# Determining the Relationship between Learners' Beliefs, Peer vs. Teacher-Ratings and Iranian EFL Learners' Writing Performance

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### Abstract

Writing is an indispensable part of any language learning process, the mastery of which requires a lot of time, effort, and energy. The process of writing itself is always influenced by some factors that may lead to individual differences. Among those contributing factors, the learners' beliefs along with peer vs. teacher ratings have been taken into account in this research. Ninety intermediate Iranian EFL learners studying English at Shayestegan English Language Institute in Tehran participated in this study. The homogenized sample of the study was selected based on their scores on the Michigan English Language Test. Then six writing assignments along with the general learners' belief scale designed by Horwitz (1988) were administered to the participants. The participants' writing assignments were scored analytically according to Jacob et al.'s scale (1981) once by the teacher and once by the peers. The results of the correlational analyses revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean of ratings of teachers and peers. In fact, rating types had a significant but small effect on the participants' writing scores. To investigate the relationship between learners' beliefs and their writing performance, a series of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients were estimated. The results of the analyses indicated that there was no significant relationship between students' beliefs and their writing performance when it was

rated by peers and/or the teacher. The pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research were also proposed.

**Keywords:** Learners' beliefs, peer vs. teacher's ratings, writing performance

## 1. Introduction

Any rating should encourage students to apply their knowledge to a new experience, reflect on it, review and adapt strategies and then try again (Meier, Roy, & Seliger, 2010). Yet, not all activities involve reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. Although teachers grade each piece of writing, in many cases, there is a gaping hole in the learning cycle (Farhady, 2003). In this respect, self- and peer-rating can provide learners with the opportunity to have a new experience of assessment, to reflect on their weaknesses and strengths, to conceptualize how to progress in learning, and finally to involve actively in the rating process. Moreover, those who are involved in the field of second language writing view feedback as a crucial factor for "encouraging and consolidating learning" (Hyland, 2006, p. 92). Some scholars in writing (Leki, 1991; Raimes, 1983) believe that giving feedback is one of the important methods assisting learners to improve their writing. Giving feedback to students' writing errors has always been one of the demanding tasks on part of the teachers. Although there have been controversies regarding the efficiency of providing errors feedback on students' writings tasks (Ferris, 1999; Truscott, 1999), more literature in this area confirms that error-correction- debate continues. Since giving feedback to students' writing tasks is difficult and time-consuming and due to the fact there are few studies examined the type of ratings which is more effective and low time-consuming particularly in the Iranian context, it is worth investigating as the most efficient way to react to errors. Literature suggests that rating is more beneficial but, along with research on the ratings' strategies of teachers, there are very few studies investigating the effectiveness of different types of ratings. In fact, one of the problems of using ratings on students' writing tasks seems to be the selection of the appropriate strategy which fits the teaching field (Ferris, 1999). Furthermore, learners' belief is usually distinguished by a large dimension of emotional reflections such as feelings and relationships in the community (Koichi & Ellis, 2014). Accordingly, learning could not come about easily unless students have positive beliefs toward it. Learners' beliefs might originate and can produce an encouraging/exciting situation for learning and teaching as confirmed by Koichi and Ellis (2014). To fill above-mentioned gap on different types of rating, to examine the power of learners' belief (whether the students are able to produce acceptable piece of writing regardless of their belief toward

language learning), and to investigate its relationship with learners' writing scores, the present study was carried out to determine the ties between learners' beliefs, peer vs. teacher-ratings and Iranian EFL learners' writing performance. To the end, following research questions were addressed:

**RQ1:** Is there any significant relationship between peer-rating and Iranian EFL learners' writing performance?

**RQ2:** Is there any significant relationship between teacher-rating and Iranian EFL learners' writing performance?

**RQ3:** Is there any significant relationship between learners' beliefs and Iranian EFL learners' writing performance?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Peer vs. Teacher Rating

