

**REIMAGING STUDENT FEEDBACK FOR IMPROVED  
ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS IN A FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH  
STUDIES MODULE AT A DISTANCE EDUCATION  
INSTITUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

by

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degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

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# DECLARATION

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## REIMAGING STUDENT FEEDBACK FOR IMPROVED ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS IN A FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH STUDIES MODULE AT A DISTANCE EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

Moreover, I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



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SIGNATURE

9 September 2021

DATE

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to two special people.

First, my grandmother, Christinah Mabote. Even though you were not educated, you encouraged me to spread my wings and fly. Because of you:

*I would like to be known as an intelligent woman,*

*A courageous woman,*

*A loving woman,*

*A woman who teaches by being.*

**- Maya Angelou**

Second, my uncle, Joseph Mocketla (Mabote). Thank you for instilling in me a love for learning and for your constant support, encouragement and love.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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From the bottom of my heart I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Kershnee Sevnarayan for her unwavering support, patience and for all the skills she has shared with me. She has instructed me throughout my study and has been a true mentor during this entire process; I truly enjoyed working with her.

I would like to also thank all the students, markers and lecturers who participated in my study and trusted me with their perceptions and thoughts.

I would like to thank my editor, Mr Bila, for correcting both major and minor errors in this study. Your editorial skills are appreciated.

I would like to thank my family and friends for their support and patience in every capacity. I am especially grateful for my immediate family – my parents, Elizabeth and David Maphoto; my daughters, Blessing and Praise and all my siblings, Sewela, Thabang, Choene, Vivian and Grace who are keen supporters of my work and genuine friends. They stood by my side through everything and I could not go through the MA process without them.

Finally, to God almighty thank you so much for your presence, strength and more blessings.

**EDITOR'S LETTER**  
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23 August 2021

To whom it may concern,

I hereby confirm that I have edited a thesis titled “**Reimaging Student Feedback for Improved Academic Writing Skills in a First-Year English Studies Module at a Distance Education Institution in South Africa**” written by Ms Kgabo Bridget Maphoto, student number 67124100 towards her MA in English Studies at the University of South Africa. I am satisfied with the depth of her incisive analysis and impeccable writing prowess.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Vonani Bila'.

**Vonani Bila (Editor)**

## ABSTRACT

This study examined first-year students, markers and lecturers' perceptions of feedback in the context of academic writing in one mega module at an open distance and eLearning (ODeL) university in South Africa. It explored feedback that was provided to students and how markers foster the significance of feedback as a teaching tool in the context of an Academic Writing module. Moreover, the study recommended guidelines emerging from the data that can help improve feedback in an ODeL context for the improved academic writing skills of the first-year students. The study is underpinned by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Hattie and Timperley's (2007) Model of Feedback to enhance learning.

The study adopted a qualitative research methodology and utilised a case study approach as a research design. Furthermore, the study gathered data from students, documents (students' marked assignments and moderators' reports), markers and lecturers. To collect data, open-ended evaluation questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and documentary analyses of marked scripts and moderation reports were used to gather data. Most studies reviewed indicated that constructive feedback improved academic writing in both distance learning and contact education universities. However, the findings in this study show that students are not satisfied with the kinds of feedback they receive from markers as it is experienced as insufficient. Because of this, students request more explicit feedback that may bridge the gap that is caused by distance learning in the ODeL context. On the other hand, the results from markers' and lecturers' data indicate that feedback is one of the major teaching tools that are emphasised in the module. The study argues that feedback is a necessity in an ODeL university since this university enrolls vast numbers of students who are mostly from diverse backgrounds in which English is spoken as an additional language. The study revealed that feedback is decontextualized and detached from students' sociocultural practices and contexts, it is primarily teacher-centred, it focuses on literacy as a subject and not literacy as a social skill and it is focused on results and is not process-focused.

**Key words:** Feedback; academic writing; ODeL; first-year students; academic literacy; distance education; EAL; Sociocultural theory; case study.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Abbreviation and acronyms	Meaning
1. EAL	English as an Additional Language
2. EFL	English as a Foreign Language
3. ENG123	Academic Language and Literacy Module
4. Covid-19	Corona Virus Disease discovered in 2019
5. DE	Distance Education
6. ODL	Open Distance Education
7. ODeL	Open Distance e-Learning
8.. EFL	English as a Foreign Language
9. FIT	Feedback Intervention Theory
10. HE	Higher Learning
11. HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
12. myUX	Learning management system at UX
13. UX	University X
14. L1	First Language speakers
15. L2	Second Language speakers
16. MKO	More Knowledgeable Others
17. PCFR	Providing Constructive Feedback Rubric
18. SA	South Africa
19. SATAL	Students Assessing Teaching and Learning
20. SPFPQ	Student Feedback Perception Questionnaire
21. SCT	Sociocultural Theory
22. ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development
23. IELTS	International English Language Testing System

# CHAPTER 1

## Empowering students through effective feedback practices: An introduction and background

*Change will not come if we wait for some other person or...some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.*

- Barack Obama

### 1.1 Introduction

This study investigates the feedback that first-year students receive in one Academic Writing module in the Department of English Studies at a distance education (DE) university. It further explores the perceptions of students, external markers and lecturers. The role of feedback has been explored in various learning contexts, but not enough research has been conducted to investigate students' expectations as far as feedback is concerned.

Studies by Núñez-Peña et al. (2015) and Cutumisu et al. (2018) posit that the specific mechanisms relating feedback to learning are still not well understood. In addition, these studies argue that "one of the most neglected issues in educational practices is giving constructive feedback to students. Teachers tend to score students' work and award them marks, but constructive feedback is rarely provided to students to make sure the intended learning outcomes are met" (Al-Hattami, 2019:885). Furthermore, studies that have investigated feedback tend to focus on the types of feedback that lecturers provide students with and whether it improves their performance or not. However, in these studies, students' voices are often omitted. For this reason, there are a number of gaps relating to feedback in academic writing that need to be addressed. Jones (2011) and Nguyen (2019) argue that explicit feedback in academic writing can contribute to the improvement of students' writing.

In this study, the researcher investigated the perceptions and experiences of students, external markers and lecturers related to feedback that is provided in an Academic

Writing first-year module at University X (UX)<sup>1</sup>, an Open Distance and e-Learning (ODEL) institution. The aim would be to ensure that gaps, which are identified in the literature review, relating to feedback are understood and addressed adequately. The researcher further explored how moderators' reports prepared by lecturers for markers foster quality and the importance of feedback. Research findings indicate that feedback is valued and used by students for reflecting on academic writing weaknesses (Carless, 2019). On the contrary, Kluger and DeNisi (1996) indicate that written feedback in academic writing is less important as students merely value the feedback provided in their first drafts and rarely pay attention to comments provided in their final drafts. This is attributed to the assumption that students are predominantly concerned with their marks or the end result. Another remark regarding feedback is that feedback is indisputably valued, but some students often criticize it for being unclear and vague (Can and Walker, 2011). As a result, this study explores students, external markers and lecturers' perceptions of feedback in an Academic Writing module in order to improve first-year students' academic performance.

Various researchers indicate that feedback in the context of an Academic Writing module must be explored as it contributes significantly to how students learn academic tasks; such as reading journal articles, preparing assignments, classroom exercises and theses for meeting the required academic needs (Ariyanti, 2016; Aunurrahman, Hamied & Emilia, 2017). Academic writing is not a simple task for most first-year students, as it requires students to conform to particular academic rules. According to Dewi, Nurkamto and Drajati (2019), academic writing is essential in higher education as it is the primary form of communication between students and instructors. It must be noted that academic writing is used to express and demonstrate acquired knowledge in the students' subject areas. This knowledge has to be presented in ways that are acceptable in the academic writing world. When students write well, their lecturers are able to follow their argument and line of thought, as well as their logic (Leibowitz, 2004; Pineteh, 2014).

Moreover, academic writing in higher education is intended to prepare students to be able to write effective essays, scientific papers or academic books (Lea & Street,

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<sup>1</sup> UX is a pseudonym used to protect the confidentiality of the institution and all the participants within the institution.

2006). It furthermore, prepares students to adopt a formal style of writing and teaches students to apply subject-specific vocabulary in their writing. The formal structure of writing ensures that an academic argument is well-developed and supported. Lea and Street (2006) further argue that for students to succeed in Academic Writing modules, it is essential for educators of academic writing to reflect on their own teaching practices. The literature indicates that constructive feedback helps students to check their academic writing performance and to reflect on their writing achievements (Lillis, 2003). According to Mag (2019), however, students indicated that teachers provided feedback that instilled a lack of confidence in their abilities.

At this point, it is imperative that the researcher's identity is discussed briefly. The researcher's identity and positionality in the study will be further explored in Chapter 4. The researcher is a permanently employed junior lecturer at UX with five years of lecturing experience at the university. She has been lecturing the Academic Language and Literacy in English (ENG123)<sup>2</sup> module during these years and has experienced challenges in trying to improve academic writing skills with students. These challenges included students not responding to the written feedback, students applying fewer suggested changes, and ignoring given comments or not being able to interpret the comments.

The researcher discovered these challenges while helping students during face to face consultations over the years. Many students could not interpret feedback and that meant that students were missing out on opportunities for learning. Interpreting feedback can be a daunting and overwhelming process (Torres & Anguiano, 2016), particularly if the student keeps repeating the same module. Students sometimes feel demotivated if the feedback is not adequately planned (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). These challenges sparked an interest in the researcher and she was inspired to explore the feedback that ENG123 students received.

For lecturers at UX, some of the challenges include high numbers of students in a module, limited to no face-to-face contact with students, limited teaching time and heavy workloads (Boughey & McKenna, 2016; Leibowitz, 2017a; AlMarwani, 2020).

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<sup>2</sup> ENG123 is a pseudonym used in this study to protect the confidentiality of the module, the lecturers, students and the institution.

Students' challenges in the Academic Writing module ranges from organisational conventions such as developing a position when writing a thesis statement to writing an introduction, signposting, argumentation, counter argumentation, referencing, paragraphing, grammatical conventions and writing reasonable conclusions and recommendations (Lea & street, 2006; Pineteh, 2014; AlMarwani, 2020). To address such challenges markers and lecturers should be willing to put in the time and effort. Hattie and Timperley (2007) emphasise that, in order to enhance learning, comprehensive feedback should be provided to all students consistently and fairly soon after the students have completed a task. This means that markers and lecturers should work efficiently when providing feedback to ensure that students have a sound academic writing learning experience.

In academic contexts, first-year students are expected to produce writing that is well researched and eloquently communicated in order to demonstrate knowledge and be able to compete with other students globally. A study conducted in Indonesia by Mukhroji (2020) maintains that lecturers who teach academic writing at a first-year level need to ensure that students receive appropriate support that addresses their writing challenges effectively and instantly in order to avoid unnecessary failure rates.

However, due to the high student numbers in the ENG123 module in the Department of English Studies (DES), in particular, academic writing students may not be supported adequately due to challenges that are mostly beyond the control of the module lecturers or the institution itself (Uiseb, 2017). Challenges, such as high student numbers in one module with a limited number of lecturers and markers ultimately, hinder lecturers' plans such as providing explicit written or verbal feedback. The challenge of having huge student numbers with a few external markers and lecturers often results in students having to wait a long time before receiving feedback from their assignments. In many cases, marked assignments can take between two to six weeks to reach students. Seemingly, students are disadvantaged as they feel unprepared for the examination due to not having had adequate time to reflect on feedback they had received from assignments.

Hardavella, Aamli-Gagnat, Saad, Rousalova and Sreter (2017) argue that feedback is essential in academic writing and receiving it in good time helps students conduct

academic writing tasks with ease. Feedback in academic writing serves as a general rule and guideline for organising one's writing through the use of other scholars' ideas, opinions and words (Jones, 2011; Gillett et al., 2013). Furthermore, providing effective feedback in an ODeL context transforms into an essential communication channel that outlines the expectations of a learning outcome particularly in teaching/learning environments where there is limited interaction between students and lecturers. Challenges faced in an ODeL context are numerous as some include learning approximately 90% of the modules in English, which is mostly the students' additional language (Uiseb, 2017).

Ma (2020) indicates that some English as an Additional Language (EAL) students in Australia need systematic language support. Mohammed (2018) adds that EAL students in Iraq mostly struggle in academic writing contexts and the reason is that they are underprepared to conduct writing tasks in English. However, with adequate assistance and support such as feedback from lecturers, most students may learn successfully. Thus "the task of teaching is not only speaking inside classrooms, but also guiding students, and providing a friendly atmosphere for the learners" (Mohammed, 2018:1383). Brooks (2013) and Hyland (2019) argue that following thorough quality procedures in grading assignments and allowing students time to reflect on the feedback may empower EAL students, enabling them to embrace their writing strengths and reflect on their weaknesses.

Studies have indicated the importance of teaching students what they may have missed in their secondary schooling, such as using English to write, read and communicate. Banda (2017) and Kuyyogsuy (2019:76) argue that "[w]riting is one of the productive skills which are paid much attention to, and it is widely accepted as a complex process for second language learners to achieve the perfect written tasks".

EAL challenges such as writing and speaking in English are a global issue as Akteruzzaman and Chowdhury (2015:160) contend:

Here, like other countries with [an] EAL context, English is taken as a gateway to academic success and learners have to pass individually in two different categories of English exams. To enter the tertiary level education, students have to come through the layers of Higher-Secondary School Certificate (HSC) centrally arranged by the government. Unfortunately, in most cases, it has been noticed that students are not put through the practices of communicative teaching and

they are not provided with the exposure of practicing their speaking skills in English.

The researcher observed that many students who performed fairly well in most subjects in high school tend to repeat the ENG123 module several times due to a variety of reasons. One of the reasons is that most students did not study academic writing in high school. This suggests that students who enter tertiary institutions need to be adequately supported regardless of how well they performed in their secondary schooling. Adequate support is required in institutions of higher learning for quality performance, however, it may be challenging to support module with high student numbers.

At present, there are a high number of students who register for the ENG123 module, which will be discussed in the next section. When the enrolment is high in a module, through experience, the researcher contends that it is often difficult to find proper ways of assessing students and providing effective feedback that would enrich learning. These high enrolment numbers are usually prevalent in first year modules that cater for diverse disciplines, such as the ENG123 module and other English language and literature modules. ENG123 enrolls students who study towards degrees in the Department of Law, Mathematics, Accountancy and Economics amongst other departments.

The purpose of the ENG123 module is to enable first-year students to gain a background in English grammar and usage, to develop the ability to read texts critically with comprehension and insight, and to acquire academic skills in reading and writing at a tertiary level (Ndlangamandla et al. 2020). This study re-imagines how feedback is administered in the hopes of improving academic writing skills of first-year students in the ENG123 module.

### **1.1.1 Contextual focus of the study**

At first-year level, students are required to think critically, respond to higher order questions, write academically and produce grammatically correct texts (Jones, 2011). It is, therefore, imperative to enable students to develop a better understanding of what they are required to know and expected to do. According to Hattie and Timperley

(2007) and Brookhart (2017), adequate feedback will arguably help students grasp the academic expectations of the university, particularly in the ENG123 module. These studies further argue that receiving meaningful feedback on language, structure and other aspects related to academic writing might minimise students' writing difficulties for future tasks and assist in improving students' overall writing performance in various learning contexts.

According to Bolton, Matsau and Blom (2020:22), in South Africa, at the broadest level, the education and training system comprises Basic Education and Post-School Education and Training (PSET). Basic Education refers to schooling, regardless of the number of years at school. PSET refers to all education and training after school, regardless of the point at which a student has left school and whether or not a student has attended school at all. PSET comprises a number of sectors, namely:

- Higher Education – offered in three types of public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) – Universities, Universities of Technology (UoTs), Comprehensive Universities – and private HEIs (Higher Education qualifications lie between NQF Levels 5 and 10, inclusive);
- Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) – offered in public TVET Colleges and private colleges (TVET qualifications lie between NQF Levels 1 and 5);
- Community Education and Training (CET) – offered in public CET Colleges (CET qualifications are below NQF Level 1 and between NQF Levels 1 and 4);
- Adult Education and Training (AET) – in the process of being replaced by CET (covered qualifications below and at NQF Level 1); and,
- Skills Development – for Trades and Occupations – offered by Skills Development Providers (SDPs) (qualifications between NQF Levels 1 and 8).

This study focuses on the Higher Education sector, in particular, in an Open Distance and e-Learning (ODEL) comprehensive university. A comprehensive university is a university that offers both vocational and academic programmes. This study does not focus on other PSET sectors, such as UoTs or TVET colleges for example, as the

researcher wanted to investigate feedback that is provided in a first-year Academic Writing module at the university where she teaches.

Researchers argue that distance learning is “designed to meet the highest possible demand of students, the most varied audiences and students seeking for flexibility and possibility to qualify without the rigidity found in conventional methods considered” (de Oliveira et al., 2018:141). According to Howell, Williams, and Lindsay (2003, cited in Uiseb, 2018:45), many HEIs, especially in developed countries, are fluctuating from purely a campus-centred model of higher education to an ODL model, using information and communication technologies. The researcher in the current study decided to investigate feedback in an ODeL context, UX, since the researcher is familiar with the context and has been working in this context for more than five years. According to Maboe (2019:5), ODeL is a “relatively new concept that is rapidly gaining ground throughout the world, and that has dramatically changed the way in which higher education institutions conduct teaching and provide learning”. Maboe (2019:5) further states that “ODeL has been instrumental in enhancing the degree of inclusiveness in higher education, especially in developing countries. An ODeL system is characterised by an open-access policy that allows students to enrol themselves with relative ease”. As a result, the researcher was motivated to investigate the issues related to feedback considering that many students register in ODeL (Maphosa & Bhebhe, 2019).

The geographical area of this study is an ODeL university in South Africa, which is located in the Gauteng province. To protect the integrity and confidentiality of the university, the researcher refers to the university as University X (UX). UX is a distance learning university in South Africa, serving students from different parts of the globe (Letseka et al., 2018). Moreover, UX caters for a diverse population - students from different age groups and various ethnic backgrounds who speak different languages.

UX registers huge numbers of students every year. Between 2018 and 2020, there are over 350 000 registered students in the university (Letseka et al., 2018:126). According to Kroukamp and De Vries (2014), these high student enrolments may be problematic when students are graded and provided with feedback and this is mostly due to an inadequate number of lecturers or markers. Kroukamp and De Vries (2014:160) add that high enrolment numbers are a dominant factor that affects

students' grades and performance negatively, particularly in South Africa. UX offers DE to thousands of students, many of whom are mostly from rural backgrounds and are linguistically diverse (Letseka et al., 2018).

After completing the registration process, UX students can access online study material which comprises a tutorial letter (referred to as a TUT101) (See Appendix J), which is a guide to the module. The tutorial letter contains a welcome message, the name, purpose and objectives of the module. In addition, the tutorial letter contains essential material such as the assignments and due dates, assignment rules, lecturers' names and contact details. Along with additional information about the module, the TUTL101 for ENG123 comprises two assignments per single semester (Appendix A). Once the registration processes have concluded, lecturers at UX presume that students would start working with their tutors (e-tutors<sup>3</sup> and face-to-face tutors<sup>4</sup>), who are appointed by UX, since they possess the expertise (the minimum requirement is an honours degree) to teach specific modules at UX. In many modules, tutors are appointed to teach students both in online and face-to-face contexts. It is presumed by the module leaders and the department that these tutors are qualified to teach students about the content of a module.

ENG123, in the DES, within the College of Human Sciences (CHS), offers academic writing skills to first-year students. This module falls within Level 5 of the NQF (National Qualifications Framework). ENG123 is offered on a Learning Management System (LMS), called myUX. It is also offered through a face to face mode in various regions across South Africa, however, since the outbreak of the Corona-Virus pandemic (Covid-19), face to face sessions have since been put on hold. Many online courses, such as ENG123, are "criticized for a lack of interaction, however, when intentionally designed, they can provide [students] with opportunities for collaboration that supports the achievement of desired learning outcomes" (Andrade, 2017:1). According to Uiseb (2017: 3):

in ODL, one of the most challenging aspects of assessment is dealing with assessing large class sizes. When faced with large numbers of students in ODL,

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<sup>3</sup> E-tutors are UX's temporary employees who teach students online. 1 etutor is allocated to a group of 200 students.

<sup>4</sup> Face-to-face tutors are employed temporarily to offer face to face tutorials in various UX regional centres across South Africa.

the main assessment challenge is finding efficient ways in which to assess them and provide them with feedback to support effective learning.

From the above statement, it is clear that student support is necessary in DE as many first-year students do not understand standard academic writing skills. When asked to respond to academic writing tasks, they often do not do well. “The diverse [students] entering higher education institutions today may need help with how to learn and particularly how to learn in an online context in order to achieve these outcomes” (Andrade, 2017:1). The researcher once briefly requested students’ opinions regarding poor academic writing performance. Students responded by stating that they are from educationally under-resourced and historically disadvantaged high schools and “their status as speakers of an additional language” adds to their writing struggle in that they are not able to express themselves in writing (Boughey & McKenna, 2016:2). Some students added that regardless of their poorly written essays during their high school learning experience, they still managed to achieve good marks in essay writing. Many of these schools are unable to provide the kind of educational background that prepares students for the skills and proficiency normally expected of a first-year university student.

The motivation for this study emerges from the premise that students in ENG123, specifically, fail this module repeatedly and may be disadvantaged by being lost among huge student numbers. The table below illustrates the module’s performance history over a period of five years:

YEAR	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
SEMESTER	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	SÝ	S1	S2	S1	S2
NUMBER OF STUDENTS ADMITTED TO EXAMINATION	±7500	±8501	±7800	±10200	±13004	±9800	±15000	±18000	±20 000	±21000
PERCENTAGE PASSED	54%	55%	61%	55%	60%	61%	69%	60%	69%	51%
PERCENTAGE FAILED	46%	45%	39%	45%	40%	39%	31%	40%	31%	49%

**Table 1.1** ENG123 performance history over a period of five years (2016-2020)

From the data in Table 1.1 above, which was extracted from the university's examination system, it is concerning that the pass rate in ENG123 module is quite low. It is clear that there is no drastic improvement in the results of the module as the pass percentage ranges between 50% to 60%, and for this reason, it is vital that the feedback practices in the module be explored. According to Pineteh (2014:17), "students' lack of the emotional readiness and intellectual maturity... severely affect the way they approach the whole learning experience and the way they handle academic tasks including academic writing". It was the researcher's assumption that students require more academic support and empowerment in order to improve their academic writing performance; particularly in assignment two of this module, as this task focuses mainly on academic writing (See Appendix J). In Street's (1984, cited in, Boughey & McKenna, 2016:3) terms, there are "many different ways of approaching and engaging with either the production or the reception of text – many different literacies". Thus, there are ways that can be followed by the knowledge producers to help students produce written texts and engage with knowledge in a manner that is valued in the academy (Street, 1984).

## 1.2 Problem statement

Students from working class and rural backgrounds, and who speak EAL, are often associated with the notion of generic gaps in general skills that they bring into Higher Education (HE) (Department of Higher Education, 2017 cited in Madondo, 2020). These students are often the most marginalised who have attracted little attention in research participation to date (Mgqwashu, 2016). It is argued that one of these generic gaps of South African students who speak EAL in HE is that they experience challenges in expressing themselves through academic writing (Leibowitz, 2004).

The researcher teaches academic writing to first-year students and holds the view that feedback has an impact on how students perform in academic writing. The researcher's previous and current experiences as a lecturer enabled her to understand that many students struggle to write academically which may be associated with their 'ways of being' (Gee, 1990) or their cultural backgrounds, linguistic inadequacies and/or semantic barriers related to English as a language of instruction. For Gee (2012:152), all people have 'ways of being', a discourse which is:

...composed of distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading coupled with distinctive ways of acting, interacting valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing, with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognized activities.

For Gee, then, a discourse is a 'socially recognizable identity' or a 'way of being' in the world. We all develop a primary discourse which we acquire from the home into which we are born and the community in which we live. It must be mentioned that the researcher's involvement in the ENG123 module has not influenced the data collection or compromised the academic objectivity of the study in any way. Both the discourses of the students and the researcher were not infringed on in any way. In Chapter 4, the researcher will discuss her identity and positionality within the study which ensures that the proper research channels were followed to ensure the reliability, credibility, validity and trustworthiness of the study (Mohajan, 2017).

It is interesting that Pineteh (2014:14) states that "students' challenges fall under the realms of three writing categories as introduced by Lea and Street (1998): Study skills, academic socialisation and academic literacies". It is important, therefore, to re-

imagine the feedback that students receive, which may be essential in enhancing and improving their academic writing. This study intends to re-imagine the feedback that is offered in ENG123 to discover first-year students' challenges related to feedback and gather in-depth experiences from lecturers and markers who work with them. In addition, this study aims to suggest possible solutions of overcoming these challenges in order to improve students' academic writing skills. The ENG123 study guide states that the module aims to:

. . .to develop [students' abilities of critical reading and critical writing which are essential academic skills, and to improve [their] Academic English competence. The module will help [them]to develop [their] ability to read and write academic genres, such as argumentative essay writing, research-based essays, research articles, lectures, and using appropriate academic conventions, such as citation[s] (Ndlangamandla et al., 2020:6).

The module's aims, highlighted above, imply that students are expected to write academic texts that are planned and showing evidence of research which is coherent and well-argued (Ndlangamandla et al., 2020). These are the academic writing expectations in the module and are expected to be followed by all first-year students. What does a module's aim have to do with academic literacy? In this study, it is argued that depending on the understanding of literacy that one adopts, they have a great deal to do with 'ways of being' required of students and lecturers as they engage in HE; which is in turn part of how re-imagining feedback within the ENG123 module can be understood. At this point, it is necessary to distinguish between the two types of literacy models, namely, the autonomous model and the ideological model (Street, 1984).

By following the writing norms of the module, students are acculturated or socialised into new social norms, also known as 'academic socialisation' (Lea and Street, 2006). In addition to the academic socialisation model, the ideological model of literacy by Collin and Street (2014) suggests that literacy and its uses are dependent on social contexts whereas the autonomous model views literacy as a set of defined skills to be mastered. As a result, the current study and Horn's (2016) study support the notion of the autonomous model of literacy in various learning spheres which, according to Collin and Street (2014), views literacy as a technical and neutral skill. According to Boughey (2003) and McKenna (2010), this view of literacy means that a lack of

appropriate acquisition can be attributed to deficiencies in the students and that addressing these can be achieved in a contextual setting such as add-on and separate language proficiency and skills courses. Street (1984) compares the two literacy models which are summarised in the Table 1.2 below:

Autonomous Model of Literacy	Ideological Model of Literacy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set of decontextualized self-contained skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context-dependent and embedded in sociocultural practices and situations.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher centred – “school-centric” reading and writing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy is a social process – something we do to make sense of our lives.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sub-skills – learn about literacy as a subject. Product-oriented.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process-focused with purpose and intentionality.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-determined and easily measurable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are multiple literacies and using multiple texts depending on place, purpose and context.</li> </ul>

**Table 1.2:** The differences between the autonomous model of literacy and ideological model of literacy

The autonomous model of literacy informs the current study in that literacy autonomously has an effect on other cognitive and social practices. Street (2006) argues that once literacy is acquired, it is assumed that other social and cognitive skills can be acquired with ease. On the other hand, Baker and Street (1994) criticise the autonomous model of literacy for placing emphasis on the cognitive consequences of literacy acquisition, on the implications of literacy for social and economic development, and on individuals acquiring the written code. According to Street (1993), such an approach to literacy implies a homogenisation that ignores the variety of practices which exist.

In contrast to the autonomous model, Baker and Street (1994) note the development of:

a more socially oriented view of literacy [and that] The ‘ideological’ model of literacy recognises above all the importance of context, seeing the skills of reading, writing and enumerating ‘as social practices, learnt in specific cultural contexts and imbued with epistemological significance (Baker & Street, 1994:3453).

Whereas the main methodologies associated with the autonomous model are research based on experimental methods and a psychometric tradition of testing, the

ideological model makes greater use of ethnographic studies which seek to understand the meaning of literacy practices for the participants themselves. Baker and Street (1994) argue that the ideological model of literacy offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another. This model starts from different premises than the autonomous model – it posits instead that literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill ... It is about knowledge: the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, being. Literacy, in this sense, is always contested.

According to Horn (2016), it seems like the autonomous view and skills associated to it play a role schools and higher learning institutions, particularly in assessment. Similar to Horn (2016), the researcher argues that in order for university students to be certified the university Alumni, they must have gone through the academic “standardized testing”, which is linked to what many people value to be correct in terms of literacy (Horn, 2016:3). These literacy practice patterns impact how students practice reading and writing (Horn 2016). It becomes a challenge when a standard skill that is required at a university context becomes difficult for students to acquire, mostly because it requires English as a cognitive tool (Maher, 2011; Pineteh, 2014; Cekiso et al., 2016). It would be interesting to understand which literacy model the ENG123 module may be categorised under in Chapter 5.

Several reports and research studies indicate that many EAL students are without adequate writing skills, they struggle to write academically and are arguably linguistically underprepared (Jones, 2011; Van Dijk et al., 2019). Other studies specified writing challenges such as students’ adoption of ineffective writing strategies, problems with planning and organising written tasks, difficulties in organising their ideas into written form, problems with writing focused papers with persuasive arguments (Pineteh, 2014; Mohammed, 2019), inexperienced approaches to revision, problems with organisation and difficulties with grammar, punctuation, word choice (Pineteh, 2014; Qasem, 2019) and negative self-perceptions of their writing skills as a result of the negative feedback they may have received (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). There are more individual, instructional and institutional-related

challenges faced by EAL students, particularly those who are in distance learning (Musingafi et al., 2015:65).

Pineteh (2014:12) revealed that the “academic writing challenges of students in universities of technology are consequences of students’ linguistic and general literacy backgrounds, their attitudes toward academic writing . . .” To date, there are students who are from secondary schooling backgrounds who did not adequately learn academic reading strategies, writing skills, researching techniques and other basic research skills to the level at which they should be functioning at first-year in tertiary institutions (Chowdhury, 2015; Roxas, 2020). As Pretorius (2000:15) notes, “academic success at tertiary level is particularly reliant on accessing information from texts in an efficient and meaningful manner”. In addition, knowing how to apply the accessed information is vital. For this reason, I argue that it is imperative that the feedback that first-year students in ENG123 receive is scrutinised by means of document analysis, interviews with the module lecturers and markers and open-ended evaluation questionnaires with the students to understand the perceptions and challenges students encounter when they receive their feedback.

### **1.3 Significance and contribution of the study**

This study seeks to investigate the perceptions of students, markers and lecturers regarding feedback that is provided in ENG123. In the recommendations section (Chapter 6), the researcher offers suggestions as to how the current feedback can be re-imagined to accommodate first-year students and be more supportive to students from non-English learning backgrounds.

Markers, lecturers, tutors and teachers of academic writing in schools would benefit significantly from this study since its aim is to express the importance of providing students with constructive information so that they are able to work independently. The focus is on distance learning students who, in most instances, feel isolated from university resources which include markers and lecturers. Providing such students with thorough feedback equips them with several key skills. This includes the skill to

assist each other or work collaboratively. In the literature review section of this thesis (Chapter 2), several studies state how peer feedback improved performance of writing students (Pirhonem, 2016; Chalmers et al., 2018; Huisman et al., 2018).

#### **1.4 Research objectives**

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- To examine how students perceive the feedback they receive from markers in the ENG123 module;
- to investigate how markers view the feedback they provide in students' academic writing; and,
- to explore how moderators' reports on marked assignments in ENG123 prepare students for improved academic writing.

#### **1.5 Research questions**

The following research questions were borne out of the research objectives above:

- What are the perceptions of students on the feedback they receive in the Academic Language and Literacy in English (ENG123)?
- How do markers and lecturers view the feedback they provide to students in the ENG123 module?
- How do moderators' reports on marked assignments in ENG123 assist students in improving their academic writing?

## **1.6. Definition of key concepts**

### **1.6.1 Feedback**

Hattie and Timperley (2007:81) define feedback as “information provided by an agent (e.g. teacher, peer, book, parent, self) regarding aspects of one’s performance or understanding”. This study adopts Hattie and Timperley’s (2007) definition of feedback as it views feedback as a fundamental pedagogical practice in teaching and learning. For the purposes of this study, the concepts ‘written feedback’, ‘feedback’ and ‘constructive feedback’ mean feedback in students’ academic writing and they will therefore be used interchangeably.

### **1.6.2 Academic writing**

According to Langum and Sullivan (2017), academic writing is an emotionally-laden process, particularly for second language writers, who have to cope with the heavy demands of language use. In addition, a study entitled, “Academic Writing Challenges of Undergraduate Students: A South African Case Study” by Pineteh (2013:12) states that “academic writing plays a critical role in socialising students into the discourse of subjects and disciplines in universities”. Academic writing is the leading language that students and lecturers use to communicate in academic settings. Students’ inability to produce academic writing that meets the required standards may affect their academic progress and performance negatively (Jones, Turner & Street, 1999). This study adopts the explanation proposed by Langum and Sullivan (2017) since the researcher teaches academic writing to students in a South African context where most students speak EAL and mostly possess both writing and language difficulties. Throughout the study, the words, ‘writing’ and ‘academic writing’ are used interchangeably.

## **1.7 Literature review**

There is an essential relationship between constructive feedback and academic writing. Research conducted in Asia by Jones (2011) postulates that feedback is a key element of both teaching and learning in academic writing. In Jones’s (2011) terms,

academic writing without feedback may delay student learning and that may have a negative effect, particularly on how students are socialised into the academic space. Moreover, academic writing is essential as students seem to learn most of their modules through organising content in writing. In most cases, students are taught that writing is not a once-off process (Nguyen, 2019) and that student success in academic writing is more dependent on the constant revisions they undergo and the critical attention they pay to the feedback they receive from assessors.

A South African study conducted by Banda (2017:18) indicates that:

students' lack of proficiency in English is a source of irritation and frustration for them. The confidence they have discussing essays in isiXhosa or isiXhosa–English code mix outside the classroom often comes to nothing as they are faced with examinations which they have to write in Standard English.

It is evident that students' struggles in academia may be beyond understanding the academic writing conventions; they have language issues that delay their academic writing success. To address issues of language and academic writing, multiple support interventions are required. After reviewing the above-mentioned studies from outside South Africa and other local studies, it is evident that there are gaps in the literature related to student support, academic writing of EAL students and feedback that this study seeks to cover.

## **1.8 Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework in this study was used as a tool to interpret data that was presented in Chapter 5. In addition, the theoretical framework also assisted in suggesting ways to prioritise feedback in an ODeL context for the benefit of the UX students. Furthermore, the framework was essential in reimagining and planning possible strategies that might improve feedback that was provided to academic writing students in an ODeL context.

This study is guided by the Vygotsky's (1987) sociocultural theory (SCT) which is discussed in Chapter 3. SCT explains how students are to be enculturated into a social group or societal ways of doing in order to behave like the natives of a community. In

light of this research, students are expected to produce writing that follows academic writing conventions although most students hail from a teaching/learning culture that had less academic writing syllabus if there was any at all (Akteruzzaman and Chowdhury, 2015). Rogoff (1990) argues that SCT goes beyond students engaging in language-based dialogue as most first-year students at universities are familiar with the language of instruction but have no good command of academic writing skills. Moreover, SCT discusses the Zone for Proximal Development (ZPD) that focuses on children's cognitive development that occurs through the guidance of companions who provide learning support by enculturating individuals into the social activity (Rogoff, 1990).

SCT in this study merges with the Model of Feedback to enhance learning (model of feedback) as discussed in Chapter 3 (See Figures 3.1; 3.3; 3.4; 3.5). The model of feedback sees learning as a process of repeatedly revising a phenomenon until knowledge manifests. It presents the power that feedback carries in enhancing students' learning. In addition, the model emphasises that both the assessor and the student must reflect on the learning goals and have a clear understanding of how the provided feedback will help them to reach the desired goals. The researcher decided that these two frameworks must merge as one would focus on the social and cultural aspects of students (Vygotsky, 1987), while the other would focus on the aspects of support and assessment that are practised in the ENG123 (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). The researcher looked at how Vygotsky's SCT concepts, namely the ZPD, Mediation, the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) and scaffolding articulate and emphasise the significance of students' social, cultural background and prior knowledge in learning new social norms, such as academic writing. The model of feedback on the other hand, has a role of demonstrating how feedback can be contextualised in order to suit the direct group of students. This means that a feedback has to be designed and planned in a way that a specific group of students can utilise it to the best of their ability, particularly if the specific feedback matches their prior social and cultural knowledge (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Vygotsky, 1987). It is, therefore, imperative that this study merges these frameworks in Chapter 3 to ensure that the research questions in this study are adequately responded to.

## **1.9 Research methodology and design**

### **1.9.1 Qualitative approach**

The progenitors of qualitative research methods can be linked to anthropology, philosophy, psychology, history, and sociology, with the main aim of focusing on the systematic explanation and analysis of a phenomenon (Mohajan, 2018). Although some studies or researchers who adopt human participants as their primary data adopt quantitative methods, this study preferred a qualitative method. This is because qualitative methods are scientific and more focused on meaning (Rahman, 2017).

The present study intends to explore students, markers and lecturers' experiences, practices and understandings with regards to feedback provision in the ENG123 module. Several tools were employed in this regard. The researcher analysed the students' marked assignments to assess the quality of feedback provided by UX's external markers using a feedback rubric by Students Assessing Teaching and Learning (SATAL, n.d.).

The SATAL coordinator, Signorini (2014:3), conducted at the University of California argues that, "for feedback to be a powerful learning tool, instructors should train students to use effective feedback practices, and a feedback rubric could provide the framework to promote this learning effectively." The SATAL rubric is created to be used by students in a formal classroom setting to give one another feedback and the instructors to assess writing and guide students on the wording of constructive feedback. Feedback practices must be shared with students so that students understand the assessment expectations. Cross and Angelo (1993:6) point out: "if an assessment is worth doing, it's worth teaching students how to do it well." This study used the SATAL Program rubric as the rubric emphasises that students must be able to critically reflect on their own work before submitting it to the lecturers. This study argues that rubrics such as SATAL's may be adopted in modules that have vast student numbers to ensure that students understand quality assessment procedures. Utilising the SATAL rubric assisted the researcher to explore the gaps in this study and identify the problems holistically. The rubric was appropriate as it enabled the researcher to explore the students, markers and lecturers' ideas, suggestions,

setbacks and experiences in ENG123 although it was initially adopted to examine students' marked assignments only. This study adopts a case study design. The case study design is appropriate because it is naturally intensive, it can systematically investigate a single individual, group, community or some other unit in which the researcher examines in-depth data relating to several variables (Heale & Twycross, 2018). In addition, the case study approach can be adopted to gather social data, such as the language participants speak, biographical information. However, for this thesis it was adopted to gather data related to activities students were involved in, and organise the data in a manner that will bring about detailed results and in-depth understandings of their reality. The current study used a case study design to gather an in-depth understanding of how feedback is effective or ineffective with regards to enhancing students' academic writing in a module in the DES.

Case studies are known for probing growth and development in a study as they involve studying a phenomenon from an individual level to a collective group with the aim of gaining more insight into a phenomenon. Tumele (2015) posits that the case study analysis involves interpreting and describing, questionnaires, observations, and documents to find substantively meaningful patterns and themes. As this study sought to assess the effectiveness of feedback provided to first-year ENG123 students' writing, the case study approach was appropriate as this study sought to examine perceptions, investigate views and explore information presented by the data gathered. Like any other approach, the case study design has its own negative effects, such as subjective biasness rather than objective. To avoid such effects, the researcher was cautious and objective when analysing the sampled data.

### **1.10 Population**

The target population in 2020 of semester 1 in this study was the ENG123 group. ENG123 is a semester module and registers approximately 20 000 students per semester. In 2020, the module comprised seven lecturers and about 40 markers. Asiamah and Mensah (2017:1615) define accessible population as a "precursor of sampling". The process of sampling commences once the accessible population has

been clearly defined and sorted. There are stages of populations; general population, target population and accessible population (Asiamah & Mensah, 2017). Contrary to this, Levy and Lemeshow (2013) argue that a population is generally the collection of all individuals or objects that are to be studied and a sample to be studied will emerge from the general population. Levy and Lemeshow (2013) attest that once collection of all individuals is observed the researcher may proceed with necessary sampling processes. According to Asiamah and Mensah (2017), there are levels of refinement to be considered until the participant group is reached. The current study is in accordance with the definition by Levy and Lemeshow (2013) as the study included most, if not all the individuals, who are part of the ENG123 module; students, lecturers and markers.

### **1.11 Sampling**

The researcher concurred with the definition of sampling by Showkat and Parveen (2017) and Harding (2018) which states that sampling is a method of selecting some parts of a population to observe so that one may estimate something about the whole population. Showkat and Parveen (2017) further mention that the sample determines the generalisability of the findings and confirm the accuracy of the research. In this study, simple random sampling which falls under probability sampling was used to set aside the individuals from the general population, that the researcher assumed could conclude the results of the entire population. Probability sampling is defined by Showkat and Parveen (2017) as a sampling that treats individuals equally in the sense that everyone has an equal chance of being selected to participate in the research. This is because the researcher assumed that any individual in the population can provide the results that are required. This study adopted the probability sampling method called simple random sampling. The definition provided by Krippendorff (2018) states that simple random sampling is a method of randomly selecting a sample in which each element has an equal probability of being selected. Researchers such as Smith and Smith (2018) regard the simple random method as the greatest and simplest sampling method because of its fairness and objectiveness in treating elements equally. They further state that simple random sampling is very popular in studies that explore complex areas of huge populations, more so qualitative-based

studies. The researcher concurred with the claim made above as it sought to understand the ENG123 group's actions, opinions, experiences and reasons behind their actions. In simpler terms, their ways of doing were questioned and such responses are discussed in Chapter 5.

Additionally, purposive sampling that is non-probability was also utilised in this study. Purposive sampling, according to Showkat and Parveen (2017) and Ames et al. (2019), is a way of approaching a sample with a purpose in mind. They further state that it is a type of sampling where a researcher selects participants that are appropriate to the research design. Moreover, non-probability in Showkat and Parveen's (2017) study is explained as a type of sampling in which the findings established lack generalisability. This means that it would be difficult for the researcher to study any particular group and claim that the same results may go beyond the studied sample. This sampling is often used because it is less complicated, affordable and easy to apply as compared to other sampling methods. Adopting this type of sampling meant that the researcher uses her/his judgment in selecting the sample to focus on. The researcher, for instance, purposefully chose to focus on a specific group, that is, ENG123, and used her own judgment when selecting some parts of the population. For example, the researcher had the liberty to use any group of students available in her department, however, most of these groups were not chosen because they did not meet a certain criterion that the study required. The criterion was that participants must be from an Academic Writing module. It was therefore, imperative that the researcher select purposefully a population then a sample that could bring about the quality results that this thesis requires to achieve.

A combination of random and purposive sampling was accurate as the researcher saw a need to purposefully focus mainly on one particular group of writing students that is those registered for ENG123. This group was one of the biggest in terms of students' registration figures; therefore, the researcher decided to also select elements of the population randomly as each participant was capable of bringing forth the best needed results.

### 1.12 Data collection methods

The online open-ended evaluation questions were posted on myUX for students to complete. However, only 10 ENG123 students' open-ended evaluation questionnaires were selected for analysis (to represent the whole module), seven ENG123 lecturers (whole ENG123 team) and four ENG123 markers (ten per cent of the marker population) were individually emailed a semi-structured interview schedule, ten randomly marked assignments and seven moderation reports (from all lecturers) were assessed and analysed on an observation schedule. These instruments are discussed fully in Chapter 4. Table 1.3 below aptly demonstrates the instruments and the corresponding research questions:

Research questions	Research instruments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What are the perceptions of students on the feedback they receive in the Academic Language and Literacy in English (ENG123)?</li></ul>	Online open-ended evaluation questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How do markers and lecturers view the feedback they provide students with in the ENG123 module?</li></ul>	Emailed semi-structured interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How do moderators' reports on marked assignments in ENG123 assist students in improving their academic writing?</li></ul>	Document analysis schedule 1 and 2

**Table 1.3:** Research questions and instruments used in the study

The current study did not have age, language nor cultural limitations. However, only students who were currently registered for ENG123 were given an opportunity to participate in the study.

### 1.13 Data analysis stages and phases

The data was analysed in two stages. In the first stage, a thematic analysis of the interviews and responses from evaluation questions took place, and in the second

stage, a textual analysis followed. Thematic analysis was done by means of scrutinising each response from interviews or questionnaires and identifying trending themes relevant to the research aim and objectives. The researcher chose thematic analysis because it is a flexible approach to qualitative analysis that enables researchers to generate new insights and concepts derived from data, however, the issue of flexibility may mean that there many different ways to interpret meaning from the data set (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). Moreover, the researcher used the research questions as a point of departure to organise themes. Some themes emerged from the research instruments. Similarly, the same method of data analysis was applied to the document analysis schedule. Analysing qualitative data of this nature required the researcher's full attention and concentration (Whelan et al., 2017). In the data collection phase, the researcher selected emerging themes and categorised them accordingly. The theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 3 guided this study when collecting and analysing the data. The data analysis stage and phases are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

#### **1.14 Delimitations**

Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018:156) state that delimitations refer to “limitations consciously set by the authors themselves”. This thesis illustrates (See Chapter 3, Figure 3.8) the relationship between a theory (Sociocultural theory by Vygotsky) and a model (Model of Feedback to Enhance Learning by Hattie and Timperley). These frameworks, as this study pointed out, were combined to illustrate that teaching and learning are social activities and that students are likely to learn with ease if guidance is provided. This study proposes the combination of frameworks and has no doubt that it is testable, however, this study does not test its validity in improving students' writing if both frameworks are to be applied in an Academic Writing module.

#### **1.15 Limitations**

According to Ross and Bibler Zaidi (2019:261), limitations “represent weaknesses within a research design that may influence outcomes and conclusions of the study”.

The study focuses on the perceptions students have regarding the feedback they received from the module markers and lecturers as well as lecturers' and markers' perceptions of feedback they provide to students. Several factors, including time and access to the information have been a challenge as this study was conducted under the Covid-19<sup>5</sup> regulations<sup>6</sup> (van Wyk, 2019). Initially, the researcher had planned to conduct face-to-face semi-structured interviews with markers and lecturers in order to do follow up questions where necessary. However, due to mandatory lock down regulations and social distancing, schedules had to be revised to ensure that there are no visits or any close contact with participants. The researcher realised that the simplest way to collect data during the Covid-19 lockdown was to administer email semi-structured interviews. This entailed schedules being sent via emails to markers and lecturers. Some of lecturers and markers could not return their responses in time, if not at all, due to home and work commitments and, therefore, the period of the study was delayed by a few weeks.

### **1.16 Ethical considerations**

According to Farrimond (2013), it vital to adhere to ethical norms in research both in primary and secondary data collection since there are ethical issues relating to fair and unbiased selection of sources and analysis. Adhering to the norms encourages truthfulness in research, secure protection of participants and generally helps in avoiding unnecessary confusion and errors. "Secondly, since qualitative research involves collaboration among individuals, ethical principles promote the values that are vital to collaborative work, such as trust, accountability, mutual respect and fairness" (Uiseb, 2017:23).

Data collection in this study could not commence until permission from the Research Ethics Committee at UX was granted (See Appendix I). The name of the university, the module, lecturers, markers, students and the module have all been given

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<sup>5</sup> Covid-19, also known as the Corona Virus, is a virus that began in China, Wuhan in 2019. This virus was spread worldwide. It affected the lungs and killed millions of people within a short period of time.

<sup>6</sup> Covid-19 regulations are restrictions introduced by the South African government to try combat the spread of Virus.

pseudonyms to protect the identities of all participants and the institution. All participants were made aware that the identities would not be revealed. The researcher considered ethics immensely by distributing consent forms to the relevant participants before collecting data from them. In addition, all participants were assured that the information provided in this study would remain confidential and would only be used for this research purposes. Thus, the study adhered to the required ethical considerations to avoid harm, disrespect, and practiced privacy and fair treatment of participants (Rahman, 2017).

First, the nature of the study was explained to the potential participants through emails. Second, the researcher explained the topic, objectives and aim of study and requested those who are interested to take part voluntarily. Interested participants signed the consent forms as an indication that they had agreed to participate in the study. All participants had the liberty to withdraw from taking part although consent forms were signed. Moreover, anonymity and confidentiality were practiced throughout the data collection process.

The researcher took the ethics set in the study into consideration and ensured that participants' privacy, character and confidentiality were not in any way harmed or violated. First, pseudonyms to hide the original names of the participants were utilised, second, participants' participation was not forced and furthermore, participants were given the liberty to withdraw from the study at any given time without any explanation.

## **1.17 Outline of the study**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction and Background**

Chapter 1 introduces and provides the background of the study. It provides a brief rationale, theoretical framework, definition of key concepts, the problem statement, the significance and contribution of the study, research objectives, research questions, the literature review, the research methodology and research design, population that the study seeks to investigate, the sampling procedure, data collection methods, data analysis stages and phases, delimitation and limitation of the study, ethical consideration and the outline of the chapters. The purpose of this chapter is to

introduce the problem that needed to be examined. The purpose of most research studies is to address a specific problem and suggest recommendations that may address the problem.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Chapter 2 discusses voices, ideas and arguments that emerge from scholars around the globe. The purpose of this chapter is to immerse oneself into the deep ends of other people's work and understand important aspects in the field. The researcher reviewed the research from outside South Africa to read about other universities' perceptions of feedback. Other studies are from parts of Africa and shared similar challenges as South Africa such as high student numbers that often compromise the quality of feedback. After exploring other studies' results, the researcher was able to make recommendations for this study. The researcher reviewed both current and older studies in order to gather previous perceptions regarding feedback and academic writing.

## **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework**

Chapter 3 provides an outline of the theoretical framework that underpins this study, that is, the Model of Feedback to Enhance Learning and SCT. The theoretical framework for this study was not the researcher's initial choice but after reviewing similar studies, the researcher found SCT and the model of feedback appropriate for this study. SCT speaks to the investigated students' sociocultural backgrounds since they are from vast populations. On the other hand, the model of feedback addresses the type of feedback that is suitable for the investigated group.

## **Chapter 4: Research methodology**

Chapter 4 presents a detailed account of the research paradigm which deals with the research approach and research type. The research methods, such as procedures, tools and techniques, ethical considerations are discussed in detail. The research paradigm adopted in this study is a qualitative approach because the study seeks to

explore in depth, the experiences and perceptions of people regarding feedback provided in academic writing. Moreover, the research design for this study is a case study approach because the study focuses on one specific group, that is, the ENG123 module.

## **Chapter 5: Data analysis, discussions and findings**

This chapter presents an analysis and interpretation of the research data. It also presents detailed discussions on the findings. This chapter commences by systematically sharing the data collected from the students' questionnaire, markers and lecturers' semi-structured interviews and goes on to interpret students', markers' and lecturers' data separately. Students' data was collected on myUX as it was initially planned but data from markers and lecturers was accidentally collected through emails due to the Covid-19 regulations related to social distancing. In the discussion, the researcher outlines themes that emerges from the raw data.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusions and recommendations**

Chapter 6 provides a summary of the study, recommendations, draws conclusions, and identifies areas for future research. It is in this chapter wherein the researcher details the overall summary of the study. All the events that have unfolded within the study are concluded in this chapter. Moreover, the researcher outlines a few recommendations and suggestions that may be considered by the specific group for the improved academic writing of students.

