

**Native and Non-native English-Speaking EFL Teachers’  
Written Feedback on Chinese EFL learners’ Writing: Beliefs,  
Practices, and Pedagogical Effects**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Although the last few decades have witnessed studies on teacher written feedback flourishing in the realm of L2 writing, some issues in this field remain under-researched: Teachers' theorizations and implementations of written feedback in their specific instructional settings, the effects of teacher written feedback on other dimensions of writing in addition to writing accuracy, and students as the insiders' perceptions on the effects of teacher written feedback. In order to fill such important lacunas, this study used a mixed-methods approach to investigate native and non-native English-speaking (NES and NNES) teachers' written feedback beliefs, practices, and their belief-practice relationships in the Chinese tertiary English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) writing context as well as the effects of their written feedback on Chinese EFL learners' writing performance and perspectives.

Phase one study was a case study, aiming to explore how NES and NNES EFL teachers conceptualized and actualized written feedback in the Chinese EFL writing classrooms. Four NES and NNES teachers were recruited through a purposive sampling technique. In this phase, data were collected from multiple research instruments: Semi-structured individual interviews, students' writing samples with teacher written feedback, stimulated recall interviews, and documents. Findings showed that both NES and NNES teachers espoused a set of beliefs regarding five themes regarding written feedback: Purpose, scope, focus, strategy, and orientation. Feedback analyses revealed that these two groups of EFL teachers shared the similar practices in terms of scope, strategy, and orientation, while their actual practices differed significantly in feedback focus. Specifically, NES teachers showed more concern with global issues of writing (i.e., content and organization), whereas their local NNES peers put more emphasis on local issues (i.e., language). The relationships

between their beliefs and practices were highly complicated: Consistencies and inconsistencies coexisted. A range of factors related to teachers, students, and context appeared to result in the belief-practice mismatches.

The phase two study employed a quasi-experimental design to examine the effects of NES and NNES teachers' written feedback. Using global feedback and written corrective feedback as the alternative independent variables, the study found that NES teachers' written feedback helped Chinese EFL learners improve their performance in syntactic complexity, fluency, content, organization, and overall writing quality. NNES teachers' written feedback benefited students' performance in accuracy, fluency, and overall writing quality. Students' perceptions of the effects elicited from a post-treatment questionnaire were generally in line with and provided detailed information to the quantitative results.

This study concludes with a discussion of the contributions and implications regarding theory, methodology, and pedagogy. Theoretically, this study extends the current body of literature in the sphere of teacher written feedback and teacher beliefs. Methodologically, this study combines both quantitative and qualitative data to address the effects of teacher written feedback. Such a design can achieve data triangulation and enhance the reliability of research results. Pedagogically, NES and NNES L2 writing teachers as well as Chinese high education institutions can draw upon the research findings to maximize the scaffolding role of teacher written feedback in L2 writing.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AT	Activity Theory
CAF	Complexity, Accuracy, Fluency
CET	College English Test
CF	Consent Form
CG	Comparison Group
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
C/T	The number of clauses per T-unit
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFC	Error-free clauses
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EP100W	Errors per 100 words
ESL	English as a Second Language
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
LD	Lexical Density
MLT	Mean Length of T-units
MSTTR	Mean Segmental Type-Token Ratio
NES	Native English-speaking
NNES	Non-native English-speaking



PIS	Participant Information Sheet
SCT	Sociocultural Theory
TBLT	Task-based Language Teaching
TEM	Test for English Majors
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TG1	Treatment Group 1
TG2	Treatment Group 2
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Chapter overview**

With a surge in the employment of expatriate native English-speaking (NES) and local non-native English-speaking (NNES) teachers in China and other EFL countries to enhance EFL teaching (Su, 2019), this study investigates NES and NNES teachers' written feedback by examining the two groups of teachers' written feedback beliefs, practices, and effects on Chinese EFL learners' writing performance. This introductory chapter opens with an introduction to the context and then presents a brief overview of the research on teacher written feedback in L2 writing as a background to the research purposes and questions. The following sections define some key terms and explain the significance of the present study. This chapter concludes by an overview of the whole study.

### **1.2 Context of the study**

Since this study was implemented in the Chinese tertiary EFL writing classrooms, this section provides contextual information related to Chinese cultures of learning, EFL teaching, and tertiary EFL writing instruction in China.

#### **1.2.1 Chinese cultures of learning**

The term “Chinese cultures of learning”, first proposed by Cortazzi and Jin (1996), describes the cultural influence on teaching and learning, which may constrain or facilitate teachers' teaching methodologies and practices (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006).

Rooted in the Confucian philosophy, Chinese cultures of learning are characterized by the a very clear unbalanced power relationship between teachers and students. In the Chinese traditional educational schema, teachers assume the responsibility of “*Jiao shu yu ren*” (Leng, 2005). That is to say, they are responsible for students’ overall development. Undertaking such responsibility, teachers are figures with high social status and they represent authority (Sheng, 2019). Specifically, in traditional classrooms in China, teachers impart knowledge and ethical norms to students, while students are required to show respect to their teachers and are not allowed to challenge them (Zhang, 2008; Zhang & Ben Said, 2014). Thus, in the Chinese context, teaching practices tend to be teacher-centered: Teachers are the protagonists, whereas their students are the passive recipients of knowledge.

The other distinctive characteristic of Chinese cultures of learning is examinations. It has been widely recognized that China enjoys a long history of testing, dating back to 2000 years ago (Spolsky, 1995). Originally, testing was employed to select government officials to maintain the dominance of the ruling class, and this was called the imperial examination. Despite imperial examinations being abolished over 100 years ago, examinations still exert a tremendous influence in the modern society of China. For example, junior high school students must pass *Zhongkao* (Entrance Examination to Senior High School) to further their study in senior high school, while senior high school students need to complete *Gaokao* (National Matriculation Entrance Examination) and obtain a good score for admission to key universities. As traditionally examinations have provided people with access to success and reputation, and have a deep-seated value, they hold great power in the Chinese educational system. In general, it is the obligation for teachers to help students prepare for and pass examinations. As a result, in the mainland Chinese educational context, teachers’

pedagogical practices, to a large extent, are guided and driven by examinations (Sheng, 2019; Zhang & Ben Said, 2014).

In brief, Chinese cultures of learning shape teachers and students' beliefs, values, and attitudes towards teaching and learning, and subtly affect their actual teaching and learning behaviors.

### **1.2.2 EFL teaching in China**

With the advent of globalization and internationalization, English has become a lingua franca in the modern world, serving as an international language to facilitate communications among people across the globe (Wen, 2012). Chinese authorities, therefore, accord great importance to English instruction, and currently China boasts the largest number of EFL learners all over the world (Rao & Yuan, 2016; Zhu & Wang, 2019).

In China, English begins to be offered to students (aged 9-10) in Grade Three at primary schools. The importance of English is heightened at secondary school because English is stipulated as a compulsory subject in the two high-stake examinations: *Zhongkao* and *Gaokao*. To help students achieve satisfactory results in these two examinations, English teaching moves from a communicative teaching approach at elementary level to a grammar translation approach at secondary level (M. Li, 2012). English instruction is teacher-centered, examination-oriented, and textbook-directed at secondary school level (Zheng & Adamson, 2003).

Unlike English education at primary and secondary stages, English teaching at universities and colleges in China is guided by nation-wide curriculum requirements, which are carried out by the Ministry of Education. After enrolling at universities and colleges, all students are required to learn English as a compulsory course. At this level, tertiary students receiving English education are classified into two groups:

English majors and non-English majors. English majors are those students who pursue the bachelor's degree in English; they take a range of courses related to English, covering *Basic English*, *Advanced English*, *British and American Literature*, and *English linguistics* etc. In contrast, non-English majors are students specializing in other disciplines such as engineering, chemistry, law, and business etc., who are required to learn English for at least two academic years. Non-English majors take *College English*, which is an inclusive course, offered within the first two years of four-year undergraduate study, that integrates English listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation to improve students' overall competence in English. English major students take separate courses in relation to English listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation in the first two academic years to cultivate their basic English skills. They also take courses, when they are juniors and seniors, such as *English Linguistics*, *British and American Literature*, and *Western Cultures* to acquire more professional knowledge related to English.

At the tertiary level, students also need to sit for some high-stake examinations to show that their English proficiency has met the standard stipulated by the Ministry of Education. Currently, there are two different testing systems assessing non-English and English major students' English level, respectively. English proficiency for students in non-English major is evaluated by College English Test (CET), Bands 4/6, which comprise sections of essay writing, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, and translation. In 2016, CETs-4 and 6 were reformed and English speaking was established as a required section to strengthen Chinese EFL learners' oral communicative competence. Usually, CET-4 is a prerequisite for non-English majors to earn a bachelor's degree but with the certificate of CET-6, they are more likely to secure a decent job.

English majors are required to take the Test for English Majors (TEM), Bands 4/8 to ensure their English proficiency. Both TEM-4/8 and CET-4/6 are used to assess students' basic English skills. TEM-4 and 8, however, are also designed to evaluate students' general knowledge of western culture, British and American literature, and English linguistics, which makes the tests more specialized and professional. These two examinations are held once a year, in the second and fourth year of English majors' four-year university study, respectively; they are of high validity as well as reliability in assessing students' real English level of proficiency. Commonly, English major undergraduates must pass TEM-4 to obtain their bachelor's degree but if they want to further their study or get a job related to English, the TEM-8 certificate is needed. TEM-8, therefore, is a benchmark to demonstrate students' professional competence for careers in English-related fields or pursue further study in English (Teng, 2016). As the number of students qualified with TEM-4 and 8 are important criteria to evaluate the teaching quality of English departments/faculties of Chinese universities, English departments or faculties tend to emphasize these two examinations.

To sum up, it is obvious that English examinations still play a pivotal role in English teaching and learning at the tertiary level (Zhao, 2019). This means that English instruction at this stage is, to a large degree, examination-oriented and numerous students often regard the passing of English examinations as their goal of English learning. Consequently, there is a lack of intrinsic motivation in improving English skills and ability (Teng, 2016; Zhan, 2012).

Chinese tertiary EFL learners have a good understanding of grammatical rules, sentence structures, and achieve high scores in examinations because they are driven by examinations and taught by the grammar translation approach, which gives priority to linguistic details and language accuracy. Chinese tertiary EFL learners tend to be

communicatively incompetent (A. Cheng & Wang, 2012; Tsui, 2007), and not able to communicate with English native speakers or other foreigners in English proficiently. To enhance Chinese EFL learners' competence in communication, several reforms have been implemented by the Chinese Ministry of Education and its sub-branches, which issued *English Teaching Syllabus for Tertiary English Majors* and *College English Curriculum Requirements* in 2004 and 2007, respectively. Both these official documents pay more attention to the cultivation of students' English oral communicative ability and cross-cultural competence (Ministry of Education, 2004, 2007). Guided and directed by the two documents, Chinese tertiary EFL teachers are encouraged to adopt new teaching approaches such as communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT), both of which emphasize students' role in language instruction and contribute to their development in oral communicative competence.

At present, even though CLT and TBLT are advocated and encouraged by English language educationalists and experts, the grammar translation approach is still prevalent in the Chinese EFL classrooms. This can be attributed to several factors: The profound influence of Confucianism (Zhang, 2010); Chinese teachers' little knowledge in different teaching approaches due to lack of teacher education; and the specific teaching context (e.g., textbooks, large number of students, heavy workload) (Sun, 2017).

### **1.2.3 Teaching Chinese EFL writing at the tertiary level**

In China, writing is a crucial skill in English teaching and learning at the tertiary level. However, compared with other English skills such as listening, reading, and speaking, writing instruction receives relatively little attention (Geng, 2017; S. Wang & Wang, 2011; Zhang, 2016), as evidenced by the proportion of score for writing in high-stake

examinations such as CET-4 and 6 as well as TEM-4 and 8. In these examinations, writing is allocated only 15% to 20% of full marks. The low proportion of the examinations given to writing may be, partly, because English writing is a challenging skill in which it is comparatively difficult for Chinese EFL learners to improve their writing (Zhang, 2013, 2016). Another related factor may be associated with English language teaching reforms in China. The reforms currently stress the development of students' oral communicative competence in English, so more attention has been paid to teaching English listening and speaking.

In Chinese universities and colleges, EFL writing instruction is delivered by different modes for non-English and English major undergraduates. Generally, English writing for non-English majors is not taught separately; it is an integral part of *College English Course*. In some universities, English writing is a selective course for non-English majors to help them prepare for and pass CET-4 and CET-6. In general, EFL writing pedagogy for non-English majors is examination-oriented (L. Yang & Gao, 2013). Teachers tend to ask their students to produce writing based on the three-paragraph structure required by CET-4 and CET-6, and evaluate students' writing according to the writing rubrics of the two examinations.

With higher expectations, English writing for English majors is taught as an essential skill and students are compelled to enrol in a writing course for two academic semesters when they are sophomores. The writing instruction for English majors can be divided into two stages: Basic English writing and advanced English writing. The former phase focuses on figures of speech, sentence structures, and paragraphs, while in the latter stage, students are expected to develop writing competence in different genres such as narration, argumentation, exposition, and description. English writing instruction, therefore, aims to develop students' writing skills "from micro-level such



as dictions and sentences to macro-level such as the whole texts in different genres” (Woodrow, 2011, p. 511). A product writing approach still dominates Chinese EFL writing classrooms and this approach evaluates writing as the final product and emphasizes linguistic accuracy (Zhang & Cheng, 2020).

More recently, Chinese higher education institutions have allocated increasing attention and energy to EFL writing instruction, as it is considered as an important construct to promote L2 learning (Zhang, 2013). Informed by the successful application of other writing pedagogies in other contexts, Chinese EFL writing classrooms have attempted to implement the process-oriented and genre-based approaches to improve Chinese EFL learners’ writing performance (Deng, Chen, & Zhang, 2014; Teng, 2016). English for academic purposes (EAP) writing courses have also been implemented and developed in some universities to support students’ academic careers (Zeng & Li, 2014). Additionally, Chinese universities and colleges have started to recruit NES teachers with higher English proficiency, who are more familiar with English writing conventions, to teach EFL writing (Zhang, 2016). By doing so, they can use their English language advantage and contribute to Chinese EFL writing instruction.

### **1.3 Statement of problems**

Feedback plays a vital role in the process of learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Yu, Wang, & Teo, 2018), including in the writing curriculum, as feedback contributes to students’ cognitive development and can help them acquire writing conventions (Hyland, 2013). Teacher written feedback, as an assessment and pedagogical tool, is a most important form of written feedback for L2 writing development (Hyland & Hyland, 2006a) and has attracted much attention from L2 writing researchers and

teachers. The last two decades have witnessed a proliferation of studies on teacher written feedback in the sphere of L2 writing.

Among the extant literature on teacher written feedback in L2 writing, much attention has been paid to the efficacy of feedback on linguistic errors, often termed as written corrective feedback (WCF) (Storch, 2018; Yu et al., 2020). The current body of literature includes a spirited debate over WCF effectiveness, provoked by Truscott (1996) who synthesized some early empirical studies and argued that WCF is not only ineffective but can be harmful for L2 writing development. To refute his argument, many scholars have examined the efficacy of WCF reporting that WCF not only plays a facilitative role in writing accuracy in text revision (Ashwell, 2000; Fathman & Whally, 1990; Karim & Nassaji, 2020; Truscott & Hsu, 2008), but also improves accuracy in new pieces of writing (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009a, 2010a, 2010b; Frear & Chiu, 2015; Shintani & Aubrey, 2016; Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2012). Currently, the effectiveness of WCF on L2 writing is widely acknowledged (Kang & Han, 2015). Some issues with respect to WCF remain unresolved, such as how to deliver WCF to students (i.e., direct or indirect WCF) and the extent to which WCF should be provided (i.e., focused or comprehensive WCF) to maximize its efficacy. No firm conclusion regarding the relative effectiveness of direct and indirect WCF, as well as that of focused and comprehensive WCF has yet been drawn (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Bitchener & Storch, 2016).

Some studies have examined what L2 writing teachers think and do when responding to their students' writing using qualitative or mixed-methods approaches (Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Lee, 2009, 2011; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019; Montgomery & Baker, 2007). These studies found that there is a complex relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices regarding written feedback. Compared with studies on

WCF effects, these studies have greater ecological validity as descriptive studies implemented in the natural occurring environment that have documented teachers' theorization and actualization of written feedback in their specific teaching contexts.

While existing literature has yielded fruitful suggestions, insights, and implications for research on, and implementation of teacher written feedback, there are still problems that need to be addressed in order to supplement current knowledge regarding teacher written feedback.

Firstly, compared with quantitative studies on WCF effects, there is a dearth of research on L2 writing teacher' beliefs and practices regarding written feedback (Evans, Hartshorn, & Tuioti, 2010; Lee, 2009; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019; Yu et al., 2020). While some "best practices" to inform teachers' feedback provision such as the use of focused feedback have been proposed (Ferris, 2014; Lee, 2019), little is known about the extent to which those practices are taken up by L2 writing teachers (Lee, 2017). Furthermore, as teachers' pedagogical practices are defined and influenced by their philosophies and theories (Borg, 2006), there is a need to investigate their beliefs so as to have a deeper insight into their feedback practices.

Secondly, in the limited research on teachers' written feedback beliefs and practices, studies examining and comparing the written feedback beliefs and practices by teachers with different cultures and languages are scarce (Ko, 2010). Given that teachers' beliefs and practices are influenced by their own sociocultural backgrounds (Bao, 2019; Crusan, Plakans, & Gebril, 2016; Su, 2019), investigations into NES and NNES teachers' beliefs and practices about written feedback are warranted.

Finally, quantitative research design dominates the current studies on the effects of teacher written feedback (Guo & Barrot, 2019; Liu & Brown, 2015; Storch, 2010), and few studies have used a mixed-methods approach. A mixed-methods

approach, including both quantitative and qualitative data to examine the effects of feedback, can realize data triangulation and make an in-depth explanation for quantitative data.

## **1.4 Research purposes and questions**

This study, in the Chinese tertiary EFL context, investigated NES and NNES teachers' written feedback from the perspectives of teachers' beliefs and practices as well as the effects of their feedback. This study is expected to provide deep insights into the two sources of teacher feedback in L2 writing.

The purpose of this present study is twofold. The phase one of the study, an exploratory case study, examined how NES and NNES teachers conceptualized feedback in their belief systems, how they implemented written feedback in practice, and the relationships between their conceptualizations and actual practices. Eight teachers (four NES and four NNES teachers) were included and data were collected from semi-structured interviews, students' writing samples with teachers' written feedback, stimulated recalls, and documents to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: What are NES and NNES teachers' beliefs about written feedback on Chinese EFL learners' writing?

RQ 2: How do NES and NNES teachers implement written feedback on Chinese EFL learners' writing?

RQ 3: What are the relationships between their written feedback beliefs and practices? And what are the factors contributing to mismatches between teachers' beliefs and practices, if any?

The phase two study, a quasi-experimental study explored the effects of the

two groups of teachers' written feedback on Chinese EFL learners' writing performance, measured by complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) as well as writing scores of their writing, and students' perceptions of the effects. Data were collected from writing tests as well as a post-treatment questionnaire. The phase two study addressed the following two questions:

RQ 4: What are the effects of NES and NNES teachers' written feedback on Chinese EFL learners' writing performance?

RQ 5: How do Chinese EFL learners perceive the effects on their writing performance?

## **1.5 Definitions of key terms**

To fully understand this study, it is essential to define some key terms at the outset. This section defines the following terms: “NES teachers”, “NNES teachers”, “teacher written feedback”, “teacher beliefs”, “teacher practices”, and “argumentative writing”.

### **1.5.1 NES and NNES teachers**

In this study, the term “NES teachers” refers to teachers who speak English as their first language (L1). In the context of China, a great many NES teachers are recruited to teach English every year (Rao & Yu, 2019; Rao & Yuan, 2016). These NES teachers tend to come from English-speaking countries such as United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. The four NES teachers, in this study, came from United States, where they were brought up and educated. By contrast, “NNES teachers” is defined as teachers who do not speak English as their mother tongue or L1. The four NNES teachers in the present study spoke Chinese as L1 and they were born, raised, and educated in mainland China. The two groups of teachers in this study had different linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds.

### **1.5.2 Teacher written feedback**

In this study, “teacher written feedback” is an umbrella term, which refers to any written information (corrections and comments) provided by NES and NNES teachers, which focuses on language, content, and organization on their Chinese EFL learners’ writing. “Written corrective feedback” refers to feedback on language (Lee, 2017; Storch, 2018; Yu et al., 2020), whereas “global feedback” means feedback on content and organization.

### **1.5.3 Teacher beliefs and practices**

When it comes to the concept of “teacher beliefs”, it refers to “the unobservable cognitive dimensions of teaching—what teachers know, believe and think” (Borg, 2003, p. 81). In the current study, it is defined as what NES and NNES tertiary writing teachers know, believe, and think about written feedback in the Chinese EFL context. The term “teacher practices” refers to “the actions that teachers take to organize what they know and to map out what is possible, which can also be affected by new beliefs and situations” (Alkhatib, 2015, p. 7). In the present study, “teacher practices” specifically refers to NES and NNES writing teachers’ written feedback given on Chinese EFL learners’ writing.

### **1.5.4 Argumentative writing**

As Chinese EFL learners tend to deal with argumentative writing at the tertiary level (Teng & Zhang, 2020), this study selects argumentative writing as the writing genre for investigation. Argumentative writing refers to “a social activity of reason aimed at increasing (or decreasing) the acceptability of a controversial point for readers by putting forward a constellation of propositions intended to justify (or refute) the point before a rational judge” (Van Eemeren et al., 1996, p. 5).

To produce a piece of well-written argumentative writing, several criteria should be met for content and organization, as shown in Table 1.1. These criteria may be used to differentiate argumentative writing from other writing genres.

**Table 1.1 Criteria for content and organization in argumentative writing**

Criteria	Content
1	English argumentation requires a statement of a central idea which specifies the writer's overall opinion on the topic addressed.
2	Writers are expected to develop at least two reasons to support their claims.
3	Each reason should be elaborated by examples, reasoning, or statistics.
4	The supporting details should be related to and logically support reasons provided.
5	Effective argumentation includes counterarguments and rebuttals.
Criteria	Organization
1	English argumentation needs an introduction which is concise. It comprises background information contextualizing topics and writers' claims/opinions.
2	The sequencing of supporting details should be logical.
3	The propositions should be connected to each other.
4	The connection between adjacent sentences should be clear and evident to readers.
5	In English argumentation, each body paragraph includes a sentence to lead the whole paragraph.
6	Each body paragraph should develop only one idea.
7	English argumentation includes a concluding paragraph, which reiterates main points and excludes new information.

Geng (2017, p. 78-79)

## 1.6 Significance of the study

Theoretically, this study expects to advance current investigations relevant to teacher written feedback in L2 writing and language teachers' beliefs. Specifically, the present study investigates NES and NNES teachers' written feedback beliefs, practices, and effects in the Chinese tertiary EFL context, a previous under-researched field. The findings of this study may establish a comprehensive picture and yield a deepened understanding of written feedback by the two groups of teachers in the Chinese

context. In addition, this study, informed by Activity Theory, examines how NES and NNES teachers provide written feedback in their specific teaching contexts. It employs Activity Theory to interpret the factors influencing teachers' written feedback practices in the Chinese EFL writing classrooms and shows how such a theory can be used in practice (Yu, 2014), thus extending its application to the area of L2 teacher written feedback in the mainland Chinese EFL context.

In terms of the relevance to research methodology, this study employs a mixed-methods approach whereas, in previous research, as noted before, quantitative research has been prevalent in the studies regarding the effects of teacher written feedback; such a research design neglects students' perspectives on the effects. In this study, the combination of quantitative data from writing tests and qualitative responses from a post-treatment questionnaire not only enables us to understand the product of teacher written feedback, that is, the effects of teacher written feedback on L2 learners' writing performance, but also the process, how teacher written feedback impacts their performance. In doing so, the product and process are connected.

This study also has pedagogical importance. It examines NES and NNES EFL teachers' written feedback beliefs, practices, and effects. The research and educational communities have acknowledged that L2 writing has become an integral part of, and an important source of support for L2 learning (Zhang, 2013). Teacher written feedback is an ubiquitous pedagogical practice in L2 writing classrooms, and efforts to maximize its efficacy are worthwhile. The empirical information provided by this study may prompt NES and NNES teachers to learn from each other in terms of feedback provision and enable each group of teachers to reflect on as well as optimize written feedback provision. In addition, such results may have useful implications for Chinese universities and colleges. The findings of this study may inform Chinese



higher education institutions of how to support and scaffold EFL writing teachers' provision of written feedback and facilitate the effectiveness of teacher written feedback.

## **1.7 Organization of the thesis**

The present study comprises eight chapters which can be divided into three sections. The first section (Chapters 1-3) outlines the whole study: Describing the context where this study is conducted; highlighting the significance of the study; conducting a critical review of studies relevant to the study; as well as illustrating the research design and methodology. The second section includes Chapters 4-6 which report the findings of this study. The last section comprising Chapters 7-8 discusses the research findings, identifies the implications and limitations, and suggests directions for further study. The following paragraphs introduce the outline of the present study in more detail.

Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter and presents a holistic picture of the study. It opens with the context in which the present study is implemented. It then identifies the existing gaps in the current body of literature on teacher written feedback in L2 writing, which make the present study necessary. The research purposes and questions are proposed next, after which some key terms are defined and the theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical significance of the present study are illustrated. The chapter concludes with an overview of the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2 reviews the pertinent literature and the theoretical frameworks. This chapter includes four parts. The first part is relevant to teacher written feedback in L2 writing, including recurring themes in research on teacher written feedback and the effects of teacher written feedback on L2 writing. The following part focuses on teacher beliefs. Specifically, it reviews definition of beliefs, factors contributing to

teacher beliefs, teacher beliefs and practices, and relationships between teacher beliefs and practices regarding written feedback. As this study involves NES and NNES teachers, the third part reviews studies which compare NES and NNES teachers' teaching behaviors in English teaching and their assessment of L2 writing. The last part introduces the theoretical frameworks related to this study: Activity Theory and Trade-off Hypothesis. Chapter 2 closes with the research gaps based on a critical review of the studies to justify the present study.

Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology of this study in detail, illustrating how the current study is conducted. It provides detailed information about the research design including participants, data collection, data analysis, steps taken to ensure the reliability of the research findings, and ethical considerations. This study is divided into two phases: In phase one, four NES and four NNES teachers' espoused beliefs, actual practices regarding written feedback, and the belief-practice relationships are explored; in phase two, a quasi-experimental study is conducted to investigate the effects of NES and NNES teachers' written feedback on Chinese EFL learners' writing performance and students' perspectives on the effects.

Chapters 4-6 present the major findings of the phase one and phase two study. Chapters 4-5 report how NES and NNES teachers conceptualize and implement written feedback on Chinese EFL learners' writing in their specific pedagogical contexts, as well as the relationships between their beliefs and practices. Chapter 6 focuses on the results of the quasi-experimental study. It reveals the effects of the two groups of teachers' written feedback on various dimensions of writing (i.e., accuracy, complexity, fluency, and content, organization and writing quality). To corroborate the quantitative results, Chinese EFL learners' perceptions regarding the effects on their writing performance are reported in this chapter as well.

Chapter 7 discusses the major findings of this study in relation to relevant studies regarding teacher written feedback in L2 writing and theories. Chapter 8 completes the study with the summary of the major findings, discussion of the important implications and contributions highlighted by the present study, identification of the limitations, and suggestions for further relevant research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

### **2.1 Chapter overview**

Since this study examined NES and NNES teachers' written feedback beliefs, practices, and effects on Chinese EFL learners' writing, this chapter reviews the existing literature surrounding three key concepts: Teacher written feedback, teachers' beliefs, as well as NES and NNES teachers. This chapter commences with teacher written feedback. The second part presents a comprehensive picture regarding teachers' beliefs and is followed by the current literature on comparing NES and NNES teachers in English teaching and L2 writing. After the review of empirical studies, Activity Theory and Trade-off Hypothesis, which serve as the theoretical frameworks underpinning the present study, are discussed. This chapter concludes by highlighting the major gaps identified from previous relevant studies.

### **2.2 Teacher written feedback in L2 writing**

This section reviews pertinent prior studies on teacher written feedback in L2 writing and opens with a definition of teacher written feedback. Four recurring themes in studies into teacher written feedback (i.e., scope, focus, strategy, and orientation) are then described in detail. Finally, this section concludes by examining the effects of teacher written feedback on L2 learners' writing performance.

### **2.2.1 Definition of teacher written feedback**

Various definitions of feedback in the field of education occur in the existing literature. For example, feedback refers to the information provided by teachers and is used to bridge the gap between the actual level and potential level in students' learning (Ramaprasad, 1983). Feedback is also known as the comments and information that students receive regarding their performance of a task, which enables them to make some changes in subsequent performance (Keh, 1990; Lamberg, 1980). Hattie and Timperley (2007) define feedback as the information provided by an agent (e.g., teachers, peers, parents, self, books and experience etc.), which aims at different aspects of one's performance or understanding.

To recap, although feedback has been defined by different scholars in different words, these definitions share in common that feedback is the information students receive targeting their performance, which enables them to understand their problems in task performance, and encourage and consolidate their learning. Based on the synthesis of above definitions, feedback, in the present study, specifically refers to written information (i.e., corrections and comments) on different dimensions of Chinese EFL learners' writing (i.e., language, content, and organization) provided by teachers. According to this definition, teacher written feedback targets both local and global issues rather than linguistic errors exclusively, and focuses on students' balanced development in L2 writing.

### **2.2.2 Recurring themes in studies on teacher written feedback**

Currently, L2 writing pedagogy is experiencing a transition from a teacher-centered to a student-centered paradigm (Zhang, 2013, 2016). Despite this, teacher written feedback still occupies a central place in L2 writing classrooms (Hyland & Hyland,

2006a). Derived from previous empirical studies related to teacher written feedback, this review identified several recurring themes in relation to feedback: Scope, focus, strategy, and orientation (Alkhatib, 2015; Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ferris et al., 2011; Lee, 2008, 2009, 2013a). These four themes, which are the foci of the present study, are explained in detail in the ensuing subsections.

### **2.2.2.1 Scope of feedback**

Scope of feedback refers to the extent of written feedback which teachers should offer to their students in feedback provision (Lee, 2017); there are two subthemes: Focused (selective) feedback and unfocused (comprehensive) feedback. Whereas the former refers to feedback on only a few pre-selected error types, the latter is defined as feedback on a wide array of errors (Ellis, 2009; Lee, Mak, & Burns, 2015). In the current body of literature on teacher written feedback, researchers espouse different attitudes towards these two kinds of feedback. At present, a great many scholars show a preference for focused feedback in response to L2 learners' writing (e.g., Benson & DeKeyser, 2019; Bitchener, 2008, 2009; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010a, 2010b; Shintani & Ellis, 2013; Suzuki, Nassaji, & Sato, 2019). They presented the merits of focused feedback as: 1) Compared with comprehensive feedback, focused feedback is more likely to make learners attend to the feedback and contribute to deeper insights into the nature of their errors; 2) from a psycholinguistic perspective, focused feedback enables L2 learners, especially low-proficiency learners, to avoid cognitive overload and to have additional cognitive resources to process new input effectively (Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009).

Other researchers (e.g., Brown, 2012; Evans, Hartshorn, & Strong-Krause, 2011; Hartshorn et al., 2010; Storch, 2010; Van Beuningen, 2010) have voiced their apprehension and cast doubts on the feasibility of such an approach to feedback in the

authentic L2 writing classrooms despite focused feedback being highly advocated. According to these studies, L2 writing teachers tend to correct a variety of errors, instead of a few errors. Furthermore, as Van Beuningen (2010) claimed, the ultimate goal of teachers' written feedback in L2 writing instruction is to help students make progress in all dimensions of their writing, rather than improve accuracy in limited specific linguistic structures, and to achieve a balanced development in L2 writing. These researchers argue that feedback on one or a limited number of error categories is insufficient to achieve this goal and that comprehensive feedback should play an important role in L2 classrooms.

Similarly, there also exist differences in L2 writing teachers' perceptions about the use of focused or comprehensive feedback. Many studies have reported that L2 teachers believed in comprehensive feedback when marking their students' writing (Alkhatib, 2015; Alshahrani & Storch, 2014; Lee, 2004, 2011). For instance, Alshahrani and Storch (2014), in a case study to explore three teachers' beliefs and practices regarding written feedback, found that teachers favored comprehensive feedback due to students' English proficiency and their sense of responsibility. Employing a questionnaire in the Hong Kong EFL context, Lee (2004) reported that a large proportion of secondary school teachers (70%) favored correcting a range of errors when they evaluated their students' writing. In contrast, a few studies have reported that L2 writing teachers attached great importance to focused feedback (e.g., Hamouda, 2011). For instance, in Hamouda's (2011) study, over 60% of the participating EFL teachers agreed that feedback should be provided selectively to reduce teachers' workloads.

In contrast to the variations in perceptions, L2 teachers, particularly EFL teachers, appeared to have the same practice about scope of feedback. In other words,

they tended to provide students with feedback in an extensive way (e.g., Alkhatib, 2015; Alshahrani & Storch, 2014; Furneaux, Paran, & Fairfax, 2007; Jamoom, 2016; Lee, 2004, 2009, 2011). For instance, Furneaux et al. (2007) found that EFL writing teachers in five countries marked students' errors comprehensively when responding to L2 learners' writing. In a similar vein, Lee (2004, 2009, 2011) conducted a string of studies in the Hong Kong EFL context, inquiring into the secondary school teachers' implementation of error correction. After analyzing teachers' performance on their students' written texts, she found that teachers adopted a comprehensive approach to feedback and corrected most errors in students' writing.

In sum, although there was no agreement in L2 teachers' perceptions regarding the scope of feedback, they appeared to employ mainly a comprehensive feedback approach when assessing their students' writing.

#### **2.2.2.2 Feedback focus**

Feedback focus is defined as what teachers focus on when they provide students with written feedback on their writing (Yu & Lee, 2014). When assessing students' writing or providing them with feedback, teachers and researchers tend to investigate different aspects of writing (i.e., language, content, and organization) (East, 2009; Jacob et al., 1981). Moreover, they assign language into one dimension, with content and organization into another one. The former dimension is termed as local level and the latter as global level (Butler & Britt, 2011; Rahimi, 2013; Y. Yang & Meng, 2013), so that feedback focus is divided into two-subthemes: Local feedback and global feedback. The former refers to feedback related to language, also referred to as written corrective feedback (WCF) (Storch, 2018; Yu et al., 2020), while the latter is feedback on global issues (content and organization). More specifically, WCF concerns the correct use of grammar and vocabulary, whereas global feedback pays attention to how



students develop their ideas as well as how their writing is structured locally and globally.

The existing literature in relation to teachers' perspectives on feedback focus has yielded inconsistent findings. For example, using a mixed-methods approach investigating ESL writing teachers' beliefs and practices about written feedback provision, Montgomery and Baker (2007) reported teachers' beliefs suggested they placed greater emphasis on content and organization than on local issues such as grammar and mechanics. By contrast, in a study of 31 ESL teachers from two different English-language schools, Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) revealed that teachers believed that more attention should be paid to grammar than content and organization. In addition, teachers in other studies (e.g., Jamoom, 2016; Lee, 2009) stressed that different dimensions of writing, such as language, content, and organization, should be taken into account when teachers deliver written feedback to their students. That is, they thought that teachers should provide feedback targeting a range of dimensions of writing.

Other studies have identified that teachers had contrasting perspectives on feedback focus in their studies (e.g., Alkhatib, 2015; Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990). In a qualitative study, Alkhatib (2015) reported that, when evaluating their students' texts, six out of ten participating teachers gave more importance to organization and generic structure of essays, whereas the other four teachers espoused that teachers should give priority to linguistic errors. She further reported that the varied teachers' perspectives were attributed to their prior learning experience and teaching experience. By the same token, Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990), in their study on L2 teachers' beliefs regarding written feedback, revealed that teachers from language institutions and universities demonstrated conflicting perceptions; while the former believed that teachers should

focus on linguistic errors, the latter emphasized global dimensions of writing. Although they did not offer reasons for the differences in teachers' perceptions, students' needs and proficiency in language institutions and universities may account for their dissimilar attitudes towards feedback focus.

Unlike the inconsistent findings in terms of teachers' beliefs on feedback focus in feedback provision, current investigations into L2 writing teachers' actual practices in feedback focus seem to reach a consensus. A number of studies have reported that teachers make a priority of correcting students' linguistic errors, especially grammatical errors in their practice (e.g., Furneaux, Paran, & Fairfax, 2007; Jamoom, 2016; Lee, 2004, 2008; Montgomery & Baker, 2007). To illustrate, Lee (2008) in the Hong Kong EFL context, investigating which aspect(s) secondary school teachers prioritized when giving written feedback, reported that teachers gave most attention to errors related to language. She also summarized a range of factors contributing to their decision-making, including a lack of teacher training, teachers' beliefs and values, accountability, and examination pressure. Likewise, with 110 teachers from five different EFL countries, Furneaux et al. (2007) found that grammatical correction predominated EFL teachers' written feedback provision.

In summary, L2 teachers' perspectives on feedback focus were mixed. However, compared with their beliefs, which were complex, teachers' actual practices in feedback focus were similar. That is, they overwhelmingly concentrated on linguistic errors, with little attention to other dimensions of writing.

#### **2.2.2.3 Feedback strategy**

Feedback strategy is concerned with how teachers deliver their feedback to their students. Broadly speaking, there are two types of feedback strategies: Direct and indirect feedback. The former is defined as the provision of direct corrections to

students' errors (Ellis, 2009; Lee, Mak, & Burns, 2015), whereas the latter refers to the indication of errors without correct answers (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ferris, 2010). Therefore, the direct-indirect dichotomy hinges on "learners' involvement in the correction process" (Van Beuningen, 2010, p.11).

In the current literature, researchers have described different ways to realize direct and indirect WCF (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ellis, 2009; Lee, 2017; Sheen, 2011). The realization of direct WCF is achieved by three different forms: 1) Providing a correct answer directly; 2) crossing out items which are redundant or erroneous; and 3) adding the omitted items. Indirect feedback can be realized by indicating errors with/without metalinguistic clues. Examples of different forms of direct and indirect WCF are presented in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1 Examples with different realizations of direct and indirect WCF**

Realization	Example
Direct feedback	
1) providing direct corrections	Yesterday, I <u>go</u> to church. (went)
2) deleting erroneous/unnecessary items	Yesterday, I <del>was</del> went to church.
3) insertion omitted items	Yesterday, I went ^church. (to)
Indirect feedback	
1) indication of errors without metalinguistic clues	Yesterday, I <u>go</u> to church.
2) indication of errors with metalinguistic clues	Yesterday, I <u>go</u> to church. (Verb)
Lee (2017, p.69)	

Currently, researchers have differing preferences for direct and indirect feedback. Researchers supporting indirect feedback assert that it provides learners with opportunities to be involved in the process of learning more profoundly, which helps their long-term acquisition and benefits their writing accuracy (Bitchener & Knoch,

2010b; Lalande, 1982). In this sense, indirect feedback probably prompts students' output. As Bitchener and Knoch (2008) claimed, indirect feedback "requires students to engage in guided learning and problem solving and, as a result, promotes the type of reflection, noticing and attention that is more likely to foster long-term acquisition" (p. 415). In contrast, those advocating direct feedback argue that direct feedback is more beneficial. Compared with indirect feedback, direct feedback provides students with explicit information to correct complex errors such as errors at a syntactic level. Furthermore, as direct feedback provides students with input, they are probably able to understand and internalize correct forms instantly (Chandler, 2003). Bitchener and Knoch (2010b) also noted that explicit information provided by direct feedback makes it possible for students to test hypotheses they have made about the target language.

Different attitudes towards the strategies of feedback have been espoused by L2 writing teachers. Teachers in some prior studies have thought that direct feedback should be given to students (e.g., Alkhatib, 2015; Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Norouzian & Farahani, 2012). For example, EFL teachers in Alkhatib's (2015) study in Saudi Arabia, through semi-structured interviews, agreed that it was necessary for teachers to provide students with direct feedback, as it could satisfy students' needs and expectations. In comparison, other studies have reported that L2 teachers stressed the use of indirect feedback when responding to students' written assignments (Hamouda, 2011; Lee, 2009). Lee (2009), in a study involving EFL secondary school teachers in Hong Kong, found that the majority of teachers favored indirect feedback, which, they believed, could foster students' ability to correct their errors independently.

L2 writing teachers' use of the written feedback strategies in their specific teaching contexts suggests that they combine the use of direct and indirect feedback rather than use a particular one in isolation (Alshahrani & Storch, 2014; Jamoom, 2016;

Lee, 2008, 2011; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019; Zheng & Yu, 2018). However, these studies fail to reach an agreement regarding the amount of direct and indirect feedback. Some studies have found that the amount of direct feedback outweighed that of indirect feedback (Jamoom, 2016; Lee, 2003, 2004, 2008, 2011). For example, after analyzing secondary school teachers' actual feedback practices on their students' writing, Lee (2008) found that the majority of errors were corrected directly by teachers. Not only did secondary school teachers use direct feedback predominately, but so did university teachers. For example, Jamoom (2016) reported that tertiary EFL teachers mainly used direct feedback to treat students' writing errors.

However, other studies have shown a contrasting result. For instance, Alshahrani and Storch (2014) in a case study in the Saudi EFL context, examining three tertiary teachers' written feedback beliefs and practices, reported that they responded primarily to students' errors indirectly. This finding may be due to the school policy, which required teachers to follow indirect feedback when providing written feedback. Mao and Crosthwaite's (2019) case study similarly revealed that EFL teachers showed a preference for indirect feedback when marking students' errors in writing in mainland China.

To sum up, although teachers held different opinions regarding feedback strategies, it seemed that they implemented similar practices when using feedback strategies. That is, they adopted a combination of direct and indirect feedback to correct errors even though the amount of direct and indirect feedback varied.

#### **2.2.2.4 Feedback orientation**

As the final theme, feedback orientation includes two subthemes: Positive and negative feedback. Positive feedback refers to comments affirming that students' writing has met a standard such as "good grammar", "clear organization", and "the

task is well achieved”. In contrast, negative feedback is defined as teachers’ comments, indicating that there are some errors, problems or weaknesses in students’ writing (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). For example, if teachers give feedback such as “a weak conclusion” or “only a very limited range of sentence structures”, it can be viewed as negative feedback.

The two types of feedback, positive and negative, play different roles. Whereas positive feedback contributes to students’ motivation and self-esteem, negative feedback can raise students’ awareness of their problems and weaknesses even though it may affect students’ emotion negatively (Ashtarian & Weisi, 2016; Bates, Lane, & Lange, 1993; Connors & Lunsford, 1993; Ferris, 1997). In the existing literature, teachers emphasized that positive feedback should be provided to highlight, in their perception, strengths and strong points of students’ writing. For instance, Alkhatib (2015), inquiring into EFL teachers’ conceptions about positive/negative feedback through semi-structured interviews, reported that teachers unanimously emphasized positive feedback to enhance students’ motivation and interest in writing. Using a survey method, Jamoom (2016) similarly revealed that teachers preferred to use positive feedback than negative feedback in their belief systems.

Despite teachers expressing favorable attitudes towards positive feedback, they were used to giving negative feedback comments to indicate problems in practice, rather than using positive feedback to motivate students (e.g., Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Jamoom, 2016; Lee, 2009; Z. Wang, 2015). For example, Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) reported that teachers did not provide students with any praise in their feedback. Lee (2009) also reported that only 3.3% of written feedback was positive, suggesting that teachers’ feedback mainly focused on students’ writing weaknesses. As an exception, Xu’s (2017a) study reported that the participating teacher made more

positive comments than negative ones. Such inconsistent findings may be due to the research context as Xu's (2017a) study was conducted in New Zealand, in an English as a native language context, whereas other studies occurred in EFL/ESL context.

To conclude, although L2 writing teachers put emphasis on positive feedback when expressing their beliefs, in practice they predominately used negative feedback.

### **2.2.3 Effects of teacher written feedback on L2 writing**

As noted previously, teacher written feedback in this study included feedback on language, content, and organization. The following sections examine the effects of feedback on content and feedback on language, respectively.

#### **2.2.3.1 Effects of feedback on content**

For convenience, feedback on content here refers to feedback on both ideas and rhetorical dimensions. In comparison with studies related to WCF (i.e., written feedback on language), there is little research on feedback on content (S. Li & Vuono, 2019; Zhang, 2018), although some early studies in this area have shown the beneficial effects of content feedback on L2 learners' writing performance. For example, in a study spanning 12 weeks, Kepner (1991) found that while students who received text-specific content feedback improved the ideational quality of their texts greatly, their performance in grammatical accuracy was equal to their peers', who were in a treatment group in which they received error correction. Sheppard (1992) also compared the effects of feedback on content and WCF and reported that, compared with indirect WCF, the practice of feedback on content contributed to students' gains in both grammatical accuracy and syntactic complexity, producing longer sentences. However, the effects of feedback on content generated in these early studies should be treated with caution because of limitations in their research designs (see Storch, 2010).

For instance, although conducted in real classroom settings, these studies failed to include a control group, which received no feedback and only engaged in writing. Without a control group, researchers cannot ensure the research findings come from the treatment of feedback or writing practice. As Truscott (1996) argued, writing practice *per se* may lead to some improvement in writing performance. Furthermore, these studies did not include a pretest at the outset of intervention, which could not guarantee baseline conditions. These limitations, to some extent, compromised the reliability of research results, so that these studies did not provide robust evidence for the effectiveness of feedback on content.

Other studies found that feedback on content had more moderate effects on high-order dimensions of L2 writing compared with WCF on linguistic accuracy. Lee (1997) reported that L2 learners, when provided with feedback on meaning and language concurrently, corrected meaning errors less successfully than linguistic errors. Similar results are seen in Ashwell's (2000) study, which showed that in comparison with the effects of WCF on accuracy, feedback on content had a weaker effect on content in revised drafts. The moderate effects of such feedback may be associated with the nature of content feedback in their studies, as it tended to be general and vague for dealing with problems. For example, Lee (1997) used simple codes to indicate problems related to meaning. These comments were too implicit to assist students in addressing their problems in global areas of writing. Moreover, compared with linguistic errors, content problems are relatively difficult to solve and require students to draw on greater cognitive resources (Lee, 1997); addressing issues in high-order dimensions of writing such as problems in meaning requires students to deal with information beyond one sentence (Hull, 1987). Unspecific feedback on content is of little use for students to address problems in their writing.



As aforementioned, L2 teachers appear to pay much more attention to errors related to language when providing their students with written feedback (Furneaux, Paran, & Fairfax, 2007; Lee, 2008, 2009). The next section reviews studies in relation to the effects of WCF on L2 writing, which have proliferated in the recent decades (S. Li & Vuono, 2019).

#### **2.2.3.2 Effects of WCF**

In the extant literature on WCF, there is a spirited discussion centering on its efficacy triggered by Truscott (1996). Having synthesized several early empirical studies, he vehemently repudiated the practice of WCF, arguing that it is not only ineffective but also harmful for L2 writing. He believed that WCF not only shows no benefits for writing accuracy, but also may lead to short, simplified writing, thus impacting negatively on linguistic complexity and fluency; he claimed that teachers should refrain from such a practice in L2 writing classrooms. His argument, however, was dismissed by many WCF researchers who have produced a plethora of empirical evidence for the effectiveness of WCF (e.g., Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b; Ferris, 2006; Guo & Barrot, 2019; Shintani & Ellis, 2013). Currently, there is a consensus that WCF plays a role in improving students' writing accuracy and should be encouraged in L2 writing instruction (Kang & Han, 2015; Lee, 2017; Zhang, 2018).

Among the growing research on WCF, researchers have examined the WCF effects on writing accuracy in revision (e.g., Ashwell, 2000; Karim & Nassaji, 2020; Kim & Emeliyanova, 2019; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986; Truscott & Hsu, 2008). All these studies reported that WCF enabled L2 learners to improve accuracy when revising texts. Unfortunately, revision studies were called into question, as they did not support the effectiveness of WCF for L2 writing development, suggesting that

successful revision does not necessarily mean that WCF can promote L2 development, or the acquisition of new linguistic structures (Truscott, 1996, 2007). As Truscott commented on revision studies:

*A writing task that students do with help from the teacher is obviously not comparable to one they do on their own, and so a study with this design does not yield any measure of learning, short-term or otherwise. (Truscott, 2007, p.257).*

Understandably, students' experience when they process revised drafts is different from creating new writing. When writing a new text, students may invest more cognitive effort and need to focus on both local and global dimensions of writing in a new linguistic environment, while with revision, they may focus just on the errors revising them in the same linguistic environment. Thus, to examine whether WCF could contribute to L2 development, studies regarding its effects on new pieces of writing are required. A growing number of WCF researchers have ameliorated research designs to look at the effects of WCF on new writing (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b; Ellis et al., 2008; Frear & Chiu, 2015; Hartshorn et al., 2010; Shintani, Ellis, & Suzuki, 2014). These studies have documented that the positive effects of WCF in revised drafts can transfer to new pieces of writing.

To summarize, the studies reviewed in this section have acknowledged the role and value of WCF in L2 writing. To maximize its efficacy, WCF researchers and practitioners have turned the spotlight onto the strategies to be used to deliver WCF (i.e., direct and indirect WCF) and the scope of WCF teachers should offer to their students (i.e., focused and comprehensive WCF). The following paragraphs discuss prior studies which address WCF strategies and scope.

#### 2.2.3.2.1 Direct and indirect WCF

As noted previously, direct WCF is known as the provision of corrections directly to errors, whereas indirect WCF refers to the identification of errors without providing corrections. In the current body of literature, a number of studies have evaluated the relative merits of these two types of WCF, summarized in Table 2.2.

In a study of 62 GFL (German as a foreign language) learners at a US university, Lalande (1982) compared the efficacy of direct and indirect WCF. The teachers corrected students' errors directly in the control group (i.e., direct group), while they gave coded WCF to students in the experimental group (i.e., indirect group). The study showed that students receiving indirect coded WCF outperformed their peers receiving direct WCF, although the difference did not reach a statistically significant level. However, the results are not very reliable due to several limitations. Firstly, this study did not include a real control group, which did not receive WCF. Secondly, there were other differences between the two groups other than the strategies of WCF. The indirect group also received a second treatment, an Error Awareness Sheet, to track the frequency and recurrence of error types, so the indirect group received more treatment activities than the direct group. In another study, Semke (1984) investigated the relative effects of direct and indirect WCF with 141 German ESL learners. He found no difference in the improvement of students' writing accuracy between the two groups. However, similar to Lalande's (1982) study, the reliability of the findings is compromised because of the unbalanced treatment between groups (Guénette, 2007).

Chandler (2003), unlike the two above studies, provided participants with four different types of WCF: Direct WCF (direct correction) and three types of indirect WCF (underlining, error codes, and underlining plus error codes). After four rounds of

WCF provision, she found that direct WCF was the most effective in text revision. For new writing, direct WCF was more effective than indirect WCF (i.e., error codes and error codes with underlining) in improving students' writing accuracy, although there was no significant difference between direct WCF and underlining. Although her study improved the research designs of prior studies, it still had some flaws. First, like previous studies, her study also did not include a control group without WCF. Solid evidence on the effectiveness of an intervention cannot be obtained if studies do not compare the efficacy of WCF and no WCF (Ferris, 2004; Truscott, 1996). Second, inappropriate task conditions compromised the reliability of the research results; the writing tasks in her study were done at home with no evidence as to whether the participants had access to additional assistance (Storch, 2010).

Although the early studies (before 2005) had some flaws in research designs, their value and strengths should not be ignored. Firstly, these studies investigated the relative merits of direct and indirect WCF on new texts, rather than only focused on revised drafts. Moreover, they were classroom-based; in these studies, participants received multiple WCF treatments, and were required to respond to the provided WCF (Storch, 2010).

**Table 2.2 Representative studies on direct and indirect WCF**

Studies	Participants	Treatment	Which one is more effective
Lalande (1982)	60 GFL learners at a US college	1. Direct WCF 2. Indirect WCF (error codes)	Indirect coded WCF was more effective (not significant).
Semke (1984)	141 German ESL learners at a US university	1. Content comments 2. Direct WCF 3. Direct WCF and content comments 4. Indirect WCF (error codes)	No difference
Chandler (2003)	20 ESL learners at a US	1. Direct WCF 2. Indirect WCF (underlining)	In revised texts, direct WCF was the

	conservatory	3. Indirect WCF (error codes) 4. Indirect WCF (underlining plus error codes)	most effective; In new texts, direct WCF was more effective than indirect WCF (i.e., error codes and error codes plus underling), but no difference between direct WCF and underlining.
Van Beuningen et al. (2008)	62 DFL (Dutch as a foreign language) learners at two Dutch secondary schools	1. Direct WCF 2. Indirect WCF (underling with error codes) 3. Practice 4. Self-correction	In revision, direct WCF and indirect WCF were both effective, but only direct WCF had effectiveness in new pieces of writing.
Van Beuningen et al. (2012)	134 DFL learners at two Dutch secondary schools	1. Direct error correction 2. Indirect WCF (underling with error codes) 3. Practice 4. Self-correction	Direct WCF was more effective for grammatical accuracy but indirect WCF was more effective for reducing non-grammatical errors (e.g., word choice).

More recently, addressing the design and execution limitations in previous studies, Van Beuningen, De Jong, and Kuiken (2008, 2012) investigated the different effects of direct and indirect comprehensive WCF. In the former study (2008), the results revealed that direct WCF was more beneficial than indirect WCF. Although both direct and indirect WCF showed positive effects on accuracy in revision, only direct WCF transferred such a favorable effect to new pieces of writing. In the latter study (2012), they extend previous literature regarding the relative effectiveness of direct and indirect WCF, as they took error types into account. They found that direct

WCF had greater effectiveness in improving grammatical accuracy, while indirect WCF was superior to direct WCF in terms of developing accuracy of nongrammatical items. The beneficial effects of direct WCF reported by these two studies are not surprising, as the participants were secondary school students, who were beginner DFL (Dutch as a foreign language) learners, and not adult learners. As these participants had limited knowledge of Dutch and possibly lacked analytical ability, direct WCF may have been more suitable for them. Although these two recent studies remedied the design limitations of previous research, it is probably hasty to conclude that direct WCF has advantages over indirect WCF as “they are the only evidence we have so far” (Bitchener & Storch, 2016, p. 47).

These two studies differ from other studies comparing the differentiatinal effects of direct and indirect WCF due to two factors. The first was related to participants’ demographic background. As mentioned above, the participants were secondary school students in these two studies, while in other studies in this set, they were adult language learners. The second, and more important factor is that the one-shot WCF intervention employed by Van Beuningen et al. (2008, 2012) was very different from the early studies presented in Table 2.2, in which the participants received WCF treatment sessions over time.

A firm conclusion with respect to the relative effectiveness of direct and indirect WCF based on the current investigations is not yet possible because the efficacy of direct and indirect WCF is mediated by a range of moderator variables such as students’ L2 proficiency, research context, different tasks, and the type of target errors (Ferris, 2002; Kang & Han, 2015). Apart from direct and indirect WCF, WCF research is also concerned with the scope of WCF that should be provided. The next section reviews studies on focused and comprehensive WCF.

