



Effect of Short Stories Summarizing on Translation Students' Writing Skill

¹Bahman Gorjian*, ²Shahram Payman

¹Department of TEFL, Abadan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Abadan, Iran

²Department of TEFL, Abadan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Abadan, Iran

*bahgorji@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effect of written summary of short stories on EFL learners' writing skill. To achieve this purpose, the study was conducted through pre-test and post-test design. Thus, a language proficiency test was administered to 150 students and then ninety language learners were selected and assigned to two experimental groups including low and high achievers based on the median score which divided them into two experimental groups. They were instructed to use the cognitive strategy of summary writing after reading the short stories for a whole academic fall semester, 2012. At the end of the treatment period, statistical analyses were conducted through Paired Samples *t*-test. Results revealed the positive effect of written summary of short stories on both groups developing their writing skill at the pre-intermediate level while the high achievers outperformed the low achievers ($p < 0.05$).

Keywords: short stories; summarizing; writing skill.



Council for Innovative Research

Peer Review Research Publishing System

Journal: Journal of Advances in Linguistics

Vol 3, No. 1

editor@cirworld.com

www.cirworld.com, member.cirworld.com



INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the challengeable skills in English as Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Gorjian, Alipour & Saffarian, 2012). This is due the nature of writing which is a productive skill requiring the learner to comprehend, organize their knowledge, and reconstruct their ideas into written form (Gorjian, Pazhakh & Naghizadeh, 2012). Therefore, many instructors face critical problems in teaching productive skills such as writing and speaking. Using short stories summarizing in enhancing writing skills has been come into consideration in the recent years (Gorjian, 2008). Short stories summarizing in EFL settings has found its place as a facilitative device and it has popular in educational curricula. It has had a great impact on language teaching and learning. Accordingly, short stories could be used as sources of learners' interests and help them to enhance their vocabulary domain, critical thinking, and a basis for writing models.

Teachers and students may gain much benefit through using short stories as a resource for summarizing short text which is contextually meaningful and comprehensible. Since a number of research studies (e.g. Lin, 2003) emphasized the advantages of short stories summarizing in the language instructions. Gorjian, Moosavinia and Shahramiri (2011) conducted a research on the relationship between using short stories summarizing and learning language instructions in developing speaking skills. Their findings showed that using of short stories summarizing can be considered as an integrated part of education and makes writing more effective.

The present study focused on using short stories summarizing as a cognitive strategy (Oxford, 1990) which helps learners do excessive drills in spelling and grammar activities and generally in the writing tasks. Short stories summarizing is frequent among L2 students especially at university level; however, the use of sending and receiving e-mails as a new technique in enhancing writing has been newly manipulated by EFL teachers and learners (e.g. Lowe, 2001). The research problem is that whether using short stories summarizing can enhance EFL students' writing abilities regarding teachers' monitoring on correcting mistakes and errors committed by the learners in writing English.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Review of the related literature in this study showed that this line of study has rarely been investigated by EFL practitioners at the academic level. Hawisher and Selfe (1991, p. 59) state that, "students spend a lot of time writing, class becomes more student-centered than teacher-centered, opportunities for collaboration increases, etc (p.59)." They (1991, p. 79) believe that "the role of the teacher- researcher is particularly valuable in writing research." Recent innovations in teaching writing could be more advantageous than before such as Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) since it is a powerful tool which makes the teachers be aware of electronic classrooms through using spelling and grammar checkers in writing processes. This also may enable the second or foreign language teachers to play their roles more effectively and give learners a sense of independent manner in doing the writing tasks. Murphy (1997, p. 244) believes that students have to be more active participants in the electronic classroom although they are not apparently in the conventional classroom. Hawisher and Pemberton (1991, p. 79) argue that the role of teachers has radically shifted towards the teachers as observers who are connected to computer as a device to lead their students to learning objectives.

