



Inculcating Self-editing Skills for Enhancing Writing Skills of the EFL Students

Valentina Sangeetha

Dr., English Language Centre, University of Bahrain, Bahrain, vsfernando@uob.edu.bh

Producing error-free compositions in academic context is a big challenge for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Since the editing and revision stage plays a significant role in the writing process in enhancing students' writing skills, there have always been various notions on applying an appropriate type of feedback method by the instructors while marking their students' compositions. The objective of this research work is to investigate the role of self-editing technique in enhancing the writing skills of English as a Foreign Language students. The data were collected using students' composition scores, questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative findings demonstrated that the students' writing skills significantly improved after using self-editing and also highlighted the students' perceptions regarding learning self-editing skill in writing classes. Also, the qualitative data results provided students' views on the role of self-editing in fostering learner independence. The study concludes with significant implications of how self-editing in revision process can facilitate students' writing skills.

Keywords: learner independence, self-editing skill, student compositions, students' writing skills, writing errors

INTRODUCTION

Mastery over academic writing in English is considered to be a key requirement at the higher education level. So, the writing course of the Foundation Programme aims to improve students' writing skills by applying various writing strategies to produce different types of compositions. However, errors in content, structure, and grammar are common in students' compositions due to several factors. Firstly, a higher level of writing skills is required to meet the challenges of academic writing courses. Also, this is due to the limited opportunity for application of this skill in real life context. Moreover, error-correction is a neglected stage in the writing process by both the teachers and the students due to its time-consuming nature (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p.261).

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In writing classes, the students' compositions were assessed by providing grades as well as feedback on errors by the instructor. But it was noticed that the students were hardly able to correct their writing errors, the main reason being their lack of editing skills. So, the same errors were repeated in the following compositions as well. At this point, it was felt that there was a need to shift from the conventional approach based on teacher-led revision to learner-based approach in improving their writing skills.

The current 'dominant paradigm' in teaching writing is the process approach where emphasis is given to various writing stages, revising and editing being an essential stage, and self-editing or peer-editing of writing errors is encouraged upon teacher-based error-correction as they facilitate proficiency in their writing skills as well as encourage independent learning (Murcia et al., 2014, p.227; Nation, 2009, p.114; Hedge, 2000, p.302). Hence, it was strongly considered that if the students learned self-editing skill, they would surely learn to identify and correct their errors autonomously producing maximum error-free well-structured compositions. So, it was decided to introduce the technique of self-editing skill in the writing class and investigate its effectiveness in enhancing the students' writing skills independently.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Drafting and revising are considered to be 'the core' of the writing process (Brown, 2007, p.404). An important part of revising is editing the first draft to improve its organization, style, grammatical and lexical correctness, and appropriateness (Nation, 2009, p.120). Students can be encouraged to edit their composition using feedback from teacher, peer, and/or self (Smith & Brown, 1995, p.122).

There have been a number of studies on corrective feedback given by teachers to their students' compositions. In his study, Ashwell (2000) tried to investigate the effectiveness of content-focused feedback approach by comparing it with form-focused feedback approach and control pattern of zero feedback. But he found that it did not result in significant changes. Ferris and Roberts (2001) studied the effective use of coded and underlined forms of corrective feedback on university ESL students' writing skills and found that the treatment groups performed better than the control group that received no feedback. However, the results revealed no significant difference between the two treatment groups. In contrary, in another study, Chandler (2003) found that direct correction and simple underlining of errors were significantly more effective than underlining and describing the error type.

