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LITERATURE
(GRADUATE PROGRAM)



STUDENTS' PERCEPTION AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF
FEEDBACK IN THE WRITING CLASS: A CASE STUDY
OF BOLE SENIOR AND PREPARATORY SCHOOL -
ADDIS ABABA

BY
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JUNE 2009

Addis Ababa

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DEDICATION

In memory of my beloved & an everlasting wife-Tigist Abebe whom I missed, while starting my MA study, — indeed a sudden death for me.

Tigu! You remain alive in my broken heart till I share your grave with you and this success is the outcome of your d-e-e-p grief accompanied by an endless tear I poured on it. A-l-a-s! 'TG'!





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my advisor, Ato Amanuel Gebru (Assistant Professor) for his patience and for his invaluable critical comments particularly for he had no reservation at all to respond to all of my questions at any time.

Above all, I am deeply indebted to my beloved wife, Tigist Abebe who is still in my heart and remains to be for ever for she continuously encouraged me to continue my post graduate study which without her, I would not have realized my long-term dream and her wishes to see my success which gave me strength and endurance to complete my study. I am also grateful to my daughters Siyanne Mekonnen (Suti) and Sinbonne Mekonnen (Bareedu) for their help in proof reading the paper on TG's behalf and my son Hennan Mekonnen (Tortora) for his time, which he would have loved to chat with me.

My heartfelt thanks go to my best friends Dr. Kiros Meles, Wassihun Legesse, Terefe Fita, Ato Tadesse Terefe, Siyum Waltenigus and his family and Goitom Debretzion for their encouragement and financial support during my study. I am also grateful for they shared my pain and their assistance to bear the challenges I faced and continue my study which in turn helped me to sustain my life for my children to whom I devote the rest of my life both as a 'mother' and father. I also extend my complements to all other friends and colleagues who worked with and around my success in my study. I am also thankful to the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR) 'as an institution' for it helped me gain diverse research and other work experiences, in which this helped me to be successful in my research work.

My thanks also go to the Bole Senior and Preparatory School management, unit leaders and the first year preparatory students of the 2009 academic year for sacrificing their time in providing and collecting the data for this study. Last but not least, I express my sincere thanks to W/ro Etsegenet Abera and Ato Zewdu Mamo who took the pains of typing and printing the research paper.

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of the study was to explore students' perception and significance of feedback in the writing class. The specific objectives were to:

- a) investigate factors responsible in affecting students' perception of the significance of feedback on their writing.*
- b) examine how students handle the feedback they receive and the strategies they use to apply to their subsequent writings.*
- c) assess if students have problems in interpreting the teacher's responses, and*
- d) examine whether or not teachers encourage their learners to act on/reinforce the comments provided.*

In order to achieve the above objectives, data was collected using questionnaire and collected data was verified using interviews. Out of the total population of grade 11 students of the Bole Senior Secondary and Preparatory School, 114 (12%) students were taken to be subjects of the study. The interview of those 30 students was audio recorded and transcription was done later.

The result of the study revealed that students feel that the feedback is useful and it helps them improve their writing, to be aware of their mistakes, identify their errors, and correct their weak points. Regarding students' strategies of handling teachers' comments, it was found that students reread their essays to refresh their memories enough to give the teacher's comments a meaningful context for interpretation and give considerable attention to it when they get their paper back.

It was also found that students have difficulties in understanding teachers' feedback out of which comments provided in the form of phrases are the most common ones. Besides, the data analysis and discussions showed that students are encouraged to incorporate the comments provided in various ways such as class work and home work writing tasks, and in the essay examinations.

On the basis of the findings, it was recommended that teachers should be able to provide adequate, clear and easily understandable feedbacks so as to enable students to use it appropriately and convey the intended message.



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAU	Addis Ababa University
DFLL	Department of Foreign Languages & Literature
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a second Language
L ₁	First Language
L ₂	Second Language

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. Background

Feedback, as an indispensable part of the teaching and learning process plays a significant role in the area of language learning. As Nuru (2000:73) comments “feedback is one aspect of classroom interaction that has been a central point of interest for both language teachers and researchers related to the notion of error treatment.”

The term feedback is referred to in a number of ways depending up on the purpose of the researcher. According to Kulahavy (1977) “the term feedback is used in a generic sense to describe any of the numerous procedures that are used to tell a learner if an instructional response is right or wrong.” Long (1977) also explains the term feedback as error detection targeted to correct errors by providing the correct response to the learners. Furthermore, others used the term feedback differently as ‘error feedback’. For example Makino (1993) says that error feedback is used to refer to teacher cues or hints which are provided to students for the sake of encouraging self-correction.

Ellis (1994: 583-584) also comments that “a number of terms have been used to refer to the general area of error treatment; these are ‘feedback’, ‘repair’ and ‘correction’. ‘Feedback serves as a general cover term for the information provided by listeners on the reception and comprehension of messages.”

In general, though these terms are interchangeably used in the literature, the concept of the term used by all researchers focuses on the provision of

information that is given to the learner with the objective of improving their performance regardless of its different meanings.

In viewing feedback from students' perspective, Derb (2007) says that, it is inevitable that, students make errors while they are trying to communicate their messages in writing. Thus, it is natural that students want their teachers to provide them with the necessary feedback for the betterment of their writing skills.

Feedback, in the teaching learning process, has long been considered to be the main concern of ESL/EFL writing programs across the world for it contributes a lot in learning language and motivating students (Hyland and Hyland, 2006). As Ferris (1995) explains, whatever is a particular teacher's orientation(s) toward responding to student writing, it is clear that teacher's response is important to both instructor and students. Chaudron (1984) also emphasizes that learners develop their effective writing skill only by means of feedback they have received regarding the information about their writing. Moreover, Keh (1990:294-295) comments that "Feedback is a fundamental element of a process approach to writing. Through feedback, the writer learns where he/she has misled or confused the reader by not supplying enough information, illogical organization, lack of development of ideas, or something inappropriate word-choice or tense." As to Kulhavy (1977), telling the right answer to the learners reinforces and increases the likelihood that they will supply the same correct response on future activities.

Based on the above views of various researchers, it could be possible to generalize that feedback is very useful both in motivating students to correct their errors and enabling them to perform well. However, there are some theoretical arguments on the positive impact of feedback as error correction in the process of language learning. For example, Kulhavy,

(1977) says that many studies show that the idea that feedback increases learning doesn't work. Karraker, (1967) and Lublin (1965) as cited in Kulhavy (1977:216) argue that "there is even research in which groups receiving no feedback, or never seeing the questions during learning perform as well as or better than groups who see feedback after every response."

On the other hand, though writing teachers spend hours in providing feedback to their students' errors using a range of techniques to motivate their learners, students' perception of feedback may influence the way they handle and practice it. With regard to students' perception of feedback on their writing in an L2 environment, researches have reached two contradictory conclusions (Taye, 2005). According to Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990), the first one is that students appreciate the feedback given to them and work to improve their written works as long as the comments are not too many to discourage them. The other aspect is, as to Leki (1986) students show a lack of interest in teacher's reaction to the content of their papers. Students have a very limited knowledge for processing feedback and perceive it as criticism (Choen, 1987 and Harris, 1995). Hence, this study tries to examine feedback from students' perspectives.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Errors play a significant role in the study of language acquisition in general and examining second and foreign language acquisition in particular. In view of this, the need for feedback both in oral and written form is crucial for feedback according to Keh (1990) is the drive which steers the learners through the process of writing on to the end product.

Consistent with this perspective, Dheram (1995:160) says, feedback is considered as a key in the process of teaching and learning writing skill



for it helps to develop an awareness regarding the nature and function of feedback provided so that both teachers and learners will be able to perform their own roles in the classroom effectively. Similarly, Gower et. al (1995) say that written feedback helps to reinforce important points made in oral feedback and since it is written on paper, it has an additional advantage of being referred to when required to be used in future works. From the above explanations, it is evident that feedback should be an integral part of English language teaching due to the significant role it plays in error correction.

However, regardless of considerable time spent on responding to students' writing and despite the claim that feedback eventually improves students' writing skills, research findings in the area of L2 seem to indicate that students do not give considerable attention to teachers' feedback as one part of the learning process. For example, Cohen (1987:57) says, "While teachers may spend hours marking student papers, the question has been raised as to whether such corrections make a difference." In addition, as reported by some educators, students give little attention to teacher's feedback while collecting their paper. To this end, Cohen citing the works of Kreizman (1984) notes that "when the students received their papers back, their primary interest is in their grade that they only did a minimal reading of the teachers' comments" (1987: 58). He further explains that students have a very limited knowledge for processing the feedback provided by the teacher.

Leki (1990) reported that L1 students rarely read and even discarded low graded papers, generally hate teachers' appropriation of their papers, and are particularly hostile to negative criticisms. Some studies suggest that students may ignore or misuse or misunderstand the comments when revising drafts (Ferris, 1995) or they understand the problems pointed out but are unable to come up with a suitable revision (Conrad and Goldstein,

1999, cited in Teshome, 2007). Harris (1995) also argues that students perceive feedback as criticism instead of considering it as constructive and well meaning suggestion for the correction of the error committed.

