



Exploring Assessment and Feedback Histories, Literacies, and
Intercultural Competence Development: Longitudinal Narratives of
International Postgraduate Students

by

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Abstract

In the highly internationalised context of British higher education, the student body is increasingly diverse. Students enter British universities with different prior experiences; in particular, postgraduate students are likely to have longer histories in diverse HE contexts that shape their academic literacies. Amongst many 'academic literacies', feedback literacy has recently gained importance and attention. In fact, feedback can facilitate student learning and development only when students are able to effectively utilise it to enhance future work and actively participate in feedback processes and dialogues. Within internationalised contexts of higher education, however, feedback processes take place at the intercultural level and can be difficult to navigate. For feedback processes and dialogues to be effective in such circumstances, students might need to develop the ability to effectively and appropriately communicate interculturally. This thesis explores ten international postgraduate taught students' experiences with assessment and feedback practices within the intercultural context of British HE and gathers in-depth insights into the complexity of cultural and contextual factors that might influence their experiences. Through a longitudinal narrative inquiry over a 9-month period of time, this thesis investigates (1) the impact of student histories on their intercultural competence within assessment and feedback contexts, (2) the impact of student assessment and feedback intercultural competence on their feedback literacy development, and (3) the role of dialogic feedback in supporting intercultural competence and feedback literacy development. Narrative interviews and audio diaries are employed as data collection methods; an integration of a two-level narrative and thematic analysis is employed to interpret the data. The findings from multiple interviews and audio diary entries reveal a connection between student assessment and feedback histories, intercultural competence, and development of feedback literacy. Dialogic feedback practices are shown to be fundamental in supporting long-term development of intercultural competence, feedback literacy, and learning. Further research directions and implications for practice are also discussed.

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'Alas! We really do not choose the ending of a journey, especially journeys that transform our lives.'

Fatima Mernissi

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Chapter I - Introduction

1.1 Context and Introduction

The phenomenon of internationalisation of Higher Education (HE) is central and of growing importance to universities in the UK (De Wit, Hunter, Howard, and Egron-Polak, 2015; Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2017) because of the significant rise of mobile student numbers in the past 30 years. The overall number of mobile higher education students worldwide is estimated to have increased by 60% between 1999 and 2005, and by 77.8% from 2005 to 2016 (UNESCO, 2018). According to De Wit (2020), the number of international students has doubled to 5 million in the period 2010-2020. In the UK alone, data retrieved from the report 'Patterns and trends in UK higher education 2018' show that non-home student numbers have increased from 184,220 in the academic year 2007-08 to 235,310 in 2016-17. Higher Education Student Statistics (HESA) reports an increase to 605,130 in 2021-2022. In 2007-08, 14.8% of students in British higher education were from non-UK countries (4.9% from other EU countries and 10.0% from non-EU countries), while in 2016-17, the proportion of non-UK students had increased to 19.1% (5.8% other EU and 13.3% non-EU respectively). In 2016-2017, more than 55% of postgraduate students were international (EU and non-EU). According to HESA (n.d.), between 2019-20 and 2020-21 there was an increase of 48,500 non-UK student enrolments. Most international students were non-EU and higher proportions were enrolled in postgraduate education compared to undergraduate. Further, the Global Student Mobility 2025 report (Böhm et al., 2002) foresees that the demand for international education will have increased to 7.2 million globally by 2025.

The reality of an increasingly diverse student body at UK HE institutions highlights the need for a transformative educational approach that can support the development of individuals' competencies to act effectively and appropriately (both for the self and for the 'other') in international academic environments (De Wit, 1999; Haigh, 2002; Turner and Robson, 2008). Such reality calls for an approach to internationalisation as 'international education and pedagogy' (Deardorff et al., 2012) that is concerned with intercultural learning and fostering international and intercultural academic understanding (Robson, 2011; Teichler, 2017). Extending on Jane Knight's (2008) most commonly accepted definition of internationalisation and building on Hudzik's (2011, 2015) concept of

‘comprehensive internationalisation’, De Wit et al. (2015) promote it as ‘the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society’ (p. 281). Nevertheless, thus far, the main interests behind the rhetoric of internationalisation seem to have been of economical nature, where the focus is on the marketisation of HE and students are perceived as ‘customers’ (Ploner, 2018).

In such intercultural contexts of HE, Leask (2009, 2015) has highlighted the importance of ‘the incorporation of international, intercultural and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods and support services of a program of study’ (Leask, 2015, p. 9). She promotes recognition of student diversity and of the perspectives they bring to the classroom as vital resources for an internationalised curriculum and HE. It follows that university teaching, learning and academic practices need to be re-explored in relation to changing contexts and players, although so far, they have rarely been reconsidered, re-evaluated, or adjusted to incorporate intercultural dimensions (De Vita and Case, 2003; Knight, 2013; Jenkins and Wingate, 2015; Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2017). This seems to reflect the predominant focus of research on international students in new, unfamiliar academic environments. Most research, in fact, tends to recognise and investigate the challenges they face within unfamiliar educational systems (Andrade, 2006, 2009; Pelletier, 2003), but often fails to explore, understand, and address the intercultural nature of such challenges (Wang et al., 2011). The main problem appears to be that international students’ academic and ‘wider’ sociocultural experiences and challenges tend to be considered as two separated issues that manifest independently inside and ‘around but outside’ the unfamiliar academic context (Russell, Rosenthal and Thompson, 2010). Research has often failed to consider that international students’ academic difficulties are of sociocultural nature too, as the cultural values, norms and beliefs that shape academic practices are context- and culture-related (Campbell, 2012; Janjua, Malik and Rahman, 2011). To understand the nature of international students’ experiences with unfamiliar academic practices a sociocultural approach is therefore needed. This research adopts such an approach to take a closer look at international students’ experiences with the academic practices of assessment

and feedback. They are in fact amongst the practices that have not been re-explored within the diverse reality of British HE, although this thesis argues they can be highly unfamiliar and challenging for international students.

Assessment and feedback (A&F) are considered to be social practices that are influenced by cultural, disciplinary, and institutional contexts, and are ‘embedded in the values, relationships and institutional discourses constituting the culture of academic disciplines in higher education’ (Lea and Stierer, 2000, p. 2). Because of such nature, this thesis argues that A&F need to be investigated in relation to the diverse student body in the intercultural context of British HE.

The choice to focus on such practices is also representative of the recent importance attributed to them in the literature. A&F are increasingly considered to have a crucial role in student education, learning and development (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Carless and Boud, 2018), and feedback is recognised to have substantial influence on student achievement (Shute, 2008). However, feedback does not necessarily facilitate learning (Kluger and DeNisi, 1996) unless students are able to effectively utilise it (Winstone et al., 2017). Recent literature has advocated for the need to move our understanding of feedback from a conceptualisation of unidirectional messages sent by providers to the passive student about their assignment performance, towards recognising the importance of the active learner involved in two-way feedback dialogues (Carless, 2015). Students are at the centre of dialogic feedback processes as they receive information on their work, need to make sense of it and be able to utilise it to enhance their subsequent work (Boud and Molloy, 2013; Carless, 2015; Carless and Boud, 2018; Ryan et al., 2022). Nevertheless, no matter the quality of the feedback that educators provide, surveys on student satisfaction with their learning experience across HE institutions in the UK (NSS, PTES, PRES) have consistently identified assessment and feedback as the source of greatest student dissatisfaction. The PTES (Report, 2018) also seems to suggest that international postgraduate taught students have relatively more negative perceptions of assessment and feedback, and that their ‘diverse expectations of study [might be] weakening the correlation’ (p.16). Slightly higher levels of satisfaction were found by the PTES 2021; however, its focus had shifted to post-Covid organisation and adjustment and the two reports are not comparable. Although the measures used for the surveys have been argued to be

problematic (Buckley, 2020; Winstone and Pitt, 2017), results suggest that students are unable to recognise, understand, and effectively utilise the feedback they receive (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Orsmond and Merry, 2011; Sopina and McNeill, 2015), and that students' literacies and previous histories seem to have an impact on student (dis)satisfaction with feedback and on their enactment of it (Sutton, 2012; Winstone et al., 2017). Thus, recent literature focuses on students' need to build their feedback literacy to enact feedback effectively (Carless and Boud 2018; Malecka, Boud and Carless, 2020; Winstone et al. 2017) and benefit from it. In light of this, this thesis considers how international postgraduate students in particular experience A&F and develop feedback literacy in an unfamiliar, intercultural HE environment.

A&F are situated and socially constructed practices that involve people (students, staff, peers), their experiences (past and present), and the sociocultural context in which they originate and take place (Tian and Lowe, 2013). Therefore, feedback literacy development cannot be considered equal for all students. Much of the prior research on assessment, feedback, and feedback literacy tends to consider and treat all students as one homogenous group (Henderson et al., 2019; Pitt, Bearman and Esterhazy, 2019). Carless and Boud's (2018) model of feedback literacy proposes that students need to build their capacity to appreciate the feedback they receive, make judgments on it, manage the affective sphere that surrounds the feedback dialogue, and subsequently take action. However, they make no particular reference to the environment and culture in which feedback literacy is developed. Recent conceptualisations of feedback literacy do take sociocultural and sociomaterial approaches (Chong, 2020; Gravett, 2020; Molloy, Boud and Henderson, 2021). However, the focus has never been on the impact of prior histories and cultures of assessment and feedback on the literacies of international postgraduate students in the British HE system.

This thesis considers that international postgraduate students are faced with challenges that originate from approaching learning with different expectations and conventions (Andrade, 2006; Gu, 2009; Rienties, et al. 2012; Taylor and Ali, 2017). They arrive in a different HE system having had previous experiences with a range of culture- and context-specific educational practices that shaped their 'literacy histories' (Barton et al., 2007) and, consequently, their assessment and feedback literacies

(Street, 2004). Student histories influence their understandings and capacities, determining the means available to them when they need to make sense of feedback information and to use it to improve their work (Carless and Boud, 2018).

So far, international students' difficulties and the impact of previous histories have not been considered in relation to feedback literacy development; this thesis therefore aims to do so. It also narrows its focus onto postgraduate taught students whose wider and longer histories with academic practices and conventions in different HE contexts (McKinley et al., 2019; Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson, 2013), are likely to have contributed to shaping more defined assessment and feedback literacies. This thesis does not view international students as 'skill-lacking' or 'literacy-lacking' and their feedback literacies are not considered as inadequate or needing to radically change. Rather, this thesis suggests a more open and conscious consideration of international students' unfamiliarity with diverse assessment and feedback practices in a new context and culture, highlighting the need for effective intercultural interactions to occur within unfamiliar contexts of A&F. In fact, feedback itself is conceptualised as an act of communication, a dialogic process in which learners are supported in the sense-making of information provided through the feedback messages and use the information to enhance the quality of their work or learning strategies (Carless, 2015). In the context of international HE, communication and dialogue within and about A&F practices take place at an intercultural level (Winstone et al., 2017). Thus, a certain degree of competence to interact interculturally might be necessary for such dialogues to be effective. International students might benefit from what Byram (1997) defines as intercultural communicative competence (henceforth intercultural competence or ICC), which is the aptitude to effectively recognise, interpret, and comprehend communication with individuals from other cultures. The competence to communicate within intercultural assessment and feedback processes may be beneficial for international students and for all involved in the practices. Drawing on the existing ICC literature, this thesis investigates whether international students would benefit from the competence to interact interculturally about diverse assessment and feedback practices in order to support the ongoing re-shaping of their feedback literacies (Deardorff and Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017).

This thesis draws on research on A&F, feedback literacy, and intercultural competence to delineate a framework through which international students' ability to communicate about assessment and feedback, re-shape literacies, and enact the feedback in a different HE environment can be investigated. Carless and Boud's (2018) conceptual model of feedback literacy provides a framework for understanding how students might develop literacies to effectively enact the feedback. Yarosh et al.'s (2018) model of academic ICC is used to shape the investigation into international students' ability to effectively and appropriately communicate in unfamiliar contexts of assessment and feedback. This thesis investigates if and how, in the particular context of intercultural HE, the two models can co-exist and inform one another, supporting an innovative inquiry into international students' experiences with A&F that does not neglect the socio- and inter-cultural nature of contexts and individuals that are involved in such practices.

1.2 Aims of the Thesis

The aim of the research reported in this thesis is to explore international postgraduate taught (PGT) students' experiences with assessment and feedback practices within the intercultural context of British HE, gathering in-depth insights into the complexity of cultural and contextual factors that might influence such experiences. The foci are on students' histories of A&F, the role of intercultural communicative competence in A&F contexts, and the impact they may have on feedback literacy development. Firstly, this thesis aims to investigate if and how histories constructed within previous, different HE contexts can impact on student literacies and competencies to communicate effectively within intercultural contexts of assessment and feedback. Secondly, it aims to inquire into the ways in which intercultural communicative competence in assessment and feedback contexts can influence international students' development of feedback literacy at university. In particular, students' competencies of knowledge, awareness, skills, attitudes, intercultural critical reflection, and emotional intelligence in A&F contexts are investigated, with a view to highlight their potential impact on the abilities to appreciate feedback, make judgements on one's work, manage emotions in feedback situations and take effective action on the feedback. The third goal is to explore the role that dialogic

feedback itself might play in supporting international PGT students' development of A&F intercultural communicative competence and feedback literacy. This thesis also intends to explore changes to and development of student histories and their roles, assessment and feedback ICC, feedback literacies, and the role of feedback dialogues over the course of the students' postgraduate experience. To do that, a longitudinal narrative inquiry is employed to gather in-depth and ongoing accounts of student experience. Narrative interviews and audio diary logs are obtained multiple times throughout the academic year, with a view to capture elements of change and factors that might influence it.

To reach such aims, the present thesis intends to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1 - How does an international PGT student assessment and feedback history impact on their level of A&F intercultural communicative competence?
- RQ2 - What role does dialogic feedback play in supporting international PGT students' development of A&F intercultural communicative competence?
- RQ3 - How does an international PGT student A&F intercultural communicative competence influence their development of feedback literacy?

1.3 Thesis Overview

The thesis comprises six chapters. The first chapter has defined the context of the thesis and clarified the research gap and aims. Chapter 2 discusses previous work in the areas of assessment and feedback and of intercultural communicative competence, with a focus on internationalised contexts of HE and issues related to international postgraduate taught students in particular. The chapter aims to make an argument for bringing together these areas of knowledge to enhance our understanding of the role of diversity and interculturality within assessment and feedback contexts. In this chapter, the 'core' literature on assessment, feedback, and literacies remains central and is re-interpreted and contextualised within theories of intercultural competence. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach and design of the research. It provides a description of and a rationale for carrying out a longitudinal narrative inquiry, whilst positioning my own narrative within the research. Further, it describes the processes of narrative and thematic analyses employed to make sense of the data collected.

Chapter 4 reports the findings of the study, drawing on data from both interviews and diaries. Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the previous chapter in relation to the existing literature. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis discussing key knowledge and methodological contribution, highlighting implications for practice, and exploring the thesis limitations and how they inform recommendations for further research.

Chapter II - Review of the Literature

This review of the literature aims to set out the scope and rationale for the current inquiry. In order to do so, it begins by examining the wider context where this research pans out and offers a brief review of the literature on international students' challenges in unfamiliar university settings. This aims to highlight the first gap this thesis intends to address: international students' challenges have been largely researched, whereas PGTs difficulties (and their origins) with unfamiliar assessment and feedback practices are often overlooked.

The literature on assessment and feedback is also reviewed, offering an overview of the developments in the discipline from early literature up to the more current lines of research and interests. One of the most recent foci of the literature is on student development of feedback literacy. This review aims to uncover how, within this line of research, distinction between student groups is not made, drawing attention to the need to look into international students' development of feedback literacy in an intercultural context.

The last section of the review covers the relevant literature on intercultural communicative competence, presenting the existing theories and models and offering an interpretation on how it can support research on feedback literacy development. This part of the review makes the case for ICC to be adapted specifically to the contexts of assessment and feedback. This shapes the conceptual framework underpinning the thesis that brings together theories of feedback literacy development and intercultural communicative competence.

2.1 International Students' Experiences

One of the biggest changes for international students is recognised to be the experience of transitioning to a new educational system combined with the transition from their home country to the new and unfamiliar 'host'-country (Taylor and Ali, 2017). Studies on international students' transition to unfamiliar HE contexts often consider this as a 'process of achieving harmony between the individual and the environment' (Hannigan, 1990, p. 91), mainly referring to student ability to respond to

interpersonal and societal demands such as making friends, being part of social activities, and behave effectively and appropriately in a culturally diverse environment (Hendrickson, Rosen, and Aune, 2011; Rienties et al., 2012). Traditionally, academic challenges due to transition have been considered as separated from interpersonal and sociocultural challenges. They have often been described as the difficulties encountered in the attempt to ‘adapt’ to aspects of the educational context (Rienties et al., 2012, p. 687), and as the ‘fitting processes’ that individuals use in accommodating to new academic circumstances and practices (Andrade, 2006). The focus on ‘achieving harmony’ and on considering both the individual and the environment is often lost when it comes to difficulties specific to academic practices. Instead, international students’ academic struggles have been traditionally considered as consequences of the phenomena of ‘education or learning shock’ (Gu, 2005, 2009; Yamazaki, 2005), ‘culture shock’ (Brown and Holloway, 2008b; Gbadamosi, 2018; Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2005), or ‘language shock’ (Smalley, 1963). These are conceptualised as the psychological, cognitive, and affective shortcomings that result from student unfamiliarity with the ‘host’ academic traditions.

A more recent approach to international students’ difficulties in unfamiliar HE has proposed a shift from a conceptual separation of sociocultural challenges and academic ‘shock’ towards a re-defined notion of academic ‘adjustment’ (Janjua et al., 2011; McClure, 2007; Wu and Hammond, 2011) that is conceptualised as a process that takes place within academic contexts’ diversity of traditions, cultures, values, and beliefs (Brown and Holloway, 2008a; Jin and Cortazzi, 2011). This approach recognises that international students are often introduced to a different educational system shaped by culturally and historically informed philosophies. Within an unfamiliar system, they are faced with academic practices that are likely to approach teaching and learning with different expectations and conventions (Janjua et al., 2011; Campbell, 2012). The sociocultural norms and values that shape such ‘foreign’ academic practices differ from those they are familiar with as they are context- and culture-related. Despite the recognition of its sociocultural nature, the way in which research approaches the issue of international students’ academic challenges still presents some shortcomings that this thesis aims to address. Firstly, it is often looked at from a perspective of international students ‘lacking’ fundamental skills, abilities, and competencies; secondly, it tends to highlight the difficulties of students

transitioning mainly from ‘Eastern’ to ‘Western’ contexts of education; lastly, it considers academic challenges to be equal in all spheres and contexts of academia, overlooking the characteristics of individual practices and the particular challenges they might pose. In particular, this thesis argues that new assessment and feedback practices are likely to cause difficulties for international students, as will be highlighted throughout the literature review.

2.1.1 Assimilationist Approaches

Research and, consequently, institutions often stress the urgent need for the skill-lacking ‘other’ to unilaterally adapt to the new educational environment (Russell et al., 2010; Zhou et al., 2008), adopting a ‘deficit approach’ that proposes ‘assimilation models’ (Asmar, 2005; Montgomery and McDowell, 2008) for international students to fit in. Deficit approaches and narratives (Lomer, 2017) are frequently accompanied by terminology that connotes students’ passivity and inadequacy: international students are invited to ‘adapt’, ‘adjust’, ‘integrate’ and ‘acculturate’ into academia if they want to be successful (Ploner, 2018). The skills, values, beliefs, and behaviours of the ‘other’ are often reduced to being inadequate and needing to change (Ploner, 2018), drawing on the unquestioned and assumed legitimacy of the ‘traditional’ pedagogies, practices and cultures of the receiving institutions that are often ‘Western’ (British institution for this thesis) (Montgomery and McDowell, 2008). Such views neglect the fact that practices in academia originate from ideals, philosophies, values, and beliefs that have developed differently throughout history. Ryan (2011) has observed that early research on international students’ challenges attempted to ‘fix the student’, whereas later research instead intended to ‘fix the teacher’ (p. 638). Such unilateral ‘adaptational’ approaches assume that diversity of beliefs needs to be ‘fixed’, neglecting the role that purposeful, bilateral communication could play in the discovery of philosophies and pedagogies that integrate views of all players in HE (Merriam and Sek Kim, 2007). Leask (2015) highlights the importance of finding such a two-way dialogue to uncover what she calls the ‘hidden curriculum’, or the implicit and often unintended messages communicated about which knowledge is considered important in different contexts.

Recently, the complexity of contextual and cultural diversity has been given more importance and attention but the tendency remains to advocate for student ‘acculturation’, a term that can be controversial. In fact, its most adopted interpretation builds on the definition of acculturation as ‘the progressive adoption of elements of a foreign culture (ideas, words, values, norms, behaviours, institutions) by persons, groups or classes of a given culture’ (International Organization for Migration, 2004). This does not take into account the perspectives, views, values, and characteristics of those who are required to ‘acculturate’ (Sam and Berry, 2006), alongside the ‘validity’ of certain cultural elements from a different cultural perspective. In academia, this remains a unilateral, reductionist approach to international students’ academic challenges that often leads to speculations on assumed and unfounded correlations between cultural diversity and international students’ ‘cognitive deficit’ (Hellstén, 2007). This thesis recognises that ‘international students arrive with a set of skills and experiences which have equipped them in the past to be successful, but which may not be fully useful in their new settings’ (Carroll and Ryan, 2005, p. 5), and considers their unfamiliarity with the diverse, culture- and context-originated practices.

2.1.2 East vs West

The deficit approach to international student ‘adjustment’ has often been conceptualised within the dichotomy of ‘Eastern’ as opposed to ‘Western’ systems of education (Biggs and Tang, 2007; Hofstede, 1986; Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005; Schweisfurth and Gu, 2009; Watkins, 2000; Wu and Hammond, 2011). The reportedly great(er) distance between these academic systems has often been considered to be the root cause of most challenges, in a body of literature that is largely concerned with Asian (often East-Asian and mostly Chinese) students’ experiences at Anglophone (mostly UK, Australia and US) ‘receiving’ HE institutions. Most researchers, such as Watkins’ (2000), Biggs and Tang (2007), and Schweisfurth and Gu’s (2009) argue that the most significant differences exist between educational systems in place at western universities that focus on a deeper approach to learning, and eastern countries that adopt a more surface approach that emphasises learning based on repetition (rote learning) and pure memorisation of information (Entwistle and Peterson, 2004). Ballard and Clanchy (1991)

labelled the eastern approach to education as a ‘conserving attitude’ to learning whilst defining the western approach as an ‘extending attitude’ towards learning. Similarly, Biggs (1996) introduced the term ‘surface’ learning as opposed to ‘deep’ learning and coined the term Confucian-heritage cultures (CHCs) to refer to the educational systems of China, Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea that have been influenced by the doctrines of Confucianism. In contrast, western systems of education are often homogeneously called ‘Socratic’ because of the influence of Socratic philosophies (Biggs, 1996). Although such a deep/surface model and its application to distinguish student ‘groups’ has been critiqued (see, for example, Howie and Bagnall, 2013; Kember, 2000), it still tends to underpin research into international students’ academic challenges.

Many researchers indicate that the core elements of the western education system are critical thinking, analysis, and an active expression of one’s own thoughts and ideas through discussion (Chanock, 2000; Tweed and Lehman, 2002; Kühnen et al., 2011; Shaheen, 2016), particularly in postgraduate education (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), 2008). As these elements are not equally emphasised in CHCs (Durkin, 2008; Holmes, 2004), international students are often considered as simply ‘lacking’ of them. As a consequence, they are uncomfortable with seminar discussions and exchange of ideas, struggle with the academic concept of criticality (including critical thinking, and reading and writing critically), and therefore experience difficulties with classroom participation and their coursework (Ballard, 1996; Robertson et al., 2000). In relation to coursework-related issues, the prevalence of plagiarism and writing difficulties in international students’ compositions have been reported in number of studies (Ryan and Carroll, 2005; Pecorari, 2001; 2003) as a consequence of their unfamiliarity with the concept of criticality and of academic writing. Hooley and Horspool (2006) reveal that staff perceive international students as holding ‘poor understanding of academic conventions, especially plagiarism; a lack of willingness to participate in discussion based learning and poor learning techniques’ (p. 4). Amongst such academic conventions, international students’ diverse academic writing styles and approaches have also been considered to be problematic, despite the awareness that different cultures often present different rhetorical tendencies and norms (Kaplan, 1966; Durkin, 2008). Some narrowed the focus onto international students’ difficulties with critical thinking skills alone, on the premises that critical thinking is not only one of the key

competencies, but also a primary goal in British higher education (Pithers and Soden, 2010; QAA, 2008), a goal that is not as much prioritised in other educational cultures. International students are regularly criticised for being non-critical thinkers and rote learners because of the lack of analysis and criticality in their approaches to studies and writing (Casanave, 2002). Lack of critical thinking and academic writing skills seem to be the reasons research has identified for Asian students' difficulties with assignments. This shows both a 'deficit' approach that overlooks cultures, values, philosophies, and traditions of assessment practices, and a reductive 'dichotomous' approach. The 'other's' learning approaches, skills and academic cultures are often perceived to be homogenous at the system wider regional level (Biggs, 1996; Brooks and Waters, 2011; Hellstén, 2007; Kumaravadivelu, 2003), whereas differences within macro-regions have rarely been considered. The importance that research and institutions attribute to cultural diversity often varies depending on the perceived degree of national or regional cultural distance (Berry, 1997; Galchenko and Van de Vijver, 2007; Ward and Geeraert, 2016) between international students and individuals (staff, peers) in the 'receiving' educational institution. This originates from – and has often been considered within – the prevalent cultural model that continues to underpin much HE research on international students: Hofstede's cultural differences model (1986; Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). The model is particularly valued to uncover east/west cultural differences; nevertheless, culture and intercultural learning has also been conceptualised beyond the rigid regional differences that the model suggests (Baskerville, 2003; Signorini, Wiesemes, and Murphy, 2009). Cultures within regions and countries do vary (Kennedy, 2002; Kingston and Forland, 2004); 'smaller' cultures either within or in between larger cultures that stretch across regional borders are created by individuals in different social contexts (Holliday, 1994; 1999). Particular organisational cultures are generated in different contexts within national organisations but are rarely acknowledged. In particular, academic cultures have been recognised to be 'small' cultures, and academic discourse(s) are one of their central features (Holliday, 1999).

This is arguably a reductionist and misrepresentative description of 'Western vs Eastern' culture and scholarship in binary terms (Ryan, 2005) that overlooks the complexities and the diversity within both 'macro' educational traditions (Ryan and Louie, 2007). Although internal differences to the 'eastern' block and nations within have at times been considered (e.g. Heng, 2019; Marambe, Vermunt and

Boshuizen, 2012), less attention has been paid to differences across the ‘west’, leading to little research involving non-Asian students in research from Anglophone ‘receiving’ countries. Nevertheless, De Wit et al.’s (2015) study on understanding of internationalisation of Higher Education in the European context identifies substantial differences within Europe, both in terms of higher education system structures and cultures and argues for the need to take this diversity into account. Similarly, Wierstra et al. (2003) and Bogain (2012) observe diversity of educational cultures between southern and northern Europe, while Taillefer (2005) reports diversity of academic literacies and cultures of ‘academic reading’ across European institutions. This thesis looks beyond the dichotomies that have been proposed when ‘comparing’ educational systems (e.g., macro-regional eastern/western or regional southern/northern) and is interested in the experiences of international students from all educational contexts who chose to study in the UK (see section 3.9 for inclusion criteria). The focus is on ‘smaller’, previous institutional cultures of assessment and feedback rather than on national or regional cultures.

The academic challenges that international students face in relation to ‘traditional’ British academic practices can be related to language and academic discourses, cultures and academic cultures that differ across contexts of HE. Language- and culture-related difficulties tend to be generalised to all spheres, situations, and practices in academia. Language as an obstacle for international students is often under-conceptualised in simple terms of lack of second language general proficiency or competence (Benzie, 2010; Heikinheimo and Shute, 1986; Yeh and Inose, 2003; Zhang and Goodson, 2011), whereas the particularity of language when applied to a context- and culture-specific academic discourse have been overlooked (Norton, 2006). Drawing on Duff’s (2010, p. 175) definition of academic discourse as ‘a complex representation of knowledge and language and identity’, language becomes the means through which students interpret and represent knowledge and information, conveying a meaning that is embedded in context and cultural identity (Bazerman, 1981; Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000). As Hyland (2009, p. 1) argues ‘academic discourse refers to the ways of thinking and using language which exist in the academy’, and as Gee (1996, p. 8) observes, discourses are ‘ways of behaving, thinking, valuing, believing, speaking’. Academic discourses are meant to facilitate communication and mutual understanding among insiders, as they define roles, identities, and common

and ‘legitimate’ practices (Hyland, 2009). However, they are likely to confuse newcomers that often feel they are forced into unfamiliar practices, roles, and identities (Lillis and Turner, 2001; Wette and Furneaux, 2018). Further, language (and language proficiency) does not exist in a vacuum: cultures are to be factored, as they mediate the worldviews of those involved and the way in which they represent them through language. According to Fantini’s (1995) ‘language-culture paradigm’, individuals attend to different aspects of a particular context in accordance with their ‘schemata’ that are framed by language, culture, and experience. Culture and language are intertwined and inform one-another (Fantini, 1995), and they are the constructs through which individuals communicate and experience the world. Individuals’ thinking, valuing, and believing are expressed through language, and similar thoughts and concepts are expressed differently through different cultural and linguistic frameworks (Fantini and Tirmizi, 2006; Anderberg, 2000). If overlooked, this can create communication misalignment between individuals who interact through different lenses.

2.1.3 A Practice-specific Focus: Cultures and Characteristics of Assessment and Feedback

Diversity of language, academic cultures, and discourses across social contexts of education seem to be the cause of international students’ academic difficulties. However, such difficulties have so far been considered within the ‘wider’ context of academia, and little attention has been paid to specific practices that, because of their nature, might pose particular challenges. This thesis argues that assessment and feedback are likely to be unfamiliar and at times inaccessible to international students. In fact, adopting a sociocultural perspective, A&F are social and cultural processes of learning (Thurlings et al., 2013). In assessment and feedback situations, meaning is co-constructed and negotiated between individuals through interaction, communication, and dialogue (Carless, 2006, 2015) and is supported by mediational means that are available to them (Esterhazy and Damşa, 2017; Säljö, 2004). Learning through A&F does not happen in isolation but within a social, cultural, and historical context. The resources international students employ in the meaning-making process might come from their previous experience, such as pre-existing knowledge or understanding (Damşa and Ludvigsen, 2016). The means of language as mediation of thoughts also plays a role in international students’ process of sense-making

(Ortega, 2009), as much as the context in which feedback is provided and the characteristics and identities of those involved in the feedback dialogue (Värlander, 2008).

As described above, research has considered the difficulties international students have with coursework. Nevertheless, the origins of such difficulties and the diverse philosophies, purposes and values practices of assessment and feedback practices across HE contexts remain largely uncovered (Tian and Lowe, 2013). Assessment determines students' learning progression, and students who have made a significant investment to study abroad are likely to give extreme importance to the assessment and feedback practices they encounter on their learning journey (Boud and Falchikov, 2007; Brown and Joughin, 2007). However, they might find them unfamiliar as they have been influenced by different assessment systems in their earlier learning experiences, which may differ from those they encounter in the UK (Carroll, 2005). Although assessment as a culturally embedded practice has been observed to present significant differences in particular between CHCs and Socratic educational systems (Biggs, 1996), fewer studies have questioned whether the same might be found across western systems. Although it is generally agreed that, within western higher education systems such as the UK's, the established norm has been for a long time to provide students with feedback on their formative work, the fact that this might not be the norm in other countries' systems has not been considered. 20 years ago, Heywood (2000) observed that the British HE system had seen, over the previous 50 years, a slow shift from a stronger emphasis on final examinations as performance evaluators towards the use of more diverse and more continuous forms of assessment. In 2012, the Higher Education Academy (HEA) observed such a transformation was bringing improvements in HE assessment policies and strategies. However, what is left unexplored in internationalised higher education is that the same might not have happened simultaneously (or yet) within other educational systems. Thus, the tradition of providing students with continuous feedback might not be universal as it is sometimes assumed to be in the 'west'. In fact, although a focus on continuous evaluation is being promoted in the Bologna Process, in some European countries, this is a new element that still needs to be introduced and encouraged (Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2018). European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG; European Association for Quality Assurance, 2005) in relation to student assessment (ESG Part 1) are in place and have a vital role in the creation of the European Higher Education Area. However,

they are non-binding and non-prescriptive, and recognise the importance of particular characteristics and autonomy of different higher education institutions (Sin and Saunders, 2014; Stensaker et al., 2010).

There are some examples of studies that suggest diversity within Europe might be greater than assumed. For example, Panadero et al. (2018) observe that Spanish Universities are highly summative oriented and high stakes exams are the norm. In the same context, feedback practices and formative assessment are still largely absent in practice (Pérez-Pueyo et al., 2008). For this reason, they suggest students coming from such backgrounds are likely to be unfamiliar with assessment at the British University. In line with this, Kelly and Moogan (2012) argue that students who are accustomed to examinations feel disoriented when they approach other forms of assessment. As Winstone and Carless (2019) contend, examinations have not traditionally included feedback (Blair et al., 2014). Thus, it may be more common for students who are accustomed to examinations to expect little or no comments on their performance. Further, Brown (2012) reports that some European countries (e.g., Russia and Italy) make greater use of oral assessment, as opposed to the written assessment tradition of Anglophone countries. Within the Italian literature on HE assessment and feedback, Grion et al. (2017) contend that Italian universities still associate assessment with the exam, where students passively learn within assessment practices that are largely in the hands of educators (Coggi, 2005). Grion (2016) defines this as a 'traditional' approach that separates such 'end of course events' from ongoing teaching and learning activities. Along the same line of research, Bevilacqua and Girelli (2020) argue that a shift to formative, sustainable assessment, and to feedback literacy development for educators in Italian higher education still needs encouragement. Although some examples of A&F diversity within Europe do exist, as Allal and Mottier (2005) point out in their review on the French-medium literature on formative assessment, there are fewer studies looking at A&F practices in non-English speaking countries. Or rather, the extensive literature available in English tends to focus on English-speaking countries, and the work carried out and published in other languages (French, German, Spanish, etc.) is relatively unknown in the English-language community (Allal and Mottier, 2005). The scope of this literature review is far from providing a substantial account of such work; nevertheless, pointing this out can provide a possible reason for the little consideration given to diversity outside the 'East vs West' paradigm.

As this thesis identifies its interest with international students' experiences with assessment and feedback practices in intercultural higher education contexts, the next sections focus on providing an account of the relevant literature on A&F.

2.2 Assessment and Feedback

It is widely recognised that assessment and feedback have a great potential in fostering effective student learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008). Over twenty years ago, Black and Wiliam (1998) introduced the concept of assessment *for* learning rather than *of* learning for such potential to be achieved. More recently, the idea of students as actively involved in feedback processes to promote effective learning and development has also become widely accepted (Winstone et al., 2017). Assessment and feedback have often been considered, researched, and discussed as entangled. In fact, the main role of feedback is to influence students' future work and learning strategies (Winstone and Boud, 2020). Students need to make sense of comments about the quality of their work in order to enact the feedback and inform the development of future tasks (Boud and Molloy, 2013; Carless, 2015; Carless and Boud, 2018). The two processes of A&F are surely connected: feedback without some type of assessment tasks in place does not happen or is not meaningful. At the same time, assessment for learning that is not supported by some form of feedback is not useful. Nevertheless, recognising the connection between assessment and feedback does not imply they are or should be considered as one practice only. Winstone and Boud (2020) observe that assessment and feedback should serve two very different purposes: grade award and justification that focuses on past achievement, and the provision of feedback information to influence future achievement. However, they also recognise that their own conceptualisation of A&F as disentangled originates from research and observations mainly carried out in Anglophone contexts (Australia and the UK in particular), whereas other higher education contexts might conceptualise and operationalise the practices differently. This thesis does not intend to make assumptions about the ways in which A&F might be conceptualised across educational contexts. Thus, it looks at international students' histories and experiences with both assessment and feedback practices.

The literature relating to assessment and feedback has seen conceptual and interest shifts in recent years. The following sections will consider how research has evolved in conceptualising assessment, feedback, and its usefulness. In doing so, it will examine the relevant literature and highlight gaps that contribute to suggesting a novel line of inquiry for this thesis. More current debates revolve around the importance of student development of feedback literacy for them to make the most out of feedback processes and develop effective learning strategies. The literature review focuses on this debate and expounds why feedback literacy development is one of the interests of this thesis. Further, this review will highlight how research on assessment, feedback, and feedback literacy development could benefit from creating space for integrating considerations about international students' potentially diverse experiences with the practices.

2.3 Assessment

Assessment has been widely considered as a core and integral part of learning and teaching, and, more generally of education (Marton and Säljö, 1997; Entwistle and Entwistle, 1991; Ramsden, 1997; Swaffield, 2008). The term assessment has been connected to the notion of learning in numerous ways. In particular, much has been discussed about assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning, highlighting different perspectives of considering the role of assessment in education (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Pryor and Crossouard, 2008). Assessment of learning is often considered as the 'first generation' of assessment practice (James, 2008): it is concerned with what is taught, how knowledge is transmitted, and how it is retained by the passive learners (Berry, 2008).

Since the pioneering work of Black and Wiliam (1998), the focus has instead been on assessment *for* learning (AfL) that positions student assessment at the heart of student learning (Black, et al., 2003), and argues that high quality and appropriate assessment is essential for enhancing deeper student learning. AfL builds on the concept of 'formative evaluation' introduced by Scriven (1976) in the contexts of evaluation and development of educational programmes, and later adapted by Bloom (1968) to the context of student learning. The focus of scholars in the past two decades has been on promoting a significant change in the assessment culture that would shift from simply measuring

learning to promoting and supporting it (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Sambell, 2016; Stiggins, 2002). AfL is adopted in the learning and teaching strategies of many British universities, as highlighted in the policies of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). It is viewed as a central way of promoting student learning, and often as a way of approaching and reducing some of the problems that assessment in higher education represents (Sambell, 2012). For example, Biggs and Tang (2007) propose that AfL can support 'constructive alignment' between teaching, learning and assessment outcomes, rather than assessment being used for purposes of benchmarking or accountability (p. 13).

Within assessment for learning, there are two types of assessment: summative and formative. 'Formative assessment' refers to assessment as an evaluation that intends to improve student work and plan for future learning activities (Sadler, 1989). Normally, this type of assessment informs students of their current and desired achievements through feedback that aims at supporting them to develop their work (Sambell, 2012). 'Summative assessment' instead aims to 'sum up' the achievements, providing a final evaluation of student work for certification purposes at the end of a course of study (Sadler, 1989). Assessment for learning 'encompasses both formative and summative assessment and in some applications the two may be indistinguishable' (Sambell, 2012, p. 3). What the paradigm of assessment for learning stresses is the principle that all assessment should contribute to helping students to learn, develop, and to succeed. For Black and Wiliam (1998) summative and formative functions of assessment are the two ends of the same learning continuum, with foci on past achievements and development of future achievements. For Boud and Falchikov (2006), 'sustainable assessment' 'build[s] on summative and formative assessment to foster longer-term goals' (2006, p. 405). On this, Lau (2016) observes that the dichotomy of formative-good and summative-bad assessment is reductive and harmful, arguing that a reconnection of the two is needed. Nevertheless, Sadler (1989) suggests that assessment tasks should not serve both purposes, as attention on past performances could obscure students' attention to the formative purpose of the task and on the feedback. This seems to happen in current HE contexts, where the primary focus of assessment is often on outcomes and measurement, whilst an only secondary focus is on formative feedback, improvement and learning as a process (Boud, 2007). Taras (2015) observes that formative assessment tends to be in fact summative with an addition of some feedback comments that are likely to be used by educators and interpreted by students as a

justification of the grade awarded (Brown and Glover, 2006). As Rust (2002) suggests, providing formative feedback on drafts might be a good way to encourage utilisation of feedback to have ‘significant effect on future performance’ (p. 153).

In the British higher education context, much theorising about formative assessment has and is being done. Nevertheless, it seems that its operationalisation continues to be flawed. Consequently, questions arise about other contexts where the shift towards developmental and formative assessment is still under way. In his book on implementing formative assessment in a Hong Kong setting, Carless (2010) argues that different forms of formative assessment are needed in different educational contexts. He warns that sociocultural factors can have significant influence on the kinds of assessment practices that are feasible and effective in different contexts. Willis (2016) conceptualises assessment through a sociocultural lens and observes that assessment involves participation in a community of practice where the possibilities for learning are influenced by cultural tools, social practices, beliefs, and power relations. Elwood (2006, p. 22) describes assessment as a cultural activity that takes place within the complexities that characterise ‘the relationship between the learner, the teacher and the assessment task in the social, historical and cultural context in which it is carried out’, and Gipps (1999) similarly argues that assessment is a social activity that cannot be deeply understood outside the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts in which it operates. Black and Wiliam (2006) also moved towards considering sociocultural learning theories (Engeström, 1987; Lave and Wenger, 1991), wherein students and teachers together define what is good learning and assessment, considering that learning is closely linked to identity construction. This thesis adopts a sociocultural conceptualisation of assessment and argues that what is considered as effective and legitimate assessment for learning is strongly framed by institutional discourses and assessment demands. What Carless (2006) suggests about the role of student ‘trust’ in assessment and feedback situations also seems to be relevant in intercultural contexts of assessment. He argues that students tend to trust practices that are desirably transparent, reliable, honest, and competent and that lack of trust in assessment practices leads to poor engagement and learning. More ‘traditional’ and ‘familiar’ assessment practices (e.g., essays) seem to be more easily trusted (Carless, 2006) and higher levels of engagement seem to follow. Nevertheless,

what is 'traditional and familiar' to international students might not be what is expected, and trust might not be built immediately.

2.3.1 Assessment Literacy

Framed by diverse institutional discourses of assessment and by different conceptualisations of traditional and effective assessment, international students' assessment literacies might not mirror those of educators and institutions in the new educational context.

The notion of 'assessment literacy' as introduced by Stiggins (1991) mainly refers to different aspects that assessment developers need to be aware of in order to ensure good practice (Price et al., 2012). It involves teachers having knowledge of what is being assessed and why, whilst being familiar with the available tools to perform assessment, being able to generate samples of the desired performance, and being aware of the issues that might arise during assessment and of the ways to prevent them (Stiggins, 1995). The idea of student assessment literacy builds on this: students as much as educators need to develop a meaningful understanding of assessment. This includes comprehending what is assessed, what are the purposes of assessment within learning, developing the ability to analyse and evaluate samples of work, and to critically evaluate and process the issues they encounter with the support of feedback. Understanding the nature and meaning of assessment criteria and standards is also fundamental, alongside familiarity with assessment technicalities, the capacity to select and utilise appropriate approaches to assessment tasks, and the capacity to self- and peer-assess (Price et al., 2012). Students need to be able to use assessment to monitor or further their learning, and to use criteria to support the production of quality work (Smith et al., 2013). O'Donovan, Price, and Rust (2004) argue that meaningful understanding of the assessment criteria and of the definition of 'quality work' involves both 'tacit' (or implicit) and 'explicit' knowledge. They consider tacit understanding of the assessment criteria and standards as awareness of what the assessment criteria are, although there might be a lack of ability to verbalise that (Rust, Price, and O'Donovan, 2003). This type of knowledge is often experience-based, shared through iterative and dialogic processes (Nonaka, 1991), and is often taken for granted by lectures and higher education institutions. Studies in Second Language Acquisition

(SLA) define explicit knowledge as the declarative, conscious knowledge of features of the L2 (or of the foreign academic discourse and language) that can be learned and potentially verbalised and that is accessed mainly via controlled processing (Ellis and Shintani, 2014), whilst implicit knowledge has been automatised and lies outside awareness (Dörnyei, 2009). Although criteria are in place to guarantee some form of transparency of assessment criteria and feedback (Randall and Mirador, 2003; Yelland, 2011), international students might possess a tacit knowledge that is not ‘aligned’ to that of educators and might encounter difficulties in understanding criteria and requirements (Bartram, 2008). Transparency is not a given (Balloo et al., 2018), and students might need to go through the first step of acquiring explicit knowledge of assessment standards and criteria that can later develop into a ‘new’ tacit knowledge with the support of feedback information and processes. Nevertheless, students often report not receiving sufficient help (Burke, 2009; Weaver, 2006). Student assessment literacy needs to be developed in order to gradually minimise the impact of that element of ‘surprise’ that international students in particular may experience when they are presented with unfamiliar assessment practices. Brown and Joughin (2007) draw attention to a number of issues that have been related to student ‘surprise’, that include different marking systems, assessment cultures, pedagogic philosophies underlying assessment, and a different set of useful assessment skills.

I would argue that a deeper, more ‘aware’ knowledge of assessment purposes, criteria and expectations is a fundamental step towards the development of student feedback literacy. In fact, feedback literacy is often considered as a sub-component of assessment literacy (Winstone and Boud, 2020) because of the connection between the practices. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, being connected does not mean being one. As Evans and Waring (2020) contend, a better understanding of what requirements are is crucial, but does not necessarily give students a better understanding of how feedback can be useful to assess their own performance and improve future work. Feedback literacy development builds on but does not equal assessment literacy. Thus, the next section provides an account of the literature on feedback and its current focus on feedback literacy.

2.4 Feedback

2.4.1 Early Literature

Although research on feedback is surely prominent in higher education, the origins of the concept of feedback lay outside the field of education. It originated during the industrial revolution as part of the development of early steam engines (Boud and Molloy, 2013), in which mechanical systems were regulated by monitoring their output and ‘feeding back’ information to control and optimise the output. Feedback was firstly introduced to the field of educational studies in the mid-twentieth century, as a tool to reinforce student learning (Burke and Pieterick, 2010), although learning and assessment were still considered as separated. Page’s (1958) comparison of the effects of grades alone and grades supported by written comments uncovered for the first time that teacher comments can have an impact on school children’s performance. Building on the line of research of the 1970s, Ramaprasad (1983, p. 4) defines feedback as the ‘information about the gap between the actual level and the reference level of a system parameter which is used to alter the gap’. The tendency then was to assume that students would simply need to be told what they did well or not so well to improve their performance and ‘fill the gap’ highlighted. However, Ramaprasad’s definition was ahead of time, as it suggested that information about the gap was to be considered feedback only when it was actually *utilised* to improve the level of the performance (William and Black, 1998) and not simply received or recorded (Sadler, 1989). Apart from his quite ‘contemporary’ view, feedback used to be simply conceptualised as pure performance evaluation and one-way information delivery. For Kulhavy (1977) and Kulhavy and Stock (1989), feedback tells students what they know by confirming the correct answers. Early feedback research adopts a behaviourist perspective, where knowledge transmission aims to modify learners’ behaviour through the reinforcement of an established desired behaviour that can foster learning (Auld et al., 2010; Sadler, 2009; Skinner, 1968). Within behaviourism, feedback processes are straightforward and linear: when feedback is given, an outcome consequently occurs (Thurlings et al., 2013). Very similarly, early cognitive theories place emphasis on linear information transmission and processing (Shuell, 1986), wherein feedback is provided, automatically processed by the learners, and the learner’s processing of information leads to outcomes.

Later perspectives argue that providing and receiving feedback that is useful involves more than the simple transfer of comments from expert to student: the feedback provided should be deeper and support student understanding of the reasons for their misconceptions and misinterpretations (Block and Anderson, 1975; Fredericksen, 1984). This ‘receptive-transmission mode’ of feedback (Askew, 2000, p. 3) sees the student as passively receiving information on their work, and is an oversimplified vision of feedback (Sadler, 2010). Much of the criticism advanced towards earlier research on feedback challenges the static, idealised and simplified notion of feedback as transmitted ‘comments’ or ‘messages’, and questions the assumption that students would automatically receive such messages, comprehend, and use them effectively (Scott and Coate, 2003). This is a dangerous and arguable assumption (Lillis and Turner, 2001) that can hinder students’ learning and development. In fact, feedback is generally the principal or only means by which students can evaluate and reflect on their progress (Hedgcock and Lefkowitz, 1996). If it is understood and used as ‘outcome evaluation’ it does not support learning. According to Cross (1986), the established norm in British HE has long been to provide students with detailed feedback on the work they complete. However, outcome- and learning-based feedback seem to fit different typologies (and traditions) of assessment. As discussed in section 2.3, assessment of learning that reflects summative tasks might be accompanied by feedback with a focus on the completed performance, whereas assessment for learning would provide more frequent formative feedback that relates to students’ learning development.

In 1989, Sadler observed that for feedback to be effective, students must take an active role in the feedback process, and not be passive recipients of comments. For him, students need support to understand the gap between their actual and desired achievement. Further, they need to be guided through interpreting, processing, and utilising the comments. Sadler’s critique greatly shifted the attention on the important role of the student as an active agent in the feedback process. From a theoretical perspective, this reflects the post-behaviourism shift towards cognitive and meta-cognitive psychology. The processes that take place at the level of the cognition are actively controlled by the individual, who decodes and utilises information to plan and monitor their own learning (Flavell, 1979). From a meta-cognitive point of view, the feedback process is not linear, and outcomes do not simply

‘occur’ without the learner actively decoding, analysing, and processing the information. Nevertheless, attention is paid on the metacognitive and controlling processes that take place when the active learner analyses and corrects the errors (Mory, 2004), and the focus often remains on ‘feedback for achievement’ rather than ‘feedback for learning’. As Boud and Molloy (2013) point out, for feedback to have consequences on learning, it needs to be provided in order to influence the quality of a subsequent piece of work, and students need to be given the opportunity to demonstrate some of the learning outcomes judged in the previous task (Feedback Mark 2). If this does not happen, feedback remains focused on the ‘achievement’ of the current task with no view towards learning and application of learning in the future.

2.4.2 Recent Developments

2.4.2.1 Learners’ Role: From Passive to Active Agents

Student-centred learning has gained importance in more recent times (Nicol and Mcfarlane-Dick, 2006), and so has the active role of students in feedback situations. If students are passive recipients of feedback information, they are unlikely to benefit from it (Winstone et al., 2017). The theoretical move towards a socio-constructivist approach emphasises the role of the learner rather than that of the educator. Individuals construct knowledge within social contexts, where they develop, access, and build knowledge through increasing participation within different communities of practice (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1990). The responsibility for learning and engaging in such learning lies with the active student (Lea, Stephenson, and Troy, 2003; Nicol and Mcfarlane-Dick, 2006). The Vygotskian notion of ‘Zone of Proximal Development’ (ZPD) has also informed socio-constructivist conceptualisations of formative assessment, where the feedback is the ‘scaffoldings’ that support the learner construction of knowledge for future achievement. Learning is also conceptualised as involving the learner in active sense-making, self-monitoring and developing awareness of learning itself (Shepard, 2000). On this premises, over the past two decades, numerous studies on feedback have been underpinned by constructivist views of learning with a focus on supporting student so-called ‘self-regulated learning’ (see, for example, Boekaerts and Corno, 2005; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Price, et al., 2011;

Rust, O'Donovan, and Price, 2005), and by the theoretical understanding of feedback as situated, socially constructed, and 'dialogic' (Carless et al., 2011; Ion, Cano-García, and Fernández-Ferrer, 2017; Orsmond, Merry and Handley, 2013; Tian and Lowe, 2013). Feedback is situated; it does not simply involve an 'objective transfer of information' in a vacuum (Falchikov, 2005). It is a complex process that takes place in a particular setting, in a certain moment in time and that factors multiple elements such as means of delivery, intention, language and discourse utilised, and sociocultural context of delivery.

The sociocultural perspective that this thesis adopts views feedback as a social process, wherein meaning of feedback information is negotiated between individuals through interaction and is supported by various mediational means (Säljö, 2004). Emphasis is placed on the complex and multi-layered social and cultural context in which feedback processes take place and consideration is given to the learner's previous experience and pre-existing knowledge (Esterhazy, 2019). I would argue that such factors should be given particular attention in recent times of international higher education, as universities are increasingly concerned with individuals that carry diverse sociocultural and educational backgrounds and experiences. Feedback interactions take place at the intercultural level, between individuals with different sociocultural values, experiences, and behaviours. Thus, feedback processes cannot be looked at without considering the individuals who participate in such processes with their experiences and characteristics. It is interesting to observe how sociocultural theories have framed most research on assessment and feedback in English Language Teaching/Teaching English as a Foreign Language (see for example Aljaafreh and Lantolf, 1994; Bitchener and Knoch, 2008; Ellis, 2009; Ferris, 2004, 2007; Han and Hyland, 2015; Vattøy and Gamlem, 2020) where all learners come from a variety of backgrounds. This has more rarely been done in HE research on feedback, where the backgrounds of learners have often been overlooked, and students tend to be considered as one homogenous group (Pitt, Bearman and Esterhazy, 2019). Further, the focus on postgraduate international students has been rare. Exceptions to this are unpublished doctoral thesis (e.g., Soden, 2013) and few published studies (Cookson, 2017; Dunworth and Sanchez, 2018; Poverjuc, 2010; Robson et al. 2013; Sanchez and Dunworth, 2015; Tian and Lowe, 2013; To, 2021), although the focus often remains on (written) feedback on academic writing and language.

Värlander (2008) observes there seems to be an increased tendency to conceptualise feedback from a socio-constructivist and sociocultural perspective, and feedback is now very commonly conceptualised and referred to as a process (Winstone et al., 2022). Nevertheless, feedback is still far too often considered from an information transmission perspective (Winstone et al., 2022), dangerously overlooking the active participation of students in the feedback processes, the context in which feedback is provided, and the characteristics and identities of those involved.

2.4.2.2 Around Active Agency: Obstacles and Facilitators

It is now generally agreed that students need to be active players (Molloy et al., 2019) in feedback processes for them to be useful. Put simply, it is not enough for students to receive feedback information to automatically recognise it, understand it, and utilise it to enhance their learning, and this is likely to be particularly true for international students (Hu and Lam, 2010; Sanchez and Dunworth, 2015).

Firstly, students need to be able to locate the feedback (Carless and Winstone, 2020). According to Verges Bausili (2018), Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) have recently become the most common ‘place’ where assessment and feedback occur at British higher education institutions. Students seem to find it easier to locate the feedback on VLEs and to access it and revisit it on multiple occasions (Parkin et al., 2012). When access to feedback is convenient, students seem to engage more. Nevertheless, this has been observed within British institutions, whereas preferences of students who come from contexts where technology might not be a common tool have not been considered. Hepplestone et al. (2011) and Jonsson (2012) do observe that this could potentially lead to greater variability in student outcomes, nevertheless contextual and cultural reasons behind this have been overlooked.

Understanding the feedback is the next crucial step. As this is one of the sine qua non for feedback to be an effective learning tool, research has largely focused on student (mis)understanding feedback (Chanock, 2000; Pitts, 2005; Rae and Cochrane, 2008; Wang and Li, 2011). Students report their difficulties originate from ambiguity and lack of clarity of comments (Carless, 2006; Huxham,

2007; Glover and Brown, 2006), uncertainty about criteria, conventions, and contexts (Hounsell, 2003), and unfamiliarity with the academic discourses of the subject area (Kettle, 2011; Weaver, 2006). Students also report that feedback does not very often facilitate their understanding of assessment and learning (Higgins, Hartley, and Skelton, 2001). This is intensified when feedback differs across modules that have their own different sets of cultural conventions and academic discourses (Crisp, 2007; Watling et al., 2014). If students are left confused when receiving feedback based on different modules' conventions, it is highly likely that international students who are familiar with different academic conventions and approaches might especially experience this as a bigger obstacle. A reconsideration of the role of students' 'micro' feedback cultures is necessary (Lave and Wenger, 1998) to reduce the risk of them remaining 'outsiders' to the new feedback practices.

Some studies have identified that student understanding of feedback intentions and meaning does not reflect that of the feedback providers. Lea and Street's (2000) qualitative study examined students' interpretations of feedback comments in depth, suggesting a powerful and significant comprehension mismatch between lecturer and student. Wiley (2012) also reports of discrepancies between the institutional use of feedback language and the way in which those terms are understood by students. Similarly, Orsmond and Merry's (2011) study confirms misalignment between lecturers' intended meaning and student interpretation and subsequent usage of feedback. Hartley and Chesworth (2000) also report that students can have difficulties interpreting what different tutors and subject disciplines required of them through the feedback received. As they were unable to understand the feedback intentions, they could not implement the feedback in an effective way. Similar findings can be seen in several other studies (see for example Jenkins, 1987; Cohen and Cavalcanti, 1990; Sommers, 1992; Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Sopina and McNeill, 2015), suggesting that teachers and students do not necessarily share the same assessment and feedback information. Recently, Ryan et al. (2022) investigated student and educator sense-making of authentic feedback, and confirmed that interpretations can differ, especially when the feedback information is not specific. For international students, diversity of information is likely to be greater, and this can be the cause of more complex problems of misunderstanding.

When investigating misunderstanding, research has questioned both the language and rhetoric of feedback. Numerous studies contend that student struggle with feedback sense-making is very often related to the technical feedback language (Ferris, 1995; Hedgcock and Lefkowitz, 1996; Lea and Street, 1998; Chanock, 2000; Hyland, 2000; Higgins, Hartley and Skelton, 2002; Carless, 2006). Language proficiency has at times been considered the cause of feedback misunderstanding in Second Language Learning contexts. However, considering language outside the academic culture in which it is used would be reductive: feedback language carries particular rhetoric and assumptions that are interpreted through individuals' 'mental schemas' (Fantini, 1995). As Bloxham and Campbell (2010) argue, student previous learning experiences alongside their previous ways of doing things impact upon the formation of their frames of reference and consequently on their ability to access and interpret the feedback. Feedback providers and international students see feedback and its meaning through different linguistic and cultural lenses, which can cause misalignment and misinterpretation. Hyatt (2005) highlights the need for greater reflexivity in the feedback comments provided, with particular attention to the level of transparency and accessibility of terminology used. In fact, common feedback terminology is embedded in context- and culture-specific academic discourses and might not be equally accessible to all. They interestingly note that, in the UK, such terminology is the product of the 17th/18th-century socio-historical context and reflects values and assumptions that belong to a very particular Anglophone academic culture (Hyatt, 2005). This seems to be underestimated in research on feedback. Consequently, educators might not consider that international students' previous A&F experiences can become the lens through which they perceive and approach feedback, causing disorientation and misunderstanding.

It is also worth highlighting that the 'difficult' language of feedback mirrors the academic jargon that is employed in the description of the assessment standards, criteria, and expectations. As Woolf (2004) observes, there is a lack of a common understanding between students and teachers concerning the phraseology employed to describe the assessment criteria (Norton, 2004). Such language and the culturally embedded academic assumptions it implicitly holds are rarely made explicit nor clarified by tutors. As Nicol (2010) argues, if the 'input' message of the assessment description is unclear and continues to be unclarified and ambiguous in the feedback, the ability of students to enact the feedback

is dangerously affected. There is then a risk for feedback to become a mere transmission of inaccessible information (Sadler, 1998). This could create a ‘loop’ in which students remain ‘outsiders’ to the academic discourse of assessment and feedback and to the cultural values behind them, because of the inaccessibility of the language that is used to introduce students to these academic conventions. Approaching the matter from a sociocultural perspective, Hyatt (2005) questions the view of students as ‘mere apprentices to be initiated into the academy’ (2005, p. 351), proposing a notion of critical inclusion through dialogue and co-constructed meaning-making, as opposed to a prescriptive notion of convention adoption. If students are not supported in the development of the necessary knowledge of fundamental concepts that are assumed by the teachers who compose the feedback, they might not be equipped to decode and use the feedback effectively (Sadler, 2010). As Sadler (1989) points out, there is a need for greater clarity about the expected learning outcomes for students to be able to interpret and take up the feedback. Students, and international students in particular, should be made aware of the standards they are expected to achieve, and of how the standards translate into practice, as an opaque understanding of these can hinder their engagement with both assessment and feedback (Rust et al., 2003). For this to be possible, communication about and assessment and feedback and through feedback should aim to be in a language that the students understand (Vattøy, Gamlem and Rogne, 2020).

2.4.2.3 Dialogic Feedback and Feedback Processes

Understanding feedback is also crucial to move forward from a ‘dry’ and present-orientated delivery of messages. Hounsell (2007) introduced the concept of ‘sustainable’ feedback, arguing that feedback should be designed to be utilised for tasks other than the current, completed one. Such feedback would go beyond ‘information-transmission’ messages, inviting the student to interpret feedback through dialogue with the lecturer and to relate such dialogue to learning activities throughout the course. Carless et al. (2011) suggest that students should be provided with continuous quality feedback that can modify their pre-assessment dispositions and gradually transform their understanding of feedback. The aim is for students to view feedback as a developmental process that can support their understanding and consequent use of feedback in the subsequent assessment (Carless et al., 2011). In order to do so,

students need to be involved in a dialogue with the feedback providers and peers where sense-making is a constructive and shared practice, and that can avoid the limitations of a one-way transmission of feedback (Yang and Carless, 2013). The paradigm of ‘dialogic’ feedback describes feedback as an act of ‘communication’ (Beaumont et al., 2011; Carless, 2016; Hyland, 1998; Higgins et al., 2001; Yorke, 2003), and as a ‘process in which learners make sense of information from varied sources and use it to enhance the quality of their work or learning strategies’ (Carless, 2015, p. 192). Dialogue should become a useful tool for uncovering and reconciling the different perceptions teachers and students might have of the feedback process (Carless, 2006; Maclellan, 2001; Yang and Carless, 2013), wherein feedback and assessment standards and criteria are approached and unpacked through co-construction of meaning (Nicol, 2010; Steen-Utheim and Wittek, 2017). Dialogic feedback is a discursive social practice (Pryor and Croussard, 2008), where the individuals involved define the modalities and contents of such dialogue. Ajjawi and Boud (2017) observe how context is fundamental when researching dialogic feedback, as interactions are facilitated and/or hindered by contextual and material factors. For international students, dialogue might not be straightforward and might need some facilitators: peers are often mentioned as an example. Ferenz (2005) and Taha and Cox (2016), found that international students tend to prefer discussing their work within their social networks of peers and friends as well as comparing their work with that of peers. Similarly, Chew, Snee, and Price (2016) and Fan, Robson and Leat (2015), reported that peer assessment can enhance international students’ experiences with assessment and feedback, as students are able to make sense of their work and that of others in a more ‘informal’ way.

Typology and quality of feedback are certainly fundamental. However, they are not all it takes for feedback information to be useful. Students’ actions in response to feedback are crucial (Boud and Molloy, 2013; Carless, 2015; Carless and Boud, 2018). When the information provided through feedback leads to some action, a ‘feedback loop’ is completed (Carless and Boud, 2018; Zimmerman, 2000). Students’ uptake of the feedback in some sort of response is fundamental to understand whether some learning has occurred. Feedback should provide students with the opportunity to close a performance or learning gap, enabling them and those giving the feedback to know that it has been

effective (Boud, 2000). Students might enact the feedback on short-term tasks (e.g. improving a specific piece of work), or with longer-term intentions (e.g. improving strategies for approaching other/future assessment tasks). Indeed, feedback should support two learning processes: it should help students to recognise the next steps in learning and how to take them, both during production and in relation to the next assignment (Boud, 2000). In a recent study, Carless (2018) draws on the work of the organisational theorist Argyris who identified two types of learning: single-loop learning that focuses on tackling a specific problem or task, and double-loop learning which adds a second loop of re-evaluating and reflecting on the way in which the problem or task was tackled (Argyris, 1990 in Carless, 2018). Carless (2018) adaptation of the theory of single and double-loop learning to feedback in higher education recognises single-loop learning in students acting upon feedback to improve a particular aspect on a specific piece of assessment, and double-loop learning in reflective thinking that allows feedback inputs to be reflected upon and assimilated. Students' reflective thinking allows them to evaluate and possibly adjust the values and practices that guide the strategies they employ when engaging with assessment. According to Panadero, Liepnevich and Broadbent (2020), an effective strategy would be what they refer to as 'self-feedback', where learners become able to create their own feedback to complete the double loop. Nicol (2020) similarly argues that students need to learn how to generate feedback internally and they do so by utilising the tools that are available to them.

