

Dissertation – Education

An investigation into the efficacy of different types of indirect feedback on student responses to lexical errors in academic writing

Structural features

Communication features

Short, simple title that addresses the topic

Abstract

Over the last twenty years, the nature, role and effectiveness of formative written feedback on second language speakers' writing ability has generated a great deal of debate, discussion and argument. As a practising EAP tutor, course director and syllabus designer, developing effective feedback methodologies and practises is of paramount concern.

This study **investigated** the relative efficacy of different types of indirect correction feedback provided by tutors during the draft stage of an academic English research writing assignment written by international students on a 10 week summer Pre-session Management Course at the University of Bath. The study was mainly designed to test the hypothesis that different methods of indirect feedback can produce more or less favourable results.

In order to narrow the focus to fit with the scope of this study, vocabulary errors **were analysed** and included an examination of 200 lexical errors and corrections, taken from 30 draft scripts. Interviews and questionnaires with International students were also used. Four types of feedback were identified (correction code only, correction code plus comments, underline only and underline plus comments) and four types of student correction methods/approaches were analysed (replacement, reformulation, removal and ignore).

Results indicated that feedback that includes both a correction code and additional comment(s) produced significantly higher success rates for lexical error correction in draft assignments. It also found that replacement was the most frequently chosen method of error correction, though analysis also revealed a significant number of unsuccessful corrections using this method. The number of unsuccessful corrections and ignored errors was highest when tutors did not provide additional comments. Finally, the study sets out a number of recommendations and conclusions, based on results that highlight the importance of providing not only additional comments with correction feedback, but also additional comments that encourage engagement with context and academic discourse, as this appeared to produce the most effective outcomes.

Abstract summarises four key parts of the dissertation

1. Context and rationale
2. Method
3. Results
4. Conclusion and implications

Past tense used in abstracts when describing what was done (as the study is completed)

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'Table of Contents' -
Essential component
of a dissertation, with
clear, easy to follow
numbering system

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

In my role as Pre-sessional Management Courses Director and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) tutor in the English Language Centre, University of Bath, I am continuously working to improve and develop the syllabus and teaching materials. On summer Pre-sessional Management (PSM) courses, tutor feedback is at the heart of pedagogical practices, and tutors provide a plethora of indirect feedback on written work with an aim to help students recognise strengths and weaknesses in their academic writing ability, encourage engagement with the learning and acquisition process, and facilitate academic skills development and success. At the beginning of the course, students are made aware of the role and importance of indirect feedback on the programme, and these principles are framed within the wider context of academic study, where students are introduced to key academic skills, such as critical thinking and the importance self-directed learning. From the start students are informed that tutors will not provide direct answers or corrections to student errors in writing. Indirect feedback is therefore used on the PSM 4 course as a means of encouraging students to begin to identify and solve their own problems, and develop strategies for dealing with the complexities and challenges of academic study.

Over the years, I have noticed that students respond differently to various types of corrective feedback, with varying results and outcomes. My review of previous literature on feedback indicated that the relative effectiveness of different types of written corrective feedback is an area of on-going debate, discussion and contention. I believe, therefore that an investigation into the relative efficacy of error feedback is valid, relevant and highly useful as outcomes may hopefully add to the body of research in this area, help to clarify some of the uncertainties surrounding the topic, and inform pedagogical decisions I have to make about the role and use of written corrective feedback on our programmes.

1.2 The Purpose of the Study

This was a small-scale study which examined the effects of four different types of indirect corrective feedback that tutors used to mark draft research essays namely,

- a) correction codes - e.g. *ww* to identify wrong word used, *Gr* to highlight grammar issues, or *Sp* for spelling errors

Longer assignments such as dissertations have longer introductions which can be divided into numbered sections. In this sample, the general introduction sets up the real-world context and rationale for the study.

First person used to describe personal/professional experience relevant to the study. In this education sample, the use was acceptable. Personal experience contextualises and sets up the rationale for the study. Check with your tutor, that 1st person is acceptable

Clear and easy to follow language used throughout the dissertation with continuous links between academic research and personal experience

- b) codes with added comments – e.g. ‘wrong word, think about the tense here’ and so on
- c) underlining/highlighting – e.g. a simple line under a grammar mistake,
- d) underlining/highlighting – e.g. line plus added comment as in b above.

The Drafting process is central to all assignment writing on PSM 4. During each week of the programme, students were required to write a short essay or report. The writing assignments were authentic in that the assignments were based on sample essay titles provided by The School of Management. Students normally submit one draft which is then checked by tutors and returned for updating and final resubmission. There is a common belief among teaching staff that draft submissions provide students with an opportunity to practise and apply academic English language and study skills they have been working on in class at a micro level, and learn from their mistakes as they progress on the course. And for the tutors the draft is a means of monitoring student progress, and assessing performance.

1.3 Context

This study was conducted during and following a 10 week English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Pre-sessional Management Course (PSM 4) in the summer of 2013. The programme is designed to develop, extend and improve international students’ academic English and study skills abilities in preparation for postgraduate Management programmes at The University of Bath. I am the English for Management Courses Director at the centre, and I am responsible for the design, implementation and delivery of all pre and in-sessional English for management courses.

All participants came from the PSM 4 course, and their entry level was typically between 6.0 and 6,5 IELTS equivalent. However, the study examined draft assignment papers for the penultimate assignment, submitted during week 8, and mid-term assessments indicated that students overall levels had improved to between 6.5 and 7.0. The University of Bath entry requirement for postgraduate management studies is IELTS 7, or equivalent (with no individual score in the 4 skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing, under 6.5) for management masters degrees and IELTS 7 or equivalent (with no individual score under 7.0) for MBA programmes. The students’ therefore were under significant pressure to reach their entry targets during the 10 week pre-sessional period.

According to the IELTS criteria (www.IELTS.org, 2013) , a student with an IELTS 6.0 in writing is considered a competent user of English and “has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings... and can use and understand fairly complex language particularly in familiar situations.”, (IELTS 2013). A student with an IELTS 7.0 in writing, on the other hand, should be a good user who ‘has operational command of the language though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations,’ but is able to ‘generally handle complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.’ In other words, there is a significant skills and language gap between an IELTS 6.0 and IELTS 7.0 learner, and for an international student, the realities and unfamiliarities of authentic academic study in a UK university environment can highlight language and skills weaknesses and present significant challenges and learning obstacles that the IELTS test does not necessarily identify.

In my experience, the IELTS writing examination is limited as it does not test or assess critical thinking and analytical skills, a fundamental component of academic study in the UK. It also uses generic topics that rely on the students’ general knowledge and general vocabulary range to give a suitable response. Thus, although students may be able to achieve a 7.0 in an IELTS writing test, this may not necessarily translate into competent academic English ability. The rigors and complexities of academic study may present significant challenges for many on pre-sessional courses, and as a consequence, performance and progress can be inconsistent and non-linear, as skills are practised, learned, acquired and applied. The PSM 4 course, therefore attempts to address this gap between the students’ ability to take an IELTS test and the realities of academic study at a British university, through an intensive programme of class and course work, written and spoken assignments and assessment tests.

Writing skills development is therefore a core component of the PSM 4 syllabus, and the provision of draft feedback on assignments plays a vital role in helping students to notice issues in their writing, and respond to indirect feedback provided by tutors, so that through their own correction, they slowly adapt and assimilate to the academic writing environment, and develop strategies and skills to improve their understanding and performance. L2 Student responses to written feedback may provide a useful insight into how some of these language and skills issues are addressed, worked through and overcome in the journey to become a proficient academic English writer.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 The Role of Feedback in EAP Teaching

The nature, role and importance of feedback in second language teaching pedagogy is well documented (Anderson 1982; Brophy 1981; Ferris 1995 & 2007; Hyland and Hyland 2006a & 2006b; Vgotsky 1978). Hyland and Hyland (2006a) **affirm** the consensus view that feedback is a critical element of the language teaching

curriculum as it facilitates language development and consolidates learning. Bruner (1970, cited by Falchikov 1995) goes further, **claiming** that learning is “dependent on knowledge of results at a time when, and a place where the knowledge can be used for correction” (p157). Jacobs 1974 (cited by Falchikov 1995) **highlighted** two important elements of feedback that make it vital to the learning process. The first element he termed informational, where data is provided to help students adapt and improve their work. And the second he described as hedonic, where feedback can help influence the motivation and desire of the student to take risks, make further improvements and extend their abilities (p158).

Yet, although feedback is generally considered a major component of the learning toolkit in second language teaching and syllabus design, debate and arguments about its relative effectiveness persist within the language learning and academic English professions today. As a practising academic writing tutor and syllabus designer, the on-going discussion is important as it addresses a number of assumptions and beliefs that shape my educational philosophy, curriculum choices and day to day teaching practices. An analysis, therefore of past and current research may help to facilitate a better understanding of the role and effectiveness of different types of formative and summative feedback on L2 student writing, and inform future decisions regarding the type of feedback I employ and factor into my teaching and course syllabus design.

2.2 Formative and Summative Feedback

Formative feedback refers to the type of assessment used to help tutors and students identify and understand strengths and issues of performance, allowing time for adjustments and improvements (Haines 2004). Haines describes the role tutors play as “coaching” (p23). Examples of formative feedback may include, direct corrections of students’ work, and indirect corrections, where tutors provide guidance on possible

The Literature Review is a significant part of a dissertation. Its purpose is to identify gaps and help you find focus for your research, and develop research questions. It should include critical analysis and evaluation. It should NOT simply describe the history of research to date.

A range of reporting verbs used to report the findings and views of other writers.
Note that older sources can use past tense.

Writer re-frames the rationale for the study within a real-world professional context .

solutions to errors or weaknesses that students' can then work on themselves to resolve. Summative assessment comes at the end of a learning cycle, the assignment essay and so on, and may include marks and comments designed to grade students abilities and /or help students understand their strengths and weaknesses so that they may improve their work in the next assignment (Haines 2004). This process she describes as "judging" (p 23), though it could be argued that the formative stage may also be viewed by both the tutor and student as a mixture of coaching and varying degrees of judging, and this may be reflected in the ways the student responds to the feedback (Askew 2000). Hyland and Hyland (2006a) suggest that formative feedback may assist students in their learning journey by drawing attention to issues in their writing that can then be used to formulate questions about their own ability and progress. Thus, feedback can empower students and provide a template for self-directed study, independent learning and intellectual authority (Bryan and Clegg 2006). Formative feedback and assessment therefore, is one of the core activities of many second language teachers, and in the context of this research paper, the different types of formative corrective feedback used on our summer pre-sessional management programmes will form the focus of this investigation.

2.3 The Feedback Debate

Over the last twenty years, the nature, role and effectiveness of formative written feedback on second language speakers' writing ability has generated a great deal of debate, discussion and argument (Bitchener 2008; Chandler 2003; Ellis 1998; Ferris 1995; Ferris and Hedgcock 1998; Leki 1991; Nguyen et al 2012; Polio, Fleck and Leder 1998; Truscott 1996). Truscott's (1996) emphatic rejection of the effectiveness of formative error correction as a means of improving the accuracy and grammar in L2 student writing signalled a war of words, claims and counter-claims, and a plethora of studies that continue to this day. Much of the research has attempted to drill down into the topic, analysing and dissecting the effectiveness of feedback at both macro and micro levels (Bitchener, Young & Cameron 2005; Ellis 1998; Ferris 1999; Ferris & Hedgcock 1998; Havranek 2002; Lee 1997; Truscott 1999). However, despite the substantive body of work that has been produced on the relative efficacy of tutor feedback, contradictory and inconclusive evidence suggest that the debate is far from over, as the following examples illustrate.

