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Feedback-giving practice for L2 writing teachers: Friend or foe?

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ABSTRACT

Informed by a reflective practice perspective on teacher learning, this study investigates the learning experiences of L2 writing teachers in providing feedback on students' writing. Drawing on multiple sources of data from 27 English writing teachers in Chinese universities, the study reveals that giving feedback on student writing can be a learning experience for most L2 writing teachers and challenges the mainstream discourse that portrays teachers' feedback-giving as a burdensome and unrewarding task. While some participants did not see the learning opportunities in giving teacher feedback due to their students' limited writing proficiency, large class size, and time constraints, the majority of teachers believed that giving feedback could improve their feedback literacy and feedback practices and enable teachers to: gain a better understanding of the students and their writing problems; improve their instructional approaches; enhance their own writing proficiency; and obtain knowledge in other disciplines, as well as identify topics for research on L2 writing. This study shows the potential of teacher learning in giving feedback and highlights that teacher learning takes place in social interaction, feedback practice, and teachers' self-reflection, thus contributing to research on L2 writing feedback.

1. Introduction

The focus of L2 writing research has been placed overwhelmingly on ways and approaches to help students develop their writing performance, whereas only scant attention has been paid to writing teachers' preparation and learning (Hirvela, 2019; Lee & Yuan, 2020). This is particularly true of feedback research in L2 writing. While previous research has examined how teacher feedback can enhance student writing quality and language learning, little has been done from teachers' perspectives, especially regarding what and how writing teachers can learn from the feedback-giving experience (Delante, 2017; Goldstein, 2010, 2016).

The discourse on L2 writing feedback research and practices implies that teacher feedback can be a time-consuming, challenging, and burdensome task and tends to portray it as a foe for L2 writing teachers (Ferris, Pezone, Tade, & Tinti, 1997; Hyland, 1990; Lee, 2017; Taut, Santelices, Araya, & Manzi, 2011). The discourse is negative, but is the experience of giving feedback an absolutely negative task for many L2 writing teachers? From the reflective practice perspective of teacher learning (Goh, 2019; Schon, 1983), giving feedback on student writing, however tedious and challenging, can provide useful learning opportunities for teachers. Thus, the current study aims to investigate 27 EF L writing teachers' learning experiences in giving feedback to student writing in Chinese universities, where the teaching of English writing is guided by a unified national syllabus (i.e., Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education, 2007) and examination-oriented system (You, 2004).

Although process/genre writing has been promoted for decades in many EFL contexts such as Hong Kong and Mainland China, it has not been embraced by the majority of writing teachers (Lee & Wong, 2014; Shi, Baker, & Chen, 2019). While writing is a core

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component in both the secondary and higher education systems in China and the national examinations of college students' English proficiency (e.g., College English Test/CET Band-4 and Band-6), teacher education on English writing instruction in China remains underdeveloped. Given the examination-oriented educational system and the deeply entrenched teacher-driven culture, teacher feedback tends to be given on single-draft writing, focusing on exams as the final goal and relying on written corrective feedback (WCF) (Yang & Gao, 2013; Zhao, 2018). Although undergraduate students in Chinese universities reported that they have experienced various types of feedback, teacher feedback is still the major source of feedback (Yu, Jiang, & Zhou, 2020). As writing classrooms in China are usually of big sizes (about 40–80 students), giving feedback on students' essays is considered the most labor-intensive part of their work by writing instructors in China. Setting its backdrop against the broad context of L2 writing teaching in Chinese higher education, this study can provide insights into the current discourse on feedback in L2 writing and contribute theoretical discussions and empirical evidence on teacher learning from the practice of giving feedback.

2. Discourses around teacher feedback on L2 writing

Teacher feedback on writing can be "a constructive judgement of a text: an evaluation that points forward to the student's future writing and the development of his or her writing processes" (Hyland & Hyland, 2019, p. 1). In the traditional product-oriented approach to writing, teachers provide feedback on discourse level form (e.g., cohesion, essay structure, and topic development), and their feedback mainly includes holistic scores, grades, or various types of WCF, such as direct/indirect WCF (depending upon whether teachers provide the correct form) and focused/comprehensive WCF (selecting the errors related to certain linguistic categories to correct, or correcting the errors comprehensively) (Ellis, 2010; Lee, 2019). In the process approaches and genre-oriented approach to writing, however, teacher feedback could take into account audience, writing purposes, and the writer's processes and focus on the development of meaningful content with appropriate genre structures, and they do not prioritize language accuracy over context and texts at the discourse level (Goldstein, 2004; Lee, 2017). Teachers can also adopt innovative feedback strategies, such as focused WCF and peer and self-feedback, which encourage students to monitor, regulate, and review their own writing (Lee, Mak, & Burns, 2015; Mawlawi Diab, 2016). There are also multiple modes of feedback delivery (e.g., audio, video, written, electronic and oral) which are available to both teachers and students as feedback providers in L2 writing contexts (Yu et al., 2020).

Teacher feedback can be a burdensome, unrewarding task that constitutes great challenges (Ferris, 2007; Goldstein, 2004, 2010; Lee, 2017). First, due to the large class size in many ESL/EFL contexts, teachers need to handle a heavy workload and have rather limited time to provide sufficient feedback to students, which consequently could impinge on their feedback behaviors (Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Lee, 2003; Lee et al., 2015). Nonetheless, L2 writing teachers still consider it their duty to correct all errors in student writing and provide other types of feedback so their students can progress (Goldstein, 2004; Lee, 2003, 2016, 2017). Second, feedback research and practices have shown that although teachers spend a massive amount of time commenting on students' writing, this aspect of their work is "often fraught with frustration and uncertainty" (Ferris, 2014, p. 6), especially when students fail to read or make effective use of the feedback. Several negative terms have been used to describe the process of giving feedback by writing teachers, such as frustrating (Ferris et al., 1997; Ferris, 2014; Lee, 2017), tedious and unrewarding (Hyland, 1990), and time-consuming and intimidating (Junqueira & Payant, 2015). Teachers have also described themselves as "marking machines" (Lee, 2010, p. 148; Lee, 2019) and "composition slaves" (Hairston, 1986, p. 117) and discussed the stress and anxiety that providing feedback brings them (Taut et al., 2011).

Feedback studies focusing on teachers have explored teachers' feedback beliefs and practices (Ellis, 2010; Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Lee, 2008; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019). They have also examined the ways teachers struggle with the feedback-giving experience and cope with the difficulties and challenges derived both from sociocultural factors such as heavy workloads, student needs, and school policies (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Lee, 2005, 2017), and from individual factors like lack of knowledge and training and teachers' philosophy of writing (Goldstein, 2006, 2016; Lee, 2008). However, the negative portrayal of teacher feedback should be reconsidered, as several recent studies have evidenced that providing feedback could be a learning opportunity for feedback-givers such as students (Huisman, Saab, Van Driel, & Van Den Broek, 2018; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Yu, 2019). We still know little regarding what writing teachers can learn from their feedback-giving experiences and the extent to which they can learn it (Goldstein, 2010). This paper aims to add new knowledge to the field by investigating EFL writing teachers' voices and experiences of learning, if any, from giving feedback to student writing.

3. What can teachers learn from giving feedback to student writing? A reflective practice perspective

In this study, teacher learning has been defined as "changes in knowledge, orientation, and skills that pertain to the person's conception of teaching and actions as a teacher" (Garner & Kaplan, 2019, p. 8). Theoretically, giving feedback to student writing may lead to changes of L2 writing teachers in their knowledge, orientation, and skills that are related to writing instruction and their conceptions of teaching L2 writing and actions as a writing teacher. These changes in teachers can be further interpreted from the reflective learning perspective.

