

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Second Language Composition Writing

According to Reid (1993), in the 1970s', ESL composition teachers in intensive language programs used writing mainly as a support skill in language learning. It meant doing grammar exercises, answering comprehension questions and writing dictation. Hence, writing was seen as a supplementary skill, which added variety to the lesson. However, today, ESL composition has begun to assume a far greater role in second language learning. It is now recognized as a valid, cognitive and communicative skill. Present research shows that writing, among the four macro skills of communication, is the most complex skill to acquire in both first and second language instructions (Makalela, 2004). Moreover, teachers are pressured to overemphasize writing in order to ensure the academic progress of their learners because the main form of assessment is through the written mode, which comprises written tests, assignments, research papers and dissertations (Makalela, 2004). As a result, this has brought on recognition by ESL teachers and researchers of the need for second language students to write for occupational and academic purposes (White 1994). Thus, today, the writing skill has attained a very important status in the second language classroom.

Since the beginning of the modern era of second language teaching, there have been successions of approaches to second language writing. Each approach has gained popularity and dominated the ESL writing classroom for a period of time and then lost popularity, but none has really disappeared (Silva, 1990). Some of the most influential approaches in the teaching of ESL writing over the years have been the controlled writing method, current-traditional rhetoric approach, the process approach, the English for academic purposes method and the computer assisted language learning method.

2.2 Popular Approaches to ESL Composition Writing in Malaysia

In this study, only the approaches that have been widely used in secondary schools and institutions of higher learning in Malaysia will be discussed in detail. These approaches are the controlled approach, the current-traditional rhetoric approach, the process approach, the English for academic writing approach and the computer assisted language learning approach.

2.2.1 The Controlled Approach

The controlled writing approach is also sometimes referred to as guided composition. The oral approach by Fries (1945) was the basis for this method of second language writing. According to the principle of controlled writing, learning to write in a second language is seen as habit formation. Error is

prevented and fluency is expected to rise out of practice with structures. Its methodology comprises the imitation and manipulation in the form of substitution, transformation or completion of model passages, which were carefully constructed (Matsuda, 2003). This form of composition writing is still practised in many ESL classrooms around the world. Controlled composition samples and exercises can still be found in primary and lower secondary English textbooks in Malaysia.

2.2.2 The Current -Traditional Rhetoric Approach

This approach to composition writing combines the basic principles of the current-traditional paradigms of native speaker composition instruction with Kaplan's (1967) theory of contrastive rhetoric. Kaplan (1967) has suggested that ESL writers employ rhetoric and a sequence of thought, which violate the expectations of the native reader. Therefore, the drill method was advocated at the rhetorical level rather than the syntactic level. The central concern of this method was the paragraph. The topic sentence, supporting details, concluding sentence, transitional signals, etc. were given priority. The development and various options on paragraph writing such as illustration paragraph, exemplification paragraph, comparison-contrast paragraph, argumentative paragraph and definition paragraph were also given importance.

Thus, form is the central focus in this method of composition writing. Students are trained to become skilful in identifying, internalizing and finally reproducing the prescribed patterns. The current-traditional rhetoric approach is popularly used throughout Malaysia in the teaching of academic writing in most institutions of higher learning, namely public and private colleges and universities.

2.2.3 The Process Approach

The process approach arose from the dissatisfaction with the controlled composition and the current - traditional rhetoric approach. Many researchers in the 80s' felt that neither of these approaches adequately fostered thought and that both discouraged creative thinking and writing. Researchers, like Taylor (1981), assume that ESL writers, who were ready to compose and express their ideas, use strategies similar to that of native speakers. Hence, the composing process was seen as a non-linear, exploratory and generative process.

