



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***EFFECTS OF MODEL ESSAYS ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF IRANIAN
IELTS CANDIDATES' WRITING ABILITY***

MOHAMADREZA JAFARY

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By

MOHAMADREZA JAFARY

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

June 2014

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DEDICATION

I Whole Heartedly Dedicate This Thesis To My Beloved Parents And Dear Supervisor For Their Incredible Endorsement And Care. I Also Wish To Express My Gratitude To Dear Yasi For Her Endless Inspiration And Support.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment
of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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June 2014

Chairman: Nooreen Noordin, PhD

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There are a number of studies on the efficacy of the common practice of most writing teachers in providing feedback to their students each having their own limitations or flaws. The present study, however, seeking to find some evidence on the effectiveness of providing students with corrective feedback moved one step forward by using a quasi-experimental approach and a qualitative study to provide a better understanding of how the model essay approach is more effective than reformulation as common tradition of writing instruction. Having been pretested for their English knowledge and their writing ability, 60 Iranian students were assigned into treatment groups (30) and control groups (30) in two different institutes in Tehran. The treatment group was provided with 10 model essays written by native speakers of English and were instructed to use them as corrective feedback. On the last session all participants were post-tested for their writing ability on IELTS academic writing Task 1 and Task 2 (descriptive and argumentative essays) but the treatment group was also interviewed for their experience on the analysis of the model essays and the prominent components which attracted them most when comparing their own works with the model essays they were provided with. In addition to this, their produced LRES (Language related episodes) were counted on four major categories defined by the IELTS academic writing rubric and their level of noticing was operationalized based on the counted LREs and text analysis. The control group had the same hours of instruction practicing how to write first the separate parts of and then whole essays paying attention to the main components identified by IELTS task 1 and 2 writing band descriptor ('task response,' 'coherence and cohesion,' 'lexical resource,' and 'grammatical range and accuracy'). Instead of model essays participants in the control group used reformulated text as a written feedback. The pre- and post-test writings of all participants were typewritten observing all the misspelling, punctuation errors, grammatical deviations, and use and usage problems in the original hand written copies before being given to 2 independent raters who scored them once for a total score and a second time to determine the sub-scores for the four essay components. The gain scores of the two groups were compared using a two way repeated measure ANOVA followed by post

hoc test (Bonferroni) and the results revealed why such patterns in the data and the statistical analysis were observed for the five scores. The treatment group was found significantly better for their total scores and for their sub-scores on the two components of task response, and lexical resources. The result of multi- mediator analysis indicated that the treatment positively affects all 4 sub-scales of IELTS writing rubric but only grammar and lexical resources significantly influenced the IELTS score. This, interestingly, matched with their interviews and produced LREs in the qualitative section of the research. Using model essays as a form of feedback in writing instruction actually improves learners' writing ability in both IELT academic writing task 1 and 2.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**KESAN ESEI MODEL MENGENAI MEMPERBAIKI PENULISAN
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Oleh

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Terdapat beberapa kajian mengenai keberkesanan amalan biasa penulisan guru yang paling banyak memberikan tindak balas kepada pelajar-pelajar mereka . Masing-masing mempunyai kelemahan atau kekurangan mereka sendiri . Kajian ini, bagaimanapun, ingin menemukan beberapa bukti tentang keberkesanan menyediakan pelajar dengan maklum balas pembedahan bergerak satu langkah ke hadapan dengan mencuba untuk menggunakan pendekatan yang lain untuk memberi pemahaman yang lebih baik bagaimana pendekatan esei sampel adalah lebih berkesan daripada tradisi biasa dengan menulis arahan. Setelah mengkaji tahap pengetahuan bahasa Inggeris mereka dan keupayaan penulisan mereka, 62 pelajar Iran telah diberikan kepada kumpulan-kumpulan pemulihan seramai 33 orang dan kumpulan kawalan seramai 29 orang dalam dua institusi yang berbeza di Tehran. Kumpulan pemulihan telah disediakan dengan 10 contoh esei yang telah ditulis oleh jurucakap berpendidikan asal bahasa Inggeris dan telah diarahkan untuk menggunakan mereka sebagai maklum balas pembedahan. Pada sesi terakhir selepas semua peserta diuji terhadap tahap keupayaan menulis, kumpulan pemulihan juga telah ditemuramah mengenai analisis contoh esei dan komponen utama yang paling menarik minat mereka apabila membandingkan penulisan mereka sendiri dengan contoh esei yang telah disediakan. Kumpulan kawalan mempunyai waktu pembelajaran yang sama bagaimana untuk menulis bahagian pertama dan kemudian esei keseluruhannya memberi perhatian kepada komponen-komponen utama yang dikenal pasti oleh IELTS tugas 2 bertulis band huraian ('sambutan tugas', 'kesepaduan dan perpaduan', 'leksikal sumber, 'dan' pelbagai tatabahasa dan ketepatan '). Pra-dan pasca-ujian tulisan semua peserta telah ditaip memerhatikan semua misspelling, kesilapan tanda baca, kesalahan tatabahasa, dan penggunaan dan masalah penggunaan dalam salinan tulisan tangan asal sebelum diberi kepada 2 penilai bebas yang memberi markah mereka sekali untuk markah keseluruhan dan untuk kali kedua untuk menentukan sub-markah bagi empat komponen esei. Keuntungan skor kedua-dua kumpulan telah dibandingkan dengan menggunakan pelbagai bebas t-ujian untuk lima markah. Kumpulan pemulihan didapati jauh lebih baik bagi jumlah markah mereka dan sub-markah mereka di kedua-dua komponen tindak balas tugas, dan kepaduan dan perpaduan. Ini, menarik, dipadankan dengan wawancara mereka yang mencerminkan komponen yang sama

