

The Impact of Analysis VS. Synthesis Task on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Paragraph Writing Ability

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Abstract

While writing is interlocked with learning, many L2 students do not know really how to write and put their ideas together. Task-based instruction is an approach which provides learners with a learning context that requires the use of the target language through communicative activities and in which the process of using language carries more importance than mere production of correct language forms. In this regard, this study explored the effectiveness of Task-based Language Teaching on the development of learners' writing skills in general, and it endeavored to compare the effect of using analytic versus synthetic tasks on Iranian EFL learners' paragraph writing ability. In this study, 100 students were selected randomly and were assigned randomly into two experimental groups after sitting on a language proficiency test [EX1: Analysis tasks and EX2: Synthesis tasks]. The pretests of writing were administered to both groups. After instruction for each group, both two groups received the posttest. The results of the paired-sample t-tests of the groups indicated that participants of both groups significantly outperformed on the post-test measures of speaking. Upon reviewing the results of the independent-samples t-test concerning writing performance of two groups, it was revealed that the no group significantly outperformed the other after the intervention indicating that both analysis tasks and synthesis tasks have helped learners improve their paragraph writing ability. The study suggests some implications for language teaching methodology, syllabus design, materials development, and assessment.

Keywords: Analysis task, Essay writing, Synthesis task, Task-based Language Teaching, Task-based writing

Introduction

While writing is interlocked with learning, many L2 students do not know really how to write and put their ideas together. Writing has been at the bottom of the hierarchy of teaching: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Moreover, writing has not achieved its right place among other skills as Reid (2001) says, "even as late as 1970s, L2 writing was not viewed as a language skill to be taught to the learners It was used as a support for skill in language Learning" (cited in Carter & Nunan 2002, p. 29). Many students in Iran do not know why they are writing (Birjandi, 2004, p.3). The reason might be the lack of sufficient exposure to native speakers of English or the great need for speaking rather than writing.

Writing is one of the language skills used by people to convey their messages. It is also used to express ideas, feelings, thoughts, and so on. In writing, a writer needs the words and organizational structures that make the words convey the writers' ideas or messages through development and coherence (Nasution, 2008).

Moreover, writing should be organized effectively and should include some aspects like word choice, grammar, mechanics, and content or evidence. It means that writing should communicate something clearly, precisely, and unambiguously so that the readers can comprehend the writer of what is being written about (Nasution, 2008). However, among the four skills, writing is the most difficult for foreign language (FL) learners to learn as it requires paying attention to both higher and lower level skills at the same time during the writing process (Bae & Bachman, 2010). Some criteria of acceptability in different aspects of writing including content, organization, vocabulary, language use, spelling, punctuation and accuracy are essential for writing task and these criteria make the writing task a difficult one (Hamadouche, 2010).

Language learners' problems in writing and finding ways to solve these problems have been an open field in the domain of language teaching. During the history of language teaching a lot of time and energy has been invested on finding some practical and effective solutions to the existing problems of writing. To do so, new methods and approaches were introduced among which Task-based Writing instruction enjoys a special status.

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Tasks as organized sets of activities play essential roles in classroom learning processes. Task-based instruction is an approach that emphasizes the significance of the role of tasks in these processes. As learners in EFL contexts have fewer opportunities to practice language outside school, classroom activities become more important (Nunan, 1989). Teachers and syllabus designers turn to the role of tasks and task-based instruction in order to have a more effective teaching-learning environment. There are some important studies examining the use of task-based instruction and its focus on communicative competence, such as the Bangalore/Madras Communicational Teaching Project and the Malaysian Communicational Syllabus (1975, Beretta & Davies, Beretta, cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Prabhu 1987). However, there are few research studies on the use of task-based instruction in teaching a specific skill, such as writing.

However, many researches are done in the field of writing ability but the main problem of writing is that writing is a complicated skill and there are so many different reasons for this claim. As a result, the writer's task is very complex and difficult. Various factors related to the writing process such as social context arrangements are needed to be considered by the writer because these are different in various societies. This study tried to examine the impact of analysis versus synthesis task on Iranian intermediate EFL Learners' paragraph writing ability.

