

**The Effects of Integrating Peer Feedback into University-Level ESL Writing Curriculum: A
Comparative Study in a Saudi Context**

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June 2010

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ABSTRACT

This project aims to investigate the effects of introducing peer feedback to a group of university-level students in a context where teacher-fronted classes are considered predominant. I performed a three-phased, three-month long project using various data collection methods. The study first investigated students' initial perceptions of peer feedback and compared them to their perceptions after the experiment using semi-structured questionnaires and individual interviews. The results of the first stage suggested that students approved of teacher-written feedback, but were apprehensive about peer feedback. The main objection to peer feedback was the fact that it was originated from fellow students whose linguistic level was lower than that of the teachers. The second phase of the project included members of an ESL class divided into two groups; the experimental group, which jointly used teacher-written and peer feedback; and the control group, which received only teacher-written feedback. Despite linguistic concerns, the overall perception of peer feedback became more positive and students subsequently accepted this technique as part of their ESL writing curriculum. The results suggest that peer feedback helped students gain new skills and improved existing ones. The last phase was a comparative study consisting of pre- and post-tests to measure the progress of students' writing. Texts were evaluated and given an overall grade based on various local and global issues, using a holistic assessment approach. Students in both groups did considerably better in the exit test. However, members of the peer feedback group outperformed the other group in every aspect of writing investigated. The study concludes that the effect of peer feedback on students' perception was profound. Students were hugely impressed by the potential of peer session on their ESL writing routines which has been reflected on their eagerness to have more similar sessions in the future. If students are properly trained to use peer feedback, the benefits could be very significant, and therefore it recommends that education policy makers and ESL writing teachers in Saudi Arabia should do more effort to introduce peer session to all ESL writing classes.

LIST OF APPREVIATIONS

L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
PF	Peer Feedback
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
KAAU	King Abdul Aziz University
χ^2	Chi-square
<i>P</i> -Value	Probability, margin of error ranging from 0.00 to 1.00
SD	Standard Deviation
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences (software)

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Peer feedback can be a very useful collaborative activity in ESL writing classes. Unfortunately, this type of feedback is rare in many non-Western teaching contexts, where teacher-fronted classes remain dominant, despite the benefits reported in the literature. Generally speaking, feedback in writing is a wide concept which can be understood in its broader sense as any type of communication students receive in order to provide information about their written tasks. Feedback nevertheless is not limited to assessing students' written work; more importantly, feedback in its formative guise is an essential component in the ongoing process of learning how to write, or how to acquire any other language skill for that matter, and hence plays an immensely important role in writing development. However, the discussion in this project is restricted to feedback in teaching writing only, and the term "feedback" will henceforth be confined to this concept (Mendonça and Johnson, 1994; Ashwell, 2000; Hyland, 2001; and Ferris, 2002).

The research project introduces this relatively new concept to a Saudi institution. The Saudi educational system in general has been seen as a context where more traditional approaches to language learning are prevalent. (Bersamina, 2009; Almusa, 2003; Al-Hazmi, 2003; Al-Awad, 2002; Asiri, 1996) The study is also in keeping with tradition of studies that investigate whether training students to adopt new concepts in ESL writing could be successful, including Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (2008), Min (2006) and Miao et al. (2006).

A three-phased study was conducted in the English department of a Saudi university involving ESL writing students from two classes to investigate the effect of incorporating peer feedback sessions into their usual curriculum. By using different approaches of data collection, the study investigates how students' perceive peer and teacher-written feedback, how different treatments affect their actual writings, and if their opinions would change following different treatments. The study also investigates if peer feedback can improve the writing skills and products of students who give and receive additional peer feedback sessions in addition to their existing usual intake of teacher-written feedback.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

Contribution to Present Research

The study investigates if peer feedback has an effect on students' beliefs and performances using a multistage data collection approach, which employs both quantitative and qualitative measures. Representative members from Saudi university context were asked first about their beliefs towards a range of issues all related to feedback in an ESL writing session, including towards teacher and peer feedback. From a wider perspective, however, the study also investigates the different beliefs of ESL students at the university level regarding, in addition to different feedback techniques, their preferences of the type of comments they receive, what sort of errors they are concerned about in writing, what areas they would like to improve (local versus global), what attitudes comments should take (praise, criticism or a combination of both) and the directness of feedback. The research also uses a comparative study to measure the effects of training a group of

students to adopt these different learning techniques usually associated with peer feedback sessions, as opposed to another group whose members are exposed only to teacher feedback to measure if the performance will differ as a result of the type of feedback students received. The last of the data collection methods used are semi-structured, individual interviews with selected members of the experiment group, which act mainly as a complement to the findings of the post-experiment questionnaire, as well as giving an in-depth insight into students' responses. Very little research investigates if training students to use peer feedback in their ESL writing classes would change their perceptions not only about peer feedback but other feedback types including teacher-written. Similarly, the combined use of different methods might not be new in previous studies but the way and timing in which they were carried out surely is. In other words, most previous studies that jointly use questionnaires and interviews use them at the end of the experiment while in this study there have been three data collection stages, before, within and after the experiment.

Limitations of Previous Research

The current literature, discussed in more details in chapter two, indicates a research gap in two aspects; firstly, although the topic of feedback and the comparison between various feedback techniques in ESL/EFL writing classes is not a new area of research, I am aware of only three recent studies that compare the effects of peer feedback on writing to those of teacher's written-feedback, two of which were conducted in different teaching contexts. These studies are Min (2006), whose respondents were drawn from a university in South Taiwan; Miao, Badger and Zen

(2006), involving Chinese students; and a recently-published paper by Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (2008), which is in some ways similar to this research topic in terms of topic and the research population. The latter includes two treatment groups: peer feedback with checklists, and checklists only; and secondly, the literature review, which without doubt proves the rarity of educational studies carried out in the Saudi context not only in ESL writing classes but in general. Moreover, none of these or other studies compared students' beliefs about peer feedback and teacher written-feedback before and after training students to use peer feedback sessions which is one of the theories the study investigates. More discussion regarding the research gap is presented in section 3.1 in the methodology chapter.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the project is to evaluate the success of integrating peer feedback into ESL writing classes in terms of developing writing and social skills, and to investigate if training students to use peer feedback would change their perceptions of peer and teacher-written feedback techniques. The specific objectives are:

- To measure students' preferences for different feedback techniques before and after the peer sessions experiment.
- To divide an ESL writing class into a treatment group, which is trained to use peer feedback in addition to teacher-written feedback; and a control group, which receives only teacher-written feedback.
- To prepare the treatment group for peer feedback sessions including training students to act as evaluators (givers) and receivers of feedback, as well as to use the checklist provided by the teacher.
- To evaluate and compare students' writing before and after the experiment by means of entry and exit tests, including members of both the treatment and control groups.
- To provide detailed evaluation reports to all participating texts as part of the assessment process.

- Once written tasks are completed and assessed, it will be ascertained whether the students in the treatment group (peer feedback) would have different perceptions of different feedback techniques.
- To find out if peer feedback sessions helped students improve their writing skills using comparisons with the other group.
- To find out if peer feedback helped to develop social, cognitive, affective and metalinguistic skills.
- To deduce implications for ESL writing teaching based on the findings of the research.

1.4 General Interest of the Study

Writing has been described as a complex process for the L1 learner, not to mention ESL student writers who struggle with their linguistic problems and has to deal with it in addition to other requirements. (Leki & Carson, 1997; Hinkel, 2004; and Ferris & Hedgecock, 2005) Difficulties in writing are no exception to Saudi university-level ESL students. IELTS data (see table 1.1) show that the lowest mean score Saudi students received is in their writing. From my personal experience as a teacher in Saudi Arabia, I have noticed that writing is indeed a problematic area for most students, even those whose major is English, and who therefore could be expected to do reasonably well. Many factors could have affected students' performance in writing, but for the interest of this study I was more concerned about how students received comments about their texts, and how such feedback could have shaped their performance and beliefs. To assess students' progress with more precision than is usually possible using qualitative measures alone, a quantitative tool was also included in the form of two evaluated written tests. More detailed analysis about these issues is available in the literature review chapter.

1.5 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is arranged in the following six chapters:

Chapter One: Introduction

The current chapter which includes an introduction, a rationale of the study and the general interest of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Which, as the name suggests, is a review of the various issues related to the topic of the study. The basic issues to be covered in this chapter are: ESL writing, teaching English in the Saudi context, different approaches to teaching writing, collaborative learning and writing and different techniques of feedback in writing classes.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The design and method of this study are presented in this chapter. It will provide information about the procedures of data collection, the subjects, the materials used to assess students writing, and statistical tests used to for the analyses. The proposed research question is also presented in chapter three.

Chapter Four: Results

Chapter four deals with the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires and the writing tests as well the qualitative data obtained from the interviews and open ended questions in the questionnaires.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This chapter covers the findings of the previous chapter and relates them to previous studies. The attention then moves to the research questions and I try to address them according to the findings.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This chapter contains a summary of the research undertaken, its implications for teaching ESL writing. Limitations to this study, suggestions for future research and self-reflection will also be presented in chapter six.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Chapter Two

The aim of this chapter is to look at the theoretical concepts underlining feedback, which is the common practice of responding to students' writing, including different writing approaches, and their effects on the process of providing feedback, as well as the effects of L2 writing on ESL students' perceptions of the feedback. The chapter is divided into three main parts. The first part looks at the general issues related to the topic, which are the nature of writing, ESL writing, and ESL student writers, and teaching English in general and writing in particular in the context of the study. The second part deals with different writing approaches and how they affect different feedback techniques, in addition to writing assessment and evaluation. Finally, the last part looks at the issues of collaborative learning and writing, as they also provide a theoretical framework in which peer feedback operates. Subsequent to this comprehensive review of the relevant literature, attention is paid to identifying work that still needs to be done, namely the research gap (see 'research question' in the following chapter).

Part One: The Nature of Writing, ESL Writing and Teaching English in Saudi Arabia

2.1.1 The Nature of Writing

Based on the natural order hypothesis, writing is generally considered to be the language skill obtained last, but nevertheless it is as important as the rest. The skill of writing is especially important in academic settings where most ESL teaching occurs. However, many researchers and scholars notice that despite writing being a very

important form of expression and communication, teaching it tends to be a much-neglected part of the language programme in both first and foreign languages (Dempsey et al., 2009; Badger & White, 2000; White & Arndt, 1991; Bailey et al., 1974). Writing has also been described by many researchers as a 'complicated cognitive task', because it is an activity that demands careful thought, discipline, and concentration, and it is not just a simple direct production of what the brain knows or can do at a particular moment. (Widdowson, 1983; Smith, 1989; White, 1987) Writing thus appears to be a challenging task, and researchers such as Widdowson (1983) believe that most of us seem to have difficulty in setting our thoughts down on paper.

This difficulty increases if English is not the writer's first language, hence learning to write in English when it is a writer's second or a third language poses its own additional problems. Hopkins (1989) mentions that for most non-native learners, writing is considered to be the most difficult skill to learn. Moreover, the task of writing in a second language is particularly severe when students are required to produce a high-quality outcome, as is the case in academic settings (McDonough & Shaw, 2003; Hopkins, 1989; Widdowson, 1983).

From a pedagogical perspective, different teaching methods have significant effects in developing students' skills in writing. For instance, Piper (1989) pointed out that instruction has an effect on how learners write, both in terms of written output, writing behaviours, and attitudes to writing. Different approaches have been adopted to teach writing in ESL/EFL classes. In Saudi Arabia (the target context of the

study), as in many other places in the world, the dominant approaches used in different teaching organisations are, arranged according to their popularity, the product, process, and genre approaches. These approaches have obvious local variations in the way implemented in the West, and with more reliance on 'traditional' ways of teaching, as discussed in later sections (see Bersamina, 2009; Almusa, 2003; Al-Hazmi, 2003; Al-Awad, 2002; Asiri, 1996). Descriptions of writing approaches, their advantages and disadvantages, and the role of feedback in relation to different writing approaches will be included.

2.1.2 ESL Writing

It has already been established that learning to write in English as second or a foreign language can be quite different from writing as a native speaker and in many occasions even problematic. In fact, the literature of ESL writing, as Ferris and Hedgcock (2005); Hinkel (2004); and Zhang (1995) report, draws attention to various and significant differences between L1 and L2 teaching contexts, which can generally be attributed to the distinctive social and pedagogical features of each, in addition to differences in linguistic competence and literacy skills of the students. For instance, Leki and Carson (1997) believe that ESL writers experience writing differently from their L1 counterparts. In fact, most non-native students (NNS), according to Hinkel (2004), experience a great deal of difficulty, and even highly advanced and trained NNS students exhibit numerous problems and shortfalls. Hinkel (2004) believes that teaching ESL writing to NNS college- and university-level students is usually academically bound. If NNS students are to succeed in attaining good grades and achieving their educational objectives, the accuracy of their L2 writing needs to be

approximate to NS students at a similar academic level. To put this difference into perspective, Johns (1997), found that many NNS students after years of ESL training often fail to recognise and appropriately use the conventions and features of academic written prose. These students were reportedly producing vague and confusing, rhetorically unstructured, and overly-personal written texts. From an academic point of view, Thompson (1999), whose study in addition to that of Dudley-Evan (1999) was described by Paltridge (2002) as the only ones that looked at academic writing at a doctoral level, highlights this issue of increased number of international students who are expected to write theses in English. Thompson (ibid) therefore calls for more work to be done to establish the characteristics of the genre they are required to write.

Similarly, Ferris (2002) conducted a study which found that L2 students are particularly concerned about their surface-level errors rather than more global issues such as logic, rhetoric and ideas. This particular finding goes along with the widely-held belief that responding to L2 students' writing has been of great significance in teaching writing, and is well considered by both writing teachers and pedagogy theorists alike. In order to explain why NNS students might focus more on local issues, Hinkel (2004) mentions that their writing lacks basic sentence-level features such as the proper use of hedging, modal verbs, pronouns, active and passive voice, balanced generalisations and exemplifications. Hinkel therefore believes that NNS are more concerned about these errors than their NS counterparts which in practice means they focus more on grammatical errors than wider global issues. As a possible negative outcome of this view of NNS students lacking overall language proficiency,

especially writing skills, many NNS students may experience frustration and alienation, which compounds their existing problems. Bearing this mind, Ferris (2002) describes giving grammar feedback to such students as 'indispensable,' contrary to recommendations made by Truscott (1996, 2004 & 2007), who called for a complete ban of this type of feedback. Hyland and Hyland (2001) take a similar stance to Ferris, as they argue that providing written feedback to language students is one of the ESL writing teacher's most important practices. ESL student participants in Hyland and Hyland's study were reported to overwhelmingly desire the correction of their linguistic and logical errors, and they added that it is teacher's responsibility to provide such feedback, in other words, teachers should equally focus on both types of errors. Ferris (2002) gives a possible explanation of such attitudes, noting that L2 writers are constantly aware of their linguistic limitations, and thus are more likely to focus on word- or sentence-level accuracy, instead of more global issues (see above). The very notion of L2 students' preference of *form* feedback is further supported by Ellis et al. (2008), Bitchener (2008), Ashwell (2000), Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1996), and others, who report that foreign language students exhibit positive attitudes to feedback that are distinctly form-focused. The aforementioned studies, moreover, report that most ESL students value and expect feedback concerning their linguistic errors. Hyland (2003: 178) clearly expresses this particular idea:

Teacher-written response continues to play a central role in most L2 writing classes. Many teachers do not feel that they have done justice to students' efforts until they have written substantial comments on their papers, justifying the grade they have given and providing a reader reaction. Similarly, many students see their teacher's feedback as crucial to their improvement as writers.

For instance, when responding to the strong views against giving grammar feedback, especially those expressed by Truscott (1996, 2004 & 2007), Ferris and Hedgcock (1998: 139) note that “In fact, given the strong preferences that L2 writers have expressed for receiving grammar feedback, its complete absence may actually be upsetting and demotivating.”

As for ESL writing teachers’ position, recent research (e.g. Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Ferris, 2002; Hyland & Hyland, 2001) also shows that teachers are very much concerned with students’ surface-level errors themselves. This focus on linguistic accuracy probably originated from L2 students’ linguistic incompetence (see above), but other pedagogical and social influences may still play a significant role. Another explanation for teachers’ attitudes is provided by Hyland (2003) and Zamel (1985), the latter of whom notes that ESL writing teachers perceive themselves more as *language* teachers, rather than *writing* teachers. Similarly, Kepner (1991) refers to the traditional view of achievement in L2 writing as mastery of the discrete surface skills required for the production of an accurately-written document. In short, there is plenty of research evidence showing that ESL students crave surface-level correction, and believe in its effectiveness (Lee, 1997; Leki, 1991; Hendrickson, 1978). Ferris and Hedgcock (1998) note that ESL students have been reported to prefer content feedback on early drafts, and form feedback on later ones, a proposition that copes with the relatively contemporary ‘process approach’ of writing.

It can be concluded that previous research findings clearly demonstrate that ESL students want, appreciate, and apply the corrections they get from their teachers (Zamel, 1985; Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Hyland, 1998; Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Hinkel, 2004; Cohen, 1987; Leki, 1991). In short, ESL teachers feel obliged to correct writing errors, and students want them to do so. Moreover, as L1 student writers usually have significantly less limitations in their linguistic competence, NS writers can focus on more theoretical, notional, abstract ideas. This is, on the contrary, not the case with NNS learners, who are still struggling with their lower-language proficiency, and concerns regarding linguistic errors therefore still occupy prominent status, as compared to their NS counterparts (Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Reid, 2000; Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; Leki & Carson, 1997; Kepner, 1991; Radecki & Swales, 1988).

2.1.3 General Review of the Teaching Context in Saudi Arabia

This section examines broader aspects of the Saudi educational context and their impact on ESL classroom. A more focused section addressing learners' problems in KSA, in addition to a more specific description of teaching English and English writing in Saudi Arabia (especially in the Department of European Languages (KAAU), where the empirical study took place), is included in the methodology chapter. This section investigates cultural, social, pedagogical, and other aspects of Saudi society and educational system that contribute to English teaching in Saudi Arabia.

It is essential to study the various components of the educational context in order to properly understand it, bearing in mind that the learning environment context does not exist in a vacuum, and surrounding environmental, social, and cultural influences

have an effect. Not adequately considering all of these dimensions might negatively affect perceptions of the situation and inhibit the tenability of plans and strategies devised for the situation. In order to understand the problems of Saudi learners, it is reasonable to first understand the Saudi wider educational context as a whole. After all, many researchers say that it is important to understand the whole in order to understand a part, by seeing other pieces of evidence that might affect this specific part (e.g. Holloway & Jefferson, 2000). In this section, an introduction to the Saudi educational context is offered, as represented by Western researchers and expatriate teachers, despite the fact that available resources including similar studies in the Saudi context and publications by the ministry of education, are indeed very scarce, and by inspecting the work of some local researchers or researchers from Saudi Arabia conducting studies overseas.

To elaborate upon the importance of context, Bruthiaux (2002) and Holliday (1994) both agree that simply 'knowing' about a particular culture to understand an educational context is not enough. Educators and researchers need to perceive and comprehend the culture of the classroom itself as unit, and the whole surrounding context as a whole. Holliday states (1994: 161):

...it is not possible to generalise about the precise nature of a particular classroom culture, or the other cultures which influence it, or the form which this influence takes. This means that the process of learning about these things is not a matter just for theorists and university researchers—not something that teachers can get from the literature. It is something that has to be worked through in the situation in which teaching and learning have to take place.

Bearing in mind the previous argument, some Western researchers, scholars, and expatriate teachers (including McKay, 1992; Gray, 2000; Whitefield & Pollard, 1998)

took a deeply critical stance regarding the educational context in Saudi Arabia by describing it as a rigid, deeply religious one, where tradition plays a very dominant position in every aspect of life, including education and educational policies. According to them, the interference of religion is manifested in the 'segregation' between male and female students, as well as in the process of selecting suitable classroom materials, which are, according to them, not based on students' needs as much as their conformity to strict religious mores. For example, McKay (1992) mentions that topics containing themes of relationships other than family and friendship are quickly deleted from textbooks for the sake of not alienating the students. She goes further and claims that any reference to music will soon be removed from textbooks in accordance with the rulings of the dominant religious sect in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, Gray (2000) claims that Saudi Arabia has gone to the 'extreme' of producing English educational materials with almost no reference to English-speaking cultures. Another concern here is the fact that pre-communicative era practices, comprised of content-focused, teacher-dependent learning styles, are still dominant in public schools (Whitfield & Pollard, 1998). This view, although shared by some other researchers, depicts a negative picture of a closed society implementing very strict rules, but it is the view of outsiders looking in, and it therefore does not take account of the voice Saudis themselves. These criticisms are usually based on the short ethnographic experiences of these expatriate researchers, and are usually accompanied with predetermined stereotypical concepts, possibly derived from reading accounts written by the same source (i.e. other expatriates). The complex sociological construct of the Saudi society makes policy decisions taken by the government not only acceptable by the majority of Saudi people, but also

recommended, as reported in Aleid (2000). If we consider the date in which McKay (1992) publishes her recommendation, it becomes almost evident that little change has been achieved since.

McKay (1992) claims that one negative trait of Saudi students is their heavy reliance on personal relationships. Although such a trait seems to be out of the classroom context, and is rather a completely social dimension of the Saudi culture, it actually has influence on students' educational progress. She mentions that an expatriate teacher in Saudi Arabia named Joy claimed that the amount of homework she could assign her students was severely affected by the fact that students devote a good deal of time to visiting friends and relatives, resulting in less time for homework, which criticism could only be valid when associated with the type of Saudi students Joy dealt with. It is however difficult to make valid assumptions from these few accounts but they can be indicators of the teaching problems there.

2.1.4 Learners' Problems in the Saudi Context

The reported problems of ESL/EFL in the Saudi context are divided into three main categories: 1) socio-cultural problems; 2) linguistic and pedagogical problems; and 3) legislative and administrative policy problems. Again, it must be stressed that getting enough information about this particular context was a challenging task; many of the references cited were unpublished theses, which were collected from two British universities visited during this research. The table below is taken straight from Cambridge ESOL notes and shows the scale of the problem.

	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Overall
Saudi Arabia	5.17	4.97	4.83	5.81	5.26
South Africa	7.72	7.40	7.18	8.33	7.72
Spain	6.63	6.90	6.02	6.45	6.56
Sri Lanka	6.39	5.88	5.78	6.28	6.15
Taiwan	5.68	5.80	5.24	5.66	5.66
Thailand	5.84	5.80	5.29	5.67	5.71
Turkey	5.99	5.83	5.43	5.97	5.87
United Arab Emirates	4.87	4.80	4.73	5.33	5.00

Table (1.1) IELTS Test Performance 2008 (From Cambridge ESOL: Research Notes, Issue 36 / May 2009))

Socio-cultural problems

These include a tendency towards teacher-centred approaches (although this particular problem can overlap other with problems of an administrative nature), overreliance on teachers as the main and sometimes the only reliable source of knowledge, and students' heavy reliance on personal contacts and mitigating circumstances to justify their low performance, even in strict professional and educational settings, a problem that McKay (1992) explicitly cited in her account of the Saudi context, as mentioned previously. Moreover, a very conspicuous problem is insufficient opportunities for average Saudi learners to use English in an authentic situation. Syed (2003) noted that local learners see no concrete links between English language ability and their communicative needs, and teachers doubt if their students use English beyond the classroom in any meaningful communication. Failure to perceive communicative aspects of English leads to other problems, including students' lack of motivation, a problem that has been described as serious by Al-Eid (2000) and Al-Malki (1996), and subsequently failure in basic communicative skills, as Syed (2003) concluded. The last two problems may also interfere with the following category of problems. However, as far as ESL writing is concerned, the available data shows that there are serious problems with Saudi

students' writing. The IELTS test performance of 2008 for instance shows that Saudi students scored the lowest average mark in writing (4.83 out of possible 9) compared to other language skills (5.17, 4.97, 5.81 in listening, reading and speaking respectively).

Linguistic/pedagogical problems

These problems interrelate with the other two categories, and include factors such as students' underachievement in the classroom, low English proficiency levels, particularly in their L2 writing. Other studies report that the educational system is more of a top-down approach with audio-lingual and memorisation regarded common practices in the classroom. As far as L2 writing is concerned, Saudi students' poor ESL writing has been widely reported in studies including Bersamina (2009) and Al-Eid (2000). A point already established by looking at table (2.2) in the methodology chapter which shows a tendency to score less in writing than other skills and subsequently the overall score. This finding in fact goes perfectly in line with the results of IELTS Test Performance 2008 shown in table (1.1) above which shows a mean score of writing for Saudi students lower than other skills. Other problems include reliance on rote learning and memorisation, and outdated curricula and methodologies (Bersamina, 2009; Syed, 2003; Khuwaileh & Shoumali, 2000; Al-Eid, 2000).

Legislative and administrative policy problems

These can include insufficient support systems, a lack of qualified English teachers, and not having proper teacher training programmes, as mentioned in Bersamina

(2009), Al-Hazmi (2003) and Al-Awad (2002). It has already been discussed that dependence on high-stakes testing and the predominance of traditional teaching approaches are not uncommon in this context, all of which can be attributed to current educational policies. A lack of sufficient qualified teachers is still a serious problem, despite the government's efforts to recruit more expatriate teachers. For example, according to Al-Hazmi (2003), more than 1,300 non-Saudi teachers were recruited in 2001 alone, Bersamina (2009) also mentions that the majority of whom come from neighbouring countries like Egypt, Jordan and Sudan. However, there are socio-cultural and pedagogical issues involved with expatriate teachers, because even if expatriate teachers may use 'contextually-situated pedagogy', their limited knowledge of socio-cultural communities and languages could subsequently create a linguistic and cultural barrier between them and their learners. Another problem associated with contracted expatriate teachers is that they are less motivated to actively engage with existing systems, and they have little impetus to innovate or initiate change (Syed, 2003; Al-Hazmi, 2003; Al-Awad, 2002; Shaw, 1997).