Writer identifies and introduces a key problem

A wide range of sources to highlight the complexity / controversy of the problem

In Bitchener's (2008) 2 month study of various types of written corrective feedback He analysed responses to error correction of a group of 75 intermediate level EFL students. Results showed that language accuracy levels improved over time following sustained explicit error correction. Similarly, Hyland and Hyland (2001) concluded that improvements in student ability were directly related to the level and types of feedback received. However, studies by Polio, Fleck and Leder (1998) and Bitchener, Young and Cameron (2005), who compared various methods of feedback were unable to reach conclusions about the overall benefits of providing feedback versus zero correction, and that results were inconclusive.

Alongside a raft of conflicting results and conclusions regarding the relative efficacy of error feedback, Truscott (1996) argued that much of the evidence used to support the place and importance of feedback in the teaching curriculum was unreliable as many of the most influential studies, such as those by Lalande (1982) and Robb et al (1986), contained fundamental design flaws including the absence of control groups in the studies (where no feedback was received), and so called into question the empirical reliability of results and conclusions. Truscott's view was also supported by critics such as Ferris (1998) and Bitchener, Young and Cameron (2006), who maintain that the onus is on the supporters of corrective feedback to provide reliable evidence that feedback, via direct or indirect correction, improves learner abilities. Guenette's (2007) detailed analysis of a variety of key studies including those by Shepperd (1992), Fathman and Whalley (1990) and Fazlo (2001), detailed a range of contradictory results, and also concluded that inadequate design may be the cause of much of the apparent confusion. However, Ferris (2004 & 2006) has since qualified her previous position by pointing out that in a second language learning environment, ethical concerns may prevent the inclusion of a control group, as it may disadvantage one learner group over another. She adds that the inclusion of a control group is also inauthentic and false in that language courses are designed to improve linguistic ability through practise, repetition and error correction for the purposes of improvement. A zero feedback situation in written assignment work is therefore, highly unlikely (Ferris 2004). **Questions of reliability therefore, remain contentious and unresolved, and as a practising Academic English teacher, this somewhat confusing, contradictory and potentially unreliable body of research makes it very difficult to determine the most appropriate pedagogical choices to make when it comes to syllabus and course design, and the type of feedback I should provide on students' written work.**

Writer's evaluation of all the evidence presented and possible implications.
The literature Review is moving towards identification of a gap in research

Personal pronoun use – Writer evaluates the problem within their own real-world experience.

2.4 Direct versus indirect feedback

Alongside the holistic debate on the overall effectiveness of tutor feedback, a number of studies have also critically examined and compared the relative effectiveness of different types of direct (explicit) and indirect (implicit) corrective tutor feedback (Lalande 1982; Ferris 1995; Ferris 1999; Ferris et Barrie 2001; Chandler 2000; Ellis Loewen & Erlam 2006). Definitions and interpretations of the terms direct and indirect vary. Bitchener (2008) defines direct corrective feedback as “the correct linguistic form or structure above or near the linguistic error” (p105). Direct feedback, therefore may involve active intervention on the part of the tutor such as error correction, crossing out unnecessary words or phrases, or the insertion of missing words/phrases or morphemes. Indirect feedback, on the other hand places the emphasis on the student to resolve the problem highlighted by the tutor, and, as Bitchener (2008) explains, opens a door for negotiation and discussion between the student and the tutor. Examples may include underlining or highlighting without explicit indications of the type of problem, error codes to indicate the place and form of the error, or margin comments and questions,

Prior to Truscott’s declaration of war against corrective feedback, there was general consensus that indirect feedback was more effective in improving L2 student performance in writing, as it encouraged self-reflection, learning autonomy and led to acquisition (Bitchener 2008). However, a number of studies (Chandler 2003; Ferris & Helt 2000; Lalande 1982; Robb, Ross & Shortreed 1986; Semke 1984) set out to test this assumption, comparing the effectiveness of direct versus indirect feedback. Of the five studies listed above, Lalande and Ferris found that indirect feedback on student accuracy produced more improvements in specific linguistic ability than direct feedback. Chandler’s study, on the other hand, found that direct corrective feedback of student grammar to be more effective, and the findings of the remainder of the studies proved inconclusive. All of the studies focused on improvements in specific, targeted grammar accuracy. For example, Chandler based his research on improvements in the use of articles, and for some including Truscott (1996), this type of research design is flawed in that learning and acquisition is not uniform, and analysis of one particular language item error may produce completely different and conflicting results from another, and therefore results are unreliable. **However, in my view, the range of studies that have focused on different areas of language areas is vast, and taken together they may provide**

A second problem

Personal language use –
Further real-world
evaluation based on
evidence presented.

cumulative evidence and a detailed picture of the efficacy of different types of feedback across may different learning and acquisition situations.

2.5 The significance of the error type

A number of critics including Truscott (1996), Bitchener, Young and Cameron (2005), Ferris and Helt (2000) and Lalande (1982) have criticised research that focuses on the study of a single language item. They argue that acquisition of different language items is not uniform or comparable and may present a distorted and over-generalised view of the effectiveness of corrective feedback based on entire language block (Ferris and Helt 2000). Bitchener et al (2005), asserts that individual linguistic elements such as articles or use of preposition represent “separate domains of knowledge that are acquired through different stages and processes” (p194). Ferris (1999, cited by Bitchener et al 2005) describes this differentiation as ‘treatable’ and ‘untreatable’ errors. Treatable errors, he claims can be resolved using a set of rules that can be sourced in grammar textbooks. Whereas, untreatable errors which he identifies as mainly word choice errors rely on learners to access prior and acquired knowledge to quick fix a particular linguistic problem. She argues that these distinctions therefore should be factored into research design and implementation (p 194). On summer pre-session courses, students produce a wide variety of errors in academic writing assignments, and their self- correction success rates vary. **It is unclear whether performance is related to error type or error feedback method, or indeed, both, and research to date does not provide a conclusive or entirely satisfactory answer.**

From my own experience as an academic tutor and course director, student performance and post- course feedback indicates that in general, students prefer indirect feedback as it helps to facilitate further learning opportunities that the student can exploit, and by doing so improve and extend their language ability and academic study skills. And while there is some evidence that more detailed forms of direct meta-linguistic feedback can lead to more substantive and effective performance in writing, a significant number of comprehensive studies such as Nguyen et al (2012) and Havranek (2002), found that continuity in student improvement was affected by the level of effort they had to apply in order to make the improvements. In other words, satisfactory performance and progress was related to providing limited, indirect feedback that encouraged engagement and student-centred learning.

Identification
of a gap in the
literature

The studies, however, do not stipulate what they mean by limited indirect feedback.

Identification
of a gap in the
literature

2.6 The effectiveness of different types of indirect feedback

Alongside comparisons of direct and indirect approaches used when providing formative feedback on written work, a number of researchers have also examined the relative strengths and weaknesses of various types of indirect feedback (Chandler 2003; Ferris and Roberts 2001; Ferris and Helt 2000; Lalande 1982; Lee 1997; Semke 1984; Robb et al 1986), but again, findings are contradictory and inconclusive. Types of indirect error correction may include using error codes, underlining/highlighting and error description (Robb et al 1986). Chandler's study of 31 ESL students, for example which compared two types of error correction, error description and underlining, found in favour of underlining as a means of facilitating the most effective learning outcomes. The findings imply a direct relationship between the salience of the feedback and the effectiveness of the student correction. Moreover, in a study by Robb et al (1986) carried out over a year with 134 Japanese learners, the effects of 4 methods of indirect feedback were measured; direct correction, code, underlining and marginal comments. Results appeared to support Chandler's finding and showed that more indirect methods of correction produced more effective short and long term learning outcomes. These findings are also supported by Semke (1984), who compared four feedback methods; direct correction, comments and questions, positive comments and corrections and correction codes only. The study found that tutor comments and questions produced the most significant improvements in the proficiency of his students. All of the studies appear to support Nguyen et al and Havranek's conclusions that the effectiveness of student responses to written feedback, appears to correspond to the amount of effort and level of engagement they have to make in order to improve their work.

2.7 The draft assignment

In EAP teaching, feedback on written work is often provided during the draft stages of an assignment, such as an essay or report. The draft is an opportunity for both the tutor and the student to identify and act upon error and linguistic and other deficiencies in the written work (Ferris 2006). On summer pre-sessional Management programmes, draft marking and

formative assessment, using indirect forms of correction, is one of the core components of the syllabus, and is designed to consolidate and improve students' written work from one stage to the next. Typically, time constraints mean that there is usually only one draft before final submission. The students' therefore have only one opportunity to make corrections and improvements.

Studies that examine the effectiveness of feedback given during the draft stages of written academic assignments are limited. Polio et al (1998) examined changes in linguistic accuracy following essay revisions. Their longitudinal study examined improvements in student ability to edit draft assignments following indirect tutor feedback in the form of editing instruction. They found improvements in overall ability were minor. Similarly, Price et al (2010) examined post- draft feedback performance and found that there was a direct correlation between performance and understanding of tutor feedback during the draft stage of an assignment. In other words, performance appeared to be enhanced by the level of clarity and explicitness of tutor responses to errors. The study however, fails to differentiate between different types of corrective feedback used, and the researchers concede that accurate performance measurement was 'fraught with difficulty' (p277).

Ferris and Helt (2000) argue that much of the previous research often focuses on discrete language elements within the context of short practice exercises; during activities normally associated with typical English as a Foreign Language classroom. This may not be entirely applicable in an academic context, as students will be wrestling with a range of complex linguistic, structural and content-focused issues. As Radecki and Swales point out (1988), academic writing in a pre-sessional context is an apprenticeship activity (p234). Students are involved in an intensive training programme to develop and extend a range of skills and academic language that is beyond general English, to use for a specific purpose through a set of specific and relevant tasks (p 234). Ferris (2006) argues, therefore, it is important to recognise these fundamental differences when designing an investigation of the effectiveness of error correction in an academic context, and more specifically during the draft stages of an academic assignment. In this respect, an analysis of vocabulary usage may provide vital evidence of the effectiveness of feedback in providing vital guidance during this transfer stage from writing apprentice to competent academic practitioner.

2.8 Vocabulary learning and acquisition in the EAP classroom

Many critics including Saville-Troike (1984) and Jordan (1997) argue that academic achievement is dependent on a high level of vocabulary knowledge, and in terms of successful academic writing, this is the “single most important area of second language competence” (Jordan, p149). This view is supported by a previous study by Jordan (1981, cited by Jordan 1997) which found that effective use of academic vocabulary was the most pressing concern for pre-sessional students about to embark on their degree programme. As an EAP practitioner, I have found that students struggle to learn, acquire and use effectively words and phrases that are specific to the academic writing genre. A number of academics including Coxhead (2000), Coxhead and Nation (2001), and Nation (2005), have examined this issue in detail. In various studies, they identified and categorised academic vocabulary as a specialist lexical group that present L2 students with a specific set of learning and acquisition hurdles that they need to overcome. This, they argue, is due to its restricted use within a specific context, and so does not allow for every day practise and development as in the case of general English. Corson (1995, cited by Coxhead 2007) describes this challenge as a lexical bar that can hinder or slow down the learning and acquisition process. Hoey (2002, cited by Coxhead 2007) argues that L2 speakers have varying knowledge of lexical items and learning can be dependent on proficiency levels and the “ natural variance in the knowledge of each individual learner” (p134). Hyland and Tse (2007) also suggests that writing for academic purposes involves specialist knowledge of academic genres, and this includes an ability to apply specific and specialist vocabulary in a relevant, accurate and appropriate generic setting. A pre-sessional programme, therefore which assesses broad-brush academic lexical ability may not take into account such variations and nuances of individual learner aptitude.

Coxhead (2000) identifies a number of elements that are essential for effective use of vocabulary. These include; spelling and pronunciation (as pronunciation can assist spelling) , regular grammar patterns of occurrence, collocations, word families, word parts, synonyms and antonyms. In other words, vocabulary learning is highly complex and it may be very difficult for L2 students to successfully juggle all of these elements when selecting appropriate vocabulary in the context of academic writing. It may be, therefore that simplistic, indirect feedback such as correction codes or underlining may be

inadequate in helping students identify and address the lexical issue clearly, and then take appropriate steps to correct it accurately and effectively.

