



## Social Sciences

*Elixir Soc. Sci.* 79 (2015) 30282-30285

**Elixir**  
ISSN: 2229-712X

# The Effect of Learning Journal Writing plus Feedback on the Degree of the Descriptive, Reflective and Critical Writing on Iranian Advanced EFL Learners

Masood Siyyari<sup>1</sup> and Mousavi, Zahra<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>TEFL, Faculty of Foreign Languages & Literature, Science & Research Branch, IAU, Tehran, Iran.

<sup>2</sup>Damavand Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received: 1 December 2014;

Received in revised form:

20 January 2015;

Accepted: 4 February 2015;

#### Keywords

Writing, Alternative assessment;  
Descriptive, Reflective,  
Critical writing, Feedback,  
Learning journals,  
Quantitative survey.

### ABSTRACT

The mastery of writing skill is a crucial for ESL/EFL students. Scholars in the field of language teaching and learning have suggested so many strategies and methods to improve writing composing. One of these methods is journal writing. However, whether the students actually realize that journal writing may improve a special kind of writing has not been explored. Therefore, the present study was conducted to investigate the effect of applying journal writing on the descriptive, reflective, and critical ability of EFL learners. The study included 80 male and female EFL learners of Hermes institute at the advanced level of language proficiency who were selected, and randomly assigned to experimental and control group. In the course of 10 sessions, the experimental group took the pretest and post test by which the teacher feedback and during which the treatment rubric were introduced. In control group, besides the pretest and posttest, they were provided with traditional writing with no treatment. Descriptive statistics and a paired sample t-test were utilized to analyze the data demonstrated that the two groups were significantly different regarding their writing ability. In order to compare the posttest of the three experimental groups while taking into account their initial differences on pretest (i.e. covariate) ANCOVA was administered. It was concluded that descriptive and reflective models of writing can lead to higher improvement in writing. In other words, the results of this study revealed that descriptive and reflective journal writing have positive effects on the learners' writing achievements and provided opportunity for teachers to modify and revise their teaching performances in terms of allocating much time on the content of the learners' writings to achieve the qualified teaching and learning.

© 2015 Elixir All rights reserved

### Introduction

"There is no doubt that writing is the most difficult skill for L2 learners to master. The difficulty lies not only in generating and organizing ideas, but also in translating these ideas into readable text" (Richards and Renandya, p. 303). However, students can practice and improve new grammatical structures, vocabulary or expressions they have learnt through writing. Raimes (1983) states that students become seriously involved in the process of languages learning in a unique way that enables them to express new ideas through writing. White and Arndth (1991) introduced writing as an important experience: "Through writing we are able to share ideas, arouse feelings, persuade and convince other people, we are able to discover and articulate ideas in ways that only writing makes possible" (p.1).

To produce a well-constructed piece of writing a set of specialized skills and techniques need to be utilized to express the writer's opinions or thoughts clearly and efficiently which consist of how to obtain ideas about what s/he will write on, how to express them in a sequence of sentences, how to organize them chronologically and coherently, and how to review and then to revise the composition (Ratnasari, 2004).

Comparing L1 and L2 writers Silva (1993, cited in Brown, 2007) has found that the L2 writers have some problems in the use of appropriate grammatical and rhetorical conventions and lexical variety of writing; they differ in their planning, are less fluent, less accurate and less effective in stating goals than L1 writers. Obviously, the main reason of these problems is their

lack of exposure to the language. The students can apply their particular knowledge of language use; namely, word choice, combining words into logical and grammatical sentence structures, appropriate registers, etc to better understand the authors' construction of texts by reading extensively as Yale (2010) stated.

Journal writing is a systematic practice of recording and developing ideas on a specific topic, in other words, it basically consists of writing a log about daily experiences, and recording thoughts and observations, reflections and perceptions on different topics. According to Spaventa (2000), journal writing provides learners with more opportunities to write freely about what they feel and helps learners write better and better day by day as Hamp-Lyons and Heasley (2006) believes that it makes the learners good writers. A journal is often confused with a diary since the terms are often interchangeably used; however, there is difference between journal and diary in that journal synthesizes our thoughts and emotions with actions that we experience rather than just recording what has happened in our life (Snyder & Lindquist, 2010).

Whereas classroom writing is an essential academic requirement, writing outside the classroom can be a tool to improve writing skill (Chanderasegaran, 2002). Keeping journals which are notebooks in which writers keep a record of ideas, opinions, and description of daily life can be a writing practice at home.

