

Exploring EAP Teachers' and Learners' Attitudes towards the Role of Scaffolding Strategy in Fostering Learner' Autonomy in Process Writing.

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ABSTRACT: *This study aimed at exploring English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers' and learners' attitudes towards the role of scaffolding strategy in fostering learner' autonomy in process writing. Data were collected via two questionnaires administrated to 50 EAP learners and 10 EAP teachers in the department of Economics, Setif 1 university, Algeria. The analysis of the obtained data has revealed that both EAP teachers and learners have positive attitudes towards the role of scaffolding strategy in fostering learner' autonomy in process writing, and that scaffolding can promote autonomy in writing. It is recommended that EAP teachers use scaffolding strategy in process writing approach as it fosters learners' autonomy and helps them to improve their writing skill.*

Key words: EAP teachers and learners; Scaffolding strategy; learner autonomy; process writing.

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1. Introduction

Writing is “a complex, cognitive process that requires sustained intellectual effort over a considerable period of time” (Nunan, 1999, p.273). According to Hedge (2005), it is necessary to organize the development of ideas or information, to avoid ambiguity through accuracy, to choose from complex grammatical devices for emphasis or focus, and to pay attention to the selection of vocabulary, grammatical patterns and sentence structures to create a clear meaning and an appropriate style to the subject matter and the reader.

As a matter of fact, writing provides us with a way not only to generate ideas before presenting them to an audience, but also to analyze the ideas and language we produce. As a result, we can receive feedback from ourselves and others to make changes and corrections. (Raimes, 2002).

Teaching writing in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is an important issue for both teachers and learners as it requires more efforts to be learned. Learning writing could be inadequate if it only relies on two or three hours learning in the classroom. Furthermore, teaching writing requires more time, more efforts and more guidance. Thus, the demand for autonomous learning in writing is a crucial issue to be focused on.

King (2008) points out that the process writing approach of writing is one of the main approaches of teaching writing that holds the greatest potential in fostering learner autonomy due to its emphasis on self-discovery and reflectivity during the writing process. In process writing, teachers' feedback is needed at every stage. And in order to move this feedback in the direction of autonomy, students need to be guided in a scaffolding way.

In the educational setting, scaffolding is the process of involving teacher's temporary assistance and guidance at the beginning of class so that learners can later develop their knowledge and skills, which is when scaffolding can be withdrawn (Mulatsih, 2011).

The purpose of this study is to explore EAP teachers' and learners' attitudes towards the role of scaffolding strategy in promoting learner autonomy in process writing. Two questions were posed in this study. First, what are EAP teachers' and learners' attitudes towards the role of scaffolding strategy in fostering learner autonomy in process writing?. Second, can scaffolding strategy promote EAP learners' autonomy in process writing? It is assumed that scaffolding can promote learners' autonomy in process writing.

2. Literature Review

2.1. English for Academic Purposes

EAP has emerged out of the broader field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), defined by its focus on teaching English specifically to facilitate learners' study or research through the medium of English (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002).

Hyland (2006, p.1) refers to EAP as “a specialized English language teaching of research and instruction that focuses on the specific communication needs and practices of particular groups in academic

contexts". On another hand, Jordan (2003) states that the rise of EAP has come as a consequence to the growing need for intercultural awareness and of English as a lingua-franca. In other words, English became the language of research in most disciplines and the language of reading and writing scientific articles.

As a matter of fact, EAP writing instruction aims to develop autonomous and ' strategic writers who will be equipped to manage their own learning and writing processes beyond their language/ writing class.

2.2. Writing and Process Writing Approach

According to Nunan (1999, p. 273), "writing is a complex process that requires sustained intellectual effort over a considerable period of time". In another definition, Nunan (2003) mentions that

writing is both a physical and mental act. At the most basic level, writing is the physical act of communicating words or ideas to some medium. On the other hand, writing is the mental work of inventing ideas, thinking about how to express them, and organizing them into statements and paragraphs that will be clear to a reader. (p.88).

Hedge (2005) claims that process writing may be more effective method of teaching writing as it helps students to focus on the process of creating text through the various stages of generating ideas, drafting, revising and editing.