Literature Review

Task-based Language Teaching

Recent years have shown increased attention to the use of task-based instruction (TBI) in language teaching (Bygate, Skehan & Swain, 2000; Skehan, 1998; Willis, 1996). The need for a change from the traditional approach of presentation, practice and production (PPP) to TBI is a controversial issue. Skehan (1996) claims that there are two opposite ideas about the help of PPP method in FL classes. Rivers (cited in Skehan, 1996) suggests that the traditional PPP method includes many techniques that provide teachers with a clear schedule of activation to follow. However, Skehan (1996) emphasizes the unproven and unrealistic nature of PPP and proposes task-based approaches to instruction as a preferable alternative. In the PPP method, students are seen as "language learners", whereas in the TBI pedagogy, they are treated as "language users" (Ellis, 2003, p. 252).

Task-based instruction can be defined as an approach in which communicative and meaningful tasks play the central role in language learning and in which the process of using language in communication carries more importance than mere production of correct language forms. Therefore, TBI is viewed as one model of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in terms of regarding real and meaningful communication as the primary feature of language learning (Richards & Rodgers,

2001). Authentic language use, the real use of real language in classroom content, fosters a learning environment in which learners have their own say; they gain communicative practice within their own sense of the defined goals in TBI. In other words, learners are to learn the language as they use it. Because of this, communicative language use comes into focus as an essential aspect of a task-based framework (Ellis, 2003, Willis, 1996). In addition to developing communicative capability, attention to form is fundamental for language learning. Even though TBI emphasizes the primacy of meaning, a focus on form has a parallel importance in the language learning process (Bygate, Skehan & Swain, 2001). In the task-based framework, it is desirable that learners can achieve accurate as well as fluent use of language (Ellis, 2003).

In addition to real language use, which is a common feature both in CLT and TBI, other critical dimensions define TBI: "input and output processing, negotiation of meaning and transactionally focused conversations" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). TBI provides effective language learning contexts in the form of tasks (Willis, 1996). Among the significant contexts for language learning, exposure to meaningful language input is seen as primary (Krashen, cited in Ellis, 2003). However, Swain (1985) indicates that productive output is as significant as meaningful input, & TBI requires a product-an output-at the end of a task (cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Communication in task-based instruction places an equal importance on the processing of comprehensible input and production of comprehensible output. In task-based learning, learners also have the opportunity to negotiate meaning to in order identify and solve a problem that occurs in their communication (Ellis, 2003). Negotiation of meaning involves adjustment, rephrasing and experimentation with language. The components of meaning negotiation are central for communication in real life conversations. Conversations involving clarification requests, confirmation and comprehension checks, and self-repetitions make input comprehensible. Thus interactions to negotiate meaning are essential to insure that input is comprehensible and language acquisition is promoted (Ellis, 2003; Seedhouse, 1998).

Writing

Writing, from linguists' points of view, is classified as a productive skill in addition to speaking, while listening and reading are receptive skills. Writing must be learned in formal situations as schools, institutions, centers, and universities.

As common in all languages, speaking was the earliest form of expression between human beings whatever their native language because all human beings grew up speaking their mother tongue or as called first language, after a long period of time writing has to be taught and learned. In line with that, Brookes and Grundy (as cited in Khaldoun, 2008, p. 10) reported:

The study of language in the twentieth century has tended to concentrate on spoken language, many linguists from de Saussure through to Chomsky, for what seemed like good reasons at that time, neglected the written mode in favor of the spoken. This, however, contributed to the fact that writing was for a long time a neglected area in language Teaching (2001, p. 01).

Writing is a difficult task whether at schools or in real life. Some of them argued that refers to writing is a recent form of expression in the development of human beings. In that Lyons and Heasley (2006) said: "writing as a complex process, and it is frequently accepted as being the last language skill to be acquired (for native speakers of the language as well as 15 for those learning a foreign or a second language) ", (p. 13). Harmer (2004) claimed: "Spoken language, for a child, is acquired naturally as a result of being exposed to it, whereas the ability to write has to be learned".

