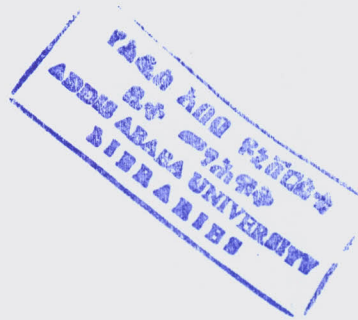


**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN *EFL* STUDENTS'  
PERCEPTION OF WRITTEN FEEDBACK AND  
THEIR WRITING PROFICIENCY**

By: Zerihun Endale



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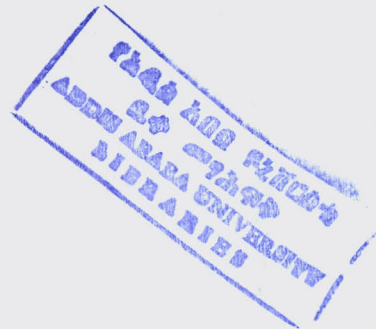
June, 2009

Addis Ababa

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**  
**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

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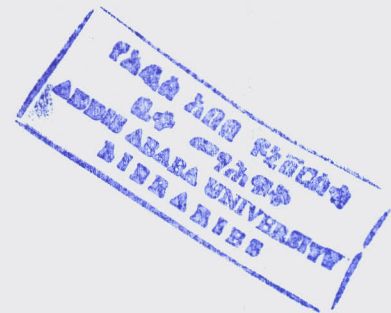
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## **Abstract**

*This study aims at investigating if there is any relationship between students' perception of written feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks and their actual writing proficiency. And the study also aims at finding out how students use the written feedback provided by teachers for writing tasks. To achieve the objectives set, necessary data were collected through questionnaire and writing skills test, which were given to 90 students. Data about perception of students and some other related issues were collected through the questionnaire. Through the writing skills test, the subjects' actual writing proficiency was obtained. The students' perception about written feedback is found to have substantial correlation (0.78) with their actual writing skills. The data obtained from the questionnaire also revealed that students did not show any interest to read teachers' feedback for their writing tasks.*



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Writing which is an integral part of language plays major role in expressing our likes and dislikes, love and hate, joy and grieves, hopes and aims etc, As White and Arndt (1991) indicate, through writing we are able to discover and articulate ideas in ways that only writing makes possible.

Although writing is one of the crucial means of communication and permanent recording, it has tended to be a much neglected part of the language program in first and ESL/EFL teaching (White and Arndt, 1991). Some applied linguists say that writing is such a complex and recursive skill that demands much higher standards of language than speaking. To this end, Bereiter and Scardamalia (1983) remark that, writing a long essay is probably the most complex act that most human beings are ever expected to perform.

Therefore this study intends to look in to the process of learning to write in a context where students use English as a foreign language to carry out their study. It particularly focuses on the possible correlation that may exist between students' perception of the feedback they receive from their teachers and their actual writing skills.

The first chapter of this thesis gives the background to the study and identifies the objectives as well as the scope within which the study will be conducted. The second chapter also attempts to review what the literature has to say about writing skills and written feedback.

Information pertaining to the design of the study, the subjects of the study, the instruments used and the procedures followed in their construction and in the collection of the data as well as the method of data analyses are presented in the third chapter. The fourth chapter

intends to answer the research questions of the study. This is done with the discussion and analyses of the data obtained through the questionnaire and the test.

The last chapter of this study gives conclusions and recommendation the conclusion are drawn from the analyses of the data in the fourth chapter. The recommendations are also given in accordance with the conclusion drawn.

### ***1.1 Background of the Study***

In Ethiopia, English is a medium of instruction from grade nine onwards up to the university. Even in some regions English is used as a medium instruction starting from grade seven (Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia, 2002). English is an important school subject in that pupils' future is largely dependent on the success in it, therefore, it is given the highest number of periods a week (Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia, 2002).

To this effect, a pass in English, in addition to other subjects, determines a student's chance of joining a university or a college (Awol, 1999). To put it in another way, students who failed to obtain a passing grade in English are not allowed to join any of the different institutions in the country. This is mainly because English is the medium of instruction in higher institutions and it is believed that students performance at this level will depend, to a large extent, on their language proficiency (Awol, 1999 and Berhanu, 2000).

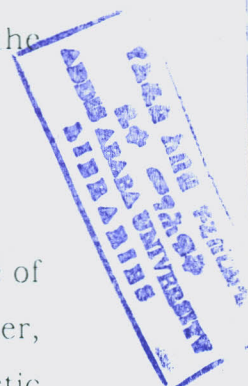
Although English has continued to be taught as a subject starting from the first years of schooling, and then becomes the medium of instruction from secondary school (grade nine and ten) onwards, the level of students' mastery of English has not been found to be sufficient enough

to help them study other subjects. Regarding this, Berhanu(2000) indicates that ‘the English language proficiency level of students in Ethiopia is so slow that it doesn’t allow them to follow their high school and university or College years.’ Awol (1999) confirms this idea and forwards some reasons for this issue. Some of these conditions are: ‘lack of conditions to use the language both in class and outside of it; inappropriate text books; large number of students in class, and lack of motivation on the part of the students.’

In order to alleviate this problem, it is important to study the aforementioned conditions and many other aspects of the teaching/learning process. This study which aims at investigating if there is any correlation between students’ perception of written feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks and their actual writing skills might be important to identify some of the causes that hamper the effective use of the language for academic purposes

## **1.2 Statement of the Research Problem**

Hyland (2003) notes that ‘providing written feedback to students is one of the ESL writing teachers’ most important tasks.’ In the same manner, ESL students also reported on a desire they have that their linguistic errors be corrected and they strongly believe that it is teachers’ responsibility to provide such feedback. In short, ESL teachers have to correct surface level errors and students want their teachers to do the same. Obviously, first language writers usually have no limitation in their linguistic competence; they can focus on more theoretical, notional and abstract ideas. This may, however, not be the case with second or foreign language learners where they are still struggling with their lower language proficiency and linguistic errors. Therefore, the notion of providing written feedback occupy a prominent status in the process of



developing learners writing competence (Raid, 2000; Radecki and Swales, 1988; Ferris and Hedgcock, 1998; Kepner, 1991; and Hyland , 2003).

Drawing on the literature review and context of the study that explores students' perception feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks and their actual writing skills, the study sets out to give answers to the following research questions:

1. How do students perceive feedback that their teachers provide them with for writing tasks?
2. How does the perception of students correlate with their actual writing skills?
3. How do students use the feedback provided by teachers to improve their writing skills?
4. How do students pay attention to various language features?

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

Generally speaking, the research in this field mostly refers to the importance of written feedback to the development of students' writing skills, teachers' mechanisms and attitudes when giving their comments and students' preferences and application of the given written feedback. According to Ferris and Roberts (2001), knowing about students' attitudes and preferences about error feedback and their own assessment of their weaknesses in writing is important. They also note that attitudes and preferences have been neglected in many previous error correction studies and reviews.

Students' perception of feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks has an immense effect for a success in writing. This paper, therefore, focuses on looking in students' perception of written feedback that

teachers provide for writing tasks in comparison to their own actual writing skills.

#### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

It is obvious that writing is amongst the most prominent skills that language learners need to learn as an essential component of their academic practice and later on in their professional life, which partially explains why teaching writing has prompted a good deal of research that covers various aspects of its broad instructional context. However, writing does not only reside in the classroom, the need for well-organized successful writing can be seen almost every where: writing a formal letter to a supervisor, a casual letter to a friend, a poem or a novella, even a short memorandum are all the examples of writing, i.e., the need for acceptable writing is found in about all everyday life practices.

Another fact is that teaching/learning how to write successfully gets even more complicated and challenging for both language teachers and students when it comes to the ESL/EFL environment compared with teaching first language writing. In the former case, learners have to focus on multiple interactive processes that go well beyond basic writing rules usually meant for native student writers.

In conjunction with this intricacy, little research concerning students' perception of written feedback and their actual performance on second language writing situations was carried out. These combined factors then may well justify the choice of this research topic and also gave a genuine reason why researching this issue could be interesting.

## 1.5 Delimitations of the Study

The study aims at correlating students' perception of written feedback with their actual writing skills. The teachers' feedback is used as a response to students' surface level writing errors, and how they operate them in their subsequent writings. The study was taken place at English Department of Kotebe College of Teacher Education. The subjects who were involved in the study were second year diploma program students. The subjects of the study have taken at least one specialized course in English writing in the college besides their previous general writing classes that they take in their language study.

The way in which comments are worded, and the nature of the message, is ultimately shaped by teachers' values, beliefs and understandings. Yet, teacher's characteristics will not be treated in this study. Another factor which is not treated here is educational context. The educational content is believed to affect students' perception of feedback. Falchicov (1995) comments on how educational context has presented teachers with a dichotomy in giving feedback: on the one hand wishing to provide timely and useful feedback, but on the other, feeling the pressure of reducing the amount of feedback due to increased students numbers and hence workload. From the teachers point of view, once again, understanding of each students needs before providing feedback is commendable (though difficult it is large class sizes), but the study doesn't primarily focus on contextual factors and how they affect feedback. The study only considers the feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks and explores if there is any correlation between this and students' actual writing skills

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Generally speaking, this chapter has two parts. The first part attempts to review what the literature has to say about writing skills. The second part deals with some important and relevant issues in feedback.

