Feedback on Academic Writing: ESL Instructors’ and ESL Students’ Perspectives

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Abstract

Most international students strive to meet writing requirements at the postsecondary level, and they are a group who need additional instructions and help on academic writing. Feedback has been widely used as a pedagogical intervention to help language learners with their writing, but effective feedback has not always been achieved. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore teaching pedagogies related to feedback strategies by analyzing students’ and instructors’ perceptions in the ESL context. From a sociocultural perspective, this study analyzed participants’ perceptions of the effectiveness of feedback and students’ engagement with instructors’ feedback. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and email questionnaires. Key findings of this research include students’ reliance on written feedback, the value of feedback conferences and dialogues, and the need to generate more feedback engagements and interactions. The study also discusses the pedagogical implications of findings and makes suggestions for future practice and research.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Feedback has been regarded as one of the most powerful tools that help English as a Second Language (ESL \(^1\)) students to enhance their academic writing skills in higher education (Agbayahoun, 2016; Cheng & Feyten, 2015). In this research paper I use the term ESL students to refer to the population of students in higher education who speak English as a second language (Lakin et al., 2012). To explore teaching pedagogies related to feedback strategies, this research investigates feedback challenges, experiences, and perceptions of ESL instructors and ESL students to gain insights and pedagogical implications in ESL writing teaching. “Teachers” and “instructors” mentioned in this paper refer to college teachers or university instructors who teach in ESL programs to prepare international students for undergraduate or graduate programs. Students in university ESL programs are mostly adult students whose native language is not English, but they need English skills for their further study. This small-scale qualitative study provided both students and instructors opportunities to reflect on their feedback experience and share their opinions about what works for them. By listening to their voices, this qualitative research was grounded within a sociocultural perspective (Newman et al., 1989; Rogoff, 1990; Wertsch, 1991) and analyzed how feedback practices and engagements take place in ESL writing contexts. In this chapter, I will explain the background of the problem, the rationale of this research, the purpose of the study, research questions, and the theoretical framework in detail.

\(^1\) The acronyms ELL, EAL, and ESL were terms used in the literature to describe English language learners, English as additional language students, and English as a second language students. I have chosen the term of ESL as it is widely used in the higher education literature and in university policy and procedural documents.
Background of the Problem

Large numbers of international students have chosen to pursue their degrees in English-speaking countries in recent years, and most of them strive to meet the demands of writing required at the postsecondary level and struggle in preparing their written assignments (Lawrick, 2013; Paltridge, 1997). As an English writing instructor, I find that writing is the most challenging proficiency for most international students compared with listening, reading, and speaking. In the language school where I previously worked, students could choose to take extra classes if they thought they were weak in specific subjects when preparing for the IELTS\(^2\) test (Sorrenson, 2012), and writing classes are always the most highly subscribed. International students often struggle in grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and organization in English and even find it hard to respond to their written task with clear and accurate language (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010). Therefore, additional instruction and help in writing are always needed for international students to achieve their academic success.

Feedback has been widely used as a pedagogical strategy in almost all the writing disciplines to facilitate ESL students’ academic writing (Cheng & Feyten, 2015). It offers considerable benefits to students’ writing skills and maintains sustainable development for students’ academic improvement and language acquisition (Zhang & Hyland, 2018). However, it is always challenging to deliver effective feedback to second language learners in higher education. Feedback uptake has not always been successful, and students may not make good use of the feedback they receive (Evans, 2013; Nicol, 2010). Instructors also find it challenging to provide feedback due to the increasing number of

\(^2\) The acronym IELTS represents the International English Language Testing System. It is the globally recognized language test for international students that is required by most higher education institutions.
students, the heavy workload, and the strict course timelines (Winstone & Carless, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to learn how feedback providers and recipients perceive feedback, what they need or expect, and their ways of interaction. Analyzing the perceptions and exploring their needs will help us develop a better feedback design to help international students in their writing.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore teaching pedagogies related to feedback strategies by learning students’ and instructors’ perceptions of feedback, in order to enhance students’ engagement and help international students to improve their writing skills in higher education. The mismatches between students’ expectations and teachers’ beliefs can have a negative effect on the feedback delivery (Li, 2020), so addressing the dissatisfactions and mismatches by learning more about students’ and instructors’ perceptions will help to improve the experience of both feedback providers and feedback receivers.

As this study employs a learner-centered model (Ramani et al., 2019) and believes ESL teaching should be learner-focused and support learners’ needs and cultures (Freeman et al., 2016), it is significant to investigate how students view, perceive, and respond to the feedback they received from their instructors in order to guide teaching or feedback providing in ESL writing. Therefore, this research put more focus on students’ perceptions and experience by collecting data both from focus group interviews and email questionnaires. It is hoped that the research findings will help instructors to be better feedback providers and enhance their overall teaching in English writing classes. It is also expected that the findings in this research will inspire ESL programs and ESL
instructors to explore more effective approaches to enhance international students’ engagement and uptake in their writing feedback, along with their academic writing skills.

**Rationale and Research Questions**

The number of international students in Canada is high and cannot be ignored as an important group that needs additional writing instruction and feedback. In 2018, Canada issued 356,876 new study permits to international students, and in 2019, the number of international students in Canada had increased to 642,408, with 306,735 students studying in Ontario (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2019). Therefore, finding better ways to improve second-language learners’ academic writing skills and help them to succeed in academic study is an urgent need. A large number of researchers have worked on students’ and teachers’ perceptions in the ESL context (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Dunworth & Sanchez, 2016; Rafiei & Salehi, 2016); however, many of them focused only on corrective feedback strategies or the style of teachers’ feedback by employing a Likert scale or quantitative research design (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Atmaca, 2016). Moreover, although dialogical feedback and feedback engagement are highly emphasized in recent years in higher education, there is only a small stream of studies related to feedback engagement in ESL contexts (Dowden et al., 2013; Winstone, & Carless, 2020). This study will fill the gap and gain more insights from ESL instructors and students to explore better teaching pedagogies related to feedback engagement and effectiveness for English writing classes.

The feedback process in writing requires both instructors and students to devote time to it. If students cannot effectively improve through feedback, then it becomes less meaningful for students and instructors to make efforts in writing and providing feedback.
Thus, it is crucial to learn the needs, experience, challenges, and perceptions of stakeholders in feedback and develop a more effective design to achieve feedback efficacy. Seeing the importance of feedback, this research aims to explore more comprehensive and practical learner-focused pedagogies for improving international students’ engagement in feedback and improving their English writing skills. In order to attain a better understanding and gain more insights of how students and instructors in the ESL program view and perceive the feedback in writing courses, this study was guided by the following research questions:

- What kinds of feedback on writing do university students in ESL programs find most helpful?
- What kinds of feedback on writing do instructors believe is most effective for ESL university students?
- What do students do with writing feedback?

**Theoretical Framework**

Sociocultural approaches were first posited by Vygotsky in the 1920s, and the foundational concept of such approaches was that human activities were shaped in cultural contexts and learning was mediated by language and symbols (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Vygotsky’s ideas were not fully developed at times because he died at a young age, but the impact of his ideas grew substantially around 1990. By understanding the nature of the interdependence between individual and social processes in the constructor of knowledge, Wertsch (1991) described a sociocultural approach by emphasizing human actions, dialogical conversations, and social interactions mediated by tools and signs. According to Werstch (1994), “Understanding how human mental
functioning is tied to cultural, institutional, and historical settings since these settings shape and provide the cultural tools that are mastered by individuals to form this functioning” (p. 204). Language, as one of the most important cultural tools, cannot be acquired by individuals in isolation. Newman et al. (1989) also stated that devices, such as talk, charts, and writing, are windows to see cognitive constructs. Therefore, this research puts more emphasis on the meaning-making involved in participants’ experience with the feedback, their perceptions of the feedback, and their engagement and uses in the feedback process. Based on the constructivist view, this study utilizes sociocultural theory as the main framework and employs a learner-centered model (Ramani et al., 2019) to interpret the sociocultural factors that influence the feedback process.

**Sociocultural Theory**

Sociocultural theory has emphasized the interactive nature of the learning process (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). It is commonly referred to by scholars in studies of L2 academic writing (McKinley, 2015). This study takes two key ideas of sociocultural theory as the main framework: interactive interpretations of learning and zone of proximal development (ZPD). Firstly, interactive or dialogical interpretations emphasized the learning process with conversations, writings, and various forms of social interactions (Newman et al., 1989; Rogoff, 1990; Wertsch, 1991). In ESL contexts, social practices—the dialogical interaction between the individual and contexts of learning—must be highlighted (Thorne, 2005). Another concept employed from the sociocultural approach is the ZPD. According to Vygotsky (1978), the ZPD refers to a potentially developmental zone where learners are collaboratively enabled to complete some tasks that they cannot achieve on their own. One useful technique rooted in ZPD is scaffolding,
which means support is provided by experts, such as instructors, tutors, or more proficient peers to generate successive learners’ engagements and transfer autonomy (Bruner, 1990). In ESL contexts, language skills, writing skills, and higher planning or organizational skills are developed though social interactions first and then transferred to individual cognition. Without enough social interactions and scaffoldings, students’ ZPD might be undermined (Nyikos & Hashinmoto, 1997).

Sociocultural theory (SCT) views language learning as an interactionally driven process instead of a result of the interaction (Lantolf, 2000). Feedback is not the end of a conversation or something done to learners, but rather the tool to initiate the interaction carried out for learners. This study employs the dialogical interpretation of learning and ZPD theory in sociocultural theory as the main framework and values the dialogical interactions, communications, and collaboration engagements in the feedback process.

**Feedback Within a Sociocultural Approach**

Feedback in this study emphasizes its impact on learners. The feedback loop is not complete until learners act on feedback (Boud, 2015; Winstone & Carless, 2020). The feedback model created by Ramani et al. (2019) serves as the most appropriate framework for this research, as it clearly illustrates the sociocultural factors that influence the effectiveness of feedback. As shown in Figure 1, learners’ performance improvement plays a central role in the feedback loop. Through a sociocultural lens, three significant factors influence the feedback process, including the recipient, the provider, and the cultural context (Ramani et al., 2019). Therefore, learning the viewpoints from feedback providers and recipients and learning the institutional context is crucial for examining feedback and exploring more pedagogical approaches.
Figure 1

*The Learner-Centered Model of Feedback*

*Note.* Source: Ramani et al. (2019, p. 745).
The learner-centered feedback model (Figure 1) was widely used in medical and clinical education (Boud, 2015; Ramani et al., 2019). When applying this to the ESL writing context, feedback providers would be the ESL writing instructors, and feedback recipients would be ESL students. The cultural context would be the institutional culture in the university ESL program. Employing a sociocultural lens, feedback is a collaborative performance that teachers and students make joint efforts and provide joint affordances to solving writing problems (Rassaei, 2014). Based on this model, the role each factor plays in the ESL context will be explained in the sociocultural framework.

**Feedback Recipients**

Feedback recipients are also learners in the model, and they refer to ESL students in this research. Treating learners as passive recipients may not generate an effective feedback delivery (Ramani et al., 2019), so in this model, the learners should play an active role in the feedback process to influence their improvement. Learners’ feedback-seeking behaviours and their active engagements exert huge impacts on feedback uptake and performance improvement (Ridder et al., 2015). Therefore, according to sociocultural theory, learners’ engagement and willingness to negotiate meanings are highly emphasized in the cognition construction (McKinley, 2015; Rassaei, 2014).

According to Fredricks et al. (2004), student engagement in analyzing L2 student responses includes behavioural engagement, affective engagement, and cognitive engagement. Behaviour engagement refers to students’ behavioural reactions to feedback, such as revision actions and the time they spend on revisions. Affective engagement means students’ emotional responses, and cognitive engagement includes cognitive strategies such as planning, prioritizing, and evaluating (Fredricks et al., 2004). Multiple
factors, including feedback providers and cultural contexts, will influence the engagement of students (Zhang & Hyland, 2018); thus, the shared responsibility of students, instructors, and intuitional culture is also implied in the framework.

**Feedback Providers**

Feedback providers, who are ESL writing instructors in this study, should observe learners’ performance, be sensitive to their needs, and provide opportunities for them to implement further learning. From a sociocultural perspective, instructors should support and guide learners to engage in the feedback and address their problems in writing by offering dialogic assistance, or scaffolding (Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). Instructors’ feedback should also operate within learners’ ZPD (Rassaei, 2014). Instead of immediately giving correct answers, feedback providers should find ways to motivate students to actively engage in the learning process, provide modified outputs, and achieve their potential zone.

**Feedback Culture**

A strong feedback culture promotes ongoing formal and informal feedback activities and generates continuous performance improvements (London & Smither, 2002). According to London and Smither (2002), feedback culture can be shaped by organizational interventions to improve the feedback quality, organizational practices to emphasize the importance of feedback, and practices to support the understanding and use of feedback. Positive perceptions of the feedback culture will motivate students’ engagement and create a shared understanding between instructors and students (Ramani et al., 2019). Therefore, with a sociocultural lens, it is significant to generate a collaborative and interactive culture for meaningful feedback exchange. It is crucial to
building space and time for feedback, no matter how concrete the course setting is (Ramani et al., 2019).

**Outline of the Remainder of the Document**

This study was intended to explore teaching pedagogies related to feedback on writing by approaching and analyzing instructors and students’ perceptions and experiences in the feedback process. Chapter 1 provided information about the background of the problem and identified more instruction and feedback are needed by ESL students in their writing. This chapter also illustrated the purpose of this study, the research questions, the rationale, and the theoretical framework. It emphasized the important roles of feedback providers, feedback recipients, and cultural contexts in the feedback process to achieve learners writing improvement. Therefore, this chapter introduced the purpose and significance of this research and set up foundations for the analysis of the following four chapters.

Chapter 2 reviews the concepts and literatures related to feedback on writing in ESL contexts. In this chapter, a new paradigm of feedback that emphasizes students’ engagement and uptake is introduced and applied to this research. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used for this research. Interviews, a focus group, and questionnaires were conducted to collect all qualitative data from student and instructor participants. This chapter also includes the details about sites and participants, data collection and analysis processes, and limitations and ethical concerns.

Chapter 4 presents a full description of the data gathered from participants by themes. Following this, Chapter 5 provides the analysis and discussion about the meaning of the data. The analysis was shaped by Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural framework and
the learner-centered model by Ramani et al. (2019). Chapter 5 also explains how the findings contribute to feedback practices and future research. By analyzing feedback providers’ and recipients’ perceptions and experiences, this study aims to improve the pedagogical approaches in the postsecondary level ESL writing classroom.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Feedback concepts and applications have been widely discussed in higher education (Nicol, 2010; Winstone & Carless, 2020), although those discussions were not always within ESL contexts. As this research focuses on feedback of students’ writing assignments in ESL programs in higher education, this chapter reviewed previous literature to gain fundamental understandings of various types of feedback and students’ and instructors’ perceptions.

Definition and Conceptualization of Feedback

Feedback can be generally defined as “comments/ commentary/ response as well as corrective feedback (CF)” (Ene & Upton, 2018, p. 1). It can take various forms, such as questions, suggestions, error corrections, praises, and criticisms (Agbayahoun, 2016). From a conventional view, the feedback has been treated as an input message (Nicol, 2010; Winstone & Carless, 2020). This message is often provided by an agent such as teachers, tutors, or peers for improvement purposes. However, it does not always deliver effective feedback because students may fail to understand the comments or have less motivation to work for improvement (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Evans, 2013; Nicol, 2010). With the development of the concept of feedback, it is now seen as more focused on students’ actions in response to the information they gained from others (Carless & Boud, 2018; Nicol, 2010; Winstone & Carless, 2020). Therefore, feedback is conceptualized as a process whereby students use comments to change their “behavior, motivation, or learning strategies” (Winstone & Carless, 2020, p. 7). This approach, focus on change, emphasizes the active role students must play and the outputs of student action.
According to Carless and Winstone (2020), the conventional view that focuses on input is defined as an old paradigm, and the interpretation of feedback that focuses on interaction and future student action is termed a new paradigm. The new paradigm of feedback implies “a partnership between teachers and students” (Winstone & Carless, 2020, p. 8). The partnership means teachers design feedback processes to facilitate students’ engagement and sense-making in productive feedback interactions. Similar interpretations illustrated in other research are two-way communications or dialogical processes (Dowden et al., 2013; Nicol, 2010). The concept of feedback in this paper will be built on the implication of the new paradigm, which emphasizes students’ engagement and students’ uptake. Feedback should be an interactive process that allows students to take further actions and make meaningful improvements through communication.

