TEACHER PREPAREDNESS AND UTILIZATION OF PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT FOR DEVELOPING STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS IN SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA

By

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DECLARATION

Declaration by the Candidate

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my professors, family, friends, colleagues and all who have been champions at encouraging and supporting me; thank you for believing in me, even when I did not believe in myself. To all those who strive for knowledge, may this work contribute, however humbly, to the greater good. To my mother, Esther Nziokari, you have been an excellent model for determination throughout my journey of life. This work is a testament to the sacrifices you have made for me. To my late father, Kitungu Kivanguli Ndia, for your passion for education for all, this achievement is as much yours as it is mine. Finally, to all teachers of English who labour continuously to help students become good writers, this work is a reflection of our shared dreams to make a difference in the lives of those we teach.

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ABSTRACT

The current study was motivated by the perpetual student underachievement in English writing skills in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) as indicated by the Kenya National Examinations Council yearly feedback reports. Focused on this, the purpose of the study was to explore the practices used by teachers of English in formative assessment for the development of students' writing skills, and to assess teachers' preparedness for assessing students' writing skills. The specific study objectives were to: assess teachers' preparedness for formative assessment of the writing skill, explore the procedures teachers used for evaluating the quality of student writing, investigate the types and modes of providing feedback that teachers used, analyse the type of written feedback that teachers provided on students' written texts and to examine how teachers ensured that feedback obtained from students' writing was used to inform learning in writing. The study adopted the pragmatic philosophical paradigm and was undergirded by Vygotsky's Social Cultural Theory. The theory posits that while mediation is central to learning, social interaction is the basis of learning. Conducted in 11 out of the 110 public secondary schools that sat KCSE in Nairobi County in 2021, the study involved 22 Form Four teachers, and their 198 Form Four learners selected using purposive, stratified, and simple random sampling procedures. The study adopted a convergent mixed methods design. Data was collected using questionnaires, teacher focus group discussions, student written task and document analysis. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics while qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis procedures. The findings revealed that teachers were inadequately prepared in some crucial aspects of formative assessment of learners' writing during their initial training yet opportunities for retooling were limited. According to the findings, the procedures used for evaluating and reporting on the quality of learners' writing did not adequately serve a diagnostic purpose as per the demands of formative assessment. Teacher feedback was prevalently used while peer and self-assessment, face-to face discussions and use of digital devices as a means of feedback provision were underutilised. Further, to a considerable degree teachers' written feedback did not include adequate detail to prompt sufficient learner engagement and remediation. Also, teachers admitted that it was difficult to provide learners with comprehensive feedback due to high curriculum demands and shortage of teachers. The findings also revealed that learners were scarcely given individualised support and that teachers did not sufficiently utilise systematic ways of using feedback to inform subsequent learning. The findings, therefore, reveal deficiencies that could hinder learners' development of writing skills. The study recommends a review of pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes to equip teachers with the necessary formative assessment competencies to align their practices to evidence- based ways and thence improve their students' writing. Further, policy makers, schools and teachers should consider the purpose of formative assessment and reenergise efforts to limit the barriers to realising its potential benefits in learning writing skills.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CBC	Competency –based Curriculum
CBA	Competency- based Assessment
ESL	English as a second language
HOCs	Higher Order Concerns
KCSE	Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education
KICD	Kenya institute of Curriculum Development
KIE	Kenya Institute of Education
KNEC	Kenya National Examinations Council
LOCs	Lower Order Concerns
NCW	National Commission on Writing for America's families, schools and colleges,
NESSP	National Education Sector Strategic Plan
MOE	Ministry of Education
NACOSTI	National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SCT	Social Cultural Theory
TSC	Teachers Service Commission
WHO	The World Health Organization
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Formative assessment is an integral part of learning to write effectively. Jimenez, (2018) defines formative assessment as assessment conducted throughout the learning process to enhance learning. Such assessment, he observes, comprises eliciting evidence about learning to identify the gap between current and desired performance, providing feedback to students and involving them in the assessment and learning process to close the gap. Writing, the focus of this study, is a fundamental functional skill for everyday life in a knowledge-oriented society, yet many secondary school students in Kenya graduate with inadequate writing skills (Barasa, 2005; Daily Nation, 2020; Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) Feedback reports 2013-2024). Research identifies formative assessment of students' writing as one of the strategies that holds promise for improving ability in the writing skill (Graham & Perin, 2007; Graham & Hebert, 2010; Graham, Harris and Hebert, 2011; Jimenez, 2018). However, there is consensus that the way it is carried out affects the effectiveness of the whole process (Graham et al., 2011) and that inappropriate practices may not only be unproductive but can also be harmful (OECD 2013). Focused on the value of formative assessment in improving students' writing abilities and the critical role played by teachers in the process, this study sought to investigate teachers preparedness and practices in formative assessment of writing skills.

This chapter presents background information to the study, statement of the problem and purpose of the study. It also includes study objectives, research questions, justification, significance, scope, limitations and assumptions of the study. Further, it

presents the theoretical and conceptual framework and provides definitions of the key terms as used in the study.

1.2 Background to study

In the context of formative assessment, a teacher's level of preparedness determines their ability to design, deliver, and adopt assessment strategies that enhance student learning outcomes. Assessment of writing is a complex process comprising a set of specific knowledge and skills that should be learned (Britton, 2023). However, it is often assumed that teachers automatically acquire these skills (Graham et al. 2011, Myres 2016), which is usually not the case. According to Myres (2016), many teachers are not prepared well to teach writing.

The ability to convey one's thoughts effectively in writing is a crucial skill for learning and in life beyond the classroom. Besides being the primary means by which students demonstrate their knowledge in school, writing is a critical learning tool that enables learners to gather, remember and share subject matter knowledge as well as explore, organise and refine their ideas about subjects (Graham and Harris, 2005). Graham et al. (2011) observe that the inability to communicate effectively in writing is one of the reasons why many students drop out of school. Further, they note that students who graduate out of school with a low proficiency in writing are at a serious disadvantage in meeting the demands of higher education, securing a job and participating in social and civic activities.

Kenya is now undertaking curriculum reforms with a new 2-6-3-3-3 education curriculum framework gradually being rolled out. The current study is situated within the 8-4-4 curriculum which is still in operation at secondary school level. The system which is gradually being phased away comprises 8 years of primary education, 4

years of secondary education, and 4 years of university education. At the end of the four- year secondary school course students sit for the Kenya certificate of secondary Education (KCSE) examination. English at KCSE is examined in three papers, namely Paper 1, Functional skills, Paper 2, Literary Appreciation and Grammar and Paper 3, Creative Writing and Essays based on set texts. Students' writing skills are mainly assessed in Paper 3.

According to Jimenez (2018) many published national reports have revealed that a high proportion of children do not meet the required proficiency levels in writing: For example, in Spain in 2001 the National Institute for Quality Education Assessment (INQE) results of the 1999-2000 primary and secondary education assessment indicated that performance of children in writing fell below expectations. In Kenya the Kenya National Examinations Council yearly KCSE feedback reports reveal similar underachievement in students' performance in the paper that assesses students' writing skills. For instance, the KNEC feedback report on the performance of candidates at KCSE for the year 2020 notes that 'Candidates' performance in paper 3 continues to be far below expectations with comparable low means of 30.86%, 32.37%, 31.42% 33.33% and 34.4 % in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 respectively.' Evidently, these means provide evidence of a serious problem in learning writing skills.

Educators and policy makers have emphasized the need to take the teaching of the writing skill seriously. For instance, the National Commission on Writing (NCW) for America's families, schools and colleges, in a call for writing to be placed at the centre for school reform agenda warned, 'Students and Society will be short-changed if writing is not placed squarely in the centre of the school reform agenda' (NCW,

2003, as quoted in Graham and Harris, 2009). Indangasi (2018) also points out the crucial role played by the writing skill in promoting acquisition of critical thinking and problem-solving skills which he asserts are essential in every education system because ‘an educational system is good to the extent to which it encourages critical thinking’ (Indangasi, 2018, P9).

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) no. 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. For lifelong learning to be a reality, educators need to put in place processes for monitoring learner achievement to engage meaningful, realistic and timely interventions. The English language syllabus (KIE, 2002) considers formative assessment as essential for developing students’ writing ability and recommends administration of diagnostic and remedial exercises followed by provision of meaningful and helpful feedback to address students’ learning needs. This emphasises the importance of ensuring teachers’ practices align with evidence-based ways of monitoring learners’ achievement towards achievement of desired goals.

According to Graham *et al.,* (2016), formative assessment of writing is a complex process comprising several connected activities that demand a set of specific knowledge and skills. All these activities should be carried out efficiently if they are to produce the desired results. Graham et al., (2011) assert that the trustworthiness of formative writing assessments can be invalidated by issues about what is assessed, how it is assessed and how it is scored.

For formative assessment of writing to be effective, teachers should be well equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills. This is particularly necessary because writing is considered the most difficult of the language skills to teach and assess

(Hyland, 2003). Koh (cited in Wong & Mak, 2019) observes that many teachers lack assessment literacy due in part to inadequate training in many pre-service programs. Kroll (cited in Noudshan, 2014) asserts that fostering useful and effective language skills in students is a painstaking task if the language teacher lacks enough experience and fails to provide appropriate practice. According to Myres (2016), many teachers are not prepared well to teach writing. There is also concern that when it comes to assessment of writing it is often assumed that teachers naturally become good assessors (Graham et al. 2011, Myres 2016) which is usually not the case. It is these concerns that gave impetus for investigating the kinds of preparation for assessing writing Kenyan secondary school teachers of English received during their pre-service training and the provisions availed after initial teacher training to update their knowledge and skills in line with the shifts in pedagogy regarding assessing writing.

The primary goal of classroom-based assessment of student writing is to make accurate inferences about student performance and progress to decide on how they should be helped and to plan subsequent instruction for remediation and further development. Accordingly, effective formative assessment should be able to obtain the appropriate level of detail required to shape subsequent instruction (Heritage, 2010; Herman et al. 2010). The implication is that teachers should use procedures which ensure the required validity is achieved. In this study, procedures used for evaluating student writing refer to those processes undertaken to judge the quality of a given piece of writing including the choice and preparation of appropriate evaluation tools as well as the question of the agents (teachers, and students) and their role in the process.

It is important to give students frequent writing assignments, but significant gains can only be made when they receive feedback about their writing and suggestions on how

to improve (Zhang, 2016). Thomas et al (2013) identify three types of response: teacher, peer and self-response. Graham et al. (2016) refer to these types of response as three levels of feedback: In an ideal situation the three types of feedback should be used together as they complement each other. For instance, research indicates that students' writing improves when teachers and peers provide students with feedback about their writing and when teachers teach students how to evaluate the effectiveness of their own writing (Graham et al. 2011). Feedback can be provided in different modes which according to this study refer to written feedback, face to face discussions, and awareness and use of digital resources to enhance student writing.

Teacher written feedback plays a pivotal role in the teaching of the writing skill. Teachers mostly use error identification and correction, but they also provide students with informational feedback through comments. Literature on teacher written feedback indicates that effective commentary should comprise both positive and constructive comments (Hyland & Hyland 2006; Graham *et al.,* 2016; Tomas *et al.,* 2013). Additionally, such comments should be specific, otherwise, they are likely to be unhelpful (Shute, 2007; Zhang, 2016). Another key element in teacher written feedback is the focus; effective writing is about both meaning and form, thus, teachers should address not only form related errors, usually referred to as Lower Order Concerns (LOCs) but also meaning issues, such as idea development and organisation, also called Higher Order Concerns (HOCs). The current study seeks to examine types of teachers' feedback in the dimensions of error identification and correction practices, type of comments and to what extent the comments focus on LOCs and HOCs.

The goal of assessing students' writing is to obtain feedback to enhance learning gains. Learners want to know the specific errors that occur in their writing and

receive guidelines on how to fix them. On the other hand, teachers need to know the effectiveness of their practices to adjust instruction to suit learners' needs. The consensus is that teachers should have systematic ways of ensuring that students make effective use of feedback (OECD 2013; and Zia et al. 2019). Revision of students writing is considered an effective way of holding students accountable for incorporating feedback into their texts. Other ways of handling feedback as proposed by Graham et al. (2016) include analysing performance data to summarize what students did well, their areas of difficulty and remedial actions to be taken, tailoring instruction to learners' needs as revealed by assessment information, prioritizing review of feedback to focus on areas of difficulty and using tracking tools to monitor students' progress over time.

Research clearly documents that writing assessment when used formatively enhances teaching and learning and improves students' overall ability in writing (Jimenez, 2018; Graham *et al.,* 2016; Graham, Harris & Hebert, 2011). Graham *et al.,* (2016) observe that research has shown that the formative writing assessment practices that teachers use have an impact on learners' achievement in writing. Further, they identify three research-based formative assessment practices that have been shown to hold the most promise for enhancing students' writing ability. These include, (a) monitoring students' progress towards the expected writing standards, (b) providing teacher feedback and (c) teaching students to self-assess their writing. They also observe that writing assessment improves when classroom writing is reliably scored to enable reliable decisions about students' writing (Graham *et al.,* 2016).

However, the Kenya National Examination yearly feedback reports on the performance of candidates in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) in the last ten years have consistently indicated this underachievement (KNEC 2023,

2022, 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014, 2013). For instance, the 2019 feedback report observes that performance in paper 3 has remained dismal over the years with low means of 32.25%, 30.86%, 32.37%, 31.42% and 33.33% in 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 respectively.

The low levels of proficiency in writing achieved at KCSE have often had far reaching implications. For instance, in September 2015, a Daily Nation reporter, Patrick Lang'at, shocked many Kenyans when he expressed concern that some magistrates and judges were unable to write proper and well-reasoned judgments (Daily Nation September 11, 2015). This is a worrisome situation given that errors in a judgement can condemn an innocent person to unlawful incarceration. Another concern is that students who leave secondary school unable to communicate effectively in writing are likely to underachieve in post-secondary learning, especially because hardly any writing courses are offered after secondary school. The KNEC 2019 noted the need to interrogate teachers' composition writing pedagogical practices to put in place necessary intervention measures.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

As the research cited above has shown, in spite of the critical role played by writing skills, there is considerable concern that Kenyan students are achieving below the required proficiency levels in this skill. There is also concern that although the effectiveness of formative assessment depends on teachers' assessment practices, many teachers are not adequately prepared to assess students' writing skills. The perpetual underachievement in the writing skill reported in the KNEC feedback reports, and the concerns expressed by Kenyans in general about the negative impact of the low proficiency levels in the writing skill in different contexts in society, give a

clear indication that there is an educational problem in need of a solution. Further, formative assessment of writing is said to play a critical role in improving student writing proficiency, but to our knowledge there is no study that has investigated how secondary school teachers of English in Kenya are using formative assessment strategies to help learners improve their writing skills or how well prepared they are to undertake the role effectively. The investigation of the extent to which teachers of English are prepared to assess learners' writing, and their use of pedagogical practices in formative assessment of learners' writing was, therefore, carried out in selected secondary schools to address this need.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the pedagogical practices used by teachers of English in the formative assessment of the writing skill, and to assess their preparedness for assessing students' writing.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were:

1. To assess teachers' preparedness for formative assessment of student writing.
2. To explore the procedures for evaluating the quality of student writing that Form Four teachers used.
3. To investigate the types and modes of providing feedback to students' writing that Form Four teachers of English used.
4. To analyse the type of written feedback that teachers provided on students' writing.
5. To examine how teachers of English used feedback obtained from students' writing to inform learning in writing.

1.6 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent were teachers of English in selected secondary schools prepared for formative assessment of students' writing?
2. What procedures did teachers in selected schools use for evaluating the quality of students' writing?
3. What types and modes of providing feedback did teachers in selected secondary schools use?
4. What type of written feedback did teachers in selected secondary schools provide to their students?
5. How did teachers in selected secondary schools ensure use of feedback obtained from students' writing to inform learning in writing?

1.7 Justification for the Study

Few would argue that writing is an essential skill in education and in life beyond the classroom. This makes the perennial underachievement in this essential skill a problem that needs to be investigated. Acknowledging formative assessment as an integral part of learning, this study aimed to find out if there were any gaps in the formative assessment process that could be addressed to limit the barriers to improving learners writing. The study's findings provide information that may be used by the Ministry of Education (MOE) Teachers Service Commission (TSC) and Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and other educational practitioners to strengthen writing instruction in secondary schools in Kenya.

Teachers and language classrooms the world over spend a lot of time responding to students' writing and providing feedback to their students. This is motivated by the assumption that their feedback is crucial for helping learners to advance their learning in writing. Based on the heavy investment of teachers' time in the formative assessment process, it is it is essential to know how effective they are and how their practices align with evidence- based practices. This is particularly important when we consider that research on responding to students' writing shows that inappropriate practices may not only be unproductive but can also be harmful (OECD 2013). The findings of this study provide significant answers to these questions.

In Kenya a lot of research regarding the teaching of the writing skill has been carried out but available literature reveals that there are not many in-depth studies on formative assessment practices, particularly on the procedures that teachers use to evaluate student writing, and the strategies employed to hold students accountable for using feedback to improve on their writing. The current study contributes literature to this end.

1.8 Significance of the Study

The current study sought to uncover teachers of English pedagogical assessment practices of the writing skill and determine to what extent their practices aligned with evidence-based practices in formative assessment of the writing skill. Overall, the investigations revealed gaps that could significantly limit learner achievement. The study also revealed challenges that hamper teachers' efforts in leveraging feedback to raise learning gains in learning writing. These findings are significant because they have practical implications for limiting barriers to effective development of writing skills among secondary school learners.

The study findings could provide information to pre-service teacher education curriculum developers on the assessment competencies that should be covered in teacher training and development programmes to produce adequate assessment literacy for effective assessment of learners' writing skills. The findings could also provide information on target areas for interventions by policy makers and educational stakeholders wishing to support teacher capacity building efforts for quality education.

Results of this study could be used to inform KICD of the gaps in writing instruction. Such information could inform curriculum review and preparation of curriculum support materials like teachers' guides that provide more information on how to conduct formative evaluation of different types of writing. Material developers may also gain insights on developing content that will facilitate and promote effective assessment.

The findings may also provide useful insights to quality assurance and school administrators on the quality assurance measures that they could put in place to promote accountability in classroom assessments.

The study reveals shortcomings in teachers' practices and provides useful information on evidence-based practices in formative assessment of learners' writing. The findings are useful in contributing to understanding of pedagogical practices for formative assessment of students' writing. They could also be used by teachers and other practitioners seeking to understand how they can assist their learners improve their writing skills. In addition, the results of the study could be used to inform capacity building in carrying effective formative assessments of students' writing abilities.

The findings revealed that teachers were unable to provide comprehensive feedback and individualised support to learners due to heavy workloads. This information may be useful to MOE and the TSC in considering priority areas for teacher recruitment.

Kenya is in the process of adopting a Competency-Based Curriculum which emphasizes acquisition of 21st century skills and learner centered pedagogy. This calls for a Paradigm shift to more of formative assessment and less of summative assessment. The current study revealed underutilisation of learner centred strategies, evidence-based practices, and digital resources to facilitate learning. Hence, the study is timely in pointing out areas that need to be targeted to align teachers' practices with desired educational goals.

This study adds to literature in formative assessment of writing skills in an ESL context. In Kenya a lot of research regarding the teaching of the writing skill has been carried out but available literature reveals that there are not many in-depth studies on formative assessment practices, particularly on the procedures that teachers use to evaluate student writing, and the strategies employed to hold students accountable for using feedback to improve on their writing. The current study contributes literature to this end.

1.9 Scope of the Study

The study restricted itself to the use of formative assessment of the writing skill in secondary schools embedded within its value as a pedagogical tool. The formative assessment practices that the study restricted itself to included procedures for gauging learners' ability in relation to desired goals, provision of feedback and the actions to be taken to advance learning. Formative assessment comes in the middle of

instruction and plays a pivotal role in gauging the effectiveness of instruction and providing information that teachers can use to shape subsequent instruction. However, this study did not cover instructional approaches and strategies save those that were inextricably intertwined with the formative assessment process. It is worth noting that this study did not concern itself with teachers' formative practices to judge the performance of teachers and schools, rather, it sought to gain insights that could generate fruitful discussions for putting in place intervention measures for raising learning gains in writing skills.

The geographical scope of the study was Nairobi County. Nairobi County is coterminous with the city of Nairobi which is the capital and the largest city of Kenya. It is also one of the 47 counties of Kenya.

1.10 Limitations of the Study

In considering the factors that may hamper the development of secondary school students writing skill, the current study limited itself to teachers' formative assessment pedagogical practices. Other important aspects of learning to write effectively could have enriched the study but it was not possible to cover everything within the available time and resources.

One limitation was in terms of the number of schools, teachers and learners who were sampled. The study population comprised only Form Four teachers and their Form Four students in sampled schools in Nairobi County. The small sample may limit the generalizability of the results. However, the researcher countered the possible effects of this by sampling from all the different categories of schools to allow for adequate variability provided by the mix of both performing and non-performing schools. Also, Form Four learners were selected because they afforded a level of proficiency that

could allow teachers to make use of a wide range of available formative assessment practices for the purposes of the study. The researcher also used various data collection approaches that made the results comprehensive enough to yield invaluable insights.

The study used circumstantial evidence of problems in learning writing skills in secondary schools in Kenya and sought to describe teachers' practices without making any causal claims. While such claims could not be made, the study may benefit further studies that may seek to explore causal relationships in the areas of focus.

1.11 Assumptions of the Study

The study was based on the assumptions that:

i. Secondary school teachers of English in selected schools are adequately prepared for formative assessment of student writing during pre-service teacher training and participate in-service programmes to update their knowledge and skills. The information gathered from the study would therefore reflect their correct understanding and application of best practice assessment procedures of their students' writing.

ii. Secondary school teachers of English formative assessment pedagogical practices of the writing skill largely reflect evidence- based ways of responding to student writing and using feedback to improve their students' writing ability.

1.12 Theoretical Framework

Formative assessment which is an integral part of learning to write effectively has a great deal of influence on students' achievement in the writing skill. Assessment of

student writing for learning is a complex process that consists of various related activities which include: designing evaluative tools that validly determine students' current ability as well as provide details on students strengths and weaknesses to allow for provision of meaningful feedback; determining the quality of students' pieces of writing; providing formative feedback, and monitoring students' progress towards the desired goal while providing them with necessary support. For formative assessment to be effective, teachers should be experts in facilitating the process to realize every student's potential. This requires that teachers of English are adequately equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to accord them expert status. The theoretical framework for the study seeks to present these aspects of formative assessment and indicate how they interact with each other in the formative assessment process.

Onsaloo and Grant (2014) liken a theoretical framework to an elevation blueprint of a house which informs all the decisions on how the house is constructed. They contend that a theoretical framework is essential because it makes the structure and vision of a study clear and provides a lens on which to support one's thinking on all aspects of the study problem from topic selection to data analysis and interpretation. The current study was framed around the Social Cultural Theory (SCT) advanced by Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934).

The Social Cultural Theory posits that mediation is central to learning and that social interaction is the basis of learning. In addition, it postulates that learning occurs within a primary activity space which Vygotsky referred to as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky views learning as a process of apprenticeship and internalizations in which the learner progresses from an actual developmental level presenting what he or she can do on their own, to a potential developmental level

presenting what he or she should be able to do through interaction with others. Between the two developmental levels is the learners' ZPD which Vygotsky defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978 P. 86). Simply put, this is the journey the learner should travel to realize his or her potential.

According to the SCT learning occurs when the learner receives appropriate types of assistance to overcome specific problems displayed in his or her work. Over time, through an iterative process of performance and assistance the novice learner progresses to performing more of the tasks without assistance. The assistance that the learner requires to progress through their ZPD is currently referred to as scaffolding. This is a mediating strategy that entails giving assistance to a learner depending on his or her specific needs.

Over the years, not much has changed in the application of SCT in education; Mediation and social interaction are still considered to be central in learning. However, the term scaffolding which in literature is synonymous with Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD has gained much attention in current learning. Vygotsky never used the term in his writing. It was introduced later by Wood, Bruner and Ross in 1976. Another addition to the application of SCT is the expansion of social interaction to include not only the knowledgeable other but also equal peers and self-directed learning. The current study was informed by the original tenets of SCT as well as these conceptions: scaffolding and the expanded social interactions possible in learning as postulated by Van Lier (2004).

Osanloo and Grant (2014) state that one should choose a theoretical framework that is generally considered acceptable in scholarly literature. SCT fits these specifications; Trumbull and Lash (2013), note that the work of Vygotsky forms much of the basis for current conceptualizations of the social cultural aspects of constructivist learning theory and has been widely applied to modes of formative assessment. In addition, other scholars also observe that the theory is most compatible with current goals of education and best explains the processes of effective formative assessment (Heritage 2010).

The SCT adequately provided a framework for exploring secondary school teachers' formative assessments practices that the current study seeks to explore. Specifically, it sufficiently undergirded the objectives of the study. Vygotsky's view of a teacher as an expert guiding the novice learner through learning activities that get him or her to reach the desired goal informed the need to determine teachers' preparedness for formative assessment of writing in selected secondary schools in Kenya. According to SCT, dynamic assessment should be carried out to reliably infer individual student's current ability. Of necessity then, the procedures for scoring and appraising students' writing should produce results that reflect students' true ability as a starting point for addressing their difficulties. In addition, the procedures should make use of tools that communicate expectations to enable students to know when they have achieved the desired goal in the assigned tasks. These conceptions informed the exploration of the procedures that teachers in selected schools used for evaluating the quality of student writing.

SCT posits that appropriate scaffolding has positive effects on a learner's performance on a task. Feedback which is a powerful scaffold for student writing can

be provided through social interaction, which is the basis for learning. Possible interactions include teacher to a whole class, teacher to an individual student or groups of students, peers working with each other in groups or in pairs, and self-assessment based on internalised strategies. These conceptions formed the basis for establishing types and modes of providing feedback to student writing that teachers in selected secondary schools used. Further, teachers as experts should provide students with appropriate types of assistance to overcome specific shortcomings in their written texts. This idea provided the impetus to analyse type of teachers' written feedback.

A social cultural theory presupposes that information received from students' assessment will be used to tailor assistance to learners' needs. It also presupposes that teachers will carefully monitor learners' progress to know what scaffolds to provide and when. These conceptions informed the need to find out the strategies that teachers employed to ensure that feedback was used to maximise students' learning gains.

Additionally, a social cultural theory takes into consideration the social cultural context within which the curriculum and learning occur. Consequently, the researcher acknowledged that school specific contexts and the fact that English in Kenya is taught as a second language could influence teachers' formative assessment practices. For instance, National schools are better equipped with libraries and computer labs, select learners with good grades and usually have well defined policies for ensuring achievement of learning goals. This provides learners with a more enabling context for learning writing skills than that of county schools that are mostly less resourced.

This diversity informed the sampling of different categories of schools to reflect different contexts.

1.13 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is diagrammatically presented in figure 1.1 below. The figure shows the key elements of the formative assessment process of the writing skill which the current study sought to investigate. Specifically, it presents the variables of the study and indicates how they interact with the scaffolding process to impact students' ability.

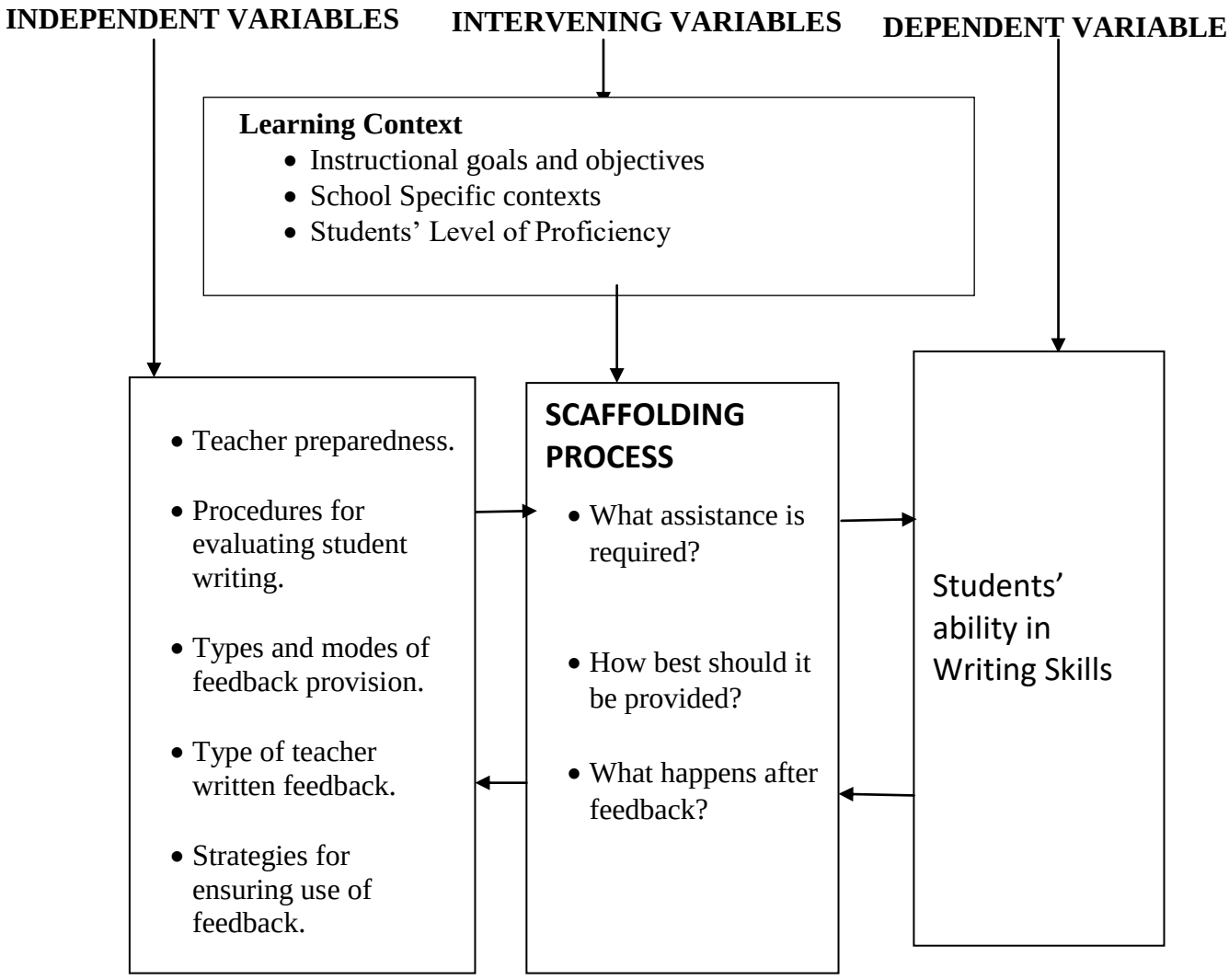


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework

The dependent variable is student performance in writing. It is conceptualized as evolving in light of Vygotsky's ZPD; through an iterative process of assessment and assistance, a student's potential level of performance becomes the actual level of performance. In the current study the Independent Variables comprised (a)Teachers' preparedness for assessing writing (b) Procedures for evaluating students' writing, (c) Types and Modes of providing feedback, (d) Type of teachers' written feedback and (e) Strategies for ensuring use of feedback to inform learning.

Scaffolding as a construct in education is associated with the work of Vygotsky. It refers to timely assistance that enables a child to achieve a goal which would be beyond what he or she can do on their own. Since its original use which entailed parent –child interaction, the term has been extended to include teacher- student interactions (expert- novice perspective), students collaborating with peers (equal-level), and self-scaffolding when a learner uses internalized strategies to assess their shortcomings and self-direct their learning (Van Lier, 2004).

The interactions indicated in the figure are closely interrelated. To begin with, procedures for evaluating the quality of students' written work should do so reliably and validly. If this does not happen, it becomes difficult to determine what scaffolds the learner exactly needs. In addition, if such procedures do not provide adequate detail on a student's performance, it is neither possible to determine what assistance is required nor provide effective feedback. Secondly, feedback acts as a powerful scaffold for student performance but if it does not adequately pinpoint the shortcomings in a student's work and give specific guidance for improvement, it is likely to have little impact; consequently, the type of teachers' feedback provided on students' written texts is a crucial aspect of formative assessment. Thirdly, students need as many scaffolds as is possible; hence, the need for different types of feedback (teacher, peer and self) and different modes of provision (written, face- to- and computer- based) to leverage on multiple forms of social interactions available and to meet the demands of multiple learning styles necessary to nurture every learner's potential. Finally, if students are not held accountable for using feedback to inform subsequent work, formative assessment will have failed to adequately serve its purpose. Formative assessment of writing skills is a complex process that demands a set of specific competencies. This requires that teachers are trained well enough to

effectively meet its demands. Further, since formative assessment is basically for informing learning, it should be an iterative process, carried out regularly to realize each student's potential.

The intervening variable is the learning context which comprises Instructional goals and objectives, School specific contexts and students' level of proficiency in English. Formative assessment comes in the middle of instruction; hence, instructional goals and objectives precede scaffolding. The objectives, goals and standards that inform assessment are those stipulated in the Kenyan secondary school English curriculum and the English language syllabus (KIE, 2002).

1.14 Operational Definition of Key Terms

Evidence-based Practice: Practices proven to work through research.

Criteria: What to look for in a student's writing in to judge the quality of the work. It includes features of effective writing such as language use, mechanics of writing, coherence, and organization.

Evaluation of student writing: The process of judging the quality of a piece of a student's written work. It may or may not involve giving a grade or a mark.

Exemplars: Refer to examples of actual samples of writing to demonstrate the various score points on a scale.

Feedback: Information obtained from an assessment that teachers can use to modify instruction to meet students' needs, and which students can use to advance their learning. It comprises identification of strengths and weaknesses in a written piece of work and comments, questions or suggestions, that a reader gives to scaffold learning.

Formative assessment: All those activities undertaken by teachers and/or by their students during learning to identify the gap between student's current and desired performance and which provide feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in order to close the identified gaps.

Higher Order Concerns (HOCs): Meaning issues such as idea development, organisation, and argumentation in students' compositions.

Lower Order Concerns (LOCs): Form related concerns such as vocabulary, grammar, spelling and punctuation in students' compositions.

Modes of Feedback: Ways of providing feedback including face-to-face discussions, written and use of technologies such computers and mobile phones.

Peer assessment: Any form of peer response during writing lessons. It entails the use of peers as sources of feedback for each other which provides them with a source of feedback besides that of their teacher and enables them to develop revision skills for improving their writing.

Procedures for evaluating student writing: Processes undertaken to judge the quality of a given piece of writing and to communicate that judgement including the choice and preparation of appropriate evaluation tools as well as the roles of the agents (teachers, and students) in the process.

Scaffolding: Assistance provided to students to close the gap between current and desired performance. The assistance should involve frequent assessment and should be timely, appropriate and tailored to students' needs.

Self-assessment: An activity that allows students to reflect on the quality of their work and evaluate how well it reflects expectations, thereby enabling them to identify shortcomings and make necessary improvements.

Teacher preparedness: Assessment literacy in formative assessment of the writing skill obtained through teacher training, and teacher development courses as well as other provisions available for them to keep abreast with current trends in writing pedagogy with regards to assessing writing.

Teachers' Pedagogical Formative Assessment Practices of the writing skills:

Activities that teachers undertake to evaluate the quality of students' writing to obtain information they can use to shape instruction, and which students can use to enhance their learning in writing. They include procedures for evaluating student writing, the way they respond to students' written compositions and the way they facilitate the whole formative assessment process.

Teachers of English: Teachers who teach English as a subject.

Types of feedback: Refer to teacher, peer and self- asssessment

Utilisation: The use of activities available for effective formative assessment of students' writing.

Writing skills: Quality of students' written texts in functional, creative and other compositions as required by the English Language syllabus (KIE, 2002).

1.15 Chapter Summary

This chapter situated the study in formative assessment of the writing skill by providing background information to the study. The chapter also included the statement of the problem, study objectives, research questions, justification, significance, scope, limitations and assumptions of the study. Further, it presented the theoretical and conceptual framework which informed the study and provided definitions of the key terms as used in the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature related to the study. Firstly, it contextualizes the issues in the study by including literature on formative assessment and scaffolding, the importance of effective writing, and the context in which the writing skill is learnt in secondary school English in Kenya. Secondly, the chapter reviews literature in relation to the objectives of the study followed by literature on related studies. A summary of the literature reviewed concludes the chapter.

