

1     **Analysis of teacher-written corrective feedback versus students' riposte in**  
2             **Second Language writing pedagogy in secondary schools, Bulilima,**  
3                     **Zimbabwe**  
4

5                             **Abstract**

6     This study investigated the teachers' practice on written corrective feedback as well as the  
7     students' response to it in a bid to find practical solutions to the problem of low performance  
8     in English composition writing at "O" Level in Zimbabwe. The study answered the following  
9     two research questions: 1) What sort of corrective feedback do "O" Level students get from  
10    their composition teachers? and 2) How do "O" Level students respond to teacher's written  
11    corrective feedback in their composition work?

12    In this qualitative research, seven informants ("O" Level students) were interviewed; the  
13    researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule to address them and their English  
14    exercise books were also analyzed using a document analysis guide designed by the  
15    researcher. The study concluded that the composition teacher marked the compositions  
16    thoroughly highlighting most of the errors for students' benefit. The teacher's focus on  
17    feedback was in line with the syllabus demands. The teacher also satisfied the Feed Up, Feed  
18    Back and the Feed Forward types of effective feedback. She had strength on mark allocation  
19    which acted as student guide to their stance in composition writing. However, although the  
20    students largely benefited from the teacher's corrective written feedback as well as the oral  
21    feedback, some of them failed to get maximum benefit because they could not understand the  
22    correction codes. It is therefore imperative for composition teachers to provide students with  
23    a correction code elaboration whenever using a marking correction code.

24  
25    *Key Terms:* Zimbabwe; Feed Up; Feed Back; Feed Forward; correction codes  
26

27                             **Background of the Study**

28  
29             Teachers' written corrective feedback is an essential element in the teaching-learning  
30     process for it enhances leaning. Shute in Nielsen (2015) defined feedback as information  
31     communicated to the learner that is intended to modify the learner's behavior for the purpose  
32     of improving learning. Saaris (2016) said that feedback ranks in the top 10 of the highest  
33     influences on student achievement and teachers also benefit from it for they review their  
34     performance, develop new skills and improve in their teaching.

35             [McCarthy](#) (2016) introduced his article on feedback by a statement seemingly from  
36     students saying: "We don't know what we don't know, but with help, that can change", a

37 statement that shows how prepared students are to receive teacher feedback and learn from it.  
38 When receiving constructive feedback, learners need to know what they did well and whether  
39 their understanding is on target for recognizing what's working reinforces those practices.

40 This study focuses on English composition teachers' written corrective feedback  
41 practices and the "O" Level students' response to it in Bulilima District, Zimbabwe. English  
42 composition is a major component of English Language, a subject that is mandatory at "O"  
43 Level in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe school curriculum has primary school level, whose  
44 curriculum consists of two pre-school years and seven years of primary education, a phase  
45 which is concluded by a national examination (USAP 2012). Grade seven examinations are  
46 mandatory for entrance into the second phase of education, that is, secondary education. It  
47 comprises six years in all, that is, four years for Ordinary Level ("O" Level) and two years  
48 for Advanced Level ("A" Level).

49 What is considered as an "O" Level pass is when a candidate passes a minimum of  
50 five subjects including English Language with a grade of "C" or better (Chinyani,  
51 Madungwe, Kadodo & Mandiudza, 2013). The English "O" Level examination consists of  
52 two compulsory papers: Paper One, the composition one and Paper Two which consist of  
53 comprehension and language items. This study is based on Paper One, the composition paper.  
54 Generally, "O" Level pass rate in Zimbabwe is low and is worse for English language;  
55 NewsDay (2014) showed that 'O' English Language pass rate was at 30.46% in 2014 while it  
56 was 27% in 2015 (TECHZIM, 2016).

## 57 **Statement of the Problem**

58 Research has it that teacher written corrective feedback enhances learning and can be  
59 key to writing improvement. However, "O" Level English Language (a mandatory subject)  
60 has low pass rate and is not clear whether the problem is with the teachers' Feed Up, Feed  
61 Back or Feed Forward; or with the students' responses, hence this investigation.



85 studied the impact of teacher indication and correction of students' errors in USA. He  
86 gathered that negative feedback from teachers adversely impacts self-confidence in writing  
87 skills and leads to negative attitudes towards writing. Since the study above already realized  
88 that negative feedback is not very helpful in the learning of ESL, this research looked into  
89 different aspect of teacher feedback in order to find out what works.

90 An experimental study was carried out by Sobhani and Tayebipour (2015) who  
91 investigated the effects of different types of corrective feedback on Iranian EFL learners'  
92 essay writing. Findings showed a statistically significant difference in the participants'  
93 performance in the posttest. Oral feedback (both focused and unfocused) and written  
94 feedback (focused) were significantly effective in the posttest. It is only the written unfocused  
95 feedback which was ineffective.

