Enforced Revision with Checklist and Peer Feedback in EFL Writing: The Example of Saudi University Students

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Abstract:

This study is a piece of action research conducted in an effort to improve the English writing of low proficiency Saudi university students, studying in a foreign language context where product-based teaching methods dominate. A regime of enforced draft revision, using a checklist, was imposed on two groups over three writing tasks completed partly in class and partly at home. One group was trained in peer revision, the other revised solely alone. There were clear draft improvements in quality, especially in mechanics, despite only modest amounts of meaning-changing and multisentential revisions being recorded. Most changes were meaning-preserving. However, final draft quality improved only slightly on performance before the intervention and fell significantly in a time limited exam situation following it. There was little difference between the revision groups, though peer revision, new to these students, was favourably commented on. There was evidence from qualitative interview data that neither peers nor the emphasis of the checklist on higher level concerns succeeded in directing attention substantially towards organisation and content, despite positive attitudes. It is surmised that these students were not ready to abandon the traditional surface error focus of their classroom.

The teaching situation and the writing problem:

This study arose from the first researcher's concern with the English writing performance of his third year students, taking the four year BA in English at King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia. What they need to be able to write, apart from course and exam compositions of expository, argumentative and narrative types, are formal letters, research reports, lesson plans, and translations of Arabic text. However, their background is six years of English in school, where ability to write simple current English is a recognized objective not substantially achieved, followed by two university years taking composition courses focussed on sentence structure and combining, appropriate lexical use, and paragraph

construction. Difficulties are experienced in discourse organisation, paragraphing and cohesion, as well as by some still at the lower levels of language, and in writing at length.

Teaching is usually by Arab teachers and product oriented: model texts are presented for the student to imitate, and the teacher's focus is on the texts which students produce. Much instruction is about written text, rather than promoting useful writing skills directly. Topics are assigned by the teacher for completion either in or out of class time, in a context of little out-of-class exposure to English. With respect to 'process writing' techniques, some teachers may promote planning by discussing or brainstorming new topics at the beginning of classes or prompting students to plan, either in L1 or L2. Usually, however, students are left to themselves to plan or not, and indeed to formulate. As generally in Arab countries (Halimah, 1991), it is not common for teachers to require more than one draft, or work on revision techniques. Group work is hindered by low proficiency and large class sizes (average 35). Consequently, any revising the student does is self revision without checklist or imposed draft writing. Teachers tacitly rely on students learning useful writing skills and strategies just through completing set writing tasks and even after the product has been marked do not generally do follow up work. Feedback is typically at the lower levels, on grammar, mechanics and vocabulary (in that order – Asiri, 1996), following preconceptions about what is important and reliance on older books and methods. Consequently students are weak in all three key strategic areas: planning, formulating and revision.

In this context potentially there were many ways in which the teacher might intervene as action researcher to do something to help his class. However, the teacher-researcher already devoted some time to planning activities and it was felt that work on revising would be most likely to help students exploit their product-based knowledge to improve their academic writing.

Possible solutions: ways of improving revision:

A search for potentially effective revision enhancement techniques revealed three, all pioneered in L1 writing (e.g. White & Arndt, 1991).

Students may be trained to: (a) write more than one draft, revising the first when writing the second or later ones; (b) use a checklist of points when revising; (c) use not only self revision (self-assessment) but also peer revision (peer feedback/review).

Revising, especially of content, has generally been shown to be beneficial (Stallard, 1974; Sommers, 1980; Faigley & Witte, 1981; Leki, 1991): 'Rewriting a piece of writing correlates more closely with improved writing than does almost any other form of instruction in writing' (Beyer, 1979: 189). This is so even with no feedback provided on the first draft (Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Polio et al., 1998). Content should be focussed on first, then form: 'editing errors and revising for better organisation should be attended to at a later stage in writing to prevent a breakdown of what Perl calls 'the rhythms generated by thinking and writing'' (Spack, 1984: 656). Consequently we decided to impose revision only following the writing of a more or less complete first draft.

Checklists have been shown to help revision (Dimento, 1988; Freedman, 1992) by prompting writers to attend to matters they might otherwise overlook, though they have also been criticized where not adapted to the specific writers and task, or encouraging global evaluation without focus on text specifics (Beach & Eaton, 1984; Hansen and Liu, 2005)). They have even been seen as deleterious to the benefits of genuine peer work, by imposing the teacher's agenda and deterring a genuine audience response from other students (Dipardo & Freedman, 1988). While in our previous study (Al-Hazmi and Scholfield, 1999) this convinced us not to use checklists, the far lower proficiency of the students in the present study and their unfamiliarity with draft revision convinced us to provide some detailed guidance.

Peer feedback is often seen as an improvement on self-feedback, simply because 'two heads are better than one' to identify mistakes in any task (Keh, 1990; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005), though actual studies with lower proficiency learners have not always fully supported this (e.g. Mooko, 1996). Peers also can help a writer spot mismatches between intended meaning and that understood by the reader (Berg, 1999). However, the peer may not provide as good feedback as the

teacher, whom students often prefer (Nelson & Carson, 1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000), but who typically, as in our situation, has no time to give feedback on non-final drafts to everyone in a large class. Still, the peer may advantageously be seen by the learner as a collaborator rather than a judge (Nystrand, 1986; Rollinson, 2005), and increase the sense of audience (Keh, 1990; Rollinson, 2005). The choice of members of pairs is crucial and complex (Freedman, 1987), and related to the stances that peers may take with respect to each other's work (Lockhart & Ng, 1995). Still the experience of Mooko (1996) with 'basic writers', though in a completely different culture from ours, and of our own earlier study (Al-Hazmi and Scholfield, 1999), encouraged us to try this.

