



PHD

Engagement with Teacher Feedback: An Exploratory Research into Chinese Student Experience in UK Higher Education

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Publication date:
2019

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**Engagement with Teacher Feedback: An Exploratory
Research into Chinese Student Experience in UK Higher
Education**

Fangfei Li

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

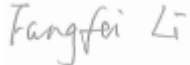
**University of Bath
Department of Education
January 2019**

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Acknowledgement

The completion of this thesis marks the end of my PhD journey, which can be likened to a quest of enlightenment that culminated in discovering the Dead Sea scrolls. On submission of this thesis, I thank all those who in one way or another, contributed to the completion of this manuscript.

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors – two genuinely helpful and capable women – Professor Xiao Lan Curdt-Christiansen and Dr Katie Dunworth. Their able guidance, valuable suggestions, prompt support and absolute patience enabled me to have great confidence in coping with the challenges throughout the process of my PhD. It was a great privilege to interact and receive supervision from them. I particularly owe a debt of gratitude to Professor Xiao Lan Curdt-Christiansen who acted as the lead supervisor in the last six months of my PhD. I would not have finished my project without her timely, selfless and concentrated support.

I am grateful to the people who provided me with insightful feedback and support on my project. I would like to thank Dr Harry Kuchah, Dr Sam Carr, Gihan Ismail, Dr Wenxuan Li, and Dr Anna Csernus for their intellectual inspiration which helped me to develop into a better researcher.

I would like to extend my gratitude to my anonymous research participants. The significant findings in this thesis would not have been generated without their contribution to the interesting and rich data. I would not have been able to undertake this endeavour without their valuable time and effort.

More importantly, a very special and heartfelt thank goes out to my supportive parents and my beloved fiancé Mr. Jiahui Chen. They offered me constant encouragement, financial and

emotional support from the beginning to the end of the process. Sincere gratitude can be credited to my Huihui for his companionship, understanding and devotion over the last few years, despite the turbulence we experienced.

Lastly, thanks also go to my single room at 27 Calton Walk and Virgil Building of University of Bath. Here I could rest in a warm place and have sufficient space for contemplating and writing my thesis. I thank McDonalds for the breakfast menu which fed me and gave me sufficient energy to work on my thesis for a whole day. I would also like to congratulate myself for enduring the difficult moments and persisting despite setbacks and adversity. It was indeed a valuable and rewarding experience.

Abstract

This thesis investigates how Chinese students exert their agency when they engage with teacher feedback in UK higher education. In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the agency of students in the feedback process. In relation to its efficacy in scaffolding the dialogical learning process, researchers have reconceptualised the notion of feedback, from ‘transmissive’ (i.e. information is transmitted from teacher to student) to ‘co-constructive’ (i.e. students act in a self-regulatory way to construct feedback information by interacting with all the participants involved in the feedback process).

Drawing on the co-constructivist view of feedback, this study explores how students construct their understanding of teacher feedback, and how they inform judgements in response to the feedback, through interaction with various contexts. The research questions guiding this study were 1) How do students from China perceive teacher feedback in the UK HE context? 2) What factors mediate the process of students transforming teacher feedback into practice? 3) What factors influence their engagement with teacher feedback in the UK HE context? This study is a qualitative exploratory research. It employs different types of semi-structured interviews (viz. background interviews, stimulated recall and retrospective interviews) to investigate feedback experiences of five Chinese postgraduate students at a UK university. Data collection covered two phases – the pre-sessional EAP programme and the first term of the MA (Master of Art) degree programme. The data were analysed thematically.

First, the research finds that participants perceived teacher feedback as having affective, cognitive and communicative dimensions. Findings suggest that participants had conflicting and mixed emotional responses to teacher feedback. They could learn from the feedback and relate it to further learning. The findings also reveal individual differences in the students’ views of teacher feedback, with some viewing it as a provider of knowledge, as a form of telling from teachers or as a springboard for communication between teacher and student.

Second, the process that participants transformed teacher feedback into practice was mediated by 1) their abilities to critically analyse inputs in different contexts (i.e. understanding of the denotative and pragmatic meanings delivered in teachers' suggestions and comments as well as their evaluation of exemplars) 2) the linguistic knowledge they mastered on the syntax and semantics of English as well as academic-based knowledge on disciplinary concepts and referencing conventions, and 3) their proactivity in seeking a better understanding of feedback and applying it in practices.

Third, the research identifies factors (viz. student essentialist thinking, self-perceptions of performance as well as social and epistemological factors) that influenced the students' engagement with teacher feedback. Findings suggest that participants' essentialist ways of identifying themselves as 'foreign students' and 'non-native English speakers' affected their interpretations of, and responses to the teacher feedback. They forged their understanding of teacher feedback by comparing the feedback with self-perceptions of their performances. The students' interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers influenced their engagement with feedback. They made sense of teacher feedback by interacting with peers and triangulating the feedback provided by other tutors. The students' trust in and adoption of teacher feedback were affected by their perceptions of tutors' position, expertise and attitudes towards students' inquiries and assignments. The students' construction of meaning in teacher feedback was also moderated by their epistemic beliefs, namely dualistic and pluralistic ways of knowing.

Overall, this study contributes to the ongoing discussion on students' agency in the feedback process and enriches the current understanding of students' engagement with teacher feedback from students' perspectives.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a flourishing of scholarly literature arguing for the importance of feedback in learning, where scholars seek to understand the notion of feedback and explore the features of effective feedback practices (e.g. Hounsell, 2007; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, Price et al., 2010; Carless, 2006; Carless et al., 2011). Different types of feedback, including teacher, peer, and self-generated feedback, and their impacts on students' learning have been comprehensively studied. This thesis aims to contribute to the existing literature on teacher feedback by focusing on a group of Chinese international students studying in UK higher education. In particular, it explores how these students perceive teacher feedback, how they make decisions in response to feedback, and what factors influence their engagement with feedback.

1.2 Feedback in learning

In the field of education, feedback is a dialogic process whereby students make sense of information from various sources and use it to improve their performance of a task (Carless, 2006). Teacher feedback is defined as teachers' input in response to students' performance in the form of suggestions and comments to be used for revision (Nicol and Macfarlane, 2006). Peer feedback is defined as a 'formative developmental process', in which learners have opportunities to interpret examples of good and poor work produced by peers working on the same assignment and to see how others interpret their own work (Mubarak, 2013). Self-generated feedback is a kind of 'internal feedback' that students generate 'as they monitor their engagement with learning activities and tasks, and assess progress towards goals' (Nicol and Macfarlane, 2006, p.200). While the three types of feedback play different roles in learning, teacher feedback is considered essential in facilitating students to monitor,

evaluate, and regulate their own learning and develop into independent learners (Ferguson, 2011). This thesis, therefore, aims to investigate how learners engage with teacher feedback to shape their learning.

Historically, teacher feedback has been treated as a single notion that has a one-sided emphasis on the messages transmitted from teacher to learner (Askew and Lodge, 2000). Feedback becomes equated with a linear model in which teachers are the sole source of knowledge and students are viewed as passive recipients of teacher-given knowledge (Sambell, 2011). Teacher feedback is expected to change the learners' performance without taking the learners' contribution into consideration (Butler and Winnie, 1995). As such, the effectiveness of feedback is of great concern. While research on teacher feedback has given insight into good feedback practices, there is growing evidence of the inefficiency of teacher feedback (Molloy and Boud, 2013). The feedback acted upon by students is in reality not as effective as teachers believe it to be (Shute, 2008). To understand the extent to which effective teacher feedback is filtered through students' practice, it is urgent to understand how students engage with the feedback they receive and how they use it to shape their learning (Eraut, 2006).

To obtain a deeper understanding of teacher feedback, researchers argue for shifting attention from examining the effects of various kinds of feedback comments on student performance to the process students undertake when they engage with feedback, for instance, how feedback is received, how it is acted upon, and how effective it is in practice from students' perspective (Shute, 2008). From a constructivist perspective, the shift towards students' 'mindful' engagement with feedback helps to conceptualise feedback as two-way communication, with students as active constructors of feedback information. Although teachers have been found to organise feedback events to promote students' reflections on feedback (Nicol, 2010), they tend to set up the direction and decide the nature of the feedback, thus limiting students' agency (Askew and Lodge, 2000).

To increase student agency in the feedback process, the focus of feedback is shifting to a co-constructivist perspective. From this perspective, students are supposed to have agency in a self-regulating way, seeking to form their own judgements through proactive and selective dialogues to address their learning needs in different contexts (Boud and Molloy, 2013). It is, therefore, individual agency, not feedback per se, that contributes to students' various interpretations of and behaviours in response to feedback. As discussed further in Chapter 2, these interpretations and practices are in turn shaped by students' interaction with sociocultural contexts. The present study, drawing on the co-constructivist perspective, investigates how (Chinese) students' individual agency contributes to the dynamics of, and the individual differences in, their engagement with teacher feedback.

1.3 Personal interest

I developed a particular interest in teacher feedback when studying for my MA degree at the University of Sheffield. I attended the pre-sessional EAP courses, during which we had four weeks to prepare and write a 2000-word essay. Giving feedback, the tutor highlighted a number of issues, including confusing expressions, ideas lacking explicit explanation, and inappropriate referencing, problems of which I had been previously unaware. Yet, I did not know how to respond to feedback comments such as, 'What do you mean?' and 'Be explicit'.

Later in the MA programme, we were required to write a short essay about Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Bearing in mind the comments that I received in the pre-sessions, I attempted to explain my ideas in greater detail to make them more understandable. For example, I added definitions when I mentioned certain terminologies. However, some of these details were then deemed unnecessary in the feedback provided by the SLA tutor. I had added definitions in my essay because I assumed that it would prove I had acquired knowledge of those terminologies, so that the teacher could evaluate how well I had mastered the disciplinary knowledge. I did not understand how an assessor could otherwise know what I had learnt, as I perceived essay writing not as a critical discussion about a certain topic to

show the writer's voice, but as a test of the knowledge students should have acquired, rather like my experience of undergraduate study in China. Later I asked the SLA tutor as to how I should explain terminologies explicitly without providing unnecessary information. The tutor explained that a good strategy was to explicitly clarify the purpose for adding a definition, for example to justify a certain argument, rather than to simply 'teach' the reader what the terminology meant. My understanding of the comment was transformed after I obtained the tutor's explanation and I learned how to take on board the feedback in my essay writing.

Given my limited experience of feedback during my undergraduate study, it was a challenge for me to revise my essays by adopting the feedback I received from the tutors in the pre-sessions and MA modules. In my undergraduate study, I was required to write module essays without receiving any instruction from teachers on how to write an essay. We then submitted the essays without receiving any feedback comments except for a grade. My undergraduate experience in China heavily influenced my understanding of, and response to, the feedback that I received in the UK. In an attempt to alleviate this struggle, I sought to better understand feedback comments by obtaining various interpretations from peers and additional explanations from tutors, as well as referring to published papers and dissertations.

My personal feedback experiences led to my curiosity of how other students who had studied in China would perceive and respond to the feedback they received at UK universities; what difficulties they encountered; how they addressed those difficulties and what changes occurred in their engagement with feedback. To do this, I searched a large amount of literature before I wrote a proposal for this project. The literature I reviewed, however, did not provide me with a systematic insight into how Chinese students engage with feedback in the UK pedagogical context. I found that, although there are empirical studies (e.g. Poverjuc, 2010; Tian, 2008) showing evidence of Chinese students' feedback experiences in the UK, those Chinese students investigated are just a small part of the multinational participants (see Poverjuc, 2010), or the findings in relation to Chinese students' feedback

experience are just a small part of the investigation of their overall academic experience in the foreign environment (see Tian, 2008). Most journal papers and books I read reflected realities which had little to do with my socio-cultural and educational context. There seems to have been little research conducted to build a comprehensive understanding of how the students from China perceive and respond to feedback in the UK. The under-researched area identified in the literature strengthened my interest in pursuing the project.

1.4 Background

To better understand Chinese students' engagement with feedback in the UK, I provide a brief introduction to the feedback provision contexts in both Chinese higher education (HE) (the undergraduate level) and UK higher education (the postgraduate level).

1.4.1 Feedback in Chinese higher education

At Chinese public universities, an undergraduate student's learning outcome is mainly assessed by mid-term and final examinations, a course essay and a graduate dissertation. In addition to providing grades on the examinations, essays and dissertations, teachers are required to provide instruction and give formative feedback to students' essays and dissertations and other written work.

Regarding instruction on course essays, there are limited policies explaining how teachers should assist students with essay writing by providing feedback. Baidu Encyclopaedia (2018) confirms that different universities have different requirements for instructing students on course essays. Most universities do not treat the course essay as a tool to develop students' research skills and therefore overlook its importance for the subsequent dissertation writing, which to some extent prevents students from developing sufficient skills and knowledge (ibid.).

Instead of receiving guidance and feedback from teachers, Chinese undergraduate students

normally learn how to write essays on their own. The lack of professional instruction on essay writing causes various problems with the quality of their essays. For example, Hao and Gao (2011) found that the students in their study tended to collect references and simply summarise other authors' ideas without ever critically analysing and evaluating them. Furthermore, since some Chinese universities do not check for essay plagiarism, evidence shows that some students merely copied ideas of others without even giving references (ibid).

Unlike the vague guidelines regarding feedback on course essays, there are clearer requirements and policies on how supervisors should give feedback to and guide students who are writing their final dissertations. Supervisors, for example, are required to track progress and assess the quality of dissertation drafts in order to provide timely feedback and suggestions (see the Notification of Undergraduate Degree Dissertation Supervisory Work of the Department of Foreign Language Studies of Tongling University, 2017). Moreover, supervisors are expected to give students 'heuristic guidance' on research topics, project argumentation, and research design, to meet with students every week, and answer their questions in person (see the Regulations and Implementing Rules of Undergraduate Degree Dissertation Supervisory Work of the School of Civil and Architectural Engineering, 2018).

Yet, despite the clear requirements on dissertation supervision, problems have recently been identified with implementing the requirements. Due to their heavy teaching and research commitments, some staff devote very limited resources to dissertation supervision, whilst others provide ineffective supervision due to lack of supervisory experience, consequently focusing only on the dissertation's format rather than its content (Hao and Gao, 2011). Additionally, some students do not take dissertation writing seriously. They do not proactively seek their supervisors' help even though they are given the opportunity to meet their teachers and discuss with teachers about their dissertation (Hao and Gao, 2011). Despite the clear policies of dissertation supervision/feedback provision, all of these issues happen and may result in poor quality dissertations.

Undergraduate students could also obtain teacher feedback on their EFL (English as a Foreign Language) written work. Empirical studies (Guo, 2012; Zhu, 2010; Yuan, 2014; Wang and Ding, 2011) show that teachers normally provide corrective written feedback and grading on students' English compositions. Wang and Ding (2011) found that teachers tended to provide brief comments, such as 'good,' 'excellent' and 'grammar mistakes' concerning the content, structure and English language issues. Zhu (2010) suggests that the lack of English writing classes for students as well as inadequate training for overseeing large classes at Chinese universities have contributed to insufficient feedback for submitted assignments. It would appear that the majority of teachers are reluctant to grant students a second opportunity to submit amended assignments and seldom inspect modifications (Zhu, 2010).

To some extent, such feedback provision context has shaped students' expectations, ideas and practices in response to teacher feedback. Research indicates that instead of just selectively identifying the problems that teachers deem important, students expect teachers to provide written feedback on every single submission and identify all the mistakes they make (Guo, 2012). Students appreciate face-to-face meetings in addition to written feedback (ibid.). Compared with the aforementioned brief comments, students prefer detailed commentaries that provide specific suggestions to improve their writing (Wang and Ding, 2011). Studies by Zhu (2010) and Yuan (2014) show that, as the majority of teachers do not check students' corrections, students might not have a serious attitude concerning teacher feedback. In such circumstances, students may not make any corrections to their work or proactively discuss with teachers how to revise their work (Yuan, 2014).

Overall, whilst different feedback provision policies are written by public universities, the extent to which these policies are implemented in undergraduate programmes varies significantly. There are 2,879 public institutions in China's higher education system (Ministry of Education, 2016), which makes the feedback provision systems and contexts wide ranging and complex. Not all Chinese universities have clear and systematic policies

on feedback provision, and the implementation of the policies is largely influenced by practicalities. Overall, the various feedback norms within Chinese university campuses have profoundly complicated and shaped individual students' expectations, needs and experiences of feedback during their undergraduate period.

1.4.2 Feedback in UK higher education

Within postgraduate programmes in the UK, students receive feedback on examinations, coursework, term-time essay assignments, and dissertations. Most universities in the UK have clear requirements and policies on feedback provision. The universities of Manchester, Swansea, Durham and Bath are discussed below as an illustration. Whilst each of these institutions has feedback provisions and assessment policies grounded on practicalities and tailored to their own specific needs, the policies are broadly similar with regards to feedback timelines and mechanisms, assessment criteria, guidance on good feedback, and opportunities for students to seek further clarification of feedback provided.

More specifically, feedback is provided by teachers either as written (e.g. grades; comments; email correspondences with students) or orally (e.g. tutorials and answers to students' questions after class) (see Learning and Teaching Handbook, University of Durham, 2017). Teachers need to explain to students the feedback's purpose, whether it is formative or summative, available feedback methods, and additional support students could seek from the university to obtain further feedback (see Feedback and Assessment Policy, University of Swansea, 2015). Teachers are required to provide feedback by a specific deadline, offer clear, detailed and instructive feedback based on assignment assessment criteria, highlight limitations of students' work, and give suggestions for further improvements (see the Assessment Framework of University of Manchester, 2018). Students are to be given opportunities to discuss feedback with teachers to seek clarification of the feedback provided, in addition to follow-up guidance on how to effectively use the feedback (ibid).

The Quality Assurance Code of Practice of the University of Bath provides those teaching

postgraduate programmes with guidance on producing substantive feedback. According to Articles 11.5-11.7 in Quality Assurance 16,

'[...] Students should receive prompt feedback on their academic performance in individual summative assignments. This is normally defined as feedback within a maximum of three semester weeks following the submission deadline for the assignment [...]. Feedback should ensure that the student understands how best to improve his or her performance in future assessments as well as commending them for achievement. The method of feedback should be consistent with the nature of the assignment, relate to the intended learning outcomes, assessment criteria and any grading descriptors [...]. Feedback on an individual assignment should offer constructive comment on a student's demonstration of generic skills, such as presentational skills and communication skills.' (QA16, p. 12).

Nevertheless, despite the clear and systematic feedback provision policies at UK universities, evidence suggests that feedback in practice varies radically. Whilst there is guidance on how to produce clear and detailed feedback, teachers may have different perceptions of what constitutes quality feedback (see Dunworth and Sanchez, 2016) in addition to differing interpretations of assessment criteria (see Dodman and Jones, 2012). Students themselves have various interpretations of feedback and respond differently to feedback (Dodman and Jones, 2012). Furthermore, students may sometimes feel confused about how to implement feedback if they cannot decode teachers' comments (e.g. Poverjuc, 2010). Whilst students are provided opportunities to ask for further clarification, some proactively seek this (e.g. Pitt and Norton, 2017), whereas others are less willing to discuss feedback for various physical and psychological reasons (e.g. Handley et al., 2007). As such, there is significant disparity between the realisation of feedback implementation and the policies/requirements of feedback provision, given the agencies that teachers and students exert in the feedback-providing and feedback-responding practices.

1.5 Understanding Chinese students' engagement with teacher feedback in UK HE

A critical review of the literature on Chinese students' feedback experiences (Section 1.4.1)

and their engagement with feedback in a host pedagogical context (Section 2.3.1) reveal the limited empirical research on Chinese students' engagement with teacher feedback at UK universities. Chinese students' engagement with feedback provided by teachers in the UK is further complicated when taking into account the differences in feedback provision norms between these two HE contexts and possible transitional impacts caused by such a contextual disparity. In this regard, it is important to know how students' expectations, ideas and practices in relation to feedback that have been shaped in their Chinese undergraduate studies interact with their engagement in the UK feedback context.

When Chinese students study abroad, the transitional sociocultural context in which they engage is unique to them, depending on people and sources with which they interact, contexts they engage with and personal experiences at different times. As such, a social-constructivist perspective could enable us to explore the impact of Chinese students' individual previous feedback experiences on their engagement with feedback in UK settings, particularly the dynamic role of student agency in adaptive response to the host pedagogical context. This thesis, therefore, employs a social-constructivist perspective to understand the process Chinese students go through when adapting to the new feedback context at UK universities.

1.6 Research purpose and research questions

This study aims to analyse the complexities and dynamics of Chinese students' engagement with feedback in UK HE, focusing on students who have studied in China's undergraduate programmes and are now completing postgraduate study in the UK.

The study aims to explore: 1) how students make sense of tutor feedback; 2) how they reflect and act upon the feedback by interacting with a range of available sources (e.g. peers' suggestions, lesson slides, assessment criteria, essay exemplars and journal articles); 3) what factors have mediating impacts on their behaviour in response to teacher feedback; and 4)

what factors influence their engagement with feedback in the foreign context.

To fulfil the research purpose and objectives, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How do students from China perceive teacher feedback in the UK HE context?
2. What factors mediate the process of students transforming teacher feedback into practice?
3. What factors influence the students' engagement with teacher feedback in the UK HE context?

1.7 Terminology of the thesis

In this thesis, there are several key terms that are open to interpretation or have been defined in various ways according to different contexts. In the context of the present study, they are defined as follows.

Perceptions of teacher feedback refers to students' emotional reactions to teacher feedback, their interpretation of feedback comments, expectations of teacher feedback, reflections on what they learned from teacher feedback, and the roles they assumed teacher feedback played in their learning.

Factors mediating the process of teacher feedback being transformed into students' practices refers to any features identified within the research data that have a mediating effect on the process wherein students transform teacher feedback into their behaviour in response to the feedback - e.g. revisions, plus actions taken to better understand feedback and to apply feedback into practice.

Student engagement with teacher feedback refers to time, energy and resources which students devote to particular feedback activities. It means student participation in the

feedback activities in terms of what they think and what they do to the feedback provided by teachers.

The examination of *factors mediating the process of teacher feedback being transformed into students' practice* serves to unpack the rounds of revision regarding how students' interpretation of specific feedback comments/suggestions affects their behaviour (revisions). Whereas, *factors influencing student engagement with teacher feedback* are taken in a broader sense, relating to the rationales of students' different levels of engagement with different sources of feedback input, such as feedback from different tutors, peer suggestions to writing and peers' interpretation of teacher feedback.

1.8 Research significance

This study aims to contribute to the growing body of research on student agency in the feedback process. There are three important areas where this study makes an original contribution to the field of feedback. First, it provides a systematic account of how Chinese students perceive teacher feedback in the UK postgraduate educational context. Second, by extending research into students' interactions with various agents in different contexts to turning feedback into practice, the study offers important insights into the 'mediators' involved in students interpreting and applying feedback. Finally, the study serves to extend the current literature on the underlying factors influencing the ways and levels of Chinese students' engagement with teacher feedback in the UK HE context.

The findings will help HE teachers and researchers develop a more comprehensive understanding of how students' engagement with teacher feedback is affected by prior learning experiences and contexts, by current learning environments, and by people with whom they interact. This thesis thus offers a platform for future studies which seek to build a fuller picture of the underlying process involved in learners' engagement with teacher feedback.

1.9 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of eight chapters. Following the introduction of the thesis, Chapter 2 provides a conceptual understanding of student engagement with teacher feedback. At the end of this review, a number of gaps in the existing literature on feedback are identified to be addressed in the current study. Chapter 3 provides an account of the development of the research methodology, with specific reference to the philosophical stance which informs my design of the research (viz. interview-based exploratory qualitative study), setting, participants, the choice of data collection instruments (semi-structured interviews) and data analysis strategies. The chapter concludes by dealing with trustworthiness and ethical issues.

In Chapters 4 to 6, I discuss the findings that relate to the three research questions. Chapter 4 presents findings on participants' perceptions of teacher feedback from affective, cognitive and communicative dimensions. Chapter 5 discusses the mediators that affect the transformation of teacher feedback into students' practice. Chapter 6 presents findings on factors that influence student engagement with teacher feedback (viz. students' self-essentialist ways of thinking, self-perceptions of performance, social interaction with peers and teachers as well as students' ways of knowing). Chapter 7 and 8 conclude the thesis with a summary of the key findings that answer the research questions, followed by a discussion of the main contributions to the field, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Overview

This chapter presents the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study. It provides a critical discussion of the empirical studies on student engagement with teacher feedback. It starts by providing a theoretical framework on feedback to guide the conceptualisation of feedback in the context of this study. It then moves on to discussing three major components of student engagement with teacher feedback, the affective, cognitive, and behavioural components, and examining the interplay among these components. Such discussion allows under-researched areas, such as the mediators involved in the process of feedback being transformed into practice, to be identified. Subsequently, a review of the factors influencing students' engagement with teacher feedback is presented. The chapter closes by situating the main focus of this study within the existing literature by identifying the gap between students' agency as demonstrated in their engagement with teacher feedback from a co-constructivist perspective and its representation in the context of students from China studying overseas in the UK HE institutions.

2.1 Theoretical framework guiding feedback

At the outset of this section, three theoretical constructs of feedback derived from recent research, the transmissive, constructivist, and co-constructivist views, are discussed. Then, drawing on the co-constructivist perspective, the literature on teacher feedback is reviewed with the aim of defining how feedback can be understood in the context of the current study.

2.1.1 Transmissive view

The transmissive view of feedback, as the name suggests, conceptualises feedback as a one-way transmission of knowledge from teachers (being viewed as experts) to students (being

viewed as novices). In this discourse, feedback is compared with a 'gift' from teachers who provide information to help students learn (Askew and Lodge, 2000). This view positions students as passive recipients of feedback information and precludes the need for student involvement in the form of producing their own judgements regarding feedback (Boud and Molloy, 2013).

In the existing literature, there are two major arguments aligning with the transmissive view of feedback. One is that the feedback comments 'given' to students are unambiguous and interpreted by students as intended by the teacher providing the information (Boud and Molloy, 2013). The other is that the more the students are 'told' what to do, the less likely they are able to develop independent thinking and self-evaluative capacity to make judgements for themselves (Sambell, 2011). A critical discussion of these two arguments is presented below.

Firstly, teachers holding a transmissive view of feedback tend to believe that as long as students work on the feedback they provide, the students can improve their performance, and therefore often complain that the feedback that they carefully craft is not engaged with by students as efficiently and effectively as they expect (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004; Boud and Molloy, 2013). However, research suggests that feedback comments are usually written in language that makes sense to the teacher but not to the students. For example, a study by Duncan on feedback comments (2007, p. 273) reveals that comments such as 'deepen analysis of key issues', 'use a more academic style', 'sharpen critique', 'identify and develop implications' and 'link theory and practice' are the ones that teachers commonly understand but the students find it difficult to interpret.

Furthermore, research suggests that students' understanding of feedback messages can differ significantly from the meaning intended by teachers. For example, employing questionnaires to separately survey staff members and students from a faculty of humanity and social sciences at an Australian university, Chanock (2000) examined the extent of agreement

between teacher and student understanding of the common but frequently misunderstood marking comment ‘too much description and not enough analysis’. The results suggest that some of the staff participants viewed ‘description’ as ‘summary of facts/story’ and analysis as ‘points of view/causal explanations/justification/significance’. Whereas the students were not sure what the teachers asked for. They interpreted ‘description’ as ‘unsubstantiated claims’ and ‘one’s own terms’, and understood ‘analysis’ as ‘argumentation’, ‘interpretation’, ‘research’ and ‘join theory into texts’. This study by Chanock was insightful in highlighting the complexities of how feedback can be interpreted differently, which challenges the passive view of student as mere recipient and absorber of feedback.

The mismatch between students’ expectations of teacher feedback and what the teachers provide in feedback is another challenge to the transmissive assumption. Beaumont, O’Doherty and Shannon (2011) show that feedback at universities emphasises independent learning as intended by teachers rather than ‘extensive formative feedback and guidance’ as desired by the students (p. 671). Using data derived from focus group interviews and questionnaires with 23 staff members and 145 learners at three UK universities, the study by Beaumont et al. reveals the disparity of perceptions of effective teacher feedback between teachers and students. The findings show that the university staff expressed frustration with low student engagement with the feedback offered. Whereas the students, who were accustomed to formative feedback comments and step-by-step guidance that they experienced in their schools, viewed the summative feedback judging performance that they received at the universities as not effective to support learning. In essence, this study by Beaumont et al. suggests that how students perceive teacher feedback is overlooked by the teachers, which may result in tutors’ prevalent belief in the usefulness of the comments they provide to students whereas students largely perceive these to be less useful.

The findings in the studies by Duncan (2007), Chanock (2000) and Beaumont et al. (2011) indicate that teachers viewing feedback as a transmissive process may overlook the fact that students, rather than being restricted to passively receiving and absorbing transmitted

information, subjectively construct their own understanding of the feedback information and make their own sense of it (Sambell, 2011).

Secondly, the transmissive view of feedback also aligns with the paradigm of ‘telling’. As Sambell (2011) suggests, ‘telling’ paradigm indicates that from teachers’ perspective, students tend to attach an over-riding significance to the judgements made by teachers and they simply wait to be told what they need to do. Resultantly, students tend to be demotivated in self-evaluating or exploring an alternative view on the given feedback or performances in question (Molloy and Boud, 2013).

Goel and Ellis (2013), for example, investigated teachers’ perceptions of their own feedback where the researchers found that some teachers were reluctant to provide students with exemplars as reference because they believed that students would imitate such exemplars without reflecting on their own work; these teachers therefore perceived exemplars as a barrier to students’ critical thinking. The teachers’ practice in this study seems to arise from the ‘telling’ assumptions that the more the students are ‘told’ what to do, the less likely they are able to develop critical and independent thinking. Yet, such assumptions seem to overlook the students’ active roles in making sense of the exemplars and determining how to use them in their own writing.

Arguably, such a view of feedback as telling tends to accord learners ‘a lowly status with little volition and limited agency’ (Boud and Molloy, 2013, p. 703) and excludes the possibility of students’ self-regulating abilities in processing feedback. It may be true in some cases wherein students may respond to the feedback on demand to improve their immediate performance at the surface level without developing further insights on why they have been asked to do so and how they could associate the feedback with future learning (Carless, 2006). Whereas, in some other occasions, students may be able to develop meta-learning and make use of the feedback in their future learning even though they have been ‘told’ what to do in the first instance. The latter has been supported in some studies.

For example, based on surveys (52) and interviews (15) with English teacher trainee students at a Hong Kong university, Carless (2006) examined the student perceptions of teacher feedback and found that students not only made use of feedback to improve their immediate performance but also incorporated the feedback into future writing. For instance, one student shared that she had obtained helpful suggestions from a teacher regarding the use of citations and referencing. As a result, she corrected the referencing mistakes in her assignment and used this work as a template for referencing in her subsequent writings. This example indicates that telling is just a starting point in a cognitive process and students may be able to develop self-regulation by making use of information they have been told to improve their future work. Telling in this case does not necessarily impede students' independent learning and self-evaluating abilities. Carless' findings indicate that it is individual differences that make students engage with feedback independently or unreflectively, and that it is arbitrary to stereotype students who expect to be advised what to do as passive recipients of feedback.

Overall, the above empirical evidence shows inconsistencies between teachers' and students' understandings of feedback comments and between teachers' anticipations of what students may do with feedback and students' actual practices. These inconsistencies identify a responsive role of students in the feedback process and highlight the need for a re-examination of the relationship between feedback and students' learning (Handley et al., 2011). Boud and Molloy (2013) stress that if teachers only pay attention to the information they deliver to students without acknowledging students' responsive roles, they are less likely to accurately assess the effectiveness of the feedback they produce and thus less able to act effectively to enhance the quality of teaching.

2.1.2 Constructivist view

The constructivist perspective of feedback recognises feedback as a constructive process and the active role of students in the feedback process (Vygotsky, 1978). It recognises that each student has different interpretations of information which are informed by their past

experiences and prior knowledge (ibid.). Askew and Lodge (2000) conceptualise feedback in the constructivist model of learning as ‘ping-pong’ to capture the two-way discussion between teacher and students. Feedback in this discourse invites students to describe and discuss their opinions with teachers (ibid). Teachers, in return, help students explore new understandings of knowledge and concepts by asking students open questions, inviting their responses and sharing perceptions for reflection. Drawing on this perspective, research shifts from a focus on examining the effectiveness of feedback information to exploring methods that could facilitate teacher-student dialogues.

By stressing the role of students in the feedback process, Nicol (2010, p.512) suggests that ‘the feedback needs to be recast as a dialogical process rather than as a monologue’. Nicol (2010) defines feedback by drawing on Laurillard’s conversational framework (2002) that views teacher-student dialogues in terms of responding to student needs (adaptive), involving bi-directional communication as to learning goals (discursive), linking actions to learning objectives (interactive) and promoting reflectivity on the feedback cycle (reflective). Aligning with this framework, feedback is defined as being ‘embedded in dialogical contexts in which feedback activities are shared across teachers and students, and are adaptive, discursive, interactive and reflective’ (Nicol, 2010 p. 504).

According to Nicol, one way to make teacher feedback adaptive to students’ needs is to have students request feedback, for example, by appending questions and concerns with which they would like help in assignments that they submit. Nicol suggests that the feedback dialogue can be continued and enriched by sharing tutorial dialogues with students, exposing students to the whole databank of comments which teachers have provided in the past, asking students to understand teacher feedback through peer group discussion, and to analyse exemplars. These approaches can optimise the adaptation of learners through provision of quantity and wide variety of feedback, and to promote student reflection on what constitutes a quality assignment. The reflective nature of teacher-student dialogue can be reinforced by asking students to write a short note to express what they take from teachers’ comments and

how they would use them.

Other researchers in recent years also have explored ways to facilitate teacher-student dialogues. For example, a teacher-student interactive cover sheet has been designed by Bloxham and Campbell (2010) to facilitate teacher-student dialogues. Attached to the front of students' assignments, the cover sheet asked students to identify particular aspects of their work on which they would like to receive feedback. The purpose of the cover sheet was to shunt more power towards the students to initiate dialogues on matters that concerned them and to thus allow them to obtain more help from teachers.

Although the approaches proposed in the literature emphasise the dialogic features of feedback and the importance of listening to students' voices in the feedback process, they are teacher-led initiatives. The opportunities to create dialogues are arranged by teachers, which positions students in passive roles and limits their agency. Such limitations are highlighted by Bloxham and Campbell (2010), who found that, despite staff-student dialogue being established through the use of an interactive cover sheet, the students' limited understanding of tutors' expectations and assessment standards prevented them from initiating meaningful dialogue.

Moreover, despite Nicol's discussion of dialogical approaches (2010), little is known about how students proactively and selectively engage with different sources, whether by peer feedback, or by exemplar analysis, or by group discussion about teacher feedback as they act upon different contexts; there is also little understanding of how they interpret their engagement with those sources. In this respect, constructivist approaches remain inadequate for unpacking the complexity of how students make meaning from dialogues created by teachers and what factors influence their preferences for one type of dialogue over the other.

As Askew and Lodge (2000) argue, although constructivism transforms the recognition of the role of students from passive recipients of information to active participants in the

learning process, the power dynamic between teacher and student still lays one-sided emphasis on the power of teacher. From this perspective, students are always guided by teachers who provide them with tools to formulate ideas, explore new understandings and construct knowledge. This perspective tends to overlook the social dimension of learning in the feedback process and simplify the context-individual interaction in a collaborative learning environment. In other words, it does not appear to take into account how students self-regulate their communication with various agents (e.g. peers, other tutors, model answers, and textbooks) to develop new understandings by interacting with varied situational contexts. To place more emphasis on the agency of student in feedback, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) suggest a co-constructive perspective to understand the feedback process.

2.1.3 Co-constructivist view

According to the co-constructivist perspective, feedback is characterised by ‘loops of dialogue and information’ wherein ‘feedback and reflection become entwined, enabling the learner to review their learning in its context and related to previous experiences and understandings - a “meta” view which can lead to meta-learning’ (Askew and Lodge, 2000, p.13). From this perspective, students are positioned as active constructors of feedback who seek to inform their own judgements through establishing the ongoing rounds of dialogues with people in different contexts (Boud and Molloy, 2013).

Compared with constructivist view, co-constructivist perspective extends the dialogic nature of feedback even further by laying emphasis on the collaborative dialogues and mutual learning established between teacher and student to develop shared understandings (Carless et al., 2011). Askew and Lodge (2000) maintain that the relationship embedded in dialogic feedback process is not designed and determined by the teacher, but self-regulated by students to seek feedback to address their own learning needs in different contexts which can lead to transformation. They note that while ‘the teacher might initiate dialogue with the learners based on their common experiences’, the learner is expected ‘to actively engage in

the process', thereby making their relationships 'less hierarchical, bounded and fixed' in comparison with the transmissive or constructivist models (Askew and Lodge, 2000, p.12). Hence, in such a relationship, the expertise and experience of both teachers and students are respected. The opinions and experiences of all participants are taken into account to open up a dialogic space. The nature of feedback shifts from a receptive-transmissive model and 'ping-pong' between teacher and student to feedback loops connecting all participants involved in feedback process (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017).

From the co-constructive perspective, feedback is multilateral, and is viewed as a social process in which knowledge is constructed by students' proactive and selective interactions with various contexts and their interpretations of such engagement (Boud and Molloy, 2013). This is echoed by Carless (2016) who specifies that the feedback process involves students' interactions with peers, teachers and other external sources such as essay exemplars, assessment criteria, textbooks or learning materials. In this context, Carless (2006, p. 1) conceptualises feedback as 'dialogic processes whereby learners make sense of information from various sources and use it to enhance their work or learning strategies'. This kind of dialogue involves interactive exchanges in which participants are able to share interpretations, negotiate meanings and clarify expectations with multiple sources (Carless, 2013).

A number of studies (Mirzaee and Hasrati, 2014; Morosanu et al., 2010; Esterhazy and Damsa, 2017; Chi, Roy and Hausman, 2008) have explored how students initiate loops of dialogues as they make sense of teacher feedback. For instance, Mirzaee and Hasrati (2014) studied four MA students in a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) programme at a university in Iran. Through interviews, they found that when the students had difficulties in interpreting and acting upon teacher feedback, they sought suggestions from peers. The students described several situations in which they communicated with other students in order to understand and act upon the written comments from the teachers. Mirzaee and Hasrati therefore suggest that the students proactively chose to interact with peers as they

made sense of teacher feedback and they decided what to learn based on their increased awareness of their problems in writing. This study provides evidence on self-regulated student engagement with feedback through both teacher-student interaction and student-student interaction.

A recent study by Esterhazy and Damsa (2017) explored how learners create knowledge from teacher feedback through ongoing interaction with peers, the teacher, and other relevant resources. By analysing student drafts, teacher comments, and learner experience surveys, the researchers found that the participating students (n=9) established interactions with both peers and resources such as prior knowledge, task descriptions, assignment drafts, and textbooks. Through ongoing rounds of interaction, they developed their interpretations of teacher feedback 'by reading a comment, suggesting a new idea, retelling what the teacher had said during the feedback session, providing justifications of their assumptions, and formulating potential responses to the comment' (Esterhazy and Damsa, 2017, p. 10). This indicates that students are able to self-regulate their interaction with various sources of information and to subjectively construct meanings for feedback during such interactive processes. These interactive exchanges are interwoven with one another, and mediate students' understanding of and responses to feedback.

Overall, review of the literature suggests that, feedback consists of a complex process and the transmissive view and constructive view of feedback, to some extent, discount the agentic role of the students. A key insight emerging from the literature review highlights the agentic role of students in constructing and creating knowledge from feedback from a co-constructive perspective. This perspective pays attention to students' self-regulation in interacting with various sources to forge their understanding of teacher feedback. This insight helped to shape the conceptualisation of feedback in the context of this study. The present study views feedback as a co-constructive process embedded within an interactive and dynamic educational environment, whereby students make sense of and interpret teachers' feedback on their assignments by drawing on a range of resources available to them.

2.2 Student engagement with teacher feedback

This section presents a review of research into university students' engagement with teacher feedback with the aim of defining *engagement* in this context and discussing the major components of feedback engagement. It then moves onto a discussion of the interrelationships among these components in order to identify gaps in the existing research on student engagement with feedback.

Feedback is a dialogic process whereby students make sense of information from various sources, such as from teachers and peers, and use it to improve their performance of a task (Carless, 2006). The present study particularly focuses on students' engagement with teacher feedback. Teacher feedback, as referred to in this study, relates to teachers' responses to students' enquiries and their comments on the quality of students' work. It may be summative, such as grading assignment quality, or formative, to improve learning, such as written comments on students' drafts or initial assignments, or verbal and written dialogues such as those in tutorials and email exchanges that deal with the enquiries raised by students during the writing process. This study examines primarily student engagement with formative feedback.

2.2.1 Defining engagement with teacher feedback

Feedback engagement relates to the 'time, energy and resources students devote to activities designed to enhance their learning' (Krause et al., 2005, p. 31). It refers to student participation and involvement in the feedback process in terms of what they think and what they do with specific academic tasks following feedback provided by teachers (Handley, Price, and Millar, 2011). It also relates to self-regulated learning (Butler and Winne, 1995) in which students demonstrate how to self-regulate the ways they deal with teacher feedback. After receiving teacher feedback, students may set learning goals to bridge the gap between their current performance and the desired performance as suggested in feedback, adopting strategies to achieve their goals and monitoring their performance by comparing their self-

assessments with teachers' assessments (Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick, 2006). Alternatively, they may adjust or abandon the goals, or engage only superficially with feedback (Grimes, 2005); or do not revise their drafts at all (El Ebyary and Windeatt, 2010).

Tardy (2006) suggests that the variation in student engagement with teacher feedback is mainly mediated by students' emotional reactions to teacher feedback, the meanings they make out of teacher feedback, and the actions they take to cope with teacher feedback. This point is also echoed by Zheng and Yu (2018), who suggest that engagement with teacher feedback is a construct which consists of three interlocking dimensions - affective, cognitive, and behavioural engagement. A graphic representation of the interlocking relationship among the three dimensions is presented in Fig 2.1.

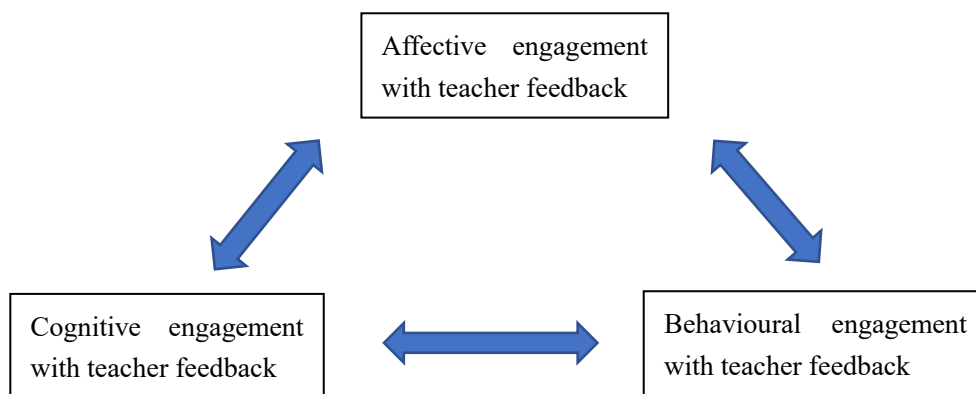


Fig. 2. 1 Interplay among affective, cognitive, and behavioural engagement (adopted from Zheng and Yu, 2018)

In order to facilitate a discussion of how affective, cognitive, and behavioural aspects of engagement interact with each other, a critical review of the concepts is presented below.