Teacher assessment as the sole assessment tradition in language classes is no longer valid nowadays (Leung, 2007). In recent years, different types of assessment have received adequate attention as an integral element of learning in general and language learning in particular. Assessment refers to "any methods used to better understanding of the current knowledge that a student possesses" (Collins & O'Brien, 2003, p. 29). Given the instructional value of assessment, ELT teachers spend a great deal of their class time engaged in one type of assessment or another (Stiggins, 2002). Currently, various innovations in assessment procedures have been carried out and attention from summative assessment has shifted to formative assessment. These innovations involve thinking of alternatives, which require questioning the learning process and using learning and assessment activities together rather than habitual testing applications. Therefore, to overcome the inherent limitations of teachers' assessments, alternative assessments, such as self-assessments and peer-assessments, gained momentum in the field of education (Hargreaves, Earl, & Schmidt, 2001). Peer-assessment is defined as "an arrangement for peers to consider the level, value, worth, quality or successfulness of the products or outcomes of learning of similar status" (Smith, Swanson, & Elliot, 2000, p. 150). Freeman (1995) highlighted the efficacy of peer-assessment to compensate for weaknesses in many assessment practices that usually fail to foster the development of independent, reflective, and critical learners. Similarly, Cheng and Warren (2005) asserted that peer-assessment "…provides learners with the opportunity to take responsibility for analyzing, monitoring and evaluating aspects of both the learning process

and product of their peers" (p. 94). Peer -assessment, in which learners assess each other, have the capability to encourage the learners to take greater responsibilities for their own learning by being engaged in assessment criteria and reflection of their own performance and that of their peers. In reality, evaluation or rating, in any instructional process is significant by itself. In fact, both instructors and learners need to get involved in and have the power to control the evaluation techniques, consequences, and their underlying justifications. When it comes to evaluating students' writing in EFL contexts particularly in popular teacher-centered classrooms, the inclusion of peer assessment as a learning instrument besides the usual teacher rating not only can improve learners' perspective toward different types of evaluations, but may also lead to outcomes at least as good as teacher rating (Topping, 1998). Being practical, beneficial, enjoyable and challenging on the one hand, and feelings of threat or being unnerved due to the subjectivity of evaluation, or failing to develop self-esteem in acting fairly as an assessor, on the other hand are some beliefs toward peer rating indicating that students' levels of acceptability are varied constantly (Cheng & Warren, 2005).

Several studies have focused on student-related variables that may affect the substantive revisions of students' writing. The effects of peer and teacher feedback on Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' writing performance was examined by Hossieny (2015). Within the last few decades, with the growing emphasis on learner-centered curriculum, self-assessment and peer-assessment have become quite important in educational assessment. He found that peer rating can encourage students to develop strategies for their own learning, to help them find their interests and tendencies, and to assist them to be more self-sufficient in their writing performance. Peer and teacher assessments are dedicated to gathering knowledge about how learners are able to prepare and comprehend real-life tasks (Huerta, 1995). Peer-rating is a process through which learners learn about themselves (Dikel, 2005). Since the development of peer and teacher rating methods, many researchers have endeavored to probe into the effectiveness of implementing new techniques of evaluating language learning of various learners. Ross (1998) has investigated the influence of using developmental rating on foreign language proficiency improvement by involving eight cohorts of foreign language learners in an eight-year longitudinal study. He found that peer rating methods proved very definite consequences on language proficiency improvements. Cheng and Warren (2005) have endeavored to study the benefits of peer-rating in English language applications. In their study, undergraduate engineering learners attending a university in Hong Kong were examined to

estimate the English language knowledge of their peers. They also endeavored to connect peer and teacher rating. The consequences of their investigations indicated that the students had a contradictory perception of evaluating their peers' language learning, but they could procure their peers' language proficiency in a comparable fashion based on the same rating criteria. Performing two manners of peer rating and conferencing, Firooz-Zareh (2006) examined the association between peer rating techniques and Iranian learners' reading knowledge. The consequences of his analysis determined that peer assessment procedures should be included in preparation and evaluation arrangements. Besharati (2004) did a similar study by focusing on the influence of alternative rating on monitoring proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. As for speaking ability, Ahangari, Rassekh-Alqol, and Ali Akbari (2013) examined the effect of peer rating on oral performance of Iranian EFL students. The consequences of their research designated the statistically meaningful differences among the groups. The conclusions of their investigation also recommended that peer rating can improve the speaking ability of learners if they are given a valid criterion or framework. As for general course performance, Abolfazli Khonbi and Sadeghi (2012) examined the effect of self-, peer-, and teacher-rating procedures on Iranian EFL learners' comprehension of English knowledge. The results showed inconsistencies in the outcomes of the three techniques in favor of peer-rating.

