The Impact of Three Feedback Types on Postgraduate TEFL Student Teachers' Writing Accuracy and Organization

Zohreh Seifoori

Department of English Language, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran
Corresponding author: Seifoori@iaut.ac.ir

Abstract

One skill that student teachers need to develop during their academic studies is the capacity to produce accurate and well-organized texts. This study reports on the comparative impact of metalinguistic feedback (MLF), teacher interactive feedback (TIF), and the peer-feedback (PF) on the accuracy and organization of postgraduate ELT student teachers' writing. The participants were 57 postgraduate students who were recruited from a population of 70 postgraduate students, in three classes, that were randomly assigned as the MLF group, the TIF group, and the PF group based on the focus of the presentation and the feedback type they would receive during the 14 session treatment. A hybrid process-oriented and genre-based methodology was employed to teach the identical teaching materials to all the groups with a focus on grammatical features and relevant grammatical exercises in the MLF group, on reflective and interactive negotiation of form and meaning in the TIF group, and on individual peer-assessment of the peer's writing in the PF group. The results revealed significantly higher levels of accuracy among the MLF group with no significant difference in the organization of the groups' writing. The findings underscore the role of MLF in enhancing accuracy.

Keywords: accuracy, interactive feedback, metalinguistic feedback, organization, peer-feedback, writing,

Introduction

Overemphasis on positive evidence ephemerally raised serious doubts about the effectiveness of formal instruction in the 1970s and early 1980s and subsequently called them into question when the paramount role of learners' output (Swain, 1985) and of interactive clues provided in negotiation of meaning (Long, 1996) were highlighted. The initial controversy was soon replaced by a growing consensus over the complementary interplay among input, output, and feedback and the mediating role of the learners' attention. A fundamental question facing the throng of EFL and ESL teachers might be the practical implications of these theoretical views; that is, the extent to which learners can benefit from feedback that is interactively coated in teachers' implicit scaffolding comments, explicitly focused on metalinguistic features, or is offered by peers.

Irrespective of the recent recognition of the role of attention to form and metalanguage awareness, there is still a cleavage among the scholars about the extent to which knowledge about formal features of language should be caught implicitly or taught explicitly. Another controversy regards the quality of teachers' feedback; it is arguable whether teachers' feedback should explicitly concern metalinguistic features of the learners' output or whether it suffices to scaffold learners' performance implicitly and interactively. Finally, research data is scarce on the extent to which post-graduate learners majoring in TEFL can adequately assume responsibility for monitoring their own and their peers' performance. The present study was inspired by these three controversial issues and aimed to compare the impact of teachers' explicit metalinguistic feedback, implicit interactive feedback, and peer-feedback on the accuracy and organization of postgraduate EFL student teachers' writing.

Researchers have given their assent to the role of writing as an adequate way of eliciting output from the learners and the learner-orientation in teaching writing (Crooks & Gass 1993; Feeney, 2006; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Zhu, 2011). No accord has been reached though regarding the most effective method of providing feedback. One option is to offer interactive feedback orally in ideal one-to-one situations or with a small group through teacher-student negotiation where it can take the form of teacher scaffolding (Lantolf, 2000) or teacher-directed questions and comments to draw learners' attention to the erroneous forms and stimulate incremental correction. The effectiveness of teachers'

scaffolding might be substantiated in terms of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a fundamental concept of the socio-cultural theory, according to which the potential for cognitive development is limited to the area of exploration for which the student is cognitively prepared, but requires help and social interaction, or scaffolding, to fully develop (Briner, 1999, as cited in Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003). Another option is to rely on what A.K. Halliday (1987) refers to as Metalinguistic Awareness (MA) or awareness of and bringing into explicit consciousness given linguistic forms and structures in order to consider how they relate to and produce the underlying meaning of utterances. It is also possible, though questionable, to engage learners interactively in implicit assessment of their own or their peers' writings.