2.2 Overview of Formative Assessment and Scaffolding

Formative assessment which is an integral part of learning to write effectively has a great deal of influence on students' achievement in the writing skill. According to Jimenez (2018), formative assessment is vital for diagnostic evaluation to plan instruction, for identifying children who are struggling with their writing and need extra assistance, for progress monitoring to determine if students are progressing as per expectations or need interventions to achieve desired writing outcomes and for outcome assessment to offer information on the effectiveness of the writing programme. When it comes to the teaching of writing, formative assessment is inseparable with learning because a student's writing must be assessed to provide feedback that can be used to move him or her forward. As such teachers' pedagogical formative assessment practices can significantly impact on students' overall achievement in the writing skill.

Trumbull and Lash (2013) define formative assessment as a process intended to yield information that teachers can use to shape instruction to meet students' needs and that students can use to better understand and advance their learning. They say that because its purpose is to help form, or shape, a students' learning during the learning process it should be so well grounded in the instructional process that the information obtained will identify whether and how instruction should be adapted to advance students' understanding. Further, Formative assessment is distinct from summative assessment which focuses on judging the extent to which a learner has achieved specified learning goals at the end of planned for instruction or course.

In formative assessment a distinction is usually made between assessment for learning, and assessment as learning. Assessment for learning is the process of gathering and interpreting evidence of learning for use by teachers and learners. It is carried out regularly to monitor a learner's progress and to obtain feedback for both the teacher and the learner. Assessment as Learning occurs when a learner is helped to develop a capacity for independent, and self-directed learning which comprises setting goals and monitoring own progress and reflecting on one's learning to identify gaps and take necessary action. Assessment as learning is an essential facet of formative assessment because self-assessing and reflecting on one's writing is one of the evidence-based practices for improving learning outcomes in writing (Graham et al, 2011). This study conceptualized effective classroom composition assessment as one that combines the key elements of the two forms of formative assessment to enhance student learning.

According to OECD (2013, p 155), formative assessment is intended to: (a) provide timely feedback which students can use to inform their future learning. (b) help

students feel safe to take risks and make mistakes in the classroom, (c) diagnose student learning needs and differentiate teaching accordingly, (d) actively engage students in their own learning processes so as to develop higher-order thinking skills and skills for 'learning to learn', and (e) to allow students and teachers to engage in conscious reflection on the learning process.

The effectiveness of formative assessment is backed by a large amount of research. For instance, Black and Wiliam as cited in Shute, (2007)) carried out a review of 250 international sources on the impact of formative assessment. The evidence of impact was drawn from more than 40 studies using controlled experiments in usual classroom settings. The studies covered among other things effective feedback, student self and peer assessment and teaching and learning featuring formative assessment methods and techniques. Results revealed that formative assessment produces substantial gains in achievement. According to Looney (2011a), the review, one of the largest ever in educational interventions, confirmed other reviews by Natriello (1987) and Crooks (1988) which reached the same conclusions. Moreover, the largest gains were made by students who had hitherto been classified as low achievers. This indicates that effective formative assessment can benefit learners of all abilities thereby supporting the "No learner should be left behind campaign".

In the Kenyan context the English syllabus (2002) provides a road map for the writing skills that learners are required to acquire by the end of their secondary education. It is the teachers' responsibility to monitor the learners' progress through the four years of high school by regularly assessing their strengths and weaknesses, targeting instruction on students' needs, giving them corrective feedback, teaching students to self- assess their writing and creating a collaborative environment that allows students

to scaffold each other's performance. Because to be able to improve their writing students need adequate opportunities for writing and meaningful feedback, the teachers should facilitate multiple opportunities for writing and correcting the errors that students make.

Santagelo and Graham (2015) observe that effective writing programs are those that purposely integrate research-based practices into instruction. They point out three documented formative assessment practices that have been validated as effective for helping students improve their writing skill. These include monitoring students' progress in their writing, providing teacher feedback and teaching students how to self-assess their writing. Monitoring learners' progress towards the expected writing standards for their grade or class is beneficial for gathering information on learner performance, which in turn helps the teacher to plan, and modify instruction to target learner needs. It is also crucial for identifying learners who are not meeting expectations to provide the necessary additional support. Providing students with feedback about their writing is generally considered essential for improving learning outcomes. Teaching students how to self-assess entails assisting them to identify the strengths and weakness of their writing and guiding them on how to make necessary revisions. Over time, this helps them internalize the qualities of good writing resulting in more effective writing.

According to the Social Cultural Theory (SCT) that frames this study, the assistance that the learner requires to realize their potential is referred to as scaffolding. This is a mediating strategy that entails giving assistance to a learner depending on his or her specific needs. Shepard (2005) relates scaffolding to assessment by arguing that formative assessment and scaffolding when considered in light of Vygotsky's social

cultural theory and the ZPD are essentially the same thing. Formative assessment is a prerequisite for Scaffolding. It is meant to reveal the strengths and weaknesses in a learner's work to determine the type of assistance to be given. According to Belland (2017) and Gonulal and Loewen (2018), the most important characteristics of Scaffolding are collaboration, contingency, inter-subjectivity, fading and transfer of responsibility.

2.3 The Importance of Becoming Proficient in Writing Skills

Learning how to write effectively for different purposes allows an individual to meet communicative demands in school, academia, and the workplace and in the varied contexts in our social lives as individuals in an ever-changing global community. According to Graham et al. (2016), improving students' writing helps them succeed inside and outside the classroom particularly so because writing is a critical communication tool for conveying thoughts and ideas not only in English as a subject but also in other classes and disciplines across the curriculum. Also, writing is a critical learning tool because it encourages critical thinking- the mental processes of constructing articulating and analysing one's thoughts involved in the writing process require learners to think critically about their ideas and how to communicate them, thereby sharpening their thinking skills (Indangasi, 2018). Significant to note also, is that the World Health Organization (WHO), 2001 as cited in Jimenez, (2018) lists writing difficulties as one of the problems that impede learning.

In Kenya English is the primary medium of instruction from upper primary school to university level. Besides, though oral assessment of learning outcomes is possible and does happen, the main direct evidence of learner achievement is usually obtained through the assessment of learners' written work. Consequently, the inability to

express oneself effectively in writing in English can have adverse effects on a learner's performance not only in English as a subject but also in other subjects across the curriculum.

Writing is also crucial outside the classroom; 'scientists, artists, mathematicians, lawyers, engineers -all think with pen to paper, chalk to chalkboard, and hands on terminal keys (Young & Fulwiler as cited in Graham (2016). We also write to create, amuse, inform, stay in touch, explain, understand, persuade, remember, learn, report, influence or discover new insights (Kennedy & Shiel, 2019). According to the National Commission on Writing (NCW, 2006) for America's families, schools and colleges, most jobs today require proficiency in writing - more than 90 percent of white-collar workers and 80 percent of blue-collar workers indicate that writing is important to job success. Further, writing is also a means of transmitting information from one generation to another thereby contributing to knowledge sharing which benefits humanity immensely.

Graham (2019) observes that learning how to write effectively is a complex process that requires to be taught and practised. Effective writing, according to Graham et al. (2016), is writing that (a) achieves the writer's goal; (b) is appropriate for the audience and context; (c) presents ideas in a way that clearly communicates the writer's intended meaning and content and (d) elicits the intended response from the reader.

2.4 Learning Writing Skills in Secondary School English in Kenya

English in Kenya is taught as a second language (ESL). The English Language content at Secondary school level as outlined by the curriculum developer (KIE, 2002) is taught under four main knowledge areas namely, listening and speaking,

grammar, reading and writing (Otunga, Odero & Barasa 2011). The curriculum developer in the current English language syllabus (KIE 2002) acknowledges the pivotal role played by the writing skill in learning by observing that the writing skill 'has wide-ranging implications for the way we think and learn.' (KIE 2002, p.5). Accordingly, the syllabus (KIE (2002) stresses the need to help learners to acquire skills that will enable them to express their ideas clearly and effectively in writing. In addition, the writing skill at secondary school level is taught within an integrated approach to language teaching and learning, whereby integration of language and literature, and emerging issues is envisaged to provide a rich environment for acquisition of communicative competence (Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), 2002). It is worth noting that The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) established in 2013 under an Act of Parliament No. 4 of 2013 is the successor of KIE.

According to the English syllabus (KIE, 2002), by the end of the secondary course, it is expected that students communicate appropriately in functional and creative writing. Specifically, they should demonstrate competence in writing different types of essays, presenting information in a variety of ways, using cohesive devices, effective punctuation, summarising information and paragraphing. In addition, they should be able to use appropriate register and format and demonstrate competence in using a wide range of sentence structures and vocabulary to create desired effects. Regarding assessment, the syllabus emphasizes the use of diagnostic tasks to identify each individual's weakness, and the provision of targeted, immediate, meaningful and supportive feedback (KIE, 2002). However, it is assumed that teachers are good formative evaluators of the writing skill as not much guidance on formative assessment is given either in the syllabus or in the Secondary School Teachers

Guidebook. Further, the course books in use provide little help on how to evaluate student writing. Notably, the acquisition of the skill could be hampered if teachers do not use all available opportunities to scaffold learning, especially at high school where the foundational knowledge for being effective writers is expected to be taught and developed.

Santangelo and Graham (2015) point out four evidence- based ways of helping students to become effective writers. They include: (a) Knowing about the general characteristics of good writing (including conveying ideas in an organized manner, using language that is appropriate for the target audience) as well as specific features associated with different genres, (b) being able to effectively use a variety of strategies that help writers to accomplish the processes involved in composing, (c) being proficient in the foundational skills required to translate ideas into written text such as handwriting, vocabulary, spelling and sentence construction and (d) having the motivation to engage in the writing process. All these competences are captured in the English Language syllabus (KIE, 2002) either directly or implicitly. Although these outlined evidence-based ways have to do with the teaching of the skill, it is worth noting that teaching and assessment are mirror images of each other (Munoz, Sandra & Marcela, 2012). Therefore, formative assessment which aims to support learning is crucial for developing these competences.

2.5 Teacher Preparedness for Assessing Student Writing

The kind of preparations a teacher receives influence the learning process in their classrooms. This study defines teacher preparedness as the kinds of training in assessment of writing that teachers have undertaken during their pre-service training and as part of their professional development to enable them to effectively carry out

formative assessment processes of students' writing skills. Many factors including school, learner individual characteristics, family and environmental experiences influence a student's academic performance. However, a significant body of research spanning decades consistently points that among school-related factors, teachers have the greatest impact on learner achievement (Myers *et al.,* 2016; Opper, 2019,).

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2023), Teacher preparation programmes should provide teachers with the necessary knowledge base to enact the practices that can support optimal learning. This includes a deep knowledge of subject matter as well as subject specific strategies for scaffolding learning to diverse learners.

Teachers as the key implementers of the school curriculum need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that they require to effectively carry out their work within the ever-changing contexts in education (Mwaka, Nabwire & Musamas, 2014). The Ministry of Education in Kenya asserts that it is necessary for teachers at all levels to have the capacity, relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to subscribe to educational objectives and make them a reality (Barasa, 2005). Further, the teaching challenges of the twenty-first century demand that an effective teacher should possess the required knowledge base for teaching. Kenya like most other countries recognizes the role played by teachers in the realization of quality education. For instance, the Report and Draft Framework for Teacher Education in Kenya (KICD; 2016) which stipulates the foundations for all teacher curricular and specifies quality standards for teacher education is a pointer to this.

According to Arends (2007), teaching with the challenges of the 21st requires teachers to possess a wide repertoire of techniques and practices in order to meet the diverse needs of all children. Arends asserts that teachers are required to learn all the time as

the knowledge required to do their work twists and turns with new challenges and the progress of science and technology. This means that although Teachers acquire the foundations of content and pedagogical knowledge through their pre-service educati**o**n, opportunities for continuing learning should be availed to them. Such opportunities are crucial if teachers are to update their knowledge, fill the gaps in their training (Barasa, 2005) and keep abreast of emerging educational trends and best practices (Arends, 2007; Barasa, 2011; Mwaka *et al.*, 2014).

Teacher education is an imperative for teacher preparedness to carry out their work in classrooms effectively. According to Mwaka et al. (2014), teacher education refers to the policies and procedures designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, values and skills they require to carry out their work effectively. They indicate that teacher education is often divided into three stages: (1) a Pre-service course or initial teacher training which comprises intensive course work, a media practical, micro-teaching and a practicum, (2) an induction process which involves providing training and support to a teacher during the first few years of teaching or his or her first year of teaching in a particular school and (3) An in-service process for practicing teachers. According to Barasa (2005) proponents of teacher education distinguish it from teacher training; teacher education is seen to embrace a wider perspective of continued learning within the teaching process. This study was concerned with the Pre-service and In-service preparation of English Language teachers, particularly to assess the writing skill. Induction activities were considered part of continuing teacher education as they come after the initial training of a teacher.

Pre-service teacher education is the education and training provided to student teachers before they have undertaken any teaching. Its goal is to provide the teacher

trainee with the necessary knowledge base for effective teaching. In his theoretical framework of what teachers should learn, Shulman (1986) proposes two types of knowledge that a teacher must master. A content knowledge known as deep knowledge of the subject itself and knowledge of the curricular content comprising subject specific content knowledge and content knowledge that deals with the teaching process including the most useful forms of making the knowledge accessible to learners. In addition to deep understanding of the subject matter, teachers need knowledge of the strategies most likely to lead to effective learning. Formative assessment supports learning; hence it is a strategy for effective learning. The implication is that training of an English teacher should prepare him or her to be able to effectively use assessment to enhance learning in writing. This is of the essence because formative assessment is an integral part of learning to write.

In-service teacher training is usually defined as the provision of organized programmes for practising teachers meant to help them as a way of supporting their development. The programmes involve developing new capabilities, acquiring skills, learning something new applicable to teaching, becoming better professionals, learning to handle situations better or improving their practice. According to Osamwonyi, (2016) in-service teacher training refers to the relevant courses and activities in which a serving teacher may participate in to upgrade his or her professional knowledge, skills and competence in the teaching profession.

There is consensus that the ability to assess and evaluate student learning is one of the capabilities required of a teacher. The KICD Report and Draft Framework for Teacher Education in Kenya (2016) in specifying the quality standards for Teacher Education stipulates that teacher training should ensure that; Teacher has knowledge of a

competency-based curriculum and how to implement it, teacher knows the learners and how to learn, teacher knows the subject matter and how to teach it, teacher uses assessment for, as and of learning to guide teaching and learning and teacher knows how to create and support inclusive learning environment.

Notably, knowledge of how to assess student achievement and progress is part of an effective teacher preparation programme. Therefore, to develop and support teachers' professional competence sufficient professional development opportunities should be created. Kroll cited in Noudshan (2014) observes that fostering useful and effective language skills in students is a painstaking task if the language teacher lacks enough experience and fails to provide appropriate practice. Because writing is the most difficult of the language skills to teach and assess (Hyland, 2003), teachers must be equipped with effective strategies for teaching and assessing it.

Specific to the teaching of the writing skill, what then should teacher preparation and continuing teacher education of a teacher of English entail? The researcher envisaged that it should comprise relevant courses and activities on assessing writing, modes of responding to student writing, feedback provision strategies and ways of monitoring learner progress. In addition, in-service courses should aim at keeping teachers abreast of current trends that impact on classroom approaches, methods and techniques in writing instruction. For example, with the increasing emphasis on incorporating ICTs into learning and digital citizenship, one would expect that In-Service teacher education programmes for teachers of English would be retooling teachers to leverage digital tools to meet the ever- evolving learner needs in the 21st Century.

2.6 Procedures for Evaluating Student Writing

The only way to judge the attributes of a written piece of writing is to measure it against a criterion- written or internalised by the evaluator. Evaluation of students' writing is an essential step of the formative process since it is through it that the necessary performance data for informing learning is collected. Besides gauging the extent to which students are achieving specified learning outcomes and informing teachers if their students are learning what they set out to teach, it allows students to obtain feedback on their writing. Effective evaluation requires a decision of the tool to be used, careful preparation of the tool, when necessary (at times pre-prepared tools are used or adapted for the purpose), and the use of the tools to make a judgement on the quality of the written product.

Evaluation of student writing in the current study refers to the process of judging the quality of a piece of written work and may or may not involve giving a grade or a mark. In the Vygotskian perspective adopted for this study, the effectiveness of such procedures will depend on the extent to which they accurately indicate students' actual performance and indicate the gap between the actual and expected performance. Further, in this perspective effective procedures are those that allow appropriate interactions through which students understand specified standards and performance levels. This in turn helps to identify and better understand specific gaps in their performance to make decisions for future learning.

Literature on assessment of writing (Graham et al. 2011 ;) indicates that an assessment can be biased or invalidated by issues involving how students' work is evaluated. This means that the choice of evaluative procedures used is crucial for ensuring that valid and reliable inferences about student performance and progress are

obtained. It is important because in the first-place assessment is conducted to establish the current status of an individual learner's competences in order to target future instruction and remediation; if accurate inferences are not obtained, it becomes difficult to focus efforts such as provision of targeted, immediate, meaningful and supportive feedback (English Syllabus for secondary schools KIE, 2002) which are necessary for improving student writing.

Grading and scoring are terms that are often used to refer to evaluation of student writing. They both imply giving a letter grade such as an "A" or a mark such as 16 out of 20. Giving a mark or a grade is useful to a certain extent and for purposes such as summative assessments, but this might not help much in moving learners forward in their day to day writing tasks. Usually, students who pass are likely to stay motivated to keep the good grades while those who fail feel helpless since grades and marks alone neither pinpoint shortcomings in their writing nor guide them on what they should do in order to improve. Moreover, many students do not understand exactly what the grades or the marks mean (Schinske and Tanner, 2014).

Schinske and Tanner (2014) observe that unless the right procedures are used, evaluation of student writing is inevitably subjective. One way of reducing subjectivity in evaluating student writing is the use of tools that define criteria on which the judgement will be based. Jacobs et al. (1981, cited in Brooks, 2012) note that setting appropriate criteria and the need to attain valid and reliable scores are essential elements of a successful English writing program. An evaluative criterion describes what to look for in a student's writing in order to judge the quality of the work. Criteria for assessing student writing is usually based on the characteristics of effective communication. According to Munoz et al., (2012) citing Grabe and Kaplan

(1996), these should include (a) Linguistic competence (Knowledge of syntactic/structural patterns, Knowledge of vocabulary and Knowledge of the written code: Spelling and Punctuation), (b) Discourse competence (Knowledge of cohesive devices and Knowledge of organizational structures), and (c) Sociolinguistic competence (Knowledge of functional uses of written language and Knowledge of register and situational parameters). In line with this many existing rubrics consider criteria such as correct use of grammar, organization, vocabulary, cohesion, punctuation, paragraphing and content.

Nodoushan (2014) observes that in developing performance criteria, one must both define the attribute(s) being evaluated (for instance, mechanics of writing), and also develop a performance continuum. For example, performance dimension for mechanics of writing can range from meeting expectations (a well-organized piece with good transitions and few errors of grammar) to below expectations (Poor paragraphing, no transitions and so many errors that understanding is hampered).

2.6.1 Tools for Assessing Student Writing

For assessments to be effective students need to have information about the quality of their work, understand what constitutes good performance, and know what excellent work looks like in order to know what they can do to improve (Ragupathi & Lee, 2020). Consequently, the choice of tools for evaluating student writing is a crucial part of formative assessment. The tools usually used in writing classrooms to evaluate student's writing include checklists, assessment sheets and rubrics. They are useful for formative assessment because they state specific criteria, provide a systematic way of recording observations and enable both teachers and students to make objective judgements about the quality of a written piece of work. In addition, well prepared

tools communicate expectations and serve as feedback provision strategies because they provide a basis for dialoguing about aspects of student writing. They also allow students to think critically about their writing and that of their peers. More importantly, they help students to internalize the qualities of effective writing thereby enhancing their learning.

Learning within the Zone of Proximal Development demands classroom environments in which students receive continuous, timely and constructive feedback. One of the most cited obstacles to providing frequent and timely feedback is lack of time by teachers due to heavy workloads and other curriculum demands (OECD, 2013). Well defined scoring tools such as rubrics and checklists can allow students to peer or self- assess their work. This can reduce the load from the teacher and create more opportunities for students to write and provide immediate feedback to each other.

2.6.1.1 Checklists

A checklist is binary. It usually offers a yes /no format in relation to a student's demonstration of specified criteria. The use of checklists allows learners to identify shortcomings in their written work and to reflect on them. For instance, students can be guided to use a checklist to identify editorial errors or check if their compositions are well organised. An example of a checklist is provided in table 1 below.

Table 1.1: Example of a Checklist

Tick Yes or No as appropriate

	Checklist Criteria	Yes	No
1	The essay effectively addresses the topic		
2	Paragraphs are organized and well developed,		
3	The writer uses correct punctuation and capitalization.		

2.6.1.2 Assessment Sheets

An assessment sheet states criteria and provides several response selections to describe the quality of a student's work. It can be said to be a checklist that uses a rating scale such that each item in it is rated according to the degree of skill, knowledge or strategies in relation to a specified criterion. Sometimes, descriptors indicating what performance in each scale looks like are provided to enable the learner to compare the piece of writing in question and rate aspects of performance regarding where they fit it in the scale. An example is given in Table 2.

Table 1.2: Example of an Assessment Sheet

On a scale of 1-5, where 1 means "not at all," 2 means "not very well," 3 means "moderately well", 4 means "well" and 5 means "very Well" indicate how well your essay meets the following expectations.

Criteria		Performance rating Scale				
1	The essay effectively addresses the topic	1	2	3	4	5
2	Paragraphs are organized and well developed.	1	2	3	4	5
3	The writer uses correct punctuation and capitalization.	1	2	3	4	5

2.6.1.3 Rubrics

Like rating scales and checklists rubrics also use a set of criteria to evaluate student performance but go beyond that to include standards of attainment for those criteria (Brooks, 2012). According to Andrade (2014) a rubric is a tool that sets the criteria for a piece of work and articulates gradations of quality for each criterion. Rubrics are considered beneficial for the learning process because they contain descriptors for different levels of performance which make clearer expectations of performance and allow students to pinpoint their strengths and weaknesses. Further, they have been seen as tools that have the potential for increased consistency of scoring, the possibility to facilitate valid judgement of complex competences, and promotion of learning (Brooks 2012; OECD, 2013). An example of a rubric for assessing vocabulary is given in Table 3 below.

Table 1.3: Example of a Rubric

Criteria	Exceeding Expectations	Meeting Expectations	Approaching Expectations	Below Expectations
Vocabulary	Uses a wide range of words and idiomatic expressions, Effective choice and use of English words and expressions. Appropriate register	Adequate range of vocabulary, Occasional error of word form, choice/ idiom and usage which does not interfere with meaning.	Limited range of vocabulary Frequent errors of word form, choice and usage, which interferes with meaning.	Little knowledge of English vocabulary. Same words are repeated, difficult to tell what is being communicated

The table includes graduated levels of performance with descriptors to indicate what performance at each level looks like. The descriptors also set out expectations for use of vocabulary at different levels of proficiency.

Rubrics have been used in writing classroom for a long time. According to Brooks (2012) they were first proposed as a tool for analysing writing in 1912 by Noyes who saw them as a means of providing a clear cut, concrete standard of measurement which would mean the same thing to all people in all places, and which would not be controlled by too much personal opinion. The early rubrics developed by Noyes and his contemporaries were designed to provide a standardized form of measurement for large scale writing assessments. However, in the 70's, as the "process approach" method for teaching composition became popular, rubrics evolved from an assessment tool to something that could be used to provide students with feedback on how well their essay met a certain set of criteria and some insight into what they could do to improve themselves as writers.

According to Ragupathi & Lee (2020) an emphasis on formative assessment has fuelled a push towards the use of rubrics. This is so because rubrics and scoring

guides give students a better understanding of what is being assessed, the criteria on which their work will be judged as well as the expected standards of performance. In addition, rubrics offer the necessary transparency in evaluation of students' writing by providing them with clear, accessible and understandable benchmarks for developing and judging their work.

Rubrics are used for both summative and formative assessments. For summative purposes, a score is assigned for each of the levels of performance and marks are aggregated to a single score. However, for formative assessment the different levels of performance are mainly used to describe the characteristics of student performance with the intention of enabling students to identify the gaps between their actual and desired performance. Brooks (2012) notes the following benefits of using rubrics in a classroom: (a) they can help teachers set clear scoring criteria which students can use to improve the quality of their work, (b) they enable the evaluation of different components or traits within a student's work. Rubrics make it easier for the teacher to score on each of the traits or sub-traits, thereby promoting feedback that informs the students on the areas that they need to improve on, (c) rubrics make it possible for the teacher to focus on more than just the sentence level structures found in the written work; Encouraging students to focus on and improve on their discourse and rhetorical skills is essential to becoming better writers:

2.6.1.4 Types of Rubrics

In a review of the main trends in assessing writing, Nodoushan (2014) classifies Rubrics into three classes: (a) Holistic, (b) Analytic and (c) Trait- based. Holistic rubrics produce a single integrated score which presents a writer's overall proficiency by providing a general impression of the quality of the particular piece of writing.

This approach reflects the idea that 'writing is a single entity which is best captured by a single scale that integrates the inherent qualities of the writing' (Salmani, 2014). The rubric that is currently used to evaluate students' compositions at KCSE is based on holistic scoring.

Analytic rubrics classify crucial aspects of writing into separate categories such as content, grammar vocabulary, coherence etc. Each of the aspects are then evaluated separately. The strengths of analytic scoring procedures are that they allow teachers to target specific areas of their students' writing. Consequently, they are a useful diagnostic tool as the teacher can tell exactly which areas of their students' writing need to be addressed. Trait scoring falls into two categories, namely Primary-trait and Multiple- trait. In Primary trait scoring the criteria focuses on one essential feature of a particular writing task which is considered as the primary trait. In practice, it is difficult to only focus on one specified aspect of a student's writing at a time. The option is a multiple – trait procedure which entails evaluating different aspects separately as it is the case with an analytic approach. However, there is a difference in that while the Multiple- trait approach is task-specific, analytic evaluation is based on a pre-determined set of aspects to be scored. According to Hylands (2003), multiple – trait scoring is a multifaceted construct which allows for contexts and purposes. Consequently, this mode allows for a more effective way of evaluating the aspects that matter most in different genres (argumentation, reporting etc.) than that offered by analytic and holistic procedures.

2.6.1.5 The Use of Rubrics Debate

Whether or not the use of rubrics is an effective tool for providing students with feedback on their writing has been a subject of debate in a variety of academic journals (Brooks, 2012). Researchers have come out both in support or against (Brooks, 2012). There are two main arguments raised against the use of rubrics. Firstly. It is said that most rubrics are developed for first language speakers, to evaluate genres that first language speakers are exposed to from an early age. The implication is that second language learners are often not aware of the different genres that the rubrics may have been developed to evaluate. In addition, their level of proficiency in the language may hinder student understanding of the information of the traits as presented in such rubrics. While this is true in most cases, the good news is that this problem can be solved if teachers understand the principles behind the preparation and use of rubrics (Zhang (2018), which include the need to customize rubrics to relevant learning contexts. In view of this, teachers can prepare their own rubrics using language and formats that are understandable to their students and which help them to prioritize whatever they need to assess at different points in the learning process.

Another argument against the use of rubrics is that both L1 and L2 students may not know how to use rubrics to improve on their written work. Understandably, in order to use rubrics meaningfully students should be able to understand the categories and sub-categories contained in the rubrics and how they can practically apply the information to evaluate their writing. This challenge can be addressed as it is possible to train students on these aspects and guide them through practical examples using exemplars and authentic samples.

Noudshan (2014), observes that students' performance in writing was traditionally judged in a norm- referenced approach by comparing an individual's performance to that of others. However, Brooks (2012) says, the teaching of writing has changed significantly over the years such that teachers are not asked to simply evaluate their student's writing but to engage in a dialogue with them as a way of helping them improve on their writing. Rubrics provide the means to do this; consequently, despite the drawbacks of their use, they are still a very useful tool for facilitating learning in line with current learner- centred approaches. As such, unless more reliable and useful means of evaluating student writing are developed, rubrics are here to stay.

2.6.2 Preparation and Use of Assessment Tools

Assessment tools should be prepared using student friendly language and simple formats that students can understand and use to indicate the extent to which they have achieved desired goals. According to the literature reviewed in this study, best practices in preparation and use of the tools include involving students in their preparation or revision, sharing the tools with students before the start of the assigned task, training both teachers and students on their preparation and use, and using them as a basis for provision of feedback.

Classroom assessment is primarily concerned with measuring students' current knowledge, skills and difficulties of writing during the learning process. According to Zhang (2018), many teachers use regular generic tools which do not fulfil a diagnostic purpose. He proposes that preparation of suitable diagnostic tools for assessing student writing should be guided by four main principles namely, reliability, validity, feasibility and revisability. A reliable tool is one that is informed by current understanding of language and linguistic theory. Validity requires that a tool has

capacity to provide adequate detail both for identification of student weaknesses and strengths and for provision of comprehensive feedback to both the teacher and the student. Feasibility refers to suitability with regards to language used in terms of its accessibility by the users, its adequacy for effective diagnosis of student ability and its practicability for feedback provision. Revisability is the quality of being modifiable to suit the purpose and the learning context in which the tool is to be used.

Developing checklists, assessment sheets and rubrics entails identifying the aspects of a writing that one plans to assess. However, rubrics are more comprehensive tools, so their development goes beyond this first step to include development of a performance continuum presenting dimensions of performance that range from exceeding expectations to below expectations. It is important to note that the performance descriptors provided should give adequate detail for each performance dimension. They should also show how performance on the various aspects of the criteria differ at each level. Detailed descriptors provide a clear sense of expectations which can help students figure out what they need to work on in order to improve. Moreover, the descriptors should be clear precise and measurable. The more precise and unambiguous they are, the more reliable the revaluation would be. Subjective descriptors of quality such as fair or good should be avoided because they do not provide a measurable description of performance. In addition, evaluative criteria can be given equal weight or weighted differently depending on the aspects of writing that a teacher prioritizes to emphasize on for different tasks and at various points in the teaching and learning process.

Popham (2000) observes that a good rubric should capture the essential elements of the skill being assessed, provide cues about what is significant in a student's text and

contain adequate detail to accurately ascertain the quality of a students work. He adds that rubrics that are excessively general and overly lengthy may not achieve such goals and are likely to be a turn off for both students and teachers.

According to Santangelo and Graham (2015) teachers can sometimes use existing rubrics such as the 6+1 traits, but it is often more beneficial for them to create their own rubrics based on specific writing tasks and teaching contexts. A one size fits all approach to grading rubrics may not provide students with the kind of support they need for writing in different genres. Turley and Gallagher (2008) observe that the most effective rubric is one created with the students and reflects their values, goals and language.

When it comes to use of evaluation tools the consensus is that they should be shared with students before the start of the assigned tasks. This is in line with SCT's condition of intersubjectivity in scaffolding; an understanding of what successful performance of the target task looks like is required in order for students to know when the task is accomplished successfully. Popham (2000) argues that for rubrics to be useful teachers should make the evaluative criteria available to students and model their use to enable students to accurately appraise their work. This idea is backed by a large number of scholars (Andrade, 2014; Graham *et al.*, 2016; Leoney, 2011; OECD 2013; Thomas, Kostka and Mott-Smith, 2013). Sharing rubrics with students can have the benefits of enhancing learning since they communicate expectations and allow students to see the characteristics of good writing first- hand.

Student involvement in preparation and use of evaluative criteria has been identified as an important way of helping students to improve their writing (Nodoushan, 2014)). Involving students in identifying evaluative criteria for different tasks and in coming

up with descriptors for different levels of performance aids them in understanding performance expectations. Furthermore, it exposes them to the features that matter most in the different genres in which they write which leads them to pay attention to such aspects whenever they write in such genres.

The need to train on the use of rubrics has been expressed by many writing scholars (Munoz et al., 2012). Teachers should be conversant with the principles behind the development and use of rubrics in order to guide students to effectively apply them to enhance their learning. This calls for teacher training on preparation and use of assessment tools. Additionally, teachers should train students how to use rubrics by modelling their use on a variety of written samples and creating many opportunities for them to practice on their own written pieces. Exemplars of performance are very useful for training students as they help them conceptualize and internalize the qualities of performance at each level of the continuum. This can help in goal setting.

2.7 Provision of Feedback

In the current study the term feedback is considered at two levels: (a) the information yielded by assessment for use by both teachers and students to improve learning and, (b) information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify the learner's thinking or behaviour for the purpose of improving learning. The teacher needs feedback to see how the learners are progressing and also to modify instructions to suit students' needs. Likewise, students want feedback on their writing (Winstone and Carless 2020). There is consensus that, unless students obtain reliable feedback on their writing, they may not improve their writing ability (Parthasarathy, 2014; Zhang, 2016). Further, although feedback, has a powerful influence on student achievement,

the type of feedback and the way it is given can impact learning differently (Tomas et al. 2013; Graham et al. 2016

Feedback can be given at various points in the learning process either immediately after a writing task or after some period of time after a student's work is evaluated. Shute (2007) notes that the main goal of feedback is to enhance learning by producing information that addresses the accuracy of students' responses as well as errors and misconceptions occurring in their responses. Hattie and Timperley's model of providing feedback (2007) proposes that for feedback to be effective students should ask three important questions: 'Where am I going? How am I going and what's next?' These questions relate to where students are in relation to set goals and what should be done to fill the gap between their actual performance and the desired performance. Poulos and Mahony (2008) observe that information obtained from feedback should allow for comparison between an actual outcome and a desired outcome, that is, what students can do now and what they are expected to do. Further, as a strategy for learning it must show how the student can develop in subsequent writing assignments.

Shute (2007) identifies three cognitive mechanisms by which a learner can benefit from formative feedback. Firstly, feedback can signal a gap between actual level of performance and the desired goal. Resolving this gap can result in higher effort and greater motivation, ultimately improving the learner's performance on the task. Secondly, formative feedback can effectively reduce the cognitive load of learners who get cognitively overwhelmed by the demands of a given task. Such learners benefit from feedback that assists them in solving the problem at hand. Thirdly, feedback serves a corrective function.

Poulos and Mohony (2008) observe that effective feedback is that which is appropriate and timely and suited to the needs of the situation. Knight and Yorke (2003 cited in Poulos and Mohony) indicate that there must be equity in feedback, that is, different feedback for different students. According to Kulhavy and Stock (1989, as cited in Shute (2007) effective feedback provides two types of information; Verification and elaboration. Verification is defined as the simple judgement of whether an answer is correct and elaboration is the informational aspect of the message that provides relevant cues to guide the learner towards a correct answer.

Literature on how feedback should be structured indicates that students should be given both positive and constructive feedback comprising what was done well, what went wrong, and suggestions for improvement. Graham et al. (2016) recommend either a "Glow and grow" or 'a Praise- Question- Polish' structure. A Glow and Grow structure entails indicating what was done well ("glowed") and areas that need improvement ("growth"). A Praise - Question - Polish approach comprises identifying something positive about a student's writing (praise), pointing out something that was unclear (question) and offering suggestions on how the writing could be improved (polish). Tomas et al., (2013) observe that students should be given both positive and constructive response in a sandwich fashion. The metaphor signifies that students should be given positive feedback, followed by constructive feedback, which should be followed again by positive feedback.

The question of how best to provide feedback has held researchers interest for a long time. In spite of the continuing debate on the best way of providing feedback, the consensus is that feedback does help learners improve on their writing ((Olsen and Hunnes, 2023; Graham *et al.,* 2011). Evidently, it is important to note that feedback

variables are likely to interact with other variables based on the context. For example, student achievement level and school specific dynamics affect the way feedback is given. Further, for differentiated attention, the feedback given may be determined by the level of proficiency of the learner. For instance, struggling students certainly need more support than the more proficient ones. According to Hyland and Hyland (2006), changes in writing pedagogy and research have transformed feedback practices with teacher written comments often being supplemented with peer feedback, face-to face feedback and computer delivered feedback.

2.7.1 Types of Providing Feedback

This study categorises types of providing feedback to student writing into three; Teacher, peer and self. Graham et al. (2016) refer to these types of response as three levels of feedback: teacher to students, peers to one another, and self-assessment by students. Teacher to student feedback highlights what is working in a students' work and provides both scaffolding and support for aspects of student work that need to be improved. Peer feedback provides a level of support similar to that given by the teacher but also teaches students how to read a peer's writing and provide meaningful and constructive comments. Self-assessment allows student to view their writing from the perspective of a reader in order to identify where they have been successful and where they need to rework their text in order for others to understand what they intended to communicate.

