

Confidence: Effect on Engagement and Participation of At-Risk EFL Students in Learning to Write

Carole Vinick Rosbruch
Secondary School EFL Educator

Abstract

Teaching writing to at-risk for academic failure high school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students is difficult yet necessary, as English is the most commonly used and widely spoken language in the world today. English is a part of mainstream global commerce, technology, economics, medicine, academics, entertainment and travel. The at-risk students in the study are at a level at least two years behind the average EFL student of the same age and class. Most of the students in the study are not only at an entry-level of language learning, but for any number and combination of reasons, many students also feel demotivated. In contrast, other students suffer from amotivation with regards to EFL and learning how to write. The study aimed to see if the building of the confidence of these at-risk learners would be able to be used as a motivational tool to engage students to want to actively participate in the learning of how to write in English. Data was collected via interviews, journals and questionnaires related to the students' stated levels of confidence, or perceived levels of confidence regarding writing. The results in this article show that weekly quizzes can be used to build the students' confidence level with regards to EFL writing and in turn, be used as a motivational tool to engage students to participate and learn how to engage actively.

Keywords: at-risk, EFL, confidence, writing, high school

1. Introduction

Student engagement instills confidence, sparks motivation and is critically important in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing, particularly in at-risk students (Dean-Rumsey, 1998). Still, that fact is not meant to imply that the at-risk students are eager and waiting to be taught. People engage in activities or are more likely to engage in activities they find fun and do well. The at-risk students in the study are not expected to be labeled as a group of students that typically find writing in English as a task the students would associate with the word fun, nor would EFL writing be considered a skill in which they consider themselves good. Writing is challenging and involves combining of mental and physical processes (Berninger, Nagy, and Beers, 2011). “To write is to do many things at once”, (Mason and Washington, 1992) and writers must balance issues of planning, purpose, content, language use, convention, vocabulary, penmanship and more; rendering writing the most complex use and form of a language (Matsuda, 2003).

There are some interesting considerations in learning a second language writing system that specifically affect the L1 Hebrew speaker when learning to write. The first one is the writing direction. English is left to right directional, whereas Hebrew is written from right to left, affecting how an individual organizes and sees the world (Tversky, Kugelmass, and Winter, 1991). The students must orient their eye and hand coordination differently which affects temporal cognition (Tversky, et al, 1991). Another consideration is that Hebrew is a consonantal writing system leaving out vowels, making it more difficult for the Hebrew EFL writer to spell and use correct vowels to represent sounds. L2 learners often draw on L1 to help navigate difficulties and make sense of the culture of writing. It is not uncommon for L2 EFL learners to leave out grammatical morphemes like to, the, is, -ing, or any conjugation of the verb, to be, causing L2 writers to have increased awareness of the target language (Cook, 2009).

According to Aristotle, writing is a by-product of speech. Often, EFL students need to translate words, expressions and ideas into oral language in L1 to encode and decode to write in L2 (Beers & Nagy, 2009). Higher cognitive functions are more fully developed via verbal communication in the form of writing (Adams, 1973, Applebee, 1985, Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975, Emig, 1977). The translation into L2 is laborious, primarily for students with any learning difficulty. A direct correlation was found between receptive vocabulary and the size and quality of the L2 writing (Llach and Gallego, 2009). For students that lack the knowledge and use of the 2000 to 3000 most commonly used words in the English language, as do the students in this study, the task of learning to write can be even more burdensome (Staehr, 2008).

An at-risk student is a student whose educational process is hampered by developmental problems due to biological and environmental factors and who requires temporary or ongoing intervention to succeed academically (Azulay, et, al, 2010, p.26). The students in this study finished junior high school having failed four or more core subject classes, did not have more than one class subject in any area with an overall yearly scored average of 80 or above out of

a possible 100 total and had poor attendance. However, the students were labeled as having showed potential according to their junior high school counselors and teachers. Students in the study were labeled as at-risk of academic failure for any number and combination of reasons that impede the student's educational process. These barriers may be school related, the student's learning style is not properly addressed, or there is a culture conflict. Other obstacles may be student-centered, relating to cognition, peer pressure, ADHD and other behavioral issues, low self-esteem, poor attendance and more. Barriers to learning for the at-risk student may also be related to the community's lack of services or needed support. The barriers that hinder an at-risk student's learning may also be a dysfunctional home, a home of low socio-economic status, drugs, alcohol, or even the loss of a parent (Duttweiler, 1995).

Students have little exposure to writing in school in all subjects, and when students are given an opportunity to write, the tasks are usually short answer and fill in the blank. Experiences with writing in a school setting are limited and generally for an audience of the teacher and a specific task and purpose leading to a grade. Assignments frequently have no relevance to the students' lives, making it more difficult for them to engage in the tasks. The students may choose not to "waste their time" on irrelevant assignments. With regards to EFL, the writing experience for the at-risk student is usually unpleasant, negative and embarrassing. The tasks are product-based, with instruction on skills mastery where the students receive poor feedback, as opposed to process-based, where students are encouraged to express their ideas leading to higher function and engagement with the language. Dewey's concept of education is about putting meaningful activity into learning and participation in classroom democracy versus rote learning and teacher authoritarianism. ".....the language should engage learners' reality and activate the learning process" (Seidlhofer, 2011, p.198). This study tries to illuminate the positive effects of learner engagement.

Due to the negative impact of past experiences with writing, the at-risk students may lack self-confidence with regards to learning to write in a foreign language. However, this article will illustrate that when a teacher takes a supportive role, that of a facilitator, in the process of teaching and learning, scaffolding, modeling, and collaboration for writing, the use of weekly quizzes helps students help themselves develop confidence and competence (Cremin 2006, Cremin and Baker, 2010, Wood, Bruner, and Ross, 1976). The thought was that when students see and feel success with what most English Language Learners consider the most difficult aspect of learning, writing, the willingness of the at-risk students to write is increased.

The research study aims to examine how an intervention program affects and contributes to at-risk EFL high school students writing in English. The objectives of this study are to build the participants' confidence in writing a paragraph in English via organization, sentence structure and length, explore the students' perspectives of the intervention program and assess how the ability of the students to express themselves in writing, increases the students' levels of confidence in order to promote the desire to learn and write more. The research questions to be investigated in this study were:

- i) What role do confidence and perceived confidence play in the willingness of the at-risk EFL student to try and learn how to write?
- ii) What is the effect of weekly quizzes on confidence?

2. Literature Review

Though there are studies on the value of weekly quizzes on a learner's performance (Geist & Soehren, 1977), increase in motivation, attendance and confidence (Ehrlich, 1995; Sporer, 2001; Wilder, et al, 2001), there is a comparatively small pool of L2 research that focuses on the at-risk EFL student and the specific pedagogical goal of using weekly quizzes to build confidence in learning how to write paragraphs. This research hopes to enlarge the pool of studies and direction of future research on the impact of weekly assessments on the at-risk EFL learner.

Positive psychology experts submit that people are more likely to do things they enjoy and consider themselves to do well, which may carry over into other facets of their lives (Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Since writing is not typically an activity at-risk EFL learners consider themselves doing well, they will not likely enjoy it and may not be motivated even to try to learn how to write in English. Hence, employment of the Humanistic Learning Theory (HLT), developed and introduced by Maslow and later expanded by Rogers, and Bugental in the early 1900s (Vyas, 2019), and based on the belief that feelings drive people, is applicable (Angyal, et al., 1981). HLT claims that once a student's needs have been met, she may discover and reach her maximum potential (King, 1983, p.40; Parkay, 1998). To achieve this feat, an atmosphere promoting "good feelings" needs to be created. How can this be accomplished with a population of students accustomed to failure and bad feelings? Tuckman, 1996 found frequent quizzes have a more positive and profound effect on students with low grades and achievement scores.

According to Graham and Harris 1987, "good feelings" can be accomplished via mimicking. Students benefit from explicit teaching, referred to as modeling, with organized and applicable strategies rather than focusing on lower-level constructs. The Social Learning Theory, introduced in the 1970s by Albert Bandura, built on the research of earlier behavior theorists (Miller and Dollard 1940s; Miller 1956; Sears 1951; Miller, Galanter, Pribam, 1960) suggests people learn and are motivated by observation and modeling (Bandura, 1977) and that we choose which behavior to mimic. Behaviors with positive rewards are the most likely to be repeated (Bandura, 1986, 1993). Zelman and Daniels, 1988 posit that a student's performance improves when the proper amount of time and preparation is allotted for each stage of a process, including assessment. These developed strategies play an essential role in helping learners with varying levels of proficiency (Graves, Nunan, 1989; Richards, 1990; Silvia, 2015) gain the control and empowerment to want to learn. It also helps the learner carve a more secure spot within their social community (Lewin, 1946) as learning is a social activity with teacher-student and student-student interaction (De Silva Joyce and Feez, 2012). Self-regulated learners often exhibit a greater sense of self-efficacy, are more cognizant of

their strengths and weaknesses and are more likely to find ways of acquiring new skills (Zimmerman and Schunk, 2011). The students need an “agent” (educator) to synthesize and transform stimuli from the environment into comprehensible and valuable information for the student (Feuerstein & Feuerstein, 1991). However, that may still not be enough to entice the student to participate and engage in the learning process.

The Expectancy-Value Theory brought to attention in the 1980s by Jacquelynne Eccles, expanding on the work of Atkinson from the 1950s and Vroom from the 1960s, claims that the desire to participate, the motivation to achieve, is based on experiences that influence a student and how much effort needs to be exerted to achieve the desired result (Vroom, 1964; Eccles & Wigfield, 1995). A student is motivated to do a task when they believe in the probability of success and how much value they associate with that task (Eccles, 2009, p. 82).

The students’ experiences with EFL assessments in the past have been negative. Negative self-related cognition begins with thoughts of failure and self-deprecation and then avoidance. Since achievement emotions are conceptualized along three dimensions: object focus (the activity itself vs. the outcome), valence (positive vs. negative quality), and activation (deactivation vs. activation) (Pekrun & Stephens, 2010), the negative stigma associated with assessments needed to be diffused. For this study, the researcher-educator developed and introduced weekly quizzes based on the specific material taught and learned each week. The quizzes were fair and designed for each student to earn scores of 90 and above out of 100 points. According to the Control-Value Theory of achievement emotions (Pekrun, 2006), the three most pervasive emotions in EFL education are anxiety, boredom, and enjoyment (Li, 2021; Piniel & Albert, 2018) and are connected to both learning activities and outcomes (Pekrun, 2006). Once the student has experienced several negative encounters with language learning, she may associate language learning with anxiety and apprehension (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). The establishment of routine via class structure and weekly quizzes creates predictability and helps reduce anxiety for the English Language Learner. Language learning anxiety is a psychological reaction incurred when a student feels she is unable to express herself (Horwitz, et al, 1986). Students are easily intimidated by not having tools to adequately communicate their thoughts and feelings. Weekly quizzes were routine, based on the week’s lessons, and were used to foster self-efficacy beliefs and reduce anxiety (Erhlich, 1995; Sporer, 2001). Systematic attention to positive behavior helped ensure the learners felt capable in their ability to acquire English Language Learning Skills. Easily attainable high, consistent scores on weekly quizzes were designed to evoke feelings of enjoyment while reducing anxiety and boredom. Weekly quizzes not only help students feel better about the material, but also helps them keep up their grade point averages (Haberyan, 2003), especially since the students were permitted to keep their 10 highest scores and drop the lowest ones.

In a process-based learning approach, learning focuses on how ideas are formulated and organized, rather than on grammar, spelling and conventions. In Israel, the Ministry of Education recognizes that each student learns differently. For this reason, the Ministry of

Education offers dispensation/accommodations for various aspects of EFL writing, including ignoring spelling and conventional mistakes, as well as a limit to the proportionate number of points that can be deducted from tasks for grammar mistakes. These accommodations mean less emphasis can be placed on skills that seem to slow down the at-risk high school EFL learner. The student can concentrate efforts on increasing vocabulary, varying sentence structure and learning formats and constructs to enhance the “big picture” of the students’ overall levels of writing. The student does not get “stuck” on the lower-level items. The teacher/researcher introduces relevant topics to help generate ideas to best facilitate the students’ interests (Tribble, 1997). The most reliable way for students’ interests to be known is through formal and informal face-to-face interviews and questionnaires.

Each section and aspect of writing was broken down and taught in chunks and each was scaffolded on the other. Gardner’s narrative entry points were used to ensure each student had a way to connect to the material being taught and presented and would have a way to be triggered and activated for use when needed. The students did not learn basic grammar as separate constructs, but rather, the students were shown ways of writing, so they could express themselves immediately and at a level conducive to the level and type of writing the student wanted to produce. Most of the teaching of writing was spent on aspects of organizing thoughts and writing an outline, prior to the actual paragraph. During these phases, the students modeled what they had been taught, shared their outlines and ways of organizing their thoughts with other students, but used different reasons, examples or support. The less room for creativity made it a little easier for the students to reproduce (Silva, 1990). For a short while in the beginning of the process, several students were hesitant to participate, unsure their ideas were worth sharing. Though this was expected (Graves, 1985), it was a small and easily overcome obstacle. The students quickly learned all responses were valued and thus, responded with participation. The process and phases allow for a shift of focus from a teacher dominated instruction to a shared environment of responsibility and accountability between teachers and students (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983).

3. Intervention Program/Rationale

Trying to build confidence in writing does not necessarily involve the why of a particular sequence or construct, but more importantly to know what it needs to be (Cook, 2009) and is the justification for putting a great deal of emphasis on the experimental process of modeling and scaffolding for this research. The students in this study were at least two years behind their peers. Some of the students were unfamiliar with the names and sounds of letters, and how to form them, even after a minimum of six years of language education. These students were exposed to the same basic constructs of beginning writing every year. The students expressed boredom, frustration and embarrassment. Weekly graded quizzes designed for success from any student who attended class is intriguing, inspiring and different from any previous EFL experience they had had. Writing is generally considered the most difficult task in English Language Learning for most EFL students, particularly those considered at-risk as confirmed by polls at the beginning of the study. According to Graham, Harris, & Mason,

2005, the difficulty of learning to write pays off as it encourages thinking, motivates thought, promotes learning, and helps with reflection. It also helps facilitate discourse competence in grammar (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). Mastering the difficult skill of writing helps the students gain confidence and a desire to continue learning. Weekly quizzing can be used as a technique to promote learning (Jacobs and Chase 1992; Zipp 2007) and retention (Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel, 2014).

Meaningful essays and compositions are built on a genre-based pedagogy using process-based scaffolding and means of assessment. The teaching method aims to help the students understand lexical and grammatical features associated with various genres used in class (De Silva Joyce and Feez, 2012, p.90). The type of text dictates the register, and the students learn to build and recognize functional paragraphs. According to the Writer's Workshop approach, systematic approaches help alleviate the need to be "creative", or need limited creativity for each aspect of the writing process. For example, in this study, the students were taught an opening that is applicable to responses to opinion writing. Students were taught that all writing regarding opinions could start in one of two ways: "*While some people believe....., other people believe..... I agree thatfor several reasons.*" Or, "*Some people think.....others think..... my opinion is.....for several reasons.*" Learning and memorizing these openings allow the at-risk student to spend less time agonizing over how to start writing an opinion paragraph and concentrate on building the paragraph while increasing knowledge, vocabulary and use. I built frames and parameters much like a formula for writing, gradually increasing the level and difficulty with the students' mastery. I did so at the students' individual paces and needs regarding writing. Every few weeks, students formulated specific personal writing goals according to mastery of other goals on their individualized charts, for which the students were responsible and accountable to monitor, update and adjust accordingly.

If according to HLT, good feelings drive motivation to help reach maximum potential, then it is reasonable to believe that getting higher marks on weekly assessments is a way to bring about good feelings to generally, low-achieving students. Being that these students need to be "won over" as their associations with ELL are negative, SLT's use of modeling assists in the students being able to learn and have new constructs reinforced each week and then assessed. This system contributes to the students' trust and reliability in the system. And, according to EVT, will help motivate the student to want to succeed. The students see immediate results with minimal effort and learn how much effort is needed to get their desired results. Because the system is process-based, all classes of instruction follow the same general format, with quizzes the last class of each week. Consistency is inherent with the expectations and reliability in routines which help create predictability, thereby reducing students' possible anxiety and boredom. The negative connotations with ELL can be replaced with positive emotions. Consistency and positivity can enhance attendance, performance and motivation. Weekly quizzes promote students' regular interaction with class material and increasing their ability to connect and retain information (Hughes, et al, 2020). All of these components together contribute to an increase in confidence.

4. Methodology

The qualitative research design was a quasi-experimental single group, longitudinal study of two years with pre- and post-intervention interviews, as well as four other scheduled individual student-teacher/researcher meetings in-between to record stated and/or perceived levels of confidence with regards to EFL writing, and of course, a great deal of informal interaction between the teacher/researcher and student participants.

Participants:

The research study originally began with sixteen tenth-grade students between the ages of 15-18 years old, eleven males and five females, all of whom were labeled “at-risk” for academic failure out of high school due to low and lack of achievement or performance caused by and influenced by any number of factors from the home environment, community, school, or personal issues. All of the students in the study experience learning difficulties and all of the students started their high school career in the lowest level of EFL offered and required to complete the fulfillment of a high school diploma; a level at least two years behind the expected level for students in the same grade and exposure to EFL. The student participants were not labeled at-risk because of their level of English and they may have been placed in the lowest level of English due to poor attendance, lack of assessment scores and grades, low assessment scores and grades or any combination of attendance, scores and grades.

All of the students in the study expressed and exhibited difficulty with written expression in EFL, as well as difficulty with written expression in L1 via questionnaires and interviews. It was observed and students mentioned having trouble with all facets of writing including brainstorming, organizing and writing supporting details, sequencing, and even identifying the task. Part of the issues stemmed from a lack of vocabulary, convention, and the inability to string together simple three-word sentences due to lack of grammar, construction and vocabulary. Through observations, interviews, and questionnaires, it was learned that the students were unaware of proper paragraph form, lacked completeness of ideas, had no awareness of topic sentences, nor supporting details, exhibited issues of illegible handwriting, staying within the lines, spacing, issues with spelling, punctuation, grammar and even letter formation. The first time I spoke to the students and inquired about their ability to write in English, I received responses of, “...I know how to write in English”.....yet, when asked to show how, the students who had answered began writing the alphabet letters.

Tools/instruments

The participants were given a questionnaire prior to the start of intervention, in which the students ranked their confidence level with regards to EFL writing on a scale of one to ten with ten being the highest. In addition, students met for face-to-face interviews with the teacher researcher where students were asked the same several questions about their confidence level and motivational level as sometimes there arises a discrepancy between answers when someone is alone or sharing out loud with someone else.

The students were interviewed to ensure the instructional goals of the intervention program were in line with the students' needs. It was discovered through these informal interviews and individual education program (IEP) planning, that students were unaware of vocabulary words related to writing such as the meaning of the word paragraph, what makes a paragraph good, topic sentences, main idea, sequencing, supporting ideas and details, organizing ideas and thoughts, conclusion, use of connectors, consistency, convention and coherence. The L1 was written next to the English to ensure the students understood what was being questioned.

During the two academic year study, student participants were given writing tasks at six intervals during the study to gauge progress, given weekly quizzes based on material learned and experienced related to EFL writing, had six formal interviews with the teacher researcher where their confidence levels were specifically questioned via the IEPs, and had countless interactions and informal meetings to discuss progress and feelings towards EFL writing that were recorded and transcribed.

The students' writing improves when teachers structure time and activities for each stage of the writing process (Zemelman and Daniels, 1988). And, since peer collaboration can lead to even better writing (Zemelman and Daniels, 1988), group planning and "sharing of ideas" were incorporated into the modeling and scaffolding of structured writing activities and instruction for this research to facilitate making the complex skill of writing, appear simpler and easier to master for the students.

Students in the research study were quizzed weekly during the last class hour of EFL instruction for each week, that covered some aspect of the writing process that was taught or reviewed during that week. This population of students does not do any type of homework, meaning all of the learning was in the school setting with a great deal of repetition and multiple methods of explaining and sharing.

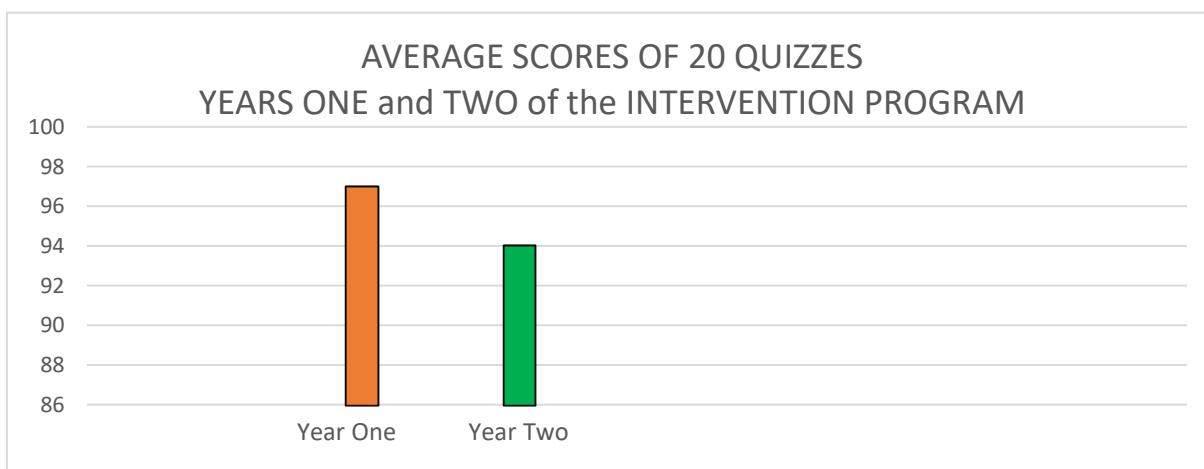
Sometimes, the students were questioned on the organization of writing, connectors most common in writing for various genres, appropriate vocabulary, main ideas, supporting details, outlining, and more. The quizzes were designed for students to earn scores of 90 points out of 100 and higher. If the students attended classes that week and paid attention, there was no way they would not succeed on the weekly quiz. At the end of each semester, the 10 highest quiz grades were averaged and entered on the feedback system as a single test grade! The catch was, there were no make-up quizzes if the student missed the quiz. However, there were more than 10 weeks in each semester which meant the student had ample opportunity to earn ten high scores and really learn how to write and write well. The quizzes were graded and scores with immediate feedback were given to the students who recorded and kept track of their scores on a chart.

5. Results

The charts below illustrate the grade averages of the yearly quizzes and the students' stated confidence levels regarding their writing in English, as well as, their stated feelings of confidence towards their levels of English, in general.

Figure 1 shows the yearly quiz grade point average, out of a possible 100 points, of the students during the two-year intervention program. Each semester, each student kept track of and were permitted to choose which scores were calculated into their yearly grades.

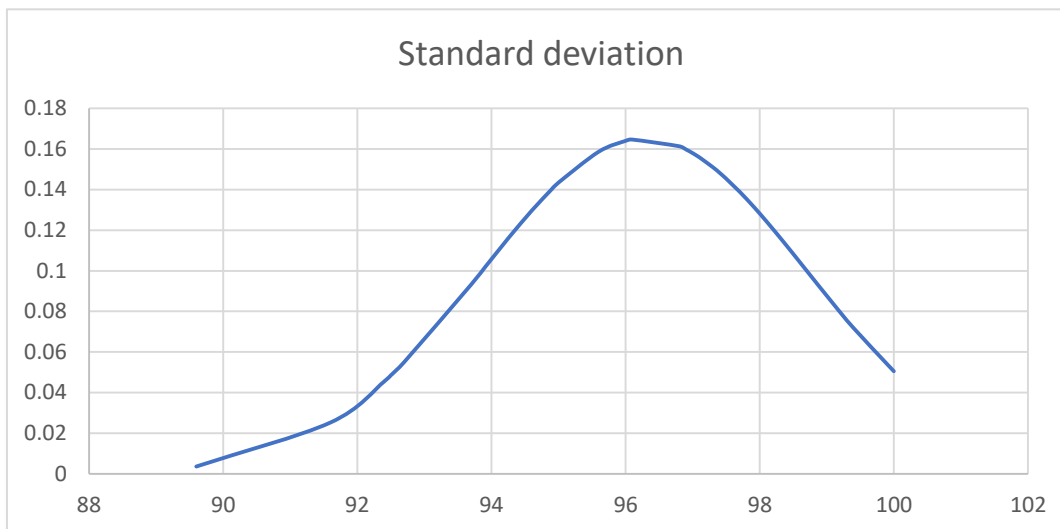
Figure 1: Year 1 and Year 2 average of weekly quizzes based on top 20 scores for each student



. Source: (Quizzes)

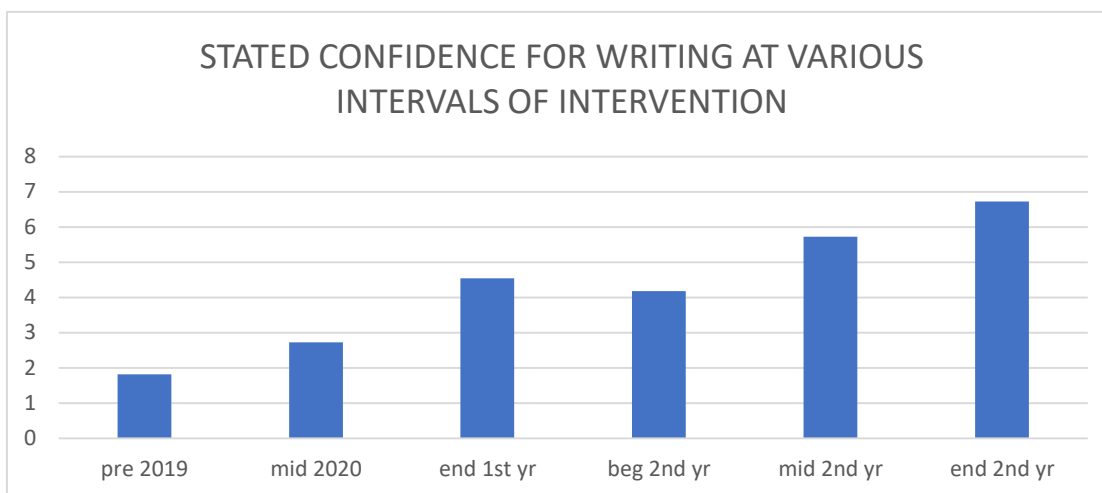
Figure 2 represents the standard deviation of quiz averages among years one and two of the study. The mean is 96; standard deviation =2.42. There was very little deviation or variance among the quiz scores between years one and two of the study, indicating the scores on the quizzes were consistent throughout the two year period of data collection. What did change was the response to the quizzes, which translates to the students' stated confidence levels of EFLwriting writing and overall level of English. There was no significant change in test scores averages, however, the consistency of high quiz scores helped contribute to an increase in the students' confidence and perceived confidence levels with regards to writing.

Figure 2: Chart of Standard Deviation Between Years One and Two of the Intervention



Source: (Quizzes)

Figure 3: Chart of students' stated confidence



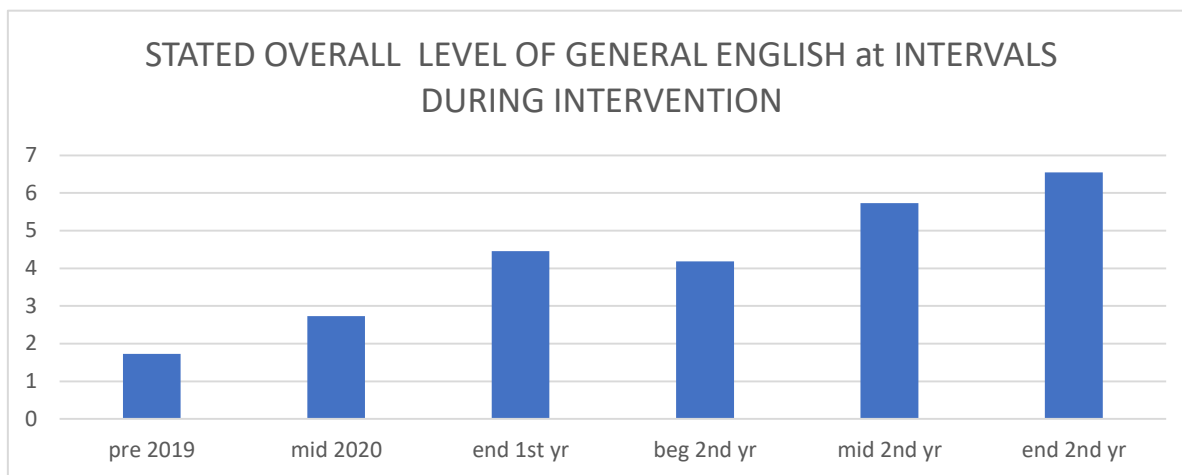
Source: (Interviews)

Figures 3 and 4 show stated confidence levels, and the students' stated EFL levels in general, at the pre-intervention and post-intervention.

Figure 3 illustrates the results of the students being asked to state their confidence level on a scale of one to ten with ten being the highest level. Some students chose a value of zero; not even able to allow themselves to start on the chart. A paired T- test was utilized to calculate the effect or perceived effect of weekly quizzes on an EFL student's confidence with writing. According to the paired T- test, the average feeling of confidence towards writing in English pre-intervention was (Mean = 0.909 and SD = 1.044), and post-intervention (Mean = 6.955 and SD = 1.604); $t=12.5005$ and the p value is less than 0.0001. By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be extremely statistically

significant. The mean of pre-intervention versus post-intervention stated confidence levels is -6.045 and the 95% confidence interval of this difference from -7.123 to -4.968. The null hypothesis can be rejected indicating that the use of weekly quizzes has a positive effect on the rise in confidence levels with regards to writing in English.

Figure 4: Chart of students' stated level of English



Source: (Interviews)

Figure 4 illustrates similar results to that of figure 2, but with regards to the students' confidence level with their overall general level of English pre and post-intervention. The students were asked to state their confidence level on a scale of one to ten with ten being the highest level. Again, some students chose a value of zero. A paired T- test was utilized to calculate the effect or perceived effect of weekly quizzes on an EFL student's confidence with regards to their English level, in general. According to the paired T- test, the average feeling of confidence towards their EFL levels pre-intervention was (Mean = 1.73 and SD = 1.90), and post-intervention (Mean = 6.55 and SD = 1.97); $t=9.6126$ and the p value is less than 0.0001. By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be extremely statistically significant. The mean of pre-intervention versus post-intervention stated confidence levels is -4.82 and the 95% confidence interval of this difference from -5.94 to -3.70. It can be concluded that weekly quizzes have a positive effect on the rise in confidence levels with regards to writing EFL levels, in general.

6. Discussion

The present study investigates the relationship between weekly quizzes designed for the at-risk EFL learner to consistently experience high marks and confidence to illustrate how the potential of confidence might predict writing engagement.

The weekly quizzes were graded on the spot and the scores with feedback were immediately given to the students who recorded and kept track of their scores on a chart. During the first quiz of the study, a couple of students yelled out, "This is so easy!". My immediate response was, "What about the quiz is easy?", to which one of the students replied, "I know all of the answers!". In front of the whole class, I asked the student if she

had been in class the whole week, I knew she had, to which she replied,” Yes!”. I said, “Great! That is why you think the quiz is easy! You were prepared! And, all of the quizzes will be easy for all of you if you come to class and pay attention.”

The students were not used to receiving such high marks in any of their classes, not just EFL class, and often were excited and surprised. One student asked in Hebrew, “Can I take a picture of my quiz grade? My grandma will never believe me!” Other students also asked to take pictures of their work to send to parents, other family members, friends, home room teachers, etc. As the program progressed and the students’ writing continued to improve, I received comments (in Hebrew) such as, “I can’t believe I can write 100 words in English...like, a whole page almost! I do not even write in Hebrew!” (L1). Other comments were along the lines of another student who said, “I am genius! I am the smartest student ever!”. All of the students’ work was kept in their individual folders so they could be reminded of their progress.

The significant hike in confidence may also be responsible for the increased and consistent attendance of the students. The students’ homeroom teachers joked and made remarks throughout the course of the two-year study that the students would sometimes be found to have attended English lessons and be truant for other classes that same day and throughout the week. “Incredible, he doesn’t show up for any class all week, but he shows up for English! What are you doing?”. The truth is we, the students and researcher, built a community that enabled the members to feel good about themselves and their contribution to the group and extended society. In the beginning of this article, it was mentioned that people tend to do things they like and that they do well. Here, it appears the students feel competent with their level of writing in English and enjoy it.

The second aim of the study was to determine what role, if any, confidence and perceived confidence play in the willingness of the at-risk EFL student to try and learn how to write. All of the students in the study had experienced failure on a regular basis with regards to language learning. These students could not be permitted to fail on the first few quizzes of the year, or it would have been a sign for them that nothing had changed and they would have stopped coming to the classes. The students needed to experience success immediately and consistently. The first few quizzes were what could be considered easy, however, they were made progressively more difficult. The significance is that as the class and assessment material became increasingly more difficult, there was no significant drop in the overall averages of the quizzes between the two years of the program. The entire scope of research was conducted during the times of Covid, and the results show above average consistency.

Based on the findings that weekly quizzes contributed to an increased feeling of confidence in the at-risk EFL students resulting in increased attendance, it can, therefore be suggested that the increased confidence or perceived confidence, positively affects the student’s motivation to continue writing and learning.

Another interesting note of interest is the pattern of the motivation increases and decreases. All of the students exhibited increases in their feelings of confidence with regards to writing in EFL, as well as, their levels in English overall. The interesting trend is that all

of the students experienced decreases between the end of year one and the beginning of year two of the study.

The weekly quizzes were the highlight of the week for many of the students. They looked forward to coming to class. They felt warm, secured, valued and confident. They knew they were a part of our class community and that they belonged there.

7. Conclusion

Critical importance on fostering an environment where learners feel confident and comfortable helps eliminate anxiety. Attendance was positively influenced as were quiz scores and attitudes towards learning writing. It can be concluded from the data collected via the questionnaires and in conferences, that fair and consistent weekly quizzes appear to contribute positively to the students' levels of confidence and perceived levels of confidence with regards to EFL writing. The building of the students' confidence can be seen as a motivational tool to engage the students to want to actively participate in the learning of how to write in English.

*Special note - by the end of the first year of the study, three male student-participants were moved to a higher-level English class and near the middle of the second year of the study, two other male student-participants had failed out of the public school system. The data collected from these students is not displayed in the charts above, however, all of the students expressed increases in their confidence levels with regards to writing in EFL and all of the students expressed increases in their general levels of EFL. The data of the five students that did not participate in the study's entirety was not calculated into the final results and analysis of the study. It is worth noting that the two students that failed out of the public school system, were passing one class each and that was English.

Acknowledgment

This paper is an output of the PhD program requirement of the Faculty of Letters at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania of the studies conducted 2019-2020 Academic Year both Fall and Spring Semesters and 2020-2021 Academic Year both Fall and Spring Semesters.

8. References

- Adams, J. N. (1973) *The Vocabulary of The Speeches in Tacitus' Historical Works*, University of Manchester press.
- Angyal, A., Maslow, A., Murray, H.A., Bugental, J.F.T., Murphy, G., Rogers, C. (1981). *Humanistic Psychology*. In: *Contemporary Theories and Systems in Psychology*. Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4684-3800-0_14

- Applebee, A. N. (1985). Studies in the spectator role: An approach to response to literature. In C. R. Cooper (Ed.), *Researching response to literature and the teaching of literature: Points of departure* (pp. 87-102). Norwood, NJ: Ablex
- Atwell, N. (1987). *In the middle: Writing, reading, and learning with adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Azulay, Y., Nahir, M., Levi-Mazloun, D., and Brown, J. 2010. Facts and Figures in the Education System 2010. Translated Protocol International Translations December 2010 p26 (pdf). Available at: <http://meyda.education.gov.il/files/MinhalCalcala/facts-and-figures2010.pdf> (Accessed: April 26th, 2020).
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological review*, 84(2), 191.
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. New York: General Learning Press.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1993). Perceived Self-Efficacy in Cognitive Development and Functioning. *Educational Psychologist*, 28:2, 117-148. DOI: 10.1207/s15326985ep2802_3
- Beers, S. F., and Nagy, W. E. (2009). Syntactic complexity as a predictor of adolescent writing quality: Which measures? Which genre? *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 22(2), 185–200. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-007-9107-5>
- Berninger, V. W., Nagy, W., & Beers, S. (2011). Child writers' construction and reconstruction of single sentences and construction of multi-sentence texts: Contributions of syntax and transcription to translation. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 24(2), 151–182. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-010-9262-y>
- Britton, J., Burgess, T., Martin, N., McLeod, A., & Rosen, H. (1975). *The development of writing abilities: 11-18*. London: Macmillan Education Ltd.
- Brown, Peter C., Henry L. Roediger III, and Mark A. McDaniel. (2014). *Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Calkins, L. (1896). *The art of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Cook, V.J. (2009), Multilingual Universal Grammar as the norm. In I. Leung (ed.) *Third Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar*, Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 55-70
- Cremin, T. (2006). Creativity, uncertainty and discomfort: Teachers as writers. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 36(3), 415-433.
- Cremin, T., & Baker, S. (2010). Exploring teacher-writer identities in the classroom: Conceptualising the struggle. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 9(3), 8-25.

- Dean-Rumsey, T. (1998). *Improving the writing skills of at-risk students through the use of writing across the curriculum and writing process instruction* (Order No. 1395724). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; ProQuest One Academic; ProQuest One Literature. (304483091). Accessed: July 2021 from <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/improving-writing-skills-at-risk-students-through/docview/304483091/se-2?accountid=14765>
- De Silva Joyce, H. & Feez, S., (2012). *Text based language and literacy education : programming and methodology*. Putney, NSW : Phoenix Education Pty Ltd
- Duttweiler, P. C. (1995). Effective Strategies for Educating Students in At-Risk Situations. Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center. ... The National Dropout Prevention Center: Journal of At-Risk Issues, Vol. 1.
- Eccles, J. (2009) Who Am I and What Am I Going to Do With My Life? Personal and Collective Identities as Motivators of Action, *Educational Psychologist*, 44:2, 78-89, DOI: 10.1080/00461520902832368
- Eccles, J.S., & Wigfield, A. (1995). *In the Mind of the Actor: The Structure of Adolescents' Achievement Task Values and Expectancy-Related Beliefs*. (pp21, 215-225). *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.
- Ehrlich, R. (1995). Giving a quiz every lecture. *The Physics Teacher*, 33, 378-3
- Emig, J. (1977). Writing as a Mode of Learning. *College Composition and Communication*, 28(2), 122–128. <https://doi.org/10.2307/356095>
- Feuerstein, R., & Feuerstein, S. (1991). *Mediated learning experience: A theoretical review*. In R. Feuerstein, P.S. Klein, & A. Tannenbaum (Eds.), *Mediated learning experience (MLE)* (pp. 3-52). London: Freund.
- Geist, J. R. & Soehren, S. E. (1997). The Effect of Frequent Quizzes on Short-and Long-Term Academic Performance. *Journal of Dental Education*, 61(4), 339-345.
- Graham S., & Harris K. R. (1987). Improving composition skills of inefficient learners with self-instructional strategy training. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 7, 66–77.
- Graham S., Harris, K. R. & Mason, L. (2005). Improving the writing performance, knowledge, and self-efficacy of struggling young writers: The effects of self-regulated strategy development. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 30(2), 207-241.
- Graves, D. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Graves, D. H. (1985). 17. All Children Can Write. *Pub Tyke*, 169.
- Graves, K. (1989). A framework of course development processes. In K. Graves (Ed.), *Teachers as Course Developers* (Cambridge Language Education, pp. 12-38). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511551178.004 Accessed: July 2020

- Graves, K. (1996). A framework of course development processes. In K. Graves (Ed.), *Teachers as Course Developers*, Cambridge Language Education (pp. 12–38). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Haberyan, K. A. (2003). Do Weekly Quizzes Improve Student Performance on General Biology Exams? *The American Biology Teacher*, 65(2), 110–114. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4451449>
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, I. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *Modern Language Journal*, 70, 125-132
- Hughes, M., Salamonson, Y., & Metcalfe, L. (2020). Student engagement using multiple-attempt 'Weekly Participation Task' quizzes with undergraduate nursing students. *Nurse education in practice*, 46, 102803. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2020.102803>
- King, Elizabeth C. Humanistic Education: Theory and Teaching Strategies, *Nurse Educator*: Winter 1983 - Volume 8 - Issue 4 - p 39-42.
- Kroll, B. (1990). *Second language writing: research insights for the classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Lewin, K. (1946). Action research and minority problems. *Journal of Social Issues*, 2(4), 34–46.
- Li, Chengchen. (2021). A Control–Value Theory Approach to Boredom in English Classes Among University Students in China. *Modern Language Journal*. 105. [10.1111/modl.12693](https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12693).
- Llach, M. P. A., & Gallego, M. T. (2009). Examining the Relationship between Receptive Vocabulary Size and Written Skills of Primary School Learners/Examen de la relación entre el conocimiento de vocabulario receptivo y las destrezas escritas de los alumnos de primaria. *Atlantis*, 129-147.
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1989). Anxiety and second-language learning: Toward a theoretical clarification. *Language Learning*, 39, 251-275.
- Mason, J. & Washington, P. (1992) *The future of thinking : rhetoric and liberal arts teaching*. London, Routledge.
- Matsuda, P. K. (2003). Second language writing in the twentieth century: A situated history perspective. In B. Kroll (Ed.) *Exploring the dynamics of second language writing* (pp. 15–34). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Miller, G. (1956). The magical number seven, plus or minus two: Some limits on our capacity for processing information. *Psychological Review*, 63, 81-97. Retrieved February 2006, from <http://www.well.com/user/smalin/miller.html>
- Miller, G., Galanter, E., & Pribram, K. (1960). *Plans and the structure of behavior*. New York: Holt.

- Miller, N. & Dollard, J. (1941). *Social learning and imitation*. New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press.
- Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing tasks for communicative classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Parkay, F.W. 1998. *Becoming a teacher*=4th ed.USA: Allyn & Bacon
- Pekrun R. (2006). The Control-Value Theory of achievement emotions: Assumptions, corollaries, and implications for educational research and practice. *Educational Psychology Review*, 18, 315–341.
- Pekrun R., Stephens E.J. (2010). Achievement emotions: A control-value approach. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 4, 238–255.
- Piniel, K., & Albert, Á. (2018). Advanced learners' foreign language-related emotions across the four skills. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 8, 127–147.
- Richards, J. C. (1990). *The language teaching matrix*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scarcella, R.C., & Oxford, R.L. (1992). *The tapestry of language learning: The individual in the communicative classroom*: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Sears, R. R. (1951). A theoretical framework for personality and social behavior. *American Psychologist*, 6(9), 476–482. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0063671>
- Seidlhofer, B. (2001). Closing a conceptual gap: the case for a description of English as a lingua franca. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 11.2: 133–58.
- Seligman, M.E.P., Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014). *Positive Psychology: An Introduction*. In: *Flow and the Foundations of Positive Psychology*. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9088-8_18 Accessed: July 2020
- Silva, R. (2015). Writing strategy instruction: Its impact on writing in a second language for academic purposes. *Language Teaching Research*, 19(3), 301-323.
- Silva, T.T. (1990). Second language composition instruction: Development, issues and directions in ESL. In B. Kroll (Ed.). *Second language writing: Research insights for the classroom* (pp. 11-23). Cambridge University Press.
- Sporer, R. (2001). The no-fault quiz. *College Teaching*, 49, 61.
- Staehr, L.S. (2008) Vocabulary size and the skills of listening, reading and writing *Language Learning Journal* 36, 139-52.
- Tribble C & G Jones. (1997) *Concordances in the Classroom: using corpora in language education* (new edition) Athelstan, Houston TX.

- Tuckman, B.W. (1996). The relative effectiveness of incentive motivation and prescribed learning strategy in improving college students' course performance. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 64, 197-210
- Tversky, B., Kugelmass, S., Winter, A. (1991) Cross-cultural and developmental trends in graphic productions. *Cognitive Psychology*, 23, 515–557.
- Vroom, V.H. (1964). *Work and motivation*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Vyas, S. (2019). Concept of Humanistic Approach in Psychology. *International Research Journal of Educational Psychology*, 3(1), 01-04.
- Wilder, D. A., Flood, W. A., & Stromsnes, W. (2001). The use of random extra credit quizzes to increase student attendance. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*.
- Wood, D., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 17(2), 89–100.
- Zemelman, S. & Daniels, H. (1988). *A community of writers: Teaching writing in the junior and senior high school*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Zimmerman, B. J., & Schunk, D. H. (2011). *Handbook of self-regulation of learning and performance*. Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.