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 27 June 2014 to conduct the final examination of Mohamadreza Jafary on his thesis entitled "Effects of Model Essays on the Improvement of Iranian IELTS Candidates' Writing Ability" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

The history of ESL composition teaching can be viewed as a succession of methods and approaches to L2 writing, “a cycle in which particular approaches achieve dominance and then fade, but never really disappear” (Silva, 1990, p. 11). The four most influential approaches since 1945 have been the current-traditional rhetoric, controlled composition, English for academic purposes and the process approach.

Controlled composition or what is sometimes referred to as ‘guided composition’ seems to be rooted in Charles Fries’ oral approach, the originator of the audio-lingual method of second language teaching. Notions underlying the approach include the claims that language is primarily speech, rooted in structural linguistics, and learning is considered as habit formation, taken from behaviorist psychology. As such, writing is of secondary concern as reinforcement for oral habits (Silva, 1990).

Writing in this approach acts like a handmaid of other skills and in no way can it take precedence or priority as a major skill to be developed (Rivers, 1981), and it must be “considered as a service activity rather than as an end in itself”. The reader to such pieces of work is the ESL teacher playing the role of a proofreader or an editor not necessarily interested in the quality of ideas expressed but concerned with formal linguistic features (Silva, 1990).

A reaction to controlled composition approach in the mid-sixties came in the form of an almost new approach called current-traditional rhetoric. It was in response to students’ needs for producing extended written discourse. It was suggested that controlled composition was not enough and there was more to writing than making grammatical sentences. This approach was proposed to fill in such a gap. Current-traditional rhetoric’s primary focus was on how to make larger stretches of discourse especially paragraphs by paying a lot of attention to contrastive rhetoric theory. As a result, more pattern drills at the rhetorical level rather than at the syntactic level was called for. In this approach, attention was given not only to elements of a paragraph (topic sentence, supporting sentences, conclusion sentences, and transitions), but also to different options for its development (illustration, exemplification, comparison, contrast, etc.). Essay development was also of major focus.

The introduction of the process approach was a reaction to the shortcomings of the previous two methods. Many believed that none of them could foster thought or its expression since controlled approach was totally irrelevant to such a goal, and the linearity and prescriptivism of the current-traditional rhetoric discouraged creative thinking and writing. As such, the composing process was seen as a “non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning” (Zamel, 1983). In classroom context, this approach entails providing a positive, encouraging and collaborative environment in which learners, with the ample time and little interference they receive, can work through their composing process. Unlike previous approaches, the teacher’s role is to

help students develop viable strategies for getting started, drafting, revising, and editing.

Though the process approach may appear as a perfect method to some, it has faced many criticism. One major portion of that comes from the fact that this approach does not adequately address some central issues in ESL writing. The process approach ignores the variations in writing processes due to differences in individuals, writing tasks, and situations; language proficiency; level of cognitive development; the development of schemata for academic discourse; and the insights from the study of contrastive rhetoric (Reid, 1984).

