The Impact of Group Formation Method (Student-selected vs. Teacher-assigned) on Group Dynamics and Group Outcome in EFL Creative Writing

Jaleh Hassaskhah
English Department, Guilan University, Rasht, Iran

Hamideh Mozaffari
English Department, Guilan University, Rasht, Iran

Abstract—**This study investigated how group formation method, namely student-selected vs. teacher-assigned, influences group dynamics as well as group outcome. In line with its experimental comparison group design, two intact classes of junior English Literature students (N=32) participated in this study over one academic semester. Community model was employed to teach creative writing to both classes, but, while in one class students (N=16) were required to self-select their working partners, in the other they were assigned into groups by the teacher, based on their learning styles (N=16). The quantitative and qualitative data, obtained through students' initial writing drafts, revised texts and an end of the course written report, underwent One way Analysis Of Variance (ANOVA) and content analysis. The findings indicated that although teacher-assigned groups had no definite advantage over those of student-selected in terms of group dynamics, they noticeably outperformed student-selected groups in terms of outcome. In particular, teacher-assigned groups were more task oriented and thus more successful at accomplishing group task -here revision. The results suggest that group formation method is a contributing factor to the success of group work.**

Index Terms—**student-selected group formation method, teacher-assigned group formation method, group dynamics, group outcome**

I. INTRODUCTION

The use of small groups has been increasingly prevalent over the last two decades. Lack of tolerance on the part of learners to just listen to the teachers' lectures, and the need to hone students' interactive and problem solving skills are among the main reasons for this rapid growth. In fact, this mode of learning serves two primary purposes: (1) it aims to increase learner's autonomy, and (2) to influence and enhance the quality of learning (Fink, 2004). However, empirical studies show that these objectives are not always achieved. In other words, many students have negative experiences in using small groups which further endangers the product of group work. Fink's study reveals that most of these problems refer to issues such as unfairness, student's accountability and so forth.

However, group work in classroom has been widely supported through the literature. Research has shown an advantage for group learning on such factors as developing metacognition (Blakey & Spence, 1990 as cited in Neilson, 2006), promoting critical and creative thinking (Cohen, 1999; Fink, 2004) decreasing anxiety (Oxford, 1997) and most notably enhancing learning (Cohen, 1994). Moreover, Harmer (2007) pinpoints some of the main advantages of group work (p. 166):

1. It promotes learner autonomy by allowing students to make their own decisions in the group without being told what to do by the teacher.
2. It dramatically increases the number of talking opportunities for individual students.
3. It encourages skills of cooperation and negotiation.
4. It recognizes the old maxim that 'two heads are better than one'.

The theoretical advantages typically associated with group learning suffer from what Bossert (1988, as cited in Cohen, 1994) calls "a black box approach" (p. 23) in which the necessary conditions for the realization of the reported benefits are ignored . Whatever the countless benefits of group work in educational setting, Light and Littleton (1998, as cited in Russell, 2010) warn against regarding it as a kind of educational panacea. In other words, simply putting students in groups of 3 or more does not guarantee the benefits which are usually associated with cooperative learning. In this regard, Jacobs and Hall (2002) poses some questions to ponder about before setting any kind of group work (p. 53):

1. How big should groups be?

2. How should groups be formed?

3. How long should groups stay together?

There are many other questions to ask, but the one investigated in the present study refers to group formation method, that is how the groups should be formed. According to Harmer (2007), either the teacher forms the groups or allows the students themselves to select whom they are going to work with. Literature refers to these two conditions as teacher/ instructor – selected/assigned and student/self – selected, respectively. Several studies (Basta, 2011; Chapman et al., 2006; Mitchell, Reilly, Bramwell, Solnosk, & Lilly, 2004) indicate that whenever students are set free to do the group member selection, they prefer to work with their friends with whom they feel more relaxed. Teachers, however, form groups either at random or based on certain criteria including personality traits, academic heterogeneity and so forth (Harmer, 2007). In the following section we reflect on some of the earlier studies which delved into the issue of group formation method and its impact on group work effectiveness.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on the role of group formation method on group effectiveness is bifurcated into two types. Some articles have mainly focused on the effectiveness of a single method (teacher-assigned or self-selected) while others have taken a comparative step to asses which method outperforms the other (teacher-assigned vs. self-selected). At the same time, group effectiveness has been looked at from two different perspectives. A number of studies (Bacon, Stewart, & Silver, 1999; Hilton & Philips, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2004; Russell, 2010) have examined effectiveness in terms of group dynamics which concerns "group's internal characteristics" that encompass factors such as group members' cooperation, trust, acceptance, commitment, teacher's role and any further feature which is internally linked to group work (Dornyei and Murphey, 2003, p. 4). However, some recent studies (Bachman, 2010; Mahenthiran & Rouse, 2000; Mushtaq, Murteza, Rashid, & Khalid, 2012) have begun to emerge which investigate this issue by analyzing performance outcomes as measured through final grades. This typology is consistent with Cohen's (1994) concept of productivity of small groups which she argues either refers to academic achievement or issues related to group dynamics (e.g. cooperativeness, degree of participation, workload sharing, commitment, etc). Regarding both types the literature includes contradictory results (some strongly advocate teacher-assigned groups while others prefer the other). In addition, most of the existing published articles (Bacon et al., 1999; Connerley & Mael, 2001) has taken a non-experimental/quasi-experimental design or has only investigated a single method which in turn restricts the conclusions that can be drawn. In what follows we look at some of these studies.

