RHODES UNIVERSITY

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN HELPING GRADE 8 LEARNERS TO IMPROVE THE ACCURACY OF THEIR WRITTEN ENGLISH

AN ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This action research study explored and analysed the role of teacher corrective feedback in helping Grade 8 learners to improve the accuracy of their written English as their second language. Therefore, the goals of this study were to examine the kind of language errors my grade 8 learners' made in their writing, to find out whether these errors could be categorized linguistically, and to determine if they were errors, mistakes or lapses. The study further analysed how learners responded to my feedback, and also determined which feedback strategies worked best to help my learners deal with their errors, mistakes or lapses.

This study set out to look at six learners from one Grade 8 class of 40 learners. The data were gathered from six written essay scripts, and each learner wrote four essay draft revisions. The learners' written essays were analysed by means of checklists in order to identify the types and patterns of errors made. Errors such as punctuation, past tense verbs, spelling and vocabulary were identified, analysed and categorized to provide insights into reasons underlying the instances in which they were committed.

The findings of this study showed that factors underlying learners' written errors included mother-tongue interference, overgeneralization, fossilization, translation, lack of concentration, and carelessness. The findings further showed that corrective feedback on learners' draft revisions provided them with extensive exposure and practice in English, enabled them to internalize language rules, and reduced the tendency to commit errors in their writing. The findings further suggest that procedures such as multiple-draft activities, indirect feedback, direct feedback, focused corrective feedback, error correction and written feedback with explicit corrective comments improved their levels of writing. Furthermore, putting these procedures into practice and reflecting critically on how to apply them helped enrich my own teaching practices and development in relation to the provision of corrective

feedback to improve accuracy in learners' writing. The findings are discussed in the context of the related literature. This study should be read by ESL teacher-trainers, ESL teachers, ESL student-teachers and ESL learners/students in general.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction, Context and Background

In this introductory chapter, I provide a roadmap of how I instituted my action research study around using corrective comments in helping my Grade 8 learners master their written English skills. I present the context and background of this action research, explain the research problem, and identify the research goals and questions. I also clarify some key concepts that are critical to this study.

I am a Namibian English Second language teacher. With independence Namibia adopted English as its main official language. Although schooling begins in mother tongue there is a gradual transition to English, and by Grade 7 the language of instruction is English, even though English is the first language for less than 1% of the Namibian population (Maho, 1998). The decision to change English as an official language was encouraged by political and economic issues and although the lingua franca for Namibia was generally Afrikaans SWAPO (South West African People's Organization), the ruling party in Namibia, chose to downgrade Afrikaans which they saw as the language of the oppressor (Maho, 1998). Despite this Afrikaans remains a very wide spoken language in Namibia. In the case of my own school for example, it is learned by some learners as a second language. However, Afrikaans remains the main language of wider communication in the community outside my school. Even though learners are from other tribes (for example Damara/Nama, Herero, Oshiwambo), Afrikaans is the language they use to talk amongst themselves. As a result, my colleagues and I find that the learners cope well with their Afrikaans school work, but find English much more challenging.

My observations as a Grade 8 English teacher are that learners in Namibia do not seem to be well prepared for writing in English at Junior Secondary level (Grade 8-10), making it difficult for them to cope with writing demands later on at Senior Secondary level (Grade 11-12) and tertiary level. Indeed, the English Second Language syllabus for Namibian secondary education states that "junior secondary learners should be taught and tested on how to write with progressively more accuracy in spelling, vocabulary, punctuation marks and tense usage" The Ministry of Education (NIED, 2007, p. 8). The use of the word 'accuracy' in this curriculum document suggests an emphasis on product rather than process. The emphasis on product is more consistent with behaviourist views where inaccuracy (i.e. errors) was seen as something to be avoided as compared with newer constructivist views where learners' errors are seen as providing a useful window onto their learning progress. Both product and process are important, and in this study the process involves the teacher giving feedback on learners' written work in order to help them recognise and correct their errors so that they can work toward being able to produce increasingly accurate products. For this reason, it is of an advantage that my learners be assisted in improving their writing skills in English as a Second Language (ESL). This explains the need to consider the contribution of direct and indirect feedback with well explained corrective comments in the improvement of my learners' ESL writing skills, particularly in the above-mentioned four language areas identified as critical by NIED (2007).

Karbalaei and Karimian (2014, p. 965) note that writing "can be challenging whether in one's furst language or second language", but as one of the basic language skills, writing boosts "language acquisition as learners experiment with words and sentences in writing to communicate their views effectively and to strengthen the grammar and lexis they are learning in class". Karbalaei and Karimian (2014) further explain that although writing was

traditionally concerned with the written product, during recent decades there has been a shift in emphasis from *what* learners write to *how* learners write. This shift gave great recognition to the role of feedback during the writing process. As Sambeny and Gonzalez (2011, p. 27) suggest, it therefore becomes important for a teacher to give the kind of feedback that is likely to help learners improve their language usage so that they can produce more accurate written texts.

Ravand and Rasekh (2011) characterise feedback as "a method in which there is communication between learners and their teacher where the aim is to facilitate learner writers' development or at least to bring about positive changes in future writing" (p. 1137). These writers further explain that feedback may be viewed as a vital element in "learners' growing control over writing skills in different approaches" (p. 1137). I recognised that my learners did not perform well in Grade 8 English writing skills because of errors in punctuation marks, past tense verbs, spelling and vocabulary. My study therefore focused on the use of indirect and direct feedback with corrective comments as a means of helping my learners improve on these language skills.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Before starting on my Master's studies I taught English Second Language (Grades 8-12) for eleven years at different schools in Namibia. In all that time I was a conscientious teacher but from my Master's studies I eventually realised that I had not fully recognised the importance of feedback. During my Master's studies we did a module on the power of feedback in helping learners improve their writing. This is what inspired me to set up this action research case study. I wanted to design my half thesis research around the issue of feedback and

assessment as this would give me the opportunity to pay much more detailed and explicit attention to my feedback practices.

Feedback is considered to be an integral and significant part of instructional strategy, and it has a strong major impact in learning theories. In language learning and instruction, including writing in English as a Second Language, the main function of feedback in learners' learning is clear: learner writers gain advantages from adequate writing practice and opportunities to revise their essay drafts to come up with a final piece of writing using feedback from a teacher or peer, or using self-correction. As explained by Hattie and Timperley (2007, p. 81), the term feedback is conceptualised as "information provided by a guide (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience)". As a result of feedback that I gave to my learners I found out what feedback was effective and what I still needed to do to help them improve so that they could integrate and use the feedback in their revision and in the final piece of their writing.

This study, therefore, gave me a chance to explore ways of providing various kinds of indirect and direct feedback to help my learners write better and with fewer grammatical errors in their essays in Grade 8 English. As an English Second Language teacher, I needed to consciously develop an appropriate set of responses on different types of written work to facilitate my learners' chances for revision. Moreover, I needed to respond to each learner's writing as "*work in progress* rather than judging it as a finished product" (Zamel, 1985, p. 96). I hoped that there would be improvement in my ways of providing feedback to enhance my learners' ability to produce accurate written English. Therefore, it was essential for me to first identify, delimit, and specify the essence of the problem on which my study focused.

1.3 Significance of the Study

In terms of its educational reform, Namibia promoted the principle of continuous assessment, whereby assessment is an ongoing process rather than being left to the end of a course of study (summative assessment) by which time it is often too late to mediate in any learning difficulties the learners might have had. Research (Uiseb, 2009) has shown that many Namibian teachers struggle to conceptualise what is meant by continuous assessment. A key feature of continuous assessment is feedback. Due to the significant effect of feedback on writing, many studies have started examining the importance of corrective feedback on learner writing. Karbalaei and Karimian (2014, p. 965) hold that of all the feedback sources, teacher corrective feedback is still valued as one of the most important, and many studies have found it helpful and effective in improving learner writing. Moreover, the most obvious focus of the past researched reports on feedback and learner writing in the ESL context is the effects of feedback focus and feedback techniques. Similarly, this action research focused on how I provided indirect and direct feedback to my Grade 8 ESL learners to improve their written accuracy, and also to improve on my teaching practices.

Several studies highlighted by Purnawarman (2011) such as those of Ferris and Robert (2001) and Hyland (2003) attempted to determine the effects of written form-focused and content-focused feedback, while studies such as those of Bitchener (2008), Sheen (2007) and Chandler (2003), found out that the effects of direct versus indirect feedback, or compared direct corrective feedback with more detailed information versus the absence of explanation. In addition, little is known from past findings regarding the effects of both strategies, namely indirect and direct feedback, on learner writing in revised work. Therefore, my study focused on the appropriateness of a combination of the two feedback approaches on errors that my

Grade 8 learners made in their essay writing. The usage of both feedback methods was helpful to me as the merging of the two helped me understand the errors my learners made, and also helped me to choose the right feedback strategy to correct such errors. My written indirect feedback followed by direct feedback with detailed corrective comments provided me with valuable information to guide my learners to understand the errors they made and to correct them appropriately.

Results from my research led me to an understanding of the common writing mistakes my learners made, and the kind of feedback strategies I provided that enabled them to perform better in their writing. Furthermore, this study helped me as an ESL teacher in deciding how to correct my learners' writing by using both responses with more detailed comments to empower them to face future challenges in their writing. At the same time, the whole process helped me to reflect and improve on my teaching practices.

1.4 Research Aim

This action research was aimed at gaining an understanding of how I could provide constructive feedback in response to my Grade 8 learners' language errors in order to help them improve accuracy in their written English. My study sought to compare learner performance on a written essay before and after the revision and the provision of my feedback. I measured my learners' performance in terms of the levels of competency in four particular language aspects, namely, punctuation marks, past tense verbs, spelling and vocabulary. These are the same four aspects identified as key areas, by both Ministry of Education (2007, p. 8) and James (1988, p. 105), which explain their inclusion as focal language aspects investigated in my study. Since written essays demand the concurrent use

of these language aspects, I used them both to provide the necessary feedback and to determine improvement in my teaching practices and development in my learners' accuracy in each particular language aspect.

I carried out this study to contribute to the component of research on writing in English as a Second Language by exploring the importance of using indirect and direct feedback with explicit comments on four common written errors in learners' narrative texts. Therefore, the role of feedback in my study was to enable me to improve on my practices and the accuracy of my learners' essay writing skills because of their response to my feedback.

Purnawarman (2011, p. 4) discusses different past researches that have approached direct and indirect feedback from a point of view; they implied that language teachers should apply atleast one feedback strategy. However, in this action research, I employed both types of feedback strategies in the writing tasks. In terms of order, indirect feedback followed direct feedback for the purpose of clarity of use, problem solving and to determine my improvement in my teaching practices. Unlike most previously conducted researches, in my study I tried to look at the effectiveness of the use of both indirect and direct methods which I gave to my learners during the revision steps of their essays. My study extended the exploration of the role of both indirect and direct strategies with comments on the first as well as third revised drafts of the essay in order to determine whether there was improvement as a carry-over effect of my feedback practices.

Referring to the above views, my case study had multiple purposes. Firstly, I identified different types of language errors such as punctuation, past tense verbs, spelling and vocabulary as they manifested in my Grade 8 learners' English essay writing. Secondly, I

measured how my learners responded to my feedback in terms of accuracy in the four language aspects, and thirdly, I determined the feedback strategy which worked best to improve the accuracy of my learners in English essay writing in the four language aspects.

1.5 Research Goals

This study had three key goals:

(a) To examine the kind of language errors my grade 8 learners made in their writing so as to find out whether I could categorize these errors linguistically, and to determine if they were errors, mistakes or lapses.

(b) To analyze how learners responded to my feedback.

(c) To determine which feedback strategies worked best to help my learners deal with their errors, mistakes or lapses.

1.6 Research Questions

Consistent with the three research goals, the following research questions formulated this study:

a) What kind of language errors do my grade 8 learners make in their writing? How could I categorize these errors linguistically? Are they errors, mistakes or lapses?

b) How do learners respond to my feedback?

c) What feedback strategies work best to help my learners deal with their errors, mistakes or lapses?

To address the above research questions, the study focused only on indirect and direct techniques with corrective comments and its role in improving my Grade 8 ESL learners' writing skills, since in the actual classroom, I provided the primary feedback. My study approached both indirect and direct feedback as complementary to each other, accompanied by explicit corrective comments which helped me to reflect on my professional development.

1.7 Clarification of Concepts

Understanding the main terms helped me to frame meaning in the readings. Key words are those that make up the research topic, so defining those key words helped me create an understanding and clear picture of what my study was about (Badenhorst, 2010, p. 88). Words that played a key function in my action research study are: action research, case study, feedback, indirect feedback, direct feedback, explicit corrective comments, English as a Second Language (ESL), writing, narrative essay, errors. These are defined in the sections that follow. Some of the terms which are defined briefly in this section are taken up in more detail in Chapter 2.

1.7.1 Action research

Koshy (2005, p. 1) explains action research as "an enquiry practised with rigour and comprehending so as to constantly refine practice; the evidence-based outcomes will then contribute to the researcher's continuing professional development". In addition, McNiff (2002, p. 5) holds that action research is "a practical way of looking at one's work to determine that it is as [one] wanted it to be; it is often referred to as researcher-based research because it involves [the researcher's] thinking about and looking back on [his or her] work;

therefore, it can also be called a way of self-reflective method". Moreover, action research is "an act of self-controlling that generally includes entering steps of planning, acting, observing and reflecting on a problem in order to improve their work" (McNiff, 2002, p. 6).

1.7.2 Case study

According to Dornyei (2011, p. 151), a case study, as the term suggests, is the study of the "particular and complex of one case". Similarly, Creswell (1994) views a case study as a qualitative approach in which the practitioner "investigates a single body or phenomena controlled by time and task" (p. 12). In the same line, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2001) define case study as a means of capturing "the reality and description of the researcher's' working experiences". Further, a case study is "an activity, event or an issue that contains a real situation [one] would encounter in the workplace" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2001, p. 181).

1.7.3 Feedback

Thompson (2007, p. 53) clarifies feedback as "the process when a teacher provides learners with the helpful comments and chances to personalise what they have been working on". According to Ravand and Rasekh (2011, p. 1136), feedback is "a method used to indicate to a learner whether an instructional response is correct or incorrect". Hattie and Timperley (2007, p. 81) conceptualise feedback as "an evidence given by an agent (e.g., teacher, fellow learners, guardians, self, experience) regarding areas of [a learner's] achievement".

1.7.4 Indirect feedback

Indirect feedback is a method of, giving feedback mainly used by teachers to [assist learners to] improve on their errors by showing a mistake without [giving] the required answer" (Ferris & Roberts, as cited in Purnawarman, 2011, p. 26). The writers further explain that indirect feedback takes place when a teacher only provides ways which make learners aware that there is an error but he or she does not give the learners the correct form.

1.7.5 Direct feedback

Direct feedback is a way of offering feedback to learners to assist them correct their mistakes by giving the right answer of the target language (Purnawarman, 2011, p. 28). Direct feedback is provided by a teacher, once realising an error, by "giving the right form or the expected answer above or close to the [language] mistake" (Bitchener et al., Ferris, as cited in Purnawarman, 2011, p. 28).

1.7.6 Explicit corrective comments

This type of feedback occurs "when a teacher offers comments to [learners] by not only revealing that there is an error but also giving clear explanation or negative response in the way of corrective feedback" (Bitchener & Knoch, as cited in Purnawarman, 2011, p. 30). It can also be referred to as direct feedback when teachers correct learners by indicating their errors and emphasising the correct forms. A teacher may offer additional information that may raise the learners' consciousness, such as giving an "explanation of a language rule or

feature and examples of correct application" (Bitchener & Knoch, as cited in Purnawarman, 2011, p. 30).

1.7.7 English as a Second Language (ESL)

English as a Second Language is defined by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture as "The language which the learner has some knowledge of and is exposed to regularly; it is one of the major languages in the community" Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture (MESC) (2003, p. 8). The Language Policy for Schools in Namibia (2003) also proposes that English as a Second Language is understood as a language of which the learners are required to have far more than "some knowledge". In addition**, '**English as a Second Language' is the term used to indicate the function of English in places where people generally use their first language (L1) at home, but may use English as a Second Language (L2) at school and in the workplace. English is actually the national language in Namibia, and the language of teaching and learning from Grade 4 onward (p. 12).

1.7.8 Writing

Lerner (2000, p. 442) defines writing as "an active process and the most sophisticated process of putting oral language into graphic symbols and a complex achievement of the language".

1.7.9 Narrative essay

A narrative essay is a story or an account of an event. There are many different types of narratives including historical narratives, fictional narratives, and real life narratives. In any type of narrative, what is important is to answer the question "what happened?" A good narrative needs an introduction, content, and a conclusion. It needs a plot where the writer tells the reader what happened in a logical manner. In this study, I adopted a genre approach to teaching the narrative style (Gibbons, 2002, p. 53).

1.7.10 Errors

According to Norrish (1983, p. 7), "a mistake occurs when a confusion arises [because of] a lack of understanding; it cannot be corrected by oneself". Specifically, a learner commits an error when he or she has not yet learned the correct form or its use (University of Namibia – Centre for External Studies [UNAM – CES], 2004, p. 2).

1.8 Organisation of the Thesis and Work Plan of the Study

This document is divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1

In Chapter 1, I present the context and background of my study. I also provide the statement of the problem, significance of the study, research goals, research questions, research aim, and limitations of the study, as well as clarification of concepts.

Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, I provide the literature I reviewed relevant to teacher feedback, the role of indirect and direct feedback to improve accuracy in learners' written texts, specifically essays. I also conduct a review on the types of learners' writing errors, what causes these errors and the effectiveness of explicit corrective feedback to improve the learners' written errors.

Chapter 3

In chapter 3, I discuss the methodology of my study, including details of the research site, research designs, action research, case study, data collection, sampling, and ethical considerations that include informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. I also discuss data validity and reliability, and the limitations of my research.

Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, I present the results of data analysis in the order of each research question.

Chapter 5

In Chapter 5, I summarise the findings of the study as presented in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 6, the final chapter, I make some recommendations for future research and conclusions of lessons learned.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this action research was to explore the role of indirect and direct feedback with explicit comments in helping my Grade 8 learners improve their writing accuracy in the ESL context. This chapter discusses different areas in the literature related to feedback and learner writing in a second language setting. This literature review begins with an overview of feedback in learning theory, a definition of feedback, and a consideration of the advantages of feedback in ESL writing. Following this are reviews of research on the effect of corrective feedback and error correction, coded feedback as indirect feedback, and the role of the teacher in providing feedback on learner writing. Next, the discussion continues with different feedback strategies such as multiple-draft revisions, indirect feedback, direct feedback, focused corrective feedback, error correction and written feedback with explicit corrective comments. Lastly, the chapter explores possible types and causes of errors in ESL writing.

2.2 Overview of Feedback in Learning Theories

This section discusses a number of different theories that address feedback as a learning technique, namely, behaviorist theory, information processing theory, inter-language theory, constructivist theory, and communicative theory.

2.2.1 Behaviourist theory

According to Norrish (1983, p. 26), based on Skinner's behaviourist theory of language learning, "if language is basically a collection of norms, then when a learner tries to learn new customs the old ones will intervene with the new ones". The behaviourist approach to language acquisition holds the point that "errors are to be eliminated at all costs" since they reinforce bad habits. Behaviourism considers learning as an act of copying, practice, boosting on achievement, and habit development (Norrish, 1983, p. 28). As such, learners would typically receive "motivation for their correct [imitations], and feedback on their written mistakes" (Lightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 35).

Skinner (as cited in Purnawarman, 2011, p. 10,) elaborates on Norrish's and Lightbown & Spada's idea that "in the behaviorist sight of learning, reinforcement and feedback can have vital command effects on learner learning as the two can mould learner behavior by emphasizing on correct responses or giving corrective comments for incorrect responses. In behaviorist approach, the learner's behavior is monitored prior and after an instruction. An instruction cannot be considered as useful if the expected changes that are related to it do not occur".

2.2.2 Information processing theory

Another theory is the information processing theory which, according to (Purnawarman, 2011, p. 11), feels that "learning is a process inside the learner". In this model, "the learner processes knowledge from the surrounding to make them required results of learning". Driscoll further argues that "feedback performs two roles during the learning process".

Firstly, “feedback gives learners information about the correctness of their achievement. Secondly, feedback offers right information that can be used by the learners to improve on their performance. They [cognitively process] information from comments and keep it in their temporary and permanent memories”.

2.2.3 Interlanguage theory

More recent constructivist theories define errors as “an essential component of language acquisition; correcting the mistakes is a way of moving the learner’s interlanguage nearer to the language in demand”. According to Darus and Ching (2009, p. 45), “interlanguage theory refers to the view that the language made by the second language learner is in the same way that first language performance is systematic”. The first and the second language reflect a set of orders that can be absorbed and discussed (Darus & Ching, 2009, p. 45). “The (inter)language of the second language user is the developing result of a linguistic system that is not the same as the first language and the language in need”.

2.2.4 Constructivist theory

Based on the constructivist point of view, errors are a sign that learning is occurring. Constructivism focuses on processes of why an error exists. Constructivists have tried to study errors in written work by hypothesising their possible causes. Myles (2002) asserts that “although reading a text full of errors can be tiring and time consuming to a language teacher, mistakes can assist the [latter] recognise the techniques that the learner is using to come up with ideas”. By analysing learner mistakes, the teacher can “determine the number

of errors from an undesirable manner to that of proper language learning" (Myles, 2002, p. 11).

2.2.5 Communicative approach

This method performs on the notion that we learn a language by – speaking, listening, reading and writing – in that language for a relevant aim where the concern is on meaning. A communicative approach is advocated in the Namibian languages curriculum which is consistent with learner centred principles. In communicative language teaching (CLT) not all errors need to be corrected. The main goal of language acquisition is "to gain and transfer meaningful information and correction should thus be based on mistakes that intervene with this goal, not on an inappropriate of usage" (Ur, 1999, p. 111).

To summarize, based on the idea of Lightbown & Spada, (1999, p. 35) behavioral learning theory reveals that "motivation and feedback can have significant instructional impacts on [learner] learning as both can mould or structure learner behavior by emphasizing or offering feedback for wrong information". On the other hand, the information processing theory emphasizes that "feedback gives appropriate information that can be utilized by the learners [and teachers] to improve their practices". Similarly, interlanguage theory posits that "correcting errors is a process of shifting the learner's interlanguage nearer to the language in demand", in this case, English as a Second Language. For those using a communicative method, as required in the Namibian languages curriculum, not all mistakes need attention, which is why my study focused only on common linguistic errors such punctuation marks, past tense verbs , spelling and vocabulary. Therefore, in this study I provided feedback on

those errors in order to maintain accuracy in my learners' writing in English and to reflect on my own practices of providing feedback.

2.3 Definition of Feedback

Thompson (2007, p. 53) "describes feedback as the moment when teachers give learners the right information and chances to [correct their errors]. The focus is to recap on the task in a satisfactory way, making conclusion for those learners who require it". This "can be done through speaking and/or seeing (Thompson, 2007, p. 53)". According to Ravand and Rasekh (2011), feedback is a general pattern for different strategies that many ESL teachers use in their practices to comment on learners' written work. Ravand and Rasekh (2011) further "explain feedback as any method applied to inform a learner whether a response is correct or incorrect". These writers explain that in motivational terms, feedback, such as praise, could be taken as a motivator that encourages certain behaviour such as writing. In reinforcement terms, feedback may reward or punish behaviours such as spelling errors or way of concluding a text. In terms of evidence, feedback may provide knowledge which can be applied by a learner to improve on his or her work towards a certain way (p. 136).

Hattie and Timperley (2007, p. 81) conceptualise feedback as evidence given by someone such as a teacher, a peer, a parent, or the learner himself or herself, on a learner's practice. A teacher can provide appropriate information, a fellow learner can provide a helpful tactic, a book can give information to clarify ideas, a guardian can offer motivational words, and a learner can search for the answer to assess the appropriateness of a feedback. Thus, feedback is a response to performance.

There are four major stages of feedback as discussed by Hattie and Timperley (2007, p. 90), who point out that "the stage at which feedback is used determines its usefulness," as follows:

- Firstly, feedback can be about a result, such as opinion on whether the work is right or wrong.
- Secondly, feedback can be aimed at the process used to produce a product or to finish a task.
- Thirdly, feedback to learners can be directed at the self-monitoring level in terms of self-assessment or courage to go further in an activity.
- Lastly, feedback can be personal in the sense that it is directed at the self, which is not related to the outcome of the activity done.

(Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 90).

In this study, I applied these four levels of feedback in guiding my learners towards becoming more proficient and independent essay writers. I also applied the four levels of feedback provision in order to establish the quality of the feedback I provided, and to detect areas of improvement in my practices.

2.4 Advantages of Feedback in English Second Language Writing

Factually, the advantage of feedback came out with the growth of learner-centred methods to writing in North American L1 essay groups in the 1970s. The move towards these approaches meant that more focus was given to teacher-learner experiences around work. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007, p. 9), useful feedback means "giving ideas on what a learner grasps or not, and what direction the learner must follow to enhance". McTighe and O'Connor (2005, p. 16) consider "feedback as the breakfast of champions", but

note that, "… amusingly the value feedback necessary to improve learning is limited or non-existent in many teachings".

Ravand and Rasekh (2011, p. 137) explain that at a recent time, feedback has been considered essential in learners developing authority over writing skills in genre-oriented approaches, where scaffolding instruction and learning are required. Therefore, commenting is vital in giving learners linguistic options central to their academic or professional reading and writing skills and for helping learners in negotiating access to new ideas and usage (p. 137).

Hattie and Timperley (2007, p. 104) emphasise that feedback is necessary and is a strong strategy for learning objectives. For learners lacking in proficiency, they argue that "it is worthy for a teacher to give elaboration through comments than to provide feedback on partially understood ideas. If feedback is focused on the right level, it can help learners to understand, take part, or come up with effective techniques to process the ideas to be acquired. To be successful, feedback needs to be precise, determined, significant, and suited with the learners' initial experience, and should offer insightful links". Hattie and Timperley (2007) further state that feedback also needs "to produce vital ideas processing on the part of learners, have difficulty in an activity, based on certain and concise aims, and give little warning to the person at the *self* level". The major differentiator is whether it is correctly focused on the task, ways or regulation and not to the *self* level. These orders highlight the advantage of a classroom environment that fosters group and self-evaluation, and allows learning from errors (p.104).

According to Gass and Mackey (2006, pp.7, 13), feedback takes place as a response to some linguistic problem. These writers see feedback as "double-pronged" in the sense that both the intention of the teacher and the interpretation by the comment receiver are vital. They further state that the learner must perceive feedback in the way the provider intended it. If feedback is given on vocabulary mistakes, it is suitable for it to be understood as lexical feedback by the learner. That is, the learner should understand the targeted purpose of the feedback.

