

**Journal of English Literature and Cultural Studies (JELCS Journal), 2018, 1(1), 1-155.**



Original Research Article

## Linguistic Forms In Teacher Feedback Comments On Students' Essays In Colleges Of Education In Ghana

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 25Nov. 2018                      Received in revised: 9Dec. 2018                      Accepted: 11Dec. 2018                      Available online: 12Dec. 2018                      DOI:</p>	<p>This study was to investigate the teachers' written feedback commentary on students' project essays, using four selected Colleges of Education in Ghana as case study. Specifically, the study sought to find out the syntactic/linguistic form of comments written by the teachers. Sixty-two (62) students' project drafts were purposively sampled at the selected Colleges of Education Resource centres for the study. Ferris et al.'s, (1997) discourse analysis model of teacher written feedback commentary formed the basis of the analysis and discussion of the study. The findings of the study indicated that the end comment, where teachers focused their written commentary in the specific categories dominated with statements, with frequency (N) 82 representing (24.4%), as against Ferris et. al's (1997) study, which realized question forms as the dominant linguistic form used in constructing teachers' written feedback comments. The findings of this study, which are greatly informed by the theoretical and analytical frameworks adopted, have several key implications for writing pedagogy, and highlight some of the problems inherent in the feedback process which teachers in other similar settings may wish to consider. For instance, since responding to students' writing is thought of as an essential part of successful writing in the L2 context, it is important for English teachers and teachers of writing in general to adapt this analysis model system to become aware or make their writing students aware of the significance of feedback and its impact on students' writing.</p>
<p><b>KEYWORDS</b></p> <p>Syntactic form                      linguistic form                      pedagogy                      teacher feedback                      students' essays                      education</p>	

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## 1. Introduction

The question of whether language teachers should provide feedback on students' writing, particularly, grammar correction in the writing assignments of ESL/EFL learners, has remained a constant debate in the field of language research (Farrokhi, 2001). Some researchers (e.g. Kepner, 1991; Sheppard, 1992; Truscott, 2007) claim that grammar corrections do not have a positive effect on the development of L2 writing accuracy. According to the most extreme views expressed by people such as Truscott (2007), corrective feedback (CF) is seen as not only ineffective but also potentially harmful. The debate continues over whether written feedback should be provided as it is often neglected and misunderstood by students (Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005; Gu nette, 2007; Truscott, 1996). Teacher feedback has been criticized for being product oriented because it occurs most frequently at the end point due to time and class size constraints (Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006). It has also been argued that while higher-achieving students seem to respond positively and benefit from teacher feedback, lower-achieving students respond poorly and constantly need to be encouraged to comprehend the teacher's comments (Gu nette, 2007). Research has even suggested that feedback may not play a significant role in students' writing due to teachers' usage of vague and 'rubber stamp' comments as well as over reliance on grammar correction (Paulus, 1999).

The present study is a reflection of Ferris et al.'s (1997) study and attempts to characterize rhetorical choices in teacher commenting with respect to their pragmatic intent and the linguistic forms that the commentary takes.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Teacher written feedback comments on students' English essays have been investigated extensively, across Europe, America and Asia (Ferris, Chaney, Komura, Roberts, & McKee, 2000; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Frantzen, 1995; Lalande, 1982; Lee, 1997; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986) to ascertain the effects of different types of teacher feedback on students' writing, improve the fluency and accuracy of students' English composition, (Ashwell, 2000) and to enhance teachers' pedagogical practice in English writing (Frantzen&Rissel, 1987). However, in Africa, very little is known of research

on written teacher feedback commentary on students' English essays writing in general, coupled with the limited scope and scarce research on teacher response to second language writing (Goldstein, 2001; Chavez & Ferris, 1997 cited in Mota de Cabrera, 2003). Obviously, successful writing is very challenging for both teachers and students in countries that have adopted English as a Second Language (L2), to which Ghana is not an exception, compared with those using English as a First Language (L1), hence, the need for studies on feedback. Given these combined factors, this study investigates the nature and location of teacher written feedback commentary, the pragmatic intent of the teacher written feedback commentary students receive on their written project essays and the linguistic forms of the teacher written comments, using selected College of Education in Ghana.

### *Research Questions*

The question that drives the present study is:

- What are the linguistic forms of the teachers' written feedback comments on written students' project draft essays in Colleges of Education in Ghana?

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this research is to analyze written teacher feedback comments on students' project essays in selected Colleges of Education in Ghana, focusing on the linguistic forms used in the written comments so as to point to teachers the need to be aware of issues surrounding the methods of giving teacher written feedback to students writing. Again, the study will offer teachers the opportunity to better negotiate their intentions and interpretations when responding to students' writing with the ultimate purpose of improving learners' composition with regard to both short and long-term efficiency from the perspectives of fluency, accuracy, and the overall quality of students' writing.

### *Significance of the Study*

The study will place teachers at the Colleges of Education in a better position to ascertain the changing disciplinary emphases on commenting, so as to promote fairness and sensitivity on students' writing. It will also help teachers fulfill the generic convention of including positive evaluations in end comments even when the student's

paper is poor, since, sweeping negativity in teachers' commenting strategies could destroy a student's relatively fragile self-confidence, (Smith, 1997).

The work is also aimed at helping teachers to establish a more personal connection with students and demonstrate the effects of their comments on students' writing. The research will further provide the teacher with a variety of styles to comment on students' writing, in order to illuminate the practices of teachers in their commenting strategies. It is expected that this study will provide the needed insights into the Teacher Written Feedback and tools which could be used to help practicing teachers to evaluate their own written feedback and to develop the schemata and skills of responding to students writing.

The study will also help the researcher to ascertain the kinds of written teacher feedback comments that students receive on their project draft essays at Colleges of Education. It will recommend the impact of the feedback comments on both students' project essays with regard to long and short-term efficacy of students' writing. The use of feedback is important in improving students' writing; it is significant because students need the skill of writing in academic as well as professional contexts. The importance of writing skills to students calls for adjustments to be made to the methodology of teaching writing and the use of teacher written feedback commentary, and will therefore, be of significance in this research.

This study will reasonably illuminate the realities of today's ESL writing classroom and other learning situations, and will encourage teachers/supervisors of students' project writing, to reconsider their theoretical and conventional assumptions about the project writing genre and other writing situations and re-evaluate how those assumptions shape their pedagogical practices.

