



**UNIVERSITY**  
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**Teachers' and students' attitudes toward formative assessment and  
feedback in teaching English for specific purposes ESP.**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

Assessment and feedback are central to learning and teaching and are essential components for any further development when they are approached appropriately. Traditionally, assessing students' progress in any subject and providing feedback as a reflection of that progress is normally varied. The current study mainly focuses on how formative assessment, as the most useful type of assessment, can be seen as an effective contributor to the learning and teaching process especially when it is followed by real formative feedback. It is assumed that both formative assessment and formative feedback have an overwhelming influence on what students learn and how teachers teach. This study will investigate such an influence through a collected 49 questionnaires--38 for the students and 11 for the teachers, at the College of Telecomm and Information (CTI) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where English is primarily taught for specific purposes (ESP).

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## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>ALM</b>	Audiolingual Method
<b>CTI</b>	College of Telecom and Information
<b>EFL</b>	English as a Foreign Language
<b>EGP</b>	English for General Purposes
<b>ESP</b>	English for Specific Purposes
<b>KSA</b>	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
<b>ME</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>NRC</b>	National Research Council

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## Introduction

Effective assessment and feedback are aimed at enhancing teaching and learning. Both assessment and feedback are closely interrelated and the effectiveness of each one relies on the other (Black and William, 1998; Knight, 2001; Yorke, 2003). Formative assessment becomes more influential and purposeful when the information drawn from it is utilised to adjust learning and teaching in order to meet student needs (Ovando, 1992; Irons, 2008). A number of authors on assessment and learning argue that formative assessment should be followed by formative feedback to be effectual, such as Knight (2001), Yorke (2003) and Ainsworth (2006). To do so, formative feedback in itself will also have the potential to have a crucial effect on students' learning (Salder, 1998; Black and William, 1998; Maclellen, 2001; Shute, 2008). The main purpose of the current study is to identify the current approaches being applied in assessing student's progress in the ESP context and to identify to what extent formative assessment is considered to be a successful tool, especially when it coincides with formative feedback. Additionally, the current approaches of providing feedback to the students in CTI will be investigated in terms of diversity and usability in the discipline of ESP.

There are five chapters to be included in the current study. The first chapter focuses on a literature review of assessment and feedback in terms of their varied definitions, uses and types. The researcher makes use of the literature to recognise the realistic ways of approaching assessment and feedback in teaching English. Unfortunately, there is a huge shortage of research in assessment and feedback in Saudi Arabia, where this research has taken place. Moreover, there is a noticeable lack of literature in the context of ESP about how both assessment and feedback should be implemented and to what extent they may influence the teaching and learning process. Therefore, the researcher endeavours to base this study on the most relevant reviews as well as some findings drawn directly from studies applied in the discipline of English in general.

Chapter 2 focuses on the current Saudi educational system in terms of policy and practice. The existing evaluation system of how Saudi students are presently

assessed is briefly addressed to have a general snapshot of the target context. A general account of how English is carried out and used as a foreign language (EFL) in the country is also highlighted in this chapter. The research paradigm is presented in the third chapter. This includes the four stated research questions, the target sample, and the methodology which is basically a questionnaire survey of eleven English teachers and thirty eight students in CTI. In chapter four, the research findings are scrutinised and discussed either quantitatively or qualitatively. It is worth mentioning some of the main research findings in this introduction. They are summarised as follows: a) summative assessment can be aligned with formative assessment, and such alignment could maximise the usefulness of assessment in general, b) the most accepted type of formative assessment among English teachers is the informal one, c) although most of the teachers seem to offer real formative and supportive feedback, only 45%.5 who committed to always providing immediate feedback, and d) the positive effects of formative assessment and formative feedback are more centralised on students' learning than on the teaching process. Lastly, chapter five includes several recommendations suggested by the researcher that aim at developing the existing scheme of assessment and feedback in CTI.

**Key words:**

English for Specific Purposes, assessment, formative assessment, summative assessment, formal formative assessment, informal formative assessment, feedback, oral feedback, written feedback, individual feedback, public feedback, summative feedback, formative feedback, learning, teaching and motivation.

# Chapter 1: Review of the Literature

## 1.1 – Assessment

It is vital to briefly look at assessment in general in order to understand the concept of formative assessment and feedback. Assessment is defined as “the process of gathering, interpreting, recording, and using information about the pupils’ response to educational tasks” (Lambert & Lines, 2000:4). It becomes a helpful and constructive tool when the information derived from it is used to adapt and modify the applied teaching and learning techniques (Black and William, 1998). Pelligrino et al. (2001:42) suggests that assessment has a fundamental role in providing information to help students, teachers, administrators, and policy makers arrive at decisions.

Historically speaking, assessment can have a more noticeable influence on students’ behaviour and performance than teaching does (Miller and Parlett, 1974). Assessment is still the most influential factor in formal education and, if not approached properly, may subvert the positive aspects of both the teaching and learning process.

Although tests and examinations are considered as one way of assessing, assessment does not mean testing. There is an obvious distinction between assessing and testing students’ performance. The purposes of tests or examinations determine clearly whether they are being used for assessment or testing (Knight, 2001:8). They are “testing” if they only provide students with marks, the final judgement, without any useful feedback of what they have (or have not) mastered. On the contrary, they are “assessments” when they aim to identify what students need to do in order to enhance their performance in the future.

In contrast to testing, assessment with the provision of feedback (as its main distinctive feature) has an enormous advantage since students are informed about the continuous development in their achievement. Ainsworth (2006) alludes to the dissimilarity between tests and assessments by arguing that the latter can: a) motivate

students to be more engaged in learning, b) help students develop positive attitudes toward a subject, and c) give students feedback about what they know and can do (p.22).

Using assessment as an instrument for learning English is crucial. The National Research Council (NRC; 1996: 5) states that “assessment and learning are two sides of the same coin...when students engage in assessments they should learn from these assessments”. In a later publication (2001), *Classroom Assessment and the National Standard*, the NRC added that “high quality assessment in the classroom can have a positive effect on students’ achievement” (p.9). Thus, English teachers should not look at assessment as merely judgement, but as an aid to stimulate and engage students in the learning process. This stimulation may occur when students become acquainted with their previous mistakes and are guided to avoid such mistakes in their future learning.

It is instructive to recognize the purposes of assessments before addressing assessment types. Kellough and Kellough (1999) have characterised six purposes of assessment:

1. To assist student learning
2. To identify students’ strengths and weaknesses
3. To assess the effectiveness of a particular instructional strategy
4. To assess and improve the effectiveness of curriculum programs
5. To assess and improve teaching effectiveness
6. To provide data that assist in decision making (p. 418-419)

In addition, it is crucial to establish clear principles that may successfully guide the implementation of assessments. The following six principles have been adapted from Pausch & Popp (1997) who also stress the significance of grounding assessments’ purposes on rational principles. These principles are:

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.
2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.
3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.

4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.
5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.
6. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change (p.1).

## 1.2- Types of Assessment in ESP

In contrast to the schools run by Ministry of Education (ME) where English is taught for general purposes (EGP), English in CTI, as indicated earlier, is mainly taught for specific purposes (ESP). Some examples are English for electronics, computing, and telecommunication. This shows that ESP assessments are mostly limited to adult students only as those who are studying English in CTI. However, there is one EGP course, along with other three ESP courses, that should be finished during the two years of their study in the college.

There are two models of applying assessment in the ESP context at CTI : summative and formative assessment. They are functionally based on the ESP course content. Therefore, they are described as "achievement" by no means diagnostic or placement assessments (Hughes, 2003). In other words, these assessments are designed to check whether or not the stated objectives of the course have been reached and to measure the degree of success of students' achievements and abilities.

In theory, however, ESP assessments can be considered as performance assessments measuring the required skills to "perform" well in the language. This language performance is varied among students according to the nature of the context and their background about the subject. So, an examinee's performance in a certain test relies on the interaction between content knowledge and linguistic knowledge.

In designing ESP tests teachers should be aware of creating relevant measures of language ability that assure the quality of these tests. Tratnik (2008) states that ESP tests need to:

7. be as authentic as possible,
8. provide accurate and reliable measures of language ability,

9. have beneficial effects,
10. be practical and economical in terms of administration, time, money and personnel (p.7).

So, what seems to be a key issue in ESP testing is whether students can communicate in the target language and use both linguistic and content knowledge in order to achieve their learning objectives. This points to the broader context of ESP not only in learning but also in teaching process. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) claim that assessment plays a central role in the ESP process as it gives ESP teachers sufficient information on the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning. However, Karim (2002) concludes that the relationship between assessing and teaching is complicated and it is confusing to say that good assessments have positive influences on the instructional process.

#### 1.2.1- Summative Assessment

Summative assessment normally takes place at the end of courses; as suggested by Torrance and Pryor (2002), “summative assessment is generally considered to be undertaken at the end of a course or programme of study in order to measure and communicate pupils’ performance and (latterly) accountability” (p.8). And its primary emphasis is to make a judgement about the learning that has occurred. A review of the literature on summative assessment reveals that this assessment has several functions in the educational system. For instance, Black (1999) suggests that summative assessment “serves to inform an overall judgement of achievement, which may be needed for reporting and review” (p.118). Regarding giving students feedback, Pelligrino et al. (2001) state that summative assessment is “a tool designed to observe students’ behaviour and produce data that can be used to draw reasonable inference about what students know” (p.42). It is used as a means of providing feedback to teachers in order that they may recognise the usefulness of learning and teaching as Pelligrino et al. (2001) suggest that it “serves as a vital role in providing information to help students, parents, teachers, administrators and policy makers to reach decisions” (p.42). Lastly, summative assessment functions as “an

input to employment or career advancement” (Irons, 2008:13). In other words, it is utilised as a preparation for life and personal interests.

However, summative assessment has been extensively criticised as it does not always promote good learning and indeed can have disadvantageous effects on students and the entire learning process. Black and William (1998) found that summative assessment is not a proper mean in terms of boosting students’ mastery and motivation toward learning. Black and William’s results may support Bloom’s (1976) findings when he states that in applying summative assessment(s) (one or two exams a term), students postpone their study or work and this reflects negatively on their performance. Also, Falchikov (2005) argues that there are some problems associated with summative assessment: emphasis on examinations, issues of validity (this problem will be highlighted later), does not promote deep learning but encourages surface learning, and contributes to students’ stress (p.40). The last problem may be due to the fact that students have only one exam and this subsequently puts them under high pressure as they may not have another opportunity to compensate if they fail this exam.

Validity in assessment requires the assessment to be “objective, accurate and reliable” (Knight, 2001:3). The validity in summative assessment in ESP may be harmfully affected since students are evaluated only once or at most twice during the whole term or year in certain courses. Additionally, in summative assessment teachers normally employ a written examination as their main assessment practice. Thus, they lack sufficient information about students’ actual levels. Moreover, a subject like ESP requires comprehensive measurements that engage all language skills for assessment such as speaking and listening, and such skills cannot, from a perspective of testing validity, be measured in written examinations.

### 1.2.2- Formative Assessment

In contrast to summative assessment where grades and marks are overemphasised, formative assessment is defined as any task that creates feedback for students about their learning (Irons, 2008). It is also delineated as “an ongoing

assessment” (Clarke, 2005:10) based on how well students fulfil learning, and engages students in improving their learning. The central principle behind formative assessment is to “contribute to students” learning through the provision of information about the performance” (Yorke, 2003:478). Black and William (1998) offer a broad definition of formative assessment by stating it is “all those activities undertaken by teachers and/or by their students which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged” (p.7-8).

