RESPONDING TO STUDENTS' WRITING IN UAE GOVERNMENT SECONDARY SCHOOLS: TEACHERS' ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES, AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

A THESIS IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

Presented to the faculty of the American University of Sharjah
College of Arts and Sciences
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

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Sharjah, UAE
May 2010

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ABSTRACT

The significance of implementing appropriate techniques when responding to students' writing has been widely discussed in the field of language learning in general and second language (L2) context in particular. Paying a great deal of attention to how teachers respond to students' writing, how they go about it and if differences occur between teachers' feedback practices in addition to teachers' attitudes and perceptions, have received little consideration in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) context. Teachers may find responding to students' writing a stressful and time-consuming task, and they may as well encounter some challenges in responding to students' writing. In other words, implementing traditional methods of writing assessment may result in decreasing teachers' awareness and appreciation of the necessity to look for useful assessment tools and the factors that might influence their practices. Moreover, little information in the UAE context is available about the perceptions and reactions of students in government secondary schools to their teachers' feedback on their written assignments.

This study was an attempt to investigate teachers' attitudes towards writing assessment and their actual practices when responding to students' writing in government secondary schools in the UAE. It also examined students' perceptions regarding this issue. The research sought to answer the following questions: (1) What are English teachers' beliefs and attitudes about providing feedback on students' written assignments in the L2 classrooms? (2) How do English teachers respond to their students' writing in UAE government secondary schools in one educational zone? (3) What are the students' perceptions of their teachers' written feedback on their written assignments?

In order to answer these research questions, a combination of qualitative data collection instruments were utilized in the form of two questionnaires and follow-up interviews. The respondents were fifty-one male and female secondary school English

language teachers working in eight different secondary boys and girls schools in the Sharjah Educational Zone in the UAE. The follow-up interviews with the eight volunteering teachers provided in-depth information about their attitudes and practices when responding to students' writing. The investigation also surveyed 240 male and female secondary school students in grades 10, 11, and 12. This allowed a better understanding of teachers' assessment practices and students' attitudes towards them. Results showed that regardless of their negative attitudes towards these practices, English teachers were fully aware of their significance for developing students' writing skills and how important it is to implement various responding techniques. The data collected from the students' questionnaire highlighted the fact that students were aware of their teachers' feedback practices. In addition, results indicated that students valued the feedback they receive.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wonderful parents, Fares Abou Eissa and Amna Abou Qassim, for their love, care, and constant prayers. It is also dedicated to my sister Seham, and my brothers; Ahmad and Kamal Abou Eissa. I should not forget the four little angels my nieces and nephews; Haya, Mariam, Fares, and Abdullah Abou Eissa for all the happiness they have added to my life. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

CHAPTER 1
OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Incorporating writing in second language (L2) classrooms entails some measure of assessment. Even though it may not be crucial for L2 teachers to read, comment, or grade every piece of writing produced by their students, diverse assessment options are necessary for responding to students' writings. Research on language teaching has emphasized the significance of assessing L2 writing as an integral part of language learning. Since writing has always had, and will continue to have, a fundamental role in the assessment of students' general academic achievement and development, assessing writing has long been considered a challenge for teachers and educators. My experience as an English teacher for seventeen years in government primary, preparatory, and secondary schools in the UAE has led me to observe that many L2 teachers encounter some challenges when responding to students' writing. That is, they may be unable to determine which methods are appropriate to use when responding to students' writing assignments. In other words, L2 teachers often cannot stop following traditional ways of responding to students' writing, particularly in L2 classrooms. As Lee (2003) states, "it is difficult for teachers to renounce the established practice of giving feedback on student errors in writing" (p. 217).

However, the majority of the L2 teachers in UAE government schools still depend on impressionistic criteria when assessing students' writing. Furthermore, some teachers might have a negative attitude towards writing assessment as they believe that it is tiresome and time consuming. Others may feel that they are not standing on a solid basis when responding to students' writing because they have not received the necessary training in this field. Therefore, this research will focus on ways in which L2 teachers at UAE government secondary schools in one educational zone respond to students' writing, and their attitudes towards this issue, in addition to highlighting the students' perceptions about the topic.

Despite numerous studies that have been conducted worldwide about the significance of feedback in L2 writing classrooms and its influence on students' writing abilities and perceptions toward writing, little has been done to shed light on this issue in the UAE context. The results of this study aim to give a clear idea about L2 teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards responding to students' writing in

UAE government secondary schools and to reveal how those teachers respond to their students' writing assignments. Moreover, the findings will highlight the students' perceptions about their teachers' practices in this field so that teachers can do their best to meet the students' needs in this aspect. The overall findings should allow me to draw some beneficial conclusions and implications for teachers in the UAE context that might assist in enhancing their abilities and techniques regarding writing assessment. This study may also indicate the importance of training and raising teachers' awareness in the area of assessment in general and writing in particular. As Weigle (2002) points out, "as the role of writing in second language education increases, there is an ever greater demand for valid and reliable ways to [assess] writing ability, both for classroom use and as a predicator of future professional or academic success" (p. 1).

<p style="text-align:center">Research Questions/Assumptions</p>

Paying a great deal of attention to how teachers respond to students' writing, how they go about it and if differences occur between teachers' feedback practices in addition to teachers' attitudes and perceptions have received little consideration in the UAE context. Teachers may find responding to students' writing a stressful and time-consuming task, and they may, as well, encounter some challenges when responding to students' writing. Thus, this research intends to answer the following questions:

(1) What are English teachers' beliefs and attitudes about providing feedback on students'' written assignments in the L2 classrooms?

(2) How do English teachers respond to their students' writing in UAE government secondary schools in one educational zone?

(3) What are the students' perceptions of their teachers' written feedback on their written assignments?

<p style="text-align:center">The Educational Context of the Study</p>

The UAE government provides free education for both boys and girls from the primary to the secondary level through government schools. In general, all the government schools are single-sex schools. Although the medium of instruction is Arabic, there is a strong emphasis on teaching English at all levels, particularly at the secondary level in order to equip students with the necessary skills and prepare them for higher education. In the UAE, the primary stage, which is known as the first cycle, includes grades 1 to 5; and the preparatory stage, which is called the second cycle, includes grades 6 to 9. The third stage which is the secondary stage includes three

grades 10, 11, and 12. However, grades 11 and 12 are always divided into two main sections: Arts and Science. The focus in the arts section is generally on literary subjects; whereas, the main focus in the science section is on the scientific subjects. However, in both sections, students study the same English curriculum. In government schools, students learn English as a second language from grade one. That is, by the time they finish their high school, they will have studied English for 12 years. Secondary level students study English on a daily basis, with each lesson lasting for fifty minutes.

An English teacher in a UAE government secondary school teaches three classes with an average number of 20 to 30 students in each class and a total of eighteen hours of teaching per week. Teachers teach a mandated curriculum using the textbook, *On Location* (2009). The book has been adapted especially for the UAE Ministry of Education by McGraw Hill. It consists of a student book and a practice book in addition to the teacher's manual and the assessment booklet. The *On Location* program is organized into three levels which aim to help students to meet the standards in grades 10, 11, and 12. In general, a process approach to writing is encouraged by the curriculum.

At the secondary level, writing is an obligatory element in both the monthly tests and the final English exams throughout each semester. Students in each grade are required to write and be tested on different genres. Each writing test is composed of two parts: part A where students are asked to write simple and compound sentences and part B where they should be able to write a well structured piece of writing. For instance, grade 10 students are asked to write a one-paragraph composition of 100-150 words. Grade 11 students are usually asked to write a multi-paragraph composition of 150-200 words; whereas, grade 12 students write an essay of 200-250 words. The topics that students are required to write are theme-based, related to the content of their course book (For more information, see the UAE Ministry of Education website www.moe.gov.ae).

The two writing tests that students are subjected to as a component of the ongoing assessment process in each semester include a piece of writing that is worth 10 percent of the total assessment. It is not treated as a final draft since teachers correct the committed errors giving feedback by using a shorthand checklist that is determined by the Curriculum Development Department of the Ministry of Education. Upon receiving the corrected composition, students are obliged to rewrite the whole

composition and correct their errors following the symbols used in the checklist. In English exam at the end of each term, the writing section is worth 40 percent of the total exam grade. However, students' papers are scored following holistic criteria on a 6-point scale that is provided for teachers by the Curriculum Development Department.

Overview of the Chapters and Appendices

Chapter One presents the purpose and the significance of the study as well as the research questions and assumptions. Moreover, it discusses the educational context in the UAE government secondary schools and describes both the writing instruction and assessment. Chapter Two consists of a review of the literature that discusses writing in L2 classrooms, process writing, assessing writing, error correction in L2 writing, common perceptions about feedback, teachers' attitudes towards writing assessment, teachers' feedback in L2 writing, and students' perceptions of teachers' feedback.

Chapter Three includes a full description of the methodology and procedures which were followed in this study. It provides detailed information about the participants and the instruments utilized for qualitative data collection. In Chapter Four, a detailed description of the data analysis and the findings of the study are presented. The presentation of the findings is divided into three sections: English teachers' beliefs and attitudes about providing feedback, English teachers' practices when responding to their students' writing, and students' perceptions of their teachers' written feedback. Finally, Chapter Five contains the summary and discussion of the findings of the study. It also discusses the implications for teachers, UAE Ministry of Education, and secondary school students in addition to the limitations of the study, and recommendations further research, and a final thought.

Five main appendices are also included. Appendix A is the teachers' questionnaire. Appendix B includes the teachers' interview questions. Appendices C and D present the English and Arabic copies of the students' questionnaire. Appendix D is the informed consent form that teachers signed before being interviewed.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this section is to review the literature in an attempt to survey literature that highlights the importance of writing skills and which focuses on teaching and learning writing in L2 classrooms, especially process writing. It will also shed light on the studies and research papers that discuss common perceptions about feedback, error correction, and teachers' practices when providing feedback on students' written assignments in L2 classrooms. Literature which deals with the significance of feedback given by teachers and the various methods they implement when responding to students' writing assignments will also be surveyed. Finally, literature that refers to students' attitudes and perceptions about teachers' practices when giving feedback and its effects on their writing development in English will also be reviewed.

Writing in L2 Classrooms

Writing is one of the most significant skills in the field of linguistics and language learning in general. As Weigle (2002) argues, it is not just considered a regular method of communication but also a vital instrument for learning. White (1995) agrees that "writing … is now seen to have an important function in empowering learners in the world outside the classroom" (p. iv). While Karagianakis (2005) refers to writing as "the most complex language learning skills" (p. 203), White (1995) describes it "as a problem-solving in which writers employ a range of cognitive and linguistic skills to enable them to identify a purpose, to produce and shape ideas, and to refine expression" (p. 3). According to Brown (2004), writing is mainly "a convention for recording speech" and for focusing on linguistic features of language (p. 218). Harmer (2007) distinguishes between two different types of writing: "writing-for-writing" and "writing-for-learning" (p. 323). Writing-for-writing is achieved through developing students' writing abilities; whereas, writing-for-learning is achieved when we help students learn to write in a language or examine them on that language. Even though the significance of oral interaction in English is highly valued, writing has always had, and will continue to play a fundamental role in the assessment of students' general academic achievement and development.

Despite the fact that the value of writing in L2 learning has become of great importance, there are still some problems that teachers face when teaching it. Writing

in L2 classrooms, as Hyland (2003) states, "is one of the most challenging aspects of second language learning" (p. xiii). Gebhard (2006) mentions some problems that teachers of L2 encounter when teaching writing. One problem is how to teach less-proficient writers who tackle writing in a different way from proficient ones. Often L2 students do not use any prewriting strategies to produce ideas and organize thoughts. Moreover, L2 learners might take a great deal of time to write down their ideas and also focus mostly on surface level aspects of writing, concentrating on form rather meaning. Ferris (2002) points out that one of the obvious differences between L1 and L2 student writers is that "the nonnative speakers make errors related both to negative transfer from their L1 and to incomplete acquisition of the L2" (p. 4). This can be due to a lack of clarification by their teachers of the process approach in writing and the focus on "quantity rather than the quality" (p. 224). Richards and Renandya (2002) argue, "Simply allowing students to write a lot will not necessarily provide sufficient practice in the types of writing valued for academic learning" (p. 321). Grabe (2001) refers to other differences between L1 and L2 writing which involve "the influences of L1 rhetorical and cultural preferences for organizing information and structuring arguments. Students have many implicit frames for presenting information and arguments in their L1; these frames and formats may not transfer straightforwardly to many English L1 academic contexts" (p. 44). Thus, being aware of the different combination of writing practices of both proficient and less-proficient writers is the first step towards a successful teaching-learning process of writing in L2.

<div align="center">Process Writing</div>

Just as students learn to control different oral registers, they must also be able to write in different ways for different purposes. Students need to be exposed to and have practice with various writing genres such as writing descriptive and argumentative essays. This is crucial for both L1 and L2 learners. Therefore, teachers can build students' writing skill through introducing the process writing. Process writing or the process approach as a classroom activity incorporates four basic writing stages: planning, drafting (writing), revising (redrafting), and editing. Matsuda and Silva (2002) argue that "understanding the strategic aspect of writing is important for writing teachers because it enables them to teach writing rather than teach about writing" (p. 255). They add, "the dissatisfaction with controlled composition and the paragraph-pattern paved the way for the process approach" (p. 261). Hairston (1982, cited in Gebhard, 2006, p. 84) also believes:

We cannot teach students to write by looking at what they have written. We must also understand how that came into being, and why it assumed the form it did …We have to do the hard thing, examine the intangible process, rather than the easy thing, evaluate the tangible product.

Many educators advocate a process approach to writing. The objective is to help students develop doable strategies for getting started, drafting, revising, and editing. Richards and Renandya (2002) indicate that in order to have an effective performance-oriented teaching program we need to systematically teach students problem-solving skills connected with the writing process that will "enable them to realize specific goals at each stage of composing process" (p. 316). Thus, process writing in the classroom may be constructed as a "program of instruction which provides students with a series of planned learning experiences to help them understand the nature of writing at every point" (Richards & Renandya , 2002, p. 316). Harmer (2007) states that this process pays attention to the various stages that any piece of writing goes through. By spending time with learners on pre-writing phases, editing, re-drafting and finally producing a finished version of their work, "a process approach aims to get to the heart of the various skills that most writers employ- and which are, therefore, worth replicating when writing in a foreign language" (p. 326). Indeed, Harmer believes that following these approaches of editing and re-drafting is even more important when practicing writing in L2 context.

As Figure 1 shows, planning, drafting, revising, and editing do not occur in a neat linear sequence, but are recursive, interactive, and potentially simultaneous, and all work can be reviewed, evaluated, and revised, even before any text has been produced at all. At any point the writer can jump backward or forward to any of these activities.