Dweck (2008, p. 62) distinguishes between two types of learners, those with a growth mind-set and those with a fixed mind-set: the former are "willing and free to learn from weaknesses", whereas the latter "attempt to ignore their weak points, and are therefore so blocked to learning". She notes how feedback is important for teachers to help learners develop a growth mind-set in order to become resilient and not fear failure, recognising that they can learn from mistakes.

Learner writers who get feedback will have knowledge about which aspects of their tasks need to be reworked on and enhanced. Carless (as cited in Purnawarman, 2011 p.13) affirms that learners who gain feedback during the writing process have an awareness of how good they are carrying out and what they need to do to upgrade. Feedback can also refine learners' reasoning or attitudes towards their work and pay attention on the aim of writing. Therefore, teachers are in charge of assisting learners to achieve their writing aims through feedback.

Purnawarman (2011) suggests that feedback in writing can encourage knowledge of learners as creative writers. He further explains "direct knowledge as the knowledge of language regulations that learners can express", and which enables them to give reasons that specific

requirements should be met. Learners who get feedback will end up with their previous knowledge about language and writing regulations that they have acquired. When writing, learner writers will utilize knowledge as boosted by the comments on their written work. Feedback can also raise learners' interest in the topic they are working on (2011, p. 14). Learners who gain feedback will focus more on what they have come up with and recognize that beyond their understanding of their work does not meet specific requirements. The comments that learners get draws their curiosity to those areas of their writing that still need teacher's intervention, and that shows them how to enhance their learning. The expansion in focus will lead to writing enhancement which can be "stated as a benefit in accuracy structure and content of writing" (as pointed out by Ashwell and by Lamberg, as cited in Purnawarman, 2011 p.14). This justifies my decision to carry out this action research study because I wanted my learners to receive the most effective feedback that could help them to improve in correcting their written errors and possibly to eliminate some errors in their writing. In return, I wanted to see improvement and growth in my ways of providing feedback, and my professional growth as an English teacher.

2.5 Effect of Corrective Feedback and Error Correction

An aspect of significance in this action research on my feedback in second language writing is corrective feedback or error correction and its effects on my learners' writing accuracy. In this case, the errors are language errors made by my Grade 8 ESL learners in their written essay. Therefore, corrective feedback is a strategy aimed at correcting any errors made by my learners; however, in this case, I chose only four common linguistic errors to respond to, such as punctuation marks, past tense verbs, spelling and vocabulary.

In addressing language errors in learners' writing, teachers can apply various strategies such as indirect or direct feedback. Indirect strategy is the process whereby an error pointed out but the right form is not given, while direct strategy, as applied in this case, is the presentation of the correct answers or related responses (Bitchener, 2008, p. 105), or "the presentation of correct answers as a feedback to learner mistakes". Both indirect feedback and direct feedback in correcting learner errors are mostly used by teachers, and they are able to use one or both. For this study, I used both strategies. However, writing teachers require to focus on different rules of feedback that are generally accepted in previous studies, as indicated by Purnawarman (2011, p. 18). Firstly, with regard to permanent writing progress, "indirect strategy is considered as more essential to learner writers than direct the other strategy and secondly, corrective feedback should be straight to the point on restricted important structures, and attention on particular mistakes is more useful than focusing on all mistakes because understanding error correction can be tiring and discouraging for teachers and learners" (Bitchener, 2008, p. 105).

Ur (1999, p. 74) suggests a strategy to allow learners rectify and amend each other's written work. "The learners may not be able to figure out or state all the weaknesses in a text, but they will notice at least some loopholes. However, self-correction may be a challenge to English Second Language learner-writers". Obviously, if they knew what was incorrect, they would not have written it in the wrong way. This said, if tasks are corrected by learners themselves, then the teacher could only go through to confirm that learners are able to rectify their errors, and then provide any required assistance, and on the other hand the teacher can make an assessment on the learners' level of comprehension and advancement. However, this suggestion by Ferris and Roberts (2001, p. 178) runs contrary to Ur's view that learners

should be offered the opportunity to correct their work without teacher's intervention so that they can advance in independent copy-edit competence.

Zamel (as cited in Lee, 2004, p. 287) warns that "uncontrolled focus on learner mistakes can change writing learners into syntactic learners, diverting them from other useful issues in writing". Therefore, Zamel advises that it is a bad notion for teachers to correct all mistakes they encounter when assessing learners' written texts. Ur (1999, p. 74) also cautions that in attempting to correct all written mistakes, meaning might be affected, which leads to misinterpretation on the side of the reader. Ferris (2002, p. 50) proposes that correcting an error may be "useful when it directs on *forms* of it, permitting teachers and learners to deal with it, say, one by one error types at a time, rather than a large number of errors".

On the other hand, Norrish (1983, p. 79) advises that learner writers must "be stopped from producing mistakes in writing by being given right direction as early as possible" and not being asked to perform exercises they have not been adequately ready for. Norrish further advises that teachers of ESL should be motivated to exercise tolerance, because correcting errors and re-teaching can be time consuming that might rather "be committed to opening the learner to more of the language". Such openness may assist learners move, within their interlanguage development, ever closer to the target language (p. 115). Therefore, in the present study, as mentioned earlier, I concentrated only on the most common language errors such as punctuation marks, past tense verbs, spelling and vocabulary in Grade 8 learners' written essays because I wanted to see improvement in my learners' writing and in my style of providing feedback.

2.6 Coded Feedback as Indirect Feedback

Since working through each of my learners' texts, writing corrections in full and providing feedback proved time-consuming for me, so to make it faster, I opted for codes to indicate learners' written errors. This is supported by Thomas (2011, p.11), who advises that "a quicker and better option is using symbols or codes to show mistakes". By applying signs or codes for correction prevents a teacher from rewriting their learners' text for them, thus encouraging learners to consider the errors they have produced and try to correct their own work. In addition, Harmer (1991, p. 147) submits that if teachers first use a symbol system, they may highlight the incorrect word in the written piece and put the code at the edge of the page. Later it will only be needful to place a sign or code at the edge of the page or above the error, requiring the learner to identify the error. In this case, I first underlined the error, and then placed the code above it. Likewise, when my learners corrected each other's work, symbols were also used. As a teacher-researcher, I had to determine the source and patterns of errors my learners made in order to provide suitable comments together with the fitting coded feedback that would allow them to recognise the errors and enable them to correct their own work.

Harmer (1991, p. 148) suggests that ESL teachers may provide late adjustments in the lesson after returning to learners' written texts coded with figures to represent their errors, then asking the learners "to discuss with partners on how they would change their work, and to apply those amendments." Alternatively, in higher grades, teachers could instruct learners to exchange books and inspect their partner's writing for punctuation, past tense verbs, spelling, and vocabulary errors. Harmer (1991, p. 147) further recommends that where a specific learner's writing accommodates a dozen of familiar errors, the teacher might code errors and duplicate the written texts, erase the learner's identity, and utilize the work as a whole class

exercise to practice identifying problems with learners. Table 1 below shows some examples of marking codes I used to indicate my learners' written errors, as proposed by Norrish (1983, p. 73). In Chapter 4 I explain how I introduced these codes to my learners.

Table 1

Example of Marking Codes

Error Type	**Abbreviation/Code**
Word choice	Wc
Wrong verb tense	Wvt
Verb form	Vf
Wrong word order	Wwo
Subject-verb agreement	Sva
Wrong article	Wa
Pronoun	Pr
Punctuation	Punc
Spelling	Sp
Sentence structure	Ss
Plural	Pl
Redundant	Red
Missing	Miss
Grammar	Gr
Vocabulary	Voc
Preposition	Pre
I do not understand what you have written	?
Number	Num
New paragraph	Np

It was necessary for my learners to know about the meaning of each symbol or abbreviation. The advantage of this marking code system was that it guided my learners, giving them an opportunity to work on what was incorrect and to attempt to put it right, as suggested by Norrish (1983, p.74). In addition, Norrish emphasizes that when marking figures are applied as indirect strategy, teachers are advised "to apply constant coded method that is sustained by standard language rule, as symbols in feedback giving can cause uncertainty in teachers as well as learners" (Norrish, 1983, p.75). In the present study, I chose to use coded feedback to identify and highlight my learners' errors in their essays. On the other hand, I also wanted to determine whether it was the most effective strategy.

2.7 Role of the Teacher in Providing Feedback on Learner Writing

Before giving feedback as a language teacher, I needed to be aware of all possible errors and mistakes in my Grade 8 learners' writing, and be sympathetic towards my learners' problems. As suggested by Norrish (1983, p. 5), an assessment of every learner's work in ways of what he or she does and does not master will assist the teacher to know how that particular learner performed in writing, and what assistance he or she may require. Moreover, teachers need to intervene in learners' writing in order to determine how well they write and whether they find writing manageable, as well as "using feedback in evaluating their own teaching by developing their reactivity to the standard of shortcomings of their teaching" (Norrish, 1983, p. 6). In order to support this idea, for my study, I decided to reflect on my feedback strategies.

It is recommended by Ravand and Rasekh (2011, p. 1137) that "teachers help learner writers improve through many revisions, offering feedback and advising them to do revisions while

writing, instead of after it." These authors observe that giving feedback is a process that allows learners to interact with their classmates or their teacher, whereby the aim is "to promote learners' improvement, and to motivate effective transforms in writing" (Ravand and Rasekh (2011, p. 1137).

Purnawarman (2011, p. 20) suggests four functions that a writing teacher plays when giving feedback to learners such as a respondent, a guide, a linguist, and an evaluator.

- Firstly, a teacher as a respondent communicates with learner writer. Under this function, a teacher responds to the idea of the text, and he or she may show agreement about an. A teacher may offer useful feedback such as "This reason is relevant" or "Your idea is good" without providing any correct answer.
- Secondly, a teacher as a guide can indicate his or her interest in specific views or about uncertainty or unjustified ideas in the learners' written work. Here, the teacher maintains his or her duty as a reader by asking for explanation or by stating interests and asks about specific opinions in the text without correcting them. He or she can, introduce learners to strategies for revision such as decisions to find solution to the problem or give an example.
- Thirdly, a teacher as a linguist provides feedback which is relevant to language errors and corresponds with language standards. The teacher may state why a certain language form is incorrect or not suitable for a particular usage, such as option of tenses and words, the use of punctuation marks, or spelling. Here, the teacher can provide a detailed clarification of language standards to assist the learners enhance their writing skills.

- Fourthly, in the instance of the teacher acting as an evaluator, it is usual that most teachers act as evaluators with the aim to judge the value of learners' written work as a result of final writing.

(Purnawarman (2011, p. 21).

Zamel (1985, p. 96) advises that a teacher may give feedback based on the type of activity learners have written. Therefore, teachers need to know how to offer relevant comments on varieties of written texts in order to encourage chances for revision. "Teachers must treat their learners' ongoing writing instead of evaluating it as a final attempt" (Zamel, 1985, p. 96. A teacher can use different strategies of giving feedback on written texts. Harmer and Harlow (2001, p. 110) advise that "the best way of giving feedback is to consider it as *reacting* to learners' tasks instead of *analysing* or *judging* what learners have written". When we react, we state how the written text looks like and whether it has met the set criteria or improvement is required.

Ur (1999, p. 110) distinguishes between evaluation and correcting error, noting that "in evaluation, the learner is informed by the teacher about the status of his or her performance, whereas in error correction, the teacher provides certain information on areas of the learner's achievement" – via clarification and provision of ways to help the learner improve. Sadler (as cited in Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 82) observes that "the teacher's intervention needs to offer specific ideas based on the practice of learning that forms a bridge between what is know and what is yet to be learned". Therefore this reinforces the reality that the feedback I provided was meant to notify my learners whether they were right or wrong, to also show that additional ideas were needed, to direct my learners to what they could pursue, and to indicate possible techniques to comprehend specific ideas.

According to Harmer (2001, p. 109), the process teachers offer feedback on learners' written work should be "based on the type of activity carried out by learners", and the result they aim to achieve. A key aspect is that learners need feedback on the opinions they include in their written text but not only on their language. When teachers comment for example on the final written composition, they may comment on it, by explaining what impressed them about the text and what they plan to offer in the learner's future writing. The other helpful process of commenting on learners' texts is "to apply different options of writing through redevelopment". The teacher could say "I would change this section a little bit differently from how you wrote it", and then rewrite it, considering the learner's initial ideas as much as possible, but keep away from any of the language challenges which the learner's actual comprised (Harmer, 2001, p. 111). Providing feedback is possible for teachers when they have enough time to interact with their learners, while "feedback is doable for learners when they have the time and able to digest, gain from, and use the information provided by their teachers" (Harmer, 2001, p. 112).

Piper (1993, p. 83) discusses "the zone of proximal development as the gap between a child's original standard of growth and the standard at which the child could function with adult assistance". Vygotsky's zones of development such as the zone of proximal development (ZPD), and the zone of actual development, namely, what the child can do alone and unassisted (ZAD), are useful in this study. In addition, Wilhelm, Baker & Dube (2001, p. 4) explain that "a learner's new capabilities can only be expanded in the ZPD via cooperation in original and physical contact with a teacher". Through adequate assistance, the learner incorporates the techniques, mindset, and self problem-solving tactics. When all these are obtained, the technique then goes into the learner's ZAD, because he or she is now able to

successfully carry out the activity on his or her own and without assistance, and to utilise this information to new cases he or she may experience. Learners achieve self-control when, in the way of scaffolding cooperation, they can regulate outside actions and are able to solve problem on their own. The teacher can stop guiding the learner once he or she can work on his or her own. Teacher guidance in task execution has been understood as a helping platform (Wilhelm, Baker & Dube, 2001, p. 4). Therefore, in this study, through the provision of feedback, I scaffold my Grade 8 learners in essay writing until they were able to write independently.

2.8 Different Strategies for Providing Feedback

With regard to feedback strategies, I agree with Hattie and Timperley (2007, p. 104), who feel that "feedback is a one-by-one method that needs patience and self-reflection". In addressing language errors in my learners' writing, I employed different strategies for providing feedback, such as engaging my learners in multiple-draft revisions, indirect feedback, direct feedback, focused corrective feedback and written feedback with explicit corrective comments. These strategies are discussed one by one in the following sections:

2.8.1 Multiple-draft revisions

Many English Second Language teacher-researchers acknowledge that teacher "comments essential when they are given during the process of writing" (Ferris, as cited in Purnawarman, 2011, p. 21). At this stage, learners can react to the teacher's comments through revisions. To monitor this procedure, the English Second Language teacher specifically motivates learners to do many versions of writing of the same task. In the same

process, teachers can offer different kinds of feedback on each draft based on different weaknesses in learners' written work. Temporarily, "learners can have adequate time to recognize what they want to say via writing" (Purnawarman, 2011, p. 21), and to revise their writing based on teacher feedback. In my opinion, such writing and rewriting also provides repetition. The latter is seen as critical to consolidating learning: repetition or repeated exposure helps embed language in the long-term memory, according to the cognitive theory of learning.

Brannon and Knoblauch, as well as McGarrell and Verbeem (as cited in Purnawarman, 2011, p. 22) suggest that writing of multiple drafts gives a chance to simplify and concentrate on the meaning with regard to what is written. Writing multiple drafts with shaping comments from teachers and fellow learners plays an integral role in writing in English as a Second language. The teacher as the expert guides the novice. This is in same way of Vygotsky's concept of "zone of proximal development" mentioned earlier (see above) which sees the teacher as the more capable peer providing guidance, i.e. "helping to make the difference between the level of mastery the learner is striving to achieve and his or her current performance" (Purnawarman, 2011, p. 22). The effects of writing in drafts among ESL learners is also supported by Chandler (as cited in Purnawarman, 2011, p. 23) who found that English Second Language learners' writing improved drastically especially those who obtained teachers' comments through indirect or direct strategies.

2.8.2 Indirect feedback

According to Ferris and Roberts (2001, p. 163), indirect feedback is a strategy applied by teachers to assist learners correct their mistakes by showing a mistake without giving the

right way of doing it. Ferris (as cited in Lee, 2004, p. 286) re-emphasises that indirect strategy refers to correcting learners' mistakes without providing the correct form, by coding the mistakes. Indirect feedback can also be understood even if teachers correct learners' mistakes with no elaboration. This strategy makes learners aware that there is a mistake, but they have to correct it themselves. Teachers can indicate where the mistake is and what kind of a mistake it is by underlining, a circling, a coding, a marking, or a highlighting on the mistake, and asking the learners to rectify the mistakes on their own (Lee, and O'Sullivan & Chambers, as cited in Purnawarman, 2011, p.26). Similarly, Bitchener, (2008, p. 107) investigates the two important kinds of indirect strategy such as coded and uncoded feedback. With regard to coded feedback, Karbalaei and Karimian (2014, p. 967) suggest that "it has to do with pointing to the exact location of an error", whereas "uncoded feedback involves underlining or circling an error" and leaving it to the learner to diagnose the error.

In indirect strategy, learners are forced to rely on the evidence given by the teacher, who acts as a 'guide' (Bitchener, 2008, p. 105) "offering helpful and relevant direction to learners in order to structure and arouse their writing skills or experience". Learners can then refer this evidence to the context where a mistake is, control the aspect of the mistake, and rectify it based on their abilities. It is important to facilitate learners with indirect strategy to help them to recognize the right way which can be later helpful to them in writing. Indirect feedback "increases learners' commitment and focus to forms and allows them to solve problems", which several studies approve to be essential in learning process (Ferris; Lalande, as cited in Bitchener, 2008, p. 105). These specialists acknowledge that "indirect feedback has the possibility for assisting learners in molding their second language knowledge, and also has advantages than direct strategy on learners' writing improvement" (p. 106.

Lalande's study (as cited in Purnawarman, 2011, p. 27), which carried out on 60 German foreign language learners, measured two unfamiliar handling of mistake correction such as direct and indirect error correction. In direct correction the teacher provides correct forms to be integrated by learners into their written work, and indirect correction which is "guided learning strategies" the teacher is expected to provide learners with symbols symbolize mistakes. In this study, learners were required to interpret codes, correct their mistakes, and rewrite the entire essay upon corrective feedback; thus, indirect feedback engaged the learners in the correction procedure and also engaged learners more cognitively during the process. Lalande adds that indirect feedback is often more essential because it forces learners to focus on language structure. Many reports indicate that a teacher's indirect feedback has been found to be stronger than direct strategy because "it demands critical thinking involvement from learners themselves". Fathman and Whalley (as cited in Karbalaei & Karimian, 2014, p. 968) similarly acknowledge that their researches point out that indirect feedback has a good result on the improvement of second language writing.

2.8.3 Direct feedback

The other strategy mostly applied by English teachers is direct feedback. This strategy is applied when the teacher offers the correct answer for the learner to copy. It can be referred to as explicit feedback when teachers identify errors and correct learners by showing their mistakes and reinforcing the right forms. For the learner "to revise the written work, he or she requires to copy the correction into the last draft" (Ferris and Roberts, 2001, p. 163).

Liu (as cited by Ferris, 2002, p. 67) identifies four types of direct mistake correction, underlining the erroneous part and providing a description, description only, and underlining only. She also notes that direct correction makes a good accurate revision. According to

Purnawarman, (2011, p. 28) direct feedback is important that it offers well explained ideas on the right way of writing and it is appropriate for beginner learners in a situation such as structuring sentences and choosing words, and when teachers want to direct learner focus to mistakes that require learners' intervention.

Chandler (as cited in Purnawarman, 2011, p. 29) shares the findings of her research including 31 English Second Language learners on the importance of direct and indirect strategies on learners' revision. She realized that direct strategy was best for producing accurate revision and was liked by the learners as it was the quickest and helpful way to write revision. The previous research on the importance of direct strategy including 75 English Second Language learners in New Zealand was carried out by Bitchener and Knoch (2008, p. 415) in their study they measured the following (direct corrective feedback, involving written, and oral metalinguistic explanation; direct corrective feedback through written metalinguistic explanation; direct corrective feedback only) with a control group. They learnt that each serviced group acted much better than the control group and there was no a gap in using the five methods of direct feedback on those groups.

Lalande (as cited in Bitchener, 2005, p. 193) concludes that "direct strategy the best way to rectify mistakes as the right ways are given, but learners may not figure out the reasons why they committed those mistakes". In the end, learners tend to make the same mistakes over and over whenever they use the same language form or structure.

2.8.4 Focused corrective feedback

"This method of feedback usually chooses for particular mistakes to be corrected while leaving out other mistakes" (Ellis et al., 2008). In that way, teachers may opt to pay attention on similar language mistakes committed by English Second Language learners like punctuation, spelling, past tense verbs and vocabulary, and ignore mistakes in prepositions, nouns, or articles, which is what I did in this study. Furthermore, Lightbown and Spada (1999, p. 171) propose corrective feedback, which can be applied implicitly or explicitly; in implicit strategy, teachers indicate the errors without providing the correction, while in explicit feedback, teachers correct learners by indicating their errors and emphasising the correct forms.

Highly focused corrective feedback normally directs on an individual kind or group of errors, or one language aspect such as errors in the use of vocabulary (Purnawarman, 2011, p. 24), on the other hand low focused corrective strategy may focus on more than one kind of error while still restricting correction to a specific number of error groups such as punctuation, spelling, and past tense verbs. Focused corrective strategy is suitable to focus learners' attention to an individual mistake or a specific type of errors, then "learners are more likely to have knowledge and understanding of the specific mistake and the correction required on it" (Ellis et al., 2008, p. 356).

2.8.5 Written feedback with explicit comments

By providing comments, an ESL teacher needs to be clear and concrete to assist learners with revision (Purnawarman, 2011, p. 30). A language teacher must know about what expected of learners, which part of written work needs to be reworked, and ways this should be done.

Feedback is initiated to assist learners recognize that there is a weakness in their writing which needs their intervention to solve it. An ESL teacher must give vivid and useful information with regard to the where about of the mistake, kind of mistake, and how to get rid of it, if not learners may experience problem in digesting teacher's comments and may not be able to correct the mistake appropriately. It is also discovered that the more clearly the ideas provided by the teacher when giving feedback, the simpler it might be for learners to accept teacher suggestions to correct mistakes and revise their work. Explicit corrective strategy, however, requires time and redoing until it is absorbed and integrated, thus helping learners to recognize the right ways of the language in demand (see Purnawarman, 2011, p. 30).

Explicit comment takes place during a language teacher gives assistance to learners by not only pointing out that there is a mistake but also "offering helpful language clarification or information in the way of feedback or more ideas that may bring up their language understanding", such as offering a clarification of a linguistic regulation or aspect and ways of right usage (Bitchener et al. 2005, p. 193). Purnawarman (2011, p. 30) suggests that explicit comments may take double ways, namely open correction and feedback. In the former the teacher's feedback simply shows what is wrong and offers the right form, while in the latter, the teacher explains language rules. Lyster and Ranta (1997, p. 47) define language feedback as "opinions, ideas, or queries based on the well-constructed of the learner's way of using words without openly providing the correct answer". Basically, comments related show that there is a mistake somewhere in learners' written work and offers linguistic standard based on the character of the mistake or provides an explanation of a word when it has to do with vocabulary shortcomings. Therefore for the purpose of this discourse, "feedback with clear comments can be explained as feedback pointing out the where about and character of a

mistake supported by a teacher's comments clarifying linguistic regulations or the nature of the mistake made", whether or not the teacher offers the right answer (Lyster & Ranta (1997, p. 47).

Purnawarman (2011, p. 31) explains that the specificity and clearness of teacher's comments play a role in the success of learner revision and the type of mistakes to be corrected in learners' written work helps them in reworking on their texts successfully. In line with this, Ferris (as cited in Karbalaei & Karimian, 2014, p. 978) advises that "teachers should be careful (a) in their responding techniques, (b) in defining those techniques to their learners, and (c) in assisting learners acquire to rework and holding them responsible for considering feedback they have received teacher or classmates". Therefore, in this study, when I provided corrective feedback with explicit corrective comments, this was more advantageous than implicit feedback or no corrective feedback at all.

To summarise, ESL teachers should encourage learners to practice writing of the same task several times through multiple-draft revision. In this way, teachers can give different kinds of feedback between the drafts and concentrate on various weaknesses of learners' written work. Through indirect feedback, ESL teachers provide uncoded feedback by underlining or circling an error and leaving it to the learner to diagnose the error (Karbalaei and Karimian, 2014, p. 967). With direct feedback, for learners to revise the text, they need only to change the correction given by the teacher into the final draft (Ferris and Roberts 2001, p. 163). ESL teachers may determine to pay attention on some similar language mistakes made by learners and ignore the other errors. With written feedback with explicit comments, ESL teachers must give vivid and constructive ideas with regard to the where about of the mind, kind of mistake, and the way to rectify it, which is what I did in this study.

2.9 Types of Errors in English Second Language Writing

Since my ESL learners were not native speakers of English, I expected that they would make errors of different types in written English. I accepted these errors and create a room for improvement, recognising all mistakes my learners made as a learning step and an opportunity to learn something new. According to Harmer (2001), errors are classified into three groups such as:

- *Slips:* errors that learners can correct themselves once the error has been indicated to them;
- *Errors:* mistakes that learners cannot correct themselves, which require clarification; and,
- *Attempts:* when a learner attempts to write something but does not yet know the right way of writing it.

Although these three groups appear mostly in spoken language, they can also take place in written English because second language learners sometimes write as they speak (Harmer, 2001, p. 99).

Another distinction is made by Norrish (1983, p. 7) who indicates that even if the term *error* can be used mainly, there are differences between errors, mistakes, and lapses. As mentioned above, "an error occurs when learners have not yet learned the right form, and so continuously get it incorrect". On the other hand, a learner might use one form and sometimes the other, quite inconsistently. This inconsistent deviation is more likely to be a mistake; sometimes the learner "gets it correct" but sometimes he or she commits an error and applies the incorrect form. A lapse takes due to factors such as "lack of concentration,

shortness of memory, or fatigue" (Norrish, 1983, p. 7). A lapse is not connected to whether or not a given form in the language has been learned, has not been learned, or is in the way of being learned. Norrish, (1983, p. 9) further distinguished between errors and lapses, the latter being easy errors. Lapses happen even with native speakers, and can be self-corrected. They call for on-the-spot correction rather than the remediation which is needed in the case of errors.

