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**A Phenomenological Investigation of Pre-sessional Students'
Perceptions and Practices of Formative Assessment in English
Writing**

YE SIR LIM

**A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of Master by Research (Education)**

This research paper complies with the British Educational Research Association's ethical guidelines.

Abstract

This thesis is a phenomenological study of English as Second Language (ESL) students' perceptions and practices of formative assessment (FA) in English writing at a university in Northern England. This study adopted Carless learning-oriented assessment theoretical framework (Carless et al., 2006) to investigate students' views and experience of three types of FA: 1) teacher feedback, 2) peer assessment, 3) self-assessment. The study involved six students, one instructor, and two teaching assistants from a pre-sessional program (PSP). The overall aim for this thesis is to examine students' perceptions and practices of formative assessment when used as a tool to promote learning in English writing.

Three research questions were pursued:

1. What are the participants' attitudes towards formative assessment in their English writing?
2. To what extent do students engage with formative assessment tools – feedback, self-, and peer-assessment?
3. What are participants' perceptions of formative assessment in terms of utility of learning?

The study employed multiple data sources and methods to understand the students' experience and practices of FA. Six students participated in the semi-structured interviews in which they responded to questions related to their attitudes and beliefs about FA, how they used FA to support learning, and the influence of FA in their learning. Classroom observations from two classes, as well as three teacher interviews were examined to understand actual practices of FA and support information gathered from the interviews. The data were analysed using content analysis. On the whole, the findings show that students value teacher feedback (TF), showed less interest towards peer-assessment (PA) and self-assessment (SA). In addition, most of the students read every feedback after receiving, but made revision based on TF more than PA and SA in their revision. Nevertheless, all students indicated that FA was considered to be an approach which is helpful in support learning outcomes.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In the last decade, formative assessment practices in the classroom have been considered an essential element to improve students' learning (Harlen & Winter, 2004). This present paper is based on Carless learning-oriented assessment theoretical framework (Carless et al., 2006) to investigate students' perception and practice of formative assessment in pre-university English writing classes. To explain the significance of this study, this chapter uses the following structures. In this chapter, a brief overview of the study (1.6), background information (1.2), a detailed rationale (1.3) in both macro and micro rationales in choosing to examine formative assessment aimed at supporting and promoting learners' language development in English as second language (ESL) classroom context, research aims and research questions (1.5), its context (1.4), followed by a summary of the research (1.7) are provided.

1.2 Background of the study

As more and more international students are admitted to universities in the U.K., students who are at the lower or intermediate levels of English proficiency need extensive support in developing their language skills, including the writing skill. According to Huot (2002), writing is one of the skills that are thought to have an essential significance in language learning, therefore, it is important for teachers to have good approaches in instructing writing classes, especially assessment. Although the views on the purpose and function of assessment have gone through significant changes over the years, assessment in education is of utmost importance (Fletcher, et al., 2012). Assessment can be defined as the way of gathering data about teachers' teaching and students' learning (Fletcher, Meyer, Anderson, Johnston, & Rees, 2011; Khalid, 2016). In other words, a function of assessment is to check if teachers' instruction method is effective and their teaching strategies are helpful to students, as well as to measure if students understand the intended class contents and meet the learning standards and goals (Andrade & Brookhart, 2019; Hanna & Dettmer, 2004). Some significant researchers, for example, Rea-Dickins (2000), Black Colby-Kelly and Turner (2007) and Black and Wiliam (2009), agreed that assessment also plays an important part in the teaching and learning processes in language education, because assessment does not only gather information about students' language knowledge or progress but also contributes to their students' language learning (Cheng & Wang, 2007; Huhta, 2007; Rea-Dickins, 2000; Leung

& Mohan, 2004; Poehner, 2007). Although there are several types of assessment, two main complementary aspects are discussed in the context of education, namely, summative and formative assessment (Watty, Jackson & Yu, 2010; Brookhart & Durkin, 2003; Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002; Heritage, 2007; Scallon, 2000). There are distinctions between the two assessment paradigms.

Summative assessment (SA), assessment of learning, is used to measure learning and to evaluate students' attainment or accomplishments. SA usually takes place at the end of an instructional unit or after the learning has been completed, which means no further revision or changes is likely to take place at this point (Bethan, 2002; Black, 2003). It is often graded according to criterion referenced assessment to check if students have reached a certain level of knowledge gain by comparing the score against some standard, and typical examples of SA are high-stakes exams or public examinations and final examinations. SA is used predominantly in both general education and language education because of its benefits. The benefits are that it summarises the achievement status of a learner, focuses on providing information and feedback about overall teaching, and identifies students' accumulation of knowledge (Sandrock, 2010; Andrade & Cizek, 2010; Keeley, 2008; Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall & William, 2003).

On the other hand, formative assessment (FA), also known as assessment for learning, does not serve the purpose of grading or judgement, nor does it compare students with one another. Instead, the purpose of FA is to inform instruction, check students' progress, and identify and modify areas that may need improvement. FA focuses on the process of learning and it takes place during the instructional process. In other words, FA facilitates learning while learning is still occurring (Bennett, 2011, Black, 2003; Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall & William, 2004). FA is an essential way of instruction in the English language writing classroom, and it is often associated with the idea of teachers' feedback, peer-assessment, or self-assessment which helps in improving students' learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Harlen & Winter, 2004; van de Watering & can der Rijt, 2006; Abrams, 2007; Carless, 2012; Crossouard & Pryor, 2012; Birjandi & Tamjid, 2012; Birjandi & Tamjid, 2012). The literature showed that FA is beneficial to both teachers and students, because it gathers data from students on their progress and teachers can use the data to better support students learning (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002; Heritage, 2007; Britton, 2011; Harlen, 2005a). In addition, FA is critically important for student learning, because not only does it help students to appreciate the standards that are expected from them, but it also is effective in encouraging

student learning across a wide range of educational settings as in levels, disciplinary areas, etc. (Rea-Dickins, 2008; Yorke, 2003; Black & Wiliam, 1998b). There is continuous debate about the definition of FA in education amongst scholars, and this lack of agreement on the terminology had led to numerous interpretations (Tarus, 2005). Therefore, it is essential to do more in-depth evaluate of formative assessment and select the most suitable definition for this present study. The further discussion regard to its definition for this study is presented in Chapter 2, literature review chapter.

1.3 Rational

1.3.1 Macro perspective

Formative assessment has become an important aspect of English teaching, because there have been strong claims that formative assessment, when designed and implemented correctly in education, can significantly increase student academic achievement. FA has been attracting considerable attention from language assessment researchers (Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Panova & Lyster, 2002; Leung & Mohan, 2004; Colby-Kelly & Turner, 2007; Leki, Cumming & Silva, 2008), and substantial interest has been shown in the use of FA. However, most of the literature that exists on FA has investigated the effectiveness of one of the FA tools in the classroom, the implementation of FA in different educational contexts, teachers' perceptions about classroom assessment, or the relationship between assessment and language learning (Andrade, 2010 & 2013; Taras, 2002 & 2010; Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Boud, 2013; Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Cumming, Kantor & Powers, 2002; Li & Barnard, 2011).

Compared to the vast research based in other settings or focus, such as teacher feedback, peer- and self-assessment, a substantial portion of the discussion in the context of English as Second Language (ESL) or English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms has been conducted within the literature of Teaching English as Second Language (TESOL) and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Leki et al., 2008; Panova & Lyster, 2002). The distinction of ESL and EFL is presented in 1.4 context section. Although ESL/EFL classrooms have been discussed in the context of certain aspects of formative assessment research, not many studies investigated in perceptions and practices of FA tools in English writing from the students' point of view (Leki, Cumming & Silva, 2008). As more and more international students are admitted to universities in the U.K., students who are at the lower or intermediate levels of English proficiency need extensive support in developing their

language skills, including the writing skill. A small number of studies that have examined students' view and practice of formative assessment, these studies have been conducted outside of the United Kingdom (Cheng, Rogers, & Wang, 2007; Birjandi & Tamjid, 2012; Chen, May Kleowski, & Kettle, 2013a, 2013b).

This study intends to investigate how ESL students, who are studying in the U.K., perceive and practice three particular types of FA, namely, teachers' feedback, peer assessment, and self-assessment, when used as tools to promote learning in English writing. Students' perception of the methods of their instruction are significant as they can also be involved in the FA process alongside teachers, and students' experience in language learning are interesting because their awareness of the process is important in their own language learning (Council of Europe, 2007). Furthermore, students trust a certain kind of formative assessment in which they wish to be taught and this particular style of teaching is the best method for students to learn (Lightbown and Spada, 2006). Therefore, this study aims to address this lack of knowledge in the area of language assessment. Quoting from Rea-Dickins (2007b, p.503) that "Good teaching – where teachers respond to learners' language learning and needs, with different types of feedback of an appropriate kind, of learner involvement through collaborative learning activities and self- and peer-assessment, with ample opportunities for language practice – implies good formative assessment practice."

1.3.2 Micro perspective

There are also two personal reasons for this study arises out of my concerns. One is for my own practice of FA in teaching English writing in the future, because I have learnt from my previous teaching experience that students are more focused on exam scores than on learning when there is little practice of FA. The way students view and practice formative assessment can be an integral part of their learning process and it can also assist students with autonomous studying and self-regulating learning, thus it is vital for teachers and students to understand how students view these practices (Andrade, 2013). Studying FA has immediate practical application for teachers and it is beneficial for learners' progress, for it is used as classroom techniques to improve students' achievement, as well as improve teaching effectiveness. Thus, investigating this topic is beneficial for me, as a future teacher.

The second personal reason is coming from a language learner's stance – I grew up in an exam culture where my schools and teachers tended to pay more attention to summative assessment rather than formative assessment. Due to some poor experience with summative

assessment in school, personally, I have developed an interest in how FA could be used to promote learning. Moreover, when I have experienced FA in English learning, I have found it useful in my language development and learning process – I acknowledge the importance of assessment for learning. This made me be interested in how FA is seen from the learner’s perspective as well. In addition, more studies about students’ perceptions of formative feedback is helpful when it comes to designing and practicing FA, therefore, this research investigation could further inform FA practices of English teachers who teach writing.

1.4 Context

This research study explores the perceptions and practices of 6 pre-sessional course students about formative assessment on their written works. The students are studying academic English in pre-sessional programmes (PSP) that helps students to develop English language skills at a university in Northern England for degree purposes. The PSP offers courses of different lengths, from 1 month to 6 months, depending on the students’ level of English proficiency and their IELTS overall or band scores. The minimum overall score for the entry to the university is 6.0, and most students who undergo PSP possess an overall score ranging from 4.0 to 5.5. According to Cambridge Assessment English (2018), these students are in between B1 intermediate to B2 upper intermediate level on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). During their PSP courses, students are assessed through a range of assignments, presentations, and tests, and once the students fulfilled their PSP requirement, there is no need for students to re-take IELTS at the end of the programme for an entry in university.

As the context of this study is Second Language (L2) classrooms, it is important to make reference to distinction between learning English as Second Language (ESL) and learning English as Foreign Language (EFL). EFL classroom takes place in formal settings and has limited use outside of the target culture. Language is taught as a subject, not as a tool on which daily survival and academic success depend. Therefore, EFL students are motivated because English is one of compulsory subjects that count toward their grades. On the other hand, ESL classroom implies the mastery of the language of the culture in which one lives and studies. ESL class environment means mastering contextually appropriate ways of knowing, understanding and communicating in one’s immediate daily context. These ways of knowing, understanding, and communicating are most often substantially different from the

ways of the home and of the home culture. In this study, participants are ESL students studying in ESL classrooms.

1.5 Aims and Research Questions

In this master's thesis, an aspect of formative assessment in teaching English as a second language (ESL) is investigated. More precisely, students' perception and practice of FA on writing is the main focus.

This study intends to answer the following research questions:

4. What are the participants' attitudes towards formative assessment in their English writing?
5. To what extent do students engage with formative assessment tools – teacher feedback, self-, and peer-assessment?
6. What are participants' perceptions of formative assessment in terms of utility of learning?

The overall aim for the thesis is to examine pre-sessional learners' perception and practice of formative assessment when used as a tool to promote learning in English writing. This study seeks to investigate how students view and respond to formative assessment (FA), specifically self-assessment, peer-assessment and teachers' feedback, in a writing classroom context as a phenomenon, and their involvement in the assessment process including its impact on students' experience of learning. The paper also aims to investigate possible positive and negative aspects discovered through students' experiences.

The first research question seeks to discover information on the different attitudes among the students towards FA. It is interesting to explore the students' attitudes to different types of FA, because students' answers may provide insight into what the students need to work with.

The second question is relevant to investigate students' individual involvement in the use of formative assessment. This question is a continuation of the first research question in which it seeks not only data on attitudes, but also answers on students' various uses of FA. The aim of this research question is to provide insight into use of language learning approaches and contributes to increase awareness of its own ESL writing.

Finally, the third question seeks to find out information and data concerning students' perception of learning outcome from correcting their written work according to teachers'

feedback, peer and self-feedback. It is supposed, this question may find out on which type of FA in particular improves their writing. Through raising this question, the aim is to gain a basic insight of students' beliefs and experiences connected to their FA practice in ESL writing class.

Further discussions of how these research questions were inspired and generated will be presented in Chapter Two.

1.6 Brief Overview of the Study

This thesis study includes five chapters. This chapter, Chapter 1, as mentioned is an introduction chapter which presents an overview of the study. In the second chapter, the literature review is discussed, including the main concepts, perspectives, theoretical frameworks, and relevant research results regarding the students' perception and practice of formative assessment. In the following chapter, Chapter Three, the methodology of the study, including the paradigm, ontology, epistemology, research approach, strategy, participants, instruments, and data collection are presented. In the fourth chapter, the findings obtained from the students and teachers' interviews, and classroom observations, as well as the results in light of the findings of previous research are analysed and discussed. Then coming to an end, in Chapter Five, the last chapter, summarises the research findings, discusses the limitations of the study and recommendations for practice and future research.

1.7 Summary

This Chapter 1 has mainly introduced topics, background, context, rationale, and aims with research questions provided. In the next chapter, a discussion and analysis of various aspects of the theoretical background of the study and of other researchers' studies relevant to the topic will be presented.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In order to reach the general aims stated in the previous chapter, this chapter seeks to address related aspects discussed in the literature and previous studies. This chapter is presented with a thematic approach, which is an approach that is often used in primary qualitative research. It identifies, analyses, and reports themes within data (Roulston, 2001). The key themes are adopted from the learning oriented assessment (LOA) framework, and the themes are perceptions and practices of formative assessment (FA) tools, such as feedback, self and peer assessment. These themes which are in relation to the research questions, represent some important patterns which are derived from literature reviews. The chapter begins with the definition of formative assessment (2.2), LOA framework (2.4), FA tools. It presents benefits of FA (2.3) and FA of writing in classrooms (2.5). Then, it discusses some studies pertaining to students' perceptions of FA in ESL classroom in higher education (2.6), and is followed by discussing students' practices of FA (2.7). Lastly, a conclusion is presented at the end of the chapter (2.8).

2.2 Defining Formative Assessment

Formative assessment (FA) has become increasingly recognised as crucial to language assessment (Lee & Coniam, 2013, p.24). It is necessary to define the concepts and definitions that are the object of this research before discussing formative assessment (FA). Various authors have defined FA in their studies (Allen et al., 2009; Black & Wiliam, 2004; Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002; Dunn & Mulvenon, 2009, Hwang & Chang, 2011), however, for this study, the following definitions are developed from different authors which will be discussed in this section.

