

Feedback, Student Collaboration, and Teacher Support In English as a Foreign Language Writing



Education

KEYWORDS : English as a Foreign Language writing, feedback, collaboration, support

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ABSTRACT

The present study attempts to determine whether regular feedback, both written and verbal, student collaboration and teacher support help students improve their writing skills in an intensive EFL writing skills program. For this study, twenty four students from grade 12 of different private schools in Nepal were taught the skills to write narrative essays within a fixed time (fifty minutes for each essay) five days a week for three months in an intensive writing program. The students were taught the writing course by two Non Native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) three hours daily at a language institute in Kathmandu, Nepal. Feedback modes such as error correction and detailed written and verbal comments were constantly given to make them aware of their errors, discuss these errors with fellow classmates and the teachers, correct them with support from their teachers, and thus, enhance their linguistic and content accuracies. They were tested on their writing skills at the beginning and at the end of the treatment period, so pre-test and post-test were the instruments used for the research. The results indicate that rewriting activities, when accompanied with written and verbal feedback, student collaboration and teacher support, develop English as a Foreign Language writing skills.

Introduction

A multitude of study has been done on second language writing, feedback, and rewriting. Researchers have emphasized on various modes of rewriting process: self-evaluation, peer review, collaboration, and teachers' comments. Bitchener (2008) states that a number of studies supported corrective feedback on second language writing. Teachers can respond to student writing with comments that encourage the writer back to the initial stages of composing, or what Sommers (1982) refers to as the "chaos," "back to the point where they are shaping and restructuring their meaning" (p. 154) (Robb, Ross & Shortreed, 1986). It is obvious that teachers' response is considered very important to both teachers and students irrespective of their orientations towards providing feedback to student writing. Commenting and giving ideas is not an easy task, and just writing comments is not enough either for students to understand and correct themselves. Ferris (1995) says that the amount of time and effort teachers spend in providing written and /or oral feedback to their students suggests that teachers themselves feel that such response is a critical part of their job as writing instructors. Regarding teachers' comments, Ferris (1997) claims that students may either follow teacher feedback very effectively or ignore completely. Allowing students to see and judge their classmates' work in small groups promotes critical thinking and it helps them develop essential editorial skills and knowledge (Moxley, 1989). Such peer review is obviously one of the ways of helping students for their rewriting. Some researchers agree that student collaboration is essential in class.

As a renowned institute in providing English language instruction to non-native speakers of English, the present language institute situated in Kathmandu, Nepal conducted research in the beginning of 2005 on how English skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) could best be taught to a growing number of students who are trying to go to university overseas for higher education. Writing was obviously one among the skills the institute looked into during the research period.

The present study attempts to determine whether rewrites resulted from regular feedback, both written and verbal, student collaboration and teacher support help students improve their writing skills in an intensive EFL writing skills program. For this study, twenty four students from grade 12 of different private schools in Nepal were taught the skills to write narrative essays within a fixed time (fifty minutes for each essay), five days a week for three months in an intensive writing program. The students were taught the writing course by two Non Native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) three hours daily at a language institute in Kathmandu, Nepal. Feedback modes such as error correction and detailed written and verbal comments were constantly given to make them aware of their errors, discuss these errors with fellow classmates and the teachers, correct them, and enhance their linguistic and content accuracies. They were tested on their writing skills at the beginning and at the end of

the treatment period, so pre-test and post-test were the instruments used for the research. The results indicate that rewriting activities when accompanied with written and verbal feedback and student collaboration and teacher support develop English as a Foreign Language writing skills.

The students were asked to write an essay in 50 minutes for five days a week. The classes ran for 3 hours daily, including a 20-minute break. The teachers would discuss multiple topics on writing, such as drafting, proofreading, and editing and content, organization, grammar and mechanics, during the first period that lasted for an hour and thirty minutes.

The question might come up: why were the students given so much time every day; why is student collaboration and teacher support needed? Polio, Fleck, & Leder (1998) mentioned that students do not have time to go back and reread their earlier drafts in timed writing. It is also clearly stated that students might not have the ability to correct their grammatical errors themselves without teachers' feedback. As a result, the students in the present research were given sufficient time to reread their essays and have conferences both with their teachers and classmates.