Though Truscott (1996, p.327) considered error correction as 'ineffective' and 'harmful' as it provided little help in improving students' writing skills and so should be 'abandoned', Bitchener (2008, p.102) successfully conducted a study to find the efficacy of the written corrective feedback and found that the students in the treatment group outperformed those in the control group in the post-test. In 2008, Ismail, Maulan and Hasan explored on the effects of teacher feedback on their students' writing performance and concluded that the students found the teacher feedback helpful which led them to self-revision. In her research, Roy (2015) investigated on to what extent teacher feedback can be effective in large Bengali medium writing classes and

concluded that peer-feedback and teacher-student engagement could promote better student learning. Similarly, an exploratory study by Agbayahoun (2016) in identifying the effects of teacher feedback on student writing revealed that the majority of the participants were not in favor of teacher feedback. Also, Mubarak (2013) investigated on the effectiveness of direct and indirect corrective feedback in L2 writing of University of Bahrain media students and found that there was some improvement in student writings, but neither type had a significant effect on their overall writing skills due to “*their low level of English*” (p.174). Thus, it was perceived that though teacher feedback had positive effects in foreign contexts, its impact on students’ writing in Bahrain higher education context needed better type of feedback.

In addition, studies have been undertaken to investigate the usefulness of peer-editing in revision stage in improving students’ writing proficiency. In his study, Min (2006) examined the effects of trained peer feedback on ESL students’ revision types and writing quality and found that the method could have positive impact on students’ revision types by enhancing the quality of writing. Diab (2010) studied the effectiveness of peer-editing by comparing it to self-editing in students’ revision practices and reported that the peer-editing significantly reduced only the rule-based errors in revised drafts. Ozkul (2017, p. V) similar to Baker (2016) researched on the impact of peer-response in L1 writing context and found that L1 writers mostly make “surface-level revisions in their writing.” In 2018, Arfani and Noor experimented on the effectiveness of peer and self-editing techniques in improving the descriptive compositions of 40 students and the findings revealed that the peer-editing helped students improve their writing skills than the self-editing technique.

However, there have been mixed conceptions on peer interaction in error correction due to its superficial benefits such as minimal writing anxiety, student collaboration, gain of awareness, confidence and support, and engaging in critical thinking (Stanley 1992, Byrd 2003). In a recent study, Wali (2017, p.225) conducted a case-study to examine the role of peer-reviewing in developing written accuracy of Bahrain Polytechnic students. The findings revealed that the students were able to identify the errors ‘relatively correctly’ in peer’s work but needed more time and practice to correct the errors. So, it was understood that peer-editing could be ineffective in enhancing writings skills of the students as they would not be able to correct their peers’ writing errors if they were weak in English and did not have enough training in editing (Murcia et al, 2014, p.232).

For these reasons, it was considered important to turn to the studies that examined the effectiveness of self-editing in enhancing students’ writing skills. Kratochvílova (2014, p. 38) implemented self-editing in developing students’ writing skills while preparing them for the maturita exam and there was some progress in the students’ writing after they learned to self-edit their writing. In their study, Khaki and Biria (2016, p.163) investigated to examine the effects of self- as well as peer-editing techniques on Iranian postgraduate students and found that the writing skills of the students who self-edited their writings improved more significantly than that of those who did peer-editing. Pospelova (2016, p.35) sought to address how self-editing could have a positive impact

on developing learners' micro skills in academic writing and the findings indicated that students who were involved in self-editing during written production had significantly improved in specific areas. Coomber's (2016, p.2) study revealed that self-directed editing in writing classes not only improved students' writing skills but also motivated them to take responsibility for improving their writing leading to independent learning. Li and Hegelheimer (2013) successfully developed and implemented self-editing in L2 writing using a web-based mobile application.

It was noticed that these studies encouraged students to be self-editors to improve their writing proficiency (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p.279). So, after carefully considering the outcomes of these studies, the researcher decided to investigate the effectiveness of self-editing technique in students' writing skills since it would facilitate the students not only to enhance their writing skills by identifying and correcting their errors, but also to learn the life-long skill of independent learning.

Research Questions

Based on the above theoretical framework and rationale, the following research questions were formulated that were directly linked to the purpose of the study, and so the answers to these questions would reveal successful implementation of the practice under investigation.

1. How effectively can introducing the technique of self-editing skill in writing classes enhance students' writing skills?
2. What are the students' perceptions towards learning self-editing skill in writing classes?
3. How effective is self-editing skill in fostering independent learning in writing classes from the students' point of view?

