

**L2 WRITING AND L2 WRITTEN FEEDBACK IN UPPER  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS AS EXPERIENCED BY TEACHERS**

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**Angeliki Manousou**

University of Jyväskylä

Department of Languages

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>L2 written feedback is a multi-faceted issue and this is the reason behind the big number of studies that have been conducted on it. However, the majority of studies deal with learners’ opinions of teachers’ feedback or several types of feedback and their advantages and disadvantages. There are no studies that could have addressed teachers’ opinions of their L2 written feedback.</p> <p>This study attempts to describe how L2 teachers view their written feedback on learners’ essays. In particular, it attempts to describe whether L2 writing is important nowadays and what text types learners produce. Moreover, it attempts to describe some definitions of feedback, forms of feedback, the effectiveness of feedback and whether feedback needs to be written in a milder way. Additionally, it attempts to describe learners’ responsibility for processing teachers’ feedback, the focus of feedback, its handling in class and whether teachers follow written guidelines when giving feedback.</p> <p>The data includes six recorded interviews of L2 teachers in upper secondary schools in Finland and in Greece. In particular, three teachers are Finnish and three teachers are Greek.</p> <p>The results of this study reveal that L2 teachers have their own reasons for making choices when giving feedback. They reflect and give explanations on their choices and they recognise their errors when giving feedback. In general, they have their own opinion about how feedback should be given to learners.</p>	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

L2 writing and L2 written feedback are two necessary actions in a classroom. In other words, L2 writing is the necessary prerequisite for teachers' written feedback to follow. L2 writing is the process of writing a text in an organised way in English so that the text is understood by readers. L2 written feedback describes teachers' English corrections in writing and comments on learners' texts. As a result, it is apparent that both learners and teachers have to cooperate since learners are responsible for L2 writing whereas teachers are responsible for L2 written feedback. However, this study deals only with the teachers' perspective on both issues.

L2 written feedback has been studied quite a lot. On the one hand, a study by Ellis (2009) describes different types of written feedback that can be used for correcting learners' texts. Accordingly, the choice of the type of feedback influences its effectiveness. Another study by Lunt and Curran (2010) focuses on the comparison between written feedback and electronic audio feedback attempting to show the benefits of the electronic audio feedback over the traditional written feedback. Yet, another study by Weaver (2006) describes learners' beliefs about teachers' written feedback highlighting the pros and cons that learners report about it. However, none of the above-mentioned studies describes how teachers view their written feedback. They either deal with the learners' beliefs or they deal with types of written feedback and their advantages or disadvantages.

On the other hand, there are studies which focus on the teachers' roles and practices regarding L2 written feedback. One such study by Furneaux, Paran and Fairfax (2007) attempts to discover the roles that teachers assume when they correct learners' texts. Accordingly, teachers take on either the role of the provider or that of the initiator. Another study by Lee (2008) deals with the feedback practices of L2 teachers in Hong Kong secondary schools and whether they follow the school principles or whether they get any written guidelines for giving feedback. Accordingly, the results show that the Hong Kong teachers do not follow the school principles and they are not given any written guidelines for giving feedback. Finally, a third study by Lee (2011) provides alternative ways of giving written feedback making teachers' job easier and feedback more effective.

This study attempts to find out teachers' opinions on L2 writing and L2 written feedback. In other words, this study attempts to find out how teachers of English view their written feedback and what they think about it. Six L2 teachers were interviewed in order to discover their opinion of the importance of teaching and learning L2 writing nowadays, text types that learners produce, defining written feedback, forms of written feedback, effectiveness of L2 written feedback and making written feedback milder. Moreover, the six interviews helped in discovering their opinion of learners' responsibility for processing written feedback, focus of written feedback, the handling of feedback in class and following written guidelines when giving feedback.

This study begins with three background chapters. Chapter 2 focuses on issues concerning L2 writing. Chapter 3 focuses on issues regarding L2 written feedback. Chapter 4 reviews all the studies focusing on L2 written feedback. Three studies are reviewed. All these studies attempt to find out teachers' feedback practices in secondary schools. In other words, they deal with feedback from the teachers' perspective. Chapter 5 focuses on the motivation of this study and its aims. Chapter 6 focuses on the data collection and methodology of this study. Chapter 7 analyses the findings of this study. Chapter 8 discusses the findings in relation to the background literature and chapter 9 describes the advantages of this study and it offers suggestions for future improvement.

First, there is a focus on the importance of L2 writing nowadays.

## **2 L2 WRITING**

This chapter focuses on specific issues concerning L2 writing such as the importance of teaching and learning L2 writing, what writing ability is and the situations in which people need to write and some theories on the writing process. Moreover, it includes a study on the age factor in L2 writing, information about the several text types produced in L2 writing, the social and cultural aspects of writing and last the different foci that there are when writing in L2.

## 2.1 The importance of L2 writing

The ability and the knowledge to write effectively are considered very important nowadays not only in the globalised world but also in L2 education (Weigle 2002: 1). Therefore, instruction in writing has become increasingly important in L2 classrooms as well. As technology and transportation develop, there is a demand for different nations to come in contact and interact with each other (Weigle 2002: 1). Under these new conditions, the demand and need for communication across languages and cultures become even more essential. As a consequence, the ability to speak and write an L2 is a very significant skill for educational, business and personal reasons. Additionally, writing is very important in L2 classrooms. Therefore, it is an important part of the communicative language teaching where language is seen as a system of communication rather than an object to be studied. In other words, writing is not used to reinforce repetitions of grammar and vocabulary in modern L2 classrooms but rather it is an important enterprise in and of itself.

Learning how to write is a quite demanding and challenging aspect of L2 learning (Hyland 2003: xiii). Learning how to write is very difficult not only for L2 learners but also for native speakers of English. In other words, being a native speaker of English does not automatically mean that this person knows how to write effectively. This means that knowing how to write effectively requires a lot of continuous and specialised instruction for both native speakers and L2 learners of English.

Furthermore, it is not only the learning of the writing skill that is important but also its teaching (Hyland 2003: xiii). In other words, teaching writing plays a very significant role in the field of L2 teaching, a role that is much more important than it was 20 or 30 years ago.

There are two reasons for the importance of learning and teaching writing (Hyland 2003: xiii). Firstly, knowing how to write is crucial for learners' success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The global digital network is the main communicative channel of many young people and the ability to communicate with others and exchange ideas and information is entirely dependent on good writing skills. In other words, learning how to write effectively is more demanding than ever in today's world. Writing has turned into one of the most necessary process skills in the modern world that is characterized by text and numerical data. Second, there is a big interest in the increase of

knowledge about the nature of written texts and the writing processes behind them in the field of applied linguistics. Many scholars from several fields such as composition studies, L2 writing, genre theory and contrastive rhetoric have shown their interest in writing. As a consequence, there is an active interest nowadays to create new theories about writing as well as new approaches to the teaching of writing in L2 classrooms combining the recent theoretical background with the findings from empirical studies.

Shifting the focus on teachers, the ability to teach writing effectively is very crucial for an L2 teacher (Hyland 2003: xv). Since it has been mentioned that learning how to write effectively is one of the most important skills that learners need to develop, a well-trained teacher needs to know how to teach writing to them. Moreover, there is an increase in the interest in L2 writing and in the ways to teach it more effectively over the last ten years.

A teacher can be both effective and strong in his/her teaching of writing (Hyland 2003: xv). On the one hand, an effective teacher is informed before he/she makes decisions about how to carry out the lesson and about the methods, materials and procedures he/she wishes to use in the classroom. This information derives from the teacher's knowledge of the recent practices in his/her field. On the other hand, a teacher can be strong as well. After being informed of all the recent practices and trends in his/her field, he/she ought to reflect on their appropriateness and on whether he/she should adopt them in the classroom. In other words, the reflection process expects the teacher to know how to relate the classroom activities to relevant current theory and research (Hyland 2003: xv).

The next section focuses on what writing ability is, whether and how it can be defined and what the situations are in which writing takes place and the purposes for writing.

## **2.2 Writing ability**

One important aspect of writing is the writing ability that people need to possess before they start writing (Weigle 2002: 3). Therefore, an attempt is needed to define what writing ability is (Weigle 2002: 3). However, this is a rather difficult task (Purves 1992, Camp 1993, White 1995, as quoted by Weigle 2002: 3). It has been pointed out that writing has many different uses depending on the situations in which it takes place and on the people who produce texts (Purves 1992, Camp 1993, White



1995, as quoted by Weigle 2002: 3). In other words, there are several different situations and people who can write texts having different purposes in their mind. As a result, no uniform definition can be provided (Purves 1992, Camp 1993, White 1995, as quoted by Weigle 2002: 3).

One definition is related to the difference between the ability of the stenographer to write down the exact words that somebody else reads for him/her and another definition is related to the ability to write a persuasive argument (Weigle 2002: 3). In other words, both the purposes and the situations are different in both definitions. This is what makes the writing ability not easily definable. Another example is that for the L2 learners, learning to write can range from mastering the Chinese characters to writing a PhD dissertation (Weigle 2002: 4). Thus, it is more useful to find out the situations in which people learn and use L2 writing and the kinds of writing they produce instead of trying to define accurately what the writing ability is (Weigle 2002: 4).

Additionally, there are five main groups of L2 learners (Weigle 2002: 5-7). The first group consists of minority children who study the majority language at school. However, the majority language is not used at home and these children have to learn to write and use this language in order to pass their subjects at school and succeed in their working life later on. The second group includes children who already speak and write the majority language but they attend immersion programs at school. In other words, they learn an L2 at school. For this group, learning the L2 can improve their marks at school but it is not learnt for survival purposes as in the first group.

The third group includes adult immigrants who need to learn how to write the majority language in order to function in their workplace. These immigrants may or may not be literate in their native language. The fourth group refers to adults who have gone to another country to study on an academic level and get a degree. The writing needs of these learners are very sophisticated because they are already highly educated in their native language. The last group comprises of majority language learners who study an L2 to satisfy their personal interest, their work place demands or their educational development. In contrast with the previous group of adults, this one does not seem to have an absolute need to write in the L2. Therefore, their writing will be simpler and less complicated.

To sum up, the different groups of learners are characterized by different age, education levels and needs for writing in and outside the classroom (Weigle 2002: 7). For example, somebody who learns English as an L2 will need to develop his/her writing ability more than somebody who learns Russian (Weigle 2002: 7). In other words, the first one has more real needs to write in English since English is recognized as the language of communication in our world. Therefore, the writing ability is not something that can be defined but it rather depends on several different factors such as the writing situation and the purpose of writing.

The next section emphasises some models of the writing process that learners may follow when they produce texts starting with the model proposed by Hayes and Flower and continuing to the more updated model by Hayes.

### **2.3 Previous theories on the writing process**

One of the first models to describe the writing process is that proposed by Hayes and Flower in 1980 (Hayes and Flower 1980, as quoted by Weigle 2002: 23). According to this model, Hayes and Flower define certain factors that a learner keeps in his/her mind when writing. These factors seem to influence the writing process as well (Weigle 2002: 23). All these factors are related to the task environment and they refer to the writing essay, to the piece of writing that has been written so far and to the learner's long-term memory. Additionally, they include the knowledge of the topic and of the audience and the learner's stored writing plans (Weigle 2002: 23). The task environment includes also several cognitive processes such as planning, translating thought into text and revising. One basic and important idea proposed in this model is the fact that the writing process is not linear but recursive. In other words, the instruction of writing is more important and effective than the provision of models of writing that the learner can be asked to follow when composing his/her own writing (Weigle 2002: 23-24).

Later in 1996, Hayes decides to expand his model on the writing process (Hayes 1996, as quoted by Weigle 2002: 24). The new model of writing includes two main parts. The first is the task environment and the second is the individual. In other words, the task environment is not sufficient to explain the writing process on its own but the individual plays an important role as well. Accordingly, the task environment is divided into the social and the physical environment. On the one hand, the social

environment refers to the real or imagined audience for somebody's writing and to the people who helped in the writing process, too. On the other hand, the physical environment refers to the piece of writing that has been written so far and the composing medium that has been used to produce this writing (Weigle 2002: 24-25). For instance, it can be written by hand using a pen or a pencil or at a computer using word processing (Weigle 2002: 25). The composing medium has been added as part of this model because of the technological development that has taken place. This technological advancement has influenced both the cognitive and social aspects of writing and this is the reason for its inclusion in the model (Weigle 2002: 25).

However, Hayes prefers to focus more on the second main part of the model, that is, on the individual rather than on the task environment (Hayes 1996, as quoted by Weigle 2002: 25). The individual aspects of writing include relations among four different parts: working memory, motivation and affect, cognitive processes and long-term memory of the learner (Weigle 2002: 25). Accordingly, the working memory consists of the phonological memory which stores verbal information such as speech, the visual-spatial memory which stores visual or spatial information such as written words or graphs and the semantic memory which stores conceptual information.

Another individual aspect of writing that plays an important role in the writing process is the learner's motivation and affect (Weigle 2002: 25). In other words, the learner's goals, predispositions, beliefs and attitudes and cost/benefit estimates can affect the way the learner writes and the effort he/she is going to invest in the writing task (Weigle 2002: 25). For instance, it has been suggested that the learner's beliefs and ideas about the inherent nature of the writing ability can affect his/her writing process. In other words, when a learner believes that writing successfully is an innate ability, he/she will not pay attention to his/her writing because he/she thinks that in any case he/she is not a writer. Similarly, when a learner believes that writing successfully is a result of effort, he/she will try hard to write well (Weigle 2002: 25).

The cognitive processes that a learner follows in the Hayes model refer to text interpretation, reflection and text production (Hayes 1996, as quoted by Weigle 2002: 25). Text interpretation happens when the learner interprets what is written in a text. In other words, text interpretation is the process during which the learner creates internal representations from the linguistic and graphic input (Weigle 2002: 25).

Reflection is the process of re-thinking of the text interpretation. In other words, during reflection, the learner creates new internal representations from the already existing internal representations. Text production is the new text that the learner creates. In other words, it is the new linguistic or graphic output which is produced from internal representations (Weigle 2002: 26).

Before Hayes continues with the last individual aspect of writing, that is, the long-term memory, he mentions three kinds of reading that are crucial for the writing process (Hayes 1996, as quoted by Weigle 2002: 26-27). These three kinds of reading are discussed in this part of the model because reading is a cognitive process happening in the learner's mind and because, as it was mentioned, reading can affect writing. The first type of reading is reading to evaluate a text. This means that the learner reads his/her piece of writing with a critical eye and tries to find errors and problems and also potential solutions to them. For example, while checking the text, the learner may apply grammar knowledge, decoding words or he/she may consider the audience's needs. Accordingly, the less good writers prefer to correct local errors that relate mainly to grammar, spelling and punctuation errors rather than correct global errors that relate to the meaning and the organisation of the text. This may happen because the learner may not have good reading skills or because he/she may not have sufficient working memory to focus both on local and global errors. Another reason may be the fact that the learner may not be aware of the need to pay attention to global errors.

The other two kinds of reading are reading source texts and reading instructions (Weigle 2002: 27-28). The ability to read a source text effectively and understand what it means affects the learner's writing. In other words, if the learner misinterprets the information of the source text, he/she will not be able to make right use of them in his/her own writing. The same principle applies to the cognitive process of reading instructions. If the learner misunderstands the instructions, he/she will not be able to complete the writing task accurately and effectively.

The final individual aspect of writing that is important to the writing process is the learner's long-term memory (Weigle 2002: 28). In this type of memory, information and knowledge relevant to the task are stored. This information includes task schemas, topic knowledge, audience knowledge, genre knowledge and linguistic

knowledge. At first, task schemas refer to information relevant to the task aims, the processes that are required to accomplish the task, the order of these processes and the way to evaluate the success of the task. Topic knowledge implies that the learner needs to know what he/she is going to write about. Knowledge of the audience refers to cultural and social issues, mainly the audience of the learner's writing, and genre knowledge refers to the socially and culturally appropriate forms that writing takes in particular situations. Last, the linguistic knowledge includes information about the linguistic resources that a learner needs to possess in order to write.

However, Hayes' model overlooks two important factors (Hayes 1996, as quoted by Weigle 2002: 28-29). First of all, it does not mention the different situations in which writing can take place. This lack can be filled by Grabe's and Kaplan's (1996) model of writing where the task environment includes the participants, the setting, the task, the text and the topic. One example of the setting can be the classroom, the library or even a computer centre and an example of the task can be lecture notes, letters or reports. The second problem in Hayes' model is that it does not pay attention to the learner's linguistic knowledge. The same model proposed by Grabe and Kaplan (1996) categorises language knowledge into three types: linguistic knowledge referring to the structures of the language, sociolinguistic knowledge referring to the ways the language is used appropriately in certain situations and discourse knowledge referring to the ways a text can be cohesive (Grabe and Kaplan 1996, as quoted by Weigle 2002: 29).

In conclusion, the model of writing proposed by Hayes is important because it describes the various factors that influence the writing process particularly those that are internal to the learner such as the cognitive processes and the long-term memory (Weigle 2002: 24,29). It is also important because it provides challenges in the L2 written feedback and assessment. In other words, the way learners think of all the above mentioned factors when they write a text can influence the teacher's assessment and feedback.

The next section focuses on a study that examines the factor of age and how this affects L2 writing.

## 2.4 A study on the age factor in L2 writing

There has been a lot of debate about the role of age in L2 learning and the particular study focuses on the same factor using the Barcelona Age Factor project (BAF) that started in 1995 at the University of Barcelona (Celaya and Navés 2009: 130-131).

This project has three main aims. First, it tries to find out whether teaching English at a younger age results in better learning. Nowadays, it is common for most European countries to start teaching English between the ages of seven and nine instead of 11 or 12 as it used to be. It is also popular in some countries to teach English in nursery schools. Second, it tries to find the best instruments for measuring the learners' written attainment and language and third, it tries to examine the lexical transfer from the L1 in multilingual settings dealing with the analysis of cross-linguistic influence.

The participants in this project were Spanish learners of English from different public schools in Barcelona and they were all Catalan-Spanish bilinguals (Celaya and Navés 2009: 134-137). The early starters (ES) began learning English at the age of eight in grade three and the late starters (LS) began learning English at the age of 11 in grade six. Both groups of learners attended English only at school and as they grew up in age and grade the amount of instruction increased as well. In the end, the late starters (LS) received more intensive instruction so that it was the same as that of the early starters. Moreover, there was a third group of more proficient learners who received instruction in English outside school.

The data consisted of a written composition that the learners had to write in 15 minutes on introducing themselves at the present time, in the past and in the future. The learners were not allowed to use dictionaries or ask any clarifications from their teachers or researchers but the instructions of the task were given in their L1. For analysing the data, there were different instruments used such as those of Long (1991) with examples and descriptions of the measures, those of Polio (1997) on measures of linguistic accuracy and those of Wolfe-Quintero *et al.* (1998) on more than 100 measures to analyse written competence.

The results of this project show that, as far as writing is concerned, it is the older learners who outperform the younger learners both in the short and mid-term comparisons (Celaya and Navés 2009: 137-143). Additionally, in the long-run, the older learners wrote better compositions than the younger ones. More specifically, in

the short and mid-term comparisons, the older learners were better than the younger ones in fluency, accuracy, lexical and syntactic complexity. However, at some point, the younger learners caught up with the older ones in fluency and accuracy. The fact that the older learners, generally, outperform the younger ones has been attributed to the cognitive maturity of the first ones. In order to check this factor of maturity at a deeper level, this project also examined the compositions of learners at the same age but with different starting ages. The results show that the older learners still outperform the younger ones especially as far as syntactic complexity is concerned, whereas the younger learners are better at fluency and lexical complexity. This ability of the younger learners has been attributed to the high number of hours of instruction and their young age. In general, it is apparent that the cognitive maturity and the explicit instruction favour the older learners at the expense of the younger ones who benefit more from exposure to real language that does not take place in English classrooms.

As far as the cross-linguistic influence is concerned, the results show that age seems to have an effect on the types of lexical transfer that were analysed and on the L2 proficiency (Celaya and Navés 2009: 144-147). However, language dominance seems to have no effect at all. The results show that both younger learners and adults tend to borrow words from the L1 with the children borrowing words more frequently. Furthermore, the use of nonstandard words due to L1 influence declines as the learners become older and, in general, L1 influence, proficiency and age affect each other in different ways depending on the type of lexical transfer.

Concerning the results of the measurement of the learners' writings, it is clear that the older learners outperform the younger ones in all the four domains of accuracy, fluency, syntactic and lexical complexity. In particular, the older learners are better at accuracy, lexical and syntactical complexity, whereas the younger ones are better at fluency.

To sum up, this BAF project concludes with a surprising result as far as English writing is concerned. The older the learner, the better writing development he/she shows. This appears to be true in all four domains of accuracy, fluency, lexical and syntactic complexity. Moreover, the age plays a role in the L1 lexical transfer with children practicing borrowing more than adults. These results seem to come in

contrast with the popular belief that younger learners learn English much better than older ones. However, no single study can produce definite results.

The next section focuses on the different genres and text types which can be produced by learners in the L2 writing.

### **2.5 Written text types/genres in L2 writing**

There is a wide variety of different genres that learners can produce in their writings such as a sales letter, an essay, a notice, an advertisement, a biography, a report, a note, an argument, a novel, an article and a film review (Hyland 2003: 19). In addition, there are also some text genres that are not so familiar to learners and thus, not so common in L2 writing. These include an inventory, a warrant, a menu, a joke, a manifesto, a ticket, a prescription, an anecdote, a toast, a sermon, a lecture, a telegram, a label, a consultation, a manual, an editorial, a poem, chat, a song, a jingle, a will, a sign, a memo, a seminar and a conversation. However, all these text genres have similarities and differences among them no matter whether they are traditional or not (Hyland 2003: 19). They can be different or similar in a variety of ways. For example, some of these genres can be written and others can also be spoken (Hyland 2003: 19). Moreover, certain genres can be targeted at specific audiences whereas others may be targeted at different ones. The genres may also serve different purposes and they may have different levels of formality, vocabulary and main grammar patterns (Hyland 2003: 19). For example, an essay can mainly be written whereas a joke can be spoken as well. An anecdote and a joke serve the same purpose, that of entertainment, whereas an essay and a report are more informative in their purpose.

Another list of text types that can be produced by learners in L2 writing can include a note, a formal letter, a summary, a narrative or a story, a description, an argumentative essay or letter, a literary text such as a novel, an advertisement or a journal article (Nation 2008: 116). It is apparent that these text genres share similarities and differences just like Hyland's list. They serve different purposes and different audiences. Furthermore, some of these genres are only written and some can be both written and spoken. Their vocabulary and grammatical structure can also be different or similar. For instance, a story or narrative can be written but spoken as well. In contrast, a journal article can have mainly a written form. Another difference among the written genres can focus on the grammatical and/or vocabulary structure.



An argumentative essay will have very different structural organisation from an advertisement. These two text types will use very different grammar and vocabulary to achieve their purposes.

To conclude, what can be drawn from the above mentioned discussion is that there are different types or genres of written texts in L2 writing. These text types share similarities and differences as far as grammar and vocabulary are concerned and also in terms of audience and purpose of writing. Additionally, some genres can only be written whereas others can also be spoken. Depending on all these factors, learners can decide what kind of text they wish to produce.

What is going to follow focuses on the social and cultural aspects of writing and how learners' culture can influence their own way of writing in the L2. Moreover, there will be some emphasis on the misunderstandings between the writer and the reader due to their different cultures and expectations.

## **2.6 Social and cultural aspects of writing**

The writing process is traditionally viewed as the result of thought and cognition on the part of the learner (Weigle 2002: 19). Based on this belief, teachers' feedback to writing focuses mainly on those cognitive aspects of writing such as grammar and vocabulary. However, writing is not the product of the learner only, but rather it carries social and cultural aspects of its writer (Weigle 2002: 19). In other words, writing happens within a context, it has a certain purpose and it serves a specific audience (Hamp-Lyons and Kroll 1997, as quoted by Weigle 2002: 19). In addition, writing is meaningful and it is socially and culturally shaped and purposeful (Sperling 1996, as quoted by Weigle 2002: 19).

In other words, the learner's culture defines his/her background understandings and schema knowledge (Hyland 2003: 36). Moreover, it affects the learner's way of writing, his/her answers in the classroom context and his/her writing performance. The culture shapes the learner's writing for two reasons (Hyland 2003: 36). First, the learner's cultural beliefs and values are transferred and shown in the language he/she uses. Second, the learner's culture gives him/her a predetermined way of organising ideas and expectations in general and in writing in particular.

There is also emphasis on the social and cultural aspects of academic writing in L2 and mainly in English (Weigle 2002: 19). Academic writing does not include only grammar and vocabulary or rhetorical forms that are frequently used (Weigle 2002: 20). For each discipline, the learner needs to know what issues are important to it, which specific methods of search are preferred and stressed and why others are not suitable for the particular discipline and how the rules of a discipline shape the learner's writing (Spack 1988, as quoted by Weigle 2002: 20). It can also expect from the learner to represent himself/herself in a text and demonstrate how a text influences subsequent texts (Spack 1988, as quoted by Weigle 2002: 20). Therefore, it is apparent that academic writing is much more than just grammar and vocabulary. The learner needs to take into consideration the social and cultural aspects of writing, that is, the context in which he/she writes.

