UiA University of Agder

# Teachers Written Feedback Commentary Practices based on the Proficiency of the Learner

A longitudinal study using TRAWL corpus documents to analyze teachers different written feedback commentary practices based on the proficiency of the learner.

ANNE GREVSEN

SUPERVISOR
Elin Maria Berg

**University of Agder, 2024**
Faculty of Humanities and Pedagogy
Department of Foreign Languages and Translation

# Acknowledgments

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Elin. Thank you for all the meetings, thorough feedback, and cheering. Despite having personal struggles, she always took the time to read and provide feedback throughout the writing period. For this, I am incredibly grateful!

Secondly, I want to thank my family for always supporting my dream of becoming a teacher and helping me every step of the way. I am incredibly appreciative of all of you.

Thirdly, I want to thank my boyfriend, Sondre, for all the love and motivational speeches when writing was hard. I love you.

Lastly, I would like to thank my starting class at the University of Stavanger for giving me three great years, an amazing start to student life, and lifelong friendships. In addition, thanks to my graduating class for the warm welcome and memorable last two years.

We did it!

# Abstract

This study examines the TRAWL-UiA corpus documents and investigates how teachers differentiate their written feedback comments and to what extent they adapt their practices to learners' different proficiencies. Discovering how the written feedback comments correspond to the recommended principles in LK20. It focuses on three aspects of feedback comments: mode/tone, explicitness, and use of L1 in written teacher comments.

The results showed that two out of four teachers used an overall positive approach with much praise, while the two others were neutral and more suggestive in their feedback comments. Surprisingly, the teachers did not differ much in the comment's mode and tone between high and low-proficiency learners. With explicitness in the comments, the teachers differed in the amount used, mainly providing more explicit feedback to low-proficiency learners and more implicit feedback to high-proficiency learners. In addition, the analysis divided the teachers into using L1 and L2 to provide feedback, not differentiating on proficiency but on grade level.

As a concluding remark, teachers provide written feedback comments very differently from each other. They do not differ much in their overall commenting style between high- and low-proficiency learners, contradicting some of the principles in LK20. The results show that teacher identity is essential, and it is important to keep giving feedback comments with the individual learner in mind.

**Keywords:** *written feedback comments, high-proficiency learners, low-proficiency learners, mode and tone, explicit and implicit feedback, and use of L1.*

# Table of contents

# List of Tables

# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Many studies have been done regarding written feedback comments in the EFL classroom (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Lee, 2017). All are trying to find the best way to provide written feedback to support learners in their language learning and writing. According to the Norwegian government and the current Curriculum, Norwegian teachers must provide written feedback comments as formative assessments. Black and Wiliam (1998) argue that assessment and feedback are formative when feedback comments are used (p.16). This means that the feedback is provided during the learning process, and the learner should use it to improve their development. Furthermore, to achieve this, learners must be made aware of their current level of understanding so that it is possible to identify the gap between what they know and what they have yet to learn. The teachers use instruction and feedback suited to one individual learner to help close the knowledge gap.

The first gap in research this thesis uncovers is that many researchers have studied written corrective feedback (WCF) while little has been discovered on written feedback commentary (WFC). Researchers such as Bitchener (2012) created a study on the current and future research on written corrective feedback. He concluded that many were ¨quite small, local, close-up, and short-term studies¨ (p.859). Bitchener (2012) continues to mention that the research he discussed (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener and Knoch, 2008, 2009, 2010; van Beuningen, de Jong, & Kuiken, 2008, 2012) did resonate with others regarding the effect of factors including L2 learning. However, it expressed a need for more longitudinal qualitative and quantitative studies on what the teachers need to decide when providing written corrective feedback (cited in Bitchener, 2012, p.856).

The second gap in research this thesis also uncovers includes the use of L1(Norwegian) in written feedback comments for L2 (English) teaching. Here, previous research has mainly discovered the classroom's oral language. A study by Yu and Lee (2014) concluded that future research could include data analysis to discover richer findings on using L1 and L2 in peer feedback. Although this study does not examine peer feedback, it aims to discover richer data material findings that determine how much L1 and L2 language Norwegian L2 teachers use in their written feedback comments.

## 1.2 Aims of the study

As student teachers, we learn about feedback and assessment in theory, but unfortunately, we get little practice providing written feedback comments to actual learners and learner texts. Therefore, I wanted to learn more about teacher-written feedback comments, hoping to discover the more experienced teachers' strategies in actual language classrooms. I will examine how teachers use mode and tone, explicitness, and to what extent they use L1 (Norwegian) in their comments to both high- and low-proficiency learners. Differences between high- and low-proficiency learners indicate that they need different types of feedback that correspond to their level of language development. In a Norwegian classroom context, the law states that learners have a right to instruction and support adapted to their individual needs (The Education Act, 2019a). This study investigates how teachers differentiate their written feedback comments and to what extent they adapt their written feedback practices to learners of different proficiency. The findings will be discussed in light of the recommended principles in LK20. With this said the research questions for this thesis are:

(1) *How do Norwegian lower secondary teachers use written feedback comments to respond to student writing?*
(2) *How do teachers' written feedback commentary practices differ based on the proficiency of the learners they evaluate?*
(3) *To what extent do teachers' written feedback commentary practices correspond to the recommended principles in LK20?*

The outline of the thesis will start with a theoretical background covering previous research in the field. The methodology chosen for the study will be explained, and the analysis results will be presented. Lastly, the thesis will present the discussion, connecting the study's results with previous research and ending with a conclusion.

When comparing written feedback comments to high- and low-proficiency learners, my expected findings are that comments will mainly be in learners' L1 for learners who struggle and receive lower grades. I also expect learners with lower proficiency who make more basic grammar mistakes will receive more explicit corrections.

# 2.0 Theoretical Background

## 2.1 Written Feedback

According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), feedback can be conceptualized as information determined by an agent, commenting on someone's work or understanding. They state that feedback is beneficial when it contributes to filling the gap between known knowledge and knowledge that is yet to be known (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.82). Cameron (2001) explains how the feedback process supports learning through several steps. First, ¨learner understands the target performance¨, then ¨learner compares target and current performance¨ and finally, ¨learner closes the gap between target and current performance¨ (p. 239). The feedback mentioned can be provided by the teacher orally or in writing.

Receiving well-thought-out feedback can help the learner improve their understanding and skills within a subject. For this to happen, the teacher must provide input in a way the receiver understands. According to Bueie (2016), learners process comments more straightforwardly if they are at their proficiency level within the subject. Feedback is more effective when focused on incorrect interpretations instead of a total lack of understanding. This means that if a teacher comments on something the learner does not understand, something above their English proficiency level, the comment will have little effect (Kulhavy, 1977, cited in Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.82). In addition, receiving comments a learner cannot relate to will result in ¨exacerbate negative outcomes, engender uncertain self-images, and lead to poor performance¨ (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p. 95).

### 2.1.1 The Three Feedback Questions

According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), there are three questions to consider when providing and receiving feedback: Where am I going? How am I going? And where to next? These are questions that, in an ideal educational setting, both teacher and learner pursue the answers to. They also refer to these questions as feed-up, feedback, and feed-forward. According to Andújar Moreno and Cañada Pujols (2023) ¨*feed-up* has to do with the learning objectives being pursued, *feedback* provides information about where the student is at a given point, and *feed-forward* speaks to how that position can be improved¨.

The question of ¨*where am I going?* ¨ also referred to as feed-up, is mentioned by Hattie and Timperley (2007) as ¨ information given to students and their teachers about the attainment of learning goals related to the task or performance¨ (p.88). For feed-up comments to reduce the gap between current and intended learning, the teacher must clearly define the goal (p.89). Learners can cultivate commitment development when they experience that the feedback they receive compliments the goals set to fill the gap in their knowledge (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.88-89). In addition, when providing feedback for learning, Lee (2017) states that it is essential to ensure learners in helping them understand their ¨strengths¨ and ¨areas of improvement¨, which can be transparent to the feed-up stage (p. 76).

Feedback is the agent (teacher), providing the learner a standpoint on their progress within the subject and answering the question of *¨how am I going? ¨*. Hattie and Timperley (2007) mentioned feedback as ¨effective when it consists of information about the progress and/or how to proceed ¨ (p.89). In schools, the question of how learners are doing is often answered through different types of tests. Still, it is essential to disclose that this is only one of many methods to answer the question, and it often neglects to convey feedback information required for both teacher and learner to fully understand how to progress (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p. 89).

Feed-forward, referred to by Hattie and Timperley (2007) as the question of ¨*where to go next? ¨*, is the last feedback question. Learners often discover that the answer to this question in school is doing ¨more¨ by receiving additional tasks and information. Instead of addressing the question with knowledge that leads to greater possibilities for learning (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.90). Hattie and Timperley's (2007) examples for this include ¨enhanced challenges, more self-regulation over the learning process, greater fluency and automaticity, more strategies, and processes to work on the tasks, deeper understanding, and more information about what is and what is not understood ¨ (ibid.). They resolve by saying that this part of the feedback process can impact learning the most (ibid.).

According to Zarrinabadi and Rezazadeh (2023), providing the goals (feed-up) and improvements for next time (feed-forward), as well as comments about current status (feedback), will help increase learner "motivation and self-efficiency and reduce writing anxiety¨ (p. 589). When all three questions are put together, rather than operating separately,

teachers and learners will have greater chances of closing the gap between where knowledge is and where it will progress (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p. 90).

### 2.1.2 The Four Levels of Feedback

In addition to the three questions, Hattie and Timperley (2007) mention four levels of feedback that all work together to close the knowledge gap (p.90). These levels are feedback about the task, feedback about the processing of the task, feedback about self-regulation, and feedback about the self as a person (p.90-91).

The first level, called feedback about the task, consists of providing input that centers around a task and whether it is correct or incorrect. This type of learning relates to ¨a surface understanding of learning that involves acquiring, storing, reproducing, and using knowledge¨ (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.93). Feedback about the task can be effective in letting the learner know if they have understood or not. Still, if used too much, learners might focus too much on the immediate goal instead of working on strategies to reach the larger goal, not only one specific task (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.91). This level's feedback type contains instructions to provide more distinctive or correct information (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.90).

The second level, Hattie and Timperley (2007) mention, is feedback about the processing of the task (p.90). Feedback about processing focuses more on the development a task provides and often correlates to strategies for error detection, where teachers and learners give feedback. This level of feedback focuses on ¨the learning process requiring understanding or completing the task¨ (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p. 90). Whether learners decide to act on the error detection they receive is determined by their motivation to pursue their goals within the subject or task to help close the gap between their goal and existing knowledge (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.93).

The third level, feedback about self-regulation, speaks of how learners themselves¨ monitor, direct, and regulate actions towards the learning goal¨ (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.93). This form of feedback can help gain self-sufficiency and belief in themselves as learners with inspiration to resume a task. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), the learner's effectiveness is a factor. Effective learners can give themselves ¨internal feedback and cognitive routines while engaging in academic tasks¨ (p.94). In contrast, less effective learners

¨have minimal self-regulation strategies and depend more on external factors (such as the teacher or a task) for feedback¨ (ibid.).

The fourth level, feedback about the self as a person, is a type of feedback Hattie and Timperley (2007) included because it is often used in the classroom (p.96). This level of feedback includes comments like ¨good job¨, not related to the task information but about positive (or negative) assessments and the learners themselves (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.96). This type of feedback does not result in effective learning because it does not come with an answer to the three feedback questions mentioned earlier. As Hattie and Timperley (2007) indicate, this type of feedback has low success for learning, except when feedback can change a learner's determination or feelings towards a task.

## 2.2 Teacher Written Feedback

Teacher-written feedback is when a teacher gives learners feedback on what they produce. For a long time, there has been a division between summative and formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 19). Research such as Lee (2017) explains that there has been a shift from summative to formative assessment since the focus has changed to a form of assessment that promotes more learning. A collection of feedback and evaluations provided to a learner over time creates formative assessments. An assessment is ¨formative if the feedback information is used¨ (Black and Wiliam, 1998, p.16). Black and Wiliam (1998) define formative assessment as an action that takes two steps. The first step is learner awareness of the gap ¨between the desired goal and the present state¨ of knowledge or skill (p.20). In ensuring learner awareness, a teacher can help interpret the gap and provide information to the learner through written feedback comments. The second step is learner action to close the gap (ibid.). On the other hand, summative feedback focuses on feedback provided at the end of a unit to evaluate the quality of something completed. Often, then, it is not used for development.

In addition to formative and summative feedback, the definition of feedback can be divided even further into written corrective feedback (WCF) and written feedback commentary (WFC), depending on the focus. According to Pearson (2022), one distinction between them is that WCF often refers to a ¨clear correct answer, whereas WFC is more complex and less certain¨ (p.2). This thesis will focus on written feedback comments provided by lower secondary teachers.

A British study of younger EFL learners (N=132) discovered that 65% of the participants found teachers' written feedback too difficult to understand (Agbayahoun, 2016). Concerning understandability, Lee (2017) mentions that ¨effective feedback is information about a student's performance and understanding in relation to the goals¨ (p.4). Learners must understand the information given when providing written feedback to improve the writing process. To accomplish this, the teacher must explain in a language corresponding with the learner´s level of understanding.

Meanwhile, a Norwegian study by Bueie (2016) found that with younger learners, feedback that includes praise is something they appreciate. The study found that learners (N=159) felt more motivated to improve their writing, even though these were less specific and vague comments. Hattie and Timperley (2007) address that praise as feedback is ¨unlikely to be effective¨ because it does not provide the learner with any information on how to close the gap in their knowledge (p.96). Yet they also state that despite concerns regarding learning outcomes, learners typically want to receive praise in their comments (Sharp, 1985; Burnett, 2002, cited in Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p. 97).

Hyland and Hyland (2001) discovered by analyzing EFL learners' (N=17) writing during a 14-day course that 44% of the almost 500 feedback points collected were related to praise. In contrast, Connors & Lunsford (1993) argued that positive feedback was rare in language learning (cited in Hyland and Hyland, 200, p. 192). Both Bueie (2016) and Agbayahoun (2016) found that in learners' experiences, the mix of positive and negative comments is the most valued. Other studies, such as Kluger and DeNisi (1996), wrote that ¨both positive and negative feedback can have beneficial effects on learning¨. They continue saying that the balance of feedback depends more on the level it is aimed for than if it is positive or negative (cited in Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.98). One example could be Kernis, Brockner, and Frankel's (1989) argument that low self-efficacious learners are more likely to experience a lack of motivation and interpret negative feedback towards their ability instead of their effort (cited in Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.99).