Ellis and Tomlinson (1980, p. 5) point out that it is not always easy to differentiate between errors and mistakes. However, if a learner repeatedly applies an item correctly but gets it incorrect once, he or she has clearly committed a mistake. [Conversely], "if a learner frequently applies the same item wrongly, then he or she is almost certainly committing errors". Harmer (2001, p. 120) makes another distinction between a mistake and an error: a mistake can be self-corrected, but an error cannot. Harmer makes a further distinction that "errors may be systematic or non-systematic". Learners are likely to repeat and not notice systematic errors. Non-systematic errors, however, occur even in one's mother tongue while systematic errors occur mostly in a second language due to inaccuracy (Harmer, 2001, p. 121).

Ellis (1997, p. 73) and Selinker (1975, p. 90) suggest that "the most frequent mistakes are those of transferable, misinterpretation, [overgeneralisation], and disordering, as well as "other miscellaneous type of errors such as punctuation and irrelevant use of informal language. For the purposes of this study however, the focus was to respond to my learners' errors in punctuation, past tense verbs, spelling and vocabulary in order to reflect and improve on my own feedback practices.

2.10 Sources and Causes of Errors in Writing

Working with my Grade 8 ESL learners in this action research, I realised that their written errors were sometimes caused by specific factors; therefore, my duty was also to identify the sources of their errors in order to provide suitable feedback. Myles (2002, p.11) identifies various ways of considering an error in writing in the light of what we know about second language learning and what we know about how written work, context, and the writing process connect with each other. Some of the main sources of errors in second language learning are mother-tongue interference, developmental mistakes or overgeneralization, and fossilisation, as well as translation errors, and carelessness in classroom activities. Therefore, I discuss each of these briefly in the sections that follow.

2.10.1 Mother tongue (L1) interference

Skinner's (1957, p.102) behaviourist theory of language acquisition claims that if language is vitally a set of habits, then when we attempt to acquire new ways, the previous ones will intervene with the current ones. This is what is known as mother tongue interference. The idea of mother tongue interruption as a main contributor to errors in learners' use of a second language is related to behaviourist views of how people acquire a language (Norrish, 1983, p. 22). Harmer (2001, p. 99) argues that ESL learners already have a deep, knowledge of at least one other language, which is their mother tongue.

Where the first language and English meet, there may be confusion that then arouses mistakes in a learner's written English. Learning a language whether a mother tongue or a second language, is a matter of habit development (Norrish, 1983, p. 22). Where there is *first*

language intervene, a learner's knowledge of their first language system may intervene with the learning of the second language. Learners will tend to compare the two languages and impose the systems of their mother tongue to produce the other language that is second to them. Also, Wilkins (as cited in Nzama, 2010, p.14) learners that when "acquiring a second language, a learner attempts to transfer rules relating to their first language to the second language". This transfer is justified where the shape of the two languages is alike, in which case it is a *positive transfer* or *facilitation.* On the other hand, it may be unjustified if the two language structures are different, in which case it is a *negative transfer*, or *interference*. Darus and Ching (2009, p. 127) hold that errors in ESL writing occur because of "interlingual transfer". An interlingual transfer error is caused by the interruption of the learners' first language (L1), especially when the learners transfer rules relating to their first language, directly or indirectly, to the second language (L2).

2.10.2 Developmental mistakes or overgeneralization

Sambeny and Gonzalez (2011, p. 126) suggest that developmental mistakes are made during learners' additional language acquisition after another language has been introduced to them. These errors may take place due to the overgeneralization of language standards, when learners assume that there are similarities between the L1 and the L2. They sometimes experience these difficulties at different stages of learning another language. Another similar reason for overgeneralization according to UNAM-CES (2004, p. 55) is when learners hear certain language features and assume that other examples follow the same rule. For example, a learner may hear the following sentence: "Usually I cook early, but yesterday I cooked late", and over-generalise this to mean that for changing a verb into the past tense, the rule is to add *–ed,* even to irregular verbs like *eat* , so they may write *–eated*, which is wrong.

2.10.3 Fossilisation

Myles (2002, p. 12) indicates that another problem is fossilisation, where a learner continuously makes a certain error no matter how many times they are corrected. "Fossilised errors can be obstruction in writing because the mistakes become fixed", like negative habits, in a learner's collection, and reappear despite scaffolding and correction. According to Rutherford (as cited in Nzama, 2010, pp. 33), "fossilisation means a near failure to achieve the targeted language proficiency". It is a way that may take place in the context of second language learning as against mother tongue learning, and which can also be attributed to lack of concentration and carelessness in a learner (p. 34). However, in my opinion, attributing this phenomenon to these two factors alone appears to be limiting as it could also result, especially in and L2 situation, from exposure to incorrect linguistic resources. One good example, although not taken from the data in this study is ' discuss about' which is used in some L2 situations and which learners can acquire through imitation of other English as a second Language users. It can therefore be argued that such attribution of errors to different causes found in the literature is not always correct. This is because the causes can be interpreted in various ways.

Krashen (1985, p. 43) explains fossilisation through the input hypothesis. His "input hypothesis claims that for language learning to occur in a second language, it is required for the learner to comprehend input containing linguistic items over their current competence level". According to Krashen, "learning stops because the learner does not require any more knowledge; they write or speak enough with their current grammatical system" (p. 44) fossilisation thus being seen as a result of the absence of need. He further posits that

fossilisation can be remedied if communicative demands are raised and the performer pays attention on grammatical accuracy.

Han (2004, p. 13) defines fossilisation as "the experience of non-continuation of learning besides continuous exposure to input, enough encouragement to learn as well as chance for practice". He adds that learners develop fossilisation into permanent error patterns that cannot be changed by teaching or correction. From teaching experience, I agree with the above definition to some extent. For example, it is very difficult to change the writing patterns of some Grade 8 learners from what they have been used to writing in their junior grades as they keep on repeating the same mistakes. Although I agree with the above-mentioned statement, I however made some efforts to change these errors and to rebuild the correct language usage.

2.10.4 Direct translation

Norrish (1983, p. 27) describes that direct translation from the mother tongue into the second language can explain why learners commit mistakes. This is especially the case with "translating idiomatic expressions word-for-word from the learner's first language". It is popular for learners acquiring a second language to interpret everything in their minds from their first language into the second language prior writing the text, and they tend to do so exactly, which causes them to commit errors.

Norrish (1983) observed that one of the most usual circumstances is when a learner is instructed to write something, but is aware that he or she does not know the correct expression or structure, and may even be unaware that a correct one occurs. Moreover, as

second language learners wish to write their ideas, they will fall back on the first language system with which they are comfortable and used to. "Mistakes based on interpretation may exist during a discussion, where learners have reached the level of concentrating more on the idea than on the code they are applying to convey it" (Norrish,1983, p. 28).

2.10.5 Carelessness

According to Norrish (1983, p. 21) carelessness is often a result of lack of encouragement. In other words, learners may make errors when they are not paying full attention to what they are doing, which often occurs with learners who are not encouraged. Learners' carelessness and lack of concentration cause errors when they are writing (Darus & Ching, 2009). In most cases, they do not care and do not even bother to ensure that, for example, they end their sentences with a full stop. Therefore, one way of minimizing the number of careless errors in written work is not only to get learners motivated, but also to train them to correct their own written work. "They can have their work corrected by classmates as well as checking their classmates' work could be another approach to this kind of learning to write in English as a Second Language" (Darus & Ching, 2009, p. 137). However, it could also be that what the literature is interpreting as carelessness is something else. For instance, it could be a result of learners' lack of understanding of the writing process. In other words, it could be that they did not understand how writers behave when crafting their texts, i.e. they did not know that it was part of their responsibility as writers to ensure that their writing conformed to established conventions. But since there was no way built into this study for me to find out caused all I can do is speculate. In any case, this study provides evidence that even if written errors are caused by whatever, an intervention such as teacher feedback can be very effective for both

learners and teacher. This is manifested by improvements that ensued the provision of feedback, although it was certainly coupled with other factors.

To summarise, Norrish (1983, p. 22) explains that mother tongue interference occurs when a learner's knowledge of their first language system may intervene in the acquisition of the second language. Thus, learners opt to compare the two languages and impose the systems of their first language to produce the second language. The literature reviewed reveals that written errors may occur due to the overgeneralization of language rules when learners assume there are similarities between their first and second language (Sambeny & Gonzalez, 2011, p. 126). With fossilisation, learners repeatedly make particular mistakes no matter how often they are corrected (Myles, 2002, p. 12). In direct translation, it is popular for learners learning a second language to translate everything they know from their first language into the second language. With regard to carelessness, the literature suggests that learners may make errors when they are not focusing to what they are doing, which often takes place within learners who are not encouraged. Thus, my main aim in giving feedback to my learners was to motivate and encourage them by showing them how they could overcome their writing weaknesses; furthermore, I motivated myself not to give up on providing feedback since it contributed to my professional development.

2.11 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, the main points which I discussed included an overview of feedback in learning theory, as well as the definition and advantages of feedback in ESL writing. The review also discussed the effect of corrective feedback and error correction, coded feedback as indirect feedback, and the role of the teacher in providing feedback on learner writing. I

also discussed different feedback strategies such as multiple-draft revisions, indirect feedback, direct feedback, focused corrective feedback, error correction, and written feedback with explicit corrective comments. Lastly, this chapter explored possible types and causes of errors in ESL writing.

The literature I reviewed strongly suggests that written feedback plays a major role as a vital aspect in improving learners' errors and enhancing feedback practices. Using written feedback not only allows me to assess my learners' work, but also helps me improve on my ability to provide relevant and suitable feedback. In this study, I provided feedback because I wanted to influence my learners' language use in the future as well as to reflect on my professional growth. Feedback was thus an important part of this learning process. In this chapter, I also reviewed literature focusing on second language learners' errors and on views of how best I could treat such errors. This literature informed planning and decision-making for the action research design and implementation of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe and explain the research design of this study and the characteristics of the research tradition in which the study took place. The chapter further discusses how I used my ESL Grade 8 learners as research participants, the research site being the school where I taught these learners. In this chapter, I also discuss how I used my learners' essay scripts as instruments, and I highlight some procedures I applied to collect my data, such as scripts of my learners' written essays. I briefly discuss how I approached the analysis of the data, and reflect also on ethical issues, issues of validity and some of the limitations of this study. The main aim of this action research was to explore the role of corrective feedback in helping my Grade 8 learners to improve the accuracy of their written English skills and to reflect on my feedback practices. Therefore, to find out what errors my learners committed, why they committed those errors, and how many errors per category each learner committed, as well as how I could help them improve, I used both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

3.2 Research Site and Sampling

This study was carried out at a senior secondary school in Swakopmund, in Namibia's Erongo region, where I taught English. The school consisted of 1040 learners, all of whom had been taught English as a second language (ESL) since Grade 1. Participants in this study

came from one of five Grade 8 classes of 40 learners each, taught by me. With qualitative data collection, “the main goal of sampling is to find individuals who can provide rich and varied insights into the phenomenon under investigation so as to maximise what can be gleaned” (Denscombe, 2007, p. 126). Denscombe emphasises that probability sampling in particular, as the name suggests, is based on “the notion that the people or matters in a sample are selected because the researcher has some idea of the probability that these will offer a cross-sectional representation of people or matters of the whole group being researched” (Denscombe, 2007, p. 13).

Even though I carried out the intervention for the class as a whole, I chose only six learners’ scripts which had more writing difficulties to work on. As Cohen et al. (2000, p. 102) explains, “a ‘sample’ is a small piece of a population chosen by a researcher for observation and assessing, while ‘sampling’ is the process a researcher applies to collect people or things to observe”. The sample I used in this action research study did not represent the wider population of the Erongo region; therefore, it is not possible to make claims about the generalizability of my findings to the whole region.

I chose six learners based on their educational background and academic performance. Three learners had been transferred from Grade 7 to Grade 8, and the other three had repeated Grade 8, while all six learners had failed English as a subject. I therefore chose both the school and the class so that I would be able to continuously monitor how my feedback improved learners’ writing, and at the same time, improve my professional development. The six learners I chose were the ones who had the most errors in their written work and scored lowest on that first written task (essay). I chose them because it seemed to me that they

would provide me with the greatest possibilities for improvement in response to my proposed action research cycles. See Appendices E-J for photocopies of their essay scripts.

3.3 Research Goals and Questions

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, this action research study was designed to explore the role of corrective feedback in helping my Grade 8 learners improve the accuracy of their written English skills. To help me focus on these research goals, I developed the following research questions:

(a) What kind of language errors do my grade 8 learners make in their writing? How can I categorize these errors linguistically? Are they errors, mistakes or lapses?

(b) How do learners respond to my feedback?

(c) What feedback strategies work best to help my learners deal with their errors, mistakes or lapses?

3.4 Case Study

Denscombe (2007) posits that "case studies generally base on one or a few occasions of a specific event with a vision to providing an insight account of events, relationships, experiences taking place in that specific occasion" (p. 35). In the same line, Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) also see a case study as "a suitable research approach that can be used to test existing theory or practices in an everyday environment" (p. 76). This qualitative case study was about exploring the role of corrective feedback in helping my Grade 8 learners improve the accuracy of their written English. Given the aforesaid characteristics of a case study, I felt that it was the most suitable fit to study my Grade 8 learners' errors in writing and explore how to assist them in correcting those errors, as well as improving my feedback practices.

3.5 Action Research

This action research was aimed at exploring the role of corrective feedback in helping my Grade 8 learners improve the accuracy of their written English skills. An advantage of action research is that it has professional self-development benefits for the practitioner (Denscombe, 2007, p. 131). Denscombe (2007) gives four features of action research:

- *It is practical:* action research is aimed at working with real-world challenges and issues, basically in work and an entity's set-ups.
- *It changes*: Action research is regarded as a process of working with practical challenges and as a means of finding out more about an event; change is considered as an important part of study.
- It is a *cyclical process*: Study includes a feedback cycle in which initial findings produce opportunities for change which are then applied and examined as a preparation to continue exploration.
- *It involves active participation*: Practitioners are integral to the research process. Their involvement is thus energetic, not meek

(Denscombe, 2007, p. 123).

According to McNiff (2002), action research draws together action and reflection in the search for practical solutions, together with ways of making a practice more effective. Thus, action research is often referred to as practitioner-based research because it is done by researchers whose main purpose is the improvement of professional growth. McNiff (2002) holds that "action research was mainly developed by academics working in teacher education". It provides researchers with a practical way of exploring challenges in their work and attempting to solve them. Action research includes a researcher's believing in their work

so as to bring about improvement in their own practice by examining existing practice and recognizing components that require adjustment. This is why McNiff defines it as "*self-reflective practice"* (2002). In addition, McNiff argues that action research "leads to spirals of action". To carry out this research, I followed the steps below in my own "spiral of action":

(a) Identification of problem area

(b) Collection and organization of data

(c) Interpretation of data

(d) Action based on interpretation of data

(e) Reflection

(McNiff, pp. 21-23).

Koshy (2005) observes that action research "involves a coil of self-reflective process". To reflect on my practice of providing feedback, I applied the following steps:

(a) Planning a change

(b) Acting and observing the process and consequences of the change

(c) Reflecting on these processes and consequences, and then re-planning

(d) Acting and observing and,

(e) Reflecting (Koshy, 2005, p. 4).

Koshy (2005, p. 5) suggests that "the procedures are not always as clean as the spiral of self-contained cycles of planning, acting and observing, and reflecting suggests"; rather, "the levels co-occur and initial plans quickly become outdated in the light of a learning practice".

Koshy (2005, p. 8) describes action research as “an investigation which is conducted in order to understand, to assess and then to change, in order to improve educational practice”. Koshy sustains that “action research integrates a process with a research procedure; it is action controlled by investigation, a personal attempt at understanding while involved in an act of enhancement and change” (Koshy 2005, p. 8). Therefore, by conducting this action research, I gained insights into specific aspects of my learners’ writing skills, explored effective ways of providing appropriate feedback to correct my learners’ errors, and improved my ways of providing feedback.

In line with other authors, Dornyei (2011, p. 191) defines action research as “a generic term for a family of related methods that share some important common principles”. The most important tenet concerns the close link between research and teaching, as well as between the researcher and the teacher. Therefore, this action research was conducted by me as a teacher-researcher for gaining a better understanding of my educational environment and improving the effectiveness of my feedback through intervention. To intervene, I employed the four cyclical processes of action research, namely, planning the lessons, acting by marking and providing feedback on my learners’ writing, observing my learners’ progress and improvement in writing, and then reflecting on my learners’ writing as well as my own teaching and feedback practices.

3.6 Mixed Methods

In this study, a mixed method design was deemed appropriate since it is a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. I applied a quantitative approach in order to focus on the number of written errors committed by my learners in their essay drafts. I also applied a

qualitative approach in order to uncover the complexities of errors and to understand why my learners made such errors in writing and how I could provide suitable feedback to help them correct those errors, as well as to reflect on my feedback practices and professional growth.

In mixed approach the researcher tends to base knowledge claims on results-oriented and problem encountered. It uses techniques of interrogation that involve gathering information to best understand research problems. The data collection also "involves gathering both numeric information such as instruments and text information based on interventions so that the last database incorporates both quantitative and qualitative ideas" (Creswell, 2003, p. 19).

According to Gay, Mills and Airasian (2009, p. 462), "mixed methods research designs combine qualitative and quantitative methods by integrate both qualitative and quantitative data in one research". I identified and analysed various writing errors made by my Grade 8 learners in their essay drafts. This gave me an in-depth understanding of the errors made by my learners in their writing and guided me in my decisions about the sorts of feedback that might work best for these learners.

3.6.1 Qualitative method

According to Creswell (2003, p. 18), "a qualitative approach is one in which the researcher often makes knowledge claims based primarily on the many meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and eventually structured with the intent of enhancing a feeling. I collected open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data. I was interested in understanding what errors my learners committed, why they

committed those errors and how I could provide appropriate feedback to help them improve on correcting those errors.

Qualitative approaches focus on a subjective understanding of phenomena rather than on measurable entities. Denscombe (2007, p. 286) points out that "qualitative data takes the code of oral and written words, as well as visual images that are seen or made". Therefore, written scripts produced by my Grade 8 learners provided the written words analysed by me in this study. Two features that all qualitative approaches have in common are that they focus on events that occur in real-life situation", and they study these vents in all their difficulty (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p.135). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) claim that in order to understand the world under investigation, "people's words, actions and products are used by qualitative researchers" (p. 46). Thus, this study's main aim was to reflect carefully on my feedback on learners' written scripts as a means of helping them improve the quality of their English essay writing skills.

3.6.2 Quantitative method

According to Creswell (2003, p. 18) "a quantitative method is whereby the researcher firstly applies for improving experience". The investigator implements methods of asking such as experiments and surveys, and gathering information on fixed tools that produce analytical information. In addition, the researcher is interested in magnitude (how much), frequency (how often), variation (spread of scores) and central tendency (average score).

In this study, I used a quantitative approach to determine both the type and number of my learners' common errors in their written essays. The appropriate quantitative type for my

research was nominal data because I quantified or counted and categorised learners' errors as discussed by Denscombe (2007, p. 255). In my study I quantified and categorised my learners' written errors such as punctuations, past tense verbs, spelling and vocabulary. To determine the most suitable type of feedback to provide on each error in order for my learners to improve their writing accuracy, I first read and re-read the essays to identify the errors made. I then counted and recorded all the errors I identified per category. I did this for the six learners I had selected.

3.7 Research Process

Drawing on what I learned from the professional literature on assessment and the key role that feedback plays in helping learners improve their writing, I designed an action research intervention consisting of a number of cycles. Denscombe (2007, p. 123) claims that "action research includes a feedback coil in which basic results generate opportunities for development which are then applied and assessed as a preparation to more observation". I started by identifying the problem, namely, my Grade 8 learners' written errors. I acted by instructing my learners to write the first draft of their essay which they revised three times. I intervened by marking the essay drafts in order to identify learners' writing errors and, I provided written feedback to help my learners redress their errors. I finally reflected on my feedback strategies with the expectation of improvement in my professional and practical insight. I also reflected on the feedback I provided in order to determine improvement of accuracy in my learners' written English. In this design, I collected data during the intervention and then integrated the information in the interpretation of findings in the overall results as discussed by Creswell (2003, p. 16).

For the purpose of collecting data for my study using learners' scripts, I applied the spiral of self-reflection, as proposed by Koshy (2005, p. 4). I listed Koshy's strategies in section 3.5, on page 52. To plan a change in my learners' writing, I taught them what a narrative essay is and how it should be written. I also taught them the structure and language features of narrative text, and showed them the rules and steps of writing a narrative essay, as well as possible types of errors in a written essay. To act and observe the process and consequences of the change in my learners' writing, I taught them how to write a narrative essay.

I then asked them to write a narrative essay about a frightening experience. I used this essay to identify and analyse their common language errors, as well as to find out what they had learned about writing a narrative essay. For easier error identification, I circled and coded the punctuation errors. I also underlined and coded the past tense verbs, spelling, and vocabulary errors. To help my learners reflect on the processes of writing an essay and responding to it through re-planning, I discussed with them the codes or symbols I used to note the errors I had identified, and subsequently worked with them to ensure that they understood these codes, thereby making it easier for them to identify and recognise their errors as they revised the essay drafts one by one.

Through acting and observing, I guided my learners to work on their first draft to improve on what they had written through self-editing and peer-editing. With their peers, learners interpreted the errors I had circled, underlined and coded in their first draft. The peer feedback guided my learners in the revision of their first draft to write the second draft, in which I also circled, underlined and coded committed errors. They repeated this strategy in correcting their second draft and writing the third draft in which I provided direct feedback by correcting errors they committed. For improvement and accuracy, as the teacher-

researcher, I provided explicit direct feedback on the third draft. Learners then copied the necessary corrections and wrote their fourth or final draft. I then observed that as a result of different forms of feedback I had provided, there was progression and improvement in correcting errors committed in the final draft. In addition, I also observed improvement in my ways of providing feedback.

Through "planning, acting, observation and reflection based on the four cyclical processes of action research" as proposed by Denscombe (2007, p. 131), my learners learned how to apply the principles of writing a narrative essay. They learned when and how to deal with written errors, and they also learned how to incorporate my feedback in their revision of their essay drafts. In addition, I learned how to provide the most effective feedback strategies in order to improve my learners' writing accuracy.

3.8 Data Collection

Since this was a mixed methods action research study, I collected my data through qualitative and quantitative approaches. The following subsections describe how and why I selected the instruments I used.

3.8.1 Instruments (primary data)

Instruments are the means I used to collect data. These included my learners' essay scripts which I marked, and errors committed by my learners which I identified during and after intervention, and which I categorised and analysed. Since this is a qualitative study, I also considered my teaching and intervention (comments on learners' essay drafts) as instruments.

3.8.2 Documents (secondary data)

According to Merriam (2001), documents include "concrete materials relevant to the research in action" (p. 112). Denscombe (2007, p. 227) holds that "documents can be considered as written sources of information in their own correct, though there are other kinds of documents for study which occur in the way of solid materials". Documents were a valuable source of data in this research and provided useful background and contextual information for the study (Koshy, 2005). Therefore, I restricted my study to the former, namely, written forms of documents such as the learners' essay scripts.

3.8.3 Learners' written scripts

As a first document source in my study, with the permission of the school authority, I made copies of scripts of learners' written essays which I later used for data analysis. These documents provided me with information in understanding my Grade 8 ESL learners' written errors and a practical means to intervene and provide corrective feedback to help them improve on correcting their written errors.

3.9 Data Analysis

In qualitative research, intensive data collection takes place over an extended period. As noted earlier, data for this action research came from my Grade 8 learners' essay scripts and my intervention (comments on learners' essay drafts). I analysed the data through a mixed method approach, as stated earlier. Since a quantitative approach focuses primarily on numbers, I applied this approach for the identification, categorisation and quantification of

my learners' written errors. For the in-depth analysis of writing errors, I applied a qualitative approach because it uncovered complexities and helped me to understand why my learners made errors in writing and how I could provide suitable feedback to help them improve on correcting those errors. It further allowed me to reflect on my feedback practices as well as my professional growth. The errors I identified and analysed, as well as my comments, are presented in tables and figures in Chapter 4.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of Rhodes University School of Education approved this action research. To take research ethics into consideration, I secured permission to conduct the study at a Namibian government school from the Regional Director and the school principal, authorised by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education in Namibia, before the actual research commenced (see Appendix C & D). I achieved this by writing letters to the Regional Director and school principal (see Appendix A & B), and responses were obtained from both parties (See Appendix C & D). In both letters I explained the purpose and nature of my study and the methods I would use to collect data, as well as the benefits that research participants would gain from this study.

Every study has ethical issues. This is perhaps in connection with action research, where a researcher is engaged in attempting to enhance his or her skills by including others who, by virtue of their learner status, occupy a less powerful position relative to the researcher (their teacher) (McNiff, 1996, p. 34). As previously noted, not only was this study conducted in the school where I taught, but the participants were my English Second Language learners.

McNiff (1996) notes that ethical issues include negotiating access, promising confidentiality and the right of withdrawal from the research, as well as keeping good faith and ensuring that information is secure (p. 35). O'Leary (2005) records that "preservation of confidentiality may include keeping the information safe, getting permission for subsequent use of data, publication of research results in a manner that does not allow for ready recognition of subjects, and eventual destruction of unprocessed information" (p. 54). Throughout the time I interacted with the research participants (my learners); I did my best to treat them with respect, and to ensure that I did not offend them in any way.

3.11 Anonymity and Confidentiality

As noted earlier, in the letters I wrote to the Director of Education and to the school principal, I gave assurances that participation in the research would be on an entirely voluntary basis, and that confidentiality and privacy would be respected and protected. I also gave the assurance that anonymity would be respected, and that the school's name and learners' names would not be revealed in the final document.

McMillan and Schumacher (2001, p. 421) observe that "qualitative researchers have a dual responsibility in terms of assuring the confidentiality and protection of privacy". This implies that information derived from research participants should not reveal their identity. To put it simply, pseudonyms for the research site as well as research participants are recommended in qualitative research. In my study, therefore, I used pseudonyms to replace the names on the learners' photocopied essay scripts, and I also used general terms such as director, principal, Grade 8 learners, Learner 1, Learner 2, Learner 3, Learner 4, Learner 5 and Learner 6. For the sake of confidentiality, the school's name and learners' real names as well as their

identities were kept completely confidential at all times and in all academic writing concerning my study. In addition, "the learners' individual privacy was kept away in all published and written data findings from this research" (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smith, 2004, p.73).

3.12 Reliability and validity of the Study

Reliability refers to "the level of regularity of information gathered by one tool on events when it should provide the same findings" (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000, p. 126). It is concerned with the stability of measures. Denscombe (2007, p. 296) echoes this description of reliability, arguing that it is the extent to which, as a research instrument, it is neutral in its effect and consistent across multiple occasions of its use.

