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**Social Justice within Assessment/Feedback Practices in an EAP Program**

**Social Justice within Assessment/Feedback Practices in an EAP Program**

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## **Abstract**

Assessment/feedback practices in higher education have been researched in a variety of contexts but the EAP (English for Academic Purposes) program has received little attention as the focus. This thesis seeks to trace the enactment of McArthur's (2018) conceptual framework by analyzing data gained through insider-research on assessment/feedback practices within the Department of English Language and Literature in a Lebanese private higher education institution. Multiple collection methods, including two types of interviews, are used to explore teachers' practices and students' perceptions of assessment/feedback practices in the program. The analysis proceeds in 2 stages. Initially, we establish a theoretical grounding for the analysis of social justice embedding in an EAP program through assessment and feedback practices. We utilize McArthur's (2018) framework to map how fairness is articulated and aligned, via the locally produced teachers' assessment and feedback practices. Second, following Trowler and Cooper's (2002) concept of Teaching and Learning Regimes (TLRs), we argue that there are limitations to the application of an ideal model of just assessment/feedback practices within the program. Findings reveal that McArthur's framework (five understandings of trust, honesty, responsibility, forgiveness and responsiveness) can be interpreted in different ways, probably partially, and in order to realize assessment for social justice fully, each category needs to be filled out, not understood partially. This thesis contributes to literature as it discusses the practices that underpin socially-just changes within EAP programs through the examination of a case study of a higher education institution in Lebanon. The thesis also has a broader contribution and is of value to EAP and EAL (English as an additional language) using a richer framework around social justice and assessment. The findings potentially add to the understanding of McArthur's (2018) work, particularly around how these concepts work in practice, and how the partial fulfillment of them falls short of their full potential.

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## List of Abbreviations

**EAL:** English as an additional language

**EAP:** English for Academic Purposes

**PSP:** Pre-sessional EAP programs

**ESL:** English as a second language

**EFL:** English as a foreign language

**JEAP:** Journal of English for Academic Purposes

**ENL:** English native language

**ELFA:** English as an academic lingua franca

**L1:** First language

**L2:** Second language

**TLRs:** Teaching and learning regimes

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This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

I confirm that the word-length of this thesis conforms to the permitted maximum for this program.

Signature: .....



## Chapter 1 - Introduction

### 1.1. Preview

This chapter lays the foundations for a single-context case study research investigating assessment and feedback practices in a Lebanese higher education institution. The primary focus is on exploring the question *'How is social justice embedded in the assessment and feedback practices in one EAP (English for Academic Purpose) program at a Lebanese higher education institution, as viewed by students and practiced by teachers?'*. Based on Honneth's critical theory and social practice theory, this study uses two types of interviews, semi-structured and focus group, to pragmatically investigate social justice embedding from the perspectives of students and staff in a Lebanese private university. The underpinning literature and theoretical position are described and analyzed further in Chapter 2 and the consequential methodological issues are pursued in Chapter 3. The findings are presented in this study in two main chapters. The first finding section (Chapter 4) describes the embedding of fair assessment/feedback practices in students' perceptions and teachers' practices. The second finding section (Chapter 5) explains the reasons for limited application of fairness within the EAP program practices, by contrasting the TLRs of McArthur's (2018) concepts with the understandings as expressed by the participants in the focus-group. A discussion of the study findings and the implications therein are addressed in the conclusion (Chapter 6). The thesis concludes by identifying the merits of an integrated interpretation of McArthur's (2018) framework to maintain assessment for social justice.

### 1.2. Background

EAP programs have a problem with assessment. EAP exams and published EAP materials tend to insist on assessing EFL learners based on native-like criteria (Jenkins, 2012) and on the learning of ENL (English native language) norms. The fact that EAP is often taught and assessed from a right/wrong perspective is problematic. For instance, assessment/feedback practices, following native-like norms, may not allow students to

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critically evaluate the opinions they have been taught or take control of their own learning. ELFA (English as an academic lingua franca) challenges those dominant assumptions about academic English, and instead regards it as a social phenomenon that is dependent on context, and in which voice and identity are key concerns (Jenkins, 2012). Therefore, the disciplinary context of assessment is crucial upon considering the nature and potential reform of any assessment/feedback practices. Such challenges suggest the revisiting of assessment/feedback practices in EAP. Moreover, the voices of teachers as EAP assessment developers are not being heard outside their own community. Even in an international publication like JEAP (Journal of English for Academic Purposes), few papers linking EAP concerns with language testing and assessment methods, strategies and information have been published over the past 8 years because few have been submitted (Schmitt & Hamp-Lyons, 2015).

In order to overcome threats to effective assessment/feedback practices, the concept of social justice in assessment tells us that if we implement a particular way of looking at things, pedagogical and social outcomes may be enhanced. A thorough deliberation of the five concepts (Trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility, and responsiveness) within assessment/practices can change the culture and practices towards greater social justice, as proposed by McArthur (2018). Hence, if we join the EAP and socially just assessment arguments together, it suggests that we could have better – fairer and more pedagogically improved – outcomes.

This research extends current thinking around the notion of social justice approaches to assessment by further developing the conceptual framework proposed in McArthur's recent work (2018). According to McArthur (2016), assessment for social justice has two aims; it addresses (i) the methods of assessment which may inaccurately demonstrate student learning and (ii) the forms of learning/the environment that will promote greater social justice within society. She adds that the way assessments are used in Higher Education institutions is partly responsible for constructing the identity of learners and eventually citizens (by fostering targets such as better academic practices or simply offering more information for students) and that social justice research allows researchers

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to consider how some mundane practices work to disadvantage groups. This paper, by exploring the five concepts from the different stakeholders' perspectives, would be able to tackle the first objective, which explores unfair practices that might affect students' learning in the EAP program. In addition, based on the findings, the research would address the second objective by suggesting how things might be done differently and how things could be better if social justice within assessment/feedback were more fully implemented in the program. As a result, this research in HE could help to identify practices and curricula that enable students to express themselves and promote greater social justice. This specific case of EAP at a Lebanese HE institution offers a lens which enables academics to reflect upon and question their own practices and therefore argue for change in their contexts.

This research into a Lebanese higher institution, although locally constructed, has the potential to uncover in depth accounts of EFL (English as a foreign language) students' experiences with assessment/feedback practices in EAP programs. In terms of curriculum development, the study also emphasizes the role of culture and context for assessment/feedback in EFL contexts. As L2 learners deal with the new language, they are also dealing with this disconnection between their L1 (First language) cultures and the L2 (Second language) regarding what knowledge is, as well as struggling with new structural patterns in terms of its presentation (as cited in Matipano, 2018). Therefore, knowledge creation, testing and assessment are best understood in a cultural context shaped by the way language is used in a particular discourse as governed by the rules of a given discourse community (Benwel & Stokoe, 2006 as cited in Matipano, 2018). In a way, this research seeks to improve assessment/feedback practices in international EAP programs and consequently help promote social justice practices within such programs.

The principal implication of McArthur's (2018) concepts is that the onus is on the teaching staff to develop equitable assessment practices that are appropriate for their students. This can be achieved by providing explicit support and instruction, but also by recognizing that institutional reform is necessary. Indeed, assessment practices need to be adapted to the student body by making assessment more inclusive and by redesigning assessment

tasks and incorporating or infusing forgiveness, support and guidance into the assessment process itself. The idea of reform is examined in more detail in Chapter 2.

### 1.3. Towards a research problem

At this stage, the researcher wants to synthesize some thoughts and perspectives towards the development of the research problem. The literature points toward significant gaps in the understanding of how students perceive, and teachers practice fair assessment and feedback practices in EAP programs (Lizzio, Wilson & Hadaway, 2007; Tierney, Simon & Charland, 2011; Aitken, 2012; Jónssona, Smith b & Geirsdóttirc, 2017; O' Neill, 2017; Seden & Svaricek, 2019), derived from the lines of thinking described in the previous sections.

The first study by Lizzio, Wilson and Hadaway (2007) indicated that students' perceptions of the fairness of their learning environment are related to their sense of psychological engagement with their school while their second study indicated that there is a clear relationship between fairness and some teaching quality variables. Tierney, Simon and Charland (2011) focused on teachers' grading practices and looked at how teachers in one standards-based educational system determined secondary students' grades, focusing specifically on the extent to which they followed a specific set of principles for grading. Aitken (2012) examined student voices from two studies, investigating students' perceptions of their grade-school and post-secondary assessment experiences. The main findings in Jónssona, Smith b and Geirsdóttirc (2017) revealed diversities in perception between teachers and students of feedback in different learning contexts. The diversities manifested between teachers and students seem to be at least partly affected by how the three Icelandic secondary schools engaged with feedback and assessment. O'Neill's (2017) study aimed to investigate students and staff views on the fairness of both the procedures and outcomes of students' choice of assessment methods in an Irish higher education institution. Seden and Svaricek's (2019) study explored insight into lower secondary EFL teachers' perceptions of fair assessment and the types of assessment that worked and those that did not work in their classes. As a collection of publications, the core finding suggests the impact of teaching practices/learning contexts on students' views of fairness and a gap between students' perceptions and teachers' practices of fairness in

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assessment/feedback. Therefore, this study serves to fill the dearth of research in studying students and teachers' perceptions of fairness in EAP programs in a higher institution context.

It is the EAP program, which is the intended focus of this study, as will be explored in Chapter 3. The university, which has more inclusive admissions processes than other higher status institutions in the country, is innovative with alternative entry procedures and is at the present time receiving higher proportions of EFL students' enrollments. Current widening participation activities prove essential for this kind of institution to achieve growth objectives. This work does not aim to attack the university's policies of widening participation: A central concern of this paper though is to reveal the necessity to implement additional strategies along with the policies to support such students. The assumption that struggling students (attaining less well than others) will be able to experience successful language learning experiences in EAP programs may be oversimplified. This assumption sidesteps the reality of the inherent difficulties with which such students complete their courses and pursue their degrees.

Moreover, proceduralizing assessment and feedback in the EAP program can be recognized through different practices, such as lowering the students' admission scores, teachers exchanging and grading papers across sections, using prearranged rubrics and assessments, promoting the English Language Center (to help less proficient students), etc. All these practices have taken place without making changes in assessment/feedback that might provide everyone with a good chance of progressing. The university has opened the gates wider, but not enabled everyone to do/perform as well as they could. And as market pressures force colleges to focus on their bottom-line goals, non-revenue producing activities are at risk.

Although my research is particularistic in the sense that it is conducted in a particular place and time, it is deploying theories and concepts which may explain and illuminate the issue at hand. Case studies, (Yin, 2009), can help to generalize to a broader theory, in that the theory can be tested in one or more empirical cases, and can be shown not to support rival, even if plausible, theories (as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Here the data are conceptualized and used within a theoretical framework to offer explanation and

illumination. The theoretical constructions brought to the research are regarded as explanations for the practices and experiences of the researched in the EAP program. It is argued that case studies located in specific places can have findings of more general interest thanks to their conceptual and theoretical insights. The research context is the locus but not the focus of the research.

#### **1.4. Research context**

The research is conducted in a private higher education institution in Lebanon. Fieldwork specifically focused on the EAP program at the department of English Language and Literature. The context, therefore, is an EAP program that has characteristics of more language focused EFL courses. The instructors and the students researched belonged to this department. The university admits students from Lebanon and the Arab Region without discrimination based on religion, gender, or physical disability. The university is committed to principles of tolerance, compassion, and openness and Christian-Muslim understanding. Most programs at the university follow the American system of education and are conducted in English, except for a few programs in French and Arabic. The university is one of many private institutions that are prevalent in the country. There is a strong competition between private universities in Lebanon, and the lower ranking ones are in a more precarious position.

#### **1.5. Theoretical underpinning**

This study does not employ a single theory in the research process. Rather, it is grounded on a set of concepts and theories to inform the research questions, the interview questions, data analysis, and the directions of discussion. The researcher's account of an ideal model bridges McArthur's (2018) view of mutual recognition and Trowler and Cooper's (2002) insight into teaching and learning regimes, so that assessment/feedback are conceived as engaging practices. After gathering an initial knowledge of assessment from textbooks and background literature in the higher education assessment field, the following bodies of literature are used as the broader literature base for this study:

**1.5.1 EAL HE assessment practices**

**1.5.2 EAP HE assessment practices**

**1.5.3 Trends in EAP programs in Lebanese universities**

**1.5.4 Fair assessment and feedback practices: the possibilities and the barriers**

**1.5.5 Students and teachers' perceptions of assessment and feedback practices**

**1.5.6 The theoretical tools used:**

1.5.6.1 McArthur's (2018) concepts of social justice within assessment and feedback

1.5.6.2 Trowler and Cooper's (2002) concept of TLRs

Details of how these bodies of literature informed this present study are available in Chapter 2.

**1.6. Contribution to knowledge**

The results of this research contribute to knowledge for assessment practice and policy initiative and are discussed in Chapter 6. A holistic summary of the findings (Tables 4.1 and 5.1) is derived based on unfolding the experiences and perceptions of the participants on assessment and feedback practices. The study's attempt to work together the theoretical tools offered by McArthur (2018) and Trowler and Cooper (2002) has resulted from the need to account for assessment and feedback as social practices. The researcher sees a complementarity between McArthur (2018) and Trowler and Cooper (2002) in that both seek to understand the imbrication of recognition through lived realities and the possibilities of emancipatory change; they both focus on practice as the key realm of analysis for understanding human actions.

Trowler and Cooper (2002) emphasize that people's expectations and experiences interact with their perceptions, reactions and evaluations, while McArthur's (2018) emphasize that the five general understandings can lead to changes in these practices towards greater social justice by shifting the regimes of recognition. Using this theoretical synthesis, this thesis contributes to knowledge of how teachers' perceptions and opinions insinuate themselves into local practices (the EAP program). The literature to which this research seeks to contribute has grown exponentially over the past years. The researcher seeks to identify the limited work that has sought to combine both students and teachers' perceptions of fairness within assessment/feedback practices in the EAP program. Using McArthur's (2018) framework has allowed the research to step firmly away from the

standard ways of assessing EAP programs. The researcher outlines theoretical tools and details how this empirical approach can be of use to university administrators and course coordinators.

### **1.7. Outline of the paper's structure**

This thesis consists of six chapters. This chapter (Chapter 1) provides an overview of the thesis which includes the background and rationale of the study, the research aims and objectives, the research questions, the research context, the theoretical underpinnings, a summary of the research methodology and methods, its contribution to knowledge as well as an overview of the structure of this thesis. This chapter serves as the introduction and leads readers into the main sections of the thesis.

Chapter 2 is the literature review chapter. Specifically, chapter 2 examines relevant literature on assessment and feedback in higher education. The topics include EAL (**English as an additional language**) HE assessment, EAP (**English for Academic Purposes**) HE assessment, EAP trends in Lebanese universities, the students and teachers' perceptions on HE assessment/feedback practices, fair assessment and feedback practices. Under the sections on EAL and EAP assessment practices, details of assessment typologies are reviewed. The section on issues with fair assessment practice critically looks at assessments that are socially just by design and assessments that promote greater social justice. The section on students and teachers' perceptions aims to compare their views regarding assessment/feedback practices. The last section sheds light on the theoretical tools used in the research and the rationale behind these choices. This chapter serves to provide the current picture of assessment practices in higher education both locally and globally and to identify the underlying rationales of implementing just assessment/feedback practices.

Chapter 3 is the chapter on methodology and methods of this research. Descriptions of ontological and epistemological positions are provided to justify the use of case study research. Explanations and arguments are included to debate why this approach is used as opposed to other designs. This chapter also includes a description of insider research, the

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methods (focus groups and semi-structured interviews) employed, the participant recruitment process, as well as the data collection and analysis process. Ethical concerns and limitations of the methodology and methods are examined together with suggestions for addressing the limitations and enhancing credibility and triangulation.

Chapters 4 and 5 are the two results chapters. Chapter 4 focuses on answering research questions on the perceptions and experiences of McArthur's (2018) concepts within assessment and feedback practices in one university in Lebanon. This finding section draws mainly on the perspectives of the students and teachers. The research preliminary empirical findings suggest different interpretations among the stakeholders of the concept of fairness. Two themes are identified for this part of the research: (1) *perceptions of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness as perceived by the students*; (2) *teachers' practices of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness in the program*. Chapter 5 turns to report the findings on teachers' perceptions and potentials of an ideal model of assessment/feedback practices, as well as the implications of fair practices for the students and the program. Two themes are identified in this area: (1) *teachers' views of fair assessment/feedback practices in the EAP program*; (2) *the implementation of fair assessment and feedback practices in the EAP program*.

This dissertation finishes with Chapter 6, where its contribution to knowledge and its conclusions are discussed. Drawing upon the study's findings, an inclusive assessment and feedback model is recommended which can be used for program refinement in this research institution or other similar universities. The chapter finishes with limitations of the study and future research recommendations.

### 1.8. Summary

In this chapter, the background to the study has been described in terms of the general and particular focus of the research. Assessment and feedback at the EAP program viewed from a critical theory and social practice perspective emphasize contextual contingency (appropriate situations and events), and this privileges insider and in-depth case study-based research design. The next chapter describes the literature and interrogates this

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rationale which underpins this study's approach. The following account will focus on EAL HE assessment, EAP HE assessment, EAP trends in Lebanese universities, fair assessment and feedback practices and students and teachers' perceptions of fairness. This research examines two main issues and aims to answer two broad research questions: *“How is social justice embedded in the assessment and feedback practices in one EAP program at a Lebanese higher education institution, as viewed by the students and teachers?”* and *“what are the teachers' perceptions of fair assessments that work and that don't work in the program?”*. Therefore, this work has two groupings: the students and the teachers and two types of interviews: the semi structured interviews and the focus group.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

### 2.1. Preview

The following sections will identify the research problem, what is known, what is missing, and this research contribution in the field. Although the focus is on assessment and EAP in higher education, this work sits within a broader discussion around the nature of teaching English and assessment; therefore, it is worth having a thin base on EAL (**English as an additional language**) HE assessment before the discussion on EAP (**English for Academic Purposes**) HE assessment. Next in the discussion would be the trends of EAP programs in Lebanese universities followed by the students and teachers' perceptions on HE assessment/feedback practices. Finally, an account on fair assessment and feedback practices was relevant to the study and was collected by the researcher before the focus group interview which probed into teachers' perceptions of an ideal model of assessment/feedback practices. The researcher wants to consider here how a greater awareness of the issues, which EAP teachers face when they develop and administer assessments in a local context, would help the wider language testing community. The researcher trusts that an increased contact between the two communities would help raise the level of assessment literacy among EAP teachers. This chapter reviews and critiques the literature which underpins the research questions, the theoretical framework and the proposed methodology. The design of the literature review is developed from the elements of the research questions.

The research questions underpinning this study are:

- 1) *To what extent do EAP students experience the notions of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness within the institutional assessment practices?*
- 2) *To what extent do EAP instructors view the notions of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness within broad institutional assessment practices?*

3) *Upon the findings of the literature, what are the teachers' perceptions of fair assessments that work and that don't work in the program?*

## **2.2. English as an additional language (EAL) and higher education assessment**

Marginson (as cited in O'Loughlin, 2014) explains that if EAL applicants can demonstrate the required minimum entry English level, then most higher education institutions have assumed that they are ready not just to start their studies but to successfully complete them, albeit with perhaps some additional English support along the way. This strategy has left many students struggling with the language of their chosen disciplines, the social English they require to participate fully within and outside their courses and the professional/vocational language to successfully enter the English-speaking workforce.

This same discourse associates international students with the lowering of standards and gives credence to statements such as: all international students have low English levels, local students do not have difficulty with English language, and it is only because of English language deficiencies that EAL students are failing to gain employment on graduation (Benzie, 2010). Associating international students with lowered standards also assumes that there exists a single, clearly defined standard of English and that if they have not achieved it before entry to the university, learners need do little more than follow a series of steps as required by their lecturers. These assertions suggest not only a narrow understanding of the nature of language learning, but also that a discourse of 'student as problem' is operating. Students are being judged as 'deficient' in their learning, not because of their preferred learning styles (Benzie, 2008; Zeegers & Barron, 2008 as cited in Benzie, 2010), but according to beliefs that they do not have, or are unable to acquire, 'native speaker' levels of proficiency in English. To remedy this supposed deficiency, universities have made provisions including increasing English language requirements and providing special language and academic support to facilitate student compliance with institutional expectations.

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Whilst it has been argued that EAL students evidence difficulties using English, it is a fallacy to suggest that there is simply a 'second language problem' that can be addressed by remedial English and generic academic support (Myers & Picard, 2007). Learning tasks are situated in specific socio-cultural environments and research has shown that assessment is particularly affected by context (Gibbs, 1999 as cited in Myers & Picard, 2007). Assessment not only reveals student knowledge and skills, but also student compliance with culturally embedded institutional expectations. Students who do not have the necessary "cultural capital" can be disadvantaged by assessment practices with implicit cultural expectations (Myers & Picard, 2007). In addition, students lacking domain-based knowledge, i.e., the specific field of knowledge or knowledge base of a particular discipline, will also experience numerous learning difficulties. EAL students are likely to have domain-based knowledge that is very different from their counterparts and lecturers in foreign countries. Therefore, in order to make assessment work for increasingly diverse student populations, critical reflection on current assessment practices and the theoretical models that underpin these practices is essential (Gibbs, 1999 as cited in Myers & Picard, 2007).

In her paper, Moore (2012) outlines the context of higher education in Australia regarding the English language proficiency of EAL students. She reports how issues of language proficiency in one context can influence definitions of language proficiency itself. These interpretations also have direct implications for how the development of English language proficiency is supported in higher education.

There have been a variety of sometimes conflicting statements about what English language proficiency is. Murray (2010) defines English language proficiency as "a general competence in language and comprise[s] a set of generic skills and abilities captured in Canale and Swain's (1980) framework ..... they are prerequisites to developing academic literacy and professional communication skills" (p. 58 as cited in Moore, 2012). On the other hand, Harper, Prentice and Wilson (2011) argue that a decontextualized focus on generic language proficiency (which they equate with grammatical instruction) is of little value, and that what is needed is "immersion in the language domain and supported development within the domain of language use: the discipline" (p. 46 as cited in Moore,

2012). Issues of language proficiency will be explored in this study as revealed by the instructors and students; two similar definitions were identified from data. The researcher would be able to associate the embedding of social justice with the instructors' definition (s) of English language proficiency, disclosed in the research data.

### **2.3. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and higher education assessment**

EAP assessments are administered at a variety of different stages in the educational cycle and for various goals, and most of these goals have consequences, sometimes major, for test takers. These programs have different names depending on the country or institution, but all share the aim of raising students' English proficiency level to allow them to meet university entry requirements. Most of these programs also aim to prepare students for the academic conventions and culture of the local higher education system. These in-house assessments may be even more high stakes for students than external exams such as TOEFL or IELTS, because students have already left their homes and, often jobs, to relocate to their study destination (Schmitt, 2015). Local EAP programs, on the other hand, are rich contexts whose length and close connection to a specific curriculum provide opportunities to assess EAP knowledge and skills using a wider range of topics and task types. In other words, local EAP programs offer considerable potential for innovation in language assessment design as they are not generic but applied (Schmitt, 2015). The pedagogical incorporation of such innovations would imply context-based assessments which may measure features of genuine language use and coincide with the students' actual needs. In addition, they offer an improved understanding of the construct of EAP and provide valuable context for research in EAP language assessment. Hence, there are many types of EAP programs, yet the context being written about is a specific, individual one rather than being universally typical.

Pre-sessional EAP programs (PSP) have been under scrutiny. The critics framed their argument in three ways. First, it was argued that EAP offers pragmatic goals in preparing students for academic study or research: "EAP conflates the needs of students with those of the disciplines and so supports a hidden curriculum reinforcing existing power relations

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and uncritically accommodating learners to the requirements of their courses” (Pennycook 1997; Benesch, 2001; Pennycook 2001 as cited in Hyland, 2018, p. 387). Moreover, EAP practitioners are ill-equipped to provide students with specialist disciplinary discourses, are not unaware of the context they work in, and are typically not in a position to influence the bigger institutional picture (Ding & Bruce, 2017). The final claim is that EAP has been accepting and benefiting from, the expansion of English across the world, thus promoting the economic interests of big business and causing the erosion of indigenous academic registers (Hyland, 2018). Thus, within higher education, EAP tends to be framed in terms of its economic rather than academic contribution (Breen, 2018).

In UK higher education, Pearson (2020) argues that the scale and nature of pre-sessional EAP provision is poorly documented particularly how the length, intensity, and frequency of courses converge with the minimum English language requirements of degree programs. He adds that in order to boost the supply of international higher education and meet the demand for enrolment, institutions adopt multiple and sometimes lengthy English for general academic purposes pre-sessional programs that often serve to bridge linguistic shortfalls of 1.0 or more IELTS bands overall and across the four components (listening, reading, writing and speaking). Research has revealed positive changes in students’ academic skills across Pre-Sessional EAP over different lengths (Archibald, 2001 as cited in Pearson, 2020) but at the same time, it has been reported that many PSP EAP alumni experience difficulties coping (Allwright & Banerjee, 1997; Atherton, 2006; Green, 2000, *ibid*), sometimes take longer to graduate or require an extension or resubmission (Lloyd-Jones, Neame, & Medaney, 2012; Ridley, 2006, *ibid*), may perform worse in relation to linguistically ready non-native English speakers (NNES) and native-speaking students (Thorpe et al., 2017, *ibid*), and are at greater risk of failing for not completing on time (Millar, 2002, *ibid*).

The general tendency in international universities, using EAP teaching, has been to assess EFL learners based on native-like criteria (Jenkins, 2012). In fact, Bjorkman (2011) and other EFL scholars argue that assessment criteria in EFL contexts are unrealistic and need to be adjusted, giving “effective use of the language” as the target. Assessment of students

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based on the conformity of their writing to native-like writing has contributed to the massification and marketization of knowledge as certain kinds of English testing have become a massive business (Jenkins, 2013). Moreover, the prevalence of a grid/rubric in its present quasi-scientific form in Anglophone/non-Anglophone (HE) institutions has incorporated too great an assumption about the nature of the knowledge to be transferred to the students. Proceduralising assessment and feedback inhibits learning and students' engagement with complex knowledge (McArthur, 2010). Accordingly, a testimony of students' learning is assumed to be the gaining of narrow and predictable knowledge along with native-like language and structure.

However, a social constructivist theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Bruner, 1986, 1990) argues that knowledge is shaped and developed through increasing participation within different communities of practice (Cole, 1990; Scribner, 1985) and that for students to truly understand the requirements of the assessment process, and the criteria and standards being applied, they need tacit as well as explicit knowledge (as cited in O'Donovan et al., 2004). Rust et al. (2005) argue how acquiring knowledge and understanding of assessment processes, criteria and standards needs the same kind of active engagement and participation as learning about anything else. The literature on effective feedback strategies revealed some factors that could affect students' reception to feedback and emphasized the value of using examples, class discussions and inclusive learning opportunities (Price et al., 1999, 2011; O'Donovan et al., 2001, 2004, 2008; Rust et al., 2003). McArthur (2018) argues how academics have a responsibility, from a social justice perspective, to provide students with challenging feedback that fosters future learning. This study adopts this approach to knowledge as it has interesting and important insights to offer for non-native English speakers and for institutions to deal with the challenges that these students experience with assessment and feedback.

The following account presents instances of successfully incorporating social justice approaches in EAP contexts. In their intervention to complement and enhance the academic core of international students' experience in the UK, Hendrie and Tibbetts reveal that "the developing role of our department and ourselves as practitioners within the

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institution, contributing to the development of teaching practice at institutional level is exemplifying the kind of approach to EAP that endorses the establishment of ‘literacy experts’ within the university” (as cited in Blaj-Ward, Hultgren, Arnold & Reichard, 2021, p. 21). Another example is Panaca (2022), who in his research, responded to the challenge of mitigating the effects of trauma in the language classroom to maximize the possibility of effective learning. Using Social Justice Pedagogy (SJP) and Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) as frameworks for analysis, Mortenson (2021) suggests that white instructors’ remaining neutral on social injustices maintains Whiteness in the context of English language teaching. His study suggests that English language teachers who seek to decolonize their teaching cannot do so while remaining neutral on issues of injustice.

It was through the work of Benesh (1996; 2001) and Critical EAP that EAP has regained some reputation. Critical EAP has sought to offer ways forward for teachers through examples of classroom practice which attempt to make ideological elements of students’ learning visible to them and ‘to create possibilities for social awareness and action’ (Benesch, 1996, p. 735).

### **2.4. The general shape and trends of EAP programs in Lebanese Universities**

In order to fully understand the trends in the teaching and assessment of writing in Lebanese universities, it is important to consider different factors that contributed to the current EAP programs status. In 1997, the Lebanese government initiated a curriculum reform aiming at promoting trilingualism: bilingualism in Arabic and either French or English, and competency in a second foreign language. Thus, students learn the humanities and social sciences using the Arabic language, they learn natural sciences and mathematics using a foreign language (either French or English) in grade seven (with many schools beginning as early as grade one or two), and they learn a second foreign language (either French or English) as a language subject. This has contributed into the formation of bilingual or trilingual students on Lebanese campuses coming from a variety of backgrounds. However, these groups of students have different needs when it comes to writing in a second language. Some students may sound like native speakers of English, but

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their writing skills might need improvement. Others may have studied English as a second or third language and might need slight or extensive skill development depending on the nature of the contact level they have had with English at their schools. In order to address the different needs of the aforementioned groups of second language writers, almost all of the universities in Lebanon have adopted a system whereby, depending on students scores on the SAT, TOEFL, or locally designed placement tests, they get placed in intensive English programs or test immediately into programs such as “the Communication Skills Program”, or “the Composition and Rhetoric Sequence” in the higher institution studied in this research .