A very important notion related to the cultural and social aspects of writing is contrastive rhetoric introduced by Kaplan in 1966 (Kaplan 1966, as quoted by Weigle 2002: 20). Contrastive rhetoric holds the idea that different cultures create different expectations on the part of people about the manner texts should be organised and written and the effects they can have on L2 writing (Hyland 2003: 45). In other words, what can be considered well-organised or coherent in writing in a culture can differ from one culture to another. These cultural differences can provoke misunderstandings in the communication among learners and teachers.

As it has already been mentioned, the notion of contrastive rhetoric was introduced by Kaplan in 1966 when he studied 600 L2 writings from learners who had very different cultural and social backgrounds (Kaplan 1966, as quoted by Hyland 2003: 46). This study shows that learners who come from different cultural backgrounds systematically differ in the way they develop and write their ideas. One notable difference is between English and Arabic development of paragraphs. Although English writing is linear, Arabic writing seems to be based on a series of parallel coordinate clauses. The study concludes that "oriental" writers come to the point only at the end of the writing using first an indirect approach. Additionally, the results of the study demonstrate a difference between English writing and French, Spanish and Russian writing. In the case of the French, Spanish and Russian writing there is a lot of extra material, a characteristic which does not exist in English writing. Because of these cultural differences, teachers were urged to provide learners with explicit

models of writing English paragraphs because they felt that the culture interfered negatively with L2 writing (Hyland 2003: 46).

However, Kaplan's study has been criticised widely (Hyland 2003: 46-47). First, it puts all the different language groups together such as all the Asians as the "oriental" writers. Second, it is too prescriptive in describing the "right" English way of writing. Third, it is too ethnocentric in describing English writing as linear. Despite all this criticism, the notion of contrastive rhetoric has gained respect since an increasing number of researchers acknowledge that writing is influenced by culture (Weigle 2002: 20).

Another issue relevant to contrastive rhetoric is miscommunication that arises among learners and teachers when there are differences in expectations, strategies and beliefs about writing (Hyland 2003: 36). This is why teachers should try and understand the varied ways that L2 learners may respond to their teaching. This miscommunication can also influence the coherence of texts, that is, the organisation of texts into a meaningful whole (Weigle 2002: 21). Coherence is not a taken-for-granted trait of a piece of writing but it results from the writer's precise assessment of what the reader will manage to understand from the text (Leki 1992, as quoted by Weigle 2002: 21). In other words, the readers have certain expectations of the text they read but the writer's intended message may be different if he/she has not taken into consideration the readers' expectations (Carrel and Eisterhold 1983, as quoted by Weigle 2002: 21). For example, it has already been mentioned that English writing is linear and that the ideas are hierarchically and clearly organised. This implies that the writer is the person who guides the reader throughout the whole text so that the reader does not need to draw conclusions on his/her own. In a culture where the reader is responsible for text comprehension, the writer can leave many ideas implicit so that the reader can infer his/her own conclusions (Weigle 2002: 21-22). If the needs of both the writer and the reader match, then there is no miscommunication. If, on the other hand, the writer and the reader share different cultures, there is the risk of cultural miscommunication (Weigle 2002: 21-22).

What should not be taken for granted is that all L2 learners are not the same and that culture is not the same all the time, that is, static (Hyland 2003: 37). Culture is dynamic, it changes and evolves and people may resist to their culture or ignore it.

Furthermore, learners have their own individual identities beyond their culture and they may decide to alter their writing preferences away from it. In other words, there should not be any stereotypical attitude towards different cultures.

To conclude, L2 writing does not only have grammatical and lexical aspects but also social and cultural ones. It takes place in a context and it has a specific purpose and audience. These social and cultural aspects affect the learner's writing. Learners who come from different cultures will inevitably construct writing based on their own beliefs as was apparent from Kaplan's study. However, the contrastive rhetoric may lead to miscommunication problems especially if the writer and the reader do not share the same cultures in writing.

The next section focuses on a number of theories that are seen as curriculum options that can be used in the classroom. More specifically, each of these options is organised around a different focus. The next section describes briefly these different foci in L2 writing.

### **2.7 Several foci on writing texts in L2 writing**

One way to look at a written text is to consider it as marks on a paper or a systematic and coherent arrangement of words, clauses and sentences based on a system of rules (Hyland 2003: 3). This way of viewing L2 writing derives from the combination of structural linguistics and the behaviorist theory which were dominant in the 1960s (Silva 1990, as quoted by Hyland 2003: 3). Based on this theory, writing in L2 is seen as a product of the learner's grammatical and lexical knowledge. Additionally, writing is the result of imitating models provided by the teacher. In other words, writing is the extension of grammar. Moreover, writing takes place through guided compositions such as gap-filling of short texts and meaning is the last thing to be dealt with (Hyland 2003: 4). Therefore, giving written feedback implies a focus on correcting grammar and vocabulary errors (Hyland 2003: 4). However, the focus on language structures prevents the learners from developing real writing beyond a few sentences and from writing in other situations (Hyland 2003: 5). On the other hand, this does not imply that the focus on language structures should be abandoned (Hyland 2003: 5-6).

Another focus can be on text functions (Hyland 2003: 6-7). In other words, certain language forms have certain functions and learners can be taught those that they need. Functions are the means for attaining the purposes of writing and they form the functional approach to L2 writing. The learners learn how to write effective paragraphs with the right topic and supporting sentences by using ready-made formulas and patterns. The text can be viewed as structural entities which have an introduction, main body and conclusion and they also have patterns such as narration and description. In other words, writing is seen as an object independent of context or of the writer. It is clearly evident that this focus is influenced by the structural model as well.

Moreover, the focus of writing can be on the creative expression of the learner (Hyland 2003: 8-10). This means that the learner is the centre of the writing. In other words, he/she can include his/her opinion and voice in the text. Teachers encourage learners to be spontaneous and creative and express their personal experiences and discover themselves. Thus, writing is not taught but rather learnt and the teacher's instruction is indirect. The teachers' role is to leave space to the learner to make his/her own meanings by avoiding imposing their opinions or offering models. Therefore, teachers actually respond to learners' writings than correct all kinds of grammatical and lexical errors (Murray 1985, as quoted by Hyland 2003: 9). Last, expressivism emphasises the asocial view of the learner and this individualism may not be preferred by some learners (Hyland 2003: 9). In addition, it is difficult to evaluate good writing if everything is written from the learner's point of view (Hyland 2003: 10).

Another focus of teaching writing can be on the writing process which highlights the learner's central role in writing but it also recognises the teacher's role in showing learners how to process writing (Hyland 2003:10-13). This focus is based on the belief that cognitive processes are involved in writing and that learners need to develop their planning skills. One model of writing processes is the planning-writing-reviewing model by Flower and Hayes which stresses the fact that writing is not a linear process but the stages of planning, drafting and revising can interact even before a text is produced. In other words, the learner can go back and forth in writing and revising a text. A second model is that of Bereiter and Scardamalia which distinguishes the novice from the skilled writer. These models are known as

knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming models and the first deals with the novice writer who plans less than an expert, revises less and has limited goals whereas the second describes the skilled writer who analyses problems and reflects on the task. The teacher's role is significant because he/she guides the learner through the writing process by helping him/her to brainstorm and to make him/her aware of the writing processes and by giving extensive feedback in any form. The feedback at this stage is very crucial because it motivates learners to reflect on their writing. However, despite these models of writing processes, we cannot have a clear opinion on what takes place in a learner's mind when writing.

The fifth focus of teaching writing can be on content, that is, what learners write about (Hyland 2003: 14-17). The content refers to the topics or themes of interest that create cohesion and coherence in a text or in a course. The learners have personal knowledge of the topics and thus, they can write about them. Content can refer to issues such as pollution, smoking and juvenile crime and the teacher's role is to facilitate the learner to acquire cognitive schemata of the topics which will be needed to write a text such as brainstorming tasks and reading for ideas. Moreover, the teacher can help with data collection techniques. Last, focusing on content relies a lot on reading because it provides the learner with the knowledge he/she needs to activate schemata that are useful for writing.

The last focus is on the genre of a text which refers to writing as efforts to communicate with the reader (Hyland 2003: 18-20). The teacher tries to show the learner how to follow certain social conventions in writing so that the reader can understand the learner's purpose. These social conventions are the genres in writing. In other words, the genre orientation combines discourse and aspects of language use. The teacher's role is also to provide the learner with explicit linguistic choices so that the texts produced appear to be appropriate to the reader. Moreover, the teacher can help the learner to distinguish among the different genres. The genre approach is drawn on the theory of systemic functional linguistics which stresses the relation between language and its social functions and the manner in which writers make choices to convey meanings.

To sum up, teaching writing can focus on many aspects of language such as language structures, text functions, creative expression, writing process, content and genre.

Depending on the teacher's methodology, there can be a combination of these foci. In general, all these foci enable teachers to improve their writing instruction and to improve their learners' L2 writing.

The next chapter focuses on L2 written feedback as it is provided by teachers to learners.

### **3 WRITTEN FEEDBACK IN L2 CLASSROOMS**

This chapter describes different issues regarding L2 written feedback. Some of these issues are related to its effectiveness, to definitions of writing and feedback, to forms of teachers' written feedback, to mitigation strategies that teachers may use when giving feedback, to some theoretical approaches that affect the way of giving feedback and to the issue of positive and negative feedback. Furthermore, there are issues such as factors that can make feedback effective and the focus of teachers' written feedback.

#### **3.1 The effectiveness of L2 written feedback**

Feedback is the main characteristic of formative assessment in the classroom (Clarke 2003: 3). However, it is this characteristic that is burdened with most of the worst practices and false views about its effectiveness. In many cases, feedback has been used by teachers in order to compare a learner's performance to another one's, thus leading the less able to a humiliating and demoralising position and the more able to a superior position. Additionally, feedback focuses mainly on certain features that can make learners lose their self-confidence and motivation for learning. On top of all these problems, the parents' expectations for a high-level performance, or even for an excellent one, aggravate the learner's acceptance of feedback.

There have also been numerous studies questioning the effectiveness of the teacher's written feedback as a way to improve learners' writing (Hyland 2003: 178). The suggestion of many of these studies is that most of the written feedback is of poor quality and it is not understood by the learners because it is either too vague or inconsistent (Sommers 1982, as quoted by Hyland 2003: 178). The feedback tends to focus on form ignoring the content and sometimes it gets too directive not permitting

the learners to develop their own texts and thoughts. In general, many researchers wonder if the teacher's feedback is effective, if the learners understand it, if they are going to use it in order to improve their writing and if they ever read it (Burke 2010: 11-12). Despite the fact that such questions do not have a definite answer, researchers persist in finding answers to them because they believe that feedback is important. It is this belief that makes them search for answers to what is most effective in feedback and to what works best in giving feedback.

Despite all these negative opinions on feedback and the negative conclusions of several studies about its effectiveness, giving feedback is considered one of the teachers' most important tasks in the L2 classroom because offering individual attention and feedback is otherwise difficult to happen under normal classroom situations (Hyland 2003: 177). Furthermore, when a learner composes a text, he/she wants it to be read by others in order to see their responses, get some kind of feedback and learn from it (Hyland 2003: 177). This feedback is critical in improving learning because it enables the improvement of the learner's writing. As a result, feedback highlights the process of writing and rewriting a text when it is not well-developed (Hyland 2003: 177). What is more, the kind of feedback and the feedback practices vary a lot among teachers depending on their preferences, on the writing task in question and on the effect they wish to achieve (Hyland 2003: 177). Despite the emphasis on the significance of the oral feedback and the peer feedback as sources of feedback, the teachers' written feedback continues playing the most important role in L2 classrooms (Hyland 2003: 178). Both teachers and learners share this same view. On the one hand, teachers feel that they are not fair towards learners' efforts unless they write some comments on their texts justifying the grade they give. On the other hand, many learners see the teachers' feedback as indispensable for their learning progress and their improvement as writers. An issue concerning feedback is also its source and the forms it can take (Hyland 2003: 177). This study focuses only on teachers' written feedback and not on peer feedback.

To sum up, despite the negative beliefs that exist about teachers' written feedback and the potential problems that it may cause to learners such as reluctance to learn and lack of motivation, feedback is regarded as one of the most important tasks that a teacher has to fulfill in the L2 classroom. Both teachers and learners agree on its



necessity. Teachers feel that they reward learners' efforts and learners want to improve their writing ability through feedback.

The next section focuses on three definitions of writing and four definitions of feedback that describe the two concepts from different perspectives.

### **3.2 Definitions of writing and feedback**

One definition of *writing* is that writing is seen as an opportunity to write something about yourself, to express or explore ideas about something and to evaluate other people's opinions (Trimmer 1998: 2). Therefore, by organising ideas and writing them in order to present them makes writing a good opportunity for communication.

Moreover, a second definition of *writing* is that writing is described as a process that includes certain stages such as planning, drafting and revising (Trimmer 1998: 5). In other words, writers go through stages in order to produce essays which proves that writing is a process (Brannan 2010: 4).

Additionally, a third definition of *writing* refers to writing as a process of creating permanent texts (Pontecorvo 1997: xv). The permanence of texts means that anybody can read them even if the intended audience was different in the beginning (Hughes 1996: 12).

All the above definitions of writing describe writing from three different perspectives. The first definition describes writing from a general point of view which, however, is true. In other words, writing is an opportunity for communicating ideas with others. The second definition describes writing from a practical point of view. According to the definition, writing is a realistic process that includes planning, drafting and revising. The last definition refers to the permanence of writing. This is also a true characteristic of writing. Texts are more permanent than speech.

One definition of *feedback* is that feedback is given by a teacher to a student and is related to student work (Brookhart 2008: 1). In other words, the teacher's feedback should focus on the work that a student has done. Feedback can be either written or oral and it can take different forms according to the audience that it appeals to (Brookhart 2008: 2). Therefore, it can take the form of individual or group feedback

(Brookhart 2008: 2). Feedback is also claimed to be the teacher's judgment about the school performance of a student (Askew 2000: 6).

A second definition of *feedback* refers to the “judgment culture associated with summative assessment” (Irons 2008, as quoted by Burke 2010: 27). This culture has developed because most assignments in school tend to be summative focusing on grades to signal the end of the learning process (Burke 2010: 26-27). Thus, in these cases, feedback is used to justify the grade. Grading is so important and it causes so much anxiety to teachers that they want it to be done as soon as possible taking on the responsibility to read learners' assignments as a process of grading (Burke 2010: 26). In other words, teachers give feedback as evaluators, judges or critics who criticise and correct a lot.

A third definition of *feedback* refers to the way people use this term (Burke 2010: 27). This implies that feedback is used in a casual and inaccurate way (Wiggins 1997, as quoted by Burke 2010: 27). Smiling at a learner saying “*good job*” or “*well-done*” or writing “*B*” on the top of a paper is not feedback (Wiggins 1997, as quoted by Burke 2010: 27). Rather, feedback is useful information about performance and it is not evaluation. In other words, feedback is value-neutral help on worthy tasks and it describes what the learner did or did not do to achieve his/her goals. Moreover, it is information that permits the learner to make clever adjustments when he/she uses it to his/her next attempt to perform. According to this definition, feedback should help learning by focusing on what to do in order to improve and ways to improve it and not focusing on evaluation. Furthermore, in this definition of feedback, a distinction is made between advisory and evaluative feedback.

On the one hand, *evaluative feedback* looks backwards and it gives a grade or rating of a paper that was written in the past and captures the teacher's perception of the learner's performance (Burke 2010: 27). This kind of feedback is mainly given so that the learner can clearly understand what the grade is for an assignment he/she has already written in the past. In other words, the grade functions as a reward or punishment for a learner's performance.

On the other hand, *advisory feedback* provides learners with guidance about how to improve their performance in the future and that is why this feedback is forward-looking (Burke 2010: 27). It aims at providing learners with information about their

performance on a certain assignment, at showing which parts of the performance need to be improved and at telling the learner what steps to take in order to improve his/her performance and thus, learning (Burke 2010: 27).

A fourth definition of *feedback* describes feedback as response between the teacher and learners that has to be interactive (Andrade and Evans 2013: 9). This means that when feedback is seen as response, then learners perceive teachers' comments as suggestions rather than commands or raw feedback. This also leads to the assumption that this interactive feedback is non-judgmental, thus, it allows the opportunity for dialogue between the teacher and learners and the possibility for negotiations of errors in writing.

A way for this kind of feedback as response is by having learners evaluate their own writing and then discuss these evaluations (Grabe and Kaplan 1996: 389). Then, this discussion can help the teacher to organise mini-lessons on the errors and the problems that learners face. In this way, the feedback can be given as a response to learners' needs and interests and it is not just a decontextualised lesson. Therefore, good feedback as response is similar to the peer group feedback since the teacher raises a number of questions to learners so that learners can make revisions before they submit their writing back to the teacher (Grabe and Kaplan 1996: 394). In other words, learners are asked to comment on their errors and this functions as self-evaluation that shows the teacher where learners face difficulties and what he/she should do next.

It is apparent that all four definitions view feedback from different perspectives. The first definition is quite general referring to feedback as something that is given by the teacher to the learner and concerns his/her work. The only clarification made is that of oral or written and individual or group feedback. In general, one can claim that there is nothing wrong with this definition and that it applies to most feedback given by teachers.

However, the second and third definitions seem quite conflicting. The second definition relates feedback to grades and summative assessment and one can claim that through this definition feedback acquires a negative meaning. In other words, getting a low grade is equal to punishment and learning does not have any role in this kind of feedback. This view of feedback seems quite narrow-minded although it is

practiced by numerous teachers. However, the main problem is that it does not promote learning.

The third definition seems to be the most balanced and useful for the learner since it promotes learning without focusing on evaluation and grading. In other words, it shows the learner what is wrong in his/her writing without overcriticising and overwhelming the learner. Furthermore, it helps him/her to find ways in order to improve his/her writing for the next assignment. Generally, this kind of feedback is preferred because it allows the learner to see his/her errors and try to correct them with the teacher's feedback. In other words, this feedback is more learner-centred since it places the responsibility of learning on the learners. Additionally, in contrast to the second definition, here feedback has a positive meaning. It is not something that learners should be afraid of.

The fourth definition views the teacher's feedback from a more social point of view and pays attention to the role of the learner as well. Feedback, even written, appears to be more interactive and stops being judgmental and absolutely strict with no margins for discussion or negotiation just like the first or second definitions where the teacher is the authority and either just corrects or gives marks that may discourage learners. In contrast, in the more social aspect of feedback, it is learners who try to figure out their errors showing the teacher where to focus his/her feedback on. This can be a much more positive experience for learners since they feel responsible for their own learning and they are not afraid of the teacher's feedback. In other words, feedback is not punishment in the form of a mark, rather it is a real effort for learning.

The following section explains the various forms that the teacher's feedback can take such as giving commentaries or electronic feedback.

### **3.3 Forms of teacher's written feedback**

There has been a variety of methods proposed to provide learners with teacher's feedback (Hyland 2003: 180). The most commonly used methods include commentary, rubrics, minimal marking, taped comments and electronic feedback. Starting with the most common method of feedback, *commentaries* are the teacher's handwritten comments on the learner's text. This kind of feedback is seen more as a response to the learner's writing than as evaluation of what is written by the learner. A

teacher's commentary can include statements concerning how the text appears to the readers, how successful it is and how it can be further improved. These statements, or else commentary, can take the form of marginal or end comments. On the one hand, the marginal comments are immediate, direct and proximate and they appear next to the exact point in the text where the error occurs. This implies that the marginal comments are relevant to the text and they are more effective than an end commentary since they make the learner understand exactly where they refer to (Hyland 2008: 181). On the other hand, the end commentary permits the teacher to write general comments and observations and it allows more space for him/her to summarise and prioritise key points.

Another method of providing written feedback is by using *rubrics* (Hyland 2003: 181). The rubrics are a variation on commentary and state explicitly the criteria that have been used to assess the learners' writing and to assess how well the learner has performed in relation to these criteria. The rubrics usually accompany the teacher's handwritten commentary and they can vary depending on the type of the learner's writing. Moreover, they may restrict the range of errors that can be corrected but they are helpful in making grading decisions and showing the criteria that a teacher uses for evaluating a specific piece of writing.

The next method of giving feedback refers to *minimal marking* (Hyland 2003: 181). Minimal marking is a kind of in-text, form-based feedback which permits the teacher to show the place and the kind of error without any explicit correction (Bates et al. 1993, Ferris 1997, as quoted by Hyland 2003: 181). This method of feedback is more effective in helping the learner develop self-editing strategies than direct feedback (Hyland 2003: 181). One way of achieving this is by using correction codes which make the feedback clearer, more organised and less threatening to the learner than the red ink. Furthermore, these correction codes help learners to find and recognise the error. Examples of correction codes are shown in the table below:

S	Incorrect spelling	P	Punctuation is wrong
W	Wrong word order	[ ]	Something is not necessary
T	Wrong tense		
WF	Wrong form		

(Adapted from Hyland 2003: 181)

However, the disadvantage of minimal marking is that all the errors cannot be easily categorised, especially when they extend beyond the sentence level.

Despite the possibility of using correction codes, minimal marking should provide learners with even less information as no underlining or symbols should be provided by the teacher (Hyland 2003: 182). Surface errors should just be marked with a cross in the margin next to the line of the error. In this way, learners should try to identify and correct the error themselves. The simplicity of the minimal marking grants more time for making substantive comments and it helps in the creation of peer discussion so that learners can find the error and write it correctly. However, it does not correct any rhetorical or communicative problems.

Yet, another form of teacher's written feedback is *taped commentary* (Hyland 2003: 182). It is an alternative to marginal commentary where the feedback is tape recorded and numbers are written on the learner's paper to indicate where the comments refer to (Hyland 1990, as quoted by Hyland 2003: 182). This form of feedback saves time, offers novelty and provides listening practice to learners who prefer the auditory style of learning. Moreover, it shows the learner how a reader understands the structure of the writing, where this structure breaks down, when confusion arises and where ideas get across (Hyland 2003: 182).

The last most common form of teacher's written feedback is *electronic feedback* (Hyland 2003: 183). Computers and new technology create new opportunities for giving written feedback and an increasing number of teachers start considering this as a new way of responding to learners' writing. The feedback can be sent by e-mail or by using the comment function which opens a new window for comments along with the text to be read. Using computers, teachers can also link online explanations of

grammar or authentic texts with the learners' errors to show them how the errors can be corrected. In other words, computers offer flexibility to the teachers' feedback practices.

To sum up, there are many different forms of written feedback a teacher can provide such as the written and recorded commentary, the rubrics, the minimal marking and the electronic feedback. Some of these forms are more traditional and thus, widespread among teachers and some are more modern, new and innovative. However, all these forms of written feedback have advantages and disadvantages and it depends on the teacher's preference and convenience what form he/she is going to use taking learning always into consideration.

The next section addresses the topic of mitigation strategies as they are used by teachers. These strategies refer to the impact that teachers' feedback can have on the learner and they allow the teacher to make his/her feedback milder.

### **3.4 Mitigation strategies**

The way that teachers offer written feedback demonstrates also their concern about the interpersonal impact of positive and negative feedback (Hyland 2003: 190). This concern is important because the teacher's feedback also entails delicate social interactions which can influence the relationship and interaction between the teacher and learners. Learners may feel unsafe about their writing achievements and thus, they can be encouraged by positive feedback and discouraged by negative one (Hyland 2003: 190). One way to avoid negative situations that can be created when criticism appears is when teachers decide to soften the force of their feedback using several mitigation strategies (Hyland and Hyland 2001, as quoted by Hyland 2003: 191). These include paired comments where there is the combination of negative feedback with positive feedback or a suggestion, hedged comments where the teacher uses certain modals verbs and imprecise quantifiers to soften his/her feedback, personal attribution where the teacher responds to the learner's writing as a common reader and not as an authority and the use of interrogative form to express doubt and uncertainty about what is written.

The mitigation strategies also enable the teacher to moderate his/her dominant and authoritative role and lower what seems overdirective and intervening feedback

(Hyland 2003: 190). This function of the mitigation strategies is significant as well because many teachers get anxious about the appropriation of their feedback and about how learners are going to respond to negative feedback that may be too directive or too authoritative. It has been argued that if the teacher's feedback is too strict and learners feel forced to follow it closely, then, they will not be able to develop their cognitive or writing skills but they will simply rewrite a text to satisfy and reflect the teacher's thought (Knoblauch and Brannon 1984, as quoted by Hyland 2003: 190). On the other hand, giving nondirective feedback has suggested both the violation of learners' cultural expectations who wish explicit and direct feedback and the failure to provide learners with concrete help they need (Reid 1994, as quoted by Hyland 2003: 190). In other words, learners come from different cultures and they may expect to receive explicit feedback. However, the teacher may provide implicit feedback thus, causing difficulties to learners. In this case, the teacher will fail to help learners with their writing and errors. Therefore, teachers should not give feedback in one single way but they should take into consideration the learners' needs and the particular context each time (Hyland 2003: 190).