### *The Delimitations*

The study is limited to only project drafts that were available in the Project Coordinators' Offices. Since, the Level 300 students were engaged in their project writing, it was difficult to assemble all their project drafts, coupled with the fact that students took the whole academic year to write the project and so this did not allow for speedy work. This study is limited to descriptive analysis of only teacher written feedback commentary, excluding other forms like conference, audio, computer

mediated feedback and revision. The decision to deal with only descriptive analysis was to help us gain insight into the kinds of discourses teachers engaged their students in when responding to students' project compositions through written commentary. The study was also limited to the linguistic structures employed by the teachers in their written commentary when responding to students' project essays. It was expected that this would provide the needed insights into the teacher written feedback and tools which could be used to help practising teachers to evaluate their own written feedback and to develop the schemata and skills of responding to students writing. The study was limited to only marginal and end comments. This was because, "marginal" and "end" comments have the potential to influence students seriously. We chose to examine only end and marginal comments since these are longer, more substantive, and have more discursive remarks on the student's writing. Finally, the study was focused on only selected Colleges of Education in Ghana, specifically Saint John Bosco's College of Education, Wesley College of Education, Our Lady of Apostles (OLA) College of Education and Akatsi College of Education. The Colleges are located in the Upper East Region, Ashanti Region, Central Region and Volta Region of Ghana respectively. The choice was informed by the absence of teacher written feedback commentary studies in Ghana in general, and the colleges of education in particular, that have the potential to construct the kinds of relationships which could either facilitate or undermine a student's writing development. The choice also stemmed from the fact that Colleges of Education, like any other institution in the country, value language in general and writing in particular as a powerful and fundamental tool of teaching and learning (Afful, 2005; cited in Akoto, 2013).

### **3. Analytical Framework and Some Key Concepts**

This section takes a two-pronged approach. First, a general discussion is offered on teacher response theory approaches utilized in teacher written commentary studies, followed by a discussion of Ferris *et al*'s. (1997) Discourse Analytic Model which forms the basis of this study.

#### *Teacher Response Theory*

Essentially, written teacher commentary in discourse/pragmatic studies, has shifted from surface-level description of rhetorical form and content issues in students' writing

to larger context of writing. That is, the type of writing which involves the audience and purpose, and the conventions of the writer's community (Anson, 1989; Baumlín&Baumlín, 1989; Fuller, 1987; Straub & Lunsford, 1995, cited in Straub 1997) and interpersonal aspects, which play a role in expressing a teacher's stance and beliefs about writing and in negotiating a relationship with learners (Hyland & Hyland, 2001), yielding several paradigms of research.

In the ensuing paragraphs selected approaches in Teacher Written Commentary are discussed, with a view to showing how Ferris *et al's* Discourse Analytical Model was chosen for this study.

In the search for an appropriate analytical model, Sommers's (1982) watershed research on teachers' written commentary, Lees's (1979) taxonomy of seven modes of commenting, Searle and Dillon's (1980) taxonomy for categorizing teacher response to students' writing, Connors and Lunsford's (1993) monumental national study, Straub and Lunsford's (1995) descriptive analysis, which gave shape to a set of principles that brought process theory and post- structural concepts of knowledge and authority to bear on the ways teachers respond to student writing (Straub, 1996) were first considered in order to shed light on teacher response theory utilized in teacher written commentary studies and to justify the choice of Ferris *et al.'s* (1997) over the other models.

Within the past two and half decades, authors from various backgrounds have tried to design taxonomies for teacher response to students' writing, for example, Beason (1993).

To address this issue, it was thought that what was needed was more investigation into what and how teacher response is constructed and of the impact that teacher response had on students' writing. These attempts have resulted in numerous taxonomies and categorization such as studies focusing on discovering the aims of teacher commentary and analytical models for describing them (Beason, 1993; Sperling, 1994; Straub & Lunsford, 1995). A common theme in the various taxonomies is the teacher's use of language to negotiate meaning with the student writers through feedback. This theme is explicitly or implicitly revealed in the taxonomies and definitions of teacher written feedback commentary by scholars such as Connors &Lunsford(1993),Searle & Dillon (1980), Sommers (1982), and Straub & Lunsford (1995).

It is believed that teacher written feedback commentary means a lot to the student, the teacher, and the school authorities (Smith, 1997; Lindsay, 2009). They consider teacher written feedback commentary as a useful part of students' writing, particularly, with the advent of the process approach, contributing to text structuring and healthy interpersonal interaction between a student writer and the reader.

In line with this, Sommers' (1982) argument found expression in Matarese's (2002), attempt to trace the line of development of these taxonomies of teacher response, indicating that Teacher Response Theory (TRT) examines various aspects of responding, which range from considerations of how teacher response manifests the knowledge, learning, and writing views of the teacher (Anson, 2001) to complex taxonomies that categorize the character and intent of different teacher comments (Straub, 1996). According to Matarese (2002), the question that has often driven work in this field is: What is thoughtful commentary? She indicated that Sommers addresses this question in her article *Responding to Student Writing* (1982). It is noted to have attacked traditional commentary, noting that more often than not, comments take a student away from her own focus, lack text-specific comments, and are comment-heavy on final drafts for no apparent reason (Sommers, 1982).

Sommers' (1982) study focuses on the faults of teachers in relation to comments written on students' composition. Following this unwavering attack on teacher written commentary, she asserted that written comments need to be viewed not as an end in themselves; thus, a way for teachers to satisfy themselves that they have done their jobs, but rather as a means of helping students to become more effective writers. She concluded that the key to successful commenting is to have what is said in the comments and what is done in the classroom mutually reinforce and enrich each other. Sommers indicates that commenting on papers assists the writing course in achieving its purpose; classroom activities and the comments we write to our students need to be connected (Sommers, 1982: p 155).

The above assertion, coupled with the argument, that teachers must respond thoughtfully and in a facilitative manner, but he/she must also reinforce written comments with class goals, explanations of responses, and the attitude he/she takes toward teaching and students (Knoblauch & Brannon 1981, cited in Matarese 2002),

have set in motion a series of analyses that attempt to discover how teachers respond to writing and how that affects students' writing (Matarese, 2002).

In line with this search for appropriate taxonomy for teacher response to students' writing, Lees' (1979), seven modes—correcting, emoting, describing, suggesting, questioning, reminding, and assigning commenting on style for teachers was considered in order to examine what kind of comments an instructor uses and on whom the burden is placed in each of the comments. She notes, without any description of procedures, statistics, or methodology, that

*correcting, emoting, and describing...put the burden of work on the teacher; the next three—suggesting, questioning, and reminding shift some of that burden to the student. The last mode—assigning...provides a way to discover how much of that burden that student has taken (Lees, 1979 cited in Matarese, 2002).*

The study comments that the situation of teachers of writing is paradoxical in that teachers comment on students' writing as if they have already created the authorial persona that it apparently takes an entire class (or more) to achieve (Lees, 1979 cited in Matarese, 2002). However, Lees' style determined new and more specific categories, and this work has been noted by many scholars as one of the earliest attempts to break away from the directive and facilitative dichotomy (Straub and Lunsford, 1995; cited in Matarese, 2002).

Next to come to the fray was Searle and Dillon's (1980) taxonomy for categorizing teacher response, which they indicated was a means for critically examining how teachers respond to students' writing. Their criteria involve elements of form (what form the response is in) and type, which have several subcategories which range from: comments on didactic/correction, encouragement, comment on attitude, to audience, and even other subcategories: clarification, elaboration, reaction, and taking action.