This approach to teaching writing advocates teachers to provide a positive, encouraging and collaborative workshop environment within which students with ample time and minimal interference can work through their composing process. The teacher's role here is to help students develop strategies for getting started, generating ideas and information, focusing and planning structure, drafting and editing. The writer here is the centre of attention, preoccupied with the expression of meaning, and the reader is concerned with content, ideas and meaning. Form is

not emphasized too much in this approach. This method has been well accepted in the ESL classroom and is widely used in secondary schools throughout Malaysia. Teachers, however, have reported that it is burdensome because of the large class sizes. At tertiary level, this approach is used in assignments, project papers, dissertations etc.

2.2.4 English for Academic Purposes

English for academic purposes is an approach which focuses on academic discourse genres. It constitutes a series of academic writing tasks, which are aimed at helping the student to function and cope with the academic context. It is meant to create similar conditions under which actual university writing tasks are done. According to Zhu (2004, p.30), "...academic writing serves different purposes in different courses and requires students to assume different social roles." In academic writing, "...academic readers approach students' writing with different sets of expectations, depending on the goals of writing, the perceived roles of the student writers, and the academic readers' own disciplinary expertise" (Zhu, 2004, p.30). Silva (1990) describes the components in this approach as follows:

The writer is pragmatic and orientated towards academic success, meeting standards and requirements. The reader is a seasoned member of the housing academic community who has a well developed schema for academic discourse.

The text is viewed as a conventional response to a particular task type that falls into a recognizable genre.

(Silva, 1990, p.17).

The last two decades have witnessed a steady growth in research on academic writing (Zhu, 2004).

2.2.5 Computer Assisted Language Learning Approach

The computer assisted language learning (CALL) approach is still very recent. Much controversy had been kicked up concerning cost, effectiveness, the quality of existing programs and teacher assistance. Specially designed software programmes for use in ESL writing classes can track errors made by students and help them monitor their own errors. One such example is the Intelligent Essay Assessor (IEA), which was first introduced in 1998 by Landauer, Foltz & Laham. A review of the research on the IEA by Chung and O'Neill (1997) shows that its scores typically correlate with those assigned by human raters. Other examples of prominent writing assessment programs are the Project Essay Grade (PEG) and E-rater, which is used by the Educational Testing Services (Rudner and Gagne, 2001). Networking programmes allow students to view each other's texts on their own screens and to communicate about those texts through their computers. There are also computer text analysis programs that can quantify text features such as word frequency and sentence length and then offer writers' suggestions for

improvement of their prose. Some established tertiary institutions have recently started using the prescribed software but it is all still rather new in the Malaysian education context.

Students who have been through the Malaysian education system from primary school to tertiary level would be familiar with the controlled approach, current-traditional rhetoric method and the process approach to second language composition writing. The English for academic purposes method is being used in institutions of higher learning. The computer assisted language learning approach is trying to make way into the second language classroom in Malaysia but is still limited to certain elite schools and institutions of higher learning due to the high cost and expertise it involves.

2.3 Approaches to Scoring Written Work

There are a variety of ways in which teachers score written work. According to Park (2004), the analytic and holistic scoring procedures are two methods that are extremely popular for scoring compositions. Teachers typically use these two methods to score essay questions (McNamara, 2000; Gallagher, 1998; Airasian, 1997; White, 1994). Gallagher (1998) and White (1994) add that besides the holistic and analytic scoring approaches, another method used to score ESL compositions is the primary trait approach. These three methods of scoring compositions are the ones that are frequently suggested for the scoring of writing

(Gallagher, 1998; White, 1994). Heaton (1990a) explained another, the error-count method. In addition, Myers (1997) and Hoffman (1995), discuss a method called reformulation, which is favoured by several scorers in the ESL field today. Chitravelu et al. (2004) advocates the use of holistic scoring, selective scoring and dual focus scoring.

The impression or holistic method of evaluation is one whereby the writing is treated as a whole. Park (2004, p.1) states, that "...it is a form of scoring in which the scorers are asked to rate the overall proficiency level reflected in a given sample of student writing."