We have uncovered only a few relevant investigations of Arab learners. Al-Semari (1993) and Aljamhoor (1996), without intervention, studied the revising behaviors of a few Saudi graduate students more proficient than ours, and in the USA ESL environment rather than Saudi Arabia where there is little exposure to English outside class. Writing in Arabic and English without peer feedback or checklist, subjects made the same revision types in both languages, overwhelmingly surface changes, though they also reported rhetorical problems. The study of Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (1999) was similar to the present study but done with the researcher as outsider, and with younger but more proficient students from a variety of Arab countries, word-processing compositions at a school in London designed for expatriate Arabs – so in an ESL environment again. Classes were small, taught by a native speaker of English with a strong process writing element. The findings (to be referenced with our own results below) encouraged us to try similar interventions in our current context.

In Saudi Arabia Al-Shafie (1990) examined how six female twelfth grade Arab EFL learners, of lower proficiency than ours, revised their compositions, written in and out of class over the span of a year. They were taught by one experienced EFL teacher who, unusually, utilized a process writing approach, including enforced revision, student-teacher conferences, peer group discussion and training in writing techniques (but not checklists). Students, whether good or poor, made consistent progress

in the quantity and quality of writing over time, as well as between drafts, despite wide variation between students and topics in the amount of revision (and with no control group data for comparison). Subjects focused on formal and meaning-preserving revisions of smaller linguistic units more than the other types of changes, as found in other studies of low proficiency writers (e.g. Hall, 1990).

Jouhari (1997) studied the effects on writing development and attitudes of the process approach with enforced revision and peer feedback. Six Saudi college freshmen very similar to ours, at King Abdul Aziz University, became more proficient in generating ideas, drafting, processing feedback and revising and gained more favourable attitudes. Like Aljamhour (1996) this draws our attention to the value of examining Arab students' explanations and attitudes as well as their revising performance.

Along with the general evidence, the Arab studies encouraged us that training in two-draft writing, peer feedback and a checklist could be beneficial to our students. At the same time such a study might be of wider interest as an attempt to improve the revising of lower proficiency Arab learners, fully contextualized in the largely product-oriented Saudi Arabian EFL situation.

Finally, one criticism of the 'process writing' approach has been that its associated activities are artificially elaborate, and, though possibly beneficial for writing in class and even real life, are not usable in exam situations (Horowitz, 1986; Hyland, 2003; Polio et al., 1998). Enforced drafting/revision may have this drawback, due to lack of time in an exam, though it heightened awareness from revision activities in class should have some beneficial effect even if they cannot be performed in exactly the same way in an exam. Also checklists cannot usually be taken into exams, but they may be partly remembered from previous training. Finally, peer revision is not usually allowed, so ostensibly training in self revision should be more re-usable in an exam situation. These considerations led us to additionally check if any benefits from our intervention had any consequent benefit for writing in the exam conditions our students experience.

Method:

The research questions to be answered concern EFL compositions revised by Saudi university students using a checklist.

Does self-revision or peer revision of drafts lead to:

- Greater changes? Then of what sort?
- Greater between-draft improvement? In what aspects?
- Better final drafts? And do final drafts improve over those before the intervention? Does writing improve in exam conditions when students have no checklist given to them, no redrafting forced on them, and no peers available?

The Students:

51 males in two intact classes of similar intermediate proficiency level in the third year at King Khalid University participated. They were typical of the university population of Saudi Arabia, and homogeneous in cultural and prior educational background but very different from the type of multicultural group often used in ESL writing studies in the USA, from which much of our knowledge about L2 writers derives.

Design:

Before the intervention, involving three writing tasks, the learners' writing was elicited so as to ascertain a pre-intervention baseline indication of writing quality (pretest). Afterwards (posttest) it was elicited again, in the exam conditions they customarily experience. During the intervention, writing was done entirely as usual in such classes, but for the following. All students were required to write two drafts, and, with training, use the revision checklist provided; students taking course five revised with peers in pairs, as well as of course being able to revise alone, while those taking course six revised only on their own. Thus the intervention was complex, including two procedures largely new to all students (writing two drafts and using a checklist) and one introduced with one group only (peer revision). The writing revision checklist (appendix A) was adapted from two lists in White and McGovern (1994) to reflect learners' errors and their examiners' preoccupations, i.e. low as well as higher levels of writing (not direct attention away from grammar as do more communicatively inspired forms such as that of Paulus, 1999).

Since the study was undertaken action-research style to benefit the participants, and deliberately embedded in their normal study, many aspects could not be controlled and no comparable class to serve as control group was available. Due to syllabus and exam requirements, the rhetorical types and topics of the writing tasks varied more than would be ideal in a classical study, and so as to avoid the criticism of Butler-Nalin (1984) that research writing tasks are often artificial we allowed learners as usual to complete drafts at home, allowing further uncontrolled factors to have an effect, primarily indeterminate time and availability of books to refer to or copy from (cf. Dimento, 1988).

Composition Topics:

Pretest. Expository, descriptive or narrative: 'Your experience in learning English as a foreign language'

Task 1. Expository: 'Academic writing'

Task 2. Comparison and contrast: 'Write about two cities of your own choice'

Task 3. Argumentative: 'Argue for or against studying abroad'

Posttest Course five. Either expository: 'The Saudi educational system'; or comparison and contrast: 'Compare and contrast village and city life'. Posttest Course six. Either expository: 'The Saudi educational system'; or argumentative: 'Many people travel abroad during the summer break to enjoy their holidays. Argue for or against travelling abroad during the summer time'. Normal exam format required a choice to be offered. Most chose the second options.