This may suggest that some students fail to understand teachers' comments as helpful in improving their writing and do not show an effort to process the comments in their subsequent drafts.

Various research works in the context of written feedback have been conducted with several aims by different researchers. Tesfay (1995) focused on which feedback technique(s) to students written errors are more effective in helping learners improve their proficiency in written English. His research finding shows that students' writing is improved better through self-correction strategy when they are provided with teacher's clue than when the teacher directly corrects written errors.

Italo (1999) also made a study focusing on investigating the effectiveness of peer versus teacher's feedback. His research finding shows that though both peer and teacher feedback have an impact of the improvement of students' composition skills; there was no significant difference between teacher and peer feedback in terms of their effectiveness. In other words the effectiveness of both techniques was found to be comparable.

In addition, a study which focuses on the responding behavior of sophomore English teachers to students writing was made by Getnet (1994) who found out that teachers use direct correction techniques in providing feedback. Similarly, Asres (2005) aimed at exploring the written error treatment practice of the intermediate writing skills instructors of Bahirdar University, and found out that teacher correction dominates the others.

Taye (2005) investigated the effect of written feedback on promoting student writing skills with reference to first year preparatory students of Kelem High School and found out that written feedback produced an insignificant difference.

Thus, the present study tries to investigate the students' perception of the significance of feedback on their composition on first year preparatory students of Bole senior secondary school at Addis Ababa.

1.2. Objectives of the study

Generally, this study aims at investigating whether or not students are aware of the usefulness of feedback on their composition. More specifically, the objective of this study would be to:

1. investigate contributing factors (if any) in affecting students' perception of the significance of feedback on their writing.
2. examine how students handle the feedback they receive and what strategies they use to apply to subsequent writings
3. assess if students have troubles in interpreting the teacher's feedback.
4. investigate whether or not teachers encourage their learners to act on/ reinforce the comments provided.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The researcher believes that this study might be helpful for teachers in that they will have a chance of evaluating to what extent their comments would be put to use. In addition it helps them evaluate the awareness of their students in handling the comments provided and design relevant strategies accordingly. Moreover, they can benefit from this study in that they will have a chance of identifying the problems in relation to students' perception of feedback and seek solutions. This study might also serve interested researchers in the area and language teachers at various levels as a source of information and reference.

1.4 Limitation of The study

As any research undertaking runs a risk of being constrained with one or another aspect needed for its completeness and success, this study suffered similar problems as well. Hence, due to time and financial constraints, the number of sample students and schools has been limited. Had this not been the case, it would have been possible to include more sample students and schools to increase the reliability of the study and come up with a more sound research findings.

1.5. Definition of Perception

Perception is defined in various ways. As Samson (2005) defines it, perception is the condition of being aware, awareness, cognizance, and sense. It is some thing, which exists in the mind as the product of careful mental activity, concept, idea, and image, notion, thought. Leul (2006) also defines perception as a general term referring to the awareness of objects, qualities or events stimulating the sense organs and is a way of seeing, understanding or interpreting some thing. Perception according to Tsehay (2007) is defined as the mental faculty of recognition. Hence, this will be an operational definition of 'perception' used in this study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. The Concept of Feedback

The concept of feedback is widely used in language learning since it is a way of correcting errors. Dulay et al. (1982) as cited in Nuru (2000:66) describes the concept of feedback as follows:

The notion of feedback has remained at the heart of research efforts aimed at understanding the process of language as it occurs both in natural settings and in the classroom. This is because feedback has been regarded as a critical variable in language acquisition research. Part of the interest in feedback emanates from the assumption that feedback represents one of the language environments to which the learner is exposed.

In addition, Brown (1994:29) says, “Whenever we talk of feedback, it should be understood in the sense that either there is correction of incorrect linguistic utterances or approval of learners for correct and partly correct outputs.” He (Ibid) further states that error appears not only in the process of learning other subjects, but also in language learning, too. Other scholars suggest that errors should not be considered as bad since they are good indicators of the learners’ stage in their second language development (Brown, 1994 and Lengo, 1995). As Edge (1989) suggests most people agree that making mistakes and correction are taken as part of learning and teaching, respectively. She further argues that correction should not be taken as a criticism or punishment since it is the way of reminding the learners on the error they made. Norrish also tells us that the most important reason why we correct errors is that “...the error itself may actually be a necessary part of learning a language” (1992:79).

Sharing the above idea, Makino (1993) adds that, "Learner errors are seen as a natural and indispensable part of the learning process. They are also seen as inevitable, since learners are encouraged to explore the target language." As to Murphy (1986) correction is a form of feedback to learners on their use of the language.

Consolidating the above views, Lengo (1995) says that errors have a paramount importance in the study of language acquisition in general and in examining second and foreign language acquisition in particular. From the above explanations, it is evident that the way feedback is conceptualized varies depending on different contexts though the end result of feedback seems to be error correction and better performance. In this respect, efforts will be made below to see various issues related to feedback in line with the purpose of this study.

2.1.1. Definition of Feedback

As can be observed from different sources, so far there is no single acceptable definition given to feedback. Different educators and writers define it in different ways. That seems why Wondimu (1998) says, the concept of feedback in language teaching has not yet been given a single and a comprehensive definition.

According to Ur (1996) feedback is defined as information given to the learner about his/her performance of learning with a view to improving their performance. Kulhavy (1977:211) defines feedback as "...any of the numerous procedures that are used to tell a learner if an instructional response is right or wrong." Similarly the Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics defines feedback as "... any information, which provides a report on the result of behavior, verbal or facial signals, which listeners give to speakers to indicate that they understand what the speaker is saying" (1992:137).

Citing the works of Zamel (1985), Wondimu (Ibid) notes that the language of feedback refers to the response given by the teacher to what learners produce in the classroom. In its most narrow sense this refers to teacher's response to error. The term feedback according to Makino (1993) "is used to refer to teacher cues or hints which are given to learners to encourage self-corrections."

Wondwosen (1992:5) also defines feedback as "... teachers' remarks or expressions (verbal/non-verbal) about the adequacy or inadequacy and the correctness or incorrectness of students' statements solicited or initiated in the development of subject-matter." Similarly, Atkins et al (1996:123) say the term feedback refers to "supplying students with clues about spoken or written errors in ways which are designed to promote correction by students. It is also used to refer to giving supportive reactions to students' ideas, way of organizing what they say or write, in such a way as to promote improvement by students." The term correction as Atkins et al further explain is used to refer to any response or reaction by the teacher showing some kind of disapproval regarding what a student has said or written.

Keh (1990) consolidates the above ideas and describes feedback as "input from a reader to a writer with the effect of providing information to the writer for revision." In other words, it is the comments, questions and suggestions a reader gives a writer to produce reader-based prose as opposed to writer-based prose.

Based on the discussions made so far, it is possible to conclude that though the concept of feedback is defined in different ways all of the definitions offered underline the responses or corrections given by the teacher to students on errors made during various writing activities to bring about self improvement in the future activities.

2.1.2. Types of Feedback

Different writers classify feedback in different ways based on their purposes. Nunan (1991:195), for instance, says:

Of various ways in which feedback can be classified, one of the most frequent and simplest distinctions is between positive and negative feedback. ...research has found that positive feedback is much more effective than negative feedback in changing pupil's behavior.

On the other hand, Harmer (1991:146-147) noted that a distinction should be made between two types of feedback, i.e., content and form feedback. He (Ibid) further states that content feedback is concerned with the assessment of how well the learners performed the activity rather than language exercises, while form feedback tells the students how well they have performed linguistically and how accurate they have been. Still others classify feedback differently on the bases of their purpose.

Brown (1994:218) classifies feedback in to two types: affective and cognitive feedback. According to him, affective feedback is primarily encoded in terms of gesture, tone of voice and facial expressions while cognitive feedback is what is always conveyed by means of linguistic devices like sounds, phrases and structures.

2.1.3. Pedagogical Significance of Feedback in Teaching and Learning English Language

Feedback plays a significant role in teaching and learning writing. "Feedback is a fundamental element of a process approach to writing (Keh 1990). "We realize that feedback is quite useful and relevant in the teaching and learning process" (Italo 1999:67). It is also believed that feedback is necessary both for learners and language teachers from the point of view of their respective purpose. Related to this issue, Chaudron (1998) cited in Tesfay (1995) comments that, provision of feedback from

the teacher's perspective, is a major means by which learners are informed regarding the accuracy of their formal target language production. On the other hand, when it is seen from the point of view of the learners', the use of feedback in repairing their language production and that of their interlocutors' may constitute the most potent source of improvement in the development of target language. Similarly, Gower et al (1995:163) note that "The aim of feedback is to bring about self-awareness and improvement." Hence, it is useful to make learners aware of the importance of feedback in order to improve their activities by way of correcting their errors in the future. Garcia (1999:100) adds, "... there is proof that various forms of feedback on a written composition help students to improve successive drafts..." After feedback is provided on errors, it is assumed that students would use the comments for future activities. Learning from mistakes emphasizes the importance of feedback as a way to learn i.e., mistakes observed should be avoided in the future (Cohen, 1987).