#### 2.2.3.2.2 Focused and comprehensive WCF

Another categorization of WCF, focused and comprehensive WCF, concentrates on the extent of feedback teachers should offer to their students. As demonstrated above, focused WCF is favored as a way of providing WCF on one or a few error types with other errors not corrected, whereas comprehensive WCF expects teachers to provide feedback on a wide array of errors. Researchers, in the literature previously discussed, show a preference for focused over comprehensive WCF, and encourage L2 writing teachers to correct students' writing selectively. Their support for focused WCF is based on a substantial body of empirical evidence. The representative studies on the effects of focused WCF are presented in Table 2.3.

As Table 2.3 illustrates, the majority of focused WCF studies were highly focused (e.g., Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009a, 2009b, 2010b; S. Li & Roshan, 2019; Shintani & Aubrey, 2016), and focused only on one error category in students' writing (Liu & Brown, 2015). For example, a series of studies conducted by Bitchener and Knoch (2009a, 2009b, 2010b) focused on two specific functional uses of English article system: Definite article (first mention) and indefinite article (anaphoric mention), examining the effects of such focused WCF in new pieces of writing. The results reported that focused WCF contributed significantly to students' accurate use of articles in the immediate posttest and retained the beneficial effects in the delayed posttest over time. Shintani and Aubrey (2016) investigated the effects of focused WCF, targeting the errors with the hypothetical conditional and found that such WCF helped students improve the accuracy with the hypothetical conditional significantly from the pretest to the two posttests. S. Li and Roshan (2019), similarly, probed into the effects focused WCF had on Iranian EFL learners' use of English passive voice, reporting that it facilitated learners' accuracy of this grammatical item

when writing new texts in both the posttest and the delayed posttest. Rummel and Bitchener (2015) also presented empirical evidence for the positive effects of focused WCF on EFL learners' use of simple past tense in the short term and long term. These studies contribute to the investigations into focused WCF, since they extended the target linguistic structures from English article to hypothetical conditional, simple past tense, and English passive voice.

**Table 2.3 Representative studies of focused WCF**

Studies	Participants	Target linguistic structures
Bitchener et al., 2005	53 post-intermediate ESL learners	Definite article; simple past tense; proposition
Sheen, 2007	91 intermediate ESL learners	Two functional uses of article: indefinite article and definite article
Bitchener, 2008	75 low intermediate ESL learners	Two functional uses of article: indefinite article and definite article
Bitchener & Knoch, 2009a	52 low intermediate ESL learners	Two functional uses of article: indefinite article and definite article
Bitchener & Knoch, 2009b	39 low intermediate ESL learners	Two functional uses of article: indefinite article and definite article
Bitchner & Knoch, 2010b	63 advanced ESL learners	Two functional uses of article: indefinite article and definite article
Rummel & Bitchener, 2015	42 advanced EFL learners (Vientiane & Laos)	Simple past tense
Shintani & Aubrey, 2016	68 intermediate EFL learners (Japan)	Hypothetical conditional
Benson & DeKeyser, 2019	151 intermediate to advanced ESL learners	Simple past tense; present perfect tense
Guo & Barrot, 2019	75 pre-intermediate	Regular and irregular simple past



	EFL learners (China)	tense; propositions indicating space
S. Li & Roshan, 2019	79 intermediate EFL learners (Iran)	English passive voice
Suzuki et al., 2019	88 intermediate EFL learners (Japan)	Past perfect tense; indefinite article

To provide stronger evidence of the benefits of focused WCF, a small number of scholars have expanded the number of error categories, focusing on two or three linguistic structures (e.g., Benson & DeKeyser, 2019; Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Guo & Barrot, 2019; Suzuki, Nassaji, & Sato, 2019), which are, therefore, mid-focused with regard to scope of feedback (Liu & Brown, 2015). For example, Benson and DeKeyser (2019) examined the effects of focused WCF targeting errors in simple past tense and present perfect tense. They reported that all three focused WCF groups, direct correction, metalinguistic explanation, and direct correction plus metalinguistic explanation, outperformed the control group in improving the accurate use of the two target structures in the immediate posttest, but in the delayed posttest, the beneficial effects of direct correction were more durable for simple past tense. Similarly, Guo and Barrot (2019) examined whether two types of focused WCF, direct correction and metalinguistic explanation, increased Chinese EFL students' accurate use of regular and irregular simple past tenses and propositions indicating space. The results showed that both the two types of focused WCF improved students' performance in the three target linguistic structures in the posttest. Recently, Suzuki, Nassaji, and Sato (2019) researched the effects of focused WCF, targeting indefinite article and past perfect tense on L2 learners' text revision and new texts, revealing that while the focused WCF was effective for the two target structures in revised writing, it only improved the accurate use of past perfect in new texts.

These focused WCF studies have tackled the limitations of research designs in the early WCF studies (see Storch, 2010). First, such focused WCF studies include a real control group, which is only engaged in writing practice and does not receive any feedback. With a control group, the confounding variable of writing practice can be excluded. Second, these studies investigate the effectiveness of focused WCF on new writing immediately after WCF treatment and over time, instead of the effectiveness on only revised writing. Including new texts can examine whether such WCF contributes to developing learners' explicit knowledge. Finally, in these studies, participants complete their writing tasks in class rather than at home, which is a more appropriate task condition. Despite these improvements in research design, most of these studies used a one-off WCF treatment; that is, participants only received a single one episode of WCF session.

Although a great many WCF researchers have provided theoretical and empirical evidence on the usefulness of focused WCF, other scholars have raised their concern over this pedagogical practice due to its lack of ecological validity (e.g., Brown, 2012; Hartshorn & Evans, 2015; Storch, 2018; Xu, 2009). More specifically, teachers tend to correct linguistic errors extensively (Lee, 2008, 2009); teachers do not focus only on one or a few error categories when responding to students' writing in the authentic L2 writing classrooms. Therefore, it is less common that L2 writing teachers adopt focused feedback in their instruction (Ferris, 2010; Van Beuningen, 2010). As Karim and Nassaji (2020) argued, to yield more direct pedagogical benefits, WCF research should reflect the reality of L2 writing classrooms, and researchers should pay closer attention to comprehensive WCF.

Recent studies that focus exclusively on comprehensive WCF are relatively few, compared with studies on focused WCF, with conflicting results documented (e.g.,

Hartshorn et al., 2010; Karim & Nassaji, 2020; Nicolás–Conesa, Manchón, & Cerezo, 2019; Truscott & Hsu, 2008; Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2008, 2012) (see Table 2.4).

**Table 2.4 Studies of comprehensive WCF**

Studies	Participants	Effectiveness in revision	Effectiveness in new pieces of writing
Truscott & Hsu, 2008	47 upper intermediate ESL learners	√	×
Van Beuningen et al., 2008	62 secondary school DFL learners	√	√
Hartshorn et al., 2010	47 adult ESL learners	—	√
Van Beuningen et al., 2012	268 secondary school DFL learners	√	√
Karim & Nassaji, 2020	53 intermediate ESL learners	√	×
Nicolas-Conesa et al., 2019	46 intermediate EFL learners	√	×

As shown in Table 2.4, prior studies appear to agree that comprehensive WCF can impact favorably on general writing accuracy in text revision. Its effects on new pieces of writing, however, are inconclusive. For example, Truscott and Hsu (2008) inquired into the effects of comprehensive WCF with 47 upper-intermediate ESL learners as participants. They found that comprehensive WCF impacted positively on general accuracy in revision, but failed to transfer such effects to new texts. The findings were consistent with Karim and Nassaji's (2020) study, but in contrast with Van Beuningen, De Jong, and Kuiken (2008, 2012) whose investigation reported that comprehensive feedback contributed to overall accuracy during and beyond revision. The mixed findings may be attributed to various factors such as the complexity of

WCF, research settings, participants' linguistic proficiency, writing task genres, and different ways to assess the effects of WCF (Kang & Han, 2015; Karim & Nassaji, 2020).

Although the above studies have examined the efficacy of focused WCF and comprehensive WCF, respectively, we still have little knowledge as to which one is more effective. To address this concern, a few researchers have attempted to compare the effects of focused and comprehensive WCF, but the results are mixed (e.g., Ellis et al., 2008; Frear & Chiu, 2015; Rahimi, 2019; Sheen, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009). Ellis et al. (2008) examined the relative effects of focused and comprehensive WCF in the Japanese EFL context and found that there was no significant difference between these two types of WCF in helping students use English articles accurately. Likewise, Frear and Chiu (2015), investigating the relative effectiveness of focused and comprehensive indirect WCF, reported that these two types of WCF was equally effective in improving the accurate use of weak verbs and the general writing accuracy in new texts. In contrast, Sheen, Wright, and Moldawa (2009) found that students who received focused WCF were more accurate in the use of English articles than their peers who experienced comprehensive WCF. Caution needs to be exercised when we interpret these findings because of some limitations. For instance, as Ellis et al. (2008) acknowledged, the two types of WCF failed to be sufficiently distinguished in their study. In Sheen et al.'s (2009) study, the treatment of comprehensive WCF was not very systematic.

#### 2.2.3.2.3 Summary of the studies on WCF effects

According to the above reviews, WCF is beneficial in improving L2 learners' writing accuracy. However, the results of the existing WCF studies are mixed with the inconsistent results ascribed possibly to research design limitations (see Guénette,

2007; Liu & Brown, 2015; Storch, 2010), and the various methodologies used, as pointed out in Kang and Han (2015) and Storch (2010).

In terms of the flaws in designs, the early classroom-based research (prior to 2005) does not include a real control group, which received no WCF (e.g., Chandler, 2003; Kepner, 1991; Semke, 1984). A lack of control group undermines the reliability of the research results for the WCF effects. In addition, Ellis et al. (2008) did not distinguish carefully focused and comprehensive WCF, with more WCF provided to the focused WCF group. This may compromise the reliability of their research results. Another example illustrating limitations in methodology is Bitchener and Knoch's (2010a) study, in which the treatment groups also received written or oral metalinguistic explanations in addition to WCF at times. This may blur the effects of WCF reported by their study.

Various methodologies used may lead to the inconsistent results as well (Kang & Han, 2015; Storch, 2010). Firstly, researchers in above studies recruited participants with various demographic backgrounds, ranging from university students (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2009a; Shintani & Aubrey, 2016) to secondary school students (e.g., Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2008, 2012); from intermediate-level learners (e.g., Sheen, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009) to advanced learners (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2010b; Rummel & Bitchener, 2015); from EFL learners (e.g., Ellis et al., 2008; Sampson, 2012) to ESL learners (e.g., Bitchener, 2008; Frear & Chiu, 2015).

The number of feedback treatments also varies. In some studies, participants received sustained WCF. That is, multiple WCF sessions were provided (e.g., Chandler, 2003; Karim & Nassaji, 2020). However, the majority of studies adopted a one-shot WCF treatment (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2010a; Suzuki, Nassaji, & Sato, 2019). The different number of WCF treatment sessions makes the results difficult to compare.

In addition, the selection of writing tasks is also a confounding variable, which may lead to the inconsistent results between the above studies. A range of genres in writing tasks have been used such as argumentative writing (e.g., Ashwell, 2000; Geng, 2017), narrative (e.g., Chandler, 2003; Shintani & Ellis, 2013), picture description (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2010b), and journal (e.g., Lalande, 1982).

Another variable is the different ways to evaluate outcomes produced by WCF. Some of the studies reviewed have documented the favorable effects of WCF on revised writing (e.g., Ashwell, 2000; Fathman & Whalley, 1990), while other studies have verified that WCF can enhance students' writing accuracy in new texts (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b; S. Li & Roshan, 2019; Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2008, 2012).

The last variable contributing to the mixed results is the different measures of accuracy used which have included: Mean number of errors (e.g., Kepner, 1991); the ratio of the number of errors to the total number of words (e.g., Ashwell, 2000; Bitchener, 2008); errors per 100 words (e.g., Frear & Chiu, 2015); and error-free T-units (e.g., Hartshorn et al., 2010).

## **2.3 Teacher beliefs**

Teachers' beliefs guide teachers' performance in classrooms and their professional life (Borg, 2003); understanding teachers' beliefs, therefore, provides us with insights into their pedagogical practices (see Borg, 2019). This section begins with a brief overview of research on teachers' beliefs and then defines teachers' beliefs as used in the present study. Literature is then reviewed pertinent to the factors influencing teachers' beliefs, and the relationships between language teachers' beliefs and practices. This section concludes with focus on the relationships between L2 writing teachers' beliefs and

practices in written feedback.

### **2.3.1 An overview of research on teacher beliefs**

Prior to mid-1970s, teacher beliefs were undervalued by researchers because the behaviorist paradigm, which emphasized teachers' observable behaviors in classrooms but paid little attention to their mental process and factors underpinning their teaching process, predominated (Clark & Peterson, 1986). In this tradition, the efficacy of teaching practice is assessed by learners' learning outcomes, and so the relationship between teachers' behaviors (process) and students' learning achievements (product) is linear (Borg, 2015).

With the rise of cognitive psychology around the mid-1970s, teacher beliefs have been established as an important issue in the arena of education. This research agenda advocates that researchers should take teachers' mental life into consideration and that teachers' observable practices within their teaching contexts will be linked to their thinking (Borg, 2003; Woods, 1996). This research paradigm connects teachers' observable behaviors and the unseen thought processes underlying their behaviors (Sun, 2017).

From the perspective of cognitive psychology, a teaching process, in nature, is behavioral-cognitive (Clark & Peterson, 1986). While teachers' thought processes are unseen as they reside in teachers' minds, their actions are observable and easier to assess. As teachers' beliefs shape and guide what they do in practice, they are important for us to understand teachers' pedagogical behaviors (Burn, 1992). Since beliefs, as mental constructs, cannot be measured directly, teachers' beliefs can be elicited and inferred from their actions (Williams & Burden, 1997). In other words, teachers' teaching practices can reflect what they know and believe, and their knowledge and thinking can account for their behaviors in classrooms.

### **2.3.2 Defining teacher beliefs**

Before researchers conduct studies into teacher beliefs, it is necessary to present an accurate and clear definition of “belief”. This is not an easy task in that it is a “messy construct” (Pajare, 1992, p. 302). Although beliefs are regarded as one of the most valuable psychological constructs in teacher education, they are difficult to define and study. The difficulty can be ascribed to two aspects, which are explained as follows.

Firstly, the concept of beliefs is broad and includes a variety of specific issues (Bao, 2017) such as content-specific beliefs (e.g., beliefs about teaching subjects like reading, writing, and grammar), self-efficacy beliefs (e.g., beliefs concerning teachers’ capacity to influence students’ learning outcomes), and epistemological beliefs (e.g., beliefs regarding the nature and process of knowledge acquisition).

As beliefs are very difficult to operationalize and conceptualize, researchers are confronted by many interchangeable terms, which lead to “definitional confusion” (Borg, 2003, p. 83). Currently, approximately 60 distinctive terms have been employed to refer to beliefs (Borg, 2015). Examples of the alternative terms include “opinion”, “attitude”, “value”, “theory”, “maxim”, “conception”, and “practical principle” etc. (Borg, 2015; Pajares, 1992). Among the various synonyms for beliefs, the distinction between beliefs and knowledge has been discussed by researchers since there are some overlaps between the concepts. Some researchers believe that there is no point in distinguishing beliefs from knowledge, as these two concepts are intertwined, can be used interchangeably, and are synonymous (e.g., Calderhead, 1996; Kagan, 1992; Smith & Siegel, 2004). Grossman, Wilson, and Shulman (1989) refer to the two terms as “blurry at best” (p. 31). Woods (1996) even claimed that it might be impossible to make a distinction between beliefs and knowledge, and so proposed the concept of BAK (belief, assumption, and knowledge).



Conversely, other scholars have endeavoured to distinguish beliefs from knowledge. For example, according to Pajares (1992), “belief is derived from judgement and evaluation, whereas knowledge is based on objective fact” (p. 313). Based on systematic research on beliefs, Nespor (1987) proposed four main characteristics of beliefs, which can be used to differentiate them from knowledge: (1) *Existential presumption*, which refers to the propositions and assumptions that people hold about the existence and non-existence of an entity; (2) *alternativity*, which means that teachers attempt to create an ideal classroom atmosphere that differs from the reality; (3) *affective and evaluative aspect*, which includes feelings, attitudes, and subjective evaluations based on personal experience; and (4) *episodic storage*, that is, beliefs are stored as episode from experience and knowledge transmission. According to these four characteristics, it is feasible for researchers to make a theoretical distinction between beliefs and knowledge. However, in empirical studies, it is not realistic to distinguish beliefs from knowledge based on the data collected, and to illustrate the respective influence of teachers’ beliefs and knowledge on their teaching behaviors (Borg, 2006). Given such a reality, researchers are not encouraged to separate these two terms nor distinguish between them in empirical research (Calderhead, 1996; Kagan, 1992).

Currently, although there is a proliferation of terms in the literature on beliefs, most denote a similar concept; as Woods (1996) asserted, the various terms do not mean that scholars research conceptually different things. The many interchangeable terms, to a large extent, result in the difficulty in examining teacher beliefs. In summary, beliefs are a complex concept with a series of interchangeable terms and these terms share the main characteristics of beliefs.

Based on the above discussion, the operational definition of teachers’ beliefs in

this study is “the unobservable cognitive dimensions of teaching—what teachers know, believe and think” (Borg, 2003, p. 81; see also Borg, 2019). In other words, teachers’ beliefs include a set of psychologically-held assumptions, values, feelings, and attitudes towards teaching (Borg, 2015). Teachers’ beliefs, in this study, are used to refer to what NES and NNEST writing teachers know, believe, and think about written feedback and their teaching behaviors in the Chinese EFL context.

### **2.3.3 Factors influencing teacher beliefs**

Unquestionably, teacher beliefs are not formed overnight; teachers develop their beliefs regarding teaching and learning throughout their professional life (Flores, 2001; Johnson, 1994). In the existing literature, three factors contributing to teacher beliefs, schooling, professional coursework, and classroom experience, have been identified (Borg, 2006, 2015). The following paragraphs describe these factors to understand how they mediate teacher beliefs.

#### **2.3.3.1 Schooling**

Schooling refers to teachers’ previous learning experience as students in school. Previous learning experience is pivotal in the formation of teachers’ beliefs and is considered to be the most influential factor contributing to their beliefs (Borg, 2006; Johnson, 1994); Lortie (1975) termed this as an “apprenticeship of observation” (p. 61). Teachers have years of schooling experience before becoming teachers. While at school, they observe their teachers’ teaching methods, ideas, and principles. While they adopt those that they favor, they reject those that they do not support, and so the teaching methods or styles that influence teachers can be formed through their schooling experience. When they become teachers, their pedagogical practices with their students reflect the way they were taught. Therefore, teachers “internalize

specific behaviors as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ and decide what sort of teacher they would like to be in the future based on their learning experience” (Bailey et al., 1996, p. 15).

There is ample research in the literature documenting the considerable influence of prior learning experience on teachers’ beliefs. After the analysis of diary entries by 26 ESL teachers, Numrich (1996) reported that teachers decided to follow or reject some teaching techniques according to their positive or negative learning experience. Likewise, Ng, Nicholas, and Williams (2010) found that prior learning experience influenced pre-service teachers’ beliefs about effective teaching. More recently, Moodie (2016), drawing on reflective writing journals and follow-up interviews to examine English teachers’ beliefs and practices in the Korean EFL context, reported that teachers’ previous language learning experience profoundly influenced their beliefs about English language teaching. If they considered their language learning experience negative, they abandoned the teaching methods that their previous teachers adopted. Furthermore, not only does prior schooling experience exert considerable influence on teachers’ beliefs, but the influence is enduring (Lortie, 1975). Peacock’s (2001) longitudinal study investigating pre-service ESL teachers’ beliefs about L2 learning, reported that teachers’ beliefs were derived from their prior learning experience, and these beliefs changed little after a three-year training program.

Although many researchers have recognized previous schooling experience as an influential factor on teachers’ beliefs, their learning experience does not necessarily benefit their teaching practices, since students’ learning from their teachers based on observation is immature and incomplete. As Lortie (1975) claimed:

*“What students learn about teaching, then, is intuitive and imitative rather than explicit and analytic; it is based on individual personalities rather than pedagogical principles” (p. 62).*

### **2.3.3.2 Professional education and coursework**

Professional coursework, known as teacher education or teacher training, is recognized as another source of teachers' beliefs. Commonly, pre-service or student teachers have opportunities to receive teacher education to become qualified in-service teachers, while in-service teachers receive ongoing teacher training to enrich their pedagogical knowledge and develop their professional skills. Therefore, both pre-service and in-service teachers have opportunities to incorporate new teaching ideas and methods, which may influence their existing beliefs, or enable them to reframe their beliefs about teaching, after professional teacher education (Sun, 2017).

Although there is a controversy regarding the influence of professional training coursework on teachers' beliefs, many scholars consider that it is an influential factor contributing to their beliefs (Borg, 2011; Busch, 2010; Flores, 2002; Mattheoudakis, 2007; Sendan & Roberts, 1998). For example, Mattheoudakis (2007), with a longitudinal study probing into changes in pre-service teachers' beliefs after a three-year teacher education program, found that the majority of teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning changed, with only a few exceptions. Busch (2010), similarly, provided empirical evidence for the influence of teacher education, revealing that most student teachers attributed their changes in beliefs to professional coursework. Drawing on data from semi-structured interviews and feedback, Borg (2011) also explored the influence of teacher education programs on teachers' beliefs. His study showed that the eight-week education program impacted teachers' beliefs in two aspects: Some teachers reframed their beliefs due to the professional coursework; and other teachers consolidated and extended their beliefs based on their teacher education, which made their beliefs more explicit and well-articulated.

To conclude, in comparison with prior learning experience, professional

coursework exerts a comparatively moderate effect on teachers' beliefs. Despite this, it is still regarded as an essential source of pre-service and in-service teachers' beliefs.

#### **2.3.3.3 Classroom practices**

It is known that teachers' beliefs guide and inform their classroom practices. However, classroom practices, in turn, influence the formation of teachers' beliefs (Breen et al., 2001; Crookes & Arakaki, 1999; Phipps & Borg, 2009). In-service teachers, especially, may assess their pedagogical contexts, including teaching syllabus, workloads, students' proficiency and needs, and school policies, and evaluate their actual teaching practices against students' learning outcomes to improve their teaching efficacy (Calderhead, 1996), which may modify or strengthen their beliefs (Borg, 2015). Crookes and Arakaki (1999), after analyzing data from interviews and observations, reported that teachers tended to adjust their beliefs on the basis of their classroom practices and that their beliefs became more explicit. Phipps and Borg's (2009) case study examining three teachers' beliefs and practices about grammar teaching found that all the three teachers believed in a "focus-on-form" approach. Their teaching experience had helped them see that this approach was more effective in improving students' scores in examination.

Moreover, classroom practices may lead to differences between novice and experienced teachers' beliefs regarding language teaching and learning. For example, Tsui's (2003) study revealed that teachers' teaching experience influenced novice and experienced teachers' beliefs regarding language input for students. Novice teachers believed in the use of formal and complicated language in their teaching practices, whereas their experienced counterparts showed a preference for simple language. The author ascribed this difference to the two groups of teachers' teaching experience; novice teachers may overestimate students' ability to understand complex language

due to their lack of teaching experience. More recently, Crusan, Plakans, and Gebril (2016) surveyed L2 writing teachers' beliefs and practices regarding writing assessment. The results also showed that teachers' teaching experience mediated their beliefs about writing assessment significantly; novice teachers, surprisingly, tended to have more confidence in the knowledge they had about assessing writing than the experienced teachers.

In conclusion, after several years of professional life, teachers gradually accumulate teaching experience through classroom practices, gaining a better understanding of students' expectations and the effectiveness of teaching methods. Such experience alters or modifies teachers' beliefs consciously, or unconsciously, resulting in the observed differences between novice and experienced teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning. The routines that teachers develop from their classroom practices, however, may prevent them from incorporating new teaching ideas and adopting more suitable teaching methods. Experienced teachers, therefore, may be particularly reluctant to revise their self-espoused beliefs and firmly believe in the teaching approaches they use (Naruemon, 2013; Tsui, 2003).

#### **2.3.4 Relationships between language teachers' beliefs and practices**

The relationships between teachers' beliefs and their actual instructional practices have attracted considerable attention from researchers and scholars. Researchers on teachers' beliefs have concentrated on the extent to which teachers' beliefs are translated into their classroom practices, in order to have a better understanding of the teaching process through comparing what teachers say they should do (beliefs) with what they actually do in classrooms (practices). Despite much research on the belief-practice relationships, the relationships are not fully understood or clearly established. It is generally believed that the relationships are neither straightforward nor linear (Fang,

1996), but highly complex, cyclical, and interactive (Calderhead, 1991; Yu et al., 2020; Zhao, 2019). Whereas teachers' beliefs guide and rationalize their pedagogical practices, they are not always reflected in their instructional practices due to a range of factors. The following paragraphs review the literature from following perspectives: The matches and mismatches between teachers' beliefs and practices; and the factors mediating the relationships.

Since teachers' beliefs underpin and inform their actual practices, some studies have found a strong consistency between their beliefs and practices (e.g., Basturkmen, 2012; Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Farrell & Ives, 2015; Johnson, 1994; L. Yang & Gao, 2013). For instance, Farrell and Bennis (2013), exploring a novice and an experienced teacher's beliefs and classroom practices regarding language teaching, found that both teachers generally translated their self-held beliefs into their actual practices. Similarly, Johnson (1994) showed that teachers' beliefs, to a large extent, were manifested in their practices. For example, the practices of a teacher, who espoused the function-approach to literacy instruction, were coded as 93% function-based. Additionally, L. Yang and Gao's (2013) case study, examining four teachers' beliefs and practices in terms of EFL writing instruction, reported that many of their beliefs were mirrored by their classroom practices.

By contrast, copious research has revealed that teachers' deep-seated beliefs are not always fully realized by their practices with discrepancy between teachers' self-reported beliefs and their instructional practices (e.g., Bao, 2019; Basturkmen, Loewen, & Ellis, 2004; Gao, 2018; Kartchava et al., 2020; Liviero, 2017; Roothoof, 2014; Salteh & Sadeghi, 2015). For example, Bao (2019) reported that teachers' oral corrective feedback beliefs diverged from their practices in L2 Chinese classrooms with mismatches between their beliefs and practices in terms of the time providing

corrective feedback, commonly used corrective feedback strategies, and the amount of corrective feedback. Similarly, drawing on data from interviews, classroom observations, and think-aloud, Liviero (2017) reported that most teachers' beliefs were not consistent with their observed grammar instruction practices. For instance, teachers stated that students should be provided opportunities to apply grammatical structures communicatively; however, no teachers, when observed, offered such opportunities.

The mismatches between teachers' beliefs and practices can be attributed to a range of factors including teacher-related factors (i.e., teachers' prior learning experience and teaching experience) (e.g., Gao, 2018; Roothoof, 2014), student-related factors (i.e., students' needs/expectations/preferences and language proficiency) (e.g., Alkhatib, 2015; Gilliland, 2015; Nishino, 2012; Phipps & Borg, 2009), and various contextual factors (e.g., classroom management, school policies, examinations, and time constraints) (e.g., Alshahrani & Storch, 2014; Farrell & Lim, 2005; Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Lee, 2009). Farrell and Lim (2005) probed into two Singaporean English teachers' belief-practice relationships in grammar instruction and found that time constraints, examinations, and institutional policies were the main factors responsible for the incongruences between beliefs and practices. Phipps and Borg (2009), in a longitudinal case study to explore the tensions between teachers' beliefs and practices in grammar teaching, showed that student expectations, students' English proficiency, and classroom management greatly impacted the extent to which their beliefs matched their practices. Gilliland (2015) also looked into teachers' beliefs and practices in L2 writing instruction and reported some belief-practice mismatches. In his study, examinations took precedence over teachers' self-held beliefs, which prevented them from translating their beliefs into their actual practices fully.



Apart from the frequently referenced factors listed above, another factor contributing to the mismatches may be the approach used to elicit teachers' beliefs (Speer, 2005). Commonly, teachers' beliefs tend to be derived from self-report instruments (questionnaires), verbal commentaries (interviews, stimulated recalls, and think-aloud protocols), and reflective writings. These instruments can be effective and useful in eliciting explicit beliefs, but it is difficult for researchers to obtain the implicit beliefs, which guide teachers' unplanned and improvised pedagogical practices (Ellis, 2012). Consequently, the discrepancies may result from the difficulty in accessing implicit beliefs.

### **2.3.5 Relationships between teachers' beliefs and practices regarding written feedback**

After elaboration on language teachers' beliefs and practices in different fields above, this section discusses research on L2 teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to written feedback. In comparison with many studies on the effects of teacher written feedback, especially WCF, those on teachers' perspectives on giving written feedback are limited (Evans, Hartshorn, & Tuioti, 2010; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019). As with studies on teachers' beliefs and practices reviewed in section 2.3.4, there are convergences and divergences in the outcomes for L2 teachers' written feedback beliefs and practices.

A few studies have reported that teachers' beliefs are consistent with their practices in providing written feedback. Min's (2013) self-study, for instance, is a good example of convergent belief-practice relationships. Conducted in the Taiwanese EFL context, the study examined an EFL teacher's beliefs and practices concerning feedback provision. Based on the data collected from reflective journal, learning log

entries, as well as feedback on students' writing, the study suggested that the teacher's beliefs changed over a semester, shifting from identifying and responding to students' problems to understanding their intentions, and that this was translated into her feedback practices. Ferris (2014) also reported congruent relationships between teachers' written feedback beliefs and practices; the teachers reached a consensus that the emphasis in feedback provision should be placed on content and organization, which was evident in their actual practices. The teachers in Ferris' study said they believed general feedback on revisions and comments should be provided in the form of endnotes, which was supported by their practices. Finally, teachers in interviews stated that they should mark the error types and present metalinguistic explanations, which many of them indeed did.

However, a larger group of researchers have documented incongruences between teachers' beliefs and practices regarding written feedback (e.g., Alshahrani & Storch, 2014; Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Lee, 2009; Montgomery & Baker, 2007). Table 2.5 summarizes the details of the studies in this line.

In these studies, the research instruments included questionnaires and/or interviews to elicit teachers' espoused beliefs, and students' written texts with written feedback to examine how teachers responded to their students' writing. The research findings suggest that teachers' beliefs were incongruent with their practices in regard to the feedback focus. A majority of studies indicated that teachers believed in giving feedback on global issues (i.e., content and organization), but focused on local dimensions, particularly grammar, when providing written feedback in their practice.

Some important research gaps can also be observed. Firstly, although the current studies on teachers' written feedback beliefs and practices have been conducted in various L2 contexts, little has been reported on this aspect of EFL

teachers in mainland China, the largest EFL learning community globally (Zhu & Wang, 2019). Because of the powerful influence of context on teachers' beliefs and practices (Bao, 2019; Borg, 2006), more pertinent studies are needed in mainland China.

Secondly, to my knowledge, no study until now has explicitly set teachers' linguistic backgrounds (L1) as a variable, investigating written feedback beliefs and practices of NES and NNES teachers. Since these two groups of teachers share different sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds, which may influence their beliefs and practices (Horwitz, 1999), how do they view on and implement written feedback? What are the cross-cultural similarities and differences in their written feedback beliefs and practices?

Furthermore, few studies have comprehensively described teachers' written feedback beliefs and practices. The existing limited studies on L2 teachers' written feedback beliefs and practices are not systematic investigations; only few researchers have examined teachers' beliefs and practices regarding feedback focus, feedback scope, feedback strategy, and feedback orientation in a single study.

**Table 2.5 Disparity between teachers' written feedback beliefs and practices**

Studies	Methods	Major findings
Montgomery & Baker (2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Questionnaire with 13 tertiary ESL writing teachers</li><li>• Six students' compositions of the 13 teachers</li></ul>	Teachers' beliefs did not coordinate with their feedback practices in terms of feedback focus. They thought feedback should be provided in content and organization. However, they focused on grammar in practice.
Lee (2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Questionnaire with 206 secondary school teachers in the Hong Kong EFL context</li><li>• Follow-up interviews with 19 teachers</li><li>• Written feedback from 26 teachers</li><li>• Follow-up interviews with seven teachers</li></ul>	Ten mismatches between teachers' beliefs and practices were reported. For example, teachers' feedback was mainly on language and they provided feedback comprehensively and directly. These practices were inconsistent with their beliefs.
Alshahrani & Storch (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Semi-structured interviews with three EFL teachers</li><li>• 45 EFL students' first drafts with written feedback</li></ul>	The research findings showed that teachers' feedback concentrated on mechanics, which did not align with their self-stated beliefs. In interviews, they believed that WCF should be given on grammar or vocabulary.
Alkhatib (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Semi-structured interviews with EFL teachers</li><li>• 93 EFL students' texts with teacher written feedback</li></ul>	Teachers' beliefs and practices mismatched with regard to feedback strategies and the use of positive feedback: 1) They supported the use of direct feedback in belief, while using both direct and indirect feedback concurrently; 2) Despite their belief in positive feedback, they provided little positive feedback in practice.

Junqueira & Payant (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Interviews with a pre-service ESL teacher</li> <li>•The teacher's reflective journal</li> <li>•Four sets of essays with the teacher's written feedback</li> </ul>	This case study revealed a misfit between the pre-service teacher's belief and practice. She believed she should provide feedback on global aspects (i.e., content and organization). In practice, she provided much more feedback on local issues.
Salteh & Sadeghi (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Questionnaire with six university writing teachers</li> <li>•32 students' writing samples with teacher written feedback</li> </ul>	What they said and what they actually did was mismatched. The results from a questionnaire found that teachers showed a preference for providing feedback on content and organization. However, the feedback analysis revealed that they gave feedback mainly on local errors.
Mao & Crosthwaite (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with five Chinese EFL writing teachers</li> <li>•100 writing assignments with five teachers' written feedback</li> </ul>	This study found two mismatches between teachers' written feedback beliefs and practices: 1) The teachers believed in direct feedback but provided more indirect feedback in practice; 2) teachers' belief in giving feedback on global issues was incongruent with their practice in which feedback was provided primarily on local issues.

The next section discusses two groups of teachers, NES and NNES, the focus of this study. It presents the dichotomy between NES and NNES teachers' teaching in general English education, and the comparisons of NES and NNES teachers' assessment in L2 writing.

## **2.4 NES and NNES teachers**

With globalization, English is recognized as a lingua franca in the modern world and an increasing number of NES teachers flood into non-English speaking countries to teach English. China serves as a good example. Universities and colleges, and even primary and secondary schools in China annually recruit a great number of NES teachers to teach English (Rao, 2010; Rao & Yu, 2019). Therefore, NES teachers have become an integral part of community of English teachers in China and other similar EFL countries (Rao & Yuan, 2016). Commonly, NES teachers, due to their proficient use of English, are regarded as English language authorities and as ideal English teachers as well as models for EFL/ESL learners, whereas NNES teachers are considered to be inferior to their NES peers in terms of English knowledge and performance (Cook, 2005, Ma, 2012a). Against such a backdrop, comparisons between expatriate NES and local NNES EFL teachers' teaching has been brought to the fore (Cheung & Braine, 2007; Clark-Gareca & Gui, 2019). In this section, the dichotomy between NES and NNES teachers' instructional behaviors is first presented. Then, prior studies on NES and NNES teachers' assessment in L2 writing are examined.

### **2.4.1 Dichotomy between NES and NNES teachers' teaching behaviors**

In the extant literature, researchers have investigated differences in teaching practices

between NES and NNES teachers based on their own self-perceptions. As the pioneers in this field, Reves and Medgyes (1994) administered a questionnaire to 216 NES and NNES teachers in ten different countries, in response to which the majority of the respondents perceived that there were differences in teaching behaviors of NES and NNES teachers. They summarized a range of differences in three dimensions: Use of English, general attitude, and attitude towards language teaching (see Table 2.6). Likewise, using the Reves and Medgyes' (1994) questionnaire with 17 NNES TESOL graduates in the US, Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) explored participants' perceptions of the differences between NES and NNES teachers' teaching in English instruction. The findings supported Reves and Medgyes' (1994) study in which the participants considered NES teachers to be fluent and accurate with a good understanding of the subtleties of the language and emphasizing communication instead of examinations. In contrast, these participants thought that NNES teachers seemed to be textbook-centered, pay more attention to examinations, but be more sensitive to students' learning needs. The participants responded that they believed NES teachers were not superior to their NNES peers in language teaching. As they thought, the effectiveness of teaching hinged on a variety of factors including students' linguistic proficiency, their age, teaching objectives, and teachers' professional skills.

**Table 2.6 Differences between NES and NNES teachers' teaching behaviors**

NES teachers	NNES teachers
<b>Use of English</b>	
Speak better English	Speak poorer English
Use English more confidently	Use English less confidently
Use real English	Use bookish English
<b>General attitude</b>	
Adopt a more flexible approach	Adopt a more guided approach
More innovative	More cautious

Less emphatic	More emphatic
Attend to perceived need	Attend to real need
Have far-fetched expectations	Have realistic expectations
More casual	Stricter
Less committed	More committed
<hr/> <b>Attitude to teaching the language</b> <hr/>	
Less insightful	More insightful
Focus on fluency, meaning, language in use, oral skills and colloquial registers	Focus on accuracy, form, grammar rules, printed word and formal registers
Teach items in context	Teach items in isolation
Prefer free activities	Prefer controlled activities
Favor group/pair work	Favor classroom fronted work
Use a variety of materials	Use a single textbook
Tolerate errors	Correct/punish for errors
Set fewer tests	Set more tests
Resort to no/less translation	Resort to more translation
Assign less homework	Assign more homework

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Medgyes (1994, p.58-59).

Arva and Medgyes (2000) conducted similar research in an EFL context, which was different to prior studies, as their study collected data from classroom observation, as well as semi-structured interviews with teachers to triangulate data. Based on the data from five NES and five NNES teachers, the findings reported a range of differences between NES and NNES teachers' teaching practices. For example, in their study, NES teachers could use English proficiently and confidently, employed flexible teaching approaches, and used different types of class activities. In comparison, NNES teachers relied on coursebooks, corrected their students' errors diligently, and emphasized examinations.

In sum, the above studies tended to utilize narratives, interviews, and questionnaires to examine the differences between NES and NNES teachers' teaching



behaviors in general English instruction. These studies, therefore, depended mainly on teachers' self-accounts to identify the two groups of teachers' teaching differences, strengths, and weaknesses.

In contrast to these studies, which are based on teachers' self-reported data, other studies have examined NES and NNES teachers' teaching differences from students' perspectives (e.g., Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Cheung & Braine, 2007; Ma, 2012b). For example, in a study of 442 EFL learners from Hungary, Benke and Medgyes (2005) compared EFL students' perceptions of NES and NNES teachers' teaching. The study revealed that students reported NNES teachers were better than their NES peers in teaching and explaining grammar as well as providing thorough preparation for examinations, whereas NES teachers were friendlier and facilitated students' spoken English. In the Hong Kong EFL context, Cheung and Braine (2007) explored university students' perceptions about NNES teachers and their weaknesses in English teaching. In their study, students generally valued NNES teachers because of their effective pedagogical skills, knowledge in English, and positive personal characteristics; they thought that NNES teachers taught as well as their NES counterparts. On the other hand, NNES teachers had weaknesses in language teaching because of their examination-oriented pedagogical practices, over-correction of students' work, and little use of English in class. More recently, Ma (2012b) conducted semi-structured group interviews to elicit Hong Kong secondary school students' perceptions. The study reported that NNES teachers had the advantages: The shared L1 with students, their sensitivity to students' learning difficulties, and the ease of understanding their teaching; NES teachers were valued for their higher English proficiency and ability to facilitate students' learning.

To summarize, the existing literature investigates the dichotomy of the two

groups of teachers' teaching behaviors on the basis of either teachers' self-reports or students' perceptions. Although the studies are conducted from different perspectives, they share some research findings. That is, NNES teachers are not inferior to NES teachers in language teaching and each of the groups of teachers have respective advantages. For instance, NNES teachers, in these studies, were good at teaching grammar, as well as having a good understanding of students' learning difficulties and needs. In contrast, NES teachers tended to have higher English proficiency and teach oral English more effectively. Both NES and NNES teachers have advantages which they contribute to teaching English. They complement each other and exercise their own language advantages to facilitate their students' language learning (Su, 2019). In this sense, it appears that teachers' linguistic backgrounds are not a single specific factor that determines teachers' teaching effectiveness.

#### **2.4.2 Comparisons between NES and NNES teachers' assessment in L2 writing**

The section examines the studies which compare NES and NNES teachers' assessment in L2 writing. Research into assessment can enable insights into how teachers may approach giving feedback. Assessment in writing is regarded as a social activity, in which teachers' sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds play an important role in their assessment behaviors (Su, 2019). Studies in this line can be classified into two broad categories: The comparisons of NES and NNES teachers' scoring, and teachers' identification of errors.

Currently, many studies have examined whether and how teachers' L1 influences their rating practices; an agreement has not yet been achieved. For example, Song and Caruso's (1996) investigation of the differences in scoring of ESL students'

essays by NES and NNES instructors indicated that NNES teachers were stricter with holistic score of writing than their NES colleagues, but there was no significant difference in analytical scoring between the two groups of teachers. Similarly, Kim and Gennaro (2012) reported on a study, in which eight NES and nine NNES teachers were recruited and asked to rate EFL learners' writing. Findings, which aligned with Song and Caruso (1996), showed that NNES teachers were more stringent than their NES counterparts in assigning overall scores.

However, some research has reported different results. Connor-Linton (1995) recruited 26 NES and 29 NNES teachers to compare their grading of Japanese EFL learners' writing. No significant difference between the two groups of teachers' holistic scores was reported. Aside from the quantitative scoring, they also examined NES and NNES teachers' qualitative justifications for their scores. Based on their qualitative responses, NES teachers paid more attention to the quality of high-order dimensions of writing, whereas their NNES colleagues focused more on linguistic accuracy. Following Connor-Linton's study, Shi (2001) invited 23 NES and 23 NNES teachers to score ten Chinese EFL learners' writing. The study revealed that NES and NNES teachers did not differ significantly in holistic scoring. However, the analysis of teachers' reasons for their scoring showed that NES teachers put emphasis on students' linguistic quality, while NNES teachers were more concerned with content and general organization.

As well as comparative studies of NES and NNES teachers' grading, researchers have investigated the two groups of teachers' perceptions of error gravity in L2 writing (e.g., Hyland & Anan, 2006; James, 1977; Porte, 1999; Rao & Li, 2017). As one of the early studies on this issue, James (1977) presented the participants (20 NES and 20 NNES teachers) with 50 written sentences, each of which had an error

made by EFL learners and asked them to identify the errors. The research showed that NES teachers, in general, were more tolerant about errors than NNES teachers. Porte (1999), similarly, undertook a study to address the differences between NES and NNES teachers in the evaluation of errors. In his study, 14 NES and 16 NNES teachers were invited to respond to a series of sentences produced by L2 students, each of which contained an error. This study also reported a gap in error identification between the two groups of teachers. NES demonstrated a more lenient attitude towards correcting errors than NNES teachers. To discover whether there were differences in teachers' assessment of errors in a different L2 context, Hyland and Anan (2006) included three groups, NNES teachers, NES teachers, and native non-teachers in their study. The participants were required to identify and correct errors in a piece of English writing by a Japanese EFL learner. They also reported that NNES teachers were more severe than their NES peers in identifying errors in L2 writing. More recently, Rao and Li's (2017) study, in the Chinese EFL context, investigated NES and NNES EFL teachers' assessment of errors in writing samples by a cohort of Chinese EFL learners. Consistent with previous studies, they found that in comparison with NES teachers, NNES teachers showed less tolerance for students' linguistic errors in writing, attributing difference between NES and NNES teachers' identification of errors to four factors: Cultural beliefs, educational background, teaching style, and English proficiency.

To sum up, the previous studies discussed above contribute to our knowledge in the disparities between NES and NNES teachers' scoring and their evaluation of errors in L2 writing. Although the results are contentious in terms of comparing NES and NNES teachers' scoring, researchers, to date, seem to reach a consensus that NES teachers tend to be more lenient of language errors than NNES teachers. Thus,

teachers' L1 backgrounds (i.e., NES vs. NNES) seem to play a role in their writing assessment. Considering that teachers' assessment practices of writing can be informative to their feedback practices, such a variable may influence their feedback provision, which establishes a rationale for this study.

## **2.5 Theoretical frameworks**

### **2.5.1 Activity Theory**

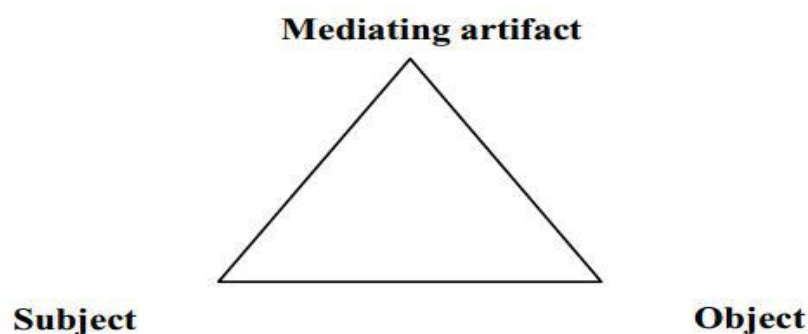
Activity Theory (AT) is a sub-theory of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) (Vygotsky, 1978). It was Leont'ev and Engeström who developed it into a mature and well-established theory, which emphasizes that sociocultural contexts play an important role in understanding human activity (Engeström, 2001). AT is defined as "a philosophical and cross-disciplinary framework for examining different forms of human practices as developmental processes, with both individual and social levels interlinked at the same time" (Kuutti, 1996, p. 25). It was developed from the concept of mediation in SCT, which posits that humans utilize material (e.g., books, computers and pens) and symbolic tools (e.g., language, sign and religion) to manage the relationships between themselves and the external world. AT, therefore, provides a useful theoretical lens to understand better human activity related to mediating artefacts in the historical, social, and cultural context. Framed within AT, teacher written feedback, in this study, is anchored in a broad sociocultural context and AT provides a good understanding of teachers' written feedback practices in the Chinese EFL context.

AT has experienced several developments, each of which makes the theory more complex and comprehensive. Currently, there are three versions of AT, referred to as generations of AT, which the next paragraphs briefly introduce.

The first version of AT, proposed by Vygotsky in the late 1920s, focuses on the connection between stimulus and response, highlighting the central role of mediation. As Robertson (2008) argued:

*First generation Activity Theory represents activity at an individual level and is based on the assumption that tools (artefacts) mediate between the subject and the object. These tools (artefacts) such as physical tools...are created and/or transformed in the course of an activity (p. 819).*

Described by the basic triangle in Figure 2.1, the first generation of AT consists of three components: Subject, mediating artefacts, and object. Specifically, the subject takes actions to achieve the object, and this process is mediated (facilitated or constrained) by artefacts that transform the relationship between humans and others, and the world. Since this version of AT emphasizes mediating artefacts, they are situated at the top of the triangle. However, as the unit of analysis of the first generation AT remains individually focused, it cannot be applied to address a collective activity (Engeström, 2001).



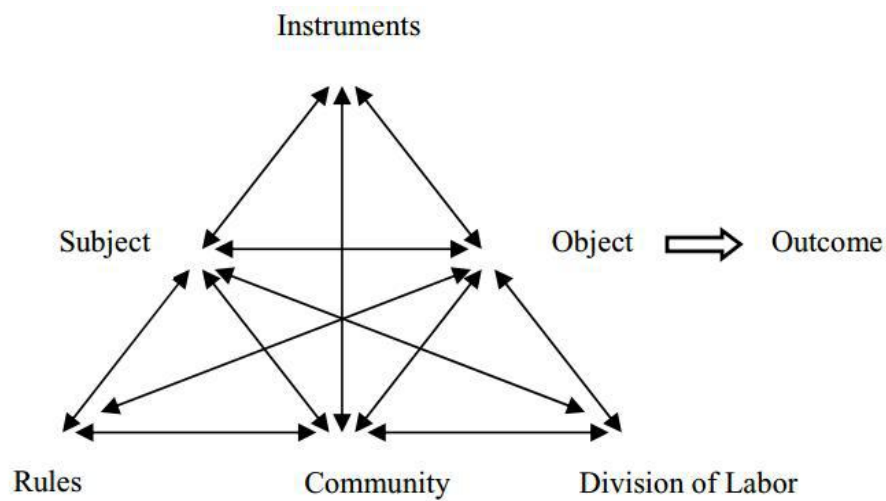
**Figure 2.1 The first generation AT (Engeström, 2001, p. 134)**

Due to such a shortcoming in the initial version of AT, the second generation AT was developed by Leont'ev to overcome the limitation, and to make the

relationships between humans and sociocultural context clearer. In this generation of AT, Leont'ev (1981) distinguished action from activity. In the second generation AT, actions are performed by individuals to achieve their own goals, while an activity is collective instead of being individual. Leont'ev also contributed to AT by formulating a scheme which includes three interconnected hierarchical levels: Activity, action, and operation. The level of activity is oriented towards motive, which is implemented by community and/or society; the level of action is driven by an individual's goal and is performed by individuals or groups; and the level of operation is directed by condition(s), which is carried out by individuals.

Engeström expanded and advanced Leont'ev's work making the social and contextual dimensions, where an activity takes place, more complex. Unlike the first generation AT, which includes only three components, this model of AT is composed of six components: Subject, tools (instruments/artefacts), object, rules, community, and division of labor. Of the six components, subject, tools, and object are at the top of sub-triangle, which indicates that the actions of an individual or a group are embedded in a collective activity system. Like the first generation AT, the subject refers to the individual or subgroup whose agency is selected as the point of view in the analysis; the object is the orientation towards which the activity is directed, and it can be transformed into an outcome with the help of tools (both physical and symbolic instruments). The other three constructs (community, rules, and division of labor), the less noticeable mediators of an activity, are new additions to the AT and are situated at the bottom of the model. The community refers to individuals or groups sharing the same object. The rules include explicit or implicit norms and values that define the actions within an activity system. The division of labor is defined as the horizontal division of tasks among the members of the community and the

hierarchical power relationships (Engeström, 1993; Yu, 2014).

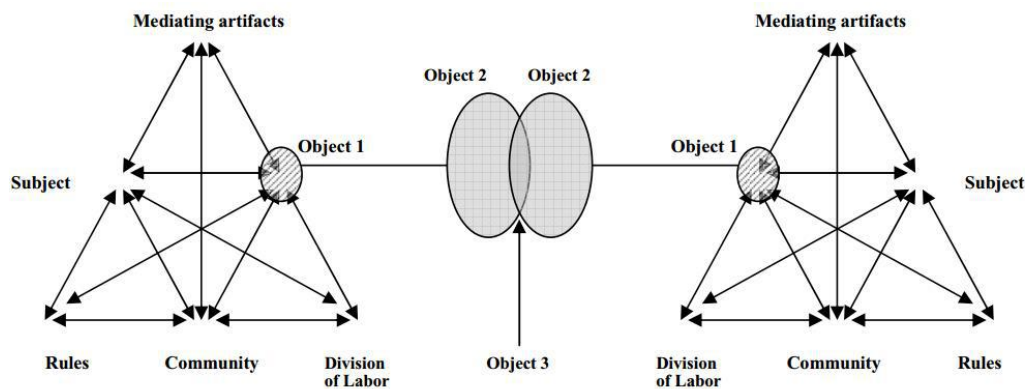


**Figure 2.2 The second generation AT (Engeström, 2001, p. 135)**

Currently, this triangular model of the activity system is a widely used graphic model and a lens for interpreting human activity (Yu, 2014). As such a model, however, fails to take different voices or views within the activity system into consideration, the third generation AT was produced.

The third generation AT proposed by Engeström (2001) to remedy the limitation of second generation AT is schematized in Figure 2.3, in which an activity happens in a community with multiple voices or viewpoints (Bitchener & Storch, 2016). This generation of AT is an empowering theoretical tool to address dialogical problems in an interactional activity system (Marwan & Sweeney, 2019). According to Figure 2.3, the third generation AT involves two interacting systems, each of which has an identifiable object. Since this model includes multiple voices/viewpoints, it may result in contradictions and tensions between the two interrelated systems. The third version of AT is developed based on multiple intersecting activity systems, which share a partial object.





**Figure 2.3 The third generation AT (Engeström, 2001, p. 136)**

To sum up, AT stresses the contexts, since contexts facilitate or constrain human activities in which they are situated. AT provides a useful sociocultural framework to map, interpret, and analyze human activities, as it is concerned with how humans deal with contexts through the mediating artefacts to realize the object. During such a process, humans are not passive individuals, subject to the context. Instead, they are active agents who act on the world and engage in the activity (Lantolf, 2000; Yu, 2014).

For this study, the second generation AT was employed to analyze NES and NNEST teachers' written feedback practices in the Chinese EFL context and identify the factors influencing their decision-making when providing feedback. The rationale for applying Engeström's second generation AT was that this study was only concerned with teachers' behaviors with feedback provision, rather than the interaction between teachers and students in feedback provision (Bitchener & Storch, 2016; Storch, 2018). Conceptualized from AT, teacher written feedback can be interpreted more comprehensively and broadly, not just as an instructional practice that helps students improve their learning performance. From the perspective of AT, the provision of written feedback by teachers, as in this study, occurs in specific pedagogical settings rather than in a social vacuum (Lee, 2014). Teachers' actions are

influenced, and mediated by the constructs within the system: Subject, object, tools, rules, community, and division of labor.

Applying AT to teacher written feedback in this study, the subject is the participating NES and NNES teachers. Their actions are mediated by a series of physical or non-physical artefacts such as teachers' beliefs and knowledge, teacher education, and their prior learning experience. Through such artefacts, they direct their actions to an object (i.e., providing their students with written feedback). The community comprises different stakeholders (e.g., students, teachers, and administrators). This community has some explicit and implicit rules including school policies, norms, and cultural values. The division of labor is associated with the hierarchical power relationships between teachers and administrators as well as between teachers and students. Based on the above, AT establishes a link between L2 writing teachers' written feedback practices and the sociocultural contexts in which they are embedded. Doing so demonstrates how teachers implement such a pedagogical practice within the sociocultural contexts of their work. It can also account for why their actual practices differ from those practices espoused by their beliefs, if any, due to the different constructs (i.e., instruments, rules, community, and division of labor) within the activity system.

To summarize, AT is a promising theoretical lens to investigate teachers' written feedback practices within a particular sociocultural context, in which teachers, and other members in the community are situated. Informed by AT, this study can elucidate under the influence of different constructs within the activity system, how NES and NNES teachers with different sociocultural and historical backgrounds implemented written feedback in their educational environment within which they operated.

### **2.5.2 Trade-off Hypothesis**

As a well-known theory in the sphere of research on task complexity, Trade-off Hypothesis, which corresponds to the theories of working memory, informs task design and implementation, as well as makes predictions for the effects of task manipulation on L2 production (Rahimi & Zhang, 2018). Trade-off Hypothesis, operationalized in the Limited Attention Model, posits that L2 learners have limited attentional resources when executing a task and can only attend to one aspect of language (i.e., complexity, accuracy, and fluency, CAF for short) at a time when performing a task (Skehan, 1998, 2009). It is likely that L2 learners improve in one area of language production (CAF) at the expense of others because of limited attention. That is, there may be a competition among the three aspects of language relating to L2 production. In addition to a trade-off among CAF, Skehan (1998, 2009) postulates that there is a competition between language and high-order dimensions relating to L2 production.

