providing information to the writer for revision" (Keh, 1990, p. 294). This information, presented in a form of comments, questions, and suggestions, is intended to help the writer transform his/her text into reader-based prose (Flower, 1979) that successfully communicates the thoughts of the author to the intended recipients. In the writing classroom, where one of the roles assumed by teachers is that of a reader (Keh, 1990; Leki, 1991), teacher response aims at reminding students about the presence of an audience, making them evaluate their texts from a reader's point of view, and aiding them as they learn to develop control over their writing (Sommers, 1982). However, when it comes to teaching writing in the L2 context, what also needs to be taken into account while responding to student writing is L2 students' unique situation as language learners. The challenges faced by these students, such as their unfamiliarity or lack of experience with L2 structures, warrant the inclusion of some elements of prescriptive instruction in teacher feedback (Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Leki, 1991). On the other hand, since in the process approach to L2 writing students are perceived not only as language learners but also as creators of original written discourse, and particular attention is paid to the content of the composition rather than exclusively its form (see, e.g., Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; Raimes, 1991), teacher feedback in this context revolves around students' writing processes in the first place, whereas issues related to linguistic accuracy tend to be de-emphasized and delayed until students have generated and explored the ideas regarding the topic and content of their texts (Raimes, 1983, 1991).

The research conducted on written teacher feedback suggests that not only does it constitute a fundamental element of process-oriented writing pedagogy as a whole (Hyland, 1990; Keh, 1990), but it is also considered a major aspect of L2 writing courses across the world (Hyland & Hyland, 2019) and the most common method of responding to student writing utilized by teachers due to its feasibility and thoroughness (Leki, 1990). Regarded as a task of utmost importance in the L2 writing setting (Ferris, 1995; Ferris et al., 1997; Hyland & Hyland, 2019; Leki, 1990) and a primary medium of communication and interaction with students (Ferris, 1995; Ferris et al., 1997), the practice of providing commentary on student texts has proven to have a profound impact on the overall development and consolidation of L2 students' writing skills (Hyland, 1990; Hyland & Hyland, 2001, 2006a, 2006b, 2019). Other benefits of teacher feedback acknowledged by researchers include its potential value in student motivation and effective self-expression (Ferris, 1997; Hyland & Hyland, 2006a; Lipińska, 2021) and the improvement of both language and composing proficiency (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ferris, 1995; Ferris et al., 1997; Ferris et al., 2013; Razali, 2015). With research backing up the positive impact of feedback on learning L2 writing and teachers' belief that their written responses help students learn and improve (Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Leki, 1990) by offering crucial information about their performance in this regard (Zamel, 1985), written teacher response is stipulated to prevail amongst other forms of teacher support (Ferris, 2003).

3 Guiding Principles for Effective Feedback

The studies that investigated written teacher response have resulted in the formulation of several recommended principles and practical strategies of constructing feedback in order to maximize the benefits that this form of teacher support may offer to L2 writers (for an overview see, e.g., Ferris, 2003, 2014). While Straub (2000) rightfully points out that there is not a single proper method of commenting on student writing and that the choice of the most suitable practices is determined by the teacher's individual preferences, particular needs of students, and specific circumstances, he argues that teacher feedback should be based upon certain accepted principles. Therefore, adhering to such a set of predetermined principles is meant to help teachers develop and refine their commenting strategies as well as to direct their attention to the purpose and methodology behind their feedback (Ferris, 2003).

One crucial principle of providing effective teacher feedback pertains to its timing in relation to how advanced the stage of a given written work is (Straub, 2000) as well as to whether students are enabled to submit subsequent drafts of the same task for revision (Hyland, 1990). Additionally, research shows that teacher response proves to be most effective when provided in the course of the composing process

as opposed to commenting solely on the final versions of students' texts (Ferris, 1995, 1997; Leki, 1991), as in the latter case, students have neither the motivation nor the reason to give any consideration to teacher's comments. In her study on student response to teacher feedback, Ferris (1995, p. 36) reports that a multiple-draft design of the writing course successfully addresses these issues, because "[when] students must rethink and revise previously written essay drafts, they are more likely to pay close attention to their teachers' advice on how to do so than in a situation in which they are merely receiving a graded paper with comments and corrections to apply to a completely new essay assignment." Moreover, Hyland (1990), who claims that the implementation of the drafting and revising stages leads to significant improvement in the final version of student texts, emphasizes the need for feedback to be interactive so that students are given an actual opportunity to adequately respond to and act on the teacher's comments and suggestions. Therefore, with the introduction of the multi-draft approach to writing accompanied by providing responses on intermediate drafts rather than the final ones, feedback does not function merely as a justification of a grade (Hyland, 1990), but also as a tool to motivate and encourage students to undertake revision.