#### 2.1 Writing Skills

The main focus of this part would be to show what the literature has to say about writing in general and developing writing skills in particular. In order to achieve this purpose, the following topics will be explored in this part: the what of writing, the nature and purpose of writing, approaches to teaching writing and the writing tasks that students carry out while learning to write.

##### 2.1.1 The What of Writing

When we write, we use graphic symbols – letter or combination of letters as we make use of sounds when we speak. On one level, then, writing can be said to be the act of forming these symbols that is, making marks on a flat surface of some kind. By contrast writing is much more than the production of graphic symbols, just as speech is more than the production of sounds. The symbols have to be arranged, according to certain conventions, to form words, and words have to be arranged to form sentences.

As a rule, we don't write just one sentence or even a number of unrelated sentences. Rather we produce a sequence of sentences arranged in a particular order and linked together in certain ways. The sequence may be very short-perhaps only two or three sentences but because of the

way the sentences have been put in order and linked together, they form a coherent whole. They form what we may call a 'text'.

Even if a great deal is not known about individual methods of composing a text, but most people would agree that it is usually neither an easy nor a spontaneous activity. Sometimes writing comes easily; if we are in the right 'mood' or have a clear and perhaps pressing need to express something. But as a rule it requires some conscious mental effort: we 'think out' our sentences and consider various ways of combining and arranging them. We reread what we have written as a stimulus to further write. Other common practices are making several versions of a text before we are satisfied with the result.

Writing involves the encoding of a message of some kind; that is, we translate our thoughts into language. Reading involves the decoding or interpretation of this message. We, thus, write for a reader who is not physically present except those occasions when we write for ourselves, e.g., shopping list. And in some cases our reader may not be known to us. So, we have to ensure that what we write can be understood without any further help from us. This is the reason for the care we have to take in writing. It is by the organization of our sentences into a text, into a coherent whole, which is as explicit as possible and complete in itself that we are able (or hope to be able) to communicate successfully with our reader through the medium of writing.

## **2.1.2 The Nature and Purpose of Writing**

### **2.1.2.1 *The Nature of Writing***

One of the most important features of writing is its difficulty in learning (Hedge, 1998 & Byrne 1988). Similarly, Ur (1996:163) reveals "much higher standards of language are normally demanded in writing than in speech: more careful constructions, more precise and varied vocabulary

and more correctness of expression in general.” Writing is a messy business which requires passing through a number of untidy drafts before reaching a final version (Ur, 1996). Besides, what makes the business of writing demanding as Ebset et al (2003) (cited in Gentnet, 1993:7) states:

*Writers have gone through the composing process --- they have taken a piece of writing from the point at which they develop ideas and consider ways of organizing them, through drafting, revising, editing and proofreading. Writers sometimes jump ahead, sometimes loop back, sometimes draw arrow and stars and sometimes hit the delete key.*

From the above quote, therefore, it seems possible to argue that writing requires the writer to pass through a number of stages without which it could not be easy to come up with a good written piece of work. So, in an attempt to make a concluding remark, White and Arndt ( 1993:3) says, “Even people writing in their native language, though they may have a more extensive stock of language resources to call upon, they frequently confront exactly the same kinds of writing problems as people writing in a foreign or second language.”

#### **2.1.2.2 The Purposes of Writing**

Writing which is one of the essential skills of a language used as a means of communication, as a means of permanent record, as a means of permanent record, as a form of expression, etc ( Italo, 1999). People write, therefore, to express their feelings, ideas, opinions beliefs, anger, happiness, and so on. The writing could also be done based on given piece of information or based on our own imagination creativity. For communication being the aim of different writings, therefore, people write

to achieve different purposes. As far as writing in the classroom situation is concerned, Byrne (1988:14), cited in Getnet (1993:7), puts as :

*Teachers need to make students aware that any piece of writing is an attempt to communicate something: that the writer has a goal or purpose in mind; that he has to establish and maintain contact with his reader; that he has to organize his material and that he does this through the use of certain logical and grammatical devices.*

Our writing has different addresses and different purpose, which also differs along several dimensions, especially those of language topic and audience (McDonough and Shaw, 1993). As to Hunt (1992), the purpose for which students need to write in English should be carefully considered and reflected in the kind of exercises given to them. The writer's aim, even at a basic level, must be to convey his/her message in such a way as to affect the reader as he intends. How he/she does this will vary according to his/her purpose for writing the kind of writing task, etc. (Atkins and et al,1996). In the same way, Leki (1986) says, "Part of the rhetorical context and part of the content of student writing is determined by who the audience of the writing is and what the purpose of the writing is".

In writing, a writer might either focus on the grammatical aspect of a text or on the meaning transmitted to the reader. Technically speaking, the former is called accuracy and the latter, fluency.

#### **2.1.2.2.1 Accuracy**

Accuracy is one aspect of writing which needs consideration while teaching writing. Given the amount of attention that teachers need to pay to, however, if the teacher is pre-occupied with element of accuracy such as grammar, spelling and punctuation while treating students' written

work, students may not express their ideas for fear of being corrected by the teacher for every deviation. As Krashen (1982) states, the objective of the lesson may determine whether or not students need to focus on accuracy (form) or fluency (content) of the language. In relation to this, Pincas (1982:23), for instance, points out "In traditional composition students are expected to demonstrate that they have mastered certain structures or vocabulary and the teacher will be looking for mistakes." Thus, there is a higher degree of control by the teacher while students are doing mechanical exercises where they are supposed to use the correct forms of words and grammatically correct sentences. However, Ur (1996:163) states, "One of our problems in teaching writing is to maintain a fair balance between content and form."

#### **2.1.2.2.2 Fluency**

Atkins, et al. (1996:138) state, "Many grammatical errors are relatively unimportant in the sense that they do not affect meaning or communication." Similarly, Pincas (1982:23) also puts as follows:

*If the aim is to achieve a reasonable communicative competence, then the teacher will be more interested in whether the student has managed to put together a piece of writing that could fulfill a broad communicative function, e.g. a reasonably set-out letter, a logically organized descriptions, a set of coherent instructions and so on.*

The approach stresses writing with purpose. In real life, we normally have a reason for writing and we write to or for somebody. This does motivate students to write and shows how writing is a form of communication. Thus, it is important to devise situations that allow students to write purposefully. For example, they can write to one another in the classroom or use writing in role play situations.

The above two purposes for writing (accuracy and fluency) can be achieved by using various approaches of teaching writing. This is to mean that if our purpose for writing is accuracy, the product approach is used to achieve it. And, if our purpose for writing is fluency, the process approach is used.

### **2.1.3 Approaches to Teaching Writing**

As far as the teaching of writing skills is concerned, there are a number of different approaches to the practice of writing skills both in and outside the classroom (Harmer, 2001). As Harmer also states, while teaching writing, teachers can either focus on the product of writing or on the writing process.

#### **2.1.3.1. The Product Approach**

As the name suggests, in the product approach to teaching writing, the aim is on evaluating students' final written papers. And the intention is to make students use the language as accurately as possible. In this regard, Hedge (2000) also says that:

*Product approaches focus the students' attention on the features of texts and are largely concerned with developing his or her ability to produce those futures accurately. The methodology, therefore, involves analysis of model texts in order to raise awareness of how they are structured. It also involves formal practice of such features.*

The practices is so controlled (controlled writing activities whose aim is on the accuracy of the language) in nature that students have little opportunity for composing (Hedge, 2000). The teacher is not in a position to help students during the writing process. Instead he/she uses the students, written works for evaluating purposes, that is, in order to diagnose their strengths and weakness, Harmer (2000:257) reveals that,

“ When concentrating on the product, we are only interested in the aim of a task and in the end product.”

In this approach as the teacher expects higher standards of language, he/she pays a comparatively more attention to the formal or micro aspects of writing such as grammar, spelling, punctuation, and careful selection of vocabulary than the macro aspects (content and organization) of writing. Zamel (1985:79) also says that, “Teachers marks and comments usually take the form of abstract and vague prescriptions and directives that students find difficult to interpret.” The reason for this could be that teachers don’t want their students to make errors, as the purposes of writing task also require students to do so.

### **2.1.3.1 The process approach**

The process approach to writing is one kind of orientation to writing (in L1 or L2) (Getnet, 1993). Contrary to the product approach researches in writing indicate that “Writing is an act of discovery” in which writers develop what they want to say during rather than before the process of writing (Hariston, 1982). As quoted in Kroll (1991:247), Kroll, ( 1991:247) further argues that:

*Usually the writing process is not linear, moving smoothly in one direction from start to finish. It is messy, recursive and convoluted. Writers write, plan, revise, anticipate, and review throughout the writing process, moving back and forth among different operations involved in writing without apparent plan.*

The transformation from product to process requires teachers to offer courses which provide students and repertoire of strategies for writing and at the same time provide them an understanding of the goals and purposes of written communication (Kroll, 1991). So real life situation that motivate learners to start writing need to be devised. Although

transferring real-life situations directly to classroom writing is sometimes problematic, 'what we should aim at is at least the creation of plausible context' (Grant, 1987 cited in McDounough and Shaw, 1993).

In the process approach to writing, students should not expect the first words they put on paper to be perfect informal. Rather, they will discover new ideas, new sentences, or new words as they plan, write, revise, and get feedback from either fellow students or their teacher. Again, the first piece of writing is not corrected or graded but the "reader responds only to the ideas expressed" (Raims, 1983). As Raims (1983:10) further explains "students explore topics through writing, showing their first drafts to the teacher or to each other, and using what they write to read over, think about, and move over to new ideas."