Although both single and double-loop learning are valuable, Carless (2018) argues that the most powerful feedback often has a 'critical longer-term dimension in that it provokes thinking, reflection and then considered action', and that longer-term approaches to feedback uptake should be fostered by students and teachers working together towards construction and sense-making of the feedback. The value of quality feedback with a focus on future work has been highlighted in other studies such as Orsmond, Merry and Reiling's (2005) and Walker (2009) reporting that feedback that is not future-oriented is perceived as less helpful by students. In fact, students seem to be unable to benefit from the feedback when the comments are related only to a specific piece of work or module (Walker, 2009). In a five-year longitudinal study, Hill and West (2020) also support that a cyclic and iterative approach to feedback that looks at future development can improve student learning over time. However, as Winstone et al. (2016) stress, the assessment design often does not allow for developmental feedback,

because students are increasingly assessed through multiple and unrelated assignments. This is related to the issue of modularisation of assessment and a lack of focus of formative assessment (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004; Lea and Street, 2000), that hinder student engagement in dialogue and feedback enactment. Carless himself (2018) reiterates that an iterative, spiral, longer-term development is not always promoted in the increasingly modularised curriculum in higher education, where feedback is more of a sporadic and disjointed practice (Jessop and Tomas, 2017; Knight, 2000). Lack of time and resources can be a great obstacle to feedback enactment-oriented dialogues. According to Wood (2021) technology mediation can support engagement with and uptake of feedback by reducing issues caused by temporal and resources constraints. At the same time, technology mediated student-teacher and peer-to-peer feedback dialogues can support the formation of a much needed ‘pedagogic alliance’. The importance of students and teachers working together has been often highlighted: Winstone et al., (2017) argue for students’ achieving ‘proactive recipience [that is] a form of agentic engagement that involves the learner sharing responsibility’ (p. 17). Active feedback seeking is a component of agentic engagement: according to Crommelick and Anseel (2013) feedback seeking behaviour is important for performance, learning and creativity, adaptation, and socialisation. Factors that seem to influence such behaviour are feedback orientation and propensity, learning goal orientation, and ambiguity tolerance. Winstone, Pitt and Nash (2020) discuss further the idea of shared responsibility in feedback processes and investigate educators’ perspectives. Their findings show that conceptualisations of feedback as information transmission are still underlying educators’ views and practices, and they therefore argue for a necessary shift towards encouraging students’ active roles through shared responsibilities in feedback processes. Carless (2022) reiterates that information-transmission feedback does not allow students to be active agents. Opportunities need to be designed for students to monitor their own work, generate internal feedback (Nicol, 2020), make sense of and use the feedback information. When students do this, they are actively involved in feedback processes that can support their learning. Carless (2022) also suggests ways in which educators can facilitate this and encourages the use of peer feedback and exemplars through which students can make comparisons with others’ work and generate feedback to improve their own work.

However, agency and proactivity should not be only considered as individual factors as they are intertwined with sociocultural factors within feedback contexts (Billet, 2006; 2008). With particular reference to active feedback seeking, Delva et al. (2013) observe that it is influenced by multiple factors, such as the learning culture, relationships between individuals involved in feedback processes, purposes and quality of feedback, and the affective responses triggered by feedback. What has not been considered in the literature is that feedback practices where students are active agents that engage in long-term, future-oriented enactment of feedback might not be similarly promoted in feedback cultures outside of the UK (Winstone, 2022). Because of different sociocultural experiences of assessment and feedback, international students might not be able to recognise the purpose of feedback as a support for their long-term academic development and perhaps perceive it as a form of evaluation that is strictly task related. This might be particularly true for international students who have little or no experience with formative assessment and that only know grade awarding as a form of evaluation. Agency itself is ‘embedded in action, as something people do within specific contexts’ (Charteris, 2016, p. 279) and might not be what all students do in academic and feedback contexts. Gravett (2020) argues that responsibility for agency cannot be on the individual and the practices only, but also on contexts, learning environments, power dynamics. Winstone and Boud (2019) observe that, despite the focus now being on students’ active agency in feedback processes, feedback practices might not always encourage nor facilitate this. They argue that national cultures shape feedback practice: examining the two examples of the UK and Australia, they report how Australian educators and practices place more emphasis on learners and on how they use the feedback, compared to their UK counterparts. Van der Kleij, Adie and Cumming (2019) also observe that, despite the literature now promoting the role of student agency in feedback processes, ‘more traditional’ feedback practices seem to prevail. Winstone (2022) confirms that, in the UK, transmission models of feedback and transmission-oriented practices are dominant. Foster-Collins et al. (2021) highlight that ‘educators inevitably draw upon their own understandings of what it is to give or receive feedback, influenced by previous educational experiences and by wider societal understandings’ (p. 12), inevitably shaping practice and their students’ perceptions of feedback.

Feedback as a dialogue might have the power to encourage international students to uncover the purposes and the potential of feedback as a learning tool, in an intercultural journey of shared and active sense-making and discovery. As Carless (2018) highlights, because of the multi-layered complexities of learning, there are student learning experiences that do not fit into the categories of single or double-loop feedback but are ‘unresolved learning puzzles [that] involve lengthy gestation and spiral forms of engagement’ (Carless, 2018:6). International students in particular are more likely to have ‘puzzling’ experiences of feedback, because of the sociocultural, linguistic, and contextual factors that impact on their discovery of academic practices and discourses.

2.4.2.4 Emotional and Relational Sphere

Puzzling feedback experiences might also be due to the emotional and relational component of feedback interactions, that have been another focus in recent literature. Emotions in relation to learning are increasingly being investigated, and so are emotions within assessment and feedback contexts (see for example Beard, Clegg, and Smith, 2007; Cramp et al., 2012; Värlander, 2008, and Falchikov and Boud, 2007). In fact, assessment and feedback are considered as very personal and emotional processes (Crossman, 2007; Rowe, 2017). If feedback can be a useful tool for learning only where students actually approach it, actively engage with it, and act upon it, all dimensions of engagement need to be equally considered and valued, including emotional or affective engagement (see Kahu, 2013). Uptake of feedback is crucial, however, it can only occur if students positively react to the feedback (Race, 1995). The role of emotions in student participation with assessment and feedback is stressed by Boud (1995) and Boud and Falchikov (2007) who argue that assessment and feedback are profoundly emotional practices and not mere technical activities; students invest time and effort in their assignments, and this generates emotional feedback expectations (Higgins et al., 2001). For Boud and Falchikov (2007), the emotional experience of being assessed is complex and multifaceted. It involves learners’ expectations and dispositions, as well as with the relationships with others involved in the assessment process.

Research has focused on positive/negative emotions and their impact on student learning. Negative emotions have been at the centre of the debate (Moore and Kuol, 2007). They have been

reported to have detrimental impact on academic motivation and attention (Nash, Crimmins and Opreescu, 2015; Poulos and Mahony, 2008), and on student willingness to read and use the feedback comments (Crossman, 2007). Negative affective states can also be beneficial at times (Pekrun and Stephens, 2010), triggering student motivation to perform better, and so can critical feedback (Fishbach and Finkelstein, 2012). On the other hand, positive emotions can broaden the focus of student attention and foster student motivation (Huntsinger, 2013; Pekrun and Stephens, 2010), but they can also undermine motivation to invest future effort (Cassidy et al., 2003; Pitt and Norton, 2017). Rowe (2017) argues that the relationships between emotions and student approach to feedback need to be observed within a taxonomy that goes beyond the simple negative/positive dichotomy and activating events or factors need to be investigated alongside the consequences. Pekrun et al. (2002) investigated the sources and ranges of emotions that might be triggered in an assessment situation and their effects on learning. They argue that academic emotions are significantly related to learning, motivation, learning strategies, cognitive resources, self-regulation, and academic achievement. Based on these findings, Pekrun (2006, 2011) captured a diverse range of academic emotions, developing a three-fold taxonomy of emotions that encompasses the elements of valence (positive or negative), physiological activation (high or low), and object (task or outcome). In the context of assessment, achievement emotions can be triggered and are defined as ‘emotions that are directly linked to achievement activities or achievement outcomes’ (Pekrun et al., 2011, p. 37). These emotions can be positive or negative, ‘activating’ when they initiate action or effort or ‘deactivating’ when they obstruct or prevent action or effort (Pekrun, 2006; 2011). For example, positive activating emotions include enjoyment and pride, whereas positive deactivating emotions include contentment and relief (Shields, 2015). Pekrun also classifies negative activating emotions, such as shame and anxiety, as well as negative deactivating emotions, for example frustration and disappointment. These different categories of emotions might impact on learning differently, as pleasant activating emotions such as enjoyment and pride may have a positive impact on motivation and performance, whilst pleasant deactivating emotions such as relief and relaxation have potentially negative effects (Linnenbrink, 2006). Thus, when looking at emotions and feedback, it is crucial to consider how the outcome of achievement emotions interacts with emotional valence.

Despite the shift towards considering antecedents and consequences of different emotions in A&F contexts, research has neglected the fact that emotions are culturally mediated and can be ‘learned’ (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001) and managed differently. For Ajjawi, Olson, and McNaughton (2022) emotions are closely linked to social relations and the characteristics of the learning environments in which they occur. For international students, triggering events and factors in intercultural A&F contexts are likely to be of social and cultural nature. The affective consequences for individuals in any intercultural situations are often correlated with undesirable emotional responses (Mak et al., 2013), and this needs to be considered in intercultural A&F context. International students in unfamiliar academic contexts often experience emotional reactions of embarrassment, impotence, shame, anxiety, and frustration (Brown, 2008; Christie et al., 2006; Ward et al., 2005), that have been classified both as activating and deactivating emotions. Such emotions have also often been linked to the initial period of transition to the foreign university, however their functions and valence in students’ approach to the practices of A&F and the outcomes associated with them have often been overlooked. A few studies have considered international students in particular: Tian and Lowe (2013) observe that international students in an unfamiliar context may be even less likely than others to use comments that have a negative emotional impact or are demotivating, and Ryan and Henderson (2018) argue that are more likely than home students to find feedback critical and upsetting.

Emotions triggered by cultural differences within norms, values, customs of A&F may contribute to misunderstandings and communication disruption that are often perceived as unpleasant and stressful and might produce negative emotions with detrimental consequences (Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern, 2002). International students’ dispositions towards the new, unfamiliar A&F practices can impact on emotions. If what they expect does not mirror the new reality, they might feel particularly confused and discouraged (Carroll and Ryan, 2005). Expectations play a fundamental role in feedback emotions: pride is likely to be experienced when expectations are met, whereas disappointment and shame are experienced when this is not the case (Kahu et al., 2015). Ryan and Henderson (2018) report on expectations that relate to feedback contents only. They observe that when students are awarded a grade lower than expected they are likely to feel sadness, anger, and shame. Nevertheless, what students

who are unfamiliar with the practices might expect in terms of feedback form, function and role are not considered.

Assessment and feedback are impregnated with ‘judgements’ made about the product that seem to be often perceived to be about the learners themselves. On this, Boud (1995) states that ‘too often the distinction between giving feedback on a specific product, which has been produced by a person, and judging them as a person is not made’ (p. 45), and this can influence student emotions and engagement (Pitt and Norton, 2017). Yorke (2003) observes that when the distinction between product and person is not clearly made ‘student confidence can be affected and the feeling of being a failure may erroneously be experienced’ when they might just have not understood what was requested of them (p. 489). International students are likely to experience this; they might feel that what was positively recognised at their previous institutions are now being judged, not recognised nor valued. Shields’ (2015) study on international students’ emotional response to feedback, although limited to first-year students, suggests that the emotional impact of feedback is highly related to student prior experiences, the value given to the feedback received, and how student beliefs about themselves as learners relate to their perceptions of feedback.

The interactional and relational aspect of assessment and feedback is also of great importance for students’ engagement with feedback (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017). Dialogue is in fact central to feedback decoding, engagement, and uptake (Värlander, 2008). Although students seem to appreciate and recognise the importance of the relational aspect within feedback (Rowe, 2011), it seems that in contemporary British HE opportunities for interaction and dialogue are not always granted (Nicol, 2010). However, for Shields (2015), the relational dimension in feedback processes is vital to support students’ sense of belonging to the academic environment and this is fundamental for international students who are ‘newcomers’. The relational and emotional dimensions of feedback equally involve students and educators as the development of a culture of feedback that is characterised by trust, empathy, and authentic guidance can enable students to overcome inhibiting emotional reactions in response to feedback (Carless and Winstone, 2020).

Research shows that students appreciate the possibility to engage in interaction with the feedback providers. On this, international students' perceptions of the relational aspect of feedback have been so far assumed to be in line with that of the wider student body. Nevertheless, such assumption is unexamined and unquestioned and the fact that feedback interactions are of intercultural nature is also overlooked. The interaction is *about* and *within* assessment and feedback; these are defined by standards, criteria and norms that are embedded in the academic discourse and made 'legitimate' and 'truthful' by those who define them. Hence, such interactions might be characterised by an unbalance of 'power' (Fairclough, 2013), as educators in the new environments are those in power of judging student performance (Reynolds and Trehan, 2000). When students experience the power difference between themselves and the feedback providers, feelings and emotions of powerlessness, impotence, and anxiety could be triggered, impacting student willingness to interact, and potentially hindering the creation of a feedback culture of trust (Boud and Molloy, 2013). Educators seem to struggle to recognise this potential obstacle (Värlander, 2008) and how it might be exacerbated for international students. In fact, it might be difficult for educators to understand the unique position in which international students find themselves, especially if they have never experienced anything similar (Fantini, 1995; Cortazzi and Jin, 2013).

Further, because of cultural norms, values and previous experiences, international students might be unwilling to engage in interaction and to build a relationship with educators or might be scared to do so (Sutton and Gill, 2010). They might hold different expectations of what a student-teacher relationship should be like (Tian and Lowe, 2013), and might expect a student-teacher relationship to be distant and formal. Particularly in CHCs (Hofstede, 1986), but not exclusively in such contexts, teachers are seen as wise and superior individuals whose knowledge is simply transmitted to students and never questioned nor discussed, and student-teacher interactions are rare. Further, as Alhazmi and Nyland (2012) point out, cultures that do not promote mixed-gender interaction might impact on the individual's being willing and comfortable when interacting with individuals of the opposite sex.

As Lave and Wenger (1999, p. 31) point out, 'learning and a sense of identity are inseparable. They are aspects of the same phenomenon'. Therefore, when looking at student affective engagement

with assessment and feedback, it is crucial to consider their perceptions and beliefs not only about assessment and feedback practices but also about themselves. For example, feedback and its impact on self-esteem and vice versa are to be mentioned. Self-esteem is intended as individuals' own ideas of self-worth, their degree of self-acceptance, and their beliefs about their ability (Young, 2000). Theorists have advanced that high self-esteem contributes to positive affect (Christie et al., 2008), and that higher self-esteem students are more likely to seek critical feedback, accept criticism (Young, 2000) and positively react to it. However, according to Lowe et al. (2008), assessment is likely to be perceived as a threat to self-esteem and consequently disregarded when high self-esteem students' expectations on their performance are not met. International students' self-esteem might particularly be put to the test when they find themselves learning in a new and culturally different context and when, as previously mentioned, their performance expectations are not met.

This thesis argues for the importance of considering international students' emotional reactions to feedback. In line with Shields (2015), a deficit approach of students considered as unable to 'cope' with negative feedback and new practices is avoided, and the focus is on supporting 'belongingness' in a new feedback culture and a sense of competence that can help recognise and manage emotions. Recent research has considered ways to do this. To create a sense of belonging and provide scaffold on emotional management, Molloy and Bearman (2019) propose that educators show 'intellectual candour' and openly discuss the challenges they faced when dealing emotionally with feedback processes.

2.4.3 Current Focus: Feedback Literacy Development

Some have argued that students 'misplaced' conceptions of feedback meaning and purposes and their consequent inability to appreciate and enact the feedback might be caused by their 'lack' of feedback literacy. Feedback literacy was initially conceptualised as students' ability to read, interpret, and understand feedback (O'Donovan, Price, and Rust, 2004; Sutton, 2012; Sutton and Gill, 2010) in a way that would 'align' to that of those who offered the feedback. As Sutton (2012) observes, most students can and do read the feedback, whereas they find decoding, interpreting, and enacting it more problematic. Reading the feedback is not sufficient for it to be useful; students need to decode and

interpret it by feeding back to the learning outcomes and assessment requirements to then act upon it effectively. On this basis, student feedback literacy and its development have become recent foci of much research. Such research builds on the initial conceptualisations of feedback literacy and has recently developed more detailed and comprehensive models that intend to define feedback literacy and what might support its development.

It is worth highlighting here that the focus of this section and of the research itself is on students' feedback literacies only. This was a conscious choice that is justified throughout the thesis and further discussed in the limitations. Despite this, I acknowledge the role of teacher feedback literacies and of the recent research that investigates it (see, for example, Boud and Dawson, 2021; Esterhazy, de Lange, and Damşa, 2021) and its interplay with student feedback literacies (Carless and Winstone, 2020; Deneen and Hoo, 2021; Tai et al., 2021).

Carless and Boud (2018, p. 1323) contend that 'one of the main barriers to effective feedback is generally low levels of student feedback literacy'. Their key conceptual model of feedback literacy proposes that, for feedback to be useful, students need to (1) build their ability to appreciate the feedback they receive, (2) make judgments on it and on their work, (3) manage the affective sphere that surrounds the feedback dialogue and (4) consequently take action (Figure 1).

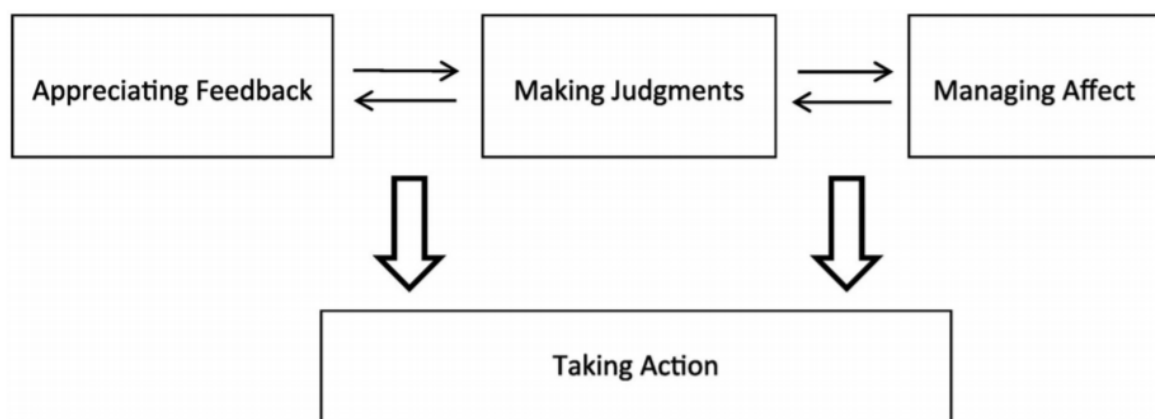


Figure 1 - Carless and Boud (2018) model of feedback literacy

The active, agentic role of students is a core element to feedback literacy, as 'students with well-developed feedback literacy appreciate their own active role in feedback processes' (Carless and Boud,

2018, p. 1318). For them, appreciating feedback can be translated into recognising the role and value of feedback and understanding the importance of being active agents. In fact, if students do not recognise feedback and do not understand what to do with it, they tend to ignore it (Still and Koerber, 2010). Appreciating feedback means understanding its intentions, meanings, and suggestions alongside one's role in feedback processes.

Making judgments on the quality of work is another crucial aspect of feedback literacy. Students are likely to benefit from developing evaluative judgement, that means becoming able to make informed decisions about the quality of work (Tai et al., 2018), including one's own and others'. This is crucial, as such decisions re-shape future work and improve its quality. Further, this can support students to develop evaluative capacities that are not only useful in higher education contexts but also outside (Villarroel et al., 2018). In fact, recent studies consider the importance of evaluative abilities also in the workplace (Gladovic, Tai and Dawson, 2022; Naidoo, Tai and Penman, 2020; Tai et al. 2018) and incorporate this as one of the components of assessment and feedback practices that are authentic and mirror situations that might occur in real life disciplines or professions (Dawson, Carless and Wah Lee, 2020). Authentic feedback then would need to create opportunities for students to learn how to monitor their performance, judge their work, and take action on the feedback.

Managing affect is another core element of feedback literacy. It does not only refer to students' ability to acknowledge, recognise, and 'manage' feelings and emotions that might be triggered in feedback situations, but also to attitudes that students might show towards feedback. For Carless and Boud (2018), exhibiting proactive attitudes (e.g. feedback seeking) rather than defensive responses to feedback often lead to students' improvement. Activating emotions and proactive attitudes are often shown in students who can utilise feedback effectively.

Taking action to inform future work is described by Carless and Boud (2018) as the most crucial yet often overlooked aspect of feedback literacy. As Molloy, Boud and Henderson (2020) confirm, enacting the outcomes of feedback information processing is of great importance if feedback is to be useful for students. In their empirical study that aims at conceptualising a framework of feedback literacy based on examined students' views of feedback processes, enacting feedback information on

future tasks is a core component. They also consider the importance of six other components of feedback literacy as follows: committing to feedback as a tool for improvement; appreciating feedback as an active process; active eliciting of information to improve learning; processing feedback information; acknowledging and working with emotions; recognising feedback as a reciprocal process. Similarly, Winstone, Mathlin and Nash (2019) developed a toolkit to support student feedback literacy skills and investigated students' perceptions of its actual development. Their study also confirms the importance of developing proactive reciprocity and agency in feedback processes where responsibilities are shared between students and educators.

With a similar focus on feedback literacy development, Malecka, Boud and Carless (2020) stress the importance of eliciting, processing, and enacting feedback and argue for incorporating those into curriculum design. Drawing on Carless and Boud's model, Tripodi et al. (2020) offer twelve tips to support the development of learner feedback literacy, stressing the role of student agency, the importance of managing affect and of teacher guidance and scaffold in conceptualising and understanding the value of feedback. Furthermore, they highlight the importance of temporality in the development of feedback literacy: they suggest embedding feedback in the curriculum, utilising exemplars, and fostering continued reflection on feedback over time. The potential benefit of using rubrics and exemplars to support development of feedback literacy has also been recently observed in other studies, including Orr, Yorke and Blair's (2014) and Sambell and Graham's (2020). Howe et al.'s (2020) work also aligns with previous literature arguing that exemplars are valuable as they support students to distinguish quality, make evaluative judgments, and reflect on their work. Further, they add that they play a significant role in guiding students to take effective action on the feedback. Understanding and managing technology that supports or enables feedback processes is also considered important (Carless and Boud, 2018; Wood, 2021).

Recent approaches to feedback literacy conceptualisation and development are often underpinned by socio-constructivist or sociocultural views of feedback. The crux of the concept of feedback literacy itself is sense-making of feedback, that goes from building knowledge and awareness of the value of feedback to its processing and enacting. Carless and Boud (2018) contend that building

literacy supports the development of ‘tacit knowledge’ of the feedback practice and of how to make it a useful tool. Nevertheless, what has been mentioned but not thoroughly empirically explored in much research on feedback literacy is the fact that feedback is a situated practice that occurs within institutional contexts, cultures, and academic power relations (Sutton, 2012). Gravett (2020, p. 4) argues for the potential usefulness of a ‘contextualised, material and sociomaterial perspective’ of feedback literacy rather than an individual and context-free development of skills and competencies. The development of feedback literacy cannot happen in a vacuum; therefore, it is unlikely to happen equally for all students. Such a consideration aligns this thesis.

Social, and environmental contexts have been recently at the centre of attention, and so have the specific disciplinary sub-cultures and norms of feedback practices. Context and individual diversity have been recently given attention in work by Chong (2020) that, underpinned by an ecological approach to learning, conceptualises feedback literacy as mediated by contexts. Building on a similar sociocultural conceptualisation of feedback, and on the concept of signature feedback practices (see, for example, Carless, To, Kwan, and Kwok, 2020; Penman et al. 2021 and Quinlan and Pitt, 2021), Winstone, Balloo and Carless (2020) observe that there exist multiple feedback literacies across different disciplinary contexts. Li and Han (2021) similarly highlight the crucial role of students’ disciplinary knowledge of concepts when engaging with feedback.

As Malecka, Boud, Tai and Ajjawi (2022) contend, students do not simply develop one feedback literacy that can effectively support them in any context and situation. On the contrary, students are likely to navigate through diverse contexts of education where they re-shape what their conceptualisations of and experiences with feedback might be. In their case studies, they find influences of learners’ feedback histories on utilisation of feedback. Such histories might be different across various disciplines, courses, and institutions and lead to diverse feedback literacies.

Further, as Fullerton et al. (2021) observe, different cultures might be impacting on individuals’ understanding of the role of feedback. This might include ethnic cultures, national cultures, and the education system culture (e.g., school education, university, or discipline cultures). An example of this can be found in Han and Xu’s (2019) case study of a Chinese educational context, that found a combination of national and educational culture as an influence upon students’ feedback literacy.

Despite the involvement of international students and non-UK/Anglophone contexts in research on feedback literacy (e.g. Han and Xu, 2019 and Yu, Zhang and Liu, 2022), the cultural aspect of feedback literacy diversity that this thesis intends to focus on has been thus far overlooked. As discussed in section 2.1.3, this thesis focuses on ‘smaller’ previous cultures of feedback that are likely to impact on students’ conceptualisations and experience of feedback in a new educational setting. It draws on concepts advanced by theories of ‘literacy histories’ and the ‘academic literacies approach’ that are discussed in the next section.

2.4.3.1 Drawing on Literacy Histories and the Academic Literacy Approach

Mobile international students arrive in the British HE system with previous experiences of a range of culture- and context-specific educational practices that shaped their so-called ‘literacy histories’ (Barton et al., 2007) and academic literacies (Street, 2004). However, this has not been given particular attention in research on feedback nor on feedback literacy and is addressed in this thesis.

Earlier research on academic literacies did consider the situatedness of certain academic practices. Research on feedback seems to limit such consideration to students transitioning from the context and culture of secondary to higher education. Little attention has been given to transitions that might happen from a context of HE to another, unfamiliar one, although existent prior literature suggests there are all the basis for such an inquiry.

Over 20 years ago, Lea and Street (1998) introduced the so-called ‘Academic Literacies Approach’ in research on transition to HE, after observing that students who are novices to the higher education context enter in contact with new ways of understanding, interpreting, and organising knowledge. Lillis and Scott describe such an approach as ‘UK based teacher-researchers writing out of higher Education, and drawing on Applied linguistics, ELT-EAP, Education, sociolinguistics and linguistic ethnography’ (2007, p. 6). The approach mainly considered first year university students transitioning to university and students of English Language or English for Academic Purposes. However, international students who enter the unfamiliar British HE context to undertake a postgraduate degree should be equally considered as ‘novices’ to the academic environment. The

Academic Literacies approach is valuable as it challenges the more traditional idea of literacy as the technical skills to read and write (Gee, 1990), instead conceptualising literacy as a complex set of social practices entangled in relational structures (Street, 2003), and shaped by social and cultural elements (Street 2003, 2004; Sutton, 2012). Building on the critique that Lea and Street advance towards older conceptualisations of literacies as skills and competencies that simply need to be acquired, Lillis and Tuck (2016) describe literacies as more complex and ‘ideologically shaped, reflecting institutional structures and relations of power’ (p. 30). In fact, as Lea and Street (1998, 2006) uncover, the codes and conventions of academia are often taken for granted, as are student and staff literacies’ ‘cultural and contextual component’ (1998, p. 157). International students are likely to have developed different feedback literacies that are specific to other academic cultures and contexts. However, to understand meanings and purposes of feedback within British HE contexts they might need to renegotiate such literacies. According to Wingate (2018) academic literacy is ‘the ability to communicate competently in an academic discourse community’ (p. 350); to communicate within feedback contexts, feedback literacy is needed. Literacy diversity can originate from student previous academic experiences or ‘histories’. Students prior ‘literacy histories’ are the experiences students gathered with a range of academic practices at previous education and HE institutions (Barton et al., 2007) and assume a crucial role for international students as they approach British HE. According to such an approach, both academic practices and literacies are situated, context-related, and subject-specific cultural phenomena (Barton and Hamilton, 2000), and affect individuals’ understanding, engagement and learning within various academic contexts. International students are accustomed to different feedback and assessment cultures, and their feedback literacies are therefore built around those. International students’ philosophies and conceptualisations of both assessment and feedback affect the way in which they evaluate and process feedback. Section 2.3.1 discusses assessment literacy as it is inherently connected to feedback literacy. According to Sutton (2012) it is necessary to situate feedback literacy within the broader academic literacies’ literature, and in particular within the literature on assessment literacy (Winstone and Carless, 2019). Sutton argues that becoming ‘literate’ means uncovering and processing ‘new ways of knowing, being and acting in academic contexts’ (Sutton, 2012, p. 33). Student decoding, interpreting, and enacting the feedback is informed by their prior understanding of feedback practices

and assessment purposes, criteria, and standards. Their capacity of forming judgements regarding what is valid and valuable academic knowledge is developed within a context specific academic culture. According to Sutton (2012), students can only be considered feedback literate when their conception of work quality aligns to that of the feedback providers. However, as a consequence of their literacy histories, he observes that international students might not be ‘feedback literate’ in the way that this is understood in the UK context. Building on Sutton’s work, Chong (2020) highlights the impact that both contextual and individual factors have upon student feedback literacies and their development.

2.4.3.2 Postgraduate histories and literacies

As previously mentioned, student histories and literacies have often been considered within transition from secondary to higher education, whereas transition to postgraduate levels of education has been neglected. Research into students’ (both home and international) postgraduate experiences is scarce, including postgraduate taught, research and doctoral programmes (Stuart et al., 2008; Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson, 2013). In 2012, the Higher Education Commission’s inquiry into Postgraduate Education expressed concern on the fact that the postgraduate student experience has been a ‘forgotten part of the sector’, calling for further research in the field (Higher Education Commission, 2012, p. 17). It would seem that first year experience is considered to be the most critical in shaping and re-defining students’ perceptions of the learning context and their beliefs about learning (Carroll and Ryan, 2005; Ryan, 2000), and that the challenges students experience are likely to gradually disappear or take different shapes and characteristics after an initial period of transition (Heggins and Jackson, 2003). For this reason, postgraduates are often assumed to have built the necessary literacy during the previous years of study (Moogan, 2020). However, such assumption tends to forget that international students might begin their studies at university in the UK at a postgraduate level. In this case, they are likely to have a different educational history. International postgraduate students have developed a higher degree of familiarity with academic discourses, language, and conventions in a different sociocultural higher education environment at undergraduate level (Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson, 2013), and are likely to have different, differently shaped feedback literacies. Their assessment and feedback literacy histories are wider and longer, as they include what they experienced

across their undergraduate studies. The ‘schemata’ through which they conceptualise assessment and feedback practices might be more rigidly shaped and potentially less flexible and changeable (Evans and Waring, 2011; Tian and Lowe, 2013). Postgraduates might be less able to recognise the values and assumptions that underpin their own (and others’) understanding of the purposes and intentions of A&F, and they might for this reason encounter greater challenges.

As most full-time postgraduate programmes have the duration of one academic year only, the issue of renegotiating feedback literacies for them to be useful in a short period of time also needs to be explored. Quan et al. (2013, 2016) argue that time is a crucial element in the complex process of discovery that international postgraduates experience. The process of a 3-year transition of undergraduate students cannot be considered as equal to a 1-year process (Arambewela and Hall, 2013). For the reasons exposed, the present thesis focuses on international postgraduate taught students who have completed their undergraduate education in a country other than the UK. The attention that the ‘academic literacy’ and ‘literacy histories’ approaches give to the culture and context mediated process of sense-making and meaning-making rather than to students deficit of skills (Gravett, 2020; Lea and Street, 1998) is valuable, and factors the need for communication within and around assessment and feedback practices. The value that is given to student academic histories and their constructs allows for a re-evaluation of academic literacies from being defined as ‘common-sense ways of knowing’ (Lea and Street, 1998) to ways of knowing that originate from a specific academic culture, context, and discourse. Lawrence (2002) supports the critique of the deficit approach, observing that the real problem lies with the teaching staff and the institutions that sometimes fail to understand and to take into consideration the new diverse student population. Research on feedback literacy development has so far failed to factor this specifically. Thus, there needs to be a dialogue that uncovers and values the assessment and feedback histories and literacies that international students bring into university feedback processes.

This thesis values Carless and Boud’s (2018) recent conceptual model of feedback literacy, although acknowledging that the model makes no particular reference to the academic culture in which feedback literacy is developed. As such, this thesis suggests that the model needs to be operationalised considering students’ previous experiences and literacy histories, and the potential impact different

A&F cultures might have on international postgraduate students' development of feedback literacy. Interestingly, Winstone and Carless (2020) describe feedback literacy as consisting of 'pertinent competencies and knowledge' that support students' understanding and uptake of feedback. This can be supported through dialogic practices; for international students, however, it is paramount to consider that feedback dialogues take place at the intercultural level (Winstone et al. 2017) where communication happens between cultures and is likely to be particularly challenging. Based on these considerations, this thesis proposes that for communication about assessment and feedback to be effective, international students might need to develop the capacity to effectively communicate in intercultural A&F contexts. The next sections discuss the role of intercultural competence to support effective intercultural communication and how this can apply to assessment and feedback processes.

2.5 Intercultural Communicative Competence

This thesis argues that when international postgraduate students engage in feedback processes and dialogues to re-shape feedback literacies and enact feedback, there may be a need for them to develop a certain degree of competence to interact effectively at the intercultural level. International students might need to build some intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997) for intercultural dialogues about and within assessment and feedback processes to be effective. The main question that underpins studies of intercultural competence is 'How do people understand one another when they do not share a common cultural experience?' (Bennett, 2013). In the context of this thesis, the interest is in those involved in A&F processes at the British university who are unlikely to share a common culture of A&F. I am aware and acknowledge that *inter*-cultural communication involves both students and educators equally and that student and educator feedback literacies interlink. Nevertheless, within this thesis, the focus is on international students and their development of the competencies needed to communicate effectively with assessment and feedback contexts.

The literature on feedback argues for a shift from one-way transmission models of feedback to dialogic processes where all involved are active agents and share responsibility and meaning making. Similarly, the concept of communication has been defined as much more than a simple transmission of

information from one individual to another: it is rather conceptualised as the mutual co-creation of meaning. Information is not meaningful in itself, particularly if ‘exchanged’ between different cultures. In intercultural communication then, information is intended and interpreted between cultures, and attains a significance through mutual creation of meaning (Bennett, 2013). To create a shared meaning of A&F, international students are likely to benefit from the ability to uncover the frames of reference through which they understand assessment and feedback, becoming aware of the values and assumptions that underpin their own thinking and behaviours in feedback situations. At the same time, for constructive interaction to take place interculturally, they should also aim to understand the cultural perspectives of others. These are the principles underpinning the theoretical notion of intercultural communicative competence that frames this thesis and that aims to support the conceptualisation of feedback literacy development in international environments. The following sections present a review of the most relevant literature that contributed to the development and conceptualisation of the multidimensional notion of intercultural competence that this thesis adopts, with the aim to highlight how it can support and inform research on feedback literacy development. Moreover, this review of the literature aims to provide a rationale behind using theory on intercultural competence to frame feedback literacy development, proposing how this can support and enrich feedback research.

2.5.1 Theories and Models of ICC

Intercultural communicative competence has been widely theorised, investigated, measured, and employed as a theoretical framework in studies across multiple disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, and education. ICC has been researched for over 50 years, and has been linked to sojourner adjustment, immigrant acculturation, culture ‘learning’, and cross-cultural transitions (Benson, 1978; Bennett, 1986; Rogers and Ward, 1993; Searle and Ward, 1990). Recent years have witnessed an increased recognition of the importance of developing intercultural communicative competence in a more mobile world (Commission of the European Communities, 2005, p. 13; Council of Europe, 2008; Lustig and Koester, 2013; Yarosh et al., 2018), whilst in the context of higher education, institutions are now more than ever encouraged to promote and support their students’

development of intercultural competence (Deardorff and Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Fielden, 2011, p. 12). Although there has been a focus on academic ICC, there has not yet been a focus on specific contexts and practices within academia. In particular, ICC has not been explored in relation to assessment and feedback dialogues and feedback literacy development in intercultural HE contexts.

Before exploring the relevant research on intercultural competence, there is a need to clarify the meaning of the term ‘competence’ as opposed to ‘competency’ in the contexts of education and intercultural communication, as they have been often inaccurately used interchangeably. As Wood and Powers describe:

‘Competence’ must be distinguished from ‘competencies’, as it rests on an integral deep structure (‘understanding’) and on the general ability to co-ordinate appropriate internal cognitive, affective, and other resources necessary for successful adaptation. A successful conceptualization of competence would show how specific competencies are integrated at a higher level’ (as cited in Eraut, 1994, p.178).

Lustig and Koester (2003) suggest competence is related to the context in which individuals interact and to the attributes and abilities they need in that particular context, stressing its contextual and situational nature. For them, competence is a situated social judgement made about others. Drawing on these definitions, this thesis refers to competence as the way in which learners utilise and coordinate particular resources, skills, or knowledge (competencies) in the cognitive, affective, and behavioural spheres of feedback processes. Competence has also been observed to be in continuous evolution and development, as ‘no other aspect of competence [...] seems so universally accepted as the ability to adapt to changing environmental and social conditions’ (Spitzberg and Cupach, 1984, p. 35). Thus, a development of competence over time in the new sociocultural academic context is possible for international students and is explored in this thesis.

As Rathje (2007) observes, there is a lack of ‘unity in the definition of the term ‘intercultural competence’ itself [that] leads to differing perspectives on the competencies of which it may be composed’ (p. 255). Further, due to the complexity of the concept and to the diverse definitions

available, the language utilised in the field is certainly not homogenous. Research has used multiple terms including intercultural sensitivity, multicultural competence, transcultural competence, global competence, international competence, global literacy, and global citizenship. Others have used the terms ‘cross-cultural’ and ‘intercultural’ interchangeably. However, intercultural approaches must be distinguished from cross-cultural work as the latter only deals with the comparison of different cultures rather than the interaction between them (King and Baxter Magolda, 2005). In this thesis, the terms intercultural competence or intercultural communicative competence are used because, as Kim and Ruben (1992) state, they are not limited to any specific cultural attributes. Culture specificity and generality are another concern and source of disagreement within the field. The main argument for culture-centred models is that competency relates and can be measured as a group's way of being (Banks, Gao, and Baker, 1991), whereas culture-general models develop and measure competence across groups with multiple cultural backgrounds (Arasaratnam, 2009). In sum, multiple theories and foci underpin the concept of ICC. This literature review does not intend to cover them all as it would not be possible within the limitations of this thesis but aims at covering what seems to be more relevant to the present thesis’ aims.

In the 1970s and 80s, the idea of competence was linked to the characteristics of the individual who was communicating rather than focusing on the effectiveness and outcomes of the communication itself (Ruben, 1976; Hammer, Gudykunst, and Wiseman, 1978). Later, the concept of competence was linked to that of communication. The notion of ‘communicative competence’ (CC) was advanced in Second and Foreign Language education as it closely relates to individuals’ diverse cultural and linguistic systems of communication (Alred, Byram and Fleming, 2003; Byram, 1997; Byram and Feng, 2006). Fantini and Tirmizi (2006) observe that a certain degree of communicative competence is normally developed by every individual as part of their first language (L1) and cultural system. When individuals enter an additional linguistic-cultural system, they potentially create a second system of communicative competence. However, once the initial, primary system is fairly well established, it reflects and affects one’s view of the world, making it increasingly harder to transcend the initial communicative competence system to enter a second (or even third or fourth) CC system. As the aim

is not to reject nor to deny the first system that is one with the individual but to reach an interaction between the two (or more) systems, the concurrent development of ‘intercultural’ (between cultures) communicative competence is required (Deardorff, 2015).

One of the earliest and certainly more influential models of intercultural competence is that developed by Byram (1997) when defining the ‘qualities’ a sojourner should have to successfully communicate in a foreign language and in a foreign context. His conceptualisation of intercultural competence is mainly operationalised in the context of language teaching and learning. Nevertheless, it introduces a sociocultural aspect to communication that is core in all intercultural contexts. Such an innovative aspect to communicative ability is grounded in Van Ek’s work (1986 as cited in Byram, 1997) that observes how every language is situated in a context and uses a specific frame of reference. To communicate effectively, sociocultural competence is needed in addition to pure linguistic competence; for this, there is a need to develop a degree of familiarity with the new context. The model also theorises on power relations and their role within intercultural communication. According to Byram (1997) those who are part of the dominant group in a familiar environment (e.g., lecturers) have the possibility of exercising power over the newcomers. In terms of language, users of a second language are more aware of the source(s) of their communication difficulties; for this reason, they are the ones that uncover the power relations of which those who communicate in their own language and culture are not aware (Byram, 1997). Similarly, in his work on power relations within language and discourse, Fairclough (1995, 2013) stresses how this depends on sustaining the ‘legitimacy’ of the dominant group’s constructs in a familiar environment. In higher education settings and in particular within assessment and feedback contexts, the relations of power between those who define assessment standards, criteria, requirements, and provide feedback and the students depend on the same ‘legitimacy’ of traditional standards and criteria that are part of the ‘dominant’ academic culture. For Byram (1997), effective communication is possible if individuals develop the followings: (i) knowledge of oneself and of the other; (ii) skills of interpreting and relating, of discovering and interacting; (iii) education, intended as political education and critical cultural awareness; (iv) attitudes of relativising oneself and valuing the other, curiosity and openness, and readiness to suspend disbelief

and judgement with respect to others' beliefs and values. One's ability to 'decentre' and to view one's own beliefs and meanings from the viewpoint of the other is valued, as it builds awareness that the interpretation of certain information in an unfamiliar context happens with the help of pre-defined frames of knowledge.

Building on Byram's work, intercultural competence has been re-defined over the last 30 years, although it has mostly been investigated within 'generic' intercultural environments and contexts of second language education. Spitzberg (1997) models ICC as an interaction 'of two individuals' motivation to communicate, knowledge of communication in that context, and skills in implementing their motivation and knowledge' (p. 380). Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) incorporate the elements of knowledge, skills, motivation, and outcomes and define competence as perceived appropriateness and effectiveness of communication in a specific context. Hammer, Bennet and Wiseman (2003) conceptualise it as the ability to think and act in intercultural appropriate ways, and Fantini and Tirmizi (2006) define it as 'a complex set of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself' (p. 12). The idea of acting appropriately is found in most definitions and it refers to behaving in a way that is perceived as suitable under certain circumstances and at certain times by the 'other'. For Fantini and Tirmizi (2006), however, an equal degree of attention needs to be placed on the effectiveness of the performance, giving equal space to the perspective of the self and to what might be effective for 'oneself'. Chen and Starosta (1999) similarly define intercultural communication competence as 'the ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviours that negotiate each other's cultural identity or identities in a culturally diverse environment' (p. 28); Deardorff (2004) conceptualises it as 'the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in an intercultural situation based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes' (p. 194). Both notions of 'effective' and 'appropriate' are central as the aim is to develop intercultural competence both for oneself and the other. This is reflected in the notion of 'etic' (self) and 'emic' (other) perspectives that is so important in intercultural work (Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 1995). Within the context of this thesis, the importance given to both appropriateness and effectiveness aims to strengthen the rejection of a

‘deficit approach’ towards international students. This aims to support the claim that the added value that international students’ competence systems bring to higher education in the UK should be acknowledged and recognised. Following Deardorff (2015), this thesis places emphasis on the aspect of *interaction* between those of different backgrounds which is the element that distinguishes *intercultural competence*.

Different models prioritise and cover different aspects, elements, and processes of ICC. Compositional models (see, for example, Deardorff, 2006; Hunter, White, and Godbey, 2006) focus on describing the characteristics of ICC, such as what type of knowledge, skills, and attitudes are required to develop intercultural competence. With a more specific view on the process of building and developing ICC, co-orientational models (see Fantini, 1995; Rathje, 2007) tend to concentrate on the elements and processes that can lead to successful intercultural interaction. Other models, known as developmental models, describe ICC from the point of view of the individual competence development over time (King and Baxter Magolda, 2005), whereas adaptational models (e.g., Gallois et al., 1988) consider the components of the developmental models in the context of encounter and adaptation to a different culture, stressing the centrality of interaction within the foreign context. Lastly, the so-called causal path models (e.g., Arasaratnam, 2008; Deardorff, 2006; Griffith and Harvey, 2000) consider both the characteristics of the compositional models and the concept of interaction, arguing that ICC can be influenced by interactions of variables.

Different elements of ICC have been put forward. From a linguistic perspective, Corbett (2003) gives prominence to the element of knowledge, defining ICC as ‘the ability to understand the language and behaviour of the target community, and explain it to members of the home community and vice versa’ (p. 2). Fantini (2000) notes that there are four dimensions to intercultural competence: knowledge, skill, attitude, and awareness; for him, effectiveness is fundamental and relates to the individual’s competencies, as well as the appropriateness that relates to the receiver’s perception of the individual’s competencies. The so-called KASA (knowledge, awareness, skills, attitudes) models of intercultural competence have been often put forward; nevertheless, there is still some uncertainty and

disagreement on what might constitute the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness necessary for having the necessary degree of intercultural competence.

Fantini (2012) argues that individuals need a specific set of skills to be competent in intercultural communication; they need to be open minded, flexible, motivated, proficient in the second language, and knowledgeable about both cultures involved. Pusch (2004) draws on the earlier work of Gudykunst and argues that the most important intercultural skills include mindfulness, cognitive flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, behavioural flexibility, and empathy. Behaviour flexibility is reported to be a fundamental element; for Lustig and Koester (2003) intercultural competence also depends on 'cultural expectations about the permitted behaviours that characterise the settings or situations within which people communicate' (p. 65). Empathy seems to be central to the ability to take a different cultural perspective. According to Bennett's (1993, 2013) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity, individuals experience cultural differences through three initial ethnocentric (= own culture is central to reality) stages where they deny, are defensive towards, and minimise cultural diversity and conceptualise reality in terms of 'us' vs 'them. If there is a development of intercultural sensitivity such 'othering' attitude is reduced, and individuals experience the three subsequent ethnorelative (culture is relative to context) stages of acceptance, adaptation, and integration. To go through these stages, individuals need empathy to lead a change in perspective: one individual worldview is not central to all reality but is relative to cultural context (Bennett, 1993).

Jandt (2016) and Neuliep (2015) contend individuals need to have knowledge about their own and others' cultural values, customs, and beliefs to communicate interculturally; this might lead to higher cultural awareness and more communicative competence (Jandt, 2016). Awareness of the diversity of cultures is as important as awareness 'of one's own personal cultural identity' (Jandt, 2016, p. 53). Neuliep (2015) discussed 'psychological adjustment', which is the ability to deal with a new culture and environment and to manage feelings of shock or frustration; for him, knowledge and psychological adjustment are interdependent and support each other. Kim (1992) similarly values adaptability as 'the individual's capacity to suspend or modify some of the old cultural ways and learn and accommodate some of the new cultural ways, and creatively find ways to manage the dynamics of cultural difference/unfamiliarity' (p. 377).

The element of motivation valued by Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) is not often included in definitions of intercultural competence. However, Wiseman (2002) suggests a definition that comprises knowledge, skills, alongside motivation, which are needed to interact effectively and appropriately with individuals from different cultures. For Wiseman, motivation is a ‘set of feelings, intentions, needs and drives associated with the anticipation of or actual engagement in intercultural communication’ (p. 4), that is often part of the ‘attitudes’ mentioned in other models and definitions (Imahori and Lanigan, 1989).

The concept of emotional intelligence (EI) has also been at the centre of intercultural competence research. Introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990), it was initially defined as ‘the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions’ (p. 189); the ability to think and reflect about feelings was later added (Mayer and Salovey, 1997). Numerous elements of EI are mentioned across intercultural competence models: regulating emotions (Ting-Toomey, 1993), empathy (Imahori and Lanigan, 1989; Gudykunst, 1993; Spitzberg and Cupach, 2002; Deardorff, 2006), and mindful listening (Ting-Toomey and Kurogi, 1998). Goleman (2006) recognises five components of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, internal motivation, social skills, and empathy. Within different conceptualisations of EI, empathy seems to be recognised as either a fundamental prerequisite to intercultural competence or as a consequence of higher competence (Deardorff, 2006; Arasaratnam, 2008). Nonetheless, Chen and Starosta (2000) warn against oversimplifying the connection between empathy and intercultural competence to more empathy equalling more competence. In fact, empathy is not an unteachable and inherent personality trait (Riess, 2017) but it can and needs to be fostered within different contexts. Although there is no agreement on the conceptualisation of EI and empathy within, emotional intelligence is recognised to be fundamental in intercultural contexts.

2.5.2 ICC in Intercultural Higher Education Contexts

Most of the models described can be applied to contexts of international higher education but were not originally developed with such context in mind. Moreover, most of the research on ICC in higher education focuses on the necessity to train professionals, in particular language instructors and international student advisors (DeJaeghere and Zhang, 2008; Paige and Goode, 2009). Only few studies are interested in student development of ICC (e.g., Busch, 2009; Fischer, 2011; Hao, 2012; Pinto, 2018), with the focus being mainly on assessment of ICC, training, and short study abroad experiences (e.g., Pedersen, 2010).

Williams (2009) developed a reflective model of intercultural competence that is particularly relevant for the current thesis as it is intended for students in higher education that spend half or one academic year abroad. In his model, intercultural competence is composed of three dimensions: (i) the cognitive dimension, which refers to the knowledge about cultural issues such as norms, values, and effective and appropriate behaviours; (ii) the affective dimension that is linked to the individual's willingness to act in intercultural situations; and (iii) the behavioural dimension that encompasses skills and abilities related to intercultural situations. His model is based on an analysis of previous studies that highlight the importance of knowledge of cultural related perspective and issues, cultural sensitivity, flexibility, and adaptability (Deardorff, 2004; Hammer et al., 2003), alongside critical skills and problem-solving skills (Deardorff, 2004; Jackson, 2005). Although valuable in its elements, this model was developed to tailor the needs of undergraduate students who go abroad for a semester or two. It is not designed for postgraduate students and does not consider previous experience of academic culture, previous academic knowledge, and well-formed values, beliefs, and perspectives. Further, it is not specifically related to assessment and feedback contexts.

A more recent study by Yarosh, Lukic and Santibáñez-Gruber (2018) developed an ICC framework investigating intercultural competence as related to the learning needs of an ERASMUS MUNDUS group of students and presents similar interests and considerations to the present thesis. For them, academia is a context in which international students find themselves encountering cultural diversity and interacting with individuals that carry different cultural backgrounds. Thus, they can

benefit from developing intercultural competence. Yarosh et al. (2018) describe ICC as composed of four main categories of elements: knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes (KASA). KASA models have been widely used within the literature (Byram et al., 2001; Fantini, 2006; King and Baxter-Magolda, 2005) although the acronym has been defined slightly differently for each model. In Yarosh et al.'s (2018) model, knowledge is intended as the information available to the individual and their conceptual understanding as essential elements for approaching cultural diversity effectively and appropriately; awareness is defined as the ability to notice and acknowledge the fact the cultures differ and that all individuals are influenced by their own and others' cultures; skills are presented as explicit and tacit elements of behaviour; attitudes are perceived as predispositions, ways of thinking, the ability of feeling and relating to cultural diversity and culturally different others. Drawing on Fantini's (2006) model of intercultural communicative competence and on Hammer et al.'s (2003) definition of 'intercultural sensitivity' as the capability of identifying and experiencing cultural differences, Yarosh et al.'s (2018) framework includes a focus on awareness that is often overlooked but essential. In their model, they also include the supporting competencies of 'intercultural critical reflection' and 'intercultural emotional intelligence'. The former comprises individuals' cognitive flexibility and ability to critically analyse intercultural encounters from a culturally aware perspective. Critical reflection is described by Brookfield (1990) as individuals' ability to identify the assumptions that underlie their own thoughts and actions, evaluate them and, whenever necessary for effective communication to occur, reconstitute them. For Kitchener and King (1990) reflective observation and analysis is developmental in nature and such development seems to be linked to intercultural competence development. The latter represents the affective aspect of intercultural competence, emotional adaptability, including empathy, managing one's emotions, dealing with uncertainty in culturally new situations and the emotional side of adopting a cultural perspective (Yarosh et al., 2018, p. 59). Yarosh et al. (2018) further argue that students can develop ICC naturally or unintentionally to a limited extent only, and that the development of intercultural competence should be supported and promoted at higher education institutions (Lee, Porch, Shaw, and Williams, 2012; Van de Berg, Onnor-Linton and Paige, 2009). They also align to recent research on intercultural competence that aims to uncover common myths about intercultural competence in academia. The most common and

widespread misconception is that gaining international experience equates to developing intercultural competence, and that being a fluent speaker of a second language equally means being interculturally competent (Deardorff, 2015). Intercultural competence goes beyond simply experiencing and knowing another culture, as well as it far more complex than mere language proficiency. In fact, it is essential to recognise the importance of the development of awareness, skills, and attitudes rather than exclusively pure knowledge. Further, the frequently mentioned concern that intercultural competence comes naturally and cannot be taught is considered a misconception.

Yarosh et al. (2018) also stress the importance of considering the diverse intercultural situations and the challenges that international students might face. The context of such situations and challenges can vary, and so can students' need for intercultural competence. This has been greatly overlooked in much research on international students in transition to higher education, which does not often distinguish between different intercultural situations in the academic context (Lamberton and Ashton-Hay, 2015). Similarly, most studies that recognise the necessity to support student development of ICC still present it as a preparatory and introductory activity to the new 'wider' context (Robson and Turner, 2007). ICC enhancement is proposed as separated from the core learning and teaching (Brown, 2009; Robson and Turner, 2007), and institutions fail to consider it as an integral part of a new culturally sensitive and inclusive pedagogy. Academic intercultural competence risks to be perceived as a general, separated academic 'skill'. In fact, the literature has often treated it similarly to the academic skills of reading, writing essays and listening that, together with 'academic English' skills, are part of a 'pack' of skills required and developed outside of the course of study (Beaven, 2012). International students are often offered ICC 'enhancement' courses that are not integrated into their course of study and treated (and possibly also perceived) as detached and independent. This is a conception of ICC this thesis intends to move away from, proposing a shift towards considering the development of intercultural competence as an integral part of international students' process of learning. Because of the notion of ICC as a 'separate pack of skills', no inquiry has yet interrogated a potential connection between student level of intercultural competence and their ability to approach, unpack, interpret and make good use of specific academic practices. However, as Zhu (2014) notes, different cultural groups exist concurrently

as do several different cultures. The traditional conceptualisation of intercultural communication as communication between members of two or more different social/cultural groups where culture is reduced to nationality (Kotthoff and Spencer-Oatey, 2007; Spencer-Oatey, 2012) leaves aside the role of sociocultural contexts, especially in the contexts of the ‘small culture’ of academia, where different practices can be impregnated of values, beliefs, and ideals of different groups (Holliday, 1994, 1999). Academic practices are embedded in the academic cultural system in which they occur. Thus, the current thesis proposes to explore the potential role of intercultural competence in assessment and feedback situations, where effective intercultural communication seems to be of paramount importance to student effective utilisation of the practices.

2.6 Intercultural Competence in A&F Contexts

Building on a sociocultural conceptualisation of feedback, theories of intercultural communication and feedback literacy development as presented in the literature review thus far, this thesis adapts Yarosh et al.’s (2018) model of academic intercultural competence to contexts of assessment and feedback. The original model addresses some of the limitations of research on intercultural competence as it proposes a development ICC through an intercultural learning pedagogy in international HE contexts, and considering specific groups of students (international PGT students for this thesis). However, it still conceptualises ICC as universally applicable to all university academic practices and dialogues. There are indeed various ways to approach intercultural communication, that can be context-specific or generic (Samovar and Porter, 2001). Yarosh et al. (2018) take a context-generic approach, overlooking the particularities of the different contexts within academia. This main criticism leads to a new, adapted model that is contextualised to assessment and feedback intercultural processes. If supported to develop ICC that is specific to A&F, international students might be more likely to develop their literacies through effective communication and potentially improve their understanding and enactment of feedback. As Witteborn (2003) suggests, context-focused approaches have the potential to highlight new ICC characteristics and patterns that are specific to certain situations.

On this basis, the current thesis proposes the investigation of student Assessment and Feedback Intercultural Communicative Competence and its role in promoting effective intercultural feedback interactions and supporting international students' development of re-shaped feedback literacies in the British HE context. The model reflects the popular KASA models (*knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes*) and presents the additional components of 'intercultural critical reflection' and 'intercultural emotional intelligence' (Yarosh et al., 2018) that are fundamental given the role of reflection within feedback processes and the emotional and relational aspects of feedback. Further, according to Griffith et al. (2016), including both cognitive and noncognitive components is fundamental. The following sections propose and explore how each component of the ICC model can be contextualised within assessment and feedback contexts, and how it might frame the development of feedback literacy as described by Carless and Boud (2018) for international PGTs in particular, drawing on the literature presented throughout this chapter.

2.6.1 Knowledge of Assessment and Feedback

Within this thesis, knowledge refers to the information that is available to international postgraduate taught students about the practices of assessment and feedback in the new context of British university. International PGTs have likely become accustomed to different A&F typologies and conventions during their pre-university and undergraduate education. Such practices, in fact, originate from different socioculturally and historically informed philosophies (Campbell, 2012; Janjua, Malik and Rahman, 2011). The educational philosophies and values that shape British A&F practices can differ from those that shape contexts of A&F familiar to the international students, as they are likely to be context- and culture-related. International PGTs are less likely to 'inherently' have the same tacit knowledge or understanding of the practices as their institutions and educators (Carroll, 2008). Instead, they might need to gather and develop further intercultural knowledge and understanding of A&F through communication. It is likely that PGTs would 'know' and conceptualise A&F through the lens of a different tacit understanding that they previously developed. Their A&F histories may be what they draw on to determine the facts and information about the practices (Barton and Hamilton, 2000).

As explored in section 2.1.3, international PGTs are likely to be accustomed to different marking, assessment, and feedback cultures; their A&F literacies are built around those. Depending upon the degree of diversity of what they previously experienced, they might build on diverse knowledge to approach, analyse, and evaluate their work. They might draw on different reference systems, values, and standards (Price, Handley, and Millar, 2011), and can therefore experience greater uncertainty about A&F conventions in the new environment (Hounsell, 2003). The distinction between summative and formative assessment of learning and their foci can be a valuable example of such diversity. In the British context, they have different intentions: awarding a grade and focusing on what was achieved and supporting development for future achievement. Developmental and formative feedback is continuously provided along the way to enhance future learning strategies and performance (Boud and Molloy, 2013). Value is given to both, with a current greater emphasis on formative purposes of assessment. Nevertheless, within non-Anglophone educational cultures, it seems that emphasis is given to the summative purposes of assessment, wherein high-stakes examinations are often the norm (Dai, Matthews, and Reyes, 2020).

International students with diverse A&F histories likely hold different 'common-sense ways of knowing' assessment and feedback (Lea and Street, 1998) and this can affect their degree of feedback appreciation. If they do not hold or develop sufficient knowledge of the culturally different A&F practices and principles, they might not be able to recognise the feedback they receive nor to recognise their active role in its processes (Carless and Boud 2018). As Dai et al. (2020) observe, within summative traditions of assessment, the feedback is likely to be known and conceptualised as one-way telling of information about the quality of the completed work. If feedback was experienced as a judgement that is passively received and used to make sense of past achievements, international students might need to develop intercultural knowledge before they can appreciate feedback as a process in which they are active agents. Further, international students might have different conceptions of valid and valuable knowledge compared to those of the feedback providers and of the assessment criteria. There might then be a risk of international students being reluctant to accept both the purposes of

assessment tasks and what is suggested in the feedback and this might lower their willingness to enact the feedback.

Because of the cultural nature of the knowledge international PGT students hold about A&F practices and its potential misalignment with that of the feedback providers, facilitating an informative intercultural dialogue about and within the practices seems paramount. International students might benefit from the construction of an intercultural knowledge of facts, principles and cultural aspects of the assessment and feedback practices. This might support effective communication with all involved in the feedback processes, whilst helping them recognise the value of feedback processes and of their active role within them in the new context of British HE.

2.6.2 Awareness of Cultural Differences within A&F

To understand the benefits and values of acquiring knowledge of other culture-specific A&F practices, international students might benefit from being aware that academic cultures differ and so do practices within. International students are likely to benefit from the ability to recognise that their ‘tacit’ awareness and understanding of assessment and feedback (O'Donovan, Price and Rust, 2004) is experience-based and culture related, and might differ from what is expected from them in the new higher education environment. Individuals involved in A&F practices are influenced by culture as are the practices themselves. Thus, awareness of cultural influences on both individuals and A&F practices might be valuable and might foster effective communication.

Being aware that all individuals are shaped and influenced by cultures and that such conditioning is in place in intercultural encounters (Yarosh et al. 2018) becomes fundamental for international PGTs. In fact, feedback is a dialogic process, an act of continuous communication that aims to support student decoding, interpreting, and enacting of feedback (Carless, 2015). When communication occurs between international players, it is conditioned by culture. In intercultural feedback processes, effective and appropriate communication cannot happen without awareness of cultural conditioning of the self and the other (Fantini and Tirmizi, 2006). All individuals involved have previously developed a primary cultural and communicative system that reflects and affects their view

of A&F (Byram, 1997). If awareness is developed about individuals' perspectives on A&F and about the cultural nature of such diverse perspectives, communication might be facilitated, and further intercultural knowledge developed.

Being aware that cultures influence individuals' views can facilitate intercultural dialogues, nevertheless it is not the only aspect that should be considered. Awareness of the cultural aspects and principles that underpin A&F practices in different HE contexts is likely crucial. A&F are shaped by the academic cultures of various educational systems and, as detailed through the literature review, significant differences have so far mainly been observed between Confucian Heritage Countries' systems in the east and Socratic educational systems in the west. However, some form of diversity might be found within the so-called 'western' system of education itself (Kennedy, 2002; Kingston and Forland, 2004). Awareness of the fact that different A&F practices originate from different academic contexts and cultures has the potential to encourage communication about and within A&F. This might facilitate co-creation of meaning in assessment and feedback contexts.

A higher degree of awareness of the academic cultures of those involved in feedback dialogues and of cultural specificity of A&F practices might support international students' appreciation of the 'new' feedback processes, through a deeper understanding of the processes themselves. Appreciating other academic cultures can support international students' understanding of assessment and feedback purposes, and potentially enhance their capacity to appreciate their own role in the practices.

2.6.3 Intercultural Critical Reflection on A&F

Intercultural critical reflection refers to international students' capacity to deal with cultural stereotypes, including their personal opinions about others' cultures, and others' perceived opinions about their own (Yarosh et al., 2018). International PGT students are likely to hold personal opinions about academic cultures and practices of A&F and might benefit from the ability to critically analyse and discuss them through a culturally aware lens.

If international PGTs develop the ability to identify different cultural systems of reference (Fantini and Tirmizi, 2006) they might see A&F from a different cultural perspective. Taking the cultural perspective of others might lead to some deeper understanding of the meanings and expectations others associate with assessment and feedback. Critical thinking and reflection about different perspectives of A&F could also support student appreciation of the principles underpinning the unfamiliar practices. In fact, critical reflection involves exercises ‘in which an experience is recalled, considered, and evaluated’ (Richards, 1990, p. 1, cited in Edwards, 2017) in light of both one’s own and others’ perspectives. Critical thinking and reflection about and within learning and teaching practices is recognised to be challenging for international students (Robertson et al., 2000), as they often need to further develop their skills and dispositions to be critical and reflective. Criticality and reflexivity are processes of historically recent origin that are often valued in certain cultures more than in others (Robson and Turner, 2007). They are considered a primary goal in British higher education (Pithers and Soden, 2010), but its definitions are the product of cultural knowledge traditions and are not universal (Turner, 2006, p. 3). International students’ who come from non-British academic contexts might have little or no experience of critical thinking and reflexive practices, and this can have an impact on their capacity to reflect on and appreciate assessment and feedback processes. Fostering international students’ development of critical evaluation and reflection on A&F processes might support their ability to communicate successfully and appropriately about them, critically expressing and analysing their own and others’ thoughts. This has the potential to enhance their capacity to make interculturally aware, informed and aligned judgements about the practices and consequently about their own work. As De Corte (1990) observes, critical reflection can support students to consider and analyse their own and others’ working strategies and goals, and eventually being able to evaluate such working processes. Developing evaluative capacities is a fundamental aspect of feedback literacy, and a fundamental step in feedback processes. Further, intercultural critical reflection on one’s own feedback behaviour, as well as on what others perceive as effective and expect has the potential to uncover the importance for international students to become pro-active learners who take future-orientated action on the feedback (Boud and Molloy, 2013).

2.6.4 Intercultural Emotional Intelligence in A&F Processes

In this thesis, intercultural emotional intelligence refers to the affective sphere surrounding student engagement with intercultural assessment and feedback practices and processes. Facing new and unfamiliar educational contexts and practices is likely to be a challenging experience for international students, not only from a cognitive and behavioural perspective but also from an emotional point of view (Andrade, 2006). When facing new A&F practices and communicating interculturally about and within them, international students are likely to be affected emotionally. Because of this, they may benefit from emotional intelligence. If students are able to show empathy towards others' cultures, manage emotions triggered in intercultural contexts, and deal with uncertainty in culturally new situations (Yarosh et al., 2018), they might be more likely to manage emotions arising within assessment and feedback processes. Managing the emotional side of cultural perspective-taking in new A&F contexts may be beneficial.