From a reflective practice perspective, teacher learning could possibly take place through reflection in action and reflection on action of the feedback-giving practice (Goh, 2019; Schon, 1983). As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) have argued, teacher learning concerns three types of knowledge: knowledge-for-practice (formal knowledge and theory acquired through training), knowledge-in-practice (learning through reflection on action), and knowledge-of-practice (learning through reflection in action). While knowledge-for-practice is important, teacher learning generally remains implicit (Hoekstra, Beijaard, Brekelmans, & Korthagen, 2007) and one important way to probe it is through reflection (Grosemans, Boon, Verclairen, Dochy, & Kyndt, 2015). The other two

types of teacher learning constitute a more dynamic process by which teachers build their repertoire and then rectify such knowledge in their teaching practice (Kelly, 2006). Through reflection on the actions or events experienced, teachers could build on their existing knowledge to form new understanding of their practice; reflection in the midst of action situates teacher learning within the context of their practice and prepares teachers to develop meaning from and make sense of their teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Grosemans et al., 2015; Kelly, 2006; Marcos & Tillema, 2006). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) have argued that reflective thinking and inquiry would facilitate teachers' awareness of situations by connecting teaching experiences to a variety of information, thereby promoting immediate decisions to frame situations and reconsider their teaching practices.

In this sense, teachers can develop their knowledge, orientations, and skills by learning in and from daily teaching practices like giving feedback in L2 writing (Little & Horn, 2007). Feedback, in the eye of receivers, is among the most powerful ways to enhance their learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). For feedback providers, this experience could also be conducive for learning by eliciting their reflection in a number of ways. Teachers could reflect on their feedback-giving practice to develop the knowledge that could close the distance between the actual and the expected student performance in English writing. They could also engage in reflection when giving feedback and form a more situated understanding of the students and their problems in writing. For writing teachers, the two types of reflection provide a learning milieu that is generally accompanied with a variety of learning tasks, such as, for example: analyzing students' needs (Liu, Chang, Yang, & Sun, 2011), adjusting feedback strategies and approaches, and implementing innovative feedback (Lee et al., 2015). Such experiences may enrich teachers' knowledge of L2 writing instruction and promote their professionalism as L2 writing teachers.

However, the current studies are rather limited concerning L2 writing teachers' reflection in and on their feedback-giving practices. Some scholars theoretically argue for the importance of teacher reflection in commenting on students' writing. For example, Goldstein (2004) suggested that writing instructors should approach and understand their teaching context so as to change or modify their practices in a way that meets students' needs in feedback, which rightly highlights how teachers can develop the knowledge of contextual and student factors from their reflection in action. Some other researchers (Best, 2004; Delante, 2017; Goldstein, 2010) reflected on their own feedback-giving experience. Such reflection generally focused on two issues: the features of feedback provided, and students' responses to teacher feedback. For instance, Delante (2017) found his comments were slightly more focused on form and error correction, which he realized might de-motivate students in revising their compositions and seeking further feedback. Besides, he also thought about these contextual, student, and cultural factors shaping his feedback and proposed several strategies to maximize the impact of feedback. As evidenced in Delante's (2017) self-reflection and other relevant studies, L2 writing teachers, through reflection on action, can identify possible areas for improvement and form new knowledge of their feedback-giving practices, which would ultimately and hopefully initiate changes in teachers' behaviors and mindsets.

Despite the theoretical support for teacher learning from providing feedback on student writing, there has been little empirical research on what L2 writing teachers can learn from their feedback-giving experiences and the extent to which they can learn it (Best, 2004; Delante, 2017; Goldstein, 2010). To fill this important void, this study focuses on 27 writing teachers' learning experiences of giving feedback on their students' writing in the Chinese EFL context. It aims to address the following research questions: (1) Do

Table 1
Teacher Participants.

Pseudonym	Gender	Degree	Writing instruction training	English proficiency	Years of teaching experience
A	M	MA	No	IELTS 7	9
B	M	PhD	Yes	IELTS 8.5	10
C	M	MA	No	IELTS 8	15
D	M	PhD	Yes	TEM 8	15
E	F	MA	No	TEM 8	15
F	M	MA	Yes	IELTS 7	5
G	F	MA	No	N/A	30
H	F	MA	Yes	TEM 8	10
I	F	MA	Yes	IELTS 7.5	3.5
J	F	BA	No	TEM 8	16
K	F	BA	No	TEM 8	25
L	F	BA	No	N/A	18
M	F	MA	No	TEM 8	26
N	F	MA	No	TEM 8	22
O	F	MA	No	TEM 8	15
P	M	MA	No	IELTS 7.5	1.5
Q	M	MA	No	TEM 8	4
R	M	MA	Yes	TEM 8	3.5
S	F	MA	No	N/A	27
T	F	MA	No	TEM 8	16
U	F	MA	No	N/A	14
V	F	MA	No	TEM 8	10
W	F	MA	No	TOEFL 102	18
X	F	MA	No	TEM 8	14
Y	F	MA	Yes	TEM 8	23
Z	F	MA	Yes	IELTS 7	4
Z1	F	MA	Yes	IELTS 7	20

Chinese EFL university writing teachers report that they learn from giving feedback on student writing? (2) What do they report learning from these feedback-giving experiences?

4. Methodology

4.1. Context and participants

A qualitative approach was adopted to provide in-depth and contextualized understanding of the participants' beliefs and experiences in learning from the feedback-giving practice. The participants were recruited through convenience and purposive sampling (Yin, 2003). Invitations for participating in the study were first sent to 35 English writing teachers who worked at the university-level in different parts of Mainland China. Attempts were made to select potential participants with different backgrounds (e.g., teaching experience, educational background, subject/course instructed, students' educational and language levels). Twenty-seven of them agreed to participate and shared their experiences in providing feedback on their students' L2 writing; they worked in 16 universities in 10 provinces (see Table 1 for details). Pseudonyms were assigned to the 27 teachers alphabetically from A to Z, with one teacher named Z1. Two of the participants held terminal degrees in applied linguistics and three were undertaking doctoral study in their related areas at the time of data collection. Nine teachers had received pre-service/in-service training on teaching writing.

Eleven participants primarily taught English to non-English-major students, 10 taught English majors, and another six instructors taught academic English to postgraduates. Some universities have set minimal requirements for the number of times a teacher should provide feedback to students, whereas others do not have such institutional rules. For the three groups of students, writing instruction could be quite different. At the undergraduate level, English writing is offered in independent modules for English-major students and as a sub-component of English for General Purposes (EGP) modules for non-English-major students. For non-English majors, writing assignments are usually completed as after-class tasks. The feedback practices for non-English-major students are generally constrained by limited teaching hours and a large class size, and teachers usually find it difficult to give comprehensive and detailed feedback on various issues (e.g., language, content, organization, and genre) in student writing (Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019). For English majors, English writing is a core component of the curriculum, and students have more teaching hours allocated for writing instruction. Students receive writing instruction in independent modules, such as English writing and business English writing. The postgraduates come from various departments and have different levels of English proficiency. Their English writing courses are generally for academic purposes, as students are required to publish in indexed international journals to secure graduation (Li & Hu, 2018).

