

The Impact of Self, Peer, and Teacher Evaluation on Iranian EFL Students' Writing Performance

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Abstract

The present study attempted to scrutinize if applying different types of writing evaluation may influence EFL learners' writing performance with respect to their general language proficiency level. A further concern of the study was to explore the specific area of improvement in terms of the five major components: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. The subjects were 106 female Iranian EFL learners of intermediate proficiency level. The design was an intact-factorial, and the instruments utilized comprised a Nelson intermediate level test of general English proficiency, two compositions as pre-test and post-test, and four compositions as experimental tasks. The subjects were divided into three groups: a control group receiving teacher evaluation, and two experimental groups receiving self- and peer-evaluation, respectively. The findings indicated that peer-evaluation had a significant effect on the students' general writing performance as well as on the five components explored in this study. It was also revealed that there was an interaction between the evaluation type and pre-test / post-test, and between the components and pre-test / post-test. On the contrary, no interaction was found between the type of evaluation, components, and pre-test / post-test.

Introduction

In writing classes, teachers consider responding to the students' writing as their main task and the most time-consuming one but most of them have not an obvious idea of how to provide written feedback on students' writing or what types of feedback are necessary, and most students have received no instruction in how to use written feedback or have not received any written feedback at all (Chastain, 1988).

Writing evaluation will inevitably involve some degrees of self-disclosure in which teachers and students move beyond their conventional relationship. Nelson & Murphy (1993) have reiterated the importance of collaborative learning. They argue that as a shift in the teaching of composition from an emphasis on product to an emphasis on process, many writing instructors began to use peer-response groups in their writing classes. Elsewhere, White & Arndt (1991) restate that essentially, we see a process-focused approach to writing as an enabling approach, and the goal of this approach is to nurture the skills with which writers work out their own solutions to the problems they set themselves, with

which they shape their raw material into a coherent message.

What is of paramount importance here, however, is the role of feedback which seems to be central to the process of teaching and learning writing. It is, therefore, important to develop an awareness of the nature and function of feedback so that teachers and learners can perform their roles effectively in the writing classroom.

As to writing evaluation itself, Brown (2001) believes that nowadays, it is embedded in the learner-centered instruction. Elsewhere, he holds that because language teaching is a domain that so often presupposes classrooms where students have very little language proficiency with which to negotiate with the teacher, some teachers shy away from giving learners the “power” associated with a learner-centered approach (p.47).

With respect to peer-evaluation of writing, Abbott & Bogas (2004), Hong & Passonno (2004), and Daigle & Egolf (2004) unanimously agree on the positive effect of peer-evaluation on the student writers’ performance. For example, Daigle & Egolf (2004) argue that many studies show those classroom activities that encourage active learning in group lead to better understanding and greater retention. Meanwhile, Mooney (2004), and Fury (2004) have no belief in peer-evaluation. As Fury (2004) believes, through peer-evaluation of writing, in order to become (good) writers, we spend a great deal of time throughout the semester honing our skills of critical reading and critical thinking, but the outcome is not as satisfactory as expected.

So as to self-evaluation of writing, Ansley & Finaly (2004), Jud (2004), and Nuger (2004) are in favor of this kind of evaluation. For instance, Nuger (2004) claims that in so doing, students should become familiar with principles and patterns of critical thinking. On the contrary, Atten (2004), Azimi (2004), Rod (2004), and Nielsen (2004) are against self-evaluation of writing. As an example, Rod (2004) believes that when self evaluating of writing, he would try to portray thoughts in a clear manner, but his grammatical mistakes and several ideas often dilute his argument.

In terms of teacher evaluation of writing, some researchers strongly agree on the positive effect of this kind of writing (Sigmon, 2004; Swanson et al. 2004). As Sigmon (2004) holds, to do the job effectively and efficiently, there are points to take into consideration as a teacher such as to have more specific information about the area where the students are not performing well, or to know the rubric or scoring guide being used to measure the students’ performance. However, there exist other findings which negate the positive effects of teacher evaluation of writing on the students’ writing performance (Rees, 2004; Mentor, 2004). Mentor (2004) claims, that she has tried outlines and keywords on the board, handouts, individual meetings, midterm evaluation, and lecturing with no use.