Another question raised about this approach is whether it realistically prepares learners for academic purposes. It creates a class atmosphere which bears little resemblance to the situations in which they will have to function in future. It also ignores certain types of key academic writing tasks such as essay exams (Horowitz & Daniel, 1986a). He believes that this approach gives students a false impression of how university writing will be evaluated. In other words, the process approach operates in a sociocultural vacuum.

An alternative to process approach with primary emphasis on academic discourse genres and nature of academic writing tasks is the EAP approach. It aims at helping to socialize the students into the academic context and ensuring that learners fall within a range appropriate and acceptable writing behaviors which are approved and dictated by the academic community (Horowitz & Daniel, 1986b). Its instructional methodology is said to seek to recreate the conditions under which actual university writing tasks are carried out.

Whatever approach used by teachers to teach writing in a writing class, providing students with the right form of corrective feedback in responding to the pieces of writing they produce is an indispensable part of the course. However, providing students with written corrective feedback has always been controversial. While some claim that it is ineffective and even harmful (Truscott, 1996, 1999, 2007), others (Ferris, 1999) argue for the practice.

Knoblauch and Brannon (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1981) and Hillocks (1986) reviewing lots of research findings of different sorts suggest that teacher correction has little effect on students' writings. He also states that "the available research suggests that teaching by written comments on compositions is generally ineffective.

Truscott (Truscott, 1996) reviewing a number of research concluded that grammar correction in L2 writing classes should be abandoned. He gave a number of reasons for that: (a) Research evidence shows that grammar correction is ineffective; (b) this lack of effectiveness is exactly what should be expected, given the nature of the correction process and the nature of language learning; (c) grammar correction has significant harmful effects; and (d) the various arguments offered for continuing it all lack merits.

One type of reasoning he presents encompasses the practical problems with error correction. First of all, he argues that many teachers may fail to notice errors (A. D. Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990). Even if they do recognize an error, they still may not have an idea of the correct use of the grammatical point. They may know an error has

occurred, but they might not know exactly why it is an error. As such they may not be able to explain the principle to the students. Even if teachers give good explanations, still students may not understand them or even if they do, they may not be motivated enough to take care of that. Finally even the “students who do try to write in accordance with the corrections they receive may not maintain their motivation to do so for long” (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990, p. 352).

However, Truscott’s claim has not been without criticism. Ferris (1999) was the first to challenge his ideas. The first criticism given by Ferris relates to Truscott’s definition of ‘error correction’. She believes that Truscott has defined error correction in the vaguest of terms. Truscott (1996) defines it as “correction of grammatical errors for the purpose of improving a student’s ability to write accurately.” He also states that “correction comes in many different forms, but for present purposes such distinctions have little significance.” Ferris disagrees with him in that she believes there is a lot of research evidence that “effective error correction, which is selective, prioritized, and clear, can and does help at least some students” As such in considering if grammar correction is ‘effective,’ it is crucially important to know what sort of error correction we are discussing (Ferris, 2004). The second main criticism offered by her is that Truscott in his review of the literature on the effectiveness of grammar correction has under- or over-stated the findings and claims of the original studies to fit his own argument.

The corrective feedback that students may be provided with may come in different forms. These different types have received a lot of attention in the past decades and each study carried out in this field dealing with feedback, has in one way or another included and dealt with one especial type or combination of a limited number of them.

The two types of feedback that have received much attention from researchers interested in the issue of corrective feedback in writing are ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ corrective feedback. ‘Direct’ is defined as the provision of the correct linguistic form or structure by the teachers above the students’ linguistic error (Ferris, 2003). It may include the crossing out of an unnecessary word or phrase, or the insertion of the missing word.

On the other hand, indirect corrective feedback is the one in which, in some way or another, is indicated that an error has occurred without explicit attention drawn (Ferris, 2003). It may involve one of the following forms: underlining or circling the error; recording in the margin the number of errors in a given line; or using a code to show where the error has occurred and what type of error it is. The teacher does not correct the error, but it is the students’ task to do the job.

Another distinction usually made regarding corrective feedback in language writing courses is the one between ‘selective’ and ‘comprehensive’ corrective feedback. In comprehensive approach (the most common practice) teachers correct all (or at least a range of) the errors in learners’ written work. This approach is also sometimes called the ‘unfocused’ approach. On the other hand, in selective or focused approach, specific errors are selected to be corrected or dealt with, and other errors are ignored. A highly focused corrective feedback will focus on a single type of error (Ellis, 2009a; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008).