The above scales were praised by composition theorists, such as Straub and Lunsford (1995). However, they were quick to point out a number of categories as being too simple for analyzing teacher comments (cited in Matarese, 2002). As such, these scales may as well not fit the frame for our analysis.

According to Matarese (2002), the 1990s witnessed a significant shift from the analyses of limited teacher response samples, with a small number of teachers' responses to a large volume of teacher response samples. Specific reference was made to Connors and Lunsford's (1993).

Although there are relevant scales or taxonomies like Smith's (1997) Genre-based analysis, Hyland and Hyland's (2001, 2003, 2006a,b, and c) Interpersonal aspects analysis, Bitchener, Basturkmen, & East's (2010) Focus of teacher commentary, and even Ferris's (1997) Teacher commentary on student writing, that could have been used for similar analysis of this nature, but Ferris's *et al's*(1997) classification best suits our analysis in respect of the reason mentioned above.

*Ferris et al.'s (1997) Discourse Analytic Model – Framework for the Study.*

This Discourse Analytic Model was designed to address the gaps in previous research on teacher response to student writing, Ferris and her colleagues (1997) conducted a discourse analytic study to investigate the nature of a teacher's written comments. More specifically, they looked for evidence of variation in teacher response across student ability levels, across assignment types and at different points during the term.

For this study, the researchers selected 47 freshmen and sophomores enrolled in three different sections of a sheltered-ESL freshman composition course. Most of this ESL population was comprised of permanent residents rather than international students. The sample consisted of 247 papers written in response to another author's argumentative essays. Results from this study showed that the teacher provided different types of commentary on various genres of writing assignments. The study also demonstrated that the amount of teacher feedback decreased as the term progressed, and that the teacher responded somewhat differently to students of varying ability levels. However, the focus of this present study shall be on only the relevant categories for analyzing the pragmatic intent of teacher response commentary and the specific linguistic form that it takes.

The linguistic form of the comment was treated as the second phase of the analysis model. In addition to rating the teacher's intent in composing each comment, the linguistic aspects of the comments were analyzed (Ferris *et al.*, 1997). Their analysis consisted of three distinct steps: one, noting the linguistic form of each comment (statement, question, exclamation, or imperative) and the second step consists of noting

whether the individual comment contained any “hedges/softeners” (Biber, 1988 cited in Ferris et al., 1997). These hedges could be either lexical (“Please,” “Maybe”), syntactic/pragmatic (using an indirect questions form such as “Can you” to make a suggestion or request), or sentential softening a criticism or suggestion with a positive statement at the beginning of a sentence).

The last step consists of noting whether or not the comment was “text-specific”. As noted by Leki (1990), teacher commentary has been criticized by researchers both for being too generic (able to be written on any paper) and for being too specific (unable to be generalized to other writing assignments or tasks). Bates et al. (1993), Sommers (1982), and Zamel (1985) encourage teachers to provide text-specific commentary rather than vague generalizations which demonstrate little teacher development with the individual student or his/her paper. Text-specific comments were defined as comments which could only have been written on this particular essay, versus “generic” comments which could have appeared on any student paper, (Ferris et al., 1997).

#### 4. Empirical Literature Review

This section reviews studies that relate to the present study with particular reference to the existing empirical literature on teacher written feedback commentary in order to establish the gap in the research on teacher commentary to student writing in the African context, in order to justify the conduct of the present study.

##### *Studies on teacher written feedback commentary*

Despite the considerable number of studies on written teacher feedback commentary, very little attention has been paid to the nature and location of teacher written commentary, the pragmatic aim of these comments, as well as the linguistic features that these comments utilize in student academic writing in sub-Saharan Africa. The review of these studies in this research goes beyond teacher written comments on college students’ project drafts, embracing other contextual variables and linguistic resources employed by teachers in their responding/commentary behaviours in college students’ project writing.

A search for the literature on studies on teacher written feedback commentary led to three major ways in which these studies can be examined: in terms of a) the nature and location of teacher written feedback commentary; b) the pragmatic intent of teacher written feedback commentary; c) the linguistic resources investigated.

#### *Studies on linguistic resources in teacher written commentary*

This section of the review discusses studies that utilized the linguistic resources espoused in Ferris et al.'s (1997) study. For example, Desrosiers' (2008) study described teacher response on content and organization of second drafts of student essays. It further traced whether or not students made revisions on the 3<sup>rd</sup> draft of their essays, what they made revisions on, and what could have been the reasons why they did or did not revise. She mostly used twenty-seven 3<sup>rd</sup> year and some 4<sup>th</sup> year Japanese university students for the study. The data consists of 54 sets of second and third drafts of essays written by 27 students in a one-semester in their Academic Writing Class. In this class, first drafts were peer reviewed. Students included the peer review sheets when turning in their second drafts and the teacher reviewed the peer review sheets and integrated peer review comments when appropriate. The data consists of essays of two genres: 27 classification essays and 27 compare/contrast essays. The essays were written consecutively over a 6-week period in the latter part of the third semester. The teacher comments of the essays were coded according to the Ferris, Pezone, Tade, and Tinti (1997) analysis model. The findings indicate that these efforts by the teachers did impact greatly on students' revision, that students appreciate teacher commenting efforts, that the patterns of teacher comments in both essays according to aim and genre combined were so similar, and that the overall intent of comments seems to be to ask for the addition of details and fuller explanations in the form of questions.

Desrosiers' (2008) study differs from the present study on three grounds while keeping close semblance with the present study in two respects. The first difference relates to the detailed distinctive analysis of the pragmatic aims and the linguistic resources in the present study. Second, the background of the students chosen for the present study – they are college students, as against the use of University students by Desrosiers. Third, in terms of the sample and nature of subject discipline, the present study samples 20 students' project drafts from different subject disciplines as against 27

students' English varied composition drafts by Desrosiers' (2008). Finally, the present study is distinct in the sense of the limitation of the analytical framework to only the pragmatic intent of the teacher commentary and their linguistic forms excluding the revision exercises or multiple drafts (process writing processes) as employed by Ferris et al., in their study. These differences, notwithstanding, the present study is similar to Desrosiers' (2008) study in that, first, it examines the pragmatic intent and linguistic features of written feedback comments of teachers on students' writings; and second, it uses the discourse analysis model of Ferris et al.'s (1997). Finally, hedges are also used in the present study.

Sugita's (2006) research investigates a particular aspect of teacher commentary on EFL students' writing and examines the influence on their revisions. Three types of handwritten commentary were used between drafts: statements, imperatives, and questions. The resulting 115 changes were analyzed based on the degree to which the students utilized each teacher's commentary in the revision. The results show that the comments in the imperative form were more influential on revisions than questions or statements and appeared to help students to make substantial, effective revisions. This outcome may imply that teachers should be careful in selecting comment types when writing between-draft comments.