The challenges that teachers and students face in writing courses both in schools and universities in Lebanon was the topic of at least one book chapter, six articles, and five MA theses (Esseili, 2016). Subthemes included the existence of different learning cultures (Bhuiyan, 2012; Bacha & Bahous, 2013), issues of plagiarism and academic integrity (Bacha & Bahous, 2010; Bacha, Bahous, & Nabhani, 2010; Esseili, 2012), transfer from other languages (Hawrani, 1974; Diab, N., 1998; Bacha, 2000; Esseili, 2012), difficulty in motivating students (Bahous, Bacha, & Nabhani, 2011), and students’ writing anxiety and apprehension (Zghir, 2007; Nazzal, 2008; and Kishli, 2007, as cited in Esseili, 2016). This research corroborates with the former studies and emphasizes the first two challenges (different learning cultures and issues of plagiarism/academic integrity) along with other challenges found in the current program.

### **2.5. Teachers and non-native speakers’ perceptions of assessment and feedback**

There is a consensus among undergraduate students as non-native speakers to prefer teachers’ feedback and more specifically corrective feedback (Ziv, 1984; Leki, 1991; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz ,1996; Ashwell, 2000; Lee, 2005; Zacharias, 2007). Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1996) explain how many students studying English as a foreign language- expect to make the greatest improvement in writing quality and to learn best when their teacher highlights grammatical and mechanical mistakes. Their perceptions of content development and organization are secondary to their concern for the evident signs of

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formal correctness. The authors state that this pattern may be directly linked to the specific characteristics of the FL environment as well as to the practices that are common among FL practitioners. They have been socialized into thinking that this is what good FL teaching and feedback are all about. In fact, a common practice observed at the institution is an emphasis on linguistic accuracy which could be detracting students from deep engagement in ideas and sources because of heightened anxiety and discouragement regarding their own abilities to produce error-free writing as EFL learners. This study does not ignore the value of the grammar/content divide in EFL settings but aims to promote more challenging and dual (written/oral) feedback, an area that has not been given credence in previous literature on NNSE. This research argues that more attention should be directed to what students make of the feedback, rather than just its organization.

Another consensus found among teachers and students was that it was difficult for students to fully understand assessment criteria (Carless, 2006). This supports the idea that understanding assessment criteria is an initial asset for students to act upon feedback. Sadler (2010) explains how teachers' approaches that emphasize feedback as telling are insufficient because students are often not equipped to decode or act on statements satisfactorily, so key messages remain invisible (as cited in Price et al., 2011). Moreover, the prevalence of a grid/rubric in its present quasi-scientific form in Anglophone/non-Anglophone (HE) institutions has incorporated too great an assumption about the nature of the knowledge to be transferred to the students: Knowledge that is narrow and predictable. Proceduralising assessment and feedback inhibits learning and students' engagement with complex knowledge (McArthur, 2010). It would be interesting to further examine such difficulties among EFL learners and try to tackle them during assessment/feedback literacy workshops or learning activities. In this way, this two-fold condition discussed earlier is addressed in the study.

The teacher's feedback not only affects the students' understanding of assessment processes, criteria and standards but also their motivation (Hedgecock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Ferris, 1999). A body of studies illustrates that teachers' feedback contributed greatly to students' emotional states particularly their motivation and attitudes towards writing in EFL contexts (Zacharias, 2007; Hamdium & Hashim, 2012; Mahfoodh, 2016). Students

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often exhibit defensive responses to feedback, particularly when comments are critical or grades are low (Robinson, Pope, & Holyoak, 2013 as cited in Careless & Boud, 2018).

The literature also presents disagreement in teachers and students' perceptions to assessment and feedback. Carless (2006) revealed how students and teachers had divergent understandings of assessment and feedback and in particular, students who viewed feedback as less useful than tutors and were grade oriented. Although students wanted to learn from feedback, they often found this difficult without some general, not surface-based, comments which stimulate feedforward learning. One way to alleviate disagreement between teachers and students about assessment and feedback is through dialogues. "Assessment dialogues can help students to clarify the rules of the game, the assumptions known to lecturers but are less transparent to students" (Carless, 2016, p. 230). By challenging the students' opinions to assessment and feedback and by fostering students' feedback literacy through dialogues, EFL learners are more equipped with critical background knowledge without which they cannot understand and interpret their mistakes.

Many variables seem to be salient about the success of feedback among EFL learners. Building upon the previous literature, EFL university students' emotional responses to feedback along with their inability to act on feedback appear to be two major barriers to these students' engagement to feedback information (Price et al., 2011). This suggests the need for new ways of thinking and for students' perceptions of corrective feedback to be challenged.

Previous research has dealt with EFL experiences with corrective feedback. Other studies investigated EFL school students' engagement with specific assessment practices. Further studies with Chinese university EFL students revealed that they generally experience student-centered assessment the least. They reported a comparative survey conducted in ESL/EFL contexts represented by Canadian, Hong Kong, and Chinese in which ESL or EFL instructors participated, and documented the purposes, methods, and procedures of assessment in these three contexts. This research does not aim to explore assessment practices used per se or to compare contexts, but rather aims to examine social justice embedding (practices of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and recognition) in

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assessment/feedback by collecting extensive students' accounts and comparing them with their instructors' views. The researcher only has strong claims about this latter area. This research's major contribution lies in the fact that it addresses practices (EAP) within assessment/feedback. This research tries to fill gaps not in research about EFL students' experiences per se or EAP studies in general; it is an amalgam of both.

### **2.6. Fair assessment/feedback practices**

The second phase of the research necessitated further exploration of fair practices in literature. The literature on fairness in assessment practices has been largely concerned with suggesting models of just assessments, proposing changes to enhance both procedures and outcomes (The Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada, 1999; Suskie, 2000, 2008; Pettifor & Saklofske, 2012). Some have argued that fairness is concerned with transparent assessment criteria and tasks (Vlanti, 2012) and with the application of objective and verifiable criteria (Stowel, 2004). Others stressed the need for assessments to meet the course objectives while others highlighted the importance of using multiple sources of assessments to support learning (Seden & Svaricek, 2018) and to demonstrate knowledge, skill, and understanding (Principles, 1993; Gipps & Stobart, 2004; Alberta Education, 2006; ASASFR Alberta Education, 2009; Suskie, 2009; Maki, 2010). These accounts sought to target changes at the micro level, targeting assessment procedures. Another more macro perspective is related to the presence of institutional guidelines and principles which ought to be used as a framework by the educators to eliminate any chances of bias and therefore affecting fairness (Tierney, Simon & Charland, 2011).

Besides the examination of elements of structure, there are other accounts that stressed agency and the importance of students' inclusive role in the assessment process (Wigging, 1993; Aitken, 2012; Vlanti, 2012; Tierney, 2014; Bourke, 2016; Jonsson, Smith & Geirsdottir, 2018; Seden & Svaricek, 2018) while others noted the need to improve teacher knowledge and practice in this area (Webber, Aitken, Lupart, & Scott, 2009, 2012, 2014; Manning, 2013; Schmitt & Hamp-Lyons, 2015). Still others called for a change at the macro

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level: a change that targets not only the individual stakeholders (students and educators) but the university overall (McArthur & Huxham, 2011; Dorime-Williams, 2018). In order to achieve whole organizational change, universities need clearly articulated justifications for providing well-informed and well-timed discussions about assessment experiences and outcomes that take place among and between student peers and educators (as cited in Hanesworth, Bracken & Elkington, 2018), promoting a more collective change.

In a study in Portugal, Flores et al. (2015) considered the perceptions of fairness of nearly four hundred undergraduates and found that students undertaking alternative 'learner centered' forms of assessment were more likely to perceive these as fair than students undertaking traditional (e.g., exam) forms of assessment. It is worth noting that the teachers, not the students' perceptions of fair practices were explored in this research, though. In this research and during the focus group interview with the teachers, the discussions allowed them to reflect on previous studies/literature, considering fair assessment/feedback practices that work and do not work in the EAP program. KeesingStyles (2003) and Mayo (1999) point to 'pedagogy of possibility': a pedagogy of possibility is not about prescribing a curriculum or assessment methodology, it is about "locally and contextually formulating practice within an integrated moral and epistemological stance" (Simon, 1992, as cited in Bain, 2010, p.23). But the real question is how can teachers implement just assessment practices? According to McArthur (2018), the answer to this query can be divided into two major parts: assessments that are socially just by design and assessments that promote greater social justice.

### **2.6.1 Assessments that are socially just by design**

2.6.1.1 Increasing students' inclusive role: This can be done within the assessment process through three major practices

#### *2.6.1.1.1 Assessment choice and diversification of assessments*

Assessment choice can be choice of assessment methods or choice of assessment topics, criteria, exam questions or submission times. There have been a limited number of studies in higher education exploring the former approach (Easterbrook, Parker, & Waterfield

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2005; Francis 2008; Garside et al., 2009; Craddock & Mathias, 2009; SPACE, 2011). Recently, O'Neil (2017) studied the impact of involving students in assessment choice by investigating students and teachers' views of adopting such an approach in an Irish higher education institution. The results revealed that students were satisfied that their assessment choices were fair in levels of support, feedback, information and, to a lesser degree, student workload and examples of assessment methods. "In exploring fairness of the outcomes, the students' grades were not significantly different between the two sets of choices. However, based on teachers' interviews, the overall grades were higher than previous cohorts and higher than average for current student cohorts in the institution" (O'Neill, 2017, p.221). Some of the barriers noted by these and others, however, are that: students complain about fairness between the assessment choices (Craddock & Mathias, 2009); academic staff is also concerned with fairness, in addition to the potential erosion of standards (Ashworth, Bloxham, and Pearce, 2010; Craddock & Mathias, 2009). Similarly, Kirkland and Sutch (2009) broadly categorized the barriers to diversification of assessment around four areas: a) *The Innovation*: factors associated with the innovation; b) *Micro-level influences*: factors related to the educators themselves, such as their capacity, competence, confidence; c) *Meso-level influences*: local factors, such as the school culture, school management wider community; d) *Macro-level influences*: these factors relate to national policy, professional bodies (as cited in O'Neill & Padden, 2022).

In Pearson (2017), data collected from interviews with students and teachers on their experiences of the process folio found that a small-scale intervention has potential for agency to be exercised within the highly constrained context of a UK EAP pre-sessional.

Consequently, new directions in research are proposed which can engage students and teachers to work for change in EAP within their internal and external constraints.

### *2.6.1.1.2 Self-assessment*

According to Aitken (2012), self-assessment is the notion of pedagogical leave-taking—taking leave, trusting students—to learn and assess their learning to make informed decisions for further lifelong learning. Similarly, Costa and Kallick (1992) state that "We must constantly remind ourselves that the ultimate purpose of evaluation is to have

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students become self-evaluating” (p. 275). “Self-evaluating” involves assessments and feedback processes that encourage students autonomous learning and increased responsibilities. Students should be able to graduate not dependent on others to tell them if they are satisfactory, good or excellent (McArthur, 2018).

Several other studies (Crooks, 1988; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Natriello, 1987) supported the claim that the use of targeted formative assessment strategies such as questioning, feedback, self-assessment, peer assessment, and formative use of summative assessment can double the speed of student learning (as cited in Seden & Svaricek, 2018). Black and Wiliam (1998) assert that self- and peer-assessment makes students think and engages them into the assessment process as reflective practitioners, mainly through the development of assessment conversations in which students are encouraged to reflect on their work and to articulate their reflections (as cited in Aitken, 2012, p.196).

However, the study by Seden and Svaricek (2019) indicates that although peer and selfassessment are used by a few teachers, teachers considered peer- and self-assessment as assessment techniques that do not work well. The rationale is that students are not able to recognize the mistakes and at the same time, they are not able to evaluate themselves or others, as there is no basis to determine that.

### *2.6.1.1.3 Peer assessment*

In their review of peer teaching in higher education, Goldschmid and Goldschmid (1976) argued that peer teaching was particularly appropriate in maximizing students’ responsibility for their own learning. The role of peers in assessment is also explicitly appreciated and understood in many theories and philosophies of learning (Dewey, 1887; Bruner, 1960; Feire, 1973 as cited in Bain, 2010).

Aitken (2012) discusses two uses of peer assessment such as 1) an informal task throughout the course or 2) a component in students’ grading. In exploring the first use, Black et al. (2004) assert that peer assessment is vital because students are more likely to accept criticism from peers than from their teachers. In addition, peer assessment is also beneficial since students would be using their natural discourse to explain and learn through examiners’ roles.

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However, peer assessment is not without worry. Knight, Aitken, and Rogerson (2000) state that peer assessment should be used in grading with some caution. They explained that work is difficult for teachers to ascertain and to assess fairly in cooperative learning. Therefore, a way to include student voice into assessment is to invite students to construct their peer-assessment rubric (as cited in Aitken, 2012).

### 2.6.1.2 Anonymous marking

Anonymous marking has been discussed as a possible means to eliminate bias and therefore establishing fairness as outcomes. The study by Pitt and Winstone (2017) revealed that there was no significant difference in perceptions of fairness according to whether marking was anonymous. Furthermore, the results suggest that anonymous marking might undermine the learning potential of feedback and minimize the strength of the relationship between lecturers and students, which may minimize the role of dialogue in the feedback process.

Therefore, the authors proposed “making assessment processes transparent to students through continued dialogue, maintaining trust in the professionalism of academics, and promoting feedback as an ongoing process of dialogue” (p.19) in order to maintain the integrity of assessment processes, without sacrificing the potential impact of feedback on students’ learning and development.

McArthur approves the ineffectiveness of such a procedural approach; she claims that a rule or procedure on its own, cannot change a flawed relationship based on misrecognition; this is likely to be unproductive and may even exacerbate the problem (McArthur, 2018). Misrecognition takes place when students are not given opportunities to develop, display, and be recognized for the traits and abilities through which they make contributions to the well-being of the society. Therefore, employing anonymous marking will not help in promoting justice in the program if students experience unfairness (i.e., not having equal chances of achievement) or distrust between them and their instructors (i.e., bias in terms of scoring).

### 2.6.1.3 Dialogic Feedback

(McArthur & Huxham, 2013; Price et al., 2013; Carless, 2016)- According to McArthur & Huxham (2013), dialogic feedback requires active engagement with the feedback, rather than passive acceptance of the teacher's suggestions. Feedback, resting on critical pedagogy, is a dynamic piece of knowledge; it should encourage dialogue; between students and lecturers, amongst peers and individually, as a form of self-critique and reflection. In his study on undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions of dialogic feedback, Wallis (2017) recommends supporting students to understand the role that dialogue plays in engaging with feedback and the personal learning opportunities it affords; the rationale is that they are often reluctant to engage in discussions about their assessment performance.

## **2.6. 2 Assessments that aim to promote greater social justice:**

### 2.6.2.1 Students' assessment literacy-

In their (2011) project, which sought to share control for curriculum and assessment design with students, McArthur and Huxham revealed that students could not agree to a particular assessment method – such as the traditional unseen exam – without knowledge of other alternatives, like take-home exams or short-answer assignments. The researchers argued that committed students could go through many years of university and simply not have the opportunities to develop a working knowledge of assessment practices. Therefore, in order to be genuinely empowered, students first need to be genuinely informed. Sadler (2013) addressed this by claiming that: “Students need a vocabulary for expressing and communicating both what they find and how they judge, at the least for that part of their evaluative knowledge they can express in words” (p. 59). It is not enough for teachers to assume that the students receive assessment vocabulary without “appropriate evaluative experience” and in-class discussions about what good and bad quality look like (as cited in Jónsson et al., 2018). Therefore, by encouraging practices that develop students' assessment literacy, academic staff are allowing opportunities for higher esteem recognition for students: students' capacity to evaluate their own learning and to identify for themselves the worth of their achievement and contributions to the society.

### 2.6.2.2 Students' feedback literacy-

Two recent definitions of student feedback literacy, which have been offered by Sutton (Sutton, 2012) and Careless and Boud (2018), show how EFL students might experience injustice linked to their lack of access to critical academic language and assessment/feedback literacy practice. Sutton (2012), from an academic literacy perspective that stresses the learning of tacit knowledge, defined student feedback literacy as the ability to read, interpret and use written feedback. Careless and Boud (2018) extended this cognitive starting point by defining student feedback literacy as “the understandings, capacities and dispositions needed to make sense of information and enhance work or learning strategies”. While Sutton’s description emphasized the value of acquiring academic language that enables understanding and interpreting of complex ideas, Careless and Boud’s account provided a more affective dimension to the term. They added that “students’ feedback literacy involves an understanding of what feedback is and how it can be managed effectively; capacities and dispositions to make productive use of feedback; and appreciation of the roles of teachers and themselves in these processes” (p. 1316). When students engage in practices that nurture their feedback literacy over time, they shall gain access to the components of the practices, such as the practical intelligibility and genuine criticality that help to make sense of things and to question the status quo and mainstream ways of living and being in society. The students become connoisseurs of quality work (McArthur, 2018). Such a more critical role, McArthur's (2018) argues, nourishes their dispositions and capacities to critically negotiate social injustices.

### 2.6.2.3 Teachers' assessment literacy-

Schmitt and Hamp-Lyons (2015) highlight how EAP teachers, with good assessment literacy, can make a difference by exercising their EAP expertise in designing new forms of assessment, new task types, and creating classroom assessment tasks that come close to authentic academic experiences; and also by participating in assessment-related activities such as joining working groups to design new scales for academic tasks, collecting authentic student data for corpus-building for assessment exemplars, and by taking a part in assessment activities within their own program and institution. The authors reported

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this type of cooperation at Bilkent University in Turkey. “With the support of University of Reading language assessment specialists, Bilkent not only developed a set of locally relevant assessments, but also implemented a dedicated assessment team who could manage the on-going creation and administration of the tests” (Schmitt & Hamp-Lyons, 2015, p.6). Research findings indicated a number of barriers for implementing effective assessment techniques, like lack of training in achieving assessment literacy, insufficient support from the university, and disparity between learning objectives and assessment techniques (Karmaker, 2020).

Through greater collaboration between the communities of language testing and EAP, language testers can develop their understanding of the wider construct of EAP and share their knowledge of assessment with EAP teachers. With collaboration, both communities are in a better position to use “their societal roles [to] strive and to improve the quality of language testing, assessment and teaching services, promote the just allocation of those services contribute to the education of society regarding language learning and language proficiency” (ILTA, 2000 as cited in Schmitt & Hamp-Lyons, 2015, p.7). From a social justice perspective, both teachers and students rely on each other to understand that a commitment to responsibility will shape the outcomes of these activities. Being able to explain assessment needs is as central to the teaching role as knowing the fundamentals of chemistry, history, law or whatever the disciplinary area is (McArthur, 2018).

### 2.6.2.4 UDL (universal design for learning) –

Hanesworth, Bracken and Elkington (2018) offer a typology for a social justice approach to assessment by advocating UDL which aims to diversify how educators teach and the methods by which they can evidence learning to enhance accessibility. UDL promotes three principles of curriculum design: (i) provide multiple means of representation (the what of learning); (ii) provide multiple means of action and expression (the how of learning); and (iii) provide multiple means of engagement (the why of learning). Teachers will question whether their practices present information in ways that reach all learners, offer purposeful options for students to show what they know, and engage all students in class. As such, UDL is primarily concerned with the accessibility of the curriculum and its

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assessment. To some extent, in terms of its application to assessment, it also seeks to extend the nature of learning through authenticity of practice and ultimate sustainability of impact.

Teacher perceptions of fair assessment and assessments that work and that don't work is an unexplored area, hence, in light of the discussion above, it is crucial to develop an explicit epistemology of fair assessment. This literature has identified a gap in the knowledge of contemporary research on HE teachers' perception of fair assessment and effective and ineffective assessment practices. Hence, this shortcoming has helped the researcher to formulate the third research question to find an answer to this query. The significance of the study is two-fold: findings from this study will deepen our reflection of social justice embedding in EAP programs and second, findings from this study will contribute to existing understandings on teachers' perception of fair assessment and assessments that work and that do not in an EFL context.

### **2.7. The theoretical tools used**

#### **2.7.1 McArthur`s (2018) conceptual framework**

The way in which we form, and practice assessment can and should influence the social justice outcomes of higher education. And because assessment plays a major role in how students learn, their motivation to learn, and how teachers teach, instructors and administration need to grant students a socially just experience with evaluation. Secondly, it has been argued that the inclusion of social justice in assessment/feedback provides students with a stronger sense of integrity and involvement. It allows them to express their thoughts on an area that is very important at university; this is because the way students understand, feel about and respond to assessment might contribute significantly to learning behavior and academic achievement. Besides the impact on their college experience, assessment practices affect students on the long term as "the nature and results of assessment practices within higher education have significant effects for the wider society where students go on to apply the knowledge and dispositions nurtured by such practices" (McArthur, 2016, p.979).

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Therefore, the aim of this research is (i) to explore staff and students' conceptions of social justice within assessment with the intention to use the data (ii) to improve staff– student relations and assessment/feedback practices. The participation of teachers and students in this study will allow integration of voices on assessment/feedback practices in EAP from various stakeholders.

Jan McArthur's (2018) concepts of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness, which are used in this research, are based on Honneth's conceptualization of social justice which regards social justice as mutual recognition. In her account, McArthur explains how Honneth conceptualizes mutual recognition in terms of three relationships to self that can be fostered through different social contexts. The realization of all three of these relationships is crucial for a person to enjoy genuinely autonomous selfhood, unbound to instrumental rationality. "These relationships are also based on mutuality; hence the recognition of others is closely linked to our capacity for self" (McArthur, 2018, p. 9). Honneth enables a close and intricate understanding of the relationship between individuals and their social world. Social justice requires the fulfillment of all three elements of Honneth's tripartite conceptualization: love, respect, and esteem recognition. She states "We must have the particularity of love recognition from family and those closest to us, we must have the universality of respect recognition, understanding and using the rights which are ours, and we must have the individuality of esteem recognition, being seen for the contributions, abilities and qualities we bring to the social whole" (p.196). Honneth's social justice can be summarized as the interconnections between mutual recognition and our basic existence as a human being of worth (Love recognition); recognition of our universal rights and abilities (respect recognition); and recognition of the contribution we make to the society (esteem recognition). Hence, if HE institutions are to prepare graduates able to challenge existing recognition regimes and work towards greater social justice, this must begin with how they experience recognition within their own universities.

The difficulty to implement change is the reason McArthur (2018) has also woven practice theory into her approach to assessment for social justice. McArthur drew on Schatzki's concept of general understandings (2002) as foundations for assessment for social justice.

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Similar to Honneth's concept of esteem recognition, Schatzki (2013) general understandings as 'abstract senses' are not ends for which people strive but senses of the worth, value, nature, or place of things, which infuse and are expressed in people's doings and sayings (p. 16 as cited in McArthur, 2018). In Schatzki's account (2002), general understandings are experienced, articulated and negotiated in situated and embodied activity and thereby transfer the cultural to situated activity. Similarly, McArthur (2018) proposed five general understandings of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness that, if embraced, would help shape assessment practices towards greater social justice. This research does not pretend that the concepts are the definite list to assessment for social justice. These general understandings are not ends in themselves, but they help shape the structures of different practices. The researcher thinks that just like a general understanding of "courtesy" shapes the nature of the practice of going into a shop and politely asking for something (2002), a general understanding of "responsibility" shapes the nature of the different practices of allowing students to be responsible for their own learning.

Therefore, the reason why this research has chosen the former framework is because McArthur's theory encompasses two principles: critical theory and social practice theory. First, critical theory leads to an understanding of social justice embedded in the lived realities of people's lives, and takes particularly seriously issues of power, domination and distortion. It involves critique of current social arrangements and looks forward to a more just society. Second, assessment needs to be understood as a social practice. According to McArthur (2018), two considerations should be taken as such: the extent to which assessment policies and practices within higher education may be considered socially just, and the extent to which such policies and practices contribute to student learning in such a way as to promote socially just dispositions, engagement with knowledge and other practices in students' ongoing social and professional lives.

Consequently, if we join the EAP and socially just assessment arguments together, it suggests that we could have better – fairer and more pedagogically improved – outcomes. The successive accounts in the chapter will explain how this idea works and the implications of such a union.

### **2.7.2 The concept of Teaching Learning Regimes (TLRs):**

“TLRs” is a shorthand term for a constellation of rules, assumptions, practices and relationships related to teaching and learning issues in higher education. These include aspects of the following salient to teaching and learning, such as: identities in interaction, power relations, codes of signification, tacit assumptions, rules of appropriateness, recurrent practices, discursive repertoires, implicit theories of learning and of teaching (Trowler & Cooper, 2002). The word regime (using the French meaning) describes how a system operates to shape an activity, and describes the system (made up of complex elements) that circumscribes the interactions, beliefs, and behaviors of a group (Trowler, 2008). In his book, Trowler (2008) argues how “Teaching and learning regimes”, unlike communities of practice, are almost always sites of contest. Therefore, this research used this definition of the word ‘regime’ to explore the underpinning sets of rules/components that were not visible within this group (the researched department), but which eventually constituted that system (assessment/feedback and teaching practices). The interviews with the teachers helped reveal both consensus and disagreements in their practices and perceptions.

While the concept of TLRs has been used to develop the participants’ awareness and explicit understandings about teaching and learning` in Trowler and Cooper (2002), it is used in this study to meet a two-fold purpose. First, TLRs is useful to investigate the teachers and students’ understanding of just assessment and feedback practices. Not only that but the use of TLRs also helped understand the value behind the implication of McArthur’s conceptual framework within assessment/feedback practices. The interactions, beliefs, and behaviors (regimes), by effectively adopting the five proposed concepts within a system, would help shape assessment practices towards greater social justice, as suggested by McArthur. As a researcher, I trust the appropriateness of using the concepts of “Teaching and learning regimes” and “The five general understandings” both rooted in social practice theory; they can take different forms but what they share is a role in shaping the nature of the practices that are carried out. As such, TLRs can also contribute into the discussion of assessment, social justice, and EAP.

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Moreover, the concept is chosen as the research explores the EAP program as the primary location of TLRs. The concept stresses the role that departments and subgroups within them have for the growth and transmission of TLRs because it is here where academics relatively challenge and adjust their attitudes, values, and practices as a result of exposure to teaching courses and other experiences (Trowler & Cooper, 2002; Trowler, 2008).

The argument presented here is that academic staff in this study have brought sets of assumptions and practices rooted in their TLRs. Academics have engaged together on tasks over the long term (predetermined rubrics, use of Turnitin, emphasis on mastering language skills, use of essays, etc.); the teachers constructed many aspects of EAP culture in the department which are invisible to them because they have become taken for granted. The concepts proposed by McArthur (2018) instantiate TLRs which may be more, or less, compatible with those of the individual teachers. The researcher argues as the previous authors that “Where there are incongruities between the two, they need not be fatal if participants are able to, or are encouraged to, surface and reflect on previously tacit assumptions embedded in their {past} TLRs” (Trowler & Cooper, 2002, p.1). Similarly, there may not be a problem if the teachers are able to exercise discretion over the application of aspects of different regimes (like the ones proposed in McArthur's five concepts), applying them in their contexts as appropriate.

In other words, some academic staff in universities would use and benefit from McArthur's (2018) conceptual framework, designed to improve HE assessment and feedback practices whilst others may experience periods of resistance or some drop out altogether. Some individuals are more able and willing than others to transfer across or between the TLRs proposed by McArthur.

### **2.7.3 The use of Jan McArthur`s (2018) five concepts:**

Considering the five named concepts would allow a detailed exploration to how the different stakeholders (students and teachers) approach assessment in the EAP program from a different and new perspective, that of social justice. Consequently, the use of these concepts would enable the teachers in specific to ask questions in terms of why they

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assess, how they assess and why that matters, and this examination may eventually encourage some changes in the institution.

### 2.7.3.1 Trust

Trust is the first essential understanding that should be deliberated while attempting changes in assessment/feedback practices in higher education. It has become significant to find ways of promoting trust within institutionalized practices because of the current and shared prospect of distrust between academics and students in higher education (McArthur, 2018). From a social justice perspective, assessment practices require mutual trust among the different stakeholders. In order to promote trust, we need to understand the position and needs of all the people involved, including the students. As such, assessments are no longer considered as mere contractual exchanges or procedures that help assess students' performance. An enhanced trust exists when assessment tasks are transparent, are negotiated and discussed with students. In this context, trust involves not just the interpersonal but also the educational level, as students are able to engage with knowledge in ways consistent with social justice, as stated by McArthur (2018).