Harmer (as cited in Ghodbane, 2010, p. 19) pointed out that "there are a number of reasons why students find language production difficult". Writing and learning to write has always been one of the most complex language skills (2007, p. 251). Nunan (as cited in Graoui, 2007, p. 15) agreed that "it is easier to learn to speak than to write no matter if it is a first or second language" (1989, p. 12). This complexity resides in the stages of the process we go through when writing, the lack of knowledge in the subject matter, etc. Moreover, it can be related to factors: psychological, linguistic, and cognitive; this applies to writing in L1, L2, and FL. Besides its complexity, its difficulty, and its importance, writing is a dynamic process which allows writers to work with words and ideas no matter if these are right or wrong. This idea (as cited in Graoui, 2007, p) is supported by Zamel (1992) who described writing as a "meaning-making, purposeful, evolving, recursive, dialogic, tentative, fluid, exploratory process ". More importantly, writing is a process of discovery, i.e., a way to help learners to learn or to discover how to compose a piece of writing. Grabe and Kaplan (as cited in Ghodbane, 2010, p. 19) think of writing as a "technology", i.e., a set of skills which must be practiced and learned through practice (1996).

According to White and Arndt (1991), "writing is also a problem-solving activity developing in progress". This means that writing doesn't come naturally or automatically, but through cognitive efforts, training, instruction and practice. Even if it is a problem solving, writing involves processes such as generating ideas, a voice to write, planning, goal-setting, monitoring and evaluating what is to be written and what has been written as well as the right language used by the writer.

Previous Findings about the Impact of Analysis VS. Synthesis Task on Learners' Paragraph Writing Ability

There are plenty of research on the effect of TBLT on various aspects of language skills. However, despite its importance in EFL instruction, little attention was paid to

the possible effectiveness of various tasks such as analysis and synthesis tasks on various language skills and sub-skills.

In one study, Bygate, Skehan, & Swain (2001) investigated the effect of analytic tasks on teaching writing tasks of a group of Australian ESL learners. The results showed that the experimental group of the study being taught through TBLT. The experimental group received instruction in writing via analytic tasks. In this regard, many researchers have pointed out to the importance of different task types on the improvement of language skills (De Bot, 2001; Kim, 2008; Rivers, 2010; Skehan, 1998; Stevens, 1983; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; & Swan 2005).

In another study, Carless (2008) endeavored to study the degree of task complexity and ESL learners' essay writing ability. The author taught different groups using different tasks among which were analysis and synthesis tasks. He concluded that if tasks are selected based on the learners' level of proficiency, learning will be more appropriate and efficient. The findings showed that analysis and synthesis tasks are almost of the same complexity level and processing demands. ESL learners in his study had almost the same level of proficiency. This study, in an attempt to add more knowledge to Carless's (2008) study but with a different focus in a different learning environment, aimed to compare the effectiveness of analysis and synthesis tasks for EFL paragraph writing ability. This study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the impact of analysis task on Iranian intermediate EFL Learners' paragraph writing ability?

RQ2: What is the impact of synthesis task on Iranian intermediate EFL Learners' paragraph writing ability?

RQ3: Is there any statistically significant difference in learners' paragraph writing ability of analysis group versus synthesis group of the study?

Methodology

The investigation aimed at examination of the effect of the impact of analysis versus synthesis tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL Learners' paragraph writing ability. In this regard, the researcher endeavored to apply task-based methodology using analysis versus synthesis tasks to improve Iranian intermediate EFL learners' paragraph writing.

The current study was a quantitative and experimental research design which adopted a *Pre-test Post-test Equivalent-Groups Design* to complement its objectives. To be more exact, this study used a true-experimental design to collect the needed data to answer the research questions. In terms of the importance of this design Cresswell (2009) stated this design is the most reliable method of the quantitative approach in which the researcher intends to examine the impact of an intervention on another dependent variable due largely

to the fact that it uses random assignment which neutralizes the effect of other extraneous factors which may mix the final results. In doing so, 100 participants were randomly selected, and in terms of their language proficiency achievement on an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) they were divided into two groups, EX1 and EX2. Both groups were taught writing by the same researcher who was a regular teacher at the institute, by the same instructional methodologies, but by different tasks.