Overall, authors agreed, to some extent, that FA is meant to support students' learning, but they addressed different focuses which differentiates their definitions of FA. In the work of several authors, FA is identified as a practice to adjust teachers' instruction with the intent of better meeting the needs of the students assessed. (Black & Wiliam, 2004; Dunn & Mulvenon, 2009; Fluckiger, Vigil, Pasco, & Danielson, 2010; Wiliam & Thompson, 2017; Heritage, 2007, 2010; Hwang & Chang, 2011; McTighe & O'Connor, 2005; Popham, 2006).

According to these authors, having a practice of FA in class can promote teachers' understanding of student's current knowledge and understanding of specific content and of

the material for the purpose of instruction adjustment. In this definition, the purpose of FA which is emphasised reflects the teachers' practice for modifying teaching instruction and learning activities.

On the other hand, other researchers viewed a different aspect of FA and referred to FA as ongoing information and a systematic process that continuously gathers evidence about learning in order to promote the learning process in the classroom (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002; Heritage, 2007; Gardner, 2006). In other words, FA is identified as the information derived from student responses to assessment tasks whilst the learning is still in progress, which according to them, ensure individual students' development and achievement during their learning (Sadler, 2009; Allen et al., 2009; Dunn & Mulvenon, 2009; Fluckiger et al., 2010; Heritage, 2007; Hwang & Chang, 2011; McTighe & O'Connor, 2005; Tiknaz & Sutton, 2006). Having ongoing information about students' learning process is important, because it helps students who struggle in learning as well as those who are not challenged enough in learning (Heritage, 2007).

The above definitions are useful because they all address the importance of FA in the field of education. However, for the purpose of this study, the definition draws upon the idea of emphasizing students' role and learning process as the core element of FA. This aligns with Lee's (2011, p.99) definition of FA that "FA emphasizes the role students play in the process of learning whereby they can negotiate learning goals and outcomes with teachers, and engage in self- and/or peer assessment." This definition covers particularly the characteristics of FA that helps students identify what they can or cannot do independently. Furthermore, participating in FA lead to active learning because it keeps students on task and focuses on learning goals. Feedback from teachers presents the precise points students need to concentrate on and what to do next to improve, and self- and peer-assessment helps students with the social construction of knowledge (Brookhart & Nitko, 2008). Different authors have highlighted different benefits which will be summarised below.

2.3 Benefits of Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is crucially important for student learning both in L2 education and education in general. There are several benefits of FA which were presented in the literature (Brookhart & Nitko, 2008; Yorke, 2003; Sadler & Godd, 2006). Firstly, it clarifies learning intentions and criteria for success. FA helps students identify what they can or cannot do. Secondly, it engineers effective classroom discussions, questions and tasks that elicit

evidence of learning. Participating in FA enables students to be active learners by way of keeping students focused on tasks. Self and peer assessment are especially helpful for students to exchange their knowledge. Thirdly, it provides precise feedback on the points they need to concentrate on and that moves students forward. Next, it activates students as instructional resources for each other. Simply put, it activates students as people involved in helping each other learn. Finally, it activates students as owners of their own learning (Brookhart & Nitko, 2008; Yorke, 2003). The idea behind this point is that it utilises the evidence of student learning to adapt teaching, learning, and instruction to meet student needs in learning process (William & Thompson, 2008). The importance of FA by looking at literature on feedback, self-assessment and peer-assessment, which is derived from learning oriented assessment, are provided in the following sections.

2.4 Learning Oriented Assessment Theoretical Framework

This study focuses on students' perception and their uses of formative assessment in ESL writing, so a framework in the language education field is implemented. In this particular research, Carless Learning Oriented Assessment (LOA) is adopted as a framework, because the LOA framework connects learning with assessment with the purpose of providing feedback for learning and it enables students to monitor their progress and evaluates the effectiveness of learning strategies (Carless, 2003; Purpura, 2004; Kim, 2009; Turner & Purpura, 2016). Figure 1 below represents and illustrates the main aspects and features of LOA framework which is based on a synthesis of relevant literature.

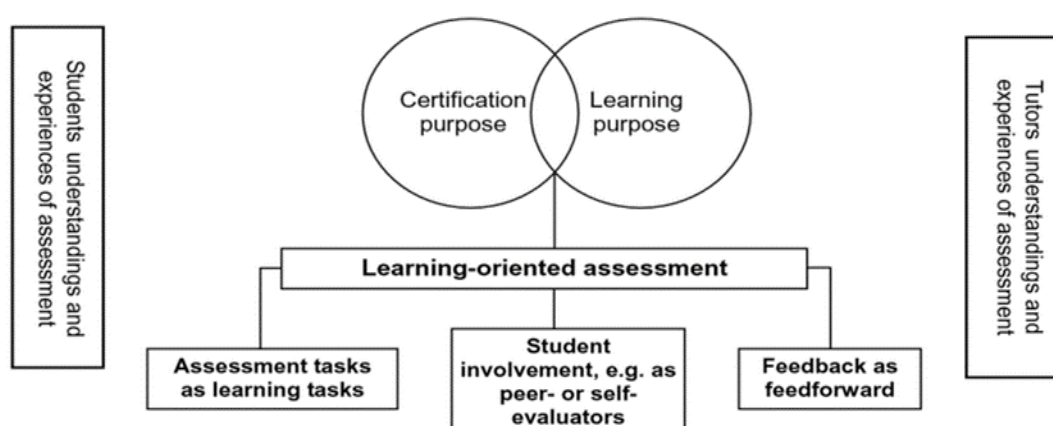


Figure 1. Framework for learning-oriented assessment. Adapted from *How assessment supports learning: Learning-oriented assessment in action*, by D.Carless, G.Joughin, N.F.Liu, 2006, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

There are several other influential theoretical frameworks have been put into practice in FA in the classrooms both in general education and in L2 education, for example, dynamic assessment, behaviourism, and cognitive theory (Carless, 2014; Hamp-Lyons, 2017; Saville & Salamoura, 2014; Hamp-Lyons & Green, 2014; Carless, Joughin & Mok, 2006; Ibrahim & Ali, 2013; Turner & Purpura, 2015; Hyland, 2007; Jang, 2009). However, the LOA framework is chosen because it explicitly gives a formative and interactive tool for improvement in learning, rather than simply a means of measuring (Carless et al., 2006; Scarino, 2013), and it values learning-focused and learner-involved assessment (Hamp-Lyons & Green, 2015). In addition, LOA locates learning at the heart of assessment context as it focuses on the potential to promote students' language learning (Carless, 2014; Purpura, 2004; Ploegh et al., 2009; Kim, 2007). In other words, LOA is formative focused and it values learning and aims to strengthen the learning that is embedded into assessment in language classrooms. Purpura (2004, p.236) interconnected the idea that the learning is the focus of LOA "it involves the collection and interpretation of evidence about performance so that the judgments can be made for further language development." In short, LOA is a kind of FA where the key aim is to promote productive teaching and students' learning (Carless, 2007; Carless, 2009), and thus, the LOA framework is suitable to be implemented in this current research context. There are three key strands presented in the LOA framework, namely, assessment tasks as learning tasks, student involvement in self- and peer-assessment, and feedback as feedforward. Refer the figure above. In the further parts of this section, these key essential features are presented in detail.

2.4.1. Assessment Tasks as Learning Tasks

The first strand in LOA is assessment tasks as learning tasks. In order to ensure the question of 'How does this assessment practice support learning?' assessment tasks should be learning tasks that are focused on learning, stimulate learning, and well-aligned with the objectives and learning outcomes to facilitate effective learning and motivate students to produce their best performance (Carless, Joughin, Liu et al., 2006; Gibbs, 2006; Biggs & Tang, 2007; Carless, 2007a). Although it is difficult to replicate target language use under the assessment tasks circumstance, assessment tasks should afford opportunities for students to engage in learning processes (Craddock & Mathias, 2009).

2.4.2. Student Involvement

Student involvement in the assessment in the form of self- or peer-assessment is considered as the second feature of LOA, in which learners are actively engaged in evaluating the quality of their own performance and that of their peers (Carless, Joughin, Liu et al., 2006). Although the teacher is the person who can initiate FA, students and teachers share the responsibility for assessment. It is an important element in developing students' learning (Falchikov, 2005). Plus, it is difficult for English teachers to assess all their students' writing work in the classroom (Cohen et al., 200; Chvala & Graedler, 2010; Irons, 2008), so teachers chose to involve students as strategy. Therefore, students should be given the opportunity to evaluate each other's performance because involvement in assessment practices offers opportunities for students to exert control over their learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Boud, 2000; Sadler, 2002; Chappuis & Stiggins, 2004). This is significant because students lack individual autonomy as students play less responsible role in the classroom, and thus are easily pulled in different directions by assessment rather than promoting students' learning (James, 2014). Researchers in this field have paid attention to self- and peer-assessment, and in the following sub sections, the means and the importance of self-assessment and peer-assessment are presented.

2.4.2.1. Self-assessment

In the past, there was little attention paid to self-assessment in language learning, and not much practice in regard to asking students to assess their own performance in the language classrooms (Coombe & Canning, 2002). However, in the past decade, there has been an increasing interest shown on learner-centred pedagogy (Vavrus, Thomas & Bartlett, 2011), and thus the importance of self-assessment has developed. Before referring to importance of self-assessment (SA), the definition of SA is first offered. Self-assessment is a process of formative assessment where students reflect on the quality of their own work, judge and revise according to stated goals or criteria (Andraded & Cizek, 2010). Such definition relates to studies from Sadler and Good (2006) and McNamara (2001) who both claimed that SA does not serve the purpose of determining a grade as part of the final result, but rather it is to make students reflect and be more self-aware of their development in learning. According to these authors, self-assessment prompts students to take responsibility in assessing their own work, and enhance students' improvement through self-reflection and revision action. SA plays a positive role in the students' learning process (Roberts, 2006). In fact, actively

involving English language learners in SA has been associated with certain gains in English language learning. The first gain is students' engagement in language learning. For example, many researchers across fields of education have found that SA stimulates students in engagement in their language learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Andrade & Cizek, 2010), especially for those students who do not actively engage in learning or actively seek for help due to the fear of receiving negative feedbacks from a peer or a teacher (Andrade & Du, 2007). A similar outcome was found in Hattie and Timperley's (2007) study that students who were engaged in SA presented more involvement in their work, and were motivated to learn and reflect on their own English learning (Adams & King, 2006), which would help to develop a sense of students' autonomy in their own learning of English language (Creswell, 2000; Griffiths, 2008).

The second gain is the improved performance when students engage in SA. For example, Myers (2001) found that the students gain more insight into their strengths and weaknesses as writers when they monitor their own writing tasks. In the same manner, SA helped students to promote their critical thinking and reflective practices in learning English language (Butler & Lee, 2010), which led to a great improvement over time without direct instruction (Chen, 2008).

Despite these foregoing gains, not all research studies have confirmed the use of SA to be successful. In fact, some researchers remain concerned about students' preparedness and readiness to SA (Patri, 2002; Matsuno, 2009). The main reason is due to the lack of training in doing the SA, which limited its utility as a part of formative assessment. For instance, both Patri (2002) and Matsuno (2009) found that their participants, EFL students, underestimated their performance in a manner comparable to that of the teachers when they were asked to self-assess their own writings, even when the criteria for assessment were given. Therefore, Patri and Matsuno emphasised the training for students in order to improve their SA. They also proposed that students become more committed and effective as learners once they acquire the strategies and a clear picture of the outcome.

The significance of FA has not only been studied with respect to SA. In the next sub section, the definition of peer-assessment and evidence of its significance to learning are presented.

2.4.2.2 Peer-assessment

Similar to self-assessment, peer-assessment (PA) has attracted much attention from writing researchers and practitioners (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Zhu & Mitchell, 2012). As a form of

FA and collaborative learning, PA has the potential to help students identify targeted learning goals (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2004; Herrera et al., 2007) and to promote second language (L2) writing development (Hu, 2005; Tsui & Ng, 2000). For the purpose of this study, PA is defined as “an arrangement for peers to consider the level, value, worth, quality or successfulness of the products or outcomes of learning of others of similar status” (Topping, Smith, Swanson & Elliot, 2000, p.150). In short, peer-assessment can be seen as peer feedback where students often assess other students’ work compared to the criteria developed by the teacher. Thus, an important aspect of peer assessment is that it engages students in dialogue with their classmates, commenting on each other’s work rather a one-way feedback system from instructor to student. According to several researchers, as students comment on their peers’ work, they apply informal or their own language which could be understandable to them (Yu & Lee, 2014; Yu, 2015; Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Thorne, 2004).

There is an increasing number of empirical studies on peer involvement across the fields of education, which have claimed that working with peers in the classroom possess many potential benefits for students (Bostock, 2000; Liu & Hansen, 2002; Saito, 2008). For example, Chen (2011) conducted a meta-analysis study and found PA advantageous as the students who used peer feedback showed the greatest learning gains. PA can facilitate students’ development of various aspects of learning, such as evaluation skills, metacognitive strategies and autonomous learning, which will allow each student to learn better (Ballantyne, Hughes & Mylonas, 2002). Furthermore, students’ attitudes towards writing can be enhanced because PA is viewed as formative developmental process for students to create discussion and comments (Hyland, 2000; Lee, 2009). PA is also an important means of motivation to promote learning since students are engaged in their own learning process. Moreover, students can improve their writing proficiency by reading each other’s work critically, be able to identify strengths and weaknesses in their own writing, and integrate peer feedback in revisions (Hansen & Liu, 2005; Graham & Perin, 2007; Zhao, 2010), which enables their practice of FA. According to Saito (2008), in order to make PA effective, not only clear objectives and guidelines should be provided but also students should be taught how to do PA. In other words, all of the benefits of PA are only possible when students have the skills required to practise PA.

Although the benefits of peer assessment have been recognised to some extent, there are a number of challenges within the classroom practice of PA, especially in EFL classrooms for the following two reasons. The first reason is because of their perceived low-level English

language proficiency. For example, Chamcharatsri (2010) found that Thai university students and Fei (2006) found that Chinese students did not appreciate with PA and hesitated to use peer comments because they felt doubtful about the quality of peer feedback. The second reason is the belief that teachers are the experts and their knowledge is superior to students' knowledge. This is due to their cultural education background where there were teacher-driven pedagogies in the entire education system. According to Yang, et al (2006), their participants, EFL students, preferred teacher feedback and made more frequent use of it than peer feedback due to their prolonged teacher-dominated English learning experience where they consider their teachers as the source of authority.

2.4.2.3 Feedback as Feedforward

Feedback as feedforward, the third strand in LOA, is considered as the key enabling strategy in ESL writing (Tsui & Ng, 2000). Feedback as feedforward provides information which is more than just a summary of grades to achieve their improvement (Sadler, 2009). Feedback forward or feedforward is referred to the feedback which is timely and provides students with information and guidance on what they can do next in order to move forward in their work, supporting current and future learning (Carless, Joughin, Liu et al. 2006; Duncan, 2007; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Feedback is not only an essential element to the process of students' learning (Price, Handley & Millar, 2011), but also a crucial aspect of writing programs for the development of language writing skills (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Moreover, feedback also plays an important motivational role in learning because it can help to build students' confidence by acknowledging their efforts and praising their accomplishments (Hounsell & Hounsell; 2010).