### 2.7.3.2 Honesty

Besides trust, honesty which involves both students and educators, is another important lens through which we can ensure the rethinking of established assessment/feedback practices for social justice. According to McArthur (2018), honesty is more than simply not doing wrong; it is essential for mutual esteem recognition; which implies, for students to be able to recognize their own achievements and the useful social role they can play through these. Students who choose practices of dishonesty cease their own capacity to recognize their achievements. Students who decide to cheat or get help will not be able to identify the worth of their achievements nor their capacities. This is a form of self-misrecognition which negatively affects their well-being. One form of self-misrecognition is displayed when the certification is viewed as having greater importance than what it allows the students to do with that certification. Instead, students should focus on the practices of engaging with knowledge and applying that knowledge to real social needs.

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Honesty also involves educators. A lack of honesty about the working conditions under which academics engage in assessment and marking practices prevents the undertaking of social justice in two ways (McArthur, 2018). On the one hand, there is misrecognition towards academics through the undervaluing of their work and their diminished capacity to feel proper esteem in their job. High levels of workplace stress may further compound the misrecognition they suffer. On the other hand, this lack of honesty about how much time is spent on assessment also reduces the students' achievements, if the products of their work are not given the attention they deserve.

### 2.7.3.3 Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a general understanding that can help shape assessment practices towards social justice as it provides a supportive link between present and potential achievement (McArthur, 2018). Forgiveness is particularly important in the context of higher education because the knowledge students are – or should – be dealing with is complicated, contested and dynamic. McArthur (2018) stresses the importance of practicing forgiveness since “many of the current ways in which assessment is organized force the pace of student learning to an unforgiving degree, leaving little scope for the reflexivity needed for proper responsibility, nor for genuine learning through feedback and an iterative sense of improving on one’s mistakes” (p. 169).

According to McArthur (2018), forgiveness, which highlights compassion and kindness, also has a vital pedagogical role. This role represents looking back with a focus on moving forward, and this can be exemplified in formative assessments and dialogical forms of feedback. We need to practice forgiveness because learning, teaching and assessment encompass making mistakes, as we could not do any of these without mistakes. Consequently, from a social justice perspective, this means that we need to be forgiving about such errors and we need a commitment to learning as an iterative process. Forgiveness (towards ourselves and towards others) is key for students to complete feedback loop (McArthur, 2018). The students can learn effectively when they move to a level of actively looking for areas to improve in their work, not fearing or shying away from possible errors; therefore, forgiveness entails responsibility (ibid).

### 2.7.3.4 Responsibility

Genuine and informed responsibility can shape the practices of assessment for social justice. “Responsibility is the right to be an informed and active member of a social group, and in the assessment context this means to be assessed through approaches and practices that enable students to take responsibility for their own learning” (McArthur, 2018, p.131). Students should have full knowledge and active participation in assessment practices to enable them to have genuine responsibility for the roles they play, and thereby to maximize their achievements. Students can recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their own work and therefore achieve esteem recognition. According to McArthur (2018), such a sense of responsibility is essential for students’ self-worth, and their place within society, on two levels. First, it allows an authentic understanding of the rules or laws under which one acts – in an assessment context, it is the awareness of the regulations and procedures that shape practices. Second, it permits understanding of the expectations of the assessment practice: it is not so much the formal rules (i.e. assessment criteria or the number of references) but the tacit knowledge which can only be gained through active participation (learning about different assessment/feedback methods and being involved in assessment and feedback processes).

### 2.7.3.5 Responsiveness

Finally, responsiveness is another understanding that can help shape assessment practices for social justice since it necessitates thoughtful responses to one’s milieu. The concept of responsiveness was discussed in two different but clearly related contexts: Responsiveness to knowledge and responsiveness to the world of work. It involves an interconnection with the world, with fellow citizens, and with knowledge; it requires an openness to have one’s thoughts and actions shaped by one’s encounters with the world in which one is placed (McArthur, 2018). Assessment practices that cultivate responsiveness encourage proactive students who see themselves as interconnected with the world in which they live, interconnected with other citizens and interconnected with the knowledge with which they engage. One of the ways in which students can appreciate the social worth of the complex knowledge they engage with is by seeing it clearly in its social context; therefore, students must be able to genuinely use the knowledge they acquire through study. This

type of participation/responsiveness, argues McArthur (2018), represents a central focus of both knowledge engagement and of social justice.

## **2.8. Summary**

This chapter first explains and contrasts the various functions of assessment. It then provides an in-depth literature review on why the current assessment practice is still measurement-dominant internationally but more so in EAP programs due to the cultural influence. While it is imperative to explore if the participants in this research context also hold the same view on assessment practice, knowledge from the literature review sets the underlying assumption that the concept of fair assessment and feedback practices is less understood in EFL contexts such as Lebanon. Thus, relating fairness in assessment/feedback and learning may not come to mind naturally. This underlying assumption informs putting McArthur's (2018) concepts upfront in the research questions; this study can thereby explicitly investigate the perceptions and experiences of fair assessment and feedback practices among the participants. Researching perceptions and experiences of Assessment for Learning is essential as rubrics feature in this concept and the findings help to associate and explain the overall picture of rubric utilization in this research context. The next chapter discusses relevant literature on assessment and feedback practices where research gaps are identified.

## Chapter 3 — Methodology

### 3.1. Preview

The research does not merely present instances of social justice within assessment/feedback practices in the EAP program but further explores McArthur's (2018) five concepts (trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsiveness and responsibility) with two groups (students and instructors), by approaching the empirical application of assessment/feedback for social justice. As such, the research can be divided into two phases: phase one which explored students' perceptions and teachers' practices while phase two tackled the teachers' views of a more ideal model of assessment/feedback. The research uses an insider case-study approach; for this sake, two research methods are employed to collect data and answer the research questions and these are semi-structured and focus-group interviews. The semi-structured interviews with the students and teachers are based on McArthur's (2018) theoretical framework, which is inspired by critical theory and social practice theory. The focus group interview with the teachers is based on both McArthur's (2018) five principles and TLR theory (Teaching learning regimes) by Trowler and Cooper (2002). The descriptive data and resulting analysis offered in this chapter present the sequential plans of action and the overall research process before delving into the interpretation of data in chapters 4 and 5.

### 3.2. Locating the study

EAP is a widely used program in Anglophone and non-Anglophone higher education institutions and is of particular interest in the research because such programs may exhibit a certain instrumental standard that international institutions use regarding teaching, assessment and course materials. In fact, a benchmark that promotes standardized engagement with knowledge and does not address the context is particularly unsound from a social justice perspective (McArthur, 2018). However, culturally responsive assessments, according to McArthur (2018), appreciate the complex histories and identities students bring with them to their assessment experiences. Such perspective

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does not see assessment as something done to students, but necessarily involving students in all aspects of the assessment processes.

The researched university, like other Lebanese private institutions, is currently experiencing a demographic change: more students, from various cultural and language backgrounds are joining the university and such difference is affecting their entry level and overall performance throughout the EAP courses. They include students who were born, raised, and educated in Lebanon – these constitute the majority of the student body, and they could be either French educated or English educated; Arab students; international and exchange students; and first or second generation Lebanese immigrants who are native speakers of English (or other languages). These groups of students have different needs when it comes to writing in a second language (Esseili, 2016). Some students' prior attainment and English knowledge is considered different and even lower than the rest of the students' cohort. Hence, the EAP program in its existing version is catering to three students' categories: Students whose first language is not English (coming from French medium schools), students whose first language is English but is weak (coming from public schools or different Arab countries) and students whose first language is English but is relatively good (coming from English medium schools). The EAP program at this university is split into two parts: Lower level or intensive courses targeting language proficiency which are designed to help weak students (ENG.002, ENG.003, and ENG.101) and higher-level courses which are designed to develop students' critical thinking and analysis skills (ENG.101, ENG.102, and ENG.203). As far as this study is concerned, the writing assessment tasks in the EAP program involved writing short paragraphs and essays, and towards the end of the sequence, a research paper while the rubrics used are predetermined (see Appendix 1).

### 3.3. Research design

Research design is determined by the research questions and the nature of the inquiry. Empirical research is constructed on a variety of foundations: scientific and positivistic methodologies, naturalistic and interpretive methodologies, methodologies from critical theory, and feminist educational research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The

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research questions mentioned in the previous chapter indicate the descriptive, interpretive and explanatory nature of this research, with the hope of establishing the “how and why” within the given situation. As such, the decision was made to conduct insider case study research, a design that was appropriate for the overall research interrogation, while the evidence collected enabled the researcher to answer the different research questions. The choice of the design (a case study that uses theory) also made the analysis easier and clearer (using the five concepts as a framework), and the conclusions trustworthy (comparing the results with literature and theory (as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007)). Research design, research questions and the nature of inquiry are highly connected: the significance of deciding the research purpose (descriptive/explanatory) is that it will determine the methods of data collection (interviews) and the type of analysis performed on the data (interpretive). This, thereby, will affect the way in which the analysis is written (Tabular/table format). And finally, the data analysis will also be influenced by the kind of qualitative study that is being undertaken (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

This study adopts a case study approach to answer the three research questions, exploring and evaluating the EAP assessment/feedback practices in depth. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) argue that the case study approach focuses on individual actors or groups of actors, and seeks to understand their perceptions of events; the approach strives to portray ‘what it is like’ to be in a particular situation, to catch the close-up reality and ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) of participants’ lived experiences of, thoughts about and feelings for, a situation (as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Adelman et al. (1980) argue that by carefully attending to social situations, case studies can represent some of the discrepancies or conflicts between the viewpoints held by participants (as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Finally, case studies are ‘a step to action’, as they begin in a world of action and even contribute to it. “Their insights may be directly interpreted and used; for staff or individual self-development, for within-institutional feedback; for formative evaluation; and in educational policy making” (Adelman et al., 1980 as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 292). A case study approach was therefore selected as it presents these different strengths over other research approaches. The results of the

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case study research however may not be generalizable except where other readers/researchers see their application.

This research combines two uses of a case study: intrinsic and instrumental. It is intrinsic as it explores the EAP program and the assessment/feedback practices therein. Stake (1994 as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007) defines intrinsic case studies as studies that are undertaken in order to understand the case in question. It is considered instrumental as it examines the EAP program in order to gain understanding into the social justice embedding within assessment/feedback practices. Literature defines instrumental case studies as examining a particular case in order to gain insight into an issue or a theory. Because the research used a case study design which is a rather loose design, this implied that there are a number of choices that need to be addressed in a principled way (Meyer, 2001). There was a need to be very explicit about the choices the researcher makes (concerning the Use of McArthur's concepts and the different groups of participants) and the need to justify them. The research project is based around five key concepts or categories (Trust, Honesty, Forgiveness, Responsibility and Responsiveness). However, the researcher did not have to exclusively engage with thematic analysis in the most open sense; it was possible to code and analyze data inductively within and alongside these five components of social justice in EAP assessment/feedback. Qualitative analysis emphasizes the importance of remaining open to what is in the data, rather than simply applying concepts imported from literature (Roulston, 2014).

After deciding the research design, it was valuable to question its trustworthiness. In principle, trustworthiness is considered a more appropriate criterion for evaluating qualitative studies. It is suggested that the notion of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and its components replace more conventional views of reliability and validity. In order to ensure the process is trustworthy, Guba and Lincoln (1989) propose the research should satisfy four criteria which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Credibility guarantees the study measures what is intended and is a true reflection of the social reality of the participants. There are many strategies to address credibility that include prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checks (Maher, Hadfield, Hutchings, & de Eyto,

2018). To ensure this research process was trustworthy, two of Guba and Lincoln's (1989) criteria for ensuring rigor in qualitative research were addressed by employing the following strategies:

For the purpose of credibility and to affirm this research measured the students and teachers' understanding of the embedding of social justice within assessment/feedback practices, McArthur's (2018) critical theory along with Trowler and Cooper's (2002) theory of Teaching and Learning regimes were used, to combine both the interpretive and emancipatory research approaches. Research methodologies using the interpretive and qualitative approach seek to clarify, understand and interpret the communications of 'speaking and acting' subjects whereas transformative methodologies, in critical theory approach, are concerned with praxis – action that is informed by reflection with the aim to emancipate" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 27).

In addition, dependability, or showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated, is confirmed in this study by using different sources of data. Triangulation can be a useful technique where a researcher is engaged in a case study, a particular example of complex phenomena (Adelman et al. 1980 as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Literature also points out that triangular techniques in the social sciences attempt to explain more fully the richness and complexity of human behavior and of situations in which human beings interact. This research therefore used methodological triangulation, different research methods on the same object of study, to check on previously collected data (the focus-group interview following the semi-structured interviews).

### 3.3.1 Sample Determination

This study, which uses qualitative research design and requires small numbers of participants and rich data rather than breadth, utilizes focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The sample used in this research is therefore purposive and coherent with this kind of research design. Lebanese final-year students (Aged 22+) from both genders represent the core participants in the present study. They were chosen for the benefit of sharing a long undergraduate experience of assessment/feedback practices in the program. These students correspond to the full range of disciplines taught at the university

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and are considered to belong to linguistically diverse backgrounds. They mainly come from two mainstream/binary educational systems in the country: French and English, private and public. The other group of participants includes the instructors of academic writing; they belong to different disciplines, and they have been teaching at the institution for more than 5 years.

The research used purposive sampling to collect data as it is targeting a particular program and two groups (students and teachers) within that program. This type of sampling indicates that the sample is taken from a group of people who are directly related to the research questions. Small-scale research often uses nonprobability samples because, despite the disadvantages that arise from their no representativeness, they are far less complicated to set up, are considerably less expensive, and can prove perfectly adequate where researchers do not intend to generalize their findings beyond the sample in question (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). While it may satisfy the researcher's needs to take this type of sample, it does not pretend to represent the wider population; it is deliberately and unashamedly selective and not generalizable, allowing depth.

Fieldwork specifically focused on these groups within the EAP program as they represent the only source eliciting rich comprehensive data on the topic of discussion. "Though these groups may not be representative, and their comments may not be generalizable, this is not the primary concern in such sampling; rather the concern is to acquire in-depth information from those who are in a position to give it" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 115). The data collection was conducted from June until September during the year 2021. Phase one took place in the first and second months of the summer semester (June and July) while phase two was completed in September upon the returning to the new term.

### **3. 3. 2 Addressing ethical issues**

The ethics procedure and framework for the whole study was approved in advance through the Lancaster University process. Approval was also obtained through the researched university management and within the department concerned. Atkins and Duckworth (2019) argue that social justice research must clearly show that social justice is at the heart

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of both its purpose and its process. During recruitment, the participants signed consent forms prior to the interviews and later before the focus groups. In these forms, the researcher provided details regarding the purpose of the study, the timing of the research, the benefits, the harms, and explained how anonymity is secured. Interviewees must provide informed consent for their participation in the research. The principle of doing no harm to the participants and to the reputation of the institution was also mentioned in the form. Finally, informed consent documents provided participants with information on how the interview data will be used, who will have access to the data, and whom they may contact for questions. Guided by the interview guide, different precautions were taken regarding the semi-structured and the focus-group interviews, in the hope of establishing a code of ethics. Interviewees should not be deceived and must be protected from any form of mental, physical, or emotional injury (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). Details on ethical procedures regarding research methods will be further explained in the sections on semi-structured interviews and the focus-group interview.

### **3. 3. 3 Recruitment**

Four aspects of recruitment are particularly influential with respect to knowledge production: research topics, predefined samples, the use of mediators, and the researchers' positionality and situatedness (Kristensen & Ravn, 2015). This study attempted to address these strategies while conducting the recruitment. The first group of predefined samples were final-year students who completed all the language courses on the EAP program. The researcher recruited them through their university emails to minimize any potential of implicit coercion. The second group included teachers who were recruited, as pertaining to the teaching of academic writing in the department, through their university emails. The researcher did not use a variety of recruitment methods other than the university emails due to the restrictions imposed by Covid-19. One implication of Covid-19 on this research was the scarcity of recruitment strategies and the unavailability of a face-to face interview, be it with the teachers or the students. Therefore, the research used Webex as an online platform that could assist in collecting the data. Some students volunteered out of interest and because of their peers who were previously interviewed. This group presented the mediators who facilitated contact between the researcher and

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the new participants (Students). Table 3.3.3.1 provides details on the students' age, majors and gender, and the type of previous schooling received. Table 3.3.3.2 provides details on the teachers' age, nationalities, years of experience and discipline.

<b>Students</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Type of previous school</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Student 1	21	French-medium	Engineering	Female
Student 2	22	French-medium	Engineering	Female
Student 3	22	French-medium	Nutrition	Female
Student 4	24	English-medium	Mass Communication	Female
Student 5	21	English-medium	Physical Education	Male
Student 6	22	English-medium	Engineering	Male
Student 7	22	French-medium	Computer Sciences	Male
Student 8	22	French-medium	Computer Sciences	Male
Student 9	23	French-medium	Computer Sciences	Male
Student 10	23	English-medium	Psychology	Female

**Table 3.3.3.1: Students as participants in the semi-structured interviews**

<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Years of experience</b>	<b>Discipline</b>
Teacher 1	55	Russian	20	Linguistics
Teacher 2	45	Lebanese	14 years	Translation

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Teacher 3	40	Lebanese	12 years	English language teaching
Teacher 4	40	American	12 years	English language & Literature

**Table 3.3.3.2: Teachers as participants in the semi-structured and the focus group interviews**

#### **3.4. The research questions**

Because the research looks at one specific level of analysis, the EAP program and its two secondary stakeholders: staff and students, it was important to investigate both students' experiences and staff practices of assessment/feedback practices.

In a case study which explores undergraduate EFL students' experiences with assessment/feedback practices in HE Academic writing classes and uses McArthur's (2018) named concepts as a conceptual lens to understand the embedding of social justice, the researcher decided to ask the following questions:

**3.4.1) To what extent do EAP students experience the notions of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness within the institutional assessment practices?**

**3.4.2) To what extent do EAP instructors view the notions of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness within broad institutional assessment practices?**

**3.4.3) What are the teachers' perceptions of fair assessments that work and that don't in the program?**

#### **3.5. Data collection methods in situ**

The researcher, guided by the research questions and the choice of the design, chose a combination of interviews: semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

### **3.5.1 The use of semi-structured interviews:**

The literature reveals how semi-structured in-depth interviews are the most adopted interviewing format in qualitative research; they can occur either with an individual or in groups to delve deeply into social and personal matters (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The reason why the researcher had chosen this type of interview is because it allows comparability among students and later between the students and their instructors. Semi-structured interviews also allow a reflective and dialogic journey between the interviewer and the interviewees (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997 as cited in Cousin, 2008); this is coherent with the topic too as the researcher is interested in assessment as a dialogic process. Many have discussed the relational character in interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997; David, 1999; Alldred & Gilles, 2002; Schostack, 2006 as cited in Cousin, 2008). This body of literature suggests abandoning the idea of the interview as a straightforward site of research and acknowledging its meaning making character. As such, this type of interview, which allowed open discussions with the teachers and students regarding the selected five concepts, was valuable in this research.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two groups of participants: 10 students and 4 instructors who shared rich descriptions of the practices of assessment and feedback in the EAP program. The rationale for this range of participants' size stems from the goal that interviews should include different participants to yield diversity in the information provided. The researcher facilitated a one-hour interview with a goal of exploring main themes/concepts that had emerged from the literature (McArthur, 2018). Students were interviewed once at the end of their degree in other words after completing the different English language courses on the EAP program.

#### **3.5.1.1 Constructing the semi-structured interview questions:**

In order to address the first two research questions, the researcher proposed 2/3 subsidiary questions to illustrate each of the five concepts, imagining the participants (staff and students) don't know the background to the project, and may never have really thought about assessment in any depth. Literature suggests that the framing of questions for a semi-structured interview needs to consider prompts and probes (Morrison, 1993 as

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cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Therefore, students and teachers were given general open-ended questions at the beginning of the interview and other subsidiary questions to explore individual concepts. To avoid theoretical and abstract discussion, the concepts of trust, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness were meaningfully examined and translated into recurrent practices, tasks or doings i.e., practices of assessment/feedback literacy, practices of self-assessment and peer assessment, etc. (see Appendices-Interview Questions Guide). In other words, to illustrate the concept of trust in teachers' practices, the researcher used the following guidelines:

Because wider assessment literacy, transparency and collaboration have been suggested as strategies to increase trust (Careless, 2008), the interview could ask questions such as:

- 1) Which different kinds of assessments did you have on the English courses? Which different kinds of feedback?
- 2) What do you think about them in general? Do you prefer some to others?
- 3) Did your teacher's feedback include different types of feedback? For example, did your feedback include instances of self-assessment, peer assessment along with the instructor's feedback?

Active interviewing between the interviewer and the interviewees on these concepts included interpretations, explanations and ideas. "This shifts the method talk for interviewing from the formulation of the right questions for the right responses to the formulation of moves to develop the dialogue and analytic attention to how meanings are assembled" (Cousin, 2008, p.74).

### 3.5.1.2 Building rapport with the participants:

Because the researcher relied on interviews as the primary data collection method, the issue of building trust between the researcher and the interviewees had become very important. Multiple authors discussed the value of establishing a good rapport with the interviewees (Roulston, DeMarrais, Lewis, 2003; Kvale, 2006; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Cohen, 2007). Spradely and other researchers explained the different stages needed to build rapport; they included apprehension, exploration, co-operation, and participation

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(as cited in DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Each stage entailed a variety of questions and interactions between the researcher and the interviewees. This idea had affected the distribution of the questions in the research interview (the researcher considered the order of the five concepts based on their complexity, starting with a nonthreatening and broad question about the EAP program and leaving the more difficult/sensitive topics and direct questions until the middle of the interview or after establishing some engagement with the participants). In order to ensure interview trustworthiness and in-depthness, the researcher avoided smoothing the interpretation by exploring subtleties, nuances, uniqueness and singularity alongside possible generalities and commonalities across groups, as informed by literature (Cousin, 2008). In other words, the researcher did not only explore instances of congruence and disagreement between the students and staff but also incongruities existing within the groups as well. The researcher recorded the participants' accounts, took notes concurrently and requested confirmation during the interviews. The use of written field notes taken either during an interview or immediately afterward has been reported as being superior to the exclusive use of audio recordings that are subsequently verbatim transcribed (Fasick, 2001; Wengraf, 2001 as cited in Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). Transcription of the interviews was done immediately after the different interviews took place.

### 3.5.1.3 Challenges involving the semi-structured interviews:

It was mostly Kvale (2006) who moved the discussion on power and control in interview relationships further when he discussed asymmetries of power and suggested agonistic interview alternatives to address power differences. Asymmetries of power in this research are two-fold; they existed between the researcher and the students and between the researcher and the teachers. To start with, power differences of the former type were not ignored by the researcher. That is to say that the goal of this research was not to examine a specimen under a microscope but to make the dynamic as even as possible, given the fact that the participants might be nervous and aware that the researcher will be examining every word. In this research, power relations have been addressed in recruitment by choosing to interview final year students (Seniors) who have not been the researcher's own students throughout the entire program. In addition, the fact that the

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researcher is using the conceptual framework by McArthur (2018) does partly eliminate the control that such interviews have on the research participants, be it staff or students. In order not to render the interviews with the students less manipulative or purely instrumental, the researcher was ready to answer some ambiguities and to explain some terms, but of course made sure that the students' speaking time was relatively high. Following the advice by Kvale (2006) who was inspired by Habermas's discourse theory (1991), the researcher chose rational interviewing as the "validity of a moral norm". In this research/context, different and more just assessment practices cannot be justified in the mind of one individual (the researcher) but in processes of argumentation between the different individuals (the researcher/students) or (the researcher/teachers).

The fact that this research used an-insider approach had caused the researcher to rethink power balances and relations on two levels. According to literature, undergoing an insider-research means that the researcher and the participants understand the local values and speak the same language, and this enables a deeper understanding of the issue (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002). Regarding students, the researcher tried to probe, ask for clarification, and offer counter-arguments – all as part of an open discussion, rather than a legal cross-examination. It was as if the researcher was exploring ideas with the students, not looking for mistakes in their perspectives. The researcher, as suggested in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), also tried to establish rapport through warm-up questions to get the participants relaxed and talking before building up to the difficult questions. The researcher asked students about their school backgrounds, their majors and their university experiences before delving into more related questions. "A conception of interviews as personal dialogues may provide liberal and humanistic interviewers with an illusion of equality and common interests with their subjects, whereas the researchers at the same time dominate the interview situation and retain sovereign control of the later use of the interview-produced knowledge" (Kvale, 2006, p.486)

As for power relations with the teachers, there are always some, the researcher can't escape this entirely. Even in a relatively equal dynamic (such as with the instructors), the interviewee knows that the researcher will be examining what they say, and this can put them in a weaker position – they feel like they are under a microscope. In a way they are,

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that's the nature of qualitative data. However, if one establishes rapport, asks open questions, and encourages and allows participants to express themselves, this may address most of the issues with that risk and guarantee honest information transfer (Kitwoo, 1997; Kvale, 1996 as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

Finally, there is also the risk of monopolizing the interpretation of the participants' accounts from the interviews. This can be addressed by using the former type of consensus interviewing and when the participants discuss their own conceptions of the components of social justice in the program.

### **3.5.2 The use of a focus group interview:**

A focus group interview is selected since it allows the researcher to capture instances of shared meanings and understanding. "Shared meaning, shared understanding and shared sense making allows people to see and understand situations and provides a basis for making one's own behavior reasonable and sensible" (Morgan as cited in Knight, 1998, p. 1291). Using the focus group, hence, also alleviates the insider researcher's bias with "polyocularity", involving research teams from several inside cultures (as cited in Trowler, 2011). Finally, the researcher could use the focus group to assess if the themes that emerged from the previous interviews also emerged from this group interview and to compare the instructors' suggestions to the collected literature, attempting to achieve methodological triangulation.

Although focus groups are unnatural settings, they are arguably slightly more natural than interviews. They are focused on a specific issue and, therefore, will yield insights that might not otherwise have been gained from a straightforward interview with the instructors (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Cohen et al. (2007) explain how "focus groups have the attraction of synergy" (p.532), allowing several people to stimulate discussions and to work together on the subject at hand, hence producing a large amount of data in a short period. Hence, the use of focus groups in higher education and within a specific EAP context (at the micro level) would support research in evaluating the EAP program (at the macro level) and would be an adjunct to the other research method used in this study. This

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completely vindicates the choice of focus groups as they allow the researcher to consider the teachers' immediate (working) and wider (cultural) context.

Moreover, the researcher strongly believes that it is important that those who know education also research it (Hjardemaal, 2009, 2011a as cited in Wilkinson, 1998), and this is the avowedly political purpose of the research. It has been argued that “focus groups enable the development of collective understandings of shared problems and (often) solutions to these problems” (Wilkinson, 1998, p.186).

Fairness in focus group interviews, whether within the procedures or outcomes, is significant to maintain the research integrity; using shared not individual sense making will therefore allow the researcher to maintain justice throughout the data analysis. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) argue that “it must be borne in mind when conducting group interviews that the unit of analysis is the view of the whole group and not the individual member; a collective group response is being sought, even if there are individual differences or a range of responses within the group” (p.374). This guarantees that no individual is either unnecessarily disregarded or subject to blame or being disliked for holding a different view. In this context, the outcomes of the focus group interview from a social justice perspective are unbiased since they represent the collective not the individual perspectives on the topic.

In order to maintain fairness in terms of procedures, informed consent in which the participants are informed about the concern and scope of the overall project, the kinds of issues the researcher is interested in discussing, and the process of data transcription were sent by email before the meeting to the different instructors. The focus group discussions were carried out with four instructors (3 females and 1 male), using purposeful sampling. The reason why the researcher has chosen to address these four instructors is because of their many years of experience in teaching writing/academic writing through the different levels (i.e. ENGL.203, ENG.102, ENGL.101 and ENG.003) in the EAP program and because they were former course coordinators (the group has homogeneity of background in the required area) . Krueger (1994) has recommended the use of very small focus groups, “mini-focus groups” (p. 17), which comprise 3 (Morgan, 1997) or 4 (Krueger, 1994) participants, with members having specialized knowledge and/or experiences to discuss in

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the group. The researcher facilitated a two-hour group interview with a goal of exploring main themes that had emerged from the literature and the conceptual framework by McArthur (2018) on fair assessments.

Conducting online focus groups has two major advantages. Firstly, meetings virtually will involve higher comfort levels and maximize the engagement of shy participants. Joinson (2005) and Hine (2005) have found that some people feel less vulnerable and exposed by participating in virtual rather than real discussions (as cited in Cousin, 2008). Moreover, participants in both dyadic interviews and focus groups reported high levels of comfort about sharing their true thoughts (Lobe & Morgan, 2021; Thunberg & Arnell, 2021). Even though it might be more difficult to establish rapport via online discussions, the fact that people are so much more used to this type of engagement makes it less daunting. Another advantage of conducting focus groups online is that the participants' contributions are already written and ready to be analyzed, using the instructors' written/typed notes. However, Seale, Charteris-Black, MacFarlane and McPherson (2010) and De lima, Gerosa, Conte and De Netto (2019) raised several problems regarding the interpretation of text produced via online forums. Texts produced via online forms are "grammatically and lexically less dense than written language and can often be unedited, with numerous contradictions of words and uncorrected typing or punctuation peculiarities" (Seale et al., 2010, p. 596).