Sugita's (2006) study is distinct from the present study on five fronts while maintaining an affinity with the present study in two respects. The first difference relates to the background of the students chosen for the present study – they are non-native speakers. Second is the description of the two broad categories of marginal and end comments in the present study. Third, the background of the students chosen for the present study – they are college students, as against the use of University students by Sugita's study. Fourth, in terms of the sample and nature of subject discipline, the present study sampled 20 students' project drafts from different subjects as against Sugita's (2006) resulting 115 changes which were analyzed based on the degree to which the students utilized each teacher's commentary in the revision. Finally, Sugita's did not adopt Ferris et al.'s (1997) analysis model. However, the present study is similar to Sugita's (2006) study in that it examines the pragmatic intent and linguistic features, though she combined the pragmatic intent and the linguistic features as one unit in analyzing her written feedback comments of teachers on students' writings.

This literature review leads me to conclude that what seems to be missing in most of the studies reported here is the provision of a more detailed account or description of the larger pedagogical context and contextual variables such as location of the teachers' commentary, the pragmatic intent of the teachers, the linguistic resources of these comments and the mitigation (hedging) aspect of these comments that might have an effect on the way ESL students write. It is expected that the present investigation will fill some of the gaps of previous research studies on teacher response to L2 writing especially the lack of consideration of the larger detailed account or description of pedagogical context of the writing situation, and the role that contextual variables play in the way students respond to their feedback drafts.

Again, in spite of this growing but far from conclusive body of research on the written feedback strategies of teachers by Anglo-American and Asian researchers, very little research is known in Africa, pertaining to investigations of the nature and location of teacher written feedback comments students receive on their essays and the pragmatic function as well as the linguistic forms that these teachers employ in their commentary on students' project drafts.

The study relates to the reviewed works in two ways: First, by way of theoretical approach and second, approach to discussing their outcomes. Directives are discussed as speech act and as such confirm Searle's (1976) taxonomy of speech acts in which directives are classified, as quoted in Ferris et al.'s (1997) discourse analytical model of teacher commentary.

## **5. Methodology**

### **5.1. Research Design**

This study is essentially a case study that relies on multiple sources of evidence and benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions. Colleges of Education in Ghana are, thus, selected as a case for study in order to explore the linguistic forms and location of written teacher feedback commentary.

#### *Description of Research Sites*

The study was carried out in Ghanaian public colleges of education, specifically the Saint John Bosco's College of Education, Wesley College of Education, Our Lady

of Apostles (OLA) College of Education and Akatsi College of Education. The Colleges are located in the Upper East Region, Ashanti Region, Central Region and Volta Region of Ghana respectively. The Colleges were selected because they run courses in Diploma in Basic Education which has EPS 399: Project Work as one of the requisite courses for the award of Diploma in Basic Education, just like the other 32 public Colleges of Education in the country and the fact that we are closely related to the colleges in terms of monitoring and supervising staff of the college, which enabled us to access data for the study. The Colleges have various departments (e.g. Department of Languages, Department of Mathematics and ICT, Department of Education, Department of Social Sciences, and the Department of Science and Technical Education). They also have a Teaching Practice Unit and Research Unit, both headed by coordinators. It is this Research Unit that coordinates the project works in all the Departments; it was, therefore, relatively easy to obtain data for the study.

## **5.2. Target Population**

The target groups for the study were the second-year students of the selected Colleges and the English language teachers because the third-year students were usually in the field for their out-segment programme and the first year students were deemed not to have had enough exposure at the Colleges.

Hence, the decision to select accessible students' project draft essays for the study. In this regard, twenty (20) students' draft project books, made up of sixty-two (62) were collected for the study. The twenty (20) students' draft projects were supervised by ten (20) teachers, but only five were consulted during the preliminary studies, to give further insight into the pragmatic intent of their comments to help the researchers gain additional information from the teachers, apart from what is realized from the context of their comments.

### *The Sample Size and Sampling Procedure*

The main sampling method – the purposive (non-probability) was employed at different stages of the study to obtain the required data. Through purposive sampling, sixty-two (62) project drafts were collected by choice. Utilizing this sampling procedure enabled quick access to the research data.

### *Description of Data*

Students in the 3-Year Post-Secondary Teacher Training Colleges Diploma in Basic Education are expected to undertake an action research Project Work (EPS 399) in their final year to be submitted to the Institute of Education, of the Faculty of Education, University of Cape Coast, in partial fulfillment of the requirements or the award of Diploma of Education.

Students are expected to identify a classroom situation in any subject area and design intervention activities to address the problem, and thereafter to write the report under the supervision of a tutor, who is appointed by the research coordinator, on behalf of the Principal of the college. They are expected to submit each written draft chapter to the supervisor for vetting, with supervisors providing written feedback commentary on each draft, until the students meet the generic requirements of the Project Essay, as required by the Institute of Education, University of Cape Coast. Again, depending on the supervisor, a student may present the work chapter-by-chapter for teacher responses; or some supervisors may even require that students present two or three chapters at a time for vetting.

After we had sought permission from the Research Coordinators, with the Principals' approval, copies of available students' project drafts were collected. The drafts contained handwritten commentary – both marginal and end comments – provided by the teachers/supervisors.

The data was collected, taking into consideration the available data at the Resource Centres, hence, the 2014 academic year was considered, since preliminary checks revealed that there were sufficient data for the study with respect to the said academic year.

### **5.3. Data Collection Procedure**

We took three steps in gathering the data for the present study. First, there was a preliminary survey of the research sites, selected Colleges of Education, particularly, the Resource Centres where the project drafts are being kept. This was to familiarize ourselves with the resource centres and also build rapport and credibility (Creswell, 2003:181 cited in Akoto, 2013) with the gatekeeper of the resource centres. It was also

to find out the number and the availability of project drafts in the Resource Centres, as well as the presence of teacher written feedback commentary in students' drafts.

#### **5.4. Coding**

We used numbers, letters of the alphabet and symbols to label the comments and further categorized them, using the analytic framework. Each category was counted for frequency and percentage. The present study adopted triangulated approach and inter-rater tests in the data analysis in order to achieve data validity and reliability. The data triangulations involved investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation, however, the methodological triangulation has found expression in the present study.

##### *Problems with the data collection and the analysis and categorization scheme*

In spite of all the necessary precautionary measures undertaken to curtail all forms of difficulties in relation to data collection and analysis, there were still two main issues, pertinent to the project that needed to be addressed: those encountered during data collection and those encountered during analysis. The problems concerned the categorization and analysis of the data, an essential part of which was to categorize the data into its rightful discourse categories. In working through the samples of the project drafts with the discourse analysis model, the raters experienced similar problems as shared by Ferris et al., (1997), with the model, with particular reference to determining where one comment ended and where another one began. In these cases, we introduced another category of linguistic resource, known as 'paired/multiple (combined) acts and linguistic forms to denote structures that consisted of more ideas or units.