2.2.2 Components of engagement with teacher feedback

Affective engagement

Affective engagement relates to students' emotional and attitudinal responses to feedback (Ellis, 2010; Han and Hyland, 2015), and it is comprised of three sub-constructs, namely student affect, personal judgement, and appreciation (Martin and Rose, 2002). Zheng and Yu (2018 p. 15) provide definitions of these three sub-constructs in the context of student

engagement with teacher written corrective feedback (WCF) on L2 writing. Accordingly, affect is defined as ‘students’ feelings and emotions expressed upon receiving WCF in conjunction with changes in these feelings and emotions when revising text’. Judgement refers to students’ admiration and praise of WCF as well as their criticism of it. Appreciation relates to ‘valuing the worth of teacher WCF’. While these sub-constructs are defined within the scope of teacher corrective feedback on L2 writing, they are equally applicable in the broader field of teacher feedback across different disciplines.

With regard to affect, recent research (Mahfoodh, 2017 p. 53) suggests that learners experience a range of emotions including ‘surprise, happiness, dissatisfaction, disappointment, frustration, and satisfaction’ when they engage with teacher feedback. Rowe (2011) claims that students may also have different emotional responses to the same feedback situation. For example, when receiving criticism as part of teacher feedback, some students may feel frustrated, while others may feel angry (ibid). Although Rowe (2011) does not provide any empirical evidence to support her argument, recent research provides explanations for students’ various emotional reactions to teacher feedback. Pitt (2014) found that students’ varying emotional responses to feedback mainly stem from their perceptions of criticism and affirmative evaluation that they receive in feedback. Emotional responses also arise from the perceived manageability of the volume of corrective feedback, the extent to which the feedback can lead to revision actions and miscommunication between teacher and student (Zhang and Hyland, 2018). These attributes reflect the fact that students’ emotional reactions arise from their cognitive processing and interpretation of feedback.

Zheng and Yu (2018) reported that many students showed *appreciation* of teachers’ effort in producing feedback on their written tasks. They expressed praise and admiration for the feedback that they received. They also made critical evaluations or *judgements* to the types of teacher feedback. For example, the students expected more verbal feedback and face-to-face conferences with teachers. However, little is known about the context in which students produce such appreciation and judgements, and how these affective responses influence their

subsequent cognitive and behavioural engagement with teacher feedback. The present study thus extends our knowledge of learners' affective responses to teacher feedback and provides a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamic and multifaceted nature of students' affective engagement with teacher feedback.

Cognitive engagement

Cognitive engagement refers to students' cognitive investment in processing feedback (Ellis, 2010). It relates to both understanding and uptake of feedback. This dimension of engagement consists of both a cognitive level and a metacognitive level (Han and Hyland, 2015).

At the cognitive level, students invest mental effort into understanding the meanings of feedback and developing questions about how to revise their texts accordingly (Storch and Wigglesworth, 2010). By conducting interviews with Chinese university students in EFL courses, Zheng and Yu (2018) showed the cognitive facet of students' engagement with teacher corrective feedback. They found that students could decode the meanings of the feedback, but they could not understand certain kinds of written feedback such as coded comments (e.g. 'ww', 'art.', a question mark or other symbols) without explaining what the teacher wanted them to do. The study also found that participants undertook a cognitive process when engaging with teacher feedback. In order to understand the teacher's expectations of revisions, some students worked beyond the content of feedback and paid attention to the teacher's intentions of producing the feedback, for example, whether or not the teacher was satisfied with the writing and the reasons why the teacher crossed out particular sentences in the text.

At the metacognitive level, cognitive engagement with teacher feedback involves students developing in-depth reflections on what they have learned from feedback and what they need to do in future writing tasks. Using stimulated recall interviews with four postgraduate students at a public university in Iran, Mirzaee and Hasrati (2014) explored how teachers'

written feedback on the students' assignments led to learning. The researchers found that by making sense of the written feedback, the learners became more aware of their weak points such as lack of clarity in paragraph development and were thus able to consciously make adjustments in other contexts.

Viewing feedback as part of the co-constructivist model of learning, researchers such as Handley, Price, and Millar, (2010) and Morosanu, et al. (2008) suggest that student cognitive engagement relates to their interpretations of teacher feedback; these in turn are mediated by their interactions with their peers and other tutors as well as with various resources such as textbooks, assignment criteria grids, model-answer guides, and scholarly literature. However, little research has been done to explore how students' cognitive processing of teacher feedback develops over time as they interact with these resources, and thus little is known about how students triangulate all the information they have collected to make sense of teacher feedback.

Behavioural engagement

Behavioural engagement focuses on the observable revisions that students make in response to teacher feedback. Several studies (Hyland, 2003; Ellis, 2010; Ferris et al., 2013) on behavioural engagement have focused on examining student textual changes and revisions made in response to teacher feedback by comparing students' original drafts against revised texts.

Analysing eight texts produced by two L2 students over a semester, Ferris et al. (2013) identified the corrected rates of different types of errors in each text in order to examine how students made progress in their writing by making use of teacher feedback. The researchers found that, over the semester, the students made improvements in their comma use but had little success in avoiding errors in word choice. In another study based on content analysis of revisions made by L2 students in response to teacher feedback, Karbalaei and Karimian (2014) found that the students were more likely to make corrections to errors at the micro-

meaning level (adding, deleting, or substituting particular words) than to make adjustments at the macro-meaning level (reorganising paragraphs and text structure).

Most empirical studies investigating students' behavioural engagement have focused on L2 learners' revisions of linguistic or rhetorical errors in response to teacher WCF in ESL/EFL writing. Given that academic writing in disciplinary discourse involves students' representation of their professional knowledge, analytical abilities, and critical argumentation, feedback in disciplinary writing is likely to be more complex than that seen in L2 writing. There is dearth of research exploring students' behaviours in response to teacher feedback in disciplinary writing. Drawing upon the co-constructivist perspective of feedback, students are able to make use of teacher feedback by building loops of dialogues with others in the feedback process. Therefore, behavioural engagement, in the context of this study, not only includes students' *revisions*, as manifest in textual changes, but also takes into account the *measures* that students take to build dialogues with others in order to seek better understanding of teacher feedback, and the *actions* they take to apply teachers' feedback to their writing practice.

2.2.3 Interplay among affective, cognitive, and behavioural engagement

As shown in Fig. 2.1, when students engage with teacher feedback, their affective, cognitive and behavioural components of engagement are closely interrelated. A number of studies have shown the interlocking relationships among the three dimensions of engagement with feedback (Mahfoodh, 2017; Carver and Harmon-Jones, 2009; Zhang and Hyland, 2018; Sargeant et al., 2008).

Research indicates that students' affective engagement has an impact on their cognitive and behavioural engagement. A student's cognitive processing of feedback could be impacted by their emotions (Boud and Falchikov, 2007). Students' emotional responses to teacher feedback influence both their understanding and utilisation of feedback (Zhang and Hyland, 2018).

Studies by Mahfoodh (2017) and Carver and Harmon-Jones (2009) revealed that anger and frustration resulting from teacher's comments could result in students completely ignoring feedback and initiating cognitive and behavioural disengagement with the feedback. In contrast, for other students, anger could enhance their motivation to engage with the feedback. Those students may question the teacher feedback and discuss the feedback with the teacher, which can promote teacher-student communication and the students' cognitive processing of feedback (Carver and Harmon-Jones, 2009). Mahfoodh (2017) states that frustration with teacher feedback thus does not always lead to low-level behavioural engagement. Some of the participating students in his study made successful revisions using the feedback despite experiencing negative emotions that initially discouraged them. This research also found that efficient engagement with teacher feedback was mainly attributed to the students' beliefs that teachers' written comments are authoritative and should be heeded carefully. This implies that there are individual differences in the ways in which affective, cognitive and behavioural components of engagement interplay with each other.

Sargeant et al. (2008) showed that the affective, cognitive, and behavioural components interact with each other to inform an integrated and recursive process of feedback engagement. By interviewing 28 physicians and exploring their emotional reactions to the feedback that they received from reviewers such as medical colleagues, co-workers, and patients, the researchers found that participants' cognitive engagement significantly influenced their emotional reactions, which in turn had an impact on their behaviours.

The researchers found that participants tended to make comparisons of feedback with their self-perceptions of performance. Emotional responses to feedback arose from inconsistencies between the feedback and their self-perceptions of performance. Those who perceived the feedback to be consistent with their self-perceptions of performance had positive emotions such as satisfaction and pleasant surprise, while those who saw the feedback as being lower than their self-perceptions generally reacted with distress, disappointment, and frustration. One participant who felt distressed with the feedback that

he received identified the need to make changes. However, further distress and powerlessness emerged as he attempted to make changes but did not know how to do so effectively. This participant thus went through a recursive process of engaging with feedback, as summarised in Fig. 2.2. His eventual behaviour in response to teacher feedback was affected by the dynamic interactions between his emotional reactions to the feedback and his understanding of the feedback content.

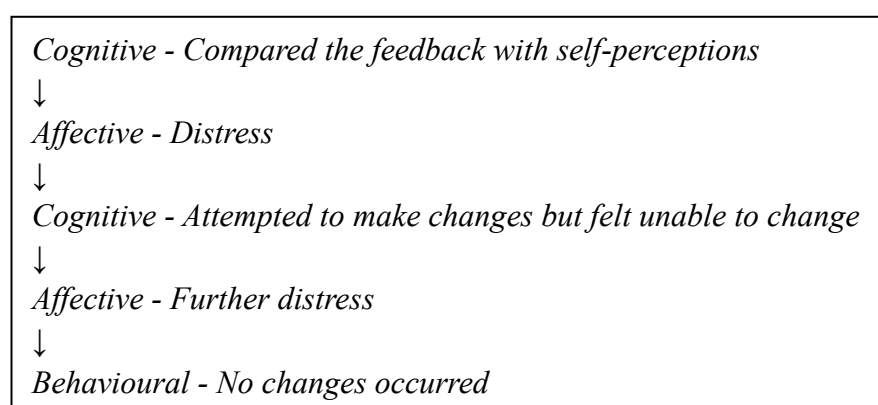


Fig. 2. 2 Recursive process of feedback engagement

Student engagement with teacher feedback is clearly an integrated process; no single component can come into play without the others. While existing empirical studies provide insights into an understanding of the recursive process by which affective, cognitive and behavioural components of engagement interact with each other, it is still insufficiently clear how such an interaction comes into play as feedback is transformed into practice, or what factors may have mediating impacts on students' decision-making and their specific practices in response to teacher feedback. As seen in Section 2.1.3, students are involved in a co-constructive process of learning in which they exchange ideas with different people and resources to construct the meaning of any feedback. These exchanges make the process of student engagement with feedback similarly recursive, which makes the interplay amongst the three components more complicated. The current study thus attempts to bridge the gap between the interplay amongst student affective, cognitive and behavioural engagement with teacher feedback and its representation in the co-constructive feedback process. It also aims to explore the underlying factors that mediate the process by which feedback is transformed

into student practice in order to obtain a better understanding of how students make decisions in response to teacher feedback and what leads them to behave in certain ways.

While the existing research presents rich evidence for variations on students' engagement with teacher feedback in different contexts, in particular feedback on L2 writing, disciplinary writing, and other educational fields, a systematic understanding of student engagement can be better achieved by taking the factors that influence feedback engagement into consideration. The next section therefore provides a review of factors that influence student engagement with teacher feedback.

2.3 Factors influencing students' engagement with teacher feedback

This section discusses the literature on factors, including contextual, interpersonal and epistemological factors, that can influence student engagement with teacher feedback. The discussion of these factors provides a comprehensive understanding of how student engagement with teacher feedback is influenced by the contexts they engage in, people with whom they interact and the ways they proceed to know.

2.3.1 Contextual factors

Prior experience in the home context

The transition from a home context to a new academic context has an impact on student engagement with teacher feedback, as their prior learning experiences and feedback experiences may be very different from their experiences in the host setting.

Studies (Beaumont et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 2013; Smith and Hopkins, 2005) suggest that the experience of feedback in school is different from that in HE and that there is thus a gap in expectations when students transfer to HE, which results in students having negative responses to teacher feedback at universities. For example, a study by Beaumont et al. (2011)

found that first-year undergraduate students perceived university feedback provision, with its emphasis on independent learning, as a culture shock; the students emphasised that their previous study in school where they had been provided intensive feedback on their writing, had not adequately prepared them for the transition to independent learning. This transition resulted in student dissatisfaction with the quality of feedback at university due to their expectations of receiving more intensive and explicit feedback from tutors. The findings are supported by Robinson, Pope and Holyoak (2013) who suggest that the ‘spoon-feeding’ approach in schools may lead to student over-dependence on teachers. When they later enter university, they may therefore misunderstand the reduction in feedback, which serves to develop students’ learning independence, as being representative of poor-quality feedback. The authors also claim that students’ failure in understanding and making use of teacher feedback and their over-reliance on teachers may be because they do not have ‘the same levels of expertise in academic skills expected in HE’ (Robinson, Pope and Holyoak, 2013, p. 269). While Robinson, Pope and Holyoak focus on the influence of prior experience of feedback practices experienced by student participants at schools and colleges in the UK, they offer valuable insights into the ways that institutional and pedagogical transitions may have impact on student perceptions of feedback quality.

A number of recent studies (Morgan, 2013; McPherson, Punch and Graham, 2017; Heussi, 2012) have investigated similar transitional experiences in postgraduate students, who experienced anxiety, disorientation, and powerlessness when they move from undergraduate study to postgraduate study, due to a lack of understanding of what postgraduate study entailed. With regard to the emergent gap in academic skills between undergraduate and postgraduate pedagogical settings, recent research (Tian and Lowe, 2013; Bailey, 2013; Ekstam, 2015) investigating Chinese students’ overseas learning experiences reveals that students’ previous learning experiences at the undergraduate stage in their home HE institutions, including limited academic writing knowledge and skills, create challenges when they enter postgraduate study and engage more deeply with academic writing tasks and receive relevant teacher feedback in the host academic setting. This shortage of

knowledge is assumed to arise from the fact that such students lack prior learning experience and practice in academic writing. (Ekstam, 2015).

As illustrated in Section 1.4.1, clear differences exist among universities in China in terms of academic writing instruction for students. Some Chinese universities teach students academic conventions at the undergraduate stage, while others do not. By interviewing local teachers at Chinese universities, Chinese visiting scholars, and Chinese overseas students (both undergraduate and postgraduate) at a UK university, Bailey (2013) obtained insight into the disparity of teaching and learning between Chinese institutions and UK higher education. Bailey (2013) states that lack of academic instruction at some Chinese local universities results in students having limited knowledge of referencing requirements and academic writing conventions, such as formality (academic register; avoidance of colloquialisms), objectivity and impersonality (use of the passive voice and impersonal pronouns), and rigidity (supporting claims with evidence and references to published research). Additionally, Ekstam (2015), who explored writing problems encountered by Chinese students at Western universities, suggests that some students when entering Western academic communities have very limited knowledge of the conventions of academic writing in relation to the standard IMRAD (Introduction, Methods, Results And Discussion) structure and other usual components of an academic text such as aims, thesis statements, and hypotheses.

Another problem facing Chinese overseas students attempting academic writing activities in host academic communities that has been acknowledged in the research is the tendency towards copying and pasting materials without critical analysis of quotations or proper references (Liu, 2005; Edwards and Ran, 2009; Tian and Lowe, 2013; Ekstam, 2015). This problem is generally identified by host institution teachers commenting on students' work as plagiarism (Liu, 2005). Edwards and Ran (2009) believe that some Chinese students involved in such practices do not intend to defraud the academic ethics system; however, due to their limited English proficiency and writing skills, they are unable to manage sources

sufficiently well to formulate ideas from them and to paraphrase such ideas. However, Bailey (2013) argues that the problem mainly arises due to the fact that not all Chinese universities teach undergraduate students how and when to reference quotations and add sources in essays. The evidence indicates that some Chinese universities and academic institutions do not require undergraduate students to quote from approved materials, despite this being a requisite for academic validity in all host academic communities where such students pursue postgraduate degree. It is thus not surprising that this lack of training on referencing and their weak awareness of the definition of plagiarism in academic writing cause Chinese students' difficulties when they engage in academic writing in host institutions.

This lack of knowledge and skills causes students difficulties in terms of engaging with writing tasks in the host academic community. Such communities presume students' proficiency in, for example, selecting sources based on library and journal database searches, incorporating other writers' voices into the author's text, and differentiating between "common knowledge" and others' specific ideas that should be acknowledged. At the postgraduate level, it is also assumed that students will know when and how to reference a source (Bailey and Pieterick, 2008).

The above-mentioned literature indicates that a lack of familiarity with the conventions of academic writing creates difficulties for Chinese overseas students in terms of effectively participating in academic writing activities at host universities. However, the impacts of these pedagogical transitions on student engagement with teacher feedback at the postgraduate level are generally overlooked. Writing difficulties can presumably cause student to misunderstand and therefor fail to meet the demands of teachers who generally require them to follow the aforementioned conventions; however, such difficulties may also be presumed to motivate students to act on teacher feedback, thus difficulties into a facilitator for learning about the requirements of the host academic institution (Tian and Lowe, 2013). However, few studies have focused on developing a nuanced understanding of how the shortage of academic knowledge caused by a lack of relevant prior learning experiences may

influence Chinese students' engagement with teacher feedback in host HE institutions, whether negatively or positively. Previous studies examining the impacts of prior learning and feedback experiences on student academic engagement in the host context foreground the need to study the impacts of the pedagogical transition from Chinese undergraduate study to UK postgraduate study on student engagement with teacher feedback.

Current experience in the host context

Research into feedback indicates that students' learning experiences in the host setting influence the way in which they engage with teacher feedback (Tardy, 2006; Tian and Lowe, 2013; Leki, 2006; Evans and Waring, 2011). In what follows, I present a discussion of the impact of the degree of familiarity with the host context on student engagement with teacher feedback in the host institutions.

Tardy (2006) studied L2 students' feedback experiences in a host learning environment. The researcher suggests that in response to the shift to a new academic setting, student engagement with teacher feedback is moderated by the extent to which they have adapted to the new context. She found that when the L2 students engaged in a less familiar learning environment, they were likely to be less certain about their own knowledge and the aim of teacher feedback. They therefore experienced difficulties in recognising whether revisions asked by teachers should be 'correcting errors, conforming to disciplinary preferences, or imposing the individual style of the teacher' (p. 72). Under this circumstance, the students tended to follow teacher suggestions unquestioningly. Whereas, as the students gained greater confidence in the host environment, they became more likely to articulate their own voices and reject teacher feedback that was not convincing to them.

This finding indicates that the students' accommodation of and resistance to as well as transformation of teacher feedback, to some extent, appeared to be influenced by the degree of familiarity with the host learning context and by their confidence in the disciplinary norms.

The finding also indicates that students may go through a range of changes with regard to how they deal with teacher feedback over the process of their adaptation to the new academic community. This point is important and likely to have implications for my research context in which my participants moved from their Chinese educational setting to the less familiar UK educational settings. They might also experience the process of accommodating/resisting and transforming feedback as they gain familiarity with the host context. Given the above, the current study aims to investigate in greater depth how students think, reflect and act on teacher feedback during the process of their adaptation to the new environment.

Additionally, students as novices in the new academic context could make use of teacher feedback as an introduction to the new culture and as a means of communicating the expectations of teachers in the host culture (Tian and Lowe, 2013). By investigating the social interactions of international students with the teachers at a US college, Leki (2006) found that some students expected more teacher feedback that can advise them what learning target they should aim for so as to accommodate the host academic culture. This indicates that students' motivations in understanding the norms of the host academic environment and in integrating into the new community promote their engagement with teacher feedback.

Eraut (2006, p.118) comments that when learners enter tertiary learning spaces, 'the type of feedback they then receive, intentionally or unintentionally, will play an important part in shaping their learning futures'. This view is also echoed by Evans and Waring (2011) who note that the process of drafting and redrafting by undertaking an ongoing interaction with teacher feedback enables students to deepen their understanding of feedback and gradually to adapt to the rules and values of the host academic community. These views shape the aim of the current study, which is to explore whether students have expectations for teacher feedback in terms of helping them learn about the host academic setting, and the ways in which they use teacher feedback to enhance their understanding of the academic community in UK HE.

2.3.2 Interpersonal factors

Social network that students establish with teachers and peers is a key aspect when exploring student engagement with teacher feedback because from the co-constructivist perspective of feedback, students interact with people in their academic environment (i.e. teachers and peers) to construct knowledge. During this process, interpersonal factors, including position and professionalism of the feedback providers as well as peer support, influence students' engagement or disengagement with teacher feedback.

Perceived credibility of teachers

A number of studies (e.g. Murdoch-Eaton and Sargeant, 2012; Hyland, 1998; Tardy, 2006; Parker and Winstone, 2016) suggest that students' (dis)engagement with feedback is influenced by their perceptions of the credibility of the teachers, with reference to their professionalism and position as assignment markers.

Students may appreciate the feedback provided by teachers who are perceived as knowledgeable and holding expertise in particular subject areas. For example, in the study by Murdoch-Eaton and Sargeant (2012), the researchers found that university students (in Year 1 and 2) show a tendency to appreciate feedback from senior academics compared with that from other teachers and they perceive only the feedback produced by senior academics as reliable and valid. Additionally, through investigating the effects of teacher written feedback on students' revision process, Hyland (1998) found that students often decide whose feedback they are going to adopt by evaluating the professionalism of the feedback provider. Participants in her study perceived the EAP tutors' role as constrained to language correction and distrusted their expertise in commenting on content and organisation in a text.

The findings of the studies discussed above support the idea that the professional position and expertise of the tutor are a factor of influence on students when they engage with teacher comments. Despite the rich evidence presented in these studies, little is known about the

condition under which students perceive the feedback provided by particular teachers as less credible and less authoritative.

Students also take into consideration of the role of the teacher as the assignment marker when they approach to teacher feedback (Parker and Winstone, 2016). By investigating how 11 focus groups of undergraduate psychology students engaged with feedback interventions from peers and teachers, Parker and Winstone (2016) found that when having difficulties in understanding teacher feedback, the students were more likely to discuss the feedback with the teacher who marked their assignments rather than to seek help from other tutors. In another study by Rodgers et al. (2014) investigating engineering students' responses to feedback provided by teacher assistants and peers, the authors reported that the students perceived the feedback from teaching assistants as more important than peer feedback because the teaching assistants would mark the assignments. Although feedback from assignment markers could facilitate students to understand the markers' expectations, students' discount on the feedback from other tutors and peers would distract their attention from the benefits of engaging with different sources of feedback (Rodger et al., 2014).

The above evidence suggests that the expertise of teachers and their positions as assignment markers are important factors of influence upon students' perceptions of credibility of feedback and adoption of it. The evidence provided by these studies foregrounds the need for the present study on examining how students' perceived credibility of teachers may influence their engagement with teacher feedback. It also invites investigation on other unexplored aspects for student (dis)engagement with feedback.

Peer support

In recent years, peer support for mediating students' engagement with teacher feedback has drawn increasing attention from researchers. A review of literature is presented to show how peers could support student engagement with teacher feedback from social-affective and

cognitive dimensions.

Some studies found that compared with teacher feedback which may be perceived as mandatory, insensitive and confusing (e.g. see Purves, 1986), students can gain more social support from peers (Zhang, 1995). Chaudron (1984, p. 2) suggests that information generated from peer discussion offers affective advantage over teacher feedback because communication with peers is more ‘at the learner’s level of development, thus [being] perceived as more informative than the superior teacher’s feedback, despite the assumption that the teacher “knows more”’. This view is supported by Miao et al. (2006) who investigated 12 Chinese university students regarding their views on teacher feedback and peer discussion that they engaged with during their EFL writing process. The researchers found that the students preferred to seek peer support in their writing activities as they believed that peers were closer to them in age and expertise. Miao et al. (2006) suggest that peer interaction involves the negotiation of meanings, and therefore, is able to facilitate mutual understandings between peers.

The affective advantage of peer support may motivate students to approach peers and seek their suggestions when they encounter difficulties in responding to teacher feedback. However, it should be noted that suggestions arising from peers’ various interpretations of teacher feedback could either facilitate students to have a better understanding of teacher feedback or mislead them. Thus, it is important to investigate how learners interact with peers and interpret their suggestions and how such an interaction may affect students’ engagement with teacher feedback.

Research into peer support (e.g. Miao et al., 2006; Edwards and Ran, 2009; Nazif et al., 2004) has also shown that peer interaction influences students’ cognitive engagement with teacher feedback. When processing teacher feedback, students may communicate with their peers to seek support to develop a more comprehensive understanding of teacher feedback. Miao et al. (2006) highlight the role of peer support on learning, suggesting that communication with

peers in the learning process provides a rich dialogue that is different from feedback produced by a single teacher. Students must actively process feedback input generating from a variety of sources and from multiple levels of interpretations from both teachers and peers (ibid.). Berg (1999) states that when students become involved in seeking advice from peers, they tend to consider the information they get, question its validity, weigh it against their own knowledge and beliefs and then develop their own independent ideas to make a decision about what to adopt for revision. Miao et al. (2006) and Berg (1999) suggest that the loops of dialogues established by students with peers provoke their cognitive processing of the information. However, it still remains unclear how students understand the information they collect from peers and how they make use of such information when they respond to teacher feedback.

Peer discussion can deepen the understanding of concepts and knowledge among L2 learners. Stephens (1997) suggests that international students can freely and independently join in discussions in their shared native language and in which the ground rules for idea expression are clear. Stephens' view on peer discussions of learning has resonance for the current research, especially given the likelihood that ease of communication in shared native languages could be one motivation for Chinese learners to seek peer support when they have difficulties in understanding teacher feedback. An enquiry into whether language barrier is a factor influencing students' approach to peer support and teacher feedback thus forms part of the current study.

The literature discussed above demonstrates the impacts of peer support, from the social-affective and cognitive dimension, upon student engagement with teacher feedback. However, little attention has been paid to how students' preference for and resistance to suggestions generated from peer discussion could facilitate or prevent them from engaging with teacher feedback. Thus, the present study will examine how students' understanding of the suggestions they obtain from their peers in interpreting teacher feedback might influence their engagement with teacher feedback.

2.3.3 Epistemological factors

Learners' epistemic beliefs have been found to influence their interpretations of learning and feedback experiences (e.g. Belenky et al., 1997; O' Donovan, 2017). Epistemology, in the context of this study, is defined as learner interpretations of learning experiences which arise 'as a result of their assumptions about the nature, limits, and certainty of knowledge [and which are] referred to as "ways of knowing"' (Magolda, 1992, p.3).

University students' beliefs about the nature of knowledge have been discussed in past studies such as Belenky et al. (1997) and Magolda (1992). Generally, these studies are built on the framework established by Perry (1970) who classifies students' epistemic beliefs into *dualist* (i.e. those who believe that there are only right or wrong answers which are judged by authorities) and *pluralist* (i.e. those who recognise the contestability of knowledge and the legitimacy of multiple perspectives). Originating from these two perspectives, epistemic assumptions of students in HE are depicted by Belenky et al. (1997) as 'received knowledge vs. constructed knowledge' and by Magolda (1992) as 'absolute/transitional vs. contextual/independent ways of knowing'.

Building on the framework developed by Belenky et al. (1997) who conceptualise five ways of knowing as silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge and constructed knowledge, Hockings, Cooke and Bowl (2007) explored the epistemological factors influencing students' academic engagement with HE. Merging questionnaire and interview data collected from UK university students, the researchers examined the students' behaviours and categorised their ways of knowing into 'received knowledge', 'subjective knowledge' and 'procedural knowledge'. Hockings et al. (2007) also pointed out that the participants in their study, who saw knowledge as 'received', viewed knowledge as absolute truth held by the 'authority' who would mark their work or who they assumed had the most power to judge their work, and that they often struggled with the ambiguity and uncertainty of knowledge provided by teachers. Students who took a subjective view of knowledge

tended to follow their own instincts in making decision on what to take from amongst the multiple truths of others. Students who applied ‘procedural knowledge’ appeared to have developed skills and techniques for comparing, analysing and evaluating information to elicit ‘the right answer’ (ibid).

A more recent study conducted by O’ Donovan (2017) explores the impact of university students’ ways of knowing on their satisfaction with teacher feedback and assessment. This is done by adapting the framework of Magolda (1992) who classifies students’ ways of knowing into *absolute/dualistic* (those who value incontestable facts and demonstrable theories) and *contextual/pluralistic* (those who acknowledging the contestability and uncertainty of knowledge). O’ Donovan found that the students holding *absolute* assumptions tended to be authority-dependent, believing that there was always a single right answer and associating ‘good’ assessment and feedback practices with unambiguous assessment criteria, standards and directional instruction for corrective actions. In contrast, students holding *contextual/independent* beliefs tended to perceive assessment and feedback as a relational and dialogic process, believing that variation of disciplinary norms, assessment standards and marking criteria were legitimate in their pedagogical context and helpful to their learning.

The studies by Hockings et al. (2007) and O’Donovan (2017) show that students’ beliefs of the nature of knowledge, be it dualistic or pluralistic, influence their interpretations of their learning experiences, including their experiences with feedback and assessment by teachers. These studies, along with their theoretical basis, provide valuable insight for the present study as to how epistemological factors could influence students’ participation in teacher feedback, which is relatively under-researched. The current study aims to develop an account of the students’ participation in feedback events to understand how their ways of knowing influence their processing of teacher feedback. To achieve this, I combine the key elements in the epistemological perspectives of Perry (1970), Baxter Magolda (1992) and Belenky et al. (1997) to inform an analytical framework underpinning the data categorisation system to

analyse factors influencing the students' engagement with teacher feedback (see Chapter 6).

In this section, I reviewed literature on factors influencing students' engagement with teacher feedback. With regard to contextual factors, while earlier studies have provided evidence on the impacts of institutional transition from school to university, on student engagement with teacher feedback, it is less clear about the impacts of pedagogical transition on student engagement with teacher feedback at the postgraduate level. In addition, the degree of familiarity with the host setting and students' motivation in using teacher feedback as a mechanism for adjustment to the new academic setting influence students' engagement with teacher feedback. The survey of literature on the interpersonal factors influencing student engagement with teacher feedback showed that several aspects in this area of research have received limited attention. For instance, there appears to be a lack of explanation to why learners distrust or devalue feedback provided by teachers who are perceived as less professional or less trustworthy. Further, research seems not to have enquired into how students' preference for or resistance to suggestions generated from peer discussion could influence their engagement with teacher feedback. Last but not least, there appears to be a dearth of research focused on the identification of learners' ways of knowing and their influence on the process of engaging with teacher feedback.

2.4 Conclusion

The literature discussed in this chapter outlines three theoretical perspectives of feedback and situates student engagement with teacher feedback within the co-constructive model of learning. The knowledge that students obtained in the feedback process is not determined by a single source of information transmitted from teachers. Instead, students are able to self-regulate the feedback process and construct knowledge through loops of interaction with various sources of information. Understanding the co-constructive nature of feedback helps to frame the overall focus of the present study which is on positioning students as key meaning makers and interpreters of the feedback, and therefore on understanding how they

engage with teacher feedback by exerting their agency.

This chapter elaborates the major components (i.e. affective, cognitive and behavioural engagement) of students' engagement with teacher feedback and the interrelated nature of these components. These concepts and the interrelationship help to inform the present study both in obtaining a more in-depth understanding of how students' perceptions/understandings of teacher feedback interplay with their specific behaviours in response to it and in identifying the factors that mediate the process of feedback being transformed into practice.

The review of literature indicates that student engagement with teacher feedback as an integrated process is influenced by the situated contexts they engage in, people they interact with and the ways they process knowledge. The paucity of empirical evidence focused on the identification of these factors influencing students' learning process and feedback engagement sets the direction for the present study to examine factors that may affect Chinese students' engagement with teacher feedback in UK HE.

Overall, despite the argument for a transferred attention from recognition of students as passive recipients of feedback information to individual agency of students in participating in feedback activities, it is still insufficiently clear about the complexities of individual experiences and the dynamics of individuals' interactions with varied contexts in relation to Chinese students' engagement with teacher feedback in the UK HE context. The present study, therefore, attempts to unpack such complexities and dynamics by addressing research enquiries into 1) how Chinese students perceive teacher feedback, 2) what mediators are involved in the process of teacher feedback being transformed into students' practice, and 3) what factors influence the students' engagement with feedback in the UK HE context. The next chapter will provide details of the methodological approach, data collection methods and procedures as well as the analytical approach, participant details and ethical considerations pertaining to this study.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.0 Overview

This chapter describes and justifies the research design and methodology adopted in this study. At the outset, the paradigmatic position underpinning this study is presented. The chapter then goes on to explain the rationale for an exploratory qualitative research design, followed by a description of the methodological procedure regarding the research site, participant selection, data collection methods and piloting. Data analysis, matters of trustworthiness concerning data and ethical considerations are also explained.

3.1 Positionality and Philosophical Stance

The philosophical stance underpinning this study is social constructivism. It evolves out of my own experiences as a student, my role as a researcher and my relationship with the participants, including how I gained access to the research site. In this section, I also put forward the ontological and epistemological positions that guide this study, so as to locate my positionality within the tenets of social constructivism.

3.1.1 Positionality

My position as a student

Over the years as a student, I have often encountered situations where feedback provided by my teachers has been a critical part of my academic development. When receiving feedback, I have been able to deal with it to improve my work accordingly, in most cases by entering into dialogue with people (e.g., peers and tutors) and by referring to material resources (e.g., scholarly literature). In the process of making sense of feedback, I have been able to construct meaning of the feedback and about my own revision practices by interacting with a variety of contexts. In doing so, I recognise how these various forms of interaction

generating from the feedback process have enabled me to create new knowledge. Based on my own learning experiences, I believe that knowledge is constructed by individual's subjective understanding through conversations between social members in which social realities are explored together (Holstein and Gulbriun, 1995; Ormston et al., 2014).

My position as a researcher and my relationship with the participants

In order to gain more insight into how knowledge is generated in the feedback process, I translated my personal experience into a formal research project and therefore evolved from my position as a student into that of a researcher. As my research purpose was to understand how students from a Chinese university background engaged with feedback from teachers within UK higher education, it was necessary for me to engage with other international students to obtain information about their experiences in relation to the feedback practices encountered by them.

Positioning myself within the social world of my research participants, I adopted an 'emic' approach to understanding their struggles and endeavours in interpreting teacher feedback. Establishing a stable friendship and trust between myself and the participants, helped me to collect rich data concerning the participants' understanding of teacher feedback, and in such a way that they were able to use their own terms and concepts to interpret their world in relation to what had meaning for them and how they explained things, instead of choosing to emphasise what I, as the researcher, considered important (Heigham and Croker, 2009; Kottak, 2006). To establish trust and 'break down' the divide between the researcher and those being researched, I socialised with my participants during leisure times, chatting with them about British life and their campus life, but avoiding any topics relevant to my research. During the data collection, I also showed respect to them, took non-judgemental tone to their accounts of teacher feedback and protected the information that participants disclosed to me.

In addition to obtaining information from the students' accounts, I adopted an 'etic' perspective to gain meaningful insights into the surroundings of the participants' experiences.

I obtained permission to enter their educational spaces, gaining access to the written work they produced as well as to various feedback sources and learning materials that they were exposed to, so that I could observe their experiences as they happened. In turn, my familiarisation with their learning experiences enabled me to contextualise their accounts and critically analyse them by triangulating them with my observation of their feedback encounters so as to avoid drawing false conclusions from their impartial accounts, if any.

3.1.2 Philosophical stance

In terms of my ontological position, I have adopted a ‘relativism’ position. I believe that social reality is related to people’s subjective understanding and that the social world can only be accessed by people through socially constructed meanings (Richards, 2003). In terms of epistemology, I have adopted a ‘subjectivist’ role (Ormston et al., 2014). I recognise that knowledge is negotiated and constructed by both the qualitative researcher and their participants through flexible and purposeful conversations in which social realities are explored together in a dynamic process, rather than in static terms (Holstein and Gulbrium, 1995; Ormston et al., 2014). As such, students constructed meanings about their revision practices and perceptions of teacher feedback by interacting with a variety of contexts (e.g., people and materials) during the feedback process and with me, as the researcher, during interviews. In other words, the participants constructed their own social reality but, due to the inevitable influence of my own perspectives and value system, my interpretations were subjective and value laden.

As both a student and researcher with experience of both Chinese tertiary education and UK higher education systems, I may have been predisposed towards cultivating an understanding of my participants’ statements from a single cultural perspective, thus overlooking personal variables and resulting in bias. To avoid interpreting meanings through a lens ‘coloured’ by my own sociocultural context and experiences (see Chapter 1) and jumping to ethnocentric conclusions based on my own values, I adopted a reflexive approach in the study of my participants, which enabled me to recognise the development of my own position and to be sensitive to issues in my own educational and cultural context as well as in that of my

participants. (Gu and Schweisfurth, 2006). In doing so, I constantly thought about and critically appraised my own views, beliefs, common sense and presumptive behaviours to avoid any bias.

For example, there were some occasions during interviews when participants talked about their perceptions of some feedback experiences that I found similar to what I had experienced. Every attempt was then made to minimise the research being biased by my personal and academic background. During the data collection, I actively listened to my participants and avoided evaluating their narratives, expressing my own views or sharing my own stories that might misguide them. To avoid making presumptions and imposing my stance on data analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), I constantly reviewed the feedback artefacts that I collected and interpreted participants' accounts in context. I also talked about my data with colleagues who might have different stances, to see if any other interpretations might emerge. Since I realised that my position might develop over time, I temporarily maintained a distance to the interpretations that I had already made and later went back to see if those interpretations were wrong or new interpretations might emerge.

Overall, the ontological and epistemological positions presented above situate this study within the tenets of 'social constructivism'. I share the constructivist view as expounded by Richards (2003) who suggests that 'constructivists seek to understand not the essence of a real world but the richness of a world that is socially determined... a view holding firmly to the position that knowledge and truth are created rather than discovered and that reality is pluralistic' (p. 39). To this extent, I chose to undertake exploratory qualitative research in order to explore in depth the complicated social world in which students engage with feedback, as well as to interrogate how their engagement is mediated by various social and contextual influences.

3.2 Research design

In order to introduce and justify the research design and the research methods selected for this study, it is necessary to re-state the research purpose and research questions. This study aims to open an investigation of how the students, who have studied in China's undergraduate programmes, engage with the feedback they receive from tutors during their postgraduate study in the UK.

1. How do students from China perceive teacher feedback in the UK HE context?
2. What factors mediate the process of students transforming teacher feedback into practice?
3. What factors influence the students' engagement with teacher feedback in the UK HE context?

To address the research questions, an exploratory enquiry of a qualitative nature was conducted in this study. The research nature centred on the students' understanding of their feedback experiences and practices which evolved out of their social construction of meanings through interacting with all the participants involved in the study (Richards, 2003). The socially constructed meanings were varied and multiple, depending on the specific and unique contexts in which the students engaged. In this regard, exploratory research, adopting a flexible, open and inductive approach, enabled me to explore the phenomena in relation to the students' understandings of and behaviours on teacher feedback in their full complexity (ibid.).

Given that this study aimed to uncover *in-depth* information *about* how a group of Chinese students made sense of, and responded to, tutor feedback in a UK higher education setting, I chose to adopt a qualitative approach. Specially, the research design for this study was informed by the five characteristics of qualitative enquiry, as defined by Richards (2003, p. 10).

Study human actors in natural settings, in the context of their ordinary, everyday world

– Using a qualitative approach necessitated prolonged and intense contact with the students in their daily learning situations, which provided me with a holistic perspective concerning their interpretations of their feedback experiences within particular situations (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014). I tried to maintain a naturalistic setting for the students without directly and consciously disturbing the daily flow of the pedagogical activities. In practical terms, I sought to match the interview arrangements with their daily learning context. Instead of *asking* students to seek feedback or *advising* the tutors to provide feedback, I booked interview sessions only after the tutors had provided students with feedback according to the feedback provision policies, or when the students spontaneously sought feedback.

Seek to understand the meaning and significance of these actions from the perspective of those involved – I intentionally encourage the students to identify ‘critical’ judgements/decisions that they had made when acting upon feedback and to talk about them in a way that reflect their meaning making processes.

Usually focus on a small number of individuals, groups or settings – In order to explore more deeply how students engaged with feedback, I focused on a small group (see Section 3.3.2), among whom I carried out an extended investigation, which may not have been possible with a large group of participants.

Employ a range of methods in order to establish different perspectives on the relevant issues – Different perspectives on students’ engagement with feedback were established by combining and triangulating within-method data from different types of interviews (for details, see Section 3.3.3). The range of methods of data collection used enabled me to collect rich data, in turn providing me with insights into the issues from different angles.

Base its analysis on a wide range of features – I conducted fieldwork without limiting

myself to preconceived categories of data. This enhanced the openness and depth of my study, obtaining valuable information about students' perceptions and possible factors influencing their engagement with feedback (Patton, 1990). Furthermore, when analysing the data, I sought to take account of the contrasting issues that I discovered in the process. This approach not only allowed me to align my interpretations of the data with the perspectives offered by the participants, it also highlighted points of convergence and divergence, which might become the basis for further investigation.

To bring forth in-depth data, interviewing was employed as the main method of data collection. Through interviews, 'meanings are not only conveyed, but cooperatively built up, received, interpreted and recorded by the interviewer' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p. 118). Knowledge, through this method, is produced by the researcher-participant interaction itself (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). In other words, the success of my study was critically dependent on the efficacy of the collaborative process within the educational community of HE in the UK, which is situationally specific and contextually bound (Eggen and Kauchak, 1999; McInerney and McInerney, 2002; Schunk, 2012).

Interviews in a semi-structured format were conducted throughout the data collection stage. Compared with structured interviews that consist of standardised closed questions with minimal variations (Boyce and Neale, 2006) and unstructured interviews consisting of free conversations between the interviewer and interviewees with no organisation (Desmond, 2002), semi-structured interview approach allowed me to explore the complexities and depth of some of the central issues concerning the participants' engagement with teacher feedback, such as their interpretations of specific comments given by tutors and their responses to them (Robson, 2002). The central issues to be discussed in interviews were identified based on my research questions and the purpose behind each interview (see Section 3.3.3.1 and Appendix 3). Semi-structured interviews also helped me flexibly adapt interview topics and formulate probing questions to fit each interviewee's particular writing progress and feedback engagement experiences (Robson and McCartan, 2016). This study, therefore,

made use of multiple types of semi-structured interviews, namely, background interviews, stimulated recall interviews and retrospective interviews, to encourage the students to be forthcoming with in-depth data on their encounters with tutors providing feedback (for details, see Section 3.3.3).

3.3 Research methods

3.3.1 Setting

This study was conducted in two phases, a) a pre-sessional language programme and b) an MA degree programme in the 2016/17 academic year at a UK university.

Pre-sessional language programme: The university provides pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses for prospective international students with a conditional offer to improve their academic English and develop the skills needed to study on a subsequent university degree programme. Normally, on the academic writing courses of the pre-sessional programme, students have the opportunity to receive written and verbal feedback (such as formative written feedback, summative written feedback and face-to-face tutorials) from tutors on their written work. Throughout the 5-week programme, students are initially required to write a 200-word pre-arrival essay and submit it in Week 1. Then, in the next few weeks, they have to write a 2,000-word project as part of the course completion assessment, for which they receive tutor feedback on the project outline and first draft as well as the final project. Tutors' feedback on the final project mainly focuses on content, text structure, reference format and language issues.