There are two ways of approaching formative assessment in ESP at CTI: formal or informal. The former refers to a series of short written exams given under controlled conditions throughout the course whilst the latter includes “ongoing observations, questioning, dialogue, and anecdotal note-taking” (Ainsworth, 2006:21). Additionally, students may be asked to deliver short presentations, which are, in purpose, considered to be a part of the informal assessment approach.

Formative assessment differs from summative assessment in what it seeks to achieve. The most important focus of formative assessment (and formative feedback as we will see later) is to help students recognize the level of learning they have mastered and “clarify expectations and standards” (Irons, 2008:17). Knight (2001) provides a straightforward definition of the main difference between the two assessments by indicating that summative assessment is for “judgement” and formative assessment for “improvement” (p.9). It is judgement since students are only given the final grade they have obtained through numerical feedback. In contrast, the assessments become improvement when students are provided with helpful feedback that shows them what they have achieved and what they need to do to master the course unites in the future. Thus, formative assessment is considered be to more useful than summative.

Black and William (1998) reviewed almost 700 research publications on formative assessment from seven different countries and focused on the 250 most relevant, concluding that “formative assessment does improve student learning” (p.61) and leads to a productive classroom environment. Also, Black and William (1998) found that frequent testing is not adequate, but rather a teacher who provides sufficient feedback to students” work has positive consequences on students”

academic performance. As Black and William alluded, formative assessment and feedback (formative feedback) are closely interrelated and the successfulness of each of them is entirely based on the other. The main concern of the current study is to investigate their findings in a different learning context (i.e., ESP) as well as in a different country (i.e., KSA).

However, as in the Bangert-Downs et al. (1991) analysis, roughly 35% of the studies revealed negative effects of formative assessments. The researchers examined these negative findings by investigating the possible factors that moderate the relation between formative assessment and enhanced performance. They discovered that the effectiveness of formative assessment is reduced when the emphasis of the assessment is put more on students' performance rather than on learning how to perform the task. This phenomenon, according to Zaff (2003), is linked to "extrinsic versus intrinsic motivations for success"<sup>1</sup> (p.5). For example, placing more focus on marks (extrinsic) causes more negative results than placing the focus on learning skills that lead to mastering a given task.

Hallam et al. (2004:12) carried out a comprehensive project called "support for the professional practice in formative assessment," which included four groups of eight or nine schools and lasted for more than two years (from May 2002 to August 2004) in Scotland. In their evaluation of this project, they found that formative assessments have been successful in improving pupils' learning and motivation (89%), the quality of students' work (88%), attainment (78%), learning skills (94%), concentration (83%) and behaviour (55%) (p.12). It is noticeable that adopting summative assessment in teaching policy may cause students to reduce their learning effort and motivation toward progress, so teachers should present formative assessments that inform students about the continuous development in their achievement. This is what Ainsworth (2006) calls "assessments for learning" (p.26).

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<sup>1</sup> Intrinsic motivation refers to carrying out a task for a feeling of pleasure or just for the sake of performing it. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, refers to carrying out a task to gain an external reward, such as a high mark (Zaff, 2003)

Some factors contribute to making formative assessment a useful instrument in terms of enhancing student learning. Firstly, students become open about their weaknesses and concerns and become involved in dialogue with their teachers and peers (Black and William, 1998). Secondly, they can be more motivated to learn to improve their knowledge and understanding instead of focusing on passing summative assessments (Knight, 2001). Thirdly, formative assessment creates a competitive learning environment and boosts students' attitudes toward learning since its primary focus is to help students understand the level of learning they have achieved (Irons 2008).

As a summary, formative assessment in ESP has some prominent purposes that make it obviously distinct from summative. Ainsworth (2006:22) suggests the following purposes for formative assessment:

1. Motivate students to be more engaged in learning.
2. Help students develop positive attitudes toward a subject
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of instructional strategies.
4. Give students feedback about what they know and can do.
5. Identify if students have mastered a particular concepts or skill in the standard.

### 1.3- Aligning Formative Assessment with Summative

Although most of the literature review proves the usefulness of applying formative assessment instead of summative, there is a probability of success in applying them together in one course. Yorke (2003), among other researchers, states that assessment could, and to some extent must, be an alignment of both formative (providing formative feedback that contributes to the students' learning) and summative (providing a quantitative judgment that contributes to the students' marks). Likewise, Taras (2002) notices no definite conflict between summative and formative assessments by arguing that "since the grade is linked to ideas of standards, it is also of great importance for formative work" (p.507). However, Butler (2004) supports the notion of "comments-only" marking (p. 37), based on his understandings of Clarke (2001), who asserts that "grades freeze [students] into „ego-related" mode

rather than „task-related“ mode” (Clarke, 2001, cited in Butler, 2004, p.37). After an experiment of the comments-only strategy, Butler finds that both students and teachers profit from completely qualitative feedback, particularly when joined with self-reflection.

There is a debate between those who prefer summative assessment and those who are against it. According to those who advocate summative assessment, they consider it a vital tool that cannot be afforded, especially in higher education where the primary emphasis is to cover all the courses“ segments in one summative exam, as normally occurs in some colleges of medicine and engineering in KSA. Recently, however, there is a strong tendency among the Saudi educationalist policy makers to shift from summative assessment to formative in all areas of ESP. However, as Irons (2008) indicates, such shifting requires “culture change” (p.30) for these systems, not only from an institutional perspective but also from academics“ and students“ perspectives to practise such “modernised” assessment.

George and Crowan (1999) argue that formative assessment should be applied in the early stages of student learning instead of summative. This view is justifiable as summative assessment only provides limited information about students“ understanding and “does not provide teachers with an indication of the type of interventions required to improve students“ learning” (Pelligrino et al., 2001:27). Hence, formative assessment should be extensively utilised, especially in this sensitive stage of a child“s learning.

However, from a practical perspective, there is a possibility of success in aligning both assessments in ESP. It also makes sense that such an alignment may be essential and indeed beneficial since “students“ achievement data derived from formative assessment provide valuable predictors of eventual student success (or non-success) on summative assessment” (Ainsworth, 2006:28). Nevertheless, if formative and summative tasks exist in parallel there is an “intolerable burden” that “will be placed on academic members of staff and students” (Irons, 2008:26). Therefore, decreasing the amount of summative assessment and replacing it with formative in ESP tests may be a good decision since we assume that formative assessment is more useful to student learning.

## 1.4- Assessment and Motivation in ESP

It is obvious that motivation is a key factor that affects, either positively or negatively, students' learning in general and assessment in particular. One of the most well-known contemporary motivation theories in psychology is what Ames (1992) calls "goal orientation theory." This theory claims that there are two different types of learning goals: mastery and performance. The former aims to have students "develop new skills, try to understand their work, improve their level of competence, or achieve a sense of mastery based on self-referenced standard" (p.262). On the other hand, performance goals orient students to get only higher marks or public recognition of what they have achieved. Ames concludes that mastery goals are more important than performance as they boost students' creativity and make them more motivated.

In the context of ESP, we may apply the above goals to the types of assessment: performance goals for summative and mastery goals for formative. The reason is that mastery goals (focusing on learning the contents) are the main distinctive feature of formative assessments whereas performance goals (focusing only on demonstrating ability and getting good grades) are closely relevant to summative purposes. This, in turn, may give us an indication that formative assessment is superior to summative since it assists students in being more engaged in the learning process. If, however, formative assessment and formative feedback are considered to be successful tools in students' learning then there is a necessity to understand that formative assessment does not only depend on learning tasks and the ensuing feedback, but "on the broader context about the motivation and the self-perceptions of students" (Black,1999: 125).

Generally speaking, the motivation of students in the discipline of ESP has two central functions: instrumental (extrinsic) and integrated (intrinsic). Instrumental motivation is usually driven by external drivers such as getting a job or receiving social recognition while integrated motivation is based around students' strong desire to learn certain subjects. In CTI, students mainly study English for instrumental purposes, more precisely, to pass the course. This, in sequence, may have a negative effect on their achievement as well as language proficiency. Therefore, adopting formative assessment, especially the informal type, may contribute to solving this

dilemma. Irons (2008) indicates that informal formative assessment leads to “intrinsic motivation” which, in turn, encourages students to be more engaged in learning and assists them to “understand their subject”(p.37).

## 1.5- Feedback

### 1.5.1- Feedback and Learning

Feedback is a key aspect in assessment and is essential in promoting students to learn from assessment (Irons, 2008). It refers to “the return to the input of a part of output system, or process” (Ovando, 1994:19). It is also linked to a “response, especially to one in authority about an activity” (ibid. 19). More specifically, feedback is conceptualized from three standpoints: the teacher, the student, and the learning process (Bloom, 1976). For instance, feedback can “reveal errors in learning shortly after they occur...a self-correcting system so that errors made at one time can be corrected before they are compounded with later errors”( Bloom, 1976:8). Likewise, Carlson (1979) states that feedback in general is the amount of authoritative information that students get to strengthen or adjust responses to learning and guide them more proficiently in attaining the objectives of the course. Schutz and Weinstein (1990) delineate feedback as a process of “collecting information about students' performance, their familiarity with the type of assessment method, and their background knowledge” (p.1).

In a more general view, feedback is seen as “an important part of the teaching and learning process” (Schutz and Weinstein, 1990: 2). As indicated earlier on in the introduction, a number of authors on assessment and learning assert that feedback can have a positive effect on students’ learning (for example, Salder, 1998; Black and William, 1998; Maclellen, 2001) Thus, feedback has been recognized as an instrument to improve teaching and learning. More recently, it has been perceived as a central component of enhancing students’ performance and motivation as well as revising the applied teaching strategies (Yorke, 2003; Gibbs and Simpson, 2004; and Irons, 2008). For instance, Irons (2008) argues that feedback can have “a very positive motivating effect on students” (p.37), and teachers should be aware of ensuring that positive statements are helpful. If students are provided with positive comments to

promote them to engage in further study, they may become good learners and good achievers as well. Such feedback is called “formative feedback” and is discussed below.

### 1.5.2- Formative and Summative Feedback

Generally, feedback in ESP is delivered to encourage students to enhance their performance in the future (formative feedback) or to summarize the final judgement of the quality of the students’ work (summative feedback). Randall and Mirador (2003) state that summative feedback is characterised by single comments about the quality of the work students have done, whereas formative feedback is “used to provide a comment which is developmental in nature, i.e., expected to provide the student with feedback on how progress can be made on the work or any aspect of the work evaluated” (p.523). According to Irons (2008), formative feedback is delineated as “any information, process, or activity which affords or accelerates student learning based on comments relating to either formative assessment or summative assessment” (p.7). The main purpose of formative feedback is to “increase student knowledge, skills, and understanding in some content area or general skill” (Shute, 2008:156). In contrast, summative feedback is mainly numerical and is connected mostly with evaluative judgement. Butler (1988) finds out that students pay less attention to teacher comments when they are eclipsed by a numeric mark for assessments. Moreover, the great emphasis on marking and grading, summative feedback, may have a harmful washback<sup>2</sup> on a student’s self-esteem, especially those of low ability. Ovando (1992) alludes to the distinction between formative and summative feedback by stating the following characteristics of formative feedback:

1. *relevant* – addresses student- and teacher-specific learning and teaching performance, respectively, in addition to achievements, needs and interests;
2. *immediate* – provided as soon as information about student and teacher performance is available;

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<sup>2</sup> Washback is the effect, either positive or negative, of a test on the learning and teaching process (Hughes, 2003).