As explored in more detail in section 2.4.2.4, the affective and relational sphere seems to be dominant within A&F processes and contexts (Falchikov and Boud, 2007). In fact, A&F are considered to be very personal and emotional practices (Rowe, 2017). This seems to be particularly relevant because of the UK focus on continuous dialogic feedback on formative assessment. In such a context, players' expectations, dispositions, and the relationships with others involved in the interactions are fundamental. Showing empathy towards others' A&F cultures and their expectations and behaviours can help manage affect, especially emotions triggered when diversity is faced. International students' expectations and dispositions towards the practices are influenced by their A&F histories and are likely to be different. If expectations are not met, they are likely to feel particularly confused and discouraged (Carroll and Ryan, 2005), and this might negatively impact on future dispositions towards the practices. A wide range of emotions could be triggered by international students' involvement in unfamiliar A&F practices, and the need to manage one's emotions constructively is high if feedback is to have a positive impact on international students (Pitt and Norton, 2017). Uncertainty is often experienced in unfamiliar and intercultural situations. Thus, dealing with uncertainty to avoid it leading to deactivating and

detrimental emotions may be beneficial. When dealing with A&F intercultural interactions, developing intercultural emotional intelligence might support international students managing affect in feedback situations, so they can consequently manage their expectations and dispositions and engage with the feedback processes.

2.6.5 Skills for Dealing with A&F

The skills that are generally considered important to guarantee effective and appropriate behaviour in intercultural situations are the degree of flexibility in one's behaviour, the ability to realise what behaviour is expected by the other, and the capacity to adopt such behaviour (Yarosh et al. 2018). For international students involved in intercultural feedback interactions, the skill to negotiate a behaviour that is effective for the self and considered appropriate by the feedback providers is linked to the ability to be flexible in accepting culturally different practices and behaviours themselves. For example, future-orientated feedback behaviours are often considered extremely valuable in the UK HE context (Nash et al., 2018), whereas international students seem to adopt present or past-orientated behaviours (Riley and Mackiewicz, 2003). Educational systems that are short-term orientated are often influenced by a culture that is itself embedded in fostering virtues related to the past and present (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005), whilst other long-term orientated academic cultures value skills oriented towards future rewards and achievement. Being particularly concerned with past and present tasks, international students might need to show flexibility to value future-orientated feedback.

Furthermore, international students might benefit from learning about a new culture, comparing the new culture with one's own, whilst resolving conflicts that might arise (Yarosh et al., 2018). In the context of A&F, if international students actively explore and discover the different characteristics of the practices and compare them with their A&F histories, they might successfully overcome potential conflicts and misalignments during feedback dialogues. Within the UK HE system, feedback as a process that promotes student self-regulation is favoured (Hattie and Timperley, 2007) because it most likely supports learner uptake and improvement (Carless and Boud, 2018). International students are likely to benefit from the skills to self-direct their learning about A&F. The skills of constructing,

mediating, and re-constructing the meaning they attribute to feedback are important for international students who face the potentially unsettling diversity of assessment and feedback. Building such skills can enhance their capacity to make judgments on their work, and to take action on the feedback (Carless and Boud, 2018). What is suggested is not a 'one way' skills adaptation. Instead, the acquisition of the aforementioned skills aims at supporting effective intercultural communication within the feedback dialogues.

2.6.6 Attitudes towards A&F

International students' attitudes that might impact on the effectiveness of intercultural feedback dialogues consist of predispositions, ways of thinking, and beliefs related to cultural diversity of A&F and of individuals involved (Yarosh et al., 2018). Ways of thinking and beliefs are generally shared by social groups within a certain culture and tend to be communicated from the insiders to the newcomers (Matsumoto, 1996). In contexts of assessment and feedback in higher education, they are often communicated from educators to students. However, rather than being unilaterally 'communicated', there should be an *inter-cultural* dialogue between students and educators that fosters shared meaning-making and negotiation of beliefs. Attitudes of openness towards practices and individuals that are culturally different can be crucial, as they tend to influence behaviours adopted in intercultural feedback processes, alongside interpretations of the meaning of other people's behaviours (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Within intercultural feedback processes and dialogues, communication can only be effective and appropriate if those involved share open attitudes towards cultural diversity (Deardorff, 2006). International students' attitudes are likely to be vital for successful feedback interactions; if they show (or develop) attitudes of curiosity and openness towards cultural diversity, are able to suspend or manage disbelief about others' A&F cultures and can re-consider their beliefs in light of an intercultural dialogues, they might engage in effective feedback communication (Byram, Nichols and Stevens, 2001). Beliefs and predispositions towards learning and teaching philosophies (Mitsis and Foley 2009) and consequently A&F philosophies are likely to impact on feedback interactions and student feedback behaviours. International PGT students A&F histories and literacies are likely to have shaped their

preferences and convictions. For example, histories of summative, high-stakes examinations that promote short-term orientated memorisation and reproduction of information over development of both skills and knowledge might impact on students' way of thinking about effective feedback behaviours. Developing proactive recipience of feedback and willingness to enact the feedback on future work might be hindered if attitudes of openness and curiosity about 'other ways' of thinking and doing are not promoted. Curiosity may lead international students to discover and evaluate the new practices (Byram et al. 2001) and to potentially adopt assessment and feedback behaviours that are considered effective in the new context.

2.7 Chapter Summary

This thesis innovation lies in bringing together concepts implicated in assessment and feedback research and feedback literacy development with theories of intercultural communicative competence. The aim of this is to potentially enhance the current understanding of international student experience with diverse A&F and feedback literacy development in a new HE environment, emphasising the value of taking an interdisciplinary approach in moving the field forward. Looking at the relations between Assessment & Feedback and Intercultural Communicative Competence might suggest what is needed for international PGTs to renegotiate and develop the necessary feedback literacies to decode, understand and enact the feedback they receive. In the unfamiliar context of British HE, international students are faced with the context- and culture-specific academic practices of A&F, and the literature suggests that they might experience difficulties when they attempt to deal with them effectively and appropriately. International students need tools to make sense of the practices through interaction at the intercultural level. Initially, such tools are what they can gather from their previous academic histories and literacies but might be in misalignment with what they really need in the new environment. Developing ICC to communicate about and within A&F might support them to use tools that are in alignment with what they need, and this might facilitate the consequent renegotiation of feedback literacy.

This thesis proposes to bring a theoretical model of ICC to the A&F context, in order to support a shift from unidirectional adaptation of international students to the new academic practices towards valuing international students A&F histories, perspectives and beliefs and promoting intercultural interactions about and within the practices. In fact, the concept of intercultural communication itself suggests that the dialogues occur between cultures and the goal is to reach a successful interaction between more than one cultural and academic framework of reference, rather than a radical assimilation of one of them. The term ‘intercultural’ implies cultures interacting (King and Baxter-Magolda 2005), and this thesis advocates for an interaction between different academic cultures of assessment and feedback. This thesis proposes to look into whether it is beneficial for international students to have (or develop) the competencies necessary to interact about A&F in a way that is effective for them and their academic cultural encoding as well as considered appropriate by the others involved in the interaction.

This thesis also considers and explores the intercultural encounters that are key around the construction or re-definition of feedback literacy and proposes that feedback literacy is not developed by all students equally. Such intercultural encounters, in fact, might not result in the development of a single and fully aligned version of feedback literacy as often intended by the feedback providers or suggested in the literature, but could result in new hybrids (Street, 2003) that encompass different cultural and academic encodings.

Chapter III - Research Design and Methodology

3.1 About the Chapter

Following a review of the relevant literature and an exploration of the theoretical framework underpinning the thesis, this chapter presents the selected research design and methodology of longitudinal narrative inquiry. Reflections on the researcher's ontological and epistemological positions are considered, as they determine the choice of positioning this research within a pragmatic paradigm. The methods of data collection are described, and a methods' selection rationale is presented. The chapter also provides sampling considerations and an overview of how the research longitudinal design was implemented. This includes a description of the way in which data collection and analysis were carried out through an integration of narrative and thematic analyses. The two approaches to analysis are described, and the significance of integrating them is discussed. Ethical considerations are addressed.

3.2 The Research Questions

The present thesis aims to investigate the following research questions:

- RQ1 - How does an international PGT student assessment and feedback history impact on their level of A&F intercultural communicative competence?
- RQ2 - What role does dialogic feedback play in supporting international PGT students' development of A&F intercultural communicative competence (ICC)?
- RQ3 - How does an international PGT student A&F intercultural communicative competence (ICC) influence their development of feedback literacy at university in the UK?

The current section aims to clarify why and how the research questions were investigated through longitudinal narrative inquiry.

3.3 The Research Approach

This research adopted a qualitative approach that is concerned with individuals and the meanings they attribute to life events as experienced through different frameworks (Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault, 2015). The aim was to provide qualitative in-depth understanding of international PGT students' assessment and feedback histories, development of A&F intercultural competence and feedback literacy, valuing their experiences, perspectives, and interpretation of A&F events (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Students are not individuals in a vacuum: this qualitative research valued histories, contexts, and settings, and aimed to get to know students' interpretation of past and present experiences with assessment and feedback. The lens through which students experience the practices was of very high interest to this qualitative research that considers everybody's perspectives as equally valuable (Taylor et al., 2015).

As most qualitative research, the current study initially adopted a flexible, exploratory research approach. Exploratory research is primarily concerned with discovery and generating or building theory (Davies, 2011), and although many contend that all research is exploratory in nature (Davies, 2011; Stebbins, 2011), such approach is particularly valuable when investigating research questions that have not been posed nor answered before (Taylor et al., 2015). Such an approach to research seemed to be appropriate for this unprecedented empirical investigation into international students' A&F histories, ICC, and feedback literacy development.

Beginning with the formulation of flexible research questions, this research is inductive in nature. Nevertheless, absolute induction is arguably never possible, and this research was inevitably approached with goals, assumptions, and questions that underpin the investigation (Bryman, 2016). Theory and existing conceptual models do play a role in shaping research, although 'theoretical reflection is often delayed until a later stage in the research process' (Bryman, 1988, p. 91). This inductive, exploratory research aimed to propose findings that might support existing theory or the formulation of new theory (Bryman, 2016) informing our understanding of international students A&F ICC and feedback literacy development. This research is an empirical exploration of the conceptual framework integrating intercultural competence development within contexts of assessment and

feedback, A&F histories roles, and feedback literacy development that was proposed in the previous chapter (sections 2.5.2 and 2.6 in particular).

Any research that adopts a qualitative approach is an interpretative process (Braun, Clarke, and Hayfield, 2019). Narrative inquiry gathers experientially based accounts that compose narratives to ‘give voice’ to the participants. However, this is not a mechanical process; rather, it is an interpretative process shaped by the researcher and the participants co-interpretation. A reflexive approach to research is therefore fundamental (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003), as both the participants and the researchers’ assumptions, beliefs and perceptions are involved in the interpretation process. The present research originated from the researcher’s questions and assumptions and recognises the value and the role of the researcher’s interpretation whilst undertaking research (Bryman, 2016). As it is not possible and not recommendable to control and ignore the researchers’ values, it is important for the researcher to be aware of them and to reflect on potential intrusion of values and biases that might occur (Trahar, 2011). For the current research, a reflective approach was vital, as I inevitably hold strong assumptions and beliefs about the questions under investigation for the very simple reason of being an ‘insider’. As an international student, my assessment and feedback histories, and my own development of A&F intercultural competence and feedback literacy have likely generated assumptions whose nature, origins, and implications need consideration. Reflecting on my own experience and lens of interpretation of academic practices and intercultural competence played a constant role throughout the research process (see section 3.7).

3.4 The Research Paradigm

3.4.1 Ontology and Epistemology

The concept of paradigm describes the researcher's philosophical way of thinking (Kuhn, 1970); it encompasses a researcher’s epistemological, ontological, and methodological principles (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) that guide research. Defining the research paradigm is essential as it describes the way in which the researcher conceptualises the portion of the world with which the research is concerned

and defines the means through which it is investigated (Stansfield, 2001). This is based on the researcher's 'world view, general perspective, way of breaking down the complexity of the real world' and clarifies the 'framework of beliefs, values and methods within which research takes place' (Patton, 2002, p. 203).

The researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions inform the paradigm selection. Ontology (from Greek 'ontos=being' and 'logos=reason') refers to individuals' beliefs about the nature of the reality (or portion of reality) that is under investigation (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, 2011), and defines the researcher own framework of understanding of the reality under consideration. The ontological questions of social research are concerned with the nature of social reality and of social beings acting in the social world (Bryman, 2016); researchers make claims about 'what they believe constitutes social reality' (Blaikie, 2000, p. 8). Experience is at the centre of the ontological assumption of this research. As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) contend drawing on a Deweyan philosophy of experience (1938), 'experience is the fundamental ontological category from which all inquiry proceeds' (p. 38). Experience is a changing stream (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007), and social reality is made of continuous and evolving interaction between individuals, their personal histories, and their social, cultural, institutional, and linguistic narratives. International PGT students' experiences with assessment and feedback were conceptualised and investigated as changing and shifting experiential interactions between students themselves, their ongoing narratives, and their histories.

Epistemology (from Greek 'episteme=knowledge' and 'logos=reason') refers to individuals' theory of knowledge (Schraw and Olafson, 2008) and concerns itself with how the world is known and with relationship between the inquirer and the known (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Epistemology's interest lies with the methods through which knowledge is obtained and validated. In the case of social research, it is concerned with 'the possible ways of gaining knowledge of social reality, whatever it is understood to be' (Blaikie, 2000; Grix, 2002). This research was concerned with investigating reality conceptualised as students' stream of experience. Experience is told, and therefore can be known, through individuals' narration of their stories. We know the world as a story world; we are what we tell, and our stories make sense of who we are. Why then not make sense of reality through others' stories?

When we aim to understand experience through narration, the relationship between the researcher and the researched is changeable, subject to time, and exists in a particular context. Both the researcher and what is to be 'known' bring with them a history and worldview. The relationship between them is then dynamic, and growth, learning and ongoing changing interpretation are a crucial part of the research process. For my research, acknowledging change and growth throughout the research progress meant recognising that histories and views are not fixed. Through participation in the research project itself and the reflection this might stimulate, what participants 'know' can change. This impacted on the ongoing co-interpretation of what was narrated and observed.

3.4.2 The Choice of a Pragmatic Paradigm

This research sits within a pragmatic paradigm that reflects the conceptualisation of reality and knowledge as explored so far. A pragmatic paradigm also reflects this thesis multidimensional approach to research and the consequent dissatisfaction with a rigid, mono-paradigmatic orientation to research. As Creswell (2003) and Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) describe, research that is situated within a pragmatic paradigm is characterised by a rejection of a positivist approach, alongside the unwillingness to accept the positivist/constructivist dichotomy and placing research within either dominating paradigms. To Dewey (1938), education is perhaps the area most polluted by conceptual dichotomies, and such a rejection seems to be the way to ensure better quality research of experience through interaction. What underpins this pragmatic inquiry is the acceptance of a multidimensional approach to research (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003) that reflects the present multi-layered investigation and its interests in social, cultural, linguistic, and experiential factors. Pragmatist philosophy holds that behaviours and actions are not separated from past and present experiences, nor from the beliefs that originate from them.

This research was guided by the pragmatist principle arguing for the need of a flexible worldview 'which would provide methods of research that are seen to be most appropriate for studying the phenomenon at hand' (Kivunja and Kuyin, 2017, p. 35). By taking a pragmatic approach, I was interested in finding and defining 'what worked' to address the questions under investigation. As

Wiliam (2019) notes, in educational research it is paramount to define what works in a specific context, as ‘anything works somewhere, and nothing works everywhere’ (p. 11). Within a pragmatic paradigm, methodologies and methods were considered and selected to best serve the purposes of this inquiry, within a context of diverse higher education and outside the constraints of paradigm purism and inflexibility.

Further, as this research is concerned with aspects of culture and interculturality, traditional paradigms that are historically Eurocentric or even Anglophones were not deemed appropriate in all their aspects and assumptions. As Stanfield (1993) argues, traditional and widely employed epistemologies are often biased ways of knowing that are influenced by ethnicity and culture. They are often Eurocentric/Anglophone ways of constructing knowledge and perceiving reality, thus I explored epistemologies and methodologies that would consider and account for cultural diversity in the discovery of how knowledge is constructed, and reality is perceived. The pragmatic paradigm allowed me to explore methodologies with cultural sensitivity and consideration of diversity, reducing cultural and contextual bias.

3.5 Methodology: Longitudinal Narrative Inquiry

Informed by the epistemological, ontological, and paradigmatic positions explored thus far, the current thesis aimed to investigate the relationship between international PGT students’ assessment and feedback histories, A&F intercultural communicative competence, and their development and redefinition of feedback literacy through a methodology of longitudinal narrative inquiry.

3.5.1 Why Narrative Inquiry?

Narrative inquiry is one of many exploratory and interpretive approaches in the social sciences (McAlpine, 2016). It is a ‘quintessentially pragmatic methodology’ (Clandinin, 2007, p. 42; Taylor et al., 2015) that mirrors the pragmatic ontology of experience. Narrative inquiry originates from sociocultural theory (Moen, 2006) that describes human learning and development as occurring in

socially and culturally shaped contexts. How individuals develop their own beliefs, views, and perspectives thus depends on what they have experienced in the social and cultural contexts in which they have lived, participated, and interacted (Moen, 2006). Diverse social and cultural HE contexts shape international students at different points in time. This longitudinal narrative inquiry allowed for past, present and ongoing experiences to be narrated in a dynamic continuum. As Fantini (2020) observes, the development of the components of intercultural competence occurs through different longitudinal processes, and ongoing student narratives had the potential to uncover such processes.

The main assumption behind the valorisation of narratives as a means of investigation is that ‘people shape their lives by stories of who they are’ (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 375), and create narrative descriptions of their experiences both for themselves and for others (Zellermayer, 1997). As Polkinghorne (1988) argues, people without narratives do not exist, and reality becomes a narrative that is composed of a number of other stories. Narrative inquiry reflects the researcher's ontological and epistemological position: human life is essentially a narrative, and stories are the most common way in which individuals tend to organise knowledge (Bruner, 1990). If individuals develop narratives and tell stories to make sense of their own beliefs, experiences, and behaviours, then it only seemed relevant to gather narratives to make sense of the experiences of others (Zellermayer, 1997). Also, as Clandinin (2007) stresses ‘the focus of narrative inquiry is not only a valorising of individuals' experience but also an exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted’ (p. 42).

A narrative is made of a collection of stories that the research participants shared and built together with the researcher. A narrative representation of international students' experiences is the lens through which the relationship between students' A&F intercultural competence and feedback literacy were investigated and understood. In fact, what distinguishes narrative research is the belief that through narratives there is the possibility to uncover different and more complex layers of meaning. Narratives capture the individual and the context at different moments in time (Wertsch, 1991) with the aim to bring them into a purposeful dialogue (Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou, 2013).

3.5.2 The Dimensions of Narrative Inquiry

Three crucial dimensions framed the pragmatic ontology of experience and narrative inquiry of this research: the elements of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007; Clandinin and Huber, 2010). A fourth dimension of intercultural experience was also vital for the present narrative inquiry.

3.5.2.1 Temporality

This inquiry investigated student experience with A&F and their development of A&F ICC and feedback literacy at multiple points in time. Stories were gathered in a longitudinal inquiry across the students' postgraduate experience. What underpinned the longitudinal design of this research was the importance of temporality in narrative inquiry: stories are continuously composed, revised and re-composed, as all 'events under study are in temporal transition' (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). The notion of temporality in narratives draws on the conceptualisation of experience as a changing stream whereby individuals continuously interact with their personal, social, and material environment (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Clandinin and Huber, 2010). 'Experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 2). Consideration towards the past, present and future of people, places, things, and events under study (Clandinin and Huber, 2010) were therefore central to this inquiry. Attention was given to international students' histories as a starting point to their changing stream of experience. Approaching a student experience with A&F narratively involved a shift from the dominant perception of the phenomenon as fixed, instead placing emphasis on the changing, personal and sociocultural nature of their development of A&F ICC and feedback literacy (Clandinin and Connelly, 2006). A longitudinal inquiry allowed to capture narratives that recount experience at different moments in time, displaying context- and time-related change and development. This is an element of novelty in the field of assessment and feedback and feedback literacy research. Up to now, little research seems to have attempted to uncover such complex layers of meaning and experience over time.

3.5.2.2 Sociality

The second fundamental dimension of narrative inquiry is sociality. The present inquiry attended to the social conditions under which international students' experiences and events unfolded, giving attention to cultural, social, institutional, and linguistic influences on narratives (Clandinin and Huber, 2010). Stories unfold as a result of social influences on the narrators' lives, on the environments within which they are recounted, and on individuals' histories (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007). Histories, contexts, and cultural influences are at the centre of international students' experiences with assessment and feedback; they were valued within this research and considered of impact on student development of A&F ICC and feedback literacy.

The element of sociality is also concerned with the relational conditions under which the research itself occurred. It recognises the importance of the relationship between the researcher's and the participants' experiences. The researcher was always interested in and aware of the feelings, needs, reactions, perceptions, and dispositions of both self and other whilst undertaking research. The relationship between the stories of all involved was crucial and is discussed further in section 3.7.

3.5.2.3 Place

Another crucial aspect is that of place, as all 'events take place somewhere' (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 481). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) define place as 'the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place' (2006, p. 480), which shape experience and stories. This research was interested in the ways in which place and situatedness of experience with A&F contribute to the meaning of a story, observing the differences that derive from context-shaped A&F histories from the beginning until the end of the narratives. The participants' A&F histories were initially shaped in diverse contexts of higher education across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East; change and development of histories, A&F ICC and feedback literacy occurred at the UK university where this research was conducted. The current inquiry recognised that international students' narratives develop out of relationships, actions, and experiences in different

places. It intended to uncover how circumstances, organisational and institutional structures, cultural and academic norms might lead to different plotlines being shaped (Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2015).

3.5.2.4 Interculturality

Narrative inquiry is a particularly appropriate methodology in research that places emphasis on intercultural aspects, as in order to understand interculturality there is a need to be able to ‘imagine a world other than the one we know’ (Andrews, 2007, p. 489). The participants of this research came from different HE worlds than what we might know (see section 3.9); what better way of depicting this than through a story? Narratives have the potential to enhance understanding between individuals in diverse higher education contexts drawing attention to the diverse histories of international students that can support teaching and learning in international higher education (Trahar, 2011). The international students’ narratives offered the opportunity to uncover different HE contexts and A&F practices, traditions, and cultures, whilst bringing more light onto the role of A&F histories and of A&F intercultural competence. Trahar (2011) also supports the use of narrative inquiry in research that involves culture and interculturality. She rightly argues that life, as much as culture, does not stand still but it is ‘always getting in the way, always making what may appear static and not changing into a shifting, moving, interacting complexity’ (Clandinin and Connelly, 2006, p. 125).

3.6 The Researcher and the Participants

The present narrative inquiry was carried out through ‘collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction’ (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Collaboration supports shared interpretation, and to guarantee this, the researcher is responsible for the creation of a caring situation in an unthreatening space where all involved feel comfortable (Moen, 2006). Following Fetterman’s (1998) suggestion, I committed to maintaining a non-judgmental and understanding attitude, creating a sense of equality between the participants and myself. Participants’ perception of equality was vital as international students might experience and

perceive power imbalances due to cultural, social, and contextual differences. The risk was they might not feel empowered to tell their stories or felt compelled to demonstrate they could meet others' expectations and 'adapt' to the new context (Boud and Molloy, 2013; Byram, 1997). Despite my genuine interest in giving voice to international students, I could not assume that participants would automatically perceive the research (and my) non-judgemental attitude and interest and consequently engage in a collaborative journey of sense-making. I endeavoured to reach a sense of equality and understanding and felt this was accomplished with fewer difficulties because I am not only an outsider (researcher) but also an insider (international PGR student). I recounted my own narrative (see following section) to the participants before the beginning of the data collection, sharing how my experience prompted this very research. I believe this might have favoured an enriching collaboration; students' comfort and willingness to tell their stories seemed to be enhanced and a joint understanding was more easily constructed (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990).

3.7 The Role of the Researcher's Narrative

Narrative inquiry 'traditionally begins with the researcher's autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the research puzzle' (Clandinin and Connolly, 2000, p. 40). Chase (2005) suggests that narrative researchers can investigate a phenomenon or research question more fully by considering and including their own experience of it, that is often referred to as 'narrative beginning' (Clandinin, Pushor and Murray Orr, 2007). I then expound the personal justification for the research choices made by situating myself in the study. Not only is my own experience one of the reasons for undertaking this research but also a narrative that can contribute to the research itself.

3.7.1 My Story

I came to my inquiry as a result of positioning myself both as an international PGT student and a teacher of international students. I chose this line of inquiry to help make sense of international students' experience with A&F, but also to support teachers like myself to use that narrated experience to interact with and guide their students in a more aware and informed manner.

I came to the UK in 2015, right after obtaining a Bachelor's degree from the University of Milan, Italy. I began a one-year full-time Master's course in TESOL in the UK just over a year after my arrival in the country. I was ready, I thought, to begin university in this country: I was more familiar with the country, its language and culture, and friends told me how university worked. But university was nothing like what I expected.

As the course began, my expectations turned out to be – to say the very least – inaccurate, and my certainties started to crumble. I had countless questions; I attempted to answer them by drawing on what I knew. Retrospectively, I would now say my answers were informed by my academic history. I will give you some practical examples. Our course schedule was made of lectures and seminars; unsure of what the difference would be I simply assumed a seminar would be a lecture given in a smaller room. After all, I only attended lectures back in my country and I had seen the different sizes of lecture theatres and seminar rooms at my British university. When lecturers began discussing assignments, I was particularly thrilled about the idea of writing essays. I never needed to write at university as we were assessed through oral examinations only, but I remembered enjoying creative writing in high school. Drawing on my only writing experience, I thought essays would mirror creative writing. Feedback was also an unfamiliar concept to me. I had only heard the word 'feedback' within my work environment: in retail, customers were giving feedback on our 'performance' on the shop floor. As a student, I thought I was a customer. I paid good money to receive a good quality education and I was sure this 'feedback' lecturers kept mentioning would be my 'judgement' on the quality of their teaching.

This is how it all started. And with 'all' I intend my journey of discovery of academia and of assessment and feedback in the UK. I was lucky enough that my course focused on second language teaching and that assessing and giving feedback to students were core elements of the curriculum. My interest in assessment and feedback practices grew with time as I became more familiar with their intentions and the philosophies behind them. The course and the tutors supported me to make sense of the practices, and as I came to realise how their guidance was fundamental, I began to think that surely not all international students would receive the same support. Surely not all courses would place the same

emphasis on the importance and meaning of assessment and feedback processes. So how were the other international students making sense of the purposes of assessment and feedback practices?

I decided to write my final MA dissertation on international student engagement with written corrective feedback on second language use. As I engaged deeply with the literature, I found that international students were (as one would arguably expect) at the centre of studies in second language teaching and learning. But how about the other international students who are not enrolled on a language course? How about postgraduate students who, like me, had not experienced similar assessment and feedback practices in their previous HE experience? How about those who, unlike me, do not study towards a degree in education?

These questions drove me to undertake the current research; they are embedded in my own experience as a student and inform my reflections as a teacher. My experience surely has accompanied me throughout the research process, and I cannot, nor do I intend to, separate myself from it. I embrace it, reflect on it and on how it might shape the process of co-interpretation of narrative that my participants and I embarked on.

3.8 Ensuring Quality of Narrative Inquiry

In the current section, considerations about ensuring rigour and quality of narrative inquiry research are provided, with a view to address some of the criticism advanced towards such approach. With this, I aim to strengthen my claim of the value of utilising narrative inquiry within the context of this research.

3.8.1 Representation of Experience

Narratives constitute a form of representation of experience that needs to be distinguished from experience itself (Goodson, 1992; Moen, 2006). In fact, it is difficult to discern a particular story that is a faithful reflection of facts from a story that might have been shaped or modified by the storyteller (Moen, 2006). Although some present this as a potential limitation to using narrative inquiry, the aim of this research was that of collecting narratives the way in which the participant-storytellers *chose* to

recount them. The narratives and the stories within them ‘belong’ to the narrators, and the possible modifications, adaptations and re-elaborations are part of the stories themselves and can tell us something valuable about the individuals and their sense-making of experience. As Andrews et al. (2013) rightly argue, storytellers do not only tell the story, but they are told by it. This thesis does not conceptualise representation of experience as a limitation to narrative inquiry but rather as what is in fact most valuable.

3.8.2 Alternatives to Validity and Reliability

Criticism is often advanced towards the validity and reliability of narrative research. In qualitative research, the notion of validity aims to define what claims are sufficiently supported by evidence and can therefore be validated (Chase, 2005; Polkighorne, 2007). Nevertheless, definition(s) and conceptualisation(s) of validity are influenced by beliefs and assumptions of different research communities that perceive and define ‘legitimizing evidence’ differently (Polkighorne, 2007, p. 475). Thus, amongst different research traditions, degrees and layers of validity can and should be observed, rather than a claim being advanced about research being either valid or not valid on the basis of a generic, universal definition (Webster and Mertova, 2007).

As Denzin (2005) observes, the validity ‘guidelines’ that are generally followed rely on measurable and objectivist assumptions (Riessman, 1993). They tend to ignore the more recent and complex research methodologies, their strategies of inquiry and paradigms and are therefore not suitable for evaluating research such as narrative inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). According to Polkighorne (2007), the validation process should have the purpose to convince readers and the research community that the claims advanced are strong and well supported and can serve as a basis for an understanding of social reality and individuals within it. In narrative inquiry, claims are made about how individuals experience and understand situations, others, and themselves. The focus is on understanding the meanings that individuals attach to events, rather than on how accurate the representation of the actual events might be (Chase, 2005). Thus, validity to the claims advanced in narrative research should not only be recognised when near certainty about a claim is reached. Instead, ‘readers are asked to make

judgments on whether or not the evidence and argument convinces them at the level of plausibility, credibility, or trustworthiness of the claim' (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 477). The concept of trustworthiness in narrative inquiry should not be confused with that of factual 'truth', as 'verifying the facts is often less important than understanding their meanings for individuals and groups' (Riessman, 2008, p. 187). The validity of this research then lays in the trustworthiness of the researcher's interpretation of the participants' narration of events that is, according to Riessman (2008), supported by coherence, persuasion, and presentation of the participants' stories and of their analysis. To support my claims of validity, I endeavoured to ensure that my analysis was coherent, persuasive, and presented in an appropriate form (see sections 3.12 and 3.13). Further, I relied on detailed and accurate transcripts; although attention to language was out of the scope of this research, high importance was attributed to the context and moment in time of the narration production (Riessman, 2008). Moreover, this inquiry adopted a comparative approach to uncover possible similarities and differences between narratives and this strengthened its claim of validity. In fact, although narrative research often uniquely investigates individual stories (Riessman, 2008), considering collective narratives can generate 'categories' and 'cross-narrative' observations (McAlpine, 2016) that can be somewhat 'transferable' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). If inferences can be made about a collective process, the knowledge generated can become the basis for other work. When this occurs, claims of 'validity' are strengthened (Riessman, 2008).

The concept of reliability in qualitative research refers to the ability of a particular method to lead to the same results whenever employed (Kirk and Miller, 1986; Webster and Mertova, 2007). Again, as Flick (2009) observes, reliability and its conceptualisation are only relevant when considered within and against a particular theory and methodology. In narrative inquiry, the possibility that the outcomes and conclusions drawn from a narrative(s) will be consistently repeated is not to be expected nor is to be considered desirable. Narratives place emphasis on individuals' experiences, contexts and time, and differences are indeed to be expected (Webster and Mertova, 2007). Thus, the notion of reliability in narrative research is related to the experience of individuals and is evaluated (rather than measured) in terms of accuracy and accessibility of the data (Webster and Mertova, 2007). For this research, to guarantee reliability as intended above, I ensured that all relevant texts and transcripts were

accurate and can be made available for readers to access. Research notes and the research process were recorded and can also be made available to external readers. This would allow readers to have access to the participants, their cultural context and the process of knowledge construction that took place between the participants and the researcher throughout the study. Further, I aimed to be as explicit as possible in describing and recounting my own journey through the data collection and analysis, being transparent on experienced uncertainties, doubts, changes of direction, reflections, and processes behind my interpretation of meanings (see sections 3.12 and 3.14).

3.8.3 Further Evaluative Measures

Other evaluative measures have been suggested to enhance the quality of narrative research. As Hubermann (1995) proposes, the measures of honesty, verisimilitude, and authenticity were considered to support the claim of trustworthiness that this narrative research advances. Reflecting on such measures as Webster and Mertova (2007) suggest, I aimed to be honest and transparent about my interpretation of the data, confirming its trustworthiness by engaging with and asking for clarification to those who reported the stories. When I was unsure about my interpretation of meaning being in line with that of the participants, the narrators were asked to comment on such interpretation. This happened both during interviews when explicit questions were asked about the trustworthiness of my interpretation of previously collected stories, and via in person or remote more informal conversations with the participants.

3.9 The Participants

Ten international postgraduate taught students enrolled on a 1-year Master's degree at a mid-ranked British university contributed to this research by sharing their narratives. As the term 'international students' has been used inconsistently and is widely contested and arguably inadequately defined across the literature (Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007), this section aims at clarifying what characteristics define the participants of this study as 'international' students.

3.9.1 Who Are They?

International student mobility is a complex reality that reflects a great variety of ‘international’ students with diverse characteristics. In light of this, criteria of inclusion and exclusion for participant sampling needed to be defined. This addressed the main issues signalled in the literature about conceptualising and identifying ‘international’ students, whilst considering the interests of this research.

Although international students are often assumed to be those with a non-UK domicile and/or citizenship, caution was exercised in utilising such criterion as it often does not reflect the complex context of mobility. In fact, second or third generation students who might still hold their parents’ nationality could be wrongly considered international (Kelo, Teichler, and Wächter, 2006), whereas those who crossed national borders for studies purposes and moved their domicile to the UK might be excluded (Ploner, 2018; Teichler, 2017). In line with these considerations, this research study considers as ‘international’ those students who are non-UK citizens, have spent the majority of their lives outside the UK, but might have chosen to be domiciled in the UK.

Although the literature largely refers to international students as those who have chosen to travel to another country for higher education studies (Carrol and Ryan, 2005), often no attention is paid to whether they have (or not) attended secondary, undergraduate, or preparatory education (e.g., Pre-Master’s courses, Foundation year etc.) in the same country. However, for the purposes of this research, a distinction needed to be made about students’ different degrees of familiarity with the conventions, practices, and cultures of the UK educational and higher education contexts (hence a different academic history). The current work only considered students who did not have any previous educational experience in the UK but entered the UK HE for the first time at a postgraduate level. They tend to be more mature and ‘formed’ students and are more likely to approach unfamiliar HE practises with a range of expectations, beliefs, perceptions, and levels of expertise that are shaped by their diverse histories (Morgan, 2014).

The term ‘international’ further needs to be clarified from a language perspective (Andrade, 2006) as the linguistic criterion should not be considered as entrenched in the definition of international.

In a world of extensive mobility and migration, individuals are increasingly bilingual or multilingual (have two or more than two native languages), therefore assuming that all international students are speakers of English as a second language would be an over-generalisation. From a linguistic perspective, only international students who are speakers of English as a Second or Other Language were included in this research.

The participants of this study were EU, other European (outside of the European Union or EEA), and non-European students. Of the ten participants, four came from the European Union (three from Italy and one from Germany), one from a non-EU European country (Serbia), and five from non-European countries (one from Bahrain, two from Pakistan, one from Sri Lanka, and one from Iraq). They were enrolled on a range of 1-year full-time Postgraduate Taught Programmes within different departments in the Social Sciences (Linguistics, Conservation, Cognitive Psychology, Finance, International Relations and Politics), Arts and Humanities (Curating, Philosophy and History of Art), and Sciences (Biosciences). The next sub-section gives an outline of the participants' profiles, using pseudonyms to guarantee anonymity.

3.9.1.1 Participants' profiles

Marlene

Marlene completed her undergraduate degree at a small Technical University in Germany. Technical Universities differ from traditional ones because of their more pronounced focus on research, practical knowledge, and work-orientated studies. There Marlene obtained a Bachelor's degree in International Relations and Management and continued her education in the UK undertaking a postgraduate degree in Peace and Conflict Studies. Marlene's first language is German, although most of her university education was through the medium of English. She also speaks fluent French and Arabic as she has some work experience (as part of her semesters abroad) in Morocco, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Switzerland. Marlene is in her early 20s and was one of the youngest students who participated in this research.

Antonio

Antonio was born in Romania but moved to Italy half-way through his primary education. He has been in Italian education since and completed an undergraduate degree in Biotechnologies at a large, historical Italian University. Antonio's higher education was entirely in Italian, although he had some non-credit bearing modules of English Language (General English). Antonio moved to the UK to begin an MSc in Biosciences, where he hoped to obtain the technical and linguistic skills to be competitive on the job market. Antonio had little experience outside of his 'mother' countries and coming to the UK was his first long-term experience in an unfamiliar context.

Ann

Ann was one of the oldest student-participants (mid 30s). She completed what is referred to as a 'one-cycle' degree in Philosophy, Art, and Cultures at a northern Italian University. One-cycle degrees at Italian Universities are a minimum of five years long and provide a qualification that includes both an undergraduate and a postgraduate degree. The language of instruction was always Italian, although Ann chose to write her final dissertation in English, hoping this would facilitate potential dissemination of her work. Ann's interdisciplinary studies included a central focus on cultures; despite her little experience abroad, she is familiar with cultural diversity and its wide impact on individuals and societies. Ann came to the UK to undertake an MA in Curating History of Art, that includes a semester based at the University's Paris Campus.

Mahmoud

Mahmoud was a medical student at a large Medical University in Iraq, where most of the courses were provided in English. Mahmoud put his medical studies on hold to pursue a UK Master's degree in Clinical Psychology, after having completed an internship in an Iraqi prison. His decision was based on his desire to understand the complex patient-doctor relationships before completing his studies. Mahmoud is also the founder of an international medical organisation to connect Iraqi students to others across the world, which is now part of the International Federation for medical students. Mahmoud also volunteered as a trainer for TEDex within his University. Although he did not have long-term

experience abroad, Mahmoud was in contact with students and doctors from all over the globe thanks to his non-academic commitments.

Nik

Nik comes from a small Serbian village in the countryside and moved to the capital for his undergraduate education. He obtained a Bachelor's degree in Economics shortly before moving to the UK to pursue a Master's degree in Finance. Despite attending a large University in Serbia, the student and staff body was not very diverse. Nik admitted never interacting with international students before and never using English within or outside academia. Nik shared that the reason for choosing the UK as a study destination is the more 'liberal' education of what he calls 'Western' countries compared to countries with a communist history. He did not wish to discuss this in detail but observed how communist mentality had shaped the Serbian society as much as the educational system.

Diana

Diana completed a double, combined degree between two Italian Universities and a large French University. She studied Semitic Philology with a specialisation in Phoenician languages, Egyptology, and Archaeology. Diana also spent a semester at a Spanish University and had some brief work experiences in the US. In the UK, she is pursuing a Master's degree in Curating History of Art, hoping to have more career opportunities after completion. Diana's choice of receiving a postgraduate education in the UK was driven by what she believes is the 'perceived' value of a UK degree across the world. Her interest was obtaining such a degree, whereas she did not seem to be particularly interested in the experience that might lead to that.

Malak

Malak was born and raised in Syria but completed her undergraduate education in Bahrain. She studied English Language and Linguistics, although the near totality of the course was taught in Arabic, which is her first language. Malak initially wanted to study Medicine, although later opted for language

studies. As part of her degree, she attended a 4-week summer general English course in the UK, and this motivated her to pursue a postgraduate degree in Linguistics in the country. She was also inspired by some of her undergraduate lecturers who obtained MAs or PhDs in the UK and also intended to apply for a funded PhD in the near future. Malak was fascinated by what she heard about British higher education and the teaching and learning practices. She believed them to be more 'modern' and 'effective' than those in place at her previous institution. Diversity in the student and staff body was also what Malak was looking for as her previous institution was mono-cultural and mono-linguistic.

Numi

Numi came to the UK after completing a Bachelor's degree in Bioscience and Environmental Science and having obtained a diploma in Child and Adolescent Psychology at a large University in Sri Lanka. During her studies, Numi used to work part time as a teacher of English and as a freelance writer. Numi's first language is Sinhalese, although she often used English in her everyday life and throughout her secondary and higher education journey. Numi is passionate about the environment and began a postgraduate taught degree in Anthropology and Conservation in the UK, hoping to be able to work with different communities across the world.

Jalil

Jalil completed an undergraduate degree in the field of Agriculture at a medium University in Pakistan and obtained a fully funded scholarship to study Conservation and Rural Development in the UK. For Jalil, leaving Pakistan to pursue an academic career in the UK was a dream come true: accessing what he calls a 'Western' and developed institution with all it can offer is something he was very grateful for. Jalil comes from a small, rural village and felt he was extremely privileged to have accessed education both in Pakistan and in the UK. However, he was a little scared he would not be up to the task in the new environment: his main concern is of linguistic nature. Jalil's first language is Urdu, and although English is the second language in the country, he only used it (in official circumstances) during

his three-year undergraduate degree. Jalil has never been abroad before and hoped he would be able to ‘integrate’ well.

Eileen

Eileen left Pakistan right after completing her Bachelor’s degree in Biomedical Engineering at a University in the capital, where she was born and raised. Unsure about what career path to take, Eileen chose to enrol on a MSc offering a programme that combines Bioengineering and Biotechnology at a British institution. She had considered continuing her studies in other European countries, however felt more comfortable about moving to an English-speaking country. In fact, Eileen had been learning English since primary school, and although it is not her first language, she felt comfortable using it in her daily life. Her undergraduate degree was officially in the medium of English however, it was alternated with Urdu. Eileen had no previous experience outside of her native country and shared she felt a combination of excitement, concern, and anxiety about being in such a new, international educational environment.

3.9.2 Sampling Considerations

Participants were recruited at the University where the study took place through purposive and homogeneous sampling. Purposive sampling is described as ‘hand-picked for the topic’, relevant to the particular phenomenon being explored (Denscombe, 2010, p. 34). It allowed for purposeful selection of participants with the explicit goal to inform an understanding of the research problem and gather rich and in-depth data (Creswell, 2007; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). Homogenous sampling selected participants following set criteria, allowing me to look at experiences of a subgroup of international students in an in-depth manner (Patton, 2002). Further, this facilitated an analysis across narratives that could strengthen the transferability of the claims advanced.

Initially, fifteen international students were recruited. Recruitment happened mainly through School administrators, Postgraduate Courses coordinators, and the Graduate School at the university where the research took place. Some of the participants were recruited thanks to the researcher role as

a teacher on non-credit bearing support modules for international students and with the help of colleagues teaching on similar modules. Some of the first recruited participants helped with enlarging the group and additional students were recruited through snowballing.

The desired sample size for this narrative research was between 8 and 12 international students, although the exact number was never particularly relevant (Flick, 2009). In fact, the focus of narrative inquiry is on providing a rationale for the participants' selection and on the description of their characteristics, rather than on numbers or saturation. The desirable size was determined in light of the existing literature. In higher education, narrative studies have utilised samples that vary from 1 to over 40 participants (Guetterman, 2015; McAlpine and Turner, 2011), with the only recommendation of having a number of individuals rather than one or two (Chen et al., 2015). Braun and Clarke (2013) and Clarke and Braun (2018) suggest at least five or six interviewees if the data are rich and the sample homogenous. Further, following Mason's (2002) suggestion, the sample was determined to have a manageable size in practical terms. 8-12 would allow the researcher to collect and analyse in-depth data from all participants in both a single and cross-narrative analysis.

A larger number of fifteen participants were initially recruited to account for potential attrition. Because of the longitudinal nature of the research and the high levels of prolonged commitment requested of the participants, attrition seemed to be highly likely. In fact, five of the initial participants did not complete the study for a variety of reasons including university drop-out, lack of engagement, and the Coronavirus pandemic, leaving the final number at ten.

3.10 Methods

Different research methods can be employed within narrative inquiry methodology (Cohen et al., 2007). As narrative inquiry methodology is positioned within qualitative research, the methods of the present study were qualitative in nature. The next sections provide a rationale for the utilisation and a description of the methods selected for this research.

3.10.1 Methods in Narrative Research

Qualitative research methods ‘consist of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.3). In practical terms, methods are the techniques and tools employed to inquire into events or phenomena. Narrative inquiry has traditionally gathered data in different ways and considered diverse sources as data and no particular method of data collection is generally favoured in this type of research (Josselson and Lieblich, 2003). Data can be collected both in one-to-one and in group situations (Clandinin and Huber, 2010). In this research, one-to-one situations were favoured to preserve the value of the individual’s experience and story and the unique nature of the individual's histories, emotions, and experiences. Within the literature, narrative research participants have been invited to share their stories in a variety of ways that include responding to interview questions, being involved in conversations or dialogue, and by telling stories prompted by various designed inputs (Clandinin and Huber, 2010). Narrative interviewing and audio diaries were utilised for the present inquiry.

The following sections offer an illustration of the methods, a justification for such choice, and a description of how they were employed.

3.10.2 Narrative Interviews

Narrative interviewing was the main data collection method utilised to obtain in-depth and comprehensive narratives on international PGT students’ experiences with assessment and feedback, their development of A&F intercultural competence and feedback literacy. Interviews are one of the most prevalent qualitative methods in the social sciences (Mason, 2002; McDonough and McDonough, 1997), in educational research (Benati, 2015), and narrative inquiry (Chase, 2005). They are considered to be particularly useful when the research aims to capture individuals’ experiences, beliefs, views, and reflections (Benati, 2015), and are normally employed alongside other research methods (audio diaries for the present research).

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe interviews as a professional conversation that is based on conversations of daily life. They argue ‘it is an inter-view, where knowledge is constructed in the inter-

action between the interviewer and the interviewee' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 2). However, as Josselson and Lieblich (2003) expound, interviews within narrative research present somewhat different characteristics and intentions. In narrative interviewing, 'the interviewer [needs to] keep their research aims and personal interests in mind, while leaving enough space for the conversation to develop into a meaningful narrative. It has to procure stories, namely concrete examples, episodes or memories from the teller's life' (Josselson and Lieblich, 2003, pp. 269-270).

As the aim was to elicit a particular narrative that was relevant to the research interests and not to gather an insight into the participants' broader lived experiences, the interviews began with a number of broad 'generating narrative questions' that were also sufficiently specific for the central theme to be clear (Flick, 2009). The aim was to allow the participants to generate a story and narrate their experiences in relation to A&F practices (Kartch, 2018), shifting the roles of those involved in the interview from 'interviewer-interviewee to narrator-listener' (Kartch, 2018, p. 2). To ensure engagement and support the construction of stories, I decided to follow the storyline wherever the narrator chose to take it, attempting to put aside any pre-existing expectations of what the narrative would uncover (Kartch, 2018). The interviews were not based on a fixed agenda or set of specific questions. Rather, they let the interviewee be in control of the direction, the content, and the pace of the interview (Anderson and Kirkpatrick, 2016). Nevertheless, the interviews did not simply let the story unfold completely freely and with no constraints. I played the role of a facilitator inviting the participants to tell their stories and supporting their telling. Further, in order to elicit richer data, I asked follow-up questions, providing input for the participants to elaborate further on their narrative (Kartch, 2018) by sharing additional and more insightful examples, clarifications, and descriptions. These interviews are generally referred to as 'directive' narrative interviews (Lieblich et al., 1998) as they invite the participants to tell their stories whilst being sensitively 'directed' to only tell part of their life stories that are relevant to the research questions and aims. Appendix 1 provides examples of the interview templates utilised. The templates only represent a guide to remind the interviewer of potential 'directive' questions, prompts and follow-up questions; not all the questions listed were asked.

The narrative interviews conducted placed particular attention on the emotions that the participants experienced and that emerged in the narration. At times, I intervened inviting the participants to elaborate on their feelings, opinions, and evaluations of their experiences. Emotions play a fundamental role in all narrative research but are also central to the models of A&F intercultural competence and feedback literacy that frame this research. Emotions were also particularly well captured through audio diaries, as the next section illustrates.

Strengths and limitations of using interviews have been largely described in the literature (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007), and were considered when selecting this method. Their flexible structure allowed for follow-up and for the unexpected and unplanned to emerge, which enabled me to gather a deeper insight of the participants' experience, emotions, perceptions, and beliefs (Josselson and Lieblich, 2003; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). This, alongside the rich in-depth accounts that can be provided, is one of the more relevant strengths of narrative interviews. However, as Robson (2011) argues, it is crucial to consider that follow-up questions might be influenced by the researcher's pre-existing expectations, and this could allow bias and subjectivity from the side of the interviewer to emerge. Further, what emerges from the interviews might be influenced by the interviewee bias, who could be inclined to give 'socially desirable responses' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 69). The degree of freedom that characterises storytelling in narrative interviews alongside exercising caution when formulating follow-up prompts or questions can mitigate this and reduce the chance of bias on the side of the narrator. However, as narrative interviews were used in combination with audio diaries that required the participants to be briefed on the research interests (see next section), some bias and desire to produce accounts that might be considered 'appropriate' are still potential issues to acknowledge.

Interviews can be conducted face-to-face or online and can be individual or group interviews (King and Horrocks, 2010). Individual, face-to-face interviews were favoured and carried out, as they allowed the researcher to listen to the interviewees' voices and to view facial expressions and physical responses that might also be valuable (Kvale, 2007). Gesture and facial expressions were fundamental for successful communication as both myself and the interviewees are speakers of English as a second or other language. In interviews conducted in a second language misunderstandings are more likely to

arise, but can be more easily resolved in-person, as questions can be explained when necessary. Further, one-to-one and in-person interviews can contribute to the creation of a safe environment where all involved can feel at ease and can comfortably express feelings and emotions when narrating experiences.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face interviews were conducted only for part of the inquiry. Because of the University closure in March 2020 and of social-distancing rules, part of the interviews had to be carried out online. Fortunately, when lockdown began, two rounds of narrative interviews had already been carried out, and only the third and last interview round took place remotely. The participants were given the possibility to select their preferred method of communication (the alternative platforms I offered were Zoom, Skype, and WhatsApp/telephone call) and almost the totality of post social-distancing interviews took place via Skype with only one being conducted via WhatsApp video call. A relationship between researcher and participants had already been created, and all participants confirmed they felt equally comfortable continuing their research participation online.

3.10.3 Audio Diaries

Diaries are often utilised in narrative inquiry as instruments of participant repeated self-report and self-reflection over time (Cao and Henderson, 2020). They are useful to investigate ongoing and changing experiences and offer the opportunity to investigate processes within particular situations and contexts (Bolger, Davis, and Rafaeli, 2003). Diaries are seldom the principal data collection method (Hislop et al., 2005) and are reported to be underutilised in higher education research (Cao and Henderson, 2020). Across disciplines, research related to learning and teaching has often analysed learner or reflective diaries (Vinjamuri, Warde, and Kolb, 2017; Wallin and Adawi, 2018). However, such diaries were not produced explicitly for research purposes but rather included in study programmes for learning purposes. Within this research, solicited diaries (for research purposes) were used alongside narrative interviews to provide more richness and detail to the individual narratives (Meth, 2003).

Diaries can help investigate temporality, context and change eliciting authentic data. When individuals utilise diaries to provide accounts of their lived experiences, the amount of time between

the experience itself and its representation is reduced. This enhanced data authenticity and provided a deeper insight into the participants' processes of meaning-making of experience and events. Diaries have the potential to support interview-gathered narratives in recording changes and development over time as they allow for numerous instances of story-telling events. To some extent, diaries seem to fit within or be equal to traditional longitudinal research designs, as they aim to collect data repeatedly over a long(er) period of time. Nevertheless, whilst traditional longitudinal studies typically involve a limited and predetermined number of repeated data collection taken at long intervals, diary accounts can be more frequent and do not need to be planned, allowing the researcher to capture changes more faithfully and flexibly (Bolger et al., 2003). The student-participants chose to record diary logs at a particular moment in time that was significant to them, and this helped understanding what meaning they attributed to particular selected events and experiences. The autonomy and freedom of expression of participants in recording their entries, alongside the immediacy of reflections (Jefferies, 2015; Noyes, 2004) was one of the most valued aspects that informed the choice of this data collection method.

Diaries are not exclusively to investigate experience, rather, they helped determine the antecedents, correlates, and consequences of experiences and feelings, providing accounts of reflection that enables the recording of emotional responses (Peterson, Brown, and Jun, 2015). Diaries helped capture sensitive emotional responses related to different stages of assessment and feedback processes, providing a deeper insight into the emotional sphere that relates to student assessment and feedback intercultural competence and feedback literacy.

For this research, solicited, 'event-contingent' diaries were employed, where participants were required to provide a self-report each time an event that is 'of interest' occurred (Bolger et al., 2003; Cao and Henderson, 2021). Participants were handed a diary protocol with prompts describing hypothetical situations that would be considered as relevant for the research (Appendix 2). To ensure participants would be able to record experiences and events that are relevant to the study, an explanatory meeting was required, where I ensured that participants fully understood the requirements and the interests of the research. A high degree of responsibility is normally placed on the participants engaging with diary logs (Robson, 2002). However, such responsibility needs to be shared with the researcher;

thus, I did my best to provide the students with sufficient information to effectively complete their diary logs.

Audio diaries were selected for this research. Literature on the audio diary data collection method is fairly scarce, and particularly concentrated in the fields of medicine, psychology, and sociology (Worth, 2009). Audio diaries have been rarely used in qualitative research and there have been very few studies that have employed audio diaries within a narrative inquiry (Monroux, 2009), although they have been previously employed in higher education research into student experience and development (Creanor et al., 2006; Jefferies, 2015). Despite the scarcity of available literature, Hislop et al. 's (2005) sleep research provided a detailed and valuable description and evaluation of the audio diary method that informed and supported its utilisation in the current research. If compared to the more traditional paper-and-pen diaries, audio diaries can overcome problems of completion and motivation associated with writing, whilst offering a means of collecting and analysing qualitative data that might otherwise remain inaccessible (Hislop et al., 2005). In fact, data obtained from audio diaries are often more detailed, due to the form in which accounts are presented. In Hislop et al. 's (2005) study, participants using audio diaries presented their stories in the form of a narrative with in-depth links to the context and their histories, whereas written accounts were reduced to a list of facts but provided little affective commentary and in-depth insights. A similar outcome was found for the current research and is discussed in more detail in section 3.12.

When selecting audio diaries, I was aware of technical and completion issues that could potentially arise. In fact, the use of technology needed to collect the data might be of hindrance and cause problems that would not arise when using pen and paper (Jefferies, 2015). To overcome this, I indicated two possible ways of recording audio logs, but I invited the participants to choose their preferred app or device if they felt more comfortable. Further, using audio diaries meant that participants were required to verbalise their own thoughts and some individuals felt more comfortable with writing than speaking. Participants who felt strongly about utilising written diaries instead of audio logs were invited to do so, and follow-up interviews were organised shortly after the diary entry was recorded to allow for further discussion.

As the participants of this research were international students whose first language is not English, the issue of speaking, writing, and expressing thoughts in a second or other language needed to be considered. This potential issue was overcome by allowing the three participants whose first language is the same as my own (Italian) to provide audio accounts in their first language should they feel more comfortable, and consequently translate them into English. Although I have previous experience with freelance Italian to English translation, I acknowledge I am not a professional translator and my experience was limited to specific domains. Thus, I made sure I performed translations that were as faithful as possible to the original story by engaging with the participants in subsequent meaning-checking interviews or audio logs. Other participants provided audio accounts in English; meaning was also confirmed in subsequent interviews when I believed misunderstanding and misalignment was likely to occur. Flexibility of language use was allowed when possible to reduce potential anxiety and language power imbalances, as it was my duty to reassure participants and create a safe and equal space in which they would feel free to express themselves. Nevertheless, the fact that I am not a native speaker of English myself seemed to favour the creation of a non-judgemental and more comfortable environment where expressing thought and feelings in a second language did not generate situations of anxiety or perceived imbalance.

3.11 Longitudinal Data Collection

Data collection began in early October 2019 and was carried out employing both narrative interviews and audio diaries. Data collection began as early as the participant recruitment process allowed for, in line with this research interest in early narratives of international PGT students with no previous experiences of the British HE context and practices. Data collection continued throughout the academic year, in order to collect multiple stories at different times that constitute a narrative of development and change. The longitudinal aspect of the narratives collected allowed the researcher to observe any changes in the impacts of student histories, their A&F ICC, and feedback literacy.

Before the official data collection started, I met individually with all participants, briefly outlining the aims and design of the research. The Participation Information Sheet and the Audio Diary

Guidelines and Prompts Sheet (Appendices 3 and 2) were discussed with all the student-participants, ensuring that there was no misunderstanding on what participation would involve. The first interviews were conducted shortly after the informal researcher-participant meetings, with the intention to gather narratives about students' previous experiences with academia, feedback and assessment practices, and their initial levels of A&F intercultural competence and feedback literacy. The first interviews allowed me to collect insights into participants' academic histories, cultures, values, and beliefs that were shaped before joining the British HE institution.

After the first data collection event, participants were asked to begin logging in their audio diaries in-between interviews. As explained in the Audio Diary Sheet, they were invited to record their thoughts, perceptions, and feelings when engaging with assessment tasks and feedback processes, and to describe how they approached their assessment tasks and the feedback received. Participants were encouraged to record an entry whenever they engaged with the two academic practices, had discussions with peers or academics about them, or felt they had something relevant to log. Student-participants were also asked to log in their audio diaries thoughts, emotions, and perceptions about feedback processes, alongside accounts of how they intended to or utilised the feedback received on subsequent tasks. Although written guidelines and prompts were provided and discussed with the participants, I clarified that they should feel free to log in whatever felt relevant to them. Participants were requested to send their recordings to the researcher on a regular basis, in order to minimise issues of forgetfulness and technology fails on the part of the participants (e.g., files accidentally deleted or lost). Diary studies tend to collect data for short periods of time (e.g., Groves, Verenikina, and Chen, 2016) to avoid attrition, loss of data and prolonged research commitments. However, there exist a small number of higher education diary studies that cover longer periods, such as 21 weeks (Dietrich, Kracke, and Nurmi, 2011) and one academic year (Cao and Henderson 2021; Scott, Green, and Cashmore, 2012), where the focus has been on ongoing reflection and experience.

A second round of narrative interviews was conducted after the student-participants had their first experience of feedback; because of the diversity of courses and assessment design across Schools and modules, these second interviews were carried out between the months of December and January.

Further interviews were conducted towards the end of the second term, between April and May. The length of interviews varied between 25 and 70 minutes with the average length of the interviews being 45 minutes. Participants continued recording their audio diaries log between the scheduled interviews whenever they felt they wished to recount events or experiences. Overall, the amount of diary logs that the participants recorded over the academic year varies from two to ten. Consequently, the number of the researcher-gathered narrations in the form of interviews and diaries varies between six and fifteen collected over the whole duration of the research study. Some of the student-participants also shared documents they felt could support the researcher's understanding of their experiences and meanings they attributed to them. Recounting their experiences with the support of material examples of feedback that were particularly meaningful to them seemed to simplify and clarify the narration; during interviews, students often logged on their virtual learning environments to show feedback comments. Some participants also shared assessment guidelines, rubrics, and some feedback-related email interactions with lecturers. Appendix 4 provides an account of the data available for each participant and shows an example of supporting material provided by the participants.

3.12 Problems and Solutions of Data Collection

The main problem that arose during the data collection process was linked to the Covid-19 pandemic. As initially planned, I intended to carry out one last round of narrative interviews at the end of the academic year, when the participants had concluded their final project or dissertation. The aim of the last interview would have been to conclude the narrative with accounts of their final A&F ICC and feedback literacy, with a particular focus on whether feedback was enacted for their last piece of work. However, after having conducted and analysed the online interviews in April and based on what I gathered from the audio diaries I received in May, I decided not to carry out further interviews. The student-participants had in fact been strongly impacted by the Covid-19 situation, the sudden move to online teaching, learning, and assessment, and the general uncertainty that the pandemic suddenly brought into their personal and academic lives. In the last data collection events, many shared frustration, suggested poor mental health, and expressed the desire for the academic year 'to be over

and done with'. The desire to simply complete their programme of study was accompanied by lack of engagement and by growing confusion due to the new online learning environment. The changes and developments I could have observed in the summer term were likely to be heavily affected by the extreme circumstances caused by the pandemic. Moreover, I felt that I had the ethical duty to prioritise the student-participants' health and wellbeing rather than the completion of my research project 'as planned'; thus, the fourth and final interview round was cancelled.

Problems also arose throughout the research process and before the pandemic began. One of the main issues was that of forgetfulness or lack of completion of the audio diary entries. A few participants revealed that although they often thought about recording in their diaries, other commitments sometimes got in the way, leading to diary completion only when reminded by the researcher. I endeavoured to be in constant communication with the participants and I made them aware I would check in with them on a fortnightly basis. However, despite the regular communication, reminders did not necessarily lead to diary completion. The same participants who would postpone logging into their diaries admitted that they would prefer to participate in a higher number of arranged interviews; they would be less inclined to forget or postpone.

As briefly mentioned in previous sections, two participants preferred to utilise written diaries and were accommodated. The risk to using written diaries is that accounts become a list of 'issues' experienced (Hislop et al., 2005), and this was observed with the participants of this study. To overcome this problem, I dedicated some of the interview time to discuss the written entries; the participants welcomed this activity and actively participated in developing their writing into more complex and story-like accounts. This is similar to what Cao and Henderson (2020) and Furness and Garrud (2010) found in their studies where some students preferred to write short diary entries and expand on them during follow-up interviews.

Lastly, because of English not being the first language of all those involved in the data collection process, issues of intelligibility and misinterpretation were experienced. This was anticipated and preventive measures were taken: some students were allowed to record audio diaries in their first language (see section 3.10.3 for details). However, when this was not possible, I simply asked for further

clarification or confirmation of her own interpretation. I invited the participants to do the same should they experience similar difficulties during the conversation. As the researcher-participant relationship consolidated, all involved in the research seemed to feel more comfortable with freely expressing need for clarification; this enhanced the quality of the data collected.

3.13 Data Analysis

3.13.1 The Approach to Data Analysis

Stories can be approached, and therefore analysed, with different intentions, interests, and foci (Chase, 2005). This thesis adopted a categorical approach to data analysis, as the aim was to consider and compare all references to the assessment and feedback experience within one narrative and across several narratives (Lieblich et al., 1998). According to King (2004) thematic analysis can be particularly effective in studies where different perspectives within a specific context are considered, therefore it was deemed useful for the current thesis. The focus of the analysis was on the experience that, within the wider individual's story, was related to the practices of assessment and feedback. A categorical approach was preferred over the 'holistic' counterpart that would consider lived experiences of international PGTs at the British university as a whole (Lieblich et al., 1998).

The categorical analysis carried out in this research focused on the content of the stories that form the narratives collected rather than on the form and structure of what is told. Within a so-called 'content-based' approach, the focus was narrowed onto the events narrated, the participants' motives or intentions, and the meanings and the importance attributed to the stories, rather than on the language or structure of the narratives. The aims of this research shaped the type of analysis conducted: content was favoured over form as the aim was to give 'voice' to the participants through their particular narratives rather than on 'decoding' the texts of their stories (Josselson, 2004).

The present thesis' approach to data analysis was twofold: (1) it valued individuals' narratives and their voices and (2) it was interested in collective wider narratives that are made of interlinked stories of individuals. The analysis intended to give emphasis on each student and their individual

narratives, to explore the sociocultural narratives of each participant and the way in which they influence their experiences (McAlpine, 2016; Riessman, 2008). Further, as Plummer (1995) argues, ‘for narratives to flourish there must be a community to hear. For communities to be heard, there must be stories that weave together their history, their identity, their politics’ (p. 87). The analysis then intended to capture similarities or differences across narratives to give voice to shared meanings and experiences.

3.13.2 Integration of Narrative and Thematic Analysis

In this thesis, narrative and thematic approaches to data analysis were adopted to produce a multidimensional understanding of international student experience with A&F. Narrative analysis helped develop a storyline that allowed for the emergence of student voices whilst considering the element of temporality and change; thematic analysis uncovered patterns across the entire dataset. Adopting such analyses in parallel supports a robust, multi-layered understanding of international students’ development of A&F ICC and feedback literacy at the British University.