Part Two: Writing Approaches, Feedback in Writing and Writing Assessment

2.2.1 Writing Approaches

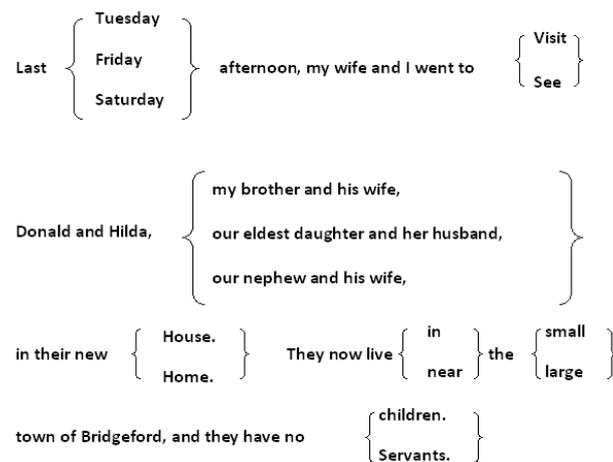
Before the discussion moves on to different ESL writing approaches, two important points need to be clarified. Firstly, the main reason for including this section is to investigate the relationship between different writing approaches and different feedback techniques, especially with process and post-process approaches, as explained below. Secondly, the three as yet unmentioned main approaches are interrelated and, in many cases, a clear-cut definition of each is very hard to

establish. This section however, briefly reviews the most popular writing approaches, as presented in the relevant literature. They will be discussed seriatim according to the general chronological order of their appearance. Although some of the following approaches might have been in the ELT field for a relatively long time, it is still difficult to brand them as 'old-fashioned' or 'obsolete,' for the simple reason that they still play their significant role in many current ELT writing curricula worldwide, although some writing approaches have gained various levels of prominence at different times. For instance, Badger and White (2000) and Tribble (1996) mention that product and process approaches have dominated much EFL teaching writing, while the genre approach has gained prominence in the last ten years. Another important point to consider is that each of these approaches has its strengths and weaknesses, but together they complement each other (Badger & White, 2003; McDonough & Shaw, 2003; White & Arndt, 1991).

The Product Approach

Many researchers, including Yan (2005), Nunan (1999), and Richards (1990), believe that this approach is perhaps the most traditional among the widely-used L2 writing approaches. From a historical perspective, Ferris and Hedgcock (2004), Silva (1990), Raimes (1983), and Flower and Hays (1980) trace this approach back to the audio-lingual method of second language teaching that appeared in the 1950's and early 1960's, in which writing was used essentially to reinforce oral patterns and to check learners' correct application of grammatical rules. Product approaches focus on the final product of the student writers, thus Richards (1990) mentions that because this

approach essentially focuses on the ability to produce correct texts, or "products" it is hence called "product approach."



Graph (1.1) A Typical Example of a Product Approach Exercise: "The way to Donald's house" (Byrne, 1979: 25)

The product approach aims to make learners imitate a model text for the purpose of producing a correct piece of writing via dependence on the (typical) text given, as graph (1.1) above demonstrates. (McDonough & Shaw, 2003; Badger & White, 2003)

This approach, according to Pincas (1982) and Badger and White (2000), focuses on teaching students linguistic knowledge, by which they mean grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling. For example, students might be asked to transform a text which is in the past simple into the present simple, or to change the plural subjects in the model text into singular ones. However, to be more specific, the main features of this approach can be summarised as follows:

1. Learners have specific writing needs.
2. The goal of a product approach programme is to focus on patterns and forms of the written text found in educational, institutional, and/or personal contexts.
3. The rhetorical patterns and grammatical rules are presented in model compositions that students can follow.
4. Grammatical skills and correct sentence structures are very important.
5. Error treatment can be achieved with the help of writing models.
6. The mechanics of writing such as handwriting, vocabulary use, capitalization, and spelling are also taught.

7. The role of the teacher can be seen as a proof-reader or an editor. McDonough and Shaw (2003) also mention that the role of the teacher is to judge the finished work.

(Accumulated from: Yan, 2005; McDonough & Shaw, 2003; Badger & White, 2003; Nunan, 1999; Richards, 1990; Silva, 1990; Hedge, 1988; and Flower & Hays, 1980).

The product approach is seen to offer many advantages, such as improving learners' grammatical accuracy, especially with lower-level students, and enhancing learners' stock of vocabulary (Zamel, 1983; Raimis, 1991; McDonough & Shaw, 2003). Nevertheless, this approach has also been criticised for several reasons. For example, it does not allow much of a role for the planning of a text, nor for other process skills (Badger & White, 2000). Moreover, students might become frustrated and demotivated when they compare their writing with better models. It has also been claimed that using the same form regardless of content will have the effect of "stultifying and inhibiting writers rather than empowering them or liberating them" (Escholz, 1980: 24). Hairston (1982) also argues that adopting this approach in teaching will not encourage students to practise writing, because it does not show them how writing works in real-life situations. He contends that teaching students the best way to write requires initiating them into a real way (i.e. an authentic situation where there is a real need for writing texts) to produce correct writing, which requires more than providing them with a set of rules. With this approach, feedback either from the teacher or from peers is not possible except on the final product, i.e. after students have completely finished their written tasks. Finally, Yan (2005) agrees that product approach ignores the actual process used by students or any writers to produce a piece of writing. The approach therefore requires constant error correction, and this practice in turn affects students' motivation and self-esteem in the long run.

The Process Approach

This approach has generally been regarded as a reaction against product-based approaches, where the focus has shifted from the final product to the underlying processes of writing that enable writers to produce written texts. This approach sees writing primarily as the exercise of linguistic skills and writing development as an unconscious process that occurs when teachers facilitate the exercise of writing skills (Badger & White, 2003; Gee, 1997; Uzawa, 1996; Zhang, 1995; and Keh, 1990).

The links between peer feedback and process approach are obvious. Berg (1999), Zhang (1995) and Keh (1990) for instance believe that peer response is actually part of the process approach to teaching writing and feedback in its various forms is a fundamental element of this approach. Many tasks involved in peer review sessions are in fact applications of the process approach.

From a historical perspective, this approach can be traced back to the late 1970's, and specifically to Zamel (1976), following the work of the cognitive psychologists who proposed a model of the composing processes involved in writing with three central elements; planning, translating, and reviewing. This approach represents a shift from the mere analysis of written texts to studies that address writing processes. It is interesting to note that the process approach has made a huge impact on writing pedagogy, and since 1980 syllabi and textbooks in many parts of the world have incorporated this approach as an integral part of teaching (Ivanich, 2004; Gee, 1997; Uzawa, 1996; White & Arndt, 1991; Flower & Hays, 1980) According to Liu and Hansen (2002) and Zamel (1983), this approach focuses on the

composing process, which views writing not as a product-oriented activity, focusing only on the final product, but rather as a nonlinear, exploratory, and generative process, whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning. This approach gives the opportunity to practise activities usually referred to as *linguistic skills* such as pre-writing, brainstorming, drafting, and editing, with less focus on *linguistic knowledge* aspects such as grammar (Badger & White, 2003; Tribble, 1996; White & Arndt, 1991; Hedge, 1988; Raimes, 1985; Zamel, 1983).

The process approach also gives students the opportunity to understand the importance of the various skills involved in writing, and recognises that what learners bring to the writing classroom contributes to the development of writing ability, as Badger and White (2000) assert. According to White and Arndt (1991) and McDonough and Shaw (2003), there are different main parts formulating the process writing approach, which are cyclical and interrelated. White and Arndt roughly divide them into pre-writing and actual writing activities, whereas McDonough and Shaw divide them into pre-writing, drafting and redrafting, editing, and a pre-final version. The shortened list of the main process as envisaged by McDonough and Shaw (2003), Tribble (1996), and White and Arndt (1991) is as follows:



Flow Chart (1.1) The Shortened List of Writing Processes. From Tribble (1996: 39)

The full list, however, usually includes the six following processes: 1) generating ideas, which is the starting point and possibly the most difficult and inhibiting step; 2) focusing, which means realising the focal idea and viewpoint of the writing, which

should be closely connected to the writer's purpose in writing; 3) structuring, which means arranging factual and linguistic information; 4) drafting, where attention moves towards the reader, and the writer starts to think of how best to organise information and ideas for them, as well as how to attract their attention by means of referring, directly or indirectly, to openings, and ends with sense of completion; 5) evaluating, which requires developing criteria for evaluation by looking for grammatical and rhetorical mistakes; and finally, 6) re-viewing, which comes as the last stage in process writing, when writers see their text gradually evolving into a form which is more-or-less final.

This approach, according to Ivanic (2004) and Flower and Hays (1980), has been praised by teachers and policy makers alike because it contains certain sets of elements which can be taught explicitly, and because it has an inherent sequence. However, as with product approach, process approach has been subject to criticism. Badger and White (2000) believe that it does not give students sufficient input, particularly in terms of linguistic knowledge, in order to enable them to write successfully. Horowitz (1986) also believes that using process writing in the classroom will leave students unprepared for writing exams. He also argues that it will give them a false perception of how their writing will be evaluated at university level. Ivanic (2004) moreover mentions that aspects of writing and writing processes might not be easy to assess, meaning that the assessment will usually be preserved for the final product. More importantly, the process approach did not differentiate between text-type, context, and purpose for writing.

With regard to feedback techniques, it is important to highlight the relationship between process writing and feedback in general, and peer feedback in particular, as this approach enables and even encourages students to work collaboratively in groups (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Badger & White, 2000). Liu and Hansen (2002) similarly recognise the relationship between feedback and process writing, and they assume that the former supports the latter, especially during the drafting and revision stages, and hence process writing enables students to get multiple feedback opportunities (e.g. from teacher, peer and self) across various drafts. This fact should certainly help to improve students' following drafts. Cohen (1990) further explains that the writing process in this approach usually passes through several rounds of peer editing and self-assessment before it reaches the teacher for assessment, making this approach a favourable one when training students to use peer feedback.

The Genre Approach

People who share the same profession have a tendency to employ a special language which is used more or less exclusively by them - the genre approach. Hyland (2007) mentions that this approach is an outcome of the communicative language teaching approach which emerged in the 1970's. It has also been described by Badger and White (2000) as a new-comer to ELT, which focuses mainly on this type of language teaching.

The main focus of this approach, according to Muncie (2002), is on the reader and on the conventions a piece of writing needs to follow in order to be successfully accepted by its readership. Ivanic (2004) and Badger and White (2000) believe that

this approach again focuses on writing as a product, and in some ways is an extension to product approach, but with attention being paid to how this product is shaped according to different events and different kinds of writing. This approach therefore includes the social aspects of the writing event, and makes broad distinctions between narrative, descriptive, expository, and argumentative writing.

In the field of ELT, Dudley-Evans (1994) notes the similarities between product and genre approaches, and outlines the main three stages to the genre approach: firstly, teachers present students with a model of a particular genre; secondly, students then perform tasks to generate structures expressing that genre; and finally, drawing on the previous stages, they produce a short piece of writing. Hyland (2007) summarises the main features of the genre approach as follows:

Explicit	Makes clear what is to be learnt to facilitate the acquisition of writing skills
Systematic	Provides a coherent framework for focusing on both language and contexts
Needs-based	Ensures that course objectives and content are derived from students' needs
Supportive	Give teachers a central role in scaffolding students' learning and creativity
Empowering	Provides access to the patterns and possibilities of variation in valued texts
Critical	Provides the resources for students to understand and challenge valued discourses
Consciousness-raising	Increases teachers' awareness of texts to confidently advise students on writing

Table (1.2) Main Features of Genre Approach

Many advantages have been associated with the genre approach. Johns (2003: 198) for instance believes that individuals who are familiar with common genres create shortcuts to the successful processing and production of written texts. He gives the example of a person who writes a letter to an editor, or a memo, or a political brief within a certain culture, and who will be able to use this prior knowledge to produce:

... a second socially-accepted text from the same genre. Thus, teaching within a framework that draws explicit attention to genres provides students a concrete opportunity to acquire knowledge that they can use in undertaking writing tasks beyond the course in which such teaching occurs.

Furthermore, applying this approach acknowledges that writing is taking place in a social situation, and shows students how real writers organise their texts, promotes flexible thinking, and, in the long run, encourages informed creativity, since students need to learn the rules before they can transcend them (Badger & White, 2000; Aleid, 2000; Kay & Dudley-Evans, 1998). It is also possible, by employing this approach, to engage in peer feedback activities before giving the teacher the final draft. On the other hand, experts also are aware of possible drawbacks. Badgers and White (2000) believe that it may lead teachers to undervalue the skills needed to produce a text, and to see students largely as passive learners. Kay and Dudley-Evans (1998: 311) further criticise this approach as “restrictive, especially in the hands of unimaginative teachers, and this is likely to lead to lack of creativity and demotivation in the learners. It could become boring and stereotyped if overdone or done incorrectly.” Like the process approach, genre approach recognises feedback as a key element in writing classes where, according to Hyland and Hyland (2006), teachers can build on learner’s confidence and literacy resources to participate in the target communities.

From the previous discussion of the literature, it can be concluded that no one approach to teaching writing is superior to the others. Therefore, it is better for writing teachers to consider a variety or a mix of approaches, their underlying assumptions, and the practice that each philosophy generates, as Badger and White (2000) and Rimes (1991) recommend. Asiri (1997) similarly suggests that an integration of different approaches, taking into account the different types of students, their processes and purposes of writing, their needs, their readers, their

writing contexts and the whole academic and social settings of the writing activity, could give the most satisfactory results.

2.2.2 Feedback in Writing

An Overview of Feedback in Writing

This section begins with a brief discussion about feedback in general, which progressively develops into a more detailed argument. According to Kepner (1991: 141), the term “feedback” in its broad context (as generally used in the ESL literature) could be defined as “any procedure used to inform a learner whether an instructional response is right or wrong.” However, this abstract definition might not be suitable for this study, because writing as seen by Asiri (1997: 5) is a creative activity, and therefore it is not enough to confine the feedback merely to informing the writer that his or her responses are right or wrong. Thus, for the purpose of this research, Freedman’s (1987: 5) comprehensive definition will be adopted, which includes different aspects of feedback (i.e. teacher feedback, conferencing, and peer feedback).¹ She states that feedback on students’ writing “includes all reactions to writing, formal or informal, written or oral, from teacher or peer, to a draft or a final version. It can also occur in reaction to talking about intended pieces of writing, the talk being considered a writing act. It can be explicit or less explicit.” This study examines the efficacy of two commonly-used techniques of feedback in teaching writing: teacher feedback and peer feedback, bearing in mind that peer feedback is still considered a novel concept in the Saudi educational context, as explained below.

¹ With the exception of self-correction, which is not within the scope of this study

The Significance of Feedback

The importance of feedback has been acknowledged by many researchers and experts, who recognise its important role in increasing learners' achievements, and its central role in writing development. Many studies such as Ferris (2002), Hyland and Hyland (2001) and Ashwell (2000) suggest that feedback is beneficial for both beginners and expert writers, because it makes them evaluate their writing and notice possible points of weaknesses. These studies then contend that feedback helps students by creating the motive for doing something different in the next draft; thoughtful comments create the motive for revising. Without comments from their teachers or their peers student writers would revise in a piecemeal way, and without comments from readers, students assume that their writing has communicated the intended meaning, and hence see no need for revising the substance of their text. Feedback also makes students realise the level of their performance, and shows them how to improve it to a satisfactory level. Furthermore, not providing students with feedback may cause confusion, leaving them unaware of the aspects of their writing that need to be reconsidered, and thus causing their efforts to be misdirected, as mentioned in the previous section: the nature of ESL writing (Miao et al., 2006; Hyland, 2003; Ferris, 2002; Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Ashwell, 2000; Hedge, 1988; Zellermayer, 1989; Robb et al., 1986, Freedman, 1987; Cardelle & Corno, 1981). Feedback is helpful not only for students who receive it, the literature also suggests that feedback is important for teachers as well, because it gives them the opportunity to diagnose and assess the problematic issues in learners' writing, and allows them to create a supportive teaching environment (Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Miao et al., 2006). However, as Gibbs and Simpson (2002)

mention, feedback needs to meet certain criteria, such as the need to be specific and to focus on learning and process, rather than on students themselves, in order to be effective.

Teacher-Written Feedback

This type of feedback is probably the most traditional and commonly-used technique of responding to students' writing in every teaching context where writing teachers are usually the sole providers of comments to their students. Despite emphasis on alternative feedback techniques including oral responses and peer feedback, Hyland and Hyland (2006) believe that teacher-written feedback still plays a central role in L2 writing classes. Research about teacher-written feedback falls into two main categories; the first looks into teachers' actual performance and self-assessment, while the other looks at the topic from the students' perspective (Montgomery & Baker, 2007; Hyland & Hyland, 2007; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 1995 & 2002). As far as the first category is concerned, teachers' feedback can take the form of praise (positive comments), criticism (negative comments), or suggestions (constructive criticism) (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Different techniques can be employed to deliver these, such as providing a written commentary, which is generally considered to be the most widely-used form among teachers. Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) believe that comments normally take the form of marginal or terminal comments. However, according to Hyland (1990 & 2003), teachers sometimes provide their students with an audio recorded commentary. Some even prefer to provide feedback via compact discs or e-mails, which is described by

Hyland (2003) as electronic commentary. Regardless of the forms teacher feedback can take, these techniques usually take two general shapes:

1. Direct feedback (*explicit/overt*) – using this format teachers tend to give precise corrections or structure notes on students’ mistakes.
2. Indirect feedback (*covert*) – in which teachers give students indications that they have made mistakes.

There are also many techniques that can be used to indicate errors, such as:

- a) Marginal error feedback: in which the margin is used to indicate the number of mistakes in each line.
- b) Coded error feedback: in which a coding system is adopted to indicate the mistake such as abbreviations or symbols.
- c) Uncoded error feedback: whereby the mistakes are underlined or circled without mentioning the type of mistake made.

(Accumulated from: Ferris, 2002; Lee, 1997; Enginarlar, 1993; Robb et al., 1986).

The following table shows the directness of various types of teacher feedback, where the first item (correction) represents direct feedback, and the subsequent items represent variations of indirect feedback:

Group	Location of Error	Content of Error	Model by Teacher
Correction	+	+	+
Coded	+	+	–
Uncoded	+	–	–
Marginal	–	–	–

Table (1.3) Feedback Methods. From Robb et al., (1986: 87).

Another aspect of teacher-written feedback that has also been thoroughly investigated is the distinction between comments on local issues, also known as form feedback, and global issues (content feedback).

As for the other category of research, students’ perceptions of teacher-written feedback, research shows that students, like their teachers, feel that this feedback is an important part of the writing process. This case is especially true with ESL

students in particular, who, despite the reported undesired effects of teacher-written feedback, think that it could possibly improve not only their writing, but their L2 grammar as well (Montgomery & Baker, 2007; Ferris, 2002 & 1995; Hyland, 1998; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994). One interesting finding of studies such as Ferris (1995) and Ware and O'Dowd (2008) is that ESL students want their teachers to focus more on local issues than on global ones, a fact that should be carefully considered when it comes to responding to these students' writing which, as Ware and O'Dowd put it, can be achieved by making a balance between fluency and linguistic accuracy. However, the question of whether L2 teachers should focus on local issues is a subject of heated debate, which must be overlooked for now (c.f. Truscott, 1996, 2004 & 2007; Ferris, 2004; Goldstien, 2004).

Teachers' comments on linguistic errors in writing have been a subject of severe criticism by Trucott (1996, 2004 & 2007), who suggests that grammar correction is not only useless, unsystematic, and arbitrary, but can also deteriorate students' subsequent writing and compromise their overall achievement. He suggests that acquiring grammatical patterns is a very complex process, and teachers should never intervene; any attempts are, according to him, a waste of teachers' and students' valuable time and effort. Many subsequent studies tried to refute Truscott's conclusion and defended using grammar feedback in ESL writing classes. For instance, Ferris (1999: 2) mentions that his ideas are "premature and overtly strong." She along with other researchers, including Lee (1997), Ashwell (2000), and Chandler (2003) believe that students cannot be left without any guidance; errors that go unnoticed can be fossilised, and, referring to the fact that students expect correction

from their teachers, they also believe that it is therefore the teachers' responsibility to provide such feedback. Other criticisms mentioned in Ferris (2006) and Reid (1993) include feedback not being text-specific, being incorrect, not addressing the issues it intends to, and mismatching between the feedback students want or expect and what is actually given.

Peer Feedback

Peer feedback, which is also known in the literature as 'peer review' (Mangelsdorf, 1992), 'peer editing' (Daniels & Zemelman, 1985; and Keh, 1990), 'peer evaluation' (Keh, 1990; and Chaudron, 1984), 'peer critique' (Keh, 1990; and Hvitfeldt, 1986), 'peer commentary' (Connor & Asenavage, 1994) and 'peer response' (Urzua, 1987; Keh, 1990; Di Pardo & Freedman, 1992; Nelson & Murphy, 1993; Liu & Hansen, 2002; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005), can be defined as the:

use of learners as sources of information and interactants for each other in such a way that learners assume roles and responsibilities normally taken on by a formally trained teacher, tutor, or editor in commenting on and critiquing each other's drafts in both written and oral formats in the process of writing. (Liu & Hansen, 2002: 1)

According to other experts such as Pol et al. (2008), Rollinson, (2005) and Topping (1998, 2000), peer feedback can also be defined as an educational arrangement, in which students comment on their fellow students' work for formative or summative purposes. Storch (2004) reported that peer feedback rests on a strong theoretical and pedagogical basis, which, in terms of the former, follows the model of social constructivist view of learning, and as far as pedagogy is concerned reinstates the concept of communicative approach to language learning. Storch also believes that despite the strong bases of peer feedback, the use of peer feedback in the classroom

is quite limited. It is not only that the use of peer feedback is limited in classroom settings, because peer feedback research is especially limited in ESL/EFL settings. However, as Saito and Fujita (2004) suggest, a large body of research into peer assessment in various areas covered by psychology and mainstream education has been conducted. The findings suggest that peer response is indeed consistent, and can be used as a reliable assessment tool in schools.

Peer feedback takes many forms and serves many purposes. It has already been mentioned that it can be employed in the form of conferencing, in the form of written as well as oral comments, or both simultaneously. This 'flexibility' is another useful aspect of peer feedback (Mooko, 1996; Hyland, 2003; Rollinson, 2005). Peer feedback can also take many formats, some of the most common ones being: 1) to assign groups of two, three, or four students and ask them to exchange their first drafts and give comments on each others' drafts before making final versions; 2) to make students read their own essays aloud, or get a colleague to read it instead, while the other students listen and provide feedback, either written or oral, on the work that they have just heard; 3) is not to restrict feedback to the time after students have written their essays, because it is possible for students to use this type of feedback in the pre-writing stage by asking other students to comment on each others' outlines, or to carry out a brainstorming session (Hyland, 2003).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Peer Feedback

Many studies have recommended the use of peer feedback in ESL writing classes for its valuable social, cognitive, affective and metalinguistic benefits (Lundstorm and

Baker, 2009; Pol et al., 2008; Min, 2008; Rollinson, 2005; Storch, 2004; Saito & Fujita, 2004; Hinkel, 2004; Ferris, 2003; Yarrow & Topping, 2001; Hyland, 2000; Reid, 2000; Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; Zhang, 1995; Mendonça and Johnson, 1994; Jacobs, 1989; and Chaudron, 1984). Yarrow and Topping (2001) for instance mention that peer interaction is of great value, and the method is recognized by many educational organizations, as evidenced by recommendations by the Scottish Office Education Department. Hyland (2000) also adds that peer feedback encourages more student participation in the classroom, giving them more control and making them less passively teacher-dependant. Ferris and Hedgcock (2005), Saito and Fujita (2004), Storch (2004) and Ferris (2003) add that peer feedback helps learners become more self-aware, in the sense that they notice the gap between how they and others perceive their writing, thus facilitating the development of analytical and critical reading and writing skills, enhancing self-reflection and self-expression, promoting a sense of co-ownership, and hence encouraging students to contribute to decision-making, and finally, it fosters reflective thinking. As for the collaborative component of peer feedback, Yarrow and Topping (2001: 262) confirm that peer feedback plays a significant role in “increased engagement and time spent on-task, immediacy and individualisation of help, goal specification, explaining, prevention of information processing overload, prompting, modelling and reinforcement.” The literature also suggests that peer feedback is more authentic and honest than a teacher’s response, and it gives students the opportunity to realize that other students experience similar difficulties to their own, and it can also lead to less writing apprehension and more confidence. Peer feedback can also help develop learners’ editing skills, and establish a social context for writing. More importantly, peer feedback internalizes

the notion of 'audience' into the minds of student writers, because it provides students with a more realistic and tangible audience than their teacher, which in turn assists them in producing 'reader-oriented' texts (Lundstorm and Baker, 2009; Hinkel, 2004; Storch, 2004; Hyland, 2000; Reid, 2000; Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; and Chaudron, 1984). Lundstorm and Baker (2009) in a recent study also revealed that peer feedback can be as beneficial to students who provide it as to those who receive it, if not more.