Most of the empirical studies investigating the impact of various types of feedback were merely centered on formal features of the learners' interlanguage systems and reached mixed results. The majority showed corrective feedback to be an effective form of interaction (Carroll, 2001; Carrol& Swain, 1993; Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006; Havranek & Cesnik, 2003; Lyster, 2004; Muranoi, 2000; Nagata, 1993). However, some revealed that little significant improvements can occur between the data of implicit and explicit feedback (DeKeyser, 1993; Kim & Mathes, 2001) and a few found recasts to be more effective (Leeman, 2003). Quite a number of studies have investigated writing proficiency in terms of syntactic accuracy, syntactic complexity, and lexical density in relation to other independent variables like concept planning, task complexity and group work as well as their impacts on learners' behavior (Kormos, 2011; Larsen-Freeman, 2006; Ojima, 2006; Ong & Zhang, 2010). Following a task-based approach, Johnson, Mercado, and Acevedo (2012) investigated a large group of Spanish-speaking learners written performance in terms of writing fluency, grammatical complexity, and lexical complexity under pre-task planning conditions. Pre-task planning condition was found to have a small significant effect on writing fluency, whereas its impact on lexical complexity and grammatical complexity was insignificant.

Kormos (2011) studied the effect of task complexity on linguistic and discourse features of narrative writing performance. He reported that FL participants produced more lexically complex texts. In addition, the findings

indicated significant differences between L1 and FL narratives in terms of lexical variety, complexity, and syntactic complexity.

A number of studies explored Iranian EFL learners' writing with regard to task type and under pre-task planning condition (Alavi & AshariTabar, 2012), task complexity (Sadeghi & Mosalli, 2013), Multiple-intelligence oriented tasks, formal instruction of cohesive ties (Seifoori & Shokri, 2012), task-supported interactive feedback (Seifoori, Zeraatpishe & Ahangari, 2012), Multiple-intelligence oriented tasks (Seifoori, Zeraatpishe & Hadidi, 2014).

One of the investigations of task-supported interactive feedback was conducted by Seifoori, Zeraatpishe & Ahangari (2012) on the accuracy, fluency and complexity of 72 Iranian English major sophomores' writing. The participants were assigned to a control group, with no task, and two experimental groups, one performing tasks with no feedback and the other performing tasks and receiving interactive feedback. All groups underwent the three stages of process-oriented writing without task in the control group, with task in the first experimental group and with task and interactive feedback offered on at the post-writing stage in the second experimental group. The feedback offered was in the form of teacher/student interaction. Each session, the teacher would select one or two papers to display on the overhead projector while using explicit prompts to draw the participants' attention to formal features and elicit corrections from them. The research findings indicated that only the feedback task group could outperform the control group, and not the task group, with regard to accuracy. As for organization and fluency, both task group and feedback task group achieved significantly higher scores only compared to the control group. The findings suggest the ineffectiveness of interactive feedback to Iranian graduate TEFL students in comparison to the facilitative role of tasks.

A relatively untouched question, however, is whether the findings might be generalized to learners at higher levels of proficiency who can produce written discourse as well as to other discourse features, like organization, of the writings they produce. Owing to the needs of the postgraduate EFL student teachers in this country, they are required to pass an "Advanced Writing Course" as part of their MA syllabus. This course is offered during the first semester to all TEFL freshmen so that they can sharpen their grammatical knowledge and refine their writing and compositional skills. A close inspection

of dissertations written by these students suffices to display the numerous grammatical and organizational deficiencies which reflect learners' failure in achieving the course objectives. Of course, the difficulty they experience in writing seems to originate from highly restricted critical resources required for noticing the gap between their IL and that of the target language (Seifoori, 2009). Nevertheless, a comparison of the impact of metalinguistic knowledge they develop, explicit feedback they receive from their peers, and the scaffolding guide offered by the teacher would indicate which is more advantageous in eradicating their grammatical problems and boosting the organization of their writing. The following research questions were thus formulated to serve the research purpose:

1. Do teacher's metalinguistic corrective feedback, interactive feedback, and peer-feedback impact the grammatical accuracy of postgraduate EFL student teachers' writing?
2. Which feedback type is more effective in promoting grammatical accuracy of postgraduate EFL student teachers' writing?
3. Do teacher's metalinguistic corrective feedback, interactive feedback, and peer-feedback impact the textual organization of postgraduate EFL student teachers' writing?
4. Which feedback type is more effective in promoting textual organization of postgraduate EFL student teachers' writing?