As purported by Ferris et al. (1997), the teacher comments did not always break down neatly into single phrases, sentences, or idea units, as required by the framework model. Some comments are usually several sentences long, and others appeared in a single word form.

#### **6. Results and Discussion**

This section is organized in two parts. The first part illustrates the quantitative data, showing the frequency of occurrence of various linguistic forms with respect to Ferris et

al.'s 1997) discourse analytic model, into the three broad strategies: Question, Statement/Exclamation, and Imperative forms, and the other categories: as paired/multiple linguistic forms, and hedges (i.e. to find out whether the linguistic forms were hedged or not), through which teachers/supervisors of writing respond to students' project draft essays. Further attempt is made in this section to interrogate the dominant linguistic strategy, and to further ascertain why teachers/supervisors of project draft essays resort to that particular strategy, as it pertains in the data, and also find out whether the teachers' commenting strategies were mitigated through the use of hedges in the data.

The following two tables (1 and 2) show the frequencies, in terms of the linguistic forms and the mitigated or unmitigated forms of the linguistic forms, in respect of the teacher's written comments. Table 1 presents the three broad linguistic forms, and the other categories of paired/multiple linguistic forms, and hedges, in written teachers' feedback commentary on students' project draft essays, and their corresponding frequencies as manifested in the data set, while Table 2 categorizes these linguistic forms in relation to the various directive comments, similar to other studies like Desrosiers, (2008); Gascoigne, (2004); Martin, (2011); Rezaei, (2012) in order to allow for easy interpretation and analysis of the data.

**Table 1: The Linguistic Forms of Teachers/Supervisors' Commentary by Category**

Linguistic Form	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
• Linguistic Form		
Statement/exclamation	116	34.5%
Question	92	27.3%
Imperative	115	34.2%
Paired/Multiple	13	3.8%
• Hedges		
Yes	5	1.4%
No	331	98.5%
Total	336	100

As can be observed from Table 1, the most frequent linguistic form was the statement form (116), with a percentage of 34.5%. The imperative syntactic form, (115)

which was just one (1) point deficient behind the statement form, had a percentage score of 34.2%. Next, was question form (92), with a percentage score of 27.3% of the data. The linguistic form with the lowest occurrence was the paired/multiple syntactic form (combined forms) (13), with a percentage score of 3.8% of the data. However, hedges were five (5), with a percentage score of 1.4% of the data.

Table 2, which has further categorized these linguistic forms in relation to the various directive comments, is shown below:

**Table 2: The Linguistic Form of Teachers/Supervisors' Commentary by Category**

Linguistic Form	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
• Statement/Exclamation 116		
Ask for Information	7	2.0%
Make Suggestion	56	16.6%
Give Information	53	15.7%
• Question 92		
Ask for Information	90	26.7%
Make Suggestion	2	0.59%
Give Information	0	0%
• Imperative 115		
Ask for Information	5	1.4%
Make Suggestion	87	25.8%
Give Information	23	6.8%
• Paired/Multiple Form 13		
	13	3.8%
Total	336	100

Table 2 above clearly demonstrates that the statement forms which are the most frequent of all the linguistic forms had the highest percentage of occurrence. The breakdown is as follows: in the make suggestion/request comments, 56 statements occurred, with a percentage score of 16.6%, followed by give information comments, which realized 53 statements, had a percentage score of 15.7%. The least occurred

statement forms featured in ask for information comments (7), with a percentage score of 2.0%.

The imperative forms, as can be seen in Table 5, were dominated by make suggestion/request comments (87), with a percentage score of 25.8%, just like the statement forms, followed by give information comment (23), with a percentage score of 6.8%. With the least again, being ‘ask for information’ comment (5), with a percentage of 1.4%.

However, the question syntactic form, recorded a whopping ninety ((90)‘ask for information’ comments, with a percentage of 26.7%, followed by a few frequency occurrence (2)of make suggestion/request comments with a percentage of 0.59% in the data. The ‘give information comment’ was, however, not featured in the question form, as evidenced in Table 2.

The second section which involves sample descriptive syntactic forms from the data provided as a form of supportive evidence, is discussed below: To begin with, considering the linguistic forms of the teacher written feedback commentary, whereas teachers’ written feedback comments were generally dominated by statement forms (34.5%), teachers tend to use more imperatives to make suggestion/request (25.8%) to students’ project draft and questions (26.7%) to ask for information from students.

However, in certain instances, when suggesting/requesting areas to students to work on in future project drafts, teachers use the statement forms as discussed earlier in section two, under make suggestion/request comments in the statement forms. For example:

**Example 1:**This is an evaluation exercise not an activity (End) (Project draft #16 comment # 206)

**Example 2:**You need yet another activity here before Activity 3 below.  
(m) (Project draft #19comment # 230)

As noticed from the Examples 1-2 above, the statement forms are seen as suggestions for revision because they advise the students/supervisees to rework their project draft essays, with respect to the demands of certain rhetorical sections or part-genres in the project essays. However, it is obvious that the teacher had negative impression or evaluation about the student’s work, as it is usually a characteristic of

suggestion/request constructed in statement form, which are said to be veiled in negative evaluations. Again, the use of the suggestion in the statement form can, also, disguise evaluations which may cause the student to view revision as a form of punishment for mistakes, and may weaken the ethos of the teacher as coach (Smith, 1997). As these evaluations-as-suggestions in a statement form may not also provide the student writer the needed specifics in the project genre to guide the student when reworking or revising the project draft.

Again, statement forms, aside giving advice to students for revision on their project draft essays, also provide information to the students with respect to what needs to be added, replaced or applauded in their project drafts. For instance:

**Example 3:**The following conclusion is therefore drawn from the outcome of the research work conducted to correct problems the pupils were bedevilled with.

First and foremost, for a problem to be corrected there is an urgent need to unearth the possible causes or attributes of the problem. Secondly, having identified the problem, the need to employ a pragmatic approach in dealing with the problem is of paramount importance. Thirdly, the researcher used activity oriented and adequate and appropriate teaching and learning materials to overcome the pupils' difficulties. Moreover, attention was given to the individual pupils when the need arose. As a way of ensuring that the individual pupils were involved in the intervention processes, they were motivated appropriately for their efforts and contribution to lesson. (End) (Project draft #14 comment # 161)

**Example 4:**a. It is recommended that teachers at the basic level should mostly base their lessons on practically oriented activities, having in mind the important role that appropriate teaching and learning materials play in fostering understanding.

b. Teachers should identify and assist the individual pupils as and when the need arises.

c. The role motivation plays in teaching and learning cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, pupils should be rewarded appropriately for the participation in lessons. (End) (Project draft #14 comment # 162)

From the ensuing examples above, it is evidently clear that the teachers/supervisors are providing information to the student writers with respect to ‘conclusion’ part-genre of project writing, as in excerpt 64, and ‘recommendation’ part-genre in project writing, as in excerpt 65. This is intended to help the student writers to incorporate the right information into their writings, since the teachers/supervisors here are positioned/viewed as the repository or experts of project knowledge. However, these statement forms usually indicate an approach by the supervisor, placing the supervisee in the powerful position of accepting or rejecting the proposition made by the supervisor (Smith, 1997).