METHOD

The research was carried out in two consecutive cycles to address the ongoing issue of error-correction in the writing class, plan an action of introducing self-editing technique, apply the new methodology, evaluate its outcomes, reflect on its effectiveness, and plan a subsequent action (Murcia et al., 2014, p.603). In this study, the independent variable represents the type of treatment given to the students' writing which is self-editing technique whereas the dependent variable is the effects of the treatment on the students' writing.

Participants

The research involved 28 writing course students doing Foundation Programme during the academic year 2017-2018. The students met 5 hours a week to learn, practice, and produce a variety of compositions by applying the strategies of writing. Over the period of the course, as part of the continuous assessment, the students were required to complete a portfolio work that consisted of 7 writing tasks.

Data Collection Instruments

To facilitate validation of data, enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, to reduce bias and synthesize the evidence on the current study, a triangulation of data collection method was used (Gorard & Taylor, 2004, p.43). The students' composition scores, questionnaires, and interviews were used as major measuring instruments and a self-editing sheet as a guiding tool which supported the participants in learning and applying the new skill in their writings.

Students' composition scores

The students' composition scores were used as a major measuring instrument to demonstrate the effectiveness of the treatment in students' compositions. By comparing the scores of each cycle, the researcher tried to establish how the new change had brought positive impact on the students' learning practice (Hillocks, 1984, p.135). Of the 7 compositions the students produced in total over the period of the course, the scores of the 1st composition which was written before introducing the change (Pre-cycle stage) were compared with the scores of the 4th composition at the end of the first cycle after the first treatment and with the scores of the 7th composition at the end of the second cycle after the second treatment which will be discussed in detail in the data analysis section.

Questionnaire surveys

At the end of each cycle, questionnaire surveys were administered during the class to explore the students' perceptions towards learning self-editing skill in writing classes since it was a suitable tool for gaining quantitative data (Walliman, 2011, p.97). The questionnaire comprised 17 statements with three Likert-scales. It was found that Li and Hegelheimer (2013) in their study used similar data collection instrument to explore and analyze the participants' views on the new error-correction tool, and Kasule and Lungu (2010) used this instrument to analyze the attitudes of second language students towards self-editing their own written texts.

Interviews

In addition to questionnaire survey, semi-structured interviews that consisted of 12 questions were carried out at the end of the study to investigate the role of self-editing skill in fostering learner independence from students' point of view (Walliman, 2011, p.99). For this purpose, ten students randomly selected were interviewed.

Self-editing sheets

In their studies, Li and Heglheimer (2013) used mobile software and Coomber (2016) used a checklist as guiding tools for their participants. Since the participants of the current research study self-edited their compositions, a self-editing sheet was used to help the participants correct their writing errors independently in the first cycle. Since the course book didn't provide a suitable editing form, the researcher utilised editing symbols based on the standard symbols suggested by Hedge (2000) and Nation (2009) to make the editing task easy and clear (Hedge, 2000, p.317). After reflecting on the

findings of the questionnaire survey, a self-assessment checklist was added in the second cycle to help the participants self-evaluate their compositions to make improvements (Murcia et al., 2014, p.234; Nation, 2009, p.120).

Research Schedule

The research was conducted in three phases: Pre-cycle, Cycle 1 with first treatment and Cycle 2 with second treatment. The three phases are discussed in detail below:

Table1

The Study Cycles

Pre-cycle	Students' sentence level compositions marked and feedback given by the instructor
Cycle 1	Students self-edit sentence level compositions
Cycle 2	Students self-edit paragraph level compositions

Pre-cycle: Analyzing the existing condition

During the one-week pre-cycle stage, the students were taught to write grammatically-correct sentence structures and given the first assignment. The assignment was marked and feedback was provided by the researcher using coding and written comments. The students did necessary revision and editing and submitted an improved final draft which was marked out of 10.