Effective feedback also requires the teacher to prioritize and place an adequate focus on certain aspects depending on a particular draft (Ferris, 2003; Keh, 1990; Straub, 2000). Prioritization may involve addressing content-related aspects of a text, before attending to stylistic or linguistic errors after students have fully developed their ideas for a given writing assignment (Raimes, 1983, 1991). The recommendation to comment on these issues in such an order stems from the fact that remarks on content are usually highly text-specific (Ferris, 2014), as opposed to those on linguistic matters. As a consequence, students might not see the point of feedback regarding their ideas when it is provided on the final draft due to its limited usability in the next writing project, but may find practical value in form-oriented comments that are not bound by the specifications of a particular task and can be successfully reapplied in a different writing context (Ferris, 1995). Furthermore, interim feedback that emphasizes concerns directly related to the requirements of a given assignment or a writing stage prevents overburdening students' attention and enables them to gradually apply necessary corrections in a given revision cycle (Ferris, 2003) and according to the immediate needs (Ferris, 1997, 2014; Straub, 2000).

While there are many other recommended strategies when it comes to providing well-constructed teacher commentary on L2 students' compositions, it can be argued that the guiding principles discussed above constitute a very basic foundation for student-centered feedback that is in line with the premises of the process approach to writing; namely, the creation of multiple drafts, emphasis on revision, and focus on the content before addressing the form. As a result, incorporating these principles in the feedback strategy applied to the writing classroom appears to be a reasonable step towards moving from strictly form-focused writing instruction to the one that promotes the multifaceted development of writing skills.

4 The Study

To investigate current feedback practices of EFL teachers on learners' written texts, a survey study, employing a questionnaire and an interview, was conducted in selected Polish secondary schools. The rationale for the study was to explore whether there are any grounds to believe that written teacher response in this context is still more product-based in spite of various research findings supporting a more process-oriented pedagogy, and whether it needs to undergo any substantial changes to align with these current trends in teaching writing. The study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What forms of feedback practices do Polish secondary school EFL teachers incorporate in their writing instruction?
2. Are these practices in line with the research supporting the implementation of process-oriented feedback?

4.1 Participants and Data Collection

The pilot study involved 40 EFL teachers from seven Polish secondary schools who responded to an open request to take part in the research. The majority of the participants (n = 33) were female, while seven were male. Their teaching experience varied between 2 and 30 years.

The study methodology included two research tools. A questionnaire designed for the purpose of this pilot study assessed whether the teachers' preferred strategies and methods of feedback provision lean more towards the product approach or the process approach to writing. In the second phase of the pilot study, the respondents were asked to answer in more detail upon their writing instruction practices so the nature of the observed tendencies and contradictions revealed in the questionnaire could be clarified.

The questionnaire comprised 18 questions in total (see Appendix 1) generating qualitative and quantitative data that could be roughly divided into three overlapping sections. The first section consisted of three questions aimed at establishing a simplified teaching profile of each participant by acquiring information regarding the language proficiency level of his/her students, the number of hours of English taught on a weekly basis, their didactic decisions regarding teaching writing in EFL context, and their prioritization of the four basic language skills taught in their English classes. The subsequent section consisted of 10 questions that revolved around the teachers' attitudes to writing as a skill and their methods of teaching writing in general. The answers to these questions were expected to help formulate a premise for the analysis of beliefs and experiences underpinning the respondents' teaching strategies in relation to the kind of commentary that they provide on their learners' texts. The final section was made up of four questions related to the teachers' assessment and feedback practices and concluded with one question requiring

the participants to express their opinion as to what factors contribute to students' difficulties with writing.

Moreover, the interview was prepared as a follow-up research tool meant to shed more light on the details regarding teaching writing with the focus on feedback provision. The semi-structured interview consisted of four groups of questions circling around aspects that teachers consider vital while providing feedback, the content of their comments, the approach to assessment of learners' texts, as well as their grading policy (see Appendix 2). The interview was conducted online and recoded.