Helping L2 students develop their range and competence in the use of academic vocabulary presents a number of challenges. In her ground breaking study into academic vocabulary competences, Kruse (1979) proposed that one of the most effective means of developing effective strategies for vocabulary acquisition is for students to learn and practise academic lexis within its contextual framework. On pre-sessional Management courses, vocabulary is taught within the context of task based activities. Students are encouraged to keep vocabulary notebooks and tutors deliver weekly vocabulary tests based on work and materials covered. Vocabulary learning and practice is therefore set within the context of authentic task based learning, using academic texts, tasks and assignments that enable students to notice, practice and develop lexical competence within the relevant and appropriate academic genre. Coxhead (2000) believes that lexical competence is not only enhanced by regular practice, but frequent and intense exposure to academic texts can also provide templates to notice, practise and learn academic vocabulary in the context of the focus field. On summer pre-sessional courses, academic reading is also a core activity. Students are required to read a wide range and substantive body of authentic academic texts as part of class and homework, assignments, projects and examinations. The inter-dependent relationship of reading and writing is emphasised throughout, with regular practice of paraphrasing, summarising and synthesising skills. In addition, specific vocabulary exercises are included alongside most reading activities. Thus, vocabulary learning is set firmly within the context of the academic genre, and through regular exposure and practice, the areas of knowledge highlighted by Coxhead (2000) can be acquired as words and phrases are re-cycled and reformulated.

2.9 Academic Vocabulary and Student Reformulation

A number of studies have examined the benefits and drawbacks of noticing and reformulation. (Adams 2003; Allwright Woodley & Allwright 1988; Long 1996; Swain 1985; Schmidt 1990; Schmidt and Frota 1986). Long (1996) developed the interaction Hypothesis which sets out a case for the importance of learning through interaction between student and tutor, and this constructive written or spoken dialogue is

a vital element in second language learning and acquisition. Similarly, Swain (1993) highlights the value of productive output which can be enhanced by noticing. Schmidt (1990) argues that noticing is critical before, during and after the output stage of learning, and is most likely to occur when students struggle with the language to express meaning. They also claim that in order for students to improve, they have to be able to identify the problem, but also have an attainable target or model to aspire to. This target model may take the form of correction and/or native-speaker-level reformulated models.

Research into the benefits of reformulation tend to focus on the effects of providing students with native-speaker-level models, so that students can notice aspirational target language, structures and vocabulary, in order for them to improve output. However, I would argue that students can also address output issues highlighted by indirect feedback cues using models noticed and practised during their course of study, that is, paraphrasing and other micro-skills practise in class, academic reading and note-taking, along with noticing and learning from errors in previous assignments. This process of noticing and self-correction may take the form of reformulation, but with the caveat of working without immediate models other than perhaps an original source that they wish to paraphrase. Thus, although the success of self-reformulation can be enhanced by previous academic writing experiences, there is a risk that self-reformulation may lead to further inaccuracy and error, and as a result, students may be reluctant to attempt this correction method.

On pre-sessional courses, I have found that there a tendency for some students to reformulate phrases or complete sentences following single vocabulary error feedback, when There may be several reasons why this can occur, including issues with comprehension issues with the highlighted word, the student's limited range of suitable synonyms, a re-assessment of the word in the context of the phrase sentence or paragraph and reformulation in the context of a wider revision of the whole assignment. However, there may also be comprehension issues with the type of indirect feedback provided. For example, an underlined word with a question mark may be interpreted as a cue to re-phrase the entire sentence. Or on reflection and review, the student may feel that the problem lies with not only the word but perhaps its contextual linguistic setting. Alternatively, the student be unable or lack the confidence to select a suitable synonym and word form that fits the current sentence structure to maintain the

meaning and linguistic integrity of the phrase, and so attempts reformulation as a means of escape and resolution. Finally, the word error may be located within a paraphrased or summarised phrase or sentence. In this instance, the presence of the original text, may provide a reliable model to manipulate.

Lexical items do not exist in isolation, and it may be that as the student works through their re-draft, addressing a range of errors issues including vocabulary, a clearer, more concise and effective version of their essay begins to formulate, and thus feedback on lexical error may be one of many triggers for improvement. In the context of the current study, I recognise that it is problematic to isolate single errors, as error can occur within the context of a range of problems and issues that the student has to attempt to resolve. However, this study provides a focus on isolated single errors, and as a starting point may lead to further research into more complex and inter-related errors.

2.10 Summary of the literature review and its significance in relation to this study

An investigation of available literature reveals an arena of on-going argument and debate. Following Truscott's (1996) claim that error correction may be harmful to learning and progress, there has been an abundance of studies testing the validity, relevance and effectiveness of various methods of formative feedback. The review, however, also revealed that findings are often contradictory, inconclusive and/or unreliable, and that further research is required to substantiate claims for or against the role and efficacy of feedback on academic English courses. The debate extends to the types of tutor feedback used, from indirect to direct, and also the effectiveness of different levels of formative indirect feedback provided.

On Pre-sessional Management programmes in the English Language Centre, a variety of indirect correction methods are used including correction codes (Appendix 1), underlining or highlighting, suggestions about how to improve language, structure, cohesion, coherence and so on. The written feedback is also supported by individual feedback tutorials when the students have an opportunity to ask questions and check their understanding or ask for clarification of the feedback provided. The tutors are instructed by the director of studies to employ indirect feedback methods to help facilitate self-correction. This pedagogy aligns with Brown and Knight's (1994) view that feedback methodologies in higher education should be designed to support and enhance institutional practises and

This section provides an evaluative re-cap for the reader and a reminder of the 'gap' in the literature and justification for the study

encourage self-directed learning, a central and critical element of the British university experience (p38). In my experience, students respond positively to clear, constructive and informative feedback that can help them improve their work, while at the same time build their skills base within an authentic academic English setting. Post-course evaluations suggest that students value targeted feedback. However, despite the range of studies available, questions of what types of indirect corrective feedback are most effective in an academic context remain unclear, **and this study is an attempt to differentiate one form from another with a view to improve tutor choices and syllabus design regarding vocabulary error feedback on Pre-sessional Management courses in the centre.**

A clear thesis statement presented

I wanted my research design to take into account Ferris and Helt's view (2000) that language errors can be divided according to whether they are treatable and untreatable. There is already a substantial body of research available on the efficacy of so called treatable errors' correction feedback. I decided, therefore, to focus on errors in academic vocabulary use, as it falls within the untreatable category. The lexical range and variety of words and phrases employed in an academic context are outside of everyday usage, and as such may require distinct and separate skills development (Ferris 2006). The ability of L2 students to correct academic vocabulary errors is dependent on their previously acquired lexical knowledge within the academic domain. In other words, the solution cannot be found in a grammar book (Ferris & Hedgecock 1998). Thus, by focusing on so-called untreatable errors (academic-related vocabulary), the study is designed to find out which method of indirect feedback facilitates more accurate and appropriate written responses.

Rationale for Research Design, based on literature review findings and interpretations

When considering my research questions, I also wanted to focus specifically on two indirect feedback methods, correction codes and highlighting. As Ferris (2006) and others have pointed out, each method provides different degrees of assistance; the correction code may point to an explicit problem, while highlighting points to an area of concern. Thus, by focusing on two specific feedback types, the study is designed to 1) Test the hypothesis that different methods of indirect feedback can produce more or less favourable results. 2) Test Nguyen et al (2012) and Havranek's (2002) assertion that the effectiveness of feedback is dependent on the degree of effort required by the student to self-correct and the level of engagement students make during the correction process. Finally, in light of the arguments for and against the use of

Clear, succinct explanation of research design – to set up Research Questions

control groups, I have taken into account the pragmatic and ethical considerations of the course, along with the immediate learning needs of the students, and therefore I have not included a control group.

2.11 Research Questions

Main Question

Is the effectiveness of vocabulary error correction dependent on the type of indirect correction feedback used?

Clear, succinct,
unambiguous Research
Questions (usually two or
three maximum)

Sub Question 1

What methods of error correction are used by respondents and why?

Sub Question 2

Do their choices impact on post-feedback performance?

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The rationale for this study is essentially pragmatic as it is designed to provide reliable data and results that can be used to improve the implementation and use of feedback on pre-session courses. I **was** interested, therefore in how students **responded** to feedback and the effectiveness of their response in relation to the type of feedback provided. I also **wanted** to investigate whether responses **were affected** by the explicitness of the feedback, and if student preference **matched** performance. I **felt** that a mixed method approach would therefore provide the most suitable means of providing measurable and meaningful data for further analysis and discussion.

Rationale for selecting a mixed method approach

Past tenses used as the study is finished

3.2 Mixed Method Approach

Denscombe (2008, p280) asserts that the mixed method approach, which combines both qualitative and quantitative data analysis, provides a suitable methodology for pragmatic-focused research. He identifies a number of key factors that make it a suitable methodology for this study. The mixed method approach can improve the overall accuracy of data analysis, by providing a means to triangulate results. The mixed method also may produce a more comprehensive and complete picture by gathering data that is complimentary or comparable. Mixed method can also avoid or reduce intrinsic bias that may be inherent in single method approaches. And finally, it provides a more effective analytical tool that enables the researcher to dig deeper into the research questions. For these reasons, along with the pragmatic aims of the study, I decided that the mixed method approach was the most suitable.

Sources used to provide further details and analysis of mixed method approach, and rationale for choosing this research design

However, the mixed method approach is not without problems or potential weaknesses, and Denscombe (2008) goes on to identify areas of concern that a researcher must take into account during the design and implementation of the study. He argues that such a holistic and practice-driven methodology can be subject to a variety and range of demands that can in themselves generate bias or distortions, and that the researcher needs to be aware of external influences that may impact on the research. In my case, this may be factors such as prior knowledge of the students, the course, approaches to feedback, student performance and results, and my own professional experiences of teaching and professional preferences and views.

Critical analysis and evaluation of mixed method approach

However, in light, of the over-arching aims of the study, which is to improve the effectiveness of written feedback provided on pre-sessional courses, and taking into account the size of the representative sample, along with time constraint and an awareness of potential reliability issues, I decided to narrow the scope of the research to an analysis of actual outcomes and the processes students work through in their attempts to resolve an error. Thus by triangulating quantitative data collected through analysis of draft papers, supported by qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interview and questionnaires, the effectiveness of each method of indirect feedback was analysed and evaluated.

Narrowing, improving reliability of the research method using triangulation

3.3 The Draft Assignment

On the ten week summer pre-sessional course, students are required to complete a number of writing assignments including weekly essays and four extended writing projects: a company report, a group case study report, an individual marketing-themed essay and an individual mini-dissertation. For each project, students submit one draft version and a corrected final version. Throughout the course, students have regular opportunities to analyse model writing assignments, and are encouraged to notice and learn from good and poor academic writing examples. Tutors will often refer back to samples when illustrating different skills and language points such as effective paraphrasing and synthesising techniques, structural issues, effective thesis statements, referencing and so on. For this study, I decided to focus my research on the mini-dissertation as the draft submission deadline was in week eight of the course. By that stage of the programme, students had already encountered and practised a wide range of academic English language and study skills, and identified and addressed some of the strengths and weaknesses in their writing at both micro and macro level. They had also worked through a selection of academic reading texts and practised paraphrase, summary and synthesis skills. Each student was assigned a writing tutor for the entire programme and by week eight, they should have been familiar with the tutor's correction methods. Thus, output and self-correction should have been informed by previous learning. The draft and final assignments provided a convenient, tangible and pragmatic means of analysing student responses within an actual and authentic academic activity.