Language learning and knowledge absorbing both require rich dialogue and communication (Cheng & Feyten, 2015; Dowden et al., 2013; Kartchava & Nassaji, 2017; Ravand & Rasekh, 2011). Therefore, feedback givers and feedback takers should cooperate and share the responsibility of interaction and action-taking to explore more based on the social constructivist framework.

**Types of Feedback**

Feedback can be categorized by source or providers, such as teachers, peers, tutors, or self (Ene & Upton, 2018). However, in this paper, we will specifically focus on how teachers design the feedback process to help their ESL students in higher education.

**Oral Feedback**

Oral feedback is one way of giving feedback that helps students improve their writing and learning (Barney et al., 2012; Erlam et al., 2013). It refers to student–teacher
conferences, which allows more detailed guiding comments and clarification from teachers (Best et al., 2015; Yepni, 2016). Two types of oral feedback—graduated feedback and explicit feedback—are always discussed by scholars. According to Erlam et al. (2013), graduated feedback refers to “tailoring the feedback to enable the learners to self-correct with the least amount of assistance” (p. 263), while explicit feedback means instructors immediately give the correct answers to students. Research shows a preference for graduated feedback based on sociocultural theory, due to its effectiveness in promoting self-correction and its gradual reduction in assistance. (Erlam et al., 2013; Yepni, 2016). However, a problem associated with oral feedback is that it is not long-lasting as students may fail to document the feedback properly and cannot go back to the information provided (Barney et al., 2012).

**Written Feedback**

Teachers’ written feedback is often categorized based on the function of the writing. By analyzing ESL students’ marked drafts, Leng (2014) found that feedback students received can be divided into two primary forms: directive and expressive feedback. Directive feedback is an act to commit the receiver of the message to take some actions, and expressive is “an act of the speaker which expresses his/her feelings” (Leng, 2014, p. 392). The sub-categories of directive feedback include directive-instruction and directive-clarification. The former provides instructions to students on how to make changes for the text, while the latter is comments that seek further information from the students in terms of requesting a clearer explanation or clarification of the ideas mentioned in the paper (Leng, 2014). The sub-categories of expressive feedback are
expressive-disapproval and expressive-approval, which illustrates the negative points and the strength of students’ draft (Leng, 2014).

Teachers’ written feedback can be also categorized based on its focus. Feedback in ESL contexts can be form-focused, content-based, or integrative (Agbayahoun, 2016). Form-focused feedback mostly deals with linguistic errors, such as grammars, spellings, and sentence structures, while content-based feedback focuses on quality and organization of ideas (Agbayahoun, 2016; Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010). A large number of studies focused on the effectiveness of corrective feedback strategies (Sanavi & Nemati, 2014). Thus, we can see written corrective feedback as a vital part in ESL teachers’ feedback. According to the classification put forward by Ellis (2009), there are six major corrective feedback strategies: reformulation, direct form, indirect form, metalinguistic, focused/unfocused form, and electronic feedback. Direct feedback means the correct form is immediately provided by instructors, while indirect feedback only indicates the location of the error by highlighting or underlining (Ferris & Roberts, 2001). Metalinguistic feedback is to use error coding or a brief grammatical description. Focused feedback means instructors only focus on what they taught and ignore other errors, while unfocused feedback means teachers correct all extant errors without specific focuses (Ellis, 2009). Electronic feedback simply means feedback is provided by specific software, and reformulation is the feedback that helps learners to reconstruct or reshape the part to make it more native-like. Sanavi and Nemati (2014) changed the term electronic feedback to peer feedback and conducted a quantitative research to examine the effectiveness of these six strategies. The findings showed that all six writing feedback strategies are effective for students’ writing improvement, although reformulation
strategy was the most effective one. Therefore, if students can fully utilise the feedback, all kinds of feedback can contribute to their language learning and academic writing.

**Values and Merits of Feedback**

This section includes the discussion about functions and benefits of instructors’ feedback and illustrates how feedback contributes to ESL students’ writing and study.

**Language Learning and Academic Study**

Feedback can be regarded as a powerful tool to support students’ writing development and motivate them to be confident writers in their second language (Agbayahoun, 2016; Cheng & Feyten, 2015; Ene & Upton, 2018). In terms of ESL services in universities, the aim is to prepare students for further academic study in higher education; thus, the feedback in this level aims to foster both the learning-to-write process and the writing-to-learn process (Agbayahoun, 2016; Cheng & Feyten, 2015). It means writing courses and feedback in assignments could contribute both to students’ academic literacy and language acquisition. Most feedback research about ESL writing is in learning-to-write context and focuses on error correction (Cheng, & Feyten, 2015; Ravand & Rasekh, 2011), but for ESL services in universities, teachers might go beyond doing corrective feedback. Especially for students in high-level ESL study, feedback also works for their logical thinking and academic literacy and prepare them for future study in higher education (Ravand & Rasekh, 2011). Therefore, it is crucial for ESL students to fully utilize feedback and uptake the merits of feedback in their study journey.

**Emotional Effects on Students**

Feedback plays an important role as a motivator or supporter of students’ learning persistence (Ravand & Rasekh, 2011). Previous research has examined the emotional
effects of feedback on students’ learning. In order to examine emotion appraisals of constructive criticism, negative, and positive feedback, Fong et al. (2017) collected data from 270 undergraduate students by asking open-ended questions about their feedback experience. The findings revealed that providing some praise or acknowledgment of student ability in feedback may lead to pleasant emotions and motivate students to believe in their capacity to succeed in their academic study. Also, Fasso’s (2013) study in synchronous online classrooms found that students’ learning emotion and motivation could be supported by instructors’ feedback in online classrooms. Furthermore, according to Finkelstein and Fishbach (2012), properly applying constructive or negative feedback can increase learners’ sense that they were making insufficient progress, which also motivates students to make continuous efforts. Moreover, Fong et al. (2017) conducted research to examine emotion appraisals of constructive criticism, negative, and positive feedback. One of the most important findings was that 63% of students experience enjoyment when feedback provides guidance for improvement, and some of them expressed that they feel enjoyment upon receiving constructive criticism because the feedback indicates the feedback giver cared enough about them and their writing. Knowing someone cares about their progress, they feel like they can do better. Therefore, the contribution of effective feedback is not limited to enhance students’ acknowledgment in academics; it also influences students’ emotions and inspires students’ learning engagement (Saeli & Cheng, 2019). Seeing the emotional effects of feedback on students, teachers should put students’ emotions into consideration when giving feedback (Dowden et al., 2013). For example, if students are in their first year of college, they may need more positive words of encouragement in their feedback (Dowden et al., 2013).
**Students’ and Teachers’ Perceptions**

Students’ and instructors’ perceptions on feedback has been explored by some researchers in ESL writing contexts. This section reviewed the insights and perspectives discussed in previous research.

**Students’ Perceptions**

Some research has investigated students’ perceptions about the feedback they received in higher education in the second language settings. Tom et al. (2013) conducted a quantitative study to examine ESL students’ perceptions on the importance of feedback and students’ preferred feedback in their academic writing assignments. Data were collected via a questionnaire from 34 ESL university students, and the findings showed that students see feedback as an important tool to help them with their writing (Tom et al., 2013). Tom et al. also found that the top two forms of feedback students prefer are grammar correction and suggestions on how to improve. Students believe these suggestions in teachers’ comments offer them important guidance for making a better draft. However, students do not like to receive questions or one-word comments in their feedback (Tom et al., 2013). One-word comments such as “revise,” “rewrite,” or “good” make students confused. Similar findings were noted in Ferguson’s (2011) research, which stated that students in higher education prefer personalized feedback with clear guidance for further improvement. These studies took an essential step for teachers to learn from students’ voice and make better adjustments when giving feedback to their students.

Students also shared the same perception in questionnaires that they prefer teachers to correct all the errors in their writing (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Hajian et al.,
According to Rosdiana (2016), students think feedback is the responsibility of teachers, and they expect teachers to correct all their errors. The same result was also shared by Amrhein and Nassaji (2010), and they also mentioned the pedagogical implication that teachers should discuss the use of written feedback with students and give clear instructions about what they expect from students based on the feedback. Students may benefit more from the feedback if they fully understand the feedback and do self-correction for repeating errors (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Rosdiana, 2016). Research in many countries, such as Iran, Malaysia, and the United States showed that students highly believe in their teachers’ feedback and think teachers know best and generate ideas for ideal writing, so they prefer teachers’ feedback more than peer feedback or self-assessment (Best et al., 2015; Ravand & Rasekh, 2011; Saei & Cheng, 2019; Vasu et al., 2016). Therefore, we can see most students highly depend on teachers’ feedback and usually get little self-motivation. They hope teachers can do everything for them and fail to take further thinking or action to explore more in writing. At the same time, we can still realize how important teachers’ feedback is.

**Teachers’ Perceptions**

Research shows that teachers perceive feedback as an effective practice to improve students’ knowledge about the language and accuracy in writing (Agbayahoun, 2016; Pearson, 2018). Teachers believe that writing is a learning reflection that shows students’ weaknesses and strengths, and teachers should help students to deal with their weaknesses by providing written corrective feedback (Atmaca, 2016). However, most teachers hold the opinion that marking all the errors will discourage students from producing written language, so they choose only to mark some major errors (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Atmaca, 2016).
In terms of teachers’ preferred feedback forms, Pearson (2018) conducted a mixed-method study at a private language teaching institution in the United Arab Emirates to investigate how teachers give written feedback while helping learners prepare their writing tasks. Seven teachers who teach writing classes in this institution participated in this study. Besides doing a quantitative analysis of students’ marked essays, the researcher used qualitative interview data to find teachers’ beliefs and perceptions underlining their feedback. He concluded that most teachers believe the most effective techniques are direct correction of errors and prescriptive comments. At the same time, different teachers have different preferences in dealing with various errors and providing feedback, and they adopted idiosyncratic methods based on their own beliefs, experiences, and theory (Pearson, 2018). In this study, it is interesting to learn different philosophies and strategies teachers adopted and see how different teachers treat various types of errors in writing compositions. Although this research fails to examine how teachers should do corrective feedback to help learners with their writing effectively, it gives us insights about teachers’ preferred feedback. It inspires further research to explore better feedback strategies.

Also, other research has found that teachers’ practices and their beliefs were often mismatched (Lee et al., 2017; Rafiei & Salehi, 2016). In Lee et al.’s (2017) study, writing teachers in a Singaporean university were interviewed about their beliefs of feedback and their feedback practice. The results revealed that teachers believed their feedback should meet the needs and capabilities of their students, but contextual constraints, such as course disciplines and program lengths, established tensions between ideal and actual practice (Lee et al., 2017). Moreover, Rafiei and Salehi (2016) found that most teachers
believe they should give indirect feedback, but in students’ marked assignments, most of their feedback is direct. The findings also indicated that most teachers shared their opinion that feedback should deal with students’ language errors, organization errors, and content errors. However, most of their written feedback was to correct students’ language errors, such as grammar, spelling, and vocabulary (Rafiei & Salehi, 2016). Overall, we can see teachers share the same perception regarding the importance of feedback, but they may have different preference in feedback practice. Their practices may not always match with their beliefs.

**Dissatisfaction Among Students and Instructors**

Surveys across the world have shown that both students and teachers in higher education feel dissatisfied with feedback on assignments (Nicol, 2010). Students claimed that most feedback they received is too general and lack of guidance (Rand, 2017), thus they had no idea regarding how to make improvements. Some students even found it challenging to understand some of the feedback, and they found most comments are related to grammar or spelling, which will not be applied to their next assignment (Nicol, 2010; Rafiei & Salehi, 2016). From the teachers’ perspective, they reported that students could not collect or made good use of the feedback they provided, and most students do not act on their feedback (Evans, 2013; Nicol, 2010). Besides, dissatisfaction may also come from the mismatches between students’ expectations and teachers’ beliefs (Li, 2020). For example, most students prefer to receive feedback with all errors corrected, yet teachers believe it is a time-consuming and ineffective issue (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Hajian et al., 2014). Therefore, it is crucial to find ways to address these dissatisfactions and increase the experience of giving and receiving feedback in higher
education. Scholars have argued that the dissatisfactions mostly come from the impoverished dialogue between students and teachers, and they emphasize the importance of two-way communication and the merits of the dialogical approach (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Dowden et al., 2013; Nicol, 2010) According to Laurillard (2001), dialogical approach emphasized the importance of feedback dialogues that are adaptive, discursive, interactive, and reflective. However, discovering ways to enhance the feedback design and generate more dialogical opportunities are still great challenges. The ideal design for feedback might be to create one-on-one meetings with teachers to talk about feedback, but this would be a huge burden for teachers in large classes to deal with each of the students’ writing assignments (Winstone & Carless, 2020).

Gaps in the Research on Writing Feedback

This study was motivated by three gaps in the literature. First, although there is a stream of research working on students’ and teachers’ perceptions, the focus is always on corrective feedback strategies or the style of teachers’ feedback (Kartchava & Nassaji, 2017; Sanavi & Nemati, 2014). Most research does not include their perceptions of engagement during the feedback process. Moreover, most research about students’ and teachers’ perceptions only include the response to predetermined survey questions (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Best et al., 2015). Therefore, there should be opportunities for teachers and students to tell their own stories, and the voice of teachers and students should be heard. Second, studies cited above were mostly done in non-English speaking countries or outside of Canada; thus, results may vary in different contexts. Learning English in an English-speaking country may create more interaction opportunities for students. Lastly, many studies emphasize students’ engagement in the feedback process,
but there are not enough findings regarding how teachers or feedback designs facilitate student engagement with feedback in the ESL context. Students’ positive perceptions of feedback can lead to positive engagement, which effectively improves students’ learning outcome (Saeli & Cheng, 2019). Taken together, these gaps in the literature related to feedback focus, research contexts, and student engagement indicate that it is important to explore students’ and teachers’ perceptions with the aim of increasing the interaction and engagement.

**Summary of the Literature Review**

The concept of feedback in research will build on the new paradigm, which emphasizes student engagement and uptake of feedback through interactions. The literature offers insight into the benefits students receive through feedback in ESL writing academically and linguistically. Although students and instructors in other studies all recognized the merits of feedback, effective feedback was not always delivered successfully. Researchers explored various forms of feedback instructors used in their teaching, but students may fail to make good use of feedback in their future writing. Mismatches between students’ and teachers’ perceptions created barriers for feedback uptake and dissatisfactions in the feedback process. It was implied in the literature that two-way communication and dialogical interactions could enhance the feedback process. It is this implication that provides opportunities for further research towards understanding how students interact and engage with feedback and the barriers to feedback uptake.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study includes questionnaires, a focus group, and semi-structured interviews to explore ELLs’ and instructors’ perceptions regarding feedback in academic writing in the postsecondary context. This study selected one ESL program from a university in Ontario. The aim of learning about students’ and instructors’ perceptions is to enhance multi-interaction and engagement in the feedback process, thus effectively improving international students’ writing skills. Accordingly, this chapter provides detailed information about the research methodology and design, selection of site and participants, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, limitations, credibility, and ethical considerations in the study.

Research Methodology and Design

To effectively answer the research questions and collect rich data, a qualitative research design was selected. According to Plano Clark and Creswell (2015), qualitative research is the type of research that helps researchers to explore individuals’ experiences and perspectives for a specific concept through textual analysis. Plano Clark and Creswell (2015) also emphasize that qualitative data can “reflect participants’ views about the research problem” (p. 286). As I am more interested in participants’ opinions, perceptions, expectations, and practices in their own words (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015), this qualitative design draws on each participants’ experiences and opinions to achieve a better understanding of their expectations and motivations. This research takes a constructivist stance as we believe knowledge is not “something absolute and finite” but constructed through interactions (Harasim, 2017). Therefore, this research focuses on
the meaning taken from students’ views and engagement of the feedback, intending to motivate students’ uptake and action-taking for further writing improvement.