Analytic scoring, on the other hand, involves the separation of the various features of a composition into components for scoring purposes (Park, 2004). Thus, the analytic scoring approach is made up of a sum of separate scores. Depending on the purpose for assessment, texts might be rated on such features as content, organization, cohesion, register, vocabulary, grammar or mechanics.

Primary trait scoring is conceptually the same as holistic scoring except that it is based on an analysis of the unique characteristics of a particular writing assignment and measures the student's performance on those unique characteristics. For example, if the student is writing a persuasive essay, 'persuasiveness' is the primary trait that such an essay should have. Hence, the more persuasive the response, the more points scored.

The grammar count/error-count scoring method involves the counting of the number of errors made in each written work and deducting the number from the given total score (Heaton, 1990a).

Reformulation, on the other hand, is a method of scoring that intends to draw the attention of the L2 writer to the way a more proficient writer would write those parts of the text. Here, native speakers rewrite the learner's essays (Hoffman, 1995).

In selective marking, the students are told prior to the writing activity what criteria they should pay attention to (Chitaravelu et al., 2004). For example, the focus for that day could be on tenses and so when the piece of work is evaluated, 'other errors' are ignored. Attention is only towards the stipulated criteria.

Dual focus marking is a method of scoring whose primary objective is not to discourage writers with good ideas but a poor command of language (Chitaravelu et al., 2004). Hence, a dual grade is given, one for content and another for language ability.

Although educators believe that written answers are crucial in demonstrating a student's skill, it is important to note that essays are far more difficult, time consuming and costly to grade. Individuals mark essays and they have to usually

interpret the student's response. This leads to the rise of an element of personal judgement or subjectivity. Therefore, although there are many scoring methods that are being used in the ESL classroom, achieving consistency and fairness in scoring still remains a challenging endeavour.

The following section will examine in detail the two most popular methods of scoring essays (holistic scoring and analytic scoring), which are widely used in the ESL classroom. Although much research in the past have focused on these methods of scoring, there is still controversy as to the reliability, validity, practicality and effectiveness of each of these methods of scoring essays as both have their advantages and weaknesses.

2.4 Holistic Scoring: An Overview

The early development of what we now call Holistic Scoring took place under the auspices of the English Testing Services (White, 1994). It was the Educational Testing Services (ETS) that sponsored the research and developed the techniques that we use today (White 1994). This method involves global judgments made by trained readers who have been provided with some focus for scoring essays. In this method of marking, the examiner places a single score (for example 70 %) or a letter or grade (C-) to each composition based on a very quick reading of the piece of work. The scorer does not read the composition in detail. Holistic scoring is based on the concept that there are inherent qualities in a written text, which are

greater than the sum of the text's countable elements and that only carefully selected and trained readers can recognize this quality.

Before reading and scoring the essay, the raters or scorers are usually trained in using a set of standards. In order to aid this training process, benchmark papers are selected and used. The scorers are trained using the benchmark essays. They are given examples of low range, middle range and upper range papers. Raters are then given several essays and are expected to inculcate the prescribed standards and to apply them to the given essays.

The process of holistic scoring is usually norm – referenced. Each paper in the group is compared with other papers in that group alone and not with those from other groups. However, in order to make the scoring more explicit, in several cases, a written scoring guide which describes the characteristics of each holistic rating (for example, the characteristics of a ‘W’ paper) is prescribed. Here, trainers would select benchmark papers that closely parallel the criteria described in the scoring guide that has been developed. The raters are then trained in the standards of the scoring guide with benchmark papers.

Today, the most widely known and used ESL holistic scoring procedure occurs with the Test of Written English (TWE) - a section of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam and the International English Language

Testing System (IELTS) exams. Each writing test has a six step and nine step scale / band respectively.