### 2.2 Learners' Beliefs

Learners' beliefs about language knowledge may have an extensive impact on their language learning achievements. Horwitz (1988) discovered that learners sometimes endure very unreliable beliefs affecting language learning. Learners' belief about language learning may be a significant grantor to language learning (Young, 1991) and one of the fundamental constituents that restricts students from reaching their aspired purposes of language learning.

In the few past decades, researchers have examined learner beliefs about language learning in an effort to consider the personal differentiation and to obtain an immeasurable perception of students' beliefs to come up with efficient methods to promote students' language learning. Analyses have proposed that some of the learners' beliefs about language learning begin from their earlier activities as language students, while other beliefs can be discovered to learners' educational experiences, household environments, and individual varieties (e.g., Horwitz, 1983, 1988; Price, 1992; Wenden, 1987; Young, 1991). These beliefs may affect the learners' language learning practices, strategies, and reactions. Consequently, explaining how students

imagine language learning, inquiring what the outcomes of their beliefs are, and considering how these beliefs should be brought with are of significant issues in developing language teaching and learning (Young, 1991). Among the analyses reviewing learner beliefs about language learning, Horwitz's (1983) study is recognized as the first endeavor to recognize learner beliefs about language education in a methodical progression. He developed the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), to evaluate students' views on a variety of subjects and discussions related to language learning. In Horwitz's (1988) research, the BALLI was administrated to 240 first language learners of German, French, and Spanish. Horwitz (1988) noticed that some students' beliefs were very optimistic and unreliable. For example, 40% of the questions in the study felt that it was reasonable to become fluent in a second language in two years or less, and 60% of the Spanish and German students admitted that learning a foreign language essentially consisted of interpretation. Such beliefs might differ from the real situations that students experience while learning a foreign language. Consequently, these characters of misunderstandings concerning communication learning might lead to disappointment or failure among language learners, bring about inadequate representation or even end their language education. Besides Horwitz's (1988) investigation, which studied the beliefs about language learning among American learners of German, French, and Spanish, also accompanied a study to review the beliefs supported by American students of Japanese, as well as to consider the relationship between beliefs about foreign language learning and language anxiety. However, students' beliefs about the challenges of language learning and motivation seemed to depend on the particular target language they were thinking. Horwitz (1988) concluded that a "perception of target language difficulty, in general, seems to influence language learners' confidence levels as well as whether students would underestimate or overestimate how long it takes them to become fluent in a foreign language" (p. 113). Data analyses have confirmed the relationship between learners' beliefs and their choice of education strategies (Horwitz, 1988; Wenden, 1987; Yang, 1992). According to Yang (1992), "learners' specific beliefs about their own language learning are critical in determining which types of strategies they used" (p. 42). Wenden (1987) utilized semi-structured interviews to obtain learners' beliefs regarding language learning and strategy practice. Wenden (1987) recognized three major sections in learner beliefs: the application of the language, the knowledge of the language, and the influence of personal circumstances. She perceived that learners' declared beliefs about language learning were compatible with their selection of learning approaches. All investigations on learners' beliefs have intimated how learners think

about language learning (Horwitz, 1988, Kunt, 1997; Oh, 1996; Truitt, 1995), how their preconceived beliefs compare to their strategy use (Horwitz, 1988; Wenden 1987; Yang, 1992), as well as how students' beliefs disagree and mismatch with those of teachers, or even with students of different schools (Kern, 1995). These issues revealed that language learners certainly have their preconceived beliefs about language learning and some of their beliefs are unreliable and even misleading. In addition, the conclusions of these studies also recommended that learner beliefs affect not only their appearances to specific tasks but also their reactions to learning activities and their preferences of language learning strategies. Amaka (2016) carried out a study on learners' belief and its role on language learning. In that study, the learning context was considered as a determinant which affected the learners' beliefs considerably. Ariogul, Unal, and Onursal (2009) investigated foreign language learners' beliefs about language learning on Turkish university students. The study addresses the differences and similarities among English, German, and French language groups' beliefs about language learning. The participant students (n = 343) completed BALLI(Horwitz, 1990) and a demographic information questionnaire. The results of a cross-tabulation of thirty-four items showed that although French language learners had more positive expectations in language learning, all three groups held certain beliefs that would be detrimental to their long-term language learning.

