

THE IMPACT OF LEARNER-CENTERED APPROACH ON EFL LEARNERS' WRITING SKILL

TAYBAT IZAT DEWALI

Dept. of English Language, College of Basic Education, University of Duhok, Kurdistan Region -Iraq

(Received: September 24, 2022; Accepted for Publication: November 9, 2022)

ABSTRACT

Contemporary education calls for the use of learner-centered approach over the traditional education where students are passive learners. English as a foreign language can be best learned in a learner-centered approach. The writing skill has always been taught in a teacher centered approach in schools which made students graduate with poor writing skills. Therefore, researchers recommend the use of the learner-centered approach to develop the writing skill of language learners. For this reason, a new educational system called the Bologna Process which adopts a learner-centered approach is currently being implemented in some departments and colleges of the University of Duhok. This study investigates the effectiveness of the learner-centered approach in the learners' writing skill, learner's attitudes towards learning academic writing in a learner-centered teaching and learning environment, and to find out which learner-centered based activity students mostly prefer adopt when learning academic writing. For this purpose, 16 students from the English Language Department/ College of Basic Education have been interviewed. The results show that students find the learner-centered approach to have a positive effect on their writing skill since it help enhance their knowledge, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, brainstorming activities and essay structure. As result, they have developed a positive attitude towards this approach and want to continue learning academic writing. The findings also have revealed that the most preferred learner-centered activities are students' presentations and group work. Finally, the study ends up with some conclusions and recommendations.

KEY WORDS: Writing Skill, Learner-Centered Approach, English as a Foreign Language, Bologna Process, Attitude.

INTRODUCTION

The writing skill, as well as other language skills, has always been taught in a teacher centered approach in schools. This has made students graduate with poor writing skills. Such students join the university with unsatisfactory capacity to express their ideas in meaningful short paragraphs and in some cases, based on personal experience; they are unable to write a well formed sentence. Since in the past years a more teacher centered approach was adopted in the university level, some students ended up with no or very little improvement in their language skills and especially students' writing skill. This has created a need for a more active way of learning; therefore, the University of Duhok (henceforth UoD) found a need for a new system that can enhance the learners' life and academic skills and has duly introduced Bologna Process into teaching at some colleges. The Bologna Process uses a learner-centered (LC) learning approach which encourages

learners to be active learners instead of being passive recipients of information. This paper aims at finding out the effectiveness of the learner-centered approach (LCA) and the learners' attitudes towards this approach in learning essay writing. It also aims at finding out the most preferred LC based activity by the learners.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The schools in our community, Duhok city and most of schools in Iraq, use a teacher-centered approach (TCA); this means students are accustomed to be passive learners. With the implementation of the Bologna Process in the UoD which demands the use of a LCA, students might face difficulty in adapting to this new approach once they reach college level. This difficulty might lead to the formation of negative attitudes towards this new educational system. The researcher, thus, found it important to

investigate the effectiveness of this approach and learn about the students attitudes towards it.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The current study aims at answering the following questions:

1. How effective is the LCA in developing learners' writing skill?
2. What are the learners' attitudes towards learning academic writing in a LC teaching and learning environment?
3. Which LC based activity do students mostly prefer to be used when learning academic writing?

This study hypothesizes that:

1. The LC learning approach is very effective in developing the students' writing skill.
2. Learners have positive attitudes towards learner- centered approach since it promotes active learning.
3. The learners' mostly preferred learner-centered activity is group writings.

AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

This study aims at finding out how effective is the LC learning in teaching academic writing to university students. It also aims at identifying students' attitude towards LCA when used in the teaching and learning of academic writing.

THE SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

This paper is limited to the EFL learning context and writing skill only. This means, it does not cover other teaching and learning subjects and disciplines.

VALUE OF THE RESEARCH

This research is expected to be of some value to the EFL teachers, students, and Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Kurdistan of Iraq. It is expected that the findings of the current study can serve students because their attitudes towards this approach will be identified, whether positive or negative. As a result, it can benefit teachers and the Ministry of Higher Education for they will know how learners view the LCA and might make necessary reformations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical background

In this section, the history of the LCA and the Bologna process as well as the relation between the two will be briefly presented.

According to Khan, Nazneen, Ahmad, and Khalid (2016), the LCA is derived from Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which emerged in the 1970s. CLT required a vital change in the learning and teaching process, it "presented different roles for teachers, students and teacher and learning materials... Learners' specific learning needs were given central importance". The learner is no longer a "passive recipient of knowledge and information", s/he is required to be an active participant in the learning process (Khan et al, 2016, p.77).