Method

Participants

A sample of 60 female and male postgraduate freshmen in three classes at Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch participated in this study. They were majoring in TEFL and were recruited based on their scores on a TOEFL pre-test from a population of 70 students who were taking a two-credit "Advanced Writing Course". Very few participants obtained scores above two SD above the mean, thus, those whose scores fell within one Standard Deviation (SD) below and above the mean were selected as the homogeneous research sample. The groups were further randomly assigned as the Metalinguistic Knowledge (MK) group with 19 participants, Teacher Interactive Feedback (TIF) group with 20 participants and the Peer Feedback (PF) group with 20 participants.

The same genre-based writing course book had been selected as the main teaching materials to be taught in the three classes.

Instrumentation

The primary teaching material employed in the three groups was a writing course book entitled "Advance Writing" (Birjandi, Alavi & Salmani-Noudoushan, 2004). The description of the procedure involved in presenting the teaching materials will be presented in the Procedure section.

Two data collection instruments were employed to collect the research data. First, a modified version of TOEFL, which comprised vocabulary and grammar sections as two prerequisite requirements for writing, was administered to assess the homogeneity of the participants' lexical and grammar knowledge. The total test score was 70 and the participants' scores were analyzed to identify the groups' initial homogeneity in terms of their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary.

Two writing tests were administered, at the onset of the study and after the treatment to elicit samples based on which accuracy and organization of the participants' writings could be assessed. Two parallel topics were selected to engage the participants in comparative and contrast writing, which is supposed to be one of the most difficult English writing genres. The pre-test topic was: "Some people prefer compact cars while others would rather have a saloon car. Compare and contrast these two cars. On the post-test, the participants were required to "Compare and contrast rural life and urban life". They were given 80 minutes to write a single paragraph on each of the topics.

Skehan (1996) described accuracy as the learner's capacity to handle different levels of interlanguage complexity. Drawing on a number of previous empirical studies (Ellis & Yuan, 2004; Foster & Skehan, 1999; Tavakoli & Skehan, 2005, as cited in Ellis 2005; Yuan & Ellis, 2003), in the current study, overall grammatical accuracy of learners' writing was measured as the percentage of error-free clauses in overall performance. Organization, on the other hand, was measured based on the organization component of the ESL composition profile developed by Jacobs, Zingraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, and Hughey (1981). Based on this scale the paragraphs were scored along a continuum of 1 to 4 representing poor to excellent organization.

The participants' writing pre and post-tests were scored by the researcher and another teacher who were both experienced assistant professors with more

than experienced in teaching writing to Iranian graduate and postgraduate EFL student teachers. The two sets of pre-test and post-test accuracy and organization scores were correlated to estimate the inter-rater reliability of the accuracy and organization measures and the following inter-rater reliability coefficients were obtained for the Pre-test and post-test accuracy and organization measures and with a range of .72 to .93 proved acceptably high.

Procedure

The book comprises 13 units the first four of which present various features of paragraph writing. These units were briefly presented and covered in the first two sessions. From unit five on, the book presents various writing genres of enumeration, chronology, process, description, definition, cause and effect, comparison and contrast and argumentation. During the eight-session long treatment, each of these units was presented by the teacher based on recognition to production orientation. The instruction in all groups followed the same process-oriented approach to writing in which they initially reviewed the underlying principles of each genre in an interactive way. They were required to follow the syllabus and apply the advanced organizer metacognitive strategy before they met each week. The first thirty minutes of each class would be devoted to review of previously presented information with a focus on metalanguage in the ML group, teacher interactive feedback in the TIF group, and peer-editing in the PF group.

The content of the chapter would be interactively presented in all groups by posing questions in about 30 minutes. Then, collectively, we would select one of the topics specified in the book and start the pre-writing stage by brainstorming and guiding the learners to generate ideas and to write a topic sentence, in approximately thirty minutes. The rest of the pre-writing and the writing stages were to be completed as homework.

