The Effect of Short Story Writing on the Writing Development of the Intermediate EFL Learners in Farhikhtegan Language Institute in Zahedan

¹Ali Saiffudin Poor and ²Massoud Tajadini
¹Department of English, Islamic Azad University, Zehedan, I.R. Iran
²Department of English, Faculty of Literature and Humanities,
Islamic Azad University, Kerman, I.R. Iran

Abstract: The goal of the study was to develop the writing ability of the study subjects by exposing short story writing as facilitative devices in a language institute in Zahedan. To this goal, two groups of leaners, each 18, participated in the experiment. The population of the study was composed of two intermediate groups of EFL learners in Farhikhtegan Language Institute in Zahedan. All of the language learners, male and female of about 42, made up the study population. To ensure the homogeneity of the subjects, Oxford placement test was used for this purpose. The 36 ones made up the subjects of the study and were classified into two groups. To collect the data, three types of instruments were used. The first, instrument was using Oxford placement test as a device to homogenize the population of the study. The second, instrument was implementing two pre and posttests of writing to determine the initial level of the subjects of the study. The pre-test was taken before the experiment started and the posttest after it finished. The third, instrument was using interview as a device to seek the attitude of the learners of the study on the use of short story writing in the writing class. The data based on the pre and posttests proved the effect of using short story writing on the writing skill of the learners. In fact the EG outperformed the learners in the CG. The difference between the mean scores of the pre and posttest proved that the EG improved more satisfactorily. Besides, the subjects in the EG expressed their positive attitudes towards the use of short story writing in the writing class.

Key words: Writing, story writing, EFL, besides, EG

INTRODUCTION

Promoting student's writing skills is considered to be one of the most important tasks which EFL learners need to develop throughout their schooling. Banat (2007) pointed out that writing is invaluable for helping students communicate and understand how the parts of language go together.

Conley (1995) noted that writing makes our thoughts and experiences vivid and long lasting and helps us learn things in every subject area. He added that "in many ways, writing is the way we make sense of our world". Consequently, helping learners master the skill of writing and enabling them to write effectively and interactively is one of the main objectives of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) field. Bello (1997) indicated that writing plays an essential role in promoting language acquisition as learners experiment with words, sentences and large chunks of writing to communicate their ideas effectively and to reinforce the grammar and vocabulary they learn in class. He added that "one of the major failing in the traditional curriculum could be attributed to lack of

attention given to writing which is an important avenue for thinking". Shorofat (2007) indicated that writing could be classified into two kinds: functional and creative. Creative writing is the writing through which individuals express their feelings, opinions, reactions and ideas to the reader in a distinguished literary style. This kind of writing includes several genres such as writing short stories, poems, plays, novels, essays and description. On the other hand, functional writing is that kind which aims at conveying a specific, direct and clear message to a specific audience.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Statement of the problem: Many second-language teaching materials either ignore teaching writing effectively or do no more than getting the students produce a few simple forms on the sentence level. A similar observation has been made by Lennon who noted that teaching and learning writing has been considered something of peripheral importance. Not the required attention is given to it or in some cases teaching it is

---

Corresponding Author: Massoud Tajadini, Department of English, Faculty of Literature and Humanities,
Islamic Azad University, Kerman, I.R. Iran

delayed to the extent that it can be taken as a forgotten skill. In the process of writing, though there are many skills and abilities that the learners have to master if they mean to produce an acceptable piece of writing. In case, they face any deficiency in this regard, they will face obstacles to improve in the skill as efficiently as possible.

They require knowing grammar of the language, acquiring suitable range of vocabulary, mastering writing mechanics, organization, etc., all of which are the necessary parts of an acceptable piece of writing. Thus, our learners have difficulties to master writing since they have had little experience to practice it in combination with these components.

Besides, the traditional methods for teaching writing emphasize writing on a given topic which is introduced by the teacher. The activities are undertaken without resort to the context of teaching or writing for a purpose. Moreover, little has been done to make writing a meaningful and concrete activity. The approach of writing on a solid tittle looks to be boring and monotonous on the part of the teacher and the learner. The activity is neither natural nor demanding. It is subject to a lot of mismatch between the given topic and the writing. The traditional writing activity ignores the context of the activity. A teaching technique is necessary that can assist the learners to overcome all these deficiencies and obstacles.