A. Studies on the Impact of Group Formation Method on Group Dynamics

Bacon et al. (1999) explored how a set of teacher-controlled contextual variables including team assignment method affects students' group experience. To this end, they surveyed a number of MBA students about their best and worst experiences. The results reported self-selected grouping as positively associated with best team experiences. Particularly, high degrees of cooperativeness, goal commitment and the feeling of group member's indispensability were among the major benefits that students linked to self-selection. More recently, the result of studies by Hilton and Philips (2008) and Russell (2010) led to the same conclusion.

A more in-depth study of this issue was conducted by Chapman et al. (2006) who developed a survey to investigate the effect of two group formation methods (random or self-selected) on a variety of group experiences including group dynamics, students' attitude toward the group experience and outcomes. The study indicated that self- selected method led to better results concerning all of the variables under investigation. Specifically, students who were allowed to select their own group members were better able to communicate together, more enthusiastic about group work, more interested in their group members, more positive toward group work, better able to deal with intra-group conflicts and had higher sense of group accomplishment but were less task-oriented than students of teacher-assigned groups.

While several studies confirm the positive effects of self-selected group formation method, not all research studies favor the use of this method in classroom setting. Having allowed students to choose between self-selected and teacher-assigned grouping method, Mitchel et al. (2004) investigated how the choice of group membership influences students' preferences for choosing their working partners. To this end, both groups' attitude toward group member selection was assessed both before (pre-test) and after group work (post-test). Results revealed that attitude of self-selected groups negatively changed from pretest to posttest, while no significant difference was reported among those of teacher-assigned. To further explore this issue, the students were inquired about the reason for this shift in attitude. The most recurrent theme emerged from students' comments referred to the strong tendency among self-selected groups to talk rather than work. Johnson et al. (1993, as cited in Mitchell et al. 2004) further admit that groups which are formed according to the selection of students are less task oriented than those of other methods.

B. Studies on the Impact of Group Formation Method on Group Outcome (Academic Achievement)

The relationship between self-selected group experience and final grades was recently explored by Mushtaq et al. (2012). The survey results indicated a high degree of "group homogeneity", "goal commitment", "group potency", "workload sharing", "supportive behaviors", "participation", "group performance" and "group viability" for this group formation method. More importantly, multiple regression analysis revealed that all these variables positively influenced

final grades. Earlier studies (Lawrenz & Munch, 1984; Mahenthiran & Rouse, 2000) also highlighted that regardless of group members' academic ability, when students are paired with their friends; it leads to higher project grades than teacher- assigned groups.

In contrast, Oakley, Felder, Brent, and Elhajj (2004) point out that when students are allowed to select their own team members they tend to choose those who are at their own academic level. This, they argue, endangers one of the major benefits of group work that is, peer teaching and accordingly puts the product of group work at risk. Similarly, Slavin (1990 as cited in Mitchell et al., 2004) and Kagan (1994 as cited in Mahenthiran & Rouse, 2000) advocate the use of academically heterogeneous groups formed by the teacher.

Additionally, Dillon and Cheney's (2009) exploration of self-selected vs. teacher-assigned personality-based grouping revealed that although the latter method leads to better products, it suffers from high degrees of intra-group personal conflicts which further decreases overall satisfaction with the course.

The studies cited above demonstrate that findings about group composition are mixed regarding whether students should be allowed to select their own group members or the teacher should take the responsibility of group formation. Moreover, all of these researches have been conducted outside the field of L2 studies. The following sections provide a detailed description of the study that aimed to investigate: (1) whether and to what extent group formation method, namely student-selected vs. teacher-assigned, influences group dynamics and (2) whether and to what extent group formation method (student-selected vs. teacher-assigned) influences group outcome.

III. METHOD

A. Participants

Thirty two junior English Literature students from two intact classes (class A=16, class B=16) doing their B.A at Guilan University took part in this study over one academic semester. Participants included male (N=3), and female (N=29) students, and their age ranged from 20 to 28. Besides, at the time of conducting this study all of the participants had prior knowledge on academic writing and had already passed a few related courses, such as advanced writing, essay writing and letter writing courses.

B. Materials

Teaching Materials
Parts of three books were nominated as the textbook of the course including: (1) *"Imaginative writing: The elements of craft"* (Burroway, 2011), (2) *"The Routledge creative writing course book"* (Mills, 2006), and (3) *"Creative writing-20: A curriculum guide for secondary level"* (Saskatchewan Education, 1998).