Another issue about which there is not so much evidence is the level of explicitness required for the error feedback provided for students. “Specifically, when teachers mark student errors, do they need to indicate the type of error the student has made, or is it adequate for the teacher to simply underline or circle an erroneous form, leaving it to the student to diagnose and correct the problem?” (Ferris & Roberts, 2001, p. 162).

Teaching a skill cannot be separated from assessing that skill. However, when it comes to writing, unlike other skills, subjectivity on the part of the assessors reveals itself in a more vivid manner. There have been different approaches to the assessment of written compositions. Any scale used in the task of assessing students’ performance in writing, implicitly or explicitly, represents the theoretical basis upon which the test is founded (McNamara & Candlin, 1996). Using a scoring scale entails having some criteria for the evaluation of the written products against which the raters have to assess the compositions. In other words, they should not judge a learner’s performance against those of others. In this manner assessment is based on scoring rubrics of criterion-reference nature rather than norm-reference. Students’ essays are usually rated on the basis of a scoring rubric which can be of different types: holistic, analytic or trait-based.

“Holistic scoring is based on the view that there are inherent qualities of written text which are greater than the sum of the text’s countable elements”(Hamp-Lyons, 1990). Based on the overall impression of a script, raters assign a single score to the text in this type of scoring. It is more practical and less expensive than analytic scoring (Jean Chandler, 2003). It is also intended to focus reader’s attention on the strength of the writing rather than the deficiencies (White, 1985). However, it is of little diagnostic value and the scores obtained are sometimes difficult to interpret (Jean Chandler, 2003).

In analytic scoring, instead of giving a single score to the whole text, each aspect of writing, i.e., vocabulary, grammar, organization, cohesion and so forth is given a separate score. As a result, a more detailed picture of one’s writing ability and performance is obtained in analytic scoring. It provides more diagnostic information about learners’ writing ability than holistic scoring. Moreover, it is more useful in rater training as inexperienced raters understand and apply the criteria more easily in separate scales (Weir, 1990). Besides, since multiple scores are given to a single script, it is more reliable than holistic scoring (Liz Hamp-Lyons, 1991; B. Huot, 1996). However, it is not practical and a good deal of information will be lost when a composite score is required (Jean Chandler, 2003).

Trait-based approach differs from other scoring methods in that it is context-sensitive. It is designed to clearly define the specific topic and genre features of a task being assessed (Jean Chandler, 2003). Trait-based approach is further divided into primary-trait scoring and multiple-trait scoring. Hyland (1986) states that “primary trait scoring represents a sharpening and narrowing of criteria intended for holistic scoring as it involves rating a piece of writing by just one feature relevant to that task” Since a separate scoring guide is needed to be developed for each task, primary trait scoring is very time consuming. Also Hyland (2003a, p. 230) states that “Multiple-trait scoring is often regarded as an ideal compromise by teachers as it requires raters to provide separate scores for different writing features, as in analytic scoring, while ensuring that these are relevant to the specific assessment task”.

In most approaches to assessment, stakeholders try to make the task of rating as objective as possible. However, as far as human raters, even trained raters, are involved, the task of judging learners' performance will be more or less subjective. While Inter-rater reliability has been recognized as a significant methodological factor, problems which could result in failed trials (Lee, 2003), or type II error (that is, to falsely accept a null hypothesis when the literature indicates that it should have been rejected) which makes high rater reliability a difficult task to achieve.

Weigle (2002) states that raters are affected as much by their experiences and cultural contexts as by the quality of the students' writings. Raters' background experience may affect their judgments. Raters from different disciplines have been observed to apply different criteria to nonnative English writing samples (Carl James, 1998; C. Knoblauch & Brannon, 1981; Leki, 1990; Leki, 1994). Also, raters familiar with L1 rhetorical conventions tend to be more accepting of L2 essays showing L1 traces in comparison with other raters (Burkland & Grimm, 2010; Radecki & Swales, 1988).

The number of levels in a scale that raters can accurately distinguish is limited. The more levels exist in a scale, the more difficult it becomes for the raters to decide accurately. Penny et al. (2000, p. 147) state that "it seems possible, and, moreover, it seems likely that the length of a scale may affect measurement error, serving to increase the error component of variance when the scale length surpasses the ability of raters to discriminate between levels of proficiency".