In general, feedback refers to the information about learners work from a teacher, from other learners, or from themselves upon reflection (Sadler, 2000). However, for the purpose of this study, feedback is defined as the comment or information received from the teacher only on the product of a learning task (Colby-Kelly & Turner, 2007). Teacher-feedback (TF) is regarded as the main, accurate, appropriate input given to students for their revision and improvement in their writing (Srichanyachon, 2012; Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006). Studies on feedback also showed that many ESL students greatly valued, preferred and thus adopted TF more than feedback from peers or from self, and made greater improvements in their revised drafts (Hu, 2005; Li & Lin, 2007; Yang et al., 2006) since TF is given as part of FA guides students how to progress their work, support current and future learning (Jawah, et al., 2004;

Carless, Joughin, Liu et. Al., 2006). Both Hattie and Timperley (2007) and Chvala and Graedler (2010) stressed the impact of TF on learning and achievement in the English subject stating that TF in English is one of the most crucial factors which can either positively or negatively affecting students' interest, motivation, and their potential future development in English. Previous research has looked into various aspects of feedback and found out that L2 students overall treasure TF and believed that TF is useful and can help them improve their writing (Ferris, 2010; Hyland & Hyland, 2006b; Yu & Lee, 2013).

In this particular study, which aims to investigate how students perceive FA in their writing classroom, students either view FA positively or negatively as point of view. More particularly, how they view self-assessment, peer-assessment, and teacher feedback are the focus of this paper.

2.5 Formative Assessment of writing in Classrooms

2.5.1 Formative Assessment in Higher Education

FA of writing in general, and especially in English as second language (ESL) is an underexplored area of research (Burner, 2016), because the focus of assessment in ESL writing instruction has served mainly summative purposes (Lee, 2007; 2011). Before discussing formative assessment in second language (L2) learning in higher education, FA in higher education is discussed in this section.

In the last decade, much work has been done in the area of FA that provides evidence that the use of FA can enhance students' achievement. For example, a significant contribution to the research on perceptions of FA in higher education is a project at the University of Huddersfield, in the U.K, conducted by Ahmed and Teviotdale (2008). They conducted a qualitative research project on how first year undergraduate students from the business school view FA through questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. The results have shown that students showed positive attitude towards FA and found it beneficial to their achievement. However, students valued differently among tutor feedback, peer- and self-assessment. The students in their research preferred tutor feedback to peer feedback and self-assessment, and most of students were unsure how to do peer- and self-assessment. With regard to peer- and self-assessment, students stated that there is less student involvement, and not all of them would engage in FA because their first-year grade is not important.

The context of the present study is ESL in university classrooms. Specifically, this study is interested in the field of L2 writing. Therefore, for the following section, formative assessment in ESL classroom is discussed.

2.5.2 Formative Assessment in ESL Classroom

Since the late 1960s, the nature of ESL context has been considered by language testing scholars. Recently, teacher-student and student-student communications has been highlighted (Chaloub-Deville, 2003; Leung & Mohan, 2004), especially, student-centred approaches and the student-peer interactive approach has an impact on FA in ESL learning. Before further discussing FA in ESL classroom, the terminology of ESL is explained. The term *English as a second language* (ESL) is also used in the current study. It refers to contexts where English is the means of instruction through which learners are taught the curriculum. This includes contexts where either all or almost all the teaching is delivered through English. The language taught in such contexts is referred to as a *second language* (L2).

According to Leung and Mohan (2004), it is important to consider students' interaction because students also bring their own interpretations and understanding of assessment tasks. Although a large amount of second language literature has long discussed the teachers' perception or practice of FA (Rea-Dickins, 2006; Hawe & Dixon, 2014; Lee & Coniam, 2013; Lee, 2007; Cheng, Rogers & Hu, 2004; Colby-Kelly & Turner, 2007), the students' perspective has received the least attention in comparison to others. As such, there is not much in the language testing literature about formative assessment neither in EFL nor ESL classrooms (Rea-Dickins & Gardner, 2000). This paper will attempt to contribute to this field.

2.6 Students' Attitudes and Perceptions of Formative Assessment

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the literature on students' perceptions of FA is relatively limited. However, this area of study is crucial because the way students view FA could shape students' attitudes towards FA, as well as shape how they prepare for it (MacLellan, 2001). As a result, students' perception could have an impact on their use of FA and subsequently lead to positive or negative influences on learning (Gielen et al., 2003). Therefore, students' perception of FA is an important area, so this is why it constitutes a cornerstone of this current study. For the purpose of this study, the term perception is defined as how students' perceive FA in the course under investigation (Van de Watering et al., 2006).

Many researchers have declared that, there is learning improvement through formative assessment which is associated with students' attitude towards learning (Black et al., 2003a; Broadfoot, 2007; Wang, 2008). In respect to students' attitude towards FA, motivation plays an important role as it can influence attitudes. For example, if students are accustomed to a

grading system and tasks, they tend to neglect the class work that is not graded (Scallon, 2000). In other words, students would not show their attitudes towards FA since it does not count on their report card. In the same vein, the way students perceive FA could provide insight into individual students' attitude to learning (Ginsburg, 2009). However, other researchers have found that formative assessment can eventually promote intrinsic learning, and high quality of the information and frequent feedback transmitted to the students are necessary (Scallon, 2000). Subsequently, from the cognitivist perspective, perceptions lead to either positive or negative feeling or attitude towards FA and thus have positive or negative influences on students' learning (Gielen et al., 2003; Baker & Bricker, 2010). This section reviews research-based studies on ESL students' perception of FA, starting with research in peer-assessment in writing classrooms.

Some studies investigated perceptions of different FA tools and highlighted positive students' perceptions of the benefits of FA (Kwok, 2008; Mok, 2010; Patri, 2002; Cheng & Warren, 2005). For example, Kwok (2008) conducted a mixed method study on 19 EAP undergraduate students' view of peer-assessment as FA, and its results further endorsed the finding of Mok (2010) who did a case study with 4 ESL junior secondary school students. Both studies found their participants reported perceived benefits of peer-assessment, in terms of facilitating thinking and reflection development and to prompt students' future actions. Furthermore, students explained that they could avoid problems in their own writings by reflecting on others' performance they assessed, because when they identify the problems of others they are likely to identify similar problem in their own writing as well (Mok, 2010). In addition, students enjoyed their experience of giving comments, making decisions, and listening to other students (Kwok, 2008). Indeed, the majority of students considered the feedback and comments from their peers useful, which means peer-assessment is viewed positively by students. However, both studies showed that most of the students had personal concerns when they perform the role of peer evaluator. They stated that they felt unprepared or 'not good enough' to assess peers as compared to the teacher who has more experience and provides professional feedback. This is an interesting finding that despite the differences between Kwok's (2008) and Mok's (2010) research in participants, methodology and scope of research, participants from both studies indicated the positive perceptions of peer-assessment when being assessed but indicated concerns as assessors.

An interesting result was found with students at different English language level. Students from Mok's (2010) study, who were aged between 12 and 14 had a low intermediate English

level, expressed that it was more challenging to be peer assessors, due to their low English proficiency. They also mentioned that there is a lack of guidelines and support for PA implementation. Similarly, another two pieces of research (Cheng & Warren, 2005; Patri, 2002), which both aimed to examine students' views on peer-assessment of oral presentation, produced strong evidence of negative reactions of peer assessors for FA but positive views on the benefits of peer-assessment. These studies used different approaches and targeted different instruments to find out students' perceptions on peer-assessment of oral presentation. Cheng and Warrant (2005) conducted a qualitative study with semi-structured interviews and peer-assessments forms with 51 electrical engineering undergraduates. The study looked at beliefs about peer-assessment on each other's English language proficiency of their oral presentation. The participants were asked to assess their classmates' performance with reference to some agreed assessment rubrics, and students were trained beforehand. Participants, especially lower English level students, expressed they were not confident as peer evaluator due to their linguistic competence. The students felt they would not provide useful feedback because of their English proficiency. They also mentioned insufficiency of training and discussion prior to the peer-assessment exercise. Nevertheless, Cheng and Warren (2005) believe that students found peer-assessment beneficial in terms of developing students' higher cognitive thinking and scaffolding a deeper learning approach. Indeed, the students' attitudes towards peer-assessment were positive. Moreover, it is found that peer-assessment significantly motivates lower English proficiency participants who were being peer assessed to improve their language proficiency. This finding was similar to a quantitative research study carried out by Patri (2002) to determine 54 English majored undergraduate participants' view on impact of peer-assessment of oral presentation. The majority of the students found peer-assessment satisfactory, and students felt the usefulness and benefits from peer-assessment. However, students found it more helpful if they could discuss the rubrics with each other before giving the feedback to each other. Moreover, the students with low-level English proficiency found it more problematic in data interpretation compared to more advanced English language students. Falchikov and Goldfinch (2000) further agreed with Patri (2002) that students need to discuss the assessment rubrics and peer-assessment exercises need to be carefully planned in order for students to assess their peers. There are several previous studies on FA tools in L2 writing classrooms, in terms of stance (i.e., positive or negative), and it has started to receive increasing attention from writing researchers and instructors recently (Chang, 2015; Yu, 2016; Yu & Lee, 2016; Hu, 2005; Zhu

& Mitchell, 2012). For example, Belachew, Getinet and Gashaye (2014) combined a qualitative and quantitative approach to examine EFL students' perception and practice of self-assessment, and its results further collaborated the findings from Nassaji (2015) who used both semi-structured interviews and stimulus recall to investigate ESL students' opinions of teacher's feedback for three weeks. Nassaji found the participants had positive attitude towards teachers' feedback, indicating that feedback was useful to correct their errors and showed their intention to utilise it in their future writing. This finding aligns with a case study carried out by Belachew, Getinet and Gashaye (2014) that the majority of the participants (16 out of 18 students) supported their participation in self-assessment and felt comfortable in assessing their own written performances. Moreover, these students showed improvement as they had more practice, because self-assessment is a helpful formative tool in acquiring the desired skill in a meaningful way. On the contrary, two students reflected the opposite idea to the majority by viewing self-assessment as a waste of time when felt they could be doing other activities such as homework. Also, these two students preferred teachers' feedback because they felt giving feedback should be teachers' job. Along the same line, other studies supported positive perspectives on the usefulness of FA tools in their writing (Yua & Hu, 2017; Lee, 2004; Hamouda, 2011). Hamouda (2011) used a questionnaire which was adapted from relevant research (Ferris, 2003; Hyland, 2003; Lee, 2005) to examine 200 university students' beliefs on formative feedback. The majority of the students (93.5%) declared that they enjoyed receiving feedback from teachers, because it stated the mistakes students made as well as corrected their errors. Furthermore, 75% of students felt their writing had improved with the help of feedback. This finding is similar to a case study carried out by Yua and Hu (2017) to investigate Chinese EFL university students' peer feedback practice in EFL writing, and most of students claimed that peer-assessment was helpful because it aided their learning process when pointing out the errors. Both studies, using different methodologies and instruments, concluded that participants had favourable perceptions of formative exercises because it identified recurring errors, provided correction, helped in learning process, and gave chances to further improve writing quality. This result was significant because it was in accord with several other studies (Lee, 2004, 2008; Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Bode, 2014; Listiani, 2017).

However, not all researchers found positive perceptions of FA from students. Norouzian and Farahani (2012) conducted a survey questionnaire on students' perception on the formative feedback in English writing to 45 university students, and it presented some negative views

from the students. Less than half of students (46%) felt progress with the help of feedback, but 37% of students indicated no progress at all in their writing. Only 11% of participants expressed that they made some progress. Different factors, such as research methodology, individual differences and amount of motivation, could be the reasons for such result of the research. Yua and Hu (2017) also agreed that students' motives and goals, individual student's values, examination culture, could also be the factors. While other researchers also identified factors, like use of L1 language, contextual factors, lack of understanding of FA by students (Goldstein, 2006; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Lee, 2008; Black & William, 2006; Usher & Earl, 2010; Wang, 2008). More specifically, Black and William (2006) have argued that there could be mainly three drawbacks to involving students in FA. First is students' belief about the achievement goals. For example, if a student has low achievement goal, he or she might not accept extra feedback or comment from others. Second is students' belief about their responses. Depending on the cultural background or learning experiences, learners may interpret feedback differently or negatively. Third is students' perception of required work and abilities to achieve these goals. For instance, students can be de-motivated or even hindered in learning if they fear to fail a task or had unsuccessful experiences previously (Black et al., 2003a). In spite of some limitations from abovementioned studies, the positive evidence provided by their results is sufficient to view that formative assessment tools, namely, peer-assessment, self-assessment, and feedback, is helpful in writing by students and that continuous feedback through FA could stimulate students' learning.

This section has presented how students perceive FA in their writing. Students' practice of FA in L2 writing is discussed in the next section.

2.7 Students' Practice of Formative Assessment

In recent years, students' involvement in the assessment process has received increasing attention (Yu, 2016; Chang, 2015; Zhu & Mitchell, 2012). Several studies underlined students' application of FA, finding students' use of FA in their writing revision. For instance, both Hamouda (2011) and Halimi (2008) conducted studies on students' practice of teachers' feedback, and they both found that more than half of their participants (68% of students in Hamouda's study, and 63% of participants in Halimi's study) read every feedback carefully after receiving it from their teachers. Participants from both studies found teachers' feedback actually helped them to improve their writing. Meanwhile, some other studies found students' use of FA tools seems influenced by students' affective preference (Black & William, 2009; Pat-EI, Tillema, Segers & Vedder, 2015). For example, 12 EFL participants

in Yang, Badger, and Yu's (2006) study also used more teachers' feedback (90%) than peer feedback (76%) in their redrafts or revision. The students claimed more value in teacher feedback than peer feedback for the improvement of their final writing, because they believed teacher feedback was more trustworthy and accurate than their classmates were. In the same line is Tsui and Ng's study (2000), who conducted a case study of the impact of peer and teacher feedback on the writing of secondary school EFL learners in Hong Kong. All students preferred and used more teacher than peer feedback in their redrafts, nevertheless, the students stated that they benefited from reading other students' work, and preparing to give feedback. They suggested that using peer feedback might contribute to the development of learner autonomy. Both studies, using different approaches examining the same research questions and similar cultural backgrounds, concluded that students are mostly likely and preferred to use teachers' feedback. However, several studies claimed that students could develop assessing skills with appropriate training. For example, Hu (2005) conducted an action research study for three years with upper-intermediate ESL Chinese students in an English course on academic writing classes. The students met their teacher for two hours, three times per week, for 25 weeks. Throughout the course, the students were asked to write six 500-word essays, each involving a different assessment – first peer and then teacher. The author found that the participants showed resistance to working with their peers in the class taught in 2001, so she designed many learning activities to support the peer-assessment process and ensured students trained for peer-assessment. Hu observed that students actively discussed each other's writing and stayed on task during the oral response sessions, and students produced quality and critical feedback that was worth taking into account for revision. Moreover, some of the peer feedback even covered problems that the teacher failed to notice. This finding is interesting because students actually showed more willingness of using peer-assessment with the support of training and students even stated that students feel freer to express opinions with peers' comments.

There are a few reasons that hindered students taking follow up action with FA for revision were also addressed: students were discouraged to revise when there were too many corrections pointed out on their paper and they feared to make other new mistakes (Hamouda, 2011; Gulcat & Ozagac, 2004; Hyland, 2003). In addition, students tended to ignore the feedback because they did not understand the feedback that was provided by teachers or peers (Mungungu-Shipale & Kangira, 2017; Yang et al., 2006).