4.2 Results and Analysis

Questionnaire Results and Analysis

All 40 participants taught groups of learners at the so-called extended level i.e. reaching an equivalent of B2 in CEFR (cf. Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej [Ministry of Education, abbrev. MEN], 2018) on average 16 contact hours per week. Moreover, 40% of the teachers (n = 16) were also teaching groups at the basic level i.e. reaching an equivalent of B1 in CEFR (cf. MEN, 2018) on average 4 h per week.

When asked to rank the importance of the four basic language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing), 90% (n = 36) of the teachers answered that all of these skills were equally important, and the remaining 10% (n = 4) chose the productive skills, i.e., writing and speaking, as the most crucial ones. The belief that writing can be taught was shared by all of the respondents, and the overwhelming majority (95%; n = 38) also agreed that it should be taught at schools, with only 5% (n = 2) holding an opposing view. However, in terms of devoting more time to teaching writing, 65% (n = 26) of the teachers expressed a negative opinion, claiming that there was already enough time to teach this skill, 20% (n = 8) supported such an option only in the case of students who learn English at the basic level, and 15% (n = 6) agreed that there should be more time dedicated to writing instruction in general.

Out of 40 teachers, 45% (n = 18) responded to the follow-up open question regarding the possible obstacles preventing them from dedicating more time to teaching writing. The most prominent complaint was a significant shortage of time in relation to the vast requirements of the National Curriculum involving not only writing, but also the other language skills, the need to prepare students for the Matura exam, and excessive teacher workload. As for the possible concerns or problems related to teaching writing, 75% (n = 30) of the teachers did not report experiencing any issues, whereas 25% (n = 10) confirmed that they had encountered some difficulties, all of which were attributed to learners and pertained to their lack of concentration on a given task, motivation to learn, willingness to devote more time to writing assignments, or awareness of the importance of text composition. 5% (n = 2) of the teachers also mentioned problems related to instructing individuals with dyslexia.

The average number of hours allotted for written exercises involving the expression of ideas was 4 h per week for the extended level and less than 1 h per week for the basic level. As can be seen in Fig. 1, the most common writing assignments given to learners were essays and letters, which were selected by all of the respondents, closely followed by school newsletter articles (75% of the respondents, n = 30), stories and narratives (55%, n = 22), reviews (50%, n = 20), and descriptions (45%, n = 18). The least popular choices were blog entries (15%, n = 6), forum posts, and news reports (5% of the respondents for both options, n = 2).

When rating the importance of four different aspects of their learners' writing (i.e., grammar, organization, content, and style), 75% (n = 30) of the teachers found the content to be the most important aspect of their learners' texts, 20% (n = 8) were mostly concerned with organization, and only 5% (n = 2) considered grammar to be the priority. None of the participants paid particular attention to style, which was most often viewed as relatively unimportant (see Fig. 2).

When it comes to the preparatory activities conducted during writing classes, the teachers usually selected more than one such activity, with the most frequently used ones being discussing a model text (95%, n = 38) and providing specific grammar and vocabulary (90%, n = 36). Introductory readings and/or group discussions were used by 40% (n = 16) of the respondents, whereas 5% (n = 2) selected providing only the topic and/or specifying the genre. The average number of both in-class writing assignments and take-home assignments was three per semester.

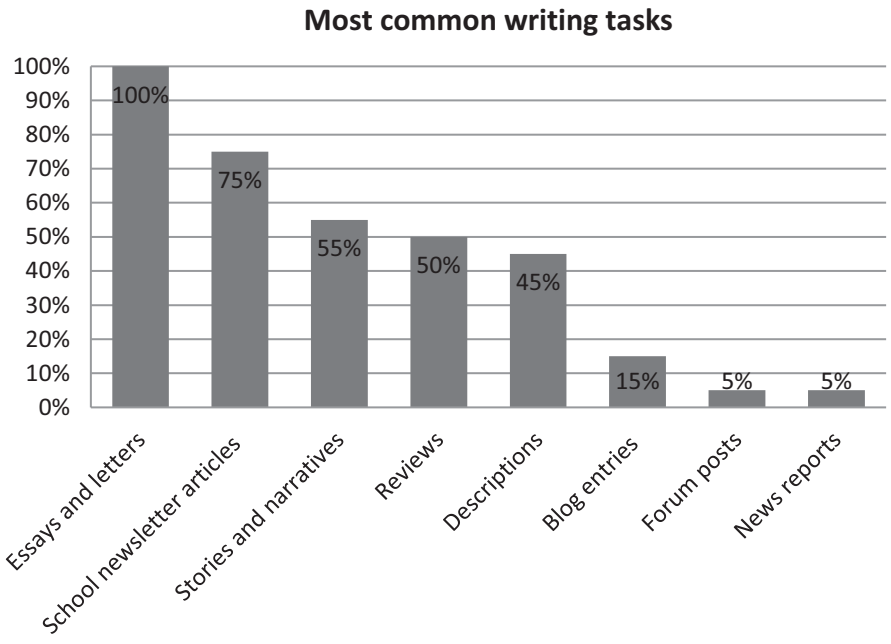

Fig. 1 Most commonly assigned writing tasks (Question 10)

