The Effect of Negotiating Pedagogies in Saudi College EFL Writing Classrooms

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Abstract

Studies on the application of centre applied linguistics circles' writing pedagogies in EFL settings have placed great emphasis on the agency and innovativeness of local teachers. Local teachers often exercise absolute power over students' learning processes by transplanting Western approaches to writing into their local contexts. However, the active roles of student-writers in negotiating, constructing and transforming these pedagogical imports to suit their needs have been overlooked in the literature. This study examined how my students' negotiations with writing pedagogies that I imported from the USA helped them to move from writing to display knowledge to writing in order to construct and transform knowledge, at levels such as self, content and form. It was found that these pedagogies helped me critically reflect upon my position as an EFL writing tutor as well as scaffold my students' learning accordingly. They also helped my students to assume active roles in writing classes.

Keywords

Negotiating pedagogies, writing, centre applied linguistics circles

Introduction

Studies on the application of centre applied linguistics circles' writing pedagogies in EFL (English as a foreign language) milieus have given enormous thought to the agency brought to classrooms by local teachers (Canagarajah, 2002; Hyland, 2007; Liu, 2008; Pico, 2013). Local writing teachers often exercise absolute power over students' learning processes by transplanting Western approaches to writing into their local contexts (Liu, 2008). Nevertheless, active roles of student-writers in negotiating, constructing and transforming those pedagogical imports to suit their local intellectual conditions have been overlooked in the professional literature (Canagarajah, 2002; Liu, 2008). While acknowledging the possibility that English as foreign language-EFL writing teachers graduated from Western institutes might unintentionally act as "technicians of empire" (Luke, 2004) in their writing classrooms, this teacher-research method study (which will be defined in the methodology section) examines how my students' negotiations with EFL writing pedagogies that I brought from the USA helped them to move from writing in order to display knowledge to writing in order to construct and transform knowledge, at levels such as self, content and form.

Taking Bakhtin's (1981) work of dialogism as well as Darwin and Norton's (2015) 'model of investment' in language learning as points of departure, this study attempts to explore how my student-writers negotiate, construct and transform writing

pedagogies that I brought from the USA. Conceptually, two negotiating cycles (which I will address them later in this article) were applied throughout one semester with a group of engineering students: the first cycle aims at helping student-writers to assume a proactive role in writing classes with the tutor scaffolding, while the intention of the second cycle was to explore how the students were able to successfully transform such knowledge into the area of examinations (i.e., for assessment purposes). This study is therefore aim to: (i) acknowledge the crucial role played by students in constructing their own knowledge of EFL writing by means of negotiation and interaction; (ii) reflect critically upon our own practices as EFL writing teachers so that we can assist student-writers' learning accordingly; and (iii) demonstrate how these negotiating practices are implemented in classrooms, and how they are recalled during exams.

Theoretical Framework

Bakhtin's (1981) work of dialogic learning is centered on assumptions that people posit their voices/arguments based on valid claims not on power or authoritative discourse. In this regard, he postulates that there are two forms of discourses: "authoritative discourse" and "internally persuasive discourse." Authoritative discourse "enters our verbal consciousness and invisible mass; one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it" (p. 343). It is often enforced from outside; as a result, the "word of a father, of adults and of teachers, etc. [requires] our unconditional allegiance" (p. 345). "Internally persuasive", conversely, is seen as "half ours and half-someone else's" (p. 345). He further demonstrates that there are two approaches of assimilating discourses: (i) knowing by heart which is often an inflexible way of assimilation generated from power or authority and (ii) "retelling in one's own words" (p. 341), which is a flexible as well as transformative way of assimilation. The "internally persuasive discourse" can be occurred as a result of interaction between the two approaches of assimilation.

Through a dialogic learning approach, student-writers can interact and negotiate their pedagogical needs with their teachers in order to develop creative and meaningful "internally persuasive discourses" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342). They can also negotiate with peers, interact and construct their writerly identity in classrooms, and at the same time demonstrate their autonomy of thoughts and authorial presence. Student-writers can be "radical agents of change" (Fielding, 2001, p.124); thus, negotiating their pedagogical needs in EFL writing classrooms through dialogical approach could help promoting their agentive appropriation as well as agentive uptake (Canagarajah, 2015; Norton, 2011). That is, "recognizing that they have the agency to assert their own identities, learners are able to negotiate symbolic capital, reframe relations of power, and challenge normative ways of thinking, in order to claim the right to speak" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 47).

Second or foreign language writing classrooms are considered sites of social transformation, interaction, negotiation and professional identity construction by student-writers (Barnawi, 2011; Benesch, 2001; Canagarajah, 2002; Leki, 2001; Pico, 2013; You, 2004). In this context, investment takes a crucial position "in language learning theory for demonstrating the socially and historically constructed relationship between language learner identity and learning commitment" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 37). This very notion of investment outlined by Kramsch (2013 as cited in Darvin & Norton, 2015) as follows:

Norton's notion of investment...accentuates the role of human agency and identity in engaging with the task at hand, in accumulating economic and symbolic capital, in having stakes in the endeavors and in preserving in that endeavor. (p. 37)

When students invest in learning a language, they do so with awareness that they will gain certain capital, which in turn will enhance their cultural and social capital in social and academic contexts (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Hence, negotiating students' pedagogical needs can provide possibilities for them to bring their own meanings and intentions to the writing classrooms (Canagarajah, 2004; Morrell, 2004).

Informed by the above discussions, I attempt to explore how the two negotiating cycles I employ throughout this study would help my student-writers negotiate, construct and transform writing pedagogies that I brought from the USA. Before I embark on this endeavor, I address the notion of localizing English academic writing in EFL instruction.

Localizing English academic writing in EFL instruction

Today, the increasing demand on written communication skills in the field of engineering has made writing courses indispensable components of undergraduate engineering programme curricula. Courses like 'English Academic Writing', 'College Composition' and 'Technical Report Writing' are now being offered as part of engineering programme requirements in different universities around the world. These writing courses are expected not only to prepare learners to master workplace writing, but also to develop their skills in scientific research and international communication. In fact, both skills are beneficial to their professional growth (Barnawi, 2011; Benesch, 2001; Dovey, 2006; Liu, 2008). It is not surprising, therefore, in this era of the new knowledge economy and emerging pedagogies, to discover that educators in many developing countries are taking various initiatives to import Western products and services (e.g., English learning resources such as textbooks, DVD, online training programmes, etc.) into their local contexts, as a way of gaining access to science, technology and information (Barnawi & Phan, 2015). Importing commercial textbooks on writing (e.g., with Middle Eastern Editions or KSA Editions) produced by established publishers such as Pearson, McGraw Hill, Oxford and Cambridge, among others, is one major example of these endeavours in many EFL contexts (Barnawi, 2012). Another example pointed out by Liu (2008) is that language teachers in many EFL contexts are encouraged to attend international English language teaching conferences; furthermore, they are deliberately sent to Western countries in order to pursue their education in English language teaching, on the assumption that they will teach their students effectively after they return home, particularly in areas such as academic literacy (Barnawi & Phan, 2015).

Hence, it could be argued that writing courses designed to prepare Arab EFL students, with a range of specializations, for specific local workplace communication, can be expected to have different purposes, discourses, strategies, and contents, among others, from those of courses designed for Western students. There are also rhetorical, cultural, and linguistic differences between Arab and Western students in writing, among other things. For example, as Barnawi (2010) points out, "Arabic generic syntactic structure is Predicate + Subject + Object; on the contrary, English generic syntactic structure Subject + Predicate + Object. These two examples may result in negative

transfer of students' native languages when students compose in English" (p. 214). These differences also mean that it is of crucial importance to examine in depth the notion of localizing Western writing pedagogies in order to critically realize what sort of language learning manners as well as literacy practices are viable to their learners (Gee, Hull & Lankshear, 1996). In this study, "localization" refers to local writing teachers negotiating with students as well as student-student negotiation with Western writing pedagogies brought to classrooms by their teachers.

Notably, studies that examine localization of Western writing pedagogies have placed great emphasis "on how local teachers negotiate with foreign imports" (Lui, 2008, p. 87). Many scholars (e.g., Leki, 2001; Muncie, 2002; You, 2004) put forward that when implementing Western writing pedagogies such as communicative writing and process writing (among other things) in particular localities, teachers must take into account their local intellectual contexts so as to ensure the successful transmission of their practice. They also need to consider the integration of those pedagogies into such contexts. Local writing teachers need to be cautious when introducing their students to relevant genre, tradition and literacy practices; in addition, they should critically consider their learners' literacy practices, linguistic needs, educational tradition, values, local culture and institutional constraints. Liu (2008), on the other hand, observes that, "these scholars have portrayed the local teacher as the major responsibility-holder in transplanting [Western] pedagogies" (p. 87). Local teachers are often expected to use their agency and innovation in EFL writing classes in order to teach their students how to produce authentic pieces of writing. In doing so, some researchers, for example (Bradley & Orleans, 1989) appropriated Western technological and cultural issues in their writing classrooms. Others (e.g., Boughey, 1997) used group work to address their writing classrooms, while some (e.g., Clachar, 2000) chose both process-centred and rhetorical approaches to teach academic writing, despite different stakeholders' concerns about Western approaches. The socio-cultural approaches to literacy and learning postulate that, rather than being passive, student-writers usually construct knowledge through dialogic interaction with peers, teachers, and with the contexts they have been exposed to (Lantolf, 2000; Morrell, 2004; Russell, 1997). In today's constantly changing environment of education, the "ability to learn how to learn" and the "ability to communicate effectively" (Dovey, 2006, p. 399) are the most valuable attributes for learners. Nevertheless, the agency of student-writers in adapting imported pedagogies has been widely overlooked in the literature (Liu, 2008).

Negotiating Western writing pedagogies in college EFL classes

In this section, I present the ways in which student-writers negotiate with the Western writing pedagogies I imported from the United States. In so doing, I will demonstrate the two negotiating cycles implemented throughout this study. I will also present the outline for the course that is under study, and the theories that inform the pedagogical design of the course. Although current studies centered on EFL writing highlights the value of a critical awareness of student-writers' agency (e.g., Benesch, 2001; Canagarajah, 2015), very little has been done to make it possible for student-writers to benefit from such pedagogies in their writing classroom practices. Researchers like Liu (2008) and Sapp (2002) indicate that studies of student-writers' negotiations with English academic writing in EFL contexts are rare; as a result, in many EFL writing classes the

potential of student-writers' agency has not been tapped. In the words of Canagarajah (2002 as cited in Liu, 2008, p. 87), "the linguistic and cultural peculiarities that multilingual students" bring to their classrooms should be regarded as 'resources' that should be seen by the research community as valuable additions to the academic discourse. These linguistic and cultural peculiarities should be regarded as depictions of the students' own identities and self-voicing. Because our student-writers often bring their writerly habits and discourses to writing classrooms, I applied two negotiating cycles in the current study, on the assumption that these cycles would scaffold them "in strategically negotiating with academic conventions and creating multivocal genres" (Liu, 2008, p. 88). These two cycles were adapted from the works of Canagarajah (2002), Hyland (2007) and Pico (2013).

The aim of the first cycle was to help the students assume active roles in the writing classes with the teacher scaffolding. It involved negotiation for the refining of course objectives, the selection of teaching materials, text modeling and constructing, joint construction of texts, independent construction of texts, student-teacher conferencing, and linkage of related texts. These negotiating strategies are not mutually exclusive; instead, they complement each other in facilitating teaching and learning writing in EFL classes. In typical college settings, courses such as composition or academic writing are usually offered to students with a range of specializations (e.g., chemical or mechanical engineering). These courses often have broader objectives, such as equipping college students to master the written communication skills that will be required in a broader domain (e.g., in engineering or business), on the assumption that this will enable the students to construct a wide range of texts centred on their chosen disciplines in the future. In the stage of refining course objectives, it thus becomes imperative for teachers to review these broader objectives with their students, in order to set objectives that are more relevant and suitable for accommodating the students' various specialist subjects while at the same time catering for both immediate and future needs. A concrete example of refining and setting course objectives will be given in a later section of this study. On the assumption that course objectives should be refined, students and teacher negotiate together to select teaching materials that will suit the overall purposes of their study. It should be noted that EFL writing teachers, relying on their own beliefs and experiences, often exercise absolute power over their students' learning; for example, they make some teaching materials compulsory for their students and others optional, with no input from the students themselves. Such practices might be valid if we continue to believe that our students are not in a position to select materials that accommodate their pedagogical needs. Today, the post-process theory of writing has encouraged us to re-examine our assumptions. It defines "writing as an activity rather than a body of knowledge, our methods of teaching as indeterminate activities rather than exercises of mastery, and our communicative interactions with students as dialogic rather than monologic" (Breuch, 2002, p. 99), as I demonstrate throughout the two negotiating cycles in this study. In the post-process theory of writing, teachers' roles have been shifting "from dialecticians who initiate students into new knowledge.... [to] co-workers who actively collaborate with their students to help them through different communicative situations both inside and outside the university" (Kent, 1994, p.166). Hence, involving students in the process of selecting teaching materials would not only help teachers to obtain constructive feedback from students' views and reflect on their

teaching practices, but would also “engender a new relationship with their students in that they actively collaborate with their students and become, in a sense, students themselves” (Kent, 1994,p.166).

In the modeling and deconstructing texts stage, teachers should, in collaboration with students, provide the class with different models of texts that represent the students’ domain of study. These texts should be read carefully by the students and then be “analysed, compared, and manipulated” (Hyland, 2007, p. 132), in order to help them gain awareness of different linguistic features, genres, purposes of writing, as well as of writing elements such as vocabulary and strategies that can be used to achieve coherence and cohesion.

At the joint construction stage, writing teachers are expected to first scaffold student-writers to become familiar with a new genre. Consequently, teacher and students, as well as students and students, should work cooperatively to write their piece of papers, by utilizing the data obtained at previous stages (Pico, 2013). The writing tutor should gradually change the focus of his or her instruction from inputting and modeling to acting as a facilitator of shared writing activities; that is, he/she should provide opportunities for group interaction and discussion and act as a responder to the students.

The independent text construction stage has a dual purpose: (a) at this stage, students can put the previous stages into practice by producing a piece of paper independently, and (b) a writing-tutor can utilize this opportunity to monitor individual writing and give advice if needed. The purposes of teacher-student conferences are as follows: (a) to discuss with students the conflicts and challenges they may experience throughout the writing course, (b) to understand the strategies they prefer when it comes to completing certain tasks or course requirements, and (c) “to display to students the implications of using their own strategies” (Canagarajah, 2002, p. 144).

At the stage of text comparison, the teacher asks students to compare their written texts with other texts that have been produced in similar contexts. Figure 1 below provides an illustration of a complete cycle of negotiating EFL writing instruction. The pedagogical outcomes of comparing texts are numerous, for example, “it offers writers an explicit understanding of how target texts are structured and why they are written in the way they are” (Hyland, 2007 as cited in Pico, 2013, p. 29).

Figure 1. Complete cycle of negotiation in EFL writing instruction

The aim of the second negotiating cycle was to explore whether students are able to successfully transfer such knowledge to their exam papers. This strategy entails “developing the context”, “modeling” and “deconstructing texts”, “independent construction of” texts, and portfolio submission. For assessment purposes, at the developing context stage, “students are required to write a text belonging to the genre studies, independently and in a specific period of time” (Pico, 2013, p. 29). In this stage, students are supposed to follow the steps described in cycle 1 above but without the scaffolding of teacher or peers. In the stage of modeling and deconstructing texts, students are expected to recall various models that were analysed in their classrooms while they were studying; for example, text formats, organization of ideas, correct use of transition signals, vocabulary choices, etc. In the stage of independent construction of texts, students are supposed to produce a piece of paper putting “knowledge of content, process, language, context and genre” (Hyland, 2007, p.136). Finally, students are expected to submit a portfolio that represents their work throughout the semester. To put this notion into practice, students should be encouraged to collect all materials—handouts, drafts or samples of their writing, worksheets, in-class assignments and homework assignments—brought to the classroom by their teachers or peers, in order to enhance their literacy of academic writing. They should then be urged to make a purposeful selection of those materials as a way of helping them progress through the writing course in comfort, with ease and with confidence, as well as being a way of documenting their learning process. Finally, they should be asked to reflect on those selected materials. These practices will provide them with opportunities to monitor their own growth and progress, as well as their weaknesses, over time. This, in turn, gives the writing teacher a chance to monitor, think about and reflect thoroughly on his/her

students' problems. Figure 2 below shows a complete cycle of writing for assessment purposes.

Figure 2. Complete cycle of writing for assessment purposes

It should be mentioned that the timeline of this summer course was 8 weeks. Also, these two negotiating cycles are mapped out to the course in a consecutive manner; i.e., while the first cycle aims at helping student-writers to assume active roles in the writing classes with the teacher scaffolding, the second cycle aims at exploring whether students are able successfully to transfer such knowledge to their exam papers without the scaffolding of teacher or peers. In the section of context, teacher and students below I will provide further details on how I linked the two negotiating cycles with the course requirements.

Methodology

This study utilised a qualitative research approach in order to obtain a holistic understanding of complex issues, not only interpreting the personal experiences of the participants in a given social space, but also linking interpretation with broader social contexts and structures (Barnawi & Phan, 2015). It examines how my student-writers negotiate, construct and transform writing pedagogies that I brought from the USA. A teacher-research method makes it possible to address the above research question. A teacher-research method is defined as systematic, intentional and contextual investigations of how teaching practices affect student learning in a given social space. In teacher-research method, the role of the teacher changes from going about the daily routines of teaching, taking attendance and marking papers, to raising critical questions about what he/she thinks and observes about his/her teaching as well as about his/her students' learning. In this role, teachers "collect student work in order to evaluate performance, but they also see student work as data to analyze in order to examine the teaching and learning that produced it" (MacLean & Mohr, 1999, p. 27). Conceptually, in teacher research, the research question evolves from a teacher's curious "*I wonder...*" about daily matters of classroom life; consequently, it is the writing teachers themselves who decide on the subject of study (Patterson & Shannon, 1993).

In this study, the data emerged from four sources: (i) my teaching journals, (ii) students' works including draft papers, final papers, collaborative projects and portfolio

reflective writings, and (iii) notes from teacher-student conferences such as tutorial sheets, list of common mistakes, layout of papers, etc.¹In a similar way to Liu (2008) in her study, in this paper, I adopt Raimes's (1991) and Canagarajah's (2002) grouping of issues involved in academic writing: namely, agentive uptake, self, content and form, in order to categorize my students' academic writing issues. In so doing, first, I applied open coding to conceptualize and analyse themes of my data. Notably, my initial open coding process was unstructured and led me to identify a large number of codes. Then, I embark on my preliminary analysis by assigning labels to each data based on issues involved in academic writing. After collecting a large amount of coding and labels, I began the process of grouping my data into broader categories (themes), reading and re-reading as well as cross-checking to locate major themes within data (Evans, 2013). From time to time, I screen the data to verify coding and labeling. After several steps of coding, analysis, and merging and subsuming categories, broader themes were identified as shown: agentive uptake, self-voicing and issues of content.

I discuss the challenges that my students experienced in the academic writing classroom. In addition, as a reflective practitioner, I utilized my journal to document my observations, interactions and negotiations with students. Such practices helped me not only to clarify my thinking about writing, to record significant lessons, but also allowed me to understand my students' pedagogical needs, among other things. The two negotiating cycles mentioned above were applied throughout a summer semester to realize the efficacy of negotiating pedagogies in EFL classrooms. Below I present the background to my study and my role as insider-outsider before addressing the efficacy of my practices.

Context, teacher and students

Similar to other countries in the Gulf region, Saudi higher education institutions have been internationalizing their programmes through adopting EMI-English as the medium of instruction, and constructing knowledge through English language (Barnawi & Phan, 2015). Applied science, computing, business, medicine, engineering and engineering technology programmes are taught exclusively in English in Saudi tertiary education settings. Hence, for prospective Saudi engineers, good writing ability represents a guarantee that they will function well academically in an English-as-a-medium-of-instruction environment. It also means that they are more likely to pass the written exams required by most employers in today's competitive job markets.

It is also crucial to note that there are social, cultural and institutional differences when teaching in a Western context and other settings. There are differences in classroom pedagogical practices between postgraduate Western education (research-based) and Saudi (local) undergraduate education. These social, cultural, institutional differences between the two sites will be clearly acknowledged throughout this study.

My role throughout this research can be characterized as that of both an outsider and an insider. I can be described as an outsider because I completed both my MEd. TESOL and my PhD at a Western university. Importantly, my PhD in Composition and TESOL exposed me to numerous English writing pedagogies, workshops, discussions, tutoring strategies at writing centres, and seminars, among other things, all of which detached me from the Saudi educational context. I can be seen as an insider because I am a native Arabic speaker who received his elementary to undergraduate level education at

Saudi schools. I have an awareness of Saudi culture, educational practices, traditions and values.

This study was conducted in a Saudi technically-oriented college during the summer of 2013. The college offers degrees in Business and Management as well as Engineering Technology. As a faculty member, I teach the ‘English Academic Writing II’ course for senior engineering students. This core course is offered for all bachelor degree students who are majoring in engineering technology. As defined by the college, the English proficiency levels of the students in this study ranged between B1 to B2 according to *The Common European Framework Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, and assessment*(CEFR). There were 23 senior engineering students on this course. Importantly, the engineering degree study plans of the college showed that all these students have taken three writing courses (i.e., composition, technical report writing and academic writing I) prior to taking this academic writing II course. The students’ records also showed that seven students were majoring in electrical engineering and nine were specializing in chemical engineering. Three were mechanical engineering students, and four were specializing in instrumentation engineering technology. Furthermore, their high school writing experiences were based on an integrated skills English series that focused solely on structured writing, grammar, vocabulary and so forth. The requirements of this academic course are summarized in the table below.

Table 1

Requirements of English Academic Writing II at a Saudi College

1	Leading classroom discussions	Each student will lead a classroom discussion once throughout the semester by means of responding to, or summarizing comments, raising constructive questions or comparing related points, etc.
2	Extended essays (i.e., Process/chronological, argumentative, cause/effect, and comparison/contrast essays	Students will write different types of essayscentered on engineering technology throughout the semester.
3	Read, reason, response	This task aims at promoting critical reading and analysis, argument, and research techniques among students.It requires each student to select and critically read and evaluate various written texts.
4	Personal research	Each student will conduct a personal research project by the end of the summer semester.
5	Mid-term exam	It is conducted to evaluate student skills or knowledge in the middle of the semester
6	Final exam	It is conducted to evaluate student skills or knowledge at the end of the course.
7	Portfolio	By the end of the semester students are required to collect all their course materials (handouts, drafts, in-class assignments, etc.). They are then urged to

		make purposeful selection of those materials. Finally, they are asked to reflect on those materials in order to have ample opportunities to monitor their own growth, weakness and progress over time.
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Taking my students' educational, cultural, literacy and linguistic backgrounds into consideration, I used the two negotiating cycles to teach this course during the summer semester. For instance, first, I informed them that I am going to negotiate with them on how to produce a piece of writing in English in a professional way, and that my position "would be changing gradually from a 'directive' to a non-directive" (Barnawi & Phan, 2015, p. 270). I also informed them that because their specialist subjects were different, we would be refining the course objectives together in order to address individual pedagogical needs, while taking the overall objective of this course into consideration. Accordingly, we selected course materials and topics that were aligned with the refined objectives and within the students' broader specializations. After that, in collaboration, the students and I shared, analysed and compared different models of texts that represented the students' domain of study. The aim of this task was to help them become aware of different linguistic structures, features, vocabulary, genres and purposes of writing centred on their major subjects.

Utilizing the data obtained from previous stages, the students were grouped according to their specializations throughout the semester and then asked to construct essays (e.g., process/chronological essays, and persuasive) related to their disciplines of study. Throughout these tasks, I acted as a facilitator for the shared writing activities: i.e., offering opportunities for group interaction and discussion, and also acting as a responder to the students. I also asked the students, using skills they had acquired in earlier stages, to construct texts independently, and then conducted a student-teacher conference. Such post-process views of teaching writing gave me excellent opportunities to monitor individual writing, discuss challenges and offer advice as needed. Finally, the student-writers were asked to compare their texts with other texts produced in similar contexts (e.g., electrical engineering) so as to gain an in-depth conceptualization of how texts are formed in a certain way; reasons for writing them in the way they are, and why particular genres and lexico-grammatical patterns are used. Over the course of the semester, I conducted several formative assessment tasks (e.g., collaborative writing projects, quizzes, and presentations) to examine the extent to which my students were able to recall different models being analysed in their classrooms while they were studying; for example, text formats, organization of ideas, correct use of transition signals, vocabulary choices, etc.

Applying the second cycle helped me explore the extent to which my students were successful in transferring this knowledge into their exam papers (i.e., for assessment purposes). I used summative assessment tasks (e.g., mid-term exams, portfolios, and reflective letter writings) to assess my students' progress in writing texts related to their subjects of study and in order to make decisions on their final grades. Overall, it should be noted that while I was implementing the two cycles in the classrooms, I noticed that my engineering students were wrestling with several issues related to English academic writing. Following the categorization issues in EFL writing stated earlier, I categorized my students' problems as follows: agentive uptake, self-voicing, content and form. First,

I will present issues of voices and agentive uptake of some student-writers through data obtained from their works as well as my notes and journals. After that, owing to space limitation, I will extensively discuss the writing experiences of 3 students (Refat, Ali, and Saleh – all pseudonyms) as examples in order to demonstrate the effect of negotiating pedagogy in my classrooms. These three examples were selected because they offer various voices with mixed views, positions, thoughts and feelings respectively.

Findings

Negotiating strategies in EFL writing classrooms

The editorial stipulation on lengths has made it challenging to share voices of all participants on the pedagogical strategies I employed in classrooms; nevertheless, examples presented below offer various voices with mixed views, positions, thoughts and feelings. The presented names below are pseudonyms. Notably, students responded differently to my classroom pedagogical practices throughout the semester, especially in teacher-student conference:

“Teacher, I can see my world now after you gave us chance and time to explore our own learning strategies” (Bander),

“The question is why we did not get such space before...” (Talal),

“Still this is not an essay task, because I do not have enough experience to do all these by myself. I think you should make this new style optional in classrooms” (Khaled), “this is a very stressful way of learning teacher. We may not know exactly all our needs, and you want us to tell you the way we want to learn” (Taher),

“How can I transfer this style of learning to other engineering courses. May be it does not work at all” (Belal),

“It is hard to say that I’ve learned a new strategy of writing my paper, because the picture is blurry” (Anas),

“I can understand the benefit of negotiations in classroom but I cannot translate them into my paper” (Hamoda), and

“So now I have to focus on writing styles related to my major of study only” (Ahmad).

Voices presented above clearly support the notion that, through a dialogical learning approach, student-writers can negotiate their pedagogical needs, resist, voice their opinions, and develop internally persuasive discourses in classrooms (Bakhtin, 1981/2004). These voices also give multiple perspectives to the writing teacher with regards to what strategies students usually appropriate, negotiate, and resist so that he/she would accommodate individuals’ pedagogical needs accordingly.

In addition to the above, one of the challenges that my students had been facing in this course was how to position themselves in the discourses and practices of their disciplines. Although they had studied three writing courses prior to my course, their “autobiographical self” (Ivanić, 1998) seemed to be having a significant influence on the voices they were projecting in a text. These students did not practice academic writing in Arabic (e.g., persuasive essays and process essays) at high school, and none of the three

courses they had studied required them to conduct research or write long essays. These students had not experienced holistic negotiating pedagogies in their previous education, either in Arabic or in English. These issues place my students at rhetorical disadvantages when writing, and prevent them from voicing their opinions professionally. The experience of one of these students illustrates the kind of negotiations he engaged in with me while striving to express his voice through his papers.

Refat's experience in academic writing class: Agentive uptake and self-voicing

Although Refat went through the complete cycles of the negotiation process in this course, he continued to use some informal phrases and choices of metaphor to present his thoughts. The following excerpt from his persuasive essay on “contributions that engineers would make to energy conservation” contains evidence of this:

Unlike art sciences, engineering major is not like easy come, easy go stuff....We as engineers often plan, design and develop any company we work for. It is a mistake to think that we do not contribute to energy conservation. We do many things to save the environment. If you think these words are not true, it is my way or the highway.(persuasive essay)

Although I drew his attention to the informal expressions, sentence structures, incorrect choices of metaphor, and how he should professionally support his claims with evidence during student-teacher conferences, he refused to accept my suggestions at the beginning on the grounds that:

Teacher, you told us that we have to have our own voices when writing papers. I noticed that there are many styles of writing in the examples we discussed earlier at classrooms. I am an engineer! I have to use my own way of writing I think. (Teacher-student conference)

Refat's reaction and persistence in using his own style of writing, reflects his strong inclination to express his voice through texts, which in turn reflects the autonomy of his thinking and his authorial presence. I, however, suggested to him that although it was important that he had his voice in such argumentative essays, nevertheless, he needed to project his voice in the professional way that is generally expected in academic writing, and that he needed to consider his audience when writing. I further asked him to compare his paper again with similar texts in order to gain more understanding of why academic texts are structured in the way they are, and of how writers support their arguments with evidence etc. Interestingly, his desire for and sensitivity regarding self-voicing in writing were still evident even after he had compared his paper with other texts produced in similar contexts. He listed some phrases and expressions used in a published article about “Engineers and Energy Conservation” and asked me the following questions: “Do I have to memorize those expressions, and replicate the same style when writing my paper? If so, where is my voice?”

Refat's strong desire to retain his own voice when writing gave rise to numerous opportunities for negotiation between us. I informed him that developing self-voicing is an ongoing process, and that in order for him to present his thinking as autonomous and

to differentiate it from that of other writers, his self-voicing must actually be a critical reflection of multiple voices. On the basis of this notion, we analysed other texts together and went through more examples to enhance his understanding. He eventually came to understand the point, but he still somehow felt that we, as writing teachers, should have taught such issues more explicitly in our writing classes. He said politely:

Teacher, do you mind if I say something about these issues of voice /position in argumentative essays, and informal way of writing, etc.? I think we should be made aware of them well in advance....not to teach us after penalizing our works (Teacher-student conference).

Such indirect and yet informative critiques of my classroom pedagogies from the students' points of view not only helped me reflect upon my practice, but also allowed me to become aware of the immediate needs of my students in writing classrooms. Informed by the experience I had with Refat, I subsequently managed to address the problems of self-voicing in writing with other students on the same course. This is also in line with Canagarajah's (2002) view that "it is at the level of voice that we gain agency to negotiate these categories of the self, adopt a reflexive awareness of them, and find forms of coherence and power that suit their interests" (p. 268).

It should be mentioned, however, it is a daunting job to accommodate student-writers' desires to express themselves and sustain the conventions of academic writing in EFL contexts. This is particularly true with Saudi students such as those on my course, whose life history in writing has placed them in a disadvantageous position: that is their voices and agency have not been tapped in their former writing classes (Barnawi, 2011), but they are suddenly required to express their voices and write in a professional way in the final year of their programmes. Interestingly, Refat himself unintentionally acknowledged, in his reflective letter in the end of the semester portfolio, the difficulty of striking a balance between expressing his own voice and maintaining academic writing conventions. He stated that:

Academic Writing II was like World War II, the lessons like battles, and the teacher was our leader. We have fought many battles; we won in some and [were] defeated in others but at the end we won the war. As they say, losing a battle teaches you how to win a war. I will mention some battles that I experienced in Academic Writing II, like self-editing, peer editing, self-voice. (Refat)

Ali's experience of academic writing: Issues of content

Moving from writing in order to display knowledge to writing in order to construct knowledge was another major challenge my students experienced in this course. The story of Ali in his 'Read, Reason, Response' task is an interesting example. In this course, students are required to choose a topic that is related to their specializations and then critically evaluate it through discussions and the building of logical arguments, in addition to proven research methods and documentation styles (e.g., APA). Ali, a mechanical engineering student, was excited when he chose an article about mechanical engineering safety to evaluate. At the beginning, in the student-teacher conference, he

was confident when I asked him to justify his choice. His reply was as follows: “this topic is within my major and I know a lot about it.” Interestingly, the first draft of his evaluative essay showed that he had successfully managed to organize his paper with regard to layout, for instance, in the introductory paragraph, thesis statement and transition signals/paragraphs. Nevertheless, he failed to evaluate the article critically and to justify his arguments either professionally or scientifically. For example, in his evaluative essay, he agreed with the author’s statement that “there are three key risks associated with mechanical engineering: exposure to hazardous substances, uncontrolled fires, and working in confined spaces.” In the teacher-student conference, I deliberately acted as if I was well acquainted with his subject, and told him that he should not have agreed with it because it was wrong. Ali was unable to hold back his reaction to my comments. He replied by saying, “Teacher, this is mechanical engineering, and I have been studying this for more than four years...I...umm, I mean I thought you were checking my English only.” I politely drew his attention to the fact that, firstly, he could not give clear reasons as to ‘why’ he supported the statement, which was a principal requirement of the ‘*Read, Reason, Response*’ task. Secondly, the article he chose was published in 1990; thus, reading more recent articles might reveal more key risks associated with mechanical engineering in the 21st century. I politely told him that, “I am not a mechanical engineering teacher, but I want you to improve your way of thinking and writing in a professional way.” I also pointed out that he had not cited or acknowledged the work of others to support his position. After a long argument, he agreed to revise his paper based on my comments, as well as to read some recent articles.

As with other students in my classes, these problems lay in Ali’s misperceptions of and lack of experience in writing. That is, when approaching the task he was unable to make an association between his knowledge of his major subject, writing conventions, and the research skills he had acquired on the course. I personally believe that my students, including Ali, should not be blamed for such practices. This is because in high school writing classrooms Saudi students are often asked to write short paragraphs on topics given by their teachers, without being given the space to think, research, or make individual decisions. Hence, they tend to write only what comes to mind or off handedly, using their prior experiences, knowledge and imagination rather than evidence. Worse still, none of the three writing courses in their current engineering programmes required them to choose a topic based on their subject of study, to practice writing extended argumentative essays, evaluate the work of others, or do research. Consequently, producing a piece of professional writing in the final year of their engineering programmes seems to be a demanding task for them, on both epistemic and cognitive levels.

In a later teacher-student conference, however, I noticed that Ali appeared to be satisfied with my previous comments. He started the conference with smiles and stated:

Oh, really, thank you teacher for rejecting my paper last week. After reading two recent articles on the same topic, I learned that most of the arguments in the first journal were outdated. Also, there are more than three key risks associated with mechanical engineering, and my mechanical engineering teacher has agreed with me on this issue. (Ali)

Ali's answer and reaction in the conference informed me of several things as a writing teacher. First, because of his past experience in writing, he was in a rush to present existing knowledge instead of exploring unknown knowledge through writing. Secondly, my rejection of his first paper caused him to read more and to construct knowledge centred on the same topic, and at the same time caused him to take the process of knowledge construction further by discussing the content of his paper with a subject matter teacher. Third, although Ali had read two recent articles about his topic, he still had self-doubt and tensions, which led him to confirm the fact that there are several key risks associated with mechanical engineering with his subject matter teacher.

It should be mentioned, however, that Ali's performance in the second draft was still unsatisfactory. He earned a low grade, since he could not write at the level of the course expectations and requirements. Hence, it is imperative for educators in different EFL settings to promote the notion of writing to construct knowledge among their students throughout their early education, in order to help them function well in today's competitive job markets upon graduation. Overlooking such practices in our education system will continue to produce students who have inappropriate perceptions of writing.

Issues of form with Saleh in academic writing classes

The third significant challenge some of my students experienced in academic writing throughout the summer semester was related mainly to grammar, sentence structure and word choices. Most of my students cannot produce grammatically correct sentences, even though they have studied English from intermediate grade (at the age of 12-13) to university level. In general, the writing ability demonstrated by some of the students in this course throughout their papers can be classified as mid-intermediate school level, for example, in their use of articles and verb tense. I was personally frustrated at this point, since the hours I spent commenting on form issues sometimes left little space for me to critique and address issues such as content and self-voicing in their writing. I sometimes felt that my students were being overwhelmed with my comments; consequently, I divided my comments based on my negotiations with the students. Importantly, I used different strategies to comment on their papers in order to accommodate their preferred learning strategies. My experience with Saleh during this course provides a good example of this.

Saleh has major problems in producing grammatically correct sentences when writing, and also the interference of his first language (L1) was noticeable throughout his papers. In our first conference, he demonstrated clear dissatisfaction after I covered his first two-page essay with red pen and gave him a low grade. His justification for his dissatisfaction was that at least I should be fair enough to recognize his ideas. I asked him nicely to read his paper aloud, saying I would listen to him while reading. As we went through his paper together, we could not identify the clear ideas that he said should be recognized because the interference of Arabic had adversely affected the message he wanted to convey. I informed him we have significant differences between Arabic and English. For example, "the generic syntactic structure in Arabic is Predicate + Subject + Object, while in English, by contrast, the generic syntactic structure is Subject + Predicate + Object" (Barnawi, 2010). I suggested he try to keep this in mind when writing. During the conference, I helped him to correct some parts of his essay, on the assumption that he would notice major mistakes in subsequent drafts. Nevertheless, he

appeared to be very disappointed, and he felt that it was too much for him to focus on grammar, content and the other requirements of the course all at the same time. He said:

To be honest, teacher, the summer semester is just 8 weeks [long] and I cannot learn all these elements of writing and apply them at the same time. Can we prioritize the feedback? I want you to focus on my ideas more. (Saleh)

This reaction and request informed me that my heavy-handed feedback on form may have dampened his enthusiasm for writing evaluative essays during the rest of the course. In order to change his attitude toward writing and balance my feedback at the same time, I told him that editing is as important as content, and said I would give him a self-editing checklist to use while writing his papers, and we could focus on content in our next conference. Interestingly enough, his second draft showed that he had somehow transformed the negotiated solutions for the problems identified. That is, he had written some short sentences and placed *s + v + o* above these sentences. Although some of his sentences are now grammatically correct, issues such as verb tense and complex sentences are yet to be resolved by Saleh. However, importantly, activities such as modeling and deconstructing, joint construction of texts and comparing similar texts, along with conferences, have made him improve the content of his papers, namely, idea generation, organization, layout and so forth. As he mentioned it in his reflective letter “I can tell that my writing has improved slightly; nevertheless, there is still a long way to go. Eight weeks will not be enough to fix all my problems in writing. But I know my needs.”

Concluding Remarks and Pedagogical Implications

This study, taking Bakhtin’s (1981) work of dialogism as well as Darwin and Norton’s (2015) model of investment in language learning as points of departure, examines the effect of negotiating pedagogies in Saudi college EFL writing classrooms. Notably, participants’ reactions to the negotiating strategies brought to their writing classrooms ranged from appropriation, wake-up call and awareness, to interrogation and resistance (see the cases of Refat, Ali and Saleh above for examples). While the concept of negotiating pedagogies in EFL classrooms is endorsed by some students (Bander and Talal), others resisted (Khaled), got frustrated (Taher), found it problematic to put it into practice (Bilal) and continued questioning its efficacy (Hamoda), among other issues. Here, it is critical to note that negotiating students’ pedagogical needs in EFL writing classrooms could simultaneously create different expectations and attitudes and, at the same time, make the relationship between writing teachers and students more complex than might initially have appeared. Student-writers often come to writing classrooms “with baggage, desires, hopes and fears about the world [of writing]” (Kent, 1994, p. 4). Nevertheless, through a dialogic learning approach, a teacher can create spaces for his/her students to become more active and agentive in EFL writing classrooms. A learner agency is the essence of academic writing classrooms (Bakhtin, 2004; Morrell, 2004). As Lier (2010) articulates:

Learner agency is attached to identity, and this emphasizes the social and dialogical side of agency: it depends not only on the individual, but also on the

[classroom] environment...learning is inseparably tied to agency. The employment of agency depends on a learning conducive environment that allows and instigates a diversity of manifestations of agency at different levels. (p. 5)

While it is tempting to state that such pedagogical practice could create internally persuasive discourses (Bakhtin, 2004) and offer possibilities of interaction, negotiation, resistance and appropriation in EFL writing classrooms, it is also important to acknowledge that it is too demanding to deeply engage student-writers to produce high standards pieces of texts centered on engineering discipline, and fully accommodate different individual's needs, especially when the writing teacher does not have the functional academic literacy of English for Engineering purposes (i.e., knowing the content, genre, discourse, lexis, and terminology of English for Engineering). Since engineering educators do not have enough time to teach writing (Kranov, 2009; Pierson & Pierson, 1997), these students brought with them many individual desires, prior experiences in writing, and broader rhetorical strategies that conflicted with academic writing conventions (Connor, 2002). Writing teachers may not have the functional academic literacy of all engineering disciplines (Benesch, 2001); hence, more collaboration between engineering educators and the English language teacher would help to address those students' needs more effectively.

The findings of this study demonstrate that some of my engineering students tend to remain detached from the subject matter when producing an academic piece of writing (see the examples above). This might be due to their past experiences in writing that required them to write short, structured paragraphs on a topic given to them by their teachers. These engineering students will more likely encounter communication problems in their workplaces upon graduation because they have little knowledge or experience of professional writing. It is imperative for writing teachers to provide discipline-specific writing support for engineering students, in collaboration with engineering faculty members, as large numbers of these students will frequently have to fulfill high expectations of their writing by future employers. In such practices, collective investment could be realized from language teachers, engineering faculty members and student-writers as well. Several studies (e.g., Kranov, 2009; Kreth, 2000; Silyn-Roberts, 1998; Tamkhane, & Singh, 2013) in English academic writing have remarked that a new professional engineer spends 40% of his time writing, while senior engineers may do so for up to 95% of their time on the job. This suggests that promoting an awareness of pedagogical outcomes of "learning to write and writing to learn" (Wells, 2010) among engineering students in writing classrooms should become the essence of academic writing.

Needless to say, the negotiating pedagogies employed in this course offered more opportunities for me, as well as for the students, to understand the strategies they preferred in writing classrooms and to accommodate their pedagogical needs accordingly and, at the same time, conform to academic writing conventions. For example, on the course, Refat took part in several arguments and activities that promote thinking aloud; consequently, he became aware of how to express himself and, at the same time, maintain the conventions of academic writing in EFL contexts, particularly in discipline-specific writing.

These classroom pedagogical practices provided students with a real sense of ownership of their own writing rather than one of powerlessness in the face of forms that are simply imposed. They also allowed me to understand my students' needs, and to accept their negotiations with respect and open-mindedness. As Canagarajah (2002) explains, "understanding the strategies preferred by the students to accomplish their pedagogical tasks will help teachers to encourage students to adopt their own styles of learning rather than imposing methods [or strategies] from the outside" (p. 144). Writing teachers need to educate their students regarding the implications of using their chosen strategies, as well as about the results "for the representation of their identity, discourse and" (ibid) self-voicing. Such a 'socially engaged' and 'ideologically informed' approach to writing instruction would help EFL student-writers to acquire meta-pedagogical and critical awareness of writing and, at the same time, address the gap between *individual* and *public professional writing* (Canagarajah, 1997; Liu, 2008; Pico, 2013).

It should be acknowledged that this study has several limitations. The negotiating pedagogies I used in this study have imitations when there is a final grade that is required, and this grade ignores much of the dialogic and collaborative work that has been done (See the case of Saleh above for example). Hence, teachers may need to explore alternative ways to assess students in their writing classrooms. Another obvious limitation of this study is in the space of this course; i.e., it might be challenging for the students to master different writing competencies within 8-week summer course. Students' educational background (especially in academic writing) in high schools might also be a challenge for me throughout the program; i.e., there is a tension between grammatical and genre-based conformity (in high schools) and the negotiating pedagogies I employed in the course as shown above.

Overall, this study helps me re-examine my own assumptions, and at the same time look at my own classroom pedagogical practices from different perspectives. Specifically, it gives me ample opportunities to: (i) to acknowledge the crucial role played by students in constructing their own knowledge of EFL writing by means of negotiation and interaction; (ii) to reflect critically upon our own practices as EFL writing teachers so that we can assist student-writers' learning accordingly, as well as (iii) to demonstrate how these negotiating practices could be implemented in college EFL writing classrooms, and how they are recalled during exams.

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¹Prior to conducting this study, consent forms were collected from all participants clearly stating the purposes of the study as well as confidentiality and other related matters.