## 2.3 Guiding Principles for Providing Written Feedback According to Research

By providing feedback, the teacher can fill the gap in learner knowledge by making appropriate, challenging, and specific goals they can strive towards. Additionally, in the learning process, the teacher must help clarify the goals and motivate learners to use the feedback they are given (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.87).

There are many ways in which teachers can help improve the written feedback process for the learners. According to Agbayahoun (2016), learners possibly needed teachers to include them more in making criteria for their writing assignments. Including the learners was a suggestion in the study because results showed that 40% only looked at the grade and threw it away before they had read the comments. Lee (2017) mentions that ¨less is more¨, meaning that significant feedback given to learners in their second language is ¨unhelpful as it is not manageable for L2 school learners¨ (p.75). Choosing a select amount of topics to focus on will give the learner a better chance of having a learner outcome (Lee, 2017, p. 76).

In addition to the amount of feedback, Black & Wiliam (1998) provide evidence that scores significantly declined when providing only grades, compared to comments with a grade or only comments. Black and Wiliam (1998) also tested learner interest, and the low achieving learners scored low in interest when grades were involved, compared to the high achievers with a high interest level in all cases (p.13). They found evidence that the effectiveness of providing written feedback, especially feedback about the task, is much higher than giving grades (ibid.).

Bueie (2016) discovered that learners of her study appreciated comments that were to the point rather than ones that were too nice and vague. In addition, Ferguson (2011) mentioned that learners (N=566) in his study appreciated comments more than grades because they found their texts more valuable that way (cited in Bueie, 2016, p. 4). To sum up, a teacher can improve the written feedback process in many ways, mainly by thinking of involvement, being direct, and reflecting on whether the comment should stand on its own or if the learners should receive a grade.

### 2.3.1 Recommended Feedback Practice According to the Norwegian Education Act

The Norwegian Education Act includes the overall laws Norwegian schools must follow. The Norwegian Education Act § 1-3 states that ¨education must be adapted to the abilities and aptitudes of the individual learner…¨ (The Education Act, 2019a). Teachers must see all learners as individuals with particular needs to support their development. In addition, § 1-1 states that the school ¨must meet the pupils with trust, respect, and demands, and give them challenges that promote formation and the desire to learn¨ (The Education Act, 2019b). In other words, feedback practices mentioned in the Norwegian Education Act require that all learners need individual feedback in all assessment forms, including written feedback.

Further, the Norwegian Education Act § 3-3 states that evaluation in school is supposed to help learners develop an increased desire to learn during the process and provide learners with information about their development in a subject both during the process and at the end of a unit (Regulations Pursuant to the Education Act, 2020). To continue in Regulations Pursuant to the Education Act (2020), §3-10 states that the purpose of formative assessment is for learners to know where they are in their learning process. It is also a tool to discover if the learner is satisfied with the type of assessment used and to decide if there is a need for an individual learning plan. In other words, using formative assessment is not only a recommendation but also a law of the Norwegian government. Still, it can also be an essential tool in discovering learning difficulties to help learners learn more.

### 2.3.2 Recommended Feedback Practices According to the Norwegian Curriculum

In line with the Education Act, formative assessment is a focus area within the Norwegian Curriculum and must be practiced in all subjects. One way this is done is through mid-term assessments, meaning several evaluation situations, providing learners with feedback to develop, all leading up to a final grade at the end of the year. The thought behind this is that learners should take control over their development within the subject and receive guidance to reflect on what they already know and how they can progress (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). These are put in place for learners to partake in their learning and hopefully contribute to creating an increased eagerness to learn (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2022).

The current Norwegian Curriculum, LK20, further mentions that teachers must help learners self-reflect on their learning process. This reflection will be beneficial in developing the skillset necessary to become independent learners in society (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). As Cameron (2001) wrote, ¨in Vygotskyan terms¨ when a learner acquires to self-reflect on their work, they go from being ¨other-regulated¨ to ¨self-regulated¨. They are not as dependent on their teachers to make decisions and to tell them what they did wrong. Instead, they are partaking in that process, giving them an advantage in continuing learning (Cameron, 2001, p.235).

According to The English subject curriculum, writing is one of the basic skills to learn within year 10. After year ten, one of the English competence aims is *to revise one's texts based on feedback and knowledge of the language* (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). Because the competency aims explicitly state that learners need to be able to revise their texts based on feedback, it shows how vital feedback is and how important it is that learners understand the feedback teachers provide.

## 2.4 Different Students, Different Needs

Learners are different, learn differently, and come from various backgrounds, contributing to various individual differences. This way, every learner is unique, and no classroom is the same. Every learner in each school has their way of learning, which the teacher must acknowledge and accommodate in their lesson and evaluation planning. When it comes to English, there will always be learners who find learning a language complex and others who already know a lot or learn fast.

In studies, learners' proficiency is often measured by tests or, like (Kim, 2023), using a scoring profile, where an average of total scores determines the proficiency level (p.5). This thesis will use the terms high- and low-proficiency learners. However, since tests are not possible, their proficiency will be based on their level of competence in terms of grades they receive. Norwegian teachers operate with a scale from 1, the lowest grade, to 6, the highest grade. In this study, learners who receive grades 5-6 from their teacher are referred to as high-proficiency, and those who received grades 2-3 are low-proficiency learners. In written language assessment, the grade reflects an overall evaluation of a text's language, content, and structure.  With different learner types in the classroom, the teacher must vary written

feedback comments provided to the individual learner based on their level to help progression (Lee, 2017, p. 77).

High-proficiency learners learn fast and often feel motivated to keep working. To not ruin that motivation, the teacher could provide detailed corrective feedback (Lee, 2017, p. 77). Meanwhile, low-proficiency learners might find questions less clear and need an in-person explanation to understand how to proceed wholly. When teachers know their learners' proficiency level, they can provide feedback that will help motivate the individual learner (Lee, 2017, p. 78).

A study by Blote (1995) comments that ¨teachers give *poor* students more praise and that the little feedback about self-regulation provided is typically negative¨ (cited in Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.100). Low-proficiency learners will most likely, as they did in the Norwegian study by Bueie (2016), need feedback to include some kind of praise and focus on including positive and constructive remarks. When the learner is at a lower level, their number of mistakes increases, which makes it essential for the teacher not to overwhelm the learner. However, providing extensive error corrections in feedback can be helpful when interpreted as a steppingstone for future learning (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.100). When differentiating feedback given to individual learners, Lee (2017) states that ¨teachers can enhance student motivation and help them develop a stronger sense of ownership of their writing¨ (p.92). Cameron (2001) writes that a learner learning an L2 language and requiring teachers' help to get ideas and exposure will not develop ¨ full range of the foreign language¨. She continues to say that an example of things that will be hard for this learner is to write at length (p.16).

## 2.5 Differentiating Written Feedback Comments

When studying written feedback, different categories are used to differentiate the characteristics. These categories help us analyze what we see and make it easier to detect patterns. Pearson (2022) has written a review article, a ¨typology of the characteristics written feedback comments on second language writing¨. In the typology, he systematically reviewed over 30 years of research and generated ten strategies to divide written feedback commentary characteristics into second-language writing. These characteristics are range of focus, mode and tone, syntactic structure, text specificity, location, explicitness, length, presence of

mitigation strategies, pen-and-paper versus computer-mediated delivery, and temporality. I have chosen to investigate two characteristics: mode/tone and explicitness. In addition, language use was added as the use of L1 or L2 has not been researched much within the field of written feedback commentary.

### 2.5.1 Mode and Tone

A significantly investigated characteristic of written feedback is its mode and tone. The mode of a comment is how one can interpret the provider's intention. There are many ways of coding this. Hyland and Hyland (2001) coded comments in simple functions, such as praise, suggestion, and criticism. Others divide the codes further into modes like correction, description, giving information, and advisory (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Ferris, 1997; Ferris et al., 1997; Grouling, 2018; Straub, 1997, cited in Pearson, 2022, p. 6). In addition to the mode of the comments, the tone can be considered positive, negative, or natural (Liu & Wu, 2019, cited in Pearson, 2022, p. 6). When writing a comment, the teacher may not be intentional in what modes they use, which can confuse the learner about the teacher's primary intent with the comment (Leki, 1990, cited in Pearson, 2022, p.7). Every learner interprets the mode of the comment differently, so it may be advised to have a consistent methodology (Hyland, 2019, cited in Pearson, 2022, p. 6).

In a study by Hyland and Hyland (2001), they used modes of praise, suggestion, and criticism when doing a text analysis on written feedback provided by teachers. When using these terms, they define praise as ¨an act which attributes credit to another for some characteristics, attribute, skill, etc., which is positively valued by the person giving feedback¨ (Hyland & Hyland, 2001, p. 186). There are many opinions on whether praise is good or bad to base a written comment on. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007, p.86), using praise to give feedback looks ineffective because it contains little learning-related evidence. Also, Ferris (1997) informs teachers to ¨bear in mind that praise does not tend to induce revisions¨ (cited in Pearson, 2022, p.7). On the other side, praise is important to enhance learner confidence and enthusiasm (Connors & Lunsford, 1993; Ferris, 1995; Straub, 1997, cited in Pearson, 2022, p.7).

Hyland and Hyland (2001) define criticism as ¨an expression of dissatisfaction or negative comment on a text¨ (p.186). Like writing comments using the mode of praise, practicing

criticism also comes with disagreeing arguments. On the one hand, studies tell teachers to be mindful of using it too much because it can weaken a learner's confidence and motivation (Connor & Lunsford, 1993; Hyland, 1998a; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994, cited in Pearson, 2022, p.7). In comparison, another side to using criticism is that when writing in their L2 language, most learners are self-aware and therefore have an expectation they will receive some negative comments (Ferris, 1995, 2003; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Saito, 1994, cited in Pearson, 2022, p. 7).

Hyland and Hyland (2001) concluded that using praise or criticism could lead to ¨confirming the teacher's right to evaluate a student's work and, as a result, sought to blur out the impact of this dominance¨ (p.207). Therefore, they discovered that if the methods combined into praise-criticism, criticism-suggestion, and praise-criticism-suggestion, they could maintain the relationships and receive better effects using their criticism and suggestions.

### 2.5.2 Explicitness in Comments

By writing out or foreseeing corrected versions of learner mistakes, the teacher can achieve the aim of correcting a learner's text so learners can revise and learn from the comments (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Ene & Upton, 2014, cited in Pearson, 2022, p.8). When looking at written corrective feedback, these comments are often referred to as direct and indirect comments (Ferris, 1995a,b; Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; Lalande, 1982; Robb, Ross & Shortreed, 1986, cited in Bitchener et al., 2005, p. 193). However, research discovering written feedback commentary, such as Pearson (2022), separates these comments into explicit and implicit. This thesis understands, in the background of the research found, that these terms are closely related. This thesis will use Pearson's (2022) terms of explicit and implicit feedback comments (p.9).

According to Pearson (2022), one definition of direct or explicit feedback comments is that the teacher provides the learner with the exact correction needed to revise (p.8). Pearson (2022) continues to define explicit comments by dividing them further into correction, directive, and example (Pearson, 2022, p. 9). According to Pearson (2022), direct corrections are the most explicit approach and could be construed as commands, not leaving the learner with questions on revising (p.9). One result of this could be, as Shintani and Ellis (2013) discovered, that direct focused corrective feedback did not help low-proficiency learners form

an understanding of specific grammar rules, revise a story, or write a new one. Still, in contrast, their metalinguistic explanation did. On the other hand, many studies (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Ferris, Cheyney, Komura, Roberts & McKee, 2000; Komura, 1999; Rennie, 2000; Roberts, 1999) have discovered that both learners and teachers prefer direct, explicit feedback rather than implicit feedback (cited in Bitchener et al., 2005, p. 193).

The implicit or indirect approach is the opposite, comments that ¨outline or explain a textual problem but providing no strategy pointing the way forward¨ (Pearson, 2022, p. 9). Bitchener et al. (2005) wrote part of the definition as ¨leaving students to diagnose and correct it themselves¨ (p.193). According to Pearson (2022), these implicit comments can also be divided into groups of confirmation check, clarification request, explanation without correction, and indicates something is wrong but does not explain (p.9). Indirect feedback can sometimes be formulated as questions suitable to benefit ¨cognitive engagement and promote autonomy¨ (Ferris, 2014, cited in Lee, 2017, p. 70).

Another differentiation made with indirect feedback is whether it is written using a code. This means that in some cases, the teacher will mark the exact location of an error using a code the learner knows. For example, highlighting words in a specific color means a spelling mistake. Uncoded indirect feedback is when the error is marked in some way for the learner to notice, but there is no telling what the error is. The learner must discover that independently (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012, p. 193).

Studies such as Lee (1997) have tested ESL college students (N=149) in Hong Kong in ¨assumptions behind ESL teacher's error correction practices¨. She found that for learners, there was a significant effect for those who received marked errors compared to those who did not. Another study by Ferris and Roberts (2001) determined how explicit feedback needs to be differentiated between receiving coded indirect feedback, marked but uncoded indirect feedback, and no feedback. They discovered that learners (N=72) in two groups receiving coded and only marked indirect feedback had ¨substantial high significant differences in their editing outcomes¨ than one group who did not receive feedback (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012, p. 176). However, they found no significant difference between the group who received coded feedback and those who received marked feedback without a code. In addition, this study discovered that all learners wanted to correct their errors, and the most frequent answer was that they requested coded feedback as well (Ferris & Roberts, 2001, p. 177).

Even though indirect feedback is spoken highly of in studies, Cheng and Liu (2022) discovered that teachers in their study used both direct and indirect written feedback (p.8). This corresponds with the statement that L2 writing teachers do not use one strategy alone to provide feedback and that ¨neither direct nor indirect feedback strategy is the best for learning¨ (Bitchener and Storch, 2016, cited in Cheng and Liu, 2022, p. 8).