2.8 Conclusion

In this literature review on FA in English writing, to some extent the value and impact of FA have been analysed. The importance of FA has been emphasised because FA directs students to practise it efficiently. Though students' perceptions about different FA tools have been investigated, the different language background of learners may influence learners to have different perceptions. So, it is not reasonable to generalize a broad view of learner perceptions in relation to other nations or locations. The following chapter describes some elements of the context, participants, instruments, and methodology of this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introductions

The main goal of this study is an attempt to understand how English as Second Language (ESL) students in the UK perceive formative assessment and the experience of using it in their English writing. This chapter provides a detailed description and explanation of the research methodology employed in the present study to fulfil the aim of the study. It is organised into ten sections. It begins with a discussion of the design of the research (3.2). Section 3.3 describes the methodology used in the study along with the participants who engaged in the study in greater detail and the educational context (3.4). Section 3.5 discusses data processing and analyses, followed by credibility, trustworthiness, and triangulation (3.6). Section 3.7 illuminates how ethics and positionality were applied in this research. The next three sections present piloting (3.8), conduct of research (3.9), and research analysis method respectively. Finally, a conclusion will be presented in the last section (3.10).

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Paradigm, Ontology and Epistemology

This thesis is a piece of an empirical research, because it is based on observed phenomena, and it derived knowledge from actual experience rather than from theory (Punch, 2016). The research questions of this research are concerned with personal opinions, experiences, attitudes and reflections, and the research method is chosen accordingly. In order to achieve the research aim, the chosen paradigm of this research study is a qualitative approach since this thesis is concerned to “understand individuals’ perceptions of the world” (Bell, 2010, p.6.). The further discussion about the qualitative approach is presented in the next subsection.

The ontological stance of this study is social constructionism or interpretivism, which essentially defines a social world of meanings (Sikes, 2004). This ontological assumption is developed from personal background and interest. Social constructionism or interpretivism assumes there is no single reality or truth – subjective meanings of individuals experience in the world they live are continually being changed and developed through social interaction, because reality is created by individuals who have their own thoughts, interpretations and meanings (Bryman, 2001). As the aim of this project depends as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied (Creswell, 2003), the interpretive design is

used in order to interpret the students' experiences, feelings, opinions, and their inner thoughts.

In association with the ontological perspectives, the epistemology position of this study is interpretivist, where suggesting the facts are based on perception rather than one objective truth (Crotty, 2003). In such epistemological point of view, it considers knowledge as personal, subjective and unique (Cohen et al., 2007). Thereof, the research findings and conclusions are interpreted from the participants rather than an abstract theory.

Regarding the ontological and epistemological perspectives, the type of research approach that involves the collection of individuals' ideas and perceptions about a social phenomenon, practicing FA in writing classroom in this project, as the most appropriate procedures of gathering and interpreting data in order to generate credibility and trustworthiness. The chosen research approach, the qualitative constructivist approach, is discussed in the following section.

3.2.2 Approach

The majority of prior studies employed mixed methods approach (Min, 2005; 2006; Yang et al., 2006; Zhao, 2014) or experimental research designs (Diab, 2010; Eksi, 2012; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Min, 2016) to investigate related research – a relatively smaller number of prior researches adopted a qualitative approach to investigate the phenomenon. One disadvantage of the qualitative approach is that the analysis takes longer and that it might be hard to generalize the findings, nevertheless, this approach is more flexible and therefore allows a larger degree of adjustments in the interaction with the participants (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2012). Quoting from Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), “people almost always talk about their experience in a storied form. Thus, qualitative research is based on textual data rather than quantitative data, on stories rather than numbers” (p.24). According to several authors, for example, Creswell (2013; 2014), Denscombe (2017), and Creswell and Creswell (2018) that in its current form it seems to suggest that were writing about FA specifically rather than research in general. In other words, the qualitative approach provides a deeper and richer understanding of a given phenomenon and participants' views are in focus. Therefore, in order to answer the research questions with available time and as a small-scale research, a qualitative approach is the most reasonable approach for this study under the given circumstances (Nygaard, 2008). In addition, since the present study aims to provide a description of how a FA practice is experienced by those involved, the adaptation of

qualitative research approach is suitable as it emphasizes subjectivity rather objectivity. In this study, qualitative data is collected from multiple sources, including students (interview), teachers (interview), and the researcher (observation) – details are presented in the further section in the chapter.

3.2.1 Strategy

The chosen strategy is phenomenology because phenomenological studies describe the common meaning of individuals' experiences of a phenomenon and produce a description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since the aim of the research is to find out individual's perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about FA tools based on actual experiences, a phenomenological design seemed to be the most likely to provide appropriate data in support of this research. Although phenomenology is often criticised for its subjectivity in data analysis, it suits small-scale research projects like this study and can provide genuine data to reflect the complex experiences of the research subjects (Rallis & Rossman, 2003; Denscombe, 2017).

3.2 Methodology

Research methodology is concerned as “the philosophy or the general principle which will guide research” (Dawson, 2007, p.15). In qualitative research, asking participants questions or making observations are the most common methods are (Silverman, 2010). In this section, the selection and discussion of research instruments are presented.

In order to allow for in-depth exploration of a phenomenon, interviews and classroom observation were implemented as the two methods of data collection. The nature of this research problem opts for students' reflections and therefore demands detailed descriptions. Consequently, interviews are the preferred data collection method, because interviewees are able to express personal experiences adequately (Patton, 2002) as well as the interviewer provides the prompts phenomena that cannot be observed (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007). Document analysis and think-aloud protocol were considered in the beginning, however, classroom observation was chosen because observation provided rich information about how participants react and practice FA in specific situations so as to have deeper knowledge of the topic and to answer the research questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Donker & Markopoulos, 2002).

3.3.1 Interview

Interviews were selected because it is assumed to be relatively better to investigate the perceptions and practices of teachers towards FA in writing classrooms more deeply. According to Cohen et al. (2007), interviews are very important in enabling the participants to express their views of the world deeply. An interview is defined as “a purposive conversation with a person or a group of persons” (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtler, 2006, p. 121).

An interview provides a comprehensive way to learn about the world of others through interaction based on a conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Qu & Dumay, 2011). In terms of interaction, there are different types of interviews such as one-to-one, focus groups, face-to-face, online or telephone interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Denscombe, 2017). A one-to-one, face-to-face individual interview is the most common form of interviews where an interviewer and an interviewee sit in the same location and talk in person (Qu & Dumay, 2011; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). It provides quite a depth of information of informants' opinions, ideas, and priorities, and it gives the validity of the data as the interviews can be checked for accuracy and relevance with the interviewees as they are collected (Denscombe, 2017). Since this study investigated individual's perception and practice of FA, a one-to-one interview was preferred rather than focus groups in this context because it is easier to get personal experience and opinion in depth to answer the research questions. Compared to online or telephone interviews, a face-to-face interview captures verbal and non-verbal cues, like body language or emotions more clearly (Lavrakas, 2008; Denscombe, 2014). In addition, in a face-to-face interview it is easy to clarify answers and probe for explanations of responses (Lavrakas, 2008), as it is to seek interviewee's voice (O'Leary, 2010). Another advantage is that it is easy to arrange the meeting and to control the line of enquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Interviews can be organised differently, and there are three interview structures to classify: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Given, 2008; Qu & Dumay, 2011). An unstructured interview has no specific format and it starts with a question or an introduction of the topic. Thus, it is hard to collect enough information relating to research questions, and there is possibility to go astray into areas that are irrelevant to the research (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Denscombe, 2017). On the contrary, a structured interview has a fixed format and it is

not flexible. In other words, new questions cannot be asked impromptu during the interview, so it gives participants limited responses. As a result, it can be difficult to obtain reliable data on attitudes, opinion and values (Qu & Dumay, 2011; Denscombe, 2017). A semi-structured interview has the format of an interview with a flexible of amount of questions to be explored, and the sequence of themes and questions may vary (Merriam, 2009). And thus, questions can be developed and changed in the process of the research in order to follow up on what is told by the interviewees (Given, 2008; Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2012).

A semi-structured interview was chosen for this study to get sufficient data to answer research questions, because it is not only easier to get participants' experience and opinion about FA in depth, but it also provides opportunity to act upon an answer instantly by clarifying answer or probing for explanations of responses during the interview process (Denscombe, 2017; Lavrakas, 2008; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Opdenakker, 2006; Oltmann, 2016). As mentioned above, teachers' interview was used to obtain further information on students' practice. It is because teachers can discuss about their perceptions of how students behave or react towards FA but they cannot provide information about the learners' perceptions. Nevertheless, teachers' interview was useful as a cross-reference and clarification to the responses obtained from classroom observation and students' interview.

23 open-ended questions (Appendix I) were planned but it had the flexibility within the range of 20 to 25 questions, and they lasted around 50 minutes. Before the interviews were conducted, they were piloted. A detail on pilot is presented in 3.8.2 section. All interviews were recorded and transcribed with promised anonymity, and all data would be deleted once used. The interview questions prepared for the students' interview were based on three research questions, with the aim of collecting as much as relevant information as possible. As discussed in the literature chapter, Chapter Two, some of the questions were based on items from questions (6-11) used in previous studies that examined similar research questions (Chang, 2015; Kwok, 2008; Hu, 2005; Yu, 2016; Yu & Lee, 2016; Zhu & Mitchell, 2012), which increased the validity of the research tool. In addition, many researches have used interviews to collect data in their relevant study of FA (Cheng and Warrant, 2005; Nassaji, 2015). Other additional specific questions were also prepared, but used to different extents depending on the talkativeness of the interviewees. The interview questions were prepared in English first, and Chinese version for some interviewees (appendices 1 and 2).

3.3.2 Classroom observation

Classroom observation is the other data collection method used for this study. Classroom observation is a research method that “enables researchers to systematically observe and record people’s behaviour, actions and interactions” (Hennink et al., 2013). It has become more common to collect data by means of observation in educational research, in fact many previous research on FA in L2 have used observation as a research tool (Rea-Dickins, 2006; Rea-Dickins & Gardner, 2000; Gattullo, 2000; Colby-Kelly & Turner, 2007; Dixon, Hawe & Parr, 2011; Enever, 2011). Moreover, it is suggested to conduct observations in classroom context for research related to assessments (McNamara, 2001), because it reveals the complexities involved in teaching and learning (Cohen et al., 2007). In this respect, observation might bring to light things that participants did not talk comfortably about in interview situations (Cohen et al., 2000). In addition, deploying this method enables the gathering of live data with direct relevance to the second research question (RQ2). As RQ2 explores how students interact with FA practice in writing class, lesson observations were undertaken to find out what actually happens in the classroom.

While offering the advantages of gathering live empirical data, there are some limitations of classroom observation critiqued (Cohen et al., 2007; Bell, 2006). For example, Bell (2006) critiqued that providing data on behaviours which only occur on one instance may lead to inconsistency of data because one observation is not the same as another. Therefore, to avoid discrepancy, the data will be compared with the data from other instruments. Furthermore, field notes were kept with a detailed record of activities taking place during the observation. The discussion about field notes is presented later in this section. In spite of these disadvantages, researchers have developed a rationale for choosing classroom observation as research instrument.

While semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain an understanding of students’ perceptions of FA through the discussion of their opinions and experience, classroom observation was deployed to explore the extent to which such knowledge is reflected in their practice of FA in the classroom. It can lead to broader understanding of the lived experience of students than interviews alone, as it provides insightful knowledge of the context, which is the writing classroom in this project. In addition, it can help to explore the possible gap between what students had said in the interviews and what was observed (Mulhall, 2003), such as the issues that students themselves were not aware of.

In the current study, classroom observation was used primarily to collect evidence about how students practice their understanding of FA, and field notes were mainly used to collect data. Writing field notes was an essential part of the observation process in that it was helpful to record important events about the participants' actions in the classroom and the context in which the assessment took place (Mackey & Gass, 2005). There are two roles can be adopted in the research environment, namely participatory and non-participatory (Given, 2008). Non-participatory was chosen for classroom observation for this research. In the role of the non-participant observer, "the researcher conducts an observation without participating in the activities that you are observing" (Hennink et al., 2010, p.185). In other words, non-participant observer is not part of the observed community, so the observer should keep a distance and observe participants and activities (O'Leary, 2010). The purpose of the observations was to record any non-verbal data such as gestures, facial expressions, or feelings (Cohen, 1998; Patton, 2002). In order to do so, finding a right spot to sit for observation is important as Hennink et al. (2003, p.33) stated "researchers need to identify an appropriate place to conduct observation." Throughout all observations, I sat in the back of the classroom and tried not to distract the teaching process.

Observational data can be recorded in the form of field notes (Hatch, 2002). The sample field notes is provided (appendix 4). Field notes were useful in any qualitative study as they are helpful to 'record in-depth descriptive details of people, places, things, and events, as well as reflections on data, and the process of the research' (Brodsky, 2008; p.342). The observational data of what actually happened in the classroom was recorded during the observation, by taking descriptive field notes, concerning ongoing activities of self-assessment, peer-assessment, and teacher feedback in the classroom. All observational data was "worth noting" (Patton, 2002, p.302). Personal feelings and reflections were also noted down on the observation notes, because "field notes also contain the observer's own feelings, reactions to the experience, and reflections about the personal meaning and significance of what has been observed" (Patton, 2002, p.303). More details about the observational data are presented in next chapter (4.3).

3.4 Participants

3.4.1 Sampling Technique and Sample Procedure

Sampling is defined as the smaller number selected from a wider population to become representative of larger population (Hammond & Wellington, 2013). In this study, the type of

sampling technique chosen is purposive non-probability sample selection based on certain criteria of a population and the objectives of this study (Palys, 2008). A purposive sampling is part of a qualitative sampling procedure where participants and sites are selected intentionally in order to learn and understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). When selecting participants for the interviews, other sampling strategies were considered, for example, snowball sampling which participants recommend others to be sample. Nevertheless, it was necessary to have the specific sample for the project in order to ensure sufficient data material answer the research questions. Therefore, the study setting, pre-session programme was purposefully selected so as to include students in academic English writing classes for ESL students. Before the data were collected, an informal meeting with the programme director was initiated in order to gather information on the context as well as to inform the study design. According to the programme director, PSP embodied the policy to promote formative assessment in lessons. In other words, all students from PSP would experience FA in writing classes. Therefore, student sample from PSP is suitable for this study and it is ensured that students were able to provide the data required. The programme director approved the implementation of this study once the programme started, and provided two instructors who would likely be teaching perceived lower English proficiency students. The participants were approached after obtaining approval from the English language programme director to contact teachers to discuss their willingness to open up their classes and students for the purpose of participation in the study. After the approval from two teachers, the participants from two different classes were contacted after each lesson to notify them of the study. The details about participants are described in the next subsection.

3.4.2 Participants

Although the number of participants sample can be varied (Creswell, 2014), it is suggested that the number of six to ten interviewees would be sufficient in providing an in-depth picture of a phenomenon (Dorney, 2007). In this study, the total number of interviewees is nine, of whom six are students and three are teachers. They were selected regardless of their gender or nationality, and they took part in this study voluntarily.

The student group consisted of 2 females and 4 males, and they are adult international students between the ages of 18 to 23. The participants represent different nationalities with varying first language: China (Mandarin and Cantonese) and Iraq (Arabic), and they never or rarely talk to family or friends in English. Thereof, all student participants speak English as a second language (ESL). They were taking PSP at a university in Northern England to

improve all parts of English skills, namely, listening, reading, writing, and speaking. They had been in the UK studying English ranging from three to six months. The English level of students varied from approximately 4.5 in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test score up to 5.5. These students featured in this study were in between beginning and intermediate level when it came to English proficiency. Some were conversant in English and did not require translation support their participation, but some were not fluent in English and needed translation support. The IELTS test scores will categorize students' English level when analyzing the data.