Furthermore, process writing mainly incorporates the four basic writing stages: planning, drafting, revising and editing, and three other stages externally imposed on students by the teacher, namely responding, evaluating and post-writing. (Seow, 2002).

In the same vein, Richards and Renandya (2002, p. 316) assume that writing has to go through several processes, involving planning (pre-writing), drafting, revising, and editing, in addition to three other stages, namely responding (sharing), evaluating and post-writing.

First, planning is any activity in the classroom that encourages students to write. Then, drafting focuses on the fluency of writing, and the writers are not preoccupied with grammatical accuracy or the neatness of the draft. After that, when students revise, they review their texts on the basis of feedback given in the responding phase. They reexamine what was written to see how effectively they have communicated their meanings to the reader. At editing stage, students are engaged in tidying up their texts as they prepare the final draft for evaluation by the teacher.

Responding to students writing by the teacher has a fundamental role to play in the successful implementation of process writing. Then, in evaluating students' writing, scoring may be analytical or holistic. In order to be effective, the criteria for evaluation should be made to students in advance. Finally, post-writing constitutes any classroom activity that the teacher and students can do with the completed pieces of writing. This includes publishing, sharing, reading aloud and transforming texts for stage performances. The post-writing stage is a platform for recognizing students' work as important and worthwhile.

In few words, as EFL writing is a cognitive thinking process that demands focused learning and extended amount of time to generate ideas, plan, write, rewrite, and revise, learner' autonomy should be developed aligned with the development of learner's writing skills.

2.3.Learner Autonomy and Writing

Learner autonomy has been valued to be a major area of interest in foreign language teaching. An autonomous classroom is basically a learner-centered classroom in which students are expected to assume more active and participatory role than in traditional teaching context.

In fact, there has been a noticeable shift towards learner-centered approaches in the field of foreign language education over the last few decades. This major change has led to an increased focus on learner autonomy as a crucial factor for learner growth and success. According to Holec (1981) and Benson (2001), autonomy is regarded as the ability or capacity to take charge and control of one's own learning.

Benson (2001,p.1) claims that "autonomy in language learning is about people taking more control over the purposes for which they learn languages and the ways in which they learn them". That is to say, learner autonomy is a learning construct that consolidates engaging EFL learners in meaningful tasks for the purpose of genuine communication. Moreover, Aktas (2015) argues that autonomy does not mean independence, it is the state where learners have to learn to work cooperatively with their teachers, peers, and the educational system. In the same vein, Little (1996, p.76) states that "in formal educational contexts learners do not automatically accept responsibility for their learning, teachers must help them to do so".

Recent research has shown that in the language classroom, teachers play an important role in promoting learner autonomy. According to Benson (2001,p.11), "language teachers have a crucial role to play in fostering learner autonomy by taking both out-of-class and classroom perspectives" .

Learner autonomy is central to the idea that as long as learners are involved in making decisions about their own learning, learners will be more motivated and they will find the learning process more focused and purposeful. Moreover, the idea that learners have the power and right to learn for themselves is considered as an essential aspect for autonomous learners. Therefore, involving students in decision making about their own learning can develop learner autonomy in language classroom. (Balçikanlı, 2010).

In language settings, learner autonomy is believed to enhance language acquisition (Benson, 2006). Furthermore, Yeung (2016) found that motivation, self-confidence, independence from the teacher and autonomous skills embracing strategy use and metacognitive knowledge have a great effect on writing performance.

Ahmad e al.,(cited in Hasin, Lumpur & Zakaria, 2016) maintain that "learner autonomy and writing are closely interrelated with one another and one way to encourage learner autonomy is through Process Writing Approach where learning is learner-centered" (p.3).

In writing, learner autonomy is observed to be crucial as learners are "given control over composing skills" (Hyland & qHyland,2006, p.33). In other words, learners are able to shape their essays, without the abstaining pressure from any parties where they have the power to determine the content and rhetoric of their writing in the process of meaning making.