Assessment Materials
Assessment of Group Outcome (the quality of performance-creative writing)
Since this study was conducted in an EFL creative writing course, the outcome of group work concerned students' creative work. Validity of creativity tests heavily depends on the validity of the theory upon which it is based. The suggested methods of creativity assessment in literature are either based on a specific theory of creativity (such as divergent thinking theory as in divergent thinking tests), judgment of experts of the field (consensual assessment technique) or attributes theoretically linked to creativity (such as originality, voice, etc. as in rubrics).

However, theories have their own limitations. For instance, most theories of creativity have proved to be invalid for assessing creativity in domains such as writing (Baer & McKool, 2009). Also, consensual assessment technique suffers from the problem of subjectivity and resource intensiveness since it requires an average panel of 10 expert judges to assess creative works based on their expert knowledge of what creativity means in a specific field (Baer & Mckool, 2009). Besides, although rubrics (especially analytical types) are one of the most reliable methods of evaluating writing, the major problem arises from the criteria on which they are developed (Blomer, 2011). In other words, most of suggested rubrics for creative writing contain attributes which are irrelevant to creativity (e.g. spelling, grammar, punctuation and syntax are correct, organization is clear, etc.) (May, 2007; Merrell, 2006; Newman, 2007), are too hard to measure (e.g. voice is distinctive, work is original, scenes and events are memorable, etc.) (Kroll, 1997) or left some key features behind. Thus, this study, informed by the existing literature, developed an analytical rubric -- considered as the most reliable and consistent method of assessing creative writing (Shraplin & Morris, 2013)-- for its own study purpose.

To develop the rubric, three steps of rubric development including (a) identifying performance criteria, (b) setting performance level, and (c) creating performance description was followed (Wolf & Stevens, 2007).The first stage aims to determine the major criteria which define performance in a specific domain. Since creative writing focuses on creativity of language, features of creativity would function as the performance criteria. To this end, the literature on the topic was consulted. It was found that there was a consensus over 4 major qualities of creative writing including *image, figures of speech, characterization*, and *story*.

The next step for developing rubrics is to determine the number of performance levels appropriate for the evaluation. This decision totally depends on the purpose one wants to achieve (Wolf & Stevens, 2007). In this study levels were set after collecting the data to ensure inclusion of the range of performance levels which might appear in actual writings. Finally, every rubric requires a description of each performance level to guide and facilitate the assessment process

(Wolf & Stevens, 2007). To clarify what each performance criterion means and how it can be achieved, the aforementioned sources were used. All criteria together with their descriptors are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1.
CREATIVE WRITING RUBRIC

Criteria	4. Excellent	3. Good	2. Fair	1. poor
Image (visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory, tactile & kinesthetic)	Maximum use of concrete significant details (there is no or just 1 abstraction, generalization and judgment) and/or figures of speech to create images	Several uses of concrete significant details (they are significantly more than abstractions, generalizations and judgments) and/or figures of speech to create images	Some uses of concrete significant details (the number of details, and abstractions, generalizations and judgments is almost the same) and/or figures of speech to create images	No use of concrete significant details (sole use of abstractions, generalizations and judgments) and/or figures of speech to create images
Figures of speech (simile, metaphor, symbol, personification, etc.)	Maximum use of figures of speech (simile, metaphor, symbol, personification, etc.)	Several uses of figures of speech (simile, metaphor, symbol, personification, etc.)	Some uses of figures of speech (simile, metaphor, symbol, personification, etc.)	No use of figures of speech (simile, metaphor, symbol, personification, etc.)
Characterization (Direct vs. indirect characterization)	Maximum use of characters' physical appearance, action, thought, symbol, etc. to reveal characters (complete indirect characterization)	Several uses of characters' physical appearance, action, thought, symbol, etc. to reveal characters	Some uses of characters' physical appearance, action, thought, symbol, etc. to reveal characters	No use of characters' physical appearance, action, thought, symbol, etc. to reveal characters
Story	The use of narrative to convey purpose.	-	-	No use of narrative to convey purpose (purpose is conveyed through formal statement)

Validating the Rubric

Rubrics provide efficient ways of assessing learning outcomes (Shraplin & Morris, 2013). However, to be effective, they should meet two major criteria: reliability and validity (Andrade, 2005 as cited in Allen & Knight, 2009).The following sections provide a brief description of the steps taken to validate the proposed rubric.

Evaluating Reliability of the Rubric

Reliability is one of the key criteria on which the effectiveness of rubrics depends. In general, reliability refers to consistency of measurement (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Following the prevailing literature on reliability assessment, this study estimated inter-rater and intra-rater reliability of the rubric. To this end, three individual raters (a university professor and two M.A. candidates of English literature- closely allied with creative writing) evaluated four samples of creative writing (which were randomly selected from two distinct classes) using the rubric. Approximately two weeks later, two of the same raters repeated the evaluation. Correlation coefficient for scores given by three different raters (inter-rater reliability, see Table 2) and for subsequent ratings (intra-rater reliability, see Table 3) was 0.86 and 0.82, respectively. Following the guidelines of Brown, Glasswell and Harland (2004) a reliability index of 0.70 proves to be sufficient for structured rubrics.