However, mitigated feedback can cause confusion to learners and it can cloud issues (Hyland 2003: 190). It may be that mitigated comments reduce the risk of demotivating learners but there is the possibility to cause misunderstandings (Hyland and Hyland 2001, as quoted by Hyland 2003: 190-191). These misunderstandings can derive from the fact that learners read feedback in English, that is, in a foreign language and being indirect can create problems. The learners may end up being puzzled and, as a result, they may overlook the feedback or they may make unnecessary revisions (Hyland 2003: 191). Furthermore, they may get frustrated and even hostile to the teacher and, in this way, effective learning may be prevented.

To conclude, mitigation strategies help teachers to soften their feedback and preserve a good relationship with learners. There is a variety of mitigation strategies such as paired and hedged comments. Despite the fact that the mitigation strategies facilitate the appropriation of the teachers' feedback, they can also provoke disappointment and frustration on the part of learners. Learners may feel bewildered by the indirectness of the feedback and they may ignore it. As a result, teachers should handle these strategies with caution taking into account the respective classroom context each time.



The next section discusses some theoretical models and approaches that have affected feedback and have shaped teachers' beliefs and practices when providing learners with corrections.

### **3.5 Theoretical models/approaches affecting feedback**

The first theories concerning feedback base feedback on *behaviourism* (Brookhart 2008: 3). This implies that feedback is either positive or negative according to the learner's behavior. If the learner is good and he/she makes no errors in his/her learning, then, there is positive feedback or positive reinforcement. If the learner is not good at his/her performance, there is negative feedback or else punishment.

However, recent learning pedagogy no longer accepts behaviourism as a theory for providing feedback (Brookhart 2008: 3). Contemporary pedagogy puts the emphasis on the learner and his/her contribution in learning and in feedback (Brookhart 2008: 3). According to the new pedagogy, the point of the feedback is to make learners make sense out of it and not just respond to it (Brookhart 2008: 3). In other words, learners have to reflect on their errors, process them and understand the reasons behind them and what they can do to correct them. It seems that the responsibility for learning from the feedback has shifted from the teacher to the learner. Nowadays, it is the learner who has to process feedback in a constructive way and not just receive the feedback and correct his/her errors.

According to the behaviourist model, learners' errors are considered to be negative and quite dangerous because they are seen as interfering with the learning process and thus, they should be avoided at all costs (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 4). What is more, behaviourism tends to argue that errors should be avoided because they can form habits that will inevitably interfere with the learning of new target-like habits. Based on this theory, learners can learn only when they have the opportunity to practice what they have been taught in the classroom and to respond to the stimuli they have received. If wrong answers are provided, corrective feedback is immediately given by the teacher.

Behaviourism acquired practical ground in the L2 classroom as well (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 4). What has to be done in order to help the learner produce right answers is to provide the right model that they will observe and practice many times (Brooks

1960, as quoted by Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 4). This implies that teachers follow the audiolingual method in classrooms and they expect learners to spend hours memorising dialogues and pattern drills and to study grammatical rules (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 4). The most surprising thing, though, is that many of the teachers never wonder about the efficacy of this mechanistic approach to error correction.

Another similar approach to behaviourism is the *receptive-transmission* model (Askew 2000: 3). Accordingly, the roles of the teacher and the learner are already defined. The teacher is the authority who corrects the learner. In other words, the teacher is the one who provides information to the passive learner. This model is very similar to behaviourism with one difference. In this model, the feedback is viewed as “a gift”. It is a gift from the teacher to the learner. The feedback has only one direction and it is useful to indicate the learner’s lack of knowledge in a certain area.

However, since the *receptive-transmission* model is similar to behaviourism, there are drawbacks as well (Askew 2000: 3). One problem regarding this model is that both teachers and learners have fixed roles (Askew 2000: 5). Learners are judged by their abilities to perform poorly or well. However, one can claim that this kind of judgment on the part of the teachers is hasty and thus, superficial and it does not do justice to the learner’s real abilities. Learners can perform poorly for several reasons and due to several factors. It is apparent that this model of feedback does not take into consideration the emotional and social aspects of the learner (Askew 2000: 5).

Another approach that helps teachers to provide feedback to learners is contrastive analysis (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 4). This approach attempts to identify features of the L2 that differ from the L1 based on the belief that the primary source of the learners’ errors is L1 interference. In this way, knowing the differences between L1 and L2, teachers can prevent the negative transfer of L1 to L2. Contrastive analysis involves the comparison of elements of both languages, finding differences between the two and predicting what errors the learners will make (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 4). After these stages, there can be explanations for why learners make errors and therefore, for the teacher’s role in providing feedback to the errors. However, based on a number of studies, the main problem of this approach is that it fails to predict the learners’ errors (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 4-5). These studies have shown that L1

interference causes many phonological errors but it cannot predict all the other types of errors that the learners make.

In sum, there have been a number of models or approaches affecting teachers' feedback with the most important being behaviourism. Despite the fact that all these approaches help teachers shape a way of providing feedback, they are all insufficient in explaining or predicting all learners' errors. Therefore, teachers should be cautious with any choice they make and they should consider which approach is most suitable for giving feedback in their classroom.

The following section explains the difference between positive and negative feedback and it focuses on what a number of studies describe about the two kinds of feedback.

### **3.6 Positive and negative feedback**

*Positive feedback* in learning refers to teachers' comments on the good aspects of the learner's work (Askew 2000: 7). Some examples of this feedback can be praise or good marks. For instance, a learner who does his/her homework correctly can receive praise from the teacher or an excellent mark. Another way to describe it is that *positive feedback* is linked with the teacher's judgments which show his/her satisfaction with the learner's performance (Askew 2000: 7). This is also the case with the example mentioned above. It shows the teacher's satisfaction with the learner's work.

On the other hand, *negative feedback* is described as criticism which implies the need for improvement (Askew 2000: 7). In other words, teachers' negative comments on a learner's work individually or in class can imply improvement on the part of the learner. However, one can argue that this type of feedback should be avoided because it does not promote learning. In contrast, it may inhibit the learner from learning.

Teachers should also try to understand whether they tend to provide more positive than negative feedback because the results of previous studies suggest that both can influence the learners' performance and motivation (Burke 2010: 48). It has been suggested that positive feedback or praise should increase and direct criticism should be used with more care in the classroom if the purpose of feedback is for learning and not for demotivating learners (Haines 2004, as quoted by Burke 2010: 49). Despite the fact that positive feedback enables learning, teachers should be careful with the

amount of praise they use since it may serve only to soften the direct criticism and comments rather than praise the good work (Burke 2010: 49). It has also been proposed that much of the negative criticism is mitigated by the use of hedging, questions and personal attribution (Hyland 2001, as quoted by Burke 2010: 49, see also section 2.10). However, the excessive use of such mitigation strategies can lead to misunderstandings on the part of learners who may not realise the purpose of the feedback.

On the other hand, researchers share different viewpoints on the value of positive feedback (Burke 2010: 49). For example, it has been suggested that praise should have a place on the learners' work but it is not regarded as a valuable form of feedback (Sadler 1989, Hattie 2001, as quoted by Burke 2010: 49). Moreover, other studies have suggested that negative feedback can make learners dissatisfied with their performance and thus, they may set higher goals and then perform better in the future in contrast with learners who receive only positive feedback or no feedback at all (Podsakoff and Farh 1989, as quoted by Burke 2010: 49). Another argument against positive feedback is that it draws the learners' attention to the "self" and distracts it from the task and learning in general (Butler 1987, as quoted by Burke 2010: 49). In other words, the learner gets prouder of himself/herself for his/her achievements than he/she focuses on improvement and learning.

However, positive feedback can encourage learners to overcome the fear of writing and can motivate them to have a positive attitude to it (Burke 2010: 49). For this purpose, there have been many studies that have examined the frequency of teachers' use of positive feedback (Connors and Lunsford 1993, Bardine et al. 2000, Straub 2000, as quoted by Burke 2010: 49). For example, it has been shown that although learners prefer positive to negative feedback, teachers are not always aware of it (Straub 2000, Connors and Lunsford 1993, as quoted by Burke 2010: 49). Based on the results of the studies, teachers tend to provide twice as many negative comments than positive ones. Furthermore, positive feedback tends to be offered to excellent papers and it is quite short and friendly in nature and even negative criticism is given with positive commentary. It has also been found that teachers usually alternate between positive and negative feedback and that their positive feedback is rather directed to issues such as effort or interest than to content and textual features (Smith 1997, as quoted by Burke 2010: 49). However, this kind of feedback is not useful for

learners since it does not provide them with any useful information about their performance or written communication. The only thing it offers is motivation for learners to keep up with the good work.

Another issue concerning positive and negative feedback is that learners may be happy and satisfied with the praise they receive from the teacher but they are not always aware of what is excellent or good in their work (Burke 2010: 49). As a consequence, they may not be capable of reproducing the good parts of their work. This highlights the importance of being a little bit more meticulous with positive feedback rather than generalize and use only one adjective (Race 2001, as quoted by Burke 2010: 49). In order to provide good and effective feedback, teachers should describe the good points of a learner's work in relation to the criteria of good work expected from learners and how these criteria demonstrate a learner's learning (Burke 2010: 50). In other words, it is significant for learners to know exactly what is right and what is wrong in their written texts but without making them be afraid of feedback. Instead, they should feel safe and they should be able to discern the need for improvement. For instance, a comment such as "*This is irrelevant*" can be a real problem in a learner's text but it is not accurate and the learner can start wondering what exactly is irrelevant and why the information is not important (Burke 2010: 50). On the other hand, a stronger and more accurate negative comment such as "*Although interesting, including information about Wordsworth's life does not explain how he used figurative language*" shows more clearly to the learner the cause of the problem and also the reason for failing to fulfill the necessary requirements of the task. The same thing happens with positive feedback. Comments such as "*I enjoyed reading your paper*" do not allow the learner to understand what makes his/her paper nice to read and thus, he/she cannot replicate a similarly interesting paper. On the other hand, a stronger positive comment will use more specific examples in order to become precise. For instance, a comment such as "*I enjoyed reading this paper much more than the first version of it because you worked on structuring information so that it now makes sense and guides me through the paper*" is more specific in nature and it uses comparison to indicate the learner's improvement from the first time. Additionally, it justifies how and why taking action has led to improvement of the text.

Generally, teachers should try to use a combination of positive and negative feedback (Burke 2010: 50). However, they should try to find the balance between constructive criticism and positive feedback in order to encourage learners to improve their texts and make changes that will help them learn and not to discourage them making them negative to the teacher's feedback. Teachers should also remember that feedback, positive or negative, should refer to the quality of the learners' work and it should show the criteria that the teacher values in a learner's paper so that the learner knows exactly what he/she is corrected for (Burke 2010: 50). In other words, negative feedback should be given in such a way that it does not hurt learners and positive feedback in a way that does not demean (Faber 1995, as quoted by Burke 2010: 50).

The next section discusses some factors that play an important role in feedback and they make it more effective for learners. Some of these factors are timing, amount and focus of the task when considering giving written feedback.

### **3.7 Factors that make feedback effective**

Studies on feedback focus on some factors that teachers should take into consideration if they wish to know how to provide learners with good and effective feedback. One significant factor that can make feedback effective is *timing* (Brookhart 2008: 10). Timing implies that feedback is more effective when it is offered immediately after the learner's error or only slightly delayed. In this way, the learner can benefit from it because he/she pays attention to it and uses it for correcting his/her errors. Moreover, the teacher's feedback should be given to a learner when there is still a learning goal and thus, the learner has a reason to use it (Brookhart 2008: 11). In other words, if the feedback is so delayed that concerns work that belongs to the past, then, in all likelihood, the learner will not benefit from it and most of all, he/she will not pay attention to it. This feedback seems pointless since learners will not be able to correct their errors.

The timing of feedback is perhaps easier for learners in L2 classes than for those in composition classes (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 125-126). This happens because teachers in composition classes have a double role in providing feedback. First, they correct learners at certain times during the writing process for all kinds of mechanical or local errors such as grammatical or lexical errors and second, they have to go beyond the provision of feedback at the sentence level. They have to pay attention to

the more global errors that concern, for example, the construction of wider discourse, the development of critical thinking skills, the rhetorical awareness and argumentation. However, this does not imply that L2 teachers do not correct global errors and that they are preoccupied only with grammatical errors. Rather it is a matter of degree and this is also determined by the proficiency level of the learners and the kind of classes or courses they attend. For instance, advanced L2 learners may be corrected in their grammatical or structural errors but, at the same time, they prepare themselves for further academic studies. This implies that the teacher has to correct the global errors as well. Furthermore, if these learners are going to attend academic studies, the correction of local issues may refer to more complicated grammatical structures such as embedded clauses or subordination of different clause patterns. While these are some of the corrections that a teacher can make, he/she often provides feedback on other earlier taught forms and structures that have not been mastered yet. Therefore, what can be concluded here is that feedback can be given to learners of any proficiency level and at any time.

Another important factor that can make feedback effective is learners' *proficiency level* (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 126). It is typical that more feedback is necessary for learners with lower proficiency than for learners with higher proficiency. Learners with lower proficiency expect accurate, detailed and regular feedback on their writings whereas learners with higher proficiency may need less feedback on their grammatical errors but they may need more feedback on other aspects of writing. However, teachers should be sensitive to the amount of feedback they give because failure to do so can result in the learners' discouragement, in the destruction of their self-esteem and in their demotivation.

Yet, another factor affecting the effectiveness of feedback is the *focus on the task* (Brookhart 2008: 19-20). This means that the feedback given on a task should provide information about its errors. In other words, if the feedback focuses on a grammatical error, it will focus on technical issues such as the addition of -s morpheme in the third person singular of the simple present tense. However, this type of feedback has one basic drawback. It cannot be transferred to other tasks. The feedback is so specific that it is impossible for a learner to use it in another task.

Moreover, Bitchener and Ferris mention the same factor as important to feedback. The teacher's aim or purpose in assigning a task can determine the kind of feedback that teachers can provide and thus, its effectiveness (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 126-127). For instance, a piece of writing may be a short exercise that attempts to test learners' accuracy in a specific linguistic form or structure. As a result, the teacher's feedback will focus on accuracy of these forms or structures. In this case, the feedback can also be given orally to the whole class since it is more immediate than written feedback.

On the other hand, writing tasks often have a specific communicative purpose and, as such, they permit learners to use targeted forms and structures (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 127). For instance, if the writing task is about writing a story of what happened last week, that is, a narrative, it is possible that the teacher focuses on the correct use of the simple past tense and of adverbs and their placement. In addition, the teacher may want to focus on the learners' fluency to produce a narrative or check if they can effectively construct a narrative. The feedback in this case will vary depending on the teacher's aim in assigning the task. On the one hand, if the aim is to focus on fluency and narrative structure, the teacher should not give feedback on accuracy errors. If, on the other hand, the focus is on the accurate use of the simple past tense, then, the teacher is eligible to provide feedback on grammatical errors. If both the above mentioned aims are significant, then it is the teacher's choice to provide feedback on the fluency of the text or on its grammatical accuracy. It is usual that in such writing tasks the teacher gives priority to the fluency of the text or to the narrative construction of the story and last to its accuracy. All in all, it is up to teachers to decide what kind of feedback they want to give to learners depending on the aims of their lessons regardless of whether they are teachers in an L2 or in composition classes. They can decide whether a focus on form or a focus on content is more appropriate depending on the task each time. However, telling learners the aims of a task may or may not be appropriate (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 127-128). The most usual practice is that learners are told the aims of the task but in cases of assessment, the teacher should not allow them to know what is being targeted.

Another factor that plays an important role in the effectiveness of feedback is its *frequency* (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 128). Feedback can be provided only once to partially learnt linguistic structures thus, increasing the learners' accuracy. Research



has shown that this is possible for many learners. However, this depends on how well the targeted form or structure has been learnt. This implies that some learners may need more frequent and regular feedback especially when they repeat the same errors. In order to find out whether this frequent feedback is helpful, the teacher can assign short writing tasks on a daily basis for a certain period of time.

Last but not least, the *amount* of feedback can influence its effectiveness (Brookhart 2008: 12). According to studies, teachers have a tendency to correct everything. However, this is not possible. The best way to provide the right amount of feedback is by taking into consideration the individual learners and the learning aim of the lesson. In other words, the amount of feedback should connect the learner's knowledge with the next level of it. Learners should be able to move one step further in their knowledge by processing the feedback they receive from the teacher. In addition, the teacher should always attempt to find out the feedback that individual learners prefer. Some learners prefer a plain explanation of their error and some others prefer a more analytical answer on the part of the teacher. This depends clearly on learners' learning style and their preferences.

Moreover, the role of the *amount* in making feedback more effective for learners has been perceived as important by Bitchener and Ferris. It is typical of most learners to prefer explicit and regular feedback on their writing (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 128-129). However, there is always the risk that too much feedback can be demotivating or burdensome for cognitive processing. Therefore, teachers should pay careful attention to the amount of feedback that they provide to learners. In order to decide on the amount of feedback, teachers should think of whether feedback should focus on specific targeted categories of error or whether it should be unfocused and thus, more general and comprehensive. In the case of focused feedback teachers should consider the number of targeted categories they want to focus on in a time whereas in the case of unfocused feedback, the number of error categories to focus on is not important. Teachers should also consider theoretical background which supports both focused and unfocused feedback. The number of targeted error categories for which feedback can be provided relies on the learners' processing capacity. For example, learners with lower proficiency can be easily frustrated by too much feedback or too much information to process. On the other hand, learners with advanced proficiency have a longer attention span than learners with lower proficiency and thus, they are more

capable of dealing with a greater amount of feedback. The same argument can also be valid for unfocused feedback. Learners with advanced proficiency can benefit from this kind of feedback and they can cope with it better especially if they have already acquired a high level of accuracy in the items they use. Additionally, it can be said that many errors by advanced learners can be corrected in a short period of time because of the learners' processing capacity.

It has been said that the teacher's focused feedback slows down the correction of the learners' numerous errors (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 129). However, this is not always true. The correction of one or two linguistic error categories in a period of months cannot determine the effectiveness of feedback over time. This implies that teachers should not only give feedback when learners have shown improvement in their errors after several months because they can show progress even after one feedback session as well. When this takes place, the teacher should introduce a new targeted linguistic form and check its accuracy over time. In other words, providing little or more feedback depends on the learners' proficiency level, their processing capacity and the complexity of the error.

To sum up, there are numerous factors that can affect the effectiveness of feedback. Timing is one factor and it can seriously affect the effectiveness of feedback if it is delayed. On the other hand, feedback can be given at any time and at any level of learning and any kind of class. The focus on the task also makes feedback effective in the sense that the feedback should reflect the aim of the task. Finally, the amount of feedback is crucial since it can help or overwhelm learners. As a result, all these factors constitute the teacher's main concerns when providing feedback.

The following section highlights the teachers' focus on written feedback. It describes whether teachers prefer to focus on grammatical and lexical errors or on content and meaning. For this purpose, a number of studies have been carried out with mixed results. Some teachers prefer to correct grammatical errors and others prefer to focus on meaning and content. Moreover, it explains some ways for teachers to balance their feedback for both kinds of errors.

### 3.8 Focus of teachers' written feedback in L2 writing

A number of studies have been carried out which describe the kinds of feedback that teachers give to learners and the results have been categorised according to the areas of teachers' concern (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 77). In the majority of these studies, teachers seem to believe that their feedback deals with global issues of content of ideas and of organisation rather than local issues of grammar, vocabulary or mechanics (Ferris 1997, Ferris et al. 1997, Hyland and Hyland 2001, as quoted by Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 77). In addition, the proportion of written feedback has been quite similar across several classroom contexts and research designs (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 77). It is apparent that the oldest study may be out-of-date nowadays since it dates back to 1980 but one of the most recent studies in 2007 shows that the teachers who participated in the study have been surprised by the large proportion of their feedback being on the correction of grammatical errors. This is in sharp contrast with their beliefs about how they respond to learners' writings since they thought that they focused more on content than grammar. The people who designed these studies believe that teachers have changed their answers to what they believe would possibly facilitate learners' progress. In other words, the teachers have thought that focusing on content correction would help their learners improve their writing.

Although all these studies demonstrate the teachers' preference for focusing more on grammatical errors and give controlling and directive feedback, modern teachers may no longer focus only on these practices (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 79). Even the most expert teachers balance their grammatical corrections with feedback on meaning and content. However, it is important to underline that the teachers in the studies have been experienced in providing feedback to learners. To conclude, although it may be quite impossible and unnatural for teachers to provide feedback only on grammatical errors, there is most likely a diversity of feedback practices with regards to the amount of attention paid to both grammatical errors and problems with content (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 79).

The issue of teachers' focus in giving written feedback has occupied Burke as well. In learner-centred classrooms, the teacher at first tries to find out what is important to learners as a way to guide their feedback to the right direction (Burke 2010: 43-44). It is logical to argue that most foreign and native university learners do not register in

the university to learn how to write but rather to study a specific subject. Therefore, they expect the teachers' feedback to focus on their discipline-specific knowledge and content. It can be assumed though that if the teachers' feedback focuses on grammatical and language errors, the learners may feel frustrated and confused if not angry and sad.

It has been said that a teacher's feedback should focus more on global issues such as content and meaning rather than on grammar and punctuation (Radecki and Swales 1988, as quoted by Burke 2010: 44). It has also been found that teachers themselves feel more comfortable with giving feedback on content (Beason 1993, as quoted by Burke 2010: 44). However, there is evidence which demonstrates that the teachers' feedback is not always in accordance with the purpose of writing (Storch and Tapper 2000, as quoted by Burke 2010: 44). Although the purpose of writing focuses sometimes on content, the teachers' feedback does not mirror this emphasis. In contrast, it focuses on other linguistic features such as grammar and mechanics in general. For example, a teacher may tell learners to write an argumentative essay in order to check their fluency. However, if the teacher gives feedback and comments on the sentence level and not on content, there can be lack of balance between the feedback and the purposes of writing. Furthermore, it has been shown that the teachers prefer to focus more on grammatical and lexical errors either consciously or unconsciously (Burke 2010: 44). Moreover, it has been suggested that the teachers tend to correct textual errors because it is easy to do while reading (Connors and Lunsford 1993, as quoted by Burke 2010: 44). This implies that teachers try to make learners aware of how their mechanical errors obstruct meaning and impede reading. This attitude on the part of teachers comes in contrast with learners' expectations about feedback on content. As a consequence, learners may think that they need to pay more attention to local errors such as grammar than to content (De Beaugrande 1979, Ashwell 2000, as quoted by Burke 2010: 44).

However, there is a variety of ways for teachers to find a balance between their global and local feedback (Burke 2010: 44). One thing that teachers can do is to avoid correcting all errors of grammar as they read which can only annoy learners and prevent them from self-correction. Instead, they can identify only some examples in the writing where the learner has written something articulately. These examples can then function as self-generated models which demonstrate to learners the ease they

can have with words in a writing. After this, the learners can use these models to correct their language or meaning errors and to compare the two examples. In other words, the learners should try to change the “bad” example to the “good” one in order to improve themselves in later writings. Another way to avoid correcting all kinds of grammatical errors is for teachers to read the writing for patterns of error (Burke 2010: 44). The teacher can show learners two or three types of errors which stress the need for revisions in the writing. Additionally, the teacher can give sources to the learners which can help them understand these patterns and show them the way to correct the problem. One advantage of this way of giving balanced feedback is that most learners tend to repeat similar kinds of errors (Burke 2010: 45). Therefore, it is easier for a teacher to provide feedback to the whole class than write the same feedback on every learner’s text.

To sum up, teachers’ focus on giving feedback refers either to global issues regarding content and meaning or to local issues concerning grammar and mechanics. It is apparent that teachers prefer to provide feedback on grammar errors because it is easier to do so while reading but this depends more on the kind of classroom they teach. For example, the teachers’ feedback focuses more on content in the university level but it focuses more on grammar in L2 classrooms. However, there are many ways to create balance in feedback on global and local errors.

The next chapter focuses on three studies that examine the topic of feedback from three different perspectives. These studies constitute a separate chapter due to their importance for this study. In other words, the topics of these three studies will be linked to this study attempting to find similarities and differences between them or lessons to be learnt.

#### **4 STUDIES RELEVANT TO FEEDBACK**

This chapter continues focusing on the topic of L2 teachers’ written feedback by describing the processes and the results of three different studies that took place in different contexts. All of these studies attempt to find out and analyse teachers’ feedback practices in secondary schools. In other words, they describe the teachers’ point of view in giving feedback and how these practices are well-established in their

teaching throughout the years even though many of them are in sharp contrast with the school curricula or the modern practices.

The first study attempts to define the teachers' roles as they are depicted in their feedback practices in secondary schools. The second study focuses on the feedback practices of L2 teachers in Hong Kong secondary schools and the reasons behind them and the third study is written by the same author as the second study and it uses the same data as the second study as well. However, the purpose of the third study is to offer alternative ways of providing feedback making this job less stressful for teachers.