### **1.18 Summary**

The first chapter of this study introduced and provided the background of the study. In addition, the researcher provided a brief rationale, a theoretical framework, the definition of key concepts, the problem statement, the significance and contribution of the study, research objectives, research questions, literature review, the research methodology, research design, the population that the study seeks to investigate, the sampling procedure, data collection methods, data analysis stages and phases,

delimitations and limitations of the study, ethical considerations and the outline of the chapters. The brief literature review revealed that challenges faced in the Academic Writing module are a global issue and are often caused by students being under prepared to learn academic writing, not receiving adequate feedback to help them improve, or not receiving feedback, or failing to interpret the feedback. This study utilises data from students, markers, lecturers, assignment marked scripts and moderators' reports to uncover if adequate and constructive feedback is fundamental in helping students improve their academic writing skills in an ODeL institution. In the next chapter, literature related to feedback and academic writing in DE is reviewed.

## CHAPTER 2

### Discourses on Feedback as an Instructional Tool

*I think that it's very important to have a feedback loop where you're constantly thinking about what you've done and how you could be doing it better*  
- Elon Musk

#### 2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 outlined the contextual focus of the study and motivation related to the perceptions on the role of feedback for improved academic writing skills of first year students at UX. The principal motivation behind this study lay in the researcher's experience in teaching first-year students to prepare them for academic study, combined with experiences of teaching academic writing to ODeL students. Chapter 1 also identified the issues related to feedback in academic writing and accentuated a need for extensive research on this topic area. This study's first research question seeks to interrogate students' perceptions on feedback, with an aim of directing them to confirm their satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the current feedback in ENG123. Furthermore, the study requests markers and lecturers to reflect on their work and offer a perspective on what needs to be done for the students and how to achieve these goals. The aims of such reflections will not only be about re-evaluating, but will also acknowledge the significance and the role of the current feedback.

This chapter will review the following main areas: The literature pertaining to students' perceptions of the feedback they receive in Academic Writing modules; the body of work related to how markers and lecturers view feedback in Academic Writing modules and an inclusion of literature that explores contextual perspectives on feedback. In addition, the relationship between feedback and academic writing; peer feedback versus teachers' feedback, and the relationship between feedback and academic writing, are discussed. This chapter concludes that there are principle gaps surrounding feedback in academic writing. Such gaps are identified and recommendations are provided in Chapter 6.

The researcher has read widely around the topic of feedback in education and hence, this chapter is organised according to the following sub-themes:

- Studies conducted in various face-to-face schools;
- studies conducted in contact universities;
- studies conducted in distance learning (DE); and,
- studies conducted in open distance e-learning (ODeL).

The researcher decided to review literature from various learning contexts as there is not much research that has been conducted on feedback practices in distance learning contexts in South Africa. For this reason, the researcher investigated feedback at various education levels which in this case is the school level, contact or face-to-face universities, as well as ODeL contexts on a global scale. Finally, the researcher discussed feedback in South Africa (SA) in a school level, contact and ODeL context. It is imperative that the researcher investigate feedback, not only in one context, since “as with public schools, institutions of higher education are facing increased accountability pressures in recent years to assess student performance” (Haughney et al., 2020:1).

## **2.2 Students and lecturers’ perceptions of feedback**

Previous literature claims that student responses to feedback are generally under-researched (Mory, 2004; Weaver, 2006; Hattie and Timperley, 2009a; Walker, 2015). Brooks et al. (2019) utilise a Student Feedback Perception Questionnaire (SPFPQ) to gather responses from 13 government schools in Queensland, in Australia, in a study entitled, “What is My Next Step? School Students’ perceptions of Feedback”. The aim of the study is to investigate students’ perceptions of different kinds of feedback, and unpredictably, some students find a ‘feedforward’ a different type of feedback which Brooks et al. (2019) notes, as being the most helpful to learning compared to other types of feedback. Although the study discovered that students would select ‘feeding up’ as an advantageous feedback as unforeseeable, the study commences by arguing that one type of feedback may be effective for one student but be ineffective for another student. According to Brooks et al. (2019), some students are more interested in feedback that is focused on one particular aspect, the information about progress rather than feeding forward.

On the contrary, a study conducted in primary and secondary schools in New Zealand entitled, "Understanding classroom feedback practices: A study of New Zealand student experiences, perceptions, and emotional responses" (Harries et al., 2014) indicates that feedback is known for improving students' learning experiences. However, little has been researched about how students view it. The results indicate that feedback is provided in the form of content and drawing, but in terms of content, feedback is overwhelming for school learners (Harries et al., 2014). The study also indicated that the percentages for praise, effort and presentation are lower than those of standards or what the teacher expected from the learners. The study is preferably chosen to make comparisons between school feedback and tertiary feedback, and there is a correlation as both contexts offer feedback that aims to change perceptions on how individuals should organise information. Harries et al. (2014), Price (2015), Jonsson and Panadero (2018) have conducted research related to feedback in dissimilar contexts but share a common view that negative, unclear, ambiguous, biased feedback is contrary to succeeding in any context of learning. This notion is expressed explicitly by Price (2015) who investigated the factors that affect the way students view feedback at Oxford Brooks University. For Price (2015), students' views on negative feedback impact the way they view positive feedback. The study makes the following assertion to express the dissatisfaction of students on feedback in general (Price, 2015:5):

Consequently, it has been known for decades what kinds of written feedback students find unhelpful – or useless and annoying. Bad feedback is feedback that consists of brief annotations, empty or incomplete proforma sheets, proforma sheets with no further explanations (as this gives the impression the marker has not read the assignment), brief remarks about citation and referencing, and small meaningless remarks such as ticks and underlining with no annotations. Many of our interviewees brought in as 'bad' feedback examples that did not meet basic standards of legibility and detail.

Price (2015) aims to find out from students if the feedback provided is perceived to be helpful or unhelpful feedback. The findings indicated above are an indication that the technical factors, such as brief annotations and remarks are what the student is not looking forward to receive. The study states that although technical factors are regarded as a part of the feedback process, they are not regarded by students as good feedback (Price, 2015). Similarly, Brooks et al. (2019) concluded that students

seek feedback that is productive, detailed and focused. Similarly, Price (2015) concludes that feedback seems to be encouraging to students' willingness to invest effort in completing academic tasks. These are the sorts of issues this study is designed to investigate within the South African context, and in the largest distance education institution in the continent. Nonetheless, perceptions of feedback are shaped by students' epistemology and beliefs, and, as a result, their perspectives on feedback will differ. What one student deems to be unusable, vague or harsh, another student may find it encouraging and useful; hence, the focus of this study is also on students' voices in a distance education context. This study concurs that the domains that affect the way students view feedback may help in diagnosing problems; and, in addition, sharpen and improve lecturers' decision-making on improving feedback which could result in a reduction of students' dissatisfaction.

Several examples that may indicate dissatisfaction regarding feedback obtained from students are discussed by Hattie (2015:79) who argues that scholars need to stop asking "what works?" but rather ask "what works best?". Hattie maintains that feedback may not be accepted because some feedback provokes students' emotions, regardless if it is only "cross" or "tick" (Hattie, 2015). The fact that someone is going to interpret a cross or tick, without any explanation often makes it more harmful than good and vice versa. For example, a student's interpretation of a cross may be that they are weak or that they have failed. Students may perceive a cross as being harsh (Price, 2019) or a 'tick' means *I have won*.

Feedback may be positive to a student because it matches the student's expectations. However, assessors may want to channel the way students view feedback by not providing the student's expectation. Feedback may provide "what works best" rather than "what works" (Hattie, 2015:79). This study also adopts a salient point in Sargeant et al. (2008) which maintains that feedback containing specific directives in order to improve learning generates fewer emotions in students and can generally be used in order to enhance performance.

Recent literature on markers' perceptions of feedback is limited, but perspectives on the lecturers and students' perspectives and the nature of feedback in contact universities have been explored globally. In 2018, for instance, Chalmers et al. (2018), in the United Kingdom, state that marking and providing feedback on students'

assessments is one of the key roles of a tutor (lecturer role). The study also focuses on how students interpret feedback. It highlights that as tutors provide feedback they should also reflect on and think about what they are giving to the students. This study also argues that making feedback a two-way process may expose the essence of its power and greatness because if feedback makes sense to the sender, chances are the receiver will also make sense of it. This is fundamental as Chalmers et al. (2018) mention that students are provided with an option of either receiving written feedback or having a 15-minute meeting with the marker and working on the marking together. This option is introduced as a result of students complaining that the feedback they receive is not helpful and interpreting it alone is challenging. On the other hand, a tutor comments that students are not showing any interest in the feedback as they are more concerned about the marks. The study introduces a public platform where students and tutors face one another to reveal their perceptions of feedback. The idea of students and tutors together in one particular environment is an intriguing prospect, however, it should be noted that as some students may not feel free to express their perceptions of feedback in the presence of their markers. However, this intervention was worthwhile as there were improvements thereafter. Both tutors and students were excited, particularly students who indicated that they were unaware their tutors meant well with the feedback they had provided (Chalmers et al., 2018).

Despite the negative perceptions of feedback, persuasive and positive arguments have been reported regarding oral, written or peer feedback. For instance, Ferguson (2011, cited in Chalmers et al., 2018) states that the primary aim of providing feedback whether in a practical, face-to-face or written setting is to improve performance (since feedback is linked with marking) for both tutors and students. This indicates that feedback is an integral part of learning and may be regarded as a powerful tool as it helps students to rethink and revisit the same concept repeatedly until the concept is understood (Rowe, 2017). However, even though many researchers noted that feedback is a powerful tool, challenges surrounding universities may marginalise its purpose in the learning context (Henderson et al., 2019). For example, most universities around the world comprise large classes and tutors are held accountable if they go over the required time to return marked scripts to students (Carpenter et al., 2020). Large classes are challenging for tutors, thus when they are questioned on the

quality of feedback, the usual response from the tutors is that of a low staff count which inevitably does not balance with the realities of student ratios (Chalmers et al., 2018). Chalmers et al. (2018) add that many students look forward to face-to-face sessions although there are those who experience anxiety at the beginning thinking that tutors will be harsh while commenting on their work, particularly in front of peers. However, in the end, face to-face feedback is more praised by students than written feedback as some students mention that they did not know their tutor wanted them to improve “so bad” (sic). The study also quotes one student mentioning that “written feedback is cold” (Chalmers et al., 2018:40), a point of view also supported by markers as a way of validating face-to face feedback sessions. Chalmers’ et al. (2018) study is further supported by Zhang and Zheng’s (2018) study which investigates the feedback practices and perceptions of lecturers and students at a contact university. Documented appraisals about face-to-face feedback in Chalmers et al. (2018) and Zhang and Zheng’s (2018) studies persuaded this current study to rethink the current feedback particularly in an ODeL context where face-to-face feedback may not be a possibility as students’ study many of their modules remotely.

Zhang and Zheng’s (2018) study assesses how lecturers provide feedback in practice; 47 pieces of lecturer-written feedback were categorised into a total of 571 analytical points. The study maintains that analysing the feedback from lecturers’ perspectives in terms of the value of feedback, the role of feedback and the effectiveness of feedback assists in an understanding of the rationale behind teaching and the effects of feedback provision. There are similar correlations between Zhang and Zheng (2018), Chalmers et al. (2018) and this thesis in terms of seeking understanding from the lecturers’ perspective of what feedback means and the impact it has on students. The lecturers’ views on feedback are to be identified as an assessment for learning tools. This is mostly a goal for gathering perceptions, opinions and views of people to ensure that what participants convey regarding the problem brings about the ultimate solution to the research problem. Chalmers et al. (2018:1121) identify this problem as follows:

Students sometimes find lecturer-written feedback overwhelming and difficult to understand or process (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Price et al., 2010); while on the other hand, teachers may not be fully aware of the feedback students find beneficial.

This study agrees with the above quote as the primary problem emanated from the experiences of the researcher as a lecturer who teaches writing to students and who observed that students are not showing successful academic writing skills. The study suggests that that feedback be used as an academic writing “assessment tool for learning” (Zhang & Zheng, 2018:1120).

The results in Zhang and Zheng’s (2018) study may guide this study as they both seek to understand the lecturers’ perceptions of feedback. Firstly, two lecturer participants in the Zhang and Zheng study provided written feedback samples on 47 assignments and distributed it to students. Secondly, lecturer participants were requested to gauge views they provided, particularly, “they were asked about their views on referential feedback, why lecturers gave more emphasis to global issues instead of local issues, how they viewed expressive feedback, and what made them value direct or indirect suggestions” (Zhang & Zheng, 2018:1124). One lecturer emphasised the necessity of writing a good introduction and why is it important to have a “well-stated introduction” (Zhang & Zheng, 2018:1124). In addition, this lecturer noted that the comments provided may motivate students to improve their introductions. However, both lecturers admitted to the challenges of striking a balance between being “analytical and descriptive” due to the realities of time and space constraints. For example, one comment stated that: “There is very little analysis: there is some discussion about the cultural significance of red/black in Japan but this is very brief indeed” and further mentioned that students provide full descriptions of why things are the way they are and what the connecting factors are (Zhang & Zheng, 2018:1124). According to the study, lecturers also mentioned that students should learn the techniques given in the feedback and be able to connect it with the objectives of the activity, particularly now that feedback is regarded as a potential learning tool (Zhang & Zheng, 2018). One lecturer mentioned that at postgraduate level, providing feedback on form or language accuracy is not as important as giving feedback on coherence and cohesion or the originality of the work. However, feedback on error correction may be important if the

meaning is lost and the reader finds what is written incomprehensible. Moreover, Zhang and Zheng (2018) state that where criticism was a necessity, a different strategy was adopted to avoid confrontational expressions.

Too often, one lecturer would use expressive feedback, such as praise to encourage students even though the writing is poor (Knight et al., 2020). For example, one student failed the first assignment and the written feedback was full of “praises and suggestions for improvements” (Zhang & Zheng, 2018:1125). Although some students may prefer expressive feedback like praises, others may prefer honest criticism as they would like to understand which areas require improvements and how to achieve such improvements. Lastly, the study discusses directives, which are concerned with providing instructions and suggestions. Most students in Zhang and Zheng (2018) interviews mentioned that they were willing to read feedback that is easy to understand and which offers explicit suggestions. Such feedback may be very accommodative because explicit instruction may be adopted with ease and assist a student in becoming an instant learner (Zhang & Zheng, 2018).

In summary, feedback differs and individuals have the liberty to criticise feedback and absorb ‘useful’ information, however, some students think ‘teacherly’ responses can be overwhelming at times. For example, one student in Zhang and Zheng’s (2018:1128) study noted:

So, if there’s something I should do to improve my assignment, I will do it. I’d prefer lecturers to be careful about the language used in their feedback. Sometimes it is vague, not specific enough, maybe sometimes it is complicated to give clear specific feedback, but I need to know how to improve.

Converging towards the idea presented above, some students have less problems with the feedback as a learning tool as Chalmers et al. (2018) mentions, however, there are issues regarding the language usage in the feedback. It suggests that most students find phrases such as ‘you have written too little’, ‘could have done’, or ‘read more’ helpful. Comparing the results emanating from these studies (Chalmers et al., 2018; Zhang & Zheng, 2018; Brooks et al., 2019; Pirhonem, 2017; Price, 2015), it is sensible to conclude that most students prefer combined feedback that features praise and criticism because they would like to know and understand their learning strengths and weaknesses. On the other hand, most lecturers or markers in these studies are

concerned about the way students appear not to take feedback seriously, in particular, the lecturers in Chalmers et al. (2018) study. Some lecturers bring forth multiple feedback strategies and prove to students that their feedback is meaningful and purposeful. This also appears in Chalmers et al. (2018) study where students are given options to choose between a written or a 15-minute face-to-face meeting with the marker. This study maintains that the strength of a productive feedback lies in embracing students' prior strengths. There must be an element of comfort in the feedback and that is perhaps where some element of encouragement or positivity is found (Knight et al., 2020).

### **2.3 Contextual perspectives on feedback**

In South Africa, feedback plays a pivotal role in the learning and teaching of academic writing particularly in second language (L2) contexts and distance learning. South African studies entitled, "Assessment Feedback in Open and Distance Learning: A Case Study of Key Academic, Strategic and Operational Requirements" from an ODeL institution, University of South Africa (Unisa) by Uiseb (2017); "Academic Writing in English Second Language Contexts: Perceptions and Experiences of First Year University Students and Tutors" also conducted at Unisa by Chokoe (2011); "Divergence and the Use of Digital Technology in Learning: Undergraduate Students' Experiences of Email Feedback in a South African University" a contact university study conducted at the University of Kwazulu-Natal by Nnadozie et al. (2020); "Enhancing Student Development Through Support Services In An Open Distance Learning Institution: A Case Study In South Africa" is another Unisa's study conducted by Lumadi (2021); "Effective student feedback as a marker for student success" also conducted in SA context by Cohen and Singh (2020); "The Academic Writing Challenges of Undergraduate Students: A South African Case Study" from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), a contact university, by Pineteh (2014); "Making Connections Through Reflection: Writing and Feedback in an Academic Literacy Programme" by Granville and Dison (2009) at a contact university; "The Importance of Writing and Teaching Writing in the Academy" from SA, Cape Town by Leibowitz (2004); "Challenges of Teaching Academic Writing Skills to Students With

Limited Exposure to English by Banda (2017) from the University of the Western Cape, a contact institution in SA and “We know what to say, we know what to write, but we don't know how: The Challenges of Becoming Academically Literate in a New Linguistic and Socio-Cultural Space” from a contact context by Sibomana (2016) highlights that L2 students often struggle to master academic writing conventions, interpret feedback provided, abilities to research and inadequate reading comprehension. Results from these studies revealed that there are many issues that determine the quality of feedback and how it impacts on the learning of academic writing. Some of these issues are related to the context in which learning takes place, while others are language-related challenges or even institutional. For instance, Sibomama (2016:123) states that “academics and scholars from non-English backgrounds are at a disadvantage: they have to adhere to academic literacy conventions in a language in which they may not be completely proficient”. To add, “academic writing challenges of students in universities of technology are consequences of students’ linguistic and general literacy backgrounds, their attitudes toward academic writing and the privileging of middle-class literacy practices in South African higher education” (Pineteh, 2014:12).

In line with other studies, an ODeL study posits that “as per data from the semi-structured interviews, the focus group interview and document analysis, I observed that the existing system of assessment in ODL fails to satisfy students’ expectations and their development in learning” (Uiseb, 2017:63). Moreover, results in a study conducted at a contact institution concludes that “some Black students come to university with low proficiency in English—the medium of instruction—and that their academic writing skills are inadequate for the demands of higher learning discourse practices” (Banda, 2017:19). Ultimately, the results in many studies conducted in SA regarding feedback have proven that L2 students struggle with academic writing tasks because they do not understand the second language (English), which is the language of instruction in many learning contexts (Balachandran, 2018). Like many other studies discussed in this chapter, the current study is conducted in SA, in an ODeL context and investigates feedback of L2/EAL students. This study is yet to discover through interviews, questionnaires and document analysis schedules the state of feedback in the ENG123 module.

Although South African research focuses on the crucial aspects of contexts such as language, very little has been done on feedback in academic writing. From reading the titles of these studies, one may conclude that feedback has not been intensively researched. However, it must be noted that the above-mentioned studies emphasise that the current writing challenges may be reduced by providing comprehensive feedback that not only focuses on language accuracy, but also focuses on the structures and processes of writing. Although feedback in L2 students has been discussed globally, more research still needs to be conducted to improve feedback in L2/ EAL contexts in South Africa.

Balachandran (2017) conducted a study in a contact university in Sweden and views feedback as a pivotal necessity for L2 writing. The study appreciates the amount of work that has been done in L2 learning and believes that with time, there will be improvements in the way L2 students write. The study further credits scholars, such as Vygotsky who supplies the research community with a plethora of learning theories, such as genre theories and SCT concepts that, in many instances, support and promote feedback in L2 contexts. The international study points out that teacher's "beliefs, knowledge and practices" influence the way they teach writing and provide feedback (Balachandran, 2017:22). "The study observed that there are discrepancies in the beliefs and actual practices of teachers in teaching writing and providing WCF [written corrective feedback] due to the contextual demands (Balachandran, 2017:22)".

Similar to Balachandran's study, the following studies identify the critical role of feedback in a learning cycle by encouraging a clear, purposeful, planned and quality feedback that aims to improve and manage performance. "Corrective Feedback in Writing Essay in the L2 Classrooms" by Xhama (2018) in a contact university in Albania; "Speaking out on Behalf of the Voiceless Learners: Written Corrective Feedback for English Language Learners in Iran" by Nemati et al. (2017), also conducted at a contact institution; "Feedback in Academic writing: Using Feedback to feed-Forward" at a contact institution in Tokyo, Japan by Jones (2011) and "Constructing Quality Feedback to the Students in Distance Learning: Review of the Current Evidence with Reference to the Online Master Degree in Transplantation" conducted in a distance learning institution from the UK by Halawa et al. (2017). The

studies outside SA are keen on written feedback as a reliable teaching tool. Kang and Han (2015, cited in Nemati, 2017:2), “concluded that using WCF can lead to greater grammatical accuracy in L2 writing, but its positive role is mediated by different factors such as learners’ proficiency, the context, and the genre of writing”. This is one of the issues this thesis seeks to discover from the data.

Both global and local studies seem to share similar research aims in that they both seek to express and interrogate the lecturers’ voices and the challenges related to feedback in L2 writing. There are some aspects of commonalities in the way they critique effectiveness and ineffectiveness of using feedback in different contexts, particularly in L2 where students seem to require more support. What is similar is that many studies mention that lecturers’ voices have been missing in the research of feedback to date and this is what inspired this thesis to gather perceptions of lecturers and markers (staff) as the providers of feedback. Secondly, many studies gathered are in favour of direct, explicit and focused feedback so that students do not have to misinterpret feedback. Furthermore, there is a clear emphasis on the fact that markers and lecturers need to constantly review and revise feedback they provide to students. Finally, some studies believe that it is crucial to consider the needs and preferences of students as far as feedback is concerned. To close the gap, this study investigates markers and lecturers’ views of feedback; and gathers students’ perceptions and preferences regarding feedback. This is because not many studies have yet gathered views regarding feedback from lecturers, markers, students and documents from a specific institution of higher learning, particularly in South African context.

#### **2.4 Peer feedback versus teachers’ feedback**

Peer feedback is a type of feedback in which individuals enter into a dialogue to discuss each other’s performance. This is a rare interaction in many ODeL institutions. Many students learn at a distance from the institution; this is the case with UX. In addition, peer feedback includes active students’ involvement in the assessment process to form a collaborative learning process. This is also not usual at UX as students are mostly not exposed to each other more often. They usually form groups on myUX, an online learning platform where students, e-tutors and lecturers share

views on aspects of the module. However, they do not normally share feedback amongst each other, instead they wait for the tutor to share exercises and feedback.

Nguyen's (2019) study adds that peer feedback is mostly used as an educational tool, particularly in academic writing contexts. Teaching contexts, such as face-to-face institutions and schools that encourage peer feedback arguably allow students to continuously interact amongst themselves. The context of the current study is ODeL, which means students learn from a distance and there is a little contact between them, if not at all. Therefore, peer feedback amongst students may not be a possibility unless it is done virtually. To contact universities and schools, peer feedback can give students learning confidence, an opportunity to become responsible and active participants in the learning process, and these are probably some missing aspects in students who learn from ODeL contexts (Araka et al., 2021). Furthermore, Nguyen's (2019) study maintains that some lecturers deny students an opportunity to participate in the assessment procedures. Granting students an opportunity to become assessors does not only benefit them academically, but also strengthens a teacher-learner relationship and a successful collaborative dialogue between them and their lecturers (Andrade et al., 2009). Through successful relationships, students may begin to engage intensely with the feedback they receive from their lecturers. Peer feedback seems to be the reasonable way to reach the required learning altitude.

The use of peer feedback in writing modules is well-justified by other studies. Huisman et al. (2018) at the University of Melbourne, a contact university in Australia, focuses on peer feedback at an undergraduate level, students' roles in peer-feedback and the essay performance after students' involvement. Participants were students from a research-intensive university in the Netherlands who participated in an introductory course on education and child development studies. Out of 136 students, 91 students participated in and completed pre-test and post-test questionnaires. In eight weekly lectures, the course covered topics from two different fields: family pedagogy and educational sciences. Between weeks three and six, students were required to write and submit a draft essay on one of two topics. The peer feedback phase took place in week seven, after which students were given the opportunity to revise their drafts and submit a final version of their essay during the eighth and final week. The central aim of their study was to investigate how students' involvement in assessment procedures

improves their writing. The results indicated that the overall performance between drafts and final essays improved significantly. After receiving feedback from each other, students made improvements accordingly. Students who provided and received feedback shared similar degrees of improvement. This means that as students provided either verbal or written feedback to other peers, they had in turn learned and improved their own academic skills immensely.

Similarly, this study utilises qualitative data collection approaches to understand the experiences of participants regarding feedback in academic writing. On the contrary, students in this study have not done peer feedback because they are distance learning students. The results of this study will informally confirm if the ENG123 lecturers have intentions of introducing peer feedback to ODeL students as this kind of feedback has been linked with improved performance (Noroozi et al., 2020; Yu, 2021). In Huisman's et al. (2018) study, there is no clear evidence on whether peer feedback improves students' academic writing as there are some perceptions in the study which indicate that students improved their academic writing willingly and not because they were involved in a peer feedback session.

To add on peer feedback, seminal contributions have been made by several researchers globally with regard to peer-assessment and self-assessment. Arguably, self and peer-assessment are methods that promote student-centred learning and are significant in helping students become independent and lifelong learners (Huisman et al. 2019). These assessment methods play a role in crafting students in becoming practitioners who are able to reflect critically on their own professional domains – characteristics that are key goals of higher education (Sambell and McDowell, 1997). Yet, lecturers are often hesitant to engage students in self-assessment processes, especially at first-year level (Dewi et al., 2019). However, a qualitative study conducted by Bharuthram (2018) at the University of the Western Cape, a contact university in South Africa, in one English academic literacy module maintains that “to produce graduates who are able to appraise their performance, self-assessment should be embedded early in the student's degree programme and be sustained throughout the degree” (Bharuthram, 2018:2). The study focuses on students who self-graded an assessment task using an assessment rubric. The central aim is to compare students' self-grades with those of the tutor. The results indicated that the

“majority (72.6%) of the students, mostly male and weaker students did not demonstrate good self-assessment skills with student grades ranging from 25% less than the tutor grade to an overestimation of 36 above the tutor grade” (Bharuthram, 2018:2). Notably, the teaching of self-grading supports ownership and leadership in one’s work. Bharuthram (2018:2) adds that it is through “assessment methods, be it tests or examinations that students are allowed to progress from one level to the next”. This may mean that the central focus of an assessment is based on grading and using good grades to progress to the next level.

This study is not concerned with self-grades, but it investigates feedback which in a way forms part an assessment process in academic writing (White, 2017). It is indisputable that some students could not progress in particular modules because feedback provided could not help them achieve the desired grades; and that is what inspired this study to address the following questions as mentioned in Chapter 1:

- What are the perceptions of students on the feedback they receive in the Academic Language and Literacy in English module (ENG123)?
- How do markers and lecturers view the feedback they provide students with in the ENG123 module?
- How do moderators’ reports on marked assignments in ENG123 prepare students to improve their academic writing?

In attempting to address these questions, this study analyses marked scripts, moderation reports, uses online open-ended questionnaires to gather data from students and conducted interviews with lecturers and markers. Many studies that responded to feedback questions used similar instruments (Mag, 2019; Yamalee, 2019; Wahyuningsih, 2020). The results in many studies concluded that to accomplish the desired results in both formative and summative assessments, quality feedback measures must be put in place (Owen, 2016). It is unproductive to discuss feedback and assessment in isolation as they both predict better quality output that offers students chances of advancement in their degree programmes (Owen, 2016). Other literature dedicated to assessment reveals that offering continuous quality assessment to first-year students plays a significant role in student retention (Day et al., 2018). Thomas et al. (2019:398) emphasises that assessment facilitates first-year

students' continuous learning, therefore, "poorly designed assessment can be demotivating and may even cause students to withdraw from [a] university". However, thus far, there is no evidence on whether self-assessment, peer-feedback or written teacher-feedback contributes to student higher-quality learning.

Written teacher-feedback is simply an overall response or comment from the lecturer that aims to offer students the required direction needed to improve a written task (Han and XU, 2020; Hattie and Timperley, 2007). As part of learning, students are expected to complete their writing tasks, it is therefore reasonable that they receive feedback from their lecturers. Any student holds a right to receive a comprehensive response regarding a completed piece of work. A response from a lecturer is evidence that the work has been received and given a sufficient amount of attention. Even though recent feedback methods such as peer, face-to-face and oral feedback are commonly used and seem to be preferred by students (Liu et al., 2021), written teacher feedback irrespective of its disadvantages, continues to claim its place in most researchers' real-life teaching experiences (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). Most studies that explore teacher-feedback commend it for its appropriate teaching of writing particularly EAL studies. According to Hyland (2018), written feedback is highly valued in L2 studies. These studies mostly seek to discover how teachers teach language and writing using a written feedback and emotions associated with it. The written feedback is mainly provided to language structures, text functions, and creative expressions during the essay writing process.

Uiseb (2017) shares similar aims as they both seek to understand perceptions and views around feedback and the improvement required thereof. Uiseb's study's objectives, much like the current study's objectives, sought to investigate how the current feedback will improve students' learning. One of the objectives in Uiseb (2017:14) reads: "To determine whether feedback on the assignments enhances the teaching-learning process in ODL", and relates to this study as it similar to objective 3 of this study that reads, 'to explore how moderators' reports on assignment 2 and marked assignments in ENG123 foster quality assurance and feedback to prepare students for the improved academic writing'. The objectives in this thesis were formulated to investigate the written teacher-feedback, its relevancy and the value it carries in preparing students for the required academic writing skills. The study

presumes that written teacher-feedback is highly valued, however on its own, it may not be helpful in enhancing student writing or learning in general. The study further mentioned that tutors need to explicitly communicate grading criteria for each writing task (Uiseb, 2017:176). In addition, Uiseb's study emphasised that there should be transparency and equity when assessing students' writing in ODeL. Tutors who teach writing to students need to be wary of how they practice assessment, more so in an ODeL environment where students are distant from the learning space. In addition, due to the realities of distance learning, time and the EAL context, feedback alone may not hypothetically produce the required performance (Araka et al., 2021).

Sopina and McNeill (2015) add that feedback in students' assessment is not new to ODeL, however, its effectiveness in institutions of higher learning is questioned as there is no clear evidence whether feedback improves students' performance or not. On the contrary, Gottipati et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative study at the Singapore Management University which argues that feedback is significant in improving student performance, teaching and learning. The study proposes a conceptual framework for student feedback analysis that provides a reference point for the community of stakeholders to consider how qualitative and quantitative feedback can help in making informed decisions with respect to teaching, learning and curriculum improvements (Gottipati et al., 2017:7).

In summary, it is important to acknowledge that a lecturer's feedback helps students to take note of their strengths and weaknesses and make appropriate changes thereof (Vygotsky, 1978; Liu and Hansen, 2002; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006; Yu and Lee, 2015). Through this review, this study revealed that explicit feedback is actually unilateral feedback or rather feedback that focuses on language and structural aspects of writing. Thus, most studies indicated that feedback focuses on language accuracies and organisation, for instance, the structure of an introduction and the development of sentences (Hyland, 2018; Cohen and Singh, 2020; Lumadi, 2021). Subsequently, students in distance-learning contexts may demand sufficient feedback, perhaps more than just language and structure as compared to a traditional environment. Students in distance learning require much more support and detailed comments, because there is a potential risk that these students may feel excluded (Paterson et al., 2020).

## **2.5 The relationship between feedback and academic writing**

In Chapter 1, reference was made to the problems students encounter at first-year level, particularly when expected to develop critical academic writing skills. Chapter 1 pointed out the relationship between feedback and academic writing by pin-pointing issues that prevent students from succeeding in developing academic writing skills. It examined the literature on the teaching of academic writing in order to understand how feedback makes a positive impact on the development of academic writing.

Several studies written on academic writing explored the essential relationship between constructive feedback and academic writing. A useful reference point to understanding the relationship between feedback and academic writing is provided by Jones (2011) in a study conducted in contact university in Asia entitled, "Feedback in Academic Writing: Using Feedback to Feed-Forward", which argues that feedback is a key element of both teaching and learning in academic writing. The study points out that feedback emphasises the significance of having constant dialogues around the subject area to keep students motivated to read and perfect their work amicably (Jones, 2011). Jones' study highlights that a feed-forward needs to be provided to students prior to the completion of their essays, and this is arguably a better way for assisting students to carry out their task, to prevent them from failing before they could attempt the task. According to Jones (2011), students were given a feed-forward to follow, then feedback was given after their attempts. However, a major challenge in the Jones' (2011) study is that students had tendencies of not responding to the final feedback they were provided with, but instead they treated it as a finished product. Ultimately, this was not a constructive method of accumulating writing skills. Jones (2011) attempts to encourage students to read and respond to the final draft of teacher feedback and carry forward ideas for improvement to the next essay and future writing endeavours. The study adds to the scope of the current study in that, it focuses on first-year students' writing and that it offers a point of departure that covers literature in the area of feedback. Jones' study reminds us that students are more concerned about the outcomes, such as marks and appraisal whereas the lecturers' goals seems to be more on the quality of feedback and its usability (Jones, 2011).

Akteruzzaman and Chowdhury (2015) prioritise the importance of feedback in an academic space by mentioning from the onset that feedback aims to improve students academically; to help them achieve success on a larger scale through rectifying errors, commonly in large English classes. Akteruzzaman and Chowdhury (2015) make this assertion in a study conducted in Bangladesh which focuses on transforming ineffective feedback of students into effective feedback. The study focuses on two English language classes, ENG091 and ENG101 at Brac University, a contact university in Bangladesh in which students lack reasoning and speaking skills in general. It points out that it is highly concerning that students in most English classes are not able to reason accordingly due to limited critical reasoning skills. Akteruzzaman and Chowdhury's (2015) study provide a background of students, which seems to be the reason behind their language, reasoning and speaking incompetency.

The study explained that the background of the students revolves around learning the English language, not acquiring particular skills, but learning from the basics to the very fundamental English skills. Furthermore, the study mentioned that these are EAL students and their journey to learning English has always been filled with the mentality of getting university entry marks rather than accumulating the knowledge in the subject area. In most instances, these students learn to pass rather than learn to gather knowledge on the subject area. As a result, when they enter into an academic environment, their struggles are exposed; they have no speaking, writing, reading, listening and critical thinking skills in English. According to the study, getting these students to speak in English has been the greatest challenge. Some students did not want to speak in English at all, others were too shy to communicate in English, whereas others deemed it unnecessary to use English in real-life situations, let alone to write in English. Therefore, to teach these students speaking skills, students were requested to provide feedback to their fellows verbally. It was indicated that in most instances, the feedback was ineffective as students were not able to communicate efficiently. However, in the challenge section, the study emphasised that students had, in most instances, taken comments from their peers personally and as a result they never improved the areas they were rectified on. Moreover, the study indicated that students always expected positive feedback from others, whereas others took their

peers feedback for granted as they thought their peers were not qualified professionals. Akteruzzaman and Chowdhury's (2015) study signifies a potential in peer feedback and suggests that peer feedback be regarded as a crucial assessment tool.

Akteruzzaman and Chowdhury (2015) introduce anonymous feedback and validates it. Anonymous peer-feedback worked immensely as students were able to reflect on the nameless feedback without feeling undermined or disrespected as these were common feelings (Akteruzzaman & Chowdhury, 2015). Nonetheless, the study argues that there are common downfalls in both peer feedbacks as students could not do away with the fact that they were receiving feedback from their peers, however challenges appeared to be greater in verbal peer feedback than in anonymous feedback (Akteruzzaman & Chowdhury, 2015). It is also noted that similar contexts may experience peer feedback differently due to participants' responses and personalities. The study concludes by mentioning that although students were not eager to speak in front of their peers, their confidence in speaking improved which impacted positively on their academic confidence. The study experimented different peer-feedback strategies which are part of feedback. Akteruzzaman and Chowdhury's (2015) study admits that peer feedback is one of the ways to develop students' academic confidence, improve their learning, reasoning, critical thinking skills. Akteruzzaman and Chowdhury's (2015) study links with this study as they both investigate the quality of feedback from the perspectives of those receiving and providing it. The differences are also observed in the fact that their study focused on improving students speaking and critical thinking skills. This study does not take this particular direction; however, it encourages lecturers/markers to provide quality feedback and for students to continue making use of feedback.

Other studies claim that feedback must have a powerful influence on the student learning experience. Granville and Dison (2009) posit that the idealised conception of feedback should be mirrored in student comprehension and usage. This is a significant point as Hattie and Timperley (2007) also emphasise that feedback needs to provide information specifically relating to the task or process of learning that fills a gap between what is understood and what is aimed to be understood. This means that students have a responsibility to adopt a position after receiving feedback; a

position of allowing themselves time to analyse, critique and comprehend comments provided (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Positioning and taking a stance correspondingly in academic writing is vital (Gillett et al., 2009). In Gillett's et al. (2009) terms, assuming position in academic writing includes studying one's opinion repeatedly, analysing and discussing it, putting more effort and focus on it so that when the writing process begins, there is a natural flow. In conjunction with the above-mentioned claim, Granville and Dison (2009) add that feedback is not only about refining one's work, but it requires active student engagement between the activities they are given and the learning goals. Both Gillett's et al. (2007) and Granville and Dison's (2009) studies argue that feedback is a process that requires students' thorough engagement, particularly in academic writing where everything has to be done consistently. Taking into consideration, the above-mentioned views, this study assumes that feedback in academic writing needs to be internalised, processed and unpacked. A general highlight to be made thus far, after reviewing studies from different contexts, is that students do not always find feedback helpful and they often take it lightly.

According to the feedback intervention theory by Kluger and DeNise (1996), feedback is not always effective in improving student performance in writing. It has been argued that feedback is an "effective tool for changing student behaviour . . . feedback had a negative effect on subsequent performance. That is, individuals receiving performance feedback do more poorly on subsequent tasks than individuals who received no feedback" (Kluger & DeNise, 1996:2). On the contrary, Pineteh (2014) argues that students do not do well in academic writing because they do not receive regular quality feedback on academic papers. Balachandran (2017:19) similarly reveals that "teachers observed that time and workload are the most challenging aspects in providing written constructive feedback" for more than 33 students in one class. Assessing huge student numbers seems to be both common and problematic in Academic Writing modules. The module under study also has huge student numbers and that maybe the contributing factor in the failure rates the module has mentioned in Chapter 1.

Nyamupangedengu's (2017) study, which was conducted at University of the Witwatersrand, a contact institution in SA, explores the challenges associated with the lack of success in South African classrooms in general. Nyamupangedengu's study

entitled, “Investigating factors that impact the success of students in a Higher Education classroom: a case study” is motivated by previous student protests regarding unaffordable fee hikes. However, in his study he argues that the challenges faced go beyond fee hikes. Universities fail to put proper transformational measures in place that support huge numbers of students. The current thesis similarly investigates a module with huge student numbers, therefore data will indicate if the issue of numbers impacts the way feedback is provided or processed in academic writing. Scott et al. (2007) interestingly adds that the main educational challenge in these circumstances is not the diversity of the student body but rather the failure by institutions and individuals to tailor the standard teaching and learning processes to the realities of the majority of the current student body. The researcher understands the challenges universities face, however, argues that students’ huge numbers with proper feedback practices in place can be attainable.

Studies argue that if lecturers and markers prioritise student support practices, such as providing constructive feedback, the challenges in institutions of higher learning would be reduced (Nyamupangedengu, 2017; Scott et al., 2007). Previous studies also echo this call as Granville and Dison (2009) demonstrate how feedback is necessary for the reinforcement of acquiring writing skills and learning in general, particularly in EAL contexts and contexts in which student numbers are beyond expectations. However, like any other learning necessities, there are challenges associated with its delivery. Challenges in academic spaces may be addressed if the objectives of learning are to be met. For instance, a study conducted in Malaysia by David et al. (2015:118) indicates how the issue of large classes has been addressed:

Chong, Tan and Mardziah (2011) revealed in their study that a growing number of Malaysian students are unable to produce coherent utterances or written text in English. Institutions of higher learning in Malaysia who are the main receptors of these students are facing the problem of helping these students improve their English language proficiency to a level required for successful academic pursuits (Chan and Yap, 2010). This is an alarming situation which needs to be addressed, as Malaysia is a developing nation aspiring to be a key player in the global business world. In view of the above problems, Malaysian public universities have been conducting English language courses to help improve the standard of English among their undergraduates.

The underlying argument of this study is that most challenges in academic writing contexts are not greater than what a collective academic staff can achieve; thus, one

of the reasons why markers and lecturers form the central focus of this study. They do not only act as participants but as success bearers of quality feedback. Brooks (2013) adds that EAL students' problems in academic contexts prevail because institutions themselves are underprepared for post-secondary education. After the apartheid era (post 1994), education took a different shift and institutions are not able to cope with the current student deviations (Nemupangedengu, 2017). This is because whenever problems are to be identified and attended to, findings are that students are underprepared for reading and writing standards that exist in the context of higher learning. For example, critical reading skills such as note-taking, complex engagement with the text, analysing, evaluating interpreting and academic writing skills, such as the use of a formal tone, good research praxis, appropriate format, the use of third person perspective, clear focus on the topic (Rule & Land, 2017; Spaul, 2013).

Most studies diagnose the underpreparedness of students (Paideya & Dhunbath, 2018; Nemupangedengu, 2017; Monnapula-Mapesela, 2015), but little has been done in the area to prepare students for high standards of higher learning. Thus, Brooks (2013) argues that following thorough quality procedures in grading assignments and allowing students adequate time to reflect on feedback may prepare them for the required standards. Brooks (2013) is of the view that setting feedback goals would assist lecturers and markers to empower students and help them to embrace their writing strengths and reflect on their weaknesses. The fact that this thesis does not focus on students who speak English as a first additional language alone, but rather as an additional language, creates a balance for the diverse populace aimed at empowering students and preparing lecturers and markers. This makes them aware of the kinds of feedback they distribute and its impact on the student learning experience in ENG123. It must be noted that the module is an English home language module that caters for a diverse range of students ranging from home language, students who speak English as a first, second, third, additional and foreign language respectively. For this reason, this study investigates EAL students as students speak English at various levels depending on their backgrounds.

Other scholars deliberate about the benefits of academic writing in first-year students. Studies by Paxton and Frith (2013) and Pineteh (2014) correctly posit that academic writing demands that are required in an academic context are appropriate and provide

a fundamental foundation for the benefit of first-year students. In short, the literature supporting the importance of academic writing maintains that lecturers who teach academic writing at first-year level need to ensure that students receive appropriate feedback and most importantly, feedback which addresses their struggles effectively to avoid unnecessary failure rates (Leibowitz et al., 2009).

Maher (2011) explored how high failure rates in South African tertiary institutions have led to a need for intervention. The study emphasised that academic performance is said to be strongly influenced by one's academic writing ability. Therefore, the study aimed at determining the impact academic writing ability had on academic performance. It also aimed at establishing which measure - the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or Wechsler Individual Achievement Test II (WIAT-II) - is a more accurate measure of academic writing. In the case of this thesis, Providing Constructive Feedback Rubric (Table 4.5) was introduced to measure the quality of feedback provided in ENG123 student assignments. Both the researcher and Mayer (2011) argue that there should be a tool in place to measure academic success. A sample of 125 first-year Psychology students wrote argumentative essays that were analysed quantitatively using the IELTS and WIAT-II scoring system. The results revealed that IELTS and WIAT-II are both adequate measures of academic writing. However, the results showed that academic writing ability is not a major predictor of and contributor towards academic performance. Further investigation is required in order to determine other factors that contribute to one's academic performance and this thesis also investigate issues that are along the lines of improved performance. The study added that there are aspects of academic literacy such as reading and speaking, as well as previous preparedness or intelligence that may need to be considered as determining factors of academic success. The results in this thesis are yet to discover if feedback is the missing factor or practice that can help in teaching writing skills, particularly to EAL first-year students who seem to be struggling with writing in the English language.

Recent studies by Kuyyogsuy (2019) from the Graduate School of Human Sciences, Assumption University in Thailand and Banda (2017) from the University of the Western Cape posit that academic writing is important in an EAL context and challenges are undertaken. These studies indicate how important it is to teach

students what they probably missed in their secondary schooling, such as using English to write academic texts, read and communicate effectively.

At most South African universities, including UX, EAL students seem to be the highest number of registered students (Kelly-Laubscher and Van der Merwe, 2014; Tshotsho et al., 2015; Lamula, 2017; Songxaba & Sincuba, 2019). Therefore, it is arguably undeniable that most SA universities cater for diverse populations as far as language and cultural backgrounds are concerned. Thus, the creation of a variety of assessments have proven to be challenging due to the high number of students who have English as their additional language. When student numbers are high, it is challenging to find efficient ways of assessing students and to provide effective feedback that would enrich their academic writing success (Nyamupangedengu, 2017). These considerable student numbers are usually found in first-year modules that cater for diverse disciplines, such as ENG123 and other English modules.

## **2.6 Perspectives on advantages and disadvantages of feedback**

Feedback is regarded a fundamental component of all performances (DeNise, 2018). Feedback may be described as a management system of individuals work and information about their performance that is provided for work refinement reasons. In most cases, feedback is considered a dominant teaching tool, particularly in contexts of English language learning (Hyland, 2019). Researchers, both local (South African) and international, argue that written feedback is more advantageous in the EAL or English as a Foreign language (EFL) contexts. For instance, Saeed et al. (2018) use a case study approach at a contact university at the University of Malaya in Malaysia to investigate the engagement of nine EFL learners in online peer written feedback on writing in a Facebook group. The study focuses on issues of writing addressed in a peer feedback and the learners' perceptions of the feedback in the Facebook group. The study is conducted amongst nine EFL Arab learners beyond the university writing course. As an extension to enhance their writing in a Facebook group, the activities of peer feedback reported in this study were monitored by the course instructor for three months. The learners' interactional feedback exchanges, text revisions, and written reflections were qualitatively analysed, and the patterns of interaction were quantified. Saeed et al. (2018) findings revealed that learners perceive the Facebook group as

an interactive learning environment that facilitates their peer feedback beyond the university context.

Similarly, a mixed methods study presented by Kio (2015) at the University of Saint Joseph, a contact university in China, investigated the effectiveness of using social networking sites for feedback provision. Kio's (2015) results showed that various aspects of the feedback mechanisms have been manifested on Facebook, especially in terms of timeliness, motivation, consistency and clarity of feedback. The current study was conducted in an ODeL context; therefore, the researcher concurs with Saeed et al. (2018) and Kio (2015) on the use of social networking sites for feedback provision. Perhaps the distance between students and lecturers and students and the university may be narrowed by using technologies available to provide feedback in various activities. The study assumed that social media is a platform that students understand and spent most of the time on, thus the study argued that teachers in the current teaching century are urged to encourage the use of social media in various learning contexts. As Kio (2015) mentions, with the development of technology globally, it has become very convenient for lecturers and students to exchange written feedback using social networking mobiles, such as computers, tablets and phones. However, some researchers and theorists have contradictory views on feedback as they believe that it causes greater damage on learning:

The Feedback Intervention Theory (FIT) proposed by Kluger and DeNisi (1996) attempts to explain the ineffectiveness of feedback in improving students' performance and success. DeNisi (2018:2) maintains that FIT resulted from a "meta-analysis of over 600 effect sizes" that dealt with the relationship between feedback and the attained performance. The study indicates that students who received feedback performed poorly afterwards as opposed to those who had not received any feedback (DeNisi, 2018).

A series of other studies further indicate that feedback can be unhelpful, confusing and even discouraging to students (Bijami et al., 2013; Eva et al., 2018). It is possible that feedback, if not handled and planned properly, may impact on performance negatively. Thus, this thesis seeks to investigate quality assurance on feedback by reviewing students marked assignments and moderation reports. The results in this thesis will confirm the results that emerged from studies that believe to be

effectiveness and those that believe it is ineffective. This will be proven through analysis of the results from participants and documents. Likewise, Watling and Lingard (2019) maintain that the power of feedback will always manifest in the work of the students when provided properly. Proper feedback should feel like a conversation between the feedback producer and the receiver. What is important is for the individuals to understand their roles in feedback.

Like Watling and Lingard's (2019) study, this study does not only explore the positive results that feedback presents, but also the weaknesses that feedback may have on the students' success. The researcher explores various opinions and perceptions of a specific group of people that conform to the similar norms as far as writing and feedback are concerned. Furthermore, opinions differ and some students may reveal the negative side of feedback, whilst others may differ and embrace the positivity that feedback comes with. For instance, Balachandran (2018) indicates that EAL students await error feedback and show a clear preference and a strong expectation. The study concludes that students regard error feedback as an essential contributor to their language success.

The ineffectiveness and effectiveness of feedback has also been explored in China by Wang (2017) who mentions that many studies in China argue about the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of corrective feedback in second language students' writing. According to the study, some researchers do not believe that feedback can improve L2 students' writing. On the other hand, some understand the effectiveness of feedback in improving only the students' grammatical inaccuracies in their writing. Wang (2017) utilised a quasi-experimental design which examined the extent to which corrective feedback improves students' writing accuracy and students' expectations or preferences of corrective feedback. The study states that one class was assigned to the control group which only received comments on content of their writing. On the other hand, two groups were assigned to each of the experimental groups which received indirect or direct corrective feedback. For data collection, Wang included student texts or error analysis, treatments, examination tests and questionnaires.

According to Wang (2017:74), the results did not reveal "statistically significant group differences between the two correct feedback groups". However, at the end, students

believed that corrective feedback did improve their grammatical accuracy in writing and believed that feedback will continue to benefit them immensely. Even so, there is a contradiction of belief between the students and their teachers. Teachers may be confused in terms of which area has improved. Some teachers expect to see massive changes in students' performance, such as structure, organisation besides grammar. Some teachers would like to see the students' writing improve instantly rather than gradually without putting any effort on the student's work. This study can attest to the notion that grammar is not the only dominating factor that delay students' success in academic writing, it is among other major factors, such as students' poor social and educational backgrounds.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter argued that lecturers and students' learning and practices are influenced by their contextual factors such as background and language as recognised by previous research. Amongst other factors, it has been observed that the nature of feedback, assessment and grading may also be informed by the educational context. In most instances, students were requested to participate in peer feedback because of the high student numbers that a particular module has. Some lecturers used peer feedback as a way to reduce the gaps that have been created by high student numbers, such as lecturers or markers not succeeding in providing sufficient feedback for the existing numbers of students. One study indicated that feedback may be ineffective especially if it is not well-planned. If student numbers are high and time for assessing their writing is limited, this may arguably compromise the quality of feedback given to students. Other studies indicated that feedback can be demotivating to students if the meaning gets lost in interpretation. This study, after engaging with several studies, acknowledges that there are discrepancies in the way feedback is provided. This is because most studies explained the challenges lecturers have in most teaching contexts that hinder the provision of quality feedback.

A follow-up of this study could focus on examining the effectiveness of feedback using methods that focus mainly on markers' and lecturers' practices regarding feedback, particularly in broader population or sample scales. In addition, challenges

experienced in different contexts, such as student numbers could be examined, rather than simply listing them as challenges. Future research could also focus on the challenges faced by markers and lecturers in the work place, such as workloads and lack of skills. Chapter 3 discusses the study's theoretical framework. This thesis is guided by SCT which aligns with what many South African and international studies discussed in the different studies reviewed in this chapter. Chapter 3 is an expansion of Chapter 2 in that it discusses how the objectives of this study were addressed using the teaching and learning model which is the Model of Feedback to Enhance Learning by Hattie and Timperley (2007).