In the MLF group, more time was spend on explicit exercises in the book entitled "Listing signals" that drew the participants' attention to organizational and grammatical structures needed in the given writing genre. Each of these exercises was followed by a model paragraph illustrating the organizational and grammatical features more vividly. For instance, in unit seven which presented the process genre, the participants reviewed two ways of using process signals in two separate diagrams, one displaying the sentence structure with

imperatives, recommendations, simple present tense and passive voice and the other illustrating the use of predicates. After practicing the exercises, the participants were required to review relevant structures by doing a specified relevant set of exercises from a grammar book (Azar, 2009). Then in the review phase of the following session, the learners' would first raise their problems regarding the grammar exercises and the key elements were further highlighted interactively. Further, they would be asked to self-edit their own writings to check the accuracy of grammatical forms as well as the organizational features and to apply any necessary corrections before submitting them to the teacher.

The teacher would specify the error types by underscoring the erroneous forms writing brief notes f referring them to review the same sections of their grammar source. Violation of structural features such as unity, coherence, and cohesion would be marked as well. The participants were further required to revise their writings accordingly and return them to the teacher the following session.

The locus of the treatment in the TIF group was on the post-writing stage when one or two of the participants were displayed on the overhead projector and the participants were required to read the paragraph in five minutes and reflect on various grammatical and discourse features. Further, the teacher would invite the participants to give feedback to the author. Meanwhile, she would raise interactive questions to direct the participants' attention to essential issues. For example, the teacher would ask: "is the text well-organized? Is the topic sentence well-written? Are the major and minor support sentences clear and relevant to the topic?" and would wait for a response. Then, she would shift to grammar by asking questions like "what do you think about the subject verb agreement? Has the author observed sequence of tense? What about articles?" The flow of questions would continue to guide them to the right response. In cases where the participants began to stray from the main points, the teacher would get them back on the right track. The same procedure was followed with each of the writing genres.

The participants' revised their writings based on the feedback they received interactively each session and submitted them for final evaluation by the teacher. The teacher underlined the violated organizational and grammatical

principles and through a comment or question guided the student writer to the right form. The teacher would not provide the correct forms.

In the PF group, the teacher followed the same procedure as the other groups in teaching writing genres. However, at the end of the session, she would ask the participants to follow the same process in editing their own and their peers' writings. Next, the participants were required to exchange the hard copy of their typed paragraphs and to edit each other's paragraphs in pairs during the review stage of each following session. All the writing assignments were finally submitted to the teachers after revisions were made and she would correct the inaccuracies in grammar and organization by underlining them and providing the corrections without changing the central meaning.

Design

This quasi experimental study, intact group design, aimed to examine the impact of three independent variables, learners' metalinguistic knowledge, teachers' interactive feedback and peer-feedback on two dependent variables, the accuracy and organization of Iranian EFL student teachers.

Results

The Pre-tests

Owing to the nonprobability sampling, I first verified the normality of the TOEFL test scores ($p = .83 > .05$) as well as pre-test accuracy ($p = .18 > .05$) and organization ($p = .14 > .05$). The groups' mean scores were further compared through a One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), as presented in Table 1.

Table 1
The ANOVA for the Groups' TOEFL and Pre-test Scores

TOEFL					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	12.98	2	6.49	.103	.90
Within Groups	3410.91	54	63.165		
Total	3423.89	56			
Accuracy					
Between Groups	.036	2	.018	1.64	.20
Within Groups	.594	54	.011		

Total	.630	56			
Organization					
Between Groups	5.42	2	2.71	1.40	.25
Within Groups	104.609	54	1.93		
Total	110.03	56			

The results of the ANOVA, as shown in Table 1, revealed that the difference in the groups' mean scores did not reach significance level in TOEFL (F $_{(2.54)}$ =.103, p =.90> .05), accuracy (F $_{(2.54)}$ = 1.64, p =.20> .05), and organization (F $_{(2.54)}$ =1.40, p=.25> .05), thus, confirming the homogeneity of the sample.