96 One may wonder if it is oral feedback or written feedback that is helpful to students;  
97 both are significantly effective in students' learning (Sobhani & Tayebipour, 2015),  
98 especially the coded ones (Alvira, 2016).

### 99 **Feedback in English as a Second Language**

100 Due to the complexity of the writing skills and the multifaceted nature of feedback,  
101 many linguists and researchers in the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL) are  
102 concerned with Second Language Writing (SLW) especially in seeking instructional methods  
103 and techniques to improve it.

104 A number of researchers worldwide have been interested in studying feedback in  
105 relation to second language writing. Çagla (2016) studied the similarities and differences  
106 between students' and teachers' perceptions about written corrective feedback in English as a  
107 Foreign Language (EFL) context. The study found out that there was no significant  
108 differences between the two groups in terms of amount and type of written corrective  
109 feedback.

### 110 **Use of Correction Codes in English Composition Marking**

111 In this contemporary world, educators are looking for better ways of doing things.  
112 Some teachers use correction codes. However, some of these codes are not universal; they  
113 vary among nations and even locally. Also, their significance is debatable. This has attracted  
114 research in that area.

115 In 2011, Ferdouse realized that selecting a right way to provide students with error  
116 feedback in their writing of English composition has proved to be a complex task to  
117 educators. He therefore conducted a study to find out an effective way of error feedback.  
118 Findings showed that students prefer coded feedback to other correction modes in the process  
119 of error feedback. The study also showed that the students benefitted more from coded  
120 feedback than from non-coded feedback. In Columbia, Alvira (2016) also realized in a study  
121 that the use of coded, written and oral feedback is widely accepted by students. The current  
122 study inquired from the respondents if the corrective written feedback they got from their  
123 composition teachers was coded and how they responded to it.

### 124 **Students' Attitude towards Feedback**

125 Research has shown that students' expectations on feedback are variegated; Yang and  
126 Carless ([2013](#)) realized that some students prefer only written comments from their teachers  
127 [while other get along well with](#) a combination of written comments with oral instruction  
128 during meetings with the instructors (Hadzic, 2016). In Hong Kong, Lee (2011) worked on  
129 the response of students to teacher's feedback. He realized that although second language  
130 teachers spend a significant amount of time marking students' writing, many of them felt that  
131 their efforts were wasted mainly because the students might experience feelings of frustration  
132 and confusion when they receive the feedback. Such result brings in the idea that teacher's  
133 feedback should be informative and clear such that students can understand it.

134 On another note, Nielsen (2015) found out that many students prefer detailed  
135 corrective positive feedback which guides them in the revision process. By positive feedback  
136 he meant that feedback which points out elements or places where the student is "on track" or  
137 has performed well also showing why that performance should be continued in future writing  
138 tasks. This stance is supported by Hall and Grisham-Brown (2011) who gathered that  
139 negative feedback from teachers is detrimental to students' self-confidence in writing skills  
140 and demotivates the learners.

141 Although this area of study on feedback has drawn the attention of many researchers  
142 worldwide, this is not so in Zimbabwe where research in general is limited. The researcher  
143 tried the internet, browsed Zimbabwean universities websites, visited some universities  
144 libraries and consulted colleagues through e-mail but failed to get Zimbabwe feedback related  
145 researches. One can therefore borrow the description by Tsvere, Swamy and Nyaruwata  
146 (2013), "dearth of literature", to describe this situation.

147 The reviewed literature above shows information on feedback as well as research  
148 finding on feedback worldwide. It shows how complicated the feedback process is; how  
149 seriously it need to be taken and how more focused researches are needed. For Zimbabwe,  
150 the clarion call is more loud since very little has been researched in the feedback area making  
151 this study mandatory so that Zimbabwe can also benefit on academic feedback issues.

## 152 **Research Methodology**

153 In this qualitative research, seven informants, "O" Level (form four) students, were  
154 interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule and their English exercise books were  
155 also analyzed using a document analysis guide designed by the researcher. The interview  
156 technique was chosen because it exposes multiple perspectives of the students as well as a  
157 complete understanding of their feelings, expectations, wants and responses while document  
158 analysis complemented the findings.

159 This integration of interviews and document analysis maximized the validity of the  
160 findings. The chosen research design was therefore appropriate because neither of the two  
161 (one on its own) could be adequate to develop a multiple perspectives and a complete  
162 understanding of the research problem of this study.

### 163 **Sample of the study**

164 The sample of the study comprises seven “O” Level English Language students from  
165 one school in Bulawayo.

### 166 **Research Instruments**

167 Self-semi-structured interview schedules for students were used for data gathering.  
168 An expert in the Graduate Education Department at Baraton University validated the data  
169 collection instruments and checked the content validity of the interview schedules, judging  
170 whether the interview items covered valuable aspects of the feedback domain which were  
171 intended to be measured by the study and whether they were proportionately spread across  
172 the domain. The researcher also used a document analysis guide to analyze the students’  
173 marked composition exercise books.