### 2.3 Writing Skill in General

Writing ability is the art of producing thoughts and ideas, the mastery of which is quite demanding. Producing a coherent and cohesive piece of writing in the first language, as Nunan (1999) stated, is actually difficult. So, writing in a second language can be even more complicated. One reason for such difficulty is due to the lack of background knowledge about the conventions of academic writing especially when the structure and vocabulary are being used (Al Badi, 2015). Furthermore, generating ideas about writing topics could also be a barrier that hinders students to improve their writing (Al Murshidi, 2014). Van De Poel and Gasiorek (2012) characterize writing as a pre-eminent element of English discourse which may use a number of various kinds of manuscripts including articles, outlines, lecture summaries, and compositions. Sanu (2016) strengthens the thought by declaring that in the English context, writing is one of the English abilities that should be comprehended by EFL learners in order to be able to interact in written reports with different particular purposes and importance. Van De Poel and Gasiorek (2012) affirm that writing requires a considerable amount of language

proficiency, primarily when the language is being used as a second or foreign language for the speaker. It is indisputable that academic writing ability acknowledged to be the most significant aspect and must be obtained by a student, particularly an EFL student to fulfill any requirements at length such as writing an observation report, book, and thesis. The most common difficulties which the learners also encounter are the accuracy of meaning, the implementation of grammar and vocabulary practice modifications, the writing scores, and the importance of writing techniques (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017). Asik (2015) observes that the character of students' writing is also influenced by understanding language problems and teaching strategies/writing elements. Brown (2001) maintains that giving feedback in the process of writing is important to improve students' writing quality. In addition, the importance of giving feedback on students' writing is equal to the importance of doing revisions and/or editing in the writing process. Given feedback is a source of information about the students' strengths and weaknesses during the writing process (Wahyuni, 2017).

### 2.4 The Current Study

Evaluating the learners' written tasks plays a key role in their writing development. While errors are natural in all aspects of language learning, EFL learners face unique challenges in developing writing skills (Evans et. al., 2010). Written corrective feedback provides learners with information they need to know confronting their errors. Ferris (2002) suggests that students "need distinct and additional intervention from their writing teachers to make up their deficits and develop strategies for finding, correcting, and avoiding errors" (p. 163). One of the concerns of teachers, especially in communicative classes, is that they wonder if learners should correct the grammatical errors in their writing themselves or the teachers should do the task (Leki, 1991). Although most teachers are involved in errors' corrections, the key issue is that not enough knowledge is provided to teachers regarding what to correct and especially how to correct. Thus, the need could be easily felt to investigate other types of ratings on EFL writing process. The present study may encourage EFL teachers to search and learn about the effective rating techniques. They can ponder about their students' needs and try to find the suitable rating methods for their students. The study is also expected to bring a new perspective to assess the students' writing assignments and put emphasis on how form-related ratings should be given to students. It directly sheds light on the question whether ratings are useful or not; and if so, in what ways they should be given. The current study was an attempt to report

the relationship between learners' beliefs and peer vs. teacher-ratings and Iranian EFL learners' writing scores.

### 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Participants

This study included 90 female intermediate participants. The age range of these students was between 11~15. They were studying English language at Shayestegan English Language Institute in Tehran. They were selected based on their results on the Michigan English Test. These learners were truly homogenous with respect to their English proficiency levels.

### 3.2 Instruments

In order to answer the proposed research questions, the following instruments were applied:

### 3.2.1. Michigan English Test

Participants were selected based on their results on the Michigan English Test and they indicated to be homogeneous. After obtaining the results of the proficiency test, only those participants who scored one standard deviation above and below the mean were chosen as the sample of the study. The Michigan English Test emphasized communicative use of English rather than a formalistic knowledge of English, and it captured the students who were able to function and perform communicative transactions in all four skill areas of the language (speaking, listening, reading, and writing). The test included 100 multiple choice items and took one hour and fifteen minutes. It had different sections as below:

1. Grammar - 40 questions.
2. Vocabulary - 40 questions.
3. Reading Comprehension - 20 questions.

### 3.2.2. Topic-based Compositions as the Pre-test and the Post-test

The researchers adopted six argumentative topics (agree or disagree). The participants were required to write about those topics and either support or reject them. Two of the topics were chosen by the researchers to be used as the pre-test and the posttest. Four more topics were given to the students during the course to write about. The researchers tried to adopt the topics that were related and close to the topics of the participants' book. The participants' writing

tasks were rated analytically according to Jacobs et al.'s (1981) scale once by the teacher and once by their peers/classmates.

