

**Students' and Teachers'
Responses Towards Teacher
Written Feedback on Students'
Writing: How helpful is it?**

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Literature review on teacher feedback in second language writing from students' perspectives

- Self-correct their mistakes from the marking codes to understand by themselves why and how they made the grammar mistake
- Want teachers to show them why and how they made the mistakes corrected
- achieve their writing compositions with no grammar mistakes
- Influenced by the form-focused curriculum in their secondary education
- Preferred well-explained content feedback on their ideas, organization of their essays and also liked comments that praised the students for working hard
- Want teachers to give comments that allow some space for them to think on their own in improving their writing
- Confused and irritated by their instructors' feedback correcting their mistakes without allowing them to think on their own on how to improve their composition papers
- Did not like content and form feedback given at the same time, which confused them
- Just care about their grade of their writing compositions and did not read the teacher written feedback

Literature review on teacher feedback in second language writing from teachers' perspectives

- Teachers misunderstood university students' writing of what they were trying to say, which connotes that students need to work harder on their content of their writing
- Hong Kong English teachers view form feedback as more important than content feedback because students misused grammar rules and make a lot of grammar mistakes in their writing compositions
- Instructors are more concerned with content feedback and sometimes blame ESL university students for having little ideas in their revising draft compositions

Why investigate teacher feedback on writing in Hong Kong?

- Most of the students' and teachers' responses towards teacher written feedback obtained from the studies were from university students and instructors from universities that were outside Hong Kong (Hedgecock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Robb, Ross, Shortreed, 1986; Byrne, 1979; Leki, 1991; Paulus 1999; Ashwell, 2000; Zamel, 1985; Sommers, 1982; Straub, 2000; Leki, 1992; Hyland & Hyland, 2001)
- Secondary English teachers in Hong Kong usually spend hours on giving written feedback to their students' writing and considered to be an "unrewarded task" by Hong Kong English teachers (Chen 1997:29) and it would be interesting to see if their effort pays off from finding out Hong Kong secondary students' real responses towards teacher written feedback.
- [1] Do teachers and students have the same preferences for different feedback focuses: form, content, content + form feedback or no feedback? Why?

What are form focuses?

- **1. Form Feedback:** The teacher corrects the students' grammatical (e.g., prepositions) and mechanical mistakes (e.g., spelling) or crosses, underlines, circles or use marking codes to highlight the mistakes on students' writing.
- **2. Content feedback:** The teacher gives comments or suggestions by praising (for encouraging students such as "Well Done") or criticizing (pointing out areas to improve that students lack on their writing such as "Not enough words!") or suggesting (giving constructive advice to students on what to improve the flow of their writing, such as "You can talk about your family at the ending!") in order to improve the following areas: creativity, coherence, paragraphing, and organization.
- **3. No feedback:** There is no written feedback by the teacher on the students' writing.

Research Study

Context and Research Subjects

- Place: English Medium of Instruction (EMI) Public secondary school in Tai Kok Tsui, Kowloon.
- When: Practice teaching practicum from October-November 2003
- Subjects
- Senior form students and secondary school English teachers, all together 89 subjects
- 6 secondary English teachers come from the same school
- 10 English teachers were from public and private schools, which the author had access to during the summer of 2003: 1) 6 English teachers were selected from an English Medium of Instruction (EMI) private school in Prince Edward, Kowloon; 2) and 4 English teachers were selected from a Chinese Medium of Instruction (CMI) public secondary school in Sung Po Kwong, Kowloon.