Raters have been found to assign higher scores to hand-written essays in comparison with those prepared by word-processors (Hahn, 1981; Leki, 1991; Marshall & Powers, 1969; Powers, Fowles, Farnum, & Ramsey, 1994; Russell & Tao, 2004; Sloan & McGinnis, 1982; Soloff, 1973; Sperling & Freedman, 1987). There are many other factors such as students' gender (Bolger & Kellaghan, 1990; Manke & Loyd, 1990; Natriello & McDill, 1986), their ethnic background (Keith, Reimers, Fehrmann, Pottebaum, & Aubey, 1986), socioeconomic status (Jussim & Eccles, 1992), and behavior (Manke & Loyd, 1990) which have been found to affect raters' rating task.

Presuming that one takes care of all the above-mentioned problems in the task of writing assessment, the question of whether to provide students with corrective feedback in writing courses still remains unresolved. In spite of the controversies present in this regard, many teachers still believe that following such a practice in their writing classes is one of their responsibilities, and insist on continuing to do so. The present study is an attempt to find evidence in support of either continuing or abandoning such a practice. In doing so, the researcher attempts to examine the effect of providing students with model essays as a form of feedback.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

During the last three decades, many studies have been carried out to show the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the common practice of most writing teachers in providing feedback to their students. However, most of these studies were in one way or another flawed. That is why drawing any conclusion about the effectiveness of such a practice has been, if not impossible, very difficult. On the one hand, Truscott (1996, 1999) argues that providing students with corrective feedback is not only ineffective but also harmful. On the other hand those who argue against Truscott's claim do present results which are obtained from studies most of which are problematic in their

methodology. Many studies showing positive results (Chandler, 2000; Ferris, Chaney, Komura, Roberts, & McKee, 2000; Ferris, 1997; Lalande, 1982) were carried out without having a control group included, which makes drawing any conclusion about the comparison of correction/no correction approaches implausible.

Three studies mostly cited in different reviews are Ashwell (2000), Fathman and Whally (1990) and Ferris and Roberts (2001). These studies have shown positive results for the practice of providing students with CF and they did include a control group. However, having a control group is not sufficient. What is needed is a control group which is compatible with the treatment group in all aspects including proficiency level, writing conditions, and instructional context (Gu nette, 2007). It is a fact that the above mentioned studies, did have a control group, but their experimental and control groups differed in proficiency levels.

Also, most of these studies were of a short duration. For example, Fathman and Whalley's (1990) participants were required to write one essay and had 30 minutes to correct it. The effect of feedback on learners' accuracy in such a short time does not seem to be conclusive at all. Moreover, most of the studies examining the effect of CF do so by requiring learners to work on the same piece of work, i.e., working on different drafts of the same essay. Very few studies have examined the corrective feedback on a new piece of writing.

The present study, like all other studies carried out in this field, seeks to find some evidence on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of providing students with corrective feedback. However, what makes this study stand out is the use of model essays as a form of feedback and exploring their effectiveness in teaching writing to the students of English as a foreign language. Apart from this, the carried out studies were not in the context of preparation for IELTS focusing on both IELTS Academic writing Task 1 and Task2. Additionally this study uses a comprehensive approach applying quantitative, qualitative and text Analysis based on the verbalized LREs derived from the interview transcriptions. Eventually, the mediating factors were assessed and a delayed post-test was administered substantiating the consistency of the outcomes. Most Iranian IELTS candidates have poor performance in IELTS writing task 1 and 2 as the conventional syntactic method could not yield desirable results (refer to Iran IELTS Official website) and it is evident that most of these candidates need to improve the instrumental use of language to find their way to one of the prime universities around the globe thereby the necessity to apply a more practical and analytic writing instruction to improve their writing proficiency becomes more paramount. In light of positive effects of applying written corrective feedbacks especially model essays as written corrective tool, this area of research needs more empirical studies. This particularly helps to introduce an effective writing instruction approach in the context of preparation for IELTS or other internationally recognized instrumental tests of English language. However, issues concerning how noticing is related to composing and subsequent feedback processing, and what impact such noticing has on L2 writing improvement, need to be addressed. Moreover the present study attempts to avoid the pitfalls of most studies carried out in this regard so far. Therefore, the methodological problems were addressed by including a control group; judging the effectiveness of the practice based on both quantitative and qualitative analysis and including a post test of a new piece of writing . To this aim, the homogeneity of treatment and control groups was taken into account and the time frame of the treatment was extended over

a course of 10 two-hour sessions followed with a delayed post- test to indicate the consistency of the results.

