Examination of the Use of Feedback in EFL Writing Instruction: A Case Study of Jordan

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Abstract—When comparing public and private schools, it is clear there are significant differences in teaching methods, and this may be used to help pupils become writers that are more creative. The goal of this research is to examine the concept of creative writing by analyzing comments made by EFL educators in their instruction. Fifteen EFL teachers in Jordan were interviewed and observed. The researcher interviewed fifteen teachers to get their opinions on how they think feedback may be used to foster creativity in writing among EFL students. The interview results revealed that thirteen instructors utilized student comments to encourage English as foreign language writers to be more creative. Moreover, observations found that ten instructors employed feedback in their courses, including peer feedback. This research supports the use of a pre- and post-test in an experimental evaluation of the impact of interventions (such as feedback) on students' writing creativity. Why some instructors oppose using creative writing exercises (feedback) is a subject that requires deeper exploration.

Index Terms—English as a Foreign Language, creativity in writing, feedback

I. INTRODUCTION

An individual's creative output is seen as a reaction to environmental cues under the behaviorist paradigm. Based on this view, creativity is something that can be taught and supported by various means of stimulation, reinforcement, and response (Craft, 2001). The principles of behavioral IQ tests have been frequently used in the evaluation of creative potential. A reinforcer may be anything that makes getting the right response more likely to occur, such as a positive comment, a high grade, or a feeling of accomplishment or pleasure (Krashen, 1982). The affective-filter theory states that the learner's emotions serve as malleable filters that either facilitate or obstruct the necessary information for language learning. Krashen (1994) argues that students with strong motivation, confidence, a good self-image, and low anxiety have the best chance of excelling in language acquisition.

Study after study highlights the importance of a supportive learning environment and constructive feedback for encouraging creative writing. Coaching, feedback, and social presence were all studied to see how they affected higher-order thinking in an online community by Stein et al. (2013). Training occurred beforehand, and comments were provided instantly thereafter. The results revealed that the frequency of higher-order thinking increased greater in the group that received coaching and feedback over time compared to the group that did not get coaching and criticism. The results demonstrated that the Community of Inquiry framework might serve as a coaching manual in addition to being utilized for course development, facilitation, and assessment.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Vygotsky focused a lot on how images might be projected and how human culture could be passed down through generations in his writings. Vygotsky, like Bruner, is concerned with the effects of language on learning and the enhancing effects of social interaction on education. As with Bruner's scaffolding learning, Vygotsky's (1978) "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD) posits that the student is directed to a higher level of performance with the help of his classmates and instructor. Vygotsky developed a model for the learning-development relationship in his ZPD, arguing that growth in behavior occurs along a spectrum.

As such, a teacher's actions facilitate student learning and growth through a process known as scaffolding, in which the educator uses a variety of strategies, including direct instruction, materials in the classroom, and extracurricular activities, to help students retain knowledge and develop skills (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Learner accomplishment with the aid of a competent instructor and learner achievement with the help of a knowing teacher are two points on a

continuum between aided performance and autonomous performance in the context of behavior development. Gaining independence in learning is facilitated by the teacher's one-on-one guidance, and the Zone of Proximal Development expands accordingly (Bodrave & Leong, 1996).

Vygotsky's ZPD has been extended outside the realm of problem solving to include a wider range of skills and abilities. Teaching is supposed to help the student in this comfort zone, and it's supposed to motivate and encourage them to achieve in areas where they may not yet feel competent. For students to be creative in their writing, they need strategies and methods that spark ideas for them to explore. Students' literacy and critical thinking skills benefit from opportunities to write and engage with others (Dyson, 1995; Rababah & Bani Melhem, 2015; Rababah, 2019).

That is why it's so important to foster an environment in the classroom that promotes teamwork. The role of the educator is to foster student participation in projects, including the generation of improvisational ideas and the implementation of those ideas. In addition, avoiding giving students static assignments is supported by Vygotsky's theory and knowledge of how social interaction influences student growth. Static exercises do not provide a challenge for students' intellectual advancement. Particularly, the ZPD lays the groundwork for many cutting-edge pedagogical techniques in the field of education today.

ZPD is a sociocultural theory that has been applied previously to cognitive and linguistic development; however, its use in the context of second language acquisition is novel. According to Schinke-Llano (1995), peer teaching plays a significant role in promoting collaborative learning by transforming the classroom into a place where the instructor is a source of both information and help and the learner's contributions are valued. By illustrating the gap between a learner's capacity without aid and his ability with assistance from others, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development made a significant contribution to understanding the social origins of higher mental processes. Teaching, small-group discussion, modeling, reflecting on one's own performance, and providing feedback are all examples of scaffolding.

In other words, teachers must first provide contexts for learning in which instruction may guide students' development before they can be considered successful teachers (Shayer, 2003). Therefore, education ought to emphasize teaching students how to learn, helping them build habits of lifelong learning, and providing them with experiences that have real-world application (Williams et al., 1997; Rababah & Almwajeh, 2018; Rababah & Banikalef, 2019).

Numerous studies have shown the importance of constructive criticism and a welcoming classroom atmosphere for encouraging imaginative writing (Rababah Alshehab & Bani Melhem, 2018; Rababah & Banikalef, 2019; Rababah, 2022; Rababah, 2018; Rababah & Rababah, 2018). The impact of social presence and a coaching and feedback intervention on higher-order thinking in an online community was studied by Stein et al. (2013). Before the lecture, the students were coached and given quick feedback on their performance. The results showed that, over time, the frequency of higher-order thinking was greater in the group that got coaching and feedback than in the group that did not. Based on the results, it was found that the Community of Inquiry paradigm may be utilized for more than only facilitating and assessing academic programs. It has the potential to serve as a useful coaching manual as well.

According to Jiang (2012), writing instructors may aid their students in gaining valuable feedback on their work via the use of peer feedback, which also gives students valuable experience in a wide variety of skills that contribute to their development as writers. Writing tactics used in English as a foreign language classrooms often find the best success when including peer criticism. Many scholars have examined this issue, each taking a little different tack and looking at it from a slightly different angle. Some teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) employ pre- and post-peer feedback to try out activities designed around student comments.

Morris (2008) argues that students can make the transition from the present to the future with the help of peer evaluation. In order to aid in language learning, peer feedback requires a two-way conversation in which each participant debates the other's interpretation of a given statement (Rollinson, 2005). Students may learn more about their own abilities and areas for improvement by receiving and giving criticism from their peers (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Students' motivation in EFL settings is very critical as this can help them have positive attitudes, and thus their performance can improve (Al-Shboul, 2022).

III. METHODS

Fifteen English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors in Jordan were interviewed and observed for this research. Researchers utilized semi-structured interviews because they are "one of the most potent means by which we attempt to grasp our fellow human beings" (Cresswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 645). At this study, the researchers opted to take on the role of a bystander, sitting in a strategic spot outside the action (like the back of the classroom) and taking notes on observations. Here is how the responses were categorized: teacher X; (TA) for "Teacher A," for instance. The same coding strategy was used throughout the interviews. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss the analysis of the qualitative data while protecting the identity of the interviewees by the use of the aforementioned coding.

IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

A. Results of Interview

A common thread ran across the educators' responses, and that was the importance of feedback. Analysis of interview responses revealed that educators valued using feedback strategies when working with students on their writing. Thirteen lecturers discussed how they utilize feedback to inspire originality in their EFL students' writing. During their instruction, the lecturers stressed the value of offering students constructive criticism. It is not always easy to pinpoint one person as the best source of helpful comments on written work; it might vary by when and what kind of input is needed. In order to get feedback, you might ask your classmates or your professors. The views of the educators on the method are as follows. TC emphasized "students expect feedback," especially on writing assignments. It would be too late if the instructor waited until the students had completed their writing tasks, which may lead to feelings of discouragement (TC, Interview, November, 2021). However, other educators, like TJ, felt that feedback was an appropriate method to utilize in EFL classes, and that "Teachers should acquaint themselves and coach their students on how to use feedback in an efficient way to acquire both proficiency and competence as English writers" (TJ, Interview, November, 2021). TF theorized that by encouraging students to provide constructive criticism to one another, classroom discourse—and hence student learning—could be enhanced. In his words:

> Students look more self-assured and engaged in writing classes when given the opportunity to edit and fix the work of their peers. This is due to the fact that effective feedback may help authors establish rapport with readers beyond simply the instructor. It has the potential to promote and facilitate student-to-student communication, resource sharing, and the evaluation of student work. (TI Interview, November, 2021)

Some people, like TG, went even farther and argued for electronic feedback. The use of e-feedback was crucial for TG, since it brought the ideas of vocal reaction into the digital sphere (TG, Interview, November, 2021) In addition, TH provided useful training and comments to the pupils. It is essential to correct pupils' misunderstandings in a supportive way. For instance, a teacher may point up that the student's draft may benefit from being written in clearer language to make it more accessible to the intended audience (TH, Interview, November, 2021).

Similarly, TE provided feedback by returning student manuscripts annotated with constructive criticism. Instead of just pointing out the student's flaws and editing the work with a red pen in front of the class, a skilled instructor would provide constructive feedback on how to improve the draft. A great educator is one who fosters an atmosphere of learning and innovation by providing students with new perspectives and opportunities (TE, Interview, November 2021).

Though opinions differed, many educators stressed the significance of students' reactions to their work. Teachers have reported employing e-feedback, peer feedback, and instant feedback. Teachers saw timely, actionable feedback as not just one of the most successful classroom tactics, but also a means by which to gauge their own students' progress and tailor their own instruction accordingly. Nonetheless, TB said that she was unable to implement the tactic. TB said that time limitations prevented him from implementing any kind of feedback. He said that there just is not enough time to provide kids constructive criticism.... It is not worth the effort.... The issue with feedback is that it often ignores the actual substance in favor of nitpicking over spelling and grammar (TB, Interview, November 2021). Regarding the opinions of his contemporaries, he said:

> Students who are just starting out in school do not benefit from peer evaluation since their writing abilities are not yet developed enough to provide insightful remarks. Allowing students to provide feedback at this stage is very dangerous for the students' and each other's writing growth (TB, Interview, November, 2021).

B. Reviews of Observations

In order to encourage more originality in their students' English as a second language (ESL) writing on this topic, ten teachers utilized feedback—including peer feedback—in their classrooms. In particular, TD encouraged his pupils to learn from one another. He explained to his pupils the value of criticism and how, by cooperating, they may learn to value experiences more deeply. Students were seen working together, and the instructor provided timely corrections as necessary (TD, Observation1, December, 2021). Similarly, TH was seen encouraging her students at every stage of the activity. He helped the pupils enhance their writing skills via one-on-one conferences (TH, Observation2, December, 2021).

In addition, the observed teachers used many drafts and comments. All of the observed teachers made extensive use of authentic feedback in their classrooms. Some students relied on input from their peers, while others looked to their teachers or even employed electronic feedback systems. In specifically, TG led an in-class writing project in which students wrote thank-you notes. Students drafted their notes on computers, and then shared them with TG for feedback and correction before moving on to a final draft. Each student was given access to a computer in order to make any necessary changes (TG, Observation1, December, 2021). Overall, the educators surveyed been optimistic for the strategy's potential to spark originality in their EFL students' writing.

Similarly, TE used student comments into his lessons. Students were put into groups or paired up to create classroom assessment exercises for each other. Following completion of their evaluations, students were to sign off on the assignment by pointing out issues with the assigned essay, making pertinent remarks, assigning letter grades, and providing any other feedback they felt was necessary (TE, Observation3, December, 2021). TJ also gave his pupils a rundown of expectations before providing criticism. Students were to provide content-based feedback during the first review session, before shifting their attention to more broad areas of grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary during the

second session. The instructor gathered the pupils' work after they had done commenting so that he could inspect it (TJ, Observation3, December, 2021).

V. DISCUSSION

Depending on the circumstances and the nature of the feedback, different people may be more suited to provide constructive criticism on written work. Depending on the circumstances, you may decide to get feedback from classmates or teachers. TC and TE agreed that teacher feedback is a valuable tool for use in EFL courses, provided it is implemented properly. TJ believed that peer feedback may improve classroom dialogue and, by extension, student learning. He said, "They are confident that feedback is one of the most effective strategies used in classrooms, as it also helped teachers know the level of the students, offer them with this information in a timely manner." However, TB argued that there wasn't enough time to implement the strategy.

Ten teachers used student comments to encourage imaginative writing in their EFL lessons, as suggested by the study's authors. The feedback was used by ten different teachers, with some additionally including student-to-student remarks. Students benefit from TE in the form of peer feedback when they work in groups. He instructs them to critique the essays by identifying flaws in their reasoning, offering solutions, and assigning grades. Moreover, after the reviewers are done, they should sign it. TJ saw that there was a long learning curve between students and reading the literature. Every class, he had the pupils focus on a different facet of writing. Teachers who have utilized peer feedback in their classrooms know that there is a lot to do before, during, and after a peer feedback activity. Teachers served as a variety of functions, including fact-checkers, commentators, organizers, demonstrators, and role models.

Second, in terms of instructor feedback, it has been seen that TD students participate actively in group assignments and that their teacher offers prompt feedback. Throughout the exercise, TH was often heard supporting the students. Through individual conferences, he assisted his students in developing stronger writing abilities. Many scholars have spent the better part of the past few decades investigating the links between L2 writing feedback and creativity.

According to Vygotsky, social interactions between children and adults are crucial to the development and learning of the young. The process of learning benefits from both the development of language, which aids in thinking, and the giving of feedback and guidance supplied by social interactions. A crucial aspect of the ZPD framework for figuring out how to teach a language is feedback on the student's linguistic performance. Students are encouraged to ask questions, provide feedback, and share their knowledge in a scaffolded learning environment. Teachers' roles in the classroom change from that of authoritative subject experts to that of helpful advisers when they use scaffolding.

Most research shows that giving and receiving feedback improves language learning (L2). Nassaji and Swain (1997) state that kids gain more from support when it is negotiated within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) than when it is supplied at random. Nine teachers discussed ways to encourage creative thinking in EFL writing via the use of feedback. During the course of their writing instruction, teachers repeatedly hammered home the need of offering critical feedback to their students. Nassaji and Swain (1997) propose that feedback may lead to more in-depth learning by drawing on the Vygotskian sociocultural viewpoint and the Vygotskian notion of the ZPD. Additionally, as noted by Flower and Hayes, the writer evaluates either the intended or actual meaning of the text throughout the reviewing process (1981). The author checks the text for any problems that might reduce its effectiveness.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current study used a novel and practical method for stimulating creativity in EFL classes and, by extension, improving students' writing abilities. The goals of this research are, thus, to learn about and teach creative writing. The fact that the research was conducted in a real-world setting posed certain difficulties. I enjoyed the task since it forced me to show how things actually are. This research has given me a greater awareness and understanding of the difficulties that language learners have while writing, since I faced many of them myself as a second language student. Participant interviews and transcriptions were the most time-consuming aspect of the project. It took us a long time since this was unfamiliar territory for us. For instance, you will need around four hours to transcribe one hour of tape. Because of this, we made sure to make plenty of time to talk with my professors and hear their thoughts on how we might improve the quality of my qualitative research papers. They made it easy for us to focus on my studies and gave us the support and feedback we needed to succeed.

In addition, the many insights we got along with my experiences and challenges helped us develop as a writer. Putting one's ideas and thoughts down on paper is an involved process. The process of writing is cyclical and self-reinforcing, consisting of interconnected stages that logically progress one into the next. Given that the fundamental elements of the creative writing process are universal, students of any background or level of exposure to the English language are capable of developing into proficient and imaginative writers. Just as no student has a leg up on the competition because of innate talent, every student has the capacity to hone the abilities required to become an extraordinary creative writer with the right amount of practice and guidance. The instructor's job is to facilitate this growth by delivering praise and helpful suggestions for improving the students' writing in areas like grammar and spelling. It is vital, therefore, that while instructing students in the art of writing, they be guided toward an appreciation for the language as a whole rather than its component elements. It was illuminating to consider the potential of

collaborative and social writing activities, in which students work together and make meaningful contributions, for use in education at this level. Although dealing with children whose English is still developing might be challenging, teachers who create a classroom culture where students feel safe sharing and appreciating their unique histories and perspectives report feeling rewarded by their profession.

In conclusion, we think the findings from this study might be useful for other EFL classes, given the goal of educational research is to inform both practice and policy. It is hoped that by doing this study, we will get a better understanding of EFL authors' capacity for innovation and the methods available for improving one's own EFL composing skills. This study helped to fill a void in the literature by arguing in favor of teaching EFL students creative writing, which in turn may encourage EFL students in Jordan to work on their own writing skills.

In the future, it would be intriguing to see whether or if the Ministry of Education's creative writing approach is being applied in other schools and to what degree. Taking use of the clear differences between public and private universities' pedagogical techniques may boost writing abilities. This research supports the use of a pre- and post-test in an experimental evaluation of the impact of interventions (such as feedback) on students' writing creativity. Why some instructors oppose using creative writing exercises (feedback) is a subject that requires deeper exploration.

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