## CHAPTER 3

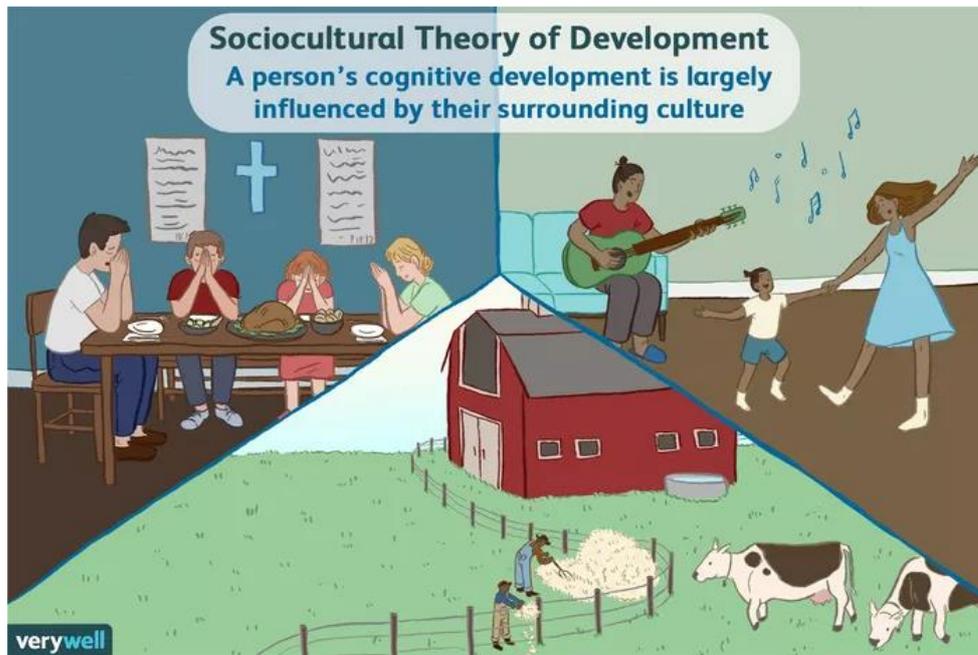
### The role of theory practices in feedback

*Learners need endless feedback more than they need endless teaching.*

- Grant Wiggins

#### 3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, the literature highlighted the significance of using feedback as a way to succeed in the teaching and learning of academic writing. Chapter 2 also emphasised the significant role that the geographical backgrounds of individuals play in the production of academic writing knowledge. The literature revealed the extent to which students' social, economic, language and educational backgrounds tend to be disregarded in the entire feedback and assessment processes; as a consequence, students may be set up for failure if historical backgrounds that affect the way they learn, in particular second language students, continue to be disregarded (Darling-Hammond, 2020). Although the fundamental focus of this study was on the feedback that students receive in one Academic Writing module (ENG123), it was of paramount importance to commence the task of feeding back from the underlying basis of what these students bring to the fore. Many studies in the literature review argue that feedback is a vital means of supporting, encouraging, improving student learning, enhancing writing performance and most importantly, consolidating learning and writing (Lam, 2016); particularly in a context which a learner is not familiar with. Below, Cherry (2019: n.p.) uses SCT by Vygotsky (1978) to illustrate how a person's surroundings facilitate their learning process:



**Figure 3.1:** Sociocultural theory of development

Figure 3.1 is an illustration of how people/things are socialised into a particular context that they either grew up in or moved to. This illustration is a mimic of how SCT explains or predicts an individual/animal's cognitive or behavioural development. The diagram shows three situations or pictures that demonstrate how people or animals behave in different situation or cultures after constantly being socialised. As it is illustrated, the upper left corner shows people seated and praying. Everyone who is part of the group joined the prayer and their behaviour shows that they are aware of what they need to do when it is prayer time. In the upper right corner, people are in a melodious mood; for example, one is playing a guitar while others are dancing. This is an indication that contexts differ, and people do things according to what is required in a situation. At times, it is a matter of following what natives of that context are doing to fit in both socially and culturally. To explain this in the current study, the researcher uses SCT which emanates from the work of the psychologist Lev Vygotsky, who, in many of his studies, seem to believe that parents, peers, and the culture at large are responsible for developing higher-order functions (Holzman, 2016). This thesis focuses on first year students' learning of academic writing and the role feedback plays to ensure that writing skills are acquired in a higher learning institution, a context that is new to them. This thesis uses SCT because students are from different learning contexts; most

students are fresh out of high school. Moreover, first-year students are from diverse language, cultural and social backgrounds as explained in Chapter 1. These students apply to a university to learn, interact and exchange knowledge with other fellows, all from diverse backgrounds. In Vygotsky's terms, learning manifests after an individual has interacted with other people (Zimmerman, 2013). Once the interaction has happened, the information is then integrated on the individual level (Tononi, 2013). In addition, Vygotsky (1978) alleged that every culture is different, and cultures can vary intensely. Vygotsky's SCT suggests that both the course and content of intellectual development are not as universal like it was suggested by the theorist Piaget (Scott & Palincsar, 2013), who believed that learning is universal (Huang, 2021), but emphasised that course and content development happens through intense interaction with natives of a specific context. This study uses three main questions to investigate underlying perceptions related to feedback that students, markers and lecturers might have. The next section focuses on Vygotsky's concepts which explains how the learning process is facilitated through socialisation. These concepts are related to the main research questions of this study and this will also be shown as the section proceeds.

All three questions addressed perceptions regarding the current feedback. Question 1 is as follows: (a) What are the perceptions of students on the feedback they receive in the Academic Language and Literacy in English module (ENG123)? This question will gather views from students using an online open-ended questionnaire. According to SCT, the researcher will be able to understand students' ZPDs from the first question. The second question reads (b) How do markers and lecturers view the feedback they provide students with in the ENG123 module? The second question seeks to gather views from marker and lecturers using an email interview schedule. According to Vygotsky's SCT and the context of this study, the second question attempts to gather views from the More Knowledgeable Others (MKO). The same applies to question 3 that reads, (c) How do moderators' reports on marked assignments in ENG123 prepare students to improve their academic writing? This question reflects on the quality of feedback that is currently provided to prepare students for improved academic writing tasks.

## **3.2 SCT concepts and feedback-related research questions**

The application of SCT to feedback is by no means unique to the proposed study. Vygotsky has been used in studies that focus on generic law of cultural development (Shabani et al., 2010). Kozulin (1990:4) indicates that:

Vygotsky's primary objective was to identify specifically human aspects of behaviour and cognition via genetic analysis methodology. He focused on several different domains of development: human evolution (phylogenesis), development of human cultures (sociocultural history), individual development (ontogenesis) and development which occurs during the course of a learning session or activity or very rapid change in one psychological function (microgenesis).

One major reason for adopting SCT as a framework for this study is the fact that it emphasises that development cannot be separated from its social and cultural context (Vygotsky, 1962). The following subsection will show how this notion shaped question of this study.

### **3.2.1 The Zone of Proximal Development**

The main component of SCT is a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and it applies to a child who is developing cognitively in a second language context (Vygotsky, 1962). Students' ZPDs are addressed by various researchers that investigate feedback (Jingxin & Razali, 2020; Falhasiri & Hasiri, 2020). Question 1 seeks to understand students' perceptions of feedback in this study. Questions from the online open-ended evaluation questionnaires are summarised in the following manner in the current study:

- 1) Has the feedback you have been given in assignment 1 guided you to improve your results in assignment 2?
- 2) Is the feedback provided by the marker on your assignment 1 or 2 useful in improving your writing? Discuss fully.
- 3) What do you think can be done by your markers or lecturers to improve the quality of feedback given to you?

These questions will gather data that will give the reader insights regarding the opinions of students and vastly explore how students feel about feedback they receive in the module under study. Studies discussed in the literature review have shown how

students viewed feedback and both negative and positive effects of feedback have been captured. Data in this study will either confirm or add to the previous results gathered or may even differ from previous perceptions of feedback by students. However, it is crucial that students be included in this studies that concern their performance and their line of learning such as this one. The ZPD in this regard will be of importance in shaping how data from students is to be analysed in that it looks at "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978:86). When analysing data, in particular students' data, the researcher will take into consideration where students are coming from in terms learning how to write and how they are expected to write in their current learning context. With that said, Vygotsky considers that when a student is in the ZPD for a particular task, providing the appropriate assistance will provide the student with enough of a "boost" to achieve the task (Vygotsky, 1978:86).

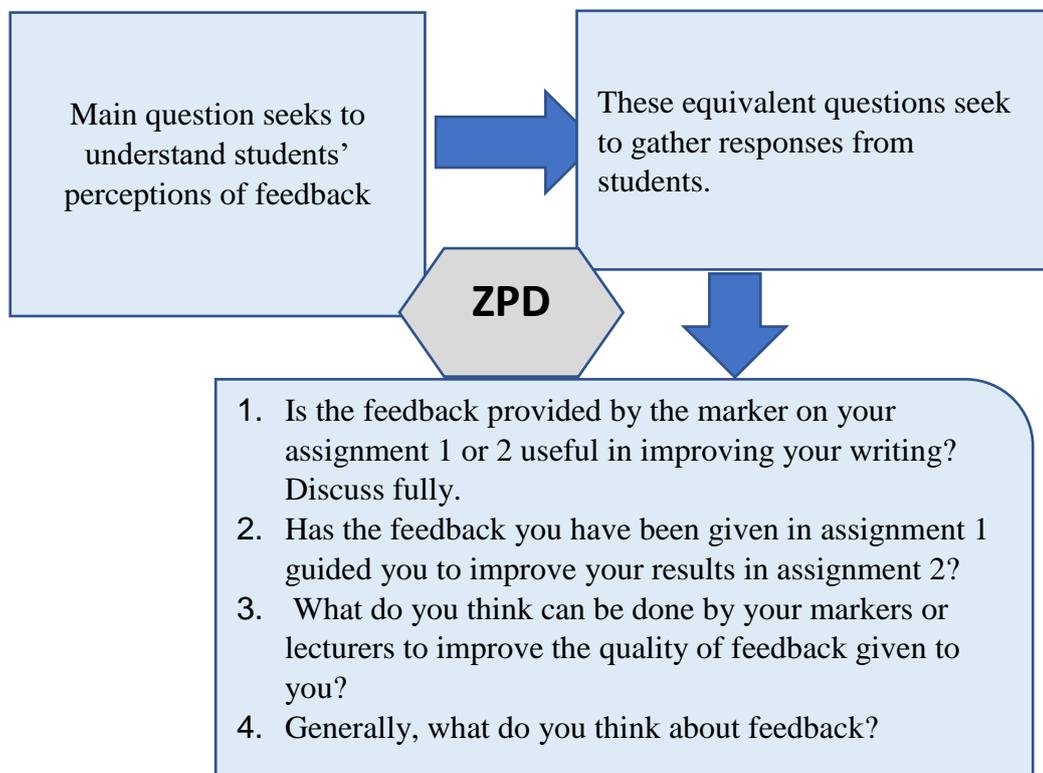
According Vygotsky (1978:87), to assist a student to move through the ZPD, it is crucial that lecturers take into consideration the following three components which are important in the learning process:

- The presence of someone with knowledge and skills beyond that of the learner (MKO).
- Social interactions with a skilful tutor that allow the learner to observe and practice their skills.
- Scaffolding, or supportive activities provided by the educator, or more competent peer, to support the student as he or she is led through the ZPD.

When analysing students' data, the researcher will search for responses that address some of three learning processes shared above. The researcher will seek to understand if students learn with the presence of someone with more knowledge that is able to address their ZPDs. Secondly, the researcher will determine if there are social interactions between students and lecturers or markers and lastly, if there are any supporting activities that aim to help students learn how to write academically. Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD was found suitable for the students' questions as it also

addresses humanity and behaviours that a specific group encompasses. Moreover, its relevancy is as a result of it being an advocate of social interaction within a specific group that a child grows up in. According to Vygotsky (1978), children use ‘tools of intellectual adaptation’ which allows them to use their basic mental abilities in a way that is adaptive to the culture in which they live. What also qualifies the ZPD to analyse students’ data is its focus on the social, cultural and historical artefacts which play a pivotal role in the children’s cognitive development as well as their potential performance (Pathan et al., 2018; Vygotsky, 1978).

The figure below illustrates a strong connection between students’ questions and how they are to be analysed using SCT’s ZPD:

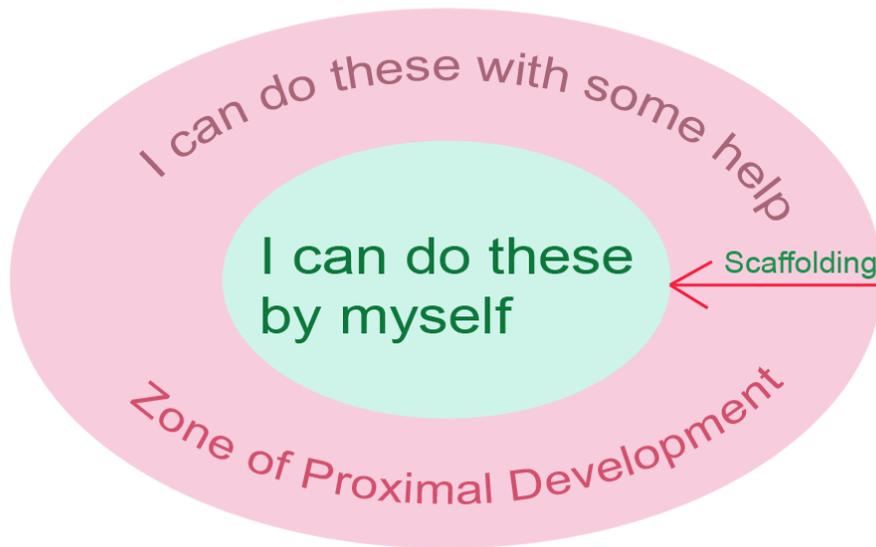


**Figure 3.2:** ZPD and the study’s research questions

To analyse data from these questions, the researcher will bear in mind what the ZPD encompasses. “The ZPD is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Pathan et al., 2018:233). The implication of the ZPD in addressing the above-mentioned questions is that there is a difference in the

development of the child when he/she is in the company of more knowledgeable people as opposed to the child who is learning independently. The child learns actively and promptly in the company of a mentor or a teacher. These are some of the aspects the researcher is expecting to investigate in the responses by students. According to Vygotsky (1978), children should be taught in the ZPD, which occurs when they can almost perform a task, but not quite on their own without assistance. This is the case with the students who are registered in the ENG123 module. They come to UX with some knowledge of English which may be an additional language (EAL) or a foreign language (EFL) to many, however, many students may require assistance or support when it comes to acquiring writing skills in an ODeL context (Lumadi, 2021). Being an EAL or EFL student can be difficult, particularly “in the current era of increased online learning, online assessments, and online marking this may be rather significant” (Cohen and Singh, 2020:156). For Makoe and Nsamba (2019:135), “the lack of student support accounts for high dropout rates in ODeL”. Thus, some form of assistance is necessary as “writing in a second language poses many problems for the majority of English as a foreign language, EFL, learners” (Shukri, 2014). Therefore, an application of the ZPD in analysing the data for students’ questions will help the researcher to investigate how students were assisted in the process of acquiring writing skills. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the researcher is intellectualising the ZPD as it represents the stage of development of the individual with help from expert to where she is able to take over responsibility for carrying out a task with the support of minimal self (Wertsch, 1979; 2008). To add, Medlin (n.d.) uses the following figure to explain how the ZPD operates in a second language context:

## Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development



**Figure 3.3:** Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development

This concept of cognitive development in this study supports the fact that most students in the module under study are second language speakers of English who, due to some challenges related to language learning, may require some form of continuous support from lecturers. Support in the second language learning contexts aids students with various language learning skills as EAL/EFL learners are "commonly stereotyped as poor writers of English" (Shukri, 2014:190). According to the ZPD, a continuous scaffolding is necessary until student is able to work independently (Azi, 2020). Through scaffolding, learners are enabled to develop from their "actual" individual levels into the "potential level" (Azi, 2020:108). According to Medlin (n.d.), the diagram in Figure 3.3 above is a good example of how second language students can be supported in the context of the university. The diagram shows two concepts of cognitive development: the ZPD and scaffolding. The ZPD is defined by Margolis (2020) as 'I can do it myself' after vigorous support from an adult, while scaffolding which is one of the Vygotsky's concepts, says 'I can do this with some help (Azi, 2020). The researcher will study how students' responses speak to the ZPD and scaffolding.

Tillema and Smith (2000) utilised SCT to analyse data in a study that investigates feedback. For Tillema and Smith (2000), utilising a SCT was appropriate for the study

as it emphasises that learning is a matter of experimenting and experiencing things prior to entering a new environment. Feedback then becomes vital once students start the process of schooling in a new context (Suhendi, 2018). Students must be supported in any new educational sphere (Suhendi, 2018). It is also essential for lecturers to begin supporting students from the lowest grades and continue doing so as learning is not regarded as a once-off process (Thurlings, 2013); it is a continuous process. These are sorts of issues the research questions of this study sought to address using SCT and its concepts namely; the ZDP, scaffolding and the MKO. According to Tillema and Smith (2000), SCT contributed in suggesting new ways of prioritising feedback, such as providing motivating feedback and acknowledging students' diverse cultural, teaching and learning backgrounds. Moreover, SCT guided the study when it came to dealing with diversities and brainstorming strategies that aimed to improve feedback in the learning context (Tillema & Smith, 2000).

### **3.2.2 The More Knowledgeable Other**

Another concept of SCT of cognitive development is the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). The MKO speaks to the second research question of the study which reads: How do markers and lecturers view the feedback they provide to students in the ENG123 module? This question is about the markers' views and opinions on feedback they plan and provide. According to Abtahi (2017:35), the Vygotskian perspective on the MKO assumes that "we learn in the presence of other people: others who have a better knowledge of certain historical and cultural practices, more knowledgeable-others". The MKO clearly speaks about someone who has a greater knowledge of a particular task, process, or concept as compared to a learner and this is what the second question of the study seeks to discover from the lecturers and markers. The MKO is in most cases self-explanatory; even though at times people mistaken it for referring to someone older (Abtahi, 2014). This is not usually the case because even a child's peers or an adult's children may be the individuals with more knowledge or experience (Abtahi, 2014). An illustration of the MKO that is adapted from Abtahi (2017) is shown in Figure 3.4 below.



**Figure 3.4:** Learning with the MKO by Abtahi (2017:35)

Figure 3.4 shows an image that is presented through a Vygotskian perspective which assumes that individuals learn in the presence of other individuals, particularly those who have better knowledge and understanding of certain historical and cultural practices. According to Abtahi (2017:35), Vygotsky did not just claim that:

children learn and develop in the process of engaging in interaction with others; he made this notion of learning with others explicit, in connection with the ZPD. He described the ZPD as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (1978: 86).

The current study includes lecturers and markers in its data collection process as they are viewed as the MKOs in this context of learning writing. The MKO will help the researcher to examine ways in which lecturers and markers consider essential when providing feedback while in a position of the MKO. The position of the MKO allows the more knowledgeable individual to provide special education to students, particularly when students are in a development stage of academic literacy; they are new and, in a position to develop literacy skills that help them to accumulate knowledge in various disciplines. The results from lecturers and markers’ data will help the researcher to determine the position that lecturers and markers occupy in the space of feedback.

Learning how to write and read in an academic space provides students with an opportunity to learn, not only in language modules but other modules that are important in their lines of careers (Araka et al., 2021). Therefore, the researcher will use the MKO as a framework to analyse responses of the following questions: 1) What kind of feedback should markers give students on assignment 2? 2) how do lecturers prepare external markers for quality feedback in assignment marking? 3) do lecturers think the current feedback given by markers is helpful to students' writing? If so, why? 4) do lecturers and markers have any document or feedback rubric that is distributed to the markers prior to marking? If not, what are they using as a guideline to provide feedback? This is just to mention a few questions that helped the researcher to gather data from lecturers and markers. Thus, the ultimate goal is to ensure that data stays relevant to the purpose of this study, which is to discover the kinds of feedback that is provided and its impact on students' learning of academic writing in an English module. Other known Vygotskian concepts are scaffolding and mediation.

### **3.2.3 Scaffolding**

Other studies, such as the one conducted by Ellis (2000), maintains that SCT components, such as scaffolding, do not only help lecturers teach with ease, but further promotes interaction amongst students themselves. Scaffolding has been a promising technique used in teaching and learning (Gonulal & Loewen, 2018:1). The same cannot be said about the ZPD as the application of the ZPD in practice is more problematic (Shayer, 2002) and Vygotsky fails to provide sufficient information about the effective use of ZPD in DE contexts. The researcher's understanding of scaffolding was that it emphasises a support system which is given to the child to meet his cognitive potential until the child is ready to learn independently and that is what makes scaffolding valuable for the third research question of the study. Question 3 reads: 'How do moderators' reports on marked assignments in ENG123 assist students in improving their academic writing?' data for this question came from two documents: moderation reports and marked scripts. To analyse data, the researcher took into cognisance what critics, such as Lantolf and Thorne (2006), said about scaffolding. According to Lantolf and Thorne (2006), because of the separation of the notion of scaffolding from social interaction and cultural tools, the use of scaffolding

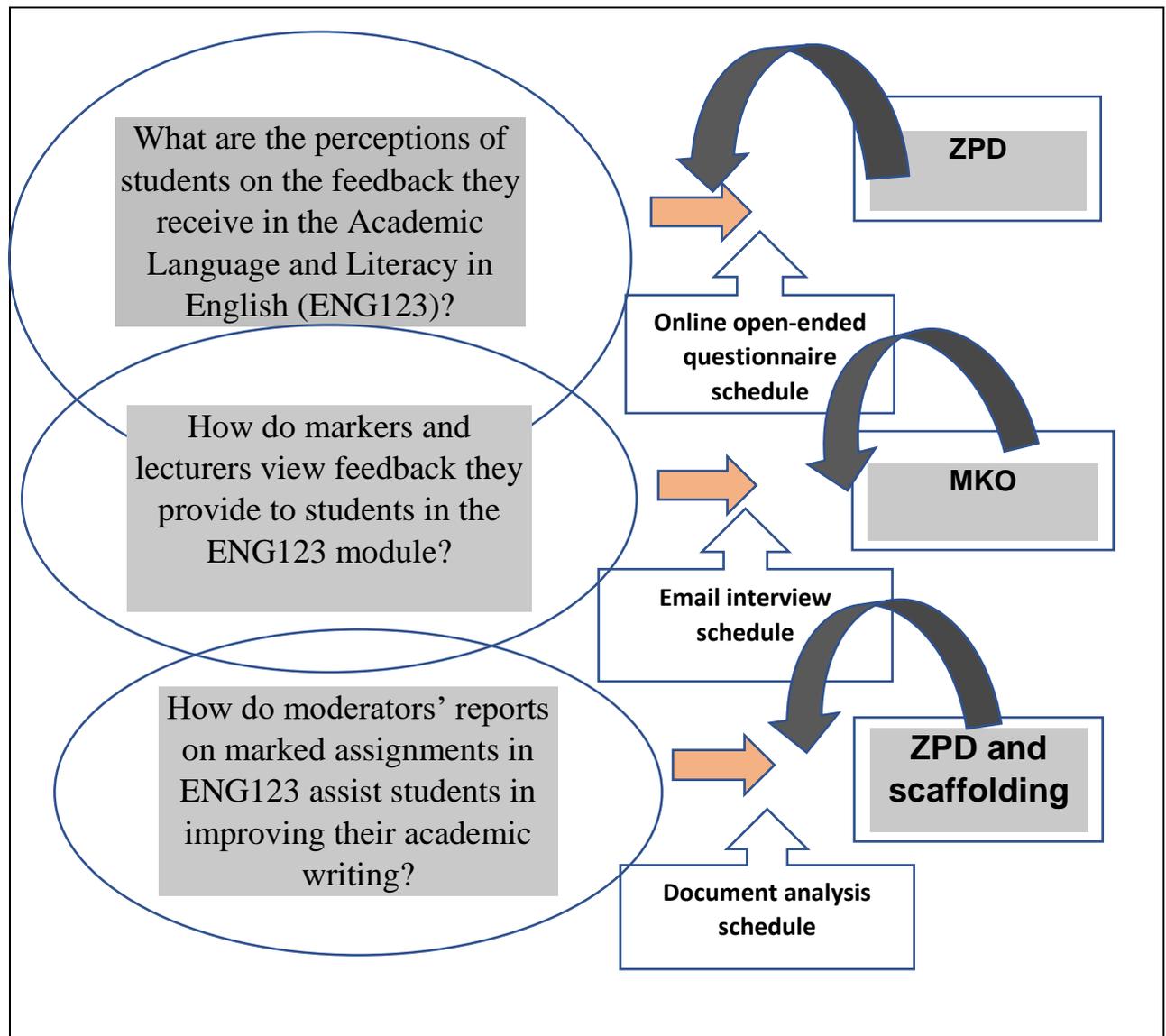
techniques by a teacher does not necessarily mean that some ZPD-related process is being activated. Briefly, simply assisting a novice in the performance of a task does not necessarily provide conditions for the internalization of mediational means during inter-psychological interaction (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Thus, “scaffolding is a pedagogically useful construct that implies graduated assistance by expert and an active role for the learner but does not consider the fundamental SCT notion that —developmentally fecund social interaction involves the internalization of cultural tools” (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006:275).

### **3.2.4 Mediation**

For Lantolf and Thorne (2006), mediation is one of the important concepts of SCT. In Vygotsky’s terms, higher forms of mental activity are mediated by culturally constructed auxiliary means (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). This means that language which is “one of the most important culturally constructed psychological tools, is central to mediation. Vygotsky defined mediation as the setting up of connections in the brain from outside” (Vygotsky, 1997:55, cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2006:60). According Lantolf and Thorne (2006), getting a better understanding of this involves understanding the way Vygotsky conceived of the interaction between humans and their environment. “Instead of acting directly in the social and physical world, human contact with the world is indirect, mediated by physical or psychological tools, the most important of the latter being language” (Wertsch, 2007:178). This Vygotskian concept is relevant to the current study because for Lantolf and Thorne (2006:60), “writing activity can function as a mediational tool to control thinking because of the reversibility of the linguistic sign”. According to Vygotsky (1997:62), “linguistic tools are directed outward to influence or regulate the mental or social activity of other individuals, but they are also inwardly directed with the goal of self-regulation”. Therefore, mediation is seen in SCT as the process of using culturally-constructed means (such as language) to regulate one’s own or others’ social and mental activity (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). However, Vygotsky’s mediation is criticised by Mecer (2008:92) who points to a lack of empirical research into how the dialogue and discourse of social interaction shape the development of individual thinking despite agreement among researchers

on “the importance of the quality of student-teacher dialogue on the development of students’ understanding of science and other curriculum contexts”.

To show the connection between the research questions and SCT concepts, the researcher uses the diagram below. Moreover, the illustration serves three purposes 1) clarifies the key research questions, 2) show research questions and theories relations and 3) illustrates the data the questions aim to generate:



**Figure 3.5:** Connection between the study’s research questions and Vygotsky’s sociocultural concepts

Figure 3.5 above is an indication that Vygotsky’s concepts; the ZPD, the MKO and scaffolding had a fundamental influence on how data in the current study was conducted and analysed.

For Silvermann (2000:10), “any scientific finding is usually to be assessed in relation to the theoretical perspective from which it derives and to which it may contribute”. This is because the data collected on the field is not certainly right or wrong, perhaps it is more or less useful according to the research questions. In Silvermann’s (2000:10) words: “Research questions are inevitably theoretically informed. So, we do need social theories to help us to address even quite basic issues in social research”.

This study supports work of Silvermann (2000) and Rengasamy (2016:120) and concurs that “social science is an academic discipline focused on the study of the social life of individuals and human groups”. This study mainly focuses on the students, markers and lecturers’ ways of doing. In a broader sense, their ways of doing mean the way these individuals conduct learning, teach, receive teaching and impart knowledge to one another and this is basically what a field of humanities, such as anthropology, archaeology, jurisprudence, psychology, history, and linguistics entail when it comes to teaching and learning (Rengasamy, 2016). However, the present study is mainly focused on the field of linguistics which is how students learn under the supervision of markers and lecturers. The selected SCT concepts, such as the ZPD, MKO and scaffolding are pillars for social science research such as the present study; as explained and shown in the figure above, almost all the research questions and objectives of the study speak connect to a specific concepts Vygotsky’s theory. SCT concepts do not only underpin the research questions, but also inform the research design utilised in this study.

Case study design was opted for as a research design as the study wishes to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in “its natural real-life context” (Crowe et al., 2011:2). This is crucial for this study as the researcher sought to understand practice (teaching), perspectives on activity (provision of feedback) and context (ODeL). In short, the researcher sought to critically study pedagogic practices that employed in the module ENG123 that accommodate students from diverse language and social backgrounds. It is for this reason that SCT and its concepts were selected as the relevant frameworks to the study. It will be made clear in the data analysis section, Chapter 5, that students are from a diverse populace.

The main research questions of these study are a mirror to the following objectives:

- To examine how students perceive the feedback they receive from markers in the ENG123 module;
- to investigate how markers view the feedback they provide students' with in their academic writing; and,
- to explore how moderators' reports on marked assignments in ENG123 prepare students for improved academic writing.

Like the research questions, the objectives are supported by the most concepts from Vygotsky's theory; namely, the MKO, mediation, ZPD and scaffolding. Some objectives are supported by more than one SCT concept. Thus, the last objective, 'to explore how moderators' reports on marked assignments in ENG123 prepare students for improved academic writing,' that reflect on quality and the strength of the feedback is supported by the MKO, mediation, ZPD and scaffolding. This is because this objective focuses on the planning side of feedback, how staff utilise feedback in the module to teach writing, encourage markers to provide a particular kind of feedback and how students can interpret the feedback, so it benefits them. The researcher finds scaffolding useful in engaging with the subject at hand as scaffolding is "a tool of assistance" and can be used in the teaching of writing (Azi, 2020:105). Briefly, the last objective will bring the following data to this study: the kinds of feedback lecturers and markers provide students with, how lecturers prepare external markers for quality feedback in assignment marking, if the current feedback addresses students' needs, if there is any rubric in place to be followed, if large students' numbers compromise or determine the kind of feedback that should be given, if giving detailed would address challenges students have in the ENG123 module and recommendations thereof. These kinds of questions are shared in Appendix B.

The first and second objectives that read, to 'examine how students perceive the feedback they receive from markers in the ENG123 module' and 'to investigate how markers view the feedback they provide students' with in their academic writing' respectively align with the ZPD and the MKO. As mentioned, the ZPD has a great "impact on developing and enhancing the different learning processes" (Azi, 2020:106), while with the MKO, a good teacher or more-knowledgeable-other, is able to recognise a student's ZPD and help them develop beyond it. Once the student has learnt, an adult can gradually withdraw as the student can be able to conduct tasks or even perform better with little or no support from the adult (Azi, 2020). The data

analysis section (Chapter 5) will illustrate how these concepts shaped data collected from students, markers, lecturers and documents. The next section discusses the relationship between SCT and model of feedback.

### **3.3. The model of feedback and sociocultural theory: A collaborative relationship between a model and a theory**

This study sets itself apart from other studies by merging a theory that highlights the significance of considering individuals' cultural aspects in the learning of new writing norms with a model that emphasises the vital role of feedback as a teaching tool. The relationship between the two will be explored later in this chapter. Merging these two frameworks in the study is an innovative way to investigate and review feedback as many studies tend to base themselves on constructivist theories, such as behaviourism and constructivism (Richardson, 1996; Weegar & Pacis, 2012).

Skinner and Watson...study how learning is affected by changes in the environment and sought to prove that behavior could be predicted and controlled . . . while Piaget and Vygotsky were strong proponents of constructivism which viewed learning as a search for meaning and described elements that helped predict what students understand at different stages of development (Rummel, 2008 cited in Weegar & Pacis, 2012:2).

The purpose and employment of the SCT concepts and model of feedback in the current study is completely different as the researcher sought to use these frameworks to investigate the impact of feedback in academic writing and to allow individuals share their own knowledge based on their own experiences.

Typically, in the feedback models as Weaver (2006) highlights, little has been said about the role of students in feedback. Thus, the conversation regarding feedback is mostly on what lecturers can do to improve the feedback, rather than what can be done to strengthen the way students view, interpret and use feedback (Boud, 2000; Nicol & MacFarlane – Dick, 2006; Yorke, 2003). Despite criticism regarding feedback models, there seemed to be an efficacy that this model brought which ultimately changed perspectives.

The table below illustrates the purpose of the model of feedback:

<b>PURPOSE</b>	To reduce discrepancies between current understanding/performance and the desired understanding/performance
<b>THE DISCREPANCY CAN BE REDUCED BY:</b>	<u>LEARNER:</u> Increased effort and use of more effective strategies. Abandoning, blurring, or lowering the goals <u>TEACHER:</u> Providing appropriate challenging and specific goals. Assisting students in reaching them through effective learning strategies and feedback
<b>EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK ANSWERS THREE QUESTIONS:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Where am I going? (The goals) Feed Up</li> <li>2. How am I doing? Feed Back</li> <li>3. Where to next? Feed Forward</li> </ol>
<b>EACH FEEDBACK QUESTION WORKS AT FOUR LEVELS:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. TASK LEVEL: How well tasks are understood/performed.</li> <li>2. PROCESS LEVEL: The main process needed to understand/perform task.</li> <li>3. SELF-REGULATION LEVEL: Self-monitoring, directing, and regulating of actions.</li> <li>4. SELF-LEVEL: Personal evaluation and affect (usually positive) about the learner.</li> </ol>

**Table 3.1:** The Model of Feedback adapted from Hattie and Timperley (2007:87)

Table 3.1 above reflects how feedback operates in teaching and learning contexts. It indicates that feedback works by ensuring that what is not understood in the beginning is at the end better understood. Moreover, it depicts that feedback is simply a way of reinforcing what is to be learnt to increase the performance rate. Feedback aims at reducing misunderstandings and directs students to the desired understanding. These desires may happen if two individuals participate in the feedback, as in the case of this study; the students, the lecturers and markers. The students' role is to put more effort in absorbing and processing the provided feedback, whereas the lecturers and markers' roles are to direct the student to the desired learning goals and explicitly

share the goals with the students, such as where they are going? How will they get there? And, where to next? At the end of the feedback process, goals should be accomplished, and performance should indicate growth.

Molly and Boud (2013) confirm that models that measure feedback in teaching and learning are just conceptual models and draw on theoretical principles rather than empirical data to support the influence of feedback on teaching, learning or performance. It further states that such models ignore the internal capacities of the learner. It is argued that feedback should be structured and measured in a different way and not follow models. Briefly, the dominant way in which feedback is framed in education is not conducive. The handbook is supported by an article by Butler and Winne (1995) who maintain that literature on models of feedback and performance in general focuses on enhancing the teacher's capacity to deliver high quality information at appropriate junctures (Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006) rather than focusing on the role of the student in feedback.

What has been said about models is that students should be made aware of the significant role of feedback and be provided with frequent opportunities to engage in productive, dialogic exchanges with multiple others. In that way, students will see feedback as a tool for 'them' rather than as a destabilizing or debilitating act (Henderson et al., 2005) 'done to them' by those in authority. One side of the spectrum is that students are neglected in the planning and practice of feedback. On the other hand, there is a plethora of studies that magnify the significant role the model plays in feedback production: Research that encouraged this study to adopt a model of feedback as one of the study's critical frameworks was conducted by Hardavella et al. (2017). The study posits that models of feedback generally identify an action plan or areas that need improvement. Models of feedback maintain that the

facilitator needs to check whether the learner wants and is ready for feedback. Then create a safe environment first by highlighting positives and as a result, this prevents defensiveness. The main aim of model of feedback is to use open questions and give the learner the opportunity to think and reflect critically (Hardavella et al., 2017:4).

According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), effective feedback addresses three questions: Where am I going? How am I going? And where to next? The first question asks where am I going? This question indicates that a goal needs to be set so that

one knows where they are heading to. The second question reads *where to next?* This question provides an answer to the previous question, which means that an individual has reached their initial destination which then leads them to the second question or destination, in this case is *where to next?* The final question introduces *How am I going?* This explains the way forward in terms of sharing the information about the preceding performance. It explains what was expected by 'feeding back'.

### *Where am I going?*

Hattie and Timperley (2007) describe the *Where am I going?* question as one that addresses the lecturers' journey in providing students with the information regarding their learning goals that eventually connect them to the desired performance. The desired goals at this stage means understanding the tasks and the type of performance that needs to be achieved. The judgement of the goal attainment may mean students receiving an approval from lecturers or completing and passing the given tasks.

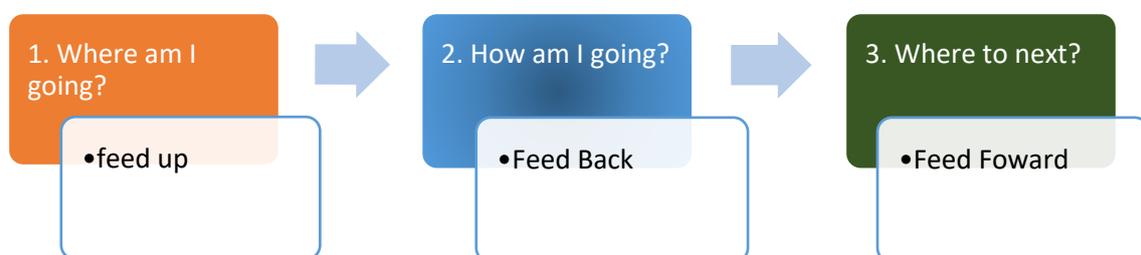
The *Where am I going?* question functions as an introductory question for feedback provision process and functions alongside other questions, such as *How am I going?* And *where to next?* Different from other questions, it addresses the feeding up process where the lecturers provide students with the information and wait for students to utilise it to the maximum. When addressing this question, Hattie and Timperley (2007) emphasise the importance of commitment and overcoming challenges in dealing with feedback. When using these terms, Hattie and Timperley (2007) mention that lecturers and students need to be committed to the goals and embrace challenges. "When goals have [an] appropriate challenge and teachers and students are committed to these goals, a clearer understanding of the criteria for success is likely to be shared" (Clarke, Timperley & Hattie, 2003; Timperley & Parr, 2005 cited in Hattie & Timperley, 2007:88).

### *How am I going?*

*How am I going?* is about the teacher providing information to students related to performance goals prior to performance. This type of question in feedback is often termed a feed-back dimension. Hattie and Timperley (2007) argue that feedback is effective especially when it features some elements of progress and/or information on how to proceed going forward. Students often appreciate feedback that inspires positive performance going forward. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), the *how am I going?* feedback question helps individuals to reflect on their expectations and start paving their way towards achieving their goals.

### *Where to next?*

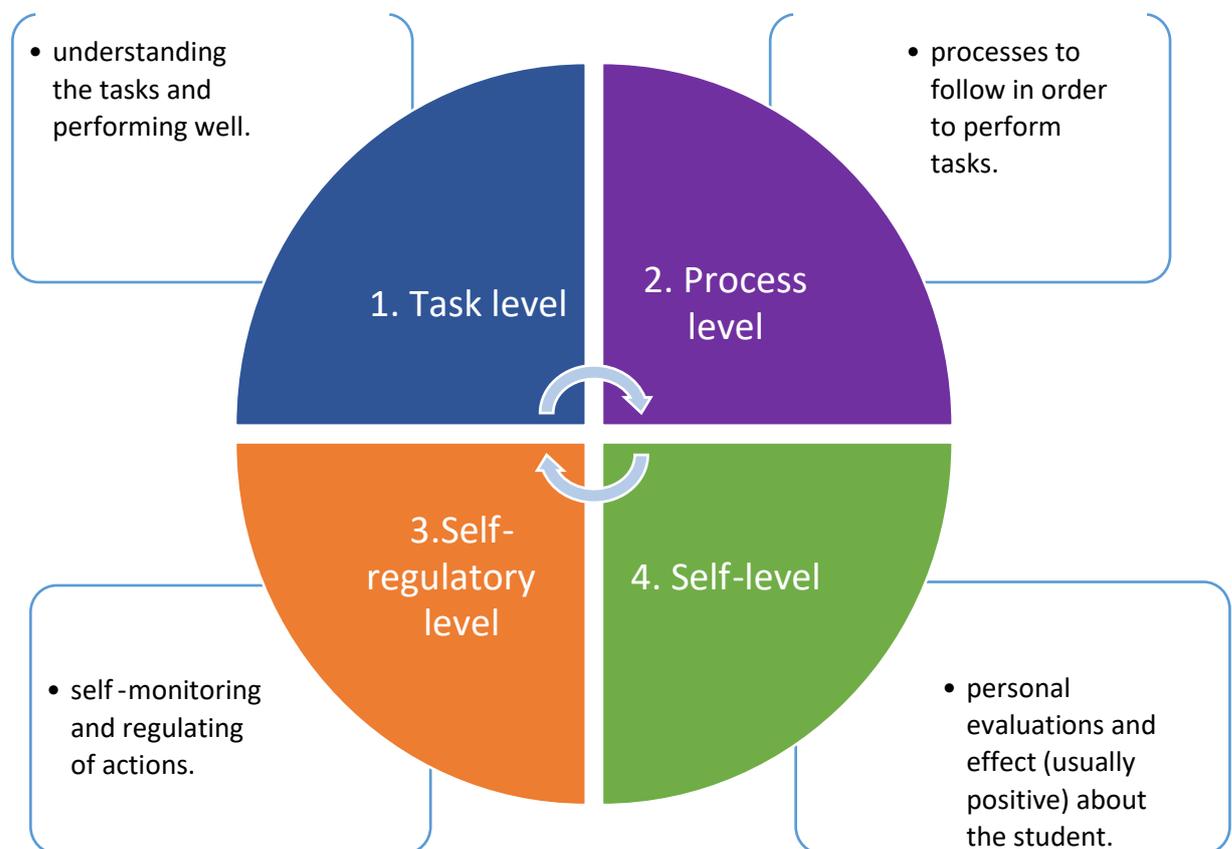
According to Hattie and Timperley (2007:90), the question of *Where am I going?* addresses the sequence of roles that both the teacher and the learner play in the teaching and learning environment. Too often, this question commences with more information given to students to decode. More tasks are completed at this stage to ensure that learning takes place. Therefore, feedback addresses this question by presenting a greater environment for learning. This may include dealing with greater challenges, finding solutions, applying working processes to start completing tasks at hand and gathering more information on what to understand and how. This question addresses a 'feedforward' dimension and emphasises that feedforward is essential for learning. Feedback questions are sequentially illustrated below:



**Figure 3.6:** The three questions asked in the Model of Feedback (adapted from Hattie & Timperley, 2007:87)

The model of feedback outlined in Figure 3.6 depicts three questions that are attached to each feedback system. Feedback systems are purposeful with regards to feedback

that should be discussed and understood by both the assessor and the student. Thereafter, both should have a desire to work towards achieving set goals for greater results. This model indicates that there are levels that may assist in making the set goals achievable. It emphasises that feedback commences from a task level, process level, then escalates to a self-regulation level and self-level. The feed up, feedback, and feed forward are conceptualised as an overpowering force in feedback provision levels. Hattie and Timperley (2007) introduce a model that indicates how feedback operates from different levels:



**Figure 3.7:** The four levels of Model of feedback (adapted from Hattie & Timperley, 2007:91) and the concepts from sociocultural theory

According to Figure 3.7, at task level, information from various sources are collected and more information is required for the learning experience. For the model of feedback, the collected information may help an individual to verify if the information is correct or incorrect. At this level, directions and guidance are necessary and

feedback at this stage is called 'corrective feedback'. The MKO is necessary at task level for providing guidance and direction because they have a better understanding of the task than the student (Shabani, 2010). The completion of the end product takes place at the process level. At the process level, the appropriate information is collected to ensure that the product is well developed. It is significant to mention that before the student reaches the end of process level, the MKO might have stepped back to allow the student to complete the task alone and show their understanding after receiving assistance as noted by the ZPD. This is because the process level requires more processing of information and understanding, whereas the self-regulation level, information is provided to ensure that better understanding of the task takes place. Both process level and self-regulatory level are supported by Vygotsky's points of imitation and mediation as these concepts are concerned about internalisation and processing of knowledge (Alsaadi & Mahdi, 2013).

Self-monitoring and directing take place in the self-regulatory level. This kind of feedback may play a major role in self-belief (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Students need this feedback to grow academically and attain greater learning achievements. Self-monitoring and self-regulatory level are in line with Vygotsky's scaffolding, which is the structure that is put in place to support the student's development in order to prepare them for the last level (Alsaadi & Mahdi, 2013). The last level, which is the self-level, requires students to do self-introspection and teaches students independence. To a certain extent, this level resonates with Vygotsky's ZPD as the student introspects; they are able to calculate what they could not achieve alone and are able to achieve it independently after learning from the MKO (Shabani, 2010). They evaluate and give themselves appraisals. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), self-level is generally not helpful for students' knowledge development. The problem may be that they were never exposed to various assessment trainings, as a result, they may not know how to assess themselves appropriately.

It would be interesting to learn, through data collected in this study, how four levels of feedback are applied in the current study to minimise challenges that L2 students usually encounter in ODeL contexts, such as major weaknesses in mastering the Academic Writing conventions and struggling with the interpretation of feedback (Sibomana, 2016), as mentioned in Chapter 2.

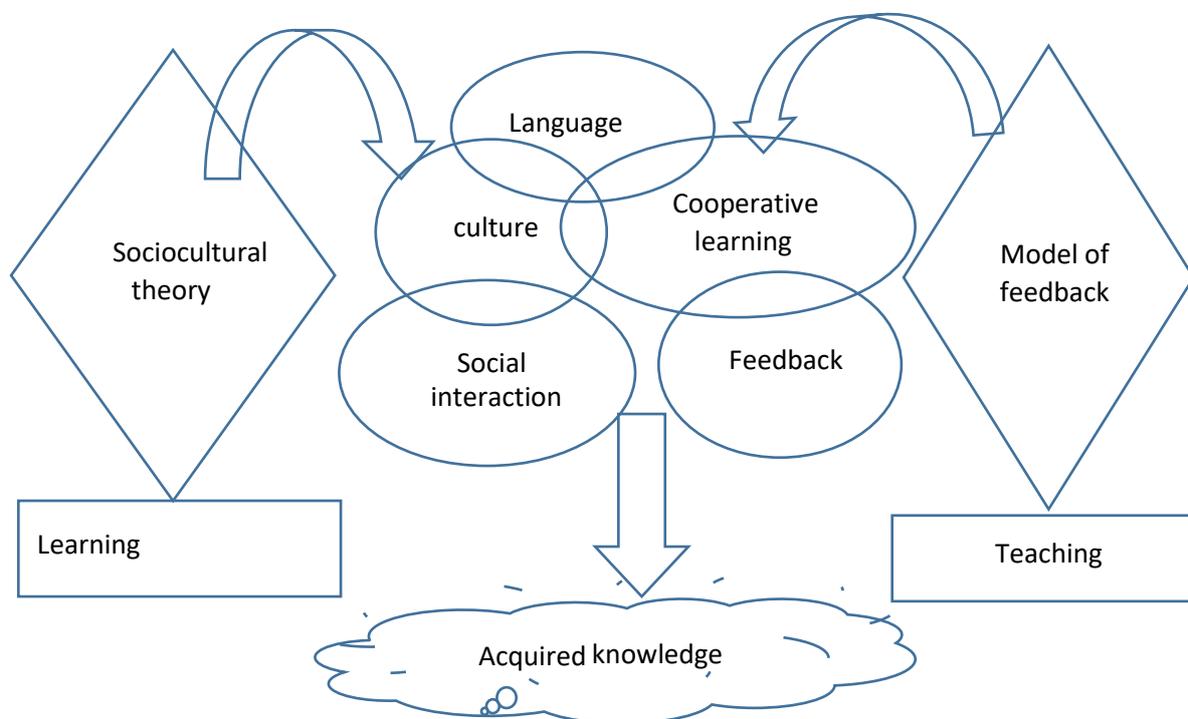
This study adopted the model of feedback to understand how feedback is implemented for the improvement of the students' writing in ODeL context. The three research questions presented in this study, which are mentioned at the beginning of this chapter investigates the perceptions of the lecturers, markers and students with regards to feedback. The main goal is to understand the process of feedback provision to enhance quality feedback for the students' benefit.

### **3.4 Integrating the model of feedback with students' sociocultural backgrounds**

It has been mentioned in the literature review that most South African universities including UX, have been predominantly registering EAL students over the years (Songxaba & Sincuba, 2019; Lamula, 2017; Tshotsho et al., 2015; Kelly-Laubscher & Van der Merwe, 2014). Most EAL students attended schools in rural areas that taught little writing or reading skills and have a number of struggles when it comes to learning in English. Akteruzzaman and Chowdhury (2015) mention that the background of EAL students revolves around learning the English language, not acquisition. It is shown in Chapter 2 that the study investigates how ineffective feedback could be improved to best support EAL and EFL students. This is an indication that challenges associated with learning in English are not only in South Africa. The model of feedback combined with SCT in this study provides struggling students, regardless of their backgrounds, with an opportunity to receive learning assistance. First, the model depicts that generally, students are dissatisfied with the feedback they receive (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), particularly a written feedback and feedback must be improved. Hattie and Timperley (2007) posit that lecturers can also assist by clarifying goals, enhancing commitment or increased effort to reaching them through feedback. In the context of this study, the researcher thought that if social and educational backgrounds of students are less considered, the model of feedback alone cannot address students' academic writing challenges. It is for this reason that SCT was considered an integral part of this study and significantly spoke to students' vast backgrounds. SCT generally believes that students' psychological development is

influenced by social interactions and culturally organised activities they are involved in on a regular basis (Vygotsky, 1978).

Moreover, the theory was found to be relevant for this study because of its educational assessment goals which are: (a) to identify abilities that are in the process of developing, and (b) an attempt to discover what the learner can do independently in future, which means that this theory believes in dynamic assessment. According to Scott and Palincsar (2013), dynamic assessment is a term utilised to characterise measures taken for the improvement of a learner score. The fact that it is also concerned with the students' performance makes it relate closely to the model of feedback as Scott and Palincsar (2013:5) indicate that SCT is "concerned about how a learner performs after receiving assistance". As a result, this study adopted model of feedback and SCT as the study believed that these two successfully accommodate each other as they both resonate productive outcomes. They are both rooted in a cognitive development perspective that sees culture as a basis of learning development. Figure 3.8 below depicts the relationship between SCT and the Model Feedback:



**Figure 3.8:** The relationship between the sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and the Model of Feedback to Enhance Learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)

This study intentionally united two disparate paradigms: The model of feedback by Hattie and Timperley (2007) and SCT by Vygotsky (1978) to predict the outcomes if the provision of feedback is to be guided by both the theory and the model. The fundamental premise is that this theory or this model alone could be inadequate in explaining students' differentiated views on feedback and experiences in the way they acquire academic writing skills. Therefore, Figure 3.8 outlines the relatedness between SCT and model of feedback and the crucial purpose these paradigms serve in helping students internalise feedback practices.

The approach of using two or more different theories to try to explain the phenomenon, is not new. It has been used by other researchers (see Rao, 2018) in second language acquisition studies who used SCT and the socio-educational model of second-language learning by Gardner (1988) to investigate the learning theories that impact on English teaching and learning. Andrade (2017) shares an intervention for learner success in online English language courses using a course design model based on distance education theory, learning theory, language acquisition theory and related pedagogical approaches. This study could have opted for using one theory alone, however, the importance of also having a model could not be overlooked. Andrade (2017:2) supports this assertion by indicating that "the model is hypothesized to support not only the development of linguistic proficiency, but also the attainment of broader educational outcomes." The significance of approaching learning from different dimensions is its focus on how to learn and how to facilitate learning rather than simply on what to learn. In other words, models of learning help students to acquire approaches to learning rather than just regurgitating the content without analysing or comprehending it. On the other hand, theories drive teaching, including ideas about how students learn, what they should learn, and how teachers can enable student learning (Wilson & Peterson, 2006).