Selection of topic: by teacher and/or students
Prewriting: brainstorming, collecting data, note taking, outlining, etc.
Composing: getting ideas down on paper
Response to draft: teacher/peers respond to ideas, organization, and style
Revising: reorganizing, style, adjusting to readers, refining ideas
Responding to revisions: teacher/peers respond to ideas, organization, and style
Proofreading and editing: checking and correcting form, layout, evidence, etc.
Evaluation: teacher evaluates progress over the process
Publishing: by class circulation or presentation, notice boards, Website, etc.
Follow-up tasks: to address weaknesses

Figure 1: A process model of writing instruction (adapted from Hyland, 2003, p. 11)

Tyson (1999) argues, "it is the use of multiple drafts which is perhaps the main identifying characteristic of the process approach" (p. 6). According to him, the process approach allows students the chance to get feedback not only from their teacher but also their peers. Moreover, it helps them to modify and rewrite more than one time before receiving a grade on the final draft. He adds that in this way, "students have a chance to develop their ideas in some depth, benefit from the suggestions of interested readers, and revise and rewrite the parts of their compositions that are difficult for this very real 'audience' to understand" (p. 6). In fact, students can learn how to write and deal with the difficult writing assignments in L2 instead of just producing correct grammatical sentences for the sake of the grade. To achieve a successful application of the process approach, a teacher can use a few suggestions based on Tyson's (1999) experience, such as the following: use language that students can easily understand; explain the benefits of multiple drafts; give students a chance to revise and rewrite at least some of their compositions before they receive a grade; give fewer, but longer writing assignments to enable students to develop their ideas as they will have the chance to practice more writing during the course; and ask students to hand in preliminary drafts along with their final ones to see their improvement.

Matsuda and Silva (2002) mention the advantages of process writing in the classroom where they believe that "the process tradition calls for providing and maintaining a positive, encouraging and collaborative workshop environment, and for providing ample time and minimal interference so as to allow students to work though their composing processes" (p. 261). Harmer (2007), on the other hand, refers to one

of the disadvantages of getting students to concentrate on the process of writing which is that it takes time. The various stages may well involve discussion, research, language study and a considerable amount of interaction between teacher and students and between the students themselves so that when process writing is handled appropriately, it stretches across the whole curriculum. From a process point of view, then, Matsuda and Silva (2002) admit:

> writing is a complex, recursive, and creative process that is very similar in its general outlines for first and second language writers … the writer is engaged in the discovery and expression of meaning [and] the reader on interpreting that intended meaning … it is up to the writer to identify a task and an audience and to make the response to the former meet the needs of the latter (p. 261).

However, none of these circumstances should prevent us from explaining the process to our students and encouraging them to plan, draft, re-draft, re-plan, etc. In longer pieces of writing, as Harmer (2007) points out, "the writing process is at least as important as the product and even in exam writing tasks, the students' ability to plan and later read back through what they have written in order to make any necessary corrections is extremely important" (p. 327).

Assessing Writing

Numerous studies that already exist in the field of language teaching greatly emphasize the impact of assessment on second language learning. As Brown (2004) points out, "assessment is an integral part of the teaching-learning cycle" (p. 14). When teaching writing skills, for example, teachers need to take into consideration which parts will be the most important ones to assess: content, organization, style, fluency, accuracy, or using appropriate rhetorical forms of discourse. Gebhard (2006) refers to the usual things associated with writing such as word choice, use of appropriate grammar, syntax, mechanics, and organization of ideas into a coherent and cohesive form. He also believes that "writing also includes a focus on audience and purpose, as well as a recursive process of discovering meaning" (p. 211). Karagianakis (2005) points out that "unlike all the other skills, writing requires more formal language training, the ability to sequence correctly grammatical and lexical structures in written form, and cognitive problem-solving ability so as to be able to evaluate and generate comprehensible ideas while searching for language with which to express ideas" (p. 203). Therefore, the assessment of writing has been considered a

challenging area for teachers, especially in the L2 context. In other words, it can be a complex and problematic phenomenon. Brown (2004) argues, "assessing writing is no simple task … [when teachers] consider assessing students' writing ability … [they] need to be clear about [their] objective or criterion" (p. 218).

Iida (2008) points out that "for the educational purpose … it is necessary for writing teachers to clarify how to assess students' production and what components of writing skills will be measured so as to increase the degree of reliability for the assessment, specially, objective and consistent scores" (p. 4). Brown (2004) also mentions problems such as human error, subjectivity, and bias that may affect the writing assessment process. He discusses rater reliability from two perspectives: inter-rater reliability and Intra-rater reliability. On one hand, the inter-rater reliability, is defined as the degree to which two or more raters agree on and attain the same result when using the same assessment instrument. Brown adds that low inter-rater reliability results when two or more scorers yield contradictory scores of the same test. He also indicates, "This is possibly for lack of attention to scoring criteria, inexperience, inattention, or even preconceived biases" (p. 21). Intra-rater reliability, on the other hand, occurs when the same rater completes the same assessment in more than one context and then compares the different ratings to find out the connection among them. Brown argues that this type of rater reliability "is a common occurrence for classroom teachers because of unclear scoring criteria, fatigue, bias toward particular "good" and "bad" students, or simple carelessness" (p. 21). Brown adds that "in tests of writing skills, rater reliability is particularly hard to achieve since writing proficiency involves numerous traits that are difficult to define" (p. 21). However, the careful utilization of adequate measurements of assessment can raise rater's reliability. Huang (2008) examines the quality of ESL students' writing when completing local English exams in terms of both the "variability and reliability rating" (p. 1) in Canada. He finds out no differences in score variation between ESL and native English students. Thus, Huang (2008) concludes that "rating reliability should be treated as a cornerstone of sound performance assessment" (p. 2).

<center>Error Correction in L2 Writing</center>

Error correction in writing is one form of teachers' responses to students' writing. As Gue´nette (2007) points out that providing students with corrective feedback is an important element in the attainment of language fluency and accuracy. Bitchener (2008) examined the effectiveness of written corrective feedback on three

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pieces of descriptive writing in pre-test, immediate post-test, and delayed post-test of 75 low intermediate international L2 students in New Zealand. According to Bitchener, findings showed that students who received written corrective feedback in the immediate post-test achieved higher levels of accuracy than those in the control group who did not receive any corrective feedback.

However, error correction could have some disadvantages. For example, Lee (2003) mentions one of the major disadvantages of marking all students' error as it can be a fatiguing process for teachers as well as an annoying experience for students themselves. Moreover, Lee (2004) conducted a study in order to examine existing error correction practices in the Hong Kong secondary writing classroom from both the teachers' and students' perceptions. The findings indicated that teachers had a tendency to mark students' writing errors comprehensively rather than marking them selectively. This argument is supported by Ferris (2002) who states that error correction can be most effective ''when it focuses on patterns of error, allowing teachers and students to attend to, say, two or three major error types at a time, rather than dozens of disparate errors'' (p. 50).

<center>Common Perceptions about Feedback</center>

Feedback is considered a fundamental aspect of learning how to write successfully in a second language context. According to Hyland (2003), feedback in the L2 context can play a major role in both the learning and developing of writing skills. He notes that feedback can provide students with "a sense of audience and sensitize them to the needs of readers [and] offers an additional layer of scaffolding to extend writing skills, promote accuracy and clear ideas, and develop an understanding of written genres" (p. 207). Moreover, Hyland argues that the written feedback that teachers provide on their students' writing should be "more than marks on a page" (p. 184). Accordingly, he argues that whenever teachers provide feedback, they should take into consideration all aspects in students' writing such as the structure, organization, style, content, and presentation. However, he admits that "it is not necessary to cover every aspect on every draft at every stage of the teaching writing cycle" (p. 184). Ferris (2002) claims that because L2 students, who are seen as developing writers, are still facing difficulty while acquiring the lexicon and morphological and syntactic systems in their L2, they need "distinct and additional intervention from their writing teachers to make up these deficits and to develop strategies for finding, correcting, and avoiding errors" (p. 4).

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Coffin, Curry, Goodman, Hewings, Lillis, and Swann (2003) argue that written feedback on students' writing is composed of three elements which many teachers would consider useful: a positive comment, a criticism, and a suggestion for improvement. However, they point out that feedback can be considered as "a complex process" (p. 103). They add that the different purposes for providing feedback might include:

- supporting students' writing development
- teaching, or reinforcing, a particular aspect of disciplinary content
- teaching specific academic writing conventions
- indicating strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing
- explaining or justifying a grade
- suggesting how a student may improve in their next piece of writing.

Teachers' Attitudes Towards Writing Assessment

How do L2 teachers react to writing assessment when responding to students' written assignments in L2 classes? Weigle (2007) states, "teachers often feel that assessment is a necessary evil rather than a central aspect of teaching that has the potential to be beneficial to both teacher and students" (p. 194). Ferris (2007) argues that responding to students' writing is not only a time-consuming job but also a tiring one that causes great challenges for L2 teachers. Moreover, Lee (2003) indicates that "it is difficult for teachers to renounce the established practice of giving feedback on student errors in writing" (p. 217). In other words, teachers cannot stop following traditional ways in responding to students' writing, particularly in L2 classrooms. As a result, it is essential for L2 teachers to be trained in how to assess and respond to students' writing. This definitely will help increase their awareness of the most effective and useful techniques of providing feedback to students' written assignments. However, Lee (2003) adds, "teachers probably see error correction as their responsibility and feel that it is hard to avoid this job, especially when students request it and when they are unable to correct errors" (p. 221). Indeed, Weigle (2007) points out that "teachers need to understand the range of possibilities for assessing students, what the essential qualities of a good assessment instrument are, and how to develop assessments that maximize these essential qualities within the constraints of time and resources that teachers face" (p. 195).

Teachers' Feedback in L2 Writing

Despite the growing importance of oral response and the use of peers as tools for providing feedback, teacher's written responses continue to have a great impact in most L2 writing classes. As mentioned earlier, because it is crucial for L2 students to develop their writing skills, many educators promote writing process in order to help students develop achievable strategies for successful writing. This process, as a classroom activity, incorporates the four basic writing stages- planning, drafting (writing), revising (redrafting), and editing. Matsuda and Silva (2002) argue that "understanding the strategic aspect of writing is important for writing teachers because it enables them to teach writing rather than teach about writing" (p. 255). Lee (2008b) argues that because L2 teachers may pay more attention to the written product rather than the writing process itself, this practice could redirect teachers and students to focus on form. Therefore, it is advisable that teachers provide feedback to multiple drafts rather than a single one.

Goldstein (2005) refers to the importance of teacher intervention and feedback as key points within the implementation of process approaches to the teaching and learning of L2 writing. She adds, "teachers as expert readers are able to help students identify what they need to learn in terms of effective processes and in terms of the knowledge of what is required when generating these drafts and to arrive at the most successful final product possible" (p. 6). Hyland and Hyland (2006b) indicate "commentary on a draft is likely to serve more immediate pedagogical goals than that given on a final product" (p. 86). They add, when responding to students' writing, teachers have other purposes rather than focusing mainly on grammar or content. They implement a variety of commenting strategies that differ according to the type of written assignment, the time when feedback is provided, and the level of proficiency of the students.

Lee (2007) conducted a study to investigate the various types of teachers' feedback and their consequences on the teaching-learning assessment process in Hong Kong secondary writing classrooms. She concluded that teachers' feedback mainly emphasized the assessment of writing summatively, so that it serves the purpose of "assessment of learning," instead of "assessment for learning." That is, the findings of Lee's showed that the feedback practices by these teachers' were influenced by institutional context and values so that teachers could not successfully use feedback to realize the potential of assessment for learning. Therefore, these teachers' attention

was directed to focus on language errors. As an alternative, in that context, feedback was given to all errors with no mention to the assessment criteria connected to the goals of teaching writing. Similarly, Sugita (2006) conducted another study to examine the impact of three types of comments on students' revisions: statements, imperatives, and questions. It was done to determine if the three types of feedback were more or less effective. Written statements, imperatives, and questions were the three types of responses that teachers implemented on students' drafts. The outcome demonstrated that the imperative comments were more influential on students' revisions than statements or questions and they were very helpful to students in order to enable them to make considerable and successful revisions. Finally, Sugita (2006) concludes that "this outcome may imply that teachers should be careful in selecting comment types when writing between-draft comments" (p. 34).

In L2 writing, teachers' feedback is considered as a helpful pedagogical act which is implemented to improve not only the teaching but also the learning of writing. White (1995) points out that "feedback is an important part of skill development. We learn from each other, and we learn to contribute to each other's learning and development through collaboration" (p. vi). Ferris (2007) indicates, "Teacher's feedback is a large part of the package of being a writing teacher [and] some would argue that it is the biggest and most significant part. Experience alone will not make a teacher an effective responder, but solid principles, useful techniques, and thoughtful reflection and evaluation probably will" (p. 179). However, Xiang (2004) points out that while it has been shown in some studies that teachers' feedback is useful to help L2 students to develop their writing skills, a number of other studies reveal that the traditional method that teachers follow to make comments on the students' drafts is not effective in improving their writing (for a review some of these studies, see Xiang, 2004).

Although writers generally point out that teachers' feedback has a much greater impact than peer feedback, peer feedback, which is sometimes known as peer review or peer editing, can affect writing development. Lee (2003) states, "it is important for teachers to use error feedback in conjunction with other strategies to help students treat their own errors" (p. 208). That is, teachers can utilize strategies such as editing training, and self or peer feedback strategy. When appropriately applied, peer feedback can produce a rich intercultural interaction, and grant students a sense of group solidarity. Liu and Hansen (2005) argue, "Effective peer response

activities are not just a stage in the writing process; they are an integral component of promoting language development in an L2 writing class" (p. 38). Hyland and Hyland (2006a) point out that from a socio-cognitive perspective, "peer review can be seen as a formative developmental process that gives writers the opportunities to discuss their texts and discover others' interpretations of them" (p. 6).

Rollinson (2005) lists a number of reasons why teachers have chosen to use peer feedback in the ESL writing classroom. According to him, the first advantage of peer feedback is that it tends to be of a different kind from that of the teacher. Second, it may be that becoming a critical reader of others' writing may help students develop into more critical readers and revisers of their own writing. Third, peer feedback can encourage a collaborative dialogue in which two-way feedback is established and meaning is negotiated between the two parties. Fourth, peer feedback may encourage or motivate students to write because it operates on a more informal level than the typically one-way, formal teacher feedback. Finally, when students see the benefits of peer feedback, their positive attitudes toward writing are enhanced (pp. 24-25).

Nevertheless, Hyland and Hyland (2006a) mention some problems with peer response which are related to the L2 context. They argue that peer editors, for example, probably deal with surface errors more than deep problems of meaning and those inexpert students may face difficulty in judging the validity of their peers' comments. Moreover, students might also have difficulties identifying problem areas in other students' writing and offer them inaccurate or misleading advice, while writers may react negatively and defensively to critical comments from their peers (p. 7). Peer reviewing may prove to be insufficient as Min (2005) states, "the problem that lies with EFL peer reviewers is, however, more than over interpretation. It is an aggregate of over- and mis-interpretation as well as a lack of skills in providing specific feedback" (p. 295). Rollinson (2005) agrees and indicates, "The peer response process itself is lengthy. Reading a draft, making notes, then either collaborating with another reader to reach a consensus and write the comments, or engaging orally with the writer in a feedback circle, will consume a significant amount of time" (p. 25).

Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Feedback

In general, L2 students may have a negative attitude towards writing which they express in highly emotionally charged responses such as "boring," "difficult," "I hate writing," etc. and they believe they will never be good writers in English

(Gebhard, 2006; He & Shi, 2008) . It is obvious that this attitude results from a lack of motivation, especially intrinsic motivation, and differences in motivation between learners. As Harmer (2007) points out, "[although some] original reasons for learning are extrinsic, the chances of success will be greatly enhanced if students come to love the learning process" (p. 98). Therefore, teachers should try hard to change students' negative attitude towards writing by listening to students' different views and experiences about writing. Gebhard (2006) believes, "[teachers] can demystify the writing process by pointing out that no person's writing is perfect and writing is hard work that aims at expressing our ideas" (p. 225). Stern and Solomon (2006) argue, "We believe that students' learning is ongoing and incremental by nature, [therefore] providing effective feedback at every opportunity is the best way to encourage and promote learning" (p. 38).