### 174 **Data Gathering Procedures**

175 The researcher planned and visited the chosen school, showed the English Language  
176 Head of Department the letter from Baraton University (which requested for permission to  
177 gather data) and made prior arrangements with the English “O” Level teacher on the  
178 interview schedule.

179 On the agreed date and time, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews to 7 “O”  
180 Level students (one at a time) from one school in Bulawayo to find out their response to  
181 composition teachers’ written corrective feedback. During interviews, the participants  
182 brought their composition exercise books for content analysis and the researcher analyzing

183 the teachers' written comments. Both information from the interviews and the content  
184 analysis was recorded in a notebook ready for coding and analysis.

### 185 **Statistical Treatment of Data**

186 Levitt (2015) argued that qualitative data requires one to adopt an interpretation  
187 through identification of patterns; this entails adapting a treatment procedure that enables  
188 meaningful interpretation of the data. The researcher therefore took the data collected from  
189 interviews and content analysis, organized, coded and analyzed it according to the emerging  
190 themes.

191 The researcher used personal experience and empathic insights while taking a neutral  
192 nonjudgmental stance towards the revealed dimensions, patterns and trends when describing  
193 the findings of the study and forming hypotheses. Findings were then portrayed in a coherent,  
194 detailed description supported by excerpts in order to capture participants' personal  
195 perspectives and experiences.


### 196 **Ethical Considerations**


197 The researcher got a letter from the office of the Director of Graduate Studies and  
198 Research from the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, which requested for permission to  
199 gather data from the English Department of the chosen school (See appendices). Using that  
200 letter, the researcher got data gathering permission from the English Department and the  
201 concerned English teacher.



202 The researcher also understands that ethical consideration is critical in research  
203 especially in this study where people are involved as informants. Their rights as participants  
204 need to be uphold, (O'Brien et al., 2014), therefore, the researcher sought informed consent to  
205 participate in the study from the informants and the data they provided was kept confidential  
206 and was interpreted unaltered.

207 **Findings**

208 **Research question one.** What sort of corrective feedback do “O” Level students  
209 get from their composition teachers?

210  information to answer this research question from content analysis of the  
211 students’ composition exercise books as well as the students’ interview responses. The  
212 reviewing of students’ composition exercise books showed that students got corrective  
213 feedback, marks and comments as feedback to composition writing.

214 On the nature of marking indicative in the informants’ composition exercise books,  
215 one informant said that the composition teacher highlighted all the errors that he has made  
216 while others echoed that the teacher corrected most of them. I confirmed that the teacher  
217 indicated many errors in the informants’ composition exercise books. This is similar to  
218 findings by ( 2011; Bruno & Santos, 2010; Parr & Timperley, 2010; Brown, 2012) who  
219 observed that language teachers spend much of their time marking and providing corrective  
220 feedback on students' writing.

221  coded those errors indicated by the English composition teacher in the students’  
222 exercise books using the *six plus one method*, that is, Gamarra (2014)’s six types of  
223 corrective feedback: Explicit Correction, Recasts, Clarification Requests, Metalinguistic  
224 Feedback, Elicitation and Repetition plus my own classification obtained from literature  
225 review, that is, Error Indication. I then classified corrective feedback from students’ exercise  
226 books according to Hattie and Timperley (2007) Feedback about the task aspects, namely:  
227 Feed Up, Feed Back and Feed Forward.  further classified the feedback in the students’  
228 composition exercise books in accordance to Al-Jarrah (2016) model of corrective feedback  
229 provision’s three basic premises, namely: combining error correction with error feedback;  
230 targeting one linguistic structure at a time and providing error correction on all the functional  
231 uses of the targeted structure.


232 From the analysis explained above, the following patterns emerged:

233 **Feed Up.** Feed up is associated with goal clarification. From the interview, the  
234 informants told me that their composition teacher clearly tells them the composition goal: to  
235 be able to write a standard composition according to English language “O” Level syllabus  
236 demands. In helping the students to meet this standard in composition writing, the informants  
237 said that their teacher gave them a list of vocabulary (of about 100 words and 100phrases)  
238 which she asked them to master and use (about five in one composition). They were given  
239 freedom to use other sources, for instance, textbooks.

240 Contrary to Çagla (2016) findings, the informants said that their composition teacher  
241 explained to them her expectation. They said that their composition teacher gave them  
242 instructions at the beginning of the year in terms of: number of words (350- 450words); Total  
243 marks (30 and 20 marks for free and guided composition, respectively) and the use of varied  
244 vocabulary, just to mention a few.