The teacher group consists of one instructor and two teaching assistants or student engagement coaches according to the institute. The student engagement coaches are in the class to support both the main instructor and the students, and they work part-time. The instructor works full time and delivers the lesson. The three participant teachers are all female. In the pre-interview, all of the teachers stated that they have experienced in teaching ESL classes in PSP before.

All nine participants took part in semi-structure, one-to-one, face-to-face interviews. The teachers' interviews, however, have only served the purpose of providing background information and overview about the FA practice in the classroom, and thus are not the main data material analysed for this study.

3.5 Data Processing and Analysis

The qualitative analyses consisted of examining and reporting on the data, and the data were collected from student interviews, teacher interviews, and classroom observations. Prior to the analysis, the first step is "to prepare and organise the data for analysis" (Creswell, 2014, p.285). An essential stage in the data analysis process is to transcribe the interviews from the students and the teachers, because it resulted in providing a written record in which subsequently coded to identify themes.

In this research, detailed descriptions of participants, interactions, as well as direct quotes and conversations were taken as observation data. These data collected from the observation field notes were composed in narrative form in a Word document, and they were filed according to the numbers. On the other hand, the data collected from the interviews was converted to unstructured text data obtained from transcribing audiotapes of interviews. Each interview was saved with their names; however, the interviewees' names were replaced with pseudonyms in the transcriptions. Both English and Chinese interviews were transcribed, and

only Chinese transcription was double-checked by a third part for the accuracy in the translation. The third party is from China and holds a postgraduate degree in TESOL from a UK university, so the person speaks both Chinese and English. As the data that were recorded were a spoken record of what the participants said, it might be difficult to entail non-verbal or behind meaning of what the students and teachers said (Cohen et al., 2007). Therefore, during the transcription process, it was carefully followed Walsh (2006)'s suggestions. For example, firstly, record only what was being said; secondly, emphasise the word or phrase by capitalising; thirdly, denote the unintelligible part; fourthly, use various punctuation to mark pauses in speech. The example of this transcription can be viewed in Appendix 1. This process entailed repetitive listening to the records and multiple reading to the text to ensure that careful attention was paid to the coding categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Cohen et al., 2007; Merriam, 2009).

Content analysis was used to analyse the data obtained from interviews and observations (Colby-Kelly & Turner, 2007). Content analysis is defined as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.128). This method was used to transcribe and code the verbal discourse from the interviews. The coding process was completed in two stages. The initial coding included proofreading the text and highlighting key phrases or recurring text of importance, because themes can only be found through expressions in data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The second stage of coding was organizing phrase, where it used a cutting and pasting procedure to put them into the same box according to a similar theme (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). During this process, important themes were identified, and the findings from this analysis are reported in Chapter 4.

3.6 Credibility, Trustworthiness, and Triangulation

3.6.1 Credibility and Trustworthiness

In this study, credibility and trustworthiness are considered in the methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation. It is important to ensure that the study is conducted according to criteria that enhance trustworthiness (Bryman, 2004), because credibility checks to minimise bias in the design and select appropriate participants into the research context (Anfara et al, 2002). Trustworthiness of qualitative research depends on what the researcher sees and hears. Especially it is essential for qualitative research such as this phenomenological research

which relies on the interpretation of data to incorporate measures to ensure that the analysis is credible and represents the participants' perspectives.

Several measures have been taken to enhance the trustworthiness of this study, as well as to promote credibility in the findings by triangulation, piloting, and the use of a reflective research diary. In the following section, how triangulation was adopted in the study is presented.

3.6.2 Triangulation

According to Schuh (2009), triangulation utilises multiple data collection methods and channels of information to collect data, and in qualitative research it enhances the confidence and trustworthiness of research outcomes (Creswell, 2013; Denscombe, 2017).

Methodological triangulation is one of the approaches to account for research triangulation, in which two or more methods are used to collect the data on the same phenomenon (Denscombe, 2017). Although triangulation is time consuming, it is still worth performing because of its ability to enhance validity. Moreover, by closely following a detailed timetable in the research, these limitations can be minimised (Schuh, 2009; Denscombe, 2017). In order to increase the validity of face-to-face interviews, another research method should be compared with the interview (Denscombe, 2017). In this study, classroom observation was chosen as it is useful in gathering face and contextual validity, as well as testing accuracy of responses (Patton, 2002; Mackey & Gass, 2005). In ensuring the credibility of the findings and their truth-value, the interview translation was checked by a third party. In addition, the transcript was provided to interviewees to check if they agree and approve. Moreover, a pilot testing was conducted to check the instruments were valid and reliable (Rothgeb, 2008). Interviews were piloted to check in to check in to ensure that the questions were easy to understand and they help understand the research questions (Hassan & Schattner & Mazza, 2006). Further information about piloting is illustrated in 3.8 section.

3.7 Ethical and Positionality

3.7.1 Ethical Consideration

This project was undertaken in line with the British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines (2018), and it was conducted with the highest possible ethical standards and the highest integrity. This study involved people as its participants, and thus this required complying with a number of ethical considerations followed closely based on BERA best

practice guidelines (Hammersley &Traianou, 2012). This section outlines how closely ethics were followed.

Prior to the commencement of the study, a written research proposal with ethical consideration was submitted to the ethical committee of the University of Huddersfield through the School of Education and Professional Development. The university approved the ethical application. Also, the programme director and the teachers from the PSP institute agreed to carry out the observation and interview. Considerations were taken to ensure that this consent was informed (BERA, 2018). For example, before doing the interviews, a clear explanation of the purpose of the research was provided to all participants, including, their right to withdraw their consent for any reason at any time, that they would have access to the data after the transcription, how the data would be kept securely, as well as the data would be deleted once used (Gray, 2004). As the person, knowledge, democratic values, the quality of educational research, academic freedom, and trust were considered when conducting the research (BERA, 2018), all disclosure was provided with openness that all participants were informed about the research process.

The second recognised ethical consideration was to keep the participants' privacy confidential and anonymous. Neither their names nor the university were named without permission, but instead, pseudonyms were used – only information that was within the law was reported. In order to ensure the anonymity of the participants, students and teachers were allocated alphabet with number, for example, student 1 = S1, teacher 1 = T1. Any information about the participants was kept safely – audio was stored in password protected phone and paper copies were kept in a personal locker.

Thirdly, it was important that research ethics were closely to follow in order to avoid causing harm to the participants, in terms of psychological, social, economic, physical, safety, legal, equality and justice (Denscombe, 2014). This was ensured by piloting and by behaving sensitively when interacting with the participants.

Next, to avoid creating any bias in participant response, only reasonable incentives were provided, such as a small snack or a cup of coffee. It was important to ensure that incentives would not prompt or lead their answers, so incentives were handed out to participants at the end.

Last but not least, since this project was conducted with English language learners, it was important to present a clear explanation of the project content to avoid the possibility of

misunderstanding due to the cultural or language differences. All participants were met prior to the actual interview to clarify questions. In addition, translation was provided when participants required – interviewing in their L1 language was prepared. Moreover, transcript was provided to students to ensure they satisfied the translation.

3.7.2 Positionality

In order to conduct an ethical research project, it is essential to pay attention to the positionality (Sultana, 2007) because information about my background concerning basic assumptions and beliefs may affect the choice and use of methodologies and procedures (Sikes, 2004).

In terms of positionality, there were some similarities between participants and me because the subjects of this research are international students in foundation courses in the U.K. They were currently studying English and experiencing FA in writings from teachers, just as my similar experience throughout my language-learning career. The participants were from different educational backgrounds, and I also learned English in different school systems and countries. Students aimed to improve their writing in their pre-session programmes before university. I also had little experience of tutoring and teaching English to ESL students so I also had experience in FA in the classrooms.

As a language learner and teacher, my own background and experience might make me feel different from other language teachers and learners who are either only teachers or learners. Nevertheless, I acknowledge the importance of how the whole research process could be affected by me, so it is important for me to acknowledge bias. Then, I attempted to make sure there were no biased research findings and no leading questions or attempts made during the data collection. Throughout the research, I would ensure not to conceal or highlight information because of personal vested interest, and had no unfair judgements due to my background (Kumar, 2014).

3.8 Piloting

Directing pilot studies before conducting the actual research study is useful, because its small-scale test allows preparation to ensure the methods and instruments are suitable in practice, provides an opportunity to make any adjustments or revisions in the actual research investigation, and enhances the credibility of a qualitative study (Jariath et al., 2000; van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2002; Padgett, 2008). In addition, because pilot work is actually helpful for novice and/or qualitative researchers to assess research protocols (Beebe, 2007;

Lancaster et al., 2004), a pilot exercise was conducted in this study. In order to fully investigate students' stance of formative assessment in the classroom, the method of interview was chosen as the first protocol. Semi-structured interview was piloted to make sure that the questions were easy to understand (Hassan & Schattner & Mazza, 2006).

In preparing the piloting, there was a concern. It was the language. As mentioned in 1.3 section all participants speak English as a second language and their English proficiency levels are in between low and intermediate according to their IELTS test scores, e.g. 4.0-5.0, the question of how much would my participants understand the interview questions and thus how in-depth interview can be carried out were my concerns. The standard of English deployed towards participants sat comfortably at their level in order for them to understand the questions. One of the participants was invited to this pilot practice, and the interview carried out by welcoming the participants, recording the time taken, meanwhile the whole procedure was recorded on a phone device. The piloting session was beneficial, because some modifications were made afterwards from the feedback on the pilot process. The adjustment made from the pilot interview was to address the questions slowly and clearly, word by word. It seemed like the questions were addressed rather fast and some words stuttered out, subsequently the pilot interviewee asked to repeat the question. Furthermore, some changes needed to be made due to its unclearness. Although I attempted to make the questions straightforward, further explanation was required when addressing the interview question. Expressing in a simple manner and choosing easy words are the key points in order for the interviewee to clearly understand. For example, the modified question of "What is your perception of teachers' feedback?" to "What do you think about teachers' feedback?" Or instead of asking "What do you think about peer-assessment?" the question was changed to "What do you think about grading each other's paper?" However, the language problem occurred when the actual interview was carried out. During the interview, the questions demanded further elaboration for the participants to answer, but the answers from a few candidates were not consistent. Assuming it was due to the language barrier, the second interview was conducted in their mother tongue language (Chinese). Fortunately, the answers provided in Chinese kept at a consistent rate and made clear understanding. As a consequence, four out of six students were asked again to do the second interview in Chinese.

There are few things I learnt from this piloting interview practice. Firstly, since a small sample is chosen for the piloting, it does not represent all. In other words, some problems can occur on the way. Secondly, more potential problems may be captured if a transcription

process was made after the interview piloting. Nevertheless, having this experience of preparing the piloting, making modifications, finding challenges from it are all valuable learning.

3.9 Conduct of the Research

The actual conduct commenced one week after PSP has begun, because the programme leader suggested that the first week would be an introductory week. The first instrument utilised was classroom observations. The first classroom observation from two different writing classes was conducted in the second week of PSP, and the second observation was conducted three weeks later. Each class lasted four hours, and during all teaching hours, I sat in the back of the classroom and tried not to distract the teaching process. In the beginning of the class, the teachers introduced me to the entire class and explained the reason for my presence. Once the teaching session of that particular class finished, I left immediately. With regards to observation, two classes from two different teachers were observed while the teachers conducted writing assessments. In other words, the observation data collected for this main study comprised four lessons. The entire duration of each class was observed with the exception of the ten-minute break. Four lessons were observed in different weeks, as Mackey and Gass (2005) explain, “over time and repeated observations, the researcher can gain a deeper and more multilayered understanding of the participants and their context” (p. 176).

On the last day of classroom observations, I approached students to ask their willingness to participate the interviews. I also asked teachers if they were interested to have an interview with me. As a result, six students from different classes, one instructor, and two student engagement coaches were agreed to participate in this study. All nine participants took part in semi-structure, one-to-one, face-to-face interviews. 25 open-ended questions (Appendix I) were planned out for student interview and 20 questions for teacher interview (Appendix III). Both interview questions had the flexibility within the range of 20 to 25 questions, and every interview lasted around 50 minutes each. With regard to student interviews, not every student was fluent in English so translation support was needed for some students. At first, all six students were interviewed in English, however, two students seemed like they did not fully understand the questions later on. As they seemed confused, I asked if they preferred to speak their first language, Chinese (Mandarin). They said yes, so I translated all interview questions conducted the interviews in Chinese. After gathering the information from interviews and observation, all data was organized as mentioned in section 3.5, data process.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter presented the design, the description of the context and participants, data collection and analysis procedures, and the rationale of the methods utilised in the present study. In addition, reliability, validity, positionality and ethics that applied in this research were also evaluated, as well as a research plan which has been provided. An overview of previous studies with similar design was also highlighted, and the limitations of the research was provided and discussed. The next chapter discusses and analyses the findings of this research.

Chapter Four: Results and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

In the present chapter, the aim is to present the participants experiences concerning their current assessment practice in ESL writing, as well as to discuss the findings obtained through conducting semi-structured interviews and observations in the light of previous research.

For organisational purposes, this chapter consists of three main sections. Each section is organised according to the research questions, and each subchapter aims to interpret, analyse and discuss the findings collected by methodology. The results presented in this chapter answer the three research questions of this study. First, students' attitudes towards FA in English writing are presented and discussed in the next section (4.2), followed by students' use of FA based on peer-assessment, self-assessment, and teacher feedback in section 4.3. Then students' views on FA in terms of learning are also presented and discussed. The findings and discussions are generated from interviews and observations under the relevant themes associated with each research question. Three categories have thus been identified. The findings within each category will be presented from themes (sub-categories) identified in the analysis of interviews (see 4.4.1). The findings were presented by selecting quotation from the students' and teachers' interviews, and the statements of field notes from the classroom observation. Those interviews conducted in Chinese were translated and transcribed into English, all quotation and statements are in English.

4.2 Research Question 1: What are participants' attitudes towards formative assessment in their English writing?

The first research question aims to investigate students' attitude towards formative assessment (FA). Students' perception and understanding of FA were investigated through the semi-structured interviews. The interview questions aimed to examine what students' attitudes were towards formative assessment in their writing. The findings can be considered as significant as it provides insights into students' general opinions about FA in writing classes. With respect to this research question, the findings from the interviews indicate that the participants seem to hold a similar view to those held by L2 learners in many different contexts (Ahmed & Teviotdale, 2008; Cheng & Warren, 2005; Mok, 2010; Kwok, 2008) that most of the participants showed positive attitudes towards FA overall. However, the students'

views showed some diverse attitudes towards each strand of FA, more specifically toward teacher feedback (TF), peer-assessment (PA), and self-assessment (SA). All six students showed positive attitude towards TF. Four out of six students displayed a negative view of PA, and two students showed indifferent attitudes. Four of the students noted negative attitude towards SA, one student had positive view about SA, and one student with indifferent opinion about SA. To gain a deeper understanding, this diversity is analysed according to these three main themes explored in the interviews. The themes are presented in the next section.

4.2.1 Theme One: preference

Students' preference played a part in terms of students' attitude towards FA. With regards to their preference of types of FA, all six students preferred teacher feedback (TF) compared to peer-assessment (PA) and self-assessment (SA). They also showed a commonly held positive attitude towards TF. Quotations from all six students in their interviews provided the reasons why they prefer TF. The main reason is because TF identifies and corrects mistakes of their writing, whereas PA and SA could only catch few errors.