### 3.5.2.1 Focus-group interview questions and vignette:

The third research question and research design guided how the focus group interview was constructed. The research's additional goal was to initiate the instructors' reflection on McArthur's (2018) five concepts, Trust-Honesty-Forgiveness-Responsiveness Responsibility, while exploring the possibility of changing assessment/feedback practices in the institution. Considering the five named concepts would allow a changed orientation to how the different stakeholders approach assessment/feedback in the EAP program. In other words, the use of these concepts would enable the teachers in specific to ask questions in terms of why they assess, how they assess and why that matters. The first set of questions was open-ended and focused on engaging the teachers and building rapport;

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the teachers were given some time to take notes and then deliberate their different answers.

While designing focus groups interviews, Kruger and Casey (2014) suggest asking open-ended but focused questions, using different types of questions, avoiding dichotomous questions and using questions that would get participants involved. In this research, the decision was made to use both the conceptual framework by McArthur and literature to guide the deliberation of the questions. In their study on EFL teachers' perceptions and challenges of incorporating justice in classrooms, Estaji and Zhaleh (2021) regarded educational and institutional factors, student-related factors, and teacher-related factors as the three major sources of challenges faced by EFL teachers. The teachers discussed the questions and probes (below) in the hope of eliminating any form of misrecognition in the institution, as suggested by McArthur (2018).

### Examples of questions informed by the conceptual framework and literature:

- *Are you happy with the assessment and feedback practices on the course? Do you think they're fair – as in honest etc.?*
- *What would you change about them, if you could, and why?*
- *What might stand in the way of using different/more just assessment processes, either practically or from the university's perspective?*
- *How do you think the students view the assessments, in terms of their fairness?*

A particular strength of this type of questions is helping the research in corroborating, refuting or extending previous scholarship on fair assessment/feedback practices in the researched program. During the focus group discussions, the researcher had Jan's principles and some other prompts like assessment types on the table for the participants' perusal. The participants, who had been questioned about their practices in the first set of interview questions (semi-structured interviews), now have the chance to read excerpts from McArthur's (2018) account on fairness in assessment/feedback practices and her perspective of the five concepts. As such, the researcher expected the teachers to be able to develop a model of fair assessment/feedback practices.

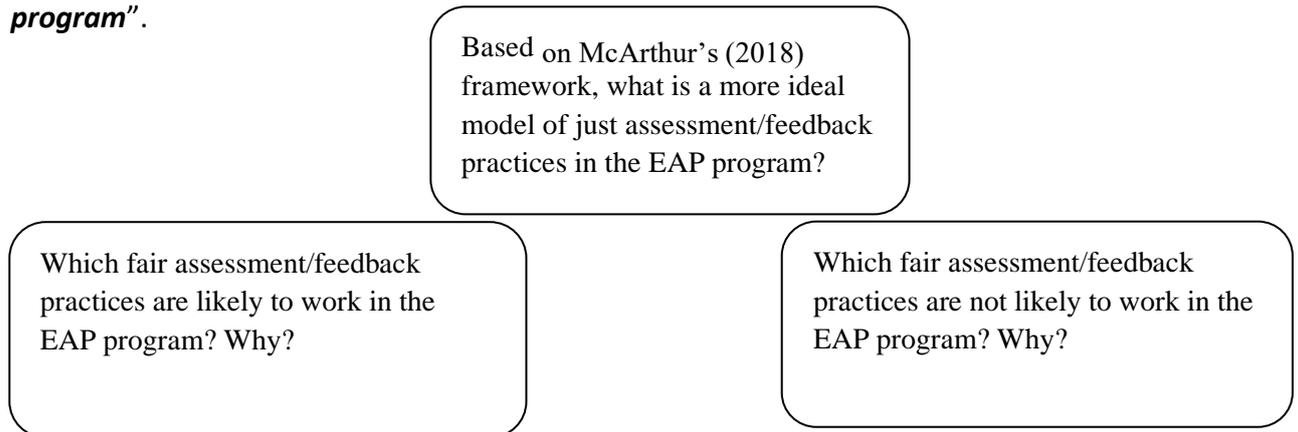
The researcher also prepared stimulus material/matrix that shows the different literature findings on fair assessment/feedback practices in order to discuss them with the team of

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instructors during the focus group meeting (see Appendix 3). The matrix below uses a short-written stimuli followed by a series of open-questions to simulate partly elements of the topic under study (Hughes & Huby, 2004). It allows the teachers to present the consequences of each potential procedure/practice and to avoid the influence of dominant groupthink.

A simulation of “*a more ideal model of just assessment/feedback practices in the EAP program*”.



**Figure 3.5.2.1.1 The teachers' focus group stimuli questions**

Consider the following suggestions and discuss their potential use and convenience in the program. According to literature, the following are examples of assessment/feedback practices that are socially just by design:

Peer Assessment:

Self Assessment:

Assessment Choice:

Anonymous Marking:

Dialogic Feedback:

Increasing students/teachers' assessment literacy:

The matrix represents an experiential vignette depicting a specific scenario with teachers as stakeholders: the interviewees need to simulate an ideal model of assessment/feedback practices in the program and hence think of potential possibilities and barriers to such

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implementation. This process is intended to encourage the generation of the teachers' own interpretations through open discussions, as well as contribute to focused data collection and analysis activities since the researcher is only interested in exploring the implementation of fair assessment/feedback practices in the program. It is argued that vignettes can draw out the individual understandings, experiences, and beliefs that closed item surveys may struggle to capture (Kandemir & Budd, 2018). Barbour (2007) suggests that one way of guaranteeing that participants are not influenced by groupthink is to give them a brief writing exercise in advance to secure their own thoughts first (as cited in Cousin, 2008; Albrecht et al. 1993; Carey, 1995 as cited in Sim, 1998). These written pieces/matrices will become part of the researcher data; indicating the origin of the quotations represents an opportunity for the researcher to cross-link concepts and themes.

### 3.5.2.2 Limitations of the focus group interview:

Three major limitations seem to affect the design and analysis of the focus group in this study. Firstly, the focus group has been formed by using a pre-existing group through purposive sampling. The rationale is driven primarily by the research purpose: a preexisting group belonging to the same organizational context would yield naturalistic exchanges, in which participants respond collectively and collaboratively, are aware of a common purpose, and reflexively act in terms of that purpose. Consequently, the focus group experience is not treated as being disconnected from the rest of the participants' lives (Allen, 2005; Brannen and Pattman, 2005; Browne, 2005 as cited in Farnsworth & Boon, 2010). As Carey and Smith (1994: 125) comment, 'Researchers who use focus groups and do not attend to the impact of the group setting will incompletely or inappropriately analyze their data' (as cited in Farnsworth & Boon, 2010).

Moreover, social relations such as gender, ethnicity, age, social status or other sociocultural factors (Allen, 2005; Brannen and Pattman, 2005; Jowett and O'Toole, 2006; Pösö et al., 2008) seem to be highly significant to the nature of engagement within groups (as cited in Farnsworth & Boon, 2010). Although the focus group in this research is heterogeneous in terms of age, sex, and discipline, it has allowed discussions about a topic, which is close to the participants' professional or academic interest, thus paying attention

to pre-existing occupational groups' experiences. As Kitzinger (1994) argues, the focus group method is very successful in connecting with difficult-to-reach individuals: "Not only does safety in numbers make some people more likely to consent to participate in the research in the first place ... but being with other people who share similar experiences encourages participants to express, clarify or even develop particular perspectives" (p.112).

Another limitation that could possibly affect the analysis of the focus group is related to issues of consent or dissent within the discussions (Smithson, 2000). Normative and conflicting discourses were aired in the focus group discussions related to an ideal model of assessment/feedback practices and the barriers to the implementation of such practices. While focus groups are likely to reproduce normative discourses, this is not universally the case; sometimes groups still display confusion and conflict within normative discourses (Smithson, 2000). In order to tackle this problem in the interpretation of focus group data, the researcher tried to elicit disagreements, asked questions whenever these instances occurred and had asked the participants to write/type some answers in advance in order to prevent the censoring of dissenting views or the emergence of prevailing opinions only. The focus group interview included instances of heated disagreements between two teachers in particular, one presenting the need to change assessment/feedback practices in the program and another opposing such changes. The latter considered the proposed concepts already practiced in the program and that there needn't to be labeled as such. The researcher made use of such disagreements to elicit data on their perceptions of fairness and their current practices.

They conceded the discussion without reaching a consensus.

### **3.6. Analysis**

In principle, researchers must align the theoretical assumptions about interviewing with the kind of research design and interview methods used to generate data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). First, in this research, data were analyzed at different levels; they were multilayered since the research required both data collection per concepts (McArthur's

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concepts) and per groups (students and instructors). Moreover, the generation of themes via coding and categorization is arguably the most common analytic approach taken by qualitative researchers using interviews (e.g., Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2005 as cited in Roulston, 2014). And the researcher therefore used such techniques inductively to address the interview data. Once the researcher had finalized the coding frame for one concept, another concept was coded in order not to cover the material all at once. For instance, the researcher examined the concept of trust from theory which was used to give broader codes/themes, and then grouped data on the differences and similarities between the students and staff in tables before moving on to another concept.

Working in a concept-driven way means basing the categories on previous knowledge: a theory, prior research, everyday knowledge, logic, or an interview guide (Schreier, 2012). The purposes of tables were two-fold. Tables allowed the researcher to compare the embedding of the different concepts, and to compare data from the two groups of participants interviewed and between the teachers' semi-structured and focus group interviews afterwards. Text matrices/tables are very flexible and especially useful for contrasting different sources or illustrating selected cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Summarizing and presenting data in tabular form can address the twin issues of qualitative research: data reduction through careful data display and commentary (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Furthermore, organizing data required that the researcher put together the issues arising across the groups (a second level of analysis) in order to look for themes, shared responses, patterns of response, agreement and disagreement, to compare groups and issues that each of them has raised. However, this organization was not without challenges. The literature indicates that the researcher needs to be mindful of the strengths and weaknesses of pre-ordinate categorization: the researcher must decide whether it is or is not important to consider the whole set of responses of an individual, i.e., to decide whether the data analysis is driven by people or by issues (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). In this case, it seemed important that data analysis should be driven by concepts across the two different groups and participants.

The third research question and the overall research design have guided how data in the focus group is analyzed: along with McArthur's (2018) concepts and literature on fair

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assessment/feedback practices, the researcher used the conceptual device of Teaching and learning regimes (TLRs) by Trowler and Cooper (2002) to explain how a reflective practice (the attempt to deliberate different assessment/feedback practices) itself represents TLRs which may be more, or less, compatible with those of the individual participants. “TLRs” is a shorthand term for a constellation of rules, assumptions, practices and relationships related to teaching and learning issues in higher education. The conceptual framework of TLRs has helped the researcher in analyzing data pertaining to research question 3 while exploring potential assessment/feedback changes at the sub-group level. The researcher tried to explain the prevalence of resistance to fairness and change by exploring the recurrent practices, tacit assumptions, rules of appropriateness, and implicit theories of learning and of teaching, as suggested by Trowler and Cooper (2002). A detailed explanation on these accounts is offered in chapter 5. As such, the researcher was able to collect barriers and challenges in the implication of McArthur's (2018) conceptual framework in the program.

### **3.7. Summary of methodology and methods**

This qualitative research encompassed two broad arrays of intellectual projects: one that seeks to represent participants' practices, opinions and experiences whereas the second attempts to contribute to social justice work. The present study adopts an insider case study paradigm to explore participants' perceptions and experiences of assessment and feedback practices in one EAP program at a private university in Lebanon. It investigates in depth the embedding of social justice within assessment/feedback practices unique to the research context and explores how the participants (students and teachers) all experienced this situation. As such, this study employs semi-structured and focus group interviews as two methods to collect qualitative data. Both of these methods allow participants to give meaning to their perceptions and experiences, thereby enabling the extraction of rich information. While the semi-structured interviews aimed at prospecting and comparing information, the focus group interview aimed at negotiating meanings.

Although the methodology and methods utilized in the present study are suitable to gather in-depth meaning of participants' perceptions and practices, they are not without

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limitations, such as subjectivity and bias. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the research process and findings in greater detail and provide a means for enhancing the credibility of findings and interpretations.

## Chapter 4– Data Analysis (Phase 1)

### 4.1. Preview:

In phase 1, the research aims to explore final-year students' experiences with assessment/feedback practices and then compare these views with how their teachers embed such practices in the institution. Phase two of the research attempts to elicit the instructors' opinions of fair assessment/feedback practices that work/don't work in the EAP program, negotiating their views in a social context. As explained in the previous chapter, the use of McArthur's (2018) named concepts (trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness) as conceptual tools for analysis has influenced the research questions formulation, overall methodology and data analysis approach.

This chapter provides a thorough account of the findings from Phase 1. It starts by presenting the findings from the interviews with the students and teachers, then moves to the exploration and discussion of the five core themes, and finally concludes with a general analysis and a summary.

### 4.2. An exploration of issues that impacted the students' experiences and teachers' perceptions of assessment/feedback practices:

The literature on this research topic indicates how teachers' perceptions of fair assessment have been explored both qualitatively and quantitatively mostly in school settings in ESL contexts (Canada and UK in Webber & Lupart, 2011) and in EFL contexts (Czech Republic in Hanesworth, Bracken & Elkington, 2018), and how few studies have researched the instructors' views of fair assessment in higher education institutions (McArthur & Huxham, 2011; McArthur, 2015, 2018). Moreover, very few studies have explored both students' experiences and teachers' views of just assessment/feedback practices as embedded in the institutional program. This study, by using a qualitative interpretive method, aims to contribute to this unexplored area and to explore students' experiences of EAP assessment and feedback practices by comparing them against their instructors' practices. Therefore,

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the first phase of the research involved the use of semi structured interviews with both groups of participants to elicit the different responses.

The university, like other Lebanese private institutions, is currently experiencing a demographic change: more students, from different cultural and language backgrounds and attainment levels, are joining the university and such difference is affecting their entry level and overall performance throughout the EAP courses (Esseili, 2016). Hence, the EAP program in its existing version is catering to three students' categories: Students whose first foreign language is not English (French medium school), students whose first foreign language is English but is less proficient (coming from public schools or different countries); and finally, students whose first foreign language is English, and it is relatively good. The EAP program is split into two parts: lower-level courses targeting language proficiency which are designed to help less proficient students and higher-level courses which are designed to develop students' critical thinking and analysis skills.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two groups of participants: the students and their instructors. Because phase 1 was probing into the implementation of broad categories, the semi-structured interview schedules had to be designed to allow the exploration of each category in explicit and identifiable ways that would reveal both students and teachers' views (see Appendix. 2). A summary of the first phase findings is represented in the table below, comparing how the groups (students and teachers) understood McArthur's (2028) five principles of social justice in assessment:

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<p><b>McArthur's (2018) conceptual framework of social justice within Assessment/feedback practices.</b></p>	<p><b><u>Students' experiences</u> of the notions of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness within the institutional assessment practices.</b></p>	<p><b><u>Instructors' views</u> of the notions of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness within the institutional assessment practices.</b></p>
<p><b>1) Trust</b></p>	<p>On a continuum between students and teachers, trust seems to lean high for students in two aspects which are collaboration and transparency but low for students in assessment literacy.</p>	<p>Teachers' trust of students is seen to be low due to their concerns towards students' poor practice and increased plagiarizing.</p>

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<p><b>2) Honesty</b></p>	<p>By using large weighting on the skills of language and content, students are not given the appropriate form of knowledge engagement in higher education, as they may attribute a disproportional significance to numerical grades.</p> <p>Attributing the students' work to a numerical grade, students are not able to recognize their own achievements and the useful social role they can play.</p> <p>Students did not show evidence of assessment/feedback literacy.</p> <p>Such fragmented practices of honesty affect students' esteem recognition.</p>	<p>Grading precision is secured using multiple sources of data to test the students' learning in each course, by second marking students' papers across sections (especially at the higher-level courses), by using rubrics, and by using clear assessment tasks and criteria.</p> <p>The workload pressure of marking has shaped the nature of the assessment practices: Teachers reported how they resorted to Moodle and Turnitin to submit students' feedback.</p> <p>Such fragmented practices of honesty affect teachers' esteem recognition.</p>
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<p><b>3) Forgiveness</b></p>	<p>Practices of forgiveness were somehow absent across the sample:</p> <p>Language proficiency was considered by many students to be the leading cause of failing a writing task.</p>	<p>Practices of forgiveness are encouraged through formative assessments used in the different courses.</p> <p>Teachers had mixed feelings about the weighting used in the rubric and how it might affect the</p>
	<p>There were mixed feelings among the students about the distribution of the different criteria on the rubrics.</p> <p>While some students found that this distribution was unfair, others admitted the value of assigning a high percentage on language and for receiving corrective feedback.</p>	<p>students' learning.</p> <p>However, they all agreed that they practice certain strictness in terms of grammar correction and plagiarism penalty.</p> <p>Some of the teachers even suggested a different percentage to be attributed for language and content.</p>

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<p><b>4) Responsibility</b></p>	<p>Students stated that verbal feedback/discussions with the instructor more than written comments had allowed responsibility and a better student engagement/esteem recognition.</p> <p>Practices (editing drafts) allowed students' recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of their own work, achieving self learning.</p> <p>Also, students felt that they understood the feedback and comments on their writing.</p> <p>The students indicated that the choice of topics used in some courses had motivated them and as a result, they had been more engaged in the task.</p>	<p>There was agreement among the instructors that students' responsibility/self-learning has increased as a result of certain tasks and practices such as oral presentations, choice of topics, and second drafts for major assignments.</p> <p>The EAP program, although welcoming them as new students (affirmative change), does little to prepare weak students or students with different language backgrounds to the different learning experience /to the new assessment and feedback practices (transformative change).</p>

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<b>5) Responsiveness</b>	<p>Students were more optimistic of their use of teachers' feedback; they experienced feedback responsiveness.</p> <p>Students stated that the courses on the EAP program have helped them learn skills and practices needed in their major courses. As such, responsiveness is not only concerned with a single course.</p> <p>Most of the students discussed instrumental, not socially informed, applications of knowledge/responsiveness.</p>	<p>Teachers were skeptical of the students' genuine responsiveness to feedback, especially after the shift to online learning.</p> <p>Responsiveness was perceived low for teachers and high for students</p>
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**Table 4.2.1 Findings from the semi-structured interviews with the students and teachers**

**4.3. Data collected from the interviews based on McArthur's (2018) named concepts**

**4.3.1 Trust-**

According to McArthur (2018), an enhanced trust exists when assessment tasks are transparent, are negotiated and discussed with students. In order to promote trust, teachers need to understand the position and needs of all students. As such, assessments are no longer considered as mere contractual exchanges or procedures that help assess students' performance. On a continuum between students and teachers, trust seems to lean high for students in two aspects which are collaboration and transparency but low for students in assessment literacy. To illustrate this point, most of the students interviewed (8 out of 10) had difficulty discussing types of assessments, rubric and feedback before the researcher introduced the difference between oral and written feedback, or explained the

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different rubric criteria and other assessment tasks that teachers could use. For students to choose their preferred types of feedback and assessments, they need to know them all. This implies that they understand feedback in quite narrow terms - perhaps only written, in relation to formally submitted assignments. During the interviews with the students, the researcher had to share other assessment/feedback types for them to answer some questions and to choose their preferred type of assessment and feedback. During the interviews with the teachers, they revealed that they tried to increase students' trust in their practices by fostering collaboration and by implementing transparency of assessment tasks and assessment criteria. As a result, the teachers can further boost their students' trust by developing their assessment literacy.

In response to a series of questions about the rubrics, a student noted the following about the changes he/she thinks are needed:

*"I don't know how it can be better. You understand me, I don't know if they can include another part to see.... the language part .....so I don't know".* One explanation for this would be students' being accustomed to the system (the rubric and the teacher as sole feedback providers) and not knowing other types of feedback that they could be offered.

The same can be discussed about assessment; one student replied when asked about what types of assessments did his/her teacher use in class:

*"I don't know what you mean by types of assessment in order to answer".*

However, different practices regarding grading students' writing have helped to achieve trust and communication between students and teachers in the EAP program, such as communication, moderation, second marking and the external examiner. At the departmental level, transparent institutional guidelines have been circulated at the beginning of the pandemic, showing the value of adopting an online proctoring system (OBS) in the EAP program and other majors to maintain integrity.

On the other hand, teachers' trust seems to lean low due to their concerns towards students' poor practice and increased plagiarizing while admitting that Turnitin and the online proctoring system (OBS) used at the institution cannot totally solve those issues. The students' poor practices, as indicated by the teachers, would more likely drive them

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to unintended plagiarism. Moreover, teachers expressed how students, by different means, will continue trying to violate the system, reflecting with the previous concern a culture of mistrust.

### **Discussion of theme 1:**

From a social justice perspective, assessment practices require mutual trust among the different stakeholders. The findings showed its absence in teachers: the teachers' views of plagiarism and poor practices across the sample revealed a general feeling of distrust in students. Moreover, the use of Turnitin and the OBS system also depict a culture of mistrust. Hence, trust is partially realized in the investigated EAP program. One-way teachers can use to increase students' trust in their practices is for students to gain assessment literacy. During the interviews, many students had difficulties in identifying types of assessment and feedback, in explaining terms, such as rubric, types of assessment, types of feedback, etc., a finding that reveals the importance of student assessment literacy. Jonsson, Smith and Geirsdottir (2018) also discussed the importance of involving students in the assessment and feedback process in order to develop students' vocabulary of assessment which could yield better learning for them (as cited in Seden & Svaricek, 2019).

Second, although teachers tried to increase students' trust through collaboration, it is considered partial collaboration since the choice of assessment topics, allowed in some courses, is only one means to increasing students' voice, and as indicated by the literature this can be further developed through peer and self-assessment, student constructed assessments and student-constructed rubrics. Aitken (2012) argued that a "pedagogically tactful teacher is sensitive to students' needs and through trust invites students to be part of the assessment process", by using student-constructed tests, student-constructed rubrics, and peer and self-assessment (p.35). Therefore, teachers need to step back and trust the students to take responsibility for their own assessment and learning (Perkins, 1992 as cited in Aitken, 2012). The practices of the teachers did show evidence of peer assessment and self-assessment which are slightly included in some of the courses and used as practices for the students before any assessment. On the other hand, data revealed

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no instances of self-constructed assessments nor self-constructed rubrics, as these concepts are not easily introduced to the students.

One successful strategy used by the teachers to increase trust was to discuss assessment tasks and criteria with the students, a finding that corroborates with literature. Teachers' practices can address the potential for distrust at the beginning of a program of study and would create a positive dialogue surrounding fairness in marking (Winstone & Pitt, 2017). However, teachers failed in being trustworthy when they offered repeated assessment opportunities to their students (paragraphs and essays). Fair assessment practice requires that students have a variety of assessment opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, skill, and understanding (Alberta Education, 2006 as cited in Aitken, 2012).

#### 4.3.2 Honesty –

Practices of honesty in the EAP program were explored in terms of the role of language background, the use of Turnitin and OBS, precision in grading, and teachers' workload. Valuing honesty as a trait in both students and academics can offer an alternative approach to problems of plagiarism or academic misconduct. Understanding why students cheat and the reasons why they were unable to comprehend the use of Turnitin seemed significant across the sample. Almost half of the students with weak language backgrounds (struggling students) expressed how they were not fully prepared for the EAP program, and that they needed additional help in contrast to their colleagues who easily progressed throughout the courses; these students often found themselves at lower levels in the program, and this postponed their study of major courses and eventually their graduation time. One student describes the situation as follows:

*“Yes, they must, uh, more, you know.... understand the students. You know that a large percentage, a large percentage of students in our university, come from French schools, they are French educated. Like 50% of the students are, uh, English educated so they managed to work and so they knew what to do, they were better than the other 50 who came from the other background, who were French educated”.*

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*“So.... you know, the 1<sup>st</sup> English course they take.... It's like, you know, it's like they are in a different county. Yes, it was a shock for me, and it was the 1st month it was a shock, and I didn't like it”.*

Students also talked about how they were not used to skills like paraphrasing and citing sources, stating that such writing style is not familiar and that their former educational background did not reinforce accreditation of sources. On their first drafts, students were often found copying and pasting, exhibiting poor paraphrasing and citing practices. One student reported:

*“So, plagiarism was, uh, forbidden and if someone was caught. Like, uh, like, uh, cheating or anything else. I was getting into a lot of problems with the Dean, so yes. Okay, this is how it was introduced in class”.*

Plagiarism seems like a common concern among teachers who expressed the importance and the need to use Turnitin and OBS to minimize attempts of students' cheating and plagiarizing. However, there was disagreement among the students about the use of OBS (Open Broadcaster Software) as a proctoring technique and the issue of plagiarism on Turnitin. Some students expressed anxiety while using online proctoring (being warned for moving around), but others stated that they were comfortable while taking the exam. In the same way, some were confident with the use of Turnitin while others thought it was difficult to get a low similarity index on Turnitin. Still others felt it was unfair to receive zero as a grade penalty for plagiarism, thus the students involved were not able to cope with failure or maybe learn from this experience. They may also have resorted to getting help by others in order to pass the assignment, as noted by the teachers.

There was also disparity among the teachers in the way Turnitin was introduced and used in the classrooms. While some of them had been using it to threaten students not to plagiarize, others had been using it as a teaching tool and had shown more understanding towards students' plagiarism. The following quotes illustrate this incongruity.

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Teacher (2) expressed the following about students' plagiarism:

*"We warn them in advance, they still try their luck. Yeah, we give them zeroes.... They have excuses, and this is how it goes, and it's been like this every semester. Yeah, we catch them .... They have excuses".*

Whereas teacher (1) gave a more benign explanation for students' plagiarism:

*"So, in that case, we introduce it, but I never threaten them with it. If you plagiarize, that would be 0; to be honest; I'm a bit lenient with plagiarism. And only with some students, because I know that sometimes they do it unintentionally".*

Nevertheless, despite the use of these platforms and software, teachers were having difficulties assessing the students' genuine work. It is also problematic if teachers are assuming that students want to cheat, rather than seeing it as poor practice because they have not been taught what good practice is. There were differences among the teachers when it comes to the use of Turnitin:

While teacher (2) stated that: *"I am not against it (Turnitin), but I do know that some students always find their way around it, and they always try to find, you know, new techniques and maybe new ways to cheat"*, teacher (1) looked at this in a different way and said that:

*"Well, yeah, instead of it (Turnitin), you can always find ways to give them assignments where they, even if they have different documents open in front of them, or, even if they have the, the help of a friend or someone, they always need to do their own work".*

On a different note, instances of partial honesty are observed in two aspects like the teachers' workload and emphasis on precision in marking. According to McArthur (2018), there is misrecognition towards academics through the undervaluing of their labor and their diminished capacity to feel appropriate esteem in a job well done. High levels of workplace stress may further compound these teachers' misrecognition. Misrecognition in the researched academics, exhibited in marking precision, seemed to be affecting practices of honesty in the program. According to the teachers, precision in terms of grading is secured using multiple sources of data to test the students' learning in each course, by

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second marking students' papers across sections (especially at the higher-level courses), by using rubrics, and by using clear assessment tasks and assessment criteria.

Using rubrics and second marking to assess students' writing, according to the teachers, were among the most preferred practices to ensure fairness and marking precision.

Finally, teachers also felt that they cannot afford extra practice before assessments; they do not always have the privilege of time with excessive tasks and tight schedules. They expressed how giving feedback took a lot of their time and that they were often grading and returning drafts.

Teacher (3) stated:

*"This semester was so squeezed for me. It was only 5 weeks. It was very rushed. It was like we have a lot of skills, uh, we have things to cover and to do exactly..."*

### Discussion of theme 2:

Practices of honesty appeared to be fragmented in the EAP program. Through the implementation of practices, such as the use of Turnitin and OBS; marking precision; and non-flexible teachers' load, the university is more likely promoting affirmative, not transformative, changes in that perspective. As such, their affirmative approach to change focuses on the end targets while a transformative approach focuses on the causes of injustice and works from that point up. Students with weak language backgrounds expressed how they were not fully prepared for the program and that they needed additional help in contrast to other colleagues who were more prepared; they often found themselves at lower levels in the program which postponed their graduation time. In their study of fair assessment practices, data revealed that a combination of low expectations and certain cultural, home and school factors contributed to widespread perceptions of stigma for students who were challenged by typical assessment practices (Shellayan et al., 2014). The authors conceded that some type of transformation may be required to ensure that all students have improved opportunities to demonstrate their learning and that those schools make adjustments and modifications to ensure accurate assessment of student learning.

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The discrepancy found in how teachers introduced Turnitin in class reflects two ends of the spectrum: the teachers' traditional versus modern mindsets and teaching methodologies. And because students expressed difficulty with using Turnitin, they were more likely in need of further guidance on its use. In fact, the use of Turnitin as a formative rather than as a deterrent tool is increasing and there is evidence that it can help students understand the concept of plagiarism (Buckley & Cowap, 2013), improve referencing and paraphrasing (Rolfe, 2011) and reassure them when they are on the right track (Whittle & Murdoch-Eaton, 2008, as cited in Seviour, 2015).