Participants

The target population of the study consisted of EFL institute students who have been studying English there for several years. The original population who had the chance to take part in the study consisted of 144 EFL learners at the intermediate level, 15-24 year-old students from Iran Language Institute of Rasht. To achieve the number of the participants for the current study to be undertaken, the students sat on a language proficiency test called Oxford Placement Test (OPT), and based on their performances on the test, they were divided into two groups, EX1 (Using analytic tasks; 50 Intermediate learners; Female: 50, Age Mean= 21) and EX2 (Using synthetic tasks; 50 Intermediate learners; Female: 50, Age mean= 21). All of them were of Iranian nationality whose religion was Islam and they were learning English as a foreign language.

Instruments

Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

To be sure of the homogeneity in two groups, proficiency test was administered to establish of participants' homogeneity. Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered to make sure the participants were homogenous in terms of their language proficiency. This enables teachers to have a great understanding of what level their students are at. The test contains 50 multiple choice questions which assess student's knowledge of key grammar and vocabulary, a reading text with 10 graded comprehension questions, and a writing task for assessing student's ability to produce the language.

IELTS Writing Measurement

There was a Writing test extracted from the IELTS Writing Section (Cambridge English Top Tips for IELTS Academic, 2009) which assesses the students' paragraph writing ability; this test was used before the commencement of the study and it was repeated at the end of the study. The writing rubric used in the study is of high validity for grading the students' essay writing and it is designed and tested by several experts.

Analytic Rating Scale

This questionnaire included two main sections. Section one was based on Ashweel (2000) and included five different sections of ability to communicate, logical organization, purpose of each paragraph, smooth ideas, and finally relevant supportive ideas. Each of the major sections was divided into six subsections and the raters chose a point along a scale (4-point Likert scale) that corresponded to their understanding of examinees' knowledge and improvement in writing ability.

Section two based upon Lee (2006); Song and August (2002) and included three different sections of grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. Each of the major sections was divided into four subsections and the raters chose a point along a scale (4-point Likert scale).

Data Collection

After the sampling procedure, two groups took the IELTS Writing Test. Then, the instructional procedure began. The students in the both groups (EX1 and EX2) were taught by the same researcher who is an English language teacher at Iran Language Institute. The EX1 was taught writing via using analysis tasks; however, the EX2 received writing instruction through using synthesis tasks.

The class time was divided to three phases: pre-task, task cycle and post-task. During the pre-task phase, the topic was introduced and the researcher encouraged the students to activate the related schemata and the background knowledge. Here the focus was on brainstorming ideas and free writing about the introduced task without concern for form. At this phase scripts, charts, maps, films and the like were used. The task cycle had three stages: task, planning and report. During the task stage, the students were asked to organize their ideas and write about the presented task. The students worked in pairs or in groups of five or six based on the difficulty of the task at hand. The researcher walked around monitoring and helping students to formulate what they wanted to say but he did not intervene to correct errors of form. During the planning stage students were asked to rewrite and draft their writing. Also, peer feedback and the use of dictionary were encouraged during the writing phase. In the report stage, one or two groups were asked to read their essays in class for comments. During the post-task phase, the structure and organization of the narrative and expository essays were fully discussed and there was some practice on the cohesive devices, grammar, content, fluency of ideas and word selection. In fact, this phase was "a language focus" phase or "a focus on form" stage.

This procedure was practiced for 10 weeks. The duration of each session was about 1 hour and 45 minutes. After 10 sessions of giving treatment, both groups were post-tested on the writing test.

To check the extent of efficacy of each task type for EFL paragraph writing, descriptive statistical procedures,

paired-samples t-tests, and an independent-samples t-test were applied using the SPSS software.

The descriptive analysis of the data for different groups of the study has been summarized below. Table 3 summarizes the descriptive analysis of the data of EX1 of the study.