Instruments:

The Jacobs ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs et al.1981) was used to measure key aspects of qulity: mechanics (spelling, punctuation etc.), language use (grammar), vocabulary, organisation, content (Appendix C). Subjects were familiarised with it and its parallels with the checklist. The Faigley and Witte instrument (1981, 1984), also well-established among previous researchers, was used to quantify between draft revisions in both the 'span' of a change (i.e. size of chunk of text affected) and the type of change (see Appendix B). All students were interviewed individually in Arabic for around 15 minutes after the last intervention session to elicit

reactions to peer and self revision (for questions asked, see results).

Procedure:

One of the researchers took 90 minute composition classes with both groups at different times on Wednesdays. Students were not made aware that a research project was in progress: for them this was simply a new teacher with new ways of teaching.

On all five composition writing occasions, for both groups, first, collective planning was led by the researcher, orally and interactively with notes on the blackboard primarily in English, for 20-30 minutes. Emphasis was on generating and evaluating ideas, and discussing organisation, i.e. the higher levels of writing.

In the pretest students then wrote an essay finished at home with whatever drafting and revision they felt like, but no access in class to teacher or dictionaries, and only self-revision effectively available.

Following the pretest, there was a training session on the nature of an evaluation checklist and how to use it by applying it to sample essays. Students had to evaluate a sample essay at home and discuss any problem in class later. There was also training in pair work, which was unfamiliar to these students, with practice in revising problems in sample essays under teacher supervision. The course five class was randomly assigned to peer revision, course six to self-revision.

Next week came the first of the three experimental occasions, in all of which we followed the steps suggested by White and McGovern (1994). In the first session, for example, different aspects related to academic writing (the composition topic) were aired through answering a questionnaire. Students were urged to develop some sort of outline and given time to note down whatever ideas sprang to mind in either English or Arabic. They then wrote the first draft individually in class, completed at home. Some students first wrote notes, ideas in the form of words, phrases, clauses or sentences; others started writing the first draft immediately. Often they paused during writing, probably to think of more ideas. Throughout class sessions the teacher and dictionaries could be consulted by both groups.

Next, when students came back the following week, they were set to revise their first drafts (previously photocopied by the teacher) according to the treatment conditions, and using the checklist, for about 45 minutes, and then write the final drafts in class during the second 45 minutes, finishing them at home if needed. In the peer revision group, students made comments by underlining on their peers' papers and writing their comments on separate sheets. Comments were in English, or Arabic in case of difficulty. Some students sought clarification from peers before commenting. Students were asked to read each other's comments to make sure they were understandable and were told to balance the time spent on each other's writing.

Finally, the posttest was their normal graded examination. It was conducted like the pretest, except that it was entirely completed in class; checklists and peer feedback were not available.

Analysis:

As the subscales of Jacobs are of different lengths, scores on each were converted to % for easier comparison and between draft improvement scores calculated as simple differences in % of the whole scale for each aspect. A trained second scorer marked quality and counted between-draft revisions in a sample of protocols as a check. Interview protocols were transcribed and read repeatedly, comparing one with another, to identify repeated themes.

Quantatative results:

Quantity of revision.

Though there were few significant differences between groups, peer revisers made more paragraphing format changes (t=2.216, p=.036) and fewer meaning preserving changes (t=2.451, p=.018) than self-revisers. Descriptively (Figures 1 and 2) they made more changes over a wider range of categories, especially of the largest units (e.g. macrostructure additions and deletions) and the smallest (e.g. tense). Feedback from peers was therefore only slightly better than that from self in beneficially directing greater attention to meaning and higher level revision, weakly supporting other studies' findings that peer feedback favours mechanics

and content revision (Al-Hazmi and Scholfield, 1999; Bisaillon, 1999).

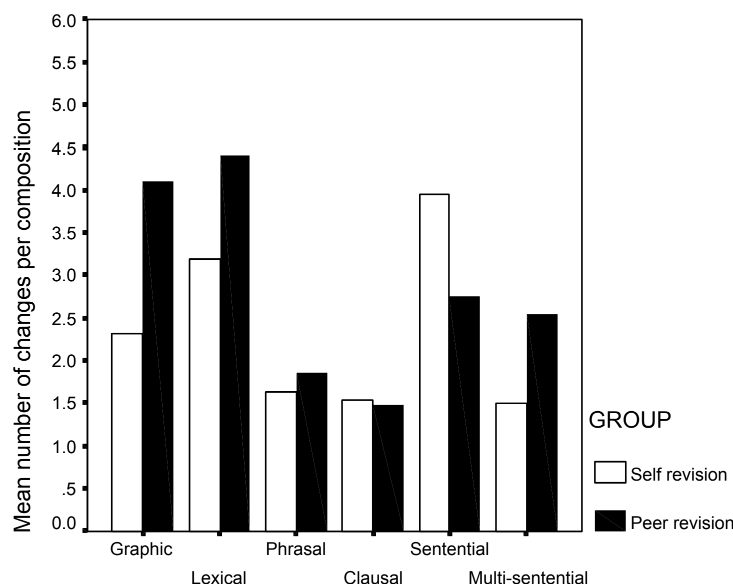

Figure 1. Numbers of revisions of different span sizes

For all students together, however, there were striking differences in amount of change between span sizes (F=3.56, p=.021) and between change type categories (F=19.31, p<.001). Despite the emphasis of the checklist on content and organisation, changes were predominantly at word and sentence level, and preserved meaning (which accounted for half of all changes on average, eight per draft). This contrasts markedly with the high proficiency Arab writers in an ESL context of Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (1999), who revised extensively at the extreme lowest and highest spans - graphic and multi-sentential, especially by adding new text. Clearly while expert Arab writers prefer mainly to add or rethink whole ideas, and to edit very low level slips, the lower proficiency writers of our study confined themselves much more to rewording their first draft, especially the linguistic basics of vocabulary and sentence structure: they made eight macrostructure changes (content-related) per 1000 words compared with 27-39 in Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (1999), and 19-23 in Faigley and Witte (1981). However, this result is widely attested in EFL

(Al-Shafie, 1990; Al-Semari, 1993; Hall, 1990; Paulus, 1999).