The Accuracy of Writing

The first research question addressed the impact of each of the three feedback types on the accuracy of the participants' writing. To answer the question, I first calculated the groups' descriptive statistics. The groups' pre-test and post-test descriptive statistics were (M= .33 and .77, SD= .12, .09) for the MLK, (M= .27 and .56, SD= .07 and.13) for the TSF, and (M = .32 and .50, SD= .11 and .12, respectively. To test the significance of the decrease in inaccuracy measures, which reflected an increase in accuracy, I ran three paired samples t-test on the groups' pre-test ad post-test accuracy measures, the results of which indicated the correlation between the groups' pre-test and post-test scores. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2
Paired Samples Correlation for the Pre-test and Post-test Accuracy Measures

		N	Correlation	Sig.
MLK	Pre & Post.	17	.48	.04
TSF	Pre. & Post	20	.74	.00
PF	Pre & Post	20	.85	.00

As depicted in Table 2, the correlation between the groups' pre-test and post-test mean scores were r=48 in the MLK group, r=74 in the TSF group and r=.85 in the PF group. The *p* values for these correlation coefficients were also .04, .00 and .00, respectively. All the *p* values were less than the critical alpha level ($p < .05$). A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the three feedback types on the participants' accuracy scores. The results are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3
Paired Samples t-test for the Pre-test and Post-test Accuracy Measures

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
MLK	Pre- Post	-.44	.11	.027	-.50	-.38	-16.14	16	.000
TSF	Pre- Post	-.29	.09	.02	-.34	-.24	-13.35	19	.000
PFP	Pre-Post	-.18	.64	.014	-.21	-.15	-12.77	19	.000

As illustrated in Table 2, There was a statistically significant decrease in accuracy scores from the pre-test to the post-test in the MLK group, $t_{(16)} = -16.14$, p=.00<.05, in the TSF group, $t_{(19)} = -13.35$, p=.00<.05, and in the PF group, $t_{(19)} = -12.77$, p=.00<.05. Hence, the first research question is responded positively; the three feedback types were effective in enhancing the grammatical accuracy of postgraduate EFL student teachers' writing.

The Comparative Impact of MK, TSF and PF on Accuracy

To compare the effectiveness of the three interventions, as posed in the second research question, it was essential to compare the groups' post-test accuracy measures. The MLK group (M=.77, SD=.09) had outperformed the TSF group (M=.56, SD=.13) and the PF group (M=.50, SD=.12) and the Levene Test proved the normality of variances, Sig = .21> .05. Subsequently, I

tested the significance of the observed differences among the groups' accuracy measures via a One-way ANOVA, as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4
The ANOVA for the Groups' Post-test Accuracy Measures

Post-Acc.					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.726	2	.363	24.725	.000
Within Groups	.792	54	.015		
Total	1.518	56			

The analysis of variance, as displayed in Table 4, showed significant differences among the groups' post-test accuracy measures, $F_{(2.54)} = 24.72$; p=.00< .05. Hence, the Tukey Post hoc analysis was run to locate the difference precisely. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Multiple Comparison of the Groups' Post-test Accuracy Measures

(I) Treatment		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
MLK	TSF	.20*	.039	.00	.11	.30
	PF	.27*	.039	.00	.17	.36
TSF	MLK	-.20*	.039	.00	-.30	-.11
	PF	.06	.038	.22	-.02	.15
PF	MLK	-.27*	.039	.00	-.36	-.17
	TSF	-.06	.038	.22	-.15	.02

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Inspection of the *p*-values in Table 5 indicates that the MLK group differed significantly (*p=.00* < .05) from both TSF and PF groups whose performance did not differ significantly (*p*=.22 > .05). Thus, I conclude that the metalinguistic corrective feedback was more effective in promoting grammatical accuracy of the postgraduate student teachers' writing.

The Organization of Writing

The third research question delved into the impact of MLK, TSF and PF on the textual organization of the participants' writing. The descriptive statistics displayed growth in organization of the MLK group from (2.23) on the pre-test to (2.41) on the post-test. The other groups, however, experienced more noticeable developments in organization of their writings, from (1.65) to (2.35) in the TSF group and from (1.50) to (2.36) in the PF group. Further, the correlation between the groups' pre-test and post-test organization measures was estimated, as indicated in Table 6.