Narrative and argumentative writing were the most common writing genres that the participating teachers used to assign writing tasks, found in 20 out of the 27 cases. Fifteen teachers would provide feedback on multiple drafts of student writing and relied on written corrective feedback in responding to the drafts, since feedback on discourse level (concerning the content, genre, and source use) was less mentioned. Only nine teachers met with their students to provide oral feedback. In the Chinese university system, although most of the universities had set requirements for the number of writing assignments (usually three to five per semester), only seven teachers reported having received institutional dictates regarding teacher feedback on the assignments that specified the focus of feedback (e.g., on language and organization) and the time of providing it (e.g., after each assignment).

4.2. Data collection and analysis

This study primarily drew upon data from semi-structured interviews with the participating teachers. The interview questions (see Appendix A) were generated from a comprehensive literature review on teacher feedback and teacher learning. The interview guide enabled the participants to share their beliefs and practices on writing feedback and the possible learning and benefits they had gained from providing feedback on student writing. In the interviews, the researcher also invited the participants to explain in detail why they could or could not learn from their feedback-giving experiences. The interview protocol was piloted with two teaching assistants of the researcher and one teacher participant (Teacher A) to make sure it could elicit enough teacher response for an in-depth understanding with the feedback experience. Follow-up WeChat and email interviews were conducted to further explore the participants' ideas and experiences when the researcher found that further clarifications were needed regarding the participants' responses in the interviews. During the interviews, the participants were asked to look at their sample teacher feedback (the in-text feedback provided to student writing or feedback summaries shown in the teaching materials) and explain why they provided feedback in the ways they did and whether they had learned anything from this feedback experience. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. A total of 27 participants participated in the interview, and 11 participated in a follow-up interview. Each interview session lasted between one and three hours.

As complements to interviews, sample teacher feedback on student writing, student writing assignments, and other teaching materials were collected from each participant. These documents could reveal how teachers provided feedback on student writing and could be used for eliciting responses in the interviews and for triangulation with the interviews. They were collected before the interviews for the researcher to obtain a situated understanding of the participants' teaching context. The initial reading and analyses of the documents enabled the researcher to have a general understanding of the participants' feedback (e.g., WCF, content feedback, and written comments in the end of the essay) and instructional practices (e.g., single-draft or multiple-draft writing). After reading through the documents, one representative sample of student writing (with teacher feedback) and teaching materials (e.g., PowerPoint slides) of each participant were selected and then used in the interviews to elicit responses.

The interviews were all transcribed and translated by a research assistant who held a Master's degree in applied linguistics and then

checked by the researcher for accuracy. The data analysis was informed by a qualitative interpretive paradigm (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). It was done in the original language (Chinese), and the process of analysis was iterative and recursive. The researcher read the interview transcripts iteratively to identify the codes and themes relating to the participants' learning from the feedback-giving practice. Codes were assigned to statements which showed the participants' changes in their knowledge, orientation, and skills relevant to writing instruction and their conceptions of teaching L2 writing and actions as a writing teacher. Sample initial codes included: Developing feedback knowledge, Changes in feedback strategies, Conceptions of peer feedback, Understanding of focused WCF, Realizing the limitations of teaching, Change teaching methods, Gaining research ideas, and Obtaining new perspectives. After that, the codes yielded from open coding were compared, sorted, merged, and re-categorized. For example, codes about the changes in feedback approaches and strategies had been categorized as Developing teacher feedback practice. Through a recursive process of open coding, the researcher allowed themes to emerge from the data and codes.

To enhance the rigor of the data analysis and the trustworthiness of the research findings, the researcher invited two research assistants (both of whom were doctoral candidates in education) to code the data both independently and together with the author and then compared the codes on the common issues and patterns emerging from the transcripts. The researcher first elaborated on the aims and purposes of this study and explained the data analysis procedures to them. Following that, the author and the research assistants coded the data and compared, revised, and integrated the themes emerging from the 27 participants' learning experiences. For example, Developing teacher feedback literacy and Developing teacher feedback practice, which were initially treated as two different themes, were combined to one theme since both of them concerned teachers' understanding and practices of giving feedback, as revealed in the findings. Finally, five themes were generated from the recursive data analysis, which can be found in the Findings section. In displaying the themes, excerpts of the interview responses, screenshots of the teaching materials and teacher feedback, and analytical notes of the researcher and the two research assistants were used.

5. Findings

The analysis of the multiple sources of data indicates that most teachers valued the learning opportunities provided by giving feedback to student writing. However, nine participating teachers held an opposite attitude, and four of them even said that providing feedback on student writing could have a negative influence on teachers. In particular, the nine teachers felt that although feedback-providing may bring learning opportunities (e.g., to gain a better understanding of student writers), teachers could become confused about certain expressions after reading student writing. For example, Teacher R said:

> 没有, 因为咱们的学生, 他们就是很受语文的影响, 可能会容易写出很多口号似的一些语言, 比如说用的最多的就是"we should"。所以这些东西其实从学习的角度上面来说, 其实你学不到什么东西。[1] I learned little from giving feedback. The students are under the influence of their L1 Chinese. They wrote slogan-like expressions, such as 'We should. . .' . (Teacher R)

The teachers offered several reasons for their negative learning experiences, among which students' limited language proficiency and writing skills were reported to be the main considerations. For example, Teacher B and Teacher D, the two male teachers who held doctoral degrees, complained that their students' writing prevented them from learning from the feedback experience:

> 学生的作文就是有毒啊！给反馈也很危险。他们水平真的不好, 每天读的话老是接受这样糟糕的input, 我自己的水平都可能下降了。[The] students' writing is 'poisonous'! Giving feedback is dangerous! Their language is not good. If I read their texts every day, my own language proficiency would be at risk of declining due to such bad input. (Teacher B)
>
> 对我自己没有太多的收获, 语言是一个问题, 结构内容也是问题。比如说你想那种基本上就是五段式的议论文文章, 净是那种！I can hardly learn anything from their writing. Language proficiency is one problem and the other problems are related to the textual structure and content. For example, they always write argumentative essays and use the five-paragraph structure. Always! (Teacher D)

Five teachers believed that providing feedback was more like "one-way output" from teachers who "outperformed students in every way" (Teacher Q, interview). Two even found that their language proficiency declined after reviewing the students' writing:

> 有的时候, 我们读到太多错误的表达和用法, 你甚至会怀疑你自己的英语。这样读大量的学生低水平的写作, 我都担心会慢慢损害自己的英语水平。Having read too many erroneous expressions, you sometimes have doubts about your own English. You worry that reading a considerable amount of student writing of poor quality will gradually have a negative effect on you. (Teacher W)
>
> 其实我觉得我英语水平, 不仅仅是写作能力, 在我教英语写作的这几年都下降了。因为看了那么多语法不对的句子, 我有的时候都怀疑是自己错了还是学生错了。I feel that my overall English proficiency, not just my writing proficiency, has declined since I started teaching English writing. After seeing many ungrammatical usages of English, I sometimes have doubts when an instance of student language use differs from my knowledge. (Teacher Z)

Teachers V and R argued that there was not a chance for teachers to learn about their students because of the large class size and time constraint. For many teachers who taught non-English-major college English, writing was in a marginalized position of the course and did not receive much attention:

> 改作文更多的像完成任务吧, 很多时候时间紧任务重, 也很难给到详尽的反馈。Marking student writing is like "finishing a task," and they [teachers] could not give detailed feedback due to the large class size and time constraint. (Teacher V)

[1] The English at the end is the translation of the Chinese.