After the break, the students would peer review essays for 10 minutes, and discuss among themselves how they would help each other in correcting their errors for another 10 minutes. Then they will begin writing their essays, and continue that for 50 minutes. Once they start writing, they would not get any assistance from their teachers. They weren't allowed to use any dictionaries; however, at the end of the writing, they would be asked to brainstorm the vocabulary they used in their essay, but couldn't spell properly. Then they would look for the words in the dictionaries that they could use while rewriting the same essay the following day.

Review of the Literature

A number of studies have been done to find out the best approaches and strategies for learning a second language. The importance of writing during the acquisition and development of a second language has usually been ignored (Knutsson, Pargman, & Eklundh, 2003). Knutsson, Pargman, and Eklundh consider writing to be of utmost importance. It gradually affects consciousness and cognition by providing a model for speech and a theory for thinking about what is said, so, they focus on the development and the use of writing tools like Granska (a Swedish Grammar Checker) in the context of second language. "Writing represents a unique mode of learning – not merely valuable, not merely special, but unique (Emig, 1977)". The writer argues that a classroom led only with the teacher's speeches does not have fruitful effects. Emig adds that writing uniquely is linked with learning because it as "process- and- product possesses a cluster of attributes that correspond uniquely to certain powerful learning strategies". Buckingham (1979) states that the

only reason for the student to learn to write effectively is to permit communication of variety of ideas, thoughts, feelings, impressions, and propositions to others. The process-oriented writings discussed in the present writing help the students to understand their own composing process, beside the ones mentioned (Planning, Writing, Drafting, Proofreading, Rewriting/ Practice after feedback and Final version) and build their repertoires of strategies for prewriting and final version. Students are given sufficient time to write and rewrite, to discover what they want to say, and to consider intervening feedback from instructors and peers as they attempt to bring expression closer and closer to intention in successive drafts (Flower, 1985; Murray, 1980, 1985; Taylor, 1981; Zamel, 1982, 1983).

Raphael, Florio-Ruane, & George (2001) discusses producing of sustained writing after reading certain texts and share ideas and experiences during classroom discussions. They have claimed that writing improves when it is produced after much reading. The students in the present study were also encouraged to read a variety of related texts. Kepner's (1991) idea about students' writing being of perennial concern has been realized in this research work.

Though the focus is on message related comments, error correction strategy as feedback has also been considered in the present study. Doughty & Williams (1998) cites evidence for the effectiveness of corrective feedback, provided it is clearly focused and the students already have a firm knowledge of the form in question. The most popular means of correction was underlining and giving a clue was evident in Leki (1991). Such correction method was also implied although comparatively fewer times. Bitchener, Young, & Cameron (2005) suggests that both oral and written feedback be given to improve linguistic accuracy on a regular basis. Guenette (2007) favors corrective feedback; however, she adds that it is only one of the many factors that helps students' language acquisition process. Variables such as classroom context, students' proficiency level, and types of writing should be taken into account while providing feedback.

The study done by Bitchener (2008) on written corrective feedback resulted in improved accuracy in the use of two functional uses of the English articles (a, the). This study also found that students who received direct corrective feedback on the targeted features and written and oral meta-linguistic explanation did better than those who didn't receive corrective feedback.

Sugita (2006) talks about three different types of handwritten comments – statements, imperatives and questions - on students' writing and the influence these comments have in subsequent drafts. The study concludes that there were substantive changes with positive effects when imperative comments were provided. Very minimal change or no change was found in the essays with the feedback in the form of statements; whereas some minimal changes with positive effects occurred in the essays with questions as comments. Sugita's study asserts that teachers' imperative comments seem to have been taken as direct instructions from an authority that encourages the students to follow the instructions and revise the drafts. Similarly, Ferris (1997) concluded that students were provided with marginal requests for information, requests (regardless of syntactic form), and summary comments on grammar, it led to the most substantive revisions better than questions or statements. Whatever may be changes (whether minimal or substantial), they overwhelmingly tended to improve the students' papers.

