# Effects of Self- and Peer-Editing on Iranian TEFL Postgraduate Students' L2 Writing

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## Abstract

Peer and self-correction of writing are considered to be two important types of corrective feedback. The present study was an attempt to investigate the possible role that self- and peer-editing may have on term paper writing by Iranian Teaching English as a foreign language postgraduate students. To this end, from the population of male and female postgraduate students majoring at TEFL at Islamic Azad University, Khorasgan branch a sample of 100 MA and PhD students, 50 each, were selected using a convenient sampling method. The participants at each level were divided into two groups. Task two of the IELTS academic writing module was run as a pre-test to gauge the homogeneity of the participants in terms of their writing performance. In the treatment phase of the study, half of the MA participants were asked to edit their own essays for 13 consecutive sessions. They were explicitly told to introduce changes at the level of punctuation, coherence and cohesion as well as grammar and vocabulary. Afterwards the two MA writing classes sat for a post-test. The procedure for the PhD candidates was partially different in that the term papers of the PhD participants were used as the corpus for the targeted data. While the term papers of 25 PhD candidates were revised and edited by themselves, those of the rest, were scored and edited by several PhD holders. Subsequently, the scores of the participants in both MA and PhD groups were compared. The results provided by paired sample t-tests revealed that exposure to self-editing instruction can significantly improve the writing ability of postgraduate TEFL students. Notably, these findings may have practical implications for those involved in English teaching and research in general and those who have their hands on teaching writing in particular.

**Keywords:** corrective feedback; self-edition; peer-edition; self-monitoring; peer-monitoring

## INTRODUCTION

Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) is an approach to writing which can help language learners learn specific strategies for planning, drafting, and revising text

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(Graham & Harris, 2005). The strategies in this approach typically focus on planning, drafting, revising, editing, or some combination of the processes (Graham & Harris, 2013). The foundational key is that "self-generated thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are directed toward achieving goals" (Bitchenerm, 2008, p. 3). Overall, self-instruction, goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-reinforcement are important in this approach. Alternatively, Graham and Harris (2005) suggest that SRSD approach goes through six different but complementary stages: develop background knowledge about the writing genre and about powerful writing strategies; discuss students' current strategies and abilities; model effective writing strategies and composing process; help students memorize strategies and self-instructions; support what students have learned through collaboration and revision, and establish independent performance.

Teachers assume that students need a lot of feedback about their writing to make improvements in content, organization, and form. Feedback from both teachers and other students is a key part of effective writing instruction, but teachers must recognize that a great many of variables can influence the way they evaluate the quality of a composition; these variables include the structure of rubrics designed for this purpose; the teacher's scoring reliability; a student's facility with writing mechanics (i.e., basic writing skills); and the paper's representativeness of a student's true writing ability (Graham, Harris, & Hebert, 2011a, 2011b). Additionally, students improve their writing quality when they use explicit criteria (e.g., rubric traits) to self-evaluate their writing performance.

 Equally important are concepts like feedback and self-correction. On the role of feedback and self-correction, Bandura (1986) proposed a view of human functioning that emphasized the function of self-referent beliefs. In this socio-cognitive perspective, individuals are viewed as proactive and self-regulating rather than as reactive and controlled by biological or environmental forces. Also in this view, individuals are understood to possess self-beliefs that enable them to exercise a measure of control over their thoughts, feelings, and actions. In all, Bandura painted a picture of human behavior and motivation in which the beliefs that people have about their capabilities are critical elements. In fact, according to Bandura, how people behave can often be better predicted by the beliefs they hold about their capabilities, what he called self-efficacy beliefs, than by what they are actually capable of accomplishing, for these self-perceptions help determine what individuals do with the knowledge and skills they have. Such perspectivization is also applicable to the writing process which requires learners' intelligent use of mental mechanisms.

 Notably, good writers use three primary, recursive processes: planning (generating ideas, setting goals, and organizing, referred to in this paper as "planning"), translating (turning plans into written language, referred to here as "transcription"), and reviewing (referred to here as "editing and revising") (see National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006). In Iranian context, one of the biggest challenges with which EFL learners encounter is to master the writing skill. When it comes to post graduate students the issue even gets more exacerbated. This is due to the fact that the post-graduate learners

need to publish articles and term-papers. Term papers are inseparable part of the educational program in Iran. The limitation of time and the problem of face-keeping for TEFL post graduate students are two other factors which lead to reluctance and demotivation on the part of the learners to publish an article with an authentic journal. In addition, the marathon of writing the proposal and thesis necessitates the students to reach the level of writing mastery.