Eldred and Hawisher (1995, p. 335) noted that computer networks may eradicate the biased aspects of face-to-face interactions in the classroom. The aspects such as gender, group function, personality factors, race, ethnicity, status, and mood may hinder learning processes. On the other hand, the probable disadvantage of using computer may be the existence of anxiety, mostly related to the novelty of the electronic interaction experience, especially while exchanging e-mails or messages with teachers or students from the other classrooms (Gousseva, 1998). According to Colombo and Simutis (1996), the case for Computer- Mediated Communication (CMC) in writing instruction has to be based not on visionary claims about CMC as an all-purpose tool for automatic teaching but on specific accounts of how and why the technology has helped teachers and students to achieve specific goals (p. 203).

According to Hayati (2005), student can benefit from both teacher and computers' feedback on their writing properties such as structural, rhetorical, contextual, and discorsal elements. Teachers should also plan writing tasks which integrate work on language which is available in the short stories as a reading tool developing the work on writing skills. In such cases, it is important to be clear about the aims of different stages in writing skills. Feedback can (and should) be learning experience, which provides the link between consecutive writing lessons. During feedback, learners are invited to recognize the shortcomings and strengths of their writing tasks discover the problems with their writings and discuss possible improvements.

Goodwin-Jones (2000, p.2) states that "using a word processors to correct written work has a number of advantages. Microsoft Word (MSW), the word processor described in Krajka (2002)". MSW offers spelling and grammar checking both of which offer suggestion which can be accepted or rejected. Goodwin-Jones (2000, p.4) added that using computers to provide feedback in correcting written essays and assignments may not be as reliable as the feedback comes from the teachers. Thus, teacher supervising is necessary and also beneficial.

Writing is a complex skill, and its development involves much more than the accurate use of grammar and a good range of vocabulary. A comprehensive EFL writing program requires the systematic treatment of a large number of interrelated elements. Hayati (2005) proposed a cyclical framework of teaching procedures comprising four stages: awareness-raising, support, practice and then feedback.

Writing skill has been considered a process rather than a product (e.g. Zamel, 1987). Clark (1992) argues that the writing process has received a great deal of attention since the early 1970s, when researchers started examining the writing strategies of experienced writers. According to Zamel (1987), the writing process is not a linear one which easily fit into a



pre-taught format, but a recursive process during which authors form and clarify their ideas. Zamel reported that the stages of "rehearsing, drafting and revising which interact together repeatedly in order to discover meaning" (p. 268). Clark (1992) points out that one-to-one interaction benefits ESL students by "allowing them to work with the teachers and practice a range of language skills and providing them a safe arena for risk taking" (p.122).

Ellis (2003) and Rahimi (2008) believe in the use of written teacher feedback in EFL composition classes added that the teacher should know the linguistic knowledge, grammar rules, and cultural background information of the learners that are generally required for teachers of other approaches. Muncie (2000) also added that "teachers must also master the schematic structure of the relevant genre of the text, and be competent to use the relevant writing skills" (p. 3)

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Subjects in the present study were chosen from students of Islamic Azad University of Abadan. A sample of 90 males and female students who enrolled grammar and writing I course was selected based on a non-random convenience sampling from among 150 students. Through their performance on the writing proficiency test which was 30-item multiple choice test designed based on *Interchange Language Placement Test* developed by (Jack C. Richards, Tay Lesley with Christa Hansen, Chuck Sandy & Jean Zukowski, 2008), 90 learners whose scores fell between one standard deviation above (i.e., high achievers) and one standard deviation below (i.e., low achievers) the mean score were selected as the participants of the study.

Instrumentation

The different testing instruments were utilized in the process of the development of the present research. Writing tests were administered to see if there was improvement in the proficiency level of language learners' writing with reliability coefficient of ($\alpha = 0.81$) before and after treatment. Initially, the subjects in two groups took a pre-test in order to determine their writing ability on a descriptive paragraph extracted from *Interchange Language Placement Test* developed by (Jack C. Richards, Tay Lesley with Christa Hansen, Chuck Sandy & Jean Zukowski, 2008) through the selection of one topic among three topics. Inter-rater reliability of the pre-test was met as ($r = .91$). Post-test of writing one paragraph essay on the selected descriptive topics was run at the end of treatment period of 15 sessions. Inter-rater reliability of the pre-test was met as ($r = .94$).