245 The teacher gave the students examples of what she expected; this could be found in  
246 other students’ compositions and the textbooks she recommended. One informant said that  
247 she followed the teacher’s expectations, requirements and guidance in order to get high  
248 marks.

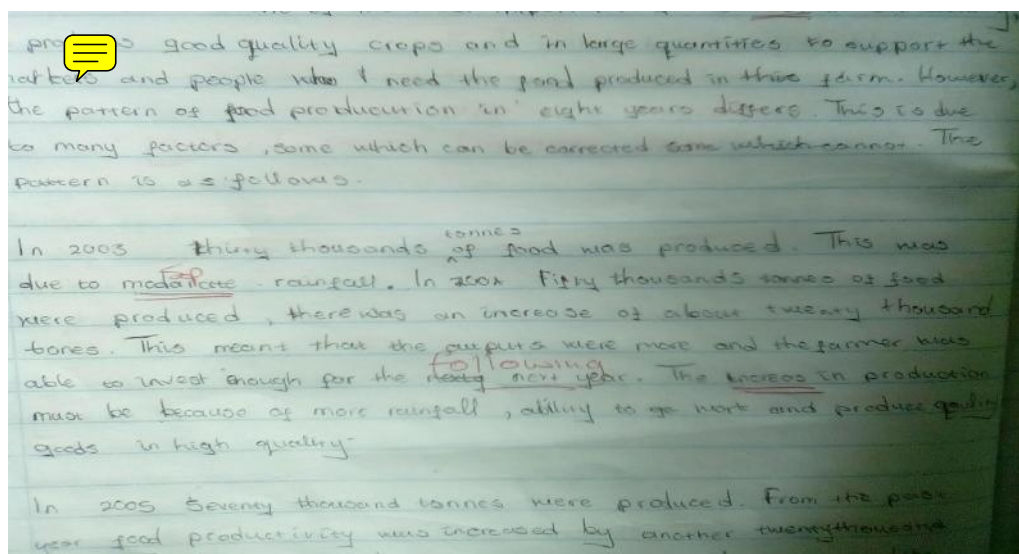
249 **Feed Back.** This refers to teacher’s response. On the question on what the teacher’s  
250 feedback focused on, all the informants talked with the same voice. What the informants said  
251 their teacher concentrated on is also what I saw in the exercise books; one informant almost  
252 summed it all as:

253 *Excerpt 1:*  marks grammar, spellings, impression (like feeling), language,  
254 vocabulary, punctuation, paragraphing, monotony, sequence of events and the subject of the  
255 paragraph.

256 Other informants added handwriting and composition length as areas of teacher's  
 257 feedback concentration. These aspects are the same highlighted in the Zimbabwe General  
 258 Certificate in Education (ZGCE) "O" Level English syllabus, 2013-2017.

259 Teacher's written corrections comprised Explicit Corrections, that is, those that gave  
 260 correct forms to the learner. The few cases that I observed were limited to correcting  
 261 capitalization and wrong words.

262 The clip below shows explicit correction for a wrong word. The student put a wrong  
 263 word *next* instead of the word *following*, so the teacher underlined the wrong word and put  
 264 the correct one above it.



265  
 266 On wrong capitalization, the teacher underlined (using one line) the letter to be  
 267 capitalized and put the capital letter above it, for instance, *the* (letter *t* underlined) at the  
 268 beginning of a sentence; and *florencce* (letter *f* underlined) for a proper noun.

269 Recasts, Clarification Requests, Metalinguistic Feedback, Elicitation and Repetition  
 270 were not indicative in the teacher's written corrections.

271 However, Error Indication dominated teacher error correction. It was in the form of  
 272 correction codes showing the errors that the students had made. Below are some of the  
 273 correction codes that the teacher used as elaborated by the informants and as I observed in the