On the other hand, Ferris and Min (2008), Hedgcock (2005), Rollinson (2005), Hinkel (2004), Saito and Fujita (2004), and Hyland (2002) also believe that ESL students will always question the purposes and advantages of this technique which is particularly true with students who are accustomed to teacher-fronted classroom. The main criticism is that they instinctively feel that a better writer such as their teacher is the one who is qualified to provide them with useful comments, so there is arguably the preference issue, which can act as a barrier to the success of peer sessions. In fact, some students might view receiving comments from colleagues whose English is at the same or even at a lower level than theirs as not being a valid alternative for the 'real deal' and hence they might resist group-centred peer review activities. Hyland (2000) mentions that this is not necessarily a bad thing, as students can make 'active decisions,' by which she means they can choose which comments to accept and which ones to reject; another way of giving students more control in the classroom. Other studies such as Min (2008) claim that peer feedback makes only a marginal difference in students' writing, but other types of feedback have been accused of exactly the same outcome, including teachers' comments, yet teachers, as well as

students, feel that feedback is an integral part of any ESL writing class. Hinkel (2004), citing a study by Carson and Nelson (1994), also mentions that some students found it difficult to provide honest feedback because they prioritized positive group relations rather than improving their writing. Another issue with peer feedback was mentioned in Hyland (2002), who says that both NS and NNS students perceived revision as error correction, and hence were culturally uncomfortable because they felt that error correction criticizes people. Hyland (2000) mentions that there are other cross-cultural issues involved in peer feedback, especially if students are from a large variety of cultural and educational backgrounds. These issues include conflict or at least high levels of discomfort among members of the peer feedback group. She then recommended more longitudinal and naturalistic research to be carried out in order to better understand these issues and find solutions. In some cases it was found that incorporating peer feedback could weaken students' writing. However, despite all these criticisms, feedback in general is still highly appreciated, especially by NNS students (see NS vs. NNS section). Storch (2004) also found that most peer responses focused on product rather than the processes of writing, and many students in L2 contexts focused on sentence-level errors (local errors) rather than on the content and ideas (global errors), a finding earlier noted by ESL teachers themselves as Jacobs (1989) reports. Jacobs in fact mention that students themselves might experience difficulties in peer sessions resulting from their limited knowledge of ESL writing. Saito and Fujita (2004) additionally report that a number of studies indicate that there are a number of biases associated with peer feedback including friendship, reference (teachers using different criteria from students), purpose (development vs. grading), feedback (effects of negative feedback on future

performance), and collusive (lack of differentiation) bias. However, the researchers admit that these biases can be found in most rating techniques, including teacher and peer feedback, and the focus should be on how to minimize them.

Other Types of Feedback: Conferencing, Self-Correction and Keeping Logs

In addition to teacher's written feedback and peer feedback, Bitchener et al. (2005), Ferris and Hedgcock (2004), Hyland (2000, 2003), Ferris (2002), Keh (1990), and Zamel (1985) also add teacher-student face-to-face conferencing, self correction, and keeping error logs as other valid techniques of feedback. In conferencing the teacher and the students negotiate the meaning of a text through a dialogue. Like the two previous techniques, conferencing has its advantages and disadvantages, all of which have been thoroughly investigated by these researchers and many others. The other two types are self explanatory. However, these techniques will not be thoroughly investigated because they are, first of all, not among the techniques that will be used in the empirical study, and secondly, the available research into these types is insufficient.

2.2.3 Introducing Peer Feedback to ESL Students

Although many researchers stress the significance of peer feedback in ESL writing classes (e.g. Habeshaw et al., 1986; Ferris, 1997; Berg, 1999; Hyland, 2000; Ulicsak, 2004; Rollinson, 2005; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005), many ESL tutors still find themselves reluctant to introduce peer feedback in their ESL writing classes. Such reluctance, according to Saito and Fujita (2004), might be based on fears that the results could be unreliable, students can be resentful, and the experience may be

chaotic. It is important to differentiate between the concepts of 'feedback' and 'assessment' as the former refers to any procedure used to inform learners whether their instructional response is right or wrong with the purpose of improving learners' skills hence it is part of the learning process (see section 2.2.2) while the latter usually happens after teaching and learning are over and acts with accordance of giving marks. Another distinction is between formative and summative assessments (see section 5.1) because feedback is an intrinsic part of formative assessment but it might or might not be part of summative assessment. It is also important to note that working in groups is not an intrinsic skill, it is rather a learned skill, and, according to Ulicsak (2004) and Rollinson (2005), teachers have to create the environment that supports students to collaborate with each other. In order to minimize or even avoid undesired results, careful planning and implementation of peer feedback techniques are required. Lundstorm and Baker (2009); Min (2006), Saito and Fujita (2004) and Habeshaw et al. (1986) suggest a number of broad principals to prepare and apply peer feedback in the university context which are all dependant on the unique needs of students involved; university students have to start peer assessment as early as possible in the first term, before they are set in their ways, because students are more willing to try peer feedback and peer assessment in early stages which do not usually contribute to students' final results. It is also recommended at the early stages of peer feedback to start with small tasks, as little as just one element of assessment, in order to make students feel that they are not taking a great risk. Moreover, peer feedback tasks in early stages have to be relatively easy, and, when students are asked to comment on their peers' scripts and/or assess them, clear marking criteria and guidelines should be explained and

introduced. Students must be given a clear rationale for peer feedback, and procedures to be followed. A possible scenario to achieve this would be to get students to agree to the procedures and then ask them to adhere to them. It is also recommended to get students to practice peer feedback before they provide actual feedback and assessment that affect grades. The teacher must provide responses to students' peer feedback, which in turn helps enforce proper standards. Finally, teachers are encouraged to have a positive attitude towards students' efforts, and to use anonymous scripts for peer feedback and assessment, in order to make students feel less exposed and to overcome subjectivity. Saito and Fujita (2004) also recommend teachers to set out clear criteria, foster understanding of goals and limits, and develop familiarity with the instrument.

In order to structure a successful peer feedback exercise, Berg (1999) specifies the following points, and recommends teachers to consider them when applying peer feedback: 1) having a comfortable classroom atmosphere; 2) the role of the peer response in the writing response should be made clear; 3) students must acknowledge the role of peer feedback in academic writing, and they should also recognize that even most successful professional writers benefit from peer comments; 4) anonymity, noting the main idea of the anonymous text in some detail, and ambiguities as well as obvious flaws in organization, support, unity, grammar and spelling - in other words, students should focus on rhetoric-level aspects rather than 'cosmetic' sentence-level errors; 5) opinions expressed in peer responses have to be appropriate in terms of vocabulary and expressions used - general comments such as 'your writing is bad' should be avoided, and alternatives

such as 'you need to provide more clarification here' should be used; 6) students should use a support tool, such as Berg's (1999) response sheet, to help them comment on specific areas of writing; 7) groups of students can benefit from each other's collaborative writing projects and from responses to these projects; and finally, 8) students when engaged in collaborative writing projects should be introduced to revision strategies and guidelines. Habeshaw et al. (1986) also add the following points: 1) teachers should brief their students with the procedures of peer feedback, and provide them with detailed information about different stages of the process and time allocated for each stage, and students must be encouraged to ask for clarification when needed; 2) students should be reminded of peer response criteria, and teachers are encouraged to provide students with copies or handouts of the criteria; 3) the process of providing peer feedback should be organized, and each script should be marked by at least three students; 4) teachers must introduce 'safeguard' techniques to avoid bias or any undesired influences on feedback; 5) teachers and students should agree on a marking scheme should peer feedback contribute to grading; and finally, 6) students should reflect on their experience to identify problems and suggest solutions. Teachers, on the other hand, should organize the process and report the findings back.

Because peer feedback involves group work, it can be seen as a collaborative learning practice (see sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2). One important distinction has to be made between pair and group work, as noted by McDonough and Shaw (2003), as they obviously reflect different social patterns. Pair work also requires little

organization on the part of the teacher, whereby a group is by its very nature a more complex structure.

The following table summarises feedback studies in ESL writing as appear in the literature review. I was interested in a number of issues when I created this table including who were involved in the study and how the researchers evaluated students' writing. Another important issue that will be discussed in the following chapter is the location in which participants were studying ESL writing.

STUDY	PARTICIPANTS/LENGTH OF STUDY	TYPE OF WRITING EVALUATED	TREATMENT GROUPS
Lundstorm and Baker (2009)	92 Students in 9 writing classes in ELC Brigham Young University	Pre and Post Writing Tests	1) Control Group: Receivers of PF (n=46) 2) Experimental : Givers of PF (n=44)
Ellis et al. (2008)	49 Japanese University Students	Pre-Test, Immediate Pro-Test and Delayed Pro-Test	1) Focused Corrective Feedback (n=18) 2) Unfocused Corrective Feedback (n=18) 3) Control Group (n=13)
Ware and O'Dowd (2008)	98 Students from the US, Spain and Chile	Monolingual Online Exchange and a Telecollaborative Project	1) E-tutoring (Phase 1, n = 13, Phase 2, n= 28) 2) E-partnering (Phase 1, n = 13, Phase 2, n = 44)
Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (2007)	51 Saudi ESL University-Level Students	Pre and Post-Tests, Choice of 3 Tasks: Expository, Comparative and Argumentative.	1) Peer Feedback and Checklist Group 2) Checklist Only Group
Miao et al., (2006)	79 Chinese University Level Students / 3-Round Multi-Draft Tasks	An argumentative, technology-orientated essay	1) Teacher Feedback Class (n= 41) 2) Peer Feedback Class (n = 38)
Min (2006)	18 Taiwanese University Students / One semester: continuing from Min (2005)	2 Expository Essays (pre and post-experiment)	Peer feedback training group: each student received 4 hours in-class training and 1 hour reviewer-teacher conference
Bitchener et al. (2005)	53 ESOL Immigrant Students/ 12 Weeks	Four 250 Word Writing Tasks at Weeks 2, 4, 8 and 12 Respectively	1) Full Time Class (direct feedback + 5 minutes teacher-student conferencing) n=19 2) 10 hrs/wk Groups (direct feedback only) n=17 3) 4 hrs/wk Group (no feedback) n=17
Storch (2004)	23 ESL Students at an Australian University/ 4 Weeks	Data Commentary Text	18 Students worked in pairs and were interviewed individually. Their interaction as they worked collaboratively was tape-recorded
Peterson (2003)	33 Grade 7 – 8 Multiethnic Students in a Canadian School/ 2+ Years	A narrative composition that takes five weeks to complete.	1) Informal Peer Interaction 2) Guided Peer Feedback Using Checklists 3) Formal Peer Response Group
Ashwell (2000)	60 Japanese EFL Students/ One 3-Draft Essay	3-Draft Essay	1) Control – No Feedback 2) Content then Form 3) Form then Content 4) Content and Form Simultaneously
Berg (1999)	46 Level 3 and 4 Students / 2 Terms	2 Assignments (pre-peer response drafts and post-peer response drafts)	1) Trained Peer Response (n= 24) 2) Untrained (n= 22)
Kepner (1991)	60 Intermediate Students/ One Semester	One Journal Entry Not More than 200 Words	1) Surface-Level Error Correction 2) Message Related Comments Only
Robb et al., (1986)	134 Japanese EFL Students/ One Year	Pretest and 4 Narrative Compositions	1) Correction of All Errors with Explanations (Direct Feedback) 2) Coded Correction 3) Uncoded (Highlighted) 4) Marginal with Number of Error by Line

Table (1.4) Recent Feedback Studies

2.2.4 Students' Beliefs in Writing

Studies such as Li (2007), Joyce (2006), Wu (2006), White & Bruning (2005), Lavelle & Zuercher (1999), and Geisler-Brenstien & Cercy (1991) which investigate students' beliefs in writing usually focus on one or more of the following areas: students' conception of writing, attitudes about themselves as writers, the need for personal expression in writing, and eventually the relationship between students' beliefs and their learning outcome.

Students' beliefs are somehow affected by different writing approaches. For example, the way students revise their texts in process writing differs according to their level as Lavelle and Zuercher (1999) report. 'Elaborative revisionists' use writing as a way of changing their thinking which contrasts the idea of writers at lower levels who report that writing is a painful experience in this regard.

Another theme emerges from Joyce (2006) and Wu (2006), both of whom discovered that many students not only believed they did not write well, but they could not obtain the tools needed to learn how to write. This belief of negative self-efficacy affected the quality of both their writing and their attitudes about writing.

Finally, as the relation between beliefs and performance continues, Wu (2006) and White & Bruning (2006) give further support to the theory that students' beliefs do affect their choice of writing processes and strategies. Students with negative beliefs score low on organisation and overall writing quality while students with more positive beliefs score high on both areas.

2.2.5 Writing Assessment

The main purpose of including this section about writing assessment and evaluation methods is to help design a reliable writing assessment tool to be implemented in the following empirical stage, which is referred to as 'writing tests, stage 3,' and is discussed in detail later in the methodology chapter.

Assessment and Feedback

'Assessment' is different from 'feedback,' even if these concepts are very similar and interrelated at some points. The main focus of this research project is to evaluate the effect of two different types of feedback which explains why 'writing assessment' as a technique would be used in the data collection phase to help evaluate the effectiveness of the different types of feedback. Cohen (1994) believes that assessing writing abilities can be a real challenge because there are numerous features in writing that can be included in the actual process of evaluation. These features include:

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- *Content*: depth and breadth of coverage
 - *Rhetorical structure*: clarity and unity of the thesis
 - *Organization*: sense of pattern for the development of ideas
 - *Register*: appropriateness of level of formality
 - *Style*: sense of control and grace
 - *Economy*: efficiency of language use
 - *Accuracy of meaning*: selection and use of vocabulary
 - *Appropriateness of language conventions*: grammar, spelling, punctuation
 - *Reader's understanding*: inclusion of sufficient information to allow meaning to be conveyed
 - *Reader's acceptance*: efforts made in the text to solicit the reader's agreement, if so desired
-
-

Table (1.5) Features to be considered in assessing writing ability, from: Cohen (1994: 307)

Cohen admits that only some of these 'dimensions' are evaluated in any given assessment of writing ability. There are some genuine factors that limit the number of features to be considered in assessment, including time available for assessment, cost of assessment, and relevance of the dimension for the given task, and the ease of assessing that dimension.

According to Cohen (1994: 20), the authenticity of writing tasks can be improved by means of some or all of the following:

1. Having a choice of interesting topics that are purposeful.
2. Clearly stating that planning is an essential part of the task, and, if required, outlining the project.
3. Providing explicit information regarding the grading criteria.

As for the first recommendation, most topics discussed were part of the curriculum but because the textbook was especially designed for ESL students, I would argue that most of the topics were of relevance to the participants of the study regardless of students' context. The pre and post tests' topics were a comparison between city and country life, and a discussion as to why students would choose a specific university respectively. The two remaining recommendations are self-explanatory.

Electronic and online Means of Writing Assessment

The reasons for including this section are, first of all, to acknowledge the existence of alternatives ways of writing assessment and, second, to explain why they become very popular in education technology research. Although I did not use any of the online assessment tools in this research project for various reasons including the relatively small number of participants in my writing tests and the shortcomings of

these programmes which can be easily avoided using conventional ways of assessment.

The emergence of easily accessible online assessment programmes such as DIALANG, ACTFL Writing Proficiency Scale and ETS CRITERION, is a serious attempt to integrate new technology into the field of ESL writing, a field which until recently has not benefited as much from current technological advances in language education as other language skills according to experts like Alderson and Huhta (2005), and Luoma and Tarnanen (2003). Despite all shortcomings in earlier or even current versions of writing assessment programmes, they can still provide numerous advantages for both teachers and learners alike. For example, the available research shows that using automated assessment programmes can save language teachers' plenty of time and effort that otherwise would be spent on counting errors and providing detailed feedback, a problem aggravated by large writing classes or with learners of low writing proficiency levels. These applications can also provide students with more frequent assessment opportunities enabling further testing and receiving feedback as well as informing them about points of weaknesses they still need to work on that would be possible with teachers in charge alone. Consecutive research in ESL writing and feedback shows a very positive attitude towards more feedback by students regardless of how beneficial this feedback is. Students can also benefit from the fact that they are no longer tied to specific location and time to complete their tests enhancing more flexibility and free environment.

With more recent developments in these programmes, it is now possible to have adaptive, customized tests where the software draws writing tests from a pool of

items. One immediate positive effect of this feature is that students can have different topics to write about. This feature is very helpful in situations where, for example, pre and post tests or multiple attempts are required. It also minimizes chances of cheating as students will be allocated different topics to write about. Moreover, by reconfiguring the settings of the software, teachers can also choose the items they want their students to focus on and they still can impose their own criteria when responding to students' writings maintaining the humanistic aspect of the process. Writing assessment programmes can perform basic tasks such as identifying individuals who require special attention and establishing fundamental knowledge of subjects much faster and with more accuracy. As these programmes are designed to generate statistical data, they can act as valuable sources of data for teacher researchers.

Despite the sophistication these programmes have reached lately there are still possible flaws with them. Some disadvantages of using these online assessment programmes include, first of all, the arduous task of training and familiarizing students with them which could prove to be exhausting, time consuming and, in the case with commercial versions such as ETS, financially expensive. Moreover, using automated assessment tools assumes by default the availability of necessary technical infrastructure, which might not be the case everywhere. More technical issues can also go problematic such as malfunctions, interference/usability issues, Internet disruptions, and other technical issues. Although these programmes can decrease or even remove the boundaries of time and location they can also mean the absence of instructors, so students will not always be able to consult their

instructors when they have a problem, an issue that become especially acute when it comes to international, self-assessment programmes like DIALANG (Alderson, 2000; and Alderson & Huhta, 2005). The issue of quality assurance has also been questionable. In fact, many reports claim that the feedback produced by these programmes is not always trustworthy, credible and reliable, especially with organization and content aspects of the written work.

Part Three: Collaborative Learning and Writing

2.3.1 Collaborative Learning

As previously mentioned, this section has been included because peer feedback is considered by many researchers and experts in the field of ESL writing to be a collaborative activity, and it is therefore essential to understand the theoretical framework of collaborative activities to help better understand this type of feedback. Such an understanding should also prove fundamental when it comes to the application of such a technique in the context of the empirical study as shall be seen in the following chapter.

Ulicsak (2004), McWham et al. (2003), Nunan (1992), Kohonen (1989), Kohonen (1992) and Gaillet (1992), among many other experts, mention that collaborative learning and teaching have emerged as significant concepts within the field of language education. McWham et al. (2003) for example mention that college and university students are increasingly being asked to work co-operatively and learn collaboratively. These concepts are based on a vast pool of scientific, well-developed philosophical perspectives and research traditions which include “ humanistic education, experiential learning, systemic-functional linguistics, and

psycholinguistically motivated classroom-oriented research” (Nunan, 1992: 1). That is in addition to the recent emphasis on teamwork in the business sector as McWham et al. (2003) stress. Again, according to Nunan (1992) and McWham et al., (2003), there are several reasons for having collaborative learning in language education. At the tertiary level of education, reasons include diverse student population who need to develop ways of learning together, the increased emphasis on learner-driven approaches such as peer learning, and student projects that often require a team approach. Additionally, teachers might want to experiment alternative ways of organizing teaching and learning, students might be more concerned with promoting a philosophy of cooperation rather than competition, researchers might want to create an environment in which learners, teachers and researchers themselves are teaching and learning from each other in an equitable way, and last but not least, curriculum designers might want to find ways to incorporate principles of learner-centeredness into their programmes. McWham et al. add that research has shown that group learning leads to academic and cognitive benefits and it helps promote learning and achievement, the development of critical thinking skills aids in the development of social skills such as communication, presentation, problem-solving, leadership, delegation and organization. Another important application of collaborative learning and joint assessment as mentioned by Dunworth (2007) is inter-professional education which is an emerging concept in social work.

Kohonen (1992) argues that the whole concept of collaborative learning is a reflection of the recent development in second language learning where the focus

has shifted away from ‘traditional behaviorist’ models which conceives teaching as transition of knowledge towards ‘experiential’ models whereby teaching is seen as transformation of existing or partly understood knowledge, based on the constructivist views of learning. The following table (ibid) briefly illustrates the main differences between language learning approaches perceived according to the behaviouristic and constructivist models.

Dimension	Traditional Model: Behaviorism	Experiential Model: Constructivism
View of learning	Transmission of knowledge	Transformation of knowledge
Power relation	Emphasis on teacher’s authority	Teacher as a ‘learner among learners’
Teacher’s role	Providing mainly frontal instruction; professionalism as individual autonomy	Facilitating learning (large in small groups); collaborative professionalism
Learner’s role	Relatively passive recipient of information; mainly individual work	Active participation, largely in cooperative small groups
View of knowledge	Presented as ‘certain’; ‘application’ ‘problem-solving’	
View of curriculum	Static; hierarchical grading of subject matter, predefined contents	Dynamic; looser organization of subject matter, including open parts and integration
Learning experiences	Knowledge of facts, concepts and skills; focus on content and product	Emphasis on process: learning skills, self-inquiry, social and communication skills
Control of process	Mainly teacher-structured learning	Emphasis on learner: self-directed learning
Motivation	Mainly extrinsic	Mainly intrinsic
Evaluation	Product-oriented: achievement testing; criterion-referencing (and norm-referencing)	Process oriented: reflection on process, self-assessment; criterion referencing

Table (1.6) Traditional and Experiential Models of Education: A Comparison (Kohonen, 1992: 31)

Collaborative learning has many objectives which include establishing ‘positive interdependence’ among the members in the group so learners work together for mutual benefits, encouraging a sense of joint responsibility where learners care about each others’ success as well as their own, and creating a feeling of social support. These goals all together help learners develop higher self-esteem and self-confidence as well as academic achievement. (Nunan, 1992 and Kohonen, 1992) In order for language learners to perform successfully in collaborative work, Kohonen (1992: 34 - 35) mentions five important factors these learners should possess. They are:

1. Positive interdependence, a sense of working together for a common goal and caring about each others' learning.
2. Individual accountability, whereby every team member feels in charge of their own and their teammates learning and makes an active contribution to the group. Thus, there is no 'hitchhiking' or 'freeloading' for anyone in a team – everyone pulls their weight.
3. Abundant verbal, face to face interaction, where learners explain, argue elaborate and link current material with what they have learned previously.
4. Sufficient social skills, including an explicit teaching of appropriate leadership, communication, trust and conflict resolution skills so that the team can function effectively.
5. Team reflection, whereby the team periodically assess what they have learned, how well they are working together and how they might do better as a learning team.

Finally, Slavin (1983: 128) summarises the literature and reviews the argument presented over collaborative learning:

... the research done to the present has shown enough positive effects of cooperative learning, on a variety of outcomes, to force us to re-examine traditional instructional practices. We can no longer ignore the potential power of the peer group, perhaps the one remaining free resource for improving schools. We can no longer see the class as 30 or more individuals whose only interactions are unstructured or off-task. On the other hand, at least for achievement, we now know that simply allowing students to work together is unlikely to capture the power of peer group to motivate students to perform.

2.3.2 Collaborative Writing

It has already been mentioned that the focus on collaborative learning has steadily increased in language classrooms especially in the course of the last few decades. This interest becomes very evident in one of its significant applications, collaborative writing, which will be the focus of this section.

Collaborative writing is an increasingly widespread activity in ESL writing classes as well as in professional writing contexts where two or more writers work together to produce a shared piece of writing. To put this fact into perspective, Ede and Lunsford (1990) mention that 85% of the documents produced in office and universities had

at least two authors. The literature indicates that collaborative and cooperative learning has become part of most curricula at all levels of education. Teachers routinely assign students small group tasks that involve giving and taking feedback and working together to accomplish a common purpose. (Gaillet, 1992)

The popularity of collaborative writing exercises among ESL educators and curriculum designers alike can be explained not only by means of recent empirical findings but also because of the many theoretical, empirical and practical advantages it offers over individual writing. Nunan (1992) for instance mentions that the recent empirical work in literacy instruction has supported the theoretically-motivated arguments in favour of cooperative learning. With regard to its advantages, collaborative writing according to Noël and Robert (2003) can save time and effort, it is more likely to produce more viewpoints and ideas, and it can also ensure that subsections of professional papers are written by experts in the field. Nunan (1992) reflects on an a case study when a group of learners were involved collaboratively in programme planning and implementation, and he then mentions the following advantages of collaborative learning: students learn about learning so they learn better, collaborative learning encourages them to increase their awareness about language and about self and hence about learning, it helps students develop metacommunicative as well as communicative skills, it helps students to confront and come to terms with the conflict between individual needs and group needs both in social and procedural terms as well as linguistic and content terms, it helps students realize that content and method are inextricably linked, and finally, it helps them recognize the decision making tasks themselves as genuine communicative

activities. In a wider context and in more practical terms, collaborative learning entails students working together to achieve common learning goals and it stands in contrast with competitive learning (although they can coexist in ESL contexts).

Murray (1992) believes that in order to prepare ESL students for authentic situations, they must experience collaborative writing by means of incorporating collaborative learning strategies into ESL writing classes. Murray argues that if we understand how native speaker participants collaborate, we will then be able to determine effective ways of using collaborative writing in the ESL classroom. Roughly speaking, collaborative writing can be divided into two types: paper-based interactions and oral-based discussion. The former is more associated with editing and publishing settings and it addresses actual writing itself not the processes involved in developing the text. It is important to note the social dimension of collaborative writing as Murray (1992: 103) mentions, "Collaborative writing was essentially a social process through which writers looked for areas of shared understanding."

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Overview of Chapter Three

The methodology chapter is divided into three main parts. The first looks into the research question, the context of the study and the research population. The second is more substantial and investigates the theoretical bases upon which the methodological framework was built. This necessitates explaining the data collection methods and how they were designed and developed, in addition to other methodological concerns such as the validity of the research area and research ethics. Finally, the last part looks at how the collected data were processed and analysed, which tools were used in the analysis process, and how the data were represented.