Informed by the Trade-off Hypothesis, it is predicted that global feedback (i.e., feedback on content and organization) may focus L2 learners' attention on content and organization, so they probably pay little attention to language in subsequent writing tasks, thus compromising their performance in linguistic aspects of new texts. A few studies, however, have refuted this prediction. For instance, Kepner (1991) found that global feedback improved the ideational quality of students' texts, but did not show a negative influence on grammatical accuracy. Similarly, Rastgou (2016) investigating the effects of global feedback on L2 learners' performance on both local and global dimensions of writing, found that such feedback showed no effects on writing accuracy, but contributed to students' improvement in syntactic complexity, fluency, content and organization.

By contrast, it is hypothesized that with WCF, L2 learners pay much attention to the accuracy of linguistic forms and probably have few attentional resources available to process linguistic complexity and increase fluency, which may hinder their performance of these two dimensions in writing that follows. In other words, accuracy improvement produced by WCF may compromise linguistic complexity and fluency (Nassaji, 2020). Such a prediction aligns with Truscott's (2007) claim that to enhance accuracy, WCF recipients would shorten and simplify their writing. To date, only a few WCF studies have assessed accuracy along with complexity and/or fluency in L2 learners' subsequent writing. Of the limited studies that could be accessed, this prediction was supported by Kepner (1991) and Semke (1984), but rejected by others (e.g., Chandler, 2003; Hartshorn et al., 2010; Rahimi, 2009; Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2012). Rahimi (2009), for example, found that students, who were under error correction treatment also improved syntactic complexity. Writing fluency was not affected negatively by WCF in Chandler's (2003) study. Instead, WCF appeared to benefit the development of fluency. As asserted by Skehan (1998), teacher written feedback should foster students' balanced development in CAF. Thus, the effects of WCF on complexity and fluency should be taken into consideration as well.

Given the trade-off between language and high-order dimensions of L2 production, it can be hypothesized that WCF directs students' attention to, and enhances language, which may mean little attention is directed to high-order dimensions of writing (i.e., content and organization), thus adversely impacting the quality of content and organization. At present, little is known regarding the effects of WCF on content and organization (Rahimi, 2019). To my knowledge, two studies (Hartshorn & Evans, 2015; Hartshorn et al., 2010) have attempted to address this issue, and reported that WCF showed no impacts on rhetoric appropriateness in

writing, although it contributed significantly to accuracy in L2 learners' new writing. The findings, however, do not support the trade-off effect between language and high-order dimensions of L2.

From exiting studies, the effects of teacher written feedback are incomplete (Hartshorn et al., 2010; Rahimi, 2009, 2019), with prior studies concentrating mainly on whether teacher written feedback impacts accuracy (Guo & Barrot, 2019). According to the Trade-off Hypothesis, the gains in accuracy probably come at the cost of other dimensions of writing. Thus, to contextualize writing accuracy, other important indexes related to writing performance such as complexity, fluency, content, and organization need to be included (Hartshorn & Evans, 2015; Nassaji, 2020).

## **2.6 Research gaps**

From a review of the studies presented in Chapter 2, some major research gaps are identified as follows:

- Few studies in the Chinese EFL context have focused on L2 teachers' espoused feedback beliefs, actual feedback practices in writing classrooms, and the relationships between their feedback beliefs and practices (Lee, 2013a, 2017; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019).
- In these limited studies, it appears that there are few comparative studies on NES and NNES teachers' written feedback beliefs and practices. Researchers have mainly focused on NES and NNES teachers' scoring of L2 writing and their perceptions of the seriousness of errors in L2 writing. Little is known about what NES and NNES think about, and how they enact written feedback in mainland Chinese tertiary EFL classrooms. Given teachers' beliefs and pedagogical practices are culturally and contextually dependent (Bao, 2019;

Ko, 2010), this issue deserves to be on researchers' agenda.

- In the burgeoning studies investigating the effects of teacher written feedback, single or limited measures were adopted (i.e., specific and/or overall accuracy) (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2010a; Frear & Chiu, 2015; Shintani & Ellis, 2013). There is little knowledge about the effects of teacher written feedback on other dimensions of writing such as complexity, fluency and the quality of content as well as organization. From the Trade-off Hypothesis perspective, measuring accuracy without considering other dimensions of writing is pointless (Hartshorn et al., 2010). Polio (2017) suggested intervention studies should focus on dimensions of L2 writing other than accuracy.
- Previous studies have employed predominantly (quasi-) experimental research designs with the pretest, the immediate posttest, and the delayed posttest to explore the effects of teacher written feedback, but do not take students' perceptions into account. Qualitative data is largely absent in these studies to explore how students perceive the effects (Guo & Barrot, 2019; Storch, 2010; Van Beuningen, 2010). Without such data, a better understanding of how teacher written feedback impacts students' writing performance is not possible.

The present study was designed for the following purposes to address some of the gaps in research literature. The initial case study explored NES and NNES (with English and Chinese as L1, respectively) teachers' written feedback beliefs and practices in the Chinese tertiary EFL context, identifying differences and similarities between the two groups of teachers' feedback beliefs and practices. The follow-up quasi-experimental study examined the effects of their feedback on Chinese EFL

learners' writing, which was assessed by multiple indexes (i.e., content, organization and overall writing quality; writing accuracy, complexity and fluency). To complement the quantitative data, an open-ended questionnaire elicited students' perceptions of the impacts of teacher written feedback on different dimensions of writing. (Creswell, 2014).

The ensuing chapter describes and introduces the research design and methodology, including participants, data collection and analysis, as well as ethical considerations.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Chapter overview**

This chapter describes the research design and methodology of this study, starting with the research paradigms which justify the employment of a mixed-methods approach in this study. The ensuing sections provide a thorough and detailed explanation of the present study, including participants, data collection, and analysis for each phase. Finally, approaches to improving the research quality and the ethical issues related to this study are discussed.

#### **3.2 Research paradigms**

Paradigms, or worldviews, refer to the philosophical perspectives that underpin and guide research (Creswell, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 1986). That is, paradigms are a cluster of beliefs and orientations about how to view and study the world. Currently, there are three main paradigms in the literature: Positivism, constructivism, and pragmatism, which inform different research approaches (Creswell, 2014). Positivism tends to employ quantitative approaches to address research questions, while constructivism favors qualitative approaches. The positivism-constructivism dichotomy has previously led to debates over quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative studies employ (quasi-) experiments or questionnaires to gather numeric data and analyze them using statistical tools to test a hypothesis, whereas qualitative studies use interviews, observations, and open-ended questionnaires to collect text or image data to provide thick descriptions of phenomena



which are under investigation. While both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses, the third paradigm—pragmatism emerged, which advocates the use of a mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 1986). The mixed-methods approach, using both quantitative and qualitative methods, is of great use in that it can “clarify and explain relationships found to exist between variables in depth and confirm or cross-validate relationships among them” (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012, p. 558). As a problem-oriented paradigm, pragmatism was considered to be appropriate for the present study because it provides researchers with the freedom to employ both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to have a deeper and broader insight into the research questions.

The present study was concerned with teachers’ written feedback beliefs, practices, and effects. To achieve the research objectives, this study comprised a case study and a quasi-experimental study, including both quantitative and qualitative data. Consistent with principles of pragmatism that there are multiple sources of data to address research questions effectively (Denscombe, 2008), data were collected from semi-structured interviews, students’ written texts, stimulated recalls, writing tests, and post-treatment questionnaires to answer the research questions of this study.

### **3.3 Pilot study**

Before finalizing the research design of the main study, I implemented a pilot study, which took approximately three weeks, to test the research instruments and procedures for data collection in the initial case study. A pilot study was conducted only for the phase one study because of its importance in the research design, and also due to time constraints. As the present study adopted an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, the initial case study paved the way for the phase two study; it enabled the

development of the independent variables used in the following quasi-experimental study.

### 3.3.1 Participants

Two EFL teachers who were responsible for English writing courses at that time were invited to be the participants (see Table 3.1). The two teachers were recruited using a purposive sampling method (Creswell, 2014). The following criteria were considered in the selection of teacher participants for the pilot study:

- The teachers were willing to participate in the pilot study
- The teachers needed to be Chinese L1 and English L1 speakers
- The teachers needed to have at least two years teaching experience in EFL writing

**Table 3.1 Demographic information on the two case teachers**

Name (pseudonym)	First language	Gender	Age	EFL writing teaching experience
Jenny	English	Female	46	4 years
Lei	Chinese	Male	38	6 years

The ten tertiary EFL students participating in the pilot session were chosen using a convenience sampling technique. Of the ten students, four were female and six were male; they were second-year students from different majors such as economics, law, and management. Their ages ranged from 19-21 with at least 8-year English learning experience.

### 3.3.2 Data collection procedures

At the beginning of the pilot study, I carefully explained the purposes and procedures in data collection to both teacher and student participants. The two teachers were

interviewed about their beliefs on feedback provision, provided feedback for the ten students' writing samples, and participated in stimulated recalls after providing feedback. The ten participating students were asked to complete a writing task, with the same prompt, within 40 minutes.

Firstly, before conducting the interviews, I contacted the two teachers to arrange the time and place for the interviews with each interview lasting 30-45 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded with the teachers' permission. Due to the time constraints, I also made notes during the interview process so that I could readily understand teachers' written feedback beliefs without referring back to the audio-recordings too often.

The ten students were asked to write an argumentative essay based on the same writing prompt. They completed the essay writing task within 40 minutes, and the essays were no less than 150 words. All the students' writing samples were collected, photocopied, and sent to the two teachers for their feedback. To check whether the feedback they provided was in accordance with their usual practices, I also collected several writing samples from their own students on which they had given feedback.

Shortly after they had completed the feedback, I implemented the stimulated recalls with the two teachers so that I could understand teachers' decision-making and the reasons for any inconsistencies between their feedback beliefs and practices. Before the stimulated recalls, I compared the teachers' interviews and their feedback practices to develop stimulated recall interview questions. Both teachers were interviewed in the form of stimulated recall for approximately 30 minutes and their interviews were audio-recorded.

In summary, three sets of data were collected: (1) Two recordings of 30-45-minute teacher interviews; (2) ten students' writing samples with teacher feedback; (3)

two 30-minute stimulated recall interviews with teachers.

Since the main purposes of this pilot study were to validate the instruments for data collection and familiarize myself with the data collection procedures, I did not analyze the collected data in depth.

### **3.3.3 Implications for the main study**

The pilot session enabled me to test the tools for data collection and to refine the procedures for implementing the following main study; it also revealed some problems and limitations in the original research design. As a result, the following changes to the main study based on the pilot study were drawn.

#### **1). Participants' selection criteria**

(a) The pilot study recruited the participants based on three criteria including teachers' availability, L1, and EFL writing teaching experience. These three criteria failed to control other confounding variables, which might affect the reliability of research findings. It was decided to include criteria such as teachers' qualifications and their majors when selecting participants for the main study.

#### **2). Data collection instruments**

(a) In the pilot study, the samples used for eliciting teachers' written feedback were written by ten EFL learners with the same prompt. It was decided, however, that the writing samples for analyzing feedback practices in the main study would be from the participating teachers' own students in their writing courses because it was a more natural and uncontrolled way to obtain written text samples. Furthermore, in comparing the teachers' feedback practices in the pilot study and their usual practices, there were still some inconsistencies, especially in the scope of feedback. The two

teachers corrected a limited number of errors in the pilot study, which contradicted their usual practices in which their feedback targeted a range of error types. Thus, the collection process for students' writing samples for feedback analysis used in the pilot study was abandoned.

(b) In the pilot study, teachers attributed the mismatches between written feedback beliefs and practices to requirements stipulated by some documents. It was decided, therefore, some documents including school policies, textbooks for writing course, and writing syllabus would be gathered in the main study as the complementary data to provide contextual information of teachers' feedback practices for this study.

### 3). Coding scheme for practices in feedback focus

(a) In the original research design, teachers' feedback focus was categorized from three dimensions: Content, organization, and language. However, in the pilot study, teachers' feedback on writing samples indicated that such a coding scheme was too general, especially for content and organization. Hence, the coding scheme of feedback focus would be refined and revised for the main study.

## **3.4 Overview of the research design in the main study**

An overview of the research design is presented in Table 3.2 and Figure 3.1. It combined a case study and a quasi-experimental study; the case study was used to respond to questions 1-3, while the data from the quasi-experimental study responded to questions 4-5.

### **3.4.1 Case study**

In the phase one study, a case study was utilized to investigate the two groups of

teachers' beliefs and practices regarding written feedback, and the relationships between their beliefs and practices. This section briefly introduces and justifies the case study approach.

A case study has been defined by different researchers in different ways (e.g., Creswell, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1994). For example, a case study is known as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1994, p. 23). Although the definitions of case studies vary, two points in common can be summarized. One is that unlike (quasi-) experimental studies, which take place in a highly controlled context, a case study tends to be conducted in a natural environment. A case study focuses on the uniqueness of the cases and analyzes the events or conditions relevant to the cases in depth to gain insights into the cases in the naturally occurring situation (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Another point in common is that there are multiple data sources for a case study. In order to obtain a comprehensive description of the case and understand its complexity, a range of data collection methods including observations, interviews, documents, and stimulated recalls should be used. Drawing on multiple sources of data can generate rich and profound understandings of the case, which is a strength of the case study approach.

The use of a case study in the phase one study was justified because there has been little research to date that has systematically examined NES and NNEST teachers' written feedback beliefs and practices in the Chinese tertiary EFL context. In this situation, a case study was an appropriate strategy, as it does not depend heavily on the previous studies or empirical findings (Yin, 2003).

In addition, the application of a case study approach should satisfy several

principles: (1) A case study focuses on “how” or “why” questions; (2) researchers have little control over the phenomenon under investigation; (3) “the object of the research is a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context”; and (4) multiple sources of data are required to be included (Yin, 2003, p. 28). The case study in phase one was compatible with the four principles: It addressed how NES and NNES teachers conceptualized written feedback and how they implemented such pedagogical practices in their specific environment; the two groups of teachers’ written feedback beliefs and practices were a contemporary phenomenon in the real-life context and were not controlled by the researcher; multiple data collection methods were included to triangulate the data and generate robust findings.

Finally, a case study approach is so flexible that it can include qualitative or quantitative data or mix of both (Yin, 2003; Yu, 2014). In the phase one study, although it was qualitatively oriented, it also included quantitative data (i.e., frequencies and percentages) to demonstrate the patterns and characteristics of teachers’ written feedback practices.

### **3.4.2 Quasi-experimental study**

In the phase two study, a quasi-experimental design was utilized to explore the effects of NES and NNES teachers’ written feedback on Chinese EFL learners’ performance in different dimensions of writing.

As a quasi-experimental study can establish a cause-effect relationship (Dörnyei, 2007), it requires a clear establishment of independent and dependent variables. Independent variables refer to variables causing or affecting the outcomes, while dependent variables are known as the outcomes or results produced by the influence of the independent variables (Creswell, 2014). In addition, in contrast to a true experimental study, quasi-experimental design does not randomly assign

participants into different groups (Dörnyei, 2007; Mackey & Gass, 2005). Although a true experimental design can be more desirable and advantageous for this study, it was not very practical due to the inclusion of randomized groups. In the Chinese tertiary education settings, students are assigned into different classes according to their majors once they are admitted, and they stay in the same class during the four-year undergraduate period. Consequently, it was difficult to assign students into different groups at random, and for this reason a quasi-experimental design was employed.

A quasi-experimental design can be further classified into several subtypes with regard to the different arrangements of tests and groups. The current study was a quasi-experimental design with three tests (i.e., pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest) and three groups (i.e., two treatment groups and one comparison group). This design was appropriate to achieve the research purpose to examine the changes of students' writing performance in different group conditions.

Based on the above discussions, the quasi-experimental design with a pretest, posttest and delayed posttest as well as treatment and comparison groups was adopted as the strategy to address the research questions 4-5. Three groups of participants from non-randomized intact classes took tests before and after the intervention. NES and NNEST teachers' written feedback was the independent variable; students' writing performance and their perceptions on the effects of feedback were dependent variables. Four rounds of NES and NNEST teachers' written feedback were designed and implemented for the two treatment groups, following which students' writing and perspectives were examined.

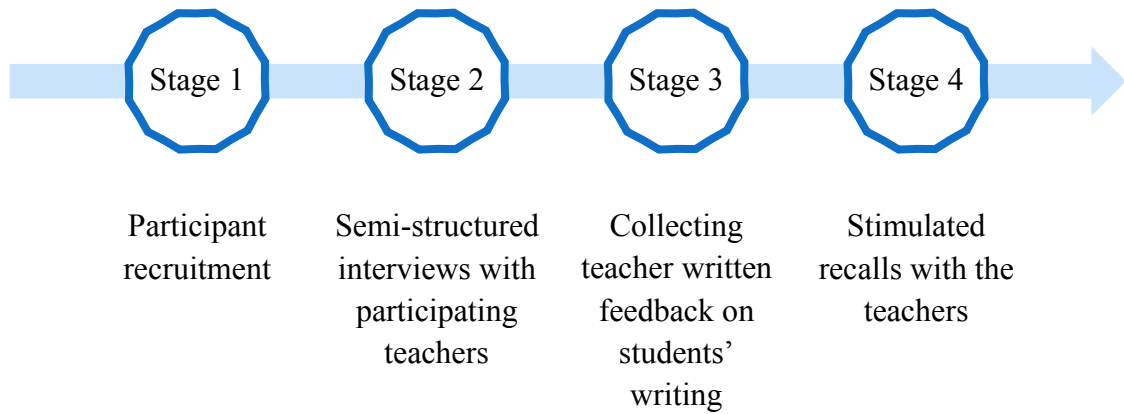


**Table 3.2 An overview of the research design in the main study**

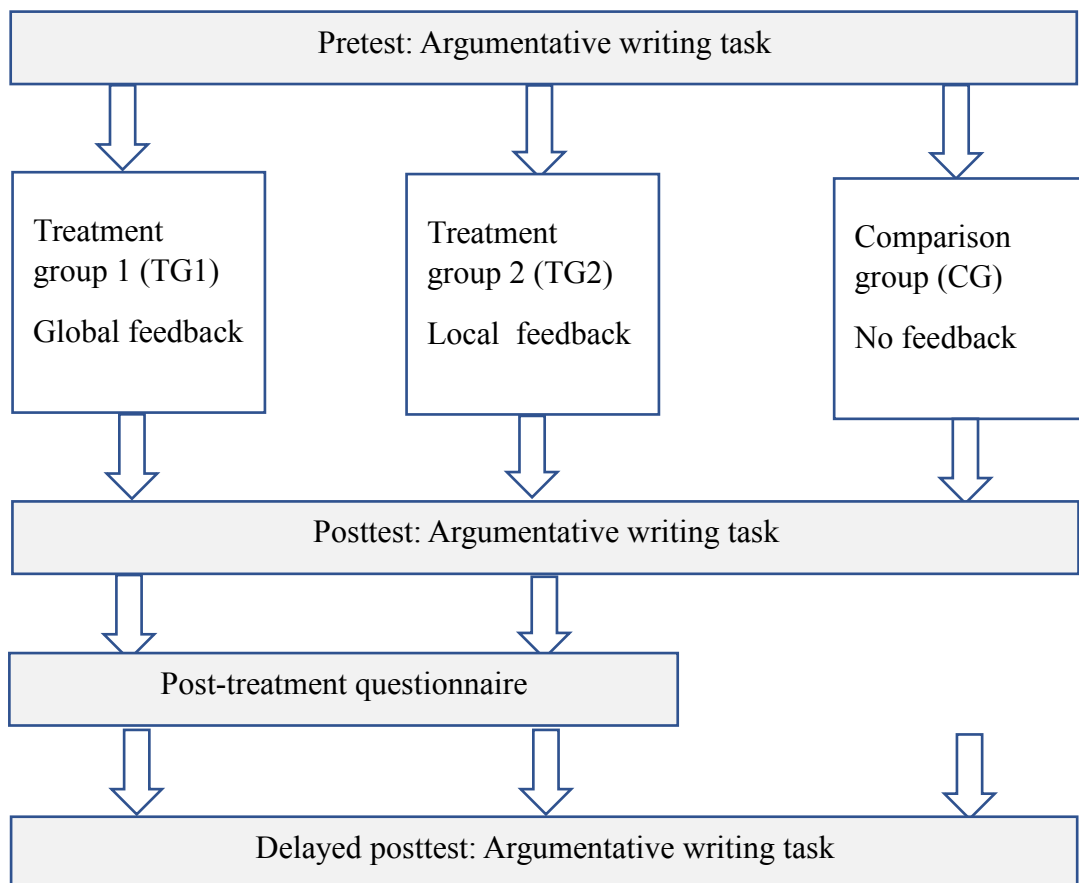
Phase	Instruments	Participants	Sampling strategy
Phase one: case study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Semi-structured interviews</li><li>• Students' writing samples with teachers' written feedback</li><li>• Stimulated recalls</li><li>• Documents</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Four NES tertiary EFL writing teachers</li><li>• Four NNES tertiary EFL writing teachers</li></ul>	purposive sampling
Phase two: quasi-experimental study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Writing tests</li><li>• Post-treatment questionnaire</li></ul>	English majors (Year 2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Treatment group 1 (n=24)</li><li>• Treatment group 2 (n=25)</li><li>• Comparison group (n=24)</li></ul>	convenience sampling

Figure 3.1 Overview of data collection procedures

Phase one:



Phase two:



### 3.5 Phase one: Case study

This section describes the implementation of the exploratory initial case study, including the participants, data collection, and data analysis.

### 3.5.1 Participants

After ethical approval for the study was given by University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, relevant faculties in the universities in the central provinces of mainland China were contacted to obtain their permissions to recruit potential participants. This study employed a purposive sampling strategy to select the NES and NNEST teachers, as it is commonly used in a case study for the selection of participants “who can provide rich and varied insights into the phenomenon under investigation so as to maximize what we can learn” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 126). The following criteria were applied for selection of the participants.

- First language: Participating teachers were Chinese L1 or English L1 speakers
- Teaching experience: They had at least two-year teaching experience in EFL writing
- Academic qualifications: Teachers earned bachelor’s degree or higher degree
- Majors: Teachers specialized in English-related majors (literature, linguistics/applied linguistics, translation, and TESOL)
- Others: 1) They taught EFL writing during data collection; 2) They were available and willing to participate in this study

To approach teacher participants in the case study, deans in the target universities were contacted and the aims of this study were explained in detail. With their permissions, the selection criteria, participant information sheets (PIS), and consent forms (CF) were emailed to all the EFL teachers in the faculty through the dean’s secretary in each university. 20 EFL writing teachers responded positively (7 NES teachers and 13 NNEST teachers).

The 20 teachers were met individually and briefed about the research purposes, procedures of data collection, and their role in this study. Finally, 14 teachers (6 NES

and 8 NNES teachers) signed the CF. As the number of teachers who consented exceeded that of the teachers needed, some teachers were excluded. In the process of exclusion, some variables (e.g., major, academic qualification, and teaching experience) were considered to ensure the demographic background of the two groups of teachers was as similar as possible. Finally, four NES and four NNES teachers were selected (see Table 3.3 for more details).

**Table 3.3 Case study teachers' profiles**

Name (pseudonym)	NES VS. NNES	Country of origin	Gender	Teaching experience in EFL writing	Academic qualification	Major
Jason	NES	US	Male	4 years	Bachelor	Linguistics
George	NES	US	Male	3 years	Master	TESOL
Bruce	NES	US	Male	6 years	Master	Literature
Christine	NES	US	Female	4 years	Bachelor	Literature
Yan	NNES	China	Female	8 years	Master	TESOL
Juan	NNES	China	Female	5 years	Master	Literature
Han	NNES	China	Male	3 years	Master	Applied linguistics
Qin	NNES	China	Female	4 years	Master	Linguistics and applied linguistics

### **3.5.2 Procedures**

Prior to semi-structured interviews, I contacted each teacher to arrange a time and place, convenient for the interview. Before each interview, I had a chat with each teacher to create a relaxing atmosphere and build a good rapport. All the case study teachers were informed that their genuine views were very important for this study. I conducted the interviews with the eight teachers individually using the prepared questions (see Appendix A), and each interview lasted 30-45 minutes. The interviews with NNES teachers were conducted in Chinese, while the interviews with NES teachers were in English. The interviews were audio-recorded for analysis, with permission of the participants. I also made notes for reference. Due to the ethical considerations, I reassured the participants that their identities and information would be kept confidential and that I would use pseudonyms, so they could express their feelings, thoughts, and ideas without anxiety.

To investigate NES and NNES teachers' feedback practices on the writing, I collected 80 writing samples (10 from each teacher), which were marked by the teachers after the interviews. The prompts of these written texts were from past TEM-4 papers and covered different topics such as "Should people do volunteering?", "Will phones kill letter writing?", and "Should private car owners be taxed for pollution?". The collected texts, written by second-year students in English major, were argumentative writing ranging from 150 to 200 words, and were completed within a time limit of 40 minutes in class without access to any external resources.

Shortly after teachers had completed the feedback, each teacher was interviewed again individually, using stimulated recall with data from audio-recording of the interview and his/her feedback on students' writing samples, to elicit each teacher's mental activities during feedback provision and why particular decisions

were made. As Dörnyei (2007) suggested, the time gap between feedback provision and stimulated recalls was within two days to minimize the memory loss. Before conducting the stimulated recalls, I carefully listened to the audio-recordings of teachers' semi-structured interviews and read their feedback on their students' writing, linking what they said in the interviews and what they actually did. During the stimulated recalls, teachers were requested to reflect on their observed feedback practices. They were also asked to explain what they thought might affect their feedback provision, and the incongruences between their beliefs, as expressed in semi-structured interviews, and their observed feedback practices. The questions in the stimulated recalls varied with teachers, as they were based on each teacher's feedback practices. Each stimulated recall lasted 30-45 minutes and was audio-recorded.

### **3.5.3 Data analysis**

#### **3.5.3.1 Analysis of EFL teachers' written feedback practices**

As defined in Chapter 1, feedback practices referred to teachers' written feedback targeting errors/problems in language, content, and organization on Chinese EFL learners' writing, including both error corrections and written commentaries. All the written assignments, from the eight case study teachers, were read by me to identify each feedback point that they provided. Feedback points were defined as the written interventions given by teachers (Hyland, 2003) based on meaningful units (Yu & Lee, 2014); that is, a symbol, word, phrase, sentence or even a paragraph that expressed full meaning could be regarded as one feedback point.

I mainly adopted a predetermined strategy to code teachers' feedback practices (Dörnyei, 2007). The coding categories were recurring themes in the previous literature, including scope, focus, strategy, and orientation (Alkhatib, 2015; Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Lee, 2009, 2013a, 2017; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019; Sheen, 2011).

In terms of feedback focus, I used each feedback as the unit of analysis. Feedback, as previously noted, can be divided into two subtypes in terms of the focus: Local feedback and global feedback. The former refers to the feedback related to language (i.e., grammar and vocabulary), while the latter is known as the feedback on global issues (i.e., content and organization).

From the pilot study, it was determined that it was insufficient to code a feedback point as global feedback, focusing on either content or organization. Therefore, subcategories under content and organization should be added. To achieve this goal, I employed constant comparison (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to develop subcategories from the collected feedback. I identified all the feedback on content and organization by one teacher and then compared each piece of feedback for similarities and differences to understand what aspects the teacher addressed in content and organization. I repeated the same process for the feedback on content and organization provided by all the teachers, after which the subcategories of feedback on content and organization by each teacher were again compared to generate the final coding scheme for feedback focus, as presented in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4 Coding scheme for feedback focus**

Focus	Subcategory	Example
Language	grammar and vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘instead of <u>bring</u> harm...’ → <i>‘bringing’</i></li> <li>• ‘<u>cell phone</u> plays...’ → <i>‘cell phones’</i></li> <li>• ‘<u>putting</u> a pollution tax’ → <i>‘imposing’</i></li> <li>• ‘<u>at the back of</u>’ → <i>‘behind’</i></li> </ul>

Content	clarity, adequacy and relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What do you mean by this sentence?</i></li> <li>• <i>Give another reason to support your idea</i></li> <li>• <i>The supporting details in paragraph two are irrelevant to the topic sentence</i></li> </ul>
Organization	the overall structure, cohesion, coherence and paragraphing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Lack of conclusion</i></li> <li>• <i>Good organization of the text</i></li> <li>• <i>Add “firstly” here</i></li> <li>• <i>One paragraph should develop one idea</i></li> </ul>

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*Note.* Examples are retrieved from feedback by case study teachers and their feedback is put in italics.

Feedback strategies were coded into direct and indirect feedback in the present study. Guided by prior studies (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ellis, 2009; Lee, 2017; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019; Sheen, 2011), I formulated different ways to realize direct and indirect WCF (i.e., local feedback). As noted in section 2.3.3, direct feedback can be realized by different forms: 1) Providing a direct correction; 2) crossing out items which are redundant or erroneous; and 3) adding the omitted items. In terms of indirect WCF, it was realized by indicating errors with/without metalinguistic clues.

Direct global feedback was achieved by addressing problems directly or providing specific suggestions for problems, whereas indirect global feedback was realized by identifying problems without offering suggestions or solutions (Geng, 2017; Z. Wang, 2015). Table 3.5 shows the typologies of direct and indirect WCF and global feedback in the present study.



**Table 3.5 Formulations of direct and indirect written feedback**

Strategy	Realization	Example
<b>WCF</b>		
Direct feedback	1) presenting the correct answers directly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using phones is <u>fitted into</u> young people... (<i>suitable for</i>)</li> <li>• Volunteer work <u>become</u> more and more popular around the world. (<i>becomes</i>)</li> </ul>
	2) crossing out the redundant or erroneous items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In order to reduce <del>to</del> pollutant emissions...</li> <li>• They can choose <del>the</del> other ways to go out...</li> </ul>
	3) adding the omitted items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As more and more people ^ using phones... (<i>are</i>)</li> </ul>
Indirect feedback	1) indicating errors without meta-linguistic clues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We can have a <u>more broad</u> perspective through making friends online...</li> <li>• As I <u>mention</u> in the first part...</li> </ul>
	2) indicating errors with meta-linguistic clues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making friends online <u>arises</u> some problems. (<i>word choice</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Global feedback</b>		
Direct feedback	1) making direct corrections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ^ <i>making friends online poses a threat to people's safety (adding a topic sentence)</i></li> <li>• ^ <i>but</i></li> </ul>
	2) offering feasible suggestions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Provide another reason to support making friends online. For example, students can make more friends online.</i></li> </ul>
Indirect feedback	1) identifying problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>These details are irrelevant to the topic sentence in this paragraph.</i></li> <li>• <i>The meaning of these two</i></li> </ul>

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*Note.* Examples are retrieved from feedback by case study teachers and their feedback is put in italics.

In this study, there were two sub-types of feedback orientation: Positive feedback and negative feedback. As mentioned previously, positive feedback refers to the encouraging comments acknowledging that students' writing (e.g., content, organization, and language) is standard. In contrast, negative feedback is defined as teachers' critical comments, indicating that students' writing fails to achieve satisfaction.

In the practical coding, it was difficult at times to distinguish negative feedback from suggestions. The present study adopted the strategy recommended by Hyland and Hyland (2001) to resolve this problem; that is, negative feedback and suggestions could be differentiated depending on whether teachers offered clear remedies for problems or errors. For instance, the feedback "this is a weak conclusion" could be regarded as a negative response to students' writing, as it offered no solutions, whereas the feedback "You should present the text in a 'introduction-body-conclusion' structure" should be classified as a suggestion rather than negative due to the provision of a remedy.

Feedback practices were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. For the quantitative analysis, I tallied the number of feedback points provided by each teacher and calculated the frequencies as well as percentages of global and local feedback, direct and indirect feedback, and positive and negative feedback. The qualitative analysis of feedback practices mainly identified what teachers addressed and how they treated students' errors/problems in writing, thus providing explanations for the quantitative data. The process of analyzing feedback practices was non-linear. I

examined each teacher's written feedback recursively and iteratively to identify his/her feedback patterns under each theme and compared the similarities and differences between NES and NNEST teachers' feedback practices.

### **3.5.3.2 Analysis of EFL teachers' written feedback beliefs**

Before analyzing teachers' beliefs about providing written feedback, all the interviews by the participating teachers were fully transcribed. To maintain reliability, all the interview transcripts were sent to the eight teachers for member checking. As the interviews with NNEST teachers were conducted in Chinese, the transcripts were analyzed in the original language and I translated them into English when they were needed for reporting the findings. The rationale for doing so was that translation may lead to the loss of information due to the difficulty in finding the equivalent words, idioms, and concepts in the source language and target language (Sechrest, Fay, & Zaidi, 1972). Once the transcriptions were completed, the analysis was done manually.

At the beginning, I read and re-read the interview transcripts several times to obtain a general picture of the data. The repeated reading enabled me to be more familiar with the data and get a general understanding of data (Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I also made some reflective notes and recorded some concepts, ideas and thoughts in the margins of the transcripts as they occurred to me when I read and re-read the data.

After the sufficient familiarity myself with the data, I adopted the thematic analysis to code teachers' beliefs. Thematic analysis is an effective approach to processing qualitative data, as it identifies, analyzes, and interprets the themes within the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can be implemented by either inductive or deductive coding approaches. For this study, a deductive approach was used as the main strategy, as it could tell us what is known and what is unknown about

the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 1986). The four recurring themes (i.e., feedback scope, feedback focus, feedback strategy, and feedback orientation) used in feedback practice analysis were pre-determined and used to investigate the relationships between teachers' beliefs and practices. Each theme included a set of codes based on the focus of the present study. In this study, "teacher beliefs" meant a set of psychologically held assumptions, values, feelings, and attitudes towards teaching (Borg, 2015). However, this definition was too abstract for me to identify teachers' beliefs in the practical analysis. To facilitate the identification, I employed the statement forms, formulated by Zhong (2012), to identify NES and NNES teachers' beliefs, which are presented in Table 3.6.

I coded the transcripts line by line and noted a code in the right-handed margins of transcripts. The words, phrases, and sentences produced by the teachers relevant to the four recurring themes, which enabled me to understand teachers' ideas regarding a particular theme, were marked. To avoid missing other important themes, aside from the predetermined themes, the coding of interview data was also open to new themes that may emerge from the interviews, along with exploring other aspects of teachers' beliefs about written feedback provision.

**Table 3.6 Statement forms of identifying teachers' beliefs**

Form	Example
General statements relating to feedback provision that expressed opinions.	<i>I believe/think/hold that...; in my opinion; from my perspective; for my part...</i>
Statements containing the modal verbs	<i>Teachers should/must/have to/need to...</i>
Statements about the functions and importance of feedback	<i>Feedback can enable students to understand their weaknesses and the directions for improvement.</i>
Hypothetical statements	<i>If I had received some feedback training programs, my feedback practices would be</i>

*different.*

Statements including superlative or comparatives	<i>The best/better way to provide feedback is...</i>
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*Note.* Adapted from Zhong (2012, p. 114). Examples are retrieved from case study teachers.

### **3.5.3.3 Analysis of relationships between teachers' beliefs and practices**

To explore teachers' belief-practice relationships, I compared what they said with what they did in the ongoing analysis of semi-structured interviews and their feedback practices on students' writing. For example, a teacher, in the interview, expressed her belief that teachers should provide direct feedback to enable students to understand their problems and errors in writing more clearly. I, next, scrutinized the teacher's written feedback on students' writing to determine the extent to which feedback was given directly. Then, I compared the teacher's espoused beliefs with the observed practices to examine the degree of consistency between beliefs and practices.

To identify the factors contributing to the mismatches between teachers' beliefs and practices, I adhered to Lee's (2013b) procedures to analyze data from the stimulated recalls. After reading and re-reading the transcripts, several salient and recurring themes pertinent to the influencing factors were identified. The identified factors were then presented and organized, mapping onto the constructs in Activity Theory (e.g., artefacts, rules, community and division of labour). These factors could account for the inconsistencies between teachers' beliefs and practices as well as the teachers' decision-making in feedback provision. Table 3.7 shows how I approached the relationships between the teachers' beliefs and practices.

**Table 3.7 Relationships between written feedback beliefs and practices**

Theme	Espoused belief	Actual practice	Stimulated recall	Explanation
Strategy	T1 espoused providing students with direct feedback	T1 gave both direct and indirect feedback	In the semi-structured interview, you said that feedback should be provided directly. Why did you combine direct and indirect feedback and give a lot of indirect feedback actually?	T1 explained that she did not have enough time and energy to provide direct feedback consistently because there were over 30 students in her class.

### 3.6 Phase two: Quasi-experimental study

The phase two study employed a quasi-experimental design with three groups (two treatment groups and a comparison group) and the pretest, the posttest, and the delayed posttest. That is, the second phase study was an intervention study which investigated “the effectiveness of teaching methods, curriculum models, classroom arrangements, and other efforts to influence the characteristics of individuals or groups” (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012, p. 6). The following sections explain the participants, data collection and analysis in the phase two study.

#### 3.6.1 Participants

Three parallel intact classes (n=73) participated in the phase two study on a voluntary basis. They were selected using a convenience sampling strategy even though this sampling method is often subject to the criticism that participants may not represent the population (Dörnyei, 2007).

The 73 participants were second-year students in English major from a medium-ranking university, who had acquired some basic linguistic and rhetorical knowledge in English writing. At the time of data collection, all the participants were enrolled in an *English Writing Course*. The three intact classes were randomly

assigned into three groups: Two treatment groups (TG1 and TG2), and one comparison group (CG).

Prior to the intervention, the 73 participants had been required to complete a questionnaire eliciting demographic information (see Appendix B). There were 6 males and 69 females, and their ages ranged from 19 to 21 with, on average, 11 years of English learning; all the participants had learnt English in the mainland China and had no experience of studying abroad. These students, therefore, were comparable in terms of age, educational background, and English learning experience. To further ensure the comparability of the three groups, they used the same university syllabus and textbook, attended the same in-and-after class writing activities, and had the same classroom instruction time.

In terms of the teacher participants, Christine and Yan, who were the participants in the case study, also participated in the follow-up quasi-experimental study and gave feedback to the two treatment groups, respectively; that is, Christine (NES) provided TG1 with feedback and Yan (NNES) offered feedback to TG2.

### **3.6.2 Independent variables**

The independent variables of this quasi-experimental study were NES and NNES teachers' written feedback. It was unfeasible, however, to ask all the NES and NNES teacher participants in the case study to provide feedback in the treatment sessions.

As this study adopted an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, the independent variables used in the phase two study were developed from the phase one study (Creswell, 2014). The findings of the initial exploratory case study (see Chapter 5) showed that NES and NNES teachers' written feedback practices differed significantly in terms of their feedback focus. That is, when providing feedback, NES teachers showed more concern with global issues (content and organization), while

their NNES counterparts paid much more attention to the accuracy in language use. In this sense, feedback on content and organization and feedback on language were regarded as the two most contrasting aspects displayed in NES and NNES teachers' feedback practices. Therefore, the alternative independent variables used in the phase two study were global feedback and WCF, two types of feedback considered typical of NES and NNES, respectively. In this quasi-experimental study, TG1 received global feedback, while TG2 received WCF.

### 3.6.3 Dependent variables

The dependent variables examined in the phase two study were L2 writing performance and students' perceptions.

Unlike prior studies, which tended to adopt writing accuracy as the only index to gauge the effects of teacher feedback on L2 writing performance, this study included complexity, fluency, and high-order dimensions of writing (i.e., content, organization, and overall writing quality). The examination of both local and global dimensions of writing could advance our understandings of the effects of teacher written feedback on L2 writing performance.

### 3.6.4 Data collection

In the phase two study, the procedures of data collection included testing, treatment, and post-treatment questionnaire, as presented by Table 3.8.

**Table 3.8 Procedures of data collection in the phase two study**

Week	TG1	TG2	CG
7	Demographic questionnaire	Demographic questionnaire	Demographic questionnaire
8	Day 1 Pretest (text 1)	Pretest (text 1)	Pretest (text1)
	Day 4 Global feedback+rewriting text	WCF+rewriting text 1	Rewriting text 1



		1			
9	Day 1	Text 2		Text 2	Text 2
	Day 4	Global feedback+rewriting text		WCF+rewriting text 2	Rewriting text 2
		2			
10	Day 1	Text 3		Text 3	Text 3
	Day 4	Global feedback+rewriting text		WCF+rewriting text 3	Rewriting text 3
		3			
11	Day 1	Text 4		Text 4	Text 4
	Day 4	Global feedback+rewriting text		WCF+ rewriting text 4	Rewriting text 4
		4			
12		Posttest		Posttest	Posttest
13		Post-treatment questionnaire		Post-treatment questionnaire	_____
16		Delayed posttest		Delayed posttest	Delayed posttest

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### 3.6.4.1 Testing

All the 73 participants from the three different groups were asked to complete a pretest, a posttest and a delayed posttest, which were given prior to, immediately after the treatment sessions, and three-weeks after the posttest. These tests were used to investigate how the different feedback treatments impacted different dimensions of Chinese EFL learners' writing performance.

In the testing sessions, participants of the three groups completed three argumentative writing tasks on different writing topics (see Appendix C), which were selected from past test TEM-4 battery. The writing topics of past TEM-4 papers related to students' daily life and general education; consequently, they were considered to be fair and familiar to each student (Teng & Zhang, 2020). As argumentative writing is an effective way to assess students' linguistic proficiency, critical thinking, and expression of ideas (Varghese & Abraham, 1989), Chinese tertiary EFL learners tend to be asked to compose argumentative writing in various large-scale English tests such as CETs-4 and 6, TEMs-4 and 8, IELTS, and TOEFL (Huang & Zhang, 2020). In this

study, all the participants were required to complete the writing tasks with no less than 200 words within 40 minutes. Moreover, they were not allowed to use any external resources, such as dictionaries and textbooks during writing process.

In summary, testing procedures, writing genre, and other requirements were kept constant in the three tests and all the three tests were administrated by me.

### **3.6.4.2 Treatment**

#### **3.6.4.2.1 Teachers' preparation**

Before the implementation of the intervention, a meeting with Christine and Yan was arranged. At first, the aims, procedures, and arrangements of the phase two study were briefly introduced to them. More importantly, they were briefed on written feedback provision to be implemented in this intervention program, followed with details on the specific steps and procedures for its execution. Christine was trained to provide TG1 students with global feedback, focusing on both the content and the organization, while Yan was asked to give WCF to TG2 students, targeting language issues. Informed by the findings from the phase one study and the anticipated workload of providing students with feedback in implementing the treatment, specific issues to be tackled when providing global feedback, and linguistic error types to be targeted by WCF were identified and presented to the two teachers, respectively (see Tables 3.9 and 3.10).

**Table 3.9 Issues targeted by global feedback in TG1**

Feedback	Specific issues to be addressed
Content	Clarity (the comprehensibility of sentences in writing); relevance (the relevance to overall theme or topic); and adequacy (the development of ideas by adequate information and reasons)

Organization Overall structure (introduction, body, and conclusion); cohesion (the logical relationships between sentences in texts, realized by linguistic devices); coherence (the implicit relationships of different segments of a text); paragraphing (dividing the body part to paragraphs according to the number of reasons).

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**Table 3.10 Linguistic error types targeted by WCF in TG2**

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Feedback	Error types
Vocabulary	Word/phrase choice
Grammar	tense Voice Plurality/singularity articles propositions Part of speech subject-verb agreement the comparative/superlative verb form (infinitive and gerund) sentence structure

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As for the strategies to provide feedback, the two teachers were informed that they could use direct and indirect feedback concurrently in feedback provision. This decision was justified as follows. Firstly, the concurrent use of both direct and indirect feedback strategies was in accordance with NES and NNES teachers' feedback practices in the phase one study. Secondly, as neither direct nor indirect feedback is "the best for learning", the choice of feedback strategies should not be pre-determined (Bitchener & Storch, 2016, p. 73). More practically, the combination of direct and indirect feedback strategies saves time and energy, compared with providing direct feedback alone, and could thus reduce the two participating teachers' workload.

During the intervention, I told the two teachers that they could ask me any questions related to the intervention. To ensure that the teachers provided the participants with feedback as required, I collected and checked their feedback on

participants' writing samples after each round of feedback treatment.

#### 3.6.4.2.2 Treatment groups: Global feedback vs. comprehensive WCF

In TG1, students received global feedback, addressing issues in the content (i.e., clarity, relevance, and adequacy) and the organization (i.e., overall structure, cohesion, coherence, and paragraphing). Feedback on the content would help students express their ideas more clearly, avoid irrelevant information, and provide sufficient supporting details. Feedback on the organization would enable students to structure their writing in an “introduction-body-conclusion” format, use cohesive devices effectively, and make ideas flow logically. In general, feedback comments on the content and the organization given to TG1 students were both generic and text-specific. Generic comments were those comments substitutable across essays by different students, while text-specific feedback referred to the feedback comments which were applied to a particular part of the text by a student (Ferris, 1997).

**Table 3.11 Direct and indirect feedback on content**

Content feedback	Direct feedback	Indirect feedback
Example		
1	<i>You should provide another reason. Think of other benefits of learning Chinese traditional culture.</i>	<i>The meaning of this sentence is not clear.</i>

**Table 3.12 Direct and indirect feedback on organization**

Organization feedback	Direct feedback	Indirect feedback
Example		
1	<i>A weak conclusion. Please summarize the main points and arguments of your essay in the concluding paragraph.</i>	<i>There is no topic sentence in this paragraph.</i>
2	<i>Divide the body part into two paragraphs.</i>	<i>Pay attention the cohesion between these two sentences.</i>

In feedback provision, direct and indirect feedback were integrated. Generally speaking, global issues tended to be addressed by indirect feedback (i.e., identifications of problems without solutions). Some feedback comments were direct; that is, the teacher provided students with specific suggestions for the problems. Although such feedback comments, in nature, were more direct than indications of problems, the participants still needed to invest cognitive resources to reformulate them in rewriting sessions. Identifications and suggestions were written in the interline space or in the margins adjacent to the problems on the participants' drafting sheets. Tables 3.11 and 3.12 illustrate how problems in the content and the organization were targeted by the global feedback offered in this study.

In TG2, students were provided with four rounds of comprehensive WCF. The WCF that TG2 students received did not focus on all the linguistic errors but targeted a wide range of error types listed in Table 3.10. As for TG2, comprehensive WCF was also provided both directly and indirectly (indicating errors by symbols). After going through the provided WCF, I found that direct feedback tended to be provided for treatable errors which were rule-governed, while indirect feedback was given to untreatable errors which were idiosyncratic and difficult to explain by rules or patterns (Ferris, 2002). Instances of direct and indirect WCF are shown in Table 3.13.

**Table 3.13 Direct and indirect WCF**

WCF	Direct feedback	Indirect feedback
Example		
1	Intelligent machines <u>is</u> a useful tool to save our valuable time. ( <i>are</i> )	The intelligent machines can only <u>take place</u> the elementary work...
2	Nowadays, a flood of intelligent machines enters our <u>lives</u> , which <u>caused</u> .... ( <i>life; causes</i> )	From my perspective, our brains won't be lazy despite ^ that intelligent machines help us to do the thinking.

3	It can make <u>a</u> efficient world. ( <i>an</i> )	Thus, they are not <u>hinders</u> to develop.
4	As is known to all, we are living in a <u>competition</u> society. ( <i>competitive</i> )	Scientists should make decision ^how to improve the efficacy of intelligent machines.

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*Note.* Feedback is put italics.

#### 3.6.4.2.3 CG: No feedback

Students in the CG received no feedback on the content, the organization, or the language. They were only asked to complete their writing tasks based on the same given writing prompts. To avoid them being disadvantaged, they were provided with global feedback and WCF after the intervention period.

After each round of feedback treatment, all participants received their first draft of writing with/without feedback, and a piece of blank paper on which they were asked to revise and rewrite their writing. Students in the two treatment groups revised their writing based on the provided feedback and they were also allowed to make other changes to writing, which were not targeted by feedback, whereas those in the comparison group were encouraged to revise and rewrite their writing by themselves. All participants were given 30 minutes to rewrite their writing, during which they were required to complete the rewriting tasks independently without access to external assistance. Students were asked to hand in both the initial and revised drafts of their writing to check whether they had completed rewriting tasks.

#### 3.6.4.3 Post-treatment questionnaire

A post-treatment questionnaire was administrated to elicit how students perceived the

effects of NES and NNES teacher written feedback, respectively. Adapted from Rastgou (2016), the questionnaire comprised both quantitative and qualitative sections (see Appendix D). In the quantitative section, participants were asked to respond to five-point Likert scales (from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”). Since a limitation of close-ended questionnaires is that the data generated from them are rather superficial and thin (Dörnyei, 2007), a qualitative section was added to the questionnaire, in which students were required to provide reasons for their decisions. The qualitative data could enable a deeper insight into how written feedback impacted the different dimensions of L2 learners’ writing, supplementing the quantitative data from the writing tests.

There were six Likert scale statements in the questionnaire, designed for the two treatment groups, which included statements relevant to students’ perspectives on different aspects of L2 writing performance (i.e., accuracy, syntactic complexity, fluency, content, organization, and writing quality).

The questionnaire was piloted to ensure reliability. Immediately after the posttest, three students in each treatment group were selected randomly to complete the questionnaire. Based on their feedback, some revisions were made; for instance, some students responded that some terms were obscure and academic for them such as “syntactic complexity”. Based on their feedback, these terms were paraphrased or replaced. In addition, a Chinese translation was added to each statement to make the statements clearer, and students were allowed to use English or Chinese at will to offer explanations so that they could provide more information to support their selections.

After the posttest, the questionnaire was distributed to the two treatment groups. Due to time constraints, students were asked to complete it out of class and return the questionnaire when taking the delayed posttest.

### **3.6.5 Data analysis**

#### **3.6.5.1 Analysis of the effects on Chinese EFL learners' writing performance**

This study adopted various measures to assess the effects of teacher written feedback. These measures included writing scores (overall writing quality, content, and organization) and writing production measures (complexity, accuracy, and fluency) to provide a comprehensive picture of the effects of teacher feedback.

##### **3.6.5.1.1 Writing scores**

Writing scores, including both holistic scores and analytical scores (content and organization), were calculated from the pretest, the posttest, and the delayed posttest.

In this study, Jacob et al.'s (1981) ESL Composition Profile (see Appendix E), a well-established and widely-used L2 writing rubric, was employed to evaluate students' writing performance. This rubric uses a weighted scoring scheme to assess five dimensions of writing: Content (13-30 points), organization (7-20 points), vocabulary (7-20 points), language use (5-25 points), and mechanics (2-5 points). It provides clear descriptors and corresponding numerical scales for every four levels in each subcategory (Teng, 2016).

The use of such a writing rating scheme in this study was justified because: It is an analytical writing rubric rather than a holistic scheme, which enhances the reliability of scoring by enabling raters to be more consistent in scoring writing samples (East, 2009; Hughes, 2003); the use of this analytical scoring rubric was consistent with the research purpose of this study. Because the study investigated whether teacher written feedback affected content and organization of Chinese EFL learners' writing, separate scores for content and organization were needed.



#### 3.6.5.1.2 Writing production measures

Writing production measures in this study included complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF), the development of which is a key aim in foreign language learning. Previously, CAF analyses have been used to assess oral production, and at present, they are also used extensively to evaluate students' writing performance (Ong & Zhang, 2010). In the following paragraphs, CAF are appraised in detail.

##### ***Complexity***

According to Skehan (1996a), complexity refers to “the elaboration of language that is produced” (p. 23). Complexity consists of two components: Syntactic complexity and lexical complexity. The former is defined as “range of forms that surface in language production and the degree of sophistication of such forms” (Ortega, 2003, p. 492), while lexical complexity assesses the richness of lexical forms. This study took both syntactic and lexical complexity into account.

To evaluate the effects of teacher written feedback on the global syntactic complexity, mean length of T-units (MLT) and the number of clauses per T-unit (C/T) were selected, two commonly used measures for assessing overall syntactic complexity (Wolfe-Quintero, Inagaki, & Kim, 1998). MLT can be calculated by the division of the total number of words in writing by the number of T-units. The greater the value, the greater the syntactic complexity of the writing. C/T is measured by the number of clauses in each T-unit. The higher the ratio, the greater the syntactic complexity of the text.

To assess lexical complexity, lexical density and lexical variation were adopted in this study. Lexical density concerns the percentage of lexical words (e.g. nouns, verbs, and adjectives etc.) in texts, which is calculated by dividing the number of lexical words by the total number of words in texts (Laufer & Nation, 1995).

Accordingly, the higher the proportion, the greater the lexical density in the texts. Compared with lexical density, lexical variation is a little more difficult to evaluate. Lexical variation is known as the variety of lexis in texts. Generally, it can be gauged by type-token ratio (TTR). “Type” means the different words in the texts, whereas “token” refers to the total number of words used in language production. The bigger the ratio, the more varied and richer is the lexis. Unfortunately, this measure has a limitation in that it is sensitive to the length of texts. Longer texts tend to have a lower type-token ratio than shorter texts (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) because there are more repetitions of some words (e.g., a, the, is).

To counter this limitation, the present study employed a different measure “mean segmental type-token ratio” (MSTTR). In the calculation of MSTTR, a text is segmented, with each segment generally including 40 or 50 words. Then the TTR of each segment is processed, after which the mean score for TTR of all the segments is calculated (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

In this study, syntactic complexity and lexical complexity were processed by the L2 Syntactic Complexity Analyzer (L2SCA) and Lexical Complexity Analyzer (LCA), two web-based programs (Lu, 2010, 2011).

### *Accuracy*

Accuracy is defined as the extent to which the language produced is in accordance with the rules of the target language (Skehan, 1996b). Accuracy can be measured from two aspects: Specific accuracy and general accuracy. Considering that “a generalized measure of accuracy is more sensitive to detect differences between experimental conditions” (Skehan & Foster, 1999, p. 229), this study assessed the general accuracy.

To obtain a comprehensive picture of accuracy in students’ writing, two commonly used measures for overall accuracy were selected: The ratio of error-free

clauses to the total number of clauses (EFC/C) and the number of errors per 100 words (EP100W) (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). The ratio of error-free clauses is obtained by dividing the number of clauses without any errors by the total number of clauses in texts multiplied by 100. The higher is the ratio, the more accurate is the text. This index, however, is imperfect: The ratio of error-free clauses overlooks the number of errors in each clause. To tackle this problem, the other measure “the number of errors per 100 words” was included. It is calculated by the division of the number of errors with the total number of words in texts, multiplying 100 (Foster & Skehan, 1996).

It is necessary first to define errors. In this study, errors in syntax, grammar, morphology, and word choice were all counted but errors in spelling and punctuation were excluded. The exclusion of errors in spelling and punctuation was for two reasons. One was to avoid the possible over-estimation of errors because of the illegible handwriting (as in Rahimi & Zhang, 2018, 2019). Additionally, this decision was influenced by observation of the participants’ writing. It was found that they made few errors in spelling and punctuation. Geng’s (2017) guidelines for coding linguistic errors were employed for marking errors in students’ writing (see Appendix F).