The mini dissertation was a 1500 word writing assignment which was designed to enable students to apply key academic English and study skills practised throughout their course,

within a semi-authentic setting. The assignment criteria (Appendix 2), was also designed to replicate the criteria used by the School of Management. Students were required to follow a typical dissertation structure (introduction, methodology, results, discussion and conclusion). Four class sessions were timetabled for the project. Session one was an introduction to research methods, session two focused on topics, titles and thesis statements, session three examined structure and dissertation components, and finally session four looked at discussion, critical analysis and editing. Students were also required to complete a research proposal two weeks prior to the draft deadline. Tutors marked and provided written feedback on research proposals, which acted as a foundation or start point for their essay. During the sessions, students examined a number of samples and model assignments selected from previous student drafts to help them identify good academic practices and further enhance their skills.

3.4 Quantitative Data Collection

I decided that quantitative analysis would provide measurable and objective statistical evidence that could be used to evaluate the efficacy of different types of feedback in relation to student responses. It also provides a “solid foundation for description and analysis... and is based on objective analysis rather than the values of the researcher.” (Denscombe, 2010, p 289) The data was used to address the main research question, but also to triangulate qualitative data collected through student interviews and questionnaires.

One of my first decisions, informed by the review of literature, was to focus analysis on lexical errors. Twenty participants agreed to participate in the study, and each provided draft and final scripts of an individual research project (mini-dissertation-1500 words). Nine of the twenty students also agreed to participate in interviews and completed questionnaires. This additional information provided further qualitative analysis to triangulate results and improve the accuracy and reliability of the research. Drafts were submitted in week eight of the ten week programme, and the final draft was submitted in week nine. The turnaround therefore, was approximately one week. In order to maintain the focus of the study, I selected single term or vocabulary phrase errors only, ignoring word form and spelling errors. I decided to divide correction types into four main categories.

Rationale for using quantitative data collection, supported by sources

Clear and succinct use of language to describe methodology

1. correction code
2. correction code with comment
3. underline
4. underline with comment.

Secondly, following an analysis of student errors and subsequent correction attempts, it became evident that there were three main categories of outcomes. These were,

1. word substitution, (S)
2. student reformulation (R)
3. word /word phrase deletion (D).

I then divided success criteria for correction attempts into a further three categories; effective (E), partially effective (PE) and not effective (NE) The effectiveness of each response was measured in relation to the lexical item and whether the response had improved or enhanced the effectiveness of the contextual phrase or sentence. Face validity was enhanced by following standardised methods of data gathering which focused primarily on data that related directly to the research questions. Thus, through detailed collection and collation of specific language items using a standardised set of categories, quantitative data was compared and contrasted with qualitative data which investigated in more detail, how participants responded to individual feedback items, and their views on how and why their attempts were successful or unsuccessful. And through this process of data gathering and results analysis the research questions were addressed and an evaluative response was produced.

3.5 Qualitative Data Collection

According to Denscombe (2003), qualitative analysis provides a more comprehensive account of student experiences and sets the research question within a wider context. In this study, it was important to investigate not only student output following different forms of corrective feedback, but also the process they go through to produce a self-correction, and the rationale for their success or failure. This was important as the data may provide a more comprehensive and substantive analysis of the relative effectiveness of different feedback types in relation to the effectiveness of output processes employed by the student to overcome the error. The aim of the qualitative research, therefore was to provide comparative data to identify consistencies, inconsistencies, similarities and contradictions

Rationale for using qualitative data collection, supported by sources

in results, and thus provide a more thorough and reasoned response to the research questions. In other words, the process of self-correction was as important as the product. Nominal data collection methods in the form of recorded answers following semi-structured interview questions, plus use of ordinal rankings generated from short questionnaires (which allocated a 'usefulness' of feedback score from 1 -5), were used to measure the effectiveness of responses. I felt that the semi-structured interview provided the most effective means of exploring and analysing student responses to feedback. Semi-structured approach allows for a degree of flexibility during the interview process, and it allows space for students to explore and develop their thought processes, and produce a more comprehensive account of how they addressed and dealt with specific vocabulary errors. I was aware that a flexible approach may run the risk of bias and unreliability, as any unprepared additional questions may inadvertently or unintentionally influence or distort responses. However, I prepared a number of prompt questions before the interviews, and ensured that all additional questions were minimal, open-ended and non-specific.

In order to produce meaningful and comparable data that was relevant to the research questions, I decided to divide the data into four categories:

1. What did students do in response to indirect correction feedback
2. What processes do they select and work through to correct a lexical error?
3. Why did they choose this method?
4. Did they think their correction was successful/ unsuccessful?

Then, from these categories, I designed what I felt was the most suitable and effective data collection methods. I selected two methods of qualitative data gathering which were semi-structured interviews and a short questionnaire. Semi-structured interviews provide sufficient levels of flexibility to collect meaningful information within a standardised format that maintains face validity (Denscombe 2003). For the interview, I asked four questions:

1. Were you clear about how to correct the errors?
2. What steps did you take to correct the vocabulary error, following tutor feedback?
3. Why did you choose to do it this way?
4. Why do you think your correction was successful/ unsuccessful?

During the interviews, students were asked to examine four sample vocabulary corrections found in their draft and final assignments, and respond to the four standardised questions above. The final assignment papers had no corrections or comments, therefore students had no guidance or feedback to help them answer questions 3 and 4. Interviews were recorded and answers to key questions were transcribed.

For the questionnaire, I decided to ask students two questions which were;

1. To allocate a score, from 1 -5 the feedback method used by the tutor according to usefulness, where 1 is not useful and 5 is very useful, and 2. To allocate a score, from 1 – 5, according to usefulness, the four correction methods selected for this study. Results from the questionnaires generated ordinal data that was used to further enhance the depth of research, and provide a more comprehensive and multi-faceted examination of student responses to specific indirect feedback.

3.6 Research Design Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study. As the participants were all actively engaged in their studies, and samples used were actual draft papers, I decided that the use of a non-feedback control group would be ethically unsound. Despite the absence of a control group, I believed that the face validity of the study would be enhanced by selecting a single language item, as this reduced the number of variables that could lead to misinterpretation of results, and produce a more reliable and comprehensive response to the research questions. In the case of the current study, I decided to focus research on the use and correction of vocabulary errors. In addition, validity is also maintained by the use of standardised feedback methodology that is applied on the summer pre-session management courses, where tutors are instructed to utilise a narrow range of indirect feedback options; correction codes, underlining/highlighting and /or margin comments.

In devising my research strategy, I had to consider what language elements within the draft essay I should focus on. In my review of literature, a number of critics including Truscott (1999) and Ferris (2006) argue that comparison of different language items is flawed as the learning and acquisition process is different. I agree with this view, and in my experience, I have noticed that language improvement and development is not linear or uniform, and some language items

Further amendments to research design, prompted by ethical considerations and supported by sources

(such as modals and tenses, and use of pronouns) are acquired more easily and readily than others. I decided therefore, to focus on the students' use and correction of vocabulary. On summer PSM programmes, academic vocabulary development is a core activity within the syllabus and a critical element in the development of L2 students' academic English abilities. (Jordan 1997). Through the development of lexical range, students are able to enhance their academic writing, find their academic voice, improve their overall confidence in their abilities and ultimately, meet or exceed the English language entry target of their chosen master's programme. My literature review also revealed that many of the previous studies focused on specific language or grammar items rather than use of vocabulary. I therefore decided that this was an area worthy of further research.

I also had to decide what types of feedback to focus on. As the English Language Centre (ELC) uses standardised correction methods, this was relatively straightforward, as there are only four main correction types used. However, when I examined the draft papers, I realised that I would have to examine all four types, as tutors tended to switch from one type to another within each draft, and a focus on fewer would not yield sufficient data for analysis.

Tutor feedback was guided and informed by the ELC standardised marking criteria (Appendix 3). The ELC writing band descriptors use the IELTS numbering system to measure and assess language levels in four areas, Accuracy (grammar), Vocabulary, Answering the Topic and Cohesion & Coherence. However, the descriptors are designed to more accurately reflect and address authentic academic writing skills and language required for academic study. During the induction process, all tutors are required to complete standardisation inductions and tests, to ensure uniformity of approach, and accurate marking and assessment. However, although standardised marking and feedback is recommended, variations in approaches to feedback provision are common. For example, some tutors may prefer handwritten /red-pen approach, while others give feedback online using the track changes tool. Tutors may also have preferences for one type of feedback method over another, and this was evident when analysing the draft assignments. Ideally, I would have liked to include an analysis of tutor preferences in relation to vocabulary, but time constraints and concerns about the scope of the research meant that this was precluded from the study.

3.7 Research Site

The study was conducted in XXX. This location was selected partly because this is my place of work and also students were studying in close proximity, thus making it convenient and easily accessible. The students were also familiar with the ELC environment, and it provided a more relaxed and non-threatening or intimidating place to conduct interviews. I was however, aware that interviews conducted in my office may raise some anxiety levels as I was the PSM 4 course director. I decided therefore to conduct interviews within the neutral space of a tutorial room. I provided tea, coffee and biscuits to further reduce any barriers perceived between the participant and their former courses director. I also explained to them that in my role as researcher, my status was similar to theirs, and they should feel free to express their thoughts and views as freely and openly as possible. Thus, the familiarity of the setting and the careful re-alignment of roles before and during the study further enhanced the validity and reliability of the results.

Rationale for location of the study

3.8 The Participants

All participants were from the Pre-session Management 4 programme, which ran from July 19 – Sept 17 2013. The entire cohort of 71 students was invited to participate in the study, and a total of 20 volunteered to take part, with 8 also agreeing to complete interviews and questionnaires. The participants were all international masters students of mixed nationality and gender, within an age bracket of between 23 and 30, and were a representative sample of the PSM 4 course, with most students coming from the Far East, including China, Thailand and Japan.

Participant profile- This should include as much detail as possible which is potentially relevant to the study , but within ethical guidelines(e.g. number, nationality, course type, gender, etc)

As previously mentioned in the context section, the PSM 4 course is 10 weeks, and the English Language entry requirement is IELTS or equivalent 6.0, with a writing score of 6.0 or more. All students on PSM 4 have conditional offers from the School of Management for masters courses in various management programmes including MBA, MSc Management, MSc Marketing, MSc in HRM. English Language ability is the only condition, and in order to meet the entry requirements of their degree programme, they had to attain an IELTS or equivalent 7.0 by the end of the PSM 4 course, with no individual score (reading, writing, listening and speaking) under 6.5. In the case of the MBA programme, students are required to reach 7.0 across all 4 skills. Research was conducted in

week 8 of the course, and students had already completed a number of marked and graded writing assignments and projects, where tutors had provided comprehensive feedback on their work. They had also completed mid-term progress assessments, and using both sets of results, tutors had reported that all participants had improved their level of academic English ability and reached scores in academic writing of 6.5 in writing or above. Student draft scripts were analysed during the PSM 4 course, and interviews were conducted approximately three weeks after the end of the course and the start of their degree programmes.

3.9 The English Language Centre Assessment System

On the PSM 4 course, tutors use the in-house marking criteria to assess student progress and proficiency in academic writing. (Appendix 3). The marking criteria employ an IELTS style numbering system of 1 – 9 to identify and measure student levels. The numbering system has been adopted because it is recognised and understood by University admissions, departments, directors of studies and subject leaders, and when PSM 4 student reports are sent to the various stakeholders, at the end of the course, grades and attainment can be understood and interpreted relatively accurately. The IELTS numbering system is also understood by most PSM 4 students and tutors, studying and working on the course, so it provides a common currency that is qualified by a detailed set of marking descriptors. It is important to reiterate, however, that the descriptors are significantly different from the IELTS version (Appendix 4), and that they are designed to reflect a more relevant and more appropriate set of academic skills within the authentic setting of university study.