Narrative – The Role of Individual Stories

Narrative analysis is the frame within which the researcher recounted and interpreted individual stories. Narrative analysis focuses on the way individuals present their accounts of themselves and views narration as a co-construction of meaning that involves the researcher and the narrator. By adopting a life story method of narrative analysis, I re-told the students’ narratives focusing on interpreting those accounts that were most significant to the research aims (Riessman, 1993). The transcribed narrative accounts were examined and re-told in a new narration that was developed throughout the analysis. In particular, the stories that the participants told during the multiple data collection events were analysed and interpreted shortly after they were obtained, considering the interests of this research. Each individual analysis of stories narrated at different times contributed to shape the individual narrative as represented by the researcher. Stand-alone researcher constructed narratives were developed to give voice to individual participants and their experiences and to facilitate analysis across narratives. These

were narrated from the point of view of the researcher (third person narration), and initially simply re-told the narration as a reconstruction of all stories (McAlpine, 2016). As the analysis continued, narrations were developed into a different form that included the researcher's interpretation, as this supported reflexivity and the analysis itself (see Appendix 5 for an example of researcher constructed narrative). The narratives that the researcher re-constructed build on a plotline that uncovers the main themes and meanings attributed to them, whilst accounting for temporality and change. Student development of A&F ICC and feedback literacy is the thread of each narrative. Through analysis and interpretation, I intended to expose implicit understandings embedded in the stories and represent them in the narratives. The aim was to give emphasis to individuals' voices without claiming that this is the only way to interpret a narrative (Feldman, Skoldberg, Brown and Horner, 2004). I re-storied accounts to build a narrative, looking for stories of experience with assessment and feedback practices that could uncover students' histories, intercultural competence, and feedback literacy. Stories told at different moments in time exposed different degrees of A&F ICC and feedback literacy; the stories converged into narratives that highlight their development considering time, context, sociality and interculturality (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

Thematic – the Role of Collective Narratives

Thematic analysis (TA) was later employed to identify similarities and differences across all narratives, aiming to provide a rich cross-narrative thematic description of the as of yet under-researched relationship between international student histories, development of A&F ICC, and feedback literacy. Braun and Clarke (2006) qualitative and interpretive conceptualisation of an approach to TA was preferred to its alternatives (see for example Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 2000; King and Brooks, 2017) as it allowed for flexibility and encouraged reflexivity throughout the analysis and interpretation process.

TA is a method of data analysis that does not rely rigidly on pre-existing theoretical or methodological frameworks (as compared to, for example, grounded theory, IPA, and discourse analysis). Rather, it is a flexible and accessible approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2020) that can be

used within different methodologies. It offers to investigate questions about experience, and often analyses data from interviews and diaries. In this thesis, TA was used within a methodology of narrative inquiry and was designed to build on an initial narrative analysis (Braun, Clarke, and Hayfield, 2019).

Through thematic analysis, the researcher aimed at finding patterns of shared meaning across narratives and offering an interpretation of the patterns identified (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun, Clarke and Rance, 2014). Such patterns were reflected in the ‘themes’ developed, that were organised around core concepts (Braun et al., 2018). Themes were made of smaller units called ‘codes’ and were developed through the researcher’s engagement and sense-making of the codes. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe two different approaches to thematic analysis that are underlined by a qualitative (rather than positivist) philosophy: codebook and reflexive TA. These do not represent a dichotomy but rather a continuum of different degrees of induction and deduction. This thesis’ analysis was positioned somewhere in the middle of such a continuum, as it began from codebook TA premises and continued with a more reflexive approach to the data.

As it is commonly done in codebook TA, the main, broader themes were developed in advance in light of the research questions and reflecting the assessment and feedback intercultural competence theoretical model that underpins this thesis. Figure 2 below lists the six initial codebook themes.

<i>Theme 1</i> - Knowledge
<i>Theme 2</i> - Awareness
<i>Theme 3</i> - Attitudes
<i>Theme 4</i> - Skills
<i>Theme 5</i> - Intercultural Critical Reflection
<i>Theme 6</i> – Intercultural Emotional Intelligence

Figure 2 - Initial Codebook Themes

These pre-determined themes were particularly helpful to initially guide a purposeful analysis and to help manage the extensive narrative accounts collected. Retrospectively, I would admit they supported

me in the initial and fairly ‘chaotic’ phases of data analysis. In fact, having little previous experience with qualitative data analysis, I felt the codebook themes helped me to purposefully navigate my data and to keep the analysis relevant to the thesis’ aims and questions. Nevertheless, the development of the final main themes and of the sub-themes that compose them was intentionally kept flexible and fluid, with a view to minimising the ‘directive’ role of the codebook themes and to guaranteeing space for the collective student-participants’ voice to emerge. It is worth mentioning that preserving such flexibility during analysis was one of the reasons for choosing thematic analysis over grounded theory; in fact, grounded theory tends to determine strict procedures for data analysis that have to be followed (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). The analysis was instead approached considering the existing, ‘guiding’ themes as potentially changing and shifting through the interpretive process. The aim of the analysis was to engage with the data in a reflexive manner to give voice to the student group rather than simply confirming the pre-defined themes.

Braun and Clarke’s (2006) work proposes the following six-step process of thematic analysis: 1) familiarising with the data, 2) generating codes, 3) generating themes, 4) reviewing potential themes, 5) defining and naming themes and 6) producing a report. Following Braun and Clarke’s advice (2006; 2013) these were considered as reference points that would help to not be ‘overwhelmed’ by the process, rather than a step-by-step guide. As expected, the analysis was in fact not a straightforward ‘from 1 to 6’ type of process but was instead rather messy, creative, and interpretive. As the data analysis was carried out longitudinally alongside the data collection events, codes were revised and re-interpreted numerous times as the narratives evolved. The diagram below (Figure 3) represents the interpretive process that led to the corroboration of the collective narrative themes:

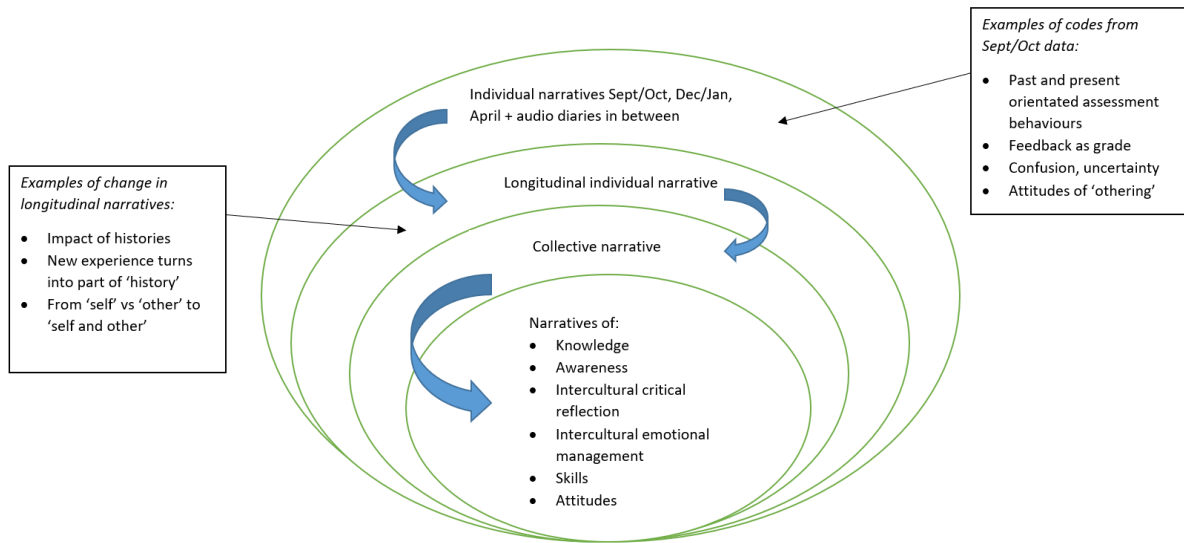


Figure 3 - Interpretive process to collective themes

Because of the longitudinal aspect of the research, beginning the data analysis with the full set of interview and audio diary transcripts (or written diary accounts) was not possible nor recommendable. The process of familiarising with the data set was gradual: I first familiarised with and worked through the data collected from the first interview round and audio diaries received up until January, then repeated the same process after the second and third rounds of interviews. This was useful as I could compare the codes developed at different points in time and observe if change had occurred. For example, 'previously shaped knowledge' changed from including only knowledge that was formed in previous university settings to combining such knowledge with the 'newly' shaped knowledge at the British university. Further, codes that were generated during the analysis of the data collected in the first trimester of research were not necessarily confirmed later in the process; similarly, new codes were generated further along the data collection and analysis process that were not developed previously. The transcripts were uploaded on NVivo 12 and worked through to identify codes that might contribute to the central organising concepts defined by the existing themes or to the definition of new themes. NVivo was employed throughout the data analysis process; nevertheless, when the full body of transcribed data was available at the end of the data collection, a pen-and-paper overall review of the generated codes was also carried out. The choice of not concluding the analysis of NVivo was personal;

I felt that by immersing myself in the hard copies of the transcripts would allow for more creativity at a stage where the risk of a chaotic and inconclusive analysis was lower because of the work previously done. When the data was worked through again, further changes were made to the codes; this led to the generation of sub-themes from grouping together several codes. The codes contributed to the development of 'lower-levels' sub-themes that describe more narrowly focused themes within the broader codebook themes (King, 2004).

The grouping and revision of the codes to generate sub-themes was carried out at this final stage of the 'ongoing' data analysis as it could be done in a more insightful and informative manner. Previous attempts at developing sub-themes were not particularly successful, as their meanings and roles within the collective student narrative was not yet clear and the narratives themselves were not complete. Nevertheless, they informed and improved the quality of the final sub-themes (Figure 4).

KNOWLEDGE

- 1- Familiarity with mechanisms and technicalities of A&F
- 2- Familiarity with philosophies, values, purposes, and intentions of A&F
- 3- Familiarity with expectations and responsibilities within A&F processes
- 4- Familiarity with language and discourse of A&F

AWARENESS

- 5- Recognising cultural diversity of A&F
- 6- Recognising role and impact of A&F histories
- 7- Recognising diversity of expectations in A&F processes

INTERCULTURAL CRITICAL REFLECTION

- 8- Ability and willingness to reflect on opinions about A&F
- 9- Ability and willingness to critically discuss about and within A&F
- 10- Ability and willingness to critically analyse A&F practices

INTERCULTURAL EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT

- 11- Showing empathy
 - 12- Dealing with uncertainty
 - 13- Dealing with emotions about/when engaging in A&F discussion
 - 14- Dealing with emotions triggered by unfamiliarity with A&F language and discourse
- ATTITUDES**
- 15- Beliefs about A&F
 - 16- Predispositions towards A&F
 - 17- Openness towards A&F
 - 18- Curiosity about A&F
- SKILLS**
- 19- Behaviour flexibility
 - 20- Ability and willingness to learn actively and independently about and through A&F
 - 21- Ability and willingness to resolve conflicts

Figure 4 - Final themes and sub-themes

The 21 sub-themes that were developed from gathering the codes contribute to substantiate the initial themes. Sub-themes 1-4 contribute to giving meaning to the theme of ‘knowledge’; 5-7 to that of ‘awareness’; 8-10 contribute to ‘intercultural critical reflection’; 11-14 to ‘intercultural emotional management’; 15-18 to ‘attitudes’, and 19-21 to the theme ‘skills’. Only the theme that was initially named ‘intercultural emotional intelligence’ (Figure 3) to align it with most of the previous intercultural competence literature was re-named ‘intercultural emotional management’ to reflect the story it tells.

I would argue that continuing to define the themes and sub-themes as ‘codebook’ would be misleading. In fact, although they were determined at the start of the analysis and used as guidance, the bottom-up process of analysis allowed for ongoing reflection and interpretation rather than a simple ‘confirmation or rejection’ of the original themes. Based on Braun and Clarke’s (2006) definition, I would rather refer to my final themes as ‘storybook’ themes: they are interpretive and tell a story about the data by recounting a central message (Braun and Clarke, 2006). They do not represent a ‘summary’

of the codes that constitute the theme but are a central organising concept (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Braun, Clarke and Rance, 2014) whose implicit meaning was explored, questioned, interpreted, and recounted as a collective student story. The collective student narrative is represented in the diagram below (Figure 5) that will guide the exploration of this thesis results in the next chapter. The map aims to help visualise the collective story this thesis is telling and how the themes and sub-themes are interlinked and inform one another.

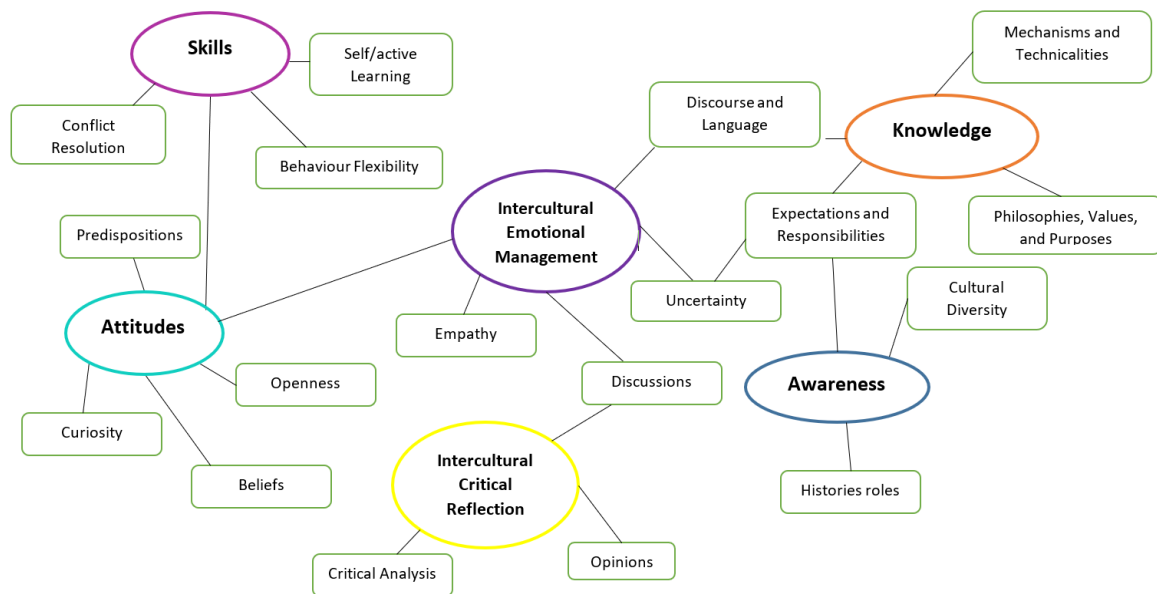


Figure 5 - Map of themes and sub-themes

The above map represents the collective narrative that was created across multiple individual stories. The contribution of each individual narrative can be found in Appendix 6, where ‘individual’ tables depict how and to what extent each student narrative fit in or contributed to each theme and sub-theme at different moments in time.

3.14 Representation of Voice, Themes, and Development

This section shortly outlines the challenge of representing this thesis’ data in the results chapter. It intends to expound the rationale behind the choice of data representation and to be of support to the

reader when engaging with the results chapter. When choosing the most appropriate and effective way to represent and organise this thesis' results, I was faced with the complexities of representing narrative and longitudinal data, and valuing and illustrating individuals' voices and overarching themes, alongside individual and across narrative development.

As described in section 3.13.1, narrative analysis was carried out for individual stories and was used to inform and support the subsequent collective thematic analysis. To guarantee representation of individuals' voices, narrative researchers often share such narrative accounts. Nevertheless, representing individual voices was not the only intention of this thesis, which also aims at uncovering a collective narrative. Uniquely proposing researcher re-interpreted narratives would fail to represent collective narratives. Thus, the final individual narratives integrated with the researcher's interpretation were not utilised in their totality to represent the results and as a basis for discussion. Instead, the results are explored by themes; the collective meanings and interpretations of such central organising concepts are the plotline of each results' sub-chapter. Relevant student-participants' direct quotes are used within the thematic and collective representation of the results to maintain the individuality of the different narratives whilst contributing to the discussion of the overarching themes across narratives. In addition, individual contributions that represent an exception that is not in line with the collective plotline are highlighted.

Further, the traditional ways of representing narrative data through either researcher constructed narrative accounts or summaries of themes seemed to be inadequate when working with longitudinal qualitative data. In fact, the multiple temporalities of narrative accounts gathered at intervals over time introduces additional complexities (Henderson, et al., 2012) that reflect on representation. The aspects of change and development at different points in time are integrated into personal narratives and a broader thematic discussion and need to be represented as such. Thus, the text within the thematic sub-chapters are organised to represent collective change and development. Change is highlighted and becomes the underlying motif of the collective narratives representing themes. For instance, when exploring the results related to 'knowledge', the sections and sub-sections are organised to represent how it developed over time, starting with initial knowledge, and making explicit how this changed

throughout the academic year. Some individuals' development is only partially in line with the collective developmental trend; space was given to consider such differences, allowing to maintain the individualities of the single student narratives alive and real.

3.15 Ethical Considerations

Narrative research is about understanding experience, and I was closely and deeply involved with the participants and their stories. This called for particular awareness of potential issues arising in terms of researcher-participants relationship, interpretation of narratives, and therefore ethics (Chase, 2005). The present narrative research engaged with longer and deeper stories, and this increased the possibility of the participant-narrator feeling more vulnerable or more exposed (Josselson, 2007). Because of the nature of this research and the deep and long-lasting involvement of the participants, potential ethical issues were carefully considered. The interest and wellbeing of the participants was placed at the centre of ethical considerations, without undervaluing those of the researcher.

Alongside ethical recommendations that are specific to narrative research (and discussed in section 3.6), the 'Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research' (BERA, 2018) strongly highlights the responsibilities that researchers have to the participants as individuals and to themselves. Thus, I ensured that all individuals involved would be 'treated fairly, sensitively, and with dignity and freedom from prejudice, in recognition of both their rights and differences' (BERA, 2018, p. 6). Guaranteeing respect for all was vital during the research process, and the rights and interests of the participants and my own were kept into consideration. In more practical terms, information about the research was provided in a transparent and honest manner, and informed consent was obtained from all participants (BERA, 2018) in a first one-to-one meeting I had with all students. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw their consent at any time during the course of the research. For the consent given to be truly 'informed', I ensured that participants were given the tools and opportunity to fully understand what their participation would involve, and only then agreed to it. Following the BERA guidelines, participants were 'told why their participation is necessary, what they will be asked to do, what will happen to the information they provide, how that information will be used and how and to

whom it will be reported. They [were] informed about the retention, sharing and any possible secondary uses of the research data' (2018, p. 9).

Obtaining initial consent from the participants is certainly fundamental, however some have rightly observed that in narrative research participants cannot be informed about what they are in fact consenting to prior to the start of the research 'since much of what will take place is unforeseeable' (Josselson, 2012). Some argue that a second consent form should be handed to the participants at the end of the research process (Josselson, 2012). In this research, consent was re-discussed and renewed at different times during the data collection process, although in a less formal way. Whenever a data collection event occurred, I openly reminded participants they should not feel forced to prolong their participation. Further, I ensured that participation was not of hindrance to their other university and personal commitments, by directly discussing this with them. As mentioned in sections 3.8.2 and 3.8.3, data, its interpretation, and conclusions were tested with the participants from which the data were collected, in order to strengthen claims of trustworthiness and validity, but also to fulfil the ethical duty I had to respect student stories and contribution to this research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Possible harm deriving from participation in the research was also considered. I concluded that no physical harm could be caused by participation and focused on reducing the possibility of research-connected emotional harm (BERA, 2018; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). I was committed to recognise potential causes of emotional harm or discomfort and to take appropriate action to minimise it. As A&F are considered to be highly emotional practices, I was aware of the potential of emotional situations arising and considered this carefully and sensibly. The ethical challenge I experienced was not to avoid the emergence of emotional situations or experiences altogether, but to maintain sensitivity, continue listening with care, and empathetically contain the emotional experiences being recounted (Josselson, 2012). As the research utilised audio diaries over an extended period of time, accounts were collected regularly, and contact was kept with the participants to allow for intervention should harmful situations arise.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University where this research took place. Anonymity was granted to student participants, institutions involved and staff members that were part of student

narratives. Pseudonyms are used to substitute the participants' real names and the name of the institution is not mentioned. Data collected are stored in a safe and password protected space on my computer and will not be disclosed without the participants' permission.

3.16 Chapter Summary

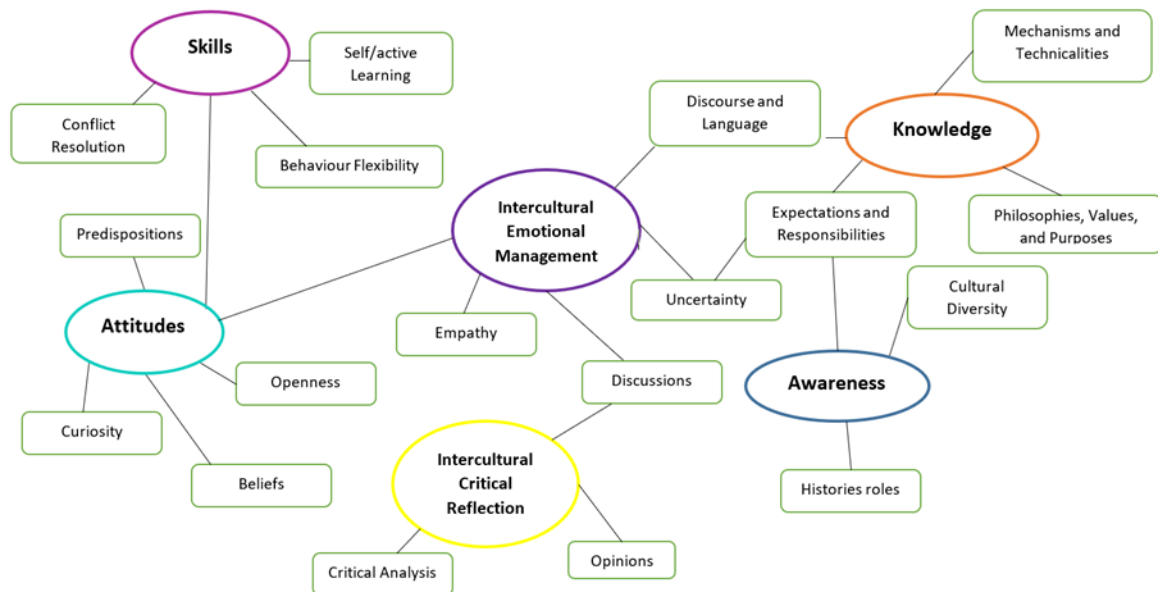
This chapter positioned this research within a pragmatic paradigm, discussing the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin this choice and the role of the paradigm in defining the methodology of the thesis. The methodology of narrative inquiry was presented and critically discussed, alongside the selection of a longitudinal design to narrative inquiry. Methods of data collection were also explored, and a rationale was given for the choice of narrative interviews and audio diaries as primary and secondary data collection tools. The longitudinal data collection process was described, and problems and solutions faced were also presented. The approach to data analysis was discussed, highlighting the role of both narrative and thematic analyses within this thesis. In light of the integration of the two analysis approaches and their foci on individual voices, collective themes emerging from all narratives, and the changes and developments observed over time, this chapter also discussed how such elements would be represented when presenting the findings. Finally, ethical considerations were discussed.

Chapter IV – Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings that follow from the narrative and thematic analyses of the data gathered through narrative interviews and audio diary logs. In the previous chapter, I outlined the rationale for presenting the findings by themes: themes represent the central organising concepts of the collective narrative that help make sense of international student experiences with assessment and feedback at the British university. Individual narratives contribute to the overarching narrative and aim to give voice to the individual students. The representation of the findings also highlights development and change of histories' impact, A&F ICC, and feedback literacy over the data collection period; individual development is also captured and represented in the narration. As I highlighted in the methodology chapter, the findings 'presented' here originate from a process of interpretation and sense-making that involved both the researcher and the participants. They represent an interpretation of the narratives that was constructed throughout the data collection and analysis stages.

The theoretical framework that underpins the current thesis proposes a contextualisation of intercultural competence to assessment and feedback situations and conceptualises a potential relation of A&F ICC to feedback literacy development. The themes explored here originated from such conceptualisation while the thematic analysis corroborated and gave meaning to the six themes originally proposed. Knowledge, awareness, skills, attitudes, intercultural critical reflection, and intercultural emotional management are fundamental elements of intercultural communicative competence in the contexts of assessment and feedback. This chapter explores findings on how these can be influenced by student assessment and feedback histories, and on how their development can contribute to the enhancement of the international student-participants' feedback literacy. In the diagram below, I re-propose the visual reduction of the collective narrative that this chapter will explore. Each thematic section within the chapter will be zooming in individual themes that are part of a whole.



The sections within this chapter will focus on exploring the sub-themes that meaningfully contribute to the central organising concept. Visual representations of individual themes and sub-themes are offered at the start of each sub-chapter to support communication of the findings.

The order in which the themes are presented in the chapter was chosen mainly to reflect how each element of intercultural competence seems to be connected to feedback literacy. The model of feedback literacy that frames this thesis (Carless and Boud, 2018) is composed of the four elements of (1) appreciating feedback, (2) making judgements, (3) managing emotions, and (4) taking action. The results suggest that knowledge and attitudes influence feedback appreciation, intercultural critical reflection seems to be linked to making judgements, intercultural emotional management can support managing emotions in feedback contexts, and attitudes and skills influence the choice and ability to enact the feedback. The themes are therefore presented in the above order.

An interpretation of the findings is presented in this chapter. The next chapter integrates the findings in a discussion, highlighting their position within the existing body of knowledge and the way in which they answer the three research questions posed in this thesis.

4.2 Theme 1 – Knowledge

Knowledge of the practices of assessment and feedback in the new academic environment was a prevalent theme in student participants’ narratives and seemed to be highly influential on other aspects of intercultural competence in A&F situations. Four sub-themes contribute to the overarching theme of ‘knowledge’ (Figure 6): international students’ knowledge (1) of mechanisms and technicalities of assessment and feedback, (2) of the practices’ purposes, intentions, underpinning philosophies, and values, (3) knowledge of expectations and responsibilities of those involved in the practices, and (4) knowledge of the specific language and discourse utilised in assessment and feedback contexts. The development of each element of student participants’ knowledge throughout the academic year is reported. Further, the findings on what influenced their initial knowledge and knowledge development are explored, alongside the connections between knowledge and feedback literacy development.

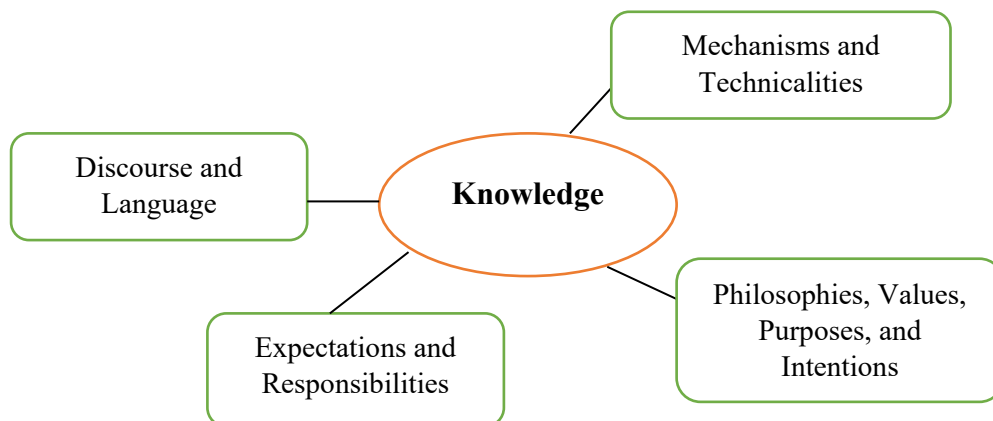


Figure 6 - Theme 1: Knowledge

4.2.1 Mechanisms and Technicalities

Upon arrival at the British institution, most student participants were unfamiliar with the technicalities and mechanisms of the new assessment and feedback practices. Often, they knew assessment in the form of summative examination and feedback in the form of ‘grade’ or ‘corrections’ that relate to completed, past performances. Very early in their postgraduate journey, students began to gather

knowledge about the new assignments' technicalities and mechanisms, as these were often widely discussed and presented inside and outside the classroom. Even students like Nik, who did not seem to be interested in actively seeking information, passively received such assessment information:

Nik: 'There is everything and everyone explaining what is the exam, what is an essay, how they mark the essay, what you need to do.'

The same did not seem to be true for feedback mechanisms and technicalities, which were not introduced nor discussed by educators and the institution. This seemed to be detrimental to students, as most reported never experiencing feedback processes before and continued to have little knowledge of them:

Malak: 'We didn't get any feedback. Never and ever. Do the task, bring it to them, get the mark.'

Antonio: 'So they normally just give you the mark and they don't give you any feedback.'

Numi: 'We definitely don't have a feedback mechanism, we just get the mark.'

Mahmoud: 'The committee would consider the answer right or wrong. The thing is, they don't share with us why, what was really correct.'

As students were not introduced to the mechanisms and technical aspects of feedback at the new university, they seemed to struggle to recognise feedback. What feedback might look like, where it could be 'found' and when one should expect it was not something most student-participants automatically knew. As they began to experience feedback during term 1, students' knowledge of it changed and tended to be re-constructed based on what they could observe. Passive observation led them to believe that feedback would be written comments received alongside or after the grade on a specific and isolated task. After all, this is what they could 'see'. For Antonio, for example, feedback was comments that give information about the grade itself:

Antonio: 'I received the mark but I will have to go and collect my feedback later at the office, so I will send you what the feedback says about the mark and my impressions and all that tomorrow.'

For others, feedback became known as in-text corrective comments. Ann, for example, experienced one-way transmission feedback until mid-second term, and only discovered 'developmental' comments late in the academic year:

Ann: 'I had to go online and open the link that would take me to my essay with the comments. Also, I never realised in the first assignments I did that there was more than in-text comments. I never realised there was this long, developmental comment as well.'

Ann comes from an academic background where virtual learning environments, technology and even electronic email communication were not utilised. For her, knowing where to look for feedback online was not immediate. Further, Ann did not know what 'form' the feedback would have and assumed in-text corrective comments would be what all feedback is.

Only for a few student participants, like Numi and Marlene, feedback mechanisms were somewhat familiar from the start of their experience in the UK, because of either academic or extra-university previous experiences. This does not imply Numi and Marlene knew the mechanisms and technicalities of feedback practices in place at the new university. Nevertheless, their familiarity with the concept of feedback impacted on their willingness to actively seek information more than other students did. This would suggest that students who simply knew about 'the existence' of feedback practices more likely recognised and appreciated their role within learning. They also tended to more actively seek to uncover the 'form(s)' feedback might assume in the new context. What Numi and Marlene 'knew' about feedback in early stages of their postgraduate experience seemed to be similar to what other students knew about assessment. All student-participants had experienced some form of assessment in the past, although new technicalities of assessment could also be initially unclear. Despite the initial diverse knowledge of assessment technicalities, students sought information about how assessment might look like and work in the UK:

Nik: 'I kind of understand the guidelines but I need a little bit of help. I think if you write five or six essays it's easier but the first one or two you don't know what you are doing.'

Ann: 'Everything is written but I really do not understand what I have to do, I don't know what they have in mind for these assignments. I need to find out more.'

This was an ongoing, developmental process mainly facilitated by experience and dialogue. As students began to recognise feedback through direct experience, they also reported it helped re-constructing knowledge about the technicalities of assessments. For Nik, this only happened at the end of the first term:

Nik: 'for the second semester it was a little easier for me. I know what to do, how to do it, it is a lot easier and I can do it better than the first ones. Especially me who came directly to Master's without doing the Bachelor here. I think they need to be more precise on how to write exams, how to write assignments, how to do precisely do it. I think this will help many students because at first, I do it on my own. When I get feedback, I know how to write so I can be better.'

Nik, like most student-participants, continued referring to feedback as comments received in formal assessment situations, because this is what he experienced throughout the academic year. Only a few students, like Mahmoud, were given the opportunity to engage in discussions within feedback processes. These students tended to recognise feedback as verbal communication as well:

Mahmoud: 'They were helpful to maybe set up a meeting, and you might discuss with them your ideas before you start to submit that you want to work on that, that, that, and they would give you some kind of feedback verbal feedback within the meeting and I found that really good and helpful.'

Overall, the findings suggest that the institution and educators tended to prioritise discussing and developing knowledge about the mechanisms and technicalities of the assessment practices, as they seemed to be recognised as unfamiliar and potentially challenging for international students. The international student-participants also tended to seek more information on assessment. In fact, they were invited to do so by staff, were able to 'recognise' assessment as a practice (although potentially

different) and could easily access assessment-related information. On the contrary, feedback mechanisms were rarely discussed, little information was available, and most student-participants did not 'recognise' it as an academic practice. Consequently, most students relied on their previous and ongoing experience to define and shape their knowledge of feedback mechanisms and technicalities. For most of them, feedback was written, corrective comments on completed work which they would passively 'receive'.

4.2.2 Philosophies, Values, Purposes, and Intentions

International students' initial knowledge of the intentions and purposes that underpin assessment and feedback practices also seemed to be highly influenced by their histories. Most students came from undergraduate backgrounds where the intention of assessment was mainly summative knowledge reproduction:

*Ann: 'You have to demonstrate that you remember what all the books are about.
This is what they say to you, that's it.'*

This was influenced by the assessment philosophies of previous institutions that valued memorising and re-telling of information. Underpinned by such philosophies, what was valued in feedback practices were messages about the 'correctness' of the information memorised:

*Nik: 'Some things you need to memorise, some you just need to understand and
read.'*

*Numi: 'Exams are based on how well you can memorise. [...] It's word by word,
so even if you use a synonym, most often you don't get the mark. So, they value the
ability to memorise exactly what we are taught.'*

Mahmoud: 'We memorise so many things. For the sake of passing the exam.'

When students' learning philosophies were based on knowledge acquisition, evaluation was often perceived as a judgement on the work completed, and the grades were most valued. Feedback purposes

were interpreted as giving and passively receiving information on the quality of the completed performance and on what was ‘wrong and right’ about it:

Malak: ‘So I thought everything was about the marks, not improving.’

Jalil: ‘The marks are the things which makes the difference. Marks show that if you have got the good marks, it means you are good. But there is no individual feedback, sometimes the professor highlights if there is something wrong or incorrect and he writes with the red.’

Antonio: ‘I like the comments on each paragraph, they tell you what was wrong and what was right, so you know it.’

Further, for some, assessment had the purpose to reproduce the knowledge lecturers would personally find relevant, which in their experience was often arbitrary and not defined by assessment requirements:

Diana: ‘To know the criteria you ask other students ‘what does he ask? What does he want usually?’’

Nik: ‘He can ask you whatever. Whatever mood he is in, because what he wants, I don’t know.’

In these scenarios of arbitrary assessment, feedback would be of little use, as different lecturers might set different requirements. For students who experienced this, the purpose of feedback in the new environment seemed to be interpreted as a clarification of what individual lecturers would expect, received only after the completion of the task. Further, most students did not know assessment that is formative in nature. Consequently, they gave little attention to potential future development. For them, feedback was a message about ‘what was done’:

Diana: ‘They ask you a question, if you do it wrong you are going to the second one, if you did wrong the second one you don’t have the chance for another one. You quit and do it again later.’

Eileen: ‘Good feedback targets the problem, like what is wrong in any assessment which you are doing. It’s like, how did a student do that.’

Nik also interpreted feedback intentions as to give information on what was done incorrectly. However, unlike others, he discarded feedback as a ‘pointless’ practice; for him, the only mistake possible would be ‘not knowing an answer to a question’ and argued he would be able to determine that on his own:

Nik: ‘After you finish exam you know for yourself where you make mistakes. If I ask you ‘what is the weather outside’ and you don’t know to tell, you will know for yourself that you didn’t know. He doesn’t have to give you feedback [...] you can’t change it anymore when you say or not say your answer.’

When receiving feedback, Nik perceived it as the lecturer ‘doing the work for him’, whereas he believed he should be evaluated on what he can do without any support:

Nik: ‘if professors give the feedback, what is the point of me writing an essay? Maybe the professor should write all essays, and everybody will be happy! That’s the fault of education in the UK.’

Students with histories of no-feedback or feedback as past-orientated, one-way corrections would not recognise it as an ongoing and dialogic process. However, some students reported they did have some previous experience of ‘feedback dialogues’. Interestingly, as they knew feedback as grade and dialogue as a discussion on the quality of past assignments, they tended to understand feedback dialogues as requests for ‘re-marking’ or ‘re-checking’ assignments:

Numi: ‘I went to discuss a paper and I was basically told that two people corrected it and if I still don’t trust it, I can put it for re-correction. So, it wasn’t about telling me why I got the grade, it was more about defending their judgement.’

Eileen: ‘If you want to know why a mark, you can go for re-checking and then you can see your papers.’

For some of the student-participants whose histories included formative assessment practices and some sort of feedback processes, the initial knowledge of the purposes of the practices seemed to be more aligned with that of the new institution:

Marlene: 'We had essays and it was really good, and throughout the programme they kind of increased in lengths and focus, so that we can improve from one essay to another. This way we built up until the thesis and it was quite easy for us to write it. There was feedback, if you asked for it, about how to improve your work [...] although I think here, they will put more effort into feedback which is great.'

Students with A&F histories that were somewhat similar to the new institution's tended to be willing to acquire further knowledge of the practices in the new context. This also seemed to facilitate their appreciation of feedback and of its developmental purposes. On the contrary, this did not seem to happen for those with different histories. Further, the lack of teachers' focus on uncovering and discussing the purposes of feedback did not support student willingness to gather or negotiate knowledge. Students focused their efforts on gathering knowledge of assessments' purposes, which were, similarly to assessment technicalities, more discussed.

Knowledge of assessment and evaluation philosophies, values and purposes in the new context did not seem to increase automatically when 'dry' and mechanical information about the practices were 'given' to students. Rather, it seemed to develop when students actively started to discuss these with peers, student advisors, and lecturers. Student development of their knowledge of feedback purposes seemed to be facilitated by clarification from lecturers: when lecturers were mentioning future task related purposes, students seemed to re-define their knowledge:

Antonio: 'The professor said: 'for future work, remember to remain focused on the task' in my first feedback, so it was very interesting, very interesting. And I think I am going to use some of this advice and tips for the next assignments.'

Towards the end of the first term, students seemed to begin to recognise the developmental aspect of feedback, although they sometimes continued to interpret it as a tool to know what was wrong in completed tasks:

Malak: 'Feedbacks you have to know: where are you? Are you on the right path? Are you doing something completely wrong?'

Interestingly, students themselves argued that in order to negotiate their knowledge of the purposes of both assignments and the feedback, there was a need for more ‘conscious’ learning experiences about the practices and through them. Malak, for example, argued for the use of drafts or exemplars to learn about the purposes of the task, to experience feedback and to understand its intentions. Mahmoud also retrospectively wished he had received more support to construct his knowledge from the start:

Malak: ‘We don’t want to get our degree by just copying the answers from our instructors. No, it’s not like that. They must give us their feedback on drafts [...] because we need to see how things work and how things are going and what is expected from us and why.’

Mahmoud: ‘I would think if we had more knowledge how to do the assignments, how to use the feedback...because what we are doing is trial and error. I think some – like a friend at another university – they have a supervisor for all their assignments, so they are asked to discuss, and they will get the feedback before they submit. This is not the case here.’

When students and lecturers engaged in discussions about feedback, and students gained enough experience through practice, what they used to know was revisited and re-negotiated in light of purposeful dialogue and direct experience:

Numi: ‘It feels like it’s not about ‘this is the right answer, this is the wrong answer’ anymore, it’s very much a discussion on how you interpret things’

Ann: ‘I didn’t really know this before. The feedback comments are more like advice and support, a kind of dialogue with the lecturer basically.’

This shows that international student-participants needed to seek, gather, and actively discuss information about the philosophies, values and purposes that underpin the new assessment and feedback practices they encountered. Without a purposeful dialogue that would uncover and clarify this, students struggled to recognise the developmental intentions of such practices and risked not appreciating the purposes and value of feedback.

4.2.3 Expectations and Responsibilities

Student initial knowledge of educators' expectations and players' responsibilities in assessment and feedback processes largely built on the philosophies of learning and assessing that were promoted in their previous environments. Students knew they were expected to learn, but the way in which learning was conceptualised and achieved through A&F seemed to be different. In particular, when familiar assessment types encouraged passive rote-learning and the feedback message/grade was past-orientated, students would not be expected to be active agents. When communication with lecturers was not encouraged, students were not expected to actively seek and initiate feedback dialogues:

Ann: 'you are not expected to produce anything on your own. To do anything on your own. You just study everything.'

Malak: 'the doctors [lecturers], they will never give you the chance even to discuss with them anything.'

Because of previous experiences, most student-participants did not expect any type of feedback when they first began their postgraduate experience. The few who expected some form of feedback had previously familiarised with the concept in academic or non-academic contexts:

Numi: 'I've written and worked as a writer and getting feedback, even though I wasn't used to getting feedback from my studies, I was a writer by profession, so feedback was like an everyday thing.'

The types of lecturer-student relationships previously experienced also played a role in how students defined their responsibility in assessment and feedback contexts. For some, the role of a student would be to passively learn and retain knowledge. Questions should not be asked and no dialogue nor form of support would be expected:

Nik: 'You didn't have a chance to ask about your work because you need to have done it, this is your job. It's not their matter how you have done it, we expect you to do it, so I learn to do it.'

Having some degree of responsibility and being expected to be active agents in feedback processes did not seem to be apparent for the student-participants. Nevertheless, as their experience with the new practices widened towards the end of the first term, students observed that feedback dialogues were helpful to clarify expectations. However, they wished they could have engaged in such dialogues from the start of the academic year. In fact, for many, waiting until official feedback episodes did not support the development of their knowledge of expectations and responsibilities, particularly when feedback came late:

Malak: 'the feedback should be on exemplars, so you know how to do your best, starting from here. And maybe we will be able to better with the guidance of the feedback on the exemplars from the start.'

Mahmoud: 'the feedback is increasing my knowledge about how others would think, what they would expect and why. So that is also I think very good.'

Eileen: 'because of the experience because now I know what my professors are expecting for me.'

The results suggest that others' expectations and students' own responsibilities within assessment and feedback practices only became clearer late in the academic year and that experience and feedback dialogues supported this. Nevertheless, expectations and responsibilities both in assessment and feedback process could have been clearer from the start if an earlier engagement with dialogic feedback practices were encouraged, alongside open and purposeful communication about the practices themselves.

4.2.4 Language and Discourse

Student-participants' knowledge of the discourse and technical language used in the contexts of assessment and feedback seemed to be initially low. Students often attempted to make sense of such language through a frame of reference that did not always align to that of educators. The language,

concepts, and the meanings that language itself attempted to convey were often unclear and hard to access:

Malak: 'Yeah, in the feedback she's talking about something I couldn't see, and she couldn't, and she didn't put any, like, effort to make it clear. She didn't get why it's not clear for me. Although I asked her very clear question.'

Marlene: 'Cohesion is a very nice word. Everyone kind of knows what it means but, in the end, it has a lot of dimensions to it and everyone interprets it in a different way. Also, different people know different styles of writing and have different perceptions of what cohesion would look like.'

This seemed to suggest that different concepts were interpreted differently by students. Although some students were aware of this, making sense of others' interpretations was not straightforward.

Some students observed that educators were at times unable to unpack their own language, and this seemed to be due to lack of awareness of different frames of interpretation of concepts they might have considered 'obvious':

Diana: 'I think my English is really bad or I really don't understand them. Maybe for them it's easy and they think 'what do you mean, you have never done this?' and for this reason they cannot really explain in depth what they mean.'

Malak: 'Those lectures, they're repeating the same things. They're just like reading from a paper or reading or recording their instructions like recording. Like, okay, we study language, and we study linguistics and how can we acquire a language, how can we understand something in the context. But you don't see this with the lecturers like they teach you those things, and you think they don't use the things that they are teaching you.'

Mahmoud: 'they have like common knowledge about the terms in this area and in academia'

It seemed that assessment and feedback language that carries culturally related meanings was hard to understand for most student-participants. Developing a shared understanding of meanings was needed to support students in recognising intentions and purposes of the practices. The increase of student

familiarity with the language and discourse of A&F is explored in section 3.5.4 under the theme ‘intercultural emotional management’ as development often did not seem to happen unless emotions triggered by misalignment were managed.

4.2.5 Summary

The results show that developing knowledge about the mechanisms and technicalities, philosophies, purposes, intentions and values, expectations and responsibilities, and discourses of assessment and feedback practices in the new context was fundamental for student learning and development. When international student-participants’ knowledge of both new assessment and feedback practices increased, student recognition and appreciation of feedback forms, purposes and roles within their own learning also seemed to increase. International students’ initial knowledge mirrored their experiences prior to the beginning of their postgraduate education in the UK. Their initial knowledge was often not in line with the tacit knowledge shared by the academic community in the new context. Students’ past experiences shaped their histories that, in turn, had a significant impact on their present and future experiences in the new educational context. Over the academic year, students negotiated and re-constructed their knowledge of assessment and feedback using the tools available to them: ongoing experience and communication. If initially many could only draw on previous personal and direct experience, as they progressed through their studies, their ongoing experience seemed to re-shape their knowledge to some extent only, whereas ongoing dialogues about and within assessment and feedback practices seemed to have a greater impact.

4.3 Theme 2 – Awareness

Student-participants' awareness of the potential diversity of assessment and feedback in the new environment and of the reasons behind such diversity was widely discussed across the narratives. The theme of awareness is presented after that of knowledge as the two elements seem to be often discussed in parallel and are connected to one another. Three sub-themes contribute to the overarching theme of awareness (Figure 7) in intercultural assessment and feedback situations: (1) the ability to recognise the cultural nature of A&F diversity, (2) awareness of the role of students' own histories in shaping a different knowledge and conceptualisation of the practices, and (3) recognition of the potential diversity of players expectations and responsibilities in assessment and feedback processes.

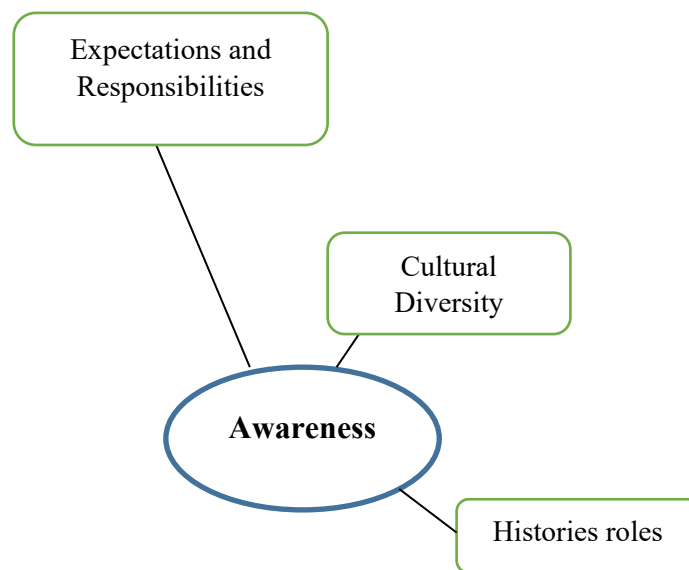


Figure 7 - Theme 2: Awareness

4.3.1 Cultural Diversity

Student initial awareness of assessment and feedback potential cultural diversity seemed to partly reflect their awareness of educational systems, institutional and individuals' diversity in intercultural contexts. In fact, students with higher initial awareness, like Marlene and Mahmoud, had previous experience in intercultural contexts or had been exposed to stories of other individuals' intercultural experiences:

Marlene: 'Due to like being abroad a lot and being on my own. Kind of like, you learn to like, [...] just learn by yourself and I'm just trying to find your way best way around and just quickly adapting to what is new.'

Mahmoud: 'I have contacted some of my friends who have studied in UK before [...] to try and make the most out of it. My connection with Iraqi friends is a good feedback as they come from similar education and had their Masters [in the UK] and would be in a similar experience to me.'

On the contrary, students whose awareness of diversity across educational systems and institutions was limited were highly unlikely to be aware of diversity within A&F practices. For example, Nik began to recognise such diversity only a few months into his postgraduate experience and admitted that, because of his lack of awareness, he initially had no interest in seeking information about what could potentially be 'different':

Nik: 'When I came here, I didn't expect anything, I didn't research how is the educational system in UK. I did not think nothing about how they exam here.'

Of the students who showed awareness of systems and individuals' differences, however, most did not necessarily recognise that such diversity could similarly exist within assessment and feedback contexts:

Mahmoud: 'I think what is different here is the whole experience, the setting of the university [...] students they bring different kinds of perspectives and it is not just one kind of narrative. They talk about different things and perceive things in their own cultures and countries.'

Mahmoud, like other student-participants, showed awareness of the impact of culture on different individuals' academic perspectives from the very beginning of his UK experience. However, he initially did not consider that this could be mirrored into assessment and feedback contexts. At first, most student-participants tended to expect and be aware of diversity in terms of course structure, student population, language as a means of instruction, teaching philosophies, and academic relationships. These differences seemed to be more immediately noticeable as they were widely discussed on the university website, at welcome events, lectures, and inductions.

Students seemed to build further awareness throughout the first term, although it was still limited to the diversity of the technicalities of assessment practices and of the marking system. This seemed to be linked to the following: the time and space given to discussing assignments within the courses, an earlier student engagement with assessment rather than feedback, and student interest in grades because of previous experiences (see section 4.2). Consequently, students sought information on assignments early in the academic year, and soon realised assessment types were different, as were requirements and teacher expectations. Only few student participants continued to be unaware of academic differences across term 1. Diana, for example, continued to look at cultural diversity quite superficially:

Diana: 'I don't find any kind of difference [...] I don't see much difference. You are still inside Europe, so it's not like a huge difference between me and an English person.'

Only later in the second term, and after having completed the first assignments, Diana began to recognise some diversity. Nevertheless, she tended to reject what was different:

Diana: 'It's very different here, it's also different from my experience in France. So, I am not sure how useful it is what we do here, I don't know.'

This seemed to suggest that raising awareness of the diversity of the practices might be the first step for students to appreciate them. Students who were more aware earlier in their postgraduate studies tended to gather more knowledge, show more interest in the practices, and consequently critically reflect on them. When awareness was not raised until late in the academic year, rejection of diversity of the practices seemed to be more likely.

The majority of student-participants had low initial awareness of feedback diversity, mainly because of their unfamiliarity and lack of knowledge of the practice. Only students who had experienced some form of feedback before seemed to be aware of potential different cultures of feedback:

Numi: 'My [undergraduate] supervisor she did her PhD in Cambridge and she's been through this culture [...] she's very big on feedback, but in general they [at

*my university in Sri Lanka] might just give a common feedback to the entire class.
Here I think it's different.'*

Student-participants with higher initial awareness seemed to be more likely to recognise the need to acquire further information about assessment and feedback practices themselves. The few students, like Marlene, who had higher awareness of diversity and knowledge of feedback practices attempted to increase their knowledge and awareness through the feedback itself:

Marlene: 'The fact that everything is so different creates confusion. I am hoping now to get more feedback and then when we get the feedback everything gets a little clearer for the next essays to come.'

As Marlene stated, being aware of the practices' diversity did not automatically translate to student ability to pinpoint and understand characteristics and implications of the differences. Nevertheless, engagement with feedback dialogues over time seemed to gradually help clarify that. Similarly, Ann's initial awareness of the differences within evaluation was not sufficient for her to identify the essence of such difference and actively obtain information. Ann had little knowledge of the new practices because of a very different A&F history and struggled to make sense of where they diversity lied:

Ann: 'I don't know how the work will be evaluated. [...] I think this is a different cultural approach. There is something different that I cannot really point out.'

This suggested that awareness alone might not be sufficient to recognise the diversity and appreciate the new practices. Further experience and engagement in open and culturally aware feedback dialogues seemed to facilitate students' sense-making of the practices. Nevertheless, only few participants were given the opportunity and encouraged to engage in feedback dialogues, as explored further in sections 4.4.2 and 4.5.3.

Direct experience is what helped many, like Nik, becoming more aware of diversity in the context of learning through assessment:

Nik: 'I see the difference now [April], they are teaching you to be proactive and active [...] I think back home the communist mentality is still in the minds of the

people, so maybe the education system is from that period of time, it's an old way of learning, like a lot of theory.'

Experience alone seemed to have some impact over longer periods of time but did not seem to be sufficient for students to recognise the implications of the diversity of feedback. For many, the focus remained on assessment:

Nik: 'So I think helping students when they come to learn how to write assignments, what is this system in UK because it is different from other countries. It would be helpful to have some indication in this particular area'

Jalil: 'So it's more about writing skills and at the same time critical thinking. It's kind of interesting and at the same time it's a new thing, it's a new challenge and I am aware of that, I am working on that.'

This seemed to suggest that if awareness was not purposefully and internationally raised about the characteristics, purposes, and importance of the new feedback practices, students were not able to recognise them through experience alone. Once again, this seemed to be linked to the absence of feedback practices in most student-participants' histories, which led them to focus on assessment as a more familiar practice despite the diversity.

Marlene observed that discussions about feedback could help build awareness and advocated for more open communication:

Marlene: 'I think if they were maybe just take 50 minutes and talk about it [feedback] in class. That could probably help people.'

Some students observed that such dialogues did not and could not take place if educators themselves had little awareness of the potential diversity. They were often unaware of practices' diversity across institutions and countries, as well as of students' diverse histories of assessment and feedback. Malak observed that educators sometimes took for granted students' ability to recognise assessment and feedback in the new environment. She, like others, believed this was due to a somehow mono-cultural approach to teaching:

Malak: 'Don't treat students as they are teachers, and don't assume that they understand you. I think it's up to their background, maybe. Maybe some of them they taught in many different universities now they have been through like different students from different backgrounds, so they have this understanding about like people not like them, you know. Some of them they're stuck in there and they don't care who's gonna understand or not.'

This suggests that awareness could be raised through purposeful communication about assessment and feedback only when educators were themselves aware of diversity and of the need for awareness to be raised.

4.3.2 Histories Role

Students' awareness of the role that their assessment and feedback histories might have played in developing a different tacit knowledge and conceptualisation of the practices seemed to be fundamental. Such awareness impacted on their willingness to gather new knowledge, seek feedback, and engage with the practices. Those who were aware of this, like Mahmoud, were also more likely to actively reflect on, negotiate, and re-shape their tacit knowledge:

Mahmoud: 'I need to get all the knowledge, especially to get all the baseline knowledge in line with the other students who have already got it in their undergraduate here with this university or other one in UK.'

Nevertheless, some students conceptualised their different tacit knowledge of the practices as a problematic 'gap' to fill. They therefore tried to comply with the widely accepted rhetoric of one-way adaptation to the 'new' environment:

Numi: 'I feel like there is a gap, but it can be met; because my class is super multicultural, everybody has issues.'

Ann: 'The essay worries me a little because I know I wrote some stuff and some notes Italian style. It is possible he is going to mark me down for this.'

This led students to try to set aside what they knew rather than engage in a two-way, intercultural negotiation of knowledge. This was detrimental for students, as it was likely to trigger negative, deactivating emotions and reactions (see section 4.5).

Other students were aware that their histories shaped the way in which they approached assignments and interpreted feedback. Marlene, for example, chose when to enact the feedback and when to rely on her previously built tacit knowledge:

Marlene: 'I can't always follow the feedback because I have been using this approach for quite a long time and I got better at it after a while. I now I am at this point where I know how to do my writing and I just do it like that.'

This seemed to be a good compromise for Marlene, who did not feel compelled to radically revise what she knew but was able to find a balance between two cultures of assessment and feedback.

Not all student-participants showed awareness of their history role in their perceptions of the new practices. Nik initially rejected the new practices, and simply perceived written assignments and feedback as a 'weaker' substitute to oral examinations. For him the practices' diversity was not due to academic cultural diversity but merely to 'constraints' in the new environment that impacted on assessment and evaluation choices:

Nik: 'I understand why writing the concept [instead of having oral examinations], because they have more foreign students who maybe have problems with pronunciation like me. So, it will be tough for professor to listen to everybody.'

Over the academic year, awareness increased for many. Discussions with peers from multiple academic backgrounds seemed to really help students recognise how diverse histories can shape different individuals:

Numi: 'Now I know it's shared by almost everyone. Not just like the people from Asia but also like from Europe they have different systems. They all said it was quite different from what they had to do.'

This seemed to encourage students to re-negotiate their knowledge. For example, when Nik faced exams in May, he recognised that even exams might differ from those he experienced in the past. Although he initially believed exams mechanisms and purposes would mirror what he previously knew, he became more aware of the diversity of learning and assessment philosophies and values. Thus, he looked for more information to re-negotiate what he knew in light of his increased awareness:

Nik: 'This is what the problem is, how to study for exam, what to study how to study. Maybe I'm studying a lot of stuff and then I waste a lot of time for them because I used to do like this, but maybe some important things have not studied for them so maybe some information on how to prepare would be helpful.'

During the second term, increased awareness of the role of one's history also seemed to help process, accept, and enact feedback that highlights action points in students' work. When students were able to recognise the reasons for approaching their work in a different way than expected or required, they were more likely to welcome and act upon the feedback:

Diana: 'When he says: 'I understand what you are trying to say and that this is your idea, but you shouldn't say it blah blah', I thought 'yes, right, I didn't even realise I did it again'. I think it's automatic. But we can say that it's the only 'Italian' style thing I did.'

Antonio: 'this was due to the fact I did my undergraduate in Italy. The Italian method is more focused on technicalities and specific aspects and topics.'

Towards the end of the academic year, the experience with assessment and feedback at the British institution seemed to become part of student histories. Many of the student-participants developed a different, re-negotiated tacit knowledge:

Marlene: 'you kind of have a routine and you know what people are expecting from you. And, you know, a little better when they give you feedback on what they mean with it. But overall, it's like mostly just because you just got practice and doing it here, the feedback could be more helpful.'

Ann: 'This is easier now and it comes more naturally. So yeah, I certainly have some basis to work on now.'

Students' narratives seem to suggest that prompt and ongoing feedback conversations could have supported their awareness development earlier than mere experience did. This, in turn, could have contributed to promote sooner student willingness to actively seek and gather knowledge, supporting re-negotiation through intercultural dialogues.

4.3.3 Expectations and Responsibilities

Being aware of the potential diversity of individuals' expectations and responsibilities within the contexts of assessment and feedback seemed to support student curiosity and interest in discovering the practices very early in their journeys. Marlene, for example, was interested in knowing what expectations would be from the beginning of term 1:

Marlene: 'I had some British and American professors who gave us some feedback. But I'm still very interested to hear now what kind of university style it is here and people specifically to this university are expecting from us.'

However, awareness alone did not reduce the confusion students experienced in terms of clarity of expectations. For instance, Malak was aware that expectations were likely to be different and that this would be a potential reason for lack of clarity:

Malak: 'I understand that the questions are not clear because of my background. How, for example, will a British girl understand and answer that question?'

Nevertheless, confusion needed to be reduced (as detailed in section 4.5.2) and not simply acknowledged.

On the contrary, when students' awareness was scarce, it was difficult for them to consider the diversity of assessment and feedback expectations in the new environment. When their original expectations were not met, emotions triggered could be detrimental. Eileen and Nik, for example, showed low

awareness and were often disappointed. Eileen's awareness was brutally raised after the first official feedback episode that uncovered different expectations:

Eileen: 'That was a big shock. I was very upset and basically cried all night and the day after I went to my professor to understand. [...] I mean the first time I thought I can do good, but right now I'm looking at it and yeah, it's hard, it's different.'

Later in the second term, some students retrospectively observed that raising awareness of diversity of expectations would have benefited their learning experience through A&F earlier on:

Numi: 'I feel it's so important to actually be setting expectations in the beginning, it would have given us a better learning experience because you know where you need to be going.'

Ann: 'They could have explained to us what feedback we should expect so that we would have looked for them.'

When students were aware of their histories' diversity and their impact, they were also more likely to be aware of the diversity of expectations and responsibility. Ann, in fact, mentioned the intention of taking up responsibility and 'looking for feedback'. However, there was a need for feedback dialogues to transform awareness into clearer expectations:

Mahmoud: 'I think it [feedback] would affect how I interpret things. I am trying to do in the same way I did with the first essay, but I still didn't receive feedback for the first one. [...] until then you are just really confused.'

Similarly, Jalil was also aware of potential diversity of expectations, however, he did not recognise what such diversity consisted in until the first feedback episode:

Jalil: 'I didn't know what to expect, what they are expecting thing from us. My first assignment, when I got that feedback that really helped me a lot. [...] Because in the first term the students are new, especially international students coming from different education systems, they don't, they don't know they haven't done anything like that before.'

4.3.4 Summary

Raising student awareness of assessment and feedback diversity, roles of histories, and the potential diversity of expectations and responsibilities seemed to support student re-negotiation of their tacit knowledge of the practices. At the same time, some knowledge of the ‘existence’ of diverse assessment and feedback practices was needed for students to recognise diversity. Knowledge and awareness seemed to be interlinked and support the development of each other and to support appreciation of the new practices. Higher awareness, in fact, contributed to student willingness to gather further knowledge of the practices, encouraged critical reflection about diversity of A&F in the intercultural context, and reduced the risk of detrimental emotional reactions. Awareness developed mainly through experience. However, it often only developed after the first feedback episodes that, for some, occurred as late as the end of the first term. Similarly to knowledge development, engagement with feedback and effective communication seemed to increase student awareness of diversity earlier in the academic year. However, students often had little engagement in feedback dialogues. Boosting awareness often helped the development of student appreciation and recognition of the diverse practices in the new context, contributing to shaping a new and more informed feedback literacy.

4.4 Theme 3 – Intercultural Critical Reflection (ICR)

International student-participants' ability and willingness to be critical and reflective in intercultural assessment and feedback processes is another fundamental competency that constitutes the third theme of the data analysis. Three sub-themes were developed and contribute to the collective narrative on ICR (Figure 8): (1) student-participants' ability and willingness to critically reflect on individuals' (the self and the other) opinions about assessment and feedback practices, (2) their ability and willingness to engage in critical and reflexive discussions about and within assessment and feedback processes, and (3) the capacity to carry out critical and reflexive analysis of the practices.

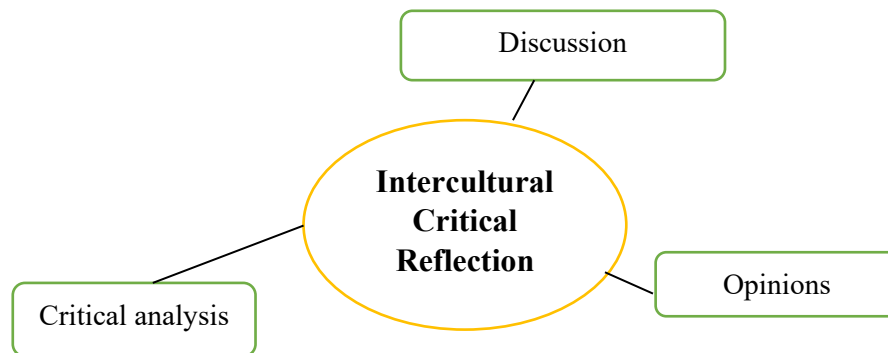


Figure 8 - Theme 3: Intercultural Critical Reflection

4.4.1 Reflection on Personal and Others' Opinions

International student-participants' ability and willingness to reflect on their own, peers, and educators' opinions on assessment and feedback seemed to support them to 'decentre' and to consider, respect, and understand other cultural perspectives and views on A&F. The results presented in this section will show how such capacity could be low for some at the start of the academic year but had the potential to develop over time.

In the very early stages of their postgraduate experience, most student-participants admitted not having an opinion on the new assessment and feedback practices. As explored in section 3.2, some students had no knowledge of the practices whilst others were beginning the process of information gathering. If they gathered some information, at the initial stage they often only included a list of assessment tasks,

deadlines, and learning goals obtained from the university website or the very first lectures. Students reported these were not sufficient to form an opinion:

Jalil: 'I am not sure about it, I will be able at the end of the year [to tell] what the reality is, but right now I just guess'.

The students who recognised not holding detailed information and informed opinions were those who showed higher awareness of the potential diversity of the practices. They recognise the need to develop a 'situated' knowledge of assessment and feedback before they could critically reflect on them. On the other hand, students who did not have such awareness tended to assume that assessment and feedback would not be different from what they experienced in the past, as explored in the section on awareness. Of these students, some were able to reflect on and analyse the practices they were previously familiar with, whereas others seemed to passively accept them as 'given'. This was important, as those who reflected on their opinions on the 'previous' A&F practices could often shift such reflection on the 'new' ones once their levels of knowledge and awareness had increased. Marlene, for example, analysed the A&F practices experienced during her undergraduate studies and was later able to do the same with those she was experiencing in the UK:

Marlene – September: 'We learnt a lot of stuff, but I always felt it was just for the sake of passing the exam, not actually learning anything. Essays were really good, we could improve from one essay to another [...] this way it built up to, until the thesis when it was quite easy for us to write. The problem overall was the lack of feedback [...] there was feedback if you asked for it, but it could have been more effective [...] and looking really into how you are writing and what you could do better.'

Marlene – December: 'Overall the feedback is more detailed [at the UK university]. You can have it online so you can always look at it and go back to it. I feel like the professors use the feedback very differently. Some really invest in it and want you to invest in it too.'

Interestingly, the different degrees of willingness and ability to critically reflect on the practices seemed to vary also depending on student familiarity with the concepts of critical and reflexive learning. In fact,

students who were not encouraged to reflect and to be critical throughout their higher education experience tended to show lower initial critical reflection:

Nik: 'In Serbia, somebody says something and that's it. Everyone knows professors teach from their own books so if you oppose them, it's not a very good thing!'

Malak: 'I wasn't even sure what is critical thinking and I used Google and asked people what it is.'

Some, like Antonio and Jalil, even interpreted the concept of criticality as expressing negative criticism towards others' opinions and consequently rejected the idea:

Antonio: 'I prefer to give my opinion rather than saying what is wrong, I don't want to be critical.'

