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Assistance of Formative Assessment in the Improvement of English Writing Skills at Intermediate Level

Abstract:

The major purpose of the study was to measure the effects of the formative assessment in the improvement of English writing skills at intermediate level. This study used a quantitative research method, descriptive in nature, so the researcher used the survey method for data collection. The study was delimited to Sahiwal division of Punjab province. The population of the study comprised of all 246 male and female colleges and higher secondary schools of Sahiwal division which are affiliated with BISE Sahiwal. Sample of this study consists of intermediate part II (328) students. A 30 items questionnaire was developed, administered and managed. Data analysis was performed by using descriptive statistics. The result shows that formative assessment assists in English writing skills, and the students face difficulties in improving English writing skills. Special lectures and trainings may be managed for English writing skills and give a specific focus on writing skills during formative assessment.

Key Words:

Writing Skills, English, Formative Assessment, Intermediate Level, Descriptive Statistics

Introduction

According to [Shukla \(2014\)](#), formative assessment is the “assessment aimed at determining individuals’ strengths and weaknesses to improve them. Generally presented in the form words rather than grades, and generally not involved in the final assessment. And formative evaluation is a testing process involving a series of events as a course develops, to assess progress in a regular manner”. According to William (2011), “formative assessment is continuous feedback that allows a teacher to evaluate the impact and a student to move their learning forward”. The present study focuses on the effects of Formative Assessment in the improvement of English writing.

The present study is going to be held at the higher secondary school level. English language that is used as an international language all over the world but for Pakistani students, it is considered as a second and foreign language. Students face difficulties in this language because of its complicated structure. This chapter proceeds with the importance of English writing at the college level and their deficiencies in English writing which they face.

Students’ learning achievement depends upon the foundation of writing. This basic tool that is used for the assessment and assessment helps the teacher to make inferences about students through it. The items that are written properly can provide proper and correct data about the performance and learning of the students. The written items become useful for a teacher to make sound decisions regarding instruction. The proficiency of the student can be checked through writing. The skill and practise is required for the assessment of the writing items. The process needs some

knowledge of national and local standardized assessments and their item types, distracters and formatting. Moreover, psychological behaviour that is related to the assessment is also help in designing writing items.

In this study, the researcher has decided to explore the effects of the formative assessment in the improvement of English writing of the students of college level. A great difficulty is faced by the students while

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writing English essays, dialogues, stories and paragraphs. The complicated structure of English grammar creates a nuisance for students or English learners. The role of assessment can be effective for the teachers in their teaching and also for the learners. The purpose of this study is to find out the effects of the Formative Assessment in the development of English writing. This study will also explore how students learning can improve if the teachers provide the students with proper assistance and cooperation. The science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) approach was followed for teaching bachelor engineers in English for specific purpose (ESP) classrooms ([Saienko, Olizko & Arshad, 2019](#)). [Nosheen, Javed and Akhtar \(2020\)](#) attributed that teachers sometimes use modern and innovative methods to teach the English language, whereas, most of the teachers never use technology to enhance students' speaking skills ([Asatrayan, 2016](#)).

Creativity in writing is totally ignored, and there is no improvement in the quality of the writing. The students have not a lot of vocabulary; therefore, they cannot produce new ideas in the English language while writing it. The new approaches which are introduced in the modern or present curriculum have a great focus on the formative assessment. There is a dire need to show the consciousness of the teachers about the problem of the students in their writing. At the college level, it is very necessary to introduce a strong and exact way of writing. Authorities, paper setters, examiners, teachers and curriculum maker should coordinate with one another to remove the clash between learning outcomes and assessment.

Creative writing, critical thinking and analysis about writing is a big requirement at the college level. The students who ignore to learn their writing at the secondary level face difficulties at the college level. They have no idea to write anything accurately. They have no competency on self-writing. They make many grammatical mistakes while writing an essay, paragraph, stories, and dialogues. The aim of this study to explore the difficulties faced by the students regarding their writing and to give them proper feedback using formative assessment. To enhance the writing performance of the students at the college level, it is needed to understand the difficulties faced by the students. The present study will be helpful to investigate the deficiencies of the students in their writing and give them new ways to improve their writing skills.

Writing is a source of expressing ones' thoughts in print, cognitive and physical factors are involved in writing, and it promotes social, emotional and cognitive development. Integrated assessment system has a great role in the development and improvement of writing. It can help the teachers to pinpoint the problems faced by the students in their writing and this way they can help them for their betterment in their writing. Graham & Perin describe writing is important regarding the transmission of ideas, feelings and experiences. The basis of humanity like; the sense of intellectual reasoning and wisdom are lost their charm because of lack of the exact transmission of ideas into written works. Rubrics are used as an instructional tool which helps the individuals to become more confident in writing and much engaged in the writing process ([Khaw & Gwee, 2016](#)).

Formative assessment is done with the help of formal and informal assessment. The teachers conduct formative and diagnostic assessment in the improvement of the students learning. The United States focuses very much regarding the achievements of writing learning. According to the perception of the Bradely (2009) who says that to raise the standards, importance is given to mathematics and reading and enhancement in the writing skills is neglected and also stated that there should be a criterion for examination to assess the improvement of writing skills.

Timely feedback can be enhanced through proper means and automated scoring. Formative assessment is reliable to assess the students' learning while other assessments are not enough that they could not provide proper correction, motivation and feedback. Thus formative assessment was such a tool which was a central element in the teaching and learning process and is helpful in the learning and teaching process. It was described as self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, academic self-concept and cultural attribution. Actually, the formative assessment is a tool that helps the students to achieve their goals.

The assessment practices and experiences associated with teaching and learning strategies bring about deep learning. The recent research, however, proved that some language teaching references do not play

appreciative alignment between assessment techniques, methods and course learning outcomes. The results indicated that inconsistencies in assessment programs designing and marking styles across the courses. These programs were invalid and unauthentic, and they did not match course learning outcomes ([Umer & Soomro, 2019](#)).

[Riaz and Gul \(2016\)](#) pointed out that the important difficulties faced by the learners of Bachelor of Commerce in written communication are associated with the fundamental grammatical structures of English. These grammatical structures are found a worldwide issue in written communication for the individuals of a second language. Although these grammatical compositions are taught to the learners, they found difficult and tiring, and majority of the learners does not pay attraction in the learning of these grammatical compositions ([Khalid, Hashmi & Hussain, 2019](#)), ([Bakhsh, Rasool & Hussain, 2018](#)). The reason was the use of the traditional methods of teaching grammar. The teachers especially do not assign homework to write passages from books which leads to lack of written practice. The teachers also do not put direct focus on the marking and checking of written tasks due to shortage of time.

[Shahbaz, Anwar and Jamil \(2018\)](#) portrayed that the learners of private institutions show a positive attitude towards the English language as compared to the public institution's learners. Tony and [Bruner \(2015\)](#) indicated that EFL writing teachers and learners respond in different ways to the new emphasis on formative assessment.

The writing process is considered as an effective strategy in encouraging and motivating students to write in a coherent manner and show a high performance in their writing. Indeed, by assessing them during the lesson, the teacher helps them to develop their skill and check whether they are progressing or not. Hence, formative assessment is an integral part of teaching which must be implemented in the Algerian educational system.

According to [Imen Zahaf \(2019\)](#), formative assessment has an impact on the progress of students in their learning in general, and in their writing skill in particular. By one hand, the analysis of the student's questionnaire shows their interest in the writing process. On the other hand, the teachers' questionnaire revealed that the implementation of formative assessment in the writing classroom is necessary and important to enable learners to enhance their writing production and to reduce some difficulties they are facing during the writing process. Due to the difficulties students are still facing in their writing, a set of suggestions were recommended in this study for the written expression teachers to reduce the writing problems students are struggling with and offering opportunities for learners to practice more and more as far as it motivates them to produce well in written texts. Written expression teachers should focus on what materials are given such as: giving notes, copies, portfolios and so on in order to meet their students' need and make the teaching effective (Govt. of Pakistan, 2009).

[Vagen \(2017\)](#) presented that students experience their evaluation practice as useful in the process of enhancing their text writing skills. However, the significance is depending on specific feedback ([Hattie & Timperley, 2007](#)).

Formative written assessment and formative feedback play an important role in improving the writing skills of secondary level high school ESL students. The students fully know the importance of English language writing skill both inside and outside the classroom ([Zaidi, Quraishi & Kazi, 2019](#)). The students were well aware of their learning needs and were able to provide pertinent information about various types of English formative assessments and formative feedback and how the two played a major role in helping them improve their writing skills ([Zia, Sarfraz & Mufti, 2019](#)). Formative assessment does have a positive effect on students' English writing performance ([Liu, 2013](#)).

[Tolley \(2016\)](#) pointed out that the overall significance and of thinking about assessment experiences in a secondary ELA context associate with prior FA research in other content areas, however, the experiences reported as used in this research study aimed to be more targeted to individual students and their learning needs. The teachers, through formative assessment approaches and techniques, are better updated to meet

diverse students' ability (CERI, 2008). Frey and Fisher (2013) suggested that advisors should focus on a formative assessment system, rather than on a suite of individual formative assessment tools and tasks (Grant Wiggins, 1998). Arshad, Qamar, Gulzar and Ahmed (2019) pointed out that institutional environment put positive effects on academic performance in English course learning content.

ELFA stands for English Learner Formative Assessment. ELFA is designed to provide teachers of EL students with a much-needed means to assess, understand, and adapt instruction based on evidence of student learning, which will ultimately facilitate the improvement of individuals academic reading skills (Shore, Wolf & Blood, 2013). Language learning strategies play a significant role in second/foreign language learning (Hafeez, Aslam & Shahbaz, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

The study was designed to investigate the assistance of the formative assessment and to know the perception of the male and female students of the higher secondary school level. The study will explore the problems faced by male and female students in writing. It will also help to explore "Does writing can be improved through formative assessment by using different approaches and practices in the classroom. The study will state the assistance of formative assessment in the improvement of the writing.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are

- To explore student's perception about the improvement of English writing skills with the help of formative assessment.
- To explore the difficulties faced by the students in English writing.

Research Questions

These are the following research questions.

- What is the assistance of formative assessment in improving students English writing skills?
- What are the difficulties faced in English writing skills at the intermediate level?

Significance of the Study

The study was designed to check the improvement of writing through formative assessment. The improvement in the writing of the students is a dire need of the time. A formative assessment is an assessment that has a continuous process to provide proper or exact feedback. Assessment critically watches the students it brings change to ensure the students 'better achievements. Specific purposes are dealt with in formative assessment and using different types of assessments have their different purposes in the writing learning. Teachers consider formative assessment as a powerful tool. This tool can be used in the improvement of the students 'academic contents, grammar, and it makes them busy in their learning. There is a deep relationship between assessment and students 'achievements. The students' writing can be improved if the formative assessment is meaningful.

Research Methodology

This study used a quantitative research method, descriptive in nature, so the researcher used the survey method for data collection. The population of the study comprised of all 246 male and female colleges and higher secondary schools of Sahiwal division which are affiliated with Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Sahiwal at intermediate level. The sample of the study was selected at a rate of 33 % of the target population (Gay, 2012). According to 33% ratio eighty-two (82) colleges and higher secondary schools are

selected randomly. Then four students from each affiliated colleges and higher secondary school were selected on a random basis. So the sample of this study consists of intermediate part II three hundred and twenty-eight (328) students learning in the affiliated schools and colleges. The researcher developed a questionnaire based on the review of related literature and presented on 5 points Likert scale to collect the required information from the respondents. The questionnaire was developed for the purpose of collecting data for the present study keeping in view the topic of the research, i.e. the assistance of the formative assessment in the improvement of the English writing at intermediate level. The researcher constructed the questionnaire in the light of the latest review from the literatures. The questionnaire is used for the purpose of collecting data as it is more reliable and convenient technique. The questionnaire was consisted of 30 items which were totally related to the research. A questionnaire is a technique in which a person provides information impartially. The collected data was analyzed through (SPSS) statistical packages for social sciences version 21. Data was analyzed quite scientifically.

Presentation and Analysis of the Results

Table 1. Think about how Formative Assessment Assists your Writing Skills

S. No	Statements	Percentages					Mean	SD
		SA	A	UD	DA	SDA		
1	I take part in all classroom activities	19.2	40.9	17.7	12.5	9.8	2.735	1.2190
2	I participate in activities like essay writing	25.3	28.7	21.0	12.5	12.5	3.043	1.2108
3	I can write a summary of the topic and minute detailed essay	21.3	35.1	20.1	18.3	5.2	2.750	1.1380
4	My writing skill is improved through these activities	21	39	15.2	15.2	9.1	3.067	1.1580
5	These classroom written activities make thinking more critical	27.4	31.1	18.0	15.5	7.9	3.021	1.1974
6	The practice of essay writing in class makes me an efficient writer	24.4	35.4	18.3	13.7	8.2	2.829	1.131
7	I usually receive proper instruction about writing an assignment	31.7	33.8	15.5	11.3	7.6	2.890	1.114
8	My writing skills are developed by my presentation	21.6	35.4	19.8	16.8	6.4	2.683	1.156
9	I learn more through formal written assignments	22.3	30.2	28.4	11.9	7.3	2.518	1.172
10	Writing assignments improve my vocabulary	29	31.7	16.8	15.5	7	2.671	1.136
11	Writing assignments increase my writing speed	31.4	29	22.6	13.1	4	2.470	1.097
12	I usually have small assessments as they improve my writing	31.7	23.8	18.6	16.8	9.1	2.716	1.209
13	Classroom discussion helps in writing	21.6	25.9	23.8	18.9	9.8	2.838	1.256
14	After the discussion, I can write a summary of new ideas and arguments	29	23.5	20.1	18.9	8.5	2.668	1.232
15	Teachers feedback in English writing helps me	38.1	19.5	14.9	14.3	13.1	2.985	1.211
16	Daily assessment improves my writing skills	34.8	25	17.4	13.1	9.8	2.857	1.149
17	Weekly tests are helpful in improving my writing	37.5	24.4	18	13.1	7	2.537	1.138
18	Continuous assessment prepares me better for the next assessment	34.1	30.2	17.7	11	7	2.55	1.115
19	Prompt feedback helps me in improving my writing	28.4	29.9	18.3	16.8	6.7	2.52	1.272
20	Formative assessment encourages me to write more	39	20.4	17.7	17.1	5.8	2.329	1.302

N=328

The table 1 shows that 60% of respondents agreed with the statement, students take part in all classroom activities, and 53% agreed that students participate in activities like essay writing. Statement 3 shows that 55% of respondents can write a summary of the topic and minute detailed essay whereas 60% said writing skill is improved through these activities. Classroom written activities make thinking more critical respond by 57% while 59% responding to the practice of essay writing in class make me an efficient writer. I usually receive

proper instruction about writing an assignment indicated by 65% of students and 57% think about my writing skills are developed by my presentation. I learn more through formal written assignments argued by 53% of students, and 61% of students agreed with the statement writing assignments improve my vocabulary. The majority 60% think writing assignments increase my writing speed and 56% usually have small assessments as they improve my writing. The 47% of respondents agreed about classroom discussion helps in writing, and 52% said, after discussion, I can write a summary of new ideas and arguments. The teachers'

feedback in English writing helps me shown by 58% of respondents, and 59% of students indicate daily assessment improves my writing skills. The 60.9% shows weekly tests are helpful in improving my writing, and 64% agreed that continuous assessment prepares me better for the next assessment. Prompt feedback helps me in improving my writing respond by 58.3%, and 59% agreed about formative assessment encourages me to write more.

Table 2. Think about your Difficulties in Writing

S. No	Statements	Percentages					Mean	SD
		SA	A	UD	DA	SDA		
1	My classroom activities are never fruitful	30.5	26.2	24.7	13.4	5.2	2.366	1.193
2	There are a lot of grammatical mistakes in my writing	32.3	28.4	27.7	7.3	4.3	2.268	1.081
3	I am confused about preparing my assignments	30.8	29.6	24.4	12.8	2.4	2.341	1.105
4	There is little focus on the open writing	30.5	24.1	23.2	15.2	7	2.579	1.206
5	I cannot express my difficulties in writing	27.1	30.8	20.1	13.4	8.5	2.454	1.255
6	English writing always makes me nervous	27.1	25.9	22	20.1	4.9	2.561	1.210
7	In classroom activities, there is less focus on writing	29.6	29.3	17.4	12.8	11	2.707	1.214
8	Students have poor educational background	35.7	26.2	19.2	12.2	6.7	2.820	1.087
9	There is a lack of writing practice	25.6	31.1	22	14.9	6.4	2.793	1.135
10	It is time-consuming process and semester is short	35.4	21.3	17.7	13.4	12.2	2.939	1.189

N=328

Table 2 indicates that majority 56.7% agreed with the statement my classroom activities are never fruitful, and 60.7% agreed with a lot of grammatical mistakes in my writing. I am confused about preparing my assignments respond rate 60.4 and there is little focus on the open writing are 54.6%. The 57.9% students agreed that cannot express my difficulties in writing whereas 53% agreed English writing always makes me nervous. In classroom activities there is less focus on writing indicated by 52% and students have poor educational background by 61.9%. The table 2 shows that 56.7% respondents agreed with the statement that students have poor educational background and 56.7% students think that it is time consuming process and semester is short.

Conclusion

The findings of the study shows that students take part in all classroom activities such as essay writing and can write summary of the topic and minute detailed essay. Classroom written activities make thinking more critical and this practice of essay writing in class makes the students' efficient writer. Writing assignments improve vocabulary as well as enhance writing speed. Classroom discussion helps in writing and can write summary of new ideas and arguments. Daily assessment and weekly tests improves writing skills. So, English writing skills enhanced by the assistance of formative assessment. The results also indicated that in classroom activities there is less focus on writing skills and students thinks that writing is time consuming process. Assessment processes are very important and helpful in evaluating the weakness and strengths of the learners and provides feedback for the teachers (Khazrouni, 2019). The study recommends that special period was arranged for English writing skills at intermediate level and give a specific focus in writing skills during formative assessment.

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