*A study on the teachers' roles as reflected in their feedback practices*

A study by Furneaux et al. (Furneaux et al. 2007: 69-90) attempts to analyse the feedback that teachers of English provide to learners in secondary schools as well as the roles they assume when they correct the learners' writings. The teachers who participated in this study were from five different countries such as Cyprus, France, Korea, Spain and Thailand and all of them were asked to give feedback on a single essay with the title "*Information of cancer*" which dealt with the issue of whether patients should be aware of their medical condition. Therefore, the research questions of the study focus on whether the teachers take on certain roles when they give feedback, whether the foci of the feedback are different for the different teachers and whether the nationalities affect feedback.

The writing that the teachers had to comment on was an artificial exercise since they were not aware of the learner who wrote it and it was not part of any subject or course. This learner essay describes the story of an aunt who died of cancer and, as a written text, it gives the opportunity for feedback on both form and content.

The data came from 110 teachers from groups of French, Korean, Spanish and Thai teachers who were in England for short teacher education courses where all three researchers were working at the time and from groups of Cypriots who were attending a summer school in Nicosia learning about the teaching of writing. Their age ranged from 25 to over 56 and all of them had experience in teaching English in secondary schools and some of them in other contexts.

Moreover, the coding scheme that was used for the study focuses both on the teacher roles and on the focus of each feedback. More specifically, the teacher roles upon which the results of the study are interpreted are those of the initiator, supporter, advisor, suggester, provider and mutator. The feedback foci include lexis, grammar, style, semantics, discourse and mechanics. However, not all the feedback is easily understood or classified in any category so there are the unspecified and the unclassifiable categories as well. For example, the role of the provider is to write the correct form by deleting the error without altering the meaning of the learner's text whereas the mutator corrects the errors by changing the meaning of the text. In addition, stylistic focus means that the teacher does not correct an error but rather offers a better alternative in terms of formality or appropriateness.

The results show that from the six roles that teachers can assume the dominant one is that of the provider. This is apparent from the number of the providing annotations which is much higher than any other kind of annotation found in the essay. However, the role of the initiator is also quite significant and it is adopted by the majority of the teachers. These two roles are first in the list leaving the rest far behind with difference.

Concerning the focus of the teachers' feedback the results are clear showing that the teachers prefer correcting linguistic errors to responding to the writing as readers of communication. In other words, the teachers tend to correct grammar errors because they consider it an important aspect of their job. This attitude clearly shows that the focus on grammar is closely related with the provider role. As a consequence, the teachers tend to appear a more traditional way of giving feedback. Another result concerning the initiator role is that the spread of the teachers' focus is more even than in the provider role.

As far as the nationalities are concerned, the only differences found are in the group of the Korean teachers who seem to correct much less than the other nationalities. Furthermore, the French teachers seem to adopt the role of the initiator more than that of the provider in contrast with most of the groups.

In addition, the margin and end comments were examined and they show that very few teachers respond to the content of the essay although the essay is suitable for both content and form attention. Moreover, from the two roles of the provider and the

initiator, it is the second role that tends to provide more marginal or end comments focusing on the content of the essay.

In conclusion, this particular study attempts to examine the feedback practices of L2 teachers from different countries taking into consideration the different roles they can assume when giving feedback and the different foci they can have in their feedback as well as their nationalities. Unfortunately, the results show that teachers still prefer to pay attention to grammar by providing corrections to errors instead of focusing on the writing as a text.

This first study is useful for this study because it examines the kind of errors teachers correct and thus, the roles they assume. In the same way, this study attempts to find out, among other things, the focus of teachers' feedback, whether it is feedback on grammar, that is, local errors or on content, that is, global errors. The difference, however, is that this study does not attempt to find out teachers' feedback practices by analysing several essays in an objective way but rather records teachers' opinions for their feedback practices. In other words, this study focuses on teachers' subjectivity and how they view their feedback.

#### *A study on the feedback practices of Hong Kong L2 teachers*

There has been a lot of research on the feedback practices of L2 teachers in university contexts but there is little research on how L2 teachers respond to learners' texts. The study by Lee (Lee 2008: 69-81) attempts to discover the reasons behind teachers' written feedback practices and the differences between these practices and the school principles. In other words, this study focuses on the way Hong Kong L2 teachers give feedback and whether they follow the school principles and on what factors influence their choices.

The data for the study came from 26 Cantonese-speaking secondary teachers of English from 15 different secondary schools involving all three levels of performance such as the high, average and low. The teachers had to provide five or six essays randomly from all three levels of performance and thus, a number of compositions were collected. The majority of the teachers were qualified in English subject knowledge and all of them were professional teachers of English having teaching experience from two to 15 years. Moreover, the teachers had to complete a



questionnaire in which they answered that the essays were the final drafts and that they corrected all the learners' errors.

After the collection of the texts, six teachers were interviewed individually to find out the reasons behind their feedback practices. These interviews searched for information about the teachers' beliefs and the teachers' context of work and they were conducted in Cantonese.

The feedback was analysed based on its focus such as on form, content and organisation, the error feedback which means that feedback was extracted from the essay to find out the strategies used and the written commentary which refers to the amount of positive feedback in relation to negative feedback.

The interview data was translated into English and transcribed but subjectivity was also unavoidable during the interpretation of the data. This was inevitable because some factors that influence the teachers' choices were implicitly stated by the teachers and had to be made explicit. However, the interpretations were shown to the teachers in order to get their approval for being correct.

The results indicate that the Hong Kong teachers prefer to focus their feedback on form, that is, grammar and vocabulary leaving the organisation last. In addition, they tend to use more direct than indirect error feedback followed by coded feedback and the percentage of praisal commentary appears to be small in comparison with negative comments. More specifically, the positive comments account for only 3.3% of the total feedback. It is apparent that all these practices come in sharp contrast with the school and literature principles about feedback where focus on form is not the recommended practice but rather focus on content is preferred. Furthermore, the school principles recommend selective feedback and in particular, indirect feedback and positive commentary that do not seem to be the teachers' practices.

Concerning the factors that influence the teachers' feedback choices, the interview data points to the general context of the teachers' work, the teachers' accountability, their beliefs and values, the examination culture and the lack of teacher training. In their work, teachers have to follow a certain feedback policy that dictates them to use detailed marking (instead of selective) using correction symbols and providing the right answers whenever the learners cannot correct their errors. When the feedback is

returned to the learners, they have to correct their errors and write an error-free draft. One surprising result is that the teachers are controlled in their job and in the way they give feedback. Furthermore, teachers are accountable for deviating from the school norms of feedback and they have to justify their practices to the school administrator, to the parents and to the learners. This necessarily forces them to give detailed feedback in order to avoid being considered lazy or irresponsible. However, it is the teachers' beliefs that all errors should be corrected that make them act like this as well. In other words, the teachers believe that this is the way their learners can learn. On the other hand, content and organization in writing do not pose many problems and thus, they do not need any attention. What is more, the examinations urge the teachers to focus on grammar and vocabulary errors for the sake of accuracy and success in the exams. Last, many teachers explained that they did not know how to give feedback due to lack of teacher training. In other words, nobody ever showed them alternative ways of providing feedback.

To conclude, the results of the study point at large differences that there are between the L2 teachers' feedback practices in Hong Kong secondary schools and the literature and school principles. On the one hand, the principles advise for a more progressive and selective feedback and on the other hand, teachers tend to follow the traditional method of giving feedback focusing on the mechanical and grammatical errors. Of course, there is a combination of factors affecting their feedback choices such as their beliefs, the school's preferences, exams and lack of teacher training.

Considering the study on Hong Kong L2 teachers, I must say that it is the most relevant study of the three to this study and the closest in perspective. The Hong Kong study involves the collection of essays for the inspection of teachers' feedback and the analysis of the reasons behind teachers' feedback. This means that there are two perspectives in the study. The one is the objective description and analysis of feedback as it is shown in the essays and the other is the teachers' subjective opinion on the reasons for providing such feedback. This second perspective is quite similar to the perspective of this study since this study also attempts to find out the reasons behind teachers' choices on certain aspects of feedback. Additionally, the research design of finding out teachers' opinions on providing feedback in this study is the same as in the study on Hong Kong L2 teachers. Both make use of interviews and this is what makes the two studies very similar to each other.

*A study on alternative ways of providing feedback*

Although the opinions about the efficacy of feedback are not definite, teachers' feedback is still important in the L2 classroom and in writing in general (Lee 2011: 378-392). Learners appreciate teachers' feedback and ask for it but at the same time they feel frustrated and lost by the meticulous feedback on errors. These feelings are the result of old methods of giving feedback to learners. Many teachers view feedback as a job that has to be finished before the next pile of essays is collected whereas others consider changing profession due to the heavy load of giving feedback. A study by Lee (Lee 2011: 378-392) shows that the learners, especially those with low proficiency, get discouraged by teachers' feedback because they find it difficult to comprehend. It also attempts to suggest alternative ways of making feedback more effective.

The data and the results of the study are the same as in the last study, that is, teachers' feedback focuses mainly on errors and not on organization or content, it is comprehensive meaning that all the errors have to be corrected, it is direct which does not allow self-correction, it focuses on a single draft of the learners' text and it overhighlights the use of scores (for details see Lee 2008: 69-81).

An alternative way of responding to learners' writing is by giving feedback with balanced coverage. This balance can be achieved by consulting a ready feedback form with specific criteria concerning content, organisation, language and genre. In this way, the teachers' load of handwriting will be reduced as well.

A second way for improving feedback is treating errors selectively instead of comprehensively. This can be achieved by using several error feedback strategies such as direct, indirect or coded feedback according to the learners' proficiency level. Moreover, teachers can encourage learners to suggest one or two patterns they want to be corrected on showing their interest in learners' needs. In addition, teachers can give detailed feedback on learners' first essay and keep a record of the error ratios for each major error type for each learner. This feedback can be given twice a year and then it can be compared. Then, using this information, the teacher can offer remedial feedback only on the major errors.

A third way for improving feedback is multiple drafting. Multiple drafting allows learners to understand how real writing is and how they can develop writing strategies. It is difficult to write everything right from the first attempt and multiple drafts always help in developing writing.

A fourth way for improving feedback is the use of marking only on some essays and learners will be able to see their marks only after revision has taken place. In this way, teachers can provide more qualitative feedback and learners will not feel overwhelmed by marks.

A fifth way of giving more effective feedback is learner involvement in it. For example, a learner can correct his/her own errors or his/her peers' writing. In this way, they can negotiate their errors using certain given criteria and they can acquire more experience in being self-responsible.

Last but not least, the joining of teaching, learning and feedback can have good results in improving teachers' feedback practices. In other words, teachers should first try to teach "good" writing based on different genres, then allow learners to learn it and then give feedback on the few errors that there are. As a result, the learners will not feel lost in the tones of corrections and the teachers will not be overloaded with giving feedback.

In conclusion, the study challenges the traditional way of giving feedback among L2 Hong Kong secondary school teachers by posing the problems that both teachers and learners face. However, this is not the case only with Hong Kong teachers but it applies to other contexts as well.

This third study is useful for this study because it provides alternative ways of making the job of written feedback easier and less stressful for teachers. This is an important question that can be asked to teachers in this study to find out whether they have ever thought of such ways such as involving the learners in it or correcting errors selectively or whether they have already used such ways in their feedback practices. Therefore, although this third study seems to be the least relevant to this study, in fact, it is useful because it can create a nice question for the interview.

The following chapter focuses on the aim of this study which includes the motivation behind this study and its research questions.

## **5 AIM OF THIS STUDY**

This chapter describes the reasons for motivating this study by explaining how other studies deal with the issue of L2 written feedback and the research questions of this study.

### **5.1 Motivation of this study**

The issue of written feedback has been widely studied throughout the years and many researchers have made conclusions on the issue by approaching it from several different sides.

For example, a study by Ellis (Ellis 2009: 97-107) has been on the typology of the written feedback types, that is, the different types of feedback that teachers can use when they correct students' essays. According to the study, the effectiveness of teachers' written feedback depends on these different types of feedback. In conclusion, the study provides the different types of feedback in a table form and their descriptions follow analytically afterwards.

A second study by Lunt and Curran (Lunt and Curran 2010: 759-769) focuses on the comparison between the electronic audio feedback and the written feedback. In other words, the study attempts to show the benefits of the electronic audio feedback in comparison to traditional written feedback. As the researchers mention, students were not happy with teachers' written feedback but after the introduction of the new way of giving feedback, the results were very positive. Students seemed to have embraced the electronic way of providing feedback and they were more likely to check it when sent to their e-mail address.

A third study by Weaver (Weaver 2006: 379-394) deals with students' beliefs about teachers' written feedback. According to the results of the study, students valued teachers' feedback but they believed it could have been more helpful. In their opinion, the feedback had to be more focused and not vague or general. Moreover, it would be better if it was timely given and in accordance with the learning outcomes.

Therefore, all the above mentioned studies show how much the issue of written feedback has been studied in detail but from many different sides. However, this

study focuses on a side that has not been so widely studied and this is the motivation behind dealing with it. The issue of written feedback and how teachers view it and what they think about it has not been the concern of many studies. This immediately creates a niche that allows me to exploit it and make a study on it.

The next section describes the research questions of this study and how they are answered by conducting interviews with six teachers of English.

## **5.2 Research questions**

This study focuses on two research questions which are the following:

1. What are the participants' opinions on L2 writing?
2. What are the participants' opinions on L2 written feedback?

In general, these research questions are answered by the interview questions of this study. In other words, there are two different issues mentioned in both research questions. The one issue is L2 writing and the other one is L2 written feedback. All the ten interview questions represent these two issues. In particular, the first two interview questions focus on L2 writing and the rest eight focus on L2 written feedback.

The first research question deals with the issue of L2 writing and is answered by the first two interview questions of this study. The interview questions that actually answer the first research question have to do with the importance of L2 writing nowadays and the text types that learners produce. In other words, the first research question shows the participants' opinions on these two interview questions.

The second research question deals with the issue of L2 written feedback and is answered by the rest eight interview questions of this study. The interview questions that actually answer the second research question have to do with the definition of written feedback, the form of written feedback that teachers use to correct learners' essays, the effectiveness of written feedback, the necessity of the mild nature of feedback and learners' responsibility for processing teachers' written feedback. Moreover, they have to do with the focus of teachers' feedback, the handling of feedback in class and the written guidelines given to teachers by their school for

giving written feedback. In other words, the second research question shows the participants' opinions on these eight interview questions.

The next chapter focuses on the methods of data collection and analysis.

## **6 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

This chapter describes the reasons behind the choice of interviews as the best method of data collection for this study and, in particular, the choice of semi-structured interviews as well as the participants of this study. Moreover, it describes the process of interviews in detail, the content analysis and the transcription and the analysis of the data of this study.

### **6.1 Reasons for methodological choices**

This section focuses on the different methods of data collection that exist and it describes the advantages and disadvantages of each one of them. Furthermore, it shows why an interview is the best method of collecting data for this study.

#### **6.1.1 Quantitative and qualitative methods**

One basic distinction of the methods of data collection is between *quantitative* and *qualitative* methods (Dörnyei 2007: 24). By using quantitative methods, results are usually translated into numbers and then they are analysed using statistical methods (Dörnyei 2007: 24). For example, using a questionnaire for a study is a quantitative method of data collection since the results of a questionnaire are numbers analysed by statistical software. A quantitative method can also be described as a descriptive method that attempts to specify or describe natural phenomena without the use of any experiments (Seliger and Shohamy 1989: 124). In other words, it is a deductive method of data collection using preconceived hypotheses and a narrow scope of investigation. This means that all the results from this kind of quantitative research are clear, specific and explicit to the reader and he/she does not need to make any inferences or guessing about them.

In contrast, a qualitative method of data collection focuses on results that are open-ended and not numerical and they are analysed using non-statistical methods (Dörnyei

2007: 24). Examples of this method include interviews with the transcribed recordings analysed in a qualitative way.

The next subsection describes the different types of interviews that there are as well as their advantages and disadvantages.

### **6.1.2 Interviews**

This study makes use of the qualitative method including interviews. However, there are different kinds of interviews depending on the kinds of questions that are asked.

The first one has to do with *single* or *multiple sessions* (Dörnyei 2007: 134-135). It is common for most qualitative interviews to last from 30 to 60 minutes. In other words, the interview is only a single session in this case. However, a single session cannot provide the researcher with rich results and thus, there should be three interviews with the same participant to gain some depth in the results (Dörnyei 2007: 134-135). The first interview can play the role of the ice-breaker and it can provide a quick look at the topics to be asked. The second interview is more focused and structured than the first one since the interviewer prepares more specific questions and the interviewee elaborates more on his/her answers. The third interview includes any follow-up questions that there may exist.

The second kind of interviews is *structured interviews* (Dörnyei 2007: 135). In structured interviews, the questions are predetermined and specific following an interview schedule which includes a list of questions for every participant. The answers provided by participants are quite similar to those of questionnaires. These kind of controlled interviews make sure that the interview has a specific focus and it covers a well-defined area. A problem of this kind of interviews is lack of spontaneity and variation in both questions and answers. In general, this kind of an interview does not need any elaboration on the questions or on the answers and it is usually used when specific information is needed and when it is necessary to collect data from a large number of participants (Seliger and Shohamy 1989: 167).

The third kind of interviews is *unstructured interviews* (Dörnyei 2007: 135-136). Unstructured interviews allow the participant to provide answers to any direction giving the opportunity for a more flexible interview. In this kind of interviews, the researcher does not interfere with the answers and he/she assumes the role of the



listener. The only thing he/she can do is ask clarification questions. The intention of these interviews is the creation of a relaxed atmosphere which implies a good relationship between the researcher and the participant. Another characteristic of these interviews is that the researcher does not need to prepare a detailed interview guide as in the structured interviews. Unstructured interviews are also called open interviews and they usually resemble informal, everyday talks (Seliger and Shohamy 1989: 167). Moreover, they allow more depth in the answers and this is the reason why they are used mainly in qualitative studies.

The fourth kind of interviews is *semi-structured interviews* (Dörnyei 2007: 136). In these interviews, there is a list of predetermined questions but they are broader than specific permitting the participant to expand on his/her answers. This kind of an interview is useful when the researcher has a good knowledge of the topic and he/she can create broad questions but, at the same time, he/she does not want to limit the participant's answers. In other words, the semi-structured interviews include questions that are prepared beforehand but they allow elaboration on the answers (Seliger and Shohamy 1989: 167).

However, interviews have advantages as well as disadvantages (Dörnyei 2007: 143). First, an interview is a natural and socially acceptable way of data collection and that is why the majority of people feel comfortable with it. Second, interviews can be used in a variety of situations dealing with many different topics and the interview schedule helps in covering the relevant domain of study. Third, interviews can produce rich data for a study. Fourth, interviews are personalized, thus they allow a level of in-depth data collection, free answers and a high degree of flexibility (Seliger and Shohamy 1989: 166). In other words, the researcher may end up collecting data that has never been discovered before.

A disadvantage of interviews is that they are time consuming to prepare and conduct and the researcher needs to have good communication skills, an ability that not everybody has (Dörnyei 2007: 143). This means that the researcher might need extensive training to acquire good interviewing skills (Seliger and Shohamy 1989: 166). Moreover, the participant may decide to show him/herself in a better way than what he/she is in real life due to lack of anonymity in interviews (Dörnyei 2007: 143-144). What is more, the participant may be too shy to talk and he/she may not produce

rich data for the study or he/she may be too talkative giving some useless data. Another disadvantage is that interviews may include the subjective opinion of the researcher and the participant may answer in the way the researcher expects in order to please him/her (Seliger and Shohamy 1989: 166).

The next subsection describes what questionnaires are and their advantages and disadvantages.

### **6.1.3 Questionnaires**

Questionnaires are printed papers which include questions or statements to which the participant answers anonymously (Seliger and Shohamy 1989: 172). They are not very different from interviews since both expect the participant to respond to a stimulus given by the researcher. One difference between the two methods of data collection is that in questionnaires the answers are written and short whereas in interviews they are oral and longer.

An advantage of questionnaires is that they are time and cost efficient allowing the collection of a big amount of data from a large group of people in a short time (Dörnyei 2007: 115). Moreover, the processing of this data can be fast especially with the use of relevant software. In addition, questionnaires can be used in a variety of contexts with a variety of people and topics and they offer anonymity to participants. Since anonymity is offered, participants may share data on more sensitive issues more easily (Seliger and Shohamy 1989: 172).

However, questionnaires can produce unreliable, invalid and superficial results if they are not well-constructed (Dörnyei 2007: 115). The problem with questionnaires is that the questions have to be simple and straightforward so that they are understood by everybody. This means that this method of data collection is not suitable for dealing with a topic deeply. This happens also because participants do not have a lot of time to answer the questions. Another disadvantage is the low response rate which can influence the validity of the results negatively (Seliger and Shohamy 1989: 172). This is especially the case with mailed questionnaires. In addition, questionnaires can be a problem for people who cannot read or write particularly in L2 classrooms where participants cannot read and write well yet. This implies that the answers provided may not be so correct.

The following subsection focuses on observations in L2 classrooms as a way of collecting data and their advantages and disadvantages.

#### **6.1.4 Observations**

Observations in L2 classrooms are mainly used for data collection on examining how learners use the language in several contexts, on examining learners' and teachers' behavior in the class and on examining the teaching and learning processes in the class (Seliger and Shohamy 1989: 162). In other words, observations examine a phenomenon or an attitude while it is going on and they can take place in many contexts such as at home, in schools or in classes.

Observations can be divided into structured and unstructured (Dörnyei 2007: 179). Structured observation means that the researcher walks into a classroom having a specific, predetermined focus of study whereas unstructured observation means that the researcher has to walk in a classroom to observe first what is happening and then decide on what he/she is looking for and what is significant for his/her study. Structured observation includes the completion of an observation scheme whereas unstructured observation requires keeping of notes supported by diagrams and maps.

An advantage of observations is that the researcher can directly observe what is happening in a classroom or in another place without relying on what participants have to say (Dörnyei 2007: 185). This makes observations more objective than if there was second-hand data. Moreover, observations can be used with participants who have weak verbal skills in the L2. They can also provide rich descriptions of settings where observations take place. Additionally, observations allow the study of a phenomenon at close quarters including many of the contextual variables that exist in an L2 class (Seliger and Shohamy 1989: 162). Structured observation can make both the process and the results more valid and reliable due to the use of coding schemes (Dörnyei 2007: 185). In this way, the results can be compared across classrooms and over time and the coding schemes offer systematicity to the observation.

Concerning the disadvantages, observations can be used only with phenomena that can be observed (Dörnyei 2007: 185-186). However, there are many processes that take place in the participants' minds and cannot be observed. In other words, they are mental processes and they are unobservable. Moreover, observing a phenomenon does

not explain the reasons behind it and the researcher's presence may change the participants' behavior. Furthermore, observations may sometimes include the researcher's opinions and subjectivity distorting their objective nature (Seliger and Shohamy 1989: 162). The problem of a structured observation is that it reduces the complexity of the situation observed since the researcher focuses on certain aspects of the situation missing other important features (Dörnyei 2007: 186).

The next subsection describes some reasons for employing interviews as the best way of collecting data for this study. In other words, I justify my choice of an interview for this study over the choices of a questionnaire or a classroom observation.

### **6.1.5 The final choice of an interview for this study**

The employment of interviews as the most suitable method of data collection for this study was made based on the topic of this study and in comparison with the other methods of questionnaires and classroom observations. The focus of this study is on teachers' opinions on their written feedback in L2 classrooms. This means that I need to explore the reasons behind written feedback and everything else that goes on in a teacher's mind before he/she decides to provide feedback to learners. For this reason, the most effective method seems to be the use of interviews where participants can explain their thoughts and processes of giving feedback.

However, it could be claimed that questionnaires are also suitable for this kind of study. This can be true depending on the kind of data that somebody wants to collect. In this study, interviews are more preferable because I attempt to understand the reasons behind written feedback and thus, I wish to collect rich data on the topic. Interviews are excellent for this purpose because they can be long giving the participants an opportunity to elaborate on their answers and say anything that they feel is relevant to the interview questions. In contrast, a questionnaire in this case would be insufficient for long answers since we all know that it often includes multiple choice questions that limit the possibility of further explanations. Rather, it focuses on specific answers that may not reflect participants' opinions and it does not uncover the reasons behind issues and this is something that comes in contrast to the purpose of this study.

On the other hand, there are clear reasons why interviews are preferred over classroom observations for this study. First of all, written feedback is something that cannot be easily observed since it rarely happens in the L2 classes. Rather, it happens at teachers' homes and then it is submitted directly to learners. This means that the processes of giving written feedback are quite mental in nature and therefore, they cannot be observed. In other words, observations pose a practical difficulty to this study and its topic. However, as I have already mentioned, interviews come to solve this problem since they attempt to penetrate into teachers' minds and discover the processes that many of them follow when considering written feedback. It is in interviews that teachers unfold the reasons behind their feedback and also their reasons of giving their feedback. As a result, I decided to use interviews for the data collection of this study since it seems to be the most useful method for the present purpose.

The next section focuses on the participants that took part in this study.