### ***Fluency***

Fluency, another important index for language development, is defined as the rate of production (Skehan, 1996b), indicating students’ ability to produce language in communication without pause or hesitation. Whereas this definition seems to be more applicable in the oral language, it is also employed in written production and evaluates how fluent of a writer (Ong & Zhang, 2010). Fluency can be measured by temporal fluency (i.e., the rate of production) and by dysfluency (i.e., the interruptions in production). In this study, temporal fluency was adopted.

Temporal fluency is commonly measured by dividing the total number of

words by the total amount of time used for writing. In this study, although I reminded the participants to record their time spent on writing, many students forgot to do so. Therefore, I used an alternative way to measure the fluency; that is, counting the total number of words in a given time, in this case, 40 minutes (Yoon & Polio, 2017). The CAF measures are summarized in Table 3.14.

**Table 3.14 The CAF measures used in this study**

Construct	Measures
Syntactic complexity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mean length of T-units (MLT)</li> <li>• The number of clauses per T-unit (C/T)</li> </ul>
Lexical complexity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lexical density (LD)</li> <li>• Lexical variation (LV): mean segmental type-token ratio (MSTTR)</li> </ul>
Accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ratio of error-free clauses (EFC/C)</li> <li>• The number of errors per 100 words (EP100W)</li> </ul>
Fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total number of words within 40 minutes</li> </ul>

After the writing scores and CAF were obtained, they were processed by SPSS. If the data satisfied the assumption of normal distribution (i.e., The standardized values of skewness fell between 0 and +/-3.0 and standardized values of kurtosis did not exceed +/-8.0) (Field, 2009), repeated ANOVA tests were employed. As for the data was not normal distributed, it was processed by a series of non-parametric tests to detect the within-subjects and between-subjects differences.

### **3.6.5.2 Analysis of students' perceptions of teacher written feedback**

The post-treatment questionnaire was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The participants' Likert-scale responses to the statements were analyzed quantitatively through SPSS to obtain descriptive and inferential data.

In analyzing the questionnaire, more attention was paid to participants' qualitative explanations for their selections, as they provided rich and in-depth information on how teacher written feedback impacted their L2 writing performance. The following steps were taken to analyze the qualitative responses. Initially, the responses which were completed in Chinese were translated into English. After translation, the responses in the questionnaire were read and re-read to provide an overview of the qualitative data. The data were then analyzed using open coding and axial coding (Yin, 2003). Through open coding, meaningful segments were identified, coded, and categorized. With axial coding, the recurrent themes were yielded to identify the reasons.

### **3.7 Quality assurance measures**

To ensure robust research findings, I adopted a variety of approaches to enhance the reliability of the present study. This section discusses the quality issues, which are of great importance for any study, in the case study and quasi-experimental study, respectively.

#### **3.7.1 Increasing the trustworthiness of case study**

Although the case study in the current study included both qualitative and quantitative data, it was qualitatively oriented. In qualitative research, trustworthiness is a term used instead of validity and reliability in quantitative studies and quality can be evaluated from four aspects: Credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The following section describes the four measures and the strategies employed to increase the trustworthiness.

Credibility is to the equivalent of internal validity in quantitative research; it concerns the degree to which the research findings are credible and believable

(Shenton, 2004). In this study, several strategies were taken to ensure the credibility. Firstly, interviews in the case study were conducted at the time and places convenient for the teachers. They were free to the use of the language, English or Chinese, in interviews, which enabled them to express their opinions in detail. Secondly, triangulation, the collection of data from a variety of sources to improve the rigor of studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), was employed to enhance the credibility of the research results. To enable the research questions to be investigated fully, the phase one study gathered data using multiple methods: Semi-structured interviews, students' writing samples with feedback, stimulated recalls, and documents. Member checking was also used to enhance the credibility. For member checking, all the transcripts of the interviews and data interpretations were sent to the case study teachers to check whether they reflected what they really thought; several changes were made according to their feedback and clarification.

Transferability, equivalent to external validity, or generalizability in quantitative research, refers to the degree to which findings of a study can be applied to other contexts (Shenton, 2004). Qualitative researchers should provide rich and thick descriptions and contextual information relevant to their studies so that readers can judge whether the findings can be transferred to or applied in other settings. To improve the transferability, this study offered a detailed account of participants, different collection procedures, data analysis as well as other important information to contextualize the findings to enable readers to understand the findings and judge their transferability.

Dependability, equivalent to the term "reliability" in quantitative research, refers to the consistency and replicability of the research findings. Dependability is of great significance for qualitative studies because "there can be no validity without

reliability (i.e., no credibility without dependability)” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). To increase the dependability, this study used triangulation and member checking to contribute to dependability. The research process, including the information about case study teachers, various approaches to collecting data, and data analysis, was described in detail to enable other researchers to check the findings and replicate the study in similar settings and contexts. In addition, the researcher’s supervisor acted as an auditor for the process of data collection and analysis. He scrutinized the procedures to gather data, the approaches to data analysis, and the research findings to ensure the consistency of the research process, as well as the outcomes, to enhance the dependability of the case study.

Confirmability, equivalent to objectivity in quantitative research, is concerned with how much the results can be confirmed or verified by other researchers (Jensen, 2008). Confirmability is helpful in determining that the research findings are derived from the informants’ ideas or experiences, and not from researchers’ characteristics or preferences (Shenton, 2004). Two strategies in the present study facilitated the confirmability. One was to triangulate the data from different sources. Triangulation is not only helpful to promote the credibility and dependability, but it can also minimize the effects of researcher bias or subjectivity in the interpretations of data. The other strategy was to invite my friend, who had obtained a master’s degree in applied linguistics to be a peer debriefer. Approximately 20% of feedback instances were selected randomly and coded by her and me independently. The intercoder reliability was measured by Pearson correlation coefficients. Results showed that the intercoder reliability for focus ( $r=0.91$ ), strategy ( $r=0.89$ ), scope ( $r=0.93$ ), and orientation ( $r=0.96$ ) reached acceptable level. To further improve the reliability, we discussed the disagreements in coding until they were resolved, after which I coded the remaining

data by myself.

### **3.7.2 Ensuring the reliability of quasi-experimental study**

In quantitative research, reliability refers to the consistency of results produced by instruments and procedures in a particular population in different circumstances (Dörnyei, 2007).

To maintain the reliability of scores in the pretest, the posttest and the delayed posttest in the quasi-experimental study, the inter-rater reliability was assessed in terms of content, organization, and overall scores. An experienced EFL writing teacher, who did not participate in this study, was invited to be a co-rater in scoring the writing. For the reliability in assessing content, we, first, individually scored 27 randomly selected samples. The inter-rater reliability measured by intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was acceptable<sup>1</sup> (0.75). To improve the reliability, we discussed the writing rubric and resolved the disagreements in rating, after which we rated another 20 samples independently; the inter-rater reliability in content assessment was 0.90. I then rated the quality of content in the remaining writing samples. In accordance with the steps of scoring content, the inter-rater reliability of organization and overall writing quality reached 0.89 and 0.95 finally.

To enhance the inter-coder reliability for accuracy, the experienced EFL writing teacher mentioned above was invited as a co-coder to mark errors. After I completed the coding work, approximately 15% of writing samples from the pretest, the posttest, and the delayed posttest were selected randomly and re-coded by her. The inter-coder reliability calculated by ICC was 0.87.

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<sup>1</sup> If the intraclass correlation is larger than 0.7, the inter-rater is considered to be acceptable. If the correlation is no less than 0.9, the inter-rater reliability is excellent (Fleiss & Cohen, 1973).



### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

This study was implemented after obtaining the approval from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 20 November 2017 (Reference No. 020361). To avoid the harm brought by this study to the participants and minimize the potential influence of this study on teaching and learning, the researcher carefully followed the requirements prescribed by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee.

#### **3.8.1 Participants' rights**

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary and participants were entitled to withdraw themselves, or any information traceable to them without giving any reasons at any time before 31/07/2018. They had the right not to answer any specific questions and to have the audio-recorder turned off at any point. The data collected from this research is to be used only for the purpose of completing my PhD thesis, and related presentations and publications. Due to the voluntary nature of this project, participation or non-participation was guaranteed not to affect their relationships with faculty or course grades in any way.

#### **3.8.2 Data management**

All hard copy data was locked in a cabinet at the University of Auckland, and all the transcripts as well as audio-recordings were saved confidentially on a password protected computer on the university server at the University of Auckland. The data collected was used solely for the researcher's doctoral thesis, associated academic publications, and conference presentations.

### **3.8.3 Confidentiality**

In this project, I spared no effort to keep the participants' identity confidential. Information of the universities' and participants' names were disguised. If the information provided by them was reported and published, I would use pseudonyms to protect their identities. The confidentiality of the data was preserved throughout the research with no identifying information or data disclosed to a third party.

## **3.9 Chapter summary**

This chapter, explaining how this study was conducted, was divided into three sections. The first section described the research paradigm as well as pilot study, and provided an overview of the main study, which was informed by the pilot study. The next section provided an in-depth account of the case study and the quasi-experimental study, including participants, data collection, and data analysis. The chapter described how the phase one study explored NES and NNES teachers' written feedback beliefs and practices through collecting data from semi-structured interviews, students' writing samples with feedback, stimulated recalls, and documents. It next reported how the phase two study investigated the effects of two groups of teacher written feedback on students' writing performance and students' perceptions, employing a mixed-method approach. The data from the post-treatment questionnaire provided detailed information for the quantitative data from the pretest, the posttest, and the delayed posttest. The last section discussed the quality of this study and ethical issues, describing how the researcher made efforts to ensure the quality of the case study and quasi-experimental study, and to attend to ethical considerations throughout the whole study.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS FROM PHASE ONE STUDY ( I )**

#### **4.1 Chapter overview**

In this chapter, the first two questions which concern NES and NNES teachers' deep-seated beliefs and actual practices regarding written feedback are addressed. Accordingly, the first section reports how four NES teachers (Jason, George, Bruce, and Christine) and four NNES teachers (Yan, Juan, Qin, and Han) conceptualized written feedback with the data from individual semi-structured interviews. Subsequently, teachers' actual written feedback practices are presented based on their students' writing samples. This chapter ends with a summary based on the above research findings.

#### **4.2 NES and NNES teachers' beliefs about providing written feedback**

In this section, teachers' beliefs cover five themes, reporting in detail in the following subsections: Purpose of feedback, scope of feedback, feedback focus, feedback strategy, and feedback orientation. Out of ethical considerations, teachers' pseudonyms were adopted in reporting the findings.

##### **4.2.1 Purpose of feedback**

All the participating teachers recognized the value of written feedback, stating that it was writing teachers' responsibility to provide students with feedback in that it played an irreplaceable role in L2 writing classrooms. However, when interviewed, the eight

teachers expressed different purposes for giving feedback on their students' writing, which are elaborated in the following paragraphs.

Most teachers (six out of eight) explained that they offered students written feedback to improve their writing performance. They concurred that teachers' feedback enabled students to recognize the errors and problems in their writing and gave students opportunities to avoid similar errors and problems in the subsequent writing tasks. For example, when interviewed why they gave feedback to students, one of six teachers (Bruce) responded that with feedback, students had an insight into their errors and problems; they were unlikely to repeat them in the follow-up writing tasks, which contributed to their writing proficiency. Bruce stressed the importance of feedback in improving students' writing proficiency. Likewise, Qin reported that feedback made students aware of the areas to which they should pay attention and provided directions for further improvement, with which students were likely to produce better written products.

From another perspective, three teachers regarded teacher feedback as a useful instrument to inform their pedagogical practices in writing instruction. In their opinion, providing feedback had important implications for their actual teaching. For example, Christine, when asked whether teachers should give feedback to students' writing, responded that teacher feedback not only played an important role in students' writing learning, but also in teachers' instruction. Guided specifically by the feedback given to students, teachers could know the areas which they should emphasize and those that they could omit in the follow-up teaching process. As a result, teachers' teaching could be more effective and efficient. Juan responded similarly that teachers' teaching practices benefited considerably from the opportunity to provide feedback. In stating her view, she pointed out that feedback provision enabled teachers to understand

whether their teaching was effective and helpful in students' writing development. Furthermore, she added that the practice of giving feedback could inform teachers' adjustment of their teaching content.

To sum up, the eight participating teachers were unanimously in favor of giving feedback on students' writing due to its value in learning and teaching. Nevertheless, they presented different purposes for feedback provision, although the majority of teachers reported they believed that teacher feedback benefited students' writing performance. Apart from the benefits for students, three teachers indicated that feedback provision was beneficial for teachers in terms of guiding and facilitating their actual teaching practices.

#### **4.2.2 Scope of feedback**

As noted previously, scope of feedback refers to the extent to which feedback is provided by teachers on their students' writing, and it has two sub-themes: Focused feedback and comprehensive feedback. This section thoroughly examines NES and NNEST teachers' beliefs about scope of feedback.

According to the interview data, three of four NES teachers (George, Jason, and Christine) voiced that teachers should provide students with focused written feedback, while Bruce argued that comprehensive feedback was more suitable. Their points are discussed in the successive paragraphs.

The three teachers, who supported focused feedback, stated focused feedback was important in L2 writing and that it was unnecessary for teachers to correct a comprehensive range of errors and problems in students' writing. For example, Jason explained that focused written feedback could reduce students' burden with revision and make it possible for them to have a better understanding of the specific errors they made. He gave an example of when he was a student, his teachers tended to focus on

two or three types of errors when providing feedback and it was, he supposed, a better way to give feedback. It was clear from his example that his belief in focused feedback came from his prior learning experience.

George's belief in focused feedback was based on students' needs. As he emphasized in the interview:

*It is not worthwhile for teachers to correct all the errors or problems in writing. As far as I am concerned, teachers' feedback affects Chinese EFL learners' emotions greatly, in particular low-achieving learners'. Too many corrections in red ink discourage them. To cultivate students' confidence and enhance their interest in English writing, it is more reasonable for teachers to provide feedback in a focused way (Interview, George).*

Christine also upheld focused feedback, but for a different reason. She noted that compared with comprehensive feedback, focused feedback was time and energy saving. Therefore, it was a more practical approach in the Chinese EFL context, in which teachers are confronted with a heavy workload and are responsible for large-size classes. Here is what she reported:

*I think focused feedback is a better approach to give feedback because of heavy workloads and large-size classes. As for me, I need to be responsible for another three courses in this semester and there are more than 30 students in my writing class, so it is really a tough task for me to provide each student with comprehensive feedback (Interview, Christine).*

In contrast, Bruce preferred comprehensive feedback. In the interview, he explained that teachers needed to correct all or most errors and problems in students'

writing. Although providing comprehensive feedback was time and energy consuming, it was a sense of responsibility that encouraged him to do so. He remarked, in the interview, that teachers were supposed to give feedback comprehensively because it was their job to let students understand different errors and problems in their writing.

In brief, with regard to scope of feedback, most NES teachers held the beliefs that focused feedback should be adopted for different reasons. Only one teacher advocated comprehensive feedback since he regarded providing comprehensive feedback as teachers' responsibility.

In contrast to NES teachers, most NNES teachers agreed that teachers should offer comprehensive feedback to students. Their beliefs are discussed in detail as follows.

Juan, Yan, and Qin supported the use of comprehensive feedback in the Chinese EFL writing classrooms, but they had different reasons for their beliefs. For example, when interviewed whether teachers should highlight different types of errors for students, Juan expressed, "Comprehensive feedback should be used in practice in that it is more helpful in improving students' overall writing performance, which is the ultimate goal of writing instruction." In her opinion, teachers undertook responsibility to help students improve overall writing proficiency, not just enhance performance in specific areas of writing. She believed that comprehensive feedback was a suitable approach to achieve such a goal.

Yan, likewise, espoused comprehensive feedback but gave a different reason to support her opinion. The annual appraisal of her faculty influenced her belief regarding feedback scope. As she said, nearly all the colleagues around her corrected a variety of errors in students' writing; if she did not correct all or many errors in writing, she would be considered lazy and irresponsible. Worse still, such an impression would

have an adverse influence on her performance appraisal by the faculty at the end of each year and would hinder her professional career. Obviously, her belief that comprehensive feedback was necessary originated from a contextual factor, that is, the annual assessment by her faculty.

Unlike Juan and Yan's reasons, Qin's justification was that if teachers provide feedback selectively, uncorrected errors may repeat in the follow-up writing. In this situation, it was very likely that those uncorrected errors might become fossilized.

*I believed that comprehensive feedback is more beneficial to students' learning because it can prevent the fossilization of errors. In reality, many students are not capable of identifying and correcting errors by themselves. If teachers leave some types of errors unmarked, students may make the errors constantly in the subsequent writing (Interview, Qin).*

As an exception, Han stressed that focused feedback was a better approach to provide feedback. He reported in the interview that teachers did not need to mark all or many errors in practice. In explaining his view, Han presented two reasons to support focused feedback. One was that focused feedback was time and energy saving, aligning with Christine's opinion. More importantly, he argued that focused feedback was of greater benefit for L2 learners' writing development, as they had opportunities to detect and correct unmarked errors by themselves, thus fostering their capacity of autonomous revision. This ability was very important for L2 students' writing development in the long term.

In summary, as regards the scope of feedback, there was a marked disparity between NES and NNES teachers' beliefs. Most NES teachers in this study preferred focused feedback over comprehensive feedback in terms of deepening students'



understandings of their errors, boosting their writing confidence, as well as saving teachers' time and energy. By contrast, three of four NNES teachers lent support to comprehensive feedback which, they thought, could improve students' overall writing performance and help students avoid the fossilization of errors.

### **4.2.3 Feedback strategy**

Feedback strategy is concerned with whether teachers should present their feedback directly or indirectly on students' writing. This section describes how NES and NNES writing teachers conceptualized feedback with regard to the relevant strategies.

NES teachers' beliefs about feedback strategies varied: George and Jason believed in the integration of direct and direct feedback strategies; Bruce supported the use of direct feedback; Christine expressed a preference for indirect feedback. These points are further examined in the following paragraphs.

George and Jason agreed that it was important to adopt both direct and indirect feedback strategies but gave different reasons for their beliefs. For example, when George responded to whether teachers should indicate students' errors implicitly or explicitly, he replied, "The best way is to combine direct and indirect feedback, which can maximize the effectiveness of teacher written feedback." In the interview, he advocated the concurrent use of direct and indirect feedback due to their respective merits. Direct feedback, he asserted, enabled students to understand the correct forms or specific solutions to their problems instantly. He thought, therefore, that teachers should give direct feedback to errors, which were difficult to correct or when they first appeared in writing. In contrast, indirect feedback could save teachers' time, improve the efficiency of feedback provision, and was more suitable for minor or recurrent errors. As he believed, to increase students' awareness of errors and improve teachers' efficiency of providing feedback, the combination of both direct and indirect feedback

was an optimal strategy.

Like George, Jason supported the belief that direct and indirect feedback should be integrated in L2 writing classrooms. In the interview, he also mentioned the individual advantages of direct and indirect feedback strategies, but the major reason for his belief was that it could best meet students' needs. From his perspective, Chinese EFL classrooms tended to be populated by students with various English proficiency and teachers' feedback should be different. To specify, those who had relatively high English proficiency should be provided with feedback indirectly, while the students with low English proficiency should be given direct feedback. His views can be exemplified by his remarks in the interview:

*In the Chinese EFL classrooms, students' English proficiency varies. For students with high English proficiency, they need to foster self-editing ability. Therefore, indirect feedback is more suitable. For low-achieving students, direct feedback is supposed to be offered, by which they can understand how to correct errors or solve problems. (Interview, Jason).*

Jason, apparently, took students' differing needs into consideration in the formation of his belief regarding feedback strategies. As he stated, to foster the ability to correct errors independently, teachers should provide advanced English learners with indirect feedback, whereas direct feedback should be given to low-achieving English learners to help them know the correct answers. In this way, the needs of students with different English proficiency could be satisfied.

The other two NES teachers held opposing beliefs about the feedback strategies. Bruce favored direct feedback, asserting that it was teachers' responsibility that made him feel obliged to provide students with direct feedback, as illustrated by

his words in the interview:

*We (teachers) have the obligation to locate errors and present the correct answers for students. This is our job. If we do not do like this, we will not fulfil our responsibility because many students, particularly those with low English proficiency probably do not know how to correct errors. This has a negative effect on their writing performance. (Interview, Bruce).*

In the above excerpt, Bruce argued for teachers to give direct written feedback to their students because it was the teachers' responsibility. He emphasized that if he did not do so, he would feel that he was not doing his job well.

In contrast, Christine was supportive of indirect feedback strategy, offering two justifications of her belief. Firstly, she argued that it was not practical to offer direct corrections or solutions to problems on each student's writing in the Chinese EFL writing context, in which the classes were large, and teachers had heavy workloads. In such a situation, providing direct feedback consumed a great deal of teachers' time and energy. Secondly and more importantly, she added that indirect feedback enabled students to become personally engaged in error correction more profoundly. Thus, they had a deeper insight into the nature of their errors, which was of benefit to their long-term development in writing. Based on the two reasons, she believed that indirect feedback should be offered to students.

To sum up, the four NES teachers held different beliefs regarding feedback strategies. Two teachers, George and Jason, supported the use of direct and indirect feedback concurrently with the other two teachers, Bruce and Christine, espousing direct feedback and indirect feedback, respectively.

The beliefs of the four NNES teachers regarding feedback strategies were not

congruent. Two teachers advocated that teachers should employ direct feedback. The third teacher advocated for the use of indirect feedback and the last one believed in a combination of both. The following paragraphs elaborate on their beliefs.

Juan and Qin agreed that teachers should present their written feedback directly to students. Juan put emphasis on the advantages of direct feedback. Firstly, it could focus students' attention on the errors or problems in writing, whereas if errors were just located, students may not take them seriously. Secondly, direct feedback enabled students to realize immediately how to correct errors.

*Providing students with direct corrections should be encouraged. If teachers just indicate errors by underlines, students may not pay much attention to them. Besides, direct feedback contributes to students' immediate understanding of error correction, especially those complicated errors such as errors in sentence structures. (Interview, Juan).*

Qin's belief in direct feedback was due to her teaching experience. After several years of teaching, she found that indirect feedback was not very effective, as it was difficult for many students to correct errors when she gave indirect feedback. In order to facilitate students' error correction, she abandoned it and employed a direct feedback strategy. As she explained:

*I do not give indirect feedback on students' writing since many students still have difficulties in correcting errors even though I underline or circle the errors. Previously, I employed indirect feedback, but I observed that it was not efficacious because students were still confused and puzzled by their errors or problems in writing. (Interview, Qin).*

By contrast, Yan espoused the use of indirect feedback, citing an old Chinese saying “授人以鱼不如授人以渔” (It is much better to teach somebody to fish than give somebody a fish.). As she explained in the interview, although direct feedback was more understandable than indirect feedback, indirect feedback contributed to students’ deeper engagement with teacher written feedback. She argued that such an engagement not only provided students with opportunities to reflect on their errors deeply, but also developed their self-editing ability, which was more beneficial for L2 students’ writing in the long run. Yan, therefore, supported the use of indirect feedback in feedback provision because it enabled students to gain a deeper insight into their errors and fostered their self-editing skills.

Unlike the above three teachers, Han believed in the concurrent use of both direct and indirect feedback strategies when giving written feedback. He believed that teachers should treat different types of errors with different feedback strategies.

*When the problems are related to content and organization, I tend to use indirect feedback. I only indicate the problems such as “the meaning of this sentence is not clear” or “there is no concluding paragraph”. In contrast, in terms of errors in grammar and vocabulary, I prefer to give corrections directly. (Interview, Han).*

In summary, both NES and NNES teachers held various beliefs about feedback strategies. The two of the four NES teachers advocated the concurrent use of direct and indirect feedback with the other two teachers supporting direct and indirect feedback, respectively. In comparison, while two of NNES teachers said they believed it was better to provide students with direct feedback, another teacher favored indirect feedback and the last one upheld the combination of both direct and indirect feedback.

#### 4.2.4 Feedback focus

As described in Chapter 3, feedback focus included two types: WCF (i.e., feedback on language) and global feedback (i.e., feedback on content and organization). This section reports the beliefs of the two groups of teachers in relation to feedback focus.

In terms of the focus of feedback, the four NES teachers unanimously agreed that writing teachers should pay more attention to problems in content and organization and provide students with feedback focusing on global issues. The details of their beliefs are presented in the following paragraphs.

When asked for beliefs regarding feedback focus, George articulated that teachers, because of their role, should give priority to issues related to content and organization. Writing teachers' main responsibility, rather than improve students' writing accuracy, was to help students develop their ideas clearly and adequately, be aware of the global and local structures of their writing, and pay attention to the logical relationships between sentences. If they paid too much attention to grammatical accuracy, they would be grammar teachers instead of writing teachers. It was clear that George believed in global feedback and that his belief was ascribed to writing teachers' identity. Bruce, like George, emphasized writing teachers' identity as well. His view could be illustrated by the following excerpt:

*I think we (writing teacher) should always remind ourselves that we are writing teachers. As writing teachers, we need to address the problems in global areas instead of focusing on the use of grammar. So, we shoulder the responsibility to teach students how to produce a good piece of writing, which contains relevant and clear content as well as well-organized structure, not just error-free sentences. (Interview, Bruce).*

The same recognition of global feedback was apparent in Jason's interview, but for a different reason. From his perspective, it was the teaching objectives that contributed to his belief about feedback focus, positing that writing teachers should take the goals stipulated by writing course into consideration when providing feedback. For example, the *English writing course* aimed mainly to foster students' genre awareness and teach them how to develop their ideas reasonably, as well as structure their ideas appropriately, and not just focus on grammatical accuracy. Guided by such objectives, he deemed that teachers should pay more attention to problems in content and organization when giving feedback to students; greater emphasis on errors in language would not achieve the objectives.

Likewise, Christine said she believed that teachers should emphasize problems in global areas, because of the nature of writing. She explained that a good piece of writing was more than error-free sentences. As she said in the interview:

*We should understand the nature of writing. Its nature is to convey an author's ideas to readers, and writing serves as a media to communicate with others. Therefore, it involves more than grammar and vocabulary. In other words, even though a student writes an essay with few errors in grammar, the essay also makes no sense if it is irrelevant to the topic and structured in a messy organization. (Interview, Christine).*

The excerpt indicates that Christine espoused the provision of global feedback because she realized that the purpose of writing was to communicate with readers rather than create a collection of error-free sentences. She thought teachers should not overemphasize writing accuracy or pay much attention to linguistic errors. Instead, they should be concerned more with global issues.

With regard to NNES teachers, three out of them believed in the emphasis on content and organization in giving feedback, while only one teacher said that teachers should focus on linguistic errors. Their beliefs are discussed specifically in the subsequent paragraphs.

When asked in the interview about the types of errors and problems teachers should focus on when they provided written feedback, Yan responded that content and organization deserved writing teachers' attention most. In her response, she suggested that it was relatively difficult for students to detect and remedy problems with content and organization independently.

*English writing course is open for English major students, so they have some knowledge of grammar and have the ability to correct grammatical errors by themselves. However, it is very difficult for them to detect global issues such as clear and convincing ideas, cohesion and coherence, let alone correct them. (Interview, Yan).*

This excerpt suggests that Yan believed in global feedback. In her view, students had more difficulties in identifying and tackling global issues, compared with grammatical errors. Therefore, teachers, in response to students' writing, should scaffold students with content and organization.

Han, consistent with Yan, favored the provision of global feedback in his belief system. In the interview, he stressed the differences between Chinese and English writing in global areas, pointing out, "As two distinctively different languages, Chinese and English have many differences in writing conventions in organization. For example, in Chinese writing, a lot of supporting details are presented before proposing ideas. By contrast, in English writing, a topic sentence needs to be



formulated at the beginning of body paragraphs, followed by supporting details.” These differences, he believed, may result in students having problems with global dimensions of English writing, which suggests that teachers should prioritize such problems when providing feedback.

As well as Yan and Han, Qin also supported the idea that teachers should pay more attention to global areas in feedback provision. Her comments to similar to Han’s. For instance, she said:

*Undoubtedly, there are many differences between Chinese and English in writing, especially in organization. Influenced by the Chinese rhetorical style, many students do not cultivate the awareness of paragraphing, cohesion, and coherence. In order to have a better understanding of English writing style, students need feedback on these areas to inform them of how to structure and express ideas appropriately in English writing. (Interview, Qin).*

In the above excerpt, Qin referred to the differences between Chinese and English writing in terms of textual organization. To counter the negative transfer of the Chinese writing style, students needed to receive feedback to understand how to compose a well-written English essay.

Unlike other teachers, Juan said she believed that linguistic errors should be prioritized when L2 writing teachers give feedback. As she explained, “Grammar and vocabulary are the basic units of writing. Even if a student produces an essay without cohesion, outstanding ideas, or reasonable organization, it can also be understood if he/she uses appropriate words and writes error-free sentences”. She continued by making an analogy. As she claimed, language was to writing what clothes were to people. If a person wore dirty clothes, other people would be unhappy. Similarly, if

there were many grammatical errors in writing, other people would lose interest in reading it. Therefore, she attached great importance to feedback on language.

On the basis of above discussions, it is evident that NES and NNES teachers were close to an agreement on what should be the focus of feedback; that is, teachers should give priority to content and organization when providing feedback. However, the two groups of teachers attributed their beliefs about feedback focus differently. The beliefs of the NES teachers were based on writing teachers' identity, the teaching objectives, and the nature of writing, while their NNES peers ascribed their beliefs to students' needs, and the differences between Chinese and English writing conventions in rhetoric.

#### **4.2.5 Feedback orientation**

As noted previously, feedback orientation included two sub-themes: Positive feedback and negative feedback. NES and NNES writing teachers' beliefs about feedback orientation are discussed in this section.

When interviewed whether writing teachers should provide positive or negative comments on students' writing, two of the four NES teachers remarked that teachers should give positive comments, while the other two NES teachers had differing beliefs.

George and Christine both responded that positive feedback should be provided, pointing out that identifying the strengths of students' writing could boost their confidence and enhance their motivation in writing. They continued by arguing that nobody would be happy and feel motivated if his/her writing was full of comments identifying the weaknesses and problems. For example, Christine noted in the interview:

*As for me, it is necessary for teachers to use written comments to highlight*

*students' strengths when providing feedback. I remember that when I was a student, my writing teachers often did so. Such positive comments enhanced my confidence and interest in writing and encouraged me to do better. (Interview, Christine).*

Christine attributed her strong advocacy for providing positive comments on students' writing to her previous schooling experience, which benefited her learning in writing greatly.

In contrast, Bruce said he believed that negative comments should be provided in practice. In the interview, he emphasized the need to give negative feedback, so that students understood their weaknesses and problems in writing; he justified his belief as follows:

*I believe negative feedback which points out students' weaknesses and problems is more beneficial for them because they pay more attention to negative comments. Additionally, pointing out weaknesses is more meaningful than providing some empty praise like "good" or "well done" in that it (empty praise) may not stimulate students' reflections. (Interview, Bruce).*

Jason showed a preference for using negative and positive comments concurrently in feedback provision, saying he thought giving feedback should take students' English proficiency into consideration. He went on to explain that advanced English learners needed more negative feedback so that they could understand their problems or weaknesses clearly, thus enabling them to make greater progress in writing. However, for students with low English proficiency, teachers should highlight the merits and strengths of any aspects of their writing, acknowledge their performance, and boost their writing confidence so they would be more willing to

make an effort. Jason's attitude towards the provision of positive and negative comments took into account students' English proficiency to meet their needs; an emphasis on only positive or negative feedback was inappropriate in Jason's view.

To sum up, the four NES teachers held varied beliefs in terms of feedback orientation. Two supported teachers using positive comments to encourage and motivate students, while Bruce advocated negative feedback to indicate inadequacies in writing, and Jason believed that positive and negative comments should be combined to suit students with different English levels.

Three of the four NNEST teachers (Juan, Yan, and Qin) supported giving negative feedback to highlight students' problems in writing, contending that it was less likely for students to improve if they did not understand their inadequacies or problems. Negative comments enabled students to be aware of their weak areas, and therefore do better in writing. Juan and Yan articulated their views as follows:

*It is important to give feedback comments to indicate students' problems because such comments are what students need and can really benefit them. If teachers do not do so, students will not pay attention to their writing problems or even they will not be aware of their weaknesses in writing at all. (Interview, Juan).*

*I think that the positive comments such as "good points", "good conclusion" or "well-organized" are meaningless because with such comments, students do not reflect on their writing. As teachers, we should assume the responsibility to identify and diagnose students' problems in their task performance rather than compliment them. (Interview, Yan).*

The above two excerpts show that these teachers emphasized the role of

negative comments in feedback provision. Whereas Juan valued negative comments to help students understand the directions for further improvement, Yan thought that teachers' responsibility was to facilitate students' understandings of their problems and weaknesses in greater depth.

In contrast, Han supported the concurrent use of positive and negative comments because of the respective advantages of positive and negative feedback. He explained that positive feedback, affirming one or several dimensions of students' writing met standards, could encourage and motivate students, while negative feedback drew students' attention to their problems in writing. To balance enhancing students' confidence and raising the awareness of their problems in writing, combining positive and negative feedback was the ideal approach. As neither positive nor negative feedback alone was better, it was necessary and more effective to include both strengths and weaknesses in feedback provision.

To conclude, most NNES teachers agreed that teachers should focus on students' problems and weaknesses when providing written feedback. In contrast, only one NES teacher held that belief. Two of the remaining NES teachers advocated positive comments and the last one supported a combination of both.

#### **4.2.6 Summary**

The four NES and NNES teachers' beliefs about purpose, scope, strategy, focus, and orientation, identified in the interviews, were reported in this section. They unanimously acknowledged the important role of teacher feedback in improving students' writing proficiency and informing their teaching practices. Their beliefs regarding the other four themes were presented in Table 4.1, with the teachers' shared beliefs, and beliefs in which they differed, summarized as follows:

Firstly, there was a marked difference in the two groups of teachers' beliefs

regarding scope of feedback. Three NES teachers supported focused feedback while three NNES teachers said they believed in comprehensive feedback.

Secondly, in relation to feedback strategy, there were variations in both NES and NNES teachers' beliefs. Specifically, two NES teachers favored a combination of direct and indirect feedback strategies; of the other two teachers, one supported the direct feedback and the other indirect feedback. In contrast, two NNES teachers preferred direct feedback; of the other two teachers, one believed in indirect feedback, and the other supported a combination of both, respectively.

Thirdly, the NES and NNES teachers reached a general agreement in feedback focus: Almost all of them emphasized that more attention should be paid to global issues.

Finally, in terms of feedback orientation, most NNES teachers stressed the importance of providing negative comments, whereas the four NES teachers did not share the same belief; two supported using positive comments and with the other two, one advocated negative comments and the other a concurrent use of both, respectively.

**Table 4.1 NES and NNES teachers' written feedback beliefs**

Participant	NES VS. NNES	Scope	Strategy	Focus	Orientation
George	NES	focused	both	global level	positive
Jason	NES	focused	both	global level	both
Bruce	NES	comprehensive	direct	global level	negative
Christine	NES	focused	indirect	global level	positive
Juan	NNES	comprehensive	direct	local level	negative
Yan	NNES	comprehensive	indirect	global level	negative
Qin	NNES	comprehensive	direct	global level	negative
Han	NNES	focused	both	global level	both

### **4.3 NES and NNES teachers' written feedback practices**

The two groups of teachers' actual practices related to the four themes (focus, strategy, scope, and orientation) were observed through the analysis of feedback provided by them in their specific pedagogical contexts. To paint a comprehensive picture regarding NES and NNES teachers' written feedback practices, the frequencies and percentages of feedback points in different themes were calculated and then the frequencies were subjected to chi-square tests. The quantitative data was triangulated with the examples from the marked writing samples.

#### **4.3.1 Feedback focus**

Although NES and NNES teachers gave feedback targeting different dimensions of writing (i.e., language, content, and organization), there was a great discrepancy between the two groups of teachers' feedback focus. Whereas NES teachers focused on global issues (content and organization), NNES teachers paid more attention to local aspects (language) in feedback provision.

##### ***NES teachers' written feedback focus***

The feedback analysis revealed that all the four NES teachers provided feedback on the errors and problems in language, content, and organization (see Table 4.2) with a significant difference in the number of written feedback points across the three subcategories ( $\chi^2=12.23$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=.002$ ). In total, NES teachers provided 495 feedback points on 40 students' writing samples, among which 130 (26.26%) focused on language, 173 (34.95%) on content, and 192 (38.79%) on organization. The four NES teachers paid more attention to problems in content and organization than errors in language. This indicated that NES teachers had a strong focus on global issues of writing when responding to students' writing. In the next paragraphs, the findings of

their feedback in the three subcategories are reported with examples.

**Table 4.2 Focus of NES teachers' written feedback**

Participant	Focus			
	Language	Content	Organization	Total
George	28(22.58%)	46(37.10%)	50(40.32%)	124
Jason	41(32.03%)	44(34.38%)	43(33.59%)	128
Bruce	33(25.58%)	44(34.11%)	52(40.31%)	129
Christine	28(24.56%)	39(34.21%)	47(41.23%)	114
Total	130(26.26%)	173(34.95%)	192(38.79%)	495

### ***Feedback on language***

The four NES teachers gave written feedback focusing on both grammar and vocabulary, as presented in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3 NES teachers' feedback on language**

Participant	Language		
	Grammar	Vocabulary	Total
George	23(82.14%)	5(17.86%)	28
Jason	36(87.80%)	5(12.20%)	41
Bruce	29(87.88%)	4(12.12%)	33
Christine	25(89.29%)	3(10.71%)	28
Total	113(86.92%)	17(13.08%)	130

As shown in Table 4.3, they gave 130 instances of language-focused feedback with, on average, three language-focused feedback points for each student's writing sample. Of these 130 feedback points, 113 (86.92%) related to grammar and 17 (13.08%) to vocabulary with a significant difference in distribution ( $\chi^2=70.89$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.000$ ). This suggested that NES teachers paid more attention to the accuracy of grammar than vocabulary when providing feedback on language. The following



examples demonstrate their feedback targeting grammar and vocabulary.

### Example 1

**Student text** *One of the advantages of putting a pollution tax is the less pollutant emission. With the development of the citizens' living level, cars find their ways into ordinary people's home...*

**George's feedback** putting→ imposing; development→ improvement

### Example 2

**Student text** *With the development of society economy, tourism in our country is getting more and more popular. Some environmental problem appears...*

**Bruce's feedback** society→ social; problem→ problems

### Example 3

**Student text** *However, this holiday should ban because there are many negative influences, such as interrupting children's education...*

**Christine's feedback** ban→ be banned

The written feedback in the above examples were provided when students had linguistic errors in their writing. In the first example, George paid attention to lexical choice, directly correcting the inappropriate use of words. The other two examples showed NES teachers' feedback targeting grammatical errors in part of speech, singularity/plurality, and voice. It seemed that they offered feedback targeting different types of grammatical errors.

### ***Feedback on content***

There were 173 feedback comments (see Table 4.4) on content made by the four NES teachers. These written comments were further analyzed into three subcategories: Clarity (72/41.62%), relevance (28/16.18%), and adequacy (73/42.20%) and the number varied significantly across the three subcategories ( $\chi^2=22.90$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=.000$ ). This indicated that much more feedback comments were delivered to clarity and adequacy than to relevance.

**Table 4.4 NES teachers' feedback on content**

Participant	Content			
	Clarity	Relevance	Adequacy	Total
George	22(47.83%)	6(13.04%)	18(39.13%)	46
Jason	18(40.91%)	6(13.64%)	20(45.45%)	44
Bruce	16(36.37%)	9(20.45%)	19(43.18%)	44
Christine	16(41.03%)	7(17.94%)	16(41.03%)	39
Total	72(41.62%)	28(16.18%)	73(42.20%)	173

The feedback on clarity concerns the comprehensibility of a text. All the NES teachers' feedback comments drew students' attention to expressing their meaning clearly in writing.

#### **Example 4**

**Student text**      *The booming tourism provides human of another way of enjoying, which could extend the happiness for tourists and create economic benefit...*

**Bruce's feedback**      What do you mean by this sentence?

#### **Example 5**

**Student text**      *And there also be some measures to try to make education more academically rigorous and to tackle a culture in the education establishment...*

**Christine's feedback**      What's the meaning of this sentence?

In the above examples, teachers' feedback comments, to identify problems in clarity in students' writing, may increase students' awareness of the need to convey clear meaning in writing. Such feedback may help students make progress in this aspect.

As well as clarity, NES teachers evaluated relevance in students' writing, with their feedback comments appraising whether students included details which digressed

from the topic in writing. Overall, two issues were targeted when the four teachers provided feedback on relevance: 1) The whole text should respond to the topic and stay focused on it; 2) in each paragraph, the supporting details should be consistent with the topic sentence. The following example, which shows Christine's response to students' writing problem in relation to relevance, was presented at the end of the script. Such a comment indicated that the essay had nothing to do with the topic and that the student writer probably misunderstood the topic. Its purpose was to help the student writer understand the necessity that he/she needed to clarify the prompt before writing.

#### **Example 6**

##### **Student text**

*Omitted because of length*

##### **Christine's feedback**

The whole essay has nothing to do with the topic whether term-time holidays should be banned.

Bruce, similarly, made comments to assess how well students' writing achieved textual relevance. Example 7 informs the student writer that writing should be operated to meet the requirement of relevance.

#### **Example 7**

##### **Student text**

*In our daily life, more and more environmental problems can be seen around. For example, thousands of people visit the places of interest and will cause severe air pollution. Because people go out by different means of transportation including buses, cars and so on, this can also result in traffic jam.*

##### **Bruce's feedback**

This detail is not relevant to the main idea of this paragraph.

In Example 7, Bruce made a comment to remind the student that he/she should control the information of each paragraph and avoid unrelated information, ensuring the details of paragraphs keep the same focus of attention as the topic sentence. Similar written comments were observed in the feedback given by Jason and George. More examples, therefore, are not presented.

The amount of information provided to develop the main idea of writing is referred to as adequacy. NES teachers, in this study, offered feedback to evaluate whether details were adequate for the development of ideas. When offering such feedback, they showed concern with the adequacy of reasoning.

**Example 8**

**Student text**

*The reason why they should not be taxed is quite simple. The majority of private car owners are ordinary people who go to work by car for their most convenience...*

**George's feedback**

Only one reason is provided. Please add another different reason to support your claim.

In Example 8, George commented on the reasons provided in writing. He emphasized that students should provide at least two different reasons to elaborate on their central ideas. Therefore, he provided written feedback to ask the student to add one more reason. In addition to the number of reasons to develop main ideas, NES teachers also stressed that topic sentences should be developed adequately with examples or reasoning. That is to say, students should elaborate on topic sentences sufficiently with details rather than simply formulate topic sentences at the beginning of paragraphs. The following extracts are comments made by Bruce and Jason to evaluate adequacy in students' writing. Both of them first pointed out the limited development of topic sentences, indicating that students had problems in adequacy and then further suggested how to solve them.

**Example 9**

**Student text**

*My arguments for this point are listed as follows. The main reason for my view is that many tourists have high education and environmental awareness. They have a good sense of environmental protection.*

**Bruce's feedback**

Lack of details to support the topic sentence. You can add an example "they do not throw rubbish when visiting some places of interest" to illustrate your idea.

**Example 10**

**Student text**

*In addition, making friends online plays an essential role in our daily life. If we do it, we will have a bigger and*

*more colourful world.*

**Jason's feedback**      No details to elaborate on your topic sentence. You should add some examples here to develop it.

### ***Feedback on organization***

In total, the four NES teachers, in the present study, gave 192 feedback points on organization in the 40 collected writing samples (see Table 4.5). That is, each student's writing received approximately five feedback points targeting problems in organization. The 192 feedback points were analyzed and broken into four subcategories: Overall structure, cohesion, coherence, and paragraphing. Based on a chi-square test, there was a significant difference in the number of the four subcategories ( $\chi^2=48.38$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.000$ ). As recorded in Table 4.5, NES teachers gave the most feedback on cohesion (79/41.15%). The remaining three subcategories were ranked as follows: Overall structure (64/33.33%), coherence (25/13.02%), and paragraphing (24/12.50%). The following paragraphs demonstrate their feedback on different subcategories of organization.

**Table 4.5 NES teachers' feedback on organization**

Participant	Organization				
	Overall structure	Cohesion	Coherence	Paragraphing	Total
George	17(34.00%)	21(42.00%)	8(16.00%)	4(8.00%)	50
Jason	13(30.23%)	18(41.86%)	4(9.30%)	8(18.60%)	43
Bruce	21(40.38%)	19(36.54%)	5(9.62%)	7(13.46%)	52
Christine	13(27.66%)	21(44.68%)	8(17.02%)	5(10.64%)	47
Total	64(33.33%)	79(41.15%)	25(13.02%)	24(12.50%)	192

Firstly, all the NES teachers provided feedback on overall structure to make students realize how English writing should be organized globally. Specifically, they gave feedback comments on the global structure, "introduction-body-conclusion", which is regarded as a general feature of the organization of essays. For feedback

comments on the introduction, teachers evaluated the quality of students' introductory paragraphs, which serve to contextualize the whole writing and arouse readers' interest. Example 11 below demonstrates that George gave information relevant to resolving a problem in introduction. His comment indicated that the student's introductory paragraph failed to satisfy the writing convention that the introduction should be succinct. This comment should enable the student writer to realize that he/she needed to make the introductory paragraph more concise. It was found also that the NES teachers were concerned with whether the introductory paragraph was complete. In general, the introduction includes two indispensable components: Background information to contextualize the topic, and a claim to express the writer's opinion regarding the topic. Bruce made a comment in Example 12, suggesting that the introductory part was incomplete since the student did not include a claim to voice his/her opinion towards travelling.

#### **Example 11**

##### **Student text**

*With the development of economy, more and more people can afford a private car, which leads to the increasing number of cars. We are now facing some problems because of the increasing cars. The major problem is the pollution caused by cars. To solve the problem, the government in some big cities have put a "pollution tax" on private cars. As far as I am concerned, this policy is sensible and should be supported. The reasons are as follows.*

##### **George's feedback**

The introduction is too long. You should leave more space for the body paragraph.

#### **Example 12**

##### **Student text**

*Have you ever heard a very popular sentence "The world is so big and we should go out". Numerous people are crazy about travelling. Tourism is a booming business in China. However, some people worry that too many tourists may bring harm to the environment.*

##### **Bruce's feedback**

What's your opinion about travelling?

When providing feedback on body paragraphs, teachers placed much emphasis on the topic sentence, which demonstrates the organization of ideas in each paragraph.

That is, a topic sentence is of great importance for each paragraph, as it is the visual representation of how ideas are structured locally. Thus, they emphasized that it was necessary for students to formulate a topic sentence to start a paragraph. In Example 13, George commented on a topic sentence. From his point of view, a topic sentence should encapsulate the whole paragraph and define the details to follow the topic sentence. As well as commenting on the absence of a topic sentence, the teachers' written feedback showed that they also appraised its validity, that is, whether the topic sentence was suitable and effective. As Example 14 reveals, Christine addressed a problem in relation to a topic sentence; her feedback indicated her dissatisfaction, as it did not summarize the main point of the paragraph exactly.

#### **Example 13**

##### **Student text**

*Just look at the atmosphere around us, especially in big cities in China, foggy has been a serious problem. People have to wear a mask before going out and we have not seen a blue sky for a long time...*

##### **George's feedback**

No topic sentence in this paragraph. Please formulate a topic sentence to conclude the whole paragraph.

#### **Example 14**

##### **Student text**

*When the little children grow up, they should take the responsibility to be a fantastic social citizen. It is the society that teaches children how to build better relationship with others...*

##### **Christine's feedback**

This is not the topic sentence of this paragraph. It cannot summarize the whole paragraph.

Teachers also gave feedback on concluding paragraphs. In such feedback, they emphasized that an essay should end with a concluding paragraph to summarize its main points or arguments. For example, George wrote the comment "the organization is not complete and there is no conclusion" on students' writing to remind them. In a similar vein, Bruce offered feedback comments such as "a lack of conclusion to summarize the essay", when students lacked a conclusion in their essays. These comments made students aware that a conclusion should be included in order to

compose a standard essay. Teachers also paid attention to the quality of concluding paragraphs which, according to them, should summarize and restate the major points of essays, and exclude new information, as exemplified by the following instances from Christine and Jason. In these two examples, the two teachers identified students' problems in concluding paragraphs: 1) Including new information; 2) failing to make a summary of the main points of the writing.

#### **Example 15**

##### **Student text**

*Therefore, it is very easy to get a result that parents should give time to their child. Parents should be aware that education is not only studying but also contains independence. Parents should not damage education only because of money.*

##### **Christine's feedback**

This is new information and it shouldn't be included in conclusion.

#### **Example 16**

##### **Student text**

*It is not wise to make friends online. We should pay more attention to the real world.*

##### **Jason's feedback**

A weak conclusion. You should summarize the main points in your writing.

As well as the overall structure, NES teachers delivered feedback on cohesion, which refers to the relationships between items within a text. This study identified that the four NES teachers provided feedback on the use of cohesive devices to help students connect sentences more smoothly and logically. When focusing on cohesion, they commented on two aspects: Conjunctions and references, to realize the anaphoric relationship in texts.

Firstly, in emphasizing the use of conjunctions, their feedback concentrated on the absence or misuse of conjunctions. The extracts below from students' writing samples demonstrate their feedback on conjunctions.

#### **Example 17**

##### **Student text**

*Compared with other industries, tourism is more promising, and it never uses that kind of resources like fossil, oil and raw materials...*

##### **Bruce's feedback**

~~And~~→<sup>^</sup>because



### Example 18

**Student text**                    *^As an old saying goes: all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. Obviously, parents take children out of school for holiday not only broadens their horizons but also help them relax both mentally and physically...*

**Christine's feedback**   *^Firstly*

The above examples show NES teachers' attention to the cohesion realized by conjunctions. In Example 17, when the student writer used a wrong conjunction to connect sentences, Bruce deleted it and gave a correct conjunction "because" to indicate the cause-effect relationship between the two adjacent sentences. In Example 18, Christine added a conjunction "firstly" at the beginning of the paragraph to illustrate that this was the first reason, which made the two reasons logically tied.

Secondly, NES teachers gave feedback targeting students' use of references, with a focus on two kinds of pronouns: Demonstrative pronouns and personal pronouns. For instance,

### Example 19

**Student text**                    *It is obvious that this can reduce pollution and is good for our environmental protection...*

**George's feedback**           *What does "this" here refer to? Specify.*

### Example 20

**Student text**                    *To begin with, as for students what is the most important is education and the best place to educate children is school. Only when we are at school can we receive more...*

**Christine's feedback**       *Children...we...: children...they.*

In the above extracts, teachers highlighted the use of pronouns. In Example 19, George underlined the demonstrative pronoun "this" and asked the student to clarify what "this" here referred to. In the second example, Christine directly changed the wrong personal pronoun "we" into a correct one "they".

Moreover, observational findings found that when giving feedback on organization, NES teachers evaluated coherence, which refers to the implicit relationships of a text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). In the present study, they focused on

the logical connections between each segment of a text, reminding students that different parts of writing should be related to each other logically. Specifically, NES teachers' feedback emphasized the logical relationships between reasons and claims in essays in order to realize a unified theme or conclusion. Example 21 provided by Jason shows his attention to coherence in terms of the logical links between reasons and claims. His feedback informed the student that he/she should be careful in the selection of reasons to ensure coherence.

### **Example 21**

#### **Student text**

*In the age of information and communication, the internet plays an important role. In my opinion, it is necessary to make friends online.*

*For another thing, more and more work needs to use computers, which have the benefits of saving time and exchanging experiences. At college, in view of the practical needs of society, there are more and more students interested in learning computers. They are experienced in making friends on the internet and they have more opportunities when they enter the society...*

#### **Jason's feedback**

How do these details relate to your claim? Can it explain your claim?

Lastly, the analysis of feedback indicated that the four teachers provided written feedback on the reasonable separation of paragraphs in the body part of writing. They all stressed the importance of paragraphing and encouraged students to be aware that they should construct their writing with appropriate paragraphing.

### **Example 22**

#### **Student text**

*Omitted because of length.*

#### **Christine's feedback**

Each paragraph should develop one idea. You need to put the two reasons into different paragraphs.

### **Example 23**

#### **Student text**

*First of all, from the perspective of government. For promoting the development of tourism and building up a nice view of city, the government will put forward according policy to protect the environment. In addition, the citizen will get the sense of pride through the process of showing the beautiful scenery to the tourists, so they will take protecting the environment as their responsibility. What's*

*more, the tourists have been drawn by the beauty. They won't destroy the environment.*

**Bruce's feedback** One paragraph should only include one idea. Divide the three reasons into three paragraphs.

Teachers, evidently, gave feedback comments on paragraphing when students' writing had problems in such an area. They asked students to divide the body part into several paragraphs based on the number of reasons, with each paragraph including one reason. Such comments enabled students to understand the need for reasonable paragraphing to produce a well-organized essay. Similar written comments were seen in the feedback given by George and Jason.

### ***NNES teachers' written feedback focus***

This section discusses the four NNES teachers' written feedback focus in detail. As shown in Table 4.6, similar to their NES peers, they provided feedback on the dimensions of language, content, and organization. In sum, they gave 792 feedback points on the 40 collected writing samples, of which 696 (87.88%) feedback points focused on linguistic errors, 58 (7.32%) feedback points on content, and 38 (4.80%) feedback points on organization. There was a significant difference, according to a chi-square test, in their focus ( $\chi^2=1061.12$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=.000$ ). That is, NNES teachers offered significantly more feedback points on linguistic errors than on other features (i.e., content and organization). This shows that NES and NNES teachers' feedback practices differed significantly in terms of focus as the former paid more attention to global issues in feedback provision.

**Table 4.6 Focus of NNES teachers' written feedback**

Participant	Focus			
	Language	Content	Organization	Total
Juan	193(84.28%)	26(11.35%)	10(4.37%)	229
Yan	174(90.16)	14(7.25%)	5(2.59%)	193

Qin	170(86.73%)	10(5.10%)	16(8.16%)	196
Han	159(91.38%)	8(4.60%)	7(4.02%)	174
Total	696(87.88%)	58(7.32%)	38(4.80%)	792

### ***Feedback on language***

The four NNES teachers in this study delivered 696 feedback points to their students in the category of language. On average, each student's script received 17 feedback points on language. According to Table 4.7, NNES teachers' feedback on language targeted errors relevant to both grammar and vocabulary, with 537 (77.16%) feedback points focusing on grammar and 159 (22.84%) feedback points on vocabulary with a significant difference in the distribution ( $\chi^2=205.29$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.000$ ). This suggested that NNES teachers, similar to NES teachers, showed more concern with grammatical errors when responding to linguistic errors in writing.