Murphy (2000) states, "understanding the student's perspective makes us better able to communicate and better able to adapt instruction to the student's needs" (p. 86). Although writing teachers spend many hours responding to students' writing and offering suggestions and feedback on language errors, students react differently to teachers' feedback. That is, some students highly value their teachers' comments and corrections on their written assignments, while others quite often do not pay attention to those comments. Lee (2008a) investigated the students' reactions to their teachers' feedback in two Hong Kong secondary classrooms. The results revealed that students, regardless of their proficiency level, sought more written error feedback and comments from their teachers. It also showed that low achievers were less interested in feedback than those of high achievers. Lee concluded that "it is important for teachers to be aware of the impact of their feedback practices on student expectations and attitudes, which should be fed back to teachers to help them develop reflective and effective feedback practices" (p. 144).

To conclude, a great deal of literature emphasizes the significance of not only teaching and developing writing skills in L1 contexts, but also in L2 classrooms. That is due to the fundamental role that writing plays in the assessment of students' general academic achievement and development. However, in L2 writing, teachers' feedback is considered as a helpful pedagogical instrument which is implemented to improve not only the teaching but also learning of writing. Regardless of the implemented techniques for providing feedback that teachers use, they should be aware of their students' attitudes towards feedback. Moreover, they should also train and help

students find and correct errors and revise on their own. Teachers should have some abilities and skills, as well as awareness of the issues and difficulties that they might encounter when giving feedback. They also need to be cognizant of their own attitudes and concerns. Therefore, teacher educators can play a vital role in helping L2 classroom teachers transform a usually boring and exhausting task into one that is enjoyable, innovative, and even motivating.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate teachers' attitudes towards writing assessment and their actual practices when responding to students' writing. Furthermore, it intended to identify students' perceptions regarding this issue in government secondary schools in Sharjah City in the UAE. Thus, the study aimed to provide answers to the following research questions:

(1) What are English teachers' beliefs and attitudes about providing feedback on students' written assignments in the L2 classrooms?

(2) How do English teachers respond to their students' writing in UAE government secondary schools in one educational zone?

(3) What are the students' perceptions of their teachers' written feedback on their written assignments?

In order to achieve the purpose of this study, I used qualitative data collection instruments. Data was collected by using two questionnaires; one questionnaire was for English language teachers (see Appendix A) and the other one was for government secondary school students (see Appendix C). I also used the teachers' interview questions (see Appendix B) to collect the qualitative data from interviews with English language teacher volunteers (see Appendix E for the Consent Form). To avoid any ambiguity or misunderstanding regarding language comprehension, I translated all the statements, items, and questions in the students' questionnaire into Arabic to enable the students to understand the statements easily. In addition, instructions on how to complete the questionnaire were given in Arabic.

The Participants

The participants of this study were composed of two groups: English language teachers and government secondary school students. What follows is a description of each group.

Teachers

The teachers' group in this study consisted of experienced secondary level teachers who teach English to grades 10, 11, and 12 in eight different government secondary male and female schools in the Sharjah Educational Zone. This group included fifty-one teachers composed of twenty-four males and twenty-seven females (see Table 1). Since the average number of English teachers in each school ranges

from five to seven, this made the total number of teacher participants in this study fifty-one teachers. All teachers were non-native speakers of English from different Arab countries, with teaching experience ranging from five to 30 years:

- 3 Emiratis
- 18 Jordanians
- 2 Tunisians
- 7 Palestinians
- 9 Syrians
- 12 Egyptians

Table1: Teacher and Student Demographics

	Schools	No. of participating schools	No. of participating teachers and students		
			TSs	MSs	FSs
1	Boys Schools	4	24	120	
2	Girls Schools	4	27		120
	Total	8	51	120	120

TSs: Teachers, MSs: Male students, FSs: Female Students

Students

The majority of the students in the government schools participated in the study were UAE nationals. However, students from other Gulf and Arab countries such as Oman, Yemen, Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Sudan, and Egypt participated too. Their ages ranged from 15 to 18 years old. This group included a total of 240 students, divided into 120 male and 120 female (see Table 1), in grades 10, 11, and 12. The aim of choosing this number of participating students was to include thirty students from each of the eight schools.

Instruments

Questionnaires

In order to shed light on teachers' beliefs and attitudes as well as their practices concerning providing feedback on students' written assignments in L2 classrooms, qualitative data collection instruments were utilized. The teachers first completed a questionnaire composed of three sections (see Appendix A). Section one asked for background information about the teachers such as nationality, gender, and teaching experience. Section two was divided into two parts and consisted of twenty-

nine close-ended statements aimed at eliciting information about teachers' attitudes and practices. For the first 15 statements, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each statement using a 5-point Likert-type scale (strongly agree; agree; undecided; disagree; and strongly disagree). For the last 14 statements, participants were asked to choose from four options (Always, Usually, Sometimes, and Never) that described their usual practices in responding to students' writing. After analyzing the data, no significant differences were found between the strongly agree and the agree responses, as well as between the disagree and strongly disagree. Therefore, resulting responses were combined. The third section included open-ended questions to give teachers the chance to freely express their opinions about the topic and make their own suggestions.

Exploring the students' perceptions of teachers' feedback was achieved through the use of a bilingual students' questionnaire. The questionnaire composed of three sections (see Appendix C). Statements, items, and questions were offered in two languages; English and Arabic (see Appendix D). Section one requested for general information about the students such as nationality, gender, and their opinion about writing in English. Section two included nineteen close-ended statements in order to investigate students' perceptions of their teachers' written feedback on their written assignments. Participating students were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each statement on the 5-point Likert-type scale (strongly agree; agree; not sure; disagree; and strongly disagree). The third section included open-ended questions to give students the chance to express their opinions and make their own suggestions about the topic.

Before the study began, students were familiarized with the procedure and parents were informed that their children responses would be used only as confidential data for this thesis research. The participant students were told that they have the right to refuse to be in the study at all, and to stop participating at any time after the study commenced. So, to get their official approval, students were asked to sign a Consent Form (see Appendix E). I distributed the questionnaires at the beginning of December, 2009, after students have already completed two months of the first academic semester. By that time, students became more familiar with both textbook writing activities as well as the nature of teachers' homework assignments.

I conducted a pilot study using both questionnaires in two secondary schools. The participants in the pilot study were five (three males and two females) English

teachers and thirty UAE male and female students from the three grades (10, 11, and 12). Those participants were excluded from the main sample in this research. The aim of piloting both questionnaires was to find out more about the clarity of the statements and if any modifications were necessary. In addition, the pilot study provided information about the actual time needed to complete the questionnaire. Although the pilot study indicated that both questionnaires were clear enough and I received positive feedback from both teachers and students, I made slight changes to the teachers' questionnaires where I added two more close-ended statements to Part one in Section two. Moreover, an Arabic language teacher in my school revised the structure of the translated statements on the students' questionnaire.

I also provided teachers in the targeted schools with both my mobile phone number and email address so that they could contact me for further clarification or inquiries regarding the content of the questionnaires. Since it was difficult to get access to the male schools, I sent the questionnaires by mail to the boys' schools, and I contacted one male teacher in each school to volunteer and to be responsible for distributing them among other English teachers and students. I also inserted a separate letter with the questionnaire in which I thanked the contact teachers for volunteering to take the responsibility in helping collect the data.

Interviews

To attain more in-depth information and to better understand teachers' perspectives and practices on the subject of providing feedback, interviews were conducted with some members of the teachers' group after the questionnaires had been completed. Teachers who took part in these interviews teach the three grades 10, 11 and 12. The interviews focused on various domains such as teachers' main focus when responding to students' writing, their views about the effective methods when responding to students' writing, and teachers' responsibility when providing feedback. The number of interviewees was determined by responses to the last question on the questionnaire (asking for volunteers). In addition to the questions listed for the interview, more specific questions relevant to the teachers' responses on the questionnaire were asked in this interview. The volunteer interviewees consisted of eight teachers: four males and four females. I managed to interview six of them (four females and two males) face-to-face. The other two teachers (both males) were not available at the time of their scheduled interview due to time constraints. Therefore, they completed the interview questions via email.

CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In this chapter, a detailed description of the data analysis and the findings of the study will be presented. Data was collected by utilizing a combination of qualitative data collection instruments. Collected data from the questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Data from the open-ended questions and interviews was analyzed qualitatively to gain more insights into teachers' responses to the questionnaire. The presentation of the findings is divided into three sections: teachers' beliefs and attitudes about providing feedback on students' written assignments in the L2 classrooms, English teachers' practices when responding to their students' writing in UAE government secondary schools, and students' perceptions of their teachers' written feedback on their written assignments.

Teachers' Beliefs and Attitudes about Providing Feedback

All teachers (51) who participated in this study responded to all the close-ended statements in part one of section two of the teachers' questionnaire that was intended to investigate their beliefs and attitudes towards providing feedback on students' written assignments in the L2 classrooms (see Appendix A). When answering the close-ended statements 1, 2, and 3 (see Table 2), most of the teachers expressed a negative attitude towards assessing writing as, 57% (29) agreed that responding to students' writing is boring; whereas, only 33% (17) disagreed with this opinion. Moreover, teachers who represent 73% (37) agreed that it is stressful and tiresome. Nearly half of the teachers 49% (25) supported the idea that responding to students' writing is time consuming; whereas, 37% (19) expressed their disagreement with this idea.

Table 2: Teachers' General Attitude (n=51)

	Statements	Strongly Agree & Agree	Undecided	Strongly Disagree & Disagree
1.	Responding to students' writing is boring.	29 (57%)	5 (10%)	17 (33%)
2.	Responding to students' writing is stressful and tiresome.	37 (73%)	5 (10%)	9 (17%)
3.	Responding to students' writing is time consuming.	25 (49%)	7 (14%)	19 (37%)

In their reply to the open-ended question number 32 (What is your main rationale behind providing students with feedback in L2 writing?) the 26 teachers who responded to this question, gave different responses which reflected their various rationales behind providing students with written feedback. Below are examples of the most repeated responses provided by these teachers:

- Preventing the repetition of the same error
- Developing students' writing skill
- Helping students identify their errors
- Being incapable to learn or improve without feedback
- Giving students the chance to correct their mistakes
- Preparing students for academic purposes
- Dealing properly with paragraph organization, coherence, cohesion and grammar
- Meeting the Ministry expectations

Statements 4, 5, and 6 were meant to explore teachers' beliefs towards the utilization of specific criteria in writing assessment (see Table 3).

Table 3: Teachers' Beliefs about the Use of Assessment Criteria (n=51)

	Statements	Strongly Agree & Agree	Undecided	Strongly Disagree & Disagree
4.	I believe that teachers should use specific criteria when responding to students' writing.	42 (82 %)	3 (6%)	6 (12%)
5.	Teachers should assess students' writing on impression.	22 (43%)	6 (12%)	23 (45%)
6.	Teachers should assess students' writing holistically based on clear guidelines.	40 (78%)	4 (8%)	7 (14%)

As seen in the Table, 82 % (42) out of the 51 teachers supported the idea that teachers should adhere to specific criteria when responding to students' writing. However, they were divided on whether teachers should assess writing on impression (43% agreed vs. 45% disagreed). On the contrary, the majority of respondents (78%)

were in favor of teachers assessing students' writing holistically based on clear guidelines.

Teachers' responses to statements 10 and 11 (see Table 4) indicated that the majority of them 44 out of 51 respondents (86%) agreed that teachers should use various responding methods according to error types and the students' levels of achievement. For example, one teacher stated:

In general, writing means the most important outcomes and evaluation for students' levels. I underline their mistakes, correct [the mistakes] over and sometimes write the most common mistakes on a separate draft and ask students to check them.

Furthermore, the majority of the responding teachers, 94% (48 out 51), believed that students should be trained on how to discover and deal with errors in written assignments (statement 11). As one of the teachers stated, "Students may reflect on their own writing, analyze their mistakes and discuss it with teacher."

Table 4: Teachers' Beliefs About the Use of Responding Methods to Students' Writing (n=51)

	Statements	Strongly Agree & Agree	Undecided	Strongly Disagree & Disagree
10.	Teachers should use various responding methods according to the error types and the students' levels of achievement.	44 (86%)	5 (10%)	2 (4%)
11.	Teachers should train students on how to discover and deal with errors in written assignments.	48 (94%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)

However, more than half of the teachers 63% (32 out 51 teachers) disagreed with the idea that it is their responsibility to underline and correct all the errors in written assignments (see Table 5). Interviews with the teachers revealed the same findings. In their response to the question, "Do you think teachers should take the whole responsibility to underline and correct all the errors in written assignments? Why/Why not?," five of the eight teachers opposed the idea. In fact, one teacher

commented:

> No, I think it is sometimes better to have students discover their own mistakes and correct them. They might also benefit from the suggestions of their colleagues. Though, I find that students need to refer to the teacher to make sure that their corrections and colleagues' suggestions are correct.

Another teacher added:

> No, I do not think teachers have to underline and correct ideas. One reason is that students do not even try to identify their errors. Another reason is that students should be able to correct their own mistakes.

On the other hand, 69% (35 out of 51) of the respondents were in favor of not only correcting errors but also writing comments when responding to students' writing. In addition, 59% (30) of the teachers in this study disagreed with the belief that "It is acceptable to refer to errors only, without providing feedback on students' writing" (statement 14).

Table 5: Teachers' Beliefs About the Use of Responding Methods to Students' Writing (n=51)

	Statements	Strongly Agree & Agree	Undecided	Strongly Disagree & Disagree
12.	It is the teachers' responsibility to underline and correct all the errors in written assignments.	13 (25%)	6 (12%)	32 (63%)
13.	Teachers should not only correct errors but also write comments when responding to students' writing.	35 (69%)	3 (6%)	13 (25%)
14.	It is acceptable to refer to errors only, without providing feedback on students' writing.	14 (27%)	7 (14%)	30 (59%)

The findings also revealed teachers' perceptions regarding the need to be trained on how to assess and respond to students' writing. That is, in their responses to the close-ended statement 15 (see Figure 2), the majority of the teachers in this study who represent 74% (38) agreed that it is essential that teachers receive this kind of training.