Therefore, teachers who use the process approach give students support with regard to "*time to try out ideas and feedback on the content of what they write in their drafts*" (1983:10). The process of writing, then, becomes a process of discovery for the students in which they discover, "new ideas and new language forms to express those ideas" (Raims, 1983:11).

In the product approach, students are expected to perform more of controlled tasks but in the process approach, mostly, free writing tasks are performed by students.

#### **2.1.4 Writing Tasks**

Generally speaking, writing activities can be divided into three levels of writing: controlled, guided and free (Atkins et al., 1996; Pincas, 1982; and Raims, 1983). As students progress in their grade levels and academic performance, they are to provided with fewer and fewer number of controlled writing tasks. Thus, the degree of control on the part of the

teacher is expected to lower and that students are supposed to have got more freedom of expression while trying to get their ideas come across.

#### ***2.1.4.1 Controlled Writing***

Controlled exercises are the most common exercise types emphasized in most English classes. There is little room for making errors and they are easily controlled by the teacher in the sense that there is/are limited answer(s). In other words, in controlled writing, students are not allowed to write their own ideas and that the teacher knows what they are writing. Because the teacher has complete control over what the students are writing, there is little opportunity for making mistakes. Such writing activities involve copying sentences from a substitution table, or filling - in blanks where students are required to supply probably only one possible answer (Atkins et al., 1996; Pincas, 1982; and Raims, 1983).

#### ***2.1.4.2 Guided Writing***

As the term 'guided' suggests, students can possibly be provided with some hints or guidance as to what to do by such writing activities. On top of what they are provided with, students have the opportunity to add their own ideas in which case they can also make mistakes. In this regard, Rivers (1981:302) states, " At the guided writing stage, students will be given more freedom in the selection of lexical items and structural patterns for their written exercises." Though an emphasis is still given to accuracy, teachers are supposed to have a more tolerant attitude towards errors made by students while doing guided writing activities. Besides, such activities are believed to be the basis for teaching paragraph writing (Atkins et al., 1996). Examples of such activities include notes from listening, notes from parallel passages, dialogue completion, questions to answers and charts, tables and diagrams (Atkins et al., 1996).

### **2.1.4.3 Free Writing**

In free writing tasks, students are provided with topics to choose from or to choose their own topics. Then, they are supposed to produce their own written texts using their own ideas. Here they are free to write to write what comes into their mind using their own choice of lexis and structure. In free writing activities, the teacher is not in a position to provide his/her students guidance in terms of language or content. By doing so, students are likely to make errors. Examples of such writing activities included writing a letter of explanation, writing questions for a quiz and writing a short story (Atkins et al., 1996).

In all these types of tasks, teachers read students' writing critically and give feedback in order to improve their writing skills. Feedback, according to Chaudron (1988), is a major means through which teachers inform learners' correctness of their target language production.

## **2.2 Written Feedback**

In this part, an attempt is made to review various issues related to written feedback. These are, the concept of feedback, is form feedback necessary? ESL/EFL learners and form feedback: are they different from their native counterparts? Some important issues in feedback, do students make use of feedback for revisions? and Related research works.

### **2.2.1 The Concept of Feedback**

The Dictionary of Education (1973:302) defines feedback as "the process of interchanging of information on the part of the human beings in communication; it is a problem solving mechanism." In addition to the above definition, Wondwossen (1992:5) in his M.A thesis states feedback as "teachers' remark or expression and correctness or incorrectness of students' statement of a subject matter."

The concept of feedback is further stated by Brooks (1971:172) as follows:

*If the purpose of communication is to exchange meaning accurately, to influence another person so as to satisfy ones need and to respond so as to mean some means of correcting faulty messages, misconceptions and misunderstandings, incorrect responses are necessary. That 'means', for correcting our shared meanings and responses and making them more accurate is feedback.*

Feedback is therefore, a means through which communication, in the process of teaching and learning, is enhanced.

But there were debates about the importance of feedback in improving students writing competence. (in this study the phrases like written feedback, from feedback, grammar feedback, feedback, error correction, correction marking, comment, etc are used to mean the same thing and used interchangeably.)

### **2.2.2 Is Form Feedback Necessary?**

The discussion about giving grammar errors' feedback ( form- feedback) cannot overlook the oft-cited, rather controversial article by Truscott ( 1996) which has been the target of almost all the following studies addressing the same topic. The findings of his article, which clearly stand against grammar correction, were the aim of continuous debate either in favor or against. It is worth noting that some earlier researchers have also concluded to stances similar to these of Truscott's but the main difference is that they do not overtly recommended teachers to completely stop giving grammar feedback anymore as Truscott do.



Cohen and Robbison (1976), for example, argue that the correction of students' compositions is often ineffective in reducing errors. However, they have an explanation for their findings that teachers correct errors inconsistently. Ferris and Hedgcock, 1998 also believes that "teachers' comments have little impact on student writing." Again, the given possible reason for ineffectiveness was due to teachers themselves. Sommers (1982:142) supports the claim when found that teachers comments were "arbitrary and idiosyncratic." Further more, it is commented on teachers written feedback that it is : Large number of short, careless, exhausted, or extensive comments (Sommers, 1982). But with respect to his radical ideas, Truscotts (1996) article yet remains the most controversial for he does not attribute the 'failure' of inadequacy caused by teachers, students, or teaching contexts but because of form feedback itself.

Many studies (Grami, 2005; Ferris, 1991, etc.) give practical evidence that grammar-correction in fact does help students improve their accuracy as opposed to Truscott(1996). The main weak point of Truscott's (1996) paper, according to Grami, (2005), is that most of the literature he used to support his claims is actually researches that have been carried out in L<sub>1</sub> contexts which cannot be transferred completely to ESL/EFL contexts as the students in the latter environment struggle with their L<sub>2</sub> and errors are definitely expected from them. Kepner (1991:305) believes that error correction in second language teaching is "of perennial concern to L<sub>2</sub> teachers." Kepner notes that many L<sub>2</sub> teachers fear the fossilization of errors (a persuasive argument later supported by Ferris, (1999) and that teachers feel morally obliged to correct all mistakes in their L<sub>2</sub> students' work. This finding may shed some light on why teachers correct 'form' errors. Ferris (1999) also notes that "L<sub>2</sub> students themselves are very much concerned about accuracy and they will ask for their errors to be corrected by their teachers."

### ***2.2.3 ESL/EFL Learners and Form Feedback: Are ESL/EFL Learners Different From Their Native Counterparts?***

Although ESL/EFL learners' success in ESL/EFL composition is the ultimate goal of the whole literature of teaching / learning writing, it seems that their point of view of the whole issue has been long ignored or, in best cases, did not receive the attention it deserves (White and Arndt, 1991 and Grami, 2005). L<sub>2</sub> students' writing has been of great significance to teaching writing and is well considered by writing teachers and pedagogy theorists alike (Ferris, 1999). Ferris (1999) describes the practice of giving feedback as "indispensable." Hyland (2003) also notes that providing written feedback to students is one of the ESL/EFL writing teachers most important tasks. In the same manner, ESL students were, also reported to overwhelmingly desire their linguistic errors to be corrected and they strongly believe that it is teachers' responsibility to provide such feedback (Grami, 2005). In short, ESL teachers have to correct surface-level errors and students want their teacher to do so. The bottom line is that as L<sub>1</sub> writers usually have no limitation in their linguistic competence, they can focus on more theoretical, notional, abstract ideas. This is, however, not the case with L<sub>2</sub> learners where they are still struggling with their lower language proficiency and linguistic errors, therefore, occupy the prominent status (Raid, 2000; Radecki and Swales, 1998; Ferris and Hedgcock, 1998; Kepner, 1991; and Hyland, 2003).

This idea can be supported not only from ESL/EFL writing teachers, the research findings show that they are very much concerned about students surface level errors (e.g., Ferris, 2002 in her preface and Hyland, 2003). This concern about accuracy is likely to be caused by already mentioned students' concern themselves. Research findings show

that students want, appreciate and apply the corrections they get from their teachers (Zamel, 1985; Hyland 2003; Hyland 1998; Ferris and Roberts, 2001; Cohen, 1987; and Leki, 1991). Zamel (1985), for instance, notices that most of ESL/EFL writing teachers' comments were concerned about surface-level errors. Zamel (1985) then suggest that ESL/EFL writing teachers perceive themselves when giving feedback. The possible explanation of such an attitude by ESL/EFL students can be obtained from Ferris (2002) who notes that L<sub>2</sub> writers are aware of their linguistic limitations and thus "more likely to focus on word-or sentence-level accuracy." Similarly, Kepner (1991) refers to the traditional view of achievement in L<sub>2</sub> writing "as mastery of discrete surface skills required for production of an accurately written document. In short, there is plenty of research evidence to show that ESL/EFL students want surface-level correction and believe in its effectiveness (Lee, 1997; Leki, 1991; and Henderickson, 1978).