Brackenbury (2012) stated that LCA is a "paradigm of challenge" since it can be quite challenging to both the learners and the teachers. The difficulty of this approach lies in the fact that it demands learners to be active participants in the learning process and to think critically to solve problems. As for teachers, it is challenging because it requires teachers to let some of their power in the class go to the learners. In this regard, Brackenbury (2012) pointed out that teachers "must care about more than just content; treat student errors as learning opportunities; and change their role from distributors of knowledge to facilitators of learning" (p.12). Despite the fact that these challenges can be frightening for both teachers and students in a way or another and it can make them lose confidence for it can look quite "different from the methods of education that most individuals have experienced before (i.e., traditional, instructor-centered models)" (Brackenbury, 2012, p.12). It is, however, important to point out that the LC teaching is not dramatically different from the other teaching and learning approaches; according to Barr and Tagg (1993), "not all elements of the new paradigm are contrary to corresponding elements of the old: the new includes many elements of the old within its larger domain of possibilities" (as cited in Brackenbury, 2012, p.12).

The LCA could be effectively implemented as the Bologna process which is an educational system currently being adopted by more than 48 countries around the world. At the beginning, this process was signed (in 1998) by only four countries namely; Germany, UK, France and Italy. Gradually more and more countries joined

until in 2015 there were 48 countries involved in the application of the Bologna process (Bologna Process Studies, 2022). According to the European Higher Education Area, the Bologna process “seeks to bring more coherence to higher education systems across Europe. It established the European Higher Education Area to facilitate student and staff mobility, to make higher education more inclusive and accessible, and to make higher education in Europe more attractive and competitive worldwide” (n.d.). Moreover, the Bologna process did not implement all aspects of the learner-centered teaching at first; in fact, it was fully taken into the process in 2009.

Definition of Learner-centered approach

Norman and Spohrer (1996) stated that the core idea behind terms like constructivism, problem-based and LC is that students’ motivation increases to learn new knowledge and information when they are totally occupied by the topic. They learn the required “knowledge and skills because they need them in order to solve the problem at hand. The goal is active exploration, construction, and learning rather than the passivity of lecture attendance and textbook reading” (p.26). This means that learners are required to explore information in order to construct their long lasting knowledge and skills; they are no longer passive recipients of information.

According to Sebarajah, (2021), most the definitions of the learner-centered learning concentrate on “group activities and teaching methods in the classroom and focus on the conditions under which learner-centeredness occurs.” (p.67). However, learner-centered teaching does not revolve entirely around group work. In this regard, Weimer (2013) argued that learner centeredness demands five key changes in the teaching and learning process, namely the balance of power, the function of content, the role of the teacher, the responsibility for learning, and evaluation purpose and processes. Balance of power means that the teacher shares some of his power with the students, i.e. students get to make some decisions related to the course. The function of content refers to the purpose behind the knowledge students need to acquire. The role of the teacher means that in LCA the teachers’ role is to assist students to learn. The responsibility for learning indicates that students are responsible for their own learning (Weimer, 2013). Finally, the purpose and processes of evaluation according to Utah

Valley University (2019), means that “there are additional purposes and processes of assessment beyond assigning grades”; teachers can use formative assessment in addition to summative ones (para.4).

On the other hand, Brown (2001, p. 47) argued that LC teaching must involve:

1. techniques that focus on or account for learners’ needs, styles, and goals;
2. techniques that give some control to the students;
3. curricula that include the consultation and input of students and that do not presuppose objectives in advance;
4. techniques that allow for students creativity and innovation; and
5. techniques that enhance a student’s sense of competence and self-worth.

From the above statements, one can conclude that LCA refers to the type of learning and teaching that accounts for the learners’ needs, styles, and goals. It promotes active learning and motivates learners to be engaged in active exploration and construction of knowledge. Collaborative work is the most, but not the only, dominant activity type in the LCA.

The use of Learner-centered approach in teaching writing skill

The use of LCA in teaching English language is very beneficial because, according to Jones (2007), it makes learners “become committed to improving their English... different learning styles can be accommodated and students can help each other to develop their skills” (as cited in Marwan, 2017, p.46). Marwan (2017) further added that due to the significant benefits of the LC teaching, “it is no longer a choice for English teachers particularly those working in the context of English as a foreign language not to apply this approach” (p.46). The four language skills and specially the writing skill can be learnt through the LCA.

Coffin, Curry, Goodman, Hewings, Lillis, and Swann (2003) argued that “student academic writing continues to be at the centre of teaching and learning in higher education” (p.3). Writing skill is one of the most important language skills and it “can be taken as a measure to have better educational performance and success” students with good writing skill have better chances to find a job in the future (Khan et al., 2016, p.75). Moreover, Celce-Murcia (2001) argued that writing is a difficult skill to master not only for non-native speakers but also for the native ones.