Tele:

E-mail addresses: [kaveh\\_j2004@yahoo.com](mailto:kaveh_j2004@yahoo.com)

Journal writing is an effective and productive means of arousing interest in writing as well as developing expression fluency. It enables students to realize why they wish to communicate their ideas by regarding writing not only as a means of personal expression but also a dialogue in written language with the readers. Moreover, "journal writing provides students with good opportunities to improve their writing skills individually and to record their thoughts and feelings" (Ngoh, 2002), Spaventa (2000) says "... there are many rewards about keeping a journal. Adding to the informal conversation that takes place in between you and yourself and you and your teacher when you have finished the course, you will have a record of what you read, what you experienced and what you thought about during that time."

Journal writing helps students reflect on their experiences so it has become an important tool used in many academic fields, such as therapeutic recreation, psychology, literature, teacher education, sociology, etc. (Dyment & O'Connell, 2003).

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of learning journal on the degree of descriptive, reflective, and critical writing on Iranian EFL learners. In other words, the researcher aims at finding out whether utilizing a particular type of writing (descriptive, reflective, and critical) significantly affects and improves students' writing. In educational setting of Iran there is no place for considering learners' opinions and preferences regarding learning language skills and there is no opportunity for both students and teachers to engage in sharing their ideas therefore, writing teachers' pay little or no attention to the students' writing regarding the content, structure and organization. This study was intended to determine to what extent learning journal writing has improved as a result of giving feedback based on the treatment which is revealed by comparing the results of using different types of writing (descriptive, reflective, and critical) by dividing them into two groups; one as an experimental group with the three models of writing in terms of pretest, and posttest and the other as a control group in which the traditional writing has been practiced. It was hypothesized that teachers' comments and feedback on the students' writings helped the teachers to improve their styles in teaching writing concerning whether there is statistically meaningful relationship among learning journal, writing improvement, and the learning outcomes of the Iranian EFL students.

#### **Methodology**

##### **Participants**

The participants of this study included 100 male and female EFL learners. The participants were selected based on the scores they received on the Oxford Placement Test (OPT; Allen, 2004). Prior to the study, 100 candidates took the OPT, however, only 80 obtained scores ranging from 150 to 169, which according to the OPT, designates them as advanced learners. The participants were randomly assigned to experimental and control group in which in the experimental group, 60 students were divided into three classes of 20 members each and the last 20 students were assigned to control group. The age of the participants ranged from 20 to 25.

##### **Instrumentation**

In order to provide data and subsequent analysis, following instruments were used in this study.

##### **Oxford Placement Test**

The Oxford Placement Test (Allen, 2004) was administered in order to identify the participants' level of language

proficiency. The OPT consists of listening and grammar sections.

##### **Scoring rubric**

The scoring rubric of the English writing competence in terms of structure, organization, punctuation, spelling and mechanics was designed to examine the participants' writing proficiency. It was adapted from Brown and Bailey (1984).

##### **Teachers' feedback**

Based on the treatment rubric on the students' journal writing was regarded as a research instrument.

##### **Teachers' treatment**

It was based on Moon (1999b) the three models of writing account: including:

1-Descriptive writing: This account is descriptive and it contains of little reflection. Ideas tend to be linked by sequence of the story rather than by meaning.

2-Reflective writing: In this phase, the description is focused on particular aspects accentuated for reflective comment. There is evidence of external ideas or information and where this occurs, the material is subjected to reflection.

3-Critical writing or deep reflection: The third phase dealt with the description which only serves the process of reflection, covering the issues for reflection and noting their context. There is a deep reflection that incorporates recognition of the event change with the frame of reference.

#### **Data Analysis and Results**

To ensure the homogeneity of the participants in this study, the oxford placement test was carried out and then the participants were assigned to the control and experimental group. An independent- sample *t*-test was used to compare the mean scores of control and experimental group. Furthermore, a paired sample *t*-test was employed to compare the mean score of the participants for the experimental and control group in order to investigate whether the treatment (instruction) and feedback on models of writing had any significant impact on the learner's journal writing.

The writing scores based on the improvement in the students writing performance after writing journals according to teacher s' treatment and feedback was compared using ANCOVA to determine whether the difference among the means of two or more groups was significant or not.

Furthermore, Wilcoxon-Signed Ranks test was employed to compare the pretest and posttest means of the control group. In order to run post hoc pair wise comparisons between the adjusted means of the three groups on the posttest, the Sidak-corrected post hoc comparisons were employed to probe whether there was an improvement in terms of the participants' writing ability when they were provided with the effect of learning journal writing based on the Moon (1999b) models of writing.. Accordingly, in this study learning journal-writing was taken as an independent variable and the degree of descriptive, reflective, and critical writing as the dependent variables. The control variable was the proficiency level of the students.