**Table 4.7 NNES teachers' feedback on language**

Participant	Language		
	Grammar	Vocabulary	Total
Juan	158(81.87%)	35(18.13%)	193
Yan	130(74.71%)	44(25.29%)	174
Qin	131(77.06%)	39(22.94%)	170
Han	118(74.21%)	41(25.79%)	159
Total	537(77.16%)	159(22.84%)	696

Examples of NNES teachers' feedback on language, targeting grammar and vocabulary are presented as follows. The two examples below reveal NNES teachers' responses to errors related to language, which drew students' attention to the accurate use of grammar and vocabulary. Their written feedback targeted different aspects of language. Juan and Han provided written feedback on a variety of grammatical errors

such as plural forms, parts of speech, articles, and word choice.

#### Example 24

##### Student text

*First, using phone to send information is more convenience. Many people complain that writing a letter wastes time. Young people just type on phones and send the message immediately, which saves much time and energy.*

*Second, using phone is fitted into young people. Today, young people have a large need to communicate with each other. Letter writing have trouble in sending too many information.*

##### Juan's

##### feedback

phone→ phones; convenience→ convenient; the message→ messages; is fitted into→ is suitable for; large: wrong word; have→ has; many→ much

#### Example 25

##### Student text

*For one thing, cleaning the dormitory is the fundamental skill which we college students need to learn. Only when we can manage ourselves, can we do something for our social. Moreover, doing laundry is also a way for us to get rid of our heavy study. It is a time to relief our brain. Last but not ~~the~~-least, of all our traditional virtue, diligent and thrifty are important for us...*

##### Han's feedback

the dormitory → dormitories; social→ society; heavy→ busy; relief→ relieve; brain → brains; the→ ~~the~~; virtue→ virtues; diligent→ diligence; thrifty→ thrift

As well as the linguistic errors noted above, observational findings showed that NNES teachers gave feedback on errors at syntactic level, which were complex linguistic errors.

#### Example 26

##### Student text

*On the other hand, to know the world in the journey, to make more friends, to see more interesting and to feel what you've seen and heard by heart.*

##### Qin's feedback

This sentence is incomplete. No subject or predicate.

#### Example 27

##### Student text

*There is a common phenomenon which nowadays young people tend to use phones more often than writing to each other...*

##### Juan's feedback

which→ that

In the first example, Qin commented that the sentence was a fragment because there was no subject or predicate. The second example shows that Juan provided a direct correction, replacing “which” with “that” when the student was confused by

appositive clauses and attributive clauses.

### ***Feedback on content***

In this study, the four NNES teachers provided 58 feedback points on content (see Table 4.8), which were subdivided into three categories: Clarity (48/82.76%), adequacy (6/10.34%), and relevance (4/6.90%). The three categories differed significantly in the number of feedback points ( $\chi^2=63.86$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=.000$ ), indicating that NNES teachers paid much more attention to the problems related to clarity.

**Table 4.8 NNES teachers' feedback on content**

Participant	Content			
	Clarity	Relevance	Adequacy	Total
Juan	21(80.77%)	2(7.69%)	3(11.54%)	26
Yan	12(85.72%)	1(7.14%)	1(7.14%)	14
Qin	7(70.00%)	1(10.00%)	2(20.00%)	10
Han	8(100.00%)	0(0.00%)	0(0.00%)	8
Total	48(82.76%)	4(6.90%)	6(10.34%)	58

Altogether 48 feedback comments were aimed at clarity to make students realize the importance of conveying clear meaning in writing. The following example illustrates Han's focus on clarity when he provided feedback on content. In this extract, faced with a sentence that he could not understand, he underlined it along with a metalinguistic description so that the student writer could rewrite such an unclear sentence.

#### **Example 28**

##### **Student text**

*How does it come to a college student to form an ability of self-independence?*

##### **Han's feedback**

Unclear meaning

The other NNES teachers, like Han, also provided feedback on clarity. For example, Yan provided a question to inform the student writer of the problem in clarity.

### Example 29

<b>Student text</b>	<u><i>It (volunteering) provides people with opportunities to communicate and help each other, lessening the sense of alienation from each other...</i></u>
<b>Yan's feedback</b>	Is this clear in meaning?

Only six written feedback comments were given by the four NNES teachers to address issues related to adequacy. Such comments given by the teachers advised students that sufficient information should be provided to achieve a strong development of ideas in writing. For instance:

### Example 30

<b>Student text</b>	<i>(Reason 1) First and foremost, it (term-time holiday) will put a bad influence on the students. One of the most important things for students is to study... (Reason 2) Also, it will have a negative effect on their (students') study...</i>
<b>Qin's feedback</b>	The two reasons you provided are similar. Provide the negative influences on other aspects.

### Example 31

<b>Student text</b>	<u><i>Last but not least, letter writing is beneficial for our Chinese learning, so we are supposed to inherit it.</i></u>
<b>Juan's feedback</b>	Add some details to develop your idea here. For example, letter writing provides students with opportunities to improve their Chinese writing skills.

In the above examples, teachers provided feedback to remind students that they should develop their ideas adequately. Their feedback on adequacy emphasized that enough reasons and specific details were needed to elaborate on the claim and topic sentence. In Example 30, Qin asked the student to provide another reason in order to achieve adequacy in reasoning. In Example 31, Juan provided the student with a specific suggestion to address how to develop the topic sentence.

Problems of relevance drew the least attention from teachers, with only four feedback comments on irrelevant information in writing. The example below illustrates Qin's response to irrelevant information in students' writing. She underlined the sentences and questioned whether they were relevant to the topic.

**Example 32****Student text**

*In order to make their children more focused on studying, parents take care of their daily life and give them food and dressing in person. There was a student who was dismissed from Tsinghua University because she has no ability to be independent...*

**Qin's feedback**

These details are related to the topic?

**Feedback on organization**

In this study, NNEST teachers altogether provided 38 feedback comments targeting organization (see Table 4.9), which were further divided into four subcategories: Cohesion (26/68.42%), overall structure (9/23.68%), paragraphing (2/5.26%), and coherence (1/2.63%); feedback on organization varied significantly across the four subcategories ( $\chi^2=42.21$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.000$ ), with problems of cohesion attracting the most attention. Given that little feedback was given to coherence and paragraphing, the examples below illustrate NNEST teachers' feedback focusing on overall structure and cohesion.

**Table 4.9 NNEST teachers' feedback on organization**

Participant	Organization				Total
	Overall structure	Cohesion	Coherence	Paragraphing	
Juan	4(40.00%)	3(30.00%)	1(10.00%)	2(20.00%)	10
Yan	0(0.00%)	5(100.00%)	0(0.00%)	0(0.00%)	5
Qin	4(25.00%)	12(75.00%)	0(0.00%)	0(0.00%)	16
Han	1(14.29%)	6(85.71%)	0(0.00%)	0(0.00%)	7
Total	9(23.68%)	26(68.42%)	1(2.63%)	2(5.27%)	38

Teachers' feedback on overall structure targeted the problems related to beginning, body, and ending, and drew students' attention to the global structure of essays. The extracts below show their responses to problems regarding overall structure.

**Example 33****Student text**

*Nowadays, taking children out of school during their term time is a prevalent social activity that has caught on among*



<b>Qin's feedback</b>	<i>parents. Parents argue that being time-saving and money-saving, children are able to have the opportunity to expand their horizon and relax themselves. On the contrary, authorities object to it since it many damage children's education and academic performance. Personally, I assume that such practice should not be encouraged in the society.</i> The introduction is too long.
<b>Example 34</b> <b>Student text</b>	<i>Secondly, when we spend more time on phones, we will know less about how to write a letter. Letter writing needs some preparations such as format, the outline, envelop and so on. Once you have better choice to communicate, the less you want to know about letter writing and also the less knowledge you actually know.</i>
<b>Juan's feedback</b>	Where's the topic sentence?

<b>Example 35</b> <b>Student text</b>	<i>In conclusion, to hire cleaners is such an unwise thing.</i>
<b>Han's feedback</b>	A weak conclusion.

In Example 33, Qin provided feedback addressing a problem in the introductory paragraph. She highlighted that the student presented a long introduction, which was inconsistent with the expectation that an introduction should be concise. Example 34 presents Juan's feedback on body paragraphs, in which she pointed out that there was no topic sentence, implying that the topic sentence summarizes the main idea of each paragraph. In the last example, Han commented on the concluding paragraph, noting that the student concluded the essay with only one sentence. Therefore, he reminded the student that this conclusion is too weak and fails to summarize the main arguments in his/her writing.

Consistent with the NES teachers, NNES teachers paid the most attention to cohesion when offering feedback on organization. Their cohesion-focused feedback is concerned mainly with students using appropriate pronouns to establish the anaphoric relationship. The following examples illustrate teachers' attention to the use of

references.

**Example 36**

**Student text**

*To begin with, it could help students to foster a sense of responsibility and become more self-reliant to make their lives well-organized...*

**Han's feedback**

"it" refers to what? Be clear.

**Example 37**

**Student text**

*When we are volunteers, we can get rid of careless shortcomings and we will treat this matter very carefully...*

**Yan's feedback**

Refer to what?

In Example 36, Han underlined the pronoun "it" together with the comment "refers to what" to ask the student to explain what "it" refers to. In Example 37, Yan paid attention to the use of demonstrative pronoun and identified the student writer's problem in this aspect.

Unlike NES teachers' written feedback on cohesion, there were few feedback comments on cohesion provided by NNEST teachers that referred to conjunctions; those that did addressed both the misuse and the lack of conjunctions. Qin and Han's feedback are examples of such feedback from NNEST teachers. Han's feedback targeted the inappropriate use of conjunctions, while Qin gave feedback on the lack of conjunctions. Their feedback contributed to establishing logical and reasonable relationships between sentences.

**Example 38**

**Student text**

*The majority of college students live in a dorm and there is not a washing machine and no parents help them clean the room. So it is obvious that they should do housework by themselves...*

**Han's feedback**

This is not a cause and effect relationship.

**Example 39**

**Student text**

*Additionally, you know summer is always a busy tour season for resorts. ^ The price of travelling will keep rising, which...*

### **Qin's feedback** <sup>^so</sup>

To conclude, this section discussed details of the two groups of teachers' feedback practices regarding focus. According to the independent samples *t*-tests, significant differences existed between NES and NNES teachers' written feedback in the amount of feedback on language ( $t=-20.59$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $d=-4.60$ ), content ( $t=11.10$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $d=2.48$ ), and organization ( $t=17.19$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $d=3.84$ ), which suggests that NES and NNES teachers' written feedback focus was significantly different. Specifically, when giving feedback in practice, NES teachers had a stronger focus on content and organization (global issues) while their NNES peers showed more concern with local issues (language).

Despite the differences, there were some similarities between NES and NNES teachers' written feedback practices in the subcategories of language, content and organization. For example, with feedback on language, both were more concerned with the errors in relation to grammar rather than vocabulary. Similarly, the two groups of teachers paid much attention to clarity when providing feedback on content. In terms of organization feedback, NES and NNES teachers put more emphasis on cohesion than other three subcategories of organization, overall structure, coherence, and paragraphing.

### **4.3.2 Scope of feedback**

In this study, both NES and NNES teachers provided written feedback in a comprehensive way. They gave feedback on a variety of errors and problems instead of a limited number of pre-selected errors. This section examines the two groups of teachers' feedback practices regarding the scope of feedback.

#### ***NES teachers' scope of feedback***

As reported in Table 4.2, the four NES teachers' written feedback focused on different

dimensions of writing (i.e. language, content, and organization). This means that their feedback was not restricted to a few types of errors. Instead, they provided feedback to address various types of errors and problems. Therefore, they provided written feedback comprehensively rather than selectively.

**Table 4.10 The amount of NES teachers' written feedback**

Participant	Amount		
	Total	Average	Range
George	124	12.40	9-15
Jason	128	12.80	11-15
Bruce	129	12.90	7-16
Christine	114	11.40	8-16
Total	495	12.40	7-16

Moreover, as shown in Table 4.10, NES teachers gave a great many written feedback points. On average, each student's writing sample received 12.4 feedback points, which was high relative to the number of words in essays (150-200). The analysis of feedback revealed that each teacher provided one feedback point in approximately every 15 words, which suggests that the four NES teachers provided extensive feedback on students' writing.

After a quick read through all the feedback, it was confirmed that they indeed offered comprehensive feedback. However, it should be noted that they did not necessarily correct each error, and they left some minor errors untouched, which did not impede understanding. The following instances illustrate Bruce and Christine's uncorrected errors.

#### **Example 40**

<b>Student text</b>	<i>Consequently, I totally disagree that tourism will harm to our environment...</i>
<b>Bruce's feedback</b>	No feedback

**Example 41****Student text**

*Actually, taking children out of school benefit children's growth...*

**Christine's feedback**

No feedback

***NNES teachers' written feedback scope***

In line with NES teachers, NNES teachers provided a great deal of feedback targeting both local and global issues (see Table 4.6). Thus, they focused on a wide array of error types instead of only being concerned with a limited number of types of errors. This indicates that NNES teachers adopted a comprehensive approach to give feedback on students' writing rather than a focused way to address errors.

**Table 4.11 The amount of NNES teachers' written feedback**

Participant	Amount		
	Total	Average	Range
Juan	229	22.90	18-29
Yan	193	19.30	9-27
Qin	196	19.60	15-25
Han	174	17.40	13-25
Total	792	19.80	9-29

As reported in Table 4.11, the four NNES teachers in the current study gave 792 feedback points. This means that 19.8 feedback points were delivered to each writing sample on average. In comparison with the length of the essays ranging from 150-200, the average number of feedback points was large. Based on the calculation, each teacher provided one feedback in around every 10 words. Such a ratio revealed that the four NNES teachers provided feedback extensively.

NNES teachers, like the NES teachers, did not give feedback to all the errors in their students' writing. The following examples show the errors that they left aside intentionally or inadvertently.

**Example 42****Student text**

*In ancient times, technology was underdeveloped, handwriting is a way of communicating with people...*

**Juan's feedback**                      No feedback

**Example 43**

**Student text**                      *Many students lack social communication experience and they needed their parents' advises...*

**Han's feedback**                      No feedback

To sum up, the findings of NES and NNES teachers' practices regarding scope of feedback were reported in this section. It could be concluded that both NES and NNES teachers targeted different types of errors including language, content, and organization in feedback provision. Nevertheless, both groups of teachers did not correct every error in students' writing. The independent samples *t*-test showed that there was a significant difference in the number of feedback points provided by the two groups of teachers with a large effect size ( $t=9.48$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $d=2.12$ ). That is, NNES teachers provided significantly more feedback points than NES teachers.

### **4.3.3 Feedback strategy**

According to the analysis of feedback, it was observed that NES and NNES teachers in the present study shared similar practices when using feedback strategies. Specifically, they did not use direct or indirect strategy alone, but combined the two strategies in their written feedback. More importantly, their selections of feedback strategies were varied with the focus of feedback. Specifically, when providing feedback on language, they showed a preference for direct feedback, while they tended to use indirect feedback in response to global issues. In the following sections, the findings concerning NES and NNES teachers' practices regarding written feedback strategies are reported in depth.

#### ***NES teachers' written feedback strategies***

In analyzing NES teachers' feedback strategies, the frequencies and percentages of

direct and indirect feedback provided by them were tallied. The direct and indirect feedback of the four NES teachers is presented in Table 4.12. They in this study combined both direct and indirect feedback strategies in feedback provision; they provided 231 direct and 254 indirect written feedback points with, on average, 5.8 direct and 6.4 indirect feedback points on each collected writing sample. There was no significant difference in the distribution of their direct and indirect feedback ( $\chi^2=1.09$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.296$ ), which means that NES teachers provided a similar amount of direct and indirect feedback. The following sections report how NES teachers responded to errors and issues related to language, content, and organization with excerpts from collected written texts.

**Table 4.12 NES teachers' written feedback strategies**

Participant	Strategies		
	Direct feedback	Indirect feedback	Total
George	55(45.83%)	65(54.17%)	120
Jason	60(47.62%)	66(52.38%)	126
Bruce	62(48.82%)	65(51.18%)	127
Christine	54(48.21%)	58(51.79%)	112
Total	231(47.63%)	254(52.37%)	485

### ***Feedback strategies on language***

In this study, NES teachers used direct and indirect feedback strategies to respond to linguistic errors concurrently. As presented in Table 4.13, the four NES teachers provided 87 direct and 43 indirect feedback points related to errors in language. According to a chi-square test, the difference between the direct and indirect feedback on language was statistical significance ( $\chi^2=14.89$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.000$ ), indicating that they provided much more direct, than indirect, written feedback when correcting students' linguistic errors. Examples 44 and 45 show NES teachers' direct WCF.

**Table 4.13 NES teachers' feedback strategies on language**

Participant	Strategies		
	Direct feedback	Indirect feedback	Total
George	19(67.86%)	9(32.14%)	28
Jason	27(65.85%)	14(34.15%)	41
Bruce	25(75.76%)	8(24.24%)	33
Christine	16(57.14%)	12(42.86%)	28
Total	87(66.92%)	43(33.08%)	130

**Example 44**

<b>Student text</b>	<i>After <u>implement</u> the policy, the number of cars will be reduced...</i>
<b>George's feedback</b>	implement→ implementing

**Example 45**

<b>Student text</b>	<i>I <u>telled</u> my sufferings to her and I did not need to worry about <u>laughing at</u>...</i>
<b>Jason's feedback</b>	telled→ told; laughing at→ being laughed at

When providing indirect feedback on language, teachers just indicated the errors by underlining or circling to draw students' attention. Indirect feedback on language generally occurred when the errors were repeated or relatively easy to correct by students. In Example 46, the student used the wrong word "polite" twice. In the second time, Bruce just highlighted it and did not correct it. In Example 47, the student made an error in verb use and Christine probably felt that the student was able to correct the error by himself/herself, so she only identified the error without correction.

**Example 46**

<b>Student text</b>	<i>As long as people are polite to our environment can we get along well with nature...</i>
<b>Bruce's feedback</b>	<u>polite</u>

**Example 47**

<b>Student text</b>	<i>If the parents take students out of school in their study time, it will has the potential damage to child's education.</i>
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Christine's feedback has

***Feedback strategies on content***

In total, the four NES teachers gave 170 feedback comments responding to problems in content on students' writing. According to Table 4.14, of the 170 feedback comments, 46 were direct and 124 were indirect feedback points, with each writing sample receiving, on average, 1.2 direct feedback points and 3.1 indirect feedback points related to content. Although teachers adopted both direct and indirect strategies to give feedback on content, the amount of indirect feedback on content was significantly greater than direct feedback ( $\chi^2=35.79$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.000$ ).

**Table 4.14 NES teachers' feedback strategies on content**

Participant	Strategies			Total
	Direct		Indirect	
	Correction	Suggestion	Identification of problems	
George	0(0.00%)	10(22.73%)	34(77.27%)	44
Jason	2(4.54%)	7(15.91%)	35(79.55%)	44
Bruce	3(6.98%)	13(30.23%)	27(62.79%)	43
Christine	2(5.13%)	9(23.08%)	28(71.79%)	39
Total	7(4.12%)	39(22.94%)	124(72.94%)	170

There were two types of direct feedback on content: Giving corrections directly and providing suggestions. The four NES teachers tended to provide students with suggestions on how to solve the content problems rather than correct them directly. Making suggestions offered students possible solutions to their problems, enabling them to understand how to revise and improve their writing. Students were expected to take up these suggestions and make corresponding revisions through engaging themselves in remedying the problems. As Example 48 reveals, Christine provided a specific suggestion to resolve a problem in relation to relevance by informing the

student writer of what to do in revision. Similarly, in addressing a problem related to adequacy, George advised the student writer how to resolve it, as illustrated in Example 49.

#### **Example 48**

**Student text** *Omitted because of length*

**Christine's feedback** Delete it and add another example such as "the term-holiday may make children fall behind their classmates".

#### **Example 49**

**Student text** *Private car owners are taxed, which is good for our environment...*

**George's feedback** Give more details here to explain why taxing private car owners benefits the environment. For example, taxing car owners may cause them to drive their cars less. This can reduce pollutant emission and is environmentally friendly.

When providing indirect written feedback on content, NES teachers only highlighted the problems without making any corrections or giving suggestions for improvement. Noticeably, this was the main strategy adopted by them to deal with students' problems in content. Such feedback, without suggestions offered by teachers, made students aware of their problematic areas, but entailed them drawing on their cognitive resources to address the problems in revision. The examples below demonstrate indirect written feedback on content.

#### **Example 50**

**Student text** *Compared with other industries, tourism is more promising on the account of that it never uses that kind of resources like fossil oil and raw materials.*

**Bruce's feedback** A lack of information to elaborate on the idea here.

#### **Example 51**

**Student text** *Meanwhile, we should make a clear distinction between right and wrong. It's unadvisable to have evildoer. But they are a few, so it is also advisable to make friends online.*

**Jason's feedback** It is irrelevant to your claim.

In the former example, as Bruce found that the student did not provide enough

details to support his/her idea, he made a comment to attract the student's attention to this problem. In Example 51, Jason underlined some details and identified that they were not relevant to the claim.

### ***Feedback strategies on organization***

In the present study, the four NES teachers together offered 185 written feedback comments to address students' problems in organization, among which 98 feedback comments were direct and 87 were indirect (see Table 4.15). Furthermore, there was no statistically significant difference between the distribution of direct and indirect feedback on organization ( $\chi^2=0.65$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.42$ ). Therefore, the amount of direct and indirect feedback on organization by NES teachers did not differ significantly.

**Table 4.15 NES teachers' feedback strategies on organization**

Participant	Strategies			Total
	Direct		Indirect	
	Correction	Suggestion	Identification of problems	
George	18(37.50%)	8(16.67%)	22(45.83%)	48
Jason	15(36.59%)	9(21.95%)	17(41.46%)	41
Bruce	15(29.41%)	6(11.76%)	30(58.83%)	51
Christine	18(40.00%)	9(20.00%)	18(40.00%)	45
Total	66(35.68%)	32(17.30%)	87(47.02%)	185

Direct feedback on organization included correction and suggestion. From Table 4.15, teachers made more corrections than suggestions when providing direct feedback on organization. Based on the observation, it was found that most corrections in such feedback were offered to cohesion. When teachers detected the misuse or lack of conjunctions, they provided corrections directly, as shown in the following examples in which teachers provided corrections for errors on cohesion. In Example

52, when the student used a wrong conjunction, Bruce corrected the misused conjunction directly. In Example 53, there was a lack of a conjunction to signify the logical relationship between the two sentences. In this situation, George added “therefore” to illustrate the cause-effect relationship between the two sentences.

#### **Example 52**

<b>Student text</b>	<i>Tourism can promote our economy, <u>and</u> we should treat it in a right way and protect our environment.</i>
<b>Bruce’s feedback</b>	And→but

#### **Example 53**

<b>Student text</b>	<i>Just look at the atmosphere around us, especially in big cities, foggy has been a serious problem. ^ People have to wear a mask before going out...</i>
<b>George’s feedback</b>	^Therefore

Alternatively, teachers provided suggestions to tell students what they were supposed to do next. In this way, students needed to invest their time and energy to revise their writing on their own accordingly. For example,

#### **Example 54**

<b>Student text</b>	<i>In conclusion, as members of our modern society, we should use Internet in the right way. It’s OK to make friends online and we also need to protect ourselves.</i>
<b>Jason’s feedback</b>	You should summarize the major points and arguments of the essay in conclusion.

#### **Example 55**

<b>Student text</b>	<i>Omitted because of length</i>
<b>Christine’s feedback</b>	Put the three different reasons into three separate paragraphs.

The four NES teachers also adopted indirect feedback to identify and highlight students’ problems in organization, which directed students’ attention to their inadequacies in organization. For instance, when a student lacked an introductory paragraph in his/her writing, George commented “Is anything missing from your essay?” to indicate the problem to the student. Similarly, as shown by Example 56,

Bruce simply pointed out that the student writer failed to write a topic sentence to lead the paragraph.

**Example 56**

<b>Student text</b>	<i>If there is a place which is beautiful and unknown, it is easy to be made a famous place for travel by the government. There will be a lot of people to come here and have fun...</i>
<b>Bruce's feedback</b>	No topic sentence

***NNES teachers' written feedback strategies***

Table 4.16 presents the distribution of the NNES teachers' direct and indirect written feedback. Consistent with NES teachers, the four NNES teachers adopted the concurrent use of direct and indirect strategies to provide feedback. They gave 450 direct feedback points and 342 indirect feedback points, of which, on average, 11.3 direct and 8.6 indirect feedback points were made on each writing sample. There was a significant difference in direct and indirect feedback points, as analyzed with a chi-square test ( $\chi^2=14.73$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.000$ ), indicating that the number of direct feedback points was significantly larger than that of indirect ones, although in practice NNES teachers combined these two strategies.

**Table 4.16 NNES teachers' written feedback strategies**

Participant	Strategies		
	Direct feedback	Indirect feedback	Total
Juan	120(52.40%)	109(47.60%)	229
Yan	99(51.30%)	94(48.70%)	193
Qin	135(68.88%)	61(31.12%)	196
Han	96(55.17%)	78(44.83%)	174
Total	450(56.82%)	342(43.18%)	792

***Feedback strategies on language***

The four NNES teachers used both direct and indirect strategies to provide written

feedback on language. They gave 427 direct and 269 indirect language-focused feedback points (see Table 4.17), with each piece of writing receiving approximately 10.7 direct and 6.7 indirect feedback points related to language. There was a significant difference in the distribution of direct and indirect feedback on language ( $\chi^2=35.87$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.000$ ), which suggested that they gave direct feedback to correct students' linguistic errors more frequently than indirect feedback. This was congruent with NES teachers' strategies in providing feedback on linguistic errors.

**Table 4.17 NNES teachers' feedback strategies on language**

Participant	Strategies		
	Direct feedback	Indirect feedback	Total
Juan	112(58.03%)	81(41.97%)	193
Yan	93(53.45%)	81(46.55%)	174
Qin	129(75.88%)	41(24.12%)	170
Han	93(58.49%)	66(41.51%)	159
Total	427(61.35%)	269(38.65%)	696

As noted previously (see Table 3.5), direct WCF can be achieved through three techniques: Giving the correct answers, crossing out the unnecessary or erroneous words, and inserting omitted words. All of these three techniques were observed in NNES teachers' language-focused feedback. The examples below show how NNES teachers gave written feedback on language directly. Specifically, Yan provided the correct answer and added the omitted item, while Qin made the direct correction and deleted a redundant word. It appeared that teachers employed at least two techniques to formulate direct feedback on language.

### Example 57

#### Student text

*Volunteer work become more and more popular around the world. There are over tens of millions of people ^ have volunteered to help those in need...*

**Yan's feedback**                      become→ becomes; ^ who

**Example 58**

**Student text**                      *Once they were interrupted, it would be ~~more~~ difficult for them to concentrate on study again...*

**Qin's feedback**                      were→ are; would→ will; more→ ~~more~~

In comparison with direct correction, there were fewer indirect feedback points on language. When using indirect feedback, the teachers merely indicated the errors by some symbols such as underlining or circling to attract students' attention. For example,

**Example 59**

**Student text**                      *Therefore, my point of view is firmly disagree...*

**Han's feedback**                      is firmly disagree

**Example 60**

**Student text**                      *Secondly, through volunteer we can gain happiness...*

**Yan's feedback**                      volunteer

Occasionally, NNES teachers not only identified the linguistic errors by symbols, but also presented some metalinguistic clues for them. For instance,

**Example 61**

**Student text**                      *I think such parents are selfish, they are no longer a good role model in children's growth.*

**Qin's feedback**                      Run-on sentence

***Feedback strategies on content***

Altogether, NNES teachers provided 58 written feedback points on content (see Table 4.18). According to a chi-square test, there was a statistically significant difference in the distribution of direct and indirect feedback points on content ( $\chi^2=30.41$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.000$ ), indicating that NNES teachers mainly employed indirect feedback to treat issues related to content.

**Table 4.18 NNES teachers' feedback strategies on content**

Participant	Strategies		
	Direct feedback	Indirect feedback	Total
Juan	3(11.54%)	23(88.46%)	26
Yan	5(35.71%)	9(64.29%)	14
Qin	0(0.00%)	10(100.00%)	10
Han	0(0.00%)	8(100.00%)	8
Total	8(13.79%)	50(86.21%)	58

As noted previously, indirect feedback means that teachers only identified problems on writing scripts, alerting students to the problems, but leaving them to work out the solutions to their problems by themselves. The following examples reveal how NNES teachers provided indirect written feedback on content. In Qin's case, she underlined the problematic area and questioned its relevance to the topic. In Example 63, Han advised the student that the details digressed from the topic. Similar comments could be seen in Juan and Yan's feedback.

**Example 62****Student text**

As long as parents spend more time accompanying their children during their free time, whether going out or not is not what matters most. It is the appropriate love and care rather than forms of entertainment that are more precious for students.

**Qin's feedback**

Is it relevant to the topic?

**Example 63****Student text**

*At last, for management of school, more strangers come into school will take a lot of problems about facilities protected. They need to pay more attention to security instead of educating...*

**Han's feedback**

This is irrelevant to the topic.



### ***Feedback strategies on organization***

In this study, NNES teachers gave 38 written feedback comments related to organization (see Table 4.19) with no significant difference between direct and indirect feedback ( $\chi^2=1.68$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.194$ ). That is, NNES teachers provided similar number of direct and indirect feedback points on organization.

**Table 4.19 NNES teachers' feedback strategies on organization**

Participant	Strategies		
	Direct feedback	Indirect feedback	Total
Juan	5(50.00%)	5(50.00%)	10
Yan	1(20.00%)	4(80.00%)	5
Qin	6(37.50%)	10(62.50%)	16
Han	3(42.86%)	4(57.14%)	7
Total	15(39.47%)	23(60.53%)	38

When giving written feedback on organization directly, NNES teachers tended to give direct corrections to errors in relation to cohesion, whereas they provided suggestions for students to resolve other problems in organization. The instances below show NNES teachers' direct written feedback on problems related to organization in their students' essays.

#### **Example 64**

##### **Student text**

*Therefore, letter writing will not be killed by phones and I suggest we should use letter writing to replace phones on some formal occasions as much as possible.*

##### **Juan's feedback**

In conclusion

#### **Example 65**

##### **Student text**

*So, to hire cleaners is such an unwise thing.*

##### **Han's feedback**

Please summarize the main ideas and points of your essay in the concluding paragraph.

NNES teachers also provided indirect feedback comments to help students diagnose their problems in organization. With such comments, students could gain a good understanding of their problems in organization. The extracts that follow are presented to demonstrate the indirect feedback by NNES teachers. In the first example, Juan pointed out the problem, which enabled the student to realize the lack of a topic sentence. In the other example, Yan indicated a problem in relation to cohesion, asking the student to explain the referent of “it”.

#### **Example 66**

<b>Student text</b>	<i>Secondly, when we spend more time on phones, we will know less about how to write a letter...</i>
<b>Juan’s feedback</b>	Where’s the topic sentence?

#### **Example 67**

<b>Student text</b>	<i>During the activity, <u>it</u> will improve volunteers’ social skills and make genuine friends.</i>
<b>Yan’s feedback</b>	“it” refers to what?

To sum up, NES and NNES teachers combined both direct and indirect strategies to provide feedback on different dimensions of writing (i.e., content, organization, and language). However, there were significant differences, according to independent samples *t*-tests, in the number of direct and indirect feedback points provided by the two groups of teachers. NNES teachers provided more direct feedback points as well as indirect feedback points than NES teachers (direct:  $t=-7.95$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $d=-1.78$ ; indirect:  $t=-3.76$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $d=-0.84$ ).

### **4.3.4 Feedback orientation**

Observations indicated that NES and NNES showed a similar pattern in providing positive or negative feedback comments; that is, both groups predominately provided negative feedback comments. In this section, the findings of NES and NNES teachers’ practices in the orientation of feedback are discussed.

### *NES teachers' feedback orientation*

In this study, NES teachers only offered 10 comments to motivate students by praising their writing performance among 495 feedback points, suggesting that NES teachers seldom provided positive feedback comments to please students, preferring, in contrast, to identify or correct students' problems/errors in writing. Of the 10 positive feedback comments, three were delivered to content and the rest were given to organization; there were no positive comments on language. Even though they offered students praise, their positive comments usually referred to an overall impression of students' writing. As a result, their positive feedback was generic instead of specific to the text items. Moreover, their praise tended to be hedged, which indicates that their positive comments were conditional. The following examples demonstrate the positive feedback to students' writing.

#### **Example 68**

**Student text**                      *Omitted because of length*

**George's feedback**        The organization is **fairly** good.

#### **Example 69**

**Student text**                      *Omitted because of length.*

**Bruce's feedback**        Your reasons are **somewhat** convincing.

As teachers failed to explain why they gave praise, the positive comments in the two examples were empty and unfocused. While implying positive reinforcement, both George and Bruce used qualifiers such as "fairly" and "somewhat", which suggested only tentative approval. In comparison, there were many negative feedback statements indicating students' problems in writing. For instance,

#### **Example 70**

**Student text**                      *Omitted because of length*

**George's feedback**        Illogical organization

**Example 71****Student text**

*Firstly, because the internet can be used as a large dating platform, we can get in touch with all kinds of people....*

**Jason's feedback**

No topic sentence

In the former example, George commented in the form of an endnote to remind the student that he/she had a problem in organization. In the latter example, Jason pointed out the lack of a topic sentence, informing the student writer that he/she did not meet the requirements of English writing.

***NNES teachers' feedback orientation***

In this study, NNES teachers did not provide any positive feedback to encourage and motivate students but gave negative feedback comments to highlight problems or errors in various aspects of writing. Students were made aware of the areas in which they were supposed to make more efforts. Teachers not only provided running feedback throughout the texts to indicate specific problems, but also offered end comments to identify the general problems of the essays. The example below shows how Qin provided comments to express her dissatisfaction with students' writing.

**Example 72****Student text**

*Omitted because of length*

**Qin's feedback**

So many grammatical errors in your writing.

In conclusion, this section reported NES and NNES teachers' practices regarding feedback orientation. Both groups of teachers tended to give negative feedback comments to point out students' weaknesses in writing rather than provide positive feedback to compliment students.

**4.3.5 Summary**

This section reported on NES and NNES teachers' actual practices in the provision of written feedback to students with regard to focus, scope, strategy, and orientation of

feedback on writing in the Chinese EFL context.

According to Table 4.20, some commonalities in written feedback practices were shared by the two groups of teachers observed. To begin with, all teachers adopted a comprehensive approach when providing feedback. Secondly, all teachers employed direct and indirect feedback strategies concurrently with their selection of feedback strategies mediated by focus of feedback. Finally, all teachers tended to give negative comments to highlight students' weaknesses in writing instead of delivering positive comments to encourage students.

NES and NNES teachers' written feedback practices, however, differed significantly in the focus of their feedback, with significant differences in the feedback points on language, content, and organization ( $t=-20.95$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $d=-4.60$ ;  $t=11.10$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $d=2.48$ ;  $t=17.19$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $d=3.84$ , respectively). Therefore, there was evidence that when giving feedback, NES teachers paid more attention to global issues, while their NNES peers had a stronger focus on language.

**Table 4.20 NES and NNES teachers' actual written feedback practices**

Participant	NES VS. NNES	Focus	Scope	Strategy	Orientation
George	NES	global level	comprehensive	both	negative
Jason	NES	global level	comprehensive	both	negative
Bruce	NES	global level	comprehensive	both	negative
Christine	NES	global level	comprehensive	both	negative
Juan	NNES	local level	comprehensive	both	negative
Yan	NNES	local level	comprehensive	both	negative
Qin	NNES	local level	comprehensive	both	negative
Han	NNES	local level	comprehensive	both	negative

## 4.4 Chapter summary

This chapter explored and reported how NES and NNES teachers conceptualized and implemented written feedback in the Chinese EFL writing classrooms, thus contributing to the answers for the first two research questions. The findings indicated

that NES and NNES teachers acknowledged the importance of providing feedback on students' writing and espoused a set of beliefs in relation to the other four themes: Scope, focus, strategy, and orientation, related to feedback. NES and NNES teachers were reported to share similar practices in terms of feedback scope, feedback strategy, and feedback orientation. They provided written feedback comprehensively, combined both direct and indirect strategies to deliver their written feedback, and provided mainly negative comments to their students. However, they demonstrated contrasting practices in feedback focus. That is, NES teachers focused mainly on global issues while their NNES counterparts showed more concern with local issues in response to students' writing.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **FINDINGS FROM PHASE ONE STUDY (II)**

#### **5.1 Chapter overview**

NES and NNES teachers' beliefs elicited from semi-structured interviews and practices from feedback analysis were analyzed and reported in the preceding chapter. According to Tables 4.1 and 4.20, matches and mismatches between their self-espoused beliefs and actual practices were found. This chapter examines the consistencies and inconsistencies between NES and NNES teachers' written feedback beliefs and practices in terms of the four identified themes and investigates the factors leading to their belief-practice mismatches.

#### **5.2 Matches between NES and NNES teachers' written feedback beliefs and practices**

In some cases, teachers' beliefs were fully translated into their actual practices. In terms of the scope of feedback, Bruce and Juan, for instance, expressed their beliefs that teachers should correct different types of problems and errors when marking students' writing and were observed to adopt a comprehensive approach to give written feedback.

In regard to feedback strategy, three teachers (George, Jason, and Han) asserted that it was better to combine both direct and indirect strategies to provide feedback aiming at students' problems in writing; analysis of the feedback revealed that they did use direct and indirect feedback strategies concurrently in practice.

When discussing feedback focus, four NES teachers concurred that writing teachers should focus on the global areas (content and organization) in evaluating students' writing. In their actual practice, they were indeed found to provide more feedback on content and organization than other areas. Juan's professed belief was also consistent with her actual practice in feedback focus; in the interview, she responded that teachers should provide more feedback on language and was observed to do so in her feedback provision.

In relation to orientation of feedback, one NES teacher (Bruce) and three NNEST teachers (Juan, Yan, and Qin) believed in giving negative feedback comments to identify students' problems in writing. Observations of their feedback indicated that they did not offer positive comments to praise students, but provided a number of negative comments to make students aware of their weaknesses in writing.

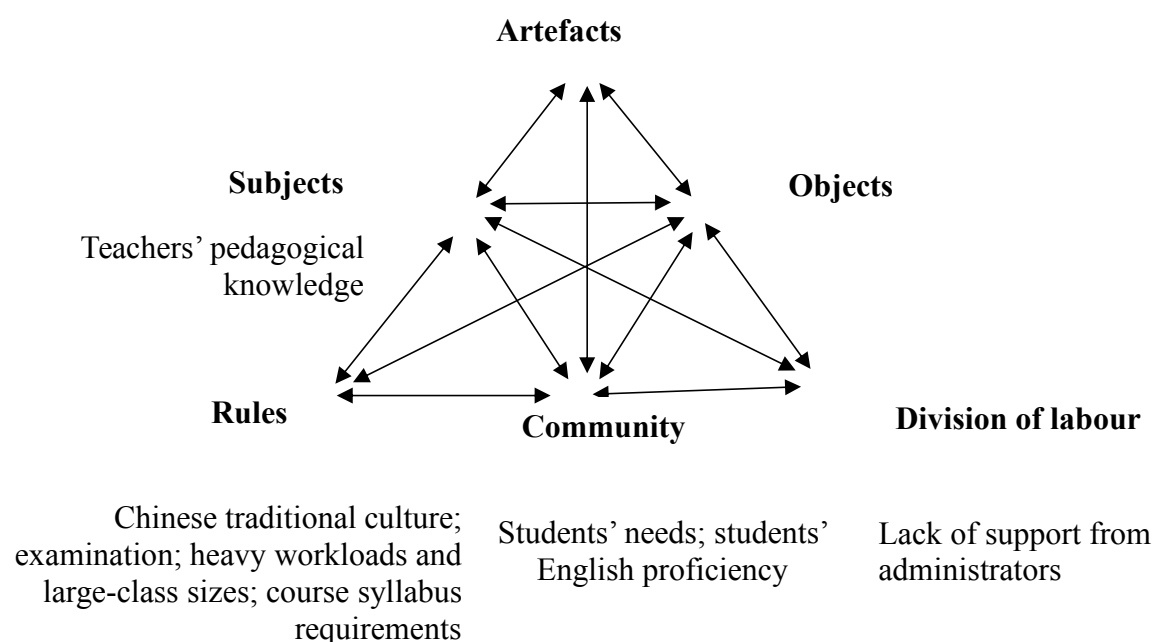
### **5.3 Mismatches between NES and NNEST teachers' beliefs and practices and the factors underlying them**

In this section, identified mismatches between teachers' beliefs and practices in the four themes are reported. More importantly, the factors accounting for inconsistencies are explored through the stimulated recalls.

Several factors, accounting for belief-practice mismatches, were identified through the stimulated recalls. They were, for example, teachers' knowledge, students' needs, and heavy workloads. The analysis of factors showed that Activity Theory (AT) as a theoretical lens could explain the factors. These factors appeared to map onto several important components in Activity Theory, which are represented by Figure 5.1. This section discusses the mismatches between their beliefs and practices, and how the factors identified interacted to influence teachers' actual practices in regard to scope of



feedback, feedback strategy, feedback focus, and feedback orientation.



**Figure 5.1** The conceptualization of factors resulting in belief-practice mismatches from AT

### 5.3.1 Scope of feedback

Three NES teachers (George, Jason, and Christine) and one NNES teacher (Han) were found to have discrepancies between their beliefs and practices about scope of feedback. Whereas they reported that they believed in a focused approach to providing feedback, they corrected a wide array of errors in practice. Several reasons were retrieved from the stimulated recalls to explain their actual practices.

Teachers' pedagogical knowledge was reported to mediate their decision-making when providing feedback. As some teachers noted during the stimulated recalls, focused feedback was a new approach to providing feedback and was not a common practice in L2 writing context. Not only were they unfamiliar with focused feedback, but they lacked adequate pedagogical content knowledge to include it in their writing instruction. They, therefore, followed a traditional approach,

comprehensive feedback when providing feedback. As George explained, he was not sure what errors should be corrected and what errors should be left aside, and felt he lacked expertise to employ focused feedback effectively.

Han also ascribed the mismatch between his belief and practice in scope of feedback to having insufficient knowledge of how to implement focused feedback. In the stimulated recall, he replied as follows:

*I only have some basic knowledge about focused feedback from research articles, and to my knowledge, it is not widely used in the EFL writing classrooms. Thus, I do not dare to try it in my teaching, and then I employ comprehensive feedback. To be honest, I did not like comprehensive feedback approach when I was a student, but I do not have confidence in challenging it at present (SR, Han).*

Han's remarks demonstrated the influence of pedagogical knowledge on his decision-making in teaching. With insufficient professional knowledge, he failed to use a new approach to provide feedback, focused feedback and instead used comprehensive feedback, even though when as a student, he had been averse to such an approach. From what both George and Han reported, it seemed that teachers' pedagogical knowledge exerted a considerable influence on their teaching behaviors, and that their limited pedagogical knowledge may have inhibited their implementation of pedagogies which they espoused.

The second factor was students' needs, constraining teachers from adopting a focused approach to provide feedback. Jason and Christine responded that they took students' needs into consideration when implementing pedagogical practices. If they found that certain practices did not satisfy students' needs, they would adjust them. As

Jason explained:

*I understand many benefits of focused feedback, as my previous teachers adopted such an approach. Unfortunately, my Chinese students do not share the same idea with me. They want me to identify and correct different types of errors in writing because they need to improve their overall performance in English writing (SR, Jason).*

Although Jason, personally, had benefited from focused feedback, he provided feedback comprehensively. It was his students' needs that compelled him to make such a decision. His students seemed to believe that they needed to have different types of errors in writing corrected to enhance their performance in the different dimensions of writing. Regardless of their beliefs, it appeared that teachers modified their practices to please their students.

Christine's adoption of comprehensive feedback, likewise, was attributed to students' needs. Her students felt that the practice of written feedback was pointless if some problems were left without being addressed by their teachers. As she reported in the stimulated recall, students thought that if teachers identified and remedied each problem in their writing, they could learn more and make greater progress in writing. Christine's response suggests that students' needs play a pivotal role in teachers' pedagogical decisions, and that teachers may compromise their beliefs for students' needs, thus leading to incongruences between their beliefs and practices.

More interestingly, the influence of Chinese cultural values was referred to by three NES teachers as contributing to disparities between their beliefs and practices. As these teachers remarked, having lived and taught in China for several years, they had learnt about some Chinese traditional cultural values through their social

relationships. George, for example, explained that Chinese cultural values had mediated his teaching behaviors and constrained him from employing a focused approach in feedback provision.

*I have lived and taught English in China for nearly ten years and acquired some Chinese cultural values from my friends, colleagues, and students. In China, people advocate and espouse “more is better” rather than “less is more” maxim. So, in the practical teaching, teachers are expected to impart knowledge as much as possible. In terms of providing feedback, I need to give feedback in a comprehensive way (SR, George).*

George, cognizant of Chinese cultural expectations, did not adopt focused feedback, which was what he believed was most appropriate. Instead, when responding to his students’ writing, he used a comprehensive approach to provide feedback on students’ writing to avoid potential cultural conflicts. As for Jason, he pointed out:

*In Chinese culture, teachers shoulder the responsibility for students’ development in learning. Under the influence of such a value, it is teachers’ responsibility and obligation to identify and correct different types of errors within students’ texts. Only by this way are they considered to be diligent and qualified teachers in China (SR, Jason).*

Thus, as he thought, offering feedback to only some of the errors might offend Chinese cultural values and he would be criticized for laziness and irresponsibility. Jason’s remarks are similar to Christine’s response in the stimulated recall. As she explained, unlike western culture, Chinese culture (Confucianism) requires teachers to

be highly responsible for students' learning development, so teachers should correct as many errors as possible for students' optimum learning progress. Consequently, Christine rejected her commitment to focused feedback. The three teachers explained that working in a different cultural background, NES teachers had to adjust their teaching practices in accordance with local cultural values to provide culturally appropriate practices (Ma, 2012a), which could mean that they were unable to realize their beliefs in their teaching practices.

Finally, examination pressure was considered an inhibiting factors, but it arose only in Han's response. In the stimulated recall, he said that as required by the Ministry of Education, all English major students had to complete TEM-4 and 8 for the appraisal of their English proficiency. Confronting such a situation, where students needed to take these two important tests, he employed comprehensive feedback in order to help his students pass the examinations. Comprehensive feedback, he claimed, enabled students to understand all or most errors that they made in writing, thereby helping them improve their writing scores in these two English examinations.

In summary, the disparities between beliefs and practices about the scope of feedback, according to the four teachers, appeared to be the result of several factors: Teachers' professional knowledge, students' needs, Chinese cultural values, and examination pressure. It was interesting to note that the influence of Chinese cultural values was referred to by the three NES teachers, while the examination pressure was only mentioned by one NNEST teacher.

### **5.3.2 Feedback strategy**

The interview data showed that three teachers (Bruce, Juan, and Qin) favored the use of direct feedback, while two teachers (Christine and Yan) believed in indirect feedback when giving feedback. However, all of them were observed to combine the

two strategies in actual feedback practices. The reasons for the mismatches are detailed in the following paragraphs.

Two factors identified from the stimulated recalls influenced Bruce, Juan, and Qin's actual feedback practices, enforcing them to add indirect feedback in providing feedback. Firstly, all of them referred to heavy workloads and large-class sizes. Although the three teachers admitted that it was more effective to give the correct answers to students when they provided feedback, the realities of classrooms constrained them from using direct feedback consistently. Thus, they used the two feedback strategies concurrently. For example, Bruce justified his comments as follows:

*Giving direct feedback takes a lot of time and I do not have so much time to do this. In this semester, I am responsible for three different courses, which take me much time to prepare. Besides, about 36 students are enrolled in my writing course, so it is a huge load to give direct corrections to each student (SR, Bruce).*

In the above excerpt, Bruce attributed the mismatch between his belief and practice with feedback strategies to a heavy teaching load as well as the large number of students in class. Other teachers also complained that these two factors challenged their written feedback practices. In Qin's case, she was overwhelmed by a tight working schedule, as she was in charge of different courses such as *Comprehensive English*, *Advanced English Writing*, and *English Linguistics* during the semester, and also responsible for supervising bachelor theses. She was engaged, therefore, in preparing teaching materials, designing class activities, modifying teaching plans, and marking students' assignments. She felt drained and exhausted each week, so she did

not have the time or energy to directly correct each student's writing. The large class size was another constraint. As she stated, her writing course had nearly 40 students, and so she had a great many texts to mark. Unable to resolve the contextual constraints, she compromised by using indirect feedback, which was time- and energy-saving.

Another inhibiting factor, the course syllabus, was mentioned by Juan and Qin. According to the two teachers, the syllabus of the *English Writing Course* in their universities clearly stipulated that teachers should foster students' self-revision ability. To achieve this goal, they had to provide some indirect feedback so that students had opportunities to develop self-editing skills to remedy their problems or correct their errors on their own. For example, Qin explained:

*The English Writing Course syllabus carried out by our faculty stresses the cultivation and development of students' ability to self-edit. Conforming to this requirement, I add indirect feedback in feedback provision. For some students, I just indicate errors and leave the task of error correction to them (SR, Qin).*

The above excerpt revealed that the syllabus requirements affected teachers' decision-making in practice. Juan commented that to develop students' self-revision ability, she gave indirect feedback to some students, so they could be responsible for attending to their errors, and so it could meet syllabus requirements.

The factors contributing to mismatches between beliefs and practices about feedback strategy for Christine and Yan were also obtained from stimulated recalls, which compelled them to use direct feedback as well in feedback provision. The two teachers justified the use of direct feedback as based on students' needs. Yan, for example, reported that as students' course evaluations conveyed dissatisfaction with indirect feedback and their preference for direct feedback, she included direct

feedback in her practice.

Likewise, Christine's employment of direct feedback was related to students' responses. Whereas in the semi-structured interview for eliciting beliefs, she supported the use of indirect feedback because of time and energy constraints, in practice she was observed to combine the two strategies. When asked for the reasons in the stimulated recall, she replied that she found many students still had difficulties in correcting errors successfully, even if the errors were indicated by her. As a result, she had to use direct feedback in feedback provision, giving correct answers explicitly, and adjusted how she provided feedback to align with students' needs.

Another factor preventing teachers from using solely indirect feedback was students' English proficiency. Both teachers commented that the various levels of students' English proficiency meant they had to provide feedback based on students' English proficiency. This point is evident in Yan's remarks in the stimulated recall:

*Since students in my writing course differ in terms of their English proficiency, I have to adopt different strategies to provide them with feedback. As for those students who are low-achievers, I need to present corrections for them so that they can understand the correct forms of their errors and avoid repeating similar errors. Offering indirect feedback to them is of no sense and wastes my time (SR, Yan).*

Yan's statement revealed that she gave students with low English proficiency the correct answers, so they would have a better understanding of how to correct errors in the subsequent writing tasks. Christine also expressed her concern in the stimulated recall of the effectiveness of indirect feedback for students with low English proficiency. Despite her belief in indirect feedback, she decided to give direct feedback



to the low-achieving students to make feedback provision more effective.

In brief, two factors, the realities of classrooms (i.e., heavy workloads and large-class sizes), and syllabus requirements persuaded three teachers to incorporate indirect feedback as well when providing feedback. The other two teachers ascribed their use of direct feedback in practice to students' needs and students' English proficiency.

### **5.3.3 Feedback focus**

Three NNES teachers, Yan, Qin, and Han, who supported the idea that teachers should pay more attention to global issues in writing (content and organization), were actually found to give much more feedback on language. These discrepancies between their beliefs and practices in feedback focus were explained in the follow-up stimulated recalls.

Firstly, teachers' pedagogical knowledge was identified as influencing their decision-making in feedback focus. As Yan and Qin expressed in the stimulated recalls, their inadequate knowledge about content and rhetorical features of English writing made them provide a great deal of feedback on language. For instance, Qin said that while it was important for Chinese EFL writing teachers to give feedback on global issues, it was challenging for her to identify and address her students' writing problems in content and organization. As she lacked confidence in delivering global feedback to her students, she focused on linguistic errors. Consequently, her belief was not mirrored by her practice.

*To be frank, I would like to pay more attention to content and organization.*

*Nevertheless, I do not have much knowledge about how to develop ideas and the discourse structures of English writing. Thus, I find it is difficult and*

*demanding for me to evaluate students' performance in content and organization and give corresponding feedback on these aspects. As a result, I provide a number of feedback points on language (SR, Qin).*

Yan, similarly, voiced concerns regarding which areas should be targeted by feedback on content and organization and how to implement such feedback effectively. Because she lacked confidence, she provided her students mainly with feedback on language. From both Qin and Yan's responses, it was their limited knowledge about global issues in English writing that constrained their ability to provide global feedback and led to incongruences between their beliefs and their practices.

Some teachers suggested that examinations considerably influenced their actual pedagogy and inhibited them applying their beliefs in feedback practices. Two NNEST teachers, Yan and Han said that English major students in China were required to sit for TEM-4 and 8 in the fourth and eighth semester, respectively. They explained that as these two examinations were of great importance to students' graduation and job hunting, they had to assist their students' preparation. For instance, when asked, in the stimulated recall, to explain why more attention was paid to language, Yan confirmed that to help students prepare for TEM-4 and 8, she had to alter her feedback focus. As the writing rubrics of TEM-4 and 8 placed great emphasis on language accuracy, she needed to give more feedback on language, so that students could get a good result in the writing section and then pass the examinations. Han, similarly, explained:

*If I do not pay much attention to linguistic errors in students' writing, they will make a lot of grammatical errors in writing of TEM-4 and 8. In this situation, the scorers will make a bad impression of their essays, so students will*

*probably get a poor score in writing, which may result in their failure in these two important English tests (SR, Han).*

Not only did examinations affect seemingly Han's practices in regard to the scope of feedback, but also his feedback focus. To satisfy the requirements imposed by examinations, both Yan and Han appeared to be compelled to adjust their teaching practices.

Lastly, students' needs were identified by some teachers contributing to the mismatches between their beliefs and practices in relation to feedback focus. For example, Han favored the provision of global feedback, whereas most of his feedback was on language. In the stimulated recall, he explained that he had tried to provide feedback on global areas but after the private talks with students, he found that students were more concerned with linguistic accuracy and expected teachers to pay more attention to language and return error-free written texts to them. As a result, he had to pay more attention to grammar and vocabulary in feedback provision. Another teacher, Yan made similar remarks in the stimulated recall, saying that her students emphasized grammar when writing essays and they hoped that there were few or no errors in language. To satisfy students' demands, she, too, had to abandon her professed belief in global feedback.

To conclude, when teachers rationalized the mismatches between their beliefs and practices regarding feedback focus, they alluded to their pedagogical knowledge, examinations, and students' needs.

#### **5.3.4 Feedback orientation**

When asked whether teachers should provide positive or negative comments in students' writing, three NES (George, Jason, and Christine) and one NNES teacher

(Han) advocated that teachers should offer positive comments or integrate positive and negative comments; it was noted, however, that they provided few positive comments. In the next section, several reasons given in the stimulated recalls accounted for their belief-practice mismatches.