15. Teachers Need to be Trained on How to Assess and Respond to Students' Writing.
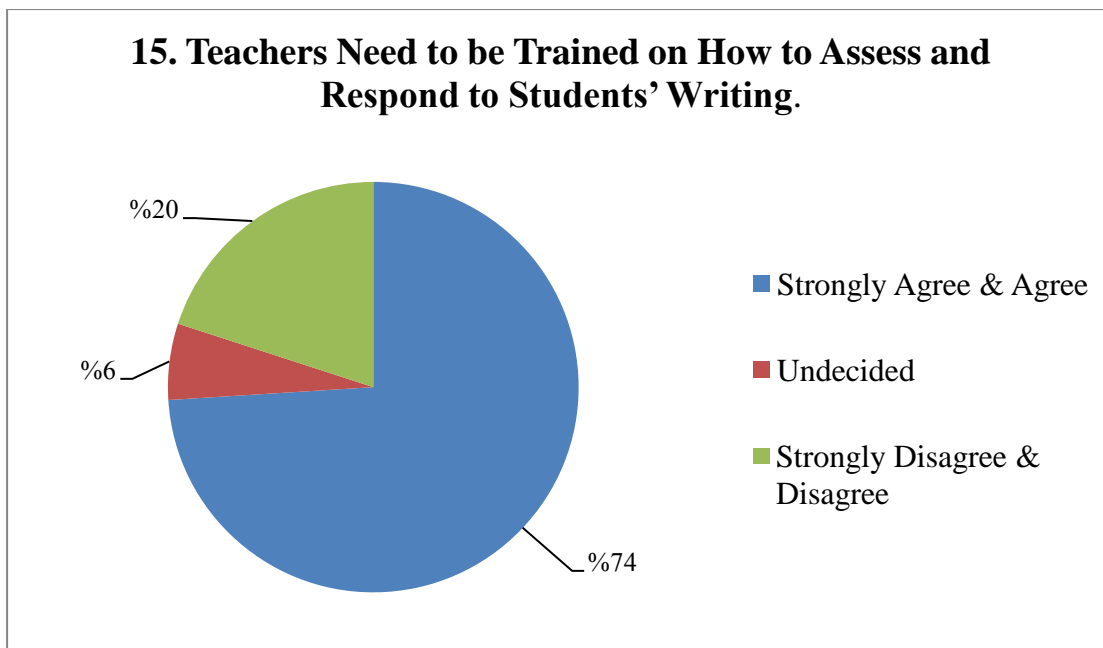
Figure 2: Secondary Teachers' Responses to Close-ended Statement 15

Teachers' responses to the open-ended question number 35 (see Figure 3), revealed that 86% (37) of the 43 teachers who answered this question pointed out that they have received some sort of training on how to assess writing. However, when asked about what kind of training they received, most of them referred to the CEPA training sessions that were prescribed by the UAE Ministry of Education. Others mentioned training sessions that focused on process writing, teaching writing in general, and raising teachers' performance in assessing the four language skills. However, teachers' attitudes varied in regards to the usefulness of these training courses in general. While some considered them useful, others disagreed. As one teacher commented, "Yes, it was CEPA training, but it was not really helpful because it didn't accurately show how to deal with real writing samples." Another teacher added, "We have several workshops on purposeful writing. Most of these workshops were not useful."

35. Have You Ever Received Any Training Regarding Writing Assessment?

%14

%86

■ Yes

■ No

Figure 3: Secondary Teachers' Responses to Open-ended Question 35

English Teachers' Practices When Responding to Their Students' Writing

Statements 16, 17, 18, 19, and 27 were grouped together and were meant to elicit teachers' responses about their practices when responding to their students' writing (see Table 6).

Table 6: Teachers' Practices When Responding to Students' Writing

	Statements	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
16.	I respond to students' writing by underlining all their writing errors.	18 (35%)	20 (39%)	10 (20%)	3 (6%)
17.	I underline and correct all grammatical errors.	10 (20%)	17 (33%)	19 (37%)	5 (10%)
18.	I underline and correct all lexical errors.	5 (10%)	19 (37%)	19 (37%)	8 (16%)
19.	I refer to the writing errors without correcting them (indirect feedback).	5 (10%)	12 (24%)	21 (41%)	13 (25%)
27.	I meet with students individually to discuss their errors.	3 (6%)	11 (21%)	35 (69%)	2 (4%)

As shown in the above table, 74% (38 out of the 51) of the secondary teachers who responded to statement 16 "I respond to students' writing by underlining all their writing errors" pointed out that they "Always" or "Usually" use this strategy; whereas, 20% (10) of the teachers indicated that they "Sometimes" apply this strategy. Furthermore, more than half of the teachers 53% (27) "Always" or "Usually

27

underline and correct all the grammatical errors in students' writing (statement 17). Moreover, 47% (24) of the teachers "Always" or "Usually" underline and correct all lexical errors (statement 18). However, when responding to the close-ended statements 17 and 18, only 37% (19) out of the 51 teachers pointed out that they "Sometimes" underline and correct all grammatical and lexical errors. On the other hand, responses of the 51 teachers to statement 19 "I refer to the writing errors without correcting them (indirect feedback), showed that only 34% (17) of them "Always" or "Usually" refer to the writing errors indirectly, while 41% (21) use this strategy "Sometimes" and 25% (13) never respond to students' writing errors indirectly. Finally, in responding to statement 27 "I meet with students individually to discuss their errors," 69% (35) of the teachers mentioned that they "Sometimes" meet with students individually to discuss their errors.

Statements 20 and 21 (see Table 7) were meant to gain a clearer idea about participating teachers' writing comments on students' papers.

Table 7: Writing Comments on Students' Papers

	Statements	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
20.	I write positive comments on students' papers.	21 (41%)	18 (35%)	11 (22%)	1 (2%)
21.	I write negative comments on students' papers.	1 (2%)	7 (14%)	21 (41%)	22 (43%)

As clearly shown in the above table, 76% of the participating teachers indicated that they "Always" or "Usually" write positive comments on students' papers (statement 20). This result agrees with what Stern and Solomon (2006) argue about that writing positive comments on students' papers is considered a more effective feedback principle rather than marking all of their shortcomings. They add, "Feedback should include compliments on inventive ideas, questions to inspire further inquiries, and evaluation on how and to what extent the goals of the assignment were achieved" (p. 26).

In their responses to statements 23 and 24 (see Table 8), the majority of teachers 82% (42) out of the 51 participating in this study, pointed out that they "Always" or "Usually" focus on the rhetorical features while 86% of them "Always" or "Usually" focus on the linguistic features.

Table 8: Teachers' Main Focus When Responding to Their Students' Writing

	Statements	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
23.	I focus on rhetorical features (content, organization, development of ideas) when responding to students'' writing.	17 (33%)	25 (49%)	9 (18%)	0 (0%)
24.	I focus on linguistic features (control of grammar and vocabulary) when responding to students' writing.	23 (45%)	21 (41%)	6 (12%)	1 (2%)

These findings were confirmed by the interviewed teachers, where five out of the eight teachers admitted that they pay more attention to organization when marking students' papers. For example, one teacher said:

I would focus on two major factors, the first one is how the students express themselves in good organized ideas and sentences and this implies using proper vocabulary and coherence, and grammatical points in second place. You can't state your ideas properly if you can't use the proper tense and parts of speech.

Another teacher commented:

Organization is the first thing I look for it [as] shows how much the student knows about writing itself and not only the topic. Information could be found everywhere but the skill is something that they enhance as they care about their writing and assure they produce a decent, readable and interesting well-written essay.

Statement 22 (see Table 9) was meant to elicit participating teachers responses regarding their use of correction codes. Findings showed that nearly half of the teachers 49% (25) out of 51 "Always" or "Usually" use a shorthand checklist when responding to students' writing, and only 14% (7) "Never" use it. This result is consistent with teachers' responses to the open-ended question number 33 (see Figure 4).

Table 9: English Teachers' Use of a Shorthand Checklist

	Statements	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
22.	I use a shorthand checklist when responding to students' writing.	8 (16%)	17 (33%)	19 (37%)	7 (14%)

**33. Do You Familiarize and Train Your Students to
Use a Shorthand Checklist?**

%32

%68

Yes

No
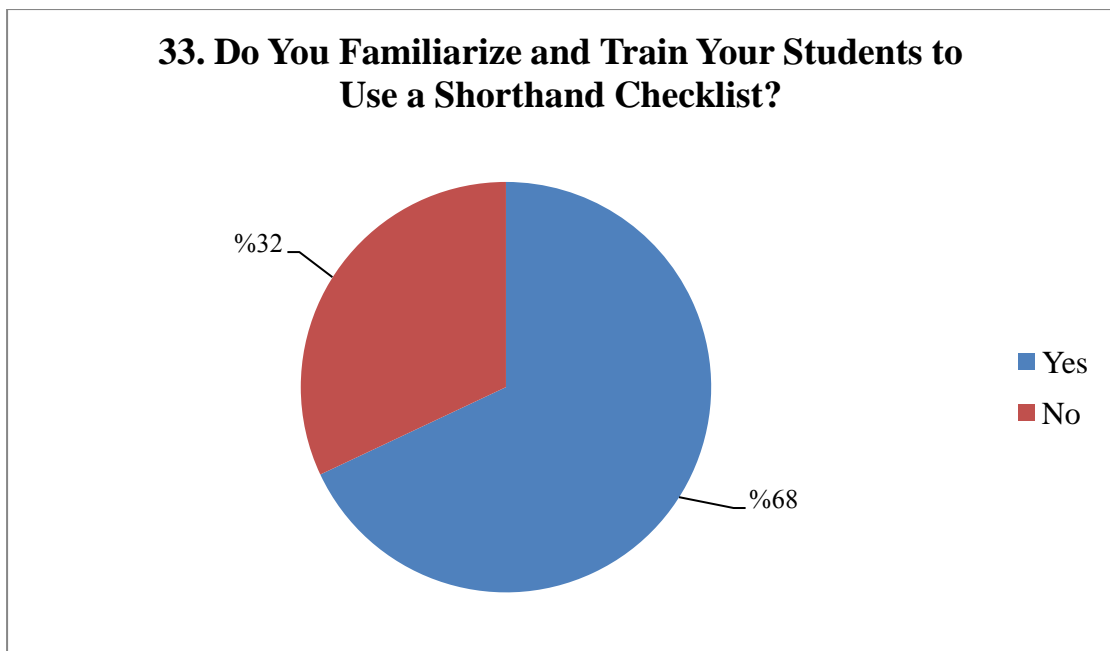
Figure 4: Secondary Teachers' Responses to Open-ended Question 33

As shown above, 68% (21) out of the 31 teachers who answered this question
stated that they familiarize and train their students to use a shorthand checklist.
Teachers who implemented this technique gave various reasons for using it. As
reported by the teachers, some of these reasons are:

- "We have started to use a shorthand checklist this year only because it was
  [suggested] by the Ministry of Education."
- "It's good for both teachers and students because students can evaluate
  themselves."
- "So, [students] can realize their errors and be able to comprehend the way of
  correcting and why they are given this mark."
- "I try to train them, actually this is new for them, but this teaches them how to
  be fair and just. Also, to learn that the mark the teacher gives depends on rules
  and rubrics."
- "To save time."

On the contrary, the 32% (total 10 out of 31) who opposed the use of a
shorthand checklist, gave the following reasons:

- "Too many [codes] to be applied, and therefore confusing to students."
- "Students lack the ability to recognize the criteria of a checklist."

- "Not enough time go over it since we [teachers] are required to cover the curriculum."
- "It's true that we are training [students] this year now; however, I find this procedure too late for grade 12."
- "No, because they should learn the correction symbols from grade one."

In the follow up interviews, only three out of the eight interviewed teachers supported the use of correction symbols and considered it as an effective method, as one teachers said:

I think using a correction code can be very effective because students can feel the difference between their first and second draft after following the teacher's guidelines and really get motivated to write more.

Another teacher added:

It is good to teach students how to use correction symbols but I think these symbols should be minimized to make students more familiar with them.

In statement 28, teachers were asked whether they use the peer response technique in their classes (see Table 10), 47% (24) indicated that they "Always" or "Usually" organize peer response pairs and groups to give students the opportunity to provide feedback on each others' writing.

Table 10: The Use of the Peer Response Technique in Classrooms

	Statements	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
28.	I organize peer response pairs and groups to give students the opportunity to provide feedback on each other's writing.	2 (4%)	22 (43%)	24 (47%)	3 (6%)

Moreover, among the 31 teachers who answered the open-ended question 34, "Do you train your students to use the peer response technique in the class? Why?" 81% (25) of them pointed out that they train their students to use this strategy in class (see Figure 5). As one teacher wrote:

Yes, I do. Students can be frank with each other away from embarrassment. They can understand each other better and can refer to the teacher for more understanding if they [work] in groups or pairs.

34. Do You Train Your Students to Use the Peer Response Technique in the Class?

%19

%81

- Yes
- No
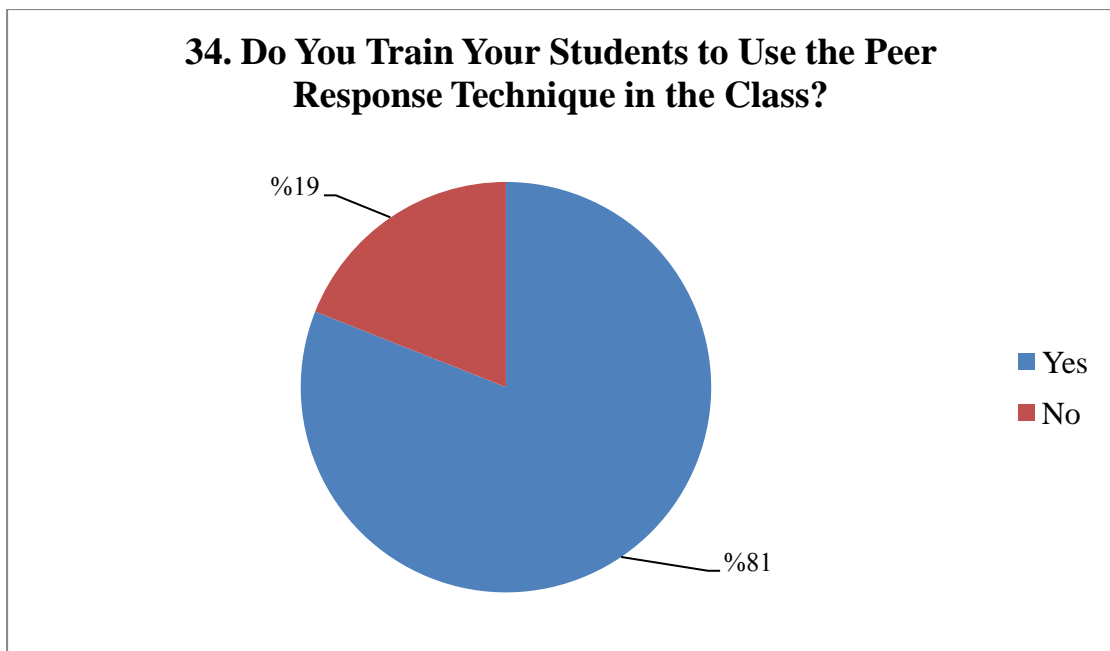
Figure 5: Secondary Teachers' Responses to Open-ended Question 34

However, some of the participating teachers in this study expressed their concerns regarding the implementation of peer response technique, as one of the teachers indicated that he rarely applies this technique because students do not take it seriously and most of them do not have the competence to give appropriate feedback.

Open-ended question 31on the questionnaire addressed the various factors that affect teachers' current practices when responding to their students' writing. Participants were given a list of factors to choose from and also to add their own, if any (see Figure 6). According to their responses, the students' levels of English proficiency was the most frequently chosen factor, as it was selected by 82% of the participating teachers (42 out of 51) in this study. The second most predominant factor was related to meeting the Ministry of Education assessment policies. Findings showed that 76% (39) of the teachers indicated that these policies affect their practices as they are required to follow them. Moreover, 65% (33) of the teachers reported that the type of writing assignments has an influence on their feedback practices; while, 63% (32) of the teachers referred to types of committed errors as another affecting factor.