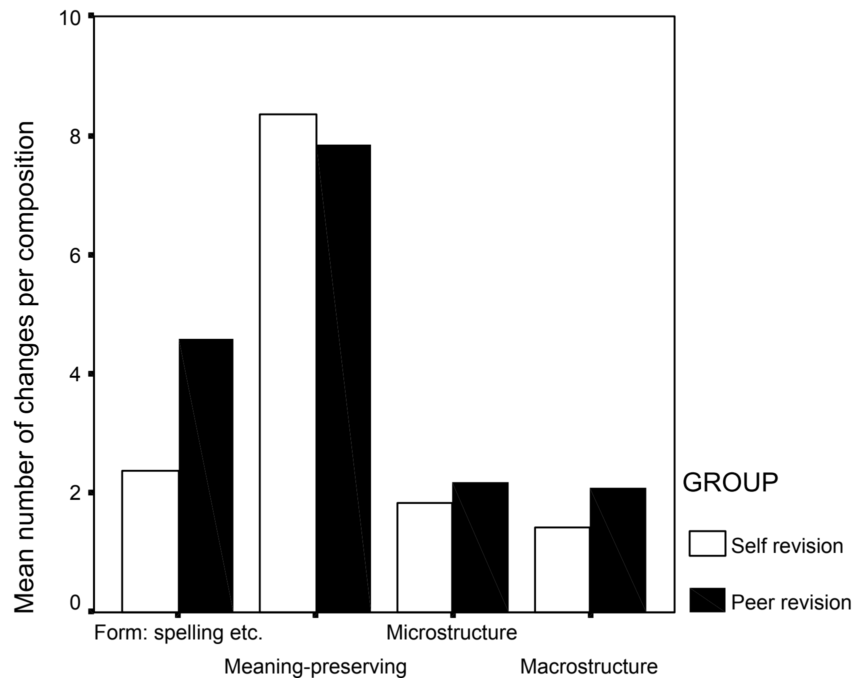

Figure 2. Revisions of two surface and two meaning changing type categories

Quality Change Between Drafts:

In the three intervention sessions quality improved between drafts significantly (p<.001) on all aspects scored by Jacobs, despite the fairly low rates of revision in some areas. This suggests that our treatment was affecting revision quality if not quantity, though the result was most prominent in the first session, implying some novelty effect. The interaction effects of drafting with group were not significant, showing that the peer versus self revision regime made no difference to between draft improvement in quality (reminiscent of Dimento, 1988). The main benefit could be due, then, to the enforced draft writing common to both groups: aside from that, a peer was no better than the student himself as a feedback source when revising.

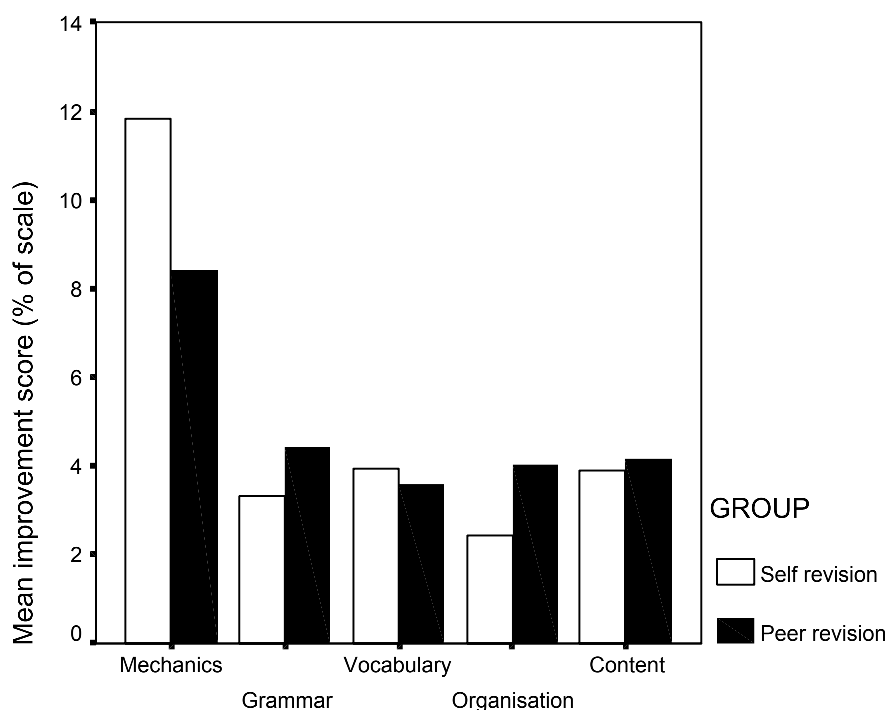

Figure 3. Between draft improvement in quality during the intervention.

There were significant differences between the amounts of improvement on the five aspects measured by Jacobs (F=12.86, p<.001), entirely due to the improvement in mechanics being greater than that in anything else. Though this may be exaggerated by the shortness of the Jacobs scale for that feature, it matches the attention noted above to graphic level revision and formal and meaning-preserving changes. It contrasts with the picture from the more proficient Arab writers wordprocessing in Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (1999) who made twice as great improvements in vocabulary, content and organisation.

In order to establish the connection of revision with improvement, we now consider correlations. Mechanics between draft improvement does correlate positively with graphic level revisions (r=.337, p=.017) and with

spelling revisions ($r=.485$, $p<.001$), demonstrating a clear link between revision and the improvement which is supported by qualitative analysis showing that often formal changes of punctuation and spelling are for the better, e.g. *Therefor* > *Therefore*, *transolating* > *translating* but compare *acadimic* > *Acadimic*.