The first reason, which the three NES teachers shared, was that their practices were affected by Chinese cultural values. Interestingly, Chinese culture not only exerted a profound influence on NES teachers' practices regarding scope of feedback, but also impacted their provision of positive/negative feedback comments. They stated that in the Chinese traditional culture, teachers should be strict with their students rather than compliment them, and that teachers had the responsibility to make their students aware of their problems in learning. Moreover, they added that from a Chinese perspective, giving negative feedback comments was considered as being strict with students, rather than discouraging them. For instance, as Jason elaborated:

*As an outsider of Chinese culture, I have to observe it and take it into consideration when implementing my teaching practices. I understand that Chinese culture has great expectations for teachers and requires teachers to be strict with students. Such a cultural value does not encourage teachers to please students, so I mainly focus on problems or weaknesses in students' writing when providing feedback. (SR, Jason).*

George gave a similar response, explaining that when first teaching English in China, he tended to praise students to boost their confidence and motivation. However, as he became familiar with Chinese culture, he came to understand that in Chinese society, teachers were expected to be strict with students. As a result, when giving feedback, he concentrated on students' weaknesses and problems and paid little

attention to strengths in their writing. According to NES teachers' responses, local cultural values influenced their pedagogical practices greatly, compelling them to convert the practices informed by their beliefs to practices localized in their working context.

Secondly, students' English proficiency was also identified as a factor restricting teachers' translation of their beliefs into practices in the orientation of feedback. Teachers complained that some students' English proficiency was so low that they could not find any strengths in writing. As Christine mentioned:

*When I respond to students' writing, I usually try to highlight their strong points in writing so that they can be motivated. Unfortunately, many students have a low level of English proficiency. They even cannot write one error-free sentence. How can I use positive feedback to praise them? (SR, Christine).*

Christine's response was echoed by Jason and Han, explaining that there were various problems in the writing of many Chinese EFL students such as grammatical errors, irrelevant details or information, and a messy organization. They questioned how you could make positive comments about the writing when there were no strengths. They, therefore, turned to negative feedback to warn the students it was imperative that they should improve their English writing performance.

Finally, the lack of support from administrators in the faculty was cited as another inhibiting factor. George and Han pointed out that they were not empowered to actualize their beliefs through their real teaching behaviors, as their practices were determined by the administrators in the faculty. To please them, and avoid negative evaluations, they had to forgo their espoused practices to align with administrators' requirements. As they stated, to enhance teaching quality, teachers' documents such as

teaching plans, power points, and after-class assignments were checked by the department administrators each semester. These mature and experienced teachers believed that teachers should undertake the responsibility to identify and highlight students' weaknesses and problems in writing. To satisfy the requirements of the administrators of the faculty, they modified their practices to focus on students' writing problems, otherwise, they would be considered irresponsible by the heads and not get a good evaluation, which then posed a threat to their professional careers. Vertical power relationships between administrators and teachers thus constrained teachers' actual pedagogical practices, depriving them of the autonomy to realize their beliefs.

In conclusion, three reasons, Chinese cultural values, students' English proficiency, and the lack of support from administrators were identified to account for why teachers' feedback practices did not consistently match their beliefs in terms of feedback orientation.

## **5.4 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, the relationships between NES and NNES teachers' written feedback beliefs and practices were examined. The findings indicated that their belief-practice relationships were highly complex and non-linear; matches and mismatches between their beliefs and practices regarding the four themes, scope, strategy, focus, and orientation co-existed. This study investigated the factors contributing to the inconsistencies, which included a range of factors such as teachers' professional knowledge, students' needs and proficiency, and heavy workloads with large-class sizes. Among these factors, Chinese cultural values profoundly impacted NES teachers' practices in providing written feedback, whereas their NNES counterparts' feedback practices were impacted greatly by examinations. Informed by Activity Theory, as

discussed in Chapter 7, the findings showed that teacher written feedback is an instructional practice, which is anchored in teachers' personal dismissions of context. In other words, their practices were subject to the influence of artefacts, rules, community, and division of labour. These constructs of activity system, which will be discussed further, were not independent from each other but worked together to impact teachers' feedback provision.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **RESULTS FROM PHASE TWO STUDY**

#### **6.1 Chapter overview**

There are two sections in this chapter. The first section reports the quantitative results of writing tests, which investigated what effects of the NES and NNES teachers' written feedback on Chinese EFL learners' writing performance (i.e., accuracy, complexity, fluency; content, organization, overall writing quality). The second section presents the qualitative findings with regard to students' perceptions concerning the effects on the different dimensions of writing through a post-treatment questionnaire.

#### **6.2 Effects of NES and NNES teachers' written feedback**

According to the findings of phase one study, the four NES and the four NNES teachers implemented similar practices with regard to scope of feedback, feedback strategy, and feedback orientation, but they demonstrated significantly different practices in terms of feedback focus. NES teachers showed more concern with global issues, while their NNES peers paid much more attention to linguistic errors. Thus, global feedback, that is, feedback on content and organization, and WCF, feedback on language were considered as a salient difference between the two groups of teachers' written feedback practices. Accordingly, global feedback and comprehensive WCF were used as the alternative independent variables in the quasi-experimental study.

Given that the data in phase two was normally distributed, two-way repeated measures ANOVAs were run to examine the effects of time and group conditions on different dimensions of writing, after which between-subjects and within-subjects



differences were examined. Specifically, post hoc tests were employed to explore whether differences regarding different indexes among the three groups for each test existed. To detect the change of each measure by each group across tests, a series of paired samples *t*-tests were administrated; to avoid Type I errors, a Bonferroni correction was used, and the effects were reported at the significant level of .017 (.05/3=.017).

Cohen's *d* was used for *t*-tests and partial  $\eta^2$  for ANOVAs for the calculation of the effect sizes. According to Cohen's (1992) criteria, *d* values of .20, .50 and .80 and partial  $\eta^2$  values of .01, .06 and .14 were considered small, medium, and large, respectively.

Table 6.1 records the descriptive data for different measures among the three groups across tests. To ensure the baseline condition among the three groups at the outset of this study, one-way ANOVAs were performed. The tests revealed that there were no significant differences in terms of the various measures among the three groups in the pretest (content:  $p=.333$ , organization:  $p=.863$ , writing quality:  $p=.709$ ; the mean length of T-units:  $p=.056$ , clauses per T-unit:  $p=.169$ , lexical density:  $p=.848$ , the mean segmental type-token ratio:  $p=.205$ , error-free clauses ratios:  $p=.971$ , errors per 100 words:  $p=.944$ , fluency:  $p=.660$ ).

**Table 6.1 Descriptive statistics for different measures over time**

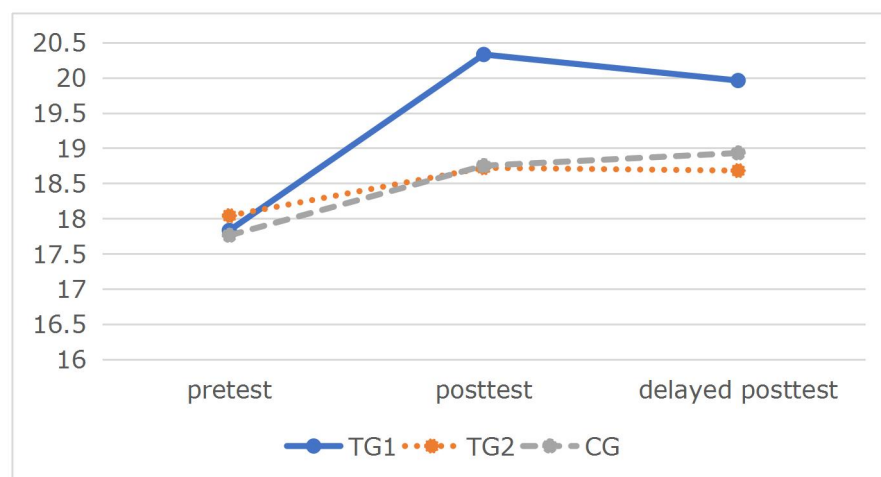
Measures	Group	<u>Pretest</u>		<u>Posttest</u>		<u>Delayed posttest</u>	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Content	TG1	17.83	1.61	20.33	2.51	19.96	2.29
	TG2	18.04	1.62	18.72	2.05	18.68	2.04
	CG	17.76	1.60	18.75	1.75	18.93	1.27
Organization	TG1	13.17	1.27	15.46	1.38	15.38	1.38
	TG2	13.36	1.35	13.64	1.50	13.88	1.51
	CG	13.21	1.32	13.88	1.23	13.67	1.37
OWQ	TG1	60.33	4.74	64.75	6.65	65.00	7.38
	TG2	61.12	4.93	65.92	5.77	67.32	5.70

MLT	CG	60.00	4.88	60.67	4.60	60.17	4.69
	TG1	15.42	2.16	18.14	2.84	19.39	3.13
	TG2	14.58	2.29	14.17	2.35	15.56	2.25
C/T	CG	13.92	2.44	14.00	2.04	14.26	1.77
	TG1	1.61	0.24	1.71	0.27	1.90	0.30
	TG2	1.61	0.19	1.52	0.23	1.64	0.29
LD	CG	1.50	0.28	1.51	0.23	1.59	0.18
	TG1	0.55	0.034	0.57	0.027	0.54	0.026
	TG2	0.55	0.030	0.56	0.029	0.54	0.031
MSTTR	CG	0.55	0.040	0.55	0.036	0.52	0.027
	TG1	0.78	0.038	0.79	0.035	0.77	0.029
	TG2	0.79	0.039	0.79	0.033	0.78	0.035
EFC/C	CG	0.77	0.045	0.78	0.035	0.76	0.037
	TG1	51.58	14.35	45.92	12.17	50.21	15.46
	TG2	52.34	10.19	62.75	11.66	64.30	11.83
EP100W	CG	51.77	13.61	44.64	18.17	52.74	10.73
	TG1	7.74	3.12	8.51	2.70	8.02	2.68
	TG2	7.96	2.22	5.27	1.65	4.79	1.82
Fluency	CG	7.98	2.63	9.53	2.77	8.41	2.35
	TG1	212.04	32.74	264.54	34.53	244.08	34.16
	TG2	213.24	32.47	237.68	39.41	240.72	31.36
	CG	220.25	35.68	218.71	39.68	217.75	32.73

*Note.* TG1=treatment group 1; TG2=treatment group 2; CG=comparison group; OWQ=overall writing quality; MLT=the mean length of T-units; C/T=the number of clauses per T-unit; LD=lexical density; MSTTR=the mean segmental type-token ratio; EFC/C=error-free clause ratios; EP100W=the number of errors per 100 words; SD=standard deviation.

### 6.2.1 Effects on content

While Table 6.1 presents the descriptive statistics on content of the three groups in the pretest, the posttest, and the delayed posttest, Figure 6.1 describes the changes of mean content scores for the three groups from the pretest to the delayed posttest. As the figure shows, the scores of all the three groups increased in the posttest to varying degrees. In the delayed posttest, they had a different performance. Specifically, the score of content in TG1 decreased slightly, whereas CG improved the score slightly. As for TG2, the score seemed to remain unchanged.



**Figure 6.1 Mean content scores over time by group conditions**

Two-way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to explore the effects of time and group on content scores, and the results are displayed in Table 6.2. As can be seen from the table, there was a main effect for time [ $F(2, 140)=20.41, p=.000$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.226$ ], but no significant effect of groups was found ( $p=.063$ ). However, the two-way interaction between time and group conditions was statistically significant [ $F(4, 140)=5.76, p=.000$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.141$ ], indicating that the three groups developed content differentially over time. Post hoc comparisons suggested that although the three groups produced the similar content scores in the pretest ( $p=.333$ ), TG1 exhibited a better performance in content than TG2 and CG in the posttest ( $p=.010, d=0.70$ ;  $p=.012, d=0.73$  respectively) and the delayed posttest ( $p=.023, d=0.59$ ;  $p=.002, d=0.97$  respectively). TG2 did not have such an advantage over CG in the posttest or the delayed posttest.

**Table 6.2 Repeated measures ANOVA of content across time and groups**

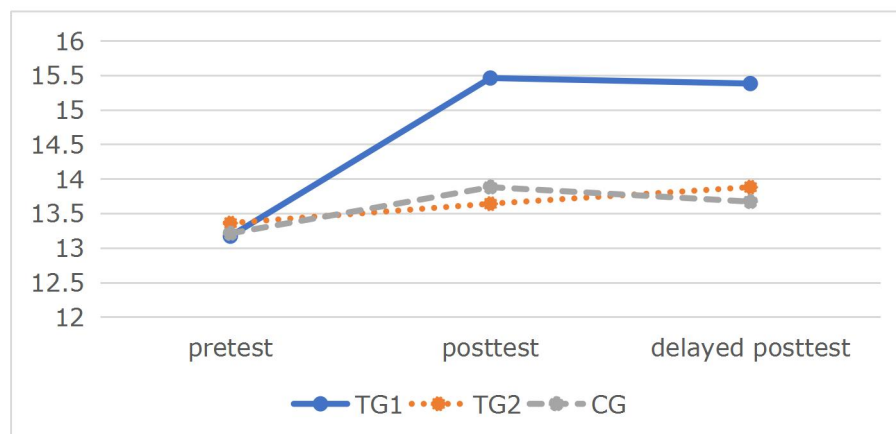
Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	partial $\eta^2$
<b>Content</b>				
<i>Between subjects</i>				
Group	2	2.88	.063	.076
<i>Within subjects</i>				
Time	2	20.41	.000**	.226
Time×group	4	5.76	.000**	.141

**\*\* $p < .001$**

Within-subjects pairwise comparisons showed that for TG1, the intervention of providing students with global feedback helped them improve their content scores over time (pretest vs. posttest,  $p = .000$ ,  $d = 1.07$ ; pretest vs. delayed posttest,  $p = .000$ ,  $d = 1.08$ ) with large effect sizes. TG2 and CG did not make statistically significant improvement in content over time.

### 6.2.2 Effects on organization

The descriptive data for organization scores by TG1, TG2, and CG during the pretest, the posttest, and the delayed posttest is presented in Table 6.1. Figure 6.2 depicts how the organization scores of the three groups changed across the three tests. The graph shows that all the three groups enhanced the quality of organization in the posttest. In the delayed posttest, the scores of TG1 and CG dropped a bit, whereas TG2 performed even better in organization.



**Figure 6.2 Mean organization scores over time by group conditions**

Table 6.3 reveals the outcomes of a two-way repeated measures ANOVA, i.e., the effects of time and group conditions on organization. Both time and group conditions had significant effects [ $F(2, 140) = 22.28$ ,  $p = .000$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.241$ ;  $F(2, 70) = 8.68$ ,  $p = .000$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.199$ ]. The significant interaction effect was also found

between time and group [ $F(4, 140)=7.03, p=.000$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.167$ ], indicating that the organization scores for the three groups were significantly different over time. Between-subjects pairwise comparisons showed that the three groups had similar organization performance in the pretest ( $p=.863$ ); however, TG1 produced a significantly better organization than TG2 and CG in both the posttest ( $p=.000, d=1.26$ ;  $p=.000, d=1.21$  respectively) and the delayed posttest ( $p=.000, d=1.03$ ;  $p=.000, d=1.24$  respectively) with large effect sizes. No significant differences were found between organization scores in TG2 and CG in both the posttest ( $p=.552$ ) and the delayed posttest ( $p=.601$ ).

**Table 6.3 Repeated measures ANOVA of organization across time and groups**

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	partial $\eta^2$
<b>Organization</b>				
<i>Between subjects</i>				
Group	2	8.68	.000**	.199
<i>Within subjects</i>				
Time	2	22.28	.000**	.241
Time×group	4	7.03	.000**	.167

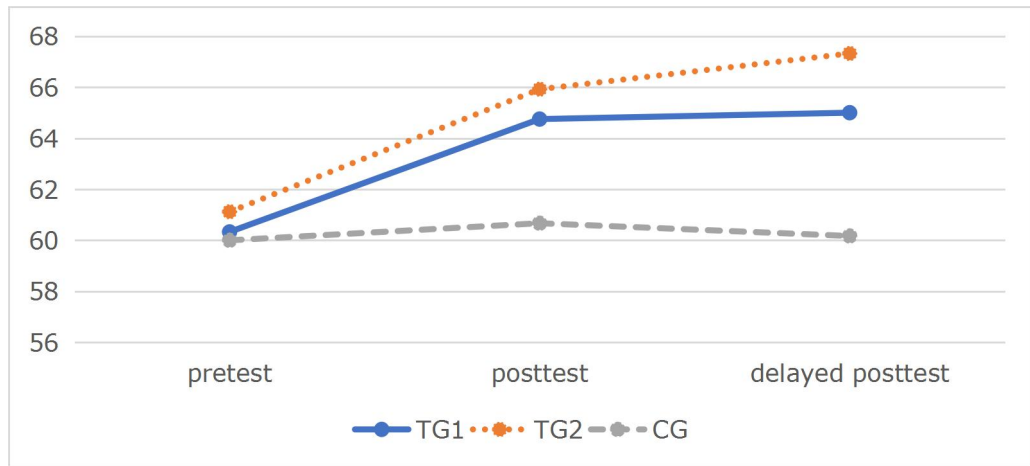
\*\* $p<.001$

A closer observation of within-subjects pairwise comparisons found that the differences of mean organization scores in TG1 between the pretest and the posttest ( $p=.000, d=1.41$ ) and between the pretest and the delayed posttest ( $p=.000, d=1.28$ ) were significant with large effect sizes. This suggests that the treatment enabled students in TG1 to improve their organization scores over time.

### 6.2.3 Effects on overall writing quality

Table 6.1 presents the descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for overall writing quality by the three groups in the pretest, the posttest, and the delayed posttest. Figure 6.3 displays the descriptive data presented in Table 6.1. As reflected by the

figure, TG1 and TG2 made great progress in overall writing quality in the posttest. In the delayed posttest, the overall writing quality in TG2 was further improved, while this index for TG1 appeared to remain unchanged. The overall writing quality in CG did not change significantly in both the posttest and the delayed posttest.



**Figure 6.3 Mean overall writing scores over time by group conditions**

To find out whether time and group had main effects and an interaction effect between them existed, a two-way repeated measures ANOVA was computed (see Table 6.4). According to the table, time and group had main effects [ $F(2, 140)=17.55$ ,  $p=.000$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.200$ ;  $F(2, 70)=6.61$ ,  $p=.002$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.159$ , respectively]. The interaction effect between time and group was statistically significant as well [ $F(4, 140)=3.80$ ,  $p=.006$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.098$ ], indicating that the three groups differed significantly in overall writing quality across the tests. Pairwise comparisons showed that although they wrote the similar overall quality of writing in the pretest, their writing quality developed significantly in the posttest and the delayed posttest. The pretest scores of overall writing quality for the three groups showed no statistically significant difference ( $p=.709$ ), whereas TG1 and TG2 outperformed CG significantly in the overall writing quality in the posttest ( $p=.016$ ,  $d=0.71$ ;  $p=.002$ ,  $d=0.97$ ) and the delayed posttest ( $p=.007$ ,  $d=0.78$ ;  $p=.000$ ,  $d=1.27$ ) with medium and large effect sizes.

There were no statistically significant differences regarding overall writing quality between TG1 and TG2 in both the posttest and the delayed posttest ( $p=.478$ ;  $p=.182$  respectively).

**Table 6.4 Repeated measure ANOVA of writing quality across time and groups**

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	partial $\eta^2$
<b>Writing quality</b>				
<i>Between subjects</i>				
Group	2	6.61	.002*	.159
<i>Within subjects</i>				
Time	2	17.55	.000**	.200
Time×group	4	3.80	.006*	.098

\* $p<.05$ ; \*\* $p<.001$

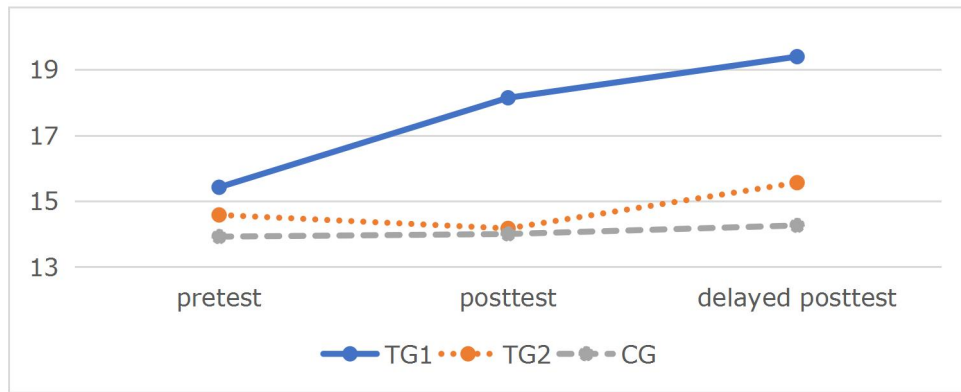
In terms of within-subjects comparisons, TG1 made significant improvement over time in overall writing quality (pretest vs. posttest,  $p=.002$ ,  $d=0.73$ ; pretest vs. delayed posttest,  $p=.008$ ,  $d=0.59$ ) with medium effect sizes. TG2 produced better writing quality from the pretest to the posttest ( $p=.000$ ,  $d=1.02$ ) and from the pretest to the delayed posttest ( $p=.000$ ,  $d=1.37$ ) with large effect sizes.

#### **6.2.4 Effects on syntactic complexity**

Two measures were adopted to assess the syntactic complexity: Mean length of T-units (MLT) and the number of clauses per T-unit (C/T). The following paragraphs elaborate on the effects of different group conditions on these two measures, respectively.

##### ***Effects on MLT***

Table 6.1 displays the descriptive results for mean scores and standard deviations of MLT, and the means are illustrated by Figure 6.4. As can be seen in the figure, TG1 increased MLT in the posttest, while TG2 decreased slightly at this time. In the delayed posttest, TG1 and TG2 improved MLT to different degrees. As for CG, it did not show much change in MLT in both the posttest and the delayed posttest.



**Figure 6.4 Mean MLT scores over time by group condition**

The results of a two-way repeated measures ANOVA to evaluate the effects of time and group on MLT are presented in Table 6.5<sup>2</sup>. It can be seen that both time [ $F(1.905, 133.354) = 14.55, p = .000$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.172$ ] and group [ $F(2, 70) = 27.53, p = .000$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.440$ ] produced main effects on MLT. Furthermore, the interaction effect between time and group was statistically significant [ $F(3.810, 133.354) = 6.98, p = .000$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.166$ ]. This suggested that the three groups varied significantly in MLT across the tests. For the differences in MLT among the three groups, post hoc tests showed that the three groups' pretest performance in MLT was similar ( $p = .056$ ), while TG1 wrote significantly longer T-units than TG2 and CG in the posttest ( $p = .000, d = 1.53$ ;  $p = .000, d = 1.67$ , respectively) and the delayed posttest ( $p = .000, d = 1.40$ ;  $p = .000, d = 2.01$ ) with large effect sizes. No significant differences of MLT between TG2 and CG in the posttest and the delayed posttest were found ( $p = .811$ ;  $p = .068$ , respectively).

**Table 6.5 Repeated measures ANOVA of MLT across time and groups**

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	partial $\eta^2$
<b>MLT</b>				
<i>Between subjects</i>				
Group	2	27.53	.000**	.440
<i>Within subjects</i>				

<sup>2</sup> A violation of Mauchly's test was found ( $p = .020$ ) and the Greenhouse-Geisser estimate was .904 ( $> .75$ ), so the Huynh-Feldt correction was applied to report the results.



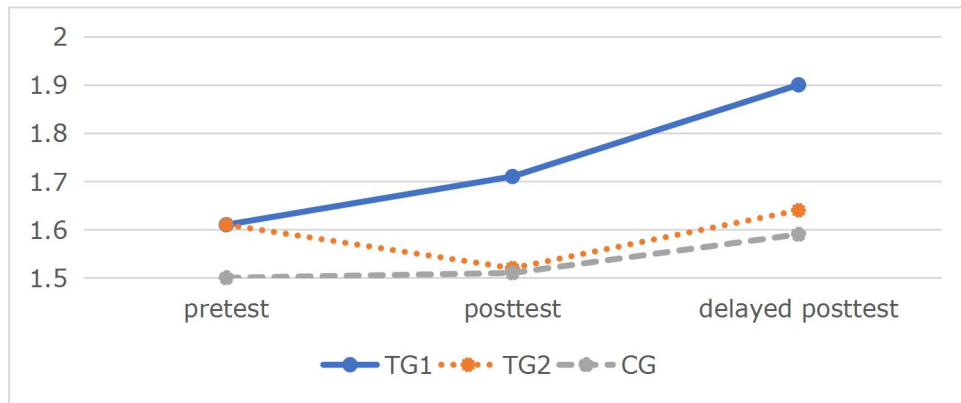
Time	1.905	14.55	.000**	.172
Time×group	3.810	6.98	.000**	.166

\*\* $p < .001$

As regards within-subjects change in MLT over time, pairwise comparisons showed that for TG1, global feedback enabled students to produce better MLT scores across the three time points (pretest vs. posttest,  $p = .001$ ,  $d = 0.81$ ; pretest vs. delayed posttest,  $p = .000$ ,  $d = 0.99$ ). With TG2, offering WCF showed no effect on MLT from the pretest to the posttest as well as from the pretest to the delayed posttest, but it improved MLT from the posttest to the delayed posttest significantly with a medium effect size ( $p = .002$ ,  $d = 0.72$ ). There were no significant differences for CG in terms of MLT over time.

### ***Effects on C/T***

As another measure assessing syntactic complexity, C/T refers to the number of clauses per T-unit. The descriptive data of mean scores and standard deviations in terms of C/T among the three groups over three tests is reported in Table 6.1. Figure 6.5 illustrates the mean scores for C/T displayed in Table 6.1. According to the graph, TG1 and CG improved C/T, while the mean score in TG2 decreased in the posttest. In the delayed posttest, all the three groups showed a similar pattern with increases in the mean scores of C/T.



**Figure 6.5 Mean C/T scores over time by group conditions**

To explore whether the changes of C/T in the three groups were significant, a two-way repeated measures ANOVA was run, the results of which are listed in Table 6.6. The table shows that time and group had significant effects [ $F(2, 140)=10.87$ ,  $p=.000$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.134$ ;  $F(2, 70)=7.64$ ,  $p=.001$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.179$ , respectively], and that there was an interaction effect between time and group [ $F(4, 140)=3.09$ ,  $p=.018$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.081$ ], suggesting that the three groups developed C/T differentially over time. A close observation of the between-subjects differences based on post hoc analyses demonstrated that although there was no significant difference among the three groups in terms of C/T at the beginning of the intervention ( $p=.169$ ), TG1 outperformed TG2 ( $p=.008$ ,  $d=0.76$ ) and CG ( $p=.005$ ,  $d=0.82$ ) significantly in this index in the posttest. Likewise, TG1 produced a significantly better C/T result than TG2 ( $p=.001$ ,  $d=0.85$ ) and CG ( $p=.000$ ,  $d=1.24$ ) in the delayed posttest. No significant differences in C/T scores were found between TG2 and CG in both the posttest and the delayed posttest ( $p=.838$ ;  $p=.520$  respectively).

**Table 6.6 Repeated measure ANOVA of C/T across time and groups**

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	partial $\eta^2$
<b>C/T</b>				
<i>Between subjects</i>				
Group	2	7.64	.000**	.134
<i>Within subjects</i>				
Time	2	10.87	.001*	.179

Time×group	4	3.09	.018*	.081
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\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .001$

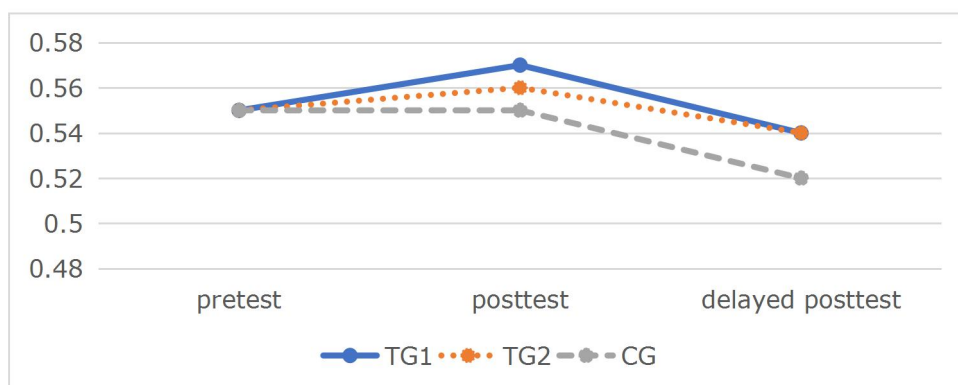
With the within-subjects changes in C/T over time, pairwise comparisons revealed that TG1 made a significant improvement from the posttest to the delayed posttest ( $p = .000$ ,  $d = 0.83$ ) with a large effect size and from the pretest to the delayed posttest ( $p = .000$ ,  $d = 0.97$ ) with a large effect size. TG2 and CG did not improve their C/T scores significantly over time.

### 6.2.5 Effects on lexical complexity

In the present study, lexical complexity was evaluated by two measures: Lexical density and lexical variation. The paragraphs below present the effects of different group conditions on these measures.

#### *Effects on LD*

As noted previously, lexical density refers to the ratio of lexical words in the text (i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives etc.). The descriptive results of mean scores and standard deviations for lexical density by each group across tests are listed in Table 6.1; Figure 6.6 describes the mean scores. As the graph shows, the lexical density of all the three groups increased in the posttest but declined in the delayed posttest.



**Figure 6.6 Mean LD scores over time by group conditions**

In addition, a two-way repeated measures ANOVA was performed to investigate whether the fluctuations among the three groups over tests were significant. Table 6.7 presents the results of the ANOVA, showing a significant effect over time [ $F(2, 140)=14.22, p=.000$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.169$ ]. This indicated that the three groups, taken together, demonstrated significantly different lexical density across the three tests. However, neither group condition [ $F(2, 70)=2.25, p=.113$ ] nor the interaction effect between group and time [ $F(4, 140)=0.834, p=.506$ ] identified significant differences. The non-significant interaction effect indicated that, overall, the different lexical density across tests did not vary according to groups. There were no statistically significant differences in lexical density among TG1, TG2, and CG in the posttest [ $F(2, 70)=1.91, p=.155$ ] or the delayed posttest [ $F(2, 70)=2.80, p=.068$ ].

**Table 6.7 Repeated measures ANOVA of LD across time and groups**

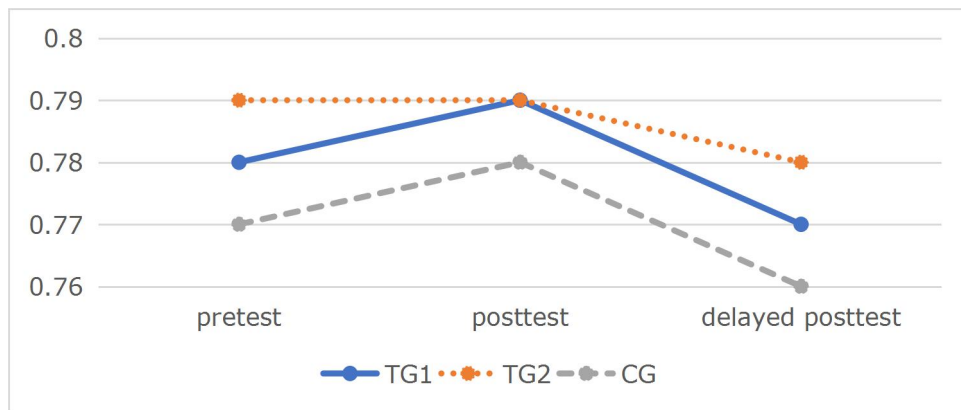
Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	partial $\eta^2$
<b>Lexical density</b>				
<i>Between subjects</i>				
Group	2	2.25	.113	.060
<i>Within subjects</i>				
Time	2	14.22	.000**	.169
Time×group	4	0.834	.506	.023

\*\* $p<.001$

A close observation of within-subjects differences revealed that there was a significant decrease in lexical density for TG1 from the posttest to the delayed posttest with large effect size ( $p=.000, d=0.95$ ). CG experienced significant decreases in lexical density from the pretest to the delayed posttest ( $p=.006, d=0.62$ ) and from the posttest to the delayed posttest ( $p=.006, d=0.62$ ) with medium effect sizes.

### ***Effects on MSTTR***

As a measure for appraising lexical variation, MSTTR, in this study, refers to the mean segmental (50 words as a segment) type-token ratio. Figure 6.7 illustrates the descriptive results presented in Table 6.1. As indicated by the graph, for both TG1 and CG, the mean scores of MSTTR were improved from the pretest to the posttest, while the score of MSTTR for TG2 seemed to remain unchanged. However, all the three groups showed a similar trend from the posttest to the delayed posttest. That is, the mean scores in all the three groups decreased.



**Figure 6.7 Mean MSTTR scores over time by group conditions**

A two-way repeated measures ANOVA was run to examine whether the variations in MSTTR were statistically significant across groups over time and the results are depicted in Table 6.8. While there was a main effect for time [ $F(2, 140)=7.39$ ,  $p=.001$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.095$ ], neither the group effect [ $F(2, 70)=2.72$ ,  $p=.073$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.072$ ] nor interaction effect between group and time [ $F(4, 140)=0.46$ ,  $p=.766$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.013$ ] was significant. Between-subjects pairwise comparisons showed that the three groups produced the similar MSTTR mean scores in the posttest and the delayed posttest ( $p=.540$ ;  $p=.055$ , respectively).

**Table 6.8 Repeated measures ANOVA of MSTTR across time and groups**

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	partial $\eta^2$
<b>MSTTR</b>				
<i>Between subjects</i>				
Group	2	2.72	.073	.072
<i>Within subjects</i>				
Time	2	7.39	.001*	.095
Time×group	4	0.46	.766	.013

\* $p < .05$

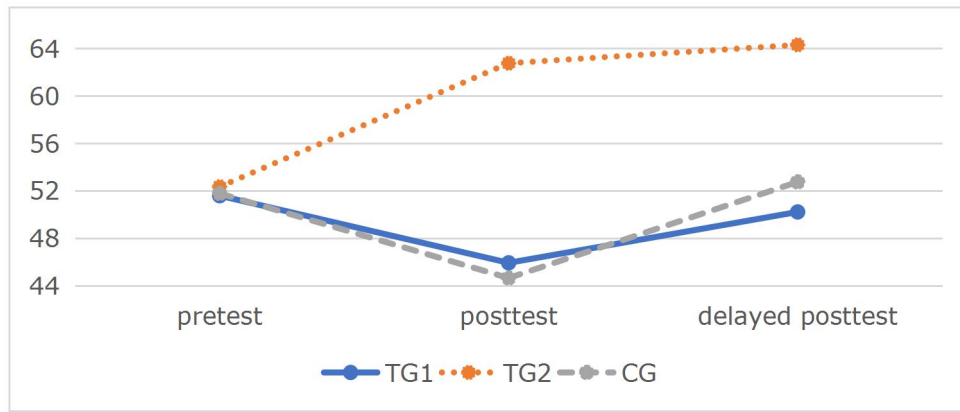
In regard to within-subjects differences, the paired samples *t*-tests found that the mean score difference for TG1 between the posttest and the delayed posttest was significant ( $p = .008$ ,  $d = 0.59$ ) and that CG's mean score difference in MSTTR between the posttest and the delayed posttest was considerable but not significant ( $p = .018 > .017$ ).

### 6.2.6 Effects on accuracy

In the current study, linguistic accuracy was assessed by two measures: The percentage of error-free clauses (EFC/C) and the number of errors per 100 words (EP100W). The results of the effects of different group conditions on these two measures follow.

#### *Effects on EFC/C*

Table 6.1 presents the descriptive results for the percentage of EFC by each group condition over the three tests and Figure 6.8 illustrates the three groups' descriptive data presented in Table 6.1. According to the figure, TG2 made a significant improvement in EFC/C while the TG1 and CG's scores dropped in the posttest. In contrast, the three groups' scores all increased, to different degrees, in EFC/C in the delayed posttest.



**Figure 6.8 Mean percentage of EFC over time by group conditions**

To establish whether the changes in EFC/C differed significantly across group conditions and tests, a two-way repeated measures ANOVA was performed. The results are presented in Table 6.9, indicating that both time [ $F(2, 140)=3.23, p=.043$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.044$ ] and group [ $F(2, 70)=10.33, p=.000$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.228$ ] had main effects, as well as the interaction effect between group and time [ $F(4, 140)=4.56, p=.002$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.115$ ]. The significant interaction effect indicated that the EFC/C scores for the three groups differed significantly over time. Given that the three groups had similar performance in EFC/C in the pretest, the results that TG2 did significantly better than TG1 ( $p=.000, d=1.41$ ) and CG ( $p=.000, d=1.19$ ) with large effect sizes in the posttest were notable. Furthermore, TG2 outperformed TG1 ( $p=.000, d=1.03$ ) and CG ( $p=.002, d=1.02$ ) with large effect sizes in the delayed posttest. There were no significant differences between TG1 and CG in the either of the two posttests ( $p=.758; p=.497$  respectively).

**Table 6.9 Repeated measures ANOVA of EFC/C across time and groups**

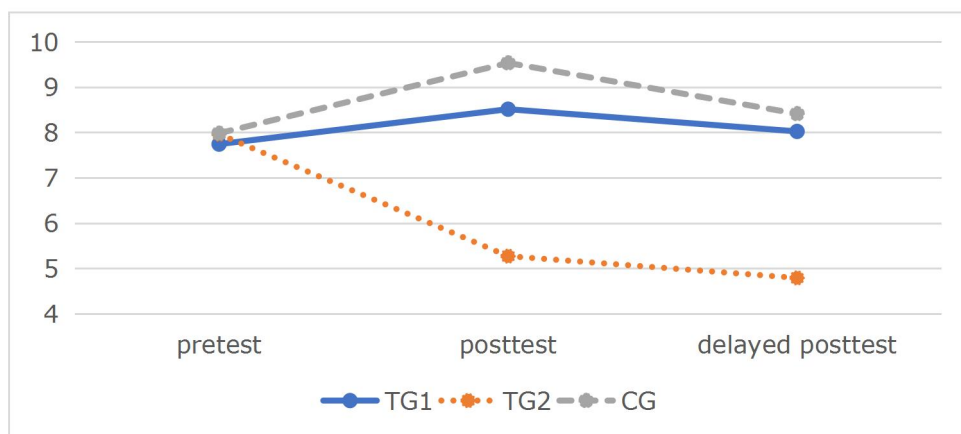
Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	partial $\eta^2$
<b>EFC/C</b>				
<i>Between subjects</i>				
Group	2	10.33	.000**	.228
<i>Within subjects</i>				
Time	2	3.23	.043*	.044
Time×group	4	4.56	.002*	.115

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .001$

A series of paired samples  $t$ -tests to examine changes in EFC/C over time in each group found that TG2 increased the EFC/C greatly over time (pretest vs. posttest,  $p = .000$ ,  $d = 0.92$ ; pretest vs. delayed posttest,  $p = .000$ ,  $d = 0.94$ ) with large effect sizes. TG1 and CG made little improvement in this index over time.

### ***Effects on EP100W***

Figure 6.9 illustrates the mean scores of EP100W which is recorded in Table 6.1. As depicted by the figure, TG1 and CG increased EP100W in the posttest, while at the same time TG2 decreased. In the delayed posttest, EP100W dropped in all of the three groups to different degrees.



**Figure 6.9 Mean EP100W scores over time by group conditions**

Table 6.10 shows the results of a two-way repeated measures ANOVA for the effects of time and group on EP100W over time. There were main effects of time [ $F(2, 140) = 3.73$ ,  $p = .027$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.051$ ] and group [ $F(2, 70) = 13.41$ ,  $p = .000$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.277$ ]; the interaction effect between time and group was also significant [ $F(4, 140) = 9.97$ ,  $p = .000$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.222$ ], suggesting that EP100W differed significantly according to time and groups. Post hoc comparisons revealed that TG2 had significantly fewer errors than TG1 ( $p = .000$ ,  $d = 1.44$ ) and CG ( $p = .000$ ,  $d = 1.86$ ) in the



posttest and the delayed posttest ( $p=.000$ ,  $d=1.41$ ;  $p=.000$ ,  $d=1.73$ ) with large effect sizes. There was little difference between TG1 and CG in both the posttest ( $p=.147$ ) and the delayed posttest ( $p=.552$ ).

**Table 6.10 Repeated measures ANOVA of EP100W across time and groups**

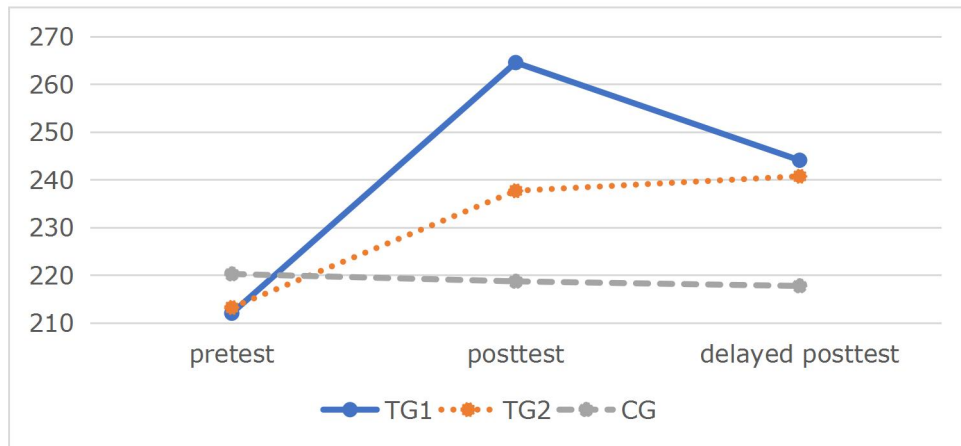
Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	partial $\eta^2$
<b>EP100W</b>				
<i>Between subjects</i>				
Group	2	13.41	.000**	.277
<i>Within subjects</i>				
Time	2	3.73	.027*	.051
Time×group	4	9.97	.000**	.222

\* $p<.05$ ; \*\* $p<.001$

A close inspection of the within-subjects differences found that TG2 decreased the EP100W significantly from the pretest to the posttest ( $p=.000$ ,  $d=1.28$ ) and from the pretest to delayed posttest ( $p=.000$ ,  $d=1.37$ ) with large effect sizes. Other groups made no significant improvements in this measure over time.

### 6.2.7 Effects on fluency

In the present study, fluency was measured by the total number of words that students produced within 40 minutes. Table 6.1 records the descriptive results for means and standard deviations of fluency by each group across the three tests. Figure 6.10 graphically illustrates the effects of different feedback treatments on the fluency in the three groups over time. As the figure shows, both TG1 and TG2 improved their writing fluency in the posttest. However, in the delayed posttest, the mean score of writing fluency for TG1 decreased, while it increased slightly for TG2. There was little change in fluency from the pretest to the delayed posttest for CG.



**Figure 6.10 Mean fluency scores over time by group conditions**

To establish whether the fluctuations in fluency were significant across groups and tests, a two-way repeated measures ANOVA was operated (see Table 6.11). The test yielded main effects of time [ $F(2, 140)=13.30$ ,  $p=.000$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.160$ ] and group [ $F(2, 70)=4.66$ ,  $p=.013$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.117$ ]. A significant interaction effect between time and group also existed [ $F(4, 140)=5.28$ ,  $p=.001$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.131$ ], indicating that the three groups developed fluency differently across tests. In regard to between-subjects differences, there was no initial group difference with respect to fluency in the pretest ( $p=.660$ ), but TG1 wrote significantly more words than TG2 ( $p=.016$ ,  $d=0.72$ ) and CG ( $p=.000$ ,  $d=1.23$ ) with medium and large effect sizes in the posttest. In the delayed posttest, TG1 and TG2 outperformed CG ( $p=.007$ ,  $d=0.79$ ;  $p=.017$ ,  $d=0.72$  respectively) with medium effect sizes, whereas there was no significant difference between TG1 and TG2 in the delayed posttest ( $p=.720$ ).

**Table 6.11 Repeated measure ANOVA of fluency across time and groups**

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	partial $\eta^2$
<b>Fluency</b>				
<i>Between subjects</i>				
Group	2	4.66	.013*	.117
<i>Within subjects</i>				
Time	2	13.30	.000**	.160
Time×group	4	5.28	.001*	.131

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .001$

A close observation of within-subjects differences showed that global feedback contributed to students' fluency in TG1 significantly over time (pretest vs. posttest,  $p = .000$ ,  $d = 1.18$ ; pretest vs. delayed posttest,  $p = .005$ ,  $d = 0.63$ ). Similarly, TG2 made a significant improvement from the pretest to the posttest ( $p = .008$ ,  $d = 0.57$ ), and from the pretest to the delayed posttest ( $p = .001$ ,  $d = 0.79$ ), whereas CG made no significant progress in writing fluency over time.

### 6.2.8 Summary

This section examined the effects of NES and NNEST teachers' written feedback (global feedback vs. WCF) on the Chinese EFL learners' writing productions (content, organization, overall writing quality; accuracy, complexity, and fluency). The statistically significant between-subjects and within-subjects differences are summarized in Table 6.12.

**Table 6.12 Significant between-subjects and within-subjects differences**

Measures	Between-subjects differences	Within-subjects differences
<b>Content</b>	TG1>TG2; TG1>CG	TG1: pretest<posttest; pretest<delayed posttest
<b>Organization</b>	TG1>TG2; TG1>CG	TG1: pretest<posttest; pretest<delayed posttest
<b>Overall writing quality</b>	TG1>CG; TG2>CG	TG1: pretest<posttest; pretest<delayed posttest  TG2: pretest<posttest; pretest<delayed posttest
<b>Complexity</b>		
MLT	TG1>TG2; TG1>CG	TG1: pretest<posttest; pretest<delayed posttest  TG2: posttest<delayed posttest

C/T	TG1>TG2; TG1>CG	TG1: posttest<delayed posttest; pretest<delayed posttest
Lexical density	——	TG1: posttest>delayed posttest  CG: pretest>delayed posttest; posttest>delayed posttest
MSTTR	——	TG1: posttest>delayed posttest
<b>Accuracy</b>		
EFC/C	TG2>TG1; TG2>CG	TG2: pretest<posttest; pretest<delayed posttest
EP100W	TG2>TG1; TG2>CG	TG2: pretest>posttest; pretest>delayed posttest
<b>Fluency</b>	posttest:	TG1: pretest<posttest; pretest<delayed posttest
	TG1>TG2; TG1>CG	TG2: pretest<posttest; pretest<delayed posttest
	delayed posttest:	TG2: pretest<posttest; pretest<delayed posttest
	TG1>CG; TG2>CG	

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Regarding between-subjects differences, TG1 outperformed TG2 and CG in content, organization, overall writing quality, syntactic complexity, and fluency (in the posttest), while TG2 had greater increases than TG1 in terms of accuracy and CG in overall writing quality, accuracy, and fluency (in the delayed posttest). CG did not exceed TG1 or TG2 in any aspects of writing performance.

In terms of within-subjects differences, for TG1, there were significant gains in various dimensions of writing (i.e. content, organization, overall writing quality, syntactic complexity, and fluency) across tests. TG2 also made a significant improvement in overall writing quality, accuracy, and fluency from the pretest to the

delayed posttest. These results suggest that NES and NNEST teachers' written feedback benefits different aspects of L2 writing performance. In contrast, in a condition in which no feedback was provided, students' performance in various writing dimensions changed little over time.

## **6.3 Students' perceptions**

This section reports how Chinese EFL learners perceived the effects on different dimensions of their writing performance. Their perceptions were elicited from a post-treatment questionnaire which extends understandings gained from analysis of the quantitative data. The questionnaire included two parts: Students' responses to five-point Likert scales and their explanations (see section 3.6.4.3). In this section, students' selections based on the Likert scales are reported first followed by their explanations for their selections.

### **6.3.1 Content**

This study was concerned with students' perceptions about content, so a key question asked students whether their ability to develop their ideas about different topics was enhanced. Table 6.13 presents the frequencies and percentages of TG1 and TG2 students' responses which reveal that the majority of students in TG1 ( $n=17/24$ ) and half of students in TG2 ( $n=13/25$ ) agreed that their ability to develop ideas about different topics was improved. An independent samples  $t$ -test showed that TG1 and TG2 students' perceptions on the development of different topics did not differ significantly ( $t=1.186, p=.242$ ).

**Table 6.13 Descriptive data for students' perceptions on content**

<b>I can develop the ideas about different topics better after the intervention.</b>						
Groups	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
TG1	24	0(0.00%)	1(4.17%)	6(25.00%)	14(58.33%)	3(12.50%)
TG2	25	0(0.00%)	3(12.00%)	9(36.00%)	10(40.00%)	3(12.00%)

The first factor contributing to TG1 participants' belief in the improvement of developing ideas was the global feedback they received (n=14/17). With the help of such feedback, they understood better how to elaborate on and develop their opinions. As Zhi explained in the questionnaire, the provision of global feedback made her have a deep insight into several strategies to develop ideas such as giving examples and making comparisons or contrasts. In combining different strategies, she was able to develop ideas more effectively. In addition, students said global feedback expanded their outlooks, and helped them think of ideas of a certain topic from different perspectives, which developed their ideas better. This point was evident in Yue's comment below:

*After several rounds of feedback, my thinking, to some extent, is improved. I can consider topics more comprehensively, so I am able to develop my ideas more easily (Yue, TG1, Q).*

Improved topic knowledge was considered as another factor by some TG1 participants (n=6/17), who believed that they could develop their ideas better. As they explained, they wrote several essays based on different topics in this intervention, so their personal information about different topics were enriched, which improved their ability to develop ideas in writing. Hui, for example, said that after writing on different topics, she accumulated writing materials and broadened her horizons. Similarly, Lin

also claimed that the intervention gave her more knowledge about different topics, which enabled her to develop her ideas better.

In TG2, students holding such a belief did not provide specific details to support it but referred to some reasons including different topics in writing sessions, multiple rounds of writing practice, and the freedom to writing. Although two students selected “agree” for this questionnaire item, their explanations appeared to contradict their selections. For example, Sa, who showed a positive attitude towards the improvement in developing ideas, offered the following explanation:

*Although I have written on different topics, I think it is still difficult for me to develop ideas in writing (Sa, TG2, Q).*

For the rest of students in the two groups who held negative or neutral perceptions regarding the improvement of developing ideas, a reason reported was that the ability to develop ideas depended on topics. As they claimed, when writing on familiar topics, they were able to develop ideas better and vice versa, as exemplified by Ding (TG1) “I can think of ideas and develop them with ease for the topics that I am familiar with. However, for those unfamiliar topics, it is still a challenge for me”. Cong, who received WCF in TG2, also expressed a similar opinion by saying if she had plentiful knowledge about a topic, she was able to develop her ideas easily. If she had little knowledge, she could not.

Students also ascribed their disagreement or uncertainty to other reasons such as the limited input and genre. For example:

*I do not read often, so I have little input of writing materials. This makes me feel difficult to develop ideas in writing (Wan, TG1, Q).*

*I make progress in developing ideas in argumentative writing. However, I am*

*not sure if this ability can transfer to other genres such as narratives or expositions (Yuan, TG2, Q).*

In conclusion, approximately 70% of TG1 students (n=17/24) perceived the improvement in developing ideas and they mainly attributed their perception to global feedback they received. In comparison, while half of students in TG2 (n=13/25) expressed the same belief, they did not provide detailed explanations. Other factors were identified including topic-dependence, limited input, and genre as leading to students' ambivalent or negative attitudes towards the improvement in the development of ideas about different topics.

### 6.3.2 Organization

One question in the questionnaire addressed global feedback and WCF recipients' perspectives on organization, that is, I can organize my English writing more effectively after the intervention. Table 6.14 presents descriptive results of the response of students in TG1 and TG2. The results reveal that most participants in TG1 acknowledged that they could organize their English writing more effectively (n=20/24); surprisingly, over half of the TG2 respondents (n=16/25) also agreed with their perceived improvement in organization. An independent samples *t*-test found no significant difference between TG1 and TG2 in regard to students' perceptions on organization ( $t=1.524, p=.134$ )

**Table 6.14 Descriptive data for students' perceptions on organization**  
**I can organize my English writing more effectively after the intervention.**

Groups	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
TG1	24	0(0.00%)	1(4.17%)	3(12.50%)	14(58.33%)	6(25.00%)
TG2	25	0(0.00%)	3(12.00%)	6(24.00%)	12(48.00%)	4(16.00%)



All the 20 students in TG1 who selected “agree” or “strongly agree” highlighted the importance of global feedback, as benefiting them in three dimensions. Firstly, they thought that global feedback contributed to a better understanding of how essays were structured globally. As Ran explained in the questionnaire, prior to this intervention she tended to omit a concluding paragraph in writing. Through four rounds of global feedback, she understood the overall structure of writing better and could structure her writing into a more coherent organization. Another student Hui espoused the same belief, mentioning also that she had a better understanding of global structure:

*Currently, I have a better understanding of the overall organization of writing. I can organize English essays based on the structure of “introduction-body-conclusion (Hui, TG1, Q).*

Many students believed that global feedback provided them with a deeper insight into local structure of their writing. That is, with the help of such feedback, they understood which elements should be included in different parts of writing. For example, Qing responded in the questionnaire that she understood body paragraphs should contain topic sentences; she felt confident she could formulate a topic sentence to encapsulate the whole paragraph. Sen, similarly, described her understanding of the necessary elements in each paragraph:

*In introductory paragraphs, we should include background information of the topic and thesis statement; body paragraphs comprise topic sentences and supporting details; and in concluding parts, main ideas should be restated (Sen, TG1, Q)*

As well as having a better understanding of the local and global structures of writing, these students also expressed their perception that global feedback had a positive effect on their logic, which led to an improvement in their ability to organize English compositions. This was expressed by Hong in saying that the treatment of global feedback improved her logical ability. After the intervention, the organization of her writing was much more reasonable and logical whereas, previously, the organization of her writing had been illogical and messy. Wan, similarly, noted that with global feedback, she developed her logical ability, which enabled her to distinguish main ideas from trivial information, and assisted her in producing well-organized essays.

The other four TG1 students who disagreed with or were uncertain about the improvement in organization did not explain their perceptions in detail. Some TG1 students, however, appeared to have misunderstood this questionnaire item, as they provided reasons which were irrelevant to this item. For example, Xue may have been confused by the ability to “develop ideas” and “organize ideas” because the reason she gave for why she selected “undecided” was:

*I am not sure when I should make cause-effect analysis, and when I should make comparisons. I am a little puzzled (Xue, TG1, Q).*

Likewise, Lu said she perceived she had made progress in organization, but she wrote “With global feedback, I can provide more relevant and detailed information to support my ideas.” Her explanation failed to justify her perception that she had progressed in the ability to organize English writing.

Unexpectedly, there were 16 students in TG2 who said they believed that their ability to organize writing had improved, even though they were not offered any

feedback on organization. A majority of these students (n=11/16) considered that the engagement with writing and rewriting was a salient reason for their perception. For example, as Tian explained, writing and rewriting enabled her to understand overall structure of argumentative writing. Likewise, Jun commented in the questionnaire “Previously, the organization of my writing was illogical. After several rounds of writing and rewriting practice, I try to follow the ‘introduction-body-conclusion’ format to compose my writing now.” Cui presented yet another benefit from writing and rewriting:

*After repeated writing and rewriting, I have accumulated some conjunctions such as initially, moreover, additionally, and furthermore. Thus, I think I can organize sub-ideas of my writing better (Cui, TG2, Q).*

According to Cui’s response, writing practice benefited her in terms of accumulating conjunctions to improve cohesion in her writing by making sub-ideas linked more logically and reasonably. Some respondents who attributed their questionnaire responses to writing and rewriting practice, however, simply provided some unspecific information such as “Practice makes perfect.” or “Writing and rewriting lead to a clear organization.”