Research Instruments

- The questionnaire survey used for both the students' and teachers' questionnaire survey was adapted from Leki (1991). The Student Questionnaire and The Teacher Questionnaire aimed to elicit a group of local secondary school senior form students' and English teachers' preference towards different feedback focuses.
- structured interviews with 16 teachers (individual) and 22 students (individual or in groups of 2-4)

RESULTS FROM STUDENTS

Figure 1: Students' (N=73) Preferences (Agree or Strongly Agree) of the Three Types of Feedback Focuses: Form, Content & Organization

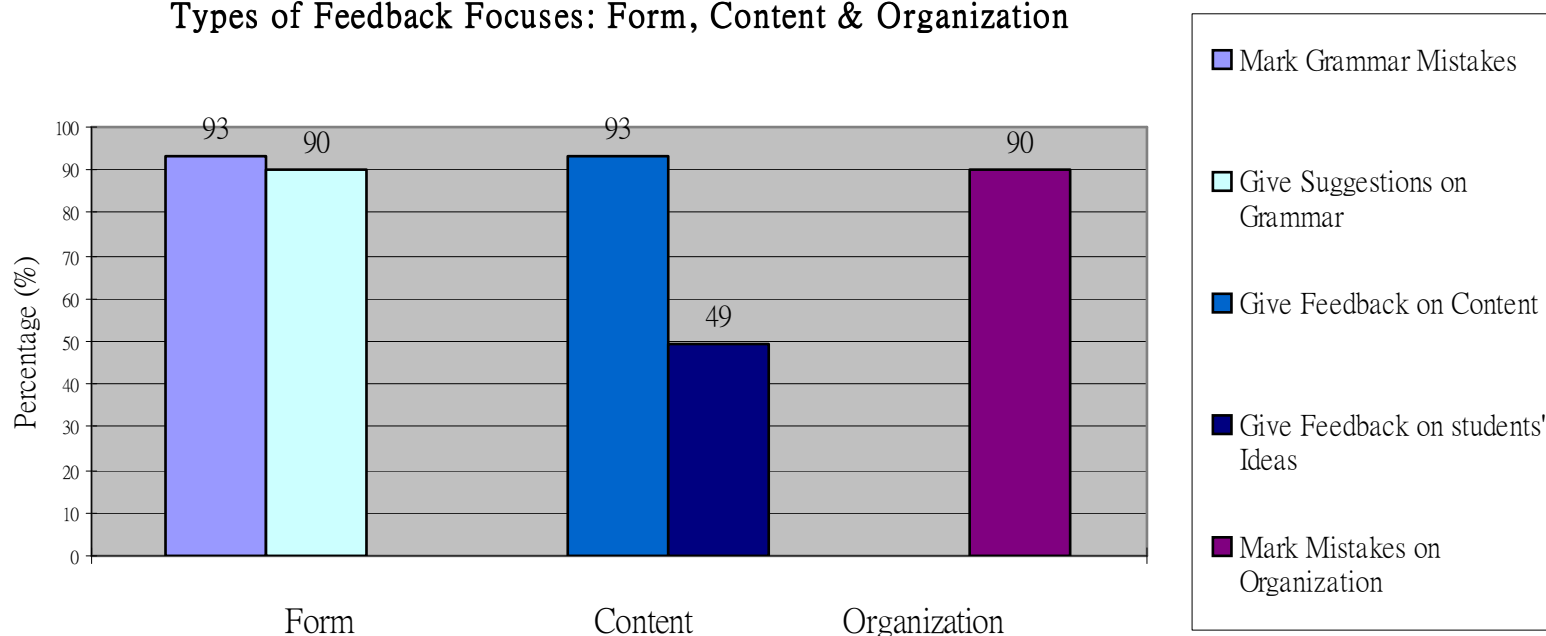


Figure 1 displays the student questionnaire findings in percentages (N=73) on the subject preferences for the option “Strongly Agree or Disagree” of three types of feedback focuses: content, form and organization. The findings suggest that the students favoured form feedback slightly more than other feedback focuses. For example, three items relating to feedback on focuses were approximately over 90%: “Mark Grammar Mistakes” (93%) and “Give Suggestions on Grammar” (90%).