### 2.5.3 Use of L1

When correcting learners' text in their L2 language, teachers sometimes write feedback, either in-text or after, in their L1 language. The reasoning for this varies, but one thing to consider, as mentioned by Ferris et al. (2011), is that the choice of feedback language could be based on the fact that the teacher does not identify as an L2 writing teacher (p.209). As Krulatz et al. (2016) argue, teachers' L2 use can be related to teacher anxiety level in using the policy of an English-through-English method. This anxiety can be based on a lack of confidence in other teachers (p.140). In a Norwegian bachelor thesis, Aunmo (2016) discovered that language use in an L2 classroom could be explained by the teacher's feelings towards the subject. If teachers taught a second language because they were told to, they often did not believe they knew more English than the learners, resulting in no confidence in practicing it (p.26). However, Krulatz et al. (2016) argue that long-term language learning requires increased teaching experience to improve teacher confidence (p.140). Only to be contradicted in the results when discovering that teacher experience did not correspond with the amount of L2 used in their study, showing that teacher L2 use is very individualized (p.147).

Cameron (2001) states that learners have a switch between literacy and oral skills in terms of what is helpful when learning their mother tongue as well as their second language. Unless the child has developed to a point where written language has become practical, the learner will find oral language more beneficial. This switch happens later for the second language than the first (p.67). According to Cameron (2001), this switch happens for learners in their L1 when they are 8-9 years old (ibid.). Because of this, it makes sense that for Krulatz et al. (2016), the results showed that the teachers' use of L2 increased with the grade level they were teaching.

Research on L2 response has long had the student in focus, doing ¨ text analysis of written teacher commentary, sometimes accompanied by analyses of student revisions¨ (Ferris et al.,

2001, p.209). In addition, survey research evaluated student reactions and preferences about the written feedback they received (Ferris, 1995; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Leki, 1991; Zhang, 1995, 1999, cited in Ferris et al., 2011, p. 209). In recent studies, for example, Lee (2009) has filled the teacher-as-informant gap. She did a study to discover that L2 teachers' beliefs did not align with their practices in responding to L2 writers. One example is ¨teachers tend to correct and locate errors for students but believe that through teacher feedback, students should learn to correct and locate their errors¨ (p.16). Because there are few studies on this subject, there is little research on written L1 use in teachers' written commentary in Norwegian schools.

Despite little research on written feedback comments in L1 language, there are a lot of assumptions that having a monolingual approach to second language teaching is the most excellent way to learn (Chambers, 1991; Halliwell & Jones, 1991; Krashen, 1985; Swain, 1985, cited in Brevik et al., 2020, p. 95). The best way to improve learners' English proficiency is by exposing them to the most English possible (Brevik et al., 2020, p. 95). Brevik et al. (2020) express that teachers must encourage learners to use the target language if practicing in a monolingual classroom. That is because it does not come naturally to communicate with friends in another language they have yet to learn thoroughly (p.96). Literature such as Cameron (2001) states that ¨teachers model language use¨ when exposing learners to target language to advance learning (p.16). Regarding this, Tsang (2023) argued, ¨without input, it is impossible for language development to take place¨, and one of the two primary channels to receive this input is through reading (p.1). Which then includes reading written feedback. On the other hand, Brevik et al. (2020) also say that a ¨monolingual approach to language teaching might stifle students' overall language development¨ (p.96). Because of this, another recommendation is to have a bilingual classroom (Brevik et al., 2020, p. 96).

A bilingual classroom is defined by Brevik et al. (2020) as a method where ¨ teacher and students both use the target language and the language of schooling¨ (p.96). The authors have used the term translanguaging, meaning there is a shift in focus from language to learners ¨language practices and repertoires¨ (ibid.). In other words, there is no correct English teaching method, but teachers' use of L1 can depend on learners' English proficiency and grade level.

# 3.0 Methodology

This chapter will describe the chosen methods used in the study to answer the three research questions:

*(1) How do Norwegian lower secondary teachers use written feedback comments to respond to student writing?*
*(2) How do teachers' written feedback commentary practices differ based on the proficiency of the learners they evaluate?*
*(3) To what extent do teachers' written feedback commentary practices correspond to the recommended principles in LK20?*

In continuation, this chapter informs about the participants and the material used. Furthermore, the advantages and challenges of using the chosen methods are discussed. Lastly, the chapter mentions the study's reliability and validity and the ethical considerations it brings.

## 3.1 Choice of Method

I sought to investigate authentic feedback comments from Norwegian teachers to see how they approach providing written feedback comments differently to different learners. I set out to design a project that would allow me to compare different teachers' approaches in detail. I decided to focus on high- and low-proficiency learners to maximize the contrast between the learners' need for support. Once I found out about the TRAWL corpus, partly collected and assembled at UiA, I understood that it would be possible to do a document analysis of data material already collected that could answer my questions.

### 3.1.1 Qualitative Method

I have chosen a qualitative research method for this thesis to explore the characteristics selected from the different teacher-written feedback comments I will analyze. That way, gain a deeper understanding of the data, creating in-depth answers to the research questions rather than collecting numerical data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2021).

A second reason for choosing a qualitative research method is to be able to analyze pre-excising documents in-depth, covering two years of learner texts, which I otherwise would not have the time or resources to do (Morgan, 2022). This way, the study has the chance of being longitudinal and still qualitative in that it uncovers teachers' written feedback comments in a detailed way.

### 3.1.2 Document Analysis

The thesis examines written feedback comments and compares how four Norwegian lower secondary teachers approach this essential task differently. Hence, document analysis is the best method to answer the research questions and uncover a central and relevant part of the English teaching profession. The study will analyze the data material and compare four teachers' feedback comments against three characteristics of written feedback provided to high- and low-proficiency learners, discovering if there are any differences in teachers' practices.

The material used for this analysis spans two years, making the study longitudinal. The material consists of learner texts from 8th- and 9th-grade learners with teacher-written feedback comments from four L2 teachers working at different schools, including in-text and end-comments. I will analyze two high-proficiency learner texts and two low-proficiency learner texts per teacher per year, totaling a number of 32 learner texts with comments.

When analyzing the material, the thesis will use a hermeneutics approach (Krogh, 2014). This means that the analyst will interpret and understand the material as someone who cannot talk to the people involved in the writing. The nature of the data makes this the most natural approach. Additionally, my background as a student teacher plays a role in understanding the material used, given that I have previous language learning experience. The hermeneutic approach makes it so that the result might not have been the same if another person did the analysis. The thesis will continuously explain the researcher's thought process to help the reader understand.

#### *3.1.2.1 Writing Characteristics*

The first chosen characteristics within written feedback comments, mode/tone, and explicitness were inspired by Pearson's (2022) typology. I was most curious to see how

teachers practice providing written feedback comments differently, having personal experience and wanting to gain insight to compare different teaching styles. In addition, the thesis will investigate the usage of L1 in L2 teacher written feedback comments because this is a characteristic that there is little documentation and studies on. As well as something that I have noticed can change connected to different proficiency levels.

As mentioned, the analysis will focus on mode/tone, explicitness, and use of L1 within written feedback comments. There are many coding schemes available to determine a comment's mode. Pearson (2022) presents in his typology ten different categories within a comment's mode. These are advisory, correction, criticism, description, giving information, ¨need to¨, praise, question posing, and reader reflection (Pearson, 2022, p.4). Despite this, the thesis will use Hyland and Hyland's (2001) three simple core functions: praise, suggestion, and criticism. This is to make the analysis understandable by not adding too many variables into one characteristic, preventing the results from being overwhelming. In addition, an overview of the four teachers' use of mode and tone was desired, hoping to increase the generalization of the result.

In addition to analyzing which mode the feedback comments are in, the results also include whether the written feedback comments were in a positive, negative, or neutral tone. As Pearson (2022) mentioned in his typology, it is also relevant to this thesis that the mode of praise aligns with a positive tone, and the mode of criticism aligns with a negative tone. Because these go hand in hand, the more exciting part of the analysis is whether the teachers wrote the feedback comments in a positive, negative, or neutral tone in the suggestion mode and if it is consistent for the different proficiencies.

When analyzing written feedback comments in the material, the researcher first marked comments as praise, suggestions, or criticism (see Table 1). Next, the researcher considered the total amount for each learner's text and the tone in which the teachers delivered them. Finally, the researcher compared the marked modes to each of the four groups (high-proficiency 9$^{th}$ grade, high-proficiency 8$^{th}$ grade, low-proficiency 9$^{th}$ grade, and low-proficiency 8$^{th}$ grade), deciding which overall mode and tone the feedback comments for the groups were in, for each teacher. Here, comments such as ¨well done¨ and ¨great arguments¨ are considered as praise (see Table 1). In contrast, if a comment was mainly focused on what

the learner could improve on, such as ¨ for next time, try reading the text out loud to detect your mistakes, ¨ it was considered in the suggestion mode (TRAWL, translated by me).

However, it was difficult to differentiate between the three modes, so the analysis added two more categories: suggestion-praise and suggestion-criticism. Meaning that both modes were present in the comments. Remember that the hermeneutics approach allows for individual understanding while being neutral. This approach implies that the analysis results might have differed if another analyst had interpreted the data.

*Table 1- examples of mode in written feedback commentary*

| **Mode** | **Norwegian examples from TRAWL** | **English examples (translated by me)** |
|---|---|---|
| Praise | *Bra jobba!*<br>*Det er utrolig hvor mye du har lært!*<br>*God refleksjon.* | *Good job!*<br>*It is amazing how much you have learned!*<br>*Nice reflection.* |
| Suggestion | *Skriv enda mer neste gang, jeg vet du kan!*<br>*Prøv og les igjennom teksten din høyt og lytt til feilene dine.*<br>*Jobb med feilene markert i teksten til neste gang.* | *Next time, write more; I know you can!*<br>*Try reading the text out loud to find your mistakes.*<br>*Work on the mistakes marked in the text for next time.* |
| Criticism | *Du mangler flere av punktene fra malen, så teksten din blir litt tynn.* | *You are missing a lot of important information, making your text thin.* |

The second characteristic, explicitness, describes whether written feedback comments are explicit, implicit, or both and to what extent teachers use them. When analyzing explicit comments (see Table 2), the number of explicit corrections is counted for the teacher's written feedback comments and compared against the total number of written comments. The explicit feedback comments are separated into Pearson's (2022) three subgroups: correction, directive, and example. Afterward, the numbers of explicit feedback comments are compared in two tables, one for high-proficiency and one for low-proficiency, to see if there was a difference in how each teacher uses this form of written feedback comments.

Like explicit feedback comments, the implicit feedback comments are separated into four subgroups (see Table 2) used by Pearson (2022), then compared the high- and low-proficiency learners. The four teachers used this form of feedback comments differently with the amount of in-text and end-comments. Because of this, the numbers are marked ¨1 out of 10 in-text¨ or ¨1 out of 10 end-comments¨ to mark the difference in where the researcher detected feedback comments. The researcher counted the number of comments to show the best results when comparing the total of implicit and explicit comments used by the teachers for the different proficiency levels.

*Table 2- examples of explicit and implicit written feedback commentary*

| **Explicitness** | **Technique** | **Example** | **A TRAWL example** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Explicit | Correction | *¨in the present time¨ is more natural.* | ¨were not where¨ |
| | Directive | *I would consider whether the proposed solution is currently being implemented, and if the answer is yes, comment on its success.* | *¨av og til kan det og sette punktum være til stor hjelp¨* |
| | Example | *If you changed the topic sentence to something like: ¨Another problem that emerges is how violent conduct and its consequences are portrayed in modern cinema¨, it would sound less repetitive.* | *Du kan fremdeles terpe på at alle ¨that´s¨ skal være ¨that is¨.* |
| Implicit | Confirmation check | *Is this relevant to the question, though?* | |
| | Clarification request | *How does this spending impact the tension with tourists?* | *Why the ¨s¨ in friend?* |
| | Explanation without correction | *This sounds like a memorized expression that could be used in an essay.* | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Indicates something is wrong but does not provide an explanation | *This is certainly clearer, but still comes across as very general.* | *¨Jeg har satt spørsmålstegn i teksten der jeg ikke forstår hva du mener – kan du forklare med egne ord hva du mente? ¨* |

The last characteristic analyzed in the thesis is whether the L2 teacher writes feedback comments in the learners' L1 (Norwegian) or L2 (English). The amount of L1 was found by reading the feedback comments and discovering the language most used to provide the learner with in-text and end-comments. Then, the analysis continues to see if there is a change in the use of L1 feedback comments for the different teachers among the high- and low-proficiency learners and the amount for 8th- compared to 9th-grade learners.

## 3.2 Study Participants / TRAWL Corpus

This thesis used the material from the TRAWL-UiA corpus from the Norwegian research group TRAWL. TRAWL is a research group investigating second and third language writing development through a corpus of authentic pupil texts from Norwegian schools (University of Oslo, 2021). TRAWL stands for Tracking Written Learner Language. The corpus aims to explore the development of Norwegian pupils' writing skills in their L2 language, English, and in the three most frequently chosen L3 languages, French, German, and Spanish (University of Oslo, 2021). The corpus is based on authentic learner written texts and contains the creation of a large corpus of learner texts. The corpus is longitudinal, collected texts following learners through 5th-13th grade. This thesis will have a narrower focus on written feedback comments, using texts from learners in 8th- and 9th-grade of Norwegian schooling.

As mentioned earlier, this thesis will analyze student texts, focusing on written feedback comments received from their teachers. Concentrating on comparing different teacher styles when providing written feedback comments. Therefore, I wanted to choose various types of levels within learner texts to hopefully gather data with more significant contrasts.

The paper will use the grades learners are given based on written assignments, which in Norway is based on structure, language, and content on a scale from 1-6, to measure learners'

proficiency level. Grades 1-3 are considered low-proficiency, and 5-6 are considered high-proficiency. Therefore, the material used was a selection of two learner texts from learners considered high-proficiency and two considered low-proficiency for each teacher each year. Making it eight learner texts for each of the four groups (high-proficiency 8th-grade, high-proficiency 9th-grade, low-proficiency 8th-grade, and low-proficiency 9th-grade). The goal is to compare and analyze teacher-written feedback comments based on the three feedback comment characteristics.