## **6.2 Participants**

The participants of this study were six teachers of English teaching English in upper secondary schools in Finland and in Greece. The first three participants were Finnish and the last three were Greeks. The reason why I chose this level of education was because learners could produce longer and more pieces of writing than in primary level and, as a result, there could be more errors in their texts focusing on several aspects of the English language and organisation. This meant that their essays were ideal for the purposes of this study.

Moreover, the participants came from both Finland and Greece. The reason behind this choice was to give a different perspective to this study since the majority of the English studies in the University of Jyväskylä focus on only Finnish participants. Furthermore, as a Greek student in Finland, I had the possibility to include Greek participants in this study since it was easier for me to find them than find Finnish participants. The reason for having chosen only teachers of English as participants of this study was to show what this group of teachers could think about their way of providing learners with written feedback. In other words, throughout this study, the participants had the chance to reflect on their way of providing feedback.

The participants were contacted by e-mail and by phone. In particular, the Finnish participants were contacted by e-mail because of the lack of familiarity whereas the Greek participants were contacted by phone since I was familiar with one of them. As a result, I got the others' phone numbers from the participant I was familiar with. The three Finnish participants took part in the interview within a period of six months from the day I sent the e-mail to them whereas the three Greek participants participated in the interview within a week's period from the day of the phone calls. All the six interviews took place from January to June in year 2014.

All the six participants were entitled to teach English as a second language in upper secondary schools since all of them had their university studies in a department of English and all of them had their pedagogical studies as well. In addition, they all held a master's degree in English and they were all experienced teachers with more than a decade of teaching experience in English. As a matter of fact, one participant was to be a pensioner the next year of the interview. As far as their gender and age are concerned, all the six participants were women between 40 and 60 years of age.

The next section focuses on the data collection of this study in detail. More specifically, it focuses on the process of the six interviews.

### **6.3 Data collection**

The interviews took place from January to June in year 2014 either in the participants' workplace or in their homes. Three interviews took place in Jyväskylä, in Finland and the other three took place in Thessaloniki, in Greece. The interviews were contacted individually and the language used was English. The choice of the language was necessary regarding Finnish teachers since English was the common language between us. However, English was used with the Greek participants as well despite the fact that all of us could speak Greek. This happened because they were teachers of English and therefore, they could certainly conduct an interview in English, especially when it regards the purposes of a master's thesis. The same argument was valid for the Finnish participants, too. No participant, Finnish or Greek, had any difficulty in answering the interview questions due to the use of English. All of them expressed their opinions easily and fluently showing that they had a really good command of English. The interviews lasted between 25 and 45 minutes each. What is more, all the participants were informed of the topic of the interview beforehand so that they could

feel confident in their answers and comfortable with the topic. They were also aware of the number of interview questions they would have to answer so that they could approximately calculate how long the interview would take. After all, nobody paid any attention to time since they all focused on answering the interview questions. However, they were not shown the specific interview questions so that they could not prepare their answers beforehand and give favourable answers. I think that informing the participants of the topic of the interview was necessary and ethically right because in this way, I allowed the participants to get acquainted with the main topic of discussion and produce as much as they could in their answers without having been totally prepared beforehand knowing the exact interview questions.

It is important to say that all the participants gave me their consent orally to use their answers for my purposes since they already knew why I needed these interviews. Before the interviews were about to start, I asked each participant some ice-breaking questions such as how they were doing on that particular day and how long they have been teaching English and whether they liked the job of teaching English or not. These ice-breaking questions were not recorded so that the participants could feel comfortable with the interview to follow.

Once the interview began, the interview questions were asked one after the other after the participant had finished with his/her answer. Every interview question dealt with a specific theme and all the ten interview questions answered the two main issues of this study. The first issue was L2 writing and the second one was L2 written feedback. The interview questions can be found in Appendix 1. The participants were asked to answer freely by explaining their own opinion either by analysing the questions theoretically or by giving an example or by using both.

At the end of the interviews, I asked all the participants whether they would like to add anything as a conclusion. The participants were urged to express their own opinions unbiased and freely and the atmosphere in the interviews was relaxed without any trace of hurry, anxiety or inconvenience. This was surprising thinking that we were not familiar except for one participant. Furthermore, the recording did not appear to be a problem and the participants were not distracted by it and the interview continued smoothly. The interviews were close to friendly conversations with both parts being comfortable and relaxed in their roles.

As far as the recording is concerned, I used a new, professional voice recorder so that any misunderstandings were avoided. In this way, I could focus on the content of the interview and the participants' answers without having to keep notes and lose track of the whole interview. Besides, a voice recorder could record all the information precisely whereas keeping notes could be more of a summary of important pieces of information. Moreover, an advantage of recording an interview is that it can capture the tone of the participants' voice, any laughter, gaps or unfinished phrases. Yet, the focus of this study is the analysis of the content of the interviews, not the meaning of all these gaps or unfinished phrases.

The next section focuses on the content analysis as the main method of data analysis of this study.

#### **6.4 Content analysis**

Qualitative content analysis consists of many techniques that are useful for the systematic analysis of texts (Mayring 1983, as quoted by Mayring 2000). However, the main idea of this analysis is the maintenance of the advantages of qualitative content analysis and the transfer and development of these advantages to interpretative steps of analysis (Mayring 2000). Moreover, anything from transcripts of interviews to video tapes and documents can be subjected to content analysis (Mayring 2000). Furthermore, content analysis analyses not only the explicit content of the material, that is, the main ideas of the text, but also the hidden, implicit content (Mayring 2000). This depends of course on the aims of the analysis (Mayring 2000). In conclusion, qualitative content analysis is an approach which follows certain content analytical rules and a set of steps in analysing texts (Mayring 2000).

As a result of the above mentioned description, qualitative content analysis has four requirements (Mayring 2000). First, the material (or data) should fit in a specific model of communication. In other words, there are certain things that should be determined such as the situation of text production. Second, there should be rules of analysis according to which the material is analysed step by step. Third, there should be categories in the analysis. This means that texts interpreted should be put in certain categories. Fourth, there should be criteria of reliability and validity. In other words, there should be regular checks for the reliability and validity of the text interpretation.



Concerning qualitative content analysis, there are two procedures that can be followed and these are the *inductive* and the *deductive* category developments (Mayring 2000). The aim of the inductive procedure is to create a criterion of definition coming from the theoretical background and research question(s) (Mayring 2000). Then, the material (or data) is processed based on this criterion and categories are carefully created. Then, these categories are revised and they are reduced to the necessary ones and their validity is checked.

The aim of the deductive procedure is to offer explicit definitions, examples and coding rules for each category determining to which category a text passage can go (Mayring 2000). The category definitions are created in relation to theory and material (Mayring 2000).

The same inductive-deductive categories are presented by Elo and Kyngäs as well. In other words, qualitative content analysis can be done in an inductive or deductive way and the choice is defined by the purpose of the study (Elo and Kyngäs 2008). In the inductive way, the categories derive from the data whereas the deductive way takes place when the analysis is based on previous knowledge and the aim of the study is to test a theory (Kyngäs and Vanhanen 1999, as quoted by Elo and Kyngäs 2008).

Therefore, content analysis based on the inductive way moves from the specific to the general which means that specific data is examined and then it is combined into a whole or general statement or theory (Chinn & Kramer 1999, as quoted by Elo and Kyngäs 2008). In contrast, the deductive way starts with a general theory or model and thus, it moves from the general to the specific (Burns and Grove 2005, as quoted by Elo and Kyngäs 2008).

It is important to mention that this study is going to follow the inductive procedure. In other words, there will be the analysis of the data collected from the interviews which will lead into conclusions. In other words, there is specific data that is analysed and then it is combined into a general conclusion.

The next section describes how the data is transcribed and how content analysis is used for analysing the interviews of this study.

## 6.5 Transcribing and analysing the data of this study

The first step for the recorded data was to transcribe each interview individually starting from the first one and finishing with the sixth one. There was no use of computers but only the use of the voice recorder where all the interviews were recorded.

Therefore, I first started listening to the first interview transcribing all of its content little by little using the rewind and forward buttons. I must mention at this point that the speed of the voice recorder was not slowed down. It was exactly the same speed as when the interviews took place. Moreover, the transcription was written on paper and not directly in the computer because I wanted to focus on the content of the interviews without polishing the text. After the transcription of the first interview, the same happened with the rest five interviews.

After that, the handwritten transcriptions were typed and polished in the computer. For this purpose, codes were used. In particular, **I** was used to refer to the interviewer/writer of this thesis and **Pa-Pf** were used to refer to the participants of this study. In particular, **Pa-Pc** refers to the Finnish participants and **Pd-Pf** refers to the Greek participants of this study. These codes were also mentioned explicitly at the beginning of every interview and then throughout the transcripts showing clearly who speaks each time. Moreover, every individual interview was mentioned as **INTERVIEW A-INTERVIEW F** at its beginning. In addition, the lines of the transcripts were numbered beginning from one at the beginning of every interview. Coding was also used for the extracts that are found in the chapter of the findings to indicate where every extract has been taken from the transcripts. This kind of coding has the following form: C, 234-236 where the letter shows the interview from which the extract has been taken from and the numbers show the specific lines in the interview.

Because the focus of the analysis is on the content of the interviews, the transcription is not as detailed as it could be focusing only on some transcription conventions which are the following:

Overlapping speech	/.../
Unfinished phrase	...
Unclear phrase/word	(something)

(Adapted from Dufva 2011:145)

After the transcription, the analysis took place. In order for the analysis to happen, I had to read the transcripts carefully keeping notes so that I could structure the data first mentally and then in a written form. The findings from the interviews showed that there are ten themes in this study. These themes are divided into categories. Examples of two themes and their categories are illustrated in Figure 1:

Figure 1. An illustration of two themes and their categories

<p><b>1 Forms of written feedback:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Commentary/corrections in the text produced by learners</li> <li>- Minimal marking</li> </ul>
<p><b>2 Focus of written feedback:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- On accuracy</li> <li>- On content</li> </ul>

As mentioned in the last section, content analysis follows the two phases of making themes and of grouping the data into categories. Since this study is based on a theory-driven analysis, the themes were created on the basis of the background literature before the analysis. This means that all the interview questions were compiled out of the background literature of this study. However, the categories were created out of the participants' answers.

The next chapter focuses on the findings of this study.

## 7 FINDINGS

In this chapter, the data from the six interviews is reported. For this purpose, the excerpts from the data are presented in numbered extracts. Every interview question is a separate section in this chapter forming the ten main themes of this study. More specifically, the first two sections respond to the first research question which has to do with L2 writing and the rest eight respond to the second research question which focuses on L2 written feedback. The research questions are mentioned at the beginning of every section so it is clear to the reader which research question every section responds to. Moreover, all the participants' answers have been categorized. The main themes and the categories are written in **bold** letters and the numbered extracts in English.

After the excerpts from the data are presented in extracts, a summary is written at the end of every section. This summary summarises the participants' answers on every single section and it is separated by a title in order to facilitate the reader. Moreover, there is a paragraph with comparisons among the six participants at the end of this summary.

In general, the chapter of the findings helps readers understand the meaning and interpretation of the data collected since the data is followed by some analysis. Based on the participants' answers, there are also some conclusions at the end of this study.

The first section of this chapter focuses on the first theme of this study, that is, the importance of teaching and learning L2 writing nowadays.

### 7.1 The importance of teaching and learning L2 writing

This first theme of this study answers the first research question, that is, what the participants' opinions are about L2 writing. Out of the participants' answers to the theme of **the importance of teaching and learning L2 writing nowadays**, four categories are created. These are drawn from the content of the participants' answers and they are the following: **active as a language learner**, **one of the four skills**, **job reasons/studies abroad** and **learning in depth**.

The first category created out of the participants' answers is that of **active as a language learner**. It is claimed that L2 writing is important to be learnt and taught

because learners have to be active in the process of learning a language otherwise getting only information is not sufficient and helpful in learning an L2. This is illustrated in extract (1):

*(1) for the students. It is, it is. Well, it's not just possess and get the information but you have to be active as a language learner as well and that's why writing is important as well. So, when it comes to writing, it's a bit of question of grammar as well, you have to notice certain rules, so writing is important as well (A, 4-8).*

What is also mentioned in this extract is that writing includes certain grammar rules that learners should take into consideration if they want to be successful in writing. In other words, it is implied that writing in L2 requires the help of another aspect of the language, that of grammar. However, in any case, learners have to be active in order to learn how to write.

The second category created out of the participants' answers is that of **one of the four skills**. This means that L2 writing is seen as one skill out of the four in the English language and that is the reason why **teaching and learning L2 writing nowadays** is important. This idea is shown in extracts (2) and (3):

*(2) it's one of the four skills that you have to be aware of when studying a foreign language. And then it's a question of choosing the right words as well, choosing the right register and there are so many levels in writing as well so you have to be aware of. So, I would claim that you can't manage on your own, all of it, all skills and understanding, reading, comprehension so, you have to be able to write as well (A, 10-15).*

*(3) yeah, of course. They go together, don't they? And, given that, lots of people actually need to learn to write because they are either planning to study abroad on a postgraduate degree or they are planning to live abroad. I guess they do need to improve their writing skills along with all the other skills that are important in a language (D, 3-7).*

Extract (2) clearly focuses on the writing as **one of the four skills** that are important in learning an L2. In this extract, it is mentioned that writing includes many things among which is the choice of right words and that of right register. Moreover, it is mentioned that writing is a skill that learners have to learn if they want to manage reading, comprehension and the other skills in general. In other words, writing is not a separate skill in a language and it is important to be learnt by learners.

Extract (3) also makes a quick reference to writing as **one of the four skills** in English. Among all other information, it is claimed that if learners want to learn how to write, it is important to learn it along with all other skills in English. This shows that writing is seen as a skill.

The third category created out of the participants' answers is that of **job reasons/studies abroad**. It is mentioned that learning how to write in English is important because learners may have to use English in order to express themselves in a future job. This is illustrated in extract (4):

*(4) because you might have a job later on where you have to express yourself, maybe your working language is English, you have to express yourself in English and to write reports and so on (B, 5-7).*

Furthermore, it is mentioned that English is everywhere nowadays and no matter what job somebody does, English is the language that everybody is going to need at some point in his/her life. This is illustrated in extract (5):

*(5) yes, of course. You need English everywhere you go nowadays. I mean, no matter what you do, either chef or, I don't know, a teacher, or anything, a lawyer you will always need English and you have to know how to write it also, how to speak and how to write. It's really important (C, 3-6).*

Moreover, it is explained that, since many people wish to work abroad or study abroad, learning how to write is important nowadays. This idea is illustrated in extract (6):

*(6) yeah, of course. They go together, don't they? And, given that, lots of people actually need to learn to write because they are either planning to study abroad on a postgraduate degree or they are planning to live abroad. I guess they do need to improve their writing skills along with all the other skills that are important in a language (D, 3-7).*

In addition, it is mentioned that learning how to write in L2 is important because many people are looking for a job abroad or for studies abroad. This is shown in extract (7):

*(7) very much especially as due to the economic crisis lot of people want to leave Greece and go, work or study abroad but not only that because we are in the European Union (something) becoming a small place people will be having dealings with people from other countries and the international language at the moment, the lingua franca, is English (E, 3-7).*

In extract (7), apart from the job reasons and studies abroad, it is also mentioned that since we live in the European Union, countries are closer to each other and English has become the lingua franca stressing in this way **the importance of teaching and learning L2 writing nowadays**.

The fourth category created out of the participants' answers is that of **learning in depth**. In other words, it is believed that knowing how to write properly in English is equal to knowing English in depth and not superficially. This is illustrated in extract (8):

*(8) because you don't want to learn a language superficially, you want to learn in depth (F, 13-14).*

However, it is argued that **the importance of teaching and learning L2 writing** is not clearly seen by learners. Instead, it is claimed that they find it boring and difficult and that they want to avoid it if they can. Learners want to find the easy way, just being able to communicate mainly by speaking. This is illustrated in extracts (9) and (10):

*(9) not at the students' point because they want to find the easy way, just to be able to communicate. But they do not know that this is supposed to have a basis which is the writing and everything (F, 3-5).*

*(10) they find it boring, not unimportant. Boring, difficult, sure they want to escape anyway. They can, unless of course, you have a very conscious student who really likes to learn in depth (F, 8-10).*

It is important to mention that according to extract (10), it is not that learners find L2 writing unimportant but rather boring and difficult. This implies that learners recognise the value of L2 writing but they are too young to incorporate it in their learning process. Instead, as it is mentioned in the same extract, they prefer to avoid it. However, this does not mean that they do not appreciate it.

Another observation in the same extract is that not all learners find L2 writing boring. There are those learners that are hard-working and they really like to learn in depth. This observation reinforces the viewpoint that learners recognise the value of writing and that not all learners find it difficult and boring.

*Summary of the theme “the importance of teaching and learning L2 writing”*

This summary describes a general viewpoint of the findings of the first theme. As it has been mentioned, the first theme includes four categories which are the following: **active as a language learner, one of the four skills, job reasons/studies abroad and learning in depth.**

In the first category of **active as a language learner**, the findings show that learners have to be active because otherwise they may not learn the L2 properly and they may not learn how to write in English as well. In other words, learning how to write properly in English has to do with the active nature of learners in class. The more involved learners are in the writing process, the better they are going to learn how to write in English.

The second category of **one of the four skills** finds out that L2 writing is an important skill out of the four in English. Based on this finding, it is assumed that it is important to teach and learn L2 writing since writing is one of the main four skills in English.

The third category of **job reasons/studies abroad** concludes that L2 writing is important nowadays because many people decide to work or study abroad. It is concluded that no matter what job or studies somebody does, the learning of L2 writing is not only important but also necessary. Especially with the European Union, countries come close to each other and the need for knowing how to write in English becomes more demanding.

The findings of the fourth category of **learning in depth** show that knowing how to write in L2 is a synonym of learning a language in depth. In other words, it is important to learn how to write in English because this means that learners know the language in depth and not superficially. It is not only speaking or reading in English but also writing in it.

Comparing the findings for the first theme, it is apparent that all the six participants agree on **the importance of teaching and learning L2 writing nowadays.** However, they have different reasons for justifying their opinions. Four out of the six participants argue that knowing how to write in English is important when work or studies abroad are involved. They claim that it is mandatory to know how to write in English because it is useful for writing reports, for example. In contrast, one



participant claims that knowing how to write in English is not so appreciated by learners. Instead, he/she claims that they usually find it boring and time-consuming. This opinion has not been expressed by any other participant and this makes the difference in his/her answer. Of course, this participant does not claim that every learner thinks so but rather that the majority of them think so.

The next section focuses on the second theme of this study which describes the **text types that learners produce** at the level of upper secondary school.

## 7.2 Text types that learners produce

**Text types that learners produce** is the second theme of this study and it answers the first research question that focuses on what the participants' opinions are about L2 writing. In other words, this theme responds to the same research question as the previous theme and actually, it is the last theme responding to the first research question of this study. The participants' answers to the theme of **text types that learners produce** create the following two categories: **exam-based text types** and **non exam-based text types**. By **non exam-based text types**, I mean text types that are not tested in exams.

The first category created out of the participants' answers is that of **exam-based text types**. This category was easy for the participants to answer perhaps due to its practical and easy nature and the fact that the participants are experienced teachers of English.

To begin with, it is claimed that learners mostly write reviews, opinion essays and summaries. This is illustrated in extract (11):

*(11) a review, they make reviews, they may get formal writings, for example a topic, for example we might give a topic from the matriculation exam, our final exam. Yes, the previous ones because we can't know the ones that are coming this spring, for example but the ones that are used already so we have those formal writings, yes, opinion writings yes, anything, anything. Yes, summaries. It varies from one course to another (A, 43-45, 50-52, 55).*

It is worth mentioning that learners practice writing reviews based on topics of previous matriculation exams. This means that writing reviews is part of these exams and perhaps learners would not have to write reviews if they were not part of these

exams. In other words, many of these **text types that learners produce** are somehow dictated by exams.

It is also mentioned that learners tend to write mostly short or long essays. This is shown in extract (12):

*(12) they can write short essays, those tasks are in the book, they can write them in their notebooks and I check them, not all, but I may check one, two, three, four, five this time and next time another pupils' short essays, I don't have time to check all 25, 30 essays and then, we write long essays from 150 words to 250 words and I'm very strict about this length because when they will matriculate, they have to be exact in the word amount (B, 34-40).*

One observation here is that there is no reference to specific text types apart from the length of the essays. For example, these essays are not classified into specific types such as opinion essays, for and against essays, letters, reports or any other type of writing. They are all either long or short, simple essays. However, it can be argued that they are already classified into essays in general instead of mentioning every single **text type that learners produce**.

Moreover, it is argued that in the past learners wrote book reviews as homework. However, this does not happen anymore because of plagiarism from the Internet. This is illustrated in extract (13):

*(13) you know, about these reviews, we earlier had a book review, they had to read an English novel, novel yes, a book. They could choose it, but then we had decided among my colleagues that we don't write, we don't give them anymore orders to read and write reviews because they take them from the Internet (B, 72-76).*

Here, there is a reference to plagiarism once more. It is explained that the reason for not allowing learners to write book reviews is plagiarism from the Internet, that is, copying other people's opinions.

Furthermore, it is mentioned that in upper secondary school learners focus on assignments such as letters to the editor depending of course on the subject that there is every time. This is illustrated in extract (14):

*(14) well, in lukio there are different courses that focus on different themes so, it depends on what course you are teaching so these few courses that I have, the other one, well, actually it is the same course, I just have*

*different groups so the emphasis is on society and this one assignment or what task was to write, letter to the editor (C, 46-50).*

Additionally, it is claimed that learners can write summaries. This is illustrated in extract (15):

*(15) oh, good that you mention that. Yes, good that you mention. Yes, we wrote, yes, everybody wrote also a summary, yes, that was one assignment. True (C, 59-61).*

Moreover, it is highlighted that the **text types that learners produce** include all kinds of writing that exams test such as opinion essays and for and against essays.

Moreover, according to this opinion, learners write all kinds of letters and reviews such as formal letters or film reviews. They also write articles, reports and stories.

This is illustrated in extract (16):

*(16) yeah, text types. Essays basically because this is what they ask for in exams, discursive kind of compositions, opinion essays, for and against essays, essays suggesting solutions to problems and then there are the letters, the formal and informal letters sent to friends and formal letters of application, to require information, to make a complaint perhaps. Some of them, for some exams also teach reviews, we also teach film reviews perhaps or restaurant reviews or book reviews and also articles, reports, stories (D, 49-56).*

Again, one observation in extract (16) is that all these text types that learners produce are somehow obligatory for learners because of exams. In other words, learners have to write these texts as practice for upcoming exams. Nobody knows if they would have to write them.

Additionally, it is claimed that learners write a lot of essays as well as articles, letters, reports, reviews and e-mails. According to this opinion, e-mails have substituted traditional letters. This opinion is illustrated in extract (17):

*(17) well, most of the time, they do a lot of essays because the majority of exams ask for just essays but because some of them may do Cambridge, because I think it gives you a more rounded education, I try to give them several (something) of text types. For example, articles, letters, reports, reviews, e-mails which could be considered the same as letters, not just essays so they get a chance to express themselves especially through articles, you can express yourself more than just through a formal essay which is restricted in its expression, I think (E, 21-28).*

Here again, exams are mentioned as the reason behind the choice of the specific **text types that learners produce**. Essays are the main kind of text because this is what is tested in exams.

In addition, it is argued that learners write essays and articles where they can add a dose of humour or description. This is illustrated in (18):

*(18) well, I have to recall my recent years' students which are usually proficiency level and they have to write essays. But, I would say that they also like writing articles especially descriptive articles where they can include some humour, description, you know, anything challenging anyway (F, 29-32).*

The second category created out of the participants' answers is that of **non exam-based text types** that learners produce. These text types are not tested in exams and thus, learners feel free to write them without any pressure.

It is mentioned that learners write, apart from essays, poems as well. This is illustrated in extract (19):

*(19) they write poems as well. So, for example, in the culture course they write poems (A, 52-53, 55-56).*

Moreover, it is argued that learners may write stories if they are part of exams but not poems which fall short of their interest. This is illustrated in extract (20):

*(20) Not if they don't have to, creative stories yes. They have to describe something, yes but poems no. At least, not yet I haven't met anyone who would like to write a poem but then again, teenagers and early 20 somethings are not into poetry very much. So, no (F, 35-38).*

This idea refers to upper secondary school learners and not to younger learners.

### ***Summary of the theme "text types that learners produce"***

This summary presents a general viewpoint of this theme. The findings of this theme are classified into two categories which are the following: **exam-based text types** and **non exam-based text types**.

As regards the first category of **exam-based text types**, the findings show that upper secondary school learners mainly write essays of all kinds, articles, letters, reviews and reports because these are mandatory as part of exams. Some examples of essays are opinion essays and essays suggesting solutions to problems. Reviews may include

book reviews, film reviews and restaurant reviews. Letters can be letters to the editor or letters requesting information.

Concerning the second category of **non exam-based text types**, the findings show that there are mainly two kinds of such texts, creative stories and poems. In other words, learners write either stories or poems.

