Student reflection: Fostering learning and writing

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Abstract

Since September 1997, first-year undergraduate students studying at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) have had to take a two-semester English course. In the first semester, one of the course aims is to teach effective academic writing skills. Students are required to write essays which present sound arguments, supported by reference materials. Most students, however, find it extremely hard to grasp the concept of, and practise, academic writing in one semester. The author reports on a case study that involved reflective experiences within classroom interaction, and ways to foster students’ reflection so as to enhance their motivation to learn, and to improve their academic writing ability. The research was also conducted for the teacher to understand the students’ difficulties, and their processes of learning. The author acted as both the teacher and a teacher-researcher, and the data include classroom observations, field notes, teaching journals, students’ e-mails and interview notes.

文章摘要

自一九九七年九月起，香港科技大學一年級的學生，都要修讀一個為期兩個學期的英語課程。首學期的課程目標之一，是提升學生學術文章的寫作能力。許多學生都覺得在一個學期內學會寫專業論文是件苦事，也有許多人看不到寫這種體裁的重要性。這次報告的內容，就是記載作者如何以不同方法，來提昇學生在學習過程中的反思能力，進而使他們提高學習興趣，和增進寫作能力；老師對學生在學習的過程中面對的難題，也有進一步的瞭解。本文作者既是老師，也是研究員，研究資料包括老師的教學筆記、學生的電子郵件和訪問等。
Background

Belcher & Braine (1995:xiii) acknowledge their own problems in teaching academic writing:

We are well aware of how marginalised academic discourse can make non-native speakers feel at Anglophone institutions of higher learning.

At HKUST, where the official medium of instruction is English, we experience similar problems. Students need to communicate with teaching staff in English, read English textbooks and write examination papers in English. However, they switch to their mother-tongue, Cantonese, whenever they do not have to use English. Students at HKUST major in Science, Engineering or Business, but have to take some electives in the School of Humanities and Social Science.

First-year university students are not necessarily motivated to learn writing in itself and for itself (Brooke 1991:7). A general impression is that our students do not enjoy writing academic papers very much. Some teachers even think that students do not have enough English to engage in this kind of writing. These impressions also contribute to my own feeling of frustration with the students.

Like many other English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers, I am interested in finding out what is happening in the writing classes for non-native speakers of English who are expected to learn to speak authoritatively in post-secondary academic communities. Most of the students have not been encouraged at secondary school to develop a writer identity and 'see' writing within a social context. Issues such as audience analysis, developing a voice, backing up ideas with references, etc. are seldom discussed in a secondary classroom.

Our first-year students are, nevertheless, expected to acquire the ability to write in a highly specialised genre within weeks. For their first written assignment, students are asked to give an in-depth analysis of a given topic in 500 words. They are expected to exploit the reference articles fully, clearly indicate their stance on the issue and present the arguments persuasively.

The participants in this study were four classes of first-year students from the Departments of Mathematics, Physics, Biology and Electrical & Electronic Engineering, taking a compulsory course English for Academic
Student reflection: Context and definition

What is reflection? Why is it important for teachers to examine students’ reflection? One of the teacher participants in a study described by Watson (1996:1) provides an insightful answer:

[Reflection is] thinking in depth about things, ... just where your thinking is challenged in any way, where you are not just reacting on a superficial level, where you are thinking beyond the immediate thing to its implications and possibilities, I think!

Schon (1983:56) links reflections to actions: ‘reflection tends to focus interactively on the outcomes of action, the action itself and the intuitive knowings [sic] implicit in the action’. Therefore, reflection ‘has a social dimension’ (Scott & Usher 1996:115). Not only is reflection strongly connected to actions, it also involves thinking. Scott & Usher argue that ‘reflection has intentionality, which is grounded in the situation and thus involves ‘thinking’, not in a purely abstract sense but thinking about something—in other words it has both the form and content’ (ibid.).

Winter (1989:25) describes reflection as ‘the crucial process by means of which we make sense of evidence—whether from specific data-gathering procedures or from our practical experience as it occurs’. But he also warns us that a problem that may arise from reflection is that while ‘reflection is tacitly assumed to be a straightforward familiar process, or one where the comprehensiveness of the data automatically guarantees the validity of the interpretation’ (ibid.), it is also subject to interpretation and reinterpretation. In the reflective process, researchers should be aware of their standpoints and make them explicit.
Baird (1992:39–40) explains reflection and reflective processes thus:

If learning is a constructivist process by which the learner generates meaning according to what he or she already knows and believes, it follows that reflection is a cornerstone of learning and of personal and professional development. ... [Reflection] mean[s] a conscious, thoughtful, purpose-related process. Reflective processes such as asking evaluative questions, selecting procedures to answer these questions, evaluating the results and making appropriate decisions may lead to enhanced cognitive understanding and metacognition awareness and control.

