

Comparing the Effect of Peer Assessment in Blended, Flipped and Face-to-Face Classes: The Case of Argumentative Essays

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Abstract

Upon the emergence of new instructional assessments of writing in foreign language classes, peer assessment (PA) has received special attention by teachers over the past decades. Accordingly, this study aimed to investigate the impact of PA in face-to-face, blended, and flipped classes on English Foreign Language Learners' (EFL) essay writing. To this aim, 65 students were homogenized by the Oxford Placement Test (OPT), and 36 students were selected and randomly assigned to three groups of blended, flipped, and face-to-face. Writing an argumentative essay as a pre-test was administrated at the beginning of the study to inspect the participants' prior writing proficiency. Regarding the treatment, the flipped group was instructed to use PA within the online class, and the blended group received instruction in an online class and applied PA in a face-to-face one, while the face-to-face group was instructed to use PA in the conventional class. After the treatment sessions, all groups attended to write an argumentative essay as a post-test. Paired sample t-test and ANOVA were used to compare the mean scores of the pre-and post-tests of each group. The results of data analysis showed that the experimental groups outperformed the control group in the post-test. Also, the results of ANOVA implied that there was not any significant difference between the effect of PA in the flipped and blended groups in the post-test. The results of this study can be useful for English language students, teachers, and researchers interested in using different technologies in teaching.

Keywords: Argumentative Essay, Flipped Class, Blended Class, Peer Assessment, Face-To-Face Class, Writing Skill

1. Introduction

In recent decades, teaching and learning a foreign or second language with the help of computers and technology have attracted the attention of many instructors and researchers. The advent of new technologies in different fields of learning and teaching has already encouraged English teachers to beneficially use them to enhance English Foreign Language (EFL) learners' interaction (Beldarrain, 2006), encourage their critical thinking (Simpson, 2010), and increase their extrinsic motivation (Rau et al., 2008).

Many researchers, in search of the best way to acquire a foreign/second language, now use Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) in language classrooms to find out its effects on language learning. As Liu (2012) mentioned, nowadays, CALL technologies are widely used in learning a foreign language such as blended and flipped teaching strategies. A blended learning strategy is simply defined as a formal education program that combines both online classes and face-to-face ones (Hrastinski, 2019). Combining the two modalities of face-to-face and online instruction, can enhance learners' engagement (Sahni, 2019), achievements (Yen & Lee, 2011), and motivation (Law, et al., 2019). A new form of blended learning which is called flipped learning, requires teachers to record their lesson and upload it on a designated website and ask their students to watch it prior to their class (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). In a flipped class, teachers use class time to solve learners' problems and build their knowledge base (Tawfik & Lilly, 2015). It is stated that flipping a class helps learners to be self-directed (Zainuddin et al., 2019), motivated (Abdullah et al., 2019;

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Zainuddin, 2018), and be autonomous (Zainuddin & Perera, 2019). Implementing a flipped class also suppresses learners' learning anxiety (Chen & Hwang, 2020), and increases their engagement in classroom activities (Subramaniam & Muniandy, 2019). Both blended and flipped teaching strategies aim to provide a flexible and differentiated teaching-learning process (Müller Werder & Mildenerger, 2021) for teaching language skills (Banditvilai, 2016); especially writing (Adas & Bakir, 2013).

Writing is the most difficult skill to master for EFL learners and is more complicated than the other language skills (Derakhshan & Karimian Shirejini, 2020). Conveying knowledge, format and structure of writing to learners seems to be problematic for EFL teachers (Behin & Hamidi, 2011). Therefore, finding ways of assisting EFL learners to improve their writing performance is of great importance. According to Topping (2003), the best method which teachers can use to help their students have better performance in writing is peer assessment (PA). PA could be defined as "the process that learners assess the work of their peers and also suggests grades for their peers" (Roberts, 2006, p.6). The main purpose of PA is to help learners help their peers identify their writing strengths and weaknesses (Topping, 2009), improve their autonomy and metacognition awareness (Ebrahimi et al., 2021). PA also increases learners' self-confidence (Sadeghi et al., 2015), and their involvement in classroom activities (Abrache et al., 2017). The use of the PA method within the context of a flipped classroom helps learners become more critical and independent (Lin, 2019), and achieve collaborative and reflective learning (Luo et al., 2020).

The previous studies in the field of PA mostly investigated the effect of giving feedback in conventional classes (e.g., Alzaid, 2017; Fathi & Khodabakhsh, 2020; Kim-Godwin et al., 2018; Nguyen, 2016) and they have neglected to compare the impact of PA in flipped, blended and face-to-face classes on students' writing, therefore; to fill the gap, the following research question is going to be answered in this study:

Research Question One: Are there any statistically significant differences among the essay writing of EFL learners, receiving PA in flipped, blended and face-to-face classes?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Previous Studies of the Use of PA in Instruction

Students' perceptions of PA were investigated by Kim-Godwin et al. (2018), Planas Lladó et al. (2014), Gielen and De Wever (2012) who state that students' attitudes of PA impact their performance. Likewise, Peng (2010) confirmed that learners hold positive attitudes towards PA before and after assessing their peers' assignments. According to Zhao, (2014), teachers' use of PA affects learners' perceptions. PA enables learners to judge the performance of their peers like their teachers (Patri, 2002). Alzaid (2017) investigated the influence of PA on learners' evaluation process and showed that both students and teachers should use PA as a strategy to assess each other. Similarly, Nguyen (2016) showed that various PAs improve learners' learning and stimulate their participation in writing classes. Landry et al. (2015) claimed that using PA as a tool is important for student-based learning, and improves their writing assignment. Likewise, Fathi and Khodabakhsh (2020) showed that PA as an effective approach reduces learners' writing anxiety. Similarly, Kurt and Atay (2007) confirmed that PA encourages collaboration among learners and improves the quality of their writing and allows them to have interaction with their peers. PA also improves learners' English-speaking skills and motivation toward learning (Chien et al., 2020; White, 2009). In contrast to the studies that reported the educational benefits of PA (e.g., Alzaid, 2017; Kurt & Atay, 2007; Nguyen, 2016), some research results stated that the use of PA as formal assessment in language classrooms may not be useful (e.g., Li, 2017; Liu & Li, 2014).

2.2. Previous Studies of the Flipped and Blended Teaching Strategies

The integration of flipped and blended classes helps learners achieve academic success (Miles & Fogget, 2016) and provides personalized and flexible learning (Clark & Kaw, 2020). Flipping instruction enhances learners' learning processes, and their engagement (Clark et al., 2016). In flipped classrooms, learners cooperate and interact with their peers and teacher in order to understand their

lesson which is according to the Interactional Theory (Long, 1996) and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978).

Teaching English skills through flipped and blended classrooms are widely used in EFL classes. For example, Afrilyasanti et al., (2016); Ahmed (2016); Ekmekci (2017); Soltanpour and Valizadeh, (2018); Turan and Akdag-Cimen (2020) investigated the impact of the flipped classroom on EFL learners' writing and confirmed their positive effect on learners' writing skill. The effect of flipped and blended instructional methods has also been investigated on learners' speaking (e.g., Khodabandeh, 2021; Tran, 2018), reading (e.g., Abaeian & Samadi, 2016; Brown et al., 2016), listening (e.g., Ahmad, 2016; Etamadfar et al., 2020), grammar (e.g., Afzali & Izadpanah, 2021; Al-Naabi, 2020; Khodabandeh & Tharirian, 2020) and vocabulary (Alnuhayt, 2018; Kirmizi & Kömeç, 2019; Zhang et al., 2016).

Implementation of a flipped class helps every learner learn at his own pace and take the initiative and become more self-directed (Ceylaner & Karakus, 2018). Moreover, the flipped classroom approach improves learners' assessment (Mingorance Estrada et al., 2019) and encourages student-centered learning (Estrada et al., 2019). In flipped classes, as learners take responsibility for their own learning (Thongmak, 2019), teachers' role is changed to a facilitator to provide instructional materials and improve the classroom environment (Westermann, 2014). Additionally, in a flipped classroom, teachers can employ a range of active learning strategies (Roehl et al., 2013). The review of the related literature makes it clear that still research needs to be conducted to compare the effects of PA within the context of flipped, blended and conventional classes on EFL students' essay writing to consolidate the basis of peer assessing.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

The current research used an experimental design where there were three groups, two as the experimental groups and one as the control group to be compared. In addition, there were pre-test and post-test in this study.

3.2. Participants

The population of the research was chosen from 190 EFL learners from Mobarakeh Payame Noor University in Isfahan. An Oxford Placement test (OPT) was administered to learners and those whose scores were between 30-49 were assigned as intermediate learners and 36 of them were selected randomly. The participants of the research were chosen from both male and female learners with the range of 18 to 20. The study was comprised of three groups, two as the experimental groups and one as the control group. One of the experimental groups was randomly assigned to the flipped group, and the second was assigned to the blended group, and the third group called the face-to-face group received a placebo.

3.3. Instruments

3.3.1. Proficiency test

A standardized test called OPT was applied to determine the participants' level of proficiency. The advantage of this test is that this test is more reliable and efficient for determining the test takers' level of English proficiency than other placement tests.

3.3.2. Pre-test and Post-tests

As the pre-test, the participants were asked to compose an essay on the presented topic (*Can cellphones be educational tools?*) using 150 words. As the posttest, the participants were given another topic (*Can money buy you happiness?*) to write an argumentative essay. The allocated time to take the tests was 1 hour and 30 minutes. The rating rubric from Khodabandeh and Hemmati (2019) was chosen to score the participants' writings. Participants' essays were scored by two English instructors and then inter-rater reliability was calculated to determine the reliability in scoring. The

results of Cohen Symmetric Measures (Kappa = 0.821 with $p < 0.001$) showed that there was almost perfect agreement between two raters scoring the participants' essay writing (Appendix A).

3.4. Procedure

The research consisted of three groups and six sessions were held for each group. Prior to carrying out the treatment, the instructor (one of the researchers) took a proficiency test to check the students' level of proficiency, and based on the results, thirty-six participants at the intermediate level were selected. In the second stage, as the pre-test, the participants were requested to write an argumentative essay. For the treatment, the instructor taught the structure and organization of argumentative essays based on the model presented in the book entitled *Essay Writing* (Khodabandeh & Hemmati, 2019). In order to teach the same content in all three groups and control teaching, the instructor asked one of her students to record her teaching when she was explaining the characteristics, format, and organization of an argumentative essay within the face-to-face class and share the recorded videos to the experimental groups. Both experimental groups were asked to practice writing through the WhatsApp application. As the first step, a group was created in the WhatsApp application, a sharing platform for teachers, and students at the beginning of the semester. WhatsApp allows teachers to create groups for students and share files, teaching materials, videos, etc.

The flipped class was conducted on the second session in the WhatsApp group. Two days before the online class, the first recorded teaching film was sent to the WhatsApp group. The participant's task was to watch the instructional video, then read the sent argumentative models. After this activity, their understanding of the format and structure of an argumentative essay was assessed in the following online class, then they were asked to work cooperatively in groups of three to answer the questions they were assigned throughout the activity. Two days prior to their following online class, they were sent topics to write their essay. After writing down their essay individually, they were asked to share their essays within their groups and ask their peers to assess their writings based on the designated rubric and share their feedback within the group.

As for the second experimental group (the blended class), the instructions in WhatsApp and face-to-face classrooms were combined and the participants attended their online and face-to-face classes every other session alternatively. In the way that one session the participants attended an online class in the WhatsApp group, and in the other session they received their instruction in the face-to-face class. The instructional materials were sent to the blended group in the WhatsApp and the instructor gave the participants some time to watch the videos and after that, the instructor asked the participants some questions to check their understanding of the format and structure of argumentative essays. They were also assigned to read argumentative model essays and answer the questions they were assigned throughout the activity. In their face-to-face classes, they were given a topic to write their essay. After writing down their essay individually, they were asked to share their essays with their peers and ask them to assess their writings based on the designated rubric.

The third group (the control group) was instructed in the face-to-face class. The instructor taught the structure and organization of argumentative essays the same as the experimental groups. After teaching and answering the participants' questions, they were given an argumentative topic to write their essays and give their writing to their partners and ask for their feedback based on the designated rubric. They were also asked to share their essays and their peers' feedback within the WhatsApp group.

At the end of the treatment sessions, a writing post-test was administered to all three groups. The same as the pre-test, all the participants wrote on the selected topic about 150 words. Their papers were scored by two raters whose rating reliability was measured by calculating inter-rater reliability.

4. Results

The results of pre-and post-tests of all three groups show that the kurtosis ratio of .186 indicated the normalcy of distribution, and no significant skewness was inspected from the data. After setting up the normality assumption, the paired sample t-test and ANOVA were used to find out which group had better results.

4.1. Paired Sample t-test Results

Tables 1 and 2 show the results of the pre-and post-tests of the control group.

Table 1: Paired Sample t-test of the Control Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Control-pre	13.75	12	1.356	0.391
	Control-post	15.58	12	1.378	0.398

The results of the control groups' paired-sample t-test have been illustrated in Tables 1 and 2. According to the results, the two-tailed Pair value is less than 0.0001 which is considered to be statistically significant.

Table 2: Results of the Control Group's Paired Test

	Paired Differences	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Mean	Std. Error	Lower	Upper	
					Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Error	
Pair 1	Control pre control post	-1.83	1.02726	0.207	0.9835	2.6765	8.8484	11	0.003397

The result of Table 2 indicated that Sig. (2-tailed) is below 0.005 (sig= 0.003397) which implies that the difference between the two sets of scores is statistically significant. The result of flipped group is presented in tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of the Flipped Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Flipped-Pre	13.5833	12	1.3113767	0.37856
	Flipped-Post	16.6666	12	1.0730867	0.30977

Table 3 shows that there was an increase from the pre-test of the flipped group (M = 13.58 to 16.66) to the writing post-test. Descriptive data reveals that the flipped participants in the experimental group appeared to perform better than the control group that had no considerable increase in their mean scores. Table 4 indicates the results of the flipped group's paired t-test.

Table 4: Paired Sample t-test of the Flipped Group

	Paired Differences	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Mean	Std. Error	Lower	Upper	
					Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Error	
Pair 1	Flipped-Pre flipped-Post	-1.875	1.564279	0.451568	2.068	4.097	-6.30	11	.00001

The results of the pair sample t-test of the flipped group show that the amount of sig is .00001 so there was a change during the treatment of the flipped group. Tables 5 and 6 show the results of the paired test for the blended group.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of the Blended Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Blended-Pre	13.8333	12	1.46	0.423
	Blended-Post	16.4166	12	1.08	0.312

According to Table 5, the mean score of the blended group has improved from 13.83 to 16.41, which shows that the participants of the blended group improved from the pre-to the post-test. Table 6 shows the results of the paired test of the blended group.

Table 6: Paired Sample t-test of the Blended Group

Pair	Blended Pre	Blended Post	Paired Differences		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
			Mean	Std. Deviation	Lower	Upper			
1			-2.58	1.6764	1.49151	3.67508	-4.907	11	.000066

The results of table 6 show that the difference between the means score of the pre-test and post-test of the blended group's argumentative writing is significant at the .05 level ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that there was an apparent statistical difference between the blended group in terms of their writing ability before and after the PA treatment.

4.2. The Results of ANOVA

To find out the differences between the mean scores of the three groups, ANOVA was used and in order to find out the exact difference between the groups, Scheffe was run. The results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Results of ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	8.6669	2	4.3335	2.3034	0.1158
Within Groups	62.0848	33	1.8814		
Total	70.7517	35			

The results of Table 7 show that the mean difference is considerable. The mean square between groups was 4.3 and within groups was 1.8. Table 8 determines the differences between the groups.

Table 8: Results of Scheffe

(I) learners	(J) learners	Mean Difference		Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
		(I-J)	Std. Error		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Face-to-face	flipped	-2.9465	.5832	0.0108855	-3.2642	-2.3558
	blended	-2.1046	.5832	0.0309879	-1.4642	.3242
Flipped	Face-to-face	2.9465	.5832	0.0108855	2.3558	3.2642
	blended	0.8419	.5832	0.8085166	.2025	2.3292
blended	Face-to-face	2.1046	.5832	0.03098794	-.3242	1.4642
	flipped	-0.8419	.5832	0.8085166	-2.3292	-.2025

The analysis of ANOVA indicated that the participants receiving PA in both the flipped and blended classrooms performed better than the control group in the post-test of essay writing. Table 8 shows that no significant difference was found between the blended and flipped classes in the experimental groups on the post-test. In other words, there was no significant difference between the effect of PA in flipped and blended regarding the participants' essay writing ability.

5. Discussion

This study was an attempt to compare the effect of PA in flipped, blended, and face-to-face classes on the participants' argumentative writing. Data analysis showed that the experimental groups outperformed the control group in the post-test. Also, the results of ANOVA implied that there was not any significant difference between the effect of PA in the flipped and blended groups in the post-test. This shows that applying PA both in the flipped and blended classes improved the participants' argumentative writing. The findings of this study are acknowledged and supported by Alzaid (2017); Fathi and Khodabakhsh (2020); Gielen and De Wever (2012); Kim-Godwin et al. (2018); Kurt and Atay (2007); Landry et al. (2015); Nguyen (2016); Planas Lladó et al. (2014); Peng (2010); Zhao, (2014) who claimed that using PA as a tool is important for students-based learning to improve their writing skill.

The findings also indicated that applying PA in both flipped and blended classes was more effective than PA in the face-to-face class in improving the participants' argumentative writing. This finding accords with what some studies have reported regarding learners' improvement in writing skills in flipped and blended classes (e.g., Afrilyasanti et al., 2016; Ahmed, 2016; Ekmekci, 2017; Soltanpour & Valizadeh, 2018; Turan & Akdag-Cimen, 2020). Both blended and flipped teaching strategies provided a flexible teaching-learning process for teaching argumentative essays within an online class which supports studies of Adas and Bakir (2013) and Banditvilai (2016). Moreover, both flipped and blended classroom approaches improved the participants' assessment of their peers' writing which is in line with the findings of Mingorance Estrada et al. (2019). According to the results, the use of the PA method within the online classes helped the participants become independent and achieve collaborative and reflective learning which supports the studies of Lin (2019), and Luo et al. (2020). In both experimental groups, the participants cooperated and interacted with their peers and instructor within their groups in order to assess each other's writing which is according to the Interactional Theory (Long, 1996) and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978).

According to the results of the current study, using PA in both flipped and blended classes, helped the participants help their peers identify their writing strengths and weaknesses, and improve their writing skill and also their involvement in classroom activities. Likewise, Hyland (2000) stated that PA enables students to know about their writing strengths, and weaknesses and helps their classmates revise their written work and point out their errors. The results of the study are in line with studies of Kurt and Atay (2007) who stated that peer feedback gives EFL learners an opportunity to have an interaction with their peers. The participants of both flipped and blended groups were asked to read their peers' essays and give their feedback and share with each other. Giving feedback within the WhatsApp group fostered the interaction of the participants of both experimental groups and allowed them to interact with each other which improved the quality of their written work. The results confirm the results of Topping (2003) who state that the best method which teachers can use to help their students have better performance in writing is PA. The results of the current research contradict the results of Li (2017); Liu and Li (2014) who stated that the use of PA as formal assessment in language classrooms may not be useful.

6. Conclusion and Implications

As already mentioned, teaching through flipped and blended classes has been affirmed to be beneficial for EFL learners in different skills like listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar. In this study, the researchers were determined to analyze the effectiveness of PA in the flipped, blended and face-to-face classes on the participants' argumentative writing. Applying PA in both flipped and blended classes turned out to be the most effective technique compared to applying PA in the face-to-face class. The participants of both experimental groups gained better marks in

argumentative essay writing than the participants of the control group. In both flipped and blended classrooms, the participants cooperated and interacted with their peers and instructor in order to give assess to their peers' writing essays.

One possible pedagogical implication for this study is that teachers should use PA in their teaching plan, as the results showed, the use of PA in the flipped and blended classes helped the participants of this study to have better performance in their essay writing. Moreover, autonomous learners may use flipped and blended instruction to empower themselves in writing skills.

In the light of the results of the present study, more studies are suggested in the area of blending PA with technology. It may be a good idea to carry out similar research with both male and female adult learners at different levels of proficiency to check the impact of flipped and blended instruction as a learning tool. The researchers can consider a wide variety of factors such as learners' intelligence, personality traits, motivation, etc. that may affect writing skills.

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Appendix A: For determining the reliability of the raters in the pre-test and post-test of writing, inter-rater reliability was used.

Results of Cohen, Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymptotic Standardized Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.821	.126	3.673	.000
N of Valid Cases		12			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

The results of Cohen Symmetric Measures (Kappa = 0.821 with $p < 0.001$) show that there was almost perfect agreement between two raters scoring the participants' essay writing.