

THE EFFECT OF USING SCREENPLAY TECHNIQUE ON IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS' PARAGRAPH WRITING ABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to investigate the effect of using screenplay technique as an approach in teaching paragraph writing ability. The question this study tried to answer was whether using screenplay technique might improve the paragraph writing ability of the Iranian EFL students of English at intermediate level in English language institutes. To answer the question, 30 intermediate level students participated in the study. They were randomly selected from among a population of 60 via an OPT test score of at least one standard deviation below the mean. They were then divided into two groups of 15 and were randomly assigned to an experimental group and a control group. A pretest of paragraph writing was administered to both groups, and then they were taught paragraph writing instruction for 5 successive sessions but with different methodologies: the experimental group received a treatment of screenplay technique while the control group received the traditional instruction of paragraph writing. A posttest of paragraph writing was then administered to both groups. The obtained data of the study were analyzed using an independent sample t-test to indicate the posttests mean difference of both groups and the closeness of the scores from pretest to posttest scores of both groups were determined by calculating the Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The results indicated that the Iranian EFL learners in the experimental group scored higher in paragraph writing after being treated with screenplay technique in 5 successive sessions.

Keywords: Screenplay Teaching, CALL, Task-Based Language Teaching, Teaching Writing, Paragraph Writing

INTRODUCTION

Recently, writing is receiving great interest and a significant role in second and foreign language education but teaching English L2 writing is different from other skills of language since, it is used as a support skill in language learning (Reid, 2002). The method of teaching English writing in language classes have been shifting from traditional way of the end product to the process of creating writing. By such an emphasis on writing process, students learn how to develop their writing, how to solve the problems and how to think critically (Paulson & Paulson, 1991). On the other hand, writing is an outlet for emotions and thoughts, and despite the fact that writing skills come late on the ladder of acquisition, they still form an important component of second/foreign language learning (Fageeh, 2011).

This study is an attempt to investigate the effect of applying screenplay technique on improving the writing performance, especially paragraph writing, of Iranian EFL learners. It considers using the screenplay technique as one of the most important techniques to the writing instruction; since writing is one of English skills which is considered as the most difficult language skill to learn for the learners, so applying screenplay technique is one of the audiovisual aids that can be used in writing classes to make lessons more fun and interesting

to learn. It can also be used to create a situation for writing classes in which the students have a lot of motivations in learning the process of writing. Thus, this research tries to find out whether it is feasible to use screenplay technique in teaching writing to the Iranian EFL learners.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One major theme in pedagogical research on writing is the nature of the composing process of writing. The upshot of the compositional nature of writing has produced writing pedagogy that focuses students on how to generate ideas, how to organize them coherently, how to use discourse markers and rhetorical conventions to put them cohesively into a written text, how to revise text for clearer meaning, how to edit text for appropriate grammar, and how to produce a final product (Brown, 2001). Also Writing does not happen in a vacuum; it is always embedded in a rhetorical situation- a complex web of relations among the elements of writing (Moffett, 1968/1983; kinneavy, 1971).

The relationship between the writer, the reader, the text and reality are constantly changing, and it is quite possible for writers and readers to develop different perceptions of any particular rhetorical situation. For this reason, the writer's task is not as simple as constructing an accurate representation of reality; the writer also has to negotiate, through the construction of text, his or her own view of these elements of writing with the views held by the readers (Matsuda, 1997).

Unlike the mentioned theories of writing, CALL lacks a theoretical framework, since it is not yet a mature field. A lack of theoretical framework makes it hard for researchers to compare and evaluate findings from CALL studies. It means that practitioners have no universally accepted theoretical basis to provide direction for development and implementation of CALL materials. Currently CALL suffers problems in the research area. Some language teachers say that the use of technology is inevitable and therefore research is not required as CALL is going to happen anyway. Another issue is that CALL research tends to try to show that CALL is effective, which is often hard to do. A more institutional problem is the fact that CALL research is often not valued by the institutional powers in terms of promotion in the academic world. CALL workers are often a minority within university academic environments and there is sometimes little recognition for their work (Anonymous, 2006, cited in www.computing.dcu.ie).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In terms of skills, producing a coherent, fluent, and extended piece of writing is probably the most difficult thing there is to do in language. It is something most native speakers never master. For second language learners the challenges are enormous, particularly for those who go on to a university and study in a language that is not their own (Nunan, 1999).

According to Khoii & Tabrizi (2011) quoting from Reilly (2005) writing is believed to be a rational activity and the most demanding of all language skills. It is also a skill that many teachers find difficult to teach and, as a result of this, a skill many learners do not enjoy. That is why during the last two decades there has been a surge in the introduction of new techniques for helping students become better writers.