2.4.1 Holistic Scoring - Its Strengths

The greatest advantage of holistic scoring is that it can be carried out rather rapidly. Hence, it saves a lot of time, making it highly efficient and extremely suitable for large-scale assessment (Park, 2004). It has been found that raters can score a substantial number of papers reliably in a relatively short period of time. It just takes five minutes or less for experienced teachers to judge a piece of writing. For example, the scorers who scored the student essays for this study stated that they could score the essays using the holistic method in about one third of the time they took to score the same number of essays using the analytic method of scoring.

Also, due to its efficiency, the composition can be scored more than once, hence making it more reliable. Park (2004) states that the holistic scoring method is very consistent and reliable, since readers are required to make only one decision while scoring. However, Chitravelu et al. (2004) and Brookhart (1999) cautioned that this level of reliability would only be possible, if guidelines pertaining to rater training and rater validity are adhered to. Therefore, the holistic method of scoring is an absolutely efficient method to be used, especially in large-scale assessments, provided sufficient training of scorers could be obtained (White, 1994).

Reid (1993) recommends that teachers in the second language writing class use this method of scoring. She states that the holistic scoring guide is simple enough that it can be given to the students and this could help them get another perspective on their writing. Also, it provides several descriptive criteria for reference, which facilitate the students to write and revise (Reid, 1993). Furthermore, a classroom holistic scoring session can demonstrate to students that teachers do not just score the students' compositions based on a subjective personal perspective. Instead, that scoring is based on a set of logically executed measurement that uses certain criteria.

This method has also found favour with admissions tutors because the descriptions are easy to handle administratively. For example, a standard such as 'all candidates at band 6 and above qualify or will be accepted into the university', can be easily implemented. Furthermore, no interpretation or computation is required. Most universities, both local and abroad, practice this. For instance, the English pre-requisite for all students who wish to enroll into the University of Sheffield Law Twinning Programme at Taylors College Subang Jaya is a minimum IELTS score of 6.5.

The holistic scoring method is also rather cost effective in nature as fewer examiners are required to score papers since the time taken to score a paper is much less than with the analytic scoring method. Holistic scoring has therefore

made the “...direct measurement of writing ability, an economically feasible alternative” (White 1994, p.24).

Furthermore, since the holistic scoring method requires a response to the writing as a whole, teachers usually only place a letter grade or numeral or a brief end comment at the end of their students’ essays. Hence, assume a positive attitude by rewarding the writing for what is done well instead of covering their compositions with 'red ink', as this could have a negative effect on a student’s motivation level.

2.4.2 Holistic Scoring - Its Limitations

The major disadvantage with the holistic approach is that it is rarely diagnostic (Park, 2004). As stated by Chitravelu et al. (2004), the end grade might not serve much purpose to a student who intends to do remedial work. While the score given might be reliable, the student will not necessarily know the reason behind his grade because formative comments with regard to specific areas in need of improvement are not available to the student. Therefore, a holistic score is limiting because it fails to offer any meaningful feedback beyond the comparative ranking it represents. It is only useful in large-scale assessments where the students do not get back their compositions (Chitravelu et al., 2004).

Research has also shown that the holistic method of marking may not be valid because it depends upon the perception of the teacher. A teacher, whose major

preoccupation is grammar, will penalize a student and give him / her a low grade if he / she displays weak grammar and vice versa. This is also known as the halo effect whereby the rating of one criterion may have a knock-on effect in the rating of the next (Hughes 2002). Therefore, the end score or grade might not be valid as it is not representative of the overall quality of the written work, instead, influenced by one or two aspects of the work, which are of interest to the scorer.

Moskal (2000) states that the holistic scoring method only provides a broad judgement and fails to give an adequate profile of the students' language abilities. It does not allow raters "... to distinguish between the various aspects of writing such as control of syntax, depth of vocabulary, organization etc..." (Park, 2004, p.1). This may be problematic, since some writers may have greater fluency than accuracy whereas others may have greater syntactic control than lexical etc. This phenomenon of different aspects of writing developing at different rates is especially evident in the case of second language learners (Park, 2004). Therefore, the holistic scoring approach is limiting because it cannot be used to discriminate between these criteria.