3. *factual* – based on actual student achievement (performance on a test, assignment or project) and teacher’s instructional performance and assessment;
4. *helpful* – provides suggestions for improvement of teaching and learning;
5. *confidential* – given directly to student or teacher without an intermediary;
6. *respectful* – respects students’ and teachers’ integrity and needs;
7. *tailored* – designed to meet individual students’ or teachers’ specific needs and circumstances;
8. *encouraging* - motivates student and teacher to continue and to increase teaching and learning efforts (p.3).

Although formative feedback can take place in a summative assessment, there is a very close relationship between formative assessment and formative feedback (Irons, 2008; Black and William, 1998 and Black, 1999). Black and William (1998) propose a definition of formative assessment which takes account of the importance of feedback by stating that “any teacher assessment which diagnoses students’ difficulties and provides constructive feedback leads to significant learning gains...the two concepts of formative assessment and of feedback overlap strongly” (p.47). The authors also make a number of generalisations about formative assessment and feedback:

1. all formative assessment by definition involves feedback between student and teacher;
2. the success of this interaction directly affects the learning process;
3. it is difficult to analyse the contribution of the feedback alone or, conversely, the assessment technique without the impact of the feedback;
4. feedback must be applied in order for the assessment to be truly formative;
5. feedback is most effective when it is objective (i.e., relevant to the task) rather than subjective (i.e., relevant to peer performance) (Black and William, 1998: 16-17).

There is, however, no consensus among researchers on the definition of formative feedback. Gibbs (2005) links the term “feedforward” with formative assessment whilst “feedback” should be allied with summative assessment. Iron (2008) subscribes to Gibbs’ distinction between feedback and feedforward but these two terms, according to Irons, should be entitled under formative assessment activities

and formative feedback, i.e., it is “feedback” when it aims to help students learn from previous formative activities and “feedforward” when it focuses on assisting students to alter and enhance their learning in the future.

It should be noticed that summative feedback does not play a significant role in summative assessment even if feedback following this assessment is beneficial and relevant to students’ progress. When a student is informed that he achieved a grade of “C” in the final examination, this does not offer much assistance for his future study. Therefore, summative purposes and feedback of any evaluation system are best separated. Crooks (1988) states that “where evaluation counts significantly toward a student’s final grade, the student tends to pay less attention to the feedback and thus learn from it” (p.457). Furthermore, summative assessment in itself may have potential problems in timing and perceived value of feedback even if this feedback is thoroughly useful. The reason is that such assessment normally occurs only once at the end of the module so students have no additional opportunities to overcome or compensate for what they have not mastered in that exam.

Black and William (1998) identify four elements that should make up every effective feedback system:

1. data on the actual level of some measurable attributes;
2. data on the reference level of those attributes;
3. a mechanism for comparing the two levels, and generating information about the gap between the two levels;
4. a mechanism by which information can be used to alter the gap (p.48)

Ramaprasad’s (1983) definition of feedback captures these same four elements: “feedback is information about the gap between the actual level and the reference level of a system parameter which used to alter the gap in some way” (p.4). Moreover, this definition of feedback includes accurately the same key elements that comprise formative assessment. Therefore, the benefit of formative assessment in the literature review, as was shown previously, provides strong evidence for formative feedback.

Feedback employed in educational situations is normally regarded as crucial to improving knowledge and skill acquisition. If we presume that offering opportunities for learning should be the main function in ESP context, then “interventions such as feedback contribute to student learning” (Irons, 2008:21). Pelligrino et al. (2001) argue that “learning is a process of continuously modifying knowledge and skills and that feedback is essential to guide test challenge or redirect the learner’s thinking” (p.234). The role of feedback, particularly formative feedback, in the learning process is to inform students of where and how their learning and performance can be improved. Hence, it is considered to be a key aspect not only in assessment but also in students’ learning.

Bangert-Drowns et al. (1991) were surprised when they found that one third of their findings were negative, i.e., feedback may have negative effects on students’ learning and can decrease their success as well. The authors, however, attribute the negative effects to the category of feedback provided. Other studies demonstrate the usefulness of formative feedback as positively effective, whilst feedback that merely indicates that the student has responded incorrectly or correctly does not effectively improve their learning (ibid. 232). Moreover, such feedback may de-motivate students to learn as well as reduce their accomplishments in the future.

### 1.5.3- Delivering Feedback

In addressing feedback, teachers should be aware of the rational principles that guarantee its usefulness on students and on the learning process. The quality of feedback is quantified by a number of ways such as immediacy, appropriateness, consistency, and the type and amount of information provided. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2004) cites that good quality feedback is “information that helps students trouble-shoot their own performance and take action to close the gap between intent and effect” (p.11). The studies on the effectiveness of feedback (for example, Crooks, 1988; Black and William, 1998; Maclellen, 2001; and Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2004) reveal that feedback is most effective when it stresses the task rather than students, and avoids extensive praise as it may negatively affect student performance. Crooks (1988), for example, indicates that feedback should focus on “students’

attention on their progress in mastering the educational task” (p.468) to be more effective. Also, Hall and Burke (2003) assert that feedback is “better to focus on causes of success and failure than to praise performance on the bases of the final product or completed task” (p.10). However, less able and younger students may benefit from the praise (Crooks, 1988).

McDowell (1995) argues that the lack of feedback to learners can reduce motivation and lead to “ineffective learning” (p.419). In any teaching discipline, feedback needs to be immediate to students“ work as delays may stimulate negative learning effects and frustrate their skill acquisition and knowledge. Additionally, feedback can be seen as a powerful motivator as well as generate intrinsic motivation among students when it encourages them to learn to “close the gap on their understanding” (Irons, 2008:63).That means students know what they have mastered and what they need to do to improve in the future. As it comes to the content of the feedback, Hounsell (1995) indicates that feedback should show students why and how corrections can be made, and comments need to be worded as questions rather than directions.

As mentioned previously, feedback may have two purposes: formative or summative. Also, the effectiveness of formative feedback is considered to be superior to summative. Here, the two ways of delivering feedback, written and oral, will be highlighted. Written feedback is normally intended to give suggestions for correcting mistakes in their work without deep negotiation of meaning between teacher and student (Smith and Gorard, 2005). However, it has a significant advantage since students can refer to it many times because they may forget what was said in oral feedback (Irons, 2008). It can be argued that written feedback is very similar to summative feedback as its main emphasis is normally on scores as well as some justifications of students“ failure. Oral feedback, on the other hand, provides students with more thorough explanations and personalised support, thus “engaging students in the learning process” (Jordan, 2004:2). It appears to be more constructive than written feedback in terms of additional information that could be presented through teacher-student or teacher-whole class conversation

One of the momentous issues in higher education is accommodating students according to their learning styles. Sarasin (1999) suggests that students are classified as auditory or visual learners and to “successfully address the learning needs of their auditory learners, instructors should emphasise the oral mode as much as possible” (p. 49). Jordan (2004) also states that oral feedback will be the ideal for auditory students whereas written feedback is more suitable to visual students. Therefore, students should be provided with both oral and written feedback as it may support a broader variety of students’ learning styles.

In addition, feedback should be based on educational standards that assure its effectiveness on students’ behaviour. These standards need to be unified, steady, and unchangeable. It also has to be specific and well-matched with current circumstances and interact with some variables such as class size, number of students, time being given for each class, and student-ability level. The latter variable was mentioned earlier by Crooks (1988), who states that low achievers may require more praise as well as immediate feedback than high achievers. Irons (2008) has set some pragmatic issues that should be taken into account in designing formative feedback: a) the workload involved in providing feedback, b) the level and type of constructive support that can be provided, and c) the opportunity to provide timely and quality feedback that will enhance student learning (p.69).

#### 1.5.4- Feedback in the Discipline of English Language

In the discipline of assessing students’ progress in the subject of English, and particularly in the domain of, for example, teaching students to become improved academic writers, frequent writing assignments allied with frequent effectual feedback are crucial elements of the course (Puhr and Workman, 1992). They state that the “comment conference” is commonly recognized among English teachers as the best way to give students “evaluative feedback and instruction for further improvement of their writing” (ibid. 49). The comment conference approach has been supported by Bardine et al. (2000) who call it “an eye-opener” (p. 97) in terms of the communication gap sandwiched between students and teachers.

Bardine et al. (2000) has conducted two studies regarding teacher's perceptions toward students' responses to written comments; in the first study, the teachers thought their students would understand a written instruction such as "clearer thesis" (p.99) because such a concept had been covered in the class so students became familiar with it. In the second study, the teachers wrongly presumed that students understood some symbols and would be essentially stimulated to rewrite to become competent writers in English.

It can be argued that the comment conference will provide one-on-one communication and then, a perfect opportunity for clarifying expectations and purposes among English teachers and their students not only in feedback but also in an informal formative assessment as it "can serve to alter the role of the teacher from the strict evaluator to a more supportive coach or guide" (Bardine et al., 2000: 100). In addition, Heller (2004) claims that the most important type of feedback in the English context is the one that "invites the student to engage in dialogue" (p. 116). Such a claim is justifiable as it may encourage students to use the language in different domains for various purposes as well as make them more confident.

This chapter will conclude with a comprehensive study conducted by Maclellen (2001) of about 80 lecturers' and 130 students' perceptions toward feedback. This study revealed huge discrepancies between lectures and students; most students believed that feedback is only sometimes helpful and 30% indicated that feedback never helps them to understand, whilst most lecturers reported that feedback frequently helps students to understand and improve their learning. These findings show a mismatch between lecturers and students in what constitutes useful feedback. The mismatch is primarily centralised in the way the feedback promotes discussion; 63% of lecturers responded that feedback promotes discussion between teacher and student whereas only 2% of students reported positively to this question, and 50% of students indicated that feedback never promotes discussion at all.

## Chapter 2: Educational System in Saudi Arabia

A general description of Saudi Arabia's educational system as well as a general account of how the English language is executed is necessary to get a complete picture of the target context.

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, and modern Saudi Arabia was founded by King Abdul Aziz in 1932. It occupies an area of approximately 872,722 square miles, making it one of the largest countries in the Middle East. It has a population of 23.3 million, according to the Central Department of Statistics in KSA (Saudi Press Agency, 2003). All Saudis are Muslims and most of the population are Arabs "who are bound together by their common mother tongue Arabic, strong family and tribal relationships, and adherence to Islam" (Al-Seghayer, 2005:125). However, KSA remains multicultural and multilingual. Arabic, Urdu/Hindi and English are the predominant languages, and all serve in various capacities and domains across the country.

### 2.1- Educational System

Over the past decade, the government has frequently recognized the need to develop its human capital by revamping the existing educational system (Yamani, 2006). KSA has increased enrolment rates for males and females at both the primary and secondary level (Ministry of Education, 2008) and invested heavily in school infrastructure (Country Studies, 2008). In spite of the positive enrolment outcomes and huge amount of money being paid to enhance the quality of the education system, Saudi schools and universities are still unable to graduate skilled students, adding to the ranks of the skills shortage and then more unemployed throughout the country (Bosbait and Wilson, 2005).

After the 9-11 attack, the United States and some western countries raised concerns about the education system in KSA, fearing that the present system is a

breeding ground for terrorism and religious extremism (Raphaeli, 2005). Therefore, KSA came under pressure to reform its existing educational system. The current Saudi curriculum has been criticised for being mainly focused on religious and humanities studies. For instance, only 18 percent of students in higher education major in scientific sciences (e.g., math, physics, chemistry and engineering), while over 40 percent specialise in Islamic and religious studies (Bosbait and Wilson, 2005: 74).