31. Factors That Affect Teachers' Current Practices When Responding to Students' Writing
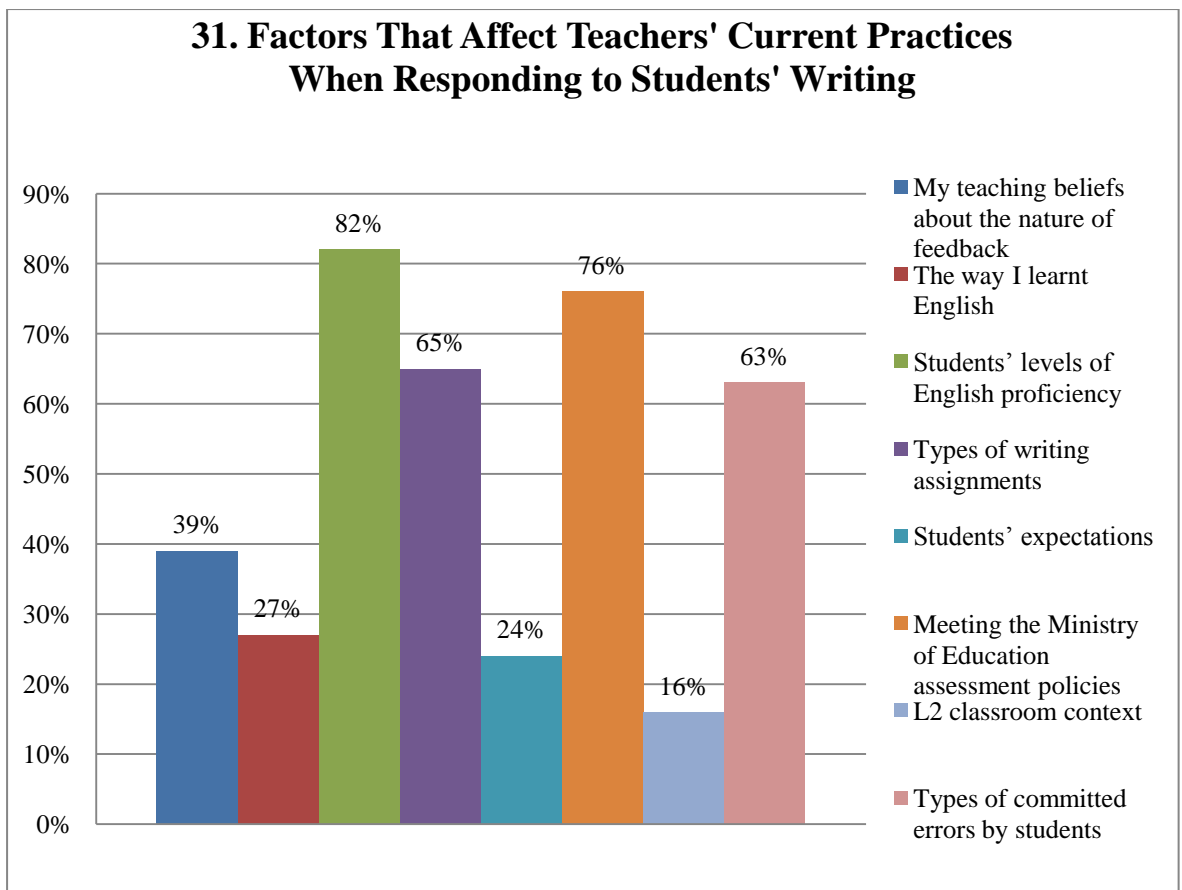
Figure 6: Secondary Teachers' Responses to Open-ended Question 31

Students' Perceptions of Their Teachers' Written Feedback

In order to investigate students' perceptions about their teachers' written feedback, 240 students from eight different government secondary boys and girls schools were surveyed. Students' responses to statements 1, 2, 3, and 4 (see Table 11) showed that the majority of the students believed that various factors helped enhance their writing skills in general. As shown in the table, 76% (183) of the 240 participants valued textbook writing activities (statement 1), agreeing that these activities develop their writing skills. Moreover, 82% (196) of the students favored the multiple drafts strategy as they considered it another helpful factor in developing their skills in writing (statement 3). Furthermore, 86% (207 participants) strongly agreed or agreed that the feedback they receive from their teacher helps improve their performance in writing (statement 2). Finally, 70% (169 participants) agreed that peer response is helpful, while only 8% disagreed with the usefulness of this strategy. It is interesting, however, that 22% (52) of the students were unable to decide if this

technique is helpful or not. This may be due to the fact that some students might not be used to peer review practices in the classroom.

Table 11: Students' Perceptions about Factors Improving Writing Skills

Statements	Strongly Agree & Agree	Not Sure	Strongly Disagree & Disagree
1. The writing activities in the student's book help develop my writing skills.	183 (76%)	29 (12%)	28 (12%)
2. My teacher's feedback helps me to improve my writing performance.	207 (86%)	23 (10%)	10 (4%)
3. Asking students to write multiple drafts of their papers is very helpful in developing their writing skills.	196 (82%)	31 (13%)	13 (5%)
4. Peer response helps students learn to give feedback to improve their writing.	169 (70%)	52 (22%)	19 (8%)

Responses to question number 10, "How does your teacher respond to your writing?" (see Figure 7) showed that 62% (148) of the 240 students pointed out that their teachers underline and correct their writing errors. However, less than half of the students, more specifically 31% (74), said that their teachers underline errors without correcting them.
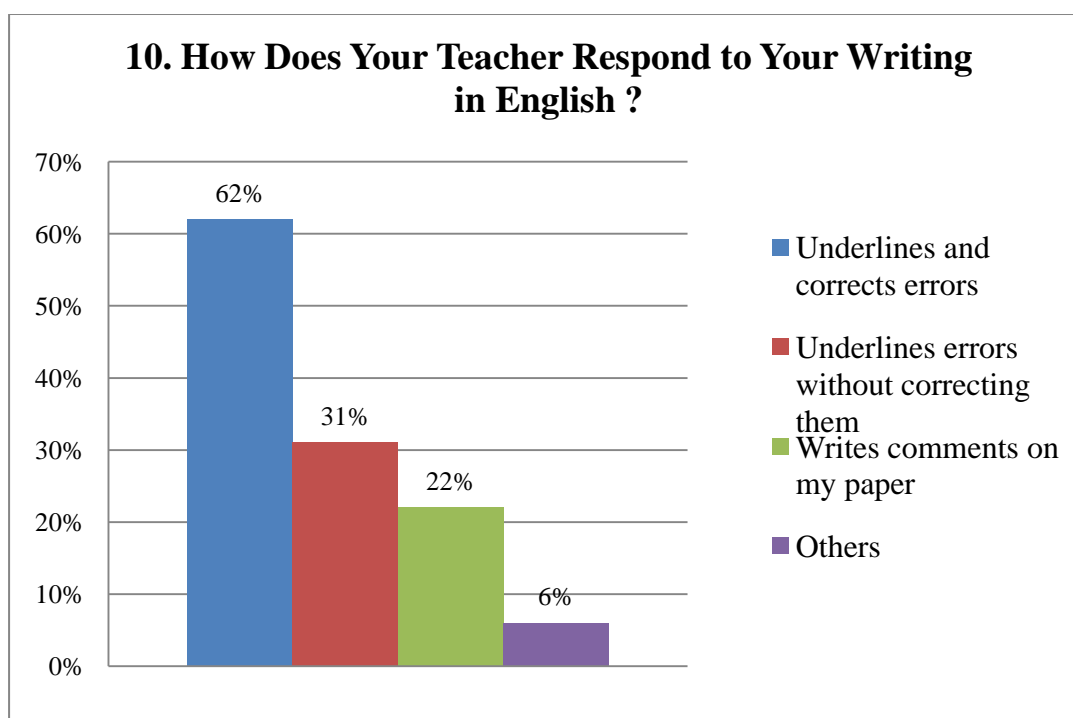
Figure 7: Secondary Students' Responses to Question 10

This reveals that students report the majority of teachers still provide direct feedback, which confirms the findings mentioned previously (see Table 6) in section two on the teachers' questionnaire.

In their answer to the open-ended question number 20 regarding the importance of providing students with feedback in L2 writing, the majority of the students 94% (212) out of the 225 who answered this question, admitted its importance (see Figure 8).

20. Is it Important to Provide Students With Feedback in L2 Writing?
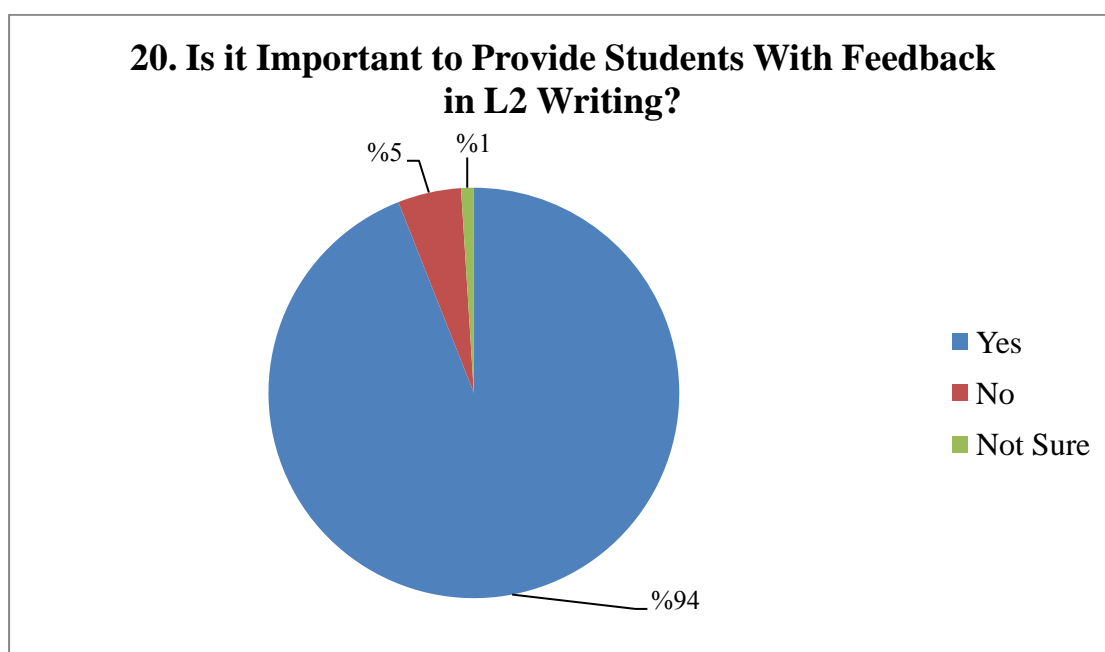
Figure 8: Secondary Students' Responses to Open-ended Question 20

In fact, almost all of the participating students in this study were fully aware of the importance of providing feedback and how helpful it is in enhancing their writing skills in English. One student wrote, "Yes, because that helps the student to improve his writing skills and reinforce them as well as discovering his writing mistakes." Another student added, "Yes, I think it's important because the students should know what the teacher thinks about their writing and they should know their errors." One more student commented, "Yes, it increases the students' abilities to [understand] English in more easy way, it also gets the student into the scene and lets him activate with the subject." The numbers in parentheses below demonstrate how often a certain reason was mentioned by the 212 out of 240 students who agreed on the importance of providing feedback:

- Improving the students' writing performance (73)
- Improving their knowledge and level of proficiency in English (45)
- Discovering and learning from their mistakes (40)
- Helping students avoid the same writing error (28)
- Correcting their committed errors in writing (21)
- Helping students pay more attention to writing (5)

Question number 9 on the students' questionnaire, "Has your English teacher ever familiarized and trained you on how to use and react to written feedback?" aimed to gain an idea about students' reaction to their teachers' feedback (see Figure 9).

9. Has Your English Teacher Ever Familiarized and Trained You on How to Use and React to Written Feedback?

%2
%9

- Yes
- No
- Undecided

%89
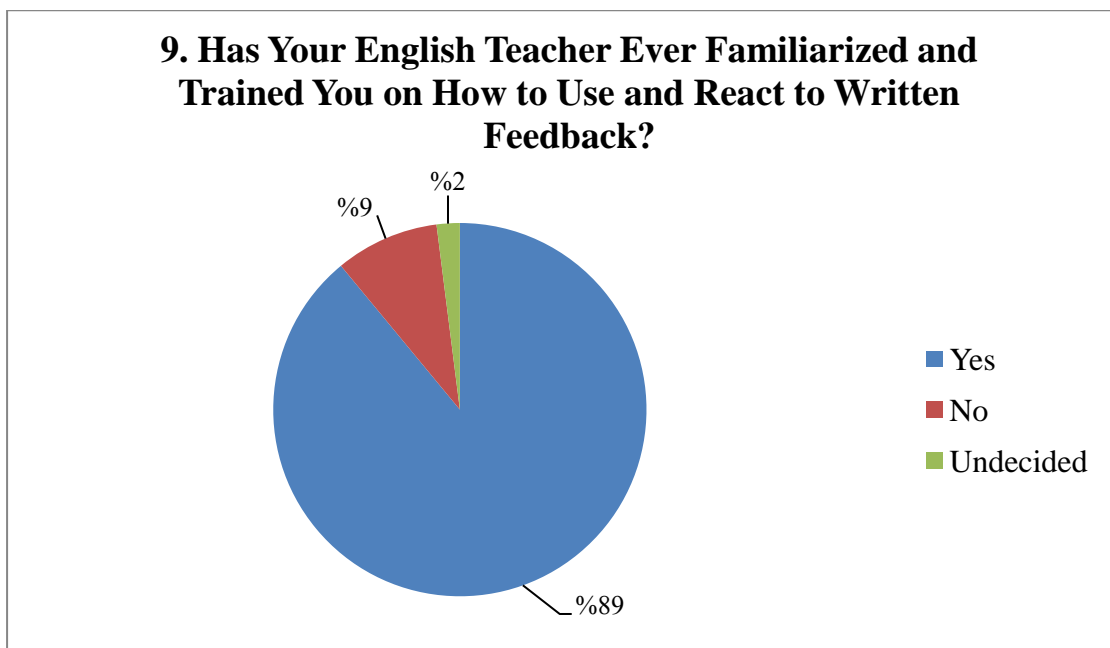
Figure 9: Secondary Students' Responses to Question 9

Findings showed that 89% (213) out of the 240 students think that they have a good knowledge about how to react to their teachers' feedback. In fact, the 215 students who responded to open-ended question 21, "What do you usually do after receiving your teacher's feedback on your writing assignments?" mentioned different actions that they follow after receiving feedback. These are shown below:

- Correcting their mistakes (54)
- Revising their committed errors (49)
- Trying to improve their writing styles (35)

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- Reading the teacher's feedback and trying to understand it (29)
- Writing down the teacher's comments (22)
- Identifying their committed errors (17)
- Asking the teacher for help (9)

In their answers to the open-ended question number 22, "What do you usually do if you do not understand your teacher's feedback on your writing assignments?" 89% (190) out of the 213 who answered this question wrote that they would go back to the teacher and ask for more clarification on the feedback. Only 11% (23) mentioned that they would ask their friends for help (see Figure 10).