> 写作其实不是我课程的主要内容，我们更多的时间花在了阅读上。所以学生作文的话就是改几个明显的错误。Writing instruction is not a core component in my class. We usually spend most of the class time on reading rather than writing. Students' essays were usually graded with few corrections or feedback. (Teacher R)

Despite the negative learning experiences of nine teacher participants, 18 of the 27 teachers said that providing feedback on student writing gave them opportunities to learn. In this section, the five themes identified from the data will be reported to illustrate the teachers' learning experiences in giving feedback to student writing.

5.1. Developing teacher feedback literacy and feedback practice

Sixteen of the 18 teachers reported that their feedback literacy and feedback practice had been greatly improved by the feedback-giving experiences. Feedback literacy involves both the understanding and the use of feedback practices and strategies to improve student writing proficiency, and it also concerns the knowledge of theories underpinning the assessment of student writing (Xu & Carless, 2017). The feedback-giving experiences enabled the teachers to develop their understanding of the role, functions, and strategies of feedback in facilitating student writing. For example, Teacher L, who taught at a comprehensive university, showed her feedback rubric and PowerPoint slides (see Fig. 1) to the researcher and explained how she had developed her understanding of the use of grammar-focused feedback and peer feedback to improve student writing:

> 写英语作文我就特别注意学生的语法错误。我以前是只给个大致的评语，为了让他们更好了解和用我的反馈，我就准备了个rubric，还有些example在里面…学生去follow rubric是好事…他们有时候做同伴互评会用我那个rubric，里面很清楚要怎么做啊，怎么评啊…我去准备这些也是在形成一个关于语法反馈的系统认识，还有关于同伴反馈的。看这些反馈怎么用来满足教学目的。I pay particular attention to my students' grammatical errors in English writing. I used to give general comments only. To help them better understand and uptake my feedback, I have prepared a rubric together with some examples. . . It's good for students to follow the rubric. . . When they are doing peer feedback activities, they also refer to the rubrics which provide very clear procedures and assessment objectives for the students. . . In the preparation, I had a systematic understanding of grammar-focused feedback and peer feedback and how such feedback could be used to fulfil my teaching purpose. (Teacher L)

Similarly, Teacher A, a novice writing teacher at a polytechnic university, attended a teacher training program after her students told her that her feedback had confused them and she learned a new way of giving feedback (i.e., coded feedback) to avoid possible confusion among students concerning the assessment criteria:

> 学生有时候觉得我的反馈绕来绕去的，就问我到底是用啥标准去改的。我才意识到，哦，得准备一个rubric。…我去注册了一个二语写作的慕课，教我怎么给coded feedback。[The] students told me my feedback sometimes confused them. They asked for my criteria for marking their writing. I realized that a rubric was needed. . . I registered for a MOOC [massive open online course] on teaching L2 writing, from which I learned how to give coded feedback. (Teacher A)

During the interviews, more than half of the teachers (16 out of 27) discussed the changes in their feedback practices resulting from their improved feedback literacy. They attributed the transitions to their continuous interactions with students through feedback allowed by multiple-draft writing. For example, five teachers had changed from providing comprehensive feedback to focused feedback that catered to the students' needs and enhanced their engagement with feedback. Teacher Q commented in the interview, "Through interactions with students, I found that it was not good to provide too much feedback on students' writing. This may frustrate [the] students." Teacher Q used to hold high standards for students' writing, as he stated in his interview: "At the beginning of my teaching career, I thought writing should be native-like and I set high standards for students' writing" and provided comprehensive feedback. He, however, also described in his interview how he gradually started to realize that it was "almost impossible and unrealistic to ask students to write like native speakers." At the time of his interview, in his feedback practices, Teacher Q would first emphasize the content of writing before focusing on certain language forms in subsequent drafts.

Teacher Z, a teacher with considerable experience teaching English writing to English majors, also agreed that the critical reflection of experiences of providing feedback changed her feedback practices. Previously, she provided comprehensive feedback on students' writing, covering all the aspects she could think of. However, she had gradually turned to more focused feedback, which she believed

Fig. 1. Two Snapshots of Teacher L's PowerPoint Slides.

to be "effective" because comprehensive feedback seemed "not useful" for the students:

> 我希望他们能在读反馈的时候更好地意识到自己的问题吧。所以, 反馈也会尽量地具体。但是这样做不见得就多有效。我也慢慢觉得反馈应该更加有指导性更加聚焦, 不能只是修改他们的错误。I hoped [the] students would have a better understanding of their problems when reading my feedback. Therefore, I considered the details when providing feedback. But this approach did not turn out to be very effective. I gradually realized that writing feedback should be more instructive and focused, rather than providing students with the correct forms and correcting their mistakes. (Teacher Z)

Several other writing instructors commented on the changes in their feedback practice. Six teachers (e.g., Teacher Z1) had started to include more formative feedback in addition to summative feedback. Others (e.g., Teacher U) had begun to use more feedback strategies in their writing classes, such as oral conferencing, teacher commentary, and self-feedback. Teacher U said in the interview:

> 其实最开始，我就是给学生一个分数。但我渐渐意识到吧，这样做不是很好[……] 那么你给了学生他们的期望的话，它可能不仅仅，是光要一个分数，它更多的希望他得到老师的一个具体的指点。[……]我今年是分数和评语和面谈结合起来。我自己在教学的这种感性认识里面, 我会发现面谈效果也挺好的, 也可能是一种辅助。At the beginning, I just provided a score for students' essays. I realized that this was not very useful. . . If you set an expectation for students, they might require more than these numerical scores; they hope to receive specific guidance from teachers about how to meet this expectation. . . This year, I start [ed] to combine together the final score, comments, and oral conferencing. Learning from my reflection of my teaching experience, I realize that oral conferencing could achieve a better result and act as an assisting tool. . . (Teacher U)

Teacher F improved his feedback strategy by combining students' self-feedback activities and his teacher feedback. Teacher F taught three medium-sized classes totalling 100 students. Deeming comprehensive teacher feedback to be "impossible" in his teaching context, Teacher F chose a combination of teacher feedback and student self-evaluation. He corrected students' linguistic errors on an ad hoc basis and encouraged them to further evaluate their own writing with the assistance of online corpora, an instructional approach he had learned in an in-service writing training program but had hardly tried before.

> 我用COCA跟那个BNC介绍给学生, 学生抱怨说它有一点相对比较滞后。所以说我想要介绍同学们用的是News on Web Now的这个语料库，更新的是新的东西，用日常语言。我有教他们怎么找合适的搭配，他们就能给自己反馈了。I have introduced COCA [the Corpus of Contemporary American English] and BNC [the British National Corpus] to my students. My students complained that their updates were slow. I introduced to my students *News on Web Now*, a corpus presenting newly updated news in everyday language. I taught them how to find proper collocations in the corpus so that they could give feedback on their own writing. (Teacher F)

5.2. Gaining more knowledge of the students and their writing

Sixteen of the 18 teachers stated that the feedback process enabled them to learn more about the students' writing proficiency and problems and difficulties that students encountered in their writing. For example, Teacher O, who taught academic writing at a comprehensive university, focused on writing content and organization in her feedback and explained that she had learnt how to identify a student's writing proficiency though giving feedback:

> 我好长一段时间都是这么用的，后来改内容和结构我就能知道学生的写作水平了。也就说你要整个来看它的topic sentence跟它的thesis statement是不是一致的。接着它每一个body paragraph里面的supporting sentence跟它的topic sentence是不是一致的。最后就看conclusion跟topic sentences和thesis statement是不是一致的。I have been using this feedback approach for a long time. Gradually I have learned how to tell a student's writing proficiency by giving feedback to content and organization. I first look for the topic sentences in the introduction to check whether they are consistent with the thesis statement. I then proceed to the body paragraphs to find the supporting sentences and check whether they are consistent with the topic sentences. Lastly, I read the conclusion to check its consistency with the topic sentences and thesis statement. (Teacher O)