Some studies targeted the editing part of the writing. Bitchener, Young & Cameron (2005) found that the combination of full, explicit written feedback and one-to-one conference feedback enabled the authors (students here) to use the past simple tense and the definite article with significantly greater accuracy in new pieces of writing than was the case with their use of prepositions. Moxley (1989) prefers to explain what the problems are rather than writing "review subject-verb-agreement". He likes to refer students to some specific reference books and previous class discussions. Similarly, he further adds that when sentence fragments written by students are read aloud, students can identify the dangling incompleteness of their ideas. Mox-

ley (1992) writes that composition scholars would like teachers to encourage students to revise their essays after receiving feedback from their teachers and peers. These scholars would like teachers to talk to students about their underdeveloped thoughts and ideas rather than focusing primarily on errors in grammar and formatting. Moxley (1992) suggests that writing classrooms be limited to 15 students and maximum of three writing courses a semester be assigned for the seriousness of teaching writing.

What seems to be important is that students, as suggested by Zamel (1982), first of all, explore ideas to write about. While more proficient writers have certain techniques to begin and proceed with their exploration, beginning writers or less proficient writers should be taught how to make use of prewriting strategies on exploration and invention techniques. The students should be taught how to "explore topics, develop ideas, and discover relationships by making use of the kinds of the invention techniques" described by Koch and Brazil (1978). (Zamel, 1982) focuses on teacher-student conferences between drafts. Zamel further discusses that syntax, vocabulary and rhetorical forms should be taught not as ends in and of themselves, but as the means that help students express better in writing. While teaching writing, these linguistic features should be taught but there should not be much more focus; else, it might hinder the progress of the students in fluency of the language learning.

Studies find that student collaboration is an important factor contributing to improvement in second language writing. Wichadee (2005) says that cooperative learning encourages interaction among students as they are working in small groups, which maximizes their learning and helps them reach their shared goal in their learning process. Ismail & Maasum (2009) finds that students perform better in writing when they work cooperatively. Thus the present study includes student collaboration in the research. Teacher support, while students are working collaboratively in their writing, is also a part of the study.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions for this study were thus formulated as follows:

1. Does written and verbal feedback positively affect students' English as a Foreign Language writing?
2. What happens if students are left open to work collaboratively in the classrooms?
3. Is teacher support needed in writing classes, especially when students already have received written and verbal comments on their drafts from their teachers?

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference in writing skills before and after written and verbal feedback, student collaboration, and teacher support.

Alternate Hypothesis: There is significant difference in writing skills before and after written and verbal feedback, student collaboration, and teacher support.

Methodology

The study incorporated the quantitative research method. The one- group pretest-posttest research design was employed for the research method since it involved a Pretest before the beginning and a Posttest after the end of the treatment. The data were statistically collected, analyzed and interpreted by using t-test for dependent samples. The results of this study revealed that the regular written and verbal feedback, student collaboration and teacher support during the treatment period made a significant difference between the pretest and the posttest at the .05 level.

This study consists of the essays written by twenty four students while studying in an intensive writing program at a language institute in Kahtmandu, Nepal. They were taught essay writing within a fixed time (fifty minutes for each essay), five days a week for three months. All the students were from

grade 12 and from English medium schools. In this particular program, they were taught by two Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs). Both teachers had a Master's degree in English Language from a university in Nepal and both had the same professional and training background.

During the first few classes, students were explicitly taught how to write narrative essays. They were given ample opportunities to practice exploring ideas, such as topics, audience, and purpose. They were encouraged to do some pre-writing activities, such as free writing, brainstorming, outlining, and clustering. Students were taught to write proper thesis statements, topic sentences, controlling ideas, and supporting details. All these processes were appropriately taught, and modeled, and then students were given sufficient time to practice and eventually, to apply these processes to produce their writing. They were provided a journal to record their experiences, describe the places visited, make their personal observations, and even to record their errors that they can keep track of. Gradually, they were also taught to write essays within a certain time frame. This led them to realizing the importance of time in writing. Although they found 50 minutes a short time for writing an essay in the beginning, they were able to produce essays within that time frame later on.