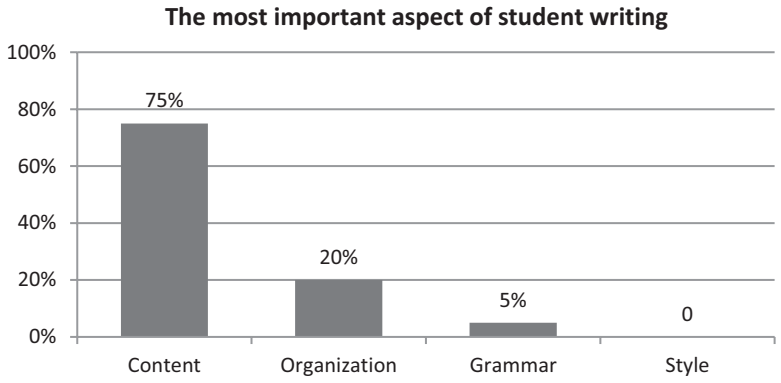

Fig. 2 The most important aspect of student writing according to the teachers' rating (Question 11)

Rewrites were allowed by all of the teachers, but mostly when students received a negative grade (70% of the respondents, n = 28). For 25% (n = 10) of the participants, rewriting was permitted in general and without any conditions, whereas 5% (n = 2) of the teachers enabled students to rewrite their texts only upon the latter's request.

Comments and suggestions for rewrites were provided by 65% (n = 26) of the teachers, while the remaining 35% (n = 14) did not engage in such a practice. The most common method of assessing learner texts involved carefully marking errors and providing extra comments on language, content, and/or organization (all 40 respondents). None of the teachers selected the remaining three options, although 5% (n = 2) included an additional comment stating that they also suggested "better answers" to their students. While grading their students' writing assignments, 50% (n = 20) of the teachers focused the most on content, 40% (n = 16) on language, and 10% (n = 4) on the organization of a text.

Finally, the inquiry about the sources of learners' difficulties with writing revealed that the majority of the teachers (75%, n = 30) believed that it was learners' inability to express their thoughts in writing due to problems with content and organization, 60% (n = 24) pointed to students ignoring the teacher's suggestions for improving their writing, 30% (n = 12) suggested their own inability to attend to every learner's needs and 25% (n = 10) found the insufficient amount of time dedicated exclusively to classroom writing activities to be the problem.

Several contradictions can be noticed in the answers provided by the teachers. For example, the vast majority of the respondents agree that writing can and should be taught. Although more than a half of them do not see the need to increase the number of hours devoted to teaching this skill and believe that it receives enough attention as it is, a lack of time repeatedly appears among the problems reported by these teachers. In fact, two of the teachers openly stated that time constraints prevented them from arranging more than a single rewrite per assignment, suggesting that they would apply a multi-draft approach to their writing classroom if the circumstances allowed it.

Keeping in mind that effective teacher response requires a setting where a text can be gradually developed over a series of drafts, it can be inferred that in the investigated secondary schools, an ample amount of time was available only for the product-based writing instruction involving the completion of an entire composition within a relatively short period, but not for the process-based one, where multiple rewrites are a common practice and interim feedback is feasible.

Another instance where the participants of this study gave contradicting answers is the selection of the most crucial feature of learner texts in comparison to the primary focus of the commentary on these texts and their assessment. Although content definitely prevailed over the remaining three aspects that the teachers found to be the most important in their learners' works, the situation changed in favor of language in terms of grading and feedback provision. In spite of the contrasting answers in this regard, all teachers claimed that when assessing learner compositions, they carefully marked errors and gave extra comments on content and/or organization. Nevertheless, the practice of simultaneously addressing every type of concern, especially on a finished product, stands in opposition to the characteristics of effective feedback strategy, where different problems are emphasized at different stages of composing. The commentary provided on students' assignments was not interactive in nature as they were very rarely presented with an opportunity to apply the suggestions made by their teachers in subsequent drafts, if at all. As can be seen, in the existing classroom conditions, teachers did not tend to adjust the focus of their comments according to the revised draft or provide truly interactive feedback, and students did not receive any incentive to actually undertake the revision of their texts. Overall, the results of the questionnaire seem to suggest that not only is process-oriented writing instruction scarce in the investigated secondary schools, but, more importantly, the practices of feedback provision are largely product-based.