TABLE 2
RESULTS OF INTRACLASS CORELAION FOR INTER_RATER RELIABILITY

	Intraclass Correlation[a]	95% Confidence Interval		F Test with True Value 0			
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Value	df1	df2	Sig
Single Measures	.862[b]	.368	.996	26.000	2	4	.005
Average Measures	.949	.636	.999	26.000	2	4	.005

TABLE 3
RESULTS OF INTRACLASS CORELAION FOR INTRA_RATER RELIABILITY

	Intraclass Correlation[a]	95% Confidence Interval		F Test with True Value 0			
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Value	df1	df2	Sig
Single Measures	.821[b]	.382	.961	10.143	7	7	.005
Average Measures	.901	.553	.980	10.143	7	7	.005

Evaluating Validity of the Rubric

Validity is another contributing factor to the quality of a rubric. Construct validity as its most significant type refers to the degree to which a rubric measures what it purports to measure (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The review of literature revealed two main methods on validity assessment: Factor analysis and Delphi method. As a statistical technique, factor analysis aims "to reduce a large number of variables to smaller more manageable numbers by identifying the number of unique underlying criteria" (Baryla, Shelley &Trainor, 2012, p. 2). Thus, it is essentially applicable to lengthy rubrics

(Baryla et al., 2012). Delphi method, on the other hand, is a relatively new method of validity assessment which requires an average panel of 10 experts to involve in several rounds of discussion on accuracy of rubric's criteria until they reach consensus (Allen & Knight, 2009).

Given the excessively intensive nature of Delphi method and impracticality of factor analysis for the purpose of this study (the rubric was formed based on the major qualities of creativity as discussed by experts of the field and thus was not a lengthy one), the researcher relied on what McNamara (1996 as cited in Allen & Knight, 2009) refers to as *a priori construct validity* of a rubric, according to which the content of a rubric is formed based on the available as well as reliable literature on the topic. In fact, the proposed rubric completely adheres to this type of validity since it is developed based on the qualities of creative writing on which the experts of the field (Burroway, 2011; Mills, 2006; Saskatchewan, 1998) have consensus.

Additionally, following the guidelines of Allen and Knight (2009), to develop statistical evidence of rubric's accuracy, a weak and strong writing sample were evaluated by three individual raters using the rubric. The results, compared through ANOVA, appear in Table 4.

TABLE 4
ANOVA RESULT FOR STATISTICAL EVIDENCE OF RUBRICS ACCURACY

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7.500	1	7.500	45.000	.005
Within Groups	.500	3	.167		
Total	8.000	4			

Assessment of Group Dynamics

One of the primary purposes of the current study was to examine how group formation method namely, self-selected and teacher-assigned learning style-based grouping, influences group dynamics. Since the instructor was not able to observe all groups' behavior simultaneously, the participants were required to write a report to elaborate on any aspect of their group experience they found significant.

Learning Style Questionnaire

Teacher-assigned grouping aimed to be based on students' learning style. Thus, there was a need to identify participants' learning style. For this purpose, Index of Learning Style (ILS) questionnaire, based on Felder and Silverman's classification of learning styles (University of Bradford, 2008) (category 1 r=0.80, category 2 r=0.78, category 3 r=0.87, category 4 r=0.72) was employed. ILS which aims to detect students' dominant learning preferences is composed of 44 statements with 2 possible options (a or b), according to which learning preferences are divided into four categories of activist/reflector, sensing/intuitive, visual/verbal, and sequential/global.

C. Procedure

Community model (Blyth & Sweet, 2008) was employed as the instructional method for teaching creative writing in both classes except that the group formation method was manipulated to achieve the purpose of the present study. Accordingly, one session before the onset of group works, the two classes were randomly assigned to student-selected and teacher-assigned grouping conditions. In other words, in the student- selected group, the participants were asked to self-select their groupmates (3-5, in line with community models' principle). However, in the teacher-assigned group, as the objective was to use students' learning style as the point of departure, students were first required to fill in the ILS questionnaire. Then, the teacher, based on homogeneity of their learning style, put them into groups of 3 members each.

Then, community model was implemented in both classes. In other words, prior to class session each group member was required to read her/his group members' writing and put comments. During class, every group should present the strengths and weaknesses of each work to the instructor whose main job was to facilitate the discussion and if necessary to teach. This might include elaboration on a specific technique which could be used or bringing examples of works which have used a specific technique successfully. Altogether, the primary purpose was to work toward some revision strategies as an attempt to further develop the work. This process which continued over one academic semester resulted in 8 pieces of writing for each individual student- including both initial drafts and revised texts. Finally, at the end of the semester students were required to write a report commenting on any aspect of group work they found significant.