In response to why this study chose to combine SCT with a learning model (a model of feedback to enhance learning) is that students are undoubtedly from vast social, educational and cultural backgrounds and as a result, a study that seeks to understand what their learning experiences are to acknowledge these students' diversities. This study opted to use SCT and model of feedback to elaborate on the impact that culture and feedback have in acquiring academic writing as a culture that

is practiced in one module, ENG123, at UX. SCT is crucial in the current exploration as it focused on what learners learn, how they learn, where they learn and the solution to their learning problems. In addition, it was also appropriate for justifying challenges that emerge in a second language acquisition context and suggest positive solutions (Ellis, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978; Williams & Burden, 1997).

Moreover, SCT argues that learning is deeply grounded in social and cultural interaction. Badenhorst and Kapp (2013:474) note that students' transitions into higher education involve crossing "a considerable sociocultural, academic and linguistic chasm". They argue that the main challenges facing such students have less to do with cognitive aspects of learning per se than with sociocultural issues of identity and culture. On the other hand, the Model of feedback sees learning as a process of repeatedly revising a phenomenon that is culturally correct.

In contrast, the constructivist theory by Vygotsky (1978) states that learning occurs in response to behaviourism. However, both constructivism and SCT concepts, when applied to learning, are concerned with the activities that an individual goes through in order to learn. However, the constructivist theory suggests that one should attend to the learning and mental representations of the individual while SCT proves that learning is an act of enculturation. Many learning situations attempt to accommodate both theories, but this thesis acknowledges the theories' differences and that learning occurs differently as individuals also differ. As a result, the thesis seeks to be inclusive by involving students, lecturers and markers in the study to understand them from an individual level rather assuming that one group may be a representative of another group. This is another reason that validates the triangulation of data collection in this study.

The study utilised online evaluation questions, an interview schedule and document analysis because they facilitate an effective usage of the theoretical framework (Fusch et al., 2018). According to Fusch et al. (2018), triangulation of research instruments in a qualitative study means revisiting social data that belongs to the same context utilising various instruments to seek depth and to discover relevance. In addition, this study is not only utilising SCT to manoeuvre comfortably in the context of various social backgrounds, but also uses the model of feedback to understand how feedback in diverse social groups is provided and interpreted.

The model of feedback integrates well with SCT as both frameworks present the power that feedback may carry in enhancing students' learning in multifaceted social groups. This model emphasised throughout the study that both the assessor and the student must reflect and have a clear understanding of how the provided feedback helps them to reach desired goals and most importantly, understand the way forward. This chapter concludes that theories of learning are vast and may be used differently to accommodate various learning situations. This chapter reflected on the premise that learning differs according to contexts and that every learning is unique, including the learning of academic writing.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the researcher offered an overview of the theoretical framework that informs the study: SCT and operational explanations of SCT's concepts. In brief, Vygotsky's theory argues that learning is not universal because culture and content concerning intellectual development may not be as universal as other theorists, such as Piaget posits in the chapter. Further findings in this chapter were that the model of feedback or SCT alone may not effectively address students' problems regarding feedback or help lecturers improve the way they provide feedback. As a result, this researcher finds it appropriate to integrate the framework and the model for better understanding of written feedback that students receive in academic writing. The next chapter addresses the qualitative research methods which have been employed in this study.

## CHAPTER 4

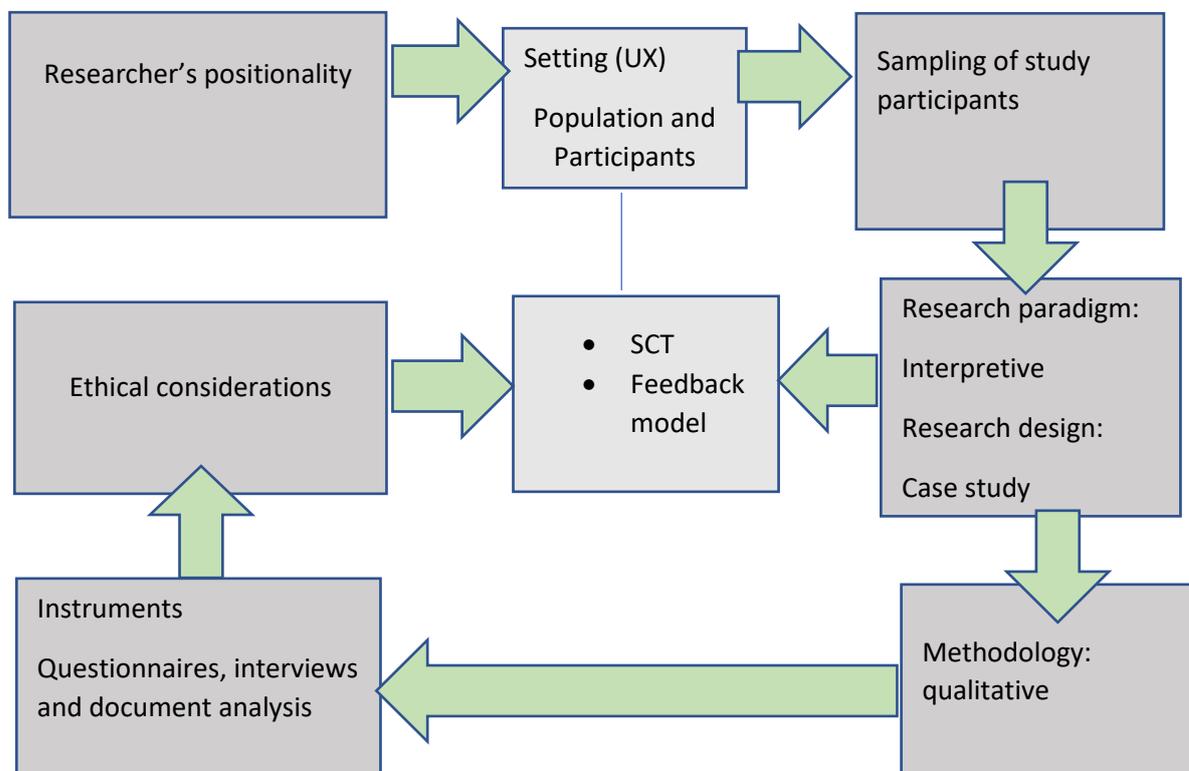
### A methodology for conducting feedback for improved academic writing

*Students can learn without grades, but they can't learn without timely, descriptive feedback*

- Rick Wormeli

#### 4.1 Introduction and context

In this chapter, the researcher addresses the context, researcher's positionality and the participants so that the reader can understand how the contextual characteristics shaped the researcher's methodological choices. Then, the methodological choices of the study, data collection, as well as the analysis procedures are detailed. An outline of the research methodology to be discussed in this chapter is illustrated as follows:



**Figure 4.1:** The research methodology used in the study

As illustrated in Figure 4.1, the first section of this Chapter discusses the context of the study providing reasons for choosing the University of X (UX) as the research site. The context is briefly explained as more details regarding the research site have been shared in Chapter 1 of this study. Similarly, details on why the ENG123 module became the focus of this study are discussed in Chapter 1. The researcher selected a higher learning context, UX, an ODeL university in South Africa as the research site (and not a contact university or high school learning context) as it allows the researcher to explore feedback from a higher learning perspective. The second reason is that the researcher works at the same context and developed an interest of investigating issues that are concerning, and assessment is one of the concerning issues in an ODeL context (Taras, 2015; Uiseb, 2017; Bharuthram, 2018). Moreover, university students have a huge responsibility of completing their tasks using higher order thinking skills than those at high schools, therefore, these students require more attention and support as they are also being prepared for conducting major academic tasks, such as research and scientific articles writing (Pretorius, 2000). Students rely on feedback to understand various tasks and are required to perform better in order to complete their studies and graduate (Pirhonem, 2016; Chalmers et al., 2018; Huisman et al., 2018). This study explored the perceptions of students, markers and lecturers with regards to feedback that is provided in the ENG123 module.

## **4.2 Researcher's identity and positionality**

Another participant in the study was the researcher, herself. Merriam (2001) identifies several positions a researcher can adopt within her own study and one of them is participant-observer position. The participant observation method is when a researcher is a part of the group they are studying in order to collect data and understand a social phenomenon or problem (Spradley, 2016). The method of participant observation in research can help the researcher to holistically understand the situation being studied without disturbing that situation or compromising the quality of the results (Merriam, 2001). There are challenges associated with the participant-observer method, such as limited access to the participants, obtaining informed consents and creating a trusting relationship with the participants (Spradley, 2016). The researcher did not have these challenges because she is not a participant-observer as an outsider but as an insider. This means that the researcher is already a part of the group and has been observing all the research participants ever since she

became a part of the group under study. The researcher is a junior lecturer at UX and one of her duties include teaching writing skills to the group under study. In the current study she conceals her observer role. This ultimately helps her to be a trusted collaborative partner as her role is known to the group, and to the equal partners in the research process, defining the problem, collecting data and so forth. The researcher's role was very much a participant as an observer than anything else. She has been teaching the module and participating in the feedback processes in the module since she is a lecturer in the module, however, in the study she has been observing as the study processes unfold. She has not in any way temper with the data collected or the results of the study as she was aware how much her active involvement can compromise the credibility of the results. Therefore, the researcher was actively involved in both the observation of data collection and data analysis but has not in any way participate in responding to the research questions or provided analysis based on her personal interests.

The researcher's primary role as a mere observer meant that collecting and engineering quality data was not her main concern. When conducting the study and dealing with the participants she had no much to do other than just collecting what was offered by participants and analysing data as is. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, the researcher's role as an observer had a definite impact on the data. Janesick (2000:389) explains several requirements of a qualitative researcher when she is also a major member in the topic under study . . . "It is essential that the researcher honestly probe her own biases at the onset of the study, during the study, and at the end of the study by clearly describing and explaining the precise role of the researcher in the study".

For Yin (2003), the role of participant-researcher or a researcher who is already a part of the group has both positive and negative impact. Being part of the group granted the researcher an opportunity to gain knowledge and a perspective on the processes related to feedback that is provided to students, and insights into what would be accessible to her as a researcher. The researcher also gained a knowledge on how to "manipulate minor events" (Yin, 2003:94), such as collecting data during the Covid-19 pandemic, it was effortless to remotely make necessary arrangement with participants as the researcher is already a member of the group.

According to Janesick (2000), the participant-as-observer approach has the potential to allow for a broader contextual view of the events under focus than other approaches, despite its substantial disadvantages of bias associated with the collection and analysis of data. Some disadvantages include the temptation to use excerpts of transcripts in a way that proves the researcher's hypothesis rather than relying on the true reflection of the original data. Nonetheless, it has been the researcher's goal from the onset to consciously focus on the objectives of the study no matter the direction the study may take (Yin, 2003). The researcher purposefully distanced herself from colleagues and students during the data collection process. Also, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher had an advantage of not meeting participants and influencing them in some way as it is unacceptable in research to influence participants.

### **4.3 Population**

The population in this study involved markers and lecturers and registered students but excluded the module administrators as they have inadequate access to the module content. A population in this study refers to a group of individuals or same species living within a specific area and relying on the same resources (Asiamah & Mensah, 2017; Quaye et al., 2019). The ENG123 population was involved in a semester module that comprised of approximately 21000 students per twenty weeks. Teaching in this module was conducted within twenty weeks by eight lecturers and approximately forty markers. Students who enrolled in the module are mostly second language speakers of English. Approximately 75% of these students are South African and from disadvantaged backgrounds as most of them usually indicated this on the queries they sent to lecturers. Most students lacked basic computer skills and had economic struggles in purchasing prescribed books or paying tuition. Roughly, 20% are students from other parts of Africa such as Congo, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, who also studied English as their third or foreign language. 5% of students in the module might have been students from Western countries such as America and France. The next section explains the sampling process.

## 4.4 Sampling

### 4.4.1 Student sample

It is often challenging to select sample size, particularly from a huge population size, however, a number of solutions have been explored by researchers from different contexts. Daherdoost (2017) believes that an adequate sample size depends on several issues rather than a number. This study used a simple random to randomly select student participants because they are over 20 000. A small number, about 10 students, were selected because they can easily be manageable. Also, a small sample was selected to ensure that the study produces rich and valid data (Daherdoost, 2017). The researcher also used simple random sampling to “control [bias] during the sampling process” (Etikan & Bala, 2017:217). This means that all members of the population had an equal probability of being selected, there was no favouritism (Krippendorff, 2018). Like any other sampling method, simple random sampling also has disadvantages. Baran (2016:112) shares four disadvantages of simple random sampling as follows:

- It may be challenging to gain access to that list because the list may be protected by privacy policies or require a lengthy process to attain permissions;
- there may be no single list detailing the population one is interested in hence, it may be difficult and time consuming to bring together numerous sub-lists to create a final list from which you want to select your sample;
- many lists will not be in the public domain and their purchase may be expensive; and,
- some of these populations will be expensive and time consuming to contact, even where a list is available (e.g., postal, telephone, email).

The above-mentioned weaknesses did not affect this study because the researcher is one of the lecturers in the module and has access to students, markers and lecturers' population lists. The researcher was further granted permission by the primary

lecturers<sup>7</sup> and the Chair of Department. It was therefore uncomplicated for the researcher to access the ENG123 population and select the required sample size.

The following is a breakdown of sampled students:

Sampled students	Pseudonyms	Gender
Online open-ended qualitative evaluation questionnaires (Random sampling)	Lise	Female
	Ali	Female
	Shell	Male
	Theo	Male
	Tilo	Female
	Gali	Female
	Hali	Female
	Iai	Male
	Jali	Male
	Kale	Male

**Table 4.1:** Sampled students used in this study

For the students' sample, the researcher randomly selected five females and five males to gather an equal amount of data from both genders as shown in Table 4.1 above. When selecting the sample for the students, the researcher checked students' ages on the assignment answer books and randomly selected the less vulnerable students, preferably between the age of 21 and 50. The demographics and employment statuses of students were not important in this study; therefore, the researcher did not collect that information. Students are first-years registered for the 2020 academic year in the first semester. The researcher did not capture the students' disciplines/faculties as this information would not affect the results or the purpose of this study. The purpose is to collect qualitative views regarding the feedback they receive in ENG123.

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<sup>7</sup> Primary lecturers are the module leaders in each module. Primary lecturers ensure that the module run smoothly and work together with the designated team.

#### **4.4.2 Marker sample**

In addition, simple random sampling approach was used to select markers. Markers' group is also large but not like the students' group. As already mentioned, ENG123 comprised approximately 40 markers and 21000 students. Considering that master's students at the UX are given three years to complete their studies, it can be impossible to analyse data from all the markers and students within the given period. It is therefore crucial that a manageable sample size of markers, which is indicative of a qualitative study, be selected.

The researcher selected samples randomly but when it came to age groups, purposive sampling was used to select young or middle-aged participants to avoid vulnerability for ethical reasons. The markers' ages ranged from 25 to 75, therefore those older than 60 years were purposefully not selected to participate in the study because participants who are older than 60 years are considered a vulnerable group (Bozzaro et al., 2018). The researcher had already worked with some markers through moderating their marked assignments and examinations. This practical experience helped the researcher to select the less vulnerable markers. The researcher randomly selected individuals between the ages of 30 and 50. There are vulnerable individuals in the marking group because the requirements of marking for the ENG123 module include having an honours degree, English language teaching experience or marking experience [optional], there is no age limitation as long as one is qualified. Most markers hold honours' and master's degrees, and a few have completed their PhDs. The marker participants are seasoned markers who also mark for other modules in the Department where the module ENG123 is offered. The markers are representative of various racial groups: there are White females and males, Indians and others are from various African countries, such as Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Ghana. To select markers' sample, the researcher used a list of markers sent by the module administrator. The list comprised of markers' emails and telephone numbers.

The following is a breakdown of the sampled markers:

Participants and type of sampling method	Pseudonyms	Gender	Experience and qualifications
Email interviews with Markers (Random sampling)	Olivia	Female	three years of marking experience with an honours in Bachelor of Arts specialising in English Literature
	Julie	Male	five years of marking experience and a Master's degree in English studies (Language)
	Omega	Female	six years marking experience, the qualification is unknown.
	Butternut	Male	two years marking experience and a first-year doctoral degree student in Education studies.

**Table 4.2:** Sampled markers used in this study

Two female and two male markers were sent interview questions through email, which were accompanied by consent forms to be signed. This was to indicate that markers were not forced to participate in the study. Male and female participants were selected to represent both genders' understanding of the feedback markers provide to students. Most markers returned the responses after a day because there were only ten questions to respond to and the questions were not cognitively demanding.

#### 4.4.3 Lecturer sample

Different from these two groups, the lecturers' population was not randomly sampled because they were only eight lecturers, excluding the researcher, hence purposive

sampling was utilised to ensure that all participants are given an opportunity to participate. Etikan et al. (2016:2) posits that “the purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses”. This study purposefully selects all lecturers in the module because they are the overseers in the module. Lecturers work with the markers; they facilitate the marking processes and train the markers in the module. The purpose here is to gather data that rich and detailed from lecturers and markers. Lecturers seem to be the relevant group because they work with all other groups involved in the module. They teach academic writing skills to students and besides training markers, they also moderate work done by markers. The main research questions, especially questions 1 and 2, are also formulated in way that would help the researcher to get as much data from lecturers as possible. Lecturers play a significant role in the module, such as making decisions and they may know the kind of feedback that is provided, if there is any, and why it is provided the way it is provided.

The table below illustrates the lecturers who participated in the study:

<b>Participants and type of sampling method</b>	<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Experience and qualifications</b>
One-on-one interviews with all lecturers (Purposive sampling)	Onika	Male	More than five years of lecturing experience and MA in English Studies.
	Simion	Male	Five years lecturing experience and MA in English Studies.
	Billy	Male	More than five years lecturing experience and MA in English Studies.
	Henry	Female	Less than five years lecturing experience, but more than five years of teaching in high school and holds a PhD in English Studies
	Conny	Female	More than five years lecturing experience and MA in English Studies.
	Henn	Female	Less than five years lecturing experience and Honours in English Studies.

**Table 4.3:** Sample lecturers used in the study

Names that appear on lecturers, markers and students' tables are not the true names of participants. Pseudonyms have been used deliberately to protect the participants' confidentiality and avoid violation of individuals' rights and humanity (Rahman, 2017). The researcher's decision to use pseudonyms rather than real names is to ensure that no names from any culture were used to avoid any culturally insensitive conflicts or accusations. Lecturers and markers' experiences were mentioned to indicate that they may have a better understanding of the phenomenon having worked with students for many years. Qualifications were also considered to be essential and believed to have influenced the way participants viewed feedback. This information

regarding the participants' experiences and qualifications was known by the researcher as she works with them.

As it has been mentioned previously, purposive sampling was utilised to select all lecturers in the module because they constitute a small number. Secondly, purposive sampling was appropriate as the researcher solicits persons with specific characteristics to participate in the study (e.g. lecturers are a small group that possess a better knowledge of the phenomenon). This means that a combination of a random and purposive sampling was found suitable for a successful selection of participants from a large and small group of individuals. The selected process using these samplings was successful although these techniques have both been criticised. A study that discusses pros and cons of the purposive sampling technique maintains that:

[The] purposive sampling technique can be highly prone to researcher bias. The idea that a purposive sample has been created based on the judgement of the researcher is not a good defence when it comes to alleviating possible researcher biases, especially when compared with probability sampling techniques that are designed to reduce such biases (Sharma, 2017:751).

The researcher considers the criticism mentioned as Sharma (2017:752) further states that the "judgemental subjective component of purpose sampling is only a major disadvantage when such judgements are ill-conceived or poorly considered". In most instances, participants who do not meet the requirements of the research are rejected. This was not problematic in the study as all participants had the required traits. All first-year students, markers and lecturers who were part of the ENG123 module in 2020 qualified to participate except those who were vulnerable because they are minors or are over 59 years. Minors and older people were excluded because they are socially positioned as a vulnerable. They must be protected because they might make uninformed decisions for themselves and the researcher might face negative consequences in that regard. In addition to individuals' perception, the researcher analysed documents. The next section explains document sampling.

#### 4.4.4 Marked assignments

The (2020) first semester marked assignments (both assignments 1 and 2) were randomly retrieved from the jRouter, a software where all students' assignment submission can be retrieved, as this study aims to investigate the feedback provided. In this study, it was important to look at student essay assignments in order to confirm the data from student questionnaires. Students' names and student numbers were erased from the retrieved assignment answer books to respect their privacy.

Script number
Script 1
Script 2
Script 3
Script 4
Script 5
Script 6
Script 7
Script 8
Script 9
Script 10

**Table 4.4:** Assignment samples

The permission to retrieve assignments was requested from Department of Assignments and the module's primary lecturers. The researcher used a feedback rubric created by SATAL Program (n.d.) to analyse marked scripts and moderators' reports.

Below is the feedback rubric by SATAL Program (n.d.):

<b>Criteria and examples for providing constructive feedback</b>				
	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Exemplary</b>	<b>Limited</b>	<b>Weak</b>
1.	Include accurate and specific data that is clear about irrefutable evidence (focuses on observation rather than inference).	“Adding research data would make the argument stronger.”	“Include expert evidence.”	“Evidence seems weak.”
2.	Focus on content rather than on the person	“Does the thesis contain the topic and how you feel about it?”	“Do you think that you can narrow down the thesis?”	“Broad thesis.”
3.	Keep comments non- judgmental and descriptive rather than evaluative (focus on description rather than judgment).	“Examples would help to understand the concept you were explaining.”	“Please add more examples.”	“Poor work.”
4.	Provide a balance of positive and negative	“You include a thought provoking topic, but it seems to me	“Will you elaborate on the topic?”	“Needs elaboration.”
	feedback. For example, negative information can be “sandwiched” between positive information.	that it needs more elaboration with examples. Strong start.”		
5.	Attribute positive feedback to internal causes & give it in the second person (you).	“You worked hard to explain the material well using relevant sources.”	“Relevant source selection.”	“Good job.”

6.	Give negative information in the first person (I) and then shift to third person (s/he), or shift from a statement to a question that frames the problem objectively.	"I thought I understood the organization of the material from the outline, but then I was not sure..."	"I was not sure where you were going in this assignment."	"You lost me."
7.	Offer specific suggestions that model appropriate behaviour.	"Have you considered trying...? How do you think that would work?"	"Why haven't you tried...?"	"You shouldn't include . . ."

**Table 4.5:** Providing constructive feedback rubric by SATAL program (n.d.)

Similar to the current study, Bharuthram (2018) uses a case study approach to evaluate assessment skills using essay rubrics in student self-grading at first year level at a contact university. Bharuthram (2018) focuses mainly on self-assessment as it is based on the premises that students should be confident in assessing themselves before they can participate in peer-assessment. Bharuthram (2018) differs with the current in that it focuses on self-assessment and it is conducted in a context different from the current study. However, both studies are concerned about "grading of assessment tasks" (Bharuthram, 2018:3). In the same line, the current study utilises a feedback rubric to investigate the adequacy of feedback provided to first-year students at an ODeL university. Most studies such as, Dochy et al. (1999); Panadero, Alonso-Tapia and Reche (2013); and Jonsson (2014, cited in Bharuthram, 2018:4), encourage the use of rubrics to identify standards and criteria and believe that rubrics are helpful in "guiding the assessment process while also strongly making a case for the rubric as a formative self-assessment tool which should be used throughout the completion of a task". The current study utilised a feedback rubric for similar reasons. The rubric was used to explore themes emanating from marked scripts as illustrated in the Table 4.4.

#### **4.4.5 Moderators' reports**

Moderators' reports are the reports that lecturers submit to markers after they have marked a batch of scripts. The researcher utilised these reports to confirm results that emerged from lecturers' and markers' interviews. Lecturers used these reports to reflect on the effort each marker puts into the scripts. The moderation process includes examining the feedback provided in each script and the accuracy of calculations in the entire script to ensure that students are not in any way disadvantaged by the markers. In the report, lecturers inform markers about the areas that lack improvement such as feedback or calculations. In summary, the following was discussed in this section:

- A) Online open-ended evaluation questions were distributed to 21000 students on the discussion forum to complete and only ten questionnaires from students were randomly selected.
- B) The semi-structured interview schedule was distributed to four markers through email. Online meetings were scheduled to interact with markers individually.
- C) Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, physical contact or visits were restricted; therefore, all meetings or data collection processes had to be done online. Ideally the researcher would have preferred to conduct face-to-face interviews with markers and lecturers but due to the pandemic, it was not possible to do so. Instead, lecturers received semi-structured interview schedules through emails to complete.
- D) The researcher sent an email to the module primary lecturers and requested that she be allowed access to the jRouter to randomly select ten scripts for assignments 1 and 2.
- E) The researcher further requested moderation reports from all the lecturers who participated.

#### **4.5 Research paradigm**

This study is rooted within the interpretive paradigm. Researchers use the interpretive paradigm to obtain a deep understanding of a case by interpreting experiences obtained from the subjects (Khaldi, 2017). It is about how people invent and relate their experiences with one another as they connect with the world around them. It is significant for researchers to select a particular paradigm so that they do not lean towards their own theoretical knowledge, which can lead to preconceived ideas and unfairness. According to Creswell (2003), interpretivists understand the world by creating their own meanings, they create subjective meanings that arise from everyday experiences. This study utilises the interpretive paradigm as it is assumed that the experiences of the participants must be engaged with to create meaning.

The study uses an interpretivist paradigm as it consists of first-year academic writing lecturers, markers and students' experiences of feedback in an ODeL context. Interpretive research is constructed socially by human beings, which includes knowledge of reality (Andrade, 2009). With open-ended evaluation questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the researcher attempted to understand the case of academic writing using feedback through understanding it from the perspectives of three different stakeholders: markers, moderators and lecturers.

#### **4.6 A qualitative research methodology**

It has been alluded in Chapter 1 that this study adopts a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is where the perspectives of participants are investigated to get an understanding of the case that is being studied (Cresswell, 2013). Zohrabi, (2013, cited in Mohajan, 2018:2) agrees that a qualitative research “makes the use of interviews, diaries, journals, classroom observations and immersions; and open-ended questionnaires to obtain, analyse, and interpret the data content analysis of visual and textual materials, and oral history.” This allows for the exploration and examination of opinions, beliefs and emotions of students, marker and lecturers related to feedback, which is what the research questions and objectives of this study sought to investigate.

Unlike quantitative research, which is based on statistics and the belief that only one reality exists (Wertz, 2014), qualitative research makes space for researchers to comprehend, and not just measure, participants' perspectives on the case under study (Levitt et al., 2018). Qualitative studies are based on the diverse perspectives of participants about a particular field of study. A qualitative approach is beneficial if little is known about a case or topic under study and more understanding is required to further interrogate a case (Neely & Ponshunmugam, 2019). With a qualitative research approach, as mentioned the section of the researcher's positionality in the study, the researcher is able to identify and manage unfairness and ensure validity in participants' responses as they may respond differently to similar questions when repeated. Arguably, this occurs as participants do not want to look bad to the interviewer and they perhaps wants to say want the researcher wants to hear (King et al., 2018). This approach can help in understanding why one participant could have different perspectives from another as it collects data from both diverse and similar groups (King et al., 2018). Because qualitative research allows participants to express themselves in an open-ended manner to get the true meaning of their experiences, the approach is considered to be interpretive (see previous section) as the study is conducted a natural setting.

This qualitative study is underpinned by SCT for these reasons, 1) as discussed by Lantolf and Thorne (2006, cited in Harvey, 2011:6), the term SCT is used in this 'feedback discussion' to show how SCT concepts, such as the ZPD, MKO, scaffolding and mediation can address issue at hand that may positively or negatively impact students from vast social and cultural backgrounds, "though in fact, it is not a theory of the social or cultural aspects of human life, but rather a theory of mind" and 2) "Sociocultural theory of mind attempts to account for the processes through which, learning and development take place" and the researcher's main objective is to gather perspectives from one specific group (Harvey, 2011:238). For Denzin and Lincoln (2003a; 2003b; 2013, cited in Anfara et al., 2014:9), the researcher "approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that he or she then examines in specific ways (methodology, analysis)". Therefore, the study relied on qualitative research approaches to address

all three questions in the current study. The next section is a discussion on the research design utilised in the study.

#### **4.7 A case study research design**

This study adopted a case study approach as its research design. Lune and Berg (2017) explain a case study as an approach that triangulates the research techniques so that they provide different views of a case. When investigating a phenomenon, the researcher must ensure construct validity (selecting the appropriate research tools), internal validity (using different methodological tools to triangulate the data) and external validity (ensuring that the data can be applied beyond a single circumstance) (Lune & Berg, 2017). In addition, a research design refers to the “conceptual blueprint within which research is conducted” (Akhtar, 2016:68). A case study approach is appropriate for this study because it allows for a systematic investigation of a single individual and then a group in which the researcher is required to examine in-depth (Heale & Twycross, 2018). According Sedlmair et al. (2012) and Yin (2003), one of the hallmarks of using a case study design in a qualitative research is using multiple data sources to enhance data credibility and reliability. Utilising the case study design means that this study could not explore feedback from one lens, but rather from a variety of lenses which allowed for multifaceted results.

In addition, the case study approach was adopted to gather social data, such as the language spoken by biographical information, activities they were involved in, and organise it in a manner that brought about detailed, genuine results and an in-depth understanding of reality. Furthermore, the reason the case study design was chosen for this study was that it allowed the researcher to converge qualitative multiple data sources such as interviews, open-ended questionnaires and documents in the analysis process rather than handling each separately. The convergence of data sources added strength to the research findings discussed in Chapter 5 as braiding the data sources together usually promotes a better understanding of the case.

Even though this study finds the case study design appropriate for the phenomenon under study, the case study design has its weaknesses. Several studies such as, Heale and Twycross (2018), Lune and Berg (2017), Zainal (2007) explore the

weaknesses of the case study design. These studies posit that most case studies investigate a small group, such as one or two phenomena, that are believed to be sufficient in helping the researcher gain insights about trends in relevant departments. For instance, when it comes to case studies, it is believed that investigating the feedback provided in one module might be used to generalise data about similar modules in the same department. The data is labelled “real life” because a single group has been chosen as the source of the data. However, most case studies involve analysing a single case with embedded units and therefore conventional empirical techniques cannot be used, or where they are used, may have limited application as there may not be enough data to meet requirements for statistical significance.

The researcher does not in any way claim that the data collected in this study offered insights about the provision of feedback in other relevant modules; however, the collected data may persuade other researchers to investigate how feedback is approached in modules that are similar to the one that was investigated in this study. The researcher’s decision to adopt the case study approach was made on the basis of having to investigate in-depth experiences, challenges and strengths related to feedback in academic writing. Most students have alluded to the discrepancies between the feedback they received in the secondary school and the feedback at the university. Many students find university education more demanding, therefore, lecturers must “increase the responsibility of students towards learning and thus must provide feedback in such a way to learning forward and create structures for students to act on it” (Uiseb, 2017:181); particularly in distance learning institutions such as UX. Working with students from different backgrounds motivated the researcher to develop an interest in investigating feedback in writing and study holistically by involving more participants as possible.

The participants’ list comprised of markers, lecturers and students who have mutual understandings of the module demands as far as feedback is concerned. The ENG123 module caters for a diverse population in the university. There are students from various learning departments who within their departments are from different learning, social and cultural backgrounds. To acknowledge such diversities, SCT, the theory that acknowledges the nature of human experience in social context, played a significant role.

Vygotsky argues that “to understand the relationship between development and learning, we must distinguish between two developmental levels: the actual and the potential levels of development” (Wang et al., 2011:298). According to Vygotsky, the actual level developments are acquisitions a student is able to accomplish independently, whereas potential level refers to accomplishments with the help from the whole community after becoming a member of a certain commune (Wang et al., 2011).

#### **4.8 Key research questions and SCT**

The research questions for this study are underpinned by Vygotsky’s (2007) work, SCT. The research questions that informed this study and their relation to the sociocultural concepts are discussed below.

**Question 1:** *What are the perceptions of students on the feedback they receive in the Academic Language and Literacy in English (ENG123)?*

Question 1 of the study is designed to generate data with regard to the perceptions of students on the feedback they receive in an Academic Writing module. The ZPD is considered to be appropriate for underpinning this students’ question because for Rao (2018:27), the ZPD describes the distance between the “actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving” and the “level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers”. Rao (2018:27) further states that:

It functions as a connecting concept and model for the higher cognitive growth and explains how a learner’s learning experience could be organized as the most effective form of learning that occurs within it. Since learning involves moving beyond the current level of competence, scaffolding in teaching serves to move learners into the nearest reaches of their incompetence and assists them to become competent there through socializing and engaging in activities with a more able adult or a peer who has already mastered that particular function.

For the researcher, to understand how EAL students acquire academic writing skills at higher institution of learning, it is essential to study their social and educational factors that shape the way they learn. According to Rao (2018:28), “learning occurs when knowledge is built on the prior experience and enhanced by the interaction

between individuals, peers, and the group". These are sorts of things the researcher sought to discover from the students' data. It is therefore indispensable to gather perceptions from students to understand how feedback they receive impact their learning.

**Question 2:** *How do markers and lecturers view feedback they provide to students in the ENG123 module?*

The second question is designed to generate data on the views lecturers and markers have with regard to feedback they provide to students. The MKO supported the use of this question in the current study because of the following Vygotskian perspectives on the MKO:

- "We learn in the presence of other people: *others* who have a better knowledge of certain historical and cultural practices, *more knowledgeable-others*" (Vygotsky, 1978, cited in Abtahi, 2017:35).
- "...the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978:85).
- Learning occur through interaction, negotiation and collaboration (Scott & Palincsar, 2013).

These three points are essential to share because they cover some important aspects regarding the role that the MKO plays in the learning process. "Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and with his peers (Vygotsky, 1978:90). Vygotsky's perspective on the MKO is the accomplishments a child can demonstrate alone or perform independently without any assistance from an adult someone without a greater knowledge; however, an amount of independence is expected after a child has timeously received support from someone (Vygotsky, 1978).

**Question 3:** *How do moderators' reports on marked assignments in ENG123 assist students in improving their academic writing?*

As mentioned in Chapter 3, data for this question emanates from 2 documents: moderation reports and marked scripts. This question is connected to both questions 1 and 2; therefore, the concepts that support these questions also apply to this

question 3 of the study. This is because question 3 confirms the data from students' questionnaires and staff interviews. In Chapter 3, the researcher linked scaffolding to question 3 of the study "scaffolding, in the lights of ZPD, facilitate and enhance the teaching and learning of different skills including the writing skills" (Azi, 2020:106). This is in line with what question 3 sought to investigate. As mentioned in Chapter 1, question 3 sought to understand how moderators' reports encourage the quality of feedback in the module. Its core objective is to understand how lecturers use moderators' reports to initiate, facilitate and sustain quality learning environment.

The research questions and objectives are the mileposts that guide this study as they foreground the research methodology. The research questions and objectives of this study are supported by SCT as they seek to understand how students process feedback they receive, and role lecturers and markers play to assist students process feedback. SCT is adopted for this study for many reasons. First reason is that SCT was developed as a theory of learning by Vygotsky and his colleagues through their work with children, and that it is often applied to the development of higher mental processes in children (Manning & Payne, 1993). Secondly, "sociocultural history relates to the development of a group of individuals; ontogenesis to the development of an individual; and microgenesis to the development of a specific process during ontogenesis". Vygotsky's research focused mainly on the ontogenetic level, seeking to explain the emergence of and transitions within human higher order thinking during childhood and adolescence (Vygotsky,1978). Vygotsky also studied microgenetic processes to show psychological processes (Mercer, 2004). These include, "the development of thought or voluntary behaviour, which is a process of undergoing changes right before one's eyes" (Vygotsky, 1978:61). Thus, the current study focused mainly on the microgenetic development of a specific process that is, feedback received by students in an Academic Writing module. This study also relates to ontogenetic development in terms of the long-term effect learning has on children and adults (Mercer, 2004).

Briefly, SCT shaped the research questions in that in order for the researcher to understand the group to be explored, she had to somewhat understand the current educational or social context of the participants. These are sort of things that SCT discusses. De Valenzuela (2006, cited in Shabani, 2010:238) "points out that cognitive

development is seen not as unfolding in a biologically driven sequence, but as emerging as a result of interactions within a cultural and historical context.” This is what the research questions of this study sought to understand. This study reviewed studies that argue that knowledge is shaped by interactions between individuals and historical backgrounds (Maher, 2011; Andrade, 2017; Uiseb, 2017). In addition, Roosevelt (2008, cited in Shabani, 2010:238) holds that:

The main goal of education from Vygotskian perspective is to keep learners in their own ZPDs as often as possible by giving them interesting and culturally meaningful learning and problem-solving tasks that are slightly more difficult than what they do alone, such that they will need to work together either with another, more competent peer or with a teacher or adult to finish the task.

This assertion shapes many questions of this study in that some questions sought to gather data that focuses on measures that adults took to improve feedback students receive in academic writing tasks. For instance, questions for participants that emerged from questions 2 and 3 collect data that addresses the idea “that after completing the task jointly, the learner will likely be able to complete the same task individually next time, and through that process, the learner’s ZPD for that particular task will have been raised” (Shabani, 2010:238). These are some of the results that studies reviewed in the literature review discovered (Saeed, 2018; Hyland, 2019). Vygotsky (1981) studied the role of social experience in the development of individual knowledge. Vygotsky placed emphasis on the social context of learning, namely, how social and cultural contexts affect a learner’s cognition, or how the social environment accounts for the development of the higher cognitive process. The research questions are built around the above-mentioned notion. Vygotsky stressed the connectedness between learning and a learner’s social and cultural world. The pedagogical implication is that all fundamental cognitive activities have social foundations, and cognitive skills and patterns of thinking are products of the activities practiced in the social institutions of the culture in which:

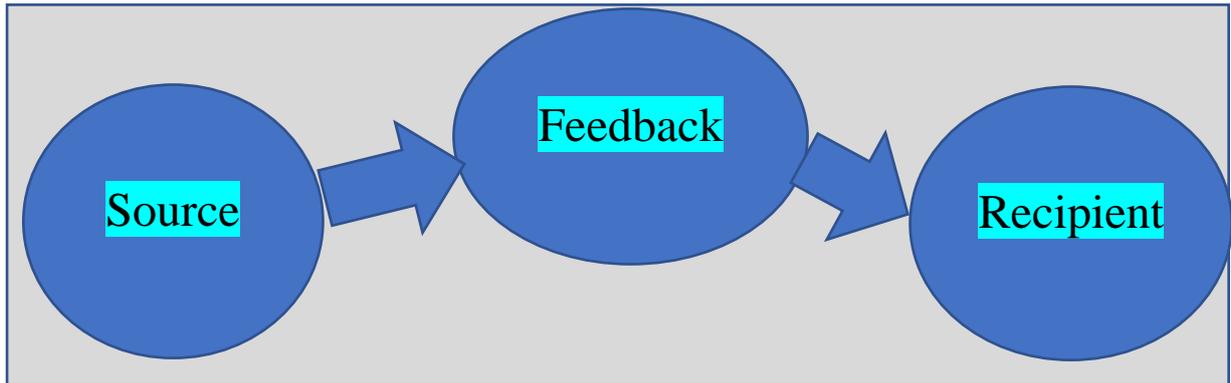
individuals grow up and mature through the process of “internalization,” which is the process whereby the individual, through participation in interpersonal interaction in which cultural ways of thinking are demonstrated in action, is able to appropriate them so they become transformed from being social phenomena to being part of his or her own intrapersonal mental functioning. (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006:193).

The study's methods and design were adopted in order to achieve desirable results that ultimately assisted in analysing responses to the research questions. Doody and Bailey (2016:41) state that "the first steps of any study are developing the research question[s]... and objective[s]. Subsequent steps develop from these and they govern the researchers' choice of population, setting [and] data to be collected and time period for the study". This thesis attests to the above quote and presumes that the approaches and methods discussed in this chapter are appropriate and would, along with the information presented in other chapters, assist in gathering responses to the study's questions.

#### **4.9 Model of feedback**

The model of feedback by Hattie and Timperley (2007) discussed in Chapter 3 also played a significant role in shaping the purpose of this research which is to investigate feedback from students', lecturers' and markers' point of view. The model of feedback shaped the questions of this study in the following manner:

According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), the model of feedback is a symbol that demonstrates the easiest way to provide feedback to students. This notion can be connected to questions 2 and 3 of the study that sought to gather data from lecturers, markers and documents respectively. The model highlights the communication process that can be created to shorten the distance between markers, lecturers and students, particularly in an ODeL context where there is a distance between individuals. As quoted in Casiraghi et al. (2020:10), "conceptualized [SIC] the feedback process as a special case of the more general communication process". Casiraghi et al. (2020) share this model of feedback that demonstrates other model of feedback qualities shared by Hattie and Timperley (2007):



**Figure 4.2:** The basic model of feedback by Casiraghi et al. (2020:10)

Figure 4.2 indicates that feedback travels through the feedback channels from one actor to another to serve the purpose. For Casiraghi et al. (2020) and Hattie and Timperley (2007), the purpose of feedback is to teach and bridge the gap between students and lecturers. This means that if lecturers are not present to correct students verbally, the written feedback then becomes the lecturers' mouthpiece. Both Hattie and Timperley's (2007) and Casiraghi's (2020) models of feedback argue that, if feedback does not support the student's formative learning process, it is not significant and therefore it should not be provided. Thus, if it cannot be used to implement improvements, it has no value. It is therefore essential to create a meaningful teaching and learning environment that can address learners' social and educational problems so that potential learning goals as highlighted by Vygotsky in Wang et al. (2011) can be reached.

#### **4.10 Research instruments**

According to Elyazgi (2018), research instruments are tools used to collect, measure, and analyse data related to one's research interests. These tools are most commonly used in the health sciences, social sciences, and education faculties to assess patients, clients, students, teachers and staff performance. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, data was collected through open-ended evaluation questions from students. The emailed semi-structured interview was created for lecturers and markers. Moreover, the document analysis instrument for marked assignments and moderation reports was prepared. A combination of instruments is essential in

qualitative studies, this one inclusive as getting results from multiple instruments “boost the validity and dependability of the data” (Zohrabi, 2013:254). These instruments blended seamlessly with the study’s methods and research design adopted as the study employed methods and instruments that aimed to explore phenomenon in detail. Consequently, the case study approach by nature inherently provides rich qualitative information. The next sub-section discusses the online open-ended evaluation questionnaire schedule.

#### **4.10.1 Online open-ended evaluation questionnaire schedule**

Online open-ended evaluation questionnaires are known to be effective ways of conducting reliable data. For this study, the researcher adopted a questionnaire (See Appendix A) which was deemed suitable to gather data in large populations; it was quick and inexpensive (Hyman & Sierra, 2016). Eckerdal and Hagström (2017), in Sweden, state that qualitative open-ended questionnaires are by nature, appropriate for collection of everyday life experiences and brings results that are full of memories, opinions and fruitful experiences free of charge. Some advantages of using the questionnaire include being practical and flexible. However, Eckerdal and Hagström (2017) argue that interviews may have similar qualities with the open-ended questionnaires as they both require participants to support their responses/assertions and share their knowledge intensely. The researcher considered open-ended evaluation questions in the form of a questionnaire to be very flexible and suitable; therefore, there was no need to explore other instruments for gathering data from students.

Even so, the questionnaires’ weakness could not be overlooked as all research instruments have weaknesses and strengths. Some disadvantages of the open-ended qualitative questionnaires include misinterpretations of questions or statements (Kabir, 2016). This depends on how it is administered. If the researcher is not present or available to clarify queries and concerns with the respondents, they may interpret questions differently and that may lead to more complications on the researcher’s side and to unreliable results. Moreover, online open-ended evaluation questionnaires may cause disruptions, delays and participants are likely to discontinue if confusions arise.

Bias is also a problem in administering questionnaires. The researcher managed most challenges by being present on the platform where they were administered. Being part of the ENG123 lecturers, the researcher benefited because she had full access to myUX and was able to constantly monitor announcements and the discussion forum where the online open-ended evaluation questionnaire schedule was posted. Students' assignments were another instrument that provided rich data that supported data from the administered online open-ended evaluation questionnaires. Some information provided from the questionnaires was observed in the assignments. Some challenges like bias could not be dealt with instantly, however, they were managed as the study proceeded. Other instruments in the research that were in place to triangulate the results were semi-structured interviews with lecturers and markers and documents. These are discussed in detail below.

#### **4.10.2 Emailed semi-structured interview schedule**

According to Hawkins (2018:493), "researchers have historically preferred face-to-face interviews but advances in technology have resulted in more options, including email exchanges, to conduct interviews." Initially, this study had planned to conduct face-to-face interviews, however, due to the restrictions that were put in place to combat the spread of Covid-19, the researcher chose to use email to gather data from markers and lecturers. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019:1) state that "the method allows the researcher to collect open-ended data, to explore participant thoughts, feelings and beliefs about a particular topic and to delve deeply into personal and sometimes sensitive issues". It was easier to follow up with participants using an email interviews than it would have been if the researcher used the face-to-face interview method. Semi-structured interviews were found suitable for markers and lecturers because they understood what the module entailed (See Appendix B). DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019:3) add that "good interviewees are those who are available, willing to be interviewed and have lived experiences and knowledge about the topic of interest". This study discovered that to obtain quality data, interviews should not be conducted with a transactional question-answer approach but rather be engaging, unfolding and allow some form of interaction between the interviewer and interviewee

(DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019); however, conducting email interviews meant less interaction between the researcher and interviewees. Despite challenges, there was flexibility and the researcher was able to initiate the discussion based on content stated by research objectives.

In short, various disadvantages associated with semi-structured interviews are discussed in a book chapter entitled “Conducting Semi-structured Interviews” by Adams (2015) which asserts that, semi-structured interviews are time consuming and require the interviewer’s presence and full attention when it is time to analysing data. Overall, semi-structured interviews are “labour intensive and more demanding” (Adams, 2015:493); however, the researcher experienced the opposite with the email interviews. The work that the researcher was involved in was to create a folder on the laptop, download and save participants’ responses. It took less than a minute to save a file from one participant.

The interview questions were prepared purposefully to respond to the research question number 2: *“How do markers and lecturers view feedback they provide to students’ Academic Writing module?”* All the other questions are based on the main question which allows the researcher to critically probe into the participants’ experiences. The researcher later requested the lecturers to submit moderation reports, discussed below in detail: The researcher received responses from the participants within two weeks and managed to analyse the collected data from four markers and six lecturers in approximately three weeks.

#### **4.10.3 Document analysis schedules**

Andrade (2018) states that documentary analysis is a procedure which encompasses the identification, verification and consideration of documents which are related to the object investigated. In addition, Dalglish et al. (2020) describes documentary analysis as a form of interpreting documents to express what has been written and gives it a meaning. Another study conducted at the Western California University by Bowen (2009:27) adds that “like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge”. This study reviewed two documents – students’ marked assignments, to explore feedback that is provided and

lecturers' moderation reports, to investigate comments regarding feedback that lecturers provide markers with. Andrade (2018) maintains that the use of documents in research is valued due to the richness of the information extracted, and because it broadens the understanding regarding the object under investigation. This study attests that document analysis schedule was significant in this qualitative case study research and essential as the researcher managed to gather intensive data that validated and corroborated data obtained from the open-ended questionnaire and interview schedules. Other benefits of using documents in a research include their stability. They do not change and the researcher or any other person may utilise them several times (Dalglish et al., 2020). Like any other instrument, a document analysis schedule has various benefits and one of these benefits includes, drawing elements of reality from the participants' writing rather than verbal expressions. Cardno et al. (2016:146) state that:

Those who theorise documentary analysis as a research method are consistent in implying that the practice of analysis is individualistic in that the researcher is the only person who engages with the documents. These theorists highlight the advantages in terms of the non-engagement of people, which allows for the circumventing of applications for ethics approval.

According to Cardno et al. (2016), a document analysis schedule allows researcher's flexibility, responsibility and decision making. This means that the researcher's analysis and opinions are vital in interpreting the information that is documented. Moreover, the study by Cardno et al. (2016:146) states that the researcher should collaborate with others to avoid a case of the "researcher's ideology dominating in their interpretation". Although some studies present a document analysis as an effective research tool, other studies such as Bretschneider et al., (2017) posit that the researcher may not receive everything they are expecting from a document. Documents may be disappointing to an extent of not getting any useful data. This means that documents may present information that is incomplete. Besides its flaws, this study believes that this instrument had its unique strength in supporting the other research instruments used in this study such as open-ended evaluation questions and email interviews. This instrument was commended for its genuineness in providing background information. Documents are likely to provide the researcher with a high percentage of what is really required for the study because of the way they are

conducted and how flexible, engaging and free participants are likely to be when completing written tasks.

The document analysis schedule generated data that responded to question 3 of the study as presented in the table below. First, it sought to explore how lecturers emphasised the significance and quality of feedback in the moderation reports they prepared for markers. Secondly, the document analysis schedule investigated the kind of feedback markers provided to students and used a rubric by the SATAL program (n.d.) to assess quality. This meant that the study reviewed two documents: 10 marked assignments and six moderation reports. Analysing data conducted meant discussing major themes that emerged through an investigation of feedback from marked assignments and moderation reports.

The table below illustrates the instruments and the specific research question:

<b>Research question</b>	<b>Research instrument</b>
1. What are the perceptions of students on the feedback they receive in the Academic Language and Literacy in English (ENG123) module?	Online open-ended evaluation qu
2. How do markers and lecturers view the feedback they provide students with in the ENG123 module?	Email semi-structured interviews schedule
3. How do moderators' reports on marked assignments in the ENG123 module prepare students to improve their academic writing?	Document analysis schedule 1 and 2

**Table 4.6:** Research questions and instruments used in this study

#### 4.11 Systematic data collection phases

##### PHASE ONE

A. The researcher began by posting open-ended evaluation questions on myUX ENG123-20-S1 site, on the discussion forum, in April 2020. An announcement was sent out to the whole group to urge students who would like to participate in

the study to sign a consent form and complete questionnaires by typing out their responses and clicking on 'submit'.

B. The researcher emailed the semi-structured interview schedules and consent forms to all eight lecturers requesting them to participate in the research. These were lecturers employed in the module at the time of this study. The same procedure was applied to four markers who were randomly sampled. Out of eight lecturers, six lecturers returned signed consent forms and confirmed participation.

C. The researcher used her ethical clearance certificate to request permission to retrieve assignments from the jRouter. As for moderation reports, the researcher emailed the lecturers and requested their moderation reports.

## **PHASE TWO**

A. Completed evaluation questionnaires were reviewed, analysed and kept safely for security purposes.

B. The semi-structured interviews responses were reviewed and kept safely for security purposes.

C. The researcher retrieved ten assignments from the jRouter, erased personal details, and saved them in a folder. Moderators' reports were saved in a folder on the researcher's laptop.

## **PHASE THREE**

A. Themes emerging from all three instruments were discussed.

Themes were developed and categorised according to the questions and objectives of the study.

## **4.12 Quality criteria**

### **4.12.1 Credibility**

Credibility is concerned about the accuracy of participants in the study (Ospina, et al., 2018). It is important that participants be true representatives who would bring about the required data that respond to the research questions accurately. It is significant that data analysis made by the researcher be logical, justified and matches the evidence obtained. To consider credibility in this study, the researcher ensured that the research findings are true representation of the data that was collected from participants. To accomplish what credibility requires, the researcher only analysed and reported data that was collected from the ENG123 participants and documents.

### **4.12.2 Transferability**

In qualitative research, transferability means the degree to which the findings of the study can be transferred to a new context with other participants and continue to produce equivalent results (Daniel, 2019). For this study, the researcher facilitated the transferability judgment by using purposive and random sampling, which both granted the researcher with the flexibility when it came to selecting relevant participants. The researcher is therefore confident that if these sampling techniques are applied to a new context, related results may be obtained. The purpose of transferability is for the reader to understand the context of the study and succeed to connect it to the other contexts.