Moreover, grading precision which was highlighted as an asset in the program by the teachers may be misleading to students. Bloxham et al. (2016) argue that marking criteria may not completely help in achieving consistent marking because they may be interpreted differently, and other sources of guidance, formal or informal, come into play. Trying to limit the marking practices with more and more artefacts such as rubrics is self-defeating and can make marking overly arduous while at the same time limiting students' independent thought and originality (as cited in McArthur, 2018). McArthur (2018) argues that in order to achieve fairer assessment/feedback practices, more complex forms of knowledge engagement instead of grading precision should be the instructors' ultimate objective in higher education. McArthur (2018) deplores culture affirmation and concedes: "Our students should not associate their achievements and self-worth with a mark, but with what it enables them to do" (p.128).

Finally, the teachers' experiences with grading resonated with research that proposes the following: high levels of workplace stress may further compound the misrecognition teachers suffer (McArthur, 2018), affecting therefore their work quality and fairness in assigning students' grades.

#### **4.3.3 Forgiveness-**

According to McArthur (2018), forgiveness helps shape assessment practices towards social justice as it provides a supportive connection between present and potential achievement. In addition, issues of failure reveal the complexity of student and teacher roles within the assessment context (McArthur, 2018). The risk of failure can make

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students feel vulnerable to the supposed power of the academics, whereas academics can feel their own credibility is at stake due to their students' performances and their own marking practices.

Two areas where practices of forgiveness are undermined in the EAP program include the rubrics and the inability to achieve a feedback loop. Language proficiency was considered by many students to be the leading cause of failing a writing task. There were mixed feelings among the students about the distribution of the different criteria on the rubrics. While half of the students interviewed (5 students) found that this distribution was unfair, the others admitted the value of assigning a high percentage on language. In some courses, it is a 50/50 split, but in general language proficiency is attributed not less than 40% out of the total distribution (see Appendix 1). The former group wished to change the weight given on language while the latter were satisfied with the current weighting. The latter group expressed how such a high weighting on language has helped them recognize their mistakes and avoid repeating them in subsequent assignments. Students, realizing the importance of language accuracy, found a strong link between their language accuracy, completion of tasks and passing courses. Student (B) stated:

*"I was upset because they were focusing on grammar instead of our knowledge but then I realized that, uh, we must build a strong language structure. So, we can write properly in advanced English courses. So, I understand it lately. I am okay with the weight given on language, no, that's good. Maybe if they balance grammar and content".*

On the other hand, all teachers (4) agreed that there exists certain strictness in terms of grammar correction and that their practices are somehow punitive. However, like students, teachers had mixed feelings about the weighting used in the rubric and how it might affect the students' learning. While some emphasized the need to stress accuracy in language courses, other teachers suggested a different percentage to be attributed for language and content. The latter even criticized the rubrics when they talked about underachievement and the ability of some students to pass with a good command of language but with poor ideas and thinking.

In response to the questions on the use of rubrics, teacher (3) noted the following:

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*"The weight on the language is more than the other parts, which I'm somehow against because we are a, it is a language course, but language is not restricted to the language mistake. That is the subject verb agreement. That is the grammar mistakes or the structure". The same teacher added:*

*"Language is communication; it is about your thought, it is about the map of your thought, how, or even the flow of your ideas, how you would present the language; "I think we need to give more weight on these, on these parts of this content organization. The way they move from 1 paragraph to another".*

Teacher (2) confirmed the previous idea by student (B) about the role of language proficiency:

*"It's fair. I don't know; it's not that it hurts. I sometimes feel when we're using 101 rubrics uh, it does hurt when students fail. Ah, but then we can explain using this rubric why they fail and, they need to fail, even though it hurts, they need to fail so that they are not passing on to English 102 where the requirements are more serious, they need to be proficient, proficient, right? As such, they just must leave the mistakes in 101. Yes, it's tough".*

Teacher (2) added: *"I don't know about other teachers in 101, but I always emphasize to my students when we go over the rubrics. The 101 class is the place where you should leave behind; all your grammar mistakes, uh, you know all the rules". "You just need to discipline yourself and, like, apply the rules".*

### **Discussion of theme 3:**

Practices of forgiveness seem to be avoided and slightly manifested in the EAP program. Upon the discussion on the weight given to language mechanics in most rubrics, it is surprising to see that all the teachers acknowledged the high percentage attributed to language and the punitive nature of such a criterion while the students had mixed feelings about this. However, recent research in applied linguistic and second language writing shows that an approach to language instruction that emphasizes grammatical and prescriptive errors can hinder writing development and too much attention on accuracy comes at the expense of other aspects of writing like fluency and complexity, and even at the expense of accuracy uptake (Larsen-Freeman, 2006).

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According to the teachers, while corrective feedback in the EAP program has been successful in eliminating some of the students' errors, other mistakes continue to persist in their writing, even at the upper-level courses. Moreover, with the use of micro correcting, many teachers fail to acknowledge the different types of errors and the order of acquisition in which language learners acquire grammar features. For instance, some teachers may not know that there are rule-based (which are due to incorrect application of a rule) and performance-based errors (which may not only occur on different stages of the skill acquisition process, but they may also stem from different influences). Others may ignore the fact that some errors do not impede meaning. In fact, SLA insights and studies on error feedback show how different error categories should not be treated the same because there are considerably different rates in students' achievement and progress across error types (as cited in Bitchener et al., 2005). According to literature, classroom L2 writing teachers can provide their learners with both oral feedback as well as written feedback on the more treatable types of linguistic error, on a regular basis. The study by Bitchener et al (2005) revealed that a combined feedback option facilitated improvement in the more treatable, rule-governed features than in the less treatable feature.

The fact that students' answers displayed discrepancies regarding the weighting on the rubric's points to students' preference to two opposing teaching methodologies: the traditional versus the modern. The former group corresponds to teacher-centered which regards the teacher as the sole provider of feedback while the latter is more student centered and views feedback as a pedagogical conversation. Another factor that may have explained this inconsistency in students' views has to do with their learning background and culture. Some students may not be familiar with a variety of assessment/feedback styles; they consider the teacher as the sole assessor/provider of information on their work. In some cultures, the issue of students' voice is not highlighted in the same way as they are in Western English academic writing (Preiss et al., 2013 as cited in Matipano, 2010).

Another area under forgiveness is feedback loop, or the ability of students to use both tutor feedback and their own reflexive approach to improve their work. Or the teachers, in the EAP program, had expressed the existence of tight schedules and various skills that

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the students need to learn throughout the course. This increasing pressure from the pace and rhythm within courses seems to affect practices of forgiveness: reducing spaces for students' engagement with feedback, with one's previous mistakes and with misunderstandings. McArthur (2018) argues how feedback must be understood as a curriculum design issue and that instructors must instill in students the practices of genuine reflection on their work. Students also need moments when it can be considered okay not to understand everything and to need further help. And the university needs to make more space for teachers to be able to provide the kinds of feedback that help students and also potentially give more time for the students to grasp material; it feels like the teachers are covering a lot into a short period of time.

### 4.3.4 Responsibility-

Responsibility in the assessment context means students are assessed through approaches and practices that enable them to take responsibility for their own learning (McArthur, 2018). Attempts at increasing students' role (responsibility) in assessment practices included choice of topics and articles on predetermined tasks in two advanced courses. Teachers expressed consistently the view that the curriculum had become more student-centered and that allowing students the choice of assessment topics had been one beneficial tool in that regard:

*"Because previously, we used to dictate everything we used to choose the topic. We used to choose the articles we used to even sometimes.... I do know that we have some blacklists for topics (some topics were not allowed in class" (Teacher 1).*

*"Yeah, yeah, it is. Like, when I ask them to choose their own topic and to write something that they are interested in, this is where, you know, how, whether they communicate effectively or not".*

Another area where increased students' voice in feedback practices can be observed is the use of verbal feedback in evaluating process writing. Many students stated that verbal feedback/discussions with the instructor more than written comments have allowed a better student engagement. The students in the interviews also indicated that the choice

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of topics in graded assignments had helped them to be more involved in the task. Besides these practices, only partial students' voices are allowed in the EAP program.

Like students, teachers also preferred verbal feedback as it allows much better interaction between them and a higher degree of understanding for the students. Verbal feedback is not a common and consistent practice throughout the courses and has not been a familiar type among the students. One explanation to this is that some students may not see this as feedback, even if it does come from a submitted assignment since they are only familiar with written feedback. Verbal feedback was voted by both group participants as the most preferred and useful type of feedback:

*"Many students in 203 actually asked me for a meeting in order to discuss further the feedback, or how they can improve 1 of the weaknesses that I mentioned in, uh, in those comments" (Teacher 4).*

Throughout the EAP program, students were not always given chances for improvements with few assessments existing. Many tasks were removed for lack of time and for practicality issues. The assignments left are awarded a high percentage along with the final exam which could be worth 40% in most of the writing courses. Teacher (3), overseeing slight opportunities with formative assessments, describes the situation as follows:

*"What we're doing in ENG.101 now is affected by the, uh, you know, by the situation, not only the situation, but the fact that our classes are large".*

Teacher 3 added: *"So there are 2 factors, the internal institutional fact, and corporate and teaching online. For that reason, we had to.....you know, shorten the assessments and minimize the number of drafts we are reading, So, what used to be process writing is now, more of a, just assessment of the product".*

In addition, individual not collective responsibility was promoted in the EAP program, with exceptions found in certain tasks at the lower-level courses (i.e., ENGL.101 and ENGL.003) with some attempts to promote group work/presentations. Presentations/oral tasks which included cooperation/teamwork were far less used than the more structured essay-writing tasks. Moreover, an attempt of fostering self assessment as a graded task was found in only one course (ENGL.101) but is now removed

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because of shifting to online learning. Self-assessment tasks in higher level courses include the student's individual editing of his/her essay; they do not involve collaborative work, as students are considered responsible for their own learning.

### Discussion of theme 4:

The concept of responsibility is partially realized across the sample in this EAP program. Students' voices seemed not as extensive as they could be at least to fulfill the element of responsibility more fully; the concept of responsibility in the EAP program does not necessarily represent the discourse of students' engagement as higher educational standards. There was agreement among the participants that students' responsibility/self-learning has increased as a result of certain tasks and practices. Yet the attempts mentioned previously seem to address the epistemological and practical voices but not the ontological, using the concepts by Batchelor (2006, as cited in Bain, 2010). Batchelor (2006) argues that we should consider different modes of student voice and asserts that these may be viewed as three constituent elements: an epistemological voice (a voice for knowing), a practical voice (a voice for doing), and an ontological voice (a voice for being and moving forward). Similarly, in Honneth's terms, this depicts an ideological form of recognition for students: one "that promises to share authority with them, that promises a fully engaged course experience, but in reality, offers only a veneer" (McArthur's, 2018, p. 151).

In EAP programs, students' inclusive role should move beyond choosing his/her own topic for research paper and editing his/her own essay; students should be able to question the value of what they are learning and how they can benefit from the courses themselves and their society in the long run. Torrance (2017) argues that although responsabilisation at the level of the individual cannot be easily reversed; nevertheless, education and assessment procedures must be regarded as a collective responsibility, maximizing success and minimizing failure, and above all realizing that both are co-constructed as part of a collaborative process.

McArthur (2015) explains how an affirmative approach to the inclusive university simply seeks to add resources and extra mentoring to help disadvantaged or non-traditional students bridge the gap between what they can do and what the so-called traditional

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students can do. On the other hand, a transformative approach aims to challenge the norms and to change the root causes of injustice and the underlying social and economic structures. Hence, a change towards a transformative approach/transformative recognition is more important for robust inclusion (McArthur, 2015).

Using McArthur's concept of inclusive university, the EAP program by some means fails to be inclusive when it allows or enables misrecognition to occur, in terms of equal opportunities for achievement and when it only fosters affirmative changes within the assessment/feedback practices. Some students are allowed in the program but are not given equal chances of learning experience and graduating time. Hence the EAP program, although welcoming them as new students (affirmative change), does little to prepare weak students or students with different language backgrounds to the different learning experience /to the new assessment and feedback practices (transformative change).

In fact, it is argued that valuing student voice and authentically addressing it indicates teachers with pedagogical tact, those who embody assessment with sensitivity. Both pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact are essential elements of pedagogic competence and fair assessment practice, which constitute the foundation and heart of teaching and learning (Aitken, 2012).

#### **4.3.5 Responsiveness-**

Assessment practices that cultivate responsiveness encourage proactive students who see themselves as interconnected with the world in which they live, interconnected with other citizens and interconnected with the knowledge with which they engage (McArthur, 2018). Students were more optimistic of their use of feedback while the teachers were skeptical of the students' genuine responsiveness to feedback, especially after the shift to online learning. Teacher (1) simply said, in reference to feedback,

*"I think the way we're handling the feedback, and our assignments in all courses is really fair for the students but, again, the problem is whether the students could benefit from such feedback or not".*

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Teacher 2 added: *“But if we want to really talk about feedback, we need to focus on the outcome of this feedback. Whether the students are benefiting or not, so here's the factor of being online because some students are being passive”*.

Teacher 3 conceded: *“I don't know if it is only because of online or the general situation that we're going through or the crisis that is affecting the students not to really follow up on their assignments and to be really engaged in what they're doing”*.

Some teachers even had to reward students for their use of feedback to encourage proofreading and self-assessment:

Teacher 3 stated that: *“And for the students who do post their work, I push a bit the grade of their previous assignment, for example, plus 2 plus 3, they wouldn't harm anyone. It would just give them motivation that they do need to consider the feedback and, you know, work on it. Yes, yes”*.

Both students and teachers highlighted the value of formative assessment which helped the students improve their drafts (in ENGL. 102 and 203). For example, teacher (1) put it this way:

*“And I do believe that feedback should be given, whether we're talking about oral or written feedback; it should be given excessively, and we need to tell them where they made a mistake without correcting the mistake. They need to do it on their own; of course,”*.

The same teacher added: *“But we do need to highlight that mistake or where they've done something wrong so they can improve their work”*.

Many of the students were only familiar with written and numerical feedback and were surprised when asked to have discussions with their instructor about their papers and had asked questions about the requirements of such a task. This verbal feedback, though a new feedback style, was preferred to other types of feedback used.

Most students expressed both extrinsic (accurate use of grammar, paraphrasing, in-text citation style) and intrinsic experiences of relevance (research skills, academic writing) towards the feedback received. Regarding the EAP program, the students expressed how some skills gained throughout the courses would also help them in their major courses.

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They listed the following as the most helpful in the long-term: skimming/scanning, research paper writing, in-text citations/referencing, finding articles, and critical writing. However, students' answers were limited to instrumental, not socially informed, application of knowledge; students never discussed broader gains which involve their society or others.

Student (A) revealed that: *"Next year will be my 1st year of medical school, so I think I will need to read more books and more scientific articles. So, I need more analysis tasks to better understand the articles and the way things are written.... because I think it is a better way to read texts and do our own research and yeah understand more subjects"*.

### Discussion of theme 5:

Responsiveness is not fully realized in the EAP program. The shift to online learning has altered the instructors' feedback practices in two ways: teachers were not given enough opportunities to give feedback and the way teachers gave feedback had changed. Most of the teachers stated that they were uncertain of how their feedback affected the students and that they needed to give detailed feedback in fear of students missing out some details during the online sessions; teachers also resorted to platforms such as Turnitin and Moodle to provide feedback. These practices along with comprehensive feedback are not enough to support improvement in students' learning. Sadler's analysis has concluded that assessment can only have a formative impact if learners are involved in the process (Pryor & Torrance, 1996, Tunstall & Gipps, 1996; William & Black, 1996). This means that if students are not actually monitoring and regulating the quality of their own learning, feedback alone, regardless of how detailed it is, will not cause improvement in learning.

Data from the interviews presented students and teachers' preference to formative assessments and dialogical feedback, a finding that substantiates previous literature. Research has consistently reported that students prefer personalized, prompt, encouraging feedback that promotes self-regulation and supports future development (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Handley, Price & Miller, et al, 2008; Tuck, 2012; Birch et al., 2016; Winstone, Nash, Rowntree & Menezes, 2016).

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Furthermore, practices of responsiveness in the program seemed to emphasize instrumental responsiveness as they value individual not socially informed achievements, which are completed with other partners and are encouraged to promote collegiality among students. McArthur, Blackie, Pitterson and Rosewella (2021) explain how a key aspect of assessment for social justice is the idea of responsive assessment, which refers to assessment that encourages students to see the interconnections between what they are doing and the world around them. “The paradox made clear by critical theory (particularly on Honneth 2004b) is that students, who associate achievement only with individual gain, and not social contribution, actually undermine their own individual wellbeing” (McArthur et al., 2021, p.12).

### 4.4. Overall discussion of the themes

A close analysis of the interview data has revealed variation in the teachers and students’ responses to the notions of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness. There exist clear discrepancies in students’ experiences and instructors’ views of social justice in assessment as indicated in three major practices, those of *trust, honesty and responsiveness*. Data also revealed how students may have experienced partial responsibility and responsiveness throughout the program. However, there was a noticeable agreement between students and instructors regarding aspects of *forgiveness and responsibility*. Both groups discussed the punitive nature of language courses and the emphasis on language proficiency in the program. There was also uniformity between the groups in terms of current practices that increased students’ responsibility.

Upon the discussion on the weight given to language mechanics in writing assessments and practices of **forgiveness**, it is surprising to see that all the teachers acknowledged the high percentage given and the punitive nature of such a criterion while the students had mixed feelings about this. In fact, many students admitted that language proficiency was the leading cause of many students’ failure. However, even where students mostly agreed with each other about the fairness of grading, there were nuanced differences in their interpretations. Some of them approved of the importance attributed to language in the rubrics while others thought the percentage was relatively high even in higher level

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courses. There are several overlapping factors that may have explained this inconsistency in the students' views. Firstly, students are not knowledgeable in assessment tasks or feedback strategies. They are only familiar with the assessment/feedback types they are given or with what had previously been administered in schools. Secondly, the nuances existing between the students regarding the weighting on the rubric reflect traditional/modern teaching methodologies. While some students, independent of their proficiency levels, preferred teacher-centered strategies, others preferred more student centered strategies. This preference of some teaching strategies over others goes back to the students' learning background.

There was agreement among the groups that students' **responsibility**/self-learning has increased as a result of certain tasks and practices, but these tasks had either been removed for institutional reasons mentioned above or had been minimized to one task per semester because of reducing some courses' credit load. Some courses went from being 5-credit (five sessions per week) to 3-credit (three sessions per week). There exist no differences within the students' views regarding practices of responsibility on the program.

On the contrary, there exists incongruity between the groups in terms of **trust and honesty**. Students seem to trust the system, the policies and assessment/feedback practices even more than their instructors. The teachers, on the other hand, admitted their inability to fully trust the students. This assumption was affirmed during the discussion on the students' cohort existing in the program: teachers clearly distinguished between students with weak language background and others who are more competent and also between students who are trustworthy and honest and others who are not. This assumption points to a rather divided view of the program that stands in contrast to the cohesive program as the students experienced it.

Upon the discussion on **responsiveness**, most students expressed both extrinsic (accurate use of grammar, paraphrasing, in-text citation style) and intrinsic experiences of relevance (research skills) in the feedback received. In addition, students stated that the courses on the EAP program had helped them learn skills and practices needed in their major courses such as research skills, critical reasoning and analysis, presenting and defending one's argument, etc. However, the teachers did not share the same assurance regarding how

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students used their feedback in subsequent drafts or courses. They discussed repeated mistakes in drafts and other papers in higher courses. They admitted that they no longer can track the students' improvement the way they used to. Another more benign explanation that the teachers gave for this was that the students needed more practice and time, which cannot be afforded.

### **4.4.1 Fairness in assessment/feedback practices, as viewed by the groups**

The concept of "Fairness in assessment/feedback practices" was discussed by students in terms of their instructors' grading. Only fairness of outcomes, as seen in terms of students' scores /achievement, was mentioned by the students and teachers. Upon the discussion of more fair practices, students only expressed how some grades were not fair (receiving a zero on high instances of plagiarism) while teachers expressed that the language component in the rubric was relatively high and harsh for students who needed extra practice. The literature however discussed the possibility of diversifying assessments. In a study in Portugal, Flores et al. (2015) considered the perceptions of fairness of nearly four hundred undergraduates and found that students undertaking alternative 'learner-centered' forms of assessment were more likely to perceive these as fair than students undertaking traditional (e.g., exam) forms of assessment (McArthur, 2018).

It is noteworthy that fairness in assessment as procedures was not discussed by both groups, which shows how fairness is thought of in quite narrow ways. The topic of "Fairness in assessment/feedback practices" has been discussed by the instructors in 3 areas: the absence of guidelines on addressing levels of plagiarism which would affect the teachers' evaluation, the fact that teachers exchange and correct papers across sections to maintain fair grading, and the component of language in rubrics (evaluating students' proficiency). Like students, the teachers did not refer to fairness in assessment as procedures, such as fairness in terms of assessments choice, negotiation of tasks, and feedback type. Fairness in terms of procedure includes thinking about types of tasks, types of feedback, students' responsibility and how these might affect students' equal chances of achievement. The teachers were more interested in discussing how they could score students fairly, in other words the outcomes. It is a focus on assuming that it is a level playing field in some ways,

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rather than students coming in with very different educational histories and disadvantages. Both the teachers and students' conviction denote a rather instrumental use of knowledge and emphasis on grades. Hyland (2018) discusses how academics have not distinguished themselves in understanding how students experience their lives, their studies and their disciplines while privileging "Text above Practice" can sometimes lead to treating language, and in particular writing, as primarily a linguistic, and perhaps even an autonomous, object rather than something which is socially embedded in particular lives, disciplines and contexts.

### 4.4.2 The students' learning/schooling background

An emerging finding from this research is the impact of students' background and schooling which has caused some students linguistic disadvantage, affecting their experience of learning English throughout the different levels of the program. It is surprising that this hasn't been talked about in the literature - in education in general the relative disadvantages felt by different kinds of students continues to be discussed at great length and has been for decades (Bacha & Bahous, 2013; Bhuyian et al., 2020). It is also remarkable that the use of English as a lingua franca is almost absent in the face of the established traditional views of native-speaker authority at the institution. To illustrate, the validity of these students' different "English" is not formally acknowledged within curricular practices such as assessment criteria. In many ELT settings, native ideology is so ingrained that any deviation from native use is perceived as errors of language production (Fang, 2018). "Language assessment is also very much based on the native standard, and English is often tested in a vacuum, without testing any real communication strategies or problem-solving skills" (Fang, 2017 as cited in Fang, 2018, p. 116). Students' language proficiency mostly determined their level on the program. Moreover, students rarely make any contribution to the formulation of their courses' learning outcomes. This can prevent the students from understanding the relationships between learning outcomes and assessment and from developing feedback literacy. In fact, the way teachers design assessment tasks opens or closes opportunities for productive feedback processes (Carless et al., 2011).

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Furthermore, accurate use of language is considered an important capital in students' writing and a significant literacy to pass academic writing courses in the program. Although the current "negative feedback" approach to error in student writing that the institution EAP program has subscribed to is grounded in L2 acquisition theory, an emphasis on linguistic accuracy could be detracting students from deep engagement in ideas and sources because of heightened anxiety and discouragement regarding their own abilities to produce error-free writing as EFL learners. Thus, the most damaging impact of assessment practices is not only in reinforcing the notion that only that which is measurable is valuable (Madaus, 1993), but also in creating what it intends to measure (Hanson, 2000 as cited in Pearson, 2017).

Assessment/feedback policies used are initiating unfair practices by adhering to a technical and skills-based approach to essay writing on the part of EAP students and teachers, by not adjusting assessment/feedback strategies to cater for such learners, and by dealing with an ideological positioning of Anglo-English as a dominant form at the institution. Having said that, this research contributes to knowledge pertaining to assessment/feedback policies in a developing learning context (EAP) and their relation to social justice. To date, such candidates' voices have been among the least heard in academic research. Many of the traditional attitudes about grading and using assessment as weapons to coerce, reward, and punish, still prevail. While these practices are not extensive, some unfair assessment practice continues today impacting the lives of many students (Guskey, 2004; Popham, 2002, 2004; Stiggins, 2002 as cited in Aitken, 2012).

A body of literature, which studied linguistically diverse learners, claimed that both micro and macro factors can contribute to a better college experience and considered the educational benefits of inclusive education (only inclusive practices in assessment are discussed here). It has been argued that fully understanding the experiences of linguistic minority students or English language learners requires a consideration of the complexity of their identities, the policies and practices that affect their experiences in college, and how they negotiate these policies and practices.

The study by Oropeza, Varghese and Kanno (2010) has demonstrated that the complexity of linguistic minority students' identities enables them to develop different forms of capital

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(i.e., aspirational capital, social/navigational capital, linguistic capital, and resistant capital), while also strongly suggesting that additive university practices and policies that reflect the richness of students' identities are necessary in order to truly value these students and improve their experiences in HE. The study by Kaur, Noman and Nordin (2016) argued for an inclusive approach in assessment in order to gain accessibility, opportunity, relevance and engagement. Such assessment practices can make valuable contributions in creating a positive learning environment, improving relatedness and self-esteem and engaging students for better effort and effective learning.

It is worth mentioning that the former studies were conducted in a heterogeneous environment (ESL context) whereas this study involves students from the same country. They somehow have the same culture and make relatively similar mistakes in written English. They are not all entirely uniform, either - class or other elements of social background mean that they have very different understandings about/preparation for higher education. These studies proved the importance of understanding differences and the effect this has on the students' engagement and experience. This research, also not concerned with students' identities but with linguistically diverse students, shares the previous concern with how students' linguistic inequity is underexplored and needs a more encompassing theoretical framework to explain it.

The teachers' practices have rather been characterized by lack of trust, honesty and forgiveness along with partial responsibility and responsiveness. There is a question as to where this comes from. To some extent it may be part of the EAP/ELT culture, in terms of how training is conducted, and how teachers internalize these ideas. There must also be something in the nature of the institution and how they run things. They do not encourage/allow different forms of assessment or give teachers enough time to teach differently or develop their teaching. By not exhibiting the true values of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness into assessment practices, students in the EAP program may feel restrained, disempowered and somehow deceived and they would move on in their lives realizing that the way assessment/feedback they have received at university/school is the only proper approach. Students should be made aware that feedback is not only associated with formally assessed work and that the teacher is not the

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only provider of feedback. Astin and colleagues (1992) suggest that assessment should pay equal attention to experiences, events, and process and the outcomes they achieve. Assessment focused solely on institutional strengths may fail to advocate meaningful change that supports student success. Assessment practices that focus only on outcomes and not on how those outcomes are achieved limit the ability to address important issues (as cited in Dorime-Williams, 2018).

### **4.5. Summary**

This chapter aimed to answer the first and second research questions, investigating the students' experiences of assessment/feedback practices and comparing them to their teachers' practices. The first phase of the research used the conceptual framework by McArthur (2018) to explore the embedding of social justice in the assessment/feedback practices in the researched EAP program. There were several takeaways from examining this EAP program assessment/feedback practices. Findings from both interviews revealed not only different interpretations of the concepts between the participant groups but also their imperfect realization in this program, leading therefore to reduced fairness within assessment/feedback practices. While some of these poor practices could be due to teachers' lack of assessment knowledge, some were associated with traditional philosophical underpinnings in teaching, learning, and assessment. The remainder of this research proposes a series of questions for educators to consider approaching assessment more equitably and inclusively and support student success rather than restrict access. The following chapter presents an attempt to explore the teachers' views regarding the implementation of a more just model of assessment/feedback, as suggested by McArthur (2018) and the literature.

## Chapter 5-Data Analysis (Phase 2)

### 5.1. Preview:

In order to move the discussion on social justice within assessment/feedback and feedforward and to promote more social just practices among instructors, the research used a second type of interviews, the focus group interview, which will answer research question 3 about how the university (and staff) can do things differently for better practice. The findings from both the students and instructors' interviews were reported to the instructors before the focus group in order to discuss a different model of assessment/feedback practices based on the conceptual framework by McArthur (2018). The interview's preliminary empirical findings suggest, as literature does, different interpretations to fair assessment/feedback practices not only across the two participant groups but also within the groups themselves. The students' experiences with assessment/feedback have rather been characterized by fragmented or incomplete trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness. The semi-structured interviews revealed the teachers' overall assessment/feedback practices within the EAP program without further exploring the possibility of changing/adjusting these practices. In order to address the issue more pragmatically, the focus group interview was selected by the researcher to reveal the teachers' perceptions towards potentially different assessment/feedback practices and their implications within the EAP program.

This chapter will start by presenting the teachers' different answers from both the semi structured and the focus group interviews; then moves to the discussion of the different nuances existing among the teachers in both types of interviews before exploring two major core themes as findings. The chapter ends with a general discussion of the findings and a summary section.

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### 5.2. An exploration of different assessment/feedback practices in the EAP program

The researcher's goal in phase two is for the instructors to collectively analyze situational enabling and constraining factors when it comes to the EAP program and social justice improvement. Therefore, the focus-group interview was identified as an appropriate method as it is a proactive approach to work alongside colleagues. A summary of the findings from both types of interviews is represented below.