2.7.1.1 Teacher Feedback

The fact that most language teachers the world over spend an enormous amount of time responding to student writing shows that they believe that their feedback is a crucial part of learning to write. According to Zhang, (2016), teacher written feedback

plays an important role in guiding students to write. Further, students value teachers' feedback as evidenced by surveys of students' feedback preferences which consistently show that they rate teachers' feedback more highly than alternative forms (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

Teacher feedback comprises error identification and comments that may be facilitative, directive or both. Error identification is the most widely used technique by teachers to provide feedback to student writing. Besides error identification and correction teachers also provide students with informational feedback through comments. Such comments enrich feedback as they allow teachers to both motivate and guide the learner in an individualized manner.

The type of written feedback that teachers give to their students is a key issue in writing pedagogy as it has been one of the main research topics in language learning in the past 30 years (Zhang, 2016). For instance, Debate on which is more effective, direct or indirect feedback, has been a prominent feature in responding to student writing. Some studies indicate that indirect feedback is more effective while others show that direct feedback serves learners better. Kamberi (2013) for example, observes that indirect feedback can be confusing to students who keep asking themselves what the various signs mean and suggests that in many cases it is only the more successful ones who make sense of it. Ferris (2003) shows that indirect feedback is more helpful because it raises consciousness and mobilizes students to participate in problem solving. But in a textual study of over 5000 teacher comments, Ferris (2006) found out that students utilized direct feedback more consistently and effectively than indirect types. Contributing to the debate, Ahmad (2012) asserts that it is worth noting that findings could be influenced by the level of proficiency of the learners involved

in the research and the varying contexts in which English as a language is taught. He recommends that teachers should use both strategies depending on their learners' level of proficiency. This view is backed by other scholars (Hylands, 2006).

2.7.1.2 Peer Feedback

The current study will use the term peer feedback to cover any form of students responding to each other's written compositions during writing lessons. According to Liu and Edwards (2018), the term peer response is an umbrella term for what is generally referred to as peer feedback, peer review, peer assessment or peer editing. Liu and Edwards (2018) define peer response as the use of learners as sources of information and as interactants for each other in such a way that learners assume the role and responsibilities more typically taken on by a formally trained teacher or editor in commenting on and critiquing each other's drafts in both written and oral format in the process of writing. According to Tomas et al. (2013), in peer response classmates read and respond to one another's writing, provide them with a source of feedback besides the teacher's and help them develop their revision skills. It can be either physical or online using available digital technologies (Liu and Edwards, 2018). The researcher acknowledges that peer feedback is distinct from summative assessment. Hence, in the current study, the term does not imply grading and scoring.

According to Tomas et al. (2013), both past and current research on peer response, continue to show that peer response fosters and supports language behaviour that benefits not only L2 writing development but also second Language acquisition in general. Mossaoui (2012) observes that teaching experience and research has proven that using peer evaluation in writing instruction is one of the most effective means of helping students to improve on their writing.

Liu & Edwards (2018) also note that findings indicate that students perceive that there are many benefits to both receiving and giving peer feedback as this fosters the noticing and scaffolding behaviours that benefit their writing. For instance, O'Donnell, (2014), and Srichanyachon, (2011), both cited in Liu and Edwards (2018) observe that giving feedback to peers fosters self-reflection and enhances writing skills as students learn how other peers approach writing tasks and also learn grammar from noticing own as well as their peers' errors.

Concerning students' attitude on peer response, existing literature indicates that though students perceive that peer feedback has some drawbacks, they believe that it improves their writing. Quoting literature on research concerning students' attitude towards peer feedback Liu & Edwards (2018) indicate that students like peer feedback (Bratkovich 2014; Jacobs, Curtis, Braine and Huang,1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Wang, 2014), feel that it is easier to understand than teacher feedback(Miao, Budger & Zhen, 2006; Zhao 2010, 2014; Zheng, 2012), less threatening than that of their teachers (Jacobs et al 1998; Srichanyachon, 2011), and that it is generally of good quality, (Bratkovich, 2014).

On the other hand, Liu & Edwards (2018) observe that students perceive that drawbacks to peer feedback response activities include mistrust of peers' feedback, (Bratkovich, 2014; Zheng, 2012), fear of being ridiculed by other peers due to limited linguistic proficiency, lack of clarity in peers' comments, the time consuming nature of peer response (Zheng, 2012) and students' fear of giving inappropriate comments due to lack of adequate grammatical knowledge (Srichanyachon, 2011). According to Gielen *et al.,* (2010) some of the risks of peer feedback include a lack of clear goals and standards and overreliance on surface learning strategies by students. However, a

number of studies show that peer feedback can substitute teacher feedback without a considerable loss of effectiveness in the long run (Gielen *et al.*, 2010).

In spite of these drawbacks, students perceive that peer feedback is useful and sometimes more useful than teacher feedback provided that it is followed up by face to face sessions in which peers are given an opportunity to discuss peer comments which allows for clarification, negotiation of meaning as well as noticing and scaffolding for content, language and organization (Liu & Edwards, 2018). The fact that it has been proven that peer feedback can be appropriated to provide effective feedback to learners is good news to teachers as they can use it to maximum advantage to provide additional and regular feedback. It should be particularly helpful for big classes and in situation where curriculum demands do not allow teachers to provide regular and timely feedback to their students.

The current study stresses that students should be trained to evaluate each other's work in order to enhance objectivity and reliability, and also to ensure that it is done in a manner that does not hurt feelings and demotivate them regarding the use of this useful means of responding to each other's writing. Training is an essential aspect of peer response (Liu & Edwards, 2018; Tomas et al., 2013). It is worth noting that while student positive experiences with peer response can enhance productivity, negative experiences can decrease their level of engagement and hinder effectiveness (Liu & Edwards 2018; Yastibas & Yastibas, 2015). Given the important role that peer feedback can play in writing classes, training in peer response as well as making time to find out what students think about the peer response activities that they engage in is vital to deal with any issues that could interfere with its successful implementation. It is also important for teachers to find out if the peer response activities are meaningful

and valuable to their students' learning (Liu & Edwards 2018) to modify their approaches to suit their students' needs.

Peer training should include showing students how to respond effectively. More importantly, it should focus on the issues that have been found to interfere with its effectiveness. For instance, Research shows that students have a tendency to read for surface, mechanical errors (LOCs) while ignoring Higher Order Concerns (HOCs). Providing adequate guidelines and descriptors would therefore not only mitigate against such a tendency but also draw learners attention to the importance of paying attention to both form and meaning in the writing endeavour. Tomas *et al.,* (2013) suggest that when it comes to learners who are not familiar with peer response, teachers should take time to explain its benefits and model specific behaviours of effective response. According to Tomas *et al.,* (2013), for effective peer response, students should be given specific guidelines, for example, a hand-out with a list of questions for peers to answer as they read through each other's work. In addition, in line with the need to help students acquire 21st century skills, schools that have computers and internet facilities can have students trained on how to use digital resources such as Spell Check and the Track Changes feature of Microsoft Word.

2.7.1.3 Self-Assessment

Fahimi and Rahimi (2015) define self-assessment as the ability to identify strengths and weaknesses and points for improvement in one's own performance (p. 731); it refers to any method that incorporates any activity that allows writers to think about, evaluate and revise their writing. According to Andrade, (2010), self-assessment is a process during which students reflect on the quality of their work, compare it to explicitly stated criteria, judge how well their work reflects the criteria, and make

appropriate revisions. Andrade & Valtcheva (2009) observe that self-assessment is a formative assessment process interested in helping students recognize the weaknesses and strengths in their work and taking the necessary steps to improve on it. They note that it does not entail determining a grade.

Wong and Mak (2019) point out that the main purpose of self- assessment is to enable students to reflect on their writing and set tangible goals for improving it. Consequently, after writing teachers should create time for students to read and reflect on their writing according to the criteria used to evaluate it. According to Mak and Wong (2018), reflection also enhances students' awareness of the goals that they cannot achieve thereby, helping them to create more realistic goals. Wong and Mak say that reflection time can be made more effective by allowing students to discuss their work with peers using availed criteria and their own specific goals. According to Andrade, (2010), rubric-referenced self-assessment is associated with more effective writing.

Students can be a source of feedback through self-assessment (Andrade and Brooke 2010. Andrade Du & Wang 2008). Research indicates that with training and practice, students embrace self-assessment to check, reflect and revise their work. (Andrade & Du, 2007; Fahimi & Rahimi, 2015).

For example, Fahimi and Rahimi, (2015) carried out a study to investigate the incorporation of self-assessment in writing and its influence on improving students' writing. The participants were forty- one female students in four classes in an intermediate level. The students did not have any experience in self-assessment before the treatment and all the classes were assessed by the same teacher. The findings were that student writing improved after the treatment. Also, training in self-assessment

provided during the study equipped them with the knowledge of how to plan and revise their pieces of writing and helped them to evaluate the progress as well as their ability.

According to Goodrich cited in Andrade and Brooke, (2010), in order for students to reap the full benefits of self-assessment the following conditions should be put in place: an understanding of the value of self-assessment; access to explicit criteria on which to base the assessment; a particular task; models of good assessment; direct instruction in and assistance with self-assessment; cues for appropriate times to self-assess; opportunities to revise and improve the task or performance; and practice. Wong and Mak (2019) observe that in order to effectively practice self-assessment, a student needs to develop characteristics of individual constructivism which include self-awareness, internalized knowledge and inner speed. However, they note that such characteristics need to be scaffolded though guided practice and feedback from teachers in line with the concept of proximal development.

Being a relatively new form of formative assessment, the implementation of self-assessment may not be an easy task for some teachers. According to Wong and Mak (2019), the challenges of implementing self-assessment include: (a) It is uncommon practice; teachers may not be aware of the practice and may consider it unrealistic or ineffective, (b) Lack of teacher education training in the area ; many teachers may not practice self-assessment in their classrooms because they are unaware of its benefits and have not received training on how to apply it in their classrooms, (c) Lack of language proficiency which is likely to hinder students in an elementary L2 context, who do not possess sufficient language for self-assessment. (d) Students doubting their ability to self-assess themselves correctly which could result in negative feelings

about the process. (e) Using a one-size fits all which is likely to fail because of contextual factors such as language proficiency, cultural background and student personalities. Nevertheless, these challenges can be solved through appropriate training for both teachers and students.

Wong and Mak (2019) assert that formal instruction on how to set goals and regulate how well the goals are attained is an essential element of self- assessment. They note that setting clear and understandable goals is the only way students can gauge what they have achieved and what they need to work on. Further, failure to understand the goals that students are working towards can compromise the internal feedback that is generated through self-assessment. They suggest that the formal instruction should also include scaffolding language use because Linguistic demands of self-assessment can be overwhelming.

Helping students learn how to self- assess meaningfully is a crucial part of self-assessment. This can be achieved through the use of rubrics, checklists and other assessment tools that spell out expectations. Andrade and Brooks (2010) observe that rubrics can promote learning when used to scaffold self-assessment as they allow a student to share a concept of quality similar to that of the teacher which enables them to continuously monitor the quality of their work. However, the language used in the tools should be grade appropriate and understandable to the learners in question (Andrade & Boulay, in Wong & Mak, 2019). Another way of enhancing the process is giving students feedback on the process, for example by showing them where they over or underestimated the quality of their work.

2.7.2 Modes of Providing Feedback

Modes of providing feedback refer to the ways in which feedback is provided and include written, face- to -face and computer delivered feedback. Responding to student writing can take the mode of written responses or face to face discussions involving a teacher with a group of students, a teacher with one student or peers making comments on each other's work either in group or pair work. Further, developments in the field of computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) have added new dimensions to responding to student writing. Thanks to these developments because it is now possible for language classrooms to leverage on various ICT technologies and platforms for online response either by the teacher or peers. For instance, Peers can engage in online discussions or provide each other with a written response through various technologies and platforms such as email, Google docs, Twitter, What's up, Facebook, and blogs such as www.blogger.com

2.7.2.1 Written Feedback

Written feedback comprises error identification and comments that may be facilitative, directive or both. It can be provided by either the teacher or by peers. In peer response which involves physical exchange of written papers students can write marginal notes and comments, underline or circle some phrases or words for attention by their peer using pre-prepared peer response forms with guiding questions which enable them to evaluate each other's work (Liu and Edwards, 2018). Guidance questions such as 'what did you like most about this essay and why?', 'Is the paper well organized? Can be used to focus students on the task and to enhance objectivity. The kind of written feedback that is provided by teachers is described 2.7.1.1 above.

2.7.2.2 Computer feedback

Computers are a powerful tool for learning. For instance, according to Liu and Edwards (2018) Students with access to computers can easily use software like Microsoft word for peer response. For instance, Liu & Edwards (2018) note that research that has examined the use of Microsoft word for peer response (Abuseileek & Abualshar, 2014; Chang, 2012; Ho & Savignon, 2007; Liu & Sadler, 2003) has found that students find the track changes feature useful for commenting and that the grammar and spell-check functions within Microsoft Word help students self- correct their writing. The implication is that schools that have computers and internet should provide opportunities for learners to use Microsoft Word for peer response. In addition, whenever possible, teachers can also encourage different modes of response; written, face to face or mixed / face to face as a follow up to written comments using available CALL technologies. This is possible in most schools and could help learners achieve digital literacy which is a core competency for 21st century learning. Besides, achievement of digital literacy is in support of the call to not leave any learners behind.

2.7.2.3 Face-to- Face Feedback

Face to face feedback comprises teacher student conferences and face- to- face peer response discussions. Such interactions in whichever form are helpful for students because they provide them with opportunities to receive immediate feedback on their writing and to clarify and negotiate meaning especially of written comments.

Teacher- student conferencing entail teachers and students discussing a piece of student writing. It can comprise teacher to individual student or teacher to a group of students. Individual conferences in which a teacher provides feedback based on an

individual students' goals equips students to better understand their weaknesses and strengths and motivates them to look for ways of improving their performance. On the other hand, face to face peer response involves students commenting on each other's writing. This can only be effective if teachers provide guidelines to focus the activity as desired. Face to face peer response provides students with an opportunity to scaffold each other's performance in the writing skill (Ho & Savignon, 2007; Verobel & Kim, 2014 as cited in Liu & Edwards, 2018) and also serves to improve their communicative competence as they talk to each other (Liu & Edwards, 2018). Verobel and Kim (2014) observe that face to face peer response provides peers with an opportunity to clarify and revise the written comments they have given peers and helps them to develop critical thinking skills as well.

One of the major constraints of face-to-face peer response is that some students may not feel comfortable expressing their ideas about their peer's work. This may result in comments that are more general and superficial and thereby not particularly helpful ((Liu & Edwards, 2018). However, students feel that the act of giving and clarifying feedback benefits their own writing (Liu & Edwards, 2018). Also, students shy away from commenting on each other's work for fear of making grammatical mistakes as they do so. In this case, scaffolding language that students can use to effectively provide feedback for each other can be an effective strategy (Wong & Mak, 2019).

According to Bitchener *et al.,* (2005), many teachers consider one-to one teacher-student conferences to be potentially more effective than written corrective feedback because they provide an opportunity for clarification, instruction and negotiation. Bitchener *et al.,* (2005) investigated the extent to which different types of feedback on three targeted error categories helped L2 writers improve the accuracy of their pieces

of writing. The findings indicated that a combination of full explicit written feedback and one-to one conference feedback enabled students to use the past tense and the definite article with significantly greater accuracy than was the case with their use of prepositions. They concluded that L2 writers can improve the accuracy of their use of rule-governed linguistic features if they are regularly exposed to both oral and written corrective feedback.

2.8 Strategies for Utilizing Feedback

The Social Cultural theory which frames this study presupposes that information received from students' assessment will be used to tailor assistance to learners' needs. It also presupposes that teachers will carefully monitor learners' progress in order to know what scaffolds to provide and when. It is therefore expected that teachers will have in place systematic ways of tracking student progress in the various aspects of their writing and ensuring that feedback obtained from assessment is used accordingly. Literature in formative assessment recognises that holding students accountable for acting on assessment feedback is crucial to the success of formative assessment. For example, according to Nodoushan (2014), a good evaluation includes a specific plan of action that uses assessment data as its rationale. Gibbs and Simpson (2004) advise that to raise the potential benefits of formative assessment, students should be stimulated to make effective use of the received feedback.

Assessment enables teachers to identify the range of writing abilities across the class in order to customize instruction to specific individual learner needs. According to Graham *et al.,* (2016), formative assessment is an iterative process that involves assessing students' writing skills repeatedly while modifying instructions to reach the desired goal. The process requires the teacher to identify learning objectives then set

desired goals and plan necessary instruction. Targeted instruction is followed by an evaluation of students' written work to judge the adequacy with which they have mastered the targeted skill or aspects of it. This should be followed by an analysis of students' performance data to identify shortcomings in their work. Finally, the teacher is required to respond by focusing on provision of necessary assistance. The process should then repeat itself with the teacher closely monitoring students' progress and providing timely feedback with an eye on the desired goal. Graham *et al.,* (2016) propose the following strategies of handling feedback on student writing:

2.8.1 Analysis of Performance Data

Student performance data is analyzed to identify areas where students need further instruction. If appropriate evaluation procedures are used, the data obtained from student written pieces should show exactly what individual students can do and what they cannot. It is important for a teacher to put in place ways of making sense of performance data and organizing it in a manner that enables him or her to monitor students' progress on important aspects of performance such as grammar, paragraphing, spelling, punctuation, cohesion and content. Analysis of performance data enables the teacher to accordingly tailor instruction for students both at the whole class and individual levels. One way of making sense of such data is the use of graphic organizers that list what students did well, their areas of difficulty, and remedial action that should be taken by both the teacher and the learner (Graham *et al.,* 2016).

2.8.2 Tailoring Instruction to Learners' Needs as Revealed by Assessment Information

Teachers can support student improvement in writing by providing tailored feedback during the writing process to offer support where it is most needed and to improve the quality of their written products. This can be done through creating customized assignments for individual students, small groups or a whole classroom. For example, the teacher can provide students with the same aspect of writing with one assignment that addresses the common problem and follow this up with discussions for further clarification and assistance. Moreover, if performance data shows that the whole class needs further instruction on an aspect of writing, then the teacher can re-teach the skill using a different approach (Graham *et al.,* 2016). Providing tailored feedback can be done using any of the types and modes of feedback provision discussed earlier. However, the choice should depend on the task and learner needs; ultimately, it should be one that will maximize learning.

2.8.3 Prioritizing Review of Feedback to Focus on Areas of Difficulty

The question of whether teachers should correct all the errors whenever they respond to student writing is an important one. According to Santangelo and Graham (2015), there are usually many issues to be addressed at any given time and if students are presented with all of them at once, they are likely to be overwhelmed and discouraged. In addition, correcting every error is often not possible, and there is no evidence to show that it is more helpful. Weigle (2013) observes that the consensus is that teachers should focus on errors that; Interfere with the comprehension of the message, are frequent, are important for the particular genre or in the context of a

particular teaching situation and are the ones that the student is developmentally ready to address.

2.8.4 Using Tracking Tools to Monitor Students' Progress over Time

Formative assessment entails assessing learners to find out how they are progressing towards achievement of expected objectives, goals and standards. It is crucial for enabling teachers to identify specific areas of difficulty and areas that need improvement for the whole class as well as for individual students. According to Graham *et al.,* (2016), to determine students' needs teachers can design on demand prompts (writing tasks) that assess learning on specific skills such as sentence structure, mechanics of writing and vocabulary among others. The prompts should be administered from time to time to provide feedback for instructional planning. In addition, these can be followed with Exit Slips which inform students when they have met expectations in a problematic area that they are working on.

To track student's performance, teachers can use journals, rubrics and portfolios that indicate how students are progressing on specific areas of difficulty. For instance, keeping a portfolio with evaluated and revised pieces of students' work over time can reveal trends in performance and help highlight continuing needs. Portfolios can also indicate how a student is doing in different types of writing and inform on the nature of practice that they require to undertake. Graphing students' performance in prioritized areas can provide a visual representation of how individual learners are progressing in a particular aspect of writing over time. It usually entails collecting a sample of a students' writing, preferably weekly, evaluating the work and graphing the scores to indicate how a student is progressing in the area of concern.

2.8.5 Revising

Scholars indicate that without accountability for revising students may not use feedback at all (Graham *et al.*, 2016). A revising approach to writing pedagogy allows teachers to review a first draft of a student's assignment, use error analysis to identify areas that need improvement, provide feedback and then assign a subsequent draft which they can review to see if learners have improved in the skill being followed up. Hence, revising is a powerful tool for ensuring that students act on feedback. It can also enable teachers to focus on different types of concerns on different stages of a draft. For instance, in a first draft a teacher can focus on global concerns that interfere with the overall meaning of a task, then focus on sentence level errors at a later stage of the process (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

Whether students revise their work or not may depend on the approach to writing that classrooms adopt. Munoz *et al.,* (2012) identify three approaches: Product, Process, and Genre. The product approach concentrates on the completed task; writing is seen as a product and feedback is provided on a final draft. The process approach to writing identifies four stages in a writing process namely, Prewriting, Drafting, Revising and Editing. The approach builds in a revision and editing stage in the writing process which allows feedback to be provided at multiple points of the process rather than only on the final draft. The Genre approach acknowledges the influence of the purpose of writing thereby emphasising on the importance of the genre in which students are composing. Each of the three approaches has been criticised for not adequately capturing what happens when people compose a text; whereas the Process approach has been criticised for not giving adequate importance to the purpose of writing, both the product and genre approaches have been criticised for failing to take into account the process followed when generating a written text. A

response to the said shortcomings is a combination of the three approaches namely, Process Product which is seen to include all the elements that are needed in generating a text (Munoz *et al.,* 2012).

2.9 Related Studies

Nthiga (2010) carried out a descriptive survey of the pedagogic process of ESL writing in selected secondary schools in Kenya. The study sought to describe the input provided by teachers, the steps in the writing process followed by learners and teacher feedback provision practices. The study also surveyed learners' reactions to the writing lesson and feedback. The study involved Form 2 students together with their teachers of English selected from 11 secondary schools. Concerning teacher feedback provision practices the study revealed that teachers mostly used Indirect Uncoded error feedback. The focus of teacher feedback was mainly on grammar and mechanics of writing which are Lower Order Concerns, while Higher Order Concerns were given less attention. Peer feedback and student conferences were rarely used. The study recommended the need to adopt a multiple- drafting and revising approach to teaching of writing in order to make provision of feedback more effective. It also recommended a better preparation of teachers with regard to feedback practices. While her study involved Form 2 Students the current study participants were Form 4 students because as observed by Weigle (2013) the level of proficiency of the learners can affect the nature of teacher feedback. Also, Nthiga's study did not concern itself with procedures used by teachers to evaluate students' writing to ensure the validity and reliability of assessment results. In addition, while her study sought to describe teacher feedback provision strategies, it did not investigate strategies for ensuring that feedback obtained from student writing is used to enhance learning in writing. Since

these are very crucial aspects of formative assessment, the current study sought to fill in the gaps.

Muya, (2014) carried out a descriptive survey on the instructional practices used by teachers to teach English Language Writing Skills to Standard 4 pupils in Nyandarua North Sub- County, Kenya. The objectives of the study were to: (a) examine the various writing approaches employed by teachers to teach writing, (b) identify writing activities that teachers engage in, and (c) identify the methods used by teachers to assess writing. 21 secondary schools were selected from the 67 schools in the county and 21 teachers, one from each of the selected schools took part in the study. Questionnaires, interviews and a classroom observation schedule were used to collect data which was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The findings revealed that teachers employed product approach while process genre and process approach were rarely used. She recommended that seminars and intensive courses that equip teachers of English with the necessary skill on how to teach all the four skills should be organized. This study was carried out among primary school teachers and teacher practices may differ due to syllabus requirements and the level of proficiency of the learners involved. A study among Secondary teachers therefore added a new perspective to knowledge on how teachers assess writing. Also, the focus of Muya's study was on instructional practices rather than the process of formative assessment. For instance, the study did not concern itself with feedback provision and procedures for evaluating students writing. The current study explored these important facets of formative assessment thereby adding to literature on the topic.

Schunn, Godley, and Demartino (2016) tested the reliability and validity of peer review of writing in high school advanced placement (AP) English classrooms. The

purpose of their study was to find out whether high school AP students in diverse settings would accurately assess their peers' writing if given a carefully designed rubric to guide their assessment and feedback. The study involved 1215 students and twenty-eight AP English language and composition teachers from twenty-six different schools located in 12 states across the United States. First, student ratings on five peer essays were compared with the mean ratings produced by other peers on the same essay across rating criterion. Second, students' assessments of their classmates' essays were compared with those of teachers and expert scorers to study their reliability and validity. Results showed that high school students can really assess their peers and give helpful feedback to each other. Further, both teachers and students perceived many benefits of participating in peer assessment. Based on the findings, the author recommended that peer assessment should be used to help teachers provide learners with more opportunities for writing and receiving feedback without increasing the teacher's paper load. This study was carried out in a different context- outside Africa. The study builds support for use of peer assessment and strengthened the current study's interest to investigate whether selected secondary school teachers of English in Kenya were making use of peer response to provide more opportunities for effective feedback. This contributed knowledge on teachers of English pedagogical practices in formative assessment of writing skills.

Bitchener and Knoch (2008) conducted a study to investigate the extent to which different written corrective feedback helped learners improve their accuracy in the use of the definite article "the" and the indefinite articles. The study found that students who received written corrective feedback outperformed those who did not. The students also retained the improved level of accuracy seven weeks later. 144 migrant and international ESL students in Auckland, New Zealand participated in the study.

The effect of corrective feedback was significant for the 2 groups. The authors recommended further research with participants from different pedagogical contexts and on other problematic error categories. The findings of the study corroborated those of other studies indicating that written corrective feedback has a significant effect in helping learners improve on their writing (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener *et al*., 2005; Fathman & Whalley, 1990, Ferris & Robert, 2001; Bitchener & Knock, 2008).While this study sought to show that corrective feedback really works, the current study sought to describe the types of corrective feedback that teachers in selected secondary schools in Kenya provide to students. This study covered a different pedagogical context to that of Auckland, New Zealand thus contributing to literature on an ESL context.

Gichuru (2014) conducted a descriptive survey study to investigate teachers' perspective on classroom assessment practices in Kenyan secondary schools. The study sought to: (a) determine teachers' perceptions about assessment, (b) examine teachers' skills and competencies in assessment and c) to examine the assessment practices used by teachers to evaluate students learning. The participants of the study were 40 secondary school teachers drawn from Murang'a County, one of the 47 counties in Kenya. The sample was selected using stratified and purposive sampling. The data was collected using questionnaires and analysed using descriptive statistics. In respect of teachers' skills, competencies and assessment practices, the findings revealed that teachers were not well prepared to meet the demands of classroom assessment: they did not define levels of performance or plan scoring procedures and did not keep any progress records. Moreover, the findings revealed that teachers who had attended In-Service training used information gathered from students to a greater extent to diagnose students learning problems, tailor instruction to students' needs,

provide feedback to and to report students' progress. In contrast, teachers who had not undertaken any in-service training had difficulty using assessment information gathered from students and rarely used such information to inform learning. The study recommended that teachers need to be trained in assessment and that their skills should be updated from time to time for quality learning. Gichuru's study provided insights into teacher assessment practices and their application across subjects without focusing on specific dynamics of any particular subject. The current study aimed to add to this knowledge by focusing on formative assessment of writing, an essential component of language learning. Further, the study used only questionnaires to obtain relevant data. The current study made use of Teacher and Student questionnaires, Teacher Focus group discussion, Document analysis and a written task which yielded more in-depth information concerning the facets of assessment that were being explored. In addition, related studies have pointed a gap in teachers' assessment literacy.

2.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents a review of literature on the topic investigated in the study to provide an in-depth understanding of the issues that the study addresses, establish the importance of the study and to provide a basis for discussing the study results. To begin with, the chapter situates the study in formative assessment, specifically assessment for learning and as learning, which is carried out in the course of learning to enhance learning gains, and which is distinct from summative assessment which is usually done at the end of a course or period of learning to ascertain the extent to which learning has occurred. To this end the chapter gives an overview of formative assessment and scaffolding and shows the pivotal role they play in developing

students writing skills which are essential for learning and for success beyond the classroom. Further, the context in which English Language learning at the secondary school level in Kenya is taught is described to contextualize the study. This is followed by a review of literature on the key components of formative assessment as addressed in the objectives of the study.

Finally, the chapter presents a review of literature on related studies to identify what other researchers have done in relation to the issues under investigation and to reveal gaps that need to be filled as a way of contribution to knowledge on the topic. For instance research studies by Gichuru (2014), Muya (2014) and Nthiga (2010) reveal teachers' assessment practices in Kenya to a large extent but do not concern themselves with establishing the procedures used by teachers to evaluate students' writing skills as well as the strategies teachers use to hold students accountable for using feedback so obtained to inform learning. Consequently, as part of the current study the researcher sought to explore these essential elements of formative assessment to fill in the identified gaps. Related studies by Bitchener and Knoch (2008), and Schunn, Godley and Demartino (2016) are both done in contexts outside Africa but are relevant in helping to rationalize the need for the current study. Moreover, the reviewed studies used a variety of methodologies which the researcher found to be a useful reference for designing the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology that was used in conducting the study. Specifically, it describes the research paradigm, the design of the study, study area, target population, sampling and sampling procedures, data collection instruments and procedures, piloting of instruments and data analysis processes. It also covers ethical issues pertaining to the study, and the measures that were taken to ensure validity and reliability of the research.

3.2 Research Paradigm

This study was guided by a pragmatic world view. According to Creswell (2023), although philosophical ideas remain largely hidden in research, individuals preparing for research should identify the larger philosophical views that they espouse since such views influence the practice of research. Creswell (2023) notes that Pragmatists concern themselves with what works, solutions to problems and use all approaches available to understand the problem; hence, they choose the methods, techniques and procedures of research that best address their needs. Further, pragmatism is not committed to any one system of philosophy and reality; hence, researchers can draw from different worldviews, both quantitative and qualitative assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2023). The view was suitable for the current study because it opened the door to mixed methods research which was necessary for providing a better understanding of the research problem. The investigation of teachers' pedagogical practices in formative assessment of learners' writing had many facets that were best addressed using both quantitative and

qualitative data. In particular, the study utilized the following data collection instruments: Teacher and Student Questionnaires, Student Written Task, Teacher Focus group Discussions, and Document Analysis. These yielded both qualitative and quantitative data which was analysed using both qualitative and quantitative analyses procedures.

3.3 Research Design

This study was conducted using a mixed methods Design which allowed for use of both qualitative and quantitative data to fully explore the problem. An important assumption of mixed methods strategies is that all methods have limitations; hence, mixing methods can allow biases inherent in any one method to be neutralized, or cancelled by the other methods (Creswell, 2023). This was the assumption held in this study. The specific mixed method design adopted for the study was the convergent mixed methods design in which the researcher converges or merges quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem (Creswell, 2023). Typically, both quantitative and qualitative data are collected at roughly the same time to allow integration in the interpretation of the overall results (Cresswell, 2023).

3.4 The Study Site

The study was carried out in selected secondary schools in Nairobi County which is one of the 47 counties of Kenya. Nairobi County is coterminous with the city of Nairobi which is the capital and the largest city of Kenya. It is also one of the 47 counties of Kenya. Nairobi County was purposively selected because it has a mix of both performing and non-performing schools which have students of varied levels of ability representative of those of secondary schools in Kenya. This allowed the

researcher to study a variety of teacher pedagogical practices in the formative assessment of students' writing skills. There were 110 public secondary schools that sat KCSE in Nairobi County in the year 2021(KCSE 2021 Results). They comprised 8 national schools, 22 extra county schools, 53 county schools and 27 Sub County Schools. The 110 schools constituted the sampling frame of the schools from which the teachers and students who participated in the study were drawn.

3.5 The Study Population

The target population was Form 4 secondary school teachers of English and their students in Nairobi County. Students in Kenya undertake 4 years of secondary education comprising Form 1, 2, 3 and 4. According to the English language syllabus (KIE, 2002), the focus of learning the writing skill at form 1 and 2 is on the foundational aspects of writing which include the mechanics of writing (handwriting, spellings, capitalization and punctuation), developing different types of paragraphs (e.g. Narrative, descriptive, argumentative), and writing the simpler forms of functional writing such as diaries and letters. At Form 4 the students are expected to have acquired a level of linguistic proficiency to engage in creative writing comprising longer texts such as creative essays, essays based on set texts and other expository forms of writing, as well as the more complex forms of functional writing such as minutes, reports and book reviews. Since this study investigated the nature of comments teachers make on essays, Form Four students were considered ideal for the study.

In line with the SCT and the conceptions of scaffolding adopted for this study, Form 4 students were presumed to have had the level of proficiency and understanding to scaffold each other's work in peer response, and to self-assess their work provided

they were given clear guidelines. It was therefore believed that Form 4 teachers would leverage the said learner characteristics to fully implement best practice in the formative assessment of the writing skill to inform writing. In addition, proficiency in a language can influence the type of feedback a teacher provides to students. At lower levels of proficiency, the teacher is generally compelled to focus on Lower Order Concerns such as vocabulary and grammar rather than Higher Order Concerns such as idea development and organization (Weigle, 2013). Since the current study was also concerned with determining how teachers balanced between higher and surface concerns of their students' writing, the researcher involved learners of expected higher levels of proficiency.

3.6 Study Sample and Sampling Techniques

The study adopted purposive, stratified, simple random sampling and stratified simple random sampling Procedures. 11 schools representing 10% of the public schools that offered KCSE in the year 2021 were selected for the study. The 110 schools were stratified into four strata, namely, National, Extra County, County and Sub- County in accordance with the way schools are classified in Kenya. The researcher then picked the number of schools proportional to the size of each stratum. There being 8 national schools, 22 extra county schools, 53 county schools and 27 Sub County Schools the study sample size constituted 1 national school, 2 Extra County schools, 5 County Schools and 3 Sub County Schools. The schools were picked using simple random sampling from each stratum. The 11 schools enabled the researcher to collect comprehensive data on teachers' formative assessment pedagogical practices of the writing skill through the various methods of data collection. A selection of performing and non-performing schools from each stratum (based on individual school's

performance in English Paper 3, in KCSE 2021 provided for variability in school and student dynamics which was necessary for valid conclusions on teacher practices.

The study used a mixed methods design which allowed for a larger sample size for some aspects and a smaller size for other aspects, depending on the purpose (Kumar, 2014). In line with this observation, from each of the selected schools 2 teachers were randomly selected making a total of 22 teachers for the study. The study involved Form 4 teachers and their students so the students in the classes that the sampled teachers taught constituted the target sample. The sampling frame for students to participate in the study was their performance in the previous end of term English exam. Stratified random sampling was applied whereby students were grouped into high, middle and low-level achievers after which 3 students were selected from each stratum using simple random sampling. A total of 18 students per school amounting to 198 students participated in the study. Considering that the study involved analysing teachers' comments on 198 marked essays, too large a population would have resulted in too much data requiring content analysis for the researcher to practically handle within the logistical constraints of the study.

Ideally, a sample should provide information not only about how things are on average but also about how much variability exists in the phenomenon under investigation (Leedy, & Ormrod, 2016). Based on this, it was expected that a sample of 22 teachers from 22 classrooms drawn from both performing and non-performing schools would provide adequate variability in teacher practices.

3.7 Research Instruments

To resolve the research problem, the researcher collected different forms of data both qualitative and quantitative. This called for different methods and data collection

instruments to collect data from different sources. The study used five instruments to collect data: Student and Teacher questionnaires, Focus Group Discussion, Written task and Document analysis of students' marked essays of which type of teachers' written comments were analysed. These tools were selected based on the objectives of the study, the nature of data to be collected and time available, as well as cost and logistical considerations (Kothary & Garg:2019). Further, the researcher considered using information obtained from the various data sources to strengthen the construct validity of the study (Yin, 2018). Data collected from multiple data sources and different instruments was analysed concurrently to corroborate the findings.

3.7.1 Teacher and Student Questionnaires

According to Kumar (2014), a questionnaire is a collection of written questions which a respondent is expected to respond to in writing. They are suitable if the population is literally large and when time is limited. In this study 198 students and 22 teachers were required to respond to Teacher and Student questionnaire, respectively. Given the logistical constraints of the study, the questionnaire was considered ideal. Questionnaires are particularly useful for collecting data that cannot be directly observed such as views, perceptions and attitudes of both teachers and students, therefore, its use enriched the findings of the study. For the current study Student and teacher questionnaires were prepared by the researcher to address areas of interest. The researcher also chose to use this instrument because it saves time and resources and is convenient and inexpensive as well. Questionnaires also offer anonymity, thereby increasing the likelihood of obtaining accurate information (Kumar, 2014). Data obtained from Student and Teacher questionnaires were triangulated with that obtained from the other research instruments to enhance validity of findings.