MA degree programme: After finishing the pre-sessional programme, students start their preferred chosen master's programme. There are four units (i.e., courses) per term and students are required to finish four unit assignments (e.g., 3,000-5,000 words essays) at the end of each term for assessment. They also have the opportunity to receive tutors' feedback in written and oral form in the course of writing assignments and after submitting them. Students obtain formal feedback 1) from two rounds of Q&A sessions for each unit

assignment, where unit convenors explain assignment topics for students to better understand and initiate discussions with students about issues raised during their writing process, 2) by booking tutorials with or contacting tutors via email, and 3) from the feedback forms on submitted assignments, the feedback on which consists of a summative part (i.e., grading) and a formative part, including an overall comment and other formative comments on assignment structure, content, presentation, analysis and use of sources.

The reasons for choosing both programmes are fourfold. Firstly, both programmes provide students with intensive and varied feedback from tutors, as well as opportunities to improve their work in light of feedback before the final submission. This allowed me to collect rich data on students' interpretations of, and responses to feedback. Secondly, I collected data over two consecutive programmes with the same group of participants. This allowed me to view students' engagement with teacher feedback as a holistic, temporal and developmental process as I intended to explore whether and how the students' familiarity with the pre-sessional learning setting in terms of academic discourses and the feedback system may have led to any changes in their perceptions of teacher feedback in their subsequent engagement in the MA programme. Thirdly, the two consecutive programmes lasted approximately seven months, during which time students were able to obtain feedback, enabling me to conduct extended fieldwork, as well as obtain rich data through my continual and intense contact with the participants. Fourthly, I had previously attended similar programmes at another UK university. Although the programmes in the research site are not identical to the one I attended, there are some similarities in terms of disciplinary norms, compulsory courses and assignments for assessment. The similar learning experiences and disciplinary background thus provided me with some relevant contextual knowledge and a good understanding of the data collected from the participants.

3.3.2 Recruitment of participants

Five participants were recruited for my study. With regard to the recruitment procedure, I sought written permission from two of the course tutors on the pre-sessional programme and attended their classes in the first week of the programme for participant recruitment purposes.

In the classes, I explained my research purpose and participant selection criteria to the students. Finally, five Chinese students (out of 19 Chinese students in the two classes) agreed to participate voluntarily. Having further negotiated their participation before data collection started, they were invited to provide me with a pseudonym (i.e., David, Hebe, Chloe, Xiao and Maggie). While I did not actively seek to select one gender over another, it is noteworthy that all of the participants were female, although one of them asked to be known as David. Table 3.1 presents participant information.

Participant	Degree	Subject area in China	Others
David	Postgraduate - 2nd-year overseas exchange student	Chinese Language and Literature (Non-English subject)	No English writing courses and relevant feedback experiences at the Chinese university
Hebe	Bachelor	Business English	Directly came to UK after finishing undergraduate courses
Maggie	Bachelor	English Teaching	Directly came to UK after finishing undergraduate courses
Chloe	Bachelor	English and Chinese Advanced Translation	Two-year working experience after graduation; overseas study fully-sponsored by the Chinese government
Xiao	Bachelor	English	Directly came to UK after finishing undergraduate courses

Table 3. 1 Participants' information

3.3.3 Data collection

3.3.3.1 *Schedule and content of interviews*

Data were collected via different types of interviews through two phases over a period of seven months. Phase 1 covered the pre-session programme (from August to September 2016). Phase 2 covered the first semester of the MA programme (from November 2016 to February 2017).

Tool of enquiry	Interview schedule	Collection of material artefacts	David	Hebe	Maggie	Chloe	Xiao
Phase 1							
Background interview	Beginning of the pre-session programme – 08/2016	N/A	15 min	18 min	21 min	20 min	15 min
Stimulated recall	After participants received tutor feedback on the project outline – 09/2016	Outline of the project with teacher feedback	27 min	22 min	30 min	25 min	35 min
Stimulated recall	After participants submitted their final project – 09/2016	Full draft of the project with teacher feedback and the submitted project	41 min	36 min	41 min	54 min	32 min
Phase 2							
Retrospective interview	After the second Q&A sessions – 12/2016	Tutorial notes; Q&A session notes/slides; email enquiries and tutors' replies	43 min	40 min	42 min	59 min	22 min
Retrospective interview	After participants finishing the first piece of draft – 12/2016	Tutorial notes; Q&A session notes/slides; email enquiries and tutors' replies	41 min	30 min	22 min	27 min	13 min
Stimulated recall	After they submitted their final assignments – 01/2017	Research field notes of Phase 2 on all the suggestions that participants sought from tutors throughout the assignment writing process; submitted work	25 min	47 min	42 min	40 min	35 min
Retrospective interview	After they received tutor feedback forms for the assignments – 02/2017	Feedback forms of the four unit assignments and submitted work	53 min	31 min	46 min	65 min	29 min
Total hours per person	N/A	N/A	4 h 5 min	3h 44 min	4h 4 min	4 hr 50 min	3 h 1 min

Table 3. 2 Data inventory table

As can be seen in Table 3.2, seven interviews were conducted with each participant over two phases of the data collection period. All interviews were carried out on a one-to-one basis. I determined my data collection content and formulated interview topics based on the gaps identified in the research literature (i.e. how students' understandings of teacher feedback interplay with their behaviour in response to it; factors that mediate the process of feedback being transformed into practice; impacts of peer discussion on student engagement with teacher feedback; impacts of the pedagogical transition from Chinese undergraduate study to UK postgraduate study on student engagement with teacher feedback), research questions, the course guide for the pre-session programme in 2016 and the handbook of the 2016/17 MA programme. The course guide and the programme handbook helped me to appreciate the students' curriculum content, schedule of assignment submission, format of tutor feedback, and the time they would receive teacher feedback. This information provided me with background knowledge of the research context, which in turn enabled me to design interviews aligning with the progress that students made during writing activities and tutor feedback, and to better understand what the participants reported in interviews. The interview schedule was structured with a consideration of the participants' availability.

In addition to formulating interview topics according to the pre-defined research purposes and course guidebooks, variable topics based on specific feedback engagement situations for each participant were included, especially in the stimulated recall and retrospective interviews. Interview questions were structured to take into account each participant's unique writing progress and the feedback scripts they were dealing with, with the aim of collecting information about the difficulties they encountered during the writing process, the suggestions they had already obtained from teachers in terms of coping with those difficulties, and their responses to such suggestions. For examples, 'What have you done to your essay since our last interview?', 'In the last interview, you said that you were still confused about xxx issue. Have you managed to address it? In what way?', 'You mean that you got some suggestions from the unit tutor. Then, what do you plan to do with the suggestions?' (Details see Appendix 3).

Phase 1: Three interviews were scheduled for the pre-session programme in 2016, aiming at investigating 1) participants' expectations regarding teacher feedback on academic writing, 2) their perceptions of tutor feedback on the outlines and first full drafts of their projects, and 3) how they responded to tutor feedback in order to produce the final projects.

- Interview 1: background interview - It was used to obtain information about the participants' previous academic writing and feedback experiences in their undergraduate education period and their expectations about teacher feedback during their upcoming study at a UK university. The information was collected to understand how the participants viewed teacher feedback and how their previous experiences might affect their engagement with teacher feedback at the UK university.
- Interview 2: stimulated recall - This instrument was used for two purposes: 1) to help my participants to introspectively reflect on their responses to the feedback on their project outline and present their interpretations of what happened when they engaged with the feedback (Nunan, 1992), and 2) to elicit the reasons behind the students' specific decision-making in response to the feedback. It allowed me to capture the uniqueness of the situations in which participants engaged, the actions they took, the feelings they experienced, and the explanations they provided for their responses. All the feedback comments on the project outline were used as stimuli to initiate concrete discussions about how participants made sense of the comments and what they planned to do in response to those comments in order to develop the first draft of the project.
- Interview 3: stimulated recall - Tutor's comments on the first full drafts of the projects, participants' full drafts and their completed final projects were used as stimuli to initiate discussion to explore 1) how participants understood and eventually made use of the tutor feedback on their full drafts to produce final projects, and 2) the rationales behind participants' certain decisions and responses to the tutors' comments. Table 3.3 shows the guiding questions and interview topics for Phase 1.

Table 3. 3 Interview guiding questions and topics of Phase 1

Interview 1 – BI	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Did you receive any teacher feedback when you studied at your Chinese university? 2. What kind of teacher support and feedback do you expect in your academic writing?
Interview 2 – SR	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me what you think of the teacher feedback you are given; Did you think the feedback you received was useful? 2. How do you understand this comment? 3. Please explain to me what you plan to do with these comments and why.
Interview 3 – SR	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me about your experience when you were revising the first draft based on the feedback. 2. I notice you made a change in here. How did you understand this comment and why did you change in this way? 3. I also see this comment. But you didn't deal with it. Why didn't you respond to it?

Before each interview, in order to prompt participants' memories and further discover how they responded to tutor feedback, I asked them to send me copies of the feedback they had received, their drafts (the original and revised ones) and the final version of their work. These documents enabled me to familiarise myself with and contextualise our discussions around their writing activities and the tutor feedback they had received, revision practices by following the feedback as well as helped participants to recall the writing and revising processes.

Phase 2: The data collection of this phase commenced at the point in the first term of the MA programme in 2016/17 where the participants received initial feedback from their tutors (i.e. the Q&A sessions). Four interviews were held to investigate 1) how students made sense of teacher feedback generated in the Q&A sessions, tutorials and email exchanges, 2) what suggestions in the feedback they had taken on board, and what actions they took during the draft revision process and in the final assignments, as well as 3) how they interpreted the final feedback forms they received. Details of the interview guiding topics and questions are presented in Table 3.4.

- Interview 4: retrospective interview – Participants were invited to recall and describe the suggestions they obtained from tutors in Q&A sessions. Topics in relation to 1) how they understood those suggestions, 2) how they would make use of those suggestions in subsequent writing and 3) what questions they still had about their assignments, were

discussed in the interview.

- Interview 5: retrospective interview – Participants were invited to recall their experiences in relation to how they had proceeded their writing since the last interview by making use of tutors’ suggestions. They were asked to describe 1) how they dealt with the outstanding questions remained in their assignment writing since the last interview, 2) how they produced their first draft after considering tutors’ suggestions and 3) what they planned to do to improve the draft if any problem was identified.
- Interview 6: stimulated recall – This was used to explore 1) how participants eventually responded to tutors’ suggestions in the course of writing their final assignments, 2) what suggestions they took on board or rejected, and 3) the reasons behind their decisions. Participants’ drafts and completed assignments, my research field notes of all the teacher feedback that participants sought throughout the assignment writing process were used as stimuli.
- Interview 7: retrospective interview – Participants were asked to describe 1) how they reflected on the feedback forms provided by tutors on each of their submitted assignments and 2) what they had learned from the feedback.

Table 3. 4 Interview guiding questions and topics of Phase 2

Interview 4 – RI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you take from the first Q&A sessions? What difficulties or confusions with your assignments have you encountered during this period? How did you solve them? • What have you taken away from the second Q&A sessions?
Interview 5 – RI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you tell me what tutors’ suggestions to this draft you have got since our last interview and what you have done with them? • Are you satisfied with the draft you have written? • Do you think the teachers’ suggestions you obtained for this draft can make any sense in your subsequent writing?
Interview 6 - SR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now we look back through what you have done with your assignments in the last two months. Here is all of the teachers’ suggestions you obtained during your writing process. Can you show me what teacher suggestions you actually took on board in your final assignments and what suggestions you didn’t respond and why?
Interview 7 – RI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you explain to me how you make sense of the feedback forms you are given and what you can take away from them?

In these interviews, I invited the participants to share any notes with me that they had taken

in their interactions with tutors for seeking advice, assignment topics, related lesson slides, their drafts as well as assignment feedback forms and final versions of their work. Directly engaging with the documents and the students' accounts enabled me to tailor these discussions in order to meet my research objective.

3.3.3.2 Format and procedure of interviews

The length of the interviews varied from 13 to 65 minutes. The range in the lengths of the interviews was due to the number of topics we discussed and the amount of information that participants wanted to tell me. The majority of the interviews were conducted on the university campus, such as the library, meeting rooms and seminar classrooms, with the selection largely dependent on participants' preferences. Some interviews were carried out in participants' house or the nearest public central library when participants were not able to come to campus. Interviews were conducted in Chinese.

In general, each interview was intended to follow a similar procedure:

- a warm-up chat
- a list of issues to be discussed (i.e., predetermined topics for background and retrospective interviews or stimuli in the case of stimulated recall interviews)
- probing questions
- prompts
- a closing question where I asked participants about any other issues they wanted to raise
- expressions of thanks

3.3.4 Piloting

Interviews were piloted with two Chinese students who had similar characteristics to my participants in terms of educational background and learning experiences in the UK. The first Chinese student whom I interviewed was studying on 2015/16 MA programme at the university and had attended the same programmes as my participants a year earlier. After

interviewing this student, I transcribed and analysed the data to identify areas of misunderstanding between the two of us. While the first pilot ran smoothly, it was clear that the question, ‘Can you tell me how you felt when you received this feedback?’, had confused the student such that she did not know how to answer it. Thus, I reformulated to: ‘Did you think the feedback you received was useful and in what way does it help you?’. The student also stated that she was not satisfied with some of her answers as she could not remember certain experiences that had happened a year earlier on the pre-sessional courses.

I invited another student who was currently attending the 2016 10-week pre-sessional courses, which had started a month earlier than the starting time of the data collection (i.e. the 2016 5-week pre-sessional programme). In the course of interviewing this student, it was evident that the reformulated question worked well, and some consistency was observable between the two students’ responses. The second student was also able to share more experiences and views on tutor feedback, as her memory of the courses was presumably fresher. Therefore, in my actual data collection, every attempt was made to conduct the interviews immediately after students had produced a manuscript and received tutor feedback.

3.4 Data analysis

3.4.1 Data transcription

I transcribed the data myself. As all of the participants chose to be interviewed in Chinese, the data (i.e. interview conversations) were first transcribed into Chinese. The transcripts focused exclusively on the representation of talk without integrating any non-verbal interaction, gestures and contextual information in relation to the interviews (transcript sample of an interview see Appendix 4). In the process, I was mindful to avoid any unnecessary editing that could significantly affect the value of the collected data or imposed my own meaning on the participants’ accounts (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Parts of the transcripts, which were used as participants’ quotes in the findings chapters, were translated into English. To maximise data validity, I translated the content of these quotes word by

word without additions and omissions, so as to retain the authenticity of the participants' accounts. The interview quotes were also double-translated by another professional translator to minimise misinterpretation of the original data.

A further consideration in the translation process was my awareness and understanding of the semantic changes that universally take place in the Chinese language. For example, there is only one word in Chinese to express a mistake/error in English (i.e., 错误 *cuowu*), while *mistake* differs from *error* from the perspective of second-language acquisition (SLA). However, when my participants talked about *cuo wu* in the interviews (for instance, 'the teacher pointed out many *cuo wu* in my draft'), they did not mean to clarify and distinguish *mistakes* from *errors*. Meanwhile, discussing the distinction between mistake and error is beyond the scope of this research. Under these circumstances, whenever *cuo wu* was mentioned by the participants, it was translated into either *error* or *mistake* (commonly referring to *something wrong*) in the findings chapters. Other semantic changes emerged in data translation were decided by discussing with the co-translator and considering the interview contexts.

3.4.2 Thematic analysis

Data analysis and interpretation were carried out by following a combination of techniques, procedures and considerations of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Despite the differences in the curriculum and feedback provision policies of the pre-sessional and MA degree programmes, the data obtained during the interviews over the two phases were coded and categorised in a holistic way. This was for the purpose of acknowledging the students' feedback experience in its entirety, without seeking to differentiate between data collection phases for comparison purposes.

When conducting thematic analysis, I structured the initial coding based on three major categories, 1) the students' perceptions of the teacher feedback, 2) the students' behaviours in response to the teacher feedback and 3) factors influencing their engagement with teacher feedback. The data were codified with the aims of identifying issues related to feedback

engagement, summarising the main ideas of the interviewees' narratives, and highlighting contradictory or inconsistent claims made by the interviewees, with notes made in the margins as to how to interpret those claims and memos about any question emerging throughout the process of the data interpretation. By identifying similarities, differences, and relationships between them, these codes were then integrated into categories and subcategories. Screenshot of such data coding are presented in Appendix 5. The coding work was done on Word documents produced from transcripts, with codes marked in different colours. Identified categories, memos, and reflective notes were added in the margin comments.

By free coding, the students' perceptions of teacher feedback, behaviours in response to teacher feedback, elements mediating their behaviours as well as some of the factors influencing their overall engagement with teacher feedback were found from the raw data and further analysed with an inductive approach.

First, the codes related to the students' perceptions of teacher feedback focus on the participants' *opinions*, such as 'their emotional reactions to teacher feedback', 'their interpretations of feedback messages', 'reflections on what they have learned from the feedback' as well as 'expectations to teacher feedback' and 'views of teacher feedback'.

Second, the codes related to the participating students' behaviours in response to teacher feedback focus on the participants' *behavioural engagement with teacher feedback*. Drawing upon the co-constructivist perspective of feedback, it is recognised that students are able to proactively seek and make use of feedback by building loops of dialogues with other members involved in the feedback process. Moreover, participants in the context of this study not only responded to teacher feedback in their submitted work, but also adopted the suggestions they sought from teachers during the writing process. Therefore, behavioural engagement, in this context, not only includes participants' *revisions* by following teacher feedback (or no revisions) which were manifested in visible textual changes, but also takes

into account of *measures* that they took to build dialogues with others in order to seek a better understanding teacher feedback, as well as *actions* they took to apply teachers' suggestions in their writing practices. Codes mainly include 'revised - followed teacher feedback without question', 'revised - found a compromise between the teachers' suggestions and own ideas', 'no revision - did not know how to revise and left the comment there', 'made a table for notetaking by following the teachers' suggestion' and 'sought peers' advice and searched literature'. To unpack the dynamics of how the students' behavioural engagement interplayed with their affective and cognitive engagement in various contexts and to understand why they behaved in certain ways, the codes were analysed by triangulating them with the justifications that participants provided for their behaviours as well as their original draft, revised drafts and teachers' feedback comments. The synthesis of participants' revision practices (textual changes), their accounts of the justifications of their practices and feedback evidence was used to induct the factors that mediated the process of teacher feedback being transformed into students' practice in order to address the second research question.

Third, differing from the factors that mediated the participants' specific behaviours in response to feedback comments, the factors influencing the participants' engagement with teacher feedback were taken in a broader sense. Codes mainly focus on the rationales that the students provided for their selective (dis)engagement with the feedback provided by particular teachers, rationales that the students provided for the inconsistencies between how they understood the feedback and how they actually acted upon the feedback, factors that contributed to a mismatched understanding of the feedback between the students and the tutors. The codes include, for example, 'obtained teacher feedback via peer talk', 'agreement/disagreement with teacher feedback' 'preferred peer talk to seeking teachers' explanations because of ease of communication among peers', 'selectively adopted this comment because the tutor was the marker' and 'adopted the comment unquestioningly due to perceptions of self as a foreign student'.

In addition to the inductive approach to analyse data, the abductive approach was employed in the data analysis to examine how the students' ways of knowing influenced their engagement with teacher feedback. The main categories, 'dualistic way of knowing' and 'pluralistic way of knowing' within the theme about epistemological factors influencing students' engagement with teacher feedback (see Section 6.3) were identified in a deductive way, derived from the discussion of the existing literature in relation to students' dualistic and pluralistic ways of knowing influencing students' academic life by Perry (1970), Magolda (1992) and Belenky et al. (1997) and their feedback experiences by Hockings et al. (2007) (see Section 2.3.3). Whereas, the codes associated with this theme were inducted from the raw data in order to enrich the features of ways of knowing. Codes focus on how participants proceeded to know teacher feedback, in the aspects of students' expectations to teacher feedback, interpretations of teachers' intentions behind feedback and opinions on the dissonant feedback information they received.

After codifying the data, I established the 'latent' themes by capturing key elements of the codes and categories. Emergent themes pertaining to the research questions enabled me to determine which data would be highlighted in the presentation of the findings, thus helping me answer the research questions (Kirk and Miller, 1986). Finally, ten themes were identified from the entire data set, relating to the three research questions (See Table 3.5).

Research questions	Themes
RQ 1 How do students from China perceive teacher feedback in the UK HE context?	Affective dimension
	Cognitive dimension
	Communicative dimension
RQ 2 What factors mediate the process of students transforming teacher feedback into practice?	Ability to analyse inputs in contexts
	Knowledge mastered
	Proactivity
RQ 3 What factors influence the students' engagement with teacher feedback in the UK HE context?	Students' self-essentialist thinking
	Self-perceptions of performance
	Social factors
	Epistemological factors

Table 3. 5 Themes

Examples of how the data were thematically analysed in inductive and abductive ways were displayed in Table 3.6 and 3.7. Details of the thematic analysis in full see Appendix 6.

Raw data	Coding	Category	Theme
<p>Wow! I found that the teacher gave detailed comments. [...] The teacher is sensitive to the implication of a single word that I used, which makes me scared. (Hebe, PS, BI)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Surprised to the ‘detailed’ and ‘careful’ comments; 2. Feelings of fear at the teacher’s so close a scrutiny of every word the student had written 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students’ mixed emotions to the first piece of written feedback 	<p>Students’ perceptions – Affective dimension</p>
<p>I just feel that the teacher was able to point out your strengths, making you feel that, ‘well, there is something good in what I wrote.’ (Maggie, PS, BI) [...] As I wrote the outline in a rush... She gave so many ticks. Is the structure really OK? Has she read it carefully? (Maggie, PS, SR)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. pleased to see tutors recognising and pointing out strengths 2. doubted the credibility of the affirmation in feedback 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Students’ conflicting emotions towards affirmation in feedback 	
<p>I hoped that I could have got more feedback on the content. [...] As far as it goes, I didn’t get something substantial from this piece of feedback. (Maggie, PS, SR) The feedback said it is not good here and there. I don’t want to read it and think about it. It makes me uncomfortable you know. (Maggie, MA, RI)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Desire for critical feedback 2. Resistance to critical feedback 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Students’ conflicting emotions towards criticism in feedback 	

Table 3. 6 An example of inductive thematic analysis

Theme	Category	Coding	Raw data
Factors influencing students' engagement with teacher feedback – Epistemological factor	1. Dualistic way of knowing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Directional instruction 2. Single standard and right answer 3. Majority as the authority 	<p>I also can't agree with the judgements he made on my language issues. [...]</p> <p>Other tutors said [in their feedback] that I had good presentation. [...] only this tutor said that there were serious language problems. (Chloe, MA, RI)</p> <p>I don't think this is my fault as I just wrote it in the light of tutors' suggestions. So, there is nothing I can do at this point. (Hebe, MA, RI)</p>
	2. Pluralistic way of knowing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Appreciation of feedback provided from multiple perspectives 2. Recognition of contextual variations 	<p>I have discussed with different teachers about this assignment. Then, I combined their suggestions with my ideas and considered which one is more suitable or how to take something that they all shared. I think, relatively speaking, this can give me a more comprehensive and rigid understanding of my ideas because different teachers may consider from different perspectives and have different focuses. (Chloe, MA, RI)</p>

Table 3. 7 An example of deductive (abductive) thematic analysis

3.4.3 Data reporting

Data analysis in relation to the three research questions was arranged respectively into three findings chapters (i.e. Chapter 4 – students’ perceptions; Chapter 5 – factors mediating the process of teacher feedback being transformed into students’ practice; Chapter 6 – factors influencing students’ engagement with teacher feedback). The findings chapters provided detailed descriptions and interpretations of the data which were often illustrated with quotes from the students in interviews and with a brief reference to the contexts of occurrence of those quotes. The quotations of the interviewees’ accounts were marked as, for example ‘Hebe, PS, BI’, according to the participants’ pseudonyms, the data collection phases and types of the interviews conducted. PS means the pre-sessional phase. MA means the master’s course phase. BI, SR and RI are short for background interview, stimulated recall and retrospective interview respectively.

In some cases, discrete extracts of data featured in more than one category. For example, both emotional and cognitive dimensions of meaning can be revealed through a participant’s perception of teacher feedback. When presenting data extracts in the findings chapters, decisions about which category each data extract would be located in were made based on consideration of the implications of each data extract’s intended focus within the specific context of each category.

While the categories emerged from interview data analysis have been presented in the findings chapters separately for the purpose of clarity and ease of description, they were in some places overlapping and integrated. It should be noted that, despite the repetitions in some instances and quotes from the participants among the chapters, these were analysed from different perspectives to highlight different aspects of student engagement with teacher feedback. As discussed in Section 2.2.3, students’ affective, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions of engagement are integrated, and none of these dimensions can come into play without the others. Thus, the processes of transforming feedback into practice and the views that the students described are associated with more than one dimension and are shaped by multiple factors (mediators) in combination. Thus, interviewees’ accounts of their

experiences are inevitably repetitive over several categories. Although the categories have been described separately in this thesis for the ease of presentation and with the aim of addressing different research questions, the co-existence of these different dimensions and factors is inherent to develop a complete conception of student engagement with teacher feedback.

3.5 Trustworthiness

Within the literature, establishing credibility and rigour has been discussed in multiple ways. For the purposes of this study, I follow the original Lincoln and Guba's (1985) model, which lists four criteria that qualitative researchers need to meet for a study to be considered as trustworthy. These are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In the rest of this section, I explain how I attempted to maximise the trustworthiness of the current study.

The credibility of my study has been increased at different stages. At the data collection stage, the lack of credibility was minimised by reducing reactivity effects: every attempt was made to put the participants at ease and create a natural, relaxed and non-threatening setting for the interviews (Sim and Wright, 2000), for example, by socialising with my participants to know each other, allowing them to choose the interview venue in which they would feel comfortable, and carefully phrasing the interview questions to come across as friendly. In addition, recognising that rich resources are conducive to obtaining rich findings (Yin, 2014), I chose to record all the conversations that I had with my participants in interviews and fully transcribed all interview data. At the stage of data analysis and reporting, triangulation of the main data sources (i.e., different types of interviews) was used to improve the precision of research findings and minimise the possibility of drawing false conclusions (Hammersley, 2008). I also allowed the participants to view and check the interview transcripts in order to decrease the incidence of incorrect data and therefore ensure that the data were authentic, original and reliable. The interview quotes that were discussed in the thesis were double-

translated by me and another professional translator to minimise misinterpretation of the original data.

With the aim of maximising dependability in my study, I described the data collection and analysis procedures (see Sections 3.3 and 3.4) in as much detail as possible, to allow my readers to develop a thorough understanding of the methods I employed and the effectiveness of the methods. I also selected extracts from the interview transcripts and quoted my questions and students' actual words wherever possible in the findings chapters. Furthermore, I set up a database for my study on which I saved documents, audio records and transcripts of interviews, so as to make it possible for conducting an external audit, whereby a researcher who was not involved in the research procedure could examine the processes I used and decide whether or not my findings, interpretations and conclusions are supported by the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Erlandson et al., 1993).

In order to allow for transferability, I have provided sufficient contextual information about the research site, such as the selection of the type of participants who contributed data, the number of participants, instruments and the length of data collection. Providing such information in detail should enable my readers to determine whether the findings can be transferred to their own settings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Erlandson et al., 1993), 'because of shared characteristics' (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 32) to other contexts.

To enhance confirmability, I triangulated the data between different types of interviews to reduce the potential effect of my bias, acknowledging my beliefs that underpinned my methodological decisions and my predisposition towards making subsequent adjustments during the data collection period (see Sections 3.1 and 3.2).

3.6 Ethical issues and dilemmas

This study has closely followed the ethical guidelines and procedures published by the

British Education Research Association (BERA, 2011). In this section, I discuss the ethical issues and dilemmas that emerged during the data collection and reporting stages and the measures that I took to address them.

After distributing copies of an information sheet about my research to all the Chinese students in two classes of the pre-session programme (see Appendix 1) and recruiting five volunteers, I met with all willing volunteers and provided them with a consent form (see Appendix 2) to sign, including the important information that they had the right to withdraw from my project at any time, without justification or consequence. By taking their needs into consideration, they were able to make any reasonable change to accommodate them at the data collection stage, such as showing me a hard copy or an electronic version of their drafts, and verifying the interview transcripts with a signature. In practice, the duration of interviewing much depended on the physical, mental and emotional conditions of the participants who were free to refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the interviews whenever they wanted. They were also informed that they could ask me to delete or withhold any of the data they provided in the data reporting.

This study was conducted by ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of all the participants. They were invited to provide me with a pseudonym to reduce identifiability to minimum. I guaranteed that I would never share any personal information disclosed to me by the participants, in verbal or written form, with any third party in the absence of their full and unambiguous consent. I audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews. At the end of the data collection, I gave each of the participants the transcripts of their interviews for the purpose of respondent validation, inviting them to modify and confirm their statements.

3.7 Summary

This chapter presents the methodology and research methods adopted in this study. Social constructivism is the paradigmatic position underpinning the study. In order to understand how the students engaged with teacher feedback in different contexts, this study was

designed as an exploratory study which incorporated qualitative inputs in the form of semi-structured interviews (incl. background interview, stimulated recall and retrospective interview). Qualitative data were obtained from five students who, after completing undergraduate programmes in China, had chosen to study at a UK university for a postgraduate degree. Data collection took around a period of seven months into two phases, covering 2016 five-week pre-session language programme and a 2016/17 MA programme. Seven interviews were conducted with each participant to explore how they made sense of teacher feedback they obtained and how they acted upon it. The data were analysed thematically and inducted into ten themes in relation to the students' perceptions of teacher feedback, mediators involved in their decision-making in responses to teacher feedback and factors influenced their engagement with teacher feedback. The next three chapters present data that address the three research questions respectively.

Chapter Four: Students' Perceptions of Teacher Feedback in the UK HE Context

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings pertaining to the first research question within this study:

➤ *How do students from China perceive teacher feedback in the UK HE context?*

It is organised according to three major themes, namely three dimensions emergent in the student perceptions of teacher feedback, which were identified during the data analysis. These include 1) affective, 2) cognitive and 3) communicative dimensions, and each of these dimensions in turn includes several categories, as presented below. A graphic representation of the thematic findings generated from the data analysis has been presented in Fig. 4.1.

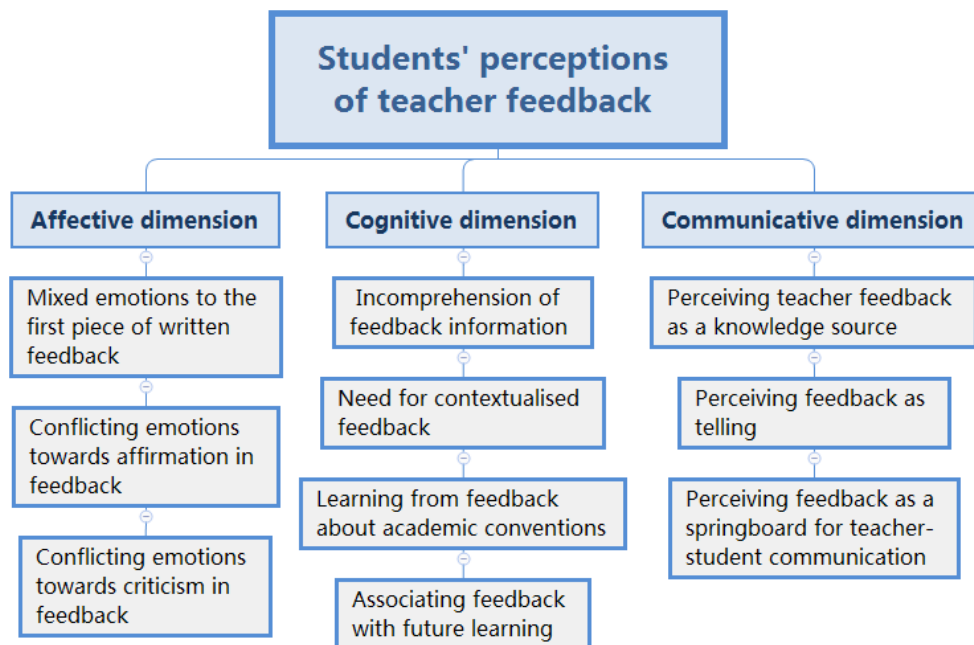


Fig. 4. 1 Dimensions of perception on teacher feedback

4.1 Affective dimension

Affective dimension, in this study, concerns mixed and conflicting emotional responses that the participants demonstrated to the feedback they received from teachers at their UK university, as well as their appreciation and critical evaluations towards the feedback (Zheng and Yu, 2018). This section demonstrates that students' affective reactions to teacher feedback vary in response to different situated contexts.

4.1.1 Students' mixed emotions to the first piece of written feedback

Predominantly, participants reported experiencing pleasure in response to the teacher feedback on their first assignment. On the pre-session course, all five students were required to write a short pre-arrival essay before arriving in the UK and to submit it on the first day of the course. The first piece of feedback that the participants received at their university was on this composition. Four of the five students observed that they were impressed by the first piece of written feedback, reporting some positive responses to it. For example, David indicated that she was happy with the written feedback that she had received because she thought that the teacher had paid attention to her written work. She noted that:

...the first feeling is happiness because someone carefully read my stuff. (David, PS, BI)

Upon being asked why she felt happy to have someone read her work, David responded as below:

[I feel happy] because my writing, especially academic writing, is weak and I hope I can improve it. If I write it alone, there is no way for me to know what problems I have. She [the tutor] not only pointed out my problems, but also pointed out something good that I wrote, which also made me happy. (David, PS, BI)

David's feelings of happiness seem to relate to the opportunity to improve her academic writing in response to the identification of the weaknesses as well as the strengths of her work. This extract shows that David appeared to assign a developmental as well as supportive role to the feedback, which is an important perspective in connection with the view that students engage with feedback and do not receive it just as a piece of transmitted

knowledge. As the extract below shows, feedback on student work was not provided at David's home university.

Previously when I prepared my IELTS test, I wrote something like this [something like the pre-arrival composition]. However, during that time, I just practised on my own by reading some reference books. Now looking at this current feedback, the teacher corrects my work sentence by sentence, which is something that I did not experience before. (David, PS, BI)

David observed that when she was preparing for her IELTS test, she did not receive any tutor feedback on her practice composition and had to rely on reference books. From this quote and the previous extract, it is evident that the spectrum of David's feedback experience spans from writing without any feedback at her home university to writing with tutor feedback at David's UK university. Thus, David's pleasure and surprise at receiving comments on her work from the tutor are explainable in terms of tutor scaffolding through feedback where there had been none in her previous educational experiences. This finding reflects the view of Beaumont et al. (2011) who suggest that the influence of prior experiences of feedback practices derived from institutional/pedagogical transition may have impacts on student perceptions of feedback quality in the host institution.

Another participant Hebe also reported that she was impressed with the first piece of written feedback that she had received at the UK university.

Wow! I found that the teacher gave detailed comments. The teacher provided very careful evaluation of every sentence we wrote. She told us how to revise our work. She pointed out our problems and told us how to adjust. In some other places where she thought were unclear, she asked a question. She gave some comments on the left side of my text and a summarised commentary at the end. I think the teacher is nice. (Hebe, PS, BI)

Hebe's exclamatory response to the feedback on her essay indicates her excitement at receiving such detailed feedback and guidance and indexes her belief in the niceness of the tutor for such detailed comments. Her excitement as she talked about her perceptions of the

first piece of feedback was clearly observable during the interview. The ‘wow’ with which she began her answers to my interview question, in a sense, may be interpreted as her pleasant surprise at the first piece of feedback provided in the pre-session course. Hebe was surprised with the ‘*detailed*’ and ‘*careful*’ comments that she was provided. Hebe’s excitement at the comments seemed to stem not just from the detailed feedback comprising evaluation, guidance for revision and identification of problems but also from questions inviting clarification of unclear sections. This is noteworthy because it suggests that the grounds for dialogue seem to have been established with the kind of feedback that not only evaluates or gives advice for revision but also invites clarification and reflection on the part of the student.

However, despite the initial positive impression of the teacher feedback, the students reported that they also felt, to some extent, pressured by the detailed feedback and to an extent fearful of it. For example, even though David felt happy with the written feedback identifying her problems, she reported feeling scared by the multiple problems in her writing of which she had not been cognizant previously (See Appendix 7 David’s script with the feedback). This finding supports the view of Rowe (2011) who claims that students may have different emotional responses to the same feedback situation. Similarly, Hebe who was surprised by the detailed and careful teacher feedback described one of her drafts as ‘a mess’ at the multiple problems identified in her writing. She recalled that ‘when I received the feedback, I found that the teacher gave too many comments. I felt that what I wrote is a mess.’ The extract below showcases Hebe’s feelings of fear at the close scrutiny of her work. Hebe observed that:

Firstly, I think the teacher read my work very carefully. The teacher is sensitive to the power of a single word that I used, which makes me scared. For example, here the tutor said that I can’t use ‘demonstrate’ and I need to say ‘argue’. [...] Sometimes, I feel scared when a teacher closely scrutinises what I write, because it makes me feel that I am not professional and still have a long way to go. This would make me lose my self-confidence in writing. (Hebe, PS, BI)

In the extract presented above, Hebe's fear seems to arise from the fact that the teacher was sensitive to the nuances of each word deployed by her, which daunted Hebe not only because it increased her awareness of the level of her own professional competence but also affected her confidence as a writer. Given that Hebe and the other participants had successfully qualified for studying at a UK university by passing eligibility tests and language competence assessments prior to arrival, the provision of the highly-detailed feedback from their UK tutor seemed to be eroding Hebe's existing self-confidence and belief in her professionalism. This is an interesting insight in view of the fact that generally speaking, tutor feedback at UK universities is meant to be developmental rather than to be a source of threat to student confidence and belief in professional competence. This aligns with the findings of the study by Mahfoodh (2017, p.70) which revealed student frustration and disappointment at too many written comments and 'too much feedback' on student work especially at earlier drafts. In view of the extracts shared above, such experiences may invite a closer examination of the original intentions (from the tutor perspective) and actual impact of the detailed feedback, especially at the point of entry for students like Hebe and her peers who are still not familiar with the new learning context.

4.1.2 Students' conflicting emotions towards affirmation in feedback

Within the current research context, affirmation in feedback refers to the teachers' affirmative responses to specific student behaviours or performances as evidenced in their written work. It differs from praise which is often viewed as 'an act which attributes credit to another for some characteristic, attribute, skill' (Hyland and Hyland, 2001, p.186), thereby approximating one's ego rather than someone's specific performance or actions. In this study, affirmation is not taken to be 'positive' feedback either, which often appears to be the meaning attributed to it in the existing literature. This is because from a co-constructive perspective, it is the students, not the researchers or teachers, who can evaluate whether or not the affirmation they receive leads to a positive or negative impact on their own writing. The findings presented below show that affirmation in feedback, from Maggie's perspective, had a positive impact on her writing, but also that this was not always the case. She had conflicting emotional responses to the affirmative feedback she received.

In the extract below, Maggie pointed out that she was pleased to see tutors recognising and pointing out her strengths as such affirmative feedback helped to pre-empt distress caused by negative comments as well as to prevent resistance to the input from the teachers. It is interesting to note that feedback based only on negative comments was seen by Maggie as a form of ‘judging’, whereas the inclusion of positive comments implied that the feedback was ‘objective’. From this perspective, Maggie seemed to perceive the inclusion of positive comments in feedback on her writing as suggesting a balanced and non-partisan approach on the teacher’s part, with the implication that solely negative and critical feedback was seen as subjective. Thus, positive comments supported an impression of objectivity on the part of the teacher, and subsequently made it easier for the recipient to accept the feedback given.

I just feel that the teacher was able to point out your strengths, making you feel that, ‘well, there is something good in what I wrote.’ [...] I think [affirmative comments] were necessary [...]. If it can point out some of the strengths, it won’t give someone a psychological resistance to the feedback. Instead of only judging me all the time, positive comments would make me feel that the whole feedback was very objective and can be easy to accept. (Maggie, PS, BI)

However, Maggie’s ‘objective’ impression of the feedback changed later when she encountered another piece of written feedback, and she responded with uncertainty and suspicion of the affirmative comments that she received. Appended below is a picture of Maggie’s project outline script along with the teacher’s feedback (Fig. 4.2).

Outline

Discuss and evaluate some of the most recent developments in the field of educational technology

1. Introduction
 - a) background
Brief introduction of educational technology ✓
 - b) point out developments
 - adoption of Web. 2.0. Iain (2011)
 - face-to-face online courses Petrea (2015)
 - c) thesis statement
 - discuss the use of the two educational technologies and evaluate their advantages and disadvantages ✓
2. Discussion about the two educational technologies
 - a) web 2.0 becomes widely used in teaching ✓
or definition?
 - b) The current use of face-to-face communication ✓
3. Advantages of the two educational technologies
 - a) Web.2.0
 - help distance students to stay in touch with one another ✓
 - peer assessment ✓
 - b) Face-to-face online courses
 - diverse courses. Allen and Seaman (2013) ✓
 - time saving ✓
4. Disadvantages of the two educational technologies
 - a) Web.2.0
 - takes time to train teachers
 - b) Face-to-face online courses
 - need for knowledge of how to work effectively online
 - limited technological competency, confidence and currency ✓
5. Conclusion → *SAY how you've answered the Q.*
 - a) Summary of the advantages and disadvantages
 - b) Suggestion of the use in the future

*In our tutorial
I'd like you to
explain Web 2.0 x
face-to-face
online courses
to me!
Thanks*

good!

Fig. 4. 2 Essay outline with tutor feedback (Maggie)

In contrast with the previous comment on the 'objective' and 'easy-to-accept' feedback, Maggie displayed uncertainty in her understanding of the affirmative feedback provided on her pre-session project outline.

... As for the structure, does the tutor really think that my structure is OK? As I wrote the outline in a rush... She gave so many ticks. Is the structure really OK? Has she read it carefully? (Maggie, PS, SR)

With reference to the extract above, the series of interrogatives appear to suggest that Maggie is unsure of what to make of the feedback given. Especially, the ticks given by the tutor, while being seen as an affirmation by Maggie, also appear to confuse her and make her doubt as to whether or not the tutor has actually read the outline meticulously. Maggie reported that she doubted the credibility of the feedback because she anticipated that there would be some potential problems emerging in her careless and quick writing, whereas the tutor gave many ticks in the outline without pointing out her problems. Reflecting on the feedback that contained ticks and two critical comments (i.e. *'definition?'* and *'say how you've answered the question'*), Maggie noted that she *'did not get something substantial from it'*. She reported that she was eager to know where she had gone wrong, but the feedback did not identify her problems.

However, as clearly shown in the written feedback, the tutor not only noted that Maggie needed to supply definitions for two key terms but she also pointed out that the project conclusion section needed to *'say how you've answered the question'*. So in the interview, I asked Maggie whether the comment on the conclusion in particular had identified any problem. She responded by observing *'I don't know what she is talking about. What question do I need to answer? I don't have a question in the project.'* Apparently, Maggie was not clear about what the comment required her to do. The teacher's comment regarding the *'question'*, in this context, could be interpreted as the need to demonstrate how the essay had addressed the prompt and justified the thesis presented in the introduction. However, the extract shows that Maggie interpreted or unpacked it otherwise, wondering what actual question she was supposed to answer, thereby suggesting that she was not familiar with the academic discourse. This indicates Maggie's disappointment in not getting *'something substantial from [the feedback]'*.

In addition, while interviewing Maggie, I found that the ‘problems’ she hoped to be identified in her outline were those she anticipated by herself. It seems that the student wanted the feedback to reflect her own evaluation of the quality of the work, and when the feedback did not reflect so or identify the anticipated ‘problems’, she chose to distrust it, doubting whether the teacher had carefully read her work.