Another linguistic form worthy of discussion is the imperative forms (34.2%) which occurred slightly below the statement forms (116 for statements and 115 for imperatives, as shown in Table 2). 25.8% of make suggestion/request for students to work in their subsequent or future project drafts are stated in the imperative. For instance:

**Example 5:** Be more explicit...lack of confidence in their ability to make use of I.C.T. (m) (Project draft #20comment # 237)

**Example 6:** Name a problem and show how I.C.T. can help to solve the problem. (m) (Project draft #20comment # 242)

**Example 7:** Give an example of the test method, otherwise you are too abstract (m) (Project draft #20comment # 245)

As seen in the above excerpts, it is clearly shown that imperatives create an obligation for the addressee/supervisee by virtue of linguistic convention, a view that was explicitly espoused in Codoravdi & Lauer’s (2012) study. He asserts that we could construe the imperative form or order uses simply as attempts to get the addressee/supervisee to do something. The supervisor exercises authority over the supervisee; that is the supervisee is obligated to comply with such attempts of the supervisor. The imperative forms, therefore, allow the teacher/supervisor to maintain at least outward control of power in these situations.

In this light, it could be argued that directive comment constructed in the imperative form expresses a certain content related to the supervisee's future actions which conveys that the supervisor wants the content of the students' drafts to become a reality, and acts as an inducement for the supervisee to bring about the content in the right form with due regard to the project writing genre.

More importantly, the direct and authoritative nature of imperatives makes it instructive and easy for students/supervisees to follow the teacher's commentaries such as:

**Example 8:** Write the population in words before figures (End) (Project draft #20comment # 245)

**Example 9:** Avoid dictionary definitions to start your review. (End) (Project draft #20comment # 245)

**Example 10:** State the date of publication as you did for the second review. (End) (Project draft #20comment # 245)

**Example 11:** Add at least two more to the concept of integers. (End) (Project draft #20comment # 245)

As can be seen, these imperatives above were more instructive to students than indirect and enlightening comments such as questions or statements. It can be said that imperatives are more useful for the students to raise the efficiency of their subsequent drafts or revising the drafts than questions or statements. The above imperatives also give a clear direction to student writers on how to respond to the comments because they explicitly asked or told the students to alter or incorporate certain changes to their constructions in the writing process.

The question form also appeared in the teacher written feedback comments with a frequency (N) of 92 (27.3%) in the data. Almost all the linguistic question forms in the 'ask for information' comments, 90 (26.7%) conveyed questions for students to provide the requisite information in their subsequent project drafts in the present study. Most often, these questions attempt to urge students to think more deeply about particular information that they may or may not have provided in their draft project essays. For example:

**Example 12:** How did you encounter the problem? (End) (Project draft#25 comment #290)

**Example 13:**How appropriate is the location of the school to the study?  
(End) (Project draft #25 comment # 291)

**Example 14:**How did you realize that the pupils had difficulty adding two digit integers? (End) (Project draft #25 comment # 294)

In the above excerpts, one can observe how students are spurred to further thought in the following questions, unlike the statement forms which usually provide student writers with additional information to grapple with, or the imperative forms which authoritatively instruct student writers to alter changes into their project drafts without further consideration, or regards for reports (studies) that are calling for teacher feedback commentary to be written in the question forms (Smith, 1997).

Though teachers are often encouraged to provide commentary in question form, both to stimulate students' thinking process and to avoid appropriating students' texts (Sommers 1982; Zamel 1985 cited in Sugita, 2006), ESL students have commented that their instructors' questions sometimes confuse them (Ferris 1995, cited in Sugita, 2006). These scholars, however, argued that questions can be helpful to get the students to think more carefully about particular issues as they write their subsequent drafts (revision) without necessarily having to change their original thought or meaning.

Furthermore, questions, as I had earlier indicated, are a means of highlighting knowledge limitations and can be used to weaken the force of a statement by making it relative to a student writer's state of knowledge. For instance:

**Example 15:** Will you use TLMs and which are they? (m) (Project draft # 30 comment #321)

**Example 16:** When you provided the words, what happened? (m)  
(Project draft #30comment # 334)

As indicated above, the student writer here is also given some power to further elaborate the information that he/she has provided in his/her draft project essays, without being subjected to the supervisor's convictions and line of thought. Again, even though Hyland & Hyland (2001) observed that questions generally seek to engage and elicit a response from the student writer, they also tend to express the teacher/supervisor's ignorance or doubt over a particular claim or assertion that the student writer may have made in his/her write up (project draft). They are quick to add

that questions can mitigate the imposition of a suggestion or an imperative, as shown in the excerpts above (examples 15-16).

In addition, questions are also useful when a teacher wishes to protect him/herself or from the full effects of what might be considered as serious allegations of criticisms of students' writings. According to Hyland & Hyland (2001), questions undermine a categorical interpretation of underlying proposition; and because of this, they can, in some cases, be seen as the teacher's attempt to withhold full commitment from the possible implications of a statement or imperatives. Hence, the use of questions, as seen in the above examples, can help him/her to negotiate meaning with the student writer of the project draft.

Finally, the paired/multiple linguistic forms, just like the directive comment types (paired/multiple comment) occur when a comment typically combines two or more linguistic forms from the repertoire of linguistic forms identified in the framework. The occurrences of these paired/multiple linguistic forms (combined forms) were also few in terms of frequency of occurrence, with just 13 (3.8%) occurrences in the data.

However, the majority of these forms (9) appeared at the end comments of students' project essays, with four (4) in the margin, as shown in Table 2, indicating that these forms which shared similar form with the paired/multiple comments were used purposely by teachers to perform multiple functions to give students some information in the form of a statement to do some work on the project, provide few specifics to guide the students in the project writing, then follow such information, with 'ask for information' comment on certain rhetorical structures or genre knowledge in the form of a question, that students may or may not have provided at the end of the project. For convenience and consistency, we shall use the examples given under the paired/multiple comments category, to illustrate the composition of the linguistic forms, as shown below:

**Example 17:** Your tables show that the pupils were fifty (50). Where from the other fifteen (15) making your sixty-five (65)? You're not analyzing data on your table! (End) (Project draft #19 comment # 217)

**Example 18:**What is the average mark?It is not clear on your table that two (2) pupils scored it.Analyse your table again in a better way! See me if you don't understand! (End) (Project draft #18, comment # 218)

The first example is made of three linguistic forms; thus, a statement, followed by a question and followed by another statement. The second example, on the other hand, consists of a question, statement, and then two imperatives respectively.