For effective teaching and learning English, feedback is basic and a determining factor whether it comes from teachers or any other sources. As Dheram (1995:160) notes, "Feedback seems to be central to the process of teaching and learning writing." He further states that it is useful to sensitize both teachers and students about the functions of feedback in order to perform their [i.e., teachers and students] role effectively in the classroom. This means teachers and learners should create suitable condition for the proper implementation and processing of feedback. Others emphasize the dual function of feedback in the process of error correction. Blair et al (1968:182) cited in Wondwosen (1992) assert that,

Feedback has the dual function of providing motivation and a chance for reinforcement to work, and of giving information that will correct error. Every reaction of a teacher in response to a student's activity is a kind of feedback that has potential for both these functions.

Drowns et al (1991:213) also state the importance of feedback. "Feedback is an essential construct for many theories of learning and instruction, and an understanding of the conditions for effective feedback should facilitate both theoretical development and instructional practice." Others comment that, responding to students' written work is central to teaching and learning of successful composition (Reid, 1994).

In the same way Kulhavy (1977:229) proposed that "... it [i.e., feedback] confirms correct responses, telling the student how well the content is being understood, and it identifies and corrects errors or allows the learner to correct them." According to Smith and Smith (1968) as cited in Kulhavy (1977: 219) "...feedback functions in two ways: as a device for acquiring data about how accurately a system is working, and as a means for identifying and correcting error messages." Apart from this, feedback facilitates language learning and has some more pedagogical importance. Matebu says:

In the task of language teaching, support from the teacher plays a much more significant role on the development of the students learning. It is well argued that it serves motivational and informative values and also allows the teacher to build a supportive classroom atmosphere (1998:12).

Nolasco and Arthur (1988:54) also summarize the importance of feedback as follows:

Feedback is a major source of motivation in any form of learning. We like to know what we have done wrong and we generally welcome constructive advice on improving our performance. So feedback is an inevitable constituent of

classroom interaction and it is one of the major roles of language teachers.

Keh (1990) as cited by Italo (1999:67) also concludes that, “feedback is a fundamental element of a process approach to writing. To sum up, the role feedback plays is decisive in language teaching in general and writing activities in particular since it helps the learners know the correct response, motivate and encourage them to process in their writing tasks for better performance.

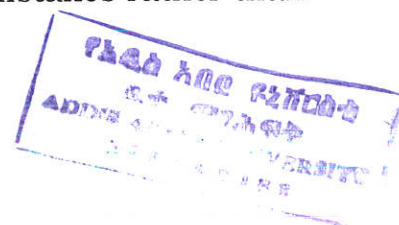
2.2. Major Ways of Providing Written Feedback

The provision of feedback takes place in various ways depending upon the type of activity and the way language learning is conducted. Nunan (1991) suggests that it is useful to create awareness, the mechanism to provide feedback to learners and to check whether feedback is properly conveyed to each learner or not. But according to him teachers, in general are not aware, whether the feedback provided is transmitted to each learner during instruction. This shows that failure of providing the right signals can have an impact in the understanding and appropriate use of the feedback in future written works.

Giving feedback in different ways brings about different effects on learners’ performance for it is being received in different ways (Chaudron, 1984). Though ways of providing feedback take different manners, this part focuses on some of the major and most commonly practiced ways of providing feedback, which are more relevant to the purpose of this paper.

2.2.1. Self Correction

Obviously, feedback is necessary when there is an error and self-correction is one of the ways in this case. A person who made a mistake after revising his own work does this type of correction. As Edge (1989) suggests most learners are interested to correct their mistakes rather than



be corrected by others. She (Ibid.) further states that self-correction is easier to remember, because it would be possible to put something right in some one's mind. Especially when the mistake is a slip, it is particularly important to give a chance for self-correction.

Gower, Phillips and Walters (1995:170) note that "The students correct as many errors as they can and submit the work for remarking... can aid self-correction by underlining errors and putting symbols in the appropriate place in the margin and/or giving appropriate page reference..." In this case the learners will be able to give more emphasis to the underlined errors while revising their activities in future works. Hence as suggested by the above researchers, self correction should be encouraged because it is remembered by the learners very easily to be processed in future written tasks.

It is much more useful that students are given an opportunity to discover their own errors than be corrected by the teacher (Corder, 1967). According to Lavezzo and Dunford, 1993, Harmer, 1991 as cited in Tesfay (1990:19), "systematic correction doesn't improve writer's language. What is of help is giving learners time to formulate what they want to say or write."

In discussing student's error, Allwright (1975) as cited in Makino (1990) suggests that learners' errors should be corrected when they are unable to correct themselves. Lewis and Hill (1985) cited in Tesfay (1990) suggest that if in any case the errors are treated immediately by the teacher, an opportunity for real understanding is lost unless the teacher provides some clues for the learners so that they can correct themselves.

Moreover, some research findings show that though error correction does improve the proficiency of learners, correction is necessary if the errors

are found to inhibit communication, stigmatize the learner and frequently appear in their activities (Hendrickson, 1978; cited in Makino, 1993). Contrary to these, however, Semke (1984:82) comments that helping students to correct their errors by themselves with the help of some error codes was found to be least effective in terms of the student's achievement and their attitude.

To sum up, even though some research findings show that self correction is ineffective, the above suggestions may indicate that self correction needs to be encouraged to motivate L2 learners develop self confidence in handling their writing tasks independently.

2.2.2. Peer Correction

This is a type of correction where the students themselves are involved in responding to each other's work before showing it to the teacher. As reported by Norrish, "Peer checking can save the teacher's time and develop a new channel of learning for the students" (1992:79). In a language class where feedback is necessary, the learners should expect feedback from each other. As Brown (1994:218) says, "One of the keys, but not the only key, of course, to successful learning lies in the feedback that a learner receives from each others." The idea of peer correction is to encourage cooperation and help students focus on errors. Elaborating this idea, Edge suggests, "The more the students are involved in correction, the more they have to think about the language used in the classroom" (1989:27). According to her, peer correction has the following advantages.

- 1. When one learner makes a mistake and the other corrects both are listening to each other and thinking about the language.*
- 2. When they correct each other's mistakes, the teacher gets a lot of information concerning their ability.*

3. *They recognize that they learn from each other and develop confidence that they can work independently.*
4. *It reduces the amount of time that the teacher has to spend on correcting written work.*

In addition to this, feedback from peer correction has more advantages. Regarding this, citing the works of Witbeck (1976) Partridge (1981), Bolin, Berezin and Golding (1982), and Brinton (1983), Chaudron (1984) summarizes its advantage as follows.

1. *Teachers' time may be saved that could be used for editing purpose and some other helpful related activities could be done instead.*
2. *Peers' feedback is found to be at their level of development or interest, thus perceived in a better way than the feedback given by teachers because the teacher is assumed to know more than the learners.*
3. *Since more than two peers may involve, learners gain a sense of a wider audience than simply a single teacher.*
4. *The more socially supportive peers can enhance the attitudes of the learners towards writing.*
5. *The learners learn more about writing and revision by reading each other's drafts critically.*

Furthermore, emphasizing the advantage of peer correction, Witbeck (1976:322) suggests that:

1. *The basic advantage of peer correction is that it will give students extensive practice in developing skills necessary for editing and revising their papers before they reach their final destination.*
2. *Composition correction can and should be another opportunity for student – student and student – teacher oral communication.*
3. *One student's correction of another student's error will reinforce and sometimes expand the former's understanding of the nature of the rule in question.*

4. *Peer correction will help students see that errors in composition are in the nature of problems to be solved by all learners of the language rather than individual weaknesses or, more simply, that errors are probably a necessary part of the process of learning rather than merely indications of failure to learn.*

Strengthening the above idea, Atkins et al (1996) comment that peer-correction has two main advantages. The first one is more learners focus on the error critically and the second they can learn from each other by using the idea of the correction made.

Apart from the advantages mentioned above, peer correction has some other significance. According to Bartels (2003) and Keh (1990), peer correction creates free communication, provides instant feedback and negotiation of meaning, students give and receives responses. As Bartels (2003) and Keh (1990) further explain, monitoring and assessing of peer response becomes easy with written feedback and saves time particularly in a large class where the teacher is unable to deal with individual learner.

Some research works demonstrated that it helps the learners to see different perspectives regarding their topics and to generate clarity and develop their ideas (see Mangelsdorf, 1992).

To sum up, whatever form it may take, peer feedback is an effective strategy through which the learners can communicate freely and get a chance of learning various techniques that help them in improving their writing.

However, peer correction has also some disadvantages. According to Atkins et al (1996:41) a few of the claimed disadvantages of using this method are:

1. *If it is always the same few students who offer to correct their peers, the teacher must find ways of calling on other students;*
2. *Students may find it difficult to accept that peer correction is aimed at encouraging cooperation, instead of just listening negatively for errors in order to criticize;*
3. *They may feel they are being criticized by people who have no right to criticize them;*
4. *They may feel the teacher is not doing his job.*

This may clearly indicate that, apart from its advantage, peer-correction has also some drawbacks that have a negative impact on the provision of written feedback unless it is exercised after the learners are well introduced and realize its significance through practice.