In this regard, Celce-Murcia (2001) asserted that “the ability to express ones’ ideas in writing in a second or foreign language and to do so with reasonable coherence and accuracy is a major achievement; many native speakers of English never truly master this skill” (p.204). Therefore, it requires more attention and devotion by both students the teachers. Finally, the English language teacher has the choice of how to have students do their writing activities. S/he can make students do the actual writing process in the class or can, as argued by Jone (2007), be done at home as assignment. Jone (2007) believed that “the classroom activities for writing should again be carried out in the form of discussion activities. Such activities can include such elements as brainstorming and mapping ideas” (as cited in Marwan, 2017, p.49). Ultimately, it is the teacher who decides what is best for their students. The teacher can choose a combination of both ways; s/he can sometimes let students do the actual writing at home and at other times have it done in the class to see how students are cooperating, discussing, and negotiating ideas and opinions.

Learner-centered based activities for writing

There are plenty of LC activities that a teacher can use for the teaching of writing. In this section, reference will be made to some of them.

Jeon (2018) highlighted three main activities, viz. peer feedback, group writing, and portfolio assessment. According to Farrah (2012), peer feedback is a process that involves “collaborative learning in which students review and evaluate each other’s writing and offer each other’s with feedback” (p.180). Peer feedback can be used as a complementary source for teacher feedback. Peer feedback, as outlined by Farrah (2012), Rouhi and Azizian (2013) and Jeon (2018) has the following advantages:

- a) it helps students understand their own writing and learn from the different views of other students regarding the writing process.
- b) it increases interaction among the learners and encourages collaborative learning, to;
- c) improve self- and peer-assessment and reduce teachers’ workload
- d) it increases the learner’s (writer’s) confidence,
- e) it encourages students to read and revise their own writings critically, and ;
- f) it helps learners acquire new vocabularies and expressions when reviewing other students’ writings.

Despite all the above mentioned advantages, peer feedback is, however, not free of disadvantages. A number of studies presented disadvantages for peer feedback, one major and most important disadvantage is that students correct surface mistakes. For example, Kirsaj and Yilmazel (2019) compared teacher feedback to peer feedback and found out that the students corrected surface level mistakes only. Similarly, Storch (2005) found out that students corrected only sentence-level mistakes and left out the mistakes related to content and ideas; this could be due to their lack of knowledge. Such a disadvantage can affect the validity of peer feedback. However, Farrah (2012) asserted that a number of studies confirmed that if students receive training on how to provide feedback it can be a good activity and very successful.

As for the group writing (also known as collaborative writing which also includes pair work) activity, students work together to create or write a piece of writing assigned by the teacher. Jeon (2018) pointed out that group writing is “a useful writing activity to promote students’ cooperation in the process of language learning.” (p.102). A study conducted by Fong (2012) showed that group writing benefited students in many ways; the researcher pointed out that collaborative learning helped in “heightening their sense of responsibility towards the task, promoting the sharing of new information, allowing the sharing of expertise, helping narrow down information, and negotiating successfully” to accomplish the given task (p.396). In another study, Lee and Lee (2014) found out that group writing increased learners’ motivation and interest in learning English language, and it helped foster learners’ writing ability and confidence (as cited in Jeon,2018). Jong (2016) presented more advantages to group work which are “1) generating interactive language; 2) offering an embracing affective climate; 3) promoting learner responsibility and autonomy; and 4) serving as a step toward individualizing instruction” (p.25). Nonetheless, the author argued that group work can sometimes be challenging and lead to problems among the group members “because there are various opinions and writing styles involved in order to produce one final product that meets everyone’s expectation” (Jong, 2016, p.25). Therefore, the participants’ of Jong’s (2016) study preferred individual writing over group writing. Likewise, the findings of Jeon’s (2018) study also revealed

that students liked individual writing over group writing because of the difficulty of working with others. Some group members were worried about their marks to be negatively affected when working with a group, and also because some might not express or say their sincere opinions and thoughts for the “fear of losing face or sustaining group harmony” (p.108).

In relation to portfolio assessment, Arter and Spandel (1992) defined it as a “purposeful collection of student work that tells the story of the student's efforts, progress, or achievement in (a) given area(s)”. Moreover, the portfolio must include “evidence of student self-reflection” (p.36). Similarly, Afrianto (2017) defined portfolio as “a systematic collection of a variety of teachers' observations and student products, collected over time, that reflect a student's developmental status and progress made in the learning process. “ (p.107). This type of activity can be used in writing classes where students keep a portfolio that contains their written work (essays) done over the year with the teachers comments. This can help students see how much they have progressed by re-reading the teacher's comments on every task. The portfolio must contain students' reflection on their own learning. It also helps students and teachers to know the students' strengths and weaknesses.

Oral presentation is another activity that can be used in the teaching of academic writing. According to Brooks and Wilson (2014), oral presentations are very useful because they are a) learner centered, b) require the use of all four language skills, c) provide students with realistic language tasks, d) valuable outside the language classroom, and e) improve students' motivation (p.203). Nonetheless, how can oral presentations be effectively used in academic writing classes? Based on the researcher's personal experience in teaching academic writing, the teacher can ask students to explain and present a certain type of essay or paragraph, for example, which can encourage the student presenter to search and collect information and prepare a good presentation. This, in turn, fosters long term learning. Or, the teacher can ask a few students who have written a good essay or paragraph to present it to the whole class and explain how it is written in terms of ideas and structure.