### **4.12.3 Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness refers to the element of trust between participants and the researcher (McGannon, 2021). The researcher understood the importance of building trust between herself and participants from the beginning of the data collection process to ensure that participants are psychologically and physically protected. To further facilitate trustworthiness, the researcher ensured that no individual participates unwillingly participates in the study and those who participated were assured that the shared information data will be used for the purpose of this study only and that pseudonyms will be utilised in order to protect the image of all participants.

#### **4.12.4 Validity**

Validity in the current study was facilitated with various instruments in order to confirm the accuracy of the data collected and the findings that were obtained. Three instruments, which are online open-ended evaluation questionnaires, email semi-structured interviews and document analysis schedules were used to collect data. In short, validity is achieved by using research instruments that measure what they are intended to measure (FitzPatrick, 2019). For this study, the intention was to gather perceptions from individuals, therefore, online open-ended evaluation questionnaire and email semi-structured interview schedules helped the researcher to achieve the purpose of the study with ease.

#### **4.12.5 Reliability**

Macphail et al. (2016) mention that reliability is achieved by using same instruments in different context and is still produce similar results. The current study concurs with the assertion and confirms that the instruments used in this study were selected on the basis that they can be reliable because of their relevance in the current context (ODeL) and other studies collected in similar contexts. Reliability has been associated with the challenge of replicating the research; however, to void the challenge, the proposed study conducted this study in a different context (ODeL), different participants (markers, lecturers, students), different theoretical framework (model of feedback and sociocultural theory) and research methods that are not usually used by other researchers.

#### **4.12.6 Triangulation**

Triangulation means the combination and application of multiple methods or data instruments in research to holistically understand the phenomenon (Crick, 2021). In the case of this study, the research opted to utilise multiple instruments, namely the open-ended evaluation questionnaires, the email semi-structured interviews and the document analysis schedules to triangulate the findings. This study confirms that these three data collection instruments complemented and supported each other. Thus, they formulated a successful triangulation as most participants shared complementary views. This strengthened the reliability, credibility and validity of the study.

#### **4.13 Delimitations**

Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018:157) state that delimitations are “in essence the limitations consciously set by the authors”. ENG123 comprised eight lecturers, excluding the researcher and 40 markers. The researcher focused on the 2020 module members (lecturers). Two new lecturers were employed in the module during the data collection period. The delimitation of the study is that, only lecturers and markers who were present in the module since the commencement of the study were emailed the interview schedule. Other lecturers and markers who joined the team in the middle of the year were excluded from the study. This is because the researcher felt it may not be fair to include new members because of the nature of the study that requires background knowledge with regard to the module and knowledge on the pedagogical practices. Only the ENG123 2020 first semester students participated in the study.

#### **4.14 Limitations**

“Limitations of the study are potential study limitations that may include assumptions regarding underlying theories, causal relationships, measurement errors, study setting, population or sample, data collection/analysis, result interpretations and corresponding conclusions” (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018:157). This study was conducted during the national lockdown<sup>8</sup>. The regulations that were put in place such as social distancing affected data collection. Initially, the researcher was supposed to conduct face-to-face interviews with lecturers and markers, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted through email. The researcher’s decision to triangulate the instruments helped with ensuring the validity of the study. This means that if the interviews were not conducted efficiently, moderation reports were available to back up the information that might have been missed due to any lack of data from the email interviews. In addition, if questionnaires were not successfully administered, marked scripts were available to back them up. It is interesting that all data collection instruments were successfully administered, and data was provided effectively.

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<sup>8</sup> A national lockdown is one of the regulations that put people on a curfew nationwide to restrict unnecessary movements. The lockdown was meant to reduce the Covid-19 infections as the numbers grow rapidly.

#### **4.15 Ethical considerations**

Permission to conduct this study was requested from the Research Ethics Committee in the Department of English Studies at UX and the ethics certificate was issued by the College of Human Sciences (Research Permission Subcommittee) (See Appendix I). The researcher could not collect data until the ethics certificate was issued.

Ethical issues were paramount in this research due to the unfairness or biasness that often occur in most social studies. Ethical considerations focus on avoiding harm, disrespect, increase privacy and fair treatment of people (Raham, 2017). The researcher considered the ethical protocols of UX by distributing consent forms to the participants. The researcher also explained the topic, objectives and aim of the study to participants and requested those who were interested to take part voluntarily. Interested participants signed consent forms. Although consent forms were signed, participants could withdraw from participating at any time. Therefore, anonymity was respected in this study, and confidentiality was practiced. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher used pseudonyms in every instrument used. Moreover, no information was shared directly without the participants' knowledge.

As mentioned in this chapter, the researcher is a lecturer in the module under study, but the researcher did not in any way violate the rights of her colleagues or her students who participated in the study. She prioritised the dignity of research participants by issuing the consent form before collecting data and explained the topic and objectives of the study to the participants. She then allowed the participants to go through the questions. Finally, she remained to be a participant-observer who was available to further explain the questions to participants when that need arose.

#### **4.16 Conclusion**

In summary, this chapter discussed methodologies used to collect data in the study. It began by discussing the qualitative approach and went on to discuss the case study design, simple and purposive sampling. Moreover, the data collection instruments utilised, that is, online open-ended evaluation questionnaires, semi-structured

interviews and documents, namely; moderation reports and marked assignments were discussed. It has been mentioned in the discussion that case studies employ a number of different research instruments to increase the construct, internal, external validities. The chapter also explained how the main questions of this study align with the concepts of SCT. The findings that emanating from the research instruments are discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### Findings and discussion on feedback in the ENG123 module

*It takes humility to seek feedback. It takes wisdom to understand it, analyse it and appropriately act on it.*

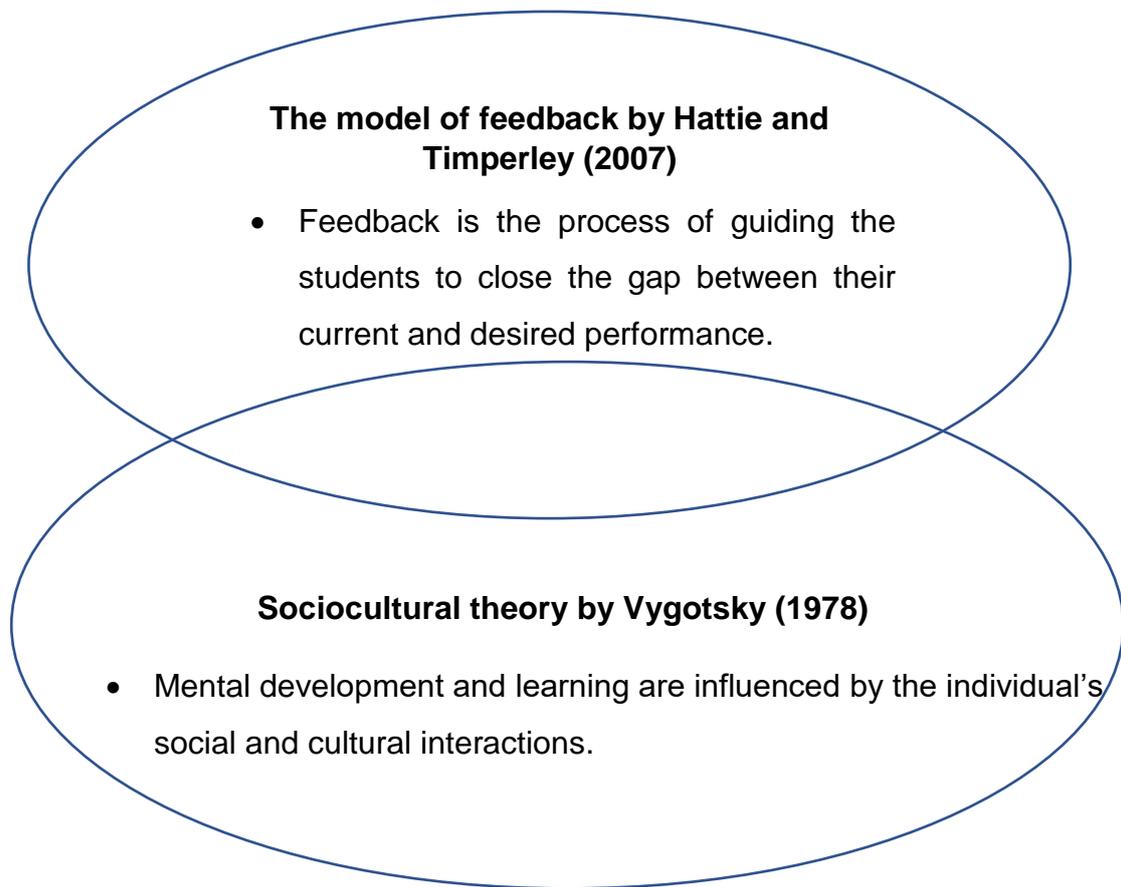
- Stephen Curry

#### 5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 discussed the qualitative research methods which are of paramount importance for this chapter. This chapter reports on, discusses and interprets the findings from the qualitative data gathered from the evaluation questionnaires, interviews, scripts and moderations reports. Difficulties regarding the provision and interpretation of feedback have been identified in literature from various contexts (Harries et al., 2014; Price, 2015; Panadero, 2018; Brooks et al., 2019). In this chapter, the researcher discusses findings from open-ended evaluation questionnaires, interviews and documentary analysis respectively under each research question. The study's research questions are as follows:

- What are the perceptions of students on the feedback they receive in the Academic Language and Literacy in English module (ENG123)?
- How do markers and lecturers view the feedback they provide students with in the ENG123 module?
- How do moderators' reports on marked assignments in ENG123 prepare students to improve their academic writing?

Since this study is aligned to Hattie and Timperley's (2007) model and Vygotsky's (1978) social-cultural theory to examine feedback that is provided in one Academic Writing module, the current chapter is guided by these two critical theories which were discussed in the theoretical framework (Chapter 3):



**Figure 5.1:** Critical points from the theoretical framework

The discussion in this chapter will reflect on the two theories highlighted in Figure 5.1. As discussed in Chapter 3, Vygotsky mentioned the “social, cultural and historical artefacts which play a pivotal role in the children’s cognitive development as well as their potential performance” (Pathan et al., 2018:232). Similarly, Hattie and Timperley (2007) view feedback as a tool that students can use to measure what they have accomplished and how far they are from their potential performance. This means that both the model of feedback and SCT share similar understandings as they are both concerned about the cognitive development of the student and have a desire to see what the student has accomplished after vigorous social interactions and engagements have taken place.

The chapter is organised in the following manner:

- Research question/s
- Analysis and interpretation of themes emerged from each research instrument
- Conclusion.

This study gathers perceptions of feedback from all participants (students, markers and lecturers) and supports and corroborates participants' perceptions with information from documents.

## **5.2 Findings from the online open-ended questionnaires**

The following open-ended evaluation questions below seek to answer the following research question: What are the perceptions of students on the feedback they receive in the Academic Language and Literacy in English module (ENG123)?

- Is the feedback provided by the marker on your assignment 1 or 2 useful in improving your writing? Discuss fully.
- Has the feedback you have been given in assignment 1 guided you to improve your results in assignment 2?
- What do you think can be done by your markers or lecturers to improve the quality of feedback given to you?
- Generally, what do you think about feedback?

The data gathered from the online open-ended evaluation questions above have led to the following themes which will be discussed next:

- English language learning challenges
- Incomprehensive feedback
- Academic writing insecurities
- Discrepancies in feedback
- Detailed feedback

### **English language learning challenges**

Unisa is one of the biggest ODeL universities in the African continent (Letseka et al., 2018). This means that Unisa attracts students from various cultural backgrounds who speak different languages other than the English language. This study investigates feedback in one mega module which registers students from various social and linguistic backgrounds. It was interesting to note that due to these social and linguistic disparities, students in the open-ended questionnaires mentioned that they were

unable to live up to standards expected by lecturers and markers since the English language alone is difficult to understand (Theo, 2020 online open-ended questionnaires). Other students mentioned that learning academic writing in English makes it even more difficult to acquire academic writing skills in a less than a year (Tilo, Gali & Ali, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire).

In line with the responses above, Vygotsky argues that learning a second language “must be studied in all its breadth and in all its depth as it affects the whole mental development of the child’s personality taken as a whole” (1997:259). Sibomama (2016) confirms the difficulties EAL students encounter by highlighting that students usually fail to master academic writing conventions during their first year of study. On the other hand, one student argues that the “feedback we receive always reminds us how we lack writing abilities. Lecturers should bear in mind that we are from a culture that had no English, let alone academic writing, if we were learning academic writing in our own languages perhaps we wouldn’t be struggling” (Hali, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire). Clearly, language continues to be a contentious issue in South African higher education (Boughey, 2002; 2012a; McKenna, 2010; 2012). Students’ responses indicate that students’ struggles are beyond acquiring academic writing skills as they seem to have language issues that they are dealing with as well. This implies that markers and lecturers need to find measures that can reduce students’ language and academic writing weaknesses through providing feedback.

EAL participants felt like the feedback they received from markers benefitted first language speakers (L1) of English as they are in a better position to interpret the language. One student lamented: “We struggle with almost everything and it seems like no one cares about our language struggles” (Kale, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire) while another one mentioned that “it seems like the realities of our language backgrounds are taken for granted– writing is not our only problem, mastering English is also a problem”. These responses indicate students’ struggles that are as a result of their social and cultural backgrounds. This resonates with the autonomous model of literacy which “is often coupled with a discourse of the

‘decontextualised learner’ who is divorced from her social context” (Boughey & McKenna, 2016:1).

Therefore, as a contingency measure, Vygotsky (1962) proposes that the students’ development be inseparable from their social and cultural experience. It would be interesting to see how first-year academic writing students are supported through feedback in other official languages in the future. From the above arguments, it is clear that students learn best when language resonates with their social experience which allows for a more ‘contextualised student’.

### **Incomprehensible feedback**

The student participants were requested to provide their own perceptions of feedback that was provided. The perceptions of the majority of students were that they often did not understand the feedback from markers because in many instances they received “positive comments that were accompanied by lower marks” (Jali, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire). Other students mentioned that they disliked negative feedback from the markers as it impacted on the way they viewed positive feedback (lai and Theo, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire). These findings corroborate with studies by Price (2015) and Hattie (2015) who argued that negative feedback is a disconfirmation feedback and can induce self-deception in students. Negative feedback can impact learning differently depending on how it is received.

Some students also mentioned that “[the] current feedback is useful because it helped me to revise other tasks” (lai, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questions). On the other hand, one student responded by saying “thank you so much for this question, the feedback is currently not useful, and it has to be useful because we are away from markers and lecturers. Some markers give few codes like ‘sp’, ‘p’ and ‘ww’ and leave it there” (Lise, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questions). This contradiction of finding feedback useful and not so useful at times could be owing to the fact that many students are not certain about the best way to interpret feedback and its application to academic writing (Chalmers et al., 2018). The finding of discovering contrasting responses from students discussed in this section is in keeping with Vygotsky’s (1978,

cited in Pathan et al. 2018:233) contention that “...the development of the child is possible in the guidance of a teacher, parent or any peer.” From students’ responses, one may conclude that due to the “psychological and communication space” between lecturers, markers and students in an ODeL context, there are challenges associated with student support (Lumadi, 2021:116). The challenge, in this instance, is having some students finding feedback useful, while others share contrasting opinions. As a matter of fact, all students should be benefiting from the feedback they receive.

### **Academic writing insecurities**

Many students seem to have academic writing insecurities and do not think that the current feedback is useful in addressing such insecurities. This finding seems to manifest itself in responses from five students who mentioned that academic writing is demanding and they did not find feedback useful. Although some students mentioned that the feedback they had received in the first assignment motivated them to do better in the second assignment, findings from other students revealed that it is not possible to improve the results of the second assignment based on the feedback received from the first assignment for the reason that these two assignments differ (Appendix J). Indeed, the results showed that students wished that these two assignments were the same so that there was a chance for improvement if they failed the first assignment. Moreover, the results showed that many students struggled with essay writing and this skill is normally required in the second assignment. Below are some of the students’ views:

“Academic writing is difficult and feedback is sometimes focused only on grammar rather than the essay structure that [I] often struggle with” (Lise, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire).

“I would appreciate ample feedback on the essay assignment more than any other assignment because essay is difficult and carries [more] marks” (Shell, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire).

“Can we receive feedback on how referencing within the essay [is done, rather] than ‘incorrect referencing’ kind of feedback” (Ali, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire).

“Sometimes essay questions require us to do research – meaning more reading, writing and taking notes – feedback doesn’t usually address all areas. I need help with research” (Jali, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire).

The comments above are diverse; however, they highlight students’ challenges related to academic writing. Most importantly, the responses show how students find academic writing to be a complex skill to master. The responses indicate that academic literacy is a new skill for many first-year students at the university. This is an indication that academic literacy skill is a vital discourse as Gee (1990) termed it a ‘secondary discourse’ and other way of being “acquired through exposure to particular social spaces” (Gee, 1990, cited in Boughey & McKenna, 2016:4). Cherry (2019) and Vygotsky (1978) attest to this by mentioning that individuals can be socialised into a context and the results of acquiring social norms and values manifest in the individual’s cognitive and behavioural development. As confirmed by the above-mentioned studies, academic literacy is a social practice, which means it is easily acquired through socialisation within a specific context. Feedback can help in socialising students into the academic discourse because it is defined as an important teaching tool (Chalmers et al., 2018; Zheng & Zhang, 2018).

A conflicting response from one student noted that “there is [an] adequate feedback in writing if I have to compare the current feedback with one I received in high school” (Gali, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire). Gali seems to be content with the current feedback and not the feedback he or she received in high school. In addition, other students highlighted that there were so many language errors that markers pointed out which helped them improve in their second assignment. They mentioned that if the marker did not point out their academic writing errors in assignment 1, they would have repeated the same errors in assignment 2. Despite some inconsistencies in their responses when sharing their insights on feedback, the findings seem to highlight that feedback improved their performance and to a larger extent, some students gained confidence through feedback (Bharuthram, 2018; Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

## **Discrepancies in feedback**

Most students indicated that the feedback generally lacked consistency, “Sometimes feedback is helpful, more often it is not clear, other times is insufficient” (Ali, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire). The student further mentioned that they had never had a time where they felt feedback addressed their concerns adequately, instead it raised many insecurities in their writing. Ali’s (2020, online open-ended evaluation questionnaire) view confirms Harries et al. (2014), Jonsson and Panadero (2018), and Price’s (2015) contention that feedback that is negative, unclear, ambiguous, biased can have a negative impact on a student’s learning confidence. The responses mentioned in this section indicate dissatisfaction. If students are not satisfied with feedback, this means that students’ ZPDs are not addressed. As explained in Chapter 3, it is believed that there is a space between what the student is able to do alone and what the student can do with guidance from an adult. Therefore, lecturers providing the appropriate assistance gives the student enough of a “boost” (Vygotsky, 1978:86) to achieve the task. There are findings on dissatisfaction with the way “feedback had different tones for both assignments” (Kale, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire). It is concerning that students did not clarify the kind of tones they are referring to; however, they could be referring to the “negative” and “confusing feedback” from markers since many have mentioned these phrases (Kale & Lai, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire).

## **Detailed feedback**

Shell argued that “thorough and detailed feedback means that the marker has engaged with our assignments and this is what we appreciate” (Shell, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire). Students mentioned that brief feedback appears incomplete and does not address their writing needs adequately. There were instances where markers provided students with global comments, such as “read the study guide” or “language is poor”, instead of clarifying and addressing “global writing issues, such as content, writing vocabulary, organisation or structure” (Shell, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire). Detailed feedback that does not only justify the grade given (Price et al., 2010), but serves as a scaffold for students is essential as it can enable students to develop from their “actual” individual levels into

the “potential level” (Azi, 2020:108). Evidently, inadequate feedback does not solve the problems that students encounter in ODeL institutions.

Studies which investigated students’ perceptions of feedback revealed that students do receive detailed feedback; however, students do not thoroughly understand how to engage with feedback as required by the lecturers (MacDonald, Burke and Stewart, 2006 cited in Uiseb, 2017). In contrast, one student participant argued that “lecturers and markers should engage with our writing as that will help us to improve our academic writing skills” (Shell, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire). Furthermore, one student added that “time and effort must be taken into consideration in order to provide us with some useful feedback” (Jali, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire). Secondly, participants mentioned that markers and lecturers must be “willing to just give feedback as that is the way they understand teaching to be done” (lai, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire). This view resonates with two of Vygotsky’s (1978) concepts: ZDP and scaffolding. The ZPD is defined as ‘I can do it myself’ after vigorous support from an adult, which means students know what they are able to do alone (Margolis, 2020), while scaffolding says ‘I can do this with some help’ (Azi, 2020), which also means that they understand that they cannot do all the learning without some guidance from lecturers and markers.

Below are a few students’ verbatim responses (Online open-ended questionnaire 2020):

**Lise:** “Timely given feedback is advantageous, as it allows time to implement necessary changes”.

**Ali:** “I don’t remember receiving assignment number 1 feedback before submitting assignment number 2. It is confusing because feedback from assignment 1 was suppose[d] to help me improve assignment [2].”

**Shell:** “I don’t read or use feedback because it doesn’t look [like] it can help. I get comments like ‘incorrect phrase’, etc.”

**Theo:** “I value the feedback markers give me. I failed assignment 1, but with feedback from it, I improved in assignment 2. The feedback didn’t help me because it came out late. Luckily, we got an extension”.

**Tilo:** “Feedback can be useful, but some markers don’t give us a useful feedback. That is why we end up not reading it”.

Responses from participants varied significantly. Many students valued feedback while others did not. Two students did not seem to value feedback in their responses. One participant alluded: “Once I see a pass mark, I don’t really care about what feedback says” (Tilo, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire). This confirms Chalmers’ et al. (2018) argument that most students are concerned primarily about their grades or the end result. It is relatively evident from the above responses that the research participants understood the importance of feedback in academic writing, however, due to factors such as time, their ZPDs were not adequately addressed by markers and lecturers. To address students’ ZPDs, Vygotsky (1978:66) argues that “what children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone”. Azi (2020:106) adds that, “it is only through exposing them to an environment during which they are externally guided by the instructions of the other more experienced adults, children become more aware of their experiences before they are internally proceeded in their minds”. These quotes are evidence that learning pathways unfold over time across various settings.

The participants’ main contention is that feedback hardly reached them in the required time which then had a negative impact on their writing performance. Noticeably, feedback remains a major source of students’ dissatisfaction in an ODeL context as it is typically insufficient (Shell, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire) and does not illustrate how they can improve on their weaknesses in academic writing. On the whole, students’ responses to the first research question, which is ‘What are the perceptions of students on the feedback they receive in the Academic Language and Literacy in English module (ENG123)?’ are satisfactory as they add to the existing body of research globally that argues that students are not satisfied with the feedback they receive in academic writing. However, it is interesting to observe these findings in a South African context.

### **5.3. Markers' and Lecturers' semi-structured interviews**

#### **5.3.1 Findings from the semi-structured interviews (markers)**

The following email semi-structured interviews questions seek to answer the following research question: How do markers and lecturers view the feedback they provide to students in the ENG123 module?

The following are semi-structured interview questions (See Appendix C) that markers responded to through email:

- What kind of feedback do you give students on their assignments?
- Do lecturers prepare or arrange workshops to explain how to provide students with quality feedback? Elaborate.
- Do you find the current feedback you are providing helpful to students? Support your argument.
- Was there any document or feedback rubric that was given to support you in your marking prior to the assignment marking? Motivate your answer:
- ENG123 is one of the biggest modules in the English Studies Department that caters for various degrees at UX. Do you think that the high numbers of students and tightened assignment deadlines compromise the quality of feedback you provide to students? Discuss.
- Most first year students seem to be struggling with academic writing more so in the first semester; do you think giving such students detailed feedback can help them in becoming better writers?
- What do you think can be done to improve feedback given to ODeL students?
- Have you read UX's feedback policy? Do you find it useful, particularly in addressing students' writing struggles? Discuss.

The data gathered from the email semi-structured interviews have led to the following themes which will be discussed next:

- Inconsistencies in feedback
- Sufficient feedback
- Feedback as a social event
- The significance of feedback

## **Inconsistencies in feedback**

All four sampled markers participated in the study and they all felt that there were inconsistencies in the way feedback is provided in assignment 2/ essay writing assignment (See Appendix J) and acknowledged their uncertainties about assessing students' writing quality in that assignment. According to many markers, writing is an important skill for everyone since it can be used to express opinions and thoughts; however, "this is the most demanding skill since it requires a complex process, including generating new ideas and acknowledging sources" (Butternut, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire)". This assertion resonates with the autonomous model that "views reading and writing as involving a set of skills focusing on the encoding and decoding of printed text" (Bouhey & McKenna, 2016:3). All these make "assessing and providing feedback challenging because students have both language and academic writing weaknesses" (Butternut, 2020 Interviews). Inconsistencies in feedback provision are bound to happen, particularly in a module that enrolls a high number of students.

## **Sufficient feedback**

Some markers indicated that they provide sufficient feedback in academic writing; feedback that motivates students and boosts their confidence. For example, one participant mentioned that "I give useful feedback that prepares students for the upcoming assessment" (Omega, 2020 Interviews). This notion contradicts Shell's (2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire) response, which argued that feedback is usually insufficient (Saeed et al., 2018; Zhang & Zheng, 2018). A further contrasting statement from one participant reads: "feedback is vital and it is encouraged in our module, I provide ample feedback all the time" (Julie, 2020 Interviews). These responses confirm some findings in Chalmers' et al. (2018) study, which found the experience of feedback beneficial and positive. Many markers reported that feedback is vital and this confirms claims that students need to be committed to the feedback goals and that feedback is effective especially when it features some elements of progress (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

To add, one participant added that "I do add feedback, but the problem is that students think academic writing is simple and requires a quick translation from their mother

tongue to the English language, whereas that is not the case” (Olivia, 2020 Interviews). The issue of transmitting thoughts from one language to the other (Christie, 1985, cited in Boughey & McKenna, 2016) relates to the autonomous model of literacy which views “reading and writing as involving a set of skills focusing on the encoding and decoding of printed text” (Boughey & McKenna, 2016:3). Hence, Street (1984, cited in Boughey & McKenna, 2016:3) suggests the ideological model, which sees “reading and writing ...as socially embedded practices... which emerge out of a set of beliefs and values”. The issue of transmitting thought from one language to the other concerned Olivia (2020 Interviews) as she believed that “it allows students rely only on their thoughts than what the feedback suggests they should do”. Students’ home language, together with their social practices play a pivotal role in acquiring academic writing skills.

### **Feedback as a social event**

One marker emphasised that students need to take feedback in academic writing seriously since their abilities to learn and write occur beyond their own personal and individual cognitive activities. This was illustrated by Olivia when she recommended that “learning academic writing should be viewed as a social event happening as a result of interaction between the learner and the context” (Olivia, 2020 Interviews), while Julia argued that “we could sense that academic writing is a new culture to most students and our feedback aims to socialise students into this culture” (Julia, 2020 Interviews). These findings support the ideological model of literacy by Street (1984) which illustrates that reading and writing are socially embedded practices which emerge out of a set of beliefs and values that are found acceptable by a certain community of individuals. The argument in this discussion is that the individual’s social surroundings play an integral role in the way they master literacy skills.

Some markers went on to mention that there is a dire need to identify the kind of feedback on academic writing that works for EAL students in an ODeL context. One marker said: “with many students’ challenges surfacing, it is vital to explore what we can do to welcome students in the culture of academic writing in an ODeL context”. Another marker conjectured that “feedback is one way of teaching students but we can explore other possibilities that can help us improve this feedback” (Omega, 2020

Interviews). As discussed in Chapter 3, these findings resonate with the Vygotskian perspective on the MKO, which argues that “we learn in the presence of other people: others who have a better knowledge of certain historical and cultural practices, more knowledgeable-others” (Abtahi, 2017:35). While on this issue of challenges in an ODeL context, other markers argued that there is a relatively high number of students who need additional learning support in ODeL. One participant explained that “there is a limited face to face platform for students to share their challenges with peers or receive support from lecturers, especially now during the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic” (Butternut, 2020 Interviews). This means that there are many factors that hinder and support students’ learning in DE.

### **The significance of feedback**

Below are some markers’ perceptions of feedback (Email semi-structured interviews, 2020):

**Olivia:** “Feedback takes the form of tuition. Feedback serves as a teacher explaining where the student went wrong, how to fix it and giving praise where it is due...Feedback is a substitute for lecturers in an ODeL context”.

**Julie:** “Students should receive their first assignment back in due course for feedback to be measurable. I think the university has unrealistic expectations and steamrolls the marking process in order to grant concessions to students. It is impossible to give quality feedback and point out errors given the tight deadlines sometimes”.

**Omega:** “My moderator has indicated that students find feedback very useful. It is also disappointing that the university keeps extending deadlines for submission of assignments which often put markers under pressure...and students do not receive the feedback in time to make the necessary changes”.

**Butternut:** “I give them feedback that points out their errors and give them guidelines on how they should have answered question. Do they find it useful? I don’t know”.

Participants generally recognise the importance of providing constructive feedback in academic writing. Chapter 2 explored studies that discussed the significance of providing constructive feedback (Knight et al., 2020; Zhang & Zheng, 2018:1124;

Jones, 2011). One marker further pointed out that “I think feedback is vital, thus, I give feedback on grammar and content”. However, for Gee (1992; 1996; 1999; 2001a; 2001b, cited in McKay, 2003:5), “Discourses cannot be learned through overt instruction. Rather, discourses are acquired through socialization and apprenticeship into the social practices of a particular discourse”. This indicates that the process of learning requires an individual to socially interact with others and behave in a way that is acceptable to a specific community. In the case of this study, students may develop academic literacies through engaging with the feedback they receive from markers and lecturers as these individuals are familiar with the disciplinary knowledge and the social context within which the learning takes place.

Another marker commented that “my moderator forwarded an email from a student requesting me to provide more explicit feedback that can help the student to improve in the exam. Clearly, there is a lot of learning that feedback encompasses” (Butternut, 2020 Interview). This finding proves that clear feedback has a huge impact on students’ learning, motivation and performance (Zhang & Zheng, 2018). The data elicited from markers allowed this study to gain insights into markers’ understandings of feedback. This finding further supports Hattie and Timperley’s (2007) assertion that good feedback is more than just providing information, but the appropriateness of the timing of the feedback relating to where the students are cognitively and how far the task requires them to go. Markers’ responses also revealed how well markers understand the role and the goal of feedback.

Qualitative analyses were necessary for this study as they helped the researcher to explain the main perceptions from participants, particularly markers as they are the main feedback providers in the ENG123 module. Interestingly, many markers understood the MKO position they hold in the module as one marker alluded that “providing feedback to students is providing them with an opportunity to engage with their own learning” (Olivia, 2020 Interviews). This is in line with the Vygotskian ZPD that has been “constructed to account for the gap between the actual level and the potential level of development of the individual learners” (Azi, 2020:105). This indicates that students may potentially master academic writing skills with support and assistance from markers and lecturers.

In summary, it was interesting to explore the perceptions from markers as they occupy a significant position of providing feedback to students in the ENG123 module. Markers shared some essential responses, such as academic writing challenges EAL students possess in ODeL context and challenges markers themselves have as far as marking in L2 and EAL contexts is concerned. For markers, academic writing skills acquisition (Lea and Street, 2006) does not seem to be an easy task for many students. This indicates that in addition to academic writing issues, students come into their first year of study with “language issues” (Boughey & McKenna, 2016:2). The next section discusses the lecturers’ responses to the second question of the study.

### **5.3.2 Findings from the semi-structured interviews (Lecturers)**

Along with markers, lecturers too responded to the main research question that markers responded to: How do markers and lecturers view the feedback they provide to students with in the ENG123 module?

Below are the email semi-structured interview questions (See Appendix B) that lecturers responded to:

- What kind of feedback should markers provide students with in assignment 2?
- How do you prepare external markers for quality feedback in assignment marking? Elaborate.
- Do you think the current feedback given by markers is helpful to students’ writing? Discuss.
- Do you have any document or feedback rubric that you distribute to the markers prior to marking? If not, what are they using as a guideline to provide feedback?
- ENG123 is one of the biggest modules in the English studies department that caters for various degrees at UX. Do you think the large numbers of students compromise the quality of feedback given to students?
- Most first year students seem to be struggling with academic writing. Do you think that providing students with detailed feedback, particularly in their writing activities may help in preparing them for their writing assignment? Support your answer:
- What can be done to improve feedback given to Ode-L students?
- Have you read UX’s feedback policy? Do you find it useful, particularly in addressing students’ writing struggles? Discuss.

The data gathered from the email semi-structured interviews have led to the following themes which will be discussed next:

- Academic writing challenges experienced by EAL students
- Factors affecting the success of feedback

### **Academic writing challenges experienced by EAL students**

Out of nine lecturers, only six lecturers were available to participate in the study. Many lecturers commenced by mentioning that EAL students generally struggle to read and write academically (Lea, 2016). To be more specific, one lecturer noted that “students received feedback continuously in the module; however, they still struggled to construct proper writing tasks because generally students struggle to express themselves in writing” (Conny, 2020 Interviews). Another lecturer added that “students’ major weaknesses are to master conventions of academic writing” (Henn, 2020 Interviews) (Lea, 2016). This may be owing to the fact that the literacy practices demanded in the academy “are tied to a notion of the student as separated from her history, culture, and language” (Boughey & McKenna, 2016:6). Conny and Henn’s (2020, Interview) responses are similar to the findings reported by Pineteh (2014:16) who argues that “applying the highly complex cognitive skills in academic writing is very challenging to students who are from rural and peri-urban backgrounds”. In addition, SCT argues that learning is socially situated and best achieved through collaboration with and dialogic feedback from peers and teachers (Vygotsky, 1978).

As discussed in Chapter 3, the role of social experience in the development of an individual’s knowledge is vital (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). In the previous section, one marker agreed that academic writing is a new culture (Julia, 2020 Interviews) and must be acquired as such. Similarly, another lecturer pointed out that “students are introduced to new ways of doing and it is understandably difficult - feedback helps here and there”. For Gee (2001a), secondary discourses such as academic writing need to be taken seriously as they are “consistently related to [the] everyday lives of people [in] their communities” (Gee, 1999; Hall, 1998:11). These secondary discourses are acquired “through subsequent participation in various social groups, institutions and organisations” (Gee, 2001a, cited in McKay, 2003:5).

## **Factors affecting the success of feedback**

Findings from lecturers support the findings from the markers' interviews as they confirm some of the responses provided by the markers. For instance, one lecturer alluded that "markers prioritise feedback all the time, I know for sure because I moderate scripts" (Billy, 2020 Interviews), while another lecturer protested that "feedback is not a major problem in the module but when markers work under pressure, due to the high numbers of students in our module, providing feedback then becomes a challenge" (Onika, 2020 Interviews). In addition, this notion is supported by Carpenter et al. (2020) who argue that high student enrolment is a global issue, but staff is held accountable if things go wrong as a result of this issue. Markers experience enormous levels of stress as the marking proceeds due to huge student numbers in the ODeL context (Uiseb, 2017). Besides this challenge, findings from one lecturer revealed that experienced markers are able to manage challenges, such as huge student numbers as compared to less experienced markers (Billy, 2020 Interviews). Zheng and Zhang's (2018) findings share a similar view that individuals without teaching experience were reluctant to discuss feedback with students. Billy further protested that moderators manage varying feedback from both experienced and less-experienced markers successfully despite the workloads they are faced with (Billy, 2020 Interviews). For instance, another lecturer noted that experienced markers are aware that feedback has to target a specific student's weakness (Henry, 2020 Interviews). "A disturbing trend was to read the same feedback on different scripts" (Henry, 2020 Interviews).

Feedback cannot be the same on every other script if students possess varying academic writing challenges and are also from different language or social backgrounds as discussed in Chapter 3. For lecturer Onika, "there are markers who copy and paste feedback from one script to the other and you find that the feedback given doesn't address the exact challenges of the student" (Onika, 2020 Interviews). Hattie and Timperley (2007:32) support Onika's assertion by arguing that "feedback is not only differentially given but also differentially received by learners based on their cultural and social backgrounds". For Horn (2016:8), "many curricula and assessments nowadays have the same expectations for students despite what type of cultural, economic, or social factors are involved in students' lives". The

autonomous model of literacy as discussed in Chapter 1 emphasises that literacy is not dependent on social practices, instead it is a “set of defined skills to be mastered” (Horn, 2016:2).

In summary, lecturers shared the following points that are believed to be hindering the success of feedback:

(1) “The lack of intense marker training” (Onika, 2020 Interviews) hinders the quality provision of feedback. The participant added that they try by all means to train all markers, but sometimes not all markers are available for the markers’ training due to their daily or urgent commitments. “In a markers’ training, three dummy scripts are marked – a weak, a medium and a strong dummy” (Onika, 2020 Interviews). He said: “this training teaches them how to mark different scripts” (Onika, 2020 Interviews).

(2) “We have EAL students and they have various challenges that are difficult to address considering the time each module is given” (Simion, 2020 Interviews). Simion protested that “academically weaker students need more motivation and feedback as compared to stronger students. Sufficient time is required in order to support these students” (Simion, 2020 Interviews). As a result, “Vygotsky’s proposal recognized the fundamental contribution of biological as well as social and cultural factors” as he argues that an individual cannot possibly learn outside of their social and cultural backgrounds (Lantolf, 1994:71). This notion is supported by mediation, which is seen as a process through which the social and the individual mutually shape each other (Vygotsky, 1997, cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Following Simion’s (2020, Interviews) view, mediation is relevant as it serves as an intervention of solving mental development problems in learning.

(3) “Providing positive feedback is problematic because such students do not improve, instead, they become overconfident and stop working hard” (Billy, 2020 Interview). According to this response, lecturers encourage markers to provide both negative and positive feedback. Drawing from a Vygotskian perspective, the MKO has some experience, understands ways of doing and is “used to think[ing] about problem[s]” and ways in which to solve such problems (Abtahi, 2017:36). This basically indicates

how moderators are able to handle feedback issues and manage feedback in a manner that would benefit students.

(4) “Students do not take the required responsibility or put in effort when it comes to interpreting feedback” (Henry, 2020 Interviews). Lea and Street (1998) agree with this response and argue that sometimes both students and markers fail to understand each other. Markers need to understand students’ social, cultural and language backgrounds to address their needs adequately. This philosophy is supported by SCT, which generally argues that students’ psychological development is influenced by social interactions and culturally organised activities (Vygotsky, 1978). This assertion assumes that students’ social and cultural backgrounds initiate the foundation for acquiring knowledge.

In summary, the findings presented in this section regarding lecturers’ perceptions of feedback are in line with Vygotsky’s SCT and the model of feedback (Hattie and Timperley, 2007) in that these two theories argue that learning is a social event, therefore, it requires interaction between individuals for it to manifest. As mentioned in Chapter 3, being a part of a particular culture influences how individuals behave, process and interpret the given information. This generally resonates with the theoretical framework of this study, as it argues that culture determines the individual’s learning and teaching procedures that consider individuals sociocultural practices (Boughey, 2016; Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). The next sub-section analyses documents.

#### **5.4 Findings from marked assignments**

Findings in this section sought to corroborate the responses from markers and lecturers in the previous sections. Below are questions which emanated from the document analysis questions (See Appendix D):

- What kind of feedback is provided on assignments? Are the strengths and weaknesses detailed in the document?
- Is there sufficient feedback on the document? Elaborate.
- Is this feedback neat and legible?

- Is the language or terminologies of the feedback provided suitable for first year ODeL students?
- Do you think students are able to interpret the feedback using the marking codes?

The document analysis section is divided into two parts. Part 1 examines students' marked assignments using a document analysis schedule (See Appendix D, document analysis schedule 1) and Providing a Constructive Feedback Rubric (PCFR). Different from part 1, part 2 examines the moderators' reports and responds to the third question of the study. Similarly, this part also utilises the document analysis questions (Appendix D, document analysis schedule 2).

### **Themes from marked scripts**

Five sub-themes emerged from the marked scripts and the document analysis schedule. They will be discussed in the subsequent sections:

- Positive feedback
- Detailed feedback (but negative)
- Insufficient feedback
- Incomprehensible feedback

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the researcher retrieved a total of ten marked assignment scripts from the online marking system, called the jRouter. Out of ten scripts, only five scripts managed to open successfully and displayed comments. The other five scripts did not display comments or students' marks due to some technical errors or network problems. In the ENG123 module, students are normally given the option to choose between two essay topics (See Appendix J). In some cases, they are given more than two topics from which to choose. The researcher used the PCFR document which was first introduced at the University of California for a SATAL program by Signorini (2014). The reason for choosing this feedback rubric is because it shares different kinds of feedback and has criteria which indicates how feedback has to be analysed, defined and the meaning it carries for a student learning to write. The researcher, therefore, analysed these marked scripts below using the rubric, which in a way summarises what a positive, a detailed, an insufficient, a thorough or difficult feedback contains.

Moreover, the researcher utilised the PCFR and the document analysis schedule (Appendix D) to organise, analyse and interpret data from the scripts. The markers' comments on the marked scripts were regarded as the data. The analysis of this data was crucial as it corroborated results gathered from the other instruments: online open-ended evaluation questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews. The table below shows the script with the PCFR criterion and the theme that emerged from the script.

<b>Scripts</b>	<b>PCFR criteria</b>	<b>Theme</b>
1	Criterion 1: Attribute positive feedback to internal causes and give it in the second person (you).	Positive feedback
2	Criterion 2: Give negative information in the first person (I) and then shift to third person (s/he), or shift from a statement to a question that frames the problem objectively.	Detailed (but negative)
3	Criterion 3: Give negative information in the first person (I) and then shift to third person (s/he), or shift from a statement to a question that frames the problem objectively.	Insufficient feedback
4 and 5	Criterion 4: Provide a balance of positive and negative feedback. For example, negative information can be "sandwiched" between positive information.	Incomprehensible or overly negative feedback

**Table 5.1:** Marked scripts, PCFR criteria (SATATL, n.d.) and themes

As already mentioned, Table 5.1 above shows a script number, PCFR criterion and a theme that emerged from each script. As the table indicates, data from only five scripts were analysed and interpreted using the document analysis schedule 1 (See Appendix D) and the PCFR (See Table 5.1). The scripts represented the kinds of comments/feedback students received from markers. As it is shown, the majority of markers allocated both positive and negative feedback; whereas, others provided adequate, insufficient and incomprehensible feedback.

The model of feedback by Hattie and Timperley (2007:86) reveals that students are likely to put in effort if the goal of the feedback is clearly outlined. In addition, hard work can be increased if the intended goal "is clear, when high commitment is secured for it, and when belief in eventual success is high" (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996, cited in Hattie & Timperley, 2007:86). Similarly, Vygotsky (1978) implied that a child must be guided

by the MKO in order to perform independently and successfully in the next tasks. The findings from the scripts reflected on the information provided above corroborates results from other instruments, particularly results from students' open-ended evaluation questions, as feedback from these marked scripts were prepared for them. The next sub-section explores themes from the marked scripts:

### 5.4.1 Positive feedback

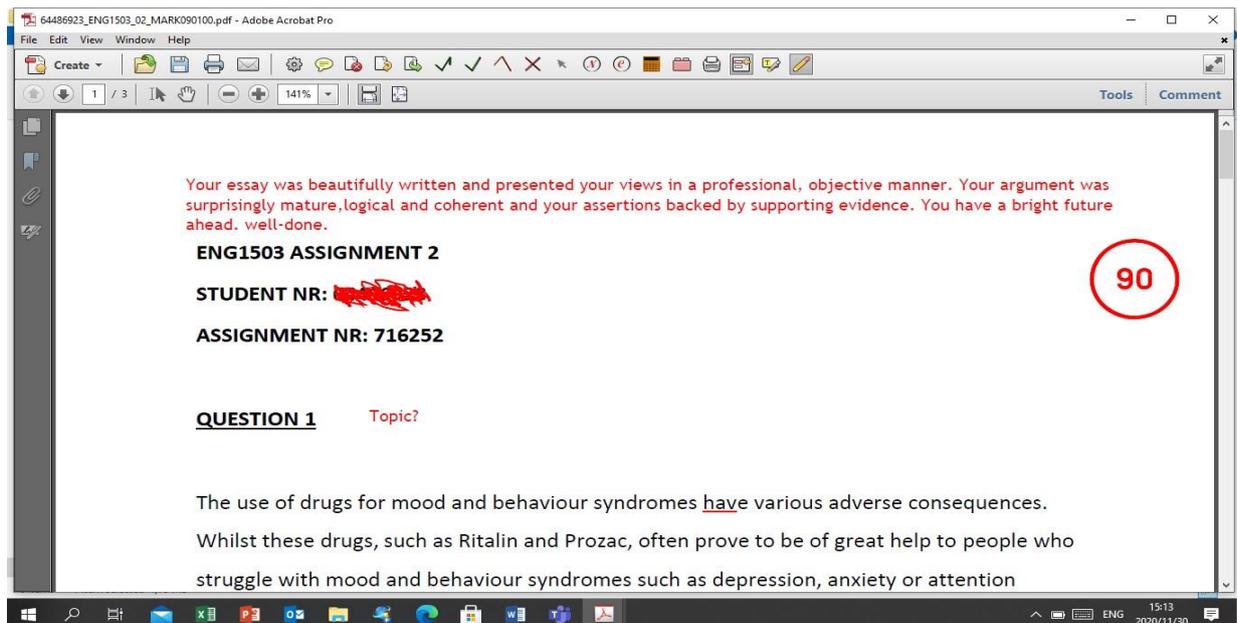


Figure 5.2: (Script 1) positive feedback

Figure 5.2 above is a marked script taken from the ENG123 second assignment marked batch. The script is labelled as positive feedback based on the PCFR's criterion number 1 that reads: 'Attribute positive feedback to internal causes and give it in the second person (you)'. According to this criterion and the first question in the document analysis schedule that reads, "What kind of feedback is provided on assignments? Are the strengths and weaknesses detailed in the document?", the marker outlined the student's strengths. In addition, the marker managed to provide feedback that aligns with the marks awarded which is 90%. This kind of feedback can be seen as a mediation process in SCT. It is important to associate positive feedback with mediation because knowledge is mediated through language (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

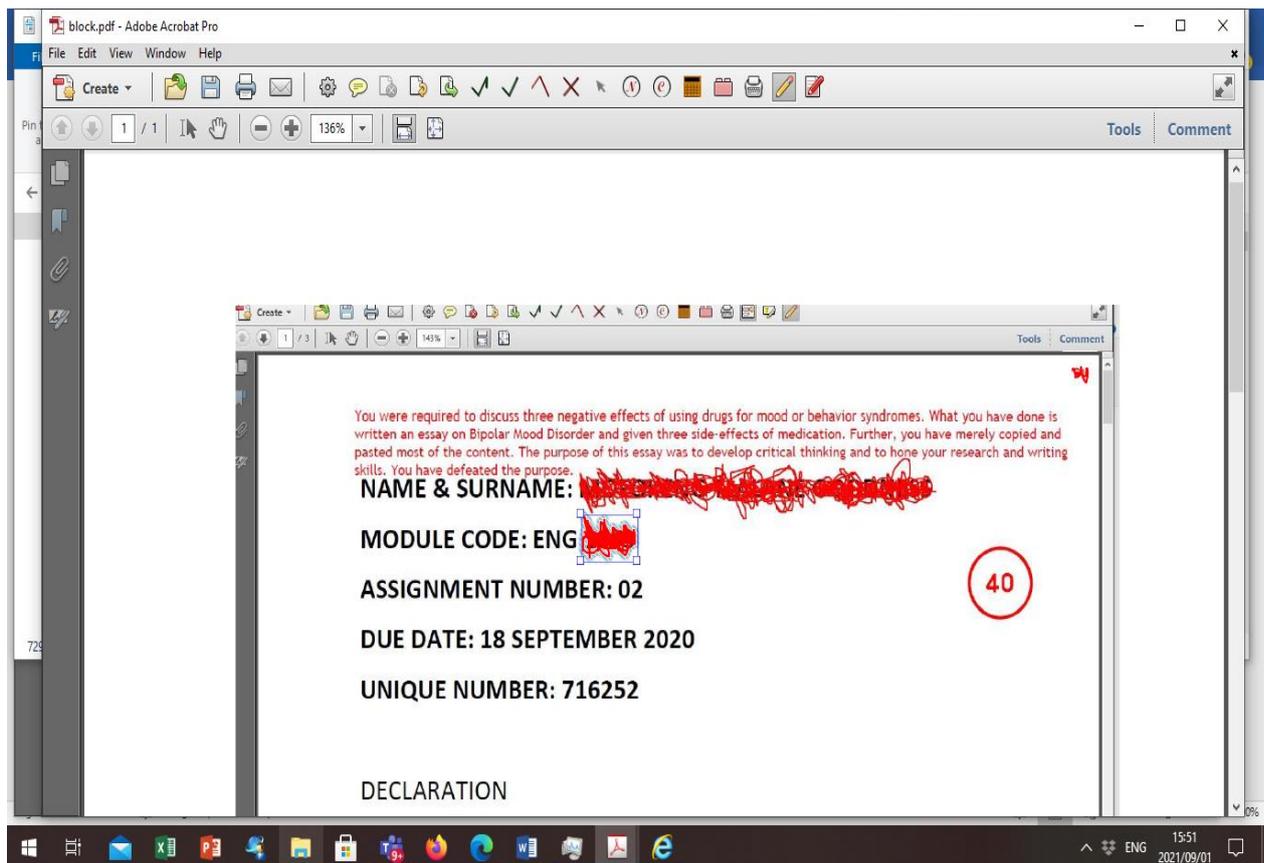
In the case of the above feedback, the marker acted as a mediator by playing an intentional role of explaining, emphasising, interpreting, or extending the environment so that the student builds up a meaningful internal model of the context or the world experienced (Cheng & Kia, 2011). Considering the given feedback, the student is likely to keep performing well (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In the case of script 1, the marker used language to encourage the student to keep performing excellently by stating “your essay was beautifully written and presented your views in a professional, objective manner”. This is the sort of feedback that may help students to perform better in the next task (Mag, 2019; Yamalee, 2019; Wahyuningsih, 2020). As mentioned in the previous section, feedback has to be purposeful to impact on students positively (Owen, 2016). The marker who provided feedback on script 1 seems to be intentional when providing feedback and this is what one lecturer alluded to in the previous in the semi-structured interviews: “I train markers to provide positive feedback and that encourages students to perform even better” (Conny, 2020 Interviews). The assumption in this response is that students value the positive feedback because it is assumed to be motivating and has a positive impact on students’ learning.

The marker who provided feedback was able to implement concrete motivation and uses words such as “your argument was mature, logical and coherent” (Figure 5.2) than providing vague comments such as ‘good’ which may not make students aware of where their strengths lies. It is for this reason that Hattie and Timperley (2007) argue that some feedback is more powerful than others. According to Molly and Eva (2018), students deserve a word of encouragement whether they perform poorly or well. It can be argued that most markers are too focused on students’ weaknesses, and, as such, they tend to highlight mostly the areas that are most challenging to students even when the student has performed fairly (Brook, 2013). For Hattie and Timperley (2007), positive feedback encourages students to improve or keep up their good standards of performance. Students who are given positive feedback are likely to perform well in the subsequent tasks than those who are not praised at all; particularly, if the student performed very well (Caldarella, 2019). However, the model of feedback by Hattie and Timperley (2007:86) opine that “praise for task performance appears to be ineffective, which is hardly surprising because it contains such little learning-related information”. The feedback that is reflected on in script 1 (Figure 5.2) indicates the student’s

strengths and omits the student's weaknesses. According to the model of feedback, this kind of feedback cannot help students to improve in the next task (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

The model of feedback highlights that effective feedback has to address these three major questions: "Where am I going? (What are the goals?), How am I going? (What progress is being made toward the goal?), and Where to next? (What activities need to be undertaken to make better progress?)" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007:86). In the case of script 1, the marker has answered the question "How am I going?" but has not discussed "Where am I going?" and "Where to next?" or how the student can improve. Although the student performed well in this particular script, all three of the major questions are not addressed; however, to a larger extent, they have been responded to. The theme of positive feedback which was addressed in this section implies that there is a necessity to provide positive feedback as it boosts students' confidence. Thus, citing scaffolding in this context is appropriate because it is described by Pathan et al. (2018:233) "as a situation which is created by an expert, peer or parent wherein the child can take part and increase his/her current skills and knowledge to higher levels of performance". Scaffolding is constructed for the use of the novice, and, in this case, first-year students may be referred to as the novice writers as they are on the verge of learning to write academically.