Some TG2 participants ascribed their perceived improvement in organization to WCF (n=9/16). From their perspectives, with WCF treatment, they improved performance in language of writing, so they could pay more attention to organization. This perspective was supported by Su, who wrote, in her questionnaire response, that thanks to WCF, she improved grammar a lot. Thus, she was able to spend time considering organization while writing. Similarly, Yuan emphasized that with fewer errors in grammar, she could spend some time on organization of her English writing.

In summary, the majority of students in both TG1 (n=20/24) and TG2 (n=16/25) said that they made progress in organization of English writing. TG1 students ascribed their perception to global feedback, which benefited their organization in three aspects, while their TG2 peers deemed that their perceived improvement was due to writing and rewriting practice as well as the positive effects of WCF.

### 6.3.3 Writing quality

Another concern of this study was students' perspectives on writing quality, so a questionnaire item inquired into whether students believed that the quality of their English writing was improved. According to the descriptive results shown in Table 6.15, most respondents in both TG1 (n=19/24) and TG2 (n=23/25) held the belief that their writing quality was improved. According to an independent samples *t*-test, TG1 and TG2 students' perceptions on writing quality did not differ significantly ( $t=0.010$ ,  $p=.992$ ).

**Table 6.15 Descriptive data for students' perceptions on writing quality**  
**The quality of my English writing is improved after this intervention.**

Groups	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
TG1	24	0(0.00%)	0(0.00%)	5(20.83%)	13(54.17%)	6(25.00%)
TG2	25	0(0.00%)	0(0.00%)	2(8.00%)	20(80.00%)	3(12.00%)

Amongst the respondents in TG1 who held a positive attitude towards this questionnaire item, nearly all of them (n=16/19) ascribed their improvement of writing quality to global feedback. In their points of view, such feedback improved their organization, thereby enhancing their writing quality. This was reflected in Qing's response that after the provision of global feedback, the structure of her writing became more and more reasonable and she could use conjunctions to realize cohesion. Likewise, when explaining why writing quality was improved, Wan stated that with

global feedback, she was cognizant of how to present her ideas in an appropriate structure.

These TG1 participants also mentioned that global feedback was helpful for their quality of content, so their writing quality was improved. This was borne out by Xie's justification in the questionnaire that after receiving feedback on content and organization, she realized how to make arguments more convincingly and support her ideas more adequately. Similarly, Xia explained her selection below:

*Thanks to multiple rounds of feedback on content, I understand problems of content in my writing and spare efforts to remedy them. Therefore, I make progress in logic and sufficiency in reasoning (Xia, TG1, Q).*

As well as improvement in adequacy, global feedback contributed to relevance in content and then benefited writing quality. This was mirrored in Yue's explanation in the questionnaire:

*Previously, I included a lot of details irrelevant to topics. However, due to the feedback I received, the problem of irrelevance, to a large extent, is resolved and I can write around a topic sentence in each paragraph (Yue, TG1, Q).*

Unsurprisingly, participants in TG2, who were in favor of improvement in writing quality, ascribed their belief to their progress in grammar because of WCF. As they responded, due to WCF, they noticed grammatical errors and avoided repeating them in the following writing tasks. This could be exemplified by Jia's explanation that after receiving feedback, grammatical errors in her writing were reduced. Similarly, Tong made a comment below:

*For writing quality, I make great progress in grammar after feedback. I can*

*avoid many grammatical errors in writing and improve my writing quality (Tong, TG2, Q).*

To conclude, most students in both TG1 and TG2 shared the same perception that their writing quality was improved, but they presented different reasons. For students in TG1, they benefited from global feedback, which improved the quality of content and organization, while for their peers in TG2, they enhanced the grammatical accuracy due to WCF, which helped them produce better writing.

### 6.3.4 Syntactic complexity

This section reports students' perspectives on syntactic complexity. As evident in Table 6.16, approximately 70% of students in TG1 ( $n=17/24$ ) said they believed that sentences in their writing were longer, whereas a much smaller number of TG2 participants ( $n=5/25$ ) agreed/strongly agreed. An independent samples  $t$ -test identified that a significant difference existed between TG1 and TG2 with respect to students' perceptions about syntactic complexity ( $t=4.772, p=.000, d=1.364$ ).

**Table 6.16 Descriptive data for students' perceptions on syntactic complexity**  
**The sentences in my English writing are longer after the intervention.**

Groups	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
TG1	24	0(0.00%)	2(8.33%)	5(20.83%)	7(29.17%)	10(41.67%)
TG2	25	0(0.00%)	12 (48.00%)	8(32.00%)	4(16.00%)	1(4.00%)

The first reason for most TG1 students' view was associated with global feedback that they were provided, which asked them to write more clearly or expand their ideas adequately. With such feedback, they had to present more details and information to make their meaning more coherent or develop their ideas more sufficiently, thus leading to longer sentences. A statement from Yue is an example:

*After receiving several feedback, which required me to express meaning clearly, I have attempted to employ participles and clauses to enrich sentences so as to convey a clearer and more complete meaning, which, in turn, increases the length of sentences (Yue, TG1, Q).*

Xia expressed a similar belief that global feedback helped her write longer sentences in writing through some feedback on content, which helped her clarify meaning or elaborate on ideas. She achieved this by expanding the sentences in her writing through providing details and information by adding different types of clauses.

The second reason referred by participants was related to writing practice. For example, Hui replied in the questionnaire that she had learnt about some strategies to write long sentences from the *English writing course* such as employing clauses or participles, but she did not have many opportunities to practise. In this intervention, she put them into practice consciously while completing writing tasks. Writing practice benefited students in another way. As Yang said, after four rounds of writing practice, she understood techniques to lengthen sentences such as the use of infinitives, participles, and prepositional phrases. The explanations of these two respondents suggested that writing practice was of importance in improving syntactic complexity; it not only provided students with opportunities to practise strategies that they had learnt, but also enabled them to acquire knowledge about how to produce long sentences.

Students in TG1 (n=7), who did not share the same perception with the majority of their peers, claimed that global feedback resulted in their ambivalent or negative attitudes towards this questionnaire item. They commented that they received feedback related to content and organization, so they had a better understanding of how to provide clear, relevant, and adequate details, and how to organize them

appropriately. They felt they still had little knowledge of how to produce longer sentences, because this type of feedback did not teach them specifically. Heng, for instance, wrote in the questionnaire:

*Feedback I received was relevant to idea and organization. Thus, I have learnt more about how to improve arguments and structure of English essays, instead of how to write long sentences (Heng, TG1, Q).*

In TG2, half of WCF recipients did not agree that they were writing longer sentences. Most of such students (n=9/12) noted that WCF focused on linguistic accuracy but did not extend their limited knowledge on how to expand basic sentence structures with greater syntactic complexity. Xin said that the feedback she received mainly paid attention to the accuracy of grammar and vocabulary. While she felt she made progress in these two aspects, she still had little knowledge about how to write long sentences. Her belief was shared by Qing who responded in the questionnaire:

*The feedback I received focused on accuracy and did not teach me how to expand sentences, so I still have difficulty in this regard (Qing, TG2, Q).*

Eight TG2 students were unsure about whether they were writing longer sentences after the intervention and indicated a neutral stance with this questionnaire item. They noted that under WCF treatment, they prioritized accuracy in writing with little attention paid to syntactic complexity. Tian said that with a focus on accuracy, she did not consider the length of sentences much, so she felt unsure about the improvement in producing long sentences. Similar comments can be observed in Yi's words:

*WCF made me concentrate on the accurate use of grammar and vocabulary, so*



*I did not attend to the production of long sentences (Yi, TG2, Q).*

Three of the TG2 respondents had positive attitudes towards this questionnaire item because they thought they had improved grammatical knowledge as a result of WCF. With more grammatical knowledge, they were able to understand what elements should be added to produce longer sentences. Bin mentioned the impact of WCF in his response:

*After four rounds of WCF, I improved my grammatical knowledge. This enables me to know what elements can be added to extend basic sentence structures (Bin, TG2, Q).*

Furthermore, WCF appeared to boost students' confidence, which then contributed to their progress in syntactic complexity. For instance, Le wrote in the questionnaire that her confidence in English writing increased because she had more grammatical knowledge and improved her performance in accuracy after the WCF treatment; she said she now felt confident to write longer sentences.

In conclusion, TG1 and TG2 participants had significantly different attitudes towards syntactic complexity. Most students in TG1 (n=17/24) perceived that they could write longer sentences in English and ascribed their perception to global feedback and writing practice. In contrast, around half of TG2 respondents (n=12/25) did not believe in their improvement in syntactic complexity because of WCF.

### **6.3.5 Accuracy**

An item in the questionnaire inquired into the extent to which students agreed that their grammatical accuracy was improved after the intervention. Table 6.17 presents the descriptive results, which show that the majority of students in TG2 (n=20/25)

deemed that their grammatical accuracy was enhanced, while only four students (n=4/24) in TG1, who did not receive any feedback on linguistic errors, believed so as well. According to an independent samples *t*-test, there was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of students' perceptions on accuracy ( $t=-6.194$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $d=-1.770$ ).

**Table 6.17 Descriptive data for students' perceptions on accuracy**

**The grammatical accuracy of my English writing is improved after the intervention.**

Groups	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
TG1	24	0(0%)	13(54.17%)	7(29.17%)	3(12.50%)	1(4.17%)
TG2	25	0(0%)	0(0%)	5(20.00%)	14(56.00%)	6(24.00%)

Through the analysis of students' explanations of the Likert scales ratings, an absence of feedback on language (i.e., WCF) contributed to TG1 participants' perception that they did not improve their grammatical accuracy (n=13/24). Without WCF, they did not acquire knowledge about grammar, so their grammatical knowledge was not improved. For example, Lu stated in the questionnaire:

*I was not provided with any feedback on language, so I did not improve grammatical knowledge. Without an improvement in grammatical knowledge, how can I improve my grammatical accuracy? (Lu, TG1, Q).*

Also, a lack of WCF made them find it difficult to identify and correct grammatical errors on their own. Yun, for instance, responded:

*I tried my best to pick out grammatical errors by myself when rewriting my essays. However, without feedback on grammar, I was not able to notice many of them because my English grammar is poor. Thus, I expect to be provided*

*with feedback on grammar (Yun, TG1, Q).*

Yun's comments indicated that students with low proficiency of English grammar needed WCF to detect problematic areas in grammar, for they were not able to do this independently. There were also students, with some knowledge about English grammar, who felt they needed WCF. For example, Jie and Yang claimed that even though they could self-correct some surface grammatical errors, without WCF it was demanding for them to identify errors in non-predicate verbs and sentence structures. These students' replies suggested that WCF was as an empowering pedagogical approach which assisted them in improving their grammatical accuracy in writing.

TG1 students (n=7/24), who reported that they were unsure about whether their grammatical accuracy was improved, mainly ascribed their belief to the global feedback they received. As they said, global feedback drew their attention to the quality of high-order dimensions of writing, so they were not concerned with grammatical accuracy. For example, Ni responded in the questionnaire:

*Since the feedback I received only addressed issues in content and organization, I paid little attention to grammatical accuracy (Ni, TG1, Q).*

In TG2, students (n=20/25) who chose "agree" or "strongly agree" ascribed their responses to WCF. There were three reasons, they claimed, why WCF benefited their grammatical accuracy. To begin with, it improved and expanded their current grammatical knowledge enabling them to have a better understanding of some grammatical rules, which they had not mastered. In the questionnaire, Xin reported that she used to be confused about present perfect tense and present perfect progressive tense but after receiving four rounds of WCF, she understood how to

distinguish and use them appropriately. Yu and Wen, who had problems in articles and singularity/plurality also felt that they could use them proficiently in writing after the intervention. These students' comments suggested that WCF might add knowledge into their grammatical system.

Secondly, respondents mentioned that as WCF highlighted errors in grammar, it drew their attention to them. Thus, they were likely to avoid such errors in the follow-up writing tasks. For example, as Wei said:

*Because of multiple rounds of WCF, I am aware of the recurrent grammatical errors in my writing, one of which is run-on sentences. This prevents me from making these errors in the future (Wei, TG2, Q).*

Wei's remark revealed that WCF contributed to her awareness of recurring grammatical errors, which she was then able to avoid in future writing. Similarly, Tong said:

*Due to several rounds of feedback, I have identified grammatical errors that I am prone to making in writing. As a result, I pay more attention to these errors, and this helps me rule out them in the following writing (Tong, TG2, Q).*

In a further example, she stated that she used to write "be beneficial to do" but realized that it was incorrect after feedback. Based on students' accounts in the questionnaire, it appeared that WCF enabled them to understand their inadequacies in grammar and to improve their accurate use of grammar.

The last benefit noted by students was that WCF fostered their grammatical consciousness, so they valued grammatical rules and did not write sentences arbitrarily. With such an awareness, they took grammatical rules into consideration when writing

sentences, which increased their writing accuracy. This is exemplified by Ran's response below:

*Previously, I wrote sentences by intuition, regardless of grammatical appropriateness. Owing to feedback provided, I take grammatical rules into consideration when writing sentences and I also employ grammatical knowledge to check whether sentences that I write are correct, through which I can avoid many grammatical errors (Ran, TG2, Q).*

Evidently, WCF made Ran emphasize grammatical rules and change her habit of writing sentences from writing at will to writing based on rules.

The rest of the students in TG2, who were undecided about their improvement in grammatical accuracy, attributed their perception to their low English proficiency. For example, in the questionnaire, Jin wrote that low English proficiency hindered her performance in accuracy, "My English is not very good, so I did not understand much feedback provided. In this situation, I am not sure whether the grammatical accuracy in my writing is improved."

To sum up, TG1 and TG2 students demonstrated contrasting perspectives on the improvement in grammatical accuracy. Half of the TG1 students (n=13/24) did not believe that they improved in this aspect and they attributed their belief to the lack of WCF. In contrast, the majority of TG2 students (n=20/25) perceived that they improved grammatical accuracy in writing. Their perception was ascribed to WCF, which, as they thought, generated three benefits.

### **6.3.6 Fluency**

In the questionnaire, students were also asked whether they thought they could write faster and more fluently after receiving feedback in treatment. Table 6.18, which

reports the descriptive results for this questionnaire item, shows that over half the TG1 participants ( $n=14/24$ ), and nearly all WCF recipients ( $n=23/25$ ) in TG2 agreed with this item. An independent samples  $t$ -test showed a significant difference between TG1 and TG2 participants' perspectives on fluency ( $t=-3.418$ ,  $p=.001$ ,  $d=-0.977$ ), indicating that TG2 students showed more supportive attitudes towards this item.

**Table 6.18 Descriptive data for students' perceptions on fluency**  
**I can write faster and more fluently after the intervention.**

Groups	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
TG1	24	0(0.00%)	4(16.67%)	6(25.00%)	12(50.00%)	2(8.33%)
TG2	25	0(0.00%)	0(0.00%)	2(8.00%)	15(60.00%)	8(32.00%)

The questionnaire responses recorded the respondents, who perceived an improvement in fluency, as attributing it to the feedback that they received, regardless of their feedback conditions. The TG1 participants claimed that global feedback gave them a deeper insight into how to develop their ideas and organize their writing in an appropriate structure, which enabled them to write more fluently. That is, their writing fluency was enhanced due to the improvement in content and organization by global feedback. Heng claimed that with the help of such feedback, she had a better understanding of argumentative writing structure, and also could develop her arguments more effectively. Thus, she perceived that she was not bothered with such issues in the process of writing, which facilitated her writing speed. Her statement aligned with Lu's explanation that she had more knowledge about essay structure and could think of reasons to support claims from different perspectives quickly and easily.

The TG2 students maintained that WCF helped extend their current knowledge related to language use, by which their writing fluency was improved. For example, Nan, when asked to explain why she selected "strongly agree" for this questionnaire

item, responded that due to WCF, her grammar and vocabulary were improved. She was able to write faster because she did not need to spend much time checking whether sentences were correct. Likewise, Yuan commented in the questionnaire that after multiple rounds of WCF, she was more familiar with grammar, and less anxious about writing correctly, and so her writing fluency increased.

Another common reason for TG1 and TG2 students' positive attitudes towards writing fluency was writing practice. While few students did not specify why writing practice benefited their writing speed, and just responded that practice makes perfect, others elaborated on the contribution of writing practice to fluency. For instance, they said that writing practice enabled them to be more familiar with organization of argumentative writing, so they could establish the structure of their writing promptly. As Wen in TG1 and Zhi in TG2 wrote, after four rounds of writing practice, as they had a better understanding of global structure of argumentative writing, they were able to outline their essays more quickly. As well as becoming familiar with the overall structure of writing, students believed that writing practice improved their language expression, as expressed by Shuang and Le:

*Due to writing practice, I have accumulated some frequently used words and phrases. This enables me to write faster (Shuang, TG1, Q).*

*After several rounds of practice, I can write sentences which I want to express more fluently, which facilitates my writing speed (Le, TG2, Q).*

Based on TG1 and TG2 participants' explanations, writing practice enabled them to understand the organization of writing and facilitated their language use, so these benefits prompted them to write more fluently.

TG1 and TG2 students, who were unsure about the improvement in fluency,

agreed that writing fluency depended on the familiarity of the topic. As Sa's comment exemplifies, less time was required when dealing with a familiar topic:

*If I am familiar with a topic, I can write fluently. If a topic is not familiar, I need more time to think about it (Sa, TG2, Q).*

The four TG1 respondents, who did not think that they could write faster and more fluently, alluded to the influence of global feedback. They said that with global feedback, they thought more about the content in writing, and they spent time thinking about the details that were needed in writing. For instance, Jie explained:

*After four rounds of feedback, I attach great importance to the quality of content. Therefore, I spend time thinking about points and information that I need. During writing process, I need to consider whether details are relevant to the topic and how to develop topic sentences, so I stop to think about them, and I reduce my writing speed (Jie, TG1, Q).*

Jie's response showed that in order to achieve a better performance in content, she spent time thinking of the details she needed in writing, instead of writing hastily. Consequently, she felt that she failed to increase her fluency.

In brief, over half of the students in TG1 (n=14/24), and almost all the participants in TG2 (n=23/25) believed that they could write faster and more fluently because of the feedback that they received and their writing practice.

## **6.4 Chapter summary**

This chapter presented the results from the quasi-experimental study, which included the effects of NES and NNEST teachers' written feedback on writing performance and Chinese EFL learners' perceptions regarding the effects of the feedback. Data from the



pretest, the posttest, and the delayed posttest revealed that NES teachers' written feedback (i.e., global feedback) impacted favorably syntactic complexity, fluency, content, organization, and overall writing quality, whereas their NNEs counterparts' feedback (i.e., WCF) contributed to writing accuracy, fluency, and overall writing quality. Students' perceptions from a post-treatment questionnaire were generally in line with the quantitative results and offered detailed explanations to account for them. To conclude, the qualitative responses to the questions in a post-treatment questionnaire was triangulated with the quantitative data from writing tests, establishing a comprehensive picture regarding the impacts of NES and NNEs teachers' written feedback on Chinese EFL learners' performance in the different dimensions of writing.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **GENERAL DISCUSSION**

#### **7.1 Chapter overview**

The present study combined a case study and a quasi-experimental study to investigate NES and NNES teachers' beliefs and practices regarding written feedback and the effects of their feedback on Chinese EFL learners' writing performance. Chapters 4 and 5 reported how NES and NNES teachers conceptualized and enacted written feedback in the Chinese EFL writing classrooms, as well as the relationships between their conceptions and practices. Chapter 6 provided the results of the quasi-experimental study, investigating the effects of global feedback and WCF on the different dimensions of students' writing performance (i.e., accuracy, complexity, fluency, content, organization, and overall writing quality) and on students' perceptions.

This chapter offers an in-depth interpretation of findings concerning the five research questions reported in the preceding three chapters. The major findings are highlighted and discussed with reference to previous studies and theoretical frameworks. It is expected that the discussion could deepen our understandings regarding the two groups of teachers' espoused beliefs about written feedback, their actual feedback practices, and the effects of feedback on students' writing performance in the Chinese EFL context.

## **7.2 NES and NNES teachers' beliefs regarding written feedback**

The first question was concerned with the two groups of teachers' beliefs about written feedback with respect to five themes: Purpose, scope, strategy, focus, and orientation. The findings are discussed in relation to these themes in following subsections in the order noted.

### **7.2.1 Purpose of feedback**

The interviews showed that all the participating teachers recognized the value of written feedback and endorsed teachers providing students with feedback on their writing. Teachers' acknowledgement of the significance of feedback is consistent with the prior literature in the fields of both written feedback (Diab, 2005; Evans, Hartshorn, & Tuioti, 2010; Hamouda, 2011) and oral feedback (Bao, 2019; Kartchava et al., 2020; Roothoof, 2014).

The eight teachers in this study presented two purposes for giving feedback to students. The major purpose mentioned by teachers was to promote students' writing performance, which was not surprising. As indicated by Schmidt (1990), feedback enables learners to notice their output deficits and be aware of the gap between what they can produce and what they need to produce, thereby contributing to their writing performance. The favorable effects of written feedback on L2 writing have been borne out by a number of (quasi-) experimental studies (e.g., Benson & DeKeyser, 2019; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009a, 2010a; Ferris, 2006). As Bitchener and Storch (2016) concluded, written feedback can facilitate L2 learners' writing accuracy, even if one-off written feedback is offered.

The second purpose for teachers' feedback provision was to inform their

pedagogical practices. This purpose of feedback provision can also be seen in prior studies (e.g., Alkhatib, 2015; Jamoom, 2016). In these studies, teachers acknowledged that feedback plays a guiding role in their writing instruction. To be specific, after feedback provision, teachers can collect information about “what students understand and what they do not understand” (Hattie & Timperly, 2007, p. 90). With such information, teachers can adjust their instructional content and focus in the subsequent teaching to enhance their teaching efficacy.

### **7.2.2 Scope of feedback**

The case study revealed that the majority of NES EFL writing teachers were in favor of focused feedback, advocating that teachers should correct a few types of errors and leave others uncorrected. This aligns with the findings of prior literature (Hamouda, 2011; Lee, 2009; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019), in which L2 writing teachers showed a preference for focused feedback. Such a finding is also consistent with intervention studies, investigating the effects of focused feedback (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2009a, 2010a; Shintani & Aubrey, 2016; Suzuki, Nassaji, & Sato, 2019). All these studies have documented the positive effects of focused feedback on improving L2 learners’ writing accuracy in target structure(s). NES teachers’ strong beliefs in focused feedback are encouraging, given its merits. Firstly, with such feedback targeting a few error types, it may be more possible for students to engage with feedback thoroughly to gain deeper insights into errors in their writing. Compared with comprehensive feedback, focused feedback, theoretically, has a greater learning potential since it can prevent students’ cognitive overload, and enable them to have additional cognitive resources to process new input efficiently (Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009).

In contrast, three of four NNES teachers believed in comprehensive feedback.

This aligns with the findings reported by a range of previous studies in various EFL contexts (e.g., Alkhatib, 2015; Alshahrani & Storch, 2014; Lee, 2004, 2011). For example, conducting a case study in Saudi Arabia, Alshahrani and Storch (2014) reported that tertiary EFL writing teachers espoused comprehensive feedback. Similarly, Lee's (2011) study found that secondary school teachers favored feedback on a wide range of errors in the Hong Kong EFL context. Furthermore, NNES teachers, in this study, provided different reasons for their beliefs in comprehensive feedback such as avoiding the fossilization of errors and enhancing L2 learners' overall writing performance. This corresponds to Van Beuningen, De Jong, and Kuiken (2008, 2012), who from quasi-experimental studies to rationalize the importance of comprehensive written feedback, reported that comprehensive WCF contributed to L2 learners' overall writing accuracy rather than accuracy in the limited pre-selected linguistic feature(s).

In this study, there was a discrepancy between NES and NNES teachers' beliefs in scope of feedback, which mirrors the controversy regarding focused feedback and comprehensive feedback among researchers of written feedback. In Chapter 2, it was noted that while a great many scholars have provided theoretical and empirical rationales for focused feedback (e.g., Bitchener, 2008; Ellis et al., 2008; Rummel & Bitchener, 2015; Sheen, 2007; Shintani & Ellis, 2013), it has been called into question by other researchers because of its lack of ecological validity (Karim & Nassaji, 2020; Rahimi, 2019; Storch, 2010; Van Beuningen, 2010; Xu, 2009). As these researchers have suggested, it is not common that teachers use focused feedback in a natural L2 writing classroom setting, as teachers' provision of written feedback in the real L2 writing classrooms is to improve students' general performance in writing.

There may be two possible reasons for NES and NNES teachers' contrasting

beliefs in scope of feedback. One is their prior learning experience, which is regarded as an important source of teachers' beliefs (Borg, 2006). In EFL contexts, as comprehensive feedback is a common practice adopted by front-line teachers in feedback provision (Furneaux, Paran, & Fairfax, 2007; Lee, 2008, 2011), the NNES teachers probably received comprehensive feedback from their teachers when they were students at school. Due to the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975), they were very likely to believe in comprehensive feedback. As NES teachers probably had high levels of English proficiency with few errors in their writing, their teachers may have used a focused approach to provide feedback. This perhaps contributed to their advocacy for focused feedback. Jason, for example, remarked in the interview that his teachers tended to employ a focused approach in feedback provision when he was a student.

The other plausible reason for such a discrepancy was the influence of different educational schemas. In Chinese educational system, deeply rooted in Chinese traditional culture, a teacher is defined as "a person who propagates doctrines, imparts professional knowledge, and resolves doubts" (B. Li, 2014, p. 4). As such, teachers are expected to correct different errors that students make to reduce their anxieties and ensure students' all-round development in learning; they would be considered irresponsible if they overlooked their students' errors. Under the influence of such an entrenched value, NNES teachers believe it is their duty to give feedback to a variety of errors. In contrast, western educational culture emphasizes students' role and agency in teaching and learning (Bao, 2019). Brought up and educated in such a culture, NES teachers may believe that it is important for students to accept responsibility to identify their errors independently, and so it is unnecessary for teachers to mark errors comprehensively.

### 7.2.3 Feedback focus

In this case study, teachers shared a belief about feedback focus, regardless of their L1. That is, they reached an agreement that teachers should focus on global issues, that is, problems related to content and organization, when providing students with written feedback, as identified also in many previous studies (Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019; Montgomery & Baker, 2007; Zhao, 2019). For example, Junqueira and Payant (2015) reported that a novice ESL teacher emphasized global issues in her belief. Similarly, Mao and Crosthwaite (2019) reported that Chinese university EFL writing teachers believed in global feedback when providing written feedback. In contrast, Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) found that teachers advocated that more feedback should be offered to linguistic errors. The inconsistent findings may be attributed to teachers' different identities. Teachers in the present study were tertiary writing teachers, whereas teachers in their study were language teachers in language institutions. In comparison with writing teachers, it is understandable that language teachers may show more concern with language and believe that more feedback should be given to linguistic errors.

Although NES and NNES teachers believed that teachers should give more importance to global issues in feedback provision, they had different reasons for their beliefs. NES teachers proposed three explanations. Firstly, teachers attributed their beliefs to their identity as writing teachers. George and Bruce, for example, regarded themselves as writing teachers rather than grammar teachers, so that they paid more attention to global dimensions of writing when providing feedback. The second reason was the teaching objectives of English writing. The aims of writing instruction, as Jason argued, were to make students understand how to develop their ideas more comprehensively and how to organize their writing in an appropriate structure. To

achieve these objectives, it was necessary for English writing teachers to provide more feedback on problems in content and organization. This is in line with Z. Wang's (2015) study, where English writing teachers conceptualized English writing instruction as teaching students to develop and structure ideas instead of focusing on grammatical accuracy. The final reason given was the nature of writing. According to Christine, writing was by no means a cluster of error-free sentences; it was more about the communication between authors and readers. She claimed that writing teachers should be concerned with the ideas and structure of writing when providing feedback. The view that writing quality is more than accuracy in language is evident in Zhao (2019), in which Chinese EFL writing teachers ranked criteria for judging writing in the order of importance as: Organization, content, grammar, and vocabulary.

In contrast, one of the two reasons proposed by NNES teachers for their beliefs in global feedback was students' needs. L2 learners tend to find it difficult to identify and solve global issues on their own, as they do not have adequate English writing rhetorical knowledge (Hinkel, 2002). Yan similarly commented that it was challenging and demanding for Chinese tertiary EFL learners to detect and correct problems in global areas independently, and that teachers needed to assist them in such dimensions of writing through feedback. From a theoretical perspective, such a belief relates to students' "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978); as it was difficult for students to deal with global issues by themselves and they needed scaffolding from teachers. Another reason was the difference between Chinese and English writing rhetoric, as documented by researchers in the field of intercultural rhetoric (e.g., Fox, 1994; Kaplan, 1966). To be specific, Chinese writing employs an indirect and inductive approach to structure, while English writing, based on Aristotelian classical rhetoric, favors a straightforward and deductive organization. As



NNES teachers had Chinese and English at their disposal, they were aware of these differences. To help students overcome the challenge of transferring from Chinese writing style, they believed that global issues should be emphasized through feedback. Loi and Evans (2010) also claimed that different rhetoric patterns in Chinese and English writing may pose obstacles to Chinese EFL learners, who are used to Chinese rhetoric patterns while composing their English writing.

#### **7.2.4 Feedback strategy**

When it comes to feedback strategy, this study revealed that there was no consensus between NES and NNES teachers on how to deliver written feedback, both within and across groups. Teachers' beliefs about direct and indirect feedback strategies were divergent and as noted previously, there is no firm conclusion regarding the relative effectiveness of direct and indirect feedback. Researchers who supported indirect feedback argued that it helps students reflect on and analyze their errors more deeply (Ferris, 1995; Lalande, 1982). In contrast, those espousing direct feedback insisted that direct feedback provides students with input and enables them to acquire correct forms instantly (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Chandler, 2003; Van Beuningen, 2010).

For the convenience of discussion, NES and NNES teachers here are considered together. Three teachers (Bruce, Juan, and Qin), in this study, considered that students should be given direct answers, a view that has been reported in existing literature (e.g., Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019). Moreover, teachers explained that with direct feedback, students could understand how to correct their errors and internalize the correct forms immediately (Chandler, 2003). Giving explicit corrections, however, may lead to students' dependence on teachers (Lee, 2008). Teachers' beliefs in direct feedback appear to indicate that they are in favor of teacher-led feedback and their students probably do not learn to correct errors

independently. Despite different reasons provided by the teachers for their beliefs, their strong orientation towards direct feedback may be related to their sense of responsibility. That is, teachers perhaps regarded correcting students' errors explicitly as their job. As Bruce said in his interview if he did not correct students' errors directly, he would feel that he did not do his job well. Similar comments are also reported in prior studies (e.g., Alkhatib, 2015; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019), with Bitchener and Ferris (2012) stating that, written feedback is regarded as a part of teachers' overall responsibility. Thus, to fulfil their responsibility better, and to enhance their professional identity (Kroll, 1990), teachers may emphasize direct feedback.

Among the eight teacher participants, two teachers (Yan and Christian) showed a preference for indirect feedback, which is close to Lee (2009) and Hamouda's (2011) investigations, in which EFL teachers preferred indirect to direct strategies when providing feedback. In the present study, the two teachers claimed that students benefited more from indirect feedback, as it enabled them to engage in error correction deeply and encouraged their self-editing ability. This would contribute to students' writing development in the long term. As Bitchener and Knoch (2008) argued, indirect feedback "requires students to engage in guided learning and problem solving and, as a result, promotes the type of reflection, noticing and attention that is more likely to foster long-term acquisition" (p. 415). Teachers' beliefs in indirect feedback are probably associated with contextual factors in EFL context (i.e., heavy workloads and large-class sizes). Christine, for example, complained about heavy workloads and large-class sizes in the interview. As prior studies also found, Chinese EFL teachers were often confronted with these two constraints (Gao, 2018; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019; Sun, 2017). In this context, it is overwhelming for teachers to provide all students with direct corrections because of time and energy consumption. In this

situation, indirect feedback appears to be a suitable strategy.

The rest of teachers, George, Jason, and Han supported a combination of direct and indirect strategies for feedback. Their beliefs may be based on students' needs, which are regarded as an influential factor contributing to language teachers' beliefs (Bao, 2019; Roothoof, 2014). For example, as Jason stated in the interview, students in the Chinese EFL writing classrooms varied in their proficiency in English and should be treated differently to meet their varying needs. In existing literature, researchers encourage teachers to take students' needs such as proficiency and motivation into consideration when deciding on feedback strategies (Brown, 2012; Lee, 2013a; Storch, 2010). The beliefs of these teachers in the concurrent use of direct and indirect feedback strategies are encouraging, since they align with the recommendation that teachers should try different feedback strategies to accommodate students' needs (Lee, 2017).

Beliefs in using direct and indirect feedback strategies concurrently may be also related to error types. They have been reported to play a mediating role in teachers' choice of feedback strategies (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ferris, 2002). It has been posited that direct feedback is more appropriate for untreatable errors which are idiosyncratic while indirect feedback should be given to treatable errors which are patterned and rule-governed (Ferris, 2002, 2006). As Han mentioned, there were different types of errors in students' writing and teachers' feedback strategies should be responsive. These teachers' beliefs in a combination of direct and indirect feedback demonstrate that teachers' decision on the use of feedback strategies is not a spontaneous practice, but may be mediated by their students, as one of the stakeholders in feedback provision, and error types.

### 7.2.5 Feedback orientation

Whereas with NES teachers, there was no consensus in their beliefs about the orientation of feedback, their NNES peers mostly believed in using negative feedback comments. Among NES teachers, Bruce and Jason supported negative feedback, and a combination of positive and negative feedback, respectively. The other two teachers, George and Christine, supported the use of positive feedback, consistent with the findings reported in the extant literature (e.g., Alkhatib, 2015; Lee, 2009). Teachers' beliefs in positive feedback are important, for they probably recognized the merits of positive feedback in enhancing students' motivation in writing. As Ellis (2009) argued, teachers should provide students with positive feedback, as it gives them affective support and boosts their motivation.

In contrast to the NES teachers, three NNES counterparts favored negative feedback, emphasizing that it could alert students to their problems and weaknesses in writing. Several studies have claimed it enables students to have a better understanding of their inadequacies in learning (Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Yu & Lee, 2013).

The finding that NNES teachers highly emphasized negative feedback is not surprising, as in Chinese traditional culture, negative feedback is considered to be “忠言” (the earnest advice) (Xu, 2017b). As an old Chinese proverb goes, “良药苦口利于病，忠言逆耳利于行” (bitter medicine cures illness, unpalatable advice benefits conduct). Negative feedback is deemed to demonstrate care and love from teachers for students, with teachers' provision of negative feedback implying that teachers are strict with their students. Negative feedback is greatly advocated and encouraged in Chinese cultural values and can be demonstrated by many Chinese old sayings including “教不严，师之惰” (if a teacher is not strict in teaching, it is his/her laziness) and “严师出高

徒” (strict teachers produce excellent students). It is not the tradition for teachers to praise students in Chinese education (Z. Wang, 2015).

### **7.3 NES and NNES teachers’ written feedback practices**

This study investigated the two groups of teachers’ feedback practices in their specific pedagogical contexts. This section discusses their practices in terms of the four themes: Scope, focus, strategy, and orientation.

#### **7.3.1 Scope of feedback**

Analysis of feedback showed that NES and NNES teachers adopted a comprehensive approach to provide feedback, focusing on a variety of errors rather than only correcting a limited number of errors. This is partly consistent with Hyland and Anan’s (2006) study, in which NNES teachers provided written feedback comprehensively, whereas their NES peers employed a focused approach to feedback. The findings in this study, however, are consistent broadly with previous research into L2 teachers’ feedback practices (e.g., Furneaux, Paran, & Fairfax, 2007; Lee, 2004, 2008, 2011). For example, Furneaux, Paran, and Fairfax (2007), in investigating secondary school teachers’ written feedback practices in five different EFL countries, reported that they marked writing comprehensively. Similarly, anchored in the Hong Kong EFL context, Lee (2008, 2011) reported that secondary school teachers provided students with comprehensive feedback. It appears that comprehensive written feedback is a common practice by EFL writing teachers across different countries and contexts. Additionally, teachers’ use of comprehensive written feedback creates an impression that feedback in L2 writing classrooms, especially in EFL writing classrooms, seems to be dominated by teachers with little participation from students. This study advances current studies in that it observed tertiary teachers’ practices regarding the scope of

feedback in mainland China, an under-researched but a rapidly growing EFL context.

While the current literature on teacher written feedback proposes some principles for teachers' feedback provision including the use of selective feedback (Lee, 2019; Lee, Mak, & Burns, 2016), in this study the participants' comprehensive approach to correcting students' errors appears to contravene the trend. Instead, their practices suggest that comprehensive feedback should occupy an important place in L2 writing pedagogy (Evans & Hartshorn, 2015; Van Beuningen, 2010). The contradiction with such a principle can be attributed to the interplay of multiple factors such as teachers' limited knowledge about focused feedback, students' needs, and Chinese culture, as reported in section 5.4.2.

Interestingly, although NES and NNES teachers marked their students' writing in an extensive way, the number of feedback points provided by NNES teachers was significantly larger than by NES teachers (792 vs. 495,  $p=.000$ ,  $d=2.12$ ). There are two potential explanations of this finding. One is that NES teachers may be more lenient about errors than NNES teachers, as observed in some prior studies (Hyland & Anan, 2006; Porte, 1999; Rao & Li, 2017). In these studies, NES teachers tended to hold a tolerant attitude towards errors, which may allow them to ignore some errors. The other possible explanation is the different focus of NES and NNES teachers for feedback provision. The analysis of feedback suggest that NES teachers put more emphasis on problems related to organization and content, whereas NNES teachers, when providing written feedback, paid more attention to local issues. Thus, it is not surprising that the number of linguistic errors is larger than that of global issues, since errors in relation to language can appear in each sentence.

### **7.3.2 Feedback focus**

The case study showed a marked disparity between NES and NNES teachers' actual

practices with respect to feedback focus. NES teachers gave much more feedback on global issues than NNES teachers (content: 173 vs. 58,  $p=.000$ ,  $d=2.48$ ; organization: 192 vs. 38,  $p=.000$ ,  $d=3.84$ ). By contrast, NNES teachers were more concerned with linguistic errors than their NES counterparts (696 vs. 130,  $p=.000$ ,  $d=4.60$ ). NNES EFL teachers' focus on linguistic errors when providing feedback is widely identified in previous studies (Alkhatib, 2015; Lee, 2008, 2009, 2011; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019).

The finding that NES and NNES teachers showed different focus in feedback provision aligns with Connor-Linton (1995), in which NES scorers emphasized the quality of content, while NNES ones showed more concern with linguistic accuracy when scoring students' writing. Such a finding of the present study also agrees with prior studies, which compared the differences of NES and NNES teachers' focus in general English education (meaning vs. accuracy) (e.g., Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Medgyes, 1994), and assessment of L2 learners' English oral performance (content vs. grammatical forms) (e.g., Zhang & Elder, 2011).

The different orientations in NES and NNES teachers' feedback focus are not that surprising. Firstly, this finding may be associated with NES and NNES teachers' teaching styles. The teaching style of NES teachers is characterized by being global and open (Rao, 2002, 2010). Influenced by this teaching style, they may regard students' writing as a whole, and evaluate it from a global perspective instead of a focus on linguistic details. NNES teachers' teaching style is "analytic, concrete-sequential, and closure-oriented" (Rao & Li, 2017, p. 57), which values accuracy and linguistic rules, and influences their emphasis on students' language use (Melton, 1990; Rao, 2002). This may account for their meticulous correction of students' linguistic errors in feedback provision.

The other factor appears to be NES and NNES teachers' prior experience in language learning. With the popularity of the communicative teaching approach in western countries, NES teachers are probably educated to concentrate their attention on meaning and comprehension, with less importance attached to language in language learning (Rao & Li, 2017). In contrast, NNES teachers have had different language learning experience in L2 classrooms, where "language is more likely to be an object in its own right with a concomitant focus on form" (Zhang & Elder, 2011, p. 43). In these classrooms, NNES teachers are instructed by the grammar-translation approach in English learning, which gives priority to discrete grammatical points and emphasizes grammatical accuracy (Rao, 2000). They are used to focusing on grammatical errors in each sentence of writing, which may account for the little attention being given to global issues when providing feedback.

Although NES and NNES teachers' feedback focus differed significantly, they were similar in their approach to local feedback. Specifically, both groups showed more concern for grammatical errors than lexical ones (NES: 113 vs. 17; NNES: 537 vs. 159), as reported in prior research (Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019; Montgomery & Baker, 2007). This is understandable because according to Ferris (2002), grammatical errors tend to be classified as treatable errors, which are rule-governed, whereas lexical errors are commonly considered as untreatable errors that are idiosyncratic and difficult to explain by rules. Lexical errors being relatively difficult for teachers to correct may then attract less feedback.

### **7.3.3 Feedback strategy**

This study reported that both NES and NNES EFL teachers combined direct and indirect strategies to deliver their written feedback. Similar findings that EFL teachers did not employ direct or indirect feedback in isolation have been reported in prior



studies (e.g., Alkhatib, 2015; Lee, 2008, 2009; Zheng & Yu, 2018). It is consistent, too, with the recommendation that direct and indirect strategies should not be pre-determined because neither of them is “the best for learning” (Bitchener & Storch, 2016, p. 73). Such a finding is very encouraging for L2 learners’ writing development, as the concurrent use of direct and indirect feedback strategies is considered as the most effective approach to scaffolding students’ writing learning process (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Although both NES and NNES teachers adopted direct and indirect feedback strategies concurrently, the distribution of direct and indirect feedback by them was different. Specifically, there was no significant difference in the amount of direct and indirect feedback by NES teachers (231 vs. 254,  $\chi^2=1.09$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.296$ ), whereas their NNES counterparts provided much more direct feedback than indirect feedback (450 vs. 342,  $\chi^2=14.73$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.000$ ).

It is obvious that teachers’ choice of direct and indirect feedback strategies was strongly mediated by error types. EFL teachers in this study tended to give direct corrections to linguistic errors, regardless of their L1, similar to findings reported by Lee (2004, 2008, 2011), and Zheng and Yu (2018). However, the proportion of direct feedback in this study was lower than Lee’s studies (2004, 2008, 2011); this difference may be due to students’ English proficiency. Students in this study were English major students, who had a higher level of English proficiency than the secondary school students recruited in her studies. In contrast to these findings, Alshahrani and Storch (2014) reported that teachers provided a great deal of indirect feedback to correct linguistic errors. Such a result reported by their study is ascribed to school policy, which required teachers to provide students with indirect feedback.

In contrast, teachers in the current study preferred indirect feedback to respond to global issues; that is, they were used to identifying content and organization

problems without making corrections or suggestions. Teachers' use of indirect feedback to address global issues, which is understandable, may be attributed to two possible reasons. One plausible explanation is that in comparison with linguistic errors, it is relatively difficult for teachers to address issues related to content and organization directly because it requires more extensive information. To complete the task of feedback provision, indirect feedback may be a more suitable strategy to address global problems.

Moreover, unlike linguistic errors, global issues are, in nature, neither clearly right nor wrong. Thus, it is very likely that there are several solutions to address a particular global problem. It may be unsuitable for teachers to employ a direct feedback strategy to address global issues. If they do so, it appears that they appropriate their students' own texts (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Out of these two considerations, indirect feedback (i.e., indicating problems only) may suit the treatment of global problems.

#### **7.3.4 Feedback orientation**

Consistent with Hyland and Anan (2006), the present study found that while NES teachers gave several positive comments to students, none of the NNES teachers did so when providing feedback. Overall, teachers used few positive comments to encourage and motivate students in the Chinese EFL context.

The finding that L2 teachers used praise rarely in feedback provision has been reported by many prior studies (e.g., Ashtarian & Weisi, 2016; Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Jamoom, 2016; Lee, 2009). For instance, Ashtarian and Weisi (2016) investigated NNES supervisors' comments on students' theses in Iran and found that teachers provided many critical comments, which were direct without any affective markers to mitigate their dissatisfaction. Likewise, Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990)

examined three EFL teachers' feedback practices, reporting that they seldom provided positive comments on students' texts. Although such a finding aligns with much existing literature, it differs from Xu (2017a), who reported that teachers provided more positive than negative comments on students' research proposals. There may be two explanations for this discrepancy. One is that the context of her research was in New Zealand, whereas the present study was contextualized in a Chinese EFL setting. The second is related to students' English proficiency. Students in her study were doctoral candidates, with higher English proficiency, while those in the current study were undergraduate students. The higher English proficiency may have made it more likely for students to achieve teachers' satisfaction and to receive more positive feedback.

It is not surprising that teachers offered little positive feedback when providing feedback in the present study, which may be rooted in Chinese cultures of education. As mentioned previously, influenced by Chinese traditional culture, teachers are expected to be strict with their students and point out their students' problems in learning directly, rather than please and compliment them (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Sheng, 2019). In this sense, praise is downplayed in educational context of China. Thus, teachers need to observe such an entrenched cultural norm in order to avoid conflicts in their teaching process. This may, in turn, result in few positive comments.

### **7.3.5 Characteristics of NES and NNEST teachers' written feedback practices**

The above sections have discussed four different aspects of NES and NNEST teachers' written feedback practices. Teacher-centeredness and teacher-directedness, as evidenced by their use of a comprehensive approach to feedback with a large number

of direct feedback points, characterized the two groups of teachers' feedback practices in this study. Students' role and agency were underplayed by such written feedback practices, as students were provided with few opportunities to identify and correct their errors independently. As such, it seemed that they did not fully take responsibility to bridge their learning gaps.

Teacher-led pedagogical practices are common in Chinese context, possibly associated with traditional culture. Chinese culture is widely acknowledged to impact Chinese educational schema greatly, in which “教书育人” (impart knowledge and educate people) is emphasized (Leng, 2005). Teachers in China are expected to be responsible for students' development and are endowed with high social status. As an old saying goes, “一日为师，终身为父” (a teacher for a day is a father for a lifetime). Accordingly, teachers are regarded as figures of high authority and can determine what and how to teach (Bao, 2019), while students tend to be the passive recipients of knowledge. This hierarchical relationship between teachers and students empowers teachers to control instruction tightly and monitor students' learning closely in China (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). Despite this, we should not ignore a fact that with the reform of English and teaching and learning in recent years in China, communicative teaching approach and task-based language teaching approach are encouraged and have been employed in more and more English classes (Wen, 2012; Yu, 2014). By such pedagogies, Chinese language classrooms are shifting from teacher-centered paradigm to student-centered paradigm. As such, the influence of Confucianism on Chinese educational system is declining, but it still has a great influence on teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices.

Interestingly, NES teachers in this study adopted many similar written feedback practices as their NNES peers. A potential factor contributing to such a

finding may be the strong influence of Chinese traditional culture, in which NES teachers worked. As the NES teachers commented in the follow-up stimulated recalls, their feedback practices regarding scope and orientation were mediated by Chinese cultural values considerably.

## **7.4 Relationships between teachers' beliefs and practices in regard to written feedback**

This section focuses on NES and NNES teachers' self-reported beliefs and their observed practices with regard to the four themes. The relationships between NES and NNES teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to written feedback were found to be rather complicated and non-linear. On the one hand, their beliefs were consistent with actual practices in some cases; for example, NES teachers gave importance to global issues when providing feedback in their beliefs, which was evidenced in their practices. Also, most NNES teachers agreed that a comprehensive approach should be used to provide feedback and such a belief was realized by their actual practices. The alignments between teachers' beliefs and practices are widely identified in previous studies (e.g., Basturkmen, 2012; Farrell & Ives, 2015; Ferris, 2014; Min, 2013; L. Yang & Gao, 2013). Such alignments indicate that teachers' beliefs, as an underlying reason, inform and rationalize their actual classroom behaviors (Borg, 2003, 2006).

On the other hand, teachers' beliefs, in this study, were not always congruent with their actual practices. For instance, NES teachers' beliefs that focused feedback should be adopted were inconsistent with their observed comprehensive feedback in practice. In addition, despite NNES teachers saying they believed that teachers should pay more attention to global issues in feedback provision, feedback on linguistic errors predominated when they gave feedback to students. Mismatches between teachers'

beliefs and practices are also reported in the literature (e.g., Bao, 2019; Lee, 2009; Roothoof, 2014; Salteh & Sadeghi, 2015). The belief-practice inconsistency means that teachers' beliefs are not always reliable predictors of their pedagogical practices (Borg, 2006; Pajares, 1992).

This study further examined factors contributing to the inconsistencies. Some factors, retrieved from the stimulated recalls related to teachers, students, and context, were found to be shared by NES and NNES teachers. These factors are discussed in following sections.

### ***Teacher-related factors***

In the stimulated recall interviews, several NES and NNES teachers attributed the mismatches between beliefs and practices to their pedagogical knowledge. They acknowledged that their limited pedagogical content knowledge may result in insufficient expertise to implement some teaching practices espoused in their beliefs. For example, when explaining why they did not apply their beliefs in focused feedback into actual practices, George and Han said that as they lacked adequate professional knowledge to implement a relatively new approach to feedback, they had to use a traditional approach to provide feedback (i.e., comprehensive feedback). Insufficient professional knowledge constrained Qin and Yan from realizing their beliefs regarding feedback focus; despite their beliefs in global feedback, they actually provided much more feedback on language.

The impact of teachers' professional knowledge on their decision-making is seen in previous studies (e.g., Gao, 2018; Nishino, 2012; Sun, 2017). For example, Sun (2017) investigated Chinese tertiary EFL teachers' beliefs and practices regarding grammar instruction. The study reported that despite teachers' strong beliefs in a "*focus on form*" approach in grammar teaching, they implemented a "*focus on forms*"

approach in their actual teaching, and the mismatch was because teachers did not have sufficient knowledge to adopt a “*focus on form*” teaching method. Similarly, Gao (2018) reported that a lack of adequate knowledge about EFL listening was a constraint, which led to inconsistencies between Chinese EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices in EFL listening instruction.

### ***Student-related factors***

In this study, student-related factors were found to result in discrepancies between NES and NNES teachers’ self-reported beliefs and their actual practices regarding written feedback, and these factors included students’ needs and their English proficiency. For instance, when asked why a great number of feedback points were provided to language, Han explained that his students wanted him to do so, and they expected teachers to return error-free written texts to them. Teachers also alluded to students’ English proficiency. For example, Christine and Yan mentioned that indirect feedback was ineffective for students with low English proficiency, so they provided direct feedback as well. Students’ low English proficiency also led to Christine giving few positive comments against her belief in positive feedback. These mismatches between written feedback beliefs and practices align with the claim that teachers’ written feedback is mediated by the needs and language proficiency of their students, the key stakeholders in feedback provision (Lee, 2013a).

Students’ influence on teachers’ decision-making in this study is consistent with a number of prior studies. For instance, Nishino’s (2012) study on teachers’ beliefs and practices revealed that students’ English proficiency and motivation prevented teachers from actualizing their beliefs about communicative language teaching method into actual practices. Alkhatib (2015) found that teachers’ beliefs acceded to students’ low English proficiency in feedback provision, resulting in

mismatches between beliefs and practices concerning feedback strategy and focus. Phipps and Borg (2009) found disparities between teachers' beliefs and practices about grammar teaching were due to students wanting teachers to instruct grammar points by a rule-based approach.

### ***Context-related factors***

In this study, teachers' provision of written feedback was mediated also by the context in which they worked. Contextual factors prohibited teachers from realizing their beliefs in practice, including realities of classrooms and lack support from administrators.

Firstly, the realities of classrooms, such as heavy workloads and large-class sizes challenge teachers' actual written feedback practices. Teachers suffer from time constraints which prevent them from translating their beliefs into practices. For example, Bruce and Qin, who also provided indirect feedback in practice despite their beliefs in direct feedback, explained that they did not have enough time to provide each student with direct corrections because of the heavy workloads and large-class sizes; therefore, they incorporated indirect feedback, which was less time-consuming. Time constraints leading to incongruences between teachers' beliefs and practices have been reported in prior literature (e.g., Alkhatib, 2015; Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019). For instance, in an investigation into Chinese tertiary EFL teachers' beliefs and practices regarding written feedback, Mao and Crosthwaite (2019) found that teachers provided indirect feedback in actual feedback provision because of time constraints, inhibiting the use of direct feedback which they espoused. Likewise, Junqueira and Payant (2015) reported that time constraints prevented a novice ESL writing teacher from realizing her written feedback beliefs through actual practices.

A lack of administrators' support was another factor that impinged on teachers'



implementation of written feedback. Two teachers (George and Han), in this study, referred to this factor in the stimulated recalls. Although they espoused positive feedback or mix of positive and negative feedback, in reality they offered little positive feedback. They explained that they adjusted their actual feedback practices to satisfy administrators in the faculty, who did not believe in positive feedback. Lee, Mak, and Burns (2016) also reported that teachers gave up implementing innovative feedback due to principals and English department heads' strong beliefs in a comprehensive feedback approach. Teachers in China do not have autonomy to implement their beliefs into their actual written feedback practices because of the administrator-teacher hierarchy. As teachers' pedagogical practices are subject to their administrators' approval, belief-practice incongruences may result (Lee, 2014).

Contextual factors, in this study, prevented teachers from fully applying their beliefs into their actual practices, leading to belief-practice disparities. This corroborates previous studies, reporting the influence of contextual factors on teachers' actual practices (Farrell & Ives, 2015; Xiang & Borg, 2014). For instance, Farrell and Ives' (2015) study revealed that contextual factors limited teachers' performance in teaching. Similarly, Xiang and Borg (2014) reported that Chinese tertiary EFL teachers' pedagogical practices were hindered by contextual factors such as heavy workloads and institutional factors.

Two factors (Chinese traditional culture and examinations) were further identified specific to the NES and NNES teachers' belief-practice mismatches, respectively.

NES teachers' practices, elicited in the stimulated recall interviews, were strongly influenced by Chinese traditional cultural values, so that at times teachers' beliefs were superseded, which generated mismatches between their beliefs and

practices. For example, three NES teachers (George, Jason, and Christine) espoused focused feedback, but provided feedback comprehensively. All mentioned that Chinese culture contributed to mismatches in scope, and also accounted for belief-practice gaps with feedback orientation. This finding confirms that culture of the context is an important factor leading to differences between teachers' feedback beliefs and practices (Eisenstein-Ebsworth & Schweers, 1997; Kennedy, 1988). Furthermore, it also reflects that teachers' feedback practices are influenced by their beliefs but mediated by the culture within which teachers operate (Hyland & Hyland, 2006b).