Another shortcoming of the holistic marking approach is that the band scales are not empirically derived. They appear to represent levels of proficiency but as yet, we do not have a clear idea of the order of acquisition of various skill attributes in writing or even if there is such an order. In other words, it cannot represent an absolute value in itself (White, 1994). Therefore, every time a holistic scoring

procedure is completed, those responsible for reporting scores need to make a fresh decision about where the cut off score should be.

Another limitation with the holistic scoring approach has to do with the inability to adjust or convert the given number scores or letter grades. Some scorers may be lenient while some others may be quite stringent. However, given the nature of the holistic score (one final letter grade or single score); it is impossible for any adjustments to be made to take into account the intra-rater inconsistencies displayed by the various scorers. It is also not possible to convert holistic scores to standardized scores.

2.5 Analytic Scoring: An Overview

In analytic scoring, the various component skills such as organization, vocabulary, grammar and content are given individual weight and finally added to arrive at the candidate's total score. They are analytic in the sense that a teacher analyzes the paper according to the areas in the scale. The analytic grading scales were first developed by Diederich (1961) and his associates at the ETS for the purpose of scoring SAT essays. Although the scale is no longer used for the SAT readings, the format has been useful to classroom teachers for grading compositions.

Upon close observation of the analytic scale, two general principles are apparent. One of which is that the criterion for scoring has to be clearly defined. Next, each criterion needs a point value assigned according to its importance. The criteria and point value may differ widely from one task to another depending on the purpose of the activity (Reid, 1993). For example, marks, percentages or letter grades are allocated for various components as shown in the examples below:

A) The allocation of marks for each component

| | |
|--------------|----------|
| Content | 40 marks |
| Language | 40 marks |
| Organization | 20 marks |

B) The allocation of a percentage of the overall grade for each component

| | |
|--------------------|-----|
| Introduction | 10% |
| Topic Sentences | 20% |
| Supporting Details | 20% |
| Grammar | 20% |
| Vocabulary | 20% |
| Conclusion | 10% |

C) The assigning of split grades for each component:

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Organization | A |
| Content | C |
| Mechanics | B |

Since the analytic scoring method has an explicit scoring guide, it is a criterion-referenced method of scoring. However, if this method of scoring is employed, it is essential that flexibility be maintained. Thus, at the various levels, it may become necessary to change either the divisions themselves or the weight given to them. For example, at the elementary level, the teacher may be more interested in grammar and vocabulary than in fluency. Hence, fluency could be omitted from the marking scheme. However, at the advanced level, fluency would be deemed important and would need to be included as an evaluation criterion.

One of the most widely used analytic scales for ESL writing is the Composition Profile in Testing Writing: A Practical Approach by H. Jacobs et al. (1981). The Composition Profile Scale has five weighted components - content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics.

2.5.1 Analytic Scoring - Its Strengths

The analytic scoring method is a method that lends itself more readily to full profile reporting. It can perform a certain diagnostic role in delineating students' strengths and weaknesses in written production. Thus, giving feedback to students on how well they are getting on in the development of their writing skills (Chitravelu et al., 2004; Hughes, 2002). This information about the strengths and weaknesses of students also helps "... instructors and curriculum developers to

tailor instruction more closely to the needs of their students....” (Park, 2004, p.2). This makes analytic scoring particularly useful.

Another advantage of this method of scoring is that a level is recorded in respect of each criterion. This method avoids the flaw of uneven development in the different criteria / skills which can occur in holistic marking. According to Hughes (2002), the very fact that scorers are compelled to consider all the aspects of performance included in the marking scheme, makes this method more valid as it controls biasness to a certain extent. In addition, the very fact that the scorer has to give a number of scores (at least three or four) will also tend to make the scoring more reliable.