Comparing the findings concerning this theme, what can be concluded is that all the six participants agree on the fact that learners in upper secondary school mainly compose essays, articles or any other form of **exam-based text types** since this is a requirement in their exams. They do not seem to deviate from this schedule since exams are formal and there is no extra time for other kinds of writing. However, only two out of the six participants state that writing poems or stories is part of their lessons in spite of exams.

The next section describes the third theme of this study which focuses on how the participants try to define written feedback.

### 7.3 Defining written feedback

**Defining written feedback** is the third theme of this study and it answers the second research question of this study, that is, what the participants' opinions are about L2 written feedback. The participants' answers create three categories which are the following: **giving comments at the end of the text**, **correcting errors in the text** and **encouraging learners**.

The first category created out of the participants' answers is that of **giving comments at the end of the text**.

It is mentioned that **defining written feedback** is a difficult task. However, it is argued that feedback is **giving comments at the end of the text** which can refer to grammar, style of the text or choice of words. It is also mentioned that these comments do not tend to be long if learners constitute a big group. This is illustrated in extract (21):

*(21) ok. Defining feedback. It's a difficult talk. It's giving a grade of course, that's one way to show how we manage to do it then, I tend to write something down as well, for example, when it comes to grammar that you have to pay attention to these aspects of grammar. I might*

*write something about the style, that's giving feedback as well and the choice of words, sometimes, I write on that as well so feedback can be all, it can be in written as well so those, I use those. But, if I have big groups, I probably don't write very long text at the end of the writing (A, 70-77).*

One observation in extract (21) is that there is a reference to grading apart from **giving comments at the end of the text**. However, it is not stressed as much as giving comments. Instead, most time is spent on talking about comments at the end of the text and about what kind of comments are written and about the fact that in big groups short feedback is given. This means that grading is not the most important part of giving feedback although it is mentioned as something that should be there and as something that is practiced.

In addition, it is mentioned that **giving comments at the end of the text** is one good practice, too. In other words, some comments are written at the end of the text praising either the language or the contents of the text. Moreover, long comments are not given to learners either. This is shown in extract (22):

*(22) usually, I correct all mistakes with red pen and then, I might sometimes write a few lines concerning the essay, sometimes I give praise for the contents and sometimes for the language but I don't write very long feedbacks (B, 85-88).*

It is apparent from extract (22) that **giving comments at the end of the text** is something that is not done regularly. It is sometimes that such comments are written and the nature of these comments is usually praise. This shows that there is a preference for being quite positive towards learners instead of giving some valuable advice in these comments, something that learners are going to pay attention to and use in their next text. In other words, these comments may be nice, encouraging and positive but they do not offer anything to learners. They are only useful for their psychology. Another observation is that, according to this opinion, these end comments are not that long.

It is also argued that **giving comments at the end of the text** is important because learners need to take notice of their errors. It is also mentioned that these kinds of comments are not harsh. According to this opinion, the comments should also make learners happy and let them try again by showing them their errors. This is shown in extract (23):

*(23) but, then I find that I have to make some comments, not very harsh ones, unless the error is repeated and I honestly believe that they haven't taken notice of my previous comments, so I urge them to, please, take a look and please, give them a try. I would be glad to see them write the same piece of writing again if they are to consider the errors they made. But, I also find it very important to make some very good comments when there is room for good comments. I very much want to give them a go and to make them happy (F, 49-57).*

What can be mentioned is that according to this idea, the comments at the end of the text not only should focus on errors but also on praising and on giving positive feedback so that learners try harder next time. In other words, these comments can have value for learners but they may also be just praising.

The second category created out of the participants' answers is that of **correcting errors in the text**.

It is mentioned that **defining written feedback** cannot be without **correcting errors in the text**. It is claimed that there should be comments in the middle of the text correcting learners' errors. This is illustrated in extract (24):

*(24) yes, it has to be. Yeah. So, the student understands what I mean with that. But I only tend to correct the writings as well, so, if there's room for choice of words, I write another so that is giving feedback as well. Ok. So, I mean in the middle of the text, not just at the end of the text. Or then I might make an exclamation mark if I think it's well-said or a good choice or whatever (A, 81-85).*

In this extract, it is underlined the fact that apart from **giving comments at the end of the text**, correcting errors in the middle of the text is necessary. These corrections may refer to word choice or to exclamation marks if something is well-written.

Furthermore, it is claimed that **correcting errors in the text** is a good practice as regards **defining written feedback**. It is mentioned that correcting grammar errors with red ink is a favourite practice. This is illustrated in extract (25):

*(25) usually, I correct all mistakes with red pen and then, I might sometimes write a few lines concerning the essay, sometimes I give praise for the contents and sometimes for the language but I don't write very long feedbacks. Because I'm more a grammar person than literary person (B, 85-88, 92).*

Therefore, although many lines are spent on talking about comments at the end of the text, it is highlighted that correcting grammar errors in learners' text with red ink is a preferred choice.

Moreover, it is mentioned that **correcting errors in the text** is not the most important thing. However, correcting errors in grammar or in vocabulary mostly as well as spelling errors is something that takes place. This idea is shown in extract (26):

*(26) well, I try to show them what they did wrong. Of course, I will correct the grammar or the vocabulary mostly. There are serious errors and not very serious errors. For example, I will correct a spelling mistake here and there but not all the time because that's not the most important thing (F, 46-49).*

The third category created out of the participants' answers is that of **encouraging learners** as a way of **defining written feedback**.

It is claimed that through feedback, learners are encouraged to learn from their errors. This is illustrated in extract (27):

*(27) well, for me, I think I would like to encourage my students, not merely give them feedback of the mistakes that they have made. Yes, I was trying to find some positive, some positive even to those who have done really, really bad (C, 81-83, 87-88).*

Furthermore, it is claimed that despite the fact that learners are encouraged through feedback, writing comments to draw learners' attention to their own errors when they are repetitive is something not to be forgotten. This is illustrated in extract (28):

*(28) I try to find something, always there should be something positive to say. But, of course, something like "next time try to focus on this and that" or if there is something constant mistake that the student makes all the time (C, 90-92).*

It is also mentioned that feedback is mainly encouraging and guiding learners than **correcting errors in the text**. Accordingly, feedback has to be constructive and not destructive or negative criticism. This is shown in extract (29):

*(29) yes, written feedback as well as spoken feedback has to be constructive. It has to be aiming not only towards correcting, I could say not so much correcting, more encouraging and guiding. It should enable students to feel that they can do it (something) and the next one will be even better and then encourage to do it. It must never ever be deconstructive if you like or destructive as it can be. It has to aim*



*towards helping the student rather than negatively criticising him (E, 55-61).*

***Summary of the theme “defining written feedback”***

This summary gives a general description of the theme **defining written feedback**. The findings from this theme are classified into three categories which are the following: **giving comments at the end of the text**, **correcting errors in the text** and **encouraging learners**.

The findings from the first category show that **giving comments at the end of the text** is one of the most common ways for defining written feedback. Accordingly, end comments are quite necessary and they may either be about learners’ errors or these end comments may praise learners for their well-written text.

In the second category of **correcting errors in the text**, the findings show that it is the second most common way for **defining written feedback**. According to what is said, these corrections can refer to grammar or vocabulary errors or even spelling errors. However, it is explained that correcting such errors is not the most important thing when giving feedback. End comments seem to be more important.

**Encouraging learners** is the third category for the theme of **defining written feedback**. It is believed that written feedback should always be encouraging and constructive to avoid disappointing learners. In other words, learners should be able to learn from it and not quit writing as a reaction to critical feedback.

The comparison among all the findings of this theme indicate that three out of the six participants agree that **giving comments at the end of the text**, that is, evaluative feedback, is how they prefer to give learners their feedback. In other words, according to these three participants, this kind of feedback is the best for learning and improving in writing.

Although **correcting errors in the text** is a common practice among the participants, they argue that it is not as important as end comments. This means that they correct errors perhaps because they have to and not because they want to. They may not believe in this practice so much but they may be forced to correct learners’ errors due to exams. The participants who support this category are the same three as those in the category above.

In addition, only two participants focus on **encouraging learners** as the main purpose of written feedback. For them, giving comments or grades is not the point of giving feedback as much as taking into consideration learners' psychology. Even if feedback stresses some problems in the writing, it has to be given in an encouraging way and not in a negative way.

One more observation is that only one participant mentions that feedback should also include grading. In other words, he/she is the only one who makes a reference to summative assessment, that is, giving grades to learners. However, five out of the six participants do not mention it perhaps because it is not important to them, because they do not practice it or because they take it for granted and they forget to mention it.

The next section describes the fourth theme of this study which focuses on the **forms of written feedback** that the participants use when they correct learners' essays.

#### 7.4 Forms of written feedback

**Forms of written feedback** is the fourth theme of this study and it answers the second research question which has to do with the participants' opinions about L2 written feedback. There are specifically two categories created by the participants' answers which are the following: **commentary/corrections in the text produced by learners** and **minimal marking**.

The first category created out of the participants' answers is that of **commentary/corrections in the text produced by learners** when asked about the **forms of written feedback** they prefer to use.

In particular, it is claimed that comments are written at the end of learners' text and there is no use of any rubrics or answer sheet to show learners their errors. In other words, the rubrics give descriptions of several different errors on a separate paper and a teacher marks the errors a learner has made. Accordingly, this is not a usual practice. This is illustrated in extract (30):

*(30) yeah, so both orally and then in written and actually I don't have any answer or, would I say, any sheet where I give feedback, it's just at the end of the writing yeah, yeah, like that. So, I don't have any extra sheet for it (A, 93-95, 98).*

Furthermore, it is mentioned that correcting learners' errors with red ink and then assigning marks is a preferred practice. There are also specific details as regards marking in the particular school. This is illustrated in extract (31):

*(31) I: Mainly you use the pen.*

*Pb: Yes.*

*I: So, you correct in hand, I guess.*

*Pb: Yes, and then, of course I mark them so the best mark is the 99 points and the worst marks can be...very bad essays is about 45 and (something) those notes that, so that, if we divide the points with ten, we get our school number. Because we have the scale from ten to four. Our marks are from ten to four. Ten is the best and four is the worst. And four is not passed (B, 110-117).*

Extract (31) shows that there is a preference to correct learners' errors with red ink throughout the text in detail and then to give a mark. It is not clear whether there are any comments written at the end of learners' texts.

Moreover, the same idea is mentioned below. In other words, there is a preference to correct errors in the middle of the text implying that the correct forms are offered to learners' errors. What is argued though is that only the most important errors are corrected. Furthermore, comments at the end of the text are added. This is illustrated in extract (32):

*(32) yeah, right. Reading it, I can mark in the middle of the text I can correct. Not every mistake but if there is a really bad mistake or, as I said, something that appears constantly then, I mark it there in the middle of the text but then there's more comments at the end (C, 103-106).*

So, in this case, both commentary and corrections in the text are combined as a form of giving feedback.

Another view expressed is that comments and corrections can take place in learners' texts, too. It is said that corrections take place with red ink whereas comments regarding the improvement of the writing are with green ink and they are written at the end of the writing. This is shown in extract (33):

*(33) because you could (something) the mistakes, I do it in red pen but the comments on how to improve it that are very important in feedback, are in green. Because if it's only red, it's too negative, it's "oh, what's this?" Ok? It's chips with ketchup on it (E, 68-71).*

In addition, it is added that the use of green ink is not as discouraging as the use of red ink because green shows constructive criticism and not negative criticism. This is shown in extract (34):

*(34) right. It doesn't make you feel right a bit, it's, it's, I guess you could say (something) it could be better and the comments will be things like "this section has been correct in this way" or "maybe you should add this in this section", "don't write too much this and that in this section". So, constructive criticism in green that they will see that helps them rather than to criticize them (E, 73-78).*

It is apparent that there is a distinction between red and green ink when making corrections and giving comments. This attitude implies that corrections and comments do not carry the same importance in a text. As it is argued, it is the comments that will help in improving learners' text and not so much the corrections of all kinds of errors in it. In other words, it is preferable to focus on the more general structure of learners' text and on the improvements that can take place rather than on grammar or vocabulary errors so much. However, this does not mean a lack of such corrections on grammar or vocabulary.

Moreover, another common practice is to correct learners' errors by producing the correct form without using any codes such as "wo" for word order or "sp" for spelling errors. Such codes are used only when there is a repetitive error and learners should pay attention to such errors. This is illustrated in extract (35):

*(35) well, I do not simply write wrong words or go find or spelling or grammar. I do produce the correct answer, ok? Unless, as I said before, if it is repeated. So, I will have to, you know, to find a way to urge you to find or to take notice because I produced it for you once and I did it twice but then, I will just underline with a red pen or whatever and you'll have to take notice one way or another (F, 70-75).*

In other words, correction codes are used only under certain circumstances, that is, when errors are repetitive. Otherwise, errors are corrected directly by providing the correct forms.

The second category created out of the participants' answers is that of **minimal marking**. Minimal marking refers to a more implicit way of correcting where learners have to find their errors on their own based on certain correction codes provided by the teacher. Such correction codes can be "wo" for word order or "sp" for spelling or

circling or underlining an error. These codes vary from teacher to teacher. However, learners are allowed to know their teacher's codes so that they can correct their errors.

In **minimal marking**, there is the use of symbols such as underlining or circling errors and then learners understand what errors they made and they try to correct them. After this, learners re-write their essays and then, they give it back with the corrections. This is illustrated in extract (36):

*(36) when I correct students' writing I use symbols, is that what you mean? We're circling those spelling mistakes and grammar mistakes and word order mistakes and wrong words used in the wrong place and we have these symbols that we actually specify what kind of error the student has actually done in each case and then what we usually do is that we return the compositions to the students and they see what type of mistake they've actually made and then they try to correct them themselves and they give us the, let's say, improved version next week and we mark the improved version (D, 74-75, 77-84).*

The underlining of learners' errors and the writing of a correction code next to them is also mentioned. For example, "ww" stands for wrong word or "sp" stands for spelling. This idea is illustrated in extract (37):

*(37) well, when it comes to mistakes, let's say, grammatical or wordwise, I usually underline the mistake and write a code next to it. Write "ww" is wrong word, "wo" is wrong word order, "sp" spelling so that I give them an opportunity to think about it again, to correct it and re-write because they always re-write it to me (E, 64-68).*

Next there is a reference to **minimal marking** as a **form of written feedback**, too. However, it is given only under specific circumstances. In other words, **minimal marking** is used only when errors are repetitive because correcting the same errors again and again is exhausting. This is illustrated in extract (38):

*(38) well, I do not simply write wrong words or go find or spelling or grammar. I do produce the correct answer, ok? Unless, as I said before, if it is repeated. So, I will have to, you know, to find a way to urge you to find or to take notice because I produced it for you once and I did it twice but then, I will just underline with a red pen or whatever and you'll have to take notice one way or another (F, 70-75).*

As a result, it seems that making use of **minimal marking** is occasional when it is needed. There is a preference for **commentary/corrections in the text produced by learners** as a form of giving feedback as it is also apparent in extract (38).

*Summary of the theme “forms of written feedback”*

This summary gives a description of the findings of the theme **forms of written feedback**. The findings create the following two categories: **commentary/corrections in the text produced by learners** and **minimal marking**.

The first category is that of **commentary/corrections in the text produced by learners**. It is claimed that writing comments at the end of learners’ texts or correcting learners’ errors in the middle of the text such as grammar or vocabulary is a common practice. It is often that there is the combination of both or the preference of one over the other.

In the second category of **minimal marking**, the findings show that giving feedback in the form of correction codes, underlining or circling is another popular practice among teachers. In this way, learners have to find the errors themselves and correct them. One such code can be “ww” which means ‘wrong word’. The codes are teacher-specific and learners of every teacher understand their meanings.

Comparing the findings regarding this theme, it is apparent that, on the one hand, five out of the six participants focus on giving comments or correcting learners’ errors. This may be the case because the participants have been used to this way of giving feedback and it seems to be easier for them to follow. It is also faster than making correction codes in **minimal marking**. The participants just provide the correct forms and write some comments at the end of the writing. On the other hand, three out of the six participants prefer to use **minimal marking** as a way of giving feedback to learners.

**Minimal marking** takes more time and effort to be realised. It is not a form of written feedback that teachers are used to. Instead, teachers have to devote time in creating and specifying their correction codes and let learners be acquainted with them. However, this form of feedback puts the emphasis more on the learner and less on the teacher because learners are those who have to search for the correct forms and then correct them themselves. In this case, the teacher plays the role of the person who guides them towards the correct forms but without explicit correction. In other words, learners have to be active in **minimal marking** in contrast to **commentary/corrections in the text produced by learners** where the correct forms

are provided by the teacher. When correct forms are provided by the teacher, it is the teacher who does most of the job. He/she is the active person and learners just take a look at the feedback that he/she has written.

The next section describes the fifth theme of this study which is the **effectiveness of L2 written feedback**.

### 7.5 Effectiveness of L2 written feedback

As mentioned before, the **effectiveness of L2 written feedback** is the fifth theme of this study. This theme answers the second research question, too, that is, what the participants' opinions are on L2 written feedback. Two categories are created out of the participants' answers which are the following: **believing in the effectiveness of written feedback** and **doubting the effectiveness of written feedback**.

The first category created out of the participants' answers is that of **believing in the effectiveness of written feedback** when asked whether they believe that their feedback may or may not be effective for their learners.

In particular, it is mentioned that written feedback on learners' essays is effective because learners pay attention to it and they care about their mistakes. This is illustrated in extract (39):

*(39) I: So, do you think that it's useful?*

*Pb: I think yes.*

*I: They pay attention to it and they care about the mistakes and so on.*

*Pb: Yes (B, 140-143).*

Furthermore, it is added that some learners like being given feedback and they may be motivated by it. This is shown in extract (40):

*(40) oh well. Maybe there are some persons who like it, I know some boys they don't care but some girls maybe and maybe some weak, I have a very very weak pupil now, they are in the group, maybe I can motivate her now by writing some feedback (B, 147-150).*

Moreover, it is claimed that written feedback must be effective because learners show progress every week and even every year. Accordingly, learners increase the length of their writing, they make it more elaborate with more advanced vocabulary and in general, their language is more accurate. This is illustrated in extract (41):

*(41) I think it must be useful because I can see big progress every week. And because they start in September with lots of pieces of writing that are, let's say, of the previous level of the student and then (something) we can see some important progress and year by year their writing becomes longer, more elaborate, more to the point (D, 95-99).*

**Believing in the effectiveness of written feedback** is highlighted below, too. It is mentioned that feedback is effective because in the end, learners care about the mark they get so they have to read the teacher's feedback in order to get a high mark. This is illustrated in extract (42):

*(42) it is because if actually they don't read it at all and they make the same mistake, they get a lower grade and I say in red clearly "you should have read my comments". Because grade is important to them at the end of the day. They will start, those who don't normally or automatically read the comments, will start reading the comments because they want a high grade. And I see the difference in the end, I see the difference because people start listening to what I say, I can see the improvement in their composition for those who do look at the comments (E, 93-100).*

Moreover, it is added that feedback is effective because learners read the feedback, they improve their writing and they feel more confident because they know what is asked from them. This is shown in extract (43):

*(43) it's effective because when they read the comments, they do improve it and they produce a better piece of writing and also they learn to understand what the examiner wants from them and help to produce a good piece of writing and they become more confident, you can see it in the writing because they know what you want (E, 113-117).*

One observation in extract (43) is that learners' psychology is seen as evidence for **believing in the effectiveness of written feedback**. In other words, it is not only the good texts that learners may produce based on teachers' feedback but also their confidence about their texts that shows the belief in the effectiveness of written feedback. It is not always a concrete result that makes feedback effective but it can also be an abstract psychological feature such as learners' confidence or joy that shows this effectiveness.

It is also claimed that written feedback is effective because learners follow the advice written, they become better by using the knowledge they have gained and they are happy when they see that what they write is correct. This is illustrated in extract (44):



*(44) for my students, I hope it is. Yes, and it's always a pleasure to see that they follow the advice, they become better and they so much like to use some, you know, fixed phrases and some patterns or something that they know, add something to the whole essay and they're so glad when they see that they did correct, they are able to incorporate the expression they learnt into the essay and I found it correct (F, 83-88).*

In extract (44) the same idea as the last one is also mentioned. It is also learners' joy that shows the belief in the effectiveness of written feedback. It is not only the correct grammar or vocabulary or the correct use of patterns and phrases as it is mentioned but also learners' lifted psychology that highlights the usefulness of feedback.

In the second category of **doubting the effectiveness of written feedback**, it is mentioned that feedback may or may not be effective and useful to learners because some of them care about it but others do not. Therefore, the effectiveness of written feedback is doubted.

It is mentioned that learners do not seem to take advantage of written feedback because they repeat the same errors in the next essay they write and they mainly care only about the mark. Accordingly, there are only few learners who try to benefit from written feedback. This is illustrated in extract (45):

*(45) well, I try to tell it is but I know that some students don't pay attention to it and sometimes I feel that it's a waste of time, they make the same mistakes in the next one as well so, especially when I've talked to other teachers I know that they write quite a lot after the writing and then, we have talked that probably the students don't take the advantage of it. For some reason, they just look at the grade they get and they don't... There are so few students who really want to take the benefit of it and want to learn with the help of it but most of them really, I think, really don't pay attention to that (A, 126-133).*

In extract (45), the mark does not seem to motivate learners to read teachers' feedback like in extract (42) where the mark makes learners pay attention to feedback. In this case, the mark is learners' only main interest and so feedback is ignored.

It is also added that paying attention to feedback or not depends on learners' motivation. Accordingly, some learners just want to pass the exams and they decide to not pay attention to it while others are motivated to learn as much English as possible. This is shown in extract (46):

*(46) yeah. It depends on the person how motivated they are. Or there are some students who just want to pass the course and they think they*

*know English already and they are very...and it is mostly boys who are like that. They know that they know everything when it comes to English and yeah. Well, some of them want to get good praise of course and then some of them are really motivated in a language and they want to put the effort into it and they want to learn more and be better surely (A, 138,141-144,150-152).*

Furthermore, it is claimed that written feedback may or may not be effective.

Accordingly, good learners of English will pay attention to feedback whereas poorer learners will not even care about it. This is illustrated in extract (47):

*(47) well, I hope it is of course but then again I'm not sure. I guess that is... everything that those students who are good at English if I write something, something focus on this and that next time, they will remember it. That is effective for them but those who don't like English, I guess they don't care, they don't care what is there. I don't know if they read it (C, 114-119).*

It is also argued that the reason behind the effectiveness or not of the feedback may be the attitude towards learning in general. Accordingly, better learners will learn from the feedback and they will appreciate its value in contrast to poorer learners who will not pay any attention to it. This is illustrated in extract (48):

*(48) well, maybe it comes to the style of learning, those who are good learners, they understand that it's for them to learn better and to be better so they understand the value of feedback and they want to learn, they find it positive so I guess it's the attitude towards learning in general (C, 125-129).*

To note, the way the style of learning is referred to is wrong since this has to do with the type of learners such as visual, kinaesthetic and so on. Instead, the attitude towards learning in general is meant as it is written in the last line of extract (48).

### ***Summary of the theme “effectiveness of L2 written feedback”***

This summary gives a description of all the results from the theme of **effectiveness of L2 written feedback**. This theme is the fifth of this study and the findings are classified into two categories which are the following: **believing in the effectiveness of written feedback** and **doubting the effectiveness of written feedback**.

The first category shows that written feedback is believed to be effective because learners show improvement in their writing by making fewer errors or by being happy

and confident about their correct writing. Feedback can motivate learners or, to put it in another way, getting higher marks can help in paying attention to feedback.

The second category of **doubting the effectiveness of written feedback** shows the uncertainty about whether learners benefit from written feedback. It is believed that good learners usually take feedback into consideration whereas poor learners do not. They prefer to focus on marks. What is also mentioned is that motivation and attitude towards learning are the keys for taking advantage of feedback.

Comparing the findings regarding the two categories, the results indicate that four out of the six participants believe in the effectiveness of written feedback. They are positive about the fact that learners benefit from their feedback. However, there are two participants who support the idea that they do not know if learners really care about feedback. They appear to be very honest by stating that most learners do not benefit from feedback and very few do benefit from it. Yet, four out of the six participants prefer to look on the bright side of things.

One possible solution to this problem of the degree of the effectiveness of L2 written feedback could be the re-writing of essays by learners. In other words, if learners were forced to revise their essays again, they would probably have to pay attention to the teacher's feedback, too. In this way, feedback would become more effective and valuable for learners.

The next section focuses on the sixth theme of this study which is **making written feedback milder**.

### **7.6 Making written feedback milder**

**Making written feedback milder** is the sixth theme of this study and it answers the second research question which focuses on what the participants' opinions are about L2 written feedback. Based on the participants' answers, there is just one category: **no need for making feedback mild**.