PART ONE: RESEARCH QUESTION, CONTEXT AND RESEARCH POPULATION

3.1.1 Research Gap and Research Questions

Research Gap

The previous chapter shows that most peer feedback studies in the literature investigate one or more of the following issues; students' perception of peer feedback and obstacles that could affect its progress (Miao et al., 2006; and Storch, 2004) , training students in peer feedback sessions (Min, 2006; Peterson, 2003; and Berg, 1999), how peer feedback activities should be executed (Bitchener et al., 2005), types of errors addressed in peer comments (Ashwell, 2000; and Kepner, 1991) and how feedback could affect students' subsequent writing in the short and

long run (Ellis et al., 2008). Many studies conduct the pre-, post-tests technique to assess the progress of students writing before and after the experiment (Lundstorm and Baker, 2009; Ellis et al., 2008; Al-Hazmi and Scholfield, 2008; Min, 2006; and Berg, 1999). Most studies also compared peer feedback to teacher-written feedback and in some cases other types of feedback such as conferencing (Miao et al., 2006; and Bithcener et al., 2005). As far as the educational context is concerned, most of these studies were carried out in Asia. For example, Ellis et al., (2008), Ashwell (2000) and Robb et al., (1986) did their studies in Japan, Miao et al., (2006) in China, and Min (2006) in Taiwan. The only published study carried out in a Saudi context was that of Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (2008) which included 51 ESL university-level students divided into two groups, one which uses peer feedback and checklists and the other which uses checklists only.

The review of the literature clearly shows that, first of all, peer feedback research in the Saudi context is very scarce, and, secondly, although many studies followed the pre-test, post-test method to evaluate students' performance before and after an experiment, a very limited number of studies investigated if students' perception of peer feedback could have changed as a result of the experiment. Although this study does not attempt by itself to establish a relationship between students' performance and their beliefs, a field which could benefit from more investigation, it can nevertheless recommend a template for future research where such a relationship could be thoroughly investigated.

Research Questions

With regard to the research gap already established in the literature review and summarised in the previous section, the research questions are:

1. How can the integration of peer feedback as a collaborative/communicative learning technique into ESL writing classes help improve students' writing skills?
2. To what extent does peer feedback help learners improve their skills when compared with students who receive only teacher-written feedback?

Research Sub-Questions: Testing Variables and Rationale

In order to answer the above main research question, the following sub-questions will be investigated:

1. What are Saudi ESL university-level students' initial perceptions of teacher-written feedback and peer feedback?
2. Will peer feedback help students gain new writing skills and improve existing ones?
3. How do these students feel about the integration of peer feedback into ESL writing classes?
4. Will students' initial perceptions of different feedback techniques change by the end of the experiment?

The first and the last sub-questions investigate how ESL students perceive the various techniques of feedback, and they aim to reveal Saudi adult ESL students' preferences, attitudes, and beliefs, and if these students are going to modify their views as they are introduced to the non-traditional techniques of collaborative learning. The reason why the researcher is interested in ESL students' points of view is that their beliefs and preferences have been reported to have a significant influence over their current and subsequent performance when they learn ESL writing, as reported by researchers such as Kepner (1991) and Ferris (2002). The researcher also aims to investigate if students' beliefs and preferences will have their impact on the level of acceptance of peer feedback by respondents, who will be

involved in the quasi-experiment study. In order to collect the necessary data for the first and last sub-questions, the researcher planned to use purpose-built, non-standardized, semi-structured questionnaires that will be discussed in detail below.

As the second sub-question has a more practical nature, the researcher planned a quasi-experiment which involved entry and exit writing tests to assess students' performance before and after the treatment. The purpose was to discover if there would be any difference in the results of the experimental group and the control group. The researcher carried out fieldwork which extended for a whole semester and involved actual teaching in the institute these ESL students were attending. The results should give the researcher strong evidence to decide if the group trained to use peer feedback performed differently from the control group. The hypothesis being questioned is that students in the experimental group would outperform their counterparts in the control group, the null hypothesis is that no significant difference in their performance would be recorded and the alternative hypothesis is that the experimental group would perform less well than the control group.

Finally, for the third sub-question, the researcher used a task-based, semi-structured interview to supplement the data gathered from questionnaires and to give an in-depth insight into the subject matter. This qualitative method helps the researcher better understand the processes involved in the actual application of peer feedback during the experimental phase, as well as offering a better opportunity for respondents to elaborate on their answers in the questionnaire. Furthermore, the multi-methodological triangulation achieved by applying both quantitative and

qualitative measures serves the purpose of validating the results, where data produced by one tool could be cross-checked against data produced by the other tool (see section 3.2.5 of this chapter). Triangulation is also a valid technique to check the consistency of the data gathered (Bryman, 2004; Cohen et al., 2000 & 2007). In fact, the interviews gave respondents more space to comment on their beliefs and experience. Discussion of data collection methods, validity, reliability and other equally important issues continues in the following sections.

3.1.2 The Context of the Study

General Educational Background: EFL in the Saudi Context

A briefer section about teaching English in Saudi Arabia has already been included in the literature review chapter. This part however is slightly different from sections (2.1.3) and (2.1.4) in the literature review because this part tackles issues more connected to the research population actually involved in the study rather than general statements about teaching ESL in SA. This part therefore contains detailed descriptions of the participants of the study.

ESL in the Department of Foreign Languages, KAAU

Although all students who join the department are expected to have successfully completed at least six years of formal education learning EFL as a requirement (see previous section), few of them actually achieve satisfactory results in their entrance exams when joining a Saudi university (Asiri, 1996; Alhazmi, 1998; Grami, 2004). As a result, the department has integrated obligatory basic remedial English courses for low-achievers in grammar, reading and vocabulary, speaking and listening, and

writing, before embarking on advanced courses in either linguistics or English literature. Although there is no English placement test on graduation, the information provided by the Department suggests that most students show a good level of progress, and many of those who took English level exams such as TOEFL have supported this assertion. Unfortunately, exact figures are not available. Although this might always be possible, the English department endeavours to graduate students with sufficient language proficiency, both written and spoken. All graduates are also expected to achieve a good level in academic English.

For writing and composition, the Department requires all students to successfully complete four compulsory courses in writing. The textbooks normally used for teaching the two introductory writing courses (coded LANE 213 & 216) are Interactions I and II respectively.

3.1.3 Participants of the Study

Bearing the research question in mind, this study targets ESL students at intermediate to high-intermediate levels with various mastery levels of ESL writing techniques and skills. Due to the absence of official records of students' proficiency, the researcher considered the option of targeting students who have successfully completed at least one semester in the department as a plausible, easily accessible measure of their level.

		Students' level in the university	Students' age	Number of completed ESL writing courses
N	Valid	73	73	73
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		n/a*	20.58	n/a*
Std. Deviation		n/a*	1.499	n/a*
Minimum		1	19	1
Maximum		5	27	4

*Table (2.1) Participants of the Study (*n/a means not applicable)*

The participants of the first stage of the project ($n=73$) were all male students, and were all registered in an ESL writing course in KAAU. Their ages varied from between 19 to 22 years-old (93.2%), averaging 20.5 years-old, with only 7 students aged above 22. As for their level in the university, most of the students were in their first or second year (61.6%). 31.5% were in their third or fourth year, and five more students were beyond the fourth. The majority of students chose English as their first preference in the university (77.8%), while the remaining 16 students had other first options but they eventually had to register in the English department for various reasons. Most students completed one course or more in English writing before they registered in 216, rendering them, on paper at least, on levels above beginners.²

The University's policy states that all students must decide on three majors they are interested in, arranged according to the level of preference. Students will then be allocated one of their chosen modules, depending on how many factors (especially their GPA) satisfy the departments' requirements. Other variables included the

² Reasons why the English Department might not be students' first choice include: some students do not have the prerequisite type of education to study at their first choice department, external reasons like better job opportunities for English graduates makes some students choose English instead of their initial first choice, or because of the quota system in place in the faculty which sometimes appoint students to departments other than their first choice.

students' type of formal education (private or public), years of learning English prior to the university, and number of successfully completed writing courses in the department (if applicable).

The participants of the subsequent stages of the research project were all drawn from these 73 students following a progressive research design. With regard to students' proficiency level, I used the writing level of students (from both writing tests, entry and exit), years learning English in formal education, and additional language remedial courses if available, as indicators of proficiency levels, as there were unfortunately no official records of students' proficiency levels held in the department (e.g. TWE or IELTS writing scores).

PART TWO: THE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF TOOLS

A multi-strategy research was conducted in this study, whereby different data collection methods were used to gather the necessary data during three different stages, tools included pre-test and post-test writing tasks, pre- and post-experiment questionnaires, and interviews with members of the treatment group. The first questionnaires helped obtain a general idea of students' perceptions of various types of feedback, and following stages of data collection enable see to see if students' perceptions are likely to change by the end of the experiment. This idea of what students thought of feedback strategies as well as the introduction of peer feedback is captured from the subsequent questionnaire and interviews. However, the writing tasks help track students' progress and improvement in their writing. This

section mainly discusses the theoretical background on which these tools were developed. The procedures taken to conduct the study and then analyse the results will be mentioned in a later section.

3.2 Justification for Choosing Data Collection Tools

This project follows a tradition of studies that employed the pre-, post-tests technique including Lundstorm and Baker (2009), Ellis et al., (2008), Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (2007), Min (2006) and many others, to compare students' progress either within a period of time usually in which an experiment is carried out with or without different treatment groups.

Semistructured questionnaires were used in the first stage of data collection for the relatively large number of potential subjects (n=155). However, as the number of participants in the subsequent stages is considerably smaller, more qualitative means of collecting data were used including more open-ended questionnaires and interviews.

3.2.1 Procedures of the Questionnaires

McDonough and McDonough (1997), Clough and Nutbrown (2007), Gillham (2000), and Cohen et al. (2000) among other experts believe that questionnaires are a very popular data collection method in educational research. There are numerous factors that can lead to a researcher choosing questionnaires to collect data from students, which naturally apply to this research project, including: a) questionnaires tend to be more reliable as they are anonymous; b) they encourage greater honesty from

respondents; c) they save the researcher's and participants' time and effort (they are more economical); and d) they can be used in small-scale and large scale issues (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989; Cohen et al., 2000; McDonough & McDonough, 1997) Mertens (1998) also mentions that questionnaires allow the collection of data from a larger number of people than is generally possible when using quasi-experimental or experimental design. However, experts also point out that questionnaires also have some disadvantages. For instance, Mertens (1998) pointed out that questionnaires rely on individuals' self-reports of their knowledge, attitudes, or behaviours, thus the validity of information is contingent on the honesty and perspective of the respondent. Cohen et al. (2000) also believe that questionnaires might have the following disadvantages: a) the percentage of returns is often too low; b) if only closed items are used they may lack coverage or authenticity; c) if only open items are used, respondents may be unwilling to write their answers.

It is therefore very important for researchers to strike a balance between the advantages and disadvantages. In order to minimize these disadvantages, the researcher distributed the questionnaire to the targeted students during one of their classes, so the return rate was likely to be higher than if it was distributed by mail. To address the lack of coverage and authenticity associated with closed questions, there was a secondary interview with some selected students, with less-structured questions and further opportunities to elaborate on answers to items in the questionnaire. This was expected to minimise any undesired negative effects including lack of coverage. Other suggestions were taken from Cohen et al. (2000: 129), who suggested that the researcher needs to pilot questionnaires and refine

their content, wording, and length accordingly, and to make it appropriate to the targeted sample (the students), as shall be seen below.

The Design and Development Stage: Points to Consider

Generally speaking, there are some considerations involved in the process of developing any data collection method. Mertens (1998) mentions the following steps to develop a data collection instrument:

1. Define the objectives of the instrument.
2. Identify the intended respondents.
3. Review existing measures.
4. Develop an item pool, i.e. resources for draft items, new measurement devices, adapting existing tools and/or adopting tools.

It is also very important to think of an appropriate title for the instrument, because this is the first thing a respondent will see, especially if the instrument is a questionnaire. Many researchers (e.g. McDonough & McDonough, 1997; Cohen et al., 2000; Walliman, 2001; Mertens, 1998) have all stressed the importance of having a cover letter that contains the title and an introductory paragraph attached to the questionnaire, especially for ones to be distributed by mail, where respondents usually have little chance to ask the researcher for clarification.

Mertens (1998) and Cohen et al. (2000) also mention that it is equally important to reassure participants of privacy and confidentiality in the questionnaire, especially when a survey asks questions of a sensitive nature; such assurances were expressed clearly in the body of the questionnaires and by the instructors themselves. Other important considerations include ensuring that the questionnaire is written in a language easily understandable to the intended respondents, and including

instructions on how to complete the questionnaire. The researcher also consulted other questionnaires from previous studies that investigated similar issues, such as Race et al. (2004) and Ferris (1995). No items were duplicated, because the questionnaire was specifically designed for the purpose of this study, but many ideas were adapted when required. In other words, the questionnaire was designed with Cohen's (1987) questionnaire in mind (later used by Ferris, 1995; and Min, 2006) but the questions used were chosen to fit the purpose of the study.

The survey was conducted in two stages: a) the pre-experiment stage, when participating ESL student writers were asked about their beliefs, preferences, and attitudes regarding both traditional teachers' written feedback, and the relatively new concept of peer feedback; and b) the post-experiment stage, when students involved in the experiment group were asked to report their beliefs in writing, preferences, and attitudes, to find out if the exposure to both techniques in general, and training to adopt peer feedback in particular influenced their perceptions. The researcher used Likert scale questions to determine students' attitudes.

A number of concerns are usually involved with questionnaires that contain items of attitude scales and self-report measures. Bell (2005), Cohen et al. (2000, 2007), and Wallace (1998) identify three major problematic aspects usually associated with questionnaires and interviews. They are:

1. Subjectivity:

This basically means ascertaining the truth of the respondents' reply. The researcher is therefore advised to spot responses that might have indicated exaggeration, consciously or unconsciously, such as students claiming they study longer than they actually do. Brown and Rodgers (2002) refer to the same aspect as 'prestigious questions'. The subjectivity of questionnaires and interviews also requires a clear distinction between 'opinions' and 'truth', as they are not necessarily interchangeable notions. However, if teacher respondents all agreed that a course book is very poor, then this book is unlikely to contribute much to an effective teaching programme. The researcher needs to be realistic and sensible about evaluating data presented through questionnaires and interviews. Moreover, the researcher needs to employ common sense when applying a questionnaire which can be reflected in items such as quality of the source and possible hidden motivations, especially in a small-scale action research, when the researcher knows the subject helping them to evaluate the resulting data well.

2. Sampling:

This problematic aspect deals with the how representative a sample is of a larger population. Sampling, according to education research experts such as Cohen et al. (2000 & 2007), Bell (2005), Walliman (2001), and Wallace (1998), is a very complex process. Comments and guidelines provided by these experts however were strictly observed when choosing a representative sample for the sake of this study. A simple random sampling technique was used in the first questionnaire because, to my knowledge, the research population was homogenous in most aspects, including

linguistic background, age group, gender, educational level and proficiency (c.f. section 3.2.5.3 Validity & Reliability). In the second stage of the research however, a 'cluster sampling' procedure was followed, which Walliman (2001) describes as cases forming clusters by sharing one or more characteristics, the sample is otherwise homogenous. In the case of PF and control group, the only observed factor that differentiates the two groups was the type of treatment they received. Other types of random sampling including systematic sampling; simple and proportional stratified sampling were disregarded because they were not applicable for the research population. Non-random sampling techniques were overlooked altogether because they tend to provide a weak basis for generalisation (Bell, 2005).

3. Intrusiveness:

This is the third problem associated with questionnaires and interviews. These techniques can be described as intrusive in terms of the time consumed to answer the question, the unwillingness of respondents to answer questions, stemming from their belief that their responses will benefit only the researcher and not themselves, or from the fact that there is no immediate feedback, as in the case with different types of questionnaires such as 'rate yourself'. Moreover, questions asked during interviews are threatening in every aspect, especially in terms of time needed, possibility of awkward or personal questions, and anxieties resulting from speculations on how the results will be presented and used. All these concerns are carefully examined in the ethical considerations section.

There are yet more specific issues that have to be avoided in order to produce a sound non-standardised questionnaire, as mentioned in Brown and Rodgers (2002: 143), which include:

1. Overly-long items
2. Unclear or ambiguous items
3. Negative items
4. Incomplete items
5. Overlapping choices in items
6. Items across two pages
7. Double-barrelled items
8. Loaded word items
9. Absolute word items
10. Leading items
11. Prestige items (exaggeration in response, Wallace, 1998)
12. Embarrassing items
13. Biased items
14. Items at the wrong level of language
15. Items that respondents are incompetent to answer
16. Assuming that everyone has an answer to all items
17. Making respondents answer items that don't apply
18. Irrelevant items
19. Writing superfluous information into items

The questionnaire that will be used in the first stage of data collection is divided into three main parts (see appendices C, D and E) The first section asks students general questions about their age, educational background, courses they have taken and suchlike. The second section asks more specific questions about teachers' written feedback in the form of a tendency scale to measure attitudes. The third section asks similar questions to the previous section, but with regard to peer feedback. The last two sections should reveal students' conceptions of the different types of feedback, which is the subject of investigation in this research project. As the main purpose of the questionnaire is to investigate students' beliefs in writing, most questions are in Likert scale format which, according to Cohen et al. (2000 & 2007), is helpful in terms of helping combine the opportunity for a flexible response with the ability to determine frequencies, correlations, and other forms of quantitative analysis. In

other words, these rating scale items offer measurement with opinion, quantity, and quality, and therefore are very suitable to collect data for this research project.

The Development of the Non-Standardised Questionnaire

Bearing in mind that the questionnaire was intentionally non-standardised, it was extremely important to achieve certain standards to render it valid. For instance, the questionnaire had to be fairly easy to use, simple and undemanding, especially in its electronic format. A questionnaire should also be written in a way that never intimidates the respondents, neither in linguistic nor in technically complicated terms. Even if the purpose comes first, the questionnaire should also appear attractive, easy to read and to follow, and easy to answer. Mertens (1998) and Cohen et al. (2000 & 2007) recommend survey designers to make them attractive by using coloured ink, coloured papers, and different type styles. In this project it was decided that items and pages should also be numbered, a brief instruction should be included (see appendices A and B), examples should be given before any item that might be confusing, the questions should be organised in a logical sequence so related items should be grouped together, beginning with interesting and non-threatening, factual questions, and the most important questions should not be left until the end.

All of these features generate achieve user-friendliness, a very important characteristic of credible questionnaires. The early draft of the questionnaire underwent numerous editing processes, and was regularly reviewed in the light of relevant educational research handbooks and references, such as McDonough and

McDonough (1997), Wallace (1998), Cohen et al. (2000) and Robert and Rodgers (2002) including trialling and piloting as explained later. Moreover, the advice of other researchers currently working in the field of education was sought prior to the pilot study stage.

The Pre-Pilot Study

This was an important step in the process of developing the questionnaire. The purpose of the pre-pilot study was basically to consult other well-informed researchers in the field about the data collection tools to be used. This process is known in the literature as the pre-pilot or the trialling stage. The opinions and comments of twelve research students working in the field of education were gathered via an opinion questionnaire specifically designed for this purpose. The opinion questionnaire also comes in an electronic MS-Word format, which enabled me to send it via e-mail to more participants than would be possible using only conventional means and regardless of their geographical locations. It contains both closed items along with an unrestricted space for further comments. However, to help get helpful yet specific responses, prompts addressing three major aspects of the non-standardised questionnaire were included. These aspects are the layout and appearance, the nature of the items involved, in terms of both content and type (i.e. dichotomous, multiple choice, scale questions etc.), and the time needed for completion. The guidelines and points to consider mentioned by Brown and Rodgers (2002) were also included. (See appendix A)

The pre-pilot study has revealed some interesting findings about both contents and the appearance of the questionnaire. For instance, three of the subjects located some minor errors in terms of grammar, organisation, and/or typography, which were all rectified accordingly. Almost half of the subjects had had concerns about some of the questions asked, and their main concern was that these questions did not necessarily apply to the targeted respondents, and therefore cannot be answered. As a result, these questions were rephrased to avoid asking for information respondents could not be expected to have. A similar number of subjects believed that the researcher should have included more questions, especially ones about students' past experiences with teachers. In fact, the researcher intentionally left a margin for students' further comments, but it seems that students could use some prompts to comment on their past experiences, which were included in the edited version of the questionnaire. Most of the researchers also believed that it would be a good idea to have the questionnaire in Arabic instead (i.e. L1 of the target research population). An Arabic version of the questionnaire, according to one of the researchers, would be more convenient for those students whose English proficiency might be lower than others, and for freshmen if they will be included.

The researcher was particularly concerned about the time factor. Poor time management results in surveys that take a very long time to complete, which are thus very likely to deter respondents from completing them, lead to them being filled in hastily and inaccurately (Cohen et al., 2000; Metens, 1998; Brown & Rodgers, 2002; McDonough & McDonough, 1997). The researcher initially sets a

maximum time for completion of around 30 minutes. Although most of the participants in the pre-pilot study took between 20 to 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire, the researcher was more interested to know why three of them took more than the maximum of 30 minutes. In fact, one indicated that it took him more than an hour to complete the whole questionnaire in an appropriate manner. His main criticism was against open-ended questions as, according to him, writing a text as an answer is very time-consuming. The researcher therefore decided to keep these questions, but only as optional, so that respondents do not have to answer them all (see appendices 3, 4 and 5).

The Pilot Study

This was the last stage of developing the non-standardised questionnaire. Mertens (1998: 117) explains how piloting a questionnaire functions as “you try it out with a small sample to your intended group of respondents.” Piloting in many aspects is very similar to trialing, and a close inspection will reveal that both have the ultimate purpose of getting feedback that helps produce a better data collection tool. The main difference however lies in the source of feedback each is likely to produce as in the pre-piloting stage more experienced participants were the ones offering their views, while in the piloting stage participants who are likely to represent the research population are the ones offering doing so and practically getting involved in a study very similar to the actual one. Bell (2007), Cohen et al. (2000, 2007) and Mertens (1998) mention that piloting data collecting tools is a very important step towards validating any data collection tool and has many advantages. They mention that everything about a questionnaire should be piloted; nothing should be

excluded, not even the typeface or the quality of the paper. Piloting increases the reliability, validity and practicality of the questionnaire. Additionally, piloting a questionnaire serves many functions including:

- To check the clarity of the questionnaire items.
- To gain feedback on the validity of the questionnaire items.
- To eliminate ambiguities or difficulties in wording.
- To gain feedback on the type (i.e. rating scale, multiple choice ... etc) of question and its format.
- To gain feedback on the attractiveness and appearance of the questionnaire.
- To gain feedback on the layout, sectionalizing, numbering and itemizing of the questionnaire.
- To check the time taken to complete the questionnaire.
- To check whether the questions are too long or too short
- To identify redundant questions.
- To identify commonly misunderstood or non-completed items.

Some procedures were identified to properly conduct the pilot study. They will be mentioned according to their chronological order.

1. Identifying a representative sample

Because the initial pilot study was set to take place in the UK, identifying a representative sample of ESL students was a crucial step to ensure that they resemble the target population in English Department, KAAU. The variables that needed to be controlled were gender, age, level of education and linguistic proficiency. However, there was one main factor that might affect results which was that these students were studying in the UK hence in a different learning context. They therefore were very likely to be exposed to different teaching styles and approaches than they would be in their original country. In order to minimise any unwanted influences, these students were asked to reflect on their experiences back in Saudi Arabia rather than theirs in the UK.

2. Communications and contacts

The researcher had to use all possible means to approach as many students as possible. These means included personal contacts, formal communications and correspondences. Despite extensive communications and correspondences, the number of available/potential students who were willing to participate at the time the study was conducted was relatively small. Nevertheless, the researcher believes that the available number was sufficient for the pilot study to proceed in both questionnaires and interviews. The following table (2.2) shows information about the participating students including information such as their number, age, level of education and, when available, their linguistic proficiency test results. The table also shows complementary information including how long have they been studying in the UK and how long are they planning to stay more along with information about their academic majors and the institutions where they will be pursuing their degrees.