Table 6
Paired Samples Correlation of Pre-test and Post-test Organization Measures

		N	Correlation	Sig.
MLK	Pre & Post.	17	.38	.12
TSF	Pre. & Post	20	.23	.32
PF	Pre & Post	20	-.08	.71

The correlation coefficients of the pre-test and post-test organization measures, as illustrated in Table 6, were (r=38) in the MLK group, (r=23) in the TSF group and (r= -.08) in the PF group. The *p*-values for these correlation coefficients were also (.12), (.32), and (.71), respectively, all lower than the alpha level (*p*<.05) and, thus, denying the impact of the three feedback types on the organization of writing. Finally, Table 7 gives the inferential statistical analyses of the same research data.

Table 7
Paired Samples t-test for the Groups' Pre-test and Post-test Textual Organization

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig.
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				(2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			

MLK	Pre-Org Post-Org	-.176	2.21	.53	-1.31	.96	-.32	16	.747
TSF	Pre-Org Post-Org	-.700	.732	.16	-1.04	-.35	-4.27	19	.000
PF	Pre-Org Post-Org	-.850	.81	.18	-1.23	-.46	-4.67	19	.000

A statistically reliable difference is evident between the pre-test and post-test organization measures in the TSF group, $t_{(19)} = -4.27$, $p=.000<.05$, and in the PF group, $t_{(19)} = -4.67$, $p=.000<.05$. In the MLK group, however, the difference in organization measures did not reach significance level, $t(16) = -32$, $p=.74>.05$. Therefore, the third research question is answered partially: TSF and PF did impact the textual organization of the participants' writing whereas MLK failed to exert any significant influence.

The Comparative Impact of MLK, TSF and PF on Organization

Further, the impact of the three feedback types on the participants' post-test organization measures were examined through ANOVA analysis to find out the significance of the slight difference in the groups' post-test organization measures. The results of which are presented in Table 8.

Table 8
The ANOVA for the Groups' Post-test Accuracy Measures

ANOVA PostOrg					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.046	2	.023	.093	.911
Within Groups	13.21	54	.245		
Total	13.26	56			

Based on the results of the analysis in Table 8, the difference among the groups' post-test organization measures did not reach significance level, $F_{(2.54)} = .093$, $p=.911> 0.05$. That is the three intervention types failed to make differential impacts on the organization of EFL student teachers' writing.

Discussion

All the three groups enjoyed some level of enhancement in the accuracy of their writing from the pre-test to the post-test which underscores the positive role of formal instruction in enhancing accuracy. According to Eckman, Bell and Nelson (1988), Pica (1983) and Pienemann (1989, as cited in Graaff&Housen, 2009), if appropriately planned, formal instruction can accelerate the rate of second language learning and help learners overcome the risk of fossilization of prematurely learned grammatical forms and achieve higher levels of grammatical accuracy and proficiency. The findings also conform to Long (1983) who underscored the considerable evidence supporting the significant role of formal instruction in SLL.

The formal instruction in the present study was complemented with various forms of form-focused feedback, MLK, TSF and PF, on the participants' writings. The effectiveness of the three feedback types highlights the need to draw the attention of Iranian postgraduate EFL student teachers to formal features of the target language at least when the focus is writing advanced and academic texts. From this perspective, the findings are in line with those of White and Ranta (2002), and Lan (2011) who postulated that making prospective and practicing teachers linguistically aware does have an impact on teachers' linguistic behavior.

The impact of grammatically-focused instruction in the MLK group was found to be greater leading to higher levels of accuracy. Such an impact was also previously witnessed on the learners' grammatical judgments (Lightbown, Spada& Wallace, 1980) and on the learners' use of grammatical features in speech (Pica, 1983, 1985). Lightbown et al. (1980) investigated the impact of half-hour grammar lessons on the grammatical judgments of 175 French speaking learners of English with a focus on morphological structures like plural, possessive and third person –s. They reported the more remarkable progress of the instructed groups. In other studies Pica (1983, 1985) compared the impact of formal instruction on unplanned speech of three groups of learners learning English in three contexts: natural contexts, instructional contexts and mixed natural and instructional conditions. Mixed findings have been reported; the instructed group was found more accurate in the use of plural

–s but less accurate in the use of progressive –ing. No difference however was found in the use of articles.