Interview Results and Analysis

Only three volunteer teachers decided to participate in the follow up interview – two very experienced in their profession – 27 and 23 years of teaching practice, respectively; and one in the profession for just a few years.

The first participant – well experienced in EFL teaching (23 years of teaching practice) – drew attention to a dominant washback effect of Polish Matura exam on her approach to teaching and assessing writing. The majority of her writing assignments reflected Matura exam text types that she assessed using Matura exam criteria for writing (cf. CKE, 2013, 2021). These criteria constituted the basis of her writing instruction, with most attention being drawn to the use of language (grammar, vocabulary, spelling). According to the teacher, language accuracy in learners' writing was the most important aspect of their texts as it straightforwardly affected cohesion. The teacher focused also on topic development and text organization in her assessment.

Regarding the nature of her feedback, she issued written comments that were sometimes extensive, especially when there were plenty of language lapses in texts.

Furthermore, the teacher offered her feedback once only and did not offer the learners an opportunity to multi-draft their compositions. The teacher claimed that with a large number of learners to guide and a limited time devoted to teaching writing, it was unrealistic to work on multiple drafts with multiple extensive comments. Again she underlined that preparing students for the Matura examination was the main objective of writing instruction. Apart from the written feedback, she allowed for oral communication regarding problem areas underlined or marked otherwise in her feedback. Nevertheless, her preferred way of working on learners' errors in writing was having students discus the incorrect forms in groups. Focusing on learners' mistakes/errors was a key element of her feedback that aimed at helping learners improve their future writing.

The teacher perceived giving feedback not merely as a justification for the grade but, most importantly, as a set of instructions and suggestions on what to focus on and what to avoid in the next writing task. In her feedback, she differentiated between learners in lower forms (cf. freshman, junior) and learners from the senior form. With freshman learners, the teacher offered detailed markings that included the type of errors and possible accurate forms to use, whereas with senior groups she only indicated the errors and encouraged learners to correct them themselves in order to foster students' autonomy in error correction.

What is interesting, occasionally, the teacher assigned her students some writing tasks that served a purpose of entertainment. Learners wrote a story or some other text genre, and then read their texts on the class forum. The class then voted on whose story/text was the most interesting, while the teacher provided very positive feedback that focused on the strengths of the text.

The second teacher, also very experienced (27 years of teaching practice), acknowledged devoting most of her class time to Matura exam preparation and employing Matura exam criteria to provide feedback. She claimed that it was fairly easy both to explain the rules of text organization and to teach learners to be adhere to the writing tasks' instructions. Language use, however, appeared to be the most challenging for the learners to acquire; thus, in her comments, she drew attention mostly to that aspect. In her words: "If a learner can manage the language, s/he can manage writing, including text organization and content."

Second of all, feedback she offered to her learners always contained comments regarding problem areas, errors/mistakes or other lapses in writing. A positive comment was granted especially in error-free texts. She marked errors, added suggestions of accurate form or use, and in rare cases allowed learners to rewrite a text to get a better grade.

The teacher openly confirmed that high-school conditions did not leave much space for teaching writing. The number of hours devoted to teaching writing, which is one of the language skills to be developed during class time, limited the opportunities for introducing a process approach to writing. It was more time efficient to practise a variety of shorter texts written just once and to follow a set of concrete assessment criteria than to work extensively on just one or two texts per semester.

Similarly to the previous teacher, this respondent also mentioned introducing writing tasks that are not Matura-based. However, these rather rare extra writing

tasks were addressed only to volunteers who wanted to explore their creativity in writing. This gave them a chance to write freely longer pieces and enjoy the lack of formal boundaries imposed by exam-type tasks. The feedback in such tasks focused on various aspects of learner writing, with language being the leading one again.