Student reflection is primarily a learning strategy, but it is also a promising self-evaluation strategy: while enriching learning for students, student reflection can also help teachers and institutions learn more about student learning. Student reflection is both an old and a new approach. Conscientious teachers always want to know more about student learning and how they evaluate the course apart from the formal evaluation system. MacGregor (1993:1) points out that 'educators in the professions contend that the skills and habits of critical reflection are pillars of effective professional practice'.

Baird (1992:36) argues that 'learning is made more than effective and productive by training students to direct active enquiry—comprising evaluation, reflection, and action—in a way which enhances metacognition regarding their own learning' [italics original]. Preparing students to consider carefully the central thesis of the writing and to evaluate what has happened in the process of the writing, involves creating opportunities for beginning writers to learn the skills and attitudes required for reflective practice.

The assumption that students need to learn to become reflective, and the belief that the EAP course should be instrumental raise three very important questions:

- What conditions can be created in EAP programmes to cultivate a reflective practice?
- How can a teacher facilitate such reflective thinking, look below the surface, explore meanings and alternative possibilities and use reflection as a form of thinking to bring about understanding of students’ learning and the teacher’s own teaching?
- What changes will there be if the teacher becomes a classroom-researcher?
In the Fall Semester, 1997, I explored different strategies to encourage continuous dialogues in different types of student–student and teacher–student interactions to collect reflections from students. The attempts to create a reflective practice in the class generated an important conception, distinguishing between the students' role as participants in relation to my role as a teacher-researcher. Not only was I experimenting with some reflection strategies to encourage students to become more reflective in their learning but those actions and students' reflection at the same time also generated reflections from myself which enriched the understanding of my own teaching practice.

A vast challenge for me was fighting against time: how could these reflective processes be incorporated within everyday classroom activities in order to foster systematically the desired learning experience the teacher thought the students should experience, while at the same time cover the basic materials on the EAP course?

**The case study**

Despite the logistic constraints of the course, a number of strategies were built into the design of tasks in order to facilitate reflective learning. The form of student reflection discussed in the paper involves students in describing their learning and making qualitative judgements about it. The reflective teaching method also gives the teacher an opportunity to learn what keeps students motivated, engaged, and interested and what they experience as useful.

**Episode one: Initial reflection**

The first week of the course introduced the course materials and assignments. Students were asked to write an e-mail message to me sharing what they thought about the following:

1. their past experience in learning English;
2. about EAP:
   - what they thought EAP was;
   - what kinds of difficulties they anticipated on the course; and
   - how they would tackle the problems.

The purpose was not to assess the students' writing ability but to know
about their past experiences, and how they perceived the type of writing
they were going to learn about in the following weeks. After receiving all
the e-mails, I collated the students’ responses and returned them to
everyone.

Some e-mails from students, among others, confirmed some of my
worries:

I hate academic English, especially academic writing. As there are
so many unnecessary words and unseen vocabularies in academic
English, that really makes me sick! I always find those academic
essay writer want to show readers they know a lot of words,
phrases and vocabularies. So they are making the essays long-
winded and in some cases, they may get off the points. That why I
hate academic writing so much. ... The world will be beautiful if
academic English never exists.

Probably would I suppose academic writing be a kind of universal
language in UST? Language using must be more formal,
emphasizing grammatical techniques?

Many students seemed to have little idea of what academic English
writing is, though many of them suspected that academic writing would
be highly relevant to their success in the university. Some stated
explicitly that they did not like learning EAP writing while others had
some misunderstanding about EAP.

Altogether there were 70 students in the four classes, thus 70 initial e-
mails came to me. I replied to some individually because I felt that some
issues had to be resolved more urgently than others, for example,
establishing greater rapport with those students who expressed aversion
towards EAP. I also replied to those who stated that they had never had
happy experiences in learning English at school.