The validity of an instrument is reflected by the degree to which it evaluates what it proposes to evaluate. Johnstone and Christensen (2000, p.106) define validity as "a judgment of the appropriateness of interpretations and actions based on findings". Similarly, Denscombe (2007, p. 296) refers to it as "the correctness and exactness of information, and its relevance in terms of the research question being explored". McMillan and Schumacher (2001, p. 407) see "validity as the level to which the explanation of an event corresponds with the real life situations and further suggest that qualitative researchers use multiple strategies to enhance validity". The challenge here is the extent to which qualitative researchers can demonstrate that their data are accurate and appropriate. Davies (2007) defines "validity as a concept which base on the question of whether the findings of your analysis are correctly represent of the reality that you insist them to be" (p. 243). Validity, according to this study, has to do

with the probability and appropriateness of the information I have presented, or in other words, the question of whether the data I presented are true or false.

This study focused on corrective feedback in helping my Grade 8 learners to improve on correcting their writing errors and allowing me to reflect on my feedback strategies. I built the following strategy into my study to ensure validity and reliability. Firstly, I used an essay written as part of the continuous assessment of my Grade 8 learners as a research instrument, with the expectation that they would try their best in the assessment since they would be motivated to supplement their end-of-year marks to pass and be promoted to the next grade. The Grade 8 final examination for ESL continuous writing requires the same essay writing skills, although the topics for essays might differ. This was thus the strategy I used to ensure that my study was reliable. I marked three drafts of the essay, and after each marking, I identified, recorded and analysed the errors. This again added value in the sense that marking each draft showed how my comments and feedback helped my learners to improve on correcting their errors. I put this procedure in place to ensure high levels of validity and reliability in my research results.

3.13 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of my study were that, firstly, the number of research participants, being only six learners, could not represent the exact picture of all mistakes and errors which Grade 8 ESL learners commit at that particular secondary school and in the Erongo region in general. Secondly, it also could not reveal whether the feedback I gave was helping or not helping learners to improve on correcting their writing errors in the entire school and the Erongo region in general. Thirdly, as an English Second Language teacher-researcher, it was not

always easy for me to be objective about my practices. The other limitations and challenges I experienced were the fact that being a second language (L2) user myself, it would not always be easy for me to identify my learners' errors, or to know how best to help them correct their errors. Sometimes I did not know the correct spelling of particular words; thus, there might be a few grammatical errors in my comments on learners' writings.

The nature of action research requires the researcher to undertake self-reflective enquiry in order to improve his or her practices. This means that the reflection and findings from this research is researcher-specific and not generalised. However, I hope that the data I collected provided answers to the research questions as I intended.

3.14 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter focused on the research methodology I chose for my study. I discussed the rationale for the choice of my research methodology and the selection of participants. I also presented different aspects regarding the methods and instruments I used to collect data, and how I dealt with reliability and validity issues. The findings are presented in the next chapter of data presentation and analysis.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the data collected from a selection of six Grade 8 learners from a secondary school in Swakopmund, in the Erongo Education Region in Namibia. In order to protect learners' identity, actual names were not used; instead, I used labels to identify them as participants of the study, namely, Learners 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. This chapter also shows how I highlighted the types of feedback I provided to improve my learners' correction of errors in their essay writing, and evidence of how the learners' writing improved after each feedback session.

Data analysis for this study was on-going right from the initial stages of the research process. To begin with, so as to be able to identify my learners' written errors, I asked them to write an essay about a frightening moment they had experienced. I subsequently marked the first draft with comments on the specific errors that they had made. I then gave my learners an opportunity to write a second draft of the essay, this time incorporating feedback and/or corrections I had provided in their first draft. We repeated this process to produce the third and final drafts of the essay.

4.2 Overview of Lessons Taught

In this section, I tabulate the lessons I taught in preparation for the essay writing task.

Table 2

Lessons for Essay Writing Preparation

Date of Lesson	Topic	Lesson Objectives
21-22 January 2013	Marking codes	By the end of the process learners should be familiar with the marking codes.
23-24 January 2013	Punctuation marks	By the end of the lesson, learners should be able to use basic punctuation marks and capitalisation effectively and correctly.
25 January 2013	Spelling	By the end of the lesson, learners should be able to demonstrate reasonable accuracy in spelling.
28-29 January 2013	Past tense	By the end of the lesson, learners should be able to use the grammatical structures of past tense verbs in writing.
30 January 2013	Vocabulary	By the end of the lesson, learners should be able to use appropriate vocabulary effectively in different contexts and situations.
31 January 2013	Essay structure	By the end of the lesson, learners should be able to write different types of essays (e.g. narrative) on a range of situations using well-structured sentences.

The lesson objectives in Table 2 were adapted directly from the English Second Language Syllabus for Grades 8-10 (Ministry of Education, Namibia, 2007, p. 13-16).

4.3 Identified Errors: Different ways in which Errors Manifested in Learners' Written Essays

In this section, I highlight the types of errors that learners made in their essay writing, namely, punctuation, past tense verbs, spelling and vocabulary errors. A discussion of these errors is found in the literature review. In Table 2 I indicated that the first thing that I needed to do was to introduce the learners to the marking codes that I was going to use to draw their attention to errors in their written essays. I therefore gave each of them a printed list of codes and asked them to paste these on the first page of their English continuous writing books. I then explained to them the meaning of each code, and how and where they will appear in their written essays. I emphasised that the code next or on top of the word tells that a specific word/phrase/sentence needs to be corrected based on the code given.

4.3.1 Punctuation errors manifested in each learner's four essay drafts

Below is a summary of punctuation errors made by my learners in each of the four drafts of their essays. Table 3 represents the total number of punctuation errors in all four essay drafts for each learner.

Table 3: *Summary of Punctuation Errors Made by Each Learner In All Four Essay Drafts*

Learner	Draft 1	Draft 2	Draft 3	Draft 4
L1	7	1	1	2
L2	4	2	1	1
L3	13	7	3	0
L4	3	0	0	0
L5	10	3	0	0
L6	7	5	n/a	n/a

Figure 5, which comes later on page 78 provides a visual image of this table and clearly demonstrates that the number of errors diminished with each draft. Looking at Table 3, we see that after each time I provided feedback, the number of punctuation errors made by each learner was considerably reduced, with Learners 4 and 5 making no punctuation errors by the third and fourth draft, and Learners 1, 2, and 3 making only a few. Learner 6 did not complete the third and fourth drafts.

4.3.1.1 Punctuation errors identified in learners' essay draft 1

Firstly, most of my learners used lower case instead of upper case letter at the beginning of all their sentences and when writing proper nouns, and they also omitted the full-stop in some sentences. For example, see Figure 1.

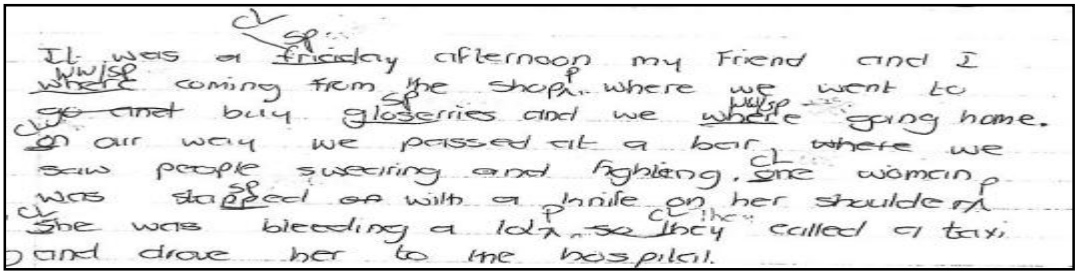


Figure 1. Learner 3, Draft 1

Figure 1 shows how in the first draft, Learner 3 wrote “friaday” (1, line 1) instead of *Friday,* and started the noun 'Friday' with a lower case letter ‘F’. Other punctuation errors the same learner committed were “on our way we passed at a bar” (line 4) instead of *On our way, we passed at a bar.* In line 5, she wrote “one woman was stapped...” instead of *One woman was stabbed...* In both cases, she started the two sentences with a lower case letter ‘O’. In draft 1, Learner 6 wrote “when I was walking... (line 4) instead of *When I was walking...* Learner 6 also started the same sentence with a lower case letter ‘w’ (See Appendix O).

Secondly, Learners 1, 2, and 3 ended most of their sentences without full-stops. For example see Figure 2.

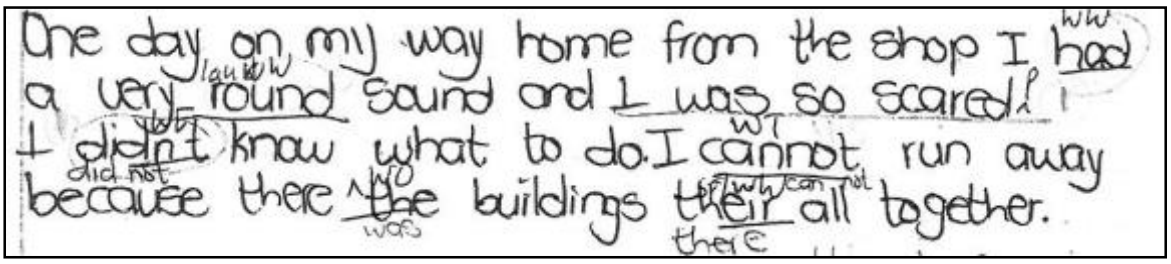


Figure 2. Learner 1, Draft 1

As shown in Figure 2, Learner 1 wrote, “I was so scared”, without a full-stop (1, line 2). Learner 2 wrote, “… grab my cellphone and ran away”, also without a full-stop (1, line 6, see Appendix G), as did Learner 3 in Figure 1. Learner 3 ended some sentences without a full-stop; for example in line 6 she wrote *“*...with a knife on her shoulder” instead of ...*with a knife on her shoulder.*, while in line 7 she wrote *“*she was bleeding a lot” instead of *She was bleeding a lot.*

Learner 6 ended questions without question marks or by using exclamation marks, as in: "…what are you doing" and "what…!", rather than *What are you doing?* and *What?* (1, lines 6 & 9 see Appendix O). Learners thus made incorrect use of question marks and capitalisation in the first drafts of their essays (see Appendices E-J). The omission of full stops, question marks, quotation marks, and apostrophes was also common in most of the first drafts. Specifically, Learners 1 and 5 rarely used apostrophes as required to show possession and for word contractions. For example, Learner 1 wrote "the womans house", and Learner 5 wrote "the mans hand" instead of *the woman's house* and *the man's hand*, respectively. In Figure 2, in line 3, Learner 1 spelled the word *didn't* incorrectly as "didnt", while Learner 5 spelled it as "dident" (Appendices E & I).

Figure 3 is taken from Learner 3's first draft to illustrate misused punctuation. Apart from other errors in this draft, most sentences begin with lower case instead of upper case letters, and there are no other punctuation marks used except for a full-stop at the end of each of the last three sentences. Figure 4 illustrates comments that I made on this draft (see Appendix G).

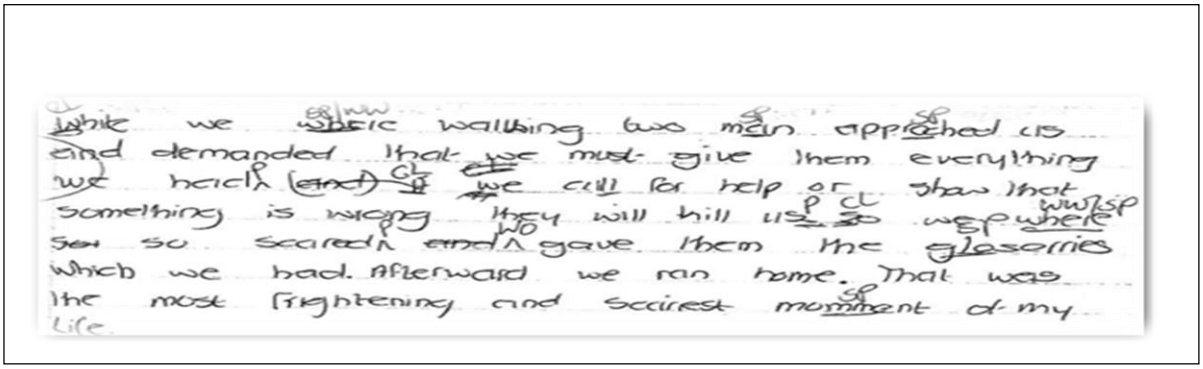


Figure 3. Learner 3 Draft 1

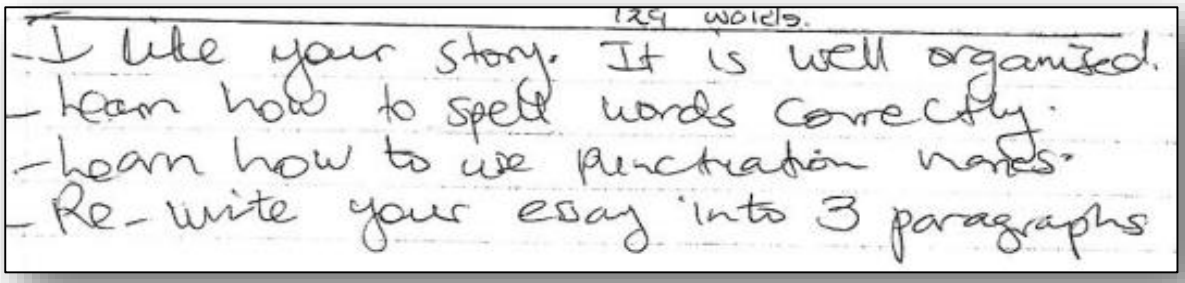


Figure 4. Teacher's Comments on Learner 3, Draft 1

Marking my learners' first draft helped me understand their punctuation errors much better. I realised that most learners did not know how to use most punctuation marks other than a full-stop at the end of some sentences. They also did not observe the rules for using capital letters at the beginning of sentences and proper nouns. To help them notice their errors, I provided indirect feedback by circling and coding wherever a punctuation mark was left out, as well as letters which were supposed to be written in upper case.

4.3.1.2 Punctuation errors identified in learners' essay draft 2

In the second draft, Learners 3 and 6 continued to begin sentences and write proper nouns with lower case instead of upper case letters, despite comments I gave in the feedback on the first version. For example, Learner 3 wrote "friday" instead of *Friday* (line 1), and Learner 6 began some sentences with lower case, e.g. "when I past…" and "then I said…"instead of *When I passed…* and, *Then I said…* (2, lines 1 & 4). In some cases, learners still did not use commas between sentences, even though I commented on this in the first draft of the essay (Learners 3 & 6, see Appendices G & J).

Indirect feedback was provided in both draft 1 and draft 2. The reason for providing indirect feedback in the first draft was to leave it up to the learners to figure out what was wrong with their writing. I felt that indirect feedback was most suitable because it helped my learners correct their mistakes and learn from them. There was a huge improvement on the second draft as far as punctuation marks usage was concerned. However, there were still a few errors in this draft which forced me to repeat the indirect feedback strategy for draft 3.

4.3.1.3 Punctuation errors identified in learners' essay draft 3

In draft 3, Learner 3 began some sentences with a lower case letter. For example, she wrote "we were so scared" and "they said we must not tell anyone", instead of *We were so scared,* and, *They said we must not tell anyone* (3, lines 1 & 2; see Appendix G).

As indicated in Table 3 on page 67, it is clear that the number of punctuation errors decreased considerably in the third draft. This proved to me that the indirect feedback I provided helped my learners improve on their written accuracy. For perfection and correction, I then decided to provide direct feedback by providing the omitted punctuation marks and capital letters which my learners were supposed to use, especially at the beginning of sentences and proper nouns. This enabled my learners to write their fourth draft accurately. It also helped me to reflect and improve on my feedback practices.

4.3.1.4 Punctuation errors identified in learners' essay draft 4

In the fourth draft, most learners did not commit spelling, past tense verb and vocabulary errors, except for Learner 1 who committed two punctuation errors and Learner 2 who committed the same punctuation error twice (see Appendix F & H).

As shown in Table 3, it is clear that the number of punctuation errors decreased significantly in the fourth draft. This also indicated to me that the direct feedback I provided helped my learners improve on their written accuracy and perfection. This also helped me to better understand my strategies of providing indirect and direct feedback.

4.3.1.5 Summary of Punctuation Errors committed by all learners

In Figure 5, the scores from Learner 1 up to Learner 6 are highlighted with the most punctuation errors to the least number of same errors per draft.

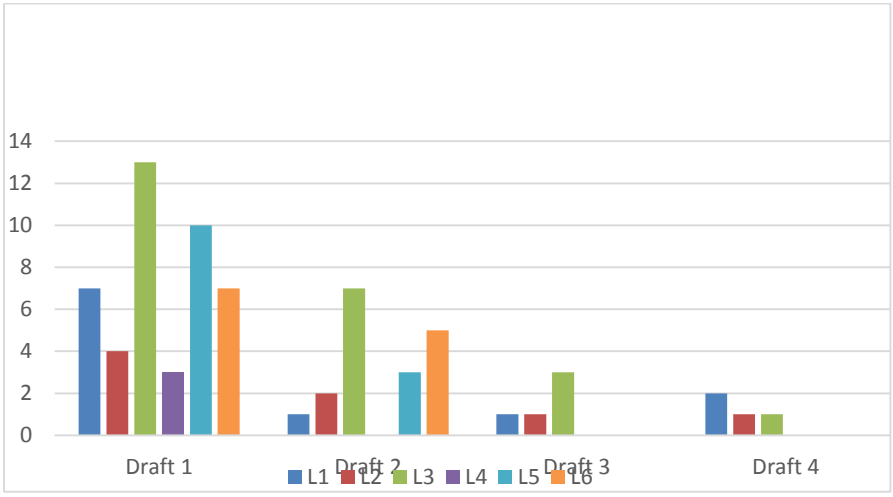


Figure 5. Summary of Punctuation Errors made by Each Learner in All Four Essay Drafts

Figure 5 indicates the four drafts of Learner 1 up to Learner 5; Learner 6 did not write the third and fourth drafts. In the first draft, Learner 3 committed the most punctuation errors in all of the first three drafts, followed by Learners 1, 5 and 6, while Learner 4 committed no punctuation errors in the second, third and fourth drafts. The graph shows a decrease in punctuation errors, which also reveals how the feedback I provided helped my learners improve in punctuation usage in their writing. On the other hand, the results indicate that even if I provided correction as direct feedback, Learners 1, 2 and 3 still found it difficult to copy corrections correctly when writing the final draft, a feature which the literature refers to as carelessness.

4.3.2 Spelling Errors manifested in each learner's four essay drafts

Table 4 shows a summary of spelling errors made by my learners in each of the four drafts of their essays.

Table 4: *Summary of Spelling Errors Made by Each Learner in All Four Essay Drafts*

Learner	Draft 1	Draft 2	Draft 3	Draft 4
L1	3	0	2	0
L2	2	0	1	0
L3	6	4	2	0
L4	3	2	1	0
L5	23	9	12	1
L6	6	3	n/a	n/a

Figure 9, which comes later (page 84) provides a visual image of this table and clearly demonstrates that the number of errors diminished with each draft. Table 4 shows that Learner 5, who committed one error, had committed the highest number of spelling errors in the first and third drafts, while Learner 6 did not complete the third and fourth draft. Almost all learners made no spelling errors in their fourth drafts. Specific spelling errors made by learners can be found in Appendices E-J.

4.3.2.1 Spelling errors identified in learners' essay draft 1

In their first draft, Learners 3, 5, and 6 misspelled most words. For example, Learner 1 misspelled the word *stopped* as "stoped" (1, line 2), and in Figure 1, line 6, Learner 3 wrote "stapped" instead of *stabbed*, while in Figure 3, line 7, the same learner wrote "momment" instead of *moment*. In addition, Learner 4 wrote "promblem" instead of *problem* (1), and Learner 6 misspelled the word *dagga* as "daga" (1, line 6). See Appendices E, G, H & J).

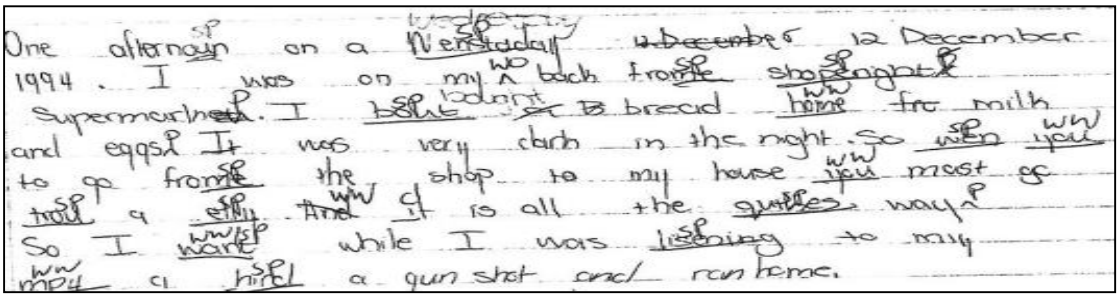


Figure 6. Learner 5, Draft 1

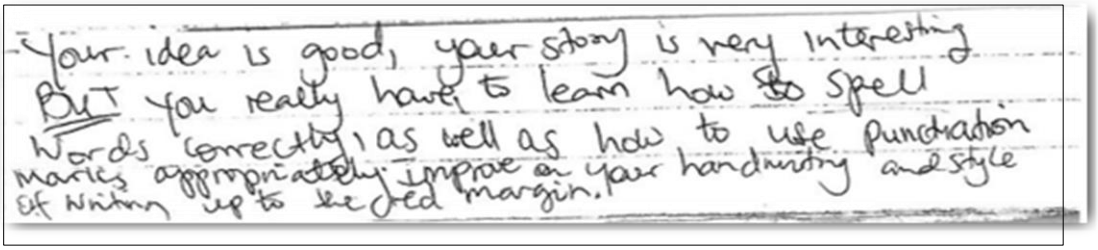


Figure 7. Teacher's Comments on Learner 5, Draft 1

Learner 5's first draft, as shown in Figure 6, contained various spelling errors, some of which were spelled phonetically, such as "aftrnoun" (line 1), "bout" (line 3), "wen" (line 4), and "mast" (line 5) instead of *afternoon*, *bought*, *when*, and *must*. Figure 6 shows these and other spelling errors in Learner 5's first essay draft, and Figure 7 indicates comments I made putting emphasis on spelling words correctly.

To help my learners improve on their first draft, I provided indirect feedback by underlining and coding the errors, which left it up to the learners to think deeply and realise what was wrong with those words and how they could correct them. Applying these strategies helped me understand the strategies much better because I wanted to prove to myself whether underlining and coding were appropriate in helping my learners improve their written accuracy.

4.3.2.2 Spelling errors identified in learners' essay draft 2

In the second draft, Learners 3, 4, and 5 still did not spell some words correctly. Learner 3, as shown in Figure 8, wrote "gloserries" instead of *groceries* (1, line 5), while Learner 4 wrote "experiend" instead of *experienced* (1, line 2), and Learner 5 wrote "stope" and "cout" for *stop* and *caught* (3, line 5; see Appendices H-I).

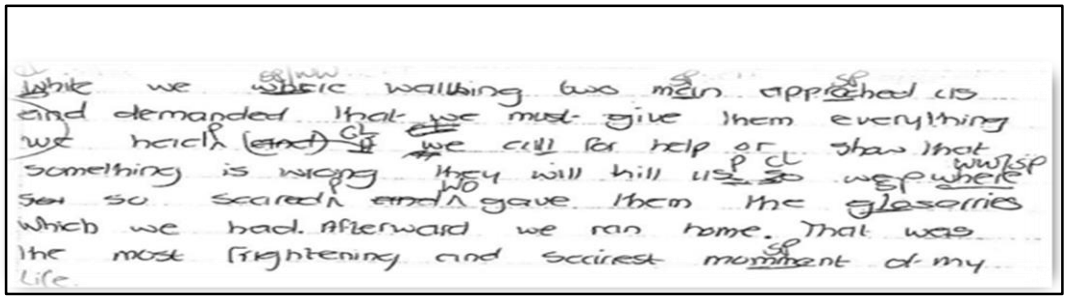


Figure 8. Learner 3, Draft 1

Looking at Table 4 on page 74, it is clear that the indirect feedback I provided helped my learners improve on their second draft. In addition, I proved to myself that underlining and coding were the best strategies in helping my learners improve on correcting spelling errors in writing.

4.3.2.3 Spelling errors identified in learners' essay draft 3

In draft 3, Learners 1, 3, 4, and 5 still misspelled some words. For example, Learner 1 misspelled the word *loud* as "lound" (3, line 2), and Learner 3 misspelled the word *shoulder* as "sholder" (1, line 5). Learner 4 wrote, "sentens" rather than *sentenced* (line 2 of the last paragraph), while Learner 5 wrote "tring" and "throu" for the words *trying* and *through* (3, lines 1 & 5). See Appendices E, G, H & I). While marking the second draft, I realised that some learners found it difficult to correct some of the words they had misspelled. I then decided to repeat the indirect feedback in their second draft by underlining and coding those few misspelled words. I applied those strategies in order to help my learners improve on their third draft. However, I found that despite the indirect feedback I repeated in the second draft, Learner 5 increased from 9 errors in the second draft to 12 errors in the third draft. This is probably a result of what the literature refers to as fossilisation, when a learner keeps on repeating the same mistakes over and over, despite correction being given. Therefore, for my learners to improve on their fourth draft, I provided direct feedback in the third draft by underlining and providing the appropriate words.

4.3.2.4 Spelling errors identified in learners' essay draft 4

The reason for correcting the misspelled words through direct feedback in the third draft was to determine whether providing the correct linguistic feature was a suitable method to help

my learners improve on correcting their spelling errors. In fact, in the fourth draft, almost all learners did not commit any errors, except for Learner 5 who committed one spelling error. This shows that all learners copied the corrected linguistic features accurately, and could have learned the correct features through this method.

4.3.2.5 Summary of spelling errors committed by all learners

In Figure 9, the scores of Learners 1 to 6 in each draft are highlighted to show the most to the least number of spelling errors.