Data Analysis and Results

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for EX1

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	12.2667	50	1.74066	.31780
Posttest	16.4167	50	1.20833	.22061

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for EX2

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	12.3067	50	2.02115	.21423
Posttest	16.0167	50	1.93196	.24150

Table 5. Paired-samples test for EX1

	Paired Differences					
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Paired1 EX1 Pretest-Posttest	4.15	1.0284	0.18777	87.154	49	.000

Table 6. Paired-samples test for EX2

	Paired Differences					
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Paired1 EX1 Pretest-Posttest	3.71	0.970	0.17728	60.299	49	.000

As table 3 indicates, the mean value of paragraph writing for the EX1 before the instruction is 12.2667 (SD=1.74066), while the mean for the EX1 after paragraph writing instruction is 16.4167 (SD=1.20833). It is obvious that the EX1 performance on paragraph writing improved greatly after the treatment through analysis tasks. It can be inferred that the instruction through a task-based methodology using analysis tasks was effective in enhancing learners' paragraph writing performance on the test. Next table shows the descriptive statistics of the EX2 of the study.

As table 4 indicates, the mean for EX2 before the instruction is 12.8667 (SD= 2.02115), while its mean value after the treatment is 16.01167 (SD=1.93196). With regard to its performance on the posttest, the EX2, instructed via synthesis tasks, also showed improvement in its paragraph writing ability.

The inferential analyses of the data for testing the research hypothesis have been summarized in the tables below.

Table 5 summarizes the inferential analysis of the data before and after treatment via analysis tasks for the EX1 of the study.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the intervention on students' scores on the paragraph writing measures. There was a statistically significant increase in paragraph writing scores from

pretest to posttest, $t(49) = 87.154, P = .000 < .0005$ (two-tailed). The mean increase in paragraph writing scores was 4.15 with a 95% confidence interval. To answer the first research question, therefore; paragraph writing instruction through analysis tasks significantly improved Iranian intermediate EFL Learners' paragraph writing ability. Table 6 summarizes the inferential analysis of the data before and after paragraph writing instruction through synthesis tasks for the EX2 of the study.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted between the pre-test and post-tests of EX2 to investigate whether the paragraph writing instruction through synthesis tasks improved students' scores on the paragraph writing measures as well or not. The results showed that there was also a statistically significant increase in paragraph writing scores of the EX2 from pretest to posttest, $t(49) = 60.299, P = .000 < .0005$ (two-tailed). The mean increase in paragraph writing scores was 3.71 with a 95% confidence interval. In response to the second research question, the instruction through synthesis tasks significantly increased the students' paragraph writing ability of the EX2. Further statistical analysis was done to examine whether significant differences existed between two groups in terms of their paragraph writing ability.

Since two groups of the study were of the same level based on OPT result; intermediate level, there could not exist any noticeable pre-existing differences between two

groups on paragraph writing ability. Therefore, an independent-samples t-test was conducted between the post-test paragraph writing scores of the groups to see whether there exist any significant differences between

two groups in terms of their paragraph writing ability after the instruction. Table 7 summarizes the results of the independent samples t-test of the post-test data of two groups.

Table 7. Independent-samples t-test for the pretest of both groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	15.51	3.27	2.11	98	0.124	0.45	0.767	4.06	2.4
Equal variances not assumed			2.11	88.67	0.123	0.45	0.767	4.06	2.39

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the means of two groups for the learners' paragraph writing ability. The Sig. value for Levene's test is larger than .05 (3.27), then the first row in the table should be consulted, which refers to Equal variances assumed. The results of the independent-samples t-test revealed that there was not any significant difference between the EX1 and EX2 ($t(98) = 2.11, p = .124$, two-tailed). To provide the answer to the third research question, the results indicated that there was not any significant difference between these two kinds of instruction.