3.10 The PSM 4 Course Tutors

There were five tutors on the PSM 4 course and all were involved in this study. Two of the tutors are core ELC staff and they work on a wide range of academic English and study skills courses throughout the year. Three of the tutors work on summer courses only, but all of them had worked on the PSM 4 course in previous years. The tutors undergo a series of induction sessions prior to the start of the course, which includes writing and speaking standardisation training. During the training process, the tutors are required to grade and comment on a number of scripts using the ELC marking

criteria. The grades are then checked by the course director, and feedback is provided on performance, which may include further testing, and or advice on grading anomalies. The tutors deliver 25 hours of teaching each week, and they are assigned two classes, one for listening and speaking sessions and the other for reading and writing. Thus the tutors develop a comprehensive understanding of the individual abilities of their students, and their strengths and weaknesses in all four skills including academic writing.

3.11 Reliability

As I wanted results from this study to inform future syllabus design on PSM 4 courses, it was vital to establish and maintain reliability of the research design and implementation. Denscombe (2010) points out that reliability is dependent on the neutrality and consistency of the research tools. By focusing, therefore, on single language items (vocabulary), a limited number of feedback correction approaches and following standardised methods of data collection, I reduced the risk of researcher bias, misinterpretations or other distortions of results. Similarly, the questionnaire was simplified to two questions, which also reduces the risk further. I was also aware of the potentially detrimental impact and influence of my previous knowledge of student progress and performance during the course. As a course director I was informed throughout the course of student progress and I check final reports, but I did not have day to day classroom contact with the participants, nor did I mark, grade or provide feedback on any of their assignments. My knowledge therefore, of their abilities aside from overall final grades was limited. In addition, as tutors employed two standardised marking systems namely the in-house marking criteria and standardised indirect feedback sheets, this also helped to maintain reliability of the research through consistency and uniformity of the feedback provided.

There were, however, four main issues regarding reliability that I had to take into account. Firstly, logistical considerations meant that interviews had to take place approximately two months after the assignment deadline. I was aware that this extended period was not ideal as students had worked on subsequent writing projects, completed the PSM 4 course and started their degree programme. At the point of interview, some had also completed masters assignments. As a consequence it was possible that their memories and recollections of the correction

Reliability (that results have not been distorted by biases, assumptions, or prejudgements) is a key component of dissertations. It is vital to ensure that methodology provides reliable results. (See Ch. 3 for more details)

methods they used and the processes they worked through may have become distorted through the passage of time, the shift in their priorities and further enhancements of their academic abilities. However, I countered these potentially detrimental effects through careful design of the interview process. I gave students plenty of time to re-orientate themselves with their PSM 4 assignment. I encouraged them to go through the entire essay and re-establish the context, and re-connect to their recollections of the writing process. And then, finally, I focused on the specific vocabulary errors present in the work, their corrections and the processes they worked through to achieve either a satisfactory or unsatisfactory result.

My second area of concern was the lack of a control group. It is possible that reliability may have been enhanced by providing data generated from students who received no feedback. However, I decided that the use of a zero-correction control group would be unethical as this was not an artificial experiment. The students were actively engaged in their studies and expected feedback on their course work to help them improve and develop their skills base. It was also unethical because feedback is used by tutors on the course as a tool for continuous assessment and to check progress.

The third issue I had to consider was that the study focused on a written project completed in week eight of the course. By this stage of the course, the students had already responded to a significant amount of tutor feedback in written assignments. It was possible that they had developed a previous understanding of the particularities of their writing tutor's feedback methods, and as results were more able to respond to minimal correction than they might have been earlier in the course. However, as tutors used standardised formats, and their feedback methods remained consistent throughout the length of the programme, alterations or improvements in the effectiveness of responses were more likely to be the result of learning and acquisition rather than any supplementary assistance from the prompts themselves. In other words, the feedback may have helped students notice persistent and habitual errors, and may facilitate positive and enhanced action following recycling and regular practice.

Finally, I had to consider the range and possible impact of different nationalities on the results of the study. I was aware that student responses, interpretations of and attitudes to tutor feedback may be influenced by cultural and /or linguistic differences, and that reliability may be compromised by such

variables. However, the sample was representative of a typical PSM 4 class profile, and therefore results accurately reflected typical responses for that particular course. This meant that data was reliable within the context of the course, and so provided meaningful results that would benefit future PSM 4 syllabus and materials design. Time constraints and issues of scope also limited any investigation of the relationship between feedback response and nationality, but this is a valid and interesting area that would benefit from further research.

3.12 Validity

By focusing on a specific language item (vocabulary) and standardised feedback methods, I felt the analysis of draft assignments and the focus questions in the student interviews and questionnaires had face validity for the students, but also content validity in terms of producing an accurate response to the research questions. There were, however a number of additional factors that may have impinged on the validity of the research design including variables outside of my control, such as the students' previous learning backgrounds and attitudes to feedback, the types, levels and intensity of the feedback they had experienced and the effectiveness of their correction methods before the commencement of the study. Despite these concerns, I felt that as the research material and results were embedded within the PSM 4 curriculum and day to day teaching and learning activities, this normalisation of the research methodology further supported the face validity of the study. In addition, validity was also supported by the analysis of written work produced on the programme, rather than additional work produced specifically for the study, and all data, results and conclusions were made available to the students, so that they may improve and develop a better understanding of tutor feedback and the effectiveness of their own correction processes. Finally, validity was enhanced through triangulation of results through qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis.

Validity (that the experiment is accurately measuring what it is supposed to) is another key component of a research study and it must be incorporated into methodological design (see Ch. 3 for more information)

3.13 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the study, the BERA Revised Ethical Guidelines for Ethical Research were followed, and both students and tutors provided written consent. A clear explanation of the rationale for the study was provided, along with logistical information such as the interview length and the level of commitment

All academic research must comply with Ethical Rules and Guidelines (see Ch. 3 for more details)

required from the students during the study. The thoroughness of this information was vital as it helped students make an informed decision about whether to participate. I also explained to students that they could terminate their participation and withdraw consent at any time during or after the research period. This was important as I did not wish my study to interfere, detract or have any detrimental effect on the students' progress on their masters' courses.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained at all times. This was also important as not only is it a requirement of BERA guidelines, but also some of the data, results and student comments were of a sensitive nature, and I wanted to ensure students felt able to respond honestly to interview questions. Letter codes (A – J) were used to replace actual names. This ensured that the identity of the participant would be known only to the researcher, each individual student and the participating tutor. I ensured that all materials adhered to the Data Protection Act 1997, and that all information was kept in secure and lockable storage, accessible only by the researcher.

I was aware that my research material might highlight student deficiencies and problems. It was important, therefore to continuously emphasise the positive and constructive nature of the study. This point was stressed in explanatory notes prior to the students' commitment to the study, and then re-stated at the start of the interview stage. Finally, I also provided post-interview support in the form of additional tutorials and email communication, and offered a free one –hour proof reading and editing session in order to allow students to benefit further from the study.

Chapter 4 Results and Analysis

4.1 An overview of Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection

4.1.1 Quantitative Data

A total of 200 vocabulary errors **were analysed** (50 of each feedback type), taken from 26 draft and final assignment scripts. Four main types of error were identified:

1. Errors with accuracy of meaning
2. Errors with accuracy of academic lexical usage (including academic word list items, referring verbs, link words and so on)
3. Errors due to L2 interference
4. Errors based on Formality/appropriacy

I did not conduct an in-depth analysis of the correlation between error type and corresponding responses as the study was more concerned with outcomes rather than critical analysis of initial student input. Data collection and analysis indicated that there were no apparent differences between error type and the effectiveness of the correction. I believe however, that this is an area that would benefit from further research.

A second issue I had to consider was the varying explicitness of the comments used by the tutors and potential influence on student outcomes. However, data revealed that the range of explicitness used by tutors who adopted Types 2 and 4 correction methods was relatively narrow and only included additional, basic information and guidance to help the student resolve the lexical error. Typically, comments included simple questions such as, *what does this mean?* and *is this correct?*, basic statements or instruction words including, *replace*, *wrong word* and *too informal*. I felt, therefore, that because of the relative uniformity of the comments, and the similarities in the levels of explicitness, the data would not be distorted and have an adverse impact on the reliability of results. **But again, this is another area that would benefit from further and more detailed research.**

Finally, I had to determine the criteria I would use to measure the effectiveness of student corrections. As I gathered evidence, I noticed that a number of correction attempts may be considered *partially* successful. The student, for example, may have selected a more suitable synonym replacement, but the contextual phrase or sentence remained grammatically or structurally weak or incorrect. However, as the study was

Past tenses used as the study is finished

Identification of a limitation of the study. This is good academic practice

concerned primarily with vocabulary items, I decided to focus on single item corrections rather than examining the context, unless reformulation or deletion occurred. I realised that this was problematic in that it is somewhat artificial to consider the effectiveness of vocabulary use in isolation but for the purposes of addressing the research questions, I felt it was important to narrow the focus of my research.

4.1.2 Qualitative Data

In total, 8 respondents were interviewed during the study (Appendix 5). This represented two fewer than the original 10 who had agreed to participate. During the analysis of draft scripts, I found that two papers did not produce sufficient vocabulary errors to be included in the study. However, the remaining eight respondents provided substantive and detailed responses to my interview questions and I concluded that I had sufficient information to triangulate results with quantitative data. A detailed analysis of draft and final scripts was carried out, and in the interviews students were asked to comment on 4 sample errors and corrections from their papers. Furthermore, a total of 25 students completed questionnaires (Appendix 6), and a further 22 draft scripts were analysed to provide additional data. The accumulated data was then used to triangulate results and improve the reliability of the study. (see Appendix 7 for details of interview responses).

Table 1 **shows** the profiles of PSM 4 students who participated in the interviews and questionnaires.

Present tense used to describe the table.

Table caption above the table

Table 1: Profiles of PSM4 participants

Student	Nationality	Gender	Degree	Writing Level (ELC)	Feedback Type A = correction code only B = correction code + comment C = underline only D= underline + comment
001	Japanese	Female	MSc/MBA	6.5	A
002	Chinese	Female	MSc/MBA	6.5	B
003	Chinese	Female	MSc/MBA	6.5	C
004	Japanese	Male	MSc/MBA	6.5	D
005	Japanese	Female	MSc/MBA	6.5	A
006	Chinese	Female	MSc/MBA	6.5	B
007	Chinese	Female	MSc/MBA	6.5	C
008	Chinese	Female	MSc/MBA	6.5	D

The entire PSM 4 cohort was invited to complete the questionnaire, and 30 out of a total of 71 students responded. The low response rate may have been due to the fact that at the time of the study, all the students were actively engaged in their master’s programme, and may have had more urgent priorities and pressures. During the analysis of the respondents’ draft and final scripts, I collected nominal data using standardised codes to simplify the research process.

I also supplemented my research using quantitative data collected from an additional 25 scripts. The data was collated using the four selected correction codes, (code, code + comment, underline, underline +comment) and four response types (replace, reformulate, remove, ignore). I therefore had sufficient statistical to facilitate a detailed analysis of outcomes.

4.2 Quantitative Results Analysis

4.2.1 Correction Success Rates per Error Feedback Type

Table 2 shows total results for 200 corrections following 4 feedback types, including success rates per correction method used.

This section deals with what the results show only. Discussion, evaluation, and implications are examined in the next section

[Clear table design](#)

Table 2: Complete Error and Correction Analysis

Feedback Type	Overall Number of corrections	Correction Process	Overall Number of corrections per feedback type	Overall effectiveness of correction	
				Yes	No
Type A Correction Code Only (ww)	50	Replace	18	9	9
		Remove	8	6	2
		Reformulate	10	7	3
		Ignore	14		14
Type B Correction Code + comments	50	Replace	26	18	8
		Remove	4	4	5
		Reformulate	18	13	2
		Ignore	2		
Type C Underline only	50	Replace	20	12	8
		Remove	8	7	1
		Reformulate	11	7	4
		Ignore	11		11
Type D Underline + Comment	50	Replace	32	25	7
		Remove	6	6	2
		Reformulate	10	8	2
		Ignore	2		

Further analysis (Table 3) shows that Type D feedback method produced the highest number of successful error corrections (39), followed by Type B (35). Types C and A generated the lowest successful correction rates respectively. In addition, Types B and D show significant differences between success and failure rates, whereas A and C do not. It must be noted, however, that unsuccessful attempts are relatively high across all 4 feedback types.