Providing feedback to EAL students in an ODeL context, and promoting other types of feedback such as peer and corrective feedback, is crucial, as feedback in such contexts is more than just feedback. It is a tool that can help build students' writing confidence and generate better opportunities for learning. According to PCFR, script 2 (Figure 5.3) below highlights negative feedback which may be criticised by the rubric for lacking motivation, encouragement and arguably, reducing students' writing confidence:



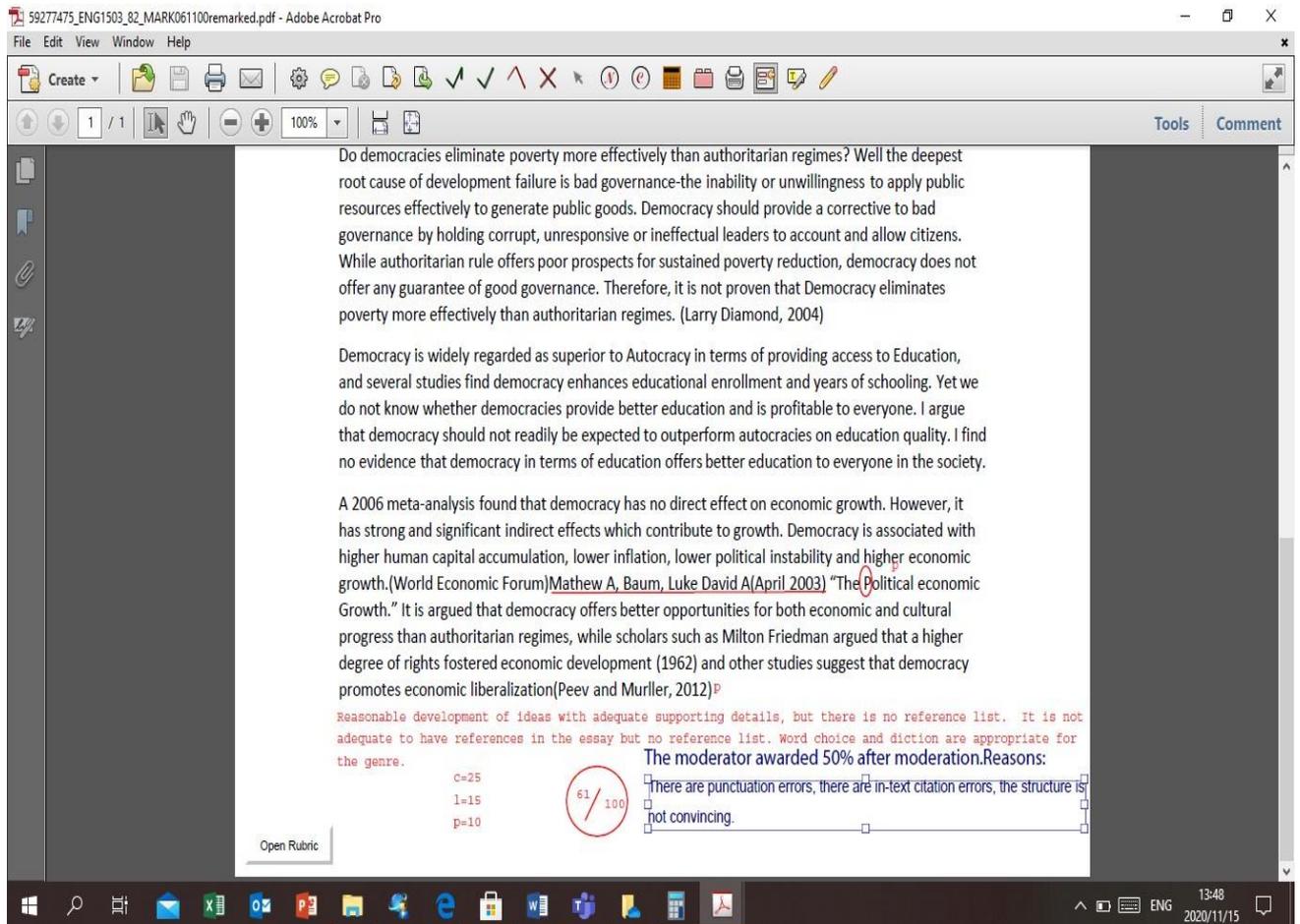
**Figure 5.3:** (Script 2) Detailed feedback (but negative)

Figure 5.3 is used as an example of critical feedback because comments were clear but firm and reprimanding. The comments are written in a negative tone as compared to the comments that are provided in script 1 (Figure 5.2). It is probably not fair to compare feedbacks that are provided in these two scripts as students also performed differently. Script 2 obtained a 40% which is a lower mark as the pass mark in the ENG123 module is 50%. As a result, the marker provided negative feedback by critiquing the contents of the assignment.

According to the model of feedback by Hattie and Timperley (2007), the comments are educational, therefore, the student who received comments in script 2 was more likely to improve in the next task than the student who received comments stated in Figure 5.2. The issue here is that this may depend on the kind of student who is going to receive this kind of feedback. Students who lack some learning confidence may struggle to interpret feedback in a way that it can be beneficial towards their learning (Sibomana, 2016). It is argued in Chapter 2 that EAL students often struggle to master academic writing conventions and interpret feedback provided (Sibomana, 2016). On

the contrary, the PCFR does not support any negative feedback without some positive feedback (Refer to Table 5.1, criterion no. 4). On the other hand, Brooks et al. (2019) objected that students seek feedback which teaches and motivates. The motivation aspect is missing in the feedback that is given in script 2, but the marker may be praised for being thorough and honest; particularly, when pointing out issues that concern a student's academic integrity such as "you have merely copied and pasted most of the content" (Figure 5.3).

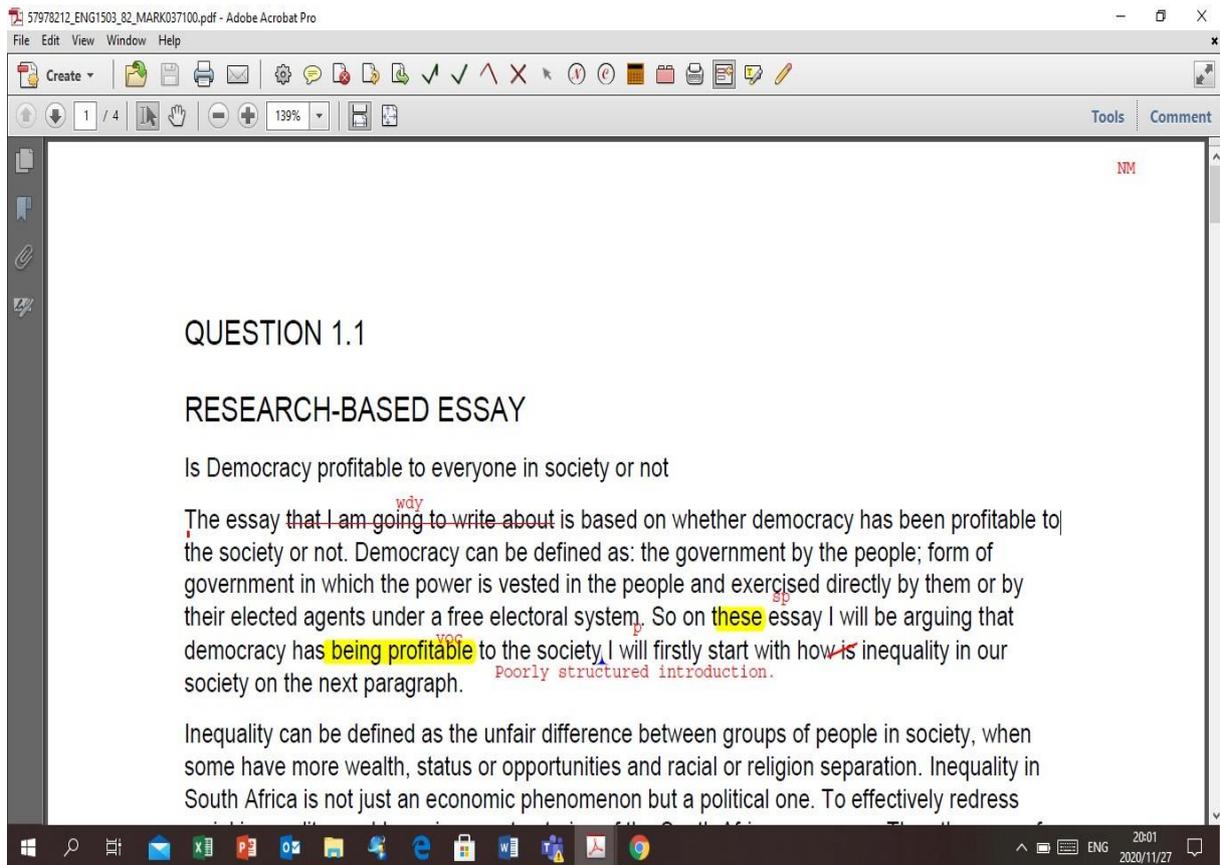
The inaptness in the feedback may be proof that there are no specific criteria that is followed for providing feedback, such as a feedback rubric. As confirmed by some markers in the interviews, there is no feedback rubric in the module that markers abided by when providing feedback. Some form of a rubric in an Academic Writing module can be essential as the rubric helps individuals set goals and stick by such goals (Signorini, 2014; Bharuthram, 2018). It can be agreed amongst markers and lecturers that a document for 'providing feedback' such as a policy or a rubric be developed to regulate feedback in the ENG123 module. In agreement, the ZPD maintains that developments can be achieved through "joint collaboration, and it is through such collaborative endeavours with more skilled persons that learners learn and internalize skills" (Shabani et al., 2010:238). The next script illustrates insufficient or incorrect feedback.



**Figure 5.4:** (Script 3) Insufficient feedback

Figure 5.4 above shows an essay that was marked twice: first by the marker and second, by the moderator. The marker awarded the student 61% and, as a result, this comment “reasonable development of ideas with adequate support” (Figure 5.4) was provided. On the contrary, one lecturer moderated the script and awarded 50% because “there are punctuation errors, in-text citation errors and the structure is not convincing”. According to the model of feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), the moderator’s feedback does not address the student’s challenges. As mentioned in this chapter, and Chapter 3, feedback has to answer several questions, such as “where to next?” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007:86). According to the model of feedback, feedback from the marker and the moderator did not address this question, therefore, this student probably did not improve in the next task because they were not taught how to rectify errors that were pointed out. Pathan et al. (2018) add that Vygotsky’s scaffolding is important in learning and must be implemented in situations such as this one. Scaffolding is defined as the “support which is given to the child to meet his cognitive potential” (Pathan et al., 2018:233). Without scaffolding, students may

continue to receive inadequate support; they will arguably remain in the same position of not knowing instead of reaching their greater learning goals (Alsaadi & Mahdi, 2013). According to the model of feedback, if goals are poorly defined, feedback will not reduce the gap between the current understanding and the intended understanding because learners may not know where to put effort (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). The next script below encompasses feedback that is also considered insufficient by PCFR:



**Figure 5.5:** (Script 4) Incomprehensible feedback

According to the model of feedback by Hattie and Timperley (2007), the PCFR and other studies (Brooks et al., 2019; Chalmers et al., 2018; Price, 2015), the comment “poorly structured introduction” is less helpful because it has limited information on how the student can improve their writing performance. Feedback may not improve the learner’s performance if:

- “the information has too little value to result in learning gains” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007:96).

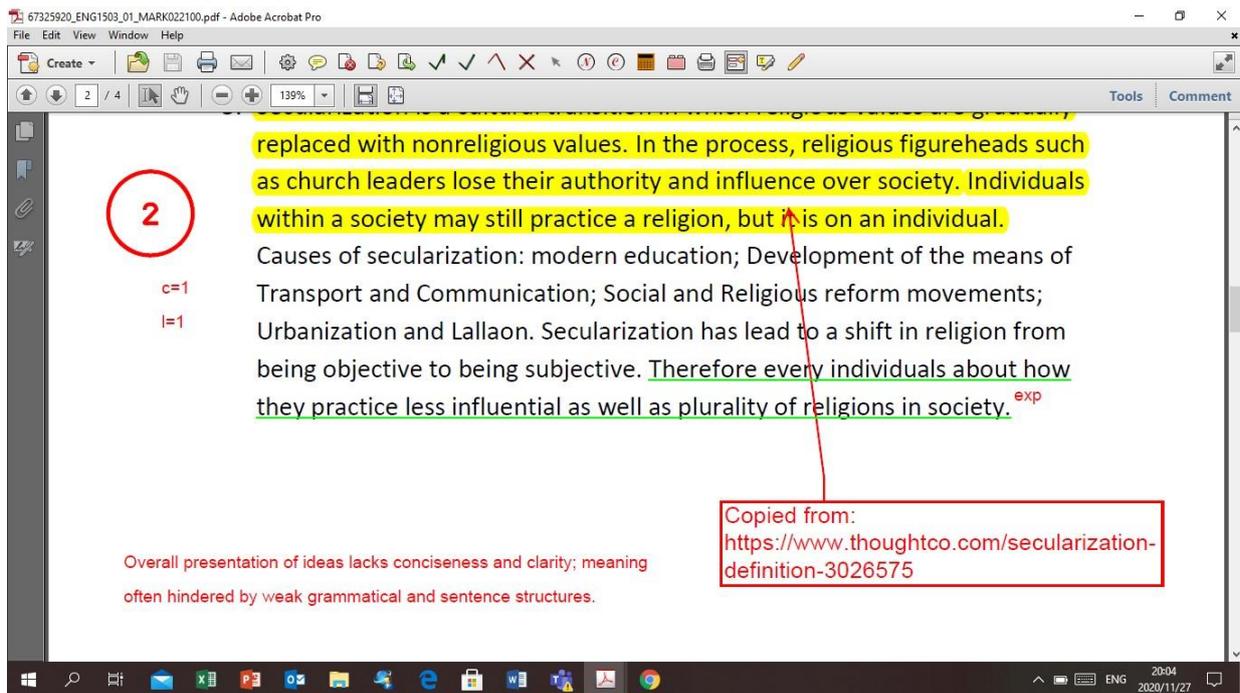
- it provides “negative information in the first person (I) and then shift to third person (s/he), or shift from a statement to a question that frames the problem objectively” (PCFR, n.d.).
- it is *cold* (Chalmers et al., 2018).

According to the model of feedback, insufficient comments such as the ones provided above usually fail to facilitate the student on what is expected to be done. As it is shown in Figure 5.5, some markers use marking codes, however, less is known if these marking codes are well understood by students or if marking codes can help students develop academic writing skills (Samia, 2017). The document analysis schedule 1 includes this question: “Do you think students are able to interpret marking codes?” (Document analysis schedule 1). The researcher assumed that this question was appropriate to be addressed in this script as the marker used a number of marking codes<sup>9</sup>, such as ‘P’ for punctuation, ‘Sp’ for spelling, ‘Voc’ for vocabulary and others. These marking codes are usually introduced in the study guides and may be understood by students who spare time to read the study guide. However, it seems that some students did not understand these marking codes as one student argued that “whenever I see marking codes, I feel like contacting the marker for an explanation” (Lise, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questionnaire).

Results from students indicate that the problem with the feedback is the marking codes, and brief feedback that is shown in Figure 5.6. Findings revealed by Zhang and Zheng’s (2018) study argue that providing feedback on form or language accuracy is not as important as providing feedback on coherence and cohesion or the originality of the work. Language is an important part of academic writing; however, cohesion and coherence are essential aspects of the structure of academic writing as they create a logical flow between sentences and paragraphs.

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<sup>9</sup> Marking codes are unique marking symbols that are formulated by module team and put into the study guide.



**Figure 5.6:** (Script 5) Critical feedback

According to SATAL’s PCFR, the feedback provided in Figure 5.6 above is legible, concise and clear even though the student did not do well due to plagiarism. The PCFR precisely says: “Keep comments non-judgmental and descriptive rather than evaluative (focus on description rather than judgment” (SATAL, n.d.) and this is what the marker has done. Moreover, it seems the issues of plagiarism in the module are rife as markers also highlighted it in the interviews. At first-year level, many students do not know how to reference other scholars’ ideas (Price, 2015). This means that markers who mark for first-year students’ assignments need more time as they also have to find sources to prove or support the claim that students plagiarised.

### 5.5 Moderators’ comments regarding feedback

Findings in this section responded to the following research question: How do moderators’ reports on marked assignments in ENG123 prepare students to improve their academic writing?

Below are the document analysis questions that the researcher used to analyse the moderators’ reports:

- Is the moderator satisfied with the provided feedback? No/Yes/Not sure Elaborate:
- Does the moderator’s report emphasise the importance of feedback? Yes/No/Not sure Explain:
- Is there any acknowledgement of a good or weak feedback/comments in the moderator’s report? If yes, provide examples:

The researcher received five moderators’ reports from lecturers who participated in the study. Below are some of moderators’ comments on the reports they wrote to markers:

Moderators’ comments
<p>Report 1</p> <p>“Thank you for this quality marking and the feedback you have provided. I also discovered that many students do not reiterate the topic at the beginning of their discussion and thank you for providing feedback on that.”</p>
<p>Report 2</p> <p>“Thank you for your dedication, however, we would like to request that you collect this batch of scripts and put comments for students. Going forward, always provide feedback. If you stay nearby, arrange with our AOs to come and pick them up. Thank you.”</p>
<p>Report 3</p> <p>“Feedback is significant in this module; therefore, ensure that your comments are more visible and readable. If I struggle to read some of your comments, how will they benefit students?”</p>
<p>Report 4</p> <p>“You have done a great job; however, on script xxxxx [student number removed] you were too generous. This student did not do thorough research...”</p>
<p>Report 5</p> <p>“Excellent marking! Previous report shows that the marker had calculation problems. I am glad to see that the marker has improved”.</p>

**Table 5.2:** Moderators’ reports

### **Insufficient feedback**

Table 5.2 above highlights some of the comments taken verbatim from the moderation reports by lecturers. From these moderation reports, the researcher learnt that some

moderators were not satisfied with the amount of feedback that markers provided. These reports demonstrate that lecturers emphasised the importance of feedback as this view is corroborated by their perceptions shared while responding to the interview questions. For Onika (2020 Interviews), markers should provide students with the feedback that is individualised because students have different challenges and needs. For Onika (2020 Interviews), “no one size fits all ...”. Similarly, Henry (2020 Interviews) mentioned that “experienced markers are aware that feedback has to target a specific student’s weakness”. Feedback that targets the specific student’s writing may assure the student that the marker is speaking to them as an individual and that may also give the student learning confidence.

### **Feedback as a teaching tool**

Moderators’ comments such as “I also discovered that many students do not reiterate the topic at the beginning of their discussion and thank you for providing feedback on that” and “feedback is significant. . .” on Reports 1 and 5 indicate that feedback is considered to be an essential teaching tool in the ENG123 module. In these moderators’ reports, it was noted that markers provided quality feedback and also thanked markers for highlighting important issues or challenges that students possess, such as failure to restate the topic in the introduction. Both reports consist of a positive feedback from moderators to markers and this can be encouraging to markers. When moderators praise markers for doing a great job, markers improve. They provide adequate feedback and mark fairly (Chalmers et al., 2018; Zheng & Zhang, 2018).

### **Feedback must address challenges**

There are a number of challenges that ODeL students face, such as “writing in a second language” (Shukri, 2014:192), “difficulties in access and use of ICT, ineffective feedback and lack of study materials” (Musingafi et al., 2015), therefore, according to moderators who compiled Reports 2, 3 and 4, providing quality feedback is essential and needs to be prioritised even though it cannot solve other problems. Moreover, the reports show that if quality marking is not provided, moderators have the liberty to return scripts to the marker for correction if students’ challenges are not addressed. It

seems like moderators realised that markers struggled to adequately provide written feedback and are returning scripts back to markers for additional feedback. Interestingly, if the marker provided effective feedback, the moderator would praise the marker in the report for doing so as it is done in Report 1.

### **Feedback on the purpose of the task**

As briefly mentioned in the PCFR and the model of feedback (Refer to Chapter 3), feedback has to focus on the assessment task and the objectives of the task as it is assumed that that way it will sound more relevant, purposeful and add value to the students' learning. This is what many moderators' reports such as Reports 1 and 4 emphasised. According to the moderators, the primary role of feedback has to be to help students develop their cognitive skills amongst other learning skills and this is in line with Vygotsky's notion of imitation, which means the learner's ability to imitate what the knowledgeable other demonstrates, whether in writing or in a classroom setting (Vygotsky 1997:95). Vygotsky's notion of imitation is the basis for the ZPD. Vygotsky's imitation, in this case, does not completely mean copying of a person's actions (Vygotsky 1997:95), but supports the notion of acknowledging the support that is offered. Imitation, therefore, depicts that moderators (lecturers) support markers so that they offer quality feedback to students.

To recapitulate, the findings revealed that most of the difficulties faced by the moderators were scripts that addressed grammar, spelling and punctuation instead of also addressing the topic, coherence, organisation and structure and citations as mentioned by students in their responses. This was also mentioned by other lecturers/moderators when responding to the interview questions. Moreover, other moderators did not seem to consider feedback as one of the teaching tools. They did not emphasise the significance of providing more feedback in the moderation reports; they were instead concerned about calculations (Report 5).

As shown in Chapter 1, Street (1984) distinguishes between an 'autonomous' model of literacy and an 'ideological' model. In Street's (1984) terms, literacy can be viewed either as an individual attribute or a social practice. As a result, this study revealed that the ENG123 module views academic writing as an individual attribute rather than a social practice. The autonomous model of literacy considers that academic literacy

is a set of skills that need to be mastered in order to produce a meaningful text and it differs from an ideological model of literacy that sees academic writing as a social practice. As shown in Chapter 1, Table 5.3 below briefly illustrates the characteristics of the autonomous model of literacy that align with findings in the current study:

Autonomous model of literacy	Findings of the study
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set of decontextualized self-contained skills.</li> <li>• Teacher centred – “school-centric” reading and writing.</li> <li>• Sub-skills – learn about literacy as a subject.</li> <li>• Product-oriented. Pre-determined and easily measurable.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Feedback from marked scripts:</i> Feedback such as detailed, positive and negative feedback is provided; however, there is no feedback which addresses students’ sociocultural aspects, such as language contexts and social backgrounds and how such student can approach academic writing. For example, Figure 5.3 and Figure 5.4 show scripts with sufficient feedback, but none of it addresses EAL students’ challenges. It is mainly on how sub-skills can be adopted. It is, therefore, evident that the module under study is more product oriented.</p>

**Table 5.3:** The autonomous model of literacy and findings of the study

According to Table 5.3 above, the autonomous model of literacy generally views literacy as an expression of a person’s intellectual and psychological abilities rather than a social practice where students’ social backgrounds are taken into consideration when tasks are planned (Boughey & McKenna, 2016). For Lonsdale and McCurry (2004:7), there should be “a strong focus on the social context in which literacy practices take place and a consequent shift from narrow vocational outcomes for individual learners to more holistic outcomes related to empowerment and capacity-building for both individuals and communities”. This means that to contextualise a learner, the module should adopt an ideological model of literacy that views literacy as a social practice (Street, 1984).

## 5.6 Conclusion

The findings in this chapter revealed that feedback reinforces students' learning by offering them an opportunity to reflect on their writing weaknesses. Findings from international studies share similar sentiments with the findings from the current study. For Halawa et al. (2017), students appreciate feedback, particularly when it comes from experienced tutors who are regarded as the learning role models or the MKO (Vygotsky, 1978). This notion has been echoed by findings from lecturers' interviews. The findings revealed that first-year students did not find the current feedback satisfactory and this contradicts with the views from markers who claim that feedback was adequate for helping students reaching their learning goals. According to the students, feedback was valued; however, its role was not acknowledged by markers and lecturers, probably due to heavy workloads and huge student enrolment numbers. This chapter revealed that feedback is decontextualized and detached from students' sociocultural practices and contexts, it is primarily teacher-centred, it focuses on literacy as a subject and not literacy as a social skill and it is focused on results and is not process-focused (Boughey & McKenna, 2016; Mgqwashu, 2016; Lea & Street, 2006; Gee, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978).

## CHAPTER 6

### Summary of findings, recommendations, implications, future research and conclusion

*It is what the students do that matters. The aim is to make the students active in the learning process until they reach a stage where they are their own teachers.*

- John Hattie

#### 6.1 Introduction

The researcher initiated this study with the hope that it would bring about an understanding of how feedback is perceived by staff and students in an ODeL context. In Chapter 1, the researcher shared that there are gaps in higher learning which were related to student support, feedback and academic writing of EAL students, while Chapter 2 and 3 discussed arguments from various scholars and theorists that underpin feedback and language learning studies. Chapter 4 provided the approaches that formed the core essence of this study and explored the qualitative approaches that made this thesis possible. Chapter 5 analysed and discussed data using the qualitative approaches discussed in Chapter 4. In this chapter, the researcher discusses the summary of findings, students, markers and lecturers' recommendations, implications, future/pending research and a conclusion of this study is outlined.

The present study contributed to the lecturers and markers' understandings of how feedback can be used as a useful teaching tool in Academic Writing modules, particularly in EAL and ODeL contexts. When holistically analysing data, the researcher discovered that some students seek explicit feedback, while others showed dissatisfaction with the current feedback. On the other hand, markers and lecturers indicated that they prioritise feedback and feedback is emphasised in the standardisation meeting with markers. They further reported that students are generally not prepared for distance learning and have language and writing challenges. Some of these aspects have been diagnosed in other studies that studied feedback (Paideya & Dhunbath, 2018; Nemupangedengu, 2017); therefore, findings in this study contribute

insights into the existing body of knowledge and increase value. The value is increased because the present study also contributes by linking the model of feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) and SCT (Vygotsky, 1978) within one research study. Linking a model and a theory as a framework in a qualitative study is rare in studies that investigate feedback as they usually opt for academic literacies and academic socialisation models, which arguably “made an influential and meaningful contribution to the teaching” of academic writing and English language in EAL and L2 contexts (Chokwe, 2011:29). Within the qualitative part, the contribution made was to holistically investigate the parts of the whole group (the ENG123 team) and this was made a success by using the case study approach. Therefore, the study contributed to the existing case study research by including students and markers, which was often not done in prior studies in feedback and academic writing.

## **6.2 Summary of the key findings**

The main finding in this thesis was that most first-year students in South African HEIs, both in a contact or a distance learning, have problems with expressing themselves in academic writing. Thus, the results in this study revealed that it is significant to constantly examine and rethink feedback in order to discover how feedback can be enhanced and improved. The purpose of this study was to reimagine ENG123 students’ feedback for improved academic writing skills, to discover first-year students’ perceptions of feedback and to gather in-depth experiences and perceptions of feedback from lecturers and markers. Drawing from Hattie and Timperley’s (2007) model of feedback and Vygotsky’s (1978) SCT, data was collected using the following key questions which were guided by this study:

## **What are the perceptions of students on the feedback they receive in the Academic Language and Literacy in English module (ENG123)?**

The data collected under this question revealed the following issues:

- Students in the ENG123 module reported that the feedback they received in the module is difficult to understand. This finding is in line with Roosevelt (2008, cited in Shabani, 2018:238), who states that the:

Vygotskian perspective is to keep learners in their own ZPDs as often as possible by giving them interesting and culturally meaningful learning and problem-solving tasks that are slightly more difficult than what they do alone, such that they will need to work together either with another, more competent peer or with a teacher or adult to finish the task. The idea is that after completing the task jointly, the learner will likely be able to complete the same task individually next time...

Although this Vygotskian viewpoint sounds practical, it may not be applicable in distance learning, as students have no immediate contact with lecturers due to a number of reasons. According to Lumadi (2021:113), "Online distance e-learning (ODeL) was introduced where students learn outside the normal lecture halls." For this reason, there is a distance between students and lecturers that limit interaction between the two. As a result, the feedback should be able to bridge the gap between the students and the lecturers and should not be difficult or vague to interpret as there will be no adult present in real time to interpret or explain in detail what it aims to achieve.

- Constructive feedback is required to enhance students' performance, particularly in ODeL where failure rates are relatively high. This finding is in line with Lumadi (2021:121) who argues that

Lecturers do not give us sufficient feedback on our assignments. They simply show that they do not care about us. Sometimes I have to fall on other friends who have done the course elsewhere to assist me. In fact, it is my friends who are my lecturers.

- Students are not satisfied with the kinds of feedback they received from markers; it is not sufficient, and students are requesting more meaningful feedback that could bridge the gap that already exists in the ODeL context.

### **How do markers and lecturers view the feedback they provide students with in the ENG123 module?**

- One of the key findings from this question was that feedback is one of the major teaching tools that are emphasised in the module, particularly in standardisation meetings with the markers;
- Students have many challenges and are also underprepared for reading and writing standards that exist in the context of higher learning (Paideya & Dhunbath, 2018; Nemupangedengu, 2017; Monnapula-Mapesela, 2015; Chokwe, 2011), therefore the current feedback targets and improves students' writing to a certain extent and excludes other areas that students struggle with;
- Staff prioritise feedback in the ENG123 module, however, there are institutional issues, such as students' huge numbers and staff workloads that have an impact on the quality of feedback (Nyamupangedengu, 2017; Pineteh, 2014) and,
- Providing feedback to EAL students in academic writing is more than just helping them master the writing skills, but to also give them the technical knowledge associated with language that supports meaning (vocabulary, punctuation and sentence structure) (Theo, 2020 online open-ended questionnaire).

### **How do moderators' reports on marked assignments in ENG123 prepare students to improve their academic writing?**

To respond to this question, the study utilised marked scripts, the PCFR and moderation reports. The study revealed varying feedback from marked scripts:

- Positive feedback
- Detailed (but negative)
- Insufficient feedback
- Incomprehensible feedback

### 6.3 Students' recommendations

Most students stated that the current feedback can be improved by if they are given a permission to have a conversation with the exact marker who marked their scripts (Lise, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questions). Some feedback can be very confusing and complicated (Price, 2015; Hattie, 2015). It is important to give feedback that is sufficient for the purpose of the task and see how students implement it in the following task.

More explicit and comprehensive feedback is required and most importantly, it should reach students in time so it can be helpful in improving the upcoming tasks, such as other assignments and exams and their ZPDs in general (Vygotsky, 1978).

Students recommended that lecturers and markers should plan the feedback they provide so that it becomes more meaningful than just passing comments, such as 'incorrect introduction' or 'sp' for spelling as shown in script 4. Most importantly, they should mention what students did well and what to do to achieve better results in the future, such as feedback that reiterate the purpose of the task as shown in script 2, explain what the student should have done and what to do next (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). In this regard, markers and lecturers may consider scaffolding, mediation and imitation as ways to improve the current feedback so it addresses the students' academic writing learning challenges holistically (Vygotsky, 1978).

Many students recommended that feedback should include specific examples of what is expected and should explain why and how changes can be made. This corroborates with the statement from Hattie and Timperley's (2007:82) study when it argues that "when feedback is combined with more a correctional review, the feedback and instruction become intertwined until the process itself takes on the forms of new instruction, rather than informing the student solely about correctness". Possibly for students that is what makes feedback meaningful and authentic.

Students further recommended that equal amount of feedback should be provided as at times it seems some students get more thorough feedback than others. In a nutshell, students recommend feedback to be consistent across markers and assignments.

In short, many of these recommendations mentioned above emerged from the first question in the online open-ended evaluation question, 'What do you think can be done by your markers or lecturers to improve the quality of feedback given to you?' (See Appendix A). Many students commented on the fact that the feedback is meaningless if it does not help them achieve more than what they achieved in the previous task. The comment was shared by Lise (2020, online open-ended evaluation questionnaire) when argued that "feedback can help us get more marks, [if] not, it is not important". Feedback has to be useful in changing the current performance and giving the desired performance as stipulated by Hattie and Timperley (2007) when they argued that the purpose of feedback is to reduce discrepancies between current understandings and performance. The theoretical framework supports the assertions made by students in many ways. The sociocultural theories such as ZPD maintains that developments can be achieved through "joint collaboration, and it is through such collaborative endeavours with more skilled persons that learners learn and internalize skills" (Shabani et al., 2010:238). Hattie and Timperley (2007) add that for learning to manifest both parties should be active participants in their endeavours. This means that students do not fail because they do not receive adequate feedback, but they fail because they do not do what feedback requires them to do. In many cases, they do receive it; however, they do not process feedback thoroughly as expected by markers and lecturers. Students have a responsibility to process, understand and apply the feedback that they receive. This notion is supported by Hattie and Timperley (2007) as discussed in Chapter 3.

#### **6.4 Markers' recommendations**

The recommendations emerge from the semi-structured interviews' question, 'What can be done to improve feedback given to OdeL students?' (See Appendix B). Markers recommendations are crucial as they give lecturers perspectives on how to reimagine the current feedback and improve where improvements are required.

The fundamental recommendation that most markers made in the interviews was that of time. One marker noted that, "...it is also disappointing that the university keeps extending deadlines for submission of assignments which often means that students do not receive the feedback in time to make the necessary changes" (Julie, 2020 Interviews). It is surprising that students did not discuss this issue; however, they mentioned receiving assignments feedback very late. Other markers commented on working under pressure due to this institutional issue. They indicated how impossible it is to consistently provide quality feedback while in panic. The pressured deadlines also are a deterrent to quality feedback (Julie, Olivia and Omega, 2020 Interviews).

Another issue is that of growing number of students. Due to this issue, other markers recommended the creation and exploration an automated feedback system due to the increasing student numbers. One marker further shared that an automated feedback may provide detailed feedback, such as "guidance in formatting documents, grammar, spelling and punctuation and unpacking the questions" (Olivia, 2020 Interviews). However, Rosen's (2015:687) findings protest that an automated feedback is "limited to specific component writing skills versus the full construct of writing quality". On the contrary, Luo and Liu's (2017) study supports the use of automated feedback system because it reduces the negative feedback. Automated feedback system can help Academic Writing modules with huge student numbers. In addition, feedback should also "teach students how to cite sources, an area that requires a lot of attention. It supposed to help them negotiate the chasm between secondary and tertiary education. This kind of feedback can be easily provided if it is automated" (Julie, 2020 Interviews). Clearly, there is a lot that students have not mastered in academic writing, including acknowledging sources, language and writing skills. Considering all these challenges, it is easy for one to assume that the problem is with students (Lea & Street, 2006); however, the 'ideological model' emphasises that "both reading and writing should be understood as socially embedded practices – things people do in relation to printed text – which emerge out of a set of beliefs and values common to particular communities about what it is *appropriate* to do" (Lea & Street, 2006:3). Therefore, with relevant measures in place, the teaching and learning of academic literacies may be understood and tackled in a way that is beneficial for both staff and students.

Most markers alluded to the importance of having a feedback rubric that would perhaps give guidance on how feedback should be given. Markers noted that a feedback rubric might help them to mark within a given time. At times, markers would be put under pressure to finalise marking within a certain period so that other assessments, such as examinations are given a sufficient time.

### **6.5 Lecturers' recommendations**

Lecturers and markers' recommendations are also based on the question, 'What can be done to improve feedback given to ODeL students?' This question is from the semi-structured interview schedule.

When responding to the question, one lecturer recommended that, for feedback to be improved, the module should move from a semester module to a year module. This would give students more time to grapple with the content of the module and would offer the lecturers and markers ample time to provide quality and useful feedback. At UX, most modules are offered per semester. Arguably, this is not sufficient as most first-year students are from high school and there is a lot of academic material to cover that was probably missed at high school. Yearly, one discovers that registration extensions affect assignment submissions and the marking period due to the limited time. The DES should consider changing the module from a semester module to a year module as semester modules are given a limited time (approximately 16 weeks) to understand content, complete two assignments and an examination.

In ENG123, students are expected to complete the two assignments that are allocated per semester. In addition, there is the marking, quality assurance processes such as moderation and the examination. All these processes are expected to be completed in a single semester which is approximately within four months. One lecturer added that to improve the current feedback, "we should integrate applications that will provide automated feedback and set up continuous online assessments on academic writing" (Henn, 2020 Interview). A similar recommendation was suggested by one of the markers in the previous section, which was that the automated feedback will provide detailed feedback (Olivia, online open-ended evaluation questionnaire). It is interesting

that staff recommended strategies that would enhance feedback in academic writing. Their recommendations are supported by Lea and Street (2006:3) when they argue that there are “many different ways of approaching and engaging with . . . different *literacies* – some of which are constructed as having more value within specific contexts than others”. This means that people who teach academic writing skills should explore different methods that may suit their context rather than trying same methods that do not work for the kind of context or students they have.

To add, one lecturer recommended that online practices, such as audio files, video recordings, pre-set automated feedback, and live web-based conferencing may be considered for modules in ODeL contexts that have huge student numbers (Onika, 2020 semi-structured interviews). Gee (1990) argues that there are many ways of acquiring secondary discourses such as academic writing.

Adding more experienced markers would also assist in improving feedback. More intense and detailed moderation could be useful in improving feedback too. Students should be frequently interviewed or consulted to find out what kind of feedback they feel would assist them further. A questionnaire or a survey to the students might help provide this information in this regard. Suggestions provided by students may shape how feedback is to be provided (Ann, 2020 Interview).

During standardisation meetings, feedback should be part of the agenda. One lecturer mentioned that “in the standardisation, the significance of feedback is emphasised” (Henn, 2020 interview). This is supported by Hattie and Timperley (2007) as they argue that feedback should be emphasised in various learning contexts because it is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement.

For educational problems to be solved, all stakeholders involved should engage, consult, commit and become active members of the teaching and learning community.

## **6.6 Implications and recommendations of the study**

From the results that emerged from students, markers, lecturers' perspectives and some results from literature review, it is clear that effective feedback improves students' performance and success in academic writing.

The study recommends that lecturers train markers to provide quality and constructive feedback appropriate for ODeL first-year academic writing students. In Academic Writing modules, any assessment whether verbal or written should be accompanied by a constructive feedback that reinforces the purpose of the task and its expectations. First-year students need more scaffolding and mediation some new behaviour becomes possible after the application of these aspects in learning.

It is recommended that lecturers in writing modules should constantly emphasise the importance of providing feedback to markers. It is also crucial that lecturers monitor markers' marking strategies and alert them of any gaps or inconsistencies that arise in that regard.

Furthermore, like the model of feedback outlined, student and lecturer roles are vital in the way feedback is created and processed. However, it is crucial to highlight the importance of lecturers' roles in feedback as they are the ones who design frameworks that help students to improve their academic work. Lecturers need to design frameworks that would be used in the feedback provision and enlighten students on how feedback is supposed to be processed and interpreted. Lecturers should ensure that students are introduced to various kinds of feedback and are given the liberty to choose their preferences. The following kinds of feedback were introduced and discussed in the literature review section:

- Peer feedback
- Oral feedback
- Written feedback
- Audio-tape feedback

Some types of feedback may not be applicable to contexts like ODeL where student numbers are huge, but others can be helpful in such contexts. However, for feedback to be effective in various teaching and learning contexts, it should be continually evaluated, reflected on and implemented in a way that suits the context and the individuals. In a nutshell, feedback practices should be contextualised. In Vygotskian terms, development cannot be separated from its social and cultural context (Vygotsky, 1962).

This study recommends that the ENG123 module explore various kinds of feedback. This study reviewed the following studies that examined feedback from different learning contexts:

- Brooks et al. (2019) utilises a student feedback perception questionnaire (SFPQ) to gather students' responses on feedback from a contact university and discovered various results. Students regarded a feed forward (improvement-based feedback) as a helpful feedback. It was therefore crucial that this study gather data from a different perspective.
- Pirhonem (2016) examines students' perceptions about the use of oral feedback in EAL classrooms. The study found that many students preferred oral feedback because it appeared to be more natural and immediate as compared to the written feedback which requires intense interpretation and precision.
- Chalmers et al. (2018) investigated student and staff perceptions of the linking of marking and feedback in face-to-face sessions. 49 students chose face-to-face marking, and the remaining 35 students received written feedback. Focus groups were used to investigate the student experience. At the end, both groups felt that the time spent together allowed for a feedback dialogue with staff. This type of feedback may be difficult to administer in a module with thousands of students.

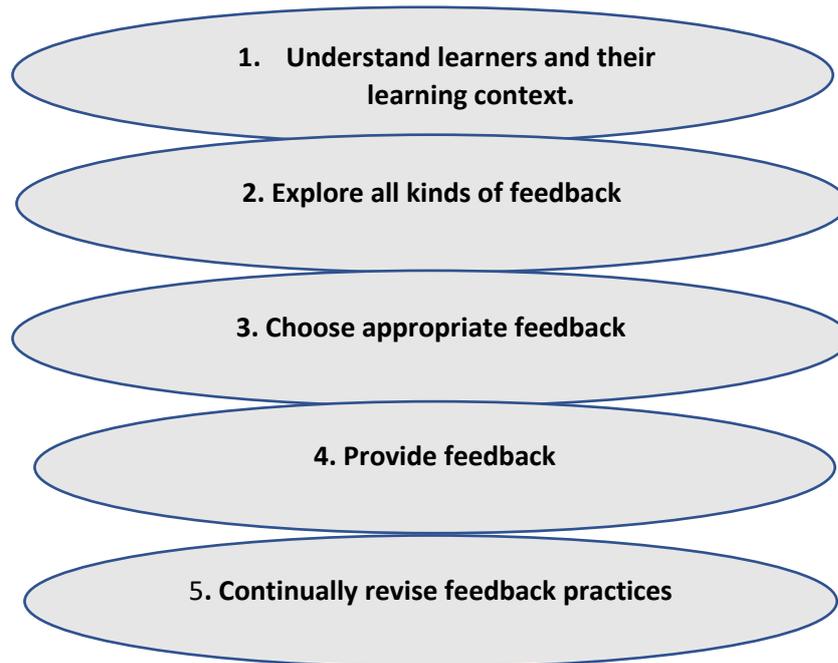
Different approaches worked for different groups that are contact-based, however, for the other contexts, such as ODeL, this study also recommends a strategic framework as this framework is suitable for EAL/L2 teaching and consists of macro strategies and micro strategies which might be helpful in both contact and ODeL contexts. According to Kumaravadivelu (1994:32):

Macro strategies are general plans derived from theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical knowledge related to L2 learning/teaching. A macro strategy is a broad guideline, based on which teachers can generate their own situation-specific, need based micro strategies or classroom techniques.

According to Kumaravadivelu (1994:32), strategic framework does the following:

- maximise learning opportunities;
- facilitate negotiated interaction;
- minimise perceptual mismatches;
- activate intuitive heuristics;
- foster language awareness;
- contextualised linguistic input;
- integrate language skills;
- promote learner autonomy;
- raise cultural consciousness; and,
- ensure social relevance.

Moreover, the following post-method framework/pedagogy as proposed by Kumaravadivelu (1994, 2006) and discussed in Chen (2014:18) may be applicable for the ODeL modules, such as ENG123:



**Figure 6.1:** The post-method to feedback

It is important that lecturers, as the teaching practitioners, understand the students they are working with. That way lecturers will be able to teach markers how to adequately address the needs of students and be able to provide feedback that would transform performance. In addition, it is vital that the context in which teaching takes place be considered if quality feedback is to be provided. The way that feedback is provided in a contact university should differ from the way feedback is provided in DE context. To understand students and their context, lecturers should consider observing students' performance and be sure to identify errors that require attention. Lecturers should also reassess the current feedback practices. In addition, Chen (2014) posits that lecturers may find outside sources that can help students learn. This includes referring students to writing centres, libraries, their online tutors and other learning communities where there are teaching experts who can readily provide feedback instead of limiting feedback to the classroom environment. It may be useful for lecturers of the ENG123 to briefly review the post-method to feedback in order to add onto their knowledge of providing feedback to EAL students.

As the model of feedback by Hattie and Timperley (2007) argues, the quality of feedback should be monitored in the same way other marking procedures are handled to ensure that the intended learning objectives are met successfully and that students are satisfied.

The researcher realised that there was little connection between what students and staff said about feedback. The researcher argued that quality feedback is highly anticipated by students because it ensures lifelong learning in many teaching contexts, whether in a traditional classroom setting or an ODeL context. This study argued that feedback is important as it helps in upgrading EAL students' academic writing skills and assures quality results, particularly in ODeL context.

The researcher recommends that digital feedback, regardless of the mode, could assist in creating interaction between the students and the lecturer/ marker. However, although feedback should be communicative from a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), it could take time to establish such an environment as students may be unwilling to interact at first. Technology could be the feedback solution that would bridge the epistemological gap between the lecturers and students; and so, this study argues that students need to get used to receiving digitised feedback; especially with the ways in which education is changing through the Covid-19 landscape. This is very important, especially because of the students' inabilities to understand or make sense of the current feedback, which was the case and the problem in this study and this could be solved through interaction. Many students stressed for more explanation, clarification and justification of the marks provided in their assignments, upon having difficulty to understand the minimal and unconstructive feedback given. Adequate training on how to use and implement digital feedback should be provided. As one of the largest and leading universities in the world, UX should invest in training their lecturers and markers in this regard as many other universities around the world are already implementing digital feedback (Luo & Liu, 2017; Rosen, 2015). However, it is crucial to create an interactive environment, with an emphasis placed on interaction and direction, rather than the technology itself (Rosen, 2015).

Lastly, the researcher realised that none of the participants recommended the use of the model of feedback; particularly, the four levels of the model of feedback, namely; the task level, process level, self-regulatory level and the self-level (See Chapter 3), as a framework for the teaching and learning of academic writing in the module. Therefore, this study recommends that the four levels of feedback, as discussed in Chapter 3, be considered for a clear facilitation of feedback in the module. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), the four levels of feedback facilitates the provision of specific feedback to individual students depending upon their learning needs. This sounds appropriate for a module, such as the ENG123 module, where students are from various learning backgrounds and have varying learning needs, as briefly alluded to by Onika (2020, Interviews), who mentioned that “no one size fits all in the module because students have different needs”. The study also recommends that Vygotsky’s SCT concepts, namely; ZPD, the MKO, mediation, imitation, and scaffolding be considered, because like the ideological model of literacy, these concepts view academic literacy as a social and cognitive practice that encompasses a network of social, cultural and educational practices (Gee, 1990). In Gee’s (1990) terms, students need social and cultural knowledge in order to function appropriately and understand the world around them. This is one of the aspects that the ENG123 module may consider in order to improve the academic writing performance of students.

## **6.7 Prospective research**

Further analyses need to be explored using this data or any related data to explore feedback from different angles. One such angle, for instance, could be to investigate how feedback is understood within various learning departments and how lecturers in various modules prioritise feedback as a teaching tool. Further research is needed on the role of feedback— specifically in an ODeL context. This study and other studies reviewed did not explore the role of feedback in DE in detail, instead it examined the perceptions individuals have on feedback, particularly in academic writing. Many written comments obtained from markers and lecturers provided sufficient data for the current research but did not go beyond understanding the feedback in different modules in an ODeL context. For this reason, there is a need for continuing research. Future research may investigate how other modules in different departments provide feedback and how

other universities in South Africa or around the globe provide feedback and why? Are there any support measures that are more efficient than feedback that can help students improve their writing? And/or, what kind of feedback is more suitable for DE students? This study has demonstrated that constructive feedback is vital in education as it can do more than just improving students' performance but can reduce the failure rates in first year writing modules. Positive feedback which is balanced with constructive feedback which encompasses Hattie and Timperley's (2007:87) three questions "Where am I going? How am I going? and where to next?" can improve students' learning confidence and also improve enthusiasm for learning.

The perception-based findings from the student, marker and lecturer interview participants could further be investigated both quantitatively and qualitatively in prospective academic writing or other studies with larger samples over a longer period as long-term studies are needed for more reliable results (Chalmers, 2018). Moreover, as the students' learning styles were not taken into consideration during the scope of this study, it would be interesting to observe how prospective studies could explore the impact of learning styles when providing feedback to students in different modes. Similarly, further studies could focus on how providing feedback based on student preferences could affect the quality of academic writing. The results of this study can be used as a baseline or fundamental basis to have similar research.

## **6.8 Concluding remarks**

Many studies that have investigated feedback have alluded to its significance in the teaching and learning of academic writing. The theoretical framework that underpinned this study could not overemphasise how feedback improves students' performance. Engaging with students, markers and lecturers' perceptions of feedback allow one to understand the phenomenon in detail and recommend constructive resolutions. Exploring various perceptions from different individuals also helps in understanding that what has been practiced as far as feedback is concerned was below the expectations of the students.

However, it is concerning that when markers or lecturers commented on the challenges students are faced with they did not clearly state how students' social, cultural and

language backgrounds contribute towards students' academic writing learning challenges. Boughey and McKenna (2016:5) argue that "academic literacy courses focus mainly on simply acquiring a set of neutral, a social, a-cultural, and a-political skills". They further add that "these courses often completely fail to acknowledge that reading and writing in the ways sanctioned by the academy have implications for students at the level of identity" (Boughey & McKenna, 2016:5). None of the participants in this study mentioned the way social and cultural aspects were considered in the planning of feedback in the module.

The present study investigates students, markers and lecturers' perceptions of feedback, and contributes to the existing literature that focused on feedback with aim of improving the student learning experience. The online open-ended questions presented students with an opportunity to reflect on the current feedback, their expectation and needs as far as feedback is concerned. The findings indicate the significance of constantly engaging students in the dialogue that addresses issues that concern feedback. Including students in the issues of assessment is vital as it may help staff to reflect on their ways of doing and can also help them to not repeatedly do what is not considered quality by students. A significant finding in the study was the contradiction that was revealed between students and staff's viewpoints: Students argued that the feedback is not sufficient and requested meaningful feedback that would bridge the knowledge gap that exists in ODeL space.

In comparison, data from the markers and lecturers in the study indicates that feedback is one of the major teaching tools that are emphasised in the module, particularly in standardisation meetings. This was proven to be not entirely correct as some of the marked scripts did not appear to have sufficient feedback. Some markers seemed to have marked under pressure and thus, minimal feedback was provided whilst others resorted to using marking codes, such as 'Sp' for a 'Spelling error', 'Voc' for a 'vocabulary error' and 'Wdy' for a 'wordiness'. Although these were deemed correct to be used in the module, most students felt marking codes should be accompanied by extensive comments in order to validate a failing mark and to demonstrate how they could improve their results in the next assessment task. At times, there seemed to be little to no connection between the students' experiences and staff's claims. On the

other hand, the preliminary findings highlight the challenges that hinder the success of the feedback in the module. Failure to deliver feedback on time has been the major highlight. It is argued that every DE student needs specific comments that are tailored to their individual strengths and weaknesses.

To remind the readers of this work, this study sought to uncover perceptions from individuals who receive and give feedback in academic writing. It was vital to understand how students were supported in the Academic Writing module to understand their expectations on feedback. In addition, the study endeavoured to understand what markers and lecturers were doing in terms of feedback in order to teach academic writing skills, since there is no face-to-face interaction in the ENG123 module. The results revealed that markers and lecturers were confident about the current feedback, while students had contradicting views. Even so, the ultimate goal was understanding the different points of views and to make thorough recommendations such as regularly seeking students' perspectives when making assessment decisions in the module. Developing different strategies on reimagining feedback would enhance the experience of learning through distance learning and could motivate more students to complete their studies successfully through ODeL.

