

Effect of Continuous Feedback on Students' English Writing Skills at Matriculation Level

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Abstract

English is taught from early grades to higher levels and compulsory subject for students of Matriculation in Pakistan. It is commonly noticed that students of Matriculation are not good enough in English writing inspite of studying from early grades. There are various strategies that might be helpful for learning English in classroom. This paper unveils the use of continuous feedback for developing English writing skills on students of 10th grade. The study is quasi experimental in nature. Pretest-posttest control group design was used for this study. To this end, a class of 40 students was divided in experimental and control groups. Pretests were conducted on experimental and control groups to determine their initial level of achievement. Maximum oral and written feedback was given for four weeks to experimental group. After the administration of intervention on experimental group, posttests were administered to both groups to assess students' English writing skills. Findings showed the better performance of experimental group as compared to control group. Thus, the study conformed the effectiveness of continuous feedback on students' writing skills at Matriculation.

Keywords: Teaching strategy, continuous feedback, English writing skills, Matriculation

Introduction

Language in the global world is used to express ideas and thoughts. English is accepted as the major international language of communication and many areas of research and education. To learn English is important for getting information, employability, research, and international mobility. In our education system good command of English has important place from early grades to higher education levels. English is studied as compulsory subject for students of Matriculation in Pakistan. Although curriculum of Matriculation addresses four skills of English language but the examination system checks only two skills of students that are reading and writing skills and these two skills are also assessed in examination. School prepares students for the preparation of these skills for getting success in examination and does not much focus on listening and speaking.

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Present study is focused to determine the effect of continuous feedback in English language classrooms to develop writing skills at Matriculation level. This stage is significant because it encourages students to enter into higher education or to continue practical life by entering into the job. Writing skills are developed by three dimensions i.e. developing ideas, organization and arrangement of as well as mechanical accuracy. Varieties of strategies have been used in English classrooms but this study is focused only on the use of continuous feedback for developing English writing skills. Feedback is important strategy that helps a lot during process of teaching writing. With the use of effective feedback students' writing skills can be improved. Feedback helps the teachers in two ways. First, teachers can know the proficiency level of students. Second, by knowing the students' weaknesses they can also improve their teaching. Khan (1999), Sawalmeh (2013), Ghani and Ahmed (2016) expressed that feedback helps students throughout the writing process i.e. from planning to the final piece of writing. They argued that feedback is fundamental aspect to improve the process of writing.

Clark and Lockhart (2011) and Spiller (2014) highlighted that regular feedback is powerful instructional approach which helps teacher to identify the gaps in students' current proficiency level. Teachers may know the next step of students' learning. Giving continuous feedback on students' work help teachers to what extent and to which direction they need to move forward. Fareed, Jawed, and Awan (2018) expressed that lack of proper feedback hinders in students' learning. Similarly, teachers that just underline the mistakes and do not recommend what to do cannot help much in raising the level of learning. As a result students face problems in understanding the concepts. Nirmla (2008) found that ESL learners are not good enough in English due to traditional approaches of teaching. Teachers give comments on grammar, tenses, preposition, spelling and punctuation.

There are two types of feedback given in classroom that is positive and negative. Positive feedback is best way to enhance students' learning while negative feedback may cause less motivation in students. It provides chance to teachers to improve where they are not in the right direction, as well as they come to know the expectation from the students. Spiller (2014) elaborated that teachers should give feedback at the end of instruction as soon as possible. Similarly, teachers should ensure that feedback provides guidelines to perform better in future. Feedback should be according to instructional aspect not only for just highlighting and communicating errors to students.

Ferris (2010) discussed that through feedback students come to know where they are lacking in the process of writing. Fatima and Akbar (2017) discussed that teachers should give feedback on domains of writing to make the writing process easier and understandable. In this way students can learn the complete process of developing writing. They further elaborated that both oral and written feedback have equal place in teaching of writing. Along with written comments on their work or highlighting and

correcting errors, they should also explain it orally for better understanding of students. Harmer (2006) elaborated that process of writing starts from prewriting and ends at editing. Students' writing can be improved if teacher follows process of writing. Writing process broadly consists of developing and arranging ideas as well as improving mechanical accuracy. Teachers should focus on these aspects to make students learn. Similarly, they can come to know where students are weak and facing difficulty. In this way teacher can focus particularly on that aspect need to be improved. It can be concluded that while giving written feedback, teachers should explain it orally so that it may be inculcated in students' minds for improvement of their writing skill.

By looking at the paper of 9th and 10th class, it showed that class 9th paper of English language contains 75 marks (56 marks for essay type while 19 marks for objective type) which includes both writing and reading skills of students. Duration of the paper is 2.30 hours. Similarly, class 10th paper of English also comprises of 75 marks (essay type contains 56 marks while objective type comprises of 19 marks) with 2.30 hours duration. Analysis of paper showed that papers assess two skills of English i.e. reading and writing. Therefore, in classroom, teachers' emphasis is on developing reading and writing. Question paper showed that most of the questions measures students' writing. So for this study continuous feedback is selected to see its effect on students' writing.

Objectives of the Study

Teachers of Matriculation use various strategies in English language classrooms. However, people believe that writing skills of students of Matriculation need to be more developed. It is obvious that some strategies are more effective than others. This study found the effect of continuous feedback on students' writing skills of experimental and control groups at Matriculation level.

Significance of the Study

Writing is very important skill to be developed among students of Matriculation. The findings of the study will help teachers about the use of feedback strategy in English language classrooms. This study may prove to be significant for curriculum developers for better formulating and implementing strategies of teaching writing to develop writing skill. This research may help in comparing the traditional strategies being taught at schools and the use of feedback strategy for the attainment of writing learning outcomes. In this way it may contribute in providing some practical suggestions for curriculum developers for the use of continuous feedback at Matriculation. In this way, this study helped teachers for the achievement of desired writing outcomes by the use of written feedback. Similarly, teachers will come to know effective way of giving feedback on students' writing.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the study were:

H_{o1}: There is no significant effect of continuous feedback on students' posttest scores controlling for pretest scores before the intervention.

H_a: After controlling for pretest scores as covariate, there are differences on achievement scores by the use of continuous feedback.

Methodology

Pretest posttest control group design by following Quasi experimental design was selected to investigate the effect of continuous feedback on scores of students. Due to the nature of the design (intact groups were taken as experimental and control group), it was possible that pretest might affect the scores because students may become familiar about the form and content of the test. As a statistical solution for removing this threat of internal validity, one way ANCOVA was conducted. ANCOVA is more appropriate analysis to determine a statistically significant difference between effects of continuous feedback on students' achievement controlling for the pretest scores.

The purpose of quasi experiment is to determine causality without randomization. An intact class of 40 students was divided into experimental and control group. Randomly, groups were selected as experimental and control group. Two groups were pretested to determine the initial differences among groups. After administering pretest, students in experimental group were taught by giving continuous feedback for four weeks. The intervention consisted of 12 prompts on narrative writing. Maximum oral and written feedback was given on students' work. Students in control group did not receive any intervention. They were only given prompts to write as per traditional method. Same test was administered to determine their posttest scores.

An English writing achievement test comprised of one essay type question related to narrative writing was administered as pretest. To develop narrative writing skill is an objective of curriculum of English for the students of Secondary School Certificate. Feedback strategy was for developing narrative writing skill lasted for four weeks. After that, posttest was administered to both groups determining the results of feedback strategy on students' achievement. Scoring rubrics were developed to score students' scripts from level 5 to 1 with 5 being high and 1 being low. The criteria used to measure the task varied from band 1 to band 5. Band 1 comprised of 'little skill', band 2 'marginal skill', band 3 'adequate skill', band 4 'competent skill' and band 5 'effective skill'. For satisfactory working of marking scheme scorers were taught to use the scoring rubric through a training session. It determined how students use different strategies when they communicate ideas and the use of vast range of writing skills in their final product.

Findings

An achievement test was given to students of Matriculation to assess their writing performance. Test contained a task related to narrative writing. To develop narrative writing skill is an objective to be attained in National Curriculum of English language 2006. ANCOVA was run for two group pre-test and post-test design. It is useful to compare the effect of treatment for each group with small sample size. Pretest scores were taken as covariate to control the already existing differences between the two groups. This was done due to the reason because when intact group were taken these groups may have different attributes. Therefore, ANCOVA was used to reduce some of its differences.

Table 1

Achievement on pretest and post test scores of experimental and control groups

Group	No	Pre Test		Post Test	
		M	SD	M	SD
Control Group	20	6.95	2.18	8.40	3.34
Experimental Groups	20	8.80	1.15	11.70	2.77

Table 1 shows the differences between means and standard deviation of experimental and control group for the achievement scores in English writing. It shows that mean of experimental group was comparatively higher (8.80, 11.70) as compared to control group (6.95, 8.40) on pretest and posttest scores respectively. It shows that English writing skills on narrative writing task were better in experimental group as compared to control group.

Table 2

Analysis of covariance for the achievement scores

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	p
Pretest	28.17	1			
Group	44.08	1	28.16	3.29	.07
Error	316.83	37	44.08	5.14	.02
Total	4494.00	40	8.56		

One way between groups ANCOVA was run to compare the effectiveness of intervention on experimental and control group. Independent variable was the teaching strategy i.e. continuous feedback and dependent variable consisted of students' achievement on test when the intervention completed. Scores of the students on pretests before the administration of intervention were used as covariate in this analysis.

After the adjustment of pre-intervention scores, there was significant difference between the two groups at the end of intervention on the effect of continuous feedback, $F(1, 37) = 5.14, p=.02$. So the null hypothesis is rejected which stated that there is no

significant difference between experimental and control group after the intervention is completed, therefore, alternate hypothesis is accepted.

Discussion

This study investigates how continuous feedback effect English writing skills of students at Matriculation. Students' writing skills are less developed to communicate effectively in writing. Findings of the current study showed that writing skills can be improved through continuous feedback. Through regular feedback students get acquainted about their strengths and the areas where they need to improve through conceptual understanding. This finding is consistent with Naeem (2011) and Khan (1999). This study explored that feedback is effective in classrooms to develop writing skills, consistent with Spiller (2014). Although in English language classrooms teachers give feedback but there should be continuous oral and written feedback so that their understanding may be developed. Harmer (2006) discussed that only written feedback is not enough to make students learn. They seldom open the copies to learn from mistakes. Teachers should correct their mistakes along with oral feedback. Sawalmeh (2013) found that feedback is effective strategy from where learners come to know about their errors in writing. Students try to remove errors in their work when they find opportunity to write again.

Although English language curriculum focuses on improving writing but in classrooms there is no focus on developing this skill. To develop the skill of narrative writing in an objective of English language curriculum for developing writing skill (Government of Pakistan, 2006). Both students and teachers know that questions for essay writing in the examination will be taken from textbook which have to be memorized by the students. This type of practice is done in classrooms of Matriculation because of the examination pattern. Another fact is that students already know that there will be choice in examination so they prepare one genre and ignore the other one. For example, they already know that in examination they have to write story, letter or dialogue so they select one genre to be attempted in examination. If teachers follows the use of continuous feedback on students' writing, their writing skills may be improved and it will also help in understanding the concepts. This will lead towards better attainment of intended learning outcomes.

Conclusion

This paper focused on the use of continuous feedback in English classrooms to develop writing skills. This study proved the positive effect of feedback on students' writing skills on narrative writing task. Developing writing skills is a challenge for teachers to improve students' skills. Being a significant strategy for developing English writing skills, teachers should use the feedback strategy in classrooms to clarify the concepts of students regarding English writing. Memorization of textbook is not enough for students to think beyond traditional way. Students' writing skills can be improved if

continuous system of feedback is adopted in schools. To conclude, teachers should ensure effective use of feedback to enhance students' learning at Matriculation level.

Recommendations

It is recommended that teachers should give regular feedback to develop students' English writing skills. This feedback should be oral and written to maximize students' learning. They should also involve students in process of writing and give comments on each aspect to make them learn the whole process of writing. Similarly there should be separate classes of writing to develop English writing skills in time table of Matriculation so that class time on developing writing skills is increased.

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