Cycle 1: Self-editing sentence level compositions

The first cycle lasted for three weeks. At the beginning of the cycle, the students were briefed about the nature of the research and a consent form was signed (Kumar, 2011, p.220). The importance of revising, self-editing and use of self-editing sheet was well-explained. Each week the students were given different assignment topics and wrote sentence level compositions. Under the researcher's observation, they edited their compositions using the Self-editing Sheet 1. After revision, they submitted the final draft of each composition which was marked out of 10. At the end of the cycle, a questionnaire survey was administered to explore students' application of and perceptions on the self-editing technique.

Cycle 2: Self-editing paragraph level compositions

Though there was a significant improvement in the students' composition scores in Cycle 1, it was observed from the survey results that the students needed more training and detailed editing form. Since they wrote paragraph level compositions in Cycle 2, a self-assessment checklist was added for the students to check over their compositions for improvements (Nation, 2009, p.144). For three weeks, the students were taught three different types of paragraphs, given topics, asked to self-edit the compositions using the Self-editing Sheet 2. Then the final drafts were marked. Once again, the questionnaire survey was administered. To triangulate quantitative findings, qualitative data were gathered through interviews with 10 randomly selected students to investigate the role of self-editing technique in fostering learner independence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected for this study focused on the effectiveness of self-editing in enhancing writing skills, student perceptions on this new method, and student attitudes towards this new method in fostering independent learning. The data were analyzed in detail and findings were derived using three sources: Student Composition Scores, Questionnaires, and Interviews.

Students' writing achievement (Data source: students' composition scores)

To study quantitatively the efficacy of self-editing skill on students' writing skills, the average score of the 1st composition was compared with that of the 4th and 7th compositions using Paired t-test. The variables of the first pair were the average scores of 1st and 4th compositions and the variables of the second pair were the average scores of 4th and 7th compositions whereas the variables of the third pair were the average scores of 1st and 7th compositions.

Table 2
Comparison of Students' Average Composition Scores

		Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Composition 1	4.18	1.020	.193
	Composition 4	7.50	.793	.150
Pair 2	Composition 4	7.50	.793	.150
	Composition 7	8.14	1.008	.190
Pair 3	Composition 1	4.18	1.020	.193
	Composition 7	8.14	1.008	.190

When compared to the Pre-cycle average score, the average scores of both cycles revealed significant increase. It is clearly evident from Table 2 that the average composition scores increased from 4.18 to 7.5 after Cycle 1 (Pair 1) and to 8.14 after Cycle 2 (Pair 3) subsequent to the implementation of self-editing technique. Thus, the findings indicate that the students after engaging in self-editing made significant improvement in the revised final drafts. Moreover, it is inferred from the comparison between Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 scores (Pair 2) that the increase was not drastic but gradual implying a systematic progress in students' writing skills. The mean scores are statistically significant as the p values are less than 0.01 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected accepting the alternate hypothesis that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of compositions before the treatment stage and the two stages after introducing the self-editing skill. The table also points out that the overall student performance had significantly improved compared to the Pre-cycle stage confirming that the new intervention had had a significant positive effect on the students' learning practice. Also, it is noteworthy that Li and Hegelheimer (2013) and Coomber (2016) had similar findings as self-editing had a significant improvement in their students' writing.

Students' perception towards self-editing technique (Data source: questionnaire)

After each experimental cycle, a questionnaire survey was administered to determine the values students placed on self-editing and the role that self-editing played in the revision process (Brown, 2007, p.479). For the purpose of analysis, the statements were carefully categorized under four meaningful themes to analyse students' views on **simplicity** of the self-editing form, students' **ability** to apply self-editing, easy **usability** of self-editing, and students' **preference** in using self-editing. The data were computed on SPSS software and analysed using Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for comparing Cycle 2 questionnaire variables against Cycle 1 questionnaire variables the results revealed a number of significant findings which are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Comparison of Students' Perceptions on Self-editing Skill after Cycle 1 and Cycle 2

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Composition 1 & 4	-3.321	.983	.186	-3.703	-2.940	-17.873	27	.000
Pair 2	Composition 4 & 7	-.643	.621	.117	-.884	-.402	-5.473	27	.000
Pair 3	Composition 1 & 7	-3.964	1.036	.196	-4.366	-3.563	-20.253	27	.000