The findings from the present study may seem apparently incompatible with those of VanPatten (1990) and Weinert (1987) who suggested that instruction could interfere with acquisition of some features by distorting the available input. It should be emphasized that in some EFL contexts, EFL and TEFL learners suffer from restrictions in amount of naturalistic exposure which refutes the postulation that formal instruction can be an impediment to natural route of development.

The findings underscore Iranian postgraduate EFL student teachers' need for attending to form and suggest all the three feedback techniques as efficient accuracy enhancement devices. These needs might be substantiated in terms of the distinction Ellis (1994) made between formal instruction as practice and formal instruction as consciousness-raising. In the practice-orientation the aim of instruction is assumed to be enabling learners to develop implicit knowledge of the rules through various practice activities whereas in consciousness-raising orientation the target is the development of explicit knowledge which is claimed to help learners monitor their performance (Krashen, 1982) and notice formal features in naturally occurring input and changing those features into intake (Schmidt, 1990, Schmidt &Frota, 1986). It seems that in highly exposure-restricted contexts where natural practice is a fiction learners require to rely more heavily on alternative techniques to enhance the accuracy of their performance.

The superior performance of the MLK group, likewise, suggests consciousness-raising and metalinguistic knowledge as the most efficient way of refreshing declarative knowledge for monitoring purposes for TEFL postgraduate students who have already covered a wide range of grammar courses and probably feel their crucial need to sharpen, expand and automatize their grammatical resources.

The findings, however, failed to reflect any significant difference in the textual organization of the groups' writing. Moreover, slight organizational improvements from the pre-test to the post-test were observed in TSF and the PF groups but not in the MLK group. This failure might be attributed to their overemphasis on grammar and exclusion of organization from their focal attention. Likewise, comparison of the groups' post-test scores indicated no

significant organizational differences. Although during the treatment due attention was given to accuracy, organization, unity and other features of academic writing and the feedback provided to the learners focused on all these features equitably, the participants seem to have relied more heavily on grammatical feedback they received possibly because it conforms to their learning tendencies and habits. It might be associated to the different organizational features and thought patterns that exist between Farsi as their first language and English. It seems that engaging the learners in the pre-writing stage of writing through more stimulating activities such as multiple-intelligence oriented pre-writing tasks (Seifoori, Zeraatpishe, &HadidiTamjid, 2014) that are compatible with learners' dominant intelligences produces more lasting impacts on organization than form-focused activities.

Expectations in terms of language knowledge are high from postgraduate EFL teacher students some of whom already have a degree in EFL teaching and some experience in teaching at high schools and private institutes. Yet, writing accurate, complex, well-developed and well-organized English texts poses a daunting challenge for many of these novice and prospective teachers who suffer from an underdeveloped ability to convert ideas to language, both in L1 and L2, which is less likely to eliminate in a two-credit course, and have highly restricted access to critical resources to notice and self-monitor their own performance in English (Seifoori, 2009). The findings emerging from the present study unraveled Iranian postgraduate EFL student teachers' need to work on the accuracy of their writing since the groups' pre-test average scores were not at an acceptable level for those who will soon function as English teachers.

It might be concluded that in writing classes attention to form should be treated as an indispensible instructional component, which can be effectively employed to maximize learners' awareness of and sensitivity to formal features of written language. Secondly, metalinguistic awareness originating in the teaching sessions and subsequently expanded by the learners based on pre-determined grammar sources seem to offer a practical way of heightening Iranian postgraduate EFL student teachers' metalinguistic knowledge and thereby boosting the accuracy of their writing.

In contrast to accuracy, enhancing the organization of writing seems to call for techniques other than feedback and metalinguistic awareness. More appealing pre-writing activities selected with regard to learners' individual preferences and differences might have a more profound impact on textual organization. Finally, differences in the organizational structure of Farsi and English written discourse might be considered as a major source of interference that calls for more longitudinal programs and systematic exposure to various writing genres. A comparative analysis of organizational features of both languages followed by compatible guided writing tasks can be more effective than providing feedbacks of any kind.

Acknowledgements

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Biodata

ZohrehSeifoori is an assistant professor and a research board member at the department of English Language, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University as well as an internationally licensed teacher and teacher trainer. Her research interests include individualizing learning, learner autonomy, and teacher education.