2.2.3. Whole class correction

This refers to another way of providing feedback where the correction is given to the whole class taking one or more selected essays and the students commenting on it. In view of this, Witbeck (1976:323) states that "The simplest and most commonly used procedure is merely to show the class one selected essay from the previous day's batch and ask for corrections." He further states that the selected essay could be put on the blackboard or projected instead of duplicating so that students will focus their attention and write the corrections made easily. The role of the teacher at this time is to provide the necessary guidance as desired and as a group; students can point out and correct errors. The advantage of whole class correction as Witbeck suggests is that, students can respond to it quite well.

On the other hand, as Witbeck further explains, whole class correction does have also several disadvantages as follows.

1. *The first has to do with what may be going on in the mind of the student whose essay has been selected. The feeling of being the chosen one (whether the choice is anonymous or not) can be distracting in several ways depending on the personality of the student.*
2. *Secondly, the discussion will very likely be dominated by certain students.*
3. *Further it is clear that actual student-to- student communication is indirect and minimal since students are really only talking to the teacher and may be more concerned with showing off their skills than with solving the problems at hand.*

This may suggest that, whole class correction may be threatening to the learners besides its advantages. Therefore, while exercising this type of feedback provision teachers should adopt different strategies that clear up such worries not to create a negative attitude towards feedback.

2.2.4. Teacher Correction

This is a type of correction where the teacher himself/herself is directly involved in correcting learners' errors. Regarding teacher's correction Harmer (1991:146-147) states that:

Where teachers wish to correct the English in written work, they may wish to use a variety of symbols. They can underline the mistakes in the written work and put a mark in the margin to show what kind of mistakes it was.

Other scholars like Nunan (1991) comment that much of the feedback given by the teacher seems to be automatic, whereas its' ultimate effect on the learners is doubtful. In addition to this Tsui (1995:14) suggests, "Teachers' feedback on responses given by students is another very important element in classroom interaction. Students need to know whether they have correctly understood the teacher and have provided the

appropriate answer.” This shows that students rely on teachers’ comment and usually expect the feedback for the error produced to confirm their responses.

Gower et al. (1995) claim that teacher’s correction is necessary when the students cannot correct their work by themselves. However this could be done after evaluating their effort. The most common role of teachers during English language class is instructing students and providing feedback on performance. In general teacher’s correction is important because it is through feedback that teachers evaluate their students and provide comments on students’ performance (Tsui, 1995). That is why teachers’ feedback is considered to be part and parcel of classroom interaction so as to enable the learners to correct their errors for future use.

The role of the teacher in responding to student writing involves intervening while the composition is undertaken to offer formative feedback which helps the learners improve their writing (Charles, 1990).

Emphasizing the role of a teacher as a key provider of feedback, Murphy (1986: 148) points out that “If teaching is solely focused on accuracy, the expectation is that learners’ talk will be ‘right or ‘wrong’. The teacher is considered sole judge in the matter and gives feedback in these terms.” Tesfay (1995) argues that the role of the teacher in treating errors would be more effective if she/he focuses on provision of feedback that enhances self-correction than if he/she corrects the whole errors on the page.

Based on some research findings, Atkins et al (1996: 142) suggest some useful advice to teachers in providing feedback in language classes.

- 1. Teachers should encourage learners to self-correct where possible, to help them to become more accurate by their own efforts. So it is better not to*

correct the errors, but rather to point out where the error is by underlining it. This gives the student a chance to self-correct. If a lot of students are making the same mistake, the teacher knows there is a general difficulty and the item has to be taught again in a different way.

2. In making less controlled work the teacher can make correction more helpful by giving students information about the kinds of errors they have made. This can be easily done by using a marking code.

Strengthening the above idea, Allwright (1975) and Long (1977) cited in Makino (1990) point out that it is advantageous for teachers not to correct learner errors or provide the right answers immediately, for giving only cues so they can correct their own errors, will further activate their linguistic competence. As Sheorey (1986) comments, the ESL composition teachers have threefold problems in correcting students errors. These problems are identifying, correcting and evaluating of errors committed.

From Keh point of view, to avoid ineffective writing and in efficient comments, "...the first step is for the teacher to respond as a concerned reader to a writer-as a person, not a grammarian or grade giver. The teacher has to communicate in a distinctly humane voice, with sincere respect for the writer as a person, and a sincere interest in his improvement as a writer" (Key, 1990: 301).

To conclude, the above views and suggestions may show that teachers should be careful in providing feedback and take into account as to when and how to give the right response. In other words, they should encourage self-correction by implementing different strategies. Besides, teachers should work in harmony with learners while correcting their errors so that they can develop interest and self reliance in handling various writing activities independently.

On the other hand, as some research findings indicate, teacher's feedback has a negative impact on the learners as well. Accordingly, "...teachers often follow the norm and spoon-feed the learner with the answer, arguably an ineffective way of improving accuracy" (Allwright, 1975 as cited in Murphy 1986). Similarly, as Key (1990) points out, most teachers dealing with writing skill will agree that providing comments on students' written works resulting frustration and is usually time consuming. In addition, there are some worries on the teacher's side. Such worries are whether the comments will be understood and produce the desired output and even be read by the students.

2.3 How is Corrective Feedback Given?

Provision of corrective feedback to students on their written exercises takes different forms depending up on the choice of the teacher as to which forms are easily understandable as a clue for the students to correct their errors. Asres (2005) comments that foreign language teachers face crucial challenge to decide the way (the technique) of providing feedback while attempting to treat the errors of their student. Teachers have a variety of options to provide the necessary comments by using one of the corrective forms (codes) which can be easily understood by their students.

Different scholars classify the forms and ways of providing corrective feedback. Atkins et al (1996: 130-131) for instance classify several ways of correcting and providing feedback on students' writing as follows:

1. Correcting all errors in a student's work

Example =

She did not closed~~ed~~ the window
She denied to help^{ing} me.

2. Underlining errors in the text (a) to show that students made errors or leaving errors for students to make their own correction (b)

Example

a) How you say it in English?

a) He is suffering with fever

3. Underlining the errors in the text and using letters or symbols in the margin to show what kind of errors they have made.

∧ Almost all English books in her section are left aft home

WO The bookshop also is short of books

VF So the only alternative she have is to share

4. Using a symbol in the margin to indicate an error.

Example: Prep. *Although the subject is difficult to her, she like it very much*

5. Commenting on the student's ideas

I enjoyed reading this, because it is well organized and you

Example: *have some interesting ideas. Well done!*

Furthermore, Hendrickson (1980: 218) classifies corrective feedback differently in to two as indirect and direct corrective techniques.

Indirect corrective Techniques: These techniques indicate either the presence or location of errors which include:

a. Underlining incorrect orthographic and morphological forms.

Example: The woman won't to kook the fitch

b. Circling inappropriate word

Example: They are very happy with t plays

c. Inserting an arrow (^) to indicate a missing word

Example: The man saying good-bye to his wife

^

- d. Placing a question mark alongside a confusing phrase or structure

Example: Two girls are going that brought other tree?

- 1. Direct corrective Techniques: - These techniques indicate both the presence and location of errors in a sentence and provide clues or tips on how students can correct their own errors.

- a. Underlining a word and providing a written tip

Example: She finds her

Use past tense

- b. Bracketing a misplaced word or phrase and indicating its proper place



Example “well nothing is forever,” told them (their mother).

Since the objective of using symbols is to provide and deliver the right message to the learners, obviously it needs considerable attention as to which forms should be used.

Hyland (1990: 279) argues that it is necessary to consider some important points while providing the correct response by using appropriate correcting codes (forms) as follows:

A central issue when correcting written work is deciding exactly how much correction to provide. Simply writing out a correct response is unlikely to offer much of a stimulus to future improvement. Too much reding is obviously disheartening. Clearly, our approach must reduce the negative effects of indicating errors without reducing the benefit of conscientious marking. One widely-used means of accomplishing this is to use a shorthand of ‘correcting codes’ written in the margins or above the error. Most teachers have found it useful to adopt symbols such as T= tense, SP= spelling, WO= word Order, R= reference unclear, etc to

guide students to their errors and indicate the kind of mistake made.

Example showing a piece of work which has been corrected using such a coding system;

Example 1

Urbanization ^{Ag} have caused our great diversity of lifestyle to ^V regress. People leaving to cities ^T leave part of their cultural values. Health service is another factor. The ^{WF} effective of modern drugs ^{Ag} cause the people to loss of confidence in traditional ^{Sp} medicine.