I then sent a feedback e-mail to all students, in which I discussed some of
the ‘interesting’ items they had initiated. I responded to some of the
issues and asked them to respond further to my comments. The
responses, however, were not as numerous or as prompt as I had
expected. But the e-mail exchanges had set the scene and started the flow
of communication between my students and me. Most importantly, it
created a reflection loop which anyone could join in whenever they felt
like it. And many students did join in at a later stage of the course.
In the initial e-mails, students were asked to anticipate potential language problems and discuss how they would solve them. They listed many problems, but very few of them actually discussed the solutions. This might indicate that students had seldom thought about how to solve the problems, or that they did not know how to solve the problems themselves. Those e-mails provided a great deal of information on how they saw the learning of English and what problems they had. One very interesting observation is that in their first e-mails, the students frequently moved from describing experiences of their learning to self-evaluation of their English ability, and then their expectation of the course. For example:

In the past, I feel learning English is so boring because the teacher only give the excise to me and then asked me to check the answer. Then I cannot learn anything in the English lessons. As the result, I don’t really like learn English. On the other hand, in my writing always contains many grammatical errors and wrong spelling.

In this course, I hope my English standard can improve that I can express my opinion better. However, I think the most difficulty in this course is people are shy as our English is not good enough. And only speak and listen more can improve this problem.

*Episode two: Reflection on critical reading*

To prepare them for their first piece of academic writing, students were given a set of reading texts as resources. The original idea was that students should not have to go to the library and search for sources. However, my students had a tendency to take what they were given to read as authoritative, as something they had to cite and could not challenge.

I believe that learners of academic writing should be encouraged to pay attention to the embedded ideology of the text they read. They should approach ideas from the texts critically and read the power within the text. In teaching the course, I want my learners to realise that they should focus not only on the product and the final grade but also the writing process, the reading and the target audience. The act of reading and interpreting texts should be taken as a very important step. Reading, here, includes multiple reading as well as 'resistant' reading—students resisting the power asserted in reading sources.
To encourage the students to experience the process of text interpretation, I asked them to read the set of reading sources (which contain thirteen academic articles related to the topic of their first written assignment) and then discussed in small groups what they had found to be useful or relevant for their assignments. They were then asked to challenge and criticise some of the ideas expressed in the reading. Each group would concentrate on reading four articles intensively. They were encouraged to find the gaps between their opinions and those they found in the reading. Then each group summarised its findings and sent an e-mail to other groups in the same class. I then collated all the students' opinions and sent a summary e-mail to all students. At one go, they could see how some of the ideas in the reading sources had been challenged. They were further encouraged to comment on the ideas recorded in the e-mail and send out their comments to everyone. This e-mail loop provided authentic readership for the novice writers. For the first time, they could expect to have 70 others reading what they had written.

The initial group work made the criticism and interpretation of texts interesting and interactive. The fact that each e-mail was sent off by a group made the students feel the message was powerful. Later on, in individual conferences (as discussed in Episode four), many of the students said that this was the first time they had been invited to challenge and reject the reading sources provided. Many of them said they had thought the given reading sources were meant to be relevant and had to be used in the writing. They also said that instead of exercising their own critical thinking in structuring the first piece of assignment, they had at first thought that they had to evolve their ideas around the ideas presented in the texts.

Despite the 'realisation', the assignments later received and marked showed that many of the students were still very wary of not accepting what they found in the reading sources. Students definitely need more training to transfer the realisation to action, as they are too bound by the ideas in the reading sources provided. It seems that sometimes the poor logic of students' writing is due to their lack of ability to extract salient points from reading and to challenge the authoritative voice of reference materials.

Episode three: Retrospection on the writing process

A few days after submitting their first assignment, students were asked to send a retrospective e-mail account on the process of how they had
carried out the research and the writing. That is, they were to talk about what they had enjoyed, and what they had not, in the process of writing, the problems they had encountered, and finally what they had learned. They were encouraged to analyse the problems they had encountered, and talk about any other related issues.

By this time, many students had already had several e-mail exchanges with me and other classmates, and many of them sent me very long e-mails. A few of them even said they were beginning to enjoy expressing their feelings by e-mail.

Below are some extracts from student e-mails, indicating how they observed the learning experience:

- How much they enjoyed the course

  When doing Paper 1, I quite enjoyed developing my critical thinking. All the points I wrote should be reference to the title and support by the resource files. It is the new experience for doing that.

  (17/11/97 Refl. 2)

  I enjoy writing in English. That's a good chance for me to write a piece of writing in English that I didn't learn it before. I learnt not only how to write a research paper but also learnt much that particular area for the research.