Numi also admitted her previous education did not prepare her to be reflexive and critical in academia. However, because of the extra-university experience of being a writer she was more familiar with the concepts:

Numi: 'We memorise exactly what we are taught. So critical thinking becomes quite a challenge for most people. I was lucky because of my job as a writer.'

(Un)familiarity with the idea of criticality and reflection as part of learning was not the only impactful factor originating from students' histories. The type and level of formality of student-educator relationships previously experienced also had an influence on students' willingness to critically reflect on opinions. For example, students who experienced academia as a rigid hierarchy tended to highly value and, at times, to unconditionally accept their educators' opinions. If in their previous experience lecturers were considered - and considered themselves - as extremely wise and infallible, students could only accept and agree with their opinions:

Jalil: 'the professor is considered like he is an ocean of knowledge, and this is his perception too, so what can you say?'

Sometimes the unconditional acceptance of opinions of those in power positions was carried on in a new environment. For example, at the end of the first term, as Eileen began to understand her lecturers' view on A&F, she also automatically and passively accepted them:

Eileen: 'That's how it works in British system. Okay, if that's how it is!'

This did not support student development of critical reflection and risked hindering such ability long-term. In fact, Eileen struggled with this until she began to recognise the diversity of student-educator relationships at the new institution. This only happened in the second term, when her peers reassured her of lecturers' openness and encouraged her to ask questions when unsure or in disagreement with their opinions.

Unlike Eileen and Jalil, some students showed the ability to deeply reflect on their views on the assessment and feedback practices experienced in the past, despite coming from an academic environment where reflection was not encouraged. These students, like Mahmoud and Ann, had formed opinions that were in disagreement with those of their previous educators:

Mahmoud: 'We are expected to memorise so many things even though it's all just there in the textbook. Why are we memorising these things?'

Ann: 'it is really frustrating to go there and explain [...] so yes, I read the book and the book says blah blah...'

Because of their disagreement with the purposes of the previous practices, Ann and Mahmoud were immediately willing to listen to educators' perspectives on assessment and feedback in the new environment. This seemed to be also linked to the fact that Mahmoud and Ann are older students than the average and had wider intercultural and international non-academic experiences.

Throughout the first term and early into the second term of studies, some student-participants continued to value their opinions more than others', as they kept viewing assessment and feedback through a strongly history-shaped lens. Antonio, for example, discarded the assignment instructions and feedback received on a critical review essay. Instead, he sought confirmation of the validity of his own

perspective from one of his undergraduate lecturers, both when approaching the assignment and after receiving feedback:

Antonio: 'my [previous] supervisor sent me a table that is something peer reviewers use, but this was not considered positively in the assignment; so, I asked him to send me another one and it was the same!'

Diana's opinions were also heavily influenced by her past experiences and similarly sought validation from a lecturer with a similar background:

Diana: 'I agree with my lecturer in Florence and not with my lecturer here. And this makes me think that I shouldn't even continue this course. I completely disagree. I also want to talk to an Italian lecturer here and discuss this with her.'

Ann, despite being more reflective than others, engaged in a comparative analysis essay as she would have done in the past. She received feedback that uncovered misalignment and expresses disagreement and confusion:

Ann: 'I am confused about the method they have here of interpreting and criticising texts. It does not really convince me, and I do not really agree with how they do it here'

Despite expressing disagreement, some, like Ann, acknowledged that their own opinions on assignments – and consequently on the related feedback - were influenced by their previous experience and might not be shared by others in different educational contexts. However, they also reported not being given the opportunity to know and discuss others' opinions; for this reason, they could not understand where the diversity lies. For Mahmoud, feedback processes would clarify others' opinions and prompt reflection. Nevertheless, he did not have the possibility to engage with any feedback until after the end of term 1:

Mahmoud: 'I think some feedback would affect how I interpret things, but so far I am trying to do the same way I did the first essay because I didn't receive anything'

Like Mahmoud, others wished for more clarity of educators' opinions and of what informs them earlier in the academic year. They believed that with this input, they would have been able to critically question their own and their lecturers' opinions and to use this to reflect on their work. For Nik, knowing what others' opinions are but not being offered a reason for them was not sufficient. This led him to perceive he was being 'forced' to agree with others' opinions:

Nik: 'I don't like strict guidelines with no reason; you need to understand why you need to do it.'

Later in the second term, some student-participants retrospectively observed that lecturers seemed to let 'experience' alone help students uncover others' views. However, they argued that understanding and taking others' cultural perspectives did not simply happen by 'being in the system'. Instead, greater engagement and opportunities for communication were needed. In fact, students who were given more opportunities to engage in feedback processes and dialogues over time seemed to engage in deeper reflection on the nature of their own and others' opinions. For example, after some time, Antonio acknowledged that opinions are culture-shaped:

Antonio: 'here they really care about respecting the topic and for them I did go a bit off topic. Mainly because – you know how it works in Italy – in Italy if you discuss a topic you need to explain what it is [...] I still want to do as I think would be good. But I know sometimes it might actually not be.'

This did not necessarily and immediately lead to students modifying their A&F behaviours, but it certainly encouraged them to consider and reflect on both opinions. With time and continuous engagement in critical reflections, students became increasingly aware of and open towards different perspectives. Halfway through the second term Jalil acknowledged this:

Jalil: 'Now I can give a critical view on like what are the alternative perspectives or how it could be done in another way.'

Dialogic and continuous feedback positively influenced student critical reflection. Consequently, this encouraged students to engage further in feedback processes. When students appreciated and valued the

existence of diverse opinions, they were increasingly willing to gather and consider others' opinions when they made decisions on how to approach an assessment task. Six months into the programme, Antonio looked back at the initial feedback he received and reflected on what he thought about it at the time and what he saw in it then:

Antonio: 'I have been thinking about it and looking back at some feedback I received in the beginning. Even if, at first, I was saying: 'What are they saying?' and I disagreed, if I look back at them now, I have unconsciously understood what they meant and why. I was also unconsciously following the feedback and using what they said.'

Overall, students' ability and willingness to critically reflect on their own and others' opinions seemed to be influenced by their educational histories and their focus on developing criticality, knowledge of the different practices and awareness of diversity of practices, opinions, and views. Feedback dialogues tended to support students to recognise others' views and re-shape their own. Through feedback and reflection on the diverse opinions held, students learnt to make more critical and informed judgements on their work.

4.4.2 Critical Discussion within and about Feedback Processes

For some students, critical discussion was not recognised to be the norm in the contexts of assessment and feedback. As mentioned in the above section, criticality and reflexivity were not familiar concepts for all students, and engaging in dialogue with educators was often not encouraged. Some students recognised that the culture of the institution where they came from tended to 'distance' students and lecturers. Feedback was not on offer, as lecturers established their superiority by being inaccessible. When asked if they ever considered approaching their lecturers to discuss about their assignments, they simply said it would not be possible:

Jalil: 'I didn't even ask him because I knew he would never do that, because he comes from the military background, and he is not giving any space'.

Ann: 'it's a feudal system where the professors are the barons or their little territory. They are some kind of superstars; they use their power to create a distance'.

For some, the only possibility to have some form of response from their lecturers was to formally complain about their exam or assignment results. This would allow them to see their papers and read the formal 'result justification' given. However, Jalil and Eileen reported this would result in resentment from the side of the lecturers, and Mahmoud observed that it was never particularly valuable as *'there is no real person I am interacting with'*. Previous experiences tended to influence students' initial willingness to discuss assignments and the feedback in the new environment. Across the first term, students were unsure what the 'accepted' practice might be in the UK and they preferred to safely keep a distance:

Antonio: 'I haven't talked to him. Maybe I can talk to him but [...] no, because it's not gonna change anything. I don't know what the system is here, but I don't think it is.'

Ann: 'I still haven't engaged directly to any professor; I am a bit scared to do that. I don't know how to approach them, you know, so I am taking my time to figure this out. [...] This is something I didn't have in Italy.'

It appeared that lack of discussion about the practices in the previous environment could impact on students' understanding of the value that was generally attributed to critical discussion at the British university. If students were not encouraged to do so very early on, they continued to base their decisions to interact in feedback processes on their previous experiences.

Some students believed that discussing assignments would lead to lecturers 'changing' their work. They anticipated they would be asked to 'shift' their view to accept others' views and rejected this:

Nik: 'If I write an essay and go to professor and he change my essay, it's pointless. I want to send it, that's my knowledge and that's it, at this time I don't know better than this. I don't like when people change my things, it's like changing my thoughts.'

For some students, like Malak and Diana, holding a discussion in a second language seemed to be an obstacle in the first few months of the programme. Malak was afraid she would not be understood and consequently considered ‘unworthy’ to study at postgraduate level in the UK. On the contrary, Diana felt she would not be able to interpret what lecturers say. Language-related power dynamics and unfamiliarity with assessment and feedback discourse seemed to hinder student willingness to engage in discussions. Adding to this, Malak remembered that her ‘attempts’ to discuss assignments at her previous institutions were badly dismissed and she did not wish for this to happen again (see sections 4.2.4 and 4.5.4 for more).

Other students appreciated the value of engaging in critical discussions about their assignments and the feedback received and seemed keen to do this in the first months of study. However, some reported that lecturers did not value and consequently did not promote critical discussions. Mahmoud and Marlene were disappointed: despite their lecturers’ active promotion of dialogue, they were unwilling to ‘practice what they preached’:

Mahmoud: ‘I was not able to discuss my ideas as he was already on the defensive like ‘I cannot say anything that might improve your mark’ - but that is not what I wanted’.

Marlene: ‘Feedback is given, but there’s not really like a process where, like we can ask and actually have a dialogue on it and like learn from the feedback. It is rather ‘Okay, we have to give you feedback, and that’s the feedback’.

Such disappointment eventually caused disengagement and little trust in educators’ interest and commitment. Mahmoud and Marlene stopped attempting to engage in critical discussion throughout the second term.

Student willingness and ability to reflect and critically discuss *within* assessment and feedback situations seemed to be enhanced if they were given the opportunity to discuss *about* the mechanisms, purposes, and values of the practices - both within and outside the modules.

Jalil reported being encouraged to reflect on his work and on the feedback received before approaching his lecturers to discuss them. He admitted that, despite being initially unsure about the meaning of ‘reflecting’ and ‘critically discussing’, in-class discussions, experience, and continuous feedback can support one’s reflexivity in feedback processes:

Jalil: ‘feedback is increasing my knowledge about how others would think. [...] I think at the start we maybe need help on how to approach things and to be critical around things.’

‘First I’ll read and analyse it and then I am going to meet them to discuss my feedback. You know, when you discuss it, it comes in a more strong way.’

Numi and Ann reported similar experiences. Within certain modules, in-class critical discussions about assessment practices and feedback processes were facilitated and encouraged by lecturers. For them, these were extremely helpful as they uncovered both students’ and lecturers’ views on the purposes, values, and intentions of A&F. When lecturers discussed their past experiences and challenges with the practices, students felt more comfortable to engage in reflection and discussion:

Ann: ‘We discussed what source analysis is, what she expected from us, what we expected to do, what we were working on and the bibliography. So, it was all perfect, you know? I could do a very good job because she put me in the position to do it and gave me all the tools to work on it well.’

Numi: ‘It helped me remember that it is a process that everybody went through.’

Numi, however, reported this only happened with an international lecturer and believed that her approach was informed by her previous intercultural experience. Diana similarly observed that most lecturers did not seem to reflect on international students’ difficulties with the practices and reported she would be more willing to engage in discussions with individuals with a similar background:

Numi: ‘She is one of the few foreign lecturers we have, at least originally foreigner. Everybody else is English and very white. So, as nice as they are, I don’t think they can relate as much. Whereas with her it’s very much what she went through’.

Diana: 'I think they don't understand our background sometimes. I think it's better for me if the person comes from the same background so they can understand my problem.'

Students reported that discussing assignments and feedback with educators who 'could relate' or were willing to understand their points of view was simpler. For similar reasons, others preferred to reflect and discuss with peers rather than educators.

Some participants shared that engaging in discussion about assessment and feedback as part of the research project itself had an impact on how they approached the practices. Some confided that discussing their experiences in interviews and through the audio diaries helped develop their reflexivity and criticality about the practices over time. Some felt it encouraged them to actively initiate feedback dialogues with lecturers and to enact the feedback more effectively:

Nik: 'because we [I and the researcher] have a discussion and I went to see if talking to professor is helpful. Maybe I should go to talk and to test if it will be the same thing or it will be different, I don't know'.

Numi: 'I think talking to you is also helping me to kind of think about feedback'

Antonio: 'I don't know if you want me to keep sending you the audios but if you don't mind I will continue doing this because it helps me think about the feedback and think about what to do with it.'

This shows that before students could participate in critical reflections and discussions when they approached their tasks or the feedback, they benefited from being engaged in similar discussions and reflections about the 'new' practices. However, this rarely happened in class settings, the only experiences reported being those of Ann and Numi.

4.4.3 Critical Analysis

The depth to which students analysed assessment and feedback practices in the new environment was closely related to their ability to be reflexive and critical about them. Initial analyses were often done

through students' own lenses of understanding of assessment and feedback and were often a simple comparison with their histories. Initial analyses normally showed little depth and criticality: Antonio, for example, compared oral summative examinations in Italy and formative assignments in the UK but was unable to verbalise a comprehensive and clear analysis. Others also attempted to analyse the practices but did so with uncertainty:

Antonio: 'I think is better here because you can actually study a topic and be more [...] I don't know how to say this, the key is that it is better because you can improve yourself'.

Jalil: 'here it's not just the content, it's much more than that. Over there as long as the information you are giving is correct, it's correct.'

Nik: 'It's very different what they value and what they expect.'

As students' experiences with assessment and feedback continued, if they engaged in deeper reflection and discussions, they seemed to be able to carry out more complex analyses. This became clearer in the final months of study when some students retrospectively reflected on their earlier analyses. They redefined them considering experience and new information acquired:

Ann: 'This approach is more interesting, creative and stimulating. It gives you the chance to do some research independently and it prepares you to write academically. However, it is excessively rigid on certain aspects. They have a very rigid way of writing essays.' 'About the feedback, now I understand they are more like advice and support. I found those interesting – I wasn't really interested in the ones that say 'good' or 'not good' or 'you could do better'. I appreciate the comments that are a kind of dialogue with the lecturer basically.'

Mahmoud: 'I realised the academic work here is kind of different to back there during my previous studies. I thought I would have to learn about the right answers. And now with the coursework there is not really a right answer but there might be a good answer or a bad one.'

Ongoing critical reflections and discussions supported students' ability to critically analyse the practices. At the same time, students often reported that being able to critically analyse A&F stimulates

further critical reflection and engagement in the feedback processes. For example, Antonio engaged with the feedback that became a guide for him to critically analyse and judge his own work. Overall, it seems that students could only begin to critically analyse A&F after they had direct experience with them. This was only possible in the second term for most students. Critical reflection was done by most students based on the experience that had become part of their history. After experiencing feedback, some students were able to analyse it and use it to inform an analysis and evaluation of their work.

In the second term, Numi and Eileen began to ask themselves similar questions to those previously asked in their educators' feedback when they evaluate the quality of their work. Jalil similarly reflected on the main suggestions received in the first feedback:

Jalil: 'Here it's more about writing skills and critical thinking. It's a new thing for me, I am working on that – I'm trying to build up coherence, and then the rationale, and then the ideas have to be clear'.

For some, a deeper and more reflexive analysis of the practices influenced behaviours in assessment situations. Nik, for example, admitted that he initially thought he would be comfortable sitting the final exams, as his previous experience of assessment only included exams. He thought he would simply behave as he did in exam situations at his Serbian university. However, he later began to realise that, because of the different purposes of assessment at the new institution, he needed to prepare and approach exams differently:

Nik: 'How to prepare them? Because it's the first time I have the exams here. In Serbia you have the book, you have the questions, you need to know the book and that's it. It's more in volume but you know what to learn. Here it's probably different.'

This suggests that critical analysis could influence both evaluation of work and behaviour in both feedback and assessment situations.

The ability to critically analyse A&F had a positive influence on making judgements on one's work and consequently the behaviour adopted when approaching tasks. Nevertheless, it could also trigger

deactivating emotions of disappointment. Halfway through the course, Numi understood that the teaching and learning philosophies of the two systems of education she experienced were reflected in the practices. She observes that, at the British university, the focus on developing students' skills, active and independent learning were mirrored in the formative nature of assessment and feedback. However, her critical reflection and analysis led her to realise that what was rhetorically valued was often not reflected in practice. Numi, Mahmoud and Marlene stressed this and admitted being disappointed (see section 3.5.3 for more):

Numi: 'I was in quite admiration of the system because I got no feedback back home, but then I realised that the system has its faults.'

For them, the critical analysis of the practices showed their outstanding potential that is, nevertheless, often not fulfilled. Students reported that the issues hindering the realisation of the practices' potential were often the impossibility to use the feedback across courses, lack of time to reflect on the feedback and their work, and lecturers lack of ability to reflect on students' diverse opinions and perspectives.

4.4.4 Summary

Student-participants seemed to benefit from the willingness and ability to reflect on their own and others' opinions about A&F, engage in critical discussions about and within the practices, and critically analyse their work through the feedback. This supported student ability to make critical judgement on their work while considering and evaluating diverse opinions. Further, it helped students develop proactive behaviours in assessment and feedback situations. Students seemed to benefit both from critical reflection and discussions *about* and *within* the practices in the intercultural context. In fact, critical reflection about the mechanisms, purposes, and intentions seemed to support deeper student criticality whilst engaging in assessment tasks or with the feedback. ICR was at times hindered by student unfamiliarity with reflexivity and criticality, the absence of discussions with educators in their previous experience, and their lack of knowledge and awareness of the diversity of assessment and feedback at the new institution. Nevertheless, students could develop such abilities when opportunities

and encouragement to engage in discussion about the practices were given. This seems to support further development of reflection and criticality and student willingness to engage with dialogue within feedback processes. Intercultural critical reflection capability seemed to be interrelated to the rise in student knowledge and awareness of practices cultural diversity. The development of criticality and reflexivity also seemed to impact on emotions and behaviours in A&F situations.

4.5 Theme 4 - Intercultural Emotional Management (IEM)

International student-participants' emotions and emotional responses in intercultural assessment and feedback contexts were predominant elements of the narration across stories. This seemed to be due to A&F practices being highly emotional, as well as intercultural interactions causing peculiar and complex emotional dynamics. Four sub-themes contribute to the development of the collective narrative on intercultural emotional management (Figure 9): (1) student empathy towards the cultural diversity of A&F practices and of those involved; (2) student ability to deal with uncertainty of expectations in new A&F situations; (3) the capacity to deal with emotions emerging from relating with others in intercultural discussions about and within A&F; and (4) the ability to deal with emotions that arise because of unfamiliarity with the language and discourse of A&F.

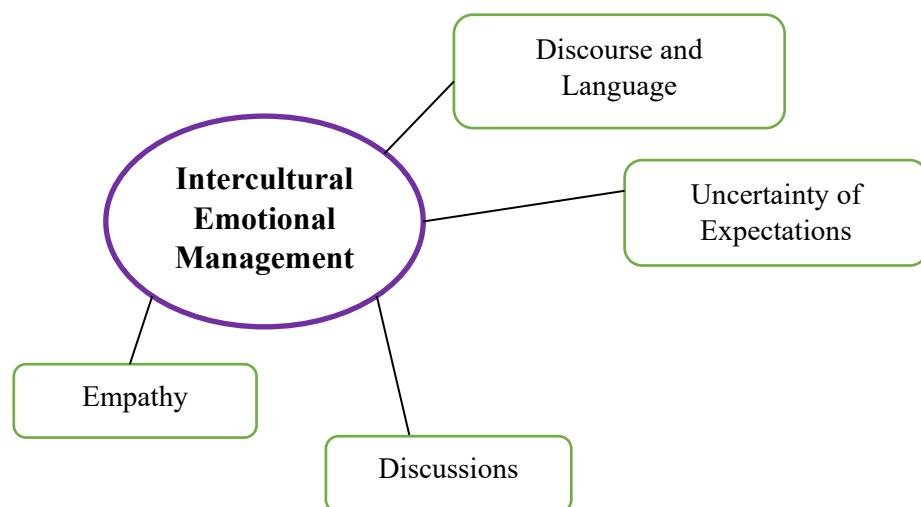


Figure 9 - Theme 4: Intercultural Emotional Management

4.5.1 Showing Empathy

Student-participants' ability to show empathy towards the cultural diversity of the practices and of those involved in assessment and feedback dialogues seemed to be related to their level of awareness of cultural diversity itself. Students who developed higher awareness of the impact of culture on roles, behaviours, and expectations within the practices over the academic year also tended to develop higher empathy and become more understanding of diversity. At the same time, more empathic students tended to avoid 'othering' and to be more reflexive about diversity. More simply, students who were able to put themselves into the perspective of the other and attempt to understand how others would perceive assessment and feedback situations were more likely to sympathise with others' perceptions. They were also more capable of managing their own emotions when perceptions did not align. Some seemed to find this easier than others from the beginning of their experience. Numi, for example, observed that listening to others' perspectives is an ability that most individuals who work and study in her field need to develop:

Numi: 'We are used to working in communities that are not our own. The inclusive and caring nature I think comes with our study area because we really can't function if we are not able to listen and adapt to the people we interact with.'

For students like Numi, showing understanding of diverse perspectives in the contexts of assessment and feedback seemed to be simpler, as diversity was not a 'surprise'. However, it was still not automatic. In fact, despite showing awareness and empathy towards the cultural diversity of individuals and institutions, students often did not immediately manifest the same competencies within the contexts of A&F. As mentioned in the section on awareness, institutions and educators tended to acknowledge and discuss cultural diversity in contexts other than A&F and so did students.

As students experienced the new practices in the first term, some slowly began to realise lecturers might have different perceptions and were willing to empathise with such diversity:

Ann: 'I think looking at differences is one of the most interesting things to do. Maybe you can also engage with people about this. But it takes some time. I think yeah, it's not immediate, no'.

Others, like Jalil, even reported that this helped them being 'kinder' to themselves in challenging assessment and feedback situations:

Jalil: 'Okay, I am first time in UK. I've never been to this country; I have never been to this educational system and these are my very first assignments and feedback. It's okay.'

Dealing with the mixed feelings of confusion and disbelief emerging when looking at others' perspectives was certainly difficult and took effort and time. Nevertheless, showing empathy and understanding towards oneself and the other seemed to help. Students who could be sympathetic towards diversity were more likely to normalise and process the negative and potentially detrimental emotions triggered in new assessment and feedback contexts.

Although the development of the ability to show empathy seemed to benefit emotional management, it did not appear to be sufficient on its own. Students often said they needed lecturers to share their perspectives in the first place if they were to try and approach the practices from a different angle. Malak, for example, understood that lecturers might have different perspectives on assignments and sympathised with the idea of re-evaluating her views from another point of view. She approached them to discuss this, but her lecturers' inability to appreciate the existence of diverse perspectives disappointed and saddened Malak:

Malak: 'So, I know they do things differently and I asked some of them 'how?'. Like, 'is there a specific thing you want me to follow when I write?' and they said like 'no, just do as you want, just write the answer'. I am so disappointed. It is not possible they don't know we don't know, do you know what I mean??'

Similarly, towards the end of the first term, Antonio reported he became increasingly sympathetic with 'other opinions and ways to do things'. However, when this was not reciprocated, he felt he was being forced to adapt and experienced frustration. Some of the students who reported feeling frustrated

offered, but did not receive, sympathy towards diversity of cultural perspectives when approaching assessment tasks and the feedback. Because of such frustration, they became somehow resistant to the new practices:

Antonio: 'These are like constraints you know? So, you have to specifically to do this in this way. Okay, maybe I don't want to write or do this, okay?'

Nik: 'Everybody say you just need this, this, and this and do not try to do something different or reverse the guidelines!'

Students suggested that working towards mutual understanding was crucial. Student empathy was not sufficient to help them reduce frustration and confusion triggered by diversity in A&F contexts as it needed to be met with equal lecturer empathy. Malak observed that when empathy was shown by lecturers, she felt relieved, motivated and 'seen', and was grateful for the effort they made. Noticing that others also make an effort to take her perspective made her feel appreciated and valued:

Malak: 'I am really happy that they saw and valued the way I am trying to improve myself and the way that I try to change. And all of that skills for an international student as we didn't used to use them in my country, I am really impressed how they noticed that.'

Few others, like Diana and Nik, did not seem to be able or willing to build sympathy but tended to reject and express disappointment with the new practices. They also felt disappointed with their learning experience as they perceived the new assignments and the feedback as unhelpful. It is worth considering that Diana and Nik were among the students who initially showed low levels of awareness and little willingness to critically reflect on diversity. Because of their history, they perceived learning as knowledge acquisition and repetition, and valued practices that would foster this. Diana and Nik were also those who experienced lower encouragement and availability from lecturers to engage in discussions. Students who were not supported through dialogue showed more difficulties in considering and appreciating different cultural perspectives. They also struggled more to manage their initial confusion or disbelief.

4.5.2 Dealing with Uncertainty of Expectations

The international student-participants seemed to be initially highly uncertain about what to expect and what was expected of them in assessment and feedback situations in the new environment. Only a few students who demonstrated particularly low initial awareness and knowledge of A&F diversity did not seem to struggle with uncertainty. Nik, for example, simply expected everything to be the same (see section 4.1). This, however, led Nik to experience strong emotions of disappointment when the reality of the new assessment and feedback contexts proved to be different. For him, disappointment was quickly turned into rejection of the new practices:

Nik: 'In most of the cases, probably you will not learn anything. [...] It's not very useful feedback [...] for me this stuff is useless.'

For others, not expecting diversity of A&F led to confusion when they were faced with the new reality of the practices. Uncertainty and stress often followed:

Malak: 'I am very disappointed and I feel I don't know [...] it's not what I expected! So I lost marks because of misunderstanding. Oh my God! I feel like, I don't know, I can't even think about this in my mind!'

Some students did not initially expect feedback processes to be in place, as feedback mechanisms were not a norm at their previous institutions. When they first heard about feedback, they remained uncertain about what it would look like, what purpose it would serve, and about their role in feedback processes. Ann, for example, felt nervous because of such uncertainty and this did not support her initial engagement with feedback:

Ann: 'I don't know what to expect after evaluation, how it will work [...] I don't know how to approach, you know, so I am taking my time.'

In early stages, when students did not expect feedback, they tended to focus their attention on grades as in the more familiar 'world of grades', uncertainty seemed to be lower. However, for many, grades initially caused strong feelings of disappointment, sadness, and confusion for two main reasons: the

marking system in place was not aligned to what most students previously experienced, and lower grades than expected were awarded to students who used to be high achievers:

Nik: 'So, my first mark is 78 from HR. And I don't know what it is. I am not happy, 78 is not 100.'

Eileen: 'I am from a background where I always scored like more than 90% or 100%. [...] But I didn't get very good on that, I got like 65%. So that was very upsetting for me like I've cried the whole night. I was shocked because I never got such a bad grade in all my life. [...] I was expecting like 90% or something like that.'

Students struggled with feelings caused by grades until expectations were clarified. For some, this happened through feedback and discussions with peers:

Eileen: 'I read the feedback; it was not as bad as I thought. And you know the funny thing is there's a girl in my class, she is one of the smartest and she did undergraduate from a British University. She asked me about the result and I said: 'I didn't get good, I got bad!' and she said 'Really? How much did you get?' and I was like 'I got 65'. And she looked at me like, 'this is good!''

Feedback and peer support seemed to help students reduce uncertainty and manage their expectations. However, for most students, feedback initially reduced disappointment and confusion only in relation to the completed task as feedback was used – and was often provided - to explain and clarify the grade. This seems to be linked to most students conceptualising feedback as ‘more details on the grade’ (see section 4.2).

Uncertainty continued throughout the first term for many, and often went hand in hand with feelings of confusion and alienation. Further, confusion was at times increased by the mismatch and diversity of expectations across the teaching body, alongside lecturers not explicitly clarifying what they expected:

Marlene: 'It is still quite unclear because we received hundred different opinions on what around the essay was expected from us. Everyone has a different opinion on it, and this creates a lot of confusion'.

Malak: 'he tells me like, 'you are doing well but you didn't write what is required', but if you don't know what is required, how would I know??'

Retrospectively, students observed that unclarity of expectations in the beginning of their experience was probably enhanced by their different histories, and so were the feelings of confusion:

Marlene: 'It is difficult especially for those outside of UK coming to the UK and wanting to know what the differences are. The information needs to focus on what is important for us, and people specifically to this university are expecting from us.'

For some, like Malak, confusion and unclarity continued throughout the first term and caused anxiety about the following term:

Malak: 'It is still confusing; I know I'm doing something wrong but what is the right thing? I don't want to be in this confusion next term, I need to know the right answer. Not the right answer, like the form of the answer so I will know how to do it.'

When uncertainty carried on for longer periods of time, it often caused student confidence to decrease and consequent anxiety and 'fear' of engaging. Only when students were encouraged to engage in feedback dialogues and discussion about feedback practices, others' expectations became clearer. This often helped students to re-define their own expectations and reduce anxiety:

Marlene: 'I think overall it takes away a little more the pressure. Because just knowing what is considered good practice is something you can work with.'

Such experiences of reduced uncertainty and anxiety often encouraged students to seek further feedback in the future:

Numi: 'it gives you a better learning experience because you kind of know exactly where you are going'.

For some, however, this never happened. Some students only received feedback after several initial submissions, and were never encouraged to discuss purposes, values, and roles of the feedback

processes. Delayed feedback seemed to increase the feelings of disappointment and frustration as it could not be utilised to reduce uncertainty and improve the work. Malak expressed strong disappointment and frustration as she believed she would have done a better job with the right guidance from the start:

Malak: 'I feel bad because I don't think we got the proper instructions for them. I mean, okay, Master's is a heavy degree and it's more about self-study, but for international students we have different backgrounds and different ways of doing assessment they need more. [...] They must give us their feedback on drafts before the real submission [...] we need to see how things are going and what is expected from us and what is not. I am really shocked and disappointed and I don't know what to do.'

Similarly, Diana observed that the feedback received on previous assignments was unrelated to the very different tasks she faced on subsequent modules. She felt confused again and argued she would need some support:

Diana: 'We don't have any guidelines, drafts nor examples. So, I don't know how you like it and I don't know what the point [of this assignment] is. [...] Nothing is really clear, I don't know what I should include. We are not even given examples and I don't understand why.'

For those who were unable to reduce uncertainty because of late feedback, lack of engagement with it and discussions about it, the experience with assessments and the feedback itself seemed to be an emotional rollercoaster. In fact, although feedback seemed to be useful to process negative emotions related to past or present grades, uncertainty remained about 'the next thing to do'. It followed that if students were not supported to conceptualise and use feedback as future-orientated and if modularisation remained the norm, uncertainty was not reduced, and the emotional experience related to assessment and feedback was disruptive.

4.5.3 Engaging in Discussions

The relational aspect of feedback seemed to provoke peculiar emotions in the international student-participants. Often emotions were triggered by the perspective of engaging in discussions with educators and during actual dialogues with them. The interculturality of the context and of the dialogues themselves were fundamental aspects of students' narratives of emotions. It seemed that the emotions experienced in the previous academic environments when approaching educators initially impacted on student willingness to do it in the new environment. In the beginning of the first term, Malak, for example, remembered feeling embarrassment and humiliation when interacting with lecturers in the past. She recounted how they sometimes 'abused' their linguistic power to dismiss and end unwanted conversations about her work. She was wary of attempting this again as she feared having a similar unpleasant experience:

Malak: 'Sometimes, because at the time we don't know English very well, they ask you to speak in English with them, and they know that you didn't learn English very well and you can't express your ideas. So, they send you away. I am scared it will happen again in my Master's'.

Others initially felt nervous about interacting within a diverse academic culture. This often happened when students never previously engaged with lecturers in contexts of assessment and feedback and were unsure what the culturally accepted 'approach' would be. Ann, for example, decided she would exercise caution in approaching lecturers to discuss her work and her feedback. She decided she would not do it unless certain this would be welcomed. The international student-participants needed to be encouraged to reach out to educators and to be reassured that dialogue is valued.

Although most of the student-participants were initially reluctant to interact with lecturers, some felt positively about it, despite this not being the norm at their previous institution. Numi, for example, showed willingness to engage in discussion but observed her previous education did not encourage her to do so:

Numi: 'I think I am a bit of an exception because I'm generally very – I'm okay to be in multi-cultural conversations but most people in Sri Lanka are not like that.'

At least in the university system they would wait for the lecturer to talk to you, so you don't get the opportunity to have feedback conversations.'

Despite the initial reluctance, most of the student-participants reported being actively encouraged by lecturers to get in touch and interact with them about their work, particularly in the first few months of their university experience. Malak and Ann were heartened by the perspective that things would be different and looked forward to experiencing the more interactive and dialogic nature of the British university feedback practices. Emotions of fear and anxiety seemed to be reduced thanks to educator encouragement. For Mahmoud, the absence of dialogues in his previous experience due to lecturers 'attempting to undermine students', was one more reason to feel positively about having this opportunity in the new environment. Further, he felt stimulated by the perceived 'openness' of lecturers in the new environment, who encouraged students to engage in feedback dialogues and respect diversity:

Mahmoud: 'a good professor works on decreasing the gap between him as an entity in education and the student. Here I think doctors are like friendly and open minded and support discussions and can accept the differences in students' backgrounds.'

Nevertheless, some students reported that despite the encouragement of the initial months, feedback dialogues rarely happened in reality. This seemed to disappoint and confuse students, who returned to be unsure and anxious about what the norm might be. Some, like Diana, abandoned the idea of reaching out to lecturers:

Diana: 'I contacted the lecturer about meeting to discuss on the topic, but he never got back to me. He completely ignored me. What can I do about it? That's it.'

Further, students often reported that in the few occasions where there was a feedback dialogue, lecturers did not seem to consider international students' struggles to understand what the feedback suggests. Malak feels disappointed and 'tricked' by her lecturer, who taught sociolinguistics but did not seem to understand where Malak difficulties stemmed from:

Malak: 'She doesn't realise like you are struggling with understanding what she means, and all that we are studying the language and how can we understand it and give answers to linguistics, different accents, different society [...] All of that you know when you come to the reality there is no one who cares'.

Lack of effective communication seemed to undermine student willingness to discuss their work any further, as they felt 'neglected' and not valued by their lecturers. Feelings of frustrations and disheartening emotions were common when communication was encouraged but did not happen in practice or was simply not useful.

The opposite seemed to happen when communication was encouraged and took place effectively. Ann's experience led her to realise that an open dialogue with lecturers was possible and she felt extremely positively about engaging in further feedback discussions:

Ann: 'They are very humble and kind to everyone and always happy to help. She really helped with what we had to write, how we had to do it, she was extremely clear and supportive. She wouldn't mind repeating things every time I asked, she is extremely nice'.

Some students only felt comfortable about engaging in discussions with lecturers when they became more aware of how much they valued interaction with students. For some, like Antonio, this only happened towards the end of the journey. Many report that if they had known, they would probably have attempted to be more interactive from the start. Being open, direct, and clear about the value and importance attributed to feedback dialogues encouraged students to interact more and to be the ones seeking feedback dialogues.

Some students also suggested they at times struggled to feel empowered to engage in discussions with their lecturers. This seemed to be linked to their histories where they experienced extremely strict and inflexible hierarchical academic systems:

Mahmoud: 'It is very different from my previous experience where I don't have an opinion on anything, we just follow the rules and guidelines about things. It's

quite challenging to say my opinion when I am talking to some scientists in this field. Sometimes I would just say my opinion between the lines.'

Numi: 'Here, the whole mechanism of feedback and also the approachability of the academics and just knowing [...] I mean, in Sri Lanka the seniority context exists so if you disagree there is very rarely a chance that you could say it. While here it's what's done, right?! Everybody disagrees!'

International students felt the need to be empowered not only to take the first step to interact with educators, but also to freely express their ideas during feedback dialogues.

Most student-participants were uncertain about what to expect in terms of types of assessment, mechanisms and purposes of assessments and feedback, requirements of assessment tasks and feedback processes, and of their own and lecturers' roles in feedback processes. Uncertainty of expectations seemed to trigger the emotions of anxiety, stress, and frustration. Most students seemed to find it hard to deal with uncertainty and reported they benefited from reduced uncertainty that boosted motivation and relief. The relational aspect of feedback processes in an intercultural environment was also cause of uncertainty, anxiety, and fear. Often students based their decision to (not) interact with educators on their past experiences, until they were encouraged to interact, reassured about the appropriateness of interactions, and empowered to participate in dialogues.

4.5.4 Language and Discourse

For some of the student-participants, the technical, specialised, and discourse-specific language used within assessment and feedback was difficult to comprehend and unpack. These students were often frustrated and alienated as they felt excluded from effective dialogues because of lack of language accessibility:

Marlene: 'Some professors are not always good at communicating what they really want. So, you know in their brain they have a good structure, but they are not able to transform it into a language that students would understand. I think sometimes you need like a kind of interpreter.'

'Some people just don't know how to break down some of their ideas they are trying to convey to make it communicable to others, so everyone clearly understands what they expect.'

Frustration seemed to be relieved only when the language was modified to become more accessible. When lecturers unpacked technical language for the students to understand it, students showed appreciation of the effort made:

Malak: 'I will say it in this way - he's always there to explain in different words, so you will get what he wants.'

Antonio: 'Some professors are not English. For example, I have a professor, I think she is from Russia, so her English is more basic, you know, accessible.'

Some students said they perceived the language of feedback to be impregnated with a great cultural component. In particular, the language of positive 'purely praising' feedback seemed to be perceived more so than that of 'negative' or 'constructive, developmental' feedback. Students reported that praise triggered different emotions. For some, it brought some relief due to reduced confusion and this seemed to support motivation. For others, it caused frustration and discouragement as it was perceived as lacking directness and honesty. Many student-participants perceived positive feedback as 'overly polite' feedback. They reported it was not effective nor motivating when it did not mirror the grade and did not suggest how to improve. They reported they perceived this to be a language and cultural related issue and advocated for more directness:

Marlene: 'Like I know that in Germany feedback would not be written like this, we are a lot more direct. We clearly say out what is good and bad. I mean I can overall understand the idea of being kind of being positive and like not making like taking people down. But I think you just need, they just need to be a little more clear of what they then, like, what is the kind of the aspects that are then missing. You can still like formulate it in a positive way. But you need to make it just kind of explicit. What is out of their perspective missing now?'

Antonio: 'This is the problem. It's the English way of being calm, positive. They say: 'it went really well, even if you could have...' what do you mean?'

Jalil: 'The feedback was different, but the marks were totally different. The feedback was saying - I was I remember the words of feedback – 'Oh, this was a great report I love reading it, and you are, it was well researched' this kind of comments and then the mark is 65, seriously?'

Positive comments did not necessarily trigger positive and activating emotions. When they were unclear and indirect and did not 'reflect' the grade, students were perplexed, and ended up having to decide whether to 'believe' the grade or the feedback. When students came from an academic culture where grades are identified with 'feedback', grades often prevailed, and the feedback was dismissed. This seemed to be an attempt for students to reduce confusion and uncertainty. They did appreciate the feedback, but they had no other choice than to dismiss it if it only created further confusion.

Further, some students found communication in a second language challenging and experienced emotions of frustration and anger when they could not convey the message intended during feedback dialogues:

Antonio: 'I find it difficult to communicate. You know, I want to say more, and I can't say it properly or I have to think about it, so I get angry, and I don't remember what I wanted to say.'

Nik: 'I don't know how to use the words to look nice, so probably that's why I don't like to write things and to speak with professor.'

This seemed to change for some over time. For example, Jalil admitted that he would initially be afraid of communicating in a second language and of not being able to use the 'right language'. Nevertheless, with time and encouragement from his lecturers he became more confident:

Jalil: 'I don't care about it anymore because English is not my first language so it's all about confidence. If I get afraid of, I don't want to afraid myself just because of speaking the wrong language, you learn with the passage of time and from the mistakes.'

Students tended to avoid engaging in dialogues with lecturers until they felt more comfortable about using the language to discuss assignments and feedback. Some, like Antonio, preferred to begin by engaging in discussions with peers, and build up the confidence needed to approach their lecturers:

Antonio: 'We have actually been meeting a lot with my classmates. You know, just checking your ideas. [...] It's easier, you know? Just, okay, go to take a beer and discuss about these things.'

4.5.5 Summary

The results suggest that emotions of confusion, frustration, stress, and alienation were often triggered in intercultural assessment and feedback contexts. Developing the ability to show empathy towards the cultural diversity of A&F practices and of those involved seemed to help students to manage negative emotions and to be kinder and more understanding towards the self and the other. Reducing uncertainty of expectations in new A&F situations also seemed to boost confidence, motivation and to produce relief from anxiety and frustration. Furthermore, detrimental and deactivating emotions seemed to emerge from relating with others in intercultural discussions about and within A&F. With dialogue, encouragement and reassurance, students developed the ability to manage negative emotions and to feel positively about relating with educators. Lastly, unfamiliarity with the language and discourse of A&F and fear of struggling to communicate in a second language triggered deactivating emotions that initially hindered student engagement in feedback dialogues. With support, clarification, and encouragement students were able to overcome such emotions. The results suggest that the development of IEM was often connected to an increase in knowledge, awareness, and critical reflection on the diverse practices. Further, increased IEM seemed to contribute to positively modifying behaviours in A&F situations.

4.6 Theme 5 – Attitudes

International student-participants' attitudes towards the new practices of assessment and feedback seemed to be influenced by their previous histories of A&F and by their attitudes towards the cultural diversity of individuals and practices. Attitudes seemed to impact on their behaviours in assessment and feedback situations. Depending on their attitudes, students were more or less willing to gather information about A&F, have a flexible behaviour, and to take others' cultural perspectives. Four sub-themes (Figure 10) constitute the collective narrative of international students' attitudes: (1) their beliefs about the practices, individuals' responsibilities, behaviours, and dialogues within them; (2) student predispositions towards the new practices and towards intercultural communication in assessment and feedback contexts; (3) their openness towards diversity of assessment and feedback and individuals that participate in feedback dialogues; and (4) student curiosity about the 'new' practices.

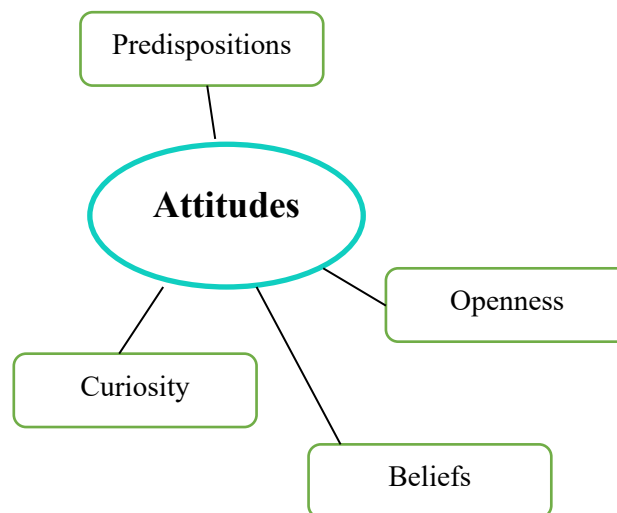


Figure 10 - Theme 5: Attitudes

4.6.1 Beliefs About the Practices

Students' beliefs about assessment and feedback practices, their own and others' responsibilities, and appropriate and effective behaviours within the practices seemed to be shaped by their histories and by the value systems formed through their previous academic experiences. Beliefs were a central element

of the narratives around student attitudes towards A&F, as they influenced student responses to the practices. Most student participants' initial beliefs originated from their previous experience: for most of them, A&F have the purpose to evaluate and judge one's knowledge of a certain topic as explored in section 4.2 about knowledge. Some initially believed assessment and feedback to be one practice only, particularly when they had little experience of feedback or when feedback was associated with grades. Ann, for instance, referred to both assessment and feedback as 'evaluation' throughout the first interview, when discussing feedback, she said:

Ann: 'I don't know how the evaluation will be.'

Assessment was often believed to be a practice that requires students to 'prove' what they know, whilst feedback was believed to be the lecturers' opinion on the quality of what they demonstrated to know (see sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 for more details). In line with this, many student participants believed that their roles and responsibilities only lied within assessment. They saw themselves as responsible for acquiring knowledge and reproducing it in their work, whereas it was their educators' responsibility to judge their work.

Diana: 'So you just have to study the kind of books they give to you [...] they give you the mark and they say why. For example, I did topography [...] and I did 28, not the maximum mark but because they told me I answered wrong for him for one question. That's it.'

This is not surprising considering how students like Diana experienced highly hierarchical HE systems, where those at the top (lecturers) consider themselves and are believed to be extremely knowledgeable. Their power lies in their knowledge and in their ability to 'judge' student work, and this impacted on student beliefs on their responsibilities within the practices. If feedback was considered to be the educators' judgement, students initially tended to believe an effective and appropriate behaviour would be to passively receive such judgement and simply try to understand the reasons for the grade awarded. As similarly explored in sections 4.4.2 and 4.5.3, most of the student participants reported that dialogue and communication in assessment and feedback situations were not encouraged nor appreciated in their

previous experience. Some of them consequently did not highly value dialogue and did not engage with it. If this happened, students also tended to firmly hold on to their pre-formed beliefs. Nevertheless, some believed in the role of communication and sought interaction to observe, compare and reflect on other's beliefs. Numi, for example, was eager to challenge her own beliefs and readily appreciated the value of communication within feedback practices:

Numi: 'I understand I come from an academic environment where the culture is that you keep your students at a distance and giving feedback is not necessary. They don't understand the value of communication.'

Student beliefs tended to evolve and to be negotiated over time, and dialogue about and within the practices seemed to play a fundamental role in this. Students often reported appreciating the guidance received through interaction. For example, if they were supported and encouraged to participate in discussions that aimed at uncovering the values and beliefs behind the 'new' assessment and feedback practices, they seemed to re-negotiate their beliefs more purposefully. For example, the students who had more feedback dialogue opportunities, tended to modify their beliefs about feedback as they went along:

Numi: 'It's not a judgement on you or your work. It's a tool to develop. In terms of adapting to that I think that now I am fine. I actually like it quite a lot because I understand why it is important.'

Those who were unwilling or were not given the opportunity to engage in purposeful discussions about and within the practices tended to rely more heavily on their ongoing lived experiences to inform their beliefs. Antonio, for example, continued to believe feedback to be an explanation of the grade, as his ongoing feedback experience confirmed his view:

Antonio: 'In the end the feedback comes only after you have done the work and after your work has been evaluated. So, the feedback is there to give you an understanding of the grade.'

Beliefs on student and educator responsibilities within assessment and feedback practices also seemed to change over time. Lived experiences seemed to have a bigger impact on this. In fact, students never reported discussing their own and their lecturers' responsibilities in feedback contexts. Most of them continued to believe they were only responsible to submit their work and to accept the grade and the feedback 'provided'. However, some built on their experience in the new context and seemed to be able to re-think their responsibility in feedback dialogues:

Antonio: 'I learnt that if you wait for them to reach out to you won't have a discussion. We need to show that we are interested and go to professors. We can't have everything served on a golden plate.'

Mahmoud: 'I can see I have more independence here. This comes with more responsibility. I receive less guidance, but I can ask for it, [...] the support is available and it's my responsibility to go look for it.'

Others continued to believe it would be the lecturers' responsibility to initiate feedback dialogues. This seems to be the case especially for those who felt uncomfortable about approaching academics because of unsettling past experiences. Malak was one of them:

Malak: 'Students need to be pushed, like I will take care of these feedbacks because I need to apply it in my next assignment. They don't do it.'

This shows how beliefs and values re-negotiation happened to some extent only through experience alone, whereas open discussions supported an earlier and more purposeful negotiation.

Few students, like Marlene, believed in feedback as a tool to mediate a two-way discussion about students' work and potential development from the very beginning. However, the weak feedback experienced led her to believe rhetoric and beliefs are never reflected in reality. Marlene came to believe that feedback is in fact simply a one-way information transmission from educators to students, as this was what she saw throughout the academic year:

Marlene: 'In the beginning all the professors and also like our school, they praised their assessment and feedback system really highly and were explaining

us how, like, we are going to get really detailed feedback on everything and we really want you to like learn from it and we want to engage with you. And I feel like these expectations that were raised, are not fulfilled.'

This suggests that both students' lived experiences of assessment and feedback and open discussions about and within the practices had an impact on how students re-negotiated their beliefs and values. It also seemed that experience needed to be supported by active dialogues for such negotiation to be purposeful and effective.

4.6.2 Predispositions Towards the Practices

Because of their previous experiences, students tended to be predisposed to focus on grades and past and current performances rather than on their ongoing development. They also seemed predisposed to appreciate summative assessment rather than formative assessment and developmental feedback. Grade orientation was often stronger for those coming from higher education contexts where ongoing feedback mechanisms were absent. If students' predispositions were to value the grade, they initially showed a similar tendency in the new context as well.

When students were firstly introduced to feedback mechanisms and processes, their predispositions seemed to play a role in how they perceived and utilised the feedback. Initially, most students were orientated towards the completed task and used the feedback to make sense of the grade. In some cases, like Nik's, they even refused to use it for future development:

Nik: 'I learn in my studies you go for exam and it's a situation where if you know you will pass, if you don't know you will go home and [try] next time. So now if I write an essay and send it and professor changes it, it loses its point. That's my knowledge, I don't know better than this, the feedback tells me what I know.'

Being grade orientated did not necessarily imply that students were past or present orientated, however, it did impact on what they utilised the feedback for in future work. Some students looked at future work with the intention to be awarded a better grade. In order to do this, they only perceived as feedback what clearly stated what was 'wrong' and used it to avoid making the same mistake again:

Eileen: 'I want to know and memorise all the mistakes, so I don't make them again. So, I started when I got my feedback and my grade with 58, now I need to get like 75 so I can get a distinction.'

Student predispositions towards communicating with others in diverse cultural contexts also seemed to be impactful. If students were not predisposed to interact with lecturers, they were not likely to engage in feedback dialogues. As explored in previous result sections, most student participants did not seem to be positively predisposed towards dialogues, in particular within assessment and feedback contexts. This was mainly linked to uncertainty of appropriate interaction behaviours and history of great distance between students and educators. Malak, for example, believed that communication about her work was fundamental, however did not think lecturers would value it as much as she did. Her prior experience influenced her position:

Malak: 'I remember the doctor [lecturer] she said 'never and ever think that you can come to my office and ask me for help or ask to clarify things. You have to go, you have to read, you have to search'. Because of this I go to the library and I don't ask.'

This shows how students' predispositions played a role in defining perceptions of assessment and feedback and feedback enactment.

Predispositions seemed to change throughout the year, mostly because of conversations about the intentions and purposes of assessment and feedback practices. A few months in, Numi reported that she would look at future work and focus on her ongoing development, whereas this did not happen before:

Numi: 'If before it was just a tick in a box when getting through the assignments, now the whole mechanism of feedback and also the approachability of the academics makes you think differently.'

Eileen also began to look at enacting the feedback for further development rather than for grade improvement. In the second term, she moved past simply implementing the feedback corrections; instead, she reached out to lecturers aiming to understand the reasons behind their feedback to support

her own development. However, despite Eileen was in fact invited by her lecturer to do so, he did not engage with her:

Eileen: 'I wrote something very weird I don't remember it. He said it was not in context with that, like, it didn't really match. I emailed my professor like 'what is it? Why isn't it good?'. So, he replied me after a week and said, I'll get back to you later on. And he still haven't replied.'

Because of a lack of response from lecturers, Eileen went back to utilising the 'corrective' feedback without deeply engaging with it. This suggests that student predisposition could change over time if students were encouraged to engage in future orientated feedback discussions. Nonetheless, they needed to be able to experience the effectiveness of feedback on future work for the change to be purposeful and permanent. Nik, for example, decided to trust his lecturers and attempted to engage in dialogue towards the end of the first term. He was willing to re-think his predispositions and attempted to discuss the feedback and to utilise it on future work. Nevertheless, when he realised the feedback did not support his development, the change did not happen:

Nik: 'If in the end it's like a summary of what I have done plus 'you can do more', for me this stuff is useless.'

As opposed to Eileen and Nik's experience that echoed others' (e.g., Mahmoud, Diana, Marlene), Malak could see the value of such change:

Malak: 'Their feedback in the first assignment when I applied it in the second and third, I was able to see the improvement, you know?'

Overall, change was possible: some students, when supported, could modify their predispositions. Nevertheless, if dialogic and developmental feedback was not placed and students were not given the valuable opportunity to explore such change, they very easily shifted back to grade and past/present orientation. The 'new' rhetoric of A&F that students attempted to negotiate needed to be reflected in reality. Negotiation and change also needed to be valued and supported by educators.

4.6.3 Openness Towards Diversity

The degree of openness towards the diversity of assessment and feedback processes that students demonstrated seemed to influence their emotions and behaviours in A&F situations. Students who were more open seemed to be willing to engage with diversity and to discover and seek feedback:

Mahmoud: 'One of the good things here is that students are international, and this creates a good quality of conversation. People would put their input and feedback from their own backgrounds and perspectives, which is great.'

Marlene: 'I am really interested now to hear what kind of assessment and feedback style this is and people specifically from this university are expecting from us.'

Antonio: 'I am very excited about this because it is very different. You can work with others and you can share and discuss your ideas with others, and they will give you feedback!'

Some students seemed to merely accept cultural diversity. They respected it but considered it as something only concerning the 'other':

Nik: 'I like other cultures and respect them. It's interesting to know about their attitudes, it's a very good thing. But I am not like this, that's how I am.'

Lack of openness towards cultural diversity led to 'othering', causing avoidance and distancing from what was different, including assessment and feedback practices. In fact, Nik initially tended to overlook the diversity of the assessment types and feedback processes, behaving as he would in his previous environment.

The results show that there needs to be some caution when discussing the consequences of openness, as they varied greatly in different situations. In fact, openness towards diversity of the practices did not automatically turn into willingness to accept A&F diversity and to be flexible in modifying behaviours from passive and past-orientated to active (or proactive) and future-orientated. The results suggest that for this to happen, a certain degree of openness was needed from both students and lecturers. Most students reported they appreciated lecturers being open to interaction. However, they also observed

many were not particularly open towards others' cultural diversity. When this happened, students felt constrained, and perceived dialogue as a tool to 'convince' them to unilaterally adapt. Some advocated for more openness and flexibility towards what international students might be able to bring to the British context:

Marlene: 'I feel like, like, you can always like learn from the different experience and I mean, especially the University of Kent is a very international university, and each country, each university has different practices, and it would definitely help if overall there is a learning process from what is out there.'

'I think a lot is very much adapting, so there's, like structural expectations that people have from you here. But if you've already developed yourself and like I've done that before I believe we can also use your own experience and apply it and not necessarily having to like use these systems that are in university but when it comes to like the structure and the way people want their assignments done. That's very top down, like there's no way of, like, engaging with professors on it. They have their own structure, and their own way of doing it and that's how they want it from their students as well.'

However, some, like Ann, after receiving one-size-fits-all feedback that encouraged one-way adjustment, communicated with her lecturers about the possibility of them being more open to the 'diversity' and individual contribution she could bring to the task:

Ann: 'There were a list of questions and assignment types you could choose from, but I did not really agree with how they want you to do it here so I proposed a different way and different themes and went to discuss with the lecturer. In the end I was able to do what interests me, building on the courses I am following here. They let me do this, I think they should advertise this more.'

This seems to suggest that both students and educators' openness was needed for open and purposeful dialogues to take place.

4.6.4 Curiosity

Student curiosity about A&F practices in the new environment was another important factor that influenced their behaviour. Initial curiosity seemed to be strongly linked to initial levels of awareness of cultural diversity in the specific contexts of A&F. Students with lower awareness admitted not being curious:

Nik: 'When I come here, I didn't expect anything different, I didn't research how is the educational system in the UK, I did nothing about how they exam [evaluate] people, I didn't look about assignment.'

Curiosity also seemed to be of different types: intrinsic and born of genuine interest about the new practices, and extrinsic and driven by the desire to be high achievers. Those who were extrinsically driven by the necessity of performing well tended to focus their interests on the technical aspects of the new assessment types. They often did not seem to be interested in the purposes and values behind them and were consequently interested in the 'corrective' aspect of feedback. They were not particularly curious about the intentions of feedback processes and dialogues and simply avoided them:

Eileen: 'I worked on those [feedback comments] and on those areas of my weakness. And now I get a little better [grades] than what I used to get.'

On the contrary, those who were intrinsically curious about diversity of what was 'new' tended to reach out to others and to seek more information and discussions in the very early stages of their journey:

Mahmoud: 'These things are actually new to me, so, I am collecting information. My connection with my friends is a good information because especially Iraqi friends come from a similar education and had their Master's and would be in a similar experience to me.'

Initial curiosity often brought students to navigate the university websites and VLEs for information. However, the information available often focused on assessment types and their technicalities whereas feedback processes were not mentioned.

Curiosity about feedback seemed to be triggered when students became aware of its existence. This only happened in the few cases where lecturers placed feedback practices at the core of the curriculum

and of learning and development. For example, Marlene was already aware of the existence of feedback practices as she experienced something similar in the past, whereas Mahmoud became aware of them through friends and lecturers who triggered his curiosity:

Marlene: 'One big difference is that you can get feedback like this and discuss it with your lecturers. So, I am really interested to see how it works here.'

Mahmoud: 'So I have talked with some lecturers about their feedback and how it works and how it works for assignments. I also contacted friends to make the most out of it.'

Discussions, once again, played an important role in boosting curiosity about feedback. For example, some students reported that being part of the research project made them more curious about trying to engage in feedback discussions with lecturers. This was the case for some students, including Nik, who only showed some curiosity after a few interview discussions:

Nik: 'I think I tried to talk to them for curiosity about this thing [feedback dialogues], and relationships and how they work. Because we [Nik and researcher] have a discussion, and I went to see if it is helpful.'

This shows that curiosity was an important aspect for students to develop competence about intercultural practices. Curiosity needed to be triggered and fostered through dialogues and discussions.

4.6.5 Summary

Immediate and initial attitudes and responses to the different practices seemed to be particularly influenced by international student histories built in previous environments. However, as students experienced the practices within the new context, beliefs and values were re-negotiated. This did not happen equally for all students. Those who already valued intercultural communication and dialogues were able to approach such negotiations earlier and more positively. Others who did not engage in communication between cultures tended to struggle as they experienced misalignment of values and beliefs with tension and uncertainty. Feedback dialogues played a crucial role in supporting re-

negotiation throughout students' experience. However, they could only be useful when valued. Attitudes of openness and curiosity towards the diversity of the practices seemed to support student willingness to discover the diversity and be flexible in their feedback behaviours. This, alongside open dialogues facilitated student negotiation of predispositions and beliefs in a way that supported their future-orientated feedback behaviours and enactment of feedback.

4.7 Theme 6 – Skills

Student narratives suggested that if student-participants had or were supported to develop certain skills, they seemed to be more likely to behave appropriately (for the other) and effectively (for the self) in intercultural assessment and feedback situations. Students seemed to benefit from the following skills (Figure 11) that constitute the three sub-themes developed from the collective narratives: the willingness and ability to (1) be flexible in the behaviours they adopt in A&F contexts; (2) actively and independently learning about and through the new practices; (3) to resolve conflicts originating from the diversity of assessment and feedback practices in the new environment.

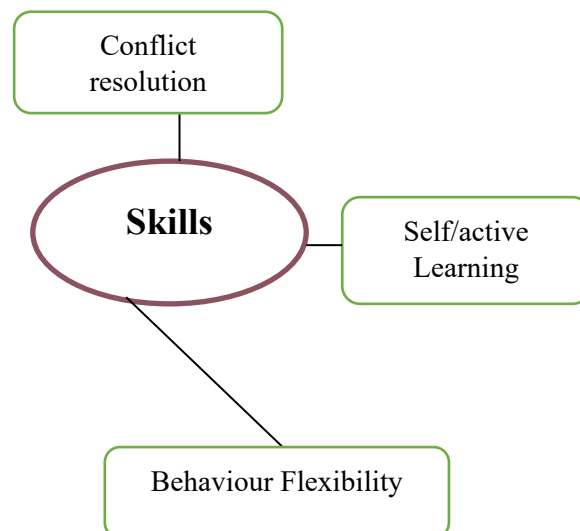


Figure 11 - Theme 6: Skills

4.7.1 Behaviour Flexibility

The way in which the student-participants behaved in assessment and feedback situations often initially mirrored what was considered appropriate by educators in their previous academic culture. They tended to adopt behaviours that proved to be effective in the past, often overlooking the fact that different practices might call for different behaviours. In assessment situations, student initial behaviours tended to vary, depending on the assessment types and purposes previously experienced. As explored in section 4.2.2, most student participants had a wide experience with summative exams, where memorisation of

a good quantity and quality of information is considered to be the purpose of assessment tasks; their behaviour then was often orientated towards the task at hand. Diana's comment supports this:

Diana: 'You need to have like a good average, you have to be the top because [...] For this you study a lot, that's the only way. [...] Then when you go to an exam you feel satisfied because you worked hard, and you know everything about the topic.'

If assessment was previously experienced as 'compartmentalised' into smaller tasks that simply need to be completed to move on to the next, unrelated one, students did not perceive assessment as a developmental and formative process and behaved accordingly. Ann's description of what an effective behaviour would be in an assessment situation is representative of many student-participants' stories:

Ann: 'You study. And you have to demonstrate that you know what the books are about. That's it basically, then you do the same with the next exam.'

Not surprisingly, when it came to feedback, most students initially behaved as they would in a summative assessment situation. They behaved with the feedback as they would with a grade: they read it, acknowledged it in relation to the completed work, and moved on to the next task with no intention of enacting it. This past-orientated behaviour seemed to be adopted particularly by those who never experienced feedback processes before:

Diana: 'I did have like a feedback [in her undergrad], it is you have passed or you haven't passed, so you know. Then you can refuse the mark and you can repeat the next month.' 'Here I read the feedback [...] they often say: 'you could have said more about certain aspects', but in the end your comment is pointless because I can't change it now.'

Jalil: 'if they highlight what is wrong you can know that this is not good and then you can match it with the books. [...] Here I think they'll give us feedback so we can know and look why we are given the mark.'

Antonio: 'I think they [feedback] are useful but this is not going to change anything because it's already done.'

Across term 1, when students gained increased knowledge and awareness of the diversity of practices in the new environment, their behaviours began to change. This seemed to be a gradual and difficult process for most; only few students could immediately recognise that their usual behaviour might not align to the different purposes of the new A&F practices. Those who could, were more likely to attempt to adopt a behaviour that might be in fact effective and considered appropriate in the new context. However, this became challenging if they were not guided towards uncovering the purposes of the practices and the reasons behind the ‘desired’ behaviour.

It was simpler for students to recognise the diversity of effective behaviours in assessment situations, as all of them had experienced some sort of assessment in the past. Further, the criteria, requirements and learning goals were often explicit and discussed in class or at least available online. Based on this, students were more likely to adapt their behaviours to the different assessment tasks:

Ann: ‘Here they keep telling us you need to do some research independently and write academically. [...] You have the opportunity to grow and develop with support but independently through assignments.’

Marlene: ‘What I do is, I ask myself: ‘what does the essay question require me to do? Do I need to discuss something?’ or ‘what do I need to do?’ or ‘do I need to do a case study?’

However, unlike assessment, feedback was more likely to be a completely new concept to students and one that was rarely openly explored in class. It followed that what to do in feedback processes remained a big question mark for many throughout the first term of studies. A few months into her studies, Ann shared she was still unsure how to behave in feedback situations:

Ann: ‘This thing with a written assignment with a feedback on it, I have never seen anything like this in Italy. I never had this for a course related exam or assignment, I am not sure how to approach it.’

It seemed that students needed to acquire knowledge and awareness of the purposes of feedback processes to be able to recognise and adopt an effective behaviour. For example, Ann only realised halfway through the second term that she could have utilised the feedback to develop her work from

the start. This happened only when, as late as March, a new lecturer provided ongoing feedback on multiple drafts and discussed its purposes and how to enact it into the final draft. Ann had not experienced this in the first term, and acknowledged she would have utilised the feedback more effectively if she had received the same input and guidance from all of her lecturers:

Ann: 'if I retroactively look at it and think about how it could be useful [...] I can't believe I never realised this. And it's not like I didn't look at the feedback, just the developmental long comment was not there!'

Ann's behaviour consequently shifted from using the feedback to understand the 'issues' related to the completed task (past-orientated), to using the feedback to guide the way in which she developed both her line of thinking and structure of the work to come (future-orientated). Others similarly moved from focusing on the task at hand to a future-orientated behaviour in the second term, as they uncovered the purposes of feedback and the value of a future-orientated behaviour:

Jalil: 'In the feedback it's highlighted things that are missing, but that helped me a lot in the next assignment which I just submitted. [...] I think this is something new for me totally, it's like every single assignment is giving me some learning and I am going towards progress.'

'First, I read it and analyse it and then I take this further [to the lecturer] if I need more information, no? For the next assignment!'