Essay topics such as the following were selected by the instructors based on class work.

- Write an essay about your favorite activity that you often do at leisure. State your thesis statement, topic sentences and controlling ideas, and provide with supporting details, and a conclusion.

The students were asked to write an essay in 50 minutes for five days a week. The classes ran for 3 hours daily, including a 20-minute break. The teachers would discuss multiple topics on writing, such as drafting, proofreading, and editing, and content, organization, grammar, and mechanics during the first period that lasted for an hour and thirty minutes. The question might come up: why were the students given so much time every day and why was student collaboration and teacher support needed?

Polio, Fleck, & Leder (1998) mentioned that students do not have time to go back and reread their earlier drafts in time writing. It is also clearly stated that students might not have the ability to correct their grammatical errors themselves without teachers' feedback. As a result, the students in the present research were given sufficient time to reread their essays and have conferences with both with their teachers and classmates. The process of collaboration begins with Vigotsky's (1978) emphasis on the role of social interaction. The literature confirms numerous advantages of collaborative writing (Kessler, Bikowski, & Boggs, 2012). For the study, it was made sure that the students were working collaborative on their drafts. While the teachers sometimes grouped and or paired the students based on the factors such as their language proficiency, and characteristics, the students were also given opportunities to choose their partners or group members at other times.

After the break, the students would peer review essays for 10 minutes, and discuss among themselves how they would help each other in correcting their errors for another 10 minutes. Then they would begin writing their essays, and continue that that for 50 minutes. Once they start writing, they would not get any assistance from their teachers. They weren't allowed to use any dictionaries. However, at the end of the writing, they would be asked to brainstorm the vocabulary they used in their essay, but couldn't spell properly. Then they would look for the words in the dictionaries that they can use while rewriting the same essay the following day.

Students did not write any essays during the first week but the one on Monday for testing their writing skills for Pretest. They were just engaged in practicing writing strategies the rest of the week. From the second week on, they began working on writing essays. Every Monday, they would begin a new essay topic; their first draft would be returned with written and verbal feed-

back on their communicative aspect (content and organization) and they would write the second draft on Tuesday. They would work on their third draft once they receive their second draft with feedback, both written and verbal, on their accuracy aspect (grammatical and mechanical errors) on Wednesday. Students would not write the final draft on Thursday. They would mainly be working collaboratively to learn from each other, and self-correcting the errors on their third draft they received the feedback on all of the aspects - content, organization, grammar, and mechanics. On Friday, they would work on the same paragraph for the forth and final time the feedback on which would be given the following Monday. This process continued until the twelfth week, and in the twelfth week, the students wrote two essays instead of one. They wrote their fourth draft of the twelfth essay on Thursday, and the first and final draft of their thirteenth essay on Friday. Their last essay (Posttest), i.e. the thirteenth one, was compared with the first essay (Pretest) written on the first day of the program.

During the treatment period, The students were given sufficient feedback that contained both written and verbal comments so that they could follow the instructions and rewrite the essays until their essays were error free. The essays were analyzed at the beginning and at the end of the treatment period to determine whether such writing practices over the treatment period resulted in improvement in writing skills.

For determining the quality of the essays, the rating scales as presented by Shohamy, Gordan and Kraemer (1992) were used. They talk about different rating scales as given below for evaluating writing. They also point out the background of and training to be given to the instructors who evaluate the essays. Remaining on the same ground, the instructors were chosen from same professional background (Master's degree in English Language) and intensive training in procedures for rating written proficiency for rater-reliability.

The Rating Scales

A - Holistic Approach

B - Communicative Approach

C - Accuracy Approach

The essays were evaluated by a total of three raters using three different rating schemes. Each rater had to evaluate the essays, using one approach only. All the raters agreed on a particular area of their interest (Holistic or Communicative or Accuracy), and were trained according to their interest to evaluate the essays.

Ratings of these approaches are as follows:

A - Holistic Approach

This focused on the general quality of writing and not specific linguistic features:

0 = Just an attempt.