The third participant representing a group of younger and less experienced teachers (6 years of teaching experience) in her interview yet again confirmed the practices of the more experienced colleagues. She stated that the key factor affecting her approach to teaching writing was the National Curriculum for foreign language instruction. As a result, as she stated, she tended to follow the coursebook closely, while the Matura exam requirements became a point of reference in the written assessment and feedback. For example, her usual teaching strategy involved an introduction of model texts characteristic of the Matura exam that her learners had to analyze carefully and then apply as a basis of their compositions. The teacher employed assessment criteria similar to those used by Matura exam board members to evaluate her students' performance especially in terms of content and organization. As she explained, not only did such means of assessment familiarize her learners with official criteria, but also they appeared to be a fairly reliable tool for providing an approximation of how their texts would likely be graded during the exam. When asked if she introduced any additional writing activities that might serve a different purpose than just exam preparation, the teacher responded that on average there was no time for any extracurricular activities, and exam preparation was her leading didactic goal that required a uniform approach.

The choice of tasks and criteria affected the way she taught, assessed and provided feedback to writing. In addition to the above-described assessment criteria, the teacher stated that her feedback practices incorporated the provision of written comments along with holding face-to-face conferences with students after returning the graded assignments. In both instances, her typical feedback covered issues related to language and stylistic correctness, content and organization. The problem areas in her learners' texts were explained in relation to the model texts and task requirements. During the conferences, she discussed a given composition in depth, elaborating on her in-text remarks and further detailing what changes would be appropriate. Despite asserting that language was of secondary importance to content and organization, her feedback to students' short texts focused mostly on lapses and errors that were marked, corrected and discussed with learners.

Furthermore, although her written and oral feedback did feature suggestions for improvement, she seemed to view them as rather definitive and universal, expecting her learners to use them in future writing tasks or make-up assignments. As she underlined, "of course, the [final] grade is important to students, but what is more important is that they write their future texts better."

The data obtained from the interviews indicate that the teachers tend to apply writing instruction and assessment that are compatible with the product approach. The learners typically do not practice multi-drafting and are given an opportunity to rewrite the assignment only if they receive a bad/negative grade. Consequently, this infrequent option of rewriting text is not seen as an opportunity to develop students' writing skills as a long-term process.

The negative washback effect of Matura exam is evident. The teachers seem to organise their writing classes around the Matura exam preparation, which is reflected in the text types that are specified in the examination requirements, e.g., a note, an announcement, an invitation, wishes, a message, SMS, a postcard, an e-mail, a story, a private letter, a curriculum vitae, a cover letter, a blog entry (cf. the basic Matura level, MEN, 2018), as well as a review, an article, or an essay (cf. the extended Matura level, MEN, 2018). Feedback provision also relies on formal aspects of compositions stipulated in the exam objectives. Although the teachers underline the role of text organisation and composition, the feedback seems to be focused predominantly on language accuracy. Other, less restricted types of texts are introduced sporadically to give the students an opportunity to receive feedback on their actual written performance, rather than the usual comments that centre around the form and language. The seemingly trivial writing for entertainment may be one of the rare occasions for the learners to notice their strengths in writing.

5 Discussion

Considering the study results, the answers to the posed research questions point to a clear tendency. Teachers claim not to have a sufficient amount of time to introduce multiple drafts when teaching writing to high school learners of English, despite the fact that learners have approximately 5–6 h of English instruction per week. For this reason, teachers do not follow the process approach to writing as popularized by Ferris et al. (1997). Instead, they provide comments, usually underlining problem areas connected with the language itself, together with the final grade as a form of assessment of their learners' texts, which stands in opposition to the process approach practices (cf. Ferris, 1995, 1997; Leki, 1991). Being focused solely on the final product, the teachers do not comment on or assess the process of writing in any way. The learners have a chance to revise and/or rewrite their texts only to receive receive a higher grade.

In the investigated contexts, language-based feedback seems to dominate. The reason for that may lie in a strong washback effect of the Matura exam that Polish high-school learners are being prepared for (a tendency observed also by Baran-Łucarz, 2019). It is important to mention that the objectives of the Matura exam reflect to the point the National Curriculum (MEN, 2018). Clearly, the research results point to the fact that the Polish EFL teachers teach writing in alignment with these documents; however, that practice is far from the assumptions of the process approach, in which the content-based approach to feedback is a priority (cf. Raimes, 1983, 1991). Other types of texts are introduced only occasionally, when time allows, to give students a chance to enjoy writing for pleasure, focus on the text content and write creatively.