  (17/11/97 Refl. 7)

  I enjoyed the process of it, e.g. finding some relevant information from the resource file. In particularly, I learned how to put the quotations to support my points that I have never learned in higher school. I find it quite interested and useful in my paper.

  (17/11/97 Refl. 10)

From the process of writing paper 1, I can learn what is academic paper, although I still can't write a good academic paper. As an University student, I think this kind of paper is of great importance for me. In the past, I would only write paper in English in the lessons without thinking. All the materials provided, I assumed, should be right! Of course, I know it is totally wrong! 'Everything should be criticised before it is chose to be used.' (17/11/97 Refl. 27)
• How much they didn't enjoy the course

Actually, I'm not enjoy doing the paper 1. I think it is quite boring and spend me quite a lot of time to do it. When writing the paper 1, I find it is hard to summarise the useful points and rewrite it. It takes me lots of time to think how can I rewrite the points correctly. Maybe I think it is difficult because I haven't write anything about English since the AL exam! (17/11/97 Refl. 5)

It's very trouble to refer my passage to the resource file. I can't express my own opinion in the case that there's no relevant reference in the resource file. (17/11/98 Refl. 42)

I don't enjoy this homework. Because it causes lots of time to check, think, correct ... something like these. (17/11/97 Refl. 36)

• The difficulties they encountered in the process of writing

My difficulties
1. how to get the good points from so many resources.
2. how to organise the points in the passage.
3. how to distinguish which passages are related to my topic. (17/11/97 Refl. 12)

At first, I can't catch the main theme ... It is very confused to write a academic paper which is argumentative. I don't know how to argue the point and show out the stand. (17/11/97 Refl. 36)

I have found a lot of problems when writing paper 1. Fisrt, I found that much of my English words and terms have been erased. When I doing it, I was frequently look at my dictionary. I couldn’t recall something which I have learnt in my high school. Secondly, I found that my grammar is very weak. I don’t know how to improve my English. (17/11/97 Refl. 65)

• What they learnt

I have learnt something in doing paper 1. The most important thing is I know how to write a formal essay. I know how to find points, how to write a referece,etc. this is very important for my further study. (17/11/97 Refl. 35)
To me, I learned much during writing the paper one. Not only
learned the skills on how to writing a academic paper but I also
knew the reasons that why some students are better than I when
learning English. I realised that what kind of learner I am. And I am
trying to change my English learning approach. (17/11/97 Refl. 33)

During paper one writing, I learned how to use quotations and how
to write the references for academic writing. I think all of these
skills are useful to me as I am a science student. (17/11/97 Refl. 33)

The move from novice writers to slightly more experienced writers
frequently causes frustration, uncertainty, self-doubt, a lowering of self-
estee, fatigue, or even hatred—the process of reflection generates many
feelings that need expression, feedback and response. These feelings
were reflected very vividly in the e-mails. What frustrated many of my
first-year students was that they did not see how the genre they were
learning was different from what they had learned at secondary school
(where the emphasis was on the mechanical part of writing and their
writer identity was not taken into consideration). Learning about writing
may also become frustrating when students do not see themselves as
‘writers’—someone who uses writing to develop thinking to get things
done or help solve problems.

Brooke (1991:5) points out that ‘developing such a role, however,
depends crucially on connecting the role of self as writer with other roles
in the culture outside the classroom, especially writers’ roles in the
culture at large—including roles for the self as reflective thinker and
community influencer’. The problem is, as reflected in the students’ e-
mails, no matter how much I emphasised the fact that they had to take a
stance, some students still did not really sense the power of writership
and the motivation possessed by genuine writers who produce this kind
of genre. It is extremely important that EAP teachers explore ways to
encourage students to negotiate stances and develop their writerly
behaviour, as learning to write meaningfully requires developing an
understanding of the self as writer.

What is encouraging is that many students now observed the importance
of the editing process. Many of them began to understand why I had
asked them to write the assignment over a period of time. Though many
of them stated that they did not enjoy doing the writing, most of them
recognised the importance of learning to produce writing of this kind.
This is different from my initial assumption that most students would
find very little relevance in learning academic writing.

Students began evaluating their writing process without realising it. Some criticised their own learning styles. For example, many of them suggested they should have planned better so they could have had more time for editing and proofreading. Most of them expressed in their e-mails that they would invest more time on editing when they did their second written assignment in the following semester. Some of them even spelt out an initial work plan for their second assignment.