In closing, the challenges faced in different learning contexts concerning feedback and academic writing has to be thoroughly studied in order to make learning a journey worth taking and to improve the experiences of first-year students. The growing diversity of the types of distance learners and technology available calls for a reimagining of feedback in distance education. The journey in ODeL can often be a very lonely and long one. However, with sufficient support, both students and lecturers could embark on this journey together, transforming the teaching and learning experience into a positive and empowering endeavour.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Students' online open-ended evaluation questions

### Online open-ended evaluation questionnaire

1. Is the feedback provided by the marker on your assignment 1 or 2 useful in improving your writing? Discuss fully.  
.....  
.....  
.....
  
2. Has the feedback you have been given in assignment 1 guided you to improve your results in assignment 2?  
.....  
.....  
.....
  
3. What do you think can be done by your markers or lecturers to improve the quality of feedback given to you?  
.....  
.....  
.....
  
4. Generally, what do you think about feedback?  
.....  
.....  
.....

## **Appendix B: Lecturer e-mail semi-structured interview schedule**

1. What kind of feedback should markers give students on assignment 2?
2. How do you prepare external markers for quality feedback in assignment marking? Elaborate your answer:
3. Do you think the current feedback given by markers is helpful to students' writing? If so, why? If not, why?
4. Do you have any document or feedback rubric that you distribute to the markers prior to marking? If not, what are they using as a guideline to provide feedback?
5. ENG123 is one of the biggest modules in the English studies department that caters for various degrees at UX. Do you think the large numbers of students compromises the quality of feedback given to students at times?
6. Most first year students seem to be struggling with academic writing more so in the first semester. Do you think giving such students detailed feedback, particularly in their writing activities may help on preparing for their writing assignment? Support your answer:
7. What can be done to improve feedback given to Ode-L students?
8. Have you read UX's feedback policy? Do you find it useful, particularly in addressing students' writing struggles? Discuss.

## **Appendix C: Marker e-mail semi-structured interviews**

1. What kind of feedback do you give students on their assignments?
2. Do lecturers prepare or arrange workshops for you on how to give students quality feedback? Elaborate.
3. Do you find the current feedback you are providing helpful to students? Your support your argument:
4. Was there any document or feedback rubric that was given to support you prior to assignment marking? Motivate your answer:
5. ENG123 is one of the biggest modules in the English Studies Department that caters for various degrees at UX. Do you think the high numbers of students and tightened assignment deadlines compromise the quality of feedback you provide to students? Discuss.
6. Most first year students seem to be struggling with academic writing more so in the first semester; do you think giving such students detailed feedback can help them in becoming better writers?
7. What do you think can be done to improve feedback given to ODeL students?
8. Have you read UX's feedback policy? Do you find it useful, particularly in addressing students' writing struggles? Discuss.

## Appendix D: Document analysis schedule for assignments and moderator reports

### Type of document: Marked students' assignments (Document analysis schedule 1)

1. What kind of feedback is provided on assignments? Are the strengths and weaknesses detailed in the document?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2. Is there sufficient feedback on the document??  
Elaborate:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

3. Is this feedback neat and legible?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

4. Is the language or terminologies used suitable for first year ODeL students?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

5. Do you think students are able to interpret feedback using marking codes?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Type of document: Moderators' reports (Document analysis schedule 2)**

**Date:**

1. Is the moderator satisfied with the provided feedback? No/Yes/Not sure

Elaborate:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2. Does the moderator's report emphasise the importance of feedback?

Yes/No/Not sure Explain:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

3. Is there any acknowledgement of a good or weak feedback/comments in the moderator's report? If yes, provide examples:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## Appendix E: Student consent form

1237 Kirkney Village  
Simonsberg Street and Abhurite  
Crescent  
Pretoria West  
0003  
7 April 2020

### Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Kgabo Bridget Maphoto and I am doing research with Dr Kershnee Sevarayan, a senior lecturer, in the Department of English Studies towards a Master's degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled 'Reimagining student feedback for improved academic writing skills in a first-year English Studies module at the University of South Africa'.

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that could help the researcher to assess the quality of feedback that is provided to the marked assignments of students who are currently registered in the ENG123 (English for Academic Purposes) at UX.

### WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are chosen to participate in this study because you are registered for this module. The sampled number of participants in this study are 10 students. All participants' privacy and confidentiality will be practiced, respected and they may withdraw from participating at any time without any explanation.

### WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. lecturers are going to respond to feedback related semi-structured interviews. Each interview session will take not more than an hour. The interviews are scheduled for June 2020.

### CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time during participation and without giving a reason.

### WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There are no incentives for participating in this study, however, because you registered for this module, you use this experience to reflect, explore and use feedback that is provided to you to improve your academic writing in the ENG123.

### ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

There will be no negative consequences as no one will know that you took part in the study. Your name will not be mentioned anywhere.

**WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

Confidentiality and anonymity in this study will be preserved. Responses and results from individual participants will remain private and will only be used for research purposes. Agreement between the researcher and the participants is that, no information about the participants will be revealed. Their privacy will be preserved.

**HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?**

Information will remain with the researcher all the time. No one will be able to access it as it will be encrypted with password. Interviews’ data will be recorded in a form of an audio and password will protect that information. To ensure that the information is more secured, she is going to use a laptop rather a cellphone as cellphones can be easily misplaced or lost, when compared to a laptop.

**WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?**

No payment will be received for participation.

**HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?**

Yes.

**HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?**

For any information regarding this study, such as the research results and findings, contact the researcher on 012 429 6128. You may also contact the researcher’s supervisor, Dr Sevnarayan on 012 429 3821.

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the <insert specific data collection method>.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname..... (please print)

Participant’s signature.....Date.....

Researcher’s Name & Surname **Kgabo Bridget Maphoto**

Researcher’s signature

Date: 7 April 2020

## Appendix F: Lecturer consent form

1237 Kirkney Village

Simonsberg Street  
and Abhurite  
Crescent

Pretoria West

0001

7 April 2020

### Dear Prospective Participant

Invitation to be part of the study: Reimagining student feedback for improved academic writing skills in a first-year English Studies module at the University of South Africa.

My name is Kgabo Bridget Maphoto and I am conducting a study in the Department of English Studies towards a Master's degree at the University of South Africa. I am inviting you to participate in a study entitled "Reimagining student feedback for improved academic writing skills in a first-year English Studies module at the University of South Africa".

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that could help me assess the quality of feedback that is provided to the marked assignments of students who are currently registered in the ENG123 module (English for Academic Purposes) at UX.

### WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY?

You have been chosen to participate in this study because you teach academic writing to first-year students in this module.

### WHAT IS THE NATURE OF YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

I would like to interview all lecturers in the module by means of a semi-structured interview. Each interview session will take no longer than an hour. Please note that privacy and confidentiality will be practiced, respected and you may withdraw from participating in the study at any time.

### WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

Unfortunately, there are no monetary incentives for participating in this study, however, since you teach this module, you should be able to use this experience to reflect on and explore ways to improve the way markers provide feedback in the ENG123 module.

### HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Information will remain with the researcher all the time. No one will be able to access it as it will be encrypted with a password. Interviews data will be recorded in a form of an audio and a password will protect that information. To ensure that the information is more secured, the researcher will store all interview data on a laptop rather a cellphone as cellphones can be easily misplaced or lost.

### HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

Yes, the study has received ethical consent from the University of South Africa.

**HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?**

The study's findings will be available on request. Kindly contact the researcher on 012 429 6128. You may also contact the researcher's supervisor, Dr Sevnarayan on 012 429 3821.

.....

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (participant's full name name and surname), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has informed me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I have read and understood the study as explained in this information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time.

Participant's signature.....Date.....

Researcher's Name and Surname Ms **Kgabo Bridget Maphoto**

Researcher's signature 

Date 7 April 2020

# Appendix G: Marker consent form

1237 Kirkney Village  
Simonsberg Street and Abhurite  
Crescent  
Pretoria West  
0001  
7 April 2020

## Dear Prospective Participant

Invitation to be part of the study: Reimagining student feedback for improved academic writing skills in a first-year English Studies module at the University of South Africa.

My name is Kgabo Bridget Maphoto and I am conducting a study in the Department of English Studies towards a Master's degree at the University of South Africa. I am inviting you to participate in a study entitled "Reimagining student feedback for improved academic writing skills in a first-year English Studies module at the University of South Africa".

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that could help the researcher to assess the quality of feedback that is provided to the marked assignments of students who are currently registered in the ENG123 (English for Academic Purposes module) at UX.

### WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

I am one of the lecturers in ENG123, therefore, your contact details are often circulated by the module administrator for quality assurance purposes such as moderation. This study reimage feedback that ENG123 markers provide in an Academic Writing module of first-year students.

You are therefore chosen to participate in this study because you are a marker of this module.

The sampled number of participants for this study are 4 ENG123 markers. All participants' privacy and confidentiality will be practiced and they may withdraw from participating at any time.

### WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

Markers are going to respond to feedback semi-structured interviews. Each interview session will take not more than an hour. The interviews are scheduled for June 2020.

### CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time without any explanation.

### WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There are no incentives for participating in this study, however, because you are a marker for the ENG123, you may want to reflect on the way you provide feedback in this module.

**ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?**

There will be no negative consequences as no one will know that you took part in the study. Your name will not be mentioned anywhere.

**WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

Confidentiality and anonymity in this study will be preserved. Responses and results from individual participants will remain private and will only be used for research purposes. Agreement between the researcher and the participants is that no information about the participants will be revealed. Their privacy will be preserved.

**HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?**

Information will remain with the research all the time. No one will be able to access as it will be encrypted with password. Interview data will be recorded in a form of an audio and password will protect that information. To ensure that the information is more secured, she is going to use a laptop rather a cellphone as cellphone can be easily misplaced or lost, when compared to a laptop.

**WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?** No payment will be received for participation.

**HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?**

Yes.

**HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?**

For any information such as the research results, contact the researcher on 012 429 6128. You may also contact the researcher’s supervisor, Dr Sevarayan on 012 429 382.

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the <insert specific data collection method>.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname..... (please print)

Participant' s signature.....Date.....

Researcher's Name & Surname **Kgabo Bridget Maphoto**

## Appendix H: Permission letter

1237 Kirkney Village

Simonsberg Street  
and Abhurite cres

Pretoria West

0001

7 April 2020

Prof MMK Lephala

Department of English Studies WMM building, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, Room [lephammk@ux.ac.za](mailto:lephammk@ux.ac.za)

Ext: 012 429 6714

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES.

Dear Prof Lephala

Invitation to be part of the study: Reimagining student feedback for improved academic writing skills in a first-year English studies module at the university of South Africa.

My name is Kgabo Bridget Maphoto and I am conducting a study in the Department of English Studies towards a Master's degree at the University of South Africa. I am inviting you to participate in a study entitled "Reimagining student feedback for improved academic writing skills in a first-year English Studies module at the University of South Africa".

The aim of the study is to investigate feedback that markers provide to the academic writing assignments of first-year students in the ENG123.

The study entails administering online questionnaires with academic writing students and conducting semi-structured interviews with lecturers and markers. Furthermore, the study examines documents, such as students' written assignments and moderators' reports.

Data collection and analysis will take place as follows: The researcher will post questionnaires on the myUX ENG123-20-S1 site. An announcement will be sent out to the whole group to urge students to complete the questionnaire by typing out their responses and clicking on 'submit'. Students will be given two weeks to complete the questionnaire. All participants will be registered ENG123 students. Only 10 randomly selected responses will be analysed for the study. This will be done in an effort to avoid over-saturation of data and to ensure that the data will be manageable for this qualitative study.

The researcher will interview all lecturers in the module and send individual emails to all eight lecturers requesting them to participate in the study in the form of semi-structured interviews. Following this, appointments will be booked for interviews. The same procedure will apply with the markers. Only 4 markers will be interviewed.

The researcher will use the ethical clearance certificate to request ENG123 assignments from the department of assignments. For the moderation reports, the researcher will analyse all the moderators' (lecturers') reports and transfer selected information on to a document analysis schedule. In addition, 10 marked assignments will be analysed.

Taking part in this study will help markers and lecturers to reflect on the way they provide feedback to first-year students' academic writing assignments. The study will help all participants involved in the study to reflect on the areas that seek improvements as far as feedback is concerned.

For any information such as the study's findings, contact the researcher on 012 429 6128. You may also contact the researcher's supervisor, Dr Sevarayan on 012 429 3821.

Yours sincerely

Kgabo Maphoto

English Studies Junior Lecturer, University of South Africa

2nd year MA student at the University of South Africa

## Appendix I: Ethical clearance certificate



RESEARCH PERMISSION SUB-COMMITTEE (RPSC) OF THE SENATE RESEARCH, INNOVATION, POSTGRADUATE DEGREES AND COMMERCIALISATION COMMITTEE (SRIPCC)

28 September 2020

**Decision: Research Permission**

**Approval from 28 August 2020 until**

**27 September 2023.**

Ref #: 2020\_RPSC\_033

Ms. Kgabo Bridget Maphoto (0606147282)

Student #: N/A

Staff #: 90291751

**Principal Investigator: Ms. Kgabo Bridget Maphoto**

Department of English Studies

School of Arts

College of Human Sciences

Supervisor: Dr. Kershnee Sevnarayan

**Reimaging Student Feedback for Improved Academic Writing Skills in a First-Year English Studies Module at a Distance Education Institution in South Africa.**

Your application regarding permission to conduct research involving UNISA employees, students and data in respect of the above study has been received and was considered by the Research Permission Subcommittee (RPSC) of the UNISA Senate, Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Degrees and Commercialisation Committee (SRIPCC) on 21 August 2020.

It is my pleasure to inform you that permission has been granted for the study. You may:

Post the questionnaire and information letter on the ENG123 myUnisa page and ask interested students to respond to the questionnaire.

Gain access to the email addresses of ENG123 lecturers and markers and send them the solicitation information letter and the questionnaires, through the gatekeeping assistance of the supervisor.

Gain access to the students' marked assignments and lecturers' moderation reports, but all identifying information, like the student numbers and the lecturers' names and staff numbers, must be removed before the student researcher can gain access to them.

You are requested to submit a report of the study to the Research Permission Subcommittee (RPSC@unisa.ac.za) within 3 months of completion of the study. The personal information made available to the researcher(s)/gatekeeper(s) will only be used for the advancement of this research project as indicated and for the purpose as described in this permission letter. The researcher(s)/gatekeeper(s) must take all appropriate precautionary measures to protect the personal information given to him/her/them in good faith and it must not be passed on to third parties. The dissemination of research instruments through the use of electronic mail should strictly be through blind copying, so as to protect the participants' right of privacy. The researcher hereby indemnifies UNISA from any claim or action arising from or due to the researcher's breach of his/her information protection obligations.

*Note: The reference number **2020\_RPSC\_033** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants and the Research Permission Subcommittee.*

We would like to wish you well in your research undertaking.

Kind regards,



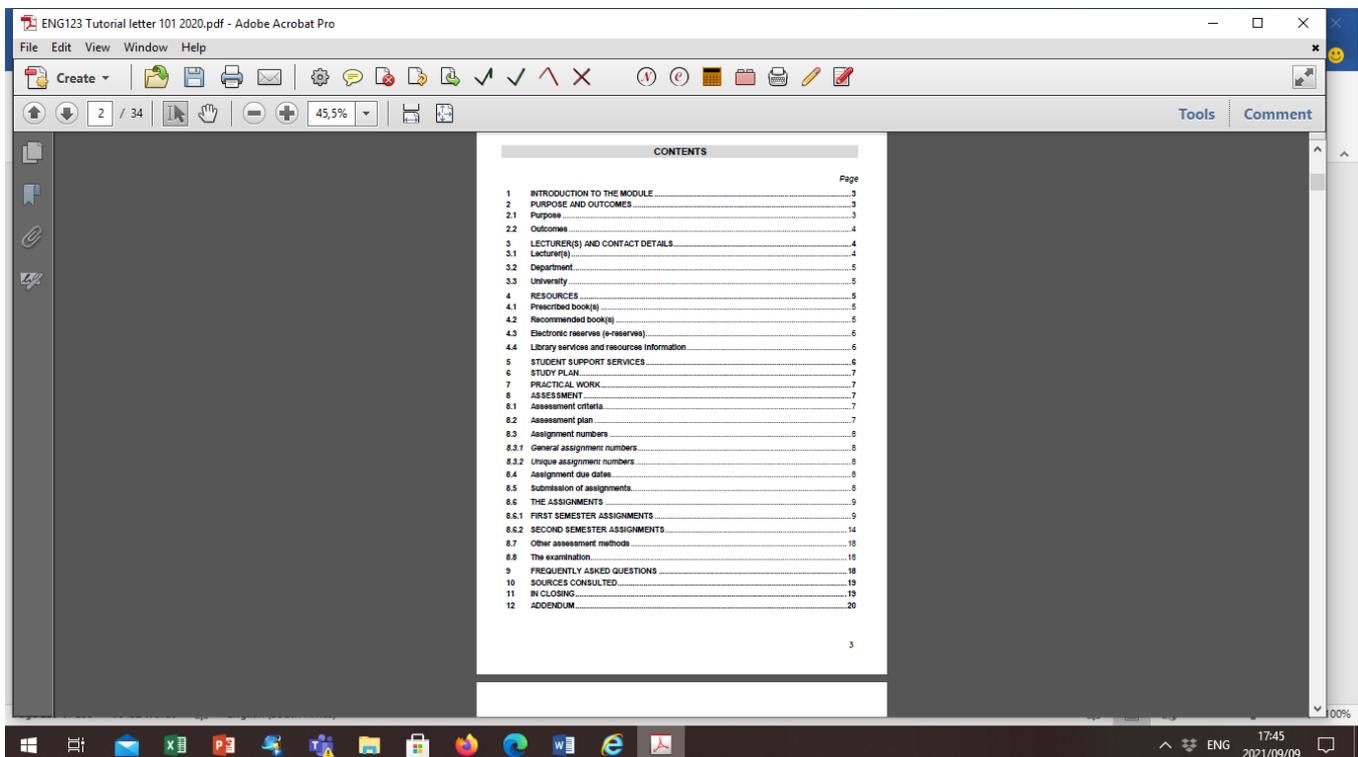
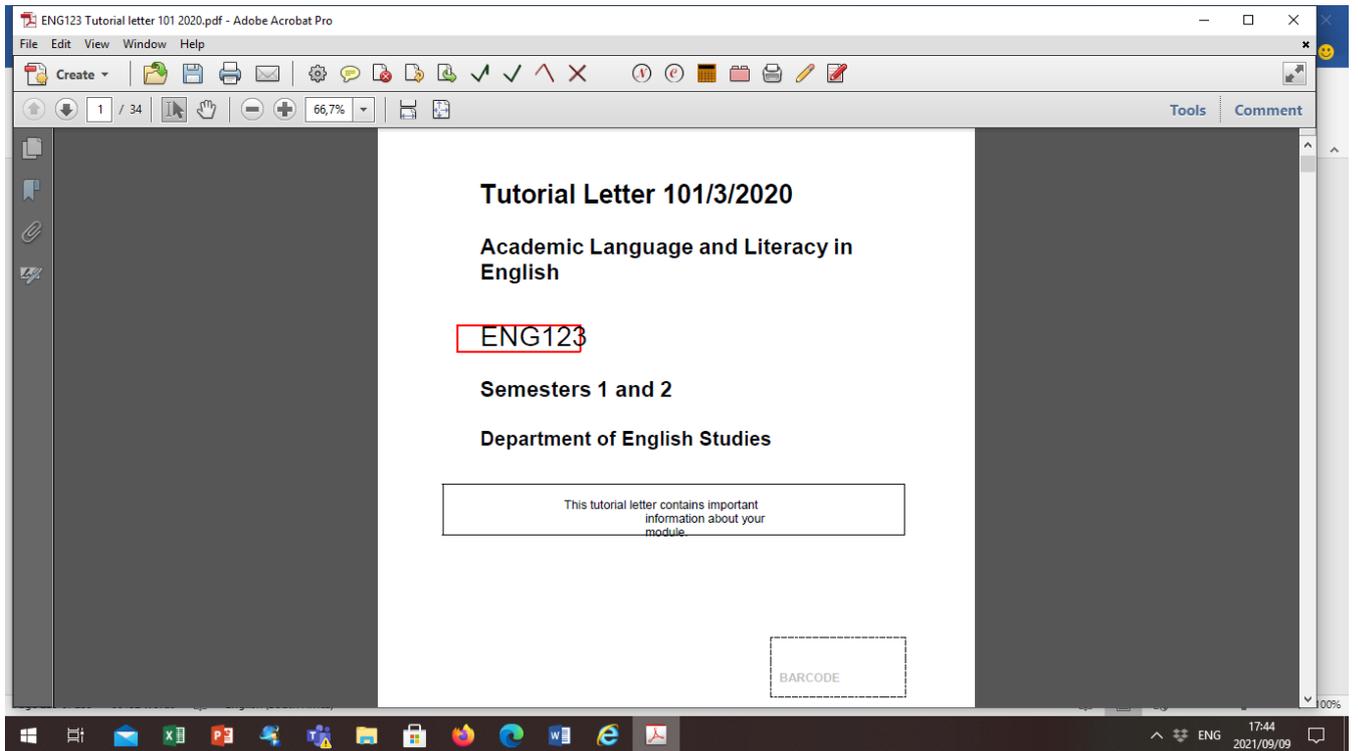
**Dr Retha Visagie – Deputy Chairperson**

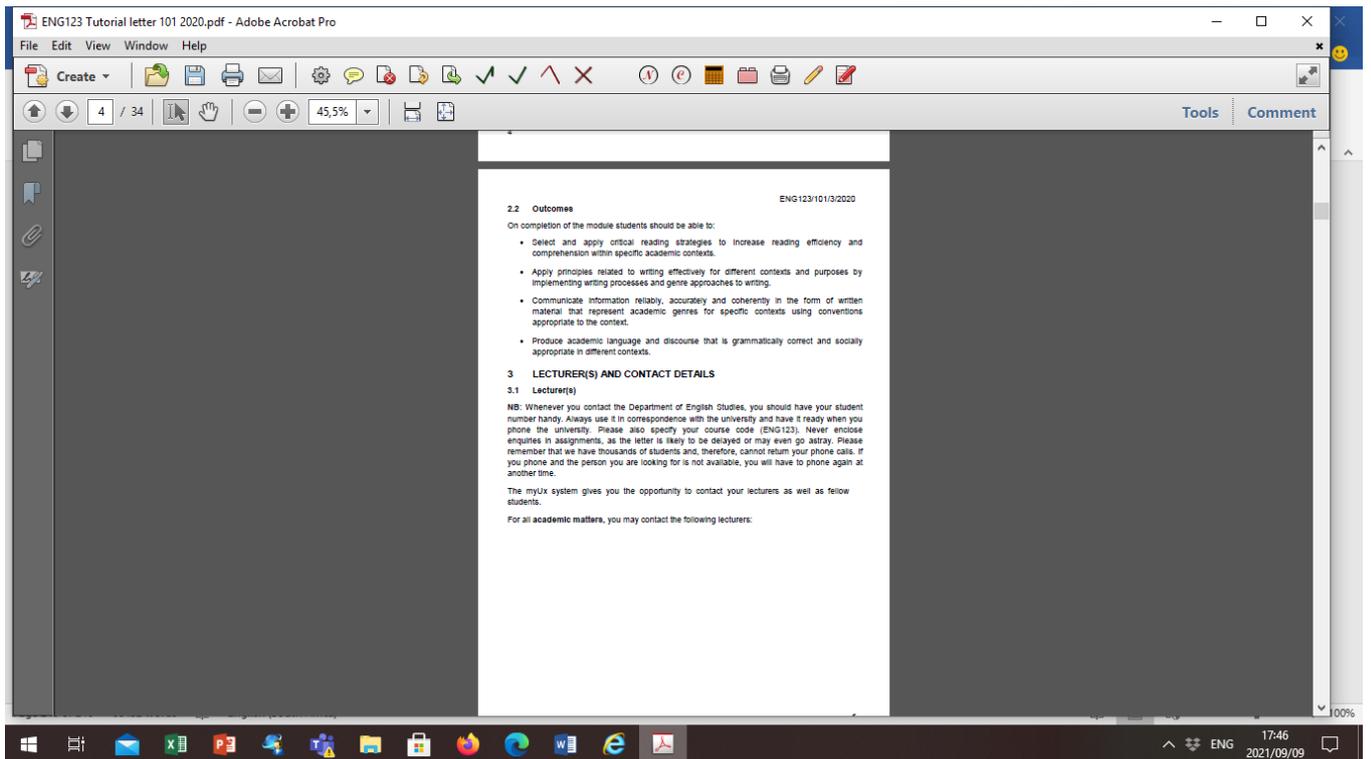
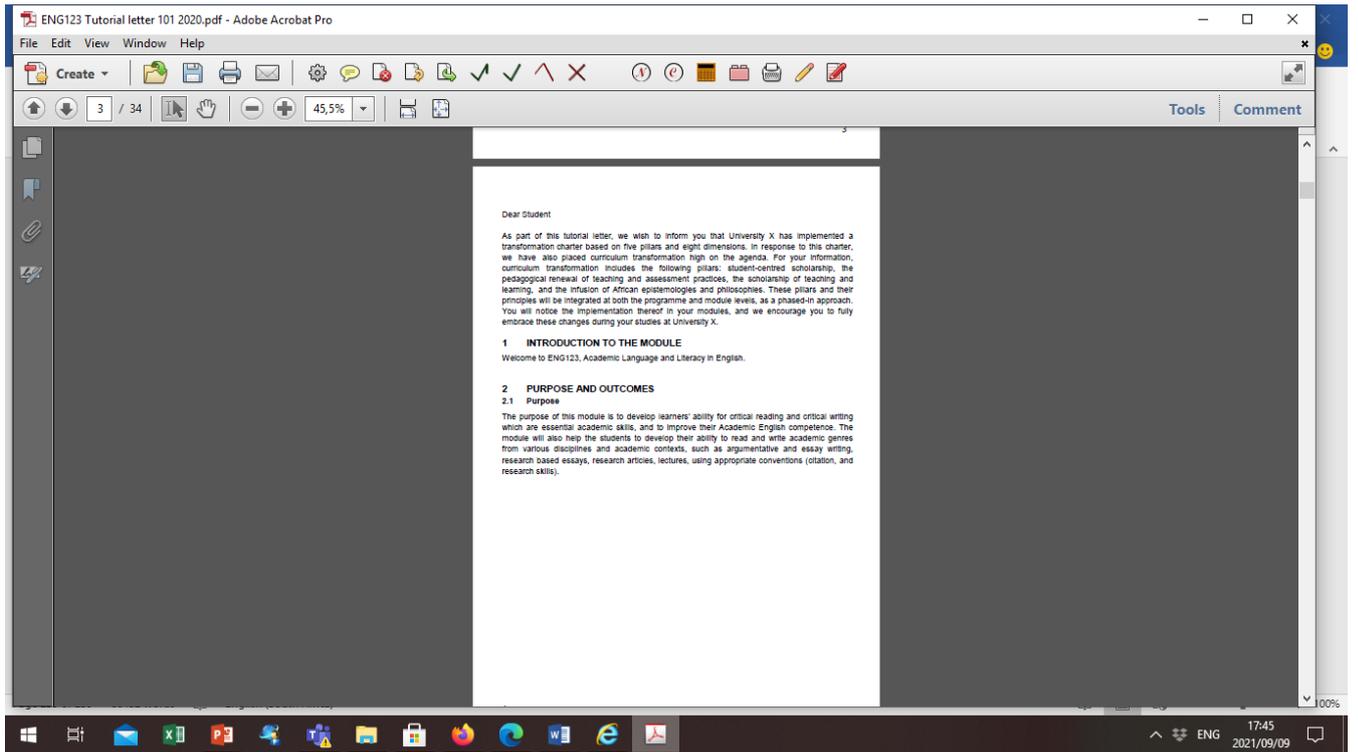
Email: visagrg@unisa.ac.za, Tel: (012) 429-2478

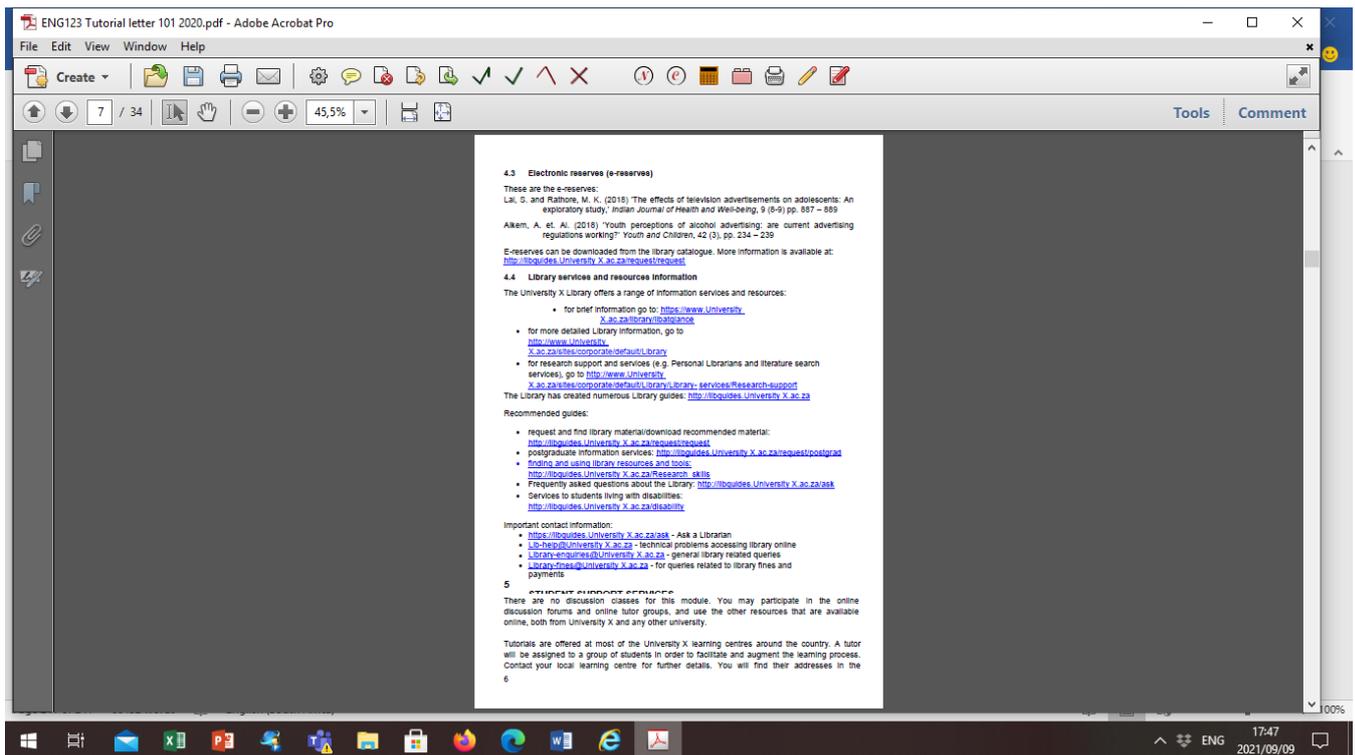
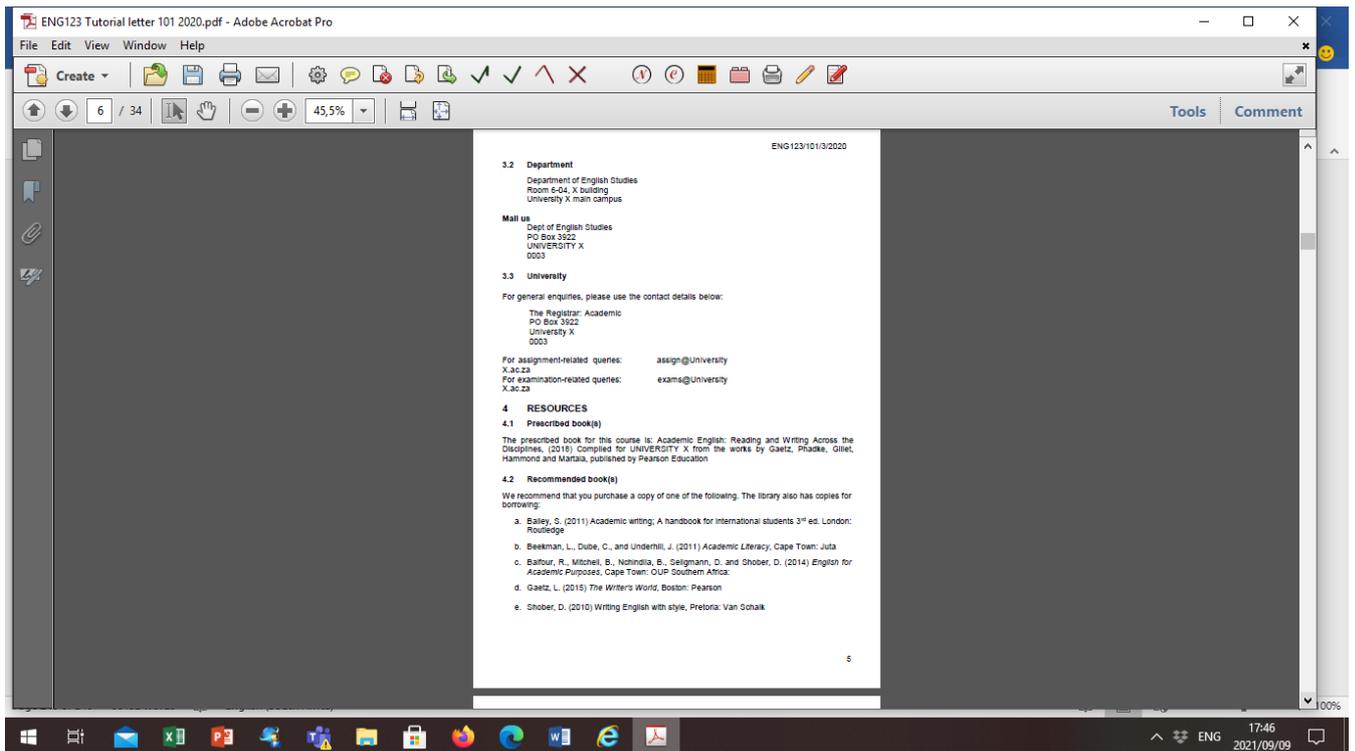
**Prof Lessing Labuschagne – Chairperson**

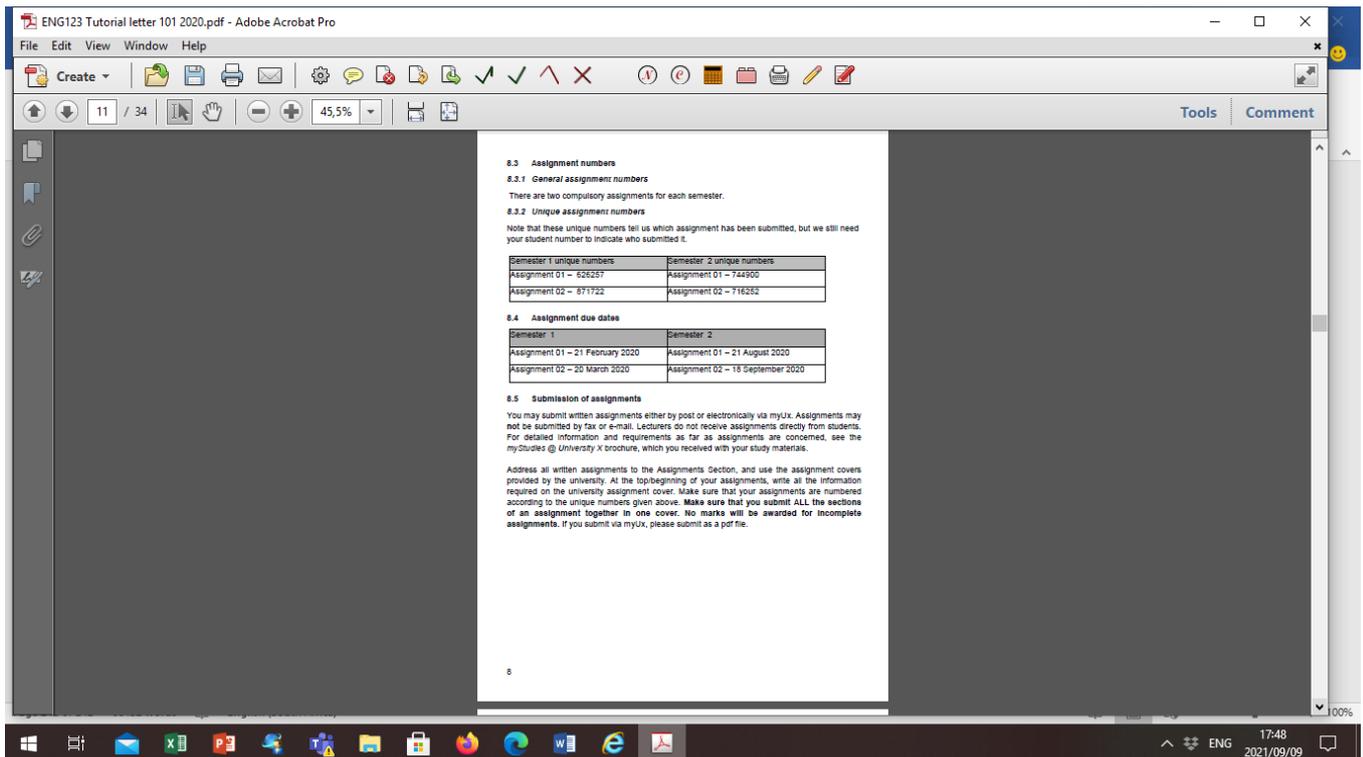
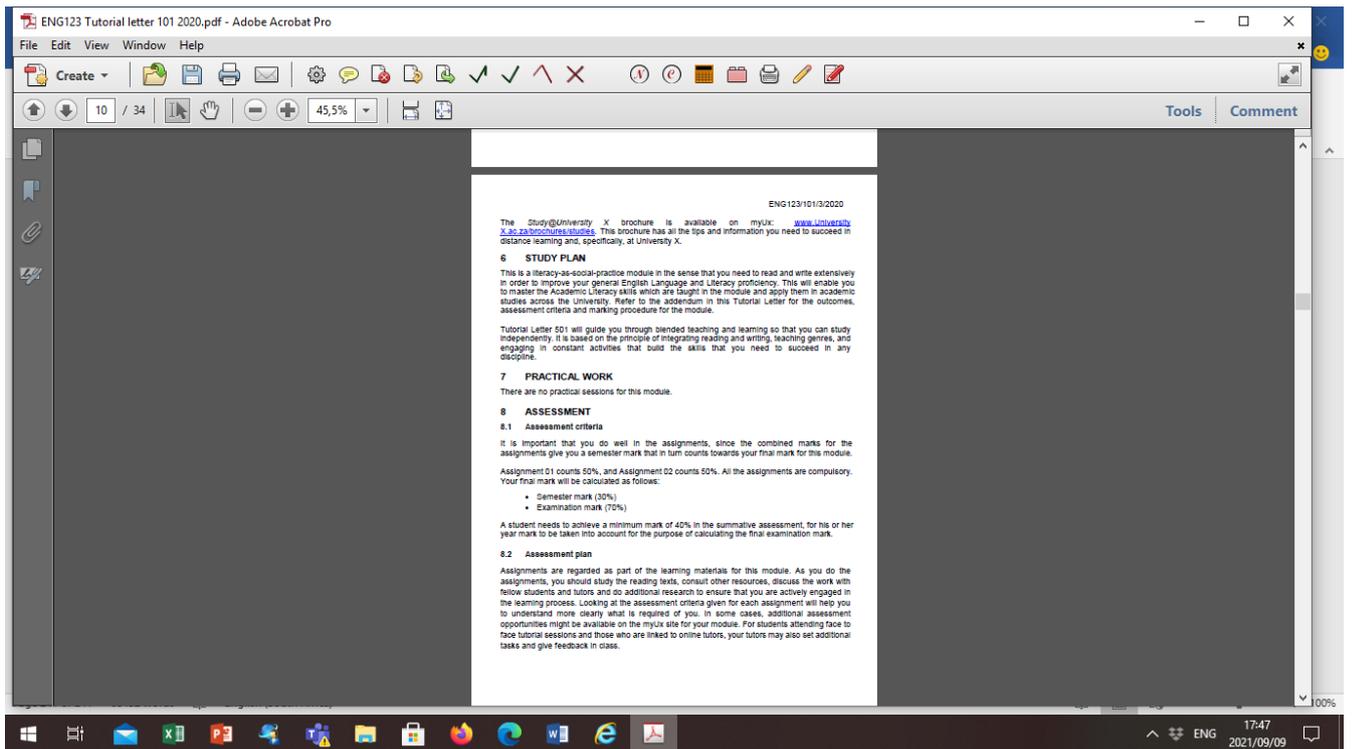
Email: llabus@unisa.ac.za, Tel: (012) 429-6368

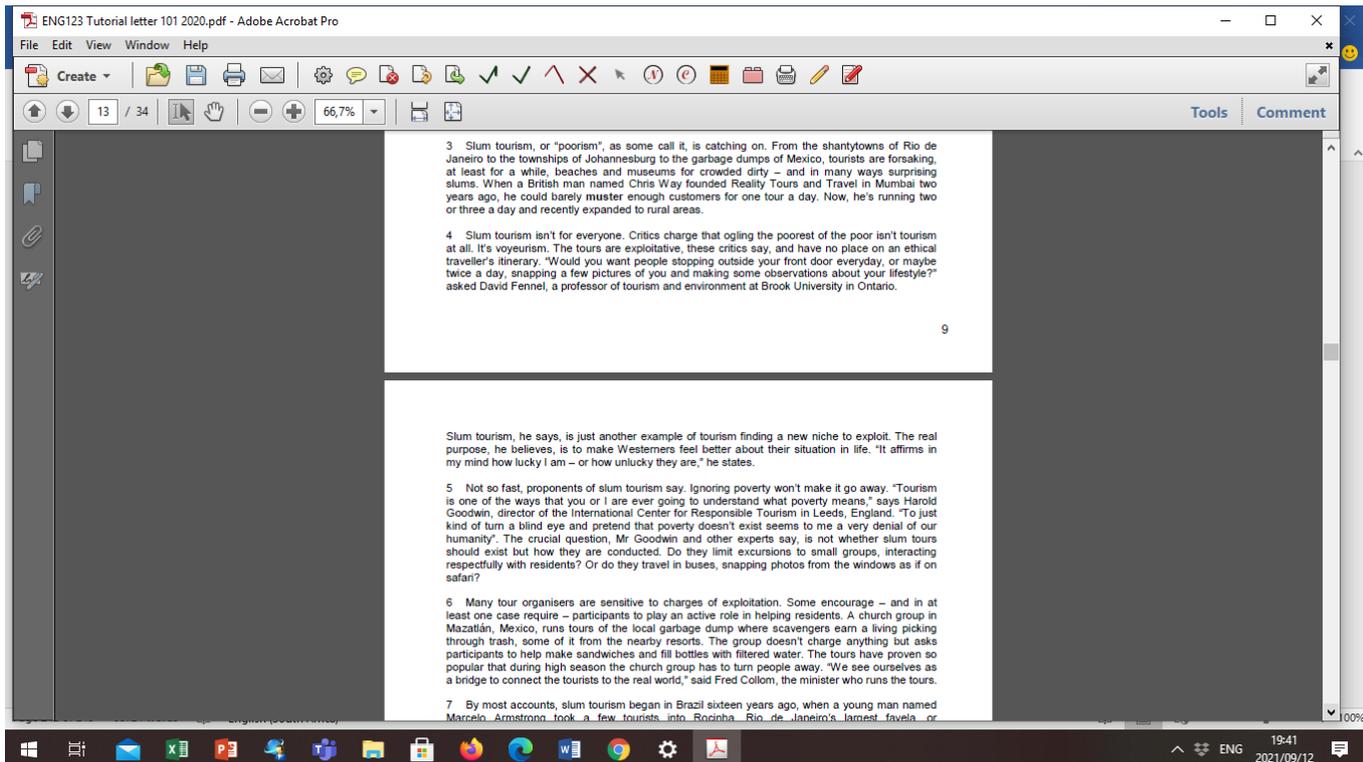
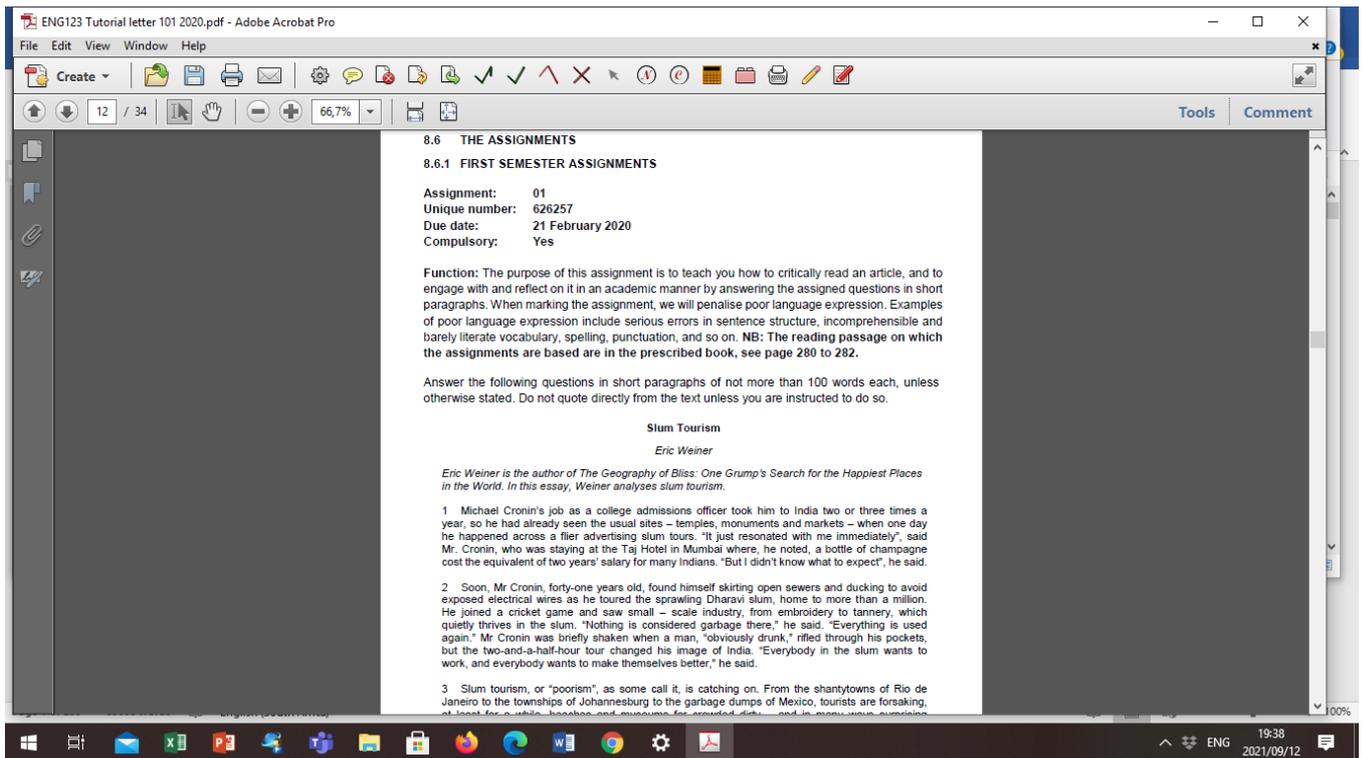
# Appendix J: ENG123 Tutorial Letter 101/3/2020

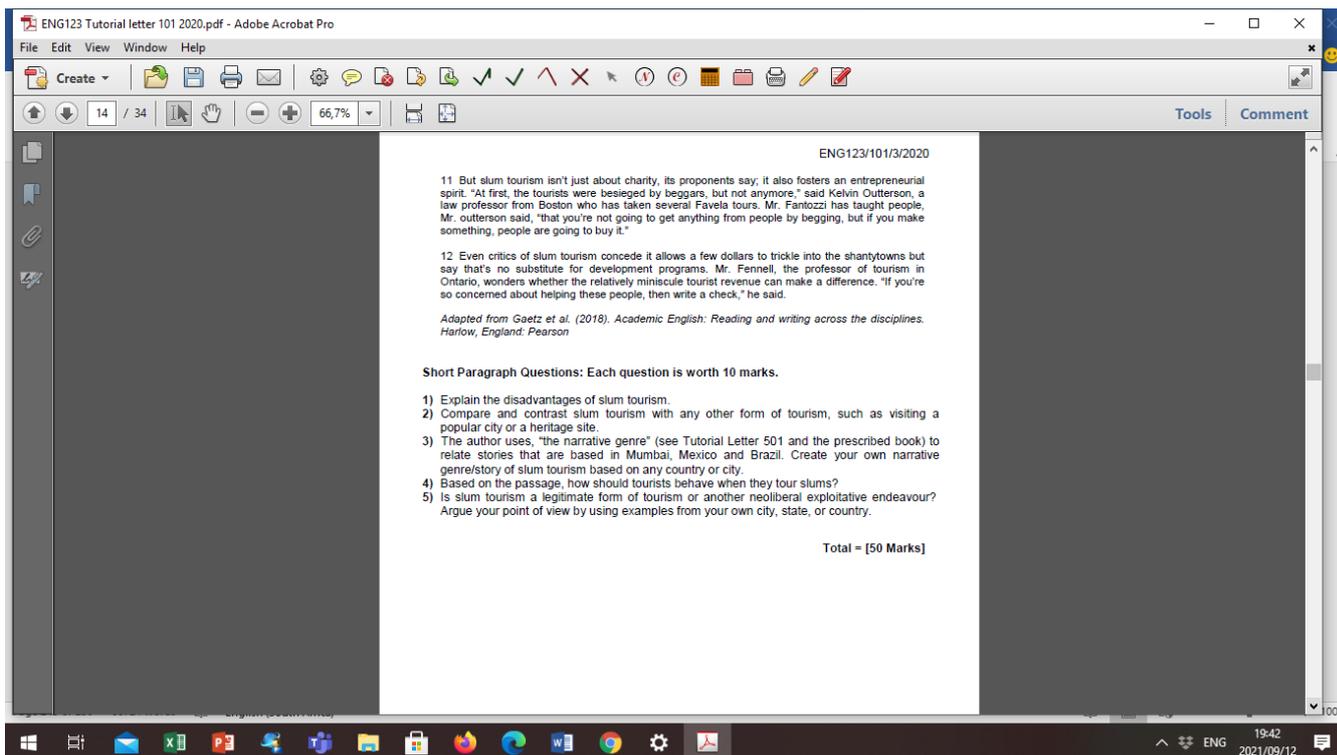
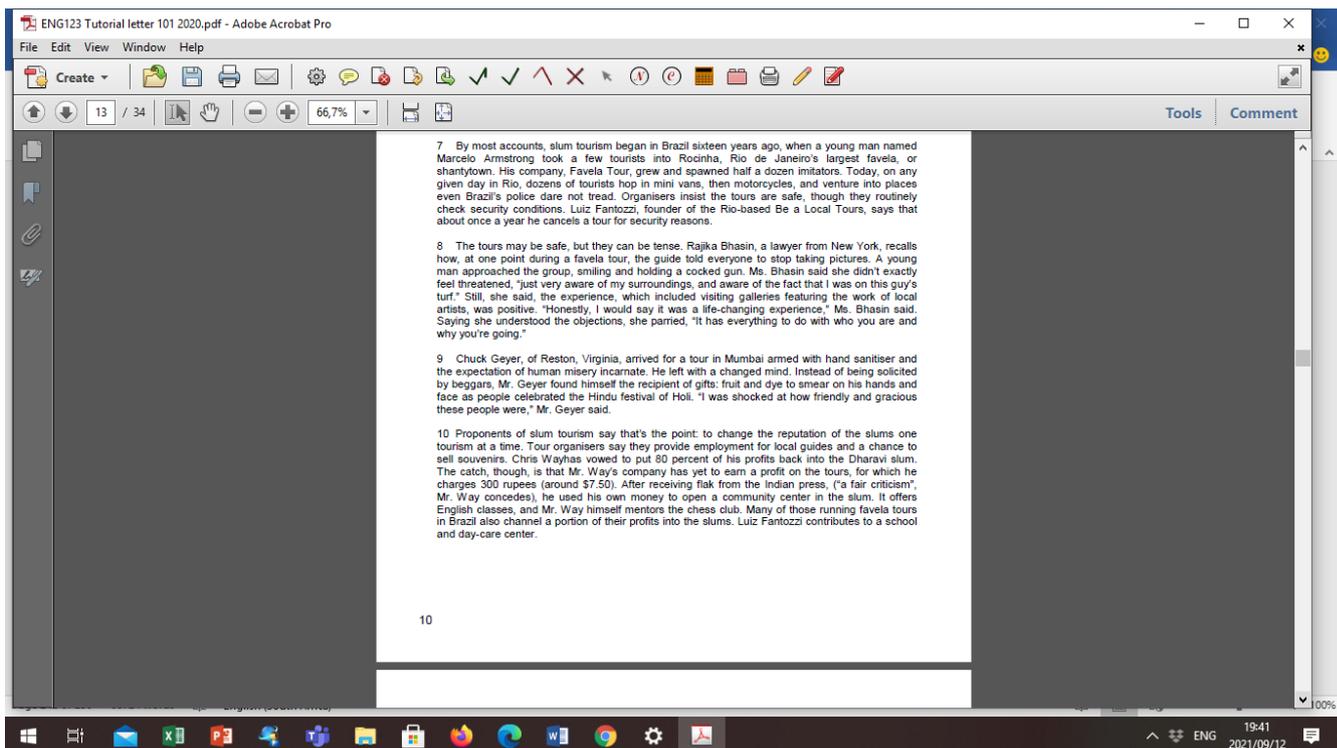












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Tools Comment

Assignment: 02  
 Unique number: 871722  
 Due date: 20 March 2020  
 Compulsory: Yes

Instructions: **Research-based essay**

This assignment should be about 500 words long. Find at least five academically valid sources and include a reference list. At least one source must be from a printed book or journal. Website sources are allowed as a main source only if they are authored articles from journals or books from nationally/internationally recognised institutions (This means you may not use websites such as Wikipedia). Articles from newspapers, magazines or civic organisations may not be used as a reliable source of scientific information. Website articles written by unidentified individuals or authors may not be used.