A student questionnaire (Appendix 3) was used to collect information concerning feedback provision practices in their class, how their compositions were evaluated, their involvement in assessment, and what they did with feedback obtained from their writing. The questionnaire was prepared by the researcher to address relevant aspects of the research problem.

A teacher questionnaire (Appendix 2) was used to obtain information about teachers' preparedness to assess students' writing skills (which was measured in terms of aspects of assessing student writing covered during their pre- service training and opportunities availed to them for teacher development), procedures which they used for evaluating student writing in their writing classrooms, their feedback provision practices and the strategies they employed to ensure utilization of feedback to inform learning. Data collected from Student and Teacher questionnaires was triangulated to corroborate findings in relevant areas of focus.

3.7.2 Focus Group Discussion

Three focus group discussions (Appendix 4) were used to collect information about procedures for evaluating students writing and teachers' feedback practices that were not adequately captured using a questionnaire. The technique allowed the researcher to gain control over the line of questioning in order to probe on key issues of the study. A focus group is used when a qualitative researcher wants to interview several participants simultaneously. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) say that focus groups are especially useful when time is limited, group members feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings with one another and when the group interaction might be more informative than individually conducted interviews. This is the case in the current study. Apart from the constraint of time, the researcher recognized that teachers of

English form a homogeneous group in terms of practice and while their practices may vary according to factors such as training, experience, and school contexts, they enjoy sharing ideas and experiences about their work. This group dynamic was quite useful in providing comprehensive information about teachers' practices and perceptions.

Interview questions were prepared in advance to ensure that all the participants were asked the same questions. This ensured that all the pertinent questions were asked during the three focus group discussions. The researcher also considered follow up questions and probes in advance to ensure the discussions yielded all the desired information. The discussions were taped and transcribed and then analysed.

3.7.3 Written task

A key step in formative assessment is an activity or procedure for eliciting information about student performance (Graham et al., 2016; Jimenez, 2018,). In the current study, a writing task (Appendix 6) allowed teachers to respond on their learners writing. To examine the type of teachers' written feedback, the sampled students were expected to complete a composition within the time usually given for such tasks. Further, students had a choice of either narrative or expository writing on familiar topics to allow them opportunities to freely and creatively express themselves through writing. Noteworthy, the researcher was not interested in any specific features of any of the two genres but appreciated that this would motivate students to write and also allow for a wider range of comments on their writing.

3.7.4 Document Analysis

Document analysis is a qualitative research method in which documents are systematically examined and interpreted by a researcher to produce meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge about a research question (Chanda,

2021; Bowen, 2009). In the current study, students wrote compositions without knowing that they would be used for research purposes. The Teachers subsequently marked the compositions of all their students and provided written feedback without the intervention of the researcher. The essays of which textual responses to students' writing were analyzed were sampled after completion of marking. The analysis was carried out using content analysis (Appendix 5) which allows for both quantitative and qualitative procedures to provide insight into the phenomenon under investigation (Chanda, 2021). At this point it is worth noting that students marked essays were analysed to discover the type of feedback teachers provided on students' written texts and not to determine students' ability in the writing skill. This was outside the scope of the study.

3.8 Validity and Reliability of the Research Instruments

The researcher was concerned with issues of validity and reliability from the planning stage of the research study. According to Burke (2014), Validity concerns itself with the correctness and truthfulness of the inferences made from a study while reliability concerns itself with the consistency and repeatability of results. To begin with, the researcher clearly stated how different constructs in the study were operationalized. This increased the likelihood that the same results would be obtained if the study were to be conducted again. This meets the condition of repeatability. The study was carried out among Form Four students. This is because the researcher was aware that extraneous variables in respect of the level of proficiency of the learners could significantly influence teachers' formative assessment practices. Form Four Students were considered to have a level of proficiency that could allow the teacher to use a wide repertoire of assessment practices as per the expectations of the study in line with best practice in formative assessment of the writing skill.

To avoid bias the researcher-maintained objectivity and accuracy in reporting and interpreting data. Interpretive validity was maintained through accuracy in presenting participants' viewpoints and perspectives. To this end, direct quotations of teachers' responses in the Focus Group discussions were used as much as required to allow the readers to experience for themselves the views of the participants. A transcript of the recorded discussions was also appended to indicate participants' actual accounts.

The researcher also used multiple data sources to better understand the issues pertaining to the research questions and to allow for crosschecking of information and conclusions made on specific areas of focus. This was meant to strengthen the construct validity of the study. Triangulation occurs when results converge on the same conclusion but at times divergent views arise. Both divergent and convergent viewpoints were noted and explained within the context of the study.

The researcher also allowed for discussions of own actions and interpretations, and conclusions with others to ensure validity in the way the research was carried out as well as the accuracy with which findings were recorded. The study was also assessed by experts including supervisors, faculty, and external assessors.

A pilot study was carried out to pretest the study's research instruments and make any changes that were necessary for ensuring the reliability of the research tools. This strengthened the validity and reliability of the study. According to Mokhtarinia, Hosseini, Maleki-Ghahfarokhi, Gabel & Zohrabi, (2018), Validity is the extent to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure. Theoretical and empirical evidence are used to assess validity. Construct validity is concerned with how a construct concept, idea, or behaviour gets translated into a functioning and operating reality (Feest, 2020). Construct validity is essential for face validity, content validity,

concurrent and predictive validity, and convergent and discriminant validity. Face validity was assessed by examining the instruments to see if the questions appeared relevant, clear and unambiguous as outlined by Jokiniemi, Pietilä and Mikkonen, (2021).

The content validity of a set of scale items is determined by how closely they relate to the appropriate content domain of the construct being measured (Mohajan, 2017)., According to Vakili and Jahangiri (2018), Content validity is a qualitative sort of validity in which the domain of the notion is stated, and the analyst assesses whether the measures appropriately represent the domain. In this study, the researcher designed instruments that comprehensively addressed the constructs under investigation. The instruments were then examined by research experts from Moi University before the study was carried out to ensure that all the constructs were covered comprehensively and appropriately.

The degree to which the outcomes of a measurement and process can be replicated is referred to as reliability (McDonald, Schoenebeck & Forte, 2019). Cronbach Alpha is normally used as a degree of internal consistency. Before using a research tool, researchers require a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher (Griethuijsen *et al.,* 2014; Taber, 2018). To determine the reliability of the research instruments, the researcher piloted the instruments in schools which shared similar characteristics with those that participated in the study. Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was then calculated to ensure that the questionnaires met the required level of reliability.

3.9 Pilot study

A pilot study was carried out to ascertain if the study could be effectively conducted in the way it was planned. The main purpose of the pilot study was to investigate the

adequacy of the questionnaires for the main study. A few adjustments in the questionnaires were made to refine them for the study. A report of the pilot study was derived from the analysis and interpretation of responses to the questions in the instrument. Reliability analysis of the rating scales that were used to measure the robustness of the questionnaires returned a Cronbach alpha value of 0.7704 and 0.9594 for the questionnaires for students and teachers respectively which means that the data from the questionnaires was reliable and had internal consistency.

3.10 Data Collection Procedures

After developing the proposal under the guidance of the supervisors the researchers obtained an authorization letter from Moi University. The researcher obtained a research permit from the National Council of Science and Technology. Next, the researcher visited the Nairobi County education office to seek clearance to visit the sampled schools. Every sampled school was visited at least two times and 3 times at most. On the first visit the researcher introduced herself to the principal and sought for consent to undertake research in the school by presenting the introduction letter and the research permit. The researcher then explained the purpose of the study to the head teacher and requested to be introduced to the English teachers handling the Form Four classes. On meeting the teachers, the researcher also explained the purpose of the study to them and described what the study entailed. The researcher also assured them of utmost confidentiality and sought their consent to participate in the study. Two teachers were sampled using the random sample technique. The students of the two sampled teachers were the ones to participate in the study. The researcher then presented the written tasks to the sampled teachers and requested them to administer the tasks to all the students and respond to the compositions as they usually did. All scripts of the students were marked as usual, without knowledge of which scripts

would be used for analysis of type of teachers' feedback. This allowed teachers to reveal their responding habits without the intervention of the researcher. The researcher requested the teachers to do this in two weeks' time. In addition, the researcher also requested the teacher to avail the end of previous term's record of performance of the class in English. This was used to sample the essays for document analysis of teachers written feedback.

During the following visit the researcher selected the marked scripts of the sampled students and photocopied them. Thereafter, the scripts were handed back to be returned to the students as teachers usually do after feedback. Next was the administration of both the student and teacher questionnaires which happened concurrently. Only the sampled students responded to the questionnaire. The researcher met the sampled students in their classroom, explained to them the purpose of the study, and then administered the questionnaire. The student questionnaire was administered collectively in a classroom. This resulted in a high response rate as all the sampled students were in attendance. The teacher and student questionnaires were administered at the same time. After this, the researcher informed the teachers on the date, venue and time for the focus group discussion and requested them to attend as part of the study as explained to them earlier on at the beginning of the study. At the end of the exercise the researcher thanked the students, the teachers involved, and the school principal for their cooperation. Three focus group discussions of about 6 teachers were undertaken on the scheduled date. The proceedings were recorded and transcribed.

3.11 Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data obtained from questionnaires was coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics. On the other hand, data from the focus group discussions and that on the type of teachers' feedback were analysed using thematic and content analysis respectively. The data was summarized using frequencies and percentages and description. According to (Leedy, & Ormrod, 2016), a content analysis is a detailed and systematic examination of the content of a particular body of material for the purposes of identifying patterns, themes or bases. It is typically performed on forms of human communication including books, newspapers etc. Bordens and Abbortt (2016) state that content analysis is a useful technique for understanding behaviour. They however note that in order to obtain valid data for content analysis the researcher must carefully define the response categories and ensure they reflect the purposes of the research, are exhaustive, and remain focused on the research questions.

To establish the focus of teacher written feedback the researcher tallied teacher comments and coded them for what they covered- grammar, vocabulary, content and organization.- and how many fell under HOCs (Global issues such as content idea development and organization) as opposed to those on LOCs (Surface issues, that is, word usage, grammar, spelling and punctuations). The data was summarized quantitatively using frequencies and percentages. The study aims to find out whether teachers encouraged a healthy balance between Local Order Concerns (formal concerns) and Higher Order Concerns (meaning concerns) for better communicative effectiveness. This is important because focusing on formal elements of writing at the expense of meaning concerns can send the wrong message to students; that one is more important than the other. This could hamper the development of effective

writing especially with L2 learners who besides finding and organizing content, have to struggle with finding the right words and using the correct grammatical structures to communicate effectively. For instance, according to the National feedback report on candidates' performance in writing (KNEC, 2020), candidates work revealed weak paragraphing, inability to develop ideas in essays and inability to write creatively due to inadequate linguistic competence. Keeping a healthy balance between formal and meaning concerns in responding to student writing is therefore essential for impressing upon learners that effective communication is about both meaning and linguistic accuracy.

To examine the type of teachers' comments on the dimension of their effectiveness in helping learners improve their writing, the comments were broadly categorized into praise, questioning, and giving suggestions for improvement in line with the "Glow or Grow" and the 'Praise – Question- Polish' structures for providing feedback suggested by Graham *et al.,* (2016). Graham explains that a "glow and grow" structure entails indicating what was done well ("glowed") and areas that need improvement ("growth") while a Praise - Question - Polish approach comprises identifying something positive about a student's writing (praise), pointing out something that was unclear (question) and offering suggestions on how the writing could be improved (polish). This approach to commenting on student writing is in sync with suggestions by literature in responding to student writing which recommends providing students with both positive and constructive comments (Tomas *et al.,* 2013). The categorized comments were tallied for frequency of each type, after which the data was summarized using percentages.

Teachers are generally advised to provide text-specific strategies, directions and guidelines for improving student writing; consequently, the comments were also examined for specificity because according to literature on responding to student writing (Olsen, and Hunnes, 2023; Shute, 2007; Tomas *et al*, 2013), vague and ambiguous comments are likely to be confusing, and unhelpful. The data was analyzed and summarized using frequencies and percentages.

Data from the teachers' focus group discussions was analyzed using thematic analysis. Clarke and Braun (2017) define thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. They observe that thematic analysis can be applied to virtually any data type from commonly used qualitative techniques such as surveys, interviews and discussions. In view of this, the researcher used thematic analysis to explore and interpret what teachers did and thought concerning the areas covered in the interview questions.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

According to Burke and Christensen (2014), the most fundamental ethical issues in research is the treatment of research participants. In line with this, ethical standards have been set to require informed consent, freedom of withdrawal, confidentiality, anonymity and privacy of research participants. In view of this, before carrying out research in the selected schools, the researcher presented copies of the proposal to Moi University School of Education Postgraduate Office to seek permission to apply for a Research Permit from NACOSIT (Appendix 11 & 12). Once permission was granted by the Ministry of Education the researcher visited the Nairobi County Education Office to inform on the intent to collect data from secondary schools in the County. Next, permission was sought from the principals of the schools involved in

the study. In addition, the researcher briefed the participants about the purpose of the study, its procedures and benefits. The participants were also briefed on their right to withdraw from the research if need be. Thus informed, the participants were required to sign a form to indicate informed consent. In addition, anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy were maintained by ensuring that both the identity and responses of the research participants were not revealed to anyone. In respect of this, the names of schools and teachers were presented using codes such as school 1 and teacher A.

The researcher protected the integrity of the research by avoiding any known research misconduct. Burke (2014) observes that misconduct in research occurs when researchers present fraudulent results. To guard against this the researcher reported the findings as accurately as possible to ensure honesty and integrity. Further, the researcher strived to maintain integrity by avoiding plagiarism.

3.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented information on the research methodology including the choice of research paradigm, design, approach, instruments and their suitability for the current study. The study was informed by the pragmatic philosophical paradigm and adopted a mixed methods design. Multiple sources of data including Student and Teacher questionnaires, Students' written task, document analysis of students' marked essays and focus group discussions were used. Further, the chapter has described the study's sample and sampling techniques, data collection and analysis procedures as well as other pertinent issues including issues of reliability and validity of the study, piloting and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The current study sought to investigate teachers of English utilization of pedagogical practices in formative assessment of students' writing skills in selected secondary schools in Kenya. This chapter presents data analysis and interpretation of the study's findings. The first part focuses on the processes involved in data collection, presentation, analysis and interpretation of findings. The subsequent sections of the chapter present findings and discussion of findings based on the five study objectives which were to: assess teachers' preparedness for formative assessment of student writing, explore the procedures that teachers used for evaluating the quality of student writing, investigate the types and modes of providing feedback to students writing that teachers used, analyse the type of written feedback that teachers provided on students writing, and to examine how teachers of English used feedback obtained from students' writing to inform learning in writing.

4.2 Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

Data was collected using Student and Teacher questionnaires, Focus Group discussion, Written Task and Document Analysis of students' marked essays of which type of teachers' written feedback was analysed. All 22 teachers and 198 students responded to the questionnaires which were analysed using SPSS. Students' marked essays were analysed using both content and thematic analysis to yield data on the type of written feedback that teachers provided to their students. The researcher

conducted three focus group discussions to gather further information on pertinent issues relating to teachers of English utilization of pedagogical practices in formative assessment of students' writing skills. The data collected from the focus group discussions was analysed thematically. Further, the data which was collected from multiple data sources and different instruments was analysed concurrently and used to corroborate findings on pertinent areas of focus.

4.3 Teacher Preparedness for assessing Students' Writing

The first objective of the study was to assess teachers' preparedness for formative assessment of students' writing. Data was gathered using a teacher questionnaire. Teacher preparedness is an imperative for teachers to carry out their work in classrooms effectively. Literature in teacher education acknowledges that teachers as key implementers of the school curriculum need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that they require to effectively carry out their work within the ever-changing contexts in education (Mwaka, Nabwire & Musamas, 2014). Brindle (2013) argues that teacher preparation is crucial for academic success because teacher variables account for more variance in student achievement than other factors. Teacher preparation in Kenya comprises pre-service, or initial teacher training and in-service training also referred to as continuing teacher education or development aimed at retraining, re-skilling and updating teachers' knowledge.

Secondary school teachers of English in Kenya are trained either as Diploma teachers with a diploma in teacher Education or graduate teachers with a Bachelor of Education. In addition, graduates who pursue courses other than education but wish to teach are required to undertake a Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) to

equip them with the professional qualifications needed to become an effective teacher. In line with this objective the researcher sought to answer the following questions:

a). Did the teachers under study have prerequisite training for teaching English in Secondary School in Kenya?

b). What kinds of preparation for assessing writing did Kenyan secondary school teachers of English receive during their pre-service training?

c). What provisions for in-service retooling are available for teachers to keep abreast with current trends in writing pedagogy with regards to assessing writing?

The results on these concerns are presented below.

4.3.1 Teachers Professional Qualifications

To find out if teachers were qualified to teach English to high school learners, teachers were asked to state their professional qualifications. The findings are as indicated in the table below:

Table 3.1: Teachers' Professional Qualifications

Qualification	Freq.	Percent
Diploma	1	4.55
B.Ed.	17	77.27
M.Ed.	4	18.18
Total	22	100

The findings show that all the teachers who took part in the study were qualified to teach English in Secondary school. As indicated in the table, 18 of the 22 teachers involved in the study (77.27%) had a Bachelor of Education qualification, four (18. 18%) had Master of Education while one (4, 55%) had a diploma in Education. This

means that all the teachers underwent an initial pre-service training as part of their preparation for teaching English, thereby writing skills.

4.3.2 Preservice Preparation in Formative Assessment of Students' Writing Skills

The ability to assess and evaluate student learning is one of the capabilities required of a teacher. The KICD Report and Draft Framework for Teacher Education in Kenya (2016) specifies that knowledge of how to use assessment for, as and of learning to guide teaching and learning is one of the quality standards for Teacher Education. Siarova, Sternadel and Masidlauskaite (2017) observe that the quality of formative assessment largely depends on the strategies that teachers use. They assert that the effective use of assessment results and assessment practices depend on teachers' assessment literacy and ability to appropriately integrate assessment data in their teaching which in turn requires teacher education programmes (both initial teacher education and continuing professional development) to ensure comprehensive preparation of teachers in the field.

It is worth noting that assessing writing requires a combination of complex skills that need to be learned (Britton, 2023) consequently, to reliably assess learners' ability and provide effective feedback for learning, teachers need to be equipped with the necessary skills. In line with this the researcher sought to determine the kinds of preparations in these skills for assessing students' writing that teachers received in their pre-service training as well as the kinds of preparations that they were receiving as part of their continuing development to enable them to effectively carry out the formative assessment processes of students' writing skills. The findings are shown below.

Table 4.2: How Well Teachers Feel They Were Prepared

How Prepared Do Teachers Feel Based On Pre service Training	Unprepared		Minimally Prepared		Adequately Prepared		Very well Prepared		Don't Know
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
Identifying errors	1	4.55	6	27.27	11	50	4	18.18	
Correcting errors	1	4.55	6	27.27	9	40.91	6	27.27	
Commenting on Student Writing	5	22.73	3	13.64	10	45.45	4	18.18	
Preparing composition marking guides	6	27.27	6	27.27	8	36.36	2	9.09	
Engaging students in peer assessment	8	36.36	5	22.73	4	18.18	5	22.73	
Engaging students in self-assessment	6	27.27	7	31.82	4	18.18	5	22.73	
Using marking guides	5	22.73	4	18.18	7	31.82	5	22.73	1
Ways of tracking student progress	4	18.18	7	31.82	8	36.36	2	9.09	1
Integrating technology in teaching and assessing	8	38.1	8	38.1	3	14.29	2	9.52	

The combined percentages of teachers feeling they were adequately or very well prepared in the different aspects were: Identifying errors (68.18%), correcting errors (68.18%), Commenting on Student Writing (63.63%), Preparing composition marking guides (45.45%), Engaging students in peer assessment (40.91%), Engaging students in self- assessment (40.91%), Using marking guides (54.55%), Ways of tracking student progress (45.45%) and Integrating technology in teaching and assessing students writing (23.81%). Evidently, a considerable number of teachers (over 30% in each aspect) felt they were not adequately prepared. Notably, higher percentage ratings of feeling not adequately prepared were reported in skills pertaining to Engaging students in peer assessment (59.09%), Engaging students in self- assessment (59.09%), Ways of tracking student progress (49.90%), and integrating technology in teaching and assessing students' writing (76.2%).

4.3.3 In-Service Preparation in Assessing Writing Skills

Teachers operate in an ever-changing world. This means that although they acquire the foundations of content and pedagogical knowledge through their pre-service educati**o**n, opportunities for continuing learning should be availed to them to fill the gaps in their training (Barasa, 2005) and keep abreast of emerging educational trends and best practices (Arends, 2007; Barasa, 2011; Mwaka *et al.*, 2014). According to Osamwonyi, (2016) in-service teacher training can occur in formal settings such as workshops, seminars, collaborative learning among teaching communities as well as in informal contexts such as independent reading, discussions among colleagues, and research. To this end teachers were asked to indicate the number of times they had attended in-service training (on teaching writing) arranged by their school or employer within five years ending at the time of the study. The findings were as follows:

Table 4.3: Frequency of Formal In-Service Preparation Opportunities

Number of Times Teacher Has Attended In-Service Training Arranged by school, TSC or MOE	Freq.	Percent
None	12	54.55
Once	5	22.73
Twice	2	9.09
Thrice	1	4.55
Four times	1	4.55
More than four times	1	4.55
Total	22	100

From the table it is evident that more than half of the teachers in the study (54.55% had not attended any in-service training in 5 years, while 22.75 % had attended only once and 9.09% twice within a five-year period. This indicates that opportunities provided by the employer for retooling teachers were inadequate.

In-service learning can also occur in informal contexts such as independent reading, discussions among colleagues, and mentorship. In line with this, teachers were asked to indicate the types of opportunities that they had pursued on their own within the same period. The results are presented in table below.

Table 4.4: Frequency of Teachers' Participation in Informal In-service Activities

Participation in in-service activities pursued individually	Freq	%
Workshop	12	54.55
Conferences	4	18.18
Personal Reading	16	72.73
Mentorship	1	4.55

From the table, it can be observed that teachers reported high rates of reading about assessing students' writing (72.73 %), but still, there was a considerable number of teachers (27.27% who were not reading as a way of adding to their knowledge. The percentage of teachers reporting to have made their own arrangements to attend a workshop was 54.55% while only 18.18 reported attending a conference. Noteworthy, 81.82% and 45.45% did not attend conferences and workshops respectively. In addition, only one teacher reported participating in a mentorship programme.

Teachers were also asked if they belonged to any English Language group, and if so, explain what activities they engaged in in such groups. The findings were that 86.36% of the teachers belonged to a collaborative group. However, only 7% of them indicated that they engaged in activities related to assessment of writing. Such groups mainly concentrated in setting and marking KCSE examinations (40.89%) and sharing teaching materials (27.27).

The researcher acknowledged that being an examiner for KCSE English Paper 3 - the paper that examines creative writing and writing of essays based on prescribed literary texts – could enhance a teacher's preparedness for marking writing. This is because such examiners are adequately prepared on using a holistic marking guide to judge the quality of candidates' writing. Majority of the teachers said they were not examiners (63. 64%) but a considerable number said they were (36.36%). Those who were examiners were asked to explain what value it had added to their formative assessment practices. The findings by percentages of teachers indicated that: it developed their strategies for teaching writing (50%), enhanced their skills in correcting learners' mistakes (12.5%) and in identifying errors in students' writing (37.5%), and generally improved their capabilities in assessing their learners' writing

(75%). Consequently, the results indicated that being trained as an examiner for KCSE Paper 3 enhanced teachers' skills in assessing learners' writing.

4.4 Procedures That Teachers Use for Evaluating the Quality of Student Writing

The second objective of the study was to explore the procedures that teachers of English used for evaluating the quality of student writing. This is an important component of assessing learners' writing because scholars agree that the trustworthiness of formative assessments of writing as a skill can be compromised by how the assessments are done and how they are scored (Graham et al., 2011, OECD, 2013). The study conceptualised procedures used for evaluating student writing as the processes undertaken to judge the quality of a given piece of writing including the choice and preparation of appropriate evaluation tools, reporting the results, as well as the roles of the agents (teachers, and students) in the process. The major tool for achieving this objective was questionnaires, both teacher and students. In addition, data emerging from document analysis of students' written compositions was used to enrich the findings.

In line with this objective the researcher sought to focus on three questions, namely:

a). What tools did the selected teachers use to evaluate students' writing?

b) How did teachers report the quality of Students' Writing?

c) To what extent did teachers use best practice for evaluating learners writing?

d) What were the learners' perception of teachers' practices of evaluating their writing?

The results on these areas of focus are presented below.

4.4.1 Teachers' choice of tools for evaluating students writing

For formative assessments to be effective students need to have information about the quality of their work, understand what constitutes good performance, and know what excellent work looks like in order to know where they are in relation to set goals, and what they should work on to advance their learning (Ragupathi & Lee, 2020). Schinske and Tanner (2014) observe that unless the right procedures are used, evaluation of student writing is inevitably subjective. Citing a study by Starch and Elliot (1912) which returned a variation of 50- 98 per cent in grading of the same learners' scripts by 142 teachers, they emphasise the need to use tools that ensure that performance in written tasks is dependent on the product produced by the learner rather than the whims of the teacher evaluating it. In line with this, teachers were asked whether they planned how they would evaluate every writing task that they assigned to their learners. In addition, they were asked to indicate to what extent they used the KNEC KCSE Paper 3 Composition Marking Guide, other pre-prepared marking guides from the internet or elsewhere, or their own marking guides.

Majority of the teachers (76.19 %) reported that they planned how they would evaluate the assignments that they gave; however, 23.81% said they did not. The results on teachers' choice of tools for rating the quality of students writing are presented in the table below.

Table 4.5: Teachers Choice of Tools for Rating the Quality of Students' Writing

Evaluation tools		Never	Some Extent	Large Extent	Very Large Extent	Total
KNEC KCSE Paper 3 marking	Freq.		6	9	7	22
Guide	Percent		27.27	40.91	31.82	100
Pre-prepared marking	Freq.	2	6	9	5	22
guides	Percent	9.09	27.27	40.91	22.73	100
Own prepared marking	Freq.		6	6	10	22
guide	Percent		27.27	27.27	45.45	100

The findings show that teachers used the three types of tools to a comparable degree. The KNEC KCSE Paper 3 marking guide was widely used for evaluating students writing with 72.73% of the teachers indicating that they used it either to a large extent (40.91%) or to a very large extent (31.82%), and 27.27% reporting that they used it to some extent. Similarly, other pre-prepared marking guides were used to a comparable degree with 73.64% of the teachers reporting that they used them to a large (40.91) or very large extent (22.73%), and 27.27% indicating that they used them to some extent. Moreover, teachers also prepared own marking guides with 72, 72% of them indicating that they used such guides to a large or very large extent. Only two of the teachers indicated that they never used pre- prepared guides.

4.4.2 Teachers' Ways of determining and reporting on the Quality of Students Writing

The focus in this case was on how the teachers reported on the quality of learners' writing as well as how they arrived at their decisions. Grading and scoring are terms that are often used to refer to evaluation of student writing. They involve giving a

letter grade such as an “A” or a mark such as 16 out of 20. While this practice is useful for certain purposes such as summative assessments, it is inadequate for formative assessment because grades and marks alone neither pinpoint shortcomings in a learner’s writing nor guide the learner on what he or she should do in order to improve (Schinske and Tanner, 2014) In a review of the main trends in assessing writing, Nodoushan (2014) observes that decisions on the quality of learners’ writing can be arrived at using different rating rubrics namely (a) Holistic, (b) Analytic and (c) Trait- based. Holistic rubrics produce a single integrated score which presents a general impression of the quality of a particular piece of writing. In contrast, analytic scoring evaluates different aspects of writing separately thereby allowing both the teacher and the learner to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the various components of the writing skills being assessed. Trait scoring entails evaluating different aspects separately as it is the case with an analytic approach. However, there is a difference in that while trait approach is task-specific, analytic evaluation is based on a pre-determined set of aspects to be scored (Hylands, 2003), and is therefore a more effective way of evaluating the aspects that matter most in different genres (argumentation, reporting etc.) than that offered by analytic and holistic procedures. To this end, teachers were asked to indicate how they reported on the quality of learners’ writing and how they typically arrived at their decisions. The results are presented below.

Table 4.6: Teachers of English Ways of Reporting on the Quality of Students Writing

How teachers Report on student writing	Freq.	Percent %
Comments only (no grade or mark)	1	4.55
An overall mark and comments	21	95.45
An overall grade and comments	0	0
Total	22	100

From the table, most of the teachers (95.45%) reported that they gave an overall comment and a mark. Only one teacher reported using comments only. None of the teachers in the study used letter grades to report on learners' performance. These results are supported by the analysis of learners' scripts to describe teachers' written feedback practices. Nevertheless, the analysis also revealed that some teachers only gave an overall mark without any comments (see appendix 9).

Regarding how teachers typically arrived at a score or grade, majority of the teachers (68.18%) indicated that they rated specific aspects separately and then added the marks to obtain the overall score, while 31. 82% reported that they usually gave an overall holistic mark by considering all criteria at once. In contrast, 95.45% of all the students' scripts that were analyzed were scored holistically- an overall mark was given at the end of each of the compositions and there was no breakdown on learners' performance on the various aspects of writing.

4.4.3 The extent to which Teachers of English used best practice in evaluating students writing

Based on the literature reviewed in the study, the best practices in evaluating learner's writing that the researcher considered for investigation included: Using appropriate diagnostic tools- which is covered under teachers' choice of tools for evaluating students writing, involving learners in preparation of marking guides, sharing marking tools with learners before the start of the assigned task and training them on use of marking tools to identify weaknesses and strengths in their own writing. Other essential practices subsumed under these broad categories were deciding on aspects of writing to be evaluated and preparing a marking guide before assessment, developing clear descriptions of performance at different levels to measure a learners' ability in specific assigned tasks and using samples to demonstrate performance at different levels.

The practice of sharing marking guides with learners before the start of assigned tasks is recommended by many scholars (e.g. Andrade, 2014; Graham *et al.*, 2016; Leoney, 2011; Popham, 2000; OECD 2013; Thomas, Kostka and Mott-Smith, 2013) who consider it to be beneficial in various ways. To begin with, this presents a learner - centred approach in which expectations are spelled out; thereby, informing them what it means to complete a task successfully. Besides, sharing marking tool with learners before an assignment helps them to stay focused on meeting set goals. The practice is also a useful learning strategy because it provides a framework for understanding the characteristics of good writing within the genre (whether functional or creative) of the assigned task and for discussing performance per criterion. In addition, it provides

learners with clear and understandable standards for determining the weaknesses and strengths in their work.

Student involvement in preparation and use of evaluative criteria has been identified as an important way of helping students to improve their writing (Nodoushan, 2014)). When students take part in identifying the aspects to be evaluated in different types of writing and in coming up with descriptors for different levels of performance, they internalize qualities of good writing in the different types of writing that they undertake.

The need to train learners on the use of evaluative tools has been expressed by many writing scholars (Liu and Edwards; 2018; Mak and Wong; Munoz et al., 2012). When learners are trained adequately, they can self-assess which allows them to reflect on their capabilities and consciously plan subsequent action for improvement. Moreover, training learners can enable them to peer or self- assess their work effectively. This can reduce the load from the teacher and create more opportunities for students to write and provide immediate feedback to each other.

Based on the teachers' questionnaire, the results of the extent to which teachers used the mentioned best practices in evaluating students writing are presented in the table below.

Table 4.7: Teachers Use of Best Practice in Evaluating Students Writing

		Not at all	Some Extent	Large Extent	Very Large Extent
Deciding on aspects of writing to be evaluated before assignment	Freq.		4	13	5
	Percent		18.18	59.09	22.73
Preparing a marking guide before assessment	Freq.	1	5	12	4
	Percent	4.55	22.73	54.55	18.18
Developing clear descriptions of performance at different levels	Freq.	2	7	10	3
	Percent	9.09	31.82	45.45	13.64
Using samples to demonstrate performance at different levels	Freq.	1	5	12	4
	Percent	4.55	22.73	54.55	18.18
Involving students in preparing marking guides	Freq.	15	4	1	2
	Percent	68.18	18.18	4.55	9.09
Sharing marking guides with students before assignment	Freq.	6	10	2	4
	Percent	27.27	45.45	9.09	18.18
Training students using marking guides to identify strengths and weaknesses	Freq.	5	7	7	3
	Percent	22.73	31.82	31.82	13.64

The results show that most of the teachers (81%) decided on aspects of writing to be evaluated before assigning tasks to a large or very large extent while 18, 18 % indicated that they did so to some extent. Further, majority of the teachers (72.73%) indicated that they prepared marking guides before assessment to a large or very large extent while 22.73 % indicated that they did so to some extent. Regarding developing clear descriptions of performance for assigned tasks, a considerable number of teachers (41.91%) reported not doing it at all or doing it to some extent but more than half of them (59.09%) indicated doing it to a large or very large extent. Majority of teachers (73. 06%) indicated that they used samples to demonstrate performance at different levels to a large or very large extent. In contrast, 27.28% reported doing so only to some extent or not at all. Apparently, majority of the teachers (68.18 %) reported that they did not involve learners at all in preparing marking guides, a few (18.18%) reported doing it to some extent and only a few (13.64) did it to a large or very large extent. Likewise, sharing marking guides with learners, and training them

on using marking guides to identify strengths and weaknesses in their writing were not common practices; 27.27 % of the teachers reported that they did not share marking guides with their learners at all while 45.45% indicated that they did it only to some extent. Similarly, more than half of the teachers (54%) reported that they did not train learners on using marking guides.

Table 4.8: Students Perceptions of Their Teachers' Practices in Evaluating Their Writing

What happens in our class		Never	Once in a long time	Frequently	Very Frequently	Total
a) The teacher involves students in preparing marking guides for different types of compositions.	Freq.	75	40	61	23	199
	Percent	37.69	20.1	30.65	11.56	100
b) The teacher shares a marking guide with us before starting to write a composition to help us understand what we should pay attention to in different types of compositions.	Freq.	28	32	77	62	199
	Percent	14.07	16.08	38.69	31.16	100
c) The teacher trains us on how to use a marking guide to identify weaknesses and strengths in our own work and the work of our classmates.	Freq.	40	40	65	54	199
	Percent	20.1	20.1	32.66	27.14	100
d) The teacher trains us to use a marking guide to know how we have performed (if excellent, good, fair or poor).	Freq.	39	46	64	50	199
	Percent	19.6	23.12	32.16	25.13	100

The results show that 57% of the learners felt that their teachers hardly involved them in preparing marking guides with 37% reporting that the teachers never involved them and an additional 20.1% indicating that their teachers only involved them once in a long time. Regarding sharing marking guide with learners before starting an

assignment, 30% of the learners reported that their teacher never availed the marking guides or did it only once in a long while. However, 69.85 % of the learners reported that teachers shared marking guides with them either frequently or very frequently. This was contrary to the teachers report whereby 27.27 % of them indicated that they did not do it at all and 45.45% reported sharing only to some extent. 40% of the learners reported that they were hardly trained on how to use a marking guide to identify weaknesses and strengths in their compositions, 32% reported that they were trained frequently while 27.14 % indicated being trained very frequently. 42% of the learners reported that they hardly received any training on how to use marking guides to better understand how they had performed (if excellent, good, fair or poor).

4.5 Types and modes of providing feedback to learners' writing those teachers of English use

The third objective of the study sought to investigate the types and modes of providing feedback to students writing that teacher of English use. Thomas et al (2013) identify three types of response to learners' writing: teacher, peer and self-response. Graham et al. (2016), also show that each of the three types of feedback occupies an important place in enhancing learners' writing skills: Teacher to student feedback highlights what is working in a students' work and provides both scaffolding and support for aspects of student work that need to be improved. Peer feedback provides a level of support like that given by the teacher by involving students in reading a peer's writing and providing meaningful and constructive comments. Self-assessment allows learners to view their writing from the perspective of a reader to identify where they have been successful and where they need to rework their texts in order for others to understand what they intended to communicate.

The three levels of feedback can be provided in different ways or modes. The different modes that this study focused on included written feedback, face-to-face discussions, and use of digital resources to enhance Learners' writing. Responding to student writing can take the mode of written responses or face to face discussions involving a teacher with a group of students, a teacher with one student or peers making comments on each other's work either in group or pair work. Face to face feedback comprises teacher student conferences and face- to- face peer response discussions. Such interactions in whichever form are helpful for students because they provide them with opportunities to receive immediate feedback on their writing and to clarify and negotiate meaning especially of written comments. Individual conferences in which a teacher provides feedback based on an individual students' goals equip students to better understand their weaknesses and strengths and motivates them to look for ways of improving their performance. On the other hand, face to face peer response involves students commenting on each other's writing which provides them with an opportunity to scaffold each other's performance in the writing skill (Ho & Savignon, 2007; Verobel & Kim, 2014 as cited in Liu & Edwards, 2018) and also serves to improve their communicative competence as they talk to each other (Liu & Edwards, 2018).