This research includes semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews were used for instructor participants, as the interview design in research is conceptualized as the best way to explore individuals’ private experiences, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes (Brinkmann, 2013). According to Brinkmann (2013), “Fewer interviews that are thoroughly analyzed are preferable to many interviews that are only superficially explored” (p. 12). Thus, the number of interviews is not large because I focus more on the depth of analysis rather than the width of coverage. The focus group and questionnaires are designed for student participants. Feedback is an important topic for university students who are taking courses and writing as a part of their academic lives, so I hoped the design could motivate students to be active in discussions and to provide rich and valuable data. According to Liamputtong (2011), the interactive nature of the focus group can motivate participants’ engagement and help them to clarify their own perceptions. Moreover, focus groups lead to a more dynamic discussion process, which allows researchers to see how participants take part in discussion and share ideas, thus facilitating the social construction of meanings (Liamputtong, 2011). Therefore, the focus group phase is included in the study’s methodology to learn how students perceive the feedback they received and how they act upon their feedback. Students who participate in the focus group were also invited to answer biweekly reflective questionnaires to clarify their opinions with more details further. These two instruments for students were to ensure more insights can be collected and more voice can be heard. More information about the instruments will be illustrated in the following Instrumentation section.
Selection of Site and Participants

In this study, instructors are feedback providers and designers, and students are feedback receivers. Thus, the perspectives from the two roles needed to be investigated. This section will provide information about the site selection and participants’ recruitment process in the research.

Selection of Site

As this research focuses explicitly on studying writing feedback in postsecondary education within ESL contexts, all the participants were selected from an ESL program at a mid-sized Canadian university in Ontario. The ESL program in most universities provides language training and academic preparation for students’ undergraduate and graduate studies. However, the variation in structure may lead to different feedback processes or practical experiences (DeLuca & Lam, 2014). That is why participants are selected from only one faculty in one university. The ESL program selected is an intensive program with 25 hours of courses per week. Currently, there are three courses provided in the program: reading and writing, listening and speaking, and the project course. The selected faculty offers five levels of training, and completion of this program’s highest level (level 5) meets the English language requirement for undergraduate and graduate programs of this university. By selecting the participants in one program, the researcher can investigate coursework experiences of instructors and students who are talking about the same kinds of course assignments and activities, which makes the feedback analysis more connected and accurate. Moreover, the associate director and the manager in this ESL program were approachable and supportive; thus, the accessibility of the ESL services program made this site an accessible and convenient location to conduct this feedback research.
Recruitment of Participants

Instructor participants and student participants were both recruited in the same ESL program within the university site. Instructor participants were selected using convenience sampling (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015). I approached the ESL faculty to send a letter of invitation via email to potential instructor participants in the selected program. The invitation letter described the purpose of this research project, the interview process involved, the voluntary nature of the study, and invited participants to contact me directly if they were interested in participation. This invitation letter was sent to potential participants two times in early April 2020. Two female instructor participants, Keyla and Diana, responded to the letter of invitation and showed their availability and interest to participate in this research project. Both instructors have their TESOL certificates and they have more than 20 years of cross-cultural English teaching experience in different countries. They both have worked in the selected program for more than 13 years, so they are also very familiar with the ESL program. Thus, they are considered highly qualified participants for participation in this research. I distributed the informed consent forms to them and clearly explained the potential benefits of this research, the confidentiality of their information, and the rights to withdraw. Also, I asked them to think about my request and send me emails if they had any questions, or they want to schedule an interview with me. A week later, they both sent me emails to set up an interview time without any concerns.

Student participants were selected using purposive sampling (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015). Plano Clark and Creswell (2015) define purposive sampling as a sampling strategy to select the most appropriate participants on purpose. Accordingly, I
chose students participants who met the following criteria: (a) students must study in high-level classes (level 4 or level 5) in the program, (b) students who have high motivation to improve their writing skills, and (c) students who have received feedback from instructors and care about their feedback. Student invitation emails were also sent by the ESL faculty to high-level classes, and student candidates who responded and met the criteria were invited to participate in this research. The invitation emails were sent out to potential student candidates three times, and four student participants were finally selected using the criteria. The demographic information of student participants is presented in Table 1. To maintain confidentiality for participants, the student names in the table are all pseudonyms.

**Instrumentation**

Three instruments were designed to facilitate the data collection of instructors’ and students’ perceptions of the feedback in ESL writing. Semi-structured interviews were used for instructor participants, and a focus group and reflective questionnaires were designed for student participants who were in high-level ESL classes. The instruments of data collection and their usage will be discussed in the following sections.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

The interview protocol for instructor participants (see Appendix A) was developed using a semi-structured, qualitative approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Ten key questions were included to explore instructor participants’ experiences of giving feedback and their perceptions of the effectiveness. Participants were also asked to share their requests or expectations for students’ engagement after they sent the feedback, and they were also asked whether they were satisfied with students’ uptake or engagement.
Table 1

Demographic Information of Four Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>ESL level of study</th>
<th>Female/male</th>
<th>Future study (prepared)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dina</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4&amp;5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rena</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4&amp;5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. High-level students were selected purposefully.
This semi-structured approach allowed me to follow up with additional questions when I needed further clarification and probe for further detail when participants offered unexpected responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To ensure the language used reflects instructor participants’ own perceptions, I also adjusted the order and the precise wording of questions according to each interview context. All the questions designed for the interview were related to instructors’ perceptions of the feedback strategies and feedback effectiveness to improve students’ writing skills. Questions 5, 6, and 7 specifically focused on the interaction and the engagement the feedback process brings, which provided insights to better analyze instructors’ perception about students’ engagement and actions.

A Focus Group

Two forms of instruments were used for student participants in this study. The first instrument used for student participants is a focus group protocol, which includes 11 guiding questions (see Appendix B) to explore students’ insight and preference for the feedback they received in ESL writing courses. Questions for the focus group were developed in alignment with research questions after a literature review of feedback in ESL contexts and higher education. Some adjustments were made for the focus group questions for students after the instructors’ interviews in order to collect more relevant and high-quality data. All of the guiding questions are open-ended questions to encourage discussion and self-disclosure among student participants. These questions also had a strong connection with the themes I explored in instructors’ interviews so that I could compare the perceptions from two parties. According to Plano Clark and Creswell (2015), the interaction in focus groups is more likely to yield the best information when
interviewees are similar. As student participants were all studying in the same program and experience the same learning environment, the focus group interview was an efficient approach to collecting valuable data regarding their perceptions of feedback.

**Questionnaires**

The second instrument was a biweekly questionnaire (Appendix C) that posted reflective questions via email every 2 weeks during the spring semester. Using emails to obtain in-depth qualitative data allows research participation at participants’ convenience in terms of place and time (Chen & Hinton, 1999). According to Boshier (1990), using emails to collect qualitative data allows a democratization of exchange. This indicated that respondents have time to consider their replies or ask questions, so that they might not be directed in certain directions immediately compared with face-to-face interviews (Pattison et al., 2015). The email method also minimizes the discomfort that face-to-face contact might caused, encourages honesty and openness, and offers participants time to reflect on their experiences (Pattison et al., 2015). The questions in this instrument were designed to prompt students to reflect on the feedback they received throughout the 2 weeks. The questions also provided them an opportunity to express their opinions or evaluations about instructors’ feedback, and at the same time, reflect on their actions or engagement. They commented on not only the effectiveness and usefulness of the feedback but also on their writing performance. Responses on the email questionnaires included students’ marked essays, their deadlines for each draft, and their perceptions of feedback were another source of the field texts collected from students, and such kind of data not only helped to clarify some opinions in the focus group interview, but also allows a better understanding of the setting of the selected program.
Data Collection

Multiple sources of data were collected through qualitative approaches. The semi-structured interviews with instructor participants were conducted first in late April. I chose to start with instructors’ interviews because instructor participants are obviously professional feedback providers. Based on the data collected from them, I could direct the students’ focus group meeting with much clearer themes. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, both interviews were conducted online via Zoom to ensure the safety of participants and researchers. Social constructivist theory assumes that knowledge and truth are social and constructed through interaction (Harasim, 2017). Therefore, the interviews were dialogic and interactive in nature and were audio-recorded for transcription and data analysis. Besides using Zoom’s automatic audio recording, I also used another electronic audio device to record the interviews in case any devices failed to record some data. The audio recording was fully transcribed, sent to participants for feedback and clarification via email. Transcriptions along with those comments became the data for further analysis of instructors’ perceptions regarding the writing feedback.

In May, after I collected all informed consents from the four student participants, a focus group meeting was held in a mutually agreeable time. The focus group meeting was conducted online via Zoom, and student participants were asked to attend in a private online room so that nobody else could hear their discussion. The guiding questions I used for the focus group (see Appendix B) were used to lead their discussions, but I also adjusted the order of questions according to where the conversation went. The four student participants all were actively involved in the discussion, and I needed to remind them to speak in order sometimes when they spoke at the same time. The whole focus
group was conducted in their native language (Chinese), which allowed them to express their feelings comfortably and clearly. I also used Zoom’s automatic audio recording and another electronic audio device to record the whole focus group meeting. One audio recording was fully transcribed in Chinese, and I translated it into English for further analysis of students’ perceptions and experiences, in terms of the feedback they received from their instructors.

Right after the focus group meeting, I started to send emails to student participants once every 2 weeks. The reflective questions for different participants were a little bit different in wording according to their answers in their previous email, but the main ideas were the same (Appendix C), and the goal was to offer students opportunities to reflect on the feedback they received in these two weeks and express their preferences. They could make their own choices to reflect on the feedback they liked or the feedback that did not work for them. They could also share their opinions on the assignment and feedback schedule. Biweekly responses were collected through emails from each student participant, so the data obtained at this stage were in written format. In the meantime, whenever I needed their clarification for any specific questions, I also contacted them through emails. I created an electronic folder for each student participant with their pseudonym to file their responses for further analysis.

**Data Analysis**

According to Plano Clark and Creswell (2015), analyzing qualitative data involves the steps of “preparing the data, exploring the data, coding the data, developing description and themes, and validating the findings” (p. 354). This research followed the steps above and started from preparing the data. I was responsible for both gathering the
data and transcribing the data. Interviews and the focus group meeting were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Verbatim means researchers type not only all spoken works but also unspoken events, such as laughter and pause, during the transcription process (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015). The transcriptions were double-checked by me for accuracy, and all the data, including observational notes, were included in my analysis. After this, I read through all the data to get a general sense of the data, and I realized some data need for further clarification. So, then I sent the transcription to participants for specific clarification.

After all sources of data were well-prepared, I started to code the data manually by following the procedure of identifying segments of text, highlighting them, and assigning a code that describes the meaning of the text segment (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Two types of coding were used in this research: open coding and axial coding. Open coding means “summarising the content of short sections of text (each “unit” of meaning) in a few words, on a line-by-line basis” (Hancock et al., 2007, p. 27). After this, I employed axial coding approach, which is to group a large number of codes into broader categories and sort them to identify emerging patterns and themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I also wrote memos and reflections in the margins to record the big ideas I got during the coding process. Instructors’ and students’ perceptions, experiences, preferences, and languages were all interpreted in the coding stage, which helps me to further develop themes from the data.

In addition, during the process of collecting questionnaire data, conducting each interview, and doing the transcription of data, I kept a research diary to capture my feelings, expressions, thoughts, and questions. This research diary made a significant
contribution to my analysis as it effectively helps me to connect my pieces of thinking, build up my understandings, and generate new ideas. The last step about validating the findings and establishing credibility is described in the following section.

**Establishing Credibility**

A qualitative design was selected for this study because it is the most appropriate design for exploring individual experiences and perceptions (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015). However, the credibility of qualitative research has sometimes been questioned as qualitative data can be seen subjective and every setting is unique. Data collected were limited to what participants chose to share (Cope, 2014). Therefore, to provide research credibility, I employed several techniques in this research. First, multiple methods and multiple sources of data were used to seek comment answers from students or confirm similar results. For instance, students’ perceptions regarding teachers’ feedback were first collected through reflective questionnaires, and the themes that emerged in the questionnaires were used to guide the focus group interviews. I also designed the questions about a similar topic in different ways and observed the dynamics of ideas through the focus group interview, which also helped to build the qualitative reliability for this research.

Besides, peer debriefing, which engages the professionals in analytic discussions and external evaluation of the research, is also one of the essential credibility techniques in qualitative research (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018). Thus, to enhance the quality of the data and the analysis, the feedback was sought from my faculty supervisor during the whole process of this research. This peer debriefing process was to make sure ideas, analysis, and data interpretation in this research would go beyond my participants and me.
Most importantly, it is also important for researchers to be aware of the influence of their background and beliefs on the research, which is conceptualized as reflexivity (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018). As a researcher, I understand my role in this research to consider participants’ responses, and it might be hard to avoid my own interpretations during the data analysis. My previous experience as a writing instructor in my home country allows me to have a better understanding of students’ challenges in English writing and their needs before they study abroad. I do believe teachers’ feedback plays an important role in students’ writing improvement and their emotions in learning. I also realized that most students expect to receive instructors’ feedback, and students usually have less motivation to practice writing if they have nobody to revise their draft or give suggestions.

My experience as a master’s student struggling in writing research papers in my second language allows me to resonate with the challenges my students experienced. I also got a much clearer perception of how different styles of professors’ feedback influence me and my writing. I understand my bias as a practitioner in writing teaching and learning. I believe instructors’ feedback has a positive impact on students’ writing skills, and I assume that there should be standards for the feedback providing process to generate favourable feedback experiences. Also, I might have my personal preference regarding the written feedback. To minimize my interpretive bias, I carefully documented the data collected from every step of the research design (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Rather than exploring or providing the generalizations, I specifically focus on presenting insights of students and instructors in terms of the feedback process.
Limitations

Qualitative research that relies on participants’ self-reporting in one specific program may raise several concerns and uncover some shortcomings. Firstly, the sample size in this study is relatively small. This research was designed with small sample sizes because it aims to focus on the depth of exploration instead of the width. However, the perceptions from a small group may not convincingly represent other ESL students’ or instructors’ opinions. Secondly, this research was conducted only in one specific program in one university. The results might not apply to all ESL programs in other universities, especially those with completely different settings. Moreover, students in different classes may experience different instructors with various teaching styles, but I have tried to lower this risk by finding a similar opinion shared by them. The last concern might be the online setting of the focus group. Students may not be able to collaborate as well as face-to-face meetings, and ideas may flow better if they can share a comfortable meeting environment. However, I motivated students to share their ideas by allowing them to speak their native language so that they might express their opinions more clearly and comfortably. Also, because I was an outsider of the program without any relationships with their instructors or program supervisor, student participants had relatively low pressure to share their opinions or real feelings with me. I am limited to interpretations of what they chose to share.

Ethical Considerations

This research project received ethics clearance and approval from the Brock University Research Ethics Board (File # 19-272-COLLIER) in early April before participant recruitment began. Before applying for ethics, I also contacted and consulted the associate director and the manager of the selected ESL program. They both gave
positive feedback about this research and offered great support to conduct the research with their instructors and students. Because of the unusual COVID-19 context, all types of data were collected through an online format to keep all participants and the researcher’s safety. Also, at each stage of data collection, participants were reminded of their volunteer status and their option to withdraw.

To maintain confidentiality for all research participants, I did not use their real names in any of my transcription, analysis, or writing. Students were also informed that their responses should not include anything that would identify the instructor responsible for the written feedback. All data were stored by the researcher in a secured location to which other people had restricted access, and the master list linking pseudonyms with identifiers were stored separately from the data. As the focus group and interviews were all conducted online through Zoom, participants stayed in a private space to participate in the video conferences, and the audio recordings were destroyed once they were fully transcribed. Student participants were asked to maintain confidentiality for other student participants’ participation and what was discussed in the focus group with others.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter introduced the methodology used to collect qualitative data in this research, which includes semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and email questionnaires. This chapter also provided detailed information about selection of site and participants, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, limitations, credibility, and ethical considerations in the study. Although it is a small-scale qualitative study, it offers valuable insights of ESL feedback on writing by in-depth analysis of students’ and instructors’ perception. The next chapter will provide full description of the data collected by this research design.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This study was designed to explore teaching pedagogies related to feedback on ESL writing and how feedback helped ESL students improve their writing skills at the post-secondary level. To obtain insights into feedback, data in this qualitative research were collected using one-on-one interviews, a focus group, and email questionnaires. Responses and perceptions of both instructor participants and student participants are presented in this chapter. By listening to participants’ experience, challenges, needs, and perceptions, this chapter also offers discussions about how understanding perceptions of feedback providers and receivers enhance the feedback process in writing. The primary research questions to guide this study were:

- What kinds of feedback on writing do university students in ESL programs find most helpful?
- What kinds of feedback on writing do instructors believe is most effective for ESL university students?
- What do students in ESL writing courses do with feedback from instructors?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, two ESL instructors and four ESL students participated in this research and shared their experiences and perceptions. The research findings are reported by themes emerged from the analysis of all qualitative data collected through questionnaires, interviews, and the focus group. I will illustrate the themes and sub-themes found in this research in the following section.