Previous studies

Plenty of studies have been conducted regarding the LCA and writing skill, most of which either compare between the LCA and the TCA in the teaching of academic writing or seek

students' preference of the activities used when teaching academic writing using the LCA. For example, Khan et al (2016) carried out a study to compare between the LCA and TCA regarding their effectiveness in improving the writing skill of college students. The researchers used a quantitative research method; they used an experiment where the participants (60 undergraduate students from University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan) were divided into two groups (30 students each group). One group was taught academic writing using the LCA and the other was taught employing TCA. These classes lasted for 15 weeks. A pre-test and a post-test were done to see the difference in the participants' writing after the experiment was over. The results revealed that the LCA was more effective in improving the students' writing skills.

In relation to the writing activities, a number of studies were conducted in order to investigate students' preference of different writing tasks, especially individual and collaborative writing. Among these are Jong (2016), Jeon (2018), and Kaweera, Yawiloeng, and Tachom (2019).

In a similar study, Jong (2016) investigated the attitudes of students towards individual, pair and group work. Jong used both a questionnaire and interviews for data collection. The participants were 37 undergraduate EFL students from a Korean university. The results revealed that more than half of the participants (54%) preferred collaborative writing specifically pair work and the other (46%) preferred individual writing; this however does not mean they did not like collaborative work. This group of students had a positive attitude towards collaborative work because they “felt that their final product created through pair and group work was better” but it was their second choice. The justification for this was that they had more freedom to concentrate on their own ideas when working alone.

To begin with, Jeon (2018) investigated the effect of the LC writing instruction on students' anxiety and attitude. The writer used an LC instruction model for writing which included four main activities: group writing, peer feedback, learner-driven feedback and portfolio. Jeon (2018) found out that those activities helped reduce the learners' writing anxiety and increased their positive attitude towards the LCA. However, the most preferred activities by the students were the learner-driven feedback and portfolio which were done individually; and

the less preferred ones were those conducted collaboratively (i.e., group writing and peer feedback).

In another study, Kaweera et al. (2019) conducted a study to compare between individual writing and collaborative writing (pair and group) and attempted to learn about the most preferred activity by the participants. They made the participants, who were 72 undergraduate EFL Thai students, do tasks individually, in pairs, and in groups for a period of three weeks. The participants were from different proficiency levels (low, fair, high). At the end, the researchers interviewed nine of these students. The results showed that students had different attitudes towards the different tasks; the difference was mainly between the low and high proficiency students. The low proficiency students preferred collaborative writing over the individual one because they were more confident and less anxious when they worked in groups. On the other hand, the high proficiency students preferred individual writing because it helped them practice writing better and because they were confident enough about their writing that they did not need others to help them.

Finally, there is another group of studies that concentrated on the nature of the produced text when written individually and collaboratively such as Dobao (2012), Storch (2005), and Al Tai (2015). These studies compared between the texts that were written by the participants individually and collaboratively. In the three studies, it was found out that the participants had positive attitudes towards collaborative work and the texts that were written collaboratively (either in groups or pairs) were more accurate. For example, Dobao (2012) stated that “the texts written by the groups were more accurate not only than those written individually, but also than those written in pairs” (p.40). Meanwhile, in Storch’s (2005) study where some groups of students wrote in pairs and some others individually; it was found out that “pairs produced shorter but better texts in terms of task fulfilment, grammatical accuracy, and complexity” (p.153). Finally, Al Tai’s study (2015) revealed that “collaborative writing positively affects accuracy, fluency and lexical resources of the texts” (p.154).

PROCEDURE AND DATA ANALYSIS

The data were collected in July/2022. The researcher conducted interviews with the

participants via Zoom application as it was summer holiday and the students were off-campus, and it was difficult to hold face-to-face interviews. The interview questions were four open-ended questions (see appendix 1). The interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

The population of this study is the EFL learners of University of Duhok (UoD). The participants were 16 third year students from College of Basic Education/ Department of English Language who were taught essay writing by the researcher. The participants were 12 females and 4 males whose age range was between 19-22 years. It is worth mentioning that these students volunteered to participate in this study.

THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The current research is qualitative in nature as it is based on interviews conducted via Zoom application.

DATA ANALYSIS

The interviews were video and audio recorded since they were conducted via Zoom application. Afterwards, the interviews were carefully listened to and transcribed in a Microsoft Word document.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the data collected from the interviewees are laid out for discussion. It is worth mentioning that for the purpose of keeping the participants’ identity anonymous, they were given codes as P1, P2, P3, etc... The letter (P) refers to the word (participant).