## 3.3 Advantages and challenges of the chosen method

Because the corpus is anonymous, I could not talk to the producers of the written material, not teachers or learners. Therefore, one challenge with the chosen method was that interviewing about the tasks and their context was impossible. This challenge kept me from asking questions like what they had done before the writing task or if there was a specific focus within the writing process when the teacher introduced the task. Neither could I ask the teachers about their relationships with the learners, which perhaps affected their written feedback comments to specific learners. Because of this, I could only read the material and perform my analysis based on the written words.

Another challenge with this method was that when I analyzed a comment as perhaps the suggestion mode seeming negative, the teacher might not have been intentionally negative when writing the feedback. So again, because I could not speak to the teachers about their thought processes when correcting and giving feedback, the analysis is based on the researchers' understanding of the written feedback.

On the other hand, an advantage of this method is that when having the opportunity to interview people about their profession, they might say what they think the interviewer wants to hear, which could limit the accuracy of the results. This way, only by referring to the words on the paper, no feelings of embarrassment or shame got in the way of the analysis.

Another advantage is that I read the feedback comments from the perspective of a teacher learning how to provide feedback best. I see and analyze feedback comments differently from someone who has never worked with language learning before.

On the other hand, having my background can make me less objective when analyzing, perhaps by sympathizing with or understanding the teacher's way of providing feedback. Being aware of this, I will do my best to be objective in the analysis and provide the most accurate results.

## 3.4 Reliability and Validity

In choosing a qualitative study, reliability and validity are terms many say are less straightforward than those of a quantitative study (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 54). One reason is that the terms have been most referred to when associated with quantitative methods and principles (p.54). In contrast, qualitative research depends on individual perceptions, and the word *truth* is relative (ibid.). Because of this, researchers argue that the terms should have their ways of ¨ attaining validity that are different from those used in quantitative approaches¨ (p.55).

Morse and Richard (2002) define reliability as ¨reliability requiring the same results to be obtained if the study were replicated¨ (cited in Dörnyei, 2007, p.57). Dörnyei (2007) explains that replicating a research paradigm is complex because the conclusion is often shaped by the ¨ respondents' personal accounts and the researcher´s subjective interpretation, ¨ which is accurate for this thesis (p.57). If a second person were to analyze the same material used in this thesis, the results might be different based on the understanding and interpretations of the teacher's comments. According to the definition, the reliability of this study is perhaps considered low since the approach is based on the individual understanding of the teacher's comments. However, the analysis is based on an overview of the teacher's comments. In addition, the fact that the comments on explicitness were counted in the learner texts might increase the chance of a similar outcome if analyzed by another person.

Validity, from a quantitative point of view, is separated into internal and external validity (Dörnyei, 2007, p.52). A study has internal validity if ¨ the outcome is a function of the variables measured, controlled, or manipulated in the study¨(ibid.). External validity determines whether the reader can generalize the findings to a larger group or other contexts (ibid.). Using these terms, this thesis would have internal but less external validity. Seeing as the participants chosen were four Norwegian teachers from four different schools, which is not enough to generalize to all lower secondary teachers.

Since this thesis used a qualitative approach, the terms more accurately used to describe the validity of the study is Lincoln and Guba´s (1985) ¨trustworthiness¨, which is separated into four components (cited in Dörnyei, 2007, p.57). These are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (p.57). Credibility is the ¨truth value¨ of the study, the same as the internal validity. Transferability is the applicability of the results to other contexts, the same as external validity. Dependability is the consistency of the findings, and conformability is the neutrality of the findings (ibid.). Therefore, the trustworthiness of this research is split between having credibility and less transferability, dependability, and conformability since the material is analyzed with a hermeneutic approach, understood, and interpreted by the researcher.

Lastly, research bias is something that could have affected the reliability of the study. The researcher is very interested in this subject and is a teacher-student herself, resulting in some pre-thoughts on L2 teachers' written feedback comments that might have led to predisposed thoughts about the results. That said, the researcher attempted to analyze the data openly, welcoming any results.

## 3.5 Ethical Considerations

Because this thesis used the TRAWL corpus, many ethical considerations were already in place when starting the analysis. As the research was conducted, the learners and teachers in the TRAWL corpus were anonymous. While using the material, when receiving a learner text, they all had a learner number, followed by Y08 or Y09, depending on the year they were in. Therefore, the learners were only referred to by the number they had. Hence, the researcher never knew the identity of the writers, except the learner´s grade level while writing the texts, as well as the grade they received from the teacher. Therefore, the results chapter referred to the teachers as teachers one, two, three, and four, not naming anything specific that could jeopardize their identity.

# 4.0 Results

The analysis of the written teacher comments in the TRAWL documents provided some interesting results regarding the different characteristics of the mode and tone, explicitness, and usage of L1. This chapter will present the results from each teacher and the comparisons made between their differing approaches.

## 4.1 Mode and Tone

### 4.1.1 Teacher One

For Teacher One, the mode of written feedback comments provided to low-proficiency learners (receiving grades 2-3), using terminology from Hyland and Hyland (2001), was praise, and the tone was positive. The learner texts consisted of comments like ¨well done¨, ¨funny story¨, and ¨I am rooting for you¨. (TRAWL, translated by me). It was evident in Teacher One's comments that they wanted to cheer on the low-proficiency learners, including comments like ¨together we will do it! ¨, inserting themself in the learning process (see Figure 1). The praise was emphasized with exclamation marks, smileys, and hearts in the comments (see Figure 2). In addition to cheering and using symbols, Teacher One included statements of improvement for next time, but not enough to make the overall mode suggestion. The tone of Teacher One's written comments was consistently positive. The mode and tone were analyzed as identical for 8th and 9th-grade low-proficiency learners.

*Figure 1- Teacher One, low-proficiency 8th- grade texts examples of praise*

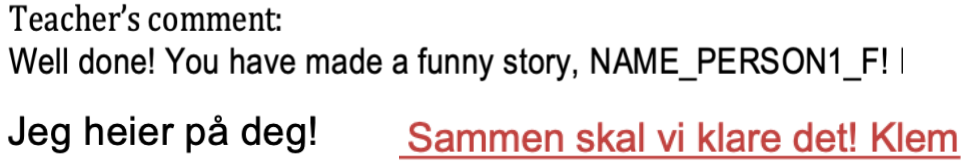
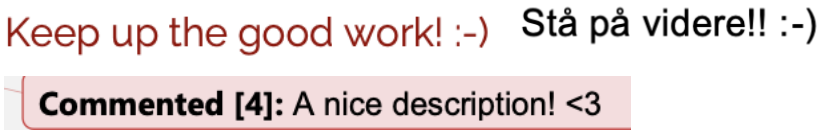
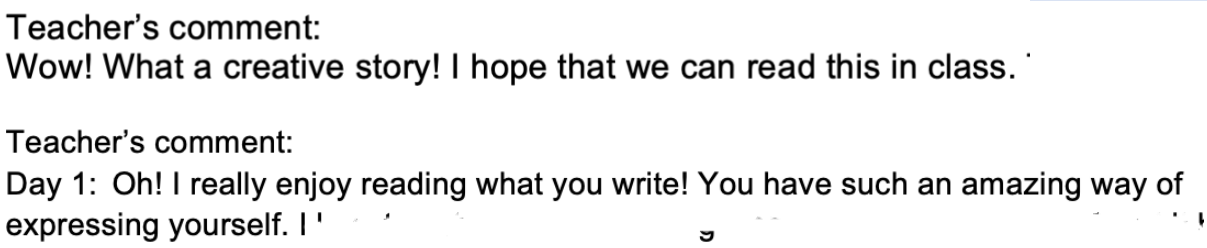



*Figure 2 – Teacher One, examples of symbols*



As for high-proficiency learners, Teacher One provided feedback comments in the mode of suggestion-praise. The reason was a mix of praise, resulting in the teacher seeming proud of the work and suggesting further improvement. Some examples of suggestions were: ¨good advice, go straight to the point! ¨, ¨ to improve your text, you should go through the verbs¨, whereas praise included comments like ¨I want to read this in class¨ (see Figure 3). The mix in comment mode can mean that the high-proficiency feedback comments concentrate on providing information that could help future writing. Improve by giving specific grammar or content-based advice and letting learners know how far they have developed. As mentioned, all of Teacher One's feedback comments were positive, never negative or included criticism. Because of this, the level of feedback targeted the most by Teacher One was the fourth level, feedback about the self as a person (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). This type of feedback was more concentrated on praising the learner instead of providing information about their work.

*Figure 3 – Teacher One, high-proficiency 8th-grade texts examples of praise*




The high-proficiency 8th- and 9th-grade learners would receive praise comments, like the low-proficiency learners' comments, but there was a difference in how they were written. The low-proficiency learner comments were uplifting and motivated by cheering. In contrast, the high-proficiency praise was analyzed as genuine praise, expressing to the learner how proud the teacher was of the progress.

To sum up, Teacher One consistently provided many enthusiastic compliments for high- and low-proficiency learners. Yet the teacher still changed focus depending on proficiency. The main difference in Teacher One's mode and tone in feedback comments provided to high- and low-proficiency learners was the shift in the type of praise offered.

### 4.1.2 Teacher Two

After reading the written feedback comments provided by Teacher Two, I noticed that the teacher offered similar feedback comments to all learner groups. Because the teacher did not exaggerate compliments and instead concentrated on being constructive, the mode was determined as suggestion-criticism, and the tone was neutral. The chosen mode is because the feedback comments highlighted corrections and mentioned things to work on, including very little praise. Examples of this included comments like ¨it would be nice if you consider varying your telling methods, so it is not only retelling what happened¨ or ¨remember the focus on linking words, the text flows well, but there are also others you can use¨ (TRAWL, translated by me). The teacher would complement with words like ¨you divide into paragraphs ok¨, or ¨good structure¨ (see Figure 4). Therefore, the tone of feedback comments provided by Teacher Two was neutral because the researcher did not interpret them as solely negative or positive when analyzing.

*Figure 4 – Teacher Two, low proficiency 8th-grade text, an example of praise*


In summary, Teacher Two did not differ in comment mode and tone for 8th and 9th-grade high- and low-proficiency learners. They consistently provided written feedback comments with a neutral tone in suggestion-criticism mode.

### 4.1.3 Teacher Three

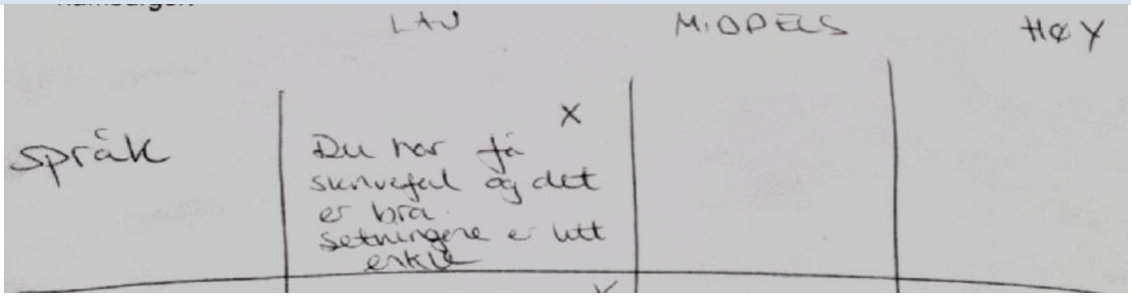
Teacher Three wrote most feedback comments provided to learners in a table divided into language, structure, and content. For low-proficiency learners, Teacher Three wrote most feedback comments in the low score section of the table, meaning they all needed improvement. For most feedback comments, the teacher gives learners a compliment and something to improve in the same sentence, which is why the suggestion-praise is used. For example, ¨what you write is nice, but it is too short¨, or ¨some of the sentences are good, try to make more of them¨ (see Figure 5). In multiple texts for 9th-grade learners, the teacher would comment, ¨I know you can … ¨ in an uplifting way (TRAWL, translated by me). Even though most low-proficiency learners had low scores in language, content, and structure, the researcher analyzed the tone throughout Teacher Three's feedback comments as neutral. The

reasoning is consistent encouragement, which could be considered criticism wrapped in a compliment.

*Figure 5 – Teacher Three, low-proficiency 8th-grade text, example 1*

| | Low | Medium | High |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Content** (innhold) | X<br>Det du skriver er fint, NAME_PERSON1_M, men det blir for kort. | | |

*Figure 6 – Teacher Three, low-proficiency 8th-grade text, example 2*




For high-proficiency learners, Teacher Three provides learners with compliments and words of reinforcement, like ¨great reflection! ¨, and ¨excellent point¨ (TRAWL, translated by me). Teacher Three provided these compliments throughout the learner text, both in-text and in the end-comments, resulting in comments having a mode of praise and a positive tone. The teacher consistently did this with 8th and 9th-grade high-proficiency learners, giving them the same result.

Written feedback comments provided by Teacher Three were in the mode of suggestion-praise for low-proficiency learners and praise for high-proficiency learners. The teacher focused the comments on what learners could improve without being negative or too strict. Even so, the researcher analyzed some comments from low-proficiency learners as criticism disguised as praise. This means that in Figure 6, the teacher mentions that the learner has few writing mistakes and that this is good, but then continues to say that the sentences are too easily written. The comment starts with a compliment, but when reading the rest, I would assume that the learner made few mistakes because the sentences were so easy. This could lead to the

assumption that the compliment was not that well-meant since the sentences themselves were not good enough.

To sum up, Teacher Three provides more praise and uplifting compliments to high-proficiency learners than to low-proficiency learners by changing both the mode and tone of the feedback comments offered.

### 4.1.4 Teacher Four

The Fourth teacher in this study wrote feedback comments for all four groups in a suggestion-criticism mode and neutral tone. Teacher Four's feedback comments lacked compliments and praise; instead, they were direct and to the point. The teacher would rarely praise learners, if so, an ¨ok¨ or ¨fine¨ at most (see Figure 7). For low-proficiency learners, the teacher would comment ¨this is good, but you have not answered the actual task, ¨ or ¨I believe you know more and would have been able to write a longer essay¨ (TRAWL). Expressing something is wrong in the form of indirect criticism.

*Figure 7 -Teacher Four, low-proficiency 8th-grade text*

Language: Okay vocabulary. Some spelling errors. Remember capital letter on nationalities in Engslih.