On the whole, secondary school English teachers can autonomously decide on how to prepare their learners for the Matura exam writing task; still, this study reports that there is a clear tendency to follow a one-draft approach to writing

(cf. the product approach). The teachers typically offer their feedback once only, which results in highlighting all spotted errors, mistakes and other lapses in language, organization and topic development. This is again in contrast to the process approach, in which learners may be requested to focus on one aspect at a time depending on their individual needs (see Ferris, 1997, 2003, 2014; Straub, 2000).

A significant number of respondents report that learners' difficulties with writing stem, among others, from the latter's unwillingness to apply the former's suggestions for improvement in their future tasks. Nevertheless, as learners are expected to complete their compositions in a single draft that undergoes assessment immediately upon submission and cannot be revised past this stage, they are not presented with any opportunities to adequately respond to teachers' suggestions unless they receive a failing grade or are allowed a rewrite. With such limited possibility to act upon teacher comments, virtually no interaction occurs between the learner and the teacher regarding writing in the investigated context – interaction that normally constitutes an important factor in process-oriented feedback especially when it comes to encouraging motivation to revise (Hyland, 1990).

In a process-oriented classroom, feedback is meant to help learners express themselves effectively (Ferris, 1997; Hyland & Hyland, 2006b) by guiding them towards the exploration and development of their own ideas in writing (Raimes, 1983, 1991). However, as Polish EFL learners are expected to create content that complies with the requirements of a given assignment, teacher feedback in this context essentially revolves around the proper fulfillment of task instructions. The need to adhere to a set of predetermined criteria for the purpose of imitating a previously introduced model text is detrimental to the promotion of self-expression within an original composition. This situation once again reflects the prevalence of product-based feedback practices resulting from the preparations for the Matura exam.

Nonetheless, as this study was designed as a pilot trial, the results presented herein need to be considered as tentative. Another limitation that may render relevant is the number of participants. A follow up study might be considered to collect data from a much larger cohort to confirm the observed tendencies in Polish teachers' approach to English writing instruction and the type of feedback they provide to their learners at the secondary level. It might also be compelling to investigate whether there are any significant differences in the teaching of writing approach among more and less experienced educators.

6 Conclusions

Teachers need to navigate their choices to manage teaching various language aspects and skills in the time dedicated to classroom instruction. It is understandable that in their choices to teach writing in English as a skill they need to consider various variables, such as following the guidelines of the National Curriculum, preparing learners for their final Matura exam and offering them guidance in language

development through feedback on their texts. To this end, teachers tend to rely on the product approach to writing – an approach that seems practical, time efficient and optimal for secondary school education. Within this approach, learners write plenty of one-draft short texts, receive feedback predominantly on language accuracy and text organization, rarely have a chance to rewrite texts, and never have a chance to experience writing as a process.

The authors of this chapter postulate to reconsider the general tendency to follow the product approach to teaching writing at secondary level, especially in terms of providing feedback on learner performance. Given the overwhelming popularity and efficacy of the process-based pedagogy propagated in L2 writing courses across the world, the Polish EFL writing classrooms could potentially benefit from adopting the current global trend rooted in well-researched practices, especially in terms of a more student-centered response system, where the multi-faceted improvement of learners' performance matters the most. It is perspicuous that the exceptional situation of EFL learners as writers requires them to work on their language proficiency alongside their writing skills, and thus teacher feedback must include some prescriptive elements. However, students should not be deprived of the opportunity to at least occasionally reflect upon their written output and review it with the teacher's procedural support and guidance beyond error correction. The recommendation for the application of more process-oriented strategies of teaching writing to Polish EFL learners that involve the provision of content-based commentary as opposed to the one concerned primarily with linguistic matters arises from the repeatedly proven assets of the process approach when it comes to the consolidation of both language and writing skills, as well as the overall development of mental processes that occur during the act of text composition.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Teaching EFL Writing in High School

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information concerning EFL writing instruction in Polish high schools. The information is gathered for research purposes only. The identity of the respondent will not be disclosed under any circumstances.