22. What Do You Usually do if You Do not Understand Your Teacher's Feedback on Your Writing Assignments?

%11

%89

■ Ask my teacher
■ Ask a friend
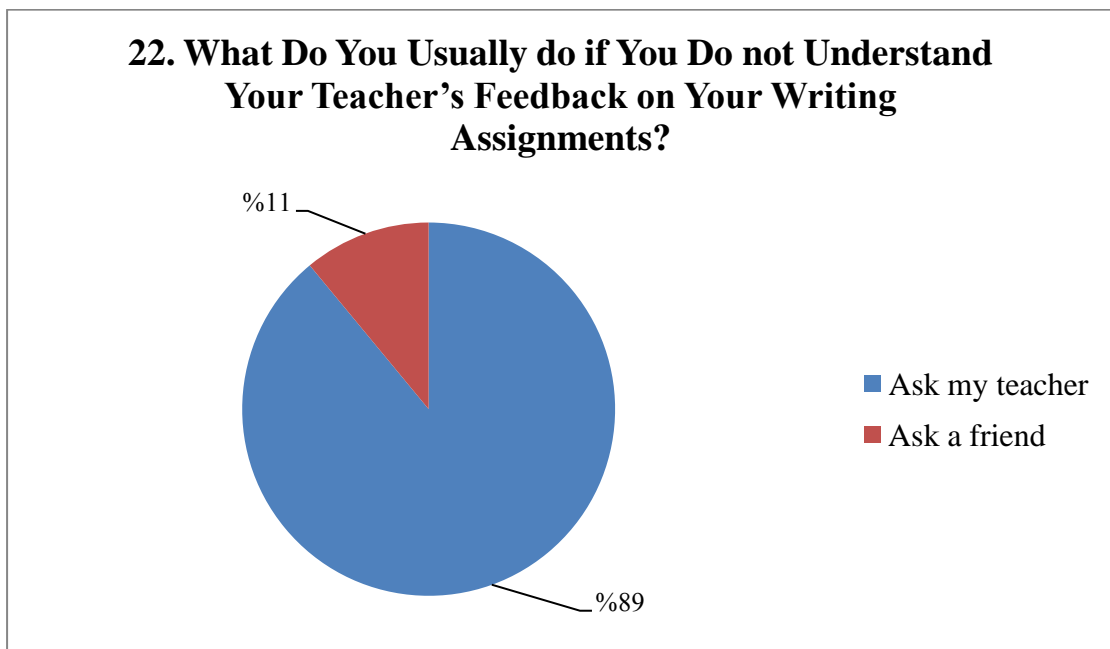
Figure 10: Secondary Students' Responses to Open-ended Question 22

Statements 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 14, and 18 elicited data concerning students' perceptions and expectations of teachers' written feedback (see Table 12). Findings indicated that the majority of participants (72%) agreed that their teachers should use specific grading criteria (statement 5); 88% felt that their teacher should use different methods of correcting their errors (statement 6), and 96% expected that teachers should train their students on how to deal with errors in writing (statement 7).

Table 12: Students' Perceptions and Expectations When Responding to Their Writing

Statements	Strongly Agree & Agree	Not Sure	Strongly Disagree & Disagree
5. I believe that teachers should stick to and use specific criteria when responding to students' writing.	172 (71%)	52 (22%)	16 (7%)
6. Teachers should use various responding methods according to the errors types and the students' levels of achievement.	210 (87%)	18 (8%)	12 (5%)
7. Teachers should train students to discover and deal with errors in written assignments.	230 (96%)	8 (3%)	2 (1%)
8. It is the teacher's responsibility to underline and correct all the errors in written assignments.	154 (64%)	46 (19%)	40 (17%)
10. Teachers can refer to errors only without providing feedback on students' writing.	42 (18%)	60 (25%)	138 (57%)
14. It is not beneficial if teachers refer to the writing errors without correcting them (indirect feedback).	138 (58%)	41 (17%)	61 (25%)
18. It is useful if teachers meet with students individually to discuss their errors.	185 (77%)	32 (13%)	23 (10%)

Statements 11, 12, 13, and 19 examined students' preferences regarding receiving written feedback from their teachers (see table 13).

Table 13: Written Feedback Preferences According to Students

Statements	Strongly Agree & Agree	Not Sure	Strongly Disagree & Disagree
11. It is useful when teachers respond to students' writing by underlining all their writing errors.	202 (84%)	28 (12%)	10 (4%)
12. Teachers should underline and correct all grammatical errors.	194 (81%)	33 (14%)	13 (5%)
13. Teachers should underline and correct all lexical errors.	182 (76%)	39 (16%)	19 (8%)
19. Teachers should give equal consideration to all students' errors in writing.	170 (70%)	35 (15%)	35 (15%)

Overall, the findings consistently revealed that students expect their teachers to work out everything for them. More specifically, 70% (170) of the students agreed that teachers should give equal consideration to all errors in writing (statement 19),

84% (202) believed that it is useful when teachers respond to students' writing by underlining all their writing errors (statement 11), and 81% (194) and 76% (182) agreed that teachers should underline and correct all grammatical and lexical errors respectively (statements 12 and 13).

Statements 9 and 15 (see Table 14) were meant to elicit students' responses regarding written comments.

Table 14: Students' Perceptions about Comment Writing

	Statements	Strongly Agree & Agree	Not Sure	Strongly Disagree & Disagree
9.	Teachers should not only correct errors but also write comments when responding to students' writing.	170 (70%)	42 (18%)	28 (12%)
15.	Writing comments on students' papers is very useful.	213 (89%)	20 (8%)	7 (3%)

As 89% (213) of the students were in favor of writing comments on students' papers, 71% (170) also agreed that teachers should not only correct errors but also write comments when responding to students' writing.
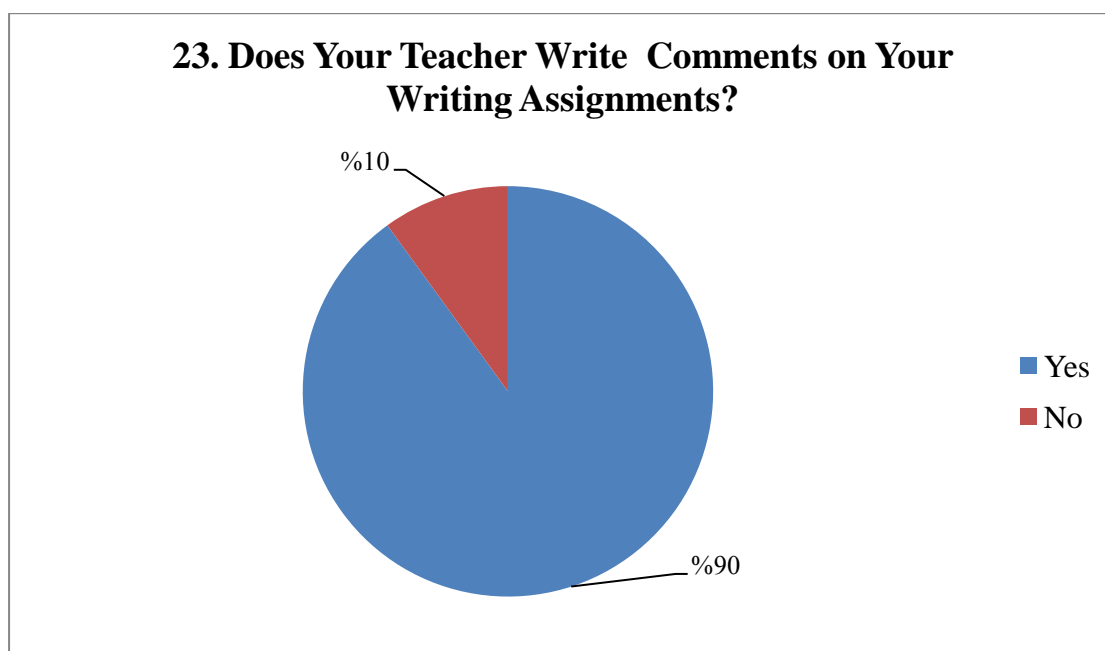
Figure 11: Secondary Students' Responses to Open-ended Question 23

Students responses to open-ended question 23, "Does your teacher write comments on your writing assignments?" revealed that 90% (167) out of 185 who answered this question admitted that their teachers write comments on their papers; whereas, 10% (18) reported that they do not receive any comments (see Figure 11). However, when the 185 students who answered this question were asked what type of comments they receive, 55% (101) indicated that they get positive comments on their writing, and only 9% (17) receive negative comments. 25% (46) of the students wrote that they receive both positive and negative comments and only 11% (21) said they do not receive either comments (see Figure 12). "Excellent, Very Good, Good, and Great Work" were among the positive expressions that were commonly used by the teachers. Although the majority of the students were in favor of the positive comments, some expressed a positive attitude towards the use of the negative comments as well. For example, one student wrote, "There's nothing bad about negative comments, sometimes you have to see the truth, but I would prefer it not to be too personally harsh."

23. Does Your Teacher Write Positive or Negative Comments on Your Writing Assignments?

- Positive Comments
- Negative Comments
- Both
- Nothing

%11, %25, %9, %55
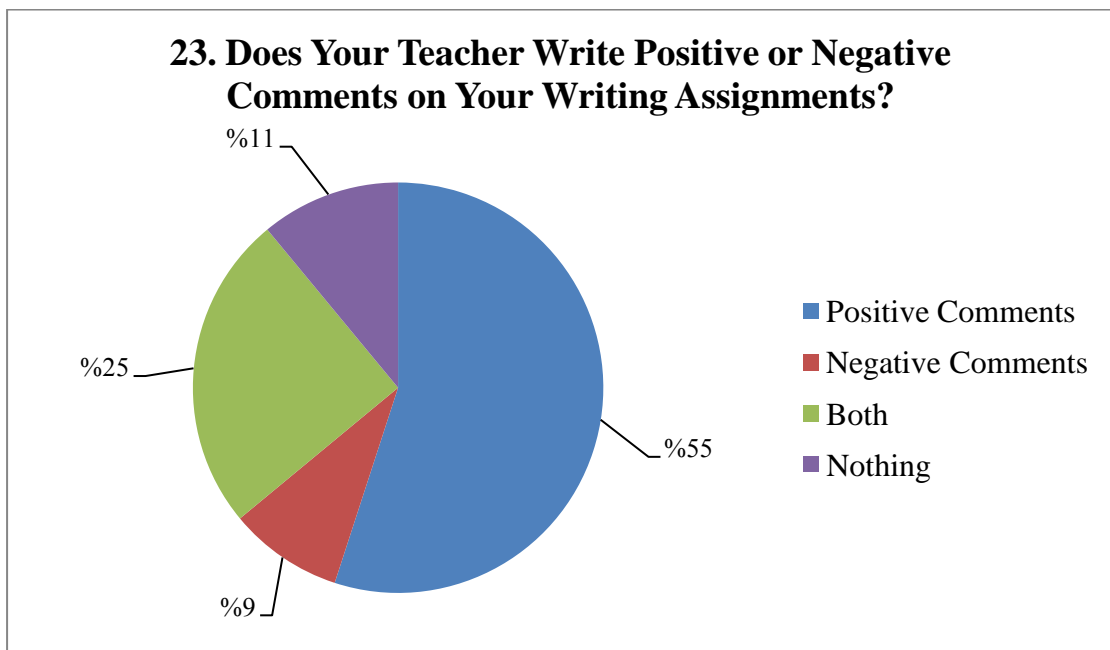
Figure 12: Secondary Students' Responses to Open-ended Question 23

Students' awareness of their teachers' main focus when responding to their writing was revealed in students' responses to statements 16 and 17 (see Table 14). The results showed that more 57% (138) out of the 240 students agreed that their teachers focus on rhetorical features, and 73% (175) indicated that their teachers focus

on linguistic features. This reflects that, according to students' response, their teachers pay more attention to grammatical and lexical errors in students' writing.

Table 15: Students' Perceptions about Teachers' Main Focus

	Statements	Strongly Agree & Agree	Not Sure	Strongly Disagree & Disagree
16.	My teacher only focuses on rhetorical features such as content, organization, development of ideas when responding to students' writing.	138 (57%)	78 (33%)	24 (10%)
17.	My teacher only focuses on linguistic features such as control of grammar and vocabulary when responding to students' writing.	175 (73%)	54 (22%)	11 (5%)

The collected data from students' questionnaire highlighted their perceptions on their teachers' practices when providing feedback on their writing assignments. Participating students in this study were aware of these practices as well as being reliant on their teachers. They also value the feedback they receive. Moreover, students showed their awareness of their teachers' main focus when responding to their writing.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary and Discussion of the Findings

This study aimed at investigating L2 teachers' beliefs and attitudes concerning their written feedback on students' papers, teachers' practices of responding to their students' writing in UAE government secondary schools, and students' perceptions of their teachers' written feedback on their written assignments. This chapter is divided into six main sections: summary and discussion of the teachers' questionnaire results; summary and discussion of students' questionnaire results; implications of the study; limitations of the study, suggestions for further research, and a final thought.

Summary and Discussion of Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

One of the main objectives of this exploratory study was to examine teachers' beliefs and attitudes about providing feedback on students' written assignments in the L2 classrooms. Another objective was to explore teachers' views of their own practices when responding to students' writing in eight government secondary schools in the Sharjah Educational Zone in the UAE.

Teachers'' Beliefs and Attitudes

Findings for the first research question, "What are English teachers' beliefs and attitudes about providing feedback on students' written assignments in the L2 classrooms?" showed that participating teachers in this study had more negative than positive attitudes about the issue of responding to students' writing. They viewed it as demanding and time-consuming practice. For example, 73% (37) admitted that it is a stressful and tiresome process. This finding seems to be consistent with Brown's (2004) view that, "assessing writing is no simple task" (p. 218). Similarly, Ferris (2007) argued that responding to students' writing is not only a time-consuming job but also a tiring one that causes great challenges to L2 teachers.

Although participating teachers in this study felt that the process of responding to students' writing is a demanding task, they highlighted the value of providing students with feedback to improve their writing skills. Providing students with feedback was viewed as a helpful pedagogical instrument to improve not only the teaching but also the learning of writing. As White (1995) pointed out that "feedback is an important part of skill development. We learn from each other, and we learn to contribute to each other's learning and development through collaboration" (p. vi). It

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is also an essential part of a teacher's job as Ferris (2007) argued, "Teacher's feedback is a large part of the package of being a writing teacher [and] some would argue that it is the biggest and most significant part" (p. 179).

Moreover, it seems that teachers who participated in this study showed preference to follow writing assessment criteria when responding to students' writing rather than correcting it based on impression. This preference was supported by Iida (2008) who pointed out that "It is necessary for writing teachers to clarify how to assess students' [writing] and what components of writing skills will be measured so as to increase the degree of reliability for the assessment, specially, objective and consistent scores" (p. 4).