<i>Age</i>	<i>Last Degree Obtained/ Institute</i>	<i>Current Language Institute</i>	<i>Length of Stay in the UK/ Planning to Stay (Months)</i>	<i>Degree Pursued/ Major</i>	<i>University</i>	<i>IELTS/ TOEFL Score</i>	<i>Writing Score: IELTS (or) TWE Score</i>
19	High School/ Private Secondary School, Makkah, SA.	INTO Newcastle	14/48	BA/ Law	Newcastle	IELTS 6.5	IELTS 5.5
28	MA/ King Khalid University, Abha, SA.	Durham Language Centre	24/48	PhD/ Pedagogy	Durham	IELTS 6.0	IELTS 5.5
32	BA/ KAAU, Jeddah, SA.	Hull Summer School	12/12	MA/ International Business Law	Hull	IELTS 5.5	IELTS 4.5
33	BSc/ Saud University, Riyadh, SA.	n/a	23/02	MSc/ Chemical Engineering	Newcastle	IELTS 6.5	IELTS 6.0
24	MSc/ Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah, SA.	INTO Newcastle	10/14	MSc/ Architecture	Newcastle	IELTS 5.0	IELTS 4.0
27	BSc/ Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah, SA.	Newcastle University	18/04	MSc/ Mechanical Engineering	Newcastle	IELTS 6.5	IELTS 6.0
22	BSc/ Riyadh College of Technology	n/a	00/12	MSc/ Nano- electronics	Liverpool	IELTS 6.0	IELTS 5.5
24	BA/ KAAU, Jeddah, SA.	n/a	00/60	MA and PhD/ TESOL	Essex	TOEFL 603	TWE 4.0

Table (2.2) Factsheet about Participants in the Pilot Study

3. Informed consent and briefing

Kent (2000) and Burton (2000) stress that the informed consent of participants is an important ethical aspect of social research. Kent (2000) mentions that a written consent form can be used to guarantee the actual consent of participants. As recommended by research experts, such as Cohen et al. (2000), Kent (2000), and Mertens (1998), the informed consent of all students involved in the pilot study was granted given that a strict policy regarding anonymity and privacy was assured. Additionally, participants were briefed about the stated goals of the research project, the purpose of the pilot study, and what the researcher expected them to do. Instructions on how to complete the pilot study were also included, and further clarifications were provided in their respective sections. (See also section 3.2.5.1)

4. Piloting the Questionnaire

As in the previous pre-pilot study section, there are certain points that interest the researcher at this stage. Apparently, the main purpose of the pilot study, as mentioned by many experts, including Cohen et al. (2000, 2007), Bell (2007), Mertens (1998) and McDonough and McDonough (1997) is to make sure that the tool designed to collect data is suitable to be used on a larger scale. The smaller pilot population should be able to spot any inconveniences, vagueness of contents, and/or any other problems with the data collection method. The pilot study's smaller group therefore has to be as representative of the actual research population as possible. Due to limitations in time and resources, the decision was made to carry out the pilot study with Saudi language students currently enrolled in academic institutes or language centres across the UK, to roughly represent ESL Saudi learners. Fortunately, there are a substantial number of Saudi students

studying in Tyne and Wear; many of them are either enrolled in language remedial courses, or are registered in foundation year programmes prior to their courses, a fact that makes them in many aspects possible representatives of the actual research population. Participants in the pilot study were asked specific questions about the newly-designed version of the questionnaire in Arabic, which has been recommended in the previous pre-piloting stage. Most questions were regarding how suitable items are, how long does the questionnaire take to complete, are there any concepts that require further clarification, and finally if students still have any further comments and questions. Other visual components of the questionnaire were also investigated including the electronic layout, the colour scheme, and the font type and size used.

First of all, the majority of students involved expressed that they have a good command in computer skills, which is a positive trait when it comes to dealing with the electronic format of the questionnaire. When students were asked about their opinion regarding which version they preferred, Arabic or English, the majority unsurprisingly expressed that the Arabic version was easier to understand and was hence more convenient. Reasons included saving time and effort, which echoed opinions mentioned earlier by researchers in the pre-piloting study. Students also believed that it was easier to follow the questions and comment on some items in Arabic rather than English.

With regard to the time factor, it seems that most students actually completed the survey in the target time limit, set at around 30 minutes. Previous amendments,

including making open-ended questions that require writing texts optional when possible, helped reduce the time taken to complete the questionnaire from around one hour, as reported by a respondent in the trialling study, to a more reasonable and realistic time target of about half an hour. The decision that open-ended questions should be kept to a minimum to save respondents' time and not deter them from adequately and effectively responding to all items of the questionnaire was subsequently made.

This small-scale pilot study also revealed some interesting correlations. For example, it was found that the more skilled the respondent was in computer use, the less time he required to complete the questionnaire in its electronic format. This association is very strong, at -0.889 , and the results are very significant at a very low margin of error (0.003). It is important to make sure that students possess the necessary computer skills prior to the commencement of the actual study in case they opted for the electronic format of the questionnaire.

Generally speaking, students were also happy with the content of the questionnaire, i.e. its items and the options of answers provided. They also believed that the explanations provided for the more technical terms used, such as 'autonomous learning' and 'writing processes' were adequate and very helpful. Some students have actually come across these terms when they were studying applied linguistics, which made it easier for them to navigate through the survey. No major changes were required as far as the contents of the questionnaire and additional information are concerned. Most of the students involved believed that the electronic format of the questionnaire, the use of tools such as scroll boxes for multiple-question items,

text boxes for open-ended questions, and tick boxes for dichotomous items, made it easier and faster for them to respond to the different items of the questionnaire effectively and easily. One commented that unlike a traditional pen-and-paper questionnaire, changing or correcting answers is no problem at all given that the respondent acquires the basic computational required skills of course. However, it is important to note that all students involved in the pilot study exhibited proper knowledge of computer use, an essential requirement to complete the questionnaire in its electronic format, but it was impossible to say the same about all subjects of the actual study. Finally, as far as visual aspects are concerned, students involved in the pilot study approved of the way the survey was presented, including font types and sizes, colour-schemes, tables, and graphs and supplementary information, hence no changes were needed.

3.2.2 The Writing Entry and Exit Tests

Writing tests, as already discussed, should help yield essential data required for analysis into the effectiveness of different feedback techniques. However, many experts in educational research (e.g. Cohen et al., 2004; Gall et al., 1996) stress the fact that the use of tests in research raises a number of ethical concerns. For instance, many researchers have reported that individuals may suffer from anxiety in testing situations. It is therefore the researcher's responsibility to elicit participants' best performance, while minimizing their anxiety if they plan to use a test as part of the data collection process. This task will be involved in phase 3 of data collection, and will be discussed in detail in a later section. The evaluated pieces of writing were new writing tasks instead of text revisions, especially important with the exit test.

Both content and grammar errors were addressed, as shown in the following chapter, results.

3.2.3 Interviews

Interviews were the last stage of data collection and were supposed to supplement and give an in-depth account of data already generated by the second questionnaire. Most research manuals mention that interviews and questionnaires are two very accepted methods for collecting data in educational research, and such extensive reviews of interviews give a clear idea of how they best function in this situation (e.g. Gillham, 2000; Cohen et al., 2000 & 2007; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Tierney & Dilley, 2001; Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2004; Denscombe, 2007; Clough & Nutbrown, 2007).

One important step towards developing the questions in the interviews is what Gillham (2000) calls 'trailing the interview questions,' which, despite many similarities, is different from 'piloting', a more advanced and mature level. In fact, trailing in a way resembles what has been already described in the earlier questionnaire section as the pre-pilot study, in the sense that both were early stages in developing data collection methods for the inexperienced researcher. Eventually, having reviewed all the available interviewing options and the unique needs of this project, the researcher imagined a scenario of how the interviews would have been conducted and what issues were to be included. The scenario was shown to two research students who commented on the prompts, timing, topics and execution. The interviews subsequently took a semi-structured, one-to-one format to best meet

the requirements of the study. Interviews also observed a more inductive logic, as opposed to deductive logic, whereby theories and cognitive principles would emerge from the data, or in other words moving from the specific to the general. Research methods literature suggests that inductive logic is more suitable for arguments based on experiences or observation as the case here (Gillham, 2000 and Cohen et al., 2007). This rough representation of the actual interviews then underwent a piloting scheme similar to the questionnaires with three students from the same sample in table (2.2), though much less formal.

Having conducted the pilot study and reviewed the literature of interviews in educational research (Gillham, 2000; Cohen et al., 2000 & 2007; Tierney & Dilley, 2001; Denscombe, 2007), students in the PF group were asked to participate in the interviews (see section 3.3.1.4 for more details). To observe research ethics, student interviewees' informed consent was confirmed using the form shown in appendix (K) which was taken from Kent (2000).

Reflections on the Interviews

My interviewees were all students and according to Tierney and Dilley (2001), interviewing students is of great significance to include them and their views into the learning process. They also predict a change in the way interviews are being conducted and the type of respondents included in educational research. In fact, they take the inclusion of students in research as an example of this change because until early 20th century, students' views were largely ignored.

Apparently, before I started interviewing students, I had to consult manuals in educational research (including Gillham, 2000; Cohen et al., 2000 & 2007; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Tierney & Dilley, 2001; Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2004; Denscombe, 2007; Clough & Nutbrown, 2007), to review various types of interviews and to figure out the best possible option of interviewing participants of this study. Important procedures including trialling interview questions and considering prompts, timing and topics to be discussed were also part of the preparation stage. (See section 3.2.3)

As far as the experience itself is concerned, I must admit that this was not an entirely new experience because I carried out a smaller-scale study involving interviewing participants some five years earlier in the same institution. Nevertheless, as research experts stress, each interview is different and the ones I had to conduct for this study were no exception. Careful preparation plays an important role when it comes to the successfulness of the event but I was also aware that interviewing skills such as the ability to prompt questions and to control the discussion in a smooth and timely manner are equally important traits of any interviewer. Being a novice interviewer myself, I acknowledge that these skills in no small part come with experience rather than reading and training, and I therefore believe there is still some margin for me to improve my interviewing skills.

Most interviews were within the boundaries of what I have expected beforehand in terms of topics discussed and time allocated. However, one particular subject that kept emerging was that of students' level in English which was not what I was mainly

trying to focus on at the time. Nevertheless, in case a student wanted to raise this issue, I had the moral obligation to listen to him and record his thoughts. I even notified students' views of this matter in the study when possible.

In all, I have learned how to respect the ethics of educational research including students' privacy and trying to present their ideas in their words when translating the interviews. I have also learned how to balance what I – as a researcher – want to investigate with what issues students want to raise within the available time limit. Asking prompts, eliciting stories, asking follow-up questions while trying to keep the interview interesting are important aspects that I might have started to learn but want to develop further more.

3.2.4 Fieldwork and Empirical Study

Quasi-Experiment: Control and Experimental Groups

Gall et al. (1996) and Cohen et al. (2000, 2007) highlight a number of issues involved in dealing with the inclusion of an experiment and control group in a study. The participants are subjected to different treatment conditions and thus should not be treated equally. The treatment group is likely to receive special training, while the control group receives either nothing or a conventional programme. In this research project, the experiment group will be trained to adopt the relatively new peer feedback technique in their writing sessions, while the control group will receive normal teaching sessions and feedback from their language teachers. Some researchers suggest that the control group subjects will be treated unfairly by not receiving special training, and thus will not benefit from the perceived advantages of

the training programme. However, subjects of the control group can benefit from the perceived advantages of the special training once the data collection stage is completed.

The Design of the Writing Task

Two issues were addressed when the researcher decided to include writing tests as data collection tools, which were what topics to choose, and what assessment procedures to follow. As for the former, it was an easy decision because on both occasions the topics students were asked to write about were predetermined by the textbook in hand (see appendix L). For the latter, however, the researcher applied a number of scientific measures to ensure that the assessment was conducted in a way that first of all provided the necessary information required in this research project, and secondly gave a fair and accurate grade to the respondents.

Peer Feedback Group Training

In order to prepare the students for the upcoming task, and also to better qualify them to actively engage in peer feedback sessions, an extensive induction week was dedicated to familiarize them with the upcoming peer feedback sessions. More details about the significance of this procedure and what points to consider have been discussed in section 2.2.2.6 (introducing peer feedback) in the literature review chapter. Preparation procedures followed similar examples by Lundstorm and Baker (2009), Min (2006), Rollinson (2005), Hansen and Liu (2005), and Berg (1999). They included the tasks of briefing students about collaborative activities, forming groups, introducing the types of activities and methods to be used, and introducing

checklists. Students were also given better access to the researcher than just during fixed formal office hours (i.e. via e-mails and more office hours during that week), in case they had queries or other issues before they began peer sessions. Part of the briefing procedure included informing students about different types of peer responses, as reported in the literature, which are prescriptive, interpretive, and collaborative (Min, 2008; Lockhart & Ng, 1995). They were also made aware of different types of errors they will be dealing with which, in crude terms, are local issues as compared to global ones. Finally, the attitude of their comments was also brought to students' attention, which basically requires balancing praise and criticism at both ends of the scale.

However, as Lockhart and Ng (1995) maintain, peer training should be a constant development process, hence the researcher repeatedly encouraged students to raise any issues via e-mails or face-to-face meetings as they progressed in their writing class. Students' performances were closely-monitored, and if issues that could affect peer response were identified, they were addressed as soon as possible.

3.2.5 Methodological Issues

Research Ethics

Like every scientific research, this research project rigorously follows ethical considerations throughout its different parts in their entirety. It is especially important to stick to such considerations when it comes to dealing with human participants. It is crucial to mention all of these ethical issues, which can all be grouped under this heading, but in order to make ethical concerns easier to spot,

they are presented in the designated sections of the data collection methods, along with recommended solutions to minimize possible negative effects.

Generally speaking, the data collection methods (questionnaires and interviews), are always considered as an intrusion into the lives of the respondents in terms of the time taken to complete the task, the level of sensitivity of the questions, and/or the possible invasion of privacy (Cohen et al., 2000 & 2007; Denscombe, 2007).

It is very important therefore to assure the privacy and anonymity of participants involved in the study when possible. Participants should provide their informed consent before participating in the study, which is what the researcher tried to adhere to throughout the research.

Formal Procedures to Conduct the Empirical Study

One of the formalities of the research project was to get formal approvals from both the educational body where the study was conducted, and the sponsor of the research. From an administrative perspective, the researcher was required to obtain formal consent from the English Department, KAAU, where the study was planned to take place before conducting the actual study. The formal procedures generally take a considerable amount of time, but fortunately the researcher has contacts in the department who were willing to speed this process. The researcher also needs the approval of the sponsor which usually goes through similar complicated formal bureaucratic procedures, in addition to lengthy correspondences prior to going and conducting the study away from the University.

Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability aspects of any data collection method used are of great significance to the findings of any scientific research. Moreover, validity and reliability issues serve as guarantees of the results of the participants' performances. Weir (2005) mentions that the educational bodies that provide language-testing services, such as Cambridge ESOL and Educational Testing Service (ETS) TOEFL have seriously and constantly addressed the reliability and validity aspects of their tests. They have also started addressing the legitimacy of the socio-cognitive elements of validity as much as they devoted attention to other reliability aspects. Weir (ibid: 11) declares that "the provision of any satisfactory evidence of validity is indisputably necessary for any serious test." The concept of validity has been of great concern to language researchers. Messick (1992) and Moss (1992), as mentioned in Mertens (1998), argue that validity is the most essential consideration in test evaluation. According to Messick (1992: 742), validity in its broader context can be defined as "nothing less than an evaluative summary of both the evidence for and the actual – as well as potential – consequences of score interpretation and use." However, the more conventional definition of the validity of an instrument according to Mertens (1998: 292) is "the extent to which [the instrument] measures what it was intended to measure." Additionally, Kelly (1927: 14), cited in Weir (2005), noted "The problem of validity is that of whether a test really measures what it purports to measure." Lado (1961: 321), cited in Weir (2005), similarly comments "Does a test measure what it is supposed to measure? If it does, it is valid." It can be concluded from the previous quotations that validity of data collection methods depends on the accuracy of their measurements.

Content Validity

Meterns (1998: 294) mentions that “Content validity is especially important in studies that purport to compare two (or more) different curricula, teaching strategies, or school placements. If all students are taking the same test but all the students were not exposed to the same information, the test is not equally content valid for all the groups.” This study actually investigates two different treatments of ESL students where the control group receives typical teaching while the experiment group is introduced to modern teaching methods, namely collaborative learning, to prompt them to produce peer feedback.

Population Validity

Gall et al. (1994) mention that one of the criteria for judging experiments is population validity. By definition, population validity is “the extent to which the results of an experiment can be generalized from the sample that participated in it to a larger group of individuals, that is, a population.” (Galls et al., 1994: 217) The concept of population validity is closely related to the process of sampling in different types of quantitative research. In this research project, the researcher selected the sample randomly to correspond with the defined population for which the generalization of results is required. The sample should be sufficient in size, which in turn reduces the probability of having different characteristics from the population from which it was drawn. The sample error in the case of the first questionnaire should be very low, and in the case of subsequent tools almost nil, because all of the participants were included.

Rating Written Tests

Scoring procedures for writing assessments followed recommendations by Weigle (2002), an analytic assessment-based rating procedure used by Lundstorm and Baker (2009), and the grading rubric used by Paulus (1999), to ensure the reliability and validity of the rating practice. That includes defining the rating scale, and ensuring raters use the scale appropriately and consistently. Rating followed an 'analytic scoring approach' which, compared to the other two approaches commonly referred to in the literature ('primary trait scoring' and 'holistic scale'), look at the scripts from a range of features including, in my case, content, organisation, cohesion, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics, in addition to the final overall score. In terms of reliability, Wiegle (2002) mentions that an analytic scale is more reliable than the holistic scale. Additionally, this type of assessment is more suitable for L2 writers, as different writing abilities develop at different rates. On the negative side, an analytical approach is usually more time-consuming and expensive, but in my case it was possible to implement this measure primarily because of the small number of participating papers involved. Even with a higher number of papers, modern electronic programmes that quantify and categorise different errors would ease the performance of an analytic scale rating.

As a reliability measure, all essays were graded by two experienced raters, the researcher and another writing teacher in the department, and the different overall scores were then averaged if possible. In most cases, the difference in the scores did not exceed one point, and in the few cases where the difference was greater than

one point, the two raters discussed the disputed aspects for giving a particular grade before agreeing on one.

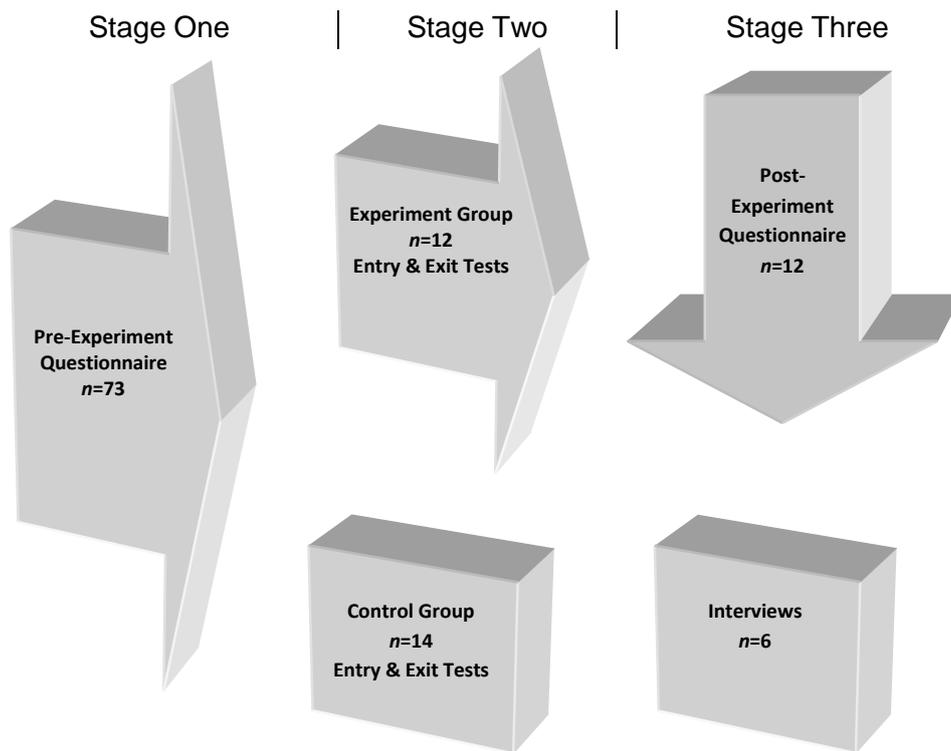
Triangulation

Many experts in education research, including Cohen et al. (2000, 2007), Clough and Nutbrown (2007), Weir (2005), and Gillham (2000) regard triangulation as an important step towards validating the results of a study. In this study, methodological triangulation was assured by having a number of different quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. As has been mentioned, triangulation helps minimise the drawbacks of employing single-method research. Findings from different methods mutually reinforce each other. In the case of this research project, methodological triangulation was achieved by using different data collection methods: quantitative in the case of pre- and post-tests and the questionnaires; and qualitative as far as interviews and open-ended items of the questionnaires were concerned.

PART THREE: DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

3.3.1 Data Collection Procedures

In this section, the procedures performed at every stage of the data collection process are briefly described. This is followed by a description of the methods and tools used to analyse the data. The following graph gives a visual idea of who were involved at which stage followed by more specific sections on each stage.



Graph (3.1) Data Collection Tools and Stages

The researcher sought the cooperation of the English department in a Saudi university, particularly from instructors who teach writing courses in it. All students registered in all writing classes were contacted via their respective instructors in the first questionnaire and were asked for their voluntary participation in the study. Students were assured that the information they provide would be made available only to the researcher and for the purpose of the study. As for the experiment, students who registered in the course LANE216 were divided into two groups. There has been no influence of the teacher as to which group a student chose, i.e. students chose their sections according to their preference of the time each class starts. Out of the 35 total registered students, 16 chose section AA (which later became the experiment group) and the remaining 17 chose section AB (the control group). Some

students from both groups eventually dropped the course so section AA ended up with 11 while 14 completed the course in the other section.

Students in the experiment group received feedback from two sources which were the teacher and their peers. There were six peer feedback sessions in total ranging between 20 – 30 minutes each. Students were divided into groups of four and members of each group were assigned by the teacher. The nomination of groups' members were mainly driven by students' levels in writing or in other words, each group consisted of students of various writing abilities. Their level in writing was determined by both their scores in the entry writing test and their marks in previous writing courses. Members of the groups played different roles at different sessions. In each session, two students wrote texts while the other two provided their comments to their peers' writing after discussing the each text as a group. In the next session, the two who provided feedback did the writing and the procedure was similar to that of the previous session. Most sessions last between 20 – 30 minutes including time required to write the short texts.

In every session, the teacher handed out checklists to the students whose role was to provide feedback. Filling out the checklist was not a requirement and no marks were assigned to this task but students nevertheless were encouraged to follow the guidelines in order to keep their comments consistent with what is expected from the course. The checklist also provided evaluators with a platform on which they can justify their decisions about their peers' writing. The checklists also provided a material of discussion for the groups. Both local and global errors were looked at in

every session although students reported that they focused more on linguistic errors whether they give or receive feedback.

The exit test of both groups was the product of individual work and students did not receive feedback from their peers nor their instructors. This was a marked task and students were aware of this. The second questionnaire was more open-ended compared to the first and involved all registered students in the experiment group. Students were urged to reflect on their own ESL writing and to give honest opinions.

The subsequent interviews were individual, one-to-one that lasted between 20 – 30minutes each. They were all conducted shortly after the exit test and included students from the experiment group. To make the interviews as natural as relaxing as possible, they were carried out in Arabic (see section 3.2.3). Presenting the interview data was one particular area of interest especially with absence of advice on what to do in the case of translated scripts as in this study. I therefore decided to conduct the interviews in the language students preferred, i.e. Arabic, record them, translate them, and then show the scripts to another teacher along with the audiotapes to verify the accuracy of the translation. I also sent the translated scripts to the respective students via e-mails. My role as a teacher-researcher could have influenced my interpretation of the data it must e said which is why I tried to seek an alternative view from another teacher in the department when I was assessing students' writing and when I translated students interviews scripts. Student interviewees were also contacted via e-mails with my interpretations of their answers. More detailed sections of each tool follow.

Writing Tasks: Entry and Exit Tests

Having acquired permission from the educational authorities, I travelled back to Saudi Arabia where I taught 60-minute composition classes, which all of the subjects of the experimental group were part of. These were taught for 3 days a week for about two months, totaling just over 20 classes. The classes started on the 12th January 2008 (the working week begins on Saturdays in Saudi Arabia). In these classes the students were introduced to peer feedback techniques, as well as the typical teaching methods they and their counterparts in the control group were exposed to by default. Students of both the control and the experimental group were distributed two sections of the same module (code named LANE 216 - Sections AA and AB). However, to sideline any undesired interference from the class, a decision has been made not to make the students aware that a research project was in progress until a later stage of the research, when some of them were interviewed about their experience. At the start of the project, I was introduced to the students as their teacher. My duties as a teacher included all the usual teaching workload, such as planning classroom activities, grading the students' assessed work, deciding on which topics to be covered, and for providing feedback. Teaching was frequently monitored by another teacher in the Department whose role was to continue the job when I finish my study. The textbook recommended by the Department was *Interactions II Writing, Middle East Edition*, which was used with both sections; the experimental and the control group, during the project.

The pretest was conducted during the first week of the course, when students of both sections (i.e. AA and AB, $n=35$), in line with the first chapter of the textbook,

were asked to write an argumentative paragraph discussing what makes them choose a specific university, either locally or overseas (see appendix L). They were notified that this was not an assessed task but one which aims to identify any writing problem they might have had. The students were also told that they could consult their dictionaries and textbooks if they wished but they could not exchange ideas or consult one another during the test. Students were also given the chance to receive detailed comments on their paragraphs, either in printed form or via e-mails if they preferred. The comments covered both form and content issues and another writing instructor reviewed them before handing them back to the students (see appendix H). As the entry test was conducted using pen and paper, the researcher typed all of the participating texts in MS-Word format to enable him to respond to errors more effectively using colour, underlining and strikethrough, while the auto-correction function was disabled to preserve the actual writing of students, and to ensure that every error was accounted for (see sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2). Taking Weigle's (2002) different types of assessment, Cohen's (1994) list of writing features to be included in assessment (see table 1.5 in the literature review chapter), and Jacob et al.'s (1981) 'ESL Composition Profile' into consideration, specific types of errors were identified and were used for assessment purposes, as well as for measuring any changes between this task and the forthcoming exit test. These factors included content, rhetorical organization, and organization from a 'content' perspective, and spelling, grammar, punctuation and run-on sentences as far as 'form' was concerned, which provides an 'analytic scoring approach' as defined by Weigle (2002). The content comments provided by the researcher were qualitative in nature, and hence might be occasionally inconsistent and both me and the other

teacher had to reach a decision. In order to minimize any possible interference caused by bias or subjectivity on the part of the assessor, the other teacher reviewed and approved the comments I provided. Local errors, on the other hand, were easier to identify and account for in a quantifiable way.