Park (2004), McNamara (2000) and Cohen & Cavalcanti (1990) report that this scoring scheme is also a useful tool for the training and standardization of new examiners. Examining bodies have found that it is easier for them to train new markers in the criteria of assessment using the analytic method of scoring. Inexperienced raters find it easier to work with the analytic scale due to its ability “... to evaluate special textual features...” (Park, 2004, p.2). It is harder to train new examiners to use the holistic marking scheme because it does not provide explicit criteria in separate components (McNamara, 2000).

Hamps-Lyons (1991) recommends this method of marking student's writing as it is believed that in order to reach a reasonable balance among all the essential

elements of good writing, readers need to pay conscious attention to all those elements – content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics. Therefore, Hamps-Lyons (1991) advocates the use of a detailed scoring procedure which requires the readers to attend to the multidimensionality of ESL writing.

2.5.2 Analytic Scoring - Its Weaknesses

The main shortcoming with analytic scoring is that it is very time consuming in comparison to the holistic scoring method. In order to score an essay using the analytic scale, a teacher might have to make, between six to twelve scoring related decisions. This leads to slow scoring, which in turn leads to high costs as more examiners are required.

Hughes (2002) states another disadvantage, which is the concentration on the different aspects of writing. He claims that this might divert the reader's attention from the overall effect of the piece of writing. As Park states, "...measuring the quality of a text by tallying accumulated sub skill scores diminishes the interconnectedness of written discourse, and gives the false impression that writing can be understood and fairly assessed by analyzing autonomous text features." Hence, as much as the whole is often greater than the sum of its parts, "...a composite score may be very reliable but not valid" (Chitravelu et al., 2004, p.341).

Although analytic schemes may facilitate agreement amongst examiners as to the precise range of qualities that are to be evaluated in an essay, Weir (1993) argues that in many schemes, the actual amount of individual marker variation involved in the assessment (the degree of unreliability) may be reduced very little if the criteria lack explicitness. There is also apparently no agreement about what if any separate sub-skills exist in writing (Weir, 1993). White (1994) states that many idiosyncratic analytic scales exist. Under such circumstances, it is extremely difficult to obtain reliable analytic scores.

According to Hamps-Lyons (1990), even experienced scorers have difficulty assigning numerical scores based on certain descriptors found in an analytic scale. This is because many analytic scales do not accommodate qualitative judgement easily.

Also if component scales are not used correctly, according to internal criteria, "... it can result in a halo effect" (Park, 2004, p.3), in which one component score may influence another.

Finally, some educators and researchers feel that detailed negative feedback can be pedagogically destructive (Truscott, 1996) and that this could inhibit a student's development as a writer.

2.6 Previous Studies on Holistic vs. Analytic Scoring

A review of literature done in the past 15 years has shown that most of the studies comparing the analytic and holistic scoring methods focused on issues on validity (Willett, 2001), reliability (Gilfert and Harada, 1992) and efficiency (Hunter et al., 1996). No study has attempted to compare or investigate directly the holistic and analytic methods of scoring and their contribution towards improving students' writing skills, hence, the significance of this study.

As stated by Cumming (1990, p.31), "research and a thorough understanding of the holistic and analytic method of scoring and their effects on students' writing performance still remain limited." Reid (1993) equates the holistic scoring method, which is rarely diagnostic to 'no feedback' or 'no correction' and the analytic scoring method, which lends itself to immediate intervention in discrete parts of the essay to 'feedback' or 'correction'. Thus, the existing research base has not addressed the big question: Does the holistic or analytic method of scoring affect students' writing performance? For the purposes of this study, previous studies which examine the correction (feedback) versus no correction (no feedback) comparison will be reviewed.

2.7 What is Feedback?

Lightbown and Spada (1999, p.171) define feedback as "...any indication to the learner that their use of the target language is incorrect." When a student writes a composition and hands it up to the language teacher, the issue of what type of feedback to provide or how to respond, always follows.