Overview of Themes

The qualitative data collected in this research were analyzed using axial coding, in which the researcher makes connections after open coding and group codes into bigger
categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As mentioned in Chapter 3, interviews with instructors were conducted before students’ focus groups and questionnaires, so data collected from students enriched the themes of instructors’ interviews and offered more insights into feedback in ESL writing. Data collected from instructors and students are presented together by themes instead of separated analysis in order to compare the perceptions of feedback providers and feedback recipients. Table 2 provides the results of the analysis with five categories, including three major themes, and two additional themes arose from the data gathered in this research. Five major categories are listed in the left column, while subthemes and concepts associated with the major theme are listed in the right column.

Major themes, including feedback experience and perceptions on the effectiveness of feedback, are analyzed and explained in response to the first and the second research questions. Sub-themes such as types of feedback, feedback challenges, and effective feedback demonstrate the kinds of feedback students received, the effective feedback strategies from the instructors’ perspective, and feedback that students consider helpful. The theme of student engagement and interactions answers the third research question. Actions students took after receiving instructors’ feedback and factors that influenced student engagement are discussed in this section. All three major themes help to answer how understanding providers’ and recipients’ perceptions enhance the feedback process. There are two additional themes from the data that are not directly in response to any research questions. However, these two themes contribute to the overall understanding of feedback process and connect to the theoretical framework of this study in significant ways. Therefore, they deserve attention and analysis in this research.
### Table 2

*Themes Found in the Research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes &amp; associated concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student writing challenges*</td>
<td>Instructors’ perception; student reflections on writing; the purpose of writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback experience</td>
<td>Types of feedback; peer editing, feedback process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions on the effectiveness of feedback</td>
<td>Effective feedback; oral feedback; rubrics; unhelpful feedback; perceptions on students’ need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student engagement and interactions with feedback</td>
<td>Student engagement with instructors’ feedback (B/A/C); factors influencing student engagement; codes; gradings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program setting and culture*</td>
<td>Course settings; assignment schedule; workshop opportunities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Denotes additional themes.
The theme of student writing challenges will be presented first to set the foundation for the feedback analysis, and the theme of program settings and culture will be illustrated lastly, in order to reveal instructors' and students' perception of the program culture. All major themes, subthemes, and associated concepts will be discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

**Student Writing Challenges**

Before going into the feedback analysis, it is necessary to learn about the writing problems and writing challenges students meet in their academic writing as effective feedback mostly deals with the writing problems and helps students to improve their writing skills. Students’ reflection on their writing and instructors’ reflection on their students’ writing problems helps to illustrate whether they work towards the same goal. At the same time, more impressions from the participants can be gathered and used.

**Instructors’ Perception of Students’ Writing Problems**

Interviews of instructors were conducted at the very beginning stage of this research. The two instructor participants selected in the ESL program both have experience in teaching various levels of classes with different English proficiency, and they teach different levels in different semesters. When I conducted one-on-one interviews with them, Diana was teaching level-5 students, and Keyla was teaching level 3. When asked about the common problems their students experience in writing, they both said that it depends on the background and level of students. However, no matter what level they teach, they both shared students’ problems with writing grammatically in English. Diana answered, “It depends on the level, and it depends what they are writing, but I say overall, the number one problem is grammar, because students try to write how
they speak, and you cannot write how you speak.” Keyla also talked about grammar and said, “Another problem is related to grammar, syntax, based on their first language. They may have different word orders, or different ways of expressing verb tenses, different order of adjectives.” Thus, grammar-related problems must leave a deep impression on instructors so that they can provide the answer without hesitation.

Diana and Keyla also talk about students’ problems with spelling and vocabulary, and they mentioned that students often write with casual language. Most of the problems they mentioned in students’ writing were related to language errors, and they did not mention anything related to organizations and ideas at this time. When I asked probing questions about content and organization, instructors both shared that these problems are still experienced by their students, and they believe it is useful to help high-level students with these. Thus, compared with form-focused problems, content-based problems are obviously not the top problems in their mind.

**Student Reflections on Writing**

Student participants shared their understanding about the purpose of writing in the focus group. They also described their feedback experience in the selected ESL program. Their reflections regarding their writing experience and challenge were presented in this section.

**The Purpose of Writing**

In the focus group meeting, all student participants shared their perceptions regarding the purpose of writing. Rena said, “I practice writing because it requires writing skills in almost all the job positions, such as writing reports or emails.” Kimberly stated that writing is to express ideas by saying that “writing is to use the appropriate
grammar and vocabulary to express your ideas which make sense to others.” Dina extended Kimberly’s idea and stated that “sometimes we may have different ideas with others, so we can make arguments to persuade others.”

As mentioned in the literature review, second language writing, learning-to-write, and writing-to-learn are two perspectives discussed by researchers (Cheng & Feyten, 2015). Three student participants all treated writing as a learning-to-write process. The main purpose of writing is to be able to “use language to express themselves” and be able to communicate with others (Cheng & Feyten, 2015, p. 7). Only Kelly’s perception, to some extent, falls into a writing-to-learn perspective, because she believed the benefits of writing went beyond acquiring the second language skills. Kelly explained her perception about writing as a process to cultivate logical thinking by stating, “through writing, we learn to organize our ideas in a logical order.” As introduced in Chapter 3, Kelly is the oldest participant, who is preparing to study in graduate school. Her thinking seems to have gone beyond learning-to-write to writing-to-learn.

**Writing Challenges**

The four students in the focus group were encouraged to talk about the challenges they have in writing. Kelly spoke first when asked to share the challenges, and she emphasized her challenge in terms of cohesion and coherence. She said,

I feel that all the points I wrote stand independently, and they are incoherent. It is not as good as the sample article we read, so this is what I think, that I have not improved much after practicing all these years. So, it is difficult for me.

Right after Kelly’s answer, Dina said, “but the problem I encountered was grammar.” Dina shared how difficult to translate Chinese to English with the correct grammar. I saw
Rena was showing her agreement by nodding, so I turned to Rena. Rena added that vocabulary is also one of her problems. Kimberly shared the challenge she met last in the group, and she described it as “not authentic.” Although all four student participants were selected purposefully from high levels, we can see they still share more linguistic problems in their writing. Although students shared different challenges they have met, all the challenges they mentioned has also been covered in instructors’ interview, and both instructors and students put a significant focus on the linguistic challenges instead of academic challenges. All participants mentioned the importance of content and organization related feedback in ESL high-level study, but their responses and the field texts collected from their paper showed strong focuses on form-focused feedback. Learning their perceptions regarding writing challenges and feedback challenges helps to illustrate the goals of feedback and how feedback helps students to address their problems and concerns.

**Feedback Experience**

It is important to solicit feedback experience from feedback providers (instructors) and feedback receivers (students) before the analysis of effective feedback strategies, as the effective feedback students and instructors perceived should logically come from the feedback they received or provided. This section is largely descriptive and summarizes the types of feedback and feedback processes described in students’ and instructors’ responses. Although student participants and instructor participants were selected from the same ESL program, their feedback experience was not all the same. In this section, I will illustrate the types of feedback students received and the general feedback process based on participants’ responses.
Types of Feedback

Based on the data collected from instructor participants and student participants, there are two overall feedback sources for students in the selected ESL program: feedback from instructors and feedback from peers. Student participants and instructor participants all confirmed that there is no tutor for this intensive ESL program. Peer feedback is always provided in class in most cases, according to student participants’ responses, and instructors provide both written feedback and oral feedback to students after peer editing. As students shared some pieces of their assignment with instructors’ feedback via email questionnaires to show the useful feedback in their perception, I observed that Dina’s assignment was printed out, and her feedback was in handwriting. However, the feedback samples the other three participants provided were electronic versions in word documents. Moreover, two instructor participants mentioned their use of rubrics to give feedback and marks in the interviews, and four student participants confirmed they all received rubrics along with their feedback. Therefore, we can have a general understanding of what kind of feedback students received. More detailed categories and perceptions associated with different types of feedback will be analyzed in the rest of this chapter.

Feedback Process

As the instructors’ data were collected first in this research, the basic view about the feedback process was gained through instructors’ interviews. Diana and Keyla both shared that they only mark the final draft of students’ writing. Keyla gave a very detailed explanation:

We do not mark the first draft, however, on the final draft, there is a little box that
we check off as we mark, and students are awarded marks for submitting the first draft. So, essentially the first draft is not marked; however, when we mark the final draft, we have to take a look and see if the first draft was submitted. If it wasn’t submitted, they would lose a few marks because of that, but the first draft is not marked. (Instructor participant, Keyla, interview)

According to her explanation, formal written feedback and marks are always provided to students after submitting their final drafts. Keyla and Diana also shared that students can meet them to talk about their feedback if they have any questions, so oral feedback usually happened after the written feedback.

To gain more information about how instructors help students with their first draft, students were asked to share their feedback experience in the focus group. Rena shared her experience first and stated,

When I was at level 4, it was … uh … um. … First, we were put into groups in classes, and our group members helped each other to revise our first draft and gave feedback to each other. And then … uh … um …, after we made corrections for each other, we would revise our own paper again according to the feedback we got from our classmates, and then we formally submitted the final version. We will get feedback from instructors only for our final drafts. (Student participant, Rena, focus group)

Dina confirmed she has the same experience; right after hearing Rena’s answer, she said, “I experienced the same feedback process, basically all the classmates did peer editing first, and then our instructor corrected our errors and gave us feedback lastly, just like this” (Student participant, Dina, focus group). Basically, from Dina and Rena’s
experiences, there were a total of two drafts for each assignment, first draft, and final draft. Instructors did not provide feedback for their first draft, so they only received feedback from instructors for the final draft they submitted. Kelly had almost the same experience, but she said she only got feedback for her final draft from instructors sometimes at level five. Rena resonated with Kelly and confirmed that sometimes there was no peer feedback in level 5.

Of all experience shared, Kimberly’s experience is unique. Kimberly said she only got feedback from her instructor, but the process was different. She explained,

Our instructor always gives us a rubric before we write. She usually asks us to write the outline first in the class, and then, um, she will help us to review the outline and give oral feedback in class and ask us to write the whole paper after class. We will submit our paper before the deadline, and she will mark our paper and give us feedback again. (Student participant, Kimberly, focus group)

Kimberly clarified that she only wrote an outline and a final draft, and there was no draft one or draft two. Kimberly reflected positively on the oral feedback of her outline from her instructor in class, because the process helped her to be more confident when writing her final draft. She mentioned how this kind of feedback process worked for her again when we talked about effective feedback, which reconfirmed her perceptions and preference about the in-class dialogue with her instructor.

From the data above, it seems that different instructors may have different strategies for providing feedback, although they may share some feedback strategies. Only Dina in the focus group shared a little about oral feedback before asked about oral feedback. Dina described her experience: “After we get the written feedback from our
instructor, our instructor will have office hours. And then, if we want to clarify any feedback in detail, our instructor will also help us with it” (Student participant, Dina, focus group). Dina’s answer reminded other student participants in the focus group, and they all said there are office hours for them. However, they seldom choose to make an appointment, as it is optional. The feedback process from participants’ response are organized into a flow chart in Figure 2. This flow chart illustrates the feedback process student participants experienced in the selected program, which helps with the understanding and analysis of participants’ perception in this chapter.

**Perceptions on the Effectiveness of Feedback**

In this research, student and instructor participants were invited to share what kind of feedback they perceived as effective feedback. Student participants also shared what they expect from instructors’ feedback and the feedback that did not work for them. This section will present the data related to participants’ perception on the effectiveness of various types of feedback.

**Effective Feedback**

Data related to the perceptions on the effective feedback were presented first in this section. As instructors’ interviews was conducted first, their responses were illustrated first.

**Instructors’ Perception of Effective Feedback**

Two instructor participants were interviewed separately, but they shared the same opinion regarding the most effective feedback strategy, oral feedback. From their comments, oral feedback usually happens after instructors’ written feedback, and it is to make sure feedback is understood.
Figure 2

*Feedback Process of One Writing Assignment in the Selected ESL Program*
Keyla explained why she thought oral feedback is the most effective feedback, commenting that

of course, oral feedback. If you can talk with them, that is the most helpful. You can do a lot of writing, you can write a lot in their paper, in their first draft, but often, they might … maybe not understand, maybe your writing is not clear. … But if you can talk to people face to face, I guess it even could be online these days, that could be the most effective feedback. (Instructor participant, Keyla, interview)

Keyla gave this answer without any hesitation and she also mentioned some barriers to written feedback. Diana also reinforced this idea by sharing her viewpoint that “very often I will meet with them one-on-one and force them to listen to me.” From her words, it seems that students were not actively seeking meetings with instructors in Diana’s experience, but Diana believed meeting in person is the most effective way to giving feedback. Besides oral feedback, Diana also shared another point in terms of the effective feedback from her perspective, she said, “The feedback has always to be what I have taught; I am not marking on something they learned somewhere else. I only mark what I teach” (Instructor participant, Diana, interview).

According to her comments, Diana used focused feedback and she believed focused feedback is one of the most effective feedback strategies. As mentioned in the literature review, focused feedback is one of the written corrective feedback strategies. In focused feedback, instructors only focus on what they taught and ignore other errors (Ellis, 2009). Such kind of feedback can increase the possibility of making sense to students as they just learned the associated knowledge or concepts in classes.
Students’ Perception of Effective Feedback

It seems that students interacted most with the formal feedback from their instructor, which is their written feedback. For example, in the focus group, Dina, the student participant, commented that corrections for grammar errors were effective feedback for her students. Kimberly, the student participant, mentioned that comments with explanations worked for her. She wanted to know why this sentence is good or why this sentence needs to be deleted. Therefore, most time, students considered written feedback with corrections, comments, and a grade as the only source of feedback. They did not talk much about oral feedback in the focus group until I mentioned oral feedback and asked questions about it.

To take a closer look at students’ interaction with their written feedback and have a better understanding about their perceptions, graded essays were collected as field texts via email questionnaires (see Appendix C). Dina shared a piece of writing with her instructors’ feedback (Figure 3), and she commented, “Blue feedback is helpful for me because it pointed out where I am wrong and how to change it” (Dina, email questionnaires). The blue feedback is a comment from her instructor which stated, “Not APA style, citation at end.” According to Leng (2014), this is directive feedback to provide the receiver with instructions to take some actions. Dina’s instructor did not correct her errors but gave a message to guide her with further revision. Moreover, this feedback focuses on academic study instead of linguistic study, which sets up foundation for her undergraduate study in the future. Dina reflected positively on this feedback compared with other ones as it contributed most to her writing improvement.
Figure 3

Sample Feedback: Student Participant—Dina

With the popularization and improvement of the technology of the computer, which has laid a solid foundation for the prosperity of business in computer games in recent years. Since computer game has dominated the life of many people, especially the young, what is not only harmful to health but also is the cause for their mental stress.

Indulgence in computer games can lead to the deterioration of children’s physical health. Especially for eyes. For example, the article “Computer Vision Syndrome: Implications for the Occupational Health Nurse,” the author (Lurati, 2018, p. 56-60) makes an effect through an example. H.Q is a 54-year-old woman who engages in computer programmer for the past 30 years, needs to sit before computer during her 8-hour shift and also uses the computer at home for leisure.
Except for Dina, the other three student participants all shared their pieces of writing in an electronic version, which means their instructors tracked changes in word documents and helped them with the revision. Based on their drafts and the preferred feedback, most of the feedback that Rena and Kelly’s received were direct feedback, so they could directly see the correct forms or words provided by their instructors. They both considered such feedback as their preferred feedback and explained that having the correct sentences helped them write better in their next assignment. Moreover, most of the feedback in their pieces of writing were grammatical. Rena and Kelly also shared what they usually do after receiving feedback, and they both said they would read instructors’ feedback and try to avoid the same mistake in their next assignment. In this situation, Kelly and Rena’s engagement with feedback was restricted to reading and reviewing the feedback message, and they did not revise the pieces they had already written.