With regard to educational assessment, the examination system, specifically written exams, is the first and remains “the only tool of educational assessment” (Al-Sadan, 2000:150) in Saudi Arabia. Generally, the academic year is divided into two semesters in primary, intermediate and high schools. The educational syllabus is distributed between these semesters and the promotion from one stage to another is decided by two summative internal examinations in each stage, taking place at the end of each semester. The examination in every stage is set by the school until the second semester in the final year of high school, as the examination is designed by ME for all schools throughout the kingdom (Al-Hakel, 1994). The lesser domination of formative assessment in ME can be exemplified; 30% of the total mark is given to continuous assessment during the term (formative assessment) while 70% of the total mark is given for “a written examination at the end of each term” (Al-Sadan, 2000:154).

In both vocational and higher education, on the other hand, most of the subjects are completed in one semester and lecturers are free to apply any sort of assessment they wish, i.e., summative or formative assessments or a combination of both. The case is the same in the CTI where this study is taking place. However, there has been a strong tendency among CTI policy makers to shift from summative to formative assessment, especially in the ESP discipline.

## 2.2- English as a Foreign Language

English is spoken as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia (i.e., it is an EFL country), and “Saudi English” is basically a performance variety. To make this clear,

one might refer to Kachru's model of three concentric circles, which represent "the types of spread, the patterns of acquisition and the functional domains in which English is used across cultures and languages" (1985: 12). The "inner circle" consists of such countries as the United States of America, the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, where English is the primary language. In the "outer circle," such as Nigeria and India, English is utilised quite widely for internal purposes. As an EFL country, KSA belongs to the third circle, the "expanding circle," where English is used as a means of communication, trade, business, diplomacy, travel, and as a medium in education.

It can be argued that English has reached a high status in KSA, as it is the only foreign language taught in both governmental and private schools, universities, and vocational and commercial institutes. It is a core subject in intermediate and high schools, all private schools stages and all majors in Saudi colleges and universities. English is also used as a medium of instruction for some majors at the tertiary level such as science, engineering and medicine. Additionally, English language proficiency is set to be the main condition to get acceptance into these majors.

Traditional English teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia has the following features: teacher-centred, grammar-oriented and textbook-dependent. The dominant methods used in teaching English in the country are "the audiolingual method (ALM), and to some extent the grammar translation method" (Al-Seghayer, 2005:129). The ALM, which emphasises dialogue memorisation and repetition drills, is the most preferred method by Saudi English teachers and the most popular method in teaching English in KSA (Zaid, 1993). This method, however, is not effectively implemented since most schools lack language laboratories that are essential in this method. Hence, students are not exposed to spoken authentic language.

With the rapid growth of English teaching in outer circle countries such as Saudi Arabia, the communicative approach has recently been implemented as a method of teaching ESP in CTI. Instead of focusing on grammar activities, English teachers are trained and encouraged to situate grammar teaching in communicative discourse and provide students with the appropriate experience that may perhaps assist them in using language in real-life communication. However, the teacher-

centred approach is to some extent still observed in a number of teaching situations in CTL.

## Chapter 3: Research Paradigm

### 3.1- Research Questions

The overall aim of this study is to identify and investigate teachers' and students' perceptions toward the different types of assessment and feedback being applied in teaching English for specific purposes in CTI. It is anticipated that there are diverse views among participants as well as some mismatch between what is assumed to be useful and what is practicably useful in applying assessment and feedback in the ESP discipline. Hence, the following four stated questions are set to address these variables:

1. What is the dominant type(s) of assessment and feedback carried out in teaching ESP?
2. What are the participants' views of a formative assessment scheme?
3. What is the exact relationship between formative assessment and feedback?
4. To what extent can formative assessment and formative feedback be seen as constructive tools in teaching ESP?

### 3.2- Sample

There are two interrelated male<sup>3</sup> samples adopted in this research. First is the student sample, which consists of 38 students, representing almost 12% of the total number of students in the department of computing at CTI. They are in the third level and have completed two courses in English; one is general and the other is specific to their field (ESP). Second is the teacher sample, which includes 11 out of the 15 English teachers in CTI.

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<sup>3</sup> The educational policy in KSA is gender-segregation based, so all the targeted participants, either the teachers or students, are male.

It is worth mentioning that the target samples are “purposive” sampling but by no means random. In other words, both teachers and students have already experienced the two main different types of assessment (summative and formative). Denscombe (2003) states that the reason for employing purposive sampling is “the researcher already knows something about specific people or events and deliberately selects particular ones because they are seen as instances that are likely to produce the most valuable data” (p.15).

The reason for such an inconsistent policy of assessing students in CTI is that ESP teachers are asked to have two rigorous exams for all groups registered in general English in the first term, whilst in terms two and three, when English is principally taught for specific purposes such as electronics and telecommunications, the teachers are free to apply any form(s) of assessment they favour.

### 3.3- Methodology

#### 3.3.1- Questionnaire

As mentioned earlier, the overall goal of this study is to identify the current approaches of assessing students’ progress being implemented in CTI, and how formative assessment and formative feedback can have constructive outcomes in learning and teaching ESP. This will be carried out by running a survey questionnaire which endeavours to obtain some facts and opinions from respondents’ practical points of view regarding the concepts of assessment and feedback. Denscombe (2003) states that information from a questionnaire in general tends to fall into two “broad categories - „facts“ and „opinions“” (p.146).

Besides the easiness of coding data statistically, a questionnaire “tends to be more reliable because it is anonymous, it encourages greater honesty, it is economical in terms of time and money, and there is the possibility that it may be mailed” (Cohen et al., 2000:269).

Nevertheless, the validity of the questionnaire in general is arguable as respondents may not complete it accurately and correctly. Hence, the researcher has

adopted two techniques to overcome this dilemma. First, both teachers' and students' questionnaires are supplied with some key terms and definitions to facilitate responding to the items more precisely and correctly (see Appendix A and C). Secondly, the students' questionnaire is translated into Arabic form to overcome the language barrier that can be encountered in answering the English one (see Appendix B). Furthermore, the researcher intends to simplify the wording of the items and order them in a clear manner so the participants will not get confused.

Both teachers' and students' questionnaires are generally divided into two main parts: assessment and feedback. The reason is that, as discussed in the literature, both assessment and feedback are strongly interconnected especially when the assessment is formative as the positive effectiveness of formative assessment basically depends on the provision of formative feedback as well.

The assessment part includes:

1. a comparison between summative and formative assessment;
2. a comparison between formal and informal formative assessment.

The comparison of the above variables is based on their usefulness in terms of enhancing learning motivation and boosting mastery in language proficiency.

The feedback part includes:

1. feedback timing;
2. approaching feedback (oral or written);
3. feedback focus (weaknesses or strengths);
4. the contribution of feedback to students' learning.

### 3.3.2- Questions

The questionnaire contains two types of question: closed-(ended) and open-(ended). In closed questions, the possible answers are identified and respondents are asked to choose one of the answers. They are set to obtain data on attitudes and opinions as well as provide a high level of control to the questionnaire. The open questions leave the respondents to decide the wording of the answer, the length of the answer and the kind of matters to be raised in their own responses. These questions do

encourage participants to provide the researcher with spontaneous information about underlying attitudes toward feedback (Fielding, 1994). They are advantageous since the information obtained by the responses is more likely to “reflect the full richness and complexity of the views held by respondents” (Denscombe, 2003:156).

The open questions, though they are few, are centralised in the feedback part where participants are anticipated to provide “unsuspected” information that guides the researcher to look into the practicality of providing feedback in more depth. Such information may reflect the exact facts or true feeling on the effectiveness of formative feedback in ESP discipline. There are seven closed questions in both the teacher’s and students’ questionnaires with three open questions in the teacher’s questionnaire and two in the students’ questionnaire.

### 3.3.3- Data Analysis

Since the questionnaire contains two different types of questions, the process of analysing them also follows two dissimilar approaches: qualitative and quantitative. The open questions are used to generate qualitative data whilst closed questions produce quantitative data. The distinction between a “qualitative” and “quantitative” approach, here, relates to the treatment of data, rather than the research method. For instance, the current research employs the questionnaire method, which is classified as a quantitative instrument, but the scrutiny of the data is executed qualitatively and quantitatively. As Strauss (1987:2) argues, “the genuinely useful distinction [between qualitative and quantitative] is in how data is treated analytically.” Thus, what is different is the manner of transforming information into quantitative data (numbers) or qualitative data (words).

In a quantitative approach, the results are mainly presented in forms of graphics and numbers. But in a qualitative approach the thematic analysis is applied to the data so the results are categorised in a list of themes or patterns as exemplified in Table 9 and 10. Also, the analysis in this approach has adopted another technique: “verbatim quotes” where the respondents’ exact words are quoted to be examined as well as link them up to other variables such as motivation, behaviour and teaching

method, as in section 4.1.2. In the case of quoting, every respondent, either teacher or student, is given a number as an identifier, e.g., Teacher 5 or Student 32, etc. As the students have answered the questionnaire in their mother tongue (Arabic), their responses will be translated into English to be quoted and illustrated by the researcher.

### 3.3.4- Distributing the Questionnaires and Gathering Responses

Two types of approaches have been adopted for delivering and distributing this questionnaire: postal and internet. The former is utilised for the students' sample while the latter is used for obtaining the responses from the researcher's colleagues directly. Administering and distributing the questionnaire to the student sample was kindly done by one of the colleagues in CTI who arranged the suitable time and place for the targeted students to complete it and to be returned the researcher by mail.

With regard to the teachers' sample, the teacher visited the CTI website where there was a list of the teaching staff and their E-mail addresses. So, the process of distributing and receiving the questionnaires was carried out electronically. The following table shows the number of sent and received questionnaires from the targeted samples.

**Table 1 Response rate to questionnaires**

The total number of sent and received questionnaires from teachers and students

	Questionnaires sent	Questionnaires Received	Percentage
Students' Questionnaire	50	38	76%
Teachers' Questionnaire	13	11	85%

## Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

### 4.1- Types of Assessment

#### 4.1.1- Summative and Formative

The summary of the literature on this topic as well as some recent findings prove the actual usefulness of formative assessment in both the learning and teaching process. Nevertheless, some researchers such as Taras (2002) and Butler (2004) see no contradiction in applying both assessments and to some extent they must be utilised in parallel during the instructional process. The researcher, moreover, supports this idea as both assessments possess their own advantages (see chapter one) that may contribute to students' learning in higher education, and more specifically, in the discipline of ESP in CTI.

The following findings in Table (2) show how students' viewpoints diverge from teachers regarding the alignment of summative and formative assessment. For instance, only 21% of students agree on the notion of aligning both types of assessments altogether. Additionally, they do not see the alignment as being important as summative assessment on its own since 26.3% prefer the latter. However, more than half of the students prefer formative assessment. There is a noticeable gap between teachers' and students' perceptions toward the usability of formative assessment as the vast majority of teachers (81.8%) believe in the view of the alignment of this assessment with summative to be more effective.

**Table 2 Teachers' and students' views toward assessment types**

Assessment types	Teachers		Students	
	No. of responses	Percent	No. of responses	Percent
Formative assessment	1	9%	20	52.6%
Summative assessment	1	9%	10	26.3%
A combination of both	9	81.8%	8	21%
Total	11	100%	38	100%

In Table (2) teachers were asked to choose the most useful tool of assessing students' progress, whilst in Table (3) below, the primary focus is on choosing between formative and summative assessment in terms of enhancing their students' mastery in learning English. Table 2 reveals a lesser degree of importance of formative assessment when it is aligned with summative as both are better to be approached in parallel. It also seems to the teachers that formative is as necessary as summative by means no difference between them in terms of assessing their student progress.