Significant results highlighted in the analysis.

Table 3: Correction Success Rates per Feedback Type

Feedback Type	No. of Errors	No. of Successful corrections	No. of unsuccessful corrections	Success rates (%)	
				Yes	No
A (correction code only)	50	22	28	44	56
B (Correction code + comments)	50	35	15	70	30
C (Underline only)	50	26	24	52	48
D (underline + comments)	50	39	11	78	22

4.2.2 Correction methods per error feedback type

Table 4 shows that analysis of 200 vocabulary errors across 26 draft and final assignments found that the majority of students chose to *replace* single item lexical errors, above all other correction methods.

Table 4: Correction methods per error feedback type

Correction Type	No of Corrections	Percentage of total no of errors (200)
Replace	96	48%
Remove	26	13%
Reformulate	49	24.5%
Ignore	29	14.5%

Figure 1 below indicates that the replacement method of error correction was the most popular across all feedback types.

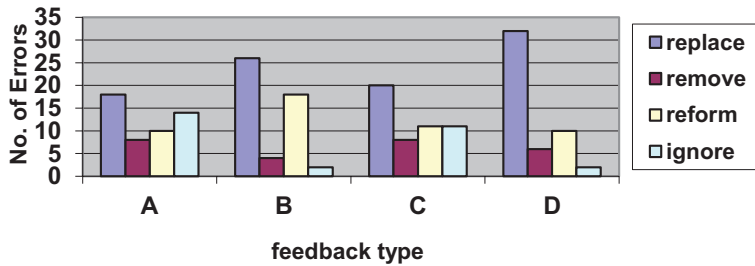


Figure 1: Correction Preferences per feedback type

Figure caption below the figure

Feedback Type D generated the highest number of replaced items (32), while Type A produced the lowest (18). In addition, feedback Type D produced the highest number of successful attempts. It is interesting to note however that overall, the replacement method also produced the highest number of unsuccessful correction attempts (32).

Reformulation results indicate slightly higher rates for responses to Types B and D, with overall 28 reformulations. This compares to 21 reformulations for Types A and C. The difference however, was negligible across all feedback Types.

Feedback Type A prompted the highest number of ignored errors (14) followed by Type C (11)

There were negligible differences in removal rates across all four feedback types.

Figure 2 also indicates that the replacement method produced a significantly higher number of unsuccessful correction attempts compared with other correction methods.

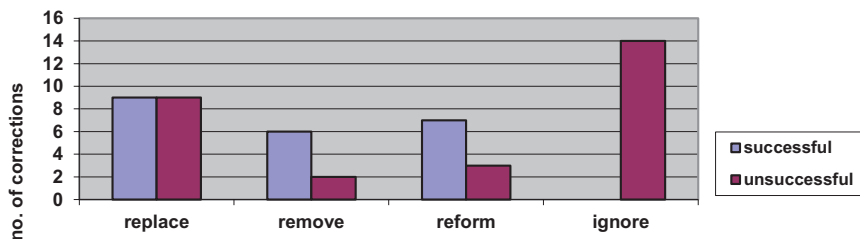


Figure 2: Success Rates per Correction Method

Finally, Figure 3 shows ignore rates for the four correction methods. Types A and C (25) produced substantially higher ignore rates than Types B and D (4). This variation is significant as ignore rates account for most of the unsuccessful correction attempts following Types A and C feedback (see Table 2).

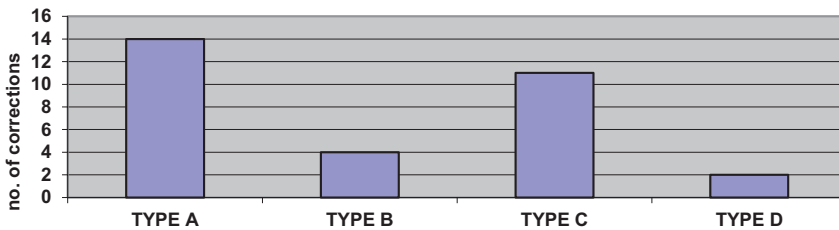


Figure 3: Ignore Rates per Correction Method

4.3 Qualitative Analysis and Triangulation of Results

4.3.1 The Interviews

Three main themes emerged from the student interviews (*Appendix 7*).

Analysis of qualitative results

i) Clarity and Comprehension Issues

In response to Q1, (*appendix 5*), there were notable differences in levels of comprehension between feedback with and without additional comments. Six out of the eight respondents reported that they were unclear about why the tutor had highlighted the item and they were unsure about what to do about it. For example, students 001, 003 and 005 indicated that for Type A and/or C feedback, lack of clarity led them to guess the nature of the error and act accordingly. Also, students 002, 003, 005 and 007 said that they were also unclear about the code itself, and had to double check the meaning with the tutor. The commonality of misunderstandings and lack of clarity about how to deal with non-comment feedback aligns with quantitative results, and suggests that respondents were anxious about their ability to identify and deal effectively with the problem. Respondents 001, 003 and 005 expressed concerns and fears about making mistakes and misunderstanding their tutor's rationale. This would also tally with quantitative results which showed that ignore rates and unsuccessful correction attempts were highest following type A and C feedback. Respondents with Types B and D feedback, however, expressed fewer concerns about lack of clarity, but 002 and 008 indicated that they had problems deciphering the tutor's handwriting. In these situations, respondents attempted

corrections based on conjecture, or ignored the feedback completely. This may also partly explain relatively high ignore and failure rates following Type B and D feedback.

Triangulation of results therefore, indicates measurable differences in the effectiveness of student responses to feedback with or without comments, and that there is a direct correlation between efficacy, comprehension and confidence. In other words, when students understood the feedback clearly, they were more confident about the correction needed and more successful in carrying out the correction.

ii) Process Issues

All respondents stated that the replacement method provided the simplest, quickest and most reliable means of correcting an error based on conjecture. Comprehensibility issues may have influenced the choice of error correction method and this may account for high use of the replacement method, along with high failure rates.

A number of interview responses also indicated a tendency to focus on form rather than discourse. Students 001, 003, 004, 006 and 007 expressed anxieties about their academic English ability, and lack of confidence in dealing effectively with lexical error. They stated that some of the errors were due to first language interference and that this was an issue that was very difficult to resolve. This led them to rely on electronic dictionaries to locate synonyms to replace vocabulary, rather than consider the word within the contextual discourse. This may explain further high correction failure rates across feedback types, and a lack of enthusiasm for the reformulation method, as it requires a level of comprehension and confident engagement with the discourse.

Students 004, 006 and 008, however, expressed a higher awareness and greater engagement with discourse rather than form. Feedback was interpreted as a means of improving the overall quality of the essay rather than quick fixing individual items in isolation. Students 006 and 008 also viewed the draft as an opportunity to take risks and experiment with both form and discourse, and that feedback with comments was more likely to encourage them to do this. Consequently, these students tended to use the reformulation method more frequently than other methods to improve content as well as language, although all students indicated that if the error was located within a sourced paraphrase, then they were more likely to attempt a reformulation.

iii) Time Pressures and Priorities

A third theme that emerged from the interviews was the impact and influence of time pressure on students' responses to error feedback. The gap between draft and final submissions was five days, and all students expressed anxieties about working to a tight deadline. All students indicated that tight deadlines forced them to prioritise errors, and this led them to guess or ignore some of the lexical errors identified in tutor feedback. Their over-riding priority was to improve the content, structure and grammar of the essay, and they believed that most of the sample lexical errors were of minor concern. For example student 006 stated, "I looked at the word and if I thought it was important I would change it and if I didn't, I would do something more important." Student 002 also explained that she ignored one of the sample errors because she ran out of time, but also that she focused on errors with comments as she believed these to be "more important."

4.3.2 The Questionnaires

Results of the questionnaire (Table 5) show that the majority of respondents scored tutor feedback as either 4 or 5 (useful or very useful) in terms of overall usefulness. It is interesting to note that the Q1 responses appear to contradict some of the statements made during the interview. It may be that students were reluctant to criticise their tutors directly, or perhaps interpreted the overall feedback process as useful. Results from Question 2 of the questionnaire, however, contradict Q1 responses, with a clear preference for feedback with comments (Types B and D). In addition, quantitative data shows that the effectiveness of student responses was directly linked to the level of explicitness used by the tutor. There may be a correlation therefore, between student expectations, feedback preferences and performance outcomes that need to be taken into account when considering recommendations.

Table 5: Questionnaire results for 30 respondents

Feedback Type	Not useful 1	2	3	4	Very Useful 5
Tutor (mixed)	3	15	12		
Type A	4	19	7		
Type B	3	13	14		
Type C	8	14	8		
Type D	4	13	13		

Chapter 5 Discussion

Results from the study show that feedback with additional comments produced significantly higher success rates for lexical error correction in draft assignments.

The findings therefore support research conducted by Price (2010) who found that the overall effectiveness of error correction in pre-sessional writing assignments was enhanced by the level of clarity and explicitness of tutor responses. In other words, different types of indirect feedback produce more or less favourable results. The findings contradict studies by Chandler (2003) and Robb et al (1986) who concluded that less explicit indirect feedback is a more effective means of producing successful corrections. The study however, partially supports the findings of Ngyuyen et al (2001) and Havranek (2002) who argue that the effectiveness of student correction is determined by the level of effort required to make the improvements, and that additional comments encourage engagement and motivation, and facilitate learning acquisition through reflection and diligent review.

While quantitative data showed a direct and measurable correlation between levels of explicitness of the feedback provided and the effectiveness of the correction, qualitative data indicates a preference for more explicit forms of support and guidance as it is perceived to facilitate more successful outcomes. As Price (2010) suggests, during draft stages of an EAP assignment, students may have expectations of high levels of support, and make more effort when encouraged to do so. Thus, by providing additional comments, there may be a perception that tutors are fulfilling their part of the expected negotiation (Bitchener (2008)). Student comments also indicated that more explicit feedback raised the priority level of the error, encouraged a higher level of engagement, improved success rates and lowered ignore rates. Also, in some cases it prompted students to experiment with the language and take risks in order to improve competence levels, and this was an indication of a more sophisticated level of engagement with language and academic discourse (Jacobs 1974, cited by Falchikov 1995).

Data analysis also revealed that the replacement method was favoured over all other methods of correction, and that different types of feedback produced different types of responses, issues and outcomes. Qualitative data indicated that the replacement method was the most popular as it was perceived as the simplest and quickest means of fixing the problem compared

Critical evaluation of results and implications. The writer reassesses research in the literature review, in light of findings, critically assesses impact and implications, and indicates whether the current study has successfully (or adequately) addressed the gap and the research

Research findings directly compared with other studies and aligned with theory to explain results

with the complexities of reformulation. It was also used when students expressed doubts or uncertainties about the nature of the error, and this may be partly reflected in high failure rates associated with replaced items. However, the high failure rates may also be partly explained by Ferris's theory (1999, cited by Bitchener et al 2005), that word choice errors are dependent on the student's prior lexical knowledge, and as "untreatable" errors, they may be more difficult to resolve. Thus, the use of the replacement method may have highlighted underlying weaknesses in the students' academic lexical abilities. As Coxhead (2000) and others point out, the restricted use of academic lexis means that students do not have regular exposure to such specialist vocabulary. Successful application of appropriate lexis may therefore be dependent on individual proficiency levels and specialist knowledge of academic genres (Hyland and Tse 2007). Recorded variations in lexical proficiency across the cohort may also indicate weaknesses in the academic competences criteria used by the ELC.