Key= Ag= agreement
T= tense
WF= word form

SP= Spelling
V= wrong word
Ar= article

Example 2

Gr The mining industry are able to bring two things to the country. First a large amount of revenue to the country
E and also jeopardy to the natural environment. BCL and other
L mines all over the world are a good example of this. Therefore we must only have local companies to mine

Key= Gr= Surface form

E= Expression

L= Logical development

2.4. Students' Reaction to Feedback on their Written Works

The issue of what students think about feedback is the main concern in the area of language teaching particularly in writing since feedback will be effective and fruitful when learners are motivated and recognize it as part of teaching and learning process (Italo, 1990). However, despite many researchers (for example, Keh 1990, Chaudron 1988, Cohen 1987, Gower et al 1995, Dheram 1995, Drowns et al 1991, Ziv 1984 and Harrison 1986

cited in Getnet 1994) agree on the effectiveness of feedback and helpful for future improvement when it is followed by subsequent revision, though some students do not seem to attach the importance claimed to teachers responses.

Leki (1990) argues that students show lack of interest in teacher's comments to the content of their papers and are more interested in their grades than the feedback provided. Similarly, that L2 students rarely read the comments more than once or read them but did not attempt or rarely incorporate teacher's corrections in their subsequent drafts is reported (Zamel 1981, Morzano and Arthur 1977 cited in Cohen 1987).

In addition, other researchers like Kreizman (1984) argue that students are more interested in their grade rather than the teachers' comment while they receive their paper back. Kreizman further argues that students only did a minimal reading of the comments provided by the teacher and some learners listened to the comments directed to the whole class but were not motivated to read the comments on their paper.

Moreover, Leki (1991) reports L1 students rarely read and even discarded low graded papers. Leki further claims that students may not read over their papers when they get it back and put it away without giving considerable attention to feedback on their works.

Apart from this, Raimes (1983) says when the written work is returned embellished by teachers' corrections, the students groan, put it away, and hope that some how they will get fewer red marks next time.

Studies in L₁ reviewed in Leki (1990), Hairston (1986), Moxley (1989) cited in Getnet (1994:31) revealed that in general students do not seem to have

positive attitude towards teachers' comments. A study made on the responding style of L1 writing teachers presented the following report.

- 1. Students often do not comprehend teachers response to their writing;*
- 2. Even when they do, they do not always use those responses and may not know how to use them;*
- 3. When they use them, they do not necessarily write more effectively as a result.*

Based on the above views it is possible to generalize that students do not give considerable attention to teacher's correction and the effort they make to incorporate comments provided in their further written works is very limited. This may indicate also that students did not perceive the importance of feedback as error correction and the best way of improving their performance.

On the other hand, various research findings show that students give considerable attention to teachers' comments. As noted by Hendrickson (1978) and Nunan (1989) there is a strong preference for error correction and provision of feedback from the learner's perspective. Wondwosen citing Allan (1991:61) further states that "Many adult students feel that the teacher is not doing his or her job properly if correction is not provided." In the same way some research findings show that after the feedback is provided by the teacher, the students made a mental note of the comments (Cohen 1987, 1996).

Cohen and Cavalcanti 1990, McCurdy 1992 cited in Italo (1990) reported that, in general students pay attention to the feedback provided and consider it as helpful to them. Other researches also reported that ESL writing students in general take their teachers' feedback quite seriously and pay a lot of attention to it (see Ferris, 1995).

The above discussions may suggest that some students recognize feedback as helpful for improving their writing and show an effort to deal with the suggestions provided in previous lessons to make a mental note of the comments.

2.5 Factors Affecting Students' Perception of the Usefulness of Feedback

There are a number of factors responsible for the failure of L₁ students to recognize feedback as helpful to improve their writing.

One of the factors according to Leki (1991) is negative criticism that the students are particularly hostile to it. Kulhavy (1977:221) argues that "one of the reasons why the corrective aspects of feedback have received so little attention is simply that many studies fail to analyze error and correct responses separately."

As to Hyland (1990), the feedback methods employed in the classroom affect students' perception as well since some feedbacks encourage them to return to their work after it has been assessed.

Besides, Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) cited in Wondimu (1998:17) concluded that students might not take teachers' feedback into account for several reasons.

...such problems may come either from the teacher side or the learners. On the part of the teachers, they may not give clear, easily understandable and detailed enough response, which guide students to improve their writings. Moreover teachers' responses may emphasize only negative points or criticisms. As a result students may not be motivated to proceed towards the problems or they may even discard it all. And on the parts of the learners, their different reactions towards teachers' response are crucial. When the students

receive their papers-their focus may be only on their grade not on the subject matter (improving their writing or students may lack clear knowledge of handling responses). As a result, they may do little or none to process the feedback in their compositions.

In general, the problem is related to both the teachers and the learners'. From the teachers' sides, the problems arise due to the failure of providing clear and easily understandable responses. In addition, teachers give more emphasis to negative points of the works that results in discouraging the students to be motivated and process the feedback provided. From the students' perspective, their different reaction towards teachers' response and limited knowledge of handling the comments in their future tasks highly influences student's perception.

Though feedback is taken as one part of the teaching learning process, students are not aware of the usefulness of feedback given by the teacher. As cited in Cohen (1987:57), Zamel(1981) claimed that "... learners would rarely read through the comments more than once and that they rarely wrote subsequent drafts incorporating the teachers' corrections." Similarly, Marzano and Arthur (1977) as cited in Cohen (Ibid), after having studied the reaction of the students towards teacher's comments on twenty-four 10th grade English-native-language writers by assigning them to three treatments, found that "... students did not read the teachers' comments or read them but did not attempt to implement the suggestions and correct the errors."

As could be drawn from the above views of various researchers, one of the factors for the failure of student's perception of the usefulness of teachers' comment is they are not forced to read the comments and perceive it as one part of the teaching learning process. As suggested by the above

researchers, negative feedback also plays an important role for the failure of students' perception of the usefulness of feedback.

2.6. Review of Local Studies

There are some research studies done at the local level, which are generally related to this study.

Tesfay (1995) conducted a research which focuses on which feedback technique(s) given on students' written errors are more effective in improving their written English and found out that self-correction strategy improves students' writing better when the students are provided with teachers' clue than when the learners themselves correct their own errors with out being given the hint.

Further more, Italo (1999) investigated the effectiveness of peer versus teachers' feedback. His research finding reveals that both peer and teacher feedback has an impact in improving students' writing skills. Getnet (1994) who made a study on the responding behavior of sophomore English teachers to students writing found out that direct correction techniques are used by the teachers in providing feedback. Another study was conducted by Mamo (1982) which focuses on classification and explanatory analysis of student errors in advanced composition and found out that grammatical errors dominate students' mistakes. Asres (2005) aimed at exploring the written error treatment practice of intermediate writing skills instructors and found out that teacher correction dominates the others.

Taye (2005) also studied the effect of written feedback on students' writing skills and found that written feedback produced an insignificant difference. Furthermore, Derb (2007) conducted a research which focused on an exploration of teachers' feedback on students' errors in writing at

high school level. His findings revealed that teachers carry high teaching loads accompanied with a large number of students. He also found that most of the class time is taken over by the plasma teacher whose speed is not compatible with the level of students and as a result of this; teachers are unable to provide immediate and adequate feedback.

It is on the basis of the related research works revised in this chapter that the present study tries to see whether or not students' are aware of the significance of feedback for improving their writing skill, what factors contribute for the failure of students' awareness (if any) and if teachers of writing persuade the learners to incorporate the comments provided to raise the students' awareness.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Research Design

The main objective of this study is to explore students' perception of the significance of feedback on composition in first year (10+1) preparatory students. A descriptive research involving both quantitative and qualitative techniques was used. Many scholars like Robinson (2002) Creswell (2003), and Sharma (2001) suggest the importance of the above mentioned tools for the study like this one. According to Robinson (2002) a survey method can be used to collect information regarding the activities, perception, feeling and belief of people. A survey method involves mainly the use of questionnaires, interviews, and self administered postal (mail) questionnaire (Robbinson, 2002 and Creswell, 2003). The two types of data gathering tools or techniques were linked due to the reason that both can corroborate each other through triangulation so that the relevant information for study under investigation would be obtained.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Subjects of the study

The total number of first year preparatory students in the second semester of the 2009 academic year was 955 in the school selected for the current study. Out of the total population, 114(12%) students were selected as a source of data. For the purpose of randomization and giving an equal chance to the existing sections, the number of selected sample students was divided into 15 sections. Since the number was not equally divided, for all sections, 8 students from 9sections and 7 students from 6 sections each were randomly selected to fill in the questionnaire.

Similarly, from the total sample of students, 30 (34%) were selected and 2 students from each of the 15 sections were selected for the interview.

3.2.2 Data Gathering Tools

Two types of data collecting tools-questionnaire and interview were used in this study, for multiple source of information's are more robust than data from a single source of information.

3.2.2.1 Questionnaire

Questionnaire was used as a major tool for this study. The questionnaire consisting 15 items was designed only for the students since the study focused on students' perception. All the questionnaires prepared included objective, i.e. closed ended types of questions.

Before collecting data for the actual research, a pilot test was conducted on the school selected. The main purpose of the pilot testing according to Louis et al (2000) is:

- to check the clarity of the questionnaire items, instructions and layout;
- to eliminate ambiguities or difficulties in wording;
- to identify redundant questions and
- to see whether the questions are reliable or not.