As for high-proficiency learners, Teacher Four focuses on what to improve with structure, language, content, and what is done well. The compliment that was used most was ¨good¨, writing comments like ¨paragraphs are used in a good way, and the use of punctuation is good¨ (TRAWL). The teacher does not provide a lot of praise. When finding material for Teacher Four, it came to light that the teacher does not provide learners with the highest grade, six, a lot. Therefore, high-proficiency learners in this material mainly receive grades 4 or 5. Giving the impression of being hard to please (see Figure 8), Teacher Four also had areas of improvement for high-proficiency learners. Hence, the mode and tone of Teacher Four's written feedback comments were equivalent to 8th- and 9th-grade learner texts.

*Figure 8 – Teacher Four, high-proficiency 8th-grade text*

Language: Mostly fluent and correct. I think the short answers are too short, you could have given more reasons for your opinion in both.

To sum up, Teacher Four provided a similar mode and tone to all four groups of this study. The amount of praise was low, and feedback comments were direct, informing the learner on what to improve. Therefore, the level of feedback that was targeted the most was the second (feedback about the processing of a task) and the third (feedback about self-regulation). These levels help the learners in the writing process, allowing them to gain more self-sufficiency and believe in themselves as learners (Hattie and Timperley, 2007).

### 4.1.5 Comparison

When comparing all four teachers, some things stand out, such as the overall mode and tone of the teachers in this study (see Table 3). One significant difference is that Teachers One and Three provide written feedback comments to 9th-grade high-proficiency learners in a positive tone. In contrast, Teachers Two and Four provide them with a neutral tone. An example of this is comparing compliments used by Teacher One being ¨fantastic¨ and ¨awesome¨, whereas Teacher Two uses ¨ok¨ and ¨fine¨.

Furthermore, a second factor for the difference in the comments' tone is that Teachers One and Three use more symbols following the comments, like exclamation marks, smileys, and hearts. Compared to Teachers Two and Three, who use no symbols.

In addition to being consistent in their tone, Teachers Two and Four were also consistent with the mode of the comments toward high- and low-proficiency learners. They were writing comments in the suggestion-criticism mode for all four groups. This mode consisted of providing direct feedback, including mistakes, not overloading with praise, and focusing on what to improve instead of cheering them on to continue. In other words, Teachers Two and Four did not differ in their written feedback comments practices based on learners' proficiency when looking at mode and tone.

Lastly, a comparison shows that only Teachers One and Three changed their comment mode from high- to low-proficiency learners. Teacher One provided low-proficiency learners with feedback comments in the mode of praise and high-proficiency learners with suggestion-praise, using a positive tone with both. Teacher Three did the opposite, using a neutral tone and more suggestions with low-proficiency learners than with high-proficiency learners.

*Table 3 – All four teachers' written feedback comments on the overall mode and tone*

| Teachers | Low proficiency | High proficiency |
|---|---|---|
| One | Mode: praise<br>Tone: Positive | Mode: Suggestion-praise<br>Tone: Positive |
| Two | Mode: Suggestion-criticism<br>Tone: Neutral | Mode: Suggestion-criticism<br>Tone: Neutral |
| Three | Mode: Suggestion-praise<br>Tone: Neutral | Mode: Praise<br>Tone: Positive |
| Four | Mode: Suggestion-criticism<br>Tone: Neutral | Mode: Suggestion-criticism<br>Tone: Neutral |

## 4.2 Explicitness in Comments

All four teachers analyzed for this thesis used explicit and implicit written feedback comments when providing written feedback to their learners. I have used the categories mentioned in Pearson's (2022) typology to present the results of explicitness in the comments. The categories used for explicit comments are corrections, directives, and explicit examples (see Table 4). For implicit comments, the categories are confirmation check, clarification request, explanation without correction, and indicating that something is wrong but does not provide an explanation (see Table 5).

When comparing explicit and implicit teacher feedback comments, I looked at one text per learner in each of the four groups (low-proficiency 8th grade, low-proficiency 9th grade, high-proficiency 8th grade, and high-proficiency 9th grade). The reason was that the material did not have the same number of assignments with implicit and explicit comments in total for high- and low-proficiency learners.

The results are presented in tables, showing overall explicit and implicit feedback comments for high- and low-proficiency learners in four tables per teacher. In the explicitness tables, the first number is the number of explicit/implicit comments found in learner texts, and the second is the total number of in-text or end-comments provided. Because not all learner texts had explicit/implicit comments in the end-comments or in-text, specific types of comments are mentioned in the tables to reduce confusion. The examples are written authentically from

the teacher's comments in the TRAWL documents, which is why they are in English and Norwegian. The teacher's written feedback with no implicit or explicit in-text or end-comments is not mentioned in the tables of explicitness feedback comments. So, instead of writing *learner 1: 0 out of 0 implicit confirmation checks*, this is removed from the table, showing only when implicit or explicit comments were present.

### 4.2.1 Teacher One

When looking at the results of explicit low-proficiency learner comments for Teacher One, what stands out is the amount of increased in-text explicit comments provided to 8th-grade learners compared to 9th-grade learners. The teacher offered a lot of explicit corrections for 8th-grade learners. Almost half of the comments were in-text comments (see Table 4). In addition, this group has the most significant number of in-text comments in total, even considering that low-proficiency texts are often shorter.

Teacher One provided learners in 8th-grade with more explicit corrections in-text, but when the identical learners wrote in 9th-grade, the teacher nearly offered none. The change in the use of explicit corrections could be caused by different focuses and goals in the assignments, as the total number of in-text comments for 9th-grade learners is severely lower. Perhaps the assignment changed the teacher's focus. Despite potential reasons, Teacher One provided more explicit corrections in-text to low-proficiency 8th-grade learners than in 9th-grade. Table 4 shows that Teacher One does not generally use many explicit comments when low-proficiency learners are in 9$^{th}$ grade when analyzing the specific texts in this material.

*Table 4 – Teacher One´s explicit written feedback comments for low proficiency learners*

| **Explicitness** | **Low proficiency** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Explicit correction<br><br>*"In the present time" is more natural.* | 8th grade<br>Learner 1: 9 out of 23<br><br>Learner 2: 6 out of 14 | 9th grade<br>Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | Examples from TRAWL<br>The learner wrote *the rector* and the teacher commented, "*Principle*". |
| Explicit directive<br><br>*"I would consider..."* | Learner 1: 1 out of 23<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 12 end-comments | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | "av og til kan det og sette punktum være til stor hjelp" |
| Explicit example<br><br>*If you change to "..." it would not be as repetitive.* | Learner 1: 1 out of 23<br><br>Learner 2: 1 out of 14 | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2:<br>3 out of 11end-comments | "Hour=time, som i en time på klokka. En time på skolen heter: lesson"<br><br>"Try to use the word *so* a little bit less". |

Teacher One used the same strategy for low-proficiency learners as for high-proficiency learners, providing more explicit feedback comments in-text for 8th-grade learners than for 9th-grade learners. In other words, Teacher One provided, in general, more explicit feedback comments to 8th-grade learners than 9th-grade learners. However, Teacher One provides more explicit feedback comments to learners receiving lower grades than high-proficiency English learners.

*Table 5 – Teacher One´s explicit written feedback comments for high proficiency learners*

| **Explicitness** | **High proficiency** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Explicit correction<br><br>*"In the present time" is more natural.* | 8th grade<br>Learner 1: 1 out of 7<br><br>Learner 2: 1 out of 8 | 9th grade<br>Learner 1: 3 out of 7<br><br>Learner 2: none | Examples from TRAWL<br>Learner wrote *it was*; teacher commented "*there were*". |
| Explicit directive<br><br>*"I would consider..."* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: 1 out of 8 | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | "I suggest for you to go back to past tense – *the room where they were standing.* " |
| Explicit example<br><br>*If you change to "..." it would not be as repetitive.* | Learner 1: 1 out of 7<br>Learner 2: 1 out of 8 | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: 2 out of 18 (end-comment) | "still some of *that's* can be changed to *that is*"<br><br>" Another tip is to vary linking words *and= in addition to*". |

From analyzing low-proficiency learner texts' written comments, Teacher One provides more explicit comments in-text (see Table 4). Because of this, implicit comments are mainly found in comments offered by Teacher One at the end. Still, there are not a lot of implicit comments, one reason being that end-comments mainly focus on complementing learners on what they did well. As previously mentioned, the tone of the teacher's comments is always positive, including praise.

Looking at the four categories of implicit comments, the only type found in in-text comments for low-proficiency learners were implicit confirmation checks for 8th-grade. Here, the teacher wrote a question mark and continued indicating something was wrong but did not explain. Then, in the end-comment, the question marks represented places in the text the teacher did not understand.

Besides these question marks, Teacher One has a few implicit comments in the end-comments, not showing a pattern in the amount given to low-proficiency 8$^{th}$ graders compared to 9th graders. Besides the small implicit comments, Teacher One provides attention in the end-comments, telling the learners what they did right and cheering them on further.

*Table 6- Teacher One´s implicit written feedback comments for low proficiency learners*

| **Explicitness** | **Low proficiency** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Implicit confirmation check<br><br>*¨is this relevant? ¨* | 8th grade<br><br>Learner 1:<br>6 out of 14 in-text<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 23 in-text | 9th grade<br><br>Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2:<br>2 out of 11 end comments | Examples from TRAWL<br><br>Question marks in-text<br><br>¨Jeg gav deg noen setningsstartere, men du brukte dem ikke. Så du ikke at jeg prøvde og hjelpe deg? Ser du nå at de kunne vært til hjelp? ¨ |
| Implicit clarification request<br><br>*¨How does this impact the tourists? ¨* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2:<br>2 out of 7 in end-comment | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | ¨why the s in friend? ¨<br><br>¨ If your main character has another problem- that doesn't show- why then, does everybody look at him? ¨ |
| Implicit explanation without correction<br><br>*¨This sounds like a memorized expression that could be used in an essay¨* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 7 end comment<br><br>Learner 2: none | ¨Your sentences are easy to understand. Sometimes they are a little bit too directly translated from Norwegian though¨. |
| Indicates something is wrong but does not provide an explanation.<br><br>*¨This is clearer, but still very general¨* | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 12 end comment<br><br>Learner 2: none | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 7 end comment<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 11 end comments | ¨question marks in the texts where I do not understand what you mean, can you in your own words explain what you mean?<br><br>¨You do not have that much content though¨.<br><br>¨Du har ikke svart helt på de to første oppgavene¨. |

Implicit comments varied for high-proficiency learners' texts commented on by Teacher One. The comments had no pattern to follow, making comparison difficult. One reason was that an 8th-grade learner's texts would receive one category of implicit comment but not another despite being in the same group. Based on the analysis, the teacher provides more implicit feedback comments in the end-comments for 8th-grade learners than for 9th-grade high-proficiency learners. Centered on the texts analyzed, it becomes clear that Teacher One offers a lot of compliments, as mentioned in chapter 4.1.1, making it less implicit comments.

*Table 7- Teacher One´s implicit written feedback comments for high proficiency learners*

| **Explicitness** | **High proficiency** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Implicit confirmation check<br><br>*¨is this relevant? ¨* | 8th grade<br>Learner 1:<br>1 out of 13 end comments<br><br>Learner 2: none | 9th grade<br>Learner 1:<br>1 out of 7 in-text<br><br>Learner 2: none | Examples from TRAWL<br>Question marks in-text<br><br>¨I am not sure you know exactly how you want this text to turn out? ¨ |
| Implicit clarification request<br><br>*¨How does this impact the tourists? ¨* | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 7 in-text<br>4 out of 13 end comments<br><br>Learner 2: none | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | ¨What is bad socially – apart from the fact that you don't know your classmates that well? ¨<br><br>¨what is the conflict? ¨ |
| Implicit explanation without correction<br><br>*¨This sounds like a memorized expression that could be used in an essay¨* | Learner 1:<br>2 out of 13 end comments<br><br>Learner 2: none | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2:<br>2 out of 12 end comments | ¨Good advice – go straight to the point! ¨ |
| Indicates something is wrong but does not provide an explanation.<br><br>*¨This is clearer, but still very general¨* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 7 in-text<br>1 out of 12 end comments<br><br>Learner 2: none | ¨Incomplete sentence, can you see what is missing? ¨<br><br>¨To improve further, look at the comments written on the text, and see if you can understand how to improve it. ¨ |

#### *4.2.1.1 Comparison*

For the comparison of Teacher One's explicit and implicit feedback comments, it was discovered that the teacher does change the most depending on learners' grade year, not their proficiency. The high- and low-proficiency learners in 8th-grade received more explicit feedback than 9th-grade learners.

In implicit comments, Teacher One provides only in-text comments to low-proficiency 8th-grade learners, then only offers them in end-comments for 9th-graders. Compared to high-proficiency learners, Teacher One provides implicit feedback comments in a general sense to the learners who need it, not thinking of grades.

### 4.2.2 Teacher Two

Teacher Two's written feedback comments were both explicit and implicit. For low-proficiency 8th-grade learners, Teacher Two provides only explicit corrections as explicit feedback comments in learner texts. In addition, the teacher does not give a lot of explicit corrections compared to the total number of mistakes found in learner's texts. It looks like a pattern in that Teacher Two provides explicit corrections in the first two paragraphs, then stops correcting grammar mistakes for the rest of the texts. This pattern is the same for 8th- and 9th-grade low-proficiency learners' feedback comments from Teacher Two.

As for 9th-grade low-proficiency learners, Teacher Two provided the same categories: explicit corrections and one example of explicit directive, pointing out continuous grammar mistakes throughout learner texts. The results provided in Table 8 make it clear that Teacher Two focuses on explicit corrections for low-proficiency learners.

*Table 8 – Teacher Two´s explicit written feedback comments for high proficiency learners*

| **Explicitness** | **Low proficiency** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Explicit correction<br><br>*¨In the present time¨ is more natural.* | 8th grade<br><br>Learner 1: 5 out of 5 in-text<br><br>Learner 2: 8 out of 8 in-text | 9th grade<br><br>Learner 1: 5 out of 7 in-text<br><br>Learner 2: 7 out of 7 in-text | Examples from TRAWL<br><br>Learner writes *skoul,* teacher comments *¨school¨*. |
| Explicit directive<br><br>*¨I would consider ...¨* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: 1 out of 6 end comments | ¨Husk også -s endelsen når du skriver i entall 3.person (text starts, the book makes ...) ¨ |
| Explicit example<br><br>*If you change to ¨...¨ it would not be as repetitive.* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | |

Teacher Two provided the high-proficiency learners with almost the same explicit comments as low-proficiency learners. However, Teacher Two provided more explicit examples, explaining why the feedback comment was there. In addition, not all in-text comments were explicit, meaning some could be implicit or compliments.