<b>McArthur's (2018) conceptual framework of social justice within assessment/feedback practices</b>	<b><u>Semi-Structured Interviews</u></b> <b>(Teachers' assessment/feedback practices within the EAP program)</b>	<b><u>Focus-Group Interview</u></b> <b>(Teachers' perceptions towards the implementation of a more ideal model of assessment/feedback practices)</b>
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<p><b>1) Trust</b></p>	<p>On a continuum between students and teachers, trust seems to lean high for students in two aspects which are <b>collaboration and transparency</b> but low in <b>assessment literacy</b>.</p> <p><b>Transparency</b> is achieved: The instructions are clear; there is a direct connection between the tasks and the overall course's purpose and between the students' performance and the rubrics.</p> <p><b>Collaboration</b> is partially achieved as students are allowed to choose their topics in a major assignment.</p> <p><b>Assessment literacy</b> is also partially achieved as students still lack the knowledge of the different types of tests, feedback and rubrics they may encounter.</p>	<p><i>Trust</i> is already practiced with the students, but it is not as extensive as it could be.</p> <p>It is difficult to implement <i>Trust</i>, as suggested by the TLRs (Teaching and learning regimes) of McArthur's (2018) framework.</p> <p>The justification by the teachers is that some students are not trustworthy.</p>
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	<p>Students are only familiar with what is presented to them; they do not know the pros/cons of such assessment types.</p> <p>On the other hand, teachers' <i>trust</i> in students is seen to be low due to their concerns towards students' poor practice and increased plagiarizing.</p>	
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<p><b>2) Honesty</b></p>	<p>Misrecognition in academics is revealed in their discussion of some demanding courses (many papers to grade and many tasks to teach/ some teachers were not happy with how one course was administered: they were doing more and more in less and less time.</p> <p>Another point of misrecognition in teachers involved marking precision, which was highly valued and often pointed to by the teachers.</p> <p>Misrecognition is present in students with weak English language proficiency who recognize how such a level has put them behind and has affected their graduation time (they need to repeat the semester and pay the fees again).</p>	<p>Teachers considered the use of rubrics and second marking as two of the sub-group assets in the program.</p> <p>Teachers discussed <i>Honesty</i> in the same way as <i>Trust</i>. It is only related to students who tend not to be honest.</p>
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<p><b>3) Forgiveness</b></p>	<p><i>Forgiveness</i> is seen to be limited in two aspects: the language component in the rubrics and the penalty attributed to poor practice and plagiarism.</p> <p><i>Forgiveness</i>, as an important pedagogical aspect, can be exhibited in practices within the EAP program such as formative assessments and dialogical forms of feedback.</p>	<p><i>Forgiveness</i> is practiced with the students according to how well/how badly they follow the rubrics and the guidelines.</p> <p><i>Forgiveness</i> is more often practiced with students in higher language levels (their effort is taken into consideration) but is less enacted with weaker students or students who plagiarized.</p> <p>Like <i>Trust</i>, it is difficult to practice <i>Forgiveness</i> because of the variety in students' backgrounds and educational systems. This violates the rubrics and leads to a drop in the standards.</p>
<p><b>4) Responsibility</b></p>	<p>There was agreement among both groups of participants that students' <i>responsibility</i> has increased as a result of certain tasks and practices:</p> <p>Attempts at increasing students' role (<i>responsibility</i>) in assessment practices included choice of topics and articles on predetermined tasks. Another area where increased students'</p>	<p>While exploring McArthur's conceptual framework and the implementation of fair assessment/feedback practices in the EAP program, it is worth noting that <i>responsibility</i> is viewed by the teachers as one-sided (only discussed in terms of teachers' role and has not included the students' inclusive role in assessment/feedback practices).</p>

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	<p>voice in feedback practices can be observed is the use of verbal feedback in evaluating process writing.</p>	<p>The teachers did not discuss any instances of students' inclusive role.</p>
<p><b>5) Responsiveness</b></p>	<p>Students were more optimistic of their use of feedback while the teachers were skeptical of the students' genuine <i>responsiveness</i> to feedback, especially after the shift to online learning.</p> <p>Most students expressed both extrinsic (accurate use of grammar, paraphrasing, in-text citation style) and intrinsic experiences of relevance (research skills) in the feedback received.</p> <p>Students stated that the courses on the EAP program have helped them learn skills and practices needed in their major courses.</p>	<p>While exploring McArthur's conceptual framework and the implementation of fair assessment/feedback practices in the EAP program, it is worth noting that students' genuine <i>responsiveness</i> to the social world has not been discussed by the teachers.</p> <p>Some tasks allowed the teachers to assess students' responsiveness to their feedback during the different courses.</p> <p>The degree of <i>responsiveness</i> depends on the students themselves; they either take the task seriously and edit their work or submit similar flawed drafts.</p>

Table 5.2.1 Findings from the teachers' interviews

### 5.3. Overview of the focus group findings/ Nuances within the data from the teachers' semi-structured and focus-group interviews

Analysis of the focus group interview revealed, not surprisingly, teachers' divergent perceptions of McArthur's (2018) five principles and their implications in the program.

These perceptions are, however, not much different from those expressed by the teachers in the semi-structured interviews. As mentioned in phase 1, trust, honesty and forgiveness are somewhat problematic concepts: teachers expressed how the program exhibits fair assessment/feedback practices, but that it was difficult to practice trust, honesty and forgiveness with students. Thus, and unlike what the teachers assumed, *trust, honesty and forgiveness* are partially realized in the EAP program. This represented one moment of incongruity where teachers' espoused ideals are different from current practices. To ensure anonymity, reference details for these teachers are not included when citing passages of text below.

To begin with, the focus group corroborated the findings in the semi-structured interviews on fragmented practices of *trust, honesty and forgiveness*. Teacher 1 said: *"The teachers are sometimes too trustworthy, honest, forgiving, and responsible but it is the other end (students) that blocks their assets"*.

The same teacher added: *"Trust cannot be totally practiced because of the variety in students' backgrounds, conduct and attitudes towards assessment/feedback"*.

Upon the discussion on practices of *honesty*, misrecognition in academics appeared to be recurrent with teachers' overload and emphasis on marking precision. Teacher 2 said:

*"Marking precision is secured within assessment/feedback practices through the use of rubrics, the validity of the tests and the usage of clear guidelines at the beginning of the semester and before each test"*.

In fact, the teachers even discussed reasons why such concepts are not likely to be accepted in the EAP program, and that there is a need to adjust the concepts of *"trust,*

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*honesty and forgiveness*” in McArthur’s (2018) framework if they were to be implemented in the program. They viewed the concepts as not being applicable in their context. Teacher 1, overseeing the inaptness of forgiveness, describes the situation as follows:

*“Yeah, forgiveness is a big word here. So, yeah, if they don't meet the requirements, then they fail. So, forgiveness is not even related to here”.*

*“There are students who consistently have some problems with the connection, who consistently don't do homework, who do not participate in class, who do not read rubrics and who do not respond to feedback”.*

*“Sometimes I feel the need to forget about all the modern Jargon and ways of teaching, I want to take the stick and try a different approach. Maybe this will work with them. I don't know, because sometimes we do this and we do that but it's the other end that also needs to have a checklist of what they need to do as students, different kinds of students or different types of students obviously”.*

This teacher’s conviction of mistrust is echoed by teacher (4) who stated:

*“So, it isn't what..... social justice if we fail them?” Because they will come and find an excuse and they will use us; they will find something of course”.*

Regarding *responsibility*, teachers discussed several means where students’ responsibility is increased within the assessment/feedback practices in the program but at the same time expressed difficulty to achieve a stronger version of responsibility due to lack of time and resources and institutional constraints. This was another finding that emerged in both the semi-structured interviews and focus group.

Teacher 3 speculated: *“Teaching students’ autonomy requires a long and slow process, which teachers may not always have time for”.*

Finally, data from the focus group substantiate the findings on *responsiveness* from the semi-structured interviews and even extend the discussion to include lack of teachers’ awareness of genuine responsiveness, as suggested in McArthur (2018). Teachers in both interviews were skeptical of students’ responsiveness to their feedback.

**5.4. Two core themes discerned from the focus group data:**

**5.4.1 A more ideal model of just assessment/feedback practices in the EAP program**

There has been a general agreement among the participants that the assessment/feedback practices in the EAP program display fairness in more than one form and that McArthur's (2018) conceptual framework of social justice is actually enacted. Moreover, there was a consensus among the interviewees regarding the factors that might impede fairness within their practices. The researcher suspected that underlying this apparent consensus, there were more complex and ambivalent meanings, as the teachers expressed different explanations in terms of fairness/social justice in the focus group interview.

Analysis of the data showed incongruities within the teachers on different discussion topics, such as the scaling on rubrics, marking precision, penalty for plagiarism, and students' increased responsibility. Their answers to these discussion topics indicated two extreme ends of spectrum: teachers belonging to the old/authoritarian school/tradition and teachers of the modern/constructivist school/tradition. Upon the discussion of McArthur's (2018) concepts, the teachers mostly deliberated the concepts of *trust, honesty and forgiveness*. It seems that there is a general feeling of mistrust towards these students. The problem is that the teachers are seeing the students in a deficit position, when really it is a cultural issue, and they probably do not have the time, expertise, leverage or will to change the system. In addition, there was consensus regarding how one course (English.101 in particular) exhibited some unfair assessment/feedback practices that the teachers tried to negotiate, by explaining why and what was going on during the discussion.

Therefore, the focus group has revealed some tensions, which were often seen in the deliberations, even when the general emerging theme contained normative assumptions, such as the fulfillment of just assessment/feedback practices in the EAP program and the futility of change. It is normal that a divergence of opinions or perspectives would emerge from the data; it is safe to assume that this reflects a corresponding underlying difference of view. Nevertheless, it is quite noticeable that the younger interviewees had a different outlook on the framework proposed by McArthur (2018) as opposed to the older

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interviewees who criticized the practicality of specific concepts within the EAP program. Below are suggestions made by the focus group participants on fair practices that might work in the program. Current assessment literature supports these teachers' suggestions and recommendations for improving fairness and student assessment practice.

### 5.4.1.1 The call for more formative assessments

A few more formative assessments should be used: there is not much room for students' improvement with the presence of few assignments and many required skills. Teacher (3) commented:

*"In one course, it feels like students are not given enough time to perform better; for instance, we are testing them for a documented essay, and we are expecting them to master paraphrasing and research skills easily and proceed smoothly into the writing phase".*

The instructors discussed the elimination of certain tasks on the syllabus they believed were useful but because of a large cohort of students and the shift to online learning, things had to be changed (teaching hours and tasks were reduced, a high weighting was assigned to fewer tasks while the final exam was assigned the highest weighting). Also, in ENG.101, there was not much continuity with only one major writing task along with the final. In ENG.101, feedback was considered static and canonical. They added that this issue can be solved by creating a certain section in the syllabus for homework, editing practices or interactive activities, and this does not necessarily demand grading or extra work on the teachers' part. Gipps and Stobart (2004) questioned whether it is possible to create an assessment system that is fair to all learners, and they concluded that the answer is no, 'but we can make it fairer'. One of their main strategies to improve the chances of fairness in assessment was to include a range of assessment strategies so that all learners have a chance to perform well (Gipps & Stobart, 2004).

The need to offer more room for rewarding students' efforts had also emerged during the discussion; teacher (3) noted that if more formative assessments were encouraged, such problems would not occur:

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*“Some hard-working students needed to see their efforts remunerated but the rubrics and the tasks do not account for such efforts”.*

### 5.4.1.2 Engaging the students

More projects that engage students to learn should be promoted: Some of the suggestions given were tasks currently employed in the program such as the movie making activity in ENG.003, the research presentation in ENG.102 and the literature review matrix activity/presentation in ENG.203. This finding also corroborates with findings in the semi-structured interviews with the instructors and the students.

Another suggestion by the instructors was to allow students to choose exam topics (more specifically essay topics) as one form of involving students in assessment choice, a finding shared in the literature (O’Neill, 2017). However, the teachers did not discuss the other forms such as the choice of criteria, exam questions or submission times but stressed the former as a more achievable and practical option. In fact, it is not true that students do not want to be involved in the design or implementation of a course. According to a study on students’ engagement in assessment processes, students were strongly motivated to try to develop assessment systems that would be fair to students with different aptitudes and preferences (McArthur & Huxham, 2011). The researched students did not suggest any further inclusive strategies; they are perhaps too socialized into a hierarchical teaching dynamic, at least in terms of the EAP program. Upon the questioning of whether they could suggest further changes within the (EAP) program assessment/feedback practices, many students (6 students) expressed the following:

*“I don't think so; I don't know what could be changed!”*

### 5.4.1.3 Adjusting the scaling on the rubric

Changing the rubric by giving a higher percentage for content and less for language is another suggestion given to enhance fairness. This notion, which is also found in the individual interviews, reveals the divergence in opinions among the instructors within the EAP program about this kind of change. Teachers who oppose this change argue that these courses are language courses and therefore should stress language accuracy

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comprehensively. On the other hand, supporters of the change claim that language accuracy comes at the expense of communication and delivery:

*“Being unaware of the fact that the students are not native speakers of the language and giving a high weight on the language component, we are being unfair”, said Teacher (2).*

In fact, assessment of students based on the conformity of their writing to native-like writing has contributed to the massification and marketization of knowledge (Jenkins, 2013). Proceduralising assessment and feedback inhibits learning and students’ engagement with complex knowledge (McArthur, 2010).

Furthermore, in considering students’ failure, the instructors need to return to the nature of knowledge with which they engage in higher education. According to McArthur (2013), knowledge is ‘not easily known’; knowledge is ‘complex, dynamic and contested’. Even when there are opportunities for formative assessment and feedback in the different courses on the program, McArthur (2018) argues, these do not necessarily provide students an understanding of the rocky and indirect ways in which knowledge is often developed.

Moreover, some of the rubrics used to assess students’ writing use a large numerical grading scale which students may not fully grasp or misunderstand (see Appendix 1). Large numerical grading scales encourage students to perceive grading as an accumulation of points, rather than a criterion-based activity, engaging with complex knowledge (McArthur, 2018). They encourage students to see knowledge as simple and easily accumulated rather than complex and requiring commitment and engagement. Likewise, Shay (2004) argues that marking rubrics are misleading in the supposed clarity they provide as marking systems. In addition, Broad (2000) states that rubrics do not, as their proponents often suggest, eliminate marking disagreements among the examiners.

When asked about changes to the divide between language/content and the weighting in the rubric, some teachers explained how students understand the impact of language proficiency on their success and resort to cheating as a result:

*“I would see them seeking help or trying to have somebody work for them and maybe even more so online, so you would feel that they are afraid of submitting a paper and they are*

*afraid of the expectation, the expectation of how high language proficiency needs to be”, said teacher 3.*

#### 5.4.1.4 Changing/Reducing the final exam weighting

Allocating less weight for the final exam is also recommended. The final exam currently represents 35 or 40% of the total average. This idea has initiated one of the ‘argumentation interaction’ moments during the focus group discussions. This finding, which resonates with the first recommendation, has raised a different concern by only one interviewee, a dissenter (Teacher 2), who viewed this as an unfair practice that should be changed. This idea was negotiated by other colleagues (Teachers 1 and 4) who explained that the high percentage designated for the final exam is set by the institution as it is the only task that might show the students’ authentic input (other tasks which were performed online may not represent the students’ real work). The discussion ended with the hope that this weighting changes when the teaching goes back to the traditional classroom setting.

During the interview, an argumentative moment between the instructors indicated how local practices can impose heavy constraints on the introduction of new assessment strategies, and how time constraints of quality assurance processes can also make it hard to adapt assessments once in place.

One instructor (Teacher 4) pointed to the role that management has on changes in assessment/feedback:

*“Sometimes micro politics or dynamics in the department or things happen, leadership roles change. I don’t know to what extent a certain model of assessment/feedback can sustain the change of leadership roles. Because you know sometimes these practices dismantle or they just break down because of these kinds of change in leadership roles so that’s why the work of the person who has been assigned a certain administrative task, is to make sure that these do get together”.*

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### 5.4.1.5 Promoting dialogue about assessment/feedback

Dialogue and assessment literacy are needed: It has been argued by the participants that discussions and conversations with colleagues and students, about the nature of assessment and how students genuinely learn the craft of assessment, should often take place. Teacher 2 expressed the importance of dialogue when she stated:

*“We need more of this in the department; we have things to suggest as well!! We do need to familiarize ourselves with more theories that ca help us explain practices”.*

Similarly, McArthur (2018) explains that it is crucial to fundamentally rethink the reasons for assessment, highlighting the notion of dialogue. “An assessed piece of work, and particularly the feedback given about it, should exist as an artefact in a dialogue between a student and the teacher” (p. 120). This shall provide the basis for a dialogue between students and their own achievements.

### **5.4.2 Barriers to the implementation of fair assessment and feedback practices in the EAP program: The clash of Teaching and Learning Regimes (TLRs)**

Based on the instructors’ discussions, there are obvious improvements in terms of how practice can be changed, made more socially just, yet there are also barriers to achieving those things. Some of them might be minor; some might be major, such as university guidelines around assessment rubrics. Trowler and Cooper (2002) argue that sub-groups within the department are the primary locations for the growth and transmission of TLRs because it is here that academics engage together on tasks over the long term. The authors claim that educational development programs are social products and themselves instantiate TLRs which may be more, or less, compatible with those that participants bring to them from other contexts. “If there are incongruities between the two, they need not be fatal if participants are able to, or are encouraged to, surface and reflect on previously tacit assumptions embedded in their TLRs” (p.236). Analysis of the focus group discussions indicates that there seems to be four elements of TLRs which explain the barriers to the implementation of an ideal model of assessment/feedback practices in the EAP program. These barriers belong to the make-up of the EAP program; they are concerned with rules

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of appropriateness, implicit theories of learning and of teaching, recurrent practices and tacit assumptions.

### 5.4.2.1 Rules of appropriateness

According to Trowler and Cooper (2002), rules of appropriateness are based on tacit assumptions; they set forth what is, and is not, appropriate practice in teaching and learning and are usually only revealed when practices proposed oppose them. This mismatch between McArthur's models (2018) of fair assessment/feedback practices and the opinions of participants in the focus-group reflective practice was observed in many areas. The focus group discussions presented a discrepancy between espoused theory in the model proposed by McArthur and theory put in use by the teachers and the EAP program.

First, although the teachers admitted the value of students' inclusive role and the need to involve students in assessment choices, self-assessment and peer assessment were not highly nominated as change options, not because they do not work well as Seden and Svaricek (2019) indicated, but since they seemed difficult to practice especially with large classes, online learning and tight schedules. Teacher 2 explained:

*"I would have preferred that the syllabus was not so demanding in order for my students to gradually and effectively master some important self-assessment skills at this basic/entry level".*

Moreover, students' inclusive role within the assessment process only includes their choices of topics for assignments. In the EAP program, few chances to peer and self-assessment exist; peer assessment is practiced as an informal practice by individual instructors while the only attempt to self-assessment is performed with major assignments (during the submission of second drafts). As such, there is a disparity between the rules of appropriateness which are dominant in the EAP program and those held by the participants. This could mean that the teachers do not like the system they are teaching within. Literature suggests two areas where students can be actively engaged in their

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learning: increasing students' tacit knowledge and taking an active role in the setting and marking of the assessment (Rust et al., 2003; McArthur & Huxham, 2011).

Another area where rules of appropriateness are divergent from those of the participants is present in the teachers' revelations on the concepts of trust, forgiveness and honesty. To illustrate, a diverse cohort of students exist at the university (students pertain to different backgrounds, different schools and different teaching methods). Hence, all the teachers expressed difficulty and often inability to practice the concepts of forgiveness and trust equally with these students. Teacher 1 speculated:

*"There should be, I don't know a different approach, or different categories that could explain forgiveness and trust with diverse types of students"; "For example, what about students who are not university material, who are not responsible themselves, and who are not honest themselves? Can we really practice forgiveness here".*

*"The type of student is definitely key here and not everyone is able to, you know, to use those concepts because the quality of education will suffer".*

The same teacher added: *If this framework is adapted fully and equally, the quality of education will suffer".* This quote vindicates the argument that the difficulties in implementing a different approach to assessment/feedback practices were indeed rooted in teachers' different attitudes to learning and assessment. It was surprising that none of the interviewed teachers articulated a different view at that moment.

One of the teachers, Teacher 4, even expressed indifference to students by stating:

*"Parents, because of not knowing what to do with their children and because universities are getting cheaper, relatively cheaper because of the economic crisis in Lebanon, they just wanted them, their children, to be at university. But would this be the right approach to students who are not university material who are not responsible themselves or are not honest themselves?".*

The former quotes reveal that there is a seeming lack of sympathy with weaker students - assuming they are not 'clever enough', and this obscures the fact that they are almost certainly simply less prepared rather than less able. As such, incongruity tends to lead to antagonism, anxiety or other negative responses on the part of the program participants.

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There is also frustration because students who are less well-prepared need a little extra help, but the staff simply do not have capacity. Lower performing students are therefore a problem, a pressure on already overworked staff. However, instructors should know that students, faculty, and staff come to an institution with diverse needs. Applying a social justice approach to higher education requires educators to know that equitable or fair treatment does not merely mean equal treatment but also means treating people with widely disparate needs in the same way (Zajda et al., 2006, as cited in DorimeWilliams, 2018). Although it is surprising how little this perspective goes through in some cases, the idea that ability rises to the top is widespread. Often teachers are people who have done well, and it is comforting for them to know that it is about their heightened natural ability, one thing most Lebanese schools/curriculums promote and adopt in their structures.

One final instance of incongruity is found between the rules of appropriateness used in the EAP program and the espoused practices recommended by the literature. The teachers expressed how they do not possess privilege or enough time to improve the quality of language testing, assessment and teaching services; for instance, changing rubric criteria, changing type of feedback or assessment, and increasing students' inclusive role within the assessment/feedback processes.

In different instances, the focus group participants indicated the fact that staff does not have the freedom to do things, and that:

*“Many of the suggestions in the literature may not fit within university rules and regulations” (Teachers 2 and 3).*

Yet, new directions in research which are proposed can engage students and teachers to work for change in EAP within their internal and external constraints. For example, Benesch (1999; 2001; 2010) has argued for the use of critical pedagogy in EAP classrooms; hid work provides models for intervention and mediation in critical conversations, demonstrating how EAP instructors can serve as “conversation facilitator[s] and, more judiciously, intervener[s] (1999, p. 578), prompting students to elaborate on their ideas to model that critical thinking is “neither an unguided free-for-all nor a didactic lecture but a balance between extended student contributions and gentle challenges by the teacher” (p. 578). Moreover, teachers can initiate program- level discussions about the ways to support

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students to gain a genuine sense of assessment responsibility over time (McArthur, 2018). According to Pearson (2017), data collected from interviews with students and teachers on their experiences of the process-portfolio found that a small-scale intervention has potential for agency to be exercised in writing assessments within the highly constrained context of a UK EAP pre sessional program. However, there are still some limits on the course and even the things teachers can do require time, thinking differently, support, training which are sadly not encouraged/allowed.

### 5.4.2.2 Implicit Theories of Learning and of Teaching

According to Trowler and Cooper (2002), it may be helpful to situate implicit theories of learning and teaching on a spectrum which extends from “Transmissive/Authoritarian” on the one hand to “Constructivist/Democratic” on the other. The concepts proposed by McArthur’s framework represent the constructivist end of the spectrum. However, the teachers do not all lay on the Constructivist/Democratic end of the spectrum. Here there was a clear contradiction between this aspect of the TLR of the proposed model and that drawn on by the teachers. Many focus group participants viewed fairness as denoting a single reality or “procedural” fairness: the way feedback is handled and the need for a valid link between the assignments, rubric and feedback. The teachers stressed the importance of clear rubrics and guidance given to students before the assigned tasks. It was until the researcher had given the literature prompts on assessment types and the account by McArthur (2018) that they started to think of assessments that are socially just by design, and that the students can be more involved in the process in different means.

When asked about changes that were needed in the rubric, Teacher 3 stated:

*“I mean, oftentimes feedback is targeted to correct what we see and so what we see in terms of whether the paper addresses the guidelines. So, at times I must dig deeper absolutely to be able to create, let's say something that is not necessarily listed in the rubric”.*

*“We might need to work on a different rubric that would facilitate the way we get feedback”.*

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This says a lot about how assessment/feedback are thought of culturally – the reason teachers don't think more broadly about changing the rubrics is because they are not allowed or encouraged to, or simply because they may lack assessment/feedback literacy. In the following quote, the instructor (Teacher 2) was implying that there is a subtle need for assessment/feedback literacy among the instructors and the students:

*“It seems that we lack creative/thoughtful ideas and reflective responses from teachers and students alike”.*

The need for teachers and students' assessment literacy is also emphasized in the literature (McDonald, 2010; Sadler, 2013; Schmitt and Hamp-Lyons, 2015; Jónsson et al., 2018). McArthur (2018) argues that the development of so-called assessment literacy does not simply happen, nor can it meaningfully occur in one module, isolated from the rest of the program. Colleagues should consider how this assessment of literacy is encouraged over time. Pettifor and Saklofske (2012) argue that deficits in teachers' knowledge of student assessment can be addressed through effective teacher education and professional development, and these can lead to increased levels of efficacy. High levels of efficacy eventually lead to heightened internal loci of control and can promote personal resilience.

### 5.4.2.3 Recurrent Practices

Trowler and Cooper (2002) explain how recurrent practices are associated with rules of appropriateness and often based on tacit assumptions but are different from them as they relate to realized behavior, not rules for practice or views of the world. The EAP program is known for the use of two “effective” strategies in terms of the routine giving of feedback on assessed work; they are the rubrics and the norming (second marking) across sections. It is assumed that these strategies are purposefully used to achieve marking decision and reliability, as indicated in the discussion with the instructors. The rubric artefact, prevalent across the EAP program levels, is predetermined by the course coordinator in accordance with the chairperson. However, the practices suggested by McArthur (2018) represent a somewhat novel set of practices: feedback as a dialogical artefact, genuine recognition of one's worth, students acting in the marking and assessment process. According to Trowler and Cooper (2002), where an educational development program disseminates ways of

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practice and uses of technologies that are different from usually unconsidered recurrent practices prevailing in participants' professional contexts then one can expect limited penetration of new practices into those contexts. The authors state that participants often encounter resistance when they take new ideas back from the program to their department.

The focus group discussions revealed total agreement on the use of rubrics and second markings which do not need to be changed, seeing their effectiveness throughout the years yet resistance to other practices such as increasing students' role in assessment and feedback process. There are two likely explanations for this: lack of time to make changes and the value of maintaining the standards of the courses running in multiple sections. Teachers, who like and have internalized what they are used to, often expressed the difficulty of changing practices that are already working in the program; they claimed that they need to sustain standards in assessing students in multiple sections. According to Trowler (2009), social practices become engraved, and they are very difficult to change unless conditions are right and implementation strategies are proper and sensitively engaged. In fact, change is hard, not least because teachers need support and space to think it through and then change their practices.

In addition, the common discourse, in terms of applying the concept of forgiveness, discloses how the rubrics imposed a strict penalty on accuracy and plagiarism, and the effect of this practice on students' performance, yet the teachers were skeptical of implementing forgiveness in the EAP context. While some approved the importance of adjusting the weighting in the rubrics, others discussed the role of students' background and the fact that different backgrounds and different educational systems existing make it difficult for teachers and coordinators to assign a different weighting and therefore resist making further changes in the rubrics. The same can be discussed in terms of the difficulty of fulfilling mutual trust among the teachers and students in the EAP program. Incongruity in terms of the rubric scaling is revealed in the following account between two teachers. Teacher 1 said:

*"I'm not only talking about the perspective of being a native or non-native here. When we give a lot of importance to the language itself as it is restricted to grammatical mistakes or*

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*sentence structure, it wouldn't be fair for the student because delivery is important". It is not only about the language itself that is whether you had subject verb agreement or not. We need to help them improve the way they think, the way they move from an idea to another, the way they move from the general concept to a more specific 1, the way they may express their ideas that will be developed later"*

While Teacher 2 simply put it in that way:

*"What we are using is fair because students are already aware of how we're going to assess, uh, their work and they already know the type of the assignment because, uh, we have already worked out ahead of time on the practice during our sessions before we get to the assignment. So, once they're aware of both, I think that's completely fair".*

*"I think the 50/50 might be an excessively punitive split and that we should reward them for ideas and so on. On the other hand, it has served the purposes of our program. Um, I think once we see progress by the time students reach ENG. 204, and I know for a fact, because I teach them at the beginning of the sequence and at the end of the sequence. We do see progress, so I know in ENG.101 and ENG.102, if I'm not mistaken. Language is the language component even later. Yes, later, it changes. So, we feel in our context. It works Okay"*

*"It depends on the courses..... for ENG.102 and ENG.203, well, they're fair. Well, I have some concerns with ENG.101 but I wouldn't say it is unfair. I would say, I think there are too many assignments. This is it, so let's say somehow fair in comparison to the other courses".*

Upon the discussions on the different concepts, the topic of rubric use was mainly mentioned to explain the teachers' practices of forgiveness. Again here, what's noticeable is the notion that some practices have become internalized for some teachers; they expressed the following:

*"So, yeah, if they don't meet the requirements on the rubric, then they fail. So, forgiveness is not even related here" (Teacher 4).*

*"Well, we do forgive our students; very often I tell them: All right there are mistakes here and here, but overall, you did a good job" (Teacher 1).*

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*“Obviously there will be something wrong, uh, but things that I asked for specifically that are in the rubric, and you haven't followed because you didn't bother to read the rubric”. And for those who don't, I punish, I even use the word punish, so yeah. But I never called it forgiveness. To me, it's just common sense” (Teacher1).*

The corresponding teachers seem to regard forgiveness as a weak teaching attribute and one that cannot reflect their teaching strategies. They do not like to label their practices as practices of forgiveness. Although they admit the harshness in assigning a large percentage for language accuracy, they continue to oppose any change to the weighting.