Specifically, it is mentioned that **making written feedback milder** depends on the teacher's personality. However, being direct as a person, always correcting learners' texts explicitly does not mean any kind of insult to them. Therefore, written feedback has to be honest and direct. This is illustrated in extract (49):

(49) *It depends on the personality. I'm very direct as a person, yeah, that depends on the person surely. So, if you somehow want to put it in the brackets or if you want to say directly but, sometimes, I am probably too direct as a person and then it could hurt somebody surely. Yeah. But, I don't want to offend anybody of course but I think I have to say like it is, not make it any milder or make it noisier if it isn't. So, I think it has to be an honest feedback (A, 162-168).*

It is worth noting that being a little harsh in the feedback knowing that learners may get hurt by it is not enough for making feedback milder. This statement shows a strong and determined personality that wants to be honest and fair with feedback no matter its wording and no matter learners' reactions to it.

It is also mentioned that there is **no need for making feedback mild** because it can be written in the way a teacher thinks best. In addition, it is claimed that it depends on learners' personality how offended they may be. This is illustrated in (50):

(50) *Pb: I guess I can write it as I think.*

*I: So, there were no students for example that ever took offense at your way of giving feedback.*

*Pb: No. It depends, it depends on the person because some may feel that I insult them if I'm too direct. It depends (B, 163-166, 169-170).*

Moreover, it is stated that written feedback should not be given in a mild way but rather as it is because then, learners can learn from their errors. Accordingly, the positive aspects of a learner's essay should be noted directly, too. This is shown in extract (51):

(51) *yes. In my opinion, you don't have to put it in any mild way. If there is a similar mistake, there is and the student should correct it and learn. It would be good to learn how to correct it but ok, there might be that similar mistake but then there is something good. Maybe the structure or the theme or it was something else that was good and you have to tell that also. So, it's not only that (C, 167-172).*

In addition, it is argued that written feedback is quite mild and it does not really offend learners but if there is a need for being stricter with those learners who are lazy and do not follow instructions, you have to be good orally so as to tell them off.

However, in the written feedback, everything is mild enough. This is shown in extract (52):

(52) *well, actually I think that the feedback we give is mild. We might become a little bit stricter if we see that the student's actually lazying around and failing to follow instructions and (something) that we have*

*taught. Well, actually we avoid harsh comments, yes, we don't write harsh comments actually. We try to be mild, as mild as possible so as not to offend them and if we want to tell them off, we should be good orally to tell you the truth (D, 111-113, 117-120).*

Again here it is said that being careful with feedback is necessary in order to avoid any misunderstandings with learners and to avoid offending them.

Moreover, some advantages and disadvantages of **making written feedback milder** are discussed. It is argued that mild feedback encourages weak learners to keep on trying and not give up and feel more confident and comfortable with what they write. In other words, mild feedback motivates them to go on. This is shown in extract (53):

*(53) well, if I make it milder, the advantages will be that the students that are weak, yeah, this must be an advantage, a weak student may feel more encouraged to actually (something) trying and not to give up and also mild feedback may actually make the students feel comfortable, may give them some kind of motivation perhaps to try harder next time (D, 135-139).*

In contrast to the above-mentioned advantage, a disadvantage of **making written feedback milder** is the lack of learners' interest in it and for the learning process in general. In other words, learners may totally ignore this kind of feedback. This is illustrated in extract (54):

*(54) well, I think that there's one disadvantage for sure is that they're not very conscientious, are completely indifferent to the learning process and won't benefit, I think, from mild feedback and mild criticism (D, 140-142).*

Moreover, it is mentioned that there is **no need for making feedback mild** because it is not written in an abrupt way. Accordingly, the use of the green pen is not that offensive. This opinion is illustrated in extract (55):

*(55) I don't think so because I tend not to be abrupt when I'm saying it. And also it's, because it's in green, it doesn't hit you as much as the red one, I think. And then the other thing, I don't think that I write something that would insult them either. So, I think I'm quite diplomatic if I could say (E, 124-127).*

Furthermore, one disadvantage of mild feedback is that it is something that learners are not going to take seriously and, as a result, they will not correct their errors. Thus, in this case, feedback needs to be made stricter so that learners can benefit from it.

This idea is shown in (56):

*(56) I think perhaps if I made it milder, then it would not be taken as something serious, they might think that, this is my opinion of course, “ok maybe that’s not that serious, I’m not gonna change it”. For the bits that have to be changed, I mustn’t make it too mild. And if I’ve seen in the re-write, they haven’t looked to the comments at all and they make the same mistakes, then I’m not gonna be mild at all (E, 130-135).*

The same idea of not making feedback milder is also expressed below. The reason for this attitude is that comments are not offensive no matter how direct they are. In any case, at the end of the day, a smile on learners’ face will light no matter what. This is illustrated in extract (57):

*(57) well, no, I would say because again as hard or as harsh as my remarks may be sometimes, they are not offensive. And I try not to use harsh words but maybe I will use, I don’t know, ten exclamation marks, huge ones or say nooooo or something like that, you know a rather big no to show you that really you goofed here ok? But, you know, I will always put a smile on your face when you read that and it will make an impression on you so hopefully you will understand without being offended. So, no, I don’t think I can make this any milder. No. I’m the teacher anyway (F, 122-131).*

One observation here is that it is the teacher’s right not to make the written feedback milder if he/she wishes so. This shows a quite authoritative role in giving written feedback with no room for negotiation.

On the other hand, one advantage of mild feedback is that weak learners can benefit from this kind of feedback because they will not get hurt and their confidence will be maintained high. This is illustrated in extract (58):

*(58) in general, it does because even if you have an indifferent student, I wouldn’t say bad student but an indifferent student, you don’t want to hurt their feelings and you want to boost their confidence (F, 136-138).*

Thus, extract (58) also agrees with extract (57) since both believe that mild feedback helps weak learners to keep their confidence and motivation at high levels. In other words, it encourages them to continue trying and improving their texts.

### ***Summary of the theme “making feedback milder”***

The theme of **making feedback milder** is the sixth in this study and what follows is a summary of all the findings regarding this theme. The findings are classified into one category, that of **no need for making feedback mild**.

In the category of **no need for making feedback mild**, it is argued that feedback is fine and there is no need to make it milder than what it is either because it is already mild enough or because written feedback needs to be direct and to the point so that learners can benefit from it. Moreover, advantages and disadvantages of mild feedback are discussed arguing that mild feedback can benefit weak learners because it encourages them and it boosts their confidence. On the other hand, mild feedback can pass unnoticed by learners if it is too mild. Learners may totally ignore it and they may never learn from it.

Comparing the findings, what can be concluded is that all the six participants think that there is **no need for making feedback mild**. All of them are fine with the way they provide their feedback because it is already written in a way that does not offend learners no matter whether it is direct or explicit. Specifically, there are two out of the six participants who are definite in their opinion that feedback is what it is and it has to be given in an explicit way and that they are the teachers in the class implying that they decide how and what should be included in the feedback. This strong-mindedness though can have a negative impact on learners. In other words, some learners can get offended by this kind of attitude and the atmosphere in the class can easily be disturbed. This attitude can be overwhelming for learners who may feel that they are suppressed by their teachers' feedback.

However, two out of the six participants mention the problems of mild feedback, too. Mild feedback can totally be ignored by learners and, as a result, it will not help in the learning process at all. They may take it lightly and they may not look at it at all. Therefore, there should not be one way of giving feedback but learners' preferences and classroom situations should be considered.

The following section describes the seventh theme of this study which is **learners' responsibility for processing written feedback**.

### **7.7 Learners' responsibility for processing written feedback**

**Learners' responsibility for processing written feedback** is the seventh theme of this study and it answers the second research question which focuses on the participants' opinions on L2 written feedback. There is only one category created out

of the participants' answers which is **being positive to learners' responsibility for processing feedback**.

It is mentioned that learners should be responsible for processing written feedback but there is a doubt about whether they do so. Many learners do not take advantage of it because they may not take studying seriously or they are not motivated enough or they care only about marks. This is illustrated in extract (59):

*(59) surely they have to process it, ok? But, as I said, I have the feeling that they don't take it that seriously, not all of them, they could be more advantage of it, for their own sake if they want it. But I 'm not quite sure depends if they take languages seriously or if it just a class (something) for them, to get a course passed and motivation is the key word here again (A, 190-194).*

Moreover, learners should be responsible because in this way they get better in English. Accordingly, they have to be active and ask questions showing that they try to understand their errors, even the negative ones, and learn from them. This is illustrated in extract (60):

*(60) of course, if they want to get better, that's the whole point of it, if they want to improve themselves in that subject, they have to be active as well and they have to make questions to me as well, what I mean with that and then try to understand and then even the negative one. It's hard but still it makes you better if you want to accept it and you want to improve your skills in that part of writing so I think that we learn from our own mistakes (A, 198-204).*

The same idea of **being positive to learners' responsibility for processing feedback** is supported below, too. It is for learners' advantage if they pay attention to it. However, it is mentioned that thinking like this is an advantage of the older age and not of a younger age. It is also claimed that learners learn from their errors if they pay attention to feedback. This is shown in extract (61):

*(61) Pb: Now when I 'm older I think that it's their advantage but maybe when I was young teacher I just did it because I had to do it.  
I: So, yeah. If I say why you think it's for their best? To learn from their mistakes I guess.  
Pb: Yes (B, 204-205, 209-211).*

It is also argued that learners should be responsible for processing written feedback because if they do so, they will become better in English and they will become more responsible in life in general. Furthermore, it is the role of school to make learners



responsible for their lives later on when, for example, they search for a job. This is illustrated in extract (62):

*(62) no, they should be responsible for that. Because it's for them that we are doing this so that they could manage in life, they could learn how to grow in English and as human beings. They should become more responsible of their own lives in general, yes. No, but really, really that is, I think that is also the school should be about that the student should become aware of the thing that they are responsible of their own lives, that first there was, there is the mother or the parents who are looking for them and at school there are teachers but we are not with them when they are looking for a job or working so we should also give them some tools to learn how to take responsibility of themselves (C, 176, 178-179, 181-187).*

It is mentioned that it is also learners' job to process written feedback and learn from it because in this way, learners can embrace learning, correct themselves and learn on their own. This is illustrated in extract (63):

*(63) learning is actually a very personal issue and I think that the trends in modern education is actually to help the students, is for the teachers to help the students learn on their own and keep reading for as long as they read so actually maybe is not only the teacher's job. It is not only the teacher's job, it is actually the student's job as well. I think that the modern teacher has to do is actually offer students stimuli and through these stimuli the students must be able to embrace learning, to love reading and the teacher must also find ways to help the students correct themselves, help the students find ways in which they can learn on their own (D, 149-154, 155-159).*

In addition, being responsible can make learners' lives in the classroom and out of it easier and they can learn how to focus on what they want to do. This is shown in (64):

*(64) they should be responsible yes, yes, because in this way, life will become easier for them, life in the classroom and perhaps life outside the classroom will become easier for them. They will learn to actually focus on what they are doing and be (something) for life or for what they're doing (D, 173-176).*

It is added that it is learners who are going to sit for exams and that the teacher's job is going to become easier if learners pay attention to feedback and learn from it.

Besides, they have to become autonomous learners using what they have learnt from their teachers. This idea is shown in (65):

*(65) no, students have to be responsible for their (something). Because the teacher is not gonna sit the exam but also if the teacher gonna (something) the student to be almost an autonomous student and learn to*

*work himself maybe it makes the teacher's job a little bit easier but you can give the student the competence they need to feel they're doing it. Yes. You mustn't just spoon feed the student because they are not going to do anything for themselves. They may not take responsibility and they won't learn as much and successfully if they don't do them themselves (E, 141-148).*

One observation is that **learners' responsibility for processing written feedback** is viewed from three different perspectives. First, it is the perspective of exams. Learners have to care about teachers' feedback because there is the need for succeeding in English exams. The second perspective is that of the teacher. Learners should learn from feedback because teachers' role becomes easier in this way. In other words, learning from the feedback is also useful for the teacher. Third, **learners' responsibility for processing written feedback** is helpful for learners, too. In other words, learners can become autonomous using what they have learnt in the class.

Furthermore, learners have to be responsible for processing written feedback. Learners can be challenged but not forced to learn from feedback. In other words, if they do not want to learn, they will not do so. This is illustrated in extract (66):

*(66) no if they don't want to take any notice of what I say or write to them, they will not. I can't force them, I can challenge them to but it is their own responsibility. If they really try hard not to learn, they will not (F, 150-152).*

Moreover, learners should be responsible for processing written feedback because they already know how to do this since they are experienced in this stage of upper secondary school. Accordingly, learners know how to process things and they know what to focus on. Teachers cannot put all the knowledge in learners' heads, they can just probe them up to a point. This is illustrated in extract (67):

*(67) if we talk about teenagers or young adults they have already gone through primary school and high school and they have seen homework over and over again and especially nowadays when children start so young, they are experienced students so they know that they have duties and by now, they supposedly know how to process things and what to get from everything. It's their business to process it. You cannot, you know, open their minds or their head and put everything in there. You, as a teacher, you probe them, you tell them everything you know and you try to find a way to reach them (F, 154-159, 161-163).*

*Summary of the theme “learners’ responsibility for processing written feedback”*

The theme of **learners’ responsibility for processing written feedback** is the seventh in this study and what follows is a summary of the findings regarding this theme. Out of the participants’ answers, there is only one category created, that of **being positive to learners’ responsibility for processing feedback**.

The category of **being positive to learners’ responsibility for processing feedback** shows that learners have to be responsible for processing written feedback. The main reason is that if learners do so, they will improve their English but they will also improve their lives outside the classroom since they will learn to become responsible in their lives, too. Furthermore, learners should take responsibility because they are experienced in upper secondary school and they know where to focus on and what to learn.

Comparing the findings, one can easily discern that all six participants think that the learning process is not only the teacher’s job but also the learner’s. They recognise the fact that they should first guide learners through their errors and that the main responsibility for this is theirs but they also recognise that it is learners’ role to pay attention to the feedback given. In other words, the participants explicitly claim that learners have to be active, if they want to learn from their errors and if they want to be responsible. As a result, their feedback is going to be effective as well. Therefore, both teachers and learners need to be active so that they can achieve good results in learning English.

The next section focuses on the eighth theme of this study which is the **focus of written feedback**.

### **7.8 Focus of written feedback**

The **focus of written feedback** is the eighth theme of this study and it answers the second research question as well, that is, what the participants’ opinions are on L2 written feedback. Out of the participants’ answers, there are two categories created which are the following: focusing **on accuracy** and focusing **on content**. To clarify these categories to readers, on the one hand accuracy refers to errors that focus on grammar, vocabulary, spelling and all these technicalities of the English language and

on the other hand, content refers to content, organisation, ideas, style, paragraphing and so on. In other words, the focus is on the more general aspects of writing.

The first category created out of the participants' answers is that of focusing **on accuracy** when written feedback is given.

To begin with, the first thing that is corrected in learners' texts is grammar because of learners' exams. This is illustrated in extract (68):

*(68) because we are heading towards the final exams it's very often a point of grammar, so mostly grammar. I have to focus quite a lot on that, that they start writing more grammatically correct writings (A, 246-247, 257-258).*

The same focus is mentioned below too, showing that grammatical errors are important to correct. Furthermore, it is noticed that the style of spoken language is not allowed in essays and this is something that has to be corrected. This is illustrated in (69):

*(69) I: But, you also, I guess, focus on the smaller mistakes from words to grammar.  
Pb: Yes, yes, yes. And if they use spoken language phrases, then I note or notice them and then I write that this doesn't suit this type of essay (B, 240-243).*

It is also explained that grammar is of importance because learners first learn the basics in a language and then it is the style or content that follows. This is illustrated in extract (70):

*(70) maybe I first focus on grammar, then on contents and the last is style because I feel that it's my task now in this stage in the high school to teach them the basic things and then the style comes later on for example in the university or wherever they go to study later (B, 249-252).*

Furthermore, focusing on grammar is part of written feedback. However, vocabulary comes last because it is hard for learners to attain the level of vocabulary they need for their class level. Moreover, it is recognised that focusing on accuracy is not the best policy but it takes place because of exams. This is shown in (71):

*(71) the third thing we focus is actually the grammar and structures and syntax. Vocabulary is actually something we do not actually grade very strictly because we do know that there is usually a kind of discrepancy between the level a student is and the vocabulary that he can produce.*

*We are more interested in the students' learning to express themselves accurately rather than actually show their intelligence or their wealth of knowledge or their own developing through a piece of writing in the foreign language. We focus more on accuracy than originality. And that's a minus but for the sake of passing the exams, this is what we do unfortunately (D, 217-221, 236-241).*

In addition, focusing on the correct use of words and expressions in relation to learners' level is mentioned as an important part of feedback. This means that learners in upper secondary school need to use advanced vocabulary and not vocabulary of a beginner's level. This is shown in extract (72):

*(72) I also go through and I circle lots of phrases I can see that are too easy in level. For example, in the proficiency, I don't accept the word "many", I circle it and say use a better expression (E, 189-192).*

Last, spelling or vocabulary is corrected only when errors are conspicuous. It is also the handwriting that should be paid attention to. This is illustrated in extract (73):

*(73) I focus on the grammar because, you know, (something) in the grammar and (something) in the spelling or the vocabulary are not so important, they are not marked down so much unless the errors make you say they are beyond recognition. The handwriting shows, you know, if it's not very smudged or torn or anything, your handwriting shows and the way you wrote things shows how much you respect what you're writing (F, 206-209, 212-214).*

The second category created out of the participants' answers is that of focusing **on content**.

Focusing on the register and the organisation of a text as well as its paragraphing and style are mentioned as important issues when giving feedback. By style it is meant whether a text is or is not nice to read. This is shown in extract (74):

*(74) and the register /.../ how it was organised, yeah, ok and then all those (something) things as well, paragraph division and all that so, if it was well formulated, all that, if there was a good beginning that interested my reading interest and how it ended because that's very important as well. And then, I mean with style, I mean other things as well, the way you're writing, if I liked the style how the student made the writing, if it was humorous or if it was informative so, I mean with style that as well (A, 250-253, 258-261).*

The reason behind focusing **on content** is the final exams that learners in upper secondary school sit for. They have to learn certain things and that is what feedback

focuses on. Accordingly, it is not only for exams but also for life that they are going to learn from teachers' written feedback. This is illustrated in (75):

*(75) oh, well, I find them important for our (something), for our final exam because I want that they get so good grades as they really earn if I know that they are good, I really would like them to do well in their final exam as well so I want to do that for the sake of their further studies as well. It's for their life as well, I think (A, 263-267).*

Focusing **on content** and the style of learners' writing as well as on its paragraphing are also mentioned below. This is illustrated in extract (76):

*(76) the contents, the style, also we have to pay attention to the chapters. A good essay has introduction, main part and the conclusion and sometimes they don't differ those parts, they just write the whole essay in one length. So, I have to also notice about that thing (B, 236-239).*

Focusing **on content** is important in giving feedback. It is claimed that, depending on the type of writing, the focus can be different. For example, regarding summaries, the focus is on the main points of them and whether learners have found them or not. The reason behind focusing **on content** is because of the need not to destroy learners' creativity. This is illustrated in extract (77):

*(77) well, it also depends on the task. If the task is to write a summary, then I focus on the structure of the summary. But more I focus on the structure of the summary, the main points if the student has found the main points of the text. It depends on the task, what is the task. Well, because I think it's much more important to handle the whole thing and if you just focus on very small things it prevents you to be very creative (C, 210-211, 212-214, 220-221).*

Extract (77) is the only one that does not make any reference to errors such as grammar, vocabulary or spelling errors because focusing on such small details kills learners' creativity. Grammar or vocabulary are quite unimportant. In other words, accuracy does not count that much in writing in English. It's mainly the content that is important.

Furthermore, it is argued that at first attention is paid to the topic relevance of the writing, then to the organisation of the writing, that is, how well organized the paragraphs and the topic sentences are and last, to the ideas and content of the writing. This is illustrated in (78):

*(78) first thing we focus is that what the student has written is actually relevant to the topic of the composition. That's one thing. And then, we very much focus on organization, that the paragraphs, that the topic sentences, that the proper link words, that the paragraphs or the sentences will (something) the same paragraphs, that there is a beginning, a middle and an end to the composition, yes. And, what else, finally we grade ideas, the content, the originality of ideas and in-depth analysis of an idea (D, 205-210, 233-234).*

The reason behind focusing **on content** is exams. Moreover, books urge towards the same direction. However, this order of foci appears to be logical. This is illustrated in extract (79):

*(79) this is what I've been told we should do, I mean, this (something) is actually dictated by the exams, by the books. This is what, yeah, it makes sense, I'm not saying that it doesn't make sense, yes. I think it's the most rational thing to do. Yeah, it makes sense and this is what actually all the exams require (D, 245-248, 252).*

Moreover, it is mentioned that structure and balance in learners' essays are important. By structure and balance is meant whether learners write a topic sentence, whether they explain it, whether they are to the point when they write and if paragraphs are balanced in size. This idea is illustrated in (80):

*(80) I prefer to focus on things that, for example, balance and structure. Have they got a topic sentence, if they give an explanation of it, have they answered the question, have they got a paragraph a lot bigger than the other paragraph, is it not balanced, have they used good expressions (E, 185-188).*

Below it is mentioned that the reason for focusing **on content** is exams once more. This kind of errors have to be corrected because exams ask for it but also because teachers should not kill learners' creativity. This is shown in (81):

*(81) because that's what we need to look at. I mean, I don't think there's anything else to focus on. Should we focus on just the mistakes? No. Especially when in some of those difficult exams, they don't focus so much on such mistakes, they focus on the quality and the level in general. It shouldn't be so fixated with mistakes because then you're killing the creativity. We've got to be very careful as teachers not to kill the students' creativity (E, 204-208, 210-211, 214-215).*

Last, it is mentioned that paragraphing is the main focus of written feedback. Learners first have to think of their ideas in a fixed way or else in an order by having clear and distinct paragraphs and then, after they have been taught how to write paragraphs, they are expected to write them correctly. This is illustrated in extract (82):

*(82) on the paragraphing because they have to... well, this won't sound very creative but that's how I have to start because you have to think that you have to put things in boxes at least when you start writing. Until you find the key how to do this ok? And you have to slice the paragraph. So, I expect to find that so, I focus on the paragraphing first of all (F, 198-201, 203,205).*

### ***Summary of the theme “focus of written feedback”***

What follows is a summary of the findings of the eighth theme of this study, that is, the **focus of written feedback**. There are two categories created out of the participants' answers: **on accuracy** and **on content**.

In the first category of focusing **on accuracy**, the findings are definite. Grammar is the main priority along with vocabulary, spelling and even handwriting. The justification is that exams are responsible for focusing on grammar.

The second category of focusing **on content** shows that focusing on aspects of English such as paragraphing, organisation, content and ideas is important, too. Moreover, style and topic relevance are issues included in content.

Comparing the findings from both categories, five out of the six participants focus on both accuracy and content in their written feedback. They start with grammar as their main focus because exams force them to do so. However, they spend a lot of time talking about errors on content such as organization, topic relevance, paragraphing and style instead of talking about grammar which is what they actually focus on. This shows an effort by the participants to present themselves as focusing on the right things, that is, on errors on content instead of errors on accuracy. This may be because they know that what they should do is to focus on content and not on accuracy so much. However, they explain that exams force them to focus on grammar and it is not their first priority when they give feedback.

The next section focuses on the ninth theme of this study which is **the handling of feedback in class**.

### **7.9 The handling of feedback in class**

**The handling of feedback in class** is the ninth theme of this study and it answers the second research question, that is, what the participants' opinions are on L2 written



feedback. There are two categories created out of the participants' answers: **lack of feedback handling in class** and **preference to the feedback handling in class**.

The first category created out of the participants' answers is that of **lack of feedback handling in class**.

It is argued that L2 written feedback should not be exposed to class because it is a personal issue. Accordingly, nobody would like his/her essay to be read or exposed to class because it could hurt his/her feelings. This is illustrated in extract (83):

*(83) actually, it's not, it's only individual so the student him/herself reads it I hope, the student reads it, but I don't share it with others for some reason. I think it's from my side to the other and it deals with that text, if they don't know the text, why should I share it with others? I find that writings are very personal. I wouldn't like mine to be read aloud, probably I wouldn't remember what I've written here and then (A, 349-350, 353-354, 358-360).*

The second category created out of the participants' answers is that of **preference to the feedback handling in class**.

At first, a list is compiled of the grammar errors that the majority of learners had and also another list is created with the percentage of learners who wrote about a certain topic. Moreover, another list is compiled of the most popular topic. In this way, learners do not feel that they are the only ones who made a certain error but that many others did the same. This is shown in (84):

*(84) I have made a common list of things where they made most mistakes in grammar and, also, I let them know how many percent of them wrote on this subject, how many percent on that subject, which subject was the most popular and then, yes, I can list some of the most common mistakes so that everybody becomes aware of that. Oh, I was not the only one, this is a common mistake, yeah (B, 323-328).*

A similar practice is to make a list of errors that learners had and show them to the class and then discuss them. However, it is not only errors written in the list but also great expressions and nice words used by learners or grammatically correct structures. This is illustrated in extract (85):

*(85) I might have written few mistakes that they have made, of course not with the names, but I can show them and we can look at them together and discuss and not just mistakes, sometimes I just write only the very good,*

*there might be a very good expression or very good words that the student has used or very, some kind of perfect grammatical sentence (C, 281-285).*

One observation is that not only are errors stressed but also good aspects of learners' texts. In other words, there is an implicit praise if learners have done well, too.

