

## Writing Instruction in EFL Classes: Dose Reflection Matter?

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### **Abstract**

A great deal of time is dedicated to thinking in the realm of language learning and writing instruction is not an exception. Newly reflective instruction has been considered as highly effective and helpful tool which materialize the integration of thinking and performance in English classes. The present study investigates the effectiveness of reflective instruction on EFL's writing performances. To this purpose 25 EFL learners were selected and they received teacher's and peer's reflection on their essay writing samples. The scores of their performances on the writing tests before and after instruction were analyzed by Paired-sample T-test using SPSS software (SPSS Inc., 2012) and finally it became clear that students' writing abilities significantly have been improved.

**Keywords:** writing instruction, reflection, EFL Learners

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The current state of education experiences an unprecedented rate of change. In recent years we have face the advent of self-autonomy of language learners by virtue of reflective practice. The concept of reflective practice originates from John Dewey who argued that learning needs times to deduce meaning from experience. Evans & Maloney (1998) asserted "It has been highly commended as a method of viewing one's own practice through analyzing, criticizing, evaluating and defining new challenges for future action"(p. 29).

Concerning the importance of reflection, Burdina (2013) stated that "University programs are mainly aimed at developing competencies and skills; yet recently reflective processes have been conceived of as highly effective and indispensable" (p. 2181). Many studies have been done in this area (Boman, 2014; Burdina, 2013; Vaiyavutjamai et al., 2012; Salehuddin et al., 2011; Rushton & Duggan, 2013), but since it is a multifaceted and novel concept it requires more research for furtherance of application.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

It has been suggested that behaviorist approach to learning could be just a type of pre-conscious learning like conditioning while reflective learning learners connect abstract concepts by observation (Conole et al. , 2004) For years, teachers have strived to enhance students' language ability to train not just elite, but intellectuals (Sellars, 2012). Having a good writing ability is not just an option but a necessity, promising an academic and civic life success (Dean, 2010). Most learners do not understand what they have learned but memorize it (Salehuddin, Ibrahim, Aladdin, & Zainudin, 2012) and it reduces their awareness of daily life and education because they just regurgitate new information and do not think about them, while thinking gives the ability of solving problems and bringing their knowledge into action. Generally, it is believed that thinking process has two different aspects: reflective thinking and critical thinking (Brookfield, 1987).

As a matter of fact, reflection is a type of personal response to opinions, events and experiences in various situations reflective thinking involves amalgamating what somebody already knows to what is going to be done, in other words, revisiting prior knowledge and experience of an issue you are exploring in advance. (Mezirow, 1990; Schon, 1987; Brookfield, 1987). According to Elliot (1943) "Learning and understanding learning processes does not happen maximally through experience alone but rather as a result of thinking about - reflecting on" (as cited in ASh, Clayton, 2009).

For having effective reflective diary writing, works have to be submitted to the instructors for feedback (Salehuddin, Ibrahim, Aladdin, & Zainudin, 2012). The process of writing reflection was implemented by Burdina (2013) for investigating development of motivation in students who connect theories to professional practices which showed that how students make meaning in their learning and also the effectiveness of the reflection. In addition, reflection practice was highly recommended because it gives self-confidence and peace of mind which is a real motivation for learners. It has been stated by Korthagen & Vasalos, (2009) that utilization of writing reflection brings about autonomous learners. Salehuddin, Ibrahim, Zainudin, and Aladdin (2012) tried to shed light on the reflection process from a new perspective. In their studies reflective diary writing was a tool to enable students tolerate the knowledge they were acquiring to pervious body of knowledge in their mind.

Hill (2002) stated that "When students reflect upon their learning, they engage in a potentially transformative act of responding to, connecting with, and analyzing an experience, event, process, or product". Reidsema & Mort (2009) in their study indicated that good texts for students are those which are linguistically rich not complex ones.

The majority of researches in this area were related to the reflective assessment or reflective diary writing. In EFL context, since students need practice in more formal and academic writing skills, essay writing can be an alternative for diary writing. The teacher can focus on the instruction of essay writing techniques and involve students in the instruction by equipping them with the power of critical thinking.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

#### *A. Participants*

The participants of this study were 25 female junior English majors enrolling in an essay writing course. They were at the second year of their education and they were familiar with the patterns of paragraph development

#### *B. Materials*

The materials used in this study were: 1) students' writing samples, 2) written comments and reflections on writing samples, and 3) pre- and post-tests of essay writing on two similar topics.