However, some argued that the time available was not sufficient to participate in ongoing and developmental feedback processes and to make good use of the feedback. Marlene observed that the time given between tasks was not sufficient to reflect on the feedback and enact it in the subsequent assignments. For Mahmoud, the feedback needed to support student development of work strategies before the official submissions. For him, the with feedback episode was as late as January:

Marlene: 'So, there wasn't even time like to properly incorporate the feedback. And, yeah, it's just like we need a lot more time and more dialogue with like more time to actually deal with the feedback and use it for your own future work.'

Mahmoud: 'the feedback from the university, I think it's quite useful and it pinpoints where I need to focus for my future assignments. Maybe the only thing is that we cannot get feedback before we submit. So, there's no point of improving your work before you submit it, you only use the feedback maybe for other assignments in another module or another course.'

Lecturers' feedback behaviours also seemed to impact on students' behaviour development and (lack of) change. In fact, when lecturers reported being allowed to provide feedback only together with an official grade (after official submission), students were likely to continue perceiving feedback as equal to a grade, carrying on with their past or present feedback behaviours:

Eileen: 'So yeah, I asked my professor whether she can, you know, give me some feedback but she refused and said 'I can't do that, that is part of the assessment, I can't give you the feedback on that. So, I can't do much with the feedback after submission.'

Finally, some students modified their behaviour to what was considered to be appropriate and used the feedback only to please their lecturers and achieve higher results. However, they did not seem to consider this as effective or valuable to them. This seemed to be a passive adaptation behaviour that was often triggered in situations where students and educators did not engage in purposeful conversation to uncover and debate the purposes of assignments and the intentions of feedback:

Diana: 'I don't think this is good what he suggested in the feedback, but I still used the statistical data he wanted at the end, to make him happy.'

Some, like Antonio, tried to find a balance by adopting a behaviour that would be effective for him and considered appropriate for the lecturers:

Antonio: 'I use some of the feedback because I'm trying to follow their guidance, but, you know, I also put something that I think it's worth. Maybe a bit less, a bit less than before.'

The results suggested that uncovering assessment and feedback purposes, discussing what behaviours might be considered appropriate and effective by all, alongside the reasons for this supported student

willingness to be flexible in their assessment and feedback behaviours. This seemed to facilitate a shift from past- or present-orientated to future-orientated behaviour that, in turn, supported student willingness to enact the feedback.

4.7.2 Self and Active Learning

Active, independent learning about the diverse assessment and feedback mechanisms, purposes, and philosophies as well as learning through feedback processes seemed to be what students needed for assessment and feedback to become useful practices to them. Findings on students proactively seeking information about A&F are explored in sections 3.2 and 3.3. The present section reports on student conceptualisation of self and active learning and on how this influences their active learning through assessment and their proactive recipience of feedback.

In early stages of their new experience, some students seemed to be unaware of their active roles within learning, assessment, and feedback. This was often related to them being accustomed to receiving or acquiring information ‘passively’ in their previous university environments. Because of this, some confused independent and active learning with reading, memorising, and repeating information ‘on their own’. This is what Antonio reported when reflecting on the course goal of becoming ‘an independent learner’:

Antonio: ‘Yeah, I know how to do that, we are used to study a lot on our own.’

Nik’s comment below reflects the initial thinking of many of the student-participants:

Nik: ‘Here they are very good because they want you to learn on your own, to research on your own, depends on you. [...] Our education system isn’t like that, they give you the book, the questions and they want the answer from the book and nothing else. So, it’s very helpful, very different. They ask you to be proactive. But the feedback is not, it doesn’t have any value for students in this. You can just – it’s better for you not to read it I think.’

They tended to appreciate the independent work of the non-exam type of assignments at the British university but did not seem to recognise the importance of active engagement in feedback processes.

This seemed to be related to the fact that they continued experiencing feedback as comments and not as a process. Further, written comments were often difficult to unpack in a vacuum and consequently considered as not useful.

For Eileen, enactment of the feedback was initially conceptualised as memorisation of the feedback comments:

Eileen: 'I want to, you know, memorise all of those weaknesses. So, I posted them [feedback comments] on the wall and I look at them every day to remember the mistakes.'

The idea of being active and independent learners seemed to be an attractive one for some, especially for students who were disappointed by and disagreed with the passive and rote learning they previously experienced. These students were curious to try to modify their approach to assessments and to the feedback processes. However, they were often not sure what this might involve in practical terms:

Mahmoud: 'I have more of self-learning opportunities here, and I can be more independent. But I also receive less guidance here, and I am not sure how to go about it, so I'm collecting information. I hope that I will make it.'

The rhetoric of postgraduate students being more independent and proactive than 'novices' to higher education seemed to be dominant in most courses. Most student-participants recognised this and showed the intention to find out what it meant to be actively involved in feedback processes. Nevertheless, they also reported being unfamiliar with feedback dynamics and their responsibilities, and called for further initial guidance:

Jalil: 'The feedbacks are good in the first term, because they're very targeted, they tell you, you have to include this, you have to exclude this, you have to do this and not do that. Because in the first term the students are new, especially international students coming from different education systems, they don't, they don't know they haven't done anything like that before. So, it's really good. It helps them a lot. It makes the job easy, but the second. The second type is once you are - once you have gone through the first term. Then you can let them play openly and independently.'

Mahmoud: 'Master's students are expected to already have an undergraduate experience with a lot of academic assignments and feedback. So maybe they have more of an idea, but for me, this is kind of new to me.'

Numi: 'To be honest, if it's a Master they all expect people to know what they are going into and to have their mechanisms and strategies.'

Some students reported proactively seeking feedback to be able to direct their learning and develop work strategies in the initial phases of greater uncertainty. However, some also reported this was not welcomed by lecturers, who responded that they were not allowed to provide feedback outside of official 'feedback situations':

Eileen: 'Honestly I am new to the system and usually the university is not aware of everything that we might need or struggle with. So, I asked for feedback, I was thinking that feedback would have helped, but she said she's not allowed to give a feedback. Okay, that's weird.'

This did not seem to encourage students' proactivity in feedback processes and led to students thinking of written, official feedback comments as the only 'real' and 'recognised' feedback. On the contrary, when students were encouraged to proactively start feedback conversations, they tended to be more engaged, recognise different forms of feedback, and enact it. Student early engagement with feedback dialogues seemed to support their ability to independently evaluate their own assessment strategies and work, needing less and less guidance as they progressed through their studies. For example, in the second term, many recognised that extremely detailed and generous feedback was not needed any longer, as they had developed effective strategies to approach assignments:

Marlene: 'learn from every experience like every assessment you're doing. And, like, even though there's not detailed feedback on it. I always kind of reflect on it myself and like try to just by myself get better with it and like learning how to improve my writing process. And I think that, overall, it helps a lot if you have certain strategies, like how to deal with it yourself.'

Mahmoud: 'I can say that now I try to learn how to make the best decisions for my work.'

Jalil: 'So for example now there is the dissertation. You know, the dissertation is something new. Okay, something to learn. But still I have some power like I have confidence on my skills on myself that I gained until now. I can use that.'

4.7.3 Conflicts Resolution

The ability to recognise the nature of and to resolve conflicts that might arise in assessment and feedback contexts was fundamental for student learning through the practices. Conflicts seemed more likely to arise when students' values and beliefs in relation to A&F were dissimilar to those of educators; dialogues and communication seemed to facilitate their resolution.

Conflicts were often about the purposes, usefulness, and requirements of assignment tasks; students tended to disagree with them when they significantly differed from what they previously experienced. For example, conflicts arose for students who recognised knowledge acquisition and memorisation as the purpose of assessment. For many of them, assignments such as essays defeated the purpose of learning as they reported written tasks could easily be completed by others or without having memorised and retained any knowledge. Consequently, they conflicted with the purposes of feedback, which becomes of little use if the purpose of learning is to memorise information. Further, if student interest laid in the grade and the completion of all assignments, feedback became unnecessary. If conflicts were not resolved, students showed low engagement and interest in completing assignments and in using the feedback to enhance their work. Diana compared her Italian and British experience:

Diana: 'So during the whole year we have like 5 assignments, in Italy we have like 30 exams. Here for an exam you prepare at home and you submit. You can have it checked by other people, how do they know it is actually my work? It would be very easy to cheat, it's not good. In Italy I know that after studying I know things, here I know nothing.'

'I find it useful that the feedback tells you where you are going wrong and what you can do about it. But you don't do it because I feel you would pass anyway. The level is really low so I would pass anyway.'

Resolving conflicts was difficult for students who did not engage in dialogues and communication about the practices. Some even seemed to be unwilling to resolve conflicts with their lecturers. They preferred to have their own position and beliefs confirmed and supported by previous lecturers or UK-based educators with similar backgrounds (see section 3.4.1 for details and direct quotes).

Conflicts seemed more intense when students perceived feedback as a tool used by lecturers to ask them to unilaterally adapt. If the feedback approach was patronising and space was not given to uncovering the reasons behind conflict, student interest in resolving misalignment was low:

Marlene: 'I would rather like conceptualise it [feedback] as kind of a top down process. I think a lot is very much adapting [...] That's very top down, like there's no way of, like, engaging with professors on it. They have their own structure, and their own way of doing it and that's how they want it from their students as well.'

Ongoing and honest communication about purposes and requirements seemed to be what Marlene advocated for to support conflict resolution. Further, the creation of a relationship of trust through dialogue favoured student openness and willingness to face and mitigate conflict. Numi observed that open discussion with her international lecturer made her realise conflicts are normal and can be resolved:

Numi: 'I think she gave us so much confidence about reaching out to her to discuss about anything [...] Somebody of that nature actually being humble enough to say I also had simple beginnings and struggled. [...] It helps me remember that that's probably a process everybody went through.'

Nevertheless, this was again not automatic nor immediate for many. Often students preferred not to face or resolve conflict; their experience led them to believe it was not appropriate nor recommendable to approach lecturers to discuss opinions that would be different than theirs:

Nik: 'I don't want to do their job or anybody else's job. I don't want to tell them how to do their job. But I am telling you, so you can do that.'

This suggests that communication was a useful tool to resolve conflicts. Nevertheless, some students needed particular encouragement and plenty of opportunity to discuss if they were to use communication effectively and to manage the conflicts that would arise in A&F situations.

4.7.4 Summary

Student-participants' abilities to recognise their own behaviours, behaviours that are 'desired' in the new contexts of A&F, and can show behaviour flexibility were more likely to adopt future-orientated behaviours that were both effective (for them) and appropriate (for others). Students enacted the feedback only if they were able to recognise the value of and reasons for such behaviour. Learning how and why to be independent and active in assessment situations and feedback processes helped with that. If students' experiences conflicted in assessment and feedback situations, they were less likely to adopt effective behaviours and make use of the practices; open communication between educators and students was paramount to help reduce conflict.

4.8 Chapter Summary

This Chapter reported the findings from narrative and thematic analyses of transcripts from student narrative interviews and audio diary logs. The findings seem to suggest that developing knowledge, awareness, abilities to critically reflect and manage emotions, alongside a set of attitudes and skills related to assessment and feedback practices were fundamental competencies for students. When developing such competencies, students were able to benefit from effective communication in intercultural contexts of assessment and feedback. The findings indicate that the international PGT student-participants' assessment and feedback histories did influence their competencies, particularly in the first months of their British academic experience. As the impact of histories was gradually reduced through first-hand experience with the new practices and dialogues about and within them, their A&F intercultural competence seemed to develop. Its development seemed to contribute to the enhancement of the international student-participants' feedback literacy. The students became more appreciative of feedback processes and of their roles within them. They developed the ability to evaluate

their work and manage their emotions and seemed to be more willing and capable to take action on the feedback in future tasks.

The next Chapter is the result of a critical reflection on the findings in light of what has been previously advanced by the available literature.

Chapter V – Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have provided a review of the relevant literature, an account of the research questions, approach and methodology, and an exploration of the results. Building on this foundation, the current chapter discusses the meaning and relevance of the thesis' results in relation to the research questions and the existing literature. The key findings and their significance are discussed in relation to the relevant literature on assessment and feedback, feedback literacy, and intercultural communicative competence. Firstly, the chapter looks at how the assessment and feedback histories of the international PGT students in the present thesis impact on their A&F intercultural communicative competence, considering changes over time (RQ1). Secondly, it discusses the role of dialogic feedback processes in supporting international PGT students' development of A&F ICC throughout the academic year (RQ2). Lastly, the chapter addresses how student-participants' A&F ICC influences the development of their feedback literacy over their postgraduate journey (RQ3). In particular, the way(s) in which the different competencies of knowledge, awareness, intercultural critical reflection, intercultural emotional management, attitudes, and skills impact on feedback appreciation, making judgements, managing feedback emotions, and taking action on the feedback are discussed. Drawing on this and on the models discussed in the literature review chapter, a general framework for student feedback literacy development in intercultural contexts is proposed. The framework considers contextual and cultural elements of feedback literacy. It proposes the integration of intercultural competence and feedback literacy development to address diversity in increasingly internationalised higher education contexts.

5.2 Research Question 1 – Impact of International PGT Student Assessment and Feedback Histories on A&F ICC

5.2.1 The Myth of Macro-regional Cultures' Dichotomies

It was clear from the analysis of the initial interviews and audio diary entries that the greater the diversity of student-participants' A&F histories, the lower their initial intercultural competence in assessment and feedback contexts. It appears that students with radically different and 'distant' histories

had initially little knowledge of the new practices, lower critical reflection capacities, different predispositions, beliefs, and behaviours, and had more challenging affective experiences. The role of ‘cultural distance’ in intercultural contexts has frequently been recognised in the literature (see for example Berry, 1997; Galchenko and Van de Vijver, 2007; Ward and Geeraert, 2016). However, its application in HE research has mainly focused upon the impact of ‘perceived’ cultural distance on affective and psychological ‘adaptation’ of international students to the wider university context. Interestingly, it is not often considered in studies on intercultural communication, nor has it been observed before in the areas of assessment and feedback. The results of this thesis offer new insights on the role of ‘cultural distance’ specifically within intercultural assessment and feedback contexts. On this, the findings show that, as students saw A&F through different and more or less ‘distant’ cultural lenses, they initially struggled to navigate the practices. Consequently, they were able to make effective use of assessment and feedback only to some extent. It would seem to be expected that those with more distant A&F histories found it more challenging to effectively recognise and utilise feedback as a tool for learning and development. This resonates with much of the literature reporting on the influence of student academic histories and previous literacies in new academic environments (Barton et al., 2007; Lea and Street, 2006; Lillis and Tuck, 2016), aligning this thesis’ finding to what has been observed within wider academic contexts. However, this finding’s specificity to A&F is significant: it reiterates that the non-homogeneity of students needs to be considered within research on feedback, in alignment with recent criticisms (Henderson et al., 2019; Pitt et al., 2019). Moreover, although the literature’s critique has highlighted the issue of one-size-fits-all research on students’ experiences with assessment and feedback, no empirically based suggestions have been advanced on where the heterogeneity might lie. The findings within the current thesis uncover that A&F cultural distance needs to be considered. In order to do so, students’ previous histories and literacies need to be investigated and valued, particularly when A&F practices are operationalised in increasingly intercultural contexts.

It was apparent that participant histories of prevalently summative assessment that promoted a focus on grades and high-stakes examinations were also characterised by absence of formative and developmental feedback practices (Panadero et al., 2018; Winstone and Carless, 2019). This was shown

to have an impact on numerous elements of ICC, including knowledge of the practices, awareness of diversity within assessment and feedback practices and purposes (e.g., formative vs summative), predispositions and beliefs about A&F (attitudes), expectations, and behaviours in A&F processes (skills). Most research has argued that such an assessment ‘orientation’ would be typical of Confucian Heritage countries’ systems of education drawing on Biggs’ (1996) and Hofstede’s (1986; Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005) theorisations of macro-regional cultural diversity. However, the findings within the present thesis contradict such contentions. In contrast to what the ‘east vs west’ dichotomy of educational systems and philosophies would suggest, the findings show that the students with highly diverse A&F histories came from a variety of educational backgrounds, including institutions in Europe (both EU and non-EU), the Middle East, and South Asia. The findings show that learning philosophies and values promoted at the students’ previous institutions shaped the practices utilised by educators and consequently students’ conceptualisations (and operationalisations) of A&F. Pure memorisation of knowledge and information, orientation towards achievement and past and present performances, little encouragement of criticality and reflexivity characterise the majority of the participants’ histories regardless of ‘regional’ cultures. These findings align with what other researchers have suggested in terms of looking past macro-regional differences between eastern and western higher education systems (Kennedy, 2002; Kingston and Forland, 2004). Regional cultures do not seem to be what is most impactful. Rather, the findings suggest that histories and literacies developed within ‘smaller’ academic cultures (Holliday, 1999) and institutional cultures (Ramani et al., 2017) of assessment and feedback are what greatly influences students’ A&F intercultural competence and feedback literacy.

The findings within this thesis dismantle the myth of cultural diversity only being ‘relevant’ across macro-regions. Further, they reveal that diversity exists and is worth investigating across different contexts and cultures of assessment and feedback. This contributes to the limited knowledge in this area (e.g., Carroll, 2008; Robson, 2011; Tien and Lowe, 2013) that has mainly pinpointed diversity of assessment types and academic writing norms between eastern and western higher education systems.

5.2.2 Histories' Impact on Interactions and Behaviours

Student histories appear to be particularly impacting on the way in which students interact and behave within assessment and feedback contexts. The findings show that most of the student-participants had experienced highly hierarchical educational systems in the past. These were characterised by high power distance and imbalances between students and educators that largely dominated and influenced student-educator relationships and interactions. This finding is consistent with what research conducted with students from Confucian heritage countries has often uncovered (e.g., Tien and Lowe, 2013; Areemit et al., 2020), and adds that similar aspects characterised the histories of the near totality of students, regardless of regionalities.

It was clear from students' narratives that histories of hierarchical power structures and lack of encouragement of student-educator interactions contributed to initial emotional reactions such as stress, anxiety, and uncertainty in the new environment. The diversity between previous and present experiences was significant: at the British institution where the research took place, most student-participants were encouraged to engage in A&F dialogues with educators. This was emotionally challenging for students who had long considered lecturers as powerful and distant individuals responsible to unilaterally judge the quality of completed work. In their past experiences, there was little space for two-ways dialogues about student work, consequently, students often considered it inappropriate to seek feedback dialogues with educators. Conversely, what they recognised as appropriate was to simply accept the judgement 'received' on past works. Morrison, Chen, and Salgado (2004) similarly observe that feedback seeking behaviours in the workplace are often impacted by cultural differences, proposing this is dependent on cultural group membership but not generalisable to all within a group. Within this thesis, the findings point to feedback seeking behaviours being dependent on international PGT students' previous membership to a different academic culture and culture of A&F.

The findings suggest links between prior cultures of assessment and feedback and other student behaviours in the new, more communicative, and interactive context. In early students' narratives, past- and present-orientated behaviours, lower willingness to seek dialogic feedback, and passive acceptance

rather than appreciation and enactment of the feedback can be clearly seen. It appears they are in fact a consequence of diverse A&F histories and literacies that promoted such behaviours. Contrarily to the behaviours that students in this thesis initially adopted, extensive research has highlighted the importance and usefulness of future-orientated behaviours, feedback seeking and proactive recipience (Boud and Molloy 2013; Crommelinck and Anseel, 2013; Winstone et al., 2017, 2019). Nevertheless, what determines student orientation, volition, and agency in feedback contexts is largely uncovered. This thesis' findings contribute to new knowledge by revealing some factors that might determine such attitudes: diverse histories and cultures of A&F shape what students recognise as valued and appropriate behaviours in A&F contexts, thus causing lower willingness and ability to behave as 'desired' and considered effective in the new environment. This consolidates the thesis' claim advanced in section 5.2.1: previous 'smaller' culture of assessment and feedback – rather than 'broader' regional cultures - impact on the intercultural competence and feedback literacy students have when entering the new environment.

5.2.3 The Cultural Element of Language and Discourse

The findings suggest that histories determine student (un)familiarity with the language and discourse(s) of assessment and feedback in the new environment, consequently impacting on their intercultural communicative competence and feedback literacy. In their interviews and diaries, students articulated that the technical and specialised language of the new A&F practices was often inaccessible. Such language was embedded in unfamiliar and obscure discourses of which students initially felt excluded, and this is consistent with much of the previous research focusing on ESL learners (e.g., Lillis and Turner, 2001; Hyland, 2009). The findings show it was very rarely a matter of language proficiency per se. Rather, students struggled to understand and interpret the highly contextual and culturally impregnated language. This was directly reported in students' narratives: for them, the assessment and feedback discourses were at times so culture-specific to cause confusion, misunderstanding, and misalignment. Often, students attempted to interpret the language of assessment criteria and rubrics and approached their assessment tasks based on their own interpretation of criteria. Unfortunately, on many

occasions, the feedback received revealed misalignment between student interpretation and the meanings educators attributed to such criteria. Furthermore, although the presence of some sort of misalignment was often recognised by students, unpacking the different meanings was not straightforward. The feedback did not always help clarify meaning. On the contrary, the feedback language was often reported to be as inaccessible as that of the assessment criteria, corroborating previous findings (e.g., Nicol, 2010; Norton, 2004).

The emotional reactions triggered by obscure language were at times disruptive. Frustration often led to disregarding feedback and assessment criteria as inaccessible information, as previous research by Sadler (1989) also highlighted. The literature on international students' often links misunderstandings with issues of language proficiency. In contrast with this, the findings in the current thesis suggest that the diversity of A&F cultures and discourses within rather needs to be taken into consideration, supporting what fewer researchers have previously argued (Bloxham and Campbell, 2010; Hyatt, 2005). The findings also reveal the need for fostering the co-construction of 'shared-meaning' between international students and educators in A&F contexts. In this regard, the contentions of Fantini and Tirmizi's (2006) language-culture paradigm seem to be relevant and empirically supported. In fact, the findings show that language and culture are strictly linked together, shape one-another, and impact on interpretation. This occurs in intercultural assessment and feedback contexts as much as in 'wider' international environment.

Overall, these findings support the many researchers who have found that students and educators often interpret A&F through different frames of references (e.g., Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Lea and Street, 2000; Orsmond and Merry, 2011; Sopina and McNeill, 2015; Wiley, 2012), adding that for the specific group of international PGT students, histories' diversities contributed to shaping such different frames. According to the participants' observations, educators seem to be largely unaware of the cultural diversity of A&F across institutions, and what might cause different interpretations is not always evident to them. Corroborating what Fantini (1995) and Cortazzi and Jin (2013) also argue, most educators seem to remain 'blind' to their own and others' academic cultures if they have always remained within them. When this happens, they tend to assume that what is 'familiar' to them is

universal. Whilst the scholars' contentions refer to 'wider' academic cultures, this thesis' findings contribute by uncovering how this also applies to cultures of assessment and feedback. The students within this thesis articulated that few exceptions exist: educators with wide(r) experiences across different assessment and feedback cultures and contexts do consider diversity and its potential impact on students' interpretations of the practices. Such observations suggest the need for educators to familiarise themselves with their students' diverse histories of A&F. Raising awareness and becoming more sensitive to diversity can facilitate effective intercultural dialogue and co-creation of meaning.

Another interesting finding linked to feedback language and culture is the 'peculiar' (if compared to previous research) student-participants' experience with and emotional reactions to 'positive' or 'positively written' feedback. In fact, many report experiencing uncertainty and frustration when reading 'positive' feedback comments that are perceived as a needless attempt to 'balance out' the action points or 'negative' comments. Positive feedback reflects what some of them explicitly refer to as 'British politeness'. Many perceive it as an attempt to show kindness and boost motivation that is not helpful unless it also clarifies what is 'wrong' in their work. The findings suggest that, instead of promoting motivation and activating affective reactions, polite, positive feedback often leads to confusion, frustration, and dissatisfaction. This finding conflicts with most of the existing literature that has suggested positive comments are appreciated by students and support motivation (Hyland, 1998; Lipnevich and Smith, 2009; Spinks, 1998). Some exceptions exist: Ramani et al.'s (2017) study observed that a culture of 'niceness/politeness' within feedback was largely appreciated unless it reduced the perceived honesty of feedback. Further, within ESL research, Baker and Hansen Bricker's (2010) findings suggest that for ESL students, the 'politeness part of comments' (p. 82) is the most nuanced and difficult to understand in teacher feedback comments. Ajjawi et al.'s (2022) recent critical literature review on emotions and feedback in health care settings also warn that trying to 'shield' students from experiencing emotions in feedback processes can cause feedback to lose its usefulness. To my knowledge, these seem to be the only findings that concur with those of the present thesis. Nevertheless, the conflict with the existing literature can be explained by the lack of consideration that previous 'wider' HE (as opposed to ESL) feedback research showed towards diversity within the

student body. This also strengthens the thesis' critique that research has yet to explore the impact of diverse linguistic and educational histories on student experience with feedback practices. In particular, further investigations into how and why diverse students might perceive positive feedback comments differently are needed.

The findings within the present thesis do reveal some reasons behind different 'reactions' to positive feedback. The student-participants' histories often promoted a focus on grades and 'right or wrong' answers to exam questions, rather than on formative assessment and feedback practices. Consequently, there was an initial tendency to value grades more than feedback comments and processes. It followed that students expected – and 'demanded' in their interviews and diary entries - comments indicating the mistakes to 'correct', discarding the positive observation considered as mere politeness. This finding indicates that student histories of 'feedback as justification of the grade' impacted on such desire to know 'what was wrong'. For many, highlighted mistakes and negative feedback served the purpose to explain the evaluation, reflecting again a common orientation towards the completed task.

5.2.4 Assessment vs Feedback Histories: Unequal Impact

The findings of this thesis also interestingly suggest that student-participants' intercultural competence related to assessment was slightly higher than that in feedback contexts, supporting researchers who argued intercultural competence should be considered to be context-specific (e.g., Witteborn, 2003). The findings uncover the two main reasons behind the differences between assessment- and feedback-related intercultural competence: the unequal (1) initial and (2) ongoing impact of assessment and feedback histories. In fact, student assessment and feedback histories were shown to present different degrees of similarity with the practices at the British university where the research took place. For instance, all student-participants experienced some form of assessment for learning at their previous HE institution, be it of summative (for the majority) or formative nature. Such 'close(r)' histories of assessment contributed to higher initial intercultural competence. In fact, building on previous experience and re-negotiating what was 'known' within the new context was simpler than approaching an altogether new practice. This was not the case for feedback, which the findings reveal being an

obscure practice. Many student-participants never heard of nor experienced feedback within academia before. Only one student reported having some previous experience of academic feedback, whilst few students experienced some form of feedback outside of university (e.g., work or non-academic projects): they were the ones who found it simpler to develop feedback intercultural competence. These findings consolidate this thesis' claim that assessment and feedback histories did have an impact on student initial intercultural competence. Further, assessment and feedback cultural distance proves again to play a role in determining the extent of histories' impact (see section 5.2.1).

As mentioned above, assessment and feedback histories had a different longer-term impact on student intercultural competence. The findings suggest that this was linked to the extent to which communication about each of the practices was fostered. Assessment practices, their mechanisms and purposes were often openly and largely discussed by educators at the new institution. According to students' narratives, discussions about assessment were particularly encouraged as most lecturers were aware of international students' potential difficulties with new and different assessment practices (e.g., writing essays, making and giving presentations etc.). On the contrary, feedback practices, their mechanisms, purposes, and underpinning learning philosophies were rarely a topic of discussion between students and educators. This seems to be the consequence of the literature's focus on international students 'challenges' with academic writing and assessment rather than feedback (e.g., Carroll, 2008; Ryan and Carroll, 2005). The findings indicate that assessment and feedback were frequently considered as one by students and, according to students' narratives, educators alike, in alignment with what the literature puts forward about assessment and feedback being often considered as one entangled practice (Winstone and Boud, 2020). Students with no histories of feedback initially believed it represented a 'supplement' to or an 'extension' of evaluation. Some educators seemed to consider and operationalise feedback in a similar way: they only provided written feedback comments alongside grades and refused to discuss or provide guidance outside of official feedback situations. Such observations suggest that these educators still conceptualise feedback as 'transmission' of information about completed tasks and as 'grade explanation'. It must be acknowledged that this is a speculative claim based uniquely on students' narratives and supporting materials (emails, written feedback)

provided by the participants. Nevertheless, this finding does resonate with those of Winstone, Pitt and Nash (2020) who report lecturers are still largely influenced by transmission models of feedback and perceive their own responsibility in feedback processes as ‘providing comments’. In addition, it is in accord with Noble et al.’s (2019) observations about student university experiences of feedback not guiding them to consider and act on feedback other than a one-way process. This thesis’ findings within intercultural contexts of feedback have important implications for future research: exploring the impact of educators’ histories on their own A&F competencies and feedback literacy could be the next step forward. In fact, this could shape our understanding about what influences educators’ conceptualisation and operationalisation of feedback. Further, it could shed some light onto the way in which intercultural communication within A&F contexts is co-constructed by students and educators together. As Pitt (2020) contends, educators should create assessment and feedback conditions so that feedback has ‘somewhere to land’. This seems to be surrounded by more complexities where A&F histories and philosophies of educators and students are different. This finding also corroborates what the literature suggests about the consequences of considering assessment and feedback as one: in such cases, feedback remains operationalised as a one-way transmission of information rather than a two-way ongoing and developmental dialogue.

5.2.5 Factors Influencing Changes over Time

It was clear from the interviews and diary entries collected at different points in time over the academic year that the impact of histories tended to decrease as student-participants’ ICC was developing. However, the rate and the extent to which histories’ impact softened as the new experiences became an integrative part of students’ ‘new’ and continued story appeared to depend on different factors. Firstly, the findings suggest that the degree of distance between previous and current A&F practices, their underpinning philosophies and values continued playing an important role. In fact, seeking and gathering information (knowledge) about A&F seemed to be easier for the few student-participants who had less dissimilar histories. Previous ‘closer’ experiences with assessment and feedback equipped them with higher knowledge about what information to gather and where. Emotional management was

simpler as detrimental feelings of anxiety, frustration, and alienation due to uncertainty and diversity were not triggered. Further, predispositions, beliefs, opinions, and behaviours were not radically different and facilitated flexibility, while conflicts were less extreme and easier to resolve. In contrast to this, the findings show that students who had no experience of formative assessment and therefore feedback processes often took longer to develop knowledge and awareness of the diversity, to reconsider and negotiate predisposing and beliefs, manage emotions, and to be flexible in modifying their behaviours.

Secondly, student familiarity with 'broader' diversity and interculturality contributed to the development of assessment and feedback ICC and the reduction of the impact of undergraduate histories. The findings reveal that having prior experience of living, working, or studying in intercultural contexts contributed to facilitating the development of A&F intercultural competence. In fact, prior intercultural experience was shown to be linked to higher awareness of cultural diversity, attitudes of openness and curiosity, increased empathy towards diverse individuals and cultures, alongside higher willingness to engage in discussions and to resolve conflicts created by diversity. Such competencies were often employed by students to communicate in contexts that were evidently intercultural. However, assessment and feedback were not initially recognised as such. Despite this, the findings indicate that the more 'broadly' interculturally competent students were able to apply such competencies within contexts of assessment and feedback earlier than others could begin to develop them. For these students, the impact of histories was more easily recognised, and recognition and acceptance of the new practices was less of a challenge. It was revealed that, for these participants, the tendency of 'othering' was clearly lower from the beginning of their new experience. Moreover, their personal experiences determined a higher level of 'comfort' dealing with diversity, consequently supporting the enhancement of their A&F intercultural competence over time. Similar claims have been made by researchers who looked at the impact of 'sojourning' abroad on broader intercultural competence in higher education (e.g., Brown, 2009; Schartner, 2016). The findings within this thesis contribute to new knowledge by contextualising such claims to the spheres of assessment and feedback.

The findings point to recognising prior intercultural experience as a contributing factor to A&F ICC development and to the reduction of impact of student histories. Nevertheless, ‘wider’ competence was not automatically transformed into assessment and feedback ICC. The findings suggest that what greatly contributed to softening the impact of previous histories and fostering A&F ICC development were purposeful interventions to support discovery, engagement with, and communication about and within the new practices.

In this chapter, it was discussed that educators and institutions tended to intervene and offer guidance mainly in the context of assessment. Interestingly, the findings show that discussing assessment had some positive implications for students’ development of not only assessment but also feedback ICC. In fact, familiarising with the philosophies, values and learning objectives that underpin assessment (i.e. formative, developmental assessment) laid the basis for building competence in feedback contexts.

However, explicit discussions about feedback practices and ongoing activities for feedback implementation contributes more deeply to the development of students’ feedback ICC. Students reported they needed to hear from their lecturers what feedback is, what it looks like, where to find it, and what to do with it in relation to assessment. They advocated for more guidance (e.g., drafts and exemplars – see section 5.3.3 for more details) to locate, recognise and implement the feedback on future work. Without such guidance and ongoing activities, some students continued to overlook the practice and its value, whereas others built their A&F competencies on the basis of what they could observe. Although experience and observation did play a role, they were not sufficient to develop ICC. This resonates with the observations made by Lee et al. (2012) and Yarosh et al. (2018), who argue that intercultural competence can be developed ‘automatically’ through experience to some extent only. Similarly, this aligns to the contentions of Carless and Boud (2018) who argue that experience alone does not make students feedback ‘literate’.

Unfortunately, students’ narratives show that open and purposeful dialogues about the mechanisms, purposes, and values of feedback practices, student and educator responsibilities in feedback processes, and the expected and effective feedback behaviours occurred rarely. However, the findings suggest that when they did, they largely contributed to A&F ICC development. In fact,

following discussions about the practices, the influence of previous histories became more evident to students and their willingness to re-explore and re-negotiate what they ‘knew’ increased. Students’ knowledge of the new practices increased, and so did their awareness of diversity of individuals, practices, and expectations in A&F contexts. Further, the encouragement of open communication reduced uncertainty and fear of discussing with educators, supporting student management of the emotions triggered in the new A&F situations. Discussions about the practices supported attitudes of curiosity and openness towards diversity, reducing conflicts arising from diversity and supporting flexibility and re-negotiation of assessment and feedback behaviours. Nevertheless, the findings also suggest that such discussions were particularly effective when supported by ongoing feedback dialogues with a longer-term approach. In fact, dialogic feedback practices themselves seemed to be what had the most positive impact on ICC development, as section 5.3 discusses.

Findings from the last interviews and audio diaries confirmed that A&F ICC was developed to different extents by students with different A&F histories and non-academic experiences as discussed thus far. Furthermore, they showed that change and development tended to come to a stall around mid-second term. At that point in time, the findings show two different scenarios. On the one hand, students who had been unable to effectively negotiate meaning within the new practices accepted ‘cultural conflict’ as an immutable reality. They were still extremely ‘attached’ to and influenced by their histories and consolidated their rejection of A&F diversity. On the other hand, those who developed some A&F ICC during the first term and the beginning of the second term tended to reach a plateau in the second part of term 2. In some cases, this seemed to be mainly because they had reached a co-negotiated balance between their undergraduate and postgraduate histories, developing sufficient A&F intercultural competence for the practices to be useful. They reported they found a compromise between effective (for them) and appropriate (for educators) A&F behaviours, often without completely discarding their previous histories. However, student narratives suggest that the development of ICC reached a stall for different reasons in different individual circumstances. Some reported that the time available to learn and develop through the practices was running out, and they were inclined to accept the ‘level’ of achievement reached up to that point in time. This caused a decrease in interest and

motivation to further improve their work through engagement with feedback. In addition, as mentioned in chapter 4, the COVID-19 situation and the changes this brought to the university were influential. The unsettling situation led to students feeling demotivated and ‘rushing’ to complete their degrees. It also appears that the no detriment policies introduced by the institution impacted on a decrease in motivation. Nevertheless, regardless of the COVID-19 circumstances, student reaching a plateau seems to concur with the observations of Quan et al. (2013, 2016) who argue that one year of postgraduate experience might be too brief for some students to go through the complex process of discovery that is required to re-negotiate their competencies and literacies. This finding has important implications for postgraduate education: given the role of time in A&F ICC and feedback literacy development, it seems paramount that this is considered and addressed very early in the academic year. Discussions about the practices and activities for building intercultural competence and feedback literacy are likely to be more beneficial if implemented throughout students’ postgraduate journey. The role of time is further discussed in section 5.3.2.

5.3 Research Question 2 – Role of Dialogic Feedback in International PGT Students’ Development of A&F ICC

Dialogic feedback processes are shown to have a vital role in student-participants’ development of assessment and feedback intercultural competence and, consequently, feedback literacy (Carless, 2020a). Their significance became particularly clear from the data obtained after the first submission(s) and ‘official’ feedback episode(s) towards the end of term one. Before experiencing feedback at the new institution, the student-participants rarely expected feedback to be a dialogic process. This was shown in their early narratives, where feedback dialogues and interactions were not mentioned. Most students tended to have quite low A&F ICC before the first feedback episodes. The findings discussed so far suggest that their competencies in the intercultural contexts of assessment and feedback were strongly impacted by their undergraduate histories. As detailed in the above section, before experiencing and engaging in dialogic feedback processes, ICC development was partly facilitated by purposeful and open discussions about the new practices. Despite the crucial role of such discussions,

the findings within this thesis reveal that what had the greatest impact on A&F ICC development was long-term engagement with dialogic feedback practices.

5.3.1 Enhanced Competencies

It appears that participating in feedback dialogues had significant benefits for the student-participants. The findings show that ongoing feedback interactions particularly contributed to the enhancement of some specific competencies that proved to be useful in intercultural assessment and feedback contexts. Firstly, two-way interactions facilitated the recognition of feedback in all its ‘forms’. In accordance with Carless and Boud’s (2018) observation, feedback was often initially identified as written corrective comments. Through engagement in dialogic processes, students were guided to recognise both the mechanisms and the forms of feedback. The findings suggest that appreciation of feedback as verbal communication was then facilitated, in line with Ajjawi and Boud’s (2017) observations. Further, by engaging in ongoing, future-orientated dialogic interactions, students began to recognise the formative and developmental purposes of assessment and feedback practices. Developing knowledge of mechanisms, technicalities, and purposes is fundamental, as it contributes to support feedback appreciation (further discussion is section 5.4.1).

Secondly, through feedback dialogues, students were supported to compare their ‘history-informed’ knowledge and competence against ‘new’ information. The findings reveal this often led to higher knowledge and awareness of diversity of prior and current A&F practices, critical re-negotiation of previous beliefs, and, ultimately, greater appreciation and engagement with both practices. This finding supports Nicol’s (2020) recent arguments: in his conceptual paper, he contends feedback always involves students making comparisons. What they compare their assessment performance against is determined by the knowledge and competence they have at a certain moment in time. The findings within this thesis suggest that, for international students, such knowledge heavily relies on previous experiences, in which assessment was underpinned by different values and purposes. The findings also reveal that ongoing dialogic feedback was a useful guide towards a re-definition of knowledge and competence: from an initial knowledge largely shaped by previous experiences towards a co-mediated,

intercultural knowledge. Nicol (2020) further argues that feedback is internally generated through such comparisons and these need to be made explicit for students and educators to effectively utilise them (Nicol and McCallum, 2021). The findings of this thesis support his contentions: they show that two-way feedback exchanges and interactions helped students 'externalise' the feedback that they internally generated in early stages of their postgraduate journey. By 'vocalising' the comparisons made and the internal feedback they generated, students could share the knowledge they were relying on. Through iterative and dialogic processes with educators and peers they could co-create a new, intercultural knowledge (Nonaka, 1991). This was shown to be fundamental, as it put an end to what some student-participants referred to as a 'trial and error' assessment processes that occurred when knowledge was not shared and co-constructed. The issue of initially blind 'trial and error' approaches to assessment was also recognised by Sadler (1989): in agreement with this thesis' findings, he observed that formative assessment and feedback practices could 'short-circuit the randomness and inefficiency of trial-and-error learning' (p. 120). Nicol (2020) similarly observes that students benefit from developing strategies to reach learning goals that are both external and internal products. Through dialogues, students 'make comparisons of their own thinking about their work with that of others and generate internal feedback' (Nicol, 2020, p. 4), rather than simply 'trying' to understand and align to what feedback 'providers' request. For international students in particular this is fundamental, as making comparisons of and evaluating different 'knowledges' is a crucial aspect of intercultural competence development.

Feedback dialogues also increased awareness of the practices' diversity. The findings show that higher awareness contributed to clarifying expectations of all involved in the new assessment and feedback contexts. This was shown to impact positively on intercultural emotional management: uncertainty was reduced as were emotions of anxiety and stress. Despite the positive influence of feedback interactions on increased diversity awareness, the findings suggest that awareness of the cultural nature of A&F diversity and of its origins in individuals' and institutions' diverse histories was rarely raised. In fact, feedback interactions that directly touched on the cultural aspects of the practices were only reported in a few of the students' narratives. As Falchikov (2005) contends, considering the

complex social and cultural context of assessment and feedback is fundamental, as meaning making does not happen in a vacuum. The findings within this thesis are in agreement with her observation, and show that, rather than simple ‘consideration’, what students benefit from is ‘integration’ of cultural aspects in feedback dialogues. Unfortunately, culturally aware and sensitive feedback interactions were rare. Nevertheless, when they did occur, they were reported with great enthusiasm by the student-narrators. As mentioned in the previous section, the few educators who encouraged such dialogues were those who had personal (direct or indirect) experience of A&F diversity across educational contexts. This finding reiterates the importance of developing intercultural competence for all involved in assessment and feedback processes within internationalised HE settings, including educators and institutions. The finding also concurs with the observations of Gravett et al. (2020) on the importance of considering experiences and literacies of educators. They suggest it would be crucial and beneficial to all to discuss the role of feedback literacy for educators and students alike. The findings of this thesis add that this would be also valuable for intercultural competence development of both students and educators.

Another competency that was particularly enhanced through dialogic feedback interactions was critical reflection. The findings show that feedback interactions promoted and supported student reflection on their histories, on the new A&F practices, and on their work. The findings support that two-way intercultural interactions helped reflection on the diverse opinions of those involved in feedback dialogues. In fact, through mediated sense-making students could re-define their opinions on what would be effective learning and good work. This finding is in line with previous research by Carless (2006) and Yang and Carless (2013) who also observe feedback dialogues are a good tool to foster interpersonal reconciliation of different perceptions. Within this thesis, the findings show that intercultural reconciliation is needed for international students, and dialogic feedback practices can foster this.

Ongoing engagement with feedback dialogues also supported student emotional management in the intercultural contexts of A&F. In addition to clarifying expectations and reducing uncertainty as mentioned previously in this section, the findings indicate that, over the long term, participants' affective

reactions linked to interactions with educators were managed. Emotions of fear, frustration, anxiety, and alienation were triggered when participating in early interactions (see section 5.2.3 for more detail). However, ongoing feedback dialogues facilitated the sense-making of the initially obscure assessment and feedback discourses, making such interactions less ‘scary’ and more accessible. Extended engagement with feedback interactions particularly reduced frustration and alienation, that were triggered by misunderstandings occurring within initial intercultural dialogues, corroborating what Gravett and Winstone (2020) contend about ‘broken’ and ineffective communication being a cause of alienation. This finding concurs with Mann’s (2001) observation that ‘alienation within unfamiliar contexts is not inevitable; it can be avoided or reduced by creating opportunity to question, examine, uncover, reframe, make visible and interpret’ (p. 17) unfamiliar discourses. The findings show feedback interactions represented a valuable opportunity to do so.

Further, dialogic, supported reflection seemed to enhance attitudes of openness and curiosity towards what was ‘new’ and different in A&F contexts. The findings show dialogue-mediated discovery of such ‘novelty’ helped reduce or resolve conflict arising where the diversity was unsettling. One of the novelties that feedback interactions helped uncover was the effectiveness of future-oriented behaviours within feedback processes. The findings reveal that, when dialogue was ongoing and highlighted the developmental and formative aspect of assessment and feedback, students were guided to shift their feedback behaviour from past- and present- to future-orientated. This was shown to support feedback enactment on future work.

Such insights support the existing literature that encourages the conceptualisation and operationalisation of feedback as a dialogic practice. Carless (2015) observes that dialogues should be encouraged as they support meaning-making of feedback information. The findings within this thesis’ support this and uncover that feedback dialogues are particularly important in intercultural contexts of A&F. At the intercultural level, in fact, they do not only facilitate sense-making of information about one’s work, but also about the new, diverse A&F practices. This is fundamental in the development of intercultural competence that can enhance student understanding and effective utilisation of the practices.

5.3.2 The Role of Time: Early and Continuous Interactions

The findings also show the crucial role of time in feedback interactions. In fact, it was revealed that when students were involved in dialogic feedback processes from very early stages of their postgraduate experience, their ICC of assessment and feedback practices increased earlier. A prompt development of A&F intercultural competence had positive outcomes for the students-participants: feedback literacy was re-negotiated from the start, and students were able to effectively utilise both assessment and feedback practices during term one. In contrast, ‘delayed’ feedback interactions reduced the usefulness of feedback and had a detrimental impact on the development of intercultural competence. The importance of timely feedback has been widely recognised in the literature (see, for example, Gibbs and Simpson, 2004; Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Mory, 2004; Poulos and Mahony, 2008), and is supported by the findings within this thesis. In fact, when the first feedback episode only occurred after ‘official’ submissions and late(r) in the first term of studies, feedback was considered as a one-way information transmission instrument for much longer. This consequently limited student enactment on future work across the whole first term of studies. This concurs with Carless’ (2018) findings on unclosed or single loop feedback, where students who receive late feedback tend to be unable to use it or they only utilise it for short-term problem solving. Carless’ 2020(a) observations are also in line with the findings within the current thesis: they uncover that the end of module/semester feedback’s effectiveness is limited as it does not provide direct opportunities to use the feedback long-term.

In the present thesis, it was also demonstrated that to build A&F ICC and re-negotiate feedback literacy that can be used with a long-term approach to learning, timely feedback needs to be accompanied by continuous engagement with feedback dialogues over time. In fact, when repeated opportunities to engage in purposeful feedback dialogues were given over time, the development of the main elements of intercultural competence continued. The findings show that when this happened, students were able to make use of such competencies (and the literacy they helped build) in longer term learning. They were able to develop new strategies to fine-tune their approach to learning through assessment tasks and feedback. This supports Carless’ (2018) and Malecka and Boud’s (2021) contentions on the vital role of ongoing and iterative feedback dialogues and processes within learning.

Carless observes that student learning through assessment and feedback is complex, slow, and can be compared to learning ‘spirals’. To account for such spiral-like, long-term learning, feedback strategies should consider ‘cycles of tackling assignments, engaging with feedback, reflecting and making ongoing adjustments’ (p. 9). The findings within this thesis concur with his observations; for international students in particular, feedback spirals are likely to account for the complexity of the intercultural learning experience that is integrated in ‘new’ feedback literacy development. Recent research on feedback literacy (e.g., Malecka et al., 2020; Tripodi et al., 2020) also stresses the need to have progressive and reflexive feedback and assessment tasks (e.g., portfolios) as a facilitator to feedback literacy development. Boud and Molloy (2013) also support this and argue that to encourage student uptake of feedback, assessment should be designed to allow for and facilitate cycles of processing and using feedback. Similarly, Ryan et al. (2020) recently developed a framework of 12 attributes for text-based feedback to support learner-centred feedback design; within their framework, promoting ongoing dialogue and active student engagement are core attributes. Molloy et al. (2020) observe this should be done from early stages of students’ developmental journeys (first year) to avoid limiting opportunities for engagement. The findings within this thesis support what these researchers contend, adding that dialogic feedback supporting ongoing reflection was crucial for the particular group of students within this thesis. In fact, unlike others, they had previous extensive experience with different A&F practices in other contexts of HE and needed time and multiple opportunities to develop their A&F intercultural competence and feedback literacy at the British institution. The longitudinal design of this research helped uncover the complex, long-term development of intercultural competence and feedback literacy. It allowed to discover that time and repeated opportunities for (spiral-like) feedback interactions contribute to such development. This corroborates previous implications from Carless (2020b), who advocates for the value of longitudinal research in the field of feedback.

5.3.3 Dialogue Facilitators

Interestingly, students reported they benefited from and valued not only one-to-one verbal dialogues with educators, but also from lecturer-facilitated group dialogues, written (email) exchanges, and peer

feedback dialogues. Amongst these, peer exchanges and interactions were more frequently mentioned in student narratives. The findings show they supported learning and facilitated further participation in student-educator dialogues. Particularly the students who initially felt more uncomfortable interacting with educators (section 5.2.3) reported they benefited from peer feedback dialogues. They articulated that engaging with peers allowed them to learn collectively and to build confidence to communicate about their work, consequently facilitating student-lecturer dialogues. These findings are in agreement with those of Ferenz (2005) and Taha and Cox (2016), who observe that international students tend to value discussing their work within their social networks of peers and friends. The findings also support those of Chew, Snee, and Price (2016) and Fan, Robson and Leat (2015), who reported that peer assessment can enhance international students' experiences with assessment and feedback. This is interesting, particularly as the participants in this thesis tended to participate in such peer dialogues regardless of whether they were requested to do so or not. The fact that students independently chose to build informal peer networks to discuss and compare their work suggests that peer assessment and feedback have the potential to be particularly useful to international PGTs. Although they were not one of the foci of this thesis, the findings from students' narratives suggest that peer dialogues are worth investigating within A&F ICC development. Further research is required to understand how peer activities can be designed and implemented to support a collective renegotiation and development of competencies.

The findings also suggest that the absence of a draft system prevented some students from establishing a two-way dialogue about their initial work during term 1, hindering their understanding of feedback purposes, their ability to process it, and to enact it. This supports what many researchers have found about the value of drafts: engaging students in feedback dialogues about early versions of their work can support their ability to make aligned judgements (Covic and Jones, 2008; Wingate, 2010). Court (2014) argues that a 'first draft-tutor-feedback-redraft' process for first year undergraduate students can support understanding and implementation of criteria and requirements. The findings in this thesis indicate that this would be appreciated and could be valuable for international postgraduate students as well.

Some of the students whose narratives contributed to this thesis also articulated that exemplars were a good alternative to drafts. They reported that working with exemplars in class allowed them to establish a dialogue about assessment tasks and minimise the element of ‘surprise’ when approaching unfamiliar tasks (see Winstone and Carless, 2020). Their assertions suggest that, although based on others’ work, exemplars helped them to make sense of assessment criteria and requirements, to reflect on the feedback given on exemplars and to utilise it in their work, in line with Orr, Yorke and Blair’s (2014) and Howe et al. (2020) observations. This practice seemed to be useful also when discussions about exemplars occurred between peers, as long as it was initially guided and scaffolded by educators. Such viewpoints seem to align with those reported in the literature (e.g., Boud and Carless, 2018; Sambell and Graham, 2020), that recognises the benefits of utilising examples in higher education and for building feedback literacy in particular. Further, this finding concurs with research reporting students are often very positive about working with exemplars (Sambell, 2011), and adds that international students particularly welcome such an opportunity before engaging with any ‘official’ assessment task.

Lastly, it seemed clear from students’ narratives that, although ongoing two-way feedback dialogues were particularly helpful to support A&F ICC development, they needed to be endorsed by critical discussion about the practices, as explored in the previous section. The findings suggest that such discussions were particularly important to ensure that communication within feedback dialogues was aligned and effective. Discussing what was considered to be effective and appropriate in feedback dialogues supported student confidence and willingness to engage. For instance, the findings show it helped students recognise their responsibilities within feedback processes, manage possible fear of engaging in discussions that originated from their histories, and supported reflection and curiosity. In short, the findings reveal that discussions about A&F practices were needed to lay the foundations of ICC, preparing students to discuss within feedback processes effectively and appropriately. Only then could students engage in purposeful, ongoing dialogic feedback that supported further intercultural competence development over time.

5.3.4 Reality Check: the Rhetoric of Dialogic Feedback

Despite the crucial role of feedback as a dialogic process in student development of A&F ICC, some students interviewed in this thesis lamented that dialogic feedback processes were often only rhetoric at the British university where the research took place. These students reported being encouraged to seek feedback and to establish communication about their work with lecturers; nevertheless, they also reported lecturers refusing to do so until after official submission. According to fewer students' stories, some lecturers never gave the opportunity for one-to-one or class dialogue on their work. This seems to be in line with the literature's argument that, despite the rich research evidence and suggestions, feedback as a dialogic practice still needs to be encouraged and needs the participation of both educators and students (Van der Kleij et al., 2019; Winstone, 2022; Winstone et al., 2019). Further, in agreement with previous research, the participants in this thesis observed that feedback dialogues were often not useful for future work outside of a specific module. Such assertions align with what Gibbs and Simpson (2004) and Carless (2018) suggested: the modularisation of contemporary HE and the compartmentalisation of assessment tasks within modules has made it harder for students to engage in feedback dialogues that are useful to improve future work.

5.4 Research Question 3 – Influence of International PGT Students' A&F ICC on Feedback Literacy Development

To answer the third research question as clearly as possible, this discussion section is divided into four parts. Each sub-section highlights what elements of student A&F ICC were found to have an impact on the four components of Carless and Boud's (2018) feedback literacy model, that are feedback appreciation, making judgements on ones' work, managing emotions in feedback contexts, and taking action on the feedback. Such breakdown of RQ3 discussion also aims to explore the adapted framework of A&F ICC and feedback literacy development that can be visualised in figure 12. This was generated by drawing on the two existing frameworks of intercultural competence and feedback literacy as presented in the literature review (Yarosh et al., 2018 and Carless and Boud, 2018) and on the findings of this thesis. Based on this framework, the section discusses (1) the link between enhanced knowledge and awareness and feedback appreciation; (2) intercultural critical reflection and its impact on

judgements made about work; (3) emotional management in the intercultural context of A&F and feedback emotions management; and (4) the influence of the development of attitudes and skills on student enactment of feedback.

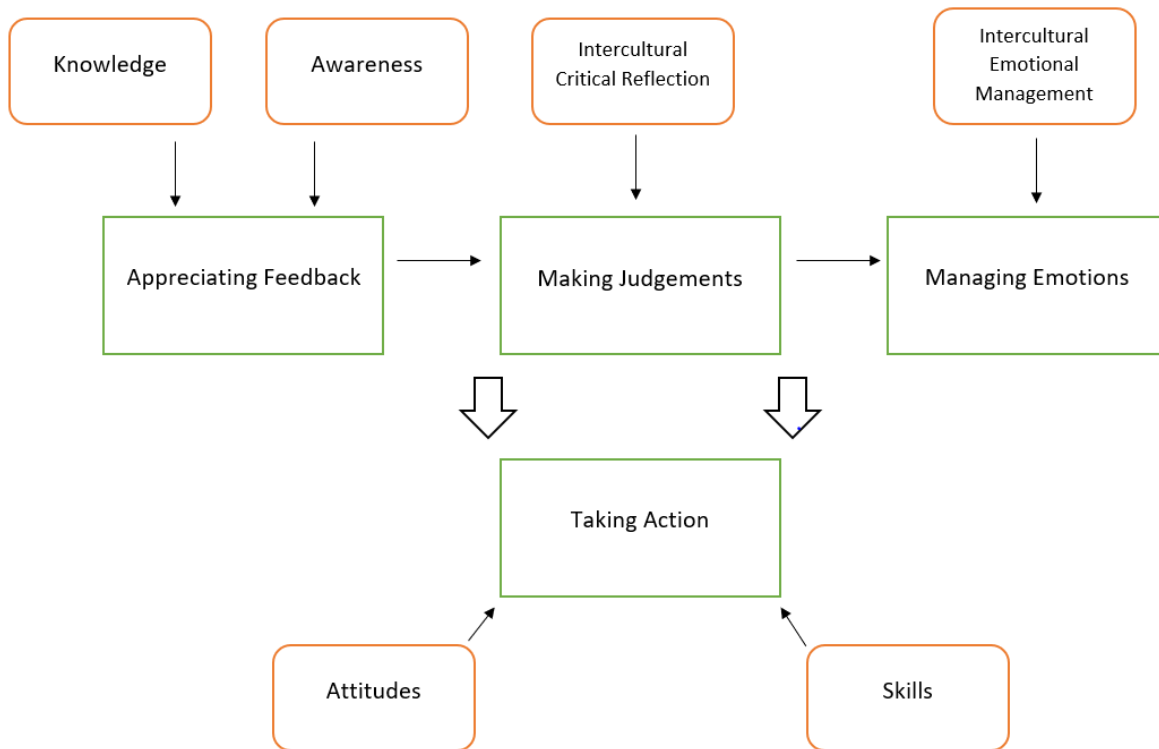


Figure 12 - Assessment and Feedback Intercultural Competence and Feedback Literacy Framework

5.4.1 Knowledge, Awareness, and Appreciating Feedback

It was clear from the interviews and diary entries collected in the first few months of students’ postgraduate journeys that they had a diverse tacit knowledge of A&F practices and different levels of A&F diversity awareness, as discussed previously. The findings suggest their knowledge and awareness of both assessment and feedback practices impacted on how – and if – student-participants initially recognised, appreciated, and conceptualised feedback in the new HE environment. Awareness and knowledge appear to be intertwined, and their enhancement seems to support the development of feedback recognition and appreciation over time. What determined the initial A&F ICC and influenced its development was discussed in the previous sections and will not be repeated here. Instead, the focus

of this sub-section is on the impact that A&F knowledge and awareness changes over time had on the development of student appreciation of feedback and their own roles within feedback processes.

Firstly, it appears that student knowledge of mechanisms and technicalities that characterise assessment and feedback practices influenced their ability to locate and recognise feedback in the new context. This is considered to be fundamental as a first step toward effective utilisation of feedback (Carless and Boud, 2018). The findings show that when student-participants tacitly ‘knew’ assessment as a summative practice and feedback as corrections and grades, they only recognised feedback in the form of written comments accompanying (and explaining) a mark, in line with Aremit et al.’s (2020) findings. Therefore, in some cases, students could only initially locate and recognise in-text grammatical and syntactical corrections. The findings further suggest that their knowledge of the virtual learning environments (VLEs) where feedback was provided was often low and so was their knowledge of feedback ‘forms’; if they did not know what to seek and where, they were ultimately unable to identify and appreciate the feedback. This is in line with Carless and Boud’s (2018) arguments about students often recognising only written comments as feedback, overlooking all that is verbal feedback. This finding also supports those of Hepplestone et al. (2011) and Jonsson (2012) who suggest that the use of VLEs to enhance feedback processes can be beneficial but can have different outcomes for different students. For international PGT students with a diverse knowledge, the ability to locate and recognise feedback can be initially low or absent, particularly within unfamiliar VLEs. Further corroborating this point, the findings show that students whose knowledge of technicalities was higher from the start, feedback was more easily located and recognised. Overall, when such knowledge developed over time, so did student recognition of feedback.

The findings also suggest that students’ initial knowledge of purposes, philosophies and values that underpin A&F impacted on their conceptualisation of feedback. As feedback was conceptualised by students and educators differently, student appreciation of the ‘new’ feedback practices was initially low. For instance, many student-participants tacitly knew the purposes of assessment as checking the information retained up to a certain moment in time, whereas feedback would be the judgement provided by experts on the quality and quantity of what was memorised. Many conceptualised

assessment as summative and compartmentalised and had no reason to recognise and appreciate feedback as an ongoing, developmental process. It appears that only the few who already understood assessment and feedback as formative and developmental could appreciate feedback processes in the new context from the start, further demonstrating that knowledge of A&F impacts on feedback appreciation.

The findings reveal that when (and if) students began to recognise assessment as a formative and developmental practice, they were also more likely to appreciate feedback as an ongoing developmental process. The findings clearly show that only when students became aware of the different forms and purposes assessment can have, they also started to recognise feedback as other than a grades, corrections, or explanation of grades. Such observations suggest the need to gain enough knowledge of the purposes of the new assessment practices to then recognise feedback and its role.

Further, the findings suggest that student-participants' knowledge of the A&F purposes impacted on their capacity to recognise and appreciate educators' expectations and players' responsibilities in assessment and feedback contexts. As Winstone et al. (2019) argue, responsibility in feedback processes should be shared by students and educators. Nevertheless, the findings show that, initially, students tended to consider themselves responsible only for accepting experts' judgements and implementing corrections made on their work. The student-participants did not immediately appreciate they were responsible for actively participating in feedback processes and exchanges. They rather tended to attribute a greater responsibility to lecturers, who needed to provide them with 'corrections' and information on past performances. Recognising feedback as a reciprocal, shared process is recognised as a fundamental aspect of feedback literacy (Molloy et al., 2020). The findings suggest that increased knowledge and awareness of roles, responsibilities, and expectations in assessment and feedback contexts is needed for international students to recognise the value of taking an active role alongside their educators within feedback processes. Such recognition encouraged students to seek feedback dialogues; when this happened, student-participants were more likely to appreciate feedback also as verbal and dialogic interactions. This finding is in alignment with the observations of the many researchers who argue for the importance of enhancing student active involvement in feedback

processes (e.g., Molloy et al., 2019; Winstone et al., 2017). Moreover, it makes a new contribution: for international PGT students, the development of knowledge and awareness of the diverse A&F purposes can facilitate their recognition of the value of active agency.

Very similarly to knowledge, the findings portray awareness of the diversity that characterises assessment, feedback, and the individuals involved in the practices as influential in students' appreciation of feedback. It appears that higher initial awareness of a potential diversity across academic cultures and contexts contributed to students' willingness to seek further information about the practices and to seek feedback itself. This, in turn, contributed to higher knowledge of A&F mechanisms, purposes, and expectations, and, ultimately, to higher feedback appreciation. Conversely, when awareness of diversity was lower, the tendency was to assume that what was 'familiar' would be universally so (Cortazzi and Jin, 2013); consequently, they did not believe they needed to seek information and struggled to recognise and appreciate the new reality of A&F. In this regard, the contentions of Crommelick and Anseel (2013) on the importance of students actively seeking information and feedback are supported by the findings within this thesis.

The findings suggest that increased awareness and knowledge were mutually reinforced and co-supported the development of feedback appreciation. In fact, it appears that initial awareness of potential diversity led to information/feedback seeking behaviours that contributed to knowledge development; in turn, the knowledge acquired contributed to further awareness of where the diversity specifically lied. Jandt (2016) and Neuliep (2015) observations seem to be in line with this finding, although they are limited to the impact of knowledge on awareness and seem to overlook the inverse relationship.

Moreover, when knowledge and awareness of the diverse A&F practices were developed early in the academic year, student-participants could appreciate feedback from the very first months of their postgraduate studies. The findings suggest this was crucial, as it contributed to feedback enactment as early as term one. Nevertheless, as discussed in section 5.3, this only happened when open and direct discussions about the practices were encouraged from the start. This reiterates the importance of guaranteeing students have multiple, continuous opportunities for dialogic feedback from early stages

of their learning journeys. When students did not receive such initial guidance and continued opportunities, their knowledge, awareness and therefore feedback appreciation could develop to some extent only. This seemed to be a much slower and uncertain process that tended to have two possible undesired outcomes: the development of feedback literacy too late in the academic year for feedback to be really useful, or the rejection of the new feedback culture because it was not readily understood. This supports recent literature contentions relating to the importance of embedding feedback literacy development opportunities in the curriculum (Malecka et al., 2020). For international students, embedding feedback literacy and intercultural competence development in the curriculum can be beneficial as risks of late feedback literacy development and rejection of feedback can be lowered.

5.4.2 Intercultural Critical Reflection and Making Judgements

The findings of this thesis reveal that student-participants' ability to independently make judgements on their work was related to intercultural critical reflection competencies. The development of their capacity and willingness to critically reflect about their work and about the new assessment and feedback practices was demonstrated to be fundamental. As the findings show, reflexivity, criticality, and self-evaluation of one's work were not often part of the international student-participants' A&F previous experience. This finding partly contradicts Nicol's (2020) contentions on students generating inner feedback: international students who recognise feedback as an external, top-down, and one-way judgement are initially unlikely to do so. In fact, most students seemed to struggle with reflexivity and critical self-evaluation of work, corroborating what researchers have argued about international students' difficulties in anglophones academic contexts (e.g., Askill-Williams and Lawson, 2005; Asmar, 2005; Ryan and Carroll, 2005; Robson and Turner, 2007). Nevertheless, previous literature does not appear to report the importance of such findings within the contexts of feedback. This thesis' findings also confirm what the literature widely supports: developing intercultural critical reflection is fundamental for effective communication in intercultural contexts (Moon, 2010; Yarosh et al., 2018), and particularly in intercultural A&F contexts (Nicol, 2020). In fact, when the student-participants struggled to critically reflect about and within the intercultural A&F practices, they also found it

challenging to develop the ability to make informed and aligned evaluations on their work, which has been widely considered a fundamental element of feedback literacy (e.g., Carless and Boud, 2018; Molloy et al., 2020; Tai et al., 2018). In early stages of their postgraduate studies, making judgements on one's own work proved to be difficult. On the one hand, students who held different (or no) opinions on A&F practices and on what is 'good' work did not feel ready to make their own evaluation. On the other hand, students who attempted to evaluate their work were largely unaware of others' diverse opinions. Because of this, they were unable to critically reflect on such diversity and struggled to make informed evaluations. The student-participants also articulated they initially struggled and felt uncomfortable about critically discussing their work with educators. Such lack of willingness to discuss about and within the practices did not stimulate reflection nor active participation in feedback processes. Nevertheless, in later interviews and diary entries, students articulated how their willingness and ability to critically discuss with educators developed throughout the academic year, and so did their ability to evaluate their own work with the feedback's support.