The strong influence of Chinese culture on NES teachers' feedback practices is not surprising. As an old saying goes "when in Rome, do as the romans do", NES teachers, as outsiders of Chinese culture, factored it into their implementation of teaching practices to minimize cultural conflicts (Ma, 2012a). Some educational norms are established and valued by Chinese traditional culture arising from Confucian philosophy, such as "teachers shoulder high responsibility for students" and "teachers should be strict with their students" (Moloney & Xu, 2016). Teaching in such a context, NES teachers had to embrace these norms and embody them in their teaching behaviors; they had to minimize the use of focused feedback and positive comments, even though these practices were integral to their personal beliefs.

The unique factor contributing to NNES teachers' incongruences between written feedback beliefs and practices was examination pressure. Surprisingly, it did not surface in NES teachers' explanations. Similarly, prior studies comparing NES and NNES teachers' teaching practices (e.g., Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Clark-Gareca & Gui, 2019; Medgyes, 1994) reported that NNES teachers' teaching was strongly affected by examinations, whereas this factor did not influence NES teachers' pedagogical practices greatly. In this study, examinations contributed to NNES teachers'

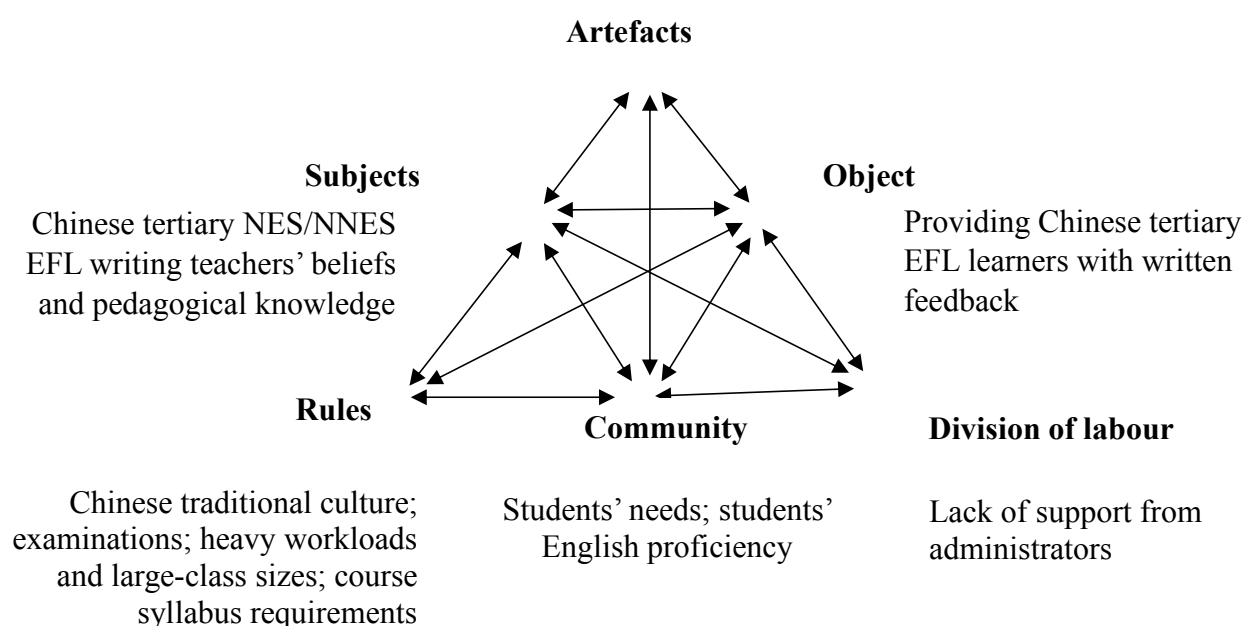
mismatches between written feedback beliefs and practices in different themes. For example, while Yan and Han agreed that teachers should focus attention on global issues in feedback provision, they paid more attention to linguistic errors in practice. They explained that they did so to help students prepare and pass TEM-4 and 8, which emphasize linguistic accuracy in writing. Han also regarded TEM-4 and 8 as a hindrance to the realization of his belief in focused feedback. This echoes the findings of prior research (Lee, 2008, 2009; Sun, 2017; Wu, Zhang, & Wei, 2019), all of which reported that Chinese NNES EFL teachers' pedagogical practices were influenced by examinations, thereby resulting in their belief-practice discrepancies.

Chinese NNES teachers' teaching practices are examination-oriented and test-driven, because there is a testing culture in China with a long history of testing, traced back to the Han Dynasty (Spolsky, 1995). Testing has come to be recognized as a reliable tool for selecting talents, and it plays a decisive role in students' further study and professional development (Clark-Gareca & Gui, 2019). NNES teachers, born and educated in testing culture, understand the importance of examinations and the pressure from examination preparation. To help their students pass examinations, they modified their teaching practices, which were not compatible with the requirements of examinations.

To conclude, multiple factors contributed to NES and NNES teachers' belief-practice mismatches regarding written feedback. Teachers had little autonomy and were constrained by both internal factors (e.g., their professional knowledge) as well as external factors (e.g., students' needs and realities of classrooms) when planning and implementing feedback practices.

From the perspective of Activity Theory, human activities are located in particular social, historical, and cultural contexts, and are mediated by sociocultural

influence from contexts (Engeström, 1987). Framed within Activity Theory, teachers' written feedback practices take place in a specific pedagogical environment rather than in a social vacuum (Bitchener & Storch, 2016; Lee, 2014). As Storch (2018) argued, from this theoretical perspective, feedback is a situated activity by humans.



**Figure 7.1 Teacher written feedback activity system in the Chinese tertiary EFL writing**

Based on the second generation of Activity Theory (see Figure 2.2) and the major findings of the phase one study, a possible model (see Figure 7.1) for conceptualizing tertiary writing teachers' written feedback activity in the mainland Chinese EFL context has been established. Within this model, NES and NNES EFL writing teachers with different linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds serve as "subjects" working towards the "object" (i.e., providing their students with written feedback). However, such an activity is not independent from the context but is influenced and governed by different constructs within the activity system, including artefacts (e.g., teachers' beliefs, their pedagogical content knowledge), rules (e.g.,

realities of classrooms, examinations, course syllabus requirements, and Chinese traditional culture), community (e.g., students, including their needs and English proficiency), and division of labour (e.g., lack of administrators' support). This model illustrates how Chinese university EFL writing teachers, working as the agents of activity, implement written feedback in their specific teaching contexts, and identifies the factors influencing their actual feedback provision.

Informed by the findings of phase one study, to achieve the object of the activity (i.e., providing students with written feedback), teachers need to mediate the relationships between themselves and various constructs in the activity system (Thorne, 2004). As a result, they give up some practices held by their professed beliefs to reconcile and resolve contradictions and tensions generated in the feedback activity system (Engeström, 2001). This can result in instances of dissonance between their beliefs and practices. In this study, NES and NNES teachers appeared to be active individuals dealing with contexts, rather than passive agents. This means that these Chinese EFL writing teachers constructed the environment by means of acting on the world and participating in activity (Lantolf, 2000).

## **7.5 Effects of NES and NNES teachers' written feedback:**

### **Writing performance and students' perceptions**

The alternative independent variables used in the phase two study were global feedback (feedback on content and organization) and comprehensive WCF (feedback on a variety of linguistic error types). In the following sections, the results are discussed with current literature regarding the effects of WCF and content feedback on different dimensions of L2 writing. Here, content feedback refers to both feedback on content and feedback on organization. Students' qualitative responses, which explain

the quantitative data, are also discussed.

### **7.5.1 Effects on accuracy**

This study was concerned with the effects of global feedback and comprehensive WCF on writing accuracy. Two measures captured the effects of the two types of feedback on students' performance in accuracy: The ratio of error free clauses (EFC/C) and the number of errors per 100 words (EP100W). The results showed that TG2 students receiving WCF on various linguistic errors improved their overall accuracy significantly in the posttest and retained the favorable effects in the delayed posttest, but TG1 receiving global feedback and CG receiving no feedback did not. Furthermore, TG2 outperformed TG1 and CG in overall accuracy in both the posttest and the delayed posttest, regardless of how it was measured.

The result of benefits of comprehensive WCF for writing accuracy in this study is partially corroborated by the analysis of the texts. For example, in the pretest, students in TG2 wrote many run-on sentences and frequently made errors in the use of articles; in the posttest and the delayed posttest the errors were greatly reduced. It is not surprising that students in TG2, who received comprehensive WCF, improved their general writing accuracy, as they were provided with four rounds of feedback in the intervention, by which they had opportunities to process the provided feedback and notice their errors. Thus, they were very likely to avoid them in the follow-up writing tasks.

The result of the positive effects of comprehensive WCF in this study refutes Truscott's (1996, 2007) claim that error correction does not benefit L2 writing and teachers should abandon it. The finding is compatible, however, with prior literature, which has reported that comprehensive WCF can contribute to L2 learners' improvement in writing accuracy (Hartshorn et al., 2010; Rahimi, 2009; Van

Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2008, 2012). Moreover, this study extends Van Beuningen, De Jong, and Kuiken's (2008, 2012) results from secondary school students who learned Dutch as L2, to Chinese tertiary EFL learners. It differs from that of Truscott and Hsu (2008), who reported that the favorable effects of comprehensive WCF on revision accuracy failed to transfer to new pieces of writing. The inconsistent findings between their study and the present study may be attributed to several reasons, including different rounds of WCF treatment (e.g., single one episode of WCF vs. four rounds of WCF), writing genres (e.g., narrative writing vs. argumentative writing), and strategies to provide WCF (e.g., the use of indirect WCF alone vs. the combination of both direct and indirect WCF).

This study extends the current investigations into the usefulness of focused WCF on accuracy (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2009a, 2010a; Ellis et al., 2008; Guo & Barrot, 2019; Shintani & Aubrey, 2016; Suzuki, Nassaji, & Sato, 2019). Studies in this area have confirmed the value of focused feedback in enhancing L2 learners' accuracy in one or a few linguistic structures (e.g., English articles or past tense), but little is known whether such a feedback practice can improve students' overall writing accuracy (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Bitchener & Storch, 2016). The observed beneficial effects of comprehensive WCF on general writing accuracy negates Sheen's (2007) argument that comprehensive WCF is of little learning potential, since it may be beyond students' readiness, and contribute to their cognitive overload. The advantage of comprehensive WCF, in this study, may be the outcome of multiple WCF treatment sessions (four rounds), during which L2 learners had more opportunities to attend to WCF and then notice their linguistic inadequacies.

The finding that TG1 receiving global feedback was inferior to TG2 in terms of accuracy is not congruent with some early studies (Kepner, 1991; Semke, 1984;

Sheppard, 1992), in which participants receiving content feedback excelled, or were equal with, those who received error correction with respect to writing accuracy. The result in the present study, identifying the inefficacy of global feedback on accuracy, is understandable. Firstly, since such feedback directed students' attention to content and organization, L2 learners might have altered their revision strategy, which focused mainly on linguistic errors (J. Chen & Zhang, 2019). To be specific, with global feedback, they probably shifted their attention from linguistic aspects to high-order dimensions of writing (i.e. content and organization). As this would require more cognitive resources, they may not have had additional attention to identify and correct linguistic errors. Secondly, such a result is probably associated with students' limited proficiency of English grammar, which would make it difficult for them to notice linguistic errors or, even though they identified some errors, they were not able to correct them independently. As Jie complained in the questionnaire:

*It is a tough task for me to identify and rectify grammatical errors by myself because my English grammar is not very good (Jie, TG1, Q).*

Similar to the students in TG1, those in CG, who were not provided with any feedback, did not increase writing accuracy scores in the two posttests, which is in contrast to Rahimi (2009). In her study, the writing accuracy of those in the comparison group increased over time. The difference between the two studies may be ascribed to two factors. One is the length of intervention. The present study was much shorter than Rahimi's. The other is the different treatments. Students in the comparison group of her study still received some general feedback comments on grammar, while those in the present study received no feedback. The general comments probably aroused students' awareness of their grammatical problems. A lack of improvement in



accuracy for the comparison group lends support to the assertion that limited and short-term writing practice without feedback does not benefit EFL learners' accuracy (Frear & Chiu, 2015). In this sense, merely engagement in writing practice, without scaffolding, will not increase accuracy. As Bitchener and Ferris (2012) recommended, L2 learners' writing practice should be scaffolded with other instructional affordances such as teachers' instruction and teacher written feedback.

**Table 7.1 Improvement vs. perception on accuracy**

Group	Statistical improvement	Perceived improvement
TG1	—	—
TG2	↑ sig.	80% ↑

*Note.* Dash indicates no statistical improvement.

Table 7.1 shows the comparison of statistical improvement and students' perceived improvement in accuracy. As the table reveals, the majority of students in TG2 (80.00%) perceived that they made progress in accuracy, which aligned with the statistical analysis. In their explanations in the questionnaire, they ascribed their improvement to WCF. As an effective pedagogical tool, WCF was reported by the students to provide three benefits. Firstly, students believed that it had a didactic role and expanded their grammatical knowledge, so they were able to use grammar more skilfully. Another benefit was that WCF drew their attention to their errors, so they could avoid making similar errors in subsequent writing tasks. That is, WCF enabled students to notice their linguistic gaps. This supports the Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990), which posits that noticing is essential for learning. Furthermore, given that the topics in the testing and treatment sessions were different, students seemed to be able to generalize WCF received in treatment to new contexts (Frear & Chiu, 2015), further suggesting that students not only noticed the gaps in their interlanguage system, but achieved the noticing at the highest level— “noticing at the

level of understanding” (Tang & Liu, 2018, p. 37). Lastly, students claimed that WCF cultivated their grammatical awareness, in which these students gave importance to grammatical rules when writing sentences. The three benefits of WCF identified by the students reflect its potency in linguistic scaffolding and provide evidence that students regard WCF as a useful learning tool. Armhein and Nassaji (2010) also reported that students recognized the pedagogical value of WCF.

According to the questionnaire, around half of the respondents in TG1 did not share such a perception, deeming that their grammatical accuracy was not improved. Most of them ascribed their perception to an absence of WCF. As they argued, without WCF, they did not improve their grammatical knowledge, and it was difficult for them to detect and correct grammatical errors on their own. As Hyland (2003) claimed, WCF enables students to notice their linguistic errors and then improve their linguistic accuracy. It appears that students attached great importance to WCF, similar to reports of EFL learners’ attitudes towards WCF in prior studies (e.g., Diab, 2005; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Mahfoodh, 2017). In these studies, L2 learners expressed their positive attitudes towards WCF and called for teachers to provide WCF for their writing.

### **7.5.2 Effects on syntactic complexity**

In this study, the effects of global feedback and comprehensive WCF on Chinese EFL learners’ performance in syntactic complexity were investigated. Two indexes, the mean length of T-units (MLT) and the number of clauses per T-unit (C/T), were employed to gain a better understanding of different feedback conditions on syntactic complexity. In terms of MLT, global feedback enabled L2 students to improve it from the pretest to the posttest and from the pretest to the delayed posttest. With regard to C/T, TG1 students improved this measure from the pretest to the delayed posttest.

However, TG2 and CG did not achieve such beneficial effects. Analysis of between-subjects differences showed that TG1 outperformed TG2 and CG in both the posttest and the delayed posttest in these two indexes. The result that global feedback benefited students' performance in syntactic complexity is congruent with a few previous studies (Kepner, 1991; Rastgou, 2016). In these two studies, it was reported that through receiving feedback on global issues, students could write a larger number of syntactically complex sentences.

In comparison, comprehensive WCF seemed to have a neutral effect on syntactic complexity, irrespective of how it was measured. Such a result contradicts Truscott's (1996, 2001) proposal that focusing on accuracy would result in students' simplified writing, and compromise syntactic complexity. Instead, the result in this study is consistent with a number of prior investigations (e.g., Evans, Hartshorn, & Strong-Krause, 2011; Hartshorn & Evans, 2015; Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2012), in which comprehensive WCF showed no effects on L2 learners' syntactic complexity. Several reasons may account for why comprehensive WCF had no effect on syntactic complexity in the present study. One may be related to the treatment period. In this study, the treatment only spanned four weeks, which was not long enough. It is not very possible that syntactic complexity can be improved within a short timeframe. Another reason may be the research design, in which students were required to complete writing tasks of no less than 200 words within 40 minutes. In such an operationalization, students may have considered syntactic complexity a peripheral requirement and of little importance. They may have decided to use those familiar sentence structures to complete their writing tasks on time. Finally, the two indexes (i.e., MLT and C/T) used to appraise syntactic complexity in the present study may have limitations. Notwithstanding their popularity in measuring global syntactic

complexity (Ortega, 2003), there is no firm conclusion that these two measures can demonstrate L2 students' syntactic development in a short-term intervention.

The effects of global feedback and comprehensive WCF on accuracy and syntactic complexity can be summarized as: Global feedback improved L2 learners' syntactic complexity without deteriorating writing accuracy; comprehensive WCF contributed to L2 learners' gains in writing accuracy without compromising syntactic complexity. From a theoretical perspective, such results regarding the effects of the two types of feedback on accuracy and syntactic complexity do not support the Trade-off Hypothesis posited by Skehan (1998). As noted previously, this theory anticipates a potential trade-off between syntactic complexity and accuracy due to L2 learners' limited attentional resources. In this study, students receiving comprehensive WCF did not produce simplified writing along with the improvement in writing accuracy, while their peers receiving global feedback increased syntactic complexity without reducing accuracy. These results reveal that there appears to be no competition between accuracy and complexity.

The results concerning the effects of global feedback and comprehensive WCF on accuracy and complexity in this study correspond to Cognition Hypothesis proposed by Robinson (2001, 2011), which takes a multiple resources perspective on language processing and postulates that accuracy and complexity are not in a trade-off relationship, since they, as two aspects of L2 learners' output, are considered to be connected closely (Van Beuningen, 2010).

A comparison between statistical improvement and students' perceived improvement in syntactic complexity is presented in Table 7.2. In TG1, just over 70% of participants assumed that they improved syntactic complexity. In contrast, only 20% of their peers in TG2, who received the intervention of WCF, believed that they could

produce longer and more complex sentences. The perceptions of both groups of students regarding their syntactic complexity were in line with the quantitative data related to syntactic complexity.

**Table 7.2 Improvement vs. perception on syntactic complexity**

Group	Statistical improvement	Perceived improvement
TG1	↑ sig.	70.83% ↑
TG2	–	–

*Note. Dash indicates no statistical improvement or general perception of improvement.*

The TG1 students attributed their perceived improvement in syntactic complexity to global feedback. Specifically, the feedback asked students to expand their ideas or clarify their meaning. They explained that directed by global feedback, they had to include more information and details to develop their ideas adequately or explain their meaning more clearly; this, they reported, contributed to the production of longer sentences in new texts. Such an explanation confirms Rastgou's (2016) speculation that feedback focusing on content to clarify meaning stimulates students to improve length of sentences. The other explanation gave by TG1 students for their perception of improvement in syntactic complexity was writing and rewriting practice. Their belief in positive effects of writing and rewriting practice on syntactic complexity, however, is not supported by CG's performance. Specifically, students in CG, who received no feedback and engaged only in writing and rewriting, failed to improve their syntactic complexity.

Approximately half of WCF recipients in TG2 thought that their syntactic complexity had not improved because of WCF. As they explained, WCF improved their accurate use of grammar and vocabulary, but it did not advance their limited knowledge of syntactic complexity. Without external scaffolding, it may be demanding and taxing for L2 learners to achieve syntactic complexity in their writing (Casal & Lee, 2019). In addition, eight students in TG2 expressed their unsure attitude towards

the improvement of syntactic complexity. In explaining their perception, they mentioned WCF, which focused their attention on accuracy. In this situation, they paid little attention to syntactic complexity.

### **7.5.3 Effects on lexical complexity**

The effects of global feedback and comprehensive WCF on lexical complexity were examined in this study. Lexical density (LD) and mean segmental type-token ratio (MSTTR) were employed to evaluate the effects of the two feedback treatments on lexical complexity. This study found that TG1 and TG2 receiving global feedback and comprehensive WCF, respectively remained unaffected with regard to LD or MSTTR across the three tests. That comprehensive WCF did not show any effects on lexical complexity aligns with the results reported by prior literature (Hartshorn & Evans, 2015; Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2012).

The result that Chinese EFL learners' lexical complexity was not impacted by global feedback and comprehensive WCF is not surprising and may be attributable to several factors. Firstly, influenced by the two types of feedback, students in the two groups had different priorities. Specifically, WCF recipients prioritized linguistic accuracy while their counterparts, receiving global feedback, gave more importance to the quality in high-order dimensions of writing; with different priorities, the students in TG1 and TG2 may have had little attention available for lexical resources. Secondly, since students need to plan, translate, and review when composing writing (Hayes & Flower, 1980), they may not have extra cognitive resources to recollect and retrieve advanced words to write an essay in a restricted time, and thus used familiar or simple words to complete the writing tasks. Lastly, it appears that neither global feedback nor WCF may be able to enlarge L2 learners' vocabularies. Without an expanded repertoire of lexical resources, it would be difficult for L2 students to produce

advanced or complex words even if they felt it was necessary to use sophisticated or different types of words.

The inefficacy of global feedback and WCF on L2 learners' lexical complexity should be viewed, however, with an optimistic lens, and this may have some important pedagogical implications. Such occurrences may encourage L2 writing teachers, in classroom instruction, to implement pedagogical strategies alongside written feedback provision. This may include providing students with more sources of input to help them expand their lexical resources to improve their lexical complexity along with enhancing other areas of writing.

#### **7.5.4 Effects on fluency**

This study investigated the effects of global feedback and comprehensive WCF on Chinese EFL learners' writing fluency, assessed as the total number of words within 40 minutes. It was found that both global feedback and comprehensive WCF enabled them to make gains in writing fluency over time. In view of students' performance in accuracy and complexity, the improvement in fluency did not affect L2 learners' writing accuracy or complexity adversely. This challenges Skehan's (1998, 2009) prediction that trade-off exists among complexity, accuracy, and fluency. With regard to between-subjects differences, global feedback prompted students to produce longer written texts in a given time (i.e., 40 minutes) than comprehensive WCF in the posttest with a medium effect size ( $d=0.72$ ), but there was no significant difference observed in the delayed posttest.

While the gains in writing fluency by TG1 and TG2 may be attributed to writing practice, the writing fluency of students in CG, who engaged only in writing practice and received no feedback, did not improve in the two posttests. This result suggests that writing practice *per se* may be not enough to motivate students to

produce longer texts.

Rastgou (2016) also reported that global feedback significantly improved students' writing fluency. This result is understandable because guided by global feedback, students were asked to write adequately and clearly. As they needed to include more information and details to elaborate on their ideas more thoroughly, they were enabled to produce longer texts.

The result that comprehensive WCF generated a significantly positive effect on writing fluency parallels that of prior research (e.g., Chandler, 2003), in which with the help of such WCF, students' fluency was enhanced. There are more studies, however, that have shown that comprehensive WCF did not affect fluency either positively or negatively (e.g., Evans, Hartshorn, & Strong-Krause, 2011; Hartshorn & Evans, 2015). WCF recipients' improvement in fluency, in this study, is probably due to the research design, which required students to complete writing tasks with no less than 200 words within 40 minutes, thus encouraging students to write as much as possible.

As illustrated by Table 7.3, while approximately 60% of students in TG1 perceived that they could write more fluently, the students in TG2, who had WCF, seemed to be more positive with almost all of them (92%) agreed their fluency had increased. According to the students' reports, WCF appeared to show greater beneficial effects on writing fluency than global feedback, but this was not congruent with the quantitative results of TG1 and TG2 students' fluency from the writing tests. The discrepancy may be attributed partly to the different measures of fluency used in the writing tests and the questionnaire; while writing fluency was assessed by the total number of words within 40 minutes in the tests, in the questionnaire students were asked whether they were able to write more fluently and faster, rather than whether they could write lengthier essays.



**Table 7.3 Improvement vs. perception on fluency**

Group	Statistical improvement	Perceived improvement
TG1	↑ sig.	58.33% ↑
TG2	↑ sig.	92% ↑

Students in both TG1 and TG2, who in the questionnaire agreed that their fluency was facilitated, recognized the beneficial effects of feedback on fluency. Those in TG1 mentioned that global feedback provided them with a better understanding of how to develop their ideas and how to structure writing locally and globally, so they wrote faster and more fluently. In comparison, their peers in TG2 appreciated the role of WCF, which enabled them to become familiar with grammar and overcome the challenges posed by grammar in writing, thereby improving their writing fluency.

Another explanation was writing practice, a factor which was identified by both TG1 and TG2 students. They reported the benefits of writing practice as familiarizing them with the organization of argumentative writing and facilitating their language use. The beneficial effects of writing practice on writing fluency, they acknowledged, were not evident in CG's performance; it appears that involvement in writing practice only does not yield any effects on fluency.

The TG1 and TG2 students ascribed their ambivalent attitude to the assigned topics. They claimed, understandably, that when dealing with a familiar topic they were able to write fluently and vice versa. Interestingly, some TG1 students reported that their negative perception about their improvement in fluency were associated with the influence of global feedback. As they explained, directed by global feedback, they emphasized the quality of content and spent time on thinking how to develop ideas better instead of writing hastily. Thus, they felt that their writing speed was not facilitated. It appears that global feedback may serve as a double-edged sword, facilitating or constraining students' performance in writing fluency.

### **7.5.5 Effects on content and organization**

This study examined the effects of global feedback and comprehensive WCF on Chinese EFL learners' content and organization of writing. The results showed that providing students with global feedback enabled them to improve their content and organization across the three tests. However, comprehensive WCF did not show any effects on L2 learners' content and organization of writing.

The results that global feedback benefited the quality of high-order dimensions of writing have been reported in prior studies (e.g., Kepner, 1991; Semke, 1984). Moreover, they extend Geng (2017), who reported that global feedback contributed to the improvement of content and organization in revision. The current study found that the beneficial effects of global feedback transferred to new pieces of writing. However, some early investigations found that global feedback exerted only weak effects on content and organization (e.g., Ashwell, 2000; Lee, 1997); the discrepancy may be due to the different features of global feedback. Specifically, the feedback in previous studies was very general, vague, and unspecific. For instance, Lee (1997) just highlighted problems in content by codes without any explanations or suggestions. In comparison in the present study, students were provided with more specific and understandable feedback on content and organization such as “you should add another one reason to support your idea”, “there is no topic sentence in this paragraph”, and “there is a lack of topic sentence. Please formulate one sentence to summarize the main idea of this paragraph”. Such feedback was more detailed, clear, and manageable for students. This suggests that the effects of global feedback probably depend on the nature of feedback that students receive, and that L2 learners benefit from specific and applicable feedback while addressing global issues (Ferris, 1997). Another plausible explanation is that the aspects that global feedback targeted corresponded to the

writing scoring scheme, based on Jacob et al.'s (1981) rubric, used to assess the quality of content and organization. For example, feedback on content mainly targeted problems in relation to clarity, adequacy, and relevance, which were also the major components to evaluate the quality of content in Jacob et al.'s (1981) writing rubric.

Noticeably, TG1 participants' improvement in organization is more encouraging, compared with that in content (posttest:  $d=1.41$  vs.  $1.07$ ; delayed posttest:  $d=1.28$  vs.  $1.08$ ), and this result is consistent with findings of prior studies (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Geng, 2017). This may be because it was relatively easy for students to enhance organization, particularly macrostructure and cohesion, as they needed only to follow "introduction-body-conclusion" to organize their essays and add some conjunctions such as "as a result", "furthermore" and "however" to realize cohesion. Furthermore, the macrostructure of essays and the conjunctions to realize cohesion do not vary with writing topics, which may have made it more convenient for students to transfer what they have learnt from feedback on organization to new texts. In comparison, the production and development of ideas may consume more cognitive resources (Faigley & Witte, 1981). As this activity was contingent on writers' topic knowledge, it could be challenging for students to formulate ideas without adequate personal knowledge relevant to a certain topic.

In contrast, the results that comprehensive WCF did not have any effects on students' content and organization are also reported in prior literature (e.g., Evans & Hartshorn, 2015; Hartshorn et al., 2010), in which it did not impact students' high-order dimensions of writing positively or negatively. This result rebuts Ashwell's (2000) argument that content can be improved through rewriting. Nonetheless, given the effects of comprehensive WCF on accuracy, complexity, and fluency, it appears that the improvement of linguistic aspects of writing does not adversely affect the

quality of global issues (Rahimi & Zhang, 2018).

The result that comprehensive WCF recipients did not produce better performance in content and organization is unsurprising, as L2 writers tend to concentrate their attention on local issues and pay little attention to problems in content and organization in revision (Barkaoui, 2016; J. Chen & Zhang, 2019). WCF reinforced this flawed revision strategy because WCF recipients probably became preoccupied with correcting linguistic errors and may have ignored their problems in global areas of writing; this may account for the ineffectiveness of comprehensive WCF on content and organization.

Table 7.4 presents students' perspectives on content: 70% of TG1 students and 52% of TG2 students considered that their content had been improved, respectively, and Table 7.5 shows that over 80% of global feedback receivers in TG1 and 64% of WCF recipients in TG2 reported the improvement in organization. Thus, the majority of TG1 participants perceived the improvement in content and organization, and this aligned with their performance in writing tests, showing significant improvement in both the posttest and the delayed posttest. TG1 students claimed, unsurprisingly, that their positive perception was due mainly to the effects of global feedback. However, the belief of many students in TG2 that they had improved content and organization was not in line with the quantitative results, indicating that the content and organization of their writing remained unaffected in this intervention.

In addition, irrespective of the type of feedback students received, they appeared to be more optimistic about the improvement of organization in their perception. This corresponded to the quantitative result in writing tests that organization seemed to be easier to improve than content.

**Table 7.4 Improvement vs. perception on content**

Group	Statistical improvement	Perceived improvement
TG1	↑ sig.	70.83%↑
TG2	–	52.00% ↑

**Table 7.5 Improvement vs. perception on organization**

Group	Statistical improvement	Perceived improvement
TG1	↑ sig.	83.33% ↑
TG2	–	64.00% ↑

Another interesting finding is that information and interpretations based on responses to Likert scales alone may be inadequate and lack high reliability. As claimed by Dörnyei (2007), results from a close-ended questionnaire need to be interpreted with caution. In this study, students were not only asked to respond to Likert scales, but also to provide explanations for their selections. Some mismatches between students' Likert-scale selections and follow-up explanations regarding their perspectives on content and organization were found. For example, some students' selections of "agree" were contradicted by their following comments. This showed that they did not really agree with the questionnaire item. Such subtle information could not be obtained by responding to Likert scales exclusively. Therefore, data from open-ended questionnaire items, like this study, are needed to triangulate and explain the data from Likert-scale selections (Dörnyei, 2007).

### **7.5.6 Effects on writing quality**

In this study, the effects of global feedback and comprehensive WCF on Chinese EFL learners' overall writing quality were examined. The result revealed that global feedback helped students improve their overall writing quality across tests. The similar beneficial effects were observed for the participants in TG2, who were provided with comprehensive WCF.

Moreover, according to within-subjects comparisons, it seemed that comprehensive WCF led to greater progress in writing quality than global feedback (from the pretest to the posttest:  $d=1.02$  vs.  $0.73$ ; from the pretest to the delayed posttest:  $d=1.37$  vs.  $0.59$ ). Such a result is understandable. In general, issues related to global dimensions of writing, in particular content which needs learners' more cognitive resources, are relatively difficult to improve. In comparison, it is easier for learners to correct linguistic errors due to their "treatable" nature. There were no significant differences, however, between the two treatment groups in both the posttest and the delayed posttest. This result may be related to the writing scoring scheme used in this study; as noted previously, the writing scoring rubric allocated 50% of the total scores to global areas (i.e., content and organization) and 45% to local dimensions (i.e., language use and vocabulary). Such allocations probably contributed to the non-significant differences between global feedback and WCF recipients' writing quality.

The students' perceptions concerning the effects on writing quality, presented in Table 7.6, show that around 80% TG1 and 90% TG2 respondents reported they had improved the quality of their writing. Their perceptions paralleled the quantitative results in writing tests, showing that both TG1 and TG2 participants had improved the overall writing quality. Unsurprisingly, TG1 students attributed their positive perception about their writing quality to the improved content and organization as a result of global feedback, while their TG2 counterparts ascribed their perception to better performance in grammar due to WCF. It appeared that the students in the two treatment groups had a different understanding about writing quality.

**Table 7.6 Improvement vs. perception on writing quality**

Group	Statistical improvement	Perceived improvement
TG1	↑ sig.	79.17% ↑
TG2	↑ sig.	92% ↑

## **7.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter discussed the main findings in relation to previous literature and theories. The first part of this chapter concentrated on NES and NNES teachers' beliefs and practices regarding written feedback; their belief-practice relationships and the reasons for inconsistencies between beliefs and practices were also discussed. The second part discussed the effects of global feedback and comprehensive WCF (i.e., NES and NNES teachers' written feedback) on various L2 writing dimensions and students' perceptions on the effects.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **8.1 Chapter overview**

This concluding chapter starts with a summary, which restates the major findings from this study, followed by a discussion on the contributions to theory, and methodology and implications for pedagogy. It concludes by pointing out the limitations of this study and offering suggestions for further research.

#### **8.2 Summary of major findings**

The purpose of this study was to explore NES and NNES teachers' written feedback in the Chinese EFL context. It was conducted in two phases. The phase one study investigated the two groups of teachers' beliefs and practices regarding written feedback and the relationships between their beliefs and practices. The results revealed that:

1) NES and NNES teachers held a set of identifiable beliefs regarding written feedback. After comparing the two groups of teachers' beliefs, similarities and differences were found. For instance, NES and NNES teachers agreed that more attention should be paid to global issues than to local issues when teachers responded to their students' writing. In contrast, there was a discrepancy in terms of the scope of feedback. While most NES teachers believed that it was better to provide written feedback in a focused way, their NNES counterparts were in favor of adopting a comprehensive approach to provide feedback.

2) NES and NNES teachers shared a series of similar actual practices.



Specifically, they employed comprehensive feedback to mark their students' writing, and when giving feedback, they combined both direct and indirect feedback strategies. Additionally, they generally used negative comments to identify problems and weaknesses in students' writing instead of providing praise. There was a marked disparity, however, in feedback focus between NES and NNES teachers' feedback practices: The former mainly focused on global issues, whereas the latter delivered much more feedback to errors in language.

3) The relationships between beliefs and practices were highly complicated with consistencies and inconsistencies. The consistencies between beliefs and practices demonstrated that teachers' beliefs rationalized and informed their instructional practices (Borg, 2006). The inconsistencies were attributed to a range of factors, which worked together to influence teachers' actual feedback provision. In this study, factors such as teachers' professional knowledge, students' needs, and heavy workloads appeared to inhibit teachers from actualizing their espoused beliefs. Chinese traditional culture also imposed a tremendous influence on NES teachers' practices, while NNES teachers' feedback practices were impacted greatly by examinations.

The phase two study was an intervention program that examined the effects of NES and NNES teachers' feedback on Chinese EFL learners' writing performance, which was evaluated by various measures, and students' perceptions. Using global feedback and comprehensive WCF as the alternative independent variables, this intervention study showed that:

1) Global feedback (i.e., NES teachers' feedback) contributed to students' writing performance in syntactic complexity, fluency, content, and organization as well as writing quality. It showed no effects on accuracy and lexical complexity.

2) Comprehensive WCF (i.e., NNES teachers' feedback) benefited students' accuracy, fluency, and writing quality. However, it did not impact students' complexity in writing or content and organization.

3) Students' perceptions regarding the effects on different aspects of writing, generally, corresponded to the quantitative results generated from writing tests. Students' perceptions were also impacted by other factors including writing practice, topics, and questionnaire design, which led to mismatches between their performance in writing tests and their perceptions in some cases.

### **8.3 Contributions and implications of the study**

This study makes several contributions to theory and research methodology, and it also has implications for pedagogy. In this section, these contributions and implications are discussed.

#### **8.3.1 Theoretical contributions**

The findings of this study make several theoretical contributions in terms of enriching the literature, theoretical applications and verifications. These contributions are outlined below.

First, this study contributes to the current body of research on teacher written feedback in L2 writing. While much attention has been paid to the effects of teacher written feedback on L2 writing, especially the effects of WCF on writing accuracy, research on L2 writing teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to providing written feedback is scant, particularly in the Chinese mainland EFL context (Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019). This study adds to our knowledge detailed descriptions of how tertiary writing teachers, with different linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds, conceptualized and enacted written feedback in foreign language classrooms in

mainland China. Furthermore, this study used multiple measures to explore the effects of teacher written feedback on L2 learners' writing performance, extending our understanding of how such a pedagogical practice impacts other dimensions of writing apart from writing accuracy. Finally, this study also elicited L2 learners' perceptions of the effects of teacher written feedback, thus connecting the product and process of teacher written feedback to advance existing knowledge of the effects of teacher written feedback on L2 writing.

Secondly, this study employed Activity Theory as a theoretical framework to investigate systematically Chinese tertiary EFL writing teachers' written feedback beliefs and practices. From this theoretical perspective, teachers' feedback provision is regarded as an activity occurring in the specific sociocultural context rather than in a vacuum (Lee, 2014, 2017). Using Activity Theory as a theoretical lens, it has been established that teachers' feedback practices are influenced by factors from artefacts, rules, community, and division of labour. Informed by the second generation of Activity Theory, and the major findings of the phase one study, a tentative model (see Figure 7.1) theorizing NES and NNES teachers' written feedback practices in mainland China has been proposed. The model contextualizes and applies Activity Theory to the sphere of teacher written feedback in an EFL context, illustrating key principles in the activity system such as mediation, contexts, and social interaction (Yu, 2014). As there are few studies on teacher written feedback informed by Activity Theory (Bitchener & Storch, 2016; Storch, 2018), this study applies it to examine NES and NNES teachers' feedback practices; it identifies that multiple factors worked interactionally to impact written feedback provision. It also demonstrates how Activity Theory, as a complex theory can be employed in a specific context and extends its application. It documents that Activity Theory is a promising theoretical framework to

inform research on L2 writing teachers' implementation of written feedback.

Finally, the results of this study do not support the Trade-off Hypothesis posited by Skehan (1998, 2009), who argued that when L2 learners perform a task at a given time, because of limited attentional resources, there may be competition among accuracy, complexity, and fluency as well as, between language and high-order dimensions of L2 production. In this study, the results showed that comprehensive WCF, through focusing attention on various linguistic structures, improved L2 learners' accuracy, fluency, and writing quality, but did not affect their performance in complexity, content, and organization negatively. In comparison, when L2 learners were provided with global feedback, which drew their attention to content and organization, syntactic complexity, fluency, content, organization, and writing quality were enhanced without adverse effects on accuracy and lexical complexity. These results have implications for the use of teacher written feedback. Specifically, when L2 learners' attention is directed to language or global aspects of writing over time, their performance in corresponding aspect(s) can be improved without impairing other dimensions. A tentative conclusion is that when L2 students are provided with feedback, targeting both local and global issues over time, multilateral feedback may not be overwhelming and will probably improve their performance in different dimensions of writing simultaneously (Rastgou, 2016).

### **8.3.2 Methodological contributions**

Firstly, the present study employed a mixed-methods approach, including quantitative data from writing tests and qualitative responses to the questions in a post-treatment questionnaire, to investigate the effects of global feedback and comprehensive WCF on Chinese EFL learners' writing performance. As advocated and called for by a host of scholars in L2 writing (e.g., Liu & Brown, 2015; Storch, 2010; Van Beuningen,

2010), there was a pressing need to conduct qualitative or mixed-methods studies to research into the effects of teacher written feedback because experimental or quasi-experimental research fails to track students' attitudes and perceptions regarding written feedback. In the present study, the qualitative data recorded students' perceptions regarding the effects of teacher written feedback on their writing. Qualitative data documenting perceptions can yield detailed and in-depth information to complement the quantitative results of students' performance in writing tests, and to contribute to a better understanding and interpretation of the quantitative results. A mixed-method research design is recommended for ongoing research, as using this design has a potential to generate rich data and establish a comprehensive picture of the effects of teacher written feedback on L2 learners' writing performance.

The other methodological contribution is identifying the benefits of multiple rounds of written feedback treatment. Many research designs in this field, which employ a one-off treatment, offering written feedback only once and then exploring the effects lack ecological validity (Karim & Nassaji, 2020; Liu & Brown, 2015). Therefore, the inclusion of multiple feedback sessions in research methodology of this study paves the way for research results with higher reliability.

### **8.3.3 Pedagogical implications**

The findings of the present study have a number of pedagogical implications for L2 writing teachers as well as for Chinese universities and colleges.

#### **8.3.3.1 Implications for NES and NNES L2 writing teachers**

Firstly, as this study reported, mismatches between beliefs and practices regarding written feedback of NES and NNES L2 writing teachers were found. Considering these mismatches, teachers should hold a critical and reflective attitude towards their

belief-practice relationships, fostering a habit of self-reflection on their pedagogical practices, through observing their actual practices or discussing their practices with their experienced colleagues, in relation to relevant espoused beliefs. As research on teacher education has shown, it is common that many teachers in many parts of world do not foster a habit of self-reflection (Borg, 2015, 2019). Alternatively, they can examine their beliefs first and then review their own practices to determine the extent to which their beliefs match their actual practices. Reflection on their beliefs and practices may have a better understanding of their beliefs, make sense of their teaching practices, minimize the belief-practice divergence, and maximize their teaching efficacy.

Secondly, the findings of this study showed that teachers' limited knowledge about written feedback prevented themselves from realizing their beliefs through their actual practices. For example, George and Han failed to implement focused feedback due to insufficient pedagogical knowledge about it, and then adopted comprehensive feedback. Accordingly, it is imperative that L2 writing teachers should proactively improve their ability to provide written feedback through engaging in teacher professional learning, such as workshops, seminars, academic conferences, and the state-of-the-art articles on providing L2 learners with written feedback. In addition, they can consult L2 writing researchers and teacher educators to discuss issues and difficulties of giving feedback in their own teaching contexts. This enables these teachers to gain new insights into feedback provision and improve their feedback literacy and pedagogical practices. Professional learning can encourage L2 writing teachers to enrich their pedagogical content knowledge about feedback provision and reflect on their practices in feedback provision.

Finally, this study found that NES and NNES teachers had different foci when

providing written feedback (global vs. local feedback). It also revealed that global feedback contributed to L2 learners' syntactic complexity, fluency, content, organization, and writing quality, while WCF improved their writing accuracy, fluency, and writing quality. These findings have implications for both NES and NNES writing teachers, which may ensure that L2 learners have a balanced development in different dimensions of writing: NES writing teachers might need to give more feedback on linguistic errors, whereas their NNES counterparts need to show more concern with high-order dimensions of writing. To realize this, NES and NNES teachers should discuss feedback provision with each other and observe each other's written feedback on students' writing to understand how to provide feedback on global issues or local issues. During discussion and observation, what NES and NNES teachers should bear in mind is that they are not supposed to be biased towards global feedback or WCF.

### **8.3.3.2 Implications for Chinese universities and colleges**

Firstly, this study found that some "best practices" of feedback provision (Ferris, 2014) were not fully translated into NES and NNES teachers' actual practices. Teacher education programs in Chinese universities and colleges should therefore provide L2 writing teachers or teacher-trainees with regular and up-to-date teacher training courses to optimize their feedback practices and improve their teaching effectiveness of L2 writing. Given that teacher education programs do not really provide very detailed courses on how to teach writing (Zhang, 2016), this might be a good time to think through the problems these teachers faced and design training courses for preparing teachers to provide feedback effectively.

Secondly, universities and colleges should empower teachers to make decisions regarding their feedback practices. As this study indicated, teachers did not have full autonomy when implementing their teaching practices, and their actual teaching

practices are regulated and influenced by various factors such as realities of classrooms. To empower them, Chinese higher education institutions need to reduce teachers' workloads and large-class sizes to enable more time for teachers to review their actual teaching. By doing so, teachers can incorporate their beliefs into their practices and implement new approaches for providing feedback to enhance the effectiveness of their written feedback.

Lastly, this study found that NES and NNES writing teachers had different orientations in feedback focus and their feedback contributed to different aspects of writing performance. This means that NES and NNES teachers' written feedback are complementary in terms of feedback focus. To maximize NES and NNES teachers' contribution to written feedback provision, a co-feedback model by NES and NNES teachers can be initiated by Chinese universities and colleges for NES and NNES teachers to complement each other. Specifically, NES teachers, particularly those with EFL writing teaching experience can be invited to cooperate with NNES teachers: NES teachers provide global feedback, while their NNES counterparts offer WCF when responding to a piece of writing. A co-feedback model may help students' overall development in both local and global dimensions of writing.

## **8.4 Conclusions, limitations, and recommendations for further research**

### **8.4.1 Conclusions**

Following a mixed-methods approach, this study examined NES and NNES EFL writing teachers' written feedback beliefs, practices, and pedagogical effects. Based on discussions and summary of major findings, four conclusions can be drawn. First, the two groups of teachers' beliefs were similar in feedback focus but differed



significantly in scope of feedback. Second, both groups demonstrated many similar practices in relation to feedback scope, strategy, and orientation but they had significantly different practices in feedback focus. Third, NES teachers' feedback (i.e., global feedback) contributed to Chinese EFL learners' syntactic complexity, fluency, organization, content, and writing quality, but their NNES peers' feedback (i.e., comprehensive WCF) benefited Chinese EFL learners' performance in dimensions of accuracy, fluency, and writing quality. Fourth, students' perceptions from a post-treatment questionnaire generally aligned with the quantitative results.

#### **8.4.2 Limitations and recommendations for further research**

This study set out to explore NES and NNES teachers' written feedback beliefs, practices, and effects on Chinese EFL learners' writing performance. The results of the present study need to be interpreted with caution because of the limitations, which are outlined in this section. Based on these limitations, I attempt to recommend directions in future studies.

Firstly, only eight Chinese EFL writing teachers (four NES and four NNES teachers) were involved in this study. As the sample is too small to generalize the research findings to other populations, further studies should enlarge the sample size, so that an understanding of how NES and NNES teachers conceptualize and actualize written feedback can be broadened.

Another limitation is that teachers' beliefs and practices regarding written feedback were investigated at one point in time, which makes it impossible to track changes in their beliefs over time. As teachers' beliefs are dynamic (Borg, 2015), further research using longitudinal studies is recommended to identify potential changes in beliefs, reasons for these changes, and how such changes in beliefs influence their actual practices.

Furthermore, the current study used argumentative writing to elicit NES and NNEST teachers' beliefs and practices and then to explore feedback effects. There is little knowledge regarding teachers' feedback beliefs, practices, and effects with other genres such as narratives or expositions. Since the genre may play a mediating role, further research needs to explore such issues on other genres.

Finally, the interval between the posttest and the delayed posttest was only three weeks, which is insufficient to provide strong evidence for the long-term effects of teacher written feedback. To have a better understanding of the effects of teacher written feedback on L2 writing, further studies need to extend the gap between the posttest and the delayed posttest.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A: Semi-structured interview guiding questions**

#### **Section 1. Teachers' personal background information**

1. Could you please tell me what degree you hold? And in which major?
2. Could you please tell me your experience of learning English writing? Particularly, how your teachers give feedback on your writings?
3. Please tell me your experience of teaching English, especially teaching English writing?
4. Is your teaching of English writing and giving feedback similar or different from your teachers'?
5. Have you ever received any trainings on how to teach English writing and give feedback?

#### **Section 2. Teachers' specific beliefs on written feedback**

6. In your opinion, is it important for teachers to provide feedback on students' writings? Why?
7. Do you think teachers should provide feedback comprehensively or selectively? Why?
8. In your opinion, what areas teachers should focus on in their written feedback? Why?
9. Do you think how teachers should indicate errors in students' writings? Why?
10. Do you think teachers should present feedback directly or indirectly? Why?
11. Do you think teachers should provide their feedback in a positive or negative way? Why?
12. Could you please tell me your ideal way to provide feedback on students' writings?
13. Do you have any comments/recommendations/problems concerning written feedback provision?

## **Appendix B: Demographic information questionnaire**

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Approximate length of English learning: \_\_\_\_\_ years

Where did you learn English?

Mainland China/Hong Kong/Macau/other \_\_\_\_\_ (please specify)

Have you ever lived in an English-speaking country or region? YES/NO

If yes, how long? \_\_\_\_\_ months

What motivates you to learn English?

A. interest   B. Job hunting   C. Studying abroad   D. other \_\_\_\_\_ (please specify)

What is your current English proficiency by test? (You can choose more than one item)

A. CET-4   B. CET-6   C. TEM-4   D. TEM-8   E. IELTS   F. TOFEL   G. others  
\_\_\_\_\_ (please specify)

## **Appendix C: Writing prompts for the pretest, the posttest, and the delayed posttest**

### **Pretest:**

Nowadays, our life is getting a lot simpler and more convenient because of various intelligent machines. However, some people think that our brains will get lazy in a world run by intelligent machines. Write a composition of at least 200 words on the following topic: *With intelligent machines to do the thinking, will our brains get lazy?*

### **Posttest:**

An undergraduate of English at a university, in a recent letter to the university's president, complained that the mandatory math classes he had to take. He said that because a language major has little use for math, he would forget all of his math lessons soon after taking the required exams. Write a composition of at least 200 words on the following topic: *Should university students of English major learn math?*

### **Delayed posttest:**

Recently, a survey reported that 67% of Chinese university students think that saving money is a good habit while the rest believe that spend tomorrow's money today is better. Write a composition of at least 200 words on the following topic: *Should university students save money or spend tomorrow's money?*



## Appendix D: Post-treatment questionnaire

Age: \_\_\_\_\_; Gender: \_\_\_\_\_; Class: \_\_\_\_\_

***1. I think the grammatical accuracy of my English writing is improved after the intervention.***

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

**Please explain why you think so**

***2. I think the sentences in my English writing are longer after the intervention.***

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

**Please explain why you think so**

***3. I think I can write faster and more fluently after the intervention.***

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

**Please explain why you think so**

***4. I think I can develop ideas about different topics better after the intervention.***

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

**Please explain why think so**

***5. I think I can organize my English writing more effectively after the intervention.***

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

**Please explain why you think so**

***6. I think the quality of my English writing is improved after the intervention.***

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

**Please explain why you think so**

## Appendix E: Jacob et al.'s (1981) Scoring Profile

ESL COMPOSITION PROFILE				
STUDENT	DATE		TOPIC	
SCORE	LEVEL	CRITERIA	COMMENT	
CONTENT	30-27	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD — knowledgeable		
		•substantive •thorough development of thesis •relevant to assigned topic		
	26-22	GOOD TO AVERAGE — some knowledge of subject		
		•adequate range •limited development of thesis •most relevant to topic, but lacks detail		
	21-17	FAIR TO POOR — limited knowledge of subject		
ORGANIZATION		•little substance •inadequate development of topic		
	16-13	VERY POOR — does not show knowledge of subject		
		•non-substantive •not pertinent •OR not enough to evaluate		
	20-18	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD — fluent expression		
		•ideas clearly stated/supported •succinct •well-organized		
VOCABULARY		•logical sequencing •cohesive		
	17-14	GOOD TO AVERAGE — somewhat choppy		
		•loosely organized but main ideas stand out •limited support		
		•logical but incomplete sequencing		
	13-10	FAIR TO POOR — non-fluent		
LANGUAGE		•ideas confused or disconnected •lacks logical sequencing and development		
	9-7	VERY POOR — does not communicate		
		•no organization •OR not enough to evaluate		
	20-18	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD — sophisticated range		
		•effective words/idioms choice and usage •word form mastery •appropriate register		
MECHANICS	17-14	GOOD TO AVERAGE — adequate range		
		•occasional errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage but meaning not obscured		
	13-10	FAIR TO POOR — limited range		
		•frequent errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage •meaning confused or obscured		
	9-7	VERY POOR — essentially translation		
MECHANICS		•limited knowledge of English vocabulary, idioms, word form		
		•OR not enough to evaluate		
	25-22	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD — effective complex constructions		
		•few errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions		
	21-18	GOOD TO AVERAGE — effective but simple constructions		
MECHANICS		•minor problems in complex constructions •several errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions meaning seldom obscured		
	17-11	FAIR TO POOR — major problems in simple/complex constructions		
		•frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order/ function, articles, pronouns, prepositions and/or fragments, run-ons, deletions		
		•meaning confused or obscured		
	10-5	VERY POOR —virtually no mastery of sentence construction rules		
MECHANICS		•dominated by errors •does not communicate •OR not enough to evaluate		
	5	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD — demonstrates mastery of conventions		
		•few errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing		
	4	GOOD TO AVERAGE —occasional errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing but meaning not obscured		
	3	FAIR TO POOR —frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing		
MECHANICS		• poor handwriting • meaning confused or obscured		
	2	VERY POOR — no mastery of conventions		
		•dominated by errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing		
		•handwriting illegible •OR not enough to evaluate		
TOTAL SCORE		READER	COMMENTS	

## **Appendix F: Geng's (2017) scheme for coding linguistic errors**

1. Count a repeated error each time it appears.
2. Count errors separately, even though they concern a single word. For example, a wrong word in a wrong verb tense is counted as a Wrong word error as well as a Verb error.  
e.g., Finally, he work it. (two errors: Finally, he solved it).
3. Do not count an error that is incurred by another error, i.e., count them as one error.  
e.g., Their living are no longer problems. (one error; Their living is no longer a problem)
4. Count a wrong phrase choice as a single error.
5. Count a nonidiomatic word choice as a lexical error.  
e.g., alive things (living things)
6. Accept both British and American usages.  
e.g., sympathise/sympathize; anymore/any more.
7. Do not count punctuation mistakes, except for those that result in fragments or run-ons, wrong form of the possessive case, or those related to restrictive/non-restrictive relative clauses.  
e.g., History is the memory of a nation, language is the carrier of history. (History is the memory of a nation. Language is the carrier of history) / Students mastering the ancient Chinese language is not necessary. (Students' mastering the ancient Chinese language is not necessary.)
8. Do not count extraneous commas, such as commas following "because" and "I think".  
e.g., I think, social media should be used appropriately rather than being discouraged.
9. Do not count misspellings or wrongly derived words.

e.g., in the accient time / well-payd

10. Do not count oral/informal English, including words, abbreviations, and idioms.

e.g., ‘cause, wanna, etc.

11. Do not count errors in proper nouns.

e.g., Kongzi (Confucius) / Nan Jing (Nanjing)

12. Do not count errors in capitalisation.

e.g., In my opinion, Animal testing should be forbidden.

13. Accept the use of “and”, “but”, “yet”, and “so” at the beginning of a sentence.

14. Do not bother to consider whether an error results from a slip of the pen because it is hard to distinguish a slip of the pen from the otherwise.

15. Count not only a wrong word as a lexical error but also an expression that contains redundant vocabulary or lacks necessary vocabulary.

e.g., in a total word (in a word) / a piece of sentence (a sentence) / almost every student learns ancient Chinese language during his school life (... during his or her school life)

16. Think twice before judging a word/phrase as a wrong word. Try considering alternative intentions of the student writers.

17. If a preposition or pronoun error makes a sentence flawed in meaning but does not makes it ungrammatical, count it as a wrong word instead of a pronoun or preposition error.

e.g., I will never agree on it. (I will never agree with it.)

18. Resort to the following references when necessary: 1) Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, the online version: <http://www.idoceanline.com>; 2) BYU-BNC: BRITISH NATIONAL CORPUS <http://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/>