**Table 3 The superiority of formative assessment to summative**

The superiority of formative assessment to summative assessment from the teachers' perspective

The teacher's degree of satisfaction toward formative assessment	No. of responses	Percent
Always	9	81.8%
Sometimes	2	18.2%
Never	0	0%
Total	11	100%

In the case of selecting between either formative or summative assessment, as in Table 3, formative assessment gains the highest level of agreement among the teachers as most of them see it as an enhancing tool to the students' language proficiency. Formative assessment, moreover, is well regarded by students: 52.6% of students support formative whereas 26.3% believe that summative assessment is superior to formative as in Table 2.

#### 4.1.2- Formal and informal formative assessment

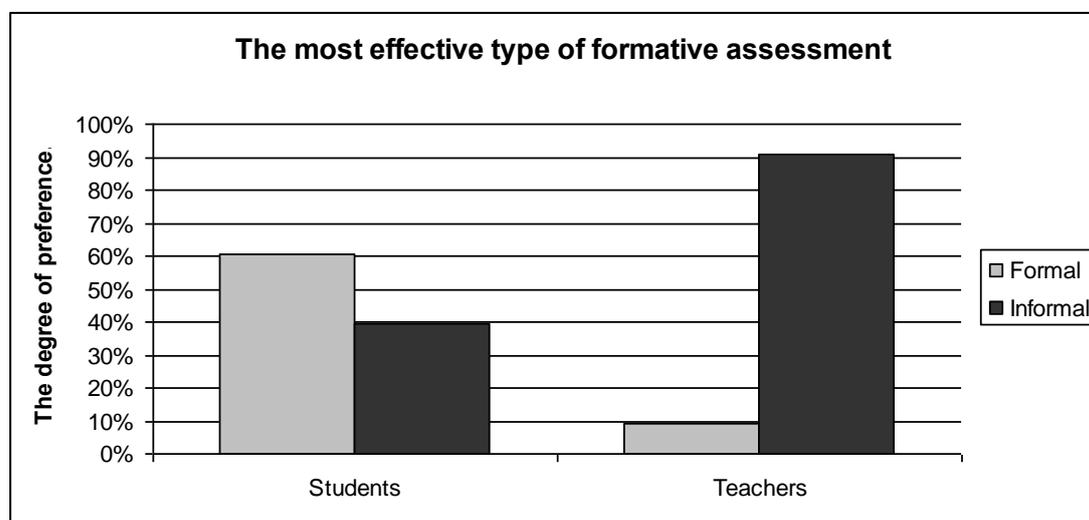
In the previous discussion, the students' and teachers' perceptions toward formative and summative assessment in general have been investigated. Here, the primary focus will be on how the participants observe the two types of formative assessments: formal and informal. Unfortunately, the review of the research has not extensively stressed these types in a specific way as most researchers only just include them under the subject of formative assessment without investigating each type

independently. Thus, one of the main purposes of this research is to explore the participants' beliefs regarding the implication of every type in the context of ESP.

To achieve this purpose, open and closed questions are employed in teachers' questionnaires whereas students are only asked to answer the closed question which is about the most effective type of formative assessment on their motivation to learn. So, quantitative and qualitative data is to be presented here.

The quantitative analysis of the results from both teachers' and students' data indicate that there is huge disparity among them: 61% of students favour formal assessment compared to only 9% of the teachers as in Graph 1. Such a wide contrast is questionable. According to the students, there are various factors that may cause this convergence to formal assessment, though a recognisable number of them (15 students) do prefer informal.

**Graph 1 The participants' perceptions toward the types of formative assessment**



Firstly, the nature of formal assessment, in ESP at CTI, requires the students to be engaged in written exams, only without deep negotiating of the language, which is the nucleus feature of informal assessment. This, in turn, may encourage the students to prefer this assessment as most of them lack language competency needed for such negotiation. Secondly, this kind of assessment has been, to some extent, employed to the earlier stages of the students' learning, more specifically in high schools, more

than informal assessment, not only in the English subject but also in the majority of humanities such as religious and Arabic language courses in ME. Thus, they are familiar with formal assessment and the shift to informal is unusual to them as they have not largely experienced and practiced this assessment before.

Thirdly, the motivational factor might also be behind students' strong willingness to prefer formal formative assessment. Students who prefer this type of assessment are normally driven by extrinsic motivation. This is because of the ultimate "instrumental" goal of the extrinsic motivation which is very much characterised by grading and marking and leads students to be not fully engaged in learning mechanisms. Grades and marks are usually associated with formal assessment, which is primarily written-based exam. On the other hand, informal assessment encourages students to initiate a dialogue, participate during classes, and do some peer and group tasks; and all these activities demand a higher degree of motivation (i.e., intrinsic motivation) from students. This has been referred to by one of the teachers' justifications of not using formal assessment while assessing students:

*"Learning comes through interaction. Formal assessment may motivate them to get grades but not to learn more" (Teacher 2).*

In contrast, the qualitative analysis of the results from the teachers' data shows that 10 teachers weigh up informal formative assessment immensely. Their justifications of applying this assessment are centralised around the following themes:

### ***Enhancing language usage***

*"This is particularly suitable for all language levels in the College of Telecomm and information (Beginner-Intermediate), where EFL learners require more encouragement towards use of language" (Teacher 6).*

*"When a language learner uses language, particularly in speaking, he feels and sees for himself that he is able to use the language...while doing a formal test, however, that feeling might not be perceptible to the learner!" (Teacher 7).*

*"The informal formative assessment method would enhance students' ability to practice the language freely since it leaves the door open to improve their language with no hesitation, fear or anxiety" (Teacher 3).*

### ***Increasing motivation to learn***

*“Informal formative assessment gives the students a chance to use the language...which boosts their motivation toward learning English” (Teacher 5).*

*“I believe this is a good way of giving students a push to learn...Asking them and interacting with them in an open and friendly way will motivate them to participate with you and your students” (Teacher 3).*

### ***Suitable for communicative approach in teaching***

*“It is the best technique to implement the communicative approach” (Teacher 9).*

The above themes give a rationalisation for employing informal formative assessment. Teachers’ responses indicate that this type of assessment is not purely grading, but it also integrates with both the teaching and learning process. It appears to be more constructive than formal assessment since it is aimed at adjusting teaching and learning to meet students’ needs (Black & William, 1998). However, assessing students’ progress entails a combination of the two approaches, formal and informal, to maximise the validity of the assessment. The language in itself requires such a combination especially when a course syllabus is designed around productive skills such as writing and speaking, as in the case of the ESP syllabus in CTI.

## 4.2- Feedback

### 4.2.1 Timing of Feedback

Both feedback and assessment are closely interconnected to each other as the nature of the assessment can influence the way the feedback is delivered. The summary of the literature indicates that feedback needs to be “timely, constructive and regenerative” (Chance, 1997:6). According to Higgins et al. (2002), feedback

needs to be timely, otherwise students may become unwilling to engage in the process of feedback and therefore allocate little opportunity to take part in reflection.

The analysis of data, as in Table 4 below, reveals an existent disinclination from the teachers to provide immediate feedback to the students when they are assessed, despite the fact that the vast majority of the students (94.7%) are looking for an immediate feedback after each sort of assessment being applied. Surprisingly, over 91% of the teachers (as shown in Graph 1 above) prefer informal assessment, which in itself requires continuous and immediate feedback because it occurs regularly, but when it comes to providing feedback only 45.5% of them say they are “always” committed to giving feedback to students. The interpretation here is that informal formative assessment is approached without immediate feedback. This, in sequence, will decrease the expected effectiveness of this type of assessment as its value is mainly based on the delivering of the immediate feedback (Heller, 2004 and Irons, 2008). Additionally, the lack of immediacy of the feedback can demotivate students and lead to “ineffective learning” (McDowell, 1995:419).

**Table 4 The participants’ attitudes toward the immediacy of feedback**

<b>Teachers’ commitment to provide an immediate feedback</b>	No. of responses	Percent
Always	5	45.5%
Sometimes	5	45.5%
Rarely	1	9%
Total	11	100%
<b>Students’ desire to get an immediate feedback</b>		
Always	36	94.7%
Sometimes	2	5.3%
Rarely	None	None
Total	38	100%

The problematic issue here is that there is a huge demand and willingness from the students to get feedback, with little commitment from the teachers to do so. It is to be noticed that students who are assessed without getting feedback at all (as one of the teachers indicates) may become unenthusiastic in learning. The case will also be somewhat the same in deferred feedback. The situation becomes worse for low achievers who actually need immediate feedback to modify their learning (Crooks,

1988). The longer the students wait for feedback, the lesser they benefit from it. Therefore, feedback must be timely to be more effective.

#### 4.2.2- Oral and Written

In Table 5, participants respond to the appropriate way the feedback should be delivered: written or oral. The table reveals a huge gap between the participants. Most teachers state that they always deliver the feedback orally. In contrast, only 15.8 % of the students prefer the feedback to be oral.

**Table 5 Participants’ perceptions toward feedback types:**

Feedback Type	Teachers		Students	
	No. of responses	Percent	No. of responses	Percent
Oral	8	73%	6	15.8%
Written	3	27%	32	84.2%
Total	11	100%	38	100%

The results of this table tell us how the nature of the assessment may affect the manner of approaching the feedback. For instance, the overall number of teachers who exploit informal assessment (10 teachers as in Graph 1) is almost equivalent to those who prefer oral feedback to written (8 teachers as in Table 5). The relation between informal assessment and oral feedback is that this assessment is ongoing during the instructional process and normally takes place more than formal does. Thus, oral feedback seems to be more suitable in the situation of informal assessment as written feedback may be time consuming and burden the teacher load. Surprisingly, the case is the same for the students, who are in the state of benefiting from, not designing feedback; 28 of the supporters of formal assessment (32 students as in Graph 1) are looking for written feedback whilst the rest (4) prefer oral feedback. To sum up, the participants, either teachers or students, link oral feedback with informal assessment, and written feedback with formal assessment.

As indicated earlier, most of the students prefer written feedback and this preference is based on some of their own perceptions. The most common issues raised in their answers are grouped and presented thematically with example(s) as follows:

***Written feedback is more informative:***

*“The teacher in oral feedback is more lenient and does not provide as many of accurate and supportive comments as in written feedback” (Student31).*

***Written feedback is suitable for future learning:***

*“I can look at it many times in the future” (Student 4).*

*“Stick in my mind for a long time and easy to remember” (Student 18).*

*“Written feedback is unforgettable and I can keep it with me” (Student 12).*

***Written feedback is appropriate for incompetent students who could not fully understand spoken English:***

*“I like written feedback. Oral feedback is implemented quickly so I could not understand fast speaking” (Student 23).*

***Written feedback is suitable for students who have a fear of speaking and have performance anxiety or speech phobia:***

*“It is better since oral feedback takes place in front of the class where I feel too shy to participate” (Student 9).*

*“I am a bit worried about discussing my mistakes with my teacher orally in the class” (Student 3).*

On the other hand, students who prefer oral feedback justify their answers by arguing that such feedback is vital to understanding their weaknesses in depth. Moreover, they believe that oral feedback promotes negotiation and the use of language. They also allude to the role that oral feedback may play in enhancing their speaking in English as well as becoming more confident learners as shown in the following quotes:

*“In oral feedback, I can recognise my mistakes clearly by asking the teacher to explain them many times” (Student 10).*

*“I can speak English while I am discussing my feedback with teachers” (Student 28).*

*“Oral feedback helps me to become a good English speaker” (Student 16).*

*“For me, oral feedback is the best..... as I can clarify my strengths to the teacher” (Student 13).*

The above discussion calls attention to the weak tendency among students toward oral feedback, though the majority of teachers implement this feedback. The strong trend from the students to written feedback does not give it the ultimate perfectionism or the preference to the oral feedback since the implications of both types rely on other variables that determine their appropriateness and usefulness to the students. These variables are: the nature of assessment (formal or informal), the number of students in the class, and teaching load (Irons, 2008).