In Maggie’s case, she evidenced mixed emotional responses to the affirmation she had received, commenting in the first instance that affirmative feedback was necessary to build confidence and to increase the objectivity of the overall feedback, and in the second example, demonstrating unsureness of and hesitation towards the affirmation provided. These extracts also serve as a good example of the view that students co-construct the feedback they receive. Maggie’s conflicting perceptions of the feedback seem to imply her agentic role in interacting with the teacher’s comments and making sense of them according to her own schema, experiences and perceptions.

4.1.3 Students’ conflicting emotions towards criticism in feedback

Desire for critical feedback

As mentioned in the previous section, Maggie reported that the feedback on her outline did not identify the existence of the anticipated problems. In addition to concerns over the lack of comments on her anticipated ‘problems’ on the text structure, Maggie suggested that she expected the teacher to provide feedback on the content. She commented that the current feedback was not substantial because it focused more on the project structure. It seems that Maggie’s negative comments on the feedback provided stemmed mainly from the fact that the comments she had expected and the concerns that she had (about content) did not match the input the teacher had provided (feedback on text structure).

Actually, I think that my greatest concern is the content. I hoped that I could have got more feedback on the content. I feel it is difficult to manage the content. [...] As far as it goes, I didn’t get something substantial from this piece of feedback. (Maggie, PS, SR)

The extract above reinforces the importance of how feedback is co-constructed and how it needs to be interpreted not only in terms of teacher concerns over issues within the work but also in terms of student concerns over content in their writing.

Resistance to critical feedback

The extracts below demonstrate the internal tension of wanting and not wanting feedback at the same time. For instance, despite judging the feedback for lacking critical comments to point out ‘problems’, Maggie stated that sometimes she was upset if feedback was full of negative comments.

[...] if the feedback was full of negative things. It would make me upset. (Maggie, PS, BI)

Maggie also showed her reluctance to read the critical comments in her MA unit assignments feedback forms as the intensive criticism in the feedback made her uncomfortable. Before carrying out the seventh interview about the final feedback forms of the participants’ unit assignments, I asked the participating students to read the feedback beforehand so that we could have a meaningful discussion later. In the interview when I talked to Maggie about her final feedback forms, I asked her if she had read the feedback forms and how she felt about them. She told me that she had not had a close look at the feedback owing to the uncomfortable feeling it caused:

I can’t remember exactly what is written in the feedback. I just have a general impression. There are many critiques in the feedback. Some of them, for example a comment saying that my language is awkward, make me feel [that I am being treated with] contempt. The feedback said it is not good here and there. I don’t want to read it and think about it. It makes me uncomfortable you know. Although I know there are many places to improve, I just don’t want to read it. (Maggie, MA, RI)

The internal tension between her desire to receive feedback that identified problems in her writing and her resistance to critical feedback when it was given indicates that Maggie

sought feedback she could use to improve her work but the quantity of critical feedback (i.e. '*many critiques*') and the language used in the feedback (i.e. contemptuous words) affected Maggie's emotions negatively. Although she understood that she needed to improve her work by following the feedback, the emotional impact blocked her cognitive engagement with the content of the feedback (i.e. '*Although I know there are many places to improve, I just don't want to read it*'). This finding is in line with the study by Carver and Harmon-Jones (2009) who found that negative emotions to teacher feedback could result in students' complete ignorance of the feedback, initiating their cognitive and behavioural disengagement with the feedback.

Moreover, this kind of negative affective response to teacher feedback reflects the findings of studies which have looked at the effect on student perceptions of teacher feedback. Focusing on the use of mitigated (with hedging) commentary and directive or unmitigated feedback, the study by Treglia (2008) into the perceptions of students enrolled in a composition class at a US university revealed that the students showed sensitivity about teacher comments they considered to be less than polite. Treglia (2008, p.130) found that her findings showed the need for teachers to understand that they should be cautious to the language they use in feedback as it has an impact on students' affective reaction to and interpretation of feedback.

So far, this section has presented the findings on the student perceptions of teacher feedback from the affective dimension. The findings reveal that the students had mixed and even conflicting emotions to their feedback encounters, whether these comprised the first piece of feedback, affirmative or critical feedback. The complex nature of the participants' affective reactions to feedback appears to be elicited in response to a number of contextual variables including the first experience with feedback provided by teachers in the UK, the eagerness to obtain feedback to improve writing and the awareness of their weaknesses after reading the feedback. Other variables include the students' comparison of the feedback with self-perceptions of performance, the perceived quantitative balance between affirmative and

critical comments as well as the language used by the teachers in the feedback.

4.2 Cognitive dimension

In this study, cognitive dimension of the participants' perceptions of teacher feedback involves participants' interpretations of the meanings of feedback messages, their reflections on what they had learned from the feedback and how they could incorporate the feedback in future writing.

4.2.1 Incomprehension of feedback information

Participants reported that sometimes they could not clearly understand the feedback provided and were not able to apply the feedback in the subsequent revisions. Xiao received a comment '*try to develop this further*' (see the comments in the left section of Fig.4.3 below) in the written feedback on her pre-sessional project outline, which asked her to further develop two body paragraphs. During the interview, she was asked how she understood this comment. Xiao said that she could not understand and respond to the comment. Fig.4.3 shows the outline with the teacher feedback.

Outline

Telegraph/Times (Cons./right)

Focus? Primary Secondary H.E.?

Re-write in light of Friday's class!

1. Introduction (Cons./right)

A. Backgrounds

1. Background of Chinese and British basic educational systems
2. Background of Chinese and British college entrance examination systems

B. Evaluation of Chinese and British college entrance examination systems briefly

2. II. Body paragraph

3. A. Comparison Chinese and British college entrance examination systems

4. 1. Scoring systems *additional*

2. Subjects in examinations

3. How important are college entrance examinations for university and college admission

III. Body paragraph

A. Evaluation of Chinese and British college entrance examination systems

1. Benefits (for students)
 - a. The benefits of Chinese college entrance examination systems
 - b. The benefits of British college entrance examination systems
2. Drawbacks (for students)
 - a. The drawbacks of Chinese college entrance examination systems
 - b. The drawbacks of British college entrance examination systems

Secondary Education
-
University Participation

Try to develop this further

beyond 2 body paragraphs.
(How can they be added to?)

Could there be a 2nd focus (as well as sts) !! The purpose is entering sthg

IV. Conclusion

Fig. 4.3 Essay outline with tutor feedback (Xiao)

In the extract below, Xiao shared her response to the teacher's feedback on her outline (Fig.4.3), noting that:

... and in here [the tutor] wanted me to develop the idea further. She did not even tell me how to take it further, how much further and which direction I should think from. I can't quite understand this. (Xiao, PS, SR)

The extract shows that the feedback provided to Xiao was not explicit enough for her to apply it to the revisions as in her view it did not include directions on the way to develop the paragraph further as well as the extent of development needed and the way she needed to think about the topic. It is interesting to note that Xiao appears to need step-by-step directions in making the revisions, whereas the aim of the feedback seems to draw her attention to the lack of development in the paragraph and to leave the actual revisions to the student herself. Similarly, Maggie also reported that she had received a written comment that confused her. In Maggie's outline for the pre-sessional project, she had included a section heading titled '*discussion about the two educational technologies*' on which the teacher had given the comment '*or definition?*'. When I asked her how she understood this comment, she said that she was confused about this comment and did not know the teacher's intention in making it:

... she said 'discussion or definition'. Does she want me to give definitions? I can't understand what she wanted me to do. I don't know what I should discuss and what I should specifically write in the discussion. [...] I think it is just about the phenomena of two technologies. How could they be discussed? (Maggie, PS, SR)

Again, the incomprehension of the feedback seems to stem from not knowing what to '*specifically write in the discussion*', suggesting as in Xiao's case, Maggie's need for detailed explanations and guidance for applying the feedback. Maggie's incomprehension of how to undertake a discussion lasted until the end of the data collection. In the last interview when we talked about her understanding of the feedback on her Unit 3 assignment, Maggie suggested that she could not understand the comment '*not appropriately developed*' and did not know what the teacher meant when she asked her to '*sufficiently discuss*' the topic. The tutor comments that Maggie mentioned specifically included: '*Again, there is a tendency here for you to mention a lot of critical points, yet these points are not sufficiently discussed. You provide some reflections; in particular the one about reinforcement is interesting. However, again some of your points are not appropriately developed*'. She suggested that the lack of understanding of such comments would prevent her from meeting such demands in the current and future writing:

... I don't know how to analyse. If I was asked to revise this part, I would still write it in a descriptive way. [...] Then, the tutor said 'sufficiently discuss'. I don't know what is meant by sufficient. She asked me to develop it appropriately. I don't know how to be appropriate either. [...] So, what I am worrying about is that I might interpret the tutor's feedback in a wrong way, in which case I would be wrong again even if I write it in another way in the next version. (Maggie, MA, RI)

The extracts presented in this section indicate the struggle of the participants with unpacking the feedback received, also highlighting their shared need for detailed, step-by-step and specific comments that could help them to make the revisions or to improve their writing in the future. The idea that feedback is co-constructed seems to be borne out by these extracts, which suggests that co-construction is a complex process, influenced by preexisting perceptions and experiences, that does not necessarily lead to shared understandings of feedback information.

4.2.2 Need for contextualised feedback

In contrast to the initial reactions to the first feedback that the participants had received upon arrival at their UK university, data analysis showed that the participants like Maggie had actually begun to think about what they needed from the feedback, a significant departure from the earlier unquestioning acceptance of the feedback information provided to the learners in previous sections (Section 4.1). This section demonstrates that, when engaging with teacher feedback, students expect teachers not only to provide evaluations of their essays but also to contextualise the evaluations with reference to specific examples from their essays in addition to offering explanations of why the points the tutors have raised are issues to be concerned about.

Regarding incomprehension of the feedback provided, the students reported that they expected to obtain more explicit information from the teacher in order to better understand and act upon the feedback in writing. For example, regarding the feedback sheet on her Unit 3 assignment, Maggie suggested that instead of just criticising what was not good, the

teacher needed to link the comments to the context of her work and to specify exactly where she had gone wrong in her written work. The extract below shows a need for the feedback-providing teacher to provide examples from Maggie's work to contextualise the teacher's comments:

... She also commented that a theory was not sufficiently discussed. But I think I have discussed sufficiently enough. [...] At least, she needs to explain why she thought this was not discussed sufficiently. Like another tutor who picked examples from my work, she should also give me one [example] and tell me like 'you did not discuss sufficiently, say, about what you have done in this part, this part and this part...' (Maggie, MA, RI)

This extract demonstrates that feedback practices seem to vary from tutor to tutor, with some preferring to use examples from student work to anchor comments and other preferring to provide only general comments. For instance, while Maggie struggled with the feedback that did not contain contextualising examples, she had a better understanding of what needed to be done when one of the other tutors picked out examples that allowed Maggie to see exactly what she had not done right in writing her discussion.

Data showed that participants not only experienced difficulties in understanding feedback that was not linked to examples from their work, but also did not always agree with feedback even when it included examples. In the extract below, Chloe reflected that she was not convinced by the feedback on the Unit 1 assignment.

... The Unit 1 tutor didn't say anything positive [in the final feedback], but just said that there are quite a lot of language errors. [...] I don't think there are a lot [of errors]. I don't think [my written language] was as bad as he said. He gave me such a low grade but did not point out where was not good. This is what I can't accept. (Chloe, MA, RI)

As can be seen from this quote, Chloe did not agree with the language issues that the tutor commented on in final feedback. She was not convinced by the 'low' grade provided as she

thought that the written feedback was not justified enough (i.e. *'He gave me such a low grade but did not point out where was not good'*). It is interesting to note that in this extract, most of Chloe's resistance to the feedback seems to stem from her own evaluation of her work and her belief that the feedback lacked positive comments. Moreover, there seem to be a number of significant inconsistencies between what was presented in the feedback and what she reported during the interview. Fig.4.4 presents the feedback sheet of the Unit 1 assignment that Chloe showed to me:

Overall

In this assignment you make a good effort to apply Reader Response Theory to the analysis of the short story.

Content

You use too many direct quotations from the source text.

Structure

Overall, the assignment is clearly structured. The problems are more at the sentence level, i.e. syntactical.

Presentation

*There are a quite a lot of English language errors. These sometimes make it difficult for the reader to follow your argument.
Some errors, such as spelling mistakes (e.g. *'truly'*, sic) could easily have been avoided.
The heading *'References'* # should be plural. You list several of them.*

Analysis

*You make a number of useful observations on the source text.
You also finish with a series of viable applications for the EFL classroom.*

Use of sources

You cite a range of appropriate literature.

Fig. 4. 4 Feedback sheet Unit 1 assignment (Chloe)

It can be clearly seen from this piece of feedback that the tutor provided quite a few positive comments (e.g. *'make a good effort to...'*, *'clearly structured'*, *'useful observations'*, *'cite a*

range of appropriate literature'), in addition to the negative comments (e.g. '*a lot of English language errors*', '*problems more at the sentence level*', '*too many direct quotations*'). Even in the case of the language errors, the tutor did provide some examples of the mistakes she had made. Comparing the content of the feedback on the assignment with what Chloe reported, there appears to be clear contradiction of Chloe's contention that the tutor '*didn't say anything positive*' and '*did not point out where was not good*'.

It can be inferred from this comparison that instead of considering the 'positive' and 'negative' comments provided holistically, Chloe tended to disagree with comments she perceived to be negative. Chloe's resistance to those comments might be attributed to the fact that these comments did not appear convincing enough to her. According to Chloe, (i.e. '*the Unit 1 tutor [...] said that language errors are quite a lot. [...] I don't think there are a lot*'), the comment '*a lot of English language errors*' did not seem to match what Chloe quantified as '*a lot*'. The inconsistencies between the teacher's comments and Chloe's perceptions indicate that while engaging with the feedback, Chloe chose to understand it in a way that was not intended or perhaps only partially understood it. In this context, the teacher's comments such as '*problems more at the sentence level*' and '*too many direct quotations*', did not seem to justify the 'low' grade that Chloe had been given. Looking at this example alone, it might be logical to conclude that Chloe's reaction to the feedback is emotive and inconsistent with what has been said by the tutor. However, an example of her response to the feedback on another unit assignment with a low grade seems to suggest that the underlying issue is more complex.

For instance, in her response to the Unit 2 feedback, Chloe appeared to offer clarification of what she considered '*something positive and pointing out where was not good*'. In the extract below, Chloe stressed that she could not agree with the Unit 1 feedback due to the lack of convincing explanation offered by the teacher. She pointed out that she was able to make sense of what the teacher had said in the Unit 2 assignment because he provided detailed feedback on her strengths and some logical problems, thereby leading her to be

convinced as to what the teacher had said about her work:

So, this is the feedback (on Unit 1 assignment) that I felt very dissatisfied with. Actually, I still have an assignment with a low grade, that is, the one for Unit 2. However, for that feedback, I can make sense of what he [the tutor] said, even though I didn't get a high mark. He gave detailed feedback pointing out my strengths and some logical problems. He also said if your argumentation is to be more powerful, I advise you to do this this and this. The feedback convinced me. (Chloe, MA, RI)

Considering this response in the context of the teacher's feedback on the Unit 2 assignment (Fig.4.5), it is discernible that the feedback is distinguishable from the comments offered by the tutor on the Unit 1 assignment (Fig.4.4) on several counts.

Analysis

Some claims are unsubstantiated, bringing down the strength of the argument. The problem begins at the start, with some generalizations attributed to a very outdated source. Otherwise, the line of argumentation is clear and generally well supported, putting a great deal of emphasis on clarifying the prejudices that favour British and American English in China. There is then a jump from that line of argumentation to a seemingly new one that Chinese English 'has come into public recognition' (rather vague, not sure what this really means). The argument seems to be that since there is academic discussion of Chinese English as a legitimate variety, this means it is accepted. But this is a leap in logic, relying on Kirkpatrick and Xu for the only claim of acceptance, rather than explaining how it is accepted. Certainly it is agreeable that the status of Chinglish is improving in China, but you needed to clarify how and why, and if, in your context, it is having an actual impact on curriculum and pedagogical practices.

Fig. 4. 5 Feedback sheet Unit 2 assignment (Chloe)

Through comparing the feedback provided by Unit 1's tutor to the excerpt from Unit 2's tutor, it can be seen that Unit 2 assignment feedback mentioned many details of Chloe's essay content, identified the concrete issues emergent in Chloe's essay and suggested what Chloe could have done. It seems that those comments referring to the text's details and contexts were more convincing to Chloe and helped her to make sense of the problems in the essay and the reason that she had been awarded this grade.

In Chloe's case, analysis of the feedback information provided by different tutors in Fig.4.4 and Fig.4.5 shows that the most significant difference between the two sets of comments seems to be that the information is presented in a piecemeal checklist fashion in the former. On the other hand, the feedback in the Unit 2 assignment (Fig.4.5) with which Chloe was satisfied is presented in a descriptive and explanatory format that highlights weaknesses and strengths of the assignment, while offering explanations of what the student should have done to prevent the issues with outdated sources and argumentation identified by the tutor. Reviewing the extracts, it appears that while the feedback from the first tutor favoured breadth, the comments by the second tutor offered depth. The extracts from the data provided by Maggie and Chloe demonstrate that they valued in-depth feedback information. When engaging with teacher feedback, the students expected tutors not only to provide evaluations of the work (e.g. discussed not sufficiently enough) but also to contextualise the evaluations with reference to specific examples from their essays in addition to offering explanations of why the points the tutors had raised were issues to be concerned about.

The findings in this section also support the idea that teacher feedback is not monolithic and uniform and that how it is structured and presented, and the level of accompanying details and explanations can influence whether or not students are able to comprehend and/or accept it as intended. This finding enriches the evidence in the existing literature that is against the transmissive view of feedback which rests on the assumption that students could understand the feedback and apply it to improve their performance as intended by teachers providing the information.

4.2.3 Learning from feedback about academic writing conventions

Learning about academic conventions from teacher feedback is another category emerged from the interviews. For example, Hebe stated that she had learned about the concept of 'thesis statement' from the oral feedback she had received in a one-to-one tutorial during the pre-session. Initially, Hebe had received a written comment which asked her to add a thesis statement in her pre-sessional project draft although Hebe was not aware of what was meant by a thesis statement. Hebe then followed up that comment in the subsequent tutorial and

asked the tutor for an explanation of thesis statement.

The written feedback said that I needed a thesis statement but didn't tell me how to write one. I didn't know what a thesis statement is. Initially I thought an evaluative conclusion is a thesis statement. Then, in the tutorial, I asked the tutor [...]. The tutor explained that it refers to the purposes of an article. So, I know how to produce a thesis statement later. (Hebe, PS, SR)

Hebe also reported that when she was studying at her Chinese university, she did not have a clear understanding of academic writing conventions and had not taken a serious attitude towards academic writing. In the extract below, she explained how she had approached academic writing before coming to study at her UK university.

Now I feel that I previously wrote essays in a careless way. When I wrote a piece of academic essay, I could understand the literature I read. Then I just used my own words to illustrate what I read without indicating where it was referenced. (Hebe, PS, SR)

After Hebe came to the UK university and received the feedback on her pre-sessional project draft, Hebe began to be aware of some features of academic writing conventions and approached academic writing more seriously.

The tutor gives comments on the lack of evidence, references and etc. Then, I realised that I should not have written essays completely based on my own assumptions. There should be evidence, clear structures, arguments and references. You [I] need to treat your [my] essay carefully. Previously I did not do it seriously and wrote an essay like a literary composition. (Hebe, PS, SR)

This extract shows how Hebe was able to engage with the feedback provided on academic writing conventions and to learn to write academic properly-referenced well-structured essays based on evidence and argumentation. This finding echoes the point of Evans and Waring (2011) who suggest that the process of drafting and redrafting by undertaking an ongoing interaction with teacher feedback enables students to deepen their understanding of feedback and gradually to adapt to the conventions and values of the host academic

community. Further, analysis seems to show participants like Hebe gaining meta-awareness of her earlier writing process in the light of the feedback she had received which may suggest the development of growing reflectivity on the processes of writing as well as the feedback itself.

4.2.4 Associating feedback with future learning

When interpreting teacher feedback, students have in-depth reflections on how they are going to apply the feedback into future learning and other contexts of writing. Such reflections could only be achieved when students have a full understanding of the teacher feedback.

For example, when discussing the final feedback sheet of Xiao's Unit 4 assignment, she reported that she had learned from the feedback, learning how to apply what she had learnt to her subsequent research project and dissertation writing. The Unit 4 assignment was related to evaluation of research methods. The assignment task was as follows:

Select a specific area within the field of the Master's programme. Identify three recent research-based articles which have made a significant contribution to the development of this field. Critically evaluate two of the following aspects of the articles: research design, methods of data collection, quality criteria, handling of ethical issues. Suggest how these aspects could be adapted for conducting research into a learning and teaching context with which you are familiar

The two aspects of the articles that Xiao chose to evaluate were methods of data collection and quality criteria. The extract below comprises excerpts of the feedback received by Hebe,

"Data collection methods and quality criteria are discussed from different perspectives in some detail and at times critically (e.g. piloting, purpose of data collection instruments, methodological triangulation, validity/reliability, generalizability issues). Some issues, however, could have been analysed in more depth and more critically. For example, in relation to Mak (2011), how exactly was the questionnaire improved as a result of the pilot phase? What does this suggest about the role of piloting in questionnaire design? As regards the questionnaires used

by Mak (2011) and Khajavy et al. (2014), any critiques of their design in terms of question types, length, suitability to age group, etc.?”

Based on this feedback, Xiao learnt what to consider when evaluating and selecting data collection methods, particularly in terms of questionnaire design. She believed that this piece of teacher feedback would benefit her in the writing of her dissertation in the future:

The tutor thought that I didn't analyse it [a questionnaire] in depth. [...] The tutor provided me with many things that I need to think about. [...] In terms of evaluating questionnaires, now I know how to evaluate and critique [questionnaires]. The feedback reminds me of something like how I can improve the questionnaire design by making use of piloting. Also, when I design a questionnaire, I need to consider [...]. These can be used in my subsequent dissertation writing. I learned how to choose my data collection methods. (Xiao, MA, RI)

Similarly, Chloe reported that in one of the Q&A sessions, she had asked a question pertaining to the idea development for the Unit 3 assignment that she was going to write. Chloe stated that she learned from the teacher's responses as to how to identify the topic and describe the context in her assignment. The extract below indicates that Chloe was able to generalise the teacher's suggestions to 'context description' into the writing of subsequent assignments:

In the first Q&A session, I asked some general questions. For example, if I wanted to write about the topic of individual differences, should it be written narrowly and specifically. [...] The response I got was that 'your topic should be specific rather than general. Context should also be as specific as you can. Instead of saying 'Chinese universities', you need to narrow the context to a class or a school'. These were the responses from the tutor, which influenced my later writing. (Chloe, MA, RI)

Although there is some evidence within the data to suggest that students learnt from teacher feedback and related feedback to future writing, the findings indicate that this kind of learning only happened when the feedback was meaningful to them. One of the conditions for the learners to learn to generalise teacher feedback to future writing was that they understood what they needed to do and why they needed to do it in a specific way so that

they could engage fully with what was intended in the comments by the teachers. There is an example indicating how the participant thought the explanations in feedback made sense to her. In the extract below, Chloe described an incident from a tutorial. In the tutorial, Chloe asked Tutor C a few questions related to her Unit 3 assignment. Chloe found that Tutor C's explanation helped her understand the tutor's suggestion.

... I also asked him a question of whether I need to write implications or suggestions in the conclusion part. The tutor read the four assignment topics of Unit 3. Then he looked at what I wrote. He said that I didn't need to write implications as there was no explicit requirement in my topic asking me to write implications. Then he gave me another example, saying, 'the topic of Unit 2 said that you need to write implications, in which case you may write some suggestions'. (Chloe, MA, RI)

The topic that Chloe had chosen for her Unit 3 assignment was as below:

In recent years SLA research has paid increasing attention to individual (physical, cognitive, affective etc.) differences amongst learners. Based on your personal experience of learning a second/foreign language or teaching a second/foreign language to a particular group of students, reflect on the L2 learning process and discuss those individual differences which you think played the most significant role in facilitating the learning of the target language.

The topic of Unit 2 assignment that the tutor used as an example was the following:

Choose a pedagogical context with which you are familiar and describe which variety/varieties of English people associate with prestige in that context. Consider the issue of linguistic prejudice and discuss the implications for the policy and/or practice of English language teaching in your chosen context. Provide support for your arguments from the scholarly literature.

By interpreting the assignment topic and providing examples, Tutor C helped Chloe to understand why 'suggestions' or 'implications' should be removed from her assignment conclusion. She stated that from the feedback she gained a deeper insight into how to analyse topics and think about problems.

Interestingly, Chloe reported that she had received the same suggestion from Tutor B in the Q&A session before attending the tutorial, although she could not make sense of Tutor B's advice.

... Actually, before having this tutorial, I had asked Tutor B about this question. The tutor just told me not to write [suggestions in the conclusion] but didn't give me an explanation about why. Since I read an assignment exemplar from last year and there are implications written in the conclusion, as far as I can see, I can also write implications [in my assignment]. (Chloe, MA, RI)

This quote indicates that Chloe was not convinced by the suggestion given by Tutor B because, as she claimed, there was no accompanying explanation for omitting suggestions from the conclusion. Chloe's insistence upon writing 'suggestions' in conclusions was influenced by an academic paper exemplar. However, Tutor B's suggestion failed to change her initial understanding of how to write the conclusion because the advice did not make much sense to her. She was not convinced until she fully understood the explanation by Tutor C in the tutorial. It was also found that a full understanding of the explanations by Tutor C helped Chloe to better understand under what circumstances 'suggestions' should/should not be added in a conclusion. Moreover, by gaining a clear understanding of Tutor C's suggestion, Chloe gained insight into how to interpret assignment requirements in the future and how to critically refer to published articles while she was writing her own assignments.

I think this suggestion gave me a reminder of how I should interpret assignment topics in future. Since I did not have a clear understanding of how to write academic papers, I learned from some published papers and some of them include suggestions in the conclusion. Then, I thought I could also do in that way. But it is actually wrong in my assignment context. (Chloe, MA, RI)

The extracts from Xiao and Chloe indicate that students were able to learn from teacher feedback and to link this information with later writing, suggesting that students were more likely to generalise teacher feedback when they not only understood what they needed to do

but also why they had to do/not do it in a certain way. These findings echo the findings of earlier research such as the study conducted by Carless (2006) which also showed that participants used advice provided on a particular essay to fulfilling the requirements of future assignments. The findings also align with the idea of Nicol (2010) who states that students are able to develop self-regulation by making use of information they are given to improve their future work.

So far, this section shows participants' perceptions of teacher feedback from the cognitive dimension. Sometimes students could not make sense of some of the feedback produced by teachers, and they could not understand teachers' intentions and act upon the feedback in writing. In order to better understand what the feedback meant, they expected the feedback to refer to the examples and details from their texts. Findings indicate that feedback not linked to the content of the students' essays might prove less effective in helping students to realise where they have gone wrong. In turn, being unconvinced about the feedback could cause the students to disagree with teacher opinions in the feedback. The students were more likely to be convinced when the feedback was contextualised within the students' assignments by the tutors.

In some occasions, students engaged effectively with teacher feedback, not just learning about academic writing conventions and other research and writing skills but also extrapolating the feedback they had received in current assignments to future writing. This suggests not just proactive engagement with feedback provided to them but also the maturing ability to make sense of what they were learning and to generalise their insights and skills to other contexts of writing. This view is reflective of existing research on the socially constructed nature of knowledge which suggests that individuals do not reproduce and follow any fixed rules, showing instead the capacity to reflect, reject, question, modify and reconstruct any imposed beliefs and to make the feedback adaptive to their own learning needs in future (Sayer, 1997). This foregrounds the central role of the students themselves, rather than the role of the teacher or the feedback itself, in making the feedback effective

(Sambell, 2011).

4.3 Communicative dimension

Communicative dimension of students' perceptions of teacher feedback concerns participants' conceptions of teacher feedback as a way of communication. This section demonstrates that there is correspondence between the way the feedback is conceptualised and how agentively students construct the feedback. In particular, the conceptions of teacher feedback that students hold influence their expectations to teacher feedback, their interpretations of feedback information and the ways they would engage with teacher feedback in the future.

4.3.1 Perceiving teacher feedback as a knowledge source

An examination of the interview transcripts shows that on some occasions, the participants tended to see teacher feedback as one-way knowledge transmission, leading to a reliance on information delivered by teachers. When the participants were exposed to the 'foreign' pedagogical context in UK HE for the first time, some participants tended to see teacher feedback as a source of knowledge that can support them to get familiar with and adapt to the host educational context. In this case, they had many expectations of teacher feedback. This is in line with the idea of Evans (2013) who suggests that feedback can serve to facilitate the entry of students into the new academic environment, enabling them to gain agency by being inducted into the norms of a specific academic setting, thereby also addressing basic learner needs that allow them to feel that they can contribute effectively to their learning community.

For instance, in the first interview carried out during Phase 1, when Maggie was asked about the kind of teacher feedback she expected, the participant talked about some difficulties she was facing at the moment and the feedback she wished to obtain from teachers in order to help her tackle the challenges. Due to the absence of similar academic writing practices in China, Maggie suggested that she did not know what to read and how to find scholarly

literature when she prepared her pre-sessional project, and she expected the teacher to guide her as to where to look for library sources for her to read.

I am not good at this [searching sources] as I seldom did such work in China. So, I hoped the teacher could give me some support on this, telling me what I should read, where I can find sources online and how to search books in the library database. (Maggie, PS, BI)

Maggie also thought that she was not very good at grammar and that currently she had not received adequate grammar training at her UK university. Thus, she expected to obtain more corrective feedback.

... My grammar is quite weak. I mean there are many grammatical mistakes in what I speak and what I write. [...] But here we don't have exclusive grammar courses. There are only some online sources on Moodle for self-learning. Maybe the tutor [at the UK university] didn't pay much attention to grammar [teaching]. So, I hope that the teacher could correct the mistakes for me in her feedback. (Maggie, PS, BI)

When Maggie found that she could not get grammar instruction in her current classes and was expected to use only some self-access resources, she expected the teacher to check the grammar for her in the feedback. Similarly, when asked about the kind of teacher feedback she expected, Hebe also reported that due to the lack of emphasis on academic writing practices during her undergraduate study, she found it challenging to cite references in her pre-sessional project. Hence, she hoped to obtain feedback from the teacher on referencing conventions for her essays:

Perhaps I still can't reference very well. Now I feel that previously I wrote essays in a careless way. I used my own words to state the sources that I had understood, but did not give a reference. Now I am still not clear about how to reference the content of an article in my essay. I also don't understand the formats of referencing. So, I hope that the teacher could tell me how to reference correctly. (Hebe, PS, BI)

These examples seem to suggest that the students depended on teachers and saw teacher feedback as a knowledge source. Their expectations of what the teachers needed to do to

help them transcend feedback per se, extending to other aspects of university support such as library assistance or grammar instruction.

Furthermore, some comments from the participants also indicated that due to unfamiliarity with academic writing prior to joining the pre-session course, they found it difficult to undertake problem-solving and self-monitoring of their writing. Under these circumstances, they expected more intensive and explicit feedback input throughout their pre-session project writing process. This finding extends the research (e.g. Morgan, 2013; McPherson, Punch and Graham, 2017; Heussi, 2012) on investigating the impact of the pedagogical transition from China's undergraduate courses to the UK's postgraduate study on students' perceptions of teacher feedback. It reflects the view of Tian and Lowe (2013) who found that in their study the students as novices in the new academic context perceived the feedback as an introduction to the new culture and as a means of communicating the expectations of the culture. It is also congruent with the findings in the study of Leki (2006) who found that some 'foreign' students in her study expected more guidance via teacher feedback on what target they were aiming for to accommodate the host academic culture.

In the extract below, Hebe expressed her dissatisfaction with the amount of feedback that she had received, which comprised only a single piece of written feedback on her full draft before final submission. As the extract shows, Hebe expected teachers to provide multiple reviews and feedback on her project draft before the final submission. She reported that she was:

... not quite satisfied because I think this kind of draft needs to be revised for many times. Because in the first round of revisions, some places need major revisions. The revised draft must still have many problems. But I don't know what problems still exist and it needs the tutor to have a look for me. So, the initial feedback is far from enough. Another round of feedback is necessary [...]. (Hebe, PS, SR)

This excerpt indicates that Hebe's apparent dependence on teacher feedback as a way to monitor and to improve the quality of her draft by identifying problems emerging in her

drafting and revising process. Hebe's expectation of intensive teacher feedback might have arisen due to her lack of confidence in unfamiliar academic writing practices in English or due to her reliance on teacher feedback as a constant source of knowledge rather than as a developmental tool. However, as another extract from Hebe shows, the latter could not serve as an encompassing explanation for her expectations of greater teacher feedback as she showed awareness of too much feedback as being obstructive to the development of her own capacity to think independently:

...But if she [the tutor] explained it in detail, my dependence [to detailed feedback] will become strong. Then it will influence the practice of independent thinking. I think that it [detailed feedback] has both advantages and disadvantages. (Hebe, PS, SR)

This apparent contradiction in the desire for more detailed feedback and the realisation that such feedback could hinder her independent thinking actually provides evidence of Hebe's transforming understandings, capacity for reflection and growth as a writer. This insight is also interesting because it shows Hebe reflecting on the process of feedback and not just the content of the feedback itself. Thus, despite her reliance on teacher feedback as a source of intensive guidance on academic writing, Hebe showed awareness of the importance of developing independent thinking during the feedback process. Nevertheless, as the quote below shows, in view of her feeling that she was a novice in academic writing, she still expected specific and intensive teacher feedback which could enable her to effectively solve problems in writing and make needed improvements:

However, concerning my current situation, I still expect the teacher to give specific suggestions, [...] which I think can let me improve in a real sense. (Hebe, PS, SR)

Analysing her desire to 'improve in a real sense' suggests that Hebe perceived herself as a novice in the UK academic community and wanted to be provided with the kind of concrete feedback that would lead to practical improvements in her writing assignments rather than the kind of comments that invited her to think and to reflect independently and to arrive at solutions herself.

The extracts discussed in this section show that when participants entered the host academic setting that they were not familiar with, they conceptualised teacher feedback as a source of knowledge and therefore relied on teacher feedback. They expected the feedback to teach them anything that they did not know yet.

4.3.2 Perceiving feedback as telling

When participants engaged with teacher feedback provided by their UK tutors, some of them expected the feedback to directly tell them what to correct rather than give interrogatives. Sometimes, they found that the feedback was not explicit and straightforward. For example, Hebe received the following comment in her pre-sessional project:

TBL approach would be very difficult to start when teachers and students are facing the shortage of materials or lack of spirit of creation and cooperation. (Why?)

Fig. 4. 6 Pre-sessional project draft (Hebe)

When Hebe was asked what she understood the comment to mean, she reflected that there were always some confusing comments in the feedback, such as ‘*why?*’ and ‘*how?*’. She noted that feedback attended by interrogatives was not explicit to indicate whether corrections were needed and therefore could not use them to improve her writing. Hebe observed that compared with comments in the form of questions, remarks prefaced with ‘*you need to ...*’ were clearer for students who wanted to understand what to do. This example from Hebe indicates that she seemed to prefer feedback which provided explicit instructions telling her what to do and that she was less able to deal with feedback which looked ambiguous and called for independent thinking by leaving the revisions to the student herself.

The extract from the data shows that Hebe assigned a ‘telling’ role to the feedback information, desiring comments prefaced with ‘*you should...*’ that told her what to do rather than comments comprising questions that invited the participant to reflect and to learn to think independently. The role of the feedback information appears to be dominant, with

participants showing limited agency by seeking only to decode the information contained within the comments so that they can improve their academic assignments.

4.3.3 Perceiving feedback as a springboard for teacher-student communication

Unlike the participants who viewed feedback largely as a knowledge source or a form of telling, Chloe tended to see feedback as teacher-student communication. In the first interview of Phase 1 when we talked about her expectations of teacher feedback, she expressed her views about teacher feedback.

I hope that there could be space for negotiation when the teacher produces feedback. I think writing is an activity with subjectivity. I have my own ideas and reasons. Instead of forcing me to do something, I hope that I can discuss with the teacher if I don't agree with her opinions in feedback. (Chloe, PS, BI)

Instead of conforming whatever teacher said, Chloe tended to engage in discussion with the teacher if they had different opinions. As the quote suggests, her view of feedback was mainly generated by her conceptualisation of writing. Her view of seeing feedback as communication was also reflected in her opinions of the genre that feedback should be produced. In the interview, I asked her how she thought ‘*space for negotiation*’ could be created in feedback. She said,

Instead of commenting like ‘you have to do this and that’, the comments can be phrased as something like ‘Do you mean ...?’ or ‘Why do you think you need this?’. However, I understand that this kind of tone may make me confused. I may not be sure what the teacher wants me to do. This might be the matter of the comments or the matter of my interpretation. So in this case, I would discuss with the teacher. I would prefer face-to-face talk. (Chloe, PS, BI)

In this quote, Chloe suggested that the comments in the questioning format, such as ‘*Do you mean ...?*’ or ‘*Why do you think you need this?*’ could provide space for negotiation, although she was also aware that such hedging comments might lead to confusion to students because multiple interpretations could be generated. Chloe believed that the possible confusion could be reduced through face-to-face communication with the teacher to understand what the

teacher intended to mean. This indicates that when encountering confusion within the interpretation of teacher feedback, Chloe tended to discuss the conflicting interpretations with the teacher.

Chloe's view of feedback as communication and her willingness to discuss difference in interpretations with teachers were also reflected in her perceptions of teacher feedback in the MA programme. For example, Chloe tended to interact proactively with teachers who could help her to better understand the final feedback of MA assignments. The excerpt below delineates how she planned to seek further clarifications from the tutor for the final feedback on the Unit 3 assignment.

I am still confused about some specific comments. Here is a comment 'you tended to provide a brief introduction to the most important construct and spent more time on how to reflect on your students'. I don't know what the tutor wanted to express. Was the tutor saying that what I wrote is good or do I need to write it deeper? I need to ask the tutor. If I get a clear answer, it must be helpful for future writing, say, whether I need to have some deeper consideration in some aspects of an essay. (Chloe, MA, RI)

Chloe believed that seeking further explanations of the comments from the tutor would help her to better comprehend the suggestions made in the feedback form and to apply them in future writing (e.g. '*If I get a clear answer, it must be helpful for future writing*'). This extract shows Chloe using clarification of feedback for developmental purposes, with an eye to future writing assignments. This is an interesting insight and shows that feedback can be taken as a trajectory for dialogue that can pave the way for better understanding of the comment and its applicability to future writing.

These extracts show that Chloe viewed feedback as a springboard for further discussions with the teachers, thus playing a strongly agentic role in engaging with the feedback and using it to create the space for negotiation and co-constructed understandings she had expressed a desire for at the outset. In this case, the role of the feedback is not to serve as a

source of knowledge or to tell students what to do but rather to serve as a point of reference for student-teacher communication.

Based on an examination of data from the participants discussed in this section, it can be suggested that the differences in the varying conceptualisations of feedback may arise from the different levels of critical analysis ability. The findings presented in this section show that all the participants communicated with the feedback by engaging with it, although the nature of the communication, the role assigned to the feedback information and the role assumed by the student tended to vary and to determine the degree of agency demonstrated by the participating students. While some participants perceived feedback as a knowledge source and form of telling that needed to be respectively decoded and obeyed, others perceived it as a trajectory/catalyst for communication and dialogue between teacher and student. Given Hebe's realisation (Section 4.4.1) that too much reliance on teacher feedback (despite her desire for detailed comments) could prevent her from developing independent thinking, it may be more judicious to view the way the students perceived and engaged with feedback as a continuum of evolving rather than static conceptualisations. This may also more effectively account for the seeming contradictions in student data as the one discussed above.

4.4 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, the findings reveal that the students' perceptions of teacher feedback vary in accordance with the situated contexts they were engaging in. Their seemingly conflicting emotions to teacher feedback occur according to different contexts. For example, as shown in Section 4.1.2, Maggie liked affirmation in feedback because it served as a recognition of her strengths and built her self-confidence, whereas David showed unsureness to the affirmative that she was given when the feedback did not reflect self-evaluation of the quality of her work. The interaction between their perceptions of teacher feedback and the varied contexts is framed by their mixed and at time seemingly conflicting emotions. The findings

also show that the students demonstrated agency in their understanding of teacher feedback. For instance, this could be reflected in a different understanding of the feedback to the one conveyed by the teachers. The students also demonstrated that they could learn from the feedback and relate it to further learning. The findings also reveal individual differences in the students' views of teacher feedback, with some viewing it as a provider of knowledge, as a form of telling from teachers or as a springboard for communication between teacher and student. The students' different views of feedback also influenced their expectations and interpretations of feedback. For example, the students who saw feedback as telling tended to expect tutors to provide solutions to the problems identified in feedback, and the students who viewed feedback as communication tended to proactively initiate discussion with tutors when they had different opinions with the tutors.

Chapter Five: Mediators in the Process of Students Transforming Teacher Feedback into Practice

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents research findings in relation to the second research question:

- *What factors mediate the process of students transforming teacher feedback into practice?*

It is arranged based on three key elements which mediated the ways that feedback was transformed into participating students' practices through the way students comprehended the teacher feedback, decisions they made and actions they took in response to the feedback. These mediators (themes) include 1) ability to critically analyse inputs in contexts, 2) knowledge mastered and 3) proactivity. These mediators comprise sub-mediators, including the students' understanding of pragmatic meaning of teacher feedback, evaluation of exemplars, their language knowledge, subject/academic knowledge, and their use of initiative in response to teacher feedback. Under each sub-mediator, I presented findings in relation to how the mediators affected the process of feedback being transformed into practice. An overview of the themes and categories generated from the data analysis has been presented in Fig. 5.1.

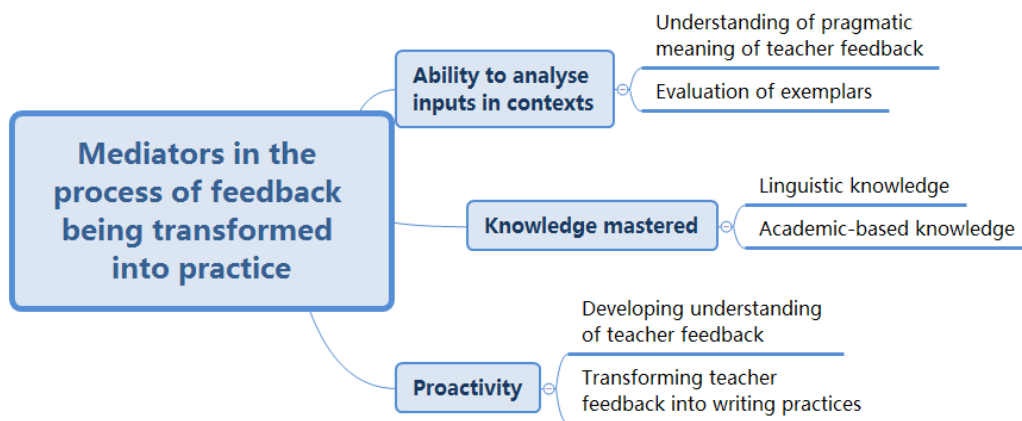


Fig. 5. 1 Mediators in the transformation of teacher feedback into students' practice

5.1 Ability to critically analyse inputs in contexts

The extent to which students are able to critically understand the information of the inputs they are exposed to in different contexts is a key mediator influencing students' revisions and decisions made as a response to teacher feedback.