1 = Some language barely comprehensible; not fully communicative.

Example (Student Excerpt):

"English language is must to communicate with people living in any part of the world so, it even creates a sense of co-operation among the people due to the common language as different people have their own native language, they find difficult to learn English language. For practicing English language, we must have the habit of writing Hence, essay writing helps us to improve our writing as well as improve our language..."

2 = Comprehensible, has some syntactical problems.

Example (Student Excerpt):

"...We can gather our vies through essay writing which includes Essay, letter etc in general we started writing A,B,C and developed ourselves to He is a boy and she is a girl and these writing took a long way and has now reached to what we write today..."

3 = Communicative; accurate vocabulary; some minor grammatical errors.

Example (Student Excerpt):

"...If we are able to write essay properly then English language will be effective. Writing essay helps to make English language more effective, sensible and comfortable."

4 = Good syntax; awareness of sociolinguistic aspects; Near native; sporadic errors.

Example(Student Excerpt):

" So, taking the example of myself, before three – months, I had little idea about this language but now I can deal with people nicely and only due to my effort and practice, my language is much more improved."

5 = Native-like.

B – Communicative Approach

This approach focused on how effective the author was in conveying his message. In fact, in the approach, content and organization were looked into.

0 = Incomprehensible.

1 = Vague statement of author’s main intent (not necessarily explicit); can deduce author’s intent; no supporting information; no expansion of ideas; no awareness of organizational features (opening, body, wind-up); lacking cohesion.

Example(Student Excerpt):

"Humanbeings have invented languages to communicate with each other. It is the most easiest way to express our feelings and Ideas. Different parts of people use different languages to communicate. These languages are according to their culture or community. Some of them are as native language."

2 = Main intent expressed; supporting ideas expressed but not clearly; no expansion of ideas; ideas not always clearly expressed; lacking some organizational features; mostly lacking cohesion.

Example (Student Excerpt):

"...It’s a fact that writing essay help in learning English language. My daily English writings really fostered my English skills to grow much better. These sorts of writing essays not only build up the writing standard but help in preventing grametical mistakes during speaking as well..."

3 = Main intent and supporting ideas expressed clearly; ideas generally expressed clearly;

Occasional lack of cohesion; exhibits proper organizational elements; limited expansion of ideas.

Example (Student Excerpt):

"...We can take an example of a talented student who is good in English and an write and express his ideas but if the same idea has to be expressed orally, he fails to do so, this is because of lack of speaking and dealing with the people..."

4 = Main intent and supporting ideas expressed clearly; expansion of ideas; proper organizational elements; sporadic awkwardness of cohesion.

5 = Native-like; main intent and supporting ideas expressed clearly; expansion of ideas; clarity of expression; proper organizational elements; entirely cohesive.

C – Accuracy Approach

This focused on the degree of quality or appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar used. However, in the present study, only grammatical and mechanical errors were considered – vocabulary was not the main part of the study.

0 = Entirely inaccurate.

1 = Poor grammar and vocabulary strongly interfering with comprehensibility; elementary errors.

Example (Student Excerpt):

"...so, they learn English and practice writing to make their language better. If we know English properly also it goes in vain if we do not practice it at all. So, writing not only improves over language, it also improve it grammatically as well as spelli-ings which ultimately helps to improve each & every aspects so,..."

2 = Frequent consistent errors yet comprehensible; basic structures and simple vocabulary.

3 = Consistent errors; accurate use of varied/richer vocabulary; longer sentence structure.

4 = Few sporadic mistakes; completed sentence structures.

5 = Accurate use of sophisticated vocabulary; near native accuracy.

As mentioned above, there were three raters, each with expertise on one of the rating approaches: holistic, communicative, and accuracy. It means that Rater A rated the holistic aspect of the essays, while Rater B and Rater C rated the communicative aspect and the accuracy aspect respectively. This was done to keep evaluation consistent and correct. All the raters were non native speaking English teachers. They had similar educational backgrounds (Master’s degree in English language) and an intensive training on the above mentioned rating scales had been provided before they rated the essays. The assessments were consistent with earlier analysis. It means the same rating scales were used to assess the essays written at the beginning and end of the treatment to keep consistency.