Many theories and methods have so far been planted in writing classes to make the learners capable of mastering this challenging skill; still many post graduate learners lack enough proficiency to enrich themselves in this case. Having students self-edit and self-revise their own papers is a technique which can be of great positive effect for Iranian post-graduate learners. On the other hand, not many studies have so far been conducted to elaborate on the effect of implementing self-edition on enhancing article writing ability of EFL learners, and writing in English as a foreign language demands the execution of strategies such as self-edition. Thus, this study tried to fill the gap and investigated the effects of self-edition on writing ability of post graduate students of TEFL.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Hedgcock and Lefkowitz's (1996) study, EFL students believe feedback focused on linguistic accuracy is more useful while ESL students are more interested in feedback that helps them develop their ideas. Cho and MacArthur (2010) examined student drafts upon feedback from expert, feedback from peer and feedback from multiple peers and suggested that students with multiple peer feedback lead them to more complex repairs and revised drafts of higher quality revisions but understood peer feedback better than teacher feedback.

Teachers assume that students need much feedback about their writing to make improvements in content, organization, and form. Feedback from both teachers and other students is a key part of effective writing instruction, but teachers must be aware that other variables can have much effect on how they evaluate the quality of a composition; these variables include the structure of rubrics designed for this purpose; the teacher's scoring reliability; a student's facility with writing mechanics (i.e., basic writing skills); and the paper's representativeness of a student's true writing ability (Graham, Harris, & Hebert, 2011a, 2011b). Additionally, students improve their writing quality when they use explicit criteria to self-evaluate their writing performance. A model has been proposed for self-regulated development.

Bitchener (2008) believe that when learners can perform self-correction, it means that they know the correct form or may have it as an alternative in mind. What is missing is fine-tuning, confirmation of the correct alternative, and routine access to it, which is achieved through self-correction (p. 107). So what teachers are required to do is to involve "learners, and therefore foster learning."

A student's utterance that immediately follows the teacher's feedback and that constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher's intention to draw attention to some aspect of the student's initial utterance is called uptake" (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, p.49). Therefore, when a learner produces an erroneous utterance, it may be followed by teacher's feedback resulting in teacher-initiated correction which is uptake, or the error might be noticed and corrected by the learner himself/ herself which might lead to a self-initiated correction.

In recent learner-centered educational settings where collaborative learning is exercised and learner autonomy is highlighted, "self-correction" is required and has been proved essential (Sultana, 2009). However, as Sultana (2009) also suggests, the specific educational context and learners' demands must be examined carefully before the application of any method or technique.

As it is obvious, one of the noteworthy speech acts which has not captured researchers' interest is the speech act of correction. There are a few studies available in this realm such as those of Takahashi and Beebe (1993).

The issue of "correction" has also been dealt with a lot so far. Among much research on correction, we can refer to that of Panova and Lyster (2002) who observed patterns of error treatment in ESL classrooms and tried to find a relationship between feedback type and learners' response. Many researchers highlighted the type of correction favored by teachers and learners and concluded that teachers prefer indirect correction (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001). Some other researchers such as Vickers and Ene (2006) examined correction in writing who concluded that the most effective type is self-correction since it leads to greater grammatical accuracy. Still other scholars studied peer correction in writing and ESP courses or investigated its effectiveness (Rollinson, 2005). Truscott (2007) tested the effectiveness of corrective feedback on a new piece of writing. These authors claim that there are no differences between control and feedback groups in these new pieces and take it as evidence that feedback has no effect beyond self-editing a text. According to what was said in literature review, it seems that there is a gap in this topic in an Iranian context; therefore, this study will try to fill the gap in this regard.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The following questions were foci in the present research:

- Does self-editing of term papers significantly improve the writing performance of Iranian post-graduate TEFL students?
- Is there any significant relationship between post graduate TEFL students' ability in writing when they self-edit their term papers compared with the time when peers or professors edit the papers?

To answer the mentioned research questions, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

- Self-editing of term papers does not improve the writing performance of post-graduate TEFL students significantly.
- There is no significant relationship between postgraduate TEFL students' ability in writing when they self-edit their term papers compared with the time when peers or professors edit the papers.

## METHOD

### Participants

The population of the study consisted of 100 post graduate students, majoring at TEFL who were selected through convenience sampling. The sample included 50 MA students from Islamic Azad University, Khorasgan branch, who were divided into two groups, and 50 PhD candidates For the ease of planting the research protocol, the students were among those studying enrolled for the writing course, and they were in two classes. Furthermore, through convenient sampling 50 PhD candidates were chosen from Khorasgan, Isfahan, Sheikh Bahaee, and other universities.