### 3.2.3. Learners' Beliefs Inventory

This study accomplished the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) developed by Horwitz (1988) to assess the learners' beliefs about learning a foreign language. The 34-statement BALLI employs a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from answers indicating "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The participants were given 30 minutes to answer the items. This questionnaire measures the following items in details:

- Beliefs about practice and learning strategies
- Beliefs about learning English
- The difficulty of learning English
- Feelings and attitudes towards learning English
- The importance of the learning environment
- Motivation and confidence in learning English

### 3.3. Design and Context of the Study

The design of this study was descriptive correlational study. As the researchers sought to understand the relationships between the variables. In other words, correlational research seeks to figure out if two or more variables are related and if so, in what way. The correlational phase of the study showed the probable relationships between the variables. It should be noted that teacher vs. peer ratings and learners' beliefs were considered as independent variables and the participants' writing scores were treated as the dependent variable of the study.

### 3.4. Data Collection Procedures

In this study, the Michigan English Test was used as a standardized measurement to seek the levels of the subjects in terms of language proficiency. The results of this standard proficiency test were used to specify the homogeneity and equality of the sample. Then, the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) developed by Horwitz (1988) was given to the participants. The homogenous participants were supposed to write six writing tasks on argumentative topics. They were given thirty~ forty-five minutes to complete their compositions. The students' compositions were evaluated analytically according to Jacobs et al.'s (1981) scale once by the teacher and once by their peers/classmates. The teacher discussed

the strategies for peers' corrections to the students beforehand. The teacher applied teacher-centered method in a sense he corrected the students' errors. At the same time, the teacher discussed the strategies for peers' corrections to the students. Things that peers should have considered in their corrections were outlined as below:

- Peers/classmates should adopt positive attitudes: they should make suggestions and corrections in a positive way.

- Peers/classmates should need to be specific: they should give the authors specific ideas on how to improve their writing.

- Peers/classmates should criticize the compositions positively.

- Peers/classmates should go through the steps of compliments, suggestions, criticisms, and corrections.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

This investigation was aimed to explore the relationship between learners' beliefs and peer vs. teacher-ratings and Iranian EFL learners' writing performance. The scores obtained from the proficiency test and writing tasks were analyzed by using SPSS version 24.0. Independent sample t-test was performed to compare the writing measures of the participants. The collected data from BALLI questionnaire was transformed into codes and then entered into SPSS program. Then the correlational analyses were carried out to examine the relationship between the variables under investigation. The amount/degree of the relationship between the variables was also presented. Then the results were discussed and reported based on the data analyzed.

### 4. Results

### 4.1. The Results of the First and Second Research Questions

To answer the first and the second research questions, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted on means of rating of teacher and students. More specifically, to prepare data for this test, the mean of six rounds of rating by each group, that is, students and teachers, was calculated and used. Table 1 represents the descriptive statistics of ratings of students and teachers.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of ratings of two groups

| Rater | | N | Mean | Std. D | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Teacher | 90 | 16.96 | 1.48 | 0.16 |
| | Students | 90 | 17.44 | 1.50 | 0.16 |

As can be seen in Table 2, there was a statistically significant difference between the mean of ratings of teachers and students, $t$ (178) = -2.13, $p$ = .03, equal variance assumed, with the effect size of .25, signifying a small difference. Hence, it can be concluded that rating types had a significant but small effect on writing scores of students, or, put it differently, teachers ($M$= 16.96  $SD$ = 1.48) were slightly more strict in their ratings that the students were ($M$ = 17.44 $SD$ = 1.50). In sum, it can be said that rating type did have a small significant effect on student's writing performance.