Kimberly’s response was similar to Dina’s in terms of the most helpful feedback. Kimberly commented,

I think good feedback should be specific and point out exactly what is good or needs to be improved and provide suggestions on how to improve it. An example is shown as below in the screenshot, from where you can see the instructor not only pointed out what was wrong but also provided me with suggestions on how to make changes. (Student participant, Kimberly, questionnaire)

Figure 4 shows Kimberly’s feedback sample in her response. Her instructor’s comments gave clear suggestions and guidance for her mistakes, but there were no alternatives provided in her feedback. Kimberly had to figure out the revision by herself to produce a better draft.
**Figure 4**

*Sample Feedback: Student Participant—Kimberly*

### Benefits of Shopping Online

The internet has been changing our lives from varied aspects including the shopping style. Instead of going to physical stores to choose what you want, nowadays you can also sit at home and shop online. It has become fashionable because of its high efficiency, considerate service and financial benefits to customers.
Kimberly is a student who seemed to actively devote time to her feedback. She was always not satisfied with knowing the correct answers without learning the reasons. She mentioned five times in the focus group that she needed feedback to “explain why” it was good or why it was wrong. She spoke highly of the focused feedback because she can easily understand and link it to what she learned in class.

In addition, student participants all stated that praise in feedback was essential to them. They expected praise even though comments of praise did not offer them any new knowledge or guide them to revise. They felt motivated when the instructor praised their good points or excellent sentence structure, and they felt happy that their hard work had paid off with instructors’ praise. Instructor participant Diana also mentioned that students need praise. She said, “feedback should always have an element of positive.” She also mentioned, “you would tell the student what they did wrong, but you started with something positive, and you will finish it with something positive” (Instructor participant, Diana, focus group). Although praise might contribute little to students’ behaviour engagement, it largely influences students’ affective engagement. Students’ positive emotional responses and attitudinal reactions can keep them motivated to produce a better draft.

**Feedback Focus for High Proficiency Students**

Because participants were high proficiency ESL student participants, instructor participants were asked how useful to give feedback on various types of errors for high-level students. Both instructor participants believed that feedback on the organization of writing was the most useful. They stated that feedback for grammar was useful for low-level students, but for high-level students, “organization is the key” (Instructor participant,
Diana, focus group). Keyla and Diana also expressed their expectations for high-level students by saying, “you expect their grammar already to be high-level” and “hopefully, their grammar structure has been taken care of” (Instructor participants). Both instructor participants expected high proficiency students to keep a high standard on grammar and emphasized the importance of feedback on writing organization for them.

Student participants shared different opinions regarding the usefulness of different error corrections. Rena started pointing out that organizational errors were most useful for her and brought her long-term benefits, as she could apply the way of organizing one writing assignment to the next one. In contrast, Dina said feedback on grammar worked best for her because she hoped her sentences would make sense for native speakers. In contrast, Kimberly explained that she did not find grammar-related feedback helpful because she paid more attention to the flow of the article. Kelly also commented that feedback on content and organization was the most useful because she instructors indicated that she “got repetitive errors for grammar and did not know how to use a word” even though she had received this kind of feedback on similar errors in her last assignment. Student participants shared different perceptions on the focus of feedback in terms of treating different types of errors. Different students had different needs, although they all studied in high-level classes. Also, it is important to note that saying organization feedback is most useful does not mean students had no problems in grammar or vocabulary. Therefore, there was no one response to the question of what gives the most useful feedback for high-level students.

Three of four student participants shared that the feedback they received from instructors mostly focused on grammar or vocabulary. The feedback pieces shared by
students also showed more grammar-related feedback than feedback on content or organization. Therefore, although instructors said organization related feedback was important, it seems that they give less feedback on organization and content. Balancing the feedback on forms, contents, and organization was implied at this point. Rather than heavily focusing on grammar errors, instructors need to provide feedback on students’ ideas, logics and organizations. It might not be easy to give written feedback on the organization if many contents need to be added or sentences/paragraphs/sections need to be reorganized, so oral feedback and interactions might be more useful in these instances. Furthermore, different students might have different needs, so feedback focus may vary when provided to different students.

**Rubrics**

Many researchers have studied the benefits of rubrics in assessing university students’ writing skills and recognized the instructional and evaluative functions of rubrics (Mahmoudi & Bugra, 2020). According to Andrade (2000), rubrics can support learning because they provide students with feedback about their weaknesses and strengths, making teachers’ expectations clear to them. As in Andrade’s findings, student participants and instructor participants selected for this study shared the view that rubrics are beneficial when receiving feedback. For example, Rena commented, “Rubrics are really important to me because I can clearly know which part I need to practice more in the future” (Student participant, Rena, questionnaires). Acknowledging their writing needs helps students have a clear direction or goal in learning, and they reflected positively on this feedback. Kelly also reflected on her favourable experience: “my instructor was nice, and very detailed feedback will show in the rubric.” Instructor
participants also stated that they liked using rubrics. Diana, the instructor, also shared her teaching experience by stating, “Rubrics have to be clear and state exactly what the teacher is looking for in the paper. … I let my students see the rubric at the beginning of the writing process, so they know what they are getting marked on.” Therefore, rubrics were considered as effective feedback from both from the students’ perspective and instructors’ perspective.

Sample rubrics were collected in this research through email questionnaires to students. Figure 5 is one of samples. Two features common in the rubrics can be found in most of collected rubrics, the list of criteria and the degrees of achievement (Andrade, 2000). The degrees of quality were almost the same for each assignment, but the list of criteria for each assignment was different. There was different focus on the evaluation criteria regarding grammar structure, vocabulary, and evidence. For example, in Figure 5, the evaluation of grammar structure focuses on the noun clause, but in another assignment, it may focus on subject-verb agreement. Different criteria indicate that students need to read or engage with the specific rubric whenever they work on a new writing assignment or receive a new feedback rubric. Therefore, using rubrics supports students to internalize these standards and understand what their grades mean (Winstone, & Carless, 2020).

Student participants and instructor participants all recognized the benefits of using rubric feedback and treated it as an effective feedback strategy. However, some students and instructors also mentioned that only using rubrics is not enough for students’ feedback uptake. Keyla, the instructor, stated that “we have marking rubrics, but I think students want more than that.”
Figure 5

Sample Grading Rubric for Students’ Writing Assignment (Email Questionnaire)

**Unit Assignment 1: Argumentative essay**

17-20 points = Writing was very successful

13-16 points = Writing was moderately successful

9-12 points = Writing was only partially successful

0-8 points = Writing was not successful

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argumentative</th>
<th>17-20</th>
<th>13-16</th>
<th>9-12</th>
<th>0-8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essay makes a convincing argument with clear contrasting ideas while supported with appropriate evidence</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Information is organized as per argumentative rhetorical style and aspects of cohesion are well managed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar structures are appropriate and accurate (in particular, noun clauses)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary is appropriate (in particular, Unit 2 Vocabulary with reporting verbs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics, including capitalization, spelling, and punctuation, are appropriate and accurate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: ______/100

Comments:
Keyla explained that students need to understand their mistakes and why they lose points for each section in the rubrics. Dina, the student, reinforced this idea by writing, “It helps me but not much, because it makes me know how the instructor graded the essay, but the rubric can be subjective without detailed feedback in the paper” (Questionnaire). Students were eager to know why they got a particular score in a particular box of the rubric, and they need more explanation than just seeing a number or a percentage. If they get a lower score in the grammar structure section, they will expect they can see a lot of grammar corrections or grammar-related feedback in their writing. Therefore, besides the function of instruction and evaluation, the rubric could also generate opportunities for students to internalize and ask instructors questions for clarification if they fully engaged with the rubric feedback.

**Unhelpful Feedback**

Students also shared their perceptions of ineffective feedback. Written feedback without clear guidance for improvement is always perceived negatively by students. Kelly shared a piece of her writing (Figure 6) and commented, “I don’t like the comment of “delete” because I cannot have a clear understanding why I need to delete those sentences” (Student participant, Kelly, questionnaires). She also explained her feelings when receiving such kind of feedback: “After deleting these paragraphs, there might be only 100 words left, what shall I do? I worked hard and wrote so many words, and my instructor asked me to delete them, I feel really frustrated” (Student participant, Kelly, focus group). Students expected that their hard work should be appreciated by their instructor. If feedback negatively influenced them emotionally, they felt lost and did not want to make further efforts. Kelly did not choose to talk with her instructor regarding
this particular feedback because she believed she needed to write more sentences by herself. Her negative perception of the feedback stopped her from interacting with her instructor, and it is possible that Kelly would continue to write something inappropriate again without the explicit instruction she needed. In the piece of feedback sample Kelly shared (Figure 6), the instructor deleted many sentences. It might be hard for the instructor to explain each comment in detail by writing or typing because of time constraints or large class sizes. Seeking or generating further interaction is needed to make the learner’s writing improvement possible, both the student and the instructor did not make that feedback and understanding happen.

Dina also commented that the green feedback of “^” shown in Figure 3 was not effective to her, and she wrote “the instructor might want to add something, but I don't know what he wanted to add.” Dina got the message that she needs to add something, but she was not able to do self-correction based on the symbol. Dina reflected negatively on the feedback. However, Dina also shared that she made an appointment with her instructor right after she received the feedback to get clarification from her instructor, which means this kind of feedback make further interactions possible for her. Through talking with Dina and reading her emails, I found that Dina is an active feedback seeker. She wrote in one of the emails she sent me that “I always want to talk with my instructor after I received feedback no matter the feedback is clear or not, because I want to know more details.” A student’s comfort level may determine whether he or she is an active feedback seeker or not, but Dina explained more regarding why she always wanted to meet her instructor. The conditions that motivated her to meet her instructor later in this chapter when we go into the section of student engagement.
Figure 6

Sample Written Feedback: Student Participant—Kelly

- **Materials:** Raw materials are not limited by standard plastics. You can choose **engineered** engineered plastic, high-performance plastic, photopolymers, and **metal** metal to match your business.

- **Software:** Professional and powerful software can make your business more productive. You can use VXinspect, VXmodel and VXremote applications as tools.

- **Partners:** Good3D has updated 3D solutions, so it can apply for any type of business. We already teamed up with companies such as Canadian Tire, Ford, and SickKids.

Enclosed you will find the detailed product category or you can find more information about each product on website [www.good3d.com](http://www.good3d.com) with the specification and image.
Student participants also mentioned that sometimes their instructor provided feedback with abbreviations that they could not understand. When they were not familiar with the abbreviation feedback, students were confused and unable to make the necessary changes to their writing. Kelly reflected, “Only when we take the course for a long time can we understand her feedback” (Student participant, Kelly, focus group). Students often do not understand the abbreviations and codes instructors use in their feedback, such as SF (sentence fragments) or RO (run-on-sentences). Instructors need to take care of students’ feedback literacy and make sure their messages can be fully understood by their students. Moreover, students sometimes found some instructors’ handwriting was hard to read, which made them frustrated in the revision process. Kimberly explained, “She may write a lot, but some words are scribble. It takes me a long time to figure it out, and sometimes I gave up.”

From the data above, students always reflected negatively on feedback without clear guidance for improvement, which is the same as Ferguson’s (2011) findings. If students fail to seek feedback clarification and recognize the importance of communication or dialogical interaction, they cannot continue their effective engagement with feedback. Moreover, if feedback makes students confused or goes beyond students’ ability to understand, they may fail to make good use of the feedback and make continuous efforts on their writing. One-way communication is risky in feedback, as negative perceptions can demotivate learners and add barriers to their writing improvement.

The Amount of Written Corrective Feedback

When asked what students expect most from feedback, Keyla commented, “they probably want to fix their errors, right? So … just error correction.” Keyla explained that
she thought students might want to understand their errors and fix their errors through the feedback process. Diana’s response included the same point. Therefore, from the instructors’ perspective, they believed students might all errors to be fixed in their writing.

Instructors believed their students need error corrections, but they both expressed that they would not mark all errors in the written feedback if there were many errors in students’ writing. Instructor participants commented that marking all the errors was discouraging and might stop students from trying. This perception also aligned to the findings of Amrhein and Nassaji (2010). Instructors also provided the strategy they used if they meet such kind of situation. Keyla said,

What I do is that I just look at the first paragraph, and I will correct everything, and I will tell the students, like, I will actually talk to the students or write it down, it depends, and just say, the errors are repetitive throughout the other paragraphs, and that they need to, you know, look at the errors. (Instructor participant, Keyla, interview)

Diana, the instructor, gave similar answers by saying,

What I tend to do is, if I see where the paper is going, I stop correcting. And in the bottom, I will write why don’t you come and see me, so we can work on verb tense, this way. … I can help you make a correct sentence using correct articles and we can work on punctuation.

Instructors expressed that they knew students expected to see all errors corrected, but they did not correct all errors for them. Keyla stated that if she was a student, “I wouldn’t be happy if somebody just told me to do self-correct.” So, instructors sometimes found it challenging to provide effective written feedback, and they believe communication and face-to-face meetings are better strategies to give feedback.
When asked about their perceptions about error correction, four student participants all expressed that they hoped their instructor could give detailed feedback and fix all their errors. They also commented that they would suppose everything is good if there were no comments or corrections in their assignment. However, when I tried to deeply explore their perceptions, I found that the meaning of “fix” in students’ perception might not be the same as what instructors perceived. Dina described her needs based on her good experience with instructors’ feedback:

One of my favourite instructors always give us detailed written feedback, I mean there are a lot of corrections and comments, and she almost helps us correct everything. However, if I make an appointment and meet her in her office, she will give me more feedback and fix more errors. … I mean, she may miss some errors in the first version of feedback. (Student participant, Dina, focus group)

From her explanation, we can find that the phrase “a lot of corrections” does not necessarily mean “all.” She felt satisfied because of the amount of feedback she received met her expectations and needs. Also, when Dina shared the piece of her writing with the feedback she likes, I found that the “corrections” she mentioned were not correct forms or words provided by her instructor. There were many error corrections codes in her paper, such as “WW,” “WF,” or “SVA.” Dina commented that she could understand the feedback well because her instructors gave instructions in class in terms of the meaning of each code. Her instructor also provided the code list to help them work with feedback after class. For example, the code list clearly showed that “WW” means wrong word, and Dina got familiar with these symbols gradually through the feedback process. Enhancing feedback literacy (she knew how to read the codes) facilitated her engagement with the feedback and revise her writing.
Rena also commented that she would like to do self-correction if instructors fixed one error and highlighted other repetitive errors. She expressed that she needed those highlights. If there were nothing in some paragraphs, she would not recheck those parts. Other student participants showed strong agreement with Rena, and they emphasized the importance of pointing out the repetitive errors. Again, students did not expect instructors to give correct answers to all errors in feedback, but they needed instructors to provide clear guidance for their revision or improvement.

Kelly and Kimberly said they need explanations to understand their good points or errors, which aligned with Instructor Keyla’s perception. Kelly also commented that she loved to see details in grading rubrics, and she spoke highly of one of her instructors who provided detailed rubrics. As we mentioned, if students treated written feedback as the end of the interaction, they had high expectations for the feedback message. They hope written feedback can be clear enough to help them understand all the details. However, if they could know written feedback is not the end of feedback interaction, their needs of explanations might be easy to achieve through further dialogical interactions. Students hope feedback could make sense for them, and they can understand and take actions for improvement. However, they may not always find the right way or effective strategies to achieve feedback uptake.

Overall, what students need was to find their errors, understand their problems, and have clear guidance to make revisions. Also, students did not necessarily expect the instructor to fix all their errors or provide correct answers for all errors; they accept various forms of useful feedback. The most important point is that they need the sense that instructors care them and their writing.
Student Engagement and Interactions With Feedback

Instead of treating feedback as an input message to inform students about their performance or errors, in this research feedback was conceptualized as a tool to initiate interactions and facilitate learning (Winstone & Carless, 2020). Feedback cannot lead to performance improvement in writing until students engage with feedback and make good use of the feedback. Therefore, it is important to explore students’ actions after they receive instructors’ feedback and how their engagement contributes to their writing.