#### ***2.2.4 Some Important Issues in Feedback***

Responding to student writing - once seen as the writing teacher and certainly the most time-consuming one- is a complex process which also requires the teacher to a number of critical decisions ( Celce-Murcia, 1991). Clece-Murcia (1991:251) also states that the teacher has to address the following key questions in responding to student writing:

1. *What are the general goals within the writing course of providing feedback to student writers?*
2. *What are the specific goals of providing feedback on a particular piece of writing?*
3. *At what stage in the writing process should feedback be offered?*
4. *What should students do with the feedback they receive?*

Similarly, while emphasizing the vitality of feedback provision, Johnson (1995) quoted in Ur (1996:243) reveals, "for successful acquisition of a

skill, the learner needs feedback on how well he/she is doing, hence the importance of provision of constant and honest assessment.” Feedback on an individual learner’s particular profile offers diagnosis and remedial measures and replaces traditional summative grading (Candlin, 1981:12). Thus, without feedback learning will be slow and errors can become ingrained resulting in fossilization (McGraw-Hill, 1997). Besides, regarding the role of feedback, Clifford (1981)cited in Wondowossen (1992:10) has to say:

- *Feedback generally increases motivation*
- *Feedback usually improves subsequent performance*
- *Feedback given punctually is more effective than that given long after the task has been completed.*
- *When knowledge of results is not provided, individuals tend to develop substitutes. For example, they may match peers and decided whether their performance is better or worse.*

Generally, the more specific the knowledge of performance the more rapidly performance improves. However, excessively detailed feedback on early trails of complex tasks may prove to be confusing and detrimental

#### **2.2.4.1 Who Should Provide Feedback?**

It is obvious that correction of student’s written work is a time-consuming business especially in large classes. Thus, in order to provide correction or remedial feedback, teachers can use any one of the strategies or in combination: self-correction, peer correction, and teacher-correction. Though traditionally it appears that teachers are the sole providers of the majority of written feedback in classroom situations, many language theorists and researchers argue that self and peer-correction play vital roles in responding to students’ written papers (Taye,2005). This is especially important in the process approach to

teaching writing where the students are required to produce multiple drafts before the final product. The idea is that when students involve themselves in the process of correction, they can be autonomous learners, become active learners and can have the practice to experiment with the language. In relation to this, Edge (1989:52) says, "involving learners in Judgments about correctness helps them become more accurate in their own use of the language." In addition, the strategies of using self- and peer- correction are important in solving the very time-consuming business of correcting students' written work in large classes (Doff, 1988; & Ur, 1996).

#### **2.2.4.2 When to Provide Feedback?**

It appears that most teachers do not provide feedback during the writing process. Instead, they provide feedback to students' final drafts, that is, when the writing task is over. While suggesting the importance of immediate feedback, Byrne (1988:124) points "If you can correct something in class, while the students are engaged in writing and everything is fresh in their minds, this is likely to be more effective than looking at a mass of corrections several days after the event." It has also been noted that it is important to follow a process approach to teaching writing where by teachers give feedback at different stages in the writing process (Hedge, 1988). In this approach, Students are more likely required to write more than one draft. Besides, students are supposed to revise what they have produced either individually or in groups.

Celce-Murcia (1991:260) also notes that "Errors must be dealt with at an approbation stage of the composing process." In fact, editing or correcting errors on first drafts can be a counter-productive activity, possibly exacerbating whatever insecurities students might have about their writing and drawing their attention away from the other kinds

revision work that must be attended to (Celce-Murcia, 1991). Besides, Zamel (1985) suggests that commentary on a first draft is likely to serve more immediate pedagogical goals than that given on a final product. In addition to this, she further states, in the process approach to teaching writing, teachers should respond to ideas on earlier draft and on grammar in later drafts.

#### **2.2.4.3 How to Correct Errors**

It is obvious that ESL/EFL students write with mistakes and it becomes necessary for us to devise ways of dealing with errors so that they do not become the sole focus of the piece of writing (Raims, 1983). There are, of course, a number of ways by which teachers correct student's writings. One of the techniques is correcting all the students written errors. This kind of technique (direct correction by the teacher) however, is believed to be the traditional method. (Byrne, 1988; and Raims, 1983). On the other hand, Edge (1989:56) says. "Correction does not mean making everything absolutely correct; correction means helping people learn to express themselves better." But if everything is always corrected, correction itself becomes the ultimate purpose of writing (Edge, 1983). This way of correction as is also suggested by other researchers does not help students in experimenting with the language or solve their problems themselves, and hence they are likely to be dependent on the teacher. Similarly, Doff (1988) points out that so many corrections are likely to discourage students as they could think that they did almost nothing correctly.

A teacher, according to Raims (1983), Celce- Murcia (1991) and Byrne (1988), can point exactly to an error by circling or underlining it in the text and writing the symbol in the margin. Alternatively, as Raims (1983), Celce- Murcia (1991) and Byrne (1988) further state if the teacher only writes the symbol in the margin, then it is the student's task to figure out

exactly where and what the error is and correct it as well. Although the latter method is, of course, more demanding in that it requires students to identify the error and where in the text it occurs, Byrne (1988) points out that it is getting so important. Ultimately, they will have to examine, evaluate and improve their own work which is part of the process of drafting, correcting and writing final versions (Byrne, 1988).

However, a teacher has to make sure that the students are familiar with which grammatical rule to apply to correct the sentence (Fathman and Whalley, 1990). He/she can use his/her own symbols consistently by training students and make them familiar with. However, the most commonly used symbols we find in most of the literature are SP: for spelling error; Cap: for capitalization; P: error in punctuation; V: error in verb form and tense; WO: for wrong word order; S/P: singular or plural wrong from, and so on (Byrne, 1988).

As far as the different techniques of responding to students written work is concerned, Fathman and Whally (1990:162) says that, "Comment on form make generalized comments about content, e.g., 'good description' or 'add details'".

Noting down and duplicating students' sentences to different groups for correcting errors is one among different techniques. Each group then is supposed to report to the whole class on how they correct their sentences. In the meantime, the student-writers can listen to the suggestions made by their friends (Raims, 1983). Though he complains that conferencing, which Keh (1990) calls "interactive feedback", is time-consuming and not practical in some situations, other preachers believe that it is productive and encouraging in promoting students writing (Berita and Scardmalia 1986). The technique of conferencing, as Keh (1990) explains, is a kind of discussion between the teacher and students about the student's written work.

Robb et. al (1986) sums it up that the more direct techniques of feedback do not tend to produce results commensurate with the amount of effort required of the instructor to draw the student's attention to the surface error generally, as is concluded by Celce-Murcia (1991). The 'best' approach to feedback on errors must undoubtedly derive from considering the circumstances of the individual student coupled with the goals of the course and the stage of the composing process a particular draft reflects.

#### **2.2.4.4 What Kinds of Errors Should Be Corrected?**

Due to time constraint and difficulty of dealing with every error, the teacher should know about the types of errors and which should be corrected first. As Nunan (1989:78) states "... the seriousness of the error and the kind of correction strategy to be used depends on the objective of the lesson and the context in which the instruction takes place." So, all the errors should not be corrected and it is better to recognize global and local errors. Hendrickson (1978), cited in Atkins et al (1996:127), says that "Errors that lead to misunderstanding of a message (global errors) should be treated first than errors that do not hinder the message (local errors)." Therefore, correction of errors should depend on the kind of errors.

In the treatment of errors teachers have to be selective. They should consider the objective of the lesson. In other words, they should treat the kind of errors that affect the communication process and students further progress. If the teacher assumes error is the problem of most students in the class, he/she should not ignore it.

### **2.2.5 Do Students Make Use of Feedback for Revisions?**

Obviously, the whole value of feedback provided to student cannot be ascertained unless students make use of all the necessary comments for revising their drafts. Despite its type, a carefully provided feedback can contribute to the improvement of student writing.

In cases whether students really consider the feedback given to them or not, research findings have shown quite discouraging results in L<sub>1</sub> situation. For instance, Kroll (1991), cited in Taye (2005) has collected the following findings from various research works.

- (1) Students fail to read the written comments on their papers, caring only about the grade (Burkland & Grim, 1986);*
- (2) Students don't understand or indeed misinterpret the written comments, and find themselves unable to make appropriate change in future drafts (Hayes and Daiker, 1984);*
- (3) Students use comments to psych out a particular teachers' personal agenda only hoping "to make the teacher happy" in the future (Freedman, 1987); and*
- (4) Students become hostile at the teachers' appropriation of their text (Leki, 1990).*

If these findings are true for L<sub>1</sub> situation Taye(2005) and Zamel (1985) predicts, it is likely to be the case in L<sub>2</sub> situation, therefore, regardless of whatever strategies teachers develop to provide feedback on student paper, as Kroll (1991:257) advises that "students must also be trained to use the feedback in ways that will improve their writing – be it on the next draft of a particular paper or on another assignments."

In conclusion, it is only when students are initiated to incorporate comments or ideas provided by their peers or teacher that the act of

writing becomes meaningful for both the students and the teacher; and that students writing skills will usually improve

### ***2.2.6 Related Research Works***

There are some local studies on feedback which are believed to be related to the present study. Among them, Getent's (1993) M.A. thesis analyzes the responding behavior of sophomore English teachers of Addis Ababa University (AAU) to student writing. An investigation is made on what features of writing the instructors focus on while providing feedback; at what stage they intervene to give feedback; how their students react to the feedback; how their students react to the feedback given to them. Analyses of the data reveals that while providing feedback, Sophomore English teachers concentrate on low-order concerns and rarely or never attend to high-order concerns. It is also pointed out that instructors respond to students after they complete their writing tasks, and not before they write or as they write. It is also observed, as the paper further notes, that instructors often use a narrow range of feedback technique such as direct correction of errors and students also employ very few strategies in handling feedback.

The other local related work is Italo's (1999) Ph.D. dissertation that compared the effectiveness of teacher versus student feedback on AAU students writing revisions. In his study, Italo found that both teacher feedback and peer feedback are equally effective in improving students' writing. Italo also concludes that, students' writing improved significantly because of the feedback given by teachers for writing tasks.