Similarly, Foster (2006,p.28) confirms that

to develop creativity and voice in their writing, we believe children should not only be introduced to a rich range of existing expressive domains, but should also be given the time and space to explore these for themselves asking choices, taking risks and developing their preferences and independence as writers.

Little (2007,p.27) defines learner autonomy as “the ability to take responsibility, to plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate his/her learning”. This definition covers all the major steps of the writing process; from planning, through monitoring, to revising and editing. Thus, there is a potential relationship between autonomy and the writing process where autonomy seems to help students perform better at writing.

In sum, learner autonomy is that capacity of taking charge of one's learning through self-confidence, independence from the teacher and decision-making. An ultimate environment for promoting learner autonomy is the one in which teachers are providing technical and personal support, besides opportunities for learners to be involved in their learning, so they will have a sense of freedom and responsibility towards their learning (Ryan, 1991- cited in Kojima & Kojima, 2005).

2.4.Scaffolding Strategy and Writing

Learning is seen as a social practice where knowledge and comprehension are created via interaction between teachers and students. Assessment, and feedback associated with it, provides an important component of that interaction.

According to the constructivist view, learners learn by restructuring their experience constructing knowledge, not by having the teacher's knowledge transferred to them. The role of the teacher is to help them construct their knowledge. Palmer (1988,p.6) confirms this idea saying:

I have no question that students who learn, not professors who perform, is what teaching is all about (...) teachers possess the power to create conditions that can help students learn a great deal or keep them from learning much at all. Teaching is the intentional act of creating those conditions.

In a writing classroom, teachers need to focus on the process and raise students' awareness of writing conventions they are engaging in while helping them to acquire the linguistic and rhetoric knowledge (Coffin, Curry, Hewings, et al., 2003).

According to Spycher (2017), students who are exposed to academic styles of writing more than others are more prepared and know how to write well. It is suggested that teachers scaffold their students to help them build their writing skills and make them aware of what a good piece of writing is.

Scaffolding plays an important role in language instruction and has a major role in writing development. Celce-Muria (2001,p.10) defines the term scaffolding as the way in which the teacher or an adult structures a learning task and uses dialogue to provide guidelines and clues that guide the learners' participation in the learning task.

Another definition of scaffolding is provided by Scholand (2015) as the creation of support features that help an individual student or group of students transition from tasks at which they are successful due to the successful procedural skill and development to tasks that are difficult for them to complete independently.

Jumaat and Tasir (2018) report another definition to scaffolding as it is a guidance or support from teachers or other knowledgeable persons that helps students to achieve the goals. It provides them with instructions slowly shifting the responsibility to them as they develop their own understanding and skills.

Scaffolding allows the teacher to help students transition from assisted tasks to independent performers (Bliss and Askew, 1996; Badrova and Leong, 1998; Palinscar, 1998). It is a step-by-step process that provides the learner with sufficient guidance until the process is learned, and then gradually removes the supports in order to transfer the responsibility for completing the task to the student.

For scaffolding to be successful, a foundation or organized procedure must first be developed. The teacher should provide students with the optimal amount of support necessary to complete the task, and then decrease the level of assistance until the student becomes capable of completing the task independently (Badrova & Leong, 1998; Elicker, 1995).

In brief, scaffolding is considered as an instructional method that helps learners learn how to solve a problem, work on a task, and achieve their goals (Pinantoan, 2013).

3.Methodology

3.1.Design

In order to attain the objectives of the study, the researcher opted for an exploratory design, and a quantitative method.

3.2.Participants

Fifty (50) EAP students in the Department of Economics, Setif 1 University, Algeria, and ten (10) EAP teachers in the same department participated in the study.

3.3.Instruments

Two questionnaires were administered to the participants; one for the teachers (see Appendix A), and one for the students (see Appendix B).

3.4.Procedures of Data Collection and Analysis

Both questionnaires were administered online, in a social media group created by the students and their teachers. The questionnaires were completed and resent to the researcher. Then, the obtained data were statistically analyzed, and the obtained results were related to previous literature.

4.Data Analysis and Results

4.1.EAP Learners' Questionnaire Analysis

Q 1. Do you consider EAP writing as important for your academic studies?