In contrast to Teacher O's focus on content and organization, Teacher D, who held a doctoral degree in applied linguistics and taught at a university of foreign language studies, stated that he could understand his students' writing proficiency and writing difficulties while providing feedback on local issues, such as the use of the definite article (see Fig. 2):

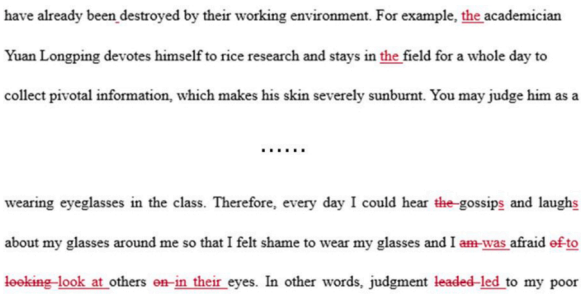
have already been destroyed by their working environment. For example, the academician
Yuan Longping devotes himself to rice research and stays in the field for a whole day to
collect pivotal information, which makes his skin severely sunburnt. You may judge him as a
……
wearing eyeglasses in the class. Therefore, every day I could hear ~~the~~ gossips and laughs
about my glasses around me so that I felt shame to wear my glasses and I ~~am~~ was afraid ~~of~~ to
~~looking~~ look at others ~~on~~ in their eyes. In other words, judgment ~~leaded~~ led to my poor

Fig. 2. Two Snapshots of Teacher D's In-text Feedback.

也都知道, 定冠词因为我们本身语言里面没有, 只能说如果学生读得够多, 可能慢慢知道怎么用。改文章的时候, 我个人也比较注意这种错误, the用得对不对。能看得出这个学生水平怎么样, 平时读得多不多。As we know, the use of the definite article in English is difficult for Chinese learners because we don't have it in Chinese. If the students have read extensively, they may acquire its usage. In giving feedback, I pay specific attention to their errors in using "the" so that I can tell a student writer's linguistic competence and identify how much the student has read. (Teacher D)

Through giving feedback to students, teachers could gain more knowledge of their students and their writing, particularly when the class size was large and when the teacher found it difficult to know well each student in the class. For instance, Teacher V said:

我们一个班上可能有三四十个学生。你又很难去了解每一个学生。但是在你改学生作文的时候, 你是能够更好地去了解他们的。比如这个学生很努力的, 那个学生语言水平不错。这就是我在改作文的时候能知道了解的。You may have 30 or 40 students in one class. You cannot know every student well. But when you mark student writing, you will know more about the student. This student gives a lot of mental effort. That student has good language proficiency. This is what you learn about the students while giving feedback to their writing. (Teacher V)

In addition, seven of the teacher participants mentioned that giving feedback on the revised essays in the process writing class provided an opportunity to know students' perceptions of and engagement with their feedback so that they would find ways to promote student engagement with feedback. For instance, Teacher Q said:

我想就是说和学生建立一些这种这种connections。虽然这个connections可能比较微弱，但我觉得我通过我的修改，学生之后能value我的东西，然后来真真的认真在看，而不是说你改了之后他就把它一直放书包，我又不希望这样子。[……]当我改他们二稿的时候，我也去看看说学生是怎么对待我的反馈的，也会想想怎么让学生对我的反馈更engaged吧。这样我改完的作文他们也能认真对待。I try to build connections with students through feedback, even though the connections may be weak. They will value my feedback and read it carefully, rather than leave the corrected work in their backpacks. . . When I mark the revised essays, I try to find out how my students perceived my feedback. I would find ways to promote student engagement with my feedback so that the students will then value my work after I have corrected their writing. (Teacher Q)

5.3. Improving L2 writing instructional approaches and strategies

The third theme is about the improvement of the teachers' L2 writing instructional approaches and strategies. Eleven of the teacher participants stated that the feedback-giving practice stimulated them to reflect on the limitations of their teaching and consider ways to improve the writing instructional approaches. Teacher S stated:

我改学生作文的时候发现, 学生写作出来的那个product当中, 它会折射出你教学当中的不足。另外一个它还折射出学生的需要的需求是什么。我觉得这也是给了我很多的东西， 我也会想怎么样在我的反馈中解决这些问题啊。When I mark[ed] student writing, I came to realize that the writing products can reflect the limitations of my classroom instructional practices. It also reflects the needs of the students. I feel that this feedback-giving practice teaches me a lot. I will consider how to address these issues in my feedback given to students. (Teacher S)

Teacher X, who has been teaching English writing to English majors for more than eight years in a national key university also explained how the feedback-giving practice could help improve her instruction:

除了这个之外, 我反馈一般还包括三部分：第一就是收集整理他们的文章, 然后总结他们的错误, 最后就是思考提升改善的方法。第二三步是很重要的。没有总结反思是很难有进步的， 这不仅仅是对学生的写作， 对我的教学也是一样的。Besides [marking students' writing], my feedback process usually involves three steps: collecting and organizing students' essays, summarizing their mistakes and problems in writing, and thinking of ways to improve. The second and third steps are very important. Without summarizing and reflection, it's hard to make any improvement, not only for students' writing proficiency, but for my instruction as well. (Teacher X)

The teachers could tailor their feedback and assessment practices according to students' writing proficiency and further improve their L2 writing instruction approaches and strategies. The interview data suggested that the teachers changed their pedagogies after providing feedback. For example, Teacher J, with around 100 students in her English writing course at a national key university, found it challenging to respond to all students' writing and had to adjust her instruction by tracing students' writing development over writing assignments. Her writing instruction was examination-oriented since her university expected that at least half of those students could pass CET-4 in their first academic year. Given the large class size, the assignments she gave to students were CET-4-oriented writing drills, such as writing short essays of 100–120 words in 30 min (prompted writing). She recalled her changes in assignment and assessment practices in the following interview excerpt:

以前我就让学生分别交上来, 但是我自己后来就忘了自己给了什么反馈了，也记不得学生错在哪儿。后来我是让他们准备了一本专门的写作的本子…我就可以看到他们每次的作业, 我改起来也公正公平些, 我给分就不只是单独看质量, 然后你每次, 从始至终写的东西他都会能看得到上一次的变化。I used to ask students to submit each assignment (five assignments in total) separately, but I could hardly remember what kind of feedback I had provided and what their problems were. Then I asked them to write down all the assignments on one notebook. . . This allows me to trace their performance over assignments and help[s] me assess their writing more fairly because I can give them scores according to not only the quality of each assignment but also the development achieved from the first one to the last. (Teacher J)

Ten of the 18 teachers stated that the feedback experience not only encouraged them to reflect on their teaching practices, but also provided a direction for change in areas such as lesson plans, classroom activities, teaching materials, and assignments. For example,

Teacher F, who planned to give his students three writing assignments in single-draft writing in the course, decided to adopt a process writing approach and use only two assignments but multiple-draft writing (i.e., two rounds of teacher feedback and three student drafts) after providing feedback to students' texts for the first assignment. "One round of feedback could not be enough because I have found that many other issues need to be addressed," said this teacher. Reflections of other teachers are illustrated as follows:

> 比如说有一些学生会犯同样一个错误，一次或者两次。我就会想说是不是这个教学过程当中有些东西没有讲清楚，训练方法是不是不太恰当，或者说教学可能太过于简略，超过了一些学生的水平，这样我会想采取一点措施去补救，比如说后面的课程当中针对某一个问题会讲的更加详细一些。Some students made the same mistake for a second or even a third time after my corrective feedback. When this happened, I reflected on my instruction and feedback comments. Is there anything that is not made clear? Is the form of feedback not suitable? Or is the instruction too brief for some students? I then think of ways to fix these problems, for example, to give more detailed instruction and feedback regarding certain problems. (Teacher P)

When adjusting their instructional methods, the teachers not only focused on surface features such as grammatical errors, but also addressed issues at the macro level such as coherence, the organization of the text, and the flow of ideas:

> 写作中的论证对于学生是个难点。比如，句子和句子，段落之间他们很多时候没有连接。在给反馈的之后呢，我也会就这个问题反思。我在课堂中强调了观点之间的连接吗？我给的例子够清楚明了吗？那我可能会在之后的教学中强调这一点， 多给些例子。[The] students find it difficult to develop their arguments. For example, there may be no links between sentences or paragraphs. I reflect on my teaching after giving feedback on students' writing. Have I highlighted the importance of the flow of ideas? Are my examples clear and persuasive enough? I then consider giving more examples in the following teaching sessions. (Teacher Z1)

5.4. Developing their language proficiency and academic writing proficiency

Five of the participating teachers suggested that giving feedback could develop their language proficiency because they could directly learn new words and expressions used in students' writing. For example, Teacher E said:

> 我也不是个无所不知的老师。有时候给学生改essay都可能看到一些不知道的单词，见都没见过的。我不确定他/她用的新词到底有没有正确的使用，那我就会去查字典了。这也是我在词汇习得。I'm not a teacher know-it-all. When giving feedback on students' essays, there are some words I don't know or even have not seen before. In such cases, I'm likely to use a dictionary to determine the meaning and decide whether the students have used them correctly. For me this is like a process of vocabulary acquisition. (Teacher E)

Another situation where the teachers learned from giving feedback is that they understood the need to consult resources and reference materials:

> 我经常要去参考些参考资料，我用网上的corpus…一个例子就是那个，玩手机这个概念，学生作文写的，play mobile phone或者play cell phone。直接从中文翻过去，玩手机。语料库那个搭配的list里面的话都没有看到play这个动词，搭配名词mobile phone的。I constantly consult reference materials. The online corpus is what I usually use. … For example, my students use [the terms] *play mobile phone* or *play cell phone* in their texts. It is literally translated from Chinese, 玩手机. But the collocation list in [the] corpus indicates that the verb *play* does not match the noun *mobile phone*. (Teacher F)

The interview data also showed that when the teachers evaluated students' writing, they learned from the feedback process and tended to reflect on their own writing:

> 在改他们的议论文的时候，我也会问自己这样的逻辑可不可以。我觉得这也让我自己的写作中的论证更好。When marking [the] students' argumentative essays, I ask myself whether the logic of their writing is acceptable or not. I [feel] that my power of reasoning in writing has improved [as a result of this reflection]. (Teacher X)

This is particularly true when the instructors, who taught students with higher language proficiency or at the postgraduate level, perceived improvement in their own reasoning and analytical skills when providing feedback on student writing:

> 我会首先看看他们文章的思辨性。其实他们想法比我都好，写作甚至有时候也比我好。在研究生阶段，他们对事情的看法还蛮独特的。这也让我想要提升自己的水平，才能更好的给他们反馈。When I provide feedback, I first evaluate their critical thinking. They can develop better ideas than mine and their writing may be better than mine. At the postgraduate level, they have a different way of looking at things. I need to increase my ability before I can comment on their writing. (Teacher U)

Six of the teachers stated that providing students with writing feedback could also enrich the language teachers' knowledge of other disciplines. This was especially true for instructors teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP). For example, Teacher U described an occasion in which she provided feedback on a student's essay on genetically modified food (GMF). The student seemed to have done some research on GMF and demonstrated knowledge of this topic in the essay. Teacher U graded the essay as "Excellent" and said that she learned from the student's writing and developed her own understanding of GMF. In a similar vein, Teacher O said:

> 他们以前有些学计算机的，就选一些跟他们专业兴趣相关的，比如AI啊，e-sport啊。以前我对电竞还是有点成见的，后来看他们写的，哦才发现原来这个现在专业电竞也是广为流传的运动了。后来为了给反馈，我自己还去看一些相关的一些文章，才跟得上他们的论点。My students were majoring in computer sciences. Many of them chose topics related to their research interests, such as AI and e-sport[s]. I used to have stereotypes about e-sports. But through their writing I have learned that professional computer gaming has become a well-recognized sport. To provide proper feedback on their writing, I had to read some articles about e-sport[s] so that I [could] make sense of their argument. (Teacher O)

Four teachers clearly stated that providing feedback on student writing was interesting and rewarding due to different perspectives brought by students on the same topic. Teacher L and Teacher U said:

> 学生作文也是金矿啊，充满amazing的想法。我去给反馈我就是在开矿嘛，新的视角会出来。[The] students' writing is a gold mine, full of amazing ideas. Giving feedback for me is like mining for new perspectives. (Teacher L)
> 理工科的学生可能想问题的角度不一样，他们会从自己研究领域出发。比如，上次我们几个安全工程专业的博士生就在讨论那个巴士坠江的事情，就是因为乘客和司机抢方向盘嘛。他们很认真的讨论这个事情，从他们专业的角度谈怎么样能避免这类事情的发生。这还蛮让我惊喜的，让我看到不同的角度。Science students may approach a topic from the perspective of their research fields. For example, a cohort of doctoral students studying safe engineering were discussing an accident where a bus fell into [a] river as a result of conflict between a passenger and the bus driver. The students were seriously discussing the safety measures that could be taken to prevent such accidents or to minimize potential casualties. The technical perspective broadened my view of this matter. (Teacher U)

5.5. *Bridging the gap between research and practice and facilitating teacher research*

In the study, five of the teacher participants also conducted research on L2 writing. For this small minority, providing feedback was viewed not as only a pedagogical tool for teaching L2 writing, but also as an experience that would be conducive to teacher research. For example, Teacher Z harvested benefits from his feedback practices in terms of research. When giving feedback, he had doubts in the effect of teacher feedback. Viewing this as an avenue for research, he developed an interest in the topic and formulated a doctoral research proposal based on his initial findings about related problems with teacher feedback. Similarly, Teacher B, who held a doctoral degree in education and taught ethnic minority students, was keen to conduct research based on his feedback experiences:

> 他们好多都是少数民族，边远地区来的，他们也很vulnerable，学英语。给他们改错可能会影响他们的身份认同的，我都感觉到他们在纠结…所以我就是对这个感兴趣，就是看教师反馈怎么帮助学生英语写作身份构建。Many of my students are ethnic minorities from remote areas and they are vulnerable in learning English, and the supplied corrective feedback seems to have a detrimental effect on their identity. I can feel their struggle. . . I [have] become interested in exploring how teacher feedback can help these students to develop their identity in English writing. (Teacher B)

Viewing writing as a process of identity construction, Teacher B closely studied students' texts and how teacher feedback had resulted in changes in students' writing over time. Starting with this study, he successfully secured a research grant at the provincial level.