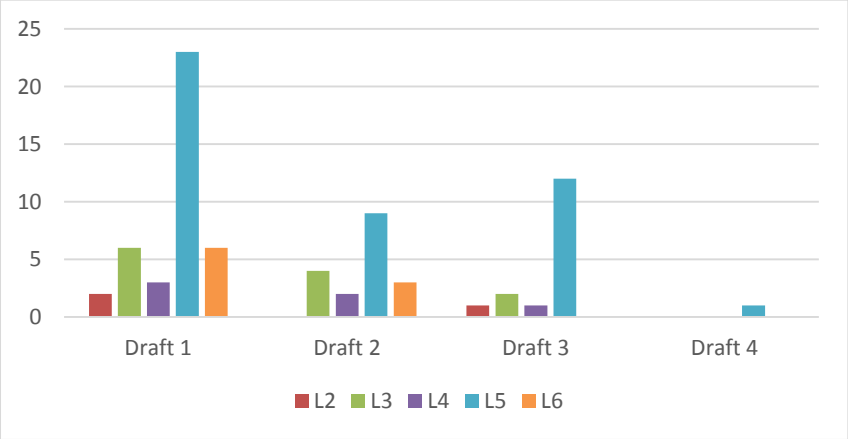


Figure 9. Summary of Spelling Errors Made by Each Learner in All Four Essay Drafts

Figure 9 indicates the four drafts of Learners 1 to 5; Learner 6 did not write the third and fourth drafts. This graph shows that Learner 5 committed the most spelling errors in the first three drafts, while Learners 2 and 3 committed few spelling errors in the first three drafts. This indicates that the feedback I provided played a role in helping my learners improve on correcting their spelling errors in each draft.

4.3.3 Past Tense Verb Errors manifested in each learner's four essay drafts

Table 5 shows the overall past tense verb errors committed by each learner in all four essay drafts.

Table 5

Summary of Past Tense Verb Errors Made by Each Learner in All Four Essay Drafts

Learner	Draft 1	Draft 2	Draft 3	Draft 4
L1	3	5	2	0
L2	3	0	0	1
L3	2	1	0	0
L4	9	1	1	0
L5	1	2	0	0
L6	7	5	n/a	n/a

Figure 12, which comes later (page 88) provides a visual image of this table and clearly shows that the number of errors diminished with each draft. As shown in Table 5, the number of past tense usage errors made by each learner had been reduced by the time they wrote the third and fourth drafts. However, Learner 2 committed one past tense verb error in the fourth draft. Learner 6 did not complete the third and fourth drafts. Specific past tense usage errors made by my learners can all be found in Appendices E-J.

4.3.3.1 Past tense verbs errors identified in learners' essay draft 1

With regard to the use of the past tense, Learners 1, 2, 4, and 6 made many errors in their first drafts, mainly in the inappropriate application of past tense rules. For instance, Learners 1 and 4 did not consider the inflections of regular verbs and irregular verbs *(-ed, -d, -t*) at the end of words. For example, Learner 1 wrote, "I stoped and listen and look around", instead of, *I stopped, listened, and looked around* (2, line 2). Learner 4 wrote "the woman die" instead of *the woman died* (2, line 2). He also failed to change some verbs into the past

perfect and past participle forms, writing "I think a got", and "He was take to the police station", instead of *I thought I got,* and *He was taken to the police station* (1 & 2, lines 4 & 5; see Appendices E, H & J). Figure 10 shows how Learner 6 misused and over-generalised the past tense rule in his first draft by writing "say", "ask", "run", "kick", and "fall", instead of *said, asked, ran, kicked* and *fell* (2, lines 4, 5 & 7). Figure 11 contains comments I made on this draft.

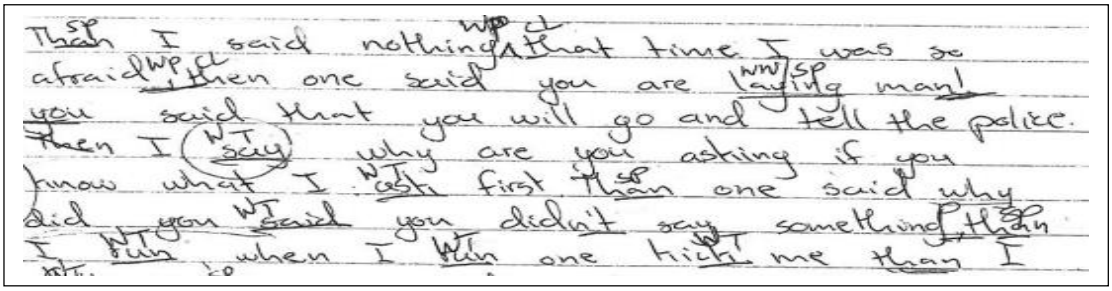


Figure 10. Learner 6, Draft 1

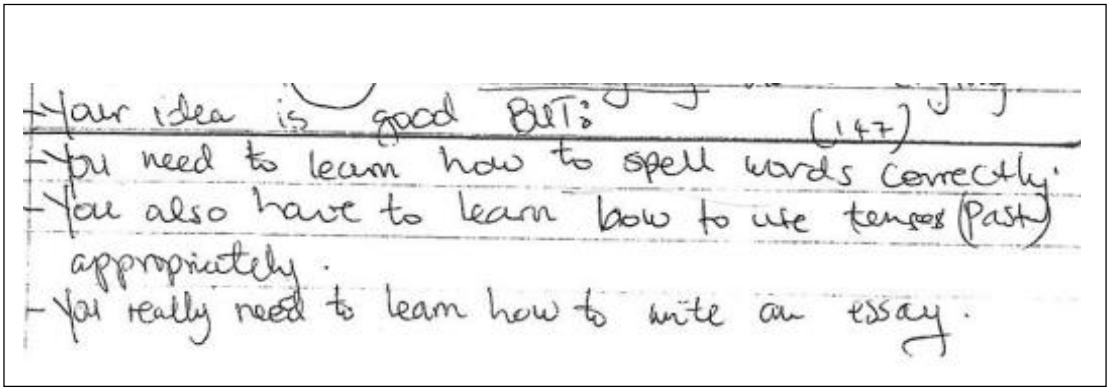


Figure 11. Teacher's Comments on Learner 6, Draft 1

Marking my learners' first draft made me realise that they were aware of the past tense but did not know how to use it appropriately. To help them improve on correcting past tense verb errors, I provided indirect feedback by underling and coding the errors. I wanted to determine whether it was the right method, and whether my learners could detect the past tense verbs errors and correct them using the feedback I provided.

4.3.3.2 Past tense verbs errors identified in learners' essay draft 2

In draft 2, Learner 1 still did not apply the rule of *-ed* at the end of verbs such as "stop", "look", and "listen" to form *stopped*, *looked*, and *listened*, while Learner 6 did not apply the same rule at the end of verbs such as "ask" and "kick" to form *asked* and *kicked,* despite comments I had made on the same errors in the previous draft (2, line 2). Learner 1 also failed to use linking verbs appropriately, writing "There are also houses" instead of *"There* were *also houses"* (2, line 4; see Appendix E).

In draft 2, I observed a huge improvement in my learners' writing. However, I realised that the best way to help learners correct their past tense verbs was to tell them to consider the inflections of regular verbs and irregular verbs *(-ed, -d, -t)*. Furthermore, for learners to be able to change verbs into perfect and past participle forms (think - *thought*), these two had to be incorporated in my comments.

4.3.3.3 ***Past tense verbs errors identified in learners' essay draft 3***

Only a few past tense errors appeared in draft 3, where Learner 1 wrote: "I cannot run away…*"*instead of *I could not run away* (1, line 2). Another example was where Learner 6 over-generalized the past tense and past participle rules by writing in line 6 "runed", and "cached", for *ran* and *caught* (4, lines 1-2). He also used the incorrect question form of the past tense and wrote, "What did you said?" instead of *What did you say?* (3, lines 3-4; see Appendix E & J). I learned that apart from providing direct feedback in marking this draft, I needed to warn my learners about over-generalizing the rules of the past tense and past participle forms by incorporating this in my comments (see Figure 11).

4.3.3.4 *Past tense verbs errors identified in learners' essay draft 4*

In draft 4, only Learner 2 committed one past tense verb error; the rest of the learners committed no errors in this draft. This indicated to me that direct feedback was suitable in helping my learners improve accuracy in their writing.

4.3.3.5 Summary of past tense verbs errors committed by all learners

In figure 12, the scores of Learners 1 to 6 highlight the highest to the lowest number of past tense verb errors per draft.

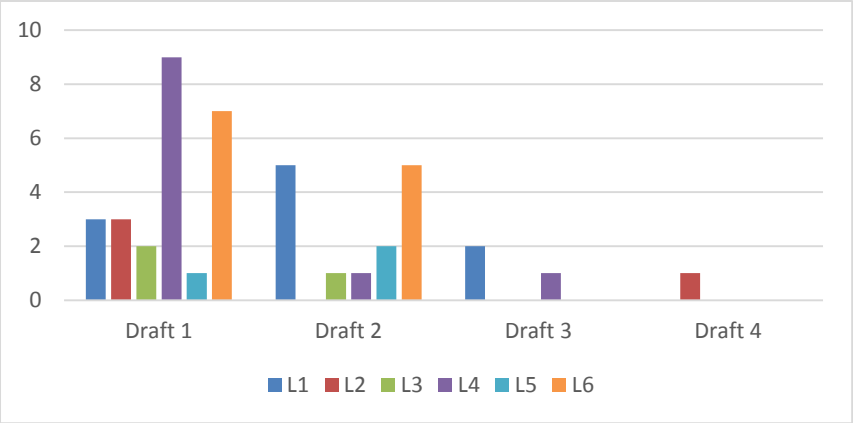


Figure 12. Summary of Past Tense Verb Errors Made by Each Learner in All Four Essay Drafts

Figure 12 displays results for the four drafts written by Learners 1 to 5; Learner 6 did not write the third and fourth drafts. In the first draft, Learner 4 committed the most past tense verb errors, followed by Learners 1 and 6 in the second draft. However, Learner 4 made a significant improvement, making few past tense verb errors in the second and third drafts and no errors of this type in his fourth draft.

4.3.4 Vocabulary errors manifested in each learner's four essay drafts

This section presents the number of vocabulary errors committed by my learners in their four drafts of the essay. Table 6 shows the overall vocabulary errors committed by each learner in all four essay drafts.

Table 6

Summary of Vocabulary Errors Made by Each Learner in All Four Essay Drafts

Learner	Draft 1	Draft 2	Draft 3	Draft 4
L1	10	5	3	1
L2	2	1	0	0
L3	4	1	0	2
L4	5	2	0	2
L5	7	5	0	2
L6	5	4	n/a	n/a

Figure 15 (page 94) provides a visual image of this table, showing the reduction in the number of errors with each draft. As seen in Table 6, the number of vocabulary errors made by each learner diminished by the time they wrote the second and third drafts. However, Learner 2, Learner 3 and Learner 5 made two vocabulary errors each, despite my direct feedback. Learner 6 did not complete the last two drafts. Specific vocabulary errors made by learners can be found in Appendices E-O.

4.3.4.1 Vocabulary errors identified in learners' essay draft 1

Vocabulary errors commonly made by my learners were mostly incorrect word usage. For example, Learner 1 used words like "I had a very round sound" instead of *I heard a very loud sound*. Learner 2 used incorrect verbs and prepositions such as "…he even loose a cellphone on the same way", instead of *he even lost a cellphone in the same way* (line 2). Learner 4 wrote "…but when there came it was to late" instead of *but when they came it was too late* (2, line 1), Learner 5 wrote "… a sowe a man" instead of …*I saw a man* (2, line 1), and Learner 6 wrote "I was on may way home" and "you are laying…"instead of *I was on my way home*, and *you are lying*...(1, lines 1 & 2; Appendices E, F, H, I).

To help my learners improve on correcting vocabulary errors, I provided indirect feedback by underling and coding the error. I wanted to determine whether it was the right strategy, and whether my learners could recognise the inappropriate words they used and were able to think about the appropriate ones through using the feedback I provided.

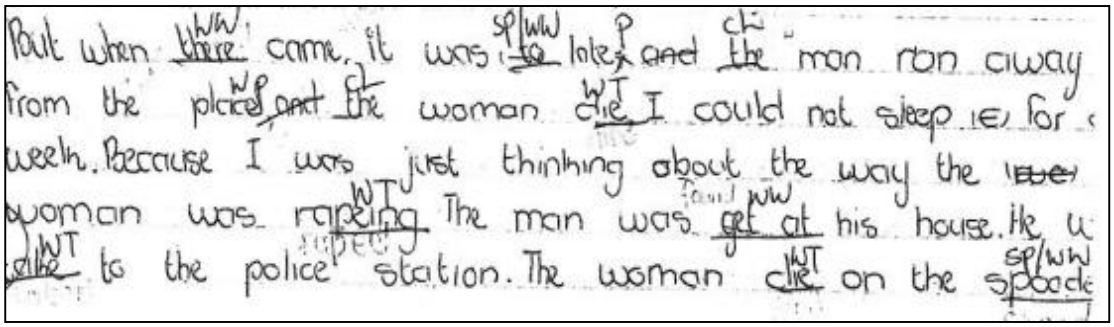


Figure 13. Learner 4, Draft 1

Figure 13 shows how Learner 4 confused adverbs with prepositions and pronouns: "But when there came it was to late" instead of *But when they came it was too late*. This learner

also confused the wrong verb and form, and the wrong preposition, writing: “The man was get at his house” instead of *The man was going into his house* (1, lines 1& 4). The last sentence of Figure 13 illustrates how the learner used the wrong form and wrong word with “The woman die on the spoode” instead of *The woman died on the spot* (see Appendix H). Figure 14 shows my comments on Learner 4’s first draft.

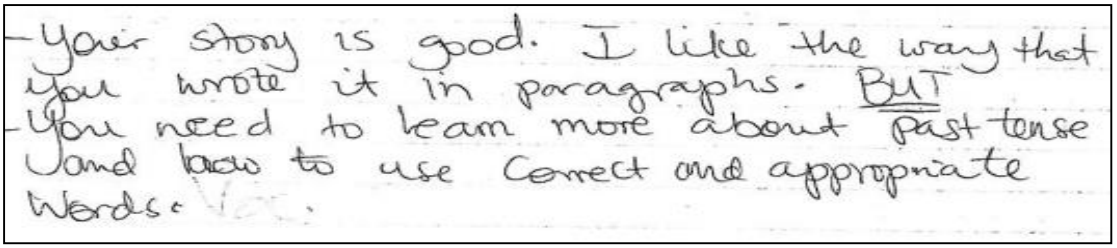


Figure 14. Teacher’s comments on Learner 4, Draft 1

4.3.4.2 Vocabulary errors identified in learners’ essay draft 2

In draft 1, Learner 1 changed the word ‘heard to here’ which was still wrong; she wrote “I here a very loud sound” instead of *I heard a very loud sound*, (1, line 1) despite the indirect feedback I had given to her. Learner 2 wrote, “I was to scared” instead of *I was too scared* (2, line 3). Learner 4 wrote, “The woman died on the stood…”instead of *the woman died on the spot* (2, last line). Learner 5 used a wrong word ‘vary’, he wrote, “It was vary dark” instead of *It was very dark,* and “I hard a gun shot” instead of *I heard a gunshot* (2, lines 1 & 5). Learner 6 still used incorrect tenses and wrong words such as “I past through” and “You are laying” instead of *I passed through* and *You are lying* (2, lines 1 & 5; see Appendices E, F, H, I, J).

In draft 1, I observed an improvement in my learners’ writing; however, I realised that the best way to help them use correct words was to repeat indirect feedback by underling and

coding wrong words again. I used these techniques to help them think critically and realise that if particular words they had used in the first and second drafts were wrong, then they should think about the other words they had not used which might be the correct ones.

4.3.4.3 Vocabulary errors identified in learners' essay draft 3

After marking the second draft, I realised that some learners found it difficult to correct some inappropriate words they had used. I learned that despite the indirect feedback I repeated in the second draft, Learner 1 still failed to use some words appropriately. For example, she wrote "I had a very lound sound" and "…said the women…instead of *I heard a very loud sound*, and…*said the woman*… (1, line 2; see Appendix E).

To help my learners improve with their fourth draft, I decided to provide direct feedback in the third draft by underlining and providing the appropriate words. I applied those strategies in order to help my learners correct their errors and learn from them. Furthermore, my reason for providing direct feedback by correcting the misspelled words was to determine whether providing the appropriate word was a suitable method to help my learners improve correcting their vocabulary errors.

4.3.4.4 Vocabulary errors identified in learners' essay draft 4

In draft 4, most learners committed few vocabulary errors; for example, Learner 1 committed one error, while Learners 3, 4 and 5 each committed two similar errors. It surprised me that Learners 3, 4 and 5 had no vocabulary errors in their third draft, yet had two each of the same

vocabulary error in their fourth draft. When a learner keeps on making mistakes in this way, this is what the literature refers to as carelessness and lack of concentration.

4.3.4.5 Summary of vocabulary errors committed by all learners

In Figure 15, the scores of Learners 1 to 6 are shown from the highest to the lowest number of vocabulary errors per draft.

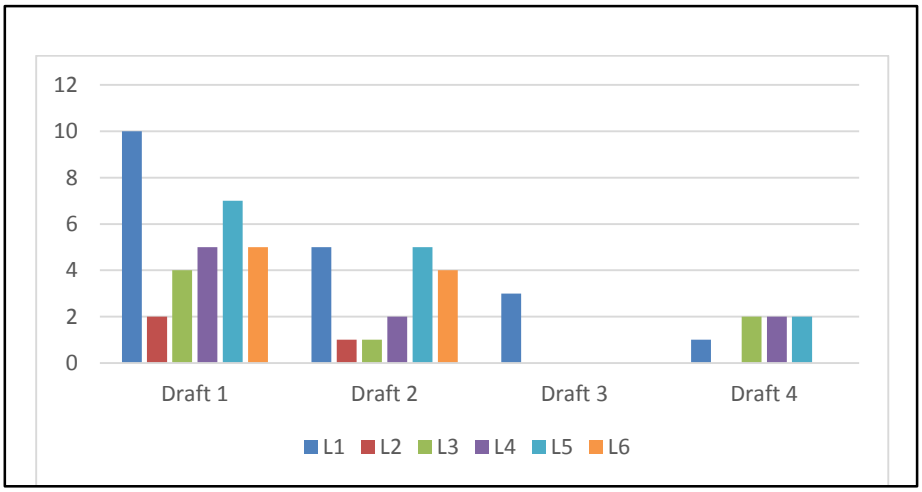


Figure 15. Summary of Vocabulary Errors Made by Each Learner in All Four Essay Drafts

Figure 15 includes the four drafts of Learners 1 to 5; Learner 6 did not write the third and fourth drafts. This graph shows that Learner 1 committed the most vocabulary errors, followed by Learner 5 in both the second and third drafts. In the first draft, Learner 4 and Learner 6 committed five vocabulary errors each, while Learner 2 and Learner 3 committed few vocabulary errors in the second draft. However, despite the feedback given, Learners 3, 4 and 5 each committed two vocabulary errors in their fourth draft.

4.4 Quality of Learners' Post-Feedback Writing in terms of Accuracy in the Four Language Aspects

In this section, I will provide evidence of how my learners' written English improved as a result of the feedback I gave on their drafts, by showing the decrease in errors made from one essay draft to the next. Some learners showed significant progress in their last two drafts, and seemed to have applied my comments. Almost all of them used punctuation marks and past tense structures correctly and appropriately, and almost all words were correctly spelled in the third draft. However, in terms of past tense verb usage, some learners still failed to add *–ed* on a few regular verbs such as *stop, look, listen, and knock*, which they subsequently corrected in the fourth draft using my direct feedback. Finally, they all interpreted most of the marking codes well, and applied my comments as well as direct feedback correctly.

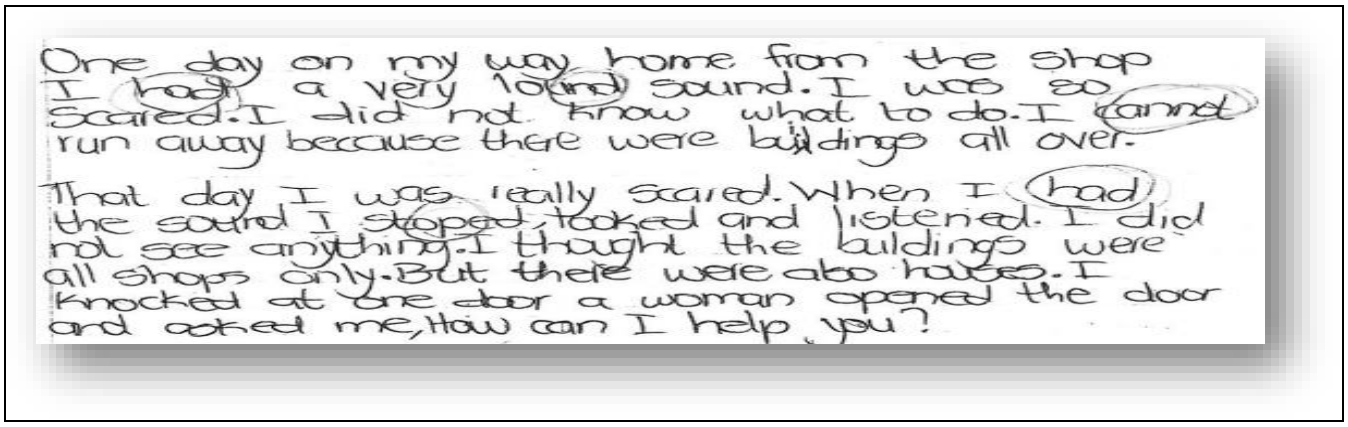
4.4.1 **Improvement on learner 1's essay drafts**

Table 7

Summary of Errors in All Categories and Drafts and Overall Improvement: Learner 1

Category	Errors in Draft 1	Errors in Draft 2	Errors in Draft 3	Errors in Draft 4	Improvement from 2nd to 4th drafts
Punctuation	7	1	1	2	Yes
Spelling	3	0	2	0	Yes
Past tense verbs	3	5	2	0	Yes
Vocabulary	10	5	3	1	Yes
Total errors	23	11	8	3	Yes

In the first draft, Learner 1 had a total of 23 errors, which decreased to 11 errors in the second draft, then decreased to eight and three errors in the third and fourth drafts respectively. This learner did not take my corrections and feedback into consideration. She failed to fully discover the nature of her errors through self and peer-corrections. Specifically, Figure 16, which is an excerpt from this learner's third draft, paragraphs 1 and 2, indicate how she still misspelled the underlined and circled words in subsequent drafts in spite of these circled words as indirect feedback to remind her that they contained an error. For example, she wrote "lound" and "stoped" rather than *loud* and *stopped*. She also confused words such as *had* and *heard* in all three paragraphs of the third draft, and confused the word "woman" with *women* (3, line 6). This improved however, by the fourth draft, following my explicit direct feedback (see Appendix E).


One day on my way home from the shop I had a very lound sound. I wos so Scared. I did not know what to do. I cannot run away because there were buildings all over.

That day I was really scared. When I had the sound I stoped, looked and listened. I did not see anything. I thought the buildings were all shops only. But there were also hakes. I knocked at one door a woman opened the door and asked me, How can I help you?

Figure 16 . Learner 3, Draft 3: Circling-Indirect feedback

4.4.2 Improvement on learner 2's essay drafts

Table 8: *Summary of Errors in All Categories and Drafts and Overall Improvement: Learner 2*

Category	Errors in Draft 1	Errors in Draft 2	Errors in Draft 3	Errors in Draft 4	Improvement from 2nd to 4th drafts
Punctuation	4	2	1	1	Yes
Spelling	2	0	1	0	Yes
Past-Verb tense	3	0	0	1	Yes
Vocabulary	2	1	0	0	Yes
Total errors	11	3	2	2	Yes

Table 8 indicates how Learner 2 correctly applied my comments in the second and third drafts and as a result made significant improvements in the use of past tense verbs compared to her first draft, though she committed one verb error in the fourth draft. In the first draft, she had a total of 11 errors, which decreased to three errors in the second draft and then decreased to two errors in the third and fourth drafts. She spelled all words correctly, and used capitalisation, punctuation marks and past tense verbs correctly and appropriately. She applied self and peer corrections well, and corrected the underlined and circled errors. She interpreted the marking codes well, and applied my comments and direct feedback correctly. By the fourth draft, Learner 2 showed significant improvement. Figure 17 shows a paragraph from Learner 2's draft 2 with two errors only; while Figure 18 indicates my comments about Learner 2's improvement on the second draft (see Appendix F).

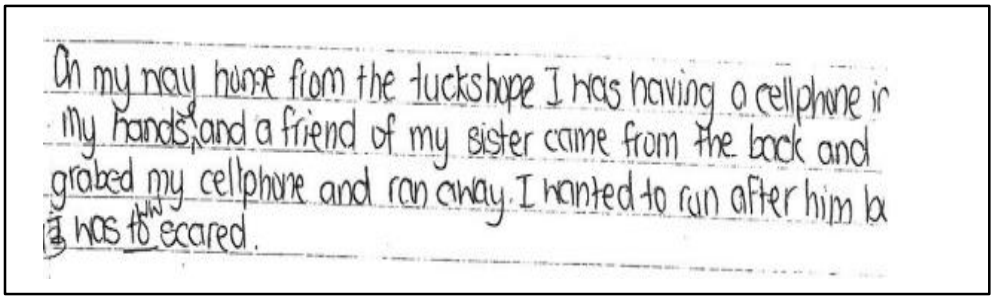

On my way home from the tuckshope I was having a cellphone in my hands, and a friend of my sister came from the back and grabed my cellphone and ran away. I wanted to run after him bu I was to ecared.