Interview findings from students

- In the interview findings, some students commented on their reasons for form preferences. Most students (R[1]=19) commented that; a) their grammar was weak; b) had difficulty understanding different parts of speech; and c) wanted corrections to difficult grammar mistakes; The following are some examples of student comments, which seem to show their need for form feedback.
- **S1:** I need to polish up my grammar. I make so many grammar mistakes. For example, tenses and sentence structures are very hard.
- **S2:** My grammar is very weak. I cannot write the correct grammar sentence. It is hard to correct by myself. I always have to ask my [English] teacher.
- **S3:** Grammar is difficult. For example, mistakes with tenses are hard to correct. I want teacher to help me to correct.
- **S4:** I prefer teacher to help me more on grammar. My grammar is poor and can't correct myself. I want [my English] teacher to help me on wrong sentence structures.

[1] R= No. of Responses

Students' request for more comments on form and content

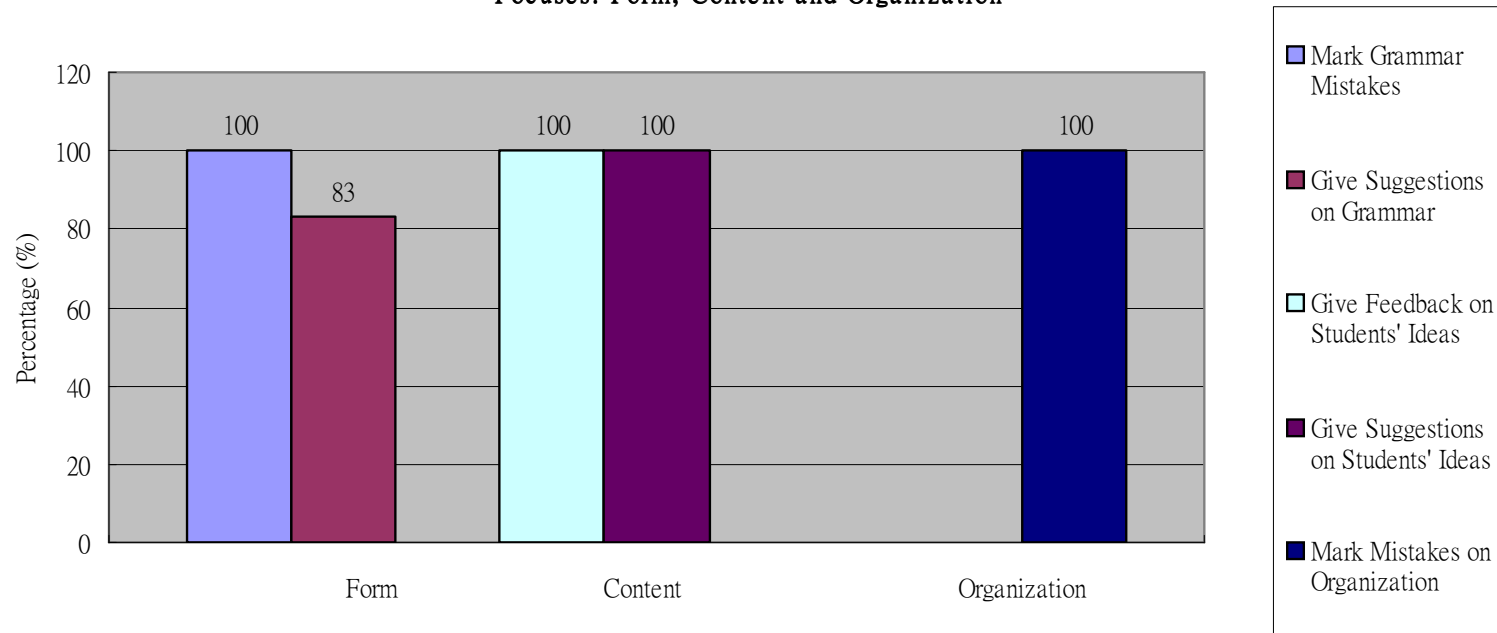
- From student interviews, most students wanted longer and specific comments on both form and content (R=19). Most students indicated that their English teachers did not give enough suggestions and comments on their compositions and stressed that they needed it very much. Many students also indicated that their comments and suggestions were very general, short, and lacked substance.
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- **S1:** Relevant. What[does it] mean by “relevant.”
- **S2:** No feedback. Just [give me] the mark [for the composition].
- **S3:** She gives very general expressions. What [does it] mean by “Well done.”