Taye's (2005) M.A thesis is also a study which tries to see whether written feedback has significant contribution to promoting student writing skills, at what stage feedback should be given, by whom and how feedback is provided to student writing; and if students make revisions as a result of feedback provided or not. And he found that the written

feedback did not seem to improve students' writing skills. He added that the reason why the students writing do not change might be ascribed to the teachers' wrong strategies of giving written feedback on the students' lack of awareness about the role of revisions in the improvement of their writing skills.

Tesfaye Solomon's (1995) research is on the effectiveness of learner self-correction of written errors in the EFL classroom. In his study, Tesfaye found out that learner self-correction of written errors became successful when errors were provided with clues for students to correct by themselves.

Wondowossen Tamirat (1992) also conducted a research on the oral feedback behavior of teachers. By so doing, wondowsen reported that teachers spent a large share of the class time (29%) for the purpose of providing feedback on students' work in the form of error treatment.

As regards international related research works, there are two controversial ideas. On the one hand, John Truscott (1996) and Cohen & Robbinson (1976) reject every possible positive effect of written feedback given by language teachers to their students in order to improve students' writing and minimize their errors. And he concluded by recommending all language teachers to completely abandon giving comments concerning surface errors. Ferris (1999), Lee (1997) and Grami (2005), on the other hand, believe that the application of written feedback is crucial and of great significance for betterment of the students' writing skills. Moreover, Grami (2005) also studies Saudi ESL beliefs and preferences of their teachers' written feedback. They expressed their strong belief of its importance and applicability. According to Ferris and Roberts (2001), cited in Grami (2005), knowing about students' attitude and preferences about error feedback and their own assessment of their weaknesses in writing is important. Their

preferences have been neglected in many previous error correction studies and reviews.

Besides the lack of studies that look in to feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks from students perspective, no attempt has been made to investigate if there is any correlation between EFL students perception of feedback that they are given for their writing tasks and students actual writing skills in the local context. In the international context, most studies in this area tend to focus either on whether or not written feedback is important for the betterment of learners' writing skills or perception of teachers' and students' about written feedback.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The aim of this study is to investigate if there is any correlation between second year Kotebe College of Teacher Education (KCTE) students' perception of written feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks and their actual writing skills. Information pertaining to the design of the study, the subjects of the study, the instruments used and the procedures followed in their construction and in the collection of the data as well as the method of analysis of the data are presented in this chapter.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study aims at exploring the students' perception of written feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks in comparison to their own actual writing skills. With the aim of eliciting relevant information, a quantitative research design was employed for the study. This was because a quantitative research design is appropriate to gather data about perception of individuals. Moreover, the result obtained from the writing proficiency test was collected using quantitative method.

#### **3.2 Subjects of the Study**

For non-native English teachers language proficiency will always represent the bedrock of their professional confidence. For the same reason, subjects of the study were second year (Regular and Extension program) students of KCTE. The reason why subjects of the study were second year students was because it is at about this stage (or year) that at least one course in writing is given.

In this study, the intention was to include 108 students (33%), out of a total population of 325 students of the College.

### **3.3 Data Gathering Tools**

The data to be analyzed in this study was collected using a questionnaire and writing proficiency test. The questionnaire would help to gather data on the perception of subjects on written feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks. The test, on the other hand, would help to collect data on the actual writing proficiency of the same subjects.

#### **3.3.1. Questionnaire**

McDonough and McDonough (1997) believe that using a questionnaire is a popular means of data collection. It is believed that they have some advantages over other data collection instruments (e.g., interview). McDonough and McDonough say:

*Questionnaires tend to be more reliable as they are anonymous; they encourage greater honesty from respondents; they save the researcher's and participants' time and effort (more economical); and they can be used in small scale issues.*

Because of the absence of a standard research instrument which is directly related to the purpose of this study an attempt was made to modify some related instruments (e.g., Grami, 2005; Italo, 1999; Getnet, 1993 and Taye, 2005). Hence, a questionnaire consisting of 28 items was prepared by modifying the above related instruments. In modifying the

questionnaire, all possible efforts were made to use plain language; and technical terms were deliberately avoided.

All the items of the questionnaire which were close-ended types were basically organized around the following major themes: 1) How students perceive written feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks, 2) The attention given to various features of language, 3) Students' strategies of using written feedback and 4) Students' perception of written feedback provision techniques used by teachers.

### **3.3.2 Writing Proficiency Test**

In this study two kinds of data were collected using a questionnaire and a writing skills test. The test was used to collect data on the actual writing skills of the subjects.

The writing proficiency of the students was measured using the 1994 and 1995 TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language test).

These standardized tests, which consist of 82 items, aim at evaluating the writing proficiency of individuals whose native language is not English. However, an attempt was made to validate it and make it more meaningful for the purpose it was intended for. This was done through analyzing all the items except the 2 essay questions.

In the process of analyzing the items, those items that have 0.3-0.7 Facility Value and  $>0.3$  Discrimination Index were selected to be included (Hughes, 1988). As a result, 54 items (out of 80) were found to be valid. These items consist of sentences that test knowledge of important structural and grammatical elements of standard written English. 2 essay questions, which were intended to measure composition skills, were administered to the subjects of the study together with those 54 items which were found to be valid. Therefore, the result obtained as writing proficiency of subjects was through these 56 items.

Regarding the marking of the essay questions, Hughes's (1988) criterion was used. According to this criterion, the following points were given for various features of language: 2 points for content, 2 for organization, 1 for mechanics, 1 for grammar, and 1 for word choice. On the other hand, each of the 54 questions carries 1 point. Totally, 14 (7x2) points for both essay questions, 54 for items of structure and written expression was allotted. Therefore, the maximum point of the writing proficiency test was 68.

### **3.4. Data Collection Procedure**

This study is intended to investigate if there is any correlation between second year KCTE students' perception of written feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks and their actual writing skills. Therefore, besides the questionnaire set to gather the subjects' perception of written feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks, a writing test was prepared to collect information about the same subjects' actual writing proficiency.

Of the 108 students who were selected to be subjects of the study, 12 students were not willing to be part of the study. Again, of the 96 students who took the test and were willing to fill in the questionnaire, 4 students did not return them. In addition, 2 students did not give information properly and were excluded from the study. Consequently, only 90 students' questionnaires and tests were considered for the study. Responses were then computed and frequencies, percentages and correlations were calculated.

Before the set questionnaire was given out to the subjects, a twenty-minute orientation on the content of the questionnaire was given. By doing so, some terms that could be unfamiliar to subjects were discussed. In addition to using plain language in constructing the

questionnaire, a session was organized thinking that it would be useful to avoid confusion when the students give response to the items.

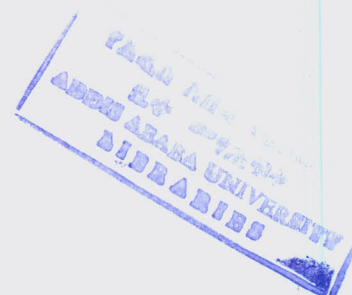
The validation process of the instrument finally resulted in having 56 items for the test. These items consist of sentences that test knowledge of important structural and grammatical elements and composition skills of students. Hence, the result obtained as writing proficiency was through these 56 items. What followed right after the collection of data using the instruments was the analysis of the data.

### **3.5 Method of Data Analysis**

To organize and facilitate the analysis, the data gathered was analyzed using quantitative method of data analysis. Generally, the quantitative data was tallied, tabulated and put into frequencies and percentages.

Specifically, the basic analyses of the collected data involved the following procedure:

- ❖ The students' responses to the items (except those related to perception of written feedback) in the questionnaire were tallied. Then, frequency and the percentage were analyzed.
- ❖ On the basis of descriptive statistical analysis, some spread or dispersion measures (e.g., Mean, Standard Deviation, etc) of students' perception and writing proficiency were calculated.
- ❖ The results of students' perception of written feedback and their actual writing proficiency were calculated using Pearson Correlation.
- ❖ Finally, from the findings, conclusions and possible recommendations were drawn.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As pointed out in the preceding chapters, the main purpose of this study was to investigate if there is any correlation between students' perception of written feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks and their actual writing skills. To that end, the following basic questions were raised:

1. How do students perceive feedback that their teachers provide them with for writing tasks?
2. How does the perception of students correlate with their actual writing skills?
3. How do students use the feedback provided by teachers for writing tasks?
4. How do students pay attention to various language features?

This chapter intends to answer these research questions. This is done with the discussion and analysis of the data obtained from questionnaire and test results. For the sake of convenience, the results gathered are revealed and discussed in three parts:

#### (1) Demographic characteristics of subjects

The focus of this part is on identifying subjects' background information. These include sex, age and mother tongue.

#### (2) Subjects' reaction to written feedback

Investigating students' reaction to written feedback given on what they write is one among the various studies conducted in relation to the significance of responding in the teaching of writing. In this study, the purpose of the questionnaire is mostly to find some information on how students react to their instructors' written feedback.

(3) Subjects proficiency of writing

In this part, issues related to students' actual writing skills are revealed and discussed.

#### 4.1 Background Information on the Study Subjects

From the first section of the questionnaire, items 1-6 were basically designed to know more about the participants' demographic and linguistic background. Accordingly, the following results have been obtained.

Table I. Background information on the study subjects.