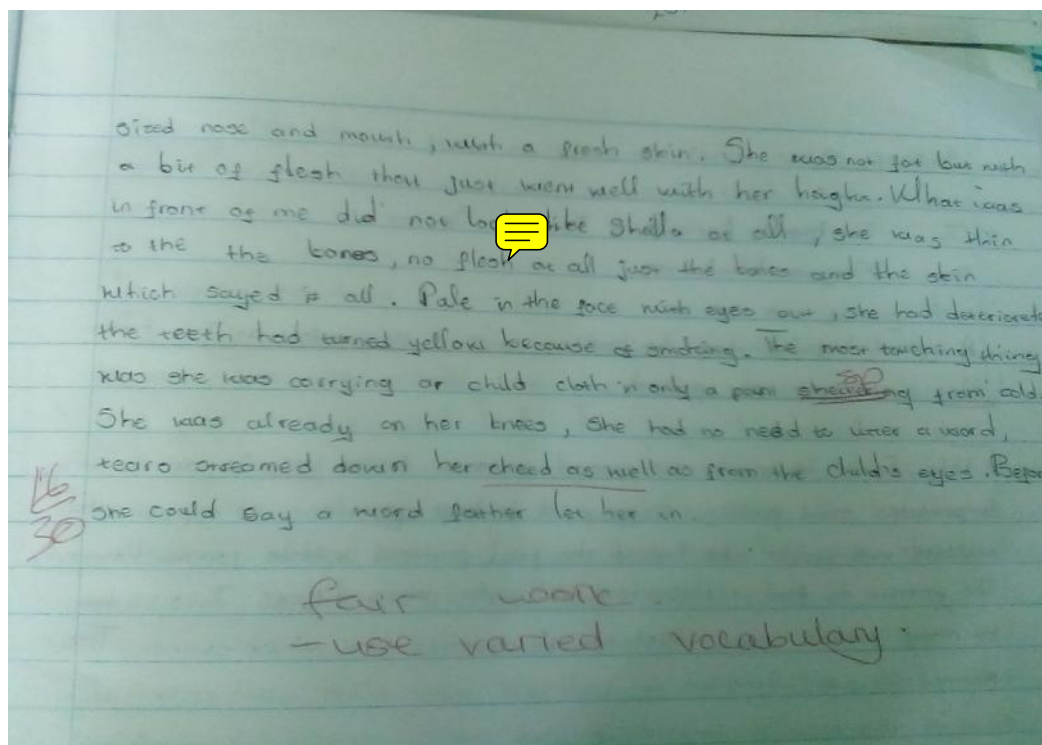
274 informants' composition exercise books: *gr* for wrong grammar; *sp* for wrong spelling; carets  
275 (^) for missing word/s; one line below a whole sentence for a bad sentence and one line  
276 below a word for a wrong word.

277           The use of correction codes that I observed in the informants' composition exercise  
278 books were supported by Alvira (2016) in Columbia who, in a study, realized that the use of  
279 coded, written feedback was widely accepted by students and was yielding positive results in  
280 the improvement of their writing skills at paragraph level.

281           For further feedback in the students' composition exercise books classification, I  
282 realized that the Explicit corrections and Error indications elaborated above are in line with  
283 Al-Jarrah (2016) first part of premises number one, that is, Error correction.

284           I also observed that the teacher wrote comments as feedback to the informants'  
285 composition performance. Teacher's comments tallies Al-Jarrah (2016) second part of  
286 premises number one: error feedback, that is the global issues that affect composition  
287 meaning and organization. Thus Al-Jarrah (2016) first premise *combining error correction*  
288 *with error feedback* was therefore fulfilled in the composition teacher's feedback of the  
289 study.

290           Teacher's written comments were at the end of the composition; they were short and  
291 to the point as if in response to Saaris (2016) who argued that non-specific feedback falls far  
292 behind feedback that is specific and focused. See the clip below:



293

294 I realized that there was a strong link between the marks that the students got and the  
 295 comments that came at the end of the composition. The highest mark that the teacher gave to  
 296 the informants was 18/30 while the lowest was 9/30. The informants said that the teacher  
 297 never gave a zero to a student. Examples of the written comments and mark allocation that I  
 298 saw in the students' composition exercise books include: 17/30 Fairly good; 17/30 Good  
 299 development; 16/30 Fair work but use variable vocabulary; 10/30 you must put more effort  
 300 and 9/30 Improve. I realized that the teacher's comments addressed issues, for instance:  
 301 Write clearly (commenting on handwriting); Improve length (written for short compositions)  
 302 and Simple clarity (encouraging for advanced vocabulary). These aspects, when followed by  
 303 students, make students improve their composition standards.

304 **Feed Forward.** Feed forward is closely linked to the use of assessment data to plan  
 305 for the future. The informants revealed through interviews that their composition teacher used  
 306 the information she got from their performance for planning. When I asked the informants the  
 307 types of composition they have learn, they listed the factual, narrative, argumentative and the

308 descriptive compositions. The list tallies the ZGCE “O” Level English syllabus 2013-2017  
309 objective number one. Among the list of the composition types, the majority of the  
310 informants indicated that they were concentrating on the descriptive and the narrative types  
311 as their teacher had advised them. The informants exposed that the teacher recommended  
312 each student in class to concentrate on a certain type of composition (according to that  
313 student’s strength and ability).