Student Interview Findings--Lack of feedback

- Some of the students queried what kind of examples their teachers wanted, and that their English teachers always repeat the same words about their ideas (e.g., Relevant) with no explanation. Furthermore, their teachers would also give very abstract and general remarks, which they found not very useful in helping to improve their work.
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- S4: [My English teacher] always repeat the same idea. For example, my English always writes 'give me more detail.' But I don't know where in my writing to give more detail.
- S5: She[English teacher] writes 'example.' What does she mean by 'example.' What kind of 'example?'

RESULTS FROM TEACHERS

Figure 2: Teachers' (N=6) Preferences (Agree and Strongly Agree) of the Three Types of Feedback Focuses: Form, Content and Organization



- Figure 2 shows some major findings from the English teachers (N=6) preferences for the three feedback focuses: form, content and organization. The results were similar to those obtained from the students where teachers supported form feedback. For example, teachers gave a full score of 100% for the item: “Mark Grammar Mistakes.”

Teacher Interview Findings— Support for Form

- Findings from the interviews with teachers suggest that most teachers liked form feedback.
- emphasis on form feedback due to students' poor performance in grammar (R=16)
- .This is illustrated in the following examples of responses collected during the interviews.
- **T1:** Students need more improvement on grammar. I think I should not scare them that you still have certain mistakes and can make mistakes. I really want them to improve.
- **T2:** Students aren't able to digest it. Not too much. It's depressing that students make many grammar mistakes. I really want to get their grammar up to standard.
- **T3:** I want weaker students to have a higher standard of grammar. It is hard to understand their writing when they make many grammar mistakes.

Teacher Interview Findings—Support for Content

- Teachers scored a high percentage of 100% for three of the two items: “Give Feedback on Content” and “ Give Feedback on Students Ideas.” This may imply that teachers see both form and content feedback as important. Below are some teacher comments showing preference towards content+form feedback.
- **T1:** There is a balance between grammar and content. They should write interesting and valid ideas with reasonable grammar.
- **T2:** We should put emphasis on form and content because students can benefit in both areas. For grammar mistakes, they can direct to form. On their ideas, they can direct to content.

Teachers' constraints on giving detailed feedback

- From teacher interviews, it was found that they could not fulfill the students' demand to give detailed comments on form and grammar due to time constraint and marking pressure. Most of the teachers (R=16) were **fed up** with marking numerous compositions they had to mark. Some teachers emphasized that marking compositions was not the only thing that they had to do, as their marking load increases by the number of classes they teach. Below are some teacher comments on the pressure of marking.

Teachers' Support for Process Writing

- Interestingly, teachers seemed to find a solution towards reducing their marking load. Most of the teachers (R=16) suggested implementing the stages of process writing because they could focus on different aspects on the same piece of composition, which would save them a lot of their marking time. For example, below are some teachers' comments on the benefits of process writing in easing the burden for their marking:

Techniques to Facilitate Teacher Written Feedback

- A majority of teachers (N=6) have mentioned showing common errors on PowerPoint made by the students to discuss in class to:
 - 1) facilitate their understanding of the marking codes:
 - 2) persuade weaker students to pay attention to their common errors:
 - 3) ask students, especially the weaker ones to participate on correcting common mistakes in class so everyone can learn from each other;
 - 4) and can prepare them for their correction homework.

Conclusion

- Teachers should place an equal emphasis on the different focuses, when giving feedback (form and content feedback) so students could improve other aspects of their writing instead of just their grammatical or mechanical problems.
- **process writing** can be implemented so teachers could focus marking on one piece of composition, and attend to different aspects on different drafts of the composition. If more teachers practice this process writing approach in schools of Hong Kong, they would learn how to manage their feedback strategically and meaningfully, as every feedback on the draft that the students receive will serve as a different purpose of improvement, either on ideas, organization or grammar, and demolish the marking ideology, which is seen as workload.

THANK YOU! GOD BLESS!

- Q & A Session