**Table 2.**  Independent Samples t-test

| | | Levene's Test | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig | Mean Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Rating | Equal variances assumed | 0.12 | 0.73 | -2.13 | 178.00 | 0.03 | -0.47 | -0.91 | -0.04 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -2.13 | 177.97 | 0.03 | -0.47 | -0.91 | -0.04 |

**4.2. The Results of the Third Research Question**

To answer the third research question, the relationship between peers' beliefs and their writing performance, a series of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients were estimated. More specifically, this is a correlation between each subscale of learners' belief construct and the students' writing performance rated by the students and teachers. As can be seen in Table 4, a matrix of correlations between subscales of learners' belief and participants' writing scores obtained from students' ratings, none of the coefficients were statistically significant (see Table 3 for finding the mean of each subscale and mean of students' rating). Given this non-significance of the findings, it can be said that there is no significant relationship between the students' belief and their writing performance, when it was rated by students. It should be said

that one student was omitted from the analysis, as s/he did not fill the belief scale (it was deleted in a leastwise manner), so the analysis was implemented with 89 participants in all parts.

**Table 3.** The descriptive statistics of Peers' Rating and subscales

|      | Mean  | Std. D | N  |
|------|-------|--------|----|
| SR   | 17.41 | 1.48   | 89 |
| v1   | 3.22  | 0.65   | 89 |
| v2   | 3.56  | 0.42   | 89 |
| v3   | 3.45  | 0.49   | 89 |
| v4   | 3.34  | 0.46   | 89 |
| v5   | 3.41  | 0.54   | 89 |
| v6   | 3.42  | 0.50   | 89 |

*Note:* SR = Student Rating, v1 = Beliefs about practice and learning strategies, v2 = Beliefs about learning English, v3 = The difficulty of learning English, v4 = Feeling and attitudes toward learning English, v5 = The importance of learning environments, v6 = Motivation and confidence in learning English

**Table 4.** Matrix of correlations between Peers' Rating and subscales

|                      |      | SR    | v1    | v2    | v3    | v4    | v5    | v6    |
|----------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Pearson Correlation  |      | 1.00  | -0.13 | 0.15  | 0.01  | 0.14  | -0.04 | -0.08 |
|                      |      | -0.13 | 1.00  | -0.29 | -0.18 | -0.03 | 0.15  | 0.26  |
|                      |      | 0.15  | -0.29 | 1.00  | 0.21  | 0.30  | -0.12 | -0.11 |
|                      |      | 0.01  | -0.18 | 0.21  | 1.00  | 0.08  | 0.32  | -0.02 |
|                      |      | 0.14  | -0.03 | 0.30  | 0.08  | 1.00  | 0.01  | 0.04  |
|                      |      | -0.04 | 0.15  | -0.12 | 0.32  | 0.01  | 1.00  | 0.25  |
|                      |      | -0.08 | 0.26  | -0.11 | -0.02 | 0.04  | 0.25  | 1.00  |
| Sig.                 |      |       | 0.11  | 0.08  | 0.48  | 0.10  | 0.37  | 0.23  |
|                      |      | 0.11  |       | 0.00  | 0.05  | 0.41  | 0.08  | 0.01  |
|                      |      | 0.08  | 0.00  |       | 0.02  | 0.00  | 0.14  | 0.15  |
|                      |      | 0.48  | 0.05  | 0.02  |       | 0.23  | 0.00  | 0.44  |
|                      |      | 0.10  | 0.41  | 0.00  | 0.23  |       | 0.45  | 0.34  |
|                      |      | 0.37  | 0.08  | 0.14  | 0.00  | 0.45  |       | 0.01  |
|                      |      | 0.23  | 0.01  | 0.15  | 0.44  | 0.34  | 0.01  |       |

Furthermore, to investigate the relationship between teachers' rating and each subscale of the belief scale, another series of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients were calculated (see Table 5 for finding the mean of each subscale and mean of teachers' rating). Again, as can be seen in Table 6, presenting a matrix of correlations between subscales and teachers' writing scores obtained from teachers' ratings, none of the coefficients were statistically significant. This indicated that there is no significant relationship between the students' belief and their writing performance when it was rated by teachers. In conclusion, it can be said that there was no significant relationship between students' belief and their writing performance.