*Table 9 – Teacher Two´s explicit written feedback comments for high proficiency learners*

| **Explicitness** | **High proficiency** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Explicit correction<br><br>*¨In the present time¨ is more natural.* | 8th grade | 9th grade | Examples from TRAWL |
| | Learner 1:<br>8 out of 10 in-text<br><br>Learner 2:<br>5 out of 6 in-text | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 5 in-text<br><br>Learner 2:<br>12 out of 16 in-text | Learner writes *was resulting*, teacher comments *resulted.* |
| Explicit directive<br><br>*¨I would consider ...¨* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | |
| Explicit example<br><br>*If you change to ¨...¨ it would not be as repetitive.* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 10 end comments | Learner 1:<br>2 out of 5 in-text<br><br>Learner 2:<br>2 out of 16 in-text | ¨Det skal være komma i; *I don´t know, she said* ¨.<br><br>¨Rewrite, suggestion: *are in a similar situation*¨. |

For low-proficiency learners, Teacher Two does not provide many implicit comments (see Table 10). The category used most with 8th-grade learners is indicating that something is wrong, like ¨the language is simple, and there are some mistakes¨, but does not provide an explanation (TRAWL, translated by me).

With 9th-grade learners, the teacher includes all four categories in the different texts, mainly asking questions to the learner as clarification requests. The low-proficiency group that received the most implicit feedback comments from Teacher Two was 9th-grade learner texts, receiving the most comments in the end-comments.

*Table 10 – Teacher Two´s implicit written feedback comments for low proficiency learners*

| **Explicitness** | **Low proficiency** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Implicit confirmation check<br><br>*¨is this relevant? ¨* | 8th grade<br>Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | 9th grade<br>Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 6 end comments | Examples from TRAWL<br>¨Har du selv en mening om hva som er handlingssammendrag, tema og karakteranalyse? ¨ |
| Implicit clarification request<br><br>*¨How does this impact the tourists? ¨* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 6 end comments | Learner 1:<br>5 out of 8 end comments<br><br>Learner 2: none | ¨Hva skjer videre med Starr? Hva tenker hun på? Hva gjør hun til slutt? ¨ |
| Implicit explanation without correction<br><br>*¨This sounds like a memorized expression that could be used in an essay¨* | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 5 end comments<br><br>Learner 2: none | Learner 1:<br>2 out of 7 in-text<br><br>Learner 2: none | ¨Rewrite¨<br><br>¨Stor bokstav¨ |
| Indicates something is wrong but does not provide an explanation.<br><br>*¨This is clearer, but still very general¨* | Learner 1:<br>2 out of 5 end comments<br><br>Learner 2:<br>2 out of 6 end comments | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 8 end comments<br><br>Learner 2:<br>2 out of 6 end comments | ¨Setningene er enkelt oppbygd, og det er viktig å legge ned innsats for å komme på karakteren 3.¨<br><br>¨Du mangler en tydelig avslutning. ¨ |

As for the implicitly written feedback comments towards high-proficiency learner texts, Teacher Two provided the most comments for 9th-grade learners (see Table 11). The difference is a variation between providing them in-text and in the end-comments.
The implicit feedback comments were used in all four groups but primarily in the high-proficiency 9th-grade groups provided by Teacher Two. The teacher provided most of the implicit comments at the end-comments to high-proficiency learners.

*Table 11- Teacher Two´s implicit written feedback comments for high proficiency learners*

| **Explicitness** | **High proficiency** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Implicit confirmation check<br><br>*¨is this relevant? ¨* | 8th grade | 9th grade | Examples from TRAWL |
| | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 5 end comments<br><br>Learner 2: none | ¨kan du se sammenhengen mellom situasjonen for Junior og familien og behandlingen de fikk som folkegruppe? ¨ |
| Implicit clarification request<br><br>*¨How does this impact the tourists? ¨* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 10 end comments | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 5 in-text<br><br>Learner 2: none | ¨I det første avsnittet er det endel setninger som begynner med I+ verb, kan du begynne med andre ord eller utrykk? ¨ |
| Implicit explanation without correction<br><br>*¨This sounds like a memorized expression that could be used in an essay¨* | Learner 1:<br>2 out of 10 in-text<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 10 end comments | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 5 in-text<br>1 out of 5 end comments<br><br>Learner 2:<br>2 out of 7 end comments | ¨Skriv linjen helt ut¨.<br><br>¨Språket star litt i veien for høyeste karakter¨. |
| Indicates something is wrong but does not provide an explanation.<br><br>*¨This is clearer, but still very general¨* | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 6 end comments<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 10 end comments | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2:<br>2 out of 7 end comments | ¨Det er noen feil i teksten som jeg har markert, gå over dem¨. |

#### *4.2.2.1 Comparison*

Teacher Two differentiated more between the different proficiency levels and provided low-proficiency learners with only explicit corrections. Compared to high-proficiency learners who received explicit examples that better explained the reasoning behind the explicit feedback comments. Also, texts written by low-proficiency learners were shorter than those written by high-proficiency learners. In addition, Teacher Two's pattern only corrects the first two paragraphs of grammar mistakes, which makes the number of corrections different compared to the length of work corrected.

Implicit feedback comments provided by Teacher Two were provided more to 9th-grade high and low-proficiency learners than 8th-graders, which was the opposite of the explicit comments. When comparing high and low-proficiency feedback comments, it became clear that implicit comments were used in all four groups but primarily in 9th-grade groups. The teacher provided the most implicit comments in end-comments for high- and low-proficiency

learners, whereas the explicit comments to all were the most in-text comments. There are few distinctive differences between the proficiencies but between 8th and 9th grade.

### 4.2.3 Teacher Three

Teacher Three's written explicit feedback comments were mainly provided in-text for low-proficiency learners, except for one 9th-grade learner text (see Table 12). The category that Teacher Three uses most is explicit corrections for 8th- and 9th-grade learners.

*Table 12 – Teachers Three´s explicit written feedback comments for low proficiency learners*

| **Explicitness** | **Low proficiency** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Explicit correction<br><br>*¨In the present time¨ is more natural.* | 8th grade<br>Learner 1:<br>2 out of 6 in-text<br><br>Learner 2:<br>5 out of 10 in-text | 9th grade<br>Learner 1:<br>9 out of 17 in-text<br><br>Learner 2:<br>4 out of 12 in-text | Examples from TRAWL<br>Learner writes *it is*, teacher comments *there are*. |
| Explicit directive<br><br>*¨I would consider ...¨* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 10 in-text | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | ¨Ta bort dette¨. |
| Explicit example<br><br>*If you change to ¨...¨ it would not be as repetitive.* | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 6 in-text<br><br>Learner 2: none | Learner 1:<br>2 out of 20 end comments<br><br>Learner 2: none | ¨Unngå og skrive slang. Skriv *going to*.¨<br><br>¨Du kan fint jobbe med måten man binder setninger sammen. *However* er et eksempel¨. |

For high-proficiency learners, the in-text comments provided by Teacher Three included more explanations for the corrections (see Table 13). It is also evident that Teacher Three uses more explicit corrections for 8th-graders and offers more examples and explicit directive comments to the 9th-grade learners. However, all explicit feedback comments provided by the teacher for high-proficiency learners were in-text.

*Table 13- Teacher Three´s explicit written feedback comments for high proficiency learners*

| **Explicitness** | **High proficiency** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Explicit correction<br><br>*¨In the present time¨ is more natural.* | 8th grade<br>Learner 1:<br>2 out of 16 in-text<br><br>Learner 2:<br>3 out of 16 in-text | 9th grade<br>Learner 1:<br>2 out of 10 in-text<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 11 in-text | Examples from TRAWL<br>Learner wrote *search up*, teacher commented *look up*. |
| Explicit directive<br><br>*¨I would consider ...¨* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 10 in-text<br><br>Learner 2:<br>3 out of 11 in-text | ¨One of Us is Lying, titler på bøker på engelsk skrives med stor bokstav på alt bortsett fra bindeord¨ |
| Explicit example<br><br>*If you change to ¨...¨ it would not be as repetitive.* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2:<br>2 out of 16 in-text | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 10 in-text<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 11 in-text | ¨Dette er et fint uttrykk, men når du bruker *way* litt senere kan det være lurt og omformulere. *Too many- a majority* ¨ |

Looking at Table 14, Teacher Three provides a mix of the four implicit categories, making no significant pattern for how and when it is provided, except that the first category, confirmation check, is not used. In addition, Teacher Three provides the most implicit feedback to low-proficiency 9th-grade learners compared to 8th-grade learners.

The implicit feedback comments from Teacher Three mostly ask questions and provide the learners with things to improve. In addition, Teacher Three mentions using available resources to help the writing process and asks the learner to search for misspelled words. For low-proficiency learners, the teacher mentions in the end-comment that there are more errors than marked and advises the learner to find and correct them. Teacher Three uses a mix of implicit feedback comments in-text and, in the end-comments, for low-proficiency learners.

*Table 14- Teacher Three´s implicit written feedback comments for low proficiency learners*

| **Explicitness** | **Low proficiency** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Implicit confirmation check<br><br>*¨is this relevant? ¨* | 8th grade<br>Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | 9th grade<br>Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | Examples from TRAWL |
| Implicit clarification request<br><br>*¨How does this impact the tourists? ¨* | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 17 end comments<br><br>Learner 2: none | Learner 1:<br>4 out of 17 in-text<br><br>Learner 2:<br>3 out of 12 in-text | ¨Har du brukt intowords?¨<br><br>¨Hør på denne setningen, mangler den noen ord? ¨ |
| Implicit explanation without correction<br><br>*¨This sounds like a memorized expression that could be used in an essay¨* | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 6 in-text<br><br>Learner 2:<br>3 out of 10 in-text<br>1 out of 5 end comments | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 17 in-text<br>2 out of 20 end comments<br><br>Learner 2:<br>3 out of 12 in-text<br>3 out of 21 end comments | ¨Husk stor bokstav¨<br><br>¨Fullfør setningen¨<br><br>¨Noen setninger er fine, prøv å lage fler av dem¨. |
| Indicates something is wrong but does not provide an explanation.<br><br>*¨This is clearer, but still very general¨* | Learner 1:<br>4 out of 17 end comments<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 10 in-text<br>3 out of 5 end comments | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 17 in-text<br>3 out of 20 end comments<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 12 in-text<br>6 out of 21 end comments | ¨Når jeg leser uten å legge merke til skrivefeil, så flyter det veldig bra¨<br><br>¨Det du skriver er fint, men det blir for kort¨<br><br>¨Se markeringer i teksten¨ |

As for high-proficiency learners, Teacher Three provided less implicit feedback for the 9th-grade learners than for 8th-grade learners, mainly because the end-comments included more praise. Teacher Three consistently used the two last categories of implicit comments (see Table 15). These are implicit explanations without correction and indicate something is wrong but do not explain. The first two confirmation checks and clarification requests did not occur in 9th-grade high-proficiency texts.

*Table 15 – Teacher Three´s implicit written feedback comments for high proficiency learners*

| **Explicitness** | **High proficiency** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Implicit confirmation check<br><br>*¨is this relevant? ¨* | 8th grade<br><br>Learner 1:<br>1 out of 16 in-text<br><br>Learner 2: none | 9th grade<br><br>Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | Examples from TRAWL<br><br>¨Avoid starting with but, and or…How could you start it in a better way? ¨ |
| Implicit clarification request<br><br>*¨How does this impact the tourists? ¨* | Learner 1:<br>2 out of 16 in-text<br><br>Learner 2: none | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | ¨I miss an ending to the blog. You have an intro, but the last part is missing. Why? ¨ |
| Implicit explanation without correction<br><br>*¨This sounds like a memorized expression that could be used in an essay¨* | Learner 1:<br>2 out of 16 in-text<br><br>Learner 2:<br>2 out of 16 in-text<br>1 out of 7 end comments | Learner 1:<br>2 out of 6 end comments<br><br>Learner 2:<br>2 out of 11 in-text<br>1 out of 4 end comments | ¨Dersom du skriver med verb i -ing form, må alle verbene i setningen være like¨<br><br>¨Jobb med å få enda større ordforråd¨ |
| Indicates something is wrong but does not provide an explanation.<br><br>*¨This is clearer, but still very general¨* | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 5 end comments<br><br>Learner 2:<br>2 out of 16 in-text | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 11 in-text | ¨skriv om¨<br><br>¨I really love your language and you have almost no spelling mistakes¨ |

#### *4.2.3.1 Comparison*

Explicit feedback comments provided by Teacher Three were not the same for the different proficiencies. One comparison was that low-proficiency learners received the explicit corrections only commenting on the corrected word, whereas high-proficiency learners also received an explanation of the correction. Still, explicit corrective comments were the overall category used by Teacher Three in explicit feedback for both high- and low-proficiency learners.

As for implicit feedback comments, Teacher Three provided the most implicit feedback comments to 9th-grade low-proficiency learners and most to 8th-grade high-proficiency learners. Low-proficiency 8th-grade learners received more explicit feedback, and 9th-grade high-proficiency received more praise.

### 4.2.4 Teacher Four

Because of the different assignments provided in the material, some learner texts had a lot of explicit feedback comments, and some had none. For instance, as seen in Table 16, Teacher Four provided low-proficiency learners in 8th-grade explicit comments only in-text, where most were explicit corrections. Meanwhile, 9th-grade low-proficiency learners received only a few explicit corrections in the end-comments.

*Table 16- Teacher four´s explicit written feedback comments for low proficiency learners*

| **Explicitness** | **Low proficiency** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Explicit correction<br><br>*¨In the present time¨ is more natural.* | 8th grade<br>Learner 1:<br>7 out of 18 in-text<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 5 in-text* | 9th grade<br>Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 7 end comments | Examples from TRAWL<br>¨Minor comment: you do not need to write *introduction*¨ |
| Explicit directive<br><br>*¨I would consider ...¨* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | |
| Explicit example<br><br>*If you change to ¨...¨ it would not be as repetitive.* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 5 in-text | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 8 end comments<br><br>Learner 2: none | ¨Perhaps a date where he was alive? ¨<br><br>¨In the end you should say: …¨ |

* Learner 2 in the 8th grade received fewer comments because the text was only three short paragraphs.