Discussions

The investigation aimed at examination of the effect of the impact of analysis versus synthesis tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL Learners' paragraph writing ability. In this regard, the researcher endeavored to apply task-based methodology using analysis versus synthesis tasks to improve Iranian intermediate EFL learners' paragraph writing. To put it differently, efforts were made to demonstrate the effectiveness of analysis tasks versus synthesis tasks for Iranian EFL learners' paragraph writing ability. The results of test scores were compared for both groups to ascertain which instructional treatment had been more effective for enhancement of learners' writing ability. In this study, 100 students of were selected randomly and were assigned randomly into two experimental groups after sitting on a language proficiency test [EX1: Analysis tasks and EX2: Synthesis tasks]. The pretests of writing were administered to both groups. After instruction for each group, both two groups received the posttest. All the data gathered from the pretest and posttest entered the data analysis process. It can be said that the better performance of the two experimental groups is related to the superiority of the task-based approach in teaching writing. This superiority has been emphasized by many scholars and researchers.

As Ellis (2003), states this superiority lies in the meaningful, purposeful, communicative and authentic nature of the task-based approach.

The findings of the study revealed that the participants of both groups performed significantly better on the posttest measures of writing, but there was not any significant difference between the performances of the two groups in paragraph writing. The findings of the current study are in line with the findings of the previous research showing that task-based language teaching could actually lead to writing development (Edwards and Willis, 2005; Ellis, 2003; Harmer, 2007; Nunan, 2004; Prabhu, 1987; Skehan, 1998; Willis, 2008). Based on the results and the statistical analyses, it can be concluded that teaching paragraph writing through task-based approach, whether it is done using analytic tasks or synthetic tasks, is more effective than teaching them through the traditional approach.

As stated in Frost (2004), TBLT establishes learners' freedom over language control and allows them to use a natural context evolved from their experiences with an appropriate language. Furthermore, the learners "will have a much more varied exposure to language with TBLT" and "they will be exposed to a whole range of lexical phrases, collocations and patterns as well as language forms" (Frost, 2004). The language in TBL comes from the learners' needs which determine to a great extent the content of the lesson. Furthermore, TBLT is a creative, enjoyable and motivating type of learning focused in particular on communication between learners (Frost, 2004). As a result, designing and using task based activities in the classroom introduces a modern and effective approach in language learning and should be definitely included in English lessons.

Task based language teaching (TBLT) is learning primarily based on tasks. Through TBL approach, also known as task based instruction (TBI), students learn more effectively when focusing on completing a task. This type of teaching helps students to improve their

performance in class when dealing with a task or solving a problem (Harmer, 2007). According to Edwards and Willis (2005), task based language learning and teaching inform language teachers about new techniques of designing tasks, enrich their existing experience and encourage them to use more task based activities in their lessons. According to Curriculum Development Council (CDC) (1999), "the role of task-based language learning is to stimulate a natural desire in learners to improve their language competence by challenging them to complete meaningful tasks" (p. 41).

According to Nunan (2004), TBLT has become a key element of many educational institutions worldwide. In TBLT a teacher effectively uses tasks in a classroom in order to activate students' acquisition processes in second language learning (Edwards & Willis, 2005). The main assumptions of TBLT mentioned by Edwards & Willis (2005) are summarized in a few points which are as follows: the focus of instruction is based on process; tasks and activities are sequenced according to their difficulty; they are based on communication and meaning, whereas learners learn language to a great extent by interaction; activities and are achieved either in a real world or with respect to a pedagogical aim in the classroom (as cited in Feez, 1998).

As mentioned above, communication and meaning-focused language use is an essential concept in creating tasks in TBLT. On the other hand, focus on form and grammar is also important with respect to effective communication and learning (Edwards & Willis, 2005, p. 16). In addition, Nunan (1998) points out that "there is a value in classroom tasks which require learners to focus on form [and that] grammar is an essential resource in using language communicatively" (p.13).

To write fluently is regarded as one of the most difficult skills for all language users (Nunan, 1989). As stated in Nunan (1989), "writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of a number of variables simultaneously" (as cited in Bell & Burnaby, 1984, p. 37). Nunan (1989) adds that this involves control of the sentence content, structure, format, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation, whereas the writer must be able to organize information into cohesive and coherent text (as cited in Bell & Burnaby, 1984). Nevertheless, writing is an important skill because people communicate everyday also in writing, as for example through electronic communication. Furthermore, writing enhances learners in language learning by means of generating thoughts, organizing ideas, discovering meaning and using their own creativity and independent thinking (CDC, 1999).