5.1.1 Understanding of pragmatic meaning of teacher feedback

The pragmatic meaning of teacher feedback refers to the meaning that teachers convey in particular contexts. In contrast with literal meaning, pragmatic meaning is based on the context in question, while the literal content is the same. Data show that the participants in certain situations had different understandings of the pragmatic meanings conveyed via teacher feedback. For example, in Hebe's Unit 2 assignment, the assignment topic required Hebe to analyse factors that influence English towards becoming a worldwide language. The topic is:

It is sometimes argued that English has become a worldwide language because it is easier to learn than other languages, i.e. because of 'language-internal features'. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain why. Provide support for your arguments from the scholarly literature and your experience as a learner and/or teacher of English.

She had a question about this assignment, which was ‘*can I illustrate external factors in addition to internal language factors in the assignment?*’, Hebe asked this question by emailing two tutors during the writing process and obtained two suggestions.

Tutor C said, ‘I do not recommend you do so, but you could mention a bit about external factors if you like, though they are not the focus of the assignment’, whereas Tutor D said that I can’t write external factors at all. However, I still introduce some external factors in one or two sentences at the beginning of the text. [...] as I think they can show my critical thinking. (Hebe, MA, RI)

It can be seen from this quote that both of the tutors intended to advise Hebe not to write about external factors, even though Tutor C seemed to provide her suggestion without directly disagreeing with Hebe’s choice. Regarding these suggestions, Hebe insisted on her idea of writing external factors and finally acted upon the suggestions in a way to make them align with her understanding of ‘critical thinking’. Hebe explained how she understood critical thinking as follows:

Critical thinking means that I need to think of all aspects, so these internal and external factors need to be listed comprehensively at the beginning. I mentioned external factors just a little bit and didn't write too much [...]. (Hebe, MA, RI)

In this quote, Hebe presented her understanding of critical thinking. She believed that thinking and writing thoroughly (i.e. ‘*You need to try to think of all aspects ... listed comprehensively*’) could show her critical thinking abilities. Thus, she wanted to list both internal and external factors in the introduction. Below is a summary of the extract of her assignment introduction. For full details of the extracted introduction, see Appendix 8.

Introduction

It is known that English as a “lingua Franca”, has become a worldwide language that is necessary for international communications, transactions and so on (MOCANU and VASILIU, 2012). With the rapidly booming of economy, more and more English users can be seen in almost every field. Wherever you are, you may hear English from televisions, you also see it on various advertisements and signs. Especially, in academic domains, Swales (1987, cited by David, 2016) figured out that more than a half of the amount of English academic papers was issued every year and the amount was increasing year after by year. [...]

[...]

English’s universal position means English as a Lingua Franca on a worldwide scale rather than people around the world only speak or use one language. Especially, there are two main ways that a language becomes universal: Firstly, this language should be the official language of as many countries as possible. Then, as a worldwide language, it has been received much attention or given priority in the field of foreign language teaching in other countries (Crystal, 1997). [...] Obviously, English has been accepted as a worldwide language and English learning has become an indispensable part of people’s lives, especially in young people’s education.

However, why it is English that could be a worldwide language and why there is no other language can take the place of it? In some degree, it is because that English is easier to master for worldwide people. So in the next section, I am going to discuss the internal features of English and explain its easiness and difficulty in learning, as well as comparing with other languages.

Fig. 5. 2 Unit 2 assignment (Hebe)

As shown in this extract, Hebe introduced the external features which made English into a worldwide language, including political, economic, academic and educational factors. The external features included in the introduction were eventually commented on by the assignment marker in the feedback form, being described as not having sufficient clarity. The comment was ‘*You also just briefly refer to non-internal features – this could have been expanded a little to make your point more clearly.*’ In the retrospective interview that Hebe

talked about the final feedback she received, Hebe stated that the lack of clarity in her points was not her fault as she ‘followed’ the tutors’ suggestions to give a succinct description of the external factors.

[In the final feedback] The comment says that I just described external factors in a few sentences. It means that now that I mentioned external factors, I should have expanded them and presented my idea clearer. Tutor C previously said that I could write external factors a little bit. Tutor D said that I couldn’t write external factors. So, I tried not to write them too much. [...] I don’t think that is my problem. I just followed what these tutors suggested. (Hebe, MA, RI)

Comparing Tutor C’s and Tutor D’s suggestions as well as the comment in the feedback form against Hebe’s interpretations of these, it can be seen that there is a mismatch between the messages that the tutors transmitted in the feedback and Hebe’s interpretation of them. Tutor C’s suggestion was ‘*I do not recommend you do so, but you could mention a bit about external factors if you like, though they are not the focus of the assignment*’. However, Hebe seemed to ignore what the tutor did not recommend and followed the latter part of the suggestion only. Hebe suggested that she followed the tutor’s suggestion because Tutor C allowed her to write about external factors. As Hebe said, ‘Tutor C previously said that I could write about external factors a little bit.’ This indicates that Hebe appeared to focus on specific parts of Tutor C’s suggestion alone and did not understand the overall direction the feedback offered holistically. Hebe also insisted that she followed Tutor D’s suggestion in a way of not writing about external factors to a great degree. Her practices were far from the actual meaning of the feedback intended by the tutor who suggested her not writing about those factors. It can be seen that Hebe tended to reinterpret Tutor D’s suggestion so it would fit with her own plans regarding writing about external factors. Hebe’s decisions related to writing about external factors, as seen in the data presented, were derived from her limited understanding of critical thinking.

Additionally, Hebe had a limited understanding of the comment in the feedback form - ‘*You*

also just briefly refer to non-internal features – this could have been expanded a little to make your point more clearly.' According to Hebe's account, she seemed to believe that this comment was asking her to expand her discussion of the external features, which was the opposite of the suggestions she obtained in the writing process. However, the data indicate that this comment appears to ask Hebe to express her arguments more clearly by elaborating on her ideas further. As can be seen in Hebe's assignment extract, she demonstrated a range of external factors and concentrated on her interest in internal factors, which may make the reader confused about the argumentation flow of her essay. In this case, as the comment stated, the tutor might want Hebe to make a link between her demonstration of external factors and her argument about internal factors by expanding the discussion, for example, in relation to how the author thought the external and internal factors interacted, as well as the role internal factors may play in the evolution of English as a universal language. The comment's focus is only on the level of clarity in her point, not if external factors needed to be elaborated. Overall, when Hebe interpreted the tutor's suggestions provided in the writing process and in the final feedback form, she tended to pick up the literal meaning of particular information in the feedback (e.g. *'you can write external features if you like'*; *'expand'*), which resulted in her limited understanding of the pragmatic meaning of the feedback in contexts.

Similar to Hebe, Maggie's understanding of the pragmatic meanings of two pieces of feedback that she received made her perceive the feedback as 'dissonant' and 'opposite' to each other. In the interview, we talked about the feedback sheet on Maggie's Unit 3 assignment. She described the suggestions received during the writing process. The assignment topic Maggie selected was:

Discuss the relative merits and limitations of at least two theories of second language acquisition showing how these may enrich your understanding of your own, or your students', second language learning experience.

Maggie reported that when she was writing this assignment, she was given a suggestion from

the unit convenor in the Q&A session, advising her to not include definitions of theories in her assignment, while the final feedback form included an ‘opposing’ comment made by the same tutor. The comment was ‘*you present this theory very briefly at the beginning and move on to merits straight away. It would be better to provide a thorough description first*’. Maggie talked about her understanding of the two pieces of feedback.

... And here it said I need a thorough description of the theory. However, I remember in the previous Q&A session, the tutor asked us not to write what those theories are. The tutor said ‘as tutors, don’t we know what those theories are?’ The tutor didn’t want us to write theories to try to reach the word count. [...] So, I wrote those theories very briefly. (Maggie, MA, RI)

Below is an extract of the submitted assignment that was related to the following comment: ‘*you present this theory very briefly at the beginning and move on to merits straight away. It would be better to provide a thorough description first*’.

3. Input Hypothesis

In input hypothesis, Krashen (1982) claims that if the related input includes information that is $i+1$, learners will make progress from level i where acquirers are at present to a higher level, which is called $i+1$ level. In other words, the comprehensible input can be meaningful when the structures are just a step ahead of knowledge that learners already acquired. Since the advent of input hypothesis, it has attracted much attention in the field of language teaching.

3.1 . Merits of Input Hypothesis

Krashen explains [...].

Fig. 5. 3 Unit 3 assignment (Maggie)

A close examination of Maggie’s assignment content showed that the two pieces of feedback (the one in the Q&A session and the other in the feedback form) are not dissonant – they meant the same thing in response to Maggie’s writing context. The comment in the feedback form is considered to mean that Maggie should focus on the theory first, and thus justify the

merits that Maggie describes under the context of that theory, in order to give weight to the arguments. Whereas, the suggestion in the Q&A session could be interpreted as an instruction to ask the students not to introduce the definitions of those theories as if they were writing a textbook, without making the author's reasons for presenting these definitions, and how they are linked to the advantages and disadvantages described later, clear to the reader. Both pieces of feedback make a clear suggestion to describe the strengths and weaknesses at hand, under the context of the theories presented. Although the feedback appeared to be different when taken at face value, the same advice is being given, just in a different way. It is obvious that Maggie failed to understand the pragmatic meaning of the different contexts and the tutor's intention behind the feedback.

The examples of Hebe and Maggie show cases where individuals did not have the ability to critically analyse the pragmatic meaning of the feedback under the specific context. They tended to pick up the literal meaning of particular information in the feedback and were less able to recognise what the tutors intended to mean in their feedback in response to different contexts. These findings are in line with earlier research (Chanock, 2000) where it was found that the students' understanding of feedback messages could differ significantly from the meaning intended by teachers through feedback comments. The instances of Hebe and Maggie also reflect the views of Boud and Molloy (2013) who suggest that students are agentic beings and active interpreters of feedback information, rather than passive recipients of information who interpret feedback meaning exactly as intended by their tutors.

5.1.2 Evaluation of exemplars

In the MA programme, in order for students to understand assessment criteria and the standards required for unit assignments, unit tutors provided students with exemplars of written work finished by students from previous cohorts. These could be downloaded by students from the university learning management system (Moodle). Each of the exemplars was named with the unit code and the grade granted for the work, such as 'Unit 1_pass', 'Unit 2_merit' or 'Unit 3_distinction'. Interview data show that these exemplars had an effect

on students' understanding of and responses to teacher feedback.

In the retrospective interview with Hebe after she received the final feedback on the Unit 2 assignment, Hebe recalled her writing experience of the assignment and reported how an exemplar that she read influenced her adoption of the suggestion she obtained from a tutor. In the Q&A session of the Unit 3 assignment, the tutor advised students to write a brief introduction in the assignment. However, Hebe decided not to follow the teacher's suggestion after reading an exemplar. As a result, Hebe's introduction was considered 'unnecessarily long' according to the final feedback. Specifically, the comment was '*The introduction is unnecessarily long and confusing and it is only at the end that it is clear what you want to focus on.*' A close examination of Hebe's assignment showed that the introduction part was judged as being too long because it contained both the introduction information and the literature review content. Below is a short summary of the introduction extract of Hebe's Unit 3 assignment. For full details of the introduction see Appendix 8.

1. Introduction

The final study results of learners who are in the same learning environment and taught by the same teacher tend to show great individual differences. This fact has made individual differences gradually become the focus of attention of a large amount of educators and linguists in recent decades (see, e.g., Skehan, 1989; Dörnyei, 2006; Vidgren, 2016). The main focus of their studies has been on examining [...]. As for those differences, Ellis (2004) explained that they could be identified three factors: affective, physical and cognitive. While, this research aims to discuss the affective and cognitive factor in facilitating learners' target language through my learning experience.

As for variables, Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) stated that individual differences in second language learning process, basically motivation and language aptitude, play an essential role in predicting whether a language learner would achieve success or not. [...]

Some models and theories are proposed on the basis of motivation, such as [...] they all relatively detailed construed the motivation in L2 acquisition and demonstrated the importance of motivation in target language learning.

Also, many researchers have been carried out their studies on cognitive variables. [...]

Another cognitive factor that has been studied in L2 acquisition is language learning strategy. Many studies in SLA have focused on [...]

This essay is also a reflection of my experience in learning the second language. I will give an analysis of three factors from two main dimensions of individual differences (affective and cognitive): motivation, aptitude and learning strategies in relation to my own L2 learning process. The aim of this paper is to learn about which factors of individual differences have decided my L2 (English) learning and then to improve my English performance to be better with the significance of exploring learners' L2 learning styles, thereby improving the effect of foreign language learning and teaching.

This paper can be divided into five sections. At the beginning, [...]

Fig. 5. 4 Unit 3 assignment (Hebe)

It can be seen in Fig. 5.4 that Hebe provided a discussion of the literature that she reviewed and there was no information about what the focus of the assignment would be until the end (see the underlined sentence in the extract). The late articulation of the aim of the essay, as the tutor's feedback suggested, led to a lack of focus in the introduction. In the interview, Hebe explained to me why she wrote a long introduction and ignored the teacher's suggestion:

Yes, the teacher mentioned this issue in the Q&A, that the introduction should not be complicated, and it should be brief. However, when I wrote the introduction, I read an exemplar before. She [the writer of the exemplar] just did like ... she didn't separate [introduction from literature review]. So, she wrote a lot in the introduction part. But she got a 'distinction'. So, I also combined the introduction with the literature review in my assignment. (Hebe, MA, RI)

Even though Hebe was advised to write a brief introduction, she ignored the tutor's suggestion and chose to follow the exemplar because she saw that it received a high mark. It is clear that Hebe gave greater weight to the exemplar's high mark than the tutor's advice. The data suggest that Hebe might believe that imitating the 'distinction' example could help her achieve a good result in her own work. The fact that Hebe obtained negative comments regarding the introduction might be due to her limited ability to evaluate the exemplar that she imitated. Since there was no tutor feedback in the exemplar for Hebe to refer to, it might be possible that Hebe failed to recognise the strengths and weaknesses that existed in the introduction sample. In this case, she might mimic the introduction of the exemplar without recognising its weaknesses, if any (e.g. the lack of focus). On the other hand, she was not able to find the merits of the sample introduction, resulting in the fact that her own introduction was not finished as good as the exemplar. It was possible that although the introduction in the exemplar was long, it was more focused and clearer than what she produced. When having a limited evaluation of the exemplar, imitating the 'distinction' exemplar might not be a wise choice for Hebe, which, instead of improving the quality of her assignment, diverted her attention from teacher feedback.

The instance of Hebe indicates that when students engage with teacher feedback, they interact with other resources (e.g. exemplars) and their decision-making in response to teacher feedback would be mediated by their various degrees of interpretation of those resources (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017). The finding also suggests that despite the feedback and exemplars that the tutors arranged to help the students formulate ideas of how to produce their assignments, the students are active interpreters of the information. As a result, their understanding of the information might be different than what their tutors expect them to comprehend from the feedback. The finding as to the impact of Hebe's limited understanding of exemplars on her implementation of the tutor's suggestion is congruent with the study by Bloxham and Campbell (2010) who found that despite the dialogue established between teacher and student via the interactive cover sheet, the students' limited understanding of the tutors' expectations and assessment standards prevented them from initiating a meaningful dialogue with their tutors.

Overall, data in this section indicate that the students' ability to analyse the inputs gathered during the writing process (specifically with the teacher feedback and exemplars), affected behaviour and output thereafter. Some participants had their own understanding of the pragmatic meaning of teacher feedback and paid attention to particular words in the feedback, and therefore believed that the different pieces of feedback they obtained were 'dissonant'. This level of understandings prevented them from applying the feedback to different contexts. Data also showed that the students' responses to teacher feedback were also mediated by the extent to which they were able to critically evaluate the exemplars in their own assignment contexts.

5.2 Knowledge mastered

5.2.1 Linguistic knowledge

5.2.1.1 Misunderstanding of feedback messages

Linguistic knowledge about the syntax and semantics of English plays an important role in the L2 students' interpretations of the feedback messages and revision practices in response to the feedback. For instance, in Xiao's pre-session project, she refused to revise the project introduction section that the teacher commented on in her first draft. The commented text extract, along with the comment in the bracket, is shown below:

Although there is not a particular method that would fulfil demands of students at all levels, a comparison and an evaluation can be presented between the two methods and a clear choice can be made in different circumstances. (to which end?)

Fig. 5. 5 Pre-sessional project draft (Xiao)

The extract shows that the tutor asked Xiao to explain the *purpose* (i.e. 'to which end') of making a comparison and evaluation of the two methods. Below is the explanation she gave in response:

Here she might think that the circumstances are not clear; that is, which should the circumstances be? I think this [paragraph] is a background introduction. [...] The circumstances are what I am going to discuss in the main body. How could I write them at the beginning? (Xiao, PS, SR)

This quote indicates that Xiao (mis)understood the comment 'to which end' as a request for a *description* of the circumstances. She believed that introduction is the wrong place to include the explanation/description of the circumstances and therefore was reluctant to follow the comment. Presumably, if she understood the comment as asking for information about the project purposes which should have been put in the introduction, she might be willing to follow the advice given. Xiao's resistance to the comment, therefore, was due to her misunderstanding of the comment which may be attributed to her limited English

language knowledge.

5.2.1.2. Lack of identification of semantic problems in work

The participants' limited linguistic knowledge about the semantics and syntax of English was not only reflected in their understanding of teacher feedback, but also in the way that they organised and produced texts. Data analysis shows that the participants' limited language knowledge weakened their abilities to recognise the semantic problems in their work. As a result, there is a lack of understanding when it comes to the teacher feedback, and in turn, they cannot act upon the feedback. In the case of David, she failed to identify the coherence and cohesion problems in her text and could not make sense of the comment that identified such problems. The commented extract of David's pre-session project draft and the following quote delineate how David responded to the comment (bolded) on the use of cohesive devices – 'however' and 'on the other hand'.

... However, it can be noted that these features do not explicitly point out what students can do to CLT approaches.

On the other hand, increasingly educational researchers believed that teachers' input in classes and students' uptake are socially shaped and constrained by many factors such as students' prior learning experiences, tutor-student interaction, ... **(The comment: On the other hand to what? The last sentence above starts with however already introduces the point you are making here. So just start with increasingly ...)**

Fig. 5. 6 Pre-sessional project draft (David)

Below is David's interpretation of that comment.

I think what the tutor said is that 'however' is used to link the next sentence and that 'however' is used to indicate a relationship between sentences. But what I wrote was two paragraphs. The two paragraphs demonstrate different things. So, I think using 'on the other hand' to link these two paragraphs is correct. (David, PS, SR)

David reported that, in her writing context, ‘however’ is used to link sentences and ‘on the other hand’ is used to link paragraphs. The teacher asked her to delete ‘on the other hand’, though David did not think that using this connector was wrong. Even though she said that she wanted to demonstrate different ideas in two paragraphs and used ‘on the other hand’ to show the relationship between the two ideas/paragraphs, David did not realise that the way the two paragraphs were written meant that a single idea was being presented, from the perspective of the tutor (or any other reader). Specifically, the author identified a gap – ‘*these features do not explicitly point out what students can do to CLT approaches*’–based on the survey of existing literature on the discussion of the features of CLT approaches. In turn, the author suggested that a greater level of focus was given by researchers on the elements linked to the student role, including students’ prior learning experiences, tutor-student interaction, in language teaching and learning. These two points actually express the same point which is the significance of the student’s role in classes. Therefore, the phrase ‘on the other hand’, which is used to introduce a contrasting point, is unnecessary in this context. It seems that David’s limited language knowledge made her fail to make sense that this was the coherence and cohesion problem that the tutor pointed out in her text.

Like David, Hebe’s limited language knowledge influenced her understanding of the semantic issue in the context of her pre-sessional project, and the responses she had to the feedback. In the first draft of Hebe’s pre-sessional project, she received a comment that asked her to add sources to the view that she cited from a paper. Hebe did not revise the commented part as she could not recognise the language issue in her writing. Below is an excerpt of Hebe’s first draft and the teacher’s in-text comment (bolded).

Nowadays, English as a universal language has been widely studied. Many traditional teaching methods cannot satisfy learners' needs gradually. So, there are more and more teaching and learning approaches that have been put forward in order to improve the proficiency level of EFL learners, such as communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based learning (TBL)(source?). These are the two representative methods that have been widely applied to in language teaching recently (Li Juan, 2006).

Fig. 5. 7 Pre-sessional project draft (Hebe)

When asked why, Hebe said she did not add the source that the tutor asked for the following reason:

This sentence [the sentence underlined] is also proposed by Li Juan. So, I didn't add [a reference]. I mean all the above is what the author said. (Hebe, PS, SR)

Hebe reported that she did not add the source required by the tutor because she thought that the underlined sentence and the last sentence came from the same author and that there was no need to repeatedly cite the same source in two successive sentences. However, what she didn't seem to realise is that the way the last sentence was written meant that it presented a different topic from the underlined section. That is, the former contains the idea of multiple ('more and more') language teaching approaches of which CLT and TBL are just examples, while the latter refers to 'the two' which are identified as 'representative'. In this case, it is not obvious to see, from the tutor's perspective, that the two sentences came from the same writer, and this might be why the tutor asked for the source which claimed the idea of multiple teaching approaches. However, due to Hebe's insufficient understanding of the language issue where two topics are presented in the writing, she did not understand the teacher's intention and did not make any revision. The aforementioned two instances from David and Hebe indicate that the participants' limited English linguistic knowledge impeded their identification with language problems in the written work as well as their adoption of the teacher feedback.

5.2.2 Academic-based knowledge

5.2.2.1 Knowledge of disciplinary concepts

Students' subject knowledge of disciplinary concepts can influence their understanding of the problems existing in their written work and affect their adoption of feedback which identifies problems. Below is an instance showing how David's understanding of subject concepts and ways of paraphrasing prevented her from revising a commented sentence in her pre-session project. In David's project, the first draft received a comment (bolded) on one of the sentences:

*And then it suggests that foreign language proficiency is equal to foreign language communicative competence. (Mitchell, 1988) **(unclear)***

Fig. 5. 8 Pre-session project draft (David)

When asked why she did not revise this sentence in her final work, she said that she did not know how to clarify this sentence.

Since this sentence was paraphrased from an article. I can't find another way to rephrase this sentence if it is unclear. (David, PS, SR)

Then, I probed her understanding of clarification by asking, 'So, you think that 'unclear' means you need to rephrase the sentence?'. She said yes.

The verb phrase of the original sentence is not 'equal to'. It is another phrase but I forgot what it is. When I wrote the draft, I replaced it with 'equal to'. I just changed this verb phrase and did not change the noun phrases before and after that because I was thinking that the sentence meaning would change if I rephrased the nouns. The teacher said it is unclear but I don't know how to make it clearer. So, I just leave it there. (David, PS, SR)

David thought that the only way to make the sentence clearer was to rephrase the

terminologies in the sentence. However, she found that rephrasing those nouns would change the sentence's original meaning, in which case, she did not know how to clarify the sentence. As a result, it is seen that David does not have enough understanding of paraphrasing, and could not make her points any clearer, feeling that the text meaning could only change through a syntactical rephrasing. In addition, instead of critically engaging with the concepts from her own (the author's) perspective and that of the reviewed literature (i.e. the meaning of the concepts in other researchers' mind and the interpretations from David), David could only rephrase the concepts at the lexical level, which shows that she might have a limited and superficial understanding of the concepts she read about. As a result, it is considered that David lacks the ability to paraphrase a sentence in any meaningful manner.

Below is another example from David which happened in Phase 2, showing David's limited understanding of the subject knowledge of Unit 1 courses that made her struggle to respond to the teacher feedback on her Unit 1 assignment. In the first retrospective interview of Phase 2, David reported that she sought suggestions from Tutor B about her Unit 1 assignment. The Unit 1 assignment required students to analyse a given written text. The assignment requirement is shown below.

Task 1: Text analysis - Short story analysis

There are two parts to this assignment:

(i) Analyse the language in the short story 'Pure Rotten'.

Your analysis should include a discussion of one of the following topics that are covered in this unit of study:

- Language in its social context*
- Text/discourse analysis/genre*
- Pragmatics and sociocultural awareness*
- Literacies*
- Approaches to literary reading and fictional discourse*

(ii) Explain how you would exploit this text for language teaching or language teacher development.

Your analysis and discussion must be supported by suitable references to the scholarly literature.

David chose to discuss the topic of ‘*Approaches to literary reading and fictional discourse*’. When preparing her first draft, she sent an email to Tutor B to ask about the approaches that she wanted to use for the analysis of the written sample and obtained some suggestions from the tutor. In the text below, we can see how David comprehended her tutor's advice:

I asked Tutor B a question in an email. I asked whether I can write imagery. I mean I wanted to analyse ‘imagery’ which belongs to approaches to literary reading. The tutor replied that it may be better to write figurative language, which the tutor thinks already includes imagery. [...] I was confused when reading this email in that the tutor suggested that figurative language includes imagery. Yet, I definitely saw it the other way around in his lesson slides. Then, I also checked some references which also pointed out that the implication of imagery was broader than figurative language. I think that the tutor made a mistake. (David, MA, RI)

It can be seen from this quote that David disagreed with the tutor’s opinion about the relationship between imagery and figurative language after comparing it against the information in lesson slides and other scholarly references. Below is the email enquiry, the tutor’s response and the lesson slide in relation to the concepts that David mentioned.

Excerpt of David’s email enquiry:

I plan to choose the written text 'no speak English' and discuss under the topic of 'approaches to literary reading and fictional discourse'. In addition, I would like to narrow the topic down to the imagery, is it feasible? And when I analyse the text in detail, should I also explain what is irony, what is simile from paraphrasing literature? [...]

Excerpt of the tutor’s reply:

Regarding your question, I presume you mean to say that you will analyse figures of speech, among which are imagery, simile, irony, etc. It is absolutely fine to focus your analysis on figures of speech. [...]

The lesson slide in relation to imagery and figure of speech:

Imagery can be produced by using:

- *descriptive, colourful language;*
- *symbolism;*
- *figures of speech (e.g. metaphors and similes).*

The above evidence indicates that David had a different interpretation of the relationship between imagery and figurative language from what the tutor suggested in the email. Her understanding was built on what she learned from the lesson slides and relevant scholarly literature. David's disagreement with the tutor's suggestion might be derived from her understanding of the lesson slide (*'Imagery can be produced by using figures of speech'* does not seem to suggest that imagery includes figure of speech) and inadequate subject knowledge that she acquired. The disagreement might also be due to her insufficient understanding of what the tutor meant in the reply email. In the tutor's reply, it is seen that *'I presume you mean to say that...'* could be interpreted as *'you mean that you will analyse figures of speech, among which are imagery, simile, irony, etc., if I understood what you mean correctly.'* In this case, it might be likely that the tutor intended to check with David to see if he understood what David meant. The message *'It is absolutely fine to focus your analysis on figures of speech'* denotes that this case was one which the tutor allowed, and David could write what she wanted to analyse, instead of *advising* her to do so, or a case where the subject which David wanted to analyse was also what the tutor expected and suggested. However, it seems that the ambiguity in language made David interpret the reply as a suggestion from their tutor (*'The tutor replied that it may be better to write figurative language'*). The interpretation of the tutor's email led to David's confusion when she responded to this 'suggestion'. She thought that her understanding of the relationship of the two concepts 'disagreed' with the tutor's 'opinion' in the email and insisted that the tutor made a mistake.

In the interview conducted when David was completing the first draft of their assignment, she was queried as to how she handled the tutor email confusion in her writing. She reported that she insisted on her ideas and wrote the assignment according to her understanding of

the relationship of the two concepts.

I wrote both of them. I wrote the assignment according to my understanding. I think that imagery includes figure of speech. So, I introduced imagery first in my assignment and then introduced figure of speech. (David, MA, RI)

However, in that interview, she also expressed a concern about her insistence, and was not fully confident in her understanding of the link existing across the two concepts.

But now I struggle a bit with it as I find that they don't have an inclusion relationship. I reviewed the lesson slides and found that they appear to be on the same level. It is not clear anyway. I worry about my disagreement with the teacher. (David, MA, RI)

This quote indicates that David was not confident enough with her subject knowledge of the concepts relationship. Although she was still unable to create a clear understanding of the literary relationship, her initial stance evolved, from 'imagery includes figurative language' to 'they don't have an inclusion relationship'. Then, in the next interview after she submitted her final assignment, we talked about how she eventually coped with this issue. She reported that she did not insist on her idea of the literary relationship and avoided referring to the relationship in her final assignment in order to avoid making mistakes.

I eventually changed it in my final assignment. I found a compromise. Although the teacher advised me to just focus on figurative language, I did not do that. I wrote both – imagery and figurative language, because imagery is what I wanted to analyse. However, I don't think that their relationship was like what the teacher said. So, I did not explicitly clarify their relationship because clarifying the relationship might cause a mistake. (David, MA, SR)

David finally found a 'compromise' between what the tutor 'advised' and her own ideas, and included both imagery and figurative language in her assignment. She suggested that she still disagreed with the teacher's 'suggestion' (i.e. 'But I don't think that their relationship was like what the teacher said. '), and she chose not to explicitly discuss the relationship in

the final assignment to avoid 'conflict' with the tutor.

It is clear that David was faced with a dilemma, and was hesitant in her response to the teacher feedback. Her struggle with adopting the feedback was mainly caused by her distrust of the teacher feedback and the lack of confidence in her own subject knowledge. She wanted to insist on her own judgment but at the same time feared the consequences of not following the teacher's 'suggestion' and taking it into consideration, even though she did not agree with the teacher. In this case, she decided to look for a compromise between her own judgment and the tutor's feedback in order to preserve her understanding of the concepts, while also mitigating the negative impacts which might have been brought on by any disagreement she had with the feedback.

This case indicates that when David processed teacher feedback, she underwent a complex cognitive process which was affected by various factors including inputs from learning materials, her interpretations of the inputs and her subject knowledge. Similar findings have also been reported in the study of Esterhazy and Damsa (2017), where the dialogues participants established with peers and tutors were interwoven with one another to mediate their understanding and adoption of teacher feedback. This finding enriches the empirical evidence of past literature (e.g. Butler and Winne, 1995; Handley et al., 2011; Price et al., 2010) on how students agentively calibrate their judgments in response to teacher feedback during the process wherein they interact with a range of contextual learning variables.

5.2.2.2 Knowledge of referencing conventions

Students' knowledge of referencing conventions in academic writing can influence their understanding and adoption of teacher feedback. In David's first draft of the pre-sessional project, a plagiarism issue was identified in the feedback. Below is an excerpt of David's draft with the teacher's comment regarding plagiarism.

Task-based learning on the other hand has three phases: pre-task, task cycle, language focus (Willis, 1996). Students will be given words or phrases list or some questions relevant to the task and they should do it before the task. Teachers should introduce the background and lead to the task, select the new words from the task and draw attention of students. Then, it comes to the task cycle [...] (No reference. Plagiarism!)

Fig. 5. 9 Pre-sessional project draft (David)

It can be found in this excerpt that David did not add references for the whole paragraph except for the first sentence. After receiving this feedback, David had a discussion with her peers who had similar problems with referencing, stating the below:

The common problem that we have is 'no references'. [...] I found that many students received comments like that. Then after class, we [David and her peers] read each other's feedback and discussed. We drew a conclusion that the parts that we wrote were not copying. The teacher thought that we took a risk of plagiarism because there was no reference in the whole paragraph. (David, PS, SR)

It can be seen that David and her peers shared an understanding that they did not copy the literature, though the teacher commented that what they wrote could be evidence of plagiarism. David then suggested that this issue may be attributed to the mismatched understandings of referencing between the teacher and students.

I think that this might be due to a mismatch of our understandings. That is, we might cite someone's article at the beginning of a paragraph. Then, we demonstrated this person's view and referred to it later in this paragraph. Those subsequent sentences were not added references because we think that those sentences are from this person

and there is no need to cite this person for many times. Other students also understood like this. That is, we can't paraphrase someone's view just in one or two sentences. There is at least a small paragraph for that. So, the way we responded to such comments is to add references to each sentence. (David, PS, SR)

David and her peers discussed their understanding of referencing and a way to respond to the teacher feedback. They believed that paraphrasing others' views without citations is not plagiarism as long as an in-text citation has been given at the beginning of the paraphrased part. The quote also reveals that David and her peers appeared to have a limited understanding of academic writing conventions, and specifically did not have the ability to refer to researcher opinions within the literature review section of their work. According to David's description in the quote above, they tended to paraphrase almost every sentence of someone's view from the original reference rather than summarise key points of that view and synthesise those points into building their own argument. In addition to her conceptions surrounding referencing, David's way of paraphrasing big chunks of texts might also be due to the fact that David had weak academic skills and language proficiency, and as a result lacked the ability to understand the author's views fully and offer a summary of key points.

Furthermore, the discussion among peers did not seem to help David understand the teacher's comment and improve David's comprehension of referencing. Instead, David's conception was 'reassured' when she found that her peers had the same understanding of referencing and citations as she did. This finding extends the research (e.g. Zhang, 1995; Nazif, et al., 2004; Rodger et al., 2015) into the impacts of peer support on student cognitive engagement with teacher feedback, by indicating that the suggestions arising from peers' interpretations of the teacher feedback sometimes may mislead students. Combining her own understanding with the conclusions drawn from the peer discussion, she revised the commented part by adding the reference '*(Willis, 1996)*' to every single sentence of that paragraph. Below is an excerpt of her revised draft:

Task-based learning on the other hand has three phases: pre-task, task cycle, language focus (Willis, 1996). Students will be given words or phrases list or some questions relevant to the task and they should do it before the task (Willis, 1996). Teachers should introduce the background and lead to the task, select the new words from the task and draw attention of students (Willis, 1996). Then, it comes to the task cycle [...]

Fig. 5. 10 Pre-sessional project draft (David)

Further, David's limited knowledge of referencing and her responses to the feedback during the pre-sessional period subsequently influenced her performance in one of her MA assignments and her responses to the counterpart feedback. In David's feedback form of the Unit 4 assignment, a comment can be seen which questions her frequent citation of a single reference within a paragraph. David gave her explanation about this referencing issue as below:

The tutor also said that I cited this article for 10 times within 388 words, that is, too many. However, this article is one of the three articles that I evaluated [in this assignment]. I had to cite much about it. So, I don't know how to respond to this comment. (David, MA, RI)

The Unit 4 assignment was related to the evaluation of research methods. The assignment task was:

Select a specific area within the field of the Master's programme. Identify three recent research-based articles which have made a significant contribution to the development of this field. Critically evaluate two of the following aspects of the articles: research design, methods of data collection, quality criteria, handling of ethical issues. Suggest how these aspects could be adapted for conducting research into a learning and teaching context with which you are familiar.

As suggested in the assignment topic, the Unit 4 assignment required students to apply knowledge about research methods in order to evaluate three empirical studies. David reported that, as the evaluation of these articles was the main focal point of her work, she

needed to include details of one of the three articles often, and as a result, felt the need to cite it often, as seen below:

Zhang and Rahimi (2014) used FLCAS questionnaires and Corrective feedback brief scale (CFBS) questionnaires in their study. The research has a strength that it has a clear and strict procedures to test the hypotheses that ensure the results are reliable (Burns, 1999, P22). It had three phrases, first was FLCAS phrase, 160 participants completed FLCAS questionnaires and were divided in two groups (Zhang and Rahimi, 2014). One was high anxiety and the other was low anxiety (Zhang and Rahimi, 2014). Second was CFCRT phrase, all the participants attended communication classes taught by the same teacher for 12 weeks (Zhang and Rahimi, 2014). In the last CFBS phase, participants filled in a CFBS questionnaire that assessed their response to the corrective feedback and their idea about corrective feedback (Zhang and Rahimi, 2014). The sample of the study was 197 students from different subjects in three institutes in Iran (Zhang and Rahimi, 2014).

Fig. 5. 11 Unit 4 assignment (David)

As shown in this extract, David cited every single sentence even though some of the citations, if not all, were not necessary. This may be why the teacher criticised her over-citation. This way of referencing looked quite similar to her previous response to teacher feedback in the pre-sessional project where she added ‘(Willis, 1996)’ to every sentence which was cited from this source. However, the previous understanding and reaction to the pre-sessional feedback were not corrected, and so David continued this practice in the assignments that followed. She could not make sense of the teacher’s comment in her MA assignment as she had not improved her understanding of referencing since the pre-sessional period. Her restricted experiences of referencing, consequently, appeared to result in David’s failure to recognise the issue identified in the feedback of the MA unit assignment. This finding provides empirical evidence towards the theoretical understanding of the temporal aspect of feedback engagement (see Handley et al., 2011) in which students’ earlier feedback experiences influence their performance in subsequent writing activities, as well as their interpretation of and reactions to such teacher feedback in the future.

5.3 Proactivity

The extent to which feedback could be transformed into practices is dependent more on the proactivity/initiative that students exert when dealing with teacher feedback than on the quality of the feedback information provided by teachers.

5.3.1 Use of initiative in developing understanding of feedback

When struggling with understanding teacher feedback, some of the participants were able to take initiative, by collecting more ideas from peers and tutors, as well as searching for new materials, to build a better understanding of how to act according to the feedback they initially obtained from tutors. An example of a student gaining a clear idea of what a tutor was suggesting was seen with Chloe, who read through new literature, looked for feedback from other tutors and associated these sources with her own understanding. In turn, she was able to successfully take actions in her writing. In the first interview of Phase 2, Chloe recalled an experience that she had in a Q&A session of a Unit 2 assignment. In the Q&A session, the tutor provided three assignment topics for students to choose from. Students were free to choose any topic they liked to discuss in their assignment. Chloe decided to choose the assignment topic in relation to ‘English varieties’. The assignment topic was:

Choose a pedagogical context with which you are familiar and describe which variety/varieties of English people associate with prestige in that context. Consider the issue of linguistic prejudice and discuss the implications for the policy and/or practice of English language teaching in your chosen context. Provide support for your arguments from the scholarly literature.

However, Chloe found that this topic was overlapping in some respects with another topic focusing on ‘native speakerism’:

Given our increasingly multilingual and multicultural world, the monolingual native speaker should not be regarded as a norm to be emulated’ (Copland, Garton, & Mann, 2016:242). Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with this statement, providing support for your arguments from the scholarly literature.

Given the overlap that she observed, she asked the tutor in the Q&A session about whether she could mention some information about native speakerism in her assignment. The suggestion that the teacher gave was ‘*you’d better just focus on your topic. Don’t try to answer questions of two topics*’. However, this suggestion did not seem to make sense to Chloe, because she believed there was an overlap in discussions of English varieties and native speakerism, and wanted to write about both.

The tutor didn't give a specific answer. I am still confused after getting this suggestion. Because, in my opinion, they [English varieties and native speakerism] are anyhow related, and it is inevitable to mention both of them in my assignment. (Chloe, MA, RI)

In an interview after she finished the first draft of her assignment, I asked her how she dealt with her question and the teacher's suggestion. She reported that her understanding of these two topics changed and that she currently had a clear idea about how to take the teacher’s suggestion in her text and focus on her topic, as seen below:

I was thinking that these two topics had some overlaps, but my current understanding is that the focuses of these two topics are different. Although I mentioned [in my text] a bit about native speakerism to suit my assignment context, the assignment focused more on English varieties. (Chloe, MA, RI)

She then told me how her understanding was improved:

In this process, I constantly analysed the two topics. I also asked another tutor. The tutor said that the two topics are overlapping at some point but you cannot focus on native speakerism. At the same time, with reading more and more papers during the writing process, I achieved a deeper understanding of some concepts. (Chloe, MA, RI)

From the quote above, it is clear that Chloe gained a clearer idea of the two topics after taking the initiative to look for advice from other tutors, study other literature to understand

the subjects in greater depth, and critically analyse the topics. During this process, her understanding of the two topics and of relevant concepts got enriched, which helped her effectively implement the teacher's suggestion in writing.

Like Chloe, Maggie also effectively adopted a teacher's suggestion in her pre-session project by proactively approaching various sources to better understand how to act upon the initial teacher feedback. While writing the pre-session project, she obtained a teacher's suggestion which she found difficult to act upon. Subsequently, she successfully used that suggestion in her project through discussions with her peers and searching out research papers. Specifically, Maggie chose a pre-session project topic which required the students evaluate English learning techniques, with the students being allowed to select and appraise any technique they chose, without restriction. Initially, Maggie had no idea about these techniques, and as a result asked for help from her tutor. She reported that in a one-to-one tutorial, the tutor advised her to think about the English learning techniques that she had used in daily life, which made her think of online English video courses she had used in the past, though she found it hard to find sufficient references. Maggie told me that in order to use the teacher's suggestion more fully, she sought advice from her peers who helped open her mind.

Later, I chatted with my classmates about what we were doing with the projects. I asked them about this issue and saw what they would say. One student said, maybe you could write 'moodle'. And another student said that apps in mobile phones are very popular and there might be a large amount of research about them. Then, I found, yes, that is a really good idea. I can evaluate apps of mobile learning, such as TED Talk that I used and the 'moodle' system which closely relates to our study lives. Then, I searched these techniques on the Internet and found many references. (Maggie, PS, SR)

Maggie eventually understood how to act upon the teacher feedback (i.e. advising Maggie to discuss techniques in daily life) through discussions with peers to collect more ideas, associating peers' suggestions with the specific context (*'I can evaluating apps for mobile learning, such as TED Talk that I used and 'moodle' which closely relates to our student*

lives’) and practising (*‘I searched these techniques on the Internet and found many references.’*).

However, certain students did not take any action as a result of feedback which was unclear or confusing to them. As the findings presented in Chapter 4 show, some of the participants suggested that on certain occasions they could not understand what the feedback meant and could not act in light of the feedback (see the instances in Section 4.2.1 and Section 4.4). As suggested in Section 4.2.1, Maggie could not understand the comment *‘not appropriately developed’* and did not know what the teacher asked her to do when she was advised to *‘sufficiently discuss’*. She also suggested that the lack of understanding of such comments would prevent her from meeting such demands in current and future writing.

... I don’t know how to analyse. If I was asked to revise this part, I would still write it in a descriptive way. [...] Then, the tutor said ‘sufficiently discuss’. I don’t know what it means by sufficient. She asked me to develop it appropriately. I don’t know how to be appropriate either. [...] So, what I am I worrying is that I might analyse the tutor feedback in a wrong way, in which case I would be wrong again even if I write it in another way in the next writing. (Maggie, MA, RI)

Even though Maggie was clearly aware that a misunderstanding or a mismatched understanding of what the teacher expected in the feedback would lead to wrong practices in future writing, she did not take any measures, for example, seeking further explanations from the tutor or asking for any help from peers like she did before in the pre-sessional period to obtain a better understanding of the comments.