Also writing as a productive skill is more complicated than it seems at first and often seems to be the hardest of the skills, since it involves not just a graphic representation of speech, but the development and presentation of thoughts in a structured way (Gabrielatos, 2002).

RESEARCH QUESTION

The present study sets out to look for answers to the following question:

RQ: Does using screenplay technique affect Iranian EFL learners' paragraph writing ability?

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

A null hypothesis has been adopted for this study:

H0: Using screenplay technique does not affect Iranian EFL learners' paragraph writing ability.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Call

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is succinctly defined in a seminal work by Levy as “the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning (Levy, 1997)”.

Warschauer (1996) and Warschauer & Healey (1998) identified three historical phases of CALL, classified according to their underlying pedagogical and methodological approaches:

- a. Behaviorist CALL: conceived in the 1950s and implemented in the 1960s and 1970s which consists of drill-and-practice materials in which the computer presented a stimulus and the learner provided a response.
- b. Communicative CALL: 1970s to 1980s which is based on the communicative approach that became prominent in the late 1970s and 1980s (Underwood 1984).
- c. Integrative CALL: embracing Multimedia and the Internet: 1990s which tries to address criticisms of the communicative approach by integrating the teaching of language skills into tasks or projects to provide direction and coherence.

Task-Based Teaching

Communicative methods of teaching involve a variety of methods following the principles of communication in different contexts and with different learners. Task-based teaching is one of the varieties of communicative language teaching where the focus of classroom procedures is on providing contexts for learning to get involved in the process of learning by performing certain tasks. The idea is that the tasks would entail real communication in naturalistic contexts since the tasks are believed to provide meaningful activities for the learners that would lead to meaningful learning (Farhady & Delshad, 2007). According to Nunan (1989) a task is “A piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, middle and an end.

Writing

Nunan (2003, p. 88) defines that writing is the process of thinking to invent ideas, thinking about how to express into good writing, and arranging the ideas into statement and paragraph clearly. It indicates that the learners are expected to explore the ideas and make them into good paragraph. Besides, writing is both a physical and a mental act. It is the physical act of

committing words or ideas to some medium, whether it is an object or a symbols or an email message.

According to Oshima & Hogue (1999) good writing is more than just using correct grammar; it is also thinking, planning, checking, and revising. So, the writing process needs thinking, planning, good idea and good grammar to make a good writing. Writing is an important part in language. Learners must realize that writing a language is much more difficult than speaking it. Lyons and Heasley in Nunan (2000, p. 91) state that writing is clearly a complex process and competent. Writing is frequently accepted as being the last skill acquired. Based on this statement, it can be concluded that writing is a complex process. Writing is a continuous activity that has more than one step, but it needs steps. The most important in writing is process not a product.

Brown (2001, p. 335) states that written products are often the result of thinking, drafting, and revising procedures that require specialized skill, skill which not every speaker develops naturally. Writing needs thinking that focuses students on how to generate ideas. In written product it involves thinking, drafting, and procedure. Skills are also important in writing activity.

METHODOLOGY

The Design of the Study

This study followed a Quasi-Experimental research design. An Oxford Placement Test was administered to 60 language learners who were the students of intermediate level of Kish Air institute and Hadaf institute of Tonekabon-Iran. The test was intended to homogenize the research population. On the basis of the results of the OPT 30 were selected as the participants of the study. Then, the selected participants were divided into two groups: the experimental group and the control group. Both groups took a pretest of paragraph writing in order to help the researcher to identify their current level of writing ability. On the treatment stage, the experimental group received screenplay writing technique for 5 sessions. The control group, on the other hand, did not receive any screenplay writing technique. Instead, they took the traditional writing instruction. After 5 sessions, both the experimental group and the control group took a posttest on paragraph writing ability.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 60 students who studied English at the intermediate level in Kish Air institute and Hadaf institute of Tonekabon-Iran. The criterion for being an intermediate level student in these two institutes was that they should take a placement test from all books of 'Let's Go' and obtain the score 70 out of 100. The students were of mixed gender. The age range of the participants varied from 17 to 25. The participants were selected on the results of OPT administered. Since those students who were weak on the writing, especially paragraph writing, could be the representatives of the weak trainees, the researcher selected 30 students whose scores were at least one standard deviation below the mean score of the class. The selected participants were then divided into two groups and were randomly assigned into two groups: the experimental group and the control group. 15 participants served as the experimental group and 15 participants as the control group.