> 我那个项目就关注identity。就是研究学生从最开始觉得自己在学，后来觉得自己也是可以写，愿意写的…去仔细看他的文本啊。有个学生的文本就是说去看他开始差不多一个字没有啊，给了几轮反馈后来就变成愿意写了呀，写得长一些了呀。不管他错误多不多，他最起码愿意写了嘛。然后有个学生还有看他开始老是些mechanical的错误，后来就拼得对得多了。这就是会在文本当中去找一些证据嘛，积极的身份变化。My research project focused on identity, exploring how some students changed from viewing themselves as learners to envisioning themselves as motivated writers. . . I studied students' texts carefully to identify the possible changes of student identity. I found a student who used to write very short essays became willing to write much longer ones after several rounds of feedback. Another student who used to make many mechanical errors in the texts could spell more accurately. In their cases, I found the evidence of positive identity change. (Teacher B)

Not every teacher showed a keen interest in research. However, 14 of the participating teachers admitted that giving feedback could be a rewarding experience for those wanting to conduct research and further their progress in academia. Teacher Q, who was studying for a doctoral degree in language teaching, commented that "as a teacher researcher, I think it is impossible to do research in this field without practical teaching experiences." He explained as follows:

> 我对二语写作教学是很感兴趣的，不只是学生的作文，包括这个整个活动里面牵扯到老师啦包括师生的互动，包括同伴之间的互动[……]那我反馈的实践还是对我的研究有益的。I am very interested in L2 writing instruction, not only students' writing, but also teacher-student interaction and peer interaction in the process. . . My feedback practice can better inform my research in this field. (Teacher Q)

Teacher U, who has been teaching academic writing to postgraduate students for more than 10 years, said that providing feedback had piqued her own research interest:

> 我也渐渐在这个过程中觉得写作蛮有意思的。英语写作和教学也逐渐成为了我的研究兴趣，不再会觉得无聊。现在，我会有意识的去搜集我班上学生的写作样本，作为未来研究的材料吧。[……]我现在考虑的比较多的是在我自己的教学中改采用什么样的反馈，什么样的反馈比较有效，又改怎么样去实施这样的反馈。Gradually, I find writing quite interesting. English writing and its instruction have now become my main research interest. I don't find teaching writing boring anymore. Instead, I collect student writing samples from my class as data for research purposes in the future. . . A major concern in my instruction is what kind of feedback is useful for promoting students' English writing and how to deliver such feedback. (Teacher U)

6. Discussion

The findings indicate that giving feedback can be a reflective learning experience for L2 writing teachers in the Chinese EFL context and highlight the importance of teacher reflection in facilitating teacher learning from the practice of giving feedback (Goh, 2019). The participating teachers' reflections on their feedback practices and teaching performance motivated many of them to implement

innovative strategies and approaches, such as focused feedback and peer feedback (Lee et al., 2015), and some teachers moved away from only providing WCF and toward providing discourse level feedback. Such reflection also was viewed as helpful for the teachers to improve their approaches to meet their students' needs. For example, some teachers (e.g., Teacher J) had changed the number of writing assignments to monitor her own feedback practices to meet the students' needs of passing the English examination, CET-4. Teachers' knowledge to attend to students' needs is acquired through deliberate reflections on their own feedback practices and is then articulated and embedded in teachers' improvement in feedback practices (Marcos & Tillema, 2006). The teachers also reflected in the midst of their feedback practices, which facilitated teacher learning through testing their ways of providing feedback and reframing such practices (Hoekstra et al., 2007). As revealed in the findings, teachers were consciously aware of the difficulties students would encounter in decoding feedback and adjusted their feedback practices accordingly (e.g., reducing the amount of feedback, using focused feedback). Such reflective inquiry during feedback-giving practices would enhance teachers' awareness of the consequences of their actions and regulate their teaching process, thereby eliciting reflective teacher learning (Delante, 2017; Goldstein, 2010; Hoekstra et al., 2007; Lee, 2019).

One explanation for the occurrence of reflective learning is that feedback-giving provides L2 writing teachers with an essential social milieu for them to reflect in/on their experience. While previous studies have argued that reflective learning should happen in social circumstances and through interaction (Grosemans et al., 2015; Kelly, 2006), this study reveals how teachers could learn from their reflections through interaction with students and their written texts and responses to implicit or explicit feedback from students. The participating teachers emphasized the importance of communication in understanding their students' needs and facilitating their reflectivity. For example, Teacher A started to reflect on her ways of giving feedback when students directly expressed their confusion about the marking criteria. Teacher X also interacted with her students by summarizing their problems in writing and then offering more targeted feedback. In both cases, interaction directs teachers' attention to specific questions in learning and teaching L2 writing, thus facilitating their reflection and improving their practices in giving feedback. The findings of this study show that teachers could learn from giving feedback through interacting with the students and through using dialogical approaches such as one-on-one/group conferencing and giving feedback on multiple drafts of students. They may benefit from their active engagement in the interactive feedback process and learn from or with their students (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Rouhi & Azizian, 2013). Through interaction, teachers could develop a more situated knowledge of students' revision processes and their difficulties in writing (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Goldstein, 2006). Besides, L2 writing teachers could also benefit from reading and responding to students' compositions, especially when they are unfamiliar with the content of the writing. As argued by Tardy (2006), teachers, those teaching EAP in particular, might have difficulties decoding students' compositions which might contain disciplinary knowledge beyond their comprehension. These findings also highlight the distinction between interacting with students (dialogic processes of giving feedback and using feedback; see Ajjawi & Boud, 2018) and interacting on and with texts and indicated that these different types of interactions could both contribute to teacher learning through feedback-giving. In this sense, the feedback-giving activities provided a socially mediated platform for teacher learning in the field of L2 writing.

The extent to which Chinese EFL teachers could reflect in/on their teaching is also related to their consciousness in giving feedback and their willingness to reflect on/in and change the feedback-giving practices. As argued by some researchers, teaching could be an immediate behavior which occurs without reflection (e.g., Korthagen, 2010). This study identified situations where Chinese EFL writing teachers' awareness of giving feedback was energized. For example, some teachers (e.g., Teacher P, Teacher U, and Teacher Z1) in the study became aware of their feedback-giving practices when they noticed the gap between their expected learning results and students' actual performance. Their attempt to close this gap encouraged them to reflect on their practices, thereby turning unconscious teaching routines into such conscious reflection (Korthagen, 2010). Some other teachers (e.g., Teacher L, Teacher O, and Teacher U) felt the challenges towards their beliefs and knowledge when they read and responded to student writing, and they reflected on their own teaching and feedback-giving performance. Such reflection was obvious among EAP teachers, echoing Tardy's (2006) observation that "students in EAP classrooms often hold more expertise in their subject-matter content than do writing teachers who may respond to their writing" (p. 73). These findings further reveal that teacher reflections on/in giving feedback could develop their awareness and establish a critical mind of addressing issues and challenges arising from the feedback-giving practice (Delante, 2017). To address the difficulties and challenges, many of the participating teachers sought support from external tools such as the MOOC, attended training workshops, and consulted resources and reference materials, which were also the sources of teacher learning in the study.