The study is to achieve certain objectives. The first objective is proving and supporting the effective use of story writing as a facilitative device in the course of teaching the learners how to write. It, moreover, aims at supporting the idea that using story writing can motivate the learners to write. To carry out the study, first the following two questions are raised:

- To what extent can story writing as a device improve the writing ability of the EFL learners?
- What is the attitude of the EFL learners on the use of story writing to improve their writing ability?

Studies on story writing and writing improvement: Albertson and Billingsley (2002) examined the effect of an instructional package consisting of strategy instruction and self-regulation techniques on story writing.

The sample of the study consisted of two gifted, middle school students. A number of points including story's length, fluency, story's elements and time were observed before, during and after the application of the instructional package. Results showed that both participants wrote longer stories, increased writing fluency, included more story elements and wrote higher quality stories after the implication of the instructional package. Ismail (2002) investigated the effects of an integrated process-product approach to writing

instruction and enveloping the creative writing skills of first years EFL majors at Suhag faculty of Education. The study recommended that 1-EFL teachers at various educational levels be trained in the implementation of the integrated process-product approach to writing instruction. The 2-Pre service as well as in service EFL teachers be systematically trained in fostering and evaluating creativity in the language arts especially writing.

Sturm *et al.* (2002) examined the effects of two forms of concept mapping, hand-drawn and computer-generated on the descriptive essay writing of middle-level students with learning disabilities and their attitudes towards writing. Results showed that student descriptive essays produced in the hand and computer-mapping conditions demonstrated significant increases above baseline writing samples on number of words, number of T-units and holistic writing scores. Results also showed that student's attitudes toward writing were significantly more positive in the computer-mapping condition when compared to no mapping and hand-mapping conditions.

Shorofat (2007) investigated the effect of using brainstorming and 'synecti's in developing creative writing skills of ninth female students and their attitudes towards writing in Arabic. Results also showed that there was no effect of the used strategies on students' attitudes towards writing.

Jarf (2007) inspected the impact of online courses on non-native freshman students to write poems and short stories in English as a foreign language. The sample of the study consisted of 38 students, who were enrolled in writing, grammar, vocabulary and reading courses. Results also showed that the online learning environment had the most positive effect on student's creativity and on their attitudes towards writing.

In a study conducted in Texas, Li (2007) investigated the effect of story mapping and story map questions on story writing performance of students with learning disabilities, regarding fluency and diversity of word usage. The results of the study showed that three of the four students improved writing fluency while the fourth student, who was more fluent than the others prior to the study, did not demonstrate improvement in fluency. Regarding the diversity of word usage, this study did not show significant changes in the student's writing performance. Yet in another study, Brunner (2010), examined the effects of story mapping plus incentives on 16 student's writing proficiency. Results revealed that all students made progress in total written words, words spelled correctly and correct word sequences measures of writing. However, in other measure, there were no significant differences in students "writing performance from baseline to the treatment.

Instrumentation: For this study, three types of instruments were used. In order to maximize the validity and reliability of the results of the study, it was decided to utilize more than one method of gathering data.

The first instrument was using Oxford placement test as a device to homogenize the population of the study. It is a test of grammar, vocabulary and short reading activities in multiple-choice forms. This gives a high reliability to the scoring of the tests.

The second instrument was implementing two pre and posttests of writing to determine the initial level of the subjects of the study. The pre-test was taken before the experiment started and the posttest after it finished. The topic of both pre and posttests were the same for both groups. For the pre-test, both groups were asked to write a 90-word paragraph on the topic. What are the most important goals because of which you study English? Explain your reasons in not >90 words. After the experiment finished and the treatment was exercised for the EG, the post test was taken with the topic below for both groups. How do you prefer to travel? In your car or by bus? Which do you prefer? Why? Explain and give your reasons not below 120 words.

Data gathering procedures: The data of the study was based on the pre and post writing scores that were offered by three independent raters on the writings that were produced by the subjects in the two groups. Interview was also used as the second instrument of data gathering tool. The appendix provides the pre and posttest scores that are given by three scorers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis procedures: In order to examine the research hypotheses, the researcher used both descriptive and inferential statistics. He used an independent t-test to analyze the difference between the means of the two groups regarding their score on the pre and posttests. The data of the study was a combination of the pre and posttest scores. The other parameter was using Spearman correlation in order to discover any meaningful relationship between the two pre and posttest of each group. The other parameter is using coefficient of correlation in order to estimate inter-rater reliability. For the interview section, frequency and percent were used to analyze the data.