Materials

The participants of the current study were selected through using an Oxford Placement Test. The test was intended to find the appropriate level for the participants of the study. The test consisted of three parts: the first part included 5 questions related to the knowledge of

different signs and notions used to indicate particular meanings, 3 cloze test passages, and 20 multiple choice questions. The second part included 2 cloze test passages and 10 multiple choice questions. The third part related to the writing ability which was intended to ask participants to write about the selected topic.

For the pretest both the experimental group and the control group were asked to write about a topic which was selected from the book “Paragraph Development” edited by Arnaudet & Barrett (1990).

At the treatment stage, the control group received the traditional writing instruction consisted of the book “Paragraph Development” in 5 sessions. The experimental group on the other hand attended the screenplay classes as a treatment for 5 sessions. At this level the researcher used a computer and a CD to show the participants the paragraph writing instructions through applying PowerPoint Software.

After 5 sessions, both the experimental group and the control group took a post-test of paragraph writing ability. For the post-test the participants were again asked to write about a topic which was selected from the book “Paragraph Development”.

Procedures

In order to answer the question of this study, the following procedure was pursued. As a first step, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) version 1.1 was administered to 60 female and male language learners of Kish Air Institute of and Hadaf Institute of Tonekabon-Iran to make sure that they are homogeneous. Then 30 language learners were selected as the participants of the study. The criterion for selecting the participants was that their scores should be 1 standard deviation under the mean score, since by administering the OPT a lot of scores were obtained all of which were not suitable for the experiment. Only those students who were weak on the writing could be the representatives of the weak trainees. Next, the selected participants were randomly assigned to the control group and the experimental group. 15 participants were served as control group and 15 participants as experimental group.

Both the experimental group and the control group took a pre-test of paragraph writing. At this stage, a topic was given to the participants. The topic was chosen from a book called “Paragraph Development” edited Arnaudet & Barrett (1990). The participants were asked to write a paragraph containing a maximum number of 150 words. 20 minutes were allotted to the participants to write about the selected topic. The criteria for scoring them were: content, organization, discourse, syntax, vocabulary, and mechanics based on the categories for evaluating writing (Brown, 1991).

On the treatment section, the control group took the traditional paragraph writing instruction for 5 sessions. In each session the researcher used the book “Paragraph Development” to teach them how to write a paragraph. For the experimental group, on the other hand, the screenplay technique was utilized for 5 sessions. Here for each session the researcher taught them how to write a paragraph by using a computer through applying PowerPoint Software. Each session lasted for 30 minutes for both the control group and the experimental group.

After 5 sessions, both the experimental group and the control group took a post-test of paragraph writing ability. They were given a topic which was selected from the book “Paragraph Development” and were asked to write a paragraph of about 150 words. 20 minutes were allotted to the participants to write the paragraph. The criteria for scoring the writing of both groups included content, organization, discourse, syntax, vocabulary, and mechanics.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Descriptive Analysis of the Data

This section presented the descriptive analysis of the obtained data of this research. To do so, the researcher utilized the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software. Table 1 showed the descriptive analysis for the pretest and the posttest of the control group of this study:

Table 1. Descriptive analysis of the data of the control group of the study

| | <i>N</i> | <i>Minimum</i> | <i>Maximum</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Std. Deviation</i> | <i>Variance</i> |
|---------|----------|----------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Pre-Co | 15 | 8.00 | 15.00 | 11.5333 | 1.84649 | 3.410 |
| Post-Co | 15 | 8.00 | 14.00 | 11.6000 | 1.80476 | 3.257 |
| Valid N | 15 | | | | | |

(list wise)

According to table 1, the total number of participants (N) was 15 in the pretest and posttest of the control group. The Minimum score or the smallest score for the pretest and posttest of the control group was 8.00 but the Maximum score or the largest score for the pretest of the control group was 15.00 and for the posttest, 14.00. The Mean score for the pretest and posttest of the control group has been shown as 11.5333 and 11.6000 respectively. The Standard Deviation has been calculated as 1.84649 for the pretest and 1.80476 for the posttest; that is, the average deviation of all scores from the Mean score of the pretest and posttest was 1.84649 and 1.80476 respectively. The Variance for the pretest scores was 3.410 and for the posttest scores, 3.257. The Valid N has been shown as 15 which referred to the number of non-missing values of the control group; that is, all the participants in the control group participated in the experiment.