In view of this, thirty (30) students were selected to respond to the pilot test and 2 students from 15 existing sections each were taken randomly. To check the instrument's reliability, a test-retest method was used in which similar questionnaire items were administered to the same respondents at different times. Finally, both test results were summarized by categorizing the same and different responses separately. The reliability of the result was calculated in percentages manually since it was not possible to analyze it by SPSS computer program for the questionnaire

does not have uniform scale through out. The evaluation of both tests showed that almost 92 (92%) of the students responded to the same questions which indicates the pilot test result was reliable. As a result, some problems were observed on some items. Some of the students chose more than one response for one particular item. Therefore these items were corrected and specific instructions were included for such items.

For the actual research purpose, the questionnaire was administered to the 114 grade 11 students of Bole Senior Secondary and Preparatory School. All students selected from 15 sections filled the questionnaire and returned it. There was a 100% return rate.

The 15 items, which were all closed-ended questions, were mainly focused on the following issues (see Appendix A for further information).

1. Whether the teacher provides feedback on students' writing.
2. How often the teacher provides feedback?
3. What students do with the teacher's feedback?
4. Whether the students have difficulties in comprehending teacher feedback.
5. How students perceive feedback.
6. Whether teachers encourage students to incorporate the comments provided.

3.2.2.2 Interview

The other type of data collecting technique used in this study was an interview. Interview was used to complement or strengthen the data gathered through the questionnaire. In other words, it was believed that interview as an additional data collecting method would help in triangulating or crosschecking the data gathered through the other tools-questionnaire. A smaller sample population than the questionnaire was

interviewed by the researcher and audio recorded. Transcription was done later.

Nine interview questions which were very much related to the questionnaire items were prepared and administered based on the convenience of the interviewee. The interview questions were ready-made, i.e., it was semi-structured type of question (Appendix B). For the reason of manageability, 30 students 2 from each of 15 sections were randomly selected and were briefly informed of the purpose of the interview ahead of time.

Though the questions were designed in English, the medium of discussion was decided based on the interest of the interviewees. Thus, the majority of the interviewees preferred to respond in English except 3 of them who were interested to give an interview in Amharic and 2 of them both in English and Amharic. On average, each interview took 16 minutes time. Items for the questionnaire, interviews and formats were developed from various research works in the area, like Cohen (1987) and Ferris (1995).

3.2.3 Methods of Data organization And Analysis

In order to organize and facilitate the analysis, the data collected were put in tables and analyzed by using quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative data, which were tallied and summed, were tabulated and put in to frequencies and percentage. They were also analyzed and interpreted accordingly. The qualitative data were organized and analyzed descriptively in line with the quantitative data.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

As already mentioned in chapter 1, this study generally aimed at investigating the students' perception of the usefulness of feedback on composition in the first year Preparatory students of Bole Senior Secondary and Preparatory School. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- assess factors responsible in affecting students' perception of the usefulness of feedback.
- investigate what students do with the teachers' comments.
- find out if students have problems in understanding teachers' feedback.
- examine whether or not teachers encourage students to incorporate the comments provided.

In this chapter, the data gathered through questionnaire and interview will be analyzed and discussed.

Accordingly, the data collected from 114 students through the questionnaire was tabulated and put in to frequencies and percentages. This data was then described and analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Items with related ideas are grouped and put in to one table so that they will be described and analyzed side by side so that various trends in the responses are examined.

After analyzing and interpreting the data obtained through the questionnaire, the data gathered from 30 students through interview were

summarized and integrated with the analysis and interpretation of the data collected through the questionnaires.

4.1 Students' Questionnaire

As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, questionnaire was the major instrument of data collection used. It was stated also that a questionnaire consisting of 15 items, all of which were close-ended type of questions were administered to 114 student respondents. The student respondents then filled out the questionnaire based on their observations and perceptions about the specific questions. The data gathered through the questionnaire are presented in the form of tables and efforts are made to analyze each item by grouping related ones together.

The first and the second items focused on how much of each composition they read and how many of teachers' comments were given considerable attention by the students.

Table 4.1. Did Students Reread their Papers and Attend to Their Teachers' comments?

No	Items	Frequency of Response										Total	
		All of it		Most of it		Some of it		Few		None of it			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	How much of each composition do you read over and over again when your instructor returns it to you?	24	21.05	49	42.98	36	31.57	-	-	5	4.39	114	100
2	How many of the teacher's corrections did you give thoughtful attention to?	29	25.43	35	30.71	28	24.56	21	18.42	-	-	114	100

For question 1 of table 4.1 which asked students to respond to questions about how much of their marked papers they read, their responses showed that 73(64.03%) of them (when the 'all of it' and 'most of it' categories are combined) replied that they read 'all' and 'most' of their essay papers. On the other hand, 36(31.58%) and 5(4.39%) of the respondents reported that they reread some and none of teachers' comments respectively. It is necessary at this juncture to note that there was a good fit between the result of the questionnaire and interview. The result of the interview showed that more than half of the interviewees 16(53.33%) responded that they read 'all' of their essays and 8 students (26.66%) replied they read 'most' of the essay. Five interviewees (16.66%) responded that they read 'some' of their essay paper. Only 1 student (3.33%) reported reading 'none' of the essay paper.

In response to question 2 which asked how many of their teacher's comments students give thoughtful attention to, their responses showed that 64(56.14%) of the student respondents in combination replied that they paid attention to 'all of it' and 'most of it'. The remaining respondents, that is, 28(24.56%) of them said 'some of it' and 21(18.42%), reported that they give thoughtful attention to 'a few' of their teacher's corrections.

According to the majority of the responses, it seems reasonable to conclude that students were more likely to reread their essays and pay attention to their teacher's comments. This finding is different from Zamel (1981) and Marzano and Arthur (1977) cited in Cohen (1987), Leki (1990) and Kreizman (1984) in that they found students rarely did a minimal reading and put the marked essay with out giving considerable attention to the comments provided. On the other hand, this specific finding is consistent with those two previous studies of Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) and Ferris (1995). Both groups found that students in general take the comments seriously and pay attention to it.

Table 4.2. Students' Response on how often the Teacher provided with feedback.

No	Items	Frequency of Response											
		Always		Frequently		Sometimes		Rarely		None		Total	
		f	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
3	How often does your teacher provide you with feedback to your written exercise?	20	17.54	23	20.17	56	49.12	15	13.15	-	-	114	100

Item 3 was meant to assess how often the teacher provided them with feedback. As can be seen from table 4.2 above, almost half of the respondents, that is, 56 (49.12%) reported that the teacher provides them with feedback 'some times' and 23 (20.18%) of them responded 'frequently'. Besides, 20 students (17.54%) said that the teacher 'always' provides them with feedback and the remaining 15 students (13.16%) reported the teacher 'rarely' provides them with feedback. The result obtained through interview fits with the above finding in that 16 students (53.33%) replied the teacher provides feedback 'sometimes' and 20% of them said the teacher provides them with the feedback frequently.

From the above table one easily understands that, students receive the necessary comments (corrections) sometimes indicating that the teacher's comment is insufficient for the students to correct their errors and improve their writing fluency. This finding corresponds with Taye (2005) who found that the teacher 'some times' provides feedback and different from Derb (2007) who found that the teacher 'always' provides the students with feedback.

Table 4.3. What Did Students Report Doing in Response to Teacher Feedback?

No	Items	Respondents	%
4	Please describe what you did after you read your instructor's comments and corrections		
	a) Just make a mental note of the feedback	21	18.92
	b) Write down points to consider for revision or future use	38	34.233
	c) Rewrite the essay incorporating the feedback (Comments) provided	9	8.11
	d) Ask the teacher for explanation	19	17.11
	e) Check grammar books	6	5.41
	f) Refer back to the previous compositions	12	10.81
	g) Do nothing	6	5.41
	Total	111	100

Question 4 asked students to describe their strategies for addressing their teacher's feedback. Accordingly, many of the student's responses were spread over all 7 options. The majority 38(34.23%), however reported writing down points to consider for revision or future use while 21(18.92%) said they just make a mental note of the teacher's feedback. About 17.11% replied re-writing the essay incorporating the feedback (comments) provided while 12(10.81%) of them replied they ask the teacher for explanation. On the other hand, a small number of students 6(5.41%) reported that they do nothing in acting on or responding to their teacher's comments. This result most likely suggests that students focus on some points (comments) they consider are useful in future activities realizing their effectiveness. This is because teacher feedback is more effective when it is focused and followed by subsequent student revision (Cohen and Cavalcanti 1990).

Table 4.4. Students' Response on what they look at first when they get their paper back and their Reaction to papers only a grade on it.

No	Items	Respondents	%
5	When your work is returned to you marked, what do you look at first?		
	a) The grades	60	55.05
	b) Corrections	30	27.52
	c) General written comments	19	17.43
	Total	109	100
6	What is your reaction to papers with only a grade on it? (i.e., with out teacher's feedback).		
	a) I like it	33	29.73
	b) I don't like it	52	46.65
	c) I am indifferent	26	23.42
	Total	111	100

As can be observed from table 4.4 above, the highest percentage of the respondents witnessed that their primary interest was on their grade. Accordingly, 60 students, that is, 55.05% of them responded that they see their grades at first while 30 students (27.52%) of them replied that they look at their corrections. On the other hand, a small number of students, that is, 19 (17.43%) of them said that they look at first at the general written comments on their marked paper.