D. Data Analysis

The data underwent quantitative as well as qualitative analysis. The study aimed to examine whether and to what extent group formation method (student-selected vs. teacher-assigned) influences group dynamics as well as outcome (academic achievement). To this end, content analysis research technique was employed, which entails "making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18).Then, one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare group work accomplishment (in this case revision) across the two group formation methods. Additionally, content analysis was used to detect the major features of group dynamics as emerged in student written reports and to find out any possible differences of this kind among the two experimental groups.

IV. RESULTS

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of written reports as well as writing samples yielded the following findings regarding group dynamics and group outcome (as manifested in performance quality), respectively.

A. Written Report

The qualitative analyses of reports revealed three major findings which are in line with McGrath's (1964, as cited in Herre, 2010) model of group behavior which includes three categories of group input, group process and group outcome. Input-process-output model maintains that input factors (group composition, size, etc.) influence group process in significant ways and in turn influence group outcome (McGrath, 1964 as cited in Herre, 2010). Participants' experiences within these categories differed significantly across the two group formation conditions, as described below.

Group Input

Input factors are classified into three levels of individual, group and environment (McGrath, 1964 as cited in Herre, 2010). Individual factors are members' characteristics such as skills, personalities, etc., while group composition and size are regarded as the main input factors on group level (McGrath, 1964 as cited in Herre, 2010). These factors can also be found at higher levels such as environment. Reward structure and level of environmental stress are among the environmental elements which McGrath considers as input factors.

Group member characteristic was the major aspect of group input on which the majority of participants from student-selected grouping condition commented. Specifically, 58% of respondents reported that their group partners were their close friends, 8.33% considered the members as homogeneous in terms of writing skills while the remaining did not refer to the issue (see excerpt 1 as an example).

My group members were my friends.

We had to choose members of the groups on our own, so we already knew about our classmates' English proficiency and writing skills. If group members were randomly chosen, probably members were more different.

Additionally, both friendship and homogeneity of writing skill were perceived as positive aspects of group input (see excerpt 2 as an example).

The people in my group were my close friends. Therefore, we could work in a friendly atmosphere.

We knew each other well and knew how to work effectively together.

Instructor-assigned groups, on the other hand, did not comment on any specific characteristics of their partners. However, more than half of them believed that when groups are formed by the teacher, chance is the sole factor which determines the members' effectiveness (whether to be put in a group who cooperates or not). However, among the respondents, most (63.6%) considered themselves as lucky enough to have helpful working partners, while the remaining (36.3%) reported the opposite and preferred to select their group members themselves (see excerpt 3 as an example).

Fortunately, the members of the group which I was put in helped me a lot about different problems and their work was helpful as well as what they told me.

I am more comfortable choosing my own groupmates.

Group Process

Process refers to "group behavior that can be observed" which might include time spent together, communication, encouragement among members (McGrath, 1964 as cited in Herre, 2010), conflict, strategy discussion, boundary management (Glastein, 1984 as cited in Herre, 2010) and any further factor which might be linked to group process.

One of the key aspects of group process on which participants of student-selected groups frequently commented was the ease with which they were able to communicate with one another. In other words, 50% of respondents reported an easy communication among the groupmates (see excerpt 4 as an example).

We could easily discuss and make decisions.

Interestingly, all these participants attributed this quality to the friendship factor among group members (see excerpt 5 as an example).

Working in a group with my friends and having the opportunity of choosing my group members made me communicate more easily.

We, ourselves, selected our group members and it helped us to be more communicative in a group with some of our close friends.

Another aspect of group process which emerged in several respondents' comments refers to the degree of willingness to accept criticisms from each other. This view was held by 25% of students. Similarly, students believed that it was the close relationship among members which contributed to this quality (see excerpt 6 as an example).

We were close with each other, so we could easily accept each other's opinion.

Moreover, another significant aspect of group process on which the members of both grouping conditions had censuses was related to cooperation among group partners. Specifically, the majority of student-selected groups (72%) and more than half of teacher-assigned ones (54%) considered their groupmates as satisfactorily cooperative. However, the remaining respondents did not refer to this issue (see excerpt 7 as an example).

We worked successfully in our team and had no problem. We read our writings together, found the problems, corrected and revised them.

My group members and I commented on each other's writing and corrected the mistakes.
Group Output

Output is the outcome of group process or in Gladstein's (1984, as cited in Herre, 2010) words it is group effectiveness. Although outcome is primarily concerned with quality of group performance, it is never restricted to it. In other words, there are other factors such as members' attitude which are among the crucial aspects of group outcome (McGrath, 1964 as cited in Herre, 2010).

The two group formation methods did not differ significantly in their perception toward the outcome. In other words, both groups regarded the group work as a beneficial activity. In particular, almost half of student-selected groups (54%) and most of teacher-assigned ones (72%) considered the outcome as favorable (see excerpt 8 as an example).

Student-selected grouping method: We discussed our problems in a short time and the attempts really affected my work.

Teacher-assigned grouping method: With my group members' evaluations I got to see my work from someone else's perspective as well. For example, when I wrote a piece it was intelligible to me but not to others and through my groupmate's corrections I could turn it into something which was more vivid and tangible.