The replacement method may also have encouraged a focus on form rather than engagement with context, discourse and critical analysis, which may be detrimental to the students' ability to move from EAP apprentice to competent and confident academic practitioner (Radecki and Swales, 1988). Finally, it is possible that tutor comments prompted the use of the replacement method. Typical feedback included, *replace, find another word, choose another phrase, different word, word choice* and so on. As Kruse (1979, cited by Coxhead 2000) pointed out, acquisition is most successful when language is learnt in context rather than in isolation. Therefore, the findings may highlight a number of critical issues that should to be taken into account when reviewing feedback procedures and methodologies. In other words, syllabus planners and tutors need to carefully consider the most appropriate means of encouraging students to engage with discourse alongside issues of form. They also need to consider what the correct version is before they write a comment.

Analysis of the reformulation method showed that across all feedback types its use was significantly lower than the replacement method. Qualitative findings suggest that this may be partly due to the level of challenge and effort required to reformulate sentence structures compared with the perceived simplicity of replacing vocabulary only items. Time constraints may have also partly dissuaded students from attempting reformulation. A detailed analysis of a number of examples of reformulated corrections also showed that in the majority

of cases, students attempted reformulation when the lexical error occurred within the context of an explicit paraphrase, indicated by the in-text reference. This may indicate that students are prompted to review the entire paraphrase and attempt a re-construction as the original text is available, and they can use this model for guidance. In other words, they are more able and willing to focus on discourse as well as form, and the presence of the original source may encourage a second attempt. Thus, findings may concur with Schmidt's view that model constructs provide pragmatic and attainable targets encourage engagement with discourse and lead to more satisfactory and successful improvements (1990, cited by Adams 2003). It is interesting to note that success rates for reformulation were higher than the replacement method. This suggests that the effectiveness of correction is not only related to the level of effort and input from the student (Nguyen et al, 2001), but also the willingness and commitment to engage with the contextual and discursive elements of academic writing, as well as linguistic considerations. High failure rates associated with the replacement method may also be due to misleading tutor comments that encourage replacement when replacement is impossible within the context of a fundamentally flawed sentence.

Finally, high ignore rates associated with Types A and C feedback may indicate that the students failed to notice the item or recognise it as an error (Price 2010). There is also evidence that they failed to understand the correction code that was used, or failed to understand the nature of the error due to lack of explicit explanation. The students' therefore were unclear about how to respond (Ferris, 2006). The absence of comments may also have led them to believe that the error was not as significant or important as feedback with additional comments, and so they opted to either ignore it or prioritise what they perceived to be more urgent issues, such as content, grammar or cohesion (Price et al 2010). The high ignore rates may also highlight the views of Schmidt (1990), Swain (1993) and others of the importance of noticing and tutor-student interaction in the feedback and error correction process, and that tutor comments provide a more tangible instruction that encourages correction attempts.

Chapter 6 Limitations, Implications and Further Research

6.1 Limitations

There were a number of limitations to the study that must be taken into account. Firstly, due to time constraints and logistical issues, the overall size of the sample was relatively small. In addition, all of the interviewed respondents came from the Far East, and consequently, this may have produced results specific to the learning issues and strategies of particular cultural and linguistic groups. I would have preferred to have included a wider range of nationalities, but time constraints and logistics made this impossible. It is important to stress, however, that I countered any possible detrimental impact on the findings by extending the sample pool to include draft papers and questionnaires from a wider catchment of international students. I believe therefore, that the data collected across both quantitative and qualitative research was sufficient to provide a reliable, accurate and representative measure of student responses to tutor feedback.

Timing and logistics were factors I also had to consider, and this imposed certain limitations on the study. The interviews were conducted three to four weeks after the completion date of the PSM 4 programme, and all of the students had already started their degree programmes. Consequently, it is possible that perceptions and memories of attitudes and the processes the students' worked through to correct lexical errors had shifted and become distorted through the passage of time, and subsequent improvements in their academic English and study skills abilities. However, through careful design of the interview process, I ensured that the respondents were given sufficient time to re-orientate themselves with their draft papers, and using pre-interview prompt questions, I allowed them space to reflect on their general experiences on the PSM 4 programme, without influencing or distorting responses to interview questions. I found that once the students engaged with the sample errors, their recollections sharpened and they were able to recount specific details of their journeys to correct errors and improve their draft assignments.

A third limitation was the degree of explicitness of tutor comments and the possible impact of such variations on the efficacy of student responses. I did not include any detailed analysis of the effects of different types of comments on student corrections, and it is possible that student response may be sensitive to subtle differences in levels of explicitness. However,

It is important in all research to recognise and detail any limitations in the study that arise either before or during the process. Critical analysis of your own study demonstrates good academic practice and high levels of criticality. It also helps point to further research and improvements that could be made in research design

analysis of comment types indicated that the range was narrow and levels of explicitness were small. Consequently, I believed that the impact on findings was negligible, but could not be ruled out entirely.

The complexity of assessing the effectiveness of student corrections was also an issue I had to address. I found that in some cases, although a word substitution was effective, the contextual phrase or sentence remained structurally or grammatically weak or incorrect. As the study was focused primarily on responses to lexical errors only, I decided to focus my assessment criteria on the lexical item only, unless reformulation or removal methods were used. I recognised that this approach was inauthentic in that lexis does not exist in a vacuum and its effectiveness is dependent on contextual factors. However, despite this somewhat artificial approach to correction analysis and assessment, the measurable disparity of success rates between comment and non-comment feedback was highly significant, and so I was confident that findings were reliable.

Qualitative data revealed variations in student attitudes to tutor feedback. For some, feedback was viewed as a support mechanism to highlight specific language issues and offered comprehensive guidance to help students reach the most suitable and effective solution. For others, however, formative feedback within the context of the draft was regarded as providing an opportunity to improve and develop not only the accuracy of the language but also the quality of the academic discourse, through experimentation and risk-taking. It was clear, therefore that individual variations in academic lexical competence, along with different levels of confidence and motivation may also have impacted on perceptions and interpretations of feedback, and the effectiveness of outcomes.

Finally, time constraints meant that the study was unable to consider the impact and effect of weekly tutorials provided by the tutors. The tutorials provide an opportunity for both students and tutors to discuss any part of the student's progress on the course. The flexibility of the tutorial system meant that while some students discussed the specifics of their draft assignment with their writing tutor, others did not. Therefore, for the purposes of consistency, uniformity and reliability, I decided to preclude analysis of any tutorial support given to supplement written feedback. I am aware, however, that for some students, tutorial support may have assisted their understanding of the nature of the error and perhaps helped them to produce a more successful correction. But it is important to stress that the tutors

were instructed not to provide direct corrections either in written feedback or during tutorials, and therefore, tutorial feedback was limited to supplementary questions only. It would be interesting however, to carry out a comparison study between those students who received tutorial feedback and those who did not.

6.2 Implications and Recommendations

The study has led to consideration of a number of implications for syllabus planners and EAP teaching practitioners. Firstly, findings demonstrate that tutor feedback generated significantly higher success rates for lexical error correction in pre-sessional draft essays. Thus, there is a direct and measurable correlation between the explicitness of tutor feedback and the resultant effectiveness of student corrections. The study also found that students perceive feedback in draft assignments as a means of helping them to improve and develop not only language accuracy but also the content and structure of the work. There are clear expectations that tutors will provide extensive and comprehensive support during the draft stages. The majority of students interviewed struggled to understand the nature of some of the sample errors, and the subsequent course of action they needed to take to remedy the problem. They frequently resorted to guess-work and quick-fix solutions such as synonym replacement methods.

It is vital therefore that pre-sessional syllabus planners, course directors and tutors need to address the following points when considering changes to feedback methodologies and practices in relation to lexical errors:

1. Formative feedback should include additional comments to support correction codes. The comments can be minimal, but should indicate the nature of the error and possibly provide guidance on how to resolve the issue.
2. Tutors should check the accuracy of feedback codes and comments to ensure that recommendations are accurate and appropriate.
3. Pre-sessional course materials, student information packs and so on clearly set out feedback rationale and methodologies, and that tutors not only explain the types of feedback they will be providing and why, but also that the dialogue of negotiation between tutor and student continues throughout the programme. Specific details such as correction codes should be made available at all times, and provided to students with every piece of formative assessment given.

Real -world implications and recommendations are set out in this section, supported by sources

4. High failure rates indicated that a focus on form is not necessarily the most effective method of correcting errors. Syllabus designers and tutors therefore, should provide feedback that encourages academic vocabulary development within the context of discourse, critical analysis and the assignment as a whole. Comments should therefore be framed to prompt review, reformulation and revision at phrase, sentence and paragraph level, and within the wider frame of the whole essay, rather than over-reliance on the replacement method
5. Follow-up tutorial support should be provided to supplement written feedback. Long (1996) and Jordan (1997) highlight the importance of on-going learner engagement and tutor-student negotiation in the feedback process which in turn leads to more effective learning and acquisition. Tutorial support provides the ideal opportunity for both sets of stakeholders to navigate the correction process, and work towards the most satisfactory and effective solution. The follow up tutorial can also clarify confusions and misunderstandings, and facilitate a shift in focus from form to discourse. Thus, on-going negotiation and dialogue may also help students extend and improve competence and confidence levels, and encourage the type of risk-taking that Jacobs argues is vital for successful second language learning and acquisition (1974, cited by Falchikov 1995).

I recognise that some of these recommendations may be challenging to implement given time pressures and constraints on summer pre-sessional programmes. However, the findings clearly demonstrate that workload issues impinge on feedback choices and methodologies used. Finally therefore, I strongly recommended that when designing pre-sessional courses and organising timetables, syllabus planners need to factor in sufficient time and space for tutors to correct draft assignments, and include provision for follow-up feedback tutorials.

6.3 Further research

Future studies may wish to examine how tutors respond to different types of student error, and how this then translates into student responses. The study also highlighted the important role of tutor-student negotiation and dialogue during the formative feedback stage, and this is an area that also merits further investigation. It would also be valuable to consider how tutor comments of varying explicitness impact on the efficacy of

Some suggestions for future research, based on limitations of current study

the feedback provided, and the subsequent correction choices adopted by the student. It may also be worthy of a study to examine whether tutors' comments match an achievable correction. In other words, if tutors recommend a replacement word, is there a suitable synonym available? Finally, it would be beneficial to conduct a follow-up study to investigate the impact of any changes made to pre-sessional feedback methodologies in light of current findings.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the efficacy of different types of feedback in order to improve feedback methodologies and practices used on summer Pre-sessional Management courses. Results provided substantive evidence that feedback with additional comments led to higher success rates for the correction of lexical errors; in other words, the more explicit the feedback, the more effective the correction. The study also found that tutor feedback tended to encourage the replacement method of correction, and this was the most frequently used by students. However, the replacement method also produced the highest rates of unsuccessful correction attempts. Across all feedback types, there was a tendency for students to use guess-work when applying word substitution, and focus on form rather than consider the specific lexical issue within the wider contextual discourse. Higher ignore rates associated with non-comment feedback also point to issues of noticing, along with prioritising practices that relegated non-comment feedback to the back of the correction queue. Qualitative data also revealed that students tended to consider lexical error as a minor problem compared with grammatical, structural or content issues, and this may also have contributed to relatively high ignore rates across all 4 feedback types.

Although the study highlighted the value and centrality of feedback in EAP teaching, it also identified the importance of clarity and explicitness in the type of feedback provided. Questions still remain, however, concerning definitions and interpretations of explicitness, and the role of feedback in helping to shift students' mind-set from a focus on form to that of discourse and critical engagement with content and ideas. Time constraints and the intense nature of summer pre-sessional courses, along with the differing needs of individual students add further complications to any consideration of changes that might be made to feedback methodologies on pre-sessional courses. Indeed, the variations in student attitudes, competencies and confidence levels may preclude a fits-all model. It may be that tutors on pre-sessional courses adopt a more tailor-made approach to feedback and utilise a wide range of feedback methods to ensure the most effective support. Follow-up tutorials are also central to successful feedback delivery, as they provide not only additional support, but facilitate the needs-driven approach to learning, and foster a deeper sense of learning through negotiation and on-going dialogue.