Figure 17. Learner 2, Draft 2

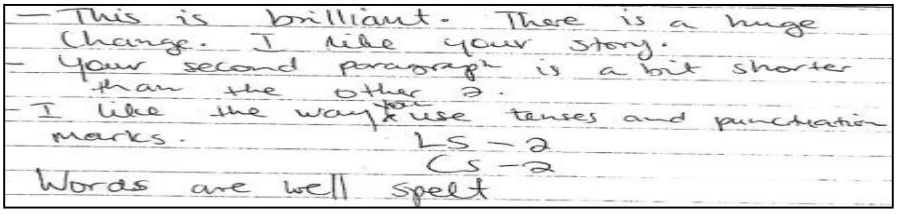


Figure 18. Teacher's Comments on Learner 2, Draft 2

4.4.3 Improvement on learner 3's essay drafts

Table 9

Summary of Errors in All Categories and Drafts and Overall Improvement: Learner 3

Category	Errors in Draft 1	Errors in Draft 2	Errors in Draft 3	Errors in Draft 4	Improvement from 2nd to 4th drafts
Punctuation	13	7	3	0	Yes
Spelling	6	4	2	0	Yes
Verb tense	2	1	0	0	Yes
Vocabulary	4	1	0	2	Yes
Total errors	25	13	5	2	Yes

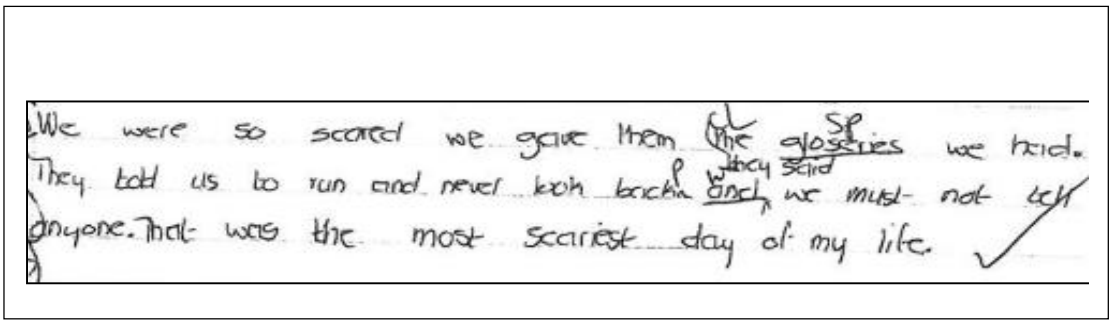


Figure 19. Learner 3, Draft 2

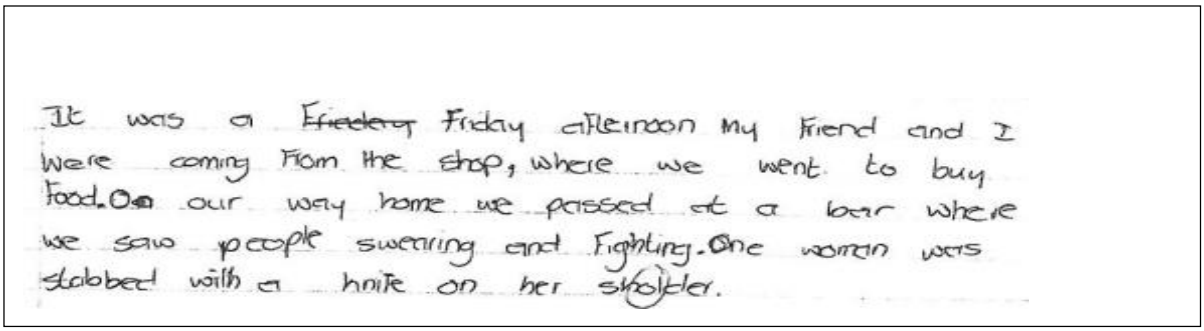


Figure 20. Learner 3, Draft 3

This learner had a total of 25 errors in the first draft, which decreased to 13 errors in the second draft, then to five errors in the third draft and two errors in the fourth draft. She effectively applied self and peer corrections; she also studied and appropriately corrected the errors I underlined and circled. Table 9 shows how Learner 3 slowly improved at correcting punctuation and spelling errors in her second and third drafts. Figures 19 and 20, which are excerpts from the second and third drafts, lines 1 and 5, indicate how Learner 3 still misspelled the words I underlined and circled, in spite of this indirect feedback to remind her that they contained an error. Finally, she spelled most words correctly in her fourth draft. She used punctuation marks and past tense verbs correctly and appropriately. She interpreted the marking codes well, and applied my direct feedback correctly (see Appendix G).

4.4.4 Improvement on learner 4's essay drafts

Table 10

Summary of Errors in All Categories and Drafts and Overall Improvement: Learner 4

Category	Errors in Draft 1	Errors in Draft 2	Errors in Draft 3	Errors in Draft 4	Improvement from 2nd to 4th drafts
Punctuation	3	0	0	0	Yes
Spelling	3	2	1	0	Yes
Verb tense	9	1	1	0	Yes
Vocabulary	5	2	0	2	Yes
Total errors	20	5	2	2	Yes

Looking at Table 10, this learner made a total of 20 errors in the first draft, decreasing to five errors in the second draft and then to two errors in the third and fourth drafts. There was a huge improvement, specifically in the use of the past tense verbs, from nine errors in the first draft to one error in the second and third drafts, while punctuation marks and vocabulary errors both decreased to zero in the third draft. This shows that this learner applied self and peer-correction correctly in almost all cases. He accurately interpreted the errors I underlined and circled. Finally, in the fourth draft, Learner 4 made a remarkable improvement with regard to the use of punctuation marks, past tense verbs, and spelling. He really demonstrated an effort to improve in the fourth draft. Furthermore, he interpreted the marking codes and my explicit feedback appropriately.

4.4.5 Improvement on learner 5's essay drafts

Table 11

Summary of Errors in All Categories and Drafts and Overall Improvement: Learner 5

Category	Errors in Draft 1	Errors in Draft 2	Errors in Draft 3	Errors in Draft 4	Improvement from 2nd to 4th drafts
Punctuation	10	3	0	0	Yes
Spelling	23	9	12	1	No
Verb tense	1	2	0	0	Yes
Vocabulary	7	5	0	2	Yes
Total errors	41	18	12	3	Yes

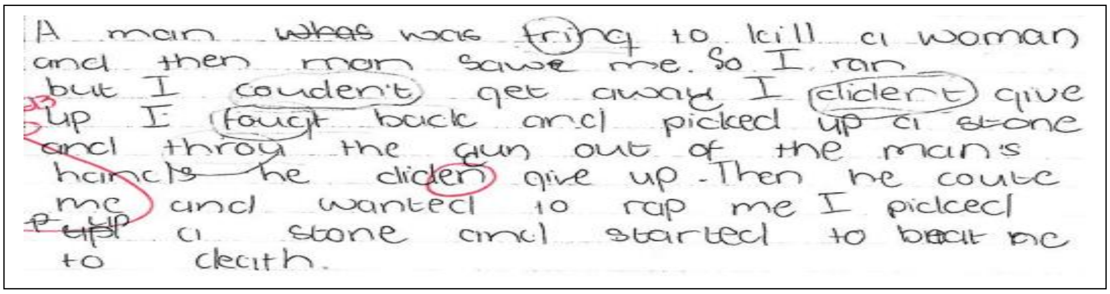

A man whas was tring to kill a woman
and then man sawe me. So I ran
but I coudent get away I dident give
up I faught back and picked up a stone
and throw the gun out of the man's
hands he diden give up. Then he coute
me and wanted to rap me I picked
up a stone and started to beat me
to death.

Figure 21. Learner 5, Draft 3

This learner made 41 errors in the first draft, decreasing to 18 errors in the second draft, then to 12 errors in the third draft and three in the fourth draft. Table 11 shows how Learner 5 made a remarkable improvement regarding the use of punctuation marks and vocabulary in the second and third drafts. However, spelling errors later increased again, with 12 errors in the third draft. This could be that this learner did not apply self and peer corrections equally

in all language aspects, although he did specifically interpret the misspelled words I underlined and circled. Figure 21, which is an excerpt from the third draft, appears to indicate how Learner 5 still misspelled the words I circled, in spite of my indirect feedback to remind him that they contained an error. Additionally, most of the words were either incorrectly spelled or used; however, my explicit comments on this learner's third draft directed him with regard to what to correct for the fourth draft. He finally interpreted the marking codes appropriately and improved in the fourth draft.

4.4.6 Improvement on learner 6's essay drafts

Table 12: *Summary of errors in all categories and drafts and overall improvement: Learner 6*

Category	Errors in Draft 1	Errors in Draft 2	Errors in Draft 3*	Errors in Draft 4*	Improvement from 2nd draft
Punctuation	7	5	n/a	n/a	Yes
Spelling	6	3	n/a	n/a	Yes
Verb tense	7	5	n/a	n/a	Yes
Vocabulary	5	4	n/a	n/a	No
Total errors	25	17	n/a	n/a	Yes

** Note: this learner did not compose third and fourth drafts.*

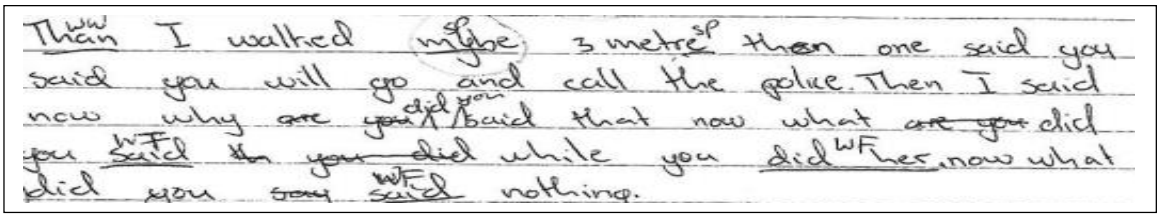
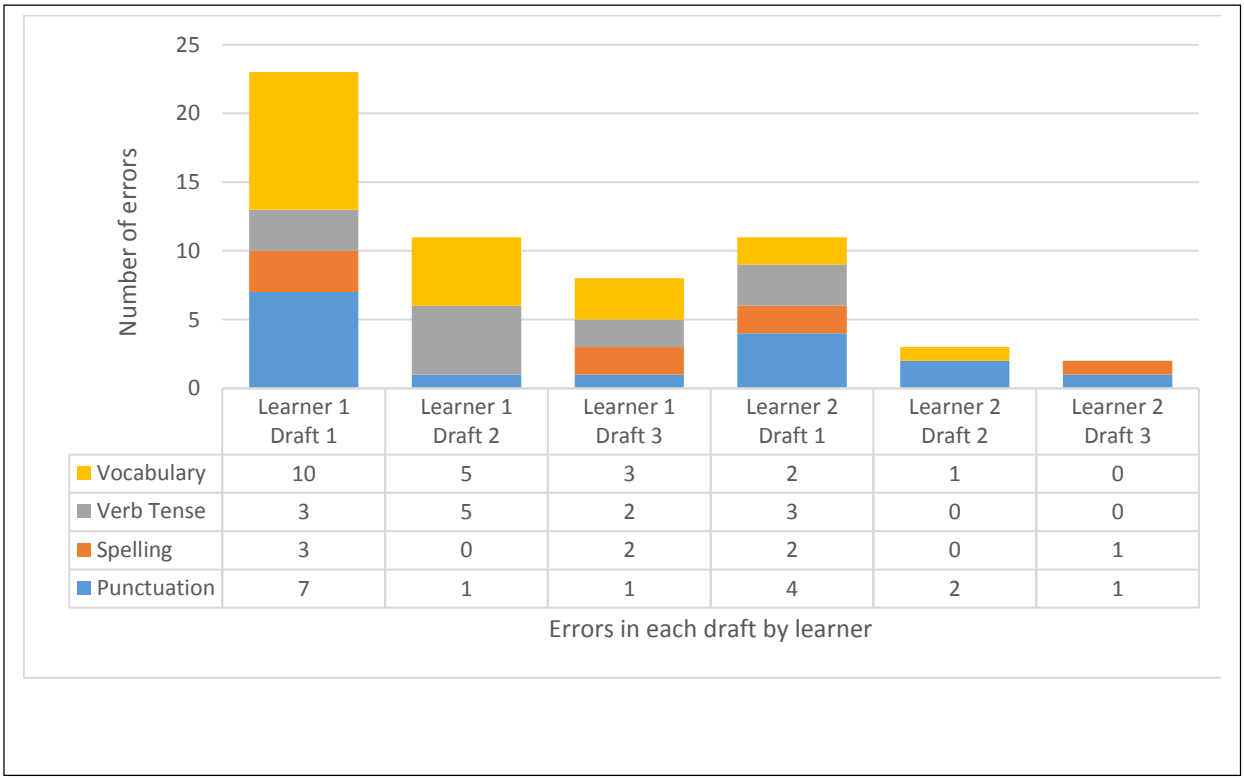


Figure 22. Learner 6, Draft 2

Learner 6 committed 24 errors in the first draft, slowly decreasing to 15 errors in the second draft. This indicates that this learner 6 slowly applied self and peer feedback, and also, to some extent, studied and interpreted the errors I underlined and circled. Table 12 shows how Learner 6 slowly improved in all categories of errors in the second draft, though he did not write the third and fourth drafts as instructed. Figure 22, which is an excerpt from the second draft, indicates in lines 1, 4, and 5 how Learner 6 still misspelled the words I underlined, in spite of my indirect feedback to remind him that they contained an error.

4.4.7 Summary of learners' improvement

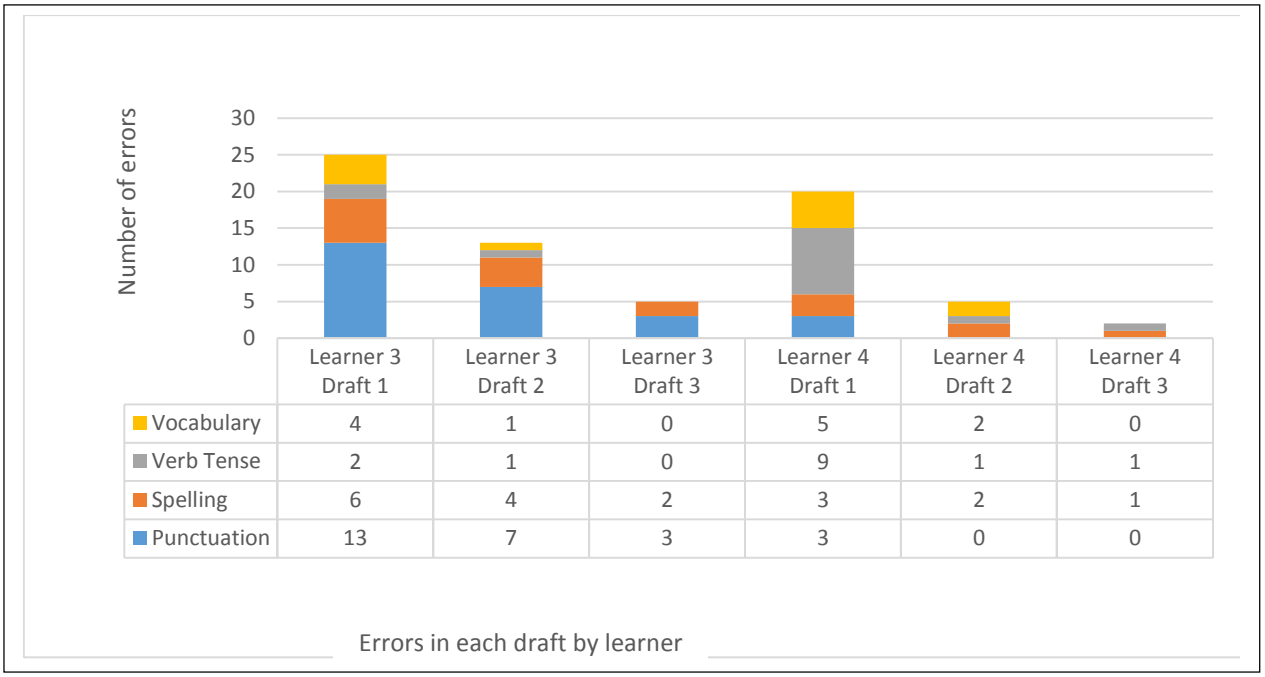
In Figures 23, 24 and 25, the scores are ordered from those of the learner with the most errors to those of the learner with the least errors per draft.



	Learner 1 Draft 1	Learner 1 Draft 2	Learner 1 Draft 3	Learner 2 Draft 1	Learner 2 Draft 2	Learner 2 Draft 3
Vocabulary	10	5	3	2	1	0
Verb Tense	3	5	2	3	0	0
Spelling	3	0	2	2	0	1
Punctuation	7	1	1	4	2	1

Figure 23. Learner 1 and Learner 2's Number of Errors by Category and Draft

Figure 23 indicates the three drafts of Learner 1 and 2. In the first draft, both Learner 1 and Learner 2 committed seven and four punctuation errors respectively; in the same draft, Learner 1 committed ten vocabulary errors, and three spelling and verb tense errors each. In the second draft, Learner 1 made a significant improvement, making only one punctuation error and no spelling errors in this draft; however, this learner increased to five past tense verb errors in the same draft. In addition, Learner 1 still committed a few errors per category in the third draft, and vocabulary was still the highest, with three errors. Learner 2 still committed a few punctuation errors, but showed good improvement in the third draft. Due to lack of space, draft 4 has not been included on the graph since it appears in Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6.

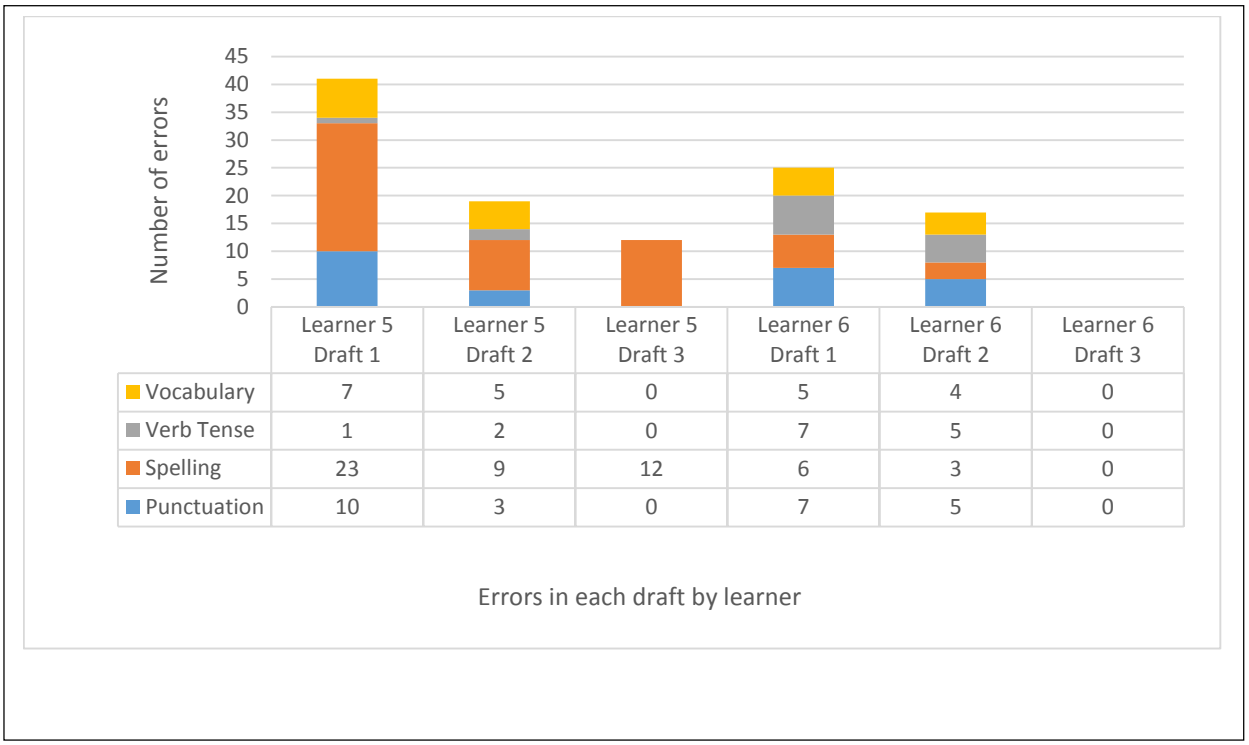


	Learner 3 Draft 1	Learner 3 Draft 2	Learner 3 Draft 3	Learner 4 Draft 1	Learner 4 Draft 2	Learner 4 Draft 3
Vocabulary	4	1	0	5	2	0
Verb Tense	2	1	0	9	1	1
Spelling	6	4	2	3	2	1
Punctuation	13	7	3	3	0	0

Figure 24. Learner 3 and Learner 4's Number of Errors by Category and Draft

Figure 24 shows the three drafts of Learners 3 and 4. In the first draft, Learner 3 committed thirteen punctuation errors and six spelling errors, while in the same draft; Learner 4

committed nine past tense verb errors and five vocabulary errors. In the second draft, Learner 3 improved on punctuation, dropping to seven errors, and improved as well on vocabulary and past tense verb errors. Finally, both Learner 3 and Learner 4 showed remarkable improvement in the third draft. Due to lack of space, draft 4 has not been included on the graph since it appears on Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6.



	Learner 5 Draft 1	Learner 5 Draft 2	Learner 5 Draft 3	Learner 6 Draft 1	Learner 6 Draft 2	Learner 6 Draft 3
Vocabulary	7	5	0	5	4	0
Verb Tense	1	2	0	7	5	0
Spelling	23	9	12	6	3	0
Punctuation	10	3	0	7	5	0

Figure 25. Learner 5 and Learner 6's Number of Errors by Category and Draft

Figure 25 represents the three drafts of Learners 5 and 6. In the first draft, Learner 5 committed 23 spelling errors and ten punctuation errors; while in the same draft, Learner 6 committed seven punctuation and past tense verb errors each. In the second draft, Learner 5 improved on spelling errors, which dropped to nine errors. In the same draft, Learner 6 improved on each error category with five punctuation and past tense verb errors each. In the third essay, Learner 5 had an increase of 12 spelling errors and Learner 6 did not write the

third draft. Due to lack of space, draft 4 has not been included on the graph since it appears on the tables 3, 4, 5 and 6 above.

4.5 The Best Feedback Strategies to Improve the Accuracy of Essay Writing

In this section I deal with feedback strategies that worked best to improve the accuracy in my learners' English essay writing with regard to four language aspects, namely, punctuation marks, past tense verbs, spelling and vocabulary. As an English Second Language teacher and researcher, I applied alternative methods to correct my learners' written work such as underlining, circling and using correction codes as indirect feedback, as well as peer and self-correction, whole-class correction, and corrective direct feedback. My impression was that there was no feedback method which worked better than the other because each one of them played its own role at its own level in each draft.

4.5.1 Underlining and circling as indirect feedback

By underlining and circling errors, I gave my learners a precise indication of where each mistake was, and left them to think about what was wrong. Most learners corrected those errors themselves. I underlined or circled learners' errors in order to provide indirect feedback that made it easier for my learners to make the corrections themselves. The indirect feedback I provided helped my learners learn from their own mistakes as they were correcting word by word, and that made it one of the most effective feedback strategies I applied.

4.5.2 Correction codes as indirect feedback

The second method I used was correction codes that consisted of a set of letters and symbols that made it clear to learners what kind of mistake they had made. This method worked well because I first made the codes and symbols known to all learners in the class. I used codes above underlined or circled errors as a clue for learners to figure out the error committed. By using correction codes, I helped my learners to learn different types of language features, most importantly, punctuation marks, spelling, past tense verbs and vocabulary, which were the focus of this study. These codes appear in Chapter 2, Table 1, on page 26.

4.5.3 Peer and self-correction

I applied the peer-correction and self-correction methods to promote teamwork, sharing of ideas and learning from others' mistakes. I instructed my learners to correct other learners' work by writing with a pencil above their mistakes. Each learner then corrected his or her own work according to the peer comments and returned their work to me. Learners got the opportunity to reflect on their mistakes and to make improvements to their writing, and showed me what they were capable of accomplishing. I then checked corrections, and gave learners feedback on anything that was still wrong, or that the learners had otherwise been unable to improve. The main method of peer/self-correction allowed my learners to revise their written work for clarity and accuracy based on comments and responses from me and their peers.

4.5.4 Providing whole-class feedback

In this fourth method, I listed all common errors on the chalkboard and asked the whole class to correct them. The reason for applying this method was to point out to my learners the type of errors their peers had made, which involved them in more conscious assessment of what they had produced. I allowed learners to share their thoughts with their classmates by reading out corrections and comments I made during the marking of their essays. Most learners gained from this process and enjoyed it because I had given them practice in using the language in realistic situations through reading others' drafts as they were making corrections.

4.5.5 Corrective direct feedback

The last feedback strategy I used was corrective direct feedback. I applied this method in order to provide feedback to my learners to help them correct their errors by providing the correct linguistic forms. Through corrective direct feedback, I provided explicit information about the correct forms. I used this method to assist my learners to correct their errors. This strategy was also suitable in situations where errors such as punctuation, past tense verbs, spelling and vocabulary were untreatable and not susceptible to self-correction. I directed learners' attention to error patterns that required their correction by numbering and writing the correct patterns both above the errors and at the bottom of the draft. Corrective direct feedback helped my learners to produce accurate revision faster. This strategy also helped my learners to learn from their mistakes as well as from my direct feedback. To wrap up, the above-mentioned five feedback strategies I applied throughout this intervention helped me grow professionally and technically with regard to feedback provision. I noticed improvement in my ways of providing feedback each time I was applying a new strategy.

4.6 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, I attempted to elucidate the learners' essay script results based on the analysis I made. I highlighted the various types of errors as they manifested themselves in the various essay drafts that were written by my Grade 8 learners. I also explained how my feedback helped learners to improve in correcting their writing errors, and also revealed the best feedback strategies that helped improve learners' writing accuracy. In the next chapter, I will analyse the preceding data to determine whether it met the study's objectives and intention, and I will compare it to the views of other researchers in the literature I reviewed.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the findings as presented and analysed in Chapter 4, and attempt to reflect on the findings by providing possible explanations and further clarification, and by comparing the findings with aspects discussed in the literature I reviewed. From the findings obtained, it became clear that most of the Grade 8 learners who participated in this study and were learning English as a second language made many errors in writing. These errors included punctuation, tense, spelling and vocabulary errors. As noted the aim of this action research study was to explore the role of my corrective feedback in improving the proper usage and correctness of my learners' writing skills. I therefore made efforts to identify, categorise, and analyse errors that appeared in these learners' drafts essay, as well as to institute intervention measures.

5.2 Findings

The findings I presented in the preceding chapter indicate that after I had provided feedback on the first and second draft essays, there was a considerable overall improvement in my learners' writing. This chapter provides a summary of these findings, including data I collected and a discussion of the findings based on my analysis. The different ways in which written errors manifested in my learners' essay writing is discussed, as well as the quality of learners' post-feedback improvement in each of the four language aspects. I also propose the most effective feedback strategies to improve my learners' English writing skills. This

chapter further presents findings based on an understanding of the role of my corrective feedback and learners' response to it, as well as the benefit which I gained from this action research study. Finally, I present recommendations and conclusions.

5.2.1 Different ways in which written errors manifested in learners' essay writing.

The findings are based on an essay written by my Grade 8 learners, who committed the following types of errors: punctuation marks, past tense verbs, spelling and vocabulary.

5.2.1.1 *Punctuation errors*

Most of my learners who participated in this study did not apply punctuation marks correctly or appropriately in their first essay drafts. In this study, the most common punctuation errors committed by my learners were the omission of the following: full stops at the end of statement sentences, commas in between sentences, and in a few cases, exclamation marks at the end of exclamation sentences. Almost none of the six learners correctly or appropriately applied the rules for capital letters, full stops, question marks, apostrophes, or quotation marks in their first drafts. In addition, most learners frequently failed to use capital letters at the beginning of sentences and proper nouns, until I pointed this out in their first drafts.