**Table 5.** The descriptive statistics of teacher's rating and subscales

|     | Mean  | Std. D | N  |
|-----|-------|--------|----|
| TR  | 16.94 | 1.48   | 89 |
| v1  | 3.22  | 0.65   | 89 |
| v2  | 3.56  | 0.42   | 89 |
| v3  | 3.45  | 0.49   | 89 |
| v4  | 3.34  | 0.46   | 89 |
| v5  | 3.41  | 0.54   | 89 |
| v6  | 3.42  | 0.50   | 89 |

*Note:* TR = Teacher Rating, v1 = Beliefs about practice and learning strategies, v2 = Beliefs about learning English, v3 = The difficulty of learning English, v4 = Feeling and attitudes toward learning English, v5 = The importance of learning environments, v6 = Motivation and confidence in learning English

**Table 6.** Matrix of correlations between teacher's rating and subscales

|                      |      | TR    | v1    | v2    | v3    | v4    | v5    | v6    |
|----------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Pearson Correlation  |      | 1.00  | -0.10 | -0.03 | -0.08 | -0.01 | -0.05 | -0.12 |
|                      |      | -0.10 | 1.00  | -0.29 | -0.18 | -0.03 | 0.15  | 0.26  |
|                      |      | -0.03 | -0.29 | 1.00  | 0.21  | 0.30  | -0.12 | -0.11 |
|                      |      | -0.08 | -0.18 | 0.21  | 1.00  | 0.08  | 0.32  | -0.02 |
|                      |      | -0.01 | -0.03 | 0.30  | 0.08  | 1.00  | 0.01  | 0.04  |
|                      |      | -0.05 | 0.15  | -0.12 | 0.32  | 0.01  | 1.00  | 0.25  |
|                      |      | -0.12 | 0.26  | -0.11 | -0.02 | 0.04  | 0.25  | 1.00  |
| Sig.                 |      |       | 0.19  | 0.40  | 0.23  | 0.45  | 0.30  | 0.12  |
|                      |      | 0.19  |       | 0.00  | 0.05  | 0.41  | 0.08  | 0.01  |
|                      |      | 0.40  | 0.00  |       | 0.02  | 0.00  | 0.14  | 0.15  |
|                      |      | 0.23  | 0.05  | 0.02  |       | 0.23  | 0.00  | 0.44  |
|                      |      | 0.45  | 0.41  | 0.00  | 0.23  |       | 0.45  | 0.34  |
|                      |      | 0.30  | 0.08  | 0.14  | 0.00  | 0.45  |       | 0.01  |
|                      |      | 0.12  | 0.01  | 0.15  | 0.44  | 0.34  | 0.01  |       |

## 5. Discussion

In the past two decades, teacher-rating and peer-rating have been frequently practiced in English as a second language writing performance (Zhao, 2010). Therefore, these two methods of ratings can have significant roles in improving the writing performance of EFL learners. Some researchers declare that peer-rating has a crucial function in developing students' writing abilities (Plutsky & Wilson, 2004; Topping et al., 2000). For example, Richer (1992) compared the effects of two kinds of assessments, peer rating and teacher rating, on first-year school learners' writing skill. The results intimated that applying peer rating performs a reasonable approach for the students to improve their writing experiences and develop their learning performance. These findings can be in line with the study of Richer (1992) and peer-rating can be adopted as an essential tool for enhancing EFL learners' writing performance. Lin, Liu, and Yusan (2001) determined that particular peer rating and critical peer rating from students may considerably promote learners to enhance their composition works. Consequently, the results of this study can be matched with this study that mentions peer-rating is more effective than teacher rating. Also, Plutsky and Wilson (2004) confirmed that peer-rating can encourage learners to become skilled writers. According to them, the results of this study revealed that peer-rating in writing can build a proficient writer. According to Wakabayashi (2013), through peer rating, learners involve in critical evaluation of peer document for the purpose of exchanging help for revision. Therefore, in line with the study's findings revision of the learners' writing can be happened more effective than teacher-rating and teacher correction. Due to this, learners can study more about writing and editing by reading other's drafts critically and their awareness of what makes writing successful and effective can be magnified and, lastly learners eventually become more independent writers (Maarof, Yamat, & Lili, 2011). In addition to all above, the results of this study revealed that peer feedback supports the students to engage in the classroom project and make them less passively teacher- dependent. To clarify this finding, Yarrow and Topping (2001) maintained that peer feedback plays a crucial role in improved commitment and time spent on-tasks, and prevention of information. Besides as results of the study revealed, using peer rating can manage to less writing apprehension and more confidence as well as building a social connection for writing. To support this claim, Yang, Badger, and Yu (2006) also calculate that peer feedback is helpful in developing critical thinking, learners' autonomy and social interaction among students. As the results of this study showed, the highest coefficient was observed between teacher-assessment and peer-assessment. This is in line with the studies of AlFallay (2004), Patri (2002), and Saito and

Fujita (2004) who reported the high coefficients between teacher-assessment and peer-assessment.

