The Hunches a Language Teacher Lives by in an Action Research: Revelations of an L2 Writing Teacher[*]

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Abstract
The researchers in this study aimed to demonstrate how impossible it could be for a language teacher to take fixed, systematic routes of action in recent Action Research designs. This was instantiated in an L2 (here, English) 'essay writing' course among some Persian speaker university students majoring in Hygiene Sciences (Family and Environment). Evidences regarding individualistic progress of students in 1)selecting a topic for their writing assignments, and 2) initiating talk on their selected topics are discussed to verify how complex it was to undertake the "process" and "catalytic" trustworthiness check of the present study via fixed action plans.

Keywords: Action Research; Reflective Teacher; Essay Writing; Technical AR; Participatory AR.

Introduction

In English Language Teaching (ELT) profession, characterizing teaching practices as situated and interpretive enterprises, which lead language teachers to open different routes for learners for socializing their learners into a non-native second as additional language (here, English) has recently been an issue among language scholars (Burns, 2005; Frelin, 2013; Jia, 2009; Mill, 2000; Talmy, 2008; Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2014). Here, the unpredictability and contested nature of learning is considered as an opportunity rather than a challenge or queer experience to be spotted in classroom situations by language teachers. Accordingly, following teachers' self-perceived practices as positive based on their own understanding relevant to specific situations have been described as a normal and even an essential undertaking (Freeman & Richards, 1996; Haneda & Alexander, 2015).

During the last decades, such views over the interpretive nature of L2 education made Action Research (AR) a useful and convenient research framework for language teachers to come across their messages to the research world outside their classes (Burns, 2005; Mckay, 2009; Borg, 2013; Yuan, Sun and Teng, 2016). Such features even urged some scholars to claim that confronting language teachers with an empirical body of knowledge and information to rehearse in their classes may *'lead to closed worlds of meaning rather than opening windows on possibilities'* (Harrington, 1994:190). Initially, inspired by Socio-Cultural approaches in L2 language education and drawing on some eminent figures like Crawford-Lange (1982), AR proponents aimed to communicate how a committed language teacher may change in the core of interaction while doing research in class.

Quite recently, scholars mostly in General Education arenas have attempted to define AR goals by introducing linear and/or sequential curriculum designing practicum, which has mainly been claiming to impose systematic routes of action and courses for teachers (Stringer, Christensen, & Baldwin, 2009). The argument, here, is that in the process of bridging in the gap between *'the ideal'* and *'the real'*, a reflective teacher might find new routes for knowing the class routines, which cannot be said to have been following fixed routes towards exploring the class practicum. Still what makes the issue more complicated is that in recent AR models, some prominent

scholars in AR trends like Burns (2010) claim that whatever decision made by a teacher must be either paralleled with earlier conceptual frameworks by others or be aligned to objective measures in order to be judged as true. This conceptualization as judgment of language teachers' interpretation based on other teachers seem not to be a fair understanding and needs to be more deliberated since it can debilitate a language teacher in making proper decisions for his/her students' progress as well as the teaching procedures s/he has taken.

With regard to the two problems mentioned above, in this study, we will instantiate how impossible it could be for a university tutor in an English language class targeting *'essay writing'* abilities to follow secure routes of action having systematic and carefully designed arrangement of activities and procedures. Explicitly, we will argue how this might impede learners' role in negotiating the weaved and pre-set syllabus in an English writing class. This chaos, which was whole-heartedly sensed by the third author of this research as a teacher-researcher in a large-scale research project for her PhD dissertation taking for two years, was spotted as essential rather than a weak point to be avoided.

In order to instantiate the above-cited arguments, some examples well-grounded in the literature are first given from some eminent scholars in AR like Burns (2010), Nunan (1990), Wallace (1996) and Pennington (1996) within Second Language (L2) domains.

Background of the study
During the recent years, Burns (2010) argued how philosophical assumptions behind AR for ELT may include solving problems via self-study and intervention by teachers within their own specific situations. To her, these approaches principally follow subjective, self-interpretive patterns on the part of language teachers and within their competencies to search through teaching practicum. This is appreciated in its understanding of pedagogical phenomena in language education arenas but in Burn's opinion, what is to be regarded as a criterion for judgment in AR is believed to be *'resonance of research outcomes with other similar social situations'* (p.95). Here, a crucial point which can be regarded as a dilemma in giving a working teacher the essential right and responsibility in

practicing what s/he corroborates as true to be followed in language classes is clearly believed by her to be objective in nature:

> Of course, AR cannot claim to be able to generalize to other classrooms. It is local research, which we do in our own classrooms. Nevertheless, what we find might still have something to say to other teachers who are facing similar issues in their own teaching and our findings might give them new ideas. In other words, our research may have resonance in other teaching contexts. The second question asks, quite reasonably, whether our results can be believed (are they credible?), and it is here that we need to find ways to strengthen the data, making sure we adopt an objective approach to the information we collect (p.95).

Burns' views above vindicate how teacher-researchers might follow individualistic approaches to solve problems of their own, but at final stages if they want to disseminate their results, what gives them credence in their research is congruence of their conversed remarks with other teachers' results and/or outcomes. In other words, the so-called teacher-researchers are, in action, required to confirm their outcomes with those of others, or else their findings cannot be relied on. Such trends that might have ignored giving full credits to working teachers were also noticeable in previous years among other researchers like Allison, Corcos, & Lam (1994). It is true that AR originally appeared to help teachers through communicating with a researcher mainly to learn research skills. Most of these studies had been conducted in L2 educational teacher training centers where student-teachers were believed not to have the essential knowledge and skills in doing a quality AR. Pennington's (1996) study on a group of MA student teachers in teaching process writing was a case in point. Wallace (1996) also came to the same conclusion among a group of undergraduate teachers in a preparation program, which aimed at getting the target group reflective practices on their professional action. In the end, the student teachers' deficiency in doing AR was publicized to the public.

In order to present a preliminary, lucid framework for this study, different conceptualizations of AR models in the literature need to be explicated.

Three conceptualizations of AR: Technical, Practical and Emancipatory

According to Zuber-Skerritt (2005), there are three types of AR aimed at improving the effectiveness and/or efficiency of educational practices and professional development. In Technical AR, the practitioners are *'co-opted'* (p.3). This means that a teacher is much dependent on the researcher *'as a facilitator'* to practice professional development. In other words, the researcher acts a Socratic role *'to encourage practical deliberation and self-reflection on the part of the practitioners' (p.4)*. 'Practical' and 'emancipatory' are more liberative in nature for the teacher. The aims that differentiate 'practical' from 'Emancipatory' AR is that in Practical AR, transformation of consciousness lets a language teacher exercise his/her intuitions in practice, but s/he needs consultancy from outside as well. In emancipatory AR, however, dictates of tradition are replaced with critically transformation of educational system. In other words, in Practical AR, cooperation is the end whereas in emancipatory AR, collaboration is intended to help language educators. By definition, in Practical AR, the relationship between facilitator and participants is cooperative via process consultancy while in emancipatory AR, this link changes into collaboration wherein teacher may have wishes and ideal outcomes to flourish but has also outside aids such as experts, administrators, policy makers etc. In effect, in emancipatory AR, in Zuber-Skerritt's view, this vigor in teacher mannerism may help in empowerment and self-confidence to embark on Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to solve complex issues and problems in teaching in totally new situations. In GT, as it has also recently been cared for, the hallmark of research is collaboration between equal members of a community to help one another with symmetrical roles.

Bringing changes in language teaching action plans

The crucial point, here, is to make it clear to what extent a language teacher is free to bring changes to his/her target situations. Views are different among scholars. Some scholars like Hopkins (1994) advocated the freedom of action among teacher-researchers in L2 arenas. In recent years, such emancipatory practices gave language teachers the necessary credence in doing reflective studies as in AR

succeeded by Greenwood and Levin (2007) during trends like New Paradigm Group in UK and in other parts of the world.

Paralleled with social workers in Brazil after Friere and Fals Borda among others, Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 560) identified another generation of AR, which could arrive at educational arenas termed as "social-participatory" AR. This connected critical-emancipatory AR with participatory AR.

In principle, in ELT environments, AR has also been arrived at as participatory approaches drawing on teachers and researchers together to bring about desirable outcomes by being linked with one another (Johnston, 1989). Likewise, language teachers are also believed to learn research skills in their teaching environments. In the UK, Stenhouse (1971, cited in McKernan 1991) working on a project known as Humanities Curriculum contended that all teaching should be based upon research, and that research and curriculum development were the realm of teachers. For ELT, some scholars in the field believed that such undertakings might impede language teachers rather than help them improve (Golombek, 1998). Then, it was assumed that language teachers themselves could possibly follow their own corroborated techniques and undertakings that suited them well. Golombek brought the case of two L2 teachers who communicated their personal practice experiences via narrative reconceptualization of their experiences at how they had been able to dynamically re/adjust their practices. He then contented how these two teachers pointed to their individual sense-making practices, which did not follow linear configurations. These and similar studies could legitimize a language teacher from periphery to the core as a major decision maker to do what s/he feels as true. This did not necessarily imply that language teachers should take strides in their professional enterprises but as Golombek also emphasized through negotiation with other colleagues in the field, language teachers were able to confirm their personal values and take responsibility for the consequences of their strategies in teaching:

> Teachers' knowledge is bound up in how they place themselves in relation to others and how their actions affect themselves as well as others. Thus, as L2 teachers use their knowledge in response to a particular context,

they are influenced by not only instructional but also personal concerns (p.460).

In another case study, Yuan, Sun and Teng (2016) explicated how motivation to do research on the part of L2 teachers in an EFL context might increase by seeking external support from their learners and not other outside forces either policy makers above or freelance researchers to regain their motivation when their self-discrepancies impeded on their way of possessing a responsibility in teaching. They sketched Gao and Xu's (2014) study to illustrate three competing "selves" in a teacher including *'actual self', 'ideal self' and 'ought self'*. With 'ought self', they meant the so-called 'teacher-researcher' self of a teacher though which s/he feels a need to live up to educational reforms. To their view, these conflicts among the three selves in a teacher could be resolved if s/he is indulged in an activity which in return might retain his/her research engagement due to the positive outcomes s/he might receive from learners. On the other hand, the same teacher may lose the motivation to proceed if new teaching practice is not conceived as useful by the learners (221). Such studies implied how 'ought' self-conceptions might or might not help a language teacher to indulge in a teaching project for evaluating something in line with his/her ideal self. In effect, actual self teacher is given an asset to get indulged in a research project to do good for moral, aesthetic, as well as any other educational reasons in his/her context of teaching.

In ELT, pros and cons abound in the literature on the precise nature of AR to be enacted by as an emancipatory practice by language teachers. For instance, some scholars in the ELT fields maintained that AR for language teachers implicates *'an approach to collection and interpreting data which involves a clear, repeated cycle of procedures'* (Bailey, 2001:490). This view by Baily could be restricting in nature. While there were those who focused on the reflective sides of teaching as motives for researching to bring about empowerment within a enthusiastic language teacher (Stewart, 2001, cited in Thomas Farrel, 2007).

In line with these new concepts of AR in ELT domains, issues pertained to curriculum innovations have recently been another strand to seek AR models for exploring classroom measures (Lotherington

2002) in various L2 education fields of study pertained to actual classrooms. The contention, here, is that brining a language teacher from the periphery to the core has not still been resolved. In one of her recent books, Burns (2010) alleged:

> Importantly, the improvements that happen in AR are ones based on information (or to use the research term, data) that an action researcher collects systematically…the changes made in the teaching situation arise from solid information rather than from our hunches or assumptions about the way we think things are (p.2).

In this assertion by Burns, one might still see roots of uncertainty being associated with a language teacher in proceeding his/her professional affairs which must be ensured with following systematic state of affairs to get prominence as a research. To support the above claim, Burns brought an example of an Italian language teacher in an actual classroom situation where the teacher had identified a problematic area in her teaching about finding out students' worries over their oral tests. In teachers' reflections, it had been evident that in the end, four successive stages of planning, acting, observing and reflecting had been in action to help the Italian teacher solve her dilemmas in a fair assessment of her students' achievements. Here, two problematic terms, which might distort the picture, on the part practicing language teachers, might be the words "systematic" and "solid information" as Burns characterized them to be crucial in AR. This systematicity in Burn's formulation does not necessarily meant that recursive, iterative cycles in teaching should not have occurred to her views, as he definitely cited other researchers who advocated flexible methodologies being applied through AR (Somekh, 1993, p. 29). She also frequently cited criticized AR models such as Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) on the grounds of rigidity and being perceptive (Burns, 2010: 8). In the second stage of doing AR, she frequently focused on how doing this kind of research might be carried out with special care that reminded the reader of systematicity: 1) identifying broad ideas, 2) narrowing them down into manageable components, 3) posing questions, refining them, 4) getting permission and covering ethical issues, 5) consulting the literature, 6) preparing

resources and materials, 7) scaffolding, 8) identifying participants 9) and finally preparing equipment and materials.

Such characterization in AR might then lead researchers to regard it among scientific enquiries of research where art and imagination of a teacher could hardly be an issue. By evidence, McKernan (1991) alleged:

> "..Clearly and convincingly action research is a root derivative of the scientific method' reaching back to the Science in Education movement of the late nineteenth century" (p.8).

Nevertheless, McKernsn also stated that though being rooted in scientific field of enquiry, AR has been at times used by a countless number of social reformists such as Collier (1945; Lippitt and Radke, 1946; and Corey, 1953; all cited in Masters, 1995).

Specifically in this study, the following research questions moved the researchers in collaborating the following study.

1. What are the constraints and praises regarding trustworthiness or validity checking via Action Research designs in an L2 'essay writing' course?

2. How could an alternative, emancipatory Action Research design be fitting in an L2 'essay writing' course?

The study

In a larger scale research project for my (the third author) PhD dissertation, I was supposed to substantiate what possible roles I could play along with my students in a 'writing course' to remove the constraints that academia might impose for both of us and if my learners could be helped to be able to develop their own pieces of writing in an EAP course using a specific teaching method termed as Genre-based Pedagogy (GP) (Hyland, 2007, 2016). In this method, university students are supposed to be taught the rules behind producing an established Academic Writing genre; here an essay article. Different moves required to be implemented in various sections of a research article are taught to students. The first axiom in GP for L2 writing instruction is concerned with the fact that no one learns how to use an act of writing (here, scholarly publication) by intuition or inspiration. It must be learned by observation, study and experiment. Hence, the ideological background of GP was to

emphasize that literacy practices are learnt in interaction rather than worked on and learnt by oneself. Accordingly, in GP, various genre or text types are conceived to be explicitly taught by some prominent scholars in this field like Hyland (2004 & 2009); Swales (2009); Paltridge (2009) etc. Butt et al (2000) defined 'genre' as *'Comparable texts which achieve the same general social purpose, and which therefore draw on the same relatively stable structural pattern'* (p. 214). Up to the present time, according to But et al (2000), various academic written genres have been recognized as pertinent at academic settings including 'Book reviews', 'Conference Abstracts', 'PhD Dissertations', 'Grant proposals', 'Submission letters', 'Peer review Reports', 'Undergraduate essays', 'Article bios', 'Teacher feedback', 'Acknowledgments', 'Editors' letters', 'Lab reports', 'Speech logs', 'Formal letters', 'Formal writing assignment' and 'RA writing'. In this study, 'RA writing', as one major genre at academia was targeted via an AR design to check the possibility of improving a group of Iranian university students in writing English articles in their major.

Implementing GP in my Action Research
In line with aims above, I managed to introduce samples of published research articles as established academic genres to my students during a sixteen-session semester via three teaching cycles (Appendix). I made various attempts to present distinctive characteristics of research articles. Next, students had to try to produce their own writings pertained to the given genre. The intended designed syllabus involving precise teaching aims, writing acts and research crafts along with the intended teaching procedures in line with GP practices were going to be developed within a three-month academic semester.

Context of the study and participants
This study was projected in an EAP context among a group of fifteen students (male and female) majoring in Hygiene Sciences. The target groups in this research project were some undergraduate university students aged 22-25 in an open university in the Northeast of Iran with a "Large" rank or scale in terms of academic capacities. They were all Persian speakers with probably sporadic instances of Kurdish and Turkish speakers who had opted for their two-credit 'Technical

English' in 2015. Having taken their two-credit remedial courses in English along with a three-credit General English (GE), students usually take their technical English as a final course in Iranian Open universities.

In line with the proposed research questions, first, I will refer to ways through which I could find a proper balance between the three conceptualizations of existing AR in my work. Then, some challenges/opportunities, which I faced on my way towards teaching my goals for the course, were outlined. Meanwhile, encountered constraints and praises which impeded/encouraged me as a university tutor on our way towards essay writing practicum through an emancipatory Action Research design were focused on to verify how alternative AR designs as such through more unrestricted courses of action could be fitting in my target situation.

Taking the initial steps; from mind to action
Initially, I wanted to see which conceptualization of AR might be responsive to the needs of a language university tutor in teaching 'essay writing' practices. Interested in opting for the third conceptualization of AR by Zuber-Skerritt (2005) and drawing on Robinson (1991) who asserted "*any well-established ESP (English for Specific purposes) center or other ELT institution has its own ideology relating to course 'design, to syllabus type, to the description of language and to the nature of language learning*" (p. 35), I established my research foundation drawing on an 'emancipatory' AR in order to be able to experience more freedom in my decision making processes.

Following my goals in introducing a recent teaching practice for improving scholarly performance of a group of university students, I faced with many obstacles, and complexities, which changed my established, pre-selected weaved syllabus at times. Firstly, major distinguished text types and purposes for writing each major section of writing a research paper were intended to be taught to the target group in a predictable, step-wise manner. By and by, conflicts and encounters emerged, which led me in many cases to change predetermined designs for teaching different text types. In this section, just some pointers are given in how fixed routes of actions could not be taken at all to go any further with the pre-planned syllabus.

The second challenge for me was to take heed of a moral/ ethical issue. In Iranian EAP classes as in many other countries where English is taught as a Foreign Language (EFL), a uni-skill teaching of "Reading" is current. In line with EFL mainstream goals and specifically considering 'exam-orientedness' of the prevalent educational system in EFL contexts, I could not deprive my learners of their EAP reading in their majors. The two-credit EAP course took two hours a week, which at undergraduate courses this two hour was practically lessened to one hour and a half. In my context of teaching, in all, I devoted the first forty-five minutes of class period to the writing instructions totaling seven hundred and twenty minutes totaling twelve hours actual classes with an extended, unlimited virtual site during sixteen actual sessions of one academic semester. The first strategy to take was that of checking feasibility procedures. Accordingly, I mainly focused on the first two parts of a typical research article: "Introduction" and "Literature Review".

The third challenge was the workload on me. Here, then reflecting on various aspects of essay writing on an issue such as 'topic selection', 'organizing', 'drafting',' proof-reading' and 'revising' were then in mind as ringing in my ears which inflicted me and my learners on how I had to manage all these in a two-hour class during a week. To tackle this second challenge, I adopted another strategy: making use of an extracurricular, virtual site in order to manage all my above-cited practices. Regarding that virtual site, fortunately my affiliated university had provided a host domain to all university professors through which my students could access to my profile in a personal webpage to receive all extracurricular materials, which I uploaded during their course semester.

In this website, there were various features and facilities including a download page which supported different sectors including "my proposed weekly schedules, 'questioning and answering', as well as 'file delivery' pages which were all accessible through the university main web address. My learners were also allowed to initiate both online conferences with me as the teacher of the course on various aspects of the taught lessons during the week or send offline messages via anonymous system tracking in the same website. Along with this website, I also collected their e-mail addresses to send the soft version

of some proposed teaching materials in the syllabus, in case they did not have frequent access to the site. In so doing, students were also able to send me their assigned weekly drafts.

Faced with all above-cited challenges, I had to manage all micro and macro levels of essay writing involving 1) the framing stage (students' research outlines), 2) directing the students' research proposals, 3) drafting writing rules with grammar manifestations, and finally 4) revising and editing. As Aristotle (1976) said '*virtuous and ethical behavior involves doing well, whatever we do*'. I did my best to satisfy my learners' needs, but challenges coming from curriculum restraints on us on the one hand and and restraints from ensuring research essentials of AR on the other restricted my attempts in taking my full potential to take action.

In the next section, I will present some selected teaching scenes, as claims and counterclaims to indicate how taking fixed routes of action in linear AR might have entangled me if I had taken them in first place.

Dilemmas on endorsing the essentials of Action Research design in my study

As Carr and Kemmis (1986) asserted, those researchers who make benefit of 'self-reflective enquiries' in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, understanding of those practices and the situations where these practices are carried out will result in tandem. This was very prosperous in word for me, but preparing the situation in a way to help me proceed in my courses of action had to be secured over a well-run and efficient platform in the first place in order that my activities and attempts be recognized as research above all and qualify for my PhD dissertation. In so doing, concerning trustworthiness concerns, I was expected to follow the general guidelines for reflective enquiries of research in an AR design wherein the focus of my study was on a specific academic context. In line with GT as my main research framework, my interpretations of the intervening treatments for my intended practices along with interview logs with the focus groups including students and subject matter teachers might then ensure credibility of the findings over the whole data collection process. Drawing on Anderson's et al (1994) conceptualization of

trustworthiness examination for qualitative research, I decided to draw on five main criteria for ensuring the concerns in this regard. I decided to observe all these criteria while collecting my data. 1) Democratic, 2) Dialogic, 3) Outcome, 4) Process, and finally 5) Catalytic trustworthiness. In order to ensure that my data in each stage of my teaching practicum was trustworthy, I had to keep in mind all these criteria for my research.

In my study, the problem arose with the last two formulations of trustworthiness check above (process and catalytic), which changed my courses of action during the data collection processes. Below, I will first give brief descriptions over each five criteria. Then, I will verify how difficult it was to control the two trustworthiness check above.

The first criteria was 'Democratic Validity' where multiple voices including both students and my colleagues for interpreting the findings were to be included via space triangulation. The second criteria involved 'Outcome Validity' for which I had to relate the success of actions to the outcomes so that new questions could arise in the field. The 'Dialogic trustworthiness' was the other criteria by Anderson's et al where this criterion paralleled the processes of peer review which was totally guaranteed through 'investigator triangulation' drawing on collaborative enquiries, which I had with my other critical PhD classmates and insights from my supervisor and advisor as major informants for my study. I had problems with the last two criteria above for trustworthiness checking behind collecting my data, which I will briefly refer to some instances in the following section.

Challenges in ensuring process trustworthiness check

'Process Validity' or trustworthiness was the fourth criteria in which it was claimed that participants must be able to keep up with the action or treatments. In order to maintain this type of validity for my purposes, I had to take time to set different strategies to assess each student's progress at his/her own pace. Accordingly, I could not set fixed rules for all students and could not penalize them in case they were not able to deliver their writing assignments by the given deadlines. Fataneh's and Ali's cases are brought below to instantiate

what problems I faced at this phase for ensuring "process" trustworthiness check in my study.

Fataneh's case

In my target class among a group of students majoring in Hygiene Sciences, there were some students whose weekly assignments were sign that either they are not interested in writing tasks, or they are not able to follow my discussions in class. Fataneh was a case in point. She changed her selected topics every so often. At the beginning of the term, she wrote to me that she was going to work on "water pollutants". When I asked her to explain to me why she had chosen this topic, she stressed that because she had been inspired by my discussions over the criteria for 'topic selection' session, she were to work on 'water' issues due to the recent crisis in the country. I referred her to one of her subject matter professors (A specialist in sanitation sciences with twenty years teaching experience) to seek some consultation from him over the topics she re/chose. After confirming the new topic, I gave all my learners some model sentences to formulate in their own words and write to me why they had chosen the topics. After a week or so, Fataneh sent me the following note:

> "Dear professor, since the topic is too difficult and vague
> for me, I changed my topic. I want to work on 'fast food'."
> (Fataneh's letter to me, Mehr, 1394)

After a while, she also attempted to change her topic to some other issues as well when I introduced different paragraph development steps. As evidence, when I introduced "Narrative" as a writing genre in developing their paragraphs for the Introduction section of their articles, she returned to me again and said she preferred to work on "Influenza H1N1". I held a private session with her to seek more on the issue on the probable reasons why she frequently changed her topics. She told me a very thought-provoking statement, which made me think over it for a while.

Her statement below is my translation to English. She said:

> "If you plant a tree awkwardly, it will grow clumsily, but
> if we cater for it, it may grow to its own route again. My
> English has been weak from the outset but the more I learn
> about how to write well-designed statements, I think I

have a lot more to say… about endless number of issues.."

(Personal communication: My teaching diary, Mehr, 1394)

Her response did not reveal anything to me about how the topic choices can still have any effects on her formulation of ideas. I continued my discussion with her to find out more about why the topics were changed by her so many times, she continued *'At first, I had chosen a topic just to keep up with the assignments and other students, now I see myself in other directions... I think my deficiencies in language are not important. I like to follow my interests…'* (Personal communication: My teaching diary, Mehr, 1394)

This crucial point by Fataneh led me to think how my learners still needed to invest on thinking about language before they were able explore their own potentiality as a human being to change their world. In my first sessions with them, I had elaborated on how they might find their sources for their topic selection phases: 1) their own problems in life (self-interests), 2) their friends' problems (other's wonders), and 3) the problems residing in society (society appraisal). These conceptualizations of 'essay writing', which I had borrowed from some eminent research guide books like Jordan's 'Academic writing course', Kaplan's 'Writing power' and Lester's 'Writing research paper', had apparently aided my learners. But, by the time they were getting familiar with whys of doing research, language problems inflicted them in finding more about their own capacities in writing an article. This urged them to think of changing their topics as in Fataneh's case.

There were still many other cases, where my learners could not choose their topic at all since they felt totally incapable to write not just because they felt they could not produce sentences in English; only because they felt they did not have the proper resources to initiate talk on a topic in their major.

Ali's case

Ali was another case in point here. He continuously told me the reason why he could not choose a right topic was that although he liked a specific topic, he could not find proper sources on his selected topics. This reason of his was formulated frequently by my other students as well: "*There must be enough amounts of information on this topic or else I have to choose other topics"* (Ali's remarks in his

communications with me). Such formulation by the majority of my students urged me to think that not just the language problems but also a countless number of other reasons might have been involved that discouraged them in initiating talk on any social problem they foundd in their surroundings. Then, I had to stop my syllabus at that point and open other issues for them to give them courage in 'thinking' itself as an academic skill. At times, this took us two or three sessions, which got me far behind my syllabus. However, since I felt it necessary, I continued with my own procedures, since I had opted for emancipatory AR design. I saw the result beneficial, since they got motivated to know more about how to think of doing a good research.

Changing my courses of action again

At elementary stages, I gave them this permission to write their paper in Persian (their native language) just to encourage them to think without any fear of production in another language (here English). Again, I thought I would certainly continue with my syllabus this time since their only problem would be, in my view, language deficiency only. I was in trouble again!

From the second round of my proposed syllabus, I was to continue with ways to teach my learners how to develop their ideas into well-designed paragraphs through various paragraph types in English like "Description", "Exposition", "Narration", "Comparison and contrast", etc. The experiences and insights I had got from topic selection strategies by my students urged me to think if I were to continue with my teaching goals, previously set on fixed routes, I would certainly fail to follow my students' success in their relevant task completion activities since they were all the time changing a bit. Their orientations to 'research writing' were not comparable. In this second round, again the same problem was taking place. Some of my students changed their topics altogether as soon as I introduced a new paragraph development type. This was recurring in various majors I had worked during the two semesters I applied my teachings. Among my Sanitation students (the target students in this research), when I introduced "narrative", some more students changed their topics. In my opinion, each student was a new reality. Sarah's reaction to Narrative paragraphs is brought below as an instance.

Sarah's case

Sarah had already asserted that she would like to work on "Cirrhosis of the liver". Initially, she had chosen "pollution of aquifers". The she changed her subject to another topic just because she thought had a lot to say through "Narrative".

> "I felt the previous topic is uninspiring or lifeless. I could
> not include my story in it." (Students' diary; 2015/12/27).

Topic re/selection continued among my students. At first, I had corroborated that changing the topics are due to their not being familiar with 1) rudiments of research doing and research writing and/or 2) language problems. The blocks were still somewhere else. They were following their own routes. It seemed that I had a side role. Mohammad's case below was similar to Sarah's.

Mohammad's case:

Mohammad, in another case, stated her reasons for changing the topic as not finding enough information about his previously chosen topic on "road accidents". His new topic was announced as "the advantages of "early sleeping". He said he would like the subject because an interesting incidence had changed him into a new person, so he wanted to tell his story to friends. It was not clear to me at first as the teacher-researcher of this course what strategy I should adopt to invoke my students to sit on their subjects when they wanted to start their writings. When I sought help from my supervisor (the second author in this research) in this regard, she said "If *you urge them to lots of dos and don'ts, it's like you are closing windows on their way to progress. Let them be free in the beautiful sense of creation"* (My email communications with supervisor; 1394, Aban). This further ensured me to still wait and see how they made progress in their learning routes to become writers *'as I wished'*. These were all instances of (un)learning for me as well since many instances of contrary-to-fact situation happened in my writing class which urged me not to expect what I had been told in books and monographs on how to proceed through a fixed, non-recycling syllabus.

I noticed my students followed their own routes in doing their assignments as well, which were not at all predictable to me to take the right strategy for all. This sense of unpredictability on the part of my learners sometimes erroneously made me think they are novice

writers. Again, I was in trouble and wrong. Namely, when I told my students to have a design for their writing and develop their outlines, in the majority of cases, they designed some awkward ones, on the face of it. This showed at times they must still be novice writers and that is why their outlines are awkward and not sign of a good writer. Nevertheless, I got astonished at how some of them were interpreting the world not like me, which also sounded right, if I pondered on their issues. They followed their own routes, which were quite sensible to me when this urged me to think how "*Teaching how to write*" on my part had not been necessary because they were making progress on their own. To reiterate, they were following their own routes. They had their own ways of understanding.

When we negotiated talk on their outlines in class discussions, their rationales for classifying various topics were revealing to me in that maybe they had been right according to their own motives. As evidence, when I introduced how they should brainstorm issues from specific to general, how they should first state a topic, then explain details, give more examples, and finally conclude their paragraphs, I noticed different procedures in their developed outlines. This made me think all the time how there might have still been endless number of other ways they might have reached my explained steps but with a diverse meaning-making process. Below, I have brought another case from Mohammad Reza's justification on how he had developed his initial outline for selecting a suitable topic.

Mohammad Reza's case:
Mohammad Reza wanted to argue how using cell phones could be destructive to man's life. He had first developed a sentence outline and started his outline on a list of disadvantages like its effect on health, relationship interruption in society etc. Among the suggested disadvantages was this sentence: "we get used to this device". When I edited his outline, I informed him that how of employing a useful telecommunication device like a cell phone depends on us as human beings to change it into a useful or harmful device. I communicated my idea this way to him to signify the fact that his argument is not sensible since this could not be one of the disadvantages as far as we use it in an improper way. His argument was largely enlightening to me in that how Mohammad Reza might have deeply been involved in

creating a piece of writing. Below, you see my translation of his response:

"My goal in writing these statements is to show the disadvantages of misusing cellphones. I wanted to show how senselessly we spend our time with this device without any benefits returned to us. <u>I wanted to use personification strategy in my writing to show how this device can be turned into an emotional partner with whom we spend our time</u>. "(Student diaries; 2015/12/28).

At first, I was not still satisfied with this response through his mail in that how this argument by him could indicate that a cell phone could be damaging through his personification strategy. When I asked him again to explain the issue to me in person, he drew my attention to his seeing the world as *'I see a cell phone as a human being and when I use it so much I want to show we get used to one another. So, part of the problem returns to the cell phone itself, because it is a good comrade and can keep us on our foot wherever we go. Can you not answer it when it rings? He is a private comrade for all of us.'* He wanted to prove himself to me more but when he rationalized his assertion by using a personification strategy; I got astonished how right he might have also been in his argumentation. He was also right in his imagination. Maybe, part of this was related to the cellphone as a useful device. This could prove to me how a sense of creation could seem common sense at first but getting more and more complex in the end. Still, we might not proceed any further if I only applied logic. This again brought me another evidence not to judge with my pre-established courses of action on my ways towards teaching writing skills. Some of them were already great thinkers before they were writers. I had this job to remind them this sense of creation in them and not more than that. I thought a lot and came to this conclusion at times: If I told them 'how to write', maybe I could block them in their own sense of creation.

Learners were steering the actions not me
These instances were just some few telling examples to signify how the beauty of my students' thoughts strengthened my sense of creation as well at times and was self-revealing to me as a teacher-researcher. No research instrument could bring me to this conclusion. This would

certainly not happen if I had not started communication with Mohammad Reza as just one example among many other stories I had collected in my writing course with them, or else I would surely take it for granted that I must be the one who knows more than they do. One possible effect of my action research was just for me to know if I had to still explore more within my learners instead of sifting through a myriads of books and articles by OTHERS on 'how to teach writing' and a countless number of monographs, thesis dissertations, etc. which I had complied in my reviewed literature log folder.

If I were to follow systematic AR, the principles obliged me to set goals beforehand and mount students on my own ways of understanding the world, but this experience proved itself to me to the contrary and was a source of (un)learning to problematize my ways of understanding of the phenomena because *'Mohammad Reza and still other students were also right in their learning routes.*

Challenges in ensuring catalytic trustworthiness check

The other criteria for ensuring the trustworthiness and later dependability of my research was taking heed of 'Catalytic' trustworthiness, which refers to the extent to which the research allows the participants to deepen their role concerning the social realities of their settings, Anderson's et al (1994). This reminded me during all data collection procedures to take care not to set so many extracurricular activities on my learners so that their whole class time and their extra time for doing their other activities during their academic semester be focused on my exclusive goals in the writing course: "how to write an essay in English".

Regarding this fifth type, each session I prepared a list of pre-selected texts and passages for different aspects of the weaved syllabus. When I started introducing each aspect, there were diverse questions and suggestions by my students which made me set different goals for the next session, which might overload some but set free many others to take their own routes for learning 'essay writing' rules. As evidence, below I will present one of my class sessions, where such experience led me to prepare various still other materials and teaching aids to include in my future sessions which was contradicting to the goals behind observing 'Catalytic' trustworthiness.

'Class began with my discussion over how to restrict their research topics to be manageable in writing their thesis statement in 'introduction' section of their articles. Various examples were provided to make the discussion clearer. I gave them three utterances to compare: 1) US presidency, 2) Kennedy's decisions in Cuban crisis, 3) Kennedy's decisions in Cuban missile crisis, which revealed his determination to protect American interests despite a threat of nuclear war. They were gazing at me with puzzling faces… (My teaching diary, Mehr, 1393/7/12)

After giving them the examples above, I realized that they were puzzling over the issues relevant to writing a good thesis statement just because some of them had not yet opted for their "research" course! They had been struggling over the issues to know 'what a thesis statement' meant before I was to teach what it involved and how they should write a good thesis statement. In the next session, I had to stop my discussion at that point and explain for them what other research moves in the introduction like 'significance of the study',' statement of the problems', signified. Since this might take the whole term and took us away from the teaching goals, I put two or three useful books for them on my website, to which they had access through the uploaded materials on my virtual website mentioned before. This could ensure that in the subsequent sessions, I would probably continue with the rest of my syllabus and expect the routines to come by, but the fact was that there was still a countless number of issues related to doing ' research', which I had to explain and in some cases, I had to refer them to their subject matter teachers. Issues like finding out more about 'the gaps in literature' in their selected topics, this was another evidence, which caused me to change my teaching goals sometimes at the middle of the course. My students' responses to my concerns always moved me as a teacher to a secondary position not to think of myself as having agency in what and how just my ways of seeing the world was different from theirs. This signified to me as a reflective teacher to think in still countless number of ways related to diverse conceptualizations of worldly matters in that I should not always seek truth from ordinary routines expected from an idealized class. If I were to follow systematically on my ways toward

conceptualization and designing thinking practices from my standpoint, I would certainly fail to see through what was involving in my students' mind.

Discussion

In this short survey, the authors mainly wanted to bring arguments and evidences for the cyclic nature of L2 writing courses in an EAP context.

In response to the first research question concerning securing two types of validity checking (process and catalytic), we referred to several facts, evidences and counter/evidences that had deterred us tread on fixed routes of learning towards teaching essay writing skills to some university students at undergraduate levels. Regarding "process validity" or trustworthiness checking in which it is claimed participants must be able to keep up with the action or treatments, in order to maintain this type of validity in this study, we had to take time to set different strategies to assess each student's progress at their own pace. Accordingly, we did not set fixed rules for all and will not penalize students in case they were not able to deliver their writing assignments by the given deadlines as in Fataneh's case, for instance. Here, 'Time triangulation' was a technique which we could use to ensure various ongoing and constant examining of the students' ideas are done over the discussion groups and students' diaries, which followed during the instructional period. Regarding "Catalytic validity" another trustworthiness check which we had to ensure in my study, other cases like Mohammad's and Mohammad Reza's cases showed how difficult it was to secure this type of validity in our work. Deepen their roles concerning the social realities of their settings, were intermingled with so many different and in some cases unknown realities, which made it hard for us to secure this validity checking during the research phases. Although this reminded us during all data collection procedures to take care not to set so many extracurricular activities so that their whole class time and their extra time for doing their other activities during their academic semester were not taken, we had to do other actions to the contrary as well to lead them to proper routes toward learning.

Thus, making an attempt to bridge in the gap between *'the ideal'* and *'the real'*, made us find new routes of learning via a reflective

observation in a real context, which could not be taken via static routes of learning and re/searching our professional world via single session research instruments used in other research enquiries as to assessing writing abilities. It was so because through utilized emancipatory AR platforms, we could certainly find out how the target learners were *following their own routes on their way to write*. This was surely tractable through emancipatory versions of AR compared with technical designs as such since we could change and adjust the courses of action to fit new strategies all the time. As Hyland (2016) - a distinguished professor and researcher in writing arenas- also alleged, '*There is no 'one-size-fits-all' formula to carrying out research on writing (or on anything else) but nor is there a perfect approach to every question* (p.117).

In response to the second research question as to how following emancipatory action research could be fitting, it must be noted that we followed an Action Research design in our study because we believed 'writing' in its totality could not be researched through only specific instances and single session, one-shot courses of action. If we were to follow the routes towards teaching the intended pre-planned syllabus with hard and fast rules via a technical Action Research design, there might not really remain room for further reflection and opening talk with individual cases for whom pre-conceived syllabus meant nothing. As Hyland also contended on this fact, there were no other ways to come to this conclusion since:

> 'In fact, the choice of methodology we adopt to study L2 writing will largely depend on what we believe writing is, the model of language we subscribe to, and how we understand learning'.(.p.117)

Hyland in his assertion here implied that taking specific strategies to research on aspects of writing depends on the hidden values that a teacher-researcher holds true for him/herself. This seemed to us to be a proper way of understanding the complex nature of writing courses in general and essay writing in particular though it was interesting to note that some scholars of writing believed to the contrary. As an example, after interviewing with 48 writing instructors, Cumming (2003) stated that there are uniform procedures in writing courses across the globe. This could hardly be achieved in our study

regarding essay writing instructions as the present cases all indicated that uniformity in teaching writing courses could not be established even in one course among the same university disciplines. Furthermore, writing itself as one aspect of written literacy along with 'reading' is not an individualistic process but calls for more complex research designs having collaborative courses of action (Shedadeh, 2011). In so doing, a large number of researchers, students, peer groups, research assistants must be involved in order that sound and more true to life conclusions can be achieved. In the long history of research inquiries on writing aspects, in the majority of cases, unfortunately, a single researcher usually follows writing aspects via one single session research designs. One contribution in this study was that text samples and multiple interviewing sessions with individual learners having an indirect impact of their subject matter teachers brought some light on the complex nature of thinking processes pertained to specific cases within learners. Live interaction of the third author in this research with her learners about their writing behavior was self-revealing in many cases not to take everything for granted about their ways of looking at the world phenomena. When their rationales for opting for a specific topic could possibly be taken as a weak point, this was immediately ruled out altogether with further open discussions not to be associated with their language level. In specific cases, there must have been still a lot of other hidden factors involved in not choosing a topic as such. Explicitly, changing to other topics for their writing assignments could still be related to their outlook, changing ideologies, not having the necessary research skills in doing experiments, changing perspectives towards the nature of writing itself, changing views towards research writing itself among many others.

    As a final point, this study mainly tried to communicate a major message to the academic public esp. language educators who intend to follow AR designs in their courses: If due researchers opt for more emancipatory and more true-to-life observation of the authentic cases where learners are observed over a large time span, they can better instantiate the true nature of their writing development compared with more organized conditions corroborated in one single session assessments or through quasi/experimental methodologies.
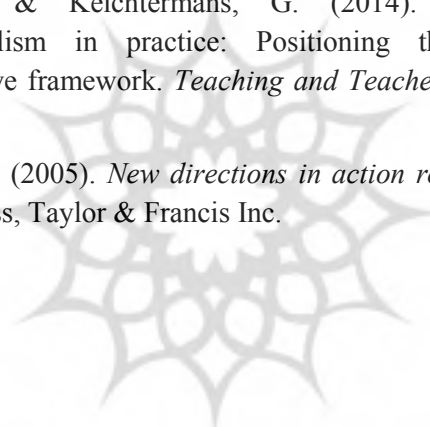
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Appendix

Table 1. The first five sessions of my proposed syllabus

Sessions	Teaching Aims	Time	Research Crafts / Writing arts	Specific procedures	Tentative Resource tools
First	Arising interest and motivation among learners for (re)searching	45 mins	1)Instruction to the course goals **Research crafts:** Sensitization of students to different genres of writing at academic settings	A) This proposed syllabus will be circulated among learners as a guide to the whole course B)Various genre classifications at academic settings are discussed very briefly to sensitize students to text types or genres such as Autobiographical essays, Biographical Summaries, Science Articles, Reports, reviews, Applications, Letter to the Editor, etc. with a special reference to research articles.	1) Academic writing course by R. R. Jordan 2) Writing power by Caplan 3) Writing research papers by James D. Lester 4) Class handouts on sample research topics
Second	Helping students to find their own routes by promoting self-enquiry	45 mins	**Research Crafts:** Introducing topic selection procedures (1)	A)Teaching three senses of self-interest/others' wonders/society appraisal for topic selection B) Requiring Learners to decide on a research topic for the next session and reflect on the reasons for their choices	

Third	Leading students to find important problems to solve	45 mins	**Research crafts:** Introducing topic selection procedures (2)	Discussing selected research themes or topics by the students	
Fou R	Creating a sense of collaboration	45 mins	**Research crafts:** Creating research teams: enhancing collaborative writing skills	A) Holding a conference session with content teachers in discussion groups for the selected topics B) Creating a common online profile on the provided class website for probable questions	
Five	Provoking thought management among learners to initiate talk on a crucial topic	45 mins	**Research crafts:** Topic restriction	A)Discussing strategies for limiting topics to manageable crafts B)Assigning self-study sources for more information	

Table 2. The second five sessions of my proposed syllabus

Sessions	Teaching aims	Time	Writing arts/ Research Crafts	Specific procedures	Tentative Resource tools
Sixth	Organization of thinking processes among learners by increasing narrative talents	45 mins	**Writing acts:** 1) Introducing General paragraph development procedures in different disciplines (1) 2) Paragraph unity	A) Teaching some paragraph kinds such as 'description' and 'expository'. B)Introducing the first characteristics of a well-developed paragraph	1)Paragraph development by Marcela frank 2)Introducing some internet sources such as http://hotsheet.com, http://research paper.com 3 Sample research articles with highlighted

				C) Due to the limited amount of time to devote to further explanations, students are directed to self-study materials (Source no. 1 and 2) for the course to follow the lessons heuristically	sections for targeted topic sentences and thesis statements
					4 English for Academic Research by Adrian Wallwork (available at class website)
Seventh	Organization of thinking processes among learners by increasing argumentation talents	45 mins	**Writing acts:** 1)Introducing General paragraph development procedures in different disciplines (2) 2)Coherence in paragraph writing	A) Teaching some paragraph kinds such as 'comparison and contrast', 'illustration' etc. B) Introducing the second essential feature of a well-developed paragraph: coherence C) Collecting students' written samples on descriptive and expository (Persian manuscripts)	
Eighth	1)Offering the first game rules (RA genre no.1) for initiating talk on the students' selected	45 mins	**Research Crafts:** Teaching how to write thesis statements in RAs **Writing acts:**	A)Bringing sample research questions from published paper resources to show elements	

	topics		Cohesion in paragraphs	of cohesive links such as referencing, conjunctions, ellipsis, substitution, and lexical ties	
	2) Organizing of information in a unified text full of relevant data via logical sequencing of ideas			B) Inviting content teachers to class to discuss one or two published articles concerning hidden propositions in the text in the highlighted thesis statements distributed among students (Source material no.3)	
				C)Assigning self-study sources for further info. (Source material no. 4)	
				D) Collecting students' written samples for other taught paragraph types in Persian	
Ninth	Presenting topic sentences (Genre no.2)	45 mins	**Research Crafts:** Organizing of new and old information	A)Discussing readability of different texts by bringing some samples from Wallswork's	

				book (2011) B)Giving feedback on students previous assignments and tasks	
Tenth	**1)**Instructing problem posing skills **2)**Increasing stimulating and thought-provoking questioning talents	45 mins	**Research Crafts:** Posing proper research questions **Writing Acts:** Questioning techniques (source material no.4)	A)Discussing general vs. specific meanings of notions: main topic vs. subtopic themes B) Collecting students' written samples on topic sentence	

Table 3. The third five sessions of my proposed syllabus

Sessions	Teaching aims	Time	Writing arts/ Research Crafts	Specific procedures	Tentative Resource tools
Eleventh	Acquainting students with propositional moves in RAs in general	45 mins	**Research crafts:** introduction to different sections of a research article genre referring to its recognized parts: Introduction/ Review of literature/ Method/ results and Discussion (IRMD).	A)Referring to some typical complaints of referees in journal articles B)Assigning self-study sources (source material no.3)	1) Class website for downloading uploaded materials: 2) Translated APA sample to Persian (six edition) 3) English for Academic Research by Adrian Wallwork (available at class website) for giving model sentences 4) Access to major databases within local

| Twelfth | 1)Acquainting students with propositional moves in the introduction section of RA (genre no.3): Summarizing the problems to be addressed, giving background on the subject, discussing previous research on the topic, and explaining whys, and hows of doing a research.

2)Learning how to process thinking in using clear justifications with proper use of verb tenses | 45 mins | **Research crafts:**
Suggesting 'problem - solution pattern' for engineering and medicine students) and (recognized genres within humanities like narratives, descriptions etc.
Writing Acts:
A) clarity of talk
B)Tense use /hedging | 1)Teaching how to
A) define the topic plus study background
B) state the problem
C) refer to objectives
D) talk of authors' contribution
2) Assigning proper writing tasks for producing a sound introduction from the suggested source materials | domains provided
 by the IT centers at my university hosts
5) Online workshops and labs for writing resources which have
 been used thus far include:
A) https://owl.english.purdue.edu/
B)http://www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop/writers
C) http://www.sfedit.net/
D)http://prosewrite.com

6) Extra sourcebooks for extensive writing tasks:
A) Science Research Writing: A Guide for Non-Native Speakers of English
By Hilary Glasman-Deal
B)Navigating Academia: Writing Supporting Genres by John M. Swales & Christine B. Feak |

| Thirte enth | 1)Acquainti ng students with propositiona l moves in the Review of literature in RAs (1) (genre no.4) 2)Learning Thought managemen t skills in brining neutrality in proper cases | 45 mins | **Research crafts:** A)Finding seminal works on their topic B)Finding relevant recent works **Writing acts:** Sequencing/voic e aspects | Teaching A) Data mining procedures in major databases for different majors such as CABI for Food Science students, Medline for medicine and Science Direct for all fields are taught B) Working on transitional words in texts (modeling) C) Collecting and analyzing students' pieces of writing (introduction) at home D)Assigning self-study sources | |