For high-proficiency learners, Teacher Four provided 8th-grade learners with texts with explicit comments, representing all three categories only in-text, most of which are explicit corrections (see Table 17). Compared to 9th-grade high-proficiency learners, who received no explicit feedback comments from Teacher Four.

*Table 17- Teacher four´s explicit written feedback comments for high proficiency learners*

| **Explicitness** | **High proficiency** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Explicit correction<br><br>*¨In the present time¨ is more natural.* | 8th grade<br>Learner 1:<br>5 out of 13 in-text<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 13 in-text | 9th grade<br>Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | Examples from TRAWL<br>Learner wrote *6*, teacher commented *six*. |
| Explicit directive<br><br>*¨I would consider ...¨* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 13 in-text | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | ¨Skip the parenthesis¨ |
| Explicit example<br><br>*If you change to ¨...¨ it would not be as repetitive.* | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 13 in-text<br><br>Learner 2: none | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | The teacher writes a correction but as a question: *further investigation?* |

When providing implicit feedback comments for low-proficiency 8th-grade learners, the teacher provides it by asking questions. These are implicit clarification requests; Teacher Four uses them most with 8th-grade low-proficiency learners (see Table 18). Teacher four also uses the third category of implicit feedback for 8th-grade low-proficiency learners, which is implicit explanation without correction. The teacher directly provides these comments, not including praise.

For low-proficiency 9th-grade learners, the feedback included Teacher Four expressing an expectance of the learners to write more. These implicit feedback comments are categories of implicit explanation without correction and indicating something is wrong but not explained. In addition, the teacher mentions specific things to work on in the future only in the end-comments.

*Table 18- Teacher four´s implicit written feedback comments for low proficiency learners*

| **Explicitness** | **Low proficiency** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Implicit confirmation check<br><br>*¨is this relevant? ¨* | 8th grade<br>Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | 9th grade<br>Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | Examples from TRAWL |
| Implicit clarification request<br><br>*¨How does this impact the tourists? ¨* | Learner 1:<br>3 out of 18 in-text<br><br>Learner 2:<br>2 out of 5 in-text* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | ¨What do you mean? Use different words ¨. |
| Implicit explanation without correction<br><br>*¨This sounds like a memorized expression that could be used in an essay¨* | Learner 1:<br>5 out of 18 in-text<br>3 out of 6 end comments<br><br>Learner 2:<br>2 out of 2 end comments | Learner 1:<br>3 out of 8 end comments<br><br>Learner 2:<br>2 out of 7 end comments | ¨You must remember punctuation, like full stops and commas¨<br><br>¨You write like someone speaks, you should have been more correct and formal in this type of text¨ |
| Indicates something is wrong but does not provide an explanation.<br><br>*¨This is clearer, but still very general¨* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | Learner 1:<br>2 out of 8 end comments<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 7 end comments | ¨A few grammatical errors¨<br><br>¨Some spelling errors¨ |

*Learner two wrote a concise text and, therefore, received few feedback comments

The implicit feedback comments provided by Teacher Four to high-proficiency learners were comments such as ¨rewrite this sentence¨ or providing the learner with verb conjugations, telling the learner there is a mistake without giving the correct answer.

In addition, the teacher provides the learners with individual things to improve in their writing regarding the two last implicit categories (see Table 19).

*Table 19 – Teacher four´s implicit written feedback comments for high proficiency learners*

| **Explicitness** | **High proficiency** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Implicit confirmation check<br><br>*¨is this relevant? ¨* | 8th grade<br>Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | 9th grade<br>Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | Examples from TRAWL |
| Implicit clarification request<br><br>*¨How does this impact the tourists? ¨* | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2:<br>1 out of 13 in-text | Learner 1: none<br><br>Learner 2: none | ¨You should have written more to clarify your opinion here¨ |
| Implicit explanation without correction<br><br>*¨This sounds like a memorized expression that could be used in an essay¨* | Learner 1:<br>4 out of 13 in-text<br>1 out of 6 end comments<br><br>Learner 2:<br>2 out of 13 in-text<br>1 out of 8 end comments | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 7 end comments<br><br>Learner 2:<br>3 out of 10 end comments | ¨Unclear sentence, rewrite¨<br><br>¨There are a few verb errors in the beginning¨<br><br>¨… write your own sentences and make them your own, do not write them in the exact way they were written in the textbook¨ |
| Indicates something is wrong but does not provide an explanation.<br><br>*¨This is clearer, but still very general¨* | Learner 1:<br>1 out of 13 in-text<br><br>Learner 2:<br>3 out of 13 in-text | Learner 1:<br>2 out of 7 end comments<br><br>Learner 2: none | ¨Short, but good answer¨<br><br>¨Be aware of was/were¨ |

#### *4.2.4.1 Comparison*

There are some distinctions when comparing Teacher Four's use of explicit and implicit feedback comments towards different proficiencies. The teacher provides no explicit feedback comments for high-proficiency 9th-grade learners, compared to 9th-grade low-proficiency learners who receive some. When looking at 8th-grade learners, both high- and low-proficiency received in-text explicit comments in chosen material from TRAWL, mainly explicit corrections.

When comparing the implicit feedback comments, Teacher Four used more clarification requests from 8th-grade low-proficiency learners than from 8th-grade high-proficiency learners. In the same way, the teacher provides implicit feedback to high- and low-proficiency 8th-graders in both in-text and end-comments but only provides this in end-comments for 9th-graders.

## 4.3 Use of L1

### 4.3.1 Teacher One

Teacher One is primarily consistent in writing the written feedback, both in-text and end-comments in the learners' L2 language. The only exception is the low-proficiency of learners in 8th-grade. These learners receive almost all comments in their L1 language in 8th-grade, and nearly all move up to receive L2 written comments in 9th-grade.

### 4.3.2 Teacher Two

Teacher Two in this project wrote all the in-text and end-comments in the learners' L1 language, both high and low-proficiency learners, in 8th and 9th-grade. The only thing not written in the L1 language was direct feedback on a word, where the teacher wrote the corrected way to write the marked word on the side.

### 4.3.3 Teacher Three

Teacher Three operates the same way as Teacher Two does, providing written feedback to all learners in their L1 language. Low-proficiency learners received in-text and all end-comments in Norwegian in the 8th- and 9th grades. One 8th-grade learner received a short end-comment in L2 for high-proficiency learners. However, all the end-comments for high-proficiency learners in 9th grade received written feedback in their L1 language. Teacher three would provide a small amount of L2 in-text comments to high-proficiency learners but not to low-proficiency learners.

### 4.3.4 Teacher Four

The result of Teacher Four's use of L1 in written feedback comments is that the teacher writes little L1. All end- and in-text comments for high- and low-proficiency 8th and 9th-grade learners received written feedback in their L2 language. The only exception was a few in-text comments provided to low-proficiency 8th-grade learners written in L1, in which the teacher mentions ¨I will say this in Norwegian, so it is easier to understand¨, indicating that the teacher considers the learners' proficiency.

### 4.3.5 Comparison

To sum up the results of the use of L1 in written feedback comments for the four teachers in this research, there are two who write all comments in L1 (Norwegian), one who writes all comments in L2 (English), and one that starts off providing L1 feedback to some of the low-proficiency learners, and then moves over to all L2 comments in 9th-grade. The only exception for the teacher representing the least use of L1 is explaining words to low-proficiency learners in-text, used only when the translation is wrong, or the word is misused.

*Table 20 – Use of L1 in written feedback comments for all teachers in this study*

| | **Teacher One** | | **Teacher Two** | | **Teacher Three** | | **Teacher Four** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Grades** | 8th | 9th | 8th | 9th | 8th | 9th | 8th | 9th |
| **Low-proficiency** | 50% | 0% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 0% | 0% |
| **High-proficiency** | 0% | 0% | 100% | 100% | 75% | 100% | 0% | 0% |

## 4.4 Summary

To summarize this study's results, some essential findings are worth mentioning.
The main difference between the four teachers was their way of providing the comments mode and tone. Teachers One and Three provided positive feedback comments consisting of praise and compliments and differentiated between providing praise and suggestive comments towards the proficiencies. Teacher One provided suggestive comments to the high-proficiency learners and praise to the low-proficiency learners. Teacher Three did the opposite, providing suggestions to low-proficiency learners and praise to high-proficiency learners.

On the other hand, teachers Two and Four provided suggestive and neutral feedback. Even though having positive comments, Teachers One and Three were the two teachers in the study who differentiated their mode and tone based on learner proficiency. Teachers Two and Four were consistent in their mode and tone with all learners.

All the teachers' written feedback comments differed in the number of explicit and implicit comments provided to the learners. All teachers provided both strategies, but the most explicit feedback comments were given to the low-proficiency learners. However, Teacher Two provided explicit feedback only in the first two paragraphs to the low-proficiency learners, making those results less.

The teachers' use of L1 in the comments resulted in teachers one and four mainly using L2 to provide the written feedback, and teachers two and three provided the written comments in the learners' L1 for all learners. The only teacher who differed in the amount of L1 used in the written feedback comments towards learner proficiency was Teacher One, who provided some Norwegian to the low-proficiency learners in 8th-grade but moved to only use L2 in the 9th-grade class. In addition, Teacher Four mentioned in the comments that L1 was used in situations where the low-proficiency learners did not understand.

# 5.0 Discussion

The discussion is structured around the three research questions. Each question will be discussed in light of both theory and findings from the study.

## RQ1: How do Norwegian lower secondary teachers use written feedback comments to respond to student writing?

Not surprisingly, the teachers in the study respond differently to different learners, compared to each other and from one task to another. Teachers One and Three provided positive feedback comments with mostly praise and compliments. Bueie's (2016) study discovered that praise helped learners feel motivated, unlike Hattie and Timperley (2007), who expressed that praise is ¨unlikely to be effective¨ since it does not contain information about what the learner can do to improve or develop. In comparison to this thesis, all four teachers included different levels of praise, but only two of the four teachers based their feedback approach on it.

The two teachers who did not base their approach on praise chose a more direct approach, providing feedback comments that were neutral and suggestive in a way that could be perceived as criticism. The directness of the comments relates to Lee's (2007) ideas of effective feedback. She mentioned that the learners need information about their performance to be most effective. In theory, clear and direct feedback would further reduce the chance of being difficult to understand, which most learners reported in the Agbayahoun study from 2016. At the same time, whether the learners understand the feedback can result from multiple reasons. On the one hand, it can be because the feedback is vague and unclear, and on the other hand, because it does not match the learner´s level of proficiency. Therefore, teachers used various methods to provide written feedback comments in this study. Using mainly praise or suggestions, both with negative and positive sides, supported by research.

When looking at the characteristics analyzed, none of the four teachers used the feedback comment strategies alone. All four teachers provided explicit and implicit feedback, the difference being the amount used for the different proficiency levels. This agrees with Cheng and Liu (2022), who discovered that L2 teachers do not use only one strategy when providing feedback to achieve the most learning. What is interesting then is when the teachers use the

same strategy for learners with different needs, which goes against the ideas of the Cheng and Liu study.

Moreover, the teachers of this study provided more feedback comments in the L1 language for all learners than was expected. In contrast to the hypothesis, most teachers provided written comments in either the L1 or L2 language instead of differentiating the language based on the learners' proficiency. Like Krulatz et al. (2016), the results showed that a teacher's use of L2 is very individualized. Teachers Two and Three provided most of the feedback comments in L1. This goes against Tsang's (2023) belief in the importance of learners being exposed to the target language to advance their learning. When comments are not provided in the target language, the learners miss the opportunity to receive this input, which can help with language development (Tsang, 2023, p.1). On the other hand, providing only L2 comments, like Teacher Four in the study, might stifle the learner's overall language development (Brevik et al., 2020, p.96). Using L1 was a characteristic the teachers in this study provided different amounts of, not changing based on the learners' proficiency but more on grade level.

Teacher Four in this study mentioned in one of the teachers' comments that the use of L1 (Norwegian) was used in situations so that the low-proficiency learner would understand. In addition, Teacher One used some L1 when providing written feedback to low-proficiency 8th-graders but nothing to the 9th-graders. Because of this, Teachers One and Four show that L1 is preferred when explaining something complicated because the message is more important. As mentioned earlier, according to Hattie and Timperley (2007), for comments to have an effect, they cannot be above their proficiency level. Therefore, when the language proficiency of a learner is low, it is wise to provide specific comments in their target language to make sure that they understand their mistake and fill the gap in the knowledge.

## RQ2: How do teachers' written feedback commentary practices differ based on the proficiency of the learners they evaluate?

According to the Norwegian Education Act and the LK20, learners are supposed to receive feedback that is suited to their level, which will help them develop the most. Knowing this, teachers two and four provided feedback comments with the same mode and tone towards the high- and low-proficiency learners, which can be seen as not meeting the learners at their individual level. In contrast, teachers one and three provided different modes and tones for the high- and low-proficiency learners. As Pearson (2022) mentioned, staying consistent with how one communicates with each individual learner contributes to less confusion and possible misunderstandings on behalf of the learner. In saying this, while providing the same overall mode and tone to all proficiencies, Teacher Four did not provide explicit corrections to 9th-grade learners, only 8th-grade learners. This goes against Pearson´s (2022) idea of staying consistent. Then, on the other hand, it could indicate that the teacher had assessed that the learner no longer needed this type of feedback.

When differentiating, Teacher One provided additional suggestive comments to the high-proficiency learners and focused on praising the low-proficiency learners. The type of suggestive comments provided to the high-proficiency learners further focused on the second and third levels of feedback (Hattie and Timperley, 2007), meaning feedback about the task and the processing of the task. In contrast, low-proficiency learners receive mostly feedback about the self as a person, which is the level of feedback that, according to Hattie and Timperley (2007), does not result in effective learning. The reason is that the feedback does not answer the three feedback questions. The only positive outcome of this type of feedback is that it can change the learners' feelings toward a task (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.96).