### Instruments

Task two of the writing module of academic IELTS was used to set the homogeneity of the participants as a pre-test. In addition, essays and term papers which were written by the participants were used as the corpus for the present study.

### Data collection procedures

At the onset of the study, the MA students were supposed to be homogeneous in terms of their writing ability, to ensure that the treatment was effective and caused significant improvement. To establish the homogeneity of the participants, they sat for a writing test. This test was the second task of the writing module of academic IELTS. This test was two-folded: first it was used to ensure that the participants enjoy the same level of writing proficiency; second it served as the pre-test.

During the advanced writing course, the students usually are given some homework assignments in the form of essays. After making sure of the homogeneity of the MA participants, 25 students were asked to edit their own essays. They were explicitly told to introduce changes at the level of punctuation, coherence and cohesion as well as changes at the level of grammar and vocabulary. The essays written by the rest 25 MA students, however, were partly checked by some classmates of the researcher (They have already passed the advanced writing credit course), and partly by the instructor of the course.

After a term of 13 sessions, the two MA writing classes sat for a post-test. The writing pre-test was run among the PhD candidates as pre-test. The procedure for the PhD candidates was a little distinct, however. The PhD candidates at universities are usually grouped in classes of 3 or 4; therefore, for the purpose of this study, the researcher gathered the needed data from several universities. For the PhD course, no credit

course as writing has been introduced, on the other hand the PhD candidates usually are supposed to write and publish articles and term papers. So the term papers of the PhD participants were used as the corpus for the needed data. In fact the term papers of 25 of the PhD candidates were revised and edited by themselves and the term papers of the rest 25 were scored and edited by some PhD holders. The rubrics for scoring the writing tests were the same rubrics used in scoring the writing section of the IELTS test. After the term was finished the scores of the participants in two groups of PhD candidates were compared using an independent samples t-test.

## RESULTS

At the end of the treatment, a writing post test was administered. To test hypothesis number one, the scores of the self-edition group in writing post tests were compared using paired sample t-tests. The results of this test are analyzed in tables 1 through 4.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for the mean comparison of the pre and post writing tests of the ma self-edition students

|  | Mean | N | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| pretest | 57.6000 | 25 | 5.40062 | 1.08012 |
| posttest | 67.8000 | 25 | 4.51848 | .90370 |

According to the figures presented in table 1, the mean score of the writing pre-test of MA students is 57.60 and that of post-test is 67.80. That is a mean difference of 10.20, which is considered to be significant. In order to put the data under more exact analysis, a paired samples t test was run between the writing pre and post test scores of the MA self-edition group. The results are presented in table 2.

**Table 2.** The results of the paired samples test of the writing pre and post-tests of the self-edition ma students

| | Paired Differences | | | | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | |
| | | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| pretest - posttest | -1.020 | 7.522 | 1.504 | -13.305 | -7.094 | -6.780 | 24 | .000 |

The significance level is .000 which is smaller than the identified level of .05 (.000<.05); therefore, it can be concluded that the using self-edition technique as a type of corrective feedback can significantly enhance the performance of MA TEFL students. The same procedure was followed for the PhD participants from self-edition group, the results are analyzed as follow.

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics for the mean comparison of the pre and post writing tests of the PhD candidates

|          | Mean    | N  | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|----------|---------|----|----------------|-----------------|
| pretest  | 76.4400 | 25 | 4.97561        | .99512          |
| posttest | 81.9200 | 25 | 8.84081        | 1.76816         |

As it is shown in table 3, the writing test mean for pre-test of self-edition group is 76.44 which is higher than that of post-test being 81.92, having a mean difference of 5.58. So it can be claimed that the PhD participants in self-edition group have changed in terms of their writing proficiency. In order to ascertain that the mean difference between the pre and post writing test of self-edition group was significant, a paired samples t-test was run between pre and post writing test mean scores. Table 4 illustrates the results.

**Table 4.** The results of the paired samples test of the writing pre and post-tests of the self-edition PhD students

|                      | Paired Differences | | | | | t | Df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|----------------------|--------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------|--------|----|-----------------|
|                      | Mean   | Std. Deviation    | Std. Error Mean   | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | |
|                      |        |                   |                   | Lower  | Upper | | | |
| pretest - posttest   | -5.480 | 11.165            | 2.233             | -10.089 | -.870 | -2.454 | 24 | .022 |

According to the results displayed in table 4, the level of significance is lower than the identified level of significance. (.022 < .05). Therefore, the difference is statistically significant and that shows that the PhD participants in self-edition group did better in writing post-test compared with pre-test. As a result, it can be concluded that exposure to self-edition instruction can statistically improves the writing ability of post-graduate TEFL students. Thus based on these results, the first hypothesis of the study was rejected.