1.3 The Purpose of the Study

The present study as its primary objective attempts to explore the effectiveness of providing students with corrective feedback in teaching writing courses. In doing so, it examines the effectiveness of the use of model essays written by native speakers of English as a form of feedback. More specifically, this study seeks to find out which aspect of IELTS writing scoring rubric including the task response/achievement, coherence and cohesion, lexical resources, and grammatical range and accuracy is more affected by model essay approach through the use of an analytical rubric, the interview, text analysis and the operationalization of their noticing behavior. As its subsequent objective it examines the mediating effect of all four sub-scales of IELTS writing scoring rubric. Eventually, the research was carried out in Iran as one of the general objectives of this study was the application of model essays as written feedback tool in Iranian context.

1.4 Research Questions

The present study seeks to find an answer to each of the following questions:

1. Is there a significant difference in gain scores of IELTS mock writing test between experimental (receiving model essays) and control group in Task 1 and 2?
2. Is there a significant difference in 'task response /achievement' sub-scale of IELTS writing scoring rubric between experimental (receiving model essays) and control group in Task 1 and 2?
3. Is there a significant difference in 'coherence and cohesion' sub-scale of IELTS writing scoring rubric between experimental (receiving model essays) and control group in task 1 and 2?
4. Is there a significant difference in 'grammatical range and accuracy' sub-scale of IELTS writing scoring rubric between experimental (receiving model essays as a form of written corrective feedback) and control group in task 1 and 2?
5. Is there a significant difference in 'lexical resources' sub-scale of IELTS writing scoring rubric between experimental (receiving model essays as a form of written corrective feedback) and control group in task 1 and 2?
6. Does IELTS writing rubric sub-scales have any mediating effect between the model essay approach and holistic gain score of IELTS writing mock test?
7. What is the frequency of LREs (Language related episodes) and their noticing behavior in different sub-scales of IELTS writing rubrics for both academic writing Task 1 and 2 concerning low and high English proficiency levels?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are based on the above research questions:

1. There is no significant difference in learners' gain scores of IELTS mock writing test between experimental (receiving model essays) and the control group for both Task 1 and 2.
2. There is no significant difference in learners' gain score as defined by their 'task response/achievement' sub-scale of the IELTS writing scoring rubric between experimental (receiving model essays) and control group.
3. There is no significant difference in learners' gain score as defined by their 'cohesion and coherence' sub-scale of the IELTS writing scoring rubric between experimental (receiving model essays) and control group.
4. There is no significant difference in learners' gain score as defined by their 'lexical resources' sub-scale of the IELTS writing scoring rubric between experimental (receiving model essays) and control group.
5. There is no significant difference in learners' gain score as defined by their 'grammatical range and accuracy' sub-scale of the IELTS writing scoring rubric between experimental (receiving model essays) and control group.
6. The IELTS writing rubric sub-scales does not significantly mediate the effect of model essay approach on holistic gain score of IELTS writing Mock test.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The first and foremost significance that the result of this study may have, is to help students to improve the writing proficiency in the context of preparation for IELTS or other internationally recognized English exams. It is noted that the main objective of many pupils is the instrumental use of language such as passing IELTS, TOEFL, FCE or any valid language testing system. In this case, improving the band score by 0.5 or 1 mark in IELTS or passing international English tests as language requirement of various universities could be a great achievement. As the academic writing has become more of a challenge for many students around the globe, the necessity to come up with an innovative and effective methodology improving the writing ability in the context of IELTS preparation has become more paramount. This particularly applies to IELTS academic writing module which is one of the needed requirements in most prime universities. The findings of the current study may be applicable in teaching writing to the students of English as a foreign language using model essays as written corrective feedback tool in writing instruction. This analytic approach could potentially improve the writing proficiency which plays an undeniable role within academic excellence and scientific productions in different fields. It is widely believed that using written corrective feedback in writing instruction will have tremendous effect on the development of analytical, more practical and less time consuming approaches. The efficacy of written feedback has become a crucial issue in writing instruction due to the ineffectiveness of most conventional methods in EAP or other academic contexts. This is due partly to the longer time frame and unsatisfactory outcomes derived from the results of the academic writing module in various international English testing systems. What pinpoints the efficacy of such an innovative methodology is its contribution to the development of useful, to the point materials and exercises in a preparatory context for various academic writing courses. It is clear that a systematic unified curriculum on the basis of an intensive and analytical approach yielding