The current situations in CTI indicate that most ESP teachers implement informal assessment (as in Graph 1) and the number of students in the class is not more than fifteen (based on the researcher’s own observation). Hence, oral feedback, with respect to student's opinions, seems to be the more appropriate one since it would intensify the negotiation of meaning between them and their teachers as well as the personalised support that they may not obtain in written feedback. Furthermore, this type of feedback is more advantageous as it “invites the student to engage in dialogue” (Heller, 2004:116). If we hypothesise that learning and acquiring the language originate principally from verbal interaction (as indicated by Teacher 2 in section 4.1.2), oral feedback will be the best contributor in this regard, as it is interactive-based. There are two forms of oral feedback that will be highlighted in section 4.2.3.

Written feedback, nevertheless, should not be entirely ignored in view of the fact that it has some beneficial characteristics as indicated by Students 4 and 12 earlier on. Additionally, in the context of employing subjective tests that mainly examine

students' ability in some of the mechanical elements of the language such as spelling and punctuation, this kind of feedback is supposed to be the more presented and attached student's work. To do so, the student can easily know the exact location of the mistakes in the target context, and then become aware of not making the same mistakes in similar situations. It also has a significant advantage in that students can refer to it over and over again in the future since in oral feedback students may forget what the teacher was saying.

#### 4.2.3- Public and Individual

There are two main forms of oral feedback: direct (addressed to the students individually) and indirect (given publicly to the whole class). Table 6 shows participants' views toward public and individual feedback. The results reveal that students are a bit more eager to have an individual feedback than teachers are. The overall percentage of students who seek individual feedback is almost 65%, while 45% of the teachers do apply this type of feedback in their own contexts.

**Table 6 Participants' perceptions toward feedback forms**

Feedback Forms	Teachers		Students	
	No. of responses	Percent	No. of responses	Percent
Individual	5	45.5%	25	65.8%
Public	6	54.5%	13	34.2%
Total	11	100%	38	100%

The divergence among the participants may be due the fact that students do not like their own mistakes to be publicly shown to their classmates as this would have a negative effect on their self-esteem. Teachers, on the other hand, may employ this form of feedback (the individual one) to clarify each student's weakness in a more specific and deep way. The practicality of this form of feedback in ESP is based on some contextualised circumstances such as the frequency of the error (individual, not very common), the number of students in the class (not too many) and teaching load (not too heavy). These circumstances, however, are the main drivers for employing public feedback; the higher the number of the students, the higher the

necessity for public feedback, and the less common the mistakes, the less the need for such feedback.

Although individual feedback can contribute to a deep understanding of someone's weakness, give the students personalised support from the teacher and guarantee a high level of confidentiality, public feedback seems to have its own benefits that make it superior especially in the discipline of ESP. The most important advantage of this form of feedback is the engagement of students into open discussion as well as practising cooperation and communication skills in the class. If the students have difficulty in a certain aspect of the language, say writing an academic composition, they can learn from group members and get advice from their teacher as well. Since students' individual needs are normally met by informal discussion (Orsmond et al. 2002), public feedback appears to be the best form of feedback in this regard. It is usually characterised by "lack of formality" in addition to the friendlier atmosphere that may exist in such a form of feedback.

Generally speaking, the emphasis of <sup>3</sup> feedback, either given publicly or individually, should address students' limitations or performance rather than their personality. In a situation of applying public feedback in ESP, teachers need to be aware of not comparing the student's performance to that of others in a competitive way, as students who perform inadequately or imperfectly will tend to attribute their weakness to lack of capability in the language, and consequently expect "to perform weakly in the future and demonstrate decreased motivation on subsequent tasks" (Shute, 2008:167).

#### 4.2.4- Methods of Giving Feedback

Feedback in the previous sections has been discussed in terms of its types and how it is approached in the discipline of ESP. Here, the primary focus will be on the content of the feedback, whether it is formative or summative-based. It has been argued in the literature that formative feedback is concerned with future development of students while summative feedback simply summarises the final judgement of students' work without deep clarification, i.e., focus on marks and grades. We also

have seen the strong adherence of formative feedback to formative assessment; nevertheless, such feedback can take place in summative assessment.

Open and closed questions were carried out to ascertain the purpose and message of feedback the participants normally espouse in CTI. The qualitative analysis of the results from the teachers' responses shows that formative feedback is highly implemented. This feedback is employed for different functions. However, some teachers combine formative purposes with summative ones. For instance, they divided the process of delivering feedback into two stages; the first emphasises grades and marks (summative purposes) and the latter emphasises future developments and suggestions (formative purposes) that students should be aware of as exemplified in the following quotes. More surprisingly, the students' marks are sometimes provided in front of the class while their areas of progress are dealt with individually as argued by Teacher 1.

*"First tell him what's his marks are in front of others, but keep the weakness points confident, and from time to time give him an update" (Teacher 1).*

*"I usually tend to inform my students about their grades publicly and then discuss each student's weaknesses and strengths individually" (Teacher 3).*

In general, the role of teachers can broadly be defined as "working to reduce the rate of error production in trial and error learning and thereby to make learning more efficient" (Sadler, 1998:78). To achieve this, teachers have to understand individuals' needs as well as subject knowledge (Black and William, 1998). In the current study, teachers have acknowledged Black and William's concerns when they implemented feedback, i.e., situated feedback in a focused and repetitive manner that seems to be appropriate to their students' needs and the target examined skill as indicated by the following teachers:

*"I try to get their information without making them feel shy; I ask each one individually in front of the class and encourage them by saying we are trying to learn English together and there is no need to be shy" (Teacher 4).*

*“I talk to students about the most frequent mistakes they make on the exam or quiz, and have them re-do that part correctly and draw their attention to this particular rule so that they don't repeat the same mistakes” (Teacher 2).*

*“Prescribe the correct answers and then asking a repetition in case of speaking exam” (Teacher 6).*

It was revealed earlier on how the nature of assessment can have an effect on feedback types (see section 4.1.2 and 4.2.2). Here, also the content of feedback is affected by the assessment type as shown by the following quote:

*“For formal tests, the student's paper is marked and short comments might also be provided. For informal tests, short comments might be given, usually publicly, focusing on learner's strengths” (Teacher 7).*

According to the current study, the implementation of formative feedback has four main functions that indicate the extent to which such feedback could be considered as a useful contributor to the learning process. These are categorised as follows:

- a. formative feedback is used to promote class discussion;
- b. formative feedback leads to feedforward (addresses students’ future learning);
- c. formative feedback encourages co-operative learning;
- d. formative feedback neither criticises nor over praises, and deals with weakness objectively without referring to personal traits.

**Table 7 The participants’ perceptions toward feedback content**

Feedback focus	<i>Teachers</i>		<i>Students</i>	
	No. of responses	Percent	No. of responses	Percent
Weaknesses	9	81.8%	4	11%
Strengths	1	9%	20	53%
A combination of both	1	9%	14	37%
Total	11	100%	38	100%

However, if we look at the teachers’ perceptions toward the content of feedback, as in Table 7, the predominant focus of teacher feedback is on students’

weaknesses (9 teachers) while only one teacher addresses both weaknesses and strengths in providing feedback. Such extensive dominance on students' weakness, rather than a combination of both weak and strong points or even just strengths, gives an indication that teachers do not seem to practise what they believe since the above analysis suggests that they are aware of the significance to offer a rational balance of negative and positive comments. Students need to be acquainted with their weaknesses and strengths to be clear about their limitations and improvement. The reason behind such a mismatch can be described by the "error-focused approach" (Lee, 2008:5) to feedback, which certainly draws teachers' attention to students' weaknesses rather than strengths in applying feedback (ibid. 5).

Unsurprisingly, students do not like their feedback to be focused on their limitations; only 4 students (11%) like it to focus on their weaknesses while 20 (53%) prefer it to focus on strengths and the rest (14; 37%) want feedback to underline their weaknesses and strengths simultaneously. The review of the research into students' perceptions of feedback they get indicates that the most important thing for them is to recognise what to do next time in order to gain better results. This is why most of the students like their feedback either to address their strengths alone, or to address their strengths in conjunction with weaknesses instead of focusing only on their weak points as their teachers mostly prefer to do.

#### 4.2.5- The Role of Feedback in ESP Learning

This study has not endeavoured to measure learning, but reports the participants' perceptions of how feedback can help in ESP learning. However, there are some constraints, which may limit the usability and practicability of approaching an effective feedback (as we will see later). As indicated earlier on, formative feedback was seen as the most dominant type of feedback among the ESP teachers in CTI. This, in turn, has some consequences not only on students' learning, but also on the whole instructional process. These consequences are classified as positive or negative according to the manners of approaching feedback and its usage.

This study reveals positive findings on the role of feedback on learning process dissimilar to Maclellen (2001) who concludes that 63% of lecturers responded that feedback promotes discussion between teacher and student whereas only 2% of students reported positively to this question, and 50% of students indicated that feedback never promotes discussion at all. The quantitative analysis of the students' responses to the open question (the advantages and disadvantages of feedback to their learning) shows that: feedback has no disadvantages at all (28 students), feedback has both advantages and disadvantages (7 students) and the rest (3) argue that feedback has no advantages at all. The analysis of the teachers' responses also shows a great consensus among the teachers on how formative feedback could have an influence on both learning and teaching. However, they have raised some concerns that may come across when applying an effective feedback to their students. The following patterns address the main perceived advantages of feedback from teachers' and students' standpoints.

**Table 8 The participants' open-question responses**

Participants' open-question responses to the advantages of feedback

<i>Teachers</i> <i>Perceived advantages of feedback (pa)</i>		<i>Students</i> <i>Perceived advantages of feedback (pa)</i>	
pa1	"Following the students' progress in English"	pa1	"It helps me to become a confident learner"
pa2	"Standardizing and arranging the learning process"	pa2	"Improve my English knowledge"
pa3	"Observing the effectiveness of teaching methods employed"	pa3	"I can learn English rapidly"
pa4	"Better screening of language acquisition"	pa4	"A useful tool for improvement"
pa5	"Pinpointing what is right and what is wrong"	pa5	"Build a strong relationship between me and my teacher"
pa6	"Avoiding future mistakes"	pa6	"Revise my mistakes and make corrections"
pa7	"Improve students' performance when he knows his weaknesses and strengths"	pa7	"Not to make the same mistakes again"
pa8	"Keep your information updated about your students"	pa8	"I can speak English quickly"
pa9	"Diagnostic process of both teaching and learning"	pa9	"I become motivated to learn English"
pa10	"Draw students' attention to their progress"		
pa11	"Shows where the learner stands in the road of learning"		

In order to meaningfully analyse the above responses, the researcher rearranged participants' related response patterns into larger categories labelled as "Teachers' Perceived Advantages" (Table 9) and "Students' Perceived Advantages" (Table 10). The number of responses in both tables does not only represent the total number of the illustrated quotes in Table 8 for each pattern type, but also includes all the participants' responses that are classified to be closely relevant to each perceived advantage.