Contrary to Teacher One, Teacher Three makes the opposite differentiation. Here, the low-proficiency learners receive the most suggestive comments, and the high-proficiency learners receive the most praise and compliments. In agreement with Hattie and Timperley (2007), receiving comments, including a mix of the three feedback questions, feed-up, feedback, and feed-forward, will give the learners the best chance of closing the gap between present and future knowledge (p.90). Also, as Zarrinabadi and Rezazadeh (2023) reported, including all three feedback questions can increase learner motivation and self-efficiency and reduce

writing anxiety (p.589). Instead, Teacher Three provides high-proficiency learners with mainly feedback about the self as a person, which does not help the learners learn how to revise their texts (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.90).

On the other hand, Teacher Two's approach is an idea of a middle ground. Instead of providing overwhelmingly explicit feedback comments to low-proficiency learners and nothing to the high-proficiency learners, Teacher Two provided explicit feedback in the first two paragraphs. This way, the learners are not overwhelmed, yet they are told there are more grammar mistakes they need to find themselves. Allowing them to revise their texts, as LK20 mentions, is something they are supposed to learn how to do (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). Still, when the learner's proficiency is lower, the number of mistakes increases. Therefore, how a learner interprets this feedback is crucial to learning. If the learners can see the extensive errors as a steppingstone, as Hattie and Timperley (2007) mention, it will be the most beneficial to future learning. Differentiating the feedback can motivate and help discover a sense of ownership of the writing (Lee, 2017, p.92).

As predicted regarding explicitness, all the teachers provided more explicit feedback to the low-proficiency learners. As Lee (2017) mentioned, the teacher needs to know the learners to provide feedback that is best suited to the individual learners' needs. The explicit corrective comments discovered in studies like Ferris and Roberts (2001) show that learners and teachers often preferred direct, explicit feedback. However, Shintani and Ellis (2013) discovered that low-proficiency learners who receive explicit comments miss out on understanding grammar rules because they are not included in the comments. In addition, the motivation comes from the learner being determined to pursue their goals, which requires the teacher to provide feedback about the processing, not only the task (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.93).

## RQ3: To what extent do teachers' written feedback commentary practices correspond to the recommended principles in LK20?

According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), when answering the question of where to go next, feed-forward is the type of feedback that can most impact learning. The current Norwegian Curriculum, LK20, mentions that after year ten, the learners should know how to revise their texts based on feedback and knowledge of the language (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). To achieve this, teachers must provide direct and understandable feedback comments on improving their texts, like teachers two and four did. Still, there is a difference between providing a suggestion that helps learners in future writing and a suggestion specific to the task or the processing of the task. The teachers of this study did not provide much feed-forward comments that could benefit the learners' ability to revise themselves in the future, because the focus was primarily on the task at hand. In the few instances, this did happen, and it was towards high-proficiency learners, which might suggest that the four teachers did not want to overwhelm the low-proficiency learners with more corrections. This could have helped learner motivation by having a goal to strive towards (Zarrinabadi & Rezazadeh, 2023).

Since there is a focus on formative assessment to increase learning in Norway, the type of comments given becomes relevant. The comments provided by teachers one and three, including the most praise, are, according to Pearson (2022), essential to enhancing learner confidence (p.7). However, as stated by Hattie and Timperley (2007), providing only praise is ineffective because it contains little learning-related evidence, which is supposed to be the focus of the Norwegian Curriculum. Another type of comment is stating improvements, essential when providing written feedback commentary. The Norwegian Curriculum mentions that feedback is supposed to help learners self-reflect on their learning process. The teachers in this study all did this to various degrees.

Further, the Norwegian Curriculum, LK20, states that teachers must help the learners self-reflect on their learning process to develop the skills necessary to become independent learners in society (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). For the learners to self-reflect, they must be aware of their progress and development. It is the teachers' job to present this to the learners so that they can take on the responsibility of closing the gap in their knowledge

with the teachers' help. As Cameron (2001) argued, going from being ¨other-regulated¨ to ¨self-regulated¨ includes partaking in the process and continuing learning. When learners receive only praise in the comments that do not include feed-up or feed-forward comments, they do not receive help to become independent learners.

One way to help the learners become more independent would be to give less explicit comments to highly-proficient learners so they can start finding answers or solutions themselves. This could push them to become more liberated in revising their own texts. However, doing this for low-proficiency would have the opposite effect since their starting points and needs differ. Providing a mix of comments could result in the learners receiving both praise on what they did right, maintaining their motivation, as well as receiving comments that tell the learner what they need to work on till next time, and in the long run, if there is a specific goal in mind. Comments advising the learners to use websites or helpful tools in their writing process are examples of feed-forward comments that let the learners discover the tool themselves, hopefully helping them correct their work and reach their writing goals.

# 6.0 Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the mode/tone, explicitness, and the teachers' use of L1 in written feedback comments for learners of different proficiency in 8th-and 9th-grade. The thesis discovered that teachers practice providing written feedback comments differently than each other, as expected. However, the teachers did not differ much in the feedback comments based on the proficiency of the learners, which does not correspond to the LK20. The thesis has shown that providing written feedback commentary to Norwegian learners studying English is complex, and I do not think there is a correct way. However, perhaps the Norwegian Curriculum is right to state that teachers must make decisions based on the individual learner since the support they need is tied to their individual state of language proficiency. That said, research and this thesis have disclosed that teachers perform this act very differently, suggesting that teacher identity plays a significant role in how one produces written feedback to learners.

Most importantly, providing written feedback commentary helps learners close the gap between present and future knowledge in their writing development. There is a need for comments to represent where the learner is in the writing process, a goal to strive towards, and specific methods to improve future writing to support the learners. As the teachers in this study mainly differed in the amount of explicit and implicit comments for the high- and low-proficiency learners, it suggests that teachers can improve more in this area to enhance language development.

This thesis aimed to investigate how L2 teachers provide written feedback comments to hopefully help teachers start a reflection process to improve their practice, as well as my own. Not one method is correct, but remember that all learners learn differently based on proficiency. Not providing the same type of feedback to all is essential.

## 6.1 Limitations

This study has several limitations. As the material was from TRAWL, not all assignments had teachers' comments. Therefore, the material that could be used in the analysis was limited. Consequently, not all assignments had in-text and end-comments, which led to the study's

sample size being relatively small. In addition, since this study only focused on four teachers from four different schools in Norway, it is difficult to generalize the findings.

Another limitation is the hermeneutics approach, where the researcher has interpreted the material with an individualized understanding. This resulted in an analysis that would not have been similar had another researcher done it. Also, some comments could be construed as criticism and suggestions, even though they seemingly looked like praise. Therefore, the analysis would have gained reliability with a group of researchers who could have discussed the more ambiguous comments together before reaching a consensus.

## 6.2 Pedological Implications

From a teacher's perspective, it is positive that teachers must follow the guidelines of LK20. The Curriculum clearly outlines the requirements for formative assessment. This allows experienced and newly educated teachers to adjust their planning and teaching methods to provide more extensive feedback to help learners with different proficiencies. I believe this will benefit the learner's development over time and their ability to become more self-sufficient in the society around them. A teacher is never done learning. Even though it might be easy to slip into a pattern with years of experience, it is essential to continue to learn and be eager to improve our teaching methods so that the learners can understand even more and more advanced.

## 6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

This study discovered that some teachers provide Norwegian written feedback comments to high- and low-proficiency learners in their L2 teaching. In addition, it was found that most research surrounding this topic only included oral use of L1/L2.

Therefore, I suggest that future studies shed some light on the L2 teachers' use of L1(Norwegian) and L2 (English) in written feedback comments in Norwegian schools to see what results lead to the most language development. Also, in which situations do teachers provide Norwegian or English comments, and how do they explain the way they provide it? What do they think is the best way, and why?

Does providing written feedback in the L2 language make it too difficult for learners to understand the feedback? Are we removing possible learning situations by providing written feedback comments in their L1?

# 7.0 Literature list


Agbayahoun, J. P. (2016). Teacher Written Feedback on Student Writing: Teachers' and Learners' Perspectives. *Theory and practice in language studies*, *6*(10), 1895. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0610.01

Andújar Moreno, G., & Cañada Pujols, M. D. (2023). Type, Level and Function of In-text Comments in Written Feedback on Specialised Translations: an Exploratory Study. *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer*, 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1080/1750399X.2023.2272465

Aunmo, S. B. (2016). *Hvorfor snakker du engelsk? En undersøkelse om læreres bruk av målspråk i L2-undervisning* [Bachelor Thesis. Høyskolen i Hedemark., https://brage.inn.no/inn-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2496116/Aunmo%20.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Bitchener, J. (2012). Written Corrective Feedback for L2 Development: Current Knowledge and Future Research. *TESOL Q*, *46*(4), 855-860. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.62

Bitchener, J., & Ferris, D. R. (2012). *Written Corrective Feedback in Second Language Acquisition and Writing* New York: Routledge

Bitchener, J., Young, S., & Cameron, D. (2005). The Effect of Different Types of Corrective Feedback on ESL Student Writing. *Journal of second language writing*, *14*(3), 191-205. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2005.08.001

Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and Classroom Learning. *Assessment in education : principles, policy & practice*, *5*(1), 7-74. https://doi.org/10.1080/0969595980050102

Brevik, L. M., Rindal, U., & Lisa, A. (2020). *Teaching English in Norwegian Classrooms : from Research to Practice*. Universitetsforlaget.

Bueie, A. A. (2016). Nyttige og mindre nyttige lærerkommentarer – slik elevene ser det. *Nordic journal of literacy research*, *2*, 1-28. https://doi.org/10.17585/njlr.v2.188

Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. Cambridge u.a: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511733109

Cheng, X., & Liu, Y. (2022). Student Engagement with Teacher Written Feedback: Insights from Low-proficiency and High-proficiency L2 Learners. *System (Linköping)*, *109*, 102880. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2022.102880

Creswell, J. W., & Guetterman, T. C. (2021). *Educational Research : Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research* (Sixth edition. ed.). Pearson Education Limited.

Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*. Oxford University Press.

Ferris, D., Brown, J., Liu, H., & Stine, M. E. A. (2011). Responding to L2 Students in College Writing Classes: Teacher Perspectives. *TESOL quarterly*, *45*(2), 207-234. https://doi.org/10.5054/tq.2011.247706

Ferris, D., & Roberts, B. (2001). Error Feedback in L2 Writing Classes: How Explicit Does it Need to Be? *Journal of second language writing*, *10*(3), 161-184. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743(01)00039-X

Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The Power of Feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, *77*(1), 81-112. https://doi.org/10.3102/003465430298487

Hyland, F., & Hyland, K. (2001). Sugaring The Pill: Praise and Criticism in Written Feedback. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 10(3)*. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1060374301000388?via%3Dihub

Kim, S. (2023). A Comparative Analysis of Language Choices in Written Peer Feedback Provided by High- and Low-proficiency Japanese EFL Students. *Language Teaching Research: LTR*. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688231193074

Krogh, T. (2014). *Hermeneutikk: om å forstå og fortolke* (2. utg. ed.). Gyldendal Akademisk.

Krulatz, A., Neokleous, G., & Henningsen, V. F. (2016). Towards an Understanding of Target Language use in the EFL Classroom: A Report from Norway. *International Journal for 21st Century Education*, *Vol. 3*(Special Issue ¨Language Learning and Teaching¨), 137-152. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21071/ij21ce.v3iSpecial.5713

Lee, I. (1997). ESL Learners' Performance in Error Correction in Writing: Some Implications for Teaching. *System (Linköping)*, *25*(4), 465-477. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X(97)00045-6

Lee, I. (2009). Ten Mismatches Between Teachers' Beliefs and Written Feedback Practice. *ELT journal*, *63*(1), 13-22. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccn010

Lee, I. (2017). *Classroom Writing Assessment and Feedback in L2 School Contexts*. Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3924-9

Ministry of Education and Research. (2017). *Core Curriculum - Values and Principles for Primary and Secondary Education.* Laid down by Royal decree. The National curriculum for the Knowledge Promotion 2020. https://www.udir.no/lk20/overordnet-del/?lang=eng

Ministry of Education and Research. (2019). *Læreplan i Engelsk (ENG01-04)* [Curriculum for English ]. Established as Regulations. The National Curriculum for the Knowledge Promotion 2020. https://www.udir.no/lk20/eng01-04/kompetansemaal-og-vurdering/kv4?lang=eng

Morgan, H. (2022). Conducting a Qualitative Document Analysis. *Qualitative report*, *27*(1), 64-77. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5044

Pearson, W. S. (2022). A Typology of the Characteristics of Teachers' Written Feedback Comments on Second Language Writing. *Cogent Education*, *9*(1), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2021.2024937

Regulations Pursuant to the Education Act. (2020). *Vurdering i fag* (FOR-2006-06-23-724). Lovdata. https://lovdata.no/forskrift/2006-06-23-724/§3-3

Shintani, N., & Ellis, R. (2013). The Comparative Effect of Direct Written Corrective Feedback and Metalinguistic Explanation on Learners' Explicit and Implicit Knowledge of the English Indefinite Article. *Journal of second language writing*, *22*(3), 286-306. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2013.03.011

The Education Act. (2019a). *Adapted Education* (LOV-1998-07-17-61). Lovdata. https://lovdata.no/NLE/lov/1998-07-17-61/§1-3

The Education Act. (2019b). *The Objectives of Education and Training* (LOV-1998-07-17-61). Lovdata. https://lovdata.no/NLE/lov/1998-07-17-61/§1-1

Tsang, A. (2023). The Relationships Between Spoken and Written Input Beyond the Classroom and Young EFL Learners' Proficiency. *Language Teaching Research: LTR*. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688231211367

University of Oslo. (2021, Apr. 28, 2023). *TRAWL: Tracking Written Learner Language*. Department of Literature Area Studies and European Languages,. https://www.hf.uio.no/ilos/english/research/groups/trawl-tracking-written-learner-language/index.html

Utdanningsdirektoratet. (2022). *Underveisvurdering* Udir.no. https://www.udir.no/laring-og-trivsel/vurdering/om-vurdering/underveisvurdering/

Yu, S., & Lee, I. (2014). An Analysis of Chinese EFL Students' use of First and Second Language in Peer Feedback of L2 Writing. *System (Linköping)*, *47*, 28-38. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.08.007

Zarrinabadi, N., & Rezazadeh, M. (2023). Why Only Feedback? Including Feed-up and Feed-forward Improves Non-linguistic Aspects of L2 Writing. *Language Teaching Research: LTR*, *27*(3), 575-592. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820960725