Student Engagement With Instructors’ Feedback

Students were invited to share what they usually do after they receive their instructor’s feedback, and all of them said they would look at the score first. Kimberly replied,

I always check my score first [other students showed their agreement by nodding], so I can get a generally understanding whether I did a good job or not. I can have an overall understanding … if I passed or not … so this is what I pay attention to first. If the mark is not good, I will review the feedback, and check where I did wrong, where there are a lot of red corrections, … or where I got repetitive errors. … So I will pay attention to my errors. … If I got a higher mark, of course I will feel happy … and then I will check where I get positive feedback, and make sure I can keep the good points for my next assignment. (Student participant, Kimberly, focus group)

It is not surprising that grades matter a lot and influence students’ emotions, and grades somehow determine their attention to feedback. Thus, grades, as a part of instructors’ feedback, have strong effect on students’ affective engagement and behaviour
engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). More discussions about grades and engagement will be illustrated in the next chapter, but at this point, we must know that all four student participants selected in this study are high-level students who have strong motivation to improve their writing, so grades for them work as motivation to explore deeper in their feedback.

According to Kimberly’s description, we found that feedback generated only interactions between her and her paper rather than interactions between her and her instructor. Rena and Kimberly had similar experience according to their description, and they all shared if they could not understand some comments, they will ask their classmates or leave them unaddressed. However, Dina shared a different story. Dina stated,

From my experience, because my instructor always gives us feedback in handwriting, so I will review all the feedback and check if I can understand every correction and comment. If I cannot understand some specific ones, I will make an appointment with her. (Student participant, Dina, focus group)

As mentioned in the previous analysis, Dina is an active feedback seeker and she always meets her instructor after she received her feedback. Because she always seeks oral feedback from her instructor, all the data were reviewed to examine what motivated her to do this. One piece of information from Dina in the focus group helps to illustrate:

I remember I did go to her office and talk with her, and she even did more corrections for me, such as some small punctuation errors. So, if you go to her office, she can help you revise more. (Student participant, Dina, focus group)
Dina perceived that if she talked with her instructor, her instructor would not only help her with clarification but also provide extra feedback and revisions. As a result of this perception, she was willing to meet her instructor to learn more. Dina’s experience showed that more dialogical interactions could enhance students’ uptake of feedback and even allow students to gain some untargeted knowledge. This idea was also evidenced in the instructors’ interview when Diana shared her strategy to help students with their writing. Diana, the instructor, mentioned, “if [students] agree and come and see me, then I will go over with them, but then I can also start teaching them other things, too, that maybe they forgot.” Therefore, the benefits of oral feedback go beyond just clarifying the feedback, and interactions allow learners to build more knowledge than they expect. At the same time, if students identify the benefits of seeking oral feedback, they can be motivated to engage with oral feedback and seek more interactions.

Another example from Dina during the focus group session may also help us to understand Dina’s motivation of engagement. She stated,

When I was in level 4, my instructor was very responsible. She gave me detailed feedback, and I always talked with her to explore more in her office hour. I am not sure, but I think, maybe … she knew I always talked with her about my feedback, so she provided me with very detailed written feedback … um … I am not sure if other students had the same experience, but she is really responsible to me. (Student participant, Dina, focus group follow-up)

Instructor factors influenced students’ perception and their engagement. Dina was willing to approach her instructor because she felt that her instructor was responsible. Dina also perceived that her instructor cared more about her feedback if she herself cared the
feedback. Such kind of positive perception motivated her to continuously seek interactions with her instructor and brought continuous development to her writing.

Moreover, in the loop of the feedback process, students’ and instructors’ perceptions may mutually influence each other and determines their further engagement. Compared with the feedback experience in level four, she also commented on her level-5 experience:

The writing instructor in my level five only gave me a little written feedback. I remember I got 91% in my first assignment and I felt like it was not necessary to meet him because of the high score. Surprisingly, I got a very low score in my second assignment, but I realized the feedback was even less than that in my first assignment. … Maybe nobody talked with him about the feedback, so he put less effort on it. (Student participant, Dina, focus group follow-up)

Dina reflected negatively on her feedback experience in level 5, and she shared that she did not meet her instructor as frequently as she did in level four even though she did not get enough feedback as she expected. Therefore, a student’s engagement with feedback can be influenced by his or her instructor, and it might be not fair to blame one party or totally depend on one party for the feedback process. Students’ and instructors’ perceptions mutually influence each other, and they took shared responsibility to generate a favourable feedback interactions or environment.

From Dina’s experience, we can see if one party does not care the feedback or is perceived as irresponsible, it can have a negative impact on the other party. Instructors in this study shared similar feelings. Diana stated, “I am a big believer in a teacher taking care of themselves, because in the beginning, it was really easy to get burn out. … When you care more than your students” (Instructor participant, Diana, interview).
Diana shared that she had a great passion on providing feedback if the students care the feedback and value the feedback from her, she could even call students or talk with her students at night. However, if the student did not care the feedback, she explained “don't expect me to go crazy, trying to help them when they don't want to help themselves” (Instructor participant, Diana, interview). An effective feedback process always requires that both feedback providers and recipients have positive perceptions on each other regarding the attention and effort they put into feedback.

**Time Spent on Revision**

Behaviour engagement is connected to desire to revise, and the time students spend on revisions (Fredricks et al., 2004). Compared with affective and cognitive engagement, behavioural engagement embodied as revision behaviours are relatively measurable and observable (Tian & Zhou, 2020; Zhang & Hyland, 2018). Student participants shared the average time they recalled that they spent on feedback for each writing assignment, and their responses are presented in Table 3. Four student participants were all active, voluntarily engaging themselves with instructors’ feedback. However, the time they spent on instructors’ feedback was not the same. Dina and Kimberly spent relatively longer time engaging with instructors’ feedback, while Kelly and Rena’s engaging time were relatively short. Their responses about the dynamic engagement are analyzed below in this section.

**Dina and Kimberly**

Based on the response from the focus group and email questionnaires, Dina and Kimberly can be considered as highly engaged learners based on the time in their responses. They took considerable time on the revision process and tried to make sure each comment made sense to them.
**Table 3**

*The Time Each Student Participant Spend on Feedback of One Writing Assignment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student participants</th>
<th>Time spent on feedback (on average)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dina</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rena</td>
<td>20–30 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dina explained that her 50 minutes usually included the time she spent on revisions and the time she met and talked with her instructors. Therefore, Dina highly engaged with both the written feedback and the oral feedback from her instructor, and she was an active feedback seeker compared with other student participants. Dina commented, “after I met her [instructor] more, I got a better sense of my errors. And then I will pay more attention to the repetitive errors and be careful next time, so I think it is helpful” (Student participant, Dina, focus group). As she recognized multiple benefits of meeting with the instructor, Dina developed a good feedback-seeking habit and be able to plan for her next writing assignment. Dina’s active engagement seemed to transfer cognitive engagement as the willingness to invest time, efforts, and thoughts to feedback are central to cognitive engagement (Zhang & Hyland, 2018).

Kimberly also showed a high level of engagement with instructors’ feedback, although her engagement replied more on interactions with the written feedback of her paper. She devoted one hour to review her feedback and make revisions accordingly. She was self-motivated to explore deeply on feedback and understand why she needed to revise certain parts. She stated, “If I receive positive feedback, I want to know why it is good or why it is wrong. I may come up with a good point by chance luckily, but I don’t realize that. If I don’t know the reason, I may not be able to apply it to my future writing.” She expressed five times in the focus group that she needed a reason for both praise and error corrections. That might be the reason why she spent a relatively long time on revisions. Moreover, Kimberly’s revision process also included her affective engagement, as she said, “My instructor will explain which part she likes most and why she likes it. I felt happy when seeing feedback like this.” She expressed her happiness and
generated motivation to write a better next time. Kimberly’s engagement with oral feedback was relatively dynamic; she stated, “if [unclear feedback] has a big impact on my writing or my mark, I have to understand. I will go to ask her” (Student participant, Kimberly, focus group). Kimberly was highly engaged with instructors’ feedback, but she can not be considered as an active feedback seeker to the same degree as some others.

**Rena and Kelly**

Rena and Kelly expressed their willingness to improve their writing skills, but their engagement with feedback was more passive compared with Dina and Kimberly. Rena stated that she usually spent 20 to 30 minutes to work on the feedback, and she never went to her instructors’ office. She stated, “I never went to the instructor’s office and talked with him because I forgot his office number, and my classmate did not know it neither. However, sometimes I asked him questions before or after class in the classroom” (Student participant, Rena, questionnaires). Rena also expressed that she never met her instructor in office hours in the focus group, because she preferred to send emails. However, at the same time, she reflected negatively on emails and said, “I found some instructors never replied to my emails.” When I asked again regarding why not meet and talk, she stated, “I need to make an appointment in advance, which is very complicated and annoying” (Student participant, Rena, focus group). Rena showed a willingness to approach her instructor, but some barriers prevented her from further engagement, either psychologically or contextually. Rena needed a comfortable space or more interventions to engage in more feedback interactions.

Kelly wrote that she usually spent 20 minutes on instructor feedback. She explained, “I usually spent 20 minutes revising each assignment and focused on the
grammar and spelling part because most comments I received are these two parts”
(Student participant, Kelly, questionnaire). Kelly’s interaction with feedback was
restricted to written feedback, and she spent the most time on her linguistic errors. Kelly
showed a preference for direct feedback and acted more as a passive feedback receiver.

As indicated in Table 3, Dina and Kimberly spent a relatively long time on
revisions, but Rena and Kelly spent less time dealing with their feedback. Looking back
to the pieces of feedback sample student participants shared, we can find that feedback
shared by Dina and Kimberly were mostly codes or comments for suggestions, and there
were no direct forms or words in their feedback. These two students also expressed their
preference for such kind of feedback as it helped with their writing improvement. In
contrast, Rena and Kelly’s feedback was mostly direct, and correct forms or vocabularies
were provided immediately in their feedback. The two student participants liked to see
direct feedback according to their responses. Therefore, aligning with the revision time in
students’ responses, the type of feedback instructors provided, or students preferred, may
influence the behaviour engagement of feedback receivers. Direct feedback may stop
students from taking further efforts or interact with other sources, and their learning
would possibly build only on the correct answer instructors provided. If feedback
providers want to improve students’ engagement with feedback, they may need to
consider the strategy they use and the comments they provide carefully.

Factors Influencing Student Engagement

Student engagement, as illustrated in the data, was influenced by instructors’
feedback strategies, students’ feedback awareness and literacy, and grades of each
writing assignment. Data regarding this finding were illustrated in this section.
Strategies to Motivate Engagement

Two instructor participants both shared that it is not easy to motivate students’ engagement with their feedback. Keyla, the instructor, expressed her perception in the interview by saying, “I don’t think I have an answer to motivate them. … We just have to … you know … try to connect with the students. That’s the only way.” Regarding how to connect with students, Diana and Keyla stated that they kept reminding students to email them anytime when they met any problems and encouraged students to meet them during office hours. They believed what they could do is to be available for students. Moreover, Diana shared another strategy she used by stating,

If you have a very active class that has good participation, it sometimes works to put them in teams, have them go over together, and have them redo some of their paragraphs, helping each other. I am a big believer in teamwork, so I like partners working together to help, and I tell my students all the time, you can talk in my class, just speak English, help each other, encourage each other!

Peer editing in class helps instructors to monitor their students to work together on their peer feedback. It creates an opportunity for students to interact with their peers and edit their drafts together. Students expanded instructors’ descriptions of peer editing and stated that instructors also go through with teams in classes to see if they have any questions. Therefore, students also had opportunities to ask questions or seek suggestions from their instructors in the peer editing process. Dialogical interactions, communications, collaboration engagements in the feedback process helped students to have a better understanding of their writing assignments and build their knowledge to complete a better draft.
As discussed above, feedback providers’ strategies can be one of the most critical factors to influence students’ engagement. What is more, as we mentioned early in this chapter, feedback providers’ responsibility and the care they expressed may also influence students’ behaviour and engagement. Instructor participants expressed their perceptions that they do not want to push their students to meet them. Keyla had a strong feeling that she wanted her students to feel comfortable, and she commented,

As a teacher, you really don't want to force anybody to meet with you. You want to … people … you want students to feel comfortable; I don’t want to force anybody because I don’t believe that can help anybody … so … you provide them feedback and say … it’s kind of up to them. (Instructor participant, Keyla, interview)

Instructors made oral feedback optional because they hoped their students could feel comfortable in their learning. They hope students, especially high-level students, have autonomy in their engagement with feedback and be responsible for themselves. However, in the focus group, three of four student participants were not motivated to talk or interact with their instructor in one-on-one meetings. Interestingly, when I asked student participants whether they would feel uncomfortable or frustrated if instructors made the oral feedback or one-on-one conferences mandatory, they all replied firmly with a “No.” Kimberly explained,

I would feel relieved because I can finally stop hesitating and decide between asking or not asking. I know I must go to clarify my feedback and writing. I feel great! (Student Participant, Kimberly, Focus Group)

Students did not have negative feelings about one-on-one conferences, and they knew, to some extent, meeting with instructors will help them in certain ways. However,
sometimes they were not self-motivated to seek for help, and they need some external motivations, such as mandatory requirements to attend conferences.

**Feedback Literacy and Awareness**

As mentioned earlier in the analysis of unhelpful feedback perceived by students, failing to understand feedback put up barriers to students’ engagement with instructors’ feedback. However, unclear comments or brief feedback can also generate opportunities for students to ask questions and interact with instructors. Instructors should help with students’ feedback related to literacy improvement, but students should also find opportunities to enhance their feedback literacy. Therefore, most negative reflections about feedback came from the lack of communication or interaction. If students and instructors can interact with each other in an encouraging environment, feedback could initiate more learning activities and effectively help students with their writing. When student participants were asked why not talk with instructors, Kelly responded, “I believe I must rely on long-term efforts. I cannot reply on ten-minute or twenty-minute meetings.” Kelly admitted that the instructor could help her to clarify some feedback, but she failed to recognize the benefits of continuously being a feedback seeker. Dina heard Kelly’s response and commented,

Well, for me, I always go to my instructor’s office in her office hours. However, I guess the reason why some students don’t want to meet is that … um. … After I went to her office two or three times, I found that I got different questions and errors every time, which means I got different problems in different assignments. So, I may meet new problems next time. … But after I met her more, I discovered that several same errors would appear in my next article, and then I will pay more
attention to the repetitive errors, and then get those corrected, so I think it is still helpful. (Student participant, Dina, focus group)

Dina’s response indicated that students might not be able to sense the benefits of one-on-one conferences at the beginning, as what they learned in the previous meeting may not successfully apply to their next assignment. Only when students meet and talk with instructors more times can they be sensitive to their problems and apply what they learned in their future writing. Therefore, students need to be aware of the merits of dialogical interactions so that they can engage well with their feedback and perform better in the next assignment.

**Teacher Feedback and Grades**

The time to provide feedback determines whether feedback itself can function as a motivator to improve students’ writing. Diana stated, “I think what students want most is a higher mark.” She said she usually asked students, especially low-level students, to rewrite their paragraphs using her comments and marked their essays again. She perceived that most students were grade oriented, and they engaged with feedback when they knew the possibility of improving their grade. When Keyla spoke about the challenge of motivating students’ engagement, she mentioned that feedback should motivate students to work for a better draft. However, student reports suggest that when they are in a stage of the writing process, if they received instructors’ feedback it played a crucial role in the feedback uptake. Rena and Dina both said that they would not read the feedback if they got a high grade or there was not much feedback in their paper. Kelly also confirmed that there were many circumstances that she did not understand the comments, but she did not go to ask but just left it there. We can find that students
sometimes lose motivation to devote to their feedback because they already get a passing grade. Even though they had a chance to write draft one, their instructor did not provide them with feedback. Diana stated that “writing is a process,” and she wanted to provide a “no-stress zone” to her students, so she did not mark students’ first draft. She wanted to help students in the process. However, students who were not feedback seekers could not receive instructors’ feedback when revising their first draft because they considered they only received peer feedback. Helping students with their first draft might need more opportunities and space for students to receive instructors’ feedback before they got a grade for their writing. Feedback providers and feedback recipients are two important factors that influence students’ writing performance. Feedback providers should be equipped with practical strategies to motivate students in their feedback engagement, and feedback recipients should raise their awareness of seeking feedback interactions. There are two pedagogical implications from this section. The first can be that instructors may implement mandatory conferences to provide oral feedback in the early stage of the writing courses and end up with optional meetings when students recognize the benefits of one-on-one meetings or build up the habit of feedback interactions. The second pedagogical implication is that instructors’ feedback before final draft might motivate students to engage more with feedback. These implications will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

**Program Setting and Culture**

Learning the contextual factors can help to understand feedback processes in ESL writing courses. According to the learner-centered model (Ramani et al., 2019), feedback culture, as an institutional factor, also plays an influential role in learners’ performance
improvement. This section will describe the program setting and program culture based on participants’ responses in this research. Their perceptions or understanding, help to explain how contextual factors influence their performance and engagement in the feedback process.