Paired sample t-test : The data in Table 1 presents the t-value test for the pre and post test for the CG. As the data offers, the t is 0.397 and the significance is 0.695 at

Table 1: Paired sample t-test

Pair 1	Paired differences (upper)	95% confidence interval of the differences		
		t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mean score for pre-test CG-mean score for posttest CG	0.41696	0.397	23	0.695

Table 2: Paired sample t-test

Pair 1	Paired differences (upper)	95% confidence interval of the differences		
		t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
The total mean for pre-test of EG-total mean for post EG	-0.96469	-9.063	23	0.000

Table 3: Correlations for CG pre-test

Pre-test for control group	Pearson correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Scorer 1	1.000	-
	0.941	0.000
	0.964	0.000
Scorer 2	0.941	0.000
	1.000	-
	0.954	0.000
Scorer 3	0.964	0.000
	0.954	0.000
	1.000	-

Table 4: Correlations for EG pre-test

Pre-test for experimental group	Pearson correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Scorer 1	1.000	-
	0.911	0.000
	0.922	0.000
Scorer 2	0.911	0.000
	1.000	-
	0.928	0.000
Scorer 3	0.922	0.000
	0.928	0.000
	1.000	-

23° of freedom. In fact the data does not show meaningful relationship between the scores of the pre and post-tests for the CG.

The data in Table 2 presented the information about the pre-test and post-test for the EG. As it can be seen, the table shows meaningful relationship between the pre and posttest scores: r = 0.000<0.05 at 23° of freedom.

Correlations: Table 3 presents the required information about the correlation of pre-tests for CG. The table shows if any kind of relationship can be observed between the marks given by three different raters. In fact, the table is a display of inter-rater reliability.

As it shows, there is high reliability between the scores of pre-test presented by Scorer 1-3, when they are 0.941 and 0.964, respectively. The relative significance for the two-tailed test is calculated to be Sig. = 0.000 that shows perfect and complete correlation between the pre-test of Scorer 1-3. On the whole, the data shows that the scores presented by three markers enjoy high correlation. Table 4 is a presentation of data belonging to

Table 5: Correlations for CG post-test

Pre-test for control group	Pearson correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Scorer 1	1.000	-
	0.951	0.000
	0.971	0.000
Scorer 2	0.951	0.000
	1.000	-
	0.959	0.000
Scorer 3	0.971	0.000
	0.959	0.000
	1.000	-

Table 6: Correlations for EG post-test

Pre-test for experimental group	Pearson correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Scorer 1	1.000	-
	0.706	0.001
	0.716	0.000
Scorer 2	0.706	0.001
	1.000	-
	0.643	0.002
Scorer 3	0.716	0.000
	0.643	0.002
	1.000	-

pre-test of EG. The same as the scores for CG, here also the scores display high correlation between different scorers. In fact, the pre-test correlation for the first and second scorer is 0.911 and it is 0.922 for the first scorer and the third. In the same way, there can be observed high correlation between the first, second and third scorer when the relevant significance is 0.000 that is the perfect correlation between and among the EG pre-tests Sig. = 0 .000<0.05.

On the other hand, Table 5 presents the coefficient correlation of posttests for CG. Table 5 shows if any kind of relationship can be observed between the marks given by three different raters.

As the table shows, there is high reliability between the scores of pre-test presented by the three scorers when they are 0.951 and 0.971, respectively. The relative significance for the two-tailed test is calculated to be Sig. = 0.000 that shows perfect and complete correlation between the pre-test of scorer 1 and scorer 2 and 3. On the whole, the data shows that the scores of the posttest for CG presented by three markers enjoy high correlation.

Table 6 is a presentation of data belonging to posttest of EG. The given scores display perfect correlation presented by different raters. As a matter of fact, the posttest correlation for the first and second scorer is 0.706 and it is 0.716 between the first scorer and the third. In the same way, we can see high and perfect correlation between the first, second and third scorer when the relevant significance is 0.001 for the first and second rater and it is 0.000 between the first and third rater. In fact, the coefficient of correlation for the three scorers is assumed to be very high. Sig. = 0.001 <0.05 and Sig. = 0.000<0.05.

Final discussion: The study could prove the positive effect of short story writing on the writing improvement of the subjects of the present study. In fact, it could be proved that the procedures employed by the teacher and exercised by the learners were effective enough to support the assumption that short story writing are useful and effective tools in the writing class and it can positively affect the performance of the learners.

Considering the results of the two groups, it can be concluded that writing is a meaningful process that entails the active and meaningful participation of the learners in the teaching-learning processes. Data from this study showed that the difference in the mean score of the writing acquisition was statistically significant because the EG showed a significantly higher amount of growth in writing compared to the CG. Paying attention to the active participation of the leaners in the learning processes can have facilitative and meaningful effect on their cognitive learning.

Based on the achieved results, it was proved that cognitive language learning can facilitate the process of writing acquisition. Regarding the goal of the study, enough emphasis was given to the use of short story writing. The results supported the writing improvement of the EFL learners in the EG more than that of the CG.

The results of the study based on cognitive styles of the learners were observed. The findings suggested that short story writing based can promote acquisition of meaning and form of L2 writing. During teaching writing, the students performed better on the test of productive writing and the scores on both the receptive and productive post-tests were higher when the students generated their own perceptions and understanding.

Second language writing has revealed that words associated with actual objects or imagery techniques are learned more easily than those without. With short story writing, it is possible to provide extra a additional opportunities for the learners to express themselves.

In the present study, it was concluded when the individual learner transitions into a meaningful and cognitive learning context, he was given a complete responsibility to deal with the problem posed to him, whether learning a single new word or getting him to make a novel sentence with the learned words. Besides, it can be discussed that cognitive learning using slides decreases the leaner's need to ask questions since short story writing assist them to know more about the new words and situations without any need for the teacher to describe more.

The results of the study are in line with the studies which were carried out with what Sturm *et al.* (2002), Shorofat (2007), Jarf (2007), Banat (2007) and Brunner

(2010) did with their own learners and students in different countries and situations. All of these studies followed the same type of objectives: examining the effect of story writing on the writing improvement of the EFL learners of their studies and almost all of them showed the effectiveness of the procedure.

CONCLUSION

The study reflected the results of the tests and they were discussed in details. It moreover presented the achievements of the study in terms of the difference between the performance and the level of achievement of the two EG and CG groups. The most important part was given to examining research hypotheses and their accuracy. Finally, some suggestions for further studies and implications of the study for pedagogical purposes were offered.

REFERENCES

Albertson, L. and F. Billingsley, 2002. Using strategy instruction and self-regulation to improve gifted students' creative writing. J. Secondary Gifted Educ., 12: 90-101.

Banat, S., 2007. The effect of a program based on the process approach and learning style on developing EFL writing skills among Jordanian secondary stage students. Ph.D Thesis, Amman Arab University, Amman, Jordan.

Bello, T., 1997. Writing topics for adult ESL students. Proceedings of the 31st TESOL Annual Conference on Teachers of English to Speakers of other Language Convention, March 11-15, 1997, TESOL, Orlando, Florida, pp: 108-115.

Brunner, M., 2010. The effect of story mapping and incentives on multiple measures of writing proficiency. Ph.D Thesis, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.

Conley, M., 1995. Content Reading Instruction: A Communicative Approach. 2nd Edn., McGraw-Hill, New York, USA.,.

Ismail, A., 2002. The effect of an integrated process-product approach to teaching writing on developing the creative writing skills of first-year EFL majors at Sohag faculty of education. Ph.D Thesis, Sohag University, Sohag, Egypt.

Jarf, R.S.A., 2007. Online instruction and creative writing by Saudi EFL freshman students. Master Thesis, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Li, D., 2007. Story mapping and its effects on writing fluency and word diversity of students with learning disabilities. Learn. Disabilities Contemp. J., 5: 77-93.

Shorofat, A., 2007. The effect of using the brain storming strategy on developing 9th grade students' creative writings skills in Arabic language. Ph.D Thesis, University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan.

Sturm, J.M., E. Rankin and L. Joan, 2002. Effects of hand-drawn and computer-generated concept mapping on the expository writing of middle school students with learning disabilities. Learn. Disabilities Res. Pract., 17: 124-139.