Furthermore, data obtained from teachers' questionnaire and interviews reflected teachers' opinions regarding their practices when responding to students' writing. The majority of the participating teachers (32out of 51) believed that teachers should not take the entire responsibility to underline and correct all the errors in written assignments. Nevertheless, the findings uncovered teachers' positive attitude towards applying different feedback strategies on students' writing and its positive impact on students' performance as 86% of the respondents were in favor of using various responding methods. The use of different responding strategies of corrective feedback such as explicit written and one-to-one conference feedback, wrote Bitchener, Young, and Cameron (2005), help L2 students improve their writing skills. However, as Hyland and Hyland (2006b) argued that teachers' responding strategies differ according to the type of written assignment, the time when feedback is provided, and the level of proficiency of the students. In addition, a very high percentage that represent 94% of these participating teachers supported the notion that students should take part in the process of providing feedback, and that teachers should train students on how to discover and deal with errors in writing.

The data also revealed teachers' perceptions regarding the need to be trained on how to assess and respond to students' writing. Teachers' attitudes varied in regards to the usefulness of the training courses they received by the UAE Ministry of Education in general. While some considered them useful, others expressed disagreement. However, as Ferris (2007) claimed, "Experience alone will not make a teacher an effective responder" (p. 179). She believed that changing a usually tedious task when assessing students' writing into an enjoyable and inspiring one depends entirely on teacher educators and the important role that they can play.

Teachers' Practices

The second purpose of this study was to gain a comprehensive insight about teachers' practices when responding to students' writing. More specifically, data was gathered to answer the question, "How do English teachers respond to their students' writing in UAE government secondary schools in one educational zone?" Findings revealed that teachers use a variety of different procedures such as writing comments, applying peer review technique, using shorthand checklists, and conferencing with students. The results also indicated that most of the teachers preferred providing comprehensive and direct feedback and error correction on students' writing more than indirect feedback. According to Ferris (2002) direct feedback is suitable for beginner students, with untreatable errors such as grammatical and lexical ones, and when teachers want to illustrate error patterns which require students' self correction. However, Lee (2003) warned against providing direct feedback as she believed that teachers may "misinterpret students' meaning and put words into their [students'] mouths" (p. 217).

Furthermore, teachers who participated in this study admitted that they not only pay equal attention to all writing errors but also underline and correct all of them, in particular the grammatical and lexical errors. This strategy of marking all students' errors is known as comprehensive error feedback. Lee (2003) argued that "Comprehensive error feedback is based on the premise that error-free writing is a desirable goal" (p. 218). In addition, she believed this strategy (i.e., over-marking students' errors) can be a fatiguing process for teachers as well as an annoying experience for students themselves. Nevertheless, responses of the participating teachers in this study showed the contradiction between their beliefs and their actual reported practices. That is, as mentioned in the previous chapter (Table 5), although the majority of the teachers (63%) did not favor (disagreed and strongly disagreed) with the notion of taking responsibility for correcting all students' writing errors, their actual practices showed the opposite. Further findings showed that almost all participating teachers in this study paid equal attention to both rhetorical and the linguistic features in students' writing.

Although using shorthand checklist or correction codes are popular among English teachers in general when responding to students' writing, the findings of this study found the participating teachers were divided on their effectiveness. As some teachers were enthusiastic to implement these techniques; others, on the other hand,

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were careful about using them as they admitted that it would have been more effective if correction codes were first used in earlier stages especially the preparatory stage rather than starting from the secondary stage. Two benefits of using correction codes with students mentioned by Hyland (2003) who pointed out that "[they] make correction neater and less threatening than masses of red ink and helps students find and identify their mistakes" (p. 181). However, Lee (2003) pointed out that teachers should not be overwhelmed by the use of marking codes as "[they] may not be as effective as some teachers think" (p. 231).

Finally, it is interesting to note that these findings also shed light on the factors that affect the teachers' practices. Students' levels of English proficiency, meeting the Ministry of Education assessment policies, types of writing assignments, and types of students' committed errors were among the most predominant reported factors that usually affect these English teachers' practices when responding to their students' writing.

Summary and Discussion of Students' Questionnaire Results

Findings concerning the third research question, "What are the students' perceptions of their teachers' written feedback on their written assignments?" showed that the majority of the participating students (183 out of 240) believed that various factors helped enhance their writing skills. Among these factors was the writing activities in their textbook which are based on process writing. Additionally, results showed that students in this study valued their teachers' feedback and perceived it as another factor that helped develop their writing skills. As Stern and Solomon (2006) argued, "we believe that students' learning is ongoing and incremental by nature, [therefore] providing effective feedback at every opportunity is the best way to encourage and promote learning" (p. 38). However, the participating students in this study were still in favor comprehensive error feedback.

Findings also reported students' beliefs about the use of peer response or peer review strategy. For instance, more than half of the students (169 out of 240) agreed that this strategy is helpful for them in order to learn how to give feedback and to improve their writing skills. The importance of peer review has been emphasized by Hyland and Hyland (2006a) as a "formative developmental process that gives writers the opportunities to discuss their texts and discover others' interpretations of them" (p. 6). Another interesting finding showed that 89% (213 out of 240) of the students in this study reported having good knowledge of how to revise their writing based on

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their teachers' feedback. However, students also mentioned that in case they face any difficulty in comprehending their teachers' feedback, they would go back to the teacher and ask for more clarification.

Overall, participating students' responses also indicated that there was a common belief among these students to expect more from their teachers. For instance, the majority of the students 88% (210 out of 240) expressed their agreement to the idea that teachers should not only use different writing assessment techniques but also allow opportunity for the students to take part in this process by training them to discover and deal with errors in written assignments. Finally, based on the analyzed responses, students in this study expressed their preference for receiving written comments on their papers as (170 out of 240) students agreed that teachers should not only correct errors in writing but also write comments when responding to students' writing. With reference to research in this area, Hyland (2003) pointed out that teachers' comments on students' papers are meant to address/respond to their work instead of evaluating what students produce. Moreover, according to Hyland, teachers' comments are supposed to help how the text should appear to the readers and how can students improve it.

Implications of the Study

The implications of this study cover three areas: pedagogical implications for English secondary teachers, implications for the Ministry of Education, and finally implications for secondary students.

Pedagogical Implications for Teachers

Since responding to students' writing is thought of as an essential part of learning how to write successfully in L2 contexts, it is important for English teachers in the UAE secondary schools to become conscious of the significance of feedback and its impact on students' writing. This can be achieved when English teachers at the school level discuss responding strategies, consider feedback issues that cause problems, and explore different means to relate their feedback carefully with error treatment in L2 writing. Consequently, teachers should be careful with the techniques they follow when responding to students' writing such as the focus on providing comprehensive and direct feedback. For example, teachers can use the strategy of providing direct feedback with less proficient students as well as for errors that students cannot deal with on their own. Moreover, they should try to utilize a wider range of responding techniques such as encouraging self and peer editing strategies

and giving oral feedback through conferencing with students on an individual or group basis in order to support their written feedback. This can result in changing teachers' negative attitudes towards the process of responding to students' writing into seeing it as an enjoyable and easily doable task.

Another important way to help students benefit from teachers' response to their writing is that teachers should make sure that they provide appropriate feedback that promotes not only learning but also the development of their students' writing skills. Thus, teachers need to take into consideration their students' needs and preferences for feedback. For instance, using comments effectively on students' written work will not only provide students with an opportunity to identify areas of development but also refer to their remarkable accomplishments in their writing. Accordingly, teachers need to assess their own feedback practices to find out to what extent their feedback is comprehensible and meets the needs of their students. They should also work hard to train and familiarize students with acquiring the principles of self-editing and peer editing strategies, mostly by representing the types of feedback that are most useful and suitable so that students can benefit from them in the long run. This will definitely involve students in the process of providing feedback and give them the chance to be partners in this process. It is also vital that teachers implement long-term procedures to assist students in becoming proficient editors by connecting feedback to the pre- and post-writing process. This results in allowing students to depend on themselves, helping them take on greater responsibility for their learning, and changing feedback into a fundamental component of teaching and learning of writing. As a result, students will not view teachers' responses as just an ordinary task that is not directly related to the development of their writing skill.

Although error correction codes may be a great help for students to reinforce their learning of writing in the L2 context, it could be very time-consuming for teachers to make use of these codes to classify various types of writing errors. Moreover, it can be discomforting and annoying for students to deal with their errors using these codes. Hence, teachers should be careful when handling correction codes. For instance, they can reduce the number of these codes and draw students' attention to the most frequent ones that reflect certain types of errors. If teachers implement these changes, error correction codes would be less challenging for students, and students would get great benefits when using them.

Finally, in order to ensure the effectiveness and success of received feedback, it is a good idea if teachers follow up with students after giving them their feedback. Teachers should help students to learn to revise, bearing in mind that they are able to recognize and make use of feedback they have received, and develop accountable mechanisms so as to make certain that students are cooperating and taking the process of response-and-revision seriously.

Implications for the Ministry of Education

Some teachers who participated in this study complained about the length of the curriculum and the lack of time to cover all other related teaching tasks. Therefore, one of the suggestions for the UAE Ministry of Education is to reduce the teaching load for teachers, especially for those teaching at the secondary level. Additionally, the Ministry of Education can take further steps to enhance the teaching-learning outcomes and reach high levels of achievement in assessment procedures in general and in assessment of writing skills in particular. One way to ensure successful learning of writing in L2 context can be achieved is through providing more responsive syllabi that meet the students' main interests and needs. Another way is to introduce writing and the assessment of writing at an earlier stage such as in the preparatory stage. This may help improve students' writing skills in the long run and eventually prepare them for more advanced writing levels.

Another thing for the Ministry of Education to do is to provide teachers with opportunities for professional development and training programs for the purpose of raising teachers' awareness about the various responding techniques and writing error correction strategies in L2 classrooms. This would result in paying more attention to helping not only pre-service but also in-service teachers acquire and implement both the newest procedures for teaching writing skills in addition to better understanding the appropriate responding approaches.

Implications for Secondary Students

L2 students, especially at the secondary level, should be able to distinguish between the different types of writing genres. They should have the ability to revise their drafts, recognize their errors, and correct them. Being able to brainstorm, outline, and mind-map their essays prior to writing is also a required skill they need to obtain to develop a basic writing skills before joining the university level. Therefore, students should be trained to depend on themselves to discover and correct their writing mistakes. However, students will still need to refer to the teacher to make sure

that their corrections and peers' suggestions are correct and suitable. Additionally, it is expected that all of the students take their teachers' responses and feedback on their writing assignments seriously and pay more attention to revising their papers. In the case that students do not understand their teachers' written comments, they should ask for clarifications.

<center>Limitations of the Study and Directions for Further Research</center>

The findings of this study were of great help in demonstrating teachers' attitudes and practices when responding to students' writing in government secondary schools in one educational zone in Sharjah City. Moreover, results illustrated participating students' perceptions about the feedback they receive on their writing assignments. Nonetheless, one has to note some of the limitations of the study. First, despite the adequate sample of participating teachers and students the study made use of, we cannot generalize the results. Therefore, more participants including teachers, English supervisors, and secondary students from all the other educational zones all over the UAE should be involved in further research. In addition, conducting a replication study in two other emirates to contrast the findings could help gain more insightful awareness about responding to students' writing in the UAE.

Another limitation of the study was the data collection, as it took more time than what was expected. Although participating teachers and students who took part in the pilot study confirmed that it did not take them more than 15 to 20 minutes to fill in the questionnaires, the participating teachers in the actual study were not willing to answer the questionnaires on the spot and asked for more time. This was due to the length of the questionnaires. Teachers complained of being over-burdened with teaching duties and taking part in administrative work.

Furthermore, collecting and analyzing samples of students' writing could have provided an opportunity to gain a clearer idea and help to draw conclusions about teachers' actual practices when responding to students' writing. Future research should aim at doing this.

<center>Final Thought</center>

Regardless of their negative attitude towards the process of responding to students' writing, English teachers in UAE government secondary schools still value this process of providing feedback on students' writing. In general, teachers are aware of its usefulness and positive impact on developing students' writing skill. Thus, written feedback at this advanced level helps students to get used to editing their

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errors by reading general comments. As teachers admitted earlier, the problem with writing at the secondary stage is that what is expected from students is way above their level. As such, students commit so many mistakes, and they need a lot of feedback which is usually difficult to carry out as it is a burden for the teachers and the students. Moreover, in addition to the traditional responding methods teachers use, they need to vary their practices and follow alternative techniques such as conferencing with students either individually or in groups, using rubrics, and writing comments.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Teachers' Questionnaire

Teachers' Questionnaire (no. 51)

The purpose of this questionnaire is to explore English language teachers' attitudes towards written feedback and their practices in responding to students' writing in UAE government secondary schools. Please note that data provided will be used for analysis as part of my thesis in the Masters in TESOL Program. All your answers will remain confidential. I appreciate your time in filling out this survey.

Section One:

1. Nationality: _____

2. Gender: ☐ Male   ☐ Female

3. Total years of teaching experience: _____

4. Total years of teaching experience in the UAE: _____

6. Spoken language(s): First: _____
                          Second: _____
                          Other: _____

6. Classes you currently teach: _____

7. What sections do you teach in grades 11 and 12?
☐ Arts   ☐ Science   ☐ Both

7. Average class size:
☐ Less than15 students   ☐ 15 – 20 students
☐ 20 – 30 students   ☐ Over 30

8. How often do you give writing assignments?
☐ Daily   ☐ Weekly
☐ Monthly   ☐ Never

Section Two:

1. Please choose from the items below the option that most accurately reflects your attitude and personal opinion about responding to students' writing.

SA= **S**trongly **A**gree, **A**= **A**gree, **U**= **U**ndecided, **D**= **D**isagree, **SD**= **S**trongly **D**isagree

	Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD
1.	Responding to students' writing is boring.					
2.	Responding to students' writing is stressful and tiresome.					
3.	Responding to students' writing is time consuming.					
4.	I believe that teachers should use specific criteria when responding to students' writing.					
5.	Teachers should assess students' writing on impression.					
6.	Teachers should assess students' writing holistically based on clear guidelines.					
7.	The writing activities in the course book can help develop students' writing skills.					
8.	Asking students to write multiple drafts of their papers is very helpful in developing their writing skills.					
9.	Peer response helps students give feedback to improve their writing.					
10.	Teachers should use various responding methods according to the error types and the students' levels of achievement.					
11.	Teachers should train students on how to discover and deal with errors in written assignments.					
12.	It is the teachers' responsibility to underline and correct all the errors in written assignments.					
13.	Teachers should not only correct errors but also write comments when responding to students' writing.					
14.	It is acceptable to refer to errors only, without providing feedback on students' writing.					
15.	Teachers need to be trained on how to assess and respond to students' writing.					

2. Please choose from the items below the option that most accurately reflects your current practices in responding to students' writing.

	Statements	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
16.	I respond to students' writing by underlining all their writing errors.				
17.	I underline and correct all grammatical errors.				
18.	I underline and correct all lexical errors.				
19.	I refer to the writing errors without correcting them (indirect feedback).				
20.	I write positive comments on students' papers.				
21.	I write negative comments on students' papers.				
22.	I use a shorthand checklist when responding to students' writing.				
23.	I focus on rhetorical features (content, organization, development of ideas) when responding to students' writing.				
24.	I focus on linguistic features (control of grammar and vocabulary) when responding to students' writing.				
25.	I depend on holistic scoring more than analytical when responding to students' writing.				
26.	I depend on analytical scoring more than holistic when responding to students' writing.				
27.	I meet with students individually to discuss their errors.				
28.	I organize peer response pairs and groups to give students the opportunity to provide feedback on each other's writing.				
29.	I give equal consideration to all students' errors in writing.				