The instances of Chloe and Maggie show that a better understanding of how to act according to teacher feedback could be achieved when the students exerted strong agency when engaging with teacher feedback and took initiative to make full use of various social networks and resources to gain more feedback sources such as suggestions from peers, tutors and materials, critically connecting all of the sources with their own understanding. This is

reflective of the co-constructivist model of feedback in which students act in a self-regulatory way to seek information by building collaborative dialogues with various agents in order to address their own learning needs (Askew and Lodge, 2000). The findings enrich the empirical studies (e.g. Handley, Price and Millar, 2010; Morosanu, et al., 2008), suggesting that students' cognitive engagement with teacher feedback develops over time as they interact with various resources. However, when students do not have strong agency, and lack the initiative to deal with feedback which is unclear to them, they would not learn effectively from the feedback and not make progress in later writing. As Maggie said, *'what I am I worrying about is that I might analyse the tutor feedback in a wrong way, in which case I would be wrong again even if I write it in another way in the next writing.'*

5.3.2 Use of initiative in transforming teacher feedback into concrete writing practices

Interview data indicate that on some occasions participants learned from teacher feedback and were able to apply feedback into current and future written tasks. During a process in which students undertook to engage with teacher feedback, they became conscious of the errors that they made in the current work. They were able to keep those errors in mind and tried to avoid them recurring in subsequent writing. For instance, during the pre-session period, Chloe used the feedback she previously received on her pre-arrival essay to regulate her subsequent pre-session project. She remembered the weaknesses that the tutor identified in her pre-arrival essay, which were paragraphs overfilled with ideas and information, and avoided making the same mistakes in her project writing.

Last time, I wrote the pre-arrival essay in which the second paragraph was very long. She [the tutor] said 'there are too many ideas in this paragraph and you should separate them.' So, this time I purposefully separated the points more clearly and tried to avoid this problem emerging again. (Chloe, PS, SR)

This finding is similar to the study by Mirzaee and Hasrati (2014) who found that by making sense of the written feedback provided by the teachers, the learners became sensitive to their weak points and consciously made adjustments later in other contexts of writing.

Additionally, some of the participants obtained tutors' suggestions during the writing process and immediately applied them in their writing activities. It was seen that participants built their metacognitive skills, including topic analysis and focusing on the right topics when writing, through the feedback they received from teachers. These skills would be beneficial to the students in their current assignments as well as any future tasks which required these qualities. For instance, Chloe reported that she learned how to take notes while reading from the Q&A session of the Unit 4 assignment.

As for the Unit 4 assignment, the tutor gave us some very instructive slides in the Q&A session. [...] The tutor told us how to take notes while reading. [...] The tutor showed us a table as an example and told us how to take notes by making tables. So, at the time when I read papers to prepare my assignment and took note, I made a detailed table according to what the tutor said. Subsequently, when I wrote this assignment, this note was indeed useful. (Chloe, MA, RI)

It can be seen from this quote that Chloe listened to the teacher's suggestion and applied the notetaking strategy while she was drafting her assignment. She used this strategy and found that it facilitated her assignment writing. The perceived benefit that Chloe gained by adopting this strategy made her believe that the suggestion she obtained from the tutor was instructive.

In addition to Chloe, in the retrospective interview conducted after David finished her first draft of Unit 3 assignment, she recalled the feedback obtained from the tutors during the assignment writing process. David stated that through a one-to-one tutorial, she learned a method which would allow her to focus on topics in writing more effectively. In the tutorial, David asked the tutor a question about whether she should have a title in the Unit 3 assignment. The tutor's answer to this question enabled David to realise that adding a title to the essay would hinder her from focusing on the assigned topic. The assignment topic was:

In recent years SLA research has paid increasing attention to individual (physical, cognitive, affective etc.) differences amongst learners. Based on your personal experience of learning a second/foreign language or teaching a second/foreign language to a particular group of students, reflect on the L2 learning process and discuss those individual differences which you think played the most significant role in facilitating the learning of the target language.

The title that David put at the top of the assignment text was ‘*Affective Motivation and Anxiety in Learning*’. Below is her interpretation of the suggestion gained in the tutorial:

I asked whether I need a title [for my text]. The tutor told me clearly that he advised me not to have a title. He said, ‘if you have a title, you would be inclined to develop your text based on the title and it will limit your thinking. But if there is no title, you may probably look back to your assignment topic from time to time.’ The tutor said that putting the assignment topic on the top of my text is a good way to remind me of focusing on the topic. (David, MA, RI)

David said that this suggestion made her realise that a title might constrain her ideas into the issues around the title and distract her from developing ideas in line with what the topic required. After understanding what the teacher suggested, David adopted this suggestion in her assignment writing and found it useful for her to focus on the topic.

What the tutor advised made a lot of sense to me. So, I copied the assignment topic at the top of my text and deleted my title. Then I found this way is useful indeed. When I looked back to the topic, I paid more attention to issues like whether I answer the questions in the topic clearly or how I should answer the questions better. (David, MA, RI)

David not only took the suggestion on board in her current assignment, but also used it in future writing projects. The below quote indicates that she proactively implemented this piece of advice into future writing.

I think what he suggested could be used in later writing, such as the issue of removing

the title. Later, instead of limiting my thoughts in a title, I will, from time to time, look back to my topic [when I write an assignment], trying not to limit my thinking on my own. (David, MA, RI)

In this section, it can be seen that the students showed proactivity when responding to their teacher feedback. The students used their initiative to communicate with various feedback sources and build a better understanding of how to act upon the initial teacher feedback they received. They used their initiative to transform the suggestions they obtained through teacher feedback into metacognitive strategies to be used in future writing. The findings reveal that it was not the information in the feedback itself that determined whether or not the students' actions would be assisted or the students' writing benefited. Instead, the students needed to proactively establish a clear understanding of the feedback provided, and apply this input in their writing practices, allowing the feedback to be valuable for them at present, and in the future. It was not that the feedback was being instructive and useful, as the 'instructive' or 'useful' effect of the feedback could not be exerted without the students' practice and use of feedback. The findings reveal the underlying process experienced by students as they dealt with teacher feedback, which offers support for the point made by Sambell (2011) who suggests that it is students, not just teachers and feedback itself, who play a central role in making the feedback effective.

5.4 Chapter conclusion

This chapter illustrates the process that participants went through to transform teacher feedback into their practices. The students behaved in various ways when engaging with teacher feedback, such as disagreeing with teacher feedback, struggling with the 'dissonant' feedback messages, revising the essays by finding a compromise between tutors' suggestions and their own ideas, ignoring teacher feedback, revising written work based on their understanding of the feedback and using teacher feedback in later writing. They also took measures, such as interacting with peers and teachers as well as searching for new materials, to understand and implement the feedback suggestions presented, and transform these into

writing practices.

The analysis shows that the process of feedback being transformed into practice was mediated by the students' abilities to critically analyse inputs in different contexts, the knowledge they mastered and their proactivity. Under the three major mediators, the students' responses to teacher feedback were affected by sub-mediators which were the students' different comprehension of the pragmatic meaning of the feedback they are provided, evaluation of exemplars, language knowledge, academic knowledge, and their level of initiative in understanding and responding to teacher feedback.

The analysis also shows that the mediators identified the students' interactions with various inputs, including their communication with scholarly literature, lesson slides, assignment requirements, exemplars as well as peers' interpretations of teacher feedback, which plays a joint role in moderating the students' decision-making and behaviour in response to teacher feedback. Findings in this chapter extend empirical studies (e.g. Zheng and Yu, 2018; Murphy and Cornell, 2010; Poverjuc, 2010) regarding students' behavioural engagement with teacher feedback and rationales they provide for their revision practices, by identifying the factors that mediate the ways that students transform teacher feedback into practice.

Chapter Six: Factors Influencing the Students' Engagement with Teacher Feedback in the UK HE Context

6.0 Introduction

This chapter addresses the third research question framing this study.

- *What factors influence the students' engagement with teacher feedback in the UK HE context?*

Analysis of the data helped to identify four themes pertaining to the factors influencing participating students' engagement with teacher feedback. These include 1) students' self-essentialist thinking 2) students' self-perceptions of performance, 3) social factors and 4) epistemological factors. Each of these themes subsumes specific factors which are discussed in succeeding sections. Fig. 6.1 presents the graphic representation of the thematic findings.

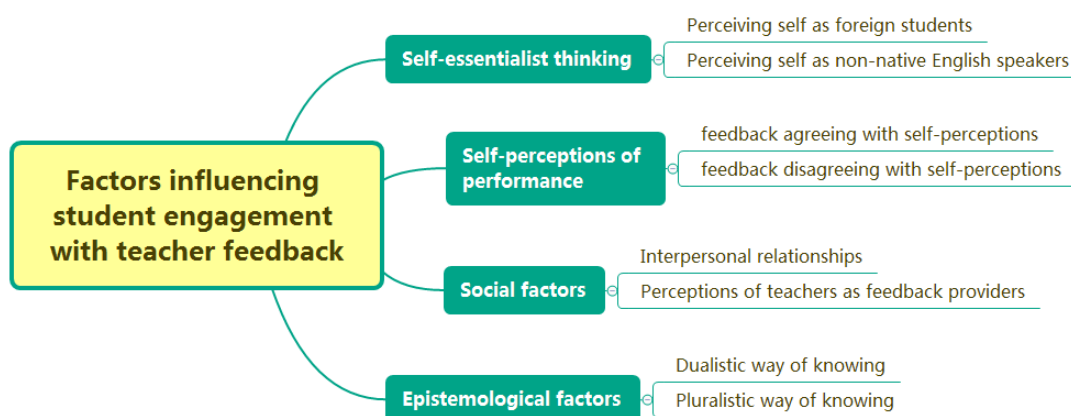


Fig. 6. 1 Factors influencing student engagement with teacher feedback

6.1 Students' self-essentialist thinking

When engaging in a foreign educational system, students identifying themselves from a self-essentialist perspective is a key factor influencing students' engagement with teacher feedback in terms of what they think and what they do to the feedback. Self-essentialist

perspective, in the context of this study, means that students perceive themselves to belong to a group of people because of an underlying essence that determines their learner identities.

6.1.1 Perception of self as foreign students

Since the participants had studied in the Chinese higher education setting prior to undertaking study overseas at a UK university, the analysis of data showed that on some occasions, the participants were inclined to proffer essentialised interpretations of teacher feedback experiences occurring as a result of the shift to the new academic setting. The participants perceived themselves as foreigners originating from a culture distinguishable from the one in the UK, and subsequently attributed their disagreement with the feedback to cultural differences with the tutors in the UK.

For example, as discussed in Section 5.2.1.2, David failed to recognise the semantic issue identified in her pre-sessional project. She did not think that what she had written was wrong, and thus disagreed with the feedback which identified the cohesion problem and asked her to delete the connection ‘*on the other hand*’. As she commented, ‘*I think using ‘on the other hand’ to link these two paragraphs is correct*’. When asking what she planned to do for this comment, she said that she would delete ‘on the other hand’ and combine two paragraphs in the light of what the teacher had suggested. Interestingly, even though David did not think that using ‘on the other hand’ was wrong, she still chose to delete it according to the teacher suggestion. When questioned as to why she had decided to do as the teacher had suggested despite her conflicting views, David explained it in terms of cultural differences:

*Because I am an overseas student here. I am engaging in a foreign education system. I think the disagreement with the teacher suggestion might be due to a kind of cultural difference. Perhaps there is a difference between China and UK in terms of the logic and style of speaking. Now that I am studying in the UK, I need to learn the writing modes here and get rid of my previous ways of thinking. Regarding English writing, I would follow the writing convention that the teacher suggested.
(David, PS, SR)*

When David engaged with the teacher feedback, she constructed her identity as an overseas student studying in the UK education system. Instead of recognising the semantic problem

in her writing due possibly to her limited language ability, David chose to take an essentialist perspective, attributing her disagreement with the teacher feedback to cultural differences and different ways of thinking depending on whether people were Chinese or British. She suggested that the purposes of studying abroad were to learn and adapt to the new academic writing conventions and abandon ways of thinking she had developed in China. Taking this position, when she linked opinions in teacher feedback to cultural differences, she tended to follow whatever the teacher suggested unquestioningly in order to adapt to the ‘foreign’ culture.

Identifying herself as a ‘foreign/overseas student’ explains the inconsistency between David’s understanding of the feedback and her eventual actions in response to the feedback. That is to say, it was her cultural identity and her essentialised ways of viewing her disagreement with the teacher’s opinions in feedback that motivated her to uncritically listen to the feedback provided by the teacher in the UK. This finding is in line with earlier research (Tian, 2008) in which it was found that in response to the transition to the new academic setting and its challenges, the Chinese students studying in the UK setting evidenced a tendency to self-essentialise in a way that was reflective of their ‘Chineseness’.

6.1.2 Perception of self as non-native English speakers

Similar to David, Chloe’s essentialist thinking and the way she constructed her identity on some occasions affected her interpretations of the feedback she was provided. For example, as analysed in Section 4.2.2, Chloe disagreed with the feedback form provided by the Unit 1 tutor who had identified language problems in her Unit 1 assignment. According to Chloe, *‘the Unit 1 tutor [...] said that language errors are quite a lot. [...] I don’t think there are a lot’*, the comment *‘a lot of English language errors’* did not seem to match what Chloe quantified as ‘a lot’ and, from Chloe’s perspective, the comment did not seem to justify the ‘low’ grade that she had been given. When queried as to what Chloe had learned from the Unit 1 assignment feedback, she explained her understanding of the language issue in the assignment writing which explained the inconsistencies between the teacher’s comments and Chloe’s perceptions of her language problems.

Next time I will invite a British friend to proofread my work. I didn't realise that language is so important in the assignment writing. I was thinking as long as my ideas and logical structure are fine, it is quite normal having some grammatical problems, particularly for someone as a non-native English speaker. If I wrote something spotless, I would assume whether the tutor would doubt that this stuff was not finished by me. I did not realise that this [the language issue] is a serious problem at that moment. (Chloe, MA, RI)

This quote indicates that when writing an essay, Chloe identified herself as a non-native English speaker, believing that it was normal for non-native English-speaking students to make grammatical mistakes in written work and that this would be tolerated by the tutor. According to Chloe, '*If I wrote something spotless, I would assume whether the tutor would doubt that this stuff was not finished by me*', which seems to suggest that she perceived tutors to have different language requirements and/or expectations for native English-speaking students and non-native English-speaking students. This led her to assume that a polished assignment submitted by a non-native learner might be viewed by the tutor as being too good to be true and that an assignment having no linguistic mistakes by a non-native English-speaking would be considered evidence of the student have cheated in some way.

This instance shows that Chloe identifying herself as a non-native English speaker occasionally led to her own 'standard' of the language proficiency required in the unit assignment and prevented Chloe from evaluating her work as the tutor had done in the assignment feedback. This finding extends what has been found in past research, such as the study by Carless (2006), on the reasons of the discrepancy between students' self-evaluation of their performance (internal feedback) and teacher feedback (external feedback).

Overall, these examples from the data collected from David and Chloe indicate that when the students engaged with the foreign educational system, they sometimes perceived their writing and feedback experiences from an essentialist perspective by identifying themselves as foreigners. They tended to *other* themselves by linking their disagreement with tutors'

feedback to the difference in cultural backgrounds and to perceptions of differences in the standard of English language proficiency expected of non-native English speakers'. As a result, they overlooked other factors behind their disagreement with the feedback.

It should be noted that although the students had transitioned from the Chinese educational setting to the UK, such essentialist identification was not determined by their previous experiences in the home setting but that rather it was influenced by their experiences within the UK academic context. As discussed earlier, this is in line with the findings of Tian's (2008) study which reflected a tendency to self-essentialise on the part of the Chinese learners participating in her research in response to experiences in the UK educational setting. In the current study too, it would appear that the participants demonstrated essentialist perspectives which led to bias on their part when engaging with teacher feedback. Their approach to tackling this was either to follow the feedback as a way of adapting to the foreign pedagogical context or to persist in their conflicting opinions which did not align with what had been intended in tutors' feedback.

6.2 Self-perceptions of performance

Making a comparison between feedback and self-perceptions of the quality of work (i.e. how students evaluate their performance) has a significant impact on students' cognitive and affective engagement with teacher feedback.

Data show that, sometimes, participants did not agree with the teacher feedback because the comments in the feedback did not match self-perceptions of their performance. For instance, two participants suggested that they did not agree with the low grades given in the final feedback of their unit assignments and thought that the grades should have been higher than they were. Specifically, David failed her Unit 4 assignment which she thought should have been awarded a pass mark. She did not agree with the failed result as she compared the failed assignment with another assignment that had been awarded a pass mark. She claimed that

she made equal efforts in completing both the assignments but had attained different results.

First, I think I might have achieved a score of 40 [the pass score]. Even though what I wrote was not good enough, it could have reached the pass level. I think I put the same effort on both the assignments of Unit 4 and Unit 2. However, the grade of Unit 2 is fine, but Unit 4 is very low. This is something I cannot be convinced about. (David, MA, RI)

This extract shows that David was not convinced by the feedback because she believed that the efforts she made deserved at least a pass grade, especially in view of the fact that the same amount of work had been done on both the assignments. It appears from this example that David seemed to have difficulties in distinguishing accurately between the perceived effort made on the assignment and the quality of her work.

Furthermore, David's disagreement with the grade also influenced her perceptions of the written comments in the feedback sheet. When asking her how she understood those comments given to the failed assignment, she said that she did not agree with a number of comments. For example, she did not agree with the comments that *'The data collection methods are identified and not convincingly explained and assessed. What was the hypothesis Zhang and Rahimi (2014) set out to investigate? The details are confusing to follow partly because of the language and also because of poor organisation of your ideas. The essay has clearly labelled sections but the internal content of each section contains a lot of irrelevant and distracting information.'*

With regards to the content, [...] He said I didn't write the hypothesis. But I don't think that is a flaw leading to grade reduction. And here I don't think my essay contained a lot of irrelevant information. (David, MA, RI)

David took issue with two of the comments in particular, namely the absence of a hypothesis and the inclusion of irrelevant information in the sections. It can be seen from the extract above that David did not recognise the problems which the feedback had identified. It is possible that her disagreement with these comments might have been influenced by

emotional resistance to the low grade which in turn may be attributed to her inadequate understanding of those comments. This finding is reflective of the study by Sargeant et al. (2008) which suggests that students go through a recursive process when engaging with teacher feedback and their responses to teacher feedback are influenced by the dynamic interplay between students' affective engagement and cognitive engagement with teacher feedback.

The comment '*What was the hypothesis Zhang and Rahimi (2014) set out to investigate?*' could be interpreted as instruction to 'clarify the research purpose/focus of the study of Zhang and Rahimi (2014) and elaborate how it relates to the hypothesis that the researchers proposed'. However, David simply understood the comment as '(didn't) *write* the hypothesis', which is far from the actual meaning of the comment. This is in line with the research by Chanock (2000) which found that the students' understanding of feedback messages could differ significantly from the meaning intended by teachers through feedback comments. David's interpretation of the comment led her to disagree with the grade and stopped her from making sense why she had got a low grade. As the extract suggests, she thought that the tutor should not have reduced the marks for not *mentioning* the hypothesis.

In contrast to the comments for Unit 4 assignment, it is interesting to note that David accepted the assignment feedback Unit 2 which had also pointed out some problems in her essay.

I can accept the other pieces of feedback of the other assignments. I also got a low grade of the Unit 2 assignment, but I can accept the feedback somehow as I knew I did not write it very well while I was writing. However, I can't understand some comments in the feedback. [...] Now that he said so, there are supposed to be problems somewhere in my assignment. (David, MA, RI)

This extract shows that David agreed with the problems identified in the feedback of Unit 2 assignment, even though she did not even understand the meanings of those comments (i.e. '*I can't understand some comments in the feedback.*'). Comparing David's divergent

responses to both sets of feedback, her acceptance of the feedback for the Unit 2 assignment might be explained by a matching self-perception of her performance (i.e. ‘*I can accept the feedback somehow as I knew I did not write it very well while I was writing*’).

Similarly, Chloe also expressed her frustration with the final feedback of an assignment in which she was granted a grade lower than what she had anticipated.

One of the final feedback forms, which gave me the lowest grade [among all my assignments], is something I don't agree with. [...] This assignment is the most disappointing one. When I was writing it, I felt most satisfied with it, yet it got the lowest grade. [...] I had a very clear thought process when I was writing. I thought I used the theory very appropriately. [...] Because I really used my brain to write it. [...] I think that there is a difference as to how teachers assess assignments. Some teachers are strict, and others are lenient. (Chloe, MA, RI)

The extract indicates that there was an obvious gap between the actual grade Chloe received and her anticipation of what she would be awarded. Like David, Chloe thought that the attained grade had to be in correspondence with the efforts she had made (i.e. ‘*used my brain to write*’). She tended to compare the feedback with her own perceptions of her performance (i.e. ‘*When I was writing it, I felt most satisfied with it, yet it got the lowest grade*’, ‘*I thought I used the theory very appropriately*’). Failing to evaluate her own performance in the same way as the tutor had done led to frustration with the grade she had received. Moreover, she attributed the low grade to the tutor’s severe marking criteria. This indicates that she seemed to have difficulty in accurately distinguishing the quality of her different assignments, which led her to assume that the variation in her grades across different assignments was a product of tutor strictness or leniency rather than her own performance.

These extracts show how self-perceptions of performance comprise a key influence on student affective and cognitive engagement with tutor feedback. This is in line with the study by Sargeant et al. (2008) in which 28 physicians were interviewed to describe their emotional reactions to their feedback reports given by reviewers of physicians (i.e. medical colleagues,

coworkers, and/or patients) and the influences of the reactions on their acceptance and use of the feedback were explored. The researchers found that the participants tended to make internal comparison of their feedback with self-perceptions of performance. Those perceiving the feedback as consistent with self-perceptions responded positively to it, while those seeing the feedback as lower than self-perceptions generally reacted to it with distress (ibid).

The instances of David and Chloe also show how they tended to engage with the comments against self-evaluation of performance which they linked not to the quality of the assignment but to the efforts expended in completing the work. Their limited capacity for self-evaluation as to the quality of their work caused the gap between their perceived performance and the given feedback. These findings echo what has been found in Carless' study (2006, p. 229) that revealed that the participating students' lack of ability to self-evaluate was the main reason of preventing them from distinguishing accurately their achievements in assignments, and that 'students may assume that their variation in grades is a product of the tutor rather than their own performance'.

6.3 Social factors

Students establish loops of dialogues with people involved in the feedback process. Their interpersonal relationship with those people (i.e. peers and tutors in the context of this study) has a significant impact on their (dis) engagement with teacher feedback. Additionally, students' perceptions of teachers in terms of their positions in the programme, expertise in certain subject areas and attitudes towards the students' written work and related enquiries also affect students' adoption of the feedback provided by those tutors.

6.3.1 Interpersonal relationships

Peer discussion as a source of teacher feedback information

Discussion with peers about teacher feedback is a common reaction undertaken by students

(Miao et al., 2006). Data show that peer discussion is a factor influencing participants gaining access to teacher feedback. For example, Maggie reported that when she was writing the Unit 3 assignment, she discussed her ideas of how to work on the assignment with a classmate. This classmate read her draft and pointed out a mistake that Maggie had made in her essay. To explain why Maggie's draft was not entirely on track, the classmate shared an email from the unit tutor with Maggie. This email had been sent by the tutor in response to a query about how to write the context section. After reading the email, Maggie realised her mistake and revised her draft.

When I was working on the Unit 3 assignment, I discussed with my friend about whether I could relate the theory to my teaching experience. My friend read my draft and said that I have to revise it as the tutor does not allow us to focus on teaching experiences. She said I should focus on my understanding of learning experiences. She told me that [...] she asked Tutor C this issue in an email and the tutor replied that the focus should be on learning experiences. Then I asked her to show me the tutor's email [...]. I can clearly see in that email that the tutor said that the focus should be on learning rather than teaching. Then I found, oh my God, I did it wrong. All I wrote was how the theory gives me reflections on my teaching (Maggie, MA, RI).

Maggie also showed me the email that her friend shared with her.

The rubric says that you must explain how the theories of SLA 'enrich your understanding of your own, or your students', second language learning experience'. That is to say, you must reflect retrospectively on your own previous L2 learning experiences or your students' L2 learning experiences and explain how your new knowledge of SLA theory informs your understanding of these experiences. Note that this aspect of the task is about L2 LEARNING, not L2 TEACHING.

This instance indicates that the way students approach teacher feedback is multidirectional and goes beyond conversations between teacher and student. Maggie was able to access teacher feedback via peer discussion in which the peer talked about the feedback she had obtained from the tutor. Maggie commented that such peer discussion about teacher feedback is a kind of resource sharing and that she benefited from this because she could obtain more teacher feedback beyond what was given to her directly.

I think discussing with classmates is useful, otherwise I might write something that distracts from the topic. They could remind me of the teachers' requirements that I might neglect or forget. Classmates have such resources and we can share them with each other (Maggie, MA, RI).

This finding supports the view of Miao et al. (2006) who suggest that peer feedback is a significant complementary source of teacher feedback. David also suggested that discussing with peers helped her gaining access to more teacher feedback. She reported that she had learnt of some tutors' suggestions from her peers and had applied them in her writing.

Peer discussion is also important. [...] Last time, before the Q&A session got started, we had a chat while we were waiting for the tutor outside the classroom. We discussed the Unit 3 assignment [...]. We discussed whether age could be a factor influencing the learning of foreign language. A girl said that she has asked Tutor A and Tutor A said that age relates to the writing context. That is to say, if your context reflects that age could be a factor facilitating language learning, then you can work on this. (David, MA RI)

After learning about the tutor's suggestion from her classmate, David realised that she could not discuss age as a significant factor in her selected context wherein students were learning English at a university.

Actually, many students including me want to discuss age in the assignment as it is an obvious individual difference. However, since my context is my university and age is not a significant factor in this context, I cannot write this. (David, MA, RI).

Moreover, David recalled that she had revisited previously-overlooked teacher comments after her peers reminded her of some suggestions offered in the Q&A sessions. During the writing process, David talked with a classmate about their ideas for the Unit 3 assignment. While discussing the details of David's draft, her classmate found that David had become distracted from the assignment focus and reminded her of a suggestion that had been given in a Q&A session. David realised her mistake after re-reading the Q&A session slides that her classmates showed to her, and in the light of this information, she decided to readjust the

assignment draft. David described that experience during the interview in the following way:

I came to my classmate's house to borrow some of her books. Then she talked with me about the Unit 3 assignment that she was writing. I said that I wrote [...] in my draft. She said that I need to delete the part about [...] because the tutor warned us in the Q&A that it was not permitted to write [...] in this assignment. Then, she showed me the slides of that Q&A session. I realised where I was wrong and I rewrote that part. (David, MA, RI)

After realising that she had overlooked the teacher's suggestions, David became more aware of the importance of the feedback provided in the Q&A sessions. Learning from this experience, she decided to review the teachers' suggestions given in each Q&A session before starting to write the counterpart assignment.

Then I found that it is necessary to read Q&A session slides or listen to the session recording. Since the instruction was obviously written in the slide, why did I still enter that 'minefield'? It is just because I initially didn't carefully listen to what the teacher said and didn't take any notes in the Q&A. I also didn't carefully read the slides afterwards. So later in the next assignments, I will review the slides of Q&A sessions before writing to avoid making mistakes. (David, MA, RI)

This indicates that peer talk changed the way that David engaged with teacher feedback delivered in Q&A sessions. She initially did not pay much attention to the teachers' suggestions in Q&A sessions. After her peer reminded her of the point she had overlooked, she realised the importance of information delivered in Q&A sessions and began to value this type of feedback.

These examples from Maggie and David suggest that students tend to engage with teacher feedback multi-directionally. They tapped into their social network to gain teacher feedback from a range of sources available around them. In addition to seeking teacher feedback from teachers, the students also sought to engage with teacher feedback through discussions with peers. By discussing tutor feedback with peers, the students understood and adopted the teacher comments by contextualising it to their own writing context. This aligns with literature that suggests feedback is not only multilateral in nature but also a social process whereby knowledge is constructed by students' interactions with different contexts and their

interpretation of such engagement (Boud and Molloy, 2013). These findings also align with literature suggesting that students actively process feedback input from a variety of sources, multiple levels of analysis and interpretations from both teachers and peers (Miao et al., 2006).

Factors influencing students' relationships with teachers and peers

Data show that the students' perceptions of the teacher-student relationship and the student-student relationship also influenced their engagement with teacher feedback. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, the feedback provision policy of the pre-sessional programme is different from that of the MA programme. In the MA programme, students need to proactively seek teacher feedback by contacting the tutors via email or booking tutorials in addition to the pre-arranged Q&A sessions and final feedback forms. It was found that when encountering difficulties in the assignment writing, some of the participants tended to stay at a distance with teachers and were more willing to approach peers so as to seek suggestions. Instead of proactively seeking feedback from tutors during the MA programme, some of the participants, for instance Maggie and Xiao, relied largely upon suggestions from peers and, as presented in the extracts discussed above, upon peer accounts of the feedback that they had sought from tutors.

For example, while conducting several interviews with Maggie in Phase 2, I noticed that she talked a lot about how she discussed her assignments with her peers and how they helped one another to cope with difficulties encountered in the writing process. However, during the entire span of the Phase 2 interviews, I observed that she had not actively asked teachers for any advice. In the final interview, I asked her 'why do you prefer talking with peers to seeking help from teachers?'. She explained as follows.

I think... I felt that issues could be explained clearer when we discussed with peers. Perhaps the relationship with peers is closer. You [I] can debate with them. Sometimes, deep peer discussion without estrangement was more beneficial for the understanding of assignment topics. So, I think peer discussion is useful and I preferred talking with

classmates. (Maggie, MA, RI)

Maggie thought that discussing the feedback with peers made her feel more relaxed than talking with teachers because of a closer social relationship with peers. Similar findings have also been reported by Zhang (1995) in his study where students could gain more social support from peer feedback. Maggie stressed that a close relationship did not cause psychological estrangement between her and her peers. The social support generated by the relationship encouraged her to debate issues with peers even when the discussants had different opinions. She reported that debating with peers deepened her understanding of the problems in her own assignments, thus indicating that for Maggie, peer talk was more affectively and cognitively advantageous than communication with teachers. This echoes the findings of Miao et al. (2006) who observed that mutual understanding between peers and the mitigation of misinterpretation were likely to occur due to the space for negotiation of ideas available within peer interaction.

Maggie's reluctance to communicate with teachers was also influenced by the psychological divide between her and her teachers. In the extract below, she described her relationship with the teachers.

Anyway, I did not actively contact teachers from the beginning to end [of assignment writing]. I was like a mouse before a cat when I met teachers. So, I normally would not contact teachers in person too often [...]. (Maggie, MA, RI)

In comparing teachers to cats and herself to a mouse, Maggie expressed how she perceived the relationship between her teachers and herself to be similar to that between predator and prey. By using this metaphor, she highlighted how she experienced apprehension and huge psychological stress when meeting teachers and how she was reluctant to talk with teachers. Combining the above two statements from Maggie, it can be suggested that the fear of teacher-student social and psychological estrangement was the main barrier preventing Maggie from approaching teachers for feedback.

Moreover, Maggie also indicated that her closeness to peers and reluctance to talk with teachers, to some extent, were connected to her limited proficiency in English:

[...]and also language. My English speaking and listening are not good. I can't express my question clearly to the teacher and sometimes I can't understand what the teacher was saying due to my poor listening ability. So, I prefer to talk to my classmates. (Maggie, MA, RI)

As the above extract shows, Maggie found language to be a key barrier to the communication between her and the teacher. Thus, when encountering difficulties in her writing, she preferred to approach her co-national classmates for discussions in their native language. Therefore, language influenced not just her interpersonal communication with teachers and peers but also her engagement with teacher feedback. This finding is consistent with the idea produced by Edwards and Ran (2009) who suggest that ease of communication in native languages where shared could motivate L2 learners to join in peer discussion in which they understand the language that they use and in which the ground rules for idea expression can be made clear.

Data show that personality was another important factor of influence upon students' communication and their relationship with teachers. For example, when asked why she was less willing to discuss issues in her assignment writing with teachers, David explained as in the extract below:

Maybe personality. I am a bit introverted, unlike some students who are very active. (David, MA, RI)

David believe that she was an introverted person, thereby giving rise to a reluctance to talk to others and to proactively interact with teachers and seek teacher feedback.

My personal observation indicates that the personality factor and interpersonal skills influenced other participants when it came to processing teacher feedback. Although they did not explicitly mention these factors, self-descriptions of participants' writing processes

and their interaction with me as a researcher during the interviews allowed me to develop this insight.

For example, in her interviews, Xiao talked about a number of issues in understanding assignment requirements and tutors' suggestions in Q&A sessions. When asked whether she had sought any help from teachers regarding the issues she mentioned, she replied negatively. When asked how she tried to deal with difficulties at the writing stage, she reported that she often discussed these issues with peers or solved problems on her own. Moreover, while interviewing Xiao, I found that Xiao was shy and introverted and gave less elaborate responses to my interview questions than the other participants even though she was encouraged to talk more. Her interactions with teachers and myself led to the inference that she experienced a sense of distance in engaging with the teachers and the researcher. It appears that Xiao found it difficult to open up to people she was not familiar with. It can be surmised that introversion and limited interpersonal skills seemed to demotivate Xiao from seeking teacher suggestions and led to a low level of engagement with teacher feedback.

Overall, this section demonstrates that the interpersonal relationships between teachers and students as well as between peers influenced their engagement with teacher feedback. Due to fear of teachers, social and affective support from peers, language barriers, introverted personality and poor communicative abilities, some of the participants were reluctant to seek feedback from the teachers in person. Instead, they preferred to talk with peers or to solve problems on their own. The reasons of preferring peer feedback to teacher feedback that the participants reported in the present study enriched the existing findings in literature in relation to the contexts of students' preference for and resistance to teacher or peer feedback.

Further, it should be noted that maintaining a distance from teachers did not mean that the students had no access to teacher feedback. The students were able to obtain teacher feedback by accessing peer accounts. This suggests that student communication with teacher feedback is neither a one-way transmission of information from teacher to student or a two-

way linear communication between teacher and student. Rather, the feedback process is relational and multidirectional. Students are able to make full use of various social networks and resources to access teacher feedback. During the process, peer interpretations of teacher feedback and students' own understanding of these accounts interweave with each other to generate new knowledge. Based on this new knowledge, students apply the teacher feedback gained from peers to their own writing context.

6.3.2 Perceptions of teachers as feedback providers

Students' perceived credibility of teachers who provide feedback can influence their engagement with teacher feedback. More specifically, when students obtain suggestions from multiple teachers, they would select one of the suggestions and adopt it in their writing. The selection is dependent on various social factors, including the students' perceptions of the teachers' positions in the programme, the teachers' expertise and their attitudes to students' enquiries and written work.

Teacher position

In the extract appended below, Maggie explained how the role of the unit tutor as the assignment marker influenced her adoption of teacher feedback. When Maggie wrote the Unit 3 assignment, she obtained two suggestions, from the unit tutor and the Critical Reading and Writing tutor as to how to link the assignment topic to her selected pedagogical context. In the Q&A session, the unit tutor advised students to select a narrow context and write it in a specific way. Maggie also discussed her ideas as to context description with the Critical Reading and Writing tutor and obtained a different suggestion. Finally, she decided to follow the unit tutor's suggestion:

About the context of Unit 3 assignment, I have asked the critical reading and writing tutor. I asked him if I can write my educational experiences and my development from the primary school to the secondary school. He said that I can do in that way. However, the unit 3 tutor said that context should be specific and narrow. So, I am not sure at this point. I think I will follow the unit tutor's suggestion [...] and just write the context of my secondary school. (Maggie, MA, RI)

This quote indicates that Maggie obtained two different suggestions from the two tutors. She eventually chose to take the suggestion from the unit tutor by taking the tutor's position into consideration.

[...] Also, I think that she is the unit instructor who will mark the assignment. So, I will listen to that tutor's suggestion and write the assignment in the light of her requirements. The critical reading and writing tutor is not from our programme. (Maggie, MA, RI)

It seems that Maggie accorded priority to the suggestions from the tutor who would mark her assignment which implies that Maggie's perceptions of the positions of tutors in the programme had an impact on her adoption of teacher feedback. This is congruent with the comparable research conducted by Parker and Winstone (2016) who found that when the participating students sought explanations of the written feedback that they did not understand, they were more likely to discuss the feedback with the teacher who marked their assignments rather than to seek help from other tutors

Teacher expertise

In addition to according importance to the tutor's role as a marker, Maggie did not take suggestions from the Critical Reading and Writing tutor by taking into account of the tutors' expertise:

I feel that the tutorial with the critical reading and writing teacher was not effective. After this assignment, I also asked this tutor about setting problem of the Unit 1 assignment. But he gave me an ambiguous reply. So, I don't dare to write in light of his suggestion. Then, he also reviewed my Unit 1 assignment, but just pointed out some grammatical mistakes. As for content, [...] perhaps need to ask more professional unit tutors. (Maggie, MA, RI)

This quote shows that Maggie seemed to distrust the Critical Reading and Writing tutor's suggestion and was not confident about following it due to the tutor's ambiguous response to her query. Additionally, Maggie seemed to see the role of the Critical Reading and Writing

tutor as being more limited to grammar correction, doubting his ability to comment on the essay content because of his lack of expertise in the specific subject area.

Like Maggie, Hebe was also more willing to take suggestions from the unit tutor. She believed that compared with other tutors in the MA degree programme, the unit tutor had greater expertise in the area of her assignment topic and was capable of giving more professional advice.

Compared with Tutor C, Tutor B is the marker of this assignment and the tutor of this module who is more professional and knowledgeable in this area. So, I should listen to this tutor more. (Hebe, MA, RI)

The instances of Maggie and Hebe are in line with the findings in some research, such as the studies by Parker and Winstone (2016) and by Tardy (2006) who found that professional position and expertise of tutor were a factor of influence on the students when they evaluated whose feedback they were going to adopt. The findings are also consistent with those in the study by Hyland (1998) who presented that participants in her study saw the language tutor's role as constrained to language correction and distrusted their expertise in commenting on content and ideas in a text.

Teacher attitude

Hebe reported that tutors' attitudes to responding to her enquiries influenced her adoption of teacher feedback. In the extract below, Hebe explains why she did not take up the suggestions given by Tutor C:

The reason why I did not listen to Tutor C is that ... once I asked C a question about Unit 1 assignment. I asked if I can write issues of identity and C said that I can. Later, I emailed the Unit 1 convenor. The Unit 1 convenor said that I can't write identity because it belongs to the topic of Unit 3. There was another chance that I asked C if I can write [...] in the Unit 1 assignment. C said that I can write anything that appears in the Unit 1 lesson slides. So, I doubt that Tutor C was not professional in other units except for his own unit. I also doubt that C responded to my questions carelessly.

(Hebe, MA, RI)

In this quote, Hebe noted that the suggestion from Tutor C appeared to conflict with the suggestion from the Unit 1 convenor which made Hebe doubt Tutor C's expertise in Unit 1 assignment. Meanwhile, suggestions such as '*you can write anything from the lesson slides*' made Hebe assume that Tutor C took a careless attitude when responding to her queries. This extract would seem to suggest that the students' distrust of teacher feedback may arise from the perceived carelessness of how teachers choose to respond.

In contrast, there is an example in the data which indicates how teachers' careful attitudes towards students' work positively influenced students' engagement with teacher feedback. As presented in Chapter 4 (See Section 4.1.1), David was impressed by the first piece of written feedback she received in the pre-sessional programme. She commented that the feedback was careful and detailed. Regarding the detailed feedback, David noted that she was respectful of the feedback:

I received detailed comments and corrections. [...] Since the tutor gave feedback very carefully, I think, for this kind of attitude, I should respect. Then I listened to the feedback and revised my draft carefully as well. (David, PS, SR)

This quote indicates that David's attitude towards the feedback was affected by how the teacher was perceived as treating her work. David tended to show her respect towards the detailed feedback. She believed that she needed to compensate for such detailed and careful feedback by paying attention to the comments and carefully revising her draft. Cumulatively, the examples from Hebe and David suggest that student perceptions of tutor attitudes towards their queries and assignments strongly influenced their engagement with teacher feedback.

Findings in this section show that participants were able to proactively and selectively engage with teacher feedback in reacting to different social contexts. The credibility of feedback interactions was not only influenced by students' perceived relationship with teachers and perceived professional capacity of the supervisors, but also affected by students'

perceptions of teachers' attitudes towards their enquiries and work.

6.4 Epistemological factors

Epistemological positions represent different ways in which people perceive truth, the nature of knowledge and authority. These ways are referred to as 'ways of knowing' (Magolda, 1992, p.3). Two main epistemological categories - *dualistic and pluralistic ways of knowing* - have been identified from the survey of the literature on students' epistemological beliefs on their learning experiences (see Section 2.3.3). Data demonstrate that different epistemological positions that students hold have considerable impacts on the ways they engage with teacher feedback.

6.4.1 Dualistic way of knowing

Directive instruction

Data show that some participants tended to believe in the notion of absolute truth, which is to say that they believed in a dualist world in which there are only right or wrong answers. Students who manifested dualistic thinking tended to value feedback comprising directive instruction for corrective actions and did not tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty in teacher feedback. For example, as presented in Section 4.4.2, Hebe believed that the feedback in the form of interrogatives such as 'why?' and 'how?' did not explicitly indicate whether corrections were needed. Hebe observed that compared with comments in the form of questions, remarks prefaced with '*you need to ...*' were clearer for students who wanted to understand what to do. In a similar view, Hebe also commented that the suggestion '*it's up to you*' which she obtained in the Q&A sessions was not useful, as it did not tell Hebe what to do:

In the Q&A session, we asked the tutor like 'Do we have to introduce the context at the beginning of the essay or after we discuss the theory?'. The tutor said, 'it's up to you.' This kind of suggestions is just like nothing. (Hebe, MA, RI)

Hebe reflected on this incident and found that this suggestion did not answer the question that the students had asked. Whereas, the tutor's suggestion seemed to imply that there was nothing wrong with the place of the context in the essay as long as one took considered the argument, the essay structure and the description of the context holistically. This shifted decision-making as to the organisation of the context description in the essay to the students.

Additionally, in the pre-sessional phase, other participants also expressed their expectations of feedback which could provide corrective feedback. For example, David reported, *'it is good that she can point out these errors, but it would be much better if she can correct them for me. I am still not sure how to revise some of the problems.'* Chloe observed that *'for this outline, I hope that the tutor could tell me how to rearrange the order of these sections and tell me what to add and what to delete.'* All of these comments from Hebe, David and Chloe indicate that they seemed to prefer feedback which provided directive instruction and a list of corrective actions telling them what to do and that they were less able to deal with feedback which appeared ambiguous and called for independent thinking in specific contexts. This is consistent with what O' Donovan (2017) found in his study that students holding *absolute* assumptions tended to be authority-dependent, expecting directional instruction for corrective actions.

Single standard and right answer

When engaging with teacher feedback, the students having a dualistic way of knowing preferred a single standard or a right answer and struggled with coping with teacher feedback in different contexts. Some participants reported that, from time to time, they received 'dissonant' teacher feedback, and that while applying one tutor's suggestion in writing they received an 'opposite' comment in the final feedback. They felt frustrated when they found that they had failed to fulfil the teacher's requirements, even though they had tried to conform with whatever the teachers had suggested.