In relation to the first question which states “*has working collaboratively with your classmates (i.e., in groups and pairs) affected your writing skill? If yes, how? If no, why?*”, thirteen participants (which equals 81%) mentioned that working collaboratively had a positive effect on their writing. It has helped improve their grammar, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, essay structure and organization, the ability to link ideas (coherence), and better use the brainstorming methods. The participants mentioned some general benefits as well of working collaboratively, among these were: 1)

they learned to accept other participants' ideas and opinions regardless of their religion, educational and cultural background, and beliefs; 2) it helped increase their self-confidence; 3) it improved their negotiation skills; 4) it improved their ability to work with others in a group; 5) the group discussions helped improve their English; 6) they learned to listen to each other; 7) finally, it helped them overcome their shyness. These results indicate the noticeable benefits of LCA not only on the participants' writing skill but also on their language proficiency, psychology, and attitudes towards others.

Despite their overall positive attitude, three participants (P2, P12, and P13), however, pointed out that working collaboratively had a negative effect on their writing. This negative effect was that they sometimes could not concentrate on their own ideas because they had to listen to other group members' ideas. In this regard, P2 said *"sometimes when you're writing you get stressed because of umm, let's say the environment or the atmosphere because everyone is going to talk in one like time so you get to think about what you want to write and you have to write it immediately. Sometimes you can't just convey the idea that maybe your mates don't like what to write for example. So you get into a problem with maybe, you know, not liking the writing or the essay that you want to do because the others like there is a disagreement taking place"*. Similarly, P12 stated *"but maybe when we write one essay as a group so we have to make them feel they are in the group and we have to listen all of them what they think. Maybe sometimes we write something we didn't want to write but because our friends they want it like this so we write it so that we don't feel guilty because you write this and after that you have a low mark..."*. Meanwhile, P13 said *"when we writing something, I just want to concentrate on my thoughts and ideas; so, when I was writing they were saying their ideas and thoughts like I was confused I didn't know what to write"*. The concerns of these three participants are quite understandable. It is true that when working alone one has the chance to concentrate only on his/her ideas and organize the text the way they desire; unlike collaborative work which demands listening to plenty and various ideas of all the members. This problem might be resolved to a good extent if the students are given different roles within the group. For example, having a leader who makes sure to give time to each

member to say their ideas, having a note taker who writes down the ideas, having a writer to write and organize the ideas, and having an editor to review and edit the final product can serve a great deal to overcome the issue of confusion and stress. In this light, the Centre for Teaching and Learning of Washington University stated that assigning different roles to group members can *"offer an opportunity for high quality, focused interactions between group participants"* (para.2).

Regarding the second question (*"do you prefer to learn academic writing in a learner-centered or a teacher-centered teaching and learning atmosphere? Why?..."*) focused on the participants' preference of either learner or teacher centeredness. Reading through the participants' answers, it appeared that the majority (N=15 which equals 94%) prefer a LCA to learning and teaching over a TCA. The most common reasons they provided for such preference were:

- 1) LCA puts the responsibility of learning on the learners' shoulders.
- 2) In a LCA, learners search for information for themselves, they do not rely only on what the teacher gives or explains to them; this, in turn, creates more independent learners.
- 3) Because in a LCA students work and are active, they retain the information they acquire for a longer period of time.
- 4) Because in a LCA students are required to be active participants, they will prepare themselves before they come to class.
- 5) Finally, in a LCA the students feel they are working in a more comfortable milieu.

These findings are in line with the findings of Khan et al (2016) who found out LCA as more effective and mostly preferred by the learners than the TCA. These findings also reveal that the students want to work and be active if the environment is encouraging and supportive. As a result, they will become more independent and responsible for their own learning.

However, one participant (P12) mentioned that he wants to learn academic writing from the teacher not the students this is why he said that he prefers a TCA. To quote P12's speech, he said *"in the writing process I need teacher-centered because teachers have more knowledge. Like for other subjects it's okay if the students explain or we study. But in writing, I think writing need like some expert teacher, expert people who have more experience and have been through many process like they read"*

many things you know". In a LCA, the teachers' role is not to be eliminated as understood by some people. P12's comment makes sense because, unfortunately, the idea of LCA is not still well understood by some teachers. From personal experience, some teachers believe that using a LCA means that students should do everything and the teacher is only an observer; sitting at the back watching the students explaining the lecture and doing the activities by themselves. This is totally wrong! LCA does not mean the students do not need their teacher anymore. On the contrary, adopting a LCA assigns more responsibilities to the teacher. Tudor (1993) argued that choosing the LCA assigns more responsibilities to the teacher than the traditional teaching methods. Tudor (1993) further added that in the LC class, the teacher is not only the knower and activity organizer but also a learning counselor. There are several other extra responsibilities for the teacher to reach the level of a learning counselor: a) he needs to identify learners' intentions (what they need and would like to do) and resources (their abilities); b) then he ought to prepare learners by increasing their self-awareness as language learners, awareness of learning options, and language awareness; c) analyze learners' needs; d) select the most suitable methodology; e) transfer responsibility (this does not mean wholly transferring the responsibility to the learners it rather means sharing responsibility of content and form of teaching with the learners); and finally f) involving the learners in the learning process (Tudor, 1993, pp.24-28). It can be seen, adopting the LCA does not mean completely abandoning the teacher-centered methodologies, it actually means building on it and it creates more roles and responsibilities for the teacher.