However, a handful of participants from both grouping conditions considered the result of group work as unfavorable. Specifically, 27% of both groups' respondents highlighted that it was due to lack of sufficient time devoted to group work that the result was not quality work (see excerpt 9 as an example).

Teacher-assigned grouping method: We did not meet the criteria during our limited sessions and the limited time.

Student-selected grouping method: We had not enough time for analyzing papers. So, it did not help me to learn much.

Besides, although the majority of teacher-assigned groups were quite satisfied with their group members, almost half of them (45.4%) believed that instructors must give students the opportunity to choose those with whom they prefer to work (see excerpt 2 as an example).

If I have to do group work I am more comfortable choosing my groupmates.
The teacher selected our group members instead of us.

B. Writing Samples

As stated earlier, the primary purpose of community model is to work toward revision. Thus, the two participating groups' (student-selected vs. teacher-assigned) mean scores for the degree of improvement from initial draft to revision was compared to explore which grouping condition accomplished the task (revision) more successfully. The descriptive statistics for both groups are presented in Table 5.

TABLE 5
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR DEGREE OF IMPROVEMENT FROM INITIAL DRAFT TO REVISED TEXT ACROSS THE TWO GROUP FORMATION CONDITIONS

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
student-selected grouping method	16	.9844	1.06250	.26563	.4182	1.5505	.00	3.00
Teacher-assigned grouping method	16	1.6563	.76308	.19077	1.2496	2.0629	.25	3.00
Total	32	1.3203	.97185	.17180	.9699	1.6707	.00	3.00

Results indicated that mean scores of improvement were higher for teacher-assigned groups than student-selected ones (Table 5). However, in order to find out whether the difference was significant, one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted (Table 6).

TABLE 6
ANOVA RESULTS FOR DEGREE OF IMPROVEMENT FROM INITIAL DRAFT TO REVISED TEXT ACROSS THE TWO GROUP FORMATION CONDITIONS

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.611	1	3.611	4.221	.05
Within Groups	25.668	30	.856		
Total	29.279	31			

As shown in Table 6, there was a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level in mean scores for the two group formation conditions ($F (1, 30) = 4.22$). Additionally, the effect size calculated, using the eta squared, was 0.12. Following the guidelines proposed by Cohen (1988 as cited in Pallant, 2005) (0.01=small effect, 0.06=moderate effect, 0.14=large effect), this value implies a very large effect size. This suggests that teacher-assigned groups significantly outperformed student-selected ones.

In brief, it can be concluded that although students of teacher-assigned group formation method showed no definite advantage over those of student-selected grouping in terms of group dynamics, they noticeably outperformed participants from student-selected grouping condition.

V. CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

A. The Impact of Group Formation Method (Student-selected vs. Teacher-assigned) on Group Dynamics

This study provides evidence that decisions about group composition significantly influence group work experience. The results reveal that group dynamics varies considerably across the two group formation conditions (student-selected vs. teacher-assigned). Specifically, students of self-selected grouping reported that pre-existing friendship was the major criterion upon which they relied to choose their working partners. Interestingly, they regarded this characteristic as a significant factor contributing to ease of communication, facilitation of cooperation and acceptance among members. Altogether these factors resulted in what they viewed as quality work.

These results parallel the findings of previous research (Basta, 2011; Chapman et al., 2006; Hilton & Philips, 2008) which revealed that whenever students are allowed to do group member selection, they choose those with whom they are friend which in turn leads to comfortable communication (Chapman et al. 2006; Russell, 2010), high satisfaction (Chapman et al. 2006; Mahenthiran & Rouse, 2000; Matta et al., 2010) and high cooperation (Bacon et al., 1999; Mushtaq et al., 2012) among group members.

Teacher-assigned groups, on the other hand, considered chance as the sole factor influencing the effectiveness of group members (whether to be put in a group whose members are hardworking or not). Our findings confirmed those of Hilton and Philips (2008) indicating that although participants' initial perception toward this group formation method (teacher-assigned grouping) seems negative, during the actual group work the majority found their partners as satisfactorily cooperative which in turn led them to regard the outcome as quality work.

Furthermore, as far as student-selected method of group formation is concerned, several studies indicate that when group members are too close to each other (friends) it would distract students from the main task (Mitchell et al., 2004), lower acquisition of social skills (Basta, 2011) and lead to academic homogeneity of members which further endanger learning performance (Oakley et al., 2004). Although none of these problems were reported by the participants of the present study, the outcome of group work (in spite of the initial homogeneity of participants' creative writing ability as well as similarity of instruction for both grouping conditions, many of student-selected groups did not accomplish group task -revision- and many of those who did exhibited lower quality than those of teacher-assigned groups) is indicative of the fact that despite the reported benefits of grouping based on pre-existing friendship, student-selected group formation method poses certain problems.

