



## **The Effect of Model Essays on Developing Accuracy and Complexity of EFL Learners' Writing in the Iranian Context**

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*During the last decades, finding methods to teach essay-writing more efficiently and effectively has been a challenge for EFL English teachers. The main purpose of this study was twofold: first, it aimed at investigating the effect of model essays on EFL learners' noticing different aspects of language which were classified into four categories (lexicon, grammatical form, discourse and content); second, it attempted to find out the effect of model essays on developing accuracy and complexity of EFL learners' writing. The participants in the present study were 40 female EFL learners. There were two groups: control group and experimental group. The Control group received teacher's written error correction as feedback and experimental group received model essays as a feedback tool. The results of the study showed that students in the experimental group mostly noticed vocabulary in the model essays. Furthermore, ANCOVA test was used to assess the effect of modeling of native speaker writing on accuracy and complexity of EFL Learners' writing. The results revealed that modeling of native speaker writing significantly affected the accuracy and complexity of EFL learners' writing. The findings of the study suggest that model essays should be included in writing courses and teachers should encourage students to use models by promoting noticing.*

Noticing may occur because of either internal or external feedback which may prompt, for example, the generation of alternatives and assessment of them from simple inspection to complex thinking [1]. There are several types of feedback in L2 writing instruction, such as teacher's essay correction, reformulation, and peer feedback. A model essay written by a native speaker may also be a beneficial resource if it can function as a feedback tool [2]. Some scholars believe that modeling of native speaker writing may improve writing better than teacher error correction [2, 3, 4]. Models are important to every writer and when appropriately integrated into the context of the writing process, they become a powerful and effective teaching tool [5]. The present study focused on the role of model essays (native speaker writing) in improving EFL learners' writing Performance. It attempted to investigate what aspects students noticed when using model essays and how it affects EFL learners' writing Performance in terms of accuracy and complexity. Here model essays and native speaker writing have been used interchangeably.

### **Model Essay**

The prose model approach of teaching writing maintains that writers can develop and improve their writing Performance through directed reading [5]. What L2 learners write depends on what they read and reading can improve their L2 writing skills. [5]. Given the opportunities to learn rhetorical modes, L2 learners can eventually apply their knowledge of those modes to their writing [5]. The necessity of model essays in an academic writing textbook was emphasized as a factor enabling L2 writers to focus on the various aspects of target language [6]. However, there are also several objections to using model essays in an L2 writing context. The process to impart meaning in L2 cannot be achieved by referring to written



texts [7]. In addition, model essays prevent L2 learner's creativity, which is an important aspect of L2 writing [8].

Regarding the purpose of the study, the following research questions are presented:

What aspects of language do EFL learners notice by comparing their own writing with the model essays in the experimental group?

What is the effect of model essays on developing accuracy of EFL Learners' written performance in comparison with teacher's written error correction?

What is the effect of model essays on developing complexity of EFL Learners' written performance in comparison with teacher's written error correction?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants in the present study were 40 female EFL students from Jahade Daneshgahi English Institute in Tabriz, Iran. Their ages ranged from 16 to 28, and they were all at intermediate level. In order to motivate the learners to participate in the study, the researcher explained that using model essays is a new approach that can improve their writing.

### **Instrumentation**

The proficiency Test employed in the present study was Preliminary English Test "PET". It included four parts: listening, writing, speaking and reading. The subjects' scores were out of 100. Those who were chosen for the study had obtained 60 or more than 60 in this test. Writing tasks and model essays for those tasks were chosen for this research project from book 'how to prepare for the TOEFL Essays' [9].

### **Procedure**

The data collection procedure consisted of three stages in two groups. Because of time limitation, every stage was conducted in a different session during instruction. Both groups had to write about the same topics. The pre-test, including an argumentative writing task, was administrated for both control and experimental groups before the treatment and the accuracy and complexity of students' writing were measured. Accuracy was measured by calculating the number of the grammatical errors per the total number of T-units[10]. Complexity was measured by calculating the number of content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) per the total number of T-units [10]. Instruction in the experimental group was as follow:

In Stage 1, students were asked to write about the topic. In Stage 2, students studied a model essay about that writing task and they underlined or took notes about those aspects of language that they noticed in the model essay written about the same task. In Stage 3, students were asked to rewrite the writing task.