For example, in the last interview when we talked about the feedback sheet on Maggie's

Unit 3 assignment, she recalled the suggestions that she had received throughout her writing process. The assignment topic that Maggie had chosen to write on was ‘*Discuss the relative merits and limitations of at least two theories of second language acquisition showing how these may enrich your understanding of your own, or your students’, second language learning experience.*’ Maggie reported that when she was writing this assignment, she received a suggestion from the unit tutor in the Q&A session that advised her not to explain the theories in the assignment. However, in the final feedback, she received a ‘contrasting’ comment made by the same tutor. The comment is ‘*you present this theory very briefly at the beginning and move on to merits straight away. It would be better to provide a thorough description first*’. Discussing her view of this ‘contradiction’, Maggie observed that:

...I remember in the previous Q&A session, the tutor asked us not to write what those theories are, [...]and didn’t want us to write theories to try to reach the word count. [...] So, I wrote those theories very briefly. As a result, it might be too brief. It is really difficult to handle the degree [of briefness]. How should I write to make the tutor happy? It is difficult to get the tutor’s points. (Maggie, MA, RI)

This excerpt indicates that Maggie seemed to interpret ‘a thorough description of theory’ as an opposite comment to the suggestion (i.e. ‘*no need to write what those theories are*’) that she obtained in the Q&A session. Maggie seemed to be dissatisfied with the ‘inconsistent’ feedback that she received. Her statement (i.e. ‘*How should I want to make the tutor happy*’) shows that she experienced frustration when she had trouble in comprehending and responding to the ‘inconsistent’ feedback. Maggie’s statements (e.g. ‘*It is really difficult to handle the degree.*’ and ‘*It is difficult to get the point.*’) indicated that she was puzzled when she found that even though she had tried to ‘follow’ whatever the tutor suggested, she had still failed to fulfil the teacher’s requirements. She seemed to believe that there had to be a single standard for the text organisation and, as a result, simply adopted tutor suggestions literally without considering what the ‘dissonant’ advice meant in different contexts. For instance, the teacher’s suggestion in the Q&A may not have been applicable to Maggie’s particular assignment context.

Instead of critically seeing how those suggestions are rooted in her writing context, Maggie saw them as ever-changing and elusive requirements of a particular tutor. She tended to consider the feedback to be *fact* transmitted from the tutor which focuses on a particular context and could not be open to interpretations in other contexts. In such a case, it seemed likely that Maggie moved from assignment to assignment with the aim of unearthing the elusive requirements of individual tutors rather than learning what it meant to write for an academic audience, within an academic discipline.

Similarly, as discussed in Section 5.1.1, Hebe failed to understand the pragmatic meaning in teacher feedback and saw the tutor's comments in the feedback form as contradict to earlier advice she obtained from other tutors. Specifically speaking, Hebe obtained a tutor suggestion during the writing process which recommended that she should not write about external factors influencing the rise of English as a global language. However, she reported that she received an 'opposite' comment from another tutor in the final feedback which comment suggested that '*you also just briefly refer to non-internal features – this could have been expanded a little to make your point more clearly.*' As the extract below shows, Hebe attributed the omission of external factors in her essay to the feedback she had obtained earlier:

I don't think this is my fault as I just wrote it in the light of tutors' suggestions. So, there is nothing I can do at this point. (Hebe, MA, RI)

The extract above shows how Hebe did not believe that she should have to take responsibility for the omission of the points mentioned in the final feedback as she had only followed the teacher suggestion made earlier, whereas the later comment seemed to suggest that it was not her fault for overlooking this aspect in her discussion.

Hebe's tendency to see feedback in a deterministic way and comments in the form of right or wrong suggest that her way of knowing prevented her from successfully dealing with and learning from 'dissonant' information in feedback. In this case, suggestions were taken as

directions which prevented Hebe from critically examining what she was writing and adjusting it where needed to provide a balanced answer covering aspects of the topic equitably. Her dualistic thinking led her to see suggestions as directives or instructions, rather than possible ways of organising her answer with necessary emphases and depth linked to the question requirements. Hence, when receiving tutor comments which appeared to contradict earlier advice, Hebe seemed unable to reconcile the apparent ‘dissonance’ as she chose to see suggestions as edicts and to view tutor feedback as monolithic without accounting for the differences in tutor perspectives.

In addition, students’ dualistic thinking also impacted their engagement with the feedback which provided multiple options. They felt helpless when receiving feedback which did not tell them the ‘right’ answer. For example, Xiao complained that the suggestions that a tutor gave in a Q&A session was hard to adopt.

The tutor gave us a few possible structures to organise the assignment. They looked so different and I cannot decide which one is better. (Xiao, MA, RI)

When asked how she eventually adopted the suggested structures, Xiao responded in the following way:

I don't know which one is suitable for me. So, I read the exemplars among which there was one that was granted a high mark. [...] I think the exemplar having a distinction means that it is a good work to follow. So, I imitated its structure. (Xiao, MA, RI)

These two quotations indicate that Xiao did not adopt teacher suggestion in the Q&A session because the suggestion did not pinpoint the most ‘suitable’ structure that she could use for her essay. When she found that she could not find the ‘right’ answer from the teacher feedback, she sought to identify it from other sources. It can be inferred from these extracts that teacher suggestions providing multiple options conflicted with Xiao’s dualistic perspective that required right or wrong choices. Eventually, Xiao chose to use an exemplar that had been awarded a ‘distinction’ as model for her own assignment, suggesting that for Xiao such a model provided the ‘right’ answer as to the best structure for her own essay. The

instances cited from the data collected from Maggie, Hebe and Xiao indicate that when students evidenced dualistic ways of knowing, they were less capable of coping with ambiguity and uncertainty in feedback and always expected to obtain the ‘right’ answer from teacher feedback. These findings align with literature categorising students’ ways of knowing which reflects a need for right or wrong answers in terms of dualistic (Perry, 1970), ‘received’ (Magolda, 1992) and ‘absolute’ (Belenky et al., 1997) thinking. As the literature suggests, students like David, Hebe and Xiao who evidence dualistic thinking tend to place great value upon incontestable facts and demonstrable theories (Magolda, 1992) and to exhibit a dependence on authority that leads to the desire for monolithic right or wrong answers in teacher feedback and unambiguous assessment criteria (O’Donovan, 2017).

Majority as the authority

The students who applied dualistic ways of knowing also tended to perceive the majority as the authority. Students sometimes compared different pieces of feedback across assignments to see how different tutors evaluated a certain area (i.e. language or text structure) of written work. In view of this, students’ agreement/disagreement with certain feedback tended to be influenced by what other tutors (the majority of the tutors) had said in their feedback. For instance, Chloe argued that she did not agree with the comments on her language in the Unit 1 assignment after comparing it to final feedback forms for other assignments which gave positive comments on her language use. One of the feedback forms for Chloe’s work contained the following comment on her language presentation:

There are quite a lot of English language errors. These sometimes make it difficult for the reader to follow your argument. Some errors, such as spelling mistakes (e.g. ‘~~true~~ly’, sic) could easily have been avoided. The heading ‘References’ # should be plural. You list several of them.

In terms of the comments on language presentation issues in the other assignments that Chloe used for comparison, the tutors respectively gave comments on the Unit 2 assignment as ‘*The writing and presentation of ideas are of a good standard. No errors impede reader*

comprehension.’, in Unit 3 assignment as ‘*The language in this essay is clear and easy to follow. The essay is appropriately formatted.*’ and in Unit 4 assignment as ‘*This essay respects academic writing and referencing conventions fairly well and the language is easy to understand.*’

I can’t agree with the judgements he made on my language issues. There were indeed one or two language problems in that assignment, but not that many as far as I can see. Other tutors said [in their feedback] that I had good presentation. [...] However, only this tutor said that there were serious language problems which, to some extent, influenced my argument or something similar. I think that this tutor has different assessment criteria on language. (Chloe, MA, RI)

The feedback on the Unit 1 assignment was not convincing to Chloe as she believed that her English writing skills had been affirmed by the other three tutors, and that the majority of the tutors had no issues with her written English ability. She conjectured that the marker of the Unit 1 assignment had his own opinions on the language issues and might have particular assessment criteria, thereby showing a greater trust in the evaluations of the majority.

However, even in cases where the comparable feedback was negative across assignments, participants tended to use the feedback on the other assignments as a point of reference for making sense of the current assignment feedback. For instance, David also tended to compare the feedback she had received on specific assignment with feedback forms on other assignments. In her Unit 2 assignment, David had received some negative comments on her language ability, and she agreed with those problems pointed out in the feedback.

... Also, he mentioned a lot about presentation, such as issues with tenses. That is serious and is indeed my problem. Other tutors also pointed out my presentation problems. (David, MA, RI)

David acknowledged the presentation problems identified in the feedback because she found that the tutor’s evaluation on her language issues aligned with the feedback provided by other tutors. In terms of David’s language issues, the tutors gave the following comments:

There are a large number of English language errors. These weaken the reader's impression of your text and sometimes make it difficult to follow your argument [...]. (Unit 1)

There are some typographical errors such as assay instead of essay, and non-standardized spacing in citations, years and page numbers. Better paragraphing is needed. (Unit 2)

When discussing theory, please be careful with the tense. When you use past tense, you signal to the reader that this knowledge/view is obsolete. Your language is generally easy to follow but there are quite a number of grammatical errors that could be avoided with careful proofreading. (Unit 3)

The language of this essay is very difficult to follow mainly because of issues at the discourse level [...]. (Unit 4)

These examples from Chloe and David indicate that when the students had dualistic ways of knowing and were less capable of evaluating their own work, they were more likely to compare and refer to feedback from different teachers to identify whether there were biases in teachers' opinions. After a comparison, they tended to believe the judgements of the majority. They became inclined to agree with the feedback when it was echoed by other tutors and to disagree with the feedback when they found it to be inconsistent with the opinions in feedback given by other tutors. It was likely that their trust in and conformity to the opinion of the majority arose from the belief that the shared tutor opinions about their ability reflected minimum bias in their evaluations. This is in line with the point made by Belenky et al. (1997, p. 41) who suggest that some students trust the judgements made by the majority on the assumption that the 'bigger in status or in number, the greater the truth'. However, this way of thinking might be problematic as it can make the students disregard problems identified by the minority, thereby leading to an inadequate understanding of the feedback given in particular contexts.

6.4.2 Pluralistic way of knowing

Appreciation of feedback provided from multiple perspectives

Students holding pluralistic way of knowing are able to recognise the relevance and uniqueness of contexts in knowledge from multiple perspectives when engaging with teacher feedback. They are more likely to accept different views and values which are judged as better or worse (rather than simply right or wrong) after being integrated with their own voices. This matches the *pluralist* way of knowing held by people who recognise the contestability of knowledge and the legitimacy of multiple perspectives (Perry, 1970). For instance, Chloe was more receptive of feedback containing different opinions. She sought feedback from different teachers to address an issue in an assignment and then tried to synthesise these suggestions with her own ideas so as to apply to her writing.

I have discussed with different teachers about this assignment. Then, I combined their suggestions with my ideas and considered which one is more suitable or how to take something that they all shared. I find sometimes some tutors emphasise one point but may neglect the others because different teachers may consider from different perspectives and have different focuses. So, I think communicating with different tutors can give me a fuller preparation [for my writing] and make my essays more logical and rigorous. (Chloe, MA, RI)

Unlike other participants who were less able to deal with feedback provided in different contexts or feedback from different tutors, the experience of receiving feedback from multiple tutors helped Chloe realise that obtaining mixed feedback from different teachers could help her to view teacher suggestions from different angles and to further refine her work. This quote indicates that Chloe had begun to develop a greater tolerance for diversity, contradiction and ambiguity in teacher feedback which she believed enabled her to learn from the different perspectives of the teachers as well as opinions that they shared. She integrated these differing and shared views with her own ideas in order to construct her knowledge and to recreate the feedback for herself. In the extract below, Chloe described how seeking feedback from different tutors helped her to achieve a comprehensive understanding of what to write in the assignment. She commented that she benefited from such feedback because after applying feedback from different tutors, she achieved a high mark in that assignment.

This [the benefit of seeking feedback from different tutors] can be reflected in Unit 2 assignment and its final feedback. [...] I previously discussed an issue with Tutor 2 who just told me not to write something but didn't tell me why. Then I found Tutor 3 who gave me the reason. Then, I solved this confusion and wrote that part very well. (Chloe, MA, RI)

These findings are in line with literature which suggests that the feedback comprises 'dialogic processes whereby learners make sense of information from various sources and use it to enhance their work or learning strategies' (Carless, 2006, p.1). This process involves students interacting with their peers, teachers and other external sources such as essay exemplars, assessment criteria, textbooks or learning materials that students seek from the Internet or library (Carless, 2006) in order to reconstruct the feedback for themselves.

Recognition of contextual variations

Additionally, the participants who had pluralistic ways of knowing were able to contextualise teacher feedback and recognise the contextual differences in the feedback provided to them and in other messages. In doing so, they were able to examine various interpretations of teacher feedback given by their peers and to collate the information to achieve their own understanding of the feedback. For example, David reported that in the Q&A session of Unit 4 assignment, the tutor suggested that the students should evaluate three research-based articles with regard to research design, methods of data collection, quality criteria, handling of ethical issues, and that they were not allowed to evaluate 'research strategies' in the assignment. Then she discussed this suggestion with her classmates but obtained different interpretations of this suggestion from her peers.

So, we discussed about whether we can write research strategies. A classmate said that we can't write this. [...] However, another girl wrote this, and she said that we can write this and she debated with me. There are also some other students who have written research strategies. What they understand the suggestion is that 'research strategies' cannot be evaluated independently but can be put in the part of research design. That is, we could discuss qualitative [research] or qualitative [research] in

*research design. Anyway, this dispute remained during the whole writing process.
(David, MA, RI)*

However, David was not convinced by the interpretations of the feedback discussed by her peers. She tried to find the answer by examining other materials and adding her own analysis, as the extract below shows:

Later, I thought about the suggestion on my own and read exemplars from the last year. The reason why I discussed with classmates is that I was a bit confused about the suggestion - the teacher said we are not allowed to write strategies but at the same time provided an exemplar which included strategies. Initially, I thought that we could write anything from the exemplars. Then, I assume that perhaps the requirement of the assignment in the last year was different from ours. So, I can't refer to the exemplar completely. (David, MA, RI)

In this quote, David reported that she initially thought that students could imitate anything from the exemplar and therefore felt confused about the intention of the tutor who warned them not to evaluate 'research strategies' while offered an exemplar which included such an evaluation. David was able to critically examine her peers' interpretations of the suggestion, the exemplar and the assignment requirements from different perspectives, David recognised the differences in the assignment requirements undergirding the exemplar and their assigned topic. She contextualised the teacher's suggestion by making a comparison between the assigned topic and the exemplar and recognised the uniqueness and variance in the contexts leading to different assignment requirements. In turn, she obtained her own understanding of the teacher's suggestion and avoided being misled by peer misinterpretations.

The finding also indicates that if peer feedback comprises an interpretation of teacher feedback and the students do not trust the interpretation, they would proactively triangulate the peer feedback with consideration of other sources such as exemplars and assignment instructions. This evidence indicates that David was able to selectively and critically engage with feedback information that she collected from difference sources. This supports the view of Berg (1999) who states that when students become involved in seeking various sources

of advice and voices, they tend to consider the information they get, question its validity, weigh it against their own knowledge and beliefs and then develop their own independent ideas to make a decision about what to adopt for revision.

The instances of Chloe and David echo the view of O' Donovan (2017) who states students holding *contextual/independent* beliefs tended to view knowledge as contextual and perceive feedback as a relational and dialogic process, and believed that variations of opinions were legitimate in their pedagogical context and helpful to their learning. The findings enrich the existing empirical evidence in the studies which associate students' learning behaviours with their pluralistic beliefs.

To sum up, this section mainly presents how students' dualistic and pluralistic ways of knowing influenced their engagement with teacher feedback. When the students held a dualist view, they were less effectively able to act upon teacher feedback with ambiguity and uncertainty. They preferred feedback delivering directive instruction for corrective actions. They found it difficult to deal with teacher suggestions that provided them with multiple options wherein they were unable to find the right answer. When they cannot get a right answer from teacher feedback, they would try to seek it from other sources. When receiving a range of opinions in feedback which conflicted with their dualistic thinking, they tended to compare those opinions and trusted the judgements of the majority.

In contrast, when they applied pluralistic ways of knowing, they did not pursue right or wrong answers. Instead, they saw all knowledge as contextual and were able to adopt feedback to suit their particular writing contexts. They were also open to the diversity in teacher feedback, thus appreciating different views from teachers and merging these with their own to reconstruct the feedback for themselves. All the findings provide rich evidence that develops our understanding upon what has been found in the previous research (e.g. Hockings et al., 2007; O' Donovan, 2017) about how students' epistemic beliefs influence their feedback and learning experiences.

Overall, it is noted that the different ways that students' approach to knowledge greatly impacted the ways in which they engaged with feedback. Although these ways of knowing have been presented in individual sections for the purpose of clarification, it does not mean that each participant used one fixed way of knowing throughout the feedback process. Evidence suggests that the participants used different ways of knowing so as to process feedback in different situations. For example, as presented above, Chloe on some occasions evidenced a dualistic way of thinking and trusted the opinions of the majority, while on other occasions appreciating feedback provided from different perspectives. Unfortunately, current data could not provide evidence on whether the students intentionally chose to use different ways of knowing in accordance with different contexts.

6.5 Chapter conclusion

This chapter presents the factors influencing participants' engagement with teacher feedback arising from students' self-essentialist thinking, self-perceptions of performance, social relationship between teachers and students, and their epistemological beliefs. The findings suggest that participants' essentialist ways of identifying themselves as 'foreign students' and 'non-native English speakers' mediated their interpretations of and engagement with the teacher feedback. They also tended to consider the feedback they had received by comparing it with their perceptions of their own performance. In addition, the students' interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers seemed to significantly influence their engagement with feedback. Sometimes, they stayed away from teachers and preferred peer talk when they encountered difficulties in writing and sought suggestions. Evidence shows that the students obtained teacher feedback through peer discussions even when they did not make contact with the teachers directly. Moreover, the students' trust in and adoption of teacher feedback were affected by how they perceived the tutors' position, expertise and attitudes towards students' enquiries and assignments. The students' engagement with feedback was also affected by their different ways of knowing, namely dualistic and pluralistic ways of

knowing. The findings offer support for the idea that teacher feedback is constructed by the learners through various means and different ways of knowing as opposed to the idea that it is linear and/or transmissive. The next chapter will present the conclusion of the thesis, offering a summary of the key findings and discussion of recommendations and future research directions.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

7.0 Overview

This section first provides a summary of the key findings that address the three research questions. It then goes on to discuss the main contributions of the findings in terms of the theoretical development of feedback from a co-constructivist perspective. This takes into account individual differences in the ways that participants engage with teacher feedback and the dynamics that emerge in such engagement with teacher feedback.

7.1 Summary of key findings

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 laid out several findings in relation to how the participants exerted agency when engaging with teacher feedback, which pertains to the three research questions that guide this study:

1. How do students from China perceive teacher feedback in the UK HE context?
2. What factors mediate the process of students transforming teacher feedback into practice?
3. What factors influence student engagement with teacher feedback in the UK HE context?

The first research question sought to explore participants' perceptions of teacher feedback in the pre-sessional and MA courses at the selected UK university. Findings related to this question suggest that the participants' seemingly conflicting affective responses to teacher feedback, that is, reactions to their first encounters with teacher feedback at the UK university as well as views on both affirmation and criticism in teacher feedback, occurred due to differing contexts. The students also exerted agency in their understanding of such teacher feedback which could be reflected in students developing a different understanding of feedback from that intended by their tutors. The students also chose when to agree or to disagree with the feedback they encountered in various contexts, as well as when to learn

from the feedback and relate it to further learning. The findings also revealed individual differences in students' views of teacher feedback, with some viewing it as a source of knowledge, some as a form of telling from teachers, and some as a springboard for communication between teachers and students.

The second research question aimed to examine participants' responses to teacher feedback and to identify factors that mediated the process of transforming feedback into students' practice. The participants' practice in response to teacher feedback was mediated by

- 1) Their ability to critically analyse inputs and manage the denotative and pragmatic meanings of the teachers' suggestions and comments in different contexts. This was also affected by their level of evaluation of exemplars;
- 2) The linguistic knowledge they mastered in terms of the syntax and semantics of English as well as their academic-based knowledge of disciplinary concepts and referencing conventions in academic writing;
- 3) Their proactive drive to seek a better understanding of the feedback and apply it in practice.

The third research question sought to explore the factors that influenced participants' engagement with teacher feedback. Four factors were thus identified. The first was participants' essentialist identification of themselves as 'foreign students' and 'non-native English speakers', which affected their interpretations of, and decision-making in response to teacher feedback. The second was students' perceptions of their own performance, which influenced their cognitive and affective responses to teacher feedback. The third related to students' interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers, which influenced the level of their engagement with feedback provided by particular teachers, and the fourth was that the students constructed teacher feedback in both dualistic and pluralistic ways.

7.2 Theoretical development of feedback from a co-constructivist perspective

One of the main contributions of this study is that it extends the current research about

students' engagement with teacher feedback from a co-constructivist perspective. Table 7.1 and Fig 7.1 depict three aspects that the present study has further developed.

Existing literature	The present study
Feedback is a co-constructive process that generates loops of interaction between learners and different learning situations through which students communicate with tutors and peers, make sense of information acquired from resources, and utilise prior and current learning experiences to forge an understanding of teacher feedback (Askew and Lodge, 2000; Boud and Molloy, 2013).	These loops of interaction shape students' perceptions of teacher feedback
	These interactive exchanges are interwoven, mediating the process by which teacher feedback is transformed into student practice.
	Students' interactions with teacher feedback are affected by several factors.

Table 7. 1 Research contributions

Fig. 7.1 presents a conceptual representation of the dialogic nature of students' engagement with teacher feedback in the context of the current study. When participants engaged with teacher feedback, they interacted with tutors, peers, and new information from resources, such as exemplars, lesson slides, and assignment topics, to form connections of understanding, tying the feedback information to previous and current knowledge. These loops of interaction interwove to influence the students' perceptions and practices in response to teacher feedback. Factors including self-essentialist thinking, self-perceptions of performance, social relationships, and ways of knowing thus all had opportunities to influence the ways that participants engaged with teacher feedback.

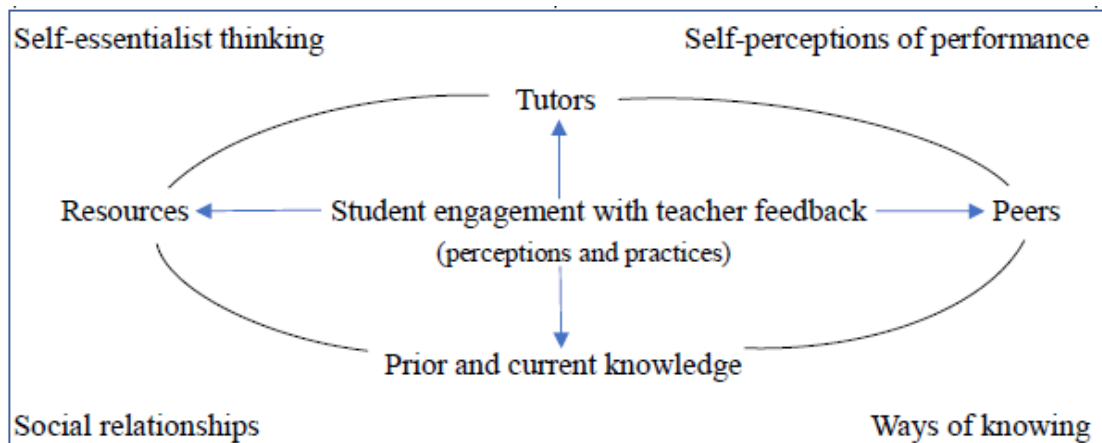


Fig. 7. 1 Conceptual framework of student engagement with teacher feedback

Combining Fig. 7.1 and Table 7.1, a detailed discussion of the three main aspects in which this study develops upon previous research can be generated. Existing literature that views feedback from a co-constructivist perspective recognises the agency role of students, who act in a self-regulatory way to establish ongoing dialogues with other participants involved in the feedback process (Careless, 2016; Ajjawi and Boud, 2017). Students must also reflect on their engagement with these dialogues to shape their learning. Building upon this perspective, this study thus provides fresh insights into Chinese students' engagement with teacher feedback in the context of UK HE.

The present study found that the students' interactions with various learning and feedback contexts shaped their perceptions of teacher feedback. For example, Maggie's perceptions of criticism in teacher feedback varied depending on the feedback that she received (section 4.1.3), while Hebe actively expected further feedback on reference use, as she had received only limited instruction on academic writing in her undergraduate study (section 4.3.1). Such findings indicate that students' perceptions of teacher feedback are formed by their interaction with the feedback provided by different tutors and by their prior knowledge of academic writing. The findings in this thesis, which link students' perceptions of teacher feedback (as seen in Mahfoods, 2017; Rowe, 2011; and Zheng and Yu, 2018) with students' interactions with different learning situations, enrich the current understanding of how students' perceptions of teacher feedback vary in response to different contexts.

The created loops of interaction with teachers, peers, and external sources are interwoven with each other to mediate the process by which teacher feedback is transformed into students' practice. The findings also reveal that students' judgements on teacher feedback are calibrated by all interactions with different situational contexts and feedback from various sources. As shown in Section 5.2.2.1, David experienced a dilemma when responding to the tutor's suggestions to the Unit 1 assignment. David initially disagreed with the tutor's suggestion, as it opposed a point presented in a journal paper; however, her point changed after a thorough review of the lesson slides, and she finally sought a compromise between the presented opinion and the tutor's suggestion. This decision-making was jointly affected by interaction with scholarly literature and the lesson slides. The findings pertaining to the impact of learners' exchanges with various sources of information on their responses to teacher feedback enrich the findings from studies by Mirzaee and Hasrati (2014) and Esterhazy and Damsa (2017), who suggest that students develop their interpretations of teacher feedback by means of ongoing dialogues with both peers and teachers.

The present study identifies several factors influencing participants' interactions with teacher feedback. This includes: The decisions that the students made in terms of adopting the suggestions provided by tutors were influenced by their perceptions of the tutors' positions, expertise, and attitudes towards student enquiries and assignments. Furthermore, when they encountered difficulties in writing and sought suggestions, the students' preferences for peer support were dependent on their social relationships with both peers and teachers. The students' dualistic and pluralistic ways of knowing affected their abilities in terms of their understanding information elicited from multiple dialogues with tutors in different contexts. In an extension of previous research, the factors identified in this study help develop a systematic understanding of how students' interactions with teacher feedback are influenced by the contexts in which they engage, the people with whom they communicate, and the ways they develop knowledge.

7.3 Individual differences among participants

Another contribution of the current study is the clarification of individual differences among the participants with regard to the ways that they engaged with teacher feedback, although the findings, as seen in the previous three chapters, were organised in a thematic manner. Table 7.2, generated from the findings, highlights the major characteristics of the participants in terms of their general view on teacher feedback, preferred ways of receiving feedback provision, and preferred methods of communication in the feedback process.

Variable Participant	General view on teacher feedback	Preferred method of feedback provision	Preferred method of communication
Chloe	Communicative tool	Multiple opinions from different tutors	Frequent communication with teachers
Hebe	Telling/knowledge source	Single standard/ 'right' answer	Limited communication with teachers
David	(no relevant data)	Single standard/ 'right' answer	Limited communication with teachers
Maggie	Telling/knowledge source	Single standard/ 'right' answer	Peer discussion
Xiao	(no relevant data)	Single standard/ 'right' answer	Solving problems individually

Table 7. 2 Features of participants' feedback engagement

All features identified for each participant represent most occasions, but not all. These features therefore cannot act as a fixed label or representation of these students' ways of engagement. Indeed, despite these features being clearly identified, the findings suggest that participants behaved in other ways in response to particular contexts, highlighting the complex and flexible nature of learners' engagement with teacher feedback. For example, even though David preferred to obtain single standard 'right' answer from teacher feedback, the contextual differences in the feedback provided enabled a more flexible response (see Section 6.4.2), including the use of other messages to allow examination and various interpretations of teacher feedback.

In terms of the individual differences, as shown in Table 7.2, there are obvious differences

between Chloe and the other participants. Chloe saw teacher feedback as a communicative tool and preferred to collect different opinions from tutors (see Section 4.3.3), whereas the other participants viewed teacher feedback as a form of telling or a source of knowledge (Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2), leading to their expectation of a single standard ‘right’ answer when seeking teacher feedback or suggestions (Section 6.4.1). There are also individual differences in participants’ preferred methods of communication in the feedback process. When encountering difficulties in writing and seeking suggestions, Chloe communicated more with teachers, which might explain her view of teacher feedback as a communicative tool. In contrast, Hebe and David communicated with teachers only at a restricted level. Unlike Chloe who used teacher feedback to create space for teacher-student negotiation and discussed any different opinions with the teachers, the role of teacher feedback as knowledge sources and telling appears to be more dominant for Hebe and David who, in spite of proactively seeking teachers’ suggestions during the writing process (see Section 5.1.1 and 5.2.2.1), sought only to decode the information contained within the comments and did not further discuss any different ideas with teachers. Maggie, as described in Section 6.3.1, preferred talking with peers to teachers when she had difficulties in writing, while Xiao, except for Q&A sessions, some tutorials, and the final feedback forms arranged by tutors, did not proactively seek any feedback from teachers and peers. She was inclined to solve issues, such as difficulties in writing and in decoding meaning of teacher feedback on her own.

In addition to the three variables presented in the table, the findings reveal different levels of agency in participants as they engaged with teacher feedback. In general, Chloe demonstrated strong agency, while the other participants demonstrated comparatively limited agency. The findings thus suggest that Chloe exerted strong agency in seeking tutors’ suggestions from multiple perspectives (6.4.2), transforming feedback into practice (5.3.2), reflecting on what she had learned from teacher feedback, and generalising her insights and skills to other contexts of writing (4.2.4; 4.3.3; 5.3.2). The other participants only occasionally related teacher feedback to other contexts (see Xiao’s instance in 4.2.4 and

Hebe's in 4.2.3) and had limited reflectivity with regard to what they had learned from the feedback and how they could use the feedback in the future. These variations in agency are also manifested in the participants' expectations of teacher feedback. Unlike other participants, who expected to receive more directive instruction and corrective feedback, Chloe reflected on how to improve her engagement with teacher feedback by proactively seeking teachers' suggestions from different perspectives for developmental purposes (4.3.3). This may be associated with her capacity to analyse information in a pluralistic way and her view of feedback as a communicative tool.

As the present study shows, there is correspondence between the students' general view on teacher feedback and the ways they interacted with teacher feedback and their reflections on the kind of teacher feedback they expected. Although the five participants were not subject to selective or differentiated recruitment (see Section 3.2 and 3.3.2), several individual differences exist among them. This suggests that a case study design could be another good option for further investigation of the differences among the five participants (cases) in order to highlight key features regarding how each of them engages with teacher feedback. A case study design could also help with a closer inspection of the incremental and transformational learning processes that each participant went through when they engaged with teacher feedback over a certain period of time.

The findings further reflect that, when participants were involved in the feedback process, individual differences in the ways they engaged with teacher feedback mediated the extent to which feedback was transformed into learning. This has a stronger influence than the information contained in the feedback itself. Only when the students played a strongly agentive role, proactively seeking a better understanding of feedback information and applying the feedback into their writing practices, could the feedback become effective and beneficial for writing. The individual differences identified in the findings resonate with the works of many researchers, including Sambell (2011), Nicol (2010), Boud and Molloy (2013), and Ajjawi and Boud (2017), who have suggested that students' responses to teacher

feedback are determined more by what the students bring to the encounters than by the nature of the feedback inputs.

Considering the findings holistically, the exertion of different levels of agency in students' engagement with teacher feedback may be attributed to factors such as the students' motivation to transform feedback into long-term learning, the students' capacities of reflection, and their conceptions of teacher feedback and learning overall. In spite of the individual differences identified among the participants, there is one main similarity. All participants demonstrated agency, either strong or weak, when engaging with teacher feedback, as shown by interacting with various sources and contexts to construct an understanding of the feedback.

7.4 Dynamics in student engagement with teacher feedback

7.4.1 Interplay among affective, cognitive, and behavioural engagement

The present study provides rich empirical evidence on the interplay among the three defined components of student engagement with teacher feedback (See Chapter 2 Section 2.2). The findings suggest that students' affective responses to teacher feedback impede their cognitive and behavioural engagement with it. For example, Maggie felt uncomfortable with the criticism that she received and was therefore unwilling to read the comments (Affection influencing cognition) (Section 4.1.3). The mismatch between her self-perception of her performance and the teachers' comments on the quality of her work made Chloe feel frustrated with the feedback (Cognition influencing affection) (Section 6.2). David's and Hebe's perceptions of tutors' attitudes towards their assignments and enquiries further influenced their decision-making process (Appreciation and judgements on the feedback influencing behaviour) (Section 6.3.2). These findings are consistent with Boud and Falchikov (2007) and Zhang and Hyland (2018), who found that students' emotional responses to teacher feedback, their cognitive processing, and their practices are all interrelated. Student engagement with teacher feedback is thus an integrated process; none of the components can come into play without the others being involved.

7.4.2 Engagement with teacher feedback as a developmental process

The longitudinal study provides evidence of the progressive and regressive trajectories of participants' engagement with teacher feedback. In addition to social interaction with people and sources, temporal contextual variables, such as students' previous feedback, their learning experiences at their Chinese local universities, and their engagement with specific feedback at a given point in time can be seen to impact later engagement with teacher feedback. The present study provides empirical evidence on how such regressive and progressive trajectories are operationalised in a naturalistic learning setting.

With regard to the regressive aspects of engagement, the participants' previous learning experiences at their Chinese local universities influenced both positively and negatively their engagement with teacher feedback at the UK university. The lack of academic writing instruction and teacher feedback during their undergraduate study made the students appreciate the feedback they obtained at their UK university, as they believed that they were being offered opportunities to improve their writing (See David's case, Section 4.1.1). However, due to the sparsity of writing instructions received in their home pedagogical settings and unfamiliarity with their host academic institution, some participants, seeing themselves as novices in academic writing, had excessive expectations of teacher feedback (Hebe's expectations that tutors make multiple reviews of her drafts and demands for intensive feedback at the pre-sessional stage; see Section 4.3.1) and perceived teacher feedback as a means of knowledge source to learn about academic conventions (Section 4.3.1). Hebe learned what a thesis statement is from the feedback she obtained in a tutorial, which echoes the view of Ekstam (2015) who states that some Chinese students when entering Western academic communities have very limited knowledge of the usual components of an academic text such as a thesis statement. This finding reflects that students, by using teacher feedback, are able to learn about the host academic community that they are initially less familiar with.

Previous learning experiences also negatively influenced some students' adoption of the

feedback provided by teachers in the UK: as shown in Section 5.2.2.2, David's limited knowledge of referencing caused her to defraud the academic ethics system unintentionally in her pre-sessional essay, and led her to make ineffective responses to the feedback that identified plagiarism in the essay. This finding supports the argument made by Bailey (2013) that some students defraud the academic ethics system because they have not learned how to reference in essays at their home institutions and have weak awareness of plagiarism. This finding reflects that lack of knowledge on academic conventions may not only cause poor quality of essays, but also impede students' uptake of teacher feedback which requires them to follow those conventions. Meanwhile, David's responses to the feedback negatively influenced her later engagement with the MA programme's unit assignment writing and the related understanding of teacher feedback at that stage.

In the current study, progressive aspects of temporal engagement were identified, including how participants' current feedback experiences influenced their reflections on how they could improve their engagement with teacher feedback in the future. For example, as described in Section 6.3.1, after speaking with peers about the tutor's suggestion delivered in the Q&A session that David had neglected, she became aware of the importance of Q&A sessions as a key source of teacher feedback and thus resolved to review the content of Q&A sessions when writing other unit assignments. Similarly, after the positive experience of benefiting from different teachers' suggestions given from multiple perspectives in her Unit 2 assignment, Chloe decided to communicate with different teachers and seek different opinions later in other contexts (see Section 6.4.2). All findings indicate that students' engagement with teacher feedback is a dynamic developmental process, which corroborates the argument of Handley et al. (2011), that engagement with any specific piece of teacher feedback is influenced by cumulative previous feedback and learning experiences, and that students' current experiences with feedback will influence future engagement.

Overall, this study makes a contribution to the field of teacher feedback by providing insights into the ways Chinese learners regulate their understandings of, and responses to, teacher

feedback. It also highlights that student engagement occurs both jointly with others such as teachers or peers in the social environment and by interacting with external sources such as the internet, texts, exemplars, or assessment criteria. This study places such feedback interactions within specific contexts, including physical environments and human relations, to highlight the range of contextual influences on student engagement with teacher feedback. This engagement is also individualised by personal learning needs and student responses to situational demands. It is through this interaction with varying contexts during the feedback process that students become able to think, reflect, and act to achieve their personal learning transformation. The investigation of students' agency as exerted in the feedback process is thus of great value in terms of revealing individual differences in the ways students engage with feedback. Drawing on a co-constructivist perspective, the process involved in student engagement with teacher feedback shows that the feedback process consists of 'loops of dialogue and information' strung between teachers and students wherein 'feedback and reflection become entwined, enabling the learner to review their learning in its context and related to previous experiences and understandings' (Askew and Lodge, 2000, p. 13).

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

8.0 Overview

This chapter discusses, from both theoretical and practical perspectives, the implications of the research for researchers in the field, teachers, and students. It ends with an acknowledgement of the limitations of this study and some recommendations for further research.

8.1 Implications

Researchers

This study adds to our knowledge of students' engagement with teacher feedback from a student perspective. It is of value to those involved in studying the co-constructivist view of feedback, as it provides illustrative examples of the ways in which students construct knowledge by communicating with others throughout the feedback process. It enriches our understanding of the complex realities of student agency in the feedback process and shows inconsistencies between what is presented in feedback and what students perceive. The rich and descriptive data generated inform researchers that students' engagement with teacher feedback is multidirectional, as students freely and independently interact with various sources based on personal needs and situational demands; they may also gain access to teacher feedback via peer discussion rather than obtaining it directly from teachers.

This study also attempts to demonstrate some changes in terms of participants' engagement with teacher feedback, from the initial pleasure at receiving 'detailed' and 'careful' feedback (4.1.1), subject to unquestioningly acceptance (6.1.1) to more reflective approaches to what students wish to obtain from teacher feedback (4.2.2; 4.3.1; 4.3.2) and articulation of own voice to challenge teachers' opinions as perceived in the feedback (6.1.2; 5.2.2.1). Future researchers could build on this to obtain a more nuanced understanding of the developmental

and incremental learning process that students go through as they engage with teacher feedback, perhaps by conducting a further longitudinal study.

Teachers

The rich descriptive and interpretive data generated by this study may help raise teachers' awareness of why the feedback they produce may be perceived by students as less effective and useful than intended by teachers, and how it may be filtered through students' agency. It may also increase teachers' awareness of the impacts of the language they use in giving feedback on students' affective reactions to, and interpretation of, such feedback. As the data show, the participants forged their understanding of teacher feedback through social interaction with others, which may encourage teachers to create more opportunities to promote teacher-student and student-student communication. This might take the form of establishing an online discussion forum, allowing both teachers and students to engage in discussion about assignments. By means of such discussion, students are more likely to come to know what teachers expect and to obtain their peers' opinions. This study also promotes teachers' reflections on their feedback practices. As described in Section 4.2.2, the participants reported that they preferred feedback that contains examples and valued in-depth feedback information presented in a descriptive and explanatory format that highlights the weaknesses and strengths of an assignment. Teachers are thus advised not only to provide evaluations of the quality of a student's work but also to contextualise such evaluations with reference to specific examples in addition to offering explanations of why the points raised are issues students should be concerned about.

Students

Given the initiative the participants showed in terms of interacting with different feedback sources to achieve a better understanding of teacher feedback, students are encouraged to reflect on the practices of Maggie and Chloe in Section 5.3. These demonstrate how to seek to understand teacher feedback by proactively communicating with teachers, peers, and literature sources, as well as how to integrate suggestions obtained from various sources into

the student's own writing context. As described in the instance of Chloe, in Section 4.2.4, the feedback received from Tutor B initially did not make sense to her; however, by asking another tutor for an explanation of the feedback, she obtained a full understanding of the initial feedback by Tutor B and was then able to generalise the feedback in other contexts. This instance shows that, although feedback provided by teachers might be initially confusing, students can enhance its usefulness for future work by proactively seeking clarifications and explanations until they achieve a full understanding in terms of what they need to do and why they should do it.

This study can also increase students' awareness that, in addition to seeking feedback from teachers, peer discussion could be another way to obtain teacher feedback. This could also remind students of teachers' suggestions which they might otherwise neglect. Moreover, the instance in Section 4.2.3, where Hebe was able to learn about academic writing conventions from teacher feedback, offers insights for those who are involved in an academic community with which they are less than familiar. When engaging with teacher feedback, students should be encouraged to learn from the feedback to understand what teachers expect and require them to achieve in a particular subject; in this way, they can use teacher feedback as a kind of introduction to a 'foreign' academic community.

8.2 Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that must be acknowledged. The first limitation relates to the reliability of the data. As can be seen by the data presented in Section 4.2.2, there are often inconsistencies between what was presented in the written feedback produced by teachers and what was reported by students. Thus, it must be presumed that the data collected from the retrospective interviews in which the participants reported the (oral) suggestions they obtained from teachers in tutorials and from peers, as well as the information they obtained from scholarly literature, might similarly have been filtered through the students' interpretations, and their accounts of the feedback they engaged with

might not match the literal feedback produced by the teachers. The questions that they asked the teachers in particular contexts might also be different from those reported in interviews; the students are, however, unlikely to mean to do this and are most likely unaware of the differences. The interview data collected in relation to the feedback that participants obtained might, however, be based mainly on interpretations.

To increase data validity, digital recording of teacher-student tutorials and peer discussions would have been useful. Discussion details in the recordings, including participants' questions and teachers' responses to such questions, as well as peer suggestions given in certain circumstances could then be utilised as stimuli in stimulated recall sessions to enable the participants to present their interpretations of what happened when they engaged with the feedback.

Another limitation pertains to the data analysis. The ways in which the data were codified, and categories derived changed constantly as the author developed a better understanding of the concept of feedback. The categories and themes presented in the three findings chapters are thus the result of meaning construction between the researcher, the data, and the particular contexts in which the analysis was made. The categorisation of the data presented is thus clearly not the only way of constructing meaning from the data, and it is very likely that other researchers would develop different sets of categories, or that meaning could be constructed in a different way in other circumstances.

The third limitation refers to the scope of the research setting. This study was an exploratory study conducted within an MA programme at a single institution, featuring a small number of students. The results cannot therefore be generalised to other groups of students even within UK higher education; however, as stated in 3.5, the detailed contextual information about the research site should allow readers to determine whether the findings are in any way transferable to their own settings. The inclusion of additional participants such as university students from other programmes or institutions in the UK might have enriched the perspectives on the phenomenon under research.

8.3 Future research

With regard to future research, this study raises a number of questions that still require attention and are thus worthy of further exploration.

The findings suggest a discrepancy between participants' self-evaluations of the quality of their work and the judgements shown in teacher feedback. Further research focusing on students' self-evaluations or self-assessment of performance might help explore the factors that prevent students from evaluating their performance in the same way as their tutors.

This study also investigated students' agency in terms of their engagement with teacher feedback from a co-constructivist perspective yet did not include teacher agency. Therefore, it may be fruitful to study what teachers consider when they give students feedback and how they react to students' perceptions of the feedback that they produce. The students' perspective and the teachers' perspective could then be triangulated to develop a more holistic understanding of the complex, dynamic, and multidirectional nature of the feedback process.

Further research could also be considered to use quantitative and qualitative combined design to examine student engagement with feedback in a broader research setting, for example, through including participants from multiple programmes or institutions, so as to enrich the perspectives on student engagement under research.