	Respondents	
	Frequency	Percent
1. Sex		
A. Female	52	57.8
B. Male	38	42.2
Total	90	100
2. Age		
A. 18 & above	22	24.4
B. 19-21	61	67.8
C. 22& above	7	7.8
Total	90	100
2. Mother tongue		
A. Amharic	26	28.9
B. Oromifa	19	21.1
C. Tigrigna	16	17.8
D. Others	29	32.2
Total	90	100

As can be seen from the above table, 57.8% of the respondents were female students. 67.8% of the total number of respondents were 19-21 years of age. The majority of the respondents (28.9% were also Amharic language speakers as a mother tongue.

## 4.2 Reactions to Written Feedback

This part provides answers for some central research questions of the study. Accordingly, the results of the attention given to various features of language (e.g., organization, content, grammar, etc), subjects' strategies of using written feedback, subjects' perception of written feedback provision techniques used by teachers and subjects' perception of written feedback are revealed and discussed as follows:

### 4.2.1 The Attention Given to Various Features of Language Aspects

The following data is obtained from subjects in order to investigate to which feature(s) teachers and students themselves pay more attention is (are) revealed.

Table II. The attention given to various features of language.

		Respondents									
No		Frequency					Percent				
		Organization	Content	Language use	Vocabulary	Mechanics	Organization	Content	Language use	Vocabulary	Mechanics
1.	To what extent do teachers comments dealt with?										
	A lot	20	22	52	28	39	22.2	24.4	57.8	31.1	43.3
	Some	28	25	31	22	27	31.1	27.8	34.4	24.4	30
	Little	26	25	7	30	16	28.7	27.8	7.8	33.3	17.8
	None	16	18	-	10	8	17.8	20	-	11.1	8.9
	Total	90	90	90	90	90	100	100	100	100	100

2.	If you attended to your teachers comments, how much attention do you give to items involving the following										
	A lot	3	38	36	30	8	3.3	42.2	40	33.3	8.9
	Some	17	30	27	30	28	18.9	33.3	30	33.3	31.1
	Little	46	16	19	20	42	51.1	17.8	22.2	22.2	46.7
	None	24	6	8	10	12	26.7	6.7	8.9	11.1	13.3
	Total	90	90	90	90	90	100	100	100	100	100

As can be seen from the first item of Table II, the overwhelming majority of the respondents (57.8%) agreed that their teachers emphasize on grammar. Sizeable portion of the respondents (43.3%) also said that their teachers tend to focus on mechanics.

In the second item of the same table, respondents reported that they attach great value to content (42.2%) and grammar (40%). As the result shows, attention is given to grammar by both teachers and students while giving and using the feedback respectively. But this is not the case in other features of the language. For instance, while giving feedback, teachers give much attention to mechanics next to grammar, whereas most students (46.3%) said that they pay little attention to mechanics while having a look at the feedback given by their teachers.

The mismatch created, except in grammar, between what teachers and students pay more attention to might play its own negative role in the effectiveness of providing as well as using written feedback.

#### 4.2.2 Strategies of Using Written Feedback

One of the most important issues regarding written feedback is the way students use the feedback provided by their teachers. The following table shows the result obtained from related items.

Table III. Subjects' strategies of using written feedback.

No		Respondents	
		Frequency	Percent
1.	How many of the teachers' correction do you pay thoughtful attention to?		
	A. All	18	20
	B. Most	28	31.1
	C. Some	37	41.1
	D. None	7	7.8
	Total	90	100
2.	Please indicate what you do when you go through the teachers' comments?		
	A. I make a mental note of the comments	33	36.7
	B. I write down points to consider for revisions or future use.	19	21.1
	C. I rewrite the essay incorporating the comments	8	8.9
	D. I refer to other paper and rewrite the essay	4	4.4
	E. I don't do anything	26	28.9
	Total	90	100

As can be seen from Table III above, most of the respondents (41.1%) said that only to some of their teachers' corrections they give thoughtful attention to. Considerable portion of the respondents (31.1%) also reported that they pay thoughtful attention to most of the teachers' correction.

In the second item of the same table, when respondents were asked to tell what they do when they read the teachers' comments, 36.7% of them said that they make a mental note of the comments. Sadly enough, 28.9% of the respondents reported that they don't do anything with the feedback they receive from their teachers.

Generally speaking, the subjects' response shows that there are things to be done in terms of encouraging students to revise their writing tasks. In other words, teachers focus on just giving the feedback rather than accompanying it with various strategies of using the feedback given.

#### **4.2.3 Subjects' Perception of Written Feedback Provision Techniques Used by Teachers**

In this part, respondents were asked about how their teachers provide feedback for writing tasks and their response is presented as follows:

Table IV. Subjects' perception of the written feedback provision techniques used by teachers.

No		Respondents	
		Frequency	Percent
1.	How often does your teacher correct your written works?		
	A. Always	18	20
	B. Sometimes	52	57
	C. Rarely	16	17.8
	D. Not at all	4	4.4
	Total	90	100
2.	If your English teacher gives feedback on your writing, how does she/he do it?		
	A. Always orally, as a general comment to the whole class	19	21.1
	B. Always orally, on an individual basis	7	7.8
	C. Always in writing	35	38.9
	D. Sometimes orally and sometimes in writing	29	32.2
	Total	90	100
3.	If your English teacher gives feedback in writing, which one of the following shows how she/he does it, most of the time?		
	A. She/he corrects all errors and leaves no correction to students.	24	36.4
	B. She/he underlines or circles errors and leaves correction to students.	4	6.0

4	C. She/he writes the kinds of errors in the margin of the student paper let us revise it.	3	4.5
	D. She/he asks questions to initiate further explanations.	5	7.6
	E. She/he gives grades to writing tasks.	30	45.5
	Total	66	100
	When you write on a given topic, how does your teacher want you do it?		
	A. She/he tells us to brainstorm, plan, Write and make revision(s).	13	14.4
	B. She/he tells us to write the final once.	24	26.6
	C. She/he gives us in the form of homework because class time is mostly occupied by other things.	53	59.0
	Total	90	100

As observed in the fourth item the overwhelming majority of the respondents (59%) reported that their teachers let their students write on a given topic in the form of homework because class time is mostly occupied by other things. This shows that writing which is a process does not seem to be strictly followed by teachers.

When respondents were asked as to how often their teachers give feedback for their writing tasks, in the first item of Table IV, the majority of them (57.8) said "sometimes". In item 2, the respondents were of the opinion that the feedback given to them is either in writing or both in a written and spoken form.

When it comes to the third item, those respondents who said writing was used solely or together with speaking ( in the second item) were again asked to report which specific way was often used by the teacher. This time, the majority of the respondents said that their teacher either correct all errors and leave no correction to them (36.4%) or give a grade to their writing tasks (45.5%). This shows that “teacher correction” is mostly used in the process of giving feedback for students’ writing tasks, as opposed to what various literature reviews say (see 2.2.4.1).

#### **4.2.4 Subjects’ Perception of Written Feedback**

The importance of teachers’ written feedback is often judged in connection with how students react to it. If the students’ reaction to teachers’ writing as found in the works of Radecki and Swales (1988) is positive, feedback is taught to be effective. If, on the other hand, the students’ perception is negative as in the study of Hayes and Daiker (cited in Cohen, 1987), feedback provision is considered as a waste of time and effort. In this study, the purpose of the questionnaire is mostly to find some information on how students react to their instructors’ written feedback.

Data related to the subjects’ perception was obtained through the items (1-20) of the fifth section of the questionnaire. (See section five of Appendix I). For the sake of convenience, results of the subjects’ response related to perception was calculated together using descriptive statistics.

Table V. Subjects' perception of written feedback.

No		N	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Expected Mean	Actual Mean	Standard Deviation
	Subjects' perception of written feedback	90	51	89.00	60.00	72.09	8.81

As shown in Table V above, the actual mean score (72.09) is well above the expected mean score (60.00). This reveals that the subjects have positive (good) perception about written feedback that their teachers provide for writing tasks.

The result of the subjects' perception of written feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks has already been found. But how about their (students') writing competence? And is there any relationship between perception of written feedback and actual writing skills? The answer for these questions is given in the following part.

### 4.3 Writing Proficiency

The following result was obtained through the writing skills test which was administered to the same subjects is revealed as follows:

Table VI. Subjects' writing proficiency

No		N	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Expected Mean	Actual mean	Standard Deviation
	Subjects' writing proficiency test	90	25	62	34	40.88	10.51

The result reveals that subjects were able to score 40.88 which is above the expected mean (34). Therefore, the subjects, in average, performed well in the test.

Now, the scores of the two most important variables of this study- perception of written feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks and actual writing skills-are going to be calculated using person correlation. This will help achieve one of the objectives of the study which is checking if the two variables have any correlation.

Table VII. The correlation of subjects' perception of written feedback and their writing proficiency.

No		Subjects' actual writing proficiency
	Subjects' perception of written feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks	
	Pearson correlation	0.78 (**)
	Sig(2-tailed)	.00
	N	90

\*\* correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

According to Best and Kahn (1998), one method that is frequently presented to interpret a correlation coefficient is to use a crude criterion for evaluating the magnitude of a correlation:

Table VIII. A crude criterion for evaluating the magnitude of a correlation.

Coefficient (r)	Relationship
.00 to .20	Negligible
.20 to .40	Low
.40 to .60	Moderate
.60 to .80	Substantial
.80 to 1.00	High to very high

Therefore, the relationship between subjects' perception of written feedback and their actual writing skills has found to be "substantial". This is to mean that as the subjects' perception of written feedback increases (becomes to be more and more positive), their actual writing nskills also increases, or vice versa. In other words, if students tend to develop positive attitude towards written feedback, it is likely that their writing skills improve.