The descriptive analysis of the pretest and the posttest of the experimental group have been shown in table 2:

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of the data of the experimental group of the study

| | <i>N</i> | <i>Minimum</i> | <i>Maximum</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Std. Deviation</i> | <i>Variance</i> |
|---------|----------|----------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Pre-Ex | 15 | 7.00 | 15.00 | 12.9333 | 2.28244 | 5.210 |
| Post-Ex | 15 | 14.00 | 19.00 | 17.0000 | 1.73205 | 3.000 |
| Valid N | 15 | | | | | |

(list wise)

According to table 2, the total number of participants (N) has been 15 in the pretest and posttest of the experimental group. The Minimum score or the smallest score for the pretest was 7.00 but while this value was 14.00 for the posttest. The Maximum score or the largest score for the pretest and posttest of the experimental group was 15.00 and 19.00 respectively. The Mean score for the pretest of the experimental group has been shown as 12.9333 but for the posttest has been shown as 17.0000. The Standard Deviation has been calculated as 2.28244 for the pretest and 1.73205 for the posttest; that is, the average deviation of all scores from the Mean score of the pretest and posttest was 2.28244 and 1.73205 respectively. The Variance for the pretest scores was 5.210 but for the posttest scores, 3.000. The Valid N has been shown as 15 which refer to the number of non-missing values of the experimental group; that is, all the participants in the experimental group participated in the experiment.

Inferential Analysis of the Data

This section focused on the inferential analysis of the obtained data of this study. This analysis was conducted through using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software from which the “Independent Sample t-test” and also the “Pearson Product Moment Correlation” were calculated and indicated in tables 3, 4, and 5 respectively.

Table 3. The t-test results of the study

| | <i>T</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i> | <i>Mean Difference</i> |
|-----------------------------|----------|-----------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Equal variances not assumed | 8.361 | 28 | 0.000 | 5.40000 |

According to the table 3, the observed t value (t) was calculated to be 8.361. The degree of freedom (df) was 28. The level of significance (Sig. 2-tailed) was calculated as to be 0.000. The mean difference was shown as 5.40000; that is, the difference between the mean scores of the post-tests of the control group and the experimental group of this study was calculated as 5.40000.

Table 4. Pearson correlation for the pretest and posttest scores of the control group

| | | <i>Pre-Co</i> | <i>Post-Co</i> |
|---------|---------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Pre-Co | Pearson Correlation | 1 | 0.776** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | 0.001 |
| | N | 15 | 15 |
| Post-Co | Pearson Correlation | 0.776** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.001 | |
| | N | 15 | 15 |

**correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

According to table 4 the Pearson’s r for the correlation between the pretest and the posttest scores of the control group was 0.776 ($r = 0.776$). It means that the closeness of the scores in the control group was high. As it was clear from the table the Sig. (2-tailed) value was 0.001 ($p=0.001$). This value shows if there is a statistically significant correlation between the two sets of scores of the control group. As it was shown, there was a significant correlation between the scores of the control group. Also, the number of participants in both the pretest and posttest of the control group was 15.

Table 5. Pearson correlation for the pretest and posttest scores of the experimental group

| | | <i>Pre-Ex</i> | <i>Post-Ex</i> |
|---------|---------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Pre-Ex | Pearson Correlation | 1 | 0.470 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | 0.077 |
| | N | 15 | 15 |
| Post-Ex | Pearson Correlation | 0.470 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.077 | |
| | N | 15 | 15 |

As it was clear from the table 5, the Pearson's r for the correlation between the pretest and the posttest scores of the experimental group was 0.470 ($r = 0.470$). It means that the closeness of the scores in the experimental group was low. In fact, it was lower than that of the control group. According to the table the Sig. (2-tailed) value was 0.077 ($p=0.077$). This value shows if there is a statistically significant correlation between the two sets of scores of the experimental group. As it was shown, there was no significant correlation between the scores of the experimental group. Also, the number of participants in both the pretest and posttest of the experimental group was 15.

Results of Hypothesis Testing

Here, the results of testing the hypothesis of the study have been presented in order to determine the rejection or support of the hypothesis. Before analyzing the hypothesis, it was repeated below:

H0: Using screenplay technique does not affect Iranian EFL learners' paragraph writing ability.

According to the collected findings the hypothesis of the study was rejected based on the following reasons:

First, according to the descriptive analysis of the given data and based on the tables 1 and 2, the mean scores of the pretest and posttest of the control group was 11.5333 and 11.6000 and for the experimental group was 12.9333 and 17.0000 respectively. As it was clear from these two tables there was no significant change in the mean scores of the control group whereas this change was very significant in the mean scores of the experimental group.

Second, the results of the t-test, table 3, showed that the observed t value was calculated as 3.361 while the critical t determined on the basis of considering df (Appendix F) was 2.048. So, the observed t value was higher than the critical t value. Also, as it was presented in the table 3, the sig. (2-tailed) value was 0.000. As this value was less than the required cut-off of 0.05, it could be concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the posttests of the control group and the experimental group. So, these two results from the t-test table could reject the null hypothesis of this study.