Materials

The materials in this study that afforded to the two groups consisted of 9 short stories extracted from Reading Development by (L.G. Alexander, 1998). The rationale behind choosing this book is that it is specialized for pre-intermediate level. Since the texts were in order of text difficulty, the first 15 text were chosen for low achievers group and the rest for high achievers.

Procedure

First, in order to determine the level of proficiency of language learners in terms of writing and to make a homogenous group, they were given a proficiency test by using *Interchange Language Placement Test* extracted from (Jack C. Richards, Tay Lesley with Christa Hansen, Chuck Sandy & Jean Zukowski, 2008) to measure the students' level of writing. The median of the scores were calculated. The general purpose of this study was the use of written summary of short stories in teaching writing. To this end, subjects were divided into two groups based on their median score: high achievers and low achievers. The number of subjects in each group were 45 who were at pre-intermediate level were under consideration. Firstly, they were given a writing pre-test and in the second session they were taught how to summarize the text and how to give written presentation.

Throughout the class time, the researcher provided groups with a short story on different intervals and the students were put to training on summary writing of the text in a short paragraph, and applying cognitive strategy of written summarizing simultaneously. Half of the time was devoted to teaching the text (words and structures) and the rest of the time was given to the subjects to participate in written presentation, and they were asked to reconstruct the text written based on the given criteria on error feedback. Each student gave the summary within 10 minutes. The whole research project and instruction lasted a whole academic semester of 15 sessions for each group. Throughout this period, the participants in the two groups made their endeavor to practice and apply the cognitive strategy of written summary. Finally, the two groups were given the post-test of writing one paragraph essay on the given topics.

In order to determine whether using written summary of short stories have effect more on Iranian high achievers and low achievers EFL learners' writing, once the scores of the pre-test and post test obtained, the mean and standard deviation of the scores were calculated and compared in order to saw which group had more progress in writing. Then, paired Samples *t*-test analysis of the tests was run in order to find out whether the differences between them are satisfactory significant.

RESULTS

In this study, one of the independent variables was language learning strategy (cognitive strategy of summarizing) including written summarizing and the other was short stories. Research question focused on the effect of summarizing of short stories (i.e. independent variable) of low and high achievers (i.e. moderate variable) Iranian EFL pre-university



students at the pre-intermediate level of English writing proficiency (i.e. dependent variables). To do so, students' writing exam was conducted at the first and the end of the semester as the pre-test and post-test of writing in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the pre-test

	Groups	N	Mean	Maximum score	Minimum score
Pre-test	High achievers	45	11.354	28	6
	Low achievers				
Post-test	High achievers	45	14.256	29	8
	Low achievers				

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics of the learner's pre-test in writing regarding the number of participants (n=90), maximum scores, minimum scores, and means. Another goal of this research was to see the significant difference between high achievers vs. low achievers on writing descriptive paragraphs. Table 2 analyzes the the means of high and low achievers.

Table 2. Paired Samples t-test of high achievers vs. low achievers

Groups	N	Mean	t	df
Pre-test (L)	45	11.354	5.425	44
	45	12.001		
Post-test(L)				
Pre-test(H)	45	14.256	4.256	44
	45	15.963		
Post-test(H)				



Table 2 indicates that written summary of short stories had effect on two groups because t -observed scores were greater than t -critical (2.021). Based on the results obtained, this strategy improved students' writing skill. Hence, the first null hypothesis was rejected due to the greater value of the means in post-tests comparing to the means in pre-tests. Also, this Table indicates that although both groups had progress, the writing skill of the high achiever group had improved more than the low group. So based on calculating the data high achiever group was better and improved more than low achievers and, the second null hypothesis was rejected. In other words, written summary of short stories affected both groups.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In general, the writing of two groups improved. This result can be more approved by this evidence that there was a significance difference between the means of pre-tests and post-tests. The means of the post-tests were higher than pre-tests. Also, t -observed was much greater than t -critical. The reason for the better performance of experimental groups in using written summarizing strategy might be due to the fact that, summarizing as a cognitive strategy may help them to restate only the main idea and the important supporting details without relying upon minor points of the author. So this summarization led them go through significant comprehension. One possible explanation of such result is that positive and correct use of such learning strategy by students helps them to enhance their learning and writing. This explanation is supported by Rubin (1975) who noted that our knowledge of what strategies successful learners employ can help us teach those techniques to students and consequently enhance their learning. Also, learning literature in this approach is basically an active process inducing students to produce necessary content instead of mere memorization (Zhang & Wu, 2011). The students would not feel bored with the environment. This would as well lead to greater concentration on learning materials. Since in this approach teacher is not the sole presenter of materials, students would take an egalitarian attitude towards him/her and so the classroom would be a friendly atmosphere where optimal learning occurs. This positive social atmosphere is assumed to increase learning much more than where learners receive instruction through traditional approaches and focusing just on form and grammar (Gorjian, Pazhakh & Parang, 2012).

The results of t -test indicated statistically significant difference between the experimental groups (low) and (high) on writing achievement post-tests. The results of the present study revealed that though all groups had progress in writing, the students in the higher achiever groups yielded a better performance. On the basis of the findings of this research, the following implications are recommended. Teachers should realize that student participation is of paramount importance in classes. Thus, by creating opportunities for students in classroom, teacher together with the students actively reconstructs the past events (Zhang, Wu, Wei & Wang, 2011) and so by imagining themselves in short stories characters, they would make a better picture of those events in mind. Therefore, they should provide opportunities for them to raise their level of motivation and effort to participate in the classroom discussion. Iranian EFL students in this study preferred to use cognitive strategy and short stories. Other kinds of strategies-namely meta-cognitive, compensation, social, affective and memory strategies (Zhang, Wang, Wu & Huo, 2011)-are also fruitful in helping them become "good language learners". Therefore, it is the duty of language teachers to introduce all kinds of strategies and their use to their students. In addition, encouraging learners to use this cognitive strategy in particular along with short stories and other types of writing strategies is fruitful for both teachers and learners (Zhang, Yan, Wei & Wu, 2010). It will help both groups to be successful in their jobs.

Learner autonomy is the ultimate goal of language teaching. If learners are solely and completely dependent on their teachers and classes to be involved in language learning activities, as soon as they will be left by themselves, they easily quit their learning. One useful way to eliminate this is strategy training. As a result, it is suggested that course designers consider and plan some strategy training for English books.

REFERENCES

- [1] Murphy, G. L. Parts in object concepts: Experiments with artificial categories. *Memory & Cognition*, 19, (1991). 423-438.
- [2] Clark, I. *Writing in the center: Teaching in the writing center sitting*. Dubuqhe: Kendal / Hunt Publishing Company. (1992).
- [3] Colombo, G., & J. Simutis. Visible conversation and academic inquiry: CMC in a culturally diverse classroom. In S. C. Herring (Ed.), *Computer Mediated Communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (1996).
- [4] Eldred, J., & G. Hawisher. Researching electronic networks. *Written Communication*, 12 (3), (1995). 330-359.
- [5] Ellis, R. *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (2003).



- [6] Goodwin-Jones, B. Emerging technologies, literacies and Technology tools /trends. *Language Learning and Technology* 4 (2), (2000). 11-18.
- [7] Gorjian, B. *The role of computer in instructing writing skills in SLA*. Paper presented in ATINER Conference, Athens, 2008.
- [8] Gorjian, B., Moosavinia, S.R., & Shahramiri, P. The effect of oral summary of short stories on speaking proficiency of pre-Intermediate EFL students: The case of gender study. *Iranian EFL Journal*, 7(1), (2011). 34-50.
- [9] Gorjian, B., Pazhakh, A. R., & Parang, K. An investigation on the effect of critical thinking (CT) instructions on Iranian EFL learners' descriptive writing: A case of gender study. *Advances in Asian Social Science*, 1(1), (2012), 114-118.
- [10] Gorjian, B., Pazhakh, A. R., & Naghizadeh, M. Comparative study of conjunctive adverbials (CAs) in native researchers' (NRs) and nonnative researchers' (NNRs) experimental articles. *Advances in Asian Social Science*, 1(2), (2012), 224-247.
- [11] Gorjian, B., Alipour, M., & Saffarian, R. The effect of multisensory techniques on reading comprehension among pre-intermediate EFL learners: The case of gender. *Advances in Asian Social Science*, 1(2), (2012), 192-196.
- [12] Hawisher, G., & M. Pemberton. The case for teacher as researcher in computers and composition studies. *The Writing Instructor* 4, (1991). 77-88.
- [13] Hawisher, G., & Selfe, C. The rhetoric of technology and the electronic writing class. *College Composition and Communication* 24 (1), (1991). 1-25.
- [14] Hayati, A. The computer and language teaching. *Asian EFL Journal* 4(2), (2005), 1-7. Retrieved January 15, 2013 from <http://asian-efl-journal.html>
- [15] Krajka, J. Correcting student work with the computer-using dedicated software & a word processor. *Teaching English with Technology: A Journal for Teacher of English*, 294, (2002). Retrieved January 15, 2013 from http://www.iatefl.org.pl/call/J_tech_10.html
- [16] Lin, S. F. Modeling a supplemental course Web-site for EFL vocabulary acquisition. *Dissertation Abstracts International* 64 (01), (2003). (UMI No. 3077889).
- [17] Lowe, J. Computer-based education: Is it a panacea? *Journal of Research on technology in Education* 34(2), (2001). 163-171.
- [18] Muncie, J. Using written teacher feedback in EFL composition classes. *ELT Journal*, 54, (2000). 47-53.
- [19] Murphy, J. D. Virtual time computer-mediated distance learning versus the Carnegie Model, In G. Hawisher, & C. Selfe, (Eds.), *Literacy, technology, and society: Confronting the Issues*, 1, (1997). 239-245.
- [20] Oxford, R. L. *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. New York: Newbury House Publishers. (1990).
- [21] Richards, J. C., Lesley, T., Hansen, C., Sandy, C., & Zukowski, J. *Interchange passages placement and valuation package (3th eds.)*. System, 27(4), (2008). 515-553.
- [21] Zamel, V. Writing: The problems of discussing meaning. In M.H.Long & J.C.Richards (Eds), *Methodology in TESOL: A book of reading*. (pp. 267 – 278). New York: New bury House Publishers. (1987).
- [22] Zhang, Y., Yan, J. Wei, G. & Wu, L. Find multi-objective paths in stochastic networks via chaotic immune PSO., *Expert Syst. Appl.*, 37, (2010), pp. 1911–1919.
- [23] Zhang, Y, & Wu, L. A hybrid TS-PSO optimization algorithm. *Journal of Convergence Information Technology*, 6 (5), (2011), 169-174.
- [24] Zhang, Y, Wang, S, Wu, L, & Huo, Y. Multi-channel diffusion tensor image registration via adaptive chaotic PSO. *Journal of Computers*, 6 (4), (2011), 825-829.
- [25] Zhang, Y, Wu, L, Wei, & Wang, S, L. A novel algorithm for all pairs shortest path problem based on matrix multiplication and pulse coupled neural network. *Digital Signal Processing*, 21 (4), (2011), 517-521