About half of them found the writing process enjoyable and thought they had learned some valuable writing skills, such as referencing and giving citations. A few of them commented on the course and my teaching style, etc. Some discussed how interaction between students and the teacher facilitated their learning. Apparently students were becoming more used to reflecting on their feelings and learning experiences.

**Episode four: Teacher-student conference**

In this stage, each student made a half-hour appointment with me. One of the aims was to involve the students more in evaluating their marked assignments. When returning the assignments, I gave them individual feedback on their writing. But I also deliberately included one more element—the students were also asked to explain why they had chosen to structure their papers in certain ways. The purpose here was not to comment on their language proficiency or the skills they had not mastered, but to elicit a retrospective description of the writing process. It was hoped that the feedback would develop a sense of audience, which students appeared to lack. The aim of asking questions was not to instruct students, but to prompt them to develop an awareness of the need to be explicit in writing, and of the possible existence of viewpoints other than their own.

The conference session, which was conducted in English, consisted mainly of the students giving feedback, while I acted merely as a receiver of feedback from novice writers. The idea was to create an environment in which the learners could describe and analyse their learning experiences which they might eventually learn from. For instance, in one of the conferences, a student told me he did not have a standpoint in his argumentative essay, and that if he took sides, he might be considered as being biased; thus he simply wrote down all the pros and cons, and left it to his readers to decide.
Their retrospective reflections are extremely useful and insightful for the teacher to understand how students perceive academic writing. They also provide an excellent channel for the teacher to clarify some of the concepts related to the conventions of writing academic papers.

The event was an important learning experience for me as well. Students' conceptions of writing and learning may not change immediately because of the conferencing, but the learning from it may grow and generate future action. When a student tried to describe why she had approached the writing in a particular way, she was already engaging in a self-evaluative dialogue with herself. At the same time she was also trying to make explicit her evaluation and justification.

Students often perceive written feedback as criticism rather than constructive and well-meant suggestions. However, my role as a facilitator in the conference sessions managed to add meaning to the conferencing experience and helped students see the importance of the two-way communication.

My reflection on teachers' reflection

The teacher as a researcher—is it possible?

Stenhouse (as discussed in Elliot 1991:24) coined the idea of the 'teacher as a researcher' to signify the dependence of pedagogical change on a teacher capacities for reflection. Elliot (ibid.) further elaborates on this idea by indicating that there are two accounts of how teachers reflectively develop their practices:

1. The teacher undertakes research into a practical problem and on this basis changes some aspect of his or her teaching. The development of understanding precedes the decision to change teaching strategies. In other words, reflection initiates action and continues to do so.

2. The teacher changes some aspect of his or her teaching in response to a practical problem and then monitors its effectiveness in resolving it. Through the evaluation the teacher's initial understanding of the problem is modified and changed. The decision to adopt a change strategy therefore precedes the development of understanding. Action initiates reflection.
Elliot’s description of the relationship between reflection and action explicitly states that reflection will bring changes, though in reality it might be difficult to distinguish between the two categories of reflection. Whether reflection or action comes first is not important to me, and it may be difficult to trace the origin. Reflection and action very often generate each other and form a cyclical process in teaching.

The process of collecting reflections benefits both the participants and the teacher-researcher, but it also implies taking risks. Sandy, one of the teachers who took part in Davis’ (n.d.) action research recounted her experience in the following way:

Learning how to critically analyse my own knowledge and teaching the students how to reflect on their own learning calls for more responsibility from both parties. There will be uncertainty, risk taking, accommodations, and adaptations before new equilibriums can be met. So far it has been very exciting and many times a humbling experience.

In my own case report, the element of ‘risk-taking’ comes in the frustration I felt at the recognition of the practical constraints which prevented me from responding to the reflections generated and collected. After the learners had been encouraged to analyse and explore problems, I felt so powerless to help them overcome them.

One student, for example, offered to resubmit his assignment after having gained a better understanding of how to tackle the topic, but when I accepted his offer, on condition that the original grade would stand, he withdrew it. I did not really think the student’s attitude toward learning should be encouraged, but this is a good example of the paradox of teachers doing classroom research—being able to have a deeper understanding of learning and teaching may not bring immediate positive changes to the teaching and learning. Sandy is perhaps right in referring to reflective teaching as a ‘humbling experience’. This kind of experience sometimes is risk-taking as it will help promote students’ evaluation of the course and it might be frustrating for both teachers and students if no action can be taken because of logistic constraints or the lack of power of teachers or students.

