

The Effect of Reading Experience on Using Grammar in Writing in Elementary Iranian EFL Students

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Abstract: Research on the effect of reading experience in enhancing writing ability supports the contribution of reading experience to better writing by EFL students. Therefore, the present study aims at investigating the influence of certain teaching methods in the domain of reading comprehension on the development of writing ability. The subjects chosen for the study were twenty female language learners studying at a private Language Institute in Ilam. In which, the subjects were divided into a control group and an experimental group. In the control group, the techniques of paragraph writing were taught and the students were given topics to write paragraphs. In the experimental group, besides the teaching of techniques, students were provided with extra reading materials. The data was collected on the topic of a paragraph that students of both groups wrote at home in the seventh session. Data analysis was done through utilizing a t-test. The results of the analysis revealed that reading experience had no effect on students' writing at this level.

Key Words: Reading Experience, Grammar, Writing and EFL Students .

Introduction:

Writing is one of the basic skills that have been under careful attention for many years. Improvement in language proficiency is primarily accomplished through reading and composing English texts. To help students with abilities of reading and writing, curricula are usually developed separately considering the belief that these two are totally different language skills. This division doesn't take

into account any possible effect of reading on writing. To overcome the shortcoming, it is radical to discuss the rationale and the merits of linking these two skills and to provide a more concrete picture of how to apply these concepts in actual teaching situations. Language learners utilize this trend tremendously considering writing as an obstacle for developing their ideas. In this study, we will find out whether language learners can move beyond merely copying ideas in developing a conscious awareness of what structural or stylistic skills they learn while reading, and to see whether they can transfer the knowledge of structures, gained from reading, in their independent writing.

Review of Literature:

Linguists with different orientations have proposed various ways to teach writing to language learners. But during the 1970s and 1980s, writing theory and research witnessed a change which was based on a shift in linguistic theory and application of text analysis in the study of spoken and written discourse. The new linguistic theory dealt with the processes readers and writers go through to comprehend and be comprehended. Zamel (1983) pointed out that composing is "a non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning (p.169). She also asserted that it was through the shift from "product" to "process" that researchers could gain insight into how to teach composition. This shift led to lots of studies on the relationship between reading and writing in both first and second language. According to Carrel and Conner (1991), reading was considered as "an act of composing parallel to writing" (p.320). In the same relation, Shuying (2002) used the process genre approach to help the learners to integrate their writing with reading.

As a result of studies on the impact of reading on writing, it is hypothesized that writing competence, i.e." the abstract knowledge the proficient writer has about writing" (Krashen, 1984, P.153) develops if the learners do a lot of reading for

interest and pleasure. It is also evident that good writers are able to tactic knowledge of conventional or formal feature of reader-based prose.

Literature can also play a significant role in composition courses. In fact, reading, composing, and responding to literature are similar processes in that all focus on the process of meaning construction. In a writing class whose reading content is literature, the kind of interpretation students learn to do, in order to make inferences to formulate their ideas, teaches them to think critically. In this regard Belcher and Hirvela (2003) propounded the role of literary texts in L2 classroom and described various methods of using literature to teach writing to L2 learners.

All studies mentioned so far have investigated the interrelationship of reading and writing in first and second languages. However the researcher of the present study intends to focus on the influence of increasing reading experience on using grammar in writing in elementary Iranian EFL students.

Theoretical Framework

Some scholars have considered reading and writing as similar cognitive processes in which readers interact with the texts. Tierney and Pierson (1983) believed that at the heart of understanding the reading-writing connection, one must begin to review reading and writing as essentially similar processes of meaning construction. For many students, writing is an important means of learning. Based on the cognitive theory, writing anything to be learned helps students practice the materials and store them in long-term memory. Berieta and Scardamalia (1987) differentiate between knowledge telling and knowledge transformation in writing. In knowledge telling, any information is retrieved from the memory and written down, with each new phrase stimulating the generation of the next idea. Knowledge transformation refers to process of writing, whereby drafting and revision takes place and the writer is constantly reflecting on the content, coherence, form, and style. The style of writing we are concerned in this

study is the second one, because students should attach importance to the coherence, form, and structure in their writing.

From a cognitive point of view, students use their mental faculty in writing. They are given a text and they should transfer the structures, they have read, in their writing.

Objectives and Significance of Study

In this study, the effect of massive reading on student's writing improvement was investigated. It intended to find out whether students can apply those structures, encountered in reading, in their writing too. If the rewarding results are obtained, teachers can revise their opinions regarding reading and writing and integrate these two essential skills together. Students will have chance to write about topics they have studied in different passages and they have been familiarized with appropriate structures and words for that topic.

Hypothesis:

Null hypothesis: Exposing students to reading passages related to their topics of writing has no effect on students' writing improvement.

Research Question:

This study was conducted to find whether massive reading can influence students writing improvement.

Method

Participants

The subjects of the present study were 20 language learners studying "New Interchange (1)" in Alpha Language Institute in Ilam. The reason for selecting these students was that at this level, they should write paragraphs based on the topics

discussed in the class most of which are related to their lives. The subjects were at the same level of language proficiency. There is a placement test for every language learner based on appropriate level of language proficiency. Based on the experience that I had regarding the language proficiency of these learners, one of the classes was considered as the experimental group and the other class as the control group. Since the number of subjects were few, the subjects were intact and there was no random sampling. Both groups were taught by the same language instructor.

Materials

Since the study was carried out to investigate the influence of reading experiences on using grammar in writing, the textbook for teaching different stages of paragraph writing was the same. It was "Guided Paragraph Writing" book. The "Interchange (1) and (2)" was utilized for giving students some topics for paragraph writing as their homework. In addition to the textbook, the students in the experimental group were provided with reading passages related to their topics to have a background about appropriate words and structures students needed in their writing.

Data collection and procedures

Since this study was quasi-experimental, there was no pretest for choosing a sample. Because the Language Institute places students at appropriate levels regarding language proficiency, it was supposed that all students of the two groups were at the same level. With regard to elementary level of learners, both groups needed instruction to be familiarized with stages of developing paragraphs. In both groups, different stages of paragraph writing were taught in two sessions. In every session, subjects were asked to write a short paragraph about that specific point they had learnt. After these sessions, the instructor selected some specific topics for students to write paragraphs in subsequent sessions. For seven sessions, students of both groups wrote paragraphs at home. The difference was that, students in experimental group were provided with three passages about the

selected topic. Those passages were analyzed in the class and students were asked to write paragraphs using appropriate words and structures they had been encountered in the passages. At the end of the seventh session, the subjects of both groups were given a topic to write a paragraph at home. There were no extra passages for experimental group, since the topic somehow was related to the previous topics and the required words and structure had been presented to them in previous passages.

Data Analysis

Subjects in both groups had been asked to write a paragraph for the third session and the last paragraph for the seventh session. It was presumed that students' paragraph writing had been improved by the seventh session. Scores of the students' paragraphs in that session were representative of their improvement. Students' paragraphs were rated by two independent raters to reduce the subjectivity of scoring, and to make assessment as reliable and valid as possible. Scoring procedures for writing assessment are divided into three categories: primary trait sales, holistic scales, and analytic scales. In this study, primary trait scales were used, since the scoring was based on vocabulary and grammar. The difference between ratings of the two raters was reconciled by averaging the two scores.

Results:

After the two sets of scores were averaged, the mean and standard deviation of both groups were computed as shown in the following table:

Treatment	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Std. Error Mean

experimental scores	10	15.2000	1.813553	0.57349
control	10	16.4000	1.95505	0.61824

After that, the Standard Error of Difference between two means was computed (SED: 0.84). Finally a t-test was performed to find the significance of the difference between the experimental and control groups. Since the t-observed value for the writings of both groups was -1.42 with the significance of 0.17, we can safely keep the null hypothesis and conclude that reading passages had no effect on students' writing.

Groups					
	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
experimental	-1.423	18	0.172	-1.2000	0.8432
control	-1.423	17.89	0.172	-1.2000	0.8432

Discussion:

This study focused on the effect of reading experience on students' writing. Students of the control group were given six topics no which to write a paragraph, and the subjects of the experimental group were given extra reading passages. In this study, it was presumed that students who were taught passages related to their topics should outperform the other group regarding appropriate vocabularies and structures. A few of the subjects in experimental group observed these attributes, but most of the subjects

had difficulty in having good word choices for their topics. Since the subjects of both groups were elementary, they had some other minor grammatical errors, but they were overlooked, since they didn't serve our purpose. The students of the control group, however, had no reading passages, but they used very nice words and structures appropriate for their paragraphs.

Therefore, it is concluded that exposing students with extra reading passages had no effects on these elementary subjects, if such a study is induced for higher levels, we may get other results.

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