8.4 Final remarks

In this thesis, feedback is conceptualised from a co-constructive perspective. As feedback is part of education, feedback-related paradigms need to be connected to the big question of what 'education' is in the first place. Although in the fields of feedback and general education, co-constructivist and social-constructivist interpretations of education have been

discussed from a theoretical perspective, transmissive ideas of education are still prevalent within pedagogical practice. Teachers are proficient at dictating what students need to produce, when they need to produce it, how they need to produce it, and telling them what education 'means'. The exertion of learner agency and self-regulation have not received enough attention from both teacher and student. Students may feel disoriented and frustrated with the learning resources they gain from their educational institutions, without reflecting on how they could make use of what they have, to achieve learning goals. Teachers may overlook what education means to students, what kind of persons students wish to become, what they can do and what they expect from teachers. It is thus not surprising that there would be mismatched understandings of feedback between teachers and students when they do not share the same concept of education. In light of this, a shift of what education 'means' to both teacher and student in the pedagogical practice is needed before it is possible to embrace the changing feedback paradigms.

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Appendix 1 Information sheet

Research information sheet

The PhD researcher (Fangfei Li) at the University of Bath's Department of Education is investigating Chinese students' engagement with teacher feedback in the UK.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study seeks to investigate and understand how Chinese students engage with teacher feedback in the UK university context, specifically exploring how students perceive of, and respond to teacher feedback.

What does it involve?

- Face-to-face interviews will be conducted to discuss how you make sense of teacher feedback/suggestions you obtained in the Pre-sessional General 5 Programme and the MA TESOL programme, how you respond to teacher feedback in your assignments/essays and why you respond to it in a certain way. Interviews will take 30 – 40 mins and will be audio-recorded. You are allowed to speak Chinese or English whenever you want during an interview.
- You are invited to show me (if you wish) your assignment work in both the PSG 5 programme and the MA TESOL programme as well as teacher feedback/suggestions on/to that work. Part of the assignment work and feedback you provide will be presented in the thesis, upon receipt of your agreement.
- The participation will cover the PSG 5 programme and the first semester of the MA TESOL programme (i.e. from August, 2016 to February, 2017)

How to protect your private information?

Any information you disclose to the researcher will be processed to be used **anonymously** for Fangfei Li's PhD research. Your personal information will be confidential, and will under no circumstance be shared with any third parties without your explicit consent. I will solely use data for the purposes of academic research.

What are the possible benefits of your participation?

- You will be able to reflect on the process in which you are engaging with teacher feedback, which can provide useful insight into your academic writing practice.
- Through doing interviews with a PhD researcher, you can have a preliminary understanding of how to do interviews in an academic research, which is beneficial for your MA dissertation.
- You will contribute to important social science research

Still interested?

Contact Fangfei Li for more details.

Mobile: 07928339050

Email: fl416@bath.ac.uk

Appendix 2 Sample of consent form

CONSENT FORM

I freely and voluntarily consent to be a participant in the research project on the topic of 'Chinese Students' Perceptions of, and Responses to Teacher Written Feedback in the UK Higher Education' to be conducted by Fangfei Li as part of her PhD thesis at the Department of Education, University of Bath. I have been informed that there will be interviews, text analysis and stimulated recall to be used in the data collection. I have been explained the nature of these data collection instruments to my satisfaction. I understand that my participation will take between 6 and 7 months. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about students' engagement with teacher feedback in the UK higher education.

I have been told that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I also understand that I may withdraw from participating in this research for any or no reason and at any time without penalty. In addition, I am free to decline to respond to any particular question(s) or to complete any particular task(s). Should I withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, my data will be returned to me or destroyed. I can also ask the researcher to delete or not make use of some of the information I provide.

I will be ensured anonymity and confidentiality. I have been told that I can have a pseudonym to minimize my identifiability. I will not be identified or identifiable in any report subsequently produced by the researcher. With regards to confidentiality, I have been guaranteed that the information I provided will merely be used for the purposes of academic research and that my personal information I disclose to the researcher will never be shared with any third parties without my consent. I understand that my information will be held and processed to be used anonymously for internal publication for Ms. Fangfei Li's PhD thesis and submitted for assessment with a view to being published in academic journals and conferences.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the study and I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction. I have been told that if I have any questions about this project, I should feel free to contact Ms. Li at her email address: fl416@bath.ac.uk. If I have any comments or concerns about the ethics or procedures involved in this study, I can contact Ms. Li's supervisor, Dr. Harry Kuchah, at his e-mail address: H.K.Kuchah@bath.ac.uk. I have read and understand the above and consent to participate in this study. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form.


Participant's Signature

Aug 19th 2016
Date

Fangfei Li
Researcher's Signature

19/08/2016
Date

Appendix 3 Interview content

Table of Interview Content

Timeline/event	Data collection instruments	Interview topics	Data collection purposes	Research question(s) involved
Phase one (Pre-sessional Programme)				
First week of pre-sessional programme (August 2016)	Background interview	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Did you receive any teacher feedback when you studied at your Chinese university? 2. Did the tutor ask you to write anything in this programme and did s/he check what you wrote and give comments? 3. What kind of teacher support and feedback do you expect in your academic writing? 	To explore students' expectations and perceptions of teacher feedback in their academic writing	1, 2
After they got tutor feedback on their first piece of writing in the pre-sessional programme (i.e. outline of the final project) (September 2016)	Stimulated recall interview (Material artefacts: feedback on the outline of the project)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me what you think of the teacher feedback you are given; Did you think the feedback you received was useful and in what way did you think it was useful? 2. Please explain to me what you plan to do with these comments. 3. Think of any kinds of comments in this draft that you wish you could get but you didn't get. 	To explore interviewees' perceptions of the feedback they received on a project outline and what they plan to do to respond to the feedback	1, 2
After submitting their final project	Stimulated recall interview	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me about your experience when you were revising the first draft based on the feedback you are given. 	To see how participants	2

(September 2016)	(Material artefacts: feedback on the full draft of the project)	<p>2. I notice you made a change in here. How did you understand this comment when you were trying to revise this part? (<i>Probing: why did you change in this way?</i>)</p> <p>3. I also see this comment. But you didn't deal with it. Why didn't you respond to it? (<i>Probing: what do you think this comment was asking you to do?</i>)</p> <p>4. When you look at your first draft and the final project, do you feel more satisfied with your revisions now? If yes, why? If not, what problems do you think still exist in your final work?</p>	understood and responded to the feedback and probe the rationale behind their responses	
Phase two (MA degree Programme)				
The first Q&A sessions for unit assignments (November 2016)	Non-participant observation (Field notes)	N/A	To obtain information about what kind of input participants were exposed to and what kind of teacher feedback was generated in the Q&A sessions. The information would be used to inform my subsequent interview questions	N/A
The second Q&A sessions of unit assignments (November 2016)	Non-participant observation (Field notes)	N/A	To obtain information about what kind of input participants were exposed to and what	N/A

			teachers' suggestions delivered in the Q&A sessions	
After the second Q&A sessions (December 2016)	Retrospective interview	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me what you have done with your assignments since the first Q and A sessions. <i>(probing: What did you take from the last Q&A sessions? What difficulties or confusions with your assignments have you encountered during this period? How did you solve them? I will be open to any solutions they have thought of to deal with their difficulties. For example, interaction with tutors in tutorials, emails or other forms of feedback. I would probe details from their narratives about what they asked; what tutors suggested; how they have been developing ideas through taking tutors' suggestions into account.)</i> 2. In our last interview, you said you still had no idea about how to deal with... in this assignment/ you were still confused about... (unanswered questions) after the first Q&A sessions. So have you managed to address them later? In what way? 3. In the second Q&A sessions you just attended, did you ask any questions? Did you find answers to your questions? How do you understand the answer? How would you take it on board in your assignment? 4. Apart from your questions, what else have you taken away from 	<p>(1) Question 1 & 2: To follow up with my participants about what they have done with their assignments since the first Q&A sessions, what teacher suggestions they have taken on board and how their ideas developed from the Q &A 1 to Q&A 2</p> <p>(2) Question 3, 4 & 5: To see how they make sense of the second Q&A</p>	1, 2, 3

		<p>the Q&A sessions? (<i>probing into how s/he reflects on issues raised and discussed in the sessions</i>)</p> <p>5. Do you still have any questions unanswered after those sessions? (<i>If yes, what are they and what do you plan to do with these questions? Why do you think these questions are important?</i>)</p>	<p>sessions and what changes with their assignments they will make after those sessions</p>	
<p>After finishing their first piece of draft (December 2016)</p>	<p>Retrospective interview</p>	<p>1. Now you have finished the first draft of this assignment. Can you tell me what tutors' suggestions to this draft you have got since our last interview and what you have done with them? (<i>probing: how did you make sense of those tutors' suggestions and take them on board in the process of drafting this essay?</i>)</p> <p>2. Are you satisfied with the draft you have written? (If yes, why? If not, what problems do you think exist? What are you going to do with them?)</p> <p>3. Do you think the teachers' suggestions you obtained for this draft can make any sense in your subsequent writing?</p>	<p>To know how participants have perceived of, and responded to tutors' suggestions to their first piece of drafts so far; to explore if and how students' engagement with those suggestions to the first drafts influences their reflection on their subsequent assignment writing</p>	<p>1, 2</p>
<p>After they submit their final assignments (January 2017)</p>	<p>Stimulated recall interviews (Material artefacts: final assignments; tutorial notes and/or</p>	<p>1. What have you done with your assignments since our last interview? (<i>to follow up with their experiences of achieving final assignments with the help of teachers' suggestions, if any, and how they dealt with challenges they encountered</i>)</p> <p>2. Now we look back through what you have done with your</p>	<p>To explore how participants eventually responded to tutors'</p>	<p>1, 2, 3</p>

	email correspondences with tutors; the field notes I took in previous interviews about their narratives of various forms of tutors' suggestions)	assignments in the last two months. Here is all of the teachers' suggestions you obtained during your writing process. Can you show me what kind of teacher suggestions you actually took on board in your final assignments and what suggestions you did not respond; Why did you respond to it in this way/why you didn't take those suggestions into account.	suggestions in final assignments and what influenced their final decisions to respond to those suggestions	
After they obtained feedback forms on assignments (February 2017)	Retrospective interview (material artefacts: feedback forms on four unit assignments)	1. Can you explain to me how you make sense of the feedback forms you are given and what you can take away from them?	To see how participants reflected on the final formative feedback on their written work, factors influenced their engagement with teacher feedback and whether participants could take anything away from the feedback that could help their future learning	1, 3

Appendix 4 Sample of interview transcript

Chloe: Interview 2 in Phase 1 (Stimulated recall interview)

Chinese version:

我：上次你说到中国老师在你作文后面给了你一些不正式的反馈，里面包含什么呀？

Chloe: 她不会提细节，她会指出你结构的比重的问题，比如你介绍部分的比重大了，应该着重放在 analysis 上面，还有注意你的 grammar, focus on your grammar 还有会说你的 conclusion is too general.

我：好的，那我们现在来看一个这个 **outline**.关于这个 **outline** 的反馈，他一共就给你两个评语， 你是如何理解它们的呢？

Chloe: 她说第一个， add an opening sentence.这个是肯定会加的啊。所以我就没有写到 outline 里。下一个就是让我分段， maybe two paragraphs,但是我当时已经写上 ABC 部分了，说明我会分段的啊。因为我之前写 pre essay 的时候，就第二段特别长，她就说我里面有太多的点了，你要分开，然后这次我也有下意识把点分得清楚一点，就有刻意的去避免这个问题再出现。她可能觉得在这篇我如果还是不小心这么写了就给我提醒一下。然后还说标题改一下，可以有主标题和副标题，主标题 general 一点。

我：她 tutorial 上说的什么？

Chloe: 她说我已经写的挺好的了, 没有什么要改的了。她说 you are on the right track. 给我唯一的建议就是 read more, 因为她没有给我文章提出太大的要求, 说结构和方向没有什么大问题。所以我也不知道该问她什么东西。

我: 那她给你这么少的评语, 你有什么感觉?

Chloe: 我现在很 confident, 基本按照这个在写, 我觉得老师既然给我这样一个肯定, 应该就说明我这样写应该是 ok 的。我就按照这个方向应该是 ok 的, 要是有小结构的变化啊, 我就再问她。

我: 那你觉得哪里还需要调整?

Chloe: 我写的时候觉得 outline 还是有可以调换的地方。就是你的 main features 已经放在这里了, 然后你再 point out differences and similarities 的时候就会特别重复, 所以这部分我就修改了, 就先有一个 general introduction, 然后把特点挑出来, 然后在点下面做比较, 我觉得这样不会重复太多的东西。然后我就先修改一下这里, 然后在明后天的 tutorial 里跟她说一下这个, 她如果觉得 OK 的话, 我就这样改。

我: 她现在给你的这两个 comments 有什么用处?

Chloe: 说实话我觉得没什么用。除了这个 title 的问题指出来了我觉得还挺好的。因为开始的时候我没意识到 title 也应该有一个层次感, 这个挺好的。其它的我写的时候本身自己也会意识到这些问题, 所以这 comment 没有特别大用处。

我：有没有什么反馈是你想要的，但是目前没有给你的？

Chloe: 我现在还没有写到那个程度，还没发现，她让我 read more,也好像什么问题都可以通过 read more 来解决一样，也不是特别有用。

我：那你希望老师给你提什么样的 **comment** 有用？

Chloe: 我觉得单拿这个 outline 的话，她也给我提不出什么特别有用的 comments，还是有一份有内容的东西给她看比较好。因为我觉得这个 outline 表达不出来里面的逻辑和内容，以及你的比重和 balance，所以 outline 的 comment 就会很受限，我觉得先写个大概的东西给她看，她才能提出来一点东西。

Translated version:

I: So in our last interview, you said your Chinese teacher gave you informal feedback at the end of a script. What was included in the feedback?

Chloe: She did not mention any detail. She only commented on something wrong with the proportion of your structure. For example, “your introduction part is too long and you should focus on analysis”. Also, “pay attention to your grammar and your conclusion is too general”.

I: OK. Now we move to the feedback on the outline you just received. The tutor gave you two comments in the outline. How do you understand them?

Chloe: She said, the first one, “add an opening sentence”. Of course, I am certainly going to add it (in my full draft). So I did not write it in the outline. The next one is asking me to separate the paragraph. “Maybe two paragraphs”. But I have written Part A, B and C (in the outline), which means I will separate this part into paragraphs (in the full draft). Since last time I wrote the pre-arrival essay and the second paragraph was very long. She (the tutor) said “there were too many ideas in the paragraph and you should separate them. So this time I subconsciously separated the points clearer (in the outline) and tried to avoid this problem emerging again. She (the tutor) might think that I would still write in that way. So she gave me a reminder. Then, she also asked me to correct the title. There could be a title and a sub-title, and the title should be more general.

I: What suggestions did the tutor give to you in the tutorial?

Chloe: She said I have written the outline very well and there is nothing to correct. She said “you are on the right track”. The only suggestion she gave me is “read more”. As she did not make major requests to my article and said that there is no big issue with my structure and direction, I didn't know what I can ask in the tutorial.

I: So she gave you just a few comments. How do you feel about it?

I'm very confident. I wrote the first draft based on the outline. Now that the tutor gave me a confirmation, that could mean that it is OK if I write it in this way. If there is any small adjustment with my structure, I will ask her.

I: OK. Then did you find anything that need adjust?

Chloe: I find that some places in the outline can be adjusted. If I list main features of those two assessment systems, then pointing out differences and similarities between the two would be repetitive. So I will adjust this part. I will have a general introduction first and then pick features and make a comparison under each feature. I think this will avoid replicating too much. So I will correct here first and then discuss this with her (the tutor) in the next tutorial tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. If she thinks it is OK, I will correct it in this way.

I: So in addition to the correction you want to make, how do you think those comments in the outline can be used?

Chloe: Honestly, I think they are not useful except for the suggestion about the title which is good, because I initially did not realise that a title should also be well-bedded. The rest of the comments... when I write the full draft, I can also realise these issues. So the comments don't have much use.

I: Then what kind of comments you wish to get but did not get in this outline?

Chloe: I haven't written it in full so I haven't found any comment that I wish. She asks me to read more. It seems everything can be solved by reading more. This is not very useful.

I: Then what kind of comments you think are useful?

Chloe: I think she is not able to give me very useful comments just based on the outline. It may be better if I give her something with content, because I think this outline can't express the logic and content inside... and also the proportion and balance. So comments on the outline would be very limited. I think after I write the first draft and give it to her, she can point out something.

Appendix 5 Sample of data coding

Screenshots of two transcript extracts with coding:

1. Hebe's first interview of the pre-sessional phase

- 你刚刚收到这封反馈的时候，是什么感觉⁴

哇(emotional response -- pleasant surprise; an exclamatory response to the first piece of feedback), 我就觉得老师给修改的好详细, 她把你写的每一句话都会很认真的评价(reasons of the emotional response - impressed by the feedback) because: 1. teacher feedback is detailed and produced carefully)。她评论里面会告诉你怎么改 (2. feedback giving suggestions for correction), 她会先点出你的问题, 你写的不合适的地方(3. feedback identifying problems in writing), 然后告诉你该怎么去调整一下。还有的地方就是她觉得我没有阐述明白, 她会给出一个问题 (4. teacher's questions inviting reflection on the part of student and teacher-student dialogue)。他在文章左边会给出一下评论, 最后还会再来一个总体的评价。觉得老师还蛮好的(perceptions of the teacher as a person)。⁴

⁴

FL **Fangfei Li**
Category: emotional perception⁴

FL **Fangfei Li**
Category: reasons for the emotions⁴

FL **Fangfei Li**
Category: influence of the emotional perceptions – (perceptions of the feedback influenced perceptions of the teacher as a person)⁴
How can this be interpreted?? Any other examples?

2. Chloe's last interview of the MA phase

有的地方我还是有点疑惑, 有一个 comment 是, you tended to provide a brief introduction to the most important construct and spent more time on how to reflect on your students. 我不清楚她是想表达什么 (cognitive perception - incomprehension of feedback), 她是想表达我这种方式很好呢, 还是我应该说的更深入一点? (vague comments influence understanding) 我想再问她一下 (communicative dimension - would address the confusion by asking teachers)。如果我问清楚, 就肯定对后面的写作有帮助 (awareness of the benefits of communicating with teachers), 就比如说我在某些地方是不是应该有个 deeper consideration 更好。⁴

FL **Fangfei Li**
Category: cognitive dimension⁴

FL **Fangfei Li**
Category:⁴

FL **Fangfei Li**
Compared with Xiao, different ways of dealing with confusing feedback. ⁴

Translated version of the transcript extracts with coding:

1. Hebe's first interview of the pre-sessional phase

I: How did you feel when you received this feedback?

Hebe: Wow! (emotional response -- pleasant surprise; an exclamatory response to the first piece of feedback) I found that the teacher gave detailed comments. The teacher provided very careful evaluation of every sentence we wrote. (reasons of the emotional response - impressed by the feedback because: 1. teacher feedback is detailed and produced carefully) She told us how to revise our work. (2. feedback giving suggestions for correction) She pointed out our problems and told us how to adjust. (3. feedback identifying problems in writing) In some other places where she thought were unclear, she asked a question. (4. teacher's questions inviting reflection on the part of student and teacher-student dialogue) She gave some comments on the left side of my text and a summarised commentary at the end. I think the teacher is nice. (perceptions of the teacher as a person)

2. Chloe's last interview of the MA phase

I am still confused about some specific comments. Here is a comment 'you tended to provide a brief introduction to the most important construct and spent more time on how to reflect on your students'. I don't know what the tutor wanted to express (cognitive perception - incomprehension of feedback) . Was the tutor saying that what I wrote is good or do I need to write it deeper? (vague comments influence understanding) I need to ask the tutor. (communicative dimension - would address the confusion by asking teachers) If I get a clear answer, it must be helpful for future writing, (awareness of the benefits of communicating with teachers) say, whether I need to have some deeper consideration in some aspects of an essay.

Appendix 6 Example of data categorisation

Students' perceptions of teacher feedback

Raw data (examples)	Coding (examples)	Category	Theme
Wow! I found that the teacher gave detailed comments. [...] The teacher is sensitive to the implication of a single word that I used, which makes me scared. (Hebe, PS, BI)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Surprised to the “detailed” and “careful” comments; 2. Feelings of fear at the teacher’s so close a scrutiny of every word the student had written 	1. Students’ mixed emotions to the first piece of written feedback	Affective dimension
I just feel that the teacher was able to point out your strengths, making you feel that, “well, there is something good in what I wrote.” (Maggie, PS, BI) [...] As I wrote the outline in a rush... She gave so many ticks. Is the structure really OK? Has she read it carefully? (Maggie, PS, SR)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pleased to see tutors recognising and pointing out strengths 2. Doubted the credibility of the affirmation in feedback 	2. Students’ conflicting emotions towards affirmation in feedback	

<p>I hoped that I could have got more feedback on the content. [...] As far as it goes, I didn't get something substantial from this piece of feedback. (Maggie, PS, SR)</p> <p>The feedback said it is not good here and there. I don't want to read it and think about it. It makes me uncomfortable you know. (Maggie, MA, RI)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Desire for critical feedback 2. Resistance to critical feedback 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Students' conflicting emotions towards criticism in feedback 	
<p>[...] She did not even tell me how to take it further, how much further and which direction I should think from. I can't quite understand this. (Xiao, PS, SR)</p> <p>[...] Does she want me to give definitions? I can't understand what she wanted me to do. I don't know what I should discuss [...] (Maggie, PS, SR)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Could not clearly understand the feedback provided 2. Confused about this comment and did not know the teacher's intention in making it 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Incomprehension of feedback information 	Cognitive dimension
<p>At least, she needs to explain why she thought this was not discussed sufficiently. Like another tutor who picked examples from my work, she should also give me one [example]. (Maggie, MA, RI)</p> <p>I can make sense of what he [the tutor] said [...]. He gave detailed feedback pointing out my strengths and some logical problems. He also said if your argumentation is to be more powerful, I advise you to do [...]. The feedback convinced me. (Chloe, MA, RI)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wanted contextualisation of the comments with links to their work 2. Valued in-depth feedback information which offered explanations of why the points the tutors had raised were issues to be concerned about 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Need for contextualised feedback 	

<p>[...] I didn't know what a thesis statement is. [...] Then, in the tutorial, I asked the tutor [...]. The tutor explained that it refers to the purposes of an article. So, I know how to produce a thesis statement later. (Hebe, PS, SR)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learned about the concept of "thesis statement" from the oral feedback she had received 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Learning from feedback about academic writing conventions 	
<p>The feedback reminds me of something like how I can improve the questionnaire design [...]. These can be used in my subsequent dissertation writing. I learned how to choose my data collection methods. (Xiao, MA, RI)</p> <p>In the first Q&A session, I asked some general questions. [...] The response I got was that [...]. These were the responses from the tutor, which influenced my later writing. (Chloe, MA, RI)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tended to apply what she had learnt from the feedback to her subsequent research project 2. Generalised the teacher's suggestions into the writing of subsequent assignments 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Associating feedback with future learning 	
<p>I am not good at this [searching sources] as I seldom did such work in China. So, I hoped the teacher could give me some support on this. (Maggie, PS, BI)</p> <p>[...] I also don't understand the formats of referencing. So, I hope that the teacher could tell me how to reference correctly. (Hebe, PS, BI)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. See teacher feedback as a source of knowledge that can support them to get familiar with the host educational context 2. Expected the teacher to guide her as to where to look for library sources 3. Hoped to obtain feedback from the teacher on referencing conventions 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Perceiving teacher feedback as a knowledge source 	<p>Communicative dimension</p>

Compared with comments in the form of questions, I prefer comments presented in a way like “you need to ...” and I think this kind of comments is clearer for us to understand what to do. (Hebe, PS, SR)	1. Expected the feedback to directly tell them what to correct rather than give interrogatives	2. Perceiving feedback as telling	
I hope that there could be space for negotiation when the teacher produces feedback. [...] I hope that I can discuss with the teacher if I don't agree with her opinions in feedback. (Chloe, PS, BI) I am still confused about some specific comments. I need to ask the tutor. If I get a clear answer, it must be helpful for future writing [...]. (Chloe, MA, RI)	1. Tended to engage in discussion with the teacher if they had different opinions 2. Believed that discussing with teachers could obtain a better understanding of feedback 3. View: feedback needs to provide space for negotiation	3. Perceiving feedback as a springboard for teacher-student communication	

Mediators involved in the process of feedback being transformed into students' practice

Raw data (examples)	Coding (examples)	Category	Theme
The comment says that I just described external factors in a few sentences. It means that now that I mentioned external factors, I should have expanded them and presented my idea clearer. [...] (Hebe, MA, RI) And here it said I need a thorough description of the	1. Focused on particular words in Tutor C's suggestion and was less able to understand what the tutor intended to mean holistically	1. Understanding of pragmatic meaning of teacher feedback	Ability to critically analyse inputs in contexts

<p>theory. However, I remember in the previous Q&A session, the tutor asked us not to write what those theories are. (Maggie, MA, RI)</p>	<p>2. Perceived the feedback as “dissonant” and “opposite”</p>		
<p>[...] the teacher mentioned this issue in the Q&A, that is, introduction should not be complicated, and it should be brief. However, when I wrote the introduction, I read an exemplar. [...] she wrote a lot in the introduction part. But she got a “distinction”. So, I also combined introduction with literature review in my assignment. (Hebe, MA, RI)</p>	<p>1. An exemplar that she read influenced her adoption of the suggestion she obtained from a tutor 2. Mimicked the introduction of the exemplar without recognising its weaknesses and identifying the merit of the sample</p>	<p>2. Evaluation of exemplars</p>	
<p>Here she might think that the circumstances are not clear, that is, which circumstances should be? (Xiao, PS, SR) This sentence [the sentence underlined] is also proposed by Li Juan. So, I didn’t add [a reference]. I mean all the above is what the author said. (Hebe, PS, SR)</p>	<p>1. Limited knowledge about the syntax and semantics of English led to misunderstanding of feedback information 2. Failed to identify semantic problems existed in own work</p>	<p>1. Linguistic knowledge</p>	<p>Knowledge mastered</p>

<p>[...] I just changed this verb phrase and did not change the noun phrases before and after that because I was thinking that the sentence meaning would change if I rephrased the nouns. The teacher said it is unclear but I don't know how to make it clearer. So, I just leave it there. (David, PS, SR)</p> <p>We might cite someone's article at the beginning of a paragraph. Then, we demonstrated this person's view and referred to it later in this paragraph. Those subsequent sentences were not added references because we think that those sentences are from this person and there is no need to cite this person for many times. [...] The way we responded to such comments is to add references to each sentence. (David, PS, SR)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A limited and superficial understanding of paraphrasing 2. A limited and superficial understanding of the concepts she read about 3. Knowledge on referencing conventions 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Academic-based knowledge 	
<p>In this process, I constantly analysed the two topics. I also asked another tutor. [...] At the same time, with reading more and more papers during the writing process, I achieved a deeper understanding of some concepts. (Chloe, MA, RI)</p> <p>I don't know how to analyse. If I was asked to revise this part, I would still write it in a descriptive way. [...] I might analyse the tutor feedback in a wrong way, in which case I would be wrong again even if I write it in another way in the next writing. (Maggie, MA, RI)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Obtained a clearer understanding of teacher feedback by proactively seeking suggestions from other tutors, reading literature and critically analysing the topics 2. Knew how to act upon the teacher feedback through discussing with peers, associating peers' suggestions with own specific context and practising 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use of initiative in developing understanding of feedback 	<p>Proactivity</p>

	3. Not taking measures to obtain a good understanding of TF prevented her from meeting teachers' demands in the current and future writing.		
<p>Last time, I wrote the pre-arrival essay. She [the tutor] said “there are too many ideas in this paragraph and you should separate them.” So, this time I purposefully separated the points more clearly and tried to avoid this problem emerging again. (Chloe, PS, SR)</p> <p>What the tutor advised made a lot of sense to me. So, I copied the assignment topic on the top of my text and deleted my title. Then I found this way is useful indeed. [...] This strategy helped me focus on my topic (David, MA, RI)</p> <p>The tutor showed us a table as an example and told us how to take notes by making tables. So, at the time when I read papers, I made a detailed table. Subsequently, when I wrote this assignment, this note was indeed useful. (Chloe, MA, RI)</p>	<p>1. Keep those errors in mind and tried to avoid them recurring in the subsequent writing</p> <p>2. Developed their metacognitive skills (e.g. analysing topics, notetaking and focusing on topics while writing) by using teacher feedback</p>	2. Use of initiative in transforming teacher feedback into concrete writing practices	

Factors influencing students' engagement with teacher feedback

Raw data (examples)	Coding (examples)	Category	Theme
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<p>Because I am an overseas student here. I am engaging in a foreign education system. I think the disagreement with the teacher suggestion might be due to a kind of cultural difference. [...] I need to learn the writing modes here and get rid of my previous ways of thinking. Regarding English writing, I would follow the writing convention that the teacher suggested. (David, PS, SR)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Constructed her identity as an overseas student studying in the UK education system 2. Linked opinions in teacher feedback to cultural differences 3. Followed whatever the teacher suggested in order to adapt to the 'foreign' culture 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Perceiving self as foreign students 	<p>Students' self-essentialist thinking</p>
<p>[...] it is quite normal having some grammatical problems, particularly for someone as a non-native English speaker. If I wrote something spotless, I would assume whether the tutor would doubt that this stuff was not finished by me. (Chloe, MA, RI)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Believed that it was normal for non-native English speakers to make grammatical mistakes 2. Perceived tutors to have different language requirements for native English-speaking students and non-native English-speaking students 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Perceiving self as non-native English speakers 	
<p>I think I put the same effort on both the assignments of Unit 4 and Unit 2. However, the grade of Unit 2 is fine, but Unit 4 is very low. This is something I cannot be convinced about. (David, MA, RI)</p> <p>[...] This assignment is the most disappointing one. When I was writing it, I felt most satisfied with it, yet it got the lowest grade. [...] Because I really used my brain to write it. [...] I think that there is a</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Did not agree with the failed result by comparing the failed assignment with another assignment that had been awarded a pass mark 2. Put same efforts but obtained different results 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Disagreeing with teacher feedback when it conflicted with self-perceptions of own performance 	<p>Self-perceptions of performance</p>

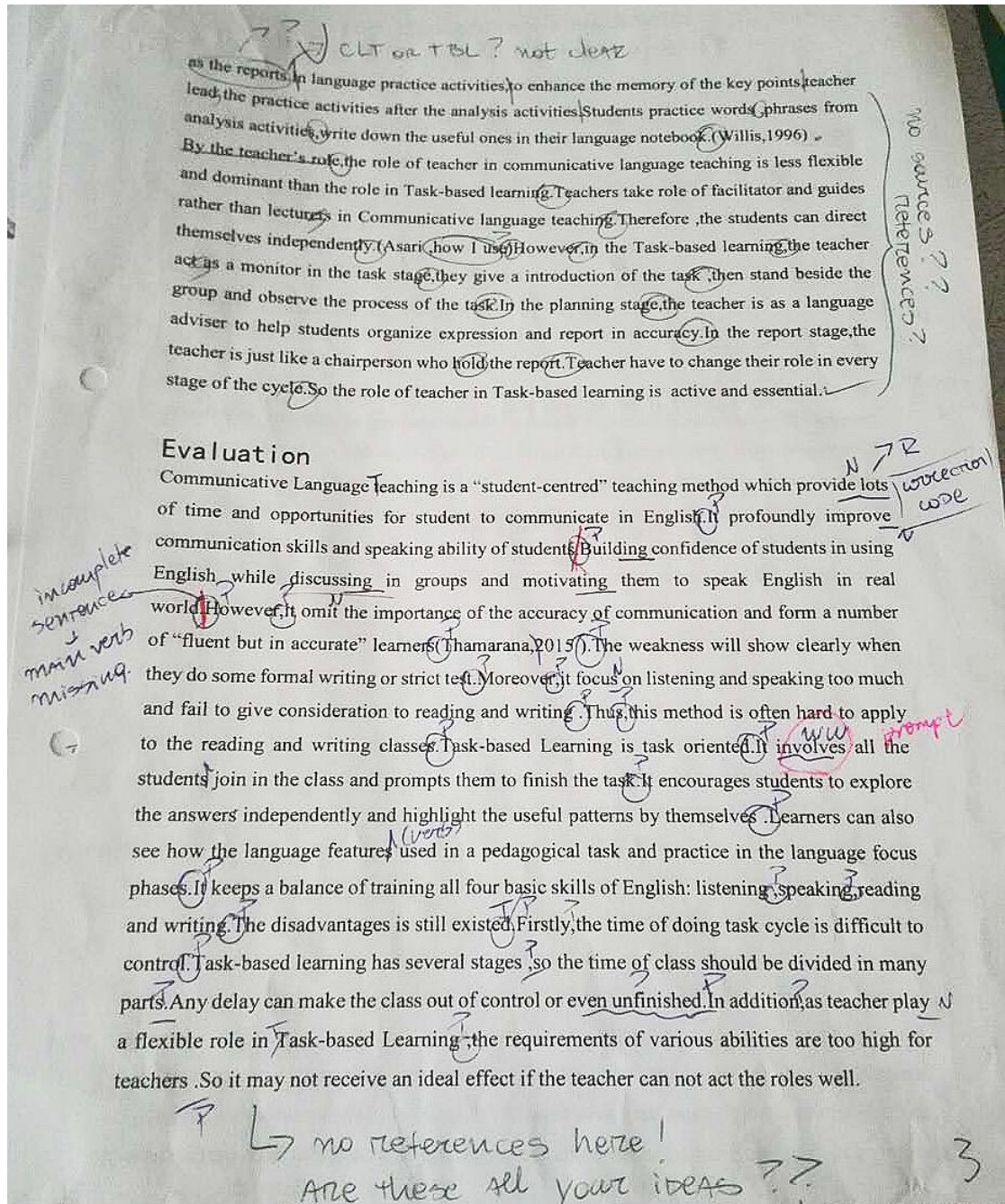
<p>difference as to how teachers assess assignments. (Chloe, MA, RI)</p>	<p>3. Disagreement with the grade influenced her perceptions of the written comments in the feedback sheet</p>		
<p>I also got a low grade of the Unit 2 assignment, but I can accept the feedback somehow as I knew I did not write it very well while I was writing. (David, MA, RI)</p>	<p>1. Acceptance of the feedback due to a matching self-perception of her performance</p>	<p>2. Agreeing with teacher feedback when it was consistent with self-perceptions of own performance</p>	
<p>When I was working on the Unit 3 assignment, I discussed with my friend about [...]. She told me that [...] she asked Tutor C this issue in an email and the tutor replied that [...]. Then I asked her to show me the tutor's email [...]. I can clearly see in that email that the tutor said that [...]. Then I found I did it wrong. (Maggie, MA, RI). Perhaps the relationship with peers is closer. You can debate with them. Sometimes, deep peer discussion without estrangement was more beneficial for the understanding of assignment topics. (Maggie, MA, RI)</p>	<p>1. Peer discussion as a source of teacher feedback information 2. Preferred talking with peers to seeking teachers' suggestions. 3. Closer to peers and feared teachers</p>	<p>1. Interpersonal relationships</p>	<p>Social factors</p>
<p>I think that she is the unit instructor who will mark the assignment. So, I will listen to that tutor's suggestion [...]. The critical reading and writing tutor is not from our programme. (Maggie, MA, RI) [...]. he also reviewed my Unit 1 assignment, but</p>	<p>1. Accorded priority to the suggestions from the tutor who would mark her assignment 2. Saw the role of the Critical Reading and Writing tutor as being more limited to</p>	<p>2. Perceptions of teachers as feedback providers</p>	

<p>just pointed out some grammatical mistakes. As for content, [...] perhaps need to ask more professional unit tutors. (Maggie, MA, RI)</p> <p>[...] Since the tutor gave feedback very carefully, I think, for this kind of attitude, I should respect. Then I listened to the feedback and revised my draft carefully as well. (David, PS, SR)</p>	<p>grammar correction, doubting his ability to comment on the essay content</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Was willing to take suggestions from the unit tutor 4. Impact of perceptions of tutor attitudes towards their queries and assignments 		
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Theme	Category	Coding (examples)	Raw data (examples)
<p>Epistemological factors</p>	<p>1. Dualistic way of knowing</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Directional instruction 2. Single standard and right answer 3. Majority as the authority 	<p>I also can't agree with the judgements he made on my language issues. [...] Other tutors said [in their feedback] that I had good presentation. [...] only this tutor said that there were serious language problems. (Chloe, MA, RI)</p> <p>I don't think this is my fault as I just wrote it in the light of tutors' suggestions. So, there is nothing I can do at this point. (Hebe, MA, RI)</p>
	<p>2. Pluralistic way of knowing</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Appreciation of feedback provided from multiple perspectives 2. Recognition of contextual variations 	<p>I have discussed with different teachers about this assignment. Then, I combined their suggestions with my ideas and considered which one is more suitable or how to take something that they all shared. I think, relatively speaking, this can give me a more comprehensive and rigid understanding of my ideas because different teachers may consider from different perspectives and have different focuses. (Chloe, MA, RI)</p>

Appendix 7 Sample of teacher feedback

David's script with feedback:



Sample of a feedback form of a unit assignment in the MA programme:

**Unit Assignment Feedback
Form
Final**

Student's name [redacted]

Unit title [redacted]

Marker's Comments
(Including strengths, areas for improvement and corrective advice)

Overall

This essay has addressed the question on individual learner differences. You have shown how motivation and language learning strategies shape the learning of your English students. To achieve a higher mark, you need to improve the structure of your essay and make sure that your language is error-free and clear.

Content

The content is relevant to the unit and the task in hand. You have a good understanding of relevant literature and you are able to apply it to your context.

Structure

Your introduction provides a thesis statement and informs the reader which variables you're going to discuss. Your paragraphs are very long and not clearly structured, which makes your arguments difficult to follow. They contain more than one idea and could be easily split. For example, when discussing strategies, you could easily have separate paragraphs for metacognitive and cognitive strategies.

Presentation

When discussing theory, please be careful with the tense. When you use past tense, you signal to the reader that this knowledge/view is obsolete. Your language is generally easy to follow but there are quite a number of grammatical errors that could be avoided with careful proofreading.

Analysis

Your first point of analysis is language learning strategies. You're clearly familiar with the theory behind them and you're able to point to some relevant research as well. However, you introduce a lot of terms in this section that are not explained, for example, cognitive load. In general though, you've got a tendency to describe the theory, rather than look at how it might affect language learning. There is a good attempt at linking the theory to your teaching experience. It would be even better if you were using clear references to show the links. The discussion on motivation is more in-depth. I'm not sure why on page 16-17, you switch to discuss intrinsic/extrinsic motivation again. Is this a mistake? It would be also good to look at actual research that looks at motivation and language learning rather than rely on textbooks. The discussion on motivational intensity focuses on concepts such as amotivation, which do not foster language learning, hence, this is irrelevant. There is a very good attempt to link the theory with practice in your discussion.

Use of sources

You have consulted a good number of sources. In the future, try to read more empirical papers at the expense of textbooks. Using references to support your claims in the discussion would make your arguments more convincing. Please use italics for titles in the reference list and format your reference list like this:
XX
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Appendix 8 Participants' drafts

Full details of Fig. 5.2 Unit 2 assignment (Hebe):

Introduction

It is known that English as a “lingua Franca”, has become a worldwide language that is necessary for international communications, transactions and so on (MOCANU and VASILIU, 2012). With the rapidly booming of economy, more and more English users can be seen in almost every field. Wherever you are, you may hear English from televisions, you also see it on various advertisements and signs. Especially, in academic domains, Swales (1987, cited by David, 2016) figured out that more than a half of the amount of English academic papers was issued every year and the amount was increasing year after by year. Also, according to the table given by Mayer (2009, p.21), English has the most number of second language speakers over the world.

In China, English has been regarded as the first foreign language since the middle of 1960s and later on, it was gradually included in compulsory courses. Also, in today's Chinese campus, those who can speak fluent English can be found everywhere. Thus, some people believe that today's worldwide status of English should be attributed to the simple internal features of English language itself. But to some extent, I disagree with this statement because English in some circumstances is difficult to learn. So this essay aims to discuss whether English is easy to learn or not in terms of its language internal features combined with my own English learning experience from the aspects of its vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar.

English's universal position means English as a Lingua Franca on a worldwide scale rather than people around the world only speak or use one language. Especially, there are two main ways that a language becomes universal: Firstly, this language should be the official language of as many countries as possible. Then, as a worldwide language, it has been received much attention or given priority in the field of foreign language teaching in other countries (Crystal, 1997). Also, according to the data given by the European Commission, having the whole world in view, more than 100 countries take English as an essential subject in education, such as China, Spain, Egypt, Russia and so on. Obviously, English has been accepted as a worldwide language and English learning has become an indispensable part of people's lives, especially in young people's education.

However, why it is English that could be a worldwide language and why there is no other language can take the place of it? In some degree, it is because that English is easier to master for worldwide people. So in the next section, I am going to discuss the internal features of English and explain its easiness and difficulty in learning, as well as comparing with other languages.

Full details of Fig. 5.4 Unit 3 assignment (Hebe):

1. Introduction

The final study results of learners who are in the same learning environment and taught by the same teacher tend to show great individual differences. This fact has made individual differences gradually become the focus of attention of a large amount of educators and linguists in recent decades (see, e.g., Skehan, 1989; Dörnyei, 2006; Vidgren, 2016). The main focus of their studies has been on examining the factors that may influence the way students learn a second language and facilitate the second language acquisition (SLA). As for those differences, Ellis (2004) explained that they could be identified three factors: affective, physical and cognitive. While, this research aims to discuss the affective and cognitive factor in facilitating learners' target language through my learning experience.

As for variables, Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) stated that individual differences in second language learning process, basically motivation and language aptitude, play an essential role in predicting whether a language learner would achieve success or not. It also can be said that Students' intake and input may be influenced by affective factors. After Dulay and Burt declared the 'Affective Filter Hypothesis' in 1870s, Krashen (1982) pointed out that affective filter is a type of psychological obstruction that hinders learners from acquiring accessible input completely. He considered affective factors as a filter that decreases the proportion of language input learners could understand.

Some models and theories are proposed on the basis of motivation, such as Gardner's Socio-Educational Model (1985), Clément's Theory of Linguistic Self-Confidence and Self-determination theory, they all relatively detailed construed the motivation in L2 acquisition and demonstrated the importance of motivation in target language learning.

Also, many researchers have been carried out their studies on cognitive variables. Skehan (1989) believed that aptitude has a consistent bearing on L2 success, but it requires further investigation in the field of SLA. Moreover, Carroll and Sapon (1963) designed the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT), which was used to predict the success of foreign language learning, as well as providing the four types of abilities that make up aptitude.

Another cognitive factor that has been studied in L2 acquisition is language learning

strategy. Many studies in SLA have focused on finding the strategies that generally well-performed language learners have and aim to proof that these strategies can enhance learners' learning process. Ellis (2008) said that those studies of language learning strategies have made some contributions to SLA theories and L2 learning, as well as providing a basis for helping learners to learn efficiently through identifying strategies and to educate them to make good use of those strategies.

This essay is also a reflection of my experience in learning the second language. I will give an analysis of three factors from two main dimensions of individual differences (affective and cognitive): motivation, aptitude and learning strategies in relation to my own L2 learning process. The aim of this paper is to learn about which factors of individual differences have decided my L2 (English) learning and then to improve my English performance to be better with the significance of exploring learners' L2 learning styles, thereby improving the effect of foreign language learning and teaching.

This paper can be divided into five sections. At the beginning, I give the introduction of this paper and the context as following. Then, I will analyze how affective factors (motivation) have affected my English learning during my senior high school period in the third section, after that the cognitive variables will be discussed in relation to the aptitude of language learners. The fourth section contains the discussion and evaluation of my learning strategies in the process of learning English as a non-native speaker. At the end is the conclusion of this paper.