**Table 9 The teachers' perceived advantages of feedback**

Teachers' patterns rearranged into larger categories under "Perceived Advantages"

Perceived Advantages of feedback	Pattern type	No. of responses
Leading to Feedforward	pa6, pa7, pa8	5
Diagnosing learning strategies	pa1, pa2, pa9	4
Modifying the applied teaching methods	pa3	2
Clarifying students' progress	pa5, pa10, pa11	4
Total responses		15

**Table 10 The students' perceived advantages of feedback**

Students' patterns arranged into larger categories under "Perceived Advantages"

Perceived Advantages of feedback	Pattern type	No. of responses
Enhancing linguistic knowledge in English	pa2, pa8	7
Raising students' self-esteem to learn	pa1, pa5, pa9	9
Contributing to steps forward	pa3, pa4, pa6, pa7	16
Total responses		32

The above tables reveal the important roles that formative feedback could play in the discipline of ESP. It is to be noticed that such feedback is not only a reflection of what has or has not been achieved in a certain exam, but its role extends to take account of other variables such as the learning and teaching process, students' behaviour, language proficiency and future learning. Also, the definite presence and effect of formative feedback is mostly taking place in students' learning and seems to be more influential than that of teaching. For instance, most of the teachers' perceived advantages address students and student learning with little emphasis on how to adapt and adjust the applied instructional methods to cope with students' level; only two of the responses (as in Table 9) respond to this concern.

The findings of the current study, as presented in Table 10, confirm the recent hypothetical perspectives that claim that formative feedback can “accelerate students learning” (Irons, 2008: 7) and “increase student knowledge, skills, and understanding in some content area or general skill” (Shute, 2008:156). This is because formative feedback is not merely a quantity of verbal or written comments on students’ progress, but it also requires them to take various actions such as initiating a dialogue, asking teachers for more clarifications about their weakness to be avoided in the future, and using the language for different situations besides expressing their personal feelings. Such actions may contribute to a better learning environment and make students learn the language rapidly.

However, if the teachers do not approach feedback formatively and prevent students from acting on it, this would have negative consequences on students’ learning (Bangert-Drowns et al., 1991). In the current study, almost 3% of the students claim that formative feedback is not truly beneficial to them. The interpretation here is that teachers are not always committed to providing real formative feedback. For instance, teachers may give feedback that is overly critical of the students’ work as stated by four students. This, in turn, will not serve any constructive function and “can be very demotivating for students” (Irons, 2008: 84).

The students’ negative attitudes toward feedback might also be attributed to their passive usage of the delivered feedback. They may be given formative feedback but are reluctant to play their anticipated role, as adult college students, in terms of considering feedback as a contributor to their future success. Brookheart (2001) noted that successful students do utilise feedback and actively act on it through self-assessing in order to learn and direct their future learning. In contrast, some students may misunderstand the real concept of feedback and perceive it as merely a judgement rather than a useful tool to a better learning. This can be exemplified by one of the teachers’ responses: “students would not understand the concept „we learn from our mistakes”” (Teacher 9). The current study, therefore, supports Sadler (1998) who suggests students to be taught on how to use feedback properly to increase its positive effects. For instance, students should be told to not concentrate on their previous mistakes, but focus on how to overcome them later (feedforward).

Although the vast majority of the students agree upon the necessity of feedback to their learning, some of them raise a number of issues on the subject of applying effective feedback. They believe that feedback should be characterised by some features to be considered as useful formative feedback. These features are summarised as follows:

- a. feedback should not heavily focus on weaknesses, but on strengths;
- b. feedback should not address their characteristics, but the task;
- c. feedback should not over critical;
- d. feedback should not have provocative comments especially when the feedback is oral and delivered publicly.

This study encounters some constraints that may affect delivering effective formative feedback. These constraints are analysed and then sorted into the following categories:

**1: Student readiness:**

*“Students may not always be ready to cope with this type of feedback” (Teacher 6).*

**2: Teacher load and class size:**

*“It puts an extra burden on the shoulders of teachers” (Teacher 9).*

*“It requires more effort especially with big classes” (Teacher 2).*

**3: Time factor:**

*“It is a time consuming process” (Teacher 3).*

*“Needs a lot of time and effort” (Teacher 1).*

**4: Misunderstanding formative feedback:**

*“The learning process becomes dull and not creative” (Teacher 9).*

*“Might hinder learner's motivation if given publicly” (Teacher 7).*

The above categories can be classified into two major types. The first categories 1 and 4 includes some constraints that appear to be easier to cope with than those of the second type categories 2 and 3, as the latter has constraints that always coincided with applying formative feedback in most of the teaching situations. This is exemplified by Irons (2008) who argues that formative feedback is time consuming and is a burden on teaching load and “there is no way of avoiding this situation” (p.72).

There are three teachers who state that students in general are not always willing to have formative feedback and their unwillingness reduces the effectiveness of employing such feedback. Nevertheless, most of the students, as indicated earlier in section 4.2.1, are eager to get their feedback immediately after their work or exam is completed, and this to some extent is an indicator of the higher level of readiness that the students may have. Thus, claiming that students are not ready to get formative feedback is arguable. On the other hand, even if we presume that students sometimes lack the required readiness, it is the teacher's responsibility to prepare and educate his students about the necessity of this type of feedback.

As indicated by Teacher 9 and 7 in category 4, there are some misconceptions among teachers about the precise role of formative feedback. In both theory and practice, formative feedback is seen as a contributor and motivator to both learning and teaching. During students' learning, it enlightens them about what they have or have not mastered and what they need to do to be good learners in the future. In the teaching process, formative feedback can also show the teachers the extent to which the applied instructional methods are (or are not) effective based on their students' outcomes. Formative feedback would not be affected by the way of approaching it since its 'formative purposes' can be obtained whether it is delivered publicly or individually. Therefore, observing formative feedback as "hindering the learner's motivation if given publicly" (Teacher 7) may be due to other types of feedback; for example, critical feedback or the one that focuses on students' personal traits rather than achievement of the tasks.

There is no doubt that formative feedback is a dynamic process which, in turn, requires additional effort and time from the teachers. In other words, it is time consuming and may burden the teacher's load. These two concerns are raised by almost eight teachers (73%) as the two main disadvantages of applying this type of feedback to their teaching contexts. Such concerns are normally increased and become real obstacles in a big class as indicated by two of the teachers in this study. Additionally and more surprisingly, three of the students also stress that formative feedback may add extra weight to their teacher's load. The teachers, however, can provide formative feedback without taking excessive amounts of time. Possibly the most constructive and biggest time saving technique is getting students to participate

in peer feedback and engaging in self-reflections. This technique may enhance students' critical ability as they share their thoughts freely in a less formal situation with their peers, bearing in mind that peer feedback should be followed by teacher feedback to correct and guide students to the targeted development.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

The current study has chiefly addressed the types of both formative assessment and feedback in the discipline of ESP in terms of their diversity, suitability and usefulness to both the learning and teaching process. As summative assessment only takes place once (or a maximum of twice) a term, it cannot provide useful information for teachers on the subject areas that students find difficult or have experienced difficulties with. Interestingly, most of the ESP teachers in CTI overcome such concern by aligning summative assessment with formative. This alignment could contribute to the comprehensibility and validity of the assessing process as well as assuring helpful washback on the students' learning since the students are exposed to such a variety of assessment techniques.

Informal formative assessment seems to be the most preferred type of formative assessment among ESP teachers; nevertheless, the students are not eager to have this assessment, as most of them prefer the formal one. This preference to formal assessment is attributed to some factors such as students' previous familiarity with this type of assessment in their early stages, the lack of language competency needed for such assessment, and motivational factors, particularly intrinsic, to be highly engaged in this ongoing evaluation. The nature of assessment, either formal or informal, affects the way feedback is delivered. Formal assessment coincides more with written feedback whereas informal assessment coincides with oral feedback.

Both formative assessment and formative feedback can be used to reinforce good teaching and learning practices or can be used as a base for adjusting an existing practice. When formative activities--both formative assessment and formative feedback--are addressed constructively, there can be positive impacts on boosting students' egos and motivation to learn English. Additionally, this may lead to an immediate change in teaching process as both can show the effect of the applied

teaching methods and modify them to cope with their students' current level. However, these formative activities do not profoundly influence the teachers in this study as most of them are reluctant to adopt any amendments to their applied teaching techniques in this regard. Finally, the role of formative feedback in ESP appears to be a very influential learning tool when it is utilised appropriately and can act as a focus for dialogue between the students and teachers and between the students themselves. However, the guarantee of providing an effective formative feedback is based on some external circumstances such as class size, teaching load, nature of assessment and students' readiness and motivation.

## 5.2 Recommendations

In this chapter, the researcher has proposed several recommendations that are aimed at improving the existing assessment scheme in CTI and raising the awareness of the ESP teachers on how to provide a systematic feedback to the students in the discipline of ESP. As the current study is mainly scrutinising participants' perceptions and experiences on how they employ and observe assessment and feedback in a particular context (CTI), the recommendations drawn from this research are not considered to be generalised and applicable to other disciplines. Cohen et al. (2006) argue that in studying the case of each individual experience or data collected from a very specific group, generalisability is compromised and therefore, findings cannot be applied to other populations. There are eight suggested recommendations in this study, as follows:

1. Practically speaking, there is not much conflict between summative purposes and formative purposes in terms of assessing student progress in ESP. Thus, the notion of aligning summative assessment with formative is workable and to some extent effective. However, formative assessment, either formal or informal, should be the dominating type because of the constructive benefits that this assessment could have on both the learning and teaching process. The proposed model, therefore, for assessing ESP in CTI: 70% of the course marks should be allocated to formative assessments;

for example, short quizzes, group work and class participation or presentation whilst 30% should be allocated to one summative exam, which occurs at the end of the course, when the ultimate aim is to cover all the course parts in one comprehensive exam.

2. Informal formative assessment seems to be more influential to students' learning and teaching mechanism than formal formative assessment is. For instance, it can increase language usage through peer and group interaction, promote students' motivation, engage students in the learning process, and encourage teachers to adopt new teaching methods compatible with their students' level. But, formal assessment normally emphasises the instrumental drivers such as grades or marks rather than student progress. Hence, informal assessment should be intensively applied as a main assessment tool since it also can fit with assessing both productive skills--writing and speaking, which are the core skills of the ESP syllabus in CTI.
3. If the teachers presume that informal assessment is a useful device for their students, they need to provide an immediate feedback to maximise the anticipated usefulness of such assessment. The reluctance of not giving "on time -feedback" not only on informal assessment but also on any sort of assessment, may reduce the effectiveness of the assessment as well as make students demotivated to learn from their errors or recognise their strengths to be pursued and developed in their future learning.
4. It is to be noticed that oral feedback is suitable for informal assessment where brevity and immediacy are the priority, and written feedback for formal assessment where the further clarification of the students' progress is enormously required. Thus, the teachers need to be acquainted with this relation and base the type of feedback on the nature of assessment. However, oral feedback should be to some extent the more commonly used type as it may provide students with personalised support and encourage them to use the language communicatively.