There were also significant positive correlations in the areas that were less improved, between content, organisation, vocabulary and grammar improvement on the one hand, and macrostructure additions and substitutions on the other. Any revision at that level clearly has value, then, and these correlations are more marked for the peer revisers.

It is also telling that content improvement correlates negatively with graphic level changes ($r=-.326$, $p=.021$), and that the relatively high meaning preserving revision at the lexical and sentential spans has near zero or slightly negative correlations with all the improvement scores: only the self revisers manage to achieve some improvement in mechanics. Clearly most of this rewording activity, typical of inexpert revisers (Sommers 1980), was ineffective, as these examples show:

Substitution and deletion leaving linguistic correctness much the same

> First draft: To start with, you have to know that Al-Baha is located in the south of the country.
>
> Second draft: First, you have to know that Al-Baha is in the south of the country.

Addition making explicit what any sensible reader would have inferred anyway:

> First draft: Abu-Arish is the same size as Khamis.
>
> Second draft: Abu-Arish is *about* the same size as Khamis.

Permutation at sentence level just adjusting the structure better to written English:

> First draft: So I decided to work on simple Arabic topics transolating them into English.
>
> Second draft: So I decided to work on translating simple Arabic topics into English.

Overall, this suggests that the checklist's highlighting of content issues, and the relatively small amounts of meaning changing revision seen above, had some beneficial effect, but that the well-attested low level and non-meaning changing concern of low proficiency writers with mechanics was still dominant and the main area of improvement, in both groups.

Final draft quality over pretest, intervention and posttest.

On the pretest, the two groups were not significantly different on any Jacobs scores, confirming our expectation that they were alike in baseline proficiency. Scores were best here (and during and after the intervention) for grammar, as commonly found in L2 studies, in this instance perhaps due to the special attention to grammar in class in the past.

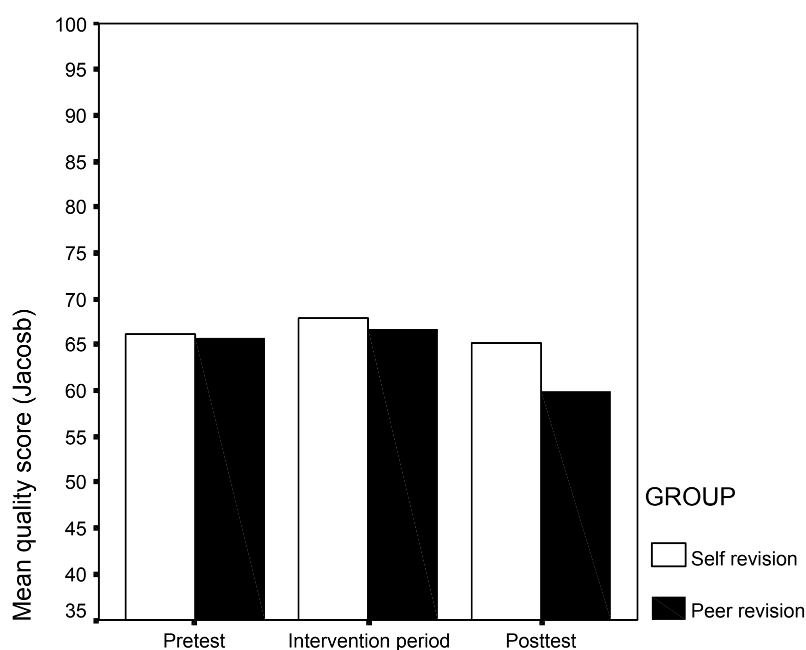

Figure 4. Final draft quality scores over the period of the study.

Final drafts during the intervention were on average slightly (but nonsignificantly) better than baseline on grammar, vocabulary, organisation and content, slightly worse on mechanics, weakly supporting

the effectiveness of the drafting and checklist regime in shifting attention to higher levels of revision with consequent improvements there. Intervention scores exceeded pretest ones more markedly on the first task, in fact, but fell off on the other tasks due possibly to decreased novelty and uneven interest in the composition topics.

In the pre-post comparison of final draft scores (n=44), remarkably students were significantly lower post than pre in overall Jacobs scores (F=4.97, p=.031; pretest mean = 66, posttest mean = 62.5). The difference was greatest for mechanics, decreasing successively through grammar, vocabulary, organisation and content (being significant only for the first two). Clearly any intervention benefits did not carry through to writing done in exam conditions, particularly at lower levels of language, and this was more marked for the peer revision group (mean fall of 5.88 Jacobs points) than for the self-revisers (mean fall 1.05), though no interaction effects of pre-post change with group were significant.

Overall, the revision strategies practised in the intervention did not help these writers when writing in exam conditions. Since the checklist covered higher levels of language first, and in more detail than lower, it is not surprising perhaps that lower level aspects became slightly less focussed on and improved, as we saw above also in intervention final draft quality. However, there was no corresponding improvement at higher levels in the posttest: possibly students attempted to use some of the pointers they could remember from the checklist, and write more than one draft and think more about content, but the exigencies of time and memory, and not being able to work on the composition at home, meant that they were unable to exploit the revision training effectively. Maybe they wasted time on such efforts instead of using whatever habitual strategies they used in the pretest. Whatever the truth, this does seem to support the value of time, agreeing with Polio et al. (1998) rather than Kroll (1990).

The slight but not significantly greater impact on the peer-revisers is of course explicable by the fact that they had no peers available to consult, as they had recently got accustomed to, while the self-revision group was working in the same self-revision mode as during the intervention.

Finally it is worth noting that despite the drop in scores in the posttest, the correlation of those scores with mean intervention scores (r= .536, p<.001) is better than that with pretest scores (r=.479, p=.001). This suggests that at least in determining who does better than who, the intervention activities have had some effect.