	Yes	No
No	47	03
%	94	06

Table 1. EAP Writing Importance

Table 1 demonstrates that **(94%)** of the participants answered that EAP writing is important for their academic studies. Whereas, only **(06 %)** mentioned that it is not important.

Q 2. Does your teacher show you how to write through process approach?

	Yes	No
No	40	10
%	80	20

Table 2. Use of Process Approach

(80 %) of the participants confirmed that their teachers use a process writing approach in order to show them how to write. **(20%)** answered that they are not taught through process writing.

Q 3. Does your teacher's feedback come only on the final draft ?

	Yes	No
No	11	39
%	22	78

Table 3. Teacher's Feedback

(78%) of the students claimed that their teacher's feedback does not come only on the final draft, whereas **(22%)** reported that they receive feedback only on the final draft.

Q 4. Does your teacher guide you during each writing stage ?

	Yes	No
No	40	10
%	80	20

Table 4. Teacher's Guidance.

Table 4 illustrates that **(80%)** of the participants are guided by their teachers during each writing stage, whereas **(20%)** are not.

Q 5. Does your teacher's guidance while writing help you improve your product?

	Yes	No
No	48	02
%	96	04

Table 5. Teacher's Guidance' Help.

(96%) of the participants stated that their teachers' guidance while writing helps them to improve their final product, but (04 %) denied the help of the teacher's guidance in helping them to improve their product.

Q 6. Does your teacher's guidance decrease gradually ?

	Yes	No
No	46	04
%	92	08

Table 6. Teacher's Help Decreasing.

Table 6 shows that (92 %) of the participants responded that their teacher's guidance decreases gradually during the writing process.

Q 7. Does your teacher's decreasing guidance help you to be more autonomous in your writing ?

	Yes	No
No	47	03
%	94	06

Table 7. Guidance & Autonomy

(94%) of the participants confirmed that their teacher's decreasing guidance helps them to be more autonomous in their writing.

4.2.EAP Teachers' Questionnaire Analysis

Q 1. Do you consider EAP writing as important for your students' academic studies?

	Yes	No
No	10	00
%	100	00

Table 8. EAP Writing Importance.

(100%) of the participant EAP teachers consider EAP writing as important for their students' academic studies.

Q 2. Do you teach writing through process writing approach?

	Yes	No
No	08	02

%	80	20
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Table 9. Teaching Writing.

(80 %) of the EAP teachers reported that they teach writing using a process approach, whereas (20 %) answered that they do not use the process writing approach to teach writing.

Q 3. Do you provide feedback only on the final draft ?

	Yes	No
No	03	07
%	30	70

Table 10. Teacher's Feedback.

Table 10 illustrates that (30%) of the teachers provide feedback only on the final draft, whereas (70%) do not give feedback only on the final draft.

Q 4. Do you provide guidance during each writing phase?

	Yes	No
No	08	02
%	80	20

Table 11. Providing Guidance.

(80%) of the teachers stated that they provide guidance during each writing stage, but (20 %) reported that they do not guide their students while writing.

Q 5. Do you decrease your guidance gradually?

	Yes	No
No	07	03
%	70	30

Table 12. Decreasing Guidance.

(70%) of the participants responded that they decrease their guidance gradually during the writing process, whereas (30 %) assured that they do not decrease their guidance.

Q 6. Do you encourage your students to be autonomous in their writing?

	Yes	No
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No	09	01
%	90	10

Table 13. Student' autonomy .

(90%) of the participant teachers said that they encourage their students to be autonomous in their writing.

Q 7. Does your gradual guidance help your gradual guidance help your students to be more autonomous in their writing?

	Yes	No
No	08	02
%	80	20

Table 14. Guidance and Autonomy.

(80%) of the participant teachers argued that their gradual guidance helps their students to be more autonomous in their writing.

5. Discussion and Interpretation

The analysis of the data obtained from the administrated questionnaires revealed that both EAP students and teachers consider writing as important. Writing is vital for academic success. It is one of the principle requirements a student must satisfy in order to earn excellent grades and also a good degree. Once students are good at writing correctly and logically, they will know how to use appropriate language and style in their study and work in the future (Dwivedi, 2015). Especially, in the current period of modern technology development, the exchange of information is largely done on the keyboard, making it essential for people to be able to communicate coherently and effectively in writing (Griffithus, 2016).