It seems that student-selected method of group formation suffered from what Hilton and Philips (2008) call lack of task-orientedness- that is, the tendency to evade working on the designated task. One possible explanation as to why student-selected groups were not much task oriented might be that pre-existing friendship led to debilitative tendency among group partners to spend too much group time on off-topic talk (socialize) rather than focus on the academic task (work) (Chapman et al., 2006; Hilton & Philips, 2008; Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1993 as cited in Mitchell et al. 2004; Mac, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2004; Shindler, 2010).

Moreover, it seems that during her experience with community model, Kostlnik (2010) anticipated such problem when she expressed her concern over how the interaction among self-selected groups would go on while the instructor is dealing with another group. Michaelsen (2004, the proposer of team-based learning) even goes further and argues that giving students the responsibility to form their own groups leads to disaster. As a result, he, like many others, posits that teachers should directly take control of group formation process as an attempt to avoid pre-existing cliques enter into a group and thus endanger group cohesiveness.

Additionally, it appears that Blythe and Sweet (2008) (the proposers of community model of teaching creative writing) did not recognize this problem since they team-taught the course, according to which each instructor was responsible for only a handful of groups (2 or 3) which had certainly facilitated managing the groups and specifically keeping the group members on the task.

B. The Impact of Group Formation Method (Student-selected vs. Teacher-assigned) on Group Outcome

The results reveal that the outcome of group work outcome considerably vary across the two group formation conditions. Specifically, groups formed based on the teacher's decision outperformed groups which were selected by the students. In other words, teacher-assigned groups were more successful at accomplishing the task of revision than the other group. The results are consistent with previous studies (Bachman, 2010; Dillon & Cheney, 2009; Lawrenz & Munch, 1984; Oakley et al., 2004) which confirmed that when groups are formed based on teachers' decision it would lead to better outcome. In particular, Mitchell et al. (2004) argue that in comparison with student-selected groups, teacher-assigned groups are more task oriented and thus fulfill group activities much more successfully.

However, this finding seems to contradict the results of Mushtaq et al. (2012) and Mahenthiran and Rouse (2000) in which a better group outcome was reported for student-selected grouping condition. This contrast in finding may be due to the fact that unlike the present study, these two studies revealed a significantly better group dynamics for student-selected groups than teacher-assigned ones which then translated into a better outcome.

In brief, the findings of this study are in line with Chapman et al.'s (2006) investigation which revealed that although student-selected groups seem to benefit from high cooperation, easy communication and positive attitude toward group outcome, they falter when it comes to task-orientedness which is considered as one of the most significant aspects of group dynamics that directly influences group work outcome. Furthermore, as far as teacher-assigned grouping method is concerned, our findings parallel those of Mitchell et al. (2004) which proved that teacher-assigned groups exhibit more commitment to the academic task assigned for group work and are thus more successful at accomplishing it (as evidenced by the quality of performance).