Nevertheless, one of the advantages of having reflective interaction with students is that it allows the teacher to incorporate elements of individualism and self-direction into situations where many pedagogical decisions, including specific content and the design of assignments, are
predetermined for the sake of standardisation. The point is that it is possible, even in highly structured learning situations, to create continuous dialogue with the learners by making sure that they have some control over as many elements of the process as possible. From this point of view, it can be argued that eliciting reflection from learners can be viewed as a potential strategy for helping teachers work with learners who may be resistant because of resentment toward the circumstances that led them to the learning activity.

**Has the teacher-researcher changed?**

I have become more patient in teaching, as I know I am collecting reflections, and the process itself allows me to be more flexible and more sympathetic to my students. Not that I demand less from them, but I have given myself a chance to examine the matters and look for possible solutions (though I am unsure whether those so-called solutions will really solve problems, rather than causing other side-effects).

The students’ reflections have changed considerably some of my unfounded assumptions about how they conceive writing and learning. I am becoming more reflective than before, by paying more attention to consultation methods and giving advice. However, I doubted the effectiveness and the usefulness of some of my comments. For example, on rereading my responses to students I found that very often I had written: ‘How interesting!’ ‘This demonstrates good critical thinking.’ or ‘This deserves your concern. Come and talk to me!’ The authoritative tone in the replies startled me. Were they useful? Maybe it is time to think about the language of responding to reflection. How can the teacher respond to students’ reflection so as to facilitate the teaching and learning? I do not have the answer now, but reflection on reading my responses to students’ e-mails has revealed that I had adopted a role of a counsellor and researcher rather than of a facilitator.

**Have the students changed?**

At the beginning I felt uncomfortable asking the students to write extra e-mails to me, for fear of disturbing them, and worried that they would complain about the increased workload. But most students said that they enjoyed maintaining a dialogue with me and other coursemates. It seems that they felt they now had a voice and someone would listen.
By taking the responsibility for self-evaluation and reflection in their own learning, the students have become more responsible and paid more attention to the different paths in the learning process.

It is hard to say whether they have improved their writing skills in such a short time. While experiences and recognition might be the foundation of learning, they do not necessarily lead to it. Writing is such a complex matter that at this moment I would be very cautious arguing that the reflections generated by students have played a crucial role in shaping their writing. Developing the habit of reflecting on one's learning process, however, will help: the learning may grow, the meanings may transform and the writing experiences of students may alter.

**Bringing it all together**

Let us end with a teacher's opinion on reflection (Richert 1992:188–9):

...(reflection) is hard because one must analyse what transpired and to some degree make a value judgement about it. And if the reflection is honest, it can mean that a teacher may have to alter his/her style or completely chuck something that he/she had worked hard to develop. It seems to be much safer and more secure not to reflect, because one doesn’t have to change that which he/she doesn’t see as being wrong. (John 1, Journal entry 4:4)

Sometimes being honest about the reflections from students may be too intimidating. Student reflection might be threatening if we really take it seriously but only when we take their voices seriously will we gain insights into student learning and their resistance to it.\(^3\)

**Notes**

1. In the Spring Semester of 1997, all first-year students had to hand in, as their first assignment, a 500-word academic paper entitled 'Some students learn a second language more successfully than others. Identify the reasons and explain'. A set of reference articles was provided. Individual teachers might initiate different teaching activities with the articles, but students were expected to read the articles themselves and decide what information would be relevant and supportive to the assignment. Due to time constraints, students were required to hand in only one draft of the paper for grading.

2. One of the paradoxes in the learning of writing, I think, is that while during the writing process students often spend much time and energy in structuring a piece of work which they think will demonstrate their logical thinking, referencing skills and good
organisation skills, etc., they seldom care to check whether they have achieved this by
referring to the teacher's comments. My observation is that unless students have to sub-
mit a second draft, or have to use the feedback of the first draft to revise the paper, they
simply ignore the teacher's comments. Written comments are very often perceived as
something negative and final. In an ideal writing classroom, the students should be
couraged to use the teacher's feedback in follow-up activities. In this way the
feedback will be acted upon as supplementary information in the process of the writing
rather as something final and grade-related.

3. A shorter and earlier version of this study was published as:
Reflection through interaction: A study of unskilled student writers. In J. Spring & B.
Gilroy (Eds), *Quality learning in English medium higher education: The challenge of content,
skills and language.* Proceedings of the third International ELT Conference (pp. 175–84).
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