Feedback or response can come in oral or written form. Oral feedback includes conferencing between students and teachers. This mode of feedback provides a platform for teachers to gain a deeper understanding of their students' writing and the students will have an opportunity to get clarification on the comments made by their teachers. On the other hand, written feedback which is the most commonly used mode of feedback in ESL classrooms, comprises marginal or end comments, underlining of errors, writing the correct form over student texts etc.

Feedback can assume a positive or negative form (Long, 1996; Chaudron, 1993). Error correction or providing the learner with direct or indirect information about what is unacceptable is viewed as negative feedback. Encouraging comments, any form of approval or providing learners with models of what is acceptable in the target language is considered positive feedback

Feedback can be given in explicit (direct) or implicit (indirect) forms. Explicit feedback includes grammatical explanations, writing over students' texts or code

marking errors whereas implicit responses include clarification requests, general and end or marginal comments (Long et al., 1998).

Ultimately, whether the feedback is in oral or written form, explicit or implicit in nature, negative or positive, the goal of feedback is "...to help students improve their writing proficiency to the point where they are cognizant of what is expected of them as writers and are able to produce it with minimal errors and maximum clarity" (Williams, 2003, p.1).

2.7.1 Considerations for Feedback in Second Language Writing

Many researchers of Second Language writing have outlined several factors that a ESL teacher should consider when responding to student writing. These considerations would aid teachers to give more effective feedback to their students.

Firstly, error correction should be clear and consistent (Ferris, 2004; Tatawy, 2002, Reid, 1993). It is therefore, important for teachers to adopt a systematic method for providing feedback.

Secondly, the teacher should respond like a concerned reader and not as a mere grammarian or grade giver (Keh, 1990). Feedback should take individual and

contextual variations into consideration (Ferris, 2003). Thus, different types of errors may likely require varying treatments (Ferris, 2004).

Thirdly, comments should be limited, as most students would not be able to pay attention to too many comments all at once. Focusing on a few errors at a time is recommended (Tatawy, 2002; Keh, 1990).

The frequency of response is also important when giving feedback. According to Reid (1993), the more immediate the response, the more effective the result because the strategies the students use for composing would still be fresh in their minds.

Instead of feedback being limited to surface level errors, it must be made on all pertinent aspects of writing such as content, grammar, organization, vocabulary and mechanics (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Ferris, 1997; Ferris, 1995; Keh, 1990).

Tatawy (2002) and Ferris (2004) also state that a learner's developmental readiness to process feedback is also another important aspect to be considered. This is because some students with lower levels of second language proficiency may not possess the linguistic competence to process the feedback and self-edit their compositions.

The amount of time students are given to process feedback and correct their compositions is another important factor to be considered. Although research evidence on the effect of peer-editing is conflicting, it has been found that students enjoy it (Ferris, 2003). Therefore it is important that students be given adequate time and opportunity to self-edit or peer-edit their work. (Tatawy, 2002).

Lastly, the feedback provided by the teacher should be fine-tuned to match the learner's perception of the given feedback as close as possible (Tatawy, 2002). In order to achieve this, Ferris (2003) suggests the use of conferencing between teacher and student.

2.8 The 'Feedback' vs. 'No Feedback' Debate

With the exception of a few research articles published in the 1980s (Redecki and Swales, 1988; Zamel, 1985), research on feedback did not get much attention until the 1990s. Although providing feedback is a time consuming and labour intensive activity, many researchers feel that teacher feedback is both desirable and helpful (Goldstein, 2004; Ferris, 2004; Chittravolu et al., 2004; Lee, 2003; Chandler, 2003 Hyland and Hyland, 2001).

A study carried out by Lee (2003) revealed that both teachers and students preferred comprehensive error feedback and that although the teachers were not

very aware of the long-term significance of error feedback, students were reliant on their teachers to correct their errors. According to Goldstein (2004, p.3), "...students need to learn that the words they inscribe on paper are not static and that meaning resides not only in these words but also in what the audience brings to the reading of these words..." In order to understand this, students need feedback from their language teachers as only through feedback can a writer learn "...where, what they have intended has been achieved and where their compositions have fallen short of their intentions and goals..."(Goldstein, 2004, p.3).