The role of the teacher in developing learner's writing skills is to design and interpret appropriate tasks, encourage learners to be innovative in writing, give them enough time and motivate them to better results. Furthermore, teachers should be flexible and sensitive, create comfortable atmosphere and take into consideration different levels and needs of their learners (CDC, 1999).

There are many different ways of practicing writing skills; either focusing on the process of writing or on the product of writing (Harmer, 2007). As stated in Harmer (2007), "When concentrating on the product, we are only interested in the aim of a task and in the end product" (p. 325). Therefore, many educators prefer to focus on the process of writing going through a number of stages in order to practice various language skills (Harmer, 2007, p. 326). Furthermore, learners can discuss every single stage with teachers and concentrate on the producing of final version of their work (Harmer, 2007). Nevertheless, activities connected with the process of writing may involve discussion, brainstorming and collecting ideas, research, language study, drafting, editing and also frequent interaction between teachers and learners and between the learners themselves (Harmer, 2007). As Harmer (2007) further explains, set of these activities connected with the process of writing is considered to be one of the disadvantages of process writing because it is time consuming.

According to CDC (1999), there are four main learning strategies used in writing: pre-writing, drafting, revising and editing stage. In the pre-writing stage learners begin with generating ideas which involves strategies such as brainstorming, free-writing, questioning, role-play, interview and reading with listening (CDC, 1999). Scrivener (2005) explains brainstorming as "a way to get the 'ideas creation engine' running" which means "opening your mind and letting ideas pour out" (p. 197). Brainstorming is realized in class by means of three steps: writing the topic on the board, asking students for their ideas connected with the topic and finally writing up these ideas on the board (Scrivener, 2005). During the pre-writing stage learners also plan their ideas including recognizing purposes and audience in the writing context and creating outlines of their writing (CDC, 1999).

As mentioned in CDC (1999), in the drafting stage learners concentrate primarily on the content than on grammar, punctuation or spelling. Teachers prepare learners for the drafting stage and help them to develop their skills in creating beginning, ending and the content of the text. Learners consider the relation of the opening to the ending and examine examples of interesting openings, such as rhetorical question or an assertive statement. Moreover, teachers enhance learners in structuring a text which is realized by practicing suitable reading activities, writing full texts, paragraphing, creating summaries or using cohesive devices. Learners should also try to write as many types of texts as possible including personal, social, public, study or creative writing (pp. 88-90). As stated in Harmer (2007), creative writing is "a journey of self-discovery, and self-discovery promotes effective learning" (as cited in Gaffield-Vile, 1998, p. 31). Creative writing involves imaginative tasks where learners use their own experiences and which encourages them to produce a greater piece of writing (Harmer, 2007).

In the revising stage, learners are motivated to make necessary changes in their drafts per peer feedback which

allows them to work interactively in pairs and comment on each other's drafts. Then, the teacher leads a discussion in small groups and comments on the drafts by providing positive support, asking questions and suggesting possible improvements (CDC, 1999).

The last editing stage deals with the final revision of grammar, punctuation, spelling and handwriting in order to enable learners to present their texts to the readers. Teachers can also explain to the learners certain grammatical points they have problems with (CDC, 1999). To sum up, Nunan (1989) provides that a successful writing includes comprehending the mechanics of letter formation together with correct spelling and punctuation, using grammatical rules in order to transform the meaning, forming content through paragraph and the whole text to analyze given and new information, correcting and improving writer's initial achievement and choosing a suitable style for the audience.

Conclusions

The need for learning English and being able to communicate through it, in situations such as our country, Iran, where there is lack of exposure to the native speakers of English as well as authentic materials, is something that both students and teachers agree on. Therefore, applying effective ways or techniques through which learners can better learn and better communicate seems an important enterprise.