Interview results :

This section reports on the results of the qualitative interview data. The purpose of the interviews was to gain more insight into the subjects' attitudes towards the pedagogic intervention followed in the study. The first author of this paper interviewed all students (51 subjects) in the two participating classes. The interviewer taperecorded students' ansewrs as they were responding. Our subjects responded to all interview questions. Interviews took from 5 to 10 minutes' time. The taperecorded interview data were then transcribed for analysis. Below is a summary of the findings.

What aspects did you revise, and why?

Revision was reported as focused more on the low-level aspects of writing than higher level ones: grammar (58%), spelling (46%), vocabulary (36%), content (17%) and organization (19%). This order of preference is consistent with our quantitative analysis of actual revision changes, and with questionnaire ratings by similar students in Daoud and Al-Hazmi (2002), and with the findings of other studies of low proficiency writers, even when using checklists that prompt attention to higher levels (Liggett, 1983; Kharma, 1985; Doushaq & Al Makhzoomy, 1989; Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989; Halimah, 1991; Zaid, 1993). These sources indicate that grammar, spelling and the like are targeted because they are seen by Arab learners as the main bearers of correctness, and as therefore important, which in turn arises because teachers themselves concentrate mainly on these features. Specially interesting, however, is the wider range of reasons given by the students themselves for their revision focus.

Some did indeed speak about grammar, spelling and vocabulary, using the general criterion of ‘importance’ in writing as their reason for focusing on them: “Spelling and grammar are the most important aspects in

writing". Some further cited audience awareness, doubtless echoing school emphases on what is essential in communication: "Grammar is important as it helps the reader understand the writing." Other learners referred more to their perceived main writing problems: "Grammar is my problem"; "Spelling (forms) represents a problem for me"; "My background is weak in both grammar and spelling." However, another comment is telling: "Most of my mistakes in writing are in spelling and grammar." The reference to mistakes again suggests that students' perceptions of their own weaknesses may ultimately derive from past experience of most of the mistakes indicated by teachers on written work being in the area of grammar and spelling (cf. Porte, 1997). It also suggests that they see revision as primarily error correction (as also Cumming & So, 1996).

However, respondents in both groups justified their revising preferences by appeal to 'ease' rather than importance: "I focused on grammar and vocabulary because of ease to tackle them; I can control grammar and vocabulary as opposed to organizing and explaining ideas." This perception of ease could reflect the true proficiency of these writers and so suggest that this limits what they can, and therefore do, revise. There is therefore no point in prompting them to revise at higher levels, a crucial implication for instruction with echoes outside the realm of writing, e.g. in Krashen's (1981) insistence that learners only benefit from input at a level of i+1 and Vygotsky's (1969) general developmental notion of a 'zone of proximal development' in which it is valuable to provide instruction. It echoes the concept of 'readiness' (common in the realm of initial L1 reading). Nevertheless, this idea has not always been considered in the writing literature, where it is often simply suggested that exposing writers to good practice, whether in the form of reading model products or being trained in the strategies used by expert writers, will benefit them regardless of proficiency level. Maybe our writers, although of university level, were still not 'ready' for some aspects of the revision activities.

Alternatively, students' perception of ease could reflect lack of confidence or motivation to put in the extra time and effort required,

rather than lack of ability to revise at higher levels. Hence they do not persevere past the lower levels of revision although the higher levels are precisely those where it should be easiest to transfer skills from L1 writing, and so strategic ability should be readily available. We think this interpretation is less likely in our situation.

Finally, more than one student said: "I revised spelling and grammar because peer comments focused on these two aspects." This demonstrates how a regime of peer revision, with pairs of a similar proficiency level, even prompted by a checklist, can simply lead to reinforcement of a lowest common denominator of activity. Maybe this writer would have attempted to revise more broadly, following the checklist, but for peer influence. Thus the social-psychological dynamics of the pair situation dumb down the level of sophistication of the revision to the capability and aspiration of the weaker partner rather than the stronger. Only with a clearer differential ability between the members of a pair might this be overcome, but in many classes, such as ours, such disparities are not found, so cannot be exploited.

These last comments additionally testify to students having at least some of the time paid attention to what their peers said (as also Nelson & Murphy, 1993; Paulus, 1999), since some studies (e.g. Connor & Asenavage, 1994) have suggested that much peer advice is overlooked in favour of the student's own opinion. Indeed if this were the case it could account for the lack of great difference between our peer revisers and self revisers.

How much did you revise these aspects compared with before this experiment?

92% of students indicated that they revised the aforementioned aspects of their essays more during the present study than before, most reporting that they did not revise writing previously: "In the past I used not to revise except spelling and handwriting"; "I did not revise my writing in the past." In short, they were used to a one-draft process of writing (the first draft is the final one). Though always an available option to the writer, in some older, product-focused, methods of teaching writing, such as these students experienced at school, even self-revision was not promoted, as

when students were required to write one-draft essays under time pressure (Al-Hazmi and Scholfield, 1999), an approach still prevalent in many Arab countries (Halimah, 1991).

If it is true that they did indeed revise much more than before, then this makes the quality results clearly disappointing, as there was only a modest improvement in quality of final drafts in the intervention period over the pretest, and a fall on the posttest. This suggests that the revision was not as effective as it might have been, maybe due to the inability of low proficiency subjects to correct themselves or peers effectively. Alternatively maybe a longer intervention and more training would have helped.

What are the difficulties you faced in revising these aspects? Are you satisfied with your revision?

