

**THE EFFECT OF INTERACTIONAL CLASSROOM PEER
WORK ON THE TREATMENT OF MISTAKES IN
STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ESSAYS**
**O efeito do trabalho colaborativo interacional em sala de aula no
tratamento dos erros em ensaios acadêmicos de alunos**

Abdullah A. KHUWAILEH¹ (*Jordan University Science & Technology*)

Abstract:

There is a wide body of theoretical and practical research on the importance of the writing skill in teaching and learning Academic English. The focus of the vast majority of this research has been on error analysis, testing, needs and evaluation of writing. However, the purpose of this study was to measure the effect of classroom peer work on the development of students' ability of academic essay writing, a topic which is a relatively neglected area. By focusing on the treatment of writing mistakes, the study gives more attention to the students' role in developing their ability to identify their errors and to treat them properly through a process of three stages carried out under the supervision of their teacher (the researcher). Therefore, the study aims at reducing if not eliminating these mistakes through classroom interaction. After establishing a control group and an experimental one, we found that maximizing the students' role in learning essay writing initiated very positive results on their ability to write essays free of mistakes and even to speak to an audience. The three stages interactional process of essay writing was a practice in Jordan University of Science and Technology (hereafter JUST) where the study was carried out. But it can be applied in other English language teaching situations similar to that of JUST. Therefore, the process is highly recommended in the case of teaching paragraph writing, term papers and skill integration not only for Arab learners of English, but also for other speakers of English who have different first languages.

Key-words: *Interaction; essay; peer work*

¹ abaiikh@just.edu.jo

Resumo:

Há muitas pesquisas teóricas e práticas sobre a importância da habilidade de escrita para o ensino e a aprendizagem do inglês acadêmico. A grande maioria dessas pesquisas tem focado a análise de erros, testes, necessidades e avaliação da escrita. Contudo, este estudo teve como objetivo medir o efeito do trabalho colaborativo em sala de aula no desenvolvimento da habilidade de escrita de ensaios acadêmicos pelos alunos, um tópico que não tem recebido muita atenção. Focalizando o tratamento dos erros de escrita, o estudo dá mais atenção ao papel dos alunos no desenvolvimento da sua habilidade de identificar seus erros e de tratá-los adequadamente, através de um processo dividido em três estágios, realizado sob a supervisão de seu professor (o pesquisador). Portanto, o estudo tem como objetivo reduzir ou mesmo eliminar esses erros através da interação entre os alunos em sala de aula. Após estabelecer um grupo de controle e um grupo experimental, descobrimos que maximizar o papel dos alunos na aprendizagem da redação de ensaios produziu resultados muito positivos no que se refere a sua habilidade de escrever ensaios sem erros e mesmo de falar em público. O processo interacional de redação de ensaios, dividido em três estágios, é uma prática na Universidade de Ciências e Tecnologia da Jordânia, onde o estudo foi realizado. Porém, pode ser aplicado em outras situações de ensino da língua inglesa, similares à encontrada nessa Universidade. Assim, o processo é altamente recomendado no caso do ensino da redação de parágrafos, trabalhos de final de ano e integração de habilidades, não apenas para aprendizes árabes de inglês, mas também para outros falantes de inglês que tenham outras línguas maternas.

Palavras-chave: *Interação; ensaio; trabalho colaborativo.*

1. Introduction

In Jordan, the first language spoken is Arabic and the foreign language spoken most widely is English due to political and technological considerations. English is therefore taught in all Jordanian public schools in the fifth grade, but in private schools, it is taught in the first grade. Consequently, Jordanian university students join their

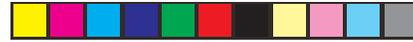


universities with a background of nine or twelve years study of English. The students who study English at the Department of English for Applied studies in JUST are required to take the course “211: essay writing” (see Appendix I) as a compulsory writing course preceded by two prerequisite courses: “English grammar” (Eng. 171) and “Paragraph writing” (115). Although the course (211) has been taught so many times by several lecturers (Ph.D. holders in linguistics), the students’ level of essay writing was not satisfactory.

The lack of improvement in essay writing was discussed in several departmental meetings for two reasons. First, the graduates of our department are usually subjected to written tests whenever they apply for a job in both private and public sectors. Taking into consideration that Jordan is a small country with a limited number of universities and English departments, many institutions telephoned our department complaining about the quality of our graduates’ writing and editing. The last institution to complain was “The Jordan Times”, a Jordanian daily newspaper published in English. Second, as English is the language of instruction at JUST, our students are tested in English when taking other courses (university requirements) in other departments. These tests are usually carried out in English. This situation put our department in a critical position which needed a reconsideration of our methods of teaching essay writing. For these conditions, we decided to investigate this area hoping to find a solution for this problem. Our major aim was to find and try new methods of teaching essay writing where the role of students was intended to be maximized to be able to apply a learner-centred approach, not a teacher-centred one, for instance. Because the new method required more than a dozen of lectures, permissions were taken from the dean of the Faculty of Sciences and Arts at JUST to solve the problem comfortably and without hindrances.

2. Literature

Among all the language macro skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening, the skill of writing is one of Man’s most complex activities. Its difficulty and complexity result from its purpose and nature. In nature, it involves many other sub-skills like the general knowledge about the



subject in question and the ability to translate ideas into grammatical sentences. Rivers (1968:243) argues that any academic writer must meet four major conditions:

The student must learn the graphic systems of the foreign language; he must learn to spell according to the conventions of the language; he must learn to control the structure of the language so that what he writes is comprehensible to his reader; and he must learn to select from among possible combinations of words and phrases those which will convey the nuances he has in mind in the register which is most appropriate.

Moreover, its purpose may be designed to persuade, to inform, to deceive, to insult, to claim, to appreciate or to prevent action. Each of these activities entails a certain method of writing with certain linguistic features. Therefore, as experience has revealed, writing often presents the greatest challenge to the students, particularly essay writing because in this activity, writing is usually extended and therefore it becomes more demanding than in the case of writing a short paragraph, for instance.

While writing in general and essays in particular pose problems to students, it is important for any student in both schools and universities. Bjork and Raisanen (1997:14-16) state that:

Traditionally, writing in schools and universities has been used primarily as a testing tool... There are many reasons why writing – and your own writing ability – deserves your attention from the very beginning of your university studies. Your writing practice, your use of your writing ability, is from a longer perspective, not simply a question of passing the next examination. It involves an in-depth engagement with the subject you are studying, and it will help you learn. It also presents an opportunity for critical thinking, which in turn, is crucial for your personal intellectual development.

We also believe that essay writing is not only crucial in schools and universities, but it is also the ‘make or break’ in getting jobs after graduation. Many recruiting institutions subject their applicants of jobs



to written and/or oral exams or interviews through competition because of the increasing number of graduates in different disciplines. Naturally, the kind of writing needed for getting jobs is a sort of advanced writing, essay writing or technical writing. Nevertheless, Jenkins et al. (1993:52) argue that:

The writing needs of advanced graduate students in science and technology have received little attention compared to those of undergraduates. Studies providing us with detailed information about the type of writing acquired of science and technology students have, for the most part, focused on undergraduate students.

After a lengthy literature review on writing, Casanave and Hubbard (1992:34) argue that:

This literature has shown the following: first, the type of writing that college students are required to do vary greatly (the personal essay so common in ESL composition classes).

It seems that writing for academic purposes in universities has started to receive much attention in research. Silva et al. (1994:194) state that:

In recent years, writing instruction for international students has become an area of increasing interest at colleges and universities.

This reveals that the importance of writing essays in universities is due to the fact that a degree seeking university student cannot achieve any progress without demonstrating proficiency in written English. However, university students find it difficult to write essays with a limited number of errors of various types. Therefore, teachers of essay writing need to anticipate certain common types of errors. They may also find other types of errors which can be revealed by analyzing the written products or essays of students. These are the conventions which are usually followed by the teachers of writing.

But how to treat these errors and help students to get rid of them is more important and worth studying. Finding out the quality and

quantity of essay writing mistakes is something important, but how to help students to get rid of these mistakes is more important. The treatment of writing mistakes is as important as the identification of mistakes. Kubota (1991) dealt with EFL writing errors in Japan and found that classroom errors' treatment was successful there if students were given the major role in handling these errors. Diaz (1994) carried out a study similar to Kubota's and he also found the same findings.

Abd-el-Jawad (1986:19-32) investigated the writing errors in spelling made by Jordanian students studying English in Yarmouk University. For treating spelling errors, he suggested the learners' awareness of the English spelling rules as a practical method of errors' reduction or restrictions. Axelrod and Charles (1990) studied also the treatment of errors in the United States. They recommended the process of 'reading critically' by their students as a practical method of errors' reduction. Ur (1981) integrated both writing and reading through group work to improve students' ability in writing.

The Arab World in general and Jordan in particular are active consumers of either EFL or EAP (English for Academic Purposes). Nevertheless, the studies on the ways and means of errors' treatment are not very frequent. Such studies need to be very frequent in the Arab World because they should correspond to the increasing and large number of English Language users in the Arab World. Therefore, the aspect of mistakes treatment in essay writing will be capitalized in this study on the basis of a case study carried out at JUST which can be representative of many cases in other Arab universities, because Jordan is an inseparable part of the Arab World.

3. Methodology

At this stage, it is worth mentioning that we took our samples from the students studying English at JUST. All of them were homogeneous in the sense that they had a similar background in English (intermediate). Because they were admitted to JUST, they were all subjected to JUST admission rules. This entails an eighty to eighty five grade in the Tawjihi.



In order to help our students to write essays free of mistakes and to activate our ESP students' performance through interactional peer work, we designed a scale (Appendix II) which was based on the examination of the content and form of their writing. The scale was given to a group of thirty students (the experimental group). The performance of another group (thirty students) was taken into consideration to create a control group for the purpose of comparison and contrast between the two groups. With the control group, the teacher followed the traditional method of teaching essay writing which did not involve the students in evaluation or criticism. Specifically, the scale was designed in a way that touches the aspects of clarity, logicity and grammaticality. The learners from the experimental group were then given copies of this scale to follow whenever they examined their colleagues' written products. They were then instructed to exchange their essays and apply the points of the scale on the essays. They had to come up with two results. First, they ought to grade the papers by giving them grades on the basis of the scale. Second, each learner had to give a very brief presentation about the quality of the written paper he was in charge of to justify the given grade on the one hand, and to convince the writer of the graded paper to accept the mark given on the other hand. Each time this process was carried out the researcher collected the graded essays as well as the scale to look for any mismatch. Later, when there was a mismatch, the researcher followed the previous stage with the stage of modification with the help of an OHP (overhead projector) to show the mismatch. On the basis of observed frequencies of the students' grades, descriptive (percentages and averages) and inferential statistics (Chi-square test) were calculated with the help of a statistician. Finally, the process of writing, peer grading, presentation and teacher's modification was repeated three times and each time a number of sessions or lectures (each lecture lasts fifty minutes) were given to each assignment.

In short, the stages of this study can be made clear by the following figure:

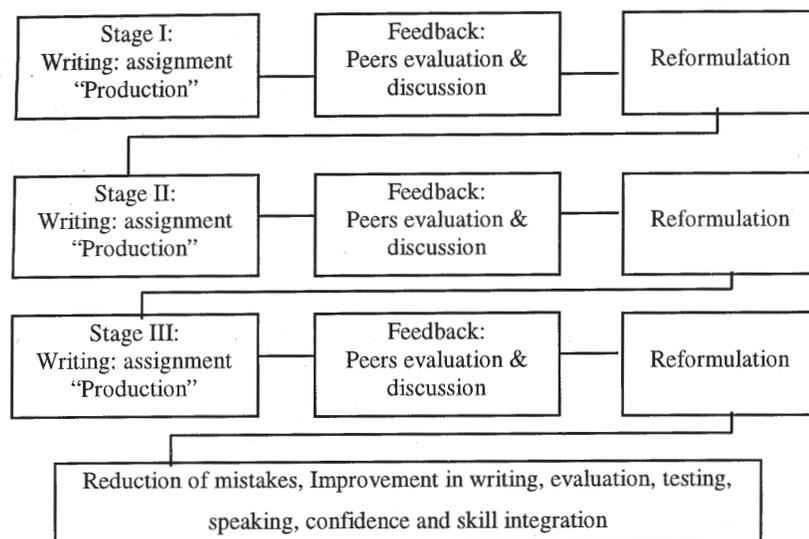


Figure 1. Stages of the study

4. Results and discussion

As we stated above, the central objective of this study was to develop JUST students' learning ability of essay writing following a three-stage-process of classroom interaction. The process was carried out over a semester (16 weeks). In general, there was a wide difference between the students' performance in the three-stage- interactional process and their performance after finishing the process. As the same course was taught to two groups of students, it has been noticed that the level of improvement was higher in the case of the experimental group than in that of the other group (the control group) where the process was not applied (Appendix I I I/A and B). Whereas the average of the experimental group performance was 5.7 out of ten after the first assignment, it was 6.1 after the second and 7.9 after the third. However, in the case of the control group and at the beginning of the semester, the performance average was 5.4 for the first assignment. It increased only to 6 out of ten in the second and to 6.6 in the third (Appendix 1 1 1/B).

Group	Assignment I	Assignment II	Assignment III
Control	5.4	6	6.6
Experimental	5.7	6.1	7.9

Figure 2. Averages of the two groups' performance

The improvement of the writing ability of the experimental group can be due to the fact that the students were informed that their products would be read and corrected by their peers and then by their teacher. Therefore, they could have revised and improved their products exerting every effort to make their writing perfect as seen in their eyes. We noticed that the students enjoyed the favour of correction, but at the same time they were worried about the fact that their written products were criticized by their colleagues. It follows from this point that the students benefited from the classroom interactional process as we will see below. This was shown by the frequencies, percentages and the Chi-square test results of the data. The results of the statistical nonparametric Chi-square test of independence were statistically significant ($P < 0.005$) across the two groups. This means that the results of this study were reliable and indicative.

Stage 1

After conducting the first stage of the process, the students essays included so many types of writing mistakes with an overall average of 6.1 as mentioned above. These mistakes referred to the production of fragments, redundant phrases, subject-verb agreement and/or clauses, misspelled words, disconnected sentences and the lack of organization. For example, their products written for the first stage of the study included many fragments like:

As satellite dishes can help viewers to know about other cultures and to have fresh news.

If we think of the disadvantages of dishes which are spread here and there because people like to learn what is happening around them.

The imported programmes I mean from the west that are teaching our young generations how to do crimes.

Considering these three quotations, it can be clearly noticed that all of them are incomplete in meaning and grammar. Out of the thirty essays written for stage one, twenty one essays included fragmentation of this type. The lack of adequate grammatical background might explain the high frequency of this kind of mistake. Another dimension could be the students' inability to use the right punctuation as in the following example:

The government should prevent these stations from presenting criminal films. Because these films show how technology is used by criminals. So our young people can apply what they see.

Obviously, the second sentence is a fragment. However, the student who wrote this sentence could have avoided this fragmentation if he did not put the full stop after the word "films" and therefore the word "because" should have been started with a small letter.

Following these results and with the help of an OHP (overhead projector), fragmentation was discussed thoroughly to be first identified and then treated. The students were then exposed to several exercises under which they were instructed to change fragments into meaningful and grammatical sentences. Later, they were given a mixture of both fragments and meaningful sentences to figure out which of which was a fragment. It was noticed that they were capable of finding out what was a fragment and what was a grammatical sentence. They also managed to correct what was incorrect.

As the students' essays included improper use of logical connectors (16 essays), the logical connection of contrast, sequence,



illustration, consequence and addition were also clarified and discussed thoroughly in the classroom before the students were instructed to write their second assignment. In the first assignment, the grammatical mistakes of subject agreements and the “-s” of third person singular were very frequent in about 28 essays. Only two essays did not include mistakes as such:

Dishes and their films is dangerous...the disadvantages of dishes is more than the advantages of dishes....

If people use the dish in a right way then the dish do not produce any harm or bad effects on people.

It is clear from the first quotation that the verb “is” in both sentences does not agree with the subjects: “dishes and their films” and “the disadvantages of dishes”. After the first stage, the students’ attention was drawn to the high frequency of the occurrence of these mistakes. Then several exercises serving this purpose were done in the classroom with the participation of all the members of the class.

English spelling, which has always been a major problem to Arab learners of English was an obvious weakness of the students’ essays (see also Finegan 1999:77). Except for one, all the remaining essays (29) included spelling mistakes with different degrees of frequency. The worst essay included seventeen spelling mistakes and the best one of the twenty nine included four spelling mistakes. Words like “recievers” for “receiver”, “advantiges” for “advantages”, “fundemental” for “fundamental”, etc. were frequently misspelled. Here again, one full lecture was assigned to the most important English spelling rules. Rules like: “i” before “e” except after “c”, etc. were elaborated with examples. Most widely used exceptional words were taken into consideration. On top of that, the students’ attention was drawn to the inherited overgeneralisations in spelling since seven essays included spelling mistakes of this nature. The following examples might clarify this point.

If this situation continue[s] and if no attention is payed to bad films then Arab culture will be lost.

If the number is to be growed, then... .

Redundancy or unnecessary wording was also another feature of the students' essays. In fact, nearly half the essays (16) included deadwood words similar to the following example:

There are many people who prefer to watch European news through satellites and there many people who prefer to watch Arab news through radios.

The phrase "there are" is unnecessary in this context. Moreover, the word "People" in the second place is not necessary since the whole sentence can be reasonably restructured as follows:

While many people prefer to watch European news through satellite dishes, many others tend to watch Arab or local news.

Here again, "redundancy" was discussed in the classroom to reduce it if not to eliminate it from the students' writing in preparation for the second assignment in the second stage of this study. Actually, the students were easily persuaded and convinced of the excessive use of phrases like: "there are ... " there is... "good nice films", etc.

The final negative aspect of the first assignment was "the lack of ideas organization" in paragraphing. Just below half the essays (13) included a paragraph that discussed two major ideas which deserved to be separated and then developed in two paragraphs. In order to tackle this aspect, the students were taught again (in one lecture) paragraph structuring touching aspects like: "topic sentences", generalizations, exemplification and supporting details. It was noticed that the students realized how a paragraph of an essay might have been structured. The stage was carried out with the help of an OHP. The students were then referred to a book called: *Paragraph Practice* (Sullivan 1971: 17–39) which deals with topic sentences and other important writing aspects.

It is worth mentioning that the first stage took two weeks (six lectures) to carry out the interactional peer work on essay writing. This stage was followed by the second assignment intended for measuring the degree of improvement in the students' ability to write after diagnosing and treating the negative aspects of their writing.



Stage II

Taking into consideration what was stated above about their first assignment, the thirty students were instructed to write another essay on “the cost of marriage in Jordan”, a topic which the students know a lot about and which might not be contaminated with any cultural differences. They were instructed to write about this topic over a weekend and at home so that they could revise their drafts and improve accordingly. They were also reminded to review first their notebooks to avoid the mistakes and points of weaknesses related to the first assignment: “satellite dishes”.

On Saturday, the beginning of the working days of the week in Jordan, the essays were collected in the classroom and then distributed randomly to start again the interactional classroom peer work on the basis of the scale given to the students earlier. In the second lecture, the students were given the chance to present what they thought of the essays they had read and the grade they have given to each essay. Later, the essays were collected and evaluated by the teacher where the average was calculated (6.1). Opposed to the average of the first assignment (5.7), the average of the second assignment revealed a noticeable improvement in the students’ writing. It follows from this point that the interactional peer work as well as the writing remedial discussion dealt with in the classroom played a crucial role in reducing the students’ weaknesses. These weaknesses were diagnosed properly, discussed thoroughly and taken seriously by the students since the essays were read by their colleagues. It is worth mentioning that the students were sensitive about the essays being read by their colleagues. Informal discussion with them revealed that they did not bother if their mistakes or writing weaknesses were seen by their teacher, but they did if they were seen by their classmates, particularly because of the oral presentations which were given on their essays. Relating this feeling to their performance in the classroom, the researcher read frustration on the students’ faces when their essays were described orally and displayed on the OHP. Consequently, they exerted much effort to improve their writing and avoid mistakes. This feeling and possibly the suggestions for improvement practised in the classroom could be behind the quick reduction of mistakes in the students’ essay writing for the second stage of this study.

Specifically, the improvement in the students' writing of the second assignment was clear in the quality and quantity of the mistakes observed, contrasted with those observed in connection with the first assignment. For example, the essays of the second assignment were written in a better way regarding "sentence connectivity". Their sentences were linked with appropriate logical connectors. Only two essays out of the total number (30) had an improper use of logical connectors of various types contrasted with 16 essays in the case of the first assignment. Moreover, only eight essays included fragmental sentences like those observed in the first assignment (21 essays). In the second assignment, the students' sentences were clear and complete in grammar and meaning. Although their sentences for the second assignment were free of fragmentation, 3 essays included other grammatical mistakes related to subject-verb agreement:

In Jordan the cost of marriage are very high because the groom must buy gold and furniture for his bride.

The family of the groom have to help him [the groom] if he want to get married at the age of twenty five.

Another type of mistake which emerged in ten essays after discussing the second assignment was the unnecessary repetition of the pronouns used in relative clauses. The following quoted extract exemplifies this point:

The wedding party which the groom must do it is very expensive especially if he want[s] to do it in a hotel.

An appropriate explanation for this mistake can be connected with the literal translation from Arabic into English as this structure is used in Arabic. It seems that the students undergo the process of thinking in Arabic before they produce their English sentences. Put differently, it is highly likely that when the students write in English, they first think in Arabic and then they translate literally their thoughts into English. This point of weakness was discussed in the classroom. Differences between Arabic syntax and the English one were thoroughly discussed in the classroom. Although it is difficult to remove the effect of language one on language two, the students were encouraged to think



in English whenever they write in English. They were shown how literal translation harmed their English writing with examples taken from their own writing.

In connection with the spelling mistakes, it was noticed that they were fewer in the second assignment than in the first one. The second assignment included fifteen essays with various types of spelling mistakes opposed to twenty nine essays with spelling mistakes in the first assignment. Here again, these numbers seem to suggest an improvement in the English spelling of our students.

However, it seems that English spelling can be an everlasting problem in the writing of Arab learners of English. A plausible explanation for the slight improvement of students' spelling can be due to the revision of English spelling rules after writing the first assignment. The students probably realized that spelling could reflect badly on the quality of their writing as they were told when their essays were displayed on the OHP and therefore they consulted their dictionaries frequently to correct their spelling. In fact, we also instructed two good participants (a female and a male) to collect data about the rules of English spelling and to make presentations to the class. These two students enjoyed the activity as they took the position of the teacher using simple language (students' language) which was easily understood by the audience as informal discussions have revealed. Other students volunteered to make other presentations which suggests that the students found it enjoyable to speak to their colleagues. They probably wanted to satisfy their teacher to get a high grade in classroom participation or it could be a gesture to show co-operation.

Stage III

The final stage of this study took again a couple of weeks. Here again, the students were instructed to write an essay of three paragraphs on "the differences between country life and city life", a neutral topic which does not need previous knowledge or reading. The students wrote their essays at home and over a week end. The thirty essays were collected and distributed randomly, marked by the students and then by

the teacher. It is worth mentioning that the students' presentations or feedback on what they had read seemed well-developed in connection with their speaking ability and the way they addressed the audience. For example, they started to speak with confidence. They also developed a way of smooth classroom communication when they were arguing and persuading.

In general, all the above-discussed mistakes were substantially reduced to the extent that no fragments or subject-verb agreement mistakes were observed. We were delighted to notice that the mistakes discussed earlier were absent and a remarkable improvement was noticed. This is shown by the average calculated for the third assignment (7.9), compared with 6.9 for the second and 6.1 for the first. These figures show that the range of improvement between the second assignment and the third one was wider than that between the first and the second. This could be due to the familiarity of the students with the stages of the interactional process. This suggests that if the stages were more than three, then the results could be better. Although the improvement was excellent and it did not reach the average of 9 as we thought at the beginning, it is still significant because we are dealing with writing which is the most difficult skill among the other macro skills (reading, speaking and listening) as the literature review has shown.

The frequency of spelling mistakes, redundancy and grammar was very low to the extent that only two essays included redundancy, seven essays included spelling mistakes and three included mistakes related to "tenses". For these reasons, this stage, the third assignment, took only four lectures for presentation and discussion, opposed to five lectures spent on the second assignment and six spent on the first.

5. Conclusion

Here again we are back at the start. The purpose of this study was to solve the problem of teaching essay writing at JUST because the level of the students in essay writing was seen as low even after finishing all the English writing courses taught at JUST. Our aim was to help students to write proper essays in terms of form, content, clarity and grammaticality.



Considering the performance of both the control and experimental groups, we have found that traditional methods of teaching essay writing were not appropriate at least in the case of our students at the English Department. The study shows that the method of involving students to solve their writing problems and to reduce the teacher's role is more practical than the traditional one. We have seen how students took the major role of working out their problems (e.g., reading the essays, grading, presenting and evaluating). They proved to be capable of doing so and at the same time, the method was encouraging because their written products were exposed to their peers in the classroom and then put under focus. These techniques stimulated them to work harder than in the case of the traditional methods where their products were only seen by their teacher. In the control group, the students' role was minimized and therefore they were passive because that was based on teaching similar to spoonfeeding, but in the case of the experimental one, they were active because their role was maximized and they were self-confident and self-driven. Surprisingly, it has been noticed that although the development of the speaking skill was not our focus, it was substantially developed since the presentations of the essays increased the students' confidence in facing an audience. They also developed an insight into essay writing and analysis. They learnt to read critically and analytically, which is another reading dimension. Therefore, the interactional process achieved another unplanned skill integration. They managed to do so because they enjoyed the process of correction and evaluation.

On top of improving the students' ability of essay writing, it is highly likely that the students have become good evaluators because they learnt to look at things from different angles which is another lesson on language testing. These techniques would remain with them even after their graduation because it was also a hard lesson for them to have their essays exposed to many people. The interactional process is worth applying on courses of writing paragraphs and perhaps term papers. By applying this process, traditional teachers who are used to taking the central role and the major time in teaching can be persuaded to reduce their role by relying on their students in working out their problems. The traditional teacher can also be convinced that students can be self-

driven and it is not humiliating for the teacher to encourage his students to take two thirds of the lectures' time.

While the findings of this study were presented in our departmental meetings to be followed by other colleagues who were involved in teaching writing on different levels (e.g., paragraph level), it is clear that the study did not cover all the aspects of essay writing due to the limitations of space and time. Further research is needed to cover aspects like style in writing academic essays or the students' ability to identify the tone in writing. Finally, English spelling seems to be a remaining problem to Arab speakers of English or maybe to other non-native speakers of English. Therefore, further research is needed on the consistency or inconsistency of English spelling. The treatment of English spelling mistakes is needed in EFL in general.

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APPENDIX I

1. Course 211 (essay writing) is described in the course description of the Department of English at JUST as:

Eng. 211 (essay writing) prerequisite: Eng. 115 (Paragraph Writing) and Eng. 171 (Eng. Grammar).

This is a course on essay writing which aims at enhancing the students' ability in extended writing. The main focus of this course is to help students to write an appropriate essay with a sense of good organization, clarity, cohesion and grammaticality.

2. The three topics:

Satellite Dishes.

Cost of marriage in Jordan.

Country life and city life.

were carefully chosen in order to have topics free of any cultural contamination or high technicality. Therefore, students did not need to read in order to have sufficient ideas on these topics, which is in line with the writing conventions followed because all the topics were neutral.

3. We would like to express our gratitudes and thanks to Dr. Amin Alawnah, a statistician at the Department of Mathematics at JUST, for his help in processing the data statistically.

APPENDIX II

The scale of evaluation and grading including the writing aspects and the frequency of each mistake

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|-----|-----|---------|-----|-----|
| 1. | Was the major topic clear to you? | Yes | No, | if yes: | no. | ... |
| 2. | Was the topic well supported with enough details and examples? | Yes | No, | if yes: | no. | ... |
| 3. | Was the essay well organized in terms of the introduction, middle and conclusion? | Yes | No, | if yes: | no. | ... |
| 4. | Were there any redundant or irrelevant points or ideas which have been deleted to improve the essay? | Yes | No, | if yes: | no. | ... |
| 5. | Were there any grammatical mistakes? | Yes | No, | if yes: | no. | ... |
| 6. | Were there any wrong punctuation or spelling? | Yes | No, | if yes: | no. | ... |
| 7. | Were there any incomplete sentences or fragments? | Yes | No, | if yes: | no. | ... |
| 8. | Were there any problems with the thesis statement or the reminder statements? | Yes | No, | if yes: | no. | ... |
| 9. | Were there any problems with sentence connectivity? | Yes | No, | if yes: | no. | ... |
| 10. | Were there any problems with the style of writing? | Yes | No, | if yes: | no. | ... |

Your final grade out of 10 is:

APPENDIX III

A. The experimental Group

The results of the three assignments including the types of mistakes and their reduction, the level of improvement and the calculated average of each assignment. Number of students: 30. Number of essays: 30

The three stages	Types of mistakes	Occurrence in n.° of essays	Averages calculated
Assignment I	Fragments	21	5.7
	Redundancy	16	
	Disconnection	16	
	Spelling	29	
	Lack of generalization	13	
Assignment II	Fragments	8	6.1
	Redundancy (pronouns)	10	
	Disconnection	2	
	Spelling	15	
	Subject-verb agreement	3	
Assignment III	Redundancys	2	7.9
	Spelling	7	
	Tenses	3	

B. The Control Group (30 students)

The averages of the control group for the three assignments were: 5.4, 6 and 6.6.

C. Inferential Statistics

The result of the Chi-square test of independence based on observed frequencies is: $P < 0.005$: Results are significant. The test shows differences across groups