The study addresses the paucity of research on the employment of task-based instruction in EFL writing classrooms. Although task-based instruction has been investigated in ESL classrooms, little research has been conducted in EFL writing classrooms. Thus, it may provide general information for program planners at the university level by providing an additional tool for the improvement of students' writing skills.

At the local level, the study may contribute to the re-thinking and re-design of speaking courses in the curriculum renewal process at Iranian University and, in turn, encourage a more thorough examination of task-based instruction in all language areas. Some experience in task-based speaking instruction may assist teachers in designing more focused tasks on the specific needs of their own students as well as assist them in modifying such tasks in mid-stream as particular student needs are identified.

Consequently, it is essential for syllabus designers and teachers to examine a variety of language learning techniques in writing to select the one which is more effective. It is hoped that a systematic analysis of the result of the present study may provide the syllabus designers an insight into more effective techniques in their materials that they design.

The findings of this study can have various pedagogical implications in TEFL/TESL. These implications can be used in different domains of TEFL, like language teaching methodology, syllabus design, materials development, and assessment.

As far as the teaching methodology is concerned, task-based language teaching (TBLT) can be very helpful. The current study made it clear that task-based language teaching (TBLT) is definitely more effective than traditional approach in teaching writing in general and in teaching writing modes like narration and exposition in particular. In fact, teaching writing to EFL learners through task-based approach has all of the advantages of the process approach to writing such as the focus on the processes involved in the pre-writing, during writing and post-writing phases. Task-based approach pays enough attention to all of the processes which are involved in producing a good essay.

It fully considers such processes and helps learners brainstorm and generate more new ideas; it also activates their previous schemata and background knowledge, motivates the students and encourages them to write freely without any concern over formal linguistic features. It adopts a dynamic view toward the act of writing and considers all of the involved factors and processes which take place when producing an essay. Moreover, it adds more peculiar aspects to the "process writing" by its complete task cycle. It also has a complete post-task phase or "a language focus phase" in which the specific structures and forms of language are focused on. It seems that task-based language teaching (TBLT) is very effective in teaching writing to EFL learners. Task-based approach can be used in teaching paragraph writing to the intermediate students and even in teaching writing skills to the beginners due to its robust pedagogical characteristics. Task-based approach can also be employed in the teaching of letter writing to EFL learners and ESP learners in Iran, and probably in other EFL contexts. Task-based approach seems to be the best methodology for teaching collaborative learning because it is quite interactive and follows the principles of cooperative learning. And another interesting feature of task-based approach is the use of peer feedback in a non-threatening condition.

With regard to the syllabus design and writing instructional materials, the findings of the present study suggest that each instructional situation is a unique one and it demands its own syllabus and instructional materials.

According to the findings of present study teachers should write or select tasks for their own teaching situations. The teachers cannot use a set of fixed tasks or activities for all learners and in all situations, because in order to teach real-world and authentic language we have to use our situation aspects and the available resources in devising our tasks and instructional activities.

The findings of the current study also suggest that formative assessment during the course can be more effective than final summative assessment at the end of the instructional period. For example, the essays written by the learners during the course can be assessed to check their progress instead of the final writing post-test. Furthermore task-based approach operationalizes the

concept of alternative assessment in reality by focusing on the gradual progress of the learners' skill/knowledge during the instructional course. That is, in task-based language teaching (TBLT), the ability to do/complete the tasks through language is both learning and at the same time it is the assessment of language learning that has occurred. Portfolio assessment as a very effective type of assessment can also be best practiced within the framework of task-based approach in teaching writing.

Task-based approach can be applied to teaching other writing modes such as descriptive vs. expository writing. Also, it can be used in teaching other language skills and sub-skills like listening comprehension, vocabulary and grammar. The effect of formative task-based assessment on the writing performance of the Iranian EFL/ESP learners could also be a very good and interesting topic for further research.

The findings of the study suggested that the application of task-based instruction was highly influential in heightening the students' ability to write better paragraphs. Since the number of the intermediate participants was rather small, further studies should be conducted with a greater number of participants.

Other studies should be conducted with participants from different levels of learning in EFL contexts. It would be fascinating to see if such kind of training would still be beneficial to those other groups.

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