Third, according to table 4, the Pearson's r correlation between the pretest and the posttest scores of the control group was 0.776. As it was clear, this value was very close to 1. It means that the closeness of the scores of the control group was high. On the other hand, the sig. (2-tailed) value for this group was 0.001. This value was less than 0.05. Because of these two reasons, it could be concluded that there was a statistically significant correlation between the pretest and the posttest scores of the control group. In other words, the control group of the current study has undergone no significant change by being treated with using the traditional instruction of paragraph writing ability. So, it was another evidence for rejection of the null hypothesis of this study.

Forth, according to table 5, the Pearson's r correlation between the pretest and the posttest scores of the experimental group was 0.470. This value was not very close to 1; instead, it was very close to 0. So it could be concluded that the closeness of the scores of the pretest and posttest of the experimental group was low. Also, the sig. (2-tailed) value for the experimental group was 0.077. This value was greater than 0.05. So, it could be concluded that there was no statistically significant correlation between the pretest and the posttest scores of the experimental group. In fact, the experimental group of the study has been influenced by the treatment, applying screenplay technique, positively.

DISCUSSION

General Discussion

The findings of the current study indicated that using screenplay technique in teaching writing especially paragraph writing could result in a better performance of language learners in paragraph writing ability. These findings seemed to be compatible with the findings of many studies which reported that CALL is useful for EFL learners, and learners generally have a positive attitude towards using technology for learning language skills like writing because technology has a positive impact on the learning/teaching process (Warden, 1995; Neu & Scarcella, 1991; Phinney, 1991; Brady, 1990; Nash, Hsieh & Chen, 1989; Johnson, 1988; Phinney & Mathis, 1988; Herrmann, 1987; Daiute, 1984). In addition, many researchers stressed that CALL improves the skill of writing (Warschauer, 1996) and facilitates communication and interaction between learners (Cooper & Selfe, 1990). Several studies also suggested that students have a positive attitude towards computer-aided writing. Greenfield (2003), for instance, reported that students enjoyed the CALL class and made significant progress in writing.

Also Gosusseva (1998) in her study found that students' attitude towards CALL was usually positive because they could see different viewpoints and improve the skill of writing. She also said that students felt more comfortable in the CALL environment.

The findings of Adair-Hauck, Willingham-McLain, & Youngs (1999) also showed that it was feasible and in fact desirable to integrate computer-based instruction into learning and teaching language.

Accordingly, the results of this study is in line with Kulik & Kulik(1991) who surveyed more than 500 studies which compared learners who received computer-assisted instruction with the learners who received traditional instruction. They found that learners tend to learn more and in less time with computer-assisted learning.

Furthermore, many studies worldwide have been conducted to investigate the effect of CALL on learning languages. Research results demonstrated a positive effect of CALL on students learning and competency (Almekhlafi, 2006; Ertmer, Ottenbreit-Leftwich & York, 2006; Benson & Mekolichick, 2007; Teo, 2009). In other words, CALL has gained considerable attention from different entities including researchers and writers.

The findings of this study is compatible with the findings of the research made by Warschauer & Healey (1998) that computers offer learners various activities for developing different language skills. They can provide a useful and motivating medium for both integrated skills and separate activities.

Finally, this study confirms the remarks made by Yasaei (2012) that a well-known way to create meaningful context for teaching English is through using media, which can be delivered through a wide variety of print, audio, and visual formats.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The results of this study indicated that using screenplay technique has a significant role in Iranian EFL paragraph writing ability. For effective uses of screenplay technique, the researchers can replicate this study by considering some helpful and beneficial suggestions. First, this study was conducted in English institutes, so the future researchers can conduct the current study in other situations in Iran such as universities, schools, and so on. Second, this study was limited to the writing skill. It is possible to conduct the study in other language skills like listening, reading, and speaking. Third, because of the limitation of time, this study

was conducted in only 5 sessions. Future researchers can carry out this research in more than 5 sessions to get a better result. Forth, the numbers of participants in this study were only 30 people. The future researchers are advised to replicate this study with more than 30 subjects in order to reach better and more general results. Fifth, this study was conducted through using PowerPoint program to answer the research question of the study. It is advised to future researchers to replicate the study by applying other computer-assisted programs like Microsoft Word, My Access, and so on. Sixth, the participants of the current study were of mixed gender. It is possible to conduct this study by selecting only male or only female subjects.

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