Results and Discussion

The paired samples t-test was incorporated in the present study as there was one group of 24 students, and the data were collected at two different times – at the beginning and at end of the treatment period. The results were used to answer the research questions in the present study.

The data were analyzed and interpreted as follows, using Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	24	40.00	68.00	55.2500	8.26333
Posttest	24	52.00	81.00	62.4583	7.75707
Valid N (likewise)	24				

Table 2 Paired Samples Correlations

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 Pretest - Posttest	24	.864	.000

Table 3 Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Pretest	55.2500	24	8.26333	1.68675
Posttest	62.4583	24	7.75707	1.58340

Table 4 Paired Samples Test

	Paired Difference				
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	Upper
Pair 1 Pretest - Posttest	-7.20833	4.20123	.85757	-8.98236	-5.43431

Table 5 Paired Samples Test

	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)
Pair 1 Pretest - Posttest	-8.406	23	.000

Thus the Pretest scores and the Posttest scores were collected and analyzed to see whether there was a significant difference in the students' writing skills after the treatment period. The results show that there was a significant difference, $t(24) = -8.406$, $p=0.00$. The mean for the Posttest (62.4583), $SD = 7.75707$ was higher than the Pretest (55.2500), $SD = 8.26333$. The findings are clearly given in the Tables 1 and 2. Thus findings supported the effectiveness of the written and verbal feedback and student collaboration, and teacher support in rewriting essays. The findings showed that the students performed significantly better in the Posttest compared to the Pretest in narrative writing, so the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is supported.

During the short interview at the end of the treatment period, the students said that they enjoyed discussing their errors with their group members and partners and learning from each other's errors. The teachers' support in explaining errors and facilitating the class was considered very useful throughout the treatment period. Throughout the treatment period, the students commented that the proper feedback definitely added a positive remark to the writing of the essays and thus, to their writing skills, especially in linguistic and content aspects.

Looking at the excerpts below, it can be noticed that student moved to conceptually more complex responses to the context they were writing on. Their long notes indicate an increased level of engagement with the context itself and an internalization of the give and take about meaning that occurs. Thus the students were able to produce better quality essays compared to the ones they wrote before the treatment.

For example (Student Excerpt):

"So, taking the example of myself, before three - months, I had little idea about this language but now I can deal with people nicely and only due to my effort and practice, my language is much more improved."

It can be observed that this sustained thinking over the situation is evidenced by the somewhat longer and more varied written responses. In the beginning, they showed little interest and lackluster performance in their writing. They showed difficulty focusing on writing: whether working independently or in groups. By the end of the program, however, their learning and engagement changed dramatically and it can be seen in the differences in the results of the test scores at two different times.

The research questions are clearly answered in this study. The findings from the tests and evaluation of the essays have revealed that that written and verbal feedback positively affects students' English as a Foreign Language writing. In the study students continued working on their drafts until those drafts were error free. When interviewed, the students said that their improvement on writing skills was due to two main things - student collaboration and teacher support. When the students were left open to work collaboratively, they were able to share their ideas, recognize their errors and assist each other in correcting those errors. The collaboration was so helpful, especially when different students made different errors, and they could help each other with the errors that their fellow classmates had made, and that they could correct those errors because they already knew how to avoid those grammatical, mechanical and content-based errors. Whenever the students were not able to correct themselves, the teacher would support them with producing similar examples that the students could use to correct the errors in their drafts. Teacher facilitation was found essential in their writing process.

Some of excerpts from the essays written by the students at the beginning and during the treatment period:

- "Human being is a social animal. They live in a society influencing the society and influenced by the society. They need to communicate with each other to express their feelings and ideas..."
- "...Yes, writing essay English definitely helps in learning English. I personally agree that writing essay helps in learning English but only the essay does not help for the student of English..."