Student 1 preferred TF:

"I want to improve my writing, and I think teacher feedback is good for me to develop my writing." (TF)

Student 2, Student 3 and Student 6 favored TF over PA and SA because it provides clearer correction:

"I can learn from teacher's feedback. Teacher feedback corrects the sentence from Chinglish (Chinese + English) to more local way. We can find easy mistakes (when PA), but it is difficult to correct." (Student 2)

"Teacher feedback identifies mistakes and can learn from it. It's useful because I can know what to avoid and how to write correctly. It's hard to know (during SA) where I do wrong." (Student 3)

"I trust teacher feedback... It is useful and it provides error code, which it's easy for me to back to understand later. TF corrects basic problems, so I can understand. I think TF is the easiest to improve writing."(Student 6)

Both Student 4 and Student 5 agreed that they preferred TF due to the difficultness of PA and SA:

“I always make mistakes but mistakes always solved. Teachers can catch the mistakes directly and easily. Students are students. They can’t realize the mistakes. It’s hard to catch the mistakes. Some of them (classmates) even correct the right to wrong. I read it sentence by sentence. But I can’t focus on the mistakes...” (Student 4)

“I recommend feedback from teachers. Teachers give more specific feedback. And I can use it. My grammar is not good. I cannot sure is it correct or not correct. I think it (SA) is not useful because I will think all my sentences are okay... I don’t know which one is wrong, how can I correct?” (Student 5)

According to the students, they were favored by teacher feedback (TF) because it indicates where the mistakes are in students’ writing, and moreover, TF gives specific correction that helps them to easily to revise the errors. Whereas it is harder for students to find out the errors or even provide correction from peer-assessment and self-assessment. This result is accord with findings from many studies, like Belachew, Getinet and Gashaye (2014), Liu (2009), Nassaji (2015) and Tsui and Ng (2000) where their participants preferred TF because they found it useful in identifying and correcting errors in their writings. In addition, the finding from Student 6 strengthened Chandler’s (2003) conclusion that students preferred TF because it is easy to incorporate.

Many students used the phrase like “to correct mistake” or “to make less mistakes” during the interview to show in a way that they hoped for an improvement in English writing. For these students, the amount of errors in their writing indicates writing quality. In other words, the paper with fewer English errors is better writing. This is in accord with the role of FA presented in Chapter 2 that FA provides precise points students need to concentrate on and what to do next to improve (Brookhart & Nitko, 2008).

All participants agreed that TF helped them to improve in their writing, and five out of six students said TF helped them to realize their errors and aided them in making fewer errors. Among the five students, one student strongly asserted that her writing proficiency level has improved, in terms of making fewer grammatical errors because the amount of TF she received on her writing had been reducing compared to her previous writing assignment: *“I would think my writing improved when I got ten mistakes last week but I get eight mistakes this week.”* As discussed in Chapter 2, students from Hamouda’s (2011), Yang, Badger and

Yu (2006), and Yua and Hu (2017) viewed TF was useful for further improvement in writing quality. Therefore, it is significant to note that this research shared similar view with these authors despite of the differences in participants, methodology approach, and the scope of research.

4.2.2 Theme Two: cultural background and education experience

As English language learners in English as Second Language (ESL) classroom, students' cultural backgrounds and education experience influenced their attitude towards FA in the classroom (Black & William, 2006; Yua & Hu, 2017).

4.2.2.1 the role of the teacher

According to students' interviews, it is clear that students respect and trust TF because of their cultural and educational background where it was teacher-driven pedagogies in the entire education system. Students noted why they valued TF below:

“Teacher feedback has more authority, because it’s from the teachers” (Student 2).

“I would take teachers’ feedback, because they are professional” (Student 3).

“I trust feedback from teachers the most, because they are who teach us” (Student 6).

During the interviews, all six students showed strong faith in teachers. They believed that their teachers are the expert and the teachers' knowledge is superior to students' knowledge, because *“teachers are professional”* (Student 1) and *“only teachers have authority”* (Student 2). For these students, only teachers “hold an answer key”. As a result, the students feel more satisfied when they receive more teachers' feedback. This result is in accord with Yang et al (2006) study where stated that their participants, EFL students, preferred TF due to their prolonged teacher-dominated English learning experience during which they considered their teachers as the source of authority.

4.2.2.2 examination culture

Examination culture is another factor which had an impact on students' preference towards teacher feedback. All participants mentioned that they came from exam driven countries where grades defined who they were, and the teachers are most likely the examiners who give them marks. As a result, three interviewees who expected to get higher marks for their writing assignments showed their stronger desire for TF. They said respectively:

“I care about teacher feedback VERY VERY VERY much. Because the teacher is the one who marks the final grade, I want to get more advice from her” (Student 2).

“You know, Chinese always care about exams...” (Student 4).

“Teachers have their standards. If the teacher doesn’t give me any feedback, I will fail” (Student 5).

4.2.2.3 emotions

Moreover, with regards to cultural background, students expressed emotions and feelings when they were asked such interview questions: “What is your reaction when your teacher ask you to swap essays with your classmates and check?” (Interview Question 13) and “How did you feel when you are asked to check your own essay?” (Interview Question 20).

Both Student 5 and Student 6 made comments about PA during their interviews and stressed their uncomfortable feelings:

“I don’t want to give it (my paper) to him (classmate). I think my paper is not so good. I don’t want to show my paper. I don’t like to talk to classmates about my writing in class. I think they don’t want to talk. I don’t want to do more this.” (Student 5)

“I don’t feel comfortable correcting other’s work (PA), because it’s just the fact that I am correcting other’s work is embarrassing. And after correcting, we need to discuss. It’s embarrassing either to find out something to correct or cannot find out anything to correct. I don’t know... maybe I don’t want to write something on other’s paper...” (Student 6)

On the other hand, both Student 6 and Student 5 continued to express their feelings for practicing SA. Quoting from their interviews:

“It’s so so... umm... I think it’s difficult to say. I think... I don’t know (Student 6).

“I think I feel worried. What if I am not doing it correctly?” (Student 5)

It seems like having PA and SA in class make students feel embarrassed. This finding is important because it showed similar findings in studies carried out by Mok (2010) and Kwok (2008). Most of the students from both studies showed their personal concerns during PA, especially when they giving comments and making decisions to other students. On the same note, my participants’ reactions were similar to Belachew, Getinet and Gashaye’s (2014)

research which concluded that the majority of the participants felt uncomfortable in assessing their own written performances.

4.2.2.4 education experience

Not only cultural background but also the educational experience shifted students' attitudes towards FA, because the educational experience they had was where students "*never tried that (PA and SA)*" (Student 3) and "*only teachers check our writing*" (Student 4). Therefore, most of students were neither trained for PA nor SA. Students stated:

"In my previous school, we don't do it (PA and SA). Only teachers correct, so only know about teacher feedback. I think I like previous way" (Student 1).

"It's new. Teachers here do it (PA and SA). But teachers in my country, no" (Student 2)

The students seemed unfamiliar with PA or SA because they never had an opportunity to practice it in a writing class. As a consequence, the students refused to use PA or SA which it prevented them from gaining the benefits of it. This finding was interesting because it was accord with the findings obtained by Matsuno (2009) and Patri (2002) that students might not be prepared and ready to practise peer- and self-assessment due to the lack of training in doing PA and SA.

4.2.3 Theme Three: perceived English proficiency level

The attitude towards FA and the students' language proficiency level seemed to have a linked relationship, to some extent, in this research. As mentioned in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, the English level of the participants ranged from approximately 4.5 in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test score up to 5.5. The students featured in this study were in between beginning and intermediate level when it came to English proficiency. Besides Student 2 (5.0) and Student 4 (5.5), the rest of the students were at the beginner level (4.5). Due to their perceived low English proficiency, six students found PA and SA challenging. On the contrary, students expressed positive attitude and stated the importance of the role of teacher feedback, and they all shared their personal experience in detail of how TF had impacted their English writing. The participants' responses were the following:

"If my classmate is someone not good at me (English proficiency level), I don't want to get feedback (PA) from that person... I think it's (SA) useless, because I cannot check what I have mistake in this sentence. Teachers know better than us (TF)." (Student 1)

“I can learn more about academic words from my teacher. To be honest, I think it’s (PA) little useful. We are at the same level. We have similar IELTS level, so there is limit for students to grade each other’s essays.” (Student 2)

“... the level for classmate would be VERY low. So it’s difficult to correct for writing (PA). I am not good at grammar. I don’t feel confident to grade other classmates’ work. You know, it’s too hard for the students at this level to correct ourselves (SA).” (Student 3)

“I was not happy to provide feedback actually, because I didn’t really give useful feedback. Some words, I don’t recognise... So I don’t think it’s necessary to check with classmates (PA). (Student 4)

“We are at the same level so... we don’t know what is right or wrong. (Student 5).”

“It’s complicated, because my English didn’t develop much for one week. So I can’t find out my own mistakes. It’s hard in a short term.” (Student 6)

All students stated that they were aware of their own English proficiency level, which inhibited them to practice PA and SA. This finding is similar to previous studies, for example, Thai university students in Chamcharatsri’s (2010) and Chinese students in Fei’s (2006) studies did not appreciate PA and hesitated to use peer comments because they felt doubtful about the quality of peer-feedback. In other words, they were not satisfied with peer’s English level. As discussed in the Literature Review Chapter, Cheng and Warren (2005) and Patri (2002) suggested a linked relationship between students’ proficiency level and their attitudes towards FA, which concluded that students with a high proficiency level seemed to have a more positive view of FA than low proficiency ones. In other words, it is expected that students with lower English proficiency may have a correspondingly negative view of FA than high proficiency ones (Green, 2006). Therefore, this is a significant result because this research data shared the similar view with Cheng and Warren (2005) and Patri (2002).

In spite of expressing negative reactions of PA and SA from most of interviewees, some students pointed out the benefits of PA and SA. They said:

“I think it’s good (PA) for me because when I correct other classmates’ essay, I would think to myself ‘did I write this way too?’ and I can learn some linking words from my classmates’ writing” (Student 6)

“But if you remember what mistakes you made last time (SA), I think it will be more powerful than teacher feedback. Because you will not make the same mistakes again.”
(Student 6)

According to the above quotations from two students, PA does not only identify simple mistakes but also helps students to avoid problems in their own writing by reflecting on the others’ performance which they assessed. This is an important finding, because participants in Mok’s (2010) research also indicated the benefits of PA. They explained that when they identify the problem of others they are likely to identify similar problem in their own writing.

4.3 Research Question 2: To what extent do students engage with formative assessment tools – teacher feedback, self-, and peer-assessment?

The second research question aims to investigate students’ individual involvement in the use of formative assessment (FA) in the writing classroom. The finding to this question is significant as it seeks to provide insight into the use of language learning approaches and to increase awareness of its use in ESL writing. As discussed in the Literature Chapter, students’ application of FA for revision purposes was categorised into revision or no revision. Students’ engagement is investigated through classroom observations, teachers’ interviews, and students’ interviews. With respect to this research question, the findings from instruments indicate that the participants seem to engage with teacher feedback (TF) compared to self- (SA) and peer-assessment (PA). To gain a deeper understanding, the findings are analysed and organised according to three different types of instruments: classroom observation, teachers’ interviews, and students’ interviews. Data from each instrument is presented in the next section.

4.3.1 Engagement of Teacher Feedback

The students interviewed expressed their engagement of TF, and the same impression was indicated through teachers’ interviews and classroom observations. In the writing class, each student was provided with TF. During the student interview, participants were asked whether they reviewed TF and if they applied TF in any way (Interview question 10). In their interview responses, five out of six students stated strongly that they considered the feedback from their teachers and make the revision into action immediately.

“I of course use teacher’s feedback and correct my paper. I know I would have some mistakes when I first write my essay. So when teacher gives me feedback, that’s when I can know what I did wrong.” (Student 1)

“I record feedback from teacher on my notebook, and I would re-write my final essay.”
(Student 2)

“When I look at teacher feedback, I think like ‘oh, I got it wrong’ and I will write it correct way.” (Student 6)

These students indicated that TF helped them to improve their writing as it provided student with information on their current writing. This finding aligns with Halimi’s (2008) and Hamouda’s (2011) findings where most of the participants check teachers’ feedback and review it in their next writing.

On the other hand, Student 3 stated that he would take time to look through the TF carefully to check on each error. However, it is unlikely for him to make a written revision – instead, he tended to review only. He cited that he already spent time to read feedback carefully, so he can just remember his mistakes and apply it in the next writing. This student considered TF as a reflection in his next writing. He stated: *“I will take the feedback from the teacher for the next writing to avoid the mistakes.”*

Student 4 also stated that his use of TF was only to some extent dependent on how important of the essay is. He said:

“If it’s about examination, I will check teacher’s feedback and change it before submission. But if it’s just a practice one, I won’t be bothered to ask for feedback from the teacher. It’s troublesome for both teacher and me... You know, I just care about exams.”

The student explained that he tended to make a revision only when the essay is part of grade. It seemed like the cultural and educational background have influenced his use of TF.

Another data worth mentioning here is from classroom observations of both classes. It is noticed that most students from both classes were showing high interest in TF. After the teaching, Teacher 2 from Class 2 asked the students to work on writing meanwhile students may ask the teacher questions if they face problems. It seemed like the students were waiting for their turn to check their paper by the teacher, because when Teacher 2 asked: “Who would be like to be next?” several students raised their hands up immediately. In addition, students who received feedback from the teacher went back to their seats and worked on correction. Students from Class 1 showed similar engagement, because they were waiting for their teacher to approach their table as the teacher rotated the groups. It is written on the field notes that *“students became more active when the teacher approaches to their table.”* When Teacher 1 came near the students, they were encouraged to ask questions. One student prepared his laptop next to him ready for editing while the teacher was giving the feedback. According to interviews from the teachers, it is also clear that students utilise TF.

“They (students) ask me if this is right, and when I tell them what it supposed to be, they go back and change it.” (Teacher 1)

“It depends on students, but many of them want feedback. Because they want to know whether what they are doing is right or wrong.” (Teacher 2)

“Students want the feedback because they need to know what they have to improve. So they will always ask for feedback. They (students) will be like ‘are we getting the feedback?’ They will always interesting in that (TF).” (Teacher 3)

This finding is important because it corresponds with previous studies that most of participants read every feedback after receiving it from their teachers (Halimi, 2008; Hamouda, 2011) and used more TF than PA and SA in their revision (Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yang, Badger, and Yu, 2006).

4.3.2 Engagement of Peer-assessment

The students are encouraged to actively use the information provided through PA, for example, the teachers required them to exchange essays with each other during the class. According to the field notes taken in classroom observations, students did practise PA as the teacher required. However, compared to their engagement of TF, students showed less interest in engagement of PA. One factor is the students’ language communication. Students’ first language (L1) has influenced students’ use of PA during class. This is an interesting finding because other researchers also identified language as one of the factors which has an impact on students’ engagement of PA (Goldstein, 2006; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Lee, 2008; Black & William, 2006; Usher & Earl, 2010; Wang, 2008; Yua & Hu, 2017).

According to observations from two different classes, the language students communicate with each other during the class plays a role in their involvement in practice of FA. It seemed like students are more likely to involve in the use of FA when they speak their L1 language. The majority of participants are from the same country – all twenty-six students in Class 1 are from one country, and 22 out of 24 students are from the same country in Class 2. Students typically use their L1 language when they are engaged in a class activity, like PA or SA. Furthermore, students from the same country like to sit together in the same table to form a group. There were several instances noted on observation field notes where students from the same group discuss in their L1 language. In Class 2, Teacher 2 did not stop students from talking their first language in class, since all the students came from the same country. Nevertheless, Teacher 1 was able to address this issue by purposefully assigning students in groups where students are from different nationalities, because Class 2 consists of diverse

nationalities. Students from Class 2 class were talking freely with each other and showed no restraint in asking in class. Whereas students from Class 1 showed less interest in PA when they had to speak L2 language for communication – instead, they tended to exchange written feedback only. As I am able to speak Chinese, I could understand students' Chinese conversations. All conversations are translated into English on the field notes. The following notes regarded on students' engagement of PA are presented below.