Ferris (1999) states that feedback is necessary because an absence of feedback could frustrate students who believe in error correction. Studies by Ferris (1997) and Ferris & Roberts (2001) have also shown that students who receive feedback were able to self-edit their texts more effectively; ultimately producing better quality written work, essays, research papers, etc.

On the other hand, studies by Leki (1990), Truscott (1996) and Conrad & Goldstein (1999) have shown that students did not revise better or arrive at more accurate texts although they received feedback from their lecturers. There is also much evidence that there is variation among students in terms of how helpful they find their teacher's feedback and how well they understand it (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Ferris, 1997). A study by Hyland (1998) which set out to investigate ESL writers' reactions to and use of written feedback showed that the

use of teacher written feedback varies due to individual differences and different experiences students bring with them to the classroom setting.

Many students find their teacher feedback confusing (Zamel, 1985; Ferris, 1995). A study by Fregeau (1999) found that the students' interpretation of responses to their instructors feedback were that of resentment and frustration. Neither participant acquired language proficiency or writing skills from the corrections written in their papers. Instead, they simply copied the instructor's corrections into their next draft (Fregeau, 1999). Research by Fathman and Whalley (1990) and Fregeau (1999) have also shown that surface level error correction overemphasizes the negative and promotes student resistance to using new language structures and improving content.

Hence, the controversy continues as to whether error correction leads ESL writers to long-term improvement in the accuracy and overall quality of their writing. According to Ferris (2004), although many studies have been carried out over the past decade on error correction, only a few have actually examined the feedback versus no feedback comparison (Lee, 2003; Ferris and Roberts, 2001; Polio, Fleck & Leder, 1998; Hyland, 1998; Fathman and Whalley, 1990). Furthermore, most of these studies focused on immediate revision or investigated teacher feedback on multiple drafts.

Critics of error correction have dismissed the fact that the ability to edit texts or produce better final papers in multiple drafts upon receiving feedback from lecturers can actually translate into improvement in writing ability. Hence, the assessment of the delayed effects of feedback is lacking in many studies in second language writing (Ferris, 2003). According to Ferris (2003, p.135), "...we have almost no longitudinal evidence about the extent to which feedback helps the students to improve their writing over a duration of time."

This does not however mean that the examination of a student's ability to edit from one draft to the next after receiving feedback is useless or irrelevant, but merely that the designs used to date have mostly been incomplete. Another problem with most of these studies is that typically no control group (receiving no error correction) is included. Due to the absence of a control group, measured improvements in accuracy over time could result from other factors besides error correction. Empirically speaking, this is a legitimate concern and certainly exposes a gap in the research base.

Only one study by Polio et al. (1998) has so far investigated the correction versus no correction comparison over a period of time with the use of a control group. However, this study was done over a semester, i.e. 15 weeks and only focused on sentence-level errors/linguistic accuracy. The results show that although students' linguistic accuracy improved, both over the semester and from draft to the revised essay, the group that received additional feedback did not perform any better than

the control group (no feedback group) on measures of linguistic accuracy. No similar study has been carried out in short-term (16-hour) courses and neither has any study focused on all the different aspects of writing (content, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics and organisation).

Hence, the current study sets out to address the following shortcomings in order to shed light on these gaps in the research base. The comparison involves the two methods of scoring (holistic and analytic), popularly used in second language writing classrooms. The study focuses on short-term writing courses and investigates the effects of the two scoring methods (analytic and holistic) on the student's writing performance. A control group is included in order to make the study more valid.

In conclusion, Chapter Two has attempted to provide the appropriate context for this research by reviewing relevant studies in the area of responding to ESL student writing and has discussed several key concepts, factors and variables. The following chapter would discuss the methodology that was employed to carry out this study.