It also appears that students were often initially inclined to evaluate their work based on criteria valued in past environments, corroborating what Nicol (2019, 2020) contends about students making comparisons with previous work and experiences. For example, the findings indicate that, at first, students tended to evaluate their completed performances in terms of amount or quality of information memorised and reproduced, overlooking the fact that educators in the new context might not value that as highly as students did. Because of such focus on compartmentalised 'reproduction of knowledge', students rarely constructed judgements on their work in order to develop strategies that could improve their future approaches to new tasks. Some of the student-participants struggled to 'decentre' and to consider, respect, and understand others' perspectives and views on the work. In such circumstances, many did not use the feedback to mediate evaluative judgements on their work, nor did they act on the feedback to improve future work.

In some cases, the student-participants in this thesis passively and unconditionally accepted their lecturers' 'judgements', considering and respecting others' perspectives but without attempting to understand them. It follows that the feedback 'received' was considered as the sole 'judgement' needed.

This was passively and instrumentally enacted to satisfy feedback providers and achieve higher grades. In such cases, student interest was not to consider and reflect on others' perspectives to improve their work and learn. Rather, by 'executing' feedback messages, they intended to produce a piece of work that would be appreciated by educators and that would grant them a better grade. Some did achieve higher grades but did not internalise the feedback nor reflect on it. These observations mirror what Bennett (2013) describes as the phase of 'acceptance' of cultural differences that does not necessarily lead to understanding and taking other's perspectives. Where critical reflection and discussion within feedback processes were absent, students struggled to consider and use the feedback as a tool to re-shape and re-build their own opinions and did not take into consideration what was perceived as quality work in the new environment. However, the findings suggest that increased familiarity with the concepts of reflexivity and criticality alongside their functions and purposes within A&F practices changed students' approach to judging their work. They did not base their work decisions and judgements uniquely on what was learnt in their previous university environment but began to consider the 'new' educators' perspectives. Further, judgements were no longer only made to evaluate completed performances, but student-participants began to look at constructing evaluations to improve their approach to future work.

The findings also indicate that international students benefited from the following: (1) the ability to critically analyse the A&F practices experienced in previous and current HE environments, and (2) to critically reflect on the different opinions that individuals held on the purposes, mechanism, and values of A&F. Such competencies laid the foundations for students to make informed and aligned judgements on their work. In fact, when the participants reported listening to others' opinions and re-negotiating their own through feedback processes, their evaluations seemed to be re-shaped. Concurring with De Corte (1990), reflection leads students to compare their strategies and solution processes with those of others. This often began with students drawing comparisons between their and others' views and between previous and current practices. Nevertheless, it evolved into making judgements that took into consideration an analysis of both opinions, values, and practices' purposes. Further, as they built the ability to critically analyse the old and new A&F practices, students began to 'modify' the lens

through which they perceived the practices and through which they originally formed their evaluation. Interestingly, the observations, evaluations, and judgements began to be made with the support of feedback. The findings suggest that when student criticality and reflexivity developed, feedback began to be utilised as ‘scaffold’ to build aligned and effective judgements. This seems to support what Nicol (2020) argues: for feedback to be effective, students need to develop the ability to generate it internally, and this happens as the result of a complex set of comparative and analytic processes (see section 5.3.2 for more detail on the role of feedback dialogues within such processes).

A&F intercultural critical reflection developed over time for many, especially for those who had opportunities and encouragement to be critical and reflexive. The findings suggest that encouraging critical discussion about and within the practices was crucial, in particular for the students who tended to avoid it because of previous experiences. In fact, it seemed that without encouragement, student-participants continued to struggle to recognise, accept, understand, and internalise its value in A&F contexts. This is of utmost importance as, once critical discussion and reflection were valued and practised, students became more capable of making informed judgements on their work, using the feedback to guide their evaluation. With time and ongoing engagement with dialogic feedback processes, students were able to develop their own working strategies and to form their own judgements, with feedback being less of a necessary guide.

5.4.3 Intercultural Emotional Management and Managing Feedback Emotions

The findings within the present thesis suggest that international students are likely to be faced with complex emotions triggered by diversity in intercultural contexts as much as by assessment and feedback situations and processes. This is a valuable insight, as it supports and brings together what has been suggested about affect within the literature on intercultural competence and assessment and feedback. The findings of this thesis align with those of the many researchers who have observed how interacting at the intercultural level can trigger peculiar (often initially negative) emotional reactions. These need to be both understood and regulated for effective intercultural communication to take place (Ting-Toomey, 1993; Mak et al., 2013). For the international student-participants in this thesis,

emotions were mainly triggered by interacting in contexts of A&F characterised by cultural diversity. Diversity of practices, unfamiliarity with feedback dialogues, language and discourses, and diversity of student-lecturer interactions within A&F seemed to be what mainly caused negative emotional reactions. This supports what the literature stresses about the role of the affective and interpersonal dimensions of feedback (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017) and uncovers how this is intensified when feedback interactions occur in an unfamiliar, intercultural context. However, the findings also show that, as students were increasingly able to recognise and manage emotional responses triggered by diversity and interculturality, their capability to do the same with emotions within assessment and feedback processes also seemed to develop.

It was clear from the initial interviews and diary entries that the student-participants experienced high levels of uncertainty and confusion. This was often related to them facing diverse perspectives and expectations within A&F. Confusion and uncertainty seemed to be experienced particularly by students who were aware of diversity but could not identify where the diversity lied, in line with the findings from Yarosh et al. (2018). The student-participants in this thesis articulated these were challenging emotions to acknowledge, accept, and manage. Uncertainty often seemed to be a 'paralysing' emotional state that caused disengagement, particularly when it lasted long-term. Research by Deardorff (2008) has highlighted the importance of 'tolerating' uncertainty in intercultural contexts, and Yarosh et al. (2018) considered the importance of managing affective reactions to 'accept' and deal with uncertainty. However, most previous literature has considered emotion-management as a supporting competency to other 'core' elements in ICC. The findings within this thesis rather suggest that, within intercultural contexts of assessment and feedback, emotional understanding and management are crucial elements that need full consideration.

Initially, students uniquely reported their affective responses in assessment situations. They either only recognised assessment as an academic practice or considered feedback as a mere 'extension' of assessment. Within assessment contexts, they experienced prolonged confusion as a result of diversity, and this often escalated into feelings of stress, anxiety, and fear. The findings indicate such transformation of confusion into more negative emotions was related to the importance students

attributed to assessment. Students expected to be as successful as they used to be in their previous HE contexts. Since assessment was their ‘achievement measure’, lack of clarity was particularly destabilising. This concurs with Higgins et al.’s (2001) observation that students invest in their assignments, and this generates expectations and consequent emotional responses when expectations are not met. For the international students within this thesis, the previous experiences of assessment did not seem to have equipped them to face the diversity of the practice in the new environment. In line with what Carroll and Ryan (2005) contend, the initial fear of not being successful triggered stress and anxiety.

Students reported experiencing similar feelings in feedback contexts as soon as they recognised feedback to be a practice. However, as the new feedback practices were more unfamiliar to the student-participants compared to assessment, the levels of confusion and uncertainty expressed were higher, and so was student anxiety about dealing with the ‘unknown’. Moreover, being faced with feedback dialogues and exchanges with educators within a different academic culture seemed to cause further stress and fear. The findings suggest that unfamiliarity with student-lecturer dialogues and the ‘norms’ that define them, alongside linguistic and discourse power imbalances and previous negative experiences of approaching educators triggered negative, often deactivating emotions. Nevertheless, the results show that, over time, students who could or were supported to deal with such emotions felt increasingly more empowered and comfortable about participating in intercultural feedback interactions. This finding is in accordance with Noble et al. (2019) observations: empowering students to actively engage with feedback is a fundamental aspect of feedback literacy, which should be enhanced through literacy development programmes.

The findings within this thesis reveal that the shift from fear and passiveness to empowerment and proactive agency mainly happened when educators encouraged students to participate actively in feedback dialogues, reassuring them that active involvement was valued. Educators were found to have a role in this: noticing students’ reluctance and taking action to minimise it was fundamental. This seemed to help students recognise and manage emotions triggered in unfamiliar situations and was, in turn, crucial to encourage student engagement with and successful utilisation of the feedback.

The findings also reveal that negative emotions were not reduced over time when feedback was delayed or absent. Rather, confusion, stress and anxiety evolved into emotions of frustration and alienation. In extreme circumstances where such emotions and their origins were not recognised nor dealt with, student-participants attempted to 'reduce' their impact by simply avoiding or rejecting the practices altogether. This seems to support the contentions of Ryan and Henderson (2017) about students rejecting or ignoring feedback that causes negative affective reactions. Further, it strengthens this thesis claim that uncertainty and confusion originating from diversity need to be reduced for feedback to have a positive role in international students' experience, aligning with findings from Pitt and Norton (2017).

Peer feedback and support seemed to help reduce uncertainty and manage expectations. However, for most students, expectations were often only clarified in relation to the completed task when feedback was used – and provided – with reference to past performance. Further, misalignment of expectations, conceptualisation and operationalisation of the A&F was reported to exist across modules, leaving students uncertain about how to behave. This was also previously reported in research by Hartley and Chesworth (2000) who observed that heterogeneity across educators' feedback left students unable to implement the feedback. The findings show the need for uncertainty and confusion caused by diversity both in intercultural A&F contexts and across modules need to be reduced. This would lower the risk of students' experience with assessments and feedback becoming a disruptive emotional rollercoaster characterised by unsettling ambiguity.

The findings further suggest that empathy can play a fundamental role in emotional management, supporting the researchers who have recognised the value of empathy within intercultural emotional competence (e.g., Imahori and Lanigan, 1989; Gudykunst, 1993; Spitzberg and Cupach, 1984; Deardorff, 2006). Students who had or developed empathy towards diversity of A&F and of individuals involved in the practices were more likely to recognise the intercultural origins of the emotions they experienced. Consequently, they could manage them more easily. In fact, students who were able or developed the capacity and willingness to be understanding towards their own and educators' diverse perspectives, tended to be more likely to welcome A&F diversity and to understand

the related uncertainty and confusion. Because of this, they seemed to show less-defensive responses to the new practices. The findings show that empathy contributed to reducing disbelief about cultural diversity of A&F; empathetic students seemed to experience less stress, anxiety and fear and were able to maintain better emotional equilibrium in the feedback processes. The findings also suggest they were more motivated to discover and engage with the practices. They were also more likely to seek feedback to further reduce uncertainty and confusion. This does not mean students who were or became more empathetic did not experience negative, deactivating emotions. Nevertheless, their empathy supported them in normalising and processing such emotions in a kinder and more understanding way.

The literature has frequently suggested that, in order to manage emotions in feedback contexts, students benefit from the establishment of a trusting atmosphere between all involved in feedback dialogues (Carless and Winstone, 2020). The findings within this thesis concur with this contention and highlight how trust was particularly important for the international student-participants. Trust seemed to be, in fact, related to empathy: students articulated that, in order to create an intercultural feedback culture of trust, empathy needed to be shown by educators as much as students. Feedback dialogues occurred in an intercultural context wherein lecturers and students had diverse cultural perspectives on A&F. Thus, student empathy needed to be met with equal lecturer empathy for them to feel positively about engaging in feedback relations. If empathy was shown by lecturers, students tended to express gratefulness, whilst feeling relieved, motivated, and 'seen' by the other. Educators' efforts to take and understand student perspectives helped build an atmosphere of trust, where students felt appreciated, valued, and empowered to seek and participate in feedback exchanges, in line with previous research (e.g., Carless, 2013). Nevertheless, such a trusting atmosphere was often absent, as students articulated lecturers' inability to appreciate the existence of diverse perspectives. Unfortunately, this led to students feeling disappointed, disheartened, and upset. Previous literature has argued students do not seem to welcome feedback invitations to adopt new perspectives (Forsythe and Johnson, 2017). The findings of this thesis appear to conflict with this; in fact, most of the student-participants within this thesis attempted (at different points in time) to understand educators' different cultural perspectives, especially when a similar effort was perceived from educators alike. The findings do indicate that some

students directly rejected the practices and discard others' perspectives; nevertheless, they reveal this was often a reaction to requests of one-way 'adaptation'. What was most detrimental was the lack of 'explicit' reasons for educators 'requesting' such adaptation; students tended to perceive this as lack of consideration and respect of their own perspectives. This is in alignment with the importance Sutton (2012) attributes to educators 'showing care' towards learners. He observes care can have a crucial role in encouraging student engagement with feedback. Furthermore, these findings support Watling and Gilsburg's (2018) perspective on the nature of trust: they argue trust does not simply 'materialise' but is only developed on the basis of clarity of intentions and goals of both assessment and feedback practices, clarity that most students within this thesis reported was not made.

In a similar way, the findings suggest that trust could not be built where the language used for intercultural feedback communication was inaccessible, and empathy towards different cultural components of discourses was not shown by educators. Students initially felt frustrated and angry when misalignment was not uncovered and caused ineffective communication. Lecturers' empathy and willingness to clarify and explain concepts underpinning obscure language helped boost confidence and reduce frustration. Consequently, feedback dialogues became more accessible, and this encouraged student engagement.

Building a culture of trust in which students were supported to manage emotions triggered by the diversity of assessment and feedback practices seemed to help manage emotions more directly related to feedback messages and dialogues. For example, previous literature on emotional reactions to feedback has often reported students experiencing negative affective reactions when faced with critical comments (Robinson, Pope, and Holyoak, 2013). Interestingly, this did not seem to be a particular issue for the postgraduate students in this research who seemed to be able to deal with it if an intercultural feedback culture of trust was established.

5.4.4 Attitudes, Skills, and Taking Action

The findings suggest that the student-participants benefited from having and developing a set of useful attitudes and skills to communicate intercultural. When students were able and willing to utilise them

in the new assessment and feedback contexts, they were also more likely to choose to enact the feedback on future work. Researchers have argued that a purposeful and mediated re-negotiation of one's beliefs and predispositions is beneficial for effective and appropriate communication to happen in intercultural contexts (e.g., Fantini, 2006; Hammer et al., 2003). In accordance with this, the findings of this thesis suggest that student-participants who showed attitudes of openness towards others' beliefs and were willing to re-consider their predispositions towards assessment and feedback were more likely to understand the value of feedback and to choose to take action on it. In fact, the findings indicate that students did not initially enact the feedback. This was due to pre-existent beliefs and predispositions that were shaped during their undergraduate experience, in which feedback did not have an important role in learning. The role of feedback was to 'judge' completed performances; consequently, students were not predisposed to be proactive agents within feedback processes, nor did they believe this was important. Previous literature tends to report students are not particularly successful at acting on the feedback (Robinson et al., 2013) as they often do not possess strategies to do so (Carless and Boud, 2018). Winstone et al. (2019b) observe that student beliefs about the utility of feedback and predispositions towards the utilisation of feedback play an important role in feedback uptake. Nevertheless, to my knowledge, the existing literature does not appear to report on what might determine such beliefs, predisposition, and the 'absence' of strategies to act on the feedback. The findings within this thesis add to new knowledge in this area, uncovering the diverse beliefs and predispositions towards A&F and low intercultural competence can hinder feedback enactment for international PGT students.

The findings indicate that re-negotiation of beliefs about assessment was crucial: when assessment was considered to be about 'providing proof' of acquired knowledge and feedback was seen as the lecturers' opinion on the quality of the demonstrated knowledge (see section 5.2 for more), student-participants believed that their roles and responsibilities only lied within assessment. They considered themselves as responsible for acquiring knowledge and reproducing it in their work, whereas it was solely their educators' responsibility to evaluate their work. Based on such beliefs, they did not see the need (and did not have the strategies) for being active agents in feedback processes. Supporting

Gravett's (2020) argument, active agency is shown to be context related. When students did not believe feedback contexts to be a 'place' where agency is beneficial, they did not uptake an active role. Such findings seem to concur with those of Winstone et al. (2019a) and add new knowledge about the reasons behind international student perceptions of responsibilities and active agency in feedback processes.

The findings also show that student-participants initially construed feedback as a one-way transmission of information on the completed work rather than a two-way dialogic practice. They tended to passively implement the feedback messages they recognised as 'corrections' and did not appreciate the role of active and future-orientated engagement. This finding confirms the importance of re-negotiating student attitudes towards the purposes of intercultural assessment and feedback practices to support feedback enactment. In fact, only when students shifted their beliefs and predisposition from summative and past- or present-orientated practices towards formative and future-orientated they could recognise the role of feedback enactment. Shifting attitudes led students to recognise the value of taking action on the feedback. Only after recognising its value, they became more likely to choose to be active agents in feedback processes.

It also appears that students' attitudes of openness and curiosity towards the diversity of the new assessment and feedback practices contributed to students' willingness to discover diversity and consequently enact the feedback. This finding is in line with the importance that previous research on ICC attributes to curiosity and openness (e.g., Byram, Nichols and Stevens, 2001; Deardorff, 2006; Spencer-Oatey, 2012), and adds that this is also key for feedback literacy development in intercultural contexts. When the student-participants were open and curious, they sought feedback to understand the purposes of assessment and actively initiated discussions to uncover the roles, values, and mechanisms of feedback itself. Interestingly, they were also less likely to show attitudes of 'othering' and to reject or avoid the utilisation of the new practices. On the contrary, openness and curiosity made them increasingly willing to discover what was new and to re-negotiate what they believed were effective and appropriate feedback behaviours. The findings reveal that behaving actively in feedback processes was linked to such attitudes.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that the student-participants who showed flexibility in their behaviours were more willing to discover and appreciate the diversity of behaviours that were ‘expected’ and perceived as effective in the new assessment and feedback contexts. For instance, when students showed flexibility, they also tended to recognise that effective and appropriate behaviours in a summative and grade-orientated context were different from the desired and expected behaviours within formative and developmental feedback processes. The findings suggest that behaviour flexibility supported student willingness to enact the feedback within dialogic and ongoing feedback processes. In this regard, the contentions of Kim (1992) about the importance of showing flexibility to modify some of the old cultural ways of ‘doing’ in intercultural contexts seems to be supported by the findings of this thesis, that add how this is crucial in intercultural assessment and feedback contexts.

Earlier in this section, the importance of students recognising A&F as contexts where agency is appreciated and useful was discussed. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that simple ‘recognition’ is not sufficient to guarantee proactive engagement. Rather, it needs to be supported by students’ appreciation of the value of independent and active learning about and within assessment and feedback practices. It appears that, despite the initial unfamiliarity of most student-participants with the concepts of self and active learning, when students began to appreciate its role and value in A&F situations, they became more likely to seek feedback, take responsibility in the feedback processes, and to use the feedback for future work. Student-participants initially only articulated they appreciated active and independent learning in assessment contexts, as feedback was conceptualised and perceived – and at times even operationalised by educators - as one-way transmission comments. Only when given opportunities and encouragement to proactively seek feedback and actively take part in feedback dialogues, their attitude shifted: engagement increased, as did the recognition of the importance of taking action on the feedback. Recent research has questioned whether extensive educators’ encouragement, ‘presence’, and responsibilities in feedback processes might be detrimental to students’ independence and heavily impact on staff workload (e.g., Beaumont, O’Doherty, and Shannon, 2011). Winstone and Carless (2020) suggested that the educators’ feedback ‘scaffold’ should be gradually removed so that students can internally and independently generate feedback. The findings of this thesis

support this: across later interviews and diary entries, student-participants articulated they were able to independently – or with peer support - evaluate their own assessment strategies and work, thus needing less and less guidance as they progressed through their studies.

The findings also show that the students within the present thesis often experienced conflicts because of the diversity of A&F practices. Only when they possessed or developed some conflict resolution skills, were they able to effectively enact the feedback. Conflict arose because of students' diverse A&F histories (see section 5.2); some more than others attempted to negotiate and solve such conflicts. Those who did not recognise nor admitted there was some conflict simply continued to consider what they knew about A&F as universally valid. Others were simply unsuccessful at negotiating and tended to react to conflict by avoiding or rejecting what was different. In particular, the findings suggest that this had an impact on feedback enactment. In fact, uptake of feedback was avoided when students rejected assessment and feedback diversity and continued to focus on grades, knowledge reproduction, and compartmentalised completion of assignments perceived as summative. The findings within the current thesis suggest that developing the skill of intercultural conflict negotiation and resolution was crucial for students to appreciate and choose to take action on the feedback, although it was not immediate nor easy. The student-participants articulated that conflict resolution was facilitated by purposeful and open discussions about the new practices and by educators' support and encouragement to engage in such discussions.

Overall, the findings indicate that supporting and facilitating the development of the attitudes and skills discussed in this section seemed to facilitate student-participants' recognition of the value of feedback alongside student willingness to act upon the feedback to enhance their future work. Recognising the value of acting on the feedback was fundamental for students to choose to do so. In fact, only when active action on the feedback became a conscious choice, students seemed to really benefit from the practice of feedback. Nevertheless, student-participants articulated they often experienced lack of opportunity to take action on the feedback and to develop future work strategies. The findings unfortunately suggest that reduced time, high modularisation, and lack of a draft-system were the main factors that reduced the opportunities student-participants had to utilise the feedback in

future work. This resonates with previous literature arguing that the current HE system does not in fact facilitate the effective use of feedback (see section 5.3 for details).

5.5 Histories, ICC, and Feedback Literacy: a Journey of Intercultural Learning and Development

This chapter discussed the thesis’ findings, emphasising their meaning and relation to the relevant previous literature on assessment and feedback, feedback literacy, and intercultural communicative competence. The findings were discussed in relation to the three research questions of this thesis and with consideration to changes observed over time. The discussion also described how the findings informed the development of the framework of Assessment and Feedback Intercultural Competence and Feedback Literacy created within this thesis and proposed earlier in figure 12. The findings were discussed in separate sections that aimed to answer each research question individually. This was a mainly functional choice, aimed at ensuring clarity and flow of arguments within the chapter. Nevertheless, the findings discussed in this section are highly intertwined, interconnected, and show overarching temporal as well as causal relations. This concluding section aims to summarise the findings discussed whilst mapping how they all come together. Figure 13 below proposes a visual representation of students’ collective narrative.

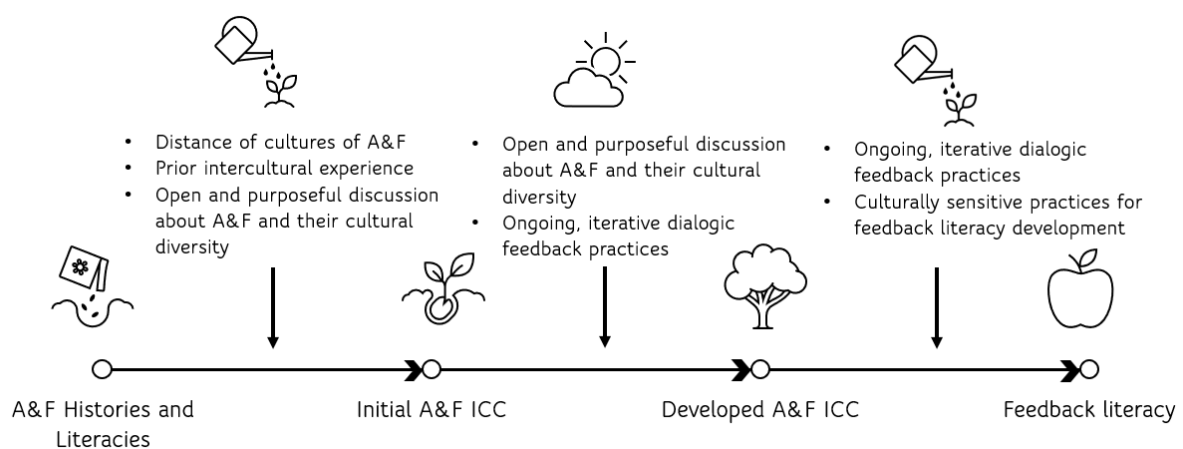


Figure 13 - Representation of Collective Narratives

As figure 13 represents, A&F histories and previous literacies, intercultural competence development and feedback literacy are connected: students transition from heavily relying on their histories to developing intercultural competence and feedback literacy in the new context. Influential factors such as cultural distance, discussions about A&F, and ongoing and iterative feedback dialogues shaped such a transition, determining when and how changes would occur.

International PGT students' assessment and feedback histories and previously built literacies are revealed to have a significant impact on their initial A&F intercultural competence. The influence of histories on intercultural competence, however, was not equal for all student-participants. Rather, it was dependent on students' previous intercultural experiences and on the degree of 'distance' between previous and current A&F practices. Histories' influence was shown to be higher in the first months of studies and tended to decrease over time as a result of increased direct experience with the new practices and engagement in purposeful discussions about them. Although students' initial A&F ICC was often low, the findings support it could be developed. In particular, iterative, and ongoing dialogic feedback interactions largely supported student development of A&F ICC. Students who were offered the opportunity to participate in early(er) and continuous feedback interactions seemed to develop intercultural competence to a higher extent and more promptly than others. Dialogic feedback practices were particularly beneficial when they built on previous discussions about assessment and feedback. Open and purposeful discussions about the practices' cultural diversity laid the foundations for effective and appropriate communication within feedback dialogic interactions. As certain intercultural competencies developed over time, students seemed to be also building and re-negotiating a 'new' feedback literacy. The competencies of knowledge and awareness of A&F impacted on student ability to recognise and appreciate feedback processes; higher intercultural critical reflection benefitted student ability to make evaluation on their work and develop learning strategies; managing affective responses to communication in intercultural contexts seemed to help managing emotions related to A&F; and the development of a set of attitudes and skills that are useful to become interculturally competent seemed to impact on student decisions and ability to take action on the feedback.

Overall, the findings show that international postgraduate students' development of feedback literacy is a complex journey of intercultural learning, meaning-making and re-negotiation of histories and previously built competencies. Throughout their postgraduate journey students benefit from developing 'new' intercultural competencies and literacies that support them in making effective use of feedback in their learning.

The next conclusive chapter will summarise and reiterate the main contributions to knowledge made within this thesis. Moreover, it will propose considerations on how the methodological choices of this thesis contributed to uncovering new insights. Limitations of the research will be considered with a view to informing future investigations and implications for practice will be explored.

Chapter VI – Conclusions

6.1 Key Knowledge Contributions

The thesis contributes to the existing body of knowledge on academic intercultural competence and feedback literacy by integrating the two and proposing a new framework for understanding feedback literacy development in intercultural higher education contexts. The crucial role of international postgraduate student's histories is uncovered, alongside the value of developing intercultural competence within A&F contexts, with the support of ongoing, iterative dialogic feedback processes. In developing such a framework, the current thesis has made some key contributions to the existing knowledge.

Firstly, the thesis demonstrates that considering students as homogenous and regarding assessment and feedback practices as universally equal is problematic. The findings revealed that assessment and feedback are shaped by context and academic cultures. What is the 'norm' at the British institution where the research took place was shown to differ from what the norm is in different countries and institutions. Having experienced diverse practices in their prior educational history, international students have developed assessment and feedback literacies that do not mirror what is valued and expected in the new environment. Cultural diversity and contextuality of literacies are not new concepts in higher education studies. Nevertheless, this thesis contributed with novel empirical observations of cultural diversity within the much-overlooked feedback contexts. Further, the observations made contributed to dismantling the myth of diversity being significant only between 'eastern/Confucian' and 'western/Socratic' systems of education. In fact, significant cultural distance does not only exist between macro-regional educational cultures; rather, it was observed within 'regions' (e.g., Europe, Asia etc.) and countries alike. This finding led to another important contribution to knowledge: what is more impactful on defining diversity of students' histories and literacies is 'smaller' academic cultures of assessment and feedback. These are shaped at the institutional level and do not necessarily represent a 'macro-regional' trait.

This thesis contribution is not limited to revealing that diversity exists but also shows the impact it has on students' understanding and utilisation of feedback in an unfamiliar HE context. Diverse histories of A&F determined the competencies students initially brought to the new context. Such competencies are elements of what is referred to as intercultural competence. This thesis' novel contribution to knowledge lays in conceptualising intercultural competence in relation to assessment and feedback contexts. It was revealed that particular competencies to interact at the intercultural level are fundamental if students with diverse literacies are to become able to understand and effectively utilise A&F practices.

It follows that intercultural competence in contexts of assessment and feedback needs to be developed for international students to be able to communicate and effectively re-negotiate intercultural feedback literacy. This allows international students to develop the ability to appreciate the feedback, make informed evaluations on their work, manage affective reactions that might be triggered, and take action on the feedback to develop future work. Such observations make an important contribution to the recent literature on feedback literacy: they reveal that not all students develop feedback literacy equally. For international students, feedback literacy development occurs at the intercultural level, where effective communication is hindered by lack of intercultural competence. Thus, developing intercultural competencies is crucial, as it lays the basis for intercultural feedback literacy development.

Lastly, this thesis contributes to knowledge by confirming the vital role played by dialogic feedback practices in the development of feedback literacy and by revealing its role in building A&F intercultural competence. Iterative feedback interactions were shown to enhance a number of competencies that were vital with intercultural feedback literacy development. In particular, such interactions are impactful when they begin early in the academic year and are fostered continuously. Ongoing feedback interactions allow for the intercultural competencies and the feedback literacy developed to be useful (and used) in longer-term learning. With the support of ongoing dialogues, competencies and literacies were constantly re-adjusted and re-negotiated, and feedback interactions provided numerous opportunities to apply such competencies on the improvement of future work and learning strategies. Ongoing interactions within feedback processes were shown to be crucial; dialogues

about A&F practices that uncovered their characteristics, functions, and purposes laid the foundations for feedback dialogues to be effective and useful.

Some of the knowledge contributions of this thesis have been disseminated in the form of paper publication or conference presentations (see Appendix 7).

6.2 Methodological Contributions

The current thesis employs a methodological approach that is innovative and differs from most previous research in both the areas of feedback literacy and intercultural communicative competence. The main element of novelty lies in the approach being narrative and longitudinal in nature. Within the present thesis, this allowed to uncover antecedents, consequences, and ongoing dynamics of international students' development of feedback literacy in an unfamiliar university context. Such a longitudinal narrative inquiry allowed to gather in-depth insights over a longer period of time, wherein stories collected at different points in time contributed to building longer narratives that highlighted change. Moreover, the flexible and exploratory nature of the inquiry facilitated the investigation of previously unexplored connections between students' histories, intercultural competence, and feedback literacy.

Within the areas of assessment, feedback, and feedback literacy, there have been recent calls for longitudinal research designs (Carless, 2020b). The main methodological contribution of this thesis is to reveal how a longitudinal inquiry can overcome the limitations of single data collection episodes that only capture student experiences at a particular moment in time. Repeated and ongoing data collection events (narrative interviews and diaries) allowed to expose change and development and the factors that fostered or hindered change in student feedback literacy over the duration of the research were uncovered. The longitudinal design allowed to expose the long-term impact of student histories; it was revealed that their role was reduced over time. Similarly, it highlighted the development of assessment and feedback intercultural competence and its links to feedback literacy development over one academic year. The long-term role of iterative, ongoing feedback dialogues within intercultural

competence development was also highlighted. This could not have been uncovered through isolated, one-off data collection episodes.

This thesis also contributes to what little is known about the use of diary methods within educational and longitudinal research. It was revealed that the use of event-contingent in between interviews diaries was valuable: it allowed to capture both immediate and ‘delayed’ emotional and behavioural student responses to assessment and feedback practices. Diaries were also shown to support the longitudinal design by providing more opportunities for data collection events over time, where and when the participants found it relevant. Despite their limitations (presented in section 6.3), diaries contributed to provide an in-depth narrative account of student experiences over time.

Overall, the narrative, longitudinal approach supported depth and contextualisation of student narratives; in fact, considering accounts of intercultural competence and feedback literacy in isolation would have given an incomplete, and potentially inaccurate, picture of events. For example, unlike past literature, the present thesis was able to make more accurate observations about the long-term development of intercultural competence and of feedback literacy, uncovering contextual and cultural factors that contributed to such development.

6.3 Limitations and Future Directions

The research journey that led to the completion of this thesis could have been undoubtedly different. Choices had to continuously be made along the way, and the decisions I made led to the thesis taking its current shape. It is a prerogative of all decisions one makes to have advantages and drawbacks; thus, this thesis inherently presents limitations. There were limitations that emerged fairly early in the process, whereas others became apparent only towards the end of the research journey. It was possible to address some of them along the way, whilst others remain and are acknowledged in this section.

Circumstantial constraints influenced my decision to focus uniquely on student narratives. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that involving educators who closely interacted with the student-participants would have been a valuable contribution to the research. In fact, intercultural

communication happens *between* diverse individuals. Thus, it can only be fully understood when the experiences, perceptions, and contributions of all involved in communication are considered. This became clearer as I engaged with the student narratives that included numerous references to educators' intercultural competence, alongside feedback literacy, conceptualisation, and operationalisation. Thus, considering how the lecturers who engaged in communication with the participants construe and practice assessment and feedback might have added a valuable insight to the thesis. Investigating lecturers' own A&F intercultural competence could have been valuable. Further, gathering insights on the way in which educators' histories might impact on their competencies could have uncovered interesting insights. Future exploratory research might consider looking into narratives of academics' feedback literacy (Gravett et al., 2020; Boud and Dawson, 2021) and intercultural competence. More 'targeted' research could consider investigating the roles that training, educational background, teaching experience (e.g., senior educators vs graduate teaching assistants and junior lecturers), and disciplinary background might have on their feedback literacy and intercultural competence.

The findings reported in the thesis originate from the narratives of the ten individuals who participated in the research. Further stories could have been gathered to include students with different undergraduate educational backgrounds and assessment and feedback histories. Nevertheless, findings were reported with no intention to generalise what was revealed, but simply to offer a collective representation of the students' experiences, as explained in the methodology section. To enrich the collective narrative that is the result of this thesis, further research could be carried out involving diverse international PGTs. For instance, this thesis excluded mature students, those coming back to postgraduate education after working in industry, and part-time PGT students. Future research could also involve postgraduate research students, although the nature of assessment and feedback processes they experience is likely to be different and this might need to be considered when designing the research (e.g., different lengths of studies, feedback coming in different forms and mainly from one or two main supervisors etc.).

The sample size of this thesis could also be considered as a limitation. Nevertheless, a smaller number of participants is a characteristic of narrative research designs. I could have selected an

alternative methodology which would have enabled me to carry out widespread data collection with a bigger sample size. However, I would argue that the depth of experience the student-participants were able to expose outweighed the potential limitations of 'low' participant numbers.

From a methods perspective, limitations can be found in the use of diaries. As explained thoroughly in the methodology section, when written diaries were employed, students tended to provide a list of items/issues rather than recount a story and the data obtained was less detailed and the participants' involvement felt more detached. Further, a limitation of using diaries over a long period of time was the necessity to remind students to do so, potentially reducing the authenticity of the entries. When the student-participants had to be reminded to complete a diary entry, immediate emotions, reactions, and behaviours could not be captured. Although this was not a specific focus of the thesis nor the only reason for using diaries, immediacy of entries would have contributed to the authenticity and value of the data collected. Moreover, using diaries and setting a minimum but not a maximum of diary entries to be submitted meant gathering more data from some students compared to others. Thus, there is a possibility that the narratives of students who contributed with more data to the research had a heavier weight on the interpretations I made when carrying out the collective, thematic analysis.

Further, the findings of this thesis are the result of my own interpretation of the data and of the meanings of student narratives (see sections 3.6, 3.8, 3.14 for more detail). Although I ensured to share and confirm the authenticity of my interpretations with the participants, I could never (and never intended to) truly set aside my previous experiences when interpreting the data, especially because they are so closely linked to those of the participants. As I argue throughout the thesis, individuals are shaped by their experiences and histories, and so is education, educational research, and myself as a researcher. For this reason, I do not believe this to be a limitation for the type of strongly qualitative, pragmatic, and interpretive research I chose to carry out. However, I acknowledge it might be interpreted as such by researchers who hold different paradigmatic beliefs. To address this and take into consideration diverse perspectives that are all valuable and precious, further research using different, less interpretive methodologies could be carried out.

Moreover, self-reported data could be considered as limited by the fact that it rarely can be independently verified; in other words, you have to take what people say. I do not consider this as a limitation, but simply as a characteristic of narrative inquiry. What the participants chose to (or not to) recount matters and can tell a lot about them and what is investigated. Nevertheless, it should be considered that social desirability might have had an impact on participant's responses due to close contact and personal discussions involved. Some participants considered the research process as a chance to open up and narrate their stories to someone who was willing to listen. Others might have been more inclined to attempt to create a positive impression of their 'quick and successful adaptation process', especially when this was perceived to be appreciated by the institution. Nevertheless, as some students articulated in their interviews and diaries, the research process contributed to some participants consciously acknowledging and reflecting upon certain issues or experiences that they might otherwise have overlooked and potentially not reported. The longitudinal aspect of this research supported this, as students at times became aware of certain issues later in the academic year; a one-off data collection even would have not been able to capture this.

Due to the unstructured nature of narrative interviews and diaries, it is possible that not all issues that affected students with regards to assessment, feedback, and ICC were raised, or that not all factors impacting their decisions were discussed. This was an exploratory research, and future inquiries could consider employing different types of more directive interviews, building on this thesis findings. The scope of discussion of this thesis was broad and gave a general insight into the relations between student histories, ICC in A&F context, and feedback literacy. To gather more in-depth insight on specific elements and their relation, further research could focus on one relation at a time.

As mentioned in other chapters, the research was somehow disrupted and potentially limited by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Future longitudinal research could be carried out for a whole academic year including dissertation period. This could give an insight into whether the developed A&F ICC and feedback literacy are operationalised in students' final work.

Further, future research could consider implementing practical interventions over the academic year; examples are discussed in the section on implications for practice. As Smith and Lipnevich (2018)

discuss, choosing between observation without interference (as I did for this thesis), and implementation of interventions is a dilemma for scholars who study feedback. Building on this exploratory and observatory research with experimental research has the potential to further contribute to knowledge.

More research into non-UK assessment and feedback practices and traditions could also be valuable to better understand our international students' histories. I would argue that research collaborations with academics working in non-UK HE settings might be beneficial. In fact, research up to now has investigated A&F practices in contexts such as the UK, US, Australia, Eastern Asia and some northern European countries (Norway, Denmark, Netherlands etc.) whilst little research is available about other HE contexts.

Lastly, I acknowledge that this research was conducted in a fairly 'traditional' higher education setting and in a pre-Covid period. The pandemic changed our understanding of higher education and caused a sudden shift to digital education. If this change was initially 'forced' upon students and educators, we are now learning to appreciate the role of digital in higher education and in assessment and feedback processes. Further research could be carried out in contexts of blended or distance higher education where different dynamics might take place and where digital literacies and histories are likely to play a significant role. The concepts of feedback 'dialogues', literacy, and that of 'communication' are also likely to have different meanings in such contexts. Further exploratory research is then needed that considers the role of 'digital' in assessment and feedback histories, literacies, and intercultural communicative competence.

6.4 Implications for Practice

Developing international students' assessment and feedback intercultural competence and feedback literacy is a priority for higher education institutions that are highly international and intercultural. Much of the current A&F practice that aims at some effective transformations for student learning and development seems to fall short in a diverse postgraduate HE. Traditional A&F paradigms (James, 2014; Taras, 2015) seem to overlook international student diversity and needs. They lack consideration

for the different A&F cultures, histories, and competencies that the diverse student body brings to institutions. Thus, fostering awareness of and effective communication between different assessment and feedback cultures becomes paramount. Encouraging the development of competencies through dialogic feedback practices can facilitate feedback literacy development and agentic engagement in feedback processes. Based on the findings of this thesis, I propose some practice considerations that might be beneficial.

Firstly, as Boud and Molloy (2013, p. 699) argue, feedback needs to be ‘repositioned as a fundamental part of curriculum design, not an episodic mechanism delivered by teachers to learners’; this should apply to postgraduate curriculum design as well. Curriculum design should also consider that the context in which the curriculum is operationalised is intercultural. Intercultural competence development needs to be integrated; curricula need to aim at developing elements of ICC to support effective communication about and within A&F and to build feedback literacy at the intercultural level. Developing genuinely intercultural pedagogies is an ethical matter (Lomer and Anthony-Okeke, 2019) and so is designing curricula that consider feedback as an intercultural practice.

Solutions to assessment and feedback practices that are ‘assimilationist’ need to be found. For example, intercultural student-educator partnerships in defining, designing, and embedding A&F practices in the curriculum could be valuable. Rather than passively training students to develop the competencies they need to ‘adopt’, institutions, lecturers and students should be engaged in the development of shared principles underpinning assessment and feedback design (Evans, 2016; Ramani et al., 2017) through dialogue and partnership. The goal is to seek congruence in student, lecturer and organisational beliefs and values (Evans and Waring, 2020), thus avoiding misalignment, conflict, and potential rejection of diversity of A&F. According to Konings et al. (2005), a participatory design would allow for integration of multiple and diverse perspectives from learners, teachers, and leaders. As Evans and Waring (2020) also advocate, assessment design should guarantee students are offered the opportunity to actively participate in determining assessment requirements and co-construct inputs and outputs. This thesis’ findings imply that not only assessment but also feedback design should be the product of a collaboration between students and staff, where all students, including internationals can

contribute to shaping and determining the effective and appropriate feedback and assessment competencies. The collaboration of international students into such participatory design has also the potential to bring some new perspectives into assessment and feedback. This might lead to some much needed questioning of the values attributed to traditional anglophone practices and to the design of intercultural practices that bring together the best of different traditions. Such exchange of ideas at the design stage might support a collaborative development of A&F intercultural competence and feedback literacy through assessment and feedback processes that are designed to take into consideration interculturality and diversity. When diversity of cultures and learning is valued and represented within assessment and feedback design, the practices can become more meaningful and authentic to all (Bourke, 2020). As Redmond and Tai (2020) propose, stepping away from ‘boxed in’ traditional approaches that tend to promote deficit narratives (and assessment/marking) might be the way forward in creating shared beliefs of learning and assessment that foster creativity, empowerment, and engagement.

Intercultural competence of both lecturers and students could be enhanced through student-educator partnership and cooperative participation in A&F design. This is fundamental as only when all can recognise the diverse histories, cultures, and beliefs of those involved in the practices, the acquisition and development of intercultural assessment and feedback competencies is facilitated, and A&F can become effective and useful practices for all. Mediated discussions about the diverse A&F cultures can lead to student-lecturer co-authorship of assessment tasks and feedback processes, where students are seen as active agents in both assessment and feedback (Taras, 2015; Yu and Hu, 2017). When students become active agents within feedback processes, they can transform feedback into something that is self-generated, filling the potential of developing feedback literacy for long-term development. This alone, however, is not sufficient but needs to be fostered by ongoing commitment and communication between all involved. Designing space for continued reflection and discussion within courses could foster ongoing open and effective communication and engagement.

For international students to feel comfortable with student-educator partnership and communication, reflection and discussion about assessment and feedback could be initially peer-led and facilitated by

trained buddies (older students/more experienced international students). This could reduce potential issues related to second language confidence, interacting with lecturers within a perceived power hierarchy, and expressing their opinions.

Dedicating some class time to guaranteeing a space for students to reflect upon feedback and share their reflections with peers and educators could also be beneficial. Further, encouraging students to keep a portfolio of their reflection and discussion sheets has the potential to help them identify recurring themes in feedback and track their emotional reactions over time (Quinton and Smallbone, 2010). This would help them develop the ability to make their own judgements on work and manage their emotions. The use of 'feedback diaries' could also be beneficial. Within this thesis, although diaries were not intended to be a practical intervention, they were often reported to promote reflection. Students reported they enhanced their awareness and knowledge of A&F, stimulating further reflection on the diversity and on ways to effectively deal with it. Diaries could be integrated as part of a portfolio.

Moreover, the use of drafts and exemplars to be linked to co-designed rubrics and assessment criteria can foster purposeful reflection and support students to recognise feedback and manage expectations (Bell, Mladenovic, and Price, 2013). They could be also employed as a starting point for in class discussions about the practices and be used for portfolio reflections. As Winstone and Carless (2020) argue, considering pre-task activities, guidance and anticipatory feedback would support agentic engagement more than post-task feedback would (Hounsell, et al., 2008). If expectations are co-constructed through partnerships at the stage of assessment and feedback design, such activities can provide clarifications and scaffold the ongoing progress.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Narrative Interviews

Narrative Interview Template – September/October 2019

First Interview

I would like you to tell me a story about yourself and your experience at university before coming to the UK and in particular events and experiences related to assessment and feedback.

Please, take your time to tell me your story. We have as much time as you need for this and you can start wherever you like. I will listen first, I will not interrupt your story and I may take a couple of notes that I will ask you questions about later, if that is ok.

Possible questions/prompts

1. Participant linguistic background

Can you tell me about your experience of using English in and outside academia?

Prompts for potential follow-up:

English language learning

English used in academic context

Use of the English language outside academia

Confidence and feelings about using English

2. Participant academic background

Can you tell me about your experience at university? What did it involve?

Prompts for potential follow-up:

University learning (lectures, seminars?)

University organisation

Course organisation

Modules organisation

What is expected of students

What is expected of lecturers

Relationships with academics/tutors

Positive aspects/action points of academia

What is a good student?

What is a good module?

What is a good lecturer/tutor?

3. Participant assessment literacy history

Can you tell me about your experience with assessment and evaluation at university?

Prompts for potential follow-up:

Types of assessment experienced (most and less common)
Assessment system and criteria
Types of assessment valued and why
Focus of assessment practices – content, knowledge, form?
Marking system and criteria
What makes a good assignment?
Feelings when engaging with assessment
Contact with academics about assessment

4. Participant feedback literacy history

Can you tell me about your experience with feedback at university?

Prompts for potential follow-up:

Feedback practices experienced
Most common feedback practices
What is the focus of the feedback you received?
What makes good feedback?
What makes useful feedback?
Feelings when receiving and engaging with feedback
Contact with academics about feedback

5. Participants initial A&F ICC

Can you tell me of your experience with assessment and feedback at the UK University so far? What do you know about A&F?

What do you think about the differences (if there are any) between assessment and feedback practices in your home country and in the UK?

How do you feel about such differences?

Prompts

Reasons for such differences

End of narrative interview questions:

Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Is there any question I should have asked you, but did not?

Second Interview

1. Assessment

Can you tell me about your first experience(s) with assignments at university here in the UK?

What did it involve?

How did you feel?

Follow-up, more directive questions:

How was your understanding of the assignment brief/requirements? Why?

How did you approach the task? Why?

How was this similar/dissimilar to what you experienced at university in your home country?

How do you feel about the differences?

Do you feel there are any differences related to the academic culture and traditions of the university? How did you deal with them?

2. Feedback

Can you tell me about your first experience of receiving feedback at university in the UK?

What did it involve?

How did you feel?

Follow-up, more directive questions:

How was your understanding of the feedback? Why?

What did you do when you received the feedback? Why?

How did you feel about the feedback you received?

How did your feelings in the moment impact your decisions on using the feedback?

How was this similar/dissimilar to what you experienced at university in your home country?

How do you feel about the differences?

Do you feel there are any differences related to the academic culture and traditions of the university? How did you deal with them?

3. Enacting the feedback

Can you tell me about your experience of using the feedback received?

Follow-up, more directive questions:

Was the feedback useful for you?

Have you used or are you going to use the feedback to improve your next task?

How are you going to do that?

4. A&F Intercultural Competence

Can you tell me about what you think about the differences in these two academic practices as experienced here and in your home country?

Follow-up, more directive questions:

Why do you think there are differences?

How do you feel about them?

Is there any knowledge of assessment and feedback practices you wish you had before starting your assignments?

Is there anything you wish you had been aware of before starting working on assignments and receiving the feedback?

Is there something you were not able to do to deal with in assessment and feedback situations?

What are your beliefs about assessment and feedback practices in the UK?

What are your attitudes towards them?

How do you feel about dealing with such practices in a different academic culture?

Reflection on individual assignments and feedback received

Awareness of purpose of comments

Attitude towards comments

Emotions in relation to comments

Critical thinking behind comments

Behaviour upon receiving and reading comments

Understanding of comments

Enactment or plan of enactment of comments

End of narrative interview questions:

Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Is there any question I should have asked you, but did not?

Narrative Interview Template – March/April 2020

Third Interview

Narrative generative questions

- Can you tell me about if and how your experience with assessment practices has changed since we last met?
- Can you tell me about if and how your experience with feedback has changed since we last met?

Prompts

Feedback ICC

Knowledge and awareness

- Knowledge of A&F practices - changes
- Purposes of A&F practices - changes
- Conceptualisation of feedback - changes

Intercultural critical reflection

- Cultural differences of A&F practices – what do you think/have your thoughts evolved?

Intercultural emotional intelligence

- How do you feel/have you felt with regards to assessment practices?
- How do you feel/have you felt with regards to feedback practices?
- How do you feel/have you felt with regards to your relationships with your lecturers/feedback providers?
- Have your feelings changed or evolved? If yes, why?

Attitudes and skills

- beliefs about the A&F practices they engaged with – changes
- what they do in a specific assessment/feedback situation – changes compared to what they used to do
- Have you had any difficulty with any A&F practice? Why and changes

Feedback literacy

- Appreciating feedback processes – how would you describe ‘feedback’ now?
- Making judgements – has the feedback supported you in becoming able to make judgements on your work? How?
- Managing emotions – has the feedback helped managing your emotions related to assessment?
- Taking action – have you been able to utilise the feedback on subsequent work? In what instances and how?

Appendix 2 - Audio Diary Guidelines and Prompts

Assessment & Feedback Audio Diary

Guidelines and Prompts

Thank you for agreeing to complete an Assessment & Feedback Diary about your experiences with assessment and feedback as an International PGT student.

These are the guidelines on how to complete the audio diary study.

1. What is my Assessment & Feedback Audio Diary?

Your Assessment & Feedback Audio Diary is a collection of your thoughts and feelings about your experiences with assessment and feedback at university. The diary gives you the opportunity to record any information or event that happens over the course of your study journey that you may want to elaborate on. It gives you the opportunity to reflect on how you experience and approach your assessment tasks and how you use the feedback you receive on them.

2. What phone Application should I use for the recordings?

Please use *Just Press Record* if you have an Apple device and *Smart Voice Recorder* if you have an Android device.

If you do not have any device on which you can record your diary entries, do not worry, you can keep a pen-and-paper diary.

3. What am I required to do?

You are required to record your thoughts and feelings about your experiences with assessment and feedback during your programme of study. Assessment might include high and low weight assignments, coursework, in-class performance, and exams. Feedback can be written (tutor comments on your work) or oral (conversation/discussion with tutors/lectures).

4. What should I include in my diary?

The prompt list (see bottom of this document) sets out the issues you should comment on during the recordings. For each recording, you can use the prompts to help you if you like. Some of the issues may be more relevant to you than others. You can talk in more detail about the issues that are more relevant to you. You can also talk about issues that are not included in the prompts if they are relevant to you.

5. How often should I log a diary entry?

You should record a diary entry when you:

- Engage with an assignment – e.g. read the assignment brief, work on your assignment, revise your assignment

- Discuss your assignment – with peers, friends, and lecturers/tutors
 - Receive and engage with written feedback – read the feedback, use the feedback for revision or for a consequent assignment
 - Receive oral feedback – talk to your lectures about your assignment, have discussions in class
- Please record at least one entry every two weeks and send the recordings to the researcher*.

6. *What should I do with the recordings?*

Please send the recordings every two weeks to vr82@kent.ac.uk or v.rovagnati@kent.ac.uk.

7. *How long should the diary entry be?*

There is no minimum or maximum length for the recordings. Please feel free to share as much as you need to.

**If you are using a pen-and-paper diary, you can send scans or photos of your entries to the researcher every two weeks.*

Diary prompts

When you record your entry, please use these prompts to support you.

Your thoughts and feelings about the assignment:

- Your understanding of the assignment briefs/instructions
- Your understanding of the assignment requirements
- Your familiarity with the assignment type
- Any difference/similarity with the types of assignment you have previous experience of
- Your understanding of the language used to explain the assignment
- Your interaction with lecturers/peers about the assignment
- Your feelings while working on the assignment
- Any other assignment related issues you would like to talk about

Your thoughts and feelings about the feedback:

- Your understanding of the feedback
- Your understanding of the language used in the feedback
- Your feelings about the feedback
- How you use the feedback or what you do with it
- Any difference/similarity with the feedback you received in the past
- Your interaction with lecturers/peers about the feedback
- Any other feedback related issues you would like to talk about

Appendix 3 - Participation Information Sheet

Invitation

I would like to invite you to take part in a research project. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve for you.

Please take the time to read the following information carefully and ask questions about anything you do not understand. Talk to others about the study if you wish.

1. *What is the purpose of the study?*

The purpose of this study is to look into the experiences that international PGT students who enter British higher education for the first time have with the practices of assessment and feedback. Assessment and feedback are practices that can be challenging for students, and the purpose of the study is to investigate whether international students face particular challenges. The aim is to raise awareness of such potential challenges, with a view to support academic staff, support services and students who might experience difficulties.

2. *Why have you been invited to take part in the study?*

You have been invited to take part in this study because you are an international postgraduate taught student who just began their journey into postgraduate higher education in the UK. You have been invited to participate because you meet the following criteria:

- International PGT student (non-UK)
- Have completed prior education and undergraduate studies in a country other than the UK
- Speaker of English as a Second or Other language
- Enrolled on a 1-year full-time PGT course

About 8-12 participants from different countries will take part in this study.

3. *Do I have to take part?*

No, you do not have to participate. There will be no consequences if you decide not to participate or withdraw at a later stage. You can withdraw your participation at any time. You can request for your data to be withdrawn until publication of the data without giving a reason and without prejudice.

If you withdraw from the study this will mean the following for your participation and data: identifiable data already collected will be retained if you allow us to. If not, all identifiable data collected would be withdrawn from the study. Data which is not identifiable may be retained. No further data would be collected in relation to you.

4. *What will my involvement require?*

If you agree to take part, we will then ask you to sign a consent form. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and a copy of your signed consent form. The research will last approximately between October 2019 and August 2020, but your involvement would only

require you to meet with the researcher 3 to 4 times, and to record data in your audio diary regularly but at your convenience.

5. What will I have to do?

You will be asked to attend four 1h interviews. One of the interviews will take place in October 2019, one in December 2019, one around March 2020 and the last one in summer term 2020.

You will also be asked to keep an audio diary in which you log thoughts and feelings about your experience and engagement with assessment and feedback during your course. You are not required to do this at a specific time set by the researcher, but you can do this anytime you feel you have something to share. You will be required to do this at any occasion where you engage with assessment and when you receive and work on the feedback. You will be provided with instructions and examples on how to do this. You will be asked to send what you have logged into your diary to the researcher every two weeks.

6. What will happen to the data that I provide?

Research data are stored securely and will be password protected. Personal data will be handled in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act (1998). Data will be used for the completion of the researcher's Doctoral Programme at the University of Kent and might be published.

7. What are the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

There are no physical disadvantages or risks of taking part in the study. However, as it is a study that requires your engagement overtime, there might be a risk of participation being time consuming.

8. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

One of the possible benefits of being involved in this study would be to have numerous possibilities to reflect on the practices of assessment and feedback, which might help you be more engaged with them. This might benefit your learning and development, alongside your experience with such practices. Further, this might benefit others in future, including staff and students, as your participation could raise further awareness of the issues that are linked to such practices.

By participating in this study, you will gain 10 Employability Points for each interview you attend. The EP can be cashed-in for the chance to apply for exclusive internships, work placements, vouchers and more.

9. What if there is a problem?

Any complaint or concern about any aspect of the way you have been dealt with during the course of the study will be addressed. Please contact my Supervisor Edd Pitt @ e.pitt@kent.ac.uk. You may also contact the Director of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education Kathleen M. Quinlan @ k.m.quinlan@kent.ac.uk

10. Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. Your details will be held in complete confidence and we will follow ethical and legal practice in relation to all study procedures. Personal data [name, contact details, audio recordings] will be handled in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998 so that unauthorised individuals will not have access to them. The data you provide will be anonymised and your personal data will be stored securely. You will not be identified in any reports/publications resulting from this research and those reading them will not know who has contributed to it. With your permission we would like to use anonymous verbatim quotations from interviews and audio recordings in reports.

11. Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is organised by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education and funded by the University of Kent (Vice Chancellor Scholarship).

12. Who has reviewed the project?

This research has been looked at by an independent group of people, called an Ethics Committee, to protect your interests. This study has been reviewed by and received a favourable ethical opinion from the CSHE REAG (Centre for the Study of Higher Education Research Ethics Advisory Group).

13. Contacts for further information:

Contact details of researcher:

Veronica Rovagnati – vr82@kent.ac.uk or v.rovagnati@kent.ac.uk

Contact details of primary supervisor:

Dr Edd Pitt – e.pitt@kent.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this Information Sheet.

Appendix 4 – Data Collected by Student

Data collected for each student participant:

Participant	Interview 1	Duration	Mode
ANN	October '19	34' 52"	Face-to-face
ANTONIO	October '19	37' 50"	Face-to-face
DIANA	October '19	29' 42"	Face-to-face
EILEEN	October '19	33' 41"	Face-to-face
JALIL	October '19	58' 31"	Face-to-face
MAHMOUD	October '19	38' 03"	Face-to-face
MALAK	October '19	59' 51"	Face-to-face
MARLENE	October '19	36' 40"	Face-to-face
NIK	October '19	48' 18"	Face-to-face
NUMI	October '19	35' 27"	Face-to-face

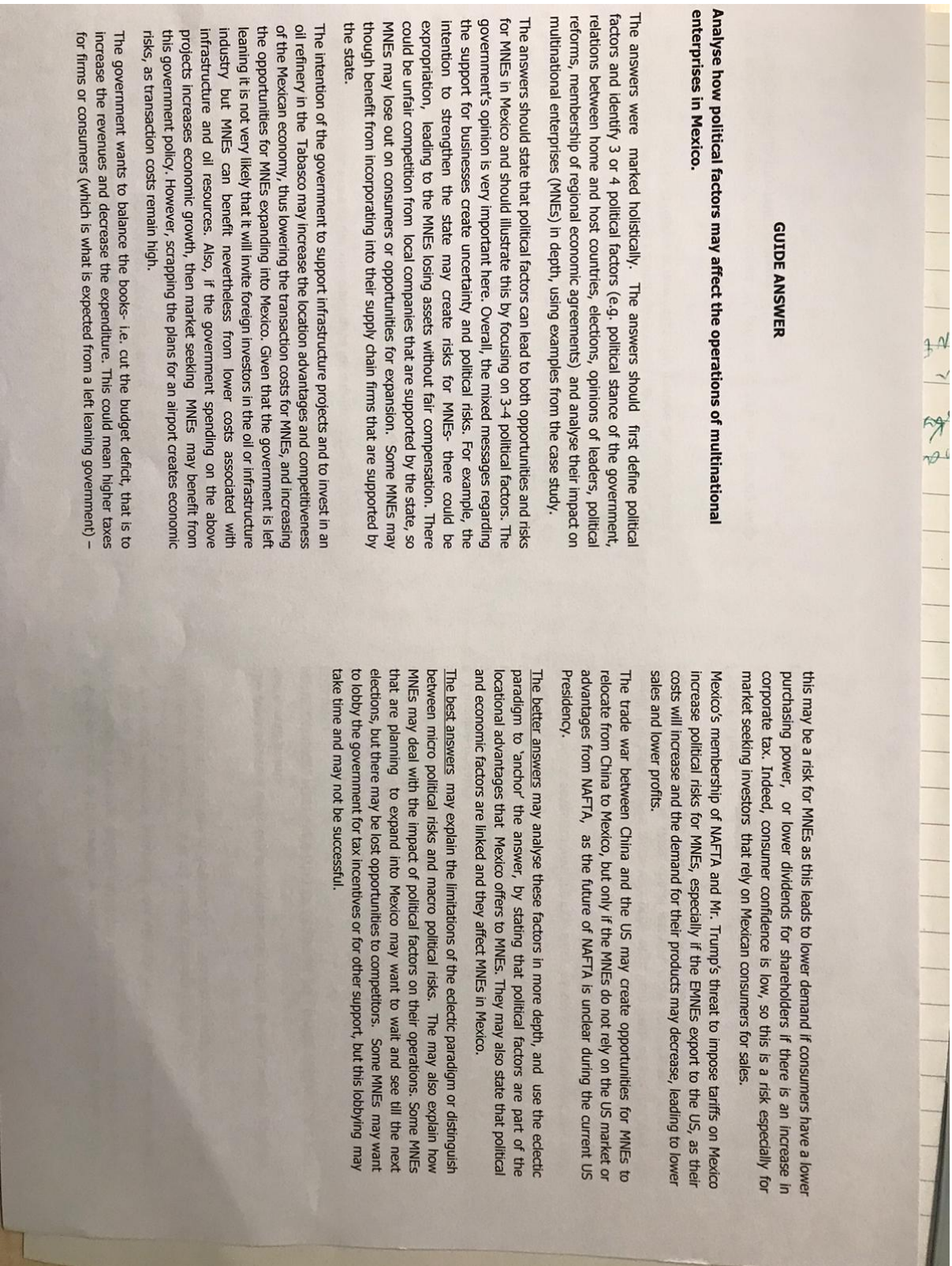
Participant	Interview 2	Duration	Mode
ANN	January '20	35' 28"	Skype
ANTONIO	December '19	30' 31"	Face-to-face
DIANA	January '20	41' 06"	Face-to-face
EILEEN	December '19	40' 51"	Face-to-face
JALIL	December '19	48' 31"	Face-to-face
MAHMOUD	December '19	33' 24"	Face-to-face
MALAK	December '19	38' 35"	Face-to-face
MARLENE	December '19	24' 19"	Face-to-face
NIK	January '20	45' 38"	Face-to-face
NUMI	January '20	43' 25"	Face-to-face

Participant	Interview 3	Duration	Mode
ANN	April '20	31' 12"	WhatsApp
ANTONIO	April '20	33' 19"	Skype
DIANA	April '20	39' 10"	Skype
EILEEN	April '20	33' 34"	Skype
JALIL	April '20	41' 36"	Skype
MAHMOUD	April '20	45' 44"	Skype
MALAK	April '20	70' 33"	Skype
MARLENE	March '20	36' 39"	Skype
NIK	April '20	35' 36"	Skype
NUMI	April '20	26' 15"	Skype

Participant	Audio Diary Logs	Extra material
ANN	2	Rubrics, guidelines, and examples of feedback
ANTONIO	11	Examples of pre and post feedback work
DIANA	2	-
EILEEN	-	-
JALIL	2	-
MAHMOUD	2	-
MALAK	3	Feedback-related email communication and written feedback
MARLENE	-	-
NIK	2	Guidelines and written feedback received
NUMI	0	

*pages: Font Calibri Body 12. The font is the same for all transcripts.

Example of extra material shared by participants:



CB936 BUSINESS IN AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE
IN-COURSE TEST FEEDBACK

Dear Students,
I have really enjoyed marking your tests. These are just a few notes based on marking your tests (please also see the guide answer below).

1. Examples from the case study, seminars and lectures were rewarded, as well as examples from independent reading.
2. Although guide answers were provided and were used in marking, thinking 'outside the box' was rewarded too, provided that the answer made sense and addressed the set question!
3. The marker was aware of the time constraints for answering the set question.

Question: Analyse how political factors may affect the operations of multinational enterprises in Mexico.

WHAT MADE THE VERY GOOD ANSWERS (70s)

1. Accuracy
2. Use of International Business terminology
3. Excellent explanation of the impact of political factors as creating both opportunities and risks for MNEs in Mexico
4. Excellent use of frameworks by examining, for example, the impact of the government's ideology, policies and of the relationships between Mexico and the USA on MNEs
5. Excellent analysis of examples from the case study and sometimes examples from wider readings
6. Very good evaluation of how the Mexican government may minimise the political risks that MNEs may face in Mexico or how MNEs may manage the risks discussed

WHAT MADE THE GOOD ANSWERS (60s)

7. Very good explanation of the impact of political factors as creating both opportunities and risks for MNEs in Mexico

8. Very good use of frameworks by examining, for example, the impact of the government's ideology, policies and of the relationships between Mexico and the USA on MNEs
9. Very good analysis of examples from the case study and sometimes examples from wider readings
10. Good evaluation of how the Mexican government may minimise the political risks that MNEs may face in Mexico or how MNEs may manage the risks discussed

The pass answers were too descriptive and rather limited, whilst making some valid points.

SOME COMMON MISTAKES (OFTEN LEADING TO LOWER MARKS OR EVEN FAILURE)

1. Discussing the impact of political factors on the Mexican economy and not really on the MNEs
2. Insufficient use of frameworks
3. Not addressing the set question
4. Insufficient explanation and/ or use of bullet points
5. Use of irrelevant theories or models
6. Language mistakes
7. Using too colloquial language
8. Not using the International Business terminology
9. Discussing too much theory in a separate section than the one discussing the case study
10. Using entire sentences from the case study without explaining what they really mean

Overall, the tests showed some very good work from many of you, but they also highlighted the need for more critical analysis, more accuracy and better use of theories or frameworks and examples in answering case study related questions.