1. *On average, how many hours of English per week do you teach to students according to their language proficiency level? Please specify.*

Students' language proficiency level	*Number of hours*
Basic	_____ *hours/week*
Extended	_____ *hours/week*

2. Is it up to you to decide what you teach specifically during your English classes?

☐ *Yes, I can make independent decisions on my teaching schedule.*
☐ *No, there is a predetermined program that I must adhere to.*

3. How would you rate the importance of the four basic language skills?

☐ *The productive skills (i.e. writing and speaking) are the most important.*
☐ *The receptive skills (i.e. reading and listening) are the most important.*
☐ *All of these skills are equally important.*
☐ *Other (please specify).*

4. Do you believe that writing can be taught?

☐ *Yes, like any other skill, writing can be mastered, given proper teacher guidance and student motivation.*
☐ *No, writing is more of an innate gift which is developed implicitly.*

5. Do you believe that writing should be taught?

☐ *Yes, it should be taught.*
☐ *No, it should not be taught.*

6. In your opinion, should more time be devoted to teaching writing?

☐ *Yes.*
☐ *Yes, but only to students who learn English at the basic level.*
☐ *Yes, but only to students who learn English at the extended level.*
☐ *No, there is already enough time to teach this skill.*

7. What do you think are the obstacles that prevent teachers from dedicating more time to teaching writing? Please elaborate.

8. Do you have any concerns and/or problems regarding teaching writing? Please elaborate.

9. Could you roughly estimate how much of your teaching time is allotted for written exercises involving students' expression of ideas?

Students' language proficiency level	*Number of hours*
Basic	_____ *hours/week*
Extended	_____ *hours/week*

10. What kind of writing assignments do you give to your students? You can tick more than one box.

Writing assignments in my class
☐ Descriptions
☐ Stories/Narratives
☐ Letters
☐ School newsletter articles
☐ Reviews
☐ Other (please specify).

11. What do you look for in a student's text? Please rank each of the following items in order of importance from 1 to 4, where 1 is the most important and 4 is the least important.

☐ Flawless grammar
☐ Good content
☐ Good organization
☐ Style appropriate for the genre of the text

12. How do you prepare your students to write given assignments?

☐ I discuss a model text.
☐ I provide specific grammar and vocabulary.
☐ I use introductory readings and/or group discussions.
☐ I only provide the topic and/or specify the genre.
☐ Other (please specify).

13. How many writing assignments do your students complete per semester? Please specify.

Type of assignment	*Number of assignments per semester*
In-class writing assignments	_____ *assignments/semester*
Take-home assignment	_____ *assignments/semester*

14. Are your students allowed to rewrite the same assignment before you grade it?

☐ Yes.
☐ Yes, but only if they ask for it.
☐ Yes, but rewrites are allowed only when the students receive a bad grade.
☐ No.

15. Do you give your students any comments on how they can rewrite their texts?

☐ Yes.
☐ Yes, but I comment only when giving a final grade on their assignment.
☐ No.

16. Which of the sentences below best describes your way of assessing students' texts?

☐ I carefully mark errors in my students' texts and provide additional comments. ☐ *What is the focus of these comments?* ☐ Language. ☐ Content. ☐ Organization. ☐ All of the above.
☐ I carefully mark errors in my students' texts, but do not provide any extra comments.
☐ I mark errors selectively and provide some additional comments if necessary.
☐ Other (please specify).

17. On what aspects of your students' texts do you usually focus on the most while grading? Please rank each of the following items in order of importance from 1 to 3, where 1 is the most important and 3 is the least important.

☐ Language.
☐ Content.
☐ Organization.

18. What do you think causes students' difficulties with writing? You can tick more than one box.

☐ Insufficient amount of time dedicated exclusively to classroom writing activities.
☐ Teacher's inability to attend to every student's needs.
☐ Students' inability to express their thoughts in writing due to problems with content and organization.
☐ Students ignoring teacher's suggestions for improving their writing.
☐ Other (please specify).

End of questionnaire
Thank you

Appendix 2: Interview

1. Which of these aspects do you find most important in a student text: language, content or organization? Why?
2. Do you give your students any comments on how they can rewrite their texts? If yes, how do you do it (in writing, orally)? What kind of comments do you give? What is the purpose of these comments? What do you focus on the most when giving such feedback (content, organization, etc.)? In case of feedback on the final draft, is your commentary meant to justify the final grade or provide some tips to be taken into consideration for future writing assignments? If not, why not? How do you instruct your students to address their issues with writing in this situation?
3. How do you assess your students' texts? Do you mark errors and/or provide additional comments? What kind of comments do you give? What is the main focus of these comments (language/content/organization/all of them)? If your feedback is error-based, how do you address the issues with the remaining aspects of your students' texts, if at all?
4. What aspects of your students' texts do you usually focus on the most while grading (language/content/organization)? Why?

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