According to the literature reviewed (see above), punctuation errors mainly occur because of carelessness and lack of concentration. But in a second language situation, based on my reflection in the context of the reviewed literature and the findings of this study, it could also be that the learners were not aware of the fact that they needed to punctuate their sentences as writing unlike speaking is something that you need to learn, including its conventions: it is

not something you naturally pick up. However, it could also be that the learners had not been exposed sufficiently to using punctuations in their writing. This is because, as the reviewed literature points out, exposure is critical to language learning: the more the learners are exposed to written language including the use of punctuation marks, the more they absorb such language and it becomes part of their linguistic resources through habit. This is also in line with the cognitive theory of learning which views language as processed in the head outlined in the reviewed literature. But whether this theory is sufficient to explain learning to write in a second language or indeed in any language is another matter. For instance, it does not seem to acknowledge the social dimensions of writing, as acknowledged by some researchers. However, without establishing why the learners made the mistakes or errors they made perhaps through some form of self-reporting mechanism, it would not be easy to say with certainty as to what led to those errors or mistakes. Since, the present study did not probe the participants to find out why they made those errors or mistakes, it would be interesting for another investigation to move a step further and find out why the learners committed those errors. But such a study would have to capture the learners' subjectivity, meaning that it needs to rely on the qualitative paradigm more than the present study which did not seek an in-depth understanding of why the learners committed the errors or mistakes. It should be remembered that the present study aimed to inquire into the teachers' feedback in terms of its impact on the learners' writing.

The Ministry of Education (p. 12) emphasises that learners should be able to use basic punctuation marks correctly and appropriately. With regard to the teaching of punctuation marks, Sambeny and Gonzalez (2011, p. 128) state that this involves the use of standard marks and signs in writing to separate words into sentences, clauses, and phrases in order to clarify meaning as well as to make the meaning of what we write as clear as possible. In

other words, punctuation marks are signals to readers; therefore, in this action research I taught my learners the importance of these signs in writing.

5.2.1.2 ***Past tense verb errors***

Based on my learners' use of the past tense, I concluded that they sometimes applied a rule in areas where it was incorrect or inappropriate. Again, here it could be due to over-generalisation of that rule. As in most cases, my learners seemed to over-generalise the rule for past tense formation by adding *–ed* and/or omitting *–ing* form. On the other hand, the inflections of the regular and irregular verbs *(-ed, -d, -t*) were easily lost or/and misused in their writing of the past tense. As Learner 4 wrote in his first draft: "…the woman die …the way the woman was rapeing" instead of *…the woman died …the way the woman was raped* (see Appendix H). However, by way of reflection on these findings, caution would have to be exercised in interpreting these errors or mistakes as hinted earlier. This is because constructions such as '… the woman die…' could be the result of more than one cause. It could be interpreted as a tense problem, on the one hand. On the other hand, it could be due to what is seen as carelessness, say if the writer left out the last letter. As it can be seen, like in the case of punctuations dealt with before, we one can only speculate as to why the learners wrote the way they did in the absence of questions that seek find out from the learner writers why they wrote what they did. Again, it should be emphasised that that was beyond the current study. It would have been interesting for me to see if asking my learners to reflect on their own writing, during the writing process, would not have addressed some of these problems they encountered such as the construction under discussion.

Furthermore, it was somewhat difficult for my learners as English Second Language users to distinguish between irregular verbs such as *lie* and *lay, rise* and *raise*, or *sit* and *set* until I intervened. Darus and Ching (2009, p. 61) suggest that learners make many past tense verb errors where they mix up tenses due to the fact that they lack the skills and experience in using different tenses in L2 (intra-lingual transfer). The use of tenses in English is also completely different from Afrikaans, which is the learners' L1 (inter-lingual transfer). Intra-lingual errors result from the incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions for rule application. Therefore, in this study, I taught my learners how most verbs change from one tense into another. I also highlighted and explained to them where exactly the change takes place in a verb.

Moreover, a narrative essay includes a temporal element that requires the writer to change verb tenses, such as when moving in and out of the present to the past. Most of my learners in this study were probably not familiar with auxiliary verbs, regular, or irregular verbs. They could not correctly use the common auxiliaries (*am, is, are, was, were, being, been, have, has, had, do, does, did*), which require a change of form to indicate number. For example, in the first draft, Learner 2 wrote, "I was having a cellphone in my hands" instead of *I had a cellular phone in my hands* (line 5; see Appendix F). To avoid mistakes involving regular and irregular verbs and concord, I therefore taught my learners which tense of the verb - past, present, future, etc. - would be most appropriate in a sentence. For example, in the first draft, Learner 4 wrote" "I think…" instead of *I thought…* (2, line 3). To reflect on the reasons for such errors or mistakes, the problem seems to be exposure, meaning that with more practice the learners would master these structures. The reviewed literature lends support to this view, claiming that exposing learners to more language improves their writing (see literature review).

In this study, some of my learners correctly used the common verb *to be* (*was, were*), which requires a change of form to indicate the number of the subject in the past tense and requires concord agreement. Learners also appropriately applied the helping verbs *am/is/was,* which are used in the first person singular, while *are/were* are used in first person plural. For example, in the first draft, Learner 3 wrote, "She was bleeding a lot", and "while we were walking" to refer to both one person and many people in the past continuous tense (see Appendix G). To reduce verb errors in my learners' written work, I applied strategies related to the number of verbs, the position of verbal endings, and time adverbials, pointing out the error by writing the appropriate code above it (*v* for "verb").

5.2.1.3 ***Spelling errors***

Some of my learners made this kind of error in different ways. Some omitted a letter, such as writing the word *stopped* as "stoped", where a double *p* was required, and some learners spelled words as they pronounced them, such as writing the word *thought* as *"*thot*".* This could be because some of the learners had not seen the word in question written down, which is attributable to lack of exposure, mentioned earlier. The other possibility is that something interfered with the learners' recall of the correct spelling of the word in the latter case, that is. But the same could also be true with respect to the situation in which some learners omit a letter. In some cases, some learners added a letter which was not part of the word they intended to write, such as writing the word *problem* written as "promblem".

The findings from this study confirmed what was noted by Abi (2002, p. 46), who says that spelling errors are systematic. Thus, if learners are not diligent in taking note of the correct

spelling, they repeat mistakes without recognising them. For example, learners' carelessness also led to many spelling errors, such as in spelling "stoped" instead of *stopped* and "thot" rather than *thought*. According to this study, spelling errors mainly occur because of carelessness and lack of editing, which my learners learnt to correct through my intervention.

With regard to the teaching of spelling, Norrish (1983, p. 21) holds that errors in spelling can also be worsened by fossilisation and carelessness in learners' writing. Thus, the most important ways that my learners learnt to spell were through daily reading and multi-draft writing activities. In fact, learners who were good readers tended also to be good at spelling. As my learners read through their own drafts and those of their peers, they visualised words – the shape of the word and the configuration of letters within it – and they used this knowledge to spell many words correctly and to recognise when a word they had written did not look right. Therefore, in this study, through the multi-draft writing method, my learners gained valuable practice using strategies they learned for spelling words correctly. I also worked with them to proofread and edit their written essay drafts, which helped them to learn more about spelling and other writing conventions. This is also in line with the cognitive theory of learning briefly considered in the literature review in the sense that it the more learners are exposed to writing the more the structures of language and conventions are ingrained.

5.2.1.4 ***Vocabulary errors***

This study revealed that all my six learners made vocabulary errors mainly due to confusion of words, as the literature suggests. Some of them were unable to distinguish between some words which sounded the same. Some did not know the meanings of some of the words they

intended to use in their writing, which caused them to use the wrong words in some places. Furthermore, I discovered that in the first draft, most of my learners did not have an idea of how to edit their work to detect mistakes, as they confused simple words such as *may*, *where* and *now* with *my*, *were*, and *know*. Therefore, for my learners to improve their vocabulary and write good essays in English, I encouraged them to develop a reading culture. Through reading and using dictionaries, my learners exposed themselves to different words and meanings, which enabled them to know the meanings of different words and made it easier for them to choose and write the right words.

To minimise vocabulary errors in my learners' essay writing, I also used the strategy of listing on the chalkboard some wrong words they had used in their essays. In this study, I referred my learners to authentic and real life situations. In some cases, they found it difficult to differentiate between antonyms and synonyms, so I helped them to understand the different nuances in the meanings of a word. Learning antonyms and synonyms helped to enrich my learners' vocabulary and provide them with alternative words.

Ur (1999, p. 83) advises the teaching of homophones − words that sound the same but differ in spelling and meaning, e.g. *see* (sight/vision) and *sea* (ocean), and homonyms – words that are spelled and sound like another word but have a different meaning, e.g. *lead* (noun) and *lead* (verb). Most of my learners were also confused when it came to learning rules that would enable them to build up different forms of a word, or even different words from that word (e.g. sleep/slept/sleeping; able/unable/disability). Some of my learners found it difficult to change certain words from one form into another until I finally intervened with corrective feedback**.**

5.3 Quality of Learners' Post-Feedback Essays in the Four Language Aspects

Most first drafts contained many written errors compared to the second, third and fourth drafts. In the following sections I will discuss learners' improvement draft by draft as I intervened.

5.3.1 Learner 1

In all three drafts, this learner managed to start most sentences with a capital letter and to end them with a full stop. In the first draft, she used the past tense poorly and did not spell some words correctly. Through my intervention, for the second draft, this learner used some other punctuation marks much better than she had in the first draft. Although she spelled most words correctly in the second draft, she still used a few words and past tense verbs inappropriately until I intervened. In the third draft, this learner showed a huge improvement in using punctuation marks. Due to direct feedback or to correction that I provided in the third draft, this learners' fourth draft had very few errors (see Appendix E).

5.3.2 Learner 2

In the first draft, this learner started most sentences without a capital letter. Of all punctuation marks, she used only a full stop at the end of a few sentences, and did not use the past tense at all. Through my intervention, in the second draft, she spelled most words correctly, and punctuation marks and past tense verbs were used appropriately. In the third draft, this learner misspelled very few words, and punctuation marks and past tense verbs were used

correctly. Due to direct feedback or the correction I provided in the third draft, this learners' fourth draft had no errors at all (see Appendix F).

5.3.3 Learner 3

In the first draft, this learner did not use any punctuation marks except for full stops at the end of some sentences; she also failed to start most sentences with a capital letter, and did not spell some words correctly. Despite my intervention, there were still errors in the second draft in the case of punctuation marks and use of the past tense, and she still did not spell some words correctly. Although she had few misspelled words in the third draft, she used punctuation marks and the past tense more correctly, which shows that she applied the feedback I gave and the corrections I made on her drafts. Due to direct feedback or the correction I provided in the third draft, this learners' fourth draft had very few errors (see Appendix G).

5.3.4 Learner 4

Learner 4 did not use punctuation marks and the past tense correctly in the first draft, nor did he spell some words correctly until I intervened, but by the second draft, he ended all sentences with a full stop. However, he misused the past tense, and misused and misspelled certain words. Through my intervention, in the third draft, Learner 4 managed to use the past tense appropriately, spelt most words correctly and used full stops correctly. Despite direct feedback or the correction I provided in the third draft, this learners' fourth draft still had a few errors (see Appendix H).

5.3.5 Learner 5

The only punctuation mark Learner 5 used in the first draft was a full stop at the end of some sentences. In the same draft, he used the past tense inappropriately and he misspelled some words until I intervened**.** Despite my intervention**,** as in the first draft, the only punctuation mark this learner used in the second draft was a full stop at the end of sentences. In the second draft, he also misspelled some words, and others were wrongly used. However, through my intervention, in the third draft, Learner 5 used some punctuation marks and the past tense appropriately; he also spelled and used some words correctly and appropriately. Despite direct feedback or the correction I provided in the third draft, this learners' fourth draft still had a few errors (see Appendix I).

5.3.6 Learner 6

In Learner 6's first draft, punctuation marks were missing. He used the past tense inappropriately, and misspelled and misused some words. He still misspelled and used some words wrongly in the second draft until I intervened. After my intervention, Learner 6 used the past tense and punctuation marks in the second draft much more correctly than in the first draft. However, he did not write the third and fourth draft as instructed (see Appendix J). From my observation, I realised that this learner did not like writing, which might be due to laziness. He was always unwilling to write, and he was very often absent from school, which I think contributed to his poor writing skills.

5.4 Most Effective Feedback Strategies to Improve the Accuracy of Learners' Essay Writing

This section deals with the feedback strategies I applied that worked most effectively to improve the accuracy of my learners in English essay writing with regard to four language aspects, namely, punctuation marks, past tense verbs, spelling and vocabulary. My purpose in correcting my learners' work was to use their mistakes as a learning opportunity. By correcting their mistakes, I hoped that the mistakes would not be repeated, and that I would improve on my ways of providing feedback.

As an English Second Language teacher and researcher, there were alternative methods I applied to correct my learners' written work, such as underlining, circling, and using correction codes as indirect feedback, peer and self-correction, and whole-class correction, as well as corrective direct feedback. These were the means I used to get my learners to take a more active part in the correction process. I simply indicated where there were mistakes, leaving them to think about what was wrong with what they had written, and correct it themselves.

5.4.1 Underlining and circling as indirect feedback

By using the method of underlining and circling some errors, I gave my learners a precise indication of where each mistake was, and left them to think about what was wrong; they then had to correct the mistakes themselves. In the beginning, I refrained from direct error feedback (i.e. overt correction), which involves the provision of the correct forms or structures for learners' faulty sentences. The danger of direct error feedback right from the beginning was that I might misinterpret learners' meaning and put words into their mouths. Although direct error feedback was appropriate for my Grade 8 learners as English Second

Language users, I decided to apply it only at a later stage when they could not correct some errors themselves.

5.4.2 Correction codes as indirect feedback

Giving correction codes was another method that I used to involve my learners and make them think about how they could correct their own work. This method consisted of a set of letters and symbols that made it clear what kind of mistake learners had made. For this method to work well, it was important for me to keep the number of symbols to a minimum and for all learners in the class to know the codes. According to my teaching experience, I realised that learners remembered things much better when they had to make an effort to find the answers themselves. It also meant that, rather than correcting every mistake, I had to stop and think about why learners had made a mistake and then give suitable feedback as required. These codes appear in Chapter 2, Table 1, on page 26.

5.4.3 Peer and self-correction

In peer and self-correction, learners worked with partners to attempt to discover the nature of their errors, and made their own corrections by writing with a pencil above the mistakes. The main purpose of using the peer-correction method was to reinforce positive aspects of my learners' writing. They needed to revise their written work based on comments and responses from me and from their peers to achieve clarity and accuracy. Partners then left it to the writer of the essay to do correction based on peer feedback and return their work to me. This gave my learners the opportunity to reflect on their mistakes and to make improvements to their writing, and it showed me what they were capable of accomplishing. I

then checked corrections and gave learners feedback on anything that was still wrong, or that they had otherwise been unable to improve.

5.4.4 Providing classroom resources

During my initial teacher training we were encouraged to always prepare teaching materials such posters, flash-cards, flipcharts, and real life teaching aids (i.e. a fresh orange) to help learners understand much better. We were advised to make sure that after teaching to display those posters, flash-cards and flipcharts relevant to a particular series of lessons on our classroom walls. In line with this I also displayed on my classroom wall written posters, flash-cards and flipcharts to do with punctuations with their symbols, meaning and usage; common misspelled words, a table of tense verbs and a list of common vocabulary. In addition to what I had on the wall, I also had a reading corner with novels, dictionaries, newspapers and magazines. All these efforts were to expose my learners to reading and writing; a good reader makes a good writer. This fourth method saved me time and developed a new channel of learning for the whole class. Specifically, where I had corrected their work by using a code, I indicated to them the types of errors they had made, which involved them in more conscious assessment of what they had produced, and this was done as a class activity. I allowed learners to share their thoughts with their classmates by discussing comments on errors I had noticed while marking their essays, as well as discussing challenging errors they had encountered. Through this process, most of the learners gained confidence in their handling of the written language because I had given them practice in using the language in realistic situations through reading other learners' drafts as they were making corrections.

Hattie and Timperley (2007, p. 93) hold that effective feedback must always provide learners with information about their progress in writing and about how to proceed to the next level. Teachers need to interact with their learners and to acknowledge learners' involvement, commitment, confidence, and competence in carrying out written tasks. Most importantly, as a language teacher-researcher, I needed to establish a collaborative relationship with my learners by drawing attention to problems, offering alternatives, and suggesting possibilities. In this sort of relationship, learner and teacher can exchange information about how the writer can communicate with the reader without causing confusion (Brannon & Knoblauch, as cited in Zamel, 1985, p.144**).**

5.4.5 Corrective direct feedback

Corrective direct feedback, the last feedback strategy I used, was best for producing accurate revisions and was preferred by almost all learners as it was the fastest and easiest way for them to do revision. In this method, I provided feedback to learners to help them correct their errors by providing the correct linguistic forms. Corrective direct feedback had the advantage that it provided explicit information about the correct forms. It was also an appropriate method for me to use on my Grade 8 learners as beginner writers, and was also suitable when errors in punctuation, past tense verbs, spelling and word choice were untreatable or were not susceptible to self-correction. It was also the most suitable feedback method when I wanted to direct learners' attention to all error patterns that required their attention and correction.

5.5 Conclusion

The findings of this study were based on samples obtained from only six written essay scripts, and I was actively involved in assessing the learners' written work in order to help them improve their accuracy in writing through corrective feedback. Feedback is inherent

and has a strong foundation in major learning theories such as behavioral learning theory and cognitive information processing theory, and these theories value feedback as a vital part in learning and instruction. In the behavioral view of learning, feedback is believed to have important instructional effects on learning as it can modify or shape learner behavior by reinforcing correct responses and providing correction for incorrect responses. Cognitive information provides learners with information about the correctness of their performance, while processing theory provides corrective information that learners can use to modify their performance.

The importance of feedback in ESL can be seen from the many studies conducted on feedback and its impact on learner writing. A teacher is one of the sources of feedback. In providing feedback, teachers have at least four roles: readers or respondents, mentors, grammarians, and evaluators. Corrective feedback is a type of feedback with the purpose of correcting any errors in learners' writing. In this study however not all errors were corrected because I did not want my learners to feel overwhelmed. In addressing such errors, teachers can employ different strategies of providing feedback such as direct feedback, indirect feedback, explicit feedback with an explanation of rules, or engaging learners in multiple-draft writing activities, all of which I applied in this study. More recent studies also lend support, providing evidence in favor of corrective feedback (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener et al., 2005; Ellis et al., 2008). Based on the findings of their studies and this study, it is maintained that teachers' corrective feedback, in conjunction with other factors such as writing in drafts and more exposure to language, is effective and helpful for learners in improving language accuracy in writing their essays.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents conclusions and lessons learned that emerged from findings as presented in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5. I summarize the findings linked to the three research questions. Some weaknesses in hindsight of this study are highlighted, and recommendations are made for possible further research which might help teachers improve their feedback practices.

6.2 Summary of findings

To conduct this study successfully I had to consider the three research goals and questions. In the first research question I examined the kind of language errors my grade 8 learners made in their writing I categorized these errors as errors, mistakes or lapses. I determined the distinction between errors, slips and mistakes or lapses (an error being a breach of the language's code resulting in an unacceptable utterance; slips being unthinking actions that do not go as planned; mistakes or lapses being a result of memory failures). In this study, learners made mainly punctuation, spelling and tense errors because they had not yet fully mastered the grammar rules of English language code. They also made mistakes or lapses in punctuations, spelling, and vocabulary errors simply because they had perhaps failed to concentrate properly.

- The first linguistically level of errors I identified from my analysis of learners' data were categorized as punctuation errors; punctuation simply means a device or making it easy to read and understand written or printed matter. The punctuation errors made by my learners in this study were capitalization, the use of comma, apostrophe, question mark and full stop.
- The second level I categorised was morphological errors. Some learners got the wrong mopheme (i.e., word part) in the wrong place at the wrong time and that caused them to commit a morphological error. The morphological errors committed by my learners were past tense verb errors.
- The third level was lexical errors these are errors relate to the words or vocabulary of a language, especially as distinguished from its grammatical and syntactical aspects. In this study, the lexical errors committed by my learners were spelling errors. The fourth level was grammatical errors; this was when learners actually broke the rules for grammatical structure in the language. Therefore, the grammatical errors committed by my learners in this study were past tense verb errors. The last level was semantic errors, learners committed semantic errors by using words that had the wrong meaning for the context.

In the second research question I analyzed how learners responded to my feedback. I learned that many learners struggled to adjust to my new feedback practices, and so the gist of the practices was not fully realised. Should I have had the opportunity to continue working with these learners I feel confident that they would have become more invested in the process. In light of the fact that this was a small scale of piece of research of limited duration and that I also changed jobs. I was not able to follow through as well as might have been hoped for.

The third research question was to determine which feedback strategies worked best to help my learners deal with their errors, mistakes or lapses. My original intention was to try to weigh up which strategy (direct or indirect) worked best but it seemed to me that each type of feedback worked to some extent; it was difficult to decide definitely that one worked better than the other. Therefore, I found that I could not fully answer this particular research question.

6.3 Weaknesses in hindsight

I might have done things differently were I to do it again. There are a number of weaknesses, some of which I list below.

- To know what learners were thinking about my feedback practices it might have been useful to hold some sort of meta-discussion with them to find out how they experienced the intervention.
- Another shortcoming was that I did not do a fully detailed linguistic analysis of the errors.
- I also realized that in the time available I focused more on language errors in isolation rather than on language in the context of narrative text.
- Retrospectively, I realized that I made a lot of tables and graphs; however, my study would be richer if I could have strengthened the qualitative approach.

6.4 Recommendations for future research

Below are some ideas I have for further research into teacher feedback.

- For this study, I recommend that more research needs to be done on what knowledge ESL teachers need to manage the feedback process in their own classrooms. This can only be achieved through mastering and understanding continuous assessment and the key role that feedback plays in assisting learners improve their writing accuracy.
- Another alternative is that ways of spending more time in teacher training programs to talk about the effects of various forms of continuous assessment and feedback should be explored. This could focus not just on those who receive it (learners), but also on the teachers who carry out the assessment processes.
- Further research into how to help pre-service ESL teachers to better understand how to give feedback in their classrooms would be good. They could be helped to develop this knowledge through experience, self-reflection, and discovery.
- Another suggestion would be to identify good teaching textbooks and other resources dealing with the importance of feedback (delineating the various forms of feedback, discussing the strengths and weaknesses of each, posing case study examples, and giving plentiful examples of appropriate word choice in writing or otherwise conveying feedback).

6.5 Conclusion

What I have learned from this research is that I have become better able to evaluate my own teaching and error-correction practices. I have gained the power of self-evaluation especially when teaching, correcting and commenting on my learners' written work. I have learned that reflecting on my own performance and experience is useful in the way that it forces me to analyze why something was or was not successful or what I have learned from the process. It also encouraged me as a language teacher to take responsibility for my own learning.

By employing a variety of types of feedback (which included multiple-drafts revision, indirect, direct and written commentary) helped me to attend much better to my learners' needs. I felt very fortunate to have been exposed in my Master's studies to many different ideas about the sorts of feedback a language teacher can use to help improve her learners' writing. I gained a lot from academic literature on feedback but there is no better way to really examine the effectiveness of these forms than to experience them as a teacher.

Working on my learners' essays often reminded me that I am a teacher of English, and, therefore, I should put more emphasis on grammar and vocabulary, and on giving learners opportunities to practise the grammar and vocabulary they have learnt. I have further learned that unless learners' written errors are pointed out and/or corrected, they cannot 'learn' from their mistakes. I was able therefore to become more honest and confident in telling my learners what mistakes they have made in their writing to help them avoid making the same mistakes in the future.

According to Namibia's English Second language syllabus**,** learners have to learn to practise writing a variety of text types to prepare for public examinations. The examination culture tends to influence the criteria teachers use to mark learners' writing with a focus mainly on accuracy. While I believe that accuracy of writing helps markers to understand what learners are saying and they can get a pass, the process towards learning to write accurately cannot be hurried, and the success of it relies on good feedback.

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APPENDIX A

Exploring the role of feedback in helping Grade 8 learners improve the accuracy of their written English:
An action research case study

Researcher: Zoachina N. Miranda
Rhodes University,
Grahamstown, South Africa
Contact: miranda.zoachina2@gmail.com, 0811484394, 0817895691

Erongo Regional Council

The Regional Director

Erongo Education Region

Private Bag 5024

Swakopmund-Namibia

Dear sir/madam

Reference: Conducting a research study at the government school

My name is Zoachina N. Miranda; I am a student at the Department of Education at Rhodes University. I am doing research study for Master's Degree in English Language Teaching. My research explores **the role of feedback in helping grade 8 learners improve the accuracy of their written English.** It is a Case Study; which I am planning to conduct in my own Grade 8 English class. Therefore, I would hereby like to request authorisation to conduct this research study.

The main purpose of my research is to identify the cause of common errors in Grade 8 written essay, how to correct the learners' work, the advantage of feedback, and strategies/techniques to improve learners' written work. It is hoped that a better understanding of how feedback helps the Grade 8 learners improve the accuracy of their written English can lead to better ways of teaching English and probably improve learners' performance particularly in grade 10 & 12

examinations. Therefore, I would be grateful if you allow me to carry out this research and observe in one of my grade 8 classes at our school during English L2 lessons.

CONFIDENTIALITY

For confidentiality, the names of: the school, grade 8 learners and their identity will be kept completely confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study. Their individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

DATA

All data will be destroyed 3 and 5 years after the research has been completed.

RISKS AND BENEFITS/PAYMENT

There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The school and grade 8 learners will not be paid for participating in the study. Any information picked up by the researcher will not have any negative impact on the school. The benefit of the study will be a contribution to the understanding of feedback in helping learners improves their written work.

TIME INVOLVEMENT

The research will take place during the English lessons class as required. The teaching will take place in a normal way as planned, and the study would not interfere with learners' school work.

SUBJECT'S RIGHTS

Please understand that participation in this study is voluntary and participants have the right to participate at any time without penalty. I remain available to provide any additional information should need arises.

I wish to thank you in anticipation for your assistance.

Yours in Education

ZN Miranda

APPENDIX B

[redacted]

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND LETTER TO THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

[redacted]

DATA

[redacted]

RISKS AND BENEFITS STATEMENT

[redacted]

TIME INVOLVEMENT

[redacted]

SUBJECTS RIGHTS

[redacted]

APPENDIX C

ERONGO REGIONAL COUNCIL

DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION

Private Bag 5024
Swakopmund
E-mail: ...

Telephone no. : 064-4105101
Fax no. : 064- 4105136

Enquiries: Mr. J. /Awaseb
Date : 02 July 2013

Ref. no.: 12/2/G/1

To : Ms. Zoachina N. Miranda

RE : PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY AT THE GOVERNMENT SCHOOL.