I hope this helps.

Best wishes,

Dr. Carmen Stolan

With choosing of AMLO as Mexican president, things in Mexico started to change?

Mr López Obrador win election on promises that he will change status quo of Mexico, bring economy to higher level, increase taxation and create more jobs. However, first year show that little of things had been done. Shrinking economy, cutting wages, lowest import since crisis in 2008, lower demand in US for Mexican products give a lot of headache to Obrador's administration. All this economic ^{problems} give some dose of uncertainty to foreign companies on which Mexico built their power in Central and South America. *too colloquial. Avoid*

expand risks/op for MNEs?
~~But~~ Not only economic signs are showing uncertainty in Mexico, also political factors are not working well of the image of Mexico. Obrador's left leaning populist politics of centralizing power, on which he won the elections, push Mexico ~~away~~ from mixed economy toward ~~the~~ planned economy, so called market socialism. Government deglobalisation politics are not very good sign for MNE. ^{why?} Mexico, from signing NAFTA ~~agreement~~ (North America Free Trade Agreement) thrived on the wings of MNE ~~and how~~ ^{downs} For Multinational Enterprises are consider only foreign companies who invest in other country, as not this case Mexico. → *knop expand*

Bashing private sector, are opposite of internalization theory of ~~the~~ guaranteeing property right, both tangible and intellectual. Mixed messages that are coming from president's office is a sign of ~~the~~ non one political course and can expose some uncertainty, increasing level of risk for outsiders.

Interwring in private sector, ~~and~~ stopping building of airport and revising oil-pipeline projects ~~shows the Mexico is not p~~ leading toward a free market, crucial point for MNE to thrive. and protecting with domestic oil production, first excluding free trade with oil from the NAFTA agreement (1994), putting tariffs on all imports, but also imposing NON-TARIFF BARRIERS like subsidies and favourable contracts in order to build strong domestic oil production. All these things show that Mexico is not leaning going in the direction of free MARKET, which is crucial for MNE business.

→ why? Expand → Expand Import?

List of headaches and problems for president is too long. No matter how much Mexico has factors fulfilled, if we are looking Porter's competitive advantage model, like, cheap labour, natural resources, ~~strong~~ built clusters of AUTO and electric industry, political instability can withdraw MNE's from further investing. ✓ Evaluation:

For MNE's to ^{do business} perform in some countries they need free MARKET, guaranteed right, protection of property etc. ✓
But, in the world full of uncertainty MNE's could do some actions to protect themselves. They could - not invest all money at once,

- use local resources like ~~local~~ local labour who are familiar with the political ~~known~~ situation ✓
- try to speed up ~~invest~~ return on investment
- not buying ~~assets~~ assets that have national meaning for locals
- have plans for quick leaving the market so-called escape plan ✓

- use ~~more~~ ~~licensing~~ +
- instead of direct investing use to models like licensing or
exporting

Political uncertainty will drive away MNE but ~~political~~ factors
could ~~create chance for~~ there is not so black for Mexico.
On Donald Trump Merkantlist politics could ~~create an~~
Mexico can grab a chance. BAD relationship between US and
China could open space for Mexico. With future unclear,
MNE from China are looking away and trying to find new
alternatives. ~~Could CANA~~ president Mr Lopez Obrador and Mexico
grab a chance and ~~get back~~ show foreign investors that
Mexico is future global player? - interesting.

→ But Mexico maybe.

Some a good points but more critical discussion of
impact of on MNEs needed. The strategies needed
to be evaluated. The OLI could have been used.

Appendix 5 – Example of Researcher-constructed Narration

Extract of Antonio's researcher-constructed narration

Antonio

Antonio is a PGT student in the School of Biosciences who recently completed his undergraduate degree in Biology at a large University in Central Italy. Antonio is originally from Romania but grew up and studied - from primary to undergraduate higher education - in Italy.

Antonio describes his higher education experience as a journey of knowledge acquisition, where he felt his role was to prove his ability to jump from little if no knowledge of his discipline to enough knowledge to pass examinations and graduate. In the very stressful and performance-orientated environment of his University, Antonio's university experience would include attending numerous, long lectures, memorising information provided in lectures and books, and preparing to recite such information during oral exam sessions. All this is normal for Antonio who seems to assume that this is everyone's reality at university.

The academic culture of his institution seems to favour delivery of knowledge as the underlying teaching philosophy. Consequently, Antonio's philosophy of learning is to study hard in order to memorise all knowledge and to demonstrate his ability to replicate and retain information. He believes that knowledge acquisition is crucial, as it lays foundations for any type of future work, within and outside academia. The assessment culture at the institution also mirrors this. Antonio has experience of being assessed through oral examinations, where he is requested to answer randomly allocated questions in the presence of a lecturer. When he sits an oral examination, Antonio is thankful for the opportunity to prove his knowledge to himself and to the examiner, as this is the way he knows to determine his development.

However, Antonio believes that this type of assessment is at times arbitrary, as examiners do not provide rationales for the exams' outcomes. Asking for the motivation behind the result is also not an option for him, as *'I don't want to go to Professor - maybe he or she will remember me for the [next] exam'*. He would not ask for feedback or support, as this would reveal his lack of knowledge and understanding leading to lecturers perceiving him as a low achiever. Examiners also do not have the time to provide students with a justification for the

exam outcomes, as sessions are often very crowded and *'everyone is tired just wants to go home'*.

In his university experience, Antonio has never received any form of feedback on his development, or rather, on his performance. He seems to believe that the exam outcome measured with a grade is what he needs to 'measure' learning. Grades are the only form of 'feedback' he recognises and does not seem to believe there is the necessity nor the possibility for other types of feedback; this seems to be related to the distant and hierarchical relationship Antonio has with his lecturers. Lectures are not interactive, do not allow space for dialogue, and approaching a lecturer outside of teaching hours is certainly not common. As little communication exists between students and educators, why would Antonio expect any form of dialogue around his development or *'current level of knowledge'*?

Antonio's decision to undertake a postgraduate degree in the UK is extrinsically determined by better career prospects if involved in an English-speaking scientific community as *'in the scientific community, everyone speaks English and papers and articles are published in English'*. English is the main aspect of diversity he notices on arrival and the one he is particularly concerned with. His concern over English being the language of instruction originates from his lack of experience of using English both within and outside academia. Although he attended English language courses throughout his primary and secondary education, he is aware of his difficulties with communicating in the foreign language. He expresses feelings of frustration that arise when *'I want to say more things and I can't say it properly or I have to think about this so I get angry and I don't remember'*.

A few weeks into his postgraduate studies, Antonio seems to experience and become aware of other differences unrelated to language per se. Antonio observes that knowledge delivery and acquisition are not the main focus in his new course of study, and for the first time he mentions the importance of developing skills. Nevertheless, his conceptualisation of skills is peculiar and seems to be influenced by his previous academic culture and experience: *'in Italy they don't give you this information and maybe you're going to publish something but you don't know how to do it. So, it's very important to give this information to students'*. For him, skills are going to be 'delivered' in the form of information that students passively process.

Antonio is also positively surprised by the level of interaction he can now have with peers and staff, and he is *'very excited about this because is very different is very nice because you can work in groups, you can work with other people so you can share your ideas with*

others'. When working on his first assignment he reaches out to peers for support, as, although the requirements seem clear, he feels some peer feedback could help him improve the work. Writing an essay is an altogether new experience for him, and he seems to welcome the novelty. To ensure his work is up to standard he deeply engages with the written guidelines and tries to reduce uncertainty by asking lecturers clarifying questions. Their prompt responses surprise and motivate him, and he feels he is ready to embark on this new adventure.

When reflecting on how the new educational experience and environment differs from that he previously experienced he again underlines his appreciation for the interactive group work philosophy, however once again his academic history influences his conceptualisation of such philosophy. For him *'it's very important to share because maybe you don't know something that other people know'*, valuing knowledge acquisition from peers.

Antonio's history with assessment and feedback practices seems to impact greatly on his conceptualisation of learning, assessment, and feedback. He believes learning equals acquiring knowledge, the purposes of assessment are to show such knowledge, whereas feedback serves the purpose of confirming that the knowledge acquired is correct. Antonio knows little about the mechanisms of assignments and feedback processes, but tries to gather information from peers, educators, and support services.

He is aware of differences in the practices of assessment and feedback and shows interest in discovering the 'practical differences': *'I need to know what to include and what not to include'*. He shows attitudes of curiosity and openness towards diversity, perceiving it as a valuable opportunity to grow and a change of scenery. Although he appreciates the purposes behind oral examinations, he feels he could benefit from engaging in different types of work. He is still unsure of what the purposes and benefits of these new practices might be but he is willing to discover it. He seeks feedback, although in terms of information and 'correct' knowledge.

Antonio's reflection on the diversity of academic practices is overshadowed by his history that leaves little space for criticality, and this is mirrored in his interest of gathering 'knowledge' of the technicalities of the practices rather than the purposes and values behind them.

At this stage, he is not particularly aware of the diversity in academic cultures that determines the differences in the practices.

After completing his first assignment and receiving feedback, Antonio recognises that the diversity of assessment and feedback practices is greater than expected and he experiences emotions of confusion and distress for the first time. His focus is on the grade received and on his inability to interpret it – he attempts to compare it to the ‘correspondent’ Italian grade and this leads to dissatisfaction. His expectations are not met, and he feels confused about what lecturers are in fact expecting from him. He considers the feedback as an explanation of the grade and information of what was right and wrong. He strongly disagrees with the feedback provider perspective and is aware that his history might impact on his own views:

‘In fact, I did go a bit off topic mainly because – you know how it works in Italy. In Italy if you discuss a certain topic you need to begin by explaining what it is.’

He seems to show awareness that different academic cultures hold different values, and respects but not attempt to reflect on such diversity and its origins. Instead, when the disappointment and misalignment with his lecturers grows, he seeks support and validation from his previous Italian supervisors, showing the extent to which his academic history impacts on his beliefs and behaviours. His initial attitude of curiosity and openness towards diversity seems to shift to closeness and rejection of what he struggles to comprehend and agree with. As the feedback is conceptualised as an extension of the judgement provided through the grade, he is not aware of the fact that a dialogue with feedback providers could potentially support reflection on his own and others’ beliefs. He briefly considers seeking a dialogue with the lecturer but quickly dismisses the idea, as *‘this is not going to change anything. I don’t know what the system is here’* – implying that a conversation would probably not bring about a change in his grade. His behaviour is particularly present-orientated, as the interest lies mainly on grades and performance.

Antonio approaches assignments *‘following [his] instincts’* that are largely shaped by his previous experiences. A few months into his course, Antonio begins to appreciate that the feedback received could be used for future work, as it provides information on *‘what was right what was wrong’*. He still prefers to follow his instincts when working on assignments, and utilises the feedback received as a ‘what to do/not to do checklist’ only before submission. The judgments he makes on work are based on his history-shaped knowledge and are orientated towards an ‘error free’ work.

Antonio feels more comfortable behaving the way he has always done, as he feels overwhelmed when he attempts to modify his behaviour according to what seems to be considered effective. He is not aware of the reasons why he should behave differently in assignment and feedback situations and prefers to manage his emotions by continuing with a comfortable behaviour. He is also unsure about what is expected from him:

'The problem is what they wanted! I don't know what they want but I know what I want'.

As time passes, Antonio feels the need is greater to understand what principles and values inform the practices he engages with and those who participate in them. He feels anxious as his values, beliefs and behaviours are not entirely appreciated as he similarly struggles to appreciate others'. Antonio is increasingly aware of people and practices' cultural differences and tries to reflect critically on the implications of this. This is initially emotionally distressing, however dialogue with peers and lecturers as well as time and 'habit' reduce the stress levels.

'I think there's a problem as an international student. I mean you have to get used to what they asked to you so that's because it may be in your countries it is different from here'.

Antonio feels the new environment is implicitly forcing him to 'adapt' to practices whose purposes he is not aware of and cannot comprehend without support.

When the second term begins and Antonio has a longer experience with assessment and feedback practices, he seems to be increasingly satisfied with his work. Although his primary focus remains on the performance, he shows increased knowledge of the purposes and criteria of assignments and seems to be developing such knowledge with the support of the feedback. When he reflects on his work, he uses the feedback comments received as a basis for his critical reflection on the impact that his history used to have (and partially continues to have) on his behaviour and feelings.

Antonio regrets not having the possibility to discuss the feedback, its purposes and the philosophies behind the practice with lecturers and peers, and feels that discussing it as a participant to this research project *'really helps understand how the feedback works and how and why feedback is given'*. When he begins to appreciate this, he seeks extra feedback and opens a dialogue with his lecturers. Antonio also believes that his increased knowledge of assessment criteria and lecturers expectations facilitates appreciation of the feedback, both in terms of content and purpose of the practice.

Antonio also develops higher awareness of the role of his previous academic history in his current experience, and a particular event contributes to this. Towards the end of the second term, Antonio sits an examination that is very familiar to him: *'I can surely say that I really enjoyed this particular type of assignment because it was based on knowledge and on what you actually understood'*. He reflects on why he enjoyed this and acknowledges that his history could be a fundamental factor: *'I can say that in Italy we are more used to studying and acquiring knowledge and yes, this was easier for me'*. This leads to Antonio appreciating the diversity of academic cultures and the importance of becoming aware of this to fully appreciate initially unfamiliar practices.

Towards the end of the second term, Antonio begins to notice that different assessment types have different purposes and recognises that the feedback 'received' supported his critical reflection on diverse practices. He reflects on his experience with feedback and his appreciation and use of it and is able to see a significant change:

'Even if at first I was saying: 'What are they saying?' and I disagreed, if I look back at them now I have unconsciously understood what they meant and why. I am also unconsciously following the feedback and using what they said.'

His unconscious ability to appreciate the feedback and to utilise to judge and improve his work seems to have become increasingly conscious, and this is likely to be related to his increased awareness of the practice and willingness to critically reflect on it and on his behaviour during feedback processes.

Antonio recognises that taking action on the feedback received led to some improvement particularly in terms of writing and transferable skills, however regrets the lack of development in terms of knowledge acquisition, due to only little focus on it. His assessment history seems to be central once again, although Antonio is now aware of its role, and consequently reflects critically on the cultural diversity of assessment and feedback purposes and philosophies. He appreciates the values and purposes behind the practices he is experiencing now, however continues to hold values originating from previous experiences and proposes an integration of these. He believes that *'this is connected to the kind of society we are in. For example, this kind of society is more interested in people's skills and no one is going to look at your knowledge'*. His enhanced ability to critically reflect on the intercultural diversity of the practices leads to a shift from an attitude of rejection and behaviour of 'confirmation seeking' from Italian old lecturers to a more open attitude to interculturality and

a behaviour of dialogue seeking. Emotions of frustration, disbelief and confusion also give space to feelings and behaviours of acceptance of diversity.

Although for the most part of his experience Antonio conceptualises feedback as an explanation of the grade and of what is good and bad, he now recognises that feedback is not only the ‘comments received’. His dialogues and discussions with lecturers and peers also have a role in the feedback processes, and he is now more inclined to seek feedback in the form of a dialogue. This shift seems to be related to the increased awareness that student-staff interactions are possible and welcome, despite his history of no staff-student relationship nor dialogue. ‘*You are not their peer, but they still listen to what you have to say, and I really like this*’ and this helps manage emotions in feedback situations.

When thinking about the upcoming final dissertation, Antonio believes he now has the tools to approach the new tasks with increased awareness and knowledge. He feels positively about the future task and he is aware of ‘*why [he is] asked to do things a certain way*’ and what are the purposes and value of it. He can now manage his own and others’ expectations and this supports the ability to make judgements and decisions on his work. For this, he gives partial credit to the feedback processes he has been involved in and highlights the role experience to be aware, understand, and critically reflect on the diversity of the practices.

Appendix 6 – Themes and Sub-themes by Participant

Contribution to themes and sub-themes by participant

Participant 1

Pseudonym: Antonio

Country of secondary and higher education institutions: Italy

First language: bilingual – Romanian and Italian

Language of HE instruction: Italian

UK course of study: MSc in Biosciences

Histories

Assessment

Summative (end of year/course)
High-stakes oral examinations
Arbitrary requirements – high staff power
on defining own requirements
(modularisation and personal
preferences of staff)
Past and present orientation
Knowledge acquisition and memorisation

Feedback

No feedback mechanisms in place
Focus on grades
Grade as only information about past
performance

Staff-student relations

Lack of dialogue – not encouraged or
valued
Power distance – hierarchical system

Narrative's contribution to themes

1. Knowledge

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Mechanisms/technicalities	F: not known A: oral exams; essays known as written 'do at home' exams	F: written comments/official feedback A: more familiarity with essays/reports technicalities	F: written comments and verbal communication A: technicalities become tacitly known
Purposes/values/philosophies	F: not known A: checking quality and quantity of knowledge memorised	F: explain the grade/understand past mistakes A: formative and developmental/knowledge and skills	F: explain the grade/indications for future work A: formative and developmental/knowledge and skills
Expectations	F: not defined A: unsure	F: info provided by staff A: defined by first feedback	F: student responsible for participation in fb processes A:
Language/discourse	unfamiliarity with jargon in requirements	Unfamiliarity with jargon in requirements and feedback	Increased familiarity through experience – not for new tasks and specifically related jargon

2. Awareness

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Cultural diversity	Related to A practices only – UK focus on skills rather than purely knowledge	Increased awareness of diversity grade focus vs developmental feedback	Awareness of UK HE cultural origin of focus on feedback
Expectations	Diversity of expectations within A – greatly discussed	Lecturers expected to provide feedback 'correction'; students expected to understand them	Students expected to seek feedback and use it in future tasks building independence and

			strategies from past feedback
Histories roles	Lack of awareness	Increased awareness	Retrospective awareness – way of approaching A&F influenced by previous histories

3. Intercultural critical reflection

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Opinions	No formed opinions on A&F Not familiar with others' opinions	Opinions influenced by histories Attempt to balance own and others' opinions to 'please' lecturers	Reflection on previous opinion and current opinions Recognition of reasons behind others' different opinions
Discussions	No critical discussions – only discussions with past lecturers to have 'confirmation'	Peer critical discussions on A – peer feedback dialogues	Critical discussions with peers and staff
Critical analysis	No reflection/analysis	Analysis influenced by history	Retrospective analysis of history practices and analysis of current - reflection

4. Intercultural emotional intelligence

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Empathy	Low awareness of cultural diversity in A&F contexts – empathy in other contexts	In A&F contexts; towards the self – reduced self-judgements	Towards the self and other – reduced detrimental emotions caused by diversity
Uncertainty	High – both A&F	Reduced through peer support	Reduced – experience, peer support and

			feedback dialogues with staff
Discussions	No discussions – unsure it is appropriate	Discussions with peers to reduce fear	Discussions with peers and staff
Language/discourse	Frustration because of unclarity	English politeness in positive feedback causes frustration because of misalignment with grade Frustration in discussions – difficulty understanding and expressing himself	English politeness in positive feedback causes frustration and uncertainty about how to develop

5. Attitudes

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Predispositions	Past orientated – focus on completed task	Past and present orientation	Future orientation
Beliefs	A: demonstration of knowledge acquisition F: no beliefs – no knowledge of practice	Feedback and assessment as practices to check summative performances	Formative and developmental aspect of A&F
Openness	No – seeking confirmation from previous supervisors	Open towards new A practices – necessity	Open towards A&F because of understanding its value
Curiosity	About assessment but not feedback	Curiosity about feedback practices and values behind	

6. Skills

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Behaviour flexibility	No recognition of own and 'expected' behaviour in A&F situations	Past and present orientated	Future orientated
Self/active learning	Confused with 'independent study'	Appreciation of value of student agency in A situations	Appreciation of value of student agency in A&F situations
Conflicts resolution	No conflict recognised	Conflict management to 'please' other	Conflict resolution when value of different behaviour in A&F situation is understood

Participant 2

Pseudonym: Diana

Country of secondary and higher education institutions: Italy with Erasmus Programme in France

First language: Italian

Language of HE instruction: Italian

UK course of study: MA in Curating

Histories

Assessment

Summative (end of year/course)
High-stakes oral and written
examinations
Arbitrary requirements – high staff power
on defining own requirements
(modularisation and personal
preferences of staff)
Past and present orientation
Knowledge acquisition and memorisation

Feedback

No feedback mechanisms in place
Focus on grades
Grade as only information about past
performance
Feedback as 'corrections' only during
dissertation period

Staff-student relations

Lack of dialogue – not encouraged or
valued
Power distance – hierarchical system
Relationship only with dissertation
supervisor

Narrative's contribution to themes

1. Knowledge

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Mechanisms/technicalities	F: corrections on text – from dissertation A: essays = long written answer to one question; similar to oral exams but fewer questions	F: written 'official' feedback comments A: increased knowledge of types of assignments and characteristics (e.g. comparative analysis etc.)	F: written 'official' feedback comments A: increase through experience
Purposes/values/philosophies	F: in-text corrections A: answering questions to prove knowledge and memorisation	F: info on what is 'wrong and right' in completed task A: answering questions to prove knowledge and memorisation	F: info on what is 'wrong and right' in completed task A: learning how to write for potential future academic work
Expectations	F: none A: equal as previous experience	F: info provided by staff and direct experience – read and understand the feedback A: defined by first feedback	F: staff provide 'corrections', student reads and understands them A: not in line with her own – rejection of practices. Engagement solely to pass.
Language/discourse	Unfamiliarity with jargon in requirements	Unfamiliarity with jargon in requirements and feedback	Loss of interest in unpacking meaning

2. Awareness

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Cultural diversity	Low general awareness	Increases about assessment	

	No awareness of diversity within A&F		
Expectations	No awareness of diversity of expectations	In assessment contexts	In assessment contexts
Histories roles	Low awareness	Increased awareness about assessment values and behaviours	Assessment values and behaviours

3. Intercultural critical reflection

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Opinions	No formed opinions on A&F Not familiar with others' opinions	Opinions influenced by histories No reflection on others' opinions - rejection	Still 'othering' and rejecting different opinions
Discussions	No critical discussions – only discussions with past lecturers to have 'confirmation'	No critical discussions – discussions with past lecturers and Italian lecturers at the university to have 'confirmation'	No critical discussions – not willing to listen to others
Critical analysis	No reflection/analysis	Analysis influences by history	Analysis influences by history

4. Intercultural emotional intelligence

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Empathy	No empathy towards diversity shown – lack of awareness	Empathy towards the self – not towards the other	Empathy towards the self – not towards the other

Uncertainty	Low – lack of awareness	In assessment situations – does not consider feedback as practices	In assessment situations – does not consider feedback as practices
Discussions	Not considered	Not considered nor encouraged by staff	Not considered nor encouraged by staff
Language/discourse	Confident there would be no issue	Frustration for inability to express herself and be understood	Frustration for inability to express herself and be understood

5. Attitudes

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Predispositions	Past orientated – focus on completed task	Past and present orientation	Little future orientation to please staff
Beliefs	A: demonstration of knowledge acquisition F: no beliefs – no knowledge of practice	Feedback and assessment as practices to check summative performances	Feedback and assessment as practices to check summative performances
Openness	No openness – rejection of what is different	No openness – rejection of what is different	No openness – acceptance of some form of diversity to ‘pass’
Curiosity	No curiosity	No curiosity	No curiosity

6. Skills

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term

Behaviour flexibility	No recognition of own and 'expected' behaviour in A&F situations	Not showing willingness to be flexible – past orientated	Flexibility shown in order to pass courses and move on – using some feedback in future work to please lecturer
Self/active learning	Confused with 'independent study'	No active learning about or within practices	No active learning about or within practices
Conflicts resolution	Does not see conflict	Conflict recognised but not solved – seeks support from staff from 'similar backgrounds'	Conflict management to 'please' other

Participant 3

Pseudonym: Eileen

Country of secondary and higher education institutions: Pakistan

First language: Urdu

Language of HE instruction: English

UK course of study: MSc in Biosciences

Histories

Assessment

High stakes written examinations with
some mid-term 'take home' written
assignments
Use of rubrics to define requirements
Past and present orientation
Knowledge acquisition and memorisation

Feedback

No feedback mechanisms in place
Focus on grades
Grade as only information about past
performance
Feedback only when asking for re-
checking (re-marking) of assignments

Staff-student relations

Lack of dialogue – not encouraged or
valued
Power distance – hierarchical system
Relations with few staff members during
dissertation period

Narrative's contribution to themes

1. Knowledge

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Mechanisms/ technicalities	F: not known A: exams; essays known as written 'do at home' exams – no academic writing	F: written comments/official feedback A: more familiarity with essays' technicalities	F: written comments and verbal communication A: technicalities become tacitly known through experience and feedback
Purposes/values/ philosophies	F: not known A: checking quality and quantity of knowledge memorised	F: explain the grade/understand past mistakes A: formative and developmental/knowledge and skills	F: indications for not repeating mistakes in future work and support for international students to align to expectations A: formative and developmental/knowledge and skills
Expectations	F: not defined A: unsure	F: info provided by staff to be memorised in order to improve future work A: defined by first feedback	F: student and staff shared responsible for participation in fb processes – staff give info, student uses info A: expected to use the feedback to be more independent in assessment situations
Language/discourse	unfamiliarity with jargon in requirements	Unfamiliarity with jargon in requirements and feedback	Increased familiarity through experience – not for new tasks and specifically related jargon

2. Awareness

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Cultural diversity	Related to A practices only – UK focus on	Increased awareness of role of	Increased awareness of diverse

	skills rather than purely knowledge	developmental feedback	characteristics and purposes of practices through experience and feedback
Expectations	Diversity of expectations within A – greatly discussed in class and university wide	Lecturers expected to provide feedback ‘correction’; students expected to memorise and use them for future work	Students expected to seek feedback and use it in future tasks Staff expected to provide clarifications when needed
Histories roles	Awareness of role in A situations – (lack of) feedback history not considered	Increased awareness in A contexts	Retrospective awareness – way of approaching A&F influenced by previous histories

3. Intercultural critical reflection

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Opinions	No formed opinions on previous and current A&F practices Not familiar with others’ opinions in new context	Willingness to adapt to others’ and tends to accept others’ opinions without reflection	Lack of reflection – automatic acceptance of others’ opinions and instructions
Discussions	No critical discussions – unsure this is appropriate	Lack of critical discussions – intent of discussion is to receive information and answers	Critical discussions with peers and staff attempted after encouragement
Critical analysis	No reflection/analysis on previous A&F practices	No reflection/analysis of current practices	Retrospective analysis of history practices and analysis of current - reflection

4. Intercultural emotional intelligence

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Empathy	Empathy towards general diversity	In A&F contexts; towards the self – reduced self-judgements	Towards the self and other – reduced detrimental emotions caused by diversity
Uncertainty	High – both A&F	Reduced through peer support, extra-curricular modules and first feedback episodes	Reduced – experience, peer support and feedback dialogues with staff
Discussions	No discussions – unsure it is appropriate	Discussions encouraged – this prompts engagement in feedback contexts	Discussions with peers and attempt with staff – disappointment when staff not engaged
Language/discourse	Frustration because of unclarity	Relief as unclarity is reduced	

5. Attitudes

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Predispositions	Past orientated – focus on completed task	Past and present orientation	Future orientation
Beliefs	A: demonstration of knowledge acquisition F: re-marking of assignment	Assessment as practices to check summative performances Feedback as corrections and info to	Formative and developmental aspect of A&F

		avoid making same mistakes	
Openness	Open towards new A practices – looks for new ways of learning and developing	Open towards new A practices – seeks feedback and dialogue	Open towards A&F
Curiosity	About assessment but not feedback (feedback not known)	Curiosity about both practices and values behind	Curiosity about continuing learning new things

6. Skills

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Behaviour flexibility	Recognition that own and 'expected' behaviour in A&F situations might be different – unsure how	Past and present orientated and feedback seeking – still unsure what is appropriate and effective	Future orientated and feedback seeking
Self/active learning	Not experienced before but seeks this change in UK	Appreciation of value of student agency in A situations	Appreciation of value of student agency in A&F situations
Conflicts resolution	Conflict not recognised – happy to unilaterally adapt	Tends to avoid conflict through willingness to adapt – no reflection	Total adaptation or total rejection if request to adapt in specific way is not understood

Participant 4

Pseudonym: Jalil

Country of secondary and higher education institutions: Pakistan

First language: Urdu

Language of HE instruction: Urdu and English

UK course of study: MSc in Conservation Biology

Histories

Assessment

High stakes written examinations with
some mid-term 'take home' written
assignments
Use of rubrics to define requirements but
reportedly arbitrary evaluation because
of high lecturer power
Past and present orientation
Knowledge acquisition and memorisation

Feedback

No feedback mechanisms in place
Focus on grades
Grade as only information about past
performance
Feedback only when asking for re-
checking (re-marking) of assignments and
during dissertation period – feedback as
correction of completed work

Staff-student relations

Lack of dialogue – not encouraged or
valued
Power distance – hierarchical system
Relations with few staff members during
dissertation period

Narrative's contribution to themes

1. Knowledge

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Mechanisms/technicalities	F: not known A: exams; essays known as written 'do at home' exams – no academic writing	F: written comments/official feedback A: more familiarity with essays' technicalities	F: written comments and verbal communication A: technicalities become tacitly known through experience and feedback
Purposes/values/philosophies	F: not known A: checking quality and quantity of knowledge memorised	F: explain the grade/understand past mistakes A: formative and developmental/knowledge and skills	F: indications for not repeating mistakes in future work and support for international students to align to expectations A: formative and developmental/knowledge and skills
Expectations	F: not defined A: unsure	F: info provided by staff to improve future work A: defined by first feedback	F: student and staff shared responsible for participation in fb processes – staff give info, student uses info A: expected to use the feedback to be more independent in assessment situations
Language/discourse	unfamiliarity with jargon in requirements	Unfamiliarity with jargon in requirements and feedback	Increased familiarity through experience – not for new tasks and specifically related jargon

2. Awareness

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term

Cultural diversity	Related to A practices only – UK focus on skills and critical thinking rather than purely knowledge acquisition	Increased awareness of role of feedback practice as he experiences it	Increased awareness of diverse characteristics and purposes of practices through experience and feedback
Expectations	Diversity of expectations within A – greatly discussed in class and university wide	Lecturers expected to provide feedback 'correction'; students expected to consider and use them for future work	Students expected to seek feedback and use it in future tasks Staff expected to provide clarifications when needed – students are expected to develop own strategies and be independent with support of feedback
Histories roles	Awareness of role in A situations – (lack of) feedback history not considered	Increased awareness in A contexts	Retrospective awareness – way of approaching A&F influenced by previous histories

3. Intercultural critical reflection

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Opinions	Negative opinions on previous A practices – no opinions on new practices yet Not familiar with others' opinions in new context	Willingness to adapt to others' and tends to accept others' opinions for the sake of succeeding	Retrospective reflection on others' opinions and finding a balance between own and others' opinions when they diverge
Discussions	No critical discussions – unsure this is appropriate	Lack of critical discussions – intent of discussion is to receive information and answers	Critical discussions with peers and staff attempted after encouragement

Critical analysis	Analysis of previous A practices – no feedback	Analysis of current practices as he uncovers them	Retrospective analysis of history practices and analysis of current - reflection
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4. Intercultural emotional intelligence

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Empathy	Empathy towards general diversity	In A&F contexts; towards the self – reduced self-judgements	Towards the self and other – reduced detrimental emotions caused by diversity
Uncertainty	High – both A&F	Reduced through peer support, extra-curricular modules and first feedback episodes	Reduced – experience, peer support and feedback dialogues with staff
Discussions	No discussions – unsure it is appropriate	Discussions encouraged – this prompts engagement in feedback contexts	Discussions with peers and attempt with staff – disappointment when staff not engaged
Language/discourse	Frustration because of unclarity	Relief as unclarity is reduced	

5. Attitudes

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Predispositions	Past orientated – focus on completed task	Past and present orientation	Future orientation
Beliefs	A: demonstration of knowledge acquisition	Assessment as practices to check	Formative and developmental aspect of A&F

	F: re-marking of assignment	summative performances Feedback as corrections and info to avoid making same mistakes	
Openness	Open towards new A practices – looks for new ways of learning and developing	Open towards new A practices – seeks feedback and dialogue	Open towards A&F
Curiosity	About assessment but not feedback (feedback not known)	Curiosity about both practices and values behind	Curiosity about continuing learning new things

6. Skills

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Behaviour flexibility	Recognition that own and 'expected' behaviour in A&F situations might be different – unsure how	Past and present orientated and feedback seeking – still unsure what is appropriate and effective	Future orientated and feedback seeking
Self/active learning	Not experienced before but seeks this change in UK	Appreciation of value of student agency in A situations	Appreciation of value of student agency in A&F situations
Conflicts resolution	Conflict not recognised – happy to unilaterally adapt	Tends to avoid conflict through willingness to adapt – no reflection	Total adaptation or total rejection if request to adapt in specific way is not understood

Participant 5

Pseudonym: Mahmoud

Country of secondary and higher education institutions: Iraq

First language: Arabic

Language of HE instruction: English

UK Course of study: MSc in Cognitive Psychology

Histories

Assessment

Summative (end of year/course)
High stakes written examinations and
practical exams
Past and present orientation
Knowledge acquisition and memorisation

Feedback

No feedback mechanisms in place
Feedback as 'corrections' and
'explanation of grade' only if officially
requested
Focus on grades
Grade as only information about past
performance

Staff-student relations

Lack of dialogue – not encouraged or
valued
Power distance – hierarchical system
Relationship only with few 'different'
lecturers with academic experience abroad

Narrative's contribution to themes

1. Knowledge

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Mechanisms/ technicalities	F: known as post-assignment corrections A: essays but unsure about how technicalities would differ from exam non-academic writing	F: written comments post-submission A: more familiarity with essays technicalities	F: written comments post-submission. A: technicalities become tacitly known
Purposes/values/ philosophies	F: telling students what was done right and wrong A: checking accuracy of knowledge memorised and ability to remember info	F: clarifying assignment expectations A: knowledge, skills and development as an independent thinker and writer	F: support development and reflect on own work; development of effective long-term strategies A: formative and developmental
Expectations	F: student expected to read feedback staff provide A: independent research and learning	F: student expected to read feedback staff provide and 'follow' it in future tasks A: better defined by first feedback	F: both student and staff responsible for participation in fb processes/dialogues A: independent work to build on for final dissertation and develop critical thinkers
Language/discourse	Unfamiliarity with jargon in requirements	Unfamiliarity with jargon in requirements	Increased familiarity through experience – still unfamiliarity with what is 'new'

2. Awareness

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Cultural diversity		Increased awareness in relation to A&F	Awareness of A&F becomes higher with

	<p>High awareness of generic cultural diversity</p> <p>Related to A practices only – UK focus on criticality and independency rather than purely knowledge</p>	<p>Awareness of diversity of feedback that is a valued and promoted practice in new environment</p>	<p>time, experience and feedback</p>
Expectations	<p>Diversity of expectations within A – greatly discussed</p>	<p>Lecturers expected to provide feedback ‘correction’; students expected to understand them and avoid making similar mistakes</p>	<p>Students expected to seek feedback; expected to use it in future tasks building independence and strategies from past feedback</p>
Histories roles	<p>Awareness in assessment contexts – way in which tasks are approached</p>	<p>Awareness in assessment contexts - way in which tasks are approached</p>	<p>Awareness in A&F – no history of feedback impact on uncertainty of behaviour in F situations</p>

3. Intercultural critical reflection

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Opinions	<p>No formed opinions on new A&F practices – disagreement with purposes of old ones</p> <p>Not familiar with others’ opinions but willing to know them</p>	<p>Considers own and others’ opinions to approach assessments and feedback effectively and appropriately</p>	<p>Reflection on previous opinion and current opinions</p> <p>Recognition of reasons behind others’ different opinions</p>
Discussions	<p>Willingness to engage in critical discussions within and about A&F as no previous opportunity to do so</p>	<p>critical discussions on A – peer feedback dialogues - reflection Staff does not encourage discussion</p>	<p>Wish for more staff engagement in discussions</p>

Critical analysis	Critical analysis of previous A&F practices	Analysis of history practices and analysis of current - reflection	Analysis of history practices and analysis of current – deeper reflection supported by feedback
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4. Intercultural emotional intelligence

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Empathy	Low awareness of cultural diversity in F contexts – empathy in A and other contexts	Towards the self – reduced self-judgements Towards others – higher acceptance of A&F new practices	Towards the self and other – reduced detrimental emotions caused by diversity
Uncertainty	High – both A&F	Reduced through peer support and first feedback episode	Reduced – experience, peer support and feedback However, wish for earlier feedback to reduce uncertainty in early stages
Discussions	Positive feelings about idea of dialogues and discussions	Discussions with peers but staff does not engage - disappointment	Discussions with peers but staff does not engage – disappointment
Language/discourse	Frustration because of unclarity	Frustration reduced through experience	Frustration reduced through feedback and experience

5. Attitudes

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Predispositions	Rejection of previous past orientated – focus on completed task attitude	Future orientation when approaching assessment but	Future orientation supported by feedback received in second term

	Predisposed to explore new practices	absence of feedback does not support that	
Beliefs	A: demonstration of knowledge acquisition is not useful – willing to explore new ways F: no beliefs – no knowledge of practice	Formative and developmental aspect of A&F But need for earlier feedback	Formative and developmental aspect of A&F
Openness	Yes – willingness to explore new practices	Open towards new A practices Open to feedback but no experience of it until mid-January	Open towards A&F because of understanding its value Open towards dialogic aspect of feedback but little experience of it
Curiosity	Yes – rejection of histories of A&F encourages curiosity	Curiosity about feedback practices and values behind – curious but feedback comes late	Curiosity triggered by feedback– goes back to see what he missed in first term

6. Skills

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Behaviour flexibility	Recognition own behaviour in A situations might not be what is 'expected'	Future orientated and dialogue seeking	Future orientated and dialogue seeking
Self/active learning	Appreciates concept Unsure how and when to do it	Appreciation of value of student agency in A situations	Appreciation of value of student agency in A&F situations
Conflicts resolution	Recognition of potential conflict but openness to others'	Conflict management through mediation of approach to	Conflict resolution when value of different behaviour in

	opinions and beliefs helps managing conflicts	assessment task (compromise)	A&F situation is understood
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Participant 6

Pseudonym: Malak

Country of secondary and higher education institutions: Syria and Bahrain

First language: Arabic

Language of HE instruction: Arabic

UK course of study: MA in Linguistics

Histories

Assessment

<p>High stakes written examinations with some mid-term 'take home' written assignments</p> <p>Arbitrary requirements – high staff power on defining own requirements (modularisation and personal preferences of staff)</p> <p>Past and present orientation</p> <p>Knowledge acquisition and memorisation</p>

Feedback

<p>No feedback mechanisms in place</p> <p>Focus on grades</p> <p>Grade as only information about past performance</p> <p>Some feedback as 'linguistic correction' experienced when writing dissertation in English</p>
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Staff-student relations

<p>Lack of dialogue – not encouraged or valued</p> <p>Power distance – hierarchical system</p>
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Relations with few staff members during dissertation period

Narrative's contribution to themes

1. Knowledge

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Mechanisms/technicalities	F: not known A: exams; essays known as written 'do at home' exams	F: written comments/official feedback A: more familiarity with essays' technicalities	F: written comments and verbal communication A: technicalities become tacitly known through experience
Purposes/values/philosophies	F: not known A: checking quality and quantity of knowledge memorised	F: explain the grade/understand past mistakes A: formative and developmental/knowledge and skills	F: indications for future work and support for international students to align to expectations A: formative and developmental/knowledge and skills
Expectations	F: not defined A: unsure	F: info provided by staff A: defined by first feedback	F: student and staff shared responsible for participation in fb processes A: independent work
Language/discourse	unfamiliarity with jargon in requirements	Unfamiliarity with jargon in requirements and feedback	Increased familiarity through experience – not for new tasks and specifically related jargon

2. Awareness

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Cultural diversity	Related to A practices only – UK focus on skills rather than purely knowledge	Increased awareness of diversity grade focus vs	Awareness of UK HE cultural origin of focus on feedback

		developmental feedback	
Expectations	Diversity of expectations within A – greatly discussed	Lecturers expected to provide feedback ‘correction’; students expected to understand and use them for future work	Students expected to seek feedback and use it in future tasks building independence and strategies from past feedback
Histories roles	Awareness of role in A situations	Increased awareness	Retrospective awareness – way of approaching A&F influenced by previous histories

3. Intercultural critical reflection

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Opinions	Formed opinions on previous A&F Not familiar with others’ opinions in new context	Opinions influenced by histories Attempt to mediate through reflection on own and others’ opinions - looking to understand reasons behind others’ opinions	Reflection on previous opinion and current opinions Recognition of reasons behind others’ different opinions
Discussions	No critical discussions – unsure this is appropriate but wish to engage in dialogue to prompt reflection	Critical discussions with peers – attempted with staff but not successful	Critical discussions with peers – attempted with staff but not successful
Critical analysis	Reflection/analysis on previous A&F practices	Analysis and understanding influenced by history	Retrospective analysis of history practices and analysis of current - reflection

4. Intercultural emotional intelligence

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Empathy	Empathy towards general diversity	In A&F contexts; towards the self – reduced self-judgements	Towards the self and other – reduced detrimental emotions caused by diversity
Uncertainty	High – both A&F	Reduced through peer support, extra-curricular modules and first feedback episodes	Reduced – experience, peer support and feedback dialogues with staff
Discussions	No discussions – unsure it is appropriate and fear of rejection	Discussions with peers to reduce fear	Discussions with peers and attempt with staff – disappointment when staff not engaged
Language/discourse	Frustration because of unclarity and fear of looking incapable of communicating	English politeness in positive feedback causes frustration because of misalignment with grade Frustration in discussions – difficulty understanding and expressing herself	English politeness in positive feedback causes frustration and uncertainty about how to develop Frustration for lack of clarification when she requests it

5. Attitudes

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Predispositions	Past orientated – focus on completed task	Past and present orientation	Future orientation
Beliefs	A: demonstration of knowledge acquisition	Feedback and assessment as	

	F: no beliefs – no knowledge of practice	practices to check summative performances	Formative and developmental aspect of A&F
Openness	Open towards new A practices – looks for new ways of learning and developing	Open towards new A practices – seeks feedback and dialogue	Open towards A&F
Curiosity	About assessment but not feedback (feedback not known)	Curiosity about both practices and values behind	Curiosity about continuing learning new things

6. Skills

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Behaviour flexibility	Recognition that own and 'expected' behaviour in A&F situations might be different – unsure how	Past and present orientated – ready to change behaviour but still unsure what is appropriate and effective	Future orientated
Self/active learning	Not experienced before but seeks this change in UK	Appreciation of value of student agency in A situations	Appreciation of value of student agency in A&F situations
Conflicts resolution	Conflict predicted but not recognised yet	Conflict management attempted but need to understand where conflict comes from – calls for staff collaboration	Conflict resolution when value of different behaviour in A&F situation is understood – however calls for staff openness to participate in resolution

Participant 7

Pseudonym: Marlene

Country of secondary and higher education institutions: Germany with periods in Morocco and Switzerland

First language: German

Language of HE instruction: German and English

UK Course of study: MA in Peace and Conflict Studies

Histories

Assessment

Formative assessment and few
high stakes written examinations
Various types of assessment
Use of rubrics to define assessment
requirements
Future orientation
Focus on application of theory to practice
and skills development

Feedback

Developmental and ongoing feedback
mechanisms in place
No use of technology in feedback
processes
Feedback 'interviews' with lecturers
In-class discussions an ongoing dialogue

Staff-student relations

Dialogue encouraged and valued
Close to lecturers as small non- traditional
university

Narrative's contribution to themes

1. Knowledge

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Mechanisms/ technicalities	<p>F: known as 'official' written comments and discussion with staff</p> <p>A: similar but unsure about how technicalities would differ in different academic contexts</p>	<p>F: written comments post-submission and ongoing dialogues with staff (highlighted by members of staff)</p> <p>A: more familiarity with diversity of essays technicalities</p>	<p>F: written comments and verbal feedback in theory – only written comments in reality</p> <p>A: technicalities become tacitly known</p>
Purposes/values/ philosophies	<p>F: telling students how to improve next works</p> <p>A: developing skills and preparing for employment; developing writing abilities and preparing students for further research</p>	<p>F: clarifying assignment expectations and support development</p> <p>A: formative and developmental</p>	<p>F: support development and reflect on own work; development of effective long-term strategies – theory but not in reality</p> <p>A: formative and developmental</p>
Expectations	<p>F: student expected to read, understand, and incorporate feedback staff provide in subsequent work</p> <p>A: independent research and learning – unsure how</p>	<p>F: student expected to read, understand, and incorporate feedback staff provide in subsequent work</p> <p>A: better defined by first feedback</p>	<p>F: both student and staff responsible for participation in fb processes/dialogues – staff often do not fulfil responsibility</p> <p>A: independent work to build on for final dissertation and develop as critical thinkers</p>
Language/discourse	<p>Unfamiliarity with meaning attributed to A jargon in different context</p>	<p>Unfamiliarity with meaning attributed to A&F jargon in different context</p>	<p>Increased familiarity through experience – feedback did not play role</p>

2. Awareness

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Cultural diversity	High awareness of generic cultural diversity and potential diversity of A&F – willingness to explore such diversity	Increased awareness in relation to A&F Awareness of diversity of feedback that is highly utilised and valued in new context	Awareness of A&F becomes higher with time, experience and dialogic feedback - however rhetoric of valued feedback processes not there in reality
Expectations	Diversity of expectations within A – greatly discussed Hoping for greater focus on feedback	Lecturers expected to provide feedback and engage in dialogues with students; students expected to reflect on it and use it to improve work in future	Students expected to seek feedback; expected to use it in future tasks building independence and strategies from past feedback
Histories roles	Awareness in assessment contexts – way in which tasks are approached	Awareness in assessment contexts - way in which tasks are approached Feedback: disappointment with little amount of feedback in history influences her engagement with feedback	Experience at the UK institutions becomes part of history and awareness increases

3. Intercultural critical reflection

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Opinions	No formed opinions on new A&F practices Not familiar with others' opinions but willing to know them	Considers own and others' opinions to approach assessments and feedback effectively and appropriately	Reflection on previous opinion and current opinions Recognition of reasons behind others' different opinions

Discussions	Willingness to engage in critical discussions within and about A&F as values critical reflection and discussion	Critical discussions about A&F and within them – however lecturers encourage it but do not engage	Lack of time for reflection and opportunity to engage in critical discussion
Critical analysis	Critical analysis of previous A&F practices	Analysis of history practices and analysis of current - reflection	Analysis of history practices and analysis of current – deeper reflection supported by experience No sufficient time to reflect on feedback and utilise it

4. Intercultural emotional intelligence

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Empathy	High empathy towards self and other – previous experience in diverse academic contexts	Towards the self – reduced self-judgements Towards others – higher acceptance of and engagement with new A&F practices	Towards the self and other – positive emotions about diversity continue Wish for same empathy from staff
Uncertainty	Considered normal in both A&F contexts Can manage stress and nervousness	Reduced through peer support and feedback	Reduced – experience, peer support and feedback However, wish for earlier feedback to reduce uncertainty in early stages
Discussions	Positive feelings about idea of dialogues and discussions	Discussions with peers and some staff members When discussion is encouraged but does not happen – frustration and disappointment	Discussions with peers and some staff members When discussion is encouraged but does not happen – frustration and disappointment

Language/discourse	Frustration because of unclarity	Frustration reduced through experience English politeness not understood	Frustration reduced through feedback and experience English politeness not understood
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5. Attitudes

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Predispositions	Future orientation when approaching assessment – discussions about A&F support it	Future orientation when approaching assessment – discussions about A&F support it	Future orientation hindered by lack of developmental and dialogic feedback
Beliefs	A: developmental and formative F: useful and hopes to see better mechanisms in the UK academic context	Formative and developmental aspect of A&F	Formative and developmental aspect of A&F – theory but not in reality
Openness	Yes – willingness to explore new practices	Open towards new A&F practices – open discussions with staff and peers support it	Less openness when formative and dialogic aspects of practices are promoted but not practised
Curiosity	Yes – particularly about more engaging feedback processes	Curiosity about A&F practices and values behind	

6. Skills

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Behaviour flexibility	Recognition own behaviour in A&F situations might not be what is 'expected'	Future orientated and dialogue seeking	Future orientated and dialogue seeking – although no response from staff

Self/active learning	Familiar concepts that were part of her history – appreciates role in A&F situations	Familiar concepts that were part of her history – appreciates role in A&F situations	Familiar concepts that were part of her history – appreciates role in A&F situations
Conflicts resolution	Recognition of potential conflict but openness to others' opinions and beliefs helps managing conflicts	Conflict resolution when value of different behaviour in A&F situation is understood	Conflict resolution when value of different behaviour in A&F situation is understood

Participant 8

Pseudonym: Nik

Country of secondary and higher education institutions: Serbia

First language: Serbian

Language of HE instruction: Serbian

UK course of study: MSc in Marketing and Finance

Histories

Assessment

Summative (end of year/course)
High-stakes oral examinations
Arbitrary requirements – high staff power
on defining own requirements
(modularisation and personal
preferences of staff)
Past and present orientation
Knowledge acquisition and memorisation

Feedback

No feedback mechanisms in place
Focus on grades
Grade as only information about past
performance

Staff-student relations

Lack of dialogue – not encouraged or
valued
Power distance – hierarchical system

Narrative's contribution to themes

1. Knowledge

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Mechanisms/ technicalities	F: not known A: essays = long written answer to one question; similar to oral exams but fewer questions	F: written 'official' feedback comments A: increased knowledge of types of assignments and characteristics (e.g. reports)	F: written 'official' feedback comments A: increase through experience but not for 'new' assessment types
Purposes/values/ philosophies	F: not known A: answering questions to prove knowledge and memorisation	F: info on what is 'wrong and right' in completed task A: answering questions to prove knowledge and memorisation	F: info on what is 'wrong and right' in completed task A: learning for future employment
Expectations	F: none A: equal as previous experience	F: read and understand the feedback A: defined by first feedback and extra-curricular academic skills modules	F: staff provide 'corrections', student reads and understands them A: work independently
Language/ discourse	Unfamiliarity with jargon in requirements	Unfamiliarity with jargon in requirements and feedback	Increased familiarity with experience and discussion with peers

2. Awareness

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Cultural diversity	Low general awareness No awareness of diversity within A&F	Increases about assessment – no interest in feedback so no increased awareness	Awareness of diversity of A&F increases through experience and participation in research project

Expectations	No awareness of diversity of expectations	In assessment contexts	In assessment and feedback contexts – however, not interested in feedback expectations
Histories roles	Low awareness	Increased awareness about assessment values and behaviours	Assessment values and behaviours

3. Intercultural critical reflection

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Opinions	No formed opinions on A&F Not familiar with/not interested in others' opinions	Opinions influenced by histories No reflection on others' opinions - rejection	Still 'othering' and mainly rejecting different opinions – particularly feedback is rejected
Discussions	No critical discussions – discussion not needed as they would provide too much 'help'	No critical discussions – wants to rely on own knowledge	No critical discussions – some engagement with peers and attempt to discuss and reflect due to research
Critical analysis	No reflection/analysis	Analysis influenced by history	Analysis mainly influences by history

4. Intercultural emotional intelligence

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Empathy	No empathy towards diversity shown – lack of awareness	Low empathy	Low empathy

Uncertainty	Low – lack of awareness	In assessment situations – does not consider feedback as practices Deactivating emotions and rejection of diversity as it comes as ‘surprise’	Reduced by experience
Discussions	Not considered	Not considered nor encouraged by staff	Not considered nor encouraged by staff
Language/discourse	Difficulty but does not show emotions	Inability to express himself and be understood – no emotion showed	Inability to express himself and be understood – no emotion showed

5. Attitudes

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Predispositions	Past orientated – focus on completed task	Past and present orientation	Past and present orientation mainly – some orientation towards future employment
Beliefs	A: demonstration of knowledge acquisition F: no beliefs – no knowledge of practice	Feedback and assessment as practices to check summative performances	Feedback and assessment as practices to check summative performances
Openness	No openness – rejection of what is different	No openness – rejection of what is different	No openness – acceptance of some form of diversity for a ‘trial’
Curiosity	No curiosity	No curiosity	Some curiosity triggered by research project

6. Skills

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Behaviour flexibility	No recognition of own and 'expected' behaviour in A&F situations	Not showing willingness to be flexible – past orientated	No flexibility in feedback contexts – rejection of purposes of practice
Self/active learning	Confused with 'independent study'	No active learning about or within practices	No active learning about or within practices
Conflicts resolution	Does not see conflict	Conflict recognised but not solved – continues with own opinions and previous behaviours	Conflict recognised but not solved – continues with own opinions and previous behaviours although trying to solve it through dialogue but being disappointed

Participant 9

Pseudonym: Numi

Country of secondary and higher education institutions: Sri Lanka

First language: Sinhalese

Language of HE instruction: English

UK course of study: MSc in Conservation Biology

Histories

Assessment

Summative (end of year/course)
High stakes written examinations, tests,
practical exams
Past and present orientation
Knowledge acquisition and memorisation

Feedback

No real feedback mechanisms in place
Feedback as 'corrections' and
'explanation of grade' only if officially
requested
Focus on grades
Grade as only information about past
performance
Some feedback experiences because of
extra academic job as writer and
dissertation supervisor

Staff-student relations

Lack of dialogue – not encouraged nor
valued
Power distance – hierarchical system
Relationship only with few 'different'
lecturers with academic experience abroad

Narrative's contribution to themes

1. Knowledge

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Mechanisms/ technicalities	F: known as post-assignment corrections A: essays but unsure about how technicalities would differ from exam non-academic writing	F: written comments post-submission and dialogues with staff (highlighted by member of staff) A: more familiarity with essays technicalities	F: written comments and verbal feedback A: technicalities become tacitly known
Purposes/values/ philosophies	F: telling students what was done right and wrong A: checking accuracy of knowledge memorised and ability to remember info but should include a developmental aspect – hopes for this in UK	F: clarifying assignment expectations and support development A: knowledge, skills and development as an independent thinker and writer	F: support development and reflect on own work; development of effective long-term strategies A: formative and developmental
Expectations	F: student expected to read and learn from feedback staff provide A: independent research and learning	F: student expected to read feedback staff provide and utilise it to improve future work A: better defined by first feedback	F: both student and staff responsible for participation in fb processes/dialogues A: independent work to build on for final dissertation and develop critical thinkers
Language/discourse	Unfamiliarity with jargon in requirements	Unfamiliarity with jargon in requirements	Increased familiarity through experience and feedback

2. Awareness

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term

Cultural diversity	<p>High awareness of generic cultural diversity</p> <p>Related to A practices only – UK focus on criticality and independency rather than purely knowledge</p>	<p>Increased awareness in relation to A&F</p> <p>Awareness of diversity of feedback that is a valued and promoted practice in new environment</p>	<p>Awareness of A&F becomes higher with time, experience and dialogic feedback</p>
Expectations	<p>Diversity of expectations within A – greatly discussed</p>	<p>Lecturers expected to provide feedback ‘correction’; students expected to understand them and improve work in future</p>	<p>Students expected to seek feedback; expected to use it in future tasks building independence and strategies from past feedback</p>
Histories roles	<p>Awareness in assessment contexts – way in which tasks are approached</p>	<p>Awareness in assessment contexts - way in which tasks are approached</p> <p>Feedback: role of non-academic history as a writer – influenced her engagement with feedback</p>	<p>Experience at the UK institutions becomes part of history and awareness increases</p>

3. Intercultural critical reflection

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Opinions	<p>No formed opinions on new A&F practices – disagreement with purposes of old ones</p> <p>Not familiar with others’ opinions but willing to know them</p>	<p>Considers own and others’ opinions to approach assessments and feedback effectively and appropriately</p>	<p>Reflection on previous opinion and current opinions</p> <p>Recognition of reasons behind others’ different opinions</p>
Discussions	<p>Willingness to engage in critical discussions within and about A&F</p>	<p>critical discussions about A&F and within them – encouraged by one lecturer</p>	<p>Reflection and critical discussions carry on as they become part of practice – both with</p>

	as no previous opportunity to do so		peers and staff members
Critical analysis	Critical analysis of previous A&F practices	Analysis of history practices and analysis of current - reflection	Analysis of history practices and analysis of current – deeper reflection supported by dialogic feedback

4. Intercultural emotional intelligence

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Empathy	High empathy towards self and other – previous experience in diverse communities	Towards the self – reduced self-judgements Towards others – higher acceptance of and engagement with new A&F practices	Towards the self and other – positive emotions about diversity continue
Uncertainty	High – both A&F Causes stress and nervousness	Reduced through peer support and feedback dialogues with staff	Reduced – experience, peer support and feedback However, wish for earlier feedback to reduce uncertainty in early stages
Discussions	Positive feelings about idea of dialogues and discussions	Discussions with peers and some staff members When discussion is encouraged but does not happen – frustration and disappointment	Discussions with peers and some staff members When discussion is encouraged but does not happen – frustration and disappointment
Language/discourse	Frustration because of unclarity	Frustration reduced through experience	Frustration reduced through feedback and experience

5. Attitudes

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Predispositions	Rejection of previous past orientated – focus on completed task attitude Predisposed to explore new practices	Future orientation when approaching assessment – discussions about A&F support it	Future orientation supported by developmental and dialogic feedback received in second term
Beliefs	A: demonstration of knowledge acquisition is not useful – willing to explore new ways F: useful and hopes to see in the academic context	Formative and developmental aspect of A&F	Formative and developmental aspect of A&F
Openness	Yes – willingness to explore new practices	Open towards new A&F practices – open discussions with staff and peers support it	Open towards A&F – higher engagement and uptake of feedback
Curiosity	Yes – rejection of histories of A&F encourages curiosity	Curiosity about A&F practices and values behind	

6. Skills

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Behaviour flexibility	Recognition own behaviour in A&F situations might not be what is 'expected'	Future orientated and dialogue seeking	Future orientated and dialogue seeking
Self/active learning	Appreciates concept		

	And is willing to incorporate this in her development	Appreciation of value of student agency in A&F situations	Appreciation of value of student agency in A&F situations
Conflicts resolution	Recognition of potential conflict but openness to others' opinions and beliefs helps managing conflicts	Conflict resolution when value of different behaviour in A&F situation is understood	Conflict resolution when value of different behaviour in A&F situation is understood

Participant 10

Pseudonym: Ann

Country of secondary and higher education institutions: Italy

First language: Italian

Language of HE instruction: Italian

UK course of study: MA in History and Philosophy of Art

Histories

Assessment

Summative (end of year/course)
High-stakes oral examinations
Arbitrary requirements – high staff power
on defining own requirements
(modularisation and personal
preferences of staff)
Past and present orientation
Knowledge acquisition and memorisation

Feedback

No feedback mechanisms in place
Focus on grades
Grade as only information about past
performance

Staff-student relations

Lack of dialogue – not encouraged or
valued
Power distance – hierarchical system

Narrative's contribution to themes

1. Knowledge

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Mechanisms/ Technicalities	F: not known A: oral and written summative, high-stakes exams	F: written in-text comments/official feedback A: more familiarity with essays technicalities	F: written in-text and developmental comments and verbal communication/dialogue A: technicalities become tacitly known
Purposes/ Values/ Philosophies/ Intentions	F: not known A: checking quality and quantity of knowledge memorised	F: explain the grade/understand past mistakes A: develop knowledge and critical/reflexive skills	F: developmental/tool to support improved work strategies and quality A: formative and developmental/knowledge and skills
Expectations/ Responsibilities	F: not clear/unsure A: not clear/unsure	F: use info provided to correct mistakes A: defined by first feedback comments	F: student responsible for participation in fb processes and utilisation of feedback for future development A: expectations clarified through 2 nd term ongoing feedback dialogues
Language/ Discourse	Unfamiliarity with jargon in A requirements	Unfamiliarity with jargon in A requirements and feedback comments	Clarification through feedback dialogues

2. Awareness

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term

Cultural diversity	General awareness of cultural diversity across educational systems No awareness of diversity within A&F	Increase related to A practices only – UK focus on criticality and independency rather than purely knowledge	Increase related to F thanks to one particular lecturer and open dialogues encouraged
Expectations/ Responsibilities	Diversity of expectations within A – greatly discussed	Lecturers responsible to provide feedback ‘correction’; students expected to understand them	Students expected to seek feedback and use it in future tasks building independence and strategies from past feedback
Histories roles	Aware in A contexts, but uncertain about what that would entail	Awareness in assessment contexts - way in which tasks are approached	Retrospective awareness – way of approaching both A&F influenced by previous histories

3. Intercultural critical reflection

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Opinions	No formed opinions on new A&F practices – disagreement with purposes of old ones Not familiar with others’ view of A&F but willing to know them	Attempts to consider own and others’ opinions to approach A&F effectively and appropriately – no dialogue so unsure about others’ views	Reflection on previous opinion and current opinions Recognition of reasons behind others’ different opinions after dialogues
Discussions	Willingness to engage in critical discussions within and about A&F as no previous opportunity to do so	No encouragement from staff – takes time to assess whether ‘appropriate’ to initiate dialogues	Critical discussions with peers and staff after dialogues ‘about’ practices within one particular module
Critical analysis	Critical analysis of previous A&F practices	Analysis of history practices and analysis of what is currently observed	Deeper reflection supported by feedback dialogues

4. Intercultural emotional management

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Empathy	Low awareness of cultural diversity in F contexts – empathy in A and other contexts where awareness is higher	Towards the self – reduced self-judgements Towards others – higher acceptance of diversity in A&F new practices	Towards the self and other – reduced detrimental emotions caused by diversity
Uncertainty	High – both A&F	Reduced through direct experience	Reduced – experience and feedback dialogues with staff
Discussions	Positive feelings about idea of dialogues and discussions	Lack of staff engagement - disappointment	Discussions encouraged by staff – heartening feelings and engagement
Language/Discourse	Frustration because of unclarity	Frustration reduced through experience	Frustration reduced through feedback and experience

5. Attitudes

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Predispositions	Rejection of previous past orientated – focus on completed task attitude Predisposed to explore new practices	Future orientation when approaching assessment but absence of feedback does not support that	Future orientation supported by ongoing feedback dialogues in second term
Beliefs	A: demonstration of knowledge acquisition is not useful – willing to explore new ways	Formative and developmental aspect of assessment	Formative and developmental aspect of A&F – feedback as a dialogic practice as

	F: no beliefs – no knowledge of practice	Feedback as in-text corrective comments as per experience	per experience in 2 nd term
Openness	Yes – willingness to explore new practices	Open towards new A practices Open to feedback but no experience of it until mid-January	Open towards A&F because of understanding its value Open towards dialogic aspect of feedback when experienced
Curiosity	Yes – rejection of histories of A&F encourages curiosity	Curiosity about feedback practices and values behind – curious but feedback is not recognised	Curiosity triggered by feedback dialogues – goes back to see what she missed in first term

6. Skills

	Initial	First term (after 1st feedback episode)	Second term
Behaviour flexibility	Recognition own behaviour in A situations might not be what is 'expected'	Future orientated and dialogue seeking	Future orientated, initiating dialogue and actively enacting feedback
Self/active learning	Appreciates concept but unsure how and when to do it	Appreciation of value of student agency in A situations	Appreciation of value of student agency in A&F situations
Conflicts resolution	Recognition of potential conflict but openness to others' opinions and beliefs helps managing conflicts	Conflict management through mediation of approach to assessment task (compromise)	Conflict resolution when value of different behaviour in A&F situation is understood

Appendix 7 – Publications from this Thesis

Paper publications

Rovagnati, V. and Pitt, E. (2021). Exploring intercultural dialogic interactions between individuals with diverse feedback literacies. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2021.2006601>

Rovagnati, V., Pitt, E. and Winstone, N. (2021). Feedback cultures, histories and literacies: international postgraduate students' experiences. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2021.1916431>

Conference presentations

22nd-24th June – **AHE Conference 2022**

Paper accepted: Teacher assessment and feedback intercultural competence and literacies: towards mutual development of co-negotiated literacy

20th June 2022 – **Hefi22 Promoting Sustainability Through Future-Facing University Teaching**

Paper accepted: Feedback interactions: exploring intercultural encounters

7th July 2021 – **IntRef International Conference – Intercultural Reflection on Teaching**

Paper presented: Intercultural Reflection in Feedback processes

13th January 2021 – **Surrey Symposium 'Feedback Literacy: From education to professional practice'**

Paper presented: The role of teacher assessment and feedback intercultural competence and feedback literacy: international students' perceptions.

21st November 2019 – **SRHE Webinar: Assessment and Feedback**

Paper presented: Assessment and Feedback Intercultural Competence

12th September 2019 – **The Universities at Medway fifth annual Festival of Learning, Teaching and Assessment**

Paper presented: Assessment and feedback as intercultural practices: a narrative inquiry into international postgraduates' experiences, engagement, and development of intercultural competence