Next, the data were tested for normality employing Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro- Wilk tests, the results of which in Table 1 indicate that the data for the control group's pretest were not normally distributed ( $p < .05$ ).

Since the normality test indicated that the control group's pretest scores were not normally distributed, Wilcoxon-Signed Ranks test was employed to compare the pretest and posttest means of the control group. The results in Table 4 indicated that the posttest mean of the control group is higher than its pretest mean, and this difference is significant;  $Z = -3.72$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $r = .83$  (i.e. large effect size).

	Group	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
	Descriptive	.171	20	.128	.918	20	.090
	Control	.209	20	.022	.903	20	.046
Posttest	Descriptive	.159	20	.198	.935	20	.191
	Control	.180	20	.089	.918	20	.091

**Table 2. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test**

	POST - PRE
Z	-3.729(a)
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

**Table 3. Paired Samples Test**

Paired Differences	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Mean95% Confidence		t	Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	Upper		Upper	Lower
Pair 1	PreG1 - PostG1	-3.400001	.09545	.24495	-3.91268	-2.88732	-13.88019	.000

**Table 4. ANCOVA results**

Dependent Variable: Posttest						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	337.722 <sup>a</sup>	2	168.861	201.201	.000	.916
Intercept	14.366	1	14.366	17.118	.000	.316
group * Pretest	1.623	1	1.623	1.986	.167	
Pretest	130.697	1	130.697	155.728	.000	.808
group	5.139	1	5.139	6.123	.018	.142
Error	31.053	37	.839			
Total	8983.000	40				
Corrected Total	368.775	39				

a. R Squared = .916 (Adjusted R Squared = .911)

Paired-samples *t*-test was employed since the data for this group was normally distributed as shown before. Table 5 demonstrates the results of *t*-test which indicates that the difference between the pretest and posttest means are significant in the descriptive writing group;  $t(19) = -13.88$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $r = .9$  (i.e. large effect size).

The results above indicated that both the control and descriptive writing groups showed significant improvement in their writing from pretest to posttest with large effect sizes. Table 4 provides the results of homogeneity of regression slopes as another assumption of ANCOVA and the main results of ANCOVA. As the group\*pretest row in Table 7 shows there is no significant interaction ( $p > .05$ ); therefore, the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes is met.

Table 4 also indicate that the groups are indeed different on the pretest ( $p < .01$ ). In other words, the covariate (i.e. pretest) has a significant effect on the posttest (i.e. dependent variable), which is controlled employing ANCOVA. Finally, the fifth row labeled group in Table 4 indicates that there is a significant difference between the posttests of the two groups;  $F = 6.12$ ,  $p < .05$ , partial eta squared = .14 large effect size, and the means reported in Table 8 show that the descriptive writing group is of a larger mean in comparison to the control group.

In sum, the above results indicate that the null hypothesis related to the first question is rejected, that is to say, providing a rubric for an event plus feedback has a significant effect on the degree of descriptive writing.

## Discussion

The general message of this study was to encourage the EFL teachers to go beyond the topics increase their expectations of students' writings in terms of reflective awareness.

This study was intended to determine to what extent learning journal writing has improved as a result of giving feedback on the treatment which is revealed by comparing the results of using different types of writing (descriptive, reflective, and critical). It can be concluded from the results of the present study that writing a journal especially on the degree of descriptive and reflective helped the students develop their habit of thinking on paper and showed them how ideas can be discovered in the process of writing. Consequently, the students got the opportunity to express themselves and some concepts that were important to them, to have their writings read by an agent (teacher, peer, audience) and shared their thoughts and received a genuine and meaningful reply.

As Trites (2001) has found, by evaluating students learning process in journal writing, they develop awareness, achieve autonomy, understand more about cultural backgrounds and improve their reflective thinking so they would be able to combine their new learning with their experiences and make them meaningful.

The outcome of this study will enable teachers to explain their own methods of teaching by paying more attention to the content of writing and not just the mechanics of it. As a result, they can change their methods based on their learners' needs. Moreover, the findings may guide the teachers about how to treat students' errors to improve their accuracy in writing.

The result would be helpful and useful for the ESL and EFL teachers in guiding the students especially the needs of Iranian EFL learners to write more accurately, effectively, concentrating the content of writing on the degree of descriptive and reflective writing so that they become better writers and complain less of the difficulties of writing.