As for the exit test, students from both groups were told in advance that this was an assessed writing task that would be part of their overall score. More time was given to complete the task, i.e. 30 minutes compared to 20 minutes for the entry test. The question was again taken from the textbook which was again mainly argumentative (see appendix L). It required students to decide which was better, living in a small town or in a big city, and it clearly required them to support their argument with proper examples, reasons, and evidence.

The Treatment of Peer Feedback Group

When the students who registered for LANE 216 had been distributed into two sections, the researcher randomly chose section AA as the experimental group, while the other section, AB, was taken by another instructor from the Department, and was considered to be the control group. It is important to note that the choice of sections was left to the students themselves and the only difference between the two sections was the starting time for each class (i.e. students were not chosen based on their age, proficiency or any other factor that might later affect their performance). It is also noteworthy to mention that because of the Department's policy, students were permitted to drop the course during the first six weeks of the semester, and some students from both sections did so.

It has already been mentioned that the researcher and the instructor of the other section had to cover the same material and meet the same course objectives, although how each instructor did that was left to them. This included choosing the teaching methods and approaches. The core reading recommended by the Department was *Interactions II Writing* (see section 4.2.2 'The Design of the Writing Task'), but the choice of any supplementary materials was again left to the instructor. These were two important factors that the researcher exploited, to integrate peer feedback within the experimental group.

The peer feedback group (the control group) received special training as a part of the research project. For example, their peer-reviewed exercises were completed with the help of Race et al.'s (2004) peer assessment grid. Students were also trained to provide feedback using a checklist (see appendix G) that was adopted from Miao et al. (2006), Min (2006), and Peterson (2003). The use of the checklist in the peer feedback group is a common practice in ESL writing classrooms (Hyland, 2000). Although some studies have raised questions about the use of checklists in peer feedback activities (c.f. Al-Hazmi & Scholfield, 2008), arguing that it actually imposes the teacher's agenda on the students' responses, students at lower levels will certainly need some guidance which, in this case, comes in the form of a checklist.

Pre and Post-Experiment Questionnaires

As already stated, there were two different sets of questionnaires. The first was distributed to a wider research population of KAAU ESL students. This comprised of

155 students, all of whom were attending and/or have attended a writing course. Of these, 76 replied 3 of which were rejected on reliability grounds. The first questionnaire was carried out at an early stage of the study and more closed in nature. The other involved participants from the experimental group ($n=14$, none of whom were rejected) and because of the limited number of subjects, more qualitative open-ended questions were used. The second questionnaire was conducted towards the end of the experiment. The criteria for choosing subjects for both questionnaires was straightforward and simple; for the first questionnaire, as already explained, every student in the English Department who was registered in at least one specialized ESL writing course was a potential subject, while only participants from the treatment group were involved in the other questionnaire. The researcher, with the help of two instructors from the Department, distributed the first questionnaire in both types: conventional paper-based and electronic format, whatever the students preferred. Out of the 155 students approached, 73 completed and handed back the questionnaire, 35 using pen and paper, the remaining 38 students e-mailed them back. The first questionnaire was more comprehensive and addressed a range of issues mostly related to the subject of the study, teacher and peer feedback in ESL writing classes. The questionnaire items came in different forms including the Likert scale, dichotomous and multiple-choice questions. The questionnaire was non-standardised, structured, and it was in Arabic, mostly to incorporate the recommendations of other researchers who viewed the early version of the questionnaire. As the researcher was aware that some concepts were probably new to the students, especially those who had recently registered on a

writing course, detailed definitions and explanations were provided to accompany the questionnaire in both formats.

As for the second questionnaire, it was concise and focused on the topic of the research which was about the students' experience of collaborative writing and peer feedback. In other words, no additional questions, apart from peer feedback and teachers' comments, were included. As noted already, because of the limited number of participants, more qualitative measures were used by means of more open-ended questions. The second questionnaire was designed to serve two purposes: 1) to report on any difference in attitude towards both teachers' and students' peer correction, as compared to the findings of the first questionnaire; and 2) to find out more about students' experience of incorporating peer feedback and collaborative writing, and how they performed and responded to each other during the experiment, an aspect which was further investigated using interviews with selected representatives from the group.

Treatment Group Interviews

As already stated, the main purpose of the interviews was used in conjunction with the post-experiment questionnaire to supplement the findings and to provide an in-depth insight into the data. Qualitative data generated by interviews provides the depth of understanding questionnaires may lack (Cohen et al., 2000 & 2007; Tierney & Dilley, 2001). To some extent, these interviews compensate for possible shortcomings of the questionnaires, mainly due to the fact of not being able to ask follow-up questions, the interviews were less structured and hence more

opportunity to explain and discuss various issues was available. As far as participants were concerned, representative students were selected from the PF group based on the results of their exit test. All students were essentially asked similar questions about the same topics but, bearing in mind the flexibility required in these interviews. All interviews took place in the Department, and all were conducted shortly after the exit test and the second questionnaire. Interviews lasted between 15 to 25 minutes in Arabic and then were translated into English. The translation was double-checked and endorsed by a research student of a similar background, to eliminate any misrepresentation of the intended meaning in the original interviews.

3.3.2 Data Processing and Analysis

This section reports on the processing of data collected in the study and the analysis tools used. As with the preceding section, this section is merely descriptive. The interpretation and inferences of the data are presented in the following chapter.

Writing Tasks

As mentioned in a previous section, following Weigle's (2002) analytic scoring approach, the researcher identified specific categories of errors, both local and global, in order to respond to students' compositions equally and consistently. The analysis also considered Cohen's (1994) list of errors, and Jacob et al.'s (1981) ESL Composition Profile, and has incorporated a modified ETS CRITERION model of assessment which uses a six-point holistic score report and diagnostic feedback (see section 2.2.3.2 in the literature review).

Each type of error was assigned a different colour, including missing and redundant items; ‘square brackets’ and ‘strikethrough’ were used to indicate these items respectively (see the example below).

[indentation] Small town is the best please to live in. That [is] because you obtien healthy environment, more secure [security] and you don't need to use transportation alot. In this easy [essay] I will discuss why is living in small town is good choise. In my opinion [,] living in [a] small town is the good oprtonity to healthy air. That [is] because [in] the small twon usually there [are] no factories or crowed[s] of cars in it. In addition, the small town usually [has] all the services is close to you. Therefore[,] you don't have to use the transportation alot. Moreover, the small town is more secuor comper [compared] to big twon. For example, Hull t~~won~~ is more secuor than London. In conclusion, small twon is the great please to live for many reason[s] [:] healthy environment, more secuor, and all the servies are close to you ~~any-time~~ [anytime] without using the transportation.

Content, Rhetorical Structure and Organisation:

Extended piece of writing that can be shortened if repeated ideas were omitted

Three valid reasons why a small town is a better place to be, but repetition can be omitted

The flow of ideas is good but there are many occasions were unnecessary repetitions are committed

Language Conventions:

Type of Error	Recurrence
Spelling	12
Grammar/Vocabulary	13
Punctuation/Capitalization	4
Run-on Sentences	None
Word-count	144
Overall Score	3/6
	Acceptable

Table (2.3) Analyses of a Writing Text

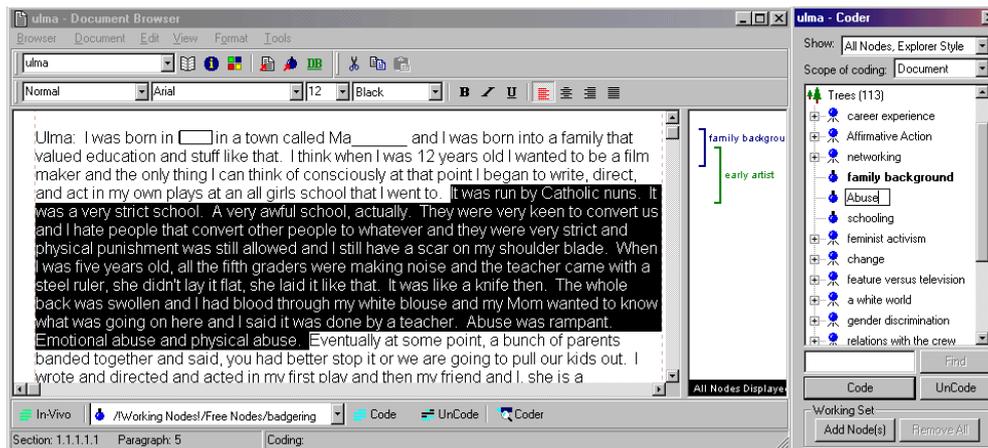
Other variables recorded included word-count and the overall score of texts. As for the global issues, including content, rhetoric, and organization, the researcher gave students comments which were endorsed by another experienced ESL writing teacher, which dealt with these issues. It must be said that the overall grade was not necessarily an accurate measurement, it rather aimed to reflect the writing quality in the light of both global and local issues as seen by both raters, although more attention was focused on the former. The quantitative data of both writing tasks were processed using SPSS 15.0, and the results that emerged are shown in the results chapter that shortly follows.

Questionnaires

I used SPSS 15.0 to help analyse and process the data. SPSS should help obtain percentages, means, associations, and reliability values from a descriptive point of view, in addition to other quantitative measures including parametric and non-parametric tests. The unstructured comments by the student subjects were limited in number (only 10 out of 73 wrote useful comments). However, as the second questionnaire was more open-ended and qualitative in nature, descriptive values are less meaningful and they would be used in the discussion chapter as indicators rather than proofs. I compiled and categorised the qualitative comments of the second questionnaire to complement the results of the interviews.

Interviews

I used NVivo 7.0 and 8.0 to process and analyse the qualitative data obtained from the interviews. NVivo is qualitative data analysis computer software which has been designed for researchers working with text-based information. Nvivo helps organise the data by speeding up the qualitative data analysis and most importantly the traceability of the analysis. The programme uses what it calls 'nodes' which are codes the researcher finds significant during the analysis process, a very important tool when it comes to inductive elements of the data. The following graph shows an example of how a response by an interviewee fits into a new 'node' which in this case coded as 'abuse'. I used nvivo in a similar manner with both predetermined categories and with ones created later using inductive logic.



Graph (3.2) Example of nvivo node (From Wadsworth CENGAGE Learning: cengage.com)

As already established, the interviews were designed to supplement and give an in-depth insight into the results of the second questionnaires. The results of the interviews were also compared against qualitative results of other tools used (i.e. content comments from writing tasks and unstructured comments from the questionnaires) when possible.

As the interviews were intentionally less structured than the preceding questionnaire, the data gathered was expectedly qualitative in nature and hence qualitative modes of analysis were used. These measures were identified and developed by following recommendations of Corbin and Strauss (2008), Clough and Nutbrown (2007), Cohen et al. (2000 and 2007), Gubrium and Holstien (2001) and Gillham (2000).

The interviews were conducted and recorded in Arabic for reasons including convenience and time saving, then translated into English and transcribed. The audio files and translated scripts were given to another colleague researcher to check and

verify the accuracy and consistency of the translation process. The translated text files were also sent to the interviewees who provided their e-mails, which should enable them to ensure that their responses were documented as accurately as possible as an additional validation measure. Having done that, the written scripts then were uploaded to the qualitative analysis software, NVivo 7.0 and 8.0, to help coding and categorizing the responses as well as to identify emerging themes (see appendix J: NVivo Output). According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), coding is the process of combining the data for the themes, ideas, and categories first, then in the light of these codes similar passages of text are labelled with the appropriate code accordingly. Codes can be based on themes, topics, ideas, concepts, terms, phrases and/or keywords. In this project however, coding the interviews took a more 'a priori' approach, which basically means investigating issues already identified by the researcher rather than investigating emerging ones, an opposite approach known as the grounded theory.³ This decision was made because of two factors: 1) as has been mentioned earlier, these interviews in essence were a stage following the questionnaires, whereby interviews act as a complement to the findings of the latter; and 2) because the number of interviews was relatively small.

As for the objectivist/heuristic code words' distinction, the analysis was more heuristic in nature yet recognizes, to a certain extent, the objectivist end of the scale. This usually means that the code words used in the analysis are primarily signposts or flags rather than a condensed representation of facts described in data, as Seidel and Kelle (1995) explained. A more heuristic approach can help recognize the data

³ Grounded theory in social sciences refers to the generation of theory from data. The first step in grounded theory-driven research is to collect data.

and give different views resulting in better opportunities to analysis and inspection. However, it is important to make a balance between a pure objectivist stance that requires certain levels of expectations in code words that becomes, in many cases, such a burden rendering it difficult to achieve, and heuristic code words a stance which requires some level of confidence in order to become effective. Therefore, an 'in between' approach seems the best option.

Having taken all of the above into consideration, a number of codes were identified prior to the analysis process. They are: 1- approval of peer feedback; 2- concerns about peer feedback; 3- procedures and construction of the sessions; 4- recommendations and suggestions for improvement; and 5- attitudes towards teacher's comments. Each of these includes a number of sub-categories of related codes as follows; the first code can be defined as any utterance that suggests a positive attitude towards the newly-introduced peer feedback sessions. Sub-categories of the first code include positive effects of peer feedback on ESL writing in terms of grammatical accuracy and logic, and certain learning and social skills that can be improved by peer feedback. It also looks into any changes in attitude towards peer feedback before and after the experiment. The second, on the contrary, includes all statements that indicate a negative attitude towards the sessions. This code includes the subcategories of challenges that can obscure the success of peer feedback experiment, any undesired results of peer feedback on ESL writing and educational or social skills. The third category looks at the organization of peer feedback sessions and how they were carried out. Two subcategories were identified which are: a) the procedures of which sessions followed; and b) the nature of

comments provided by peers during these sessions. The fourth category is very much self-explanatory, and includes suggestions by students for future development which might come in a way as a response to any possible shortcomings of peer feedback sessions (i.e. the second code in this analysis). The last category involves all ideas regarding feedback and instructions provided by the teacher, including the peer feedback checklist used in related sessions.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Overview of Chapter Four

This chapter presents the results as emerged from the data collection tools which are the questionnaires (pre- and post-experiment), the writing tasks (entry and exit tests), and finally interviews with members of the peer feedback group. No interpretation of the results is included here as it has been saved for the following chapter: discussion. A decision has been made to have these two chapters separate mainly in order to keep a clear distinction between what has been found and how the findings are related to the study and previous research.

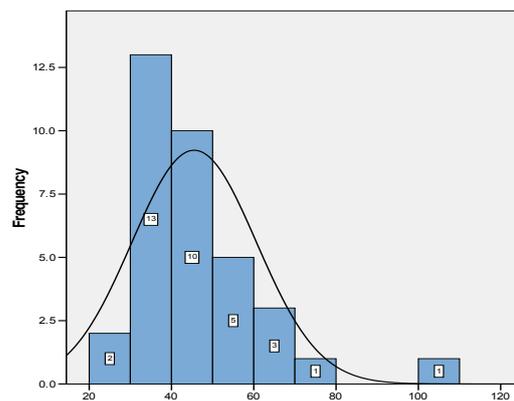
4.1 Writing Tests Results

There were three separate sets of results from the writing tasks, the first of which included writing texts of the participants from the treatment and control groups, otherwise known as LANE 216 sections AA and AB respectively, and will be considered as the entry test for both groups. The second set however included the writing tasks of the treatment group only and it was carried out shortly after subjects were involved in the experiment. Finally, the last writing task included the writing texts of the control group only and it was carried out almost simultaneously as that of the treatment group. (See Procedures Section in the Methodology Chapter)

4.1.1 Entry Test Results

The entry test results were as follows: The total number of participating texts was 35 distributed between the two groups, 16 for the treatment group and 19 for the

control group (some students from both sections dropped the course eventually). On average, texts were 46 word-long but with a high SD of (15.5) rendering this result as not very representative. In fact, papers ranged between 29 to 102 word-long which shows that the texts could be considerably different from the mean value especially at the longer end of the scale. Nevertheless, despite that discrepancy, most texts were between 30 and 60 word-long as the histogram graph below demonstrates. Students were actually expected to write around 150-word long texts (see appendix L) but it is safe to say that all texts were below this limit. The word length did not count in the overall score and it served like a guideline rather than a requirement.



Graph (4.1) Histogram Chart of Texts' Length of the First Task

As far as local issues are concerned, the most commonly occurring type of errors was grammatical (including subject-verb agreement, tenses, plural –s, and word-choice), where 204 were recorded (the term *grammatical errors* was loosely used to contain errors such as incorrect word-choice, redundant and missing words). That equals about 5.8 errors per text, though with a high standard deviation of 3.58 reflecting the fact that many students committed considerably more grammatical errors than others. For example three texts alone shared a total of forty grammatical errors rendering the mean value less representative.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SPELLING	35	0	12	98	2.80	3.85
GRAMMAR	35	0	15	204	5.83	3.585
PUNCTUATION	35	0	13	109	3.11	2.709
RUN-ON SENTENCES	35	0	4	31	.89	1.078

Table (4.1) Local Errors in the Entry Test (per text)

Other types of errors recorded are (arranged according to the frequency of their recurrence): punctuation ($n=109$), spelling ($n=98$) and run-on sentences (a run-on sentence is a sentence consisting of two independent clauses joined with no punctuation or conjunction) ($n=31$). Once again, the high SD values of all these types of errors show that texts widely varied in their level of accuracy as table 4.1 above shows.

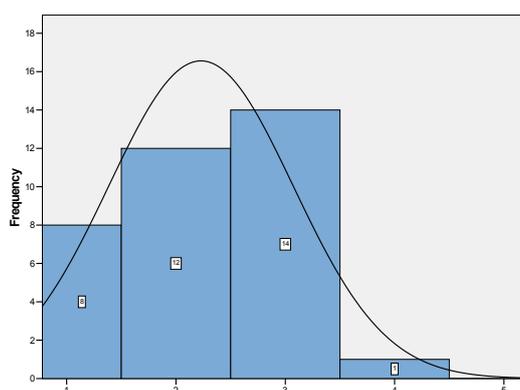
I have also adopted a basic measure of errors per 100 words to be used in combination with average numbers of errors per text for comparison purposes later in the discussion chapter. The purpose of having such a measure is to have a more balanced representation of data as would be possible when only errors per text are used bearing in mind the variance of text lengths. The following table represents the different types of errors per 100 words in the entry test.

TYPE OF ERROR	OCCURRENCE PER 100 WORDS
GRAMMATICAL	12.8
PUNCTUATION	6.84
SPELLING	6.15
RUN-ON SENTENCES	1.94
TOTAL	27.4

Table (4.2) Errors per 100 Words (Entry Test)

However, as for global issues (rhetoric, organisation and logic), texts were jointly assessed and commented on by the researcher and another experienced language

teacher from the department. The comments were intended to achieve two purposes; 1) to inform students about the level of their writing and 2) to justify the overall grade given. (See appendix H: entry test) There were six different grades used to assess students' writing which were 1 very poor, 2 poor, 3 acceptable, 4 good, 5 very good, and 6 exceptionally good. For more information on choosing this grading rubric please refer to section (3.3.2.1) in the methodology chapter. Most texts, using the criteria set by the researcher and endorsed by the language teacher, were given marks 2 ($n=12$) and 3 ($n=14$). The mean value of the entry test was 2.23 with an average standard deviation of 0.84.



Graph (4.2) Overall Scores of the Entry Test

As far as qualitative comments are concerned, most students were given a combination of encouraging comments (praise) with constructive criticism by both the researcher and the writing teacher (see table '2.3' in the methodology chapter and appendix H). The reason for the combined use of praise and criticism was largely because I followed Hyland and Hyland's (2002) recommendations on feedback attitudes. However, when a text was really poor, by which I mean it scored 2 or less in overall, most comments were written to justify this score on one hand and to show students what areas of their writing that needs improvement on the other (See

examples '2, 5, 11, 15, 16, 27, 28 and 32' of the appendix H: entry test). When a poor score was recorded there was usually one or more of the following problems in the texts: absence of a clear theme/topic sentence, absence or inappropriate use of transition words, illogical transfer of ideas, irrelevant and inconsistent ideas, incorrect use of vocabulary/idioms, incomplete sentences, and in some occasions the higher than usual rate of linguistic errors especially when excessive errors hinder the transmission of intended ideas.

4.1.2 Results of Exit Test

As far as linguistic aspects of the exit test are concerned, the results show that members of the PF group wrote 97-word long texts on average with a relatively high SD of 24.2 due to variations in individual texts. In other words, texts were considerably different in length ranging between 63 to 144 words per paper. Students were expected to write between 100 – 150-word long texts, so some texts might have fallen short in terms of length (see appendix L). This guideline should have been made a requirement in order to make students stick to it, possibly by making text length a contributor to the overall score.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<i>WORD-COUNT</i>	11	63	144	97.45	24.246
<i>SPELLING ERRORS</i>	11	0	13	2.27	3.797
<i>GRAMMATICAL ERRORS</i>	11	0	14	5.64	5.334
<i>PUNCTUATION ERRORS</i>	11	0	4	.91	1.375
<i>RUN-ON SENTENCES</i>	11	0	1	.09	.302
<i>OVERALL SCORE</i>	11	3	5	4.00	.775

Table (4.3) PF Group Local Errors (per text)

The linguistic (local) errors recorded according to their repetition per paper were; grammatical (5.6), spelling (2.2), punctuation (0.9) and almost no run-on sentences. It is

noteworthy to mention that the minimum number of every type of error is 'nil' as the table above shows which in other words means that many papers did not actually commit certain types of errors at all. To be more precise, 10, 6, and 4 papers did not contain run-on sentences, punctuation and spelling errors respectively. The average overall grade the PF group achieved was 4 (out of 6) with an SD of 0.77 which shows that the result is somehow more consistent than that of the other group (as shall be seen shortly). In fact, the majority of papers got an overall grade of either 4 out of 6 ($n=5$) or 5 ($n=3$).

TYPE OF ERROR	OCCURRENCE PER 100 WORDS
GRAMMATICAL	5.78
PUNCTUATION	0.93
SPELLING	2.33
RUN-ON SENTENCES	0.09
TOTAL	9.13

Table (4.4) Errors per 100 Words (PF Group Exit Test)

The other measure used, errors per 100 words, tells a similar story as of which errors are more prevalent. Again, grammatical errors were the most commonly recorded, roughly at around 6 errors in every 100 words. Apart from that, the remaining types of errors occurred at much lower frequency rates as table (4.4) above shows. The average number of all different types of errors for the PF group exit test stands at a total of just over 9 per 100 words.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
WORD-COUNT	14	81	150	109.22	23.481
SPELLING ERRORS	14	1	7	3.29	2.367
GRAMMATICAL ERRORS	14	4	25	9.43	7.165
PUNCTUATION ERRORS	14	1	14	4.71	4.921
RUN-ON SENTENCES	14	0	1	.14	.3633
OVERALL SCORE	14	2	5	3.64	1.082

Table (4.5) Control Group Local Errors (per text)

By inspecting the same language issues as of the previous group, members of the control group on average wrote 109-word long texts in their exit test writing task. Texts ranged between 81 to 150 word-long with a lower SD of 23, compared to that of the PF group, which means the dispersion of results is lesser. The most common types of errors arranged according to their average per passage are: grammatical errors (9), punctuation (5), spelling (2) and run-on sentences (insignificant).

TYPE OF ERROR	OCCURRENCE PER 100 WORDS
GRAMMATICAL	8.61
PUNCTUATION	4.30
SPELLING	3.00
RUN-ON SENTENCES	0.09
TOTAL	16.01

Table (4.6) Errors per 100 Words (Control Group Exit Test)

Their overall grade averaged 3.64 (out of 6) with an SD of 1.08 meaning the distribution of grades was higher than their counterparts of the PF group. It must be noted that as far as grammatical errors are concerned, two passages share 47 errors between them which partially explain the relatively high value of SD. Another measure taken to compare the performance of both groups was ‘clause complexity analysis’ which can be found in appendix (M). The findings were as follow:

Clause Relation	Paratactic	Hypotactic
Elaboration	7 [0.63]	0
Extension	2 [0.11]	0
Enhancement	3 [0.27]	10 [0.91]

Table (4.7) Number of Clause Relations in Texts by Treatment Group (n = 11) [per text]

Clause Relation	Paratactic	Hypotactic
Elaboration	7 [0.50]	0
Extension	15 [1.1]	1 [0.1]
Enhancement	4 [0.29]	12 [0.86]*

Table (4.8) Number of Clause Relations in Texts by Control Group (n = 14) [per text]

*One text contains three Hypotactic Enhancement relations

4.2 Questionnaire Results

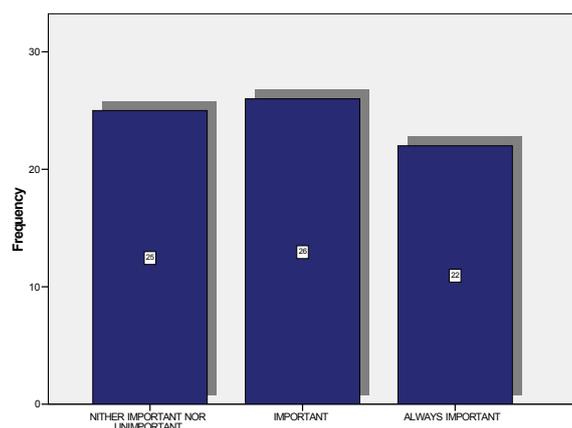
4.2.1 The Pre Experiment Questionnaire

Using SPSS, the following results were obtained:

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative
Valid	<i>NOT SURE</i>	25	34.2	34.2	34.2
	<i>IMPORTANT</i>	26	35.6	35.6	69.9
	<i>ALWAYS IMPORTANT</i>	22	30.1	30.1	100.0
	TOTAL	73	100.0	100.0	

Table (4.9) Students Beliefs of Teachers' Comments

When student were asked about how important they thought the comments provided by their teachers in general, the results were as follows: None of them described the comments as unimportant, 65.7% mentioned that they either thought that the comments were either important or very important with a mean of 3.96 and a standard deviation of 0.8 (scores have been given to answers where 5 is for 'always important' and 1 for 'very unimportant') as the following table and graph below demonstrate.