The second hypothesis of the study at hand stated that there is no significant relationship between post graduate TEFL students' ability in writing when they self-edit their term-papers compared with the time when peers or professors edit the papers. In order to test this hypothesis, the term papers of a group of MA students and a group of PhD candidates were edited and revised by peers and professors. Then a post-test was run on the posttest scores. Then the gathered data were analyzed in tables 5 through 8 present the results.

**Table 5.** Descriptive statistics for the mean comparison of the writing post-test of the MA participants

| groups             | N  | Mean    | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------------------|----|---------|----------------|-----------------|
| Self-edition group | 25 | 67.8000 | 4.51848        | .90370          |
| Peer edition group | 25 | 63.0400 | 3.27210        | .65442          |

As it is shown, the post-test mean score of the MA participants in self-edition group, is 67.80 which is more than the post-test mean of peer edition group, 63.04. This is a mean difference of 4.76. In order to analyze the post test scores of MA self-edition and peer edition groups, an independent samples t-test was run, the results are presented in table 6.

**Table 6.** Results of the independent samples test of the writing post-test of the MA students

| Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
| F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| 3.465 | .069 | 4.266 | 48 | .000 | 4.76000 | 1.11577 | 2.51660 | 7.00340 |
| | | 4.266 | 43.742 | .000 | 4.76000 | 1.11577 | 2.51095 | 7.00905 |

Based on the statistics presented in table 6, the significance level is .000, which is smaller than the identified level of significance. Accordingly, it can be said the MA students who practice self-edition perform better in writing tests.

As the next step of finding evidence to accept or reject the second hypotheses, the post test score of the PhD participants in self-edition and peer edition groups were compared, the results of which are presented in follow.

**Table 7.** Descriptive statistics of the writing post-test of the PhD participants

| groups | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Self-edition group | 25 | 81.9200 | 8.84081 | 1.76816 |
| Peer edition group | 25 | 77.0000 | 6.06905 | 1.21381 |

As shown in Table 7, the mean score of the self-edition group is 81.92 and that of peer edition equals 77. Thus, a mean difference of 4.92 in post-test score mean values can be observed. However to ensure the significance of the difference an independent samples t-test was run on the scores of the self-edition and peer edition groups. Table 8 presents the results of this test.

**Table 8.** The results of the independent samples test of the writing post-test of the PhD students

| Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
| F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| 5.697 | .021 | 2.294 | 48 | .026 | 4.92000 | 2.14470 | .60779 | 9.23221 |
| | | 2.294 | 42.510 | .027 | 4.92000 | 2.14470 | .59336 | 9.24664 |

According to the results of the paired samples t-test the level of significance is less than the identified level of significance (.026<.05). So it can be said that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of post writing tests of the self-edition and peer edition groups. Based on all the discussion in this section, the second null hypothesis according to which There is no significant relationship between post graduate TEFL students' ability in writing when they self-edit their term-papers compared with the time when peers or professors edit the papers, should be rejected.

## DISCUSSION

The results of analyzing the first research hypothesis showed the following results.

Using self-editing technique as a type of corrective feedback can significantly enhance the performance of MA TEFL students. The PhD participants in self-edition group did significantly better in writing post-test compared with pre-test.

To improve writing, writers should engage themselves in self-editing and modify their work through self-reflection. The reason for such findings may be due to the fact that self-edition offers students the opportunity to contribute to a dialogue concerning the text, students become active participants in discussion. Authors' self-evaluations may help them to develop more explicit awareness of their writing quality or of problems as seen from multiple readers' perspectives (Cho, Cho & Hacker, 2010).

Self-editing help students develop the ability to make judgments, which is a necessary skill for study and professional life (Brown, Rust & Gibbs, 1994). Furthermore, EFL students can analyze and criticize misconceptions so that they raise awareness of their own inappropriate writing habits and faults. On the other hand, peer-editing enhances students' critical thinking techniques by encouraging students to express and negotiate their arguments and comments.