#### *C. Procedure*

By the starting of the semester, students received limited sessions of instruction in writing essays. After being familiarized with necessary information of the course in each session, all of the students were supposed to write an essay on the special topic given by the instructor. Each student received self, peer, and instructor's reflection. All the members of the class had a printed version of their classmates' essays and they read that essay in order to find the possible areas of problem dealing with content and structure. Finally, they had a discussion in which they offer their suggestions for the improvement of the written essays. During the process of the reflection it was possible for the author of the text to change his/her mind about the content and structure of the essay and modify it.

### **IV. RESULTS**

The total 25 EFL learner received reflective instruction and finally their performances at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester were subject of the statistical analysis with SPSS 21 Software (SPSS Inc., 2012).

The students' essays were rated by the instructor and the mean of the scores before the reflective instruction was 16.48 for the whole class. The minimum score of 14 in the pretest has been upgraded to 15 after reflective instruction and the maximum score in the pretest which was 18 has been upgraded to 19 in the post test.

The descriptive statistics shows that the mean score increased from 16.48 to 17.18 after the instruction.

Table 1: Paired Sample Statistics

Pair	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std Error Mean
Post test	16.4800	25	.88365	.17673
Pre test	17.18	25	1.10755	.22151

The Paired sample T-Test was used to compare the means of the scores. The result of the analysis showed that there was a significant difference between mean score of the students before the instruction and after the instruction with 95% confidence.

Table 2: Paired Samples t-test

Pair	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	df	Sig (2-Tailed)
Pretest & Post test	-.700	1.59426	.31885	24	.038

The effect size is a type of quantitative measure which examines the strength of the phenomenon and by this we can see whether our measurement is reliable or not.

$$d = \frac{17.18 - 16.48}{.88} = .79$$

This means that even the small difference between the two groups was significant here.

Analytical analysis of writing components was based on the mean scores of students' performances on both the pre & post-tests, and the result showed that only progress has happened in the grammatical aspects of writing (Table 3).

Table 3: Analytical analysis of writing components

Mean scores	Grammar	Organization	Content
Pre test	3.2	2.9	3.1
Post test	4.1	3.3	3.4

## V. CONCLUSION

With regard to using reflective instruction in EFL writing classrooms, the present study depicted that making students aware of what they are doing and giving them the opportunity of active engagement in the process of writing brings about good performances. In fact, students gained understanding of what was going on when they were writing and insight into the dynamic process of writing.

Creating ideas and presenting them in the form of body of related words always was a matter of controversy, but actually in this study revision and enrichment of the writing samples not only helps the students to improve their ability of writing but also it provides them acumen performance. The long lasting question of how to make learners autonomous has been materialized by means of giving reflection on the sample writing by both peers and instructors.

The reason for the improvement in terms of content and organization could be related to elimination of unrelated sources of variance, always students feel unconfident to write let alone to present their writing to other people. The reflective instruction requires students to apply theory they have already learn into practice and in this process they learn from each other. They see that how people start to write and how they implement their ideas into words and how they examine other's works.

The first and foremost advantage of reflective instruction is that giving comment is an asset to the author of the essay. Sometimes linguistic aspect of the text is not the most difficult part but sequence and genre really matters and the best way to have a view whether we are successful in asserting our thoughts incomprehensible way is to ask others rough ideas on the product especially in a critical way and the only constructive place is reflection on the essays.

Based on the results of the analysis, reflective instruction of writing ability to EFL learners facilitates the process of thinking and writing for the learners.

Students spent enough time in interaction with peers and instructors to gain the necessary knowledge and integrate their background experiences with their beliefs and mastery over language for presentation. Following a demonstration on standards of reflective instruction have been stated.

This is actually a long term project which needs a type of longitudinal analysis because it has a type of multidimensional nature and the ongoing process of writing involves an unstructured type of sequences.

The comparison is unavoidable during the program and it really depicts areas in which problems lie and if clear explanation is given to learners, it could accelerate the rate of achieving the goals. Critical reflective instruction may develop understanding of teaching process and pupils' interactions to think critically. Finally the only meaningful improvement in students' performance was seen in the grammar part because partly the focus of the class was on it and the other two components including organization and content are subjective parts of an essay and are difficult to be controlled or taught.

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