33% of the students said that revising certain grammatical aspects (e.g. tenses and relative clauses) was a difficulty because of inability to detect and/or correct grammatical mistakes in their own or colleagues' essays: "I found it difficult to distinguish tenses." This contrasts with the evidence above where grammar was regarded by some an easier aspect to correct. 12% said that revising content represented a difficulty as they felt at a loss for ideas: "It was difficult for me to find sufficient ideas related to my topic." Only 10% claimed that finding suitable vocabulary was difficult while revising; 8% reported that organizing ideas was also a difficulty in the revision process. As for our students' satisfaction with revision, 40% said they were satisfied to some extent; 31% satisfied; and 16% unsatisfied. The rest did not comment on this.

Overall, these comments support the interpretation that though these students did revise, and indeed made some between draft improvements, they were aware themselves that they were not expert enough to make enough good changes to radically enhance the quality of the final product.

Which revision strategy do you prefer: collaborative or individual?

All students confirmed that they wrote individually before the study but 70% expressed preference for collaborative revising: "I prefer collaborative writing as I make use of my colleague's ideas"; "I prefer

collaborative writing because it helps me detect my mistakes." This echoes Dipardo and Freedman (1988) and Keh (1990) and matches 69% of advanced ESL writers with positive attitudes to peer review in Mangelsdorf (1992).

30%, on the other hand, favored revising individually: "I like to express myself the way I like; also my colleague's revision could be wrong"; "I prefer individual writing to learn from my mistakes." Also some students said that there were some topics which they could not share with other classmates. In part this might reflect a prescriptive stance adopted by the peer (Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992) and awareness of peer limitations (cf. Nelson & Murphy, 1993; Mangelsdorf, 1992). Overall, students show awareness of the differences between the approaches in their impact both at the level of content/ideas and of form/language, despite the few differences in the revisions made.

Do you think the revision sheet was helpful while revising?

All students said that the revision sheet was beneficial, particularly because it drew attention to areas in writing that they were not aware of before and helped them revise systematically: "the sheet helped me revise accurately and it gave writing a new dimension for me"; "the revision sheet drew my attention to aspects in writing I was not aware of".

This suggests that, despite their major focus on spelling and grammar, the checklist did have some influence in broadening the range of things they revised, supporting the evidence of the analysis of the revisions themselves. However, it is also consistent with the view that their revision was not always sufficient in quantity or quality to affect final draft quality radically.

Conclusion:

This study reminds us of the surgeon's report that 'the operation was a success but the patient died'. We see revisions being made, probably more than before, albeit mostly low level. The checklist was appreciated, and had some small effect on what was revised, as also the peer feedback. There is evidence of between draft improvement of quality even in higher level areas less the focus of revision. However, final drafts in the

intervention period improve in quality only marginally over the pretest, and fall in the exam posttest, and improvement of final drafts must surely be our ultimate goal. This conflicts with the generally positive tenor of previous studies and demands explanation. At least three factors could be relevant.

First, possibly the intervention (eleven weeks) was too short to afford sufficient training in how to use the checklist or peer feedback fully effectively, a crucial consideration (Berg, 1999; Nelson & Murphy; 1993; Rollinson, 2005). Compare Al-Shafie (1990) who took a year and Jouhari (1997) a semester, though over such longer periods improvements could have been due to factors other than the special instruction. Furthermore, possibly only with a longer intervention can learners' attitudes shift towards a new classroom ethos with greater focus on content.

Second, despite overall positive attitudes, our students perhaps were not 'ready' in attitude or proficiency terms to exploit new strategies to improve drafts at levels where there is most room for improvement, higher than mechanics. Clearly all revision is not effective revision. With these students the teacher's task is now to see how to make those weaker areas of revision more successful, countering the formal correctness tradition the students are used to, and indeed how to maintain the effort which we already saw slipping even over just three sessions. From our previous study of more proficient Arabs (Al-Hazmi and Scholfield, 1999) and Zamel (1983), the key area to target is clearly Faigley and Witte's macrostructure.

Thirdly, revision methods that work in ordinary classes but cannot easily be used in the exam situation do not necessarily have any rub-off benefit in that situation: in fact they may make things worse by distracting students from the things they traditionally revise well in that situation and making them attempt things that are beyond them. But if real life writing is more like class writing, with time and home resources available, maybe it is the exams that need changing (cf. Brown 1989)! Time buys effective revision, in areas constrained by the writer's proficiency, and enhanced by the awareness raising benefit of a checklist (contrast Kroll, 1990).

Methodologically, this study further confirms the value (as in Al-Hazmi and Scholfield, 1999) of studying separately the revisions made, between draft quality improvement, and final draft quality, supplemented with qualitative data. Not all studies include all these and it is often simply assumed that more revision must mean improved quality, or that between draft improvement produces final draft improvement. In fact we saw that there was statistical support for graphic/spelling revisions leading to mechanics improvement, and for the small numbers of macrostructure changes leading to content, organisation, vocabulary and grammar improvement. There was however little relationship between the sizeable amounts of meaning-preserving changes at the lexical and sentential size spans and any improvement in grammar or vocabulary.

Clearly more work is needed on teaching EFL/ESL writing at lower proficiency levels and in the Arab world, where product-based teaching still predominates. Apart from trialling different training methods, we need to detect, and speed learners up to, the 'readiness' threshold. The role of L1 writing strategies, which we suspect may be weak, also needs attention. Still, we remain convinced that 'if writing means rewriting, then teaching writing means teaching rewriting' (Bisaillon, 1999: 133).

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Appendix A

Evaluation checklist.

1. Main idea

What is your overall idea?

2. Purpose

2.1 Is your primary purpose clear? Is the purpose to:
- inform?
- persuade?
- or both?

3. Content

3.1 Have you written enough about the student adequately?
3.2 Is all the information relevant to your topic?
3.3 Are the main ideas supported by specific examples or evidence?
3.4 Are there gaps in the information?
3.5 Is there too much information on some points?