The above result of the correlation between the two variables was obtained by considering the average score of the subjects. However, this would not show the clear picture of the relationship of the variables of each subject.

Therefore, to see the clear picture of the relationship of the variables, the researcher divided subjects into two using their scores of perception of written feedback. The first group members are those students who score  $\leq 60$  (less than or equal to the expected mean score of the subjects perception of written feedback). Those students who score  $> 60$  are also members of the second group. Accordingly, 9 students became members of the first group and 81 students, the second.

The writing proficiency score of those 9 students (the first group) reveals that 77.8% of them (7 out of 9) score less than the expected mean of the writing proficiency test ( $<34$ ). This could be interpreted as the writing proficiency of those students who developed negative perception towards written feedback is weak.

On the other hand, the second group members' writing proficiency score shows that 74.9% of them (60 out 81) score greater than or equal to the expected mean of the writing proficiency test ( $\geq 34$ ). This means that



those students who have higher writing proficiency is likely to develop positive perception towards written feedback.

Therefore, it can be claimed, as far as the findings of this study concerned, as students' perception of written becomes to be more and more positive, their writing proficiency also improves. As a result, the magnitude of the correlation of the subjects (0.78), in average, is ascertained.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Conclusions and Recommendations are the two parts of this chapter. The concluding remarks are drawn from the analyses of the data. Whereas, the recommendations are based upon the conclusions drawn.

#### 5.1 Conclusions

Based on the critical analysis of the data, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The relationship between students' perception of written feedback and their actual writing skills is considerable (0.78). In other words, when students develop positive perception towards written feedback, their writing proficiency also increases and vice versa.
- It has been found that most students do not use or just make a mental note of the written feedback provided by teachers for their writing tasks.
- Teacher correction seems to be used more than other ways of giving correction to students' writing tasks.
- The emphasis given to various features of writing by students seems to mismatch, somehow, with that of teachers. Teachers pay more attention to features like grammar and mechanics whereas students attach great value to content and grammar.

## 5.2 Implications

- As shown in the conclusion part above, perception of written feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks has substantial correlation (0.78) with actual writing skills. Therefore to improve learners' writing proficiency, the development of their belief about written feedback and appropriate way of using it is very important. To this end curriculum developers, teacher education trainers as well as English language teachers should pay considerable attention to students' perception of written feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks.
- In order to improve the students' level of using written feedback provided by their teachers to writing tasks, the student-researcher recommends that teachers should encourage their students to revise the writing tasks using the feedback given.
- Although providing written feedback using various techniques is an arduous task, teachers should consider it as one of the most important aspects of improving learners' writing proficiency and give due attention to it. In other words, the techniques should include something more than just using teacher-correction method which is again in the form of giving grades to students' writing tasks.
- There should be some kind of common understanding between what features of language need to be emphasized most by teachers while providing written feedback and students, in using it. The language teacher, rather than just emphasizing on grammar and mechanics, she/he should pay more attention to high-level

language features like organization and content too. The learners should also be encouraged to go accordingly.

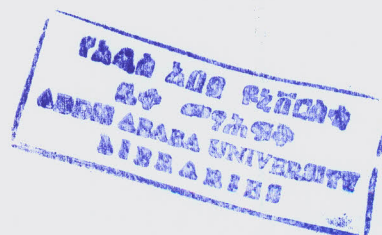
- In this study, an attempt was made to investigate if there is any relationship between students' perception of written feedback and their writing proficiency. And it has been found that there is substantial amount of relationship (0.78) between the two variables. But in the future it is recommendable if other researchers work on factors that affect students' perception of written feedback.

### **5.3. Limitations**

In the process of conducting this study, the researcher faced some difficulties. The first one is the absence of ready made research instruments (e.g. questionnaire) to obtain data on students' perception of written feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks. Secondly, while collecting data on students writing proficiency, it was difficult to persuade subjects to take a test with a lot of questions

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# Appendix I

## Questionnaire

### **Thesis Title: An Exploration of EFL Students' Perception of Written Feedback and Their Actual Writing Skills**

The purpose of this questionnaire is to investigate students' beliefs about how teachers should correct errors and give them feedback on their writing. It aims to offer better understanding for your perception about written comments you get from your teacher. Ultimately, this will help improve teachers' written remarks and students writing ability on the other.

**Notes:** (1) The information that you will supply here will never be

revealed to a third party without getting your consent. However, your personal information (name and age) will never be revealed to any other person.

(2) If you have any queries please feel free to ask me at any time.

**Remember:** you have the right not to answer any of these questions if you feel they are irritating or intrusive.

#### Section I

**Section One:** This section asks you to answer some general questions such as your educational and linguistic background. The purpose of this section is to know more about the participants.

(Just tick the correct answer or the most suitable one)

- Name ( optional) :\_\_\_\_\_
- Sex : Male  Female
- Age : 18 & below  19-21  22& above
- Mother tongue : Amharic  Oromifa  Tigrina  others
- Year of study :\_\_\_\_\_
- How many years have you been studying English in formal education?\_\_\_\_\_
- Have you taken any special course(s) outside of school or university which involved writing?  
Yes  No
- If yes, how many of these writing courses have you taken?\_\_\_\_\_

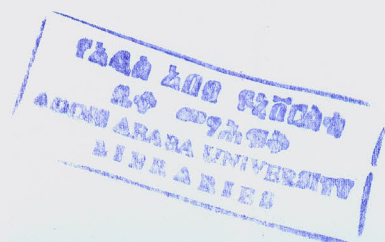
**Section Two:** The following questions are general question about your own beliefs and preferences regarding teachers' written feedback

Please insert "✓" in the appropriate sense where

**SD= Strongly Disagree      D= Disagree      N= Neutral**

**A= Agree,      SA= Strongly Agree**

	SD	D	N	A	SA
	1	2	3	4	5
2.1 Teachers' corrections help me improve my writing skills.					
2.2 Different teachers I have had given me feedback in different ways by using different methods.					
2.3 Some teachers are very good at giving feedback					
2.4 I want my teacher correct every error.					



2.5 I believe that the application of symbols (e.g., VT: Verb tens, Sp: spelling, Pro: the selection of pronoun) is quite useful.					
2.6 It is more helpful to give clear, direct instructions about my writing errors than suggesting a correction.					
2.7 I do not make the same error once the teacher corrects it.					
2.8 I will learn more if my teacher are tolerant to my incorrect written works					
2.9 I believe that producing errors is a natural and necessary phenomenon in language learning.					
2.10 My teacher should expect errors from us,					
2.11 To overcome errors, my teacher should shorten the time lapse between the incorrect response and provision of feedback					
2.12 I always pay close attention to my teacher's written feedback on my writing.					
2.13 It is better to write the feedback in the margins than at the end.					
2.14 The cause of my errors is laziness or sloppy thinking					
2.15 Errors are signs of failure.					

2.16 I want my teacher give me a comment on my ideas					
2.17 my teacher should let me participate in the process of giving correction					
2.18 the feedback that my teachers provide me with should be clear					
2.19 I feel despair when my teacher emphasizes only my errors.					
2.20 when I get poor grades, I tend not to give any attention to it.					

**Section Three: Students' perception of written feedback provision techniques used by teachers**

**Just tick the correct answer or the most suitable one**

3.1 When you write on a given topic, how does your teacher want you to

Do it, most of the time it?

- A. she/he tells us to brainstorm, plan, write, and make revision (s)
- B. she/he tells us to write the final version at once
- C. she/he gives us in the form of homework because class time is mostly occupied by other things

3.2 How often does your English teacher give feedback on writing?

Always  Sometimes  Rarely  Not at all

3.3 If your English teacher gives feedback on your writing, how does he/she does it?

- A. Always orally, as a general comment to other whole class
- B. Always orally, on an individual basics
- C. Always in writing
- D. Sometimes orally and sometimes in writing

3.4 If your English Teacher gives feedback in writing, which of the

Following shows how she/he does it? (More than one answer is possible)

- A. She/he corrects all errors and leaves correction to the students.
- B. She/he underlines or circles errors and leaves correction to the students
- C. She /he writes the kinds of error in the margin of the student paper and us to revise
- D. She/he asks questions to initiate further explanations

**Section Four: Student's strategies of using written feedback that teachers provide for writing tasks. You will be asked questions about what you do with the feedback you receive from your teacher. In questions were chooses are given, tick one of them**

4.1 How often do you use the feedback you receive for revising your writing tasks?

Always  Sometimes  Rarely  Not at all

4.2 How much of the essay did you read when you got it back?

All of it  Most of it  some of it  none of it

4.3 How many of the teacher corrections did you give thoughtful attention to ?

All of them

Most of them

Some of them

None of them

4.4 Please indicate what you did when you went over the teacher's comments.

I made a mental note of the comments

I wrote down points to consider for revision or for future use

I rewrote the essay incorporating the comments

I Referred to other papers and rewrote the essay

I did nothing

**Section Five: The attention given two various features of language**

5.1 To what extent do teachers' comments dealt with?

	A lot	Some	Little	None
Organization				
Content				
Language use				
Vocabulary				
Mechanics				

5.2 If you attend to your teacher comments, how much attention did you give to items involving the following?

	A lot	Some	Little	None
Organization				
Content				
Language use				
Vocabulary				
Mechanics				

## Appendix II

### Structure and Written Expression

**Time: 25 minutes (including the reading of the directions)**

**This section is designed to measure your ability to recognize language that is appropriate for standard written English. There are two types of questions in this section, with special directions for each type.**