The third interview question states *"do you like to continue learning academic writing in a learner-centered environment? Why?"*. The results continued to reveal the learners' positive attitudes towards LCA; 14 participants (87.5%) showed their desire and willingness to continue learning academic writing in a LCA. The participants mentioned that learning in a LC environment is useful for them and it has helped improve their writing. In this regard, P7 said *"when it comes to writing, learner-centered approach would be more effective because like writing is not... is not only an information that you gain; using it while you are in a class makes you better- the more you practice the better"*.

Similarly, P8 said that she wants to continue learning in a LCA *"because most of the students get benefit from it... working with mates in the class has another thing I mean it's fun and also it makes you know the subject to the point better"*. Also, P15 pointed out that *"...after learning the way I did this year in academic writing, I am much much better than any time in writing in English or in my language..."*. As can be seen, the learners like to learn in a LCA and want to continue learning it in such an environment. The positive attitudes towards this approach come from personal experience with it. Such findings indicate learners' motivation and enthusiasm for being active participants rather than passive recipients of information; a point that should be seriously heeded and positively taken advantage of by the EFL teachers and educational institutions. Using LCA is quite beneficial for the development of the writing skill because, as mentioned by some students, it is not enough to only theoretically learn how to write an essay but rather the learners need to actually practice writing it. Writing opportunities are very common when the approach in practice is learner-centered.

In contrast, P12 argued that for academic writing in specific, a TCA must be used because teachers are more professional and have more expertise; therefore they must explain the subject for the students because it is not an easy subject. P12 said *"I don't mind but I think the teacher-centered environment will be better because we need an expert teacher for academic writing because it's not easy"*. Whereas P15 had a different view, this participant wants a combination of both approaches to be used; she said *"I think for reading and writing its better if the teacher explain to them like so I think teacher-centered is better than learner-centered... hmm, maybe both of them are important because if the teacher explains and students do not do exercise it will not be useful but if they work it will be useful for them. So, I think both of them are important, they work and also teacher should explain for them"*. In relation to P12 and P15s' comment, the same misunderstanding regarding the application of LCA that was witnessed in the responses of a few participants to interview question two (see page 13). As it has been mentioned before, there seems to be a misconception and a misunderstanding by the teachers and the learners concerning how the LCA is implemented. This thought mostly comes from their own experience

with how some teachers apply the LCA, some students think that if LCA is to be used then students must do all the work. They must explain the lecture instead of the teacher while the teacher will only observe without commenting or explaining or clarifying anything. This creates a stress and concern on the part of the students especially if the subject is not an easy one. In order to avoid such misconceptions, both the teachers and learners need to be educated on how the LCA is implemented.

Finally, question four states "*which activity did you enjoy and benefit from the most? Why?*". Of the sixteen participants, eleven (69%) said that the activity they enjoyed the most and was beneficial to them was oral presentations. The remaining five participants preferred group work. The oral presentations done in the academic writing class were individually and collaboratively (in pairs). For the first semester, the presentations were done in pairs and for the second semester they were done individually. This is why some participants (N=4) preferred pair presentations while the others (N=8) liked doing presentations individually. The most common reason given for the preference of presentations over other types of activities (individual writing, pair writing, group writing) is that it encourages them to search and collect information by themselves, hence their understanding of the topic is enhanced. In this regard, P2 said "*I would prefer presentations since I would look up the topic myself and I would work as hard as possible to convey the idea in the most easiest and the most suitable and convenient way...*". Another reason provided by the participants was that presentations help improve their English language as mentioned by P8 "*now I prefer presentations because it is something that will make your English better and others too...*". P5, however, mentioned that her preference for presentations is due to the fact that she really wants to be a teacher; therefore, doing oral presentations perhaps gives her the chance to practice being a teacher for a few minutes. In relation to group work, the most common reason provided by the five participants (31%) who chose group work over other activities was that working in groups helps share and discuss ideas with the group members which, in turn, enhances learning. The group work often done in my classes was in the form of group writings where students had to write an essay as a group. In this regard, P14 said "*the one that I enjoyed*

the most is when we would finish talking about an essay, how to write an essay. Then we would be paired up or we would be in groups and we would write an essay and we were writing together each one of us had different ideas... specially groups, it helped us so much because each one of us had different ideas...". From these results, it can be concluded that half of the participants (8 which equals 50%) prefer individual work while the other half (50%) prefer collaborative work. These findings are a bit close to the ones obtained by Jong (2016) whose participants (54%) preferred collaborative work and (46%) preferred working individually. In our college (College of Basic Education), we often train our graduates to be English language teachers. This could be the reason why the participants (69%) preferred presentations over other types of activities. In other words, they might like practicing being teachers, as mentioned by P5, even if it is for a few minutes. They want to learn how to convey ideas to the students in the best ways, as stated by P2, so that they know what to do when they become teachers in the future. As a result, this can enhance their self-confidence when they meet their future students in the classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