Course Settings

Keyla explained that reading and writing used to be two separate courses in the selected program. As the program moved to emphasize “integrated skills,” writing classes were incorporated with reading classes as one course (Instructor participant, Keyla, interview). Reading and writing classes take 10 hours each week. The writing assignments for high levels (levels 4 & 5) include mostly argumentative essays, summary/response essays, and persuasive essays. Student participants shared how they understand their writing task as “a 500-word essay with one thesis and three supporting points.” Feedback from tutors is not available in this program, so Keyla said, “we are at the service” and “it is our responsibility for everything” (Instructor participant, Keyla, interview). Students need to come to their instructors if they need any help, and the interactions in the feedback process were either with instructors or peers.

Assignment Schedule

Writing assignments’ deadlines could help us learn the time available for students to generate a new written product. The schedules shared by four student participants were slightly different because they were in different classes taught by different instructors. However, they almost kept at the same pace in that students submitted two writing assignments each month. Usually, there were only two weeks between each assignment. Table 4 illustrates the writing assignment schedule in the fall and spring semester shared by Dina and Kelly.
Table 4

**Deadlines for Writing Assignments—Student Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing assignment deadlines—Fall</th>
<th>Writing assignment deadlines—Spring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1: October 3</td>
<td>Week 1: February 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5: October 30</td>
<td>Week 4: February 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7: November 12</td>
<td>Week 5: March 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 9: November 27</td>
<td>Week 7: March 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 10: December 2</td>
<td>Week 9: April 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final: December 6</td>
<td>Final: April 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As it is an intensive program with a tight schedule, the contextual constraints might be another big challenge for students and instructors to deal with feedback in an effective way. As mentioned by both instructor participants and student participants, instructors’ feedback was provided after students submitted their final draft. There was limited time for the feedback process.

**Workshop Opportunities**

Student participants and instructor participants stated that there were no other sources, such as workshop opportunities, to help them with their writing feedback. Keyla, the instructor participant, commented that she never encouraged her students to do workshops, and she said, “because the point that was made to us is that we shouldn’t be giving our work to somebody else.” Keyla also thought the workshops or other feedback sources were provided for undergraduate students, so ESL students could not access those services. She also reemphasized, “we are not allowed to encourage students because we are supposed to give them everything.” Instructors perceived that they were responsible for everything. Keyla and Diana both expressed that they were happy to help students, but at the same time, they expressed it was not easy to provide feedback to classes with large class sizes. Student participants also shared the same situation: they had not gotten any workshop opportunities or sources to seek feedback. Rena said, “I never heard about that” (Student participant, Rena, focus group). Therefore, feedback interactions mainly rely on student-instructor interactions.

**Summary of Findings**

In this chapter, feedback from participants’ perceptions were explored from two ESL instructors, Keyla and Diana, and four ESL students, Dina, Kelly, Kimberly, and
Rena, in the selected ESL program. Their perceptions and experiences provided valuable insights for to learn more about the ESL feedback process and feedback interactions in writing. Data collected by interviews, the focus group and email questionnaires incorporated the following themes: (a) student writing challenges, (b) feedback experience, (c) perceptions on the effectiveness of feedback, (d) student engagement and interactions with feedback, and (e) program setting and culture. Although students and instructors are unique in nature, they shared some consistent views in terms of feedback. They all believed that feedback is an important intervention in ESL learning, and they all expected their work to be valued by others.

In summary, ESL instructors believed oral feedback was the most effective feedback based on their ESL teaching experience. They believed meeting students one-on-one is the most effective and easy way to give sense-making comments and suggestions. Instead of writing a lot, instructors believed in communications, collaboration, and dialogical interactions with students. In contrast, when talking about feedback, most students considered the written feedback they received on the paper as feedback. Students overall demonstrated a preference for specific, detailed, and directive feedback, consistent with Winstone and Carless’s (2020) findings. Students hoped to gain explanations on their errors and suggestions on how to improve. However, when reflecting on the feedback they perceived helpful, they provided us with different examples, such as codes, rubrics, praise. The amount of feedback or how detailed it was, gave students a sense regarding whether their instructors care about them. Whenever they felt their instructors were responsible and cared about their writing, they reflected positively on their feedback and writing progress.
Data collected in this research also revealed what students do with instructors’ feedback. Students spent the most time interacting with the paper they received, which means they engaged most with their written feedback. Students paid attention to their grades, examined their rubrics, and correct their errors. Most students lacked the awareness of seeking oral feedback from instructors, so they acted more as an information receiver rather than a feedback seeker. Two students spent more time on revisions and engaged more with feedback, while two other student participants spent less time on feedback and dealt with feedback at the surface level, although they actively engaged with the written feedback. Only one of the four student participants was an active feedback seeker, and she also reflected how one-on-one conferences facilitate her writing improvement.

Understanding students’ and instructors’ perceptions and experiences of feedback exposed the gaps in perceptions between feedback providers and recipients. Exploring strategies to narrow the gap might enhance the feedback process and provide better feedback experience to ESL learners. Instructors do not want to force their students, so they depended on students to seek for further oral feedback, but students highly relied on instructors’ written feedback and lacked the awareness of seeking more feedback interactions. Thus, increasing students’ feedback literacy, enhancing students’ feedback engagement, reinforcing the shared responsibility of instructors and students, and providing more opportunities and spaces for dialogic interactions in tight course schedule were implied by this research and more pedagogical implications will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Teaching ESL students writing and providing them with more opportunities for writing practice are crucial before they start their undergraduate or graduate studies. International students’ second language writing skills may largely determine their academic success when studying in an English-Speaking country. Therefore, it is important to continuously look for better ESL writing feedback designs or pedagogical approaches to help international students conquer their writing challenges and become confident writers. As mentioned in Chapter 2, effective feedback should be the intervention to initialize interactions and engagements rather than a message input (Carless & Boud, 2018; Nicol, 2010). Feedback on writing is important for students, and it is also a time-consuming task for instructors. If effective feedback cannot be successfully processed or students cannot apply feedback uptake, the effort students make in writing and the effort instructors make to give feedback would not be fully appreciated.

This study aimed to explore teaching pedagogies related to feedback strategies to promote students’ uptake of feedback and enhance their writing skills. It is hoped that the findings and implications of this research could help find more productive ways or designs for applying writing feedback effectively.

The framework of this research emphasized the interactions, engagements, and uptakes in the feedback process. The findings also demonstrate the influential perceptions and shared responsibilities between feedback providers and feedback receivers. This chapter discusses the findings and significance of the data. It begins with talking about the findings in relation to the conceptual framework, and at the same time, it compares the findings with previous research. Going deeper into the analysis, it discusses how
understanding the findings, concepts, and frameworks helps to enhance the writing feedback process for ESL university students and the implications for practice. Besides, this chapter also includes a discussion about the limitations of the study and the suggestions for future research.

**Discussion**

This research takes a constructivist stance and employed sociocultural theory as the main framework (Vygotsky, 1987). Scaffolding, the ZPD, and social interactions rooted in the sociocultural theory guide the thinking and analysis of this study to achieve learners’ best interests and learners’ performance improvement (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1987; Wertsch, 1991). To better understand the significance of findings in this research, this section demonstrates the summary and discussion of the major findings in alignment with the framework and previous research to explore the deeper theoretical and pedagogical approaches in the ESL writing feedback process.

**Linguistic Challenge and Cultural Tools**

In this research, students and instructors had deeper perceptions of students’ linguistic challenges, such as challenges related to grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, than academic challenges related to organization, ideas, or contents. Both ESL instructors and ESL students put more focus on linguistic challenges when talking about students’ challenges in writing. Instructors’ feedback also mostly dealt with students’ linguistic errors, such as grammar, vocabulary, spellings, or use of unauthentic expressions. From a sociocultural perspective, learners become familiar with the skills of their community and gain accumulated knowing by approaching cultural tools (Vygotsky, 1978). Cultural tools include psychological or intellectual tools, such as languages,
symbols, and writing. These cultural tools are usually learned through the support of more expert partners in social interaction, through learning in the ZPD and scaffolding (Säljö, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). In ESL contexts, when students sense challenges are linguistic-related, social interaction in these contexts becomes more important. The whole process of learning happened in the context of students’ second language. Interactions can not only help learners to solve some targeted problems in writing and writing feedback, but also gain some untargeted knowing by approaching and using cultural tools, such as language skills and feedback symbols instructors use. These acknowledgments always influence students’ writing skills either consciously or unconsciously and help them to write in a more authentic or academic way.

Vygotsky (1978) defined ZPD as the zone in which people can perform better by cooperating with more capable partners than working alone. With more analysis and comprehensive understanding of the ZPD, Säljö (2010) conceived the ZPD as a developmental path where learners’ appropriation of a cultural tool is partial and extra support is needed to complete a task. For ESL students, their appropriation of language is still partial, but as indicated in the findings, their individual zones for development are not the same even though they study in the same-level class. It is the assistance and interactions that help to explore the zone in which a student is sensitive to instruction (Säljö, 2010). Therefore, effective feedback provided by a more knowledgeable person through social interactions can help students develop deeper understandings of the cultural tool, such as feedback language, symbols, and writings, and use it properly in specific settings. ESL students gain language-related knowledge not only by approaching the cultural tools through interactions but also through written feedback on their papers.
The benefits of instructor feedback interactions go far beyond learning to write without
the same errors as in the past but include having a better sense of the second language
and write more like native speakers would.

**Communication and Dialogical Interactions**

One of the critical findings of this research is the high value of dialogical
interactions or one-on-one feedback conferences with instructors. Instructor participants
perceived oral feedback or one-on-one feedback conferences as the most effective
approach to provide feedback to students. They also explained that oral feedback helps to
address students’ confusion in their written feedback. They illustrated that when there are
many repetitive errors, two-way communication and dialogical interaction through a one-
on-one meeting are more effective than written feedback. This idea resonates with Yang
and Carless’s (2013) interpretation that dialogue circumvents the limitation of one-way
transmission of instructor written feedback and reduces students’ difficulties in
understanding feedback.

Student participants who did seek oral feedback had a strikingly positive
reflection on their one-on-one meetings with instructors. However, some students did not
appreciate the opportunities for oral feedback or feedback conferences because they do
not recognize the benefits of interactions or they lack the motivation to seek oral
feedback. In contrast to Best et al.’s (2015) findings, which stated that students placed a
high value on face-to-face interactions with their instructors, this research found that only
those students who perceived the benefits of oral feedback valued the opportunity of
feedback interactions. However, it was essential to note that the one-on-one feedback
conferences in Best et al.’s research were mandatory, and all students were required to
talk with their instructors, and most students spoke highly of face-to-face interactions. In the research presented here, most feedback meetings were optional, so students might not have grasped the opportunity of oral feedback and did not get a clear understanding of what they can get from oral feedback. It is the priority of instructors to help students to acknowledge the value of dialogic and oral interactions so that effective feedback process can be achieved.

Feedback dialogues between instructors and students shift the whole pedagogical or learning process from “instructors to students” to “instructors with students.” As mentioned in Chapter 4, most students tended to depend highly on instructors’ in-class instruction and their written feedback. This leaded to many misunderstandings and dissatisfactions. For example, instructors might give short comments and expect students to meet them if they cannot understand. However, students perceived such unclear and short feedback as irresponsible instructors’ behaviour. Feedback conversations possibly narrow the different thinking between instructors and students, as they get timely responses from each other. Such bi-directional communication not only helps students to gain much clearer feedback on their assignment, but also allows instructors to learn students’ preferences reactions or potentials for the feedback they received (Nicol, 2010). Besides, dialogic interactions tend to expand the learning brought by written feedback. As found in Dina’s experience, feedback meetings or dialogical interactions with the instructor also include the possibility of initiating new topics, which enabled her to gain more than she could expect. This finding was consistent with the findings of Steen-Utheim and Wittek (2017), who also mentioned the possibilities and merits of maintaining and extending dialogue. Also, the awareness of learning more through oral
interactions might make one-on-one conversations more attractive to students, and they would more actively engage in the feedback process. As indicated by Vygotsky (1978), collaborative communication was needed in the learning process, so feedback interactions and dialogues can be important interventions to enhance the feedback process.

**Shared Feedback Responsibilities**

The findings in this research implied that the feedback process is risked when fully depending on one party to initiate feedback. Instructors worried that mandatory meetings might make students uncomfortable and relied on their students to seek feedback, but students perceived that providing feedback is the instructors’ responsibility. Such perceptions decreased the opportunities for feedback conferences and further interactions. According to Rogoff (1990), effective feedback processes require the joint effort by all parties to maintain mutual understanding and engage in conversations. Therefore, students and instructors need to acknowledge that feedback interactions cannot be realized when depending on only the instructor or the student. Instructors should be responsible for observing students’ needs and supporting them to engage in dialogue, and students should have the responsibility for seeking feedback whenever they want to improve (Ramani et al., 2019). This idea was in alignment with Ramani et al.’s (2019) learner-centered model, which emphasized the cooperation of feedback providers and receipts. Wertsch (1991) combined Vygotsky’s concept of the ZPD with dialogical interpretations of learning, which emphasized the importance of dialogical interactions in learning. The selected ESL program was so intensive that there was a limited time for instructors to provide feedback and even less time for students to engage with instructors’
feedback. Creating more opportunities and space for feedback conferences and dialogues, especially in such an intensive ESL program, is one of the important pedagogical implications of this research.

**Feedback Engagement**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, student engagement in second language writing includes behavioural engagement, affective engagement, and cognitive engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). The behavioural engagement was relatively easy to investigate through listening to students’ experience, so data were collected regarding what students do with instructors’ feedback to gain more insights about student engagement. The findings showed that students spent the most time on the written feedback, and only Dina, one of the student participants, sought oral feedback from her instructor. Findings also demonstrated that some confusions in written feedback were not fully figured out by students. Therefore, it is significant to enhance and motivate student feedback engagement, as “feedback without engagement is completely unproductive” (Price et al., 2011, p. 894).

**Motivation of Engagement**

Findings regarding what students do with instructors’ feedback in this research implied that the timing of invitation for feedback conferences is an important factor that influences students’ feedback engagement. As mentioned in Chapter 4, students received instructors’ written feedback and grade at the same time, and optional one-on-one conferences came after they received the grade. Most students may not be motivated to engage deeply with the feedback because the process will not improve their grade and they cannot foresee whether any feedback could apply to their next assignment.
Moreover, even some students were willing to improve their writing, they might only engage with the written feedback. They lacked the motivation and awareness of engaging in oral interactions if instructors did not facilitate oral feedback or did not make feedback conferences mandatory. According to Winstone and Carless (2020), students are more likely to seek dialogic interactions if the process has the potential to raise their grades. Providing feedback, both in written and oral forms, in the early stage of writing or for early drafts could generate more feedback engagement, leading to an effective feedback process.

*Feedback Engagement and Uptake*

In the findings of this research, instructors and students both mentioned focused feedback when talking about effective feedback strategies. As mentioned in Chapter 2, focused feedback means that instructors only provide written feedback on what they taught and ignore other errors (Ellis, 2009). Focused feedback often leads to effective feedback uptake, as students can easily understand the feedback when reviewing what they have learned in class. Students in this study engaged well with the focused feedback because it was within the “zone” in which students can perform better or complete the task by cooperating with the written feedback (the focused feedback). Students said they appreciated focused feedback as they acquired the feedback literacy based on what they learned in class and it was not necessary for them to make further effort to seek other interaction or explore other sources. Instructors found it effective because most students, including students who were passive learners, could process revisions according to instructors’ focused feedback. If written feedback is considered as the ending point of the feedback process, focused feedback could be one of the most effective strategies.
However, it is noteworthy that students’ ZPD might not be fully stretched without integrating various forms of feedback interactions, such as oral feedback, conferences, or online discussions.