The findings reveal individual differences in teacher learning in the Chinese EFL context (2006, Best, 2004; Goldstein, 2005, 2010; Grosemans et al., 2015). It is noteworthy that we should not assume that all EFL writing teachers do reflection in and/or on the action of giving feedback to student writing. A number of individual and contextual factors account for the differences in their beliefs and experiences, including the teachers' writing proficiency and their personal beliefs and practices regarding giving feedback, the differing levels of student writing proficiency, school contexts, curriculum requirements, class sizes, teaching workloads, and the nature of writing tasks (Goldstein, 2006; Hyland & Hyland, 2019; Lee, 2017). In some cases, the students' limited language proficiency and writing skills were reported to be major factors constraining the usefulness of feedback-giving for teacher learning. As noted above, some teachers even stated that giving feedback on student writing had a negative influence on their own writing proficiency. Due to the class sizes and teaching workloads in some situations (reported by seven out of the 27 participants) in the Chinese EFL context, the teachers did not have enough time to give feedback, or even to teach English writing. These findings reinforce the sociocultural and contextualized nature of teacher learning in L2 writing instruction (Hirvela, 2010; Lee, 2013).

One limitation of this study is that classroom observations of the participants' actual teaching practices were not conducted. Further research is needed to reveal how their learning from giving feedback affected their actual classroom teaching. Future studies should draw on more sources of data, including classroom observations and stimulated-recall interviews, to provide more solid

evidence of teacher learning from feedback-giving activities. Another limitation is that while sample teacher feedback from some participants was analyzed, the nature of each teacher's feedback was not analyzed. So it is not possible to know if it were actually the case when a teacher reported s/he had made changes in her/his feedback practices. Case studie could be conducted to provide in-depth analysis of contextualized teacher learning in the feedback-giving experiences.

Despite these limitations, this study has several pedagogical implications for L2 writing teachers and teacher educators. First, L2 writing teachers should take a critical and reflective stance towards giving feedback on their students' L2 writing. While previous studies on L2 writing feedback report teachers' complaints about feedback practices (Ferris, 2007; Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Lee, 2017), the findings of this study clearly show that teachers can develop their expertise and professionalism, both as writers and as teachers, via giving feedback on student writing and reflecting in and on action (Delante, 2017; Goldstein, 2010). This finding is encouraging to L2 writing teachers who spend a great deal of time marking student essays, working like "composition slaves" (Hairston, 1986). Thus, L2 writing teachers need to see the learning potential of feedback-giving and be reflective of the feedback-giving practice, even though feedback-giving can be a challenging task, especially given the large class sizes and heavy workloads that many teachers face (Goldstein, 2016). Teachers need to realize that as they give feedback on their students' essays, they can learn more about the students and their writing. In doing so, their feedback literacy and practice can be improved and they may gain more knowledge and skills regarding feedback, writing, and writing instruction.

Second, since not all teachers can self-learn through their own experience, writing teacher education programs may consider raising teachers' awareness of learning from giving feedback and guiding teachers on how to reflect in and on the feedback-giving practice. Feedback training should be provided to prepare writing teachers for giving feedback on student writing and enhance their awareness of the contextual nature of the feedback-giving behavior so they can learn from the feedback-giving practice (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2013; Goldstein, 2010). In many L2 writing contexts, such as the Chinese context of this study, most teachers are not well prepared to teach writing because writing skills have been marginalized in English language education and few teacher education programs provide courses on L2 writing instruction for pre-service or in-service teachers. Many L2 writing teachers lack the knowledge and skills for giving feedback, even though research on feedback in L2 writing has proliferated (2016, Goldstein, 2006; Hyland & Hyland, 2019; Lee, 2017). Many of the teachers in the study expressed concerns and confusion about giving feedback to students with low L2 proficiency, or about doing so in large classes. Therefore, it is important for teacher educators to train L2 writing teachers in methods of providing feedback on student writing. How teachers can learn from the feedback-giving practices through self-reflection and continuous practice could be included in the training program (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2013; Goldstein, 2010; Min, 2013).

However, teacher feedback practices are also influenced by other institutional and contextual factors, such as the exam-oriented teaching and learning culture, lack of institutional support, large class size, heavy teaching loads, and institutional devaluation of responding to student writing (Ferris, Liu, & Rabie, 2011; Goldstein, 2016; Lee, 2008; Séror, 2009). These factors cannot only shape teacher feedback practices, but they also influence teachers' learning from giving feedback to student writing, as shown in the findings of this study. Due to the contextual constraints and the material conditions of the feedback-giving practice, some teachers may not be aware of the importance of refection in and on action and easily give up making changes. Thus, while it is important that L2 writing teachers realize the importance of learning to challenge traditional feedback approaches (such as providing feedback to single draft writing and relying on written corrective feedback) and embrace innovative feedback strategies (such as conferencing and peer and self-evaluation; Lee et al., 2015), it is also crucial for program administrators and institutions to create the conditions for teachers to reflect in and on action and to continue learning to become better L2 writing teachers (Goldstein, 2016). On one hand, programs and institutions should notice the differences between L2 writing courses and curricula and other types of courses and curricula in terms of the workload of giving feedback to student writing and avoid assigning too many writing classes to writing teachers and the use of large class sizes for L2 writing courses. In particular, L2 writing courses should not be marginalized in the language education programs so that L2 writing teachers' identity and expertise can be recognized and support from administrators, programs, and institutions can be given to them to reflect on their feedback practice and improve their learning and teaching. On the other hand, like most participants of this study, L2 writing teachers need to be aware of the power of reflection and their agency as teachers and life-long learners and learn how to cope with the difficulties and challenges arising from the feedback-giving practice and their working conditions to make meaningful changes to their feedback and assessment approaches and strategies.

7. Conclusion

Informed by a reflective practice perspective on teacher learning, this qualitative study found that most of the teacher participants had learning experiences in giving feedback to student writing that enabled them to improve as professional writing teachers, academic writers, and teacher researchers in the Chinese EFL context. The findings suggest that giving feedback on student writing may lead to changes in the ways that L2 writing teachers use their knowledge, orientations, and skills related to writing instruction (Delante, 2017; Garner & Kaplan, 2019; Goldstein, 2010). The study contributes to the current discourse on L2 writing feedback by showing that the experiences of giving feedback on student essays may be unexpectedly rewarding for teachers, and feedback for L2 writing teachers can be a friend rather than a foe.

Appendix A. Sample interview questions

1 Would you please share your educational background and your experiences of teaching English writing?
2 How do you teach English writing? How do you usually provide feedback on students' English writing? Why do you provide feedback in certain ways? What concerns or problems, if any, do you have in marking student writing?

3 Have you received any training on L2 writing instruction or giving feedback to student writing? What do you think of the feedback-giving practice? Do you enjoy marking student essays? Why or why not?
4 What are good or effective feedback strategies? How do you know this? How would you perceive the effectiveness of your own feedback practices?
5 What are the regulations and rules about giving feedback to student writing in your institution?
6 What are you thinking when providing feedback on students' writing? Do you have any reflections on your own teaching?
7 What are you thinking when providing feedback on a student's writing that is poorly written with many grammatical errors? How about providing feedback to a well written one?
8 Do you make any adjustment to your class plan and course assignments when you finish marking student writing? If so, could you give some examples?
9 Do you think you can learn anything from the feedback-giving experiences? What could you learn? Could you give some examples? Any stories to share with me?
10 Could you fully understand your students' writing? Have you found anything interesting in their writing?
11 Do you think your own English writing has improved? If so, is the improvement related to your experience of providing feedback to student writings?
12 Have you made any changes to your ways and strategies of providing feedback in the past years? Why or why not?
13 Have you made any changes to your writing teaching approaches? What are the changes? Why did you make such changes?
14 Some people may think providing feedback is a time- and effort-consuming work that does not necessarily result in any benefits. Do you agree? Why and why not?
15 Do you think providing feedback is a one-way job or win-win solution? What benefits do you think you can harvest from it?

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