The LCA accounts for the learners' needs, learning styles, and goals. It promotes active learning and encourages learners to explore and construct information. In traditional classrooms the teacher was the main source of information; he conveyed his knowledge and information to the students and the students, in turn, were only passive recipients. This does not work anymore with today's students. If education is all about information then with a click students can have access to information about any subject. This is why recent research demands the use of a LCA because it does not only help students acquire information but also it helps them develop their skills. The findings of this study have helped the researcher arrive at the following conclusions:

1. Working collaboratively has a positive effect on the students' writing. It has helped improve students': grammar, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, essay structure and organization, the ability to link ideas (coherence), and better use the brainstorming methods. This finding gives answer to our first research questions "*how effective is the LCA on the learners' writing skill?*" and confirms the first hypothesis "*the LC*

learning approach is very effective in enhancing the students' writing skill".

2. The majority (91%) of the participants prefer a LCA to learning and teaching over a TCA because it makes the students responsible for their learning, students search for information for themselves; they do not rely only on what the teacher gives or explains to them; thus, it creates more independent learners; in a LCA students work and are active therefore they retain the information they acquire; LCA requires students to be active participants. Finally, in a LCA the students are more comfortable. This finding answers our second research question "*what are the learner's attitudes towards learning academic writing in a LC teaching and learning environment?*". These benefits led to the formation of positive attitudes towards LCA which confirms our second hypothesis "*learners have positive attitudes towards learner-centered approach since it promotes active learning*".

3. Learners have positive attitudes towards the LCA and want to continue learning academic writing according to it.

4. The learners' most preferred activity is oral presentations followed by group writings. This result answers our third research question "*which LC based activity do students mostly prefer to be used when learning academic writing?*". This finding somehow refutes our third hypothesis "*the learners' mostly preferred learner-centered activity is group writings*" the results showed that group writings is still favored by the learners but it was not their first choice.

5. EFL learners prefer oral presentations over other types of LC activities because they help improve their teaching skills and provides them with confidence.

6. LC learning does not revolve entirely around collaborative activities; in fact, collaborative work is only one part of it; students can work individually as well.

7. In addition to improving the learners' writing skill, working with others (collaboratively) helps develop other skills as well such as communication skills, accepting others' opinions and ideas, increases learners' self-confidence, helps improve their speaking, and overcomes shyness. They learn how to work in teams, and listen to others.

8. The teacher who uses a LCA has more responsibilities than the one using a TC.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations can be suggested:

1. University teachers need to attend workshops and seminars on how LCA can be actually implemented since there seems to be a misunderstanding regarding its implementation.

2. As far as the Bologna process is considered, teachers of all subjects and specifically of writing need to realize how the process works in terms of credits, assessment, the grading (scoring) system, student work load, and teacher workload etc...

3. The Bologna process and its implication ought to be well explained to the students when they first join college so that they understand everything about this newly applied system to avoid any future problems and misunderstandings. This need to be done for all EFL classes including writing class.

REFERENCES

- Afrianto. (2017). Challenges of using portfolio assessment as an alternative assessment method for teaching English in Indonesian schools. *International Journal of Educational Best Practices (IJEBCP)*, 1(2): 106-114. DOI: [10.31258/ijeep.v1n2.p106-114](https://doi.org/10.31258/ijeep.v1n2.p106-114).
- Al Tai, Y. (2015). The effect of collaboration on Omani students' writing: a comparison between individual, pair and group work. *European Scientific Journal*, 1: 154-171. Retrieved from: <https://eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/view/5554>. Date of retrieval: 15/8/2022
- Bologna Process Studies. (2022). *History of Bologna process*. Retrieved from: <https://bologna.nevsehir.edu.tr/en/history-of-bologna-process>. Date of retrieval: 15/8/2022.
- Arter, J.A. & Spandel, V. (1992). Using portfolios of student work in instruction and assessment. *Educational Measurement: Issue and Practice*, 11(1), 36-44. Retrieved from: <http://www.edmeasurement.net/resources/Module11ClassroomAssessment-PortfolioAsses.pdf>. Date of retrieval: 28/8/2022
- Brackebury, T. (2012). A qualitative examination of connections between learner-centered teaching and past significant learning experiences. *Journal of the scholarship of teaching and learning*, 12(4): 12-28. Retrieved from: <https://www.bgsu.edu/content/dam/BGSU/health-and-human-services/document/cdis/Brackebury-2012.pdf>. Date of retrieval: 15/8/2022

- Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. New York: a Pearson education company.
- Brooks, G. and Wilson, J. (2014). Using oral presentations to improve students' English language skills. *Humanities Review*, 19: 199-212. Retrieved from: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/143638488.pdf>. Date of retrieval: 1/9/2022
- Celce-Murcia, M. (2001). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language*. Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle.
- Coffin, C., Curry, M.J., Goodman, S., Hewings, A., Lillis, T.M., and Swann, J. (2003). *Teaching academic writing*. Routledge: London.
- Dobao, A.F. (2012). Collaborative writing tasks in the L2 classroom: comparing group, pair, and individual work. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 21: 40-58. Doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2011.12.002.
- European Education Area. (n.d.). *The Bologna process and the European higher education area*. Retrieved from: <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/inclusive-and-connected-higher-education/bologna-process>. Date of retrieval: 15/8/2022.
- Farrah, M. (2012). The Impact of Peer Feedback on Improving the Writing skills among Hebron University Students. *An - Najah Univ. J. Res. (Humanities)*, 26(1), 179-210. Retrieved from: https://www.academia.edu/1399177/The_Impact_of_Peer_Feedback_on_Improving_the_Writing_skills_among_Hebron_University_Students. Date of retrieval: 20/8/2022
- Fong, L. S. (2012). Benefits of collaborative writing for ESL advanced diploma students in the production of reports. *US-China Education Review*, 4, 396-407. Retrieved from: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED533571.pdf>. Date of retrieval: 20/8/2022
- Jeon, E.Y. (2018). The effect of learner-centered EFL writing instruction on Korean university students' writing anxiety and perception. *TESOL International Journal*, 13 (3), 100-112. Retrieved from: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1247310.pdf>. Date of retrieval: 5/8/2022
- Jong, Y. (2016). Comparison of different types of writing and individual, pair, and group work on English writing tasks. *English Language & Literature Teaching*, 22(4), 21-43. Retrieved from: <http://etak.or.kr/Journal/32608>. Date of retrieval: 15/8/2022
- Kaweera, C., Yawiloeng, R., and Tachom, K. (2019). Individual, pair and group writing activity: a case study of undergraduate EFL student writing. *English Language Teaching*, 12(10):1-13. Doi: 10.5539/elt.v12n10p1.
- Khan, A., Nazneen, M., Sumera Shan Ahmad, S.S., and Khalid, A. (2016) A comparative analysis of effectiveness of learner-centered approach and teacher-centered approach in writing skills of undergraduate students. *Linguistics & Literature Review (LLR)*, 2(2), pp.73-91. Retrieved from: https://www.academia.edu/44491571/A_Comparative_Analysis_of_Effectiveness_of_Learner_centered_Approach_and_Teacher_centered_Approach_in_Writing_Skills_of_undergraduate_students. Date of retrieval: 5/8/2022
- Kirsaj, E. and Yilmazel, G. (2019). Teacher feedback and student feedback on writing tasks: a comparative study. *Journal of Teaching and Education*, 9(1):417-428. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362424962_Teacher_Feedback_and_Student_Feedback_on_Writing_Tasks:_A_Comparative_STUDY. Date of retrieval: 20/8/2022
- Norman, D.A and Spohrer, J.C. (1996). Learner-centered education. *Communications of the ACM*, 39(4): 24-27. DOI: 10.1145/227210.227215.
- Storch, N. (2005). Collaborative writing: product, process, and students' reflections. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 14(3), 153 - 173. Retrieved from: https://www.academia.edu/6917239/Collaborative_writing_Product_process_and_students_reflections. Date of retrieval: 16/8/2022
- Tudor, I. (1993). Teacher roles in the learner centred classroom. *ELT Journal*, 47(1): 22-31. Retrieved from: <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1013.5365&rep=rep1&type=pdf>. Date of retrieval: 22/8/2020
- Utah Valley University/ Office of Teaching and Learning. (2019). *Learner centered teaching*. Retrieved from: <https://www.uvu.edu/otl/blog/lct.html>. Date of retrieval: 10/9/2022
- Washington University in St. Louis/ Centre for Teaching and Learning. (2022). *Using roles in group work*. Retrieved from: <https://ctl.wustl.edu/resources/using-roles-in-group-work/>. Date of retrieval: 25/9/2022
- Weimer, M. (2013). *Learner-centered teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1

Interview Questions

1. Has working collaboratively with your classmates (i.e., in groups and pairs) affected your writing skill? If yes, how? If no, why?
2. Do you prefer to learn academic writing in a learner-centered or a teacher-centered teaching and learning atmosphere? Why? In other words, do you prefer to learn academic writing in a class where the teacher is responsible for explaining and presenting information and the students are only passive recipient of information or would you prefer a class where the students are active participants and working individually and collaboratively to obtain knowledge and information.
3. Do you like to continue learning academic writing in a learner-centered environment? Why?
4. Which activity did you enjoy and benefit from the most? Why?