The writing process

You are encouraged to study units 2, 3, 4 and 5 in your Tutorial Letter 501. There is an overview of the writing process in Unit 2.

Your essay should demonstrate the conventions you have learned from the module about essay structure and layout. This includes forming a thesis statement, clarity of message, taking a clear position and stance, using the appropriate words for the type of essay; cohesion and logical organisation of information, proper paragraphing, correct sentence structure and referencing.

Choose one of the following topics:

Question 1

When students come to university after high school, they have their own expectations regarding university experience. They also look beyond the university years and envisage the satisfaction of achieving their goals in life, as a result of university education. Hence, in Zimbabwe and indeed in a number of developing countries, retention is not a problem since university education is very highly regarded. Most students aspire to have some form of university education and become frustrated if they fail to get it.

Adapted from: Moyo, HJ (1995) "First year Students' Expectations Versus the Reality of Learning at University" in *University of Witwatersrand Foundation in English Language Module 1: Introduction to Academic Literacy AELS 123/124*

In addition to the above extract, read Chapter 12 of your prescribed textbook on Comparison

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Tools Comment

In addition to the above extract, read Chapter 12 of your prescribed textbook on Comparison and Contrast.

Instruction: Write a research-based essay where you compare and contrast your university experience against your experience at high school. Discuss three categories of your choice from the list below.

- Socio-cultural factors
- Financial factors
- Educational factors
- Psychological factors

OR

12

ENG123/101/3/2020

Question 2

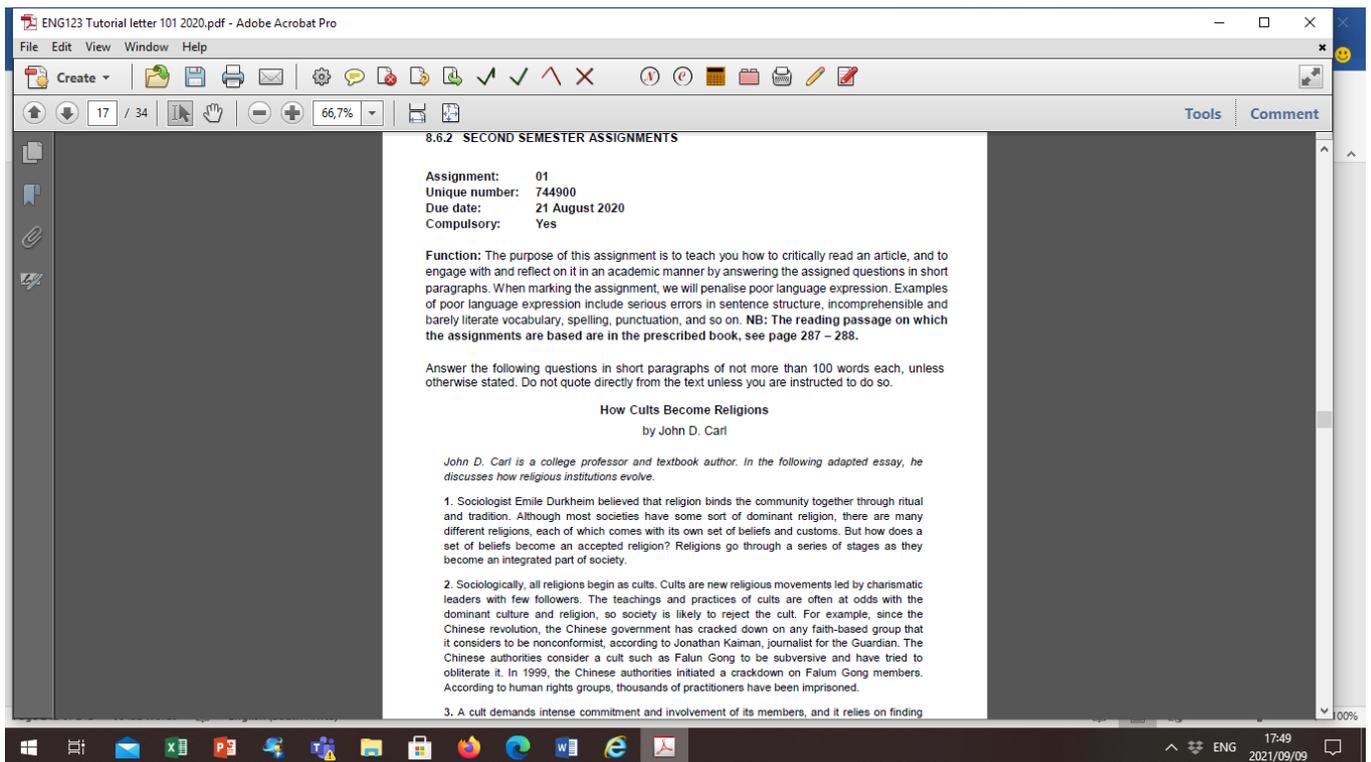
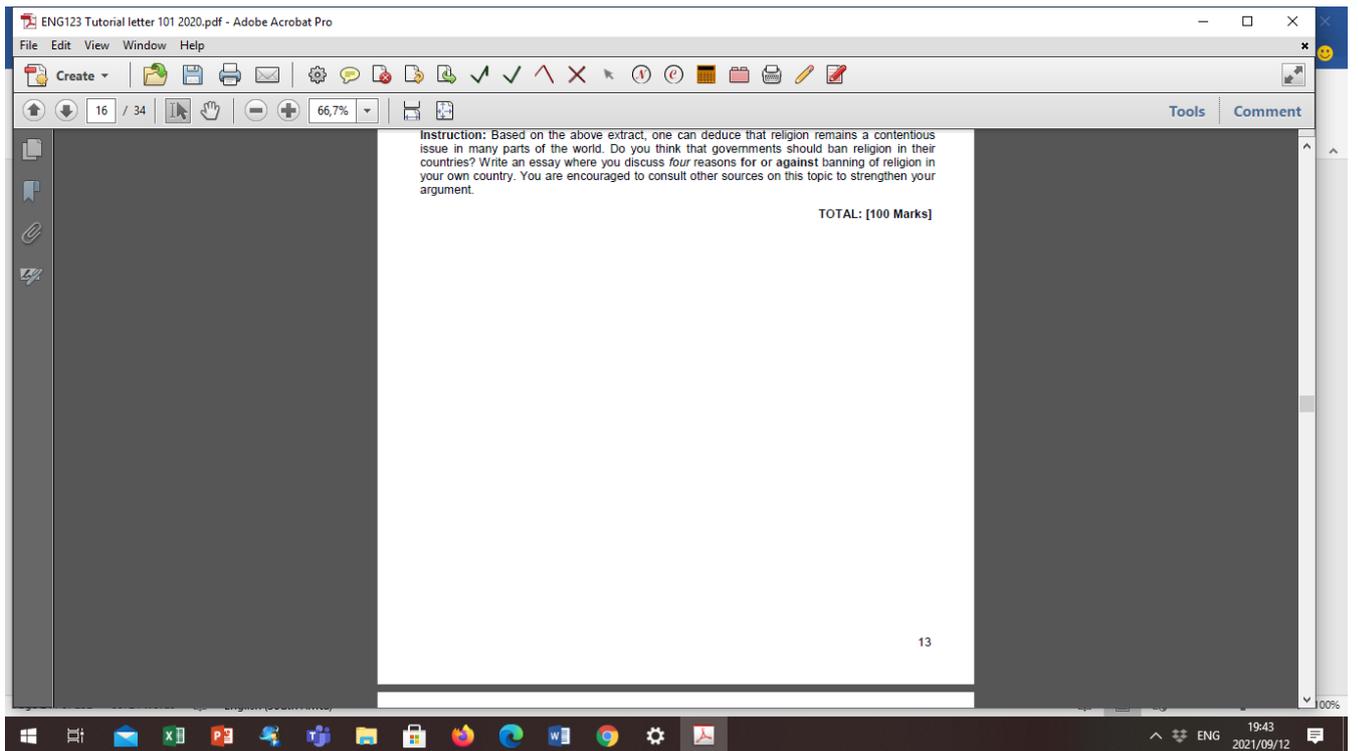
**How Cults become religions**  
 By: John D. Carl

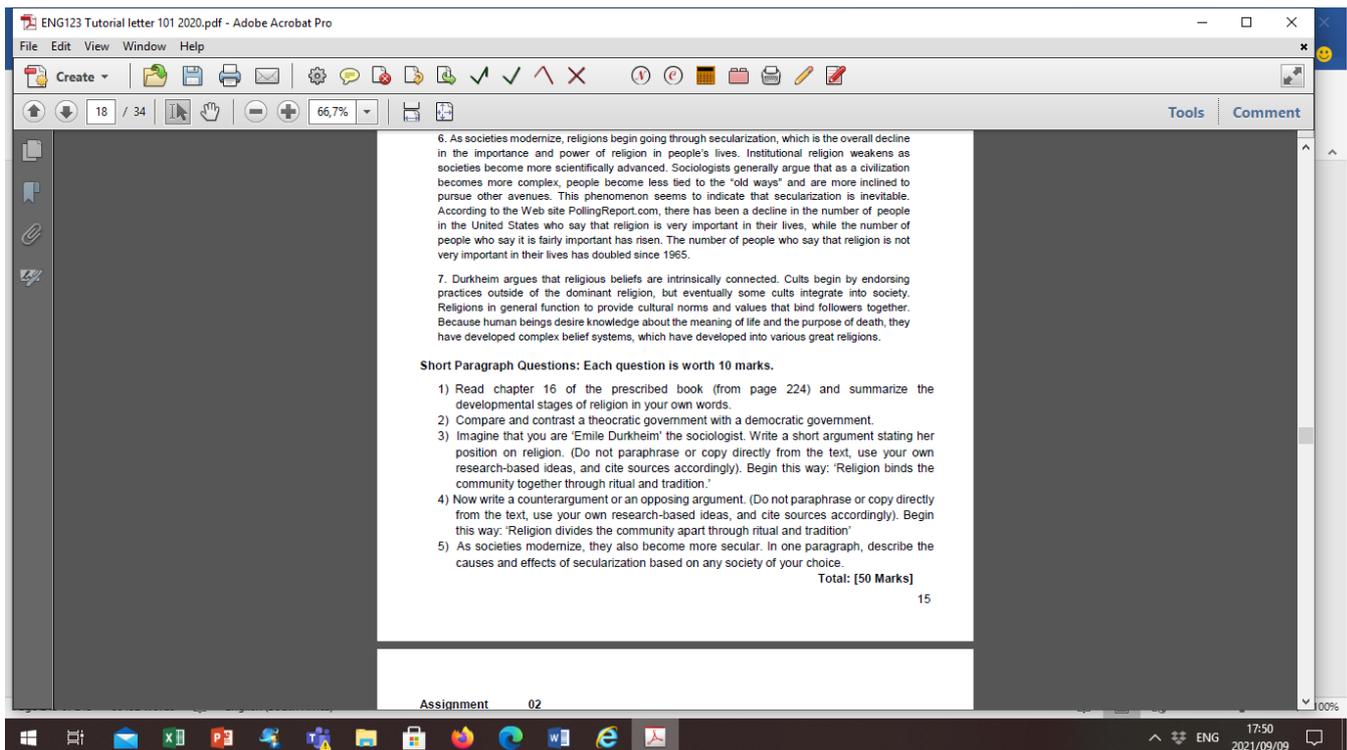
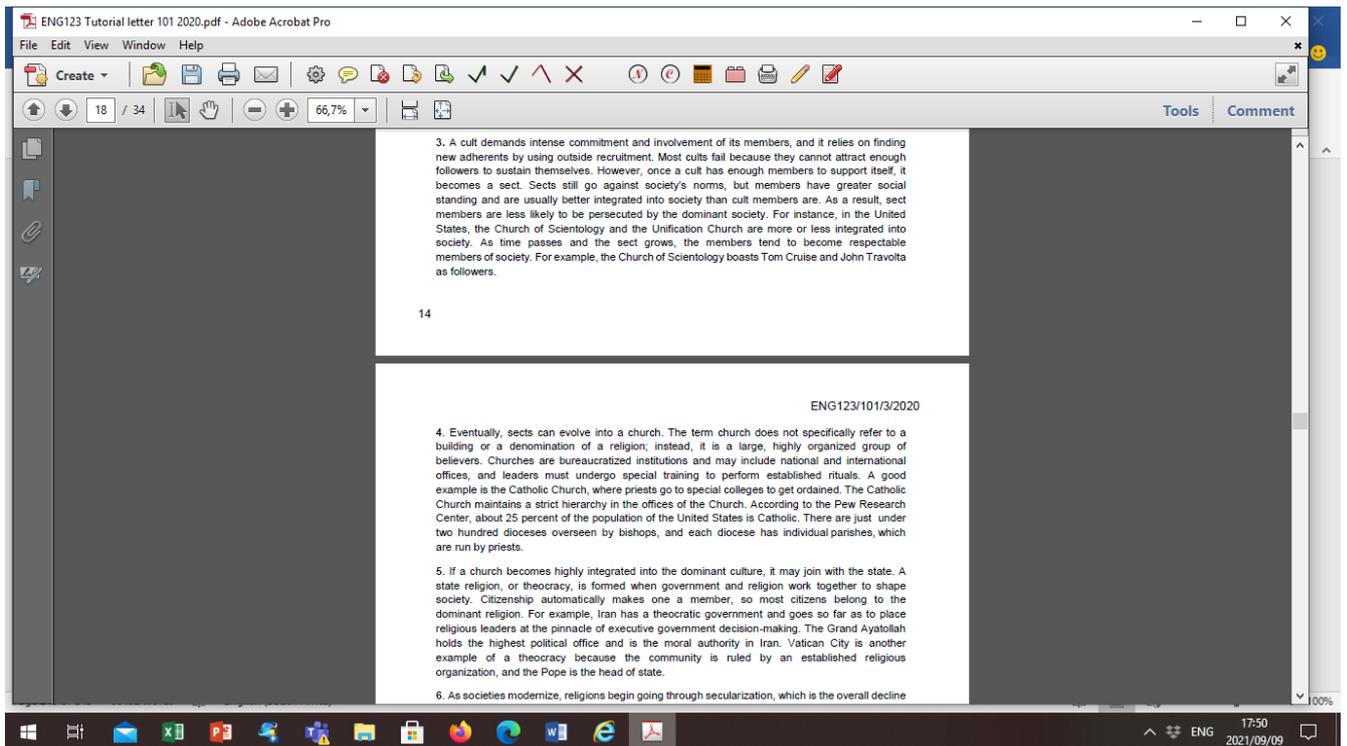
Sociologist Emile Durkheim believed that religion binds the community together through ritual and tradition. Although most societies have some sort of dominant religion, there are many different religions, each of which comes with its own set of beliefs and customs. But how does a set of beliefs become an accepted religion? Religions go through a series of stages as they become an integrated part of society.

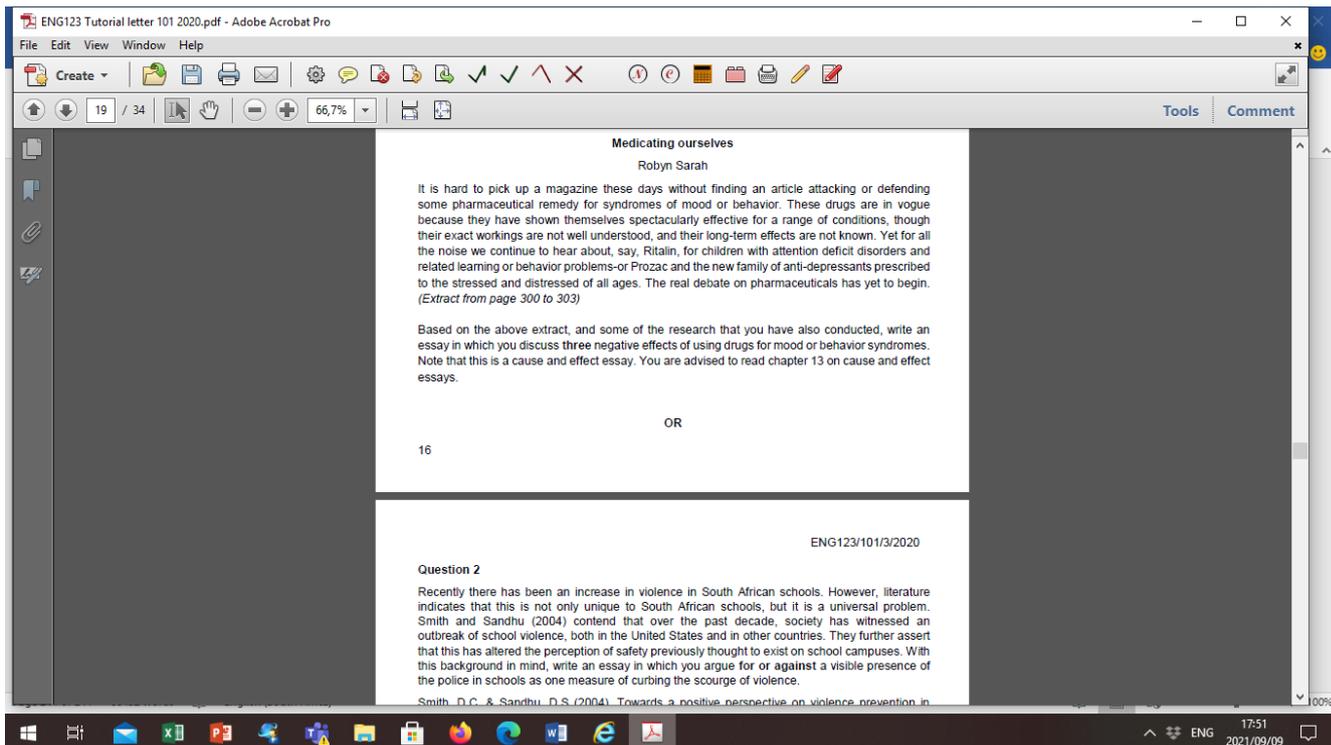
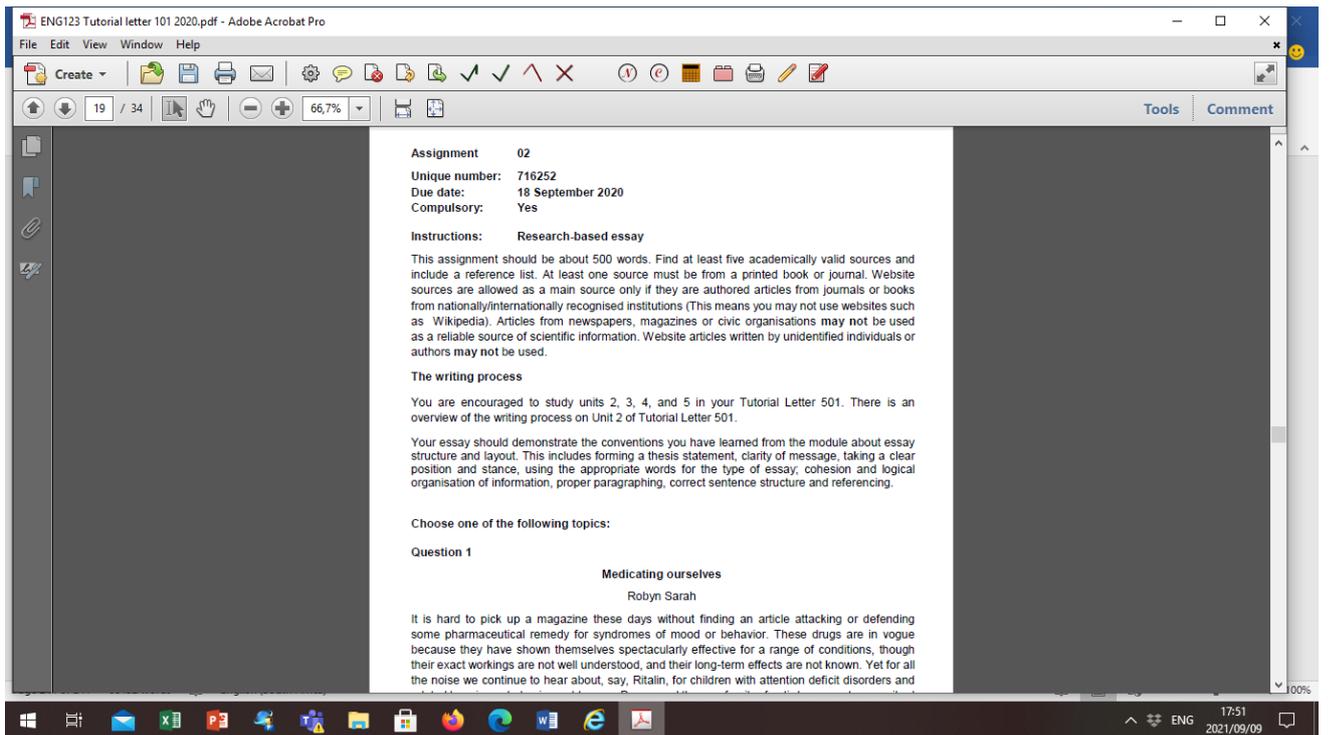
Sociologically, all religions begin as cults. Cults are new religious movements led by charismatic leaders with few followers. The teachings and practices of cults are often at odds with the dominant culture and religion, so society is likely to reject the cult. (Extract from page 287 to 288)

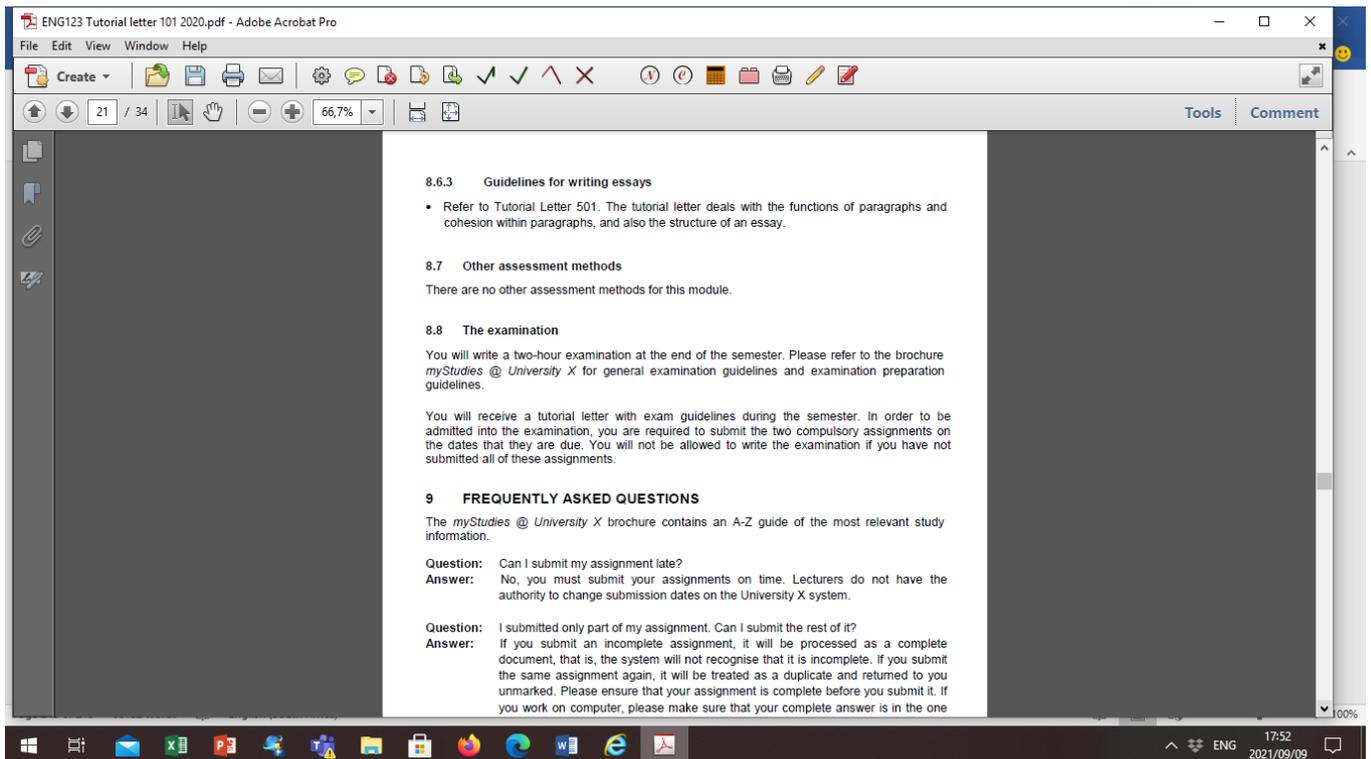
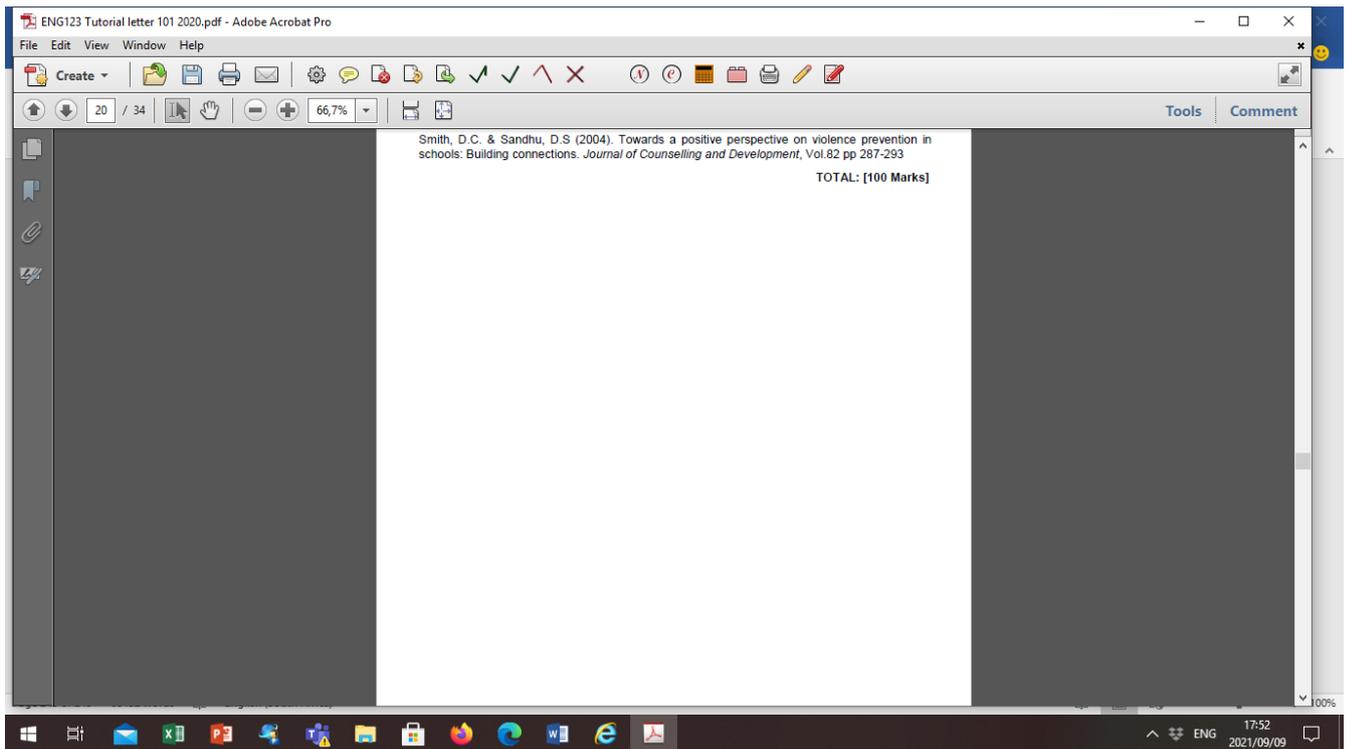
Instruction: Based on the above extract, one can deduce that religion remains a contentious issue in many parts of the world. Do you think that governments should ban religion in their countries? Write an essay where you discuss four reasons for or against banning of religion in your own country. You are encouraged to consult other sources on this topic to strengthen your

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Tools Comment

Question: I submitted only part of my assignment. Can I submit the rest of it?  
 Answer: If you submit an incomplete assignment, it will be processed as a complete document, that is, the system will not recognise that it is incomplete. If you submit the same assignment again, it will be treated as a duplicate and returned to you unmarked. Please ensure that your assignment is complete before you submit it. If you work on computer, please make sure that your complete answer is in the one file/document that you submit.

Question: I submitted the wrong file / module code / assignment. I have received 0% for it. Can I resubmit the correct assignment?  
 Answer: It is your responsibility to ensure that you have submitted the correct assignment. If you submit an incorrect document, it will be processed as though it were the correct assignment, that is, the system will not recognise that it does not contain the correct content. If you submit the same assignment again, it will be treated as a duplicate and returned to you unmarked. If you work on computer, please make sure that you use a meaningful name (e.g. "ENG123 – Assignment 1") so that you submit the correct document.

18

ENG123/1 01/3/2020

**10 SOURCES CONSULTED**  
 No sources were consulted to prepare this tutorial letter.

**11 IN CLOSING**  
 The ENG123 team wishes you every success in your studies!

17:53 2021/09/09

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27 / 34 97,8%

Tools Comment

<b>ESSENTIAL CRITERIA FOR ESSAYS (MARKING RUBRIC)</b>	1	0-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very little or no evidence of understanding and knowledge of the topic.</li> <li>Some irrelevant and repeated information</li> <li>Very little understanding of the genre conventions</li> <li>Fragmented/disjointed/ muddled ideas</li> <li>No evidence of research on the topic</li> <li>Writer stance and voice muddled</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor command of vocabulary, sentence structure and punctuation</li> <li>Very limited use of the appropriate grammar and syntactic structures</li> <li>Inappropriate use of expressions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cluttered presentation Illegible handwriting/ many grammatical and typographical errors</li> <li>No to inadequate referencing</li> </ul> <p>(Marks 0 – 4)</p>	Very Poor
	2	10-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unsatisfactory handling of the topic</li> <li>Some irrelevant and repeated information</li> <li>Mundane handling of the topic</li> <li>Flawed by generalizations and inadequate supporting detail</li> <li>Very little to no evidence of research on the topic</li> <li>Writer stance and voice vague and indeterminate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited vocabulary and sentence variety</li> <li>Inadequate use of appropriate syntactic language features/structures</li> <li>Poor punctuation and sentence construction</li> <li>Obscured/confused meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Inconsistently defined paragraphs</li> <li>Progression of ideas hard to follow</li> <li>References used but inappropriately presented</li> </ul> <p>(Marks 5 – 9)</p>	Poor
	3	20-25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some understanding and knowledge of the topic</li> <li>Some evidence of research based arguments with clear supporting details.</li> <li>Reasonable development of idea inadequate appraisal of positions on the topic.</li> <li>A few lapses in content, claims not fully supported</li> <li>Sometimes disjointed and loosely presented ideas</li> <li>Inadequate/incomplete sequencing of ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Occasional flawed sentences, punctuation and spelling errors</li> <li>Word choice, vocabulary and diction is appropriate for the genre</li> <li>Sentence structures are correct but not as varied</li> <li>Sentences are not so well linked and coherent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reasonably good presentation</li> <li>A few poorly structured paragraph breaks</li> <li>Legible, but with some typing errors.</li> <li>Incomplete bibliography, but incorrectly listed and no in-text citing.</li> </ul>	Satisfactory - Good
	4	26-30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sound understanding and knowledge of the topic</li> <li>Convincing but not captivating presentation of the topic</li> <li>A concerted effort at originality</li> <li>Relevant supporting details</li> <li>Evidence of a research based argument but not well substantiated</li> <li>Writer stance and voice but with some hesitation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very good command of grammatical structures</li> <li>A wide range of vocabulary, linking devices and sentence structures</li> <li>Demonstrates a mastery of the register of the genre</li> <li>Sentences are linked, and coherent</li> <li>Meaning clear, occasionally hindered by grammatical errors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Well-structured essay, neat and legible</li> <li>Clearly defined paragraphs</li> <li>Structure is easy to follow and adheres to the structure of the genre.</li> <li>Complete and correctly formatted references with few slips in citation conventions</li> </ul> <p>(Marks 13 – 15)</p>	Good-very good
	5	31-40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An excellent understanding and knowledge of the topic.</li> <li>Clear evidence of research based arguments and very good to exceptional understanding of supporting research evidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Punctuation and grammar are correct</li> <li>Word choice, vocabulary and diction is highly appropriate for the genre</li> <li>Demonstrates a mastery of the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Logical flow of ideas in the essay and within paragraphs.</li> <li>Clear introduction and conclusion as well as clearly defined paragraphs.</li> </ul>	Excellent-outstanding

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**APPENDUM B: ASSESSMENT CRITERIA**

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of a research based argument but not well substantiated</li> <li>Writer stance and voice but with some hesitation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete and correctly formatted references with few slips in citation conventions (Marks 13 – 15)</li> </ul>	
5	31-40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An excellent understanding and knowledge of the topic.</li> <li>Clear evidence of research based arguments and very good to exceptional understanding of supporting research evidence</li> <li>Well-conducted appraisal of positions on the topic</li> <li>Insightful and original demonstrating a clear stance and voice</li> <li>Highly selective supporting details</li> <li>Captivating introduction and highly convincing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Punctuation and grammar are correct</li> <li>Word choice, vocabulary and diction is highly appropriate for the genre</li> <li>Demonstrates a mastery of the register of the genre</li> <li>Sentence structure is correct and varied</li> <li>Sentence are linked, coherent</li> <li>Meaning clear with very few or no grammatical errors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Logical flow of ideas in the essay and within paragraphs.</li> <li>Clear introduction and conclusion as well as clearly defined paragraphs.</li> <li>Structure is easy to follow and adheres to the structure of the genre</li> <li>Sources cited accurately using an appropriate format both in and end of text referencing (Marks 16 – 20)</li> </ul>

24

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Level	Range	Content	Language	Presentation and writing conventions.	Overall comment
		40 %	40 %	20 %	

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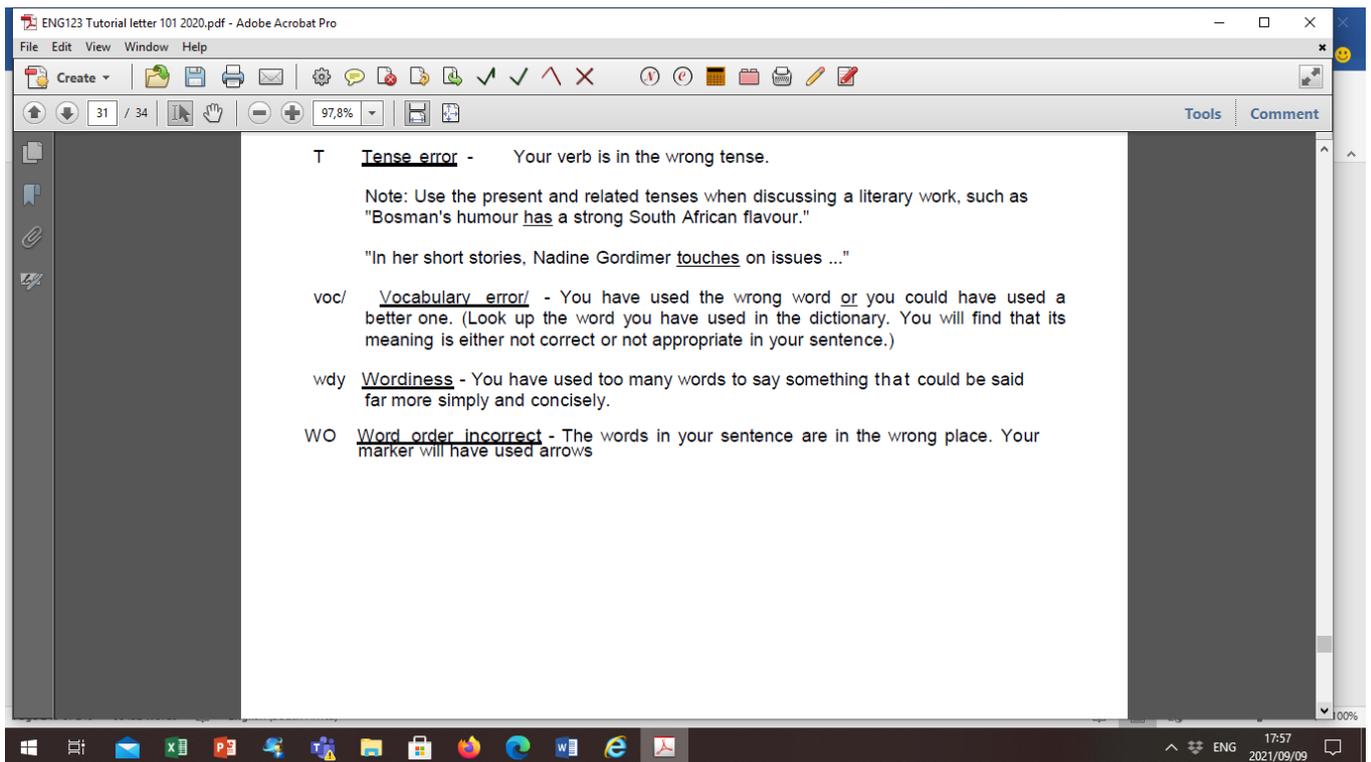
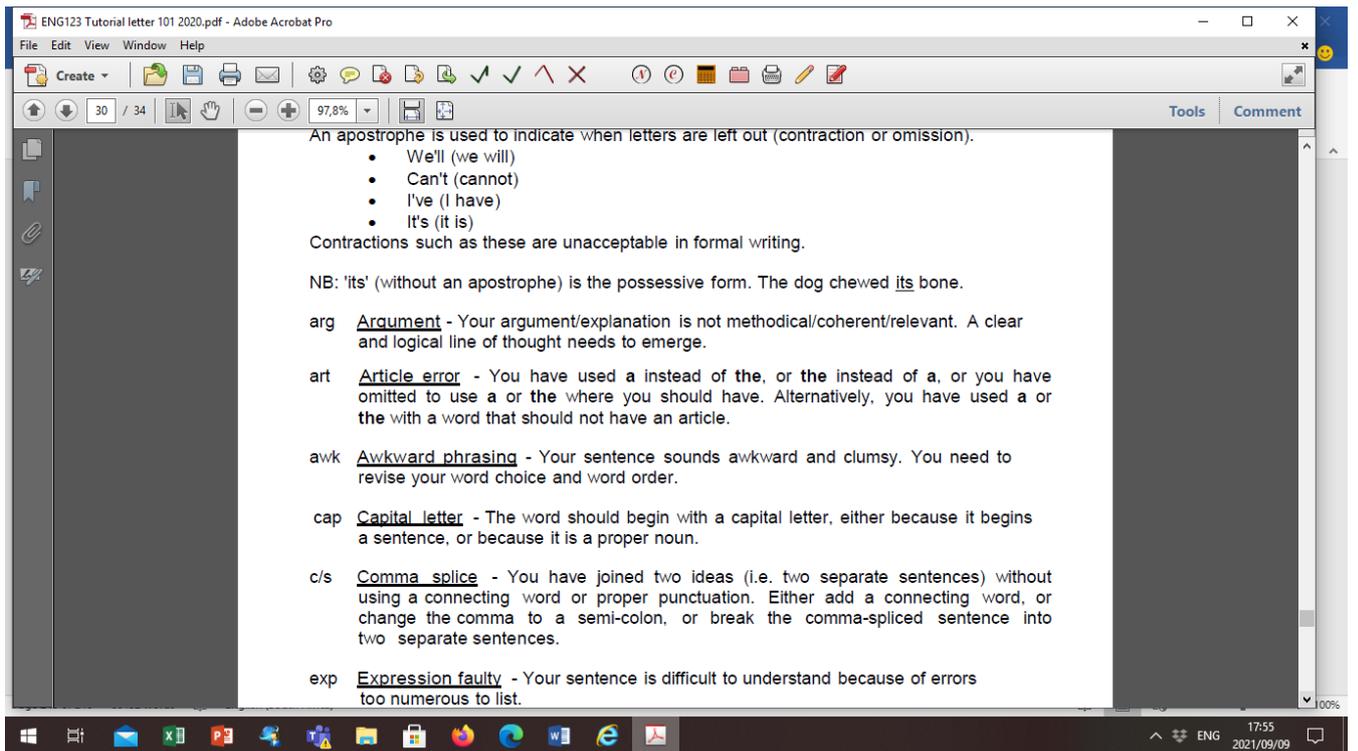
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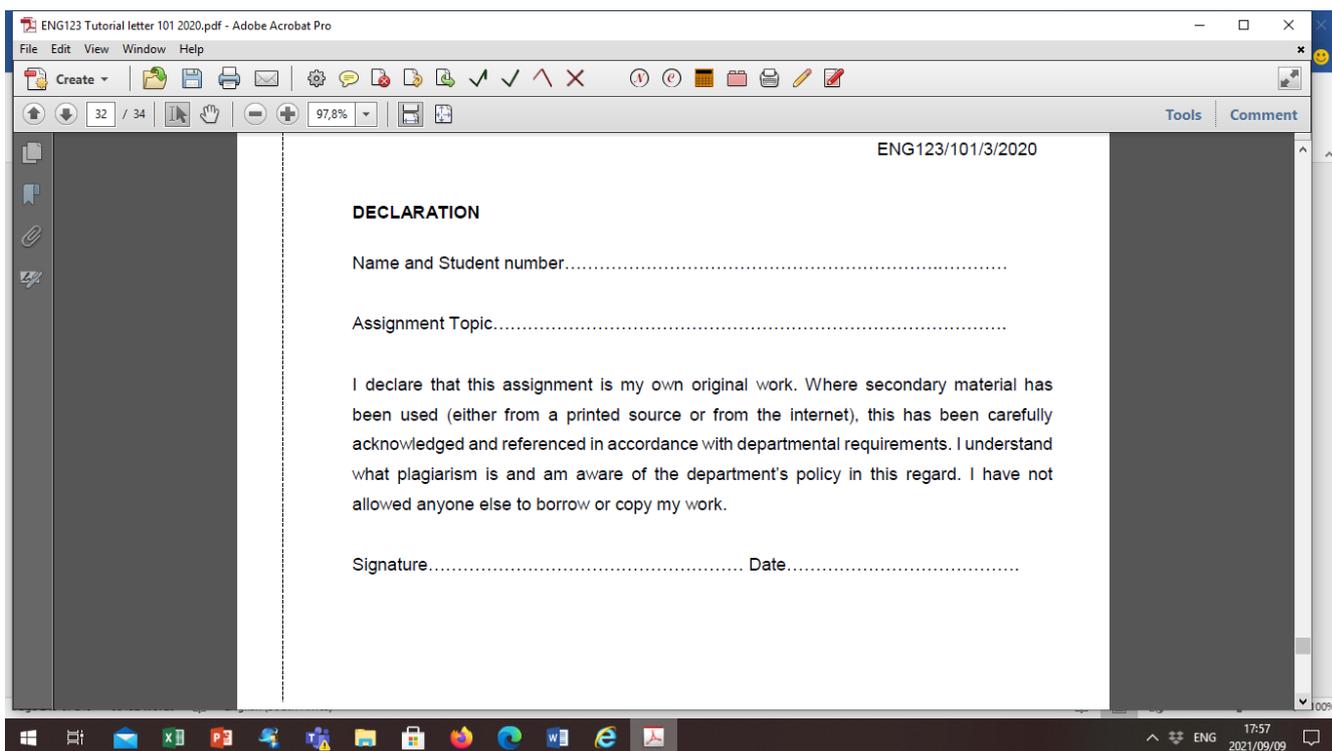
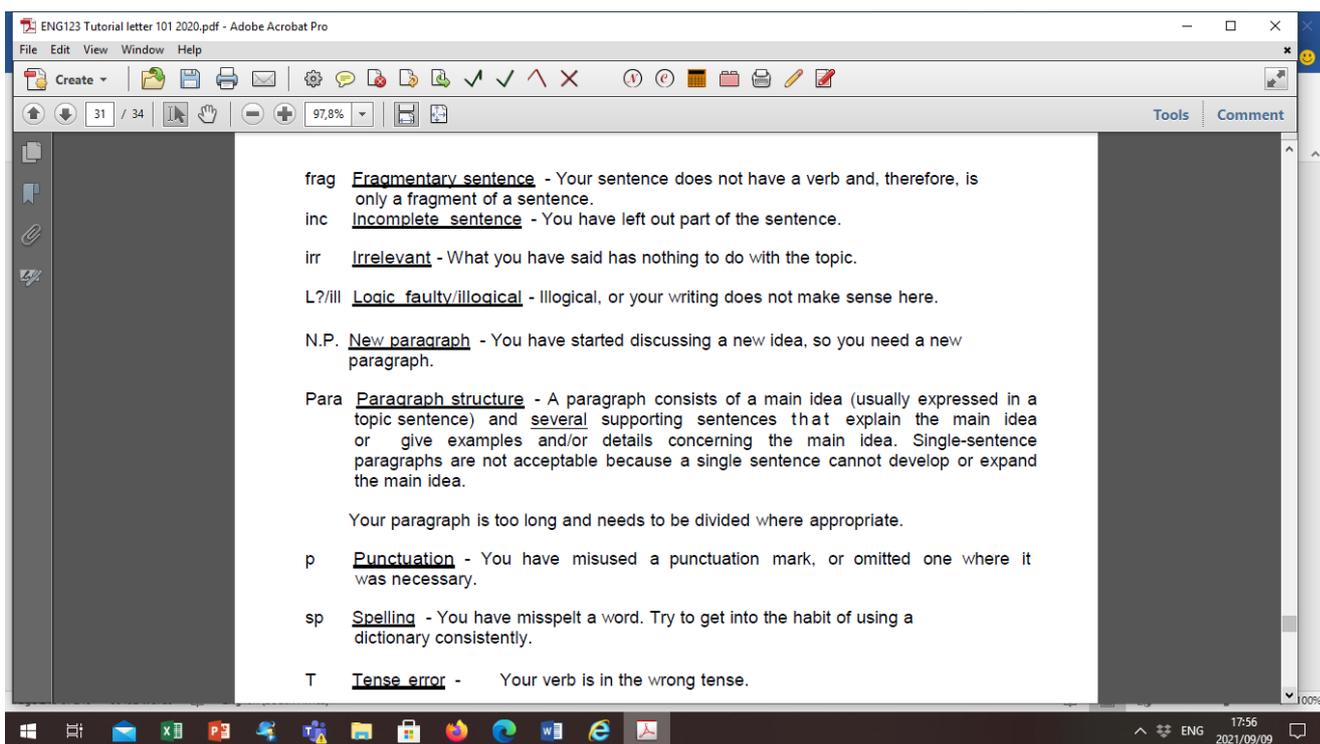
**APPENDUM C: MARKING CODES**

When assessing your essays, markers use the following codes in addition to written feedback.

Symbol	Error	Explanation
abb	<u>Abbreviation</u>	- Do not use abbreviations or contractions (such as can't, don't, etc.) in <b>formal</b> writing (e.g. a written assignment).
agr (s/v)	<u>Agreement error</u>	- Your verb does not agree with your subject in number. Check whether your subject is singular or plural.  A plural subject takes a plural verb: The students <b>read</b> the book. A singular subject takes a singular verb: The student <b>reads</b> the book.
amb	<u>Ambiguity</u>	- Your statement could have two meanings. Rephrase.
ap	<u>Apostrophe error</u>	- An apostrophe is a comma that hangs above the line.  An apostrophe is used to indicate possession. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The boy's hands are dirty (the hands of the boy).</li> <li>Mandela's leadership (the leadership of Mandela).</li> <li>The boys' privileges (the privileges of the boys).</li> </ul> An apostrophe is used to indicate when letters are left out (contraction or omission). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We'll (we will)</li> <li>Can't (cannot)</li> <li>I've (I have)</li> </ul>

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# TURNITIN REPORT

The screenshot displays the Turnitin interface for a student named Kgabo Bridget Maphoto, MA. The main document view shows the title page of a dissertation: "REIMAGING STUDENT FEEDBACK FOR IMPROVED ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS IN A FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH STUDIES MODULE AT A DISTANCE EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA" by Kgabo Bridget Maphoto, submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of South Africa, supervised by Dr K. Sevnarayan. A "Match Overview" panel on the right indicates a 31% match rate. Below this, a list of matches is shown, including sources from uir.unisa.ac.za (4%), hdl.handle.net (1%), scholarcommons.usf.edu (1%), www.researchgate.net (1%), Submitted to University... (1%), and video.onlinenigeria.com (1%). The interface also shows a sidebar with document sections and a Windows taskbar at the bottom.

Turnitin - Class Portfolio | Feedback Studio - Google Chrome

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kgabo Bridget Maphoto | MA

Match Overview

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Currently viewing standard sources

View English Sources (Beta)

Matches

Rank	Source	Match Percentage
1	uir.unisa.ac.za Internet Source	4%
2	hdl.handle.net Internet Source	1%
3	scholarcommons.usf.e... Internet Source	1%
4	www.researchgate.net Internet Source	1%
5	Submitted to University... Student Paper	1%
6	video.onlinenigeria.com Internet Source	1%

REIMAGING STUDENT FEEDBACK FOR IMPROVED ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS IN A FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH STUDIES MODULE AT A DISTANCE EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

by

KGABO BRIDGET MAPHOTO

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: DR K. SEVNARAYAN

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