In the experimental group, in Stage 2, what students noticed (as written in notes or displayed as underlining) was classified into four categories (the researcher followed Abe's (2008) classification):

1. Lexicon: words, phrases, expressions,
2. Form: articles, plurals, sentence structures, verb forms, tenses,



prepositions, comparatives and superlative, punctuation, and spelling,

3. Discourse: cohesive devices,

4. Content: own opinion, knowledge, experiences, evidence, and supportive ideas.

Students in the control group received the teacher error correction. At the end of the seventh week program, the participants in both groups were post tested. The post testing procedures were exactly the same as pretesting.

## Design

Due to the proposed research question, this study required a quasi-experimental method of research. Feedback which has two levels of essay modeling and teacher error correction, was the independent variable, which is the major variable hoped to be investigated. The accuracy and complexity of participants' writing are the dependent variables which are observed and measured to determine the effect of the independent variable.

## Results

In this chapter, first, the descriptive data gathered for question one will be described. Then, the results of questions two and three will be presented in the following section that include T-test for pre-test and results of ANCOVA tests. Finally, the researcher will discuss the results.

### Frequencies and proportions of features noticed in the Stage 2

The first research question aimed to investigate which aspects of language the participants noticed in the model essays.

Table 1. *Frequencies and proportions of features noticed in the Stage 2 by the experimental group.*

	F	%	M	SD
lexicon	134.2	38.37	9.50	4.15
Form	77.8	22.24	5.64	3.50
discourse	35.9	10.26	3.14	1.92
content	101.8	29.11	7.64	2.92
total	349.7	100	25.92	5.34

As Table (1) indicates, the largest proportion and mean frequency of the noticing was lexical (38.37%, M = 9.50), followed by content (29.11%, M = 7.64), form (22.24%, M = 5.64), and discourse (10.26%, M = 3.14).

### Results of Pre –test Scores for Accuracy and Complexity Scores

Table 2. Independent sample t-test for pre-test scores of accuracy in two groups

Pre-accuracy	N	mean	t	Sig.	df
Control group	20	1.09 (.39)	.087	.983	38
Experimental group	20	1.08 (.37)	.087		37.94

Table 3. Independent sample t-test for pre-test scores of complexity in two groups

Pre-accuracy	N	mean	t	Sig.	df
Control group	20	3.85 (.61)	-.003	.841	38
Experimental group	20	3.85 (.56)	-.003		37.75

According to Tables (2& 3)  $p > .05$ , which shows that there are not any significant differences between two groups in pre-test.

### Results of ANCOVA Test for Accuracy Scores

To answer the second question of the research, ANCOVA test was used. Table (4) shows the results of ANCOVA test.

Table 4. The Results of ANCOVA Test for Accuracy Scores

Group	Mean	Std. Error	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
control	.800 <sup>a</sup>	.040	85.394	.000	.698
experimental	.279 <sup>a</sup>	.040			

a. *covariates* appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Pre-test = 1.0875. Table (4) shows that ( $F(1, 37) = 85.394, p = .000$ ). In other words, the difference between adjusted means in post-test of two groups is significant. The magnitude of this difference is high (Eta Squared)  $\eta^2 = 69.8\%$ . The adjusted mean of experimental group ( $M = .279$ ) is less than the adjusted mean of control group ( $M = .800$ ), which shows that modeling of native speaker writing has positive effects on improving accuracy.

### Results of ANCOVA Test for Complexity Scores

To answer the third question of the research, ANCOVA test was used. Table (5) shows that ( $F(1, 37) = 234.639, p = 0.00$ ). In other words, between the adjusted means in post-test of two groups, the difference is significant.

The magnitude of this effect is high (Eta Squared)  $\eta^2 = 86.4\%$ .

Table 5. The Results of ANCOVA Test for Complexity Scores

Group	Mean	Std. Error	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
control	3.879 <sup>a</sup>	.098	234.639	.000	.864
experimental	6.002 <sup>a</sup>	.098			

a. *covariates* appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Pre-test = 3.8540.

The adjusted mean of experimental group is 6.002, and the adjusted mean of control group is 3.879. The mean of the experimental group is more than the control group which shows that modeling of native speaker writing has positive effect on improving complexity of EFL writing.



## Discussion

The findings of this study, similarly, indicate that participants noticed lexis more often than other categories and they were able to find solutions to the lexical problems more often than other categories in the revised task. The results of ANCOVA test for both accuracy and complexity, regarding questions two and three, show that there is a significant difference between the experimental group, receiving model essays, and the control group, receiving teachers' written error correction. These findings support the findings that modeling of native speaker writing is better than teacher's error correction [4]. In the mentioned study, students who received model essay improved their writing skill more often than students who got teacher feedback.

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