4. Structure of text

4.1 Does your essay have a clear introduction and a clear conclusion?
4.2 Is the sequence of your ideas clear - earlier to later, general to particular, thesis to supporting points, supporting points to conclusion, weaker arguments to stronger arguments? If not would it help to rearrange the order of ideas?
4.3 Paragraphs
   a. Does your essay have clear paragraph divisions?
   b. Is each paragraph built around one main idea?
   c. Do paragraph divisions match the organisation of ideas in the plan?
   d. If not, should any of the paragraphs be:
      - joined together?
      - divided into smaller units?
      - rearranged?

5. a. Cohesion

5.1 Do the connections between the ideas need to be made clear or explicit?

5.2 If connecting words like the ones below have been used, have they been used appropriately? Do they give the reader a sense of flow in your ideas? Or do the ideas simply read like a list?

Types of connectors

'And' type: therefore, as a result, accordingly, consequently, thus

'Or' type: in other words, to put it more simply

'But' type: however, yet, nevertheless

Other connectors include: who, which, that, when, where, because, since, although, etc.

5. **b.** Response as readers

5.1 Does the opening paragraph make the reader want to read on?

5.2 Do you feel satisfied with the way your essay comes to an end?

5.3 Indicate your interest in your essay as a whole, using a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is very interesting and 5 is not interesting.

6. Vocabulary

Is specialist or technical and general vocabulary accurately used?

7. Grammar

Do students and verbs agree? Are verb tenses correctly formed and correctly used? Check the correct use of prepositions, articles, adjectives, passive forms.

8**.** Mechanical accuracy

8.1 Punctuation: Does each sentence end with an appropriate mark of punctuation?

8.2 Capital letters: Are capital letters used where they are needed?

8.3 Spelling: Check your spelling of words that you are not sure about in a dictionary, or use the spelling checker if you are working on a word processor.

APPENDIX B

Classification of types of revision (Faigley and Witte, 1981; 1984).

I. Surface changes
A. Formal changes: (00)
1. Spelling: 01
2. Tense, number, and modality: 02
3. Abbreviation: 03
4. Punctuation: 04
5. Format
a. Paragraph: 05
b. Other: 06
B. Meaning-preserving changes (10)
1. Additions: 11
2. Deletions: 12
3. Substitutions: 13
4. Permutations: 14
5. Distributions: 15
6. Consolidations: 16
II. Meaning changes
A. Microstructure changes (20)
1. Additions: 21
2. Deletions: 22
3. Substitutions: 23
4. Permutations: 24
5. Distributions: 25
6. Consolidations: 26
B. Macrostructure changes (30)
1. Additions: 31
2. Deletions: 32
3. Substitutions: 33
4. Permutations: 34
5. Distributions: 35
6. Consolidations: 36

Appendix C:

The ESL Composition Profile, Jacobs et al. 1981 (A condensed version)

Writing Aspect	SCORE	
CONTENT (30%)	EXCELLENT	30-27
	GOOD	26-22
	FAIR	21-17
	POOR	16-13
ORGANISATION (20%)	EXCELLENT	20-18
	GOOD	17-14
	FAIR	13-10
	POOR	9-7
VOCABULARY (20%)	EXCELLENT	20-18
	GOOD	17-14
	FAIR	13-10
	POOR	9-7
LANGUAGE USE (25%)	EXCELLENT	25-22
	GOOD	21-18
	FAIR	17-11
	POOR	10-5
MECHANICS (5%)	EXCELLENT	5
	GOOD	4
	FAIR	3
	POOR	2

أثر المراجعة الإجبارية الفردية والتعاونية باستخدام قائمة الفحص الكتابي في تحسين مستوى الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: دراسة على عينة من طلاب الجامعة السعوديين

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الملخص :

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحسين مستوى الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية لعينة من الطلاب الجامعيين السعوديين كفايتهم اللغوية محدودة يدرسون في سياق تسود فيه منهجيات تعليم الكتابة كناتج نهائي (Product) وليست كعملية (Process) تتضمن سلسلة متشابكة ومعقدة من العمليات الإدراكية والكتابية.

ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، تم تطبيق أسلوب المراجعة الإجبارية باستخدام قائمة فحص للكتابة خاصة لهذا الغرض لثلاث مقالات أنجزها طلاب مجموعتي عينة الدراسة؛ حيث اعتمدت إحدى المجموعات طريقة التغذية الراجعة التعاونية (Peer Feedback) بينما استخدمت الأخرى طريقة التقييم الذاتي (Self Assessment).

أظهرت النتائج تحسنا واضحا في مستوى كتابة طلاب المجموعتين بين النسخ الأولى والنهائية خصوصا فيما يتعلق بآليات الكتابة كالإملاء والترقيم؛ إلا أن التحسن في جوانب المعنى على مستوى الجملة والنص بعمومه كان طفيفا. كذلك بينت النتائج وجود فرق طفيف بين المجوعتين في مستوى النسخ النهائية للمقالات.

من جانب آخر أظهرت نتائج تحليل بيانات المقابلات التي أجريت مع طلاب المجموعتين أن أسلوب التغذية الراجعة التعاونية واستخدام قائمة الفحص الكتابي، وهي طريقة جديدة على هؤلاء الطلاب، لم يفلح في توجيه انتباه الطلاب إلى مراجعة وتحسين محتوى الكتابة وترتيب الأفكار، رغم تسجيل اتجاهات ايجابية من قبل الطلاب نحو هذا الأسلوب. وقد خلصت الدراسة إلى أن أفراد العينة غير مهيئين للتخلي عن التركيز على الأخطاء الشكلية كالإملاء والترقيم أثناء عملية الكتابة والمراجعة الذي اعتادوا عليه في سياقهم التعليمي.