As we reported earlier in our analysis of the paired/multiple comment, you would notice that in the excerpts provided in Example 18, the teacher/supervisor resorted to more than one of the syntactic forms, in an attempt to get the student to respond to the conventions of tables presentation in research as may be required by the supervisor's genre knowledge of data analysis, thereby, drawing the student's attention in a statement form (give information), followed with a question (ask for information) and finally, concluding with a statement (make a suggestion/request) to the student, to rework on the proposed analysis. Since the information provided did not reflect what the student had earlier on provided, hence, the need to draw the student's attention to the discrepancy by first, providing/reminding the student of his data in a statement form (give information), which is deemed as advice, typical of statements, second, ask for verification in a question form, (ask for information) indicating the teacher's attempt to spur the student to further thought, before finally suggesting to the student what is not done or what needs to be done in another statement form (make a suggestion/request) confirming the teacher's conviction for a revision in the subsequent draft to ensure that the requisite information is provided.

In the second excerpt (Example 18 ), the teacher first, 'ask for information', in a question form, in order to mitigate the full force of a statement, then followed that with 'make suggestion/request', in statement form; thus, suggesting/tasking the student to re-think his/her analysis, then finally, with two imperatives indicating the need for the student to see the supervisor for appropriate redress or assistance.

These patterns of paired/multiple forms (comments and linguistic forms) confirmed Smith's (1997) classification of end comments into 'patterns of secondary genre', where such genre or pattern composed of two or more 'primary genres'. The secondary genres, according to Smith (1997) are more complex units of discourse formed by "absorb[ing] and digest[ing] various primary genres" (pp. 250). Where primary speech genres here refer to simple units of written or spoken discourse, such as apologies or greetings, that he said

display "relatively stable" content, style, and structure each time they appear. The finding also corroborates Hyland & Hyland, (2001), category of 'paired pattern acts', where teachers combined their critical remarks with either praise and suggestion or suggestion and criticism. According to Hyland & Hyland (2001), the adjacency of the two acts serves to create a more balanced comment, and to slightly soften the negativity of the overall evaluation. They indicated that teachers seem to syntactically subordinate criticism to praise by preceding a negative comment with a positive one in order to assuage the full force of the criticism in the second part of the paired comment.

Studies (Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Smith, 1997) with paired acts (comments) maintained that these strategies serve to both mitigate the potential threat of criticism and to move the students towards improving either their current text, or their writing processes more generally in the longer term.

Another commenting strategy employed in the present study, was the use of hedges. Not surprisingly, hedges were widely used to tone down criticisms and reflect a positive, sympathetic relationship with student-writers. While hedges have both an epistemic and affective function (Hyland, 1998), their principal purpose in the present research was not to suggest probability, but to mitigate the interpersonal damage of critical comments.

As every teacher knows, responding to student writing entails more than deciding whether to comment on form or content; it involves delicate social interactions that can enhance or undermine the effectiveness of the comment and the value of the teaching itself. This is one reason why teachers may choose to compliment the ideas in a student essay or opt to criticize them (Hyland & Hyland, 2001).

Hedges are intended to soften a statement or indicate hesitation. Hedges were, however, noticeably few from the teachers' written feedback comments in this study, which consisted of mostly making a suggestion/request to students. In this regard, there were no hedges in the question and imperative forms, since, for instance, almost all the question forms were constructed in the WH-interrogative form. For instance:

**Example 19:** Where is the introduction of the chapter defining it, indicating what it consists of? (m) (Project draft #28 comment # 304)

**Example 20:** What is the essence of that sentence in bracket? (m) (Project draft #24 comment # 288)

Notwithstanding, the use of hedges allows the student agency in making the necessary changes, and in doing so, produces a sense of ownership. These courteous phrases can allow the student to remember that the comments are coming from the teacher, as an extension of their classroom relationship, rather than through a voiceless, nameless textual entity. These types of comments do not only afford the student the power of decision, they also allow the student to “save face” while taking responsibility for the writing (Treglia, 2009).

According to Treglia (2009, cited in Martin 2011) hedged comments tend to improve the self-esteem and self-efficacy of the writer. There were five (5) (1.4%) hedging devices in the data of teacher written feedback comments. It is possible that most questions and imperatives may not have needed the softening effect intended by hedges, in the sense that teachers/supervisors wanted the students to respond to these questions and imperatives which were directives.

However, almost all the hedges were constructed, using ‘make a suggestion/request comment’, which seems in line with suggestion/request discourse in general (Hatch, 1997 cited in Desrosiers, 2008). For example:

**Example 21:**Please, take a careful look at your handwriting by way of ‘doting’ your ‘is’ and crossing your ‘ts’!(End) (Project draft #21Comment#250)

**Example 22:**Please, I think non-random sampling techniques like purposive sampling is preferable because in your situation,you know those who have the difficulty. (m) (Project draft #31 Comment#329)

The above hedges largely occurred in evaluations of content, with the first excerpt pointing to grammar issues, where one might expect the interpersonal effects of direct criticism to be potentially most harmful, but, the presence of the hedging marker ‘please’ helps to mitigate the force of the reservations that the teacher had about the student’s punctuation, as in Example 83 and the student’s choice of sampling technique in 22.

This finding supports the research studies that teachers should avoid being overly directive and critical in their feedback (Ferris etal, 1997). The studies argued that negative feedback can have a detrimental effect on writer confidence (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Studies confirmed that teachers seem to be following this advice,

praising their students frequently and mitigating negative comments as a means of building confidence (E.g. Hyland & Hyland, 2006c). This assertion is further supported by the fact that mitigation is a form of politeness intended to mediate the emotional involvement and possible sense of inadequacy related to receiving critical responses to one's writing (Rubin, 2002 cited in Treglia, 2009).

However, there is a contrary argument, that an indirect approach to feedback may lead students to miss the point of the comment (Hyland & Hyland, 2006c). Conrad & Goldstein's (1999) study certainly points to it being problematic for students. They found comments that did not directly state that a revision was needed were often not revised or were revised unsuccessfully. Other studies have also shown that students have difficulty understanding the intent of comments that are hedged in some way (Hyland & Hyland, 2001; 2006c). Students may also view the use of praise and questions as an indication that there is nothing wrong with their writing, therefore gaining a false impression of their writing ability (Ferris et al, 1997). This aspect of written feedback clearly has the potential for miscommunication and requires careful consideration. For example, Hyland and Hyland (2001) find that "the effect of mitigation was often to make the meaning unclear to the students, sometimes creating confusion and misunderstandings" (p. 207). A later study conducted by Treglia (2009) also reveals that although mitigation is not a determining factor in revising successfully, it is viewed by students as a "face-saving technique and as a tool to engage students to take responsibility for their writing" (p. 83 cited in Al Kafri, 2010).