“Not very talkative when they start doing PA. Students are trying to look at each other's work... One student is asking his partner regarding the partner's writing... Student A said: ‘Oh no, why did you use this word? I think here is a spelling mistake.’ Student B answered: ‘Oh, right, thank you. It's my mistake.’” (Class 1)

“The teacher (Teacher 2) asked the whole class to do PA, but not every student is involved in PA. Few students are looking at their phones. Two students who seem like couples are chitchatting... Regardless, there are some students, about half of the class, are trying to focus on the peer-assessment. They are discussing with group members. One student identified something and told her classmates, and he made the correction right away. But mostly, students only talk/discuss rather than making revision. Unsure whether if there is not much to correct or they did not know what to do with PA... Student A said ‘What are you doing? Are you actually correcting my essay?’ and Student B answered ‘I am, I am reading through with my eye. But there is nothing to give feedback.’ When Student A returned her work from Student B, she did not seem happy or satisfied with it as if Student B did not give useful feedback or no feedback at all.” (Class 2)

The data from classroom observation corresponded to the findings from students' interviews. In the interviews, students were asked to explain how they make use of the information provided through peer feedback, and in the following students stated:

“I will read it (peer feedback) carefully, because I think it could be useful.” (Student 1)

“Teachers asked us to talk to each other about essays but we never did – we always talk about computer games...” (Student 4)

“... my classmates didn't want to talk. They don't say anything...” (Student 5)

In their interview response, most of students reflected on the information shared by peers. However, not all of them expected to make a revision based on peer feedback.

Teachers explained in their interviews:

“Students might talk this or that, but I don’t think they are knowledgeable enough to evaluate their peers’ work... They can’t go into that depth. They don’t seem doing anything. I didn’t capture this in the classroom... One reason I could say is English sufficiency level. In terms of grading other paper, it’s not multiple questions where the answer is very objective – you are grading something very subjective. You can’t just simply give a guideline and expect students to correctly interpreting it. Second, they don’t have experience.” (Teacher 2)

“I think students feel more confident and use more actively at the end of the course, because they have experience of PA.” (Teacher 1)

4.3.3 Engagement of self-assessment

The students are also encouraged to actively practise self-assessment for their own writings, as it was recorded on the field note that *“the teachers asked students to take out their writing and review it by themselves in the writing class.”*

“Students seem like they are doing well with checking on their own work, because they seem focused on SA... One student is using a guidance sheet to do SA.” (Class 1)

“Most of students are trying to give feedback to themselves, but I do not see much movement – mostly they are just reading. After certain time passed, some students seem like they are killing their time – just dozing out during the SA.” (Class 2)

Apart from the observation, students’ interviews stated detailed explanations.

“I try my best to do it (SA). I think it is good for me...” (Student 2)

“When teacher asked me to correct myself, I didn’t think a lot. I just read it again. I read sentence by sentence, but I didn’t find some mistakes when I read my paper. (Student 4)

“I do what teacher says. I look at my paper but it’s hard to find mistakes by myself. I try my best to check and hope teacher to check.” (Student 6)

Six students who were interviewed stated they would practise SA in class if their teachers required, however, not every student was engaged in SA from the classroom observations.

The teacher explained in the interviews:

“Some of the follow the instruction to do self-assessment, and some don’t. Generally, some is okay doing – they will do what tutor asked to do. But some students not motivated to do SA. I think more guidance is needed.” (Teacher 2)

“I see students use their previous feedback to do SA. They pull out their paper that has teacher feedback and to see what they can correct...” (Teacher 3)

Although the participants seemed to engage themselves in SA to some extent, they were not actively involved to serve the purpose of SA. Instead, most of the students were unsure of SA due to low perceived language proficiency and lack of training. This finding is significant because the result is different from a case study carried out by Belachew, Getinet and Gashaye (2014) where students use SA comfortably.

4.4 Research Question 3: What are participants’ perceptions of formative assessment in terms of utility of learning?

Along with the first research question, students’ attitude towards FA, and second research question, students’ engagement of TF, the third research question is answered in this section. This research question seeks to find out information and data concerning students’ perception of learning outcome from correcting their written work according to teachers’ feedback, peer and self-feedback. In short, this question may find out on which type of FA in particular promotes their writing. The student interviews were analysed in the findings to gain a deeper understanding. The findings below of this research noted how students found FA promote their writing. Student 1 spoke positively about FA in general by saying:

“I think writing is the hardest thing in English, because it’s not like multiple choices... I need teachers to help me to write better. Students cannot correct my writing, because our level is low... My writing improved now because of feedback from the teacher. There are 4 to 5 students didn’t take teacher’s feedback, so their writing did not change (improve), not even 1%.” (Student 3)

“My writing improved, because my teacher helped to solve my mistakes. After several times, my writing improved. I don’t think others can help me improve writing... (Student 4)

“Of course my writing improved with teacher’s help. I am not sure about classmates’ feedback. For myself... I know which part I am not better, so I can do more practice in this way in writing...” (Student 5)

“All those three types are more or less helpful to improve my writing. I think teacher feedback is the most helpful one for me.” (Student 6)

The students in the interviews commented that FA overall was considered to be an approach that is helpful. More specifically, they found TF supporting learning outcome, whereas PA and SA had less impact on promoting their writing. The findings related to this research question were the particularly valuable of, because this finding showed the different findings in other studies carried out by Yua and Hu (2017) and Belachew, Getinet and Gashaye (2014). Chinese university students in Yua and Hu's (2017) study found peer-assessment aiding their learning process, and ESL students in Belachew, Getinet and Gashaye's (2014) study indicated that self-assessment is helpful in acquiring the desired skill in a meaningful way.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, findings on each research question have been analysed and discussed. In sum of the findings, the students valued teacher feedback the most. On the other hand, they showed less interest towards peer-assessment and self-assessment. In addition, most of the students read every feedback after receiving it, but made revision based on TF more than PA or SA. Nevertheless, all participants indicated that FA was considered to be an approach that is helpful in supporting learning outcomes. In the next chapter, a summary of the important conclusions derived from the discussion is presented.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, Chapter Four, the findings obtained in this study were discussed and interpreted. The main purpose of this final chapter is to provide a summary of the important conclusions drawn from the discussion of the findings in Chapter Four.

This final chapter is organized into four sections. Following this first introductory section, are the summary and implications for practice (5.2). In attempt to answer the study's research questions, the main findings of this study are presented and discussed. Then, research strengths and limitations of this research are outlined (5.3). Next, the pedagogical and teaching implications for further research (5.4). A conclusion is presented at the end of the chapter (5.5).

5.2 Summary of the study

This section provides a brief conclusion for all the chapters of this thesis and highlights how research questions were addressed in this study.

The main aim of this thesis is to explore ESL students' perceptions and practice of formative assessment when used as a tool to promote in writing class. Specifically, the study has investigated students' attitudes and experiences in regards to receiving and using feedback from teachers, peers, and themselves. Moreover, the aim of the thesis has been to provide in-depth insight into this phenomenon through a qualitative phenomenological study. Within the main focus of a formative assessment (FA) practice to ESL writing, it has been central to discuss students' use of FA.

The study employed multiple data sources and multiple methods to understand the individual and contextual factors involved in their FA experience and practice. Six students participated in the semi-structured interviews in which they responded to questions related to their attitudes and beliefs about FA, how they used FA to support learning, and the influence of FA in their learning. Classroom observations from two classes, as well as three teacher interviews were examined to understand actual practice of FA and support information gathered from the interviews.

The summaries of findings for this study are presented according to each research question (RQs). To restate the RQs from Chapter One, they are:

RQ 1: What are the participants' attitudes towards formative assessment in their English writing?

RQ 2: To what extent do students engage with formative assessment tools – teacher feedback, self-, and peer-assessment?

RQ 3: What are participants' perceptions of formative assessment in terms of utility of learning?

As mentioned in Chapter One, RQ 1 collected the information on different attitudes among the students towards FA. RQ 2 investigated students' individual involvement in the use of formative assessment. RQ 3 examined information and data concerning students' perception of learning outcome from correcting their written work according to teachers' feedback, peer and self-feedback.

5.2.1 What are the participants' attitudes towards formative assessment in their English writing?

With respect to this research question, the findings from the interviews indicate that most of the participants showed positive attitudes towards FA overall (4.2). However, the students' views showed some diverse attitudes towards each strand of FA, more specifically toward teacher feedback (TF), peer-assessment (PA), and self-assessment (SA). All six students showed positive attitude towards TF. Four out of six students showed negative view of PA, and two students had indifferent attitudes. Four of the students noted negative attitude towards SA, one student had positive view about SA, and one student with indifferent opinion about SA. Three main themes explored in the interviews regards to this research question, namely, preference, cultural background and education experience, and perceived English proficiency level.

Students' preference played a part in terms of students' attitude towards FA (4.2.1). With regards to their preference of types of FA, all six students preferred teacher feedback (TF) compared to peer-assessment (PA) and self-assessment (SA) and showed a commonly held positive attitude towards TF. The main reason that all six students favored teacher feedback is because TF identifies and corrects mistakes of their writing, whereas it is harder for students to find out the errors or even provide correction from peer-assessment and self-assessment. All participants agreed that TF helped them to improve in their writing, and five out of six students said TF helped them to realize their errors which aided them to make fewer errors.

Among the five students, one student strongly asserted that her writing proficiency level has improved, in terms of making fewer grammatical errors because the amount of TF she received on her writing had been reducing compared to her previous writing assignment.

As English language learners in English as Second Language (ESL) classroom, students' cultural backgrounds and education experience had an impact on their attitude towards FA in the classroom (4.2.2). As students' cultural and educational background was teacher-driven pedagogies in the entire education system, the students respect and trust TF. The students believed that their teacher is the expert and the teacher's knowledge is superior to students' knowledge. Examination culture is another factor which had an impact on students' preference towards teacher feedback. Two interviewees who expected to get higher marks for their writing assignments showed their stronger desire for TF. Moreover, regards to cultural background, students stated that they felt embarrassed and uncomfortable towards peer-assessment and self-assessment. Education experience also influenced students' attitudes towards FA, because they have not experienced PA or SA in their previous school.

Students' language proficiency level is another factor that shifted students' attitude towards FA (4.2.3). Due to their perceived low English proficiency, the students hesitated to practice PA and SA because they found PA and SA challenging. On the contrary, students expressed positive attitude and acknowledged the importance on the role of teacher feedback. The students all shared their personal experience in details of how TF had impacted their English writing. Nevertheless, some students indicated the benefits of PA and SA. They explained that PA could identify simple mistakes and help students to avoid problems in their own writing by reflecting on others' performance they assessed, because when they identify the problems of others, they are likely to identify similar problems in their own writing as well.

5.2.2 To what extent do students engage with formative assessment tools – teacher feedback, self-, and peer-assessment?

The second research question aims to investigate students' individual involvement in the use of formative assessment in the writing classroom (4.3). Students' engagement is investigated through classroom observations, teachers' interviews, and students' interviews. With respect to this research question, the findings from instruments indicate that most of participants read every feedback after receiving it from their teachers and used more TF than PA and SA in their revision. The students explained that TF helped them to improve their writing as it provided student with information on students' current writing. On the other hand, one

student stated that he would take time to look through the TF carefully to check on each error but not make a written revision. He stated that he already spent time to read feedback carefully, so he can just remember his mistakes and apply it in the next writing. It is noticed that most students from both classes were showing high interest in TF from classroom observations of both classes. It is because students were raising their hands to ask teacher to give feedback to their paper. During the observation, most of the participants engaged with teacher feedback and make the revision into action immediately.

The students were encouraged to actively use the information provided through PA, for example, the teachers asked them to exchange the essays with each other during the class. One interesting finding is that when students practice PA, they tended to speak their L1 language with the classmates. In their interview response, most of students stated they would review the feedback that their classmates give. However, not all of them expected to make a revision based on the peer feedback.

The students are also encouraged to actively practise self-assessment for their own writings. All interviewees stated that they would practise SA in class when their teachers required, however, not every student was engaged in SA from the classroom observations.

5.2.3 What are participants' perceptions of formative assessment in terms of utility of learning?

This research question seeks to find out information and data concerning students' perception of learning outcome from correcting their written work according to teachers' feedback, peer and self-feedback. All students indicated that FA was considered to be an approach that is helpful. More specifically, they found TF supported learning outcome, whereas PA and SA had less impact on promoting their writings.

5.3 Research Strengths and Limitations

In this section, strengths and limitations of this research are presented.

5.3.1 Strengths

The first strength, I would argue, is this research is positioned in the interface between formative language assessment and English as second language, which included two different areas of research. Secondly, the data collections methods of this research are suitable to provide sufficient information because three collection methods could explore the same phenomenon from different perspectives. Thirdly, interviewing in students' first language is another strengths of this research. This allowed students to communicate and express freely.

As MacLean et al. (2004) indicated quality of data is depended on how interviewees feel about having interview in L2 language. These are the strengths identified, in the next subsection, the limitations of the research are presented.

5.3.2 Limitations

This study followed appropriate academic guideline of research, nevertheless, there are several limitations found in this study. The main ones are discussed below.

Firstly, there are some limitations on students' interview. As mentioned in Chapter Three, an interview piloting with one PSP student was successfully conducted in the early stage. However, I should have piloted with a student who has a beginner to intermediate English proficiency level, because, during the actual interview, two participants had problems to understand the interview questions. Even though I informed the participants about the translation support before the interviews, they did not request for it. I had to offer the translation support once more during the interview in English because two interviewees seemed confused with the questions and thus did not answer the question. As a result, two interviews were conducted again in Chinese. If I could suggest this limitation, I should have translated the interview questions to their L1 language in advance to provide students support when needed.

Secondly, there is limitation in the timing in classroom observations. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the first observations were conducted on the second week of PSP start. Since it was the beginning of the programme, two classes focused more on teachings than activities. Thus, I gathered insufficient information about FA during the first observations. Even though the programme leader suggested me to observe the classes starting from the second week, I could have waited for a further one to two weeks to conduct the classroom observation.

Thirdly, although this qualitative study is a small-scale research, it was expected to interview more than the number of students who participated in the interview ($n = 6$). If I would suggest, I would interview larger sample as interview is the key instrument to collect students' perceptions of FA.

5.4 Pedagogical and Teaching Implications

There are two implications required to address based on the current study. The following major findings have emerged from the current study:

In this study, students' perception and practice of FA is investigated in ESL writing classrooms. One major finding was found in this research was that students' perceptions strongly influence their practices of FA. There are some challenges on context of L2 in higher education, for example, perceived low English proficiency, pressure on students to have good marks, limited teaching hours, etc. Due to these reasons, students might lose interest in formative assessment practice, especially if they value summative assessment more than formative assessment, as in the case of the students in this study. In addition, most students in this study indicated that they did not prefer peer- or self-assessment, and it is hard for them to practice PA and SA.

Therefore, it is crucial to stress the importance and benefits of formative assessment to students and to continuously encourage students to practice FA. However, if students, especially who have low English proficiency, still do not value PA or SA, it is worth considering about not implementing into lessons. If teachers highly value PA and SA and require students to practice it, then sufficient trainings and scaffolding regards to PA and SA should be introduced as many students indicated that they have no knowledge in how to utilise it in their writing classroom.