### 5.4.2.4 Tacit Assumptions

According to Trowler and Cooper (2002), tacit assumptions include understandings of what is and is not considered relevant to a teaching and learning issue. They also involve schemes, such as the nature of students in higher education, the nature and direction of external involvement in higher education, and the direction and quality of leadership in universities. A challenge for this research project was that the researcher did not want to only report majority opinions but had hoped to be able to demonstrate a diversity of views as far as possible within the group, while recognizing that these could be public discourses. Smithson (2000) highlights how tensions can often be seen in discussions even when the general emerging theme contains normative assumptions. In this research, unfair assessment/feedback practices were exposed even when the general account among the participants is that of the emergence of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsiveness, and responsibility in the EAP program. The following account presents instances of incompatibilities between aspects of the TLRs propagated within the framework and those inhabited by the individual participants.

Analysis of the focus group interview with the teachers within this research points to a rather problematic view of the student's ability: teachers associated performance with natural tendency, rather than a contrast in experience/preparation. This is so weird that they think this when language has almost everything to do with exposure. Teacher 4 said, in reference to lack of support for such struggling learners,

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*“We have quite a bunch of very different students; therefore, some assessments may be fair but for those from the lower level of abilities maybe extra practice before assessment would help, but we can't afford this. We just, you know, we don't have this privilege”.*

This idea of meritocracy, despite their being teachers, is quite telling. Assumptions that exist within the program about the importance of accuracy over fluency revealed the instructors' rigidity and fear of change, and this is common in EAP/EAL, so the university and teachers have internalized this. The idea of change has triggered an 'argumentative interaction' moment during the focus group discussions. Two teachers, while discussing one course (ENG.101), expressed incongruity in terms of promoting autonomous learning as follows:

Teacher 1 said: *“So I think this involvement of the students in the process work very well, because we, as teachers, we know very often students just look at the grade and that's it they are either upset or happy, but we teachers always want them, you know, I spent all this time, writing, feedback, correcting almost every mistake. So that next time they don't make the same mistake, right? Yeah. Yeah, I felt that it was more productive with the students` self-reflection because they looked not only at the grade, but they were forced by the exercise....by the activity to go back to their papers and really evaluate the level and the gaps”.* But teachers cannot also expect students to make a mistake once, see it is wrong, and then never do it again.

Teacher 2 replied: *“This is another issue with ENG. 101 because I believe that uh, we should not allow students to be autonomous learners yet; maybe we can do it in further, uh, courses because in 101 there are still, uh, especially those new students.... Um, I think they're still less confident to go through this process. Um, again, this is my personal belief”.*

Some participants seemed more reluctant to try various things and think differently than others, when it comes to the effectiveness of other fair assessment/feedback practices. These teachers were satisfied with the current practices in the program and were able to see similarities between their performance and the model practices suggested in McArthur's (2018) conceptual framework. However, dissenters were not completely satisfied and encouraged changes in different forms. This is potentially one of the only times that these instructors have been encouraged to think about assessment differently,

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and it is expected that they found it challenging. In addition, the EAP program displays the acceptance of certain practices, a unique culture of its own, and the emergence of certain tasks, predetermined objectives, rubrics, Turnitin, etc. which are used rather effectively throughout the years. However, according to McArthur (2018), movement towards predetermining learning outcomes and that of stipulating graduate attributes risk, privileging certain forms of assessment that meet the qualities favored by an audit culture.

Each of these assumptions points to a rather traditional view of the program that stands in contrast to the TLRs of McArthur's (2018) framework. Trowler and Cooper (2002) argue how some individuals are more able and willing than others to transfer across or between TRLs, they relatively easily challenge and adjust their attitudes, values, and practices as a result of exposure to teaching courses and other experiences. It is argued that learning and transferring new assessment strategies into regular teaching repertoires entail an open state of mind and willingness to risk taking. Therefore, "these personal attributes can inhibit or nurture professional growth and ultimately influence change initiatives focusing on improving student assessment" (Webber et al., 2012, p. 292).

The ongoing tension between traditional versus modern ways of doing things and the resultant distrust meant that much of the implementation (TLRs of the program) differed markedly from the TLRs proposed by McArthur (2018). Yet the contradiction lies when two teachers expressed consistently the view that these concepts were indirectly implemented in the context (Teachers 1 and 4 consecutively):

*"I mean, we are doing this, why complicate our teaching practice with more jargon?"*

*"Ah, yeah, well, yeah, you're right and we're doing this anyway, and it happens automatically. So why do we need to label each step or each procedure? right? What you're saying is right, right. That's .....that just means good practice.*

*All right so we are doing it without itemizing, is there any practical value in itemizing?*

*This will make us better teachers if we call it forgiveness ....*

*No, because we're already doing this, so maybe it was too, uh. I don't know, maybe it was meant for other lecturers, other instructors to remind them of what procedure they need to follow to assess, uh, students".*

Moreover, teachers' excerpts from both interviews indicated that McArthur's framework can be interpreted in different ways, probably partially, yet in order to realize it fully, each category needs to be filled out, not understood partially.

### 5.5. Overall discussion

This chapter explored the differences in the perspective that underscores social justice in assessments as suggested by McArthur's (2018), in contrast to commonly held assumptions and understandings as expressed by the teaching and learning regimes in both teachers' interviews.

The participants' declarations demonstrated a distinction between ideals and expectations (TLRs in McArthur's framework), while acknowledging the strength of some fixed habits in the program regarding assessment/feedback. In fact, analysis of the focus group interview revealed the sub-group's shared tacit assumptions in relation to the importance of rubrics, the role of students' background/language and the role of administrative constraints in allowing/hindering change. For researchers looking at what might help teachers improve current and future assessment/feedback practices (which was the aim of the research), this type of data is particularly useful in order to go beyond a simple collection of teachers' opinions, to locate tensions between beliefs and practices, which emerged discursively throughout the focus group interview.

There are a few overlapping factors that may have explained the consistency of some teachers' views. There are likely some explanations for this: firstly, these teachers belong to the old/authoritarian way of thinking; they adopt "traditional" ways of doing things - which as we know may not necessarily be better. Secondly, teachers expressed unwillingness for change especially when current practices seem to be quite working. Their situation is a combination of things: they are institutionalized to some extent, they are familiar with the system, they are short of time, and they are not encouraged to think differently, either through their training, through how EAP works, or through leadership and mentoring. In other words, it is like a bit of a cage. An intervention seems to be required to enhance the understanding of current literature in EAP testing. For instance,

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changes pertaining to the rubric and increased forgiveness were not preferred by experienced and veteran teachers whereas forgiveness was more encouraged by new and younger teachers. Valuing student voice and authentically addressing it indicates teachers with pedagogical tact, those who embody assessment with sensitivity (Aitken, 2012). Pedagogic thoughtfulness and tact are essential elements of pedagogic competence and fair assessment practice, the foundation and heart of teaching and learning. Nevertheless, the focus group interview revealed that not all the interviewed teachers displayed such characteristics.

However, the findings from this research do not suggest that older teachers' attitudes were particularly less rational or less reflective of improvements in the EAP program than those expressed by the younger teachers, but rather that they were the result of differing interests and priorities. As mentioned earlier, there maybe a difference between what academics say about their underpinning TLRs and the complexity of their practices: between espoused theory and theory in use. Indeed, certain aforementioned EAP regulations, which some teachers opposed, were often portrayed as a safeguard against student complaints or disputes rather than enabling the best possible learning experiences.

### 5.6. Summary

Lack of assessment/feedback literacy, mistrust, and traditional philosophical underpinnings in teaching, learning, and assessment seemed obstacles to achieving complete social justice in the program. While the dominant discourse was of fairness of assessment/feedback practices in the EAP program, conflicting views and contradictions were illuminated in the focus group by members disagreeing and arguing with other participants, even in areas unanticipated by the researcher (degree of satisfaction with the current assessment/feedback practices and the proposed changes which guarantee improved students' experiences). Even though the participants are sort of homogenous in some ways, the researcher had been able to find differences and congruence. Evidence demonstrated the apparently disparate nature of the different approaches to teaching and learning instantiated in the program and the teachers'

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attitudes, values and practices. In its broadest sense, the major factor behind these differences is the contrast between the program TLRs and the TLRs of the conceptual framework proposed. Therefore, in order to implement the changes proposed and to improve fairness in teachers' practices, the teachers need to accept and tolerate different and new assessment/feedback strategies, trust their students and admit the inclusive role of students in the assessment process. Based on her case studies in 1992 and 1994, Scott (2003) argued that students experience intensive classes differently than they do traditional semester-length courses, but the quality of the experience depends on the presence or absence of certain attributes. Students highly recommended the use of effective teaching strategies in intensive courses such as: accurate assessment, classroom interaction and discussion, experiential and applied learning, and the lack of therein will render such courses tedious and painful for students. Moreover, Scott's qualitative analysis revealed the value of different types of assignments such as smaller, more meaningful and in-class group assignments. In order to be successful, intensive courses require good planning, well-organized and structured activities, a multitude of teaching strategies, a focus on learning objectives, and accurate assessment (Daniel, 2000).

The final chapter (chapter 6) aims to address the study conclusions and present further suggestions to ensure more just practices in the EAP program.

## **Chapter 6 – Conclusion**

This chapter has four main goals. The first is to summarize the answers to the research questions from Chapters 4 and 5. The chapter provides a summary of how the research questions are answered. The second objective is to use the project's findings to formulate advice for the future of the EAP program. The chapter will also discuss issues surrounding extension of the findings and some suggestions are made for further work. Finally, the chapter will reflect on the research shortcomings and the development of the researcher's skills.

### **6.1. A summary of the findings/ the research questions answered**

Even though, in terms of the language requirement, the lack of language proficiency is the only reason preventing students from entering their major programs directly, the course they are required to take upon entering university is an EAP course rather than a General English one, hence, not directly addressing their lack of general language proficiency. In addition, EAP programs are often taught and assessed from a right/wrong perspective (Jenkins, 2012). There have been several studies examining the EAP programs; one study revealed the need for a revised EAP curriculum (Zand-Moghadam et al., 2018). However, outside of a study on rater training for EAP writing assessment (O'Connell, 2022), there remains a dearth of research on fairness in assessment/feedback practices in these programs. On the larger scale, this research examines assessment/feedback practices in the EAP program. On a small scale, it aims to investigate social justice embedding from the perspectives of staff and students in a Lebanese private university.

This present research, which drew on interviews conducted with learners of English as a foreign language of one common first language background, various disciplines, and different linguistic experiences together with a handful of native/non-native English-speaking academics, aimed to explore fair assessment and feedback practices in one EAP program. Section 4.2 in chapter 4 provided a broad summary of the answers to the first and second research questions primarily in the context of the embedding of social justice

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in HE EAP programs, as viewed by students and teachers. Section 5.2 in chapter 5 provided a broad summary of the answers to the last research question which aims to collect suggestions on improved assessment and feedback practices in the department. The research preliminary empirical findings suggest, not surprisingly as previous literature, different interpretations among the stakeholders of fairness generally and to McArthur's (2018) concepts of Assessment for social justice specifically. In this conclusion, from a summary of the findings, suggestions are made as to their relevance to students, teachers and EAP programs in general. But first, the research questions are:

*Research Question 1: To what extent do EAP students experience the notions of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness within the institutional assessment practices?*

*Research Question 2: To what extent do EAP instructors view the notions of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness within broad institutional assessment practices?*

McArthur's theoretical framework (2018) includes five concepts (trust, forgiveness, honesty, responsibility and responsiveness) which need to be fully addressed in order to achieve social justice within assessment and feedback practices. An enhanced trust exists when assessment tasks are transparent, are negotiated and discussed with students. Moreover, honesty involves both the students and teachers. For students, it is to be able to recognize their own achievements and the useful social role they can play through these. A lack of honesty about the working conditions under which academics engage in assessment and marking practices prevents the undertaking of social justice. Furthermore, forgiveness is particularly important in the context of higher education because the knowledge students should be dealing with is complicated, contested and dynamic. In addition, responsibility is the right to be an informed and active member of a social group, and in the assessment context it means to be assessed through approaches and practices that enable students to take responsibility for their own learning. Finally, assessment practices that cultivate responsiveness encourage proactive students who see themselves as interconnected with the world in which they live, interconnected with other citizens, and interconnected with the knowledge with which they engage.

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Two major findings can be elaborated: First of all, there was this sense that McArthur's principles are not enough and that they could be extended in a way that suits EAP rather than speaking about their general implication in HE.

Second of all, the exploration of McArthur's (2018) concepts in the EAP program revealed instances of camouflaged injustice which were discerned through nuances within the two groups of participants and between them as well. For instance, the notions of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness within the institutional assessment practices were interpreted differently by the students and teachers. While trust was high in students, the teachers presented distrust. Secondly, honesty seems low in teachers. Moreover, while teachers thought they were practicing forgiveness according to the rubric used, students revealed how grammatical inaccuracy was not tolerated and caused them to repeat courses and/or graduate late. Teachers and students only agreed on some instances of responsibility. Responsiveness was also high for students but low for teachers. The study also revealed how the five concepts are only partially practiced in the program and in order to realize fairness, they need to be fully addressed (**Figure. 6.1.1**). The table below summarizes the findings of research questions 1 and 2 and shows how each of these concepts is imperfectly practiced in the EAP program.

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<p><b>McArthur's (2018) conceptual framework of social justice for Assessment/feedback.</b></p>	<p><u>Students' experiences</u> of the notions of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness within the institutional assessment practices.</p>	<p><u>Instructors' views</u> of the notions of trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness within the institutional assessment practices.</p>
<p><b>1) Trust</b></p>	<p>On a continuum between students and teachers, trust seems to lean high for students in two aspects which are collaboration and transparency but low for students in assessment literacy.</p>	<p>Teachers' trust of students is seen to be low due to their concerns towards students' poor practice and increased plagiarizing although they admitted that both Turnitin and the online proctoring system (OBS) used at the institution cannot totally solve those issues.</p>

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<p><b>2) Forgiveness</b></p>	<p>Language proficiency was considered by many students to be the leading cause of failing a writing task.</p> <p>There were mixed feelings among the students about the distribution of the different criteria on the rubrics.</p> <p>While some students found that this distribution was unfair, others admitted the value of assigning a high percentage on language and for receiving corrective feedback.</p> <p>Students therefore considered forgiveness absent in teachers' practices.</p>	<p>Practices of forgiveness are encouraged through formative assessments used in the different courses.</p> <p>Teachers had mixed feelings about the weighting used in the rubric and how it might affect the students' learning.</p> <p>However, they all agreed that they practice certain strictness in terms of grammar correction and plagiarism penalty, contributing to a reduced amount of forgiveness.</p> <p>Some of the teachers even suggested a different percentage to be attributed for language and content.</p>
<p><b>3) Honesty</b></p>	<p>By using large scale grading in the rubrics, students are not given the appropriate form of knowledge engagement in higher education, as they may attribute a disproportional significance to numerical grades.</p> <p>Students did not show evidence of assessment/feedback literacy.</p>	<p>Grading precision is secured using multiple sources of data to test the students' learning in each course, by second marking students' papers across sections, by using rubrics, and by using clear assessment tasks and criteria.</p>

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		<p>Teachers' workload pressure of marking has shaped the nature of the assessment practices: the use of Moodle and Turnitin to submit feedback.</p>
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<p><b>4) Responsibility</b></p>	<p>Students stated that verbal feedback/discussions with the instructor more than written comments had allowed a better student engagement. Also, students felt that they understood the feedback and comments on their writing.</p> <p>The students indicated that the choice of topics used in some courses had motivated them and as a result, they had been more engaged in the task.</p>	<p>There was agreement among the instructors that students' responsibility/self-learning has increased as a result of certain tasks and practices such as oral presentations, choice of topics, and second drafts for major assignments.</p> <p>The EAP program, although welcoming them as new students, does little to prepare weak students or students with different language backgrounds for the different learning experience /to the new assessment and feedback practices.</p>
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<b>5) Responsiveness</b>	<p>Students were more optimistic of their use of teachers' feedback.</p> <p>Students stated that the courses on the EAP program have helped them learn skills and practices needed in their major courses.</p> <p>Most of the students discussed instrumental, not socially informed, applications of knowledge.</p>	<p>Teachers were skeptical of the students' genuine responsiveness to feedback, especially after the shift to online learning.</p> <p>Responsiveness was perceived low for teachers and high for students.</p>
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**Table 6.1.1 Summary of the findings**



**Figure. 6.1.1 Incomplete social justice in Assessment/feedback**

The conclusion chapter now proceeds to present findings related to ELF or what is known for English as a lingua franca (the use of English among speakers of different first languages). The use of ELF involves speakers from diverse linguistic cultural backgrounds who use ELF to communicate with one another, to get things done, and to socialize. Language assessment issues raised by ELF transcend questions of proficiency conceptualized in terms of a stable variety; they are concerned with what counts as effective and successful communication outcomes with English that can include emergent and innovative forms of language and pragmatic meaning (Jenkins & Leung, 2014).

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On the one hand, the interviews with both the students and their instructors highlighted an emerging lack in knowledge of different testing/feedback practices and in assessment and feedback literacy (the different assessment and feedback types/the different types of errors/the ways teachers can voice the varied students' needs, etc.); the EAP program is deeply unrepresentative of the different students' groups which it claims to be teaching and testing. These students come from different language backgrounds and are tested the same way upon entering the university and throughout the EAP program. Jenkins and Leung (2014) argued how generic testing of English for lingua franca communication needs to be replaced with contextualized, socially realistic, and socially fair means of assessing candidates' English language abilities.

Moreover, weak students and some teachers did not understand why students kept repeating similar mistakes. In Manning's (2013) research into EAP teacher assessment literacy, most respondents reported having developed their knowledge of assessment practice on the job and over half stated that they did not actively consult the assessment research literature (as cited in Schmitt & Hamp-Lyons, 2015). Not surprisingly, Manning also found a lack of understanding of the complexity involved in assessment development and interpretation. On the other hand, the instructors expressed concerns about students' language weaknesses and labeled them as less able in comparison with their counterparts.

The research found absence of ELF awareness among the instructors and students, and this therefore indicates a need for ELF critical pedagogy/literacy within the EAP program. The results of this study lend support to Jenkins (2013) who states that HE practices have remained the same as nowhere in HE, Anglophone or non-Anglophone, does there seem to be any awareness, outside the ELF (A) research community, of what it means to use English as a lingua franca. The research proposes that the injustice the students might experience concerning their linguistic difference is linked to their lack of access to critical ELF pedagogy and assessment/feedback literacy practice along with the lack of teachers being trained in these approaches. However, I believe that ELF is only one way of ensuring greater incorporation of Social Justice into EAP assessment.

A reform of such nature will first require a significant overhaul in this HE institution through the EAP program, given that teachers and authorities may be reluctant to embrace such

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changes. Therefore, training in feedback and assessment criteria seems crucial for the students to overcome the above obstacles so that they understand the feedback given to them and not passively receive what they are told. It is unfair to assume that EFL students (students from different language backgrounds) in this program understand the feedback and therefore can act upon it by receiving written comments along the rubric. Not only does this guarantee less chances for students to learn but it also presents this feedback, i.e., teachers' feedback as the only type of feedback that these students could receive. Sadler argues that "students should be trained in how to interpret feedback, how to make connections between the feedback and the characteristics of the work they produce, and how they can improve their work in the future. It cannot simply be assumed that when students are given feedback, they will know what to do with it" (as cited in Rust, O'Donovan and Price, 2005, p.78). Without such training and strategy teaching, EFL students will continue to misunderstand and misinterpret feedback given by their instructor. If the system cannot be improved, students need to be encouraged to understand the system better. It is not the ideal approach, that would be a critically pedagogical overhaul, but it is a practical one.

Moreover, testing the corresponding students as if they were native English speakers, unfairly imposing that they should be, functions to demoralize them and ignores their different learning experiences and their very real writing problems. Carrying out the study had allowed the researcher to explore the extent to which traditional Native English Speakers (NES) orientations to assessment/feedback still permeate EFL in this HE institution, whether there was any receptivity to the ways in which English is written by NNES (Non-Native English Speakers) or whether there was an inherent "social character" in teachers, and which areas of assessment/feedback policy and practice were most in need of addressing in these respects. The findings indicate that such practices still exist, even in local contexts such as the Lebanese HE. Teachers (as the researched) who continue to promote language proficiency as generic do not perceive the need to change current assessment rubrics.

The findings also revealed that some of the practices suggested in McArthur's (2018) framework are more suitable than others in this context. For instance, teachers and

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students' views of practices of trust, honesty and forgiveness were contradictory. Students seemed to trust the instructors and administration while the latter seemed to show distrust, dishonesty and inability to forgive mistakes. The attitude of grudging acceptance from some instructors who seemed to be doing very little to change their practices or to accept different perspectives was surprising during the focus-group. When English as a lingua franca becomes more widely accepted among teachers and administration, new directions in research can engage EFL students and teachers to work for change in EAP even within their internal and external constraints. This research is an important contribution to the ongoing quest by EAP practitioners worldwide for context specific pedagogical practices. The following section will present the findings and responses to the last research question.

*Research Question 3: Upon the findings of the literature, what are the teachers' perceptions of fair assessments that work and that don't work in the program?*

Different conceptual lenses have been used to explain and study assessment and feedback in higher education. The first model views assessment as a social practice and aims to explore a lower level of analysis by excluding broader structural issues (O'Donovan et al., 2004; Rust et al., 2005; Price et al., 2007) while the second stems from a realist approach and tries to study assessment apart from the users (Shay, 2008). Drawing on sociologists of education, Basil Bernstein and Karl Maton, Shay (2008) supports the re-conceptualization of the relationship between knowledge and assessment. In order to have rewarding assessment practices, we should center disciplinary forms of knowledge as an explicit component of the object of our assessment (Shay, 2008). A social constructivist approach to feedback requires that the students actively engage with the feedback (Careless et al., 2018; Molloy et al., 2019). One radical dimension to assessment/feedback, using social practice theory and the insights of critical theory to support assessment for social justice and learning, has been first discussed by McArthur (2010, 2012, 2013, 2018). Assessment principles within higher education, McArthur (2018) states, should not be blindly accepted; they need to be examined through a critical and complex lens of social justice.

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Regarding this research, the suggested model of improved assessment/feedback practices by the participants in the focus group involved a blend of approaches which address assessments that are both socially just by design and assessments that promote greater social justice, as suggested by McArthur (2018). These approaches, which include increasing students' roles in assessment/feedback and promoting students/teachers' literacy, mostly align with social constructivist theory. Analysis of McArthur's model of assessment and feedback practices notes a generally consistent model of good practice: she stresses active engagement on the part of students and autonomy for students in their learning, and a constructivist approach to HE assessment/feedback. The model therefore recommended behaviors which promote student-centeredness regardless of their discipline. However, instructors' willingness and institutional policies seemed to be the leading barriers into the implementation of fairer assessment/feedback practices in the EAP program. The teaching culture that exists in the program is actually resistant to the inclusive one that should exist (Trowler & Cooper, 2002). There is also a wider, almost macro level of structure in that EAP should be taught and assessed on certain kinds of standards/accuracy, which the instructors have internalized.

### **6.2. EAP programs and reform: A partial jigsaw**

Drawing upon the findings of this research, the following account will provide areas where more just practices could be promoted and where reform is possible in the EAP program.

#### **6.2.1 Language proficiency and the concept of social justice**

Conflicting definitions of language proficiency in the context were revealed by the research participants: a generic language proficiency (which they equate with grammatical instruction) along with a generic core of knowledge and skills in English. In Moore (2012), Harper, Prentice and Wilson (2011) reject the argument that language proficiency is distinct from, and a prerequisite for, academic literacy and professional skills. They also reject the argument that there is an identifiable "threshold level [of proficiency] which students must traverse in order to participate in academic or professional literacies" (p. 41), asserting that this approach encourages an approach to support that is remedial,

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decontextualized, and which construes EAL students as deficient. Harper et al. (as cited in Moore, 2012) suggest a model of integrated literacies (academic, professional and 'everyday') which have a common "generic core of knowledge and skills in English;" each of which develops simultaneously (pp. 45-6). They further argue that a decontextualized focus on generic language proficiency (which they equate with grammatical instruction) is of little value, and that what is needed is "immersion in the language domain and supported development within the domain of language use: the discipline" (p. 46).

In the EAP program, the assessment rubrics and professor feedback indicated that a great deal of emphasis is placed on accuracy (grammar usage, structure and mechanics) with 40% or 50% of an essay's grade dependent on student's accuracy in English. The cognitive resources involved in language processing and learning are finite; so too much attention on accuracy comes at the expense of other aspects of writing like fluency and complexity, and even at the expense of accuracy uptake (Larsen-Freeman, 2006). EAP assessments should include tasks that demonstrate students' ability to read, write, speak or listen to learn and use academic content. Schmitt and Hamp-Lyons (2015) reported how EAP assessment has often steered clear of assessing content knowledge, but in doing so it misses the opportunity to assess whether students are able to use the language they know to undertake challenging learning tasks. Given these findings, leading scholars in the field of second language writing and applied linguistics offer strategies for language instruction that emphasize written complexity over accuracy and suggestions for assessment measures and feedback practices that address accuracy without sacrificing students' written complexity and fluency.

Therefore, it may be useful for instructors who teach the required English courses at this institution to familiarize themselves with the scholarship in this area in order to assess whether such an approach might be useful in the local context. However, several barriers to this application exist: the material and time are both lacking for teachers. Also, teacher development training and workshops which consider this area of improvement are nonexistent in the institution. Teaching language and composition courses that deemphasize the role of accuracy can encourage students to take risks with their language learning and critical thinking, which builds their written fluency and complexity (while still

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helping them with their accuracy) and often enhances their engagement with their own writing processes and products. When structural support, along with time and material, is scarce, then the departmental role is to bring these ideas forward to the instructors.

### **6.2.2 A call for an inclusive and transformative approach in assessment /feedback in EAP programs**

A shared finding in the study by both groups of participants is the call for an enhanced role for the students. In order to achieve an effective inclusive approach, it is advised that the teachers develop assessment/feedback literacy and openness to change. Aitken (2012) concedes that in order to implement student voice successfully into assessment, teachers not only have to have the knowledge and skills, but more importantly, an attitude of care and tact in students' learning. They must trust the students, become mentors and coaches, and work with students to help them be part of the conversation. Teachers must let go of total control and invite students into their own assessment. And all of this is a problem where the culture/teacher enforces a hierarchy rather than a partnership between staff and learners.

Speaking about changes rendered by the university to be more inclusive, accepting and bringing a group (students from weak language background) into the mainstream, where the mainstream remains supreme, is therefore affirmative and not transformative change (McArthur, 2021). McArthur uses critical theorist Nancy Fraser's distinction between affirmative and transformative change. McArthur (2021) explains how an affirmative approach focuses on the end targets and can often be easily measured, while a transformative approach focuses on the causes of injustice and works from that point up. She adds that the goal of an affirmative approach to the inclusive university might be to add resources and extra mentoring or tuition to help disadvantaged or non-traditional students bridge the gap between what they can do and what the so-called traditional students can do (the composition courses in the EAP program showcased this idea). However, a transformative inclusive university would challenge its own assumptions about norms and actively address the structural forms of misrecognition. In other words, transformative change involves not just those who are welcomed into the university or who move from marginalized to inclusive spaces/positions (students from weaker

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language backgrounds), but a change in the identity and material reality of everyone involved, and in many cases of the university itself as an organization (McArthur, 2021).

Framing some students as in deficit is not the perfect model, but creating a culture where support is widely available, not targeted, is a better option. As such, the asset-framing model can be promoted as it defines students by their assets and aspirations before noting the challenges and deficits. Such an approach entails not using assessment data as the only motivator for change, placing students' learning and success at the center of all practices, not just institutional rankings (William, 2018). All these observations point to a key lesson to be distilled from the inability of EAP programs, adopting affirmative change, to fully realize fairness as proposed by McArthur (2021).

Working towards a more critical and recognition-based understanding of inclusion at any university requires a strategic and systematic approach. It is often complicated by the higher administration's strategic plan for the university. Thus, without support and commitment from top level administrators, it is difficult to enact such a vision. Nonetheless, there are small incremental changes that can be considered to support the student success/learning and the professional development of instructors.

### **6.2.3 The major role of departmental structures and organizational cultures in adopting reform**

Even when stakeholders such as the teachers and coordinators had anticipated problems in the EAP program and were actively involved in diffusing information about alternative practices, they did not share strong feelings of change and decision ownership as their thoughts would not be fully utilized by the administration. They have the power to implement changes to their teaching practices within their classrooms but not to the overall content and assessment strategies. Power differentials, coupled with the very different perspectives and interests between the administration on the one side and staff and beneficiaries on the other side, influenced and eventually undermined the potential to empower participants with less influence: the final decision will eventually be taken by the middle manager. Departmental structures and functions certainly play a crucial role in adopting any change (Blackmore & Kandiko, 2012; Trowler et al., 2003 as cited in Anakin

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et al., 2017). Moreover, Hockings (2010) states that there is little evidence of universities adjusting their assessments to cater for diverse student cohorts with instead an emphasis on students themselves having to adapt to their university's prevailing assessment styles (as cited in Hanesworth, Bracken & Elkington, 2019). The literature reveals how EAP assessment theory tends to be developed by language testers rather than EAP practitioners (Schmitt & Hamp-Lyons, 2015), whereas this research is carried out in an EAP program by a researcher integrated in EAP, language testing and assessment community at the university. In this regards, Breen (2018) argues how teachers need to challenge stereotypes of their field, and illustrate to others the power of the EAP practitioner's knowledge base in contributing to the academy as a whole.