positive outcomes in a shorter time frame would be considered as a great success. Interestingly enough, positive results substantiating the efficacy of model essay approach could potentially cast more light on the subtle and messy area of written corrective feedback and its interpolation in writing instruction. Additionally, only few studies have attempted to directly investigate whether L2 students who receive written corrective feedback or model essays are able to improve the accuracy of their writing. The carried out researches did not compare model essay approach group with the participants who do not receive model essays as a form of written feedback tool. Moreover, the efficacy of using model essays as feedback tool has never been investigated through a comprehensive study. However, the current study is an experimental approach with a time frame of 10 sessions endorsed by in depth qualitative supportive information. The qualitative section of the current study includes the operationalization of noticing by using think aloud protocols and counting produced LREs in all four major IELTS writing sub-scales in both academic Task 1 and 2. Subsequently, an interview based on IELTS writing rubric was carried out to gain more in depth details as well as conducting a full mediation model analyzing the mediating variables in both IELTS academic writing Task 1 and 2. The findings of this study may contribute to the enrichment of model essay approach in various aspects such as preparing course material, curriculum development and tailor made intensive and semi-intensive writing programs.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Due to practicality issues, the inter- and intra-rater reliability indices for the essay components identified by IELTS writing rubric for the pretest and posttest writing samples were not calculated. Instead their agreement for the overall scores given to the writing samples in the pre and posttest was presumed to be representative of their performance for the four elements.

As mentioned in the previous section, the components of writing examined in the present study were restricted to those identified by IELTS. It was not possible to examine all the elements identified by other different rubrics.

One factor that may limit the generalizability of the results is the fact that all participants were of almost high proficiency. It was impractical to try to examine the existence of such an effect across different proficiency levels. As such, it is not possible to generalize the results to other situations. It is the users' responsibility to examine the context of the study and see if it matches the contexts to which they wish to apply the findings.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

This study employs several key terms which are conceptually and operationally defined as follows:

1.8.1 Model Essays

Model essays are pieces of sample essays written by native speakers to give students a model of how to approach a topic. Usually, in most textbooks for teaching writing skill, students are provided with such essays for the first few units to gain insight into the points explained in the text (Cameron, 1999). The model essays as written

corrective feedback tools for L2 writing instruction aims to reflect how Iranian EFL pupils notice their language problems by analytically comparing their own writing with a model essay written by the native speaker or an expert of the academic panel in the context of preparation for the IELTS writing test. This terminology is partly replicated from Qi and Lapkin (2001) study of the reformulation method. Model essays in the context of this study are indirect and explicit written feedback.

1.8.2 Corrective Feedback

Corrective Feedback refers to teachers' or peers' reaction or treatment to one's errors by either correcting them directly or simply indicating that an error has occurred, which requires the learners to correct it. Corrective feedback (CF) comes in a variety of forms. It can be direct or indirect, selective or comprehensive, and implicit or explicit (Ellis et al., 2008). It is to be noted that model essays used in this study are written corrective feedback as indirect CF and the type of the essays are descriptive and argumentative in both types of presenting an argument, balanced argument or cause and effect ones tested in IELTS academic writing task 2. It is note worthy that both the model essays and reformulated texts are written corrective feedback in writing instruction context.

1.8.2.1 Direct vs. Indirect CF

'Direct' feedback is defined as the provision of the correct linguistic form or structure by the teachers above the students' linguistic error (D. Ferris, 2003). It may include the crossing out of an unnecessary word or phrase, or the insertion of the missing word. There are also other forms of direct feedback such as written meta-linguistic explanations at the end of students' essays, or even spoken meta-linguistic explanations as in individual conferences between teachers and students (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009). On the other hand, indirect corrective feedback is the one in which, in some way or another, it is indicated that an error has occurred without any explicit attention drawn to it (Ferris, 2003, 2011). It may involve one of the following forms: underlining or circling the error; recording in the margin the number of errors in a given line; or using a code to show where the error has occurred and what type of error it is. The teacher does not correct the error, but it is the students' task to do the job. In the context of the current research the use of model essay approach in treatment group is considered as written indirect feedback, however the methodology of writing instruction in control group was heavily based on conventional syntactic way of writing instruction and the use of reformulated texts of the original drafts of the students.