The ZPD concept emphasizes the importance of providing all kinds of support to help learners to stretch beyond their individual performance (Lantolf & Poehner, 2010). Stretching beyond students’ individual performance might not restrict in their language acquisition in their writing. Using the ZPD concept, Tzuriel (2001) stated that higher planning and organizing functions in development appear first in social interaction and then transfer to individual cognitive functioning. This transfer is associated with Fredricks et al.’s (2004) description of cognitive engagement, which includes strategies such as planning and prioritizing. Dina and Kimberly, student participants, both mentioned how feedback, especially oral feedback, helped them to organize a better draft. Dina also mentioned that her good experience of talking with her instructor also motivated her to seek more feedback conversations or oral feedback every time after she got the written feedback. Her behavioural engagement with feedback had a positive impact on her cognitive engagement and provided her with a way of organizing the next draft. The willingness of seeking various feedback opportunities cognitively contributed to her planning skills and writing skills.

The Sense of Caring

The findings in this research also demonstrate that instructors’ care showed through feedback, and interactions play an important role in students’ writing improvement. Students will be motivated if they perceived their writing is cared about by someone, such as their instructor. This finding was in alignment with Fong et al.’s (2017)
findings. As mentioned in the previous chapter, students found various forms of feedback worked for them, and their needs were not the same. Whenever they felt their instructor is conscientious, responsible, and patient, they always reflected positively on the feedback no matter whether it was direct or indirect, oral, or written. Any feedback language that shows little care for students’ writing may demotivate them and prevent their improvement. Students do not tend to like one-word feedback, such as delete or revise, as those comments often give unclear guidance and may indicate instructors were tired of giving further explanations. Meeting students’ needs requires teachers to demonstrate their care and be careful with their feedback language, and it also requires continuous improvement of students’ feedback literacy to understand the brief feedback and perceive the importance of dialogical feedback interactions.

Findings related to Dina’s feedback experience indicated that student engagement with feedback is not entirely students’ responsibility (Price et al., 2010). Instructors should also take the responsibility as student engagement seems to be influenced by instructors’ teaching pedagogy. Dina acted differently with different writing instructors. She sought feedback more actively from the instructor whom she perceived approachable and willing to help. Feedback providers share the responsibility with feedback recipients to influence each other in a positive way. As indicated by Ramani et al.’s (2019) learner-centered model, in order to achieve learners’ performance improvements, students need to raise their awareness of seeking feedback, and instructors should facilitate their awareness and engagement with feedback. These two important factors allowed the feedback loop of the learner-centered model to work and feedback interactions can be realized. According to Winstone and Carless (2020), to realize more feedback
interactions, dialogues, and engagements, it is important for instructors to demonstrate that they are willing to help, and to put students’ best interests at heart. Informing students of the office hours and showing the availability might be not enough or not effective to generate further feedback conversations. Instructors should express their expectations to meet with students and emphasize the benefits of dialogical interactions with their students in writing teaching. When students sense their instructors are approachable and instructors put student learning as a priority, students may gain autonomy and confidence to seek further feedback interaction.

**Feedback in Multiple Modes**

Rather than viewing various forms of instructors’ written feedback and oral feedback as competing approaches, this research implies the complementary feature of multiple feedback modes. Findings in this research indicated that students had different needs although they studied in the same ESL program. Kimberly and Dina, two student participants, both described the good experience of getting both written and oral feedback from their instructor. Kimberly received instructors’ oral feedback in class and written feedback for the final draft. Dina received written feedback first and sought oral feedback after it. Designing the feedback process with multiple approaches might generate more feedback interactions, which stretches students beyond their individual performance from multi-dimensions. For example, some student participants have received grammar-related comments in their written feedback, but they received comments about thesis statements, outlines, or organizations in their oral feedback. The oral feedback also helped students clarify some unclearly written feedback and addressed some untargeted problems. From a constructivist stance, learning and knowledge always happen through interactions (Cobb
& Bowers, 1999; Green & Gredler, 2002). More interactions and engagements generated by various modes of feedback could make the feedback process more effective.

Elola and Oskoz’s (2016) research, which examines how four Spanish learners performed in a Spanish advanced writing course with multiple modes of feedback, came to a similar conclusion that implementing both oral and written feedback effectively improved students’ writing skills in Spanish. Therefore, no matter whether students are English language learners or Spanish language learners, it seems that written feedback and oral feedback are two complementary approaches to help second language learners in their writing. Moreover, multiple modes of feedback are not limited to feedback from instructors, the ZPD indicates that cooperation with more capable peers or other sources possibly generates more opportunities for feedback interactions that contribute to knowledge construction. Thus, more explorations are needed in terms of how to design the most effective feedback process with multiple modes.

**Implications for Practice**

The purpose of this study was to explore teaching pedagogies related to feedback strategies by learning students’ and instructors’ perceptions on feedback in the ESL context. This section outlines the practical implications that arise from the findings of this study and the perceptions and experiences of participants. It was hoped that these practical implications will help build understanding of a more effective feedback process and facilitate international students to improve academic writing skills. The first practical implication from the research is that the ESL writing course design should include classes or workshops to improve students’ feedback literacy (i.e., their understanding of abbreviations, terms, and codes) and raise students’ awareness of engaging with various
forms of feedback. The findings of this research demonstrated that students who had higher feedback literacy, such as understanding various feedback symbols, engaged better with instructors’ written feedback. Students were willing to understand all comments provided by instructors, so increasing feedback literacy helps them to meet their needs and make good use of the feedback. Moreover, students hoped to gain explanations for specific comments and want to have a clear understanding of their writing problems, but most of them did not gain awareness or strategies to deal with confusion in feedback. It is essential to teach students how to deal with feedback and how seeking feedback that contributes to their writing improvement.

Another implication for practice would be that feedback conferences should be implemented in ESL writing to generate more social and dialogic interactions in the feedback process. Many scholars have emphasized the merits of the dialogical approach in feedback (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Dowden et al., 2013; Nicol, 2010). This research recommended feedback conferences facilitated by instructors should happen in the early stage of writing, such as for draft one or draft two, so students can be motivated to engage with the feedback discussions to create a better draft. Another possible strategy can be that instructors make feedback conference mandatory in early semester or early stage of the ESL program. It will raise the possibility for students to recognize the value of feedback conferences and become more self-directed. Both implications would help students to appreciate all the opportunities to talk and discuss their writings and feedback with instructors. As we mentioned in early chapters, creating one-on-one meetings with instructors out of class time to talk about feedback would be a huge burden for instructors in large classes (Agbayahoun, 2016; Zhang & Hyland, 2018). Therefore, possible approaches to generate more interaction opportunities might include in-class oral
feedback sessions, online feedback platforms, and writing centers that allow students to seek feedback from instructors or talk about instructors’ feedback with more capable peers. These feedback conversations and interactions before the final draft would facilitate students’ feedback engagement and uptake and allow a more effective feedback process.

The findings of this study also recommended the feedback design with multiple modes which incorporated both written feedback and oral feedback. Different modes of feedback could help students’ writing from different dimensions and facilitate students in the learning process. Oral feedback could make up for deficiencies of written feedback and deal with some complicated problems in students’ writing, such as the organization of ideas. Although this study did not go far to investigate how to integrate written feedback with oral feedback, it recommended the feedback process with both written and oral comments, and instructors’ feedback, either oral or written feedback, should be provided for early drafts to motivate students to make continuous effort for a higher grade and for improved or enhanced writing and learning. Winstone and Carless (2020) also mentioned how the design of parallel tasks in the program would increase the potential to interact or review previous feedback and apply it to future assignments. This means that if instructors’ written feedback were provided with a grade, the next writing assignment should be similar so students could realize the importance of the previous feedback and apply it. This course design can be practically applied to the selected ESL program as this intensive program allows limited time between each assignment. Creating opportunities and space for written and oral feedback is important when helping students with their writing.
Strengths and Limitations

In this research, data were collected from various sources: semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and post-interview questionnaires. Field texts such as writing samples were also collected as support materials to demonstrate student participants’ perceptions. Multiple sources allow the study to report findings accurately. However, there might be some response bias (Ghanem et al., 2005), as the analysis was limited to the data of what participants chose to share, including the challenges and experiences from their own lenses. No data were collected from direct observation.

This study is small in scale. The small sample size allows for in-depth analysis of participants, but it might not be representative of a typical situation in other universities. Also, for ethical and confidential considerations, student participants were not allowed to disclose the name of their instructors. So, student participants were not matched to the instructor participants and they might be limited to discuss practices that were characteristic of certain instructors’ pedagogical decisions. Moreover, student participants in this research were all Chinese students. Although the participant group mirrors the selected program’s demographics, any generalizing of participants’ perceptions needs to take this into account, especially when applying strategies to other ESL programs with a more diverse student population.

Future Research

This qualitative research explored students’ and instructors’ perceptions associated with feedback preferences and engagements on writing. Recommendations for future research are to expand the study for student engagement with feedback in ESL
contexts, to design larger scale studies with more diverse groups of participants, and to explore the complementary functions of various modes of feedback.

The first recommendation for future research is to expand the study for student feedback engagement in ESL contexts. Previous feedback research about ESL writing heavily focused on the effectiveness and preference of feedback strategies (Leng, 2014; Sanavi & Nemati, 2014). Students’ voices and what they do with their feedback were not largely explored. Although this study provided insights regarding how students engage with instructors’ feedback, data was limited to what they wanted to share. Direct observation and more comprehensive research designs should be employed in future research to enrich the data and analysis. Effective strategies or feedback designs should be continuously explored to help ESL students enhance their writing skills and achieve academic success.

Another implication for future research is that larger-scale studies with more diverse groups of participants should be conducted to gain better insights and more pedagogical inspirations. Researchers could recruit student and instructor participants from more institutions with diverse demographic characters to address the same research problem so that the findings could be more representative. More generalized outcomes could be applied to more ESL programs and a more ELL population. It is hoped that listening to more students and instructors can lead to pedagogically changes towards a more effective feedback process.

Lastly, the findings of this research also indicate that more studies about multiple modes of feedback would facilitate the pedagogical development of feedback. Previous research mostly focused on examining one mode of feedback, either written feedback,
oral feedback or peer feedback (Erlam et al., 2013; Yu & Lee, 2016). It is crucial to explore the feedback design or process incorporated with multiple modes of feedback, so students could have more interactive opportunities to build their knowledge. Moreover, this research did not go far to explore technologies or online systems that help instructors to provide feedback for students’ writing assignment. The COVID reality reminds researchers to explore more possibilities for digital feedback and distance synchronous conferencing. Therefore, more research needs to be conducted to explore more convenient feedback modes integrated with technology, such as audio feedback or online chatting rooms. Exploring more modes of feedback would increase the potential to achieve a more effective multiple-mode design that facilitates ESL students with their writing.

**Final Reflections**

Through exploring perceptions of instructors and students regarding the feedback process, this qualitative research provides an opportunity to learn strategies instructors perceived effective, preferred feedback by students, and how students engage with instructors’ feedback. The findings have indicated the importance of raising students’ awareness of seeking feedback and generating more opportunities and space for feedback interaction in pedagogical practices. This last section of this research paper illustrates my final reflections as a researcher and as an educator.

**As a Researcher**

My research journey is like climbing up from the bottom of a well, and the image of feedback is just like the sky seen from the well. I can only see a small part of the sky at the very beginning of this research, and the research journey helps to consciously broaden
my view of the sky. I previously saw feedback as a tool to correct errors in students’ assignments, but now I have a more comprehensive understanding of feedback after doing this project. Feedback is an intervention or a process in ESL contexts to generate more interactions and knowledge construction activities. Although this research just took a brief look into the feedback process and there is great potential to explore more, it enriches my understanding of feedback and guides me with more research possibilities. Most importantly, as a researcher, I realized that it is important to listen to students’ and instructors’ voices as their voice often informs and inspires more effective teaching practices. Learning how they think and how they act in the feedback process could guide the whole feedback process and make pedagogical changes to serve students’ needs.

**As a Writing Instructor**

This study provided me with the opportunity to take a closer look at the ESL program in a Canadian university. As approaching the end of this project, I reflected critically on my previous teaching experience and saw great potential to improve the feedback process pedagogically. As a writing instructor, I used to highly focus on or even only focus on the written feedback and spent great amount of time after class to provide written feedback. Sometimes I felt a little bit of disappointment when I saw repetitive errors in their next assignments because I had provided such amount of feedback related to those errors. Although I provided additional instruction in class when I found most students shared some common problems, I did not generate more opportunities for students to engage with oral feedback or discussions. This research also inspired me to see my students as active learners and reminded me create more opportunities, spaces or platforms to seek feedback. Furthermore, I found myself more carefully in providing
written feedback. Previously, most of feedback I provided was corrective feedback. I thought pointing out all the errors would help them to improve and seldom wrote praise comments. I paid more attention to my language in feedback and added the praise in comments. This research raised my awareness to paying attention to the contexts and students’ zone of development, it also helped me to understand my role of teaching more comprehensively.

All in all, teaching and learning do not happen independently. Feedback providers’ effort, feedback learners’ seeking behaviours, and feedback contexts are all important factors for learners’ performance improvement (Ramani et al., 2019). Creating more feedback interactions and designing a feedback friendly environment could be the priorities to achieve an effective feedback process. It was hoped the insights offered by this paper will contribute to implementing a more effective feedback process to help ESL students with their academic writing skills and facilitate them to succeed academically in higher education.
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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Instructor Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your teaching experience or your history?
2. What are the common writing problems that your students experience?
   - Is most of the feedback form-based (grammar) or content-based?
3. What kind of feedback do you think is most effective for improving ESL students’ writing skills?
4. What do students need in the feedback from your perspective? Why? (What do you think students want most from your written feedback? Why?)
   - Do you think students can easily understand the feedback?
5. What kind of follow up do you require from your students after they receive the feedback on their writing? / What do you expect from your students after sending them feedback?
   - Do you think your students act on your feedback?
6. What are the challenges of giving feedback? Are there any barriers?
7. What might be some good strategies to facilitate student engagement with feedback processes?
8. If there are many errors in students’ writing, how do you deal with those errors, will you mark all the errors?
   - Do you think too many corrections will increase students’ anxiety in writing?
9. In your experience, how useful is it to point out organization errors? Grammatical errors? Content/idea errors? Vocabulary errors?
10. Do you have anything else to share?
Appendix B

Focus Group Protocol

Student Focus Group Questions

1. What is the purpose of writing?

2. What challenges have you met in your academic writing?

3. Are you interested in the feedback you get from instructors?
   - in what circumstances are you more interested in the feedback?

4. What kinds of feedback do you receive? (share your experience about feedback)
   - Do you expect teachers to correct all your errors?
   - What do you want most from the feedback?

5. What kind of feedback do you think is helpful?

6. A lot of instructors think oral feedback works the best. Do you have the chance to have one-on-one meetings/conferences with your instructor to talk about your feedback?
   - if yes, does it work for you?

7. What type of feedback doesn’t help? Or you don’t like?

8. What do you usually do after you receive feedback from instructors? Why? (share your story)
   - What will you do if you don’t understand the comments? Ignore? Ask? Peer?
   - If it is mandatory to talk with your instructor after you receive feedback, how do you feel?

9. How many drafts do you need to submit before the final paper? Do you receive a grade or feedback for each draft?

10. In your experience, how useful is it to point out the problem in the organization, Grammar, Content/idea, Vocabulary?

11. What are your suggestions, opinions, feelings that you want to share with us lastly about the feedback?
Appendix C

Email Questionnaire Protocol

Email Questionnaire 1:

- Can you give at least one example of the feedback you got in these two weeks? And explain why you like it or not and what actions did you take after receiving the feedback?

Example answer:

I believe XX feedback is effective for me because........ After I got this feedback, I .... or 【However, the third one does not work for me, as.........................】

Your response should not include anything that would identify the teacher responsible for the written feedback (this would include initials that might appear in a the ‘track changes’ of a word document. The method to delete this information in the word document is provided below.

1. Firstly, open the document and click “File”, then “Info”.
2. Next, click “Check for Issues” icon.
3. On the drop-down list, click “Inspect Document”.
5. Then click “Inspect”.
6. Soon, there will be a notice saying certain document information is found. You should only click the “Remove All” button in “Comments, Revisions, Versions, Annotations” part.
7. Click “Close” lastly.

Feel free to ask me if you meet any problems when doing this.
Email Questionnaire 2

- Could you please share one of the rubrics you received in the feedback? (Please don't disclose your name, your instructor's name, and your grade) Explain how you feel when you see the feedback in the rubrics. Do you think the rubrics help you with your writing?

Email Questionnaire 3

- Could you please share your assignment schedule? How long it usually takes you to review the feedback and do the revision for each draft (on average)?