Section Three:

30. In the space below, please mention any alternative methods you use when responding to students' writing.

_____

_____

_____

_____

31. Please check the factor(s) that affects your current practices when responding to students writing?
☐ My teaching beliefs about the nature of feedback
☐ The way I learnt English
☐ Students' levels of English proficiency
☐ Types of writing assignments
☐ Students' expectations
☐ Meeting the Ministry of Education assessment policies
☐ L2 classroom context
☐ Types of committed errors by students
☐ Others: (Please specify) _____

_____

_____

32. What is your main rationale behind providing students with feedback in L2 writing?

_____

_____

_____

_____

33. Do you familiarize and train your students to use a shorthand checklist? Why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

34. Do you train your students to use the peer response technique in the class? Why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

35. Have you ever received any training regarding writing assessment?
☐ Yes   ☐ No

If Yes, What kind of training have you received? Was the training helpful on how to provide feedback on students' writing?

_____

_____

_____

_____

36. Please write any additional comments regarding the assessment of writing in English language classes at the secondary level in UAE government schools.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please fill the information below if you would like to be interviewed. The interview should take out 15-20 minutes and will discuss more issues about responding to students' writing in language classrooms.

Name: _____

Mobile: _____

E-mail: _____

Appendix B: Teachers' Interview Questions

1. How can you describe typical secondary school students' essay writing? What kind of writing should those students be able to do on a routine basis?

2. When you respond to students' written assignments in your class, which aspects do you focus on and mark up? Why?

3. In your opinion, what implemented method(s) is considered effective when responding to students' written assignments? Why?

4. Do you think teachers should take the whole responsibility to underline and correct all the errors in written assignments? Why/Why not?

5. When you write comments on students' written assignments, do they follow them? What do you expect students to do afterwards?

6. After receiving your feedback on their writing, what do you usually ask your students to do? Please specify.

7. Do you refer to writing errors without giving feedback? Why?

Appendix C: English Copy of Students' Questionnaire

Students' Questionnaire (no. 240)

The purpose of this questionnaire is to investigate students' perceptions of their English language teachers' practices in responding to their writing in UAE government secondary schools. All your answers will remain confidential. I appreciate your time in filling out this questionnaire.

The questionnaire is divided into three sections. Please choose from the items below the option that most accurately reflects your attitude and personal opinion about responding to students' writing.

<u>Section One</u>:

1. Nationality: _____

2. School: _____

3. Age: _____

4. Gender: ☐ Male   ☐ Female

5. Grade: ☐ 10   ☐ 11   ☐ 12

6. Section: ☐ Arts   ☐ Science

7. Do you like writing in English?

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Somewhat

8. How often are you required to complete writing assignments?

☐ Daily   ☐ Weekly   ☐ Monthly   ☐ Never

9. Has your English teacher ever familiarized and trained you on how to use and react to written feedback?   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

10. How does your teacher respond to your writing?

☐ Underlines and corrects errors

☐ Underlines errors without correcting them

☐ Writes comments on my paper

☐ Others (please specify): _____

_____

1. Please choose from the items below the option that most accurately reflects your attitude and personal opinion about your teacher's practices when responding to students' writing.

SA = **S**trongly **A**gree, **A** = **A**gree, **NS** = **N**ot **S**ure, **D** = **D**isagree,
SD = **S**trongly **D**isagree

	Statements	**SA**	**A**	**NS**	**D**	**SD**
1.	The writing activities in the course book help develop my writing skills.					
2.	Teachers' feedback helps me to improve my writing performance.					
3.	Asking students to write multiple drafts of their papers is very helpful in developing their writing skills.					
4.	Peer response helps students give feedback to improve their writing.					
5.	I believe that teachers should adhere to and use specific criteria when responding to students' writing.					
6.	Teachers should use various responding methods according to the errors types and the students' levels of achievement.					
7.	Teachers should train students to discover and deal with errors in written assignments.					
8.	It is the teachers' responsibility to underline and correct all the errors in written assignments.					
9.	Teachers should not only correct errors but also write comments when responding to students' writing.					
10.	Teachers can refer to errors only without providing feedback on students' writing.					
11.	It is useful when teachers respond to students' writing by underlining all their writing errors.					
12.	Teachers should underline and correct all grammatical and sentence structure errors.					
13.	Teachers should underline and correct all lexical errors.					
14.	It is not beneficial if teachers refer to the writing errors without correcting them (indirect feedback).					

	Statements	SA	A	NS	D	SD
15.	Writing comments on students' papers is very useful.					
16.	My teacher only focuses on rhetorical features such as content, organization, development of ideas when responding to students' writing.					
17.	My teacher only focuses on linguistic features such as control of grammar and vocabulary when responding to students' writing.					
18.	It is useful if teachers hold a meeting to discuss the errors with students					
19.	All students' errors ought to have the same consideration.					

Section three:

20. Is it important to provide students with feedback in L2 writing? Why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

21. What do you usually do after receiving your teacher's feedback on your writing assignment?

_____

_____

_____

_____

22. What do you usually do if you don't understand your teacher's feedback on your writing assignment?

_____

_____

_____

_____

23. Does your teacher write positive or negative comments on your writing assignments? Write one example of each.

_____

_____

_____

_____

24. Please write any additional comments you would like to make regarding the assessment of writing in English language.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix D: Bilingual Copy of Students' Questionnaire

Students' Questionnaire (no. 240)

The purpose of this questionnaire is to investigate students' perception of their English language teachers' practices in responding to their writing in UAE government secondary schools. All your answers will remain confidential. I appreciate your time in filling out this survey.

الهدف من هذا الاستبيان هو تحري ملاحظات الطالبات فيما يتعلق بممارسات معلمي/ معلمات اللغة الإنجليزية عند تقييمهن لكتابة الطالبات باللغة الإنجليزية في المرحلة الثانوية من المدارس الحكومية في دولة الإمارات. سيتم المحافظة على سرية إجابتكِ. أقدر لكِ وقتكِ الثمين للإجابة على هذا الاستبيان.

Section One:

1. Nationality: (**الجنسية**)_____

2. School: (**المدرسة**) _____

3. Age: (**العمر**) _____

4. Gender: (**الجنس**)   ☐ Male (**ذكر**)   ☐ Female (**أنثى**)

5. Grade: (**الصف**) ☐ 10   ☐ 11   ☐ 12

6. Section: (**القسم**)   ☐ Arts (**الأدبي**)   ☐ Science (**العلمي**)

7. Do you like writing in English? (**هل تحب/ تحبين الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية؟**)

☐ Yes (**نعم**)   ☐ No (**لا**)   ☐ Somewhat (**إلى حد ما**)

8. How often are you required to complete writing assignments?

(**كم مرةً يُطلب منك أداء واجبات كتابية؟**)

☐ Daily (**يوميًا**)   ☐ Weekly (**أسبوعيا**)

☐ Monthly (**شهريًا**)   ☐ Never (**أبدا**)

9. Has your English teacher ever familiarized and trained you on how to use and react to written feedback?

(**هل يعودك/تعودك ويدربك/تدربك معلم/معلمة اللغة الإنجليزية على كيفية استخدام والتعامل مع الملاحظات المكتوبة (التغذية الراجعة)؟**)

☐ Yes (**نعم**)   ☐ No (**لا**)

10. How does your teacher respond to your writing in English?

(**كيف يقيم/تقيم معلمك/معلمتك كتابتك باللغة الإنجليزية؟**)

☐ Underlines and corrects errors (**يضع/تضع خطاً تحت الأخطاء وتصوبها**)

☐ Underlines errors without correcting them (**يضع/تضع خطاً تحت الأخطاء ولا تصوبها**)

☐ Writes comments on my paper (**يكتب/تكتب ملاحظات على ورقتي**)

☐ Others (please specify): (**أخرى،حدد/حددي رجاءً**) _____

_____

1. Please choose from the items below the option that most accurately reflects your attitude and personal opinion about your teacher's practices when responding to students' writing.

SA= Strongly Agree أوافق بشدة, **A**= Agree أوافق, **NS**= Not Sure غير متأكد

D= Disagree لأوافق, **SD**= Strongly Disagree لأوافق بشدة

	Statements	**SA** أوافق بشدة	**A** أوافق	**NS** غير متأكد	**D** لأوافق	**SD** لأوافق بشدة
1.	The writing activities in the student's book help develop my writing skills. **تساعدني التدريبات الكتابية في كتاب الطالب على تطوير مهاراتي في الكتابة.**					
2.	My teacher's feedback helps me to improve my writing performance. **تساعدني ملاحظات (التغذية الراجعة) معلمي/معلمتي من تحسين أدائي في الكتابة.**					
3.	Asking students to write multiple drafts of their papers is very helpful in developing their writing skills. **كتابة عدة مسودات تساعد الطلاب/الطالبات على تطوير مهارتهم/مهارتهن في الكتابة.**					
4.	Peer response helps students learn to give feedback to improve their writing. **استخدام طريقة العمل الثنائي تساعد الطلاب/الطالبات على تعلم إعطاء التغذية الراجعة وبالتالي تطوير مهارتهم/مهارتهن في الكتابة.**					
5.	I believe that teachers should stick to and use specific criteria when responding to students' writing. **أعتقد أنه يجب على المعلمين/المعلمات الالتزام واستخدام معايير خاصة عند تصحيح أعمال الطلاب/الطالبات الكتابية.**					
6.	Teachers should use various responding methods according to the errors types and the students' levels of achievement. **يجب على المعلمات استخدام أساليب متنوعة عند تصحيح أعمال الطلاب/الطالبات الكتابية طبقاً لنوعية الأخطاء ومستوى أدائهم/أداءهن.**					
7.	Teachers should train students to discover and deal with errors in written assignments. **يجب على المعلمين/المعلمات تدريب الطلاب/الطالبات على كيفية اكتشاف الأخطاء وكيفية التعامل معها في الواجبات الكتابية.**					

	Statements	SA أوافق بشدة	A أوافق	NS غير متأكد	D لأوافق	SD لأوافق بشدة
8.	It is the teacher's responsibility to underline and correct all the errors in written assignments. مسئولية المعلم/المعلمة أن يضع/تضع خطاً تحت جميع الأخطاء و يصوبها/تصوبها.					
9.	Teachers should not only correct errors but also write comments when responding to students' writing. لا يجب على المعلمين/المعلمات تصويب الأخطاء فقط بل أيضاً كتابة ملاحظات عند تصحيح أعمال الطلاب/الطالبات الكتابية.					
10.	Teachers can refer to errors only without providing feedback on students' writing. يمكن للمعلمين/للمعلمات تحديد الأخطاء دون إعطاء ملاحظات (التغذية الراجعة) على كتابة الطلاب/الطالبات.					
11.	It is useful when teachers respond to students' writing by underlining all their writing errors. من المفيد أن يصوب/تصوب المعلمون/المعلمات أعمال الطلاب/الطالبات الكتابية بشكل شامل وذلك بالإشارة إلى جميع الأخطاء.					
12.	Teachers should underline and correct all grammatical errors. يجب على المعلمون/المعلمات الإشارة إلى جميع أخطاء قواعد اللغة وتصويبها.					
13.	Teachers should underline and correct all lexical errors. يجب على المعلمون/المعلمات الإشارة إلى جميع أخطاء مفردات اللغة وتصويبها.					
14.	It is not beneficial if teachers refer to the writing errors without correcting them (indirect feedback). من غير المفيد أن يشير/تشير المعلمون/المعلمات إلى أخطاء الكتابة دون تصويبها.					
15.	Writing comments on students' papers is very useful. كتابة الملاحظات على أعمال الطلاب/الطالبات الكتابية مفيد للغاية.					

	Statements	SA أوافق بشدة	A أوافق	NS غير متأكد	D لأوافق	SD لأوافق بشدة
16.	My teacher only focuses on rhetorical features such as content, organization, development of ideas when responding to students' writing. عند تصحيح أعمال الطلاب/الطالبات الكتابية، يركز/تركز معلمي/معلمتي أكثر على الخصائص البلاغية كالمحتوى والتنظيم وتطوير الأفكار.					
17.	My teacher only focuses on linguistic features such as control of grammar and vocabulary when responding to students' writing. عند تصحيح أعمال الطلاب الكتابية، يركز/تركز معلمي/معلمتي أكثر على الخصائص اللغوية كالقواعد و المفردات.					
18.	It is useful if teachers meet with students individually to discuss their errors. من المفيد أن يعقد/تعقد المعلمون/المعلمات لقاءات فردية مع الطلاب/الطالبات لمناقشتهم/لمناقشتهن في أخطائهم/أخطائهن الكتابية.					
19.	Teachers should give equal consideration to all students' errors in writing. يجب أن يأخذ/تأخذ المعلم/المعلمة بعين الاعتبار جميع أخطاء الطلاب/الطالبات بشكل متساوٍ.					

Section Three:

20. Is it important to provide students with feedback in L2 writing? Why?
هل من المهم إعطاء الطلاب/الطالبات ملاحظات (التغذية الراجعة) على الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية؟ لماذا؟

_____

_____

_____

21. What do you usually do after receiving your teacher's feedback on your writing assignments?
ماذا تفعل/تفعلين عادةً بعد أن تتلقى/تتلقي ملاحظات (التغذية الراجعة) معلمك/معلمتك على أعمالك الكتابية؟

_____

_____

_____

22. What do you usually do if you don't understand your teacher's feedback on your writing assignments?

ماذا تفعل/تفعلين عادةً إذا لم تتمكن/تتمكني من فهم ملاحظات (التغذية الراجعة) معلمك/معلمتك على أعمالك الكتابية؟

_____

_____

_____

23. Does your teacher write positive or negative comments on your writing assignments? Write one example of each.

هل تكتب معلمك/معلمتك ملاحظات إيجابية أو سلبية على أعمالك الكتابية؟ اكتب/اكتبي مثالاً على كل واحد.

_____

_____

_____

24. Please write any additional comments you would like to make regarding the assessment of writing in English language.

رجاءً اكتب/اكتبي أي تعليقات إضافية تحب/تحبين إضافتها تتعلق بتقييم الكتابة في مادة اللغة الإنجليزية.

_____

_____

_____

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form

The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers' written feedback on students' papers. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at anytime without adversely affecting your relationship with the researcher or your school. If you choose to participate, all information gathered will be held in strict confidence and will be used solely for the purpose of this research. I hope you will agree to take part in this research. I think it will prove to be both exciting and informative experience for all of us. If you agree to participate, please sign the consent form below and return it back to me.

_____

I have read and understand the information on this consent form. I consent to participate in this study. I understand that any information I give is completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at anytime.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

VITA

Aida F. Abou Eissa was born in Dubai, UAE, on August 2, 1970. She was educated in government schools in Sharjah City, UAE, where she received her high school diploma from Al Ghubaiba Secondary School in 1988. She graduated from Ajman University in 1992 with a Bachelor's degree in English Language and Translation.

Ms. Abou Eissa has been teaching English for seventeen years. She has teaching experience in government primary, preparatory, and secondary schools in the UAE. Ms. Abou Eissa is a member of TESOL Arabia and IATEFL (International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language). She attended both the 12th and 13th CTELT (Current Trends in English Language Testing) conferences, an International Conference on Bilingualism and Bilingual Education at AUS, in addition to various workshops and training sessions. Her fields of interest include pragmatics, bilingualism, and language assessment.