Graph (4.3) Students Beliefs regarding the Importance of Teachers' Comments

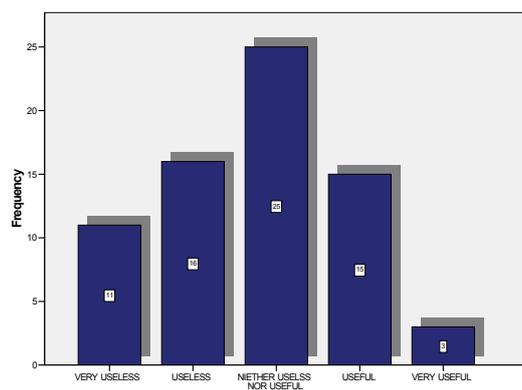
Students were also asked about how useful they thought peer feedback was (which was different from being important in the sense that the former asks about the

general concept of TF while the latter looks into the issue from practical point of view).

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative
Valid	<i>very useless</i>	11	15.1	15.7	15.7
	<i>useless</i>	16	21.9	22.9	38.6
	<i>not sure</i>	25	34.2	35.7	74.3
	<i>useful</i>	15	20.5	21.4	95.7
	<i>very useful</i>	3	4.1	4.3	100.0
	Total	70	95.9	100.0	
Missing		3	4.1		
Total		73	100.0		

Table (4.10) Students Beliefs regarding Usefulness of Autonomous Learning

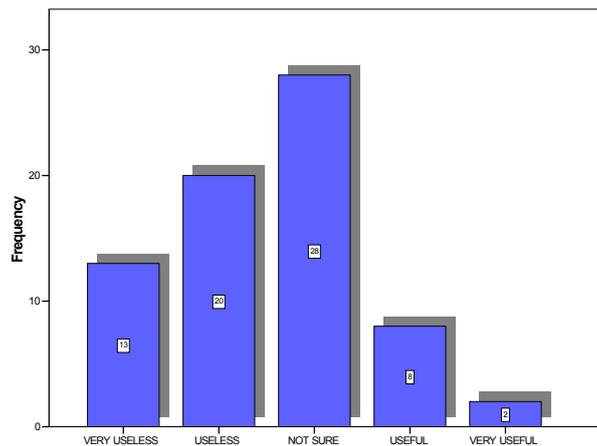
Their responses to this question were more diverse than those for the previous question as 38.6% believed it to be either useless or very useless in comparison to 24.6% who believed that peer feedback was useful or very useful. However, 34.2% of the respondents did not have an opinion. The mean value was 2.76 with a relatively high standard deviation of 1.09. The following table and graph demonstrate their results. Only three students did not answer this question (shown on the table as 'missing') which means the remaining 70 students responded.



Graph (4.4) Students Beliefs Regarding Autonomous Learning

When students were asked about their beliefs regarding two unconventional learning techniques which were 'autonomous learning' and 'peer feedback', their

responses were similar in terms of not having an opinion about them as 27 and 28 students were not sure about their usefulness respectively. However, a very small number found peer feedback useful or very useful (10% in total as shown in graph 4.5 below) compared to a slightly higher percentage (18%) when it comes to autonomous learning.



Graph (4.5) Perception of Peer Feedback

In the few occasions when effects of different factors on other variables were possible, nonparametric tests more specifically chi-square (χ^2) were used instead of parametric measures because the questions concerned did not test or measure the subjects, as compared to data in the form of scores or measurements when parametric tests would have been more appropriate. Another reason for avoiding parametric tests is the fact that they are more likely to generate type I error than with nonparametric tests especially when using the former with data that do not meet parametric assumptions. (Kranzler, 2007) Accordingly, a number of association tests were carried out to measure the effects of different factors on students' perceptions of both teachers' and peer feedback but no significant results were obtained as can be seen later. For example, I tried to find out if students who had

passed more ESL writing courses perceived peer feedback differently. The cross tabulation revealed the following:

			<i>Students beliefs regarding the usefulness of PF and CL</i>					<i>Total</i>
			VERY USELESS	USELESS	NIETHER USELESS NOR USEFUL	USEFUL	VERY USEFUL	
Successfully completed ESL writing courses	None	count	2	1	4	1	0	8
		expected count	1.5	2.3	3.2	.9	.2	8.0
	One course	count	8	8	17	2	0	35
		expected count	6.4	9.9	13.8	3.9	1.0	35.0
	Two courses	count	1	8	3	3	1	16
		expected count	2.9	4.5	6.3	1.8	.5	16.0
	More than two courses	count	2	4	4	1	1	12
		expected count	2.2	3.4	4.7	1.4	.3	12.0
	Total	count	13	20	28	7	2	71
		expected count	13.0	20.0	28.0	7.0	2.0	71.0

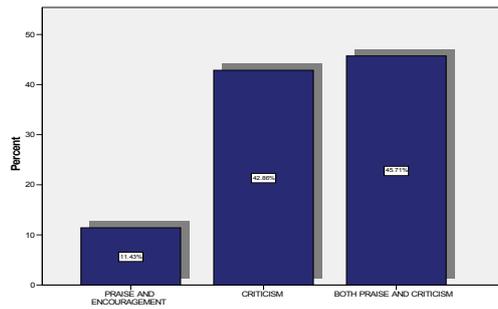
Table (4.11) Number of Previous Writing Courses*Students' Beliefs (crosstabulation)

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.481(a)	12	.170
Likelihood Ratio	19.317	12	.081
Linear-by-Linear Association	.092	1	.762
N of Valid Cases	71		

(a) 15 cells (75.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .34.

Table (4.12) Chi-square results of table (4.9)

The chi-square results should be treated cautiously due to the presence of 16 cells with an expected count of less than 5 and the high p -value of 0.17. Unfortunately, attempts to recode the variables so options (1, 2), and (4, 5) are to be merged respectively to indicate 'useful' and 'useless' instead did not successfully remove all the defected cells. The high score of the chi-square test indicates that the null hypothesis is false but since the $p > 0.05$ then we cannot reject the null hypothesis (H_0)



Graph (4.6) Students Preference of Feedback Attitudes

Similar nonparametric association tests were carried out to measure the effect of variables such as 'level in the university' $\chi^2=14.7$, $p=0.55$, 'age' $\chi^2=21.05$, $p=0.63$, 'the first choice of major in the university' $\chi^2=3.35$, $p=0.50$, on students' perception of peer feedback. As the case with the previous chi-square result, the null hypotheses (H_0) in all these tests cannot be rejected due to the high p -value. However, the actual count of students whose first choice was English major did exceed the expected values which means that they hold a more positive attitude towards peer feedback and those whose first choice was not English did exactly the opposite, i.e. their actual count in the negative side exceeded their expected results.

Original Results	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.134(a)	4	.889
Likelihood Ratio	1.142	4	.888
Linear-by-Linear Association	.003	1	.955
N of Valid Cases	71		

a 4 cells (40.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .99.

Recoded Results	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.988(a)	2	.610
Likelihood Ratio	.992	2	.609
Linear-by-Linear Association	.013	1	.910
N of Valid Cases	71		

a 1 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.93.

Tables (4.13, 4.14) Chi-Square Unfamiliarity with PF * their Perception (Before and after recoding)

The chi-square results here show that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected on both occasions (i.e. before and after recoding the data) because, first of all, the p -value is extremely high (0.95 and 0.91 respectively) and secondly because at least one cell of an expected value of less than 5 remains even after attempts to remove defected cells by recoding options (1, 2) and (3, 4) to indicate 'useless' and 'useful' respectively. The χ^2 value itself is not of great significance anyway (1.1 and 0.98) so we cannot assume that students' unfamiliarity with peer feedback has affected their perception of it here.

4.2.2 The Post-Experiment Questionnaire (Peer Feedback Group)

This questionnaire was much less comprehensive and involved a considerably lesser number of subjects compared to the previous one. It was designed in conjunction with the interviews to measure any change of attitudes towards specific feedback techniques since the previous questionnaire, and in the other part to avoid redundancy, because the questions that did not bear meaningful comparisons and therefore could stand by their own have already been looked at either in the first questionnaire or via other data collection tools such as the entry/exit tests and the interviews (see the methodology chapter). It must be noted that due to the small number of participants in this stage, statistical results should be treated as indicators rather than solid facts and will be used alongside the qualitative results for comparison purposes in the following discussion chapter.

The qualitative data gathered from the post-experiment questionnaire indicate that many students were still unsure about the usefulness of peer feedback even after they had been trained and involved in peer sessions. However, a more substantial number of students also believed that peer feedback is now useful or even very useful. Students also reported that most of the comments they received from their peers addressed local issues (grammar, spelling, punctuation) and a fewer number received a combination of both local and global feedback, by global I refer to wider issues in writing such as logic, ideas and the likes as classified by Ferris and Hedgcock (1998).

However, when students were asked about how they responded to their peers' errors, local issues were of great concern to them as all students claimed that they have looked at them at one point or another. Global concerns on the other hand were of less importance to students as almost all students said that they paid little attention to them when responding to their peers' writing with only one student who thought he paid attention.

4.3 Results of the Interviews

This brief section looks mainly at the qualitative results of the interviews as generated using NVivo 7 and 8. The results at this stage tell very little apart from the categorization and coding procedures which have been discussed in details in the methodology chapter. However, meaningful interpretations of the results should be saved for the following chapter: discussion. Following a rough order of the categories identified and based on the special arrangements of the software applied to help

analyse data, the early results of the interviews were as follows: 12 references had been recorded which suggested improved learning and social skills. A further 19 indicated positive attitudes towards peers' comments. On the contrary, 9 references recorded indicated difficulties in implementing peer feedback and four more suggest undesired results of peer feedback. Other responses of interest recorded included these related to how peer feedback sessions were carried out (16) and the type and attitude of comments in peer feedback sessions (9). As for teacher's feedback (to be compared to peer feedback), the responses indicating approval (5) and disapproval (3) have been coded. (See appendix J: NVivo results)

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Overview of Chapter Five

This is the last main chapter of this project. Having read the literature, revised the methodology, collected and analysed the data, and finally ascertained the results, attention will now turn to the interpretation of the data, and connecting these findings to those of previous studies in this field. The research questions will be progressively addressed in the process, and hence sensible recommendations for both ESL teaching and future research will be established, both tasks would have been carried out in a proper manner. Chapters four and five are closely connected and there will be many references throughout this chapter to the previous one as interpretations of the raw results emerge.

In general, most of the findings of the study are in line with those of the majority of similar studies in almost every aspect investigated. The results show that, as far as feedback in general is concerned, more feedback and training in writing sessions was beneficial to the students regardless of their source, whether teachers or peers, and by using either conventional or innovative measures. In fact, this particular result supports the stance of Ferris (1999, 2003, & 2007), Ashwell (2000), Chandler (2003), and many others who support the idea advocated mainly by Truscott (1996 & 2004), that correction should be avoided because it is useless, if not counter-productive. It was also found that controlled peer feedback did help students write better, in terms of grammar and content, along with developing many essential social and cognitive skills, including more classroom participation, actively engaging in communicative language exercises, responding to others' texts in a controlled and useful manner,

the ability to argue and defend ideas, and last but not least, the ability to address a particular audience, in comparison to the outcome of the other group, which relied only on teachers' comments. These findings are in accordance with studies such as Min (2008), Rollinson (2005), Storch (2004), Saito and Fujita (2004), Hinkel (2004), Ferris (2003), Yarrow and Topping (2001), Hyland (2000), Reid (2000), and Ferris and Hedgcock (1998)

5.1 Students' Perception on Different Types of Feedback

This part looks into the first of the research sub-questions (see section 3.1.2). Before we proceed to discussing the question of the student's beliefs about this learning process, it should be noted that there is an overlap between this and the last of the research questions (c.f. section 5.4), which is due to the fact that both questions look at students' beliefs regarding different feedback techniques at some stage. However it was necessary to separate them, as this question looks into the preferences of ESL students regarding feedback in general, the rate of feedback they receive, the attitude of criticism or comments they prefer, the areas of writing they want feedback to focus on, and the directness of corrections, not merely teacher and peer feedback as is the case in the other section. Moreover, at this stage I am also interested in students' initial beliefs concerning the different feedback techniques, to see if such beliefs could have affected their performances in the following stages, hence the results of both questionnaires might be required. However, if these beliefs changed, as students in the treatment group were exposed to peer feedback training and engaged in PF sessions, this would be the focal point of the other section.

The investigations conducted to answer the first of the four sub-questions went through two different stages; the first targeted all students who took or were about to take a writing course in the department, which would be the main source of information in this part; the second stage included only those who were members of the PF group, and would be analysed minimally at this point. Data was collected using a combination of closed and open-ended questions, more quantitative items in the first questionnaire and more open-ended, qualitative questions in the second. The approach used to gather data was mainly quantitative in the first occasion given the relatively large number of students approached in the first stage. Yet the qualitative aspect of their responses was still available achieved by the presence of open-ended items. Having collected the necessary data, the descriptive data of different preferences and beliefs, and eventually comparisons between the two stages, were processed and analysed.

The descriptive statistics of the first questionnaire show that as far as attitudes towards teacher comments were concerned, the majority of students preferred a combination of 'constructive criticism' and 'praise', or simply 'constructive criticism' alone, rather than mere praise in a formative assessment (as compared to summative assessment⁴, when students expectedly preferred more praise and encouragement, $n=26$ in the latter as compared to only 8 in the former). In fact, only 11.4% of students preferred their work to be merely praised by their teachers (see graph 3.6), a result which could be affected by the age factor, as all of the students

⁴ Formative assessment generally refers to comments given while students are revising their texts with the purpose of improving and accelerating learning. (Sadler, 1998) Summative assessment on the other hand refers to comments on the final version of students' texts and refers to only failure or success, or how students compare with their peers. (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006)

involved were mature university-level students. It can be argued that because of students' level and age, the majority were willing to accept criticism as long as they were convinced that this was going to help them become better writers. In other words, they were more concerned about possible points of weaknesses so they can work on them, than with what they were already good at. However, no direct comparisons were immediately possible, by which I mean investigating the beliefs of students from other levels, linguistic backgrounds, or, for that matter, those of their female counterparts. If the same finding is to be compared to other studies in the literature, the study of Hyland and Hyland (2001) investigated the preferences of many male and female students from different age groups, linguistic and authentic backgrounds, which generated the diversity of their findings as to which type of feedback students preferred. One assumption from this result is that ESL student writers would not be very much negatively affected by the attitude of feedback they receive, regardless of where it comes from, as long as it highlights their shortcomings. Therefore, students were asked to focus on their peers' errors more than on praising their good points during the training week and the following sessions, because these were ongoing developmental exercises, not a final marking practice (i.e. they were formative not summative).

Due to the comparative nature of the study, more obviously in the fourth research question, a decision was made that items of students' responses that involve beliefs and attitudes should be identified and categorised in both questionnaires. Because of the topic of this project, the most prominent categories were naturally students' beliefs concerning teachers' feedback compared to the preferences of their peers in

ESL writing classes. It should be noted however that asking students about peer feedback in the first questionnaire might not yield enough informed replies, because bearing in mind the distinctive traditional methods of learning most EFL students are used to in Saudi Arabia, it could be a totally novel idea to some. To be more precise, half of the subjects who returned the first questionnaire have never been involved in peer sessions prior to the experiment, see section 4.2.1 (the pre-experiment questionnaire). However, the notions of autonomous/collaborative learning and peer feedback in writing classes have been thoroughly clarified, explained, and exemplified as much as possible, not only in the supplementary information included in the copies of the questionnaire given to potential subjects, but also by the instructors who were monitoring the process, including myself, as time and resources permitted (see Index: 1st Questionnaire) to make sure that students had at least some idea about the subject. In fact, the general impression of this research population is an invaluable source of information. The data also gave an important insight into how students would have initially perceived different learning approaches, how will that affect their performances, will these preferences and beliefs change according to different treatments they receive and how will that be reflected in their actual writing, withstanding the aforementioned precautions.

By inspecting the descriptive results of the first questionnaire, it becomes obvious that as far as teacher written feedback is concerned, the overwhelming majority of students have very strong views in favour of this type of feedback (see graph 4.3 and table 4.7 in the results chapter). In fact, not a single student described teacher feedback as either (2) unimportant, or (1) very unimportant (on a Likert scale of 5),

which simply means that despite the reported shortcomings of this type of feedback reported in studies such as Truscott (1996, 2004 & 2007), students would still like to see more comments from teachers on their written work. More importantly, 65.7% of students believed that such feedback is either (4) important, or (5) very important, a result which gives a definite answer regarding how much ESL student writers valued their teachers' comments. Again, building on the evidence of these results, it can be argued with a high level of certainty that such a finding does in fact support that in the majority of similar studies, most of which reported how ESL students appreciate teacher feedback in particular, as compared to other sources, such as peer feedback (Montgomery & Baker, 2007; Ferris, 2002 & 1995; Hyland, 1998; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; and Chaudron, 1984).

By moving to the other major theme of the study, the descriptive results of the first questionnaire show that as far as peer feedback was concerned, graph 4.5 confirms the assumption that student writers were very uncertain, even disapprove of this type of feedback. In fact, 33 out of the valid 71 cases reported that peer feedback was either 'useless' or 'very useless', as compared to only 10 students who thought that peer feedback was useful/very useful (a ratio of over 3:1). This finding at that early stage of the study simply reiterates the assumption that most students had a negative attitude in general towards peer feedback, and when compared with the earlier results of teachers' feedback, it becomes evident that the latter was much more desired than the former. By following a similar analogy, students in the first questionnaire can be described as having more diverse attitudes towards peer feedback once compared to their consistent beliefs regarding teacher feedback. In

fact, the mode of 3 signals that they were generally unsure about how useful peer feedback could be, a result which at that stage was expected, given that as many as 37 students (or just over half of the research population) had never had been involved in peer feedback sessions before. The other significant result is that despite students' unfamiliarity with PF exercises (or not), their general impression was that of suspicion, not only by being unsure of their usefulness, but also claiming that such exercises could yield negative results. If we look at graph 4.5 in the results chapter, we will find that about half of the students (46.5%) believed that PF is either 'useless' or 'very useless'. When we combine this number with that of those who had negative attitudes towards peer feedback, we will be left with only 10 students (14.1%) who thought that peer feedback could actually be 'useful' or 'very useful'. In other words, students at that stage were definitely not in favour of peer feedback, and their responses towards teacher feedback in contrast show a much more positive attitude towards it. These results make it possible to assume with confidence that students were not eager to substitute their 'traditional' way of learning, which in this case comes in the form of teacher feedback, with a more unconventional, innovative way of learning, represented here by peer feedback. Many possible reasons as to why students thought that peer feedback might not suit their learning needs have been identified, including that (arranged in descending order, according to how strongly students thought they had an impact): fellow students did not possess the necessary linguistic skills to provide feedback (69% of the subjects thought so); students were not qualified to give comments (53%); students will not take the matter seriously (43%); correcting peers' scripts can embarrass some students (32%); students will not accept corrections from their

peers (23%); and finally, it is the teachers' responsibility to provide feedback (21%). Linguistic ability frequently seems to be of paramount importance to ESL students, including subjects of this study, who questioned PF techniques mainly because they believed that the linguistic level of their peers was lower than that of their teachers, which supports the findings of many previous studies, including Ashwell (2000), Ferris (2002), Hinkel (2004), Ellis et al. (2008), Bitchener (2008), and many others (see section 1.2 in the literature review).

So, the investigations into students' beliefs of different types of feedback can be summarised as follows: while the overwhelming majority of students in the first questionnaire (pre-experiment) reported that they believed teachers' feedback was a very important source of knowledge, there were some promising results as to how they perceived the notion of collaborative learning, which includes peer feedback exercises. These positive attitudes were further enhanced by training and actively engaging a group of students to incorporate peer feedback sessions into their typical writing classes.

5.2 How Can Peer Feedback Help Students Improve Writing Skills

To answer the second research question, which asks whether PF helps students to improve their existing writing skills and gain new ones, how, and to what extent, it is logical to conduct a comparative study which looks at how students fared in their writing placement tests before and after the experiment. The assessment procedures followed what Black and William (1998) describe as the four essential elements to effective assessment and feedback, which are: 1) establishing a

recognized and measurable standard; 2) a means of identifying student performances in relation to that standard; 3) a means of comparing the two levels; and 4) a way to apply this information to alter the gap. More details about how the writing tests were conducted are available in the methodology chapter section 3.3.2. It must be acknowledged that the entry test as it was administered does not provide a solid baseline data because students did not follow the word-length guideline resulting in possible differences in evaluation of performance and because of the variations in proficiency levels where some texts showed far greater number of errors than others. Nevertheless, the results of the entry test can be used as an indicator of students' common errors in writing. The results can be compared to those of the exit test but with caution given the way in which the entry test was administered.

As far as the writing tasks are concerned, both groups (control and treatment) showed significant improvement in their performances from their corresponding results in the earlier entry test. On average, members of the PF group scored a much lower number of errors per 100 words in every type investigated; the scores show a significant drop from 12.8 to less than 6 in grammar, 6.15 to 2.33 in spelling, and more substantially in punctuation and run-on sentences, which come at 6.84 to 0.93 and 1.94 to 0.09 respectively. The total number of errors significantly dropped from a massive 27.4 to just 9.13 as a result. This result shows a significant improvement in the level of accuracy but it must be treated with caution due to the limited number of participating papers in the writing tests. An important question arises, which is whether such a dramatic improvement in terms of local issues can be attributed,

wholly or partially, to peer feedback sessions. In order to address this question, it is logical to see how the other group performed, given that both groups performed under similar circumstances, with only the addition of peer sessions to the PF group.

The control group on its part showed improvements in their exit test as well compared to results of the entry test. In fact, the control group without exception performed better in the exit test in all four linguistic aspects investigated, not as well as the PF group but better it has to be said. In other words, despite their positive results, the scores were not as good as the PF group in all the four local issues investigated. Firstly, here is a summary of how the control group showed improvements since their entry test (using a similar test of errors per 100 words): for grammatical errors, there was a significant drop from 12.8 to 8.61. This number should be treated with caution because two participating texts shared 47 errors between them which explains the high standard deviation of 7.16 shown on table (4.5), despite this significant improvement, it was still not as much as that of the PF group. The overall average of errors per 100 words of the control group stands at around 16, compared to more than 27 in the entry test. However, the PF group, as already seen, has a much lower average of around 9. The greatest contributors to the higher average of the control group that was much less significant than in the PF group are spelling and punctuation errors. Again, as the case with the treatment group, these results should be treated as indicators rather than solid facts because of the limited number of participating texts. One option was to ignore these results all together but despite the relatively small number of participating texts, the analytic assessment approach could be used in a larger scale follow up studies resulting in

more meaningful findings. Other intervening factors might have affected the overall result of the PF group as well including the different type of discussion in the classroom, additional access to tutorial time and the use of supplementary materials.

The language results of the treatment group also show that its members wrote shorter but more accurate texts compared to their counterparts in the control group. Far fewer errors in all aspects investigated were recorded in the PF group exit test. However, spelling mistakes in the treatment group were more prevalent in some papers than in others, and given that one paper for instance had 13 misspelled words, while some others do not have a single error, the mean could have been distorted as a result. The high SD of 3.79 confirms this assumption. The PF group nevertheless did considerably better in grammar and punctuation compared to the other group (with 5.64 and 0.91 for the PF group, compared to 10.11 and 7.11 for the control group).

As far as qualitative measures are concerned, the PF group achieved a better overall grade, reaching a mean score of 4, compared to 3.64 for the other group, the PF group had a much more consistent mean result due to the lower SD. The overall grade looks not only at language aspects, but at wider global issues as well, including ideas, logic and organization, and hence the higher score, which indicates more achievement in this area too. Both assessors noted that the works of the PF group dealt with more advanced ideas, were better organized, and contained more well-developed arguments. The scope of issues discussed followed better logical transaction. In organizational terms, the sentences and paragraphs were also

constructed better. Despite the fact that the PF group wrote less on average, their writing was reported to be more focused and to-the-point, with less redundant or unnecessary information.

Finally, we look at the global issues of the writing tests where comparisons between the two groups took place accordingly. Issues such rhetoric, logic, supporting examples, and sufficient explanations were of interest. The results of the entry test were diverse as seen in the results chapter. On the negative side, many papers showed numerous occasions of chaotic and confused ideas, incorrect word-choice, very basic sentences both grammatically and rhetorically with little or no transition words, incorrect use of articles, weak rhetorical structure, excessive use of the conjunction 'and' (an attribute to many Arab learners, see Aljamhour, 2001), unclear genre (comparative, argumentative), missing essential components of any paragraph (e.g. a central theme, topic sentence and concluding sentence), and scarce or even absence of supporting evidence and examples. On the other hand there have been some good points though in considerably fewer number papers including smooth flow of ideas, some good examples and evidence, good argument and occasionally good transition of ideas.