## **7. Recommendations and Conclusion**

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the teachers' written feedback commentary on students' project essays, using four selected Colleges of Education in Ghana as case study. Specifically, the study sought to find out the syntactic/linguistic form of comments written by the teachers. Ferris et al.'s, (1997) discourse analysis model of teacher written feedback commentary formed the basis of the analysis and discussion of the study.

### ***Implications for writing instruction and teaching***

The findings of this study, which are greatly informed by the theoretical and analytical frameworks adopted, have key pedagogical and theoretical implications.

### ***Pedagogical implication***

The findings raise some interesting issues for writing pedagogy, and highlight some of the problems inherent in the feedback process which teachers in other similar settings may wish to consider.

First, since responding to students' writing is thought of as an essential part of successful writing in the L2 context, it is important for English teachers and teachers of writing in general to adopt this analysis model system to make their writing students aware of the significance of feedback and its impact on students' writing in terms of the nature and the linguistic forms of their written feedback comments. Colleges of Education teachers/supervisors could use vetted students' project drafts and analysis variables induced from the data in this study to demonstrate to students the "real" teacher response or commentary.

Second, the findings of this study could also make teachers of writing aware that their responses to students' writing have the potential of constructing the kinds of relationships which could either facilitate or undermine a student's writing development. So, if we accept that our goal as teachers is essentially to help our learners to become efficient and effective participants in real writing/communicative situations then, this involves more than the knowledge and skills necessary to manipulate the structures of a written text or language.

Third, the kinds of vagueness and misinterpretation we have identified, though not the focus of this study, suggest that it may be a good idea for teachers/supervisors of writing (project) to consider critically their own responses and to consider ways of making them clear to students. Certain aspects, we think, they could consider more closely are the linguistic forms and the mitigation devices they use.

Finally, in order to ensure the effectiveness and success of teacher written feedback, it is a good idea for teachers to be sensitive to the needs, abilities, and personalities of their students in providing feedback, and to keep questioning their own practices and have the courage to identify their own faults, and work on overcoming them.

### ***Theoretical implication***

The study has added to the existing scholarship on teacher written feedback commentary. It has confirmed the existing view that teachers locate their comments

both at the margins and ends of students' project drafts. Their comments further contain linguistic forms espoused in Ferris et al.'s (1997).

Also, the study serves as an invaluable source of reference for researchers in Ghana and elsewhere investigating teacher written feedback on essays in academic writings and settings. As a result, the study gives a useful reference material for researchers who are interested in probing issues on the responding strategies of teachers of writing.

Moreover, teachers should try to utilize a wider range of responding techniques such as encouraging self and peer editing strategies and giving oral feedback through conferencing with students on an individual or group basis in order to support their written feedback (Freedman & Sperling, 1995; Parthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997; Walker & Elias, 1987, cited in Ferris et al., 1997) so as to get better understanding of the goings-on in the students writing development.

### ***Recommendation***

First, the data for the analysis comprised drafts at various stages of the research process. Some were from 'early' work and some from 'nearly completed' projects, consisting of either some number of chapters or the entire five-chapter draft. Further research is needed to compare the nature of feedback given at early and later stages of the supervision process.

Second, the sample for the data was homogeneous; comprising almost all the subject disciplines taught by trainees in the course of their out-segment teaching practice, coupled with "one-size-fits -all" mode of project supervision; where all teachers/supervisors were qualified to supervise any student' project without due regard to subject discipline or subject taught by such tutors in the College, and the fact that what supervisors consider to be appropriate feedback may vary from supervisor to supervisor and from discipline to discipline (Bitchener et al., 2010), made it extremely difficult to obtain project works written and supervised in the English language subject discipline by English teachers/supervisors. This limitation possibly made teachers/supervisors to ignore the grammar/mechanic written feedback commentary, since some tutors in certain subject disciplines tend to down play the significance of grammar/mechanics in students' writing and is likely to skew findings in the direction

of the content and ideation types of feedback. Future research should, therefore, aim for a more balanced project drafts written in the English Language discipline (subject of study) and also supervised by English Language tutors (teachers of the English language).

Third, future studies should compare and contrast the results of this study with descriptions of commentary provided by other teachers in other context, particularly in a different tertiary education setting, in order to ascertain the veracity or otherwise of the variables espoused in this study in relation to Ferris et al., (1997).

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX: A

#### **Data on students' project draft books from the selected Colleges of Education.**

##### **List of abbreviations;**

M- Marginal comment

E-End comment

#### **Project Book 1**

- Reframe this part (m)
- Reframe this part (m)
- Reframe this part (m)
- Every argument should gear towards solving the problem. (m)
- Not necessary (m)

#### **Project Book 2**

6. Reframe this by (m)
7. Not very clear (m)
8. Reframe this part to have a link with the above paragraph (m)
9. Reframe this portion (m)
10. Where I have put the questions marks need reframing. Think and write. (End)
11. Then this is not a research problem. (m)
12. Reframe this portion (m)
13. Besides what? (m)
14. Somebody here means what? (m)
15. Rewrite the delimitation portion (End)
16. “may be” and “may not” (m)
17. What is this? (m)

#### **Project Book 3**

18. I don't believe all of them gave the same response. (m)
19. Why are they not readily available? (m)
20. How were they pronounced? Give the alternative pronunciation (m)
21. The explanation in table 1.3 is not clear at all. I can't follow the argument. (m)
22. The approaches could be (i) drills (ii) use of TLM (iii) children involvement etc. (End)
23. I don't understand. (m)

#### **Project Book 4**

24. Any Ref? Any date? (m)

- 25. Are you sure? (m)
- 26. What language do Nankani speak? (m)
- 27. You've written purpose of the study. (End)
- 28. Restructure? (m)
- 29. Poor sentence construction (m)
- 30. Has done what? (m)
- 31. Problem / Challenges you envisage (m)
- 32. This is not a view (m)
- 33. Are you using different pupils?  
Table 1 = 23 pupils  
Table 2 = 25 pupils (End)

### Project Book 5

- 34. Treat as leading answers (m)
- 35. What/which element? (m)
- 36. Any ref? (m)
- 37. Incomplete sentence, statement, why? (m)
- 38. I don't understand a lot of issues because you have a lot of incomplete sentences/statement here. (End)
- 39. Work on your punctuations and do the corrections. (End)
- 40. You can call for any clarification at any time. (End)
- 41. How many pupils had the problem? How did you identify the problem? (End)
- 42. What are they?  
How did you use them? (End)
- 43. I don't understand. (End)
- 44. Why this group? (m)
- 45. Refer to pre-int 1st paragraph. (m)
- 46. Difficult to understand (m)
- 47. You need to again read your guide and rearrange your subheadings in this chapter (End)
- 48. What did you do with your target group? (End)
- 49. How was the testing and obs

**How to cite this manuscript:** Gborsong et al. Linguistic Forms In Teacher Feedback Comments On Students' Essays In Colleges Of Education In Ghana. *Journal of English Literature and Cultural Studies*, 2018, 1(1), 59-94. DOI:xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx