RESEARCH ARTICLE

POWER AND EMPOWERMENT IN THE EFL WRITING CLASSROOM

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Article Info:

ABSTRACT

The current study sought to probe into the extent to which empowering students during writing conferences can help students develop their writing abilities and hence become confident writers. It attempts to answer certain questions pertaining to: how tutees perceive power and empowerment in the writing classroom; and the relationship between empowerment and both development of students' writing abilities and their feeling as confident writers. Inspired by critical pedagogy principles and to achieve this, the study utilises questionnaires, a rubric and interviews for data collection and elicitation. The study makes use of a mixed quantitative to gain answers to the research questions. The paper ends with a discussion and some recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

The educational system prevailing in the Egyptian educational arena is characterised by a prevalence of pedagogic practices that supported teacher dominance over learner passivity, fostering memorization and rote learning (Ibrahim, 2009). Those led to stifling creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving strategies among students. Furthermore, those practices, yielded poor quality education with widespread reliance on private tutoring to supplement it which in turn leads to a "*high level of economic inequality, raising concerns about social justice*" (Loveluck, 2012: 3). Moreover, and as a result of the rapidly increasing demand on education, with high population growth rate and a lack of financial resources; the public education system has been struggling to accommodate such increase, and the provision of education has been taken over by non-state sector aiming primarily to invest their money in educational projects with guaranteed success. This resulted in the increase of social injustice among the low income majority of students who feel depressed, unjust, and depowered (Hartmann, 2008). They feel that a more privileged social class is controlling the way of how they approach their education and hence their future career.

Literature review

 There is an educational conundrum stating that empowering students is a key factor for a challenging education. Power, based on a very modernist position, is the ability, capacity and right to act and exercise control. This is not the case of Foucault (2003) who emphasised that power is a constantly shifting array of flows in which tactical advantage, not structural domination, is the ruling principle. Before that, social control was dominating the social canon connoting top-down power. Bourdieu & Passeron (1998) assume that the dominant classes of a society often plays an ideological role in the reproduction of social equality or inequality as their rules and customs function to maintain the hegemony that serves their social and economic interests. Furthermore, this reproduction assists in keeping the various factions of the dominated classes divided against each other in the interests of the ruling class hegemony. Schools are only one of several institutions that, on occasion, serve to perpetuate a hierarchical social structure through the transmission of habitus, or the inculcation of particular dispositions in students, teachers, administrators and politicians that generate specific power practices.

Today's language classroom can pave the ground for improving teachers and students' linguistic and educational status and empowering them to act consciously and freely. The responsibilities in the classrooms are no longer on the shoulders of teachers since students have appeared on the stage and have become more active and responsible participants in the learning process (Scharle & Szabo, 2000). While in traditional pedagogy, the ultimate objectives of learning were determined a priori by theoreticians and handed down to teachers who were thought of as the sole authority within the classroom, or, as has been represented by (Freire, 2000, Kumaravadivelu, 2003), the traditional banking methods of education, in which students are perceived as empty vessels to be filled with the teacher's unquestionable knowledge, the critical pedagogy in contrast, involves students in the construction rather than in the absorption phase of knowledge and create possibilities for change.

Thus, both students and instructors may acquire and practice similar traditions in which a particular social order reflecting the interests of the dominant classes is systematically reproduced. Critical theory, assumes the same premise. It examines how individuals can exercise *agency* to act upon what can be called as their own destiny and interrupt the transmission of an oppressive tradition or culture. Thus, they may deny the power of dominant social classes (namely teachers or a dominant oppressive education) through *resistance* (Selfe, 1996: 275) and try to possess power themselves. In other words, they try to look for empowerment that gives them the chance to put the process of habitus transmission into effect.

This type of educational system can be labeled as alternative pedagogies in which empowerment can help students become more effective and confident when expressing themselves; and also give them the chance to find their voices and gain fluency in academic discourse. Moreover, it entails understanding language as a symbolic action of truth and self; of the world as a social construct; and of writing as a social activity (Jordan, 2003). With such a view of pedagogy, students can play a fundamental rule in understanding, developing and spreading (justice) inside and outside the academic

discourse and thus try to achieve higher aims represented in the creation of new collective futures for teachers and students. In other words, they will act to emphasise their social and linguistic identity.

To apply such an alternative pedagogy, there should be a theory that has power over and informs the teaching practice and is believed and practiced by those working within the educational arena since theory and practice influence each other. Furthermore, just as advances in language theory are reflected in the classroom, the realities of pedagogy have an impact on theory (Eckman, Highland, Lee, Mileham, & Rutkowski Webber, 1995). Critical pedagogy, as an alternative theory, aims to creating engaged, active, critically thinking citizens, that is to say, political subjects who can participate as decision-makers in the organization of their socio-cultural realities (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1992). Critical pedagogues challenge teachers and students to rethink the purpose and meaning of schooling, and the role that they might play as cultural workers. Moreover, and as has been suggested by Moreno-Lopez (2005), critical pedagogues encourage teachers to reinvent the role of power, placing authority on the students, and arranging curricula and classroom practices to ensure students can develop the relative autonomy necessary to be empowered to analyze, criticize, and question not only the material they are studying, but also the texts in which the content material is presented. It is to question power relations, discourse and identities in a world not yet finished, just or humane (Shore, 1999).

Revisiting the student-teacher relationship (Empowerment in the classroom)

Having such an alternative pedagogy and new concepts means the relationship between students and teachers should be revisited again. In other words, such argument helps dismantling the traditional teacher-student hierarchy. This can be done, according to Freire (2000), by reconciling the contradiction between teachers and students so that both can be teachers and students naming this as "*teacher-student with students-teachers*" (p:26). The role of the educator, then, is to create, together with the students, the conditions under which the

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traditional teacher-student hierarchies are broken down and that the participants of the education process are the co-builders of knowledge.

Writing conferences as an approach in teaching echoes this relationship. Its advocates presume that writing, along with learning and thinking, is a social and collaborative act, rejecting the old conceptualization about writing that it is a solitary and individualized process (Jordan, 2003). This fallacy about writing can be dispelled properly by reestablishing and revisiting the relationship between writing and conversation. It is through this social context or writers and readers that the standards and conventions of knowledge are created and reinforced, and it is through these academic conversations that students practice the social reality of writing.

Purpose of the study

There is little in the extent literature which focuses on identifying the relationship between students' empowerment and language development in an EFL context. Therefore, the current study aims at investigating the extent to which empowering students during writing conferences can help students develop their writing abilities and hence become confident writers. In other words, the study seeks to finds answers to the following research questions:

1. How do tutees perceive empowerment in the writing classroom?
2. What is the relationship between empowering students in the writing conferences and their writing competence?
3. What is the relationship between students' empowerment and their perceptions of themselves as confident writers?

Methodology

The current study stemmed from the philosophical ontological assumption that students can define their own way of learning which is socially constructed through society, media, and institutions. Current pedagogy, then, aim not only to challenge and question the status quo of behaviours in the classroom, but also to raise students'

consciousness to question the dominant cultural, political and social domains as a pre-step towards *"social transformation in the classroom and in the collective societal level"* (stevens, 2009).

Based on the document analysis conducted on the writings of a sample of 25 students, the results revealed that most students did not lack the basic skills of writing clear and correct English sentences. However, on the paragraph level, most of their writings were not coherent, out of context, and sometimes ended up abruptly. This made their writings incomplete and un-comprehendible. Moreover, some students who are believed to be good writers were unable to criticie their classmates writings have proved better writing in certain topics, general ones like "*pollution or mal-behaviours*"; and unclear and incoherent writing in other topics like "*expressing opinion in front of strangers*" or *"youth, the future of countries"*. This proves the stereotypical portrait of Egyptian students as quiet and uncritical. They could not get ideas and information out of their heads, and unconsciously were unable to criticize their classmates' works. When asked about that, their response was similar to a great extent to what Asmaa elaborated in her own language. She said: *"we are not used to express our opinion frankly and freely like that "and* do not know on *"what basis should we criticize"*. Then what students really need is to go deep beneath surface behaviours of reading and writing i.e. to examine their own society through the lenses of power in order to expose the structural inequalities and marginalisation (Mack, 2010).

Participants

Thirty-two female EFL students enrolled in the education department at Al-Azhar University in the second semester of the 2009 academic year participated in this study. The administrative approval and students' consent have been gained. This department has high admission standards since it requires its students to have high scores in the General Secondary Certificate. That is why those female students had a unique profile. They are very enthusiastic, ambitious and assertive to learn the English language. They studied a four hour English language preparation course named "*Selected Readings in Education*" which is taught throughout the academic semester; aiming at training students

on the functional use of reading and writing via educational topics.

Designing the course: To design the course of the class, I used the established departmental syllabus as a guideline to guarantee that the students attending this section would cover the aims allocated for the course. It was designed so that the reading sections and the writing activities and exercises are integrated together to reflect the current educational topics aims and reports believed to be of help for them. The topics allocated for reading in the course were chosen based on negotiation between the tutor and tutees to reflect their needs and attitudes and at the same time to cover the aims of the syllabus. The teaching process was in the form of conferences, either micro-conferences or mass-conferences, or what can be labeled as hierarchical or collaborative conferences, in which students and teachers talk together about their writings. The purpose of those conferences was to review students' previous writings in their portfolios, review the current draft of a topic, and explore ways to improve their performance in the class or present the finalised draft to students.

METHODS

A mixed methods approach was used to collect data and gain a complete profile of students pertaining to the aspects of the study. They were: questionnaires, a rubric for analysing students' writing, and interviews. They are as follows:

1. Students' Self Perception of Empowerment (SPE) questionnaire (see appendix 1). The purpose of this questionnaire was to give a full account regarding students' empowerment in the writing classroom and hence give an answer to the first question. The questionnaire has been categorized into four categories with twenty nine items:
    a) The role of the social context in empowerment; this includes items (1,2,3,7,8);
    b) The role of the student in the classroom; items (6,10,12,13,14,15)
    c) The type of the educational system; with items (16,17,18,19,26,27,28,29); and

d) How students perceive teachers' performance regarding empowerment. This includes items (4,5,9,11,20,21,22,23,24,25).

2. A writing rubric (see appendix 2): In order to answer the second question, this rubric has been designed to analyse students' writing based on five dimensions: focus, organization, support and elaboration, style and writing conventions.

3. Students' Self Perception as Confident Writers (SPCW) questionnaire (see appendix 3). The purpose of utilizing this tool was to complete the profile of learners regarding their ability in writing and feeling of empowerment. The scale is handling three dimensions to reveal students' confidence while writing; studying (items:4,6,7,11,16,17,18) , clarifying (items: 8,9,15) and producing (items: 1.2.3.5.10.12,13,14,19).

4. An after task interview protocol was adopted to gain a deep understanding of the issues the questionnaires is enquiring about (see appendix 4).

Data collection and analysis

At the beginning of the study, the SPE questionnaire has been conducted to verify the extent to which students feel empowered in their classroom. The scale addressed how students perceive four dimensions regarding empowerment; the social context, the teachers' role, the educational system and students' role. The teaching method adopted was the conferencing approach. During and after conducting the conferences, students' writing samples were analysed using the allocated writing rubric. The purpose of utilising the rubric was to verify whether there is a relationship between students' empowerment in the classroom and their writing competence. At the end of the academic semester, the SPCW scale was conducted to verify the extent to which students feel confident while writing after empowering them in the classroom via the use of conferences.

The design of those questionnaires is based on my experience as a language instructor, and some other colleagues who are interested in the same filed and

the literature pertaining power, empowerment and writing conferencing.

To check the validity of the two questionnaires and the interview protocol, two assistant professors of education have reviewed them to see the extent to which the items reflect the dimensions and the clarity of wording to be appropriate to the participants. This resulted in changes in wording and eliminating some items. Moreover, they requested that there should be other two Arabic versions of the two scales for those students who might be interested in reading in Arabic; especially the way the scales address certain items might not be appropriate in language for some students. Moreover, and to compute the descriptive statistics on the questionnaires, SPSS v.17 has been utilised.

RESULTS

The study sought to investigate the influence of empowering students through conferencing approach on the development of their writing abilities and self concept as confident writers. The results reached by conducting the tools of the study can be presented in three main themes covering the research questions. They are: the feeling of powereless; the development of students writing abilities based on their feelings of empowerment; and the development of confident writer. The next section will address those issues.

Feeling of empowerment

The SPE questionnaire is divided into four dimensions to verify whether students feel empowered or not and the factors that constitute that. In other words, the questionnaire aims at investigating the role of the social context in empowerment; the role of the student in the

classroom; the type of the educational system; and how students perceive teachers' performance regarding empowerment. The following sections will deal with them.

Using SPSS v.17, statistics presented in (table 1) and the appendix 1 show that the majority of the participants (around 81%) believe the social context embedded in family and the society around and the social life problems influenced their approach to study and their feelings of empowerment in a negative manner. They emphasised the assumption that parents usually are either authorised by students or willing to take some important and serious decisions in students' social and academic lives. Furthermore, most of the participants revealed that they do not have enough experience, courage or knowledge to question teachers regarding the teaching materials in their classrooms which means the lack of empowerment in both social and academic arenas.

In addition, most of the participants asserted that the type of the educational system adopted in schools and institutes does not help practicing freedom or promoting innovation and empowerment since they do not give the chance to students to decide for themselves, starting from the educational programmes presented and ending with the aims and content of courses taught within these programmes.. Contrary to that, the educational system is centralised and encourages authoritarian and dictatorship. Likewise, most of them think that teachers are there in the classroom for their help, and that if they need anything, they would think of teachers first. Also, they revealed that talented teachers are those who are able to give the due help to students in the due time. The following table summarises these results:

Table (1): The SPE Questionnaire					
	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The social context	24	57	12	7	0
Role of students	26	60	9	5	0
Type of educational system	27	49	17	4	3
Teacher performance	12	71	10	5	2

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In one of the after task interviews, students were asked if they think teachers and parents influence their education or not, they all agree. Samah for example said "*my parents forced me to attend in the literary section in the secondary stage although I was a brilliant student in mathematics and science. This is because being in the scientific section is costy and they cannot afford that*". Manal affirmed this saying "*I did not know which college to attend, and one of the secondary school teachers advised my parents to let me enroll in this college*"; "*I have no opinion*".

Sarah had another idea. She said in an affirmative manner " *can you go and ask any staff member in this college if he considers our opinion in the courses we are taught or even the way we are assessed. The fact is "we are helpless in regarding that*."

The development of students writing abilities based on their feelings of empowerment

The main source of data for this section of the study was essays written at the beginning and at the end of the semester. The holistic analysis conducted on the data was mainly based on the bands the participating students obtained. This level of analysis aimed mainly to ascertain whether students' academic writing competence has improved purely in numerical terms. On analysing students' scores statistically, at the beginning and at the end of the study using *t*-test (paired samples correlation), the results clarified students gained better results than theirs before conducting the conferencing approach. The following table explains this:

Table (2): Paired Samples Correlations (writing abilities and empowerment)							
		N	mean	SD.	t	df	Sig.
Pair 1	Students' scores before the conferences & Students' scores after the conferences	25	.618	10.004	-15.094	24	.000

In a short interview with the participants and to gain deep knowledge about their ideas and feelings towards the conference approach, I asked them an open ended question: "*Please explain why you like or dislike the writing conference*." Of the twenty five students surveyed, 18 students said they like it. Their reasons for feeling this way, in their words, were as follows: "*to make my writing better; to express my ideas freely ; to get more ideas; to give me the chance to criticise my writing and my colleagues writings; It is a good social activity ; and I like it because I feel happy during it*". However, four students still said they disliked the activity and three of them were unsure about it. Their reasons were the following: "*I don't know how to write; obtaining nothing from the conferences; to get no tips from the teacher about how to write; Why not assign a teacher who can speak*".

Developing confident writers

The participants of the study completed the SPCW scale. As mentioned earlier, the scale was divided into three parts; the first is related to ideas connected with *studying*, the second is linked with practical processes in the classroom named as *clarifying* and finally the third section is linked with the outcome of the process of writing which is *producing*. Using one sample *t*-test, the statistics revealed that the significance of the scores on the three dimensions is (0.00) with (*M*- from 1.2 to 3.6 and *SD* from 0.13 to 0.31) which indicates that students' self-confidence and efficacy in writing is high. Table 3 illustrates this:

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Table (3): one sample t-test on SPCW Questionnaire						
SPCW dimensions	N	mean	SD.	t	Df	Sig.
studying	25	3.68	0.29	0.62	24	.000
clarifying	25	1.20	0.13	0.45	24	.000
Producing	25	2.70	0.31	0.42	24	.000

DISCUSSION

Based on the results mentioned earlier, it seems that students were aware that they did not have an impact on their environment, or could practice any control over their circumstances. The negotiations of life circumstances or classroom processes were not there either in social life or in the classroom (*no negotiations regarding education or even social events*). This means students understand well that they are suffering from an oppressive educational and social system, and also realise their exact position inside that system. This helpless knowledge and feeling, from one side, hindered them from negotiating meanings or goals with their teachers or parents which essentially influenced their lives, and from the other side, can be considered a starting point towards change whether on social or educational levels.

Students' discussion regarding the educational system is not a new discussion because this system is deeply rooted in the Egyptian culture and traditions. Students are brought up to cram the contents of the courses for the sake of examination despite all the efforts done by consecutive governments to change those mass goals of knowledge towards practice. This system exemplifies Freire's (2000) concept, "*the banking concept of education*", in which knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing (students). Students' greatest concern is to store and maintain this information so that when it is needed, they pour it out in the exam which is held to test their evidence of learning.

Educated in such context, it was difficult to expect students enjoying empowerment which is higher in rank than just cramming. Even empowerment in the society in general is something luxurious, for the elite people, as expressed by students themselves: "*I could not discuss the idea of attending other college with my father. I just kept silent*" Asmaa said. Consequently, the results of the SPE questionnaire are not surprising. Students lacked the feeling of empowerment as a result of some social and cultural traditions students brought up on or some others enacted inside or outside the classroom context. Even talking about or studying topics addressing empowerment is a taboo.

Having realised this feeling and situation, and as I attempted to conduct the conferences in writing, students found out that the educational setting has changed completely from absolute dependence on teachers and parents to ownership. This process was not easy to start and needed much effort to be enacted. Starting from scratch, the participants found out that they were constantly in the process of raising topics and of gaining or losing status by having their topics disregarded or embraced. Especially in moments where topics were established or dismissed, it was easy to understand the participants as acting on each others' actions. Moreover, the previous illustrated debate raised in the literature regarding the types of conferences whether collaborative or hierarchical is not present in this study since students sometimes used both types to perform the task. For instance, Eman has two conferences with the same topic "*Learning Styles*". She unintentionally enacted both types of conferences. First, she utilsed the hierarchical conference to elaborate her ideas, and then moved on to the collaborative form of enactment. But in general, both conferences shared the idea of co-constructing knowledge through ownership of goals, topics and ideas (an essential step towards full empowerment). To be practical, Eman initiated her

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topic and goals first hierarchical, and then worked as a resource to fulfill the goals collaboratively. She contributed extensively and substantially in the conversation and let other students contribute as well. She sometimes worked as a traditional teacher by trying to enforce her ideas, but the attendees refuse this and resort back to the form of negotiation.

When empowered, it was not surprising to find students act as a traditional student in some situations, especially when enacting the hierarchical form of conferences. In general, the different types of conferences attempted appear to result in significant gains. Each conference met the tutee's goals: leaving with a plan for the essay and a better understanding of comments, understanding how to create the narrative structure of the essay, and having ideas for polishing the drafts. In addition to an approach for their current writing task, each gained or seemed to gain confidence, a degree of fluency in academic discourse, and possibly even transferable skills. Further, each also experienced moment that potentially heightened their awareness of writing as a social act; "*I think we can choose later some topics about society and social life*" Sally commented. Further, we cannot know with certainty whether a different approach, for example, a more hierarchical approach or a more collaborative approach, would have resulted in the same degree of empowerment. Accordingly, we must conclude that conference dynamics vary, and that conferences of many varieties can empower tutees.

Sally's conference was deviated to discuss some organisational and mechanical elements in the topic, (mind mapping). This may be due to the psychological nature of the information presented in the topic. Once students started to elaborate certain ideas, meaning negotiation arose, and more ideas were suggested with reference to the acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses; "*I felt unable able to fulfill the conference at the beginning, thinking that it is the same like the traditional method of writing, but later, my colleagues started negotiating ideas with and felt different*" Sally commented. This clearly asserts the ideas presented earlier by Freire who asserts that once students have been given

voice and responsibility, this will inevitably lead to social transformation.

Young and Miller (2002) agree with those ideas. They discuss how student- teacher writing conferences held consistently over a period of time and the feeling of empowerment they have during the conferences will eventually lead students to become independent writers and reviser of their own writing.

These results conform with those reached by Berbache (2007) which revealed that there is ample evidence that language learners need to be engaged in interactive activities, particularly in peer review conferences, that create opportunities for them to negotiate meaning and to learn from and implicitly teach peers in order to promote their language proficiency, including L2 writing and their self esteem and confidence while writing.

Matsumura and Hann's (2004) findings also support this idea. They indicated that the student's writing improvement and feel of confidence was related to the student's choice of feedback. The group with the most writing improvement was comprised of students who chose to use both online feedback and face- to- face feedback.

There was some impediments hindered the full enactment of empowerment in the classroom. One area was students' misconceptions regarding passive audience in the conferences. Lilly, as an example, considered two of her colleagues, Rehab and Mona, as passive learner. She started to show them how to handle a task and mainly some mechanical aspects like grammar and spelling. Gradually, this moved to the traditional method of teaching writing. Another area to obstruct empowerment involved the ownership of learning goals. While focusing on the learners' goals is empowering to some degree, but it might be a form of lacking empowerment or a backfire, as other goals of other learners might produce better results. For instance, Lilly's goal was to maintain some help in punctuation and grammar. While gaining power over this issue, she stopped working on the sentence level while reading another topic.

Social mobility, critical education, and language development

Students' own words and ideas presented were considered to be a hidden manifestation of the oppressed feelings that students felt at that time towards the way they live, have been educated and treated whether on the educational or social levels. When students have been given *the voice* as in Freire's words, they started to talk about how they felt oppressed and injustice towards the educational system and the way they have been treated in schools and even at homes. With the help of other innovations and facilities available to them, it was not strange, then, to find those young people as the sparkle for the social and political mobility nationwide nowadays, which clearly confirms the ideas of Freire who asserted that once young people given the chance to freely express themselves, social transformation is the next step. Critical pedagogy, then, is no longer a luxurious approach or an approach for the elite. It has become a necessity, then, to bring up and educate our children to accommodate all the new changes.

On the other hand, and with the advent of new technologies and means of communication, language is not simply a means of communication of expression; rather, it is a practice that constructs, and is constructed by, the ways students understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities for the future. It is not a matter of language learning or language education; it is a societal move towards new era in which justice, freedom and equality are the overwhelming young people thinking, ideas and approaches in life. Thus, such issues have become central for critical language pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

The current study explored power and empowerment in the EFL writing classroom in one of the Egyptian classes located in Upper Egypt. Empowering students was started from choosing topics to cover course aims, the process of conferencing and meaning negotiation, the freedom of talk and criticism, the integration of social and academic goals, and in general changing the academic context to allow students to have their own voice in the language classroom. The results of the study indicated that when students feel empowered in their educational setting, students' linguistic ability can be significantly developed. There are some that argue that changing power in practice must begin locally, in class, as it is in the arenas of everyday life in which people are able to act. Others argue for the importance of the nation state, and how it mediates power, suggesting that the nation state is still the main crucible of empowerment and public authority. Despite this argument, it was noticeable that empowerment itself whether it is practiced locally or nationwide is helpful in realising and achieving goals and wishes.

There are some recommendations based on the procedures and the results of the study for the writing teaching and learning process. First, empowering students in classroom entails that students should practice ownership of texts. Teachers are entitled to share their ideas and information with the tutees and help them choose the texts and improve their writing abilities. Second, conducting conferences in the language classes in general, and in writing classes in particular, should be on both hierarchical and collaborative methods. There is no such a clear cut difference between the two dichotomies and that, in fact, both are helpful in facilitating language learning. Third, embracing both the hierarchical and collaborative forms of conferences, in addition to tutor facilitation and meaning negotiation, can help eliminate the drawback of text ownership. In other words, sometimes and due to the misuse of text ownership, students do not have the chance to learn what is believed to be essential for their writing ability improvement. Consequently, it was suggested to let students practice ownership of texts and gain authority and power over the leaning process with some recommendations and suggestions from teachers in a non-directive approach. Finally this meaning negotiation regarding ownership of texts should be extended to embrace both goals and process with teachers applying the same non-directive approach in the process. This powerful approach in writing classroom will not be effectively

conducted without the proper preparation and training from the side of the teachers.

Finally, it is suggested for researchers to look for the implication of writing conferences on the enactment of political empowerment like ethical issues. Others might be interested in identifying the implications of power and empowerment in improving students' listening levels, or to enhance students' oral abilities by using a responsive approach in the language classroom. In conclusion, empowerment can be fully utilised as a philosophical base to improve language education context.

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Appendix (1)

Students' responses on the SPSE Questionnaire

Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. My private problems affect my education.	(5) 20	(15) 60	(5) 20	(0) 0	(0) 0
2. There is a link between social problems and my status in education.	(4) 16	(15) 60	(6) 24	(0) 0	(0) 0
3. My life experiences influence my approach to study.	(4) 16	(16) 64	(4) 16	(1) 4	(0) 0
4. I mainly depend on my teachers in my study.	(4) 16	(15) 60	(6) 24	(0) 0	(0) 0
5. I feel confident when teachers become the sole controllers of the writing class.	(4) 16	(15) 60	(6) 24	(0) 0	(0) 0
6. I cannot depend on myself to take decision regarding my education.	(3) 12	(16) 64	(6) 24	(0) 0	(0) 0
7. Parents usually help me take my decisions.	(4) 16	(15) 60	(6) 24	(0) 0	(0) 0
8. I usually wait for parents or teachers to tell me what to do.	(4) 16	(15) 60	(6) 24	(0) 0	(0) 0
9. Teachers usually help me gain knowledge.	(4) 16	(14) 56	(7) 28	(0) 0	(0) 0
10. I do not have enough experience to share knowledge with teachers or peers.	(4) 16	(15) 60	(6) 24	(0) 0	(0) 0
11. Teachers are there to guide me to the right education.	(5) 5	(15) 60	(4) 20	(0) 0	(0) 0.0
12. My only role is to listen carefully to what teachers say to do it.	(0) 0	(0) 0	(6) 24	(12) 48	(7) 28
13. I can question teachers in the educational ideas.	(3 12	(16) 64	(6) 24	(0) 0	(0) 0.0
14. I do not have enough experience to question teachers in ideas related to education.	(5) 5	(15) 60	(4) 20	(0) 0	(0) 0.0
15. I do not have enough courage to question teachers in ideas related to my learning process.	(4) 16	(15) 60	(6) 24	(0) 0	(0) 0
16. The educational system does not give us the chance to express our ideas in our learning process.	(5) 20	(15) 60	(4) 16	(1) 4	(0) 0.0
17. I hate my schools, I feel imprisoned inside.	(2) 8	(13) 52	(6) 24	(2) 8	(2) 8
18. I think feeling freedom in school is necessary for a balanced educational system	(5) 20	(16) 64	(6) 24	(0) 0	(0) 0
19. I hate the way principles deal with us in schools	(4) 16	(15) 60	(4) 16	(2) 8	(0) 0

20. I usually depend on my teachers in terms of knowledge	(4) 16	(15) 60	(4) 16	(0) 0	(2) 8
21. Teachers should not interfere in my choices regarding education	(5) 20	(15) 60	(1) 4	(1) 4	(3) 12
22. Sometimes I feel embraced because of teachers' oppression	(4) 16	(15) 60	(2) 8	(0) 0	(4) 16
23. Skillful teachers are those who give their students the chance to feel free	(4) 16	(17) 68	(4) 16	(0) 0	(0) 0
24. If my teacher just helps me, I will be happier	(4) 16	(15) 60	(5) 20	(1) 4	(0) 0
25. My teacher feels like a dictator at school	(4) 16	(15) 60	(6) 24	(0) 0	(0) 0
26. I have the chance to reflect on my writing	(0) 0	(0) 0	(6) 24	(4) 16	(15) 60
27. I am in control of my writing	(0) 0	(0) 0	(6) 24	(4) 16	(15) 60
28. I have learned to evaluate my writing strategies	(0) 0	(0) 0	(5) 20	(4) 16	(16) 64
29. I have the power to select my best approach to a piece of writing	(0) 0	(0) 0	(6) 24	(4) 16	(15) 60
Numbers are shown in brackets, followed by percentages)					

Appendix 2

The writing rubric

The items	Very clear	Clear	Not sure	Unclear	Very unclear
1. The writer is confused about the subject matter					
2. The writer has not effectively established a focus					
3. The writer probably has been effective in establishing a focus.					
4. The text exhibits a constancy of purpose					
5. The development of elements is clear					
6. The related ideas are clearly progressed					
7. The related ideas are unified					
8. The ideas presented are complete					
9. The details in the text are related to the focus and organisation					
10. The details are concrete and specific					
11. Ideas presented in the text are not repeated or redundant					
12. Repetition in the text is for the sake of paraphrasing					
13. Ideas presented in the texts are sufficient to cover the ideas					
14. Word choice is appropriate					
15. Phrases are appropriately chosen					
16. Description in the text is suitable to the audience					
17. The writer uses different sentence styles to clarify his cause					
18. The writer has control of the grammatical conventions					
19. Errors do not impede the reader's understanding of the text					
20. Spelling is correct to a great extent					
21. The writer uses correct punctuation					
22. Correct grammatical sentences are evident in the text					

Appendix 3

Students' Self Perception as Confident Writers Scale (SPCW)

How confident are you that you will be able to:

The items	Very confident	confident	Not sure	unconfident	Very unconfident
23. Write effectively on your own in independent study					
24. Produce your best work under examination conditions					
25. Respond to questions in writing asked by a lecturer					
26. Manage your work load to meet course work deadlines					
27. Hand in a report or critical analysis about a topic to a group of fellow students					
28. Attend most writing sessions					
29. Attain good grades in your work					
30. Send questions in writing to the lecturer about materials and ideas they are teaching					
31. Engage in profitable academic debate in writing with your peers					
32. Summarize your understanding of the material teachers teaching during the lecture in writing					
33. Prepare your work thoroughly in writing					
34. Express your opinion freely and without pressures					
35. Produce course work at the required standard					
36. Write in an appropriate academic style					
37. Ask for help if you are unable to write well					
38. Pass assessments at the first attempt					
39. Plan appropriate revision schedules					
40. Remain adequately motivated throughout					
41. Produce your best work in coursework assignments					

Appendix 4

The interview protocol

The following questions were just guideline questions to the interviews.

1. In your opinion, do you think your parents, family or friends influence the way you are educated? Give examples.
2. Do you like the conferencing approach in the classroom? Why?
3. How is conferencing different from other approaches you have been taught with?
4. How do you feel after conducting the conferencing approach in terms of authenticity and ownership?
5. Do you think this approach will influence your approach to learning other courses