Traditional values and beliefs (organizational cultures) seemed to be another barrier to the implementation of more fair assessment and feedback practices. The focus group interviews revealed how some teachers within the program disapproved of the idea of change and considered being fair as related to drops in the standards. This could come to a sense of 'traditional, thorough' ways of doing things - which are not necessarily better. In their attempt to study the impact of socio-cultural and structural contexts in academic change, researchers found that teachers' professional development and practice are influenced by the working context and supportive networks, the predominant teaching culture to which they belong and leadership within the department (as cited in Englund, Olofsson & Price, 2018). There is also something in here about workloads - if teachers do not have time, the pressure to change their practices (which is hard and requires reading, reflection, and support) is even more difficult. More honesty about the workload demands of marking on academics' time – in genuine ways and not through some workload models – would force change for the better in assessment practices (McArthur, 2018).

The study by Nauffal and Nader (2021) found that elements of all four cultures (collegium, bureaucracy, corporation, and enterprise) co-exist within Higher Education institutions in Lebanon and that although the predominant culture was mostly corporate within all universities, it was permanently coupled with bureaucracy so that many HEIs operated in highly regulated environments and employed a mix of both governance modes. Similarly, McNay (1995) states that organizational cultures are hybrids where there are different

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cultures. McNay's model displays four quadrants corresponding to as many types of university organizational culture: enterprise, corporate, collegiate, and bureaucratic. The cultural approach and the behavior of the higher education institutions are influenced, among other factors, by the national culture and the government policy on education. This university, like other universities in Lebanon, is a curious blend of business, public service, democracy and autocracy.

### **6.2.4 Issues of trust, honesty and forgiveness need to be reconsidered in EAP programs (Revisiting the concepts/conceptual framework):**

The concepts of trust, honesty and forgiveness seemed to be problematic in the EAP program. The students and the teachers did not share similar thoughts on these concepts. In fact, the teachers expressed how these three concepts are not context specific and that McArthur's (2018) discussions about trust, honesty and forgiveness do not necessarily apply to the Lebanese context. Data revealed how issues of forgiveness cannot be completely practiced when trust and honesty are absent with a specific category of students. The participants therefore conceded that the framework was a good place to start and that it could be used as a point of reference.

Two main issues need to be reconsidered here: the teachers' assumptions of students and the way plagiarism is dealt with in the program. Using the literature to ground the research recommendations, it is advised that the instructors use culturally responsive ways to address the issue of plagiarism with such students. It has been established in the research literature that EAL students may not understand plagiarism in the same way as students whose first language is English (Abasi & Graves, 2008; Chen & Van Ullen, 2011 as cited in Eaton & Burns, 2018). Plagiarism more broadly is seen as assuming that students 'want to cheat' rather than misunderstand the principles of good practice, they're making mistakes rather than trying to deceive staff. This situation is further complicated when faculty members from institutions in various locations around the world make false assumptions about the reasons why international EAL students might plagiarize more than students whose first language is English (Leask, 2006; Phan, 2006; Sowden, 2005, as cited in Eaton & Burns, 2018). For instance, teachers often expect students to write with agency and assume authorship of their work (Abasi & Graves, 2008; Amsberry, 2010; Sutherland-

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Smith, 2016, as cited in Eaton & Burns, 2018). However, this assumption may be incompatible with the previous learning experiences of international EAL students, who may think that it is more appropriate to show one has memorized, and can repeat by rote, what others have said (Leask, 2006; Pecorari, & Petrić, 2014, as cited in Eaton & Burns, 2018).

In this research, data revealed how students were often labeled dishonest and untrustworthy by their instructors. This is another reason that the researcher believes that labels and classifications of students may not be helpful, when what is needed is a pedagogical approach that is inclusive, dynamic and supportive, while still maintaining academic rigor. For decades, the responsibility to prevent plagiarism has been placed on individuals, meaning either the student or the professor (Bretag, 2017 as cited in Eaton & Burns, 2018). Recently, literature also recommends another multi-stakeholder approach to support students (Bretag, 2017 as cited in Eaton & Burns, 2018). In this EAP program, however, a community approach has been used not as support for students but as a means of detecting plagiarism and securing the system integrity. Consequently, the teachers needed to abide by the system's rules and policies on plagiarism penalty.

### **6.2.5 Practical steps to personalizing assessment**

Indeed, the whole assessment regime used in much of the EAP and ELT worlds would have to change very radically to ensure greater incorporation of social justice in assessment practices. While Academic Literacies, English as a Lingua Franca and Critical EAP have not resolved issues by providing alternatives to EAP instruction, they have raised important questions which have encouraged practitioner reflection and strengthened professional practice (Hyland, 2018). Hyland (2018) argues that it is local contexts, rather than universal narratives, which define what EAP is, how it is taught, and the potential it has to improve the lives of those who study it.

Within this same line of thought, I stake out my own position and argue for a more positive view of EAP and the merits of personalizing assessment in EAP programs. Social justice in assessment can exist through different tangible/actualized means. To begin with, language assessment perhaps needs to move to a place where it is developmental rather than corrective. There might also for example be a shift from an emphasis on product to process, as written about by such

authors as Jayne Pearson in regard to Pre-Sessional and IELTS assessment. Furthermore, there has to be some way of amending the rubric and proficiency expectations that shape the way language learners are currently tested. More personalized assessment may also include a proactive attitude from the instructors to trust their students and forgive these learners' repetitive language errors. Finally, students in such local contexts (EAP programs) should be involved in the assessment process and indeed assisted to become assessment literate.

### **6.3. Contribution to the literature and the institution**

Although both groups of participants expressed shared problems and concerns about the students' different educational backgrounds and the use of generic standards, increased students' participation and collaboration, as suggested in McArthur's conceptual framework (2018), seem to coincide with the global vision of the institution. This awareness of differences in the students' body has not been matched by an evolution of equitable assessment practices within the HE program. Both the concepts of responsibility and responsiveness could not be embodied in their fullest at this university. This study was an attempt to allow the seemingly voiceless group (students) to express their opinions and share their experiences about assessment and feedback in the institution. EAP programs would be more effective only when the university and academics are open to EFL students' different experiences and start to address these groups' needs differently. Similarly, Bjorkman (2011) states that "excluding the usage of English by its non-native speakers in ELF settings and not giving it the airing space, it needs in EAP would be reducing EAP qualitatively and quantitatively, and therefore, unhelpful to the learners" (p. 95).

It has been argued that insider research needs to address ethical constraints related to power imbalances and dependent relationships. Moreover, according to Anderson and Jones (2000), educationalists researching the management of their own institutions face four specific dilemmas: epistemological, methodological, political, and ethical (as cited in Mercer, 2007). Insider research has been used here in order to answer the three research questions and for the sake of illustrating the teachers and students' experiences with assessment and use of feedback. The activities by which unfairness is occurring at the institution may initially appear arcane but examined more closely-as insider- they are easily

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understood by those within the university. It has been argued that when participants engage in real-world experiences, evaluate what had happened in the past, and reflect on their own experiences, this can build assumptions that would eventually inform their future decisions and actions (Hart & Paucar-Caceres, 2016). Arthur (2007) argues that change is likely to be most effective when students and academics work together as “insider activists” taking account of institutional context and culture (as cited in Higgins & Thomas, 2016).

This study contributes to the literature when it attempts to research the embedding of social justice as portrayed in McArthur's (2018) five concepts within the instructors' practices in the EAP program. It has attempted to apply assessment for social justice in two ways as suggested in McArthur (2016, 2018). First, the research showed how some methods of assessment and feedback used in the EAP program may inaccurately demonstrate students' learning, and this finding suggests that the five concepts work specifically to EAP rather than just in a generic sense. Second, the research attempted to foster an environment that supports students' inclusive role and students and teachers' assessment literacy as revealed in the literature. Moreover, this thesis is a rare example of work that examines this topic in this context: It discusses EAP in Lebanon, and how in this institution, students from three different educational language backgrounds in the country (which is quite unusual) are effectively treated the same and are tested according to quite generic standards.

This study does not only contribute to the literature in the field of assessment and feedback and EAP pedagogy in higher education, but it also offers recommendations for the university where this research is conducted and for other higher education institutions in Lebanon and countries with similar experience or context respectively. Finally, findings offer an opportunity for any universities which have EAP programs to reflect on their practices. I am not saying that other universities will be the same; outside EAP researchers and readers will likely make the transferability judgements themselves, as the literature suggests that this “native standard” testing model is quite common. Lincoln & Guba (1985) state that “It is, in summary, not the naturalist's task to provide an index of transferability,

it is his or her responsibility to provide the database that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers” (p.316).

### **6.4. Suggestions for further research**

The findings and implications of the present close quarters study provide directions for future research. This research has demonstrated how an insider case study can be usefully deployed to study local assessment/feedback practices and the embedding of social justice. Further studies or different research designs could address the gaps and follow on from this work. One such suggestion could involve a comparative case study which investigates students’ experiences with assessment/feedback using inclusive strategies to enhance students’ awareness and literacy, as recommended by the literature (O’Neil, 2017; Pearson, 2017). Another suggestion could explore students, not teachers, perceptions of fairer practices in EAP programs from different institutions in order to collect similarities and differences. This study could be repeated across a larger number of institutions (e.g., a different methodologically approach like surveys would enable the researcher to talk about prevalence), and undertaking it in different cultural contexts where EAP is taught would no doubt prove enlightening. Finally, in order to carry McArthur’s (2018) five concepts further, the researcher could explore teachers and students’ perceptions on how to improve trust, honesty, and forgiveness in the EAP program. As an extension study on the back of this work, looking at EAP at other places in Lebanon and/or elsewhere, something on a larger scale, would allow the researcher to make broader claims.

### **6.5. A sense of the caveats**

There are two major caveats in this present research. First, it is argued that results from qualitative studies are often not generalizable because of their small-scale nature, yet qualitative studies are often not positioned to claim generalizability (Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011). Instead, rich and illuminating insights from the findings are their merits. In this research, data richness, triangulation and saturation have been confirmed by the author of this study when repeated ideas by the participants seemed to be prominent.

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Second, as in all similar studies, this research will have been influenced by the researcher's position. Measures used in this research to tackle this include involving two stakeholder groups as informants and using a variety of opinions within the groups, to ensure a wider representation of perspectives. In addition, the researcher has been transparent in acknowledging this but also taking a systematic, theoretically informed approach to analysis.

### **6.6. Reflections on the development of the researcher's skills**

As a researcher, conducting this study has helped me with gaining skills in research design and methods, data collection and analysis. In addition, doing the research involved developing survival strategies and going through challenging issues on the personal and social levels. On a personal level, I learned how to work under pressure and with minimal everyday life facilities and services because of the dire situation in my country. I incorporated habits into my new life as a PhD student that served me well throughout the course of my graduate studies, such as setting deadlines, using a calendar with assigned tasks, and being self-motivated (Mays & Smith, 2009). On the social level, I learned how to negotiate meanings with different colleagues. To some instructors, the concepts have been quite eye-opening and challenging; the model was against their views and their norms; therefore, the researcher's task was not easy in this regard. As an instructor, this research has allowed me to reflect on my own teaching and assessment history in the department and helped collect advisors and develop a support group. My colleagues and I had the chance to revisit current practices, reconsider issues of plagiarism and language accuracy, and co-construct different developmental assessment/feedback practices in the EAP program (Mays & Smith, 2009). Eventually, the researcher learned that recurrent assessment/feedback practices have been internalized in the department. Although there have been changes made involving assessment types, rubrics distribution, and reduced course timeline over the years, the implemented changes needed to meet the policies/vision at the macro-Level; otherwise, these changes were not likely to be accepted.

### **6.7. What's next?**

The investment in EFL students of weak language background, which has been underserved, is essential to tackle the betterment of postsecondary education. Educators must strengthen the capacities of institutions and programs to educate the country's emerging population. The divide between private and public schools has impeded these students' ability to receive effective language learning. In fact, the differences in cultures of learning within the same educational system played a significant role in students' academic achievement at the university level (Bacha & Bahous, 2013). Moreover, countries in which students follow the same curriculum up to age 16 show higher results on achievement tests than countries in which students are directed into different secondary education tracks at very early ages (Heus & Dronkers, 2010b as cited in Dronkers, Velden, & Dunne, 2012). The students' language background may lead to differential assessment outcomes which fail to adequately demonstrate students' learning (Williams, 2018). Hence students, arriving at the university door without (foreign) language advantages, complete their degrees with difficulty at unacceptably low rates which in turn affect their graduation. Such limited access has hindered their ability therefore to meet administrative/educational needs in higher education. These students will need to afford a much more expensive education.

Shutting more and more people out of the prospect afforded by university education might create bitterly divided groups in the university and society as well. A study recognized that weakness in educational structure and content may have contributed to civil conflict and that an education system that reinforces segregation can represent a dangerous source of conflict (Frayha, 2009 as cited in Baytiyeh, 2017). The Lebanese school system, Baytiyeh (2017) adds, has long fostered the development of sectarian views in children at an early age, views that no doubt played a major role in the sectarian violence committed in the country during the past decades. The fact that certain students are often seen as different and consequently are socially or academically unacceptable is a stigma that many students experience (Scott, Webber, Lupart, Aitken, & Scott. D, 2014). As a result, long-term institutional support and funding is needed to empower public schools to reach a level of

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stability that ensures the students enrolled receive the same quality academic programs offered by other schools/institutions.

On the other hand, EAP programs are key vehicles for improving the higher education opportunities of EFL students or students from low language backgrounds. Affordable and accessible postsecondary education does more than simply providing students with greater earnings capacity in the future; it is associated with a range of broader and more robust political, cultural and social impacts. Tilak (2009) states that higher education constitutes a public good, and it produces public or social goods (externalities) which benefit simultaneously the individuals and the larger society. Because the observations and conclusions made in this study may be transferable to another EAP context, I seek to understand, in the spirit of Breen's (2019) call to EAP academics to get to work across our own communities, how we may contribute to building more equitable institutions and disrupt the marginalization of EAP within English language teaching registers.

Higher education can also serve a public good through increasing the educational/critical awareness of the population, such as in the Lebanese context where students struggle to fight sectarianism in different forms, following Freire's critical pedagogy concepts. Freire's critical pedagogy, which has been influenced by the Frankfurt School, is deeply rooted in the notion that education should play a role in creating a critical, just and democratic society (Nouri & Sajjadi, 2014 as cited in Shih, 2018). Freire (2000 as cited in Shih, 2018) uses criticism as a tool for emancipation, and higher education should reflect that as well. Teachers, course coordinators and authorities need to seriously consider a different strategy for engaging fair assessment/feedback practices to help such students. However, one key lesson to be drawn from this case study is the need for a heightened awareness of power dynamics and differences in the application of McArthur's (2018) conceptual framework. Perhaps implementing McArthur's (2018) framework is more valuable when participants already have a certain degree of shared trust, and when most of the participants have some level of assessment/feedback literacy. The paper has shown how issues of trust, honesty and forgiveness, coupled with the different perspectives and interests among teachers and between teachers and administration, influenced, and ultimately undermined the potential of fair assessment/feedback to empower students

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within the EAP program. The findings revealed practice-based tensions to meet specific institutional targets for EFL students' participation, while broadening students' participation more generally.

These things are locked in at various levels, and so much needs to change in order to facilitate the kind of changes needed. Other key lessons to be gained from this study require consideration of what factors led to and perpetuated the gap between students and teachers in terms of some fair practices, and further what factors held the possibility of reducing this gap. As this research shows, there are a lot of other power dynamics and vested interests at play. The truth, which we hold about EAP programs being accessible to different students in their current forms, is no longer accepted if the country's cultural and educational divides become more pronounced. While our universities become more internationally and ethnically diverse, they are not necessarily becoming more socially and economically diverse if fee and entry structures privilege mainly wealthy overseas students (McArthur, 2021). Improving fairness in schools and in EAP programs is a slow incremental process, but one which characterizes just learning institutions. Access to fair, not only equal, education should now represent one of the most fundamental goals of Higher Education.

**Appendices:**

**Appendix One: Essay Rubrics**

**ENGL 101 Fall 2021-22 Opinion Essay- Editing Checklist**

**Content of the essay (50 points)**

- The essay has a catchy title (no full stop at the end of the title).
- The essay has a clear thesis statement. The thesis statement is not a question.
- The topic sentences of the body paragraphs are related to the thesis statement. The topic sentences are not questions.
- Each body paragraph has at least 100 words.
- The ideas and examples in each paragraph support the topic sentence.
- There are clear logical transitions from one idea to the next.
- There are appropriate opinion phrases.
- The conclusion does not introduce a new topic.

**Language and Writing Style (Note: Penalties apply for each occurrence of an error) (50 points)**

- A range of vocabulary is used effectively to express the ideas.
- Grammatical structures are used in a manner appropriate for the module/task and ENGL 101 level.
- Well-structured sentences are used: no run-ons, comma-splices, fragments, incorrect relative clauses or incorrect reported question forms (-2)
- All subjects agree with verbs. (-2)
- Correct verb tenses and/or verb forms are used. (-2)
- Proper capitalization. (-1)
- Proper punctuation is used. (-1)
- Proper pronoun reference is used. (-1)
- No informal language is used (e.g. wanna, u, thru). (-1)
- No etc. and/or ... (three dots) are used. (-1)
- All the words are spelled correctly. (-1)

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**ENG. 102: Argumentative/Documented Essay Rubric**

<b>Name:</b> _____	<b>80 and above</b>  <b>Very Good</b>	<b>70 -79</b>  <b>Good</b>	<b>60 – 69</b>  <b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>55 – 59</b>  <b>Unsatisfactory</b>	<b>Below 55</b>  <b>Inadequate</b>
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<p><b>Content _____</b> <b>/40</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Clearly defined claim/thesis</li> <li>*Extensively developed support</li> <li>*Unified paragraphs</li> <li>*Original treatment of topic</li> <li>*Relevant backing from articles</li> <li>*Does not have fallacies</li> <li>*Effective introduction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Effective claim/thesis</li> <li>*Many specific supporting details</li> <li>*Has general focus &amp; unity</li> <li>*Some originality of ideas</li> <li>*Has sense of unity and completeness which may be a little flawed in one of the body paragraphs</li> <li>*Uses backing from readings</li> <li>*Does not have fallacies</li> <li>*Well-developed introduction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Has a clear claim/thesis which may be general</li> <li>*Some development of support</li> <li>*Relevant evidence but not sufficient</li> <li>* Ideas may ramble somewhat, clusters of ideas loosely connected</li> <li>* Limited backing from articles</li> <li>*May include a few logical fallacies</li> <li>*Brief introduction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Unclear or undeveloped claim/thesis</li> <li>*Minimal support (not enough &amp;/or too general)</li> <li>*Focus may drift or shift abruptly</li> <li>*Little elaboration of detail</li> <li>*Some irrelevant material</li> <li>*Minimal backing from articles</li> <li>*Contains some logical fallacies</li> <li>*Basic introduction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Lack of defined claim/thesis</li> <li>*Unclear or inadequate support</li> <li>*No elaboration of details</li> <li>*Little or no backing from articles</li> <li>*Lacks a sense of completeness</li> <li>*Includes numerous logical fallacies</li> <li>*Very basic introduction</li> </ul>
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**Social Justice within Assessment/Feedback Practices in an EAP Program**

<p><b>Organization</b> __ /10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Predictive/catchy title</li> <li>*Varied topic sentences starting each support paragraph</li> <li>*Unified paragraph development</li> <li>*Skilled use of transitions-words &amp; sentences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Broad title</li> <li>*Topic sentence starts each support paragraph</li> <li>*Evidence and examples linked to thesis but not very explicitly</li> <li>*Uses adequate transitions between paragraphs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Unoriginal title</li> <li>*Topic sentences in one support paragraph</li> <li>*Supports tend to relate logically to one another in t least one body paragraph</li> <li>*Limited use of transitions in support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Possibly lacks a title</li> <li>*Faulty paragraphing</li> <li>*Weak or missing topic sentences</li> <li>*Few transitions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Unclear essay structure</li> <li>*No topic sentences</li> <li>*Illogical arrangement of ideas</li> <li>*No transitions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Documentation</b> __ /10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Correct APA citations</li> <li>Skillfully integrates citations in an original paper</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Correct APA citations</li> <li>Relies mostly on paraphrasing and summarizing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Correct APA documentation</li> <li>With a few errors in format</li> <li>Overly relies on citations or one of the sources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Serious errors in citation form</li> <li>*Lacks originality and/or shows many instances of wrong APA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Incorrect citations - If any</li> <li>And/or excessive quoting</li> <li>No accreditation accompanying sources</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Sentences / Mechanics &amp; Style ___/40</b></p>	<p>*Very few, if any, sentence errors (no pattern of any one type of error)</p> <p>*Very few mechanical errors (i.e., spelling, punctuation, etc.)</p> <p>*Complex, varied sentence structure</p> <p>*Formal, sophisticated word choice</p>	<p>*Few sentence errors, no pattern of repeated errors</p> <p>*Few mechanical errors</p> <p>*Varied sentence structure</p> <p>*Some use of formal vocabulary but word choice may lack sophistication</p> <p>*Generally smooth flow of sentences</p>	<p>*Sentences could have errors in structure &amp; punctuation but are relatively clear</p> <p>*Some mechanical errors that do not interfere with meaning</p> <p>*General sentence sense, some variety</p> <p>*Common vocabulary; perhaps repetitive or slang</p>	<p>*Patterns of several types of sentence errors</p> <p>*Varied mechanical errors</p> <p>* May demonstrate excessive monotony, little sentence variety</p> <p>*Ineffective/informal word choice</p>	<p>*Many patterns of sentence errors which interfere with clarity</p> <p>*Numerous, serious mechanical errors</p> <p>*Basic &amp;/or unclear sentence structure</p> <p>* Inaccurate/incorrect word usage</p>
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**Appendix Two:**

**Interview Schedule Guide (The students)**

**I- The topic to be discussed:** The research aims to explore final-year students' experiences with assessment/feedback practices and then compare these views with how their teachers embed such practices in the institution. The use of McArthur's (2018) *named concepts (trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness)* as conceptual tools for analysis has influenced the research questions formulation, overall methodology and data analysis approach.

**II- Phase one (The warm-up):** Research participants will be asked some general open-ended questions at the beginning to get them engaged and later other subsidiary questions to explain/explore the 5 individual concepts.

- Where are you from?
- What kind of school did you attend?
- Which program are you studying?
- How are you getting on at university?
- Why are you taking EAP?
- How would you describe your experience in the EAP program in general?
- How did this experience/this participation in the program affect you in general?
- How would you rank your relationship with your instructors and administration on a scale of hierarchy (is it leaning more towards a distant relationship? Or a close one?) Explain your answer.

**III- Phase two (The exploration): The issues within each concept/practice to be discussed, together with questions and prompts:**

**Practices of trust:** Because wider assessment literacy, transparency and collaboration have been suggested as strategies to increase trust, the interview could ask questions such as:

- 4) Which different kinds of assessments did you have on the English courses? Which different kinds of feedback?
- 5) What do you think about them in general? Do you prefer some to others?
- 6) Did your teacher's feedback include different types of feedback? For example, did your feedback include instances of self-assessment, peer assessment along with the instructor's feedback?
- 7) How did you deal with the assessment criteria/the rubric used to evaluate your written assignments? Did you read them? Did they make sense to you?

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**Practices of honesty:** The interview could address honesty with questions like:

- 1) How have your instructors dealt with the topic of plagiarism in class?  
How do you feel about this?
- 2) Describe your experience with the online proctoring service (OBS) lately used by the institution to proctor students? How did you feel about it?
- 3) What do you think of the use of “Turnitin” by your institution? Are you comfortable with it?

**Practices of forgiveness:** The interview could address forgiveness with questions like:

- 4) In general, what would make a student fail a writing task in the EAP program?
- 5) In assessing writing assignments, what overall percentage was given for the following: Language? Content? Organization? Format? How do you feel about the weight given for each? Do you prefer a different weighting?
- 6) In general, does the feedback given help you with future assignments, or is it specific to the assignment in question?

**Practices of responsibility:** Responsibility is defined as the students’ inclusive role in the assessment/feedback processes for them to be more engaged in their own learning.

- 7) Did the EAP staff give you some responsibilities? Did they develop your responsibility to learn on your own? If yes, how did they do that?
- 8) How does feedback work in EAP – is it part of a conversation or simply something you receive? For example, did you get the chance to engage with your instructor’s feedback and assess your own work as well as others?
- 9) Did you participate in any formulation of assessment tasks? Did you choose articles/discussion topics?
- 10) How does this participation/new responsibility or lack of make you feel?

**Practices of responsiveness:** The interview could address responsiveness with questions like:

- 11) What do you think of the EAP program not only in terms of learning English but also in terms of your development of learning?
- 12) Has the way assessment/feedback been used in EAP allowed you to learn skills needed in the future and not only in writing classes? Explain your answer.
- 13) Were the written tasks and feedback given clear enough that you did not need to refer to the teacher for further clarification?

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**IV- Phase three (Core questions):**

- Is there anything that you suggest being changed in the EAP program and especially within assessment/feedback practices?

**V- Warm-down/Closing question:**

- Would you like to ask me any questions?
- Do you have any final thoughts?

General Comments:

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## Social Justice within Assessment/Feedback Practices in an EAP Program

### Interview Schedule Guide (The instructors)

**I- The topic to be discussed:** The research aims to explore final-year students' experiences with assessment/feedback practices and then compare these views with how their teachers embed such practices in the institution. The use of McArthur's (2018) *named concepts* (trust, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility and responsiveness) as conceptual tools for analysis has influenced the research questions formulation, overall methodology and data analysis approach.

**II- Start-up interview questions:** Research participants will be asked general open-ended questions at the beginning to get them engaged and later other subsidiary questions to explain/explore the 5 individual concepts.

- How long have you been teaching at the institution? How long have you been teaching writing/academic writing?
- Do you like teaching writing?
- How would you describe your experience in the EAP program in general?
- How did this experience/this participation in the program affect you in general?
- How would you rank your relationship with your students and administration on a scale of hierarchy? (Is it leaning more towards a formal and distant relationship? or a close one?) Explain your answer.

**III- The issues within each concept/practice to be discussed, together with possible questions/prompts:**

**Practices of trust:** Because wider assessment literacy, transparency and collaboration have been suggested as strategies to increase trust, the interview could ask questions such as:

- 1) What are the different kinds of assessments used in the EAP program? What do you think of the different kinds of assessment used? Which ones do you like? Why?
- 2) What are the different kinds of feedback used in the EAP program? Are they formal? Informal? What do you think of the different kinds of feedback used? Which ones do you like? Why?
- 3) Did you include different types of feedback? For example, did your feedback include practices of self-assessment, peer assessment along with the written feedback?

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- 4) How have you dealt with the assessment criteria/the rubric used to evaluate students' written assignments? How did you prepare students to use them?

**Practices of honesty:** The interview could address honesty with questions like:

- 1) How have you dealt with the topic of plagiarism in class?
- 2) Describe your experience with the online proctoring service lately used by the institution to proctor students? How did you feel about it?
- 3) What do you think of the use of Turnitin? How do you prepare students for it?

**Practices of forgiveness:** The interview could address forgiveness with questions like:

- 1) In general, what would make a student fail a writing task in the EAP program?
- 2) In assessing writing assignments, what overall percentage was given for the following: Language? Content? Organization? Format? What do you think of the weight given for each? How might this distribution affect the students? Explain your answers
- 3) In general, does the feedback help the students with future assignments, or is it specific to the assignment in question?

**Practices of responsibility:** Responsibility is defined as the students' inclusive role in the assessment/feedback processes for them to be more engaged in their own learning.

- 1) As an EAP staff, did you give the students some responsibilities? How guided is the students' independent learning?
- 2) Were the students given the chance to engage with feedback and assess their own work as well as others?
- 3) Did the students participate in any formulation of assessment outcomes/tasks? Did they choose articles/discussion topics?

**Practices of responsiveness:** The interview could address responsiveness with questions like:

- 1) What do you think of the EAP program not only in terms of learning English but also in terms of students' development of learning?

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2) Has the way assessment/feedback been used in EAP allowed the students to learn skills needed in the future and not only in writing classes? Explain your answer.

**IV- Closing/warm-down questions:**

-Would you like to ask me any questions?

-Do you have any final thoughts?

Date of the interview:

Interviewee number:

Interviewee position:

Time of the interview:

General Comments:

**Appendix Three: Focus-group Interview Matrix**

Based on McArthur's (2018) framework, what is a more ideal model of just assessment/feedback practices in the EAP program?

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Which fair assessment/feedback practices are likely to work in the EAP program? And why?	Which fair assessment/feedback practices are not likely to work in the EAP program? And why?
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