Themes	Variables	Positive	Negative	Z	Sig.
Simplicity	1. The symbols are easy to use.	7	0	-2.53	0.011
	2. The instructions are clear to follow.	7	0	-2.53	0.011
	3. I am not comfortable using self-editing sheet.	4	16	-2.874	0.004
	4. I am confused with the self-editing symbols.	3	15	-2.425	0.015
Ability	5. The self-editing gives me an opportunity to identify and correct my writing errors.	5	2	-1.134	0.257
	6. I can easily identify my writing errors using the self-editing sheet now.	14	4	-2.357	0.018
	7. I am able to correct my writing errors on my own using the self-editing sheet.	14	3	-2.707	0.007
	8. I feel that I can be a good academic writer with the help of self-editing.	9	2	-2.111	0.035
Usability	9. I make less writing errors now.	11	2	-2.000	0.046
	10. My writing scores have improved.	6	4	-0.832	0.405
	11. Using self-editing sheet is time-consuming.	6	14	-1.751	0.08
	12. Learning to use self-editing is an important skill for writing courses.	9	1	-1.941	0.052
	13. Self-editing will help me in my future writing courses.	10	2	-2.309	0.021
Preference	14. I prefer editing my compositions using self-editing sheet.	14	1	-3.300	0.001
	15. I need to learn how to use self-editing because it is very important for writing course.	8	1	-2.333	0.02
	16. I like to know and correct my writing errors.	0	0	0.000	1
	17. I enjoy using self-editing sheet.	7	6	-0.277	0.782

In regard to the **simplicity** of the self-editing form, the results are statistically significant since the p values are lower than 0.05 level of significance. However, it is noticeable that the negative ranks of 16 cases in Variable 3 and 15 cases in Variable 4 indicate that in Cycle 1 these participants were not comfortable using self-editing sheet and were confused with self-editing symbols, but at the end of Cycle 2 they felt that they were comfortable and not confused with self-editing symbols since more practice was given in using the self-editing symbols to ensure better implementation. So, in that case the participants' overall perception level increased positively from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2.

Concerning the participants' perceptions on their **ability** to apply self-editing skill in revision stage, the findings revealed that there were 14 cases in variables 6 and 7 who positively perceived that they could easily identify their writing errors ($z = -2.357$, $p = 0.018$) and correct them on their own ($z = -2.707$, $p = 0.007$) using the self-editing sheet by the end of Cycle 2 at 0.05 level of statistical significance which validates the positive impact of self-editing skill in improving their writing skills.

In relation to easy **usability** of self-editing while revising compositions, at the end of Cycle 2, 11 cases in Variable 9 agreed their improvement in error reduction ($z = -2.000$, $p = 0.046$), 9 cases in Variable 12 agreed that self-editing is an important skill for writing courses ($z = -1.941$, $p = 0.052$), and 10 cases in Variable 13 agreed that self-editing will help them in future courses ($z = -2.309$, $p = 0.021$). Thus, it is clearly evident that the participants' overall satisfactory level on usability of self-editing significantly increased from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2.

Finally, regarding participants' **preference** in using self-editing in correcting their writing errors, it is interesting to note from Variable 16 that in both cycles all participants agreed that they liked to know and correct their writing errors since the positive and negative ranks were 0. It signifies the students' willingness to enhance their writing skills. Also, there were 14 cases in Variable 14 who agreed that they preferred using self-editing for error-correction ($z = -3.300$, $p = 0.001$) indicating the statistical significance of the results. However, in Variable 17 there was no significance difference since in both cycles most of them felt self-editing less-enjoyable. It correlates with the interview findings where the participants expressed that their major concern was the amount of effort and time required for self-correction process. It is noteworthy here to refer that similar findings were highlighted by Pospelova (2016). Time constraint was considered to be a major limitation of the study (p.35).

To conclude, the overall findings of the questionnaire survey revealed that the positive impact the self-editing had on enhancing students' writing skill and scores urged them to use it in future writing courses to be better writers though they felt self-editing their compositions to be time-consuming and less-enjoyable.