Computers have also become a powerful tool for learning in writing (e.g. Liu and Edwards, 2018; Wang and Han, 2022). Hence, many teachers of English have adopted the use of automated feedback which has benefits such as reducing teachers workload and obtaining immediate and frequent feedback (Wang and Han (2022).

In line with the objective the researcher sought to answer the following questions:

a). How did teachers typically evaluate learners writing?

b). To what extent did teachers use the three types of feedback available for learning in writing?

c). To what extent did teachers use the different modes of feedback provision?

d). What were the learners' perception of their teachers' use of different types and modes of providing feedback on their writing?

The results on the areas of focus are presented below.

4.5.1 Teachers' Use of Types of Providing Feedback on Learners' Writing

To find out how teachers typically responded to learners' writing, they were asked to indicate whether they responded to all the compositions that they assigned learners or allowed them to respond to some of the assigned compositions. The results are as indicated in table 12 below.

Table 4.9: How teachers typically respond to learners' writing

How teachers typically respond to learners writing	Freq.	Percent
I ask students to evaluate some of their compositions	10	45.45
I mark all the compositions that I assign learners	12	54.55
Total	22	100

As observed from the table, teacher feedback was used more prevalently than peer feedback with more than half (54.55%) of the teachers reporting that they marked all the compositions that they assigned, while 45.45 % reported that they asked learners to evaluate some of the assigned compositions.

Regarding the extent to which teachers used the different types of feedback, they were asked to indicate how often they engaged their learners in the activities specified in table 4.10 below.

Table 4.10: Frequency of Teachers Use of Different types of Providing Feedback on Learners' Writing

Teachers' classroom practices		Never	Occasionally	Frequently	Very Frequently	Total
Marks assigned composition	Freq.		8	10	4	22
	Percent		36.36	45.45	18.18	100
Assigns students to peer assessment	Freq.	4	11	4	3	22
	Percent	18.18	50	18.18	13.64	100
Assigns students to self-assessment	Freq.	4	12	5	1	22
	Percent	18.18	54.55	22.73	4.55	100

The findings indicated that majority of teachers marked assigned compositions frequently (45.45%) or very frequently (18.18%). From the table, it can also be observed that peer assessment was not commonly used for learning in writing as 18.18% of the teachers reported that they never used it, while 50% of them reported using it only occasionally. However, 31.82% of the teachers used it with 18.18% of them reporting that they used it frequently and 13.64% very frequently. Likewise, the results indicated that self-assessment was not used as a common strategy for learning in writing with 72.73% of the teachers reporting that they never used it (18.18 %) or used it occasionally (54.55%).

4.5.2 Teachers' Use of Modes of Providing Feedback on Learners' Writing

Regarding the utilization of the different modes of feedback provision, teachers were asked to indicate how often they engaged their learners in specified activities. The results are shown in the table below:

Table 4.11: Frequency of Teachers Use of Different Modes of Responding to Students Writing

Teachers' classroom practices		Never	Occasionally	Frequently	Very Frequently	Total
Whole class or group face to face discussion	Freq.	2	11	6	3	22
	Percent	9.09	50	27.27	13.64	100
One on one individualized discussion	Freq.	1	10	8	3	22
	Percent	4.55	45.45	36.36	13.64	100

The results revealed that 40.91% of the teachers used whole class or group face to face discussions frequently. The rest of the teachers reported using the mode occasionally (50%) or not at all (9.9%). When it came to use of one – on- one individualized discussion, half of the teachers reported using the mode either frequently or very frequently (50%) while the other half (50%) indicated that they used the strategy occasionally or not at all.

Teachers were also asked to indicate their practices regarding use of digital devices as a way of providing feedback on learners' writing. The results are shown in the table below.

Table 4.12: Use of Digital Devices for provision of feedback

		No	Yes	Total
Mobile Phones	Freq.	11	11	22
	Percent	50	50	100
Projectors	Freq.	19	3	22
	Percent	86.36	13.64	100
Computers	Freq.	16	6	22
	Percent	72.73	27.27	100

The results show underutilization of digital resources as a way of providing feedback to learners' writing. While 50% of the teachers indicated that they used mobile phones, the rest reported that they did not. Only 13.64 % and 27.27% of the teachers reported using projectors and computers respectively.

4.5.3 Learners' Perception of Their Teachers' Use of different Types and Modes of Providing Feedback on Their Writing

Learners were asked to indicate their perceptions towards their teachers' feedback provision practices. The results are indicated in table 4.13.

Table 4.13: Learners' Perception of Their Teachers' Use of different Types and Modes of Providing Feedback on their Writing

Types and Modes of providing feedback on students' writing		Never	Once in a long time	Frequently	Very Frequently	Total
a) Teacher written feedback	Freq.	5	64	97	33	199
	Percent	2.51	32.16	48.74	16.58	100
b) Peer feedback	Freq.	55	38	56	49	198
	Percent	27.78	19.19	28.28	24.75	100
c) self-assessment	Freq.	32	22	65	80	199
	Percent	16.08	11.06	32.66	40.2	100
d) whole class discussions	Freq.	6	37	66	90	199
	Percent	3.02	18.59	33.17	45.23	100
e) face-to face individual discussion	Freq.	43	60	55	41	199
	Percent	21.61	30.15	27.64	20.6	100
f) use of mobile phones or computers	Freq.	181	9	6	3	199
	Percent	90.95	4.52	3.02	1.51	100

As shown in the table, majority of the learners (64.32%) reported that their teachers marked their compositions either frequently (48.74%) or very frequently (16.58%). This corroborates findings on preference for teacher written feedback as indicated in tables 4.7 and 4.8. Although Teachers written feedback was a prevalent means of responding to learners' writing, a considerable number of learners (32.16%) reported that their teacher marked their compositions once in a long time or not at all (2.5 %).

The number of learners reporting that their teachers used peer feedback frequently or very frequently was (52.03%). However, 27.78 of the learners reported that their teachers never used peer feedback in their classes while 19.19% of them indicated that their teachers used peer feedback only once in a long time. In contrast, fewer teachers (31.82%) than learners (52.03%) reported using peer feedback frequently or very frequently with 18.18% and 50% of the teachers respectively reporting that they never used it or used it occasionally.

Most of the learners (72.86 %) felt that their teachers engaged them in self-assessment frequently or very frequently. This contrasted with findings revealed by the teacher questionnaire that self-assessment was not used as a common strategy for learning in writing with 72.73% of the teachers reporting that they never used it (18.18 %) or used it occasionally (54.55%). Given that the term self- assessment is hardly used in the 8-4-4 curriculum in which this study is situated, it is possible that that learners did not understand what self- assessment entailed.

Learners perceived that their teachers used whole class discussion to a large extent with 78.40% of them reporting that their teachers used the mode frequently or very frequently. Some learners however, reported that such discussions never happened (3.02%) or took place once in a long time (18.89%). In contrast teachers reported using whole class face to face to a lesser degree with only 40.91% of them indicating that they used the mode either frequently (27.27%) or very frequently (13.64%).

Most of the learners (51.75%) reported low use of individualized face to face engagement with 21.61% reporting that their teachers never used such discussions and 30.15% indicating that their teachers used them once in a long time. The rest of the learners (48.24 %) indicated that their teachers frequently engaged them in face-to

face discussions. The results indicate convergence since a comparable number of teachers (50%) indicated using the strategy occasionally or not at all while the other half (50%) reporting using the mode frequently or very frequently was comparable to that of the learners (48.24) reporting the same thing.

Most of the learners (90.95%) reported that their teachers never asked them to use mobile phones or computers to make corrections. The results also affirmed convergence as findings from the teacher questionnaire indicated low use of various digital resources as shown in Table 4.12.

4.6 Analysis of the Type of Written Feedback That Teachers Provide on Students Writing

The fourth objective of the study was: to analyse the type of written feedback that teachers provide on students writing. Teachers' written feedback is an essential component of assessing learners' writing because the type of feedback and the way it is provided can impact learners' level of achievement (Derham et al. 2021) Based on this, the researcher sought to find out how effective teachers were in diagnosing learning problems in learners' writing and in communicating this information to learners to allow for appropriate interventions. The major tool for achieving this objective was document analysis; students wrote compositions which the teachers subsequently marked and provided written feedback. The responses to students' writing were then analysed using content analysis to discover the type of feedback teachers provided on students' written texts. In respect of maintaining anonymity and confidentiality, the 22 teachers were assigned letter names from teacher A to teacher V. The scripts for every teacher were assigned numeric values tagged to their

respective teachers for instance A1, A2, and so forth for the scripts marked by teacher A.

In line with this objective the researcher sought to answer three questions, namely:

a). What error identification styles did teachers use?

b). What type of comments did teachers use?

c). What was the focus of teachers' comments in terms of Lower Order Concerns (LOCs) and Higher Order Concerns (HOCs)?

The results on these areas of focus are presented below.

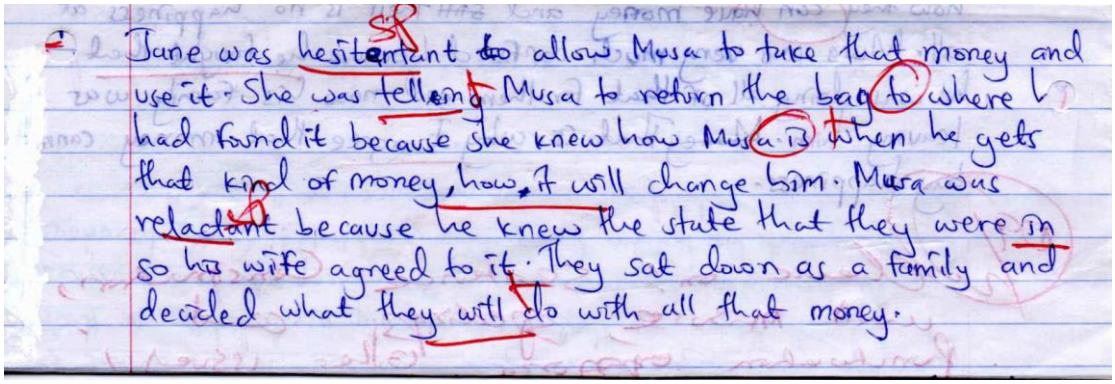
4.6.1 Teachers' error identification and correction styles

In error identification one of the most important distinctions usually made is between direct (DIR) versus indirect (IND) corrective feedback (Ene & Kosobucki, 2016; Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005). Direct corrective feedback entails a teacher identifying an error and providing the correct form, for example, crossing out a misspelt word and writing it correctly. On the other hand, indirect feedback is when a teacher identifies an error but leaves the student to diagnose and correct it (Ahmadi, Maftoon & Mehrdad, 2012; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Zhang, 2016). Indicating or locating an error without indicating the nature of the error is considered uncoded feedback, whereas labelling for example *SP* for spelling or *WO* for word order is considered coded feedback.

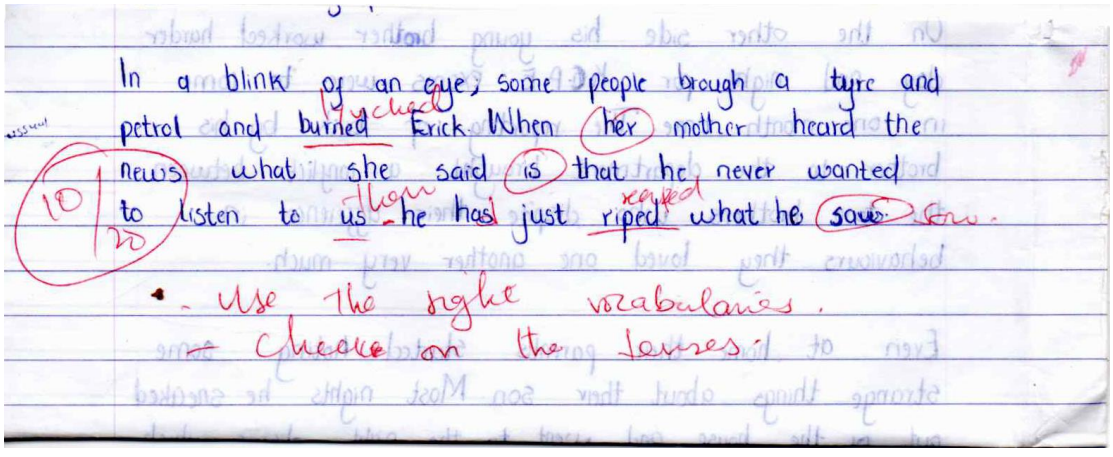
Further analysis of learners' marked scripts indicated that teachers identified errors variously. Majority of them (64%) provided coded feedback by labelling the type of error that had occurred. However, this was not done consistently across the scripts as some specified the type of error only in some cases. On the other hand, 36% of the teachers provided uncoded feedback whereby they identified errors but did not

specify the type. The results further indicated that majority of the teachers (55%) provided indirect feedback as they only identified the errors without providing the correct form. The others (45 %) however, provided corrections on some of the underlined errors, for instance by writing the correct spelling, or grammatical form of the underlined words. Also, the findings revealed that a good number of learners' compositions had low scores with only a few or no error identification (see appendix 8 and 9). The following excerpts present examples of error identification styles prevalent among the teachers under study.

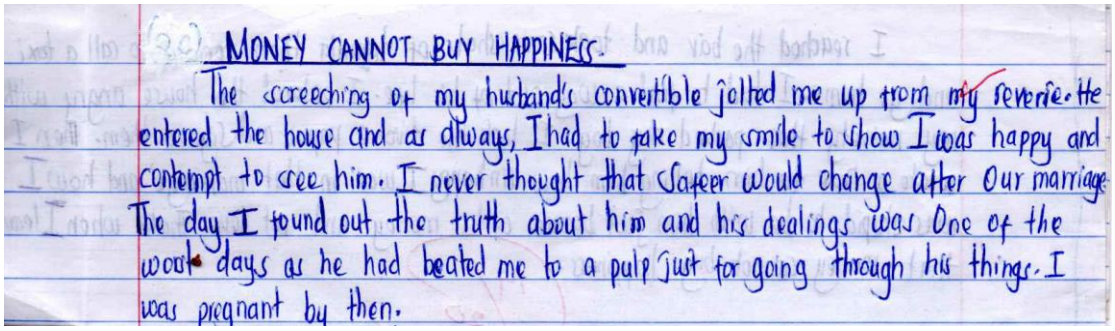
Excerpt 1



Excerpt 2



Excerpt 3


MONEY CANNOT BUY HAPPINESS.

The screeching of my husband's convertible jolted me up from my reverie. He entered the house and as always, I had to take my smile to show I was happy and contempt to see him. I never thought that Sateer would change after our marriage. The day I found out the truth about him and his dealings was one of the worst days as he had beated me to a pulp just for going through his things. I was pregnant by then.

As observed from excerpts 1, 2, and 3 of essays marked by teachers under study, errors were identified by circling, underlining or giving the correct word. However, while errors in excerpts 1 and 2 were identified, some glaring errors were left unidentified in excerpt 3. For instance, at a glance, the word "*contempt*" in the third sentence is an error, and so is the expression "*beated* " in the second last sentence.

4.6.2 Type of comments used by teachers to provide feedback on learners' writing

Besides error identification and correction, teachers also provided students with informational feedback through comments. Literature on teacher written feedback indicates that effective commentary should comprise both positive and constructive comments (Hyland & Hyland 2006; Graham *et al.*, 2016; Tomas *et al.*, 2013) comprising what was done well (praise), what went wrong, and suggestions for improvement. In addition, such comments should be specific, otherwise, they are likely to be confusing and unhelpful (Olsen and Hunnes, 2023; Shute, 2007; Zhang, 2016).

First, to examine the type of teachers' comments the informational feedback was broadly categorized by function into P*raise*, *What Went Wrong*, *Explanation of What*

Went Wrong and Giving S*uggestions for Improvement*. Further, all the comments were examined for *Specificity*. Table 4.14 provides examples an of teachers' comments as categorized in the current study.

Table 4.14: Examples of type of Teachers' Comments by Function and Specificity

Type of comment	Examples	Teacher Giving the Comment
	Great points. Good flow.	A
	A rather good presentation.	G
	Captivating story.	L
	Good work. Keep it up.	Q
Praise	Good use of flashback	Q
	Check your tenses/ check your punctuation/ check your spelling/ check your sentence structures. Do not mix tenses.	A,F,G, H,K, M, T
	Avoid direct translation.	E
	You have not addressed the question.	G
	Your essay lacks the language blending that a discursive essay should have.	I
	Your weaknesses are spellings, punctuation, simplistic ideas, and jerky flow.	L
	Poor way of starting a composition.	N
	Paragraphing.	P
What went wrong	Contradicting.	b

Type of comment	Examples	Teacher Giving the Comment
Explanation of what went wrong	Not attained required length; shorter than 350 words.	k
	The story is very shallow, it does not elicit any feeling.	T
	Several paragraphs are not addressing the topic.	Q
Suggestions for improvement	Give examples for every point.	A
	Work on your handwriting; write bigger letters and write them clearly.	J
	This is an argumentative essay, argue for both positive and negative sides	V
	Include a conclusion	U
specificity	Start all sentences with a capital letter	A
	Good use of flashback	Q
	The topic sentence is not in line with the supporting sentences.	V
	Give examples by using factual information, for instance statistics.	V

As indicated in the table, *Praise* comments were those that pointed out something that was done well. *What went wrong* comments indicated where an error had occurred without explaining exactly what had gone wrong. Most of comments in this category were general directives such as “check your spellings”, check your tenses or “jerky flow” that came at the end of the compositions to direct learners to address the errors that the teachers had identified (see Appendix 7). The category *Explanation of What Went Wrong* was used to cover comments that sought to give a brief explanation of what exactly needed to be addressed. *Suggestions for improvement* comments indicated actions that learners needed to take to move forward in their learning. *Specific* comments were those that provided feedback that was specific enough for a learner to understand the strength or weakness being pinpointed. In contrast, some suggestions were considered general and vague because they were likely to leave a learner at a loss as to what needed to be done.

Secondly, the categorized comments were tallied for frequency of each type per teacher and summarized using percentages. Table 17 presents a distribution and summary of teachers’ comment by function and specificity.

Table 4.15: Distribution and summary of Teachers' Comments by Function and Specificity

Teacher	Total No of Comments made	Praise	Identifies What Went Wrong	Explains What Went Wrong	Gives Suggestions for Improvement	Specificity
		Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq
A	23	11	9	0	3	8
B	15	1	13	1	0	5
C	8	0	7	0	1	5
D	0	0	0	0	0	0
E	9	0	8	0	1	1
F	21	0	12	2	7	7
G	16	4	8	2	2	5
H	25	0	23	2	0	1
I	26	3	15	4	4	6
J	2	0	1	0	1	1
K	21	0	18	1	2	10
L	32	1	31	0	0	2

Teacher	Total No of Comments made	Praise	Identifies What Went Wrong	Explains What Went Wrong	Gives Suggestions for Improvement	Specificity
		Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq
M	21	0	15	1	5	9
N	6	0	2	1	3	6
O	0	0	0	0	0	0
P	14	0	14	0	0	1
Q	26	11	7	0	8	11
R	0	0	0	0	0	0
S	1	0	0	0	1	0
T	27	0	18	3	6	20
U	5	0	5	0	0	0
V	20	0	1	2	17	16
Summary	**318 100%**	**31 9.7%**	**207 65.1%**	**19 6.0%**	**61 19.2%**	**104 32.7%**

From the table the total number of comments made on 198 learners' scripts by the 22 teachers under study was 318. Out of these 65.1% indicated what went wrong without an explanation while only a small percentage of comments (6%) provided an explanation of what went wrong. Most of the comments made were general, as indicated by the relatively small percentage (32.7%) of comments found to be specific. Teachers rarely gave Praise comments as only a small percentage (9.7%) of the comments made indicated that something was done correctly. Further, out of the comments made only 19.2% gave specific suggestions that could be actioned on for improvement.

4.6.3 Focus of Teachers' Comments in Terms of Lower Order Concerns (LOCS) and Higher Order Concerns (HOCS)

Another key element in teacher written feedback is the focus; effective writing is about both meaning and form; thus, teachers should address not only form related concerns, usually referred to as LOCs but also global issues, also called Higher Order Concerns (Wang and Han (2022). HOCs relate to macro-level features of writing, such as content, organization, and developing and supporting an argument while LOCs focus on micro-level features, such as spelling, grammar, vocabulary and punctuation (Sowell, 2020). To establish the focus of teacher written feedback the researcher tallied teachers' comments for what they covered- macro or micro-level features - and how many fell under HOCs as opposed to those falling under LOCs. The data was summarized quantitatively using frequencies and percentages.

Table 4.16: Distribution of Teachers' Comments by Focus on LOCs and HOCs

TR	Comments per Teacher	Content	Org	Idea devt.	Total of HOC	Voc	Gr	Mechanics	Others	Total No. of LOCs
A	23	6	4	2	12	0	10	1	1	11
B	15	2	0	2	4	0	7	2	2	11
C	8	2	1	2	5	0	0	0	3	3
D	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
E	9	0	2	3	5	0	1	2	1	4
F	21	7	2	0	9	1	4	4	3	12
G	16	8	2	1	11	0	0	2	1	5
H	25	0	2	0	2	5	8	9	1	23
I	26	4	9	1	14	0	2	3	7	12
J	2	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
K	21	8	0	3	11	1	3	6	0	10
L	32	1	8	0	9	2	13	6	2	23
M	21	8	0	3	11	2	1	5	0	8
N	6	5	0	1	6	0	0	0	0	0
O	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

TR	Comments per Teacher	Content	Org	Idea devt.	Total of HOC	Voc	Gr	Mechanics	Others	Total No. of LOCs
P	14	0	4	0	4	0	8	2	0	10
Q	26	12	0	7	19	2	1	4	0	7
R	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
S	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
T	27	10	1	13	24	1	1	1	0	3
U	5	1	0	0	1	0	2	2	0	4
V	20	10	5	4	19	0	1	0	0	1
Summary	318 100%	85 26.7%	41 12.9%	45 14.2%	171 53.8%	14 4.4%	64 20.1%	50 15.7%	19 6.0%	147 46.2%

From the table the total number of comments made on learners' scripts by the 22 teachers was 318. Out of these 53.8 % fell under HOCs while 46.2 % fell under LOCs. Out of the 85 comments made on HOCS 26% were on content issues particularly directing learners to either focus on the topic or include more points. Next in terms of percentage were grammar-related comments at 20.1%. Most of comments in this category were directives such as "check your tenses", check subject verb agreement or "vary your sentences", that came at the end of the compositions. During analysis a new category comprising comments that did not fall under the defined categories emerged. The category was labelled as others and mainly included comments based on aspects of style. Nineteen comments representing 6% of the comments fell under this category.

It is worth noting that results on the focus of teachers' comments might not present an accurate general picture because the results indicated a considerable variation in the number of comments made per teacher. For instance, Teachers I, L, Q and T made the most comments with 26, 32, 26 and 27 comments respectively. In contrast, teachers D, O and R did not give any comments, while teacher J, S and U made the fewest with 2, 1 and 5 comments respectively. Noteworthy, most comments focusing on HOCs came from just a few of the teachers.

4.7 Utilization of Feedback Obtained from Students' Writing to Inform Learning in Writing.

The fifth and last objective of the study was: to examine how teachers of English used feedback obtained from students' writing to inform learning in writing. The objective was achieved through questionnaires and teacher focus group discussions. Literature

in formative assessment recognizes that holding learners accountable for acting on assessment feedback is crucial to the success of formative assessment. For example, Nodoushan (2014) notes, a good evaluation includes a specific plan of action that uses assessment data as its rationale. Gibbs and Simpson (2004) advise that to raise the potential benefits of formative assessment, learners should be stimulated to make effective use of the received feedback. It is therefore expected that teachers should have systematic ways of ensuring that learners make effective use of feedback (e.g, OECD, 2013; Zia, Sarfraz, & Mufti, 2019).

When it comes to ensuring that feedback obtained from learners' writing is used to enhance their writing skills, revision is considered an effective strategy for holding learners accountable for incorporating feedback into their texts (Graham et al. (2016). Other systematic ways of handling feedback as proposed by Graham et al. (2016) include analyzing performance data to summarize what learners did well, their areas of difficulty and remedial actions to be taken; tailoring instruction to learners' needs as revealed by assessment information; prioritizing review of feedback to focus on areas of difficulty and using tracking tools to monitor learners' progress over time.

The objective focused on answering the following questions:

a) To what extent do teachers use systematic strategies for ensuring that feedback obtained from students' writing is used to enhance learners' writing skills?
b) To what extent did learners perceive their teachers to be facilitating use of feedback to improve their learning in writing?
c) What challenges did teachers face in provision and use of feedback to improve learners' writing skills?

The results of these areas of focus are presented as follows:

4.7.1 The extent to which teachers used systematic strategies for ensuring Use of feedback

Teachers were asked to indicate whether they used selected feedback strategies for ensuring use of feedback obtained from students' writing. Their responses are summarized in Table 19.

Table 4.17: Teachers' Use of Systematic Ways of Ensuring Use of Feedback on Learners Writing to Inform Learning in Writing.

Strategies of ensuring use of feedback to improve learning in writing	No. and % of Teachers using indicated strategies				TOTAL
	NO	%	YES	%	TOTAL
Explaining meanings of various scoring and grading signs, words and symbols	1	4.55%	21	95.45%	100%
Facilitating revision and resubmission of work after feedback	10	45.45%	12	54.55%	100%
Prioritizing review of feedback to focus on some areas of difficulty	7	31.82%	15	68.18%	100%
Providing individualized remedial activities	18	81.82%	4	18.18%	100%
Making written observations of how learners have performed	8	36.36%	14	63.64%	100%
Keeping progress records to track performance in specific aspects of writing	17	77.27%	5	22.73%	100%
Informing learners when they master a problematic area in their writing	16	72.73%	6	27.27%	100%

The results show that 95.45% teachers took time to explain to learners the meanings of the various scoring and grading signs as a way of helping them to understand what errors they made. A good number of teachers (54.55%) facilitated learners to revise their compositions to incorporate corrections of the errors made. However, a significant percentage of teachers (45.5%) did not require learners to revise their writing after formative feedback. Though 68.18% of the teachers prioritized review of feedback to focus on areas of difficulty, a significant percentage (31.82) did not. A large percentage of teachers (81, 82%) indicated that they did not provide individualized remedial activities.

In terms of making written observation on how learners had performed, 63.64% of the teachers indicated that they did this while 36.36% indicated they did not. Only a small percentage of teachers (22.73%) indicated that they kept progress records to track learners' performance in specific aspects of writing. Further, 72.73% of the teachers indicated that they had no ways of informing learners when they met expectations.

4.7.2 The extent to which learners perceived their teachers to be facilitating use of feedback

The learners were asked to indicate whether their teacher used the indicated strategies in their classrooms. This aimed at corroborating data on teachers' practices. The findings are presented in Table 20 below.

Table 4.18: Learners perceptions on their teachers' use of systematic ways of ensuring use of feedback

Teachers use of strategies to hold learners accountable for using feedback on our writing	No. and % of students				TOTAL
	NO	%	YES	%	TOTAL
Explaining meanings of various scoring and grading signs, words and symbols	21	10.71	175	89.29%	100%
Facilitating revision and resubmission of work after feedback	92	46.46	106	53.53%	100%
Prioritizing review of feedback to focus on some areas of difficulty	65	34,57%	123	65.43%	100%
Provides individualized remedial activities	189	95.46%	9	4.54%	100%

The results presented in Table 2 show an agreement between teachers' responses and learners' perceptions to a very large degree. Both learners and teachers indicated that teachers took time to explain the meanings of the various scoring and grading signs at 89.29% and 95.45% respectively. Similarly, the percentage of teachers who indicated that they facilitated revision and resubmission of work to ensure that learners incorporated given feedback (54.55%), was comparable to the percentage of learners (53.53%) indicating use of revision. On prioritization of review of feedback to address learners' areas of difficulty, 65.43% of learners affirmed this, compared to 68.18% of the teachers. Regarding provision of individualized support, a higher percentage of learners (95.46%), compared to that of teachers (81.82%) indicated that tailored support was not provided. These high percentages identify this as an area of concern.

The convergence of teachers and learners' responses in Table 4.17 and 4.18 indicate the credibility of the results in respect to the extent to which teachers use structured ways to ensure that feedback obtained from learners' writing is used to inform learning in writing.

4.7.3 Challenges Faced by Teachers in Provision and use of Feedback to Improve Learners' Writing Skills

Results of qualitative analysis of teachers' focus group discussions revealed the following as the challenges faced by teachers in provision and use of feedback to improve students' writing skills.

(a) **Large class sizes**: Most of the teachers indicated that they had large classes ranging from 60 to 96 students. They observed this did not allow them to assess their students' compositions as frequently as they wished to. Further, they noted that even though they evaluated their students' writing, it was difficult to do so adequately because the large classes made it difficult to track and monitor learners' progress. One of the teachers said **"**Because of the 100% transition, we...I have had challenges … for example, in my form one class, I have 96 students. Ah, these 96 students, I have given them, like in the first term, I gave them two compositions. The first one I was able to mark. But when you're marking, you cannot go into detail."

(b) **Limited time to offer assistance:** Teachers pointed out that the curriculum was so heavy that it was difficult to find time to assist learners outside class time. The common practice was to assist the very low achievers and the above average learners with an aim of improving the mean results in KCSE. Consequently, the average learners were never really helped to realize their potential; One teacher noted "But as a teacher, like I said, you'll make time for the weaker one and you may not make

enough time for an average performer. So that's why maybe we are not breaking to the excellent grades. The...the ones who are just average they are managing. We... they get lost somewhere in the system."

(c) Poor reading culture among students: Teachers indicated that many students were not interested in reading. Consequently, they lacked adequate exposure of language use and authentic examples of good writing. One of the teachers noted, "Because they are not good readers, becoming good writers is also a problem."

(d) **Low proficiency in English and lack of support across the curriculum:** Teachers indicated that many of their students had a very low proficiency in English – "We are getting students at the secondary school level who need to be taught English as a foreign language- they have no English at all." The challenge was compounded by some teachers who taught various subjects using languages other than English.

(d) **Shortage of teachers and heavy workloads:** Teachers pointed out that they had heavy workloads due to shortage of teachers. This did not allow them to assess learners as often as they thought necessary.

(e) **Inadequate training on marking compositions;** Teachers indicated that inadequate training on evaluating students writing was also a challenge; hence, you would find a composition scoring low marks, yet without any error identification or comments to communicate to learners about their strengths and weaknesses. Certainly, such a response would not help a learner to advance their learning in writing.

4.8 Discussion of the Findings

This section is a discussion of the study findings in relation to teachers' pedagogical practices in formative assessment of learners' writing skills. The discussion is presented based on the five objectives of the study.

4.8.1 Teacher Preparedness for assessing Students' Writing

4.8.1.1 Teachers' Professional Qualifications

The findings indicate that all the teachers who took part in the study were qualified to teach English in Secondary school with (77.27%) having a Bachelor of Education, four (18. 18%) a Master of Education while one (4, 55%) had a diploma in Education. This means that all the teachers underwent an initial pre-service training as part of their preparation for teaching English, thereby writing skills. The implication is that if teachers as a group exhibited inadequacy in their assessment practices, it is probable that a gap in training in formative assessment existed.

4.8.1.2 Preservice Preparation in Formative Assessment of Students' Writing Skills

The results indicated a gap in training in assessing learners' writing. Findings on teacher initial preparedness for assessing students' writing showed that a considerable number of teachers (over 30% in each of the aspects that were investigated) did not feel adequately prepared in crucial skills for assessing students' writing. Percentages of teachers feeling adequately prepared in each of the aspects that were investigated included: Identifying errors (68.18%), correcting errors (68.18%), Commenting on Student Writing (63.63%), Preparing composition marking guides (45.45%), Engaging students in peer assessment (40.91%), Engaging students in self-assessment (40.91%), Using marking guides (54.55%), Ways of tracking student

progress (45.45%), Integrating technology in teaching and assessing students writing (23.81%). This notwithstanding, of concern were the large percentages of teachers feeling inadequately prepared in learner-centred strategies for enhancing students writing such as engaging students in peer and self- assessment (59.09%) and (59.09%) respectively, and in ways of tracking student progress (49.90%). Since such learning strategies have been observed to improve achievement in learning writing skills (Graham et al. 2016), the results suggest that learners were probably disadvantaged by not being adequately facilitated to realize their potential in developing their writing skills.

In addition, the combined percentage of teachers feeling unprepared or minimally prepared in integrating technology in teaching and assessing students' writing was rather high (76.2%). This is of great concern given the emphasis and importance of learning with technology in the 21st century. In view of this, failure to integrate available ICT technologies in learning writing disadvantaged learners since it denied them opportunities to leverage technology for greater learning gains. For instance, learners could be facilitated to use what's up, email and other social media apps to peer assess and act as scaffolds for each other's learning, or they could be engaged in automated scoring to identify shortcomings in their compositions which could serve as a springboard for independent work on their areas of difficulty. Consequently, equipping teachers with adequate ICT skills and encouraging them to explore their use would be helpful. For example, it could reduce their composition marking load by supplementing their efforts and also provide learners with additional and more frequent feedback (Wang and Han, 2022)

4.8.1.3 In-Service Preparation in Assessing Writing Skills

The results indicate that teachers received inadequate preparation outside their initial teacher preparation programmes. From the study, opportunities provided through their employer were minimal while on their own the most common form of opportunities they pursued was personal reading. According to the study, some of the teachers tried to update their knowledge on their own. This indicates a gap in knowledge which the teachers tried to fill. However, as indicated in the study, the efforts to this end were also inadequate probably because of lack of resources. The results indicate that teachers who had undergone training as KCSE Writing examiners had felt more prepared for assessing students' writing. This lends credence to the need for continuing training after college to enhance teacher capabilities.

The results on teacher preparedness agree with Myres (2016) who observes that many teachers are not prepared well to teach writing. Myre also notes that when it comes to assessment of writing it is often assumed that teachers naturally become good assessors, which is usually not the case. As indicated by Koh cited in Wong and Mak (2019), many teachers lack assessment literacy due in part to inadequate training in many pre-service programs. This is evident in the study whereby over 30 percent of the teachers reported feeling inadequately prepared in all the essential skills in assessing students' writing that were investigated in the study.

The results also agree with those of reviewed studies concerning the need to adequately prepare teachers in formative assessment. For instance, Gichuru (2014) found that generally teachers were not well prepared to meet the demands of classroom assessment; nevertheless, those who had attended In-Service training used

information gathered from students to a greater extent to diagnose students learning problems, tailor instruction to students' needs, provide feedback to and to report students' progress. The study recommended that teachers needed to be trained in assessment and that their skills should be updated from time to time for quality learning. Muya (2014) also recommended in service training to better equip teachers of English to teach all the four language skills

4.8.2 Procedures That Teachers Use for Evaluating the Quality of Student Writing

This objective aimed at establishing whether learners were assessed reliably both to have a true picture of their actual ability in relation to set goals and to better understand the specific shortcomings in their writing that they would need to address to improve. The researcher acknowledged that if learners did not realize the shortcomings in their work, it would be difficult to realize their potential in the writing skill. Moreover, if the procedures used did not accurately determine shortcomings in every learner's writing, it would be difficult to assist individual learners to advance their learning in writing. To achieve this objective the researcher gathered information on teachers' choice of tools for evaluating students' writing, teachers' ways of reporting the quality of students' writing and the extent to which they used practices considered effective in evaluating learners' writing.

4.8.2.1 Choice of tools for rating the quality of students' writing

The findings revealed a prevalence for use of generic tools. Notably, teachers used pre-prepared marking guides to a great extent. Such generic tools are inadequate for formative assessment because they do not fulfil a diagnostic purpose (Zhang, 2018). Both the KNEC KCSE marking guide and other prepared marking guides are

prepared for specific purposes that may not reflect the teachers' purpose for formative assessment. For instance, the KCSE Paper 3 marking guide which most teachers used extensively is summative and impressionistic in nature. Formative assessment, however, should serve a diagnostic purpose in such a way that from the assessment the learner can obtain details about the strengths and weaknesses in their written pieces, and be guided on what to do to enhance their writing in the problematic aspects identified through the evaluation. Moreover, a marking guide meant for formative assessment should include details on performance at different levels of proficiency of the specific aspects to be assessed to allow the teacher to not only determine a learner's actual ability but to also objectively provide feedback to individual learners.