Moreover, positive comments are presented in the class collectively whereas errors and praise are shared with learners individually. This is illustrated in extract (86):

*(86) we make some positive than negative comments to the class as a group and then maybe we will address some students individually either to praise them or to actually point out one or two negative things (D, 322-325).*

Extract (86) also stresses the value of mentioning the positive aspects of written feedback. In other words, feedback is not only about negative points but also about positive points. Accordingly, these have to be stressed publicly.

In addition, the discussion of errors that are common to all learners in class, collectively, is a common practice but it never happens on an individual level because learners' humiliation has to be avoided. This is shown in extract (87):

*(87) if I see that there's a mistake that all are making, the majority is making, then I'll talk about it in general. I'll not focus on one student and pull him up in front of the class. I would never do that. That's humiliating and I think the feedback is very personal. Never humiliate, always encourage (E, 279-282, 289).*

It is also mentioned that if there are repeated errors and if learners do not understand something, there is going to be a talk about it in general, in class. Learners' names are never revealed to avoid negative exposure in class. This is illustrated in extract (88):

*(88) when I had (something) observations, I see people repeating mistakes or if I see something that we have talked about or I understand that they did not (something) one or two or maybe more, they did not get something, I will not give a name. I would say I saw in some essays that somebody did this and that. Maybe you did not get it right so let's talk about it again or try to focus on that (F, 308-313).*

### ***Summary of the theme "the handling of feedback in class"***

The theme of **the handling of feedback in class** is the ninth theme of this study and the participants' answers create two categories which are the following: **lack of feedback handling in class** and **preference to the feedback handling in class**.

In the first category of **lack of feedback handling in class**, it is argued that written feedback in general and in English as well, is a personal issue and it should not be revealed to others.

The second category of **preference to the feedback handling in class** shows that written feedback should be discussed in class. However, common errors by learners and positive comments should be presented anonymously in class and then be discussed collectively.

Comparing all the results, it is apparent that five out of the six participants agree that feedback can be presented in class anonymously and collectively. This should be the case with both positive and negative feedback. The fact that positive comments are stressed shows that praising learners implicitly is a necessary part of teaching. It is not only errors that should be highlighted but also the positive aspects of learners' texts.

Another observation that results from the comparison is that no participant wants to humiliate or let learners down psychologically by exposing negatively their errors in front of the class. All the six participants stress that whatever they do with feedback is anonymous for this reason and they express this opinion explicitly in their interview. In other words, there is no intention of ridiculing learners. To reinforce what they believe, they discuss the positive comments of their feedback in class.

The next section describes the tenth theme of this study which is **following written guidelines when giving feedback**.

### **7.10 Following written guidelines when giving feedback**

**Following written guidelines when giving feedback** is the tenth theme of this study and it answers the second research question, that is, what the participants' opinions are on L2 written feedback. Out of the participants' answers, there is one category created: **lack of written guidelines for giving feedback**.

In particular, it is mentioned that there have never been any written instructions of how to give learners feedback and that this job can be done independently. It is also explained that in Finland, teachers are quite independent in their teaching and even the headmaster may not know what they are doing in their classes. This is illustrated in extract (89):

*(89) we can do it individually and, I think, it depends on the personality as well so, there's no written rule how you should, actually I never got anything how it should be done. In Finland, we can be rather independent in our teaching so there's nothing that actually makes us do in a way that should be done everywhere in schools so probably our head teacher doesn't know what we do in our classes (A, 315-317, 320-322).*

Moreover, there have never been any written guidelines showing teachers how to give feedback in the extract below. In other words, schools allow teachers to have freedom regarding their teaching practices. However, teachers have their own language teacher organisations and they can be informed of all kinds of problems they may face during their teaching career. This is shown in (90):

*(90) no, we don't have. The school itself doesn't, or let's say the other way, the school itself gives us teachers very free hands but we have our own language teacher organisations and from there we can get information and tips for all kinds of problems or all kinds of areas in that language teaching (B, 262, 264-267).*

In extract (90) it is apparent that it is up to individual teachers to get help from language teacher organisations regarding different teaching issues such as giving feedback even if their school does not provide them with specific written guidelines.

In the extract below, it is claimed that there have never been any instructions how to give feedback in class, either. This is illustrated in extract (91):

*(91) well, when I started last autumn in Norssi no, no one, no, at least I didn't get any instructions. So, I'm not sure, there might be some but at least, no one gave me any instructions (C, 234-236).*

Furthermore, it is argued that in the past there were some rules about teaching practices in general but now there are not such guidelines. Instead, there are modern trends that can be followed by attending conferences and seminars. This is illustrated in extract (92):

*(92) actually I've been teaching for a long, long time. There was a kind of (something) guideline that I followed when I was younger but now that I've been working for so long actually, I, I follow the modern trends on my own into the school that actually dictates the rules to me. I tend to attend conferences and to attend speeches and seminars on the writing (D, 274-278).*

In extract (92), the **lack of written guidelines for giving feedback** is justified as the result of long teaching experience. In other words, teaching for so many years forces

teachers to act responsibly and “update” their ways of giving feedback instead of having this done by the school. Therefore, seminars and conferences are suitable for this purpose.

It is implicitly argued in the extract below that there are not written guidelines in the school either. Instead, teachers are allowed to create guidelines of their own. This rule urges learners to re-write an essay taking into account the teacher’s written feedback. This is illustrated in extract (93):

*(93) well, actually I came up with this idea of re-writing them again in a sense that when I came to the school, I told them this was a great idea in writing and they adopted it afterwards. Because I think it’s the best way in helping the students (E, 237-239, 246).*

However, I must note that this is not an actual written guideline concerning feedback but it is more of an oral agreement among the teachers of that school. It is more an unofficial rule that they agreed to follow.

In the extract below, it is also mentioned that there are no written guidelines in the school. The school seems to trust teachers’ teaching. However, there should be such guidelines so that nobody does anything he/she wants. This is shown in (94):

*(94) I will put on a serious face because I’ve been working for a long time now. There’s a point seen of course but no, they do not interfere with my job themes, they trust me. But sometimes, they, in general, schools have to. You cannot go round, not doing things or doing things in an unacceptable way (F, 273-277).*

### ***Summary of the theme “following written guidelines when giving feedback”***

The theme of **following written guidelines when giving feedback** is the tenth theme in this study. The participants’ answers create one category: **lack of written guidelines for giving feedback**.

This category shows that schools do not offer written guidelines about giving feedback either because they do not practice it or because they trust their teachers who have been teaching for so long. However, there is the possibility to attend seminars and conferences or to be members in certain language teaching associations or to propose guidelines.

Comparing the findings concerning the theme of **following written guidelines when giving feedback**, the conclusion is that none of the six participants follows any guidelines for giving written feedback because they have not been given such ones. However, as it has already been mentioned, three out of the six participants make the effort to improve their ways of giving feedback by attending several informational seminars or by being members in associations or by making their own guidelines. In other words, this is an attempt to show that they care about the quality of their work and about the results that it can have on learners in general. Therefore, if they feel that they need to improve their way of providing feedback for learners' good, they try to do so on their own initiative. Yet, schools should give teachers such written guidelines not only for giving feedback but also for other aspects of L2 teaching. In this way, all teachers will be able to know what exactly to do and there will not be teachers who will do nothing in the class because this behavior is going to have an impact on learners. By offering such guidelines, schools show responsibility for learners' learning and help teachers follow rules that will make their job of giving feedback easier.

The next chapter focuses on the discussion of the findings in relation to the background literature as reported in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

## **8 DISCUSSION**

The aim of this study is to find out what six teachers' of English in upper secondary schools think about L2 writing in general and what they think about their own written feedback on learners' essays. In order to achieve the aim of this study, two research questions have been created. The first research question is answered by the first two themes in chapter 7. The second research question is answered by the rest eight themes in chapter 7. This chapter discusses the findings taking into consideration the background literature in chapters 2, 3 and 4. Moreover, some possible reasons behind some of the findings are expressed in this chapter.

### ***The participants' opinion on L2 writing***

The first theme does not provide any surprising findings, rather expected answers. The importance of teaching and learning L2 writing nowadays is highlighted in the

first theme. However, there are several reasons to justify this importance of L2 writing. It is claimed that knowing how to write is important for studying or working abroad because English is everywhere used in the world no matter what job a person has. Another reason mentioned is the fact that writing is one of the four skills so it has to be taught. Moreover, knowing how to write well means knowing English in depth.

The importance of teaching and learning L2 writing is also supported in the background literature of this study. In other words, knowing how to write effectively in English is important in the modern world and in L2 education (Weigle 2002; Hyland 2003). As it is mentioned in section 2.1, technology and transportation develop increasing the need for contact among nations making the teaching and learning of L2 writing more important than ever no matter whether L2 writing is used for business or educational reasons (Weigle 2002: 1). Furthermore, it is claimed that learning L2 writing is a difficult task for L2 and native speakers and, for this reason, specialised instruction is required (Hyland 2003: xiii). The difficulty of L2 writing may imply that learning how to do so is equal to learning a language in depth as it has been found in this study.

The second theme is about the text types that learners produce. According to what is mentioned, learners in upper secondary schools tend to write mostly all kinds of essays such as opinion essays and for and against essays. Furthermore, they may write summaries, reviews and reports. However, as it is claimed, the urging force for writing these text types are exams. There are only two mentions of poems and stories as types of writing that learners produce.

According to section 2.5 in the background literature, letters, summaries, essays, articles and stories are the main text types that learners produce in L2 classes, too (Nation 2008: 116). However, there are other types of writing, too such as advertisements, biographies, poems, novels, inventories, menus, lectures, memos and manuals that are more creative than essays but they are not produced so often in L2 classes (Hyland 2003: 19). Therefore, it is not surprising that there are only two mentions of poems and stories as non exam-based text types produced by learners. It is argued that learners have to write essays because of exams. This is the main first sense one gets from the participants' answers throughout the interviews. It is a common feeling that certain actions have to be done due to exams and this does not

happen only with the text types that learners produce. I will mention the same factor of exams later in one more theme concerning L2 written feedback. Yet, it is apparent here that, although there are several text types that are not included in exams, learners are forced to compose only these text types that are tested in exams.

### ***The participants' opinion on L2 written feedback***

The third theme describes the definitions of written feedback. Written feedback is viewed as either writing comments at the end of learners' essays or making corrections in the middle of the text or encouraging learners through it. It is claimed that the comments and the corrections correct both grammatical and vocabulary errors and content, paragraphing and style errors. There is only one mention of marks as part of written feedback. However, it is stressed that this is not a priority when giving feedback. This is surprising because teachers are expected to answer that written feedback is mainly a mark followed by corrections and/or comments. Yet, in this study, marks are hardly mentioned apart from this one mention. The reason for this may be because the word *feedback* prompts the participants to think of text rather than numbers and grades. Therefore, they focus on corrections and comments than grades. However, I cannot imagine that the participants do not give grades at all.

According to section 3.2 in the background literature, giving comments and corrections is called *advisory feedback* and it is one way to define feedback (Burke 2010: 27). *Advisory feedback* shows learners what they should do to improve their writing in the future (Burke 2010: 27). In other words, this kind of feedback provides learners with information about their performance on a specific essay showing learners what needs to be done in the future in order to improve their writing.

Another way of defining written feedback is by giving grades which is called *summative feedback* (Burke 2010: 26-27). This means that grades are so important on a paper that they can make teachers focus only on this aspect of feedback (Burke 2010: 26). In this study, it seems that there is no strong focus on this definition of written feedback perhaps because grades are not considered important to learning.

Despite these definitions of feedback, there is one more definition that is not mentioned in this study. According to this definition, written feedback is seen as a response between the teacher and learners and it has a more social perspective and it



is more interactive than the other definitions (Andrade and Evans 2013: 9). This implies that the feedback is not judgmental allowing an opportunity for dialogue between the teacher and learners (Andrade and Evans 2013: 9). One way to realise this kind of feedback is by letting learners evaluate their own writing and discuss these evaluations with another classmate and then organise a mini lesson on the errors that learners have made (Grabe and Kaplan 1996: 389). However, feedback is not viewed from this social point of view by the participants in the findings. The reason may be that the participants see themselves as the main sources of giving feedback. In other words, they define their duties as those authorities who have to correct learners' essays. In contrast, learners have to follow the teacher's corrections and comments if they want to improve their texts.

The fourth theme deals with the forms of written feedback that can be used when giving feedback. According to the findings of this study, there are two ways to do so: either by writing comments and making corrections in learners' texts or by using certain symbols to show learners their errors. Of course, learners know what these symbols mean. For example, it is mentioned that "sp" stands for spelling and "ww" stands for wrong word. Then, learners have to re-write their essays following these symbols and give them back to the teacher. This way of giving feedback is called minimal marking.

According to section 3.3 in the background literature, commentaries is the most common form of giving feedback and these are described as the teacher's handwritten comments on the learners' text (Hyland 2003: 180). These comments can either appear at the end of the text as end comments or they can appear next to the errors as margin comments (Hyland 2003: 180). In this study, it is apparent that this is the most common form of giving feedback perhaps because it is the fastest and easiest way of all. Besides, it is a traditional and comfortable way of giving feedback.

Minimal marking is also mentioned as a form of written feedback that helps learners develop self-editing strategies (Hyland 2003: 181). This is because learners have to find their errors on their own using certain symbols or codes as they are called. It is apparent that by using minimal marking, the participants in this study want to put the emphasis on learners and make them more active and responsible for their writing and

their errors. They do not want to offer explicit corrections but rather activate learners to search for them and learn from them.

However, there are other forms of written feedback such as rubrics, taped commentary and electronic feedback (Hyland 2003: 181-183). More specifically, the rubrics show the criteria that a teacher uses to assess learners' performance and they constitute a variation on commentary (Hyland 2003: 181). Taped commentary is another form of teachers' commentary where the feedback is recorded (Hyland 2003: 182). Last, electronic feedback is feedback sent to learners by e-mail or in general by using computers (Hyland 2003: 183). It is apparent that none of these forms of feedback is mentioned by the participants perhaps because they are more innovative than the traditional form of commentary and the participants may not feel so familiar with them and because they require some kind of expertise in technology and computers that not all the participants may possess. Moreover, some of these forms of feedback such as taped commentary may be time-consuming and that is why they may be avoided by the participants.

The fifth theme has to do with the effectiveness of written feedback. On the one hand, it is believed that written feedback is effective because learners correct their errors and they do not repeat them in following essays. Accordingly, the reason behind the effectiveness may be either learners' attitude and motivation or getting a high grade. In other words, good learners are going to pay attention to the teacher's feedback and learn from it. Others, less motivated, are going to pay attention to feedback only to get a high grade but not to really learn. However, both of them will care about feedback. On the other hand, the effectiveness of feedback is doubted because learners do not even look at the feedback and they do not show any progress in their writing.

Based on section 3.1 in the background literature of this study, there are quite many studies that doubt the effectiveness of written feedback by suggesting that written feedback is most of the time either too vague or inconsistent and of poor quality (Hyland 2003: 178). In general, researchers doubt whether feedback is effective, whether learners understand it or whether they read it at all (Burke 2010: 11-12). The same idea has been expressed by the participants of this study, too.

However, there are other reasons that prove the effectiveness of written feedback such as the fact that learners write a text because they want it to be read by others, receive

feedback and learn from it (Hyland 2003: 177). Moreover, teachers feel that they treat learners fairly by giving feedback and learners consider feedback a necessary part of their learning process (Hyland 2003: 178). All these ideas prove that feedback can be effective and useful for learners. However, there is no definite answer to this issue.

The sixth theme has to do with the use of mitigation strategies, that is, making written feedback milder in the way it is provided. According to the findings of this study, there is no need for making it milder because it is not offensive to learners.

Furthermore, it is claimed that making feedback milder has an advantage and a disadvantage. The advantage is that learners, especially the weak ones, can feel more confident and encouraged by mild feedback to continue trying whereas the disadvantage is that milder feedback may be overlooked by learners. In other words, learners may not take it seriously and, as a result, they will not pay attention to it.

According to section 3.4 in the background literature, these pros and cons mentioned above exist. Learners may feel uncertain about their writing and this mild feedback can encourage them to continue the effort (Hyland 2003: 190). In contrast, too mild feedback can confuse learners who may end up ignoring it not knowing what to do with it (Hyland 2003: 191). In conclusion, mild feedback does not only have advantages but also disadvantages as both the findings of this study and the background literature mention.

What I notice from the participants' answers is the respect towards learners' personality. The participants try to avoid being offensive in their written feedback and they try to avoid ridiculing them or humiliating them for their errors. In other words, even if they correct learners' errors, they never try to judge them negatively. They prove it by giving mild feedback that may be direct but still not offensive or personal. Instead, they try to encourage and motivate learners to continue developing their writing skills and they try to make them never give up.

The seventh theme of this study focuses on learners' responsibility for processing written feedback. According to the findings of this study, learners should be responsible for learning from the teacher's written feedback because in this way they are going to learn English better and they will become responsible for their errors. Moreover, they will become more active as language learners and they will ask questions trying to understand their errors. Furthermore, learning to be responsible for

processing feedback means learning to be responsible in life. Besides, it is the role of school to make learners responsible for their lives. Another opinion is that learners should be responsible for processing feedback because they are already experienced in this stage of upper secondary school.

According to section 3.5 in the background literature, modern pedagogy accepts the same view that learners should make meaning out of feedback and they should reflect on their errors, process them and correct them (Brookhart 2008: 3). It seems that modern pedagogy has put the emphasis on the learner, too and his/her contribution in learning and in feedback (Brookhart 2008: 3). In other words, the responsibility for learning from feedback has shifted from the teacher to the learner.

The eighth theme deals with the focus of written feedback. According to the findings of this study, the focus of feedback is on both accuracy such as grammar, vocabulary, spelling or even handwriting and on content such as ideas, paragraphing, register, organisation of a text and style. Despite the fact that both kinds of errors are corrected, the priority is first given to the accuracy such as grammar and then to the content such as organization or style. What forces this order is exams once more.

Just like the text types that are specific because of exams, the focus of written feedback follows a specific order, too. First, the focus on grammar and then on meaning. This is the second time that exams have determined what the participants do in terms of feedback and this is the feeling I get from all the participants as far as this interview question is concerned. The aspects of the English language that the participants correct are those that exams force them to focus on. In other words, as they claim, they have to correct mainly grammar and vocabulary because they constitute an important part of exams and learners have to be accurate in those. All the other aspects of the English language such as content, style or paragraphing are important too, but they do not have the first priority in the participants' feedback.

According to section 3.8 in the background literature, although studies show that teachers try to focus more on grammatical errors, modern teachers try to balance their feedback between grammar and meaning (Bitchener and Ferris 2012: 79). Otherwise, focusing only on grammar seems unnatural. This is what the participants of this study do. They try to focus on both kinds of errors paying a little more attention to grammar due to exams.

The ninth theme of this study deals with handling written feedback in class. On the one hand, it is mentioned that learners should never be negatively exposed in class and that is why feedback is never handled in class. On the other hand, it is mentioned that the most important and repetitive errors are discussed anonymously in class so that no learner is negatively exposed. The feeling I get from this interview question is again the respect that teachers show towards learners' personality. They do not want to expose learners negatively in the class, humiliate them or offend them. Even if teachers correct errors, they do not want to judge learners negatively.

The tenth theme of this study has to do with whether or not schools have certain guidelines for giving written feedback and whether or not teachers follow them. Based on the findings of this study, such guidelines have never been given to the participants.

In contrast, according to an article in chapter 4 in the background literature, teachers in China are controlled in their job and in the way they give feedback and they cannot escape from these norms (Lee 2008: 69-81). However, many teachers explain that they do not know how to give feedback because of lack of teacher training and of written rules (Lee 2008: 81). Nobody ever showed them new ways of providing feedback. Therefore, there is a similarity between the Chinese teachers and the participants of this study in that none of them has ever been given any guidelines for giving feedback to follow. Yet, there is a difference between them. Chinese teachers are strictly controlled in their job whereas the participants of this study are totally free of guidelines from their school of how to give feedback. They are free to follow their own way of giving feedback.

The next chapter focuses on the conclusion of this study. In particular, it attempts to evaluate the reliability and validity of this study and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this study and suggestions for it.

## **9 CONCLUSION**

The final chapter attempts to assess the reliability and validity of the findings of this study by evaluating the methods of data collection and data analysis. Moreover,

strengths and weaknesses of this study are discussed as well as suggestions for further improvement.

One basic weakness of interviews as a qualitative method of data collection is that the findings can be influenced by researchers' opinions and misinterpretations (Dörnyei 2007: 41). In other words, what is claimed is the lack of objectivity of the findings and their analysis since the researchers can interpret participants' answers from their own point of view and since participants can produce socially expected answers. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the methods of data collection and analysis to gain reliability.

The choice of the particular method of data collection in the form of a semi-structured, theme interview and the selection of the participants were carefully thought of before they were employed in this study. This choice appears to be the most suitable for this study. Besides, it is claimed that in semi-structured interviews participants are allowed to develop their answers freely on certain issues (Dörnyei 2007: 136). Therefore, semi-structured interviews ensure that participants will not produce any socially expected answers. Concerning the objectivity of this study, it is ensured by the use of theme interviews where main themes are selected beforehand based on the foundations that were made during the analytical process (Dörnyei 2007: 245-257). In other words, theme interviews are based on content analysis which is a theory-driven analysis. This means that the themes have been created based on a theory, as Dörnyei mentions. Therefore, the themes are predetermined which is a way of ensuring the objectivity of this study. Moreover, ice-breaking questions before and after the interviews create a relaxed atmosphere which is necessary to create trust with the participants so that they answer the questions freely.

Reliability in data analysis can also be ensured by describing the data collection process. First, in order to avoid subjectivity, the interviews were recorded and once they were all collected, they were transcribed. In order to be accurately transcribed, they were listened through many times so that all the detailed information was included in the transcripts.

Moreover, the reliability of this study can be shown in the analysis of the interviews. As it has already been mentioned, the findings of a study can be influenced by researchers' subjective interpretation of the data. However, in order to avoid this

problem, the analysis of the interviews was based on content analysis. Content analysis is theory-driven analysis which means that the themes of this study were based on specific background literature which the participants of this study did not know beforehand. Of course, narrowing down the topic of this study was necessary since otherwise it would be multi-faceted and too long including unnecessary information that would not respond to the research questions of this study. Therefore, having predetermined themes makes this study objective. Additionally, the categories in content analysis are not in any way predetermined but they are created based on the available data analysed (Dörnyei 2007: 245). This is also further evidence in support of the reliability of this study.

Furthermore, there have been attempts to ensure the validity of this study. The validity of a study can be proved through data display (Miles and Huberman as quoted by Dörnyei 2007: 245). In other words, by giving extracts from the interviews, readers can be persuaded for the validity of a study. For this purpose, authentic extracts from the recorded interviews and interpretations of them were included in the findings of this study. The extracts were chosen so that they were the most representative ones highlighting every category separately. Moreover, there is more than one extract in every category and thus, in every theme of this study.

One strength of this study concerns the research questions. In other words, this study succeeds in answering the research questions posed for it. Additionally, this study made the participants reflect on their feedback practices and see if they could possibly improve their feedback to ensure learners' better learning. While reflecting, some participants offered alternative practices that they could adopt or practices that they could abandon. The findings of this study also give an idea of how teachers think when they provide learners with written feedback and how this knowledge can contribute to improving other teachers' feedback practices. Yet, another strength of this study is the homogeneity of the participants who are of the same educational experience level (Dörnyei 2007: 127). This homogeneity permits an in-depth analysis in order to find out common patterns in a group of people with similar characteristics. Moreover, this strength increases the reliability of this study.

On the other hand, there are weaknesses in this study, too. One weakness is the small number of the participants. There are only six and a bigger number could yield more

results. These results could be better analysed providing more details about the topic of written feedback showing how the majority of teachers think regarding written feedback.

What could be proposed as future suggestion could be the replication of this study in a wider context including many more participants from a bigger number of schools. Then, the results from the data could be more varied and interesting. Another suggestion could be the replication of the same study with fewer themes. Reducing the themes could make this study more specific making the issue of written feedback clearer to readers. Finally, this study could perhaps be replicated only from the point of view of L2 written feedback without L2 writing as a part of this study.



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**Appendix 1: Theme interview questions**

1. Do you believe that teaching and learning L2 writing is important nowadays? Why? Why not?
2. What kind of texts do your students produce?
3. How would you define feedback?
4. What forms of written feedback do you use when you correct students' writing?
5. Do you think that your written feedback is effective and useful for you and your students? Why? Why not?
6. Do you need to make your written feedback milder? Why? Why not? How do you make it milder? Do you think that making feedback milder has advantages and disadvantages for your students? Can you explain?
7. Do you believe that students should also be responsible for their learning and for processing your feedback? Is feedback just the teacher's job? Why? Why not?
8. What does your feedback focus on? Why? Why not?
9. How is feedback handled in class?
10. Does your school advise you to follow certain written guidelines when giving feedback? Do you follow them? Why? Why not?