1.8.2.2 Comprehensive vs. Selective CF

In comprehensive approach (the most common practice) teachers correct all (or at least a range of) the errors in learners' written work. This approach is sometimes called the 'unfocused' approach. On the other hand, in selective or focused approach, specific errors are selected to be corrected or dealt with, and other errors are ignored. A highly focused CF will focus on a single type of error (Erlam, Ellis, & Batstone, 2013). Teachers can elect to correct all of the students' errors, in which case the CF is unfocused. Alternatively they can select specific error types for correction. For example, in the above examples the teacher could have chosen to correct just article errors. The distinction between unfocused and focused CF applies to all of the

previously discussed options. Processing corrections is likely to be more difficult in unfocused CF as the learner is required to attend to a variety of errors and thus is unlikely to be able to reflect much on each error. In this respect, focused CF may prove more effective as the learner is able to examine multiple corrections of a single error and thus obtain the rich evidence they need to both understand why what they wrote was erroneous and to acquire the correct form. If learning is dependent on attention to form, then it is reasonable to assume that the more intensive the attention, the more likely the correction is to lead to learning. Focused metalinguistic CF may be especially helpful in this respect as it promotes not just attention but also understanding of the nature of the error. However, unfocused CF has the advantage of addressing a range of errors, so while it might not be as effective in assisting learners to acquire specific features as focused CF in the short term, it may prove superior in the long run. Model essay approach applies the inherent qualities of selective feedback as the type of topic and learning context directs the approach applied. However, the more syntactic and conventional techniques are considered as comprehensive feedback similar to what was applied within the non treatment group.

1.8.2.3 Implicit vs. Explicit CF

In providing students with corrective feedback, options for teachers range from very explicit feedback such as marking an error at its exact location in the text and labeling it with a code or verbal cue, such as 'VT,' or 'wrong verb tense,' to placing a checkmark in the margin of the paper to let the writer know that there is an error somewhere in that line, but anyhow it is left for the students to find, diagnose and correct the error (James, 1998). Within the implicit written feedback types reformulated text are the most effective ones and model essays are the explicit types applied in the treatment group. Sheen(2010), pointed out that the explicitness of the feedback was a better predictor of the written accuracy. However, within the comparison of implicit feedback, written reformulations were more effective than the other investigated types.

1.8.3 Scoring Procedure

The process of assigning a score to a piece of writing produced by a student is known as scoring procedure. Scoring can be either norm-referenced or criterion-referenced. In the former, each student's performance is compared with those of other students. In the latter, each student's performance is assessed against a predetermined criterion called scoring rubrics. The scoring rubrics can be holistic, analytic, or trait-based. The scoring procedure used in this study is of criterion-reference and both a holistic and analytic type using IELTS scoring guide.

1.8.3.1 Holistic Scoring

A method based on the view that "there are inherent qualities of written text which are greater than the sum of the text's countable elements" (Hamp-Lyons, 1990). In holistic scoring a single score is assigned to a script based on the overall impression of the script. Each writing is read quickly and then judged against a rating scale, or scoring rubric that outlines the scoring criteria (Weigle, 2002).

1.8.3.2 Analytic Scoring

In analytic scoring, instead of a given single score, scripts are rated on several aspects of writing. The scripts may be rated on aspects such as vocabulary, grammar, content, organization, cohesion, register, or mechanics. As a result, analytic scoring provides us with more detailed information about a test taker's performance in different aspects of writing (Weigle, 2002). The fact that for each aspect of writing, a score must be reported helps us ensure that features are not collapsed into one; therefore, analytic scoring provides us with more information than holistic scoring (Hyland, 2003a).

1.8.4 Noticing, understanding and awareness in SLA

Schmidt (1995) defines noticing as “conscious registration of the occurrence of some event” and understanding as “recognition of a general principle, rule or pattern”. In other words, noticing deals with surface level language phenomena, while understanding is related to the learning at a more abstract level.

1.8.5 Think Aloud Protocol Approach

A verbal report type of data collection procedure which provides a rich amount of data reflecting on the subject's mental processes, (Schmidt, 1990) . He maintains that concurrent verbal reports such as think aloud protocols are trust worthy evidence as to whether something has been consciously perceived or noticed.

1.8.6 Language Related Episodes

LREs include —all interaction in which learners draw attention to form, that is, those that focus on form in the context of meaningful interaction as well as those that are set apart from such communication and simply revolve around questions of form itself (Williams, 1999, p. 595). LREs have been used as a unit of analysis in classroom-based studies of interaction and have been shown to occur frequently in classroom contexts (Ellis, 2009b; Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001a, 2001b; Loewen, 2003, 2004; Swain & Lapkin, 2001; Williams, 1999, 2001). Furthermore, LREs may promote the noticing of L2 forms and subsequent learning, so their role in interactions is important.

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