## References

- Anderson, J. (1993). Journal writing: The promise and the reality. *Journal of Reading*, 36(4), 304-309.
- Brookhart, S. M. (2003). Developing measurement theory for classroom assessment purposes and uses. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 22(4), 5-12.
- Brown, J. D., & Bailey, K. M. (1984). A categorical instrument for scoring second language writing skills. *Language Learning*, 34(4), 21-42.
- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). White Plain, NY: Pearson Education.
- Burton, J.K., Locke, B.B., Potter, K.R., Evans, M.A., & Culver, S.M. (2011). Impacts of different types of teacher corrective feedback in reducing grammatical errors on ESL/EFL students' writing. Black burg, VA. Pupung Purnawarman.
- Carless, D. (2006). Differing perceptions in the feedback process. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(2), 219-233.
- Chakraverty, A., & Gautum, K. (2000). *Dynamics of Writing Forum*, 38(3).
- Chanderasegaran, A. (2002). *Intervening to Help in the Writing Process*. RELC Portfolio Series7
- Dyment, J. E., & O'Connell, T. (2003). Journal writing in Experiential Education: Possibilities, Problems, and Recommendations. *ERIC Digest*: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools Charleston, WV.
- Garmon, M .A. (1998). Using dialogue journals to promote student learning in a multicultural teacher education course. *Remedial and Special Education*, 19(1), 32-45.
- Hamayan Else, V. (1995). Approaches to alternative assessment. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 15, 212-226. Cambridge University Press.
- Hamp-Lyons, L., & Heasley, B. (2006). *Study Writing* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed). Cambridge University Press.
- Huerta-Macias, A. (1995). Alternative assessment: Responses to commonly asked questions in *TESOL Journal*, 8-10.
- Hyland, K. (2003). *Second Language Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Keh, C. L. (1990). Feedback in the writing process: A model and methods for implementation. *ELT journal*, 44(4), 294-304.
- Khodashenas, M.R., Kishani Farahani, S., & Amouzegar, E. (2012). The effect of keeping portfolios on writing ability of advanced EFL learners. *University of Applied Science and Technology, IJLLALW*. 4(2), 80-88.
- Krashen, S. (1989). *Language Acquisition and Language Education*. Prentice Hall, Hertfordshire.
- Moon, J. A. (1999b). *Learning Journals: A Handbook for Academics, Students and Professional Development*, London: Routledge Falmer.
- Ngoh, T.J. (2002). From Journals to Weekly Papers. *Guidelines*, Vol.24, June 2002.
- Nurfardilla Nasri et al. (2010). Teachers' perception on alternative assessment. University Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Peterson, S.S. (2010). Improving student writing: using feedback as a teaching tool. *OISE/ University of Toronto*.
- Raimes, A. (1983). *Techniques in Teaching Writing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ratnasari, D. (2004). *Improving students' writing skills by using peer editing strategy in the writing process at the 4<sup>th</sup> semester of UMM*. Unpublished Thesis. Malang: Postgraduate Program of Islamic University of Malang.
- Richards, J, Platt, John, & Platt, Heidi. (1992). *Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Harlow: Longman.
- Schwartz, F., & White, K. (2000). Making sense of it all: Giving and getting online course feedback. *The Online Teaching Guide: A handbook of attitudes, strategies, and techniques for the virtual classroom*, 57-72.
- Shahrina, M.D.,& Norisham, M. (2006). The best of two approaches: process/genre based approach to teaching writing. *The English Teachers*, 35, 75-85.
- Snyder, M. & Lindquist, R. (Eds.). (2010). *Complementary and alternative therapies in nursing*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Spaventa, S. (2000). *Essay Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Takaesu, A. (2012). EFL journal writing: An exploratory study in self-expression as a bridge for creative writing. *Accents Asia*, 5(1), 45-54.
- White, R. & Arndt, V. (1991). *Process Writing*. London: Longman.
- Yale, J.B. (2010). *The relationship between reading and writing*. Retrieved March 11, 2010 from <http://www.K12reader.com/the-relationship-between-reading-and-writing>.
- Yinger, R. (1985). Journal writing as a learning tool. *The Volt Review*, 87(5), 21-33.
- Zamel, V. (1983). The composing processes of advanced ESL students: Six case studies. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17(2), 165-188.
- Zamel, V. (1992). Writing one's way into reading. *TESOL Quarterly*, 26(3), 463-485.
- [www.buzzle.com/articles/descriptive writing](http://www.buzzle.com/articles/descriptive-writing).