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- "...Yes, writing essay English definitely helps in learning English. I personally agree that writing essay helps in learning English but only the composition does not help for the student of English..."
- 'Writing, listening and speaking are the basic things that comprises for learning English language. So, writing essays definitely helps in learning English language. When we write something we write it by understanding it properly...'
- '...For learning English only speaking and communication is not enough. We need to practice it as well. We need to prepare various essays. With the help of essay writing, we not only improve our spellings and grammatical aspect as well as our writing skill...'

Concluding Discussion

The use of regular written and verbal feedback, student collaboration, and teacher support in teaching second language writing is proved in this study to have improved the students' writing skills. The study lends credence to some researchers' hold that such use in teaching writing helps improve English as a Foreign Language writing.

The findings from the tests have revealed that written and verbal feedback, student collaboration and teacher support, and rewrites play a vital role in the improvement of English as a Foreign Language writing. We find it when we compare the evaluations of the two stages of the students' essays. Timely and proper feedback adds to the learning of writing skills. Students seem to have produced significantly improved essays after they received proper feedback, both written and verbal. During the first hour and an half every day, the teacher would facilitate the class, and the students would be given opportunities to work collaboratively in groups and pairs. The students were able to work with different members as they had to keep working with different groups or pairs. In the beginning, the students were reluctant to work in groups and pairs. However, they were happily engaged in working collaboratively and sharing ideas and helping each other soon. When groups or pairs were unable to find solutions to their errors, they would approach their teachers who would just provide them with similar examples to help them understand their errors in writing. Thus teacher support was found invaluable among the students. This study also shows that the students had many difficulties in expressing their ideas in writing because of the writing style they had been following in their schools, one of the difficult areas being contrastive rhetoric, in academic writing in an EFL setting of Nepal. They obviously did not have sufficient exposure to the second language environment for extensive reading and writing. Though the same instructors in the same environment taught them in the same way, their writings reflected different stages of development. When the teachers allowed for open discussion, the students seemed to be fairly busy discovering new ideas and sharing them with fellow students and incorporating new dimensions of thoughts and feelings in their writings.

Certainly, the present study had some limitations. Only students who had already been familiar with English as a Foreign Language writing to a greater extent were considered for the study. It could have brought a better result if a few students from public schools where English is not taught until students reach grade three had also been chosen for the research purpose. This would have been a different opportunity to closely learn their problems and add the same to this project. Similarly, having small size (24 students) was another limitation - a bigger size would have been a full representative and brought in a different picture. In the present study, vocabulary did not get thorough attention. While the teachers taught content and organization, certain aspects of vocabulary such as word choice, and word form were discussed; however, the students were not explicitly taught the use of vocabulary. It was definitely a limitation.

The research included three things - feedback, both written and verbal, student collaboration and teacher support in the present study. However, these three things were not evaluated in detail as the time frame was short, which was surely another limita-

tion. It was definitely difficult, if not impossible, to teach writing skills to the students and try to evaluate them during such a short period of time of three months. Taking more time to teach and evaluate could have provided different and more relevant data. These EFL students needed to be instructed in their writing lesson strategies to think effectively, analytically and creatively as demanded by Lin (2001), which was not possible as the study period was short.

Different researchers advise teachers and students differently on students' writing process. However, the essence of the findings of the study is that feedback, student collaboration, and teacher support obviously enhances students' writing. In their rewriting process, students certainly reconsidered their arguments, reviewed their evidence, refined their thesis and reorganized their contents as explained by their teachers in the comments. Teachers' comments should be clear enough for students to understand and respond accordingly. The study shows

that written and verbal comments, student collaboration, and teacher support definitely shape the direction and the way English as a Foreign Language students are writing. Such feedback, collaboration and support inspire students for better writing, resulting in a new and well-shaped piece of writing.

Based on the findings, the study would still like teachers to include both written and verbal feedback in English as a Foreign Language students' writing practices. Just mentioning errors isn't quite helpful. These errors should be discussed among students; students should be provided an opportunity to learn from each other's errors. Teacher should provide support throughout students' writing process. They should not act authoritatively in class; they should rather facilitate the classroom and support students with understanding their errors and help them work collaboratively to find the ways to correct those errors and improve their writing.

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