The results of the present study, as far as the effect of self-edition on writing ability is concerned, are in line with Vickers and Enes' (2006) study who examined correction in writing and concluded that the most effective type is self-correction since it leads to greater grammatical accuracy. The results also supported Cho and Cho (2007, p.340) study, in which it was concluded that self-correction is highly effective with grammatical errors. According to the results, students have improved their linguistic creativity through self-correction.

The results of analyzing the second research hypothesis are as follow: The MA students who practice self-edition performed better in writing tests compared with those MA students whose writings were exposed to peer-edition. The PhD students who practice self-edition performed better in writing tests compared with those PhD students whose writings were exposed to peer-edition.

The following issues should be mentioned regarding peer-edition. Peer-editing can help students learn and develop self-editing techniques. Against the present study, Polio (2001) claimed that feedback from peers helped learners produce writing with better

quality and higher accuracy. He stated that monitoring strategy provides students with an opportunity to activate their linguistic competence in correcting both peers' and their own errors. Mittan (1989) stated that giving feedback had positive effects on the reader's self-editing skills since "by responding critically to their colleagues' writing, students exercise the critical thinking they must apply to their own work" (p. 210).

Regarding peer-editing, Carson and Nelson (1996) found that their Chinese students showed reluctance to criticize their peers' work, as they were afraid of losing face. However, against Carson and Nelsons'(1996) study, the participants in the present study were not reluctant to edit others' writings, which may be due to the fact that all the participants were post-graduate students and they all had reached the level of growth to know the real value of research and studying. One more point is that the efficiency of peer response depends on the editors' writing ability; however, writers with lower skills usually cannot correct composition skillfully.

The results of the present study are comparable with Ru Tsai and Feng lins' (2012) study in which most of the students assume peer-editing is an effective revision tactic. In addition, Ru Tsai and Feng lins (2012) claimed that "by responding critically to their colleagues' writing, students exercise the critical thinking they must apply to their own work" (p. 210). This result is in agreement with Cho, Schunn and Kwon's (2007) study, which suggested that after detecting problems in texts, reviewers are automatically engaged in diagnosing the problems. In the same line with this study, other scholars studied peer correction in writing and ESP courses or investigated its effectiveness (Rollinson, 2005). The results of this study also support the results of the study by Bitchener (2008) which indicated that peer feedback appears to be an instructional technique of some potential (e.g. social gains, overall L2 development, opportunities for reflection) but no immediate and spectacular results should be expected as far as writing improvement is concerned.

Since this study was done among Iranian intermediate TEFL students and may reveal the effect of integrating activities to improve the level of peer and self-edition in writing classes, it can be a starting point to improve the quality of teaching English in this country, especially for the students of TEFL who are going to become language teachers. It must be noted here that in order for the findings of this study to be pedagogically valid and applicable, first of all, they must be subjected to replication and empirical validation. It is then and only then that the results and findings can be generalized to other populations.

The findings may well suggest that the incorporating correction as a type of feedback in EFL writing classes in Iran may be fruitful for both the teachers and learners. As the current study showed that self-edition has a positive relationship on Iranian EFL learners' and their performance in writing, then the problems associated with writing could lie in the teachers' inability to plant the feedback technique in writing classes and learners' inability to execute this technique. Therefore, the results of this study can brighten the path for both language teachers and learners.

It should be mentioned that the findings of this study could enrich the literature in the area of second/foreign language acquisition in Iran, and the results can be applied to students at lower levels like the BA students of TEFL. Therefore, the Iranian EFL learners can take benefit of the literature on corrective feedback in general and peer and self-correction in particular, to enhance their writing ability. Those language institutes and universities which are following the task of mastering a foreign language in general and writing performance of EFL learners in specific, can experience a boom in their task via using the findings of the present study. Meanwhile the people in charge of the ministry of research and science and ministry of education can arrange their policies in a way so that the educational centers make use of the outcomes of psychological researches.

## CONCLUSION

The study was in fact an attempt to shed more light on the point whether using self and peer-edition technique can enhance writing performance of Iranian EFL learners or not. As it was illuminated in the preceding section of the study, the findings of the study revealed that first; self-edition can enhance the writing ability of TEFL students. Second, though peer-edition improved the writing ability of post-graduate TEFL students, compared with self-edition, peer edition did not result in significant enhancement of the performance of the sample under study. Thus, based on the results obtained from the statistical analysis on the collected data mentioned in chapter three, it can be safely claimed that using self-edition technique as a corrective feedback technique, can significantly improve the writing achievement of post graduate students of TEFL. All in all, more attention should be given to such techniques as corrective feedback of different types. Given that writing ability can be enhanced through these techniques.

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