In comparison however, when we inspect the comments given to the PF group texts, it becomes apparent that students wrote more consistent texts as gathered evidence shows that PF group members provided better explanations and reasons to support their claims. Similarly, the examples provided were much related to the subject discussed. Many texts showed good logical progress of ideas and a convincing

discourse from the most important issues to lesser ones. The PF group texts in general seemed well connected, due to good use of transitional words and phrases, an issue emphasized throughout the course. On the other hand, there were rare instances of unnecessary repetitions, which were very limited indeed, and were quite possibly related to specific individuals rather than indicating a systematic problem with the group. Other problems noticed included over-general topic sentences and incorrect word-choice. The control group performed fairly well in this field as well, compared to their corresponding results in the entry test. A close inspection of the comments given indicates that some good examples were provided to support the argument, which is a noticeable improvement from the previous test. Similarly, in terms of rhetoric and organization, there was a significant improvement since the entry test, but on both occasions the PF group fared considerably better. Despite the fact that many texts from the control group provided more examples to support their argument, these examples were not as directly connected to the central theme as the ones provided by the other group. There were also some confused and unclear sentences in many of the texts of the control group, in which the rate of repetition is more apparent than that of the PF group. Transition words and phrases were a real concern in many scripts from the control group, resulting in weak rhetorical structure, a problem that was far less prevalent in the PF group's texts.

The clause complexity analysis performed on texts produced by members of both groups does not show much difference between them apart from Extension clauses which were used more often by members of the control group (see tables 4.7 and

4.8 in the results chapter). Again even that result has to be taken with caution because of the limited number of participating papers and despite the interesting analysis I have decided not to focus too much on these results for now. Clause complexity analysis can yield better results when a larger number of papers are involved.

Given the results of both tests, it is now possible to address the second research question, and argue that peer feedback sessions did in fact play a significant role in helping students write better not only drafts that have been jointly revised, but also later texts, at least in the short time span during which it was possible to investigate the phenomenon in this research project. An interesting particularity about PF group texts which has been noticed is that they were shorter than those of the control group. In other words, the PF group wrote shorter but more accurate texts. However, it must be said that the length of papers was not a determining factor in assessing students' writing, and was never treated as fundamental issue. Instructions about the expected length of texts were available but they were also clearly meant to be a guideline rather than a determining factor of the overall grade. The two most important concerns, as already mentioned, were how organized and coherent students wrote their papers in terms of logic and ideas, and how accurate they were from a linguistic perspective.

It must be said that the results of the entry test were remarkably poor. In addition to a lack of feedback, revision opportunities and training, there were arguably many factors that might have contributed to the less than satisfactory performance

including: the timing of the test, which was at the beginning of the term; the fact that some low-achieving students who initially registered on the course subsequently dropped out; and unfamiliarity with the requirements of the course, teachers, other students, course objectives, expected workload, and the nature of the writing tasks. As alluded to earlier, all or some of these factors could have affected the result to some extent, but more research might be required to indicate the key agents with certainty (c.f. section 6.4 'recommendations for future research').

It has already been mentioned that the results of the writing tests proves that peer feedback helped students improve their ESL writing. However, to better engage with the second research question, the investigation should go beyond the results of the tests and include results from the questionnaires and interviews as well. Such inclusion gives a more humanistic approach towards the PF experiment, and one reason that makes the following discussion different from the one already mentioned is that it aims to find out more about how PF sessions helped students write better as they see it themselves, which, in addition to the results of their actual performance in the previous discussion, should give a better understanding of how and to what extent such a technique worked.

Starting with the first questionnaire, the pattern of the results shown in table 4.09 (in the results chapter) indicates that there is a clear difference between the expected and the observed values. For instance, the positive end of the scale ('useful' and 'very useful') have fewer observed counts than expected, which

indicates that students who passed fewer writing courses had a less positive attitude towards peer feedback. Another remarkable finding is that only students who had passed one writing course outnumbered the expected value. Those who had passed more than one seemed to have a less favourable attitude. The negative options ('useless' and 'very useless') also show that most students had a more negative attitude than expected, which, in the case of those who passed two courses, is very noticeable. More observed values can also be found under 'neither useless nor useful', with students who were still in their first writing course indicating that they may prefer not to discuss something they are not well-informed about. The chi-square test, however, tells us that these results are not reliable for two reasons. Firstly, there are 15 cells of less than 5 expected values, rendering the results void. Secondly, since the significance value (p -value) is much higher than 0.05, the probability of error is very high. Recoding the values did not help much either, as there were still cells of less than 5 counts. There might be a trend with regard to students' responses but unfortunately it is not statistically proven. The descriptive results of the questionnaire show that 42.8% of students seemed to be willing to receive only constructive criticism feedback, in comparison to a slightly higher percentage (45.7%) who would prefer to have a combination of both praise and criticism, a finding which very much correlates to that of Hyland and Hyland (2002) reporting on ESL writing students. It is possible that students at this stage were not looking for approval as much as ways of improvement. Another interesting factor that might have affected students' response is their gender, or to be more specific, personal traits associated with their gender. Male students, as reported in Hyland and Hyland's (2002) study, tended to have similar attitudes towards constructive

criticism. In other words, they were less concerned about social approval or encouragement than their female counterparts, but unfortunately due to constraints of access (see the limitations section) resulting in the absence of the female voice in this study, a significant aspect of the question remains unanswered.

As far as the interviews are concerned, the results show that all interviewees had had some very positive attitudes towards peer feedback sessions. A respondent commented on the experience as 'I have a more important role in the classroom than just attending and listening' and another commented on the novelty of the idea as 'it was a good concept using different ways of learning.' As a whole, most respondents had a good experience and comments received from colleagues were useful. For example, a respondent commented on that by saying 'students have more time per paper than a teacher so they can write longer and more detailed comments' and another said 'my friends seem to be better aware of my mistakes.'

Three respondents commented on the concept of alternative ways of learning and they believed that this was a valid yet interesting and exciting approach in writing classes. Students were particularly happy with the fact that they had more opportunities to discuss their writing problems with each other as opposed to limited chances when teachers were the only ones in charge. Two interviewees believed that because they could then play a greater role in decision making and because they were not simply passive receivers of what teachers had to say, classes were far more interesting, a point that goes perfectly in line with findings of similar studies (including Lundstorm and Baker, 2009; Hinkel, 2004; Storch, 2004; Hyland,

2000; Reid, 2000; Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998). The following excerpt explains their point of view: 'the classes become more exciting to me than just listening to what the teacher says' Another student believed that he benefited a lot from comments given to him by peers whose linguistic ability was considerably better than his 'Good students have better ideas and are well-informed about the subject being discussed' which brings us yet again to the issue of which errors students were concerned about. In this case, it became apparent that the utmost concern of ESL students was once again their linguistic errors. Students mixed levels again was commented on by another interviewee who thought that good students were the ones capable of producing ideas and well-informed judgments when it comes to feedback. Another issue I am glad that students were aware of is that of intended readership as an interviewee commented: "... I very much liked the idea that I can now understand how other students perceived my writing, I mean if they understand the meaning I intended to convey then my writing should have been clear enough."

When Interviewees were asked about how they benefited from these sessions, most of them were happy with a particular characteristic of collaborative writing sessions which was the fact that they now can express and defend their opinions more freely as well as being able to discuss the comments they received from their peers. For instance, an interviewer commented 'I very much liked the idea that I can now realise how other students perceive my writing. I mean if they understand the meaning I intended to convey.' These skills ultimately enhance students' ability of critical thinking and judgment. Other skills of similar importance that have been

developed according to the interviewees were their communication abilities and the ability to be an active member of a group.

So, given the joint results of empirical studies including writing tests, questionnaires and interviews, it can be argued that peer feedback does indeed help students improve many writing skills not only in terms of linguistic achievements, but also the social, sociocultural, cognitive and affective skills. It also made them aware of the importance of collaborative learning and subsequently changed their beliefs about peer and teacher-written feedback.

5.3 Students Experience in the Peer Feedback Group

Bearing in mind that the third research question looks into students' experience with peer feedback as they see it from their perspective, a more qualitative measure has been utilised to gather and analyse the data which, in this case, consisted of individual, one-to-one interviews with members of the PF group. As noted earlier in the methodology chapter, one purpose of the interviews was to complement the findings of the second questionnaire also involved members of the peer feedback group. In this section, however, the discussion will rely mostly on the findings of the interviews, for the aforementioned reason.

The collective results of interviews and second questionnaires showed that all participants, regardless of their score in the exit test, had had more positive attitudes towards peer feedback by the end of the experiment compared to results of the first questionnaires. The interviewees for instance reported that many

learning and social skills had been progressively developed as a result of engaging in collaborative learning activities, in the form of peer feedback sessions, especially in terms of autonomous learning. A participant said 'I really developed [the] skill of defending and arguing my ideas in a scientific and systematic way.' This finding also goes perfectly in line with findings of similar studies, including Min (2006) and Miao et al., (2006). For example, from a social point of view, students reported that they could express their own ideas more openly and freely, with less apprehension than was usually possible if they were to do the same with teachers as already seen in the previous section. They could also give their own opinions and recommendations to their peers, a role which was to some students a new experience in the sense that they were doing a task that until recently had been exclusively performed by their teachers. A less teacher-centred classroom and more student participation are two essential components of modern teaching approaches, which encourage students to take more responsibility of their own learning. As the previous section reveals, the overall perception of students on peer feedback was indeed very positive even in a culture which gives great authority to teachers.

However, students expectedly raised some concerns about peer feedback and it should not be surprising to know that most of these were yet again related to their peers' level in English. For example, one participant in the second questionnaire mentioned that he did not expect his colleague to correct linguistic errors if his level was around or below his own, '[students] are at around my level in English so I don't expect them to correct all language errors' although he did not explain on which basis he made his decisions about his colleagues' proficiency levels. Another believed

that he might even get incorrect comments from his peers but he was also aware that despite that he could still benefit from discussing these comments with them. An interviewee claims that because of peers' supposed incompetence, the feedback he received was not always reliable. Some students also commented on the social boundaries that might hinder giving honest feedback. One interviewee thought that it was very difficult for him to criticize someone's writing if he did not know him. In fact, most of these concerns have been reported in similar studies such as Ferris and Min (2008), Hedgcock (2005), Rollinson (2005), Hinkel (2004), Saito and Fujita (2004), and Hyland (2002) which makes us assume that they are naturally occurring phenomena when students work with each other.

Despite these concerns, the fact of the matter remains that the volume of negative or uncertain comments about the peer feedback experience was far less common than comments approving it which in turn suggests that the overall impression was very positive indeed. To summarise then, the overall perception of students regarding their experience was very positive despite the few concerns regarding the execution of these sessions and the linguistic level of their peers. Teachers however must acknowledge these concerns and explicitly discuss them with their students when it comes to classroom training.

5.4 Shift of Attitudes towards Teacher-Written and Peer Feedback

This question has been partially addressed in section 4.1 (above), which looks at students' beliefs and attitudes in a much broader sense but does not compare them to theirs after the experiment. However, I am also more interested in this section to

trace such a shift of attitudes in a more detailed approach, based on the data analysis and results which should eventually help provide explanations for such a shift. As stated earlier, this change of attitude, especially towards peer feedback, was remarkable in the sense that it happened in a relatively short time.

The discussion will be largely based on the combined results of questionnaires and interviews, as well as the findings of previous studies. In fact, the results seem to support the findings of the majority of previous research, for example Hinkel (2004), Hyland (2003), Ferris (2002), Ashwell (2000), and Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1996), which mainly report that ESL students prefer teacher's comments to those of their peers, on the grounds of reliability, teachers' level of experience and more importantly teachers' language proficiency level compared to their peers', regardless of the style and manner in which they are delivered. One interviewee for example mentioned that 'the teacher knows better because students can make errors themselves.' Despite students' preference of teacher-written feedback, the majority of students in this study were aware of educational, social and extra-curricular skills they had improved as a result of engaging in peer sessions. Such an experiment in turn had positively affected their perception of peer feedback. They were aware of the importance of skills such as the ability to critically assess others' work and to defend their own ideas, both of which were essential components of peer feedback exercises. The overall impression is that despite students' initial resentment of peer response equal to that of their teachers, the general idea has gradually become accepted, and most students were happy to engage in more of the same in the future writing classes.

Analysing the results of the two questionnaires (pre- and post-experiment) regarding students' beliefs about teacher-written feedback, it can be seen that the overwhelming majority of students in the first questionnaire (i.e. pre-experiment) had very strong views in favour of teacher-written feedback as already seen in section 4.1, which, as far as literature is concerned, was greatly expected. By inspecting table 4.7 and graph 4.3 in the results chapter, it was discovered that not a single student described teacher feedback as either 'unimportant' or 'very unimportant'; on the contrary, over 65% of them described it as 'important' or 'very important'

Following a similar analogy, students in the first questionnaire had had more diverse attitudes towards peer feedback compared to their consistent positive beliefs of teacher-written feedback. In fact, the mode of 3 signals that they were mostly unsure about how useful peer feedback could have been, a result which at that stage was largely expected given that as many as 37 students or just over half of the research population never had been involved in peer feedback sessions before. The other significant result is that despite students' unfamiliarity with PF exercises, their general impression was that of uncertainty, not only because they were unsure how useful they were, but also because they believed such exercises could yield negative results. If we look at graph (4.5) in the results chapter, we find that about half of the students (46.5%) believed that PF is either useless or very useless. When we combine this number with that of those who had negative attitudes towards peer feedback, we will be left with only 10 students (14.1%) who thought that peer

feedback could actually be useful. In other words, students at that stage were definitely not in favour of peer feedback and their responses towards teacher feedback in contrast show a much more positive attitude. These results make it possible to assume that students at that stage were not eager to substitute their 'traditional' way of learning, which in this case comes in the form of teacher feedback, with a more unconventional way of learning represented here by peer feedback. Many possible reasons as to why students thought that peer feedback might not suit their learning needs have been identified and they were (arranged according to how strongly students thought they had an impact): fellow students did not possess the necessary linguistic skills to provide feedback (69% of the subjects thought so), students were not qualified to give comments (53%), students will not take the matter seriously (43%), and to a lesser degree: correcting peers scripts can embarrass some students (32%), students will not accept corrections from their peers (23%) and finally the least reason that could possibly deter students from peer feedback sessions was that they thought it was teachers' responsibility to provide feedback with 21% of students believing so. The linguistic ability once again seems to be of paramount importance to ESL students including subjects of this study who questioned PF techniques mainly because they believed that the linguistic level of their peers was lower than that of their teachers, which supports the findings of many previous studies in the literature including Chaudron (1984), Ashwell (2000), Ferris (2002), Hinkel (2004), Ellis et al., (2008), Bitchener (2008), and others.

The descriptive results of the questionnaire reveal that most of students were engaged in peer feedback sessions at least five times during the course of the writing

class, with at least four opportunities for the remaining few. This is possibly not a very extended experience, but given the fact that previous carefully-designed orientation sessions were provided to students prior to taking a place in the sessions, along with the constant presence of the instructor to guide them throughout the different stages, this experience should be effective and of some value, to say the least. Most students did both tasks involved in the sessions, which were responding to their peers' scripts, and receiving and discussing comments on their own writing. The results of the second questionnaire tell a completely different story about peer feedback compared to the previous one. It becomes evident from the qualitative results of both questionnaires and interviews that students had a much more positive attitude towards the usefulness of peer feedback, with around 42% of the sample believing that it could be 'useful' or even 'very useful'.

As far as what type of corrections they provided is concerned, the majority of students believed that they focused very little on global issues. Surface errors on the other hand were of more concern to students and almost all of the students interviewed or involved in the questionnaire were concerned about issues such as grammar, word-choice, punctuation and spelling. On both occasions however, students did not report that they 'never' or 'always' looked at a specific category of errors, which means that in the second instance, students still looked at linguistic errors when responding to their peers' writing at one point or another. They were again asked a similar question about what type of comments they received from their peers to be compared to what they provide; the majority again reported that the comments received were regarding grammar, spelling, and punctuation, with

only two students who received comments on global issues as well. This finding gives more evidence to support the theory that ESL students are more concerned about their linguistic performance than other writing skills, despite attempts to shift the focus from local issues towards wider global ones. Such a finding goes in line with these of earlier studies such as Ellis et al., (2008), Bitchener (2008), Min (2006), Hinkel (2004) and Ferris (2002 & 1995).

It is also interesting to note that the majority of students thought that peer feedback can be a reliable or even a very reliable source of information, which was definitely not the case at the beginning of the experiment, when attitudes towards peer feedback were gauged to be quite the opposite. A very plausible explanation for such a difference in attitudes is that all respondents to the second questionnaire had been involved in peer feedback sessions at least four times in addition to the orientation programme, while on the contrary over half of the subjects of the first questionnaire had never been in one. When students were trained and engaged in peer sessions they should have realized the objectives and potential benefits of having them. Claiming that the comments they received from their peers were reliable naturally presupposes that students accepted this type of feedback, and they were more likely to have made positive changes to their writing in response to the peer feedback received. It was noticed that as confidence grew in peer feedback as a valid source of comments, the importance accorded to teachers' comments correspondingly declined somewhat. This shift is a remarkable change of attitude, given the short time in which the experiment was conducted and the strongly entrenched traditional educational experiences of the students.

However, despite this change of attitudes towards peer feedback, teacher written-feedback was still of greater value to these students which was expected given that they were ESL students who aim to improve not only their writing skills but their English as well. The available evidence in the literature shows a similar conclusion in studies such as Montgomery & Baker (2007), Ferris (2002 & 1995), Hyland (1998), and Hedgcock & Lefkowitz (1994).

Bearing all the above argument in mind, it can be argued with confidence that students' belief in peer feedback positively grew by the end of the course which somehow comes at the expense of confidence in teacher-written feedback. An important factor of this change was because they were trained to incorporate peer feedback into their writing classes hence were able to assess it from a close range as opposed to the views of other students whose opinions might be largely based on their rationalization and preconceived ideas of it. Extensive training is a very important factor in peer-triggered feedback and it can directly have a positive impact on students' revision types and quality of texts.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Overview of Chapter Six

This is the last chapter of this project. It comprises a summary of the present study, implications for ESL teaching, limitations and recommendations for future research.

6.1 Summary of the Study

Peer feedback is a very effective tool in ESL writing classes, even in contexts where more traditional views of learning and teaching are widespread. Having established this, it should also be noted that the degree of successfulness largely depends on factors like the type and extent of training students receive, their beliefs and perceptions, and the level of teachers' interference. Peer feedback in many aspects is a collaborative skill that requires some degree of students' interaction throughout peer sessions. This is why peer feedback has been widely associated with writing approaches such as the process and genre approach. In fact, there are numerous advantages of integrating peer feedback in ESL writing classes. It was found that peer feedback developed not only the final product, but it also helped improve many skills including the ability to work with other learners with a group spirit.

The findings of this study give further support to the widespread, oft-cited theory in the literature that ESL student writers in particular expect, value, and appreciate feedback about their writing regardless of the source (Montgomery and Baker, 2007; Miao et al., 2006; Ferris, 2002 and 1995; Hyland, 1998; Hedgcock and Lefkowitz, 1994) In other words, ESL students tend to believe that the more feedback they

receive, the more chances they have to develop their writing skills. However, teachers' feedback was still the most desired type of feedback among L2 writers, even when they were trained to use other non-conventional types of feedback, which in the case of this study was peer feedback, a belief which is based largely on students' assumption that their peers might not be as qualified as their teachers when providing comments, due to many factors, especially linguistic proficiency and experience.

Despite their apparent preference for teacher-written feedback, the overwhelming majority of students eventually had positive attitudes towards peer feedback and peer writing sessions when they were part of the experiment; probably not as positive as towards teacher-written feedback, but positive enough to be rendered effective. Students were also aware enough of teachers' limited time to respond to each and every error in their writing, hence feedback from other sources, including peers and electronic software programmes, was necessitated. It was found that students' acceptance of peer feedback was largely affected by the type of training they receive, i.e. when they were trained to use peer feedback, their attitude towards it became more positive.

As far as types of errors were concerned, students were more worried about linguistic errors than wider global issues, a finding which in fact does not come as a surprise, as most ESL students in previous studies exhibit a similar attitude (Ellis et al, 2008; Montgomery and Baker, 2007; Miao et al., 2006, Hinkel, 2004; Ferris, 2002 and 1995).

The results of the exit test show a very significant improvement in the writing quality of students who were trained to use peer feedback compared to the writing of the other group. Students in the peer feedback group also reported that they benefited from additional skills other than L2 writing, including the ability to work in a group, developing critical thinking, greater autonomous learning, and the ability to defend their ideas. Students also benefited from the less formal atmosphere when working with their peers, which helped them discuss and exchange ideas more freely and openly.

6.2 Implications for Teaching

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that peer feedback be integrated in all ESL writing classes from as early a stage as possible. Obviously, because of students' lack of experience in pre-university education, extra training sessions are required to familiarise them with this new technique, including the different tasks and roles expected from them during these sessions, which could be significantly different from what they are used to in teacher-centred approaches. This recommendation goes perfectly in line with most previous studies including Chaudron, (1984), Jacobs et al. (1998), Miao et al., (2006), and Ellis et al., (2008).

Another finding of interest which could have serious implications was that of students' concerns about their local errors, which come at the expense of other types of errors, a finding which is also reported in similar studies such as Mendonça and Johnson (1994) and Leki (1990). Obviously local errors need to be addressed at one

stage or another as students' progress in the writing course, but they are nevertheless not more important than other types of errors which students tend to ignore. A more balanced approach is required where both types, local and global, would be equally and consistently addressed. Even in peer feedback sessions when teachers' level of intervention is minimised, proper training and tools like checklists should help students focus on global issues.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

There are inevitably limitations in this study that need to be acknowledged. They are divided into three main categories, depending on where they come from.

Methods

The study used three data collection methods: writing tests (entry and exit tests), questionnaires (pre- and post-experiment), and interviews, as mentioned in the methodology chapter. The literature of classroom research also suggests that other methods can also be used to collect data, including classroom observation and think-aloud protocols. These two tools can be very useful in terms of observing and documenting what students actually do during feedback sessions which, despite being very important to studies of this kind, were not utilised here because this front was not among the issues investigated. The writing tests were designed to investigate students' progress in the short-term, but given the time limit, it was not possible to assess their performances in the long run.

Time Factor

Time limit affects almost every research project, this one included. The real shortage of time experienced was during the data collection stage, as the research was bound by fixed start and end dates of the term. The time limit inevitably affected the choice of data collection tools. In other terms, time consuming tools such as think-aloud protocols and classroom observation were replaced with more time-efficient tools.

Access to Participants

The study involved ESL students from one university in Saudi Arabia, making it difficult to generalise the findings for the wider context of ESL teaching and learning regionally and globally. Social constraints also meant that it was difficult to include female students, even from the same institution, because they are taught separately, and this constraint had to be borne in mind when the data collection plan was designed.

Scope of the Research

The study compared and assessed two techniques of feedback in ESL writing classes, whereas other feedback techniques such as conferencing and self-assessment also exist. Teacher written-feedback was chosen as an example of a teacher-centred approach to ESL writing teaching, to be compared against a more modern approach in the form of peer feedback. The latter in particular was of interest because it requires certain learning and social skills from students' perspectives, as well as being the product of collaborative learning, another aspect neglected by most traditional teaching methods.

Electronic writing assessment programmes and online applications such as ETS CRITERION and DIALANG, which could foster peer feedback exercises, were also overlooked, because in many aspects these programmes could be very helpful in classes with a large number of students or in distance learning situations, where students from different parts of the world can review each other's writing, exchange ideas and comments online, however, neither of these two scenarios were applicable to this study, hence they were excluded.

6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

It is worthwhile to consider carrying out more extensive research that includes other possible factors likely to affect the final results. Such a study could include the effects of gender, age, linguistic level, nationality, and linguistic background, in addition to the factors already investigated. It is also possible to have a wider range of students involved in the project, especially by avoiding being gender specific. This was complicated in this study by the unique educational policies set by the government (i.e. this is a more complicated issue than merely access). A possible solution to overcome such restrictive legislation is to develop contacts in the female sections who can act on behalf of the researcher, including carrying out usual teaching load, distributing questionnaires, and interviewing students. In geographical terms, participants can be drawn from a wider linguistic and demographic context to help generalize the findings of the research.

It could be equally important to investigate how students interact and perform during peer feedback sessions, which means including data collection tools like classroom observation and think-aloud protocols. Such a study would shed more light into students' actual performances during peer sessions, and it gives further insight into how specific skills are developed. Someone can extract useful information from students' interaction with each other in a way that makes it possible to notice and assess them, and subsequently recommend how the ideal type of interaction is going to be. As far as assessment procedures are concerned, a study which incorporates electronic means of writing assessment and then investigates and evaluates their effect on student writing would be highly recommended. Moreover, the assessment of both writing tests was a tedious and time-consuming task. As already mentioned, there are electronic tools that should help to take some or most of this burden off the teachers, especially when a considerably larger number of participants are included (see section 2.2.5). Finally, from a methodological point of view, a longitudinal study which is capable of assessing students' development in the long run, as well as capturing any progress in their writing over an extended period of time, is highly recommended. The current literature shows that no previous studies of this kind exist.

In general, this proposed study should maximise the generalisability of research findings to ESL writing classes across Saudi Arabia and the wider ESL context. It could also yield more interesting results about students' interaction, and the immediate effect on writing in the short and long run in a way that helps to develop better classroom teaching and instructions provided to students.

6.5 Self-Reflection

This is presumably the largest single piece of academic work I have carried out so far and it surely had its impact on me academically and personally. It has also been a demanding yet immensely interesting project for me. As a result of that, I have every reason to believe that my research skills have considerably developed and I would argue that I am better prepared now for future research than when I first enrolled in the PhD programme. Such acquired skills should also be transferable to other research fields in addition to ESL writing, that is not to undermine the important position which ESL writing occupies but to stress the significance of other fields of research. These disciplines include, but are not limited to, developing collaborative learning environments, the use of technology in education and teaching in non-Western countries. Similarly, the use of various data analysis tools like SPSS and nVivo, as well as becoming aware of quantitative and qualitative measures in educational research are two treasured skills I possibly would rely upon in upcoming projects. Statistically speaking, I am confident that my ability to read and understand various charts and figures has considerably improved thanks to my research project.

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