These findings agree with other research findings that many teachers use regular generic tools which do not fulfill a diagnostic purpose (Zhang, 2018). Given that diagnosis of what learners can do as well as the areas that need improvement to enhance learning is a key purpose of formative assessment, the results reveal a shortcoming in teachers' practices. According to Santangelo and Graham (2015), while teachers can sometimes use existing rubrics, creating and using their own marking schemes based on specific writing tasks and their learners' abilities is more beneficial. This argument is supported by Brooks (2012), who observes that the evaluation tools used in the classrooms should be developed for the specific tasks that the teacher requires the students to perform and be made to evaluate the traits that the teacher expects to see in their learners' work.

4.8.2.2 Teachers' ways of reporting on the quality of Students Writing

The findings revealed that most of the teachers (95.45%) gave an overall comment and a mark. A matter of concern, however, is that an analysis of learners' scripts revealed that some teachers (18%) only gave a mark without comments (see Appendix 9). In addition, among the teachers who gave marks and comments there existed inconsistencies in that some commented only on some of the compositions and failed to comment on others where obviously a learner would have benefited from some guiding comments. When learners do not obtain adequate information about their strengths as well as their weaknesses, they are at a loss on what they need to do and this may lead to helplessness and apathy (Derham et al. 2021). Moreover, it becomes difficult to hold them accountable for advancing their learning. Schinske and Tanner (2014) observe that learners may not understand exactly what a mark or grade means; therefore, failing to give them informational feedback constituted a gap in reporting performance.

Regarding how teachers typically arrived at a score or grade, the findings based on the teachers' questionnaire revealed that majority of the teachers (68.18%) used analytic rating while 31. 82% used holistic marking by considering all criteria at once. In contrast, 95.45 % of students' scripts that were analyzed were scored holistically - an overall mark was given at the end of each of the compositions and there was no breakdown on learners' performance on the various aspects of writing. It is possible that the discrepancy between what the teachers reported, and the findings of the document analysis may have been occasioned by teachers' susceptibility to respond in what they thought was the best way of responding to learners' writing. Noteworthy, the researcher thought the results obtained from analysis of learners' written

compositions were more credible since teachers marked the compositions as they usually did in their classrooms.

Moreover, holistic reporting was a shortcoming in teachers' formative assessment practices because it only serves to identify a student's overall writing proficiency without providing more specific feedback, which is essential for formative assessment. Bacha (2001) in his study, found that students performed significantly differently in the various components of their writing indicating different proficiency levels in various aspects of their writing. This supports the view that analytic scoring is preferable for formative assessment because it serves as a useful diagnostic tool for determining individual learners' performance in essential aspects of writing such as content, grammar, vocabulary, punctuation and coherence. According to Bacha (ibid), when holistic marking guides are used, essential information about learners' performance is lost. Moreover, analytic reporting is also beneficial for formative assessment because it can serve as a basis for provision of comprehensive feedback to learners; for instance, the teacher can use the descriptors of what performance looks like at different levels of proficiency to show the learner at what level they are performing, pinpoint their strengths and weaknesses and guide on action to be taken in subsequent writing to address the shortcomings pinpointed through the descriptors.

4.8.2.3 Teachers' use of best practice in evaluating students writing

The findings revealed that teachers scored well in the use of some best practices, especially the teacher centred ones, and while there were some deficiencies in these, significant gaps existed in the utilization of some essential practices, mainly the learner centred ones. The practices that most of the teachers reported using to a large or very large extent by percentages included: deciding on aspects of writing to be

evaluated (81%), preparing or deciding on the marking guide to use before assessment (72.73%) and using samples to demonstrate performance at different levels (73. 06%). Conversely, when it came to use of practices that involve learners in their learning of writing, large percentages of teachers reported that they used them to a small extent or not at all in preparing marking guides (86.36%), sharing marking guides with students before assignment (73.72%) and training students in using marking guides (54.55%). Noteworthy, the results reflect the findings on teacher preparedness which revealed that a considerable percentage of teachers felt inadequately prepared in learner-centred strategies for enhancing students writing such as engaging students in peer and self- assessment and in ways of tracking student progress. Therefore, the findings reveal that deficiencies in practice were more glaring where there were gaps in teacher preparation.

It is gratifying to find out that majority of the teachers decided on the aspects of writing that they aimed to assess as it means they thought through the specific traits that they wished to see in their learners' writing. However, the 18.18% that reported doing this only to some extent present a gap. In addition, even though most teachers (72.73%) indicated preparing or deciding on the marking guide to use before assessment, the considerable number of teachers (22.73%) reporting that they did this only to a small extent indicate a gap in determining standards of performance before some of the assessments. The implication is that in some cases learners were not assessed reliably. A similar number of teachers (22.73%) also reported minimally using samples of written pieces to demonstrate performance at different levels. This is a beneficial practice that helps learners to internalise what performance at different levels looks like, which in turn creates awareness of their true ability in relation to excellent performance and encourages goal setting.

Similarly, the considerable number of teachers (41.91%) who reported that they did not develop descriptions of performance for different levels of proficiency or did it only to a small extent (31.82%) is of concern because without doing so, it becomes difficult to objectively and efficiently place a learner within their range of ability. Nodoushan, (2014), citing Hyland (2003) asserts that if a teacher fails to have a clear sense of the full dimensions of performance, ranging from poor or unacceptable to exemplary, he or she will not be able to teach students to perform at the highest levels or help them to adequately evaluate their own performance. Also, this could impact learning negatively because it denies learners opportunities to understand what good and excellent performance looks like and where they are in relation to set goals. This can in turn contribute to failure to set goals and little or inadequate self- directed learning to meet expectations, since in the first place the expectations are not known.

The findings also indicated that the practice of training learners on using marking guides was also underutilized with more than half of the teachers (54%) reporting that they did not train learners on using marking guides at all or did it only to some extent. This means that majority of learners missed out on the benefits of the practice (Liu and Edwards; 2018; Mak and Wong; Munoz et al., 2012) which among others include building their capacity to self and peer assess to enhance their learning.

4.8.3 Teachers' use of Different Types and Modes of Responding to Students Writing

The objective focused on establishing the extent to which teachers used the three types of feedback available for learning in writing, namely teacher, peer and self and the ways in which learners received the feedback. The findings are significant because although feedback has a powerful influence on student achievement, the type of

feedback and the way it is given can impact learning differently (Tomas et al. 2013; Graham et al. 2016).

4.8.3.1 Teachers' Use of Different Types of Providing Feedback on Learners' Writing

The results revealed that teachers used the three types of feedback together to a considerable degree. However, teacher feedback was used more prevalently than peer feedback with more than half (54.55%) of the teachers reporting that they marked all the compositions that they assigned, and 45.45 % reporting that they asked learners to evaluate some of the assigned compositions. In addition, the findings indicated that peer assessment was not commonly used for learning in writing as 18.18% of the teachers reported that they never used it at all, while 50% of them reported using it only occasionally. Likewise, self-assessment was not used as a common strategy for learning in writing with 72.73% of the teachers reporting that they either used it occasionally (54.55%) or not at all (18.18 %).

Although Teachers' written feedback was a prevalent means of responding to learners' writing, the considerable number of learners (32.16%) reporting that their teachers marked their compositions once in a long time or not at all is of concern. This is because according to literature, teacher written feedback plays a crucial role in guiding students to write effectively (Zhang (2016). Further, given that peer and self-assessment were not common strategies of providing feedback, the data suggests that many learners received inadequate guidance on how to enhance their writing. This could hamper development of their writing skills since in an ideal situation the three types of feedback should be used together. This is supported by research findings that show that students' writing improves when teachers and peers provide students with

feedback about their writing, and when learners effectively evaluate the effectiveness of their own writing (Graham et al. 2011).

These results agree with those of Nthiga (2010) who found that peer feedback was hardly used in the classes under study. They are also supported by Fahimi and Rahimi (2015) who observed that assessment of the writing skill is usually done by teachers and that students usually have no idea of their place in their learning of the skill. Accordingly, this was not helpful because students who only relied on teachers to assess their writing, missed the opportunity to perform activities that could help them to enhance their writing and ultimately missed the chance to regulate their learning.

It is understandable that self-assessment was used minimally given that it is a relatively new form of formative assessment (Wong & Mak, 2019). Based on Wong and Mak (2019) teachers may have been unaware of the practice and its benefit or may not have received training on how to apply it in their classrooms. Moreover, with an orientation to teacher centred practices as observed under teachers' procedures in evaluating learners' writing covered in objective two of the current study, it is possible that teachers might have thought that peer and self-assessment would not work effectively in their classes. Moreover, the results of the current study actually suggest that most of the teachers may not have known how to make use of the two strategies since findings on initial teacher preparedness indicated that 59.09% of the teachers felt they were inadequately prepared in engaging students in peer and self-assessment.

The minimal use of peer and self-assessment has implications for learning in writing in the current study because it implies that learners did not get the unique benefits of the two types of feedback described in literature in assessment of writing skills (e,g.

(Mak & Wong, 2018; Mossaoui, 2012; Tomas et al.; Wong & Mak, 2019; Yastibas and Yastibas, 2015). For instance, in a study on the effect of peer feedback on writing anxiety by Yastibas and Yastibas (2015), pre-test and post-test results indicated that peer feedback reduced students writing anxiety. Further, learners considered peer feedback understandable because their peers had a language proficiency similar to their own, and supportive as it provided them with continuous feedback. Additionally, learners perceived that it allowed them to interact and collaborate in a positive way which enabled them to learn from each other. According to Tomas et al. (2013), both past and current research on peer response, continue to show that peer response fosters and supports language behaviour that benefits not only L2 writing development but also second Language acquisition in general. Mossaoui (2012) also supports the importance of peer assessment by observing that teaching experience and research has proven that using peer evaluation in writing instruction is one of the most effective means of helping students to improve on their writing. When it comes to self-assessment its most important benefits are that it allows learners to reflect on their writing and set tangible goals for improvement (Mak & Wong, 2018).

4.8.3.2 Teachers' Use of Modes of Providing Feedback to Learners' Writing

The results revealed that whole class or group face to face discussions were used minimally with only 30.91% of the teachers reporting using them frequently. The rest of the teachers reported using the mode occasionally (50%) or not at all (9.9%). These results agree with Nthiga's (2010) findings that teacher student conferences were hardly used by the classes that she studied. Similarly, one – on- one individualized discussions were not used adequately since only half of the teachers reported using the mode either frequently or very frequently (50%). The other half (50%) of the teachers indicated that they used the strategy occasionally or not at all. Considering

that whole class or group face to face discussions were used minimally and only half of the teachers used one – on- one individualized discussion to a considerable degree, the data suggests that learners received inadequate face to face interactions. Consequently, they were inadvertently disadvantaged since research indicates that face to face interactions are essential because they provide learners with an opportunity to discuss their performance which allows for clarification, negotiation of meaning as well as noticing and scaffolding for content, language and organization (Liu & Edwards, 2018).

The findings revealed underutilization of use of digital resources to provide feedback on learners' writing. Most of the learners (90.95%) reported that their teachers never asked them to use mobile phones or computers to make corrections. On the other hand, while 50% of the teachers indicated that they used mobile phones, the rest reported that they did not. Only 13.64 % and 27.27% of the teachers reported using projectors and computers respectively. Evidently, learners were denied the benefits of computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) which has added new dimensions to responding to student writing. For instance, language classrooms can leverage various ICT technologies and platforms for online response either by the teacher or peers through various technologies and platforms such as email, Google docs, Twitter, What's up, Facebook, and blogs such as www.blogger.com. Noteworthy, failure to facilitate learners to leverage technology for learning is a disservice to them since digital literacy skills have become an integral part of 21st century living.

4.8.4 Analysis of the Type of Written Feedback That Teachers Provide on Students Writing

The fourth objective of the study was: to analyse the type of written feedback that teachers provided on students' writing. In view of this, the researcher analysed teachers' feedback in the dimensions of error identification and correction practices, type of comments and to what extent the comments focused on LOCs and HOCs. According to Kulhavy and Stock (1989, as cited in Shute (2007) effective feedback should be directive; identifying the errors that need to be fixed, and facilitative; giving comments and suggestions to guide students to address weaknesses in their work. In addition, evaluation should focus on both meaning (HOCS) and formal concerns LOCS as they are both essential in good writing.

4.8.4.1 Teachers' error identification and correction styles

Majority of teachers (64%) provided coded feedback by labelling the type of error that had occurred. As indicated, while a considerable number of teachers coded and corrected many of the errors made by their learners, of concern was the equally considerable percentage (36%) of teachers giving Uncoded feedback; consequently, in many learners' compositions there was too much underlining without any indication of what went wrong. This can be confusing especially with learners struggling with grammar and other language issues (Kamberi, 2013) as it was evident in the work of most of the learners under the study. One of the perceived benefits of feedback is improving learning by guiding and enabling learners to address the weaknesses in their writing. However, when learners have no clue of what went wrong, feedback may not only increase their confusion but also promote apathy (Derham et al. 2021). This can hamper the development of their writing skills.

The results further indicated that 55% of the teachers provided indirect feedback by identifying the errors without providing the correct form. The issue of which is the more effective way of providing written feedback, direct or indirect, has been a subject of debate in writing pedagogy for a long time (Zhang, 2016). Recent literature (Wang and Han, 2022) indicates that the debate is still inconclusive. Some researchers believe that indirect feedback provides learners with opportunities to use their existing knowledge to correct the errors themselves, but tends to be more effective in the long term (Bitchener and Ferris, 2012). However, more recent studies, report that it seemed to be more effective to provide direct corrective feedback involving metalinguistic explanations, through which learners' cognitive engagement could also be enhanced (Wang and Han (2022). Ahmad (2012) contributing to the debate, argues that it is worth noting that findings could be influenced by the level of proficiency of the learners and the varying contexts in which English as a language is taught. He recommends that teachers should use both strategies depending on their learners' level of proficiency. This is the view adopted in the current study.

The findings of the study partly corroborate those by Nthiga (2010) which indicated that teachers mostly used Indirect, Uncoded error feedback. Fortunately, in the current study there was more of coded feedback. Nthiga's study was done among form two learners while the current study involved form four learners just a month before their KCSE examination. The current study reveals that the KNEC KCSE Paper 3 Marking Guide which has an elaborate system for coding candidates' errors was prevalently used to evaluate learners' writing. Consequently, it was probable that teachers believed that learners at this level were familiar with the coding system and would therefore understand and address the identified errors. Needless to say, in the 8-4-4 system in which this study is situated, learning is exam oriented and teachers

responding styles at the point of study were more likely to be influenced by expectations for the writing test at KCSE level.

While teachers identified errors variously, of concern was a lack of consistency in error identification; some specified the type of error in some scripts and not others. Also, some scripts received low scores, yet they were very clean with many errors left unidentified. This made it appear as though some teachers were marking the compositions just to satisfy accountability demands- sometimes heads of languages in schools check if learners' writing is marked. These results are corroborated by qualitative data where teachers indicated that sometimes they were unable to provide comprehensive feedback to learners. Notably, failure to identify glaring errors, while giving low scores is a weakness on teachers' practices as this can leave learners frustrated since they are unable to figure out how to advance their learning.

4.8.4.2 Type of comments made by teachers in providing feedback on learners' writing

To examine the type of teachers' comments on the dimension of their effectiveness in helping learners improve their writing, the comments were broadly categorized into *Praise, What went wrong,* E*xplanation of what went wrong* and *Giving suggestions for improvement*. Further, all the comments were examined for specificity. Out of the 318 comments made by the 22 teachers, the study returned the following distribution by percentages: *Praise* (9.7%), *What went wrong (*65.1%), *Explanation of what went wrong* (6%) and *Giving suggestions for improvement* (19.2%). Moreover, out of the 318 comments only 32.7% of them were specific. The results indicate that teachers focused mainly on identifying what went wrong and for the most part did not provide clear explanations to enable learners to understand the weaknesses in their writing.

The data also reveals that not much attention was given to providing strategies for improvement. This does not promote learner engagement in utilizing feedback and may also hamper development of learning in writing.

According to Derham**,** Balloo and Winstone (2021), the manner in which the feedback message is conveyed can generate an emotional response which has the potential to affect student engagement and thus influence on-going development. They also observe that since the way comments are framed potentially influences how learners will interact with them the messages that learners receive should be powerful and succinct (Rand, 2017). Citing Weaver (2006, 379), Winstone and Carless (2020) highlight unhelpful comments as "comments which were too general or vague, lacked guidance, focused on the negative, or were unrelated to assessment criteria".

The results indicated that teachers rarely gave *praise* comments as only a small percentage (9.7%) of the comments made indicated that something was done correctly. This can negatively impact on the development of learners' writing skills since learners need to stay positive to actively engage with feedback. For instance, Pitt and Norton (2017 cited in Derham et al. 2021) argue that learners are inclined to engage more with positively evaluated feedback and disengage from negative comments. Further, Ryan and Henderson (2018) indicate that negatively-phrased comments may lower self-esteem and perceived self-efficacy thereby impacting upon the learners' confidence in their ability. Vangadasamy(2002) argues that praise comments are considered facilitative because learners need to know when they are doing something right. Also, learners report that they feel discouraged when they don't receive positive comments (Ferris, 1995). Given that positive comments facilitate improvement, the results suggest a deficiency in teachers commenting styles that can negatively impact learner achievement in learning writing.

In the current study 65% of the comments identified error had occurred without explaining exactly what had gone wrong. Ideally, effective feedback should clearly communicate learners strengths and weaknesses to motivate and facilitate corrective action (Vangadasamy, 2002), thus comments such as Your weaknesses are: ‘simplistic ideas’, ‘jerky flow’, ‘a Poor way of starting a composition’ or ‘Poor paragraphing’, which where prevalent in the current study, may need some qualifying statement to help the learner understand what needs to be fixed. In any case, the problem exhibited in a learner’s composition indicates that he or she is unaware that an error exists and therefore needs some details to get this across. Commenting on vague and unclear directives, Derham, Balloo and Winstone (2021) argue that Comments that are not understandable may provoke helplessness and apathy which subsequently impacts upon learning.

Data from the current study revealed that suggestions for improvement were scarce, as indicated by the paltry percentage (19.2%) of comments providing strategies for improvement. This is a considerable dent on teachers commenting practices because feedback is most effective when it includes specific suggestions for how to improve future performance (OECD, 2013). A key principle of feedback is that it should usefully inform the student of ways to improve their performance (Winstone and Carless, 2020). Moreover, Scaffolding is about giving appropriate assistance just when it is required (Belland, 2017). This means that thoughtful commenting to reach out to learners and guide them to deal with the problems identified through the feedback is of the essence.

Another finding about teachers commenting practices is the low percentage (32.7%) of comments found to be specific. Notably, most of the comments came at the end of the compositions and were not anchored to the sections that needed to be addressed (see appendix 7 and 8). Often, teachers end comments comprised a series of general directives such as ‘be creative’, be organized. Such comments to a learner who perceives to have done their best may not help him or her to engage with the identified weaknesses since in the first place the learner neither understands what needs to be fixed nor knows how to fix it. These findings agree with those of Sommers (1982) who found that most teachers' comments were not text-specific and could be interchanged or rubber-stamped from text to text. Certainly, to develop appropriate interventions, teachers need to give specific comments that help learners to address the shortcomings in their writing (Shute, 2007; Zhang, 2016). For instance, a review conducted by Shute (2007) on the most powerful and efficient types of formative feedback and the conditions under which different types of feedback help learners to improve their understanding found that feedback is significantly more effective when it is specific and when it provides details of how to improve the answer rather than when it just indicates whether the students’ work is correct or not. The review also indicated that students find feedback that is nonspecific frustrating and are likely to find it unhelpful because it does not provide them with clear and explicit strategies for addressing their areas of difficulty. Further, such feedback was found to reduce motivation to act on it.

4.8.4.3 Focus of teachers' comments in terms of Lower Order Concerns (LOCs) and Higher Order Concerns (HOCs)?

Out of total number of comments made on learners' scripts 53.8 % fell under HOCs while 46.2 % fell under LOCs. Out of the 85 comments made on HOCS 26% were on content issues particularly directing learners to either focus on the topic or include more points. The study's findings contrast with various research findings that reveal that most learners focus on HOCS rather than HOCs. For instance, Nthiga (2010) found that the focus of teacher feedback was mainly on grammar and mechanics of writing which are Lower Order Concerns, while Higher Order Concerns were given less attention. The context of the study may help to explain the discrepancy; some of the weaknesses highlighted in KCSE feedback reports on learners' performance in the writing skills in English are weak paragraphing, poor organization and inability to develop ideas in essays (e.g. KNEC, 2020). Most teachers in Kenya pay attention to information given in the KNEC feedback reports and take the advice given seriously. While Nthiga's study was carried out among Form Two students, the current study was done among Form Four students just a month before their KCSE examination and it is most probable that teachers were using the feedback on the writing task as an opportunity to impress upon learners to pay attention to the areas that had been pinpointed in the KCSE feedback reports. This can also be explained by the fact that most of the comments under study came from only the teachers who made comments. Noteworthy, findings on whether teachers kept a healthy balance between formal and meaning concerns in responding to student writing revealed there was no cause for concern at Form Four level.

4.8.5 Utilisation of Feedback Obtained from Students' Writing to Inform Learning in Writing

The fifth and last objective of the study was: to examine how teachers of English use feedback obtained from students' writing to inform learning in writing. The objective focused on examining the extent to which teachers of English used systematic ways to ensure that feedback obtained from learners' writing was used to facilitate improvement since it has been argued that Learners who do not use feedback on their writing may not improve their writing ability (Parthasarathy, 2014; Zhang, 2016). Feedback serves to enhance learning by producing information that addresses the accuracy of learners' responses as well as errors and misconceptions occurring in their response (Shute, 2007). In addition, as a strategy for learning, feedback informs the learner how he or she can develop in regard to future writing assignments so as to achieve the desired learning outcome (Poulos & Mahony, 2008). Essentially then, it is crucial that learners are stimulated to make effective use of received feedback (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004).

4.8.5.1 The extent to which teachers use systematic strategies for ensuring Use of Feedback

The results indicate that teachers did well in some of the strategies and not in others. For instance, 95.45%of the teachers under study took time to explain to learners the meanings of the various scoring and grading signs as a way of helping them to understand the type of errors they made. This is an important strategy as it is likely to raise the level of action in correcting the identified challenges, especially for learners who are motivated to improve. Also, 68.18% of the teachers prioritized review of feedback to focus on areas of difficulty. This is considered an effective study for

enhancing learning. For instance, according to Santangelo and Graham (2015), there are usually many issues to be addressed at any given time and if students are presented with all of them at once, they are likely to be overwhelmed and discouraged. In addition, correcting every error is often not possible, and there is no evidence to show that it is more helpful (Graham et al. 2016). According to Weigle (2013) the consensus is that teachers should focus on errors that interfere with the comprehension of the message, are frequent, are important for the assigned task or in a particular teaching situation and which the learner is developmentally ready to address. However, of concern is the considerable number of teachers 36.36% who did not prioritise review of feedback.

Majority of the teachers (63. 64%) indicated that they made written observations on how learners performed but of concern is the 36.36% who did not. Student performance data is analyzed to identify areas where students need further instruction. Graham et al. (2016) assert that it is important for a teacher to put in place ways of making sense of performance data by organizing it in a manner that enables him or her to tailor instruction for students both at the whole class and individual levels. They propose that one way of making sense of such data is the use of graphic organizers that list what students did well, their areas of difficulty, and remedial action that should be taken by both the teacher and the learner (Graham *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, the results suggest that a considerable number of teachers skipped a crucial step for using feedback to enhance learning.

Further, results reveal that a considerable number of teachers did not adequately use some pivotal ways of holding students accountable for using feedback on their writing. Of great concern is that 81% of the teachers did not provide individualized

support to learners, 45.45% did not facilitate revision to incorporate feedback, 77.27% did not keep progress records to monitor learners' progress in various aspects of writing and 72.73% did not have a way of informing learners when they mastered a problematic area in their writing. This indicates a significant gap in holding learners accountable for using feedback to improve their writing ability.

Only a small percentage of teachers (22.73%) indicated that they kept progress records to track performance in specific aspects of writing. Formative assessment entails assessing learners to find out how they are progressing towards achievement of expected objectives, goals and standards. Tracking performance is therefore a crucial strategy for offering assistance just where it is needed in line with the principles of scaffolding (Belland, 2017; Gonulal and Loewen, 2018). According to Graham *et al.,* (2016), to determine students' needs teachers can design on demand prompts (writing tasks) that assess learning on specific skills such as sentence structure, mechanics of writing and vocabulary among others and accordingly follow it up with appropriate interventions both for the whole class as well as for individual learners.

Providing feedback to learners when they master a problematic area in their writing is also an important strategy for motivating learners to address their other challenges, yet 72.73% of the teachers indicated that they had no ways of informing learners when they met expectations. The results are in keeping with the current study's findings, teachers rarely gave positive comments. This is contrary to effective scaffolding which entails keeping the learner informed on where they are in relation to set goals to facilitate them move to the next developmental stage.

A significant finding of the study is that learners rarely received individualized support; a higher percentage of learners (95.46%), compared to that of teachers

(81.82%), indicated that tailored support was not provided. These high percentages identify this as an area of concern. Individualized support is necessary for supporting learners to do what they would not be able to do on their own by providing customised types of assistance to overcome specific shortcomings in their written texts (Graham *et al.*, 2016). Hence, lack of individualised support to such a large extent indicates a deficiency in supporting learners to advance their writing skills.

Revision, another powerful strategy for holding learners accountable for using feedback to improve their writing did not receive as much attention as it should. Study results indicated that 45.45% of the teachers did not facilitate revision to incorporate feedback. Literature indicates that without accountability for revising students may not use feedback at all (Graham *et al.*, 2016). Graham et al (Ibid) observe that the revising approach to writing pedagogy allows teachers to review a first draft of a student's assignment, use error analysis to identify areas that need improvement, provide feedback and then assign a subsequent draft which they can review to see if learners have improved in the skill being followed up. Hence, revising is a powerful tool for ensuring that students act on feedback. Bitchener & Ferris, 2012 highlight revision as a useful strategy for improving writing since it allows teachers to focus on different types of concerns on different stages of a draft.

4.8.5.2 The extent to which learners perceived their teachers to be facilitating use of feedback to improve their learning in writing

Results on learners' perceptions on their teachers' use of systematic ways of ensuring use of feedback to help them improve on their writing indicated convergence on all the strategies that were investigated. This convergence affirms the credibility of the

results in respect to the extent to which teachers use structured ways to ensure that feedback obtained from learners' writing is used to inform learning in writing.

4.8.5.3 Challenges Faced by Teachers in Provision and use of Feedback to Improve Learners' Writing Skills

Teachers indicated that they were not able to effectively leverage formative assessment of writing to enhance learners' writing owing to some serious challenges that they faced in school. These included: limited time to interact with learners due to heavy curriculum demands, large class sizes and heavy workloads occasioned by teacher shortages, a poor reading culture among students, low proficiency in English, inadequate support across the curriculum, and inadequate teacher training on marking compositions. Results of qualitative analysis of teachers' focus group discussions revealed the following as the challenges faced by teachers in provision and use of feedback to improve students' writing skills.

(a) **Large class sizes**: Most of the teachers indicated that they had large classes ranging from 60 to 96 students. They observed this did not allow them to assess their students' compositions as frequently as they wished to. Further, they noted that even though they evaluated their students' writing, it was difficult to do so adequately because the large classes made it difficult to track and monitor learners' progress. One of the teachers said **"**Because of the 100% transition, we...I have had challenges … for example, in my form one class, I have 96 students. Ah, these 96 students, I have given them, like in the first term, I gave them two compositions. The first one I was able to mark. But when you're marking, you cannot go into detail."

(b) **Limited time to offer assistance:** Teachers pointed out that the curriculum was so heavy that it was difficult to find time to assist learners outside class time. The

common practice was to assist the very low achievers and the above average learners with an aim of improving the mean results in KCSE. Consequently, the average learners were never really helped to realize their potential; One teacher noted "But as a teacher, like I said, you'll make time for the weaker one and you may not make enough time for an average performer. So that's why maybe we are not breaking to the excellent grades. The...the ones who are just average they are managing. We... they get lost somewhere in the system."

(c) Poor reading culture among students: Teachers indicated that many students were not interested in reading. Consequently, they lacked adequate exposure of language use and authentic examples of good writing. One of the teachers noted, "Because they are not good readers, becoming good writers is also a problem."

(d) **Low proficiency in English and lack of support across the curriculum:** Teachers indicated that many of their students had a very low proficiency in English – "We are getting students at the secondary school level who need to be taught English as a foreign language- they have no English at all." The challenge was compounded by some teachers who taught various subjects using languages other than English.

(d) **Shortage of teachers and heavy workloads:** Teachers pointed out that they had heavy workloads due to shortage of teachers. This did not allow them to assess learners as often as they thought necessary.

(e) **Inadequate training on marking compositions;** Teachers indicated that inadequate training on evaluating students writing was also a challenge; hence, you would find a composition scoring low marks, yet without any error identification or comments to communicate to learners about their strengths and weaknesses.

Certainly, such a response would not help a learner to address the shortcomings in their writing.

4.8.6 Discussion of Findings Based on the Conceptual Framework

According to the Social Cultural Theory (SCT) that frames this study, mediation is central to learning, social interactions are how the mediation is executed, formative assessment is a prerequisite for mediation and learning occurs within a primary activity space which Vygotsky referred to as the ZPD. Further, the teacher is the expert who guides the learner to progress through their ZPD. The assistance that the learner requires to move through their ZPD is referred to as scaffolding. This is a mediating strategy that entails giving assistance to a learner depending on his or her specific needs. According to Belland (2017) and Gonulal and Loewen (2018), the most important characteristics of scaffolding are collaboration, contingency, inter-subjectivity, fading and transfer of responsibility; collaboration entails social interaction to support learning, contingency means that scaffolding should be provided only when needed and should be adjusted to the students' level of understanding, fading means that the support provided to the student should be withdrawn gradually as he or she becomes competent in the task at hand and inter-subjectivity is, the understanding of what successful performance of the target task looks like so that the learner can know when the task is accomplished successfully and shift to higher goals. These conceptions inform the discussion of the findings in light of SCT.

Based on the SCT's view of learning, for formative assessment to be effective, teachers should be adequately equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to accord them expert status for guiding learning. The findings on teacher initial

preparedness for assessing learners' writing indicated that a considerable number of teachers did not feel adequately prepared in crucial skills for assessing writing. In addition, opportunities for in-service training were inadequate, hence the teachers received minimal training to fill the gaps in initial training and update their skill in response to changing demands in pedagogy. Further findings indicated that shortcomings in teachers' preparedness were reflected in their practices whereby they relied more on teacher centred strategies and minimally used digital resources to facilitate learning. Therefore, lack of expertise in crucial aspects of assessing learners writing denied learners opportunities to receive adequate guidance. This could be a contributing factor in underachievement in learning in writing.

According to the Social Cultural Theory learning occurs when the learner receives appropriate types of assistance to overcome specific problems displayed in his or her performance. In view of this, learners should be assessed reliably and frequently to know what assistance they need and to monitor their progress towards desired goals. Additionally, assessment tools should be able to obtain adequate details about a learner's performance to allow for relevant remediation actions. Results on procedures for evaluating the quality of learners' writing revealed various shortcomings in teachers' practices. Firstly, there was a preference for the use of generic evaluative tools that do not adequately serve a diagnostic purpose as per the requirements of formative assessment. Secondly, the evaluative tools used did not provide both the learner and the teacher with adequate detail to plan subsequent learning and remediation. Thirdly, best practices in evaluating learners writing to improve learning gains were underutilised. With these failings it not possible for learners to maximise learning gains. This could also contribute to inadequate development of writing skills among the learners.

SCT posits that social interaction is the basis of learning. Feedback which is a powerful scaffold for student writing can be provided through possible social interaction which may include teacher to a whole class, teacher to an individual student, peers working with each other in groups or in pairs, self-assessment based on internalised strategies and use of digital resources. To this end, the findings of the study revealed preference for teacher feedback and low use of peer and self-assessment. This notwithstanding, a considerable number of learners reported that their teachers marked their compositions once in a long time or not at all. Findings also revealed underutilisation of whole class discussions, individual face to face interactions and digital resources as a way of providing feedback on learners' writing. Furthermore, data from teacher focus group discussions revealed that teachers were unable to provide learners with comprehensive feedback on a regular basis. Undoubtedly, with the limited interactions for scaffolding learning, it is no wonder that learners did not meet expectations in learning in writing.

Teacher written feedback which entails identifying inaccuracies in learners' writing and giving comments and suggestions to guide them to address pinpointed weaknesses is a crucial scaffolding process on learners' writing. However, the kind of feedback given can determine the extent to which it is used to inform learning (Derham, Balloo and Winstone , 2021; Winstone and Carless, 2020). The findings revealed that 64% of the teachers provided coded error feedback and that slightly more than half of them provided the correct forms where inaccuracies had occurred. Nevertheless, there were learners who received low scores without much indication of the weaknesses in their writing. Also uncoded error identification was of concern especially for a considerable number of struggling learners who would find it difficult to make sense of the feedback. Regarding commenting on learners' writing, the

findings revealed that teachers mostly gave vague comments that did not specify what was amiss, scarcely gave positive comments, and did not adequately provide strategies for improvement. Thus, teachers' comments were considerably unhelpful when it came to informing and motivating learner engagement for further development of learners writing. Commenting on scaffolding, Mcleod (2019) observes that scaffolding should involve helpful interaction to support a learner by simplifying a task, motivating the learner, highlighting errors and giving models that can be imitated. Unfortunately, teachers written feedback did not adequately possess the said characteristics. This suggests that learners received inadequate guidance that could limit them from realizing their potential in writing skills.

A social cultural theory presupposes that information received from students' assessment will be used to tailor assistance to learners' needs. It also presupposes that teachers will carefully monitor learners' progress to know what scaffolds to provide and when. The study's findings on strategies that teachers employed to ensure that feedback was used to maximise students' learning gains also revealed that learners were not adequately stimulated to make effective use of feedback. Of great concern is that 81% of the teachers did not provide individualized support to learners, 45.45% did not facilitate revision to incorporate feedback, 77.27% did not keep progress records to monitor learners' progress in various aspects of writing and 72.73% did not have a way of informing learners when they mastered a problematic area in their writing. This indicates that many learners were not held accountable for using feedback to improve their writing ability. It is worth noting that: (a) individualized support is necessary for supporting learners to do what they would not be able to do on their own, (b) tracking learners performance keeps in sight what a learner can and cannot do thereby allowing appropriate scaffolding when required, (c) revision gives

learners a chance to internalize new knowledge and (d) learners need to be encouraged along the way by being informed when they meet goals. Therefore, in line with SCT learners missed out on essential strategies. This could also contribute to underachievement.

SCT places learners at the centre of learning. The teacher as an expert helps the learner to move from actual development level where he or she needs assistance to complete a task to the potential development level where they can perform the task by themselves. In this journey the learner is expected to take responsibility for their own learning with teacher support being withdrawn gradually as he or she becomes competent in the task. The findings of the study indicated an orientation to teacher centred practices. For instance, some learner centred strategies that are known to enhance learners' writing such as involving learners in preparation of marking guides, sharing marking guides with learners before assigned tasks, training learners in peer and self-assessment, involving learners in peer and self-assessment, monitoring learners progress towards the desired goal and individualised support were underutilised. In addition, the study's findings indicated that teachers hardly gave praise comments or informed learners when a task had been completed successfully, practices that could motivate them to set new goals to advance their learning. In view of this, learners missed out on various opportunities for not only internalizing qualities of good writing but also for building capacity in self-directed learning. This could hamper development towards desired goals.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This Chapter presents the summary of findings, conclusions of the study, recommendations and suggestions for further research. The summary of findings is based on the five study objectives which were to: assess teachers' preparedness for formative assessment of student writing, explore the procedures that teachers used for evaluating the quality of student writing, investigate the types and modes of providing feedback to students' writing that teachers used, analyse the type of written feedback that teachers provided on students writing, and to examine how teachers of English used feedback obtained from students' writing to inform learning in writing.