#### Structure

**Directions: Questions 1-30 are incomplete sentences. Beneath each sentence you will see four words or phrases, marked (A), (B), (C), and (D). Choose the one word or phrase that best completes the sentence.**

1. Andy Warhol was----- in the pop Art movement who was known for his multi-image silk-screen paintings.  
A. That one of a leading figure  
B. A leading figure  
C. leading figures  
D. Who leads figures
2. Even with vast research, there is still a great deal that is ----- known about the workings of the human brain.  
A. Neither  
B. None  
C. No  
D. Not
3. -----the United States consists of many different immigrant groups, many sociologists believe there is a distinct national character.  
A. In spite of  
B. Despite  
C. Even though  
D. Whether



- A. Meant  
B. Meaning
- C. That it meant  
D. Whose meaning
12. Jet propulsion involves ----- of air and fuel, which forms a powerful exhaust.
- A. A mixture is ignited  
B. To ignite a mixture
- C. A mixture of igniting  
D. The ignition of a mixture
13. Salt is manufactured in quantities that exceed those of most, -----, other commercial chemicals.
- A. Of all not  
B. Not if all are
- C. Are not all  
D. If not all
14. The United States consists of fifty states, ----- has its own government.
- A. Each of which  
B. Each they
- C. They each  
D. Each of
15. Though smaller than our solar system, a quasar, which look like an ordinary star, emits more light ----- galaxy.
- A. Than an entire  
B. Entirely as
- C. That the entire  
D. Entirely than
16. According to the third law of thermodynamics, ----- possible is -273.16 degrees centigrade.
- A. That temperature is lowest  
B. The temperature is lowest
- C. Lowest temperature  
D. The lowest temperature
17. After the First World War, the author Anais Nin Became interested in the art movement known as surrealism and in psychoanalysis, both ----- her novels and short stories.
- A. In which the influence  
B. Of which influenced
- C. To have influence  
D. Its influence in
18. Muskrats generally ----- close to the edge of a bog, where their favorite plant foods grow plentifully.
- A. Staying  
B. They are staying
- C. Stay  
D. To stay there



26. The decimal numeral system is one of the -----ways of expressing numbers.
- A. Useful most world's  
B. World's most useful  
C. Useful world's most  
D. Most world's useful
27. Emily Dickinson's garden was a place -----great inspiration for her poems.
- A. That she drew  
B. By drawing her  
C. From which she drew  
D. Drawn from which
28. The mountains surrounding Los Angeles effectively shield the city from the hot, dry winds of the Mojave Desert, -----the circulation of air.
- A. But they also prevent  
B. Also prevented by them  
C. And also to prevent  
D. And also preventing
29. Not only-----is to determine the depth of the ocean floor, but it also used to locate oil.
- A. To use seismology  
B. Is seismology used  
C. Seismology is used  
D. Using seismology
30. Nebraska has floods in some years, -----.
- A. In others drought  
B. Droughts are others  
C. While other droughts  
D. Others in drought

## Written expression

**Directions:** in Questions 36-54 each sentence has four underlined words or phrases. The four underlined parts of the sentence are marked (A), (B), (C), and (D). Identify the one underlined word or phrase that must be changed in order for the sentence to be correct.

31. People usually wear clothing why to basic purposes-warmth and decoration.  
A B C D
32. In 1990 Kate Hurd-Mead became medical director of the Bryn Mawr school for girls, one of a first schools in the United States to initiate a preventive health program.  
A B C D
33. Superior to all others woods for shipbuilding, teak is also used for furniture, flooring, and general construction.  
A B C D
34. Weather is the transitory expression of climate that can change great from day to day or season to season.  
A B C D
35. Archaeological investigations indicate that control of fire is an extremely old technical attainment, though the time, place, and mode of his origin may never e learned.  
A B C D
36. Paul revere designing the metal plates on which the first paper money in the united states was printed.  
A B C D
37. It was after shortly microscopes were introduced at the beginning of the seventeenth century that microorganisms were actually sighted.  
A B C D

38. Until the 1840's, practically the only pioneers who had ventured to the  
 A B C  
 western united States were trappers and a little explorers..  
 D
39. Medical research indicates but large amounts of histamines can be  
 A B C  
 responsible for colds, hay fever, and other respiratory reactions.  
 D
40. Yttrium is a silvery, metallic element used in the made of red phosphors  
 A B C  
 for television picture tubes.  
 D
41. Tropical forests exist close the equator, where both high temperature and  
 A B C  
abundant rain flall occur year-round  
 D
42. The ease with which houseplants can grown causes them to be popular  
 A B C  
among amateur horticulturists.  
 D
43. Paintings of a religious, ceremonial, or history character tend to elevate  
 A B  
their subjects above the level of ordinary existence,  
 C D
44. According to classical musical tradition, the term "sonata" is given to  
 A B  
 those works are written for solo piano or for a solo wind or stringed  
 C  
instrument.  
 D

45. Precisely because photographs are produced by mechanical devices, a camera's images now seem to some artists the perfect means for expression the modern era.  
A B  
C D
46. The discovery of the magnetic effects of coils made possible to measure an electric current.  
A B C  
D
47. Since the 1950's the city of Baltimore has financed several major programs of urban renew, including rebuilding the Inner Harbor.  
A B C D
48. For at least 4,000 years, Native American artists adorned rocks, cliff walls, and caves in the American south west with an amazing various of symbolic figures.  
A B C  
D
49. Animal researches have identified many behavioral patterns associated with selection a place to live, avoiding predators, and finding food.  
A B C D
50. Contemporary film directors, some of them write the scripts for, act in, and even produce their own motion pictures, are there by assuming ever more control of their art.  
A B C D
51. Petroleum it is composed of a complex mixture of hydrogen and carbon.  
A B C D
52. Pop art was a movement of the 1950's and 1960' whom imagery was based on readily recognized American products and people.  
A B C D

53. Because the machining fly is a parasite of harmful insects, much species  
A B  
have been imported into the United States to combat insect pests.  
C D
54. All almost the electricity for industrial use comes from large generators  
A B C  
driven by steam turbines.  
D

## Test of Written English

**Time: stop working on your essays at the end of 30 minutes.**

Topic1 \_\_\_\_\_

Successful students do well in school for many different reasons. Identify one or two important personal characteristics that help a student succeed in school. Use reasons and specific examples to show why you think these characteristics are important for student success.

Topic2 \_\_\_\_\_

Some people believe that newspapers are the best source of news. Other people think that the news is presented better on radio or television. Which of these sources of news do you prefer? Use reasons and specific examples to support your choice.

### Appendix III

#### The students' Score of Perception of Written Feedback and Their Writing Proficiency

S. No	Students' Writing Proficiency Score	Students' Perception of Written Feedback Score
1.	34	68
2.	40	73
3.	31	71
4.	49	71
5.	28	55
6.	50	74
7.	58	87
8.	36	60
9.	51	75
10.	34	66
11.	40	83
12.	57	80
13.	56	80
14.	52	86
15.	49	77
16.	40	64
17.	48	83
18.	53	79
19.	35	60
20.	46	78
21.	42	69
22.	34	66
23.	41	72
24.	50	73

25.	30	69
26.	32	68
27.	27	72
28.	44	62
29.	39	64
30.	38	66
31.	32	65
32.	26	70
33.	29	61
34.	55	83
35.	52	76
36.	36	69
37.	36	72
38.	33	73
39.	61	84
40.	48	66
41.	60	74
42.	39	77
43.	54	81
44.	36	63
45.	37	72
46.	62	82
47.	61	89
48.	40	70
49.	42	67
50.	25	58
51.	57	88
52.	30	65
53.	40	69
54.	38	74
55.	61	89

56.	40	72
57.	31	68
58.	56	82
59.	32	61
60.	28	60
61.	33	71
62.	32	79
63.	50	83
64.	29	52
65.	60	90
66.	37	74
67.	36	77
68.	30	70
69.	58	80
70.	30	67
71.	35	76
72.	34	63
73.	25	52
74.	29	68
75.	28	73
76.	25	59
77.	36	74
78.	49	81
79.	40	70
80.	38	76
81.	32	66
82.	48	83
83.	33	64
84.	40	78
85.	31	64
86.	54	84



87.	55	80
88.	39	73
89.	35	62
90.	26	51

**N.B.** The minimum and the maximum score of the writing proficiency test are 0 and 68, respectively. Whereas the minimum and maximum score of perception of written feedback are 20 and 100, respectively.

## Appendix IV

### The Correlation Result of Students' Perception of Written Feedback and Their Writing Proficiency

		sex	age	mother tongue	Writing proficiency	Perception of written feed back
sex	Pearson Correlation	1	-.060	.139	-.038	-.178
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.573	.192	.722	.093
	N	90	90	90	90	90
age	Pearson Correlation	-.060	1	.084	-.080	-.114
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.573		.429	.453	.286
	N	90	90	90	90	90
mother tongue	Pearson Correlation	.139	.084	1	.067	.065
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.192	.429		.533	.545
	N	90	90	90	90	90
Writing proficiency	Pearson Correlation	-.038	-.080	.067	1	.778(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.722	.453	.533		.000
	N	90	90	90	90	90
Perception of written feed back	Pearson Correlation	-.178	-.114	.065	.778(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.093	.286	.545	.000	
	N	90	90	90	90	90

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university, and that all resources of material used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Name -----

Signature -----

Place Institute of Language Studies,  
Addis Ababa University

Date -----