Your request to conduct a research has reference.

The Education Directorate supports your studies and believes that the outcome of the research will benefit the region and its learners.

According to your request you mentioned to carry out the research during the English L2 lessons, therefore permission from the principal is needed to do the exercise and not to interrupt the normal school programme.

We trust that this research will have desired effects on our learners.

Yours faithfully,

ERONGO REGIONAL COUNCIL
DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION
PRIVATE BAG, SWAKOPMUND
03 JUL 2013

J. /AWASEB
REGIONAL DIRECTOR

APPENDIX D

Swakopmund Secondary School

P.O. Box [illegible] SWAKOPMUND
Tel: 064-[illegible]
Fax: 064-[illegible]
e-mail: [illegible]

02 July 2013

Ms. Zoeshina N. Miranda
Rhodes University
Grahamstown
South Africa

Dear Ms. Miranda,

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I refer to your letter on the above subject matter.

I am pleased to inform you that permission has been granted for you to carry out the intended research in our school.

I assure you of our cooperation in this regard.

Best wishes.

Mr. S.S Sibungo
PRINCIPAL

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
PRINCIPAL
SWAKOPMUND SECONDARY SCHOOL
02 -07- 2013
P.O. BOX 1ST, SWAKOPMUND
TEL: 064-[illegible] - FAX: 064-[illegible]
E-mail: [illegible]
ERONGO REGION

APPENDIX E

A frightening experience (1) 31 January 2013

On your way home from the shop you had a frightening experience. Tell a story about the events and why you were so scared.

One day on my way home from the shop I heard a very loud sound and I was so scared. I didn't know what to do. I cannot run away because there are buildings all together.

That day I was really scared when I heard the sound. I stopped and looked and I didn't see anything. The time that I was there I thought all the buildings were shops only but no there were also houses and I knocked the door. A woman opened the door and asked me how can I help you? I said I am really scared because I heard a very loud noise please help me. Ok, said the woman. I stayed there for a long time at the woman's house.

From that day on I never ever went to the shops by myself. I thank the woman.

Your story [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible]

Narrative essay

(2) 13 February 2013

A frightening experience

One day on my way home from the shop I heard a very loud sound and I was so scared. I did not know what to do. I can't run away because there are buildings all over.

That day I was really scared when I heard the sound. I stopped, looked and listened. I did not see anything. I thought the buildings were all shops only. But there are also houses. I knocked one door, a woman opened the door and asked me, How can I help you?

I said, I am really scared because I heard a very loud noise please help me. Ok, said the woman. I stayed there for a long time at the woman's house. From there I never ever went to the shop by myself. I thank the woman.

- Good story
[illegible]

Correction

29 May 2013

A frightening experience

One day on my way home from the shop I hear a very loud sound. I was so scared. I did not know what to do. I could not run away because there were buildings all over.

That day I was really scared when I hear the sound I stopped, looked and listened. I did not see anything. I thought the buildings were all shops only. But there were also houses. I knocked at one door a woman opened the door and asked me, How can I help you?

I said, I am really scared because I hear a very loud noise please help me. Oh, said the women. I stayed there for a long time at the woman's house. From there I never ever went to the shop by myself. I thank the woman.

[illegible]

APPENDIX F

Correction [illegible]

A frightening experience

One day on my way home from the shop I heard a very loud sound I was so scared I did not know what to do. I could not run away because there were buildings all over.

That day I was really scared when I heard the sound I stopped, looked and listened. I did not see anything. I thought the buildings were all shops only. But there were also houses. I knocked at one door a woman opened the door and asked me, How can I help you?

I said, I am really scared because I heard a very loud noise please help me. She said [illegible]. I stayed there for a long time at that woman's house. From there I never ever went to the shop by myself. I thank the woman.

[illegible]

APPENDIX G

3 [illegible] 20[illegible]

A frightening experience

Sit your now think from the time you had a frightening experience. Tell a story about the events and why you were so scared.

One day I was watching a movie called "[illegible]" that [illegible] someone [illegible] me. There was very [illegible] [illegible] grab things from people on streets. After watching a movie, my mom sent me to buy sugar at the [illegible] in the main street. On my way there from the [illegible] I was [illegible] [illegible] in my hands and a friend of my sister came from the back and [illegible] [illegible] and ran away. I [illegible] after him but I was so scared. Later on he came back and gave me back the cellphone and told me not to use cellphones on streets because he even [illegible] a cellphone the same way. I told him that he made me scared and I was [illegible] once and he told me that it was my [illegible] [illegible] the day I watch a scary movie some thing happened to me.

[illegible] words

- [illegible] good and well [illegible]
- [illegible] [illegible] on spelling and punctuation [illegible]
- [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] in your [illegible]
- [illegible] your [illegible] in paragraphs.
- [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

[illegible] [illegible]

Narrative essay 16 February 20[illegible]

A frightening experience

One day I was watching a movie called [illegible] and on [illegible] someone [illegible] frightened me. [illegible] was very [illegible]. He was a thief. [illegible] grab things from people on streets. After watching a movie, my mom sent me to buy sugar at the [illegible] in the main street. [illegible] ~~[illegible] from the [illegible]~~ [illegible] a cellphone.

On my way [illegible] from the [illegible] I was [illegible] a cellphone [illegible] my hand [illegible] a friend of my sister came from the back and [illegible] grabbed my cellphone and ran away. I wanted to run after him I [illegible] [illegible] scared.

Later on he came back and gave me back the cellphone and told me not to use cellphones on streets, because he even lost a cellphone in the same way. I told him that he made me scared and I was afraid [illegible] [illegible] and he told me [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]. On the day I watch a scary movie [illegible] something happened to me.

[illegible] [illegible]

- [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
- [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
- Your second paragraph [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
- [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
- [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
- [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

APPENDIX H

Correction [illegible] June 20[illegible]

A frightening experience ✓ (1.0) 3

One day I was watching a movie called [illegible] and [illegible] someone [illegible] frightened [illegible] was very [illegible] he [illegible] things [illegible] on streets. After watching a movie, my mother told me to buy sugar at the [illegible] shop in the main street.

On my way home from the [illegible] shop having a cellphone in my hands, but a friend of my sister come from the back and grabbed my cellphone and ran away. I wanted to run after him but I was too scared.

Later on he come back and give me back the cellphone and told me not to use cellphones on street, because he can take a cellphone in the same way. I told him that he made me scared and it wasn't good to do that and he took me back. That was my story. On the day I watched a scary movie, something happened to me.

— [illegible]

[illegible]

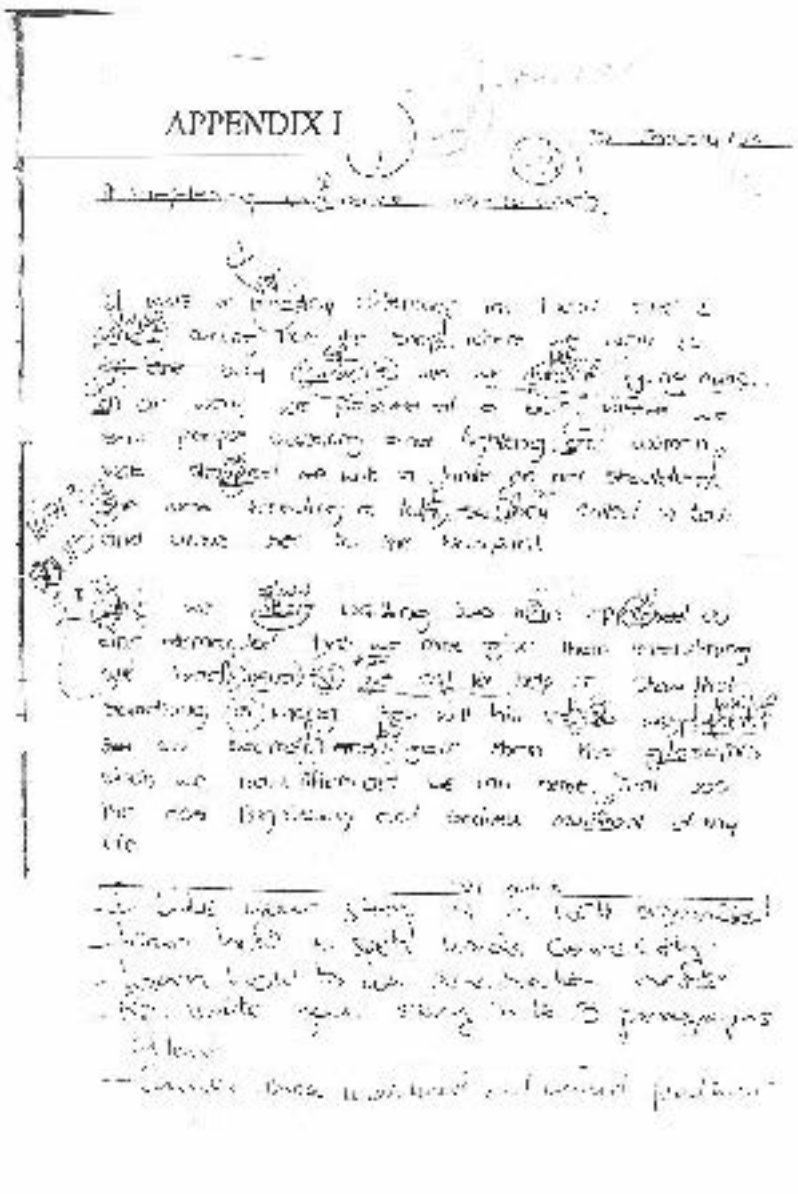
(1) (1.0) 4 — [illegible] June 2013

Correction

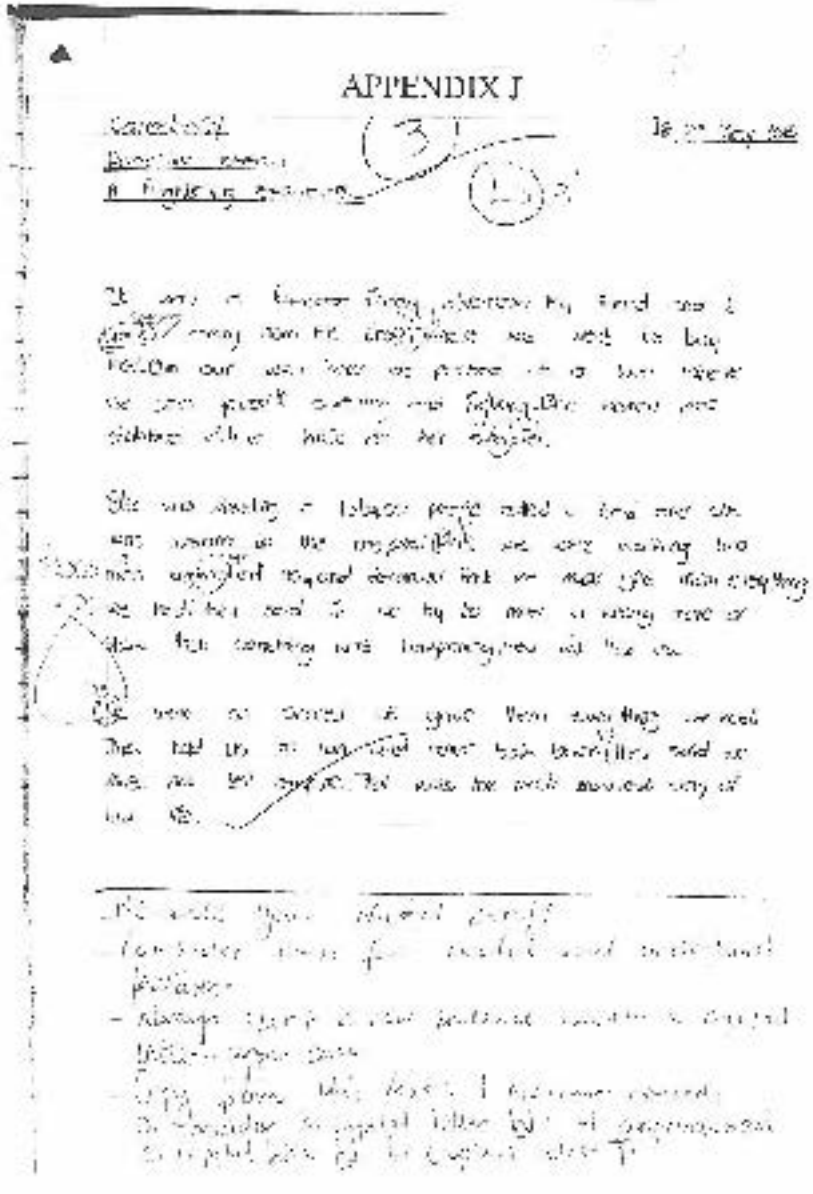
A frightening experience ✓

[illegible]

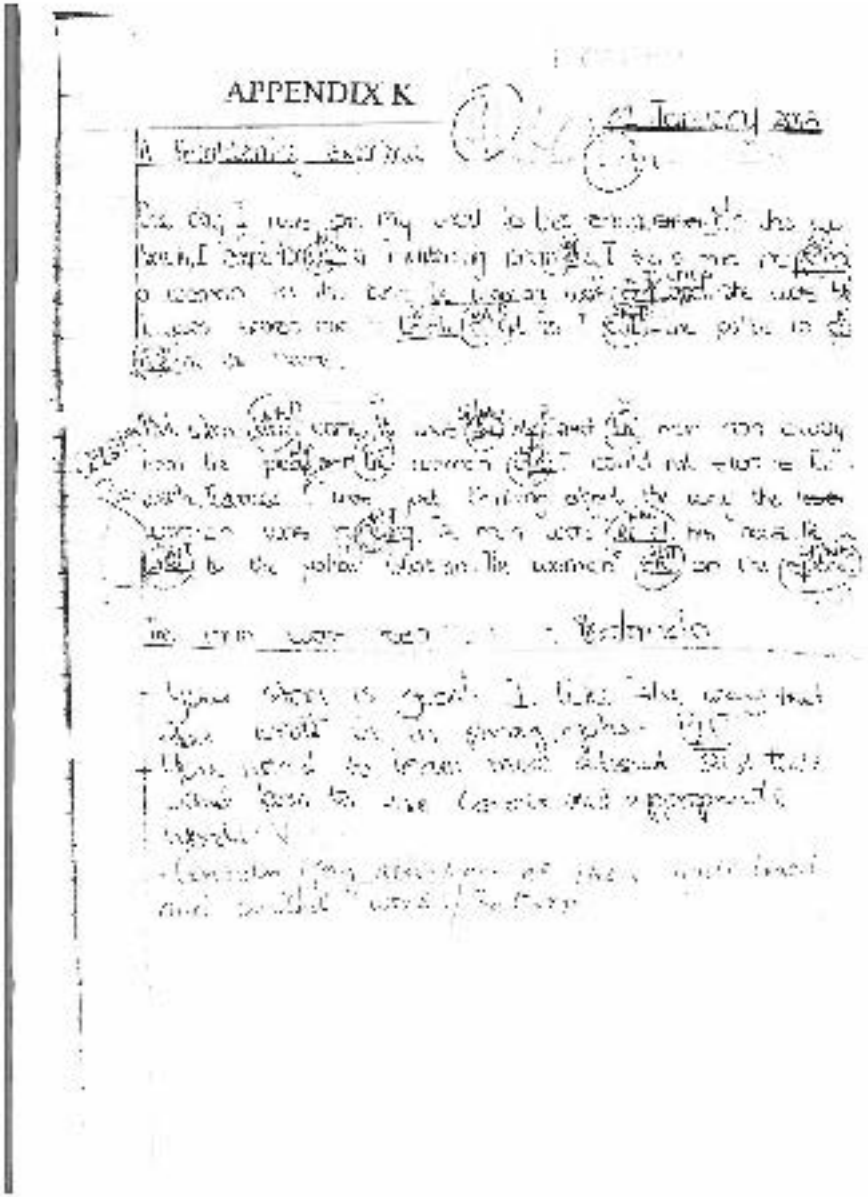
APPENDIX I



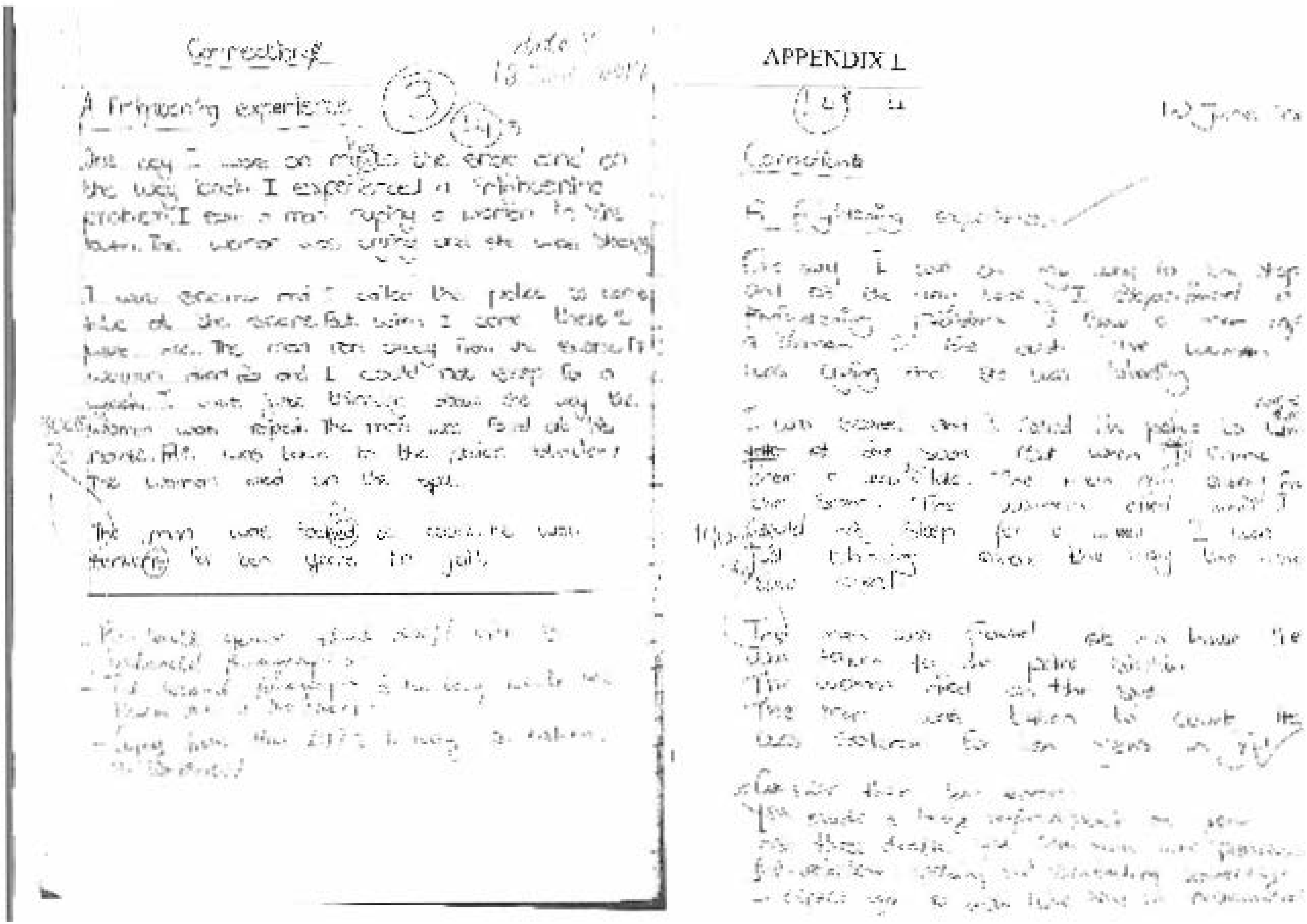
APPENDIX J



APPENDIX K



APPENDIX L



Correcting

A frightening experience

One day I was on my way to the [illegible] and on the way back I experienced a frightening problem. I saw a man [illegible] a woman in the town. The woman was crying and she was bleeding.

I was [illegible] and I called the police to [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] I could not sleep for a week. [illegible] The woman died on the spot.

The man was [illegible] for ten years in jail.

[illegible]

Corrections

A frightening experience

One day I was on my way to the shop and on the way back I experienced a frightening problem. I saw a man [illegible] a woman in the [illegible]. The woman was crying and she was bleeding.

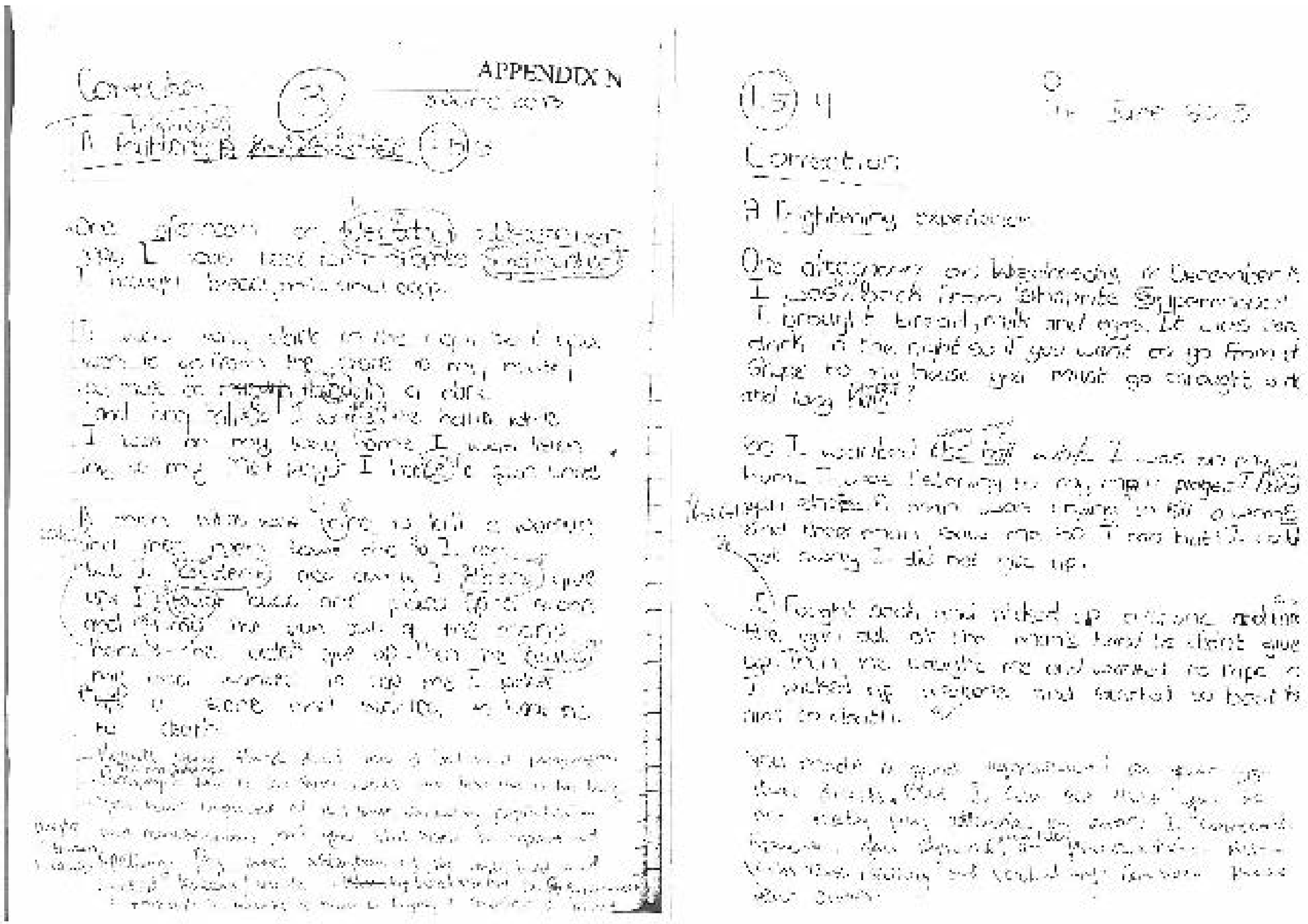
I was scared and I called the police to [illegible] [illegible] I could not sleep for a week. I was just thinking about the way the woman [illegible].

The man was found [illegible] the police station. The woman died on the spot. The man was taken to court. He was [illegible] for ten years in jail.

[illegible]

APPENDIX M

APPENDIX N



Correction

A Frightening experience

APPENDIX O

1. A frightening experience — 25.01.2013 — (1) L6/1

~~Essay~~

One day I was on may way home. I was coming from Shoprite in town and I am staying in Mondesa. It was 5 o'clock in the afternoon. When I was walking in a open space area, I found three guys, and they where smoking dagga. Than I say "what are you doing in a deep bazz. I will go and tell the police. Than they said what.

Than I said nothing. that time I was so afraid. Then one said you are laying man! you said that you will go and tell the police. Then I say why are you asking if you know what I ask first. Than one said why did you said you didn't say something. Than I run when I run one kick me than I fall. Than one said just leave the small boy man.

That time I was crying that time, than one said you are talking things that you don't now. then I was going home crying!

(147)

- Your idea is good BUT:
- You need to learn how to spell words correctly.
- You also have to learn how to use tenses (Past) appropriately. — Consider the circled and underlined features.
- You really need to learn how to write an essay.

Narrative essay — 18 February 2013

A frightening experience — (2) L6/2

One day I was on my way home. I was coming from Shoprite in town and I am staying in Mondesa. It was 5 o'clock in the afternoon. When I was walking in the open space area, I found three boys, and they were smoking weed.

When I past through, then I said what are you doing in a deep bazz. I will call the police now. That time one of the big boys did her what I said. Then she said what? Ther I said nothing. Then one said you are laying you said something man.

Than I walked maybe 3 metre then one said you said you will go and call the police. Then I said now why did you said that now what did you said while you did her now what did you said nothing.

I runed away screaming help me, help me, then they cathed me, then they kicked me. Then one boy said just leave the small boy man. Then one said he talked things that he do not know. Then I was going home crying (sorry)! repetition

7/10 26.02.2013

- I like the way that you wrote in paragraphs.
- I enjoyed the content of your essay.
- Learn [illegible] more about past tense.
- Consider / Pay attention at the underlined and circled

APPENDIX P

Cynthia Murray, D.Phil (Applied Linguistics)
Global Launch
University of Arizona
Email: cynthia.murray@asu.edu

15 June 2015

CONFIRMATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING

This serves to confirm that Dr Cynthia Murray provided English language editing for the Master's Thesis entitled "Exploring the Role of Corrective Feedback in Helping Grade 8 Learners to Improve the Accuracy of their Written English: An Action Research Case Study", submitted to Rhodes University by Zoachina Nangobe Miranda.