Sengupta (1998) asserts that many researchers have studied peer- and self-evaluation in L1 and L2 writing (e.g. Mangelsdorf 1992; Mendonca & Johnson 1994). Accordingly, the findings suggest that

student writers take selective account of peer comment when they revise, preferring to depend more on their own knowledge. Mangelsdorf (1992, p.280) reports that peer reviews are always rated negatively by Asian students, and raises the question of the effect of teacher-centered cultures on the way students regard peer comments.

However, there is a vital need to make a thorough, and more importantly “simultaneous” investigation through the impact of self, peer, and teacher evaluation on the writing performance of the “Iranian” EFL learners as unfortunately, there hasn’t been any adequate, efficient, and comprehensive research in this field in our country so far.

To achieve the purpose of this study, the following main questions were formulated: “Does the type of evaluation (self, peer, and teacher) have any significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL students’ writing performance on a test of writing as a whole?” and “Does the type of evaluation have any significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL students’ writing performance considering the content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics components of writing?”

Method

1. Subject

118 adult female students at Simin educational association in Tehran participated in this study. In order to have more homogeneous groups, a Nelson test was administered and 106 intermediate students whose scores were between one standard deviation above and below the mean of the test were selected. Then, the screened students were classified into two groups: 1-A control group whose writings were corrected by the teacher herself, an 2-An experimental group which was further divided into two sub-groups, i.e., the group that received peer-evaluation and the one that received self-evaluation on their writing. All the subjects aged 18 and over.

2. Instrumentation

The instrumentations utilized in this study were a pre-test including a Nelson test and a composition (Characteristics of a good teacher), a post-test writing (Characteristics of a good student), and four compositions as homework (The reason for marriage, The advantages and disadvantages of TV programs, The effects of education on your future life, and Not knowing a foreign language can sometimes be embarrassing.)

There was a pilot study of two phases one semester before the original study. In phase 1, the Nelson test was piloted with a group of subjects similar to the original sample, and in phase 2 the most suitable topics of writing were selected. The result was 16 topics out of which the researcher selected two as the pre- and the post-test and four as their homework.

3. Procedure

The subjects of this study were divided into three groups: one control, and two experimental ones. Then, in an early separate session, a composition test (Characteristics of a good teacher) was given to the students to elicit evidence in order to compare the post-test writing test (Characteristics of a good student) with prior to receiving any kind of evaluation. It should be mentioned that during the course, all the four compositions (The reason for marriage, The advantages and disadvantage of TV programs, The effects of education on your future life, and Not knowing a foreign language can sometimes be embarrassing.) of each student of the control group were evaluated by the teacher only, while those compositions of every subject of the experimental groups were evaluated as follows: one group by the peer of the student, and the other by the student herself. Undoubtedly, the entire subjects (in all groups) received their paper after each evaluation (to receive feedback).

4. Scoring

After the compositions' being evaluated either by the teacher, or the peers, or the student herself, they were re-evaluated by three scorers (inter-rater scoring) to have reliable results. The scoring was done based on ESL Composition Profile by Jacobs et al. (1981) for an objective measure as this scale focuses on the writing components namely , content, organization, vocabulary , grammar , and mechanics. It should be mentioned that the average of the three scorings by the three scorers for each composition including a pre-test and a post-test composition as well as four other compositions during the study were calculated. As a result, each subject had one single score for each of her compositions, that is, she had six scores altogether.

5. Results and discussion

One-Way ANOVA

Here, the F-Observed value, .078, at the 2 degree of freedom, is lower than the critical value of F, i.e., .925 ($F\text{-Observed} = .078 < F\text{-Critical} = .925$). By this comparison, it was revealed that the three research groups enjoyed the similar level of proficiency.

MANOVA

To investigate through the effect of the type of evaluation on the EFL students' performance on a test of writing, a MANOVA was run. Table 1 shows that the F-Observed value for the effect of the type of evaluation, 13.63 at 2 and 103 degrees of freedom, is greater than the critical F-Value, i.e., 3.09. Thus, the regarding null-hypothesis is rejected.