REFERENCES

[1]   Allen, S. & Knight, J. (2009). A method for collaboratively developing and validating a rubric. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 3,* 1-17.
[2]   Bachman, C. H. (2010). Using learning styles as a group selection technique. Unpublished manuscript, Center for Teaching Excellence at New York.
[3]   Bacon, D. R., Stewart, K. A., & Silver, W. S. (1999). Lessons from the best and worst student team experiences: How a teacher can make the difference. *Journal of Management Education, 23,* 467-88.
[4]   Baer, J., & McKool, S. S. (2009). Assessing creativity using the consensual assessment technique. In S. Schreiner (Ed.), *Handbook of research on assessment technologies, methods and applications in higher education* (pp. 65-77). Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference.
[5]   Baryla, E., Shelley, G., & Trainor, W. (2012). Transforming rubrics using factor analysis. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, 17,* 1-7.
[6]   Blomer, Y. (2011). Assessment in creative writing. *Wascana Review, 43,* 61-73.
[7]   Blythe, H. & Sweet, C. (2008). The writing community: A new model for the creative writing classroom. *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture, 8,* 305-325.
[8]   Brown, G. T. L., Glasswell, K., & Harland, D. (2004). Accuracy in the scoring of writing: Studies of reliability and validity using a New Zealand writing assessment system. *Assessing Writing, 9,* 105–121.
[9]   Chapman, K. J., Meuter, M., Toy, D., & Write, L. (2006). Can't we pick our own group? The influence of group selection method on group dynamics and outcomes. *Journal of Management Education, 30,* 557-569.
[10]   Cohen, E. (1994). Restructuring the classroom: Conditions for productive small groups. *Review of Educational Research, 61,* 1-35.
[11]   Connerley, M., & Mael, F. (2001). The importance and invasiveness of team selection criteria [abstract]. *Journal of Management Education, 25,* 471-494.
[12]   Dillon, J., & Cheney, J. (2009). Building the team: Assessing two design group formation methodologies. Paper presented at ASEE Annual Conference and Composition, New York.
[13]   Dornyei, Z & Murphey, T. (2003). Group dynamics in the language classroom. New York: Cambridge University Press.
[14]   Fink, L. D. (2004). Beyond small groups: Harnessing the extraordinary power of learning teams. In L. Michaelsen, A. Knight & L. D. Fink (Eds.), *Team-based learning: A transformative use of small groups.* Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
[15]   Harmer, J. (2007). The practice of English language teaching. England: Pearson Education.
[16]   Herre, C. (2010). Promoting team effectiveness: How leaders and learning processes influence team outcomes. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Fribourg - Germany.
[17]   Hilton, S., & Philips, F. (2008). Instructor-assigned and student-selected groups: A view from inside. *Issues in Accounting Education, 25,* 15-33.
[18]   Jacobs, G. M., & Hall, S. (2002). Implementing cooperative learning. In J. C. Richards & W. A. Renandya (Eds.), *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice* (pp. 52-58). New York: Cambridge University Press.
[19]   Kostelnik, K. (2010). Revisions from within: The potential of the Ph.Ds. in creative writing. *Creative writing: Teaching Theory and Practice, 2,* 1-32.
[20]   Krippendorff, K. (2004). Content Analysis: An introduction to its methodology. US: Sage Publications.
[21]   Kroll, J. (1997) A or C: Can we assess creative writing fairly? *Text, 1,* 1-7.
[22]   Lawrenz, F., & Munch, T. (1984). The effect of grouping of laboratory students on selected educational outcomes [Abstract]. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 21,* 699.
[23]   Mac, K. (2011). Small group workshops in large creative writing classes because you can't be everywhere at once. *Wasacana Review, 4,* 224-234.
[24]   Mackey, A. & Gass, S. (2005). Second language research: Methodology and design. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
[25]   Mahenthiran, S., & Rouse, P. (2000). The impact of group selection on student performance and satisfaction. *The International Journal of Education Management, 14,* 255-264.
[26]   Mattta, V., Luce, T., & Ciavarro, G. (2010). Exploring impact of self-selected student teams and academic potential on satisfaction. *Information Systems Educators Conference, 27,* 1-10.
[27]   May, S. (2003). Teaching creative writing at undergraduate level: Why, how and does it work. English Subject Centre, HTA.
[28]   Merrell, Ch. H. (2006). PIPS assessment of creative writing. United Kingdom: University of Durham.
[29]   Michaelsen, L. (2004). Getting stated with team-based learning. In L. Michaelsen, A. Knight & L. Fink (Eds.), *A transformative use of small groups* (pp. 27-42). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
[30]   Mills, P. (2006). The Routledge creative writing coursebook. New York: Routledge.
[31]   Mitchell, S. N., Reilly, R., Bramwell, G., Solnosky, A., & Lilly, F. (2004). Friendship and choosing groupmates: Preferences for teacher-selected vs. student-selected groupings in high school science classes. *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 31,* 20-32.

[32] Mushtaq, R., Murteza, G., Rashid, S., & Khalid, A. (2012). The influence of group selection method on grades, performance and group outcome. *Journal of Basic and Applied Scientific Research, 2,* 7003-7008.

[33] Neilson, D. (2006). Small group learning and its value to social work education. *Investigation in University Teaching and Learning, 3,* 58-66.

[34] Newman, J. (2007). The evaluation of creative writing at M.A. level (UK). In S. Earnshaw (Ed.), *The handbook of teaching creative writing* (pp. 24-86). Edinburg: Edinburg University Press.

[35] Oakley, B., Felder, R. M., Brent, R., Elhajj, I. (2004). Turning student groups into effective teams. *Journal of Student Centered Learning, 2,* 9-24.

[36] Oxford, R. (1997). Cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and interaction: Three communicative strands in the language classroom. *Modern Language Journal, 81,*443-456.

[37] Pallant, J. (2005). SPSS survival manual: A step by step guide to data analysis using SPSS. Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press.

[38] Russell, M. (2010). The formation of effective work groups within an FE classroom. *Research in Post-compulsory Education, 205,* 205-221.

[39] Saskatchewan (1998). Creative writing 20: A curriculum guide for secondary level. Regina: Saskatchewan Education.

[40] Sharplin, E. & Morris, G. (2013). The assessment of creative writing in senior secondary English: A colloquy concerning criteria. *English in Education, 47,* 49-65.

[41] Shindler, J. (2010). Transformative classroom management: Positive strategies to engage all students and promote a psychology of success.US: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

[42] University of Bradford (2008). Index of Learning Styles (ILS) learning style questionnaire. Retrieved March, 18, 2013, from http://www.brad.ac.uk/lss/learnerdevelopment/.

[43] Weigle, S. C. (2002). Assessing writing. New York: Cambridge University Press.

[44] Wolf, H. & Stevens, E. (2007). The role of rubrics in advancing and assessing student learning. *The Journal of Effective Teaching, 7,* 3-14.

Jaleh Hassaskhah is currently an assistant professor at the English Department of the University of Guilan. Her areas of interest include curriculum development, assessment and exploring new horizons in teaching language skills, which has led to the publication of different articles and books. She has also served as the reviewer and lecturer on these topics both nationally and internationally.

Hamideh Mozaffari holds an MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). She is currently a language teacher at Allame Tabatabaee Language Centre (ALC).