Standard essay-style conclusion that summarises the dissertation and provides some final thoughts

The debate therefore, is far from over, and it is likely that future studies will continue to provide contradictory and conflicting results. In many ways, the study confirmed that the nature, impact and efficacy of feedback is highly complex, and the myriad of variables, anomalies and influencing factors it encompasses are multi-faceted and difficult to measure or include in a single study. The on-going debate however, continues to provide opportunities to reflect, question and re-consider assumptions, challenge the status quo and explore new, innovative and exciting methods of teaching. Whatever routes and directions the debate takes, I believe formative feedback will continue to play a central role in all good EAP teaching. The provision of high quality and effective feedback on pre-sessional programmes not only enhances the students' learning experience, but is also fundamental in helping them to move effectively from cautious EAP apprentice to confident and able academic practitioner.

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List of Appendices

Writer provides a useful list of appendices to help the reader and organise the dissertation

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Appendix 1

The correction codes used at the English Language Centre

Spelling and Punctuation		
Sp	Spelling (written exactly where error has occurred	Bisness
P	Punctuation	he speaks Chinese
Grammar		
T	Tense	He go there 2 weeks ago
N	Number	She listen to the radio every day
F	Form of word	The film was bored
G	General grammar mistake	She doesn't spoke English
^	Omission	She a very tall person
Art	Article	He's eating the lunch
Vocabulary		
Ww	Wrong word	She is a very comfortable person
R	Register	I wanna apply for your course
WO	Word order	I like very much chocolate
/	Unnecessary word	We went to there yesterday
General Comments		
?	Not clear	
Wavy line	Not quite right (whole or part of the sentence, can add type of mistake as above and/or 'rewrite'	
//	New paragraph	
	Good. (T can also indicate phrase or section with highlighter, and reason why it is good	

Appendix 2

Assignment Criteria for PSM 4 Research writing assignment

RESEARCH PROJECT C

Individual Writing Assignment

Aims

- *To develop and improve essay and dissertation writing skills*
- *To understand the purpose and structure of research methods, research proposals and dissertations*
- *To practise critical and analytical thinking skills*
- *To improve research skills; reading and note-taking, paraphrasing, synthesising, academic sources on the internet*
- *To improve library research techniques*
- *To improve data analysis techniques*
- *To practise self study and time management skills*

In Project C, you will be required to write and submit a research proposal and a mini dissertation on a topic relating to your chosen field of study. The project will include a:

A Title

This must accurately reflect the area of research you intend to focus on.

B Research Proposal (200-300 words)

This should set out clearly your reasons for choosing your topic.

C Research Paper / Dissertation (1500 words)

This may be in standard essay or report format

Marks will be awarded as follows:

Research Proposal 20%

Dissertation 80%

Deadlines

Week 4 Monday pm Agree essay title with tutor

Week 5 Monday pm Hand in research proposal

Week 6 Wednesday pm Hand in first draft

Week 7 Monday 2pm Hand in final draft

** A **paper copy** must be submitted to your tutor and an **electronic copy** (in Microsoft Word, not pdf) must be uploaded through Moodle by 14.00 **

NB. These are **deadlines** so, remember, they are the **last dates** for submission. You can and should try to hand things in earlier.

Appendix 3

ELC Writing Assessment Band Descriptors

Band Descriptors

NB Does not cover mechanical elements of referencing source material as this cannot be given an IELTS type score – they either get it right or are breaking the rules. On the new Student Reports, “Incorporating Source Material” is given a score of either “Unsatisfactory” or “Satisfactory” only.

Level	5	6	7	8
<p>Task Achievement (answering the question)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language inadequacies prevent a satisfactory answer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some main ideas presented, but limited Viewpoint/position present but may not be entirely clear i.e. the writer understands the task BUT Language inadequacies mean that it is difficult for the writer to actually achieve the task Position is either underdeveloped or inadequately supported or both Some details are either irrelevant or relevance is unclear Some repetition probably present Conclusion, if present, is unconnected to previous evidence and/or ideas 	<p>Task has been achieved but with some weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant aspects of topic covered Relevant viewpoint/position established Limited development of topic Expressed in a manner approaching/in some parts achieving academic style <p>BUT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some parts of text better than others e.g. no thesis statement, weak or missing conclusion Unbalanced and/or underdeveloped answer May be some repetition Support for points not entirely satisfactory e.g. badly chosen examples or irrelevant references Conclusion may be over-generalised or unjustified 	<p>Task has been achieved adequately:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Task has been achieved, generally speaking Clear viewpoint/ position/ argument established All aspects of topic covered, and most or all points developed adequately Satisfactory support for points and source material incorporated Expressed in clear academic style Some extension or original/ creative development of points or argument <p>BUT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adequate research but more sources would need to be incorporated for a more extended argument 	<p>Task has been achieved very well:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops argument well, and all points made are supported Not formulaic All points totally relevant Has done effective research Evidence of creativity or originality 	<p>NB Level 9: Could be published as is</p>

<p>Organisation & Cohesion (comprehensibility)</p>	<p>Language inadequacies prevent the intended organisation from being apparent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The writing can be followed, and connections can be inferred with some effort from the reader Some cohesive devices may be present <p>BUT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No overall plan apparent Sentences may seem unconnected to each other Inadequate or illogical paragraphing Argument is too simplistic if it can be followed Significant errors in use of cohesive devices and referring (if these are used at all) 	<p>A logical flow of ideas is present but with some weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The message can be followed without the reader having to make too much effort Generally correct paragraphing Discourse markers in evidence, at least some used well Referring evident <p>BUT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be mechanical and/or overuse of discourse markers e.g. Firstly, Secondly at beginning of each paragraph Some errors in referring e.g. “this” used to refer to a plural phenomenon Conclusion may not be linked logically to the argument proposed 	<p>Well constructed and a logical flow of ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Logical flow which can be followed throughout Clear introduction, body paragraphs and conclusion, each with an appropriate structure Discourse markers and referring devices generally used well <p>BUT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construction good but possibly formulaic i.e. the writer has mechanically “ticked the boxes” for structure Minor errors possible in referring e.g. wrong form or choice in referring item, substitution 	<p>Level of sophistication becoming native speaker-like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Argument is logical and very well organised, therefore easy to follow Cohesion is almost always effective Discourse markers and referring devices almost always used correctly Not formulaic, variation beyond “Firstly, ...Secondly,...Thirdly,....” At times, seems as if written by a native speaker – style does not “jar” <p>NB Level 9: High level of sophistication, NO errors</p>
<p>Vocabulary Range & Accuracy</p>	<p>Limited vocabulary with frequent errors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Just enough vocabulary present to carry the message Generalised, unspecific message conveyed <p>BUT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repetition of vocabulary items; no risk taking in vocabulary choice Frequent inappropriate use of vocabulary items Significant errors in spelling and form which cause difficulty for the reader Possible incorrect use of register 	<p>Vocabulary used generally sufficient but errors present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meaning of vocab used is clear enough to make the point Errors don't lose the meaning or cause difficulty for the reader Limited vocabulary range although writer make take risks in vocabulary choice <p>BUT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some errors in spelling or word form Attempted use of more complex vocab (risk-taking) may result in errors of appropriacy, form or spelling Minor lapses in register 	<p>Vocabulary use mainly accurate and precise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some evidence of more complex vocabulary used, generally correctly Evidence of style and collocation extending beyond the banal Appropriate register <p>BUT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few errors in usage, spelling or form may remain Some odd collocations may be present 	<p>Vocabulary range and accuracy impressive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of style and collocation becoming sophisticated NO lapses in register, always appropriate Complex academic vocab almost always used correctly <p>BUT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very occasionally uses inappropriate words, collocations or word formation (but these do not impede communication at all) <p>NB Level 9: NO errors in word choice or form</p>

<p>Grammatical Accuracy & Fluency of Language</p>	<p>Generally only basic structures and simple sentences present, with errors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple sentence patterns, probably repeated • Better than a random smattering of words i.e. there may be clusters of words that hang together <p>BUT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent grammatical errors which cause strain on the reader • Reader has to re-read or “fill in” information to make sense of the writing • Any attempt at use of more complicated structures may be very difficult to understand • Punctuation may be faulty 	<p>Generally accurate use of simple structures with more complex problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple sentences used, usually accurate • Some subordinate clauses used • Errors do not impede communication <p>BUT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any more complicated structures attempted probably contain some errors 	<p>Good range of structures in well managed sentences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient language to express all ideas • Few grammatical errors • Frequent and generally accurate use of complex structures • Frequent and generally accurate use of subordinate clauses • Structures such as modals, conditionals and passive form present and generally accurate <p>BUT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few errors remain e.g. inconsistent use of articles, persistent 3rd person errors, which cause no difficulty for reader • Minor punctuation error may still be present 	<p>Wide range of structures almost error-free:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most sentences, even those using complex structures, are error-free • Accurate use of many complex structures e.g. modals, conditionals, passives • Frequent and accurate use of subordinate clauses <p>BUT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few minor errors present (probably the same one/s repeated) e.g. articles <p>NB Level 9: NO errors in any structures used</p>
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- **A 5.5 level piece of writing** would have all of 5.0 features

BUT better use of cohesive devices

AND/OR wider range of vocab **AND/OR** better task achievement **AND/OR** less strain for the reader

BUT not all of these!

- **Similar description/decision process for 6.5 and 7.5**

Appendix 4

IELTS band Descriptors (Public Version)

Band 9 - Expert User:

Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.

Band 8 - Very Good User:

Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.

Band 7 - Good User:

Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.

Band 6 - Competent User:

Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.

Band 5 - Modest User:

Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.

Band 4 - Limited User:

Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.

Band 3 - Extremely Limited User:

Conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.

Band 2 - Intermittent User:

No real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.

Band 1 - Non User:

Essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.

Band 0 - Did not attempt the test:

No assessable information provided.

Appendix 7

Summary of Interview Responses

Response Topics	TYPE A + C Feedback	TYPE B + D Feedback
I didn't understand correction code/ comment	All students	002, 004, 008
I didn't understand the nature of the error	001, 003, 005, 007	002, 004, 008
I applied guess work because I didn't understand or wasn't clear about the error/ feedback	All students	All students
I was anxious about making more mistakes	001, 003, and 007	002, 004, 006
I used replacement method because I didn't have time to reformulate	001, 003, 005,	All students
I used replacement method because reformulation was too difficult	001, 003, 005, 007	002, 004
I focused on context/ discourse more than form	004, 006, 008	
I replaced lexical item using an electronic dictionary	All students	All students
I reformulated a sourced paraphrase following a lexical error	All students	All students
I ignored the error because I didn't understand it	All students	002, 004, 006
I ignored the error because I didn't notice the feedback	001, 003, 007	
I ignored error because I prioritised more serious errors	All students	All students

(Note: students demonstrated the following responses for at least one out of the four sample errors examined)

Diana and Tom's comments

This dissertation was very well-presented, very well-researched and clearly written. The depth of understanding of the topic of correction in general, and correction and feedback of written work in an EAP context in particular, was very good. The writer has used her/his own experience and knowledge of teaching and learning of writing and correction to good effect and shown, at each stage of the report, the relevance of this study to their context of work. The 'gap' in the research was made clear and the rationale for the choice of a mixed methods approach was well- reasoned, and clearly suited the research goals. The writer recognised the limitations of the study, and this demonstrates a reflective approach to research and adds to the reader's confidence in the integrity of the work. Insights drawn had practical applications.