The results of this study also illustrated that there was a neutral relationship between Iranian EFL students' beliefs and writing performance through peer and/or teacher-rating. One possible explanation might be the point that high level of learners' beliefs may or may not influence students' performance. The findings of this study contradict with what Pervin and John (2001) and Hedge (2008) observed. They concluded that positive beliefs serves as a determinant of the time duration and the amount of energy invested when difficult situations are encountered. This finding can be interpreted in the light of the fact that positive beliefs might boost EFL students' writing performance and would give them a chance to flourish through systematic reflection and by observing their performance, they feel more to be goal-oriented and be motivated toward their work. This corroborates with what Farrell (2004) and Jay and Johnson (2002) found. As "few student evaluations of peer rating are reported" (Falchikov, 1995, p. 177), the results explain that studies on students' beliefs to this method are confusing and uncertain. The findings of this study are in line with the conclusions of other investigations which gained a positive effect for peer-rating on the development of students' writing achievements (Dyer, 1996; freeman, 1995; Hughes & Large, 1993). The findings are also in line with the investigation of Dyer (1996) which determined that when rating criteria are set, peer-rating can allow learners to assess the writing of their peers in a practice comparable to their supervisors. Peer evaluations, as presented in this study, can be used as powerful instruments in supporting the students to be responsible for their own learning and evaluation. According to the results of the study, teachers' rating was more critical, but peer-rating can enhance the group work and increase the learners' awareness about the language items. According to the findings of this study, the results cannot be in line with the results of the study of Ahangari, Rassekh-Alqol, and Ali Akbari (2013). Furthermore, in language learning, Learners' beliefs as an important and objective disposition toward those who have differing opinions, perceptions or beliefs (Ariogul, Unal, & Onursal, 2009) can influence the language learning. According to the results of the study which are not in line with this, individuals with higher attitudes are more likely to be open to new and different experiences because of their open attitudes toward unique or different situations. Consequently, learners' belief has not the capability to predict and develop the learners' writing performance. In case of writing comprehension, Amaka (2016) indicated that writing usage in classrooms and

syllabus of learners with high learners' beliefs can make connection between what they learnt and what they have already known and it may facilitate learners' speech and communication actions in various circumstances and also convey different meaning in different situations and context. But this study showed that the learners' belief cannot be a good facilitator for increasing the learners' awareness. In other words, results of the study cannot show the large relationship between writing skill and learners' beliefs.

### 6. Conclusion

With respect to the goals of the study, it can be concluded that rating types had a significant but small effect on writing scores of the participants. In fact, rating type did have a small significant effect on student's writing performance. Regarding another independent variable of the study, that is, learners' beliefs, it can be said that there is no significant relationship between the students' beliefs and their writing performance, when it was rated by the peers and/or the teacher. Presenting a matrix of correlations between learners' beliefs subscales and teachers' and peers' writing scores showed that none of the coefficients were statistically significant. This indicated that there is no significant relationship between the learners' beliefs and their writing scores.

The outcomes of this study present practical implications and suggestions for EFL teachers, educators, and learners to promote the qualities of students' writing skill. Language teachers need to raise learners' motivation by prompting peer rating. It would encourage the students and promote their writing ability as it may help learners achieve a good command of writing skill in instructed settings. As Cotterall (1995) asserted, the receptiveness of L2 learners to what has been presented in L2 classes is influenced by their beliefs. If leaners are not positive, they might behave as a kind of barrier to their success. L2 leaners may be demotivated by low beliefs and their ability may be hindered through thinking critically. Giving feedback to EFL learners' writing assignments either by teacher and/or the peers would cause them to become more confident, and consequently enable them to obtain higher scores. This sense can encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning and enjoy it as well. The followings recommendations are suggested by the researchers for future studies:

- A further investigation can be carried out to repeat this study in other academic settings and/or on other skills.

- This study focused on intermediate Iranian EFL students. A similar study can be performed focusing on other students with different age range, proficiency levels and L1 backgrounds.

- Self-rating can be added as another independent variable along with teacher/peer rating in further studies.

- Other affective features including self-efficacy, learning style, anxiety, etc. could be taken into account in other studies.

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