Then, the used approach to teaching writing in the EAP classroom is process approach. Hedge (2005) argues that process writing may be more effective method of teaching writing as it helps students to focus on the process of creating text through the various stages of generating ideas, drafting, revising and editing.

After that, concerning teacher's feedback and decreasing guidance,, and its role in fostering autonomy, it was illustrated that teachers do not provide feedback only on the final draft, rather they provide decreasing guidance during each writing stage which promotes learner's autonomy. In this vein, corrective feedback has been the focus of many studies. It has been shown that providing learners with feedback can potentially help them improve their writing. (Chandles, 2003; Ferris & Robert, 2001; Gascoine, 2004).

Moreover, Palferyman and Benson (2019) argue that formative assessment is a critical factor of the success of an autonomous learning process because teachers are using constructive feedback that enables learners to think, modify, and reevaluate their work. Furthermore, they claim that " the role of the teacher is to carefully and responsively scaffold attempts by the learner to take control of their learning decisions and performance in the second language" (p. 672).

6. CONCLUSION

EAP writing instruction aims to develop autonomous and “strategic writers who will be equipped to manage their own learning and writing process beyond their language/writing class” (Ferris, 2018, p.89).

This study aimed to explore EAP teachers' and learners' attitudes towards the role of scaffolding strategy in fostering learner autonomy in process writing. An exploratory design and a quantitative method were adopted to achieve the objectives of the study.

The analysis of the data collected through the administered questionnaires to 50 EAP learners and 10 EAP teachers have demonstrated that both EAP teachers and learners have positive attitudes towards the role of scaffolding strategy in fostering learner autonomy in process writing. Moreover, it has been shown that scaffolding strategy can promote learner autonomy in process writing.

As a matter of fact, EAP teachers are recommended to use scaffolding strategy to teach writing through process approach as it fosters learner autonomy and helps the students to improve their writing skill through the sustained decreasing guidance and help offered gradually at each writing stage.

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8. Appendices

Appendix A: EAP Learners' Questionnaire.

Dear participant,

The purpose of this questionnaire is to explore EAP learners' attitudes towards the role of scaffolding strategy in fostering learner autonomy in process writing. There is no correct or incorrect answers. Your response is highly important. All responses are completely anonymous and will be used for research purpose only.

Please, put a tick (✓) in the right column:

- 1. Do you consider EAP writing as important for your academic studies?**

- Yes ☐ No ☐
2. Does your teacher show you how to write through process approach?
- Yes ☐ No ☐
3. Does your teacher's feedback come only on the final draft ?
- Yes ☐ No ☐
4. Does your teacher guide you during each writing stage ?
- Yes ☐ No ☐
5. Does your teacher's guidance while writing help you improve your product?
- Yes ☐ No ☐
6. Does your teacher's guidance decrease gradually ?
- Yes ☐ No ☐
7. Does your teacher's decreasing guidance help you to be more autonomous in your writing ?
- Yes ☐ No ☐

Appendix B : EAP Teachers' Questionnaire.

Dear participant,

The purpose of this questionnaire is to explore EAP teachers' attitudes towards the role of scaffolding strategy in fostering learner autonomy in process writing. There is no correct or incorrect answers. Your response is highly important. All responses are completely anonymous and will be used for research purpose only.

Please, put a tick (✓) in the right column:

1. Do you consider EAP writing as important for your students' academic studies?
- Yes ☐ No ☐
2. Do you teach writing through process approach ?
- Yes ☐ No ☐
3. Do you provide feedback only on the final draft ?
- Yes ☐ No ☐
4. Do you provide guidance during each writing stage ?
- Yes ☐ No ☐
5. Do you decrease your guidance gradually?
- Yes ☐ No ☐
6. Do you encourage your students to be autonomous ?
- Yes ☐ No ☐

7. Does your gradual guidance help your gradual guidance help your students to be more autonomous in their writing?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Author's biography

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