For question 6, which asked students to respond to questions about their reaction to papers with only a grade on it, the majority of the respondents that is 52 (46.85%) of them reported that they don't like papers with out teachers' feedback. The rest 33 students (29.73%) of them said that they like papers with out teachers' comments, i.e., papers returned to them with only a grade on it and 26 respondents (23.42%) pointed out that they are indifferent. In light of the above finding, it can be inferred that students like teacher's feedback and perceive its significance. This finding supports Hendrickson (1978) and Nunan (1989) that students have a strong preference for error correction and receives feedback from the

teacher. Furthermore, many students feel that the teacher is not doing his/her job properly if the teacher does not provide the feedback (Allan 1991 cited in Wondwosen 1992).

However, they are attracted more towards their grades than to teachers' comments not realizing the impact of feedback on their performance. This finding is consistent with the finding of Derb (2007), Kreizman (1984) and Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) who found that students are interested in looking at their grades rather than the teachers' comment while they receive their paper back.

This finding may suggest that, the above situation may contribute to the reason why students might not take teachers' comments in to account and fail to incorporate in their writing tasks. Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) suggest that students' focus may be only on their grades when they receive their paper back not on the subject matter (improving their writing or lack clear knowledge of handling responses). As a result they may do little or none to process the feedback in their composition.

Table 4.5. Did Students Report Difficulties in Understanding Teacher's Feedback?

No	Items	Respondents	%
7	Were there any comments or corrections that you did not understand?		
	a) Yes	78	66.37
	b) No	36	33.63
	Total	113	100
8	If your response to the above question is 'yes', what were they like?		
	a) symbols	10	13.16
	b) Single words	21	27.63
	c) Phrases	26	34.21
	d) Complete sentences	19	25
	Total	76	100
9	What do you do about those comments or corrections that you do not understand?		
	a) Ask my instructor to explain them	49	46.23
	b) Look Corrections up in a grammar book or dictionary	30	28.30
	c) Ask friends /classmates/ family for help	21	19.81
	d) Do nothing	6	5.66
	Total	106	

On question 7, the students were asked if they ever had any problems with their teachers' feedback that was difficult to interpret and if so, to give specific examples of such problems. Accordingly, 78 students, (68.42%) said that they had difficulties in understanding teachers' comments; another 36 students (31.58%) said that they never had any problems in understanding their teachers' feedback. This finding is contrary to Ferris (1995) who found the students never had any problems. This result most likely suggests that more than half of the students have some difficulties in understanding teachers' comments that they could hardly make use of them in future writing tasks. This finding corresponds with the student's interview in which 56.66% of them confirmed that they had some problems in understanding teacher's comments.

Of the students who did report specific problems, 26 students (34.21%) complained about not being able to understand comments given in the form of phrases. In the remaining responses, the next specific example mentioned was single words. In this respect, 21 students (27.63%) reported that they had trouble understanding comments provided in single words and 19 students (25%) responded complete sentences and 10 students (13.16%) said that symbols were their problems in comprehending the comments provided. Seen in this light, it seems discouraging that more than half of the respondents reported having difficulties in understanding the teachers' comments out of which phrases are the most dominant specific problems which were reported by the majority of the students (34.21%). The finding was also supported by students' interview in which those who replied having difficulties in understanding the comments indicated that phrases are the most recurring types of comments that were difficult for them to interpret.

This finding is consistent with Derb (2007) who found that students encountered difficulties in understanding the comments but different in students' specific problems. In this regard, Derb's finding showed that symbols were the major difficulties and phrases are the dominant ones that most of the students reported in this study.

Similarly, the subjects were asked to specify the strategy that they would use for each of the teacher's comments that they indicated as difficult for them to understand. The majority of the respondents (about 46.23%) indicated that they ask their instructor directly to explain for them while 30(28.30%) reported going to an out side source (grammar book or dictionary). The remaining of the respondents, that is, 21(19.81%) replied they ask friends or families for help in understanding vague comments. Other few students (about 5.66%) reported that they do nothing rather than taking any further steps to respond to unclear comments supplied by

the teacher. Cohen and Cavalcanti's (1990) finding fits with the present finding that they found students ask the teacher directly as a strategy to use unclear comments.

In general providing unclear comments in any form affects students' motivation towards processing the feedback in various ways, such as going through the comments to deal with it and correct their errors. This situation might have a negative impact on students' perception of the significance of feedback. As some research findings showed, the type of feedback employed affects students' perception since some feedbacks encourage them to return to their work after it has been assessed (Hyland, 1990). Furthermore, students might not take teachers' feedback into account due to the failure of providing clear and easily understandable responses from the teachers' side (Cohen and Cavalcanti, 1990).

Table 4.6. Did Students Feel That Teachers' Feedback is Useful?

No	Items	Respondents	%
10	How would you regard the teacher's feedback?		
	a) useful	97	86.61
	b) Not useful	15	13.38
	Total	112	100
11	If you consider 'useful', to what extent is it useful?		
	a) A lot	63	64.95
	b) Some	26	26.8
	c) Little	8	8.25
	d) None	-	-
	Total	97	100
12	If your response to question number 10 is 'useful', in what way is it useful?		
	a) Helps me improve my writing skills and confirms my work	34	4.12
	b) Helps the teacher know the students' common errors	56	6.19
	c) Helps me to be aware of my mistakes, identify my errors and correct my weak points for future use	70	72.16
	d) Reminds me of what I forgot	9	9.28
	e) Helps me to get better grades and pass essay exams	8	8.25
	Total	97	100
	13	If you don't consider as useful and do not use it in the future, what is the reason for that?	
a) The comments are not clear (not understandable)		8	53.33
b) The teacher provides us with negative feedback		7	46.67
c) I don't consider teacher's comments as helping to improve my writing skill		-	-
Total		15	100

Question 10-13 assessed the students' perceptions of the usefulness of feedback, to what extent and in what way it is useful and the reason why feedback was not useful (for those respondents who perceive feedback as

having no importance). The responses to these 4 questions are summarized in Table 4.6.

On question 10 above, students were asked how they would rate the teacher's feedback in improving their writing skill. The responses to this question were affirmative and encouraging. The majority (about 86.61%) perceive feedback as useful. Only 15 students (13.39%) however, responded negatively to this question, saying that feedback is not useful. Over all, as could be seen from the table above (Table 4.6), the students seem to value their teacher's comments as significant in their writing proficiency. In the interview session, the great majority of the interviewees (93.33%) responded that feedback is useful which shows that there is a match between the two instruments used. The above finding is also consistent with the finding of Ferris (1995). His study showed that overall, the students' found teachers' feedback useful in helping them improve their writing. This finding corroborates the view of various researchers like Keh (1990), Gower et al (1995), Garcia (1999), Cohen (1987), Dheram 1995, Drowns et al (1991) and Kulhavy (1977) who suggest that feedback is useful in improving students' performance and correct their error.

The responses of students to question 11 indicate that, when 'a lot' and 'some' categories were combined; most of the students (91.75%) believe teachers feedback contributes more to improve their writing. Only a small percentage (8.25%) reported that it contributes 'little'.

In responses to question 12 which required the students to say in what way feedback is useful, the great majority of the students, that is, 70 (72.16%) of them felt that teacher's feedback had indeed helped them improve their writing, to be aware of their mistakes, identify their errors and correct their weak points for the development of their writing skills.

The result of the interview was found to be similar with the above finding as half of the respondents replied in the same way.

On the other hand, the remaining respondents, that is, 9 students (9.28%) said that feedback is helpful in that it reminds them what they forgot. Eight students (8.25%) of them indicated that it helps them to get better grades and 6 students (6.19%) reported it helps the teacher know the students' common errors while only few students (4.12%) of them responded that it helps them improve their writing skills and confirms their work. From this, it might be inferred that, students recognize the usefulness of teachers' feedback including the various advantages they can get from it.

Those respondents who perceive feedback as having no significance to their compositions forwarded various reasons. Eight students (53.33%) said that teachers' comments are not clear (not understandable) while nearly (6.47%) reported the teacher provides them with negative feedback.

This finding confirms the established methodological view that unclear, hard to understand, negative comments and lack of reinforcement contribute a lot for students' failure to understand the importance of feedback and to use it in later writing tasks. Raimes (1983) suggest that students might not take teachers comments in to account because the teachers may not give clear, easily understandable and detailed enough feedback which guide students to improve their writings. In addition, teachers' responses may emphasize only negative points or criticisms to the exclusion of encouraging students to incorporate the comments provided in their further writing tasks.

Table 4.7. Whether the Teacher Reinforces the Comments Provided in Writing Tasks and specific Activities Practiced.