Table1: MANOVA Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source of Evaluation	Sum of Squares	D.F	Mean Squares	-F Observed	F- Critical
Type of Evaluation (Eval-type)	142.92	2	71.46	13.63**	3.09
Within Cells	539.96	103	5.24		

A. One-Way effect

According to table 2 (F-Observed = 32.92 > F-Critical = 2.42), it is statistically proved that peer-evaluation has had a significant effect on the improvement of the writing components of the subjects' writing here.

Table2: MANOVA Tests involving "Components" Within-Subjects Effects

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	D.F	Mean Squares	F- Observed	F- Critical
Components	426.87	4	106.77	32.92**	2.42
Eval-type by Components	140.24	8	17.53	5.41**	1.98
Within Cells	1335.75	412	3.24		

B. Two -Way interaction

Through table 3, it is proved that the type of evaluation has a significant effect on the students' writing performance considering the writing components of: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics (Components by pre-test / post-test: F-Observed = 5.52 > F-Critical = 2.42).

C.Three-Way interactions

The only none-significant F-Value belongs to the three-way interactions among the type of evaluation, components and pre-test / post-test (F-Observed = 1.13 < F-Critical = 1.98, Table3). The result indicates that there is no interaction among pre-test / post-test, the evaluation type, and the writing components as factors of this study.

Table3: MANOVA Tests involving “Component by Pre-test / Post-test” Within-Subjects Effects

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	D.F	Mean Squares	F- Observed	F- Critical
Components by Pre-test / Post-test	13.26	4	3.32	5.52**	2.42
Eval-type by Components by Pre-test / Post-test	5.41	8	.68	1.13	1.98
Within Cells	247.41	412	.60		

Discussion

The findings of this study are in line with the general conclusion drawn from other studies in this regard (Hughes & Large, 1993; Miller & Neg, 1994; Freeman, 1995; Dyer, 1996; Brown, 2001; Patri, 2002) that Peer-evaluation of writing has a significant impact on the improvement of the student writers' performance. As an example, in a study, Patri (2002) found that when assessment criteria are firmly set, peer-evaluation enables students to judge the performance of their peers in a manner comparable to those of the teachers. The research findings are also in congruity with the studies of Abbott & Bogas (2004), Daigle & Egolf (2004), and Hong & Passonno (2004). For example, Daigle & Egolf (2004) claim that in peer-evaluation of writing, as a problem-based learning, the problem comes first and provides the incentive to learn and understand the concepts. However, contrary to the previous findings, Sengupta (1998) in her study came to the conclusion that the traditional roles of the teacher and learner in the school curriculum seem so deep-rooted that the only possible interpretation of knowledge appears to be that it is transmitted from the teacher to the student, and not constructed by the classroom community. As she argues, unless these perceptions regarding teachers' roles are addressed, it is probable that little value will be attached to peer-evaluation, and collaborative and autonomous learning may not become a reality.

Conclusion

As presented in the “Discussion” section, the experimental group, having received peer-evaluation of writing, out-performed the other experimental and control group having received self- and teacher-evaluation, respectively. Consequently, the corresponding null hypothesis, the type of evaluation has no impact on the writing performance of students as a whole product was rejected.

Considering that the control and experimental groups consisted of students with similar English

proficiency and that they had followed the same procedure, it can be supported that “Peer-evaluation” had helped in achieving much better pieces of writing as a whole and in respect of the writing components in question. There was also advancement in the aforementioned experimental groups’ writing components, i.e., content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. Hence, the corresponding hypotheses as the type of evaluation have no effect on the writing performance of students considering the components of writing: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics were also rejected.

The findings of this research may encourage the teachers who still believe in teacher-centeredness in language teaching to change their viewpoints in favor of more learner-centered approaches. The results are also useful for students. Learning how to write well through peer-evaluation would be more enjoyable and meaningful, because it moves away from the boring and tedious process of the analysis of the traditional type of writing evaluation, i.e., teacher-evaluation. As Brown (2001) asserts, this way, students enhance their sense of competence and self-worth. Syllabus designers and textbook writers will also benefit from the results of this study. As Biber & Rappen (2002) claim, they can introduce a variety of topics, and revise pedagogy to reflect actual use that can result in radical changes which in turn facilitate the learning process for students.

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