5.5 Conclusion

As already mentioned in the first chapter, this study investigated how formative assessment is practiced in pre-sessional English programme in the writing class at an university in northern England, and it also compared how these practices are perceived and performed by ESL students. This study is contributed to the field of TESOL and language assessment by providing an in depth view on formative assessment from the learners' perspectives.

Finally, this chapter presented the key findings of the study along with the research aims. Besides, research strengths and limitation, and Pedagogical and Teaching Implications were given based on the outcomes of this research. In addition, professional and personal development, as well an evaluation for further research has been discussed.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Student Interview in English

Coding Key

Text coloured in red – attitude towards FA

Text coloured in pink-engaging in TF

Text in bold-help in writing improvement

Text highlighted in green-attitude towards PA

Text coloured in purple-engage in PA

Text highlighted in blue-attitude towards SA

Text underlined-engage in SA

M: Hi, thanks for participate this interview.

S: No problem.

M: How long have you been studying PSP?

S: 3 months.

M: How often do you have writing class?

S: Once a week and we need to submit one writing each week

M: What writing activities/ exercise/ practice do you do in your writing class?

S: We have to write in class and submit it.

M: So do you get feedback?

S: Yes. After I write in hand, teacher sees it first (feedback). I correct it, and then I typed it online. Teacher will mark online essay.

M: How do you feel about correcting each sentence?

S: **Teacher are good. Better.**

I think it's **absolutely useful**.

In the beginning, we always make grammar mistakes or on words. But mistakes always be solved and then.

As the time goes on, I make less grammar mistakes or words.

M: What do you think of TF in terms of writing improvement?

S: My writing improved compared to the first time.

M: How often PA?

S: Only once – that was the only time we actually swop the paper and did correction.

We are lazy. Teacher asked us to talk to each other about essays (PA) **but we never did – we always talk about computer games**.

I think it's useful, but other students don't like studying.

M: How did you feel when teacher asked PA?

S: My feeling was **it won't be useful – students are students**.

They are not teachers.

They can't realise the mistakes. I think so at least.

M: Do you feel the need to do PA?

S: I only do it because the teacher said so

M: Did you read your classmates' paper carefully and try to give feedback?

S: yes

M: how did you feel when others correct your paper?

S: Surprised and **glad to see they have patient to do so**.

M: How do you think of the quality of peer feedback?

S: **Helpful in tense of sentence, or like commas**

M: Were you satisfied with the PA last time?

S: **No, not actually**.

Well, my classmates didn't give any correction for me.

He just read it and then "Oh, that's good."

M: How was it to check other's paper?

S: For me, I can only focus on the grammar or words. I think it's very difficult.

Also the works were written by others, it's not mine. It's really hard to understand. Some words I don't know. Some points I can't get.

M: How did you feel to provide feedback?

S: Not so happy.

M: Do you have experience of check your own paper?

S: Yes, Each week. Before I submit the writing to teacher, we need to check it by ourselves.

M: What was your attitude/ reaction when teacher asked you correct yourself?

S: I didn't think a lot. I just read it again. No feeling – not happy or unhappy.

M: Did you actually find some mistakes when you read it again?

S: No. I read it sentence by sentence.

But I can't focused on the mistakes.

My answer is we are students. Students are students.

M: What do you mean by students are students?

S: Our first language is not English.

Studying and teaching are different things.

So teachers can catch or recognise the mistakes directly or easier.

Students hard to catch the mistakes.

Some of them even correct the right to wrong. It's me... haha

For example, the sentence is right but I correct it into wrong way.

M: Finally What do you say about TF, PA and SA?

S: Generally, teacher gives feedback to students is really helpful.

It's easy to understand TF. But **If it's about examination, I will.**

But if it's just a practice, I won't bothered to ask. It's depends on how important of the essay. It's troublesome for teacher and for me hah. You know Chinese always care about examinations. And Lazy..

We didn't really give useful feedback to each other. And I don't like to show my writing to classmates. I don't think it's necessary to check with classmates.

I won't do SA if teacher doesn't ask. Before submit your writing to teacher, you need to check your writing – small or big.

M: Thank you for your time and interview.

S: No problem.

Appendix II: Student Interview in Chinese

M: 你好，□□你能参加□次采访□。

S4: 没关系的。

M: 你学 PSP 多久了？

S4: 3 个月。

M: 你多久会有一次写作□呢？

S4: 一个星期一次，我□每个星期□需要提交一篇□文。

M: 你□的写作□有些什么□的写作活□，写作□□或者写作□□呢？

S4: 我□必□在□堂上写完然后上交。

M: 所以你会得到反□？

S4: 是的。在我手写完作文后，老□先会□□一遍（□出反□）。然后我会改正它，接着我会打在□□上，老□会在网上批改□文。

M: 你□改每一个句子有什么感想呢？

S4: 老□很好，更好些。

我□□□□□是有用的。

□开始，我□□是犯□法□□或者□□拼写□□。但是最后□□□是能被解决。

随着□□的推移，我犯的□法□□和□□拼写□□就少了。

M: □于写作的提升，你□ TF 有什么想法呢？

S4: 相比第一次，我的写作水平提升了。

M: PA 的□多久一次？

S4: 只有一次，其□那是我□唯一一次交□□文和批改。

我□很□。老□叫我□跟彼此交流□文（PA）但是我□从没做□，我□□是□□□□游□。

我□□它是有用的，但是其他学生不喜□学□。

M: 当老□□到 PA，你是怎么□□的？

S4: 我当□□□□并没有用，学生是学生。

他□不是老□。

他□不能□□到□□。至少我是□么□□的。

M: 你□得有 PA 的必要性。

S4: 我只完成它因□是老□要求去做的。

M: 你有看□你的同班同学的□文然后□□□出反□□？

S4: 有的。

M: 当其他人帮忙改正你的□文□你是怎么看待的

S4: 感到惊□和很高□看到他□有耐心去做□些。

M: □于同□的反□你是怎么想的？

S4: □于句子很有帮助，或者像逗号。

M: 你□上次的 PA □意□？

S4: 其□并不怎么□意。

比如，我的同学不会□我任何批改意□

他只会□完之后□”哦，□写的很不□。“

M: 那去□正其他人的□文你有何感想呢？

S4: □于我来□，我只会关注□法或者□□，我□□□些很□。

而且□些□文是其他人写的，而不是我，所以□很□明白他□写的是什么，有些□□我不懂，有些□点我也不理解。

M: 提供你的反□你是怎么□得的？

S4: 不是那么开心。

M: 你有自己□□自己的□文的□□□？

S4: 有的，每个星期都有。在我上交我的写作□老□之前，我□需要自己修改一下。

M: 当老□□你自己批改自己的□文，你是什么□的□度和反□呢？

S4: 我没有想太多。我只是会再看一遍。没有什么感□，没有开心也没有不开心。

M: 当你再□□一遍的□候你真的可以找到一些□□□？

S4: 不会，我只是看一句□一句。

但是我不能找到□□

我的意思是我□是学生，学生就是学生嘛。

M: 你□学生就是学生是什么意思？

S4: 我□的第一□言不是英□

学□和教学是不同的两个概念。

所以老□可以很直接或者很□□的找到和□□□□

学生却很□□□□□。

有些人甚至改□了自己的□□，比如我，哈哈哈哈哈

例如我会把一个正确的句子改成□□的句子。

M: 最后，□体你是怎么看待 TF, PA and SA 的呢？

S4: □的来□，老□□学生反□是非常有用的。

TF 很容易理解，但是如果是关乎考□，我会□真□待。但如果只是一个□□，我不会去关心去□很多。□□要考□到作文的重要性。□于老□和我而言，□是个很大的麻□。你知道中国人□是在乎考□。而且很□…

我□不会真的□彼此有用的反□。我也不喜□在全班学生面前展示自己的作文。

我不会做 SA 如果老□没有要求去做。在提交你的□文□老□之前，你需要□□你的内容，不管小的□是大的□文。

M: □□你的□□和参加□次采□。

S4: 不客气。

Appendix III: Teacher Interview

Coding Key

Text coloured in red – attitude towards FA

Text coloured in pink-engaging in TF

Text in bold-help in writing improvement

Text highlighted in green-attitude towards PA

Text coloured in purple-engage in PA

Text highlighted in blue-attitude towards SA

Text underlined-engage in SA

M: Hi, How long have you been teaching PSP?

T: I did it 6-week last week, but doing 12-week this year. 4 groups, 22 students in each one.

M: How do you find it?

T: Actually, it's nice. It was more difficult last time because it's the first time. I enjoy it.

M: Do you know what FA is?

T: Yes. For the student or in my opinion. In my opinion – it's following what the university says and do this and this.

M: What kind of FA writing activities use in class?

T: First, it's explaining the topic. In the beginning, it's more open like any topic. Let's say about a college. Okay, you have this text, and you have read that and I need you to tell me what this is about. You know they start it that way. Then it was little bit more complicated asking "Okay, for you what is the meaning of the title? What is that for you?" And then they doing that step by step. But I also realise, I was having writing workshops on my own, they actually don't know what is the topic sentence. Then I try to explain from the beginning with examples, because sometimes they know but don't know the name.

M: So the teacher teaches, do you have other activities helps students' writing?

T: We have the workshops without the teachers only SEC.

M: How often do students do writing in class?

T: It depends on what the book say, but usually, they are having writing on Fridays. Only teacher makes the correction. We (SEC) can do with them but the formal one is by the teacher.

M: How does the class react to teachers' correction? Students' reaction?

T: Well, students submit the paper to the teacher. On Friday, the teacher gives the paper back to the students with the correction. We went around and ask students "What do you understand for this? What is sth that's not clear? Okay this means this this and this." **And then when they were writing it again, we went around, making the correction one by one.**

M: What's the general response about the feedback? How do students react to the feedback?

T: **Very worried, because they are under the pressure, you know. They are worried " Okay, this is the feedback, maybe I won't get enough score in that" but after you say "it's okay, don't worry, this are things like this and that." Then they are okay.**

M: Do you think students generally understand those feedback from the teacher?

T: Yeah, but I think it's just a little bit complicated because the feedback.. is error code so if they don't pay attention to the table, **they may say "What is this?"** and then you will say "Okay, go to the table and read what is the meaning of that, and you will get it."

M: Do you think generally students want the feedback?

T: Yeah yeah, of course. **Because they need to know what they have to improve.** So they will **always ask for your feedback. They will be like Are we getting the feedback? They will always interesting in that. And they have to re-write the same one they need to improve.** And submit it into turn-it-in.

M: What's their general practice when re-write? Based on the feedback or ask for help?

T: Well, it depends on the students. They are super different. **Some of them go "Okay, yea, this is my correction and will do this."** But some of them actually need to do more research. **So after the feedback actually look for more resources and write new things** because they didn't do before. So it's kind of what is the level or where your level were. They are similar

level, but there are plenty of students. Students get estimated scores from mock exam to practice and see, like you can get 40 or 50 – to see the level where you at.

M: Is there any rubric or criteria for it?

T: Yes, there is. The teacher always explain the criteria, showing if you want to get between 30-40, you should get this and this and this. If you want to get between 50-60, you should get this and this and this.

M: Do you think those feedback improve students' writing? Do you think students feel that improvement?

T: Yeah yea yea, of course. Yes. Yea, I think the only way they have to know is the feedback. As international students, you know your writing improving when look at the feedback. Or from the mark, like last time you get 30 but this time I get 20 – so I am improving. You will know. They will know from feedback and the marks. They will feel more confident.

M: How of do student practise PA?

T: It depends on the teacher. It's part of the exercised.

M: How do students generally react to PA?

T: I think students feel more **confident at the end of the course**, not in the beginning. In the beginning, I remember, when they were asked to do that and **they are like "yea yea, everything is okay. I believe my friend"** and we are like no. But now **I think they are more able to say this is wrong**, maybe he can change this for this with more knowledge.

M: Students feel more comfortable in the end, what factors?

T: More or less because more knowledge. They are all in the same level in the beginning. **They are actually not able to know if the person making the mistakes or not. Or maybe they know but not confident to say** that because they don't want to be wrong, so they are like just waiting?

M: So students generally feel okay to assess others is okay?

T: As I have told you, in the end, it's more easier – it's easier for them. Than in the beginning, they were like Okay, what should I do..

M: How about SA?

T: I think in the end, I saw Teacher 1 was doing it.. I think I just saw once or twice with T1.

M: How do think students will react to SA?

T: I am not sure, but I think **most of students will find it difficult**. They have their writing and you ask them to correct themselves, **how they know this right or not**. They already wrote that so they need someone to say yea this is good or no. Because for them, maybe that's okay.

M: Do you think it's easier for students to correct themselves if rubrics/ criteria to follow up? Why?

T: Level of students (at the class). I don't think it should be easy UNLESS they have previous feedback. Maybe it's easier to do with a friend like they see the paper and say you can do this or this. Because they didn't write that so it's maybe they can see the mistake. But on your own writing, unless you have plenty of knowledge maybe you are not able to see you have a mistake if you are in an elementary level. Maybe when you are more advance, you should be able. I am not sure.

I think students prefer teacher feedback. Not sure about other two. Because I didn't do that so much with students. In the workshop, in the beginning when I ask **"do you understand?"** **students would say "Yes"**, but later on, students would say "yes or no". When I show a style of a paper, they actually start to understand what actually was the mistake in their paper. But that's after I show my example. But in the very beginning, when I was asking "do you think this is right, which one is the mistake here?" They were not able to actually say which one was a mistake.

M: Can you summarise?

T: I am not sure how students think, but I just know what students say to me. They are just asking maybe little bit **confusion about something so they need to clarify what that mean**. And after that, they are able to improve that.

Actually students **feel more safe** just asking to the teacher.

Appendix III: Field Note

5th July, Classroom Observation (Class 2)

- Class starts, and teacher (T) asks students (Sts) to get ready for the ‘writing day’
- Students read and write individually firstly
- Now T asks them to discuss in groups
- 7 minutes later, T starts checking answers in each group
- Write again → activity
- Write → exchange writing and give feedback

TF:

- T rotating the class table by table
- After the teaching, T ask Sts to work on writing meanwhile students can ask teacher questions if they have problems.
- Most students from both classes were showing high interest in TF.
- waiting for teacher because when T said “Who would be like to be next?” several students raised their hands up quickly
- After students who received TF, they went back to their seats and worked on correction.

PA

- T asked Sts to exchange writings and discuss
- Sts did PA
- note: compared to their engagement of TF, students showed less interest in engagement of PA.
- Sts speak Chinese, and T doesn’t mind.
- Sts talk freely and openly
- Few (3-4) students are using phones. Two students who seem like couples are chitchatting...
- Still some students, about half of the class, are trying to focus on the peer-assessment. They are discussing with group members.
- S1 identified something and told S2, and S1 made the correction right away. But mostly, sts only talk/discuss rather than making revision. Unsure whether if there is not much to correct or they did not know what to do with PA...
- S3 said ‘What are you doing? Are you actually correcting my essay?’ and Student 4 answered ‘I am, I am reading through with my eye. But there is nothing to give feedback.’ When Student 3

returned her work from Student 4, she did not seem happy or satisfied with it as if Student 4 did not give useful feedback or no feedback at all

SA

- T requires sts to review and check on their essay
- Most of students are trying to give feedback to themselves
- not see much movement – mostly they are just reading
- time passes, some sts (4-5) killing their time – just dozing out during the SA