No	Items	Respondents	%
14	Does the teacher help you to incorporate the comments provided in your various writing activities?		
	a) Yes	79	70.54
	b) No	33	29.46
	Total	112	100
15	If your answer to question 14 is 'yes' in which specific activities are you asked to incorporate them? (More than one response is possible).		
	a) In class work activities	26	32.91
	b) In our homework writing tasks	3	3.8
	c) In our written exams	4	5.06
	d) In all of the above activities	46	58.23
	Total	79	100

The question in table 4.7 above was meant to assess whether the teachers insist their students to incorporate the comments provided in different writing tasks so that students can realize the purpose and significance of feedback. As the data above reveals, student's response was positive. The highest percentage (70.54%) said their teachers encourage them to use the comments provided while 33 students (29.46%) pointed out that their teachers do not insist them to apply the comments provided in any of their writing activities. As the responses of the students in the interview reveal, more than half (73.33%) of them reported they receive feedback from their teachers. This clearly indicates that both results agree.

Those students who answered that their teacher encourages them to incorporate the comments were asked in which specific activities they were insisted to practice the comments. In this regard, 46 students (58.23%) said that they are insisted by their teacher to practice the comments in a number of activities such as class work, homework writing tasks and in the essay examinations. Some 26 students (32.91%) reported they are asked by

their teacher to incorporate the comments and practice them only in class work activities and a negligible percentage of the respondents (5.06%) and (3.8%) responded that they are asked to incorporate those comments in their written exams and home work writing tasks respectively. Those who replied they receive feedback from their teacher during the interview reported that the teacher encourages them use the comments in class work activities indicating that this result is in harmony with and confirms the above finding. This most likely suggests that the students receive the necessary comments and encouraged by their teachers to act on the comments so that they realize its impact on their performance and grades. Therefore, we can say that it is necessary to encourage the students to practice the given feedback in various activities for lack of reinforcement has a significant role in students' failure of recognizing the usefulness of teachers' comments (Raimes 1983).

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, an attempt was made to investigate, describe and analyze the data gathered on students' perception of the usefulness of feedback on composition in preparatory (10+1) students of Bole Senior and Preparatory School. In order to collect the necessary data, and achieve the objectives of the study, questionnaire (as a major tool) and interview were employed. The major findings are summarized and presented with recommendations in this chapter.

5.1 Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the data presented in chapter four, the following conclusions could be made.

1. Students were found aware of feedback as useful in improving their writing skill. It was observed that responses of almost all students were affirmative. The great majority of the students (86.61%) replied that teacher's feedback is helpful to them. The responses of the majority of the students indicate that students seem to value the teacher's comments as an important input and they consider it as an integral part of teaching-learning process.

1.1. Teachers' feedback for the students has been found more useful in that it helped them improve their writing, to be aware of their mistakes, identify their errors and correct their weak points (please see item 12 in table 4.6).

2. The result of the questionnaire indicated that students read (when the 'all of it' and 'most of it categories are combined) 'all' and 'most' of their essays when they get their papers back (Table 4.1). We see that there is a

match between the result of the questionnaire and interview. The result of interview showed that the majority of students (53.33%) read 'all' and 26.66% of the respondents replied they read 'most' of the corrected essays.

2.1 It was revealed that students give considerable attention to teachers' comments. This was confirmed by the majority of the students who replied that they pay attention to almost all of the comments they receive from their teacher.

2.2. Students prefer writing points to consider for revision or future use as their own strategy in handling the teachers' comments (Table 4.3). This might suggest that having perceived the significance of feedback, they are motivated to go through the comments and focus on specific ones which those students consider are necessary to give more attention and process them in future writing tasks.

3. It was also found students encountered certain problems that hinder them from using or interpreting the comments provided. The majority of the students replied that they had difficulties in understanding teachers' feedback. This is because students receive unclear comments from teachers (Table 4.6).

3.1 Out of the comments that are not clear and difficult to understand, phrases were the most frequently provided by teachers. Unclear and not easily understandable comments might be information barriers or create information breakdown and discourage students from using them in various ways. Besides, this might be considered a factor which contributes a lot for the negative students' perception of the importance of feedback.

3.2 Students used the strategy of asking their teacher directly to understand and make clear comments that they found difficult to interpret.

4. It was found that teachers provide students with limited feedback. In other words teachers' provision of feedback seems to be insufficient to convey the required information to students.

5. The result of the study revealed that students receive the necessary support and encouragement to act on the comments provided on their writing. Students' response during interview also confirmed that they are being insisted by their teacher to incorporate and practice the feedback.

5.1 Teachers encourage their learners to incorporate the given comments in subsequent drafts so that students will be able to correct their error and use the language appropriately. Students are given an opportunity to practice teacher's feedback in various ways such as class work, homework writing tasks and in their essay examinations (Table 4.7).

5.2 Recommendations

Feedback as a means of error correction is a fundamental element useful to promote students' writing. However, it has become a common problem in that most students in various levels are not conscious enough of the role of teachers' comments on their performance and the effort made to process in their writing task is very limited. Thus, in order to help learners improve their writing skill by making use of feedback and encourage teachers of writing to convey the right message, the following recommendations are forwarded.

1. Teachers' feedback is necessary because it enables students to correct their errors and help teachers as well to evaluate their students' performance. Teachers are thus, advised to supply adequate, necessary and sustainable feedback at the right time in each and every written tasks of their students.

2. The effect of feedback on students' performance is realized when the right and required message is conveyed to the students. Therefore to avoid information breakdown, teachers should be able to provide clear and easily understandable feedback with legible hand writing so that learners can interpret and use it appropriately. Otherwise, it may have a negative impact on students' awareness of the significance of feedback.

3. Though providing comments in the form of phrases is found to have some advantages such as saving time etc., the feedback provided should be detailed enough and preferably given with relative clues as this encourage students to correct their errors by themselves. Thus, language teachers particularly those who engaged in teaching writing skill should be selective while treating the errors of their students in providing appropriate comments that are familiar and easily understood by their students. Teachers can also use some corrective codes or symbols that are well known by students for this in turn saves teachers' time. Comments should, in general, convey an appropriate, sufficient and the required message for all students to enhance students' writing skill.

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APPENDICES

Appendix – A

**Addis Ababa University
Institute of Language studies
Department of Foreign Languages and Literature
(Graduate program)**

Questionnaire for Students

Dear Students,

I am conducting a research on “students’ perception and significance of feedback in the writing class.” Your genuine responses to the questions below will be of much use. I thus kindly request you to answer each question carefully. Your responses will be kept confidential. It is not necessary to write your name.

Direction

Please think of the last composition paper that your teacher corrected and returned to you. You will be asked questions about what you did with the feedback from your teacher. Please answer with a tick (✓) except for the questions which requires to circle the responses.

1. How much of each composition do you read over and over again when your instructor returns it to your?
 - a. All of it _____
 - b. Most of it _____
 - c. Some of it _____
 - d. None of it _____

2. How many of the teacher’s corrections did you give thoughtful attention to?
 - a. All of them _____
 - b. Most of them _____
 - c. Some _____
 - d. Few _____
 - e. None _____

- c. Ask friends /class mates/ family for help
 - d. Do nothing
10. How would you regard the teacher's feedback?
- a. Useful _____
 - b. Not useful _____
11. If you consider as 'useful', to what extent is it useful
- a. A lot
 - b. Some
 - c. Little
 - d. None
12. If your response to questions number 10 is 'useful'. In what way is useful?
- a. Helps me improve my writing skills and confirms my work
 - b. Helps the teacher know the students, common errors.
 - c. Helps me to be aware of my mistakes, identify my errors and correct my weak points for future use.
 - d. Reminds me of what I forgot
 - e. Helps me to get better grades/pass essay exams.
13. If you **don't consider** as useful and do not use it in the future, what is the reason for that?
- a. The comments are not clear (not understandable)
 - b. The Teacher provides us with negative feedback
 - c. I don't consider teacher's comments as helping to improve my writing skill.
14. Does the teacher help you to incorporate the comments provided in your various writing activities?
- a. Yes _____
 - b. No _____
15. If your answer for question no 14 is 'yes' in which specific activities are you asked to incorporate them?
- a. In class work activities.
 - b. In our home work writing tasks.
 - c. In our written exams.
 - d. In all of the above activities

Appendix – B

**Addis Ababa University
Institute of Language studies
Department of Foreign Languages and Literature
(Graduate program)**

The Interview for Students

First of all, I would like to thank you for your cooperation in responding to the questions below.

1. Does your teacher provide you with feedback in your composition exercise?
2. Do you read all of the essay when you get your paper back?
3. What do you feel when you get your papers with out teacher's comments?
4. How do you view the usefulness of teacher's feedback in improving your writing skill?
5. If you consider teacher Feedback as useful, in what way it is useful?
6. If you don't consider as useful, what do you think is reason?
7. Do you have some problems in understanding teachers' comments?
8. If you say 'yes,' what do they like (symbols, phrases etc)?
9. Does your teacher help you incorporate the comments provided in your activities?

DECLARATION

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

Name: Mekonnen Abebe Diriba

Signature: _____



Place: Addis Ababa University, DFL

Date of Submission: June, 2009