5. The need for individual or public feedback is determined by some circumstances as discussed in 4.2.3. Individual feedback usually fits with individual mistakes and small classes. It also provides one-on-one communication between the teacher and student. Public feedback, on the other hand, may have some attributes that make it more influential to the students' learning than that of the individual feedback, such as promoting class interaction and making students learn from their peers through peer feedback.
6. Summative feedback gives the students only the final judgement of their progress in a form of grades and marks rather than detailed clarifications, so the teachers should entirely replace it with formative feedback. Formative feedback is very constructive to students' learning since it informs them of what they have achieved and where their performance can be enhanced in the future, bearing in mind that feedback content needs to address both strengths and weaknesses, as the excessive focus on only one aspect may reduce its effectiveness on students' behaviour. However, stressing the strong points of students' work seems to be a bit encouraging especially for low achievers, as this may enhance their motivation and confidence in the subsequent stages of their learning.
7. The role of the teacher should not be seen as only a supplier of the feedback, but extend to educate students on how to consume and benefit from feedback. For instance, raising students' awareness to not be fully concerned about their mistakes as learning the language is based on trial and error, and engaging students in peer and group-correction techniques to encourage them to share their thoughts in a collaborative and interactive way of correcting. In order to maximise the usefulness of formative feedback and avoid harming students' personal traits, teachers also have to carry out feedforward. It is aimed at preparing students for future developments by: a) not largely focusing on their previous mistakes and b) addressing students' performance rather than themselves or their characteristics.

8. Applying an effective feedback is always faced by two main challenges; it is time-consuming and is an additional burden on the teacher's load. However, the teachers can adopt some techniques that may sort out such challenges. For example, public, oral and peer feedback are likely to be the three most beneficial types of feedback in this regard as they fit with big class size, very common mistakes and overloaded teachers.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Teacher Questionnaire

**University of Glasgow**

**Faculty of education**

**Master of Education**

**English Language Teaching**

**Khaloufa Dhafer S Alshehri**

**0700505a@student.gla.ac.uk**

**Research title:** Teachers' and students' attitudes toward formative assessment and feedback in teaching English for specific purposes ESP.

**Dear colleague,** kindly answer the following questionnaire as a part of a study aims at investigating students and teachers perceptions toward assessment and feedback in the discipline of ESP. The questions are preceded by some definitions of the terms in order that may help you answering them easily and aptly.

#### **Assure confidentiality**

All information, which is collected, about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will be identified by an ID number and any information about you will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.

#### **Terms and definitions:**

**Summative assessment:** used to measure what students have achieved at the end of a course or programme. It occurs once or maximum twice a term.

**Formative assessment:** short exams and continuous evaluation given regularly throughout the instructional process and can be applied formally or informally.

**Formal formative assessments:** written exams applied under restricted and timed conditions.

**Informal formative assessments:** assessing students by observing their oral progress throughout the course orally: interact with them, ask them to make short presentation.

**Formative feedback:** inform students of where and how their learning and performance can be improved.

Answer the following questions by choosing one answer.

1- The most useful technique of assessing students' progress is by:

- a- formative assessment
- b- summative assessment
- c- a combination of both

2- Formative assessment, either formal or informal, is superior to summative assessment in terms of enhancing students' mastery in language proficiency:

- a- agree
- b- slightly agree
- c- disagree

3- The most effective type of formative assessments in terms of boosting students' motivation toward learning English is: (see the definition of formal and informal formative assessments above)

- a- formal
- b- informal

*Can you please justify?* .....

.....

.....

4- Students are provided with feedback in applying any form of assessments:

- a- always
- b- sometimes
- c- rarely

5- Feedback is always given:

- a- orally
- b- written

6- Students get their feedback:

- a- individually
- b- publicly

7- Feedback mainly focuses on:

- a- students' weaknesses
- b- students' strengths
- c- a combination of both

8- Can you explain how do you normally give your students feedback?

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

9- What are the main advantages and disadvantages of formative feedback?

Advantages (if any):

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

Disadvantages (if any):

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

---

Thank you very much indeed for giving me your valuable time.

Appendix B: Student Questionnaire in Arabic

University of Glasgow  
Faculty of education  
Master of Education  
English Language Teaching  
Khaloufa Dhafer S Alshehri  
0700505a@student.gla.ac.uk

عض أظن طلبت:  
السلام عن أس ح خ . تشمبر  
ث عذ/

فأب أحدى طلاءة ايح عي . ايئش طيبى ي حصه عي دس خ اي بسخ زئش ف زئس سري بي غخ  
الانجطن خ مي ايئش ثخ فخب ع خ لاسق . قى ح بى بشناس خ رز شوع خ رخب د  
سجف داي طلاءة افس س . حه رطج ق الاغيسا دوصش ح ايس زش حثب لإضافة اى اى خ  
اعطباض غرثاى اخ عخ يز الاغيسا د اى اذ ق دس زافر طشاى عي خاى زئس ح خ  
وزئس س بسج عي غخ الانجطن خيم غ خ خصص خ .

ح ت ال أحدى طلاءة عي . ق عي . الاغيسا ف . زاميداس خ , أس خاى زن ثثب لإجته عي  
زا الاسج بوب فى ل . أ خ شح ف ب ب ص زاي ح ح . ع ل احظة لسلى بيخ ط شفق خ  
غب خ فلى سى خ موب . طي ة ل اى ع ع س الك صر شح خ ض ع ه ح ه  
الجب خاى زئش إبسج خ . ع عي ال غش يض ثثب خ اس ل م ب أجب زلى رس زخ ذ إلا  
لأش اضاي ح ح اى ع في ق ط .

ى لخص وثقن شور فيب ,,,,,,,,,,

لجب حث  
خيف ظفب شرس ع د اى عئش ايش ش  
خب ع خ خ لاسق

تش طَبَّ

عضضای طبى دتوز عقب زهای خ قوسب عذک عى الإجناخ عى الأیخ طى شوقخ ف.زا  
الاسنچبُ:

الاخیسایزد عغیح ذ: هو الخیس ای زطجق ف.بُخیزش ایس اس.ح \* خ ع  
ای حذا دایس ایس خ.

افق \*س رش: رُق \*لای لثأبءث عذم و فحس ایس خ \* ن \* زك إخذ یطشوق ز  
زهای ز:

اغزج بسا نزهتخ حذح ق ذص .ع \*

• رُق \*س زش لأطئ ل خ لثأبءث بس م خ یس شح بیخ ای ش ف خ س قعش ذخ ع طش ق  
رقد ح بدت خ قوص شح الی ع وای دب ع دال هوف ص و.

افغ خ لثأبءث ع ع: جبع ح ع ریلج فحش صی طبى تی ع ش فب لایم \* خ ف . الاخیس ا د  
ص ح ی اضطی ب ث ع \* اش ی ا \* سر \* تم \* خ ب ق ق ص ح ی ی برام \* خ ل .

اس ولة:

### 1- أفضل طريقة للتقويم هي عن طريق:

أ) د ع خ . ز الخیس اذ عقص شح س اوح ش شخ أ شوق ثض لایفخ ای رُق \*س الأیورای ج .  
ع یاقق ای سرش.

ب) الخیس سرش ش (أخذ) أنك ثبی ح ذ الی (ش ب وید ع خ ب لای ج .

ج) خ ع برق د.

### 2- أرغب أن يكون التقويم:

أ) د ع خ . الاخیس اذ ح ش ش خ ع ق ص ح فوقظ.

ب) رُق \*س الأیورای سرش ش ای ج ع فایب عواقب ش داخ وای ص و.

### 3- أرغب في الحصول على تغذية راجعة بعد كل عملية تقويم شفوية أو تحريرية.

أ) طب

ب) طب

ج) بسا

4- أرغب أن تكون التغذية الراجعة:

أ) حشيش (إطيرة عيقب بيزبث ح ع يئق قح بئزلث عذرح ح ح) (شوف ح ) (إطيرة عيقب د شوف ح ) إى ع ي ح ه س زرحي ل ف . (الخبس)  
ب) الأجب هى زاع زند عي ب ف. الخيس ك:

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

5- أرغب أن تكون التغذية الراجعة:

أ) فش د ح  
ة) إباى طلا ة

6- أرغب أن تكون التغذية الراجعة ( سواء التحريية أو الشفمية) تركز بشكل أساسى على:

أ) ب طامض عفاق صس فو الخيس ك ف ح تلاف ب و ز الأظباء سرق بلا  
ة) ق طاق ح الإجتب داص ح ح اى ز. أذضرب ف. زارا الخيس  
ج) خ ع برق د

7- من وجهة نظرك: هل هناك أي عيوب أو مزايا للتغذية الراجعة من حيث تأثيرها على مستواك العلمى أو على رغبتك فى التعلم:

س ي ج ب طاقى غز ح ل ا خ ع خ) إ ح ذ)	ض ا ب ا قى غز ح ل ا خ ع خ) إ ح ذ)
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.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....

وشكر جزيلا ك اخي لطلب على تيعونك



## Appendix C: Student Questionnaire in English

**University of Glasgow**

**Faculty of education**

**Master of Education**

**English Language Teaching**

**Khaloufa Dhafer S Alshehri**

**0700505a@student.gla.ac.uk**

**Research title:** Teachers' and students' attitudes toward formative assessment and feedback in teaching English for specific purposes ESP.

**Dear student,** kindly answer the following questionnaire as a part of a study aims at investigating students and teachers perceptions toward assessment and feedback in the discipline of ESP. The questions are preceded by some definitions of the terms in order that may help you answering them easily and aptly.

### **Assure confidentiality**

All information, which is collected, about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will be identified by an ID number and any information about you will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.

### **Terms and definitions:**

**Summative assessment:** used to measure what students have achieved at the end of a course or programme. It occurs once or maximum twice a term.

**Formative assessment:** short exams and continuous evaluation given regularly throughout the instructional process and can be applied formally or informally.

**Formal formative assessments:** written exams applied under restricted and timed conditions.

**Informal formative assessments:** assessing students by observing their oral progress throughout the course orally: interact with them, ask them to make short presentation.

**Formative feedback:** inform students of where and how their learning and performance can be improved.

Answer the following questions by choosing one answer.

1- The most useful technique of assessing students is by:

- a- formative assessment
- b- summative assessment
- c- a combination of both

2- The most effective type of formative assessments in terms of boosting your motivation toward learning English is: (see the definition of formal and informal formative assessments above)

- a- formal
- b- informal

3- I want to be provided with immediate feedback after any sort of assessment:

- a- always
- b- sometimes
- c- rarely

4- The way you like your feedback is:

- a- written
- b- oral

*Plases provide some reasons for your choice.*

.....

.....

.....

.....

5- How do you like your feedback to be given?

- a- individually
- b- publicly (in front of the class)

6- What do you like feedback to focus on?

- a- on your weaknesses
- b- on your strengths
- c- a combination of both

7- What are the main advantages and disadvantages of formative feedback to your learning?

Advantages (if any):

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.....

Disadvantages (if any):

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

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Thank you very much indeed for giving me your valuable time.

Appendix D: Ethical Approval Form

**UNIVERSITY of GLASGOW**

**Faculty of Education**

**Ethics Committee for Non Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects**

***EAP2 NOTIFICATION OF ETHICS APPLICATION FORM APPROVAL***

**Application No.** (Research Office use only)          E1003 - 3

**Period of Approval** (Research Office use only)      6 May 2008 to 28 August  
2008

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Date: 4 August 2008

Dear Khaloufa

I am writing to confirm to you that your application for ethical approval, reference E1003 for “Teachers' and students' attitudes toward formative assessment and feedback in teaching English for specific purposes ESP”, has been approved.

You should retain this approval notification for future reference. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me in the Research Office and I can refer them to the Faculty’s Ethics Committee

Regards,

Terri Hume

Ethics and Research Secretary