5.2 Summary of the Findings

The Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) yearly feedback reports show perpetual learner underachievement in English writing skills in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). This gives circumstantial evidence that there are challenges in the teaching of writing skills. Based on this, the researcher sought to investigate if there were deficiencies in teachers of English pedagogical practices in formative assessment that could be addressed to enhance learning gains in the essential skill. Focused on this, the study sought to: assess teachers' preparedness for formative assessment of the writing skill, explore the procedures teachers used for evaluating the quality of student writing, investigate the types and modes of providing feedback that teachers used, analyse the type of written feedback that teachers provided on students' written texts and find out how teachers ensured that feedback

obtained from students' writing was used to inform learning in writing skills. The findings revealed various shortcomings which can significantly impact development of writing skills among learners. This has implications for both language teacher preparation and development of learning and teaching strategies in formative assessment of writing skills to improve learning in writing.

The study investigated the kinds of preparation for assessing writing Kenyan secondary school teachers of English receive during their pre-service training and the provisions available for them to keep abreast with current trends in writing pedagogy with regards to assessing writing. The results indicate a gap in training in assessing learners' writing. All the teachers who participated in the study were qualified to teach English in secondary school. However, the findings on teacher initial preparedness for assessing learners' writing indicated that a considerable number of teachers did not feel adequately prepared in crucial skills for assessing writing. Of concern were the large percentages of teachers feeling inadequately prepared in learner- centred strategies for enhancing students writing. In addition, the study revealed that opportunities for in-service training were inadequate, hence the teachers under study received minimal training after their initial teacher preparation programmes. The results also indicated that teachers who had undergone some training in assessing KCSE, writing assessments, felt more prepared for assessing classroom writing, thereby supporting the importance of continual teacher development opportunities. Another significant finding was that the deficiencies in teachers' practices were more glaring in the strategies in which teachers perceived they were inadequately prepared in in their preservice training.

The study sought to explore the procedures teachers used for evaluating the quality of student writing. The findings revealed a prevalence for use of generic tools which do

not adequately serve the purpose of formative assessment. Learners' scripts were mainly scored holistically. Further, reporting on learners' performance was largely impressionistic and without adequate details to inform subsequent development. When it came to the use of best practices in evaluating learners' writing, most of the teachers did well in using teacher centred strategies such as deciding on the aspects to be evaluated and preparing for scoring. However, learner centred strategies such as involving learners in preparing marking guides, sharing marking guides with learners and training learners in using marking guides to self or peer-assess were underutilized. Noteworthy, the results also indicated gaps in in determining standards of performance before some of the assessments; a considerable number of teachers did not plan how they would score assigned compositions while many teachers reported that they did not establish descriptions of performance at different levels of proficiency. Considering these findings, the results indicated that in some cases learners were not assessed reliably enough to know their actual ability in relation to set goals and that they did not receive adequate information about the shortcomings in their writing to maximize remediation. This raises issues of accountability in promoting development of learners' writing skills.

The study sought to establish the extent to which teachers used the three types of feedback available for learning in writing, namely teacher, peer and self and the ways in which learners received the feedback. The results revealed some shortcomings that could negatively impact on learners' development of writing skills. The three types of feedback were used together; however, teacher feedback was used more prevalently than peer and self-assessment. Further findings revealed that peer and self-assessment were not common strategies for learning in writing as most of the teachers reported using them either occasionally or not at all. Moreover, although teacher written

feedback was the prevalent means of responding to learners' writing, a considerable number of learners reported that their teachers marked their compositions once in a long time or not at all. Given that peer and self-assessment were not commonly used, these results reveal that such learners received inadequate guidance on how to enhance their writing. This could hamper the development of their writing skills since in practice they were denied opportunities to address the shortcomings in their writing. Further, qualitative data revealed that teachers were unable to provide learners with comprehensive feedback on a regular basis due to heavy workloads and large classes. It is therefore quite unfortunate that they did not facilitate learners to cultivate autonomy for self and peer assessment to supplement their efforts.

Further, the results revealed underutilization of the different modes of feedback that were studied; more than half of the teachers reported using whole class discussions occasionally or not at all, while only half of the teachers reported using individualized face-to-face discussions either frequently or very frequently. The results also indicated that the teachers under study were hardly leveraging technology in their writing classrooms - a probable consequence of their being inadequately prepared on the use of digital devices as indicated by study's findings'. The data therefore suggests that learners received inadequate social interactions to facilitate scaffolding on their writing.

The study sought to analyse the type of written feedback that teachers provided on learners writing with a focus on error identification styles, type of comments that teachers made on learners writing and the focus of teachers' comments in terms of form related concerns (LOCs) and meaning or global concerns (HOCs). Again, results indicated significant weaknesses in teachers' practices. The findings revealed that teachers identified learners' errors variously but for the most part did not provide

learners with adequate detail to facilitate them to address the shortfalls in their compositions. More than half of the teachers under study prevalently gave Coded Indirect feedback. Nevertheless, a big number of learners' scripts had a lot of underlining and circling without any indication of what went wrong. This can be confusing and frustrating, especially for struggling learners who are unable to figure out the weaknesses in their writing. Further findings revealed that some scripts that received low scores were very clean with many errors left unidentified. This was a weakness in error identification because effective feedback should identify the inaccuracies in a learner's writing to raise consciousness of the gaps in their learning that should be addressed for them to progress towards desired goals.

The findings indicate that commenting on learners' writing was mainly done poorly because most of the comments made by teachers did not promote learner engagement in utilizing feedback. The results indicate that teachers focused mainly on identifying what went wrong and mostly failed to provide clear explanations to enable learners to understand the problems in their writing. The data also reveals that not much attention was given to providing strategies for improvement. Also, teachers rarely gave *praise* comments. Additionally, the results revealed that most of the comments made by teachers were not specific. This is a considerable dent on teachers' commenting practices because feedback is most effective when it includes specific suggestions for remediation.

Concerning the focus of teachers' comments, the results indicated that most of the comments made focused on HOCS. This contrasts with various research findings that reveal that most teachers focus on HOCS rather than HOCs. Nevertheless, the discrepancy could be attributed to the context of the study; the participants were Form Four students, just a month before the KCSE examinations and the teachers were most

likely focusing on dealing with the issues of weak paragraphing, poor organization and inability to develop ideas in essays which had been highlighted in previous KCSE feedback reports. Also, this is highly probable given the highly examination-oriented teaching associated with the 8-4-4 system in Kenya.

The study also sought to examine how teachers of English used feedback obtained from students' writing with a focus on the extent to which teachers of English used systematic ways to ensure that feedback obtained from learners' writing was used to inform learning in writing. The findings revealed that crucial strategies for holding students accountable for using feedback were used to a small degree. More specifically, the results indicated that: (a) most of the teachers did not provide learners with individualized support, (b) revision to incorporate feedback was not required by a considerable number of the teachers under study, (c) most of the teachers did not keep progress records to monitor learners' progress in different aspects of writing and (e) most of the teachers did not have a way of informing learners when they mastered a problematic area in their writing. The implication is that most of the learners were in sufficiently held accountable for using feedback to improve their writing ability.

Qualitative data from the focus group discussions revealed that Teachers were not able to effectively use formative assessment of writing to enhance learners' writing owing to some serious challenges that they faced in school. These included: limited time to interact with learners due to heavy curriculum demands, large class sizes and heavy workloads occasioned by teacher shortages, a poor reading culture among students, low proficiency in English, inadequate support across the curriculum, and inadequate teacher training on marking compositions.

Overall, the investigations reveal gaps that can significantly limit learner achievement in writing. These findings are significant because they have practical implications for limiting barriers to effective development of writing skills among secondary school learners. The study also reveals challenges that hamper teachers' efforts in assessing learners' writing which could be insightful for educators and policy makers concerned with curriculum development and implementation, teacher preparation and development, recruitment of teachers, and quality assurance measures to hold teachers accountable for using effective strategies for promoting quality in education.

5.3 Conclusion

As indicated by this study's results, the news on teachers' utilization of pedagogical practices in formative assessment for the development of students' writing skills is not good; based on the results, their practices reflected evidence-based ways to a limited degree. According to the findings, the procedures used for evaluating and reporting on the quality of learners' writing did not adequately serve a diagnostic purpose as per the demands of formative assessment. Teacher feedback was prevalently used while peer and self-assessment, face-to face discussions and use of digital devices as a means of feedback provision were underutilised. Further, to a considerable degree teachers' written feedback did not include adequate detail to prompt sufficient learner engagement and remediation. Also, teachers admitted that it was difficult to provide learners with comprehensive feedback due to high curriculum demands and shortage of teachers.

Of concern were gaps in reliability in determining learners 'ability, underutilisation of learner centred strategies in evaluating the quality of learners writing, feedback provision practices that did not offer learners adequate opportunities to engage with

feedback for further development of their writing skills and inadequate use of evidence-based strategies of ensuring that feedback was used to inform learning in writing.

All findings considered, teachers' practices displayed shortcomings that can significantly hamper development of learners' writing skills. Notably, the results suggest that to deal with the perpetual underachievement in writing skills in English at KCSE, it is necessary to adequately equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations.

5.4.1 Recommendations on teacher preparedness

The study revealed gaps in teachers' preparedness in crucial aspects of formative assessment. This suggests that teachers should be well equipped with comprehensive skills for assessing learners writing. This is particularly necessary because as observed in the study, formative assessment of learners' writing requires a combination of complex strategies that need to be learned. The findings also support the need for continual retooling to fill in any gaps in initial training and to keep teachers abreast of any relevant developments in pedagogy. Moreover, retooling should be structured in a way that provides opportunities for all teachers, not just a selected few, and considers the gaps arising from shifting paradigms in pedagogy. The specific recommendations are given below.

a). The Ministry of Education should ensure that relevant Pre-service teacher education curriculums are reviewed to equip teachers with adequate assessment

literacy to effectively implement educational goals as per the demands of the subjects in which they are trained.

b). The Ministry of education needs to reenergize efforts in retooling teachers to comprehensively build teachers capacity in all aspects of assessment that are necessary for them to effectively undertake formative assessments.

c). Educational stakeholders and partners can use the findings of this study to mount intervention measures targeting formative assessment of writing to limit the observed barriers in improving learners' writing.

d). KICD should make efforts to approve English textbooks that offer teachers adequate guidance in formative assessment of all the four language skills.

5.4.2 Recommendations on evaluating the quality of learners' writing

The primary goal of classroom-based assessment of student writing is to make accurate inferences about student performance and progress to decide on how they should be helped and to plan subsequent instruction for remediation and further development. Accordingly, the procedures for evaluating the quality of students' written work should do so reliably and validly. If this does not happen, it becomes difficult to determine what scaffolds the learner exactly needs. In addition, if such procedures do not provide adequate detail on a student's performance, it becomes difficult for both the teacher and the learner to act on feedback for further development. In relation to this, the study offers the following recommendations.

a). Teachers should use evaluative tools that reliably diagnose learners' performance and provide adequate detail about the strengths and weaknesses in their writing to effectively monitor their progress and provide appropriate assistance as and when required.

b). Teachers should use evidence-based strategies such as involving learners in preparing and using marking guides to self and peer- assess. Such strategies put the learner at the centre of their learning, help them to internalise what good and excellent performance in the various writing skills looks like, enable goal setting and serve to motivate action towards achievement of desired goals.

c) Schools should put in place mechanisms for ensuring that learners are assessed reliably, given meaningful feedback that can be used to inform subsequent learning and held accountable for using feedback obtained on their writing to advance their learning.

5.4.3 Recommendations on teachers' feedback provision practices

While evaluation of the quality of learners' writing determines what a learner can do in relation to set goals, feedback suggests the actions that a learner should take to advance their learning. This study recommends that:

(i) Teachers need to review their approaches to engage learners more in learner centred strategies. For instance, they need to recognize the potential benefits of self and peer assessment and train learners to use the two strategies regularly. This is crucial for helping learners to not only cultivate characteristics of self-regulated learning, but also to build their capacity to provide themselves with additional regular feedback especially where teachers are unable to do so due to heavy workloads and other constraints.

(ii) Teachers should leverage technology as it holds potential for easing their load while still enabling learners to advance in their learning. For

instance, they can use digital devices to support learning through automated error identification and appropriate social interactions afforded by platforms such as email, Google docs, Twitter, What's up, Facebook, and relevant blogs, all of which can be used for providing extra informational feedback and individualized scaffolding.

(iii) Teachers should provide learners with comprehensive, meaningful feedback to assist learners to advance their learning. All learners need to know the weaknesses in their writing in a way that suits their needs. Regarding commenting on learners' writing, teachers need to review their commenting to give more of comments that promote and motivate learner engagement to address identified shortcomings. Reading and evaluating learners' writing is labour intensive and time consuming; hence, it is crucial to reap full benefits from it by thoughtful commenting that clearly facilitates learners to not only understand the issues that they need to address but also provides adequate and specific strategies for improvement.

(iv) To raise the benefits of the feedback, there is need to link assessments with accountability measures to ensure both teachers and learners are held accountable to high standards of performance. Teachers therefore need to make use of evidence-based ways such as facilitating revision of compositions to reflect given feedback, tracking learners' performance in different aspects of their writing and provision of tailored support to address identified problematic issues. Also, schools should put in place mechanisms for ensuring that teachers hold learners

accountable for using feedback obtained from writing assessments to improve their skills.

(v) Findings of the current study revealed that heavy workloads and shortage of teachers hampered provision of comprehensive feedback and tailored support. Given the crucial role played by writing in and out of school, The Ministry of education through the TSC should make deliberate efforts to employ adequate teachers of English to meet the demands of teaching all the language skills effectively.

5.5 Areas for Further Research

In view of the limitations and delimitations of the study, the following recommendations for further research are made.

(i) The current study focused on secondary school teachers in the 8-4-4 system that is currently being phased out. The new competence-based curriculum that is currently being implemented recommends more of formative assessment and use of learner centred strategies. A similar study involving teachers in primary and junior school should be carried out to find out how well teachers are prepared to meet the demands of teaching and assessing writing skills within the framework.

(ii) There is a need to carry out experimental studies to find out the effectiveness of evidence-based practices in evaluating the quality of learners' writing proposed in the study including the effectiveness of peer and self-feedback and use of digital resources in development of learners writing skills.

(iii) This study used circumstantial evidence of problems in learning in writing as a basis for examining teachers' pedagogical practices of formative assessment to develop learners' writing skills. A study that correlates teachers' pedagogical

practices and learners' actual performance would be helpful in building a better understanding of the phenomenon.

(iv) The current study targeted a small number of teachers in Nairobi County. A similar study involving a larger population of teachers drawn from diverse counties could be carried out.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: INFORMED CONSENT

Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Media,
Moi University
P.O Box 3900
Eldoret

Dear Participant,

Re: Participation in this Study

I am a post graduate student pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy Degree programme in the Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Media, Moi University. I am currently conducting research on **"Teachers of English Utilization of Pedagogical Practices in Formative Assessment for the Development of Students' Writing Skills in selected secondary schools in Kenya"**. I kindly request you to participate in this study. Your response to the items in the questionnaire will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will not be used for any other purposes except this study. You may also request the researcher to inform you about the findings of this study.

Thank you very much for accepting to participate in this study. Please sign in the space provided on this letter if you accept to be a respondent in this study.

Yours faithfully,

Ngumbao Rachel Mawia Kitungu.

Participants Signature: ----------

Date: ----------

APPENDIX II: TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Colleague,

This questionnaire is purely meant for academic research.

The purpose of this research is to gain insights on how teachers assess students' writing skills and how well they are prepared to meet the demand of helping students become effective writers. You are kindly requested to respond to all the questions as truthfully as you can.

Please note that your responses to this questionnaire are important and invaluable in helping to identify ways in which stakeholders can work together to improve students' outcomes in writing.

Kindly note:

i. Do not write your name nor that of your school in this questionnaire as these will not be used in any report or presentation.
ii. There are no foreseen risks to participating in this study.
iii. There are no benefits to you other than contributing to knowledge that could inform necessary interventions for improving students' writing.
iv. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study if you wish to.

PART 1

Preparedness For Assessing Student Writing

1. What is your highest professional qualification?

SI/Diploma [(1)]

PGDE [(2)]

B.Ed. [(3)]

M.Ed. [(4)]

PhD [(5)]

Other (specify)

_____

_____

_____

2. Based on your pre-service training rate how well you were prepared in the following areas in assessing writing.

Tick as appropriate

Factors	Unprepared [(1)]	Minimally Prepared [(2)]	Don't know [(3)]	Adequately Prepared [(4)]	Very well prepared [(5)]
Identifying errors in student writing					
Correcting errors in student writing					
Commenting on studen writing					
Preparing composition marking guides.					
Engaging students in pe assessment (students working in pairs or groups to assess certain aspects of their writing such as spelling, punctuation, etc. using guidelines provided by the teacher)					
Engaging students in se assessment (a student working on their own te assess certain aspects o their writing based on guidelines provided by the teacher)					
Using marking guides t determine the quality o students' writing.					
Ways of tracking stude progress.					
Integrating technology teaching writing.					

3. How many times have you attended in-service training (on teaching writing) arranged by your school since 2017?

None [(1)]

Once [(2)]

Twice [(3)]

Other (Specify) [(4)]

_____

_____

4. Which of the following types of preparation in assessing writing have you pursued on your own since college?

Workshops [(1)]

Conferences [(2)]

Personal reading [(3)]

Other (specify) [(4)] _____

_____

5. (a) Do you belong to any English Language teachers' group?

Yes [(1)] No [(2)]

5(b) If yes to 5(a), what type of activities do you engage in?

_____

_____

6 (a) Are you an examiner for KCSE English paper 3?

Yes [(1)] No [(2)]

b) If yes, to 6(a) briefly explain what value this has added to teaching and learning writing skills.

_____

_____

PART 2

Types and Modes of Responding to Student Writing
How do you typically respond to student writing?

(Tick one choice)

I mark all the compositions that I assign students. [(1)]

I ask students to evaluate some of their writing. [(2)]

How often do you undertake the following activities in your writing lessons?

Factors	Very Frequently [(4)]	Frequently [(3)]	Occasionally [(2)]	Never [(1)]
Mark the compositions that I assign to students.				
Place students in pairs or in groups to react and critique each other's writing (peer assessment)				
Ask students to evaluate some aspects of their own writing by themselves (self-assessment)				
Use whole Class or small group face to face discussions to address students' errors.				
Use one-on-one individual student discussion to address individual progress and writing problems.				

a) Do you use any digital devices such as mobile phones and computers to enhance student writing?

Yes [(1)] No [(2)]

If yes in 3(a), briefly indicate which ones you use and what you use them for.

_____

PART 3

Procedures for Evaluating Student Writing
Do you plan how you will score every writing assignment you give students?

Yes [(1)] No [(2)]

Which of the following describes how you score student writing?

An overall mark and comments. [(1)]

An overall grade (e.g A, B e.t.c) and comments. [(2)]

Comments only (no grade or mark). [(3)]

Other (specify) [(4)]

_____

To what extent do you use the following tools to rate the quality of your students' writing.

(Tick as appropriate).

Evaluation tools	Very Large Extent [(4)]	Large Extent [(3)]	Some Extent [(2)]	Never [(1)]
The KNEC KCSE Paper 3 marking scheme for evaluating creative writing and essays based on set texts?				
Pre-prepared marking guides (e.g. rubrics/ checklists/ marking schemes) from the internet or elsewhere.				
Own prepared marking guides				

_____

Which of the following describes how you typically award creative essays?

(Tick one choice).

I assign an overall impressionistic mark based on a

Student's overall ability. [(1)]

I rate specific aspects of writing (e.g. grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, organization, idea development and content) individually then add up the marks for each to obtain an overall score.

[(2)]

Indicate to what extent you undertake the following activities in preparation for evaluating the quality of students' compositions.

Preparation and Use of Assessment Tools	A very large extent [(4)]	Large Extent [(3)]	Some Extent [(2)]	Not at all [(1)]
Before giving a writing assignment, I decide on the aspects of writing that I want to evaluate (e.g. grammar, vocabulary, spelling, paragraphing, organization, development of ideas and content etc.)				
I prepare a marking guide on the aspects of writing that I want to assess and decide on a scale with different levels of performance (e.g. Very good, good, fair etc.)to reflect different learner abilities				
I develop clear descriptions of what performance looks like at each level of performance to enable me to easily place students' performance				

where they fit in the scale.				
I use samples of written compositions to demonstrate what performance at the various levels of ability looks like.				
I involve students in preparing marking guides for different assignments.				
I share marking guides with students before assignments to help them understand what they must pay attention to in composing particular types of compositions.				
I train students on how to use the marking guide to identify strengths and shortcomings in their own writing.				
I train students on how to use the marking guide to determine at what level they are performing and to set goals for subsequent assignments.				

PART 4

Strategies for ensuring use of feedback

Do you take time to explain to students the meanings of the various scoring and grading signs, words and/or symbols used as a way of helping them understand what errors they have made in order to make useful corrections?

Yes [(1)] No [(2)]

2. After feedback is provided, do you require students to revise and re-submit their compositions for a second marking?

Yes [(1)] No [(2)]

3. When you mark a student's piece of writing, do you indicate and address all the errors in the composition?

Yes [(1)] No [(2)]

Explain:_____
_____

_____

Do you provide different remedial activities for different students?

Yes [(1)] No [(2)]

Explain: _____

_____

_____

a) After marking your students' compositions in a particular assignment do you make written observations on how they have performed?

Yes [(1)] No [(2)]

If yes in 5(a), explain what you include in your observations.

_____

_____

_____

6. a) Do you keep any progress records on individual student's performance in specific aspects of their writing such as grammar, paragraphing organization of ideas etc.?

Yes [(1)] No [(2)]

When a student has improved in a problematic area in their writing do you have a way of letting them know that they have met expectations?

Yes [(1)] No [(2)]

APPENDIX III: STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear student,

I am writing to request your assistance to respond to this questionnaire. This is NOT A TEST.

Please respond to all the questions honestly. Kindly note that your responses are important in helping to identify ways in which those concerned can work together to help students improve in composition writing.

Please do not write your name or that of your school in this questionnaire.

PART 1

General Information
How many compositions do you write in a month?

One [(1)]

Two [(2)]

Three [(3)]

Four [(4)]

Out of those how many does the teacher mark individually.

One [(1)]

Two [(2)]

Three [(3)]

Four [(4)]

PART 2

Types and ways of receiving information about performance in our compositions. (Tick as appropriate)

How often do the following apply in your class?

Factors	Very Frequently [(3)]	Frequently [(2)]	Once in a long time [(1)]	Never [(0)]
Teacher marks my compositions.				
Teacher puts us in pairs				

or groups to read each other's compositions to pick out and correct the mistakes that we can see in each other's writing.				
c) Teacher gives us written guidelines to help us identify and correct the mistakes in our compositions on our own (self-assessment)				
d) After marking our compositions, the teacher discusses our performance with the whole class to address the mistakes seen in our marked compositions.				
After marking our compositions the teacher carries out a face-to face discussion with me to talk about the mistakes in my composition and shows me what I should do to improve my writing.				
f) The teacher asks us to use mobile phones or computers to make corrections (e.g. spellings mistakes) on our written work.				

PART 3

Ways of rating/determining students' performance in compositions
1. Indicate how much your English teacher does the following:

(Tick as appropriate)

Factors	All the time [(3)]	Sometimes [(2)]	Rarely [(1)]	Never [(0)]
The teacher involves students in preparing marking guides for different types of compositions.				
The teacher shares a marking guide before starting to write a composition to help us understand what we should pay attention to in different types of compositions.				
The teacher trains us on how to use a marking guide to identify weaknesses and strengths in our own work and the work of our classmates.				
Trains us to use a marking guide to know how we have performed (if excellent, good, fair or poor).				

PART 4

Use of information received from marked compositions to help us improve our writing skills

1. Does your teacher take time to explain the meanings of symbols used to show the mistakes in students' compositions as a way of helping you understand and correct the errors in your compositions?

Yes [(1)] No [(2)]

2. After your composition is marked, are you asked to write your composition again and hand in your corrected work for follow-up and further action?

Yes [(1)] No [(2)]

3. When your composition is marked, does the teacher handle all the areas of difficulty all at once or does he or she focus on particular problems at a time?

Yes [(1)] No [(2)]

Explain:

_____

4. What support does your teacher give you individually to help you improve on your areas of difficulty?

_____

_____

5. Does your teacher have any way/s of helping you to follow up how you are improving on the problems that you have in composition writing?

Yes [(1)] No [(2)]

What strategies do you think your English teacher should use to help students improve on their writing skills?

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX IV: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS

1. What do you consider when preparing a marking guide for a composition?
2. How do you ensure objectivity in scoring and grading student writing?
3. How do you create a shared understanding of what constitutes poor, adequate, good and excellent performance?
4. What do you do with the information that you get when you mark students' compositions?
5. How do you track student progress over a period of time?
6. What kinds of support do you give to students who are struggling with their writing?
7. How do you handle different needs of students?
8. What strategies do you use to make sure students use feedback obtained from yourself and peers to improve their writing?
9. What challenges do you face in helping students improve their writing skills?

APPENDIX V: SCHEDULE FOR CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TYPE OF TEACHERS' FEEDBACK

ERROR IDENTIFICATION PRACTICES
Identifies an error

Identifies an error and points out what type of error it is using symbols e.g. 'sp' for spelling, 'WO' for word order.

Identifies an error but does not point out what type it is (leaves students to diagnose)

Identifies an error and provides correct form.

Identifies an error but does not provide correction.

TYPE OF TEACHERS' COMMENTS
Identifies a problem.

Explains the nature of a problem.

Gives a suggestion for improvement.

Specificity - comment is specific.

Praise- Indicates what a student did well.

FOCUS OF TEACHERS' COMMENTS
Higher Order Concerns Categories [HOCs]

[HOC1] Content (relevance, points)

[HOC2] Meaning (breaks in logic, missing information)

[HOC3] Organization.

[HOC4] Idea development

Lower Order Concerns Categories. [LOCS]
[LOC1] Vocabulary (Variety and appropriateness).

[LOC2] Grammar.

[LOC3] Spelling.

[LOC4] Mechanics (paragraphing, spelling, capitalization, punctuation).

{LOC5} Other

APPENDIX VI: WRITTEN TASK: CREATIVE WRITING

*Answer **one** question from the choices given below. Your composition should be between 350 – 450 words.*

Either

1. Your class has decided to have a discussion on the topic "The mobile phone is one of the most useful innovations of modern life." You are one of the key speakers. Write down what you would say.

Or

2. Write a story to illustrate **one** of the following sayings:

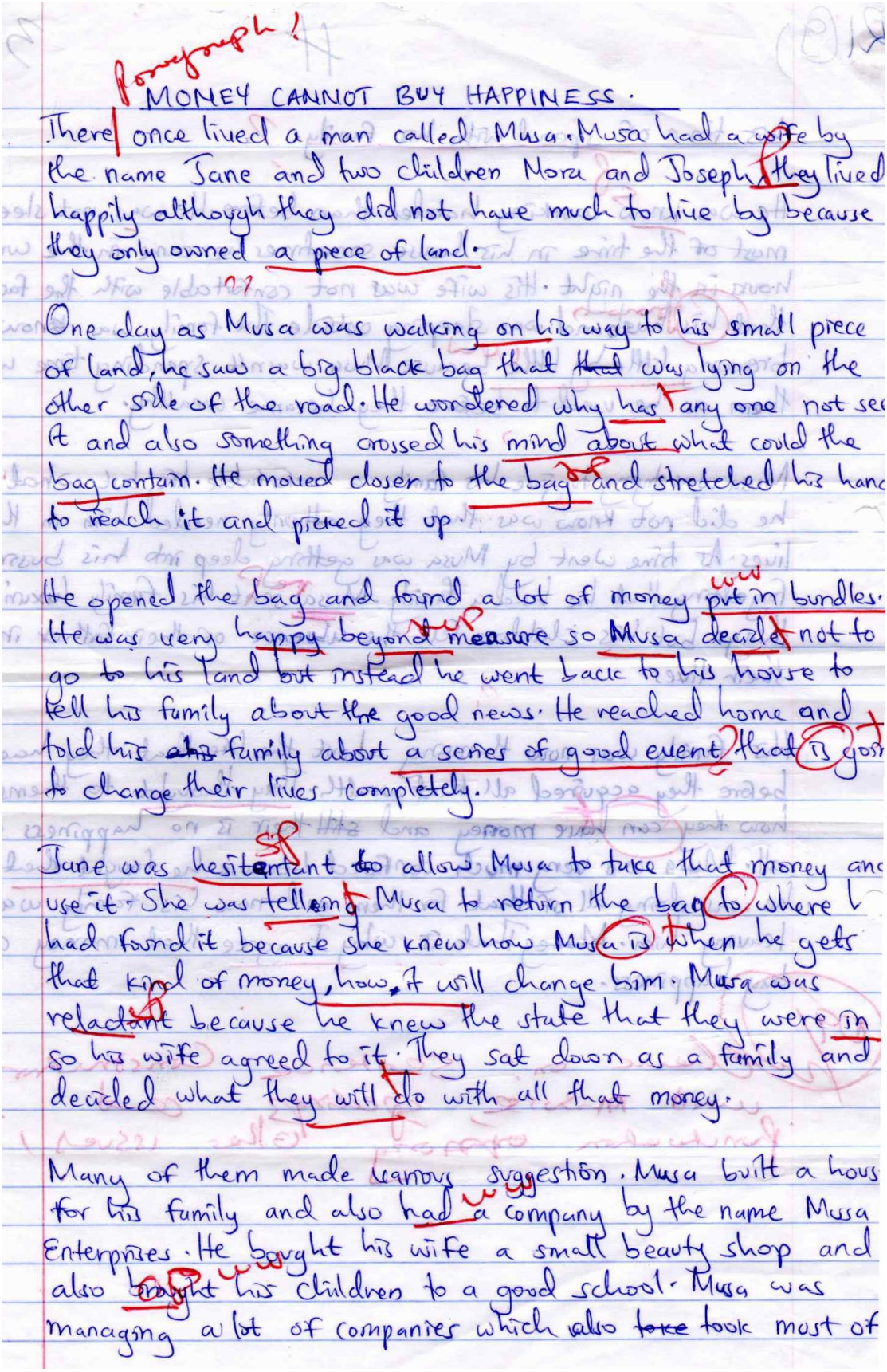
(i) You reap what you sow.

(ii) All that glitters is not gold.

(iii) Money cannot buy happiness.

(iv) Unity is strength.

APPENDIXVII: MARKED COMPOSITION 1



paragraph !

MONEY CANNOT BUY HAPPINESS.

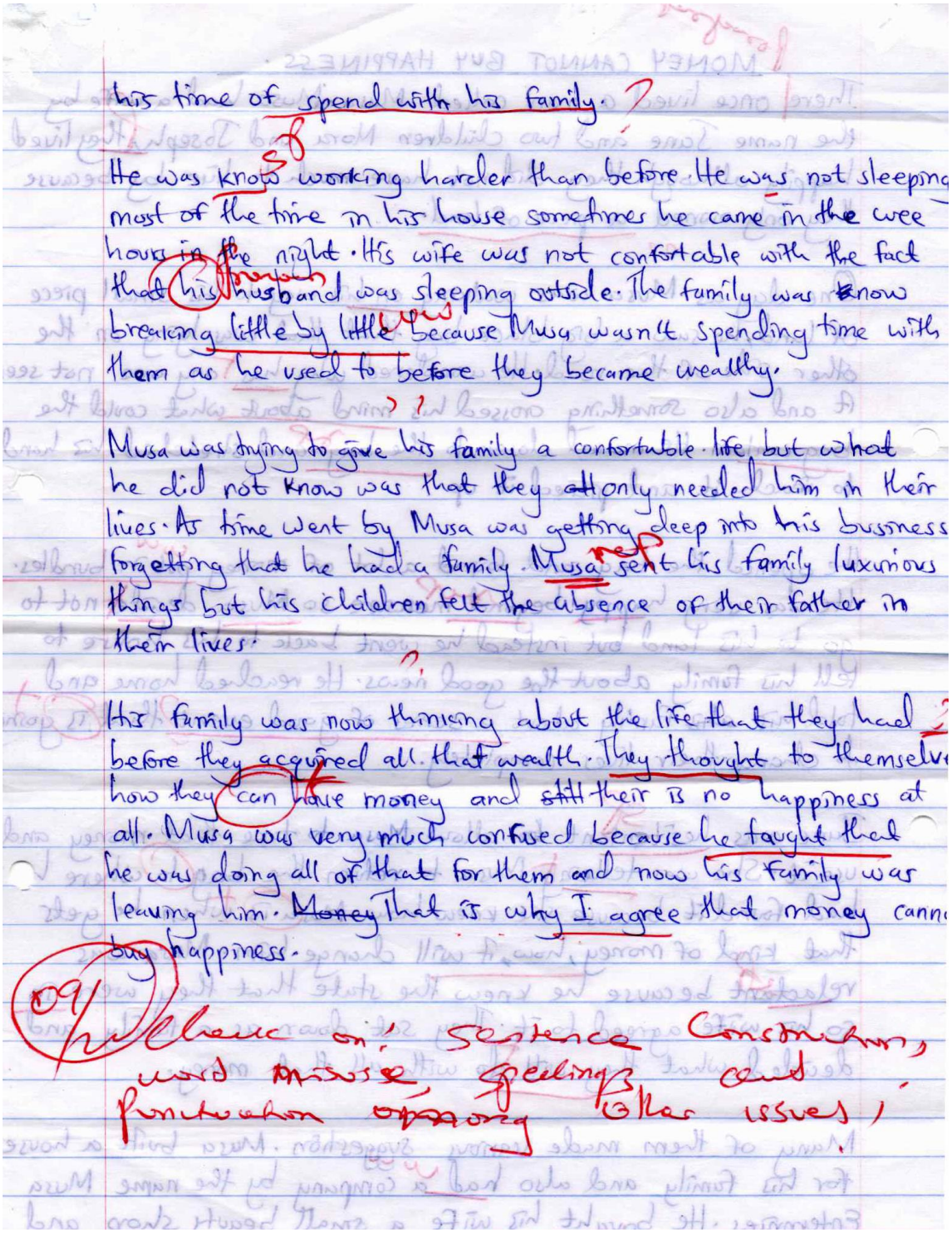
There once lived a man called Musa. Musa had a wife by the name Jane and two children Nora and Joseph. They lived happily although they did not have much to live by because they only owned a piece of land.

One day as Musa was walking on his way to his small piece of land, he saw a big black bag that ~~that~~ was lying on the other side of the road. He wondered why has any one not see it and also something crossed his mind about what could the bag contain. He moved closer to the bag and streteched his hand to reach it and picked it up.

He opened the bag and found a lot of money put in bundles. He was very happy beyond measure so Musa decide not to go to his land but instead he went back to his house to tell his family about the good news. He reached home and told his ~~his~~ family about a series of good event that is goi to change their lives completely.

Jane was hesitant ~~to~~ allow Musa to take that money and use it. She was telling Musa to return the bag to where h had found it because she knew how Musa is when he gets that kind of money, how it will change him. Musa was relactant because he knew the state that they were in so his wife agreed to it. They sat down as a family and decided what they will do with all that money.

Many of them made various suggestion. Musa built a hous for his family and also had a company by the name Musa Enterprises. He bought his wife a small beauty shop and also brought his children to a good school. Musa was managing a lot of companies which also ~~take~~ took most of



his time of spend with his family.

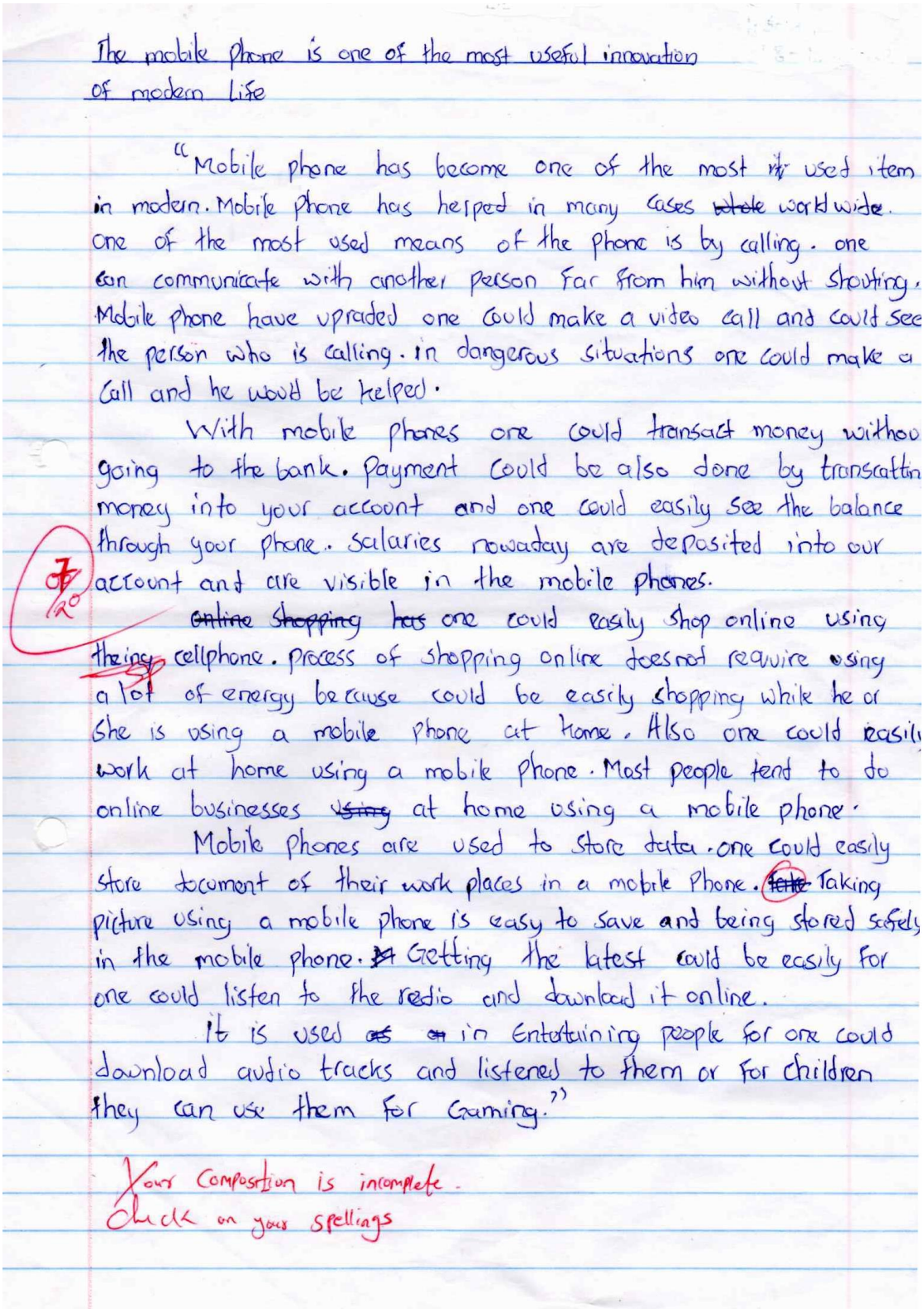
He was know working harder than before. He was not sleeping most of the time in his house sometimes he came in the wee hours in the night. His wife was not comfortable with the fact that his husband was sleeping outside. The family was know breaking little by little because Musa wasn't spending time with them as he used to before they became wealthy.

Musa was trying to give his family a comfortable life but what he did not know was that they all only needed him in their lives. As time went by Musa was getting deep into his business forgetting that he had a family. Musa sent his family luxurious things but his children felt the absence of their father in their lives.

His family was now thinking about the life that they had before they acquired all that wealth. They thought to themselves how they can have money and still their is no happiness at all. Musa was very much confused because he taught that he was doing all of that for them and now his family was leaving him. Money That is why I agree that money cannot buy happiness.

09 Work on sentence Construction, word choice, spelling and punctuation errors like issues.

APPENDIXVIII: MARKED COMPOSITION 2



The mobile phone is one of the most useful innovation of modern Life

"Mobile phone has become one of the most ~~it~~ used item in modern. Mobile phone has herped in many cases ~~whole~~ world wide. one of the most used means of the phone is by calling. one can communicate with another person far from him without shouting. Mobile phone have upraded one could make a video call and could see the person who is calling. in dangerous situations one could make a call and he would be helped.

With mobile phones one could transact money withou going to the bank. payment could be also done by transactin money into your account and one could easily see the balance through your phone. salaries nowaday are deposited into our account and are visible in the mobile phones.

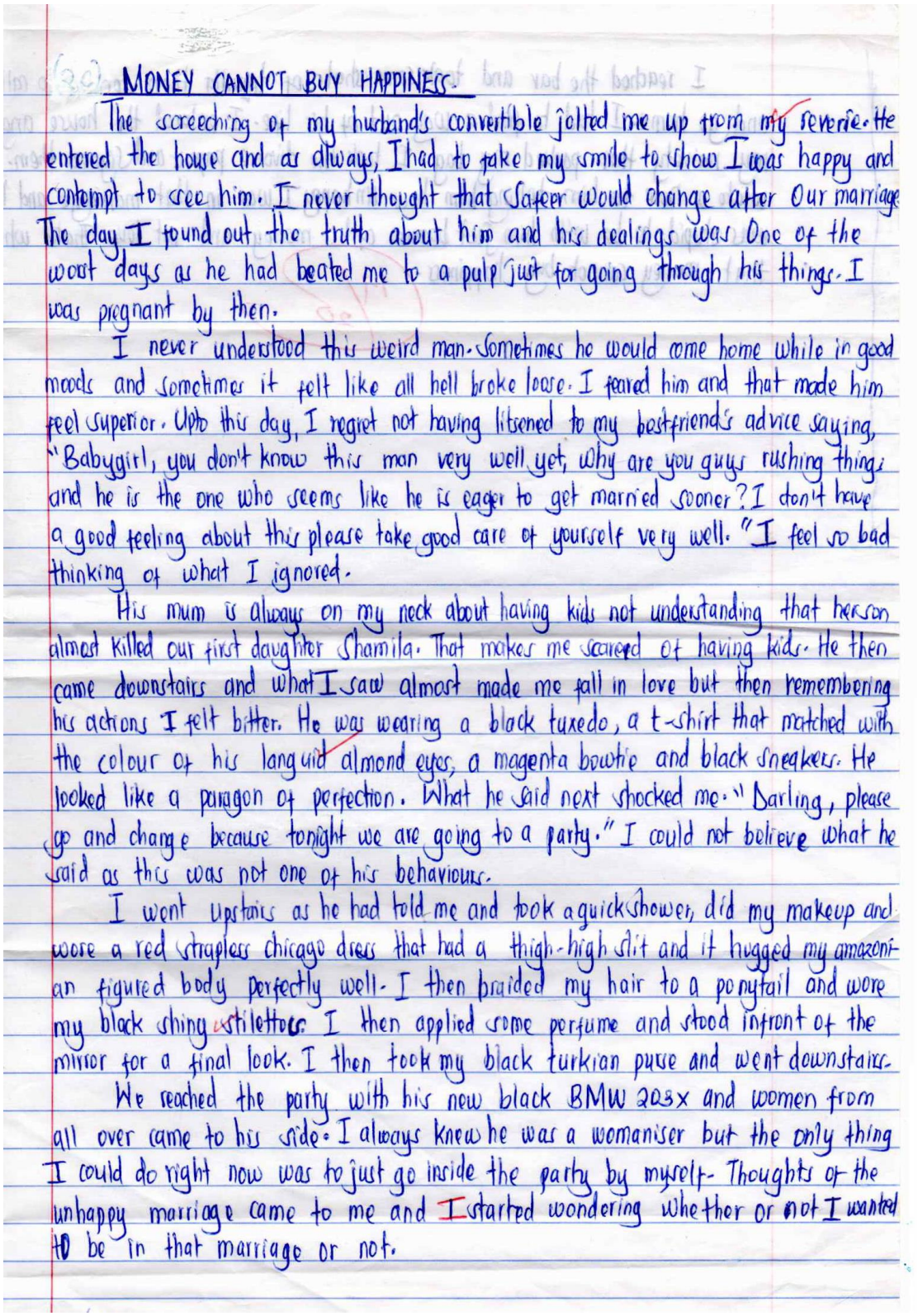
~~online shopping has~~ one could easily shop online using ~~their~~ cellphone. process of shopping online doesnot requaire using a lot of energy because could be easily shopping while he or she is using a mobile phone at home. Also one could easily work at home using a mobile phone. Most people tend to do online businesses ~~using~~ at home using a mobile phone.

Mobile phones are used to store data. one could easily store tocument of their work places in a mobile Phone. ~~tehe~~ Taking picture using a mobile phone is easy to save and being stored safely in the mobile phone. ~~It~~ Getting the latest could be easily for one could listen to the redio and download it online.

It is used ~~as~~ ~~on~~ in Entertaining people for one could download audio tracks and listened to them or for children they can use them for Gaming."

Your Composition is incomplete.
Check on your spellings

APPENDIX IX: MARKED COMPOSITION 3



MONEY CANNOT BUY HAPPINESS.

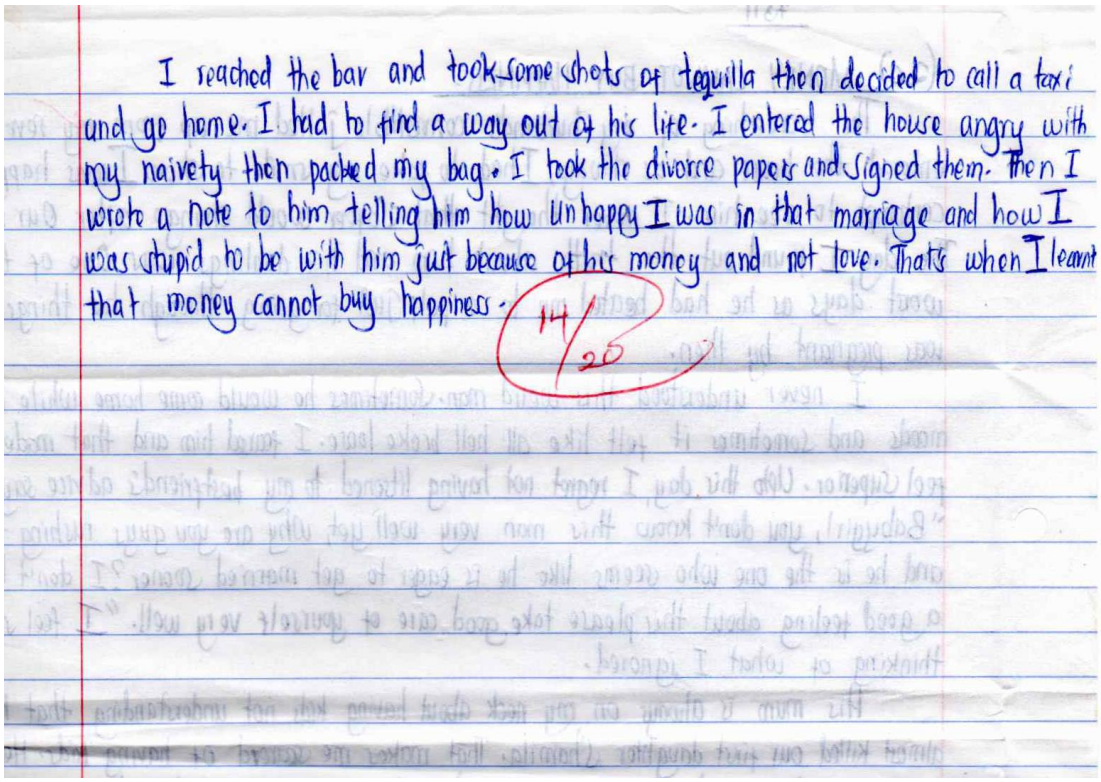
The screeching of my husband's convertible jolted me up from my reverie. He entered the house and as always, I had to take my smile to show I was happy and contempt to see him. I never thought that Sateer would change after our marriage The day I found out the truth about him and his dealings was One of the worst days as he had beated me to a pulp just for going through his things. I was pregnant by then.

I never understood this weird man. Sometimes he would come home while in good moods and sometimes it felt like all hell broke loose. I feared him and that made him feel superior. Upto this day, I regret not having listened to my bestfriend's advice saying, "Babygirl, you don't know this man very well yet, why are you guys rushing things and he is the one who seems like he is eager to get married sooner? I don't have a good feeling about this please take good care of yourself very well." I feel so bad thinking of what I ignored.

His mum is always on my neck about having kids not understanding that her son almost killed our first daughter Shamila. That makes me scared of having kids. He then came downstairs and what I saw almost made me fall in love but then remembering his actions I felt bitter. He was wearing a black tuxedo, a t-shirt that matched with the colour of his languid almond eyes, a magenta bowtie and black sneakers. He looked like a paragon of perfection. What he said next shocked me. "Darling, please go and change because tonight we are going to a party." I could not believe what he said as this was not one of his behaviours.

I went upstairs as he had told me and took a quick shower, did my makeup and wore a red strapless chicago dress that had a thigh-high slit and it hugged my amazonian figured body perfectly well. I then braided my hair to a ponytail and wore my black shiny stilettos. I then applied some perfume and stood infront of the mirror for a final look. I then took my black turkian purse and went downstairs.

We reached the party with his new black BMW 203x and women from all over came to his side. I always knew he was a womaniser but the only thing I could do right now was to just go inside the party by myself. Thoughts of the unhappy marriage came to me and I started wondering whether or not I wanted to be in that marriage or not.



I reached the bar and took some shots of tequilla then decided to call a taxi and go home. I had to find a way out of his life. I entered the house angry with my naivety then packed my bag. I took the divorce papers and signed them. Then I wrote a note to him telling him how unhappy I was in that marriage and how I was stupid to be with him just because of his money and not love. That's when I learnt that money cannot buy happiness.

14/20

APPENDIXX: SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

R Now, what do you consider when preparing a marking guide for a composition? Yeah, anybody can take that question. Let's say you want to do some functional writing, maybe a letter, what do you consider? What elements are you interested in seeing in a students' work?

D As for me, uum … I take this at two levels. For the senior classes, forms 3 and 4 we normally rely on the KNEC marking guide, which is standardized and can be applied for these senior classes. But for the junior classes it may vary … and it also depends on the type of the writing test. If the writing test has guidelines that they are supposed to fulfill then it means the marking rubric will be varied according to the test at hand. So, at times it is varied depending on the type of task given, but if it is the general standard tests similar to the ones done by the national examiner, we rely on the guidelines given by KNEC.

R Like if it is a narrative would we rely on that? Maybe you can tell us what aspects there in that KNEC guidelines that you are using.

S Like the KNEC guideline, the one based on the narrative, it is largely the linguistic ability, which is the main scoring area, so it will vary, so they give the descriptors depending on the mastery of the language- the linguistic ability of the learner. I want to believe that is the main guideline in the writing rubric.

E: others

F Umm, personally, okay. I also look at, if is varied depending on the type of the question like now for the functional writing er the particular question, I think it guides, because it depends on what are you really looking for but the key things like the layout and the linguistic ability, the way the learner has used grammar are allocated marks

R So if it is functional writing, what do you look at?

F the requirements, the format er …the layout and the format for that matter.

R anything else….

S Yeah, I am going to comment on both. The functional writing, er, I check on the format. That's what we insist on for functional writing. For the essays I like to look at the structure of the paragraph. Probably, I want them to come up with the structure that KNEC recommends when they are marking, the structure of topic sentence, illustrations and the clincher. Once they get that I check that and when I am marking, I check for that.

E: Just to add, for the Form 1 learner I am very particular on the handwriting in terms of capitalization, in terms of shapes of letters, spacing and legibility.

R Okay. J,

J Umm, maybe to be specific: the length, the grammar and the structure.

R Ok.

D But sorry, Madam R, there is something there that should be pointed out because when these marking guides are being made, you find our sister department, for instance, Kiswahili, their marking guide is point based, largely point based. And when learners receive their scripts, they are seeing ticks that are targeting points and that tells them how they have measured up. You come to English, and it is now the linguistic ability and this at times stresses the students to a point of confusion. You give them for example an argumentative essay or an expository kind of essay, you will find them giving emphasis to filling the pages with points at the expense of the ability to express themselves, so that is something ….

R: Actually, there are different types of marking rubrics. For national exams, usually people use the holistic type of marking guide that is impressionistic, because of the big numbers er….you need a guide that moves scoring fast, but for classrooms, people use the analytical type where you consider what you want to assess like grammar, organization of the paragraph, vocabulary, etc then you assign different marks for those areas. Then you mark per area, and then you add the marks that is, the difference from the impressionistic KNEC guide.

E: For me, I also want to add, eh, that I can have an assessment just for one or two or three aspects of writing. So that is what I will be looking for. I would at some point ignore other areas. Yeah, like when probably I look at something like functional writing, like minutes. I could give an assignment, and I am only interested in the format alone. So, at that time I don't really look at the language. At times I only look at the content. So, it depends on the outcome that I am looking for.

R: So, you prioritize on different aspects. And now third question is: How do you ensure objectivity in scoring and grading students' writing? Because research has shown that marking students' essays is, you know, a very subjective activity. So that you can find that in about 5 teachers, every one of them gives a different mark. But now you want to know exactly what the learner can do; how do you ensure that you are objective in your assigning marks?

E: I can go first; I will say I will rely on the marking guide strictly.

R: Yes….

E: So that I am not moved by impression. Yes, but you know.

R: Thanks E

D: That is interesting because you can have your marking guide on the table. But then if you are checking on the handwriting, there is a handwriting that will appeal to you even when there is nothing much in it, and then there is the hallo effect of you know, when you meet his or her composition. So when you meet his or her composition you may end up over awarding, even when it is not worth that much. In my school what has helped us to ensure objectivity is the conveyor belt marking. I'll not mark the scripts of my students so once we have done the exams, you will find that the scripts are bundled up randomly and assigned to every teacher so you end up marking a script that does not

belong to your class, then at the end of the marking session the scripts that have scored the highest marks are remarked and shared by all the members of the department and we decide, this is an A, this is not an A, this is overmarked, this is undermarked, again you select the scripts of students you know have really mastered the writing skill and you find they have scored lower than you expected. You read and say this time round the mark is low or this time round it's been overmarked, this script is supposed to score … so that conveyor belt at our school has helped us. And it becomes very tricky because in this era of awarding teachers for performance your class is going to be awarded for topping in writing so you may end up over awarding if you are the only one handling the scripts of your students. So, the conveyor belt has helped us to manage and achieve some level of objectivity.

S Yeah, I think I can go next. One of the things we do in an examination situation, we sit down and first and agree. Sometimes we do not want to be strict on the linguistic aspect because in paper 3 question 1 we are looking at creativity. So, at times we pick out on students who have been very creative and then we use that as an example and then deal with the linguistic aspect later. You may get some students who write very well but they have hiccups of language, but the composition in content, it's very good. So sometimes we move away from, eh, that marking scheme, not very far away.

R Mm

S But we also don't want to discourage these students. Um because a student who scores 05 once, twice, thrice, may give up. Sometimes we ignore but you know it is because that marking scheme or rubric is not for classroom purposes.

R Yeah. It is not prescribed for classroom purposes. So, you are saying you determine what you want to see in your students' writing and then you stick to that, to see whether it is there. Others…

F O yeah, like eh, just like what colleagues have said, we do practice the conveyor way of marking. And interestingly in my case whenever I mark the scripts of my students/ class I do not look at the names, I just …

R How do you avoid that?

F I ensure that I open all the pages, like all the first pages. You know, the name is normally written on the top. So, I never look at the cover page. I look at it later. So, in that case I will not be influenced by Moses this or Amos that.

D Sorry, but from the handwriting you can tell this is Margarets' writing! Are you telling me that you can't know someone and be objective?

F Okay that I think is a way of running away from that hallo effect that you just get influenced and say Ah, this is Moses, wow, I know Moses is likely to do this and that.

E How does J handle? (laughter)

J It reminds me of a teacher. We had gone to mark some papers. Then he was giving us this range and this learner should get this to this, actually, it

was a private school. So (laughter) then because it was a conveyor whatever, we didn't listen, so he wasn't happy.

R So predetermined? Okay, but now we are asking, in your own class, in your own class, how do you ensure objectivity, that a student does not get 12 when they are at a level of 10?

J Then I stick to the guidelines, the KNEC guidelines.

R They are the ones that you use even in your class?

J: Yeah.

R: Okay. Maybe we could go to the next question. So how do you make students understand what constitutes poor adequate, good and excellent performance? I mean er... do they know what good performance looks like? Do they know what poor performance looks like, and if they don't know how do you make them understand that?

S Okay. I normally take the good compositions, the average ones and for the weak ones…. let me call them the poor ones, then actually we read those sets of compositions then we analyze together, and they can tell the best one from the others.

R: Ok, F?

F Wow. What I normally do, just to give feedback. I think it is more of when I give the feedback. I analyze, I tell them this is why you scored this and this is how to make it better. How you should have written this. And then we discuss the specific points on what is required in this mode of writing if er, it's the narrative or the expository essays we discuss. I discuss the key points with them and then I also share what the best is. If it is an exam already done, I will share some of the best performances, some of the best scripts. I will even photocopy them and share them actually on the noticeboard of the classroom so that they can read later. Or sometimes we read with the students. I ask some of them to read and then we discuss the specific details, how exactly has this one presented their work as opposed to the other one.

R Yes…

E For me I use samples from the learners themselves. And I project, not the entire text but probably a well written paragraph. Then I would tell them this one is what we categorize probably as a grade A writer. This is what we categorize as a grade B writer and so on up to grade D. So, once I give then at least two samples they are able to relate. Then they can now judge their own writing where to place yourself.

R: Okay.

D Thank you, this reminds me of one of my former students who exceled. He was Kenya One in English in KCSE. One day he approached me at night and asked me to write him a composition that would score 20 because every time he wrote a composition he would have a 16 or a 15 so he told me, 'Sir, I want to request you to write me a composition that would score 20 out of 20 from

the KNEC. I told him it is not going to be possible and I found it now inevitable to share with him the marking rubric , what is this that will place you at a band of A, band of B or what places you at a band of C and we be-laboured on this bit of definite spark which definitely concerns the plot. It has to be a strong plot and one with some strong morals to really go there. And this comes along with problems because you find students now embark on cramming or mastering parts of essays of the excellent type and they try to reproduce back to you and you'll still find them scoring because you have to mark what the student has given. So that originality bit is still actually a big challenge and yet it is an important indicator of a script that should score highly. If it is original and the thoughts there are actually fresh and it gives you that definite spark, then definitely it will score the highest marks but now I have also adopted the approach of using sample compositions, essays of excellence that have been published or have been produced internally by students. But the students reproduce them back to you which again ends up beating the logic of training them on how to use samples. It works, but now it ends up being counterproductive because they try to cram and regurgitate.

R: It is still good to use the samples

D: Yes.

R: And then I can still see that apart from the samples you also share the rubric.

D: The Rubrics

R: Yeah, so that they can understand. Anything to add?

S: For Form 1 and 2 what we do, I actually ask them to share, to exchange their essays the way they are seated so that it may not be coincidental that two poor performers are sitting together. So we share that they read. I have also tried to explain to them when they see a tick, an SP what it means. For form 3 and 4 I have given them samples actually from KNEC feedback reports, one of the best essays and one of the worst and they really appreciate, and they want to write like what they have seen.

R: okay that's good. Umm, what do you do with information? Perhaps you could expound on that a bit. What do you do with the information you get when you mark students work? You get feedback yeah, this one has performed, and this one has not, what do you do with this information?

S: We use that information to fill gaps. In my case I classify those students according to their performance so that I may now, er, give those who are performing well, I give them more work, er, advanced er compositions. For those weak once especially the ones that even need handwriting, we take them back to handwriting lessons and then we er… try to bridge the gap between the two. So, of course, the ones which are poor writers consume more time because we want to bring them up to the level of the others. So, feedback is important because if we keep it as teachers it will not help, you will keep on getting the 05, 07 and 08.

E: Others

F: in my case I share the feedback the information with the students. And I make them repeat. Sometimes even the same essays. I discuss like the essays on set books, I will come to class and discuss what was expected and ask them to rewrite. Other times I group them into…. i make them work in groups and each group reproduces that particular essay with corrections. Then we discuss, now to see, the corrections from the feedback.

R: Okay, Anyone else? With something to add?

D: For me the information I get from marking students work provides a springboard upon which I can tailor lessons to help them in their areas of weakness. Because er, that information is very important by the way because it is what is going to push them to another level. So that they overcome their weaknesses when they are doing other writing exercises. So this information helps me to plan even my future lessons and remedial strategies.I would also add that it helps me identify learners who I could say are good learners and use them to help for, say peer correction would also use the same information just like others have said to reteach a given lesson, writing skills.

R: Good. And how do you track students' progress over a period of time? How do you track how they are progressing, for instance in grammar, do you have ways of checking er… this one had issues in this type of grammar, this time they have improved or how do you track progress?

E: J can take it

J: Okay although it might not be clear, I use the progress record though it is not giving that clear picture because the content is not per area. But at least you are able to tell if a leaner has improved. From the book you can check what the learner has been writing from the beginning as you progress.

R: Do you check everything as a whole or do you have a way of determining, now I want to follow this learners progress in grammar so that I can help them in this area?

S I want to be sincere to say I have never done that on particular areas. For example, following up a student grammar. But for Form 4 because we want to be sure, the learners improve but form 1, 2, 3, sincerely speaking I have not done it.

E: Agree with my colleagues but majorly there is a major challenge with the numbers in the classes. Like there is a class that has 60 students. It is not easy to actually follow up on every one of the 60 students and especially in terms of areas like in grammar. But now when I give them the exam I will come back and highlight the keys areas that require improvement and generally. And then for the students that I have marked, you know there are those ones that you have marked and you are like, this one can get an A. Those ones I call them specifically and try to find out and even give them extra work to go and do and then we mark and discuss with them. And there are also some of the students that are quite poor, I think it is my catchment area, that they cannot even write. So you keep …you follow them up you give them even Form one work, when they are in Form four you are giving them work from Form 1.

You walk with them until some of them actually register an improvement from Cs to Bs.

R: It's okay. Anybody with something else to say about tracking students' progress.

E: Okay, one way before D goes is that I would at times demand to see a previous script, when I have a feeling, because I know my students after a while, when they drop or when they improve. I would at times ask them to bring me their previous scripts. At times, it is used for negative reinforcement because I would quarrel them if they repeat the same errors that I had highlighted before, but at times it works.

R: Anybody else?

D: Okay, I won't say I have been able to track it in that very keener sense, but there is a time I tried and with a particular student and what came out was not so pleasant because I realized the student was writing the same composition that he came with from primary school at Form 2 third term and now when I asked him, could I get the compositions that you were writing previously? He could get three and when he brought them it was the same script marked on different, you know, terms and scoring 11, 12, 11. But then I have been able to do it per paper because when we have the 3 papers you can track a student and tell in this series of examinations in paper 1 you had this, in paper 2 you had this, in paper 3 you had this and with that you can tell whether there is an improvement in a particular area and if it is paper there is an improvement, you can tell almost with certainty that the improvement is in the oral skills which is normally the area that has the highest marks. If it is paper 2 then you can tell it is the 2nd question that has 25 marks and if it is paper 3 then you can tell it is question 2 or question 3 that has set the pace.

F: Okay. So can I say that one way of tracking students' progress is by using a mark book where I record the marks, and I can progressively see whether this one has improved or not then I look for maybe alternative ways of keeping the student.

E: Okay, then we can go to the next.

R: The next one is, what strategies do you use to make sure that students use the feedback that you give to improve their writings?

S: Retesting the same question to see whether there will be an improvement after you gave feedback and revised the same question yeah.

D: (Laughter) Mine has been a crude one (laughter).

R: Tell us what you do that's what we want to know.

D: I have a collection of these expressions that are pleasant and will definitely score ticks of merit, right? So you would give them a list of the same and actually demand that in the next composition I expect to read one or two of these so that when I receive the scripts and I spot those expressions that were in the checklist I gave them then I can see, oh the strategy is actually working. They are employing. It's a crude one but I have used it (laughter).

R: Because like if you do not ensure that feedback is used, then is that feedback you give them helpful or is that feedback they have received helpful? (Laughter). Yes, tell us anything you do to ensure that they actually use that feedback. The specific feedback that you give them.

F: Sometimes I give them related questions so that I can see whether they got it if they can reproduce what was in the feedback. Not necessarily the same question but related.

E: Maybe one I use which I think would be fitting what you are asking that before, when they are doing revision for their exams, I always insist that they look at the last paper that we marked and to look at those, whatever was marked and then they correct hoping that when they are given some new writing they will not repeat the errors, some have visual errors so that they run away from their visual errors like those who combine some words or some kind of spelling errors so before another writing exercise, I take them back to what was marked last.

R: Do you ever ask them to rewrite the same essay now, making sure that they have used the comments you have given them.

E: Yeah, me I have done that.

R: do you ever do that.

E: I have done that.

D: Personally, I have used it but now at just the introduction, you know we normally insist that the introduction is supposed to be attention grabbing and so once you have told them these are the common ways of introducing your essays… So, every time there is an essay writing you ask them now, can you decide which approach you are going to use to introduce your composition so that when I get the composition I know they are s trying to use this approach that we learned, and not just the narrative approach of "one morning or once upon a time" that most of them will find very easy to start with.

R: Now we know that most of our students have various needs. There are those very good writers there are the ones in the middle and the ones who are struggling. How do you handle the different needs of all the students in your class?

S: Let me take that first. I have group discussions where I have placed them 4 per group because writing takes around 80 marks we, I put emphasis on that during group work we discuss even their scripts that they have already written so I use group discussion. Mostly guided group discussion.

R: Okay, how do you handle it?

J: Me I use these things that my teacher used to use with the needy ones, the needy ones I tell them see me. They come and then I have a one-on-one interaction. Those who have really improved, I remember one of the girls last year shocked me when I marked her composition and I called her, and I told her this is exemplary, was it your work? And she went ahead and said she was among the top in the final examination. So, I call. For me I call, especially

the ones who are in the two, the best and ones that are struggling the ones in the middle are somehow…. get lost there in the middle

E: Forgotten. Laughter

R: So, what kind of support do you give to those who are struggling?

E: For those who are struggling in my case, I give them er, basics of writing. There are those books that we have from Europe and us that take them through the basic writing skills. So, I would give them those simple exercises and I think I works.

R: Okay

J: Me sometimes I find better ways to motivate them to change their attitude towards the subject.

R: The ones who are writing really badly.

J: Mmm

R: How do you help them?

E: I think for the less gifted leaners who may not even in the first place, there is no story to write. They can't even tell what a story is or what is a good story. So er… the best approach as for me has been to plot a story together with them. Now, can you tell me a story that you would want to write? Where should this story begin from? Where should it move to? How should we make it a little complicated? Then how do we end the story? Then once we have mapped it out together, they write in the process, the process-oriented method whereby they don't have to write the whole story and bring for marking. Just start the introduction let us prepare it together, go through it together, correct it, rewrite it then you can now move to the next in the mapping out that we did. So it is done in a process, up to the end and it is a good story. So, I'll expect them to write up to 3 stories in a week.

E Tell us how you do it with struggling learners.

S I think I had already talked about the groups but apart from the groups, those poor learners who are not able even to write anything, I give them samples and actually tell them, when an examination comes like for question 1, the narrative. I tell them just to remember what you have read... and reproduce…(Laughter) the exact, during the examination.

D Give back!!

S And it has worked, from 01 even to just 06 giving back just what they have read. I also tried one time to give them newspaper stories. I told them, when it is an examination, instead of writing two sentences and you leave, just write what you remember either from those stories or from the class readers that you have read in class. Anything you remember (laughter/disbelief).

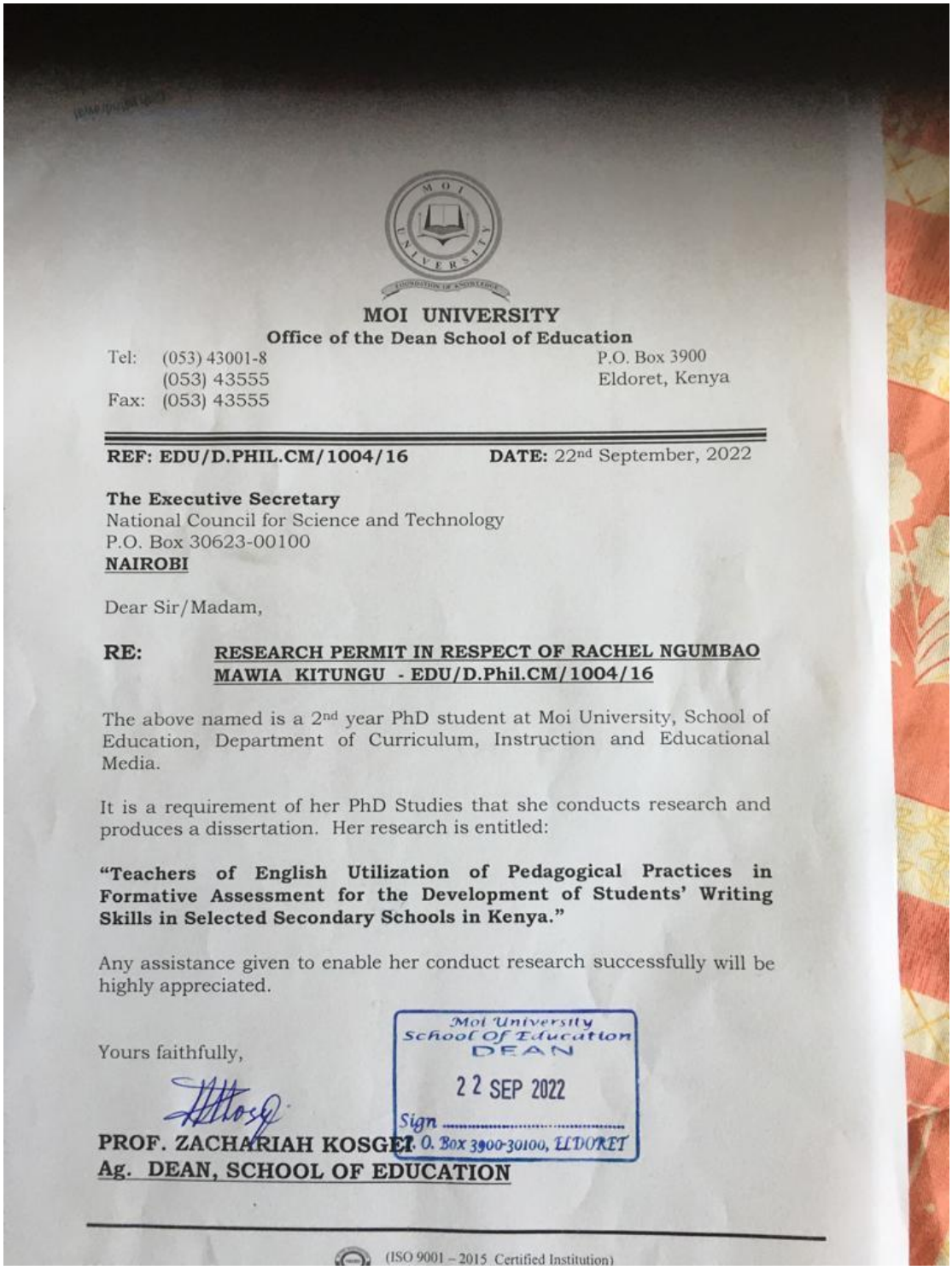
R: But now, you know that is very exam centered, we are talking formative. You want them to become better writers and you are not just focusing on the examinations.

E In my first posting I had a very serious time-taker and I would give this learner a passage and tell her to copy, just copy what it is word for word. They would still struggle to copy. Then I tell her, you have copied it well, and I tell her copy this one again. Mmm… So, by copying, I think they are learning.

D: Different ones

R: Yeah, different ones and somehow it helped them.

APPENDIX XI: AUTHORITY TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH



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REF: EDU/D.PHIL.CM/1004/16 **DATE:** 22nd September, 2022

The Executive Secretary
National Council for Science and Technology
P.O. Box 30623-00100
NAIROBI

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: **RESEARCH PERMIT IN RESPECT OF RACHEL NGUMBAO MAWIA KITUNGU - EDU/D.Phil.CM/1004/16**

The above named is a 2nd year PhD student at Moi University, School of Education, Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Media.

It is a requirement of her PhD Studies that she conducts research and produces a dissertation. Her research is entitled:

"Teachers of English Utilization of Pedagogical Practices in Formative Assessment for the Development of Students' Writing Skills in Selected Secondary Schools in Kenya."

Any assistance given to enable her conduct research successfully will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

Moi University
School Of Education
DEAN
22 SEP 2022
Sign .....
P. O. Box 3900-30100, ELDORET

PROF. ZACHARIAH KOSGEI
Ag. DEAN, SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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APPENDIX XII: RESEARCH PERMIT

REPUBLIC OF KENYA

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Ref No: **788309**

Date of Issue: **04/October/2022**

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This is to Certify that Ms.. Rachel Mawia Ngumbau of Moi University, has been licensed to conduct research in Nairobi on the topic: TEACHERS OF ENGLISH UTILIZATION OF PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS IN SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA for the period ending : 04/October/2023.

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Word count:50234

Awarded by

Prof. Anne Syomwene Kisilu
CERM-ESA Project Leader Date: 26/02//2025