314 The composition marks that the informants got were generally from average (18/30 to  
315 low (9/30); I got from the informants that this also applies to their classmates. Due to the low  
316 composition standard, as reflected by the marks, the teacher put a lot of effort on giving  
317 feedback to students. One informant said:

318 *Excerpt 2:* She (the composition teacher) conducts one-on-one feedback. She comes  
319 in class and sits and calls one by one of us explaining our mistakes and telling us her  
320 expectations as well as advising us on the type of composition we should concentrate on  
321 according to our strengths

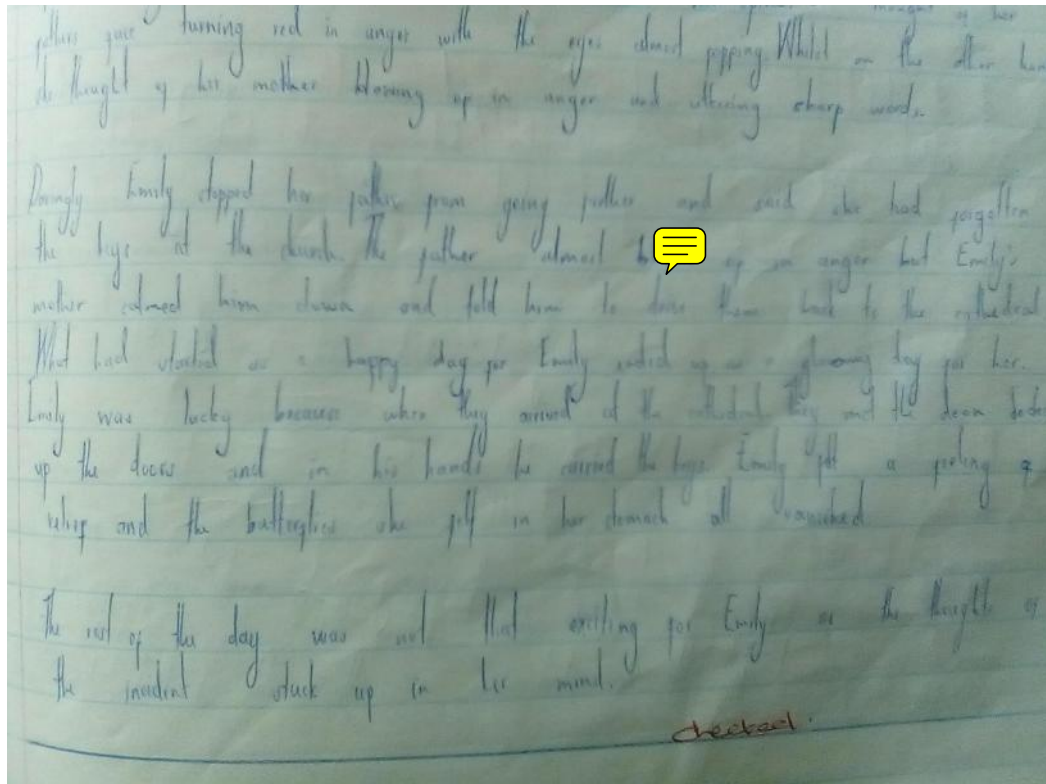
322 I also got that the teacher used group feedback to the students:

323 *Excerpt 3:* She divides the class into two (Group A and B). Individuals who fall under  
324 A, for instance, write the same topic on description composition while those under B write on  
325 a narrative topic. The teacher selects samples from each side, reads them and comments on  
326 what is correct and wrong for the benefit of the whole class.

327 Again, all the informant said that the teacher extended her feedback gesture by  
328 inviting students whosoever wanted to come for consultation during free time. The other  
329 informants affirmed this and added that the composition teacher started such moves during  
330 their form four second term when she started intensively preparing them for final  
331 examinations. One informant contrasted the present teacher’s actions with her old ones  
332 saying that during form four first term, they were all given the same composition and if the

333 majority failed, she would just come with notes explaining how to write that type of a  
 334 composition as a class. This is a clear evidence of Feed forward in the study.

335 An informant brought in the idea that the composition teacher gave them holiday  
 336 composition exercises, more than five per student (for practice), which she did not  
 337 necessarily mark but just put the word *checked* to indicate that she has seen them. I confirmed  
 338 it in the students' exercise books as shown by the clip below:



339  
 340 However, all the informants realized a change in teacher's intensive marking and  
 341 timeous returning of the composition exercise books. They said that she intensified the  
 342 number of composition they were getting per week (an average of three) all of which were  
 343 marked and returned to them during the same week. The informants were quick to give a  
 344 reason:

345 *Excerpt 4:* She is preparing us for final examinations that will come at the end of the  
 346 year. She is aware of our short-falls.

347           These finding are similar to Hattie and Yates (2014) ideas, in the improved Hattie &  
348   Timperley (2007) Effective Feedback Model; there is emphasis on immediate feedback for  
349   novice learners. They also argued that feedback enhances achievement. Thus, the finding of  
350   the study and the theory of the study are closely linked. All these teacher's moves were  
351   caused by what the teacher realized on students' assessment, hence, Feed forward.

352

353           **Research question two.** How do "O" Level students respond to teacher's written  
354   corrective feedback in their composition work?

355           The grand tour question asked the informants how they viewed composition writing.  
356   Almost all the informants beamed their faces before responding to the request for they  
357   seemed to know the composition subject very well and showed some interest in it. One  
358   informant rightfully said:

359           *Excerpt 4:* It is an art of expressing one's imagination and feelings. Sometimes I write  
360   what is real but in most cases I use my imagination. It is like writing a summarized novel.

361           She went on to say that when she writes a descriptive and narrative composition, she  
362   used information she got from movies (since she is exposed to technology) while she  
363   believed that those from rural areas are guided by what they encounter in their rural setting.

364           Another informant jovially and positively said that in composition writing, one needs  
365   to be creative and should read widely in order to get ideas and facts so as to be able to write a  
366   standard composition. These ideas were complemented by another informant who echoed:

367           *Excerpt 5:* I like composition writing for I am given a chance to express myself and  
368   my ideas especially in descriptive and narrative composition writing. When I write a story, I  
369   think of reality then I add my imagination.

370           Still another informant explained that composition writing is a way of practicing  
371   language skills and exposing one's understanding on what one gets from novels and movies;

372 a way of expressing self using appropriate vocabulary and good English Language. All the  
373 informants seemed to understand very well what composition writing is about.

374 On teacher's feedback, one informant talked of oral feedback from their composition  
375 teacher; she said that she benefited from that oral feedback than the written feedback. This  
376 means that oral feedback should always complement teacher's written feedback. Same  
377 finding were also made by Sobhani and Tayebipour (2015) and Alvira (2016).

378 However, another informant complained that the oral comments were only good for  
379 correct performance, for bad ones, he said that it was not good because the teacher mentioned  
380 names. "After all, what is important is the mistake and not the name of the offender", one  
381 informant put it that way.

382 When I asked the informants how they viewed the feedback they got from their  
383 composition teacher, the informants were generally happy with the feedback they got. This is  
384 in line with Lee (2011) findings who realized that students valued and wanted teachers to  
385 give them feedback on their writing.

386 The informants said that they have benefitted from their teacher's feedback and have  
387 improved their work especially on vocabulary. One informant said:

388 *Excerpt 6:* She (the teacher) encourages a variety of vocabulary. I have improved  
389 from a C grade to a B grade when I consider my composition marks.

390 Another informant contentedly said that composition length was his problem. He used  
391 to write very short compositions running short of words but he has improved greatly.

392 Only one informant had a worry, she said that she was not happy with the progress  
393 she was making in composition writing. She worriedly elaborated that she seemed not to  
394 improve her level of writing since the beginning of "O" Level. When I asked her what caused  
395 her not to improve, she was not sure and simply said that English is a second language that is  
396 difficult.

397           There are specific aspects that I asked informants about, one of them being  
398 composition marks that they received from their composition teacher. Almost all the  
399 informants commented on the marks as being fair. They said that the marks they got were  
400 true representation of their performance. They also seemed to understand teacher's mark  
401 allocation for they said that their teacher, in her composition expectations presentation,  
402 explained the relationship between composition standards (outstanding, generally good,  
403 average and below standard) and mark allotted to each standard.

404           Even the informants who were struggling and had low marks and seemingly harsh  
405 comments, seemed to accept the comments they received from their teacher. One informant  
406 with a comment: *Don't be lazy* said that the comment was not negative but reprimanding her  
407 to work hard. I concluded that the above marks match the associated comments.

408           Only two informants seemed to take some offence in the comments they received.  
409 One of them explained:

410           *Excerpt 7:* I like some of the comments I received, for instance, *You have good*  
411 *writing skills*. However, other comments, like, *Improve your vocabulary*, although being  
412 informative, they discourage me.

413           From the general informants' responses, it can be said that the student were happy  
414 with the marking and comments they got as feedback from the composition teacher. Even  
415 those who got low marks seemed to understand their performance. One informant explicitly  
416 said:

417           *Excerpt 8:* My teacher writes short and precise comments at the end of the  
418 composition. In the composition, there are only codes and few corrections on capitalization.  
419 The composition is not all red.

420           Such sentiments from students were also found by Ferdouse (2011) in his study where  
421 light-marking (use of correction codes) was effective and gave encouragement even to

422 struggling students. He also realized that students understood the feedback better when  
423 correction codes were explained.

424 The informants said that they understood their composition teacher's comments which  
425 one informant described as;

426 *Excerpt 9:* Short, straight to the point and satisfying, never confusing and beneficial.

427 This shows that the informants understood their composition teachers' focused comments and  
428 benefitted from them. In a study, Saaris (2016) had the same findings.

429 When I asked the informants if they concentrate on the written comments they  
430 receive, one of them answered:

431 *Excerpt 10:* I read the comments – I don't concentrate on them because they are short  
432 and straight forward. They don't need much attention. I understand them.

433 When I asked them if they understood the correction codes in their composition  
434 exercise books, there were mixed feelings and responses. One informant from the A Class  
435 said that the codes meanings were never given to them but she understood them all because  
436 they were using the same codes since primary education. Another informant from the same A  
437 Class said that he recalled receiving the codes meaning two years ago when they were  
438 beginning "O" Level, that is, in form three.

439 From the B Class, one informant said that although there were never given a code  
440 elaboration (code-meaning chart), she understood the correction codes given by her  
441 composition teacher. She went further to give a reason:

442 *Excerpt 11:* During revision, our teacher tells us some of the codes' meanings. After  
443 all, the same codes have been used for a long time and we get to understand them.

444 However, the other informant from the same B Class said that she understood some of  
445 the codes but not all, for instance, the single and the double lines, where a mystery to her.

446 When I asked her why she never asked her teacher about the meanings, she simply said that  
447 she never thought about it.

448 All the three informants from the C Class worriedly echoed that they hardly  
449 understood the correction codes. One of them shyly said the following on both the single and  
450 double lines correction codes:

451 *Excerpt 12:* Maybe they mean that what I have written does not make sense.

452 This finding tallies one by Ferdouse (2011) in Bangladesh who realized that  
453 correction codes are a necessity in English composition teaching but are only useful when  
454 they are understood by the students.

455 When I asked the informants how quick was their teacher in returning the marked  
456 composition, all the respondents showed concern; they said that at the beginning of the year,  
457 their composition exercise books were returned after a long time, at times, after three weeks.  
458 Some informants were not happy about it; one of them said that he became anxious and  
459 worried due to the delays for he wanted to see his mistakes and improve.

460 This finding tallies that by Wiggins (2014) who argued that feedback is often  
461 unhelpful when it is received by the students late.

462 However, one of the informants justified the delay:

463 *Excerpt 13:* Our teacher teaches all the form fours, a total of about 150 students. She  
464 needs time to mark.

465 I got from the informants that the teacher brought the composition exercise books  
466 very early toward the final examinations.

467 When I asked the informants if they wrote corrections to their marked compositions,  
468 they all said that they rarely wrote them. One informant defended her teacher saying:

469 *Excerpt 14:* She does it in another manner; our mistakes are indicated, there is usually  
470 an oral discussion which is enough. After all, she encourages us to improve.

471 One aspect that also all the informants told me is that they had the same teacher for  
472 three consecutive years. They said that they liked it for they ended up understanding each  
473 other better and got maximum help from their composition teacher. One informant knowingly  
474 said that their teacher prepared and gave them composition materials for she was with them  
475 for a long time. This finding concurs that by (Crimmins, Nash, Oprescu, Liebergreen, Turley,  
476 Bond & Dayton, 2016) who realized that continuous feedback can create and enhances  
477 student-teacher relationship.

478 While the rest of the informants could not think of a disadvantage of having one  
479 teacher for a long time, one of them talked of labeling. He said that when one fails once or  
480 twice, one will always fail because the teacher will have classified that one as a failure.

## 481 **Conclusions**

482 The following conclusions were drawn from the first research question findings of the study:

- 483 a) The composition teacher marked the composition thoroughly highlighting most of the  
484 errors for students' benefit.
- 485 b) The teacher's focus on feedback was in line with the syllabus demands.
- 486 c) The teacher satisfied the Feed Up, Feed Back and the Feed Forward types of effective  
487 feedback.
- 488 d) The teacher had strength on mark allocation as a student guide to their stance in  
489 composition writing.

490 These conclusions were drawn from the second research question findings of the study:

- 491 a) Although the students liked and largely benefited from the teacher's corrective written  
492 feedback as well as the oral feedback, some of them failed to get maximum benefit  
493 because they could not understand the correction codes.

## 494 **Recommendations**

495 The study made the following recommendations:

- 496 a) English composition teachers should make use of elaborated correction codes.
- 497 b) The teachers should return marked exercise books to the students on time.
- 498 c) The teachers should try and avoid negative comments as feedback to students and  
499 should avoid mentioning names when giving bad examples in class.
- 500 d) Having the same composition teacher for a long time can be tried in the schools for  
501 the teacher comes to know every student's problem and therefore address it  
502 accordingly.
- 503 e) Composition teachers should use oral feedback to complement their written feedback.
- 504 f) Students should write corrections to every given composition work so that they can  
505 refer to them during revision.
- 506 g) Teachers should always find out whether the students have understood teacher's  
507 feedback or not for they use it on developing strategic teaching tactics.

### 508 **Recommendations for further Studies**

- 509 a) Research in peer feedback needs to be carried out in Zimbabwe since some  
510 researchers elsewhere in the world found it as one of the most powerful elements in  
511 the writing process.
- 512 b) Research also need to be carried out in the area of correction codes in composition  
513 writing, trying to find out how best it can be utilized by the teachers.

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