Students' attitudes towards the role of self-editing in promoting learner independence (Data source: interview)

Becoming 'independent self-editors' is a crucial need for students (Lane & Lange, 1993, p. xix) since teachers will not always be there to guide them (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005

p.279). Interviews with 10 participants were conducted to examine their attitudes towards the role of self-editing in promoting learner independence. These interviews were transcribed and the content was analyzed to discuss perceived effectiveness and issues related to self-editing technique.

The findings revealed that none of the participants were able to identify or correct their writing errors before the study because they were not familiar with the self-editing technique indicating their dependency on teacher for error-correction. After learning self-editing, all participants expressed that they tried to correct their writing errors on their own and 8 of them thought that they were responsible for improving their writing skills. It was evident that when students learned to correct their mistakes on their own, they started monitoring their writing errors. Thus, just as Coomber's findings (2016) confirmed that the self-editing skill motivated students to take responsibility leading to autonomous learning, in the future, these students will become 'very good independent or lifelong learners' which is highly expected at the higher education level (Biggs & Tang, 2011, p.61).

While 10 participants in Kratochvílova's research (2014, p. 48) perceived that they had improved in their writing and self-editing, 7 participants confirmed that self-editing would help them to improve future writing and so they would 'use self-editing in the future'. Others were apprehensive of using self-editing in the future due to its time-consuming nature. They also admitted that 'it will be useful for other students also'. Concluding with the interview findings, the student responses were highly in favour of self-editing and its role in fostering learner independence and substantiated the findings of student scores and questionnaire.

Nonetheless, similar to the findings of Pospelova (2016), the major limitation of self-editing was the amount of time required for self-editing. This resulted in delayed-submission of final drafts. Thus, the whole process of revision and editing stage took longer than drafting stage. Moreover, weak students needed more time and guidance to understand the concept of self-editing and correct their errors without teacher's help. Lastly, due to the short duration of study, the long-term effects of self-editing on students' writing practice could not be investigated.

To sum up, from the above analysis and findings of the triangulated sources, in spite of its limitations, it is evident that if students learn to self-edit their writing errors, it will not only improve their writing skills and scores, but also will make them independent learners.

CONCLUSION

The study was undertaken to enhance students' writing skills by inculcating self-editing skill in writing classes. The findings of the study, both quantitative and qualitative, directly correlated with the research questions. It was clearly evident from the empirical results that the average composition scores of students increased from 4.18 to 7.5 after Cycle 1 and to 8.14 after Cycle 2 subsequent to the implementation of self-editing

technique. The cumulative overall improvement of students' writing in the study confirmed that this new technique facilitated significant improvement in student composition scores as well as their writing skills and encouraged independent learning, thus validating self-editing an appropriate method for implementation in academic practice. Moreover, the students were also very positive in practicing the new technique and implementing it in future writing courses because they perceived self-editing skill to be a required lifelong learning skill in academic practices and more application of self-editing will result in better writing and more independent learning.

The successful implementation of the research work has recommended a number of potential implications. First of all, the outcomes of this study confirm that, as Biggs and Tang (2011, p.59) indicated, in higher education self-assessing has the greatest single effect on students' learning process. Hence, students are encouraged to learn and utilize self-editing skill and to identify and correct their errors autonomously producing maximum error-free well-structured compositions. Secondly, the findings also encourage the teachers of writing to incorporate self-editing in their writing classes as it enhances students' writing skills and facilitates independent learning. They are suggested providing their students with regular opportunities for self-assessment and encouraging them to monitor their writing on their own in revision process (Brown, 2007, p.479; Hedge, 2000, p.95). Moreover, since self-editing had significantly positive effects on students' writing skills, further research can be undertaken to investigate the potential effectiveness of self-correction in other language skills such as listening, speaking, and reading. Finally, the study has had a significant influence on the researcher's professional practice. It has positively changed her attitude on the role of self-editing in revision process in writing classes. To conclude, since the study demonstrated a positive effect of the new method